

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Prime Time Commemoration: An Analysis of Television Broadcasts on Israel's Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism

Oren Meyers¹, Eyal Zandberg², & Motti Neiger²

1 Department of Communication, University of Haifa, Haifa 31905, Israel

2 School of Communication, Netanya Academic College, Netanya 42365, Israel

This study explores the ways in which commercial media perceive and manifest their public mnemonic role. It does so via an exploration of the “memory menu”—the contents and flow of programming—offered by Channel 2, Israel’s leading commercial television channel, on the eve of the country’s Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism (MDHH), in which the airing of commercials is banned. In order to do so, the study incorporates a multilevel analysis that probes the structure of entire broadcasting evenings as well as the narrative building blocks that constitute each item. The study investigates the ways in which commercial media outlets operate in the context of “commercial vacuums” as they substitute material capital with symbolic capital. This process is illuminated through Channel 2’s inability to work MDHH into its extremely successful routine broadcasting formulas. The channel’s MDHH broadcasts construct a commemorative narrative that is insulated from day-to-day Israeli public Holocaust memory discourse; hence they operate as a significant site of Israeli postmemory work. Furthermore, such a narrative not only commemorates the memory of the Holocaust itself but also the ways in which Israeli culture used to narrate the memory of the Holocaust in the past.

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The mass media constitute the most prevalent site of collective recollection in modern national societies (Huysen, 2000). Such media are mostly guided by commercial considerations and are increasingly embracing globalized patterns of operation (McAllister, 2003). Therefore, in recent years, media researchers as well as collective memory scholars have increasingly explored the role of mass media in processes such as the commercialization of collective memory (Loshitzky, 1997) and the development of opposing—or rather complementing—local, national, and cosmopolitan memories (Alexander, 2001; Levy & Sznajder, 2002).

National commemorative days such as Israel’s Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism (MDHH) provide a rare opportunity to explore such themes, because they illuminate the role of the media in shaping the ways in which social

Corresponding author: Oren Meyers; e-mail: omeyers@com.haifa.ac.il

groups understand their past through the years and under changing circumstances. According to Kertzer (1988), “without rites and symbols there are no nations”; and so, “invented traditions” (Hobsbawm, 1983) such as MDHH emphasize the ways by which nations aim to solidify their communal identity and reinforce the value systems supposedly shared by all members of the nation. The legal prohibition on the operation of theaters, cinemas, and restaurants during MDHH drastically limits the public’s recreational choices and directs Israelis toward participation in this ritual of mass bereavement via television viewing. Despite the difficult and demanding contents of MDHH broadcasts, the average ratings achieved by Israeli television channels on the eve of MDHH¹ over the years have been similar to those recorded on regular prime time evenings, in which Israeli channels feature the usual mix of news, comedies, talk shows, and reality shows.² Thus, the ceremonies, dramas, documentaries, and newscasts aired by Israeli television channels on the MDHH offer the most heavily attended mnemonic public events of that day.

The investigation of the structure and contents of the broadcasts of Channel 2, Israel’s leading commercial television outlet, on MDHH illuminates fundamental subject matters that stand at the heart of both media studies and collective memory scholarship. For many years, the broadcast version of MDHH was dominated by official-statist agents, as Israel’s television and radio outlets were all noncommercial and publicly owned. Since the beginning of the 1990s, however, Israel’s media map has changed drastically, with the introduction of cable broadcasting, two commercial television channels, and satellite broadcasting. Correspondingly, the surge in the number of commercial television outlets has moved Israeli electronic media into a globalized era in which viewers can choose between local channels that rely mostly on local programming, converted channels that give foreign channels a minimal local feel, foreign-national and global channels, and so forth (Cohen, 2005). These dramatic changes in Israel’s media landscape have brought about the question that stands at the core of this study: What are the characteristics of national commemoration rituals in a commercial media era?

The construction of the Israeli memory of the Holocaust has been previously researched through its representation in various cultural arenas such as the theater, literature, and film. Interestingly, relatively few studies have focused on how the Holocaust is commemorated by Israeli press and television (Cohen, Zemach-Marom, Wilke, & Schenk, 2002; Nossek, 1994; Zuckerman, 1993), and fewer still have focused on the memory narratives offered by the mass media on MDHH (Zandberg, 2008). Therefore, this article complements existing knowledge by probing the memory narratives that are manifested through Israel’s leading television channel on MDHH. Moreover, this study focuses on Israel’s MDHH television broadcasts because they provide a stable research corpus for exploring how Israeli media have reflected and constructed the memory of the Holocaust through the years. Day-to-day Israeli media discourse is saturated with direct and indirect references to the memory of the Holocaust. However, in contrast to these omnipresent mnemonic recollections, the establishment of MDHH created a unique situation in which all Israeli media address

the memory of the Holocaust every year on the same day. This phenomenon enables us to track the diachronic development of Israeli Holocaust media memory across time, and especially since the introduction of commercial broadcasting in the 1990s.

Lastly, this study offers a novel approach to the investigation of collective memory in the media: On a conceptual level, the study incorporates a multilevel exploration of televised “memory menus” as it probes the structure and flow of entire broadcasting evenings as well as the fundamental narrative building blocks that constitute each televised item. On a methodological level, the study implements a quantitative content analysis scheme to operationalize the main research questions. The vast majority of collective memory studies rely on qualitative methods, and when quantitative methods are used, it is mostly to survey the public (Lang & Lang, 1989; Schuman, Schwartz, & D’Arcy, 2005) rather than to explore mnemonic contents. Therefore, the design and execution of this study help illuminate, in a systematic manner, phenomena and processes that characterize the construction of social memories.

The article consists of four sections. The first section presents the study’s theoretical framework via a discussion of the fundamentals of collective memory research, the role of the media as memory agents, and the development of Holocaust commemoration in Israel. The second section discusses the logic and design of the study. The third section presents its main findings and analyzes the characteristics of the memory narratives offered by Channel 2 on the eve of MDHH. Finally, the concluding section positions the study’s findings within the context of the debate over the public role of commercial media.

Media, memory, and the commemoration of the Holocaust

Although the term “collective memory” was first coined by Hugo Van Hofmannsthal in 1902 (Olick & Robbins, 1998, p. 2), French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs is usually recognized as the founder of the field and his fundamental arguments still serve as the guidelines for any collective memory study. According to Halbwachs ([1951] 1992), social groups construct their own images of the world by establishing versions of the past. Such versions define groups and enable them to create boundaries that separate them from other groups who share other memories of the past or, rather, other interpretations of the same past.

