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Holocaust and Heroism: the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Zionist Mythology

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Abstract

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The April 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising represented the single largest instance of Jewish resistance to the Nazis during the Second World War. Despite its status as an anomalous instance of armed resistance, the Israeli narrative of the Holocaust came to disproportionately center around this outlier. Through a process of mythologization, the Zionist movement adopted the narrative of Zionist-inspired heroism conveyed by a group of survivors of the Uprising who made their way to Palestine. Through parallel processes of myth-making, the surviving leaders of the Uprising established themselves and their fallen comrades as national heroes, while the State of Israel embraced their mythologization, and retroactively established the Uprising as part of the Zionist struggle for a homeland in Palestine. By firmly placing the Uprising into the context of other foundational national myths, the Zionist movement positioned the Uprising as the focal point of Holocaust memory. In essence, the story of the Holocaust became the story of the Uprising.

The narrative of the Holocaust as expressed through the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising began to shift after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, as it broadened to reflect the multiplicity of experiences the Jews of Europe underwent. Nevertheless, the Uprising has retained its symbolic significance. Israeli commemoration of the Holocaust continues to invoke imagery of the Ghetto Uprising disproportionately. The State of Israel has continued to both bankroll and endorse projects initiated by the Uprising's survivors which present the mythologized narrative. Though the memory of the Ghetto Uprising has been the subject of shifts and contestations, it remains a central symbol of both the Holocaust and state-building in Israel.

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Introduction: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

It was Passover Eve in the Warsaw Ghetto—April 19, 1943. The thousands of Jews remaining in the squalor of the ghetto gathered what limited resources they could to commemorate this important date on the Jewish calendar. Thousands had already been deported to Treblinka and other extermination camps. A similarly large share died of disease and starvation in the abhorrent conditions of the ghetto. As they began the *seder* ritual, however, a commotion arose. Explosions blared into the night, marking the commencement of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—the single largest instance of Jewish civilian resistance to the Nazis during the Holocaust.

The rebels represented a complete cross-section of Warsaw Jewry—communists, Bundists (non-Zionist Jewish socialists), Zionists of both the right and left, religious and secular. The majority fought under the banner of the Socialist Zionist *Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (ZOB, trans. Jewish Combat Organization), while a smaller group of combatants were aligned with the revisionist-Zionist *Żydowski Związek Wojskowy* (ZZW, trans. Jewish Military Union). The ZOB had smuggled in a cache of weapons from the Polish resistance in the “Aryan” section of Warsaw, outside the ghetto walls. Nevertheless, both organizations were vastly outmanned and outgunned.

The Uprising’s commanders were well aware of their impending defeat—there seemed to be no ultimate victory awaiting on the horizon. A prevailing sentiment shared among many of the fighters was a desire to take one’s destiny into one’s own hands—to choose a manner of death in a setting wherein that had once seemed impossible. Weeks of heavy fighting ended in the defeat of the rebels and the liquidation of the Ghetto.

In the course of the Uprising, one commander, the legendary Mordechai Anielewicz, wrote of the impending massacre, “Only a few individuals will hold out. All the rest will be killed sooner or later. The die is cast.”¹ Nonetheless, Anielewicz felt contented: “The main thing is the dream of my life has been fulfilled. I’ve lived to see a Jewish defense in the ghetto in all its greatness and glory.”² This quote, from a lost letter to a fellow ZOB commander, Yitzhak Zuckerman, eventually made its way to Mandatory Palestine, where it spread quickly amongst the Jews of the Yishuv (trans. “settlement”, referring to Jewish settlements in pre-state Palestine). These words can be found in seemingly every book on the Uprising, and they are inscribed on a memorial dedicated to Anielewicz in Israel. Yet there was one issue—Anielewicz likely never wrote those words. Zuckerman, the recipient of the letter, said, years later, that the original letter “had none of the pathos that was added to it.”³

Given its unique status as a large-scale civilian resistance to the Nazis during World War II, the Ghetto Uprising attracted the attention and admiration of millions, in politically diverse contexts. Given its even more unique status as an instance of large-scale *Jewish* resistance during the War, the Uprising was especially resonant in Jewish communities around the world. Because of its historical resonance, the memory of the Ghetto Uprising became a valuable political commodity, and it has been manipulated to fit into a multiplicity of ideologies. Perhaps the clearest iteration of this construal—and the subject of my analysis—is the Zionist interpretation of the Uprising.

¹ Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 322.

² *Ibid.*

³ Quoted in Mooli Brog, “From the top of Massada to the Bottom of the Ghetto” in *Myth and Memory: Transfigurations of Israeli Consciousness*, ed. David Ohana and Robert Wistrich. Translated by David Ohana. (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 1996). Published in English by *The Jewish Agency for Israel*. <http://www.jewishagency.org/revolt/content/37221>.

Because many of the leaders of the Uprising were Socialist Zionists (matching the politics of the Yishuv leadership) and because a group of these Zionist fighters made their way to Palestine in the aftermath of the Uprising, a distinct Israeli narrative of the Uprising emerged in the years after the war. The Israeli narrative emphasized the role of the Socialist Zionists at the expense of all others, excluding the many Bundists and Revisionist Zionists involved in the fighting. This allowed the Zionist movement to symbolically adopt the Uprising as its own, placing it firmly in the same framework as the struggles for a Jewish state in Palestine from both antiquity and the modern period.

The “Zionized” narrative of an Uprising led by Zionist “New Jews” enabled the Jews of Palestine to draw a contrast between themselves and the masses of European Jewry, who did not resist and were therefore undeserving of respect or recognition. Thus, in place of a holistic picture of the Holocaust, the Jews of Palestine came to understand the Shoah⁴ as defined by the heroism of the Zionists and the pitiful surrender of the masses. While the period immediately following the Holocaust in Israel was defined by silence on the topic of the destruction of European Jewry, the Zionist movement was keen to discuss the Holocaust insofar as it connected to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The Uprising functioned as a useable past for the Holocaust in Zionist ideology, fitting squarely into the worldview of the movement. As a result, Israeli commemoration of the Holocaust in the early decades of the state disproportionately centered around the Uprising.

The mythologized narrative of the Ghetto Uprising was established through parallel processes of myth-making: the group of surviving leaders of the ZOB who arrived in Palestine established that the Uprising had been led, inspired, and undertaken by Socialist Zionists, while

⁴ Trans. “catastrophe.” Hebrew term for the Holocaust.

the structures of the Israeli state endorsed this politically expedient account and contextualized it as a central founding myth of the Jewish state. The surviving leaders—particularly Yitzhak Zuckerman and his wife Zivia Lubetkin-Zuckerman, found a receptive audience for their tales of Zionist heroism. Through speeches, publications, and museum work, the survivors transmitted their narratives in the politically amenable climate of 1940s-50s Israel. In this process of mythologization, manipulations like the one in Anielewicz’s letter, which emphasized the heroism of the Zionists, were not uncommon.

The narrative of the Holocaust as understood through the Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto began to shift in 1961 after the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, as a more encompassing picture of the Holocaust began to take hold. Nevertheless, by that time the Uprising had been firmly established as a powerful symbol of the Holocaust and of the Zionist movement. As a result, the prominence of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising did not die with the decreasing preeminence of that narrative. Israeli commemoration of the Holocaust, while no longer defined by the Uprising, continues to invoke imagery of the Uprising on a regular basis.

In my research, I have not found any monographs written specifically on the role of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Zionist mythology, though some monographs include analysis of the Zionist mythologization of the Uprising. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Idith Zertal’s *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*.⁵ Zertal tracks the development of Israel’s understanding of the Holocaust, including in her analysis a brief discussion of the “Zionization”⁶ of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Another influential work on Israel and the Holocaust is Tom Segev’s *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*.⁷ Like Zertal, Segev undertakes a

⁵ Idith Zertal. *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶ Contraction of “Zionist” and “mythologization.”

⁷ Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

broad analysis of Israel's relationship to the Holocaust, including selections on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and on the narrative link between the Holocaust and heroism. I rely greatly on these two monographs. Several authors include the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in articles on Israeli Holocaust memory, and Israeli Holocaust education, including Mooli Brog⁸ and Nili Keren.⁹ I look to build on these works, combining evaluation national myths and Holocaust memory into a broad analysis of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Israeli national identity.

In the first chapter, on the development of Zionist ideology and mythology, I include many monographs written in both Israel and the United States. Of these, I most often refer to Yael Zerubavel's *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, an influential and comprehensive work on Zionist mythmaking.¹⁰ For more traditional histories of Zionism, I have relied on works by Michael Stanislawski¹¹ and Walter Laqueur.¹² For further scholarship on the history of Zionism, see David Vital's authoritative trilogy¹³, as well as Ezra Mendelsohn's *On Modern Jewish Politics*.¹⁴

In Chapter Two, I rely greatly on three first-hand accounts of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, written by three prominent authors. The first, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, by Israel Gutman, combines his first-hand knowledge with academic research on the

⁸ Brog.

⁹ Nili Keren, "Ideologies: Attitudes and Holocaust Teaching in the State of Israel—History and Recent Development" in *Remembering for the Future*, ed. Yehuda Bauer, Alice Eckardt, and Franklin H. Littell, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), 1029-1037.

¹⁰ Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹¹ Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

¹² Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*. (New York: Schocken Books, 2003).

¹³ *The Origins of Zionism* (1980), *Zionism: The Formative Years* (1982), and *Zionism: the Crucial Phase* (1987).

¹⁴ Ezra Mendelsohn, *On Modern Jewish Politics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Uprising.¹⁵ The second, a traditional memoir by Yitzhak Zuckerman, is entitled *A Surplus of Memory: A Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*.¹⁶ Finally, I examine Dr. Marek Edelman's extensive interview with the Polish journalist Hannah Krall published as *Shielding the Flame: An Intimate Conversation with Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*.¹⁷

In the third chapter, on Israeli state commemoration of the Holocaust and the Uprising, I consulted many sources detailing the history of Israeli Holocaust commemoration, including articles by James Young¹⁸, Avner Ben-Amos¹⁹, Natasha Goldman²⁰, and Dalia Ofer.²¹ Furthermore, I rely heavily on James Young's "The Biography of a Memorial Icon", wherein he details the history and interpretations of an important commemorative monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.²²

In the fourth chapter, in which I examine the commemoration of the Uprising on two kibbutzim in Israel established by survivors of the Uprising, I principally consulted the websites of the museums located on the grounds of the kibbutzim. In addition, I consulted Tom Segev's

¹⁵ Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993).

¹⁶ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*.

¹⁷ Hannah Krall and Marek Edelman, *Shielding the Flame: An Intimate Conversation with Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1986).

¹⁸ James Young, "When a Day Remembers: A Performative History of 'Yom ha-Shoah,'" *History and Memory* Vol. 2, No. 2 (Winter 1990): 54-75.

¹⁹ Avner Ben-Amos, Ilana Bet-El and Moshe Tlamim, "Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools: Ceremonies, Education and History," *Israel Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1999): 258-284.

²⁰ Natasha Goldman, "Israeli Holocaust Memorial Strategies: From Silence to Recognition," *Art Journal*, Vol. 65 No. 2 (Summer 2006): 102-122.

²¹ Dalia Ofer, "The Strength of Remembrance: Commemorating the Holocaust during the First Decade of Israel," *Jewish Social Studies* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter 2000): 24-55.

²² James Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rappaport's Warsaw Ghetto Monument," *Representations* Vol. 26 (Spring 1989): 69-106.

The Seventh Million for information on the history of the kibbutzim and for additional details on the contents of the museums.

Finally, in the fifth chapter, I detail the contestations raised by the right-wing Revisionist Zionists into the role of the ZZW during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The two principal works written by Revisionists in support of the ZZW are Chaim Lazar Litai's *Muranowska 7*²³, and, more recently, Moshe Arens' *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*.²⁴ These two works argue for a historical revision of the traditional Israeli narrative of the Holocaust, suggesting that the ZZW had been written out of the Israeli account. To this end, I include a selection of newspaper articles written by Arens in support of his monograph, as well as scholarly criticisms of Arens' work written by the Polish researchers Laurence Weinbaum and Dariusz Libionka.²⁵ In addition, I rely on works by Stanislawski and Colin Shindler²⁶ for details on the history and ideology of Revisionist Zionism.

One final note: though I have primarily sought out English language sources in the course of my analysis, I generally found that the Hebrew sources I required had been translated and published in English. Perhaps this attests to the world's enduring interest in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

²³ Litai, Chaim Lazar. *Muranowska 7: The Warsaw Ghetto Rising*. Tel Aviv: Massada, 1966.

²⁴ Moshe Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*. (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing, 2011).

²⁵ Dariusz Libionka and Laurence Weinbaum, "Review of *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*," *Jewish Political Studies Review* Vol. 23 (Fall 2011): 102-110.

²⁶ Colin Shindler, *The Rise of the Israeli Right: From Odessa to Hebron*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

I: “They Have Learned the New Lesson”: the Zionist Mythologization of the Uprising

To a certain extent, the Holocaust validated the worldview of Zionism. There was no clearer example of the untenability of Jewish life in the Diaspora, or of the need for a Jewish state, than in the destruction of European Jewry. Nevertheless, there remained a tension inherent in Zionist ideology between the wholesale slaughter of European Jewry and the nationalist ideal of Jewish military strength and political power. To integrate the Holocaust into Zionist ideology, the movement emphasized the Zionist heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and effectively “Zionized” its meaning as the focal point of Holocaust memory. In a nascent society built on the conception of the “New Jew”, primed to fight on behalf of the Jewish nation, unburdened by the restraints of the Diaspora, a contrast needed to be drawn between those Jews who fought their Nazi oppressors (i.e. the Zionists, the “New Jews”), and those who went “like sheep to the slaughter”, the “Old Jews”, content with Jewish life in the Diaspora. Through the adaptation of a narrative of heroic resistance led by “New Jews”, the Zionist movement created a uniquely Zionist interpretation of the Holocaust in the face of the incomprehensible tragedy that the Shoah wrought on the Jewish people.

The “Zionization” of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising occurred through several distinct stages: first, through the adoption of the Ghetto Fighters as “New Jews”, exceptions to the rule of Jewish passivity in the face of the Holocaust; second, through the contextualization of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the continuum of similar, militaristic myths of Jewish history, narratives that reshaped defeats into moral victories and “heroic deaths”; and third, by establishing the Uprising as a Zionist event led by “honorary Israelis”, inspired by the mentality of the Zionists in Palestine, necessitating that non-Zionist fighters be excluded from the

narrative. The end product of this process was a distinctive Israeli narrative of the Uprising that was idealistic in its depictions of heroic militarism, disingenuously selective in its focus on Zionism, and steeped in contrast between those who fought and those who did not.

In Zionist thought, the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising served as an outlier in the broader narrative of Jewish passivity during the Holocaust. Tom Segev, an Israeli historian and journalist, writes, “The attempt of the last Jews of the Warsaw ghetto to ‘die with honor’... contradicted the stereotype of the Diaspora Jews going passively to their deaths. It robbed Israel of its monopoly on heroism. The embarrassing truth was that the rebels had not received any help from the yishuv... Yishuv mythology took care of this problem in its own way—it adopted the uprisings as if they had been its own operations.”²⁷ Therefore, to integrate the Holocaust into Zionist ideology, the movement adopted this outlying instance of military resistance, and imbued the fighters with exclusively Zionist agency in their actions.

