

ENGRAVED IN STONE: COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE
HOLOCAUST IN MEMORIALS ERECTED IN THREE
CEMETERIES IN GREATER TEL AVIV AREA

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Abstract

About five hundred memorials to communities destroyed in the Holocaust have been erected in three cemeteries in the metropolitan environs of Tel Aviv (Nahalat Yitzhak, Kiryat Shaul and Holon), in separate, designated areas. Since the memorials are situated in cemeteries, they cannot be related to like memorials that are constructed in public squares or gardens. Yet they are not tombstones since there are no graves underneath. In effect, they function simultaneously as a memorial and as a substitute tombstone. On Memorial Day and memorial services, they function as memorials; at the same time, they serve as a quasi-grave. Indeed, upon leaving the cemetery, many visitors place small stones on the base of the memorials as they do on regular graves. The words inscribed on these memorials are designed to deliver messages for generations to come.

The purpose of this research is to decode the messages from the engraved words and the figurative design of the memorials; the aim is to decipher the content of the collective memory they bear. Inasmuch as a memorial is only part of society's collective memory, and does not reveal all its memories, its designers must decide what should be engraved for eternal memory. Since most of the memorials were

designed by tombstone builders rather than artists, I do not deal with the artistic aspect of the memorials.

The study found that there are two main types of memorials: traditional, and declarative. The traditional memorial resembles the traditional Jewish tombstone. It is a rectangular block of stone placed on a base. The message is transmitted by words and not by its shape or artistic figure. The declarative memorial transmits its message through its so-called artistic qualities. It resembles a memorial rather than a tombstone. It is an asymmetric rock or block, and words are kept to a minimum.

Each of the memorials reflects a different type of collective memory. The traditional type reflects collective memory in the codes of traditional commemoration, while the declarative type reflects collective memory in the codes of the modern world. What is common to both types of memorials is that they commemorate the destroyed communities but barely accentuate the Holocaust. They express their thoughts about the horrors only by short passages from the Bible or by lines from Hebrew poets. This is due, perhaps to a lack of words sufficient to express the horrors of the Holocaust.

Many visitors to the cemeteries do not linger near the memorials. They arrive for a funeral or a memorial service and pass by the memorials. But the memorials certainly evoke memories in those who pass by, if only for a short time. However, for those who purposefully visit their community's memorial, it is a quasi-grave for their loved ones; as well as a public memorial where remembrance ceremonies are held on the anniversary day commemorating the community, and on Holocaust Memorial Day.