Collective memory has several distinct characteristics: It is always functional (Zelizer, 1995) and thus social groups may recollect and commemorate their past in order to set a moral example or to justify failures (Sturken, 1997); collective memory might deal with abstract ideals, but in order for it to become functional it must be materialized through physical structures, commemorative rituals, and so forth (Young, 1993); and finally, commemorations of the past frequently appear in the form of narratives: The conjunction between narration and collective memory is based on the assumption that arranging the past through a narrative can justify former activities and reinforce present ones.

The fundamental role of collective memories in the formation of modern national identities, the rise of mass culture and mass politics, and the development of new communication technologies have all led to the current situation, in which the right to narrate the past is no longer reserved for academic and political elites. Nowadays, major historical events gain their public meaning not only through academic and state-sponsored interpretations but also through television, films, and the press (Zelizer, 1992). Moreover, all explorations of the operation of current mass media as memory agents should take into account the incursion of commercial culture into most forms of cultural production, including electronic media. While the origins of broadcasting were rooted in an attempt to harness the power of television and radio toward the creation of unified national identities (Cardiff & Scannell, 1987; Liebes, 2006), today's electronic media are often blamed for undermining national identity and replacing it with globalized consuming identities (Schudson, 1994). Thus, the phenomenon of MDHH commercial broadcasting illuminates the interrelations between commercial media and national identity, as well as the tensions between popular—"profane" and "mundane"—forms and "holy" contents.

Within the larger context of the study of the operation of mass commercial media as memory agents, the case study of the construction of the memory of the Holocaust bears a unique significance. This is because the extreme nature of the Holocaust as an "event at the limits" of human experience (Friedlander, 1992, p. 3) clearly illuminates both the limitations and the capabilities of commercial media in its representation of difficult pasts.

While it is extremely difficult to perceive the Holocaust as a reality, there is a notion that the scope of the tragedy does not let the imagination take off; that is, such an ultimate moral crisis could not, or rather should not, be conveyed by means of conventional storytelling strategies—a notion that obviously limits its cultural representation. These concerns have led to the development of conventions demanding that the representation of the Holocaust be accurate and solemn and to present it as a unique historical event (Des Pres, 1988). Conventions of this type contradict the premises of the operation of commercial media in three fundamental ways. First, a conflict exists between understanding the Holocaust as a unique event and the standardized nature of mass media production: The mere fact that television shows are always part of a flow of entertainment that is frequently interrupted by commercials necessarily "secularizes" any representation of sanctified subjects such as the Holocaust (Shandler, 1999). Second, commercial media usually strive to attract a superficial kind of attention and their main quality is that they do not challenge the consumer. These traits conflict with the notion that representations of the Holocaust ought to command maximum attention and have lasting effects (Meyers & Zandberg, 2002). Finally, in order to please consumers, commercial media products are designed according to schemes that have been proven to be successful in the past. And so, the reliance on schemes such as the dominance of conventional and active heroes and a definitive "happy ending" contradicts the complex realities of the Holocaust (Loshitzky, 1997).

At the same time, other scholars point to the humanist and even radical potential of commemoration via mass commercial media. Hence, for instance, Landsberg (2004) argues that while traditional representations of collective memory were created, namely, in order to integrate the communal identity of specific social groups, current technological advancements have led to the creation of mass mediated representations of the past that “have the capacity to create shared social frameworks for people who inhabit, literally and figuratively, different social spaces, practices, and beliefs” (p. 8). According to Landsberg, mass mediated “prosthetic memories” generated through films such as “Schindler’s List” or mnemonic institutions such as the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum undermine the distinction between authentic and inauthentic memories and thus enable heterogeneous audiences to identify with the experiences of people who endured severe traumas and were different in many respects from the current consumers of such representations.

During Israel’s first decade of existence, its public Holocaust discourse was dominated by official voices and the Holocaust was utilized as a political and educational tool. The fact that most of the murdered Jews did not revolt against the Nazis did not fit the prevailing Zionist ethos. This perception was encapsulated in the dichotomous title “Memorial Day for the Holocaust and the Heroism” given to Israel’s official day of mourning, which was established in 1951 and has become over the years one of the dominant rituals of Israel’s civil religion (Handelman & Katz, 1990; Liebman & Don-Yehiya, 1983; Young, 1990). The title stresses the supposedly inherent tension between the “unfitting,” “passive,” and diasporic conduct of most of the victims, represented by the term “Holocaust,” and the courageous “Zionist” actions of the few victims who did revolt, represented via the term “Heroism.”

Several researchers identify Adolf Eichmann’s trial, held in Jerusalem in 1961, as a turning point in the shaping of how Israelis remember and understand the Holocaust, because the trial exposed many Israelis for the first time to the stories of the victims (Bresheeth, 1997; Segev, 1993). Subsequently, traumatic experiences such as the waiting period before the 1967 war or the sight of helpless Israeli prisoners of war (POW) during the 1973 war led to an increased erosion of the victim/hero dichotomy. Through this gradual process, Israeli perceptions of the Holocaust and the memory of the Holocaust have changed in several ways. First, Holocaust memory has become more privatized due to the shift from official memory agents to individual ones. This means that even official–national rituals have gradually lost some of their collective traits. Second, over the years Holocaust discourse has exceeded the well-defined borders of the official remembrance days and infiltrated day-to-day Israeli life to the extent that the Holocaust functions as a “filter” through which Israelis interpret both foreign and domestic affairs. Finally, over the years Israeli Holocaust discourse has gradually shifted from a constant discussion of the event itself to an increasing emphasis on the memory of the Holocaust and the challenge of preserving it. These noted developments have nourished new radical forms of Israeli Holocaust commemoration to rise. Hence, for instance, “alternative” MDHH ceremonies and popular culture creations such as the satirical television show

“The Chamber Quintet” are voicing the critical perceptions of “third-generation survivors” who are mocking, among other issues, the ongoing attempts of Israeli leaders to achieve political gains by capitalizing on post-Holocaust guilt notions among Western nations (Zandberg, 2006).

Research objectives and design

This study investigates the structure and flow of programming and the specific contents of programs that were featured by Channel 2 on the eve of MDHH through the years. The decision to focus on Channel 2’s broadcasts was informed by the wish to investigate a television channel that reaches wide audiences and addresses the memory of the Holocaust in its MDHH programming.³ Specifically, Channel 2’s broadcasts were chosen as prime examples as to how an Israeli commercial television channel addresses the challenges of Holocaust commemoration on MDHH because in its 14 years of operation the channel has become the most significant media outlet in Israel.

