

## **“IN THE TREASURE CHEST OF MEMORY”**

*Kathimerini*

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**The Holocaust lies in Yad Vashem Museum – “The Modern Form of Anti – Semitism is Sinister”**

**By, Yiannis Massouras**

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The cursed moments of the darkest period in the history of humanity are kept very much alive in the underground rooms of Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem.

The tour among the photographic documents of the barbarity of the Nazi regime and the personal belongings of the people murdered in an unprecedented systematic way in the name of racial purity creates intense feelings. The shouting and orders of Adolph Hitler, echo from the speakers of the museum and the constant images of endless violence jump forth from the dozens of TV screens. Terror, rage and also sorrow.

Any then in the yard of the museum just a few meters away from the Memorial of the Lost Children, the serene atmosphere of the Valley of the Dead comes to sooth the anguish of the visitor.

Everything is frozen in time. No voices are heard, even the fear has abated. Just huge traditional stones, those still used today to build all buildings in Jerusalem, on which the names of the Jewish communities exterminated from the face of the earth are engraved.

### **A Memorial, a Name**

As the Hebrew name of the area – freely translated “Yad Vashem” means “a memorial and a name” indicates, the tremendous expanse of land in the heart of the forest of Jerusalem, is considered something more than a museum of macabre exhibits from the concentration camps of the Third Reich. In reality, it is a treasure chest of the collective memory of the Holocaust and is the key to understanding the sensitive web which makes up Israeli society.

And it is true that for the great majority of the Israelis, the Holocaust and the preceding persecution of their co-religionists in Europe, make the right to create a Jewish state in Palestine obvious. But it is the influence the Holocaust has on the psychology of Israelis which in turn explains – although it does not always justify – the facility with which they accuse anyone who disagrees in a “harsh way” with the policy of the Jewish state towards the Palestinians of anti – Semitism.

### **Expressions of anti – Semitism**

“The collapse of Nazi Germany did not signal the end of anti – Semitic phenomena,” stresses Onra Steinfeld, Director of the Information Center about anti – Semitism in Yad Vashem. Earlier she had gone back into the past, claiming that the first persecution followed the fracture between Christianity and Judaism and is a result of the teachings of the first ecclesiastical leaders about the responsibility of the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus.

“The modern form of anti – Semitism is very sinister and the phenomena it begets are not always clear,” she claims. Of course, nobody denies for instance, that the desecration of Jewish cemeteries is a clear expression of anti – Semitism and Mrs. Steinfeld agrees that they are phenomena caused by extreme – Right Wing groups.

But what happens with the “grey” zones as she characterized them? “It is clear that we are not ready to close our eyes to the anti – Semitism also stemming from the activities of Leftist circles, who disagree with the policy of Israel,” she stresses, and cites last year’s cartoon which depicts Ariel Sharon devouring Palestinian children as an example. When the comment was raised that in many cases these cartoons are simply the product of a lack of creativity, Mrs. Steinfeld asks: “Did you see cartoons depicting President Chirac devouring young people after the incidents in Paris?”

Even though she appears convinced that anti – Semitism in Europe is on the rise, she admits that the policies of every Israeli Government cannot be beyond criticism and appears to understand that there is a fine line between combating modern anti – Semitism and censorship.

### **The “cure”**

“In any case, demonizing a people as a result of the policies of the governments which represent it is dangerous,” Mrs. Steinfeld insists, referring to the definition of anti – Semitism provided by the European Center for Monitoring Phenomena of Racism and Xenophobia. “Among other things, comparing the policy of modern Israel to that of the Nazis and collectively accusing Jews for the actions of their governments are considered anti – Semitism in the document. Mrs. Steinfeld concludes by stating that enacting laws against anti – Semitism and informing citizens is the best cure for fighting it.

The truth is always somewhere in the middle, and nations are the ones which must decide how they will react. However, the hardening of the stance of both sides comes to upset the serene atmosphere in the Valley of Dead Communities, where there can be no response.