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Invoking the Holocaust at the Border: Holocaust Museums, Commemoration and Community Activism in the Southwest.

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INVOKING THE HOLOCAUST AT THE BORDER: HOLOCAUST MUSEUMS,
COMMEMORATION, AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM
IN THE SOUTHWEST

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COMMEMORATION AND COMMUNITY ACTIVISM
IN THE SOUTHWEST

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

This thesis is a localized study that engages with the literature on Holocaust memory and memorialization in the U.S. and asks how the themes and methodologies of those scholars elucidate Holocaust memorialization and education along the U.S.-Mexico border. During 2018-2019, the U.S. witnessed migrant Caravans from Central America, Haiti, Africa, and South Asia as migrants fled violence, displacement, and extreme poverty to cross multiple borders and perilous terrain to seek refuge at the U.S.-Mexico border. During these same years, Holocaust analogies and Holocaust memory were instrumentalized by human rights advocates, descendants of survivors, and public officials who either linked migrant detention practices and conditions to concentration camps or advocated against such analogies. I compare the ways in which Jewish activists and Holocaust museums in Tucson, Arizona and El Paso, Texas have addressed human rights abuses against migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border. Primary and secondary sources, including interviews by Rabbis and activists, revealed the varying ways Tucson's and El Paso's Holocaust museums and Jewish community organizations addressed representation during the humanitarian crisis (in Jewish and organizing spaces), the contrasting Jewish response to the perceived crisis, and when Holocaust memory and never again are evoked in such spaces. This thesis examines Holocaust museums, commemoration, and activism in hypermilitarized Southwestern borderland communities, and its relation to the contemporary migration discourse.

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Introduction

The years 2018-2019 were the inflection point in human rights violations at the border; indeed, there were peak border surges and migration crisis rhetoric of migrant Caravans from Central America including Honduras, El Salvador, and other migrants from Haiti, Africa, and South Asia fleeing violence, displacement, and extreme poverty to cross multiple borders and perilous terrain to seek refuge. Communities and individuals displaced by civil wars, gang violence, climate change, poverty, and persecuted groups seeking refuge bore the brunt of discrimination, strict immigration quotas, closed borders, and were barred from presenting asylum claims in western liberal democracies like the United States.¹ These years also signaled an anti-immigrant platform and rhetoric of the border wall and border crisis. Throughout 2018-2021, Holocaust analogies and holocaust memory were instrumentalized by human rights advocates, descendants of survivors, and public officials. They either linked detention practices and conditions in detention centers and points of entry at the southern border to concentration camps or advocated against such analogies.

This thesis is a localized study of Holocaust memorialization and invocation through museums and community action. It engages with the literature on Holocaust memory and memorialization in the United States and asks how the themes and methodologies of those scholars elucidate Holocaust memorialization and education along the U.S.-Mexico border. The tensions within public memory of the Holocaust and Jewish communal organizations in the

¹ “Hope and Resistance at the Border,” Hope Border Institute, (El Paso: Hope Border, 2019), 1-8., https://www.hopeborder.org/files/ugd/e07ba9_6548ef1b4a064f2e8ec27a66ca909f78.pdf ; and “Asylum Ban: Muslim Travel Ban,” Immigration History Society. <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/muslim-travel-ban/> Last accessed April 22, 2022. The Muslim Ban (2017-2020) under President Trump restricted travel to the U.S. for 90 days for Muslim countries including Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and suspended the resettlement of Syrian refugees. Further restrictions on travelers from Venezuela and North Korea were added.

Southwest (Tucson and El Paso) such as the Holocaust museums and religious institutions reveal the extent to which Jewish communities responded to the migration crises and Holocaust memory being invoked at the border. The Holocaust museums examined in this these are the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) in Tucson, Arizona and the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center (EPHM) in El Paso, Texas. The responses of these two museums located along the U.S-Mexico border matter due to their positionality in a contested space reproducing epistemic violence, but also illustrating resistance through the four community actions. This leads to ask the question of whether empathy and the promise of democratic ideals enshrined in the narrative of Holocaust museums espousing human rights, Holocaust education, and the responsibility to the stranger rooted in Jewish tradition, apply to those migrating and seeking refuge from the global south. Does the memory of the Holocaust and the promise of "never again," and analogizing its lessons, serve as a moral imperative for action against othering, discrimination, hate, apathy, and violence? Do these museums and communities perpetuate the violence, rhetoric, and biases they seek to prevent through their silences, actions, or ambivalent responses? This research illustrates the complexities of border policies, Holocaust memory, human rights, and social justice advocacy in Jewish and non-Jewish spaces and elucidates how Jewish organizations and individual actors navigated which refugees and crises to confront. It also illustrates how individuals and Jewish organizations committed to documenting, and advocating for persecuted groups, for the displaced, migrants, and refugees activate Jewish values and the memory of the Holocaust by connecting to the legacy of civil and social justice movements.

Background

Tensions within popular memory and historical memory of the Holocaust are exemplified through the Holocaust memory debate on whether detention centers at the southern border can be likened to concentration camps. The conflation of the diverse universe of the concentration camps and killing centers aided in the politization and outcry over Holocaust memory and parallels to the Holocaust. Museums such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) and historians spoke against such statements and analogies that trivialize the Holocaust throughout 2018-2019. However, immigrant rights activist groups like Never Again Action, who rally around the memory of the Holocaust and the pledge of survivors of “Never Again,” displayed a poster with Anne Frank outside an immigration courthouse and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office to advocate for immigrants in detention. Activists held signs and displays imploring for the release of immigrants arguing that “Anne Frank died of Typhus.” Other factors such as the unsanitary condition of the concentration camp and prolonged detention, malnourishment, and starvation contributed to Frank’s death and should be examined within the context of World War II and genocide.² The pledge made by survivors rooted in memory and moral responsibility to create “a new world of peace and freedom...this is our responsibility to our murdered comrades and their relatives” propelled diverse actors from Jewish and non-Jewish communities across the U.S including the southern border to show that never again requires action in the face of violence, othering, and practices that infringe on human

² “Bergen-Belsen: Holocaust Encyclopedia,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/bergen-belsen>, Last accessed May 3, 2022. Bergen-Belsen was first a P.O.W. camp. From 1943-45, Bergen-Belsen evolved to include political prisoners, Roma, and Sinti and morphed into a collection camp from 1944-1945.; Never Again Action, “Anne Frank Died of Typhus Not a Gas Chamber. If Detainees Cannot Social Distance, Governor Cuomo, Free Them All.” Twitter, March 2022. <https://twitter.com/NeverAgainActn/status/1241198203183267842>

rights.³ Whether misaligned or not, Holocaust analogies will always be imperfect; however, they speak to universal claims of teaching empathy and speaking out against injustice, prejudice, hate, and othering promised by Holocaust education and commemoration.

On Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Twitter account *St Louis Manifest*, poignantly engaged with the historic exclusion and expulsion of Jewish refugees turned away at the maritime border in 1939 and sent to their deaths at Auschwitz, Sobibor and other camps within the Third Reich. The Tweet was posted and reposted on Holocaust Remembrance Day at a time when refugees continued to be turned away and threatened by Trump era punitive policies which expanded the asylum ban and would include family detention. For example, on April 17, 2021, the price of seeking refuge for August Collin was “being turned away at the border. I was murdered at Sobibor.”⁴ The unintended consequences of migration in transit countries such as Mexico and deterrence policies like the Migrant Protection Protocols or “Remain in Mexico” are represented through Gabriela’s testimony featured in the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center’s exhibit 2019 ASILO/ASYLUM. After receiving politically based violent threats from gangs and the Partido Liberal, Gabriela, a government worker for the National Party, fled Honduras with her husband and children on March 15, 2019, at the height of the Refugee/Caravan Crisis. On March 28, 2019, Gabriela, her daughter, and other asylum seekers were held under the Paso Del Norte Bridge. Hers and her family’s journey toward safety was

³ Doris Bergen, “Studying the Holocaust: Is History Commemoration?” in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed by Dan Stone (Berghahn Books, 2012), 170-171. According to Hilberg the Communists and inmates liberated at Buchenwald initiated the dictum and call to memory of never again. To Bergen it implies political and moral challenges. Bergen illustrates the tensions between historical memory of the Holocaust, commemoration, activism, and academic study.; and “1937-1945- Buchenwald,” Buchenwald Memorial, Accessed May 3, 2022. www.buchendwald.de/en/471

⁴ St. Louis Manifest, “My name is Auguste Collin. In 1939, I fled my home seeking safety in the US and was turned away at the border. I was murdered in Sobibor, Twitter, Jan 27, 2022, 6:40 p.m. https://twitter.com/Stl_Manifest/status/1486871664793206791

marked with violence, extortion, and kidnapping while in transit. Later, while waiting in Mexico, they experienced discrimination in the migrant shelter from directors and staff.⁵ Between 2018 and 2021, the United States witnessed the separation of unaccompanied minors and families at the border, the expansion of the influx facility known as Tornillo that detained migrant youth in a military style facility, the holding of migrants in pens at international ports of entry, and Human rights violations. Human rights violations, xenophobia and violence against refugees and migrants continue today on both sides of the border and have become more prominent. On September 27, 2022, a group of nine migrants were shot while drinking water at a reservoir near Hudspeth, Texas. On April 3, 2023, 40 migrants died at a detention center in Juarez, Mexico in a devastating fire, victims of corruption and unjust asylum policies.⁶ Throughout the humanitarian crisis rabbis, and interfaith clergy making a moral pilgrimage to the border to protest punitive border policies chronicled the narratives and fears of those in shelters and in detention centers.

This thesis looks at Holocaust museums and Holocaust memory and activism in Southwestern borderland communities and its relation to the contemporary migration discourse. It also looks at Holocaust museums broadly, the intersection of human rights language and “never again” by focusing on communities in a hyper-militarized border like El Paso, Texas, or adjacent to a hyper-militarized border like Tucson, Arizona. Most importantly, this work looks at representation during times of perceived crisis, Jewish space/organizing spaces, Jewish response

⁵ Interview with Gabriela by Yolanda Chávez Leyva, July 11, 2019, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso. Recording provided by TJMHC for the “Jewish Museum Milwaukee’s Virtual Passport Series: ASILO/ASYLUM Virtual Tour,” April 6, 2021. The exhibit also included resistance through witnessing and direct-action protests.

⁶ Daniel Borunda and Martha Pskowski, “Twin Brothers Arrested in Shooting Death of Migrant: Affidavit Provides New Details,” *El Paso Times*, Oct. 1, 2022. <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/crime/2022/09/29/west-texas-shooting-hudspeth-county-texas-rangers-fbi-immigration/69527912007/>; Josiah Heyman and Jeremy Slack, “The Causes Behind the Migrant Shelter Fire,” *NCLA*, April 30, 2023, <https://nacla.org/ciudad-juarez-migrant-shelter-fire> Last accessed April 30, 2023.

to the perceived crisis, and how Holocaust memory and never again are evoked in such spaces. This research is also informed by borderlands historical methodologies, in particular the idea that violence at the borderlands continues to exist to in diverse iterations, as seen through the pervasive history of racialization, discrimination, and surveillance of borderlanders and persons of color in the Southwest.

This research is informed by the scholarship on Holocaust memorialization by James E. Young's *Texture of Memory* and *The Changing Face of Holocaust Memory* and Michael Berenbaum's *the World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* (2006). This research is usually presented from a national or international perspective; my thesis does so, within the particularities of border communities. Oscar J. Martinez's *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S Mexico Borderland*, which argues that the experience of living near an international boundary promotes particular social and cultural characteristics, informs the borderlands historical approach. Oral histories provide a nuanced engagement with the binational and bicultural aspects of the border, border enforcement and evolution, as well as situating migrant advocacy from the *fronterizo* perspectives deeply influencing the *typology of activism* presented in chapter two.⁷

The Texture of Memory is essential in understanding the global engagement with Holocaust museums and commemoration and the evolution of commemorative practices, historical debates, and museum trajectories from sites of memory to museum heritage sites such as Auschwitz. Holocaust memory in the U.S. was molded by Jewish communities, survivors, and the U.S Presidential commission in 1978. Young looks at museums, counter monuments, and

⁷ Oscar J. Martinez. *Border People Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994).

monuments in Poland, the U.S. including the USHMM, the Tucson Memorial, the Dallas Holocaust Museum—illustrating how communities and visitors shape and reshape Holocaust memory.⁸ Young argues that Holocaust commemorative practices began in 1942-1943, evolved in the immediate postwar period, and ascended again during the Holocaust museum and memorial boom of the 1990s.⁹

Hasia Diner's *We remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust 1945-1962* chronicles the efforts of Jews in the United States to memorialize the Holocaust in the postwar period.¹⁰ Holocaust consciousness and memorialization took diverse forms from the literary to the political and rhetorical and liturgical modes of representation and ranged in public and private settings from Passover Haggadah's to poetry. Diner argues that the Holocaust was invoked in the post-war period for "liberal projects" and used "the rhetoric of universalism and Jewish particularism" when making parallels to events in the U.S and Israel, Civil Rights, and the Cold War dispelling "the myth of silence from 1945-1962."¹¹ For historian Tim Cole, the Eichmann Trial, Anne Frank, The Holocaust television miniseries, and Oskar Schindler represent however problematic the iconography of the public construction of the Holocaust memorialization. Cole further critically engages with construction of Holocaust memory by stressing the Holocausts mythological proportions, the universalization of the Holocaust, its iconography and the dark heritage tours resulting from the

⁸ James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), xxi-2 and 296-301.

⁹ Ibid., *The Texture of Memory*, 284-287.

¹⁰ Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust 1945-1962*. (New York: NYU Press, 2009) 5; and 266-267.

¹¹ Ibid., *We Remember with Reverence*, 17 and 306.

Holocaust memory boom expressed in *Selling the Holocaust*. Cole questions the centrality and construction of Holocaust memory, and how and why the Holocaust became American history.¹²

Rachel Deblinger's dissertation, "in a world still trembling: American Jewish Philanthropy and the Shaping of Holocaust Survivor Stories in Postwar America 1945-1953," demonstrates the importance of cultural media for Jewish communal organizations as a critical tool "for memory construction" and engagement with the Holocaust, survivors, and displaced persons.¹³ Significant in Deblinger's study is the reconstruction of survivor narratives by "secondary witnesses," ranging from religious, secular, and cultural Jewish organizations who wove what they saw and the stories encountered to engage in philanthropy, fundraising and to raise awareness to the plight of survivors of the catastrophe, their displacement and their resettlement through newsletters, radio, adverts, speeches.¹⁴ Additionally, Deblinger's work provides insight on Jewish advocacy and organizations that aided refugees throughout the war and in the postwar period. Deblinger examines the turn of these organizations such as Jewish Federations, Hadassah, NCJW toward aiding Soviet Jews, or HIAS which has been tasked in aiding refugees across the globe from 1975-present. Deblinger offers a new way to look at Jewish communal organizations and their advocacy programs in the contemporary period.