As aforementioned, until the early 1990s, Israeli electronic media were dominated by public radio and television broadcasters. Israel’s public television channel (Channel 1) commenced broadcasting in 1968 and did not face any viable competition for more than 20 years. In November 1993, Channel 2 inaugurated its commercial broadcasts and soon after became Israel’s most heavily watched television channel (Almog, 2004, pp. 240–269). Although Israeli cable and satellite services offer viewing packages that feature dozens of channels, Israeli television viewers tend to overwhelmingly choose Channel 2 over all other viewing options. In any given week, nine or ten of the ten most watched television programs in Israel are aired on Channel 2. The channel’s routine prime time programming schedule opens with the main evening newscast (8:00–8:45 p.m.), which is followed by a variety of Israeli sitcoms, talk shows, reality shows, and so forth. The evening prime time schedule usually ends (from 11:00 p.m. and onwards) with the airing of imported (mainly American) sitcoms or dramas. Concurrently with Channel 2’s unprecedented success among viewers, it has often been criticized by academics and media critics for its blunt commercial nature, unsophisticated contents, and unquestioning patriotic tone (Sheleg, 2006; Yuran, 2001).

All explorations of commercial television broadcasts have to address several fundamental interrelated contexts that shape programming patterns as well as specific contents. First, the character of commercial broadcasting is determined by its profit-driven logic. Second, commercial broadcasting operates within boundaries determined by legal regulation and supervision. Hence, for example, the operation of Israeli broadcast channels was initiated by parliamentary legislation defining, for these channels, high-minded goals such as the expression of Zionist values and the cultural diversity of Israeli society (Schejter, 1996, p. 194). Third, commercial media operate within the context of specific, yet interwoven environments and identities that range from local subcultures of regional audiences to national cultures and global influences. Finally, commercial broadcasting is determined by the capabilities

and limitations of specific media organizations and the professional values of the individuals who work for them.

The broadcasts of commercial television on MDHH, just like its broadcasts on any other given day, are shaped by these four contexts. Yet the radical circumstances of the MDHH expose the complex interrelations between these contexts in a manner that illuminates the overall operation of commercial broadcasting. The legal regulation of electronic broadcasting in Israel prohibits the airing of commercials on local channels during three commemorative dates—MDHH, Fallen Soldiers' Memorial Day, and the 9th day of the month of Av (*Tish'a Be'av*).⁴ During these 3 days, Israeli commercial broadcasters are compelled to undermine their own fundamental goal. It is impossible to comprehend the functioning of commercial media on MDHH without considering this acute starting point. The ultimate purpose of commercial broadcasting is financial gain, and thus the exceptional occasions on which this motivation is eliminated—voluntarily, or due to binding legislation—enable us to explore the meeting point between commercial broadcasting and widely-perceived “public interests”.

As discussed, varying evaluations exist with regard to the ability of commercial media to produce meaningful, valid, and engaging representations of difficult pasts, and especially of the Holocaust. At the same time, both those who stress the limitations of popular narrations of the past and those who emphasize the cultural and political potential embedded in such narrations agree that commercial motivation is the key factor in shaping these recollections. Within this context, the following study explores the exceptional consequences of the elimination of commercial motivation from commercial broadcasting. It asks whether the creation of this temporary “commercial vacuum” on this specific occasion fosters the rise of innovative narratives that do not conform with the routine conventions of popular commercial culture; do such unique circumstances stimulate the voicing of radical and challenging interpretations of the collective past? And, do these circumstances enable different narratives, different protagonists, and different readings of Israel's Holocaust commemoration culture to be heard?

In order to address these questions, the “memory menu” offered by Channel 2 on the eve of MDHH was explored through a set of questions addressing both the structure and contents of the broadcasts. Our corpus of data consisted of Channel 2's broadcasts on the eve of MDHH between 7:30 p.m. and midnight in the years 1994–2007.⁵ The basic unit of analysis—an item—was defined as an individual movie, ceremony, or news item. All 278 items aired on the 14 examined evenings were coded. The fundamental assumption guiding the coding process was that each unit of analysis encompasses a narrative that stands by itself. Hence, in order to explore the study's main questions in a systematic manner, a 22-question coding scheme was designed to address the genre of each item, the identity of its producers, the identity of the individual/s the item focused on, the main events addressed in the item, and so forth (see Appendix 1). The entire research corpus was coded by four coders after they had viewed full-length items.⁶ Twenty hours of broadcasting (33% of the entire

corpus) were coded for reliability by three out of the four coders (in alternating make-ups). The nominal Krippendorff Alphas for all the variables were over 0.78.

Prime time commemoration: Channel 2 broadcasts on the eve of MDHH

Genres

The findings (see Figure 1) highlight the centrality of the documentary genre in MDHH broadcasts. The number of documentaries that were aired on the eve of MDHH through the years is slightly lower than the number of news broadcasts (an aggregated number of central newscasts and news flashes), and is higher than the number of ceremonies, dramas, and panel discussions. This finding stands in stark contrast to Channel 2's regular prime time programming (and for that matter, to the prime time programming of most commercial television channels), which rarely features documentaries.⁷

This programming pattern may be related to the large variety of low-budget documentaries dealing with the Holocaust, which are produced with the support of public funds. Furthermore, the salience of the documentary genre could be explained within the context of the ongoing debate over the adequate manner of representing the Holocaust (Friedlander, 1992). As noted, the implementation of popular-commercial culture conventions is highly contested when it comes to the narration of the Holocaust. In contrast, other media have gained a privileged status within the realm of Holocaust representation. A prime example of this phenomenon is the common perception of still photography as a mode of representation that captures authentic "traces" of the past, in a way that provides a potent conjunction between image and referent (Hirsch, 2001, pp. 13–14). Hence, the findings presented here position documentary films as the parallels of photography within the realm of the televised commemoration of the Holocaust. Such films supposedly defuse the difficulties caused by the implementation of popular-commercial conventions of representation by showing the unmediated past, "as it was." Therefore, the airing of documentaries enhances the perception of authority and status of the entire MDHH programming schedule and bestows coveted respectability upon the broadcaster.