In the Zionist adaptation of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, distinctions were drawn on multiple levels. There was a clear distinction drawn between those who resisted and those who did not. Furthermore, in the context of the Uprising, the portion of fighters with ties to Zionist causes and organizations were adopted as “honorary Israelis”, while the many non-Zionist resisters were written out of the narrative, or at least presented as secondary players in the story of Zionist resistance. Finally, within this portion of Zionist fighters, those who shared in the dominant center-left ideology of the Yishuv were remembered as Zionist heroes, while the right-wing Revisionist Zionists were almost completely forgotten. This sub-group of center-left Zionist fighters became “near-mythical figures”²⁸ in the State of Israel, presented as the

²⁷ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 184.

²⁸ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 211.

archetypal “New Jew” left behind in the Diaspora, and the heroes of a Zionist narrative of Jewish strength.

The Ghetto Uprising was placed into the context of several other foundational myths of Jewish heroism. These historical myths served to form the backbone of Israeli national identity, through an emphasis on brave, military resistance in the face of an existential threat to the Jewish people and its sovereignty in the Land of Israel. These complementary narratives, which included the rebellion at Masada, the Bar-Kochba Revolt, and the Battle of Tel-Hai, followed a similar narrative structure to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. All four featured a small group of Jewish fighters, outgunned and outnumbered, attacked by a stronger fighting force attempting to uproot them from their positions, and all ended in Jewish defeat. The Zionist movement re-interpreted these four historic, disastrous defeats, and reconfigured them into moral victories, victories that demonstrated the value and strength of Jewish warfare.²⁹

The primary distinction separating the Ghetto Uprising from Tel-Hai, Masada, and the story of Bar-Kochba’s rebellion, is that the former, unlike the latter three, did not occur in the land of Israel. Thus, on its surface, the comparison between the four falls flat. Yet by retroactively “conscripting the Ghetto Fighters into the Haganah’s³⁰ fighting unit,”³¹ the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was imbued with the same meaning as the three other myths: as a fight for Jewish nationhood. By constructing this heroic, Zionist narrative, and placing it into a parallel

²⁹ In her work *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Yael Zerubavel cites the Masada Rebellion, the Battle of Tel-Hai, and the Bar-Kochba revolt as key myths instrumentalized in the development of Israeli national identity. Through my analysis, I seek to add the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising into this continuum. Though it does not share one of the principal features linking Zerubavel’s case studies—it didn’t take place in the Land of Israel—I argue that, through the “Zionization” of the Uprising, and through the creation of physical memorial sites imbued with symbolic meaning (see Chapter 4), the Uprising belongs in this same framework.

³⁰ The Jewish military force in Mandatory Palestine.

³¹ Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust*, 26.

framework to that of the other myths, the Zionist movement filled the pervasive silence surrounding the horrors of the Holocaust that endured in Israel up until the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961.³²

The Holocaust further reinforced the belief in the impossibility of Jewish life in the Diaspora. Yitzhak Tabenkin said, “These times have once more shown, in a terrible light, the fundamental truth of Zionism, which is: the Jewish person cannot exist in the Diaspora.”³³ Benzion Dinur, the former Israeli minister of education, argued that “the complacency of Diaspora Jews before the Holocaust brought about an inability to believe that this kind of murder was possible...The Diaspora is not only a disaster but also a terrible sin.”³⁴ Oz Almog suggests that while the Jews of Palestine were shocked by the Holocaust, they concurrently evinced an attitude of condescension that was rooted in an anti-Diaspora sentiment, which consequently led to a period of insensitivity from the Jews of Palestine to the events of the Holocaust.³⁵ The ingrained notions of Jewish passivity in the Diaspora gave credence to the popular perception that the Jews of Europe had gone “like sheep to the slaughter.”³⁶

³² Israeli historians generally argue that the period from 1946-1961 in Israel was relatively silent regarding the traumas of the Holocaust, with the trial of Adolf Eichmann acting as a catalyst in the expansion of Israeli dialogue on the Holocaust (see Zertal, Segev). In contrast to this, writings on the Uprising seem to have begun almost immediately in its aftermath, and continued consistently through the decades, until a spike around the Uprising’s 50th anniversary in 1993.

³³ Yitzhak Tabenkin, *Writings vol. 4 (1943-1949)*. (Tel Aviv: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1976), 33. Quoted in Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust*, 29.

³⁴ Quoted in Ofer, “The Strength of Remembrance,” 39.

³⁵ Almog, *The Sabra*, 82.

³⁶ This phrase, coined in this context by the poet Abba Kovner, became a popular phrase in descriptions of Jewish “passivity” during the Holocaust. Writers on the Ghetto Uprising have diverging views on where the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising fits in this description. Israel Gutman writes that the Uprising “erased the stereotype of the passive Jews of the diaspora.” Alternatively, Moshe Arens maintains that the Ghetto Fighters remain separated in history from the Jewish masses who, “unarmed and undefended... were led like sheep to the slaughter.”

Given the scope of the Holocaust, its decimation of one third of world Jewry, and the emigration of nearly 200,000 Jewish survivors³⁷ to Palestine in the aftermath of the war, it was, if not inevitable, then at least certainly reasonable, that the Holocaust would become a crucial component of Israeli national identity. Yet given the ideological goals of the Zionist movement—to move on from Jewish life in the Diaspora and construct a “New Jew”—the lesson of the Holocaust could not be a singular focus on the impossibility of Jewish life in the Diaspora, or on the utter devastation of European Jewry. Rather, the lesson to be gleaned from the Holocaust derived from a distinction between those Jews who were killed passively and the Zionists who fought “with Eretz Israel under their heads.”³⁸

The concept of the “New Jew” amounted to an explicit repudiation of Jewish life in the Diaspora, often playing on popular stereotypes of Jews in Europe. Whereas the “Old Jew” was characterized as a poor shtetl-dweller, feebly living at the behest of local rulers, the “New Jew” was presented as forward-thinking and progressive, laboring in Palestine to sow the seeds of a new Jewish future, free from the shackles of Diaspora life. A textbook from the era exemplifies this mindset, stating that “[The Jews of the Diaspora] became accustomed to fear a driven leaf, began to be unmindful of their dress and their gait; their aesthetic sense degenerated, and they lost all sense of respectable appearance.”³⁹ In contrast, the physical image of the Sabra, or Jew native to the Land of Israel, was “strapping, self-confident, and strong-spirited, as opposed to the stereotypical Diaspora Jew, who was pale, soft, servile, and cowardly.”⁴⁰

³⁷United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Aftermath of the Holocaust” in *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, accessed March 17, 2017.

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005129>

³⁸ Yitzhak Zuckerman, a Zionist leader of the Uprising, claimed that “90 percent” of those who resisted did so “with Eretz Israel under their heads.” See Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 592.

³⁹ Quoted in Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

In Zionist thought, the emergence of a Jewish society in Israel created a Jew that, unlike the Jew in the Diaspora, was a proud military combatant. Thus, in deriving historical myths from the events of Jewish history, a conscious effort was made to emphasize Jewish military strength. Zionist leaders sought to reconfigure the events of Jewish history through a triumphalist, nationalist, and militaristic framework. Yael Zerubavel argues that the Zionist movement derived much of its traditional identity from a revival of Jewish life in antiquity, offering a reinterpretation of Jewish history that adopted the ancient Jewish national autonomy as an ideal and a model for the Zionist future.⁴¹ This was evinced through the reconfiguration of two important stories from antiquity, which later served as important elements in Israeli national identity—the Bar Kochba Revolt, and the Masada myth.⁴² In the modern era, the defeat of the Zionists at the Battle of Tel-Hai (1920), as well as the eventual defeat in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, were similarly reconfigured to fit the heroic nationalist narrative. Notably, these myths all end in defeat for the Jews; however, these historic losses were recast into glorious defeats that necessitated the heroic deaths of Jewish martyrs. In instrumentalizing these myths, the Zionists aimed to reconcile their view of Jewish nationhood and strength in antiquity with their own modern national struggle.

The tradition of the “heroic defeat” is featured prominently in European nationalisms. In his work *Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity*, Steven Mock argues that the concept of defeat is endemic in European nationalisms—he includes an array of European national myths in his analysis.⁴³ He writes, “myths of defeat provide models of heroes who have

⁴¹ Yael Zerubavel, “Transforming Myths, Contesting Narratives: The Reshaping of Mnemonic Traditions in Israeli Culture.” In *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*. ed. Gerard Bouchard. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 174.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Steven Mock, *Symbols of Defeat in the Construction of National Identity*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 177.

made... sacrifices, while the fact that the nation continues to live on in spite of the defeat to commemorate the heroic act serves as concrete proof that those who altruistically choose a suffering or death on behalf of the nation do not do so in vain.”⁴⁴ Tellingly, one of the few non-European nations included in Mock’s analysis is Israel, where he cites the cases of Masada and the Western Wall as memorial sites of national defeat. The inclusion of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising into this framework presents a unique challenge in that, crucially, the Uprising did not happen in Israel. As Yael Zerubavel writes, “For the Zionists the major yardstick to evaluate the past was the bond between the Jewish people and their ancient land.”⁴⁵ Yet despite this geographic distance, the heroic defeat in Warsaw became a national symbol in the young Jewish state.

The revolt of Simon Bar-Kochba against the Roman occupiers of Jerusalem in 132 CE has remained a controversial event, and Bar-Kochba a controversial figure, throughout Jewish history. According to ancient Jewish sources, Bar-Kochba was idolized by his followers, but was demonized by the broader public who witnessed his ultimate military failure.⁴⁶ Commemoration of the Bar-Kochba revolt in Judaism accompanies the holiday of *Tisha B’Av*, which marks the destruction of the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, as well as the exile of the Jewish people from their ancestral homeland. According to Zerubavel, the revival of Bar Kochba’s heroic and legendary image in the late nineteenth century coincided with the Zionist movement’s emergence and emphasis on ancient heroism.⁴⁷ The result of this shift was a movement from mournful commemoration to celebration. Furthermore, the minor Jewish holiday of *Lag B’Omer* provided a second vehicle for commemoration of the Bar Kochba revolt. While the holiday had

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁴⁵ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 15.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 175

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

traditionally been associated as a celebration of the end of a period of plague that killed 24,000 Jewish students in Roman Palestine, this later came to be understood as a veiled reference to Bar-Kochba's military defeat.⁴⁸ As a result of this association with Bar-Kochba, *Lag B'Omer* became a prominent feast of celebration in the modern period, despite the fact that it commemorated the early victories of Bar-Kochba's rebels, and glossed over his eventual military failure. The reinterpretation of the Bar-Kochba legend provided a framework through which the Zionists could construe future "heroic defeats."

A second and more prevalent example of such a reinterpretation of history in Zionist ideology is the story of Masada. Unlike the Bar Kochba revolt, the story of Masada is unmentioned in Jewish religious tradition, and was awarded "no specific significance" in Jewish tradition prior to the emergence of the Zionist movement.⁴⁹ In fact, the story of Masada is only mentioned once in the historical record, in the writings of the ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, who wrote extensively on the "Jewish War" (the first Jewish uprising against the Romans, 73-74 C.E.). Josephus' account of the story documents the fate of hundreds of Jewish men, women and children who escaped to the mountain of *Masada* in the Judean Desert after the Roman legion had conquered Jerusalem. After a siege that lasted nearly three years, the Romans finally penetrated the fortified mountain. Before the Romans could reach the Jews atop the mountain, the men killed their wives and children before killing themselves to avoid enslavement or death at the hands of the Romans.⁵⁰ This story, perhaps more than any other of its kind, became a crucial element in the national and historical ethos of modern Israeli identity. This may be attributable to the fact that, in contrast to the Bar Kochba revolt, a physical landmark exists

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 176

⁵⁰ Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*. (Philadelphia: Jas B. Smith and Co., 1857).

that has allowed the Zionist leaders to use it as a manifestation of Jewish strength and a site of pilgrimage and national tourism.

Entire monographs have been written on the “Masada myth”, including one by Nachman Ben-Yehuda, a lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Ben-Yehuda details the development of the “Masada myth” by early Zionist leaders, focusing his research on the role of the myth in distinctive contexts within Israeli society.⁵¹ One particularly relevant context, which is also referenced by Zerubavel⁵², is the use of the Masada myth in Zionist youth organizations. Once again, Zionist leaders stoked anti-Diaspora sentiments by presenting Masada as a “counter-model for exilic Jewish passivity in the face of persecution”, especially in the years during and after the Holocaust.⁵³ Ben-Yehuda notes a powerful social construction that sought to create a link between the heroic Jews of antiquity and the modern Zionist Jews, who, like their compatriots before them, faced the potential of a heroic martyr’s death.⁵⁴ Pilgrimage to Masada, which involved a strenuous trek up to the top of the mountain, became a rite of passage for young Zionists. This continued into the state period—the Israeli Defense Forces requires its soldiers to climb Masada as part of its basic training.⁵⁵ Several of these trips took place on the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, which commemorates yet another Jewish revolt of antiquity—that of the Maccabees.⁵⁶ For members of these Zionist youth organizations (who numbered in the many thousands)⁵⁷, this created an inextricable link between Jewish historical heroism and the ideal of modern Jewish political autonomy.

⁵¹ Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth: Collective Memory and Mythmaking in Israel*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

⁵² Zerubavel, “Transforming Myths,” 177.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada Myth*, 83.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 147

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 106

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 83

In the pre-State period, Zionist leaders again constructed a heroic myth from a military defeat, although this particular instance dealt not with antiquity, but rather with the Zionist national struggle itself. The Battle of Tel-Hai, in which a small Jewish force was defeated in its attempt to protect a settlement from an Arab attack, became emblematic of the Zionist movement's struggle for a nation. Prior to the battle, Tel-Hai had already achieved symbolic significance because of its precarious geopolitical situation as a far-flung outpost in what would become the north of Israel, surrounded on all sides by Arabs.⁵⁸ Thus, Tel-Hai became emblematic of the entire Zionist national project. Through a similar process of mythologization that the Bar-Kochba Revolt and Masada underwent, the Battle of Tel-Hai was remembered by the Zionist Movement not principally as a military failure, but rather as a glorious defeat. This was furthered by the transmission of a famous quote, the veracity of which has been disputed.⁵⁹ Before succumbing to his wounds, the commander of the Jewish forces at Tel Hai, Joseph Trumpeldor, allegedly said "it's nothing, it is good to die for our country."⁶⁰ This phrase was captured and re-transmitted by Zionist leaders, and it became a popular slogan in the movement. Thus, the military defeat at Tel-Hai joined Masada and Bar-Kochba in the canon of Jewish defeats reconfigured into moral victories by the Zionist movement. Zertal argues that, in the case of the Tel-Hai defeat, the Zionist movement bestowed this mythical dimension on the battle because of a need to "repress a defeat which it was unable to confront at such a formative stage."⁶¹

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising came to occupy a similar position in Zionist thought. In his work "From the Top of Massada to the Bottom of the Ghetto", Mooli Brog outlines the

⁵⁸ Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 17.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 19

development of the “Warsaw as Masada” narrative. He writes, “Zionist educators in the *Yeshuv* (sic) portrayed the two events as historic parallels: in the Ghetto they saw a recapitulation of past revolts, and in the fighters—‘comrades in arms’ with the heroes of Masada.”⁶² The comparison was immediately and explicitly drawn by the Jews of the Yishuv. The May 16, 1943 headline of the Israeli daily *Yediot Aharonot* read “The Masada of Warsaw Has Fallen—The Nazis Have Set Fire to the Remnants of the Warsaw Ghetto.”⁶³ Yitzhak Greenboim, chairman of the *Va’ad Ha’atzala* council, which attempted to rescue rabbis and yeshiva students from the carnage in Europe, said “[the fighters] have...renewed the tradition of the Zealots in Jerusalem, the heroes of Bar-Kochba, and the other Jewish struggles.”⁶⁴ Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, the future President of the State of Israel, said “we cannot ignore the desperate heroism of the defenders of the ghetto, which is incomparable in history, since the days of Masada.”⁶⁵

The fighters of the Ghetto were presented as exceptions to the rule of Diaspora Jewish weakness, and were championed as shining examples of the Zionist “New Jew”. They were presented as the spiritual successors to the Masada defenders, the Bar Kochba rebels, and the Tel-Hai fighters. Yitzhak Zuckerman, one of the commanders of the Uprising, noted that “Tel-Hai and its defenders spoke to the ghetto fighters in their own language and spirit.”⁶⁶ A speech by David Ben-Gurion, the ideological figurehead of Socialist Zionism and future Prime Minister of Israel, at a memorial service in Tel-Hai some six days after the Uprising had commenced, perhaps best encapsulates the explicit linkage between Tel Hai and the Warsaw Ghetto.

