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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

The Holocaust Museum of Greece, Thessaloniki: In Whose Memory?

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Abstract
This article explores the political and discursive framing of the emerging project Holocaust Museum of Greece (HMG) based in Thessaloniki (announced in 2013). As an "in situ" Holocaust museum, the HMG could represent an important step toward recognizing Jewish suffering in a country where—compared with the rest of Europe—unprecedentedly high levels of antisemitic attitudes have been recorded over the past decade. Supported by a qualitative media analysis and supplemented with data from our online survey, we explore how HMG stakeholders and potential local visitors reflect on the project. Occurring amid contemporary endeavors in Holocaust commemoration and Greek-German reconciliation, we connect it with their persistence in combating far-right tendencies and antisemitism. Specifically, we investigate whose memory HMG stakeholders aim to display, how they reflect on dominant Greek historical narratives and whether they express a clear memory commitment and a genuine effort to produce a more integrated historical interpretation of the Holocaust in Greece.

Keywords: politics of memory; Holocaust commemoration; Greece; memorial museum; Thessaloniki

Introduction

Following the European boom of memorial museums on Jewish history, the Holocaust, and WWII over the past two decades, the recent steps toward Holocaust commemoration in Greece's Thessaloniki, once described as the Jerusalem of the Balkans (Molho 2013, 290; Naar 2016, 1–2), is a logical development. The emerging Holocaust Museum of Greece (HMG) project (or as its official website—holocausteducenter.gr—labels it, the Holocaust Memorial Museum & Educational Center of Greece on Human Rights) was officially announced in December 2013. Back then, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Jewish Community of Thessaloniki (JCT), the Municipality of Thessaloniki, and the GAIAOSE railway company, landowner of the proposed site.

Since 2013, cooperation for the HMG project has advanced significantly, adding the Central Jewish Board (KIS), Greek governmental authorities and the Mémorial de la Shoah as expert guarantor to the aforementioned parties, while getting Germany, Greece, and the nongovernmental Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF) on board as benefactors. In June 2017, the HMG project was approved by the Regional Council of Central Macedonia (*lifo.gr*, July 24, 2017) and confirmed by a presidential decree in December (FEK 293, December 29, 2017). Greek PM Alexis Tsipras and Israeli President Re'uven Rivlin laid the first foundation stones in January 2018 (HMG, February 22, 2018). About a year later, the HMG emerged as a Brussels-based nonprofit organization, in which the Municipality of Thessaloniki, the JCT, and the Mémorial de la Shoah would act as founding members (*dailythess.gr*, July 2, 2018; *thestival.gr*, February 21, 2019). An international,

27-membered Executive Board representing all parties, including renowned scholars, was created in December 2019 (*Makthes.gr*, December 13, 2019).

Construction itself, however, has yet to be launched due to protracted negotiations on practical aspects of its realization. Despite all efforts, the Executive Board was still preoccupied with solving problems related to the assigned building plots throughout 2020 (*Makthes.gr*, August 25, 2020). Rather than technicalities, this article reflects on the aims of HMG stakeholders regarding their memory commitment and historical (re)presentation. While their efforts to communicate the Holocaust through the HMG project may be well-intentioned, their memory commitment, like that of potential local visitors and the Greek public, appears less robust. More than that, it fails to connect with "contemporary discrimination and historical suffering" (Benedik 2020) and with David's (2020) concept of moral remembrance. As such, we assume that declared commitments and mnemonic strategies envisioned as "educative" are rather superficial (Subotić 2019).

While significantly more attention has been focused on the Holocaust in Greece over the past two decades (Droumpouki 2013, 2016; Molho 2016; Apostolou 2018; Lewkowicz 2006; Králová 2017), the HMG project has yet to be subjected to wider scholarly or public debate. Such an omission is not new, as demonstrated by historians and memory scholars, sometimes even in comparative studies (Himka and Michlic 2013; Makhotina et al. 2015, most recently, e.g., Radonić 2021). Regarding its dealings with its troubled past, however, Greece as a case study is never included in these volumes, which primarily consider either Western or Eastern Europe (including former Yugoslavia) from a Cold War rather than a geographical perspective. Like many other European countries, Greece was quick to 'nationalize' the suffering of the Jews after the Second World War and dissolve it into a localized narrative of victimhood (Lagrou 2005, 22–23; Antoniou et al. 2020, 861–886). With the absence of Jews, traditional antisemitism was often masked by a pretended oblivion. Charges of omission, substitution, or nationalistic accommodation could be answered by using national history as an explanatory or even apologetic framework (typically the Greek Civil War for Greece, 1946–1949) and appropriating the term Holocaust (*olokautoma*) as a specifically Greek word (Goschler 2015, 164–166; Králová 2017, 149–175; Varon-Vassard 2018).

Yet the recent global proliferation of Holocaust memorial museums serving as indisputable shrines of historical consciousness, based on a sense of community, solidarity, and anti-discrimination, creates a new dilemma. Is there a lesson learned from this iconic image of unquestionable evil and universal humanitarianism, or do these shrines rather consolidate the "well-established and self-interested national narrative," as Niven and Williams (2020, 143) suggest? The new Holocaust museum in Budapest, the House of Fates, exemplifies many of these concerns (Radonić 2020, 70–78), as the Holocaust starts to occupy a metaphoric position of a nationalized traumatic past (Huyssen 2003, 14). On the one hand, as Purin credibly showed in his historical research on early Jewish museums established around 1900 in Germany, a (self)representation of outgroups can energize its otherness and contribute to othering them as alien and exotic with discriminatory results (Purin 1993, 150–153). In the increasingly globalized era, marked with deepening multiculturalism and postcolonialism, the representations of others—be it in the form of exoticizing as a way of emphasizing difference, or assimilating through stressing similarities—has become more complex given the changing nature of the "self" and the "other," further nuanced by the previously neglected categories of race, gender, ethnic or social origin (Nederveen Pieterse 1996, 172).When it comes to the top-down creation of Holocaust remembrance, it can develop a colonized arena where the memory of the colonizers and the deployment of national suffering and victimhood narratives remain unacknowledged, thus representing the colonizers more than the colonized (Marstine 2006, 14–19).

Once Holocaust remembrance became the flagship of a common and unifying European culture of remembrance—the European "founding" myth and even an "entry ticket" to the civilized world at the turn of the 20th century (Judt 2005, 803–804)—new Holocaust memorial museums strove to surpass national boundaries. They began to function as exemplary front runners, dynamically staking out a universal reputation (Allwork 2015). However, this often served the purpose of

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political appropriation or exculpation, with genuine memory commitment lagging behind (Stańczyk 2016, 418; Subotić 2019, 25–30). More than that, some of these memorial museums, usually co-financed by public funds, used it as an opportunity for externalizing guilt and stimulating their market-driven potential (Andermann and Simine 2012, 7; Radonić 2021).

In this context, there was for a long time little space in the Greek national narrative for adopting hospitable memory (Derrida 1994, 175) toward Jews. Instead, a comfortable pseudo-amnesia set in. To be fair, aside from Greece's absence of religious or ethnic minority museums, there is neither a Greek Civil War museum nor a museum strictly dedicated to contemporary Greek history. As Taylor suggests in his comparative study on Greece and Bosnia, Greek museums attempt to narrate national identity, both domestically and internationally, by an obvious projection of continual Greek (Orthodox) national identity from antiquity up to the Greek nation-state, leaving little room for contemporary history, let alone the recognition of ethnic or religious pluralities (Taylor 2012).