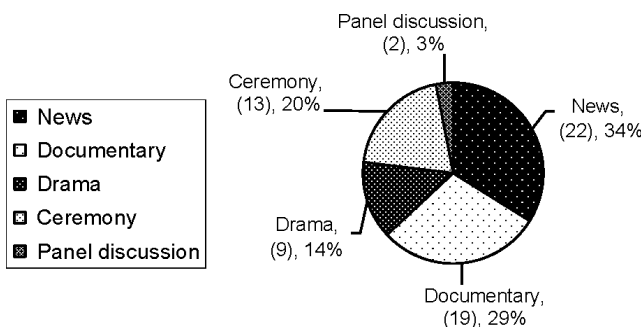


Figure 1 Distribution of items by genre⁸.

Another salient finding is the centrality of MDHH's opening ceremony at *Yad Vashem* (Israel's national Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority), which has been regularly aired by Channel 2 since 1995. This ceremony is also routinely aired by Israel's two other broadcast channels (1 and 10), which use the same footage while airing it. This uniform scheduling decision turns the state ceremony into a televised "media event" that enables the institutional memory version to be heard and seen with minimal mediating interruptions. Following the Dayan and Katz (1992) (pp. 25–53) typology, the airing of the *Yad Vashem* ceremony seems to best fit the "coronation" category: Its authority as a media event stems from its status as a (relatively) long-standing tradition and its ceremonial-repetitive nature. Moreover, the airing of the ceremony is a "coronation" media event in the sense that it operates as a sanctifying rite of passage that transfers the nation into the sacred realm of Holocaust remembrance.

Finally, it is important to note the almost total absence of panel discussions within the programming schedule. Contemporary panel discussions in Israel, which mostly focus on politics, are characterized by an aggressive and confrontational atmosphere. Hence, MDHH programmers may wish to distance the evening's broadcasts from this type of shows, or even from an association with the genre. Interestingly, the only Holocaust-related panel discussion recorded throughout the entire examined period took place in 2001, before the airing of the documentary "The Specialist," dealing with the Eichmann trial. The film embraces the critical approach of Hannah Arendt (1963) to the trial, which is presented in the film as a planned performance of Zionist propaganda. The preliminary panel discussion thus sought to balance the film's subversive message to a certain extent.

Producers

Most items aired on the eve of MDHH (see Figure 2) were made by Israeli creators and producers. A closer look into the identity of the producers of the items reveals that while all news broadcasts, all ceremonies, and most documentaries were Israeli productions, the vast majority of dramas that were aired through the years were made by non-Israeli companies and creators. This difference might be explained by the high costs of production for feature films, which make it hard to produce such films in Israel. But regardless of the explanation for this phenomenon, its consistency points to a clear rhetorical "division of labor": On the one hand stand Israeli productions, which rely on the "rhetoric of transparency" and aspire to reflect reality "as it is," or rather, "as it was." News items, ceremonies, and documentaries feature "real people" who actually experienced or witnessed the Holocaust, and thus reflect and reaffirm the Israeli notion of custodianship over the "authentic" memory of the Holocaust. On the other hand stand foreign Holocaust-related dramas that are clearly scripted and mediated (rather than "transparent"). Such productions may be emotionally potent and educational and yet they do not challenge the perception of the Holocaust as an "authentic" Israeli memory.

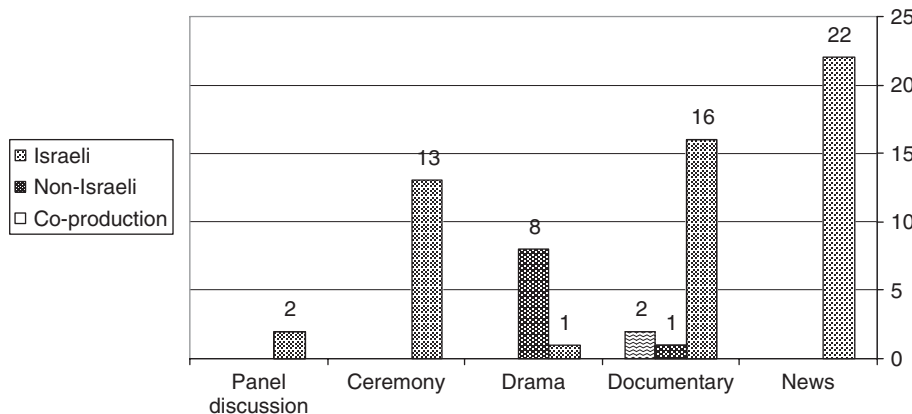


Figure 2 Distribution of items by identity of the producer and genre.

Programming

An examination of Channel 2's MDHH flow of broadcasting through the years points to a rather fixed pattern of programming: In most investigated years, the central newscast was shortened and scheduled at 7:30 p.m., half an hour before its usual broadcast time. The central news broadcast was then followed by the airing of the ceremony from *Yad Vashem* (8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.), which was usually followed (until midnight) by two or three documentary films or dramas, all dealing with the memory of the Holocaust in various ways. Sometimes this flow was interrupted by another news segment, usually an unplanned news flash—such as the two 2006 news flashes reporting on terrorist attacks in the Sinai Peninsula.

The airing of the *Yad Vashem* ceremony pushed the central newscast out of its 8:00 p.m. slot and turned the official state ceremony into that evening's programming anchor. As can be seen in Figure 3, most news items that were aired during this early newscast did not address the events of the Holocaust or the memory of the Holocaust, but rather covered day-to-day issues such as local and international politics, the economy, and so forth. In contrast, 42 of the 43 nonnews items (dramas, documentaries, panel discussions, etc.) that were aired on Channel 2 during the examined years focused in various ways on the Holocaust and its memory. That is, the decision to air the main news broadcast before 8:00 p.m. created a clear distinction between the mundane and secular nature of news reporting and the sacred sphere of televised rituals of mourning and commemoration. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of the content and line-up of the news items aired on the eve of MDHH revealed a consistent pattern.

As can be seen in Figure 4, the first part of the 30-minute newscast, which contained approximately 15 items, dealt predominantly with topics that were not Holocaust-related. Moreover, Holocaust-related items that did appear in this section were almost always brief clips that promoted the full-length Holocaust-related items that would appear toward the end of the newscast. In contrast, following the airing of the last commercial break, almost all news items (38 out of 40) focused on the

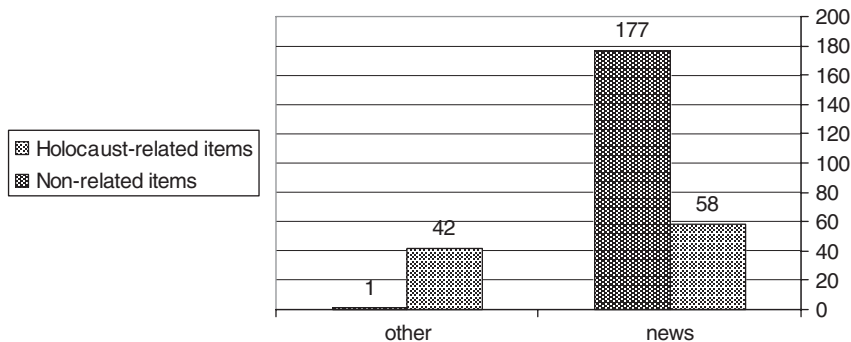


Figure 3 Holocaust-related and nonrelated items.