⁶² Brog, “From the Top of Massada”

⁶³ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Quoted in Brog, “From the Top of Massada”

However, for this tortured exile as well, the death of the defenders of Tel Hai was not in vain. Six days ago news reached us that our comrades in Warsaw—the tiny remnant of Jews still there, decided to fight for their lives and organized small groups to rise up and defend themselves. They could not obtain weapons from the Polish underground, and only a few had them, but they still decided to fight, and yesterday the first report reached us that the Jews of Warsaw have rebelled and dozens of the Nazi hangmen have been killed by our comrades. Although hundreds and perhaps thousands—who knows how many paid for it—with their lives, they have learned the new lesson of death which the defenders of Tel Hai and Sedgera⁶⁷ have bequeathed to us—the heroic death.⁶⁸

Ben-Gurion's words created an inextricable link between the defenders of Tel-Hai and the fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto, which thus linked the Uprising to the Zionist movement and its broad aspirations. Furthermore, Ben-Gurion's words are revelatory of the Zionist view of the Jewish Diaspora. In his words, the Jews of Warsaw (i.e., the "Old Jews" in the Diaspora) needed to "learn the new lesson of death" from the Zionists; therefore, the Uprising, and the "heroic death[s]" that it spawned, could not have occurred without the inspiration of the movement. By bestowing the same "heroic death" on the Ghetto fighters as those who had fallen with Bar-Kochba, at Masada, and Tel Hai, Ben-Gurion firmly placed the Ghetto Uprising into the canon of Zionist mythology.

Ben-Gurion's fellow Zionist leaders quickly drew the same connection between the rebellion in the Ghetto and the struggle for a Jewish state in Palestine. Yitzhak Tabenkin proclaimed at a 1943 May Day rally for workers in Haifa that "the force of this homeland" had

⁶⁷ A Zionist settlement in the Northern Galilee. Today called "Ilaniya."

⁶⁸ Quoted in Gutman, *Resistance*, 257.

inspired the fighters.⁶⁹ Zalman Shazar, a fellow activist, who later became Israel's President, said "the flame of the rebellion has been ignited in the ghettos in the name of Eretz Israel."⁷⁰ Benzion Dinur, the Israeli minister of Education, writing in the aftermath of the 1948 Israeli-Arab War, or the Israeli War of Independence, called that war "a direct continuation" of the Ghetto Fighters' War.⁷¹ According to Segev, Dinur viewed Jewish heroism as "all one."⁷² Moshe Sharett, the second Prime Minister of Israel, stated that "The initiative for active self-defense came from our movement."⁷³ Golda Meir, the future Prime Minister of Israel, echoed these sentiments, adding that "our comrades that are rebelling in the Diaspora...do not want to die silently in surrender, but to die as heroes in order to protect the honor of Israel in coming generations."⁷⁴

The Zionist-Uprising narrative was transmitted through Israeli education in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Idit Gil writes that, in textbooks published in the early decades of the State of Israel, "the emphasis was on the uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto, fighters were called 'Hebrews' or 'Zionists', and their membership in pioneer youth groups was stressed." She continues, "By linking the Warsaw Ghetto fighters with the young Zionist pioneers, books connected exilic Jews to the recently established Jewish state and insinuated that Zionists fought against the Nazi regime, and won by creating the Jewish state out of the ashes from the war."⁷⁵ The most popular history textbook used in elementary education, *The History of Israel*, dedicated 60 percent of its Holocaust discussion to the Uprising and other instances of armed resistance, and other

⁶⁹ Quoted in Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 29.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 435.

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 184.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Brog, "From the Top of Massada."

⁷⁵ Idit Gil, "Teaching the Shoah in History Classes in Israeli High Schools," *Israel Studies* Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 2009): 6.

textbooks devoted an average of 40 percent to that same material.⁷⁶ A textbook used in high school education, entitled *The History of Israel in our Time*, reinforced the distinction between the fighters and the Jewish masses. It stated, “the heroic stand of the Ghetto Jews also compensated for the humiliating surrender of those led to the death camps; to the dead and tortured, human dignity was restored.”⁷⁷ Nili Keren adds that in the 1950s, “every boy and girl was familiar with the name Anielewicz⁷⁸ and the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto, *but only few had heard names like Treblinka and Auschwitz.*”⁷⁹

The “Zionization” of the Uprising was a necessary element in the engagement of the Holocaust into the Zionist worldview (and thus, in the emergence of Israeli national identity). A narrative of the Holocaust that solely underscored the tragedy that befell the millions of European Jews completed some, but not all of this process. While it underscored the belief that Diaspora Jewish life was untenable, it ignored a complementary premise of Zionist ideology: that the Jewish people possessed a latent fighting spirit that would arise, enabling them to establish a national homeland. Thus, through the “Zionization” of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, contrasts could be drawn between the Zionist and the Other, the “New Jew” and the “Old Jew”, the Jew that would lead the people into the future, and the Jew left behind by history. It is this break with the past, as expressed through contrasts made possible by the “Zionization” of the Uprising, which formed the basis of the Israeli narrative of the Holocaust, and thus a constituent element of Israeli national identity.

⁷⁶ Dan Porat, “From the Scandal to the Holocaust in Israeli Education,” *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 39, No. 4. (October 2004): 622.

⁷⁷ Shimon Kirschenbaum, *The History of Israel in our Time*. (Tel Aviv: 1968), 278. Quoted in Porat, “From the Scandal to the Holocaust,” 622.

⁷⁸ Referring to Mordechai Anielewicz, one of the leaders of the Uprising. (See chapter 3).

⁷⁹ Keren, “Attitudes and Holocaust Teaching,” 1031. Emphasis my own.

II: “Who Will Defend Our Honor?”: the First-Hand Accounts of the Zuckermans, Marek Edelman, and Israel Gutman

The ragged collection of Jews who took up arms against the Nazis in the Warsaw Ghetto represented a cross-section of modern Jewish politics. Bundists, Revisionist Zionists, Socialist Zionists, Jewish Communists, and others, formed the fighting force in the Ghetto, acting primarily under the banner of the left-wing Zionist *Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa* (“ZOB”, trans. Jewish Combat Organization). The ZOB, fighting alongside the Revisionist Zionist group *Żydowski Związek Wojskowy* (“ZZW”, trans. Jewish Military Union), were the most well-equipped and well-armed Jewish groups, making them the obvious choice for leading a military insurrection.⁸⁰

Ideological disagreements became manifest through internal divisions within the ZOB prior to and in the course of the Uprising.⁸¹ To this end, the ZZW was formed after the Revisionists found it impossible to work with the Socialist Zionists in the ZOB. Even so, it is important to consider the fluidity with which politically-oriented Jews engaged in political activism in the early twentieth century. Lines separating socialists and Bundists, Zionists and “here-ist” nationalists were often blurred by activists subscribing to political and cultural institutions of varying ideologies.⁸² Thus, while the appearance of Bundists and other non-Zionists in groups like the ZOB was superficially abnormal, it was far from unprecedented.

Nevertheless, the political diversity of the ZOB during the Uprising, borne out of necessity, was likely unmatched in any preceding period, as Yitzhak Zuckerman, a commander

⁸⁰ Gutman, *Resistance*.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁸² Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de siècle*, 2001.

of the ZOB, recounted in his memoir. He writes, “never in Jewish life in Poland did the Bundists and the Zionists work together so closely...as during the Holocaust.”⁸³

The leadership of the ZOB, though composed largely of Zionist activists, included the prominent Bundist, Dr. Marek Edelman. Edelman, who survived the Uprising and joined up with the Polish Resistance, went on to become an outspoken critic of the Zionist-Israeli interpretation of the Uprising. Deciding to remain in Poland after the war, he went on to become an important figure in Polish politics. Several other surviving members of the ZOB, including Dr. Israel Gutman, Yitzhak Zuckerman, and his wife Zivia Lubetkin, emigrated to Israel after the War and transmitted their own first-hand accounts, which helped to constitute the Israeli narrative of the Uprising. The Israeli embrace of Gutman, Zuckerman, and other left-wing Zionists at the expense of Edelman and the Bundists has typified the Israeli interpretation of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising fully “arrived” in Palestine during Zivia Lubetkin’s 1946 speech at a conference of the United Kibbutz Movement (aligned with the Israeli Labor Party) at Kibbutz Yagur. By then, word of the heroism in the Ghetto had reached Palestine’s shores and spread amongst the Jews in the Yishuv, affording her and her fellow Zionist fighters “a high position in the Zionist ethos.”⁸⁴ Thus, when it was announced that Lubetkin had arrived in Palestine, and that she would be speaking at the conference, thousands arrived at Yagur to hear her words. In the speech, Zivia recounted her harrowing experiences in the Ghetto prior to and during the Uprising, captivating her audience. In her account, the Uprising was inspired by the ethos of the Zionist movement, stressing that “the Uprising was sparked in those places” where

⁸³ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 464.

⁸⁴ Bella Gutterman, *Fighting for Her People: Zivia Lubetkin, 1914-1978*. (Yad Vashem: Jerusalem, 2014).

the movement had spread (i.e. Palestine).⁸⁵ Her enraptured audience embraced Zivia's tales of courage and valor. The Israeli poet Haim Guri called her speech "a sublime and terrible occasion...it came as a knife to the heart."⁸⁶ It was here at Yagur that the Ghetto Uprising entered the Israeli consciousness, cementing Zivia Lubetkin and her fellow fighters as Zionist heroes.

Dr. Israel Gutman, a fellow rebel in the ZOB, was born in Warsaw in 1923.⁸⁷ Reflecting on his life in the ghetto, and later in the Zionist movement, Gutman recounted his experiences for the Yad Vashem project "'To Build and to be Built': The Contribution of Holocaust Survivors to the State of Israel". Though Gutman has written and said little publicly about his pre-war political activism, in this video project he details his role in the Uprising and his experiences in the ZOB. "The Uprising began on the eve of Passover. Some houses in the Ghetto, even though they knew their days were numbered, celebrated the Passover Seder. Members of the Jewish Fighting Organization⁸⁸ began going from house to house, letting the people know that it had begun. I was inside a bunker where room was made for the wounded. That was my responsibility. Well, I was shot... I was hit near the eye, the ghetto turned into an urban battleground. The first German attack was warded off, and they left the Ghetto. For at least a few hours, the Ghetto was liberated ground. We knew we had no chance, not to save ourselves, and not to reach anything that resembles victory, but there was a sense of duty to participate in the Uprising."⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Quoted in Gutterman, *Fighting for Her People*, 372.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 374.

⁸⁷ "Professor Israel Gutman" in *'To Build and to be Built': The Contribution of Holocaust Survivors to the State of Israel*, Yad Vashem, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/survivors/gutman.asp>.

⁸⁸ Another name for the ZOB.

⁸⁹ "Professor Israel Gutman."

Like many of the survivors of the Uprising, Gutman was deported first to the Majdanek concentration camp, followed by a second deportation to Auschwitz. On his time at Auschwitz, Gutman continues, “In Auschwitz I was also part of the resistance. I guess it could not have been otherwise.”⁹⁰ After the war, Gutman spent time in a Displaced Persons’ Camp before emigrating to Israel, where he became an active member in the *Bericha* movement, which sought to resettle Jewish Holocaust survivors in Israel. Reflecting on this time, he says, “I became active, first of all, in youth movements, in Kibbutzim that were established, in education, in public relations, and in the illegal immigration movement. We built a movement out of a dual sense of duty. First, of going to Israel, and second, to fight for our right to go to Israel. Today people simply think that emissaries from Israel came and did this. However, they were able to work, thanks to a large group of activists, an independently organized group of survivors who didn't want to return to the places from which they had come.”⁹¹

Gutman went on to a career in Zionist activism, and as an educator at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His later career consisted of two major positions at Yad Vashem, first as the head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research and then as the museum’s Chief Historian. Through his Zionist activism and his work as a historian, Gutman became a relatively prominent public intellectual—a textbook written on the Holocaust by Gutman and Chaim Schatzker became a standard Israeli high school teaching tool for over twenty years.⁹² Gutman’s inclusion in the *To Build and to be Built* exhibition on the contribution of Holocaust survivors to the State of Israel, along with only twelve other Holocaust survivors-turned-intellectuals, speaks to this degree of public recognition.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Dalia Ofer, “The Past That Does Not Pass: Israelis and Holocaust Memory.” *Israel Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 1-35.

Yet despite Gutman's public acknowledgement, the true standard-bearer for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the State of Israel was Yitzhak "Antek" Zuckerman. Zuckerman, born in 1915 in Vilnius, was the second-in-command of the ZOB, preceded only by Mordechai Anielewicz. Unlike Israel Gutman, Zuckerman's pre-war political activism has been well-documented. He was active as a youth in *HeHalutz HaTzair* (trans. The Young Pioneer), a Zionist youth movement associated with the *Poale Zion* (trans. Workers of Zion) Labor-Zionist political party. In 1938, Zuckerman was appointed as the General Secretary of the *HeHalutz* movement.⁹³ Zuckerman himself was instrumental in the creation of the ZOB in 1942. At a meeting of several major Zionist youth organizations, including *Dror* (associated with the *HeHalutz HaTzair* organization), *HaShomer HaTzair* and *Akiva*, Zuckerman helped to unite the groups into a fighting force under the banner of the ZOB.⁹⁴ Zuckerman survived the Uprising by escaping into "Aryan" Warsaw, where he led a unit of Jewish fighters in the Polish Uprising of 1944.⁹⁵ After the war, Zuckerman, like Gutman, became active in the *Bericha* movement, and he was largely responsible for evacuating the remnants of the Jewish community of Kielce that had been shattered by a post-war Polish pogrom.