The work of Anna Hajkova was instrumental in addressing the comparisons regarding children's art in the Terezin Ghetto during the Holocaust and can be connected to prison societies which extended to the art of migrant children from the global south in the U.S.

¹² Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold*, (New York: Routledge, 1999)

¹³ Rachel Beth Deblinger, "in a world still trembling:" American Jewish Philanthropy and the Shaping of Holocaust Survivor Stories in Postwar America 1945-1953 (PhD. Diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014), 3-4.

¹⁴ Ibid., Deblinger, "in a world still trembling," 22-23; Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 184-185.

detention system, at temporary influx sites such as Tornillo, Texas.¹⁵ *The Last Ghetto* offers a corrective to the postwar master narrative that place Terezin “within the framework of the human spirit,” focused on art and culture as resistance that obfuscates the heterogeneity of the ghetto and the complex hierarchies and power dynamics accentuating class, ethnicity, gender, and language.¹⁶ Hajkova further argues that “art does not stand alone.”¹⁷ Her work illuminates the complexities of “everyday life,” within “a prisoner society,” and provides an expansive framework that complicates the master narrative of Terezin where even children in the youth homes engaged in these eschewed power dynamics throughout their internment in the ghetto.¹⁸

There is limited information as to whether refugees, immigrants, and economic migrants use the parallels and analogies themselves to describe the conditions of abuse, surveillance, and containment. Background information on concentration camps becomes important as the diverse narrators and actors engaged in witnessing at the border, rallying against inhumane border enforcement policies that prey on the vulnerable and are in direct violation of international law, call on the memory of the Holocaust and concentration camps. Historian Dan Stone’s *A History of Concentration Camps* chronicles the emergence and transformation of concentration camps, illustrating their centrality rooted in the modern state’s “age of nationalism and technology,” and in response to crises— (heterogenous state moving toward a homogenous one, refugees, displacement, etc.). He argues that concentration camps take other forms—other than Auschwitz, Dachau, or Bergen-Belsen. These camps and public memory construction and narratives are driven by the narratives and photography of the liberating armies. The global history of

¹⁵ The 2019 Uncaged Art Exhibit curated by historians Yolanda Chavez Leyva and Dr. David Romo sought to connect the experiences of children interned at Tornillo with the broad history of children in detention..

¹⁶ Anna Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3-4 and 225-227.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 168- 172.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 12-13, 80.

concentration camps predates Nazi Germany's use of the term and the killing centers which have come to dominate public memory and discourse. Other examples, predating Nazi concentration camps are 19th century German and Dutch Colonial/Imperialist concentration camps in colonial South Africa, and Southwest Africa and in the campos de reconcentracion in Cuba and the Philippines. Additionally, the concentration camps established during World War I functioned to produce the condition of statelessness sustained by "ideas of nationalism and biological metaphors defining the healthy and valuable on the one hand and the polluting and degenerate on the other."¹⁹ The distinction on the concentration camp debate for Stone, lies on the lack of recourse and legal representation in which people in concentration camps found themselves during the Holocaust, while those in detention centers across the United States and other carceral states (Canada, and Australia) can have access to legal representation, although limited and often result in unsuccessful denial claims, or in coercion to plead for voluntary repatriation, as some prosecutors are part of ICE/CBP. While detention centers concentrate undesirables (Indigenous migrant children and youth, and persons of color seeking asylum, refugees), contain barbed wire and surveillance—dehumanize, abuse, and exploit those in detention, non-combatant civilians, are by standard descriptive definition concentration camps. Stone further illustrates that the "concentration camp was an expression of the centralization of terror, one of the key characteristics of the modern state in the age of nationalism and technology," and remains a site and instrument of terror and trauma for those within and behind its enclosure.²⁰ Those in detention become, as Arendt argues, "experiments in eradicating the human from human

¹⁹ Dan Stone, *Concentration Camps: A Short History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); 8, 11-16.; See also, Andrea Pitzer, *One Long Night: A Global History of Concentration Camps* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2017).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Concentration Camps*, 15-16.

beings.”²¹ Extracting humanity from those detained marked as other and excluded whether immigrants, the stateless, dispossessed, refugees and asylees by being removed from sphere of obligation.²²

The work of Hasia Diner, *A Century of Jewish Immigration to the U.S* and *How America Met the Jews* explores Jewish immigration and Jewish history to the U.S, the creation of Jewish communal and religious organizations, the “golden era of Jewish immigration to the U.S.,” and advocacy programs for Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to Holocaust survivors and refugees throughout WWII and from 1960s-present.²³ For Diner, and Libby Garland, although Jewish immigrants encountered antisemitism during their integration and assimilation to the U.S., their advocacy and involvement in social movements functioned around the Black and White race binary which also created tensions in these spaces and continue to the present. Libby Garland’s *After They Closed the Gates* centers on Jewish immigration to the U.S. within the U.S. Southwestern border and at the national level. Her tome shows the porousness of the U.S-/Mexico border and the rehabilitation of illicit Jewish immigration to the U.S., via third countries in Latin America and Mexico. Garland demonstrates how Jewish communal organizations, Rabbis like Zielonka from El Paso and Jewish communities engaged with and reshaped Jewish immigration and responded to refugee/humanitarian crises created by the restrictive immigration policies of the 1920s-1930s. ²⁴ Garland’s book situates El Paso and the U.S. border within Jewish history of the U.S. beyond the history of early settlers providing a glimpse on Jewish organizations like NCJW, HIAS, the JDC, and religious figures involved in immigration and advocacy for refugees by looking at Jewish illegal immigration to the U.S., offering a way to

²¹ Ibid., *Concentration Camps*, Hannah Arendt as quoted by Stone, 120.

²² Ibid, *Concentration Camps*, 120.

²³ Hasia Diner, *How America Met the Jews*, (Providence: Brown University Press, 2017).

²⁴ Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates*, 43-49.

engage with immigration to the U.S. and interrogate which groups have been historically excluded by the state.

Although not cited in this thesis, the work of Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism*, informs U.S. border enforcement and advocacy from a transnational setting. Walia situates immigrant rights movements within capitalism, settler colonialism, labor exploitation, and state-building within the Canadian-U.S. framework, as both countries share and expand restrictive immigration/detention policies. Additionally, "border Imperialism" interrogates the "modes of governance that determine [who] will be included within the nation-state."²⁵ Stemming from organizing and advocacy, *Border Imperialism* includes vignettes and solidarity statements from Indigenous communities in Canada and the U.S. (Tohono O'odham) and allows for an engagement with the U.S.-Mexico border as solidarity movements advocate for "welcoming centers." Her work situates, detention, activism, and theory within a Canadian- U.S. framework. Walia's work on borders such as *Border and Rule* further connects the global implications on border technologies refugees, crisis rhetoric and similarly, the work of Todd Miller's *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the US Border Around the World* (2019), illustrates that the U.S border enforcement apparatus ranging from policy, to walls, militarization, and intricate surveillance to diverse training units across the world reinforce U.S. empire and borders. Miller looks at the history of the U.S Mexico border and the role of the U.S. within a national and global system of border enforcement.

Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag's *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements* provide an immersive engagement with the international and global sanctuary practices by redirecting its focus from the 1980s U.S.-Canada

²⁵ Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2013), 12-13.

Sanctuary movement widening its scope to include the UK, Germany, France, Canada, and Nordic countries.²⁶ I engage with two articles, “The Voice of the Voiceless,” and “I Didn’t Know If This Was Sanctuary,” which illuminate the trajectory of the old sanctuary movement of the 1980s and the new sanctuary movement practices, its co-adaptation of the term sanctuary, and redefining what sanctuary means. Both articles provide the historical context of the destabilization, political turmoil, and violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua caused the displacement and migration of thousands of refugees—creating the refugee crisis. The NSM’s shift from physical housing, a type of refugee/migrant and engagement in civil disobedience tactics in the 1980s and became a movement of solidarity and radical accompaniment from 2007-present that includes vigils, teach-ins, demonstrations, de-escalation of violence, and accompanying migrants and families to court proceedings show the new political and legal realities. Both articles reinforce that the new movement relies on religious imagery that invokes action and advocacy like its predecessor. These articles show the adaptation of tactics to address the needs and situation of undocumented migrants and refugees and the continuous involvement of interfaith clergy and activists from all walks of life in acts of solidarity and coalition building revolving around immigrants, human rights, dignity, and narratives of migrants and refugees to stir the moral compass of the public to enact policy change which can be seen at the U.S-Mexico border throughout 2018-present and in the *typology of activism* in chapter two.

²⁶ *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements* Edited by Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag (New York: Routledge, 2013), 73- 134.; Marta Caminero-Santangelo, “The Voice of the Voiceless: Religious Rhetoric, Undocumented Immigrants, and the New Sanctuary Movement in the United States,” *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*,” Edited by Randy K. Lippert Rehaag (New York: Routledge, 2013), 92-105.; and “ I Didn’t Know If this Was Sanctuary’: Strategic Adaptation in the US New Sanctuary Movement,” *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*, Edited by Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag (New York: Routledge, 2013),106-134.

Erin Doran's thesis, "The border between remembering and forgetting: El Paso, Texas and the Holocaust," focuses on recovering the role of the National Council of Jewish Women in El Paso aiding Jewish immigrants, refugees and survivors through legal counsel and accommodations for those "fleeing Nazi Germany" for both legal and illegal border crossing and discusses the influence and legacy of Rabbi Zielonka in immigration affairs.²⁷ Doran explores Holocaust memory by incorporating Holocaust survivors and the history of the El Paso Holocaust Museum until its reopening in 2008. This research builds on Doran's work by chronicling the changes since the museum's reopening, programing, and its representation of the border crisis in 2018-2019.

Methodology

This research is based on 18 oral histories, museum digital archives, museum annual reports and strategic plans, community demographic studies, secondary sources, and vertical files from University of Texas at El Paso's (UTEP) Special Collections. It engages with four in-depth oral histories in the *typology of activism* found in chapter two. The practice of oral history and interviews engage in the active process of the construction of memory and the remembering process, for "memories are as much about the present as it is about the past," it is also about the individual, the collective, and national memory.²⁸ These interviews engage with collective and individual memories and wider historical contexts. Lynn Abrams reminds us that popular memory involves the production of memory related to the past and its representation is reshaped

²⁷ Doran, Erin E. "The Border Between Remembering and Forgetting: El Paso, Texas, and the Holocaust," (M.A. Thesis, The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2008.) ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. Retrieved from: <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/border-between-remembering-forgetting-el-paso/docview/276071086/se-2>

²⁸ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 78-79.

by those doing the remembering. As such, there is always tension over the representation of popular memory “involving dominant and marginalized groups.”²⁹ The practice of oral history allows one to speak to the silences relating to a specific event, person, or place in a particular setting; such is the case with the pro immigrants’ rights Never Again Action Lions Plazita *Havdalah* service in July 2019. Further, it is important to address that the interviews [conducted] are mediated by the interviewer’s subjectivity and positionality and, as such, the conversation/experience becomes a collaborative process—one marked with power dynamics and lived experiences of both interviewer and narrators.

Additionally, this research looks at Holocaust museums throughout the greater southwest: Holocaust Museum LA (HMLA), the Holocaust Museum Houston (HMH), the Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum (DHHRM), The El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM), and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC). Additional research consists of websites, press releases, and social media posts including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Vimeo, Jewish communal organization statements, consciousness raising panels/lectures, individual blogposts and communal Rabbinic responsa from the Central Conference of American Rabbis, *The New Mikdash* by T’ruah (The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights) addressing the new sanctuary movement, and diverse stream of Judaism organizations condemning family separation. In addition, I attended (or participated in) extensive webinar and virtual zoom discussions, book club panels, community outreach programs and lectures to contextualize and compare how the programming reflected local issues such as systemic racism during a time of social upheaval and if and how the “refugee crisis” and migrants were addressed. Recruiting willing participants throughout a global pandemic using tools such as Zoom to collaborate in this

²⁹ Abrams, *Oral History*, 96. Additionally, Abrams argues that although memory is personal “is always influenced by shared memories, whether at a family, community, or even at the national level.”

oral history has been an undertaking of persistence and dedication. Rabbis witnessing at Tornillo were contacted to expand on how the Jewish community in or adjacent to border cities and at the national level responded to the crisis rhetoric, detention centers, and evoking the Holocaust at the border such as Rabbi Bruce Elder from Congregation Hakafa in Chicago, and Rabbi Stephanie Aaron from Congregation Chaverim in Tucson Arizona. Their experiences, and deep engagement with the interview process shaped this research allowing me to consider my own relationship and understanding of the border, witnessing, personal responsibility and engagement with the ongoing humanitarian crises. Therefore, Rabbis, and local activists comprise most of the interviews included in the *typology of activism*, while interviews with a few members of the Jewish community of El Paso and museum professionals are embedded throughout chapter 1 and chapter 2.

Limitations

This study was impacted and inspired by the onset of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The limitations provided opportunities by widening the scope of participants and connecting with educators and changemakers at museums such as the USHMM, Holocaust Museum Houston, and Jewish Museum Maryland. The pandemic offered an opportunity to immerse myself in the robust Holocaust commemoration programming and community outreach programs reflecting COVID-19 and the social and racial unrest in the United States. The COVID-19 pandemic emerged while I was researching and conceptualizing the thesis in regional terms and as I was reaching out to members of the Jewish community and Holocaust museum community for interview requests in El Paso and Tucson. Due to travel restrictions, I could not conduct face-to-face interviews, visit museum locations and exhibits, or conduct in-person archival research in

specific communities other than El Paso. Instead of face-to-face interviews, I collaborated with participants via Zoom. During the time of my study, the Jewish History Museum and Holocaust Study Center experienced many changes in its short but impactful time, such as changes in leadership and internal restructuring and reframing of the museum's dynamic vision toward one centered on Holocaust education. My analysis shows that the regional context is likewise critical for understanding the specific role of these museums, in this case as sites far removed from sites of atrocity and adjacent to the migration crisis.

This research interrogates the following questions: How does the borderland experience inform the Jewish community's approach to memorialization? How have Southwestern borderland communities such as Tucson and El Paso confronted and responded to the migration crisis and detention centers at the southern border? And why does the museums' responses or lack of response and representation to the migration crisis matter?