The existing Jewish museums in Athens, Thessaloniki, and Rhodes emerged as a bottom–up initiative by local Jewish Communities and Holocaust survivors; no similar public institutions have ever been established by the Greek state. While the Jewish Museum of Greece (EME), based in Athens, became the country's first Jewish museum, established in the Jewish Community's own premises in 1977 (Stavroulakis 2006/2007, 118–124), the Jewish Museum of Thessaloniki (JMT), the city with by far the largest Jewish community in the country before WWII, was only inaugurated in 2001 (Seficha 2015, 150–151). Finally, the Rhodes Jewish Museum, established in 1997, stemmed from a private initiative, further endorsed by Jewish Community representatives (see *Rhodes Jewish Museum* 2006). All three Jewish museums dedicated a major exhibition gallery to the Holocaust, logically raising the question of why Greece—particularly Thessaloniki—needs an additional Holocaust museum. While the existing museums are at former centers of local Jewish life, the HMG project is located on the site of an old railway station where, between March and August 1943, more than 45,000 Jews of German-occupied Greece were deported (Fleischer 1991, 271–273; Mazower 2001, 244; Droumpouki 2016, 207). The HMG would thus be the first "in situ" museum in the local Holocaust landscape.

Despite this, the HMG project has so far attracted limited public attention and only gradual interest from the Greek state. External funds have been fixed, with Germany and SNF donating 10 million EUR each (of an estimated 22–30 million EUR total). The remaining resources, to be provided by the Greek state, hang in the air (*Thessnews.gr*, August 8, 2018). However, on a rhetoric level, the project has enjoyed considerable support from the governments of both Alexis Tsipras (SYRIZA/ANEL; 2015, 2015–2019) and Kyriakos Mitsotakis' incumbent cabinet (New Democracy; 2019-). While the Greek state's financial contribution appears to be a logical step, the pledge was only made when external funding proved insufficient to cover the growing expenses (*Thestival.gr*, August 9, 2018). The municipality's role is significant for the technical realization but did not entail provisioning further funds.

Concerning the other two benefactors, their financial contributions seem to be in line with their long-term strategies in Greece. Among other initiatives, Germany sponsored the reconstruction of Jewish synagogues in several Greek towns as well as temporary exhibitions and publications on Jewish history and the Holocaust. The SNF's activities broadly target the spheres of arts, culture, education, health, and social welfare. What is probably more important for the SNF than the representation of the Holocaust in Greece is the prospective prominence of the HMG as an ambitious commemorative, educational, and research-oriented project with strong civilizational ambitions and an international impact. Such an aim corresponds with other SNF flagship projects, first and foremost among them being the SNF Cultural Center, inaugurated in Athens in 2016.

In addition to the various groups involved, two prominent personalities have stood out as major HMG advocates: first, the KIS and (at the same time) JCT President David Saltiel on behalf of Greece's Jewish Communities; second, Thessaloniki's ex-Mayor (independent for SYRIZA; 2011–2019) and current HMG Director Yiannis Boutaris (since December 2019; *Makthes.gr*, December 13, 2019). Especially Boutaris, compared to more restrained Saltiel, was able to attract some

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attention to the HMG project. His 2018 speech on Holocaust Remembrance Day went viral, despite—or maybe because of—his direct references to the complicity of the Greek Orthodox population in the WWII persecution of Jews. He even included the question of Jewish assets and their appropriation by locals in the aftermath of deportation (Molho 2016; Apostolou 2018; Kavala 2018; Dordanas 2018; Kornetis 2018). What was no doubt intended to promote the HMG instead diverted public attention toward strengthening hegemonic narratives of Greek victimhood.

In our article, we first contextualize the HMG project within the Greek economic and migration crises and the interrelated rise of political extremism. Because all HMG stakeholders—be they advocates, guarantors, or benefactors—follow a particular agenda, we then expand on the initial idea of creating, financing, and building this new museum. Consequently, we ground the first analytical part on the visions verbalized by local, national and international actors, and ask whose memory is to be preserved and whose power is to be represented (Luepken 2011). The second part of our analysis reflects on the HMG project's discursive framing, perception, and reception along with its presumed future mission as presented by stakeholders. Drawing on the official websites of the museum-to-be, the KIS, the JCT, Greece's public institutions (such as the Municipality of Thessaloniki and governmental authorities) and Greek as well as international media, we follow the HMG project from December 2013 up to the judicial resolution in October 2020 on Golden Dawn (*Chrysi Avgi*; XA), whose violent xenophobic activities were publicly presented as one of the major incentives for the HMG project (HMG, February 22, 2016). In this manner, we navigate the article toward two major points of focus: national representations of victimhood, complicity, and vindication; and the HMG's aspiration to become a prestigious international monument of strong ethical appeal.

The HMG project emerged without any meaningful scholarly or public debate. What is more, it did so without provoking significant public interest. As our online survey conducted in September 2020 (with 76 participants) showed, only 5 were somehow aware of the project.[1] Furthermore, despite many delays a lack of any clear inauguration date, the HMG still needs to undergo scrutiny. We suggest that the nonparticipation of an informed public and the absence of a substantive debate on Holocaust commemoration, and the HMG project in particular, are symptomatic of the generally limited understanding of the Holocaust in Greece.

Holocaust Commemoration in Times of Crisis

The recent economic and migration crises in Greece impacted the HMG project mainly in two ways. First, rising Greek political extremism was used by HMG stakeholders to argue for constructing the project as an educational center aimed at countering racism, religious intolerance, and the violation of human rights (HMG 2016). Second, a mixture of German "politics of regret" (Olick 2007) for the extermination of Greek Jews and an attempt to improve the image of Berlin amid a row with Athens over Greek bailout conditions motivated Germany to become one HMG's major benefactors. In this way, Germany got engaged in the political campaign against Golden Dawn (XA), a flagrantly chauvinist, racist, antisemitic, and anti-immigration political party in Greece. Between 2012 and 2019, XA was represented in the Hellenic Parliament, despite substantiated allegations of violent crimes committed by its members; meanwhile, Greek governments have faced international criticism for failing to address this problem (Georgiadou 2013; Ellinas 2015).

In around 2013, a political campaign targeting Germany emerged in Greece in response to the Berlin-dominated European Union (EU) negotiations on Greece's bailout, and Greek representatives from across the political spectrum raised and politicized the issue of WWII reparation payments. Setting up an expert committee and compiling an 800-page report to support reparation claims (Králová and Karasová 2015, 321), the conservative Samaras government (New Democracy; 2012–2015) helped stir up anti-German sentiment (Public Issue 2013). The national memory of WWII, which centered on Greek victimhood, was blatantly exploited in Greek political and public discourse (Droumpouki 2013, 190–191; Bickes et al. 2015, 343–344). The reparation claims were

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promptly picked up on by SYRIZA, which promised to successfully conclude Greek-German talks once elected. Yet after coming to power in 2015, the Tsipras government not only yielded to EU pressure and accepted bailout conditions (Walter et al. 2018, 276–279) but also failed to pursue reparations (*Vima.gr*, April 17, 2019).

