

## РОЗДІЛ: ПСИХОЛОГІЯ ПІЗНАВАЛЬНИХ ПРОЦЕСІВ

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## REFLECTION ON COLLECTIVE MEMORY IN THE MUSEUM

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*The article describes visitors' interpretation and understanding of the narrative about the Holocaust in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Visitors comments were the material for the analysis, used methodology was discourse analysis. Different discourses were singled out in visitors' comments. Differences between visitors' comments given in different years were ascertained. Age differences and differences among narratives of various groups of the Museum visitors were shown. It can be concluded that the Museum fulfills various functions. Besides being a place of commemoration, it accomplishes its educational function and serves as a source of information about the Holocaust.*

*Key words: museum, Holocaust, visitors, comments, discourse.*

Музеї є одним із засобів, у яких спільноти відображають свою колективну пам'ять. Експозиції музеїв встановлюють певні рамки, які наповнюються різним контентом і дають можливість створити різні нарративи. Музеї відіграють активну і майже непомітну роль в створенні пам'яті. Але музеї не тільки конструюють пам'ять, ця пам'ять має бути сприйнята і присвоєна відвідувачами. Першим кроком у цьому процесі є безпосередня реакція на експозицію музею, яка відображається в записках відвідувачів в книжках коментарів, які вони роблять за власним бажанням. Ми припустили, що емоційні реакції відвідувачів, інформація, одержана в музеї, буде впливати на розвиток або зміну пам'яті відвідувачів. Матеріалом для аналізу були коментарі відвідувачів, зібрані в різні роки в Меморіальному музею Голокосту Сполучених Штатів Америки. Переважна більшість коментарів була залишена американцями, були також коментарі від громадян інших країн. Методом аналізу коментарів був обраний аналіз дискурсу, в якому були використані підходи Дж. Джи, а також критичний дискурс аналіз ван Дуйка і Р. Водак. На підставі проведеного аналізу були одержано наступне. Було виділено декілька дискурсів, найбільш часто вживаних були емоційний, спрямований на майбутнє і дію, песимістичний і космополітичний. Була виявлена різниця між коментарями відвідувачів, залишених ними в різні роки: підвищилась кількість коментарів у критичному, космополітичному і життєстверджуючому дискурсах, що може бути пов'язано зі впливом терористичного акту 11 вересня 2001 року. Відрізнялись також коментарі відвідувачів різних вікових груп. Підлітки і діти більш безпосередньо висловлювали свої емоції у порівнянні з дорослими, які показали глибше розуміння подій і їх наслідків. Було виокремлено декілька різних груп відвідувачів. Ті, хто вижили, і члени їх родин виявили травматичні почуття, афро-американці проводили паралелі і ідентифікували себе з євреями, німці відчували сором і жаль і т. ін. Так, музей стимулює рефлексії про Голокост, власну ідентичність і слугує основою для подальшого розвитку колективної пам'яті про Голокост.

*Ключові слова: музей, Голокост, відвідувачі, коментарі, дискурс.*

*Данная статья описывает интерпретацию и понимание нарратива о Холокосте в Мемориальном музее Холокоста Соединенных Штатов. Материалом для анализа стали комментарии посетителей, для их анализа использовался анализ дискурса. В комментариях посетителей были выявлены различные дискурсы. Были установлены различия между комментариями, написанными в разные годы. Были показаны возрастные различия и различия между нарративами разных групп посетителей музея. Можно сделать вывод, что музей выполняет различные функции. Кроме места коммеморации, он выполняет образовательную функцию и является источником информации о Холокосте.*

*Ключевые слова: музей, Холокост, посетители, комментарии, дискурс.*

**Introduction.** Museums are one of the forms in which communities shape their collective memory. Museum exposition sets definite frames which can be filled in with different content and meaning and gives the possibility to organize material in different narratives. Museums play an active but subtle role in creating memory. It might be memory about history of the country [4], [6], or some periods in it, or memory about events, people [5], etc. In any way narratives in the museums present collective memory of a certain social

group or a state as a whole [9]. There are museums specific for a definite country or a city. Museums in different countries may be devoted to the same events that happened in these countries but the narratives about them might be different [11].