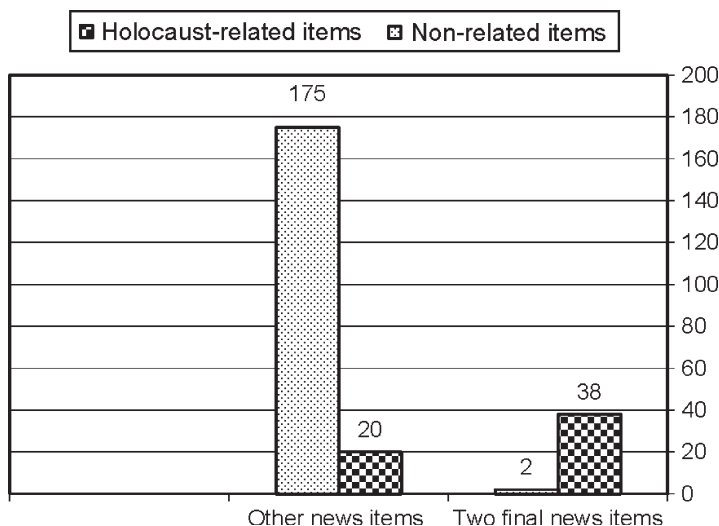


Figure 4 Position of Holocaust-related items in newscasts.

Holocaust and its commemoration. By doing so, the newscast provides a clear thematic structure that directs viewers through their transition from secular to sacred time zones. As part of the mass-mediated ritual process, these final news items provide a “separation from the everyday flow of activities, involving a passage through a threshold state or *limen* into a ritual world removed from everyday notions of time and space” (Abrahams, 1969, p. ix); the news items create a liminal sphere that connects the newscast dealing mostly with the “here” (Israel) and “now” (the present) to the rest of the evening’s programs, dealing in various complex ways with the “there” (Europe) and “then” (1939–1945). This liminal complexity is also reflected in the contents of the items and the means of representation they implement. Thus, for instance, news items that were aired at the end of the newscasts covered issues such as the “March of the Living,” a guided tour of Israel Defense Forces

(IDF) generals in *Yad Vashem*, a meeting between children of Holocaust survivors and children of non-Jews who rescued Jews during the war, the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe, and so forth.

The selection of such items as mediators between the “regular” first section of the newscast and the *Yad Vashem* ceremony illustrates the meeting point, or rather the clash, between secular news reporting routines and the characteristics of televised commemorative rituals. News is supposedly embedded within the present. Thus, only a few of the closing news items were based on archival materials and even in these few cases, the reports emphasized the current news value of filmed evidence, as in the case of a 2001 news item that aired for the first time a rare 1938 amateur film made by a German citizen during “Crystal Night.” Also, news is supposedly always anchored within “reality”; it does not have the privilege of dramatic films that can present the past (for instance, the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt) using professional actors who reenact events as if they were happening in the present at the same time that we are watching television. While dramatic representations take for granted the viewers’ acquaintance with the notion of the suspension of disbelief, news reports are far more limited in their representation of “reality.”

This commitment of the news genre to an ethos of novelty and documentary “realism” leads to a situation in which most Holocaust-related items presented during the liminal, concluding section of the newscast deal with the past via the mediation of the present. That is, they focus less on what actually happened in the past and more on the current ways through which this past is remembered. Moreover, the inability of news reports to present the past as though it were happening in the present contributes to the frequent use of Holocaust survivors as the main narrative tool through which such stories are told. Thus, many of these news items feature Holocaust survivors as guides or interpreters of current events and occurrences. The survivors, unlike Holocaust victims who have perished, or those who did not experience the Holocaust embody in their mere presence in these news reports a connecting link between the “there” and “then” and the “here” and “now.”

Identity of main characters

Within the framework of the analysis, the coders were asked to indicate which person or persons stood at the center of the narrative told through all Holocaust-related items (Figure 5).

Academic and popular discourses dealing with the representation of the Holocaust and the commemoration of the murdered victims of the Holocaust often debate the identity of the characters through which these narratives ought to be told: Is it better to focus on the fate of those who perished in the Holocaust and thus commemorate their memory, or should we concentrate on survivors who can tell their stories in their own words? Should the commemoration of the Holocaust address the perpetrators as well, so we can learn from their narratives how to prevent future Holocausts? What is the role and authority of second- and third-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors? And what role, if any, should be given to narrators who are not directly

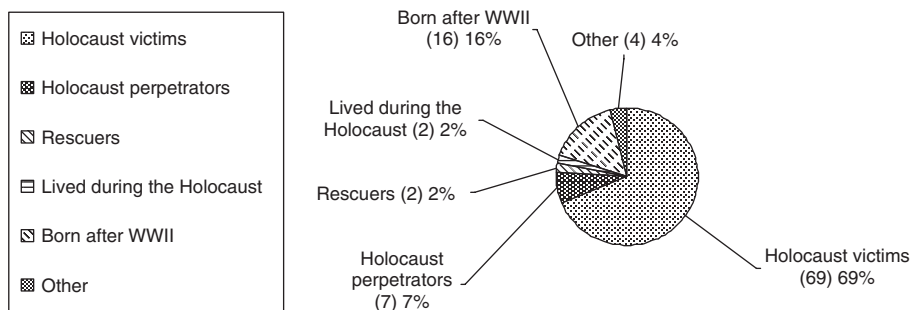


Figure 5 Main characters in Holocaust-related items in all genres.

related to the event or its consequences? Certainly, none of these questions has a definitive answer, and the answers all depend on the point of view of the narrator, on her intentions, and on how audiences decode these narratives. Thus, for example, debates over “Schindler’s List” raised the question of whether it was moral that such a wide-reaching representation of the Holocaust—that for many viewers constituted a first encounter with the event—told the story of a German Nazi turned rescuer, rather than focusing on the Jewish victims of the Holocaust (Loshitzky, 1997). Following the same line, the success of “Life is Beautiful” raised a similar heated debate over the hazards of implementing conventional popular culture storytelling strategies (the Holocaust as a fairy tale with a happy ending) in the representation of the Holocaust (Flanzbaum, 2001).