The Greek political exploitation of the traumatic memory of the Axis occupation (1941–1944) during the recent crisis might surprise many considering that Greece had already re-established relations with Bonn in the late-1940s, shortly after the Greek Civil War. For decades, however, their reconciliation did not entail addressing WWII crimes, let alone the Holocaust (Králová 2016; Molho 2013). Such a step would have required confrontation with Greek collaboration, for which Greece was not ready (Kalogrias 2008; Dordanas 2012; Apostolou 2018). The Cold War geopolitical constellation, with Bonn and Athens on the same side, pressured both countries to refrain from pursuing their troubled past. The new political climate allowed them to focus on reviving prewar diplomatic, cultural, and, above all, economic relations (Pelt 2006). Yet this diplomatic practice, rather than erasing memories and wounds of the German occupation, served only to displace them (Králová and Kocián 2018, 300–310). Hagen Fleischer aptly called this the *Realpolitik* of reconciliation (Fleischer 2014).

After the end of the Cold War, united Germany redefined the material dimension of its *Wiedergutmachungspolitik* and began to seek a more general moral reconciliation, especially in its dealing with East European claims. Later on, German political and cultural foundations regularly sponsored Holocaust-related publications, seminars, conferences, and exhibitions in Greece. Amid the reparations debate, the 2014 establishment of the German-Greek Future Fund (*Deutsch-Griechischer Zukunftsfonds*) can be interpreted as a symbolic move reflecting the relatively new German practice in Central and Eastern Europe (Králová and Kocián 2018, 313–314). Even though the HMG project was already public at that point, the Future Fund was never identified as a stakeholder. Instead, Germany authorized the German Minister of State for Europe, Michael Roth, to negotiate German support for the HMG project worth 10 million EUR; the Bundestag approved the funding in December 2016 (Voria.gr, December 15, 2016).

At that time, the HMG project was in the third year of a preparatory process negotiated by involved parties. Profiting from xenophobic reactions within Greek society from the peaking migration crisis, the far-right XA enjoyed exceptional political success, even becoming the third-largest party in the 2015 legislative elections. Much to the dismay of Greece's Jewish Communities, the XA openly used antisemitic rhetoric, blaming "Jews and Zionists" for instigating the Greek economic crisis (Droumpouki 2013, 191) and accusing them "of seeking to eliminate the Greek nation through US-induced globalization and cosmopolitanism" (Ellinas 2013, 551).

Naturally, this rise in antisemitism was of particularly concern to Jews in Greece and further affected their position on the HMG project. In January 2018, Heinz Kounio, an Auschwitz survivor and later JCT Head, called the HMG "our commitment to the rights of the people in the whole world to live in the absence of fear" (HMG, February 22, 2018). In July that year, current KIS/JCT President Saltiel proclaimed that the HMG would teach young people to fight against racism and antisemitism and repulse attacks against democracy (Thessaloniki Municipality, July 2, 2018). Others, including the young generation of Greek Jews, also expressed fears of growing antisemitism, adding that many of their peers had decided to leave the country due to the economic crisis. They worried that the Jewish tradition of Thessaloniki would soon be remembered solely by its monuments (*Kathimerini.gr*, February 21, 2018).

However, it was neither the XA's open antisemitism and neo-Nazi sympathies nor anti-racism legislation issued in 2013 that finally brought its leadership to the courtroom. Not until the 2013 murder of Pavlos Fyssas, an anti-fascist rapper, was a large-scale investigation of the party launched, eventually shedding light on previously neglected cases of non-Greek victims of XA violence (Doxiadis and Matsaganis 2012; Triandafyllidou and Kouki 2014). The trial began in April 2015 and was labeled by the media the "trial of the century" (Fekete 2020) or "the biggest Nazi-related trial since Nuremberg" (Baboulias 2020). The court proceeded against the XA not as an extremist

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political party but as a criminal organization. The final verdict was issued by the Athens Appeals Court in October 2020 and pronounced the party leadership guilty (*Lawspot.gr*, October 7, 2020).

The KIS welcomed the verdict but simultaneously urged its members to stay "on guard" and "encourage[d] the battle against Nazism so that the serpent's egg will never be laid again in Greece" (KIS, October 7, 2020). PM Mitsotakis and Deputy PM Pikrammenos, who was commissioned by the HMG on the government's behalf, subsequently met with KIS representatives to further express their support, highlighting the importance of the verdict (*CNN.gr*, October 10, 2020). The KIS as an institution has traditionally tended not to get involved in legal disputes concerning antisemitic acts and attitudes[2] or comment on a common Greek interpretation of the Holocaust as a "double genocide," suggesting—alongside the genocide of Jews—the national suffering of Greeks (Himka and Michlic 2013, 17). It rather sees its task in raising awareness, stirring memory, and commemorating Jews and their communities in Greece by pointing to their ancient history and long-lasting presence on Greek soil. This approach is also evident in all three Jewish museums in Greece, be it Rhodes, Athens, or Thessaloniki and parallels the Greek national narrative.

Toward Holocaust Memory in Greece

The HMG project anticipates the emergence of a public institution combining an *in situ* memorial museum, an educational facility, and a research institute (HMG 2016). First, its very location involves a great deal of historical symbolism and gives added commemorative appeal. Furthermore, the architectural conception of the venue reflects the city's best-known monument, the White Tower, which used to serve as an Ottoman prison and implicitly reminds of that era. This can be regarded as an interpretative bridge between the historical presence and the modern Greekness of Jews in Greece. The project also incorporates a memory park of ancient olive trees surrounding the building (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 30, 2018).

In addition to its commemorative character, with special programs for schools, the HMG aims to challenge the "educational deficiency and lack of academic interest in regard to the Holocaust and Human Rights," which the HMG Board considers characteristic for Greece and its mounting antisemitism (HMG 2016). Moreover, the HMG plans to act as a research institution by supporting the study of racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism in the Balkans, documenting the Holocaust in the Balkans, collecting archival documents, visual materials, and testimonies and preserving various historical exhibits (HMG 2016).

The concept of the HMG's thematic, territorial, and time frame is nevertheless ambiguous. While the character of the place and the aesthetics of the project invoke local symbolics and the historical experience of Thessaloniki Jews, in its name the institution refers to the country level, placing the need to educate on Holocaust and human rights within the confines of domestic political and social reality. At the same time, the HMG has a distinct regional ambition. It wants to extend its research focus to the Balkans, acting as an acknowledged regional arbiter rather a self-proclaimed one.

We could argue that, by equating itself to top Holocaust-related public institutions in the world, such as Yad Vashem, USHMM, and Mémorial de la Shoah (HMG, May 26, 2016; *Voria.gr*, December 15, 2016; *AMNA.gr*, July 9, 2020), the HMG project eventually aims to exceed regional importance and be classified as an institution of European or perhaps "cosmopolitan" appeal (Levy and Szneider 2001, 9–10). While the HMG strives to appear as an institution with a general focus on universalist values, such as anti-racism and human rights protection, its interest in Jewish and Holocaust studies clearly dominates its mission, which may discredit its commitment to the first cause (David 2020).