The Holocaust is the event that concerns directly almost each European country, European Jewry and influenced a lot of countries and many people. Museums devoted to this event were founded in different European countries, in Israel, and the United States. A number of the Holocaust museums were built mainly in the sites (concentration and death camps, places of deportation, killing and so on) [1]. But countries that were not the places of the Holocaust established memorial museums telling about it and created for commemoration [12]. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC is such a museum.

As J. Young noted, each country has its "own Holocaust". USHMM narrates own history of the Holocaust and creates collective memory of it. But museums are expected not only to create memory but this memory should be consumed and appropriated by the visitors. It is difficult to find out how the museums succeed in it. The visitors of the museum are influenced by various factors and information. Some information they had before a visit to the museum. All this is mixed, and it is hard to say what namely the museum's contribution was. But it is possible to record a direct visitors' reaction after their visit to the museum. Visitors can share it in the book of visitors' comments of their own free will.

We suppose that visitors' emotional reaction, seen and heard information in the Museum will influence a development or change of visitors' memory.

**Material for the Analysis.** Visitors' comments are one of the possible data for studying the consumption of information and memory. We used them for the analysis of the consumption of the collective memory about the Holocaust presented in the permanent exhibition of the USHMM.

More than 400 comments from different years (1996, 1997, 2001, and 2002) were analyzed. Last years' comments were taken from the Museum Archives; comments of 2001 and 2002 came from the Visitors Services of the Museum. The majority of comments were left by Americans, though among visitors who mentioned their residence were those who lived in Israel, Germany, Poland, Nigeria, Japan, Australia, former Soviet Union, etc. Most comments were written in English, there were several comments in Spanish, Hebrew, Russian, etc. We analyzed only those that were written in English, German (they were translated by the native speakers) and Russian. Several comments were also translated from Hebrew.

**Methodology.** Discourse analysis was chosen as methodology for the analysis of visitors' comments. We did not adhere strictly to one specific technique. We based on J. Gee's ideas of the discourse analysis [7] and critical discourse analysis of van Dijk, Ruth Wodak [10] and others. They used discourse analysis for studying racism, anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. One of the main features of critical discourse analysis is that it deals with written texts and focuses primarily on social problems and political issues, and it interprets discourse as a form of social action. We consider that in a discourse as a social action a new layer of collective memory is produced. While analyzing comments we focused both on their content and language means and thus determined a specific discourse.

**General Results.** The overwhelming majority of visitors' comments contain gratitude to the Museum ("*Thank you*", "*good job*", etc.). There is also an appeal to remember about the Holocaust forever in most comments. This appeal is presented in two different ways: "*Always remember*", "*Never forget*" and visitors also mention that they do not want it to happen again ("*Never happen again*").

As a whole those visitors who left their comments estimate the permanent exhibition highly and positively. Some visitors notice that it was not their first visit to this Museum. In several comments "Daniel's story" (a small museum in the Museum created for children as a story of the Holocaust which was seen and experienced by the boy) is mentioned as a part of the Museum that made a special impression. Some of those comments belong to children; some comments came from the adults. Several visitors give their recommendation to the Museum.

There are 1% negative comments among more than 400 that have been analyzed ("*The Holocaust Museum was sickening*" or "*This place sucks*"). There is a group of comments that give a general positive evaluation, but their authors consider that it contains little information about homosexuals, handicapped, witnesses of Jehovah, etc. who also suffered during the Holocaust. However many comments have more complicated content and a methodology of discourse analysis can be applied to them.

We could single out several discourses.

The emotional discourse appeared to be the most frequent (9.2%). In this discourse visitors described their emotions. Here it is possible to see the whole variety of emotional state: from distinctly negative referring to the events of the Holocaust ("*scared*", "*horrible*"), till positive caused by the appreciation of the Museum and of how the exhibit is done ("*overwhelming*", "*powerful*", etc.). People wrote about their pity toward victims, shame about what have been done by people to other people. Sometimes opposite emotions are united in the same comment: "*I am gutted through and through. I will never forget this feeling. My love to victims and my hatred to those that made this nightmare a reality*".

Thus, it may be concluded that the permanent exhibition influences visitors' emotions first of all.