Both during and after the War, Zuckerman's account of the Uprising, which minimized the influence of the Bundists and others as compared to the Socialist Zionists, met a receptive audience in Mandatory Palestine. Upon relocating to Palestine in 1947, and establishing *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot* (trans. Kibbutz of the Ghetto Fighters)⁹⁶, Zuckerman became a prominent public figure in Israel. Israel Gutman remarked on Zuckerman's positive reception, "[Zuckerman

⁹³ Shmuel Spector, "Zuckerman, Yitshak." in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of the Jews in Eastern Europe*, accessed March 8, 2017, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Zuckerman_Yitshak.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 3.

and his followers] were witnesses at the trial [of Adolf Eichmann in 1961]. They were well-known because they were Zionists. They had established themselves in the Kibbutzim, and had written and lectured in Hebrew, thus finding a way to make their deeds known amongst the Yishuv in Israel.”⁹⁷

Michael Marrus writes on the political controversy surrounding Zuckerman’s narrative, which emphasized only the Socialist Zionist cohort of fighters, “[when] the Hebrew edition of his book appeared in Israel, intense debates arose among a handful of survivors of these movements—who were loyal to their comrades after almost half a century—over Zuckerman’s precise claims over the preeminence of the Dror. In his own account, Zuckerman was one of the original architects, together with his girlfriend from Dror, the formidable Zivia Lubetkin. None of the “adult” formations — the *Po’alei Zion* or the Bund, for example — took part in those first discussions.”⁹⁸

A June 1945 letter penned by Zuckerman outlines his interpretation of the fighting in the Ghetto, and of Jewish resistance in general. Zuckerman’s letter separates those Jews who resisted from those who did not, and draws a distinction between Zionists and others in terms of their willingness to take part in the armed conflict. The sentiments put forth in the letter were repeated by Zuckerman and his colleagues in speeches and writings transmitted across Mandatory Palestine. The message within the letter formed a crucial component of the Israeli interpretation of the Holocaust and the Uprising. He writes:

But the question is different: why were we annihilated *like that*⁹⁹ and not otherwise? Right now, I’m talking privately and

⁹⁷ “A Living Record,” Yad Vashem, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.yadvashem.org/holocaust/eichmann-trial/a-living-record>.

⁹⁸ Michael Marrus, “Ghetto Fighter: Yitzhak Zuckerman and the Jewish Underground in Warsaw,” *The American Scholar* Vol. 64, No. 2 (Spring 1995): 280.

⁹⁹ i.e., why were the vast majority of Jews murdered without armed resistance?

with bleeding wounds in our heart, of a nation we belong to. Why, of 600,000 Jews in Warsaw Ghetto, did only 500 fight? But if the Germans had invaded our land in Eretz Israel, out of 600,000 Jews in Eretz Israel, 500,000 Jews wouldn't have fought and been killed in battle, but 150,000! Isn't that the truth?!

Indeed it is the truth that, in our conditions here (which are not enviable), the battle was difficult; yet, nevertheless, it was possible. Why could a revolt erupt in the Treblinka death camp when no more than a few hundred Jews were left alive—but was impossible when tens of thousands went to the crematoria there? Here is the fundamental difference between our essential nature here and there...

Who fought? Who carried on the battles? Of twenty-two battle groups in the Warsaw Ghetto, there was only one civilian group of (Zionist Youth) and the rest were groups of the Labor Movement; of these twenty-one groups of laborers and youth, 75 percent were ours! And who were the leaders? You know that....

Who defended our honor in Krakow? Our Movement and the splendid members of Akiba who were bound to us by thousands of threads during the war, to He-Halutz, and to the Jewish group of the PPR—aside from them, no one! Who defended Czestochowa, Bialystok? And who organized the battle organizations in the various camps? We can learn less from the revelations of the partisans' war, where chance mostly prevailed, whereas the fighters' organizations went to battle consciously, went deliberately to death for the sake of life.

In sum, if we ask: 'Did our Movement stand up to the test of history?' It did! Was the education we received correct? It was! To know how to work in time of peace and to fight in time of

war. And what are the conclusions? (1) There is still a little sap of life left in the nation; (2) laborers and youth are the ones who defended our honor; (3) 90 percent of the laborers and youth were killed with Eretz Israel under their head.¹⁰⁰

Here, Zuckerman's narrative leaves little room for the Bund (or, for that matter, anyone other than the center-left Zionists) in the heroism of the Holocaust. The implication that a larger proportion of Jews in Eretz Israel would have rebelled echoes the contrast drawn in Zionist ideology between the "Old" and "New" Jew—the Zionist "New" Jews were prepared to fight, while their diaspora counterparts were unwilling. Furthermore, in this overview of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, Zuckerman makes disparaging references towards the many Jewish partisans, many of whom fought alongside Polish and Belarusian communists in the forests of Eastern Europe. Zuckerman's relative ignorance of the partisans was, to a certain extent, replicated in the State of Israel. Perhaps because the partisans often associated with non-Jewish fighters, or because they did not fight for such explicitly Jewish (or Zionist) aims as the fighters in the Ghetto, the Partisans never received the level of attention that the Warsaw Ghetto fighters received.¹⁰¹ Thus, in Zuckerman's narrative, which was embraced in Israel, the only resistance fighters worthy of praise were center-left Zionists.

Nowhere was the Israeli embrace of Zuckerman (and Gutman) clearer than at the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi official, and one of the key architects of the Holocaust. The trial, which many historians refer to as a turning point in Israeli public discourse on the Holocaust, saw the sole prosecution of a high-ranking Nazi official in the Israeli court system. SS-

¹⁰⁰ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 589-592.

¹⁰¹ For a full description of the Jewish partisans during the Holocaust, see Michael Marrus, *Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust* (Westport, CT.: Meckler, 1989).

Obersturmbannführer Eichmann was captured in Argentina in 1960, and his subsequent trial in Jerusalem was used, at least partially, as a tool for the Labor-Zionist Israeli government, led by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, to educate Israeli youths about the Holocaust. Zertal writes, “Ben-Gurion, who ordered the capture of Eichmann, who almost single-handedly and without the knowledge of his closest colleagues, supported the planning and implementation of the abduction scheme... was the architect, director, and stage manager of the preparations for the trial and of the trial itself.”¹⁰² Alternatively, Deborah Lipstadt maintains that, while the “conventional wisdom” that Ben-Gurion orchestrated the trial himself “is not supported by the facts”, she concedes that Ben-Gurion took a more active role in the trial as it became clear that the Israeli public viewed it as a watershed moment—for the first time in the history of the state, the victims of the Holocaust, and not just the resistance fighters, became part of a national dialogue. This novel development presented a crucial opportunity for Israeli families to teach their children about the Holocaust, and for the large community of Holocaust survivors in the State to tell their stories to a receptive audience.¹⁰³

The lead prosecutor in the trial, Gideon Hausner, saw the trial as an opportunity to educate. Hausner appointed Rachel Auerbach, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto and a researcher at Yad Vashem, to help select witnesses for the trial. According to Lipstadt, “[Auerbach] believed that the trial promised a ‘unique opportunity’ to demonstrate ‘the full extent and unique nature of the destruction of the Jews of Europe’. Rather than a small criminal trial that focused specifically on Eichmann’s wrongs, she conceived of—and Hausner fully shared her view—a ‘large historical one.’¹⁰⁴ Thus, Hausner, notwithstanding the possible influence of David Ben-

¹⁰² Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 96.

¹⁰³ Deborah Lipstadt, *The Eichmann Trial*, (New York: Schocken Books, 2011), 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Gurion, sought to litigate the Holocaust in general, arguing that, as witnesses, “survivors had the perfect right to be ‘irrelevant’ to Eichmann’s specific crimes.”¹⁰⁵

Evidently, a priority in selecting those witnesses “irrelevant to Eichmann’s specific crimes” was to include a disproportionate number of survivors who practiced armed resistance, with a focus on the events in the Warsaw Ghetto. According to Tom Segev, Hausner “sought the advice” of Zuckerman prior to the trial to plan a way to present the Uprising in “their way”—a way that avoided the moral questions over whether the Uprising was justified in the light of the Ghetto’s subsequent liquidation.¹⁰⁶ An analysis of the testimony of Gutman and Zuckerman reveals little relevance to the prosecution of Eichmann specifically. Zuckerman’s testimony focused almost singularly on a recounting of the events of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (as did the testimony of his wife, Zivia).¹⁰⁷ Israel Gutman’s testimony followed along similar lines, though he reflected equally on his experiences in Auschwitz, and on the Holocaust more generally—this is not particularly surprising, given that Gutman had begun to establish himself as an authoritative historian of the Holocaust by the time of the trial.¹⁰⁸

The acceptance of Zuckerman’s narrative was an integral component of the “Zionization” of the Uprising, which sought to retroactively grant the Uprising (and thus, the Holocaust in general) meaning in its connection to the Zionist movement and its struggle for a Jewish state in Palestine. Yet one of the Uprising’s leaders, Marek Edelman rejected this narrative, denouncing any retroactive application of meaning to the Uprising. Edelman was born in Homel, present-day Belarus, in either 1919 or 1922. He was raised in a world of socialist politics; his father, Natan

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 341.

¹⁰⁷ “Eichmann Trial - The District Court Sessions, Session 25,” Nizkor, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-025-07.html>.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

Feliks Edelman was a member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party, and his mother Cecylia Edelman was an active member of the General Jewish Labor Bund.¹⁰⁹ Unsurprisingly, Edelman himself became a leader of the Bund, and he became the third-in-command of the ZOB, representing the large faction of Bundists in the ranks of the organization.¹¹⁰ After weeks of heavy fighting, Edelman survived the slaughter in the Ghetto by escaping through the sewers into “Aryan” Warsaw.

It is here, after the War, that Edelman’s story diverges from those other leaders of the Uprising. Edelman, true to his Bundist worldview, decided to remain in Poland following the War. Edelman “viewed Poland as his homeland and went on living there, partly, he said, because it was the place where his friends had died and his people been felled.”¹¹¹ Throughout his life, Edelman opposed efforts to imbue the Uprising with symbolic meaning. The “heroic” narrative promulgated by the Zionists had little basis in fact, according to Edelman. In his memoir, Edelman writes, “Can you even call that an uprising? All it was about, finally, was that we not just let them slaughter us when our turn came. It was only a choice as to the manner of dying.”¹¹² In Edelman’s eyes, the motives behind the Uprising were driven neither by Zionism, nor by a desire to be consecrated as heroes. Edelman and his fellow Bundists were almost certainly not part of Zuckerman’s so-called “90 percent... who were killed with Eretz Israel under their heads.”

Edelman’s comments regarding the Uprising throughout his life evoked responses both explicit and implicit from the two other subjects of this chapter, Gutman and Zuckerman. As will

¹⁰⁹ “Marek Edelman- Biografia,” Newsweek Poland, accessed March 8, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.pl/polska/marek-edelman---biografia,46737,1,1.html>.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 35.

¹¹² Krall and Edelman, *Shielding the Flame*, 14-15.

be examined later, several of the Ghetto fighters who perished were posthumously honored in Israel, including the head of the ZOB, Mordechai Anielewicz. Revered in a similar “near-mythical”¹¹³ vein to Zuckerman, Anielewicz is the namesake of *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai*, home to a museum and memorial to the Uprising. In a 1976 interview with *Die Zeit*, Edelman remarked that Anielewicz was chosen to be a commander because “he very much wanted to be a commander”, adding that “[Anielewicz] was a little childlike in this ambition.”¹¹⁴ This criticism seemed to have struck a chord with Israel Gutman, who harshly criticized Edelman in a response in *Haaretz* entitled “Misrepresentations about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.”¹¹⁵ Gutman charged that Edelman added nothing new to the story of the Uprising, contributing only “a mixture of groundless pondering and surprising distortions.”¹¹⁶

Criticisms of Edelman often referred to his non-Zionism, and to his decision to remain in Poland after the War. Gutman writes, “Why did Marek Edelman remain in Poland as a doctor when almost all his Jewish political colleagues and people close to him personally—left?” Gutman’s words seem to challenge Edelman’s Jewish self-identification and his commitment to Jewish causes. In his memoir, Zuckerman offers similar comments that can perhaps be read as an implicit rebuke of Edelman. He writes, “most of the Jews then wanted to immigrate to Eretz Israel to be with other Jews. Remaining in Poland was the last thing any ordinary Jew wanted.”¹¹⁷ Through his constant criticisms of the policies of the State of Israel, Edelman remained a controversial figure in the country throughout his life. Edelman’s 1977 memoir, which was a success in Poland, and was “translated into many languages immediately after its

¹¹³ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 211.

¹¹⁴ Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 37.

¹¹⁵ Israel Gutman, “Misrepresentations about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” *Haaretz*, May 21, 1976.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 652.

publication”¹¹⁸, was not published by a major Israeli publishing house until 2006. In a 2009 interview quoted in *The New York Times*, the Israeli film-maker Etgar Keret commented on Edelman’s lack of positive recognition in Israel, suggesting that “Israel has a problem with Jews like Edelman. He didn’t want to live here. And he never said that he fought in the ghetto so that the state of Israel could come into being.”¹¹⁹ The Israeli politician and historian Moshe Arens wrote, “Many of the survivors of the uprising who settled in Israel could not forgive Edelman for his frequent criticism of Israel.”¹²⁰ Edelman remained peripheral to the Israeli narrative of the Uprising throughout his life.

Edelman’s controversial status in Israel stands in marked contrast with his near-heroic standing in Poland. Remaining in Poland as a cardiologist after the war, Edelman became an influential liberal activist in his later years. In the 1970s and 80s, Edelman was active in the anti-Communist opposition as a member of the Committee for the Defense of Workers.¹²¹ He also became active in the Solidarity movement, and was arrested in 1981 when General Wojciech Jaruzelski declared martial law.¹²² Edelman was later appointed as a Senator for the Polish Republic, where he was an outspoken champion for liberalism and anti-fascism. In 1998, Edelman was awarded Poland’s highest civilian honor, the Order of the White Eagle.¹²³ The famed former President of Poland, Lech Walesa, was present at Edelman’s funeral. Edelman has been concretized in Polish public memory as a campaigner for freedom and against tyranny. The

¹¹⁸ Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, 38.

¹¹⁹ Marcy Shore, “The Jewish Hero History Forgot,” *The New York Times*, April 18, 2013.

¹²⁰ Moshe Arens, “The Last Bundist,” *Haaretz*, October 5, 2009.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Michael Kauffman, “Marek Edelman, Commander in Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Dies at 90,” *The New York Times*, October 3, 2009.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

mural depicted below, which can be found at 9B Nowolipki in Warsaw, speaks to this memorialization of Edelman.



The inscription reads: “The most important is life, and when there is life, the most important is freedom. And then we give our life for freedom...” Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

Perhaps Edelman’s socialist politics, bred in the Bund, inspired his more universalist approach to the Ghetto Uprising. This universalizing message, coupled with his later career in activism for liberalizing reforms in Poland, led to Edelman’s embrace as a Polish hero rather than a Jewish one. It was likely for this reason that Edelman never received the level of recognition that his Zionist colleagues received in the Israeli narrative of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

A comparison of Gutman, Zuckerman and Edelman reveals much about the role of the Uprising in the formation of Israeli national identity. Zuckerman’s letter, which spelled out his

interpretation of an Uprising led by Zionists, found a receptive audience in Israel. Given that the Jewish community in Palestine had already begun to adopt the Uprising as their own, it is clear why this interpretation found such a receptive audience. Shaping the narrative into an epic of Zionist “heroic defeat” in the vein of Masada and Tel-Hai, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising created a Trumpledor-like figure out of Mordechai Anielewicz, and, to a slightly lesser extent, Yitzhak Zuckerman. Furthermore, the contrast between Zuckerman and Edelman represented the contrast between the “New” and “Old” Jew in Zionist thought; Zuckerman and his fellow Zionists, like the “New Jews” of Palestine, fought for the honor of the Jewish people against the Nazi oppressors, while Edelman, the “Old Jew”, set on life in the Diaspora, was simply a secondary player in this Zionist story.