Once again, it remains unclear whether the HMG intends to concentrate on the story of Thessaloniki Jews, the Jews of Greece, Sephardic Jews, or the Balkan Jews. After the expulsion of Jews from medieval Castile, Thessaloniki developed as a thriving center of Sephardic culture; the Sephardim also represented the majority of Jews in the Balkans and South Mediterranean with

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networks connected to Thessaloniki (Rodrigue 2005, 2; Lévy 2020, 2–3). Yet only approximately half of the 26 Jewish Communities in Greece can be clearly identified as Sephardic, with the rest attributed more to Greek- and Italian-speaking Romaniotes (Menexiadis 2006). In this regard, representing solely Sephardim would exclude other Jewish congregations of Greece that had their own distinctive traditions until the Holocaust blurred them.

Yannis Boutaris, the former Mayor of Thessaloniki and the current HMG Director, has persistently defended the establishment of the HMG as a global center for Sephardic studies. According to him, Thessaloniki as "the metropolis of the Sephardic Jews […] aspires to tell the unknown story of the Holocaust of the Jews of the Mediterranean and the Balkans, of the Sephardic Jews of Thessaloniki and Corfu, of Chania and Patras, but also of Belgrade, Skopje, Bitola, and Sarajevo, Trieste and Livorno" (Thessaloniki Municipality, January 29, 2018)[3]—although only part of the Jewish communities of Trieste and Livorno were in fact Sephardic. He assumes it is particularly important for the HMG to pursue this mission "as there are no corresponding centers worldwide" (Thessaloniki Municipality, July 2, 2018), since the current focus of Holocaust studies lies in Ashkenazi-dominated Central and Eastern Europe (Thessaloniki Municipality, January 29, 2018).

Boutaris' plan to dedicate the HMG to the research of the Sephardic historical experience and the memory of the Sephardic Holocaust seems clear enough, but other statements of his tend to muddy the waters. For example, he claimed that "[t]his museum is not just a Holocaust Museum. Through this Museum, the importance of the presence of the Jewish community of Thessaloniki will be highlighted, not only for the past 500 years, but from 30 AD [i.e., long before the Spanish exodus]" (JCT, January 30, 2018). The KIS/JCT President Saltiel maintains a more locally focused vision. According to him, the HMG "will not just be the voice of millions of Jews who were displaced, humiliated and exterminated. It will be the voice of the Greek Jews in religion, of the long journey of the Sephardim in the city, of their history which is the very history of Thessaloniki" (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 15, 2017). Regarding the narrative typology, who the "we" is in this storyline remains an open question; also missing is a clear timeline and the identity of the actors. What it does do is weaken the chances of a more integrated historical interpretation.

Another matter for discussion is what kind of objects the HMG will possess and display. The HMG aims to make use of currently undisplayed artifacts that belong to the local JMT, to approach the Jewish diaspora of Thessaloniki and to negotiate the return of authentic objects and archives currently located abroad. The JCT has demanded that Poland return *judaica* and other objects looted from Thessaloniki (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 15, 2017), and, for example, has asked the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum to donate some exhibits. Furthermore, the HMG is hoping to reclaim a large archival collection originally belonging to the JCT from the Russian State Military Archive in Moscow (*Makthes.gr*, March 29, 2017). As stated by Boutaris in 2016, the HMG also wants to cooperate with the few Holocaust survivors who are still alive to collect information and preserve their memory (HMG, May 26, 2016). Sadly, this noble aim will probably come to naught as the years take their toll. Still, the museum could make use of the audio-visual accounts in Yale University's Fortunoff Archive, the USC Shoah Foundation, and Centropa, many of which are recorded in Greek by local historians. However, this option is not mentioned in the HMG project.

More than that, the question of the HMG's coexistence with the JMT, which will continue in the future to serve its current purpose, has been completely overlooked (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 15, 2017). As it happens, the JMT has added a new wing, inaugurated in October 2019 and financially supported by the SNF, one of the HMG's central stakeholders (SNF, October 25, 2019). In addition, the JMT already has a permanent exhibition on the history of Sephardim in Thessaloniki, which includes an installation dedicated to the Holocaust and Thessaloniki and is esthetically dominated by a glass plague with the names of local victims (see JMT). Taking into account the complexity of the HMG project and its financially demanding nature, it is worth reflecting on the reconceptualization and added value of the HMG compared with the JMT. From this perspective, the absence of any effort to publicly justify the HMG project is even more striking if we consider that the premises of the JMT

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have been used for receiving prominent guests of the JCT, both Greek and international officials, lobbying on the HMG's behalf (KIS, July 1, 2020; AMNA.gr, July 9, 2020).

Between Peaceful Coexistence and Annihilation

The line of argumentation pronounced by various actors for the HMG has frequently emphasized, on the one hand, the past glory of the city as a vibrant cultural center of the Eastern Mediterranean, full of ethnic and religious diversity; and, on the other, its suitability as a locus to commemorate those murdered in the Holocaust. As an illustration, we quote the HMG's website:

> Thessaloniki's identity is embedded in its unique history as a multi-cultural city with [a] long enduring prolific co-existence of Christians, Muslims and Jews. Thessaloniki's Jewish community, the oldest in Europe [*this is not in fact the case—an authors' note*], was present in the city for 2,000 years and was the largest ethnic community of the city between the years 1492 and 1912. The fire of 1917 destroyed many of the Jewish buildings of Thessaloniki, and the extermination of the Jewish community during the German occupation of World War II erased much of the city's Jewish fabric. [… The HMG] seeks to commemorate the devastating fate of the Jewish community, but also to recount its cultural history and rejuvenation after World War II […] (see HMG).

These words highlight, quite symptomatically, the uniqueness of Thessaloniki while omitting other Ottoman cities with mixed populations. As indicated earlier, they assume the existence of a local Jewish community already in antiquity and suggest an uninterrupted continuity of Jewish presence. There is no further explanation why Jews were the "largest ethnic community" (yet the Greek legislation only recognizes religious minorities) from 1492 to 1912 and why there is a rift between 1917 and 1943, the quarter of a century before deportations when most Jews were actually Greek subjects. Finally, while the "fire of 1917" can reasonably be considered an act of God, to include the Holocaust in the Jews' "devastating *fate*" suggests inevitability, and thus avoids the question of Greek complicity.

Similarly, in June 2017, Greece's left-wing former PM Tsipras spoke, in a rather idealized, populist manner (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014), about the peaceful coexistence of religious communities in Thessaloniki, lasting for more than 400 years:

> This mosaic of cultures, languages and traditions was a great wealth for the city of Thessaloniki and gave it a unique impetus and dynamic in the wider region […] The restless progressive spirit, vitality and creativity of the Jewish community have been instrumental in the development of the entire city, both commercially and economically, but also in terms of culture and ideas (JCT, June 15, 2017).