Chapter one looks at the emergence of Holocaust consciousness and memorialization broadly through the establishment of Holocaust museums in the U.S., and the Southwest. It compares the El Paso Holocaust Museum & Study Center (EPHM) and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC), their trajectories, and permanent exhibitions. More important, it looks at both institutions representation of the Holocaust, and the different approach they undertook in response to the migration crisis at the U.S. southern border directly affecting their communities. The Tucson Jewish Museum and History Center and The El Paso Holocaust Museum both responded to the migration crisis in two distinct ways. TJMHC, 60 miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border, boldly continued its trajectory of engagement with the diverse refugee crises and displacement since its opening in 2016 curating three exhibits which included the Global Refugee Crisis of 2015(2016), Call Me Rohingya (2018) and ASILO/ASYLUM

(2019-2022) with the last exhibit making direct parallels to the plight of Jewish refugees escaping Nazism and Jewish immigration and status as refugees with the contemporary migration crisis, human rights abuses and the criminalization of asylum at the border. EPHM while located within 1.2 miles to the nearest point of entry conservatively engaged with refugees and the border crisis until 2021 through its representation of the Afghan refugees and resettlement through their community outreach programming *All People Have Voice*. Although both museums are located along the U.S.-Mexico border, their proximity to the border, committee dynamics, and mission determined how to address the humanitarian/refugee crises at the southern border and illustrate their political realities as institutions.

Chapter two engages with the legacy of Jewish civic and communal engagement in Tucson and El Paso communities along with the broad the history of immigration to the Southwest and how these Jewish communities have engaged with migration, restrictive immigration quotas, humanitarian crisis, refugees, and involvement with advocacy historically. The border has been part of *fronterizos* and border people's everyday experiences through shared binational histories, languages, and distinct border cultures while violence, policing, and detention at the border has deep roots in racist policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Acts and the National Origins Act and Quotas of 1921-1924. The chapter then shifts to examine four community actions undertaken by regional Jewish communities and national groups such as HIAS/T'ruah to the border from 2018-2019 at the height of family separation and Holocaust analogies. Borderland communities in the southwest engaged in symbolic communal response from the Jewish Relations Council of the Jewish Federations of Greater El Paso and southern Arizona and four notable actions of protest and prayer including national and regional Jewish

and interfaith actors such as delegations of Rabbis visiting the U.S.-Mexico border to enact Jewish values and decry immorality and inhumanity they encountered.

The second half of chapter two proposes a category to examine the border paradigm and advocacy by introducing the typology of activism comprised of four oral histories and three categories (the Humanitarian Rabbi Activists, The Art Activist and The Grassroots Activist) that elucidate how Jewish communities at the regional and national scope have responded to the migration crisis and have invoked Holocaust memory at the US-Mexico border by diverse actors and different mediums. This analysis shows the nuances of Jewish advocacy throughout diverse refugee crises and social justice coalition building shedding light on individual and communal engagement with the sanctuary movement, the new sanctuary movement, Jewish diasporic history, Jewish tradition, and multidirectional memory.³⁰ The TJMHC, its leadership, and the Jewish community in Tucson more prominently display these finely interwoven threads than the local response from EPHM and the El Paso community.

³⁰ “Multidirectional Memory in focus,” *EUROM* Magazine of the European Observatory on Memories, December 20, 2019, <https://europeanmemories.net/magazine/multidirectional-memory-in-focus/> Accessed July 2, 2021. Multidirectional Memory, for Rothberg functions as a vessel that allows for interaction with diverse histories, memories and marginalized communities. Multidirectionality functions as a resource to engage with “memories of the Holocaust to challenge colonial or racist memories.”; Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) 7-12. Additionally, multidirectional memory challenges the notion that engaging with contested histories and memory of the Holocaust results in competitive memory, or “hierarchy of suffering,” evident through the uniqueness of the Holocaust where its universality conflicts with comparisons. It reinforces the tensions over the Holocaust as the paradigm for genocide as the debates over Holocaust memory and trivialization obfuscate its comparative qualities since other genocides have not presented themselves in the scope and methods. He argues that not all memories of marginalized groups share the same memories, and a comparative approach allows for critical engagement with the past.

Chapter 1: Holocaust Representation in Southwestern Museums

Introduction

The El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM) and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) are uniquely situated along the U.S.-Mexico border where their Jewish populations are minorities within their communities. During the migration crisis of 2018-2019, the situation at the southern border became highly politicized and critics of the U.S. government's policies frequently used Holocaust analogies to emphasize the gravity of the situation. The comparisons of detention centers to concentration camps at the southern border prompted both museums to respond in diverse ways and in a manner that support their mission, collaborations, and donor dynamics. The El Paso Holocaust Museum took a conservative approach to engage with migration, refugees, and internment by releasing a statement in 2018, through their *All People Have Voice* book series and by hosting lectures centering on Japanese and Japanese American internment during World War II and the Afghan Refugees in who arrived at Fort Bliss in 2021. The Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center released a provocative exhibit, ASYLUM/ASILO, in 2019-2020. This participatory exhibit directly engaged with the migration crisis at the southern border by linking migration histories of Holocaust survivors, then coded as refugees, escaping Nazism during the Holocaust and continued antisemitism in the postwar period to the plight of contemporary refugees from the global south, specifically Central American asylum seekers who were victims of punitive polices and mass detention. ASILO/ASYLUM further complicated the notion of the U.S. as a safe haven for the oppressed. This is important as Holocaust memory continues to be reshaped by Jewish

communities, institutions devoted to the memory and education of the Holocaust, and the non-Jewish public.

The main objective of this chapter is to compare the El Paso Holocaust Museum & Study Center (EPHM) and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC), their representation of the Holocaust, and the distinct ways they have responded to the migration crisis at the U.S. southern border. I argue that the migratory stages of Holocaust survivors, geographic location, and museum mission statements in both communities' shape community engagement and response to politicized issues affecting their communities that require more than symbolic acts. However, it also raises the question: what are the limits of representation and advocacy for Holocaust museums as centers for education and memory, engaging with multidirectional and pluralistic narratives to become inclusive and democratizing spaces or sites of contestation?³¹

The first section of this chapter examines the extant literature on Holocaust memory and Holocaust consciousness in the United States. The literature shows that American Jews engaged with the Holocaust and survivors during the war and postwar periods through public and private commemorations, philanthropy, and fundraising campaigns.³² It evolved over time as film, television, and museums highlighted Holocaust history and introduced it to broader audiences. The second section explores the chronological trajectory of Holocaust Museums in the Southwest and examines the establishment of EPHM and the TJMHC and how the museums' unique geographical locations along the U.S.- Mexico border are reflected in their missions and

³¹ Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro, "Introduction," in *Museums and Sites of Persuasion: Politics, Memory and Human Rights* edited by Joyce Apsel and Amy Sodaro (New York: Routledge, 2020) 3-17; and Amy Sodaro, "Selective Memory: Memorial Museums, Human rights and Politics Victimhood," in *Museums and Sites of Persuasion*, 19-23.

³² Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust 1945-1962* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); 11-15.; Rachel Deblinger, "in a world still trembling:" American Jewish Philanthropy and the Shaping of Holocaust Survivor Stories in Postwar America 1945-1953" (PhD. Diss., University of California Los Angeles, 2014), pp ii-iii.

permanent exhibitions, and their approach to representing migration and refugees. I also compare the El Paso Holocaust Museum and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center's permanent exhibits, narratives, and historiographical approaches. The El Paso Holocaust Museum reflects its humble beginnings, a survivor-led curatorial approach that corresponds to the historiographical and museological trends of the 1990s and early 2000s. The Jewish Museum & Holocaust Center in Tucson, which opened in 2015, reflects the latest trends in Holocaust historiography that conceptualize the Holocaust as an example of genocide and/or as an event that fits into the framework of genocide and violation of Human rights. Both museums integrate survivors and testimony; however, the Tucson Holocaust Center's core exhibition is mediated and rooted in testimony and experiences of survivors in southern Arizona, as a culturally specific midsize Jewish Museum and integrated Holocaust center. I argue that the TJMHC's diverse programming and actions are due to the extension of the museum's vision as a culturally specific institution as it is both a Jewish Museum and a Holocaust center where Jewish values, shared histories (tensions arising from varied and differing narratives), antiracist practices, and testimonies create a cohesive synthesis across both campuses. I also analyze the responses and representations from both museums to the refugee crisis.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of why the responses to these two museums located along the U.S-Mexico border matter. Historians have long argued that Holocaust museums in the U.S. must be understood in terms of the country's national ideals. My analysis shows that the regional context is likewise critical for understanding the specific role of these museums, in this case as sites far removed from sites of atrocity but remarkably close to the contemporary migration crisis.

Background

Jewish refugees and survivors arrived in the U.S. escaping Nazism from 1933-1945 through numerous efforts often illegal and via alternate routes via third countries such as Palestine/Israel, Shanghai, Cuba, and Latin America. Jewish emigration was discouraged and considered illegal, and many countries capped national quotas or restricted emigration due to xenophobia, antisemitism and the context of the war, often Jewish refugees were seen as undesirables. The executive directives of 1945 issued by President Harry S. Truman, and the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, coupled with various Jewish and non-Jewish aid groups made immigrating to the U.S. a reality for refugees that included individuals, families, and children—accompanied and unaccompanied. Beth B. Cohen states that roughly 200,000 Refugees and 3,000 children made their way to the U.S. from 1949-1953.³³ Mimi R. Gladstein and Sylvia Cohen, estimate that 80 survivors—from Poland, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, settled in El Paso, and 240 survivors passed through the city since 1933.³⁴ As a border city, El Paso became a transit point for Jewish refugees as “new Americans” from 1933-1953. Jewish survivors arrived in Southern Arizona in two waves, from 1948-1953 and from 1979-2001. Immigrants arriving in this later period were primarily of Jews from the Soviet Union known as *refuseniks*.³⁵ It is interesting to note that among this group of refugees from Southern Arizona are

³³ Beth B. Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust: The Youngest Remnant and the American Experience*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 8.

³⁴ Mimi R. Gladstein, and Sylvia Deneer Cohen, *El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center: El Paso—The Wild West Welcomes Holocaust Survivors* (Gaithersburg: Signature Book Printing Press, 2012), 6-7; Mimi R. Gladstein and Sylvia Deneer Cohen, “El Paso: The Wild West Welcomes the Holocaust,” in *The Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas*, ed., Hollace Ava Wiener and Kenneth Roseman (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 243.

³⁵ “Refuseniks,” The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/refuseniks>, Accessed, August 3, 2022. The term *refusenik* is used to describe Jews from the Soviet Union who petitioned to emigrate to Israel or the U.S. but were denied. Many who experienced antisemitism were demoted from their jobs, lost housing and many were considered political dissidents. During this time, Jewish communities and the American public rallied around human rights for those persecuted in the Soviet Union such as political dissidents.

Holocaust survivors from Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, the areas associated with the “Holocaust by bullets,” *aktions* in the East, double occupations, and the USSR’s Great Patriotic War.³⁶ These migratory waves of Jewish refugees reflect the composition of their communities and the attitudes of Holocaust survivors, donors, and visitors in both cities and across the U.S.

Holocaust Memory and Museum Development in the United States (Myth of Silence)

In the 1990s, scholars of Holocaust memory and memorialization argued that the rise of Holocaust consciousness and survivors speaking out publicly occurred from the late 1960s through the 1990s. More recent scholarship by historians such as Hasia Diner, however, challenges this periodization, referring to it as the “myth of silence.” Diner and others show that American Jews and Jewish organizations engaged with the Holocaust and survivors during the war and the postwar period through varied modes of representation.³⁷ James Young asserts that the American public memory of the Holocaust began as early as 1943 through newspaper articles chronicling the mass murder of Jews in Europe and that the first public commemoration took place on December 2, 1942, and in subsequent years, labor unions commemorated the Warsaw Ghetto in 1944.³⁸ According to Deblinger and Cohen, survivor identities and testimonies were shaped and rehabilitated by Jewish philanthropic organizations through newsletters, speeches, films, and radio to raise funds for the plight of “Displaced Persons, New Americans, Newcomers

³⁶ Mark Tolts, “A Half Century of Jewish Emigration from the Former Soviet Union: Demographic Aspects,” (lecture, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, November 16, 2019).

<https://daviscenter.fas.harvard.edu/events/half-century-jewish-emigration-former-soviet-union-demographic-aspects#:~:text=Based%20on%20collected%20data%2C%20it,of%20about%20half%20a%20century>

291,000 Soviet Jews emigrated to Israel, U.S., and Germany from 1970-1980 and between 1989-2018, 328,000 emigrated to the U.S. A more nuanced engagement and experiences of this wave of immigrants from the Soviet Union and Russia in Southern Arizona, El Paso and the southwest is beyond the scope of this current research.

³⁷ Diner, *We remember with Reverence*, 33.

³⁸ James Young, “*The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (New Haven: 1993), 287-89.

and Pilgrims and Patriots,” in Europe, the U.S., and Israel.³⁹ A prominent example of media shaping survivor narratives highlighted by Deblinger is a 1953 episode of the *This is Your Life* television series where survivor Hanna Bloch Kohner’s, memories of concentration camps collided with the present on national television, denying her the chance for agency. This is significant as it shows a different facet of engagement with Holocaust testimony and survivors being “beautiful new Americans.⁴⁰ Deblinger’s periodization from 1945-1953 further reflects that Jewish philanthropy in the U.S. was an important vessel “for meaningful engagement with the Holocaust” and the displaced across Europe through clothing and food drives, and letter writing.⁴¹

The work of scholars David Cesarani, Eric Sundquist, Hasia Diner reassert that American Jews had significant engagement with the Holocaust dispelling the widely accepted “silence” propagated by scholars like Novick and Finkelstein in the 1990s-2000s. In *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, Diner argues that the Holocaust was invoked in the post-war period for “liberal projects” and used “the rhetoric of universalism and Jewish particularism” when making parallels to events in the U.S., and Israel, Civil Rights, and the Cold War.⁴² Diner’s work shows that the lessons of the Holocaust were often disagreed on by survivors and their communities across the U.S. Most importantly, American Jewish communities were making Holocaust analogies and rallying around the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide

³⁹ Deblinger, “in a world still trembling,” 4-5, and 95-98.; Cohen, *Case Closed*, 1-15; Hasia Diner, *We Remember with Reverence*, 32-33. Both Deblinger and Cohen engage with Jewish Aid organizations for Jewish refugees and the displaced in the U.S.

⁴⁰ Deblinger, “in a world still trembling,” 276-279; Diner, *We Remember with Reverence*, 34.

⁴¹ Ibid., Deblinger, “in a world still trembling,” ii- iii, 15.

⁴² Diner, *We Remember with Reverence*, 266-267.