Yet Edelman’s narrative did not come without a distinct interpretation of its own—Edelman’s particularistic understanding of Jewish identity, as understood through the lens of Bundist socialism—a more universalist perspective than socialist Zionism—was grounded in an anti-nationalism that separated him completely from the Zionists and their narrative. However, whereas Zuckerman made sweeping declarations about the meaning of the Uprising through its connection to Zionism, Edelman refused to endow the event with any particularistic Jewish meaning, nationalist or otherwise.

The appearance of Gutman, Zuckerman, and other resistance figures at the trial of Adolf Eichmann represented an attempt to shape, and to inculcate in the Israeli youth population, a narrative of the Holocaust that centered around resistance. Given that the Eichmann Trial was used as a teaching tool for Israeli youths on the Holocaust, there was a conscious decision to focus the story of the Holocaust on armed resistance in general, and on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in particular. The Israeli narrative of the Holocaust—steeped in contrast between the

resistors and the others—was reflected in the Uprising narrative transmitted by Zuckerman.

Thus, the Zionist movement found a usable narrative of the Holocaust in the portrayal of Zionist heroism presented by Zuckerman, and the movement adopted this narrative, presenting it as paradigmatic of Zionist strength, Diaspora weakness, and as the true meaning of the Holocaust.

III: “None of Them Had Ever Looked Like This”: Israeli Commemoration of the Uprising

The brief period between the 27th of Nisan and the 5th of Iyar on the Hebrew calendar—the space of one and a half weeks in April/May on the Gregorian—contains three of the most important civic holidays on the Israeli calendar: *Yom HaZikaron laShoah ve-laG'vurah* or *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day), *Yom HaZikaron l'Chalalei Ma'arachot Yisrael ul'Nifge'ei Pe'ulot Ha'eivah* or *Yom HaZikaron* (Day of the Memory for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel and Victims of Terrorism), and *Yom Ha'atzmaut* (Independence Day). The first two holidays are occasions of utter solemnity. Sirens blare across the country at specified times to commemorate the dead, prompting the whole of the nation to come to a complete stop. To the non-Israeli observer, the scenes are somewhat surreal—all the vehicles on the motorways suddenly halt, and the bustle on the streets abruptly halts while the sirens roar. The mournful period then transitions into the celebrations surrounding Independence Day, just one day after *Yom HaZikaron*. In this brief window of time, three emotionally evocative holidays create a linear narrative of the path to a Jewish state, beginning with the Diaspora (*Yom HaShoah*), transitioning to the struggles for a Jewish state (*Yom HaZikaron*), and ending with the state's establishment (*Yom Ha'atzmaut*).

The two principal vehicles of Holocaust commemoration in the State of Israel—the *Yom HaShoah*, and the Yad Vashem museum—have reflected the overemphasis of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Israeli Holocaust memory. These two primary commemorative practices have helped to shape the “Zionization” of the Holocaust, strengthening the bond between the Ghetto Fighters and their war, and the establishment of the State.

Contestations over the content of these two commemorative practices have often revolved around the extent to which they associate the Holocaust with the heroism of the Ghetto fighters. As early as 1944, the Jews of the Yishuv deliberated over the selection of a memorial date for the Holocaust, and a consensus emerged that the commemoration date ought to be established in close proximity to the 14th of Nisan—the date of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The *Histadrut*—an umbrella organization of labor unionists in Mandatory Palestine—sought to commemorate the Holocaust on April 19th (14th of Nisan on the Hebrew calendar), the day of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.¹²⁴ A letter to the editor of the *Histadrut* newspaper *Davar* from a Tel Avivian named Beham supported this date of commemoration, suggesting that “the Zionist organization would establish the day of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as a sacred day—the memorial anniversary of our martyrs’ death.”¹²⁵ However, because the Uprising began on the first evening of the Jewish holiday of Passover, religious Jews opposed establishing a memorial on that date. Mordecai Nurok, a member of the Knesset for the National Religious party, argued that the government needed to “choose a date that coincides with most of the slaughter of European Jewry and with the ghetto uprisings that took place in the month of Nisan.”¹²⁶

Others, including the future Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, argued that the State should commemorate the Holocaust on the 9th of Av, a traditional fast day of Jewish mourning commemorating the destruction of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem, among other historical calamities.¹²⁷ Others still sought to commemorate the Holocaust on the 10th of Tevet, a Jewish fast date memorializing the siege of Jerusalem in antiquity by Nebuchadnezzar—

¹²⁴ Ofer, “The Strength of Remembrance,” 31.

¹²⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Quoted in Young, “When a Day Remembers,” 60.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

this date is used by many Orthodox Jews today to say a memorial prayer for those killed in the Holocaust.¹²⁸

Although the majority had expressed a desire to commemorate the Shoah around the date of the Ghetto Uprising, differences of opinion emerged on the selection specific date because the Uprising had occurred during the Jewish holiday of Passover. On April 21st, 1951, the Knesset mandated that the 27th of Nisan would serve as the official “Holocaust and Ghetto Rebellion Memorial Day”, explicitly linking the memory of the Holocaust to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.¹²⁹ The decision was a compromise between the secular and religious wings of the Knesset—the 27th of Nisan avoided the Passover holiday while remaining near the Uprising’s date. Furthermore, the National Religious party found the date appropriate because it “recalled the season when European Jews were slaughtered during the Crusades.”¹³⁰ The establishment of *Yom HaShoah* near the date of the Uprising, and including the term “Ghetto Rebellion” in the title, were pivotal moments in the process of Zionist mythmaking, and these decisions laid the groundwork for a Holocaust commemoration day that honored the memory of the Ghetto Fighters at the expense of the Jewish masses.

The bill in the Knesset did not mandate how the day would be commemorated. In the absence of such instruction, the Uprising and its memory took center stage. In the early 1950s, ceremonies were held at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* and at *Lohamei HaGetaot*—kibbutzim established by survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the commemorative activities were mostly undertaken by the survivors themselves, and the rest of the country carried

¹²⁸ Chabad.org, “All About 10 Tevet,” Accessed March 5, 2017, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3170662/jewish/All-About-10-Tevet.htm.

¹²⁹ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 436.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.* See Chapter 4.

on as if it were any other day. For this reason, and because these ceremonies often “serve[d] as platforms for party declarations on current political issues”, the Knesset resolved to reform the memorial day.¹³² Mordecai Nurok decried the status quo. He objected, “Places of entertainment are wide open on this day. The radio plays happy music, dances, and humor, and the display windows glow. Merriment and happiness instead of sorrow and mourning.”¹³³ Nurok and the National Religious party presented a bill that would force Israeli stores to close, mandate schools to hold memorial ceremonies, and grant workers time off to participate in commemorative events.¹³⁴

In response to Nurok’s bill, the Mapai government presented a proposal of its own in 1958. The bill included a change of the day’s name from “Holocaust and Ghetto Rebellion Memorial Day” to “Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Day”. The Mapam party, then the second largest party in the Knesset, objected sharply to the removal of “Ghetto Rebellion” from the name. A member of the Knesset for the party declared, “They are trying to obliterate the memory of Mordechai Anielewicz”, the fallen commander of the Uprising, and a leader of *HaShomer HaTzair*, the party’s youth wing.¹³⁵ Despite her objections, the law passed in April 1959. Though the nomenclature shifted, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising continued to hold an outsized influence on the day’s commemorative activities. Ceremonies held at Israeli schools reinforced the “Zionized” narrative of the Uprising; “[the Ghetto fighters] were recognized as modern day Masada warriors, Tel-Hai defenders, and soldiers in the War of Independence, and they became

¹³² *Ibid.*, 437.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

the protagonists of the ceremony. Tales of their courage...were related in minute detail in reading selections.”¹³⁶

Beginning in the 1960s, and through to the present day, the two principal vehicles of Holocaust commemoration meet on *Yom HaShoah*, when the official state commemorative ceremony is held on the grounds of Yad Vashem, the national Holocaust memorial and museum in Jerusalem. As early as 1942, when the wholesale slaughter of European Jewry had only just begun, Mordecai Shenhavi (sometimes spelled “Shenhavi”), an activist in *HaShomer HaTzair*, wrote a proposal to the Jewish National Fund to establish a memorial to the victims of the Nazis.¹³⁷ Shenhavi wrote, “We are obligated to perpetuate the memory of the century’s greatest catastrophe within the framework of our Zionist enterprise.”¹³⁸ Though years of political debate ensued following the Holocaust, there was a general agreement amongst Zionist leadership that there ought to be a single memorial museum, and that it should be housed in Israel rather than in the Diaspora.¹³⁹ By 1953, a bill reached the floor of the Knesset entitled “Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Act—Yad Vashem”. The bill, presented by Benzion Dinur, the Minister for Education, referenced the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in his definition of “heroism”, arguing that it “symbolized the entire tragedy” of the Holocaust.¹⁴⁰ The museum opened to the public in 1957.

The principal memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising at Yad Vashem stands just outside the entrance to the museum. There, one can find a statue commemorating the Uprising, alongside a memorial to the “righteous gentiles” that sheltered Jews from the Nazis. As Tom

¹³⁶ Ben-Amos, Bet-El and Tlamim, “Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools,” *Israel Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 1 (Spring 1999): 269.

¹³⁷ Esther Zandberg. “Holocaust Memorial Was Already Being Planned in 1942,” *Haaretz*, January 31, 2014.

¹³⁸ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 428.

¹³⁹ See *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 434.

Segev points out, “the visitor meets the righteous gentiles and the ghetto rebels, two exceptions in the history of the Holocaust, before learning anything of the extermination of the Jews.”¹⁴¹

The statue is a replica of Nathan Rapaport’s famed “Monument to the Ghetto Heroes” erected in Warsaw at the site of the Ghetto.



“Monument to the Ghetto Heroes” in Warsaw. Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 423.



Warsaw Ghetto Uprising memorial at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

James Young refers to the Warsaw statue, and its counterpart in Jerusalem, as “the most widely known, celebrated, and controversial” memorial to the Holocaust.¹⁴² The Polish-Jewish sculptor, Nathan Rapoport (or “Rappaport”), was born in Warsaw and was a committed member of *HaShomer HaTzair*, the same Socialist-Zionist youth movement led by Mordechai Anielewicz. During and after the war, Rapoport was employed as a state-sponsored sculptor in the Soviet Union, tasked with creating works of art that celebrated Soviet military heroes.¹⁴³ Given this background, many critics have placed the “Monument to the Ghetto Heroes” in the broader context of Soviet communist military art.

¹⁴² Young, James. “The Biography of a Memorial Icon,” 69.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

Nevertheless, the work is unmistakably Jewish—the heroic figures in the center of the statue are adorned on both sides by menorahs, and a relief on the back of the statue depicts the exiled religious Jewish masses that comprised a large portion of the Ghetto’s population. In the center of the statue stands the robust figure of Mordechai Anielewicz. Like the statue of Anielewicz at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai*, which is discussed in further detail in the next chapter, Anielewicz is depicted with a grenade in his hand. His fellow resistors hold weapons as well—a woman can be seen holding a Kalashnikov rifle, and a young boy is depicted holding a small dagger. There is a marked contrast between the depiction of the resistance fighters and the mass of exiled Warsaw Jewry. The emotions conveyed by the faces of the fighters are resilient and optimistic, while the huddled masses of Warsaw Jewry, accompanied by the religious Jewish imagery that characterized the “Old Jews”, face the ground with sullen expressions. Rapoport’s statue underscores the contrast drawn between the “New” and “Old” Jews, and between the resistors and the unarmed masses.



Relief depicting Warsaw Jewry accompanying the statue of the fighters. Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

The idealized image of the Ghetto fighters displayed in Rapoport's statue was decried by none other than Marek Edelman. In his interview with the Polish journalist Hannah Krall re-transmitted in *Shielding the Flame*, Edelman said “none of them had ever looked like this. They didn't have rifles, cartridge pouches, or maps; besides, they were dark and dirty. But in the monument they look the way they were ideally supposed to. On the monument, everything is bright and beautiful.”¹⁴⁴ Just as Edelman objected to the mythologization of the Uprising by the Zionist movement, he objected to a similar mythological construction displayed in the statue.¹⁴⁵

The memorial in Warsaw, established in 1948, has become a site of great symbolic importance in post-war Holocaust commemoration. Most famously, the West German Chancellor Willy Brandt spontaneously knelt at the foot of the statue in 1970, prompting a broad national conversation in the Federal Republic of Germany, and marking a new chapter in German Holocaust memory.¹⁴⁶



Plaque depicting Chancellor Brandt's spontaneous kneel (*Warschauer Kniefall*) at Willy Brandt Square in Warsaw. Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

¹⁴⁴ Krall and Edelman, *Shielding the Flame*, 77.

¹⁴⁵ Ironically, despite his objections to the statue's depiction, a memorial service in Edelman's memory was held in front of the Warsaw statue shortly after his death.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 94.

Visits by several U.S. presidents, including Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, as well as Pope John Paul II, have underscored the monument's symbolic prominence. Fascinatingly, in 1983, a delegation from the Palestine Liberation Organization (P.L.O.) laid flowers at the memorial site, declaring "As the Jews were then justified to rise up against their Nazi murderers, so now are the Palestinians justified in their own struggle with the Zionist."¹⁴⁷

The version of the statue in Jerusalem was commissioned by an American Jewish philanthropist (and survivor of the Ghetto) Leon Jolson, partially due to fears that the Polish statue would be removed during Poland's post-Six Day War anti-Semitic purges.¹⁴⁸ The image of the strong, strapping figure of Mordechai Anielewicz was already well-known in Israel, and the statue took on new meaning when it arrived at Yad Vashem, as a symbol of the museum. By 1967, and through the 1980s, the official information pamphlet published by the museum bore an image of the statue on its cover.¹⁴⁹ That the museum would adopt the image is not all that surprising—Rapoport, the Zionist and member of *HaShomer HaTsair*, created a monument that reflected the "Zionized" version of the Uprising, steeped in contrasts between "New" and "Old" Jews.

In perhaps the clearest linkage between *Yom Hashoah*, Yad Vashem, and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the official state commemorative ceremony on *Yom HaShoah* takes place in front of Rapoport's statue at Yad Vashem. Since at least 1990, and up through the present day, the memorial has served as the backdrop to the official state commemorations of *Yom HaShoah*. The decision to hold the ceremony there reflects the endurance of a strong connection between commemoration of the Holocaust in general, and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Rather than

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Marcus Meckl, "The Memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising," *The European Legacy* Vol. 13, No. 7, (2008): 815.

¹⁴⁸ Young, "The Biography of a Memorial Icon," 96.

¹⁴⁹ Goldman, "Israeli Holocaust Memorial Strategies," 105.

focusing solely on the masses of European Jewry, who comprised the clear majority of those murdered by the Nazis, the commemoration of the Ghetto and its valiant heroes (literally) takes center stage.



Israeli soldiers on stage during commemorative ceremonies. Rapoport's statue is visible in the background. Courtesy *Flickr Commons*.

Thus, in the two primary vehicles through which the State of Israel commemorates the Holocaust—the Yad Vashem museum and *Yom HaShoah*—the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising continues to weigh outsized influence. This small Uprising of a few hundred participants came to occupy a disproportionate space in Israeli memory relative to the six million Jews who were murdered without weapons in their hands. Furthermore, the presentation of the Uprising in both cases continuously creates and reinforces the inextricable connection between the Holocaust and heroism, and between the Ghetto Uprising and the Zionist movement. As the Israeli political leadership and soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces stand before the statue dedicated to the

Ghetto, a powerful image of national revival is transmitted to the viewer—out of the ashes of the Diaspora, a contingent of intrepid “New Jews” laid the groundwork upon which the state was willed into being. This, in the Zionist context, is the true lesson of the Holocaust.