A year later, the KIS/JCT President Saltiel expressed his conviction that "[t]he Museum belongs to the city, not only because the Jews loved it with all their hearts, but also because of the sad event of the Holocaust. The 50,000 dead Jews are being honored today and we must continue our efforts in this direction" (Thessaloniki Municipality, July 2, 2018).[4] It is disputable whether his speech addresses an inclusive or an exclusive history; it is not quite clear whether the Jews of Thessaloniki belonged to the city or whether its Orthodox population mostly perceived them as an outgroup. Moreover, his description of the Holocaust as "a sad event" appears like an understatement and an avoidance of the issue of guilt and complicity. On Holocaust Remembrance Day in January 2019, former Greek President Prokopis Pavlopoulos further supported the existing discursive division between the Hellenic "Us" and the Jewish "Them" by stressing that "all Greeks and all Hellenism, as well as I personally […] consider that we are fulfilling a basic duty toward the Martyrs and Heroes of the Holocaust in general." (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 27, 2019).

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The HMG project has enjoyed promises of support from the country's leaders and the mayors of the city. Nevertheless, the media narrative does not fully reflect the complicated issue of past and present Greek Orthodox-Jewish relations, or even hint at Greek complicity in the persecution of Jews during WWII. And although the media talk about the HMG, this does not mean that it is generally recognized in Greece. In this context, the speech by Boutaris in January 2018 radically challenged the dominant Greek historical narrative and sparked a heated debate, as he chose to characterize the HMG as a symbol of Greek shame "[…] for what happened, for what we did, and especially for what we were not able or did not want to do, the natives and the refugees, the right-wingers and the left-wingers during and after the war. The Museum is a debt of the city […]" (Thessaloniki Municipality, January 29, 2018).

Boutaris then continued in an even harsher mode:

> Who mourned their missing neighbors in 1945? What monuments were erected? What ceremonies took place? Only the community, tormented and ragged, struggled to rebuild its existence and mourn its dead. The city, the society, the whole country, did not care. They hid behind their fingers. They pretended not to know what happened, who did it, who helped, who protected when others, many, demolished, burned, stole, occupied the space and the belongings of the many absent and the few present (Thessaloniki Municipality, January 29, 2018).

Boutaris surprised the public with his critical approach (unparalleled among Jewish and non-Jewish officials) toward the complicity of Greeks in the WWII persecution of Jews. Even more remarkable was his positioning of the notion of "We," meaning the Greek Orthodox majority, as active participants in those contentious historical events. His aim was clearly to provoke a debate in Greek society about its responsibility, not only for what happened in Thessaloniki but in the country as a whole.

Boutaris went further than, for example, PM Tsipras, who during the same event spoke of the HMG as "a tribute to the thousands of Greek Jews who were exterminated in the concentration camps sent there by the Nazi authorities of the city," and adding that "this monument emphasizes that nothing and no one has been forgotten… Neither the criminals nor their victims" (JCT, January 30, 2018). Tsipras admitted that even before the Axis occupation, "[t]hings were not always idyllic or easy," referring explicitly to interwar Greece and its marginal but fervently antisemitic fascist associations, such as the National Union of Greece (*Ethniki Enosis Ellados*; EEE). At the same time, he relativized his words by saying that "[t]here were acts of violence, but the vast majority of ordinary people in the city stood by them [Greek Jews]" (JCT, January 30, 2018).

Such a statement might be too comforting. Interwar Greek antisemitism was not solely limited to militant chauvinist groups; it was also characteristic of the social environment of destitute Asia Minor refugees who arrived in the country as a result of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. Once the Jews of Thessaloniki were forcibly deported during WWII, locals willingly benefited from Jewish homes. In such cases, non-Jews acted as accomplices in the expropriation of the Jewish property and persecution of Jews (Mazower 2004, 416–417; Kornetis 2018, 237–240). However, in criticizing Tsipras, it should be noted that the public statement by Boutaris was considerably more critical than any proclamation of the JCT. At the very same event, Saltiel formulated his criticism euphemistically without any direct accusation: "This city had been covered in a veil of silence" while the Holocaust "survivors did not find the best possible conditions when they returned" (HMG, February 22, 2018). Simultaneously, Saltiel felt the need to express his surprise about the positive reception of the project by the Greek public, which would suggest that he did not expect a commonly welcoming reaction.

As much as the previous statements celebrate the significance and the uniqueness of Thessaloniki Jews' victimhood, they fail to integrate this Jewish heritage into the hegemonic narratives of Greek national history. This issue becomes even more obvious when the "double genocide"

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argument, a common Greek trend, is used in public speeches on the HMG. In January 2019, former Greek President Pavlopoulos stated:

> The Holocaust marks the unequivocal condemnation of every genocide, where land, something that for us, the Greeks, assumes great importance, since we, as a people and as a nation, have experienced the tragedy of two genocides: Genocide of the Greeks of Pontus and the Genocide of the Greeks of Asia Minor. […] In this context, we must not overlook or underestimate the causes that provoked the universal tragedy of the Holocaust (Kathimerini.gr, January 27, 2019).

In other words, Pavlopoulos indicated that the Holocaust—although being a case of genocide with a universal legacy—was first and foremost a Jewish tragedy whereas the Greeks (meaning ethnically Greek population of Greek Orthodox denomination) suffered from their "own" genocides. The argumentation of the "double genocide" was also used by one of the rare public critics of the HMG project in the Municipal Council of Thessaloniki Giorgos Rakkas (We live Thessaloniki; Menoume Thessaloniki). Rakkas expressed his opposition to dedicate the HMG solely to Jews and the Holocaust in the following words:

> The choice of the Boutaris administration to proceed with the establishment of a Holocaust Museum, which will refer exclusively to the genocide of the Jews of Thessaloniki, fails to express the multidimensionality of the martyr heritage that governs the modern history of our city, but also to maximize its international footprint. (…) A great, historic opportunity is lost for Thessaloniki (Thestival.gr, June 14, 2016).

Nevertheless, Rakkas's speech was less motivated by broadening HMG's scope than his anti-Israeli attitudes and conspirationist mindset, bordering open antisemitism. This can be exemplified by his criticism of "'Jewish exclusivity' of the state of Israel and the American-Jewish lobby, which uses the indisputable Holocaust that the Nazis unleashed against the modern-day policy of wars, genocides, generalized destabilization of the Middle East." Furthermore, he seemed concerned about how Greece would deal with the ongoing "clash of civilizations," the geopolitical aims of foreign actors and their colonizing efforts. He also assumed that alongside the Holocaust, the HMG should emphasize the "genocide of Hellenism" as well as the Armenian genocide (Thestival.gr, June 14, 2016).

Leaving aside outcries against the HMG project in an openly antisemitic Greek media (e.g., *Elora.gr*, January 8, 2018), there were other—non-far right—critical voices targeting Boutaris rather than the HMG. In February 2018, the communist daily, *Rizospastis,* published a commentary accusing Boutaris of "falsifying the history" when omitting the "solidarity of the Greek people toward the Jewish element" and "the self-sacrifice of the EAM [Greek left-wing resistance organization during WWII] of Thessaloniki when it attempted to rescue the persecuted Jews of the city." At the same time, its author notoriously transferred a part of the responsibility of the genocide on local Jewish Community leadership, claiming it "remained idle trusting the Nazi authorities" (*Rizospastis.gr*, February 8, 2018).