The characters standing at the center of Channel 2’s prime time MDHH broadcasts are undoubtedly individuals who were persecuted by the Nazis—victims of the Holocaust who either perished in the Holocaust or survived. Even though Israeli memory culture has embraced the narratives of second- and third-generation descendants of Holocaust survivors, this mapping shows that far fewer items focused on individuals who were born after the war than on survivors. Also, it is interesting to note that through the years, more items have focused on Nazi perpetrators than on individuals who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. Finally, during all 14 examined evenings, not even one item focused on the story of a victim of Nazi persecutions who was not Jewish. It seems as though the circumstances of such broadcasts—that is, prime time programming on Israel’s leading channel—make it hard to include within this televised mourning ritual victims who are not directly affiliated with the nation’s “master commemorative narrative” (Zerubavel, 1995). Within this context, it would be worthwhile to explore the same question with regard to off-prime time programming, or more peripheral channels. Thus, for instance, a review of television broadcasting guides shows that in past years, various Israeli cable channels have aired programs narrating the stories of homosexuals who were persecuted by the Nazis, as in the case of the protagonists of the 1997 British drama “Bent.”

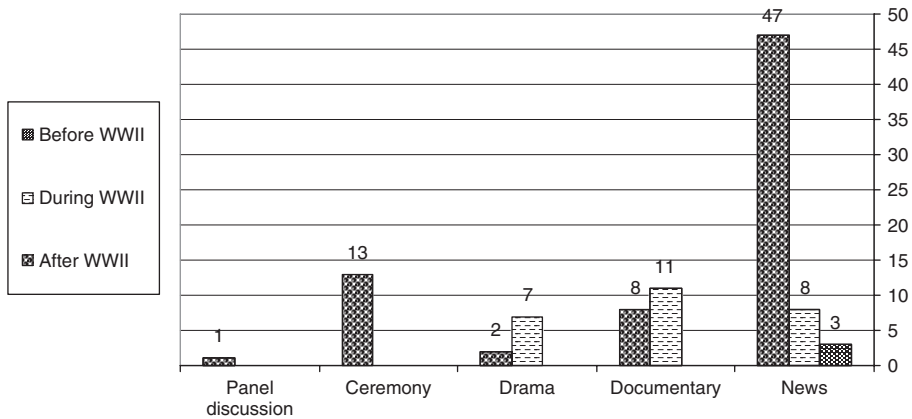


Figure 6 Time of occurrence of main event in Holocaust-related items in all genres.

Time of occurrence

The construction of collective memory is a process that inherently intertwines the past and the present. This is because the concept of collective memory refers to two complementary processes: The recollection of the past via current perceptions and values, and at the same time the presence of the past—in intended and unintended ways—in the present (Schudson, 1997). Hence, this section probes the representation of the time dimension in Channel 2's prime time MDHH programming. The coders were asked to determine for each item what main event stood at the center of the narrative and what was the time during which this event occurred—before the war, during the war, or after the war (Figure 6).

The vast majority of Holocaust-related news items dealt with the Holocaust via the coverage of events that take place in the present (young soldiers meeting Holocaust survivors, an update on the upcoming *Yad Vashem* ceremony, etc.). This outstanding bias of the news toward the present as a starting point for the representation of the Holocaust leads to a situation in which most news items dealing with the Holocaust focus on commemoration efforts, rather than on the event itself, as it happened in the past. This tendency, which is rooted within basic reporting conventions (Schudson, 1986), strengthens existing trends in Israeli Holocaust discourse of shifting from the description of the event to a discussion over the meaning of the commemoration of the event. At the same time, because this pattern of representation is characteristic of news broadcasts, which are guided by an ethos of objectivity, this salient focus on the commemoration of the event is usually not accompanied by a critical take, as can be seen in other modes of representation (namely, satire) dealing with the Israeli memory of the Holocaust (Blau, 2005).

The event that is positioned at the center of the airing of the *Yad Vashem* ceremony is, of course, the ceremony itself; it takes place in the present and reflects the current statist-official interpretation of the story of the Holocaust and its significance for Israelis as narrated by high ranking officials and chosen representatives of the

Israeli public. In contrast, most dramas and documentaries position at the center of their narratives events that took place during the Holocaust. This mode of representation reflects a traditional tendency of narrating the event itself, supposedly “as it happened” (such as the televised play “The Diary of Anne Frank,” the miniseries “Holocaust,” or the documentary “The Final Solution”), rather than focusing on the act of commemoration. Therefore, the examined MDHH programming constructs “memory time” in two parallel and complementing ways: The ceremonies and most news items focus on current events that commemorate the memory of the past, whereas a large majority of the dramas and a smaller majority of the documentaries detail the events of the past and position these events in the present via the current airing of the programs.

Main events

Only three Holocaust-related items focused on events that took place before WWII; the three were news items coded under “persecution of Jews.” Among the main events that took place during the war, the salient categories were “persecution/annihilation of Jews” (for instance, the program “Last Letters,” in which Israeli actors read the last letters written by Jews sent to their death), followed by the category “survival/escaping/hiding during the Holocaust” (for instance, the film “The Pianist”). It is important to note that among the 26 items that detailed events that had occurred during the war, not even one focused on armed resistance (Ghetto revolts, partisans’ operations) against the perpetrators. This finding illuminates claims about changes in current Israeli Holocaust commemoration discourse: In the early years of the State of Israel, this discourse was dominated by Zionist ideology in a way that blocked Holocaust survivors who did not actively fight against the Germans from entering the public sphere. Over the years, however, other voices have penetrated Israeli public Holocaust discourse, and nowadays the concept of “heroism” within the context of the Holocaust is perceived in various ways, extending beyond armed resistance (Neiger, 1999; Zandberg, 2005).