IV: “From Holocaust to Revival”: The Two *Kibbutzim*

The adoption of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising into Zionist ideology created national heroes of the Uprising’s Zionist leaders. The commanders of the ZOB associated with Zionist youth movements (e.g., Yitzhak Zuckerman and Mordecai Anielewicz) became “near-mythical”¹⁵⁰ figures in the nascent State of Israel; Zuckerman, through his prominence in the Kibbutz movement and post-war activities, and Anielewicz, through posthumous Zionist mythologization of his leadership. Collectively, the Ghetto fighters were symbolically connected to the fighters felled in battles against Palestinians both before and in the course of the 1948 war. The story of Jewish military resistance—be it against the Nazis or the Palestinians—was a single, Zionist continuum that culminated in the creation of a state.

Separated by nearly 200 kilometers of Israeli coastline lay two kibbutzim: *Kibbutz Lohamei Ha’Getaot* (trans. Kibbutz of the Ghetto Fighters), in the north of the country, near the Lebanese border, and *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* (trans. Kibbutz of Mordechai’s Hand), just a short distance from the Gaza Strip. These two kibbutzim, established by members of the Zionist youth organizations to which Zuckerman and Anielewicz belonged, are home to the principal commemorative sites devoted to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in Israel. Both kibbutzim house museums and memorials established in the memory of the Ghetto fighters which chronicle their stories and archive documents on life in the Ghetto. The exhibitions at *Ghetto Fighters’ House Museum* (at *Lohamei HaGetaot*) and *Yad Mordechai Museum: From Holocaust to Revival* (at *Yad Mordechai*) present narratives that connect the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to the establishment of the State of Israel. Echoing the narrative of the Uprising promulgated by the Israeli state, and

¹⁵⁰ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 211.

receiving express acknowledgment and endorsement from the state apparatus, the two kibbutzim became major sites of the “Zionization” of the Holocaust. In a similar manner to Masada, the sites at the two kibbutzim have been instrumentalized by the state to promulgate a “Zionized” narrative of the Jewish story in the twentieth century. The two kibbutzim function much as the physical mountain of Masada functions in the Masada myth—as a physical manifestation of “Zionized” history, engaged with and promoted by the state and its apparatus.

Several survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, including Yitzhak Zuckerman and his wife Zivia, and other members of the socialist-Zionist youth movements *Dror* and *HeHalutz* established *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot* in April, 1949, on the land of the depopulated Palestinian village of Samaria.¹⁵¹ The kibbutz’s founding statement described it as a “settlement on the redeemed land of the Western Galilee—a living and productive monument to the ghetto Uprising.”¹⁵² The name of the Kibbutz underwent several changes before *Lohamei HaGetaot* concretized, reflecting disagreements among the group’s leadership over the nature of the kibbutz. Yitzhak Tabenkin originally proposed that the kibbutz be named *Vilna*, in memory of the large Jewish community from the Lithuanian city. Zuckerman opposed, instead proposing that the Kibbutz be named *Lohamei HaGetaot Samariah* (trans. Ghetto Fighters Samaria), in reference to the Arab village. This reflected the desire of Zuckerman and the founders of the kibbutz to link the Ghetto Uprising and the national struggle by including the name “Samaria”. The Jewish National Fund objected to this name, telling the kibbutz that “the conjoining of ‘ghetto fighters’ and the memory of Samaria was unthinkable”, proposing instead that the

¹⁵¹ Tzvika Dror, a historian and resident of the Kibbutz, called Samaria “a village of terrorists”. See Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 451.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 450.

Kibbutz be named after the Biblical tribe Asher, which had once inhabited the region.¹⁵³ Even after the kibbutz acquiesced and removed “Samaria” from its name, the JNF continued its objections, arguing “that it was unthinkable to include the term *ghetto* in the name of an Israeli settlement”, though these suggestions went unheeded.¹⁵⁴ Thus, the final decision to name the kibbutz *Lohamei HaGetaot* reflected divergent understandings of the relationship between the Holocaust and the Zionist movement—whereas Zuckerman and his fellow Kibbutz members aimed to name the settlement after their heroism in the ghetto, tying it to the land of Israel with the name “Samaria”, the JNF diametrically opposed the use of the term “ghetto”, reflecting a desire to distance the undesirable past of the Holocaust and the Diaspora from the bright future represented by the kibbutz and the Zionist movement at large.

Later that month, the Kibbutz members broke ground on the museum, *Beit Lohamei HaGetaot* (trans. Ghetto Fighters’ House). According to the museum’s website, “Since its establishment in 1949, the museum tells the story of the Holocaust during World War II, emphasizing the bravery, spiritual triumph and the incredible ability of Holocaust survivors and the fighters of the revolt to rebuild their lives in a new country about which they had dreamed—the State of Israel.”¹⁵⁵ The vision of the museum—to connect the Holocaust to the foundation of the State of Israel—is evident in this mission statement.

The museum, which sets out to chronicle the Holocaust, instead focuses on the role of the Zionist youth movements during the period of the Holocaust through the establishment of the State of Israel. Concurrently, according to Segev, “The extermination of the Jews is

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 451.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁵ “About the Ghetto Fighters’ House”, Ghetto Fighters’ House, accessed March 8, 2017. <http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=229>.

presented...as background to the main subject—the fight against the Nazis.”¹⁵⁶ The museum’s peripheral exhibitions, which include artifacts and information on the murder of the six million Jews during the Holocaust, center around “the heart of the museum” —the exhibit “The Warsaw Ghetto Fights Back.”¹⁵⁷ The primary focus of the “Ghetto Fights Back” exhibition is the stories of Zuckerman, his wife, and fellow members of Socialist-Zionist youth movements in initiating the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. As Segev writes, “Lohamei HaGetaot adopted the Warsaw ghetto uprising as if it were theirs alone.”¹⁵⁸

A past exhibition, entitled “Jewish Youth Before the Holocaust”, presented a similar argument. According to an official description on the museum’s website, the exhibit set out to document “the decisive role played by the [Zionist] youth movements in organizing the uprisings in the ghettos of Nazi-occupied Europe, and of the Warsaw ghetto in particular.”¹⁵⁹ The description continues, “This exhibition is also the collective story of the founders of the Ghetto Fighters’ House: members of Zionist youth movements who took part in the uprisings and went on to fulfill...the Zionist goal of immigration to the land of Israel.”¹⁶⁰

A new core exhibition is under construction at the museum, set to replace “30 and 40 year old exhibitions.”¹⁶¹ Part of this upcoming installation, which has yet to be named, will be funded by the Prime Minister’s Office—amounting to a State endorsement of the exhibit and its narrative.¹⁶² The planned exhibition reinforces the continuum between the Holocaust, the

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ “The Warsaw Ghetto Fights Back,” Ghetto Fighters’ House, accessed March 8, 2017. <http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=61&ArticleID=74>

¹⁵⁸ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 446.

¹⁵⁹ “Jewish Youth Before the Holocaust,” Ghetto Fighters’ House, accessed March 8, 2017. <http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=409&ArticleID=69>

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ “The New Permanent Exhibition,” Ghetto Fighters’ House, accessed March 8, 2017. [http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=349&ArticleID=711&dbAuthToken=.](http://www.gfh.org.il/eng/?CategoryID=349&ArticleID=711&dbAuthToken=)

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and the establishment of the State of Israel (as represented through the founding of the kibbutz): “The exhibition’s layout is both chronological and thematic. It highlights the centrality of the youth movements and the Jewish stance—in every sense of the word—as a core value in Holocaust remembrance. *This structural framework creates a connection and narrative continuity that resonates with significance in presenting the history of the Holocaust and the uprising, immigration to Eretz Israel, and founding the Kibbutz.* These pronounced elements represent the dearest yearnings, the manifestation of the ideology and values, guiding the kibbutz and museum founders during the war and since.”¹⁶³

Throughout the museum’s history, successive Israeli governments have embraced the narrative the museum presents. On the first iteration of the Israeli “Holocaust and Heroism Memorial Day” in 1951, (then called “Holocaust and Ghetto Rebellion Memorial Day”), memorial ceremonies were held at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* and *Lohamei HaGetaot*.¹⁶⁴ According to Segev, “The ceremonies at Yad Mordechai and Lohamei HaGetaot did, in fact, often serve as platforms for party declarations on current political issues.” The annual *Yom HaShoah* ceremonies held at the museum have attracted key members of the Israeli government on a yearly basis. In 2015, Yitzhak Herzog, Member of the Knesset and leader of the Zionist Union, the second-largest party in the Knesset, gave the keynote address.¹⁶⁵ In previous iterations of the ceremony, members of the Israeli cabinet and leaders of the Israeli Defense Forces have spoken; in 2014, Yair Lapid, then Minister of Finance, and Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz, then Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, gave speeches of their own. Furthering the state endorsement of the museum is the program mandating Israeli soldiers to visit the museum, which has been in place

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* Emphasis my own.

¹⁶⁴ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 437.

¹⁶⁵ “Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day Annual Assembly,” Ghetto Fighters’ House, accessed March 8, 2017. <http://gfh.org.il/Eng/?CategoryID=39&ArticleID=81&dbAuthToken=>

since at least the 1970s. Mirroring the treks to the top of Masada required of new conscripts, the visits to *Lohamei HaGetaot* reinforce the Zionist myth of the Warsaw Ghetto and its relationship to the modern mission of the IDF. The museum prominently displays photographs of visiting IDF soldiers on its website.¹⁶⁶

The “From Holocaust to Revival” museum housed at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* presents the narrative link between the Uprising and the Zionist movement even more clearly than the museum at *Lohamei HaGetaot*. The kibbutz, founded by members of *HaShomer HaTzair* in the British Mandate period, was originally named *Mitzpe HaYam* (trans. Sea Lookout), but was rededicated in honor of Mordechai Anielewicz in 1944.¹⁶⁷ In 1948, during the Arab-Israeli War, an Egyptian army battalion attacked the Kibbutz, leading a five-day bombardment that ended in its capture. Weeks later, with the assistance of the newly established Israel Defense Forces, the kibbutz members re-took the kibbutz from the Egyptians.¹⁶⁸

The museum on the kibbutz sets out with a similar purpose as *Lohamei HaGetaot*—to symbolically link the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising to the establishment of the State of Israel. The museum, tellingly titled “From Holocaust to Revival”, takes the visitor on a physical journey through three temporal periods: pre-war Jewish life, to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, ending with the 1948 Battle of Yad Mordechai and the establishment of the State of Israel.

As a visitor begins his or her visit to the museum—pre-war Jewish life—he or she is lead into a dark basement. A placard posted on the dim wall reads “In this place try to see what can no longer be seen, to hear what can no longer be heard, to understand what can never be

¹⁶⁶ “The Warsaw Ghetto Fights Back”, *gfh.org.il*.

¹⁶⁷ “Toldot HaKibbutz”, Kibbutz Yad Mordechai. Accessed March 8, 2017. (Hebrew).

<http://www.yadmor.org.il/cgi-webaxy/item?271>.

¹⁶⁸ Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 253.

understood.” Images depicting Jewish children in Eastern Europe are accompanied by the following passage: “Most of the people were poor and humble”. Furthermore, inscriptions use language evoking imagery of the physical degradation of the “Old Jews”: “They lived in small towns; their backs were bent and they walked with a stoop.” Segev notes that, in contrast with the Yad Vashem museum, the explanations are written not in Yiddish but only in Hebrew and English—perhaps to symbolically distance the museum from the language of the “Old Jew” in the Diaspora.

In the second part of the museum, much of the space is devoted to the Jewish resistance to the Nazis as well as Yad Mordechai’s battle with the Egyptians during the War of Independence. According to Segev, the exhibit creates the impression that the two events were connected, “as if the [Zionist endeavors] were an inseparable part of the Holocaust.” Finally, as one enters the third part of the museum, they enter “a museum of War and Victory.” Segev recounts that he passed between the second and third sections of the museum “gradually, almost without noticing, but in accordance with precise planning.” In this third section, a visitor can view detailed maps and battle plans dating to the War of Independence, focusing on the battle at *Yad Mordechai* and the surrounding kibbutzim.¹⁶⁹

The most direct image linking the Ghetto Uprising to the Zionist movement can be found outside the museum. There, on the grounds of the Kibbutz, stands a statue of Mordechai Anielewicz, sculpted by Nathan Rapoport (the same sculptor who created the Uprising memorials at Yad Vashem and in Warsaw).¹⁷⁰ The sculpture presents a stout, muscular figure, in full military uniform, head pointed forward, with a hand-grenade clutched in the right hand.

¹⁶⁹ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 448-450.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 447.

Segev calls the statue “a sort of Israeli version of Michelangelo’s David, but in battle dress.”¹⁷¹ Idith Zertal describes it as “a symbol of power, heroism, and independence.”¹⁷² Behind this statue stands a decrepit water tower, filled with bullet holes, scars of the 1948 Battle of Yad Mordechai. The image of the triumphant Anielewicz emerging against the backdrop of the water tower—a physical reminder of the struggle for a Jewish state—indicates an inextricable link between the Uprising and the 1948 War. Furthermore, as Idith Zertal points out, “the site is constructed so that it appears to the visitor that Anielewicz’s statue, representing the earlier event, grows out of the destroyed water tower, representing the later event.”¹⁷³



Statue of Anielewicz at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai*, in front of water tower. Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

As at *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot*, the Israeli Defense Forces take part in ceremonies commemorating the Holocaust at *Yad Mordechai*.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust*, 37.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*



A group of Israeli soldiers commemorating “Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day” at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai*. Statue of Anielewicz visible in background. Courtesy *Wikipedia Commons*.

Responses to the creation of alternative memorial sites at *Lohamei HaGetaot* and *Yad Mordechai* were not uniformly positive. One Board Member of Yad Vashem opposed the establishment of the memorial sites at the two kibbutzim. He protested, in particular reference to the site at *Yad Mordechai*, “They want to prove that the ghetto rebellion was initiated by members of HaShomer HaTzair.¹⁷⁴ For this reason there is no way to be sure that their publications will be purely truthful and historical. In my opinion, now, when there is a national institute like Yad Vashem, they should dissolve.”¹⁷⁵ The board member evidently feared that the

¹⁷⁴ *HaShomer HaTzair* was a left-wing Zionist youth movement established by Polish Jews in the early 20th century. Mordechai Anielewicz, and several other members of *HaShomer*, (including the founders of *Yad Mordechai*) were members of *HaShomer*.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 450.

HaShomer HaTzair would depict themselves and their fellow left-wing Zionists as the sole initiators of the Ghetto rebellion.

To some extent, the fears of the board member were realized. The narrative construction of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising at the museums of *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot* and *Yad Mordechai* both encapsulate the Uprising's "Zionization", and reinforces it for each successive generation of Israeli visitors. All three dimensions of the Zionist adaptation of the Uprising are represented; (1), the creation of a "heroic" narrative framework, (2) the sole inclusion of Socialist Zionists (i.e. "New Jews") in the story of the Uprising, and (3) the drawing of contrasts between the "Old" and "New Jews." To the first point, Nathan Rapoport's statue of Anielewicz depicts a strong, muscular figure, depicting none of the malnourishment or disease that Anielewicz and his colleagues faced in the squalor of the Warsaw Ghetto. To the second point, those participants in the Uprising who were not members of Zionist youth movements receive scant mention. Finally, the presentation of Jewish life at both *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* and *Lohamei HaGetaot* reflect distorted views of pre-war Jewish life—*Lohamei HaGetaot*'s exhibit entitled "Jewish Youth before the Holocaust" refers primarily to the portion of Jews involved in the Zionist youth movements, and the presentation of the "Old Jew" at *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* reflects the anti-Diaspora mentality common in early-period Zionism. In essence, a visitor to both museums may take away the lesson that the Holocaust was only important insofar as it spawned the Ghetto Uprising, which was logically followed by the establishment of the State of Israel.