While historically grounded, the commentary revolves around an ideology-based interpretation. It not only reflects the ongoing uncritical approach of left-wing intellectuals toward the heritage of the EAM but also their inward-looking attitude toward national history, which often stands far from their proclaimed internationalist starting points. One could argue against the patronizing interpretation of the EAM's support to Jews, which disregards their own agency in favor of the communist ideology and the power aspirations of the EAM that strived to seize control over the country rather than to serve as a humanitarian organization.

More appeasing argumentation was used in July 2018 by the current Mayor of Thessaloniki, Konstantinos Zervas (Independent), who expressed his pride for being involved in the project but

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characterized Boutaris' viewpoint, which emphasized the nation's shared guilt for the persecution of Jews, as "extreme." In his opinion, the HMG would become a "monument of forgiveness and reconciliation and not serve as a payoff," thus stressing the need to overcome the burdened past by preserving its memory but being able to forgive. He supported his claim by saying that, in history, many had their personal share in justice and injustice, further suggesting that the EAM's wartime activities, the Jewish representation in terms of the rescue of Jews as well as other issues should be part of the discussion: "Much could be said both ways about the responsibilities that existed in that cannibalistic era" (*Thestival.gr*, July 2, 2018). Nevertheless, it could be argued that to forgive, the guilty ones need to be exposed first. Therefore, the endeavor of Zervas to facilitate reconciliation might lead to the downplaying of the responsibility, leaving the city behind the "veil of silence" that President of KIS/JCT Saltiel aimed to remove, or, as Mazower (2004) claimed, preserving the "City of Ghosts."

Moral Commitment or a Matter of Prestige

As a memorial museum following the "Western" trend of combining museum, educational center, and research institution under one roof, the HMG's next challenge is to meet all its commitments: to raise awareness about the Holocaust, commemorate and educate on antisemitism, support human rights protection, and foster religious tolerance. Former President Pavlopoulos stated that the HMG "will obviously function as a cradle of valuable lessons [from the past] for the future" (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 27, 2019). According to former PM Tsipras, "[t]he creation of the Holocaust Museum aims to preserve and pass on this historical memory of the pain and martyrdom of the Jews of Thessaloniki to future generations. At the same time, […] it is a promise for the present and the future. A promise that the peoples of the world will resist anything that threatens or will threaten freedom, dignity, and human life" (JCT June 15, 2017). Thus, Greece does not seem ready to give up its role as cornerstone of European civilization; however, neither has the glorified Greek resistance lost its ability to mobilize nationalist sentiment.

In January 2018, Tsipras referred to the HMG as a "weapon in the battle of memory against oblivion," noting that "we will never let the past return like a nightmare and we will not be indifferent to the shadows that reappear in Europe" (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 30, 2018). Similarly, in Israel in June 2018, his successor Kyriakos Mitsotakis spoke at the Global Forum of the need to address the "authoritarian and populist forces, which are becoming increasingly powerful throughout Europe and the world." He went on: "We can no longer afford to be timid. We must fight for our values. Freedom, equality, tolerance, the rule of law. These are the foundations on which our societies are built. It is our duty, the duty of both peoples, not only to protect them but also to strengthen them" (*Thestival.gr*, June 11, 2018).

These pronouncements by Greek high political representatives urging us to stand up against any wrongdoing, as well as the museum's overall concept, are more than a simple invocation of the venerable slogan "Never again!": they are a reaction to rising extremism, racism, and religious intolerance, both domestically and globally (Bergen 2015, 170–172). Their commitment, however, is less than convincing. As David (2020, i) points out, "a human rights memorialization agenda does not lead to a better appreciation of human rights but […] merely serves to strengthen national sentiments, divisions and animosities along ethnic lines, and leads to the new forms of societal inequalities that are closely connected to different forms of corruptions."

Our illustrative survey suggests that a considerable proportion of respondents favored the direct involvement of the Greek state and Thessaloniki Municipality in the HMG project, including its financing. In response to our multiple-choice suggestions as to who might be possible stakeholders of the Holocaust museum-to-be, 17 out of 76 respondents indicated either Greece, Thessaloniki, or both; 28 opted for multiple stakeholders with the Greek authorities involved; while 17 deemed the HMG a matter of solely Jewish interest, identifying the JCT, the Jewish diaspora, or both as stakeholders. Only 3 respondents selected a variety of possible stakeholders with Jewish

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participation but without official Greek involvement. Although our sample is too small to be truly representative, the results do indicate that the HMG is a matter of public responsibility.

By contrast, the Greek state—despite facing the threat of XA and domestic antisemitism—at first relied on exclusively external funding (HMG 2016). Moreover, JCT also decided to raise the issue of WWII compensation claims as leverage against Germany and use them in favor of the HMG. In March 2015, at the anniversary of the deportations of Jews from Thessaloniki, the JCT/KIS President David Saltiel requested 20 million EUR from Germany to compensate Greek Jews for the enforced payment of train fares to Nazi concentration camps totaling of more than 2 million Reichsmark—the equivalent of approximately 25 million euros today (*Newsweek*, March 23, 2015; *Haaretz*, March 24, 2015). He commented: "We think it's a big opportunity that if the German government decides they want to help, it would be a very good coincidence that this money goes for this purpose" (*Newsweek*, March 23, 2015). However, this simple announcement leaves too many questions unanswered, such as what "opportunity" he had in mind, what "help" he was considering and what he meant by "a very good coincidence." Moreover, sharp criticism of Saltiel was reported from within the JCT, such as how "he could be fobbed off with the ten million euros and personal fame—instead of insisting on compensation payments" (*DW*, January 16, 2017).

Discussions about Greek compensation claims were probably under way in the earliest stages of the project. Already in 2014, after Berlin categorically rejected any obligation to Greece (*Naftemporiki.gr*, February 26, 2014), the German Minister of State for Europe, Michael Roth, traveled to Thessaloniki to negotiate a soft solution. In September 2016, he paid a visit to Thessaloniki's Monastiriotes Synagogue, reconstructed with, among others, German subsidies (KIS, September 19, 2016; HMG, January 17, 2017a). Through its donations, Germany fostered good relations with Greece and improved its media image, damaged during the Greek crisis. In the same month that Germany approved the donation to the HMG (December 2016), German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier was proclaimed an honorary member of the JCT in a ceremony at the Monastiriotes synagogue, an unprecedented act on behalf of a non-Jew (*DW*, January 16, 2017). Steinmeier was honored for his part in promoting good relations between the Community and the German state as well as his commitment to combating antisemitism and racism. Saltiel characterized the event as "a miracle of reconciliation" and an acknowledgment of Germany's political and moral responsibility for WWII crimes (HMG January 17, 2017b).

German "acts of generosity" appeared to have a positive impact on the self-presentation of both sides of the negotiating table. Less than a year later, Saltiel received the Cross of Merit at the German consul's residence in Thessaloniki for his contribution to German-Jewish cooperation. At the ceremony, Roth applauded Saltiel's personal commitment to the realization of the HMG (EJC, November 6, 2017). To complete the list of honors, Boutaris received the Damaskinos Award in June 2016 for fostering tolerance and cooperation among all religions in Greece. The award was inaugurated in New York by the American Sephardi Federation and the American Friends of the Jewish Museum of Greece (Athens), which named it after Archbishop Damaskinos to commemorate his support of Greek Jews during the German occupation (HMG, May 14, 2016). Understandable as these ceremonies are as tokens of appreciation of many laudable efforts in such an important project, one might perhaps expect them to take place after the HMG had become a reality.