Items that narrate events that took place after the war contribute to the shift in focus from dealing with the events of the Holocaust to a discussion over its commemoration. Such items rarely focus on individual commemoration (e.g., a news item that documented the voyage of one Israeli survivor with her grandchildren to Poland). Rather, in most cases the occupation with the commemoration of the Holocaust is mediated by an official institutional perspective. This tendency is evident, of course, in the airing of the *Yad Vashem* ceremony, but it can also be tracked in news reports about commemorative initiatives by various organizations or newly released academic reports on the scope of anti-Semitism across the world. Communication research has extensively analyzed the reasons for the ultimate supremacy of institutions over individuals and oppositional protest groups as journalists’ sources of information (Ryan, 1991; Sigal, 1986). Following this line of thought, the findings of this study indicate that in the realm of Holocaust commemoration, organizations and institutions that are assisted by professional

spokespersons, who are acquainted with the media's needs and work patterns, have a far better chance of gaining coverage in comparison with individual commemorators.

Conclusion

This study explored the “memory menu” offered by Israel's leading commercial television channel on the eve of MDHH. Its methodological strategy enabled us to deconstruct Channel 2's memory narratives into their fundamental components—characters, events, time of occurrences, and so forth. At the same time, a reconstruction of these data informed by an understanding of the larger contexts that define commercial broadcasting can illuminate the processes that shape Israel's Holocaust memory discourse, as well as the ways by which commercial media perceive their public role and responsibility.¹⁰

The findings of the study highlight the exceptional position of MDHH broadcasts within the larger landscape of commercial broadcasting. On MDHH, the operation of Israeli commercial media is defined, as always, by the four above-mentioned contexts: the profit-driven logic of commercial broadcasting, legislation and regulation, surrounding cultural environments, logistical considerations, and professional values. But MDHH's unique place and function within the Jewish-Israeli collective calendar and consciousness influence the interrelations between these contexts on that day. As mentioned, the significance of MDHH to Jewish-Israeli national culture is realized via legislation that drastically limits the presence of televised commercial promotion on that day. Following the same line, the commercial and professional fundamental principle of competition between media outlets is dimmed on MDHH, when all three Israeli broadcast channels voluntarily surrender their narrating authority to the state through the common and uninterrupted airing of the *Yad Vashem* ceremony.

With regard to the context of possible cultural environments, we can see that in line with regular broadcasting days, Channel 2 features on the eve of MDHH a mix of local and foreign productions. But on this day of national mourning, a clear hierarchy of storytelling authority is set, as Israeli news items and documentaries provide the “authentic” or superior narratives of the Holocaust, in comparison with foreign narratives that provide, for the most part, the nondocumentary components of the channel's “memory menu.” MDHH newscasts are another site in which the negotiation between the different contexts that shape commercial broadcasting is evident. This component of the channel's programming directs the shift from “secular” to “sacred” time zones via the airing of Holocaust-related news items mainly toward the end of the newscast. At the same time, the narrative strategies used in these news items still adhere to the professional values of newsmaking, focusing on the present, featuring “real people,” emphasizing novelties, and so forth.

The mere fact that commercial media outlet such as Channel 2 invest financial resources in such a non-profitable broadcasting day suggests that money (that is, ratings) is not the only currency used by commercial broadcasters. Rather, on MDHH, Israeli commercial media replace material capital with symbolic capital; that

is, they utilize their commercial-free broadcasts on this day to promote their image as legitimate agents of memory and as providers of the main arena in which the national commemorative ritual takes place. This assertion is illuminated by the fact that only two types of promotional content still air throughout MDHH: Public service announcements that encourage Holocaust survivors who suffer from psychological distress to contact various support agencies and the station's identification visuals (logos). Hence the only commercial entities that gain access to this "sacred" programming sphere are the franchisees that operate Channel 2.

While these logos are aired on MDHH, as they are on every other broadcasting day, we suggest that the most significant characteristic of the studied schedules is the almost total absence of Channel 2 from them. That is, what stands out while looking at Channel 2's contents over the years is the channel's lack of will, or inability, to work MDHH into its well known and extremely successful broadcasting formulas. Besides the central newscast, which is usually aired before the official opening of the bereavement ritual, only one Holocaust-related show, lasting only 1 minute, has also been aired on regular days. Following the same line, when a highly popular talk show was aired on the eve of MDHH in 1996, it did not focus on the memory of the Holocaust, but rather on current events. Therefore, during thousands of examined airtime minutes, none of Channel 2's flagship programs and talents was used to address the Holocaust and its memory. This is also the case for Channel 2 personalities who do address tragedies and complex issues in their television work on various occasions. This seems to suggest that the people who shape Channels 2's MDHH programming assume that the best way to accumulate the symbolic capital that might be gained through broadcasting on that evening is to air programs that are perceived as utterly unrelated to commercial broadcasting.

Such thematic and stylistic choices bring us back to the question of the radical or even subversive potential of the "commercial vacuum" created via MDHH legislation. The findings of this study show that under such unique circumstances, commercial media do not embrace a questioning ethos, but rather adopt a traditional and statist reading of the collective past. The contents and tone of Channel 2 on the eve of MDHH reflect a narrative version that is insulated in many ways from day-to-day Israeli public Holocaust memory discourse: The broadcasts tend to undermine controversies regarding the events of the Holocaust and its commemoration, as well as the common reliance on the Holocaust as a rhetorical tool used to address current political debates. Such preferences position Channel 2's MDHH broadcasting as a significant site of Israeli postmemory work (Hirsch, 2001): The channel offers Israelis, who are mostly not survivors themselves, the opportunity to become part of the mourning ritual through a reliance on highly structured and repetitive patterns of programming and the airing of already familiar rituals and images. Moreover, the patterns of representation revealed in this study reflect the work of postmemory in another sense: Such depictions of the past not only commemorate the memory of the Holocaust itself, but also commemorate the ways in which Israeli culture used to narrate the

memory of the Holocaust in the (less radical and less commercial) past. Hence such patterns of programming ultimately commemorate (previous) commemoration.

Finally, it is important to note that the patterns described here are dynamic, rather than stable. And so a noticeable shift in the above-mentioned tendencies occurred during the last year analyzed in this study. On the eve of the 2007 MDHH, Channel 2 aired with great success (a 17.5% rating) the documentary “The Ethics of Reparations” (originally produced for a niche satellite channel), which criticized the Israeli government, Israeli banks, and various international Jewish organizations for their unwillingness to support needy Israeli Holocaust survivors with German reparations monies allocated for that purpose. The film, which was made by two leading television journalists, embraced a docu-activist Michael Moore-like rhetoric and tactics that included the ambushing of various officials and an overt manifestation of the journalists’ agenda.

What “The Ethics of Reparations” essentially did was to lower two self-constructed barriers: one separating Channel 2’s routine commercial contents and popular appeal from the solemn, highbrow character of its previous MDHH programming, and the other separating the growing critical takes on Israel’s culture of Holocaust commemoration (Zandberg, 2006) from the unquestioning character of the vast majority of the channel’s previous MDHH programming. Such a stark deviation from the firmly defined features of Channel 2’s invented tradition of MDHH programming might be a one time exception; at the same time, it may pave the road toward similar productions. In any event, if the tendency to change the tone and contents of Channel 2’s MDHH programming persists, it would be impossible to attribute this tendency to the usual motivations that guide commercial channels in their decision to make such changes: Whatever Channel 2 airs on MDHH in the future, it will still not yield any direct material capital in the form of advertizing profits. Any potential changes in Channel 2’s MDHH “memory menu” would therefore attest to shifts in the nature of the symbolic capital that could be gained through programming decisions of that kind;¹¹ hence such shifts would continue to illuminate how Israelis perceive the memory of the Holocaust in the context of changing political and cultural circumstances.

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Notes

- 1 Following Jewish tradition, MDHH commences on the eve of MDHH and comes to an end on the following evening.
- 2 The average ratings (1999–2004) of the airing of the *Yad Vashem* ceremony that opens MDHH on Israel's main public channel and two leading commercial channels was 14.5%. The airing of "Schindler's List" on Channel 2 on the eve of 1998's MDHH yielded the highest ratings (48.8%) throughout the channel's entire first decade of broadcasting. Israeli ratings data are measured by people meters located in 648 Israeli households, which represent a total viewing audience of 5,472,000 Israelis above the age of 4. Ratings data were provided by the Israel Audience Research Board and compiled by Tele-Gal TNS.
- 3 Global channels such as MTV or FOX News are part of the basic Israeli cable and satellite packages, and they are regularly aired on MDHH. The ratings of these non-Israeli channels on regular days as well as on MDHH are far lower than the ratings of "local" Israeli channels (Cohen, 2005).
- 4 A mourning day commemorating the destruction of the first and second temples, both of which were destroyed on the ninth day of the Jewish month of Av.
- 5 Channel 2's MDHH broadcasts between 1994 and 2007 were obtained from the archives of the Second Authority for Television and Radio. The studied corpus excludes 2.5 hours of broadcasts (4%) out of the total 63 hours of prime time MDHH programming. The missing data from 1995 and 2000 could not be retrieved.
- 6 The coders were one of the authors, one graduate student, and two undergraduate students who viewed 2–3 hours of broadcasting in each coding session. All coded contents were viewed separately by the coders in a university lab, or at their homes.
- 7 To illuminate this point we analyzed the distribution of number of items by genre during 1 week (July 11– July 17, 2008) of regular prime time (7:30 PM to midnight) Channel 2 broadcasts: news, 40%; dramas, 22%; entertainment, 11%; comedies, 8%; reality shows, 11%; documentaries, 5%; other, 3%.
- 8 In Figures 1 and 2, each newscast was counted as one item. In all other figures, each news item within the newscasts was counted and analyzed individually.
- 9 An annual journey in which thousands of primarily Jewish teens from around the world gather in Poland to mark MDHH.
- 10 The article establishes the relative popularity of Channel 2's broadcasts on the eve of MDHH (see footnote 2), but it does not venture into an assessment of the ways in which Israeli audiences process these televised contents. Such a research trajectory goes beyond the scope of this content analysis based study.
- 11 Because Israeli broadcast commercial channels are operated via franchises awarded by the state, gaining such symbolic capital might eventually be related to forms of material capital; for example in the case of discussions regarding the renewal of franchises of commercial operators.

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Appendix 1 Coding scheme: MDHH television broadcasts (translated from Hebrew)

1. Date:	
2. Channel:	
3. Title of the item:	
4. Starting time (full four digits):	
5. Ending time (full four digits):	
6. Length (in minutes):	
7. Genre:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. News 2. Documentary 3. Drama 4. Comedy 5. Ceremony 6. Discussion panel 7. Artistic performance 8. Other
8. Producer:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Israeli 2. Non-Israeli 3. Co-production
9. Is the item aired only/mostly on Holocaust Memorial Day?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No—airs on other days as well 3. Other
10. Does the item address the Holocaust?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes 2. No
11. Identity of the individual/s on which the item focuses:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holocaust victims 2. Holocaust perpetrators 3. Rescuers (individuals who rescued Holocaust victims) 4. Lived during the Holocaust, but do not belong to previous categories 5. Born after WWII 6. Other 7. Irrelevant
12. Fate of victims:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holocaust survivors 2. Perished in the Holocaust 3. Other 4. Irrelevant (item does not belong to this identity category)
13. Religion/nationality of victims:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jews 2. Non-Jews 3. Other 4. Irrelevant (item does not belong to this identity category)

Appendix 1 (*Continued*)

14. Religion/nationality of perpetrators:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Germans 2. Other non-Jews 3. Other 4. Irrelevant (item does not belong to this identity category)
15. Religion/nationality of rescuers:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jews 2. Non-Jews 3. Other 4. Irrelevant (item does not belong to this identity category)
16. Religion/nationality of those who lived during the Holocaust, but do not belong to previous categories:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jews from the Land of Israel 2. Jews from other places 3. Non-Jews 4. Other 5. Irrelevant (item does not belong to this identity category)
17. Religion/nationality of those who were born after WWII:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jews from the Land of Israel/State of Israel 2. Jews from other places 3. Non-Jews 4. Other 5. Irrelevant (item does not belong to this identity category)
18. Time of the occurrence that stands at the center of the item:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before WWII 2. During WWII 3. After WWII 4. Other 5. Irrelevant
19. Before WWII—main topic of the item:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jewish life in Europe 2. Persecution of Jews 3. Other 4. Irrelevant (item does not focus on this time category)
20. During WWII—main topic of the item:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Persecution/annihilation of Jews 2. Persecution/annihilation of non-Jews 3. Rescue efforts 4. Armed resistance (Ghetto revolt, partisans) 5. The war (item does not focus on the Holocaust) 6. Survival/escaping/hiding during the Holocaust 7. Other 8. Irrelevant (item does not focus on this time category)

Appendix 1 (*Continued*)

21. After WWII—main topic of the item:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Holocaust commemoration—institutional2. Holocaust commemoration—private3. War Commemoration (WWII)4. Anti-Semitism5. Search for and prosecution of Holocaust perpetrators6. Other7. Irrelevant (item does not focus on this time category)
22. Location of the main event/s that stand at the center of the item:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Israel2. Europe3. United States4. Arab countries5. Other6. Irrelevant