The problematic narrative structures presented at these two museums are not illogical—the members of the kibbutz who established these museums sought to stake their claim to leadership in this pivotal moment of Jewish history. Thus, it is unsurprising that they would

present a narrative that stressed the primacy of the Zionists, and that they would create heroic imagery to commemorate the actions of their comrades. Furthermore, it is easy to understand why the two museums would over-emphasize the Ghetto Uprising in the context of the Holocaust—they were established in the memory of their fallen comrades in the Ghetto. Yet the instrumentalization of these two memorial sites by the Israeli government and by the IDF lends official credibility to the narratives that these museums present, amounting to a de facto endorsement by the state.

The use of *Kibbutz Yad Mordechai* and *Lohamei HaGetaot* as sites for educating soldiers and for commemorating the Holocaust creates an inextricable link between the Holocaust, the Ghetto Uprising, and the defense of the State of Israel. In the days prior to the Six-Day War, a young officer in the IDF named Uri Ramon recognized and reflected this narrative construction. He writes, “[T]wo days before the war, when we felt that we were at a decisive moment...I came to the Ghetto Fighters Museum at Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot. I wanted to pay my respects to the memory of the fighters, only some of whom had reached this day when the nation was rising up to defend itself. I felt clearly that our war began there...in the ghettos.”¹⁷⁶

In her work *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Yael Zerubavel describes the process by which several historical events of Jewish history—including the Masada myth and the Battle of Tel Hai—were mythologized and concretized in the formation of Israeli national identity.¹⁷⁷ Central to Zerubavel’s thesis is the connection between these events and the physical Land of Israel—the sites of Masada and Tel-

¹⁷⁶ Uri Ramon, “The Consciousness of the Holocaust during the Six-Day War.” *Dapim Leheker Hashoah Vehamered*, (1969), 59. Quoted in Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 392.

¹⁷⁷ Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*.

Hai became hallowed ground in Israel's civic religion. Both functioned as sites of pilgrimage and education for young Israelis.

Although the greater part of modern Jewish history had occurred in the diaspora, the Zionist movement represented the fighters of Masada, Bar-Kochba, and Tel-Hai as the ideal manifestation of the "New Jew", exemplary of the connection between the Jewish people and the fight for its homeland. Given that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising underwent a similar process of Zionist mythologization as the myths included in Zerubavel's analysis, it seems that she excluded it because it had occurred in the Diaspora.

However, I suggest that the Ghetto Uprising fits squarely into this frame of analysis. Just like at Masada, the two kibbutzim are sites of military visitation, tourism, and official state ceremonial activities. Though the Ghetto Uprising has no physical ties to the kibbutz lands, the narratives promulgated by the museum and endorsed by the State suggest that, indirectly, or in spirit, the Uprisings did in fact happen there. By closely connecting the Zionist movement's struggle for a state to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and presenting the two struggles as part of the same Zionist war, the two kibbutzim function to memorialize the ground on which the Uprising was inspired, if not where it actually occurred. This ongoing process of myth-making, started by the founders of the kibbutzim, and continually endorsed by the State of Israel and the Israel Defense Forces, have created museums and memorial sites that function much in the same way as the mountain of Masada. Thus, I argue that the Ghetto Uprising fits squarely into the "Zerubavelian" conception of Israeli national mythmaking.

V: “The Truth Conquers”: Political Contestations over Memory

That the mythologized Uprising and its folkloric heroes became political instruments is not a particularly surprising development. Just as the Zionist youth movements claimed leadership of this seminal moment in Jewish history, Israeli politicians similarly attempted to monopolize the memory of the Uprising. Almost immediately after the War, political parties recruited the Ghetto Fighters for their causes. *Lamerhav* and *Al Hamishmar* competed for the endorsements of the living ghetto fighters, while two political parties invoked the name of the legendary Mordechai Anielewicz on the campaign trail—*Mapam* and the communist *Kol Haam* party.¹⁷⁸

An amenable political climate welcomed the leftist ZOB ghetto fighters upon their arrival in Mandatory Palestine. The government of the Yishuv, and the successive Israeli government, was led by the *Mapai*, a socialist-Zionist party formed by the merger of two large Zionist labor movements—*Poale Zion* and *HaPoel HaTzair*. This strain of socialist Zionism prominent in the Yishuv and in the early decades of the State of Israel contributed significantly to the public recognition of fighters like Yitzhak Zuckerman, Zivia Lubetkin-Zuckerman, and the mythologization surrounding Mordecai Anielewicz. This is not to say that political in-fighting on the left was absent. The particular organizational allegiances of Zuckerman and Anielewicz prompted different left-wing political parties to compete for the memory of the Uprising. Nevertheless, the politics of the Yishuv enabled the fighters of the ZOB to gain prominence, and to promulgate their narrative of the Uprising. By the 1960s, however, the right-wing Revisionist Zionists began to challenge the narrative of an Uprising led by socialists.

¹⁷⁸ Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 293.

The history of Revisionist Zionism—the ideological forerunner of the modern Likud Party—is inextricable from the life story of its founding ideologue, the Russian-Jewish political theorist Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky was born in Odessa in 1888, and unlike many of the other Zionist leaders of his day, he grew up outside of the dominant traditionalist Jewish culture of Eastern Europe.¹⁷⁹ Instead, his family practiced a more secular Judaism, and Jabotinsky grew up with a relatively cosmopolitan outlook.¹⁸⁰ While in his twenties, Jabotinsky moved to Rome, where he wrote as a political and cultural correspondent for the newspaper *Odeskii Listok*, which catered mainly to “Russified”, secular Jews.¹⁸¹ He regularly contributed articles to Russian Marxist periodicals, including *Avanti* and *Zhizn*.¹⁸²

Around the time of Theodor Herzl’s death in 1904, Jabotinsky began to take a greater interest in Zionism. After going through a personal “ideological crisis”, Jabotinsky emerged with a newfound Zionist identity. The historian Colin Shindler writes that “Jabotinsky eventually embraced nationalism as a means of repairing the world and providing himself with an identity and a direction.”¹⁸³ Writing on the occasion of Theodor Herzl’s death, Jabotinsky wrote in a glowing obituary, “Sometimes from the midst of a nation’s gifted individuals there arises a personality who is endowed with an exceptional sensitivity which other mortals lack...the God of the nation speaks through the lips of this man...Happy are those nations to which destiny grants

¹⁷⁹ Shindler, *The Rise of the Israeli Right*, 18.

¹⁸⁰ Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de siècle*, 122-123.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 30.

such a leader.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, by 1904, Jabotinsky fully embraced Zionism as the answer to the age-old European “Jewish question.” As Stanislawski writes, “From Rome, Jabotinsky returned to Russia and to full-time Zionist activism.”¹⁸⁵

Jabotinsky’s first major encounter with Zionism after his ideological renaissance came as part of the Jewish Legion, a brigade of Jewish soldiers in the British army who arrived in Palestine towards the end of first World War. Jabotinsky envisaged this force as the basis of a future Jewish army that would protect the Jews in the Yishuv from their Arab neighbors.¹⁸⁶ The experiences with the Jewish Legion gave rise to a newfound militarism within Jabotinsky, who had once written a pacifist play as a youth.¹⁸⁷ After the war, he was made a political officer of the Zionist commission by the British Government, and he acted as a liaison between the Jews of the Yishuv and the British military authority.¹⁸⁸ After a series of riots by the Arab population in Jerusalem, Jabotinsky became convinced of a “need for an army for the purposes of self-defense.”¹⁸⁹ This marked a major point of departure between Jabotinsky and the Labor-Zionists who led the governmental structures in the Yishuv. Whereas Jabotinsky unequivocally advocated for a large Jewish armed force, regardless of the legality of such an endeavor, the Labor Zionists preferred a 2,000-man British force to a hypothetical (and illegal) 10,000-man Jewish force.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Vladimir Jabotinsky, “Shiva: On the Death of Herzl,” *Everiskaya zizhn’* 6, (June 1904), quoted in Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 338.

¹⁸⁵ Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de siècle*, 177.

¹⁸⁶ Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 344.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

By 1907, Jabotinsky had resolved to create his own political party and youth movement. During this phase, Jabotinsky envisaged a new conception of Zionist ultra-nationalism, separating himself from the dominant socialist Zionism of his era. Jabotinsky “proceeded to create a version of Zionism that consciously attempted to destroy the traditional stance of Eastern European Jewry”, concluding that the Jewish state ought to encompass all of the land governed by the British Mandate—the land on both banks of the Jordan River, stretching westward to the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁹¹ In order to accomplish this, Jabotinsky proposed that upwards of 40-50,000 Jews would have to emigrate every year for 25 years in order to maintain a Jewish majority in the country. Jabotinsky’s vision of the Jewish state was one that was militarily strong, economically liberal, and composed of all the lands that made up the Biblical Kingdom of Israel. This desire for a Jewish majority in Palestine, coupled with the endeavor to control the land on both banks of the Jordan River, marked a final point of departure between himself and Chaim Weizmann, the leader of the Labor Zionists. Weizmann stated in an interview that “I have no understanding of or sympathy for a Jewish majority in Palestine.”¹⁹² Though Jabotinsky was accused of ignoring the “Arab problem”, his political party and youth movement *Betar* went on to receive a strong following among both Jews in Palestine as well as European Zionists. He went on to lead factions of the Revisionist paramilitary organizations *Palmach* and *Irgun* throughout the 1930s, before eventually passing away in New York.

¹⁹¹ Stanislawski, *Zionism and the fin de siècle*, 202.

¹⁹² Laqueur, *A History of Zionism*, 348.

Years after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Israeli Revisionists pointed to the ZZW (*Żydowski Związek Wojskowy*, trans. Jewish Military Union), a Revisionist Zionist organization, arguing that they had, in fact, been the instigators of the rebellion, and were just as influential, if not more so, than the ZOB in the course of the fighting. Leading the efforts to recognize the ZZW was Chaim Lazar Litai, a writer closely aligned with the Revisionist movement and with *Betar*. Litai wrote *Matzada Shel Varsha* (trans. “Masada of Warsaw”) in 1963, harkening back to the ancient myth of the Masada warriors. The book was published in English in 1966 as *Muranowska 7*, referencing the base of operations for the ZZW in the Warsaw Ghetto. Litai argued that the founding of the ZZW preceded that of the ZOB; that it came to be the most well-armed and well organized force in the ghetto; and that the ZZW undertook the lion’s share of the fighting.¹⁹³ Litai wrote:

After twenty years a picture has emerged in the public eye as it was described by one camp, and when there are memorials to the Warsaw ghetto revolt and to the Jewish underground, they ‘of course’ refer to the Jewish Fighting Organization that had the Polish initials ZOB, which was led by the Zionists organizations of the left. And above all, ignoring deliberately and stubbornly the other fighting underground, and I do not say the second, even though for the truth’s sake as becomes clear from testimonies and documents, I should have said, and as every objective historian should say: the first Jewish fighting underground—the first to organize, the first to warn, the first to train and arm, and the first to take action [was the ZZW].¹⁹⁴

Litai bemoaned the narrative of the left, suggesting (somewhat correctly), that the ZZW had been consciously excluded from it by the leftist survivors. Litai’s assertion, however,

¹⁹³ Libionka and Weinbaum, “Review of Flags.”

¹⁹⁴ Litai, *Muranowska 7*, 6.

that the ZZW was the “first to organize, the first to warn, the first to train and arm, and the first to take action”, has been discounted by historians. Nevertheless, attempts by Revisionist ideologues to contextualize the precise role of the ZZW did not die with Litai in 1997.

In the last decade, the Likud Member of the Knesset Moshe Arens has picked up where Litai left off. Beginning in 2003 and through the present day, Arens has written numerous opinion pieces in Israeli newspapers arguing for greater recognition of the ZZW. His earliest piece, published in 2003 in the *Jerusalem Post* under the title “The Changing Face of Memory: Who Defended the Warsaw Ghetto?”, charges that “the story of the heroic struggle in the Warsaw Ghetto, the myth of Jewish heroism that has captured the imagination of so many, has left little room for the participation of the fighters of the ZZW in the revolt.”¹⁹⁵

Arens’ research efforts culminated in his 2011 monograph entitled *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*. Echoing the arguments of Litai, Arens argues for a historical revision, suggesting that the ZZW were the first to organize and first to fight, leading the Uprising in the Ghetto. He attributes the lack of recognition of the ZZW to the fact that the better part of its ranks was killed either during or after the Uprising, and to a campaign of disinformation led by the members of the ZOB who survived. He writes, “[Yitzhak Zuckerman] assigns to ZOB the primary role in the organization of the uprising and the fighting in the ghetto. He limits ZZW to a marginal role...Zuckerman’s tone regarding ZZW was generally disparaging.”¹⁹⁶ He argues that the ZZW were consciously written

¹⁹⁵ Moshe Arens, “The Changing Face of Memory: Who Defended the Warsaw Ghetto?,” *The Jerusalem Post*, April 29, 2003.

¹⁹⁶ Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*, 10.

out of “this narrative...promoted in Israel, governed for the first twenty-nine years of its existence by the Socialist Labor Party.”¹⁹⁷ Arens concludes, in his introduction, “The true story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising needs to be told. *Veritas vincit*, the truth conquers.”¹⁹⁸

Ironically, for a researcher committed to uncovering the “true story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” Arens commits several distortions of his own. While Arens sets out to reconstruct a new narrative distinct from the traditional “Zionized” narrative of the center-left, his monograph shares many overarching commonalities with that narrative. While he writes in great detail on the role of the ZOB in the Uprising (whom he characterizes as partners with the ZZW), he minimizes the activities of the Bundists and their leader, Marek Edelman. Arens presents the dubious claim that Edelman was left out of “the inner circle that took the important decisions” which “consisted of Zuckerman, Lubetkin, and Anielewicz.”¹⁹⁹ Relative to these three Zionist leaders of the ZOB, Edelman receives meager attention; he is only referenced in relation to his role in the actual fighting and is nowhere to be found in Arens’ account of the planning stages.

Curiously, in an article published in *Haaretz* shortly after Edelman’s death, Arens recounted his visit to Edelman in Warsaw as part of his research. In the article, he refers to Edelman as “one of the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising”, suggesting that “He died not having received the recognition in Israel that he so richly deserved.”²⁰⁰ This is a surprising display of admiration for Edelman given the limited role that he is granted in Arens’ account. Perhaps Arens altered his message to accommodate the perceived

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 112.

²⁰⁰ Moshe Arens, “The Last Bundist,” *Haaretz*, October 5, 2009.

leftward political leanings of *Haaretz's* readership, or simply because this piece served as Edelman's obituary. Nonetheless, given that Arens has established himself as a public authority figure on the Uprising in Israel, it seems that he himself is partially responsible for the lack of recognition for Edelman that he bemoans in the article.