Almost the same number of comments was written in the intellectual discourse (8.3%). Visitors note important and interesting information about the Holocaust that they received in the Museum. They mention that it was educational, opening eyes, making think. "*Thank you for this museum. You have opened my eyes to history. Educational exhibition. It shall prevent history from repeating itself*" (a girl, 17 years old). "*I came through here, not knowing what to think. Now, I think!*"

The authors of the discourse directed into future and of action (5.6%) consider the Holocaust to be the lesson that will give a possibility not to allow any similar event to happen in the future. «*The Holocaust was a crime against humanity. It must not be forgotten not to happen again*». Moreover, some of the visitors understand that it is necessary to be active to achieve this goal and they are ready to do it. «*I was learning about the Holocaust from my early childhood, but it never impacted me so greatly. Knowing that so few people expressed their compassion with action is scary. This museum showed me that in order to see results, actions are necessary*». «*I will bring my children here when they are old enough to understand these horrors and to use their knowledge to prevent them from reoccurring*»

The pessimistic discourse can be considered opposite to this one (2.9%). Its authors do not exclude the repetition of something like the Holocaust; they have doubts as to moral qualities of people and their ability to resist the evil. «*This museum is about the madness of Nazis but also about weakness of others that allow this Holocaust to happen. We must remember that this has happened many times before from the beginning. Is man doomed to see this sort outrage come again*». «*It is both hard and easy to believe that human beings can stoop to killing others for living space and economic survival*».

In addition some of them draw an analogy with contemporary events in Somali, Bosnia, etc. and make rather a trivial conclusion that history repeats itself and does not teach people.

It seems to be important the appearance of the cosmopolitan discourse (2.9%) according to which all people considered to be people irrespective of their race or ethnicity. The term "cosmopolitan" is used here by the analogy with the term "cosmopolitan memory" introduced by D. Levy and N. Sznajder [8]. In the cosmopolitan discourse the conclusions that can be drawn from the Holocaust are spread to all people, to the whole mankind. For example: «*A message we should learn from the Holocaust – a message of love, peace and unity among all inhabitants of the Earth*». «*This Museum has taught me to cry for people, not because of their ethnicity but because they are simply people. And the state should protect them (14 years old)*».

Some comments are written in religious discourse (2.7%). It can be a pray about the victims, a pray that it should not be repeated and the gratitude to God for one's life. «*With God's help this shall never happen again*».

One more important discourse is the so called life-asserting discourse (2.2%). From all seen in the Museum their authors conclude that the life is beautiful and it is necessary to appreciate it. «*I took life for granted. I should be happy that I am alive and with my family. It encouraged to read more and to look more into the Holocaust*».

In the discourse of personal changes (1.2%) people write that experience in the Museum changed them for the whole life, that after this visit they will not be the same as they were before. Some of them even write that this will change them forever. Certainly, nobody can tell if it is really so or not, but the mere mentioning it shows a deep influence they experienced.

In the national and civic discourse (1.2%) visitors comprehend how they are happy to live in such a country as the United States.

The comparative discourse. Those seen at the Museum encouraged some visitors to the comparison of the own ethnic or other social in-group with the Jews. Usually in these comments their authors immediately mention the ethnic group they belong to and draw some conclusions as a result of comparing these groups. Among comments there were several those in which the fate of Jews is compared with the fate of other people who endured various persecutions. «*My family experience much the same here, in America because we are different (An American Indian)*». «*Until this day, as a Blackman, I thought the slave trade was the most evil act of inhumanity. However, my mind is changed forever. This is certainly the most evil*» (Nigerian).

There are also critical discourses with different objects of the criticism: the policy in the years of the Holocaust («*So little was done to help these people who were terrorized. Why?*»); the behavior of Jews during that period («*I am amazed that European Jews went like lambs to the slaughter*» (A Jewish member of the US Air Force)); the policy of the current government («*May the US government look at our own tyranny and may US citizens resist racism, sexism and oppression within our own borders*»); the policy of Israel now («*The Jews are doing the same for Palestinians!*»).

There is a group of personal comments (5.6%) in which visitors mention their social roles («*I am a child of a survivor, I am a survivor*, etc.), or their ethnical identity («*I am a German, I am African-American*, etc.) or religious identity (Jew, Catholic, Christian, Muslim, etc.). Survivors and members of their families write shortly how they survived. For example: «*I am a child of a Holocaust survivor. My mother survived Auschwitz as a young girl. Here I can visualize all the stories I grew up with. Thank you for showing the world what hate can do. I will never forget, hopefully no one who comes here will either*».