The HMG project also attracted political figures from countries other than Greece and Germany, such as when top Israeli politicians paid visits to Thessaloniki and expressed their support. In June 2017, PM Netanyahu unveiled a commemorative plaque, and in January 2018 President Rivlin laid the museum's foundation stone. Netanyahu, the main purpose of whose visit was to discuss the Mediterranean undersea natural gas pipeline project, spoke at the unveiling of the need to preserve memory and focus on prevention (*Times of Israel*, June 15, 2017; *CNN.gr*, June 15, 2017). Rivlin went further, categorizing the Holocaust as a global historical event while simultaneously bringing it back to the national level of Greece: "The Holocaust is not only a Jewish issue, it is an international

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issue that touches every nation and people. Here too, in Greece, it is a national issue" (HMG, February 22, 2018).

Whether the Holocaust has been perceived in Greece as a "national issue" is debatable, but it is clearly considered and dealt with as an issue of international concern—a fact that is being used to promote HMG beyond national borders. Portraying the Holocaust as part of national collective suffering would tend to defer questions of co-responsibility and collaboration while promoting the externalization of responsibility, which would go against the principle of "integrated history" (Friedländer 2010, 21–29).

Indeed, the HMG as conceived aspires to join prominent international memorial museums in Europe and beyond by making a strong political and moral statement, thus earning prestige and political capital. The HMG Director and former Thessaloniki Mayor Boutaris saw this vision as an international signal. According to him, the HMG "will constitute a vibrant research center concentrating on Jewish studies as a whole and on the past of Thessaloniki's Jewish community in particular. It will be in the service of researchers in Greece and the Balkans, as well as in Europe and the entire world" (HMG, May 26, 2016).

On a different occasion, Boutaris claimed that the HMG would be "a monument of global anti-racism" (Thessaloniki Municipality, June 28, 2018), thus following the trend of the human rights memorialization agenda (David 2020). At the meeting of the Council of Europe in October 2019, SYRIZA deputy for Thessaloniki's district A, Alekos Triandafyllidis, clearly fell in line with the Europeanisation and universalization of the Holocaust (Eckel and Moisel 2008): "The aim of establishing a Holocaust Museum and a Memorial Park is to make Thessaloniki a European city, a World Center for all Jews" (*Avgi.gr*, October 4, 2019). According to KIS/JCT President Saltiel, stressing once again the human rights memorialization aspect and connecting it with prestige, the HMG "will become a global reference point against the fight against racism and will change the horizon of the western entrance of the city and [rank] among the museums of Europe regarding the Holocaust" (JCT, January 30, 2018). Former President Pavlopoulos assessed the HMG project as a model memorial museum that "[…] together with other similar Museums around the world, it will broadcast, *urbi et orbi*, the following message: Every member of the world community has a duty to remember, for the sake of man and humanity, that the Holocaust is the worst crime against humanity that must not be repeated at any cost" (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 27, 2019).

With its aspirations to be a Greek Yad Vashem (HMG, May 26, 2016), the HMG claims to be inspired by other memorial museums and clearly strives to approximate them in terms of professional reputation and prestige (Thessaloniki Municipality, January 29, 2018). The director of the Mémorial de la Shoah, Jacques Fredj, expressed his support for the HMG project thus: "What happened in Thessaloniki during the Holocaust is part of local and European history, which we must teach especially to young people in the fight against antisemitism, racism and all discrimination, which are unfortunately resurfacing throughout the world." (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 15, 2017). Again, this statement aligns Holocaust commemoration with Europeanization and the human rights agenda, and with what Germany, for instance, is ready to support financially.

By comparison, the HMG tells us that cooperation with the USHMM regarding the creation of educational programs has already been prenegotiated (*Makthes.gr*, July 9, 2020) and discussed with US Ambassador Geoffrey R. Pyatt, in July 2020. The Ambassador described the HMG project as "an extremely important initiative for Greece, for the city of Thessaloniki, given the central role that the Jewish community has played in the history of Thessaloniki" (*AMNA.gr*, July 9, 2020). Despite the exalted vocabulary used, the USA does not seem to be substantially engaged in the HMG project; Pyatt made no more than a vague promise to help facilitate cooperation with the USHMM. Any such partnership, however, would signal that the HMG actually aspires to become, first and foremost, a Holocaust museum, not a Jewish history museum (as Boutaris suggested earlier), similar to, say, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

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The HMG Through the Prism of Economic Benefit

In addition to commemoration and education, the HMG has been perceived as an essential economic asset in terms of tourism. As Boutaris suggested while in charge of Thessaloniki as a mayor, the Jewish heritage of the city can be marketed alongside the city's well-known UNESCO-protected Byzantine sights and monuments of the Ottoman era: "All of these are sources of wealth and without the creation of wealth there can be no growth" (*Makthes.gr*, June 16, 2017). The HMG anticipates large numbers of visitors, specifically tourists and local students (HMG 2016). The General Secretary of Infrastructure in the Mitsotakis government, Giorgos Karagiannis, confirmed this vision in November 2019, especially the benefits of international visitors: "The Holocaust Museum of Greece will be a new important landmark for the city of Thessaloniki that will attract hundreds of thousands of visitors from all over the world" (JCT, November 3, 2019).

The presentation of the HMG as a tourist attraction was also discussed at a meeting between Mayor Boutaris and Henriette Reker, the incumbent Mayor of Cologne, Thessaloniki's twin town, in October 2018. Reken was one of the political representatives who had symbolically laid the foundation stone of the Jewish Museum in Cologne about 4 months earlier. In Thessaloniki, she emphasized the significance of both projects in the fight against racism and antisemitism and "convey[ed] the message that we want to be a modern society that lives in peace." On his part, Boutaris stated that "with these museums, these two cities will show their citizens and the world all the importance that the Jewish community had for forming an identity. We are walking on parallel roads" (*Thestival.gr*, October 3, 2018). In addition to the striking sight of the building itself, Thessaloniki City Council hopes the presence of the HMG will increase the attractiveness of a less developed part of the city that has often been described as "disadvantaged" (Thessaloniki Municipality, July 2, 2018).

Boutaris also pointed out that the history of Jewish Thessaloniki needs to be promoted as it is "entirely unknown to the whole world" (*Kathimerini.gr*, January 15, 2017). However, his claim does not seem entirely substantiated, given the fact that even the less than 100-page-long Polyglott tourist guidebook of Greece from 1996, i.e., even before the JMT was actually established, has an introductory paragraph on Thessaloniki history ending with the following sentence: "In WWII, Thessaloniki was occupied by the Germans, who completely destroyed the centuries-old Jewish culture" (Christoffel-Crispin and Crispin 2014, 38). In contrast, a 2004 Greek guide to Thessaloniki devotes a large section to the city's modern and contemporary architecture, including many buildings of Jewish heritage that are at best listed as built or owned by Spanish or Italian subjects, thus failing to acknowledge their Jewish origin (Tsaktsiras et al. 2004, 169–208).