Convention (1948) “even as the 1960s-1970s outshined earlier modes of Holocaust representation.”⁴³

There was a robust public engagement with the Holocaust in the 1960s and ‘70s. Tim Cole and Edward Linenthal, like Novick and Finkelstein, attribute the rise of Holocaust consciousness in this period to the 1961 Eichmann Trial, release of the film *The Diary of Anne Frank*, (1952) and NBC’s 1978 transmission of the TV series *The Holocaust*. These moments mark the non-Jewish American public’s consciousness of the Nazi atrocities committed on the 6 million Jews of Europe along with the 5 million who perished including the Roma and Sinti, political prisoners, the elderly, infirm, and Poles. Additionally, the Presidential Commission on the Holocaust was established in 1978 by Jimmy Carter, which set in motion a nationally sanctioned museum in the nation’s capital, a “living memorial to the 6 million Jews and other victims of the Holocaust.”⁴⁴ Earlier memorialization efforts prior to the 1978 Commission on the Holocaust were slow to materialize because the “Holocaust was not seen as American history,” despite well-established Jewish communities and refugees in the United States. However, the first museum established by survivors was the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum (HMLA) in 1961. The Holocaust became American and part of the American national narrative through the establishment of the national Holocaust memorial museum, by recognizing American soldiers as liberators, and as survivors transitioned to the category of new Americans.⁴⁵

⁴³ Ibid., Diner, “*We Remember with Reverence*,” 17 and 300-308.

It is important to note that Holocaust consciousness regarding human rights language and the genocide convention were limited in the immediate postwar period. For scholars like Samuel Moyn, Mark Mazower and Dirk Moses the 1950s (decolonial movements) and the 1970s marked a focal point in human rights language. Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Mark Mazower, “The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009); “Decolonization, Self-Determination, and the Rise of Global Human Rights Politics” ed. Dirk Moses, Marco Duranti and Roland Burke (Cambridge: Cambridge: University Press).

⁴⁴ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 200; Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler, How History is Bought, Packaged and Sold*, (New York: Routledge, 1999): 3, and 12.

⁴⁵ Young, *The Texture of Memory*, 200-201.

In Selling the Holocaust, historian Tim Cole argues that the Holocaust became American history to avoid confronting the myth of American exceptionalism and its violent racist past, including Indigenous genocides, the enslavement of Africans, the segregation of their descendants, and Japanese internment camps.⁴⁶ He further illustrates that it was easier to address and condemn events such as Holocaust and the Third Reich's policies that led to genocide as it served to highlight democratic principles espoused by the U.S. such as liberty and democracy, as exemplified by American soldiers' participation in the war and the liberation of camps. For Cole, representation and memory drive public memory of the Holocaust while enabling dark tourism of the sites of atrocity and a simplified and trivialized engagement with representation of the Holocaust. Figures like Anne Frank, Adolf Eichmann, and Oskar Schindler and the creation of memorial museums such as Yad Vashem in Israel and the USHMM (1993) mark important forms of remembrance that complicate the history of the Holocaust by extracting moral lessons, discussions, and revenue. This great interest in the Shoah is attributed to wider media reach and engagement with public memory of the Eichmann trial (1961), the Holocaust miniseries (1978), and the rise in Holocaust denial. While this latter periodization offers a glimpse of the wider phenomena of the proliferation of the Shoah through an array of modes of representation, the postwar period was anything but silent in Jewish and secular spaces. Survivors shared their stories and testimonies right after the war and in some cases, most did not speak about their experiences. Jewish communities commemorated and engaged with survivors and the Holocaust through a wide array of mediums and with varying degrees of salience from 1945 to the 1990's "memory boom." The focal point of the 1990's memory was the opening of the United States Holocaust Museum in 1993.

⁴⁶ Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, 14-15.

Holocaust Museums in the Southwest

Museums like the Dallas Holocaust & Human Rights Museum (DHHRM) (1984), the El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM) (1984) and the Holocaust Museum Houston (HMH) (1996) were conceptualized in the 1980's and opened as free-standing museums throughout the 1990s, during the Holocaust memory boom. These museums were established by Holocaust survivors, Jewish community foundations, and private donors and reflect their space in the community as institutions devoted to the memory and education of the Holocaust.

The El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM) was the first bilingual museum in the United States and serves an 82% Latinx bilingual and binational community. It was established in 1984 by Holocaust survivor Henry Kellen. Originally from Lodz, Poland, Kellen moved to Lithuania to join his parents and siblings. Kellen, his wife Julia, and their nephew Jerry emigrated to the U.S. in 1946 and settled in El Paso.⁴⁷ His passion for teaching about the Holocaust and the community's desire to visit the small exhibition led to a series of museum expansions in 1994 and 2008, through the efforts of survivors, second-generation survivors, and private donors.⁴⁸ To understand Kellen's drive for Holocaust education, it is imperative to revisit his past. In 1944, the Kellen's survived the Holocaust while hiding in a barn thanks to a Lithuanian farmer and Mr. Kellen's foresight to leave the Kovno ghetto after hearing about an *Aktion* targeting the ghetto's children on March 26, 1944.

The Kellens and approximately 35,000 Lithuanian Jews experienced disruption of quotidian life through violence and massacres at the hands of Lithuanian nationalists, police

⁴⁷ "About the Founder, Henry Kellen," El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, <https://elpasoholocaustmuseum.org/about-the-founder-henry-kellen>, Last accessed April 2, 2021; Gladstein and Cohen, "El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center," 12-14.

⁴⁸ For a more detailed look on donors and stakeholders of the free-standing museum see Gladstein, and Cohen, *El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center: El Paso—The Wild West Welcomes Holocaust Survivors*, (Gaithersburg: Signature Book Printing Press, 2012).

units, and neighbors, believing them Judeo-Bolshevist threats and economic competition after the German invasion on June 22, 1941. Lithuanian Jews were terrorized and killed by their neighbors in a series of pogroms that ranged from beating them with crowbars to burning down the occupied Slobodka Yeshiva.⁴⁹ The Lithuanian nationalists and combined Lithuanian Auxiliaries and Einsatzgruppen units murdered the Kaunas Jews at the VII and IX Forts from June 24-27. Approximately 38,000 were killed in pogroms and aktions in Kaunas and 12,000 in the borderlands. The Kovno ghetto was sealed off on August 15, 1941, and suffered two main *aktionen* on October 4 in the “small ghetto” and October 29, at the “large ghetto.” By September 1943, The Kovno (Kaunas) ghetto became the Kauon Concentration camp under SS Captain Wilhelm Goecke and 3,500 Jews were sent to satellite camps.⁵⁰ During the liquidation of the ghetto in the Estonian Aktion, 2,700 Jews (elderly and children) were sent to labor camps in Estonia or deported to Auschwitz.⁵¹ On March 24-27, Kinder Aktion took place in Kovno ghetto where 1,800 infants, children, and the elderly were murdered.⁵²

The camp was liquidated on July 8, 1944. Kovno was liberated by the Soviet Army on August 15, 1944.⁵³ The Kellens’ survival, therefore, ensured that the atrocities that occurred in the Holocaust will not be forgotten. Additionally, 1994 marked a milestone connecting public

⁴⁹ Sara Ginaite-Rubinson, *Resistance and Survival: The Jewish Community in Kaunas 1941-1944* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 2015) 35-37. Ginaite-Rubinson was part of the ghetto resistance and describes how a 9,200 “procession of shadows were marched to their death” to describe the October 29, 1941, Aktion (65).

⁵⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Photo Archives #81079, Courtesy of George Kadish/Zvi Kadushin, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa11839> Last accessed, May 3, 2022.

⁵¹ Ibid, *Resistance and Survival, 198-199*. She incorporates witness accounts describing the brutal search for children in the ghetto of the March 27 Kinder Aktion from the *Kaunas Ghetto and its Fighters*, by Meyer Jellin and Dimitry Gelpernas.

⁵² Jews in the Kovno ghetto are boarded onto trucks during a deportation action to either a work camp near Kovno or Estonia,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kovno>, Last accessed, Jan.3, 2022.; Kovno: Historical Background the Holocaust,” Yad Vashem, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/kovno.html>, Last accessed Jan. 7, 2023.

⁵³ Ibid., “Jews in the Kovno ghetto are boarded onto trucks.” <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kovno>, Last accessed, Jan.3, 2022.; Kovno: Historical Background the Holocaust,” Yad Vashem, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/stories/kovno.html>, Last accessed Jan. 7, 2023

construction of Holocaust memory within a regional setting when Kellen and Rabbi Stephen Leon, Rabbi Emeritus at Congregation B'nai Zion, organized field trips for school students to watch *Schindler's List* in local theaters.⁵⁴

In 2008, The El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, located at 715 N. Oregon, reopened in the downtown museum district, 1.2 the U.S.-Mexico border's port of entry at the Paso Del Norte International Bridge. The museum was designed by Victor Mireles, who immersed himself in Holocaust literature and scholarship to bring the Jewish community's vision of the museum and permanent exhibition to fruition. In collaboration with Henry Kellen and Dr. Mimi R. Gladstein, Mireles refined the narrative for the museum to "chronicle the events of the Holocaust in a manner that relates to the lives of the museum's visitors."⁵⁵ Part of this process was a commitment to present the museum's materials in both English and Spanish. This early inclusion showed an institution engaged with its majority Latinx population. However, the finely interwoven threads connecting the Jewish and Latinx communities are difficult to find—besides the inclusion of bilingual aspects to the permanent exhibition and a bilingual docent, how does the museum reflect or engage with representation of the lives of borderlanders and the border experience?⁵⁶

While EPHM has expanded several times, it has not transformed in the ways that many of the other Holocaust museums in the southwest have. The DHHRM, The HMH, and the Holocaust Museum LA(HMLA) are prime examples of the changes in Holocaust museums since

⁵⁴ Interview with Stephen Leon by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, June 23, 2021.

⁵⁵ Gladstein and Cohen, *El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center*, 6-7.

⁵⁶ Interview with Jamie Flores by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, April 2021. In 2016, the community outreach program *Community Encounters* was established in the middle of the politicized U.S. Presidential election to foster dialogue. During the COVID-19 Pandemic the *All People Have Voice* series served to promote dialogue and representation through *The Hate You Give*, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and *Dante and Aristotle Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. The museum's outreach programming and committed partnership with the YWCA Paso Del Norte constitute its diversity and inclusion work.

their modest beginnings from small exhibits at Jewish Community Centers, and midsize museums to becoming Holocaust and Human Rights museums. From 2017-2022, these three Holocaust museums expanded to include CEOs and widened the scope of their missions to reflect the needs of their communities by incorporating human rights and other genocides as permanent galleries, virtual tours and invested in innovative technology to engage with survivor testimony such as USC Shoah *Dimensions in Testimony*.⁵⁷ In 2019, the HMM underwent a multimillion expansion that included several technology enhanced galleries, a human rights wing, and a bilingual permanent exhibition and plans a name change to transition into a human rights center to establish itself at the forefront of museology while EPHM has not incorporated genocide nor human rights into its mission or permanent exhibit.⁵⁸

These museology trends illustrate an understanding of the Holocaust as an event of global proportions affecting humanity understood in terms of World War II (1939-1945) and placed within the context of other genocides like the Armenian genocide (1915-1917), the Rwandan genocide (1994), and the mass violence and detention faced by the Uyghurs on the basis of religion and ethnicity in China since 2014. These changes illustrate that museums have engaged with other genocides nationally and regionally since 1995, and in more critical engagement with genocide since through the Simon Skjold Center for the Prevention of

⁵⁷ The HMLA renamed and redefined itself at the cusp of social, racial, and political upheaval in the U.S. (i.e., the rise of antisemitism, the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue, the continued assault of black citizens by law enforcement). Like EPHM, it has not engaged in Genocide and Human Rights directly like Tucson, Dallas and Houston and other Holocaust museums (Human Rights wings, and extensive engagement with genocide and human rights.)

⁵⁸ “2021-204 Strategic Plan,” Holocaust Museum Houston, <https://user-qbed71z.cld.bz/HMH-2021-2024-Strategic-Plan/12-13/>, Last accessed February 2, 2021.; and “About HMM: History of the Museum,” Holocaust Museum Houston, <https://hmm.org/about/> Last Accessed February 2, 2021.

Genocide since 2013.⁵⁹ These shifts and expansions illustrate museum becoming attuned to their community's diverse populations, historiographic research, and practice.

This trend is also reflected in recent scholarship by historians of genocide such as Donald Bloxham and Dirk Moses, which places the Holocaust within a larger continuum of genocides moving away from the notion of the Holocaust as the paradigmatic model. These historians embrace a critical comparative framework in which the Holocaust is the paradigmatic model of genocide without losing specificity, scope and its repercussions on European Jewry, social, political, and geographical context.⁶⁰ This historiography serves as an important basis for the inclusion of genocide and human rights in most of the Holocaust museums in the southwest.

The Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, formerly the Jewish History Museum and Holocaust Center Tucson, was established in 2015 on the Tucson Jewish Museum's campus founded in 2005. Unlike the rest of the museums discussed above, the TJMHC was established after the Holocaust museum and memorial boom of the 1990s. Yet it illustrates the importance of Holocaust education and a community desire to engage with survivors, the lessons of the Holocaust, and to incorporate the Holocaust into broader understandings of genocidal violence.⁶¹ Located within 60 miles of the U.S Mexico border, the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust

⁵⁹ "About T Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention>, Last accessed Nov. 11, 2022. However, like human rights, atrocity prevention and genocide prevention are [aspirational] moral indictments and non-interventional. Moreover, like Moses argues the parameters of what genocides look like need to expand as it was an expanding concept.

⁶⁰ Dirk Moses, "Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Genocides?: The Canadian Human Rights Museum and Grievable Suffering," *In Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, edited by Alex Laban Hinton, Stephen Eric Brunner, and Nela Navarro, (Rutgers University Press: 2014)215-223. Moses illustrates the tensions over competitive memory and suffering stemming from the extractive lessons of the Holocaust as the paradigmatic model for genocide and human rights abuses in Holocaust and Human Rights Museums; "The Holocaust and World History: Raphael Lemkin and Comparative Methodology" in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Bergham Books, 2012); Donald Bloxham, "Introduction," *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 1-14.

⁶¹ "About Us: Who We Are," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/>, Last accessed Jan 3, 2023, The Jewish History Museum and Holocaust Center (JHM) became the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) in 2022.

Center Campus resides on Tohono O’odham territory, as stated on the museum’s website. It is located at 564 S Stone Avenue in the historic Barrio Viejo neighborhood, which used to be a multicultural and Latinx /Hispanic. ⁶²The museum is distinctive in the Southwest as it is both a Jewish Museum and a Holocaust Center. The Holocaust Center’s first Executive Director was Sol Davis. Davis’s curatorial and theoretical imprint is weaved into the narrative, planning, and design of the core exhibition. The museum and permanent exhibit emerged from a survivor portrait exhibit co-curated by Davis in 2013. The Holocaust Center was a “50-year-old long aspiration of the Jewish community of Southern Arizona to preserve the histories and experiences of survivors.”⁶³ And as such, the Holocaust Center is rooted in education, testimony, and shared histories, which allow for “messy entanglements.”⁶⁴ These messy entanglements are seen through the museum’s curatorial approach enacting Jewish values, the lessons of the Holocaust, Human rights and connecting Jewish history in the southern Arizona region to complex histories. This is important as Holocaust memory is being mediated in Holocaust museums through survivor testimonies, second and third-generation survivors narratives and material objects as there are fewer survivors left.