Thus, we can make the following conclusion. Though there are a large variety of discourses that were used in the visitors' comments, several of them are dominating. Namely these are emotional, intellectual, directed into future and of action, pessimistic and cosmopolitan discourses.

Sometimes in the discourse of the same author appear two contested voices each representing an opposite view. For example: «*I do not know whether to be grateful or ashamed*». From time to time a kind of discussions arise in the book of visitors' comments. People who come up to write their comments can read what was written before. And the situation can encourage the discussion. May be people even give up their initial intentions to write something definite and are forced to "answer" a previous comment: «*We should look into the future, not on the past.*» - «*If we do not recognize the past, how are we to base our actions for the future?*»

**Analysis of differences between visitors' comments given in different years.** The main discourses (emotional, intellectual, directed into future and of action, religious, personal) are repeated constantly from year to year. However it is possible to notice some peculiarities in their appearance that are connected with the situation in the world and in America that is changing, and with some other reasons that cannot always be explained and understood immediately.

Thus, pessimistic discourse was expressed more evidently in 1996 in comparison with 2002 when the number of comments with this discourse decreased. At the same time in 2002 critical discourse became more frequent. If in 1996-97 it could be met by chance (one critical comment in the whole sample), in 2002 it became more popular. Recently people began to write about repeated holocausts in the world. Such comments were not met before. The situation in the world that has changed, more attention is attracted by mass media to such events, more involvement of the United States in them seem to cause the appearance of critical discourse.

Though a cosmopolitan discourse appeared earlier, it began to be used more frequently lately. This might be connected with a more distinct understanding of interference of events that happen in the world, and possibility for everybody to be involved in them.

In 2002 a life asserting discourse is found more often too. The events of September the 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attack apparently changed people's worldview. A possibility to lose one's life very easily that many people began to experience themselves forced to evaluate life preciousness, uniqueness and fragility in a new way. An explanation of temporal differences can be connected with the fact that the eternal truths seem to move aside daily problems.

**Age Analysis.** Though visitors' comments do not suppose an indication of name, age and other characteristics, people often put them. Children write their names, age and place of residence rather often. Hence it was possible to single out a group of teenagers who indicated their age or wrote that they study at school.

What is written in their comments? Children mention that they got much information, a lot of new that they never heard about at school. They are sorry for the Holocaust victims, they understood that the Holocaust is something horrible that should be never repeated, and the past is as important as present and future. Others noted that all those seen at the Museum made them want to change, to become better, try to live their lives to the fullest. The Museum taught some of them *"to cry for people, not because of their ethnicity but because they are simply people."*

Some younger children address the Museum and Daniel directly: *"Dear Daniel, Sorry what happened to you and your family."* Certainly, such appeals cannot be found in the adults' comments. Comparing with the adults, there are no comments with critical and comparable discourses in children and teenagers' comments. Male teenagers gave some rude comments which seem to be an expression of their strongest emotions. Several teenagers (namely girls) wrote that they could not handle all those horrors that were displayed at the Museum.

**Different groups of visitors. Survivors.** Survivors and members of their families were attributed to this group. It was the largest group that identified itself. Those survivors who visited the Museum themselves are first of all thankful to the Museum because it tells the world that **IT** (the Holocaust) really happened. The whole world and all people should know about it. Though undoubtedly the tour of the Museum revived their painful memories, and it was not always easy for them to come here, at the same time such visit was to some extent a catharsis to them. Some of them ask a question that nobody seems to be able to answer: *"Why was I spared when so many of my loved ones were exterminated?"*

Survivors and their family members can be divided into two groups. In the first group the survivors tell about their experience and what they endured, survivors from the other group do not like to speak about it and try to avoid such conversations. Either the traumatic experience is discussed in the families or not, it has been shown that not only survivors themselves have deep traumas but their children too. As it was shown the traumatic experience influenced survivors not only as persons but as parents as well [2], [3]. There are some evidences in visitors' comments that even the third generation in the survivors' families appears to be hurt too.

For family members from the first group the Museum visualized the stories of their relatives. Family members of the second group finally got an opportunity to learn and see what the Holocaust looked like. The silence in survivors' families is not productive for their children and grandchildren, and the Museum breaks this silence. As one girl mentioned, it was a possibility to *"crawl in my grandpa's skin"*. And for many it is *"a great place to remember those who were killed"*.