Returning to the absence of debate about the desirability and mission of the HMG project, expressions of constructive criticism have likewise been lacking. This does not mean, however, that the project is without its potential problems; rather that it is not a political priority. Again, this raises the question of commitment. After Mitsotakis replaced Tsipras as PM in July 2019, the state's political support of the HMG remained steady. The only critical remarks came from the new local and regional administration, targeting the presumed mismanagement of the project by their predecessors. For example, in September 2020, the Ministry of Interior of Macedonia and Thrace accused SYRIZA and former Mayor Boutaris of announcing a ready project on a "non-existent plot," as the municipal land concessions were allegedly finalized only under the new leadership (Interior Ministry of Macedonia and Thrace, September 7, 2020; *Kathimerini.gr*, May 21. 2021). Similarly, Zervas criticized the former city council for promoting the HMG project without having "any plans" (*Makthes.gr*, August 25, 2020). In September 2019, he suggested: "Many projects that gave the impression of being completed or in the process of implementation are at a very early stage. For example, the Holocaust Museum […] is still in its infancy and will need much work to get on track to implementation." (Thessaloniki Municipality, September 16, 2019).

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Our survey shows that, even today, many locals are not particularly interested in Jewish and Holocaust-themed museums. In response to an open question, only 5 participants in the survey identified, among other Thessaloniki sights, the present JMT as a place regularly visited by Greeks with their schools (3), with international guests (2), and with friends (1). Only one of the respondents who said they visited the JMT with friends marked the existing museum as one of the most important sights in Thessaloniki (next to 4 other places related to Byzantine and Ottoman heritage, including the White Tower, which appeared in this section 60 times). The same person was also aware of the HMG project; otherwise, there was no overlap between interest in visiting the JMT and awareness of the HMG. Thus, the question remains whether the HMG would in fact be of only peripheral interest to the inhabitants of Thessaloniki.

The lack of awareness indicated by the survey might be connected, among other things, with the fact that WWII (together with the Holocaust) is not the historical period that the families of our 76 respondents, most of them (46) born in Thessaloniki, remember as of primary importance in their family history. The majority mentioned first and foremost the heritage of the so-called Asia Minor catastrophe and the influx of Greek Orthodox migrants (see Hirschon 2003). Only in 12 cases are the events of WWII the dominant element in their family history. Respondents' estimates of the proportion of Jews in the prewar and postwar population of the city were wildly inaccurate: instead of 20% and 1%, respectively, responses ranged from 10 to 90% for the prewar era, and 1 to 60% for the postwar period. Not only that, they proved similarly unacquainted with the number of Armenians or Muslims, and even with the total population size of Thessaloniki itself. In this light, it is doubtful whether the HMG will succeed in raising awareness of the historical diversity of the city or contribute significantly to its appreciation.

Conclusion

At first sight, the HMG project gives the impression of a highly reasonable, desirable, and important act, and its mission seems clear: to create a memorial museum *in situ*, which will include an education and research center while aspiring to international status. However, after studying a large number of available sources, especially media releases in Greek, English, and German, we are yet to be persuaded of the commitment of HMG stakeholders to the preservation of historical memory and the promotion of tolerance. This qualitative media analysis, supplemented by data from our online survey, clearly demonstrated not only stakeholders' low level of commitment but also a lack of transparency. Parallel to this, the lack of public debate on the HMG, and corresponding lack of interest among the Greek public, makes it difficult to establish a platform for monitoring and examining the whole process of the HMG's genesis and evolution.

While the stakeholders' financial commitments seem to be met, their commitment concerning HMG's mission remains vague. Rather than a memorial of genocide and human suffering and an instrument of anti-racism and tolerance, the HMG might easily turn into an institution that primarily celebrates civilized European values, which Greece manifestly shares. The HMG project could potentially help the country foster the image of a modern society, defined by its multicultural identity, inclusivity, and peaceful character. Yet by attempting to be transnational and capitalizing on the European idea, new Holocaust memorial museums do not become less nationalistic. As David has argued, the discursive exploitation of the human rights agenda by these institutions may diminish the real impact of its actual goals, serving merely to strengthen national sentiments and divisions (David 2020).

Although specific Greek public bodies and organizations could still impose conditions in terms of content, the public statements of national representatives suggest that it may eventually lead to promoting the dominant Greek narrative, at least on the discursive level. This works both ways: first, by externalizing guilt and sneaking in the notion of either the national "double genocide," thereby supporting the myth of shared suffering as is the case in Baltic and other countries (Radonić 2018, 510–529); second, by promoting the harmonious coexistence of ethnic communities and the

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exceptional compassion and bravery of Greeks, which would correspond to recent developments in Poland, such as the turn toward rescuers of Jews (Wóycicka 2019) and the de-Holocaustization of the Holocaust (Janicka 2016).

Similarly, the stakeholders could also use this project of a modern, innovative, and, therefore, inviting museum as a chance to colonize Holocaust memory by consolidating hegemonic national narratives. The multiple references to a "double genocide," the Greek resistance and the treating of Jews as an outgroup, in contrast to the relatively isolated acknowledgments of complicity (which many reject), would again support this. When it comes to presenting the city's multicultural spirit and moving the project toward a more integrated history, the HMG Board is evasive or silent. The inclusion of outgroups—in addition to the Jews, there are Muslims and Armenians, i.e., religious and ethnic groups other than Greek (Orthodox)—that might spoil the Greek hegemonic narrative, therefore, seems somewhat misleading.

Moreover, on behalf of international stakeholders the local interested parties could once again commercialize the Holocaust, as appears likely from many statements in our analysis, and use the subsidies for their own market-driven profit. More worryingly, the HMG project can be seen as facilitating the stakeholders' ambitions to increase their own prestige and recognition, rather than accommodate its potential visitors and commit to its mission more than superficially. However, much the need for "lessons learned" is being emphasized, there is no evidence of a clearly defined commitment to challenge either the national or the global Holocaust narrative, or of a cogent discursive framing of genocide, guilt, and vindication. This does not appear to be a part of the HMG project, nor is it elaborated on by the stakeholders. In consequence, the great international aspiration to become a monument of compelling ethical appeal is inconclusive. After being in limbo for several years, the project was revived in spring 2021 with the HMG Board trying to find a contractor by the end of 2021 (*Kathimerini.gr*, May 21, 2021). Despite that, a lot can still be adjusted and refined. An informed and rational public debate could be of immense value.

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Disclosures. None.

Notes

1 The questionnaire was completed mainly by students of economics, social sciences, and humanities at Thessaloniki's University of Macedonia, and indicated a surprising lack of knowledge about the HMG project. In general terms, it also revealed their low awareness of Thessaloniki's multicultural past. It should be noted that the results are illustrative and by no means representative, either of Greek society as a whole or of specific young, rather well-educated social groups, as it reflects the opinions of a relatively small number of respondents. Last but not least, we want to thank Maria Paschalina Dimopoulou for her kind assistance with the realization of our survey.
2 See the internal debate on Jewish Community intervention in the trial of the Holocaust denier, Konstantinos Plevris, in *Alef* 19, 2 (2008).
3 Let alone the fact that neither Corfu nor Chania or Patra were Sephardic communities *per se*.
4 Saltiel's announcement dates back to 2 July 2018, the day Thessaloniki Municipality entered the HMG non-profit organization.

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