The central claim of Arens' work—that the ZZW was just as influential in the course of the Uprising as the ZOB—has been questioned by the Polish researchers Dariusz Libionka and Laurence Weinbaum. The two scholars, who have devoted much of their research to understanding the role of the ZZW, accuse Arens of sloppy scholarship, citing several instances wherein Arens employs discredited sources in support of his argument.²⁰¹ They write, “This book is clearly not the work of a qualified historian who has an appreciation of the caution required in using oral testimony and who understands that, after so many years, not all aspects of the uprising can be established with certainty.” Furthermore, Libionka and Weinbaum attribute Arens' shoddy scholarship to his political biases. They write, “at times, the author's emotional closeness to the subject of his study appears to have clouded his judgment”, adding that “Among scholars...it is unlikely that Arens' work will be considered as dispassionate history writing.”²⁰²

Arens' work received a glowing review from none other than the Prime Minister of Israel and Likud Party leader, Benjamin Netanyahu. Printed prominently on the book's back cover, Netanyahu writes:

²⁰¹ The research conducted by Libionka and Weinbaum has attempted to reconstruct the history and role of the ZZW in the Warsaw Ghetto. Though they do not dispute that the survivors of the ZOB actively sought to exclude the ZZW from their narratives, they argue that, given the paucity of reliable information, it is currently impossible to evaluate the exact role of the ZZW. See Libionka and Weinbaum, “Deconstructing Memory and History: The Jewish Military Union (ZZW) and the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* Vol 18, No. 1-2 (Spring 2006): 87-104.

²⁰² Libionka and Weinbaum, “Review of Flags,” 106.

In his new book, Professor Moshe Arens brings to light the truth about Jewish heroism and self-sacrifice in the Warsaw ghetto. His thorough research does justice to groups and individuals whose critical role and extraordinary bravery have up until now been largely left out of the historical record. Facing unimaginable odds and internecine differences, these men and women fought and fell for the honor of the Jewish people, and they deserve to be recognized. Moshe Arens' groundbreaking work is another remarkable chapter in the life of a leader who has dedicated himself to strengthening the Jewish people and the Jewish state.²⁰³

Echoing the mythical construction of the Uprising which materialized in the years following the War, Netanyahu explicitly links “Jewish heroism and self-sacrifice”, suggesting that it was the “heroic deaths” of the fighters that merited their recognition. Furthermore, Netanyahu’s blanket suggestion that the fighters “fought and fell for the honor of the Jewish people” is neither provable nor reflected in evidence. As Marek Edelman writes, “All it was about, finally, was that we not just let them slaughter us when our turn came. It was only a choice as to the manner of dying.”²⁰⁴ Though Edelman’s comments somewhat cynically erase all ideology from the inspiration behind the Uprising, the suggestion that he, and other fighters who may have shared in his view, were fighting “for the honor of the Jewish people”, is suspect at best and disingenuous at worst.

Flags received similar endorsements from former state officials, including those unaligned with Revisionist Zionism. Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, the former Ashkenazi Chief

²⁰³ Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*, Back Cover.

²⁰⁴ Krall and Edelman, *Shielding the Flame*, 14-15.

Rabbi of the State of Israel, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, and a Holocaust survivor, called Arens' work "an essential addition to the library of Holocaust heroism."²⁰⁵ Professor Shevah Weiss, the Former Speaker of the Knesset for the Israeli Labor Party, called Arens' work "an outstanding study of a central chapter in the history of Holocaust heroism."²⁰⁶

It is undoubtedly true that the narrative constructed by the Socialist Zionist establishment after the war downplayed the influence of the ZZW. The reports of the Uprising published by the Nazi commander Jürgen Stroop attest to a greater role of the ZZW in the Uprising than Zuckerman and Gutman admit in their memoirs.²⁰⁷ Yet the narrative that Arens and his fellow Revisionists so stridently criticize echoes the same distortions used in their alternative—a narrative of an Uprising led and carried out solely by Zionists, be it Socialists or Revisionists. Echoing the "Zionized" narrative, Arens perhaps also overemphasizes the relative importance of the Uprising in Holocaust memory, and speaks of it in poetic, mythological terms. He writes, "The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was one of the major events of World War II...It will go down in history as a battle between the few against the many, the sons of light against the sons of darkness, good against evil incarnate."²⁰⁸

That the Revisionist crusade for recognition of the ZZW has endured into the 2010's, and has been recognized by Israelis as prominent as Benjamin Netanyahu, speaks to the extent to which the Uprising has become ingrained in Israeli national identity. The

²⁰⁵ Arens, *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*, Back Cover.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ "The Stroop Report", published by Jürgen Stroop, the commander of the Nazi forces in the Ghetto, details the fighting led by the ZZW around Muranowska Square. See Jürgen Stroop, *The Stroop Report: The Jewish Quarter of Warsaw is No More!*, trans. Sybil Milton, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1980).

²⁰⁸ Arens. *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*, 283.

same political incentives that prompted Yitzhak Zuckerman to downplay the roles of the Revisionists and the Bundists, and Marek Edelman to similarly distort the Uprising's history to erase any traces of its Jewish features, still exist today—the memory of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising remains a valuable political commodity. Yet in the course of this persistent contest for memory, the fact remains that all sides—Revisionists, Socialists, and Bundists alike—have distorted the historical truth in advance of distinct political agendas, and have done so in similar fashions.

Conclusion: The State of the Myth Today

On December 23, 2013—some seventy years after the conclusion of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—the Israeli author and Holocaust survivor Eli Gat published an opinion piece in *Haaretz* entitled “The Warsaw Ghetto Myth.”²⁰⁹ In the piece Gat attacks several of the fundamental premises underlying the heroic narrative of the Uprising constructed by the Zionist movement. Gat charges that the accepted narrative greatly overestimated the number of fighters and the duration of the fighting. He writes, “The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising—the very name is deceptive. The Jews of Warsaw never revolted... Only a small group of young people revolted, whose size and efforts were inflated to mythic proportions in Israel after the state was established in 1948.”²¹⁰ Gat continues, “the activist part of the Labor movement... laid claim to the Uprising while repressing the memory of other movements that took part, like the Bundists, Communists and right-wing Revisionists.”²¹¹

The publishing of Gat’s article was something of a *cause célèbre* in Israel. Moshe Arens, seemingly ever-present in Israeli media coverage of the Uprising, wrote his response three days later, titled “The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt is No Myth.”²¹² Despite his outright repudiation of Gat’s thesis in the title of his op-ed, Arens finds some common ground with Gat. He writes, “The article by Eli Gat, ‘The Warsaw Ghetto Myth’, is an important commentary on the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt and the Jewish tragedy during World War II, but its conclusion is wrong: The Warsaw ghetto uprising is no myth. It is a compelling tale of Jewish heroism against insuperable

²⁰⁹ Eli Gat, “The Warsaw Ghetto Myth,” *Haaretz*, December 23, 2013.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Moshe Arens, “The Warsaw Ghetto Revolt is No Myth.” *Haaretz*, December 26, 2013.

odds.”²¹³ While Arens decries Gat’s attempts to undermine the extent of Jewish heroism in Warsaw, and challenges Gat’s conclusion that the Uprising led to the liquidation of the Ghetto, he agrees that “the narrative of the uprising as defined by Zivia Lubetkin...and repeated by her husband, Yitzhak ‘Antek’ Zuckerman...strays quite far from what really happened in the Warsaw ghetto in April 1943.” He goes on to sympathize with Gat, adding that Gat’s “description...of the part played by ZZW will probably be rejected immediately by those Israeli historians who dismiss out of hand any writings about the Warsaw Ghetto revolt by those not considered ‘professional’ historians.”²¹⁴ Arens’ criticism falls in line with his central argument in *Flags over the Warsaw Ghetto*; he criticizes the narrative established by Zuckerman and the left for excluding the Revisionists, while simultaneously acclaiming the heroic Zionism imbued in that same narrative by the Zionist left.

Not every response to Gat’s article was as charitable in its criticism. Writing in the right-wing newspaper *The Jerusalem Post*, the columnist Isi Liebler wrote a diatribe against Gat and *Haaretz*, attacking the paper for running the opinion piece. Liebler begins, “I rubbed my eyes in disbelief this week when I read an article prominently featured on *Haaretz*’s website entitled ‘The Warsaw Ghetto Myth.’”²¹⁵ He continues, “This unquestionably distorted interpretation of events typifies the historical revisionism to which *Haaretz* is predisposed, not only with regard to post-Zionism but now also to Jewish history.”²¹⁶ From there, Liebler quickly launched into a digression against *Haaretz* and its readership, arguing that “*Haaretz* journalists are often indistinguishable from Palestinian propagandists.”²¹⁷

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Issi Liebler, “Candidly Speaking: Debasing the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising,” *The Jerusalem Post*, December 25, 2013.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, not every criticism of Gat came from right-wing publications. Responding in *Haaretz*, the historian and Tel Aviv University professor Havi Dreifuss wrote “Don’t Minimize the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt.”²¹⁸ Dreifuss calls Gat’s article “a distortion of history and morality”, and “fundamentally flawed.”²¹⁹

Tellingly, Isi Liebler connects *Haaretz*’s decision to run Gat’s article to the paper’s “zeal to undermine the core principles of Zionism.” To Liebler, and likely to others, an attack on the Ghetto Uprising constituted an attack on the very foundations of Zionist ideology.²²⁰ The firestorm elicited by Gat’s editorial—which seems to have been published at a seemingly random occasion, unattached to any anniversary of the Uprising—suggests that the Ghetto Uprising has retained a distinctive space in Israeli collective memory.

Up to the present day, the IDF has continued its program sending young recruits to visit the museum at *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot*, with one brief interlude. Throughout Israel’s tumultuous, conflict-ridden history, the meaning of the Holocaust has often reflected Israel’s perceived position in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the lead-up to the 1967 Six-Day War, Israeli politicians invoked the specter of a “second Holocaust” to encourage Israeli preparation for war.²²¹ In her work *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Idith Zertal argues that the State of Israel instrumentalized the Holocaust during this period to garner sympathy on the world stage, projecting an image of victimhood.

Yet in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, the notions of victimhood and weakness no longer reflected the reality on the ground. Israel swiftly defeated five Arab armies, and conquered the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights—territory gained from Jordan, Egypt,

²¹⁸ Havi Dreifuss, “Don’t Minimize the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt,” *Haaretz*, December 29, 2013.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ Liebler, “Candidly Speaking.”

²²¹ Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust*.

Lebanon and Syria. The resounding victory and ensuing military occupation established Israel as a military hegemon in the region. The First Intifada shifted perceptions of Israel even further—to that of an aggressor. Palestinians and their supporters around the world began to instrumentalize the Holocaust, accusing Israelis of Nazi-like tactics in their occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. A few months after the Intifada began, the IDF suspended its program mandating its soldiers to visit *Lohamei HaGetaot*. The official explanation given by the army stated that there were not enough qualified tour guides on staff at the museum to accommodate the cadets. However, Segev writes, “Unofficially, there were reports that the events in the occupied territories had elicited extreme reactions from the soldiers: some had concluded from what they saw in the museum that brutality like that of the Nazis was the way to deal with rioters.”²²² Alternatively, others “concluded that they could no longer be accessories to the oppression in the territories” after visiting the Ghetto Fighters’ House.²²³ That visits to the Ghetto Fighters’ House evoked such emotional reactions from young Israeli conscripts suggests that the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising remains a resonant and relevant event in the minds of Israeli youth.

The ultimate power of the myth established in the first decades of the State of Israel lies in its endurance as a symbol of the Holocaust and of Zionism in the present. On the 65th anniversary of the Uprising, then IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi visited the memorial site in Warsaw, his comments reflecting the persistence of the Uprising in Israeli Holocaust memory. He said, “The central story of the Warsaw Ghetto is a story of the utmost importance for IDF combat soldiers”, adding that Israel and the IDF are the “answer to the Holocaust.”²²⁴ In 2012, in an act of religious anti-Zionism, ultra-Orthodox Jewish protestors defaced the statue of

²²² Segev, *The Seventh Million*, 408.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Yuval Azoulay, “IDF Chief, in Warsaw: Israel, Its Army, Are Answer to Holocaust,” *Haaretz*, April 29, 2008.

Mordechai Anielewicz outside of Yad Vashem, perhaps cognizant of the statue's symbolic significance.²²⁵ The vandals wrote, "If Hitler hadn't existed, Zionists would have invented him" on the right wall of the statue. That the protestors chose to deface the statue of Anielewicz suggests that they viewed it as a symbol of both the Holocaust and of the Zionist enterprise that they were decrying.

According to Idit Gil, Israeli Holocaust education has dialed back its emphasis on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising since 2000. Whereas Israeli textbooks once focused almost singularly on the Uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto, "textbooks since 2000...present in depth at least one of the revolts in ghettos such as Bialystok, Vilna and Krakow. Fighting back has been expanded to include partisans fighting in the forests; revolts in the extermination camps; Treblinka, Sobibor, and Auschwitz; and Jews fighting in the allied forces."²²⁶ On resistance in general, Gil notes a shift in terminology reflecting a change in attitude towards Jewish action (or inaction) during the Holocaust. She writes, "Since 2000, programs, textbooks, and exams replaced the term of revolts with the concepts of 'fighting', 'resistance', 'coping' and 'struggle': the last three concepts describe daily life in the ghettos. Thus, the dichotomist view of heroism and sorrow, which characterized the 'Zionist stage', was replaced with a much less sentimental approach."²²⁷ Thus, the myth of the Zionist-Ghetto Uprising, steeped in contrast between those who fought and those who did not, seems to have somewhat subsided.

Thus, Holocaust memory in Israel has broadened to reflect the multiplicity of experiences that the Jews of Europe underwent. Beginning in the aftermath of the Eichmann Trial in 1961, the "passive resistance" of every-day life has been recognized alongside the "active resistance"

²²⁵ Hillary Zaken, "'Hitler, thank you for the Holocaust' is spray-painted on Yad Vashem," *The Times of Israel*, June 11, 2012.

²²⁶ Gil, "Teaching the Shoah," 6.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*

of the Warsaw Ghetto. Particularly since 1990, state commemorative activities have emphasized the personal value of every individual killed during the Holocaust, not merely those who fought in the ghetto. A case in point is the commemorative project entitled “Every One Has a Name.” On *Yom HaShoah*, loudspeakers are installed around the country, and pedestrians are invited to step up to the microphone and read the names of Holocaust victims aloud. In education, a more inclusive narrative of the Holocaust has become the norm. The anti-diaspora sentiment reflected in the “Zionized” narrative of the Holocaust no longer permeates Israeli identity in the way it once did. Gone are the days when the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising dominated Israeli collective memory of the Holocaust.

And yet, Eli Gat prompted an uproar when he called the Israeli narrative of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising a “myth” in 2013. Moshe Arens has, in the twenty-first century, found a receptive audience (in none other than the Likud Prime Minister,) for his political crusade to recognize to the role of the ZZW in the Uprising. Israeli commemoration of the Holocaust still references the Ghetto Uprising disproportionately—on *Yom HaShoah* in 2015, the leader of the second largest Israeli political party (Isaac Herzog, Zionist Union) spoke at *Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot*, while the leader of the largest party, Likud Prime Minister Netanyahu, spoke in front of the famous statue of Anielewicz at Yad Vashem. The museums at *Lohamei HaGetaot* and *Yad Mordechai* continue to present their “Zionized” narratives of the Holocaust up to the present day, and they still receive state endorsement through funding and through IDF visitation programs. For today’s Israeli students, who are taught a more nuanced history of the Holocaust than were their parents or grandparents, visits to the two museums concurrently reinforce the lessons of the past.

Thus, while one can reasonably suggest that the “Zionized” narrative of the Holocaust has lost its full grip on Israeli society, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which has defined that narrative, has retained a degree of its primacy into the present.

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