**Jews.** Those people who wrote, "I am a Jew" in their comments or signed the comment "A Jew form ..." were attributed to this group. They directly claimed their identity. On the whole all the variety of discourses that was described can be found in this group. After this visit some people wrote that they felt themselves closer to their ancestors and pride for being Jews.

**African-Americans.** The next group is identified as African-Americans. They wrote about the similar experience of the Black and the Jews, that both were the objects of discrimination. But they conclude that the Holocaust is even worse than slavery that was experienced by African-Americans. *"Being raised in an apartheid state, being segregated because of the color of skin, being persecuted because tried to change things, I feel the same what the Jews did. But my experience is nothing compared to what the Jews went through. I love Jews and pray for them"*. *"Until this day, as a Blackman, I thought the slave trade was the most evil act of inhumanity. However, my mind is changed forever. This is certainly the most evil"* (Nigerian).

Thus, through the comparison of similarity of fates and experiences a strong empathy and connection to other people arise.

**Germans.** Those Americans who have Germans in their roots appeared to face with a complicated dilemma. The overwhelming emotion they experienced walking through the exhibition was the emotion of shame and bitterness. They apologize for their ancestors and are even sorry for being Germans. *"I feel deeply ashamed of my heritage as a German. Being only 22 years old I am extremely appreciative that I was not part of what took place 55-60 years ago."* *"I felt sad, ashamed and sick. I am from German-Dutch descent. I practically cried out when I saw my family name on that wall."*

Several citizens of Germany who gave their comments share the grief of Jews. They cannot change the past but, as they mention, can try to change present and future.

**Catholics and Christians.** Religious identity is mostly declared by the Catholics. Thus, some of them did not suspect the Catholics of the involvement in anti-Semitism, and this fact horrified them. *"I am a Catholic and I never learned of our involvement in anti-Semitism. I am horrified by own history. Especially for the part the US paid in refusing entry of the Jewish people on the St. Louis (name of the ship – O.I.). I will spread my love to all people."*

In another comment there is an appeal to God to forgive the persecutions of Jews. Christian visitors write about the importance of the experience received in the Museum for them.

#### Former Soviet Citizens

It appeared to be not the smallest group. A survivor from Ukraine wrote a story how her mother rescued her but her relatives were executed. A girl from Russia thanked the Museum for opening her eyes. One of the visitors wrote: *"Stalin did even worse things. So where is multi-million dollar museum for those people?"*

**Citizens of Israel.** The comments of those who signed them in this way in general do not differ from others, though some of them are written in Hebrew. Israel citizens emotionally react; notice that they learned something new though they had been to Yad Vashem and other places.

Thus, relying upon visitors' comments analysis the Museum made almost each group that has been singled out to manifest own specificity, in addition to general gratitude to the Museum, an appeal to remember the Holocaust and compassion to its victims.

### **Conclusions**

The conducted analysis showed the following. Visitors understand the message of the Museum and the narrative it constructs. According to their comments they got a frame for further development of their memory of the Holocaust on the basis of collective memory provided by the Museum.

The Museum plays an educational role giving visitors emotionally rich information, subtly influencing their perception and memory of the Holocaust.

In visitors' comments a variety of discourses was singled out. They show how in different way they interpret the content they got to know. Visitors try to connect the Holocaust with contemporary events and understand the necessity of actions to prevent the repetition of such events as the Holocaust. The events of September the 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 attack apparently changed people's worldview.

Visitors' comments also reflect age differences. Young children identify themselves with the main character of the child's narrative, teenagers react very emotionally first of all, adults show besides emotions deeper comprehension.

Different groups of visitors have specific features. Survivors and their family members revived traumatic feelings; African-Americans drew a parallel with the Jews and identified with them; Germans feel shame and pity; Christians learned a role of Christian church in anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews and felt pity of that.

The Museum gives a possibility to the visitors to compare the fate, experience and problems of their own group with those of the Jews, and thus it brings the visitors to a deeper comprehension of their in- and out-groups. Basing on conducted analysis it is possible to conclude that the Museum is effective and fulfills various functions. Besides being a place of commemoration, it accomplishes its educational function and serves as a source of information about the Holocaust. Being penetrated by intensive emotions such education becomes more effective. It encourages reflections not only about the Holocaust, but also about one's identity and value of life, about people's nature, good and evil and moral problems, thus serving a basis for a further development of the collective memory about the Holocaust.

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