Tucson architect Thomas Sayler-Brown and the SBBL architectural firm designed the Tucson Holocaust Center. The Museum’s design and structure aid in moving the broader narrative and history of the Holocaust and its vision to center survivors and their “intimate

⁶² “About Us,” Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/about> Last accessed April 3, 2022.

⁶³ Bryan “Sol” Davis, Interview with Mayra Martinez, El Paso, November 18, 2021; Bryan Sol Davis *Teaching with Testimony, A Metalanguage*, (PhD., dissertation, University of Arizona, 2018), 12-13.; Davis co-curated an exhibition on the Holocaust mediated through Holocaust survivors in 2013 that became part of the permanent collection. Dr. Davis comes from a line of Holocaust Museum directors—his mother was the EPHM after the museum’s electrical fire in 2001. Under Davis the TJMHC crafted its lens toward testimony, education, shared histories, and advocacy.

⁶⁴ The higher numbers of survivors in Tucson and organizations devoted to Holocaust memory and education show the engagement with preserving and continuing memory as survivors are fewer each year.

histories,” and experiences while tying it to the historic building it is a part of on the historic Synagogue campus. For Sayler-Brown, every decision and aspect of the Holocaust center was intentional and loaded with meaning to create an experience that would “reflect and respect the Holocaust.”⁶⁵ This is important for a core exhibition and mission rooted in testimony. The design materials follow the design elements found in other museums and memorial sites across the U.S. that include wood, steel, brick, exposed beams, and unfinished grout—design choices made to highlight the exhibit. The Holocaust Center’s space reflects newer practices involving lighter and brighter spaces, limiting the number of authentic artifacts it displays by focusing on resistance, survivor testimony, and photographs throughout the galleries. The Holocaust History Center displays material through timelines, text, pictures, audio, video /documentary, and artifacts. The lighting and open space aid in the sensory experience of the visitor and reception of material presented.

El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM) and Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) Museum Comparisons

This section will compare both EPHM’s and TJMHC’s history, and trajectory. A comparative approach allows one to see how these museums engaged with issues affecting their communities since “memory is political” and, as such, reflect their regional contexts and composition. El Paso, Texas’ and Tucson, Arizona’s unique geographic locations and demographic compositions inform their respective Holocaust museums’ permanent exhibits, outreach programs, and museum trajectories. The Hispanic/Latinx population in 2020 was

⁶⁵ “Thomas Sayler-Brown on Designing the Holocaust History Center: I Tick So Many Boxes,” Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, *Vimeo*, March 18, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/525741425>, Last accessed April 3, 2022.

estimated at 82% in El Paso and 45.5 % in Tucson.⁶⁶ The Jewish community in El Paso is estimated to be around 5,000 (1% of the overall population), while the Jewish population in Tucson (according to Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashekfy's 2019 projection) is estimated to be at 22,400 (4% overall population), thus, constituting a larger Jewish presence in their community. In both cases, the Holocaust Museums serve to educate the Jewish and non-Jewish communities about the Holocaust in a space far removed from the sites of atrocity geographically and temporally.

The El Paso Holocaust Museum and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center's educational focus is middle-high school students making the trek from history lessons at school and into the experiential and multimodal museum tours ending with survivor testimonies, in person (Tucson) or recorded interviews (El Paso).⁶⁷ The driving mission of EPHM is to use education as a tool to create civically engaged upstanders. EPHM holds a Biannual Educators Conference, a summer camp, and several programs ranging from book clubs and temporary exhibits geared toward children and youth. Before the pandemic, around 15,000 people visited the museum to learn about the Holocaust and other "genocides and to be vigilant against discrimination and othering."⁶⁸ This is particularly important due to the rise in racial violence

⁶⁶ Lev Gringauz, "'Change takes time': How the Tucson area's Jewish federation and foundation came together," May 17, 2022 <https://jewishphilanthropy.com/change-takes-time-how-the-tucson-areas-jewish-federation-and-foundation-cametoegether/#:~:text=The%20Tucson%20area%20has%20around,relationship%20between%20the%20two%20age,ncie> Last Accessed May 20, 2022. According to the Jewish Philanthropies the Jewish population in Tucson ranges between 25, 000- 30,000; See also, Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky, "United States Jewish Population, 2019," *The American Jewish Yearbook*, vol. 19 (2019),135-231, Last accessed May 4, 2022. There has not been a community study since 2002.

⁶⁷ Karla Martinez, "Greater El Paso Jewish Demographic Study," (M.A thesis, University of Texas at El Paso, 2021) 22-23. ProQuest Thesis and Dissertations, Retrieved from: https://scholarworks.utep.edu/open_etd/3294. In 2019, as listed by the Jewish Community Study there were six survivors in Greater El Paso at the initial stages of this research. In the summer of 2022, Mr. Guy Hauptman (z" l), one of two survivors died. Mr. Hauptmann a "hidden child of the Holocaust" arrived in El Paso with his family via HIAS and Emile Reisel. He was an integral part of EPHM community.

⁶⁸ Interview with Walter Chayes by Mayra Martinez, El Paso Texas, December 8, 2021.

and xenophobia in the U.S. and in the borderland. From 2016-2019, TJMHC welcomed around 10,000 students in its first four years (2016-2019). EPHM works closely with the Texas Genocide and Holocaust Commission and the USHMM for content, conferences, and lectures. Similarly, TJMHC docents and educators from Southern Arizona developed toolkits and lesson plans with the USHMM. The museum sustains an educational program with the University of Arizona to provide internship opportunities for graduate students to learn more about Holocaust education, research, and museum practice.

Both museums have initiatives geared toward Holocaust education through displays, testimony, and educational toolkits to fulfill state mandates on teaching the Holocaust. The Texas Holocaust and Genocide Commission was created in 2009 by Senate Bill 482 to provide “resources to students, educators, and the general public regarding the Holocaust and other genocides.”⁶⁹ In Arizona, the Arizona House Bill 2241 " Holocaust Education Bill" was introduced and became law requiring public schools across the state to teach about the Holocaust and other genocides.⁷⁰ Holocaust survivors in Tucson and Arizona actively engaged in lobbying and providing testimony to make this bill a reality. This is significant as Holocaust distortion, denial, antisemitism, and revisionist nationalist right-wing movements have gained traction in the U.S. and Europe. Further, the global and transnational aspects of the Holocaust offer a comparative and often excluded history and a means to engage with the contemporary moment.

EPHM collaborated with the University of Texas at El Paso’s Jewish Studies Program, Dr. Ezra Cappell, and the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso to bring renowned Jewish authors such as Art Spiegelman, Gary Shteyngart, and Deborah Lipstadt to EPHM and UTEP

⁶⁹ About Us,” The Texas Holocaust and Genocide Antisemitism Advisory Commission, <https://thgaac.texas.gov/about> , Last accessed, Jan 2, 2023

⁷⁰ “Resources for Educators,” Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/resources-for-educators> , Last accessed Nov 22, 2022.

(2008-2018). These lectures and film screenings enabled first-generation Latinx students to further engage with antisemitism, representation of the Holocaust, and the Jewish diaspora. The El Paso Holocaust Museum became a staple in Cappell's college courses at UTEP which allowed students to engage in guided tours by Holocaust survivors and a space to retell his family's experiences during the Holocaust and lives after the war, as a third-generation survivor.⁷¹ The museum has served as many students' first encounters with Holocaust museums and memorials, survivors, and Jewish history. This partnership with UTEP's Jewish Studies program showed the museum's role as an institution committed to educating and including a wider group of students and researchers.

Both Holocaust museums have played a crucial role as they prepared visitors and students to visit other museums such as the USHMM, and sites of atrocity across Poland and Germany.⁷² Visiting EPHM prepared first generation Latinx students for their study abroad trek across Poland and Germany to further engage with concentration sites and ghettos such as Warsaw, Krakow, and Auschwitz in Spring 2016 and 2018.⁷³ In Tucson, students and community members have embarked on the trip through the March of the Living led by Rabbi Stephanie Aaron of Congregation Chaverim since 2001. The MOTL began in 1988. (Initiative started).⁷⁴ The Poland itinerary included overnights in Krakow, Zamosc and Warsaw, during

⁷¹ Interview with Ezra Cappell by Mayra Martinez, Charleston, South Carolina, November 16, 2021. His grandfather, Charles Cappell was interned at Ft. Breendonk prison camp for political prisoners in Brussels in 1942. His grandmother's experience differed as she cared for orphaned children in one of the camps. Their testimonies demonstrate that life did not end after the Holocaust and the ways subsequent generations engage with the Holocaust and testimony. It further shows the importance of transmission of memory and narratives from generation to generation. Cappell was fortunate to interview his grandparents and preserve their testimony and fill the silences around their experiences.

⁷² "Jewish History Museum and the Gould Holocaust History Center: An Annual Report on the 2017-2018 Season," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/annualreport2017-18>, Accessed November 11, 2021.

⁷³ Interview with Ezra Cappell by Mayra Martinez, Charleston, South Carolina, November 16, 2021.

⁷⁴ Interview with Rabbi Stephanie Aaron by Mayra Martinez, Tucson, Arizona, April 2022.

which the delegation visited historical sites, Jewish quarters, synagogues and memorials and heard a “Righteous Among the Nations” speaker.⁷⁵ Their experience is mediated through regional flair and the community of survivors, second-and third generation survivors and those involved in the process of commemoration and Holocaust education.

Permanent Exhibition El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM)

The permanent exhibition of the EPHM is a reflection of the historiographic trends that were common at the time of the museum’s founding, which follow a standard chronological periodization and emphasize the singularity of the Holocaust as a historical event.

It emphasizes the responsibility of the German state, the role of liberators fighting during WWII, and presents the U.S. as Nazi Germany’s antithesis, through its pluralistic and democratic values.

One overarching narrative in the EPHM is that of Jewish history and memory, which is framed through Jewish persecution and violence since antiquity, the destruction of the Second Temple, antisemitism, and violence (i.e., edicts of expulsion to 19th century pogroms), World War I, and economic depression leading to the Holocaust. Yet, the permanent exhibit is framed through “Life in Europe before the Reich” and “Before They Were Victims” galleries to show robust and heterogenous Jewish communities in the 20th century before the rupture and loss across civilized Europe as the Reich extended its territory through collaboration, annexation, and invasion. The temporal framing shifts between “*Life in Europe before the Nazi Party*” and the “*Rise of the Nazi Party (1933-1938)*.” This narrative reflects the tension between memory and historical trauma found in testimonies, as James Young asks “Where does memory begin? After

⁷⁵ Ibid., Interview with Rabbi Aaron, rabbi Aaron has taken over 10 trips to Poland and 9 trips were organized as part of the March of the Living Campaign which included survivors and local youth from southern Arizona. These trips are an extension of her commitment to Holocaust Education, community, and the “sacred work of memory.”

the War, or the *hurban*—destructions of the 1st and 2nd Temple?” and “where does it end?” This temporal shift establishes collective memory of antisemitism and violence against Jewish communities leading to the Holocaust, *Shoah*.⁷⁶

The galleries and timelines of the EPHM’s permanent exhibition reflect a chronological periodization that moves the events of the Holocaust from 1933-1945. However, events and policies during the Holocaust were not linear. The permanent exhibition timelines can be divided into three major categories to reflect a standard periodization: 1933-1938, chronicling Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of Germany to the November Pogrom with an emphasis on Kristallnacht and Nazi propaganda; 1938-1941, the early years of World War II, including the German invasion of Poland, and the Soviet Union; and 1941-1945, the Final Solution to resistance and liberation. Lastly, the remembrance and memorial room mark the postwar period and survivors’ reflections on the war and immigration to the U.S through brief testimonies. However, the permanent exhibit and galleries present a few temporal and narrative shifts.

Like most Holocaust museums in the U.S., the influence of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s narrative and design is present at the El Paso Holocaust Museum through the exposed steel and wooden beams, brick and concrete facade, replicas of box cars, staged barracks, surveillance towers and crematoria to evoke industrial mass murder, using the iconography of Auschwitz. The darker walls and dim lighting add to the somber mood and narrative that begins with “The rise of the Nazi Party,” with its triadic panel depicting Hitler and Nazi soldiers and an array of enshrined Nazi memorabilia and artefacts in its gallery. The narrative in this section moves from a defeated Germany coming out of WWI, the economic depression, “radical ideology,” and conditions that led to Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor of

⁷⁶ James Young, *The Changing Face of Holocaust Memory* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1995), 10.

Germany, the Anschluss, and the November Pogrom. This triadic mural, coupled with the corporate IBM printer, display aims to provide a layered narrative of involvement and collaborators including the “technology that enabled genocide,” oscillating between a moderate intentionalist approach and an ultra-intentionalist approach focused on antisemitism,⁷⁷ an over-involved Nazi state and the uniqueness of the Holocaust thesis prevalent in the 1980-1990s, further reflecting the tension in museology and historiographic trends of the early 2000’s. This is significant as public institutions reflect the tension over memory and academic debates on the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the extractive moral lessons. The dark solemn mood and tension are carried onto the propaganda and Kristallnacht Galleries (bilingual posters), the ghettos and transportation, and into the world of the concentration camps.

After the representation of Kristallnacht, the permanent exhibit signals a geographical shift toward the East through the ghettoization process and transportation to death camps and killing centers. The narrative moves from 1938-1942 toward the Wannsee Conference & the Final Solution led by Reinhard Heydrich. The museum features a replica of a rail car used to transport Jews across occupied territories and into the system of concentration camps, labor camps, and killing centers. The visitor is ushered to board the rail car and into the darkness of concentration camps, where visitors are met with barbed wire, a watch tower and replica of the

⁷⁷ Doris Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 30; A modified intentionalist approach is present in Bergen’s scholarship. Bergen acknowledges the evolution of Nazi policies, the gamut of perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust in the name of race and space while encompassing Hitler and the effects of WWI. Bergen argues that “Hitler was an essential factor in Nazism and the genocide it produced” (30). For more on the historiography of the functionalist/intentionalist debate, see Donald Bloxham’s *The Final Solution: A Genocide*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 313-320. The Functionalist and Intentionalist approach in Holocaust historiography gained traction in the 1970s-1980s and the 1990’s (313). One school of thought situated Hitler and antisemitism within a master plan of exclusion and extermination as early as 1933 prior to the evolution of exclusionary policies, and expulsions preceding the Final Solution. The intentionalist also support the uniqueness of the Holocaust and are preoccupied with its trivialization and that of Jewish victims while promoting its position as the prime example of extreme violence and genocide. Functionalists expand the scope of involvement and economics, geography, war, and expansions that led to evolutionary policies leading to the Final Solution and genocide. Notable proponents of the uniqueness model include Deborah Lipstadt, Michael Berenbaum and Yehuda Bauer.

Auschwitz gate with the infamous *Arbeit Macht Frei* motto, and a diorama depicting Auschwitz, Monowitz, and the killing center Birkenau. This section also displays brushes, shoes, teeth, and cups from diverse camps along with Zyklon B pellets, and whips used by Nazis. Additionally, the wide array of authentic artifacts from Majdanek and Auschwitz serve to ground and bridge the geographical sites of atrocity to “a remote corner of the diaspora” in El Paso.

An enlarged photo of the survivors looking like the “living dead” at the “little camp,” at Buchenwald, however, complicates the representation of the world of the camps. Without the proper context, visitors would most likely assume that this photo is from Auschwitz. The infamous picture is part of the “iconography and memory of the Holocaust,” and as such was misprinted, reprinted, and decontextualized in magazines and exhibits.⁷⁸ The composition of the camp at Buchenwald looked different before the death marches and after liberation photos were taken. This staged photo is one of the most impactful yet, it illustrates older museology trends that condense and conflate the universe of the concentration camps and killing centers into a small area, or as an extension of different sections of one camp, Auschwitz. The tone and color shift as visitors exit the world of concentration camps and into the galleries depicting resistance such as the garden mural with brief narratives on the righteous among the nations.

The narrative from “darkness to light,” is evident as the gallery depicts both Jewish and non-Jewish resistance and quotes from American G. I.’s present at liberation. Local liberators have been part EPHM’s permanent exhibition since its reopening in 2008. The museum pays homage to American soldiers who witnessed the devastation of the concentration camps they

⁷⁸ Sharon Oster, “The Musselman Liberated: Impossible Holocaust Metaphors in Survivor Memoirs and Photography,” in *Lessons and Legacies XIV: The Holocaust in the Twenty-First Century: Relevance and Challenges in the Digital Age*, edited by Time Cole and Simone Gigliotti, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 39-40.; See Figure 1.1 *EPHM Concentration Camp*; and EPHM Virtual Tour - Part 7: Final Solution (360 VIDEO),” El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, YouTube. Dec 15, 2021, <https://youtu.be/I1OIhq6GpAA>, Last accessed, March 3, 2022.

liberated through its “Liberators” wall and a small display case featuring objects soldiers carried. Featured is a brief excerpt from Ernesto Pedregon-Martinez from the 104th Infantry Army Division depicting his encounter with a dimly lit camp and survivors whom he described as “a moving dark cloud,” and as “flimsily dressed human beings.” The unit’s mission was to look for any S.S. remaining at the Dora-MittelBau (Nordhausen) Concentration Camp.⁷⁹ The camp was the center of a slave-prisoner network of subcamps and was liberated by U.S Troops in April 1945. Pedregon-Martinez’s excerpt further reflects the shock of discovery and death in the camps. “We thought we were entering a hospital for the mentally ill. When we entered the barracks, there were piles of dead bodies lying around [...] when the medics arrived. We left to complete our mission.”⁸⁰ In 2015, the Timberwolves of the 104th Division who liberated Nordhausen were commemorated during International Holocaust Day.⁸¹ The inclusion of liberators from Ft. Bliss and El Paso ground the exhibition within the context of World War II, the border, and U.S. involvement during the war documenting and bearing witness to the atrocities committed during the Holocaust. The section ends leading to the brightest and most peaceful room, the Memorial and Reflection Room.

The Memorial and Reflection Room contains elements common in many Holocaust museums like the skylight, the eternal flame, the tree of life, and plaques commemorating families and entire communities ruptured because of the Holocaust. The gallery contains portraits of local survivors and media stations to search through archived interviews and

⁷⁹ “Overview: Dora-MittelBau,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia,, 2022. <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/dora-mittelbau-overview>, Last accessed, Nov. 11. Dora-MittelBau was a subcamp of Buchenwald. In October 1944, it became an independent concentration camp with over 30 subcamps and the center of enslaved and forced labor.

⁸⁰ “Liberators Panel: Pedregon Martinez,” Author’s notes of EPHM’s self-guided tour.

⁸¹ Samantha Sooner, “El Paso Holocaust Museum Commemorates 70th Anniversary,” *KWRG*, Feb. 2, 2015, <https://www.krwg.org/regional/2015-02-02/el-paso-holocaust-museum-commemorates-70th-anniversary>

synopses. This section contains two of the three reflective benches found in the museum. The Hall of Remembrance engages the visitor turned witness to partake in the commemoration process by placing *yahrzeit* candles and commemorative stones with the words “L'dor v'dor,” or “from generation to generation,” inscribed in Hebrew. The triadic motto Remember, Reflect, Respond calls memory into action.

On December 15, 2021, The El Paso Holocaust Museum launched a narrated and interactive 360-degree video tour consisting of eight parts that chronicle life before the war, the rise of antisemitism, deportation via railcars in a mounted replica of a boxcar, the arrival of the camps marking the Final Solution, and proceeding unto liberation, as well as the hall of remembrance.⁸² The virtual tour guides visitors to move along with the narration to view objects and details about the permanent exhibit such as the replica of a German Jewish household set for the sabbath and entering the replica of a barrack with the enlarged photograph of the “Little Camp” at Buchenwald.⁸³ Intended for visitors across the Jewish community, the general public, and school-aged youth, the tour allows for a deeper engagement with the self-guided permanent exhibition.

The virtual tour is significant as the museum aims to adapt newer technology to engage a wider audience. While the museum’s virtual tour seemingly expands the scope of its audience it is still limiting since it does not adhere to the bilingual model that museum sees as an essential

⁸² “About Us, “El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center. <https://elpasoholocaustmuseum.org/about-us/> The galleries include *Life in Europe before the Nazi Party; the Rise of the Nazi Party; the Use of Nazi Propaganda; Kristallnacht; Life in the Ghettos; Transportation by Railcars to the Camps; Life and Death in Nazi Concentration Camps; Liberation by the Allied Forces; the Righteous Among the Nations; a Memorial and Reflection Room; and a Gallery of El Paso Holocaust Survivors*, as stated on the museum’s website.

⁸³ “EPHM Virtual Tour-Part _Pre-war (360 VIDEO), El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, <https://youtu.be/KO-do5awhqM>; and “EPHM Virtual Tour - Part 7: Final Solution (360 VIDEO),” El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, YouTube. Dec 15, 2021, <https://youtu.be/11OIhq6GpAA>, Last accessed, March 3, 2022.

part of their mission as the first bilingual Holocaust museum in the U.S.⁸⁴ However, the virtual content is inaccessible to Spanish-speaking audiences as the virtual tour is not in Spanish, and Spanish subtitles are unavailable— limiting a transnational audience of researchers, general public from Mexico, and Latin America including Holocaust museums across Latin America, even though EPHM’s location on the U.S.-Mexico border. Linguistic inaccessibility limits the immersion or engagement of its Spanish-speaking audience wishing to engage with Holocaust education offered by the museum. In this sense, the museum could engage more with its 82% Latinx, bilingual and binational population. Moreover, the survivor video testimonies available are not translated into Spanish or subtitled, nor is a visible transcript made available. However, the testimony of survivor Neftali Frankl is the only interview available in Spanish as Frankl emigrated and spent most of his life in Mexico after the war. Interview summaries exist in Spanish and as part of an older gallery are deeply buried on the museum’s digital archives, to which an active hyperlink does not exist on the museum’s webpage.⁸⁵

Despite the EPHM’s 2008 renovation and new virtual offerings, the museum’s overall aesthetic and narrative focus remains firmly rooted in the museological and historiographical trends of the 1990s when it was first founded. There is a strong emphasis on the Nazi state and enlarged black and white photographs have the effect of denying the agency of victims of Nazi genocidal policies common in the 2000s. Darker gallery colors, dioramas, and lack of engagement with the Holocaust as a genocide further demonstrate that the museum has not evolved in the same way that many others have in the last thirty years. Additionally, the lack of public records, and annual reports does not allow for a critical engagement with the museum’s

⁸⁴ Interview with Jamie Flores by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, April 2023.

⁸⁵ “Leer Sus Historias,” El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, <https://elpasoholocaustmuseum.org/survivor-exhibit-esp/>, Last accessed Dec. 5, 2021.

trajectory, Holocaust education, exhibition and content updates, steering committees, and future goals. EPHM's permanent exhibition also raises questions of what to do with artefacts that no longer carry the narrative forward but are part of the museum's history.

*Permanent Exhibition of the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center TJMHC*⁸⁶

The Tucson Jewish History Museum and Holocaust Center places the Holocaust and the Shoah into the larger framework of genocide without losing specificity by engaging in a multidirectional approach. The museum's timeline reflects a standard Holocaust periodization that puts the Holocaust within the context of World War II. Part I looks at the prewar context, 1933-1939, and part II at the war period, 1939-1945. This periodization serves an educational purpose as students who visit the museum learn about the Holocaust in the context of the Second World War. The permanent exhibit is also rooted to the space the museum inhabits and mediates the narrative through the experiences of the local survivors in Southern Arizona.

The Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center developed an online virtual 3D map of the Holocaust center, and a ten-part guided virtual tour precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸⁷ The virtual tour launched in November 2021 on the museum's website and YouTube channel. The docent-led virtual tour consists of gallery themes and temporal framing that correspond to the 3D virtual layout, where the visitor can experience the museum's galleries, grounded in testimony and the Jewish experience. They include: Holocaust survivors in Southern Arizona; The Stages of Genocide; Poem; Liberators and Righteous Gentiles; Suspended Lineage;

⁸⁶ This section reflects both the permanent and virtual tours offered by the museum due to the COVID-19 pandemic and sheltering in place visiting the museum campus was not a viable option. As a researcher, I attended lectures, online programming and utilized the museum's concise narrative and framework available through the digital map, and the virtual tour series.

⁸⁷ "Home." Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/>, Last accessed, Nov. 3, 2021.

Life After the War; A Case History; Contemporary Human Rights; and Contemplation.⁸⁸ The museum frames the visitor's experience on resistance and remembrance through the statue of a resistance fighter and reflection space replicating the Auschwitz gate, yahrzeit candles and stones from Auschwitz linking the memory of survivors and victims to Southern Arizona.

The history of the Holocaust at the TJMHC begins with presenting definitions of antisemitism, the Holocaust, and genocide to mediate visitor experiences. The devastating effects of these processes on European Jewry generally and survivors from Southern Arizona and their families specifically carry through to the "Intimate Histories" and "Suspended lineage" Galleries. In the "Intimate Histories gallery," two banner-sized photographs of local survivors depict life before and after the Holocaust. The portrait of a five-year-old Wanda Wolovsky portrays ordinary life in Warsaw before the Holocaust. Meanwhile, the photograph of survivor, Rosie Neumann and her family depicts migration to the U.S. and their arrival in Tucson.⁸⁹ The Museum then ties together life before the war, the arrival of Jewish survivors and their journeys to the United States and Tucson by chronicling events that led to the Holocaust, genocide, liberation and commemorating the life of survivors in southern Arizona and their efforts to thrive in the diaspora. By focusing on individual survivor stories, and resistance the scope and statistics of the Holocaust and genocide are palpable.

The TJMHC places the Holocaust within a continuum of genocides and within the wider scope of antisemitism. This way of contextualizing the Holocaust aligns with more recent historiographical trends, as exemplified by the work of Dirk Moses and Donald Bloxham. Genocide, mass murder, and violence are presented in the TJMHC without compromising the

⁸⁸ "Introduction: Holocaust Center Virtual Tour, Part 1 of 10," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, YouTube, Nov. 3, 2021, <https://youtu.be/SzT4h4wbhKI>, Last accessed April 24, 2022.

⁸⁹ "Holocaust Survivors in Southern Arizona: Holocaust Center Virtual Tour, Part 2 of 10," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, YouTube, Nov. 3, 2021, <https://youtu.be/vXTkd086NR8>, Last accessed April 24, 2022.

museum's centrality on survivors, their testimonies, and their presence in Southern Arizona. The museum places importance on the process of "naming the crime without a name," as stated by Winston Churchill in 1941. The term genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin and extensively explored in *Axis and Rule* in 1944, and the term was adopted by the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide in 1948. Genocide, according to Article II can be defined as:

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a nation, ethnic, racial, or religious group, as such (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁹⁰

The term signals that genocide is a series of gradual processes and evolving policies. Dirk Moses argues that for Lemkin, although the concept of genocide was not new "the evil it describes it as old as the history of mankind," where the "object of destruction is a certain group."⁹¹ The Holocaust was specific and evolved within certain social, political context. This engagement with current historiography and museology are seen through the *Stages of Genocide* station.

The Eight Stages of Genocide, developed by Gregory Stanton, are displayed thematically in the museum, and stress the commonalities and differences of genocidal processes and events in a synthesized form to engage further study and discussion in a short time frame. The Eight Stages of genocide include: *Classification, Symbolization; Dehumanization; Organization; Polarization; Preparation; and Extermination, and Denial*. Allowing for critical engagement with the Holocaust as an event in Jewish history, part of multicausal processes and policies that

⁹⁰ "Genocide," United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>, Last accessed November. 11, 2021.

⁹¹ Dirk Moses, *The Holocaust and World History*, 278.

led to the genocide of 6 million Jews, and other groups that correspond with the museum's mission. For example, through *classification*, the racial laws in the U.S. exemplified in the Virginia State Legislature are juxtaposed with the Nuremberg Race Laws, rooting it within a U.S. historical context of systemic racism and exclusionary policies. After the classification process, the next category is *symbolization* which singles groups as "other." *Symbolization* includes two suspended portraits on a wire showing Tucson survivor Klara Maislis Swimmer wearing a yellow star, and three variations of the yellow star with the word Jew, or a J, in the language of origin or nation in which Jews found themselves during the Holocaust—in collaborating countries, annexed areas, and invaded areas in the name of race and space.⁹² A portrait of a woman wearing a blue checkered scarf illustrates how the Pol Pot Regime in Cambodia set people apart. Also represented are symbols that signaled out gay men during the Nazi regime (pink triangles). Through *polarization*, the museum presents a comparative approach to the escalation and progression of genocidal actions, assisted by text, videos, and pictures of the Third Reich, the Cambodian (1975-1979) and Rwandan (1994) genocides to create affect. Lastly, *denial* incorporates the Armenian genocide and its lengthy process to be recognized and the Holocaust, its thorough documentation, *denial*, and trivialization. In this section, a portrait of street art from Guatemala reads " Si Hubo Genocidio," or " Yes, There Was a Genocide," engages with Mayan genocide (death squads, scorched earth policy and cultural rupture of indigenous communities) and the 36 year old repression and civil war in Guatemala.⁹³

⁹² "The Stages of Genocide: Holocaust Center Virtual Tour: Part 3 of 10," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, YouTube, November 3, 2021. <https://youtu.be/xnXiWVxIO5g> April 24, 2022.; "Portrait of Klara (Maislis) Swimmer wearing a yellow star." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Photo Archives #99648. Courtesy of Klara Swimmer, accessed May 3, 2022, <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1121319>; Klara Swimmer, Obituary," Arizona Jewish Post, July 25, 2013, <https://azjewishpost.com/2013/klara-ilona-swimmer/>, Last accessed April 2022. Dr. Klara Swimmer whose portrait is displayed at the TJMHC was a Holocaust survivor who settled in Tucson. Dr. Swimmer and her family left Hungary in 1956 and moved to Israel and New York before relocating to Tucson in 1983. She often shared her testimony with the military and the broader Tucson community.

⁹³ Ariel Goldberg and Laurie Melrood, "Sanctuary," in *Protocols* no. 5 (2019), <https://prtcls.com/article/sanctuary/>

The thematic approach to case studies illustrates that genocides are not part of a distant past, nor are they committed under extraordinary circumstances and allows to understand the scope of genocidal violence that persists. Holocaust education promises that genocides are preventable in their early phase.

A detailed case study and linear approach would begin with other genocides before the Holocaust: The German genocide of the Herero and Nama in colonial Southwest Africa (1904-1907), the Armenian genocide (1915-1923), the genocide of European Jews leading to the Holocaust (1933-1945), the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda (1994) and massacres in UN safe zones like Srebrenica in 1995. *The Eight Stages* signal that these processes can happen out of order, all share similarities, and that not all genocides will look like the paradigmatic model, the Holocaust. Similar patterns exist in most case studies, even though they occurred within specific national, geographical, and political contexts. As Dirk Moses states, “genocides, for all their variation, share the recurring features that congeal in different constellations and different conjectures.”⁹⁴ As the uniqueness of the Holocaust resurfaces through the quantification of victims and casualties, historians like Dan Stone and Dirk Moses stress that comparisons are necessary “otherwise it is rendered outside the realm of human existence.”⁹⁵

Last accessed August 4, 2022. The Maya Indigenous genocide is represented through a small image with graffiti “Si Hubo Genocidio,” according to curator Ariel Goldberg.; and “Nosotros,” Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala, <https://fafg.org/nuestra-historia/>, Accessed, August 4, 2022. Guatemalan Genocide refers to the killings of civilians, especially those of Mayan origin, as part of counter-insurgency operations during the 1960-1996 Guatemalan Civil War. While massacres took place in 1966-1967, the most intensive killings was the Panzós massacre in 1978-1983. The FAFG estimates that 160,000 killed and 40,000 victims of forced disappearances. This also marks large numbers of displaced and refugees migrating northward through Mexico and the U.S.

⁹⁴ Dirk Moses, “The Holocaust and World History,” 284; Moses. “Does the Holocaust Reveal or Conceal Genocides? The Canadian Human Rights Museum and Grievable Suffering,” in *Hidden Genocides: Power, Knowledge, Memory*, edited by Alex Laban Hinton, Stephen Eric Brunner, and Nela Navarro (Rutgers University Press: 2014), 328.

⁹⁵ Dan Stone. “Memory, Memorials and Museums,” *Historiography of the Holocaust* (UK, Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) 509-510; and Dan Stone, “Is it Possible to Compare the Holocaust a Genocide?” (Lecture, Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Oct. London, England. November 30, 2020), <https://www.hmd.org.uk/news/is-it-possible-to-compare-the-holocaust-to-other-genocides/>

After the “Eight Stages of Genocide” the permanent exhibition is depicted through a simple timeline mural to resemble documents where the text and metatext reflect specific events throughout the Holocaust from 1933-1945. Unlike other museums periodization, it is not mediated through Jewish victimhood from antiquity. The timeline depicts events from 1933 to 1939, such as the Nazi ascent to power, the establishment of concentration camps such as Dachau (1933) and Buchenwald (1937); the promulgation of Nuremberg Race Laws (1935); and implementation of a nation-wide pogrom during Kristallnacht (1938). Meanwhile, rescue efforts like kindertransports, the Wagner Rogers Bill, and the Voyage of St. Louis in 1939 depict the complexity of rescue efforts and American attitudes toward refugees and are placed alongside each other to show tension.⁹⁶ Both cases, show the reluctance of U.S state and general public in admitting refugees turning away the idea of 20,000 unaccompanied Jewish children which according to Laura Delano would turn into unassimilable “20,000 ugly adults.” This narrative moves the themes of migration, displacement, and individual stories forward and into the contemporary human rights gallery. The second timeline includes the years from 1939 to 1945, covering the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. The exhibit advances chronologically to the Wannsee Conference, the Establishment of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1942, the Nazi occupation of Hungary in 1944, and concluding with liberation in January-May of 1945.

The section on “liberation” displays portraits of local survivors in the postwar period in displaced persons camps (DP camps), their new lives across Europe, Israel, and United States,

⁹⁶ Michael Dobbs. *The Unwanted: America, Auschwitz and a Village Caught in Between*,” (New York: Alfred A. Knopf) 101-103. The Wagner Rogers Refugee Bill was a Kindertransport like bill that would admit 20,000 Jewish children and whose proponents hoped “would stir the humane instincts in us all,” and relax the restrictive immigration quotas from 1924.; and “The Story of the S.S. St. Louis (1939),” JDC Archives, <https://archives.jdc.org/topic-guides/the-story-of-the-s-s-st-louis/> , Last accessed Jan 2, 2023. The Voyage of the St. Louis’s illustrates the impact of restrictive policies as Jewish refugees were unable to disembark and turned away from Cuba and the U.S. 254 of the 937 refugees were murdered in the Holocaust or during the War.

and highlights their milestones and ordinary events. This section provides a glimpse into life after the war and sets the tone for the commemorative wall displaying portraits of 260 survivors and brief synopses. Along the opposite side leading to the next section on liberation are portraits of survivors that carry onto the wall of survivors and testimony station. The testimony station holds accompanying benches to immerse the visitor in the survivors' first-hand experiences through a large screen. Embedded into the structure of the museum and the middle of the gallery containing the "Stages of Genocide," "Liberation," and "Historical Timeline," on the unfinished concrete floor is the poem "Root" by Miklos Radnoti, whose poetry was discovered after his grave was exhumed. "Root" was composed while Radnoti was in a labor camp in Hungarian-occupied Yugoslavia (present-day Serbia), where he was shot and thrown into a grave in 1944.⁹⁷ The museum then dedicates a small section to local liberators before moving onto the display of Holocaust survivor portraits and testimonies.

The TJMHC, as an American Holocaust Museum devoted to education and memory and democratic ideals, includes the testimony of liberating G.I. troops. The accounts and narratives of American soldiers provide first-hand witness accounts. The museum highlights the memoir of a local cardiac surgeon and his experience in World War II. Brendan Phibbs, a combat surgeon, wrote *The Other Side of Time: A Combat Surgeon in World War II*. His narrative reveals the encounter with survivors and the conditions of Landsberg-Kaufering, a satellite of Dachau. "Never did I see a human form dead or alive in the condition of the survivors here," he wrote. The camp was liberated on April 30, 1945, by U.S. troops.⁹⁸ Allied troops and U.S. liberators

⁹⁷ Interview with Davis, Bryan "Sol," by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, November 18, 2021; and Miklos Radnoti "Root," *Poetry Foundation*, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/miklos-radnoti> Last accessed Nov 3, 2022.

⁹⁸ "Kaufering: Media Essay," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kaufering>, Last accessed November 11, 2022. Kaufering was part of the Dachau forced labor and prison camp system in the Landsberg area.

photographed the conditions of the camps and as such shaped the memory of the camps. Like the liberator section at EPHM, these accounts reveal the post-death march composition of survivors as camps in the East like Auschwitz were evacuated and destroyed due to the advancement of the Soviet Union.

The tour concludes with the “Esther & Rubin Langer Contemporary Human Rights Wing” and exhibits, and the local case study of survivors Rubin and Esther Langer. The case study focuses on the Langers’ journey after liberation and the complex emigration process displayed through photographs, paper-walls, documents from the displaced person’s camp, and other documents that enabled their emigration. Again, by focusing on individual histories, the museum does more than present historical facts and artifacts but can draw on personal experiences to contextualize the magnitude of the Holocaust and survivor trajectories to the U.S.

Comparison of Permanent Exhibitions/ Museum’s Missions

Key aspects of the permanent exhibition of both museums involve their mission and design. The TJMHC's mission is centered on Holocaust education and establishes the Holocaust within the continuum of genocide, and purposely engage with human rights in the present. In 2021, under the leadership of interim Director Dr. Michelle Blumberg, the TJMHC reworked its mission focus on four key points: 1) Educating about the Holocaust and other Genocides; 2) Exploring the legacy of Jewish experiences in Southern Arizona; 3) Preserving the first synagogue; and 4) Collaborating with Tucson’s diverse community to promote human rights. This definition allows for more expansive and more inclusive research, programming, and collaborations with diverse communities engaging with multiple histories.

The El Paso Holocaust Museum's mission is to memorialize "the millions of people who were brutally murdered by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Regime from 1933-1945" and "teach about the history of the Holocaust to combat prejudice and intolerance through education, community outreach and cultural activities."⁹⁹ The museum's embedded definition reveals a more universalized and simplified approach, yet it denies specificity of other groups targeted by the Nazi regime and collaborators such as the disabled, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Roma and Sinti, Polish intelligentsia and Soviet prisoners of war. Still, its key focus is on education and outreach programs and cultural activities to engage youth across the El Paso/Juarez metroplex area.

When it comes to TJMHC's and EPHM's designs, it is important to explore their functionality and accessibility, and advancement of narrative, as well as if the designs are situated within the museums' mission statements. Important focal features of the Holocaust Center in Tucson are "suspended lineage" and the stages of genocide. This section carries the action and evolution of genocide-its wide range of actors and consequences across temporal, geographical, and political spaces (before and after the Holocaust). The museum is also devoid of perpetrator objects. It is not a full absence; its limited presence is negotiated through the "Stages of Genocide" module station. The museum's design and inclusion of raw materials, wooden beams, unfinished concrete, dark steel, and industrial feel evoke railcars, barracks, ghettos, and structures to contain, transport and dehumanize individuals during the Holocaust decentering the mass industrial murder and focus on crematoria. Contrastingly, the El Paso Holocaust Museum's strategic features center on the experiential and theatrical mode of representing the Holocaust through its replicas: a mounted railcar that ushers the descent into the world of the concentration camps, a surveillance tower, a replica of a crematoria oven, a staged

⁹⁹ About Us," El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, <https://elpasoholocaustmuseum.org/about-us>, Last accessed May 7, 2022.

barrack and gas chamber showers to show the extent of the Holocaust through its murderous machinery and move the visitor to pledge “never again.” Whereas the EPHM displays older museology practice of darker spaces, dioramas, and object-heavy displays, the Tucson Holocaust Center reflects new practices of brighter, more open spaces and sections and limiting the number of perpetrator objects. The limited objects related to perpetrators at TJMHC raise the question of how to represent perpetrators and collaborators and if such loaded objects are necessary in American Holocaust museums and Jewish History museums. The lighting and open space aid in the visitor experience and reception of the material opening the space for discussion rather than careful whispers in somber galleries. These shifts and expansions illustrate museums becoming attuned to their community’s diverse populations, historiographic research, and practice further becoming sites of persuasion and contestation.¹⁰⁰

Holocaust Museums and the Migration Crisis

Throughout this research, I look at when, where, and how Holocaust memory is evoked in relation to the contemporary refugee crisis in the Southwest United States. Linking the Holocaust to the U.S. government’s response to migrants at the southern border became a topic of national debate beginning in 2017, with United States congresspeople, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial and Museum, and various political activists all participating. At the local level, the Tucson Jewish History Museum and Holocaust Center and the El Paso Holocaust Museum took different strategies to address the refugee crises (global and national), migration, and the rights of refugees.

¹⁰⁰ Sodaro, “Selective Memory: Memorial Museums,” 19-23.

The idea of a “crisis” at the U.S.-Mexico border is not new. The rise of the “Latino threat” gained traction throughout the 1960s-1970s and crisis rhetoric, accompanied by imagery of flooding, invasion, and a border under siege were prominent in the 1990s.¹⁰¹ Fleeing civil war, poverty, ethnic violence, and gang violence, migrants and refugees from Central and South American countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua sought asylum in the U.S. in the last decades of the twentieth century. In 1991, these groups were denied asylum; however, the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act of 1997 (NACARA) enabled certain groups to apply for asylum.¹⁰² Since 2016, refugees and asylum seekers from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Haiti, and Venezuela have made similar treks to the United States. Museums in Southwestern borderland communities have responded by incorporating such issues in their contemporary human rights wings or through a series of outreach programs.

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement opened a temporary detention facility for unaccompanied minors in Tornillo, Texas, just forty miles east of El Paso. Tornillo and similar immigrant influx facilities quickly became equated with concentration camps and Holocaust analogies were at the fore of national debates.¹⁰³ These sites garnered national attention when U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez called detention centers “concentration camps on the border.” This comparison garnered outrage as Holocaust memory and the Holocaust were politicized. Today, the Holocaust and Auschwitz dominate public memory and for many, comparisons meant trivialization and

¹⁰¹ Douglas S Massey and Karen A Pren, “Unintended Consequences of US Immigration Policy: Explaining the Post-1965 Surge from Latin America,” *Population and Development Review* 38, no. 1 (March 2012): 14-16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2012.00470.x>

¹⁰² Immigration and Ethnic History Society, “Timeline: Immigration History,” <https://immigrationhistory.org/timeline/> Last accessed July 11, 2022.

¹⁰³ Raul Reyes, “In El Paso Uncaged Art Spotlights Detained Kids’ Memories of Home,” NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/el-paso-uncaged-art-spotlights-detained-kids-memories-home-n1044516>, Last accessed Dec 6, 2021.

decontextualizing the Holocaust and minimizing suffering, and the social and political context that led to the Holocaust.

In response to the use of Holocaust analogies and concentration camp nomenclature and calls to take the frequently used term “never again” seriously in that moment, the United States Holocaust Museum (USHMM) released two statements condemning the misuse of Holocaust memory and Holocaust analogies, or comparisons “to other events historical and contemporary.”¹⁰⁴ Through this statement, the USHMM rendered any Holocaust comparison, and by extension its own center for genocide prevention null and void. These politicized statements by the USHMM signal the continued tensions over Holocaust memory, its uniqueness and “trivialization,” as well as, the limits of its universality obscuring the lessons of the Holocaust. The museum received immediate push-back to the statement. A group of scholars, some former USHMM fellows, wrote a statement that urged the museum to “reverse its position,” citing its mission to use Holocaust education as a preventative for genocide and human rights violations. The statement noted that “pointing to similarities across time and space is essential for this task.”¹⁰⁵ Ultimately, if the Holocaust’s moral lessons are not extractable then it is placed beyond the scope of human understanding. What activists, historians, and organizations such as Never Again Action¹⁰⁶ were calling on was the rhetoric employed on, and against

¹⁰⁴ Edna Friedberg, “Why Holocaust Analogies are Dangerous,” United States Holocaust Museum and Memorial (Press Release, Dec 12, 2018), <https://www.ushmm.org/information/press/press-releases/why-holocaust-analogies-are-dangerous>. Last accessed, February 5, 2021.; Andrea Orzoff, Omer Bartov, Doris Bergen, Timothy Snyder, and Anika Wielke, et al., “An Open Letter to the Director of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum,” in the *New Yorker Review Books*, July 7, 2019, <http://dx.doi.org/10.17613/z23s-bk97>.

¹⁰⁵ Since 2018, Tornillo functioned to surveil and exclude undesirables in a militarized setting—criminalizing around 6,000 unaccompanied children that passed through the facility.

¹⁰⁶ “About Us,” Never Action, <https://www.neveragainaction.com/>, Last accessed, Dec 2, 2021. Never Again Action is a Jewish-led organization mobilizing “against the persecution, detention, and deportation of immigrants in the United States as part of the broader fight against white supremacy, fascism, and racial capitalism.” Never Again Action coalesced and gained traction through its direct-action rallies and protests after Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez visited detention sites along the U.S.-Mexico border.

vulnerable populations, the racialized overtones, the complicity, and the ruthlessness of policies in which the legal pathways to seek asylum and refuge are blocked by all legal means necessary.

The debate over Holocaust analogies centered the borderland in national discourse. As the two institutions with missions centered on Holocaust education nearest to the U.S.-Mexico border, the El Paso Holocaust Museum and Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center inevitably had to grapple with how to respond to the refugee crisis. Through their positions as non-profits, the two museums responded to the migration and refugee crisis affecting their communities in diverse ways as extensions of their call to “Bear Witness,” and the moral injunctions implied in their missions and in Holocaust education to stand up against injustice.

The TJMHC’s main initiative for engaging with the refugee crisis was an exhibit called ASILO/ASYLUM, which highlighted anti-immigrant discourses and policies aimed to deter refuge as codified in international law and the UN Refugee Convention of 1951. The exhibit was meant to “address the chaotic circumstance created by the U.S Government 2019-2020.” The participatory exhibit weaved multilayered trajectories and experiences through : (1) tags relating personal responses to devised questions posed by the curatorial team; (2) through multimedia stations displaying poetry, testimonies, and interviews from those who experienced detention; (3) commemorating those who perished crossing multiple borders seeking refuge; and (4) witnesses who engaged in local and national protests and rallies like Never Again Action; (5) displaying images of the Tent City in Tornillo, Texas. The artistic representations and wood prints displayed were painted by artist Gabi Hurtado Ramos, whose work is seen as a form of resistance against the criminalization of migration and systems of oppression. Statements by the curatorial team to engage the audience included: (1) How close are you to asylum? (2) Members of my family past or present fled another country for fear of persecution (3) I fled another country for fear of

persecution. These statements in this participatory exhibition prompted the visitor to reflect on personal migration histories or fears that arose from the current political climate in the U.S., including antisemitism, targeted acts of racial violence, xenophobia, racism, and the current immigration system. It presented testimony from those detained at sites in Tornillo, Texas, and Eloy, Arizona. In the process, ASILO/ASYLUM further complicated the notion of the U.S. as a safe haven, and beacon of democracy.¹⁰⁷

One of the narratives featured in the ASILO/ASYLUM exhibit was that of “Freddy,” a reserved 16-year-old who fled Honduras to escape poverty, gang and state violence crossing Guatemala and Mexico to arrive at the border at Reynosa, Mexico-McAllen, Texas during the Trump Administration (2017-2021). At the U.S.-Mexico border, he experienced layers of violence before being detained. He faced further uncertainty as news about his asylum case was scarce. Yet his real journey commenced while detained for 40 days between the *hieleras* and Tornillo. “Freddy” described the desperation of children held in kennels “500 kids fit in a cage... kids crying that they couldn't take it. I wondered, why lock me up like a dog?”¹⁰⁸ His account illustrates the precariousness of children in detention centers and influx facilities and shows his determination to bear witness so that people understand the plight of children in detention. Unaccompanied youth were forced to cover themselves with thin aluminum blankets, mocked, and served expired food, yet these conditions worsened once they were transferred to the militarized influx facility at Tornillo. “Freddy” states, “I was desperate in Tornillo [...] More and more paperwork was missing [...] I will never forget what I lived. I feel proud telling my story

¹⁰⁷ Authors notes from “Jewish Museum Milwaukee’s Virtual Passport Series: ASILO/ASYLUM Virtual Tour,” April 6, 2021, <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82695804888?pwd=YzIhRSZlMaGRYQVN2d2wyNzF0QTgzQT09>

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Freddy by Alejandra Zavala and Dr. David Romo, April 13, 2019, "Interview no. 1707," Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso.; Author’s notes from, “Jewish Museum Milwaukee’s Virtual Passport Series: ASILO/ASYLUM Virtual Tour,” April 6, 2021, <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82695804888?pwd=YzIhRSZlMaGRYQVN2d2wyNzF0QTgzQT09>

because what I say is true."¹⁰⁹ His testimony shows the strength required to survive a punitive immigration system designed to humiliate and dehumanize individuals while thwarting asylum.

“Freddy’s” account illustrates the complex bureaucratic process of asylum and migration that provide a glimpse into some of the themes considered in the Alan & Marianne Langer Contemporary Human Rights Wing at the Tucson Jewish Museum Center. His account also shows what concentrating undesirables and the stateless in detention centers looks like in the 21st century, further placing it in a continuum of concentration sites.¹¹⁰ The Langers’ story demonstrates the extensive paperwork needed to emigrate and leave the displaced persons camps after the Holocaust, which often resembled, and in some cases were, concentration camp sites.¹¹¹ The engagement with testimony and personal narrative links the Museum’s attentiveness to microhistory and place. Another layer of meaning was added to the exhibition through the inclusion of poetry written by a young person while in detention. The poem, as a need to document and make sense of the experience, is likened with those of diarists who chronicled life across the ghettos like Emmanuel Ringelblum, of the Oneg Shabbos and Poet Miklos Radnoti in the gallery space.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., Interview with Freddy.

¹¹⁰ “Contemporary Human Rights: Holocaust Center” Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center. <https://youtu.be/iit5DwZuVA0?list=PLDFqV7hnJVEkZXrzs9TYCyCDMNwt54sTy> Accessed January 3, 2023.

The Marianne and Alan Langer Contemporary Human Rights Gallery has been the section in which the diverse refugee crises have been discussed.

¹¹¹ Dan Stone, “Memory, Memorials and Museums,” *Historiography of the Holocaust* (UK, Palgrave MacMillan, 2004) and *History of Concentration Camps*, (New York: Oxford University Press) 4, 11-16 and 109-113. Stone addresses the 2015 Refugee crisis and the use of sites such as the Dachau Garden to house refugees. He notes that Refugee camps function to aid the displaced and those seeking refuge and serve as “sites of exclusion from “world of nations.” Stone like Wachsmann and Pitzer, argue that there is no-typical concentration camp.

¹¹² For more engagement on young diarists’ experiences with migration, loss of citizenship, the war, and conditions in the ghettos see Alexandra Zapruder’s *Salvaged Pages: Young Writer’s Diary of the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), and Alexandra Garbarini *Numbered Days: Diaries and the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

Just as ASILO/ASYLUM sought to make connections through inhumane policies and stories of persecution and engage in deep conversation and difficult conversations the museum garnered diverse responses from the community. There was a mixed reaction from the Jewish community to the exhibition. Guguletho Moyo, the former executive director, expressed at the Jewish Museum Milwaukee's Passport Series Virtual Tour of ASILO/ASYLUM, that the later wave of Jewish immigrants, or refugees from the Soviet Union (which may include Holocaust survivors), did not connect with the experiences of those modern refugees seeking asylum as represented by the exhibit and reflected a conservative political approach regarding immigration. However, many did connect with the immigrant experience as members of a diasporic community in the U.S. The responses reveal the diversity in opinions, experiences, political affiliations, diverse streams of Judaism, and secularism of the Jewish community in Tucson. The community reaction to the exhibit illustrates the tensions associated with the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the unintended engagement with comparative suffering. In such cases, experiences such as mass violence, migration, fleeing persecution, closed borders, and internment cannot compare or be understood because they are not the Holocaust, or the refugee experience and emigration attempts from places like the Soviet Union from the 1970-2018. The museum's narrative further placed indefinite detention within a phenomenon of human rights violations in the 21st century, in city, the border and in the United States. The Jewish Museum Milwaukee's Passport Series ASILO Virtual Tour served to address the border crisis and its representation in Jewish and Holocaust museums. It highlighted the museum's first bilingual exhibit, and centered advocacy through education and testimony via the work of its staff who engaged in migrant advocacy dealing with children and adults in detention.¹¹³

¹¹³ Authors notes from "Jewish Museum Milwaukee's Virtual Passport Series: ASILO/ASYLUM Virtual Tour," April 6, 2021. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82695804888?pwd=YzIzRSZlMaGRYQVN2d2wyNzF0QTgzQT09>

El Paso became the epicenter of the debate over Holocaust analogies when Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez toured the Tornillo facility in 2018. But the El Paso Holocaust Museum was reluctant to respond. Though the museum released a vague symbolic statement on refugee day in 2018, it failed to engage directly with the human rights crisis in Tornillo, the right to seek asylum, and the plight of more than 6,000 unaccompanied youth interned or passed through Tent City, in a binational community that deals with the effects of migration, policing, the industrial border military complex. However, EPHM did engage with refugee-related programming that centered on Afghan refugees in the U.S., many of whom were processed Ft. Bliss and thus had a temporary connection to the city. These migration narratives, vignettes, and community discussions centered personal stories to highlight the complex dynamics that force people to migrate and to become displaced. These events *were* a condensed world tour of the refugee experience. For instance, through George Takei's *They Called Us Enemy* and Malala Yousafzai's *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World*, the museum and the community engaged in critical yet conservative discussions about migration, displacement, internment, and asylum.

In response to the influx of Afghan refugees at Ft. Bliss, the El Paso Holocaust Museum held two online discussions through its *All People Have Voice* programming series. The two events included an online discussion of *We Are Displaced* by Malala Yousafzai on Dec. 7, 2021, and a community panel entitled “Journey to Better Tomorrow” on Dec. 9, 2021. The latter event included four panelists residing in El Paso and their stories regarding asylum: Dr. Nosrat Heidarian (who received religious asylum as a member of the Baha’i faith in Iran), Ersela Kripa (who fled the communist regime in Albania representing political asylum), Holocaust survivor Tibor Schaechner, and immigration lawyer Jesus Guereca, who dispelled myths about refugees

and immigrants draining U.S. resources or receiving benefits. Those categorized and resettled as refugees, in the U.S, are provided a certain limited amount of aid and must become self-sufficient, often the reality of resettlement and refuge take a toll on the displaced such as Syrian, Eritrean and Afghan refugees and migrants.¹¹⁴ For most, migrants, and refugees as noted by Gowayed, the displacement and trauma does not end with asylum, or temporary protected status.¹¹⁵ This panel discussion was a necessary response from the museum to the plight of Afghan evacuees from one of the U.S.'s longest wars seeking refuge, or temporary protected status. The panel primarily focused on happy and successful asylum claims and legalized immigration status, although Guereca centered on the complexity of immigration law and difficulties of presenting asylum claims.

Through *All People Have Voice*, attendees were able to engage with the stories of people experiencing asylum.

The discussion of Malala Yousufzai's *We Are Displaced*, moderated by Christine Ponsford, featured Azita, an Afghan refugee who shared moments of her life as a teacher, the threats her family faced, her trajectory to the U.S., and her desire to become integrated into the fabric of American life. Her narrative illustrates how resettlement is the beginning of a new journey and series on longings and aspirations. Her vulnerable conversation decentered a subdued engagement with migration and displacement focused on uplift and American exceptionalism. However, there was limited engagement with the experience of central American youth seeking refuge.

¹¹⁴ Heba Gowayed, *Refuge: How the State Shapes Human Potential*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022), 3-6, and 11-13. Gowayed notes how Syrian refugees and asylum seekers aim to navigate a complex refugee and resettlement program contributes to their social and economic marginalization and exclusion.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., Gowayed, *Refuge*, 8-9.

Yousufzai's *We are Displaced* features vignettes from nine girls, ranging from displaced women in Iran, the Rohingya in Bangladesh, a welcoming community in the U.S., and the story of an unaccompanied minor named Annalisa from Guatemala who spent six weeks in detention before being reunited with her sponsor. Analisa, a young fifteen-year-old from Mazatenango, Guatemala after crossing multiple borders from Mexico to Texas survived three detention and holding facilities: the hielera, the perrera, and "children's shelter run by the Office of Refugee Resettlement"(135).¹¹⁶ Like, "Freddy" featured in ASILO, and for many, the kennels figure prominently in the narratives of survivors of detention, "like the Icebox, I don't know its official name [it was] a gigantic warehouse with chain-link fences separating different sections, so it felt like you were a dog in a cage" (132). Most importantly, her narrative reveals the dehumanizing processes migrants and layers of trauma asylum seekers face in transit and at detention sites. She describes being herded onto cattle trucks, "[...] we were truly being treated like animals. There was not enough room...I was pressed against all these strangers"¹¹⁷ (129). This vignette showed a careful response by both moderators and the audience in attendance. The museum's late involvement reveals the dynamics within the institution and which refugee crisis is deemed non-partisan. This is significant as the book discussion on *We Are Displaced* engaged superficially with existing humanitarian crisis at the El Paso/ Juarez border regarding migrant children from Central America.¹¹⁸

EPHM also hosted a lecture on May 24, 2021, by historian Selfa Chew, on "the history of anti-Asian Sentiments in the Borderland" a community discussion on George Takei's *They*

¹¹⁶ Malala Yousafzai, *We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories of Girls Around the World* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2021), 121- 135.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., Yousafzai, *We Are Displaced*, 129-132.

¹¹⁸ Author's notes "Journey to a Better Tomorrow," El Paso Holocaust Museum and Holocaust Center, December 7 and 9, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/EPHM84/>

Called Us Enemy.¹¹⁹ Dr. Chew's lecture emphasized structural racism and restrictive immigration laws (i.e., Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Immigration Laws of 1924) that labeled certain groups as unassimilable to address the Japanese internment and deportation across the U.S.-Mexico border. The book discussion and lecture centered how the U.S., like other countries, has a long history of incarceration, deportