# Memory and Ethnicity

# Memory and Ethnicity:
# Ethnic Museums in Israel and the Diaspora

Edited by

Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Dario Miccoli
and Tudor Parfitt

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# INTRODUCTION

EMANUELA TREVISAN SEMI, DARIO MICCOLI AND TUDOR PARFITT

Recent years have witnessed the growth and multiplication of places of Jewish memory, such as museums and different kinds of memorials. These are particularly linked to the memory of the *Shoah*, but also to places commemorating the Jewish past in the Diaspora both in places where Jews are still living and from which they have mostly disappeared, such as eastern Europe or the lands of Islam.[1] In Israel there are also places where the memories of marginalised Israeli citizens, such as Palestinian Arabs, have been given some recognition and expression.

In this volume, themes like memory, collective memory, and the transmission of memory[2] are highlighted and analysed mainly in the context of Israel's particular circumstances. This book deals with issues which are interwoven with the history of the State of Israel and Zionist ideology, with its symbols and values, but also with the many stories of migrants who make up the country.

Memory studies have flourished in particular due to the rediscovery of the works of Maurice Halbwachs,[3] the publications of *Les lieux de mémoire* by Pierre Nora,[4] and especially thanks to Paul Ricoeur's[5] responses to themes dealt with by Halbwachs and Nora.

Collective memory depends on the ways in which individual memories are preserved, transported and stabilised by the social groups to which the individual belongs, as Halbwachs discovered, and this generates a current of thought that argues that the past can still continue to live within the group that maintains it. These memories provide the specificity and consistency of a group especially when it is facing major historical changes. Through the transmission of places of memory which are considered to be shared the individual participates in its collective memory, one that is still alive in individual memories and is part of a broader set of memories. This volume offers many examples of how memory has been carried and transported by Jewish communities during their migration. Aleida Assman writes about the memory of non-

hegemonic groups that can be recovered through oral histories and images but also from photographs, films and documentaries and which may also be representative of different forms of resistance,[6] preserved in many of the places of memory mentioned in the chapters of this volume.

From the articulation of national history to the stories of migration, especially in a country like Israel whose national history is made up of so many stories of migration, it is possible to establish a national collective memory that is the result of different collective memories. A national collective memory is the expression of the multiplicity of Jewish migration trajectories, some of them recognised and legitimised such as the *ashkenazi* experience, and others such as the *mizrahi* communities less so. The national collective memory also includes that of the pre-existing population, the Palestinian Arabs. The Museum of the Jewish Diaspora (*Beit Ha-Tefutzot*), located in Tel Aviv and discussed in this volume, should have attempted to create a collective memory for all the various Jewish groups which migrated to Israel. In the event it responded to the felt need to support the master Eurocentric narrative of the national enterprise, which has had the effect of marginalising the *mizrahi* experience.

Also, the memory preserved or frozen in places of the Jewish diaspora is affected by the dynamics of recognition and legitimisation given to the Jews in countries they inhabited for millennia—this is the case in Morocco or more recently the USA. In Italy, these dynamics have given rise to a complex relationship between the Libyan Jewish diaspora in Rome and Israel as well as the long settled Italian Jewish community.

The development of a common heritage through the creation of museums has aesthetic as well as commemorative value,[7] but such a development also creates a political narrative which in this case begins with the creation of the State of Israel and celebrates the pioneering and heroic phase of its history, and may also recall earlier histories and stories and the multiplicity of migration experiences.

The many small museums discussed in this volume are a new phenomenon and the expression of the desire to commemorate of individual *entrepreneurs de mémoire* who wished to leave a record of their own vision of their migratory story. The small ethnic museums that have recently arisen in Israel fit into the dynamics of multiculturalism which have been more accepted over the last decades in Israel, countering the former ideology of the negation of the Diaspora, a *leitmotiv* of Zionism, which implied the erasure of thousands of years of diaspora history. In cases where this has not been done, such as Egyptian Jewry, digital resources may come to the rescue.

Therefore, this volume is mainly devoted to a study of ethnic museums in Israel but for comparative purposes there are three whole chapters and parts of other chapters which deal with museums (in the case of Miccoli's chapter a virtual museum) not on Israeli soil but elsewhere, such as Morocco, Florida and Rome. In the first chapter, Tamar Katriel looks at how the Israeli museological scene has grown over the years to accommodate a variety of ethnic voices. Katriel shows that the national narrative, based on Zionist ideology and a binary opposition between Diaspora and return to the Land of Israel, is presently challenged by an increasingly multivocal cultural field. By analysing this dialectic through what she calls "local vernacular museums," such as the Museum of Central European Jews and that of the Russian-Jewish Veterans of World War Two, Katriel shows how these grassroots initiatives attempt to reshape the Israeli public arena thanks to novel display policies and cultural programming. Moreover, these museums exemplify broader shifts in the Israeli national identity, leading to an attenuated version of multiculturalism.

So to better understand the opposition between Diaspora and Land of Israel, ethnic and national memory, and how this has been visualised in museums, it is useful to consider the case of *Beit Ha-Tefutzot*, the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora. Through an in-depth analysis of this museum and basing herself on seminal works by Eco and Baudrillard, in the second chapter Shelly Shenhav-Keller discusses how Jewish history and past are presented in *Beit Ha-Tefutzot*. By convincingly arguing that the museum translated the diasporic Jewish past into a series of "invented exhibits," Shenhav-Keller demonstrates that *Beit Ha-Tefutzot* embodies a double message—the overt content-related and ideational message for which it was created, and an ideological one, designed to meet the needs of the mythical-historical national narrative that has long dominated the Israeli public sphere.

Many of the so-called ethnic museums born in Israel in the last few decades have to do with communities long kept at the margins of the national narrative, namely the *mizrahim*. For this reason, the next three chapters focus on different museological institutions founded by the Jews of Morocco, Libya and India respectively.

Emanuela Trevisan Semi investigates museums and heritage centres created by Moroccan Jews in four Israeli locations. Through these case-studies she illustrates the dynamics of memory and oblivion which come into play when representing the past of a community of memory. According to Trevisan Semi, these museums function thanks to *entrepreneurs de*

*mémoire* belonging to a generation of Jews born in Morocco who came to Israel in early adolescence and who now wish to leave some trace of a long and glorious history which—according to them—risks being completely obliterated from the memory of the new generations. Additionally, the Moroccan Jewish museums also confirm the possibility in today's Israel of publicly displaying (tentative) signs of an ethnic memory that had long been kept on the margins.

Stemming from a similar approach grounded in memory studies and in the works of Nora and others, the chapter of Piera Rossetto focuses on the Libyan Jewish community and its multiple public representations, in-between Israel and the Diaspora. Analysing the Libyan Room in the Jewish Museum of Rome on the one hand, and an exhibition on Libyan Jewish material culture that opened in Netanya, Israel, in 2012 on the other, the author clarifies the importance of looking at museums as *lieux de mémoire* and as cultural media where different approaches to the construction of collective and personal memory can be traced. Rossetto interestingly compares Israeli and European cultural institutions, interpreting museums as places which construct a kind of relational memory which connects Libyan Jews through time and space, transmitting their heritage from one generation to the other.

Of all the *mizrahim*, the Indians are perhaps the least known and studied. In the fifth chapter, Benedetta Cordaro tries to fill this gap, investigating the Cochin Jewish Heritage Centre of Moshav Nevatim, in Southern Israel. Through an in-depth discussion of the notion of *mizug galuyot* and taking into account the works of prominent Israeli sociologists, Cordaro shows that the museum of Moshav Nevatim is that of a community in evolution, defined by an attentive selection of elements taken from the Indian Jewish past and at the same time deeply rooted in the reality of today's Israel. The museum can thus be seen as a crucial tool through which this marginalised community affirms its identity and reclaims its legitimacy within the Israeli national narrative.

In the sixth chapter, Miri Gal-Ezer, basing her study on theoretical work by Bourdieu, Bhabha and Eisenstadt among others, analyses the divides within which the Umm El Fahem Art Gallery, in Northern Israel, operates. The author explores some of the processes that foster the success and vision of the Umm El Fahem Art Gallery in the context of contemporary cultural Arab-Israeli and Muslim-Jewish relations. Allegedly the first modern Arab art museum in Israel, the gallery operates as a secular cultural institution in a city of the Galilee inhabited by a Muslim majority. Umm El Fahem exhibits works by Israeli Jewish and Muslim artists as

well as foreigners and Palestinians from the Occupied Territories. According to Gal-Ezer, the gallery can therefore be viewed as a promising space of cultural interaction and cooperation between different sectors of Israeli society.

Museums located outside Israel offer yet another perspective on how Jewish identity and heritage are preserved. A particularly interesting example is the Jewish Museum of Casablanca, Morocco. Sophie Wagenhofer looks at the extent to which this museum, dedicated to the history of the Jews of Morocco, reproduces or challenges dominant discourses on Moroccan identity, images of Arab-Jewish relations and the narratives considered by many as central and unavoidable in Jewish museology—for example the *Shoah*. The analysis of this museum also gives an insight into how Jewish history can now be displayed in a Muslim country, which until the 1960s hosted one of the most vibrant Jewish communities of the Maghreb.

Despite the increased number of ethnic museums, some communities still lack a cultural institution to commemorate their history. In order to address this impasse, the eighth chapter by Dario Miccoli looks at how Egyptian Jewish associations and cultural institutions are utilising the Internet and digital resources. Contextualising all this within the burgeoning field of digital history, Miccoli highlights the digital interconnections that can be traced between Egyptian Jewish memory, history and ethnic identity. Investigating websites of Egyptian Jewish associations and digital projects undertaken by amateur associations and by the National Library of Israel, the author argues that the internet allows for new ways of remembering the Egyptian Jewish past and, in doing so, creates innovative networks of exchange and discussion where hitherto marginalised historical sources are collected.

The last chapter by Katz and Parfitt describes the creation of the Jewish Museum of Florida which has recently been acquired by Florida International University. The museum has seen its role as presenting a positive "invented" narrative of the times when Jews predominated in Miami Beach and its recent history highlights the difficulties of sustaining small ethnic museums in the United States and elsewhere.

## Notes

[1] See: Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Piera Rossetto, "Memory and Forgetting among Jews from the Arab-Muslim Countries. Contested narratives of the Past," *Quest – Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 4 (2012): 2–4, available at: http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/index.php?issue=4 (accessed May 26, 2013).
[2] On the relations between memory and transmission see David Berliner, "Anthropologie et transmission," *Terrain* 55 (2010): 4–19.
[3] Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997) and Id., *Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994).
[4] *Les lieux de mémoire*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–1986).
[5] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[6] Aleida Assman, "Canon and Archive," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 97–107.
[7] See Michel Rautenberg, "Les 'communautés' imaginées de l'immigration dans la construction patrimoniale," *Les Cahiers de Framespa* 3 (2007), available at: http://framespa.revues.org/274 (accessed May 26, 2013).

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# GLOSSARY

## List of most recurring Hebrew terms

*‘Aliyah* (pl. *‘aliyot*, lit. “ascent [to Zion]”)—the migration of a Jew to the Land of Israel.

*Ashkenazi*—a Jew from Central or Eastern Europe and, more broadly, a Jew of European descent.

*Halakhah*—the Jewish law.

*Ketubah*—Jewish marriage contract.

*Ma‘abarah*—transit camps created in the 1950s to accommodate the new migrants to the State of Israel, especially those coming from the Middle East and North Africa.

*Mizrahi* (pl. *mizrahim*, lit. “Easterners”) —a Jew from the Middle East and North Africa.

*Mizrahiyut*—Eastern identity.

*Mizug galuyot*—the “ingathering of the exiles.” The term refers to the ideology upon which the process of migration to the Land of Israel, and the absorption into a new Jewish national culture, was to be based.

*‘Oleh* (pl. *‘olim*)—a Jewish migrant to the Land of Israel.

*Shlilat ha-golah*—the “negation of the Diaspora.” This expression refers to the idea that, after migrating to the Land of Israel, the Jews were to abandon and negate their previous diasporic history and memory.

In this book we followed a simplified version of the scientific transliteration system from Hebrew into English: “ ‘ ” stands for *‘ayin*, “ ’ ” for *’alef*, “v” for *vav*, “h” stands both for *heh* and *het*, “kh” and “k” for *kaf*, “q” for *qof*, “tz” for *tzade* and the sign “-” between two or more words indicates the construct-case.

# CHAPTER ONE

# HOMELAND AND DIASPORA IN ISRAELI VERNACULAR MUSEUMS

TAMAR KATRIEL

Museums in general, and heritage museums in particular, have assumed a major role in the construction of collective identities. They serve as resources for state-power as well as central players in the "politics of recognition"[1] associated with the increasingly multicultural arenas of contemporary societies. As sites of cultural production, museums provide platforms in and through which national and ethnic identities (among others) are constructed, negotiated and challenged in the public domain.[2] They thus serve as sites of self-display and recognition, providing contexts in which particular narratives of the past, which are associated with national history or the cultural legacy of particular groups, can be rehearsed and re-animated. The considerable expansion of the Israeli museum scene since the 1970s, including many heritage museums relating to various Jewish pasts, indicates that Israel has joined the global enterprise of museum-making with great enthusiasm.[3] Indeed, as the preface to an English-language guide book to Israeli museums notes: "There is a passion for museums in Israel, a passion for preserving and interpreting the past, understandable in this old-new land."[4] Given the large number of heritage museums that dot the Israeli landscape, only part of which are officially recognised by the Ministry of Culture, this chapter addresses the question of what versions of the past are being preserved, narrated and interpreted in these Israeli museums, and in what ways has the Israeli museological scene grown to accommodate ethnic voices over the years. Addressing some examples from my own and others' ethnographic research in museum settings, I will show that the focus on the national-Zionist master-narrative that initially dominated the Israeli museum scene has been to some extent challenged and enriched by various ways of acknowledging the increasing multivocality of the Israeli

cultural field, in which ethnic voices have been vying for recognition and echoing each other's claims for social standing and cultural self-respect. This ethnicisation of the Israeli museum-making enterprise entails reconfiguring the basic temporal and spatial orientations that underlie the Zionist project, which are expressed in the value-laden binary of the Jewish Diaspora as exile and a past to be left behind, and of the Israeli-Zionist Homecoming as a dominant present. This mythic binary undergirds the national narratives cultivated—directly or indirectly—by Israeli national museums whether they are specifically concerned with the enshrining of the Zionist project or not.

Over time, the rigidity of this underlying ideological binary has been relaxed through a revaluation of the Diaspora past in museum displays, which took different forms. On the one hand, the events of the Holocaust gave rise to great grief and a reassessment of the Diaspora Jewish world within Zionist circles. The growing centrality of the Holocaust in national commemoration clearly indicated that the Diaspora past was not to be left behind. On the other hand, the cultural heritage of the Jewish Diaspora writ large became a more central part of the museological scene with the establishment in Tel Aviv of a museum wholly devoted to this legacy, *Beit Ha-Tefutzot* (in Hebrew, lit.: "House of the Diasporas") in 1978. As these new museum trends indicate, the Zionist trope of "negation of the Diaspora" (in Hebrew: *shlilat ha-golah*), which in some cases involved downplaying the continued relevance of the Diaspora past, and in others its outright denigration, began to lose its hold on Israeli society. Yet, as scholars have shown in various ways,[5] the Diaspora-as-exile/Zion-as-Homeland binary, and its attendant teleological narrative that traces the Jews' path from various diasporic locations to the land of Israel, remains dominant even in national museums devoted to Jewish Diaspora life.

In her study of the cultural work performed within and by several national-level museums in Israel—including a temporary exhibition on Orientalism in Israeli art at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv and the Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem[6]—Goldstein points to the ideological constraints that limit these museums' capacity to fulfil the liberal promise envisioned by their designers and curators and develop inviting and inclusive spaces that are equally open to all, including non-Jewish citizens of Israel, Palestinians and others. She interprets some of these limits in museum displays and practices in relation to the emergence of the debate concerning the local version of multiculturalism in academic discourse,[7] as well as among museum professionals, and notes in passing the trend towards establishing local-vernacular museums in Israel. Indeed, the proliferation of such museums

around the country since the mid-1970s seems the most notable development in the Israeli museology and it is this part of the museological landscape that will hold our attention here. Many of these vernacular museums deal directly with aspects of the Zionist agenda and its core values of immigration (in the valorised sense of *'aliyah*), settlement and defence,[8] and were expressly designed to reaffirm the Zionist place-making ethos, as will be discussed in the next section. Other local-vernacular museums, also found around the country, house the cultural legacies and memories of Jewish-Diaspora communities as reconstructed in the Land of Israel. These Diaspora-affirming displays and narratives give voice to both loss and nostalgia, as will be discussed below. By attending to the Diaspora/Homeland dialectic in these local-vernacular museums, I will explore the ways in which these largely grassroots, bottom-up initiatives attempt to shape and reshape the public arena through their politics of display and cultural programming.

## Museums and the Zionist ethos

Both national and local vernacular museums were founded and shaped in response to cultural imaginaries addressing the nature of nationhood, the role of ethnicity and the weight of religion as these pertain to the Israeli present and the Jewish past. The multiple cultural conflicts attending the construction of Israeli identity have been profoundly affected by the sense of rupture introduced by the Zionist revolution and the sense of revival associated with the establishment of the state of Israel. This rupture and re-birth have become metaphorically re-inscribed in Israeli museological discourses in spatial and oppositional terms—a "here" denoting Israel poised against a "there" denoting the Jewish Diaspora as a place of exile. The fundamental identity question of "Who we are?" has been thus transmuted into the spatially-anchored questions of what brings us here and what we make of this place. Within the cultural heritage field, these questions found their response in site-museums that enshrined the idea of place as home, of particular places and the events linked to them, and of the home-making practices that domesticate alien places. The first among these place-anchored museums were ones,[9] some of which were established in pre-state years. These museum-sites served to legitimise the Zionist narrative of return by establishing the land of Israel as an ancient patrimony. Archaeological sites and the museological displays that enshrined their findings were thus taken to support claims to national continuity and to territorial entitlement. In particular, the archaeological

traces pertaining to the Old Testament era became sources of material, scientific and textual evidence for the Jews' claim to the land.

The ongoing interest in the ancient Jewish traces found in the land of Israel continues to serve as a legitimizing discourse of attachment to the land as an ancient patrimony. Yet, since the last quarter of the 1970s, this archaeological rhetoric of belonging and ownership has been overlaid by another line of legitimizing discourse—that of pioneering Socialism that dominates a range of settlement museums established around the country, many of them in rural settings. These vernacular museums foreground a revolutionary discourse of self-making and place-making associated with the utopian vision of Socialist Zionism and its secular-material values of land cultivation, productivity, technological progress and collectivism. These values found their ultimate expression in the founding of *kibbutzim* and other agricultural settlements in the 1920s and 1930s. As I have shown in my previous work,[10] this version of the Zionist tale centred on the early pioneers' place-making and self-making project that turned the often barren and hostile Israeli environment into a veritable home for the *new Jews* who constructed their identities in and through their settlement efforts. The recognition of this productive material and social-cultural feat was accompanied by a wilful rejection of the Jewish Diaspora past and its religiously-based traditions, which marked exilic Jews as passive, dependent and non-productive. This Zionist "negation of the Diaspora," referred to above, finds its expression in pioneering settlement museums first and foremost in an idiom of absence and erasure. Hardly any traces of this past can be gleaned in their displays either in the form of Jewish ritual objects of the kind that populate Jewish museums worldwide, or in the form of mundane objects of nostalgia oriented to personal or communal remembrance. Infused by a rhetoric of new beginnings, these museums emphasise the Israeli "here" as a product of an ideological rupture with the past rather than as part of a continuous historical process.

Another aspect of the Zionist enterprise that is marked within the Israeli museum scene has to do with another productive endeavour, one associated with the effort to populate the land of Israel with incoming Jews—the struggle for *'aliyah* during the British Mandate, when the immigration of Jews fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe was restricted in response to pressures exerted by the local Palestinian population who feared the influx of Jews would displace them. In an attempt to sidestep these restrictions, dozens of ships recruited by various Jewish underground organisations made their way from various European harbours to the shores of Palestine between 1934 and 1948, in the hope of evading the

British naval blockade. This clandestine immigration project, immortalised in the film *Exodus*, is commemorated in two museums in the Haifa area.[11]

In different ways, both settlement and clandestine immigration museums thematise the Israel-centric ("here") orientation of the Zionist project, highlighting the pull of the land of Israel as the Jews' authentic and mythic homeland. While they both stress the Jews' striving for the land, they each present a different interpretation of the meaning of the land of Israel in its own distinctive version of the Zionist saga. These two visions have underwritten much of the cultural-political debate between competing yet not incompatible ideological strands in Zionism and have greatly affected the tenor of Israeli cultural conversation about national goals to this day. In pioneering museums the land is constructed as a site for the Jews' newfound collective agency in the context of a Socialist utopia in which autonomy and productivity reign supreme, whereas in clandestine immigration museums it is constructed as a haven in which the Jews' survival can be ascertained (or at least defended) within a collective narrative of rescue. In settlement museums, the rejection of the Diaspora is an ideological statement flowing from the secular-Zionist negative stance towards Jewish heritage. In clandestine immigration museums it is an existential response to the exigency of persecution and the Holocaust rather than a reaction to Diaspora Jewish life. In both cases, very real differences within the *ashkenazi* community of newcomers to the land, which resulted from the cultural inflections associated with particular places of origin, are glossed over in all the museological displays. Cultural variations and local European legacies are part of the "there" that newcomers to the land were expected to put behind them. As we shall see, these differences and localised distinctions as they pertain to Jewish communities in Europe came to the fore in later years with the establishment of ethnic museums, which will be discussed below.

The Homeland of settlement museums is a homeland in the making, and their objects of veneration are not the material traces of Jewish ritual practices but the tools and implements enshrined by secular Zionism as part of the "cult of the land" (in Hebrew: *dat ha-'adamah*). Thus, at the time of my research, agricultural tools and implements adorned the point of entry to the display at the Yif'at museum, representing the tools the pioneers found when they came to the land of Israel. Some of these tools, which were obviously appropriated from or modelled on implements used by local Arabs a century or two earlier, were affixed with biblical names, invoking the Jews' narrative of return. The museum's narrative focus, and the visitors' gaze, were thus fixed on the site of arrival, coloured by claims of belonging to their ancient patrimony. No reference was made to their

places of origin or to the tribulations of the journey they undertook in migrating to the land of Israel. The pioneers in this narrative came from nowhere, or "were born from the sea," in a well-known Israeli trope of Zionist rebirth.[12] This clear agricultural focus was somewhat moderated in recent years. Following a renovation of the museum display in the late 1990s, visitors now encounter several travellers' suitcases and a horse-carriage at the entrance to the museum. These signal the pioneers' journey to their new home, intimating the existence of the Diaspora land of origin yet still not making it part of the story.

In the museum in kibbutz Ein-Shemer, by contrast, a few enlarged portraits of unnamed, bearded religious Jews were hung at the entrance to the display and provided an opportune moment for a recognition of the Diaspora past. These figures, however, are distantly represented in generalised contrast to the kibbutz figures (in the form of mannequins) that populate the reconstructed dining hall in the museum space, and tour guides often point to the enormous cultural distance their offspring had successfully travelled in becoming properly-attired pioneers, as is also signalled by one of the little vignettes repeatedly told in this space. Among the aforementioned mannequins is an urban-looking figure of a newcomer to Palestine—a photographer the tour guides call Hans—who is wearing a European-style jacket (rather than a Russian shirt, *rubashka*, or *kibbutz* working-clothes as worn by the other mannequins) and carrying a camera. As the story goes, Hans had to be explicitly told to remove his jacket and forget about his desire to become a photographer since he was expected to become an agricultural worker, so as to be a full-fledged participant in the pioneering enterprise.

The goal of overcoming cultural distance as a form of erasure was conveyed by other pedagogical activities in settlement museums as well. A stark example I once observed involved a hands-on exercise in which primary school students were given small cardboard figures of a Jewish-looking religious young man and were instructed to turn him into an Israeli by removing the skullcap and side-locks pasted onto his visage. In these various examples, the fundamental Zionist binary of "here" and "there,"—Israel as Homeland poised against an exilic Diaspora world—is encapsulated in and through the visual language of the body and its "look." Both the look of the traditional *shtetl* Jew and the look of the European bourgeois urbanite were rejected in the pioneering world constructed by these museums, and little diversity of look and identity was allowed either. The message conveyed was that to become part of the Zionist national enterprise, one needed to shed both the Jewish past and one's personal tastes and preferences, to look and feel like everybody else

in the here and now of the pioneering world in which "new Jews" are bent on creating a new Jewish society in the Land of Israel.

Rather tellingly, and somewhat ironically, this museological rhetoric of pioneering emerged at a time when the Socialist Zionist ideology epitomised by the vision of the *kibbutz* was losing its grip on Israeli cultural imagination, and when the *kibbutz* movement itself was already in a state of dissolution. The loss of hegemony of the Socialist Zionist movement, which resulted in the victory of the right-wing *Likud* party in the Israeli 1977 elections, was associated with the rise of newly emerging cultural discourses in and through which deeply buried social tensions surrounding ethnicity and religion were brought forth. The establishment of local settlement museums, which make up about a third of the over two hundred museums currently open in Israel, marked the ascendance of vernacular idioms of place and place-making. Thus, in one sense the museum field became increasingly de-centralised in terms of its localised production of ideological messages and place-based displays, as well as the community involvement they mandated. Despite their local focus and vernacular idiom, however, these museums remained faithful reproducers of the Zionist master-narrative of Jewish return and revival in the land of Israel. While ethnographic museums began to be established in the 1970s as well, it was only in the 1990s that the multivocality they introduced into the museum field became culturally visible enough to unsettle the Zionist master-narrative embraced by settlement museums by promoting a doubly articulated sense of place—one involving the sense of home associated with the Jews' Diaspora places of origin and one involving the land of Israel as a mythic Home and place of collective return. Straddling the "here" and "there"—the Israeli Homeland and the Jewish Diaspora—ethnographic museums thus "de-monopolised" the Israeli museum narrative, as discussed by Ariela Azoulay.[13] The contours of this museological development will be traced in the next section.

## The Cultural Challenge of Israeli Ethnographic Museums

In the Israeli context, the label "ethnographic museums" is used to refer to museums concerned with the ethnically-marked cultures of diasporic communities. This excludes museums devoted to the local Israeli terrain which fall under the category of "settlement museums," as discussed in the previous section. This locally-inflected distinction in Israeli museological parlance is, of course, more than a merely spatial division of labour between museological genres, and carries far-reaching ideological overtones. Kark and Peri[14] discuss the cultural role of Israeli

ethnographic museums against the background of the emergence of a local version of multiculturalism that gives voice to ethnicised narratives of Jewish existence in the Diaspora and the immigration of diasporic communities to the land of Israel. Just as the matrix of vernacular museums enshrining the Zionist project inhabits competing versions of the Zionist master-narrative, which promote alternative visions of the land of Israel as a place of refuge or as a site of Utopia, so this complementary matrix of ethnographic museums inhabits different ethnic versions of the Israeli immigration saga as it relates to Jewish communities around the world and inscribes their intricate links to the Zionist project.

The ethnographic museums established around the country over the past two decades make up about ten percent of the museums populating the Israeli cultural landscape. Many of them were established in small towns and villages in the Israeli periphery as grassroots enterprises sponsored by immigrant groups. Many of these vernacular museums represent the heritage of Jewish communities in Muslim lands (to which several chapters in this volume are dedicated), and some pertain to Jewish European communities hitherto considered marginal to the dominant *ashkenazi*, East European ethos of Socialist Zionism. The identity claims of the various immigrant groups that sponsored the establishment of ethnic museums are made clearly visible through a rhetoric of presence and publicity, claiming cultural distinctiveness and demanding recognition, whereas the cultural claims to *ashkenazi* dominance remain submerged in pioneering settlement museums by rendering the identity of *ashkenazi* Jews "transparent" in ethnic terms. These museums are also distinctive in their hybrid formation, combining elements of Jewish museums as found around the world, focusing on traditional ways of life, notably religious practices and ritual objects, with elements of immigration museums of the kind established in countries of mass immigration in the global West, which narrate stories of departure, travel and arrival as they relate to various historical times and places.

Unlike the case of the Israeli clandestine immigration museums discussed earlier, whose main focus is on the journey portion of the Jews' immigration tale, these ethnic museums focus on the story of departure from the lands of origin. It elaborates the "push and pull factors"[15] of discrimination and persecutions on the one hand, and a sense of national belonging on the other, that characterise Jewish migration at various points in time. It also dwells on the newcomers' arrival phase and their process of adjustment to their new life. The ways in which the pre- and post-immigration phases are represented in different ethnographic museums, and the relative weight each of them is given in the museum display,

greatly affect its overall tenor and message. In the story of Jewish immigration to Palestine (or the state of Israel after its founding in 1948), the departure phase is largely associated with pre-immigration memories of anti-Semitism and persecution. The arrival phase, on the other hand, often blends the sense of homecoming and anticipation for new beginnings with the sense of life-disruption associated with renouncing the Jews' past life in the place of origin. The balance (or imbalance) between the promise of anticipation and the pain of uprooting, nostalgia and dark memories, are differently constructed on each museum floor against the background of the particular history of each particular Diaspora community whose legacy is thus enshrined.

Notably, the discourse of ethnicity in Israel has been largely conducted with reference to the overarching categories of *ashkenazim* and *mizrahim*, i.e. Jews of European extraction vs. Jews hailing from Muslim lands in the Middle East and North Africa. Yet Israeli ethnographic museums sidestep and, in a sense, dismantle the cultural-political discourse that focuses on the *mizrahi/ashkenazi* ethnic divide. They do so by employing a strategy of particularisation, dwelling on the tales of particular Jewish communities: the Jews of Iraq, the Jews of Yemen, or of larger culture-language areas such as that of German or Hungarian-speaking Jews, or of a subgroup within a particular Jewish community such as the Russian veterans of World War Two. In stark contrast to the displays found in settlement museums, ethnographic museums highlight the Jewish Diaspora experience, reconstructing Jewish life in various diasporic communities in rich detail and in ways that reaffirm their particular religious traditions, as well as their historical trajectories and their continued relevance to the contemporary Israeli scene. In focusing on the diasporic pole of Jewish life and history, these museums spin tales of Jewish continuity, at times supporting, at times reversing, and at times reconstructing the "here"/"there" binary that underlies the Zionist ethos. By revalorizing Jewish life in the Diaspora they forge links between the "here" and "there," eschewing the kinds of erasures I have noted in discussing Israeli pioneering settlement museums. These discursive links between the Diaspora and the Jewish Homeland may take various forms—they may come as a re-affirmation of a religiously-anchored version of the longing for Zion that inscribes histories of participation in Zionist youth movements, or they may be articulated through a recognition of the pain of dislocation associated with immigration, or through nostalgic reconstructions of the personal and communal past.

By avoiding the over-generalised and highly politicised ethnic dichotomy between *mizrahim* and *ashkenazim*, and by using a largely non-

polemical rhetoric of self-respect and recognition, ethnic museums give voice to the very same immigrant groups from the Muslim world who were socially and culturally discriminated against during the ascendancy of the Eurocentric Socialist Zionist movement in the first decades of statehood (and, some would say, to this day). Each of these ethnographic museums invokes an idiom of communal nostalgia towards identifiable diasporic locations, thereby constituting embodied claims to cultural distinctiveness in particular times and places. One such museum is the Babylonian Jewry Museum (or Center for Iraqi Jewish heritage) in Or Yehuda, which has been insightfully studied by Esther Meir-Glitzenstein.[16] Meir-Glitzenstein points out that Iraqi Jews were the best integrated immigrants from Islamic countries, noting that the founders of the museum, and the cultural centre linked to it, were middle-class, "Westernised" *mizrahim* who promoted the museum as a symbol of modernisation and tool of both cultural recognition and integration. Her analysis of the various parts of the display shows that it incorporated both identification and critique of the dominant Zionist narrative. On the one hand, a great deal of space is given to the story of the Zionist movement and its exploits in Iraq, whereas the voices of non-Zionist Jews are suppressed and the non-Jewish Iraqi context largely ignored. On the other hand, they reject the *ashkenazi* Zionist salvage narrative of the "rescue" of Jews of Islamic countries that depicts them as passive recipients of assistance extended by the Jewish state.[17] They construct the story of the immigration of Iraqi Jews as a willing sacrifice—the sacrifices made by the many Iraqi Zionists activists who risked, and at times paid with, their lives so that their community could immigrate to Israel, and the multiple daily sacrifices of all Iraqi immigrants who left everything behind them and suffered a great deal of deprivation and discrimination in the years they spent in transit camps after their arrival in Israel. This sacrifice is only amplified as the story of the immigrants' shock of arrival is cast against the section housing the ethnographic display of the richness of Jewish life in the Iraqi Diaspora, with its splendid synagogues, ritual objects and hand-made festival garments, and reconstructed old-town alley.

Meir-Glitzenstein's assessment that this museum treads a fine line between nationalism and ethnicity seems to me to hold, in one way or another, for the other local-vernacular museums I discuss here. Even while aligning itself with the mainstream Zionist saga, the museum display nevertheless challenges some aspects of the hegemonic *ashkenazi* narrative of mass-immigration. It localises and concretises its ethnic voice in such a way as to de-construct the larger categories of *mizrahim* and *ashkenazim*. In so doing, it reaches out for a newly recognised sense of

roots that draws on the Jewish Diaspora past as a source of cultural richness, yet maintains a shared commitment to the Israeli national Zionist project. The ideological shift that allows for the revalorisation of the Jewish Diaspora is thus coupled with a museological shift that involves a turn to the vernacular, the local and the communal, facilitated by the establishment of local pioneering settlement museums in the Israeli periphery a decade or so earlier.

Another example of ethnic museums, which similarly demonstrates the process of de-monopolisation in the museum field, involves those that relate to particular sections of the *ashkenazi* Diaspora. I see the establishment of these museums as a move towards an ethnicisation of the transparent identity of *ashkenazi* Jews that has been inspired by the articulation of ethnicity in vernacular museums enshrining the legacy of Jewish communities in Muslim lands (such as the museum of Iraqi Jews discussed earlier). The small number of museums that fall into this category, and the fact that none of them represent the cultural heritage of the East European communities that were dominant in pre-state years, suggests that this process of ethnicisation is still a tentative one.[18] Of the museums devoted to the heritage of Jewish-European communities in Israel, two relate to Central European Jewish groups: German-speaking Jewry (covering Germany, Austria and the Czech Republic), and Hungarian speaking Jewry (covering Hungary, Transylvania, Slovakia and other smaller regions). Both are ethnographic museums in the Israeli sense, i.e. museums that are concerned with various aspects of the everyday life and culture of Diaspora Jewish communities that fall within these particular culture-language areas. A third example relates to Russian veteran museums that relate to the heroic saga of the participation of Jewish soldiers in the Soviet Army during World War Two. Two such museums have been insightfully studied by Sveta Roberman.[19] All these museums are located in Northern Israel in the Haifa area and the Galilee.[20] In that same area there is also a museum devoted to the Palestinian legacy in Sakhnin, which focuses on the heritage of village life, and foregrounds the Palestinian population's longstanding attachment to the land and its local landscape. In what follows, I elaborate on the museums dealing with the legacy of Central European Jewry and then turn to those established by the Russian-Jewish veterans of World War Two.

The two museums that enshrine central European heritage in the Galilee share the hybrid quality that characterises ethnographic museums concerned with Jewish communities in Muslim lands as well. They affirm the relevance and vitality of Jewish Diaspora life, linking their current Israeli identities to the languages of their countries of origin, ignoring the

Zionist imperative of erasing the Diaspora past, yet at the same time holding on to their national-Zionist attachments and ideologies. By defining their terrain in linguistic rather than in place-centred terms—as German-speaking or Hungarian-speaking Jews—these museums delineate communities of reference that have never actually existed as continuous territorial entities. Rather, these are "imagined communities," whose demarcation is determined by cultural-linguistic rather than geopolitical or religious criteria. The displays in these two museums address the ritual and cultural life of German and Hungarian-speaking Jewish communities in domestic as well as public contexts. They also negotiate the positions of these Jewish communities in relation to their non-Jewish host societies that run from cultural separateness to high levels of cultural integration.

The Jews' integration into their host societies is signalled by displays relating to their contributions to social and cultural life in their countries of origin, which form a good part of the museological display. It is, however, also circumscribed by evidence of anti-Semitic attacks on Jews, which form an intrinsic part of these museum exhibitions. The story of the Diaspora past in these museums is inevitably and powerfully coloured by the memory of Nazi persecution and the Holocaust. In various ways, and to different degrees, these dark memories lurk in the background of the story of German and Hungarian-speaking Jews' arrival in Palestine and then Israel, even while their expressed attachment to their cultures of origin remains strong, which may account for the fact that even those who were involved in Zionist movement activities before the Nazi rise to power did not, for the most part, choose to migrate to Palestine and leave their diasporic life behind. Explicit statements found in museum publications explicitly state that most Central European Jews, much like the Holocaust survivors who arrived in Palestine during and after World War Two as clandestine immigrants, were not driven there by Zionist passion. They went there in search of a place of refuge and, as the claim made in the museum of German-speaking Jewry goes, became Zionists through the place- and home-making endeavours in which they participated.

The tracing of Jewish heritage to its diasporic roots in Israeli ethnographic museums, then, is marked by both nostalgia and trauma. The identity positioning that these museums cultivate is also deeply informed by the encounter with the new land and the immigration experience of newcomers from German and Hungarian-speaking countries in what was to become their new homeland. Memories of these immigrants' arrival recount the social and economic difficulties they encountered as newcomers to the land, and the language and cultural barriers they confronted, often aggravated by the indifference or outright resentment of

members of the society whose ranks they joined. Stories of the newcomers' gradual integration in that society capitalise on their many contributions to developing and shaping its economic and cultural life.

The story of the newcomers' acculturation in the new land is indeed given a central place, especially in the museum of German-speaking Jewry, and adds another layer to the museum display. In addition, this story of the immigrants' integration within the local Jewish society at the time of their arrival inserts another set of participants into the story of immigration—the second-generation Israelis whose childhoods were coloured by the distinctive sounds, tastes, smells, linguistic traces and domestic scenes associated with the immigrant homes in which they grew up. These museums thus become distinctive sites of intergenerational contact that truly incorporate the experience of the second generation to immigration, not merely positioning them as audiences of their elders' tales. Immigration in this context thus appears as an unfinished process that accompanies the life experiences of Israeli-born adults who grew up in immigrant homes, and perhaps mediated for their parents the gaps between the domestic homeworld with its diasporic traces and the world of the new homeland outside. Thus, the involvement of second generation members makes the museum story richer and more complex, pointing to the immigrant home as an arena where cultures and languages clash and mix in creative ways.[21] Straddling past and future, these ethnographic museums weave together the "here" and the "there" of the Israeli heritage enterprise in new ways. They are not only sites of recognition, they are also performative sites in which flimsy and hybrid yet distinctive ethnic identities of more than one generation come into being through a self-reflexive and playful reclamation of the sights and sounds of the immigrant home in which Diaspora and Homeland rub against each other.

In a somewhat similar way, as shown in Roberman's sensitive study,[22] Russian veterans who arrived in Israel with the mass immigration of the 1990s established local vernacular museums of their own. These museums enshrine the memory and legacy of World War Two soldiers who participated in the fighting of the Soviet army on several fronts, challenging the here/there binary that grounds the Israeli national narrative in new ways. They do so by highlighting the heroic role of Jewish soldiers in the fight against Nazi Germany, a prideful chapter of their own history that they failed to find in established museums dealing with World War Two history in Israel. The image of the heroic Jewish soldier undermines the widely accepted contrast made in mainstream Zionist renditions of the Jewish past between the passivity and victimhood of Diaspora Jews and the heroic figure of the Israeli fighter, a contrast that embodies the

here/there binary of Zionist ideology. Countering this erasure of the figure of the heroic Diaspora Jewish soldier, Russian veterans have established their own sites of recognition that link the story of their military exploits and sacrifices to those of their Jewish forerunners in ancient times, on the one hand, and to that of contemporary Israeli soldiers on the other.

The aforementioned museums exemplify the "ethnic turn" in Israeli museum-making. Notably, however, even though this turn towards ethnicity involves a challenge to the Diaspora/Homeland binary as inscribed within the Zionist ethos, it does not entail its complete rejection. The main ideological moves made in these ethnic museums relate to the way the Jewish Diaspora has been represented and revalorised over the years, the many threads of continuity between Diaspora life and the Jews' subsequent lives in their new homeland, and a focus on the experiences of particular communities and individuals. Rather than erasing the Diaspora past, as is the case in pioneering museums, or focusing on its darkest moments, as is the case in Holocaust museums, ethnic museums acknowledge its cultural force in all its myriad manifestations, both as a spiritual legacy and a communal resource as well as a legacy of trauma. As against the Diaspora "there," the Zionist ethos constructs the land of Israel as the Jews' authentic homeland, and as the ancient patrimony to which modern Jews have made their collective return as a nation. Yet ethnic museums, by highlighting the pain as well as the promise of the Jews' often difficult immigration and acculturation experiences in the new land, are also coloured by a sense of nostalgia for the former home in the land of origin, a nostalgia that second generation visitors nowadays recognise as part of the habitus that infused their immigrant homes.

## Conclusion

The foregoing account of the Israeli heritage museum scene, as it has evolved over the years, delineates an increasingly multivocal cultural field in which different voices find their expression and place. Within the perspective proposed here, heritage museums—as platforms for the performance of national and ethnic identities—serve as active players in an animated cultural politics in which different social groups and ideological positions vie for recognition and influence. Similar socially-grounded identity negotiations and power struggles can be gleaned in other cultural fields as well, such as popular music and other creative industries, and the study of museums cannot be divorced from them. As communally-oriented institutions, heritage museums inscribe their narratives and negotiate the social positioning of their founders, custodians and patrons

through a rhetoric of visual and material display. The fact that each heritage museum is enclosed within its own walls, spinning its own version of the past, often with no recognition given to alternative or competing ones, seems to safeguard its integrity and the distinctive identity claims it makes. Yet this parallel matrix is detrimental to the emergence of dialogical engagements in the arena of heritage museum-making that could help cultivate a dynamic vision of the heritage scene writ large, providing open forums in which mutual recognition and intercultural contact can be negotiated. This results in a rather attenuated version of multiculturalism, one that serves to fortify national and ethnic identities but does not promote a dialogue that can traverse ethnic and ideological divides.

The politics of museum-making in Israel is of course closely linked to the ideological shifts Israeli society has undergone over the past decades. As the account presented here suggests, it both reflects and affects the construction of Israeli-Jewish identities and their relations to the Israeli homeland, to Diaspora communities of origin and, at times, to what the poetess Lea Goldberg has termed "the heartache of two Homelands," that may attach itself to the experience of immigration and to the need to reconcile and reconfigure the categories of homeland and Diaspora.[7] The establishment of both national museums and local vernacular ones has been initiated and shaped in response to Israeli cultural imaginaries that address the nature of nationhood, the role of ethnicity and the weight of religion relating to the experience of homeland and Diaspora. Israeli heritage museums, as we have seen, have been active participants in the production of Israeli Jewish identity, its continuities and ruptures, and its exclusions. As such, it constitutes a dynamic institutional field that invites close ethnographic studies of the kind presented in this book. As explorations of vernacular museums increasingly reveal the blurring of the lines between "here" and "there," at times collapsing nationalism and ethnicity into each, the Israeli museum scene may need to be considered within the much broader context of Jewish museums in different parts of the world, raising new questions about the homeland/Diaspora dialectic and the ways in which it plays into contemporary Jewish life. Furthermore, an account of the Israeli museum scene that acknowledges the categories of homeland and Diaspora with reference to the historical experience of the Palestinian citizens of Israel as well, going beyond the de-politicised veneer that attends both museum displays and the discourse surrounding them will further and fruitfully complicate our sense of the many troubled notions of place that populate the Israeli imaginary.

## Notes

[1] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–73.
[2] *Making Histories in Museums*, ed. Gaynor Kavanagh (London: Leicester University Press, 1996); Steven C. Dubin, *Displays of Power: Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum* (New York: New York University Press, 1999).
[3] *Museums in Israel*, eds. Yehudit Inbar and Eli Schiller (Jerusalem: Ariel Publications, 1995).
[4] Nitza Rosovsky and Joy Undergleider-Mayerson, *The Museums of Israel* (Tel Aviv: Steimatzky, 1989), 6.
[5] Deborah Golden, "The Museum of the Jewish Diaspora Tells a Story," in *The Tourist Image*, ed. Tom Selwyn (Winchester: John Wiley and Sons, 1996); Kaylin Goldstein, *On Display: The Politics of Museums in Israeli Society* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2003); Shelly Shenhav-Keller, "Visual Politics and Poetic Memory at the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora," in this volume.
[6] Goldstein, *On Display*.
[7] Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled, *Being Israeli: The Dynamics of Multicultural Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[8] Notably, these museums complement each other's focus in terms of the museological division of labour. Clandestine settlement museums foreground the struggle for immigration (in the face of the British blockade) as part of nation-building. They actually end their story with the newcomers' arrival in the land of Israel, the very point at which settlement museums begin their story. The story of immigration per se, as a personal and communal experience, is actually incorporated into the narrative of ethnographic museums, as will be discussed below. The theme of security is dominant in military museums run by the Ministry of Defense as well as museums devoted to the history of pre-state underground groups that are critical rather than state-centred in orientation.
[9] Aharon Kempinski, "The Influence of Archaeology on Society and Culture in Israel," *Ariel*, 100–101 (1994): 179–190 [Hebrew]; Nadia Al Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2001).
[10] Tamar Katriel, *Performing the Past: A Study of Israeli Settlement Museums* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997).
[11] Tamar Katriel, "'From Shore to Shore': The Holocaust, Clandestine Immigration and Israeli Heritage Museums," in *The Holocaust and Visual Culture*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 198–211.
[12] A phrase referring to his fallen Sabra brother in a well-known book by author Moshe Shamir, *Bemo Yadav* (in Hebrew: "In His Own Hands") (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1973) [Hebrew].
[13] Ariela Azoulay, "With Open Doors: Museums and Historical Narratives in Israel's Public Space," in *Museum Culture: History, Discourses, Spectacles*, eds. Daniel Sherman and Iris Rogoff (London: Routledge, 1994), 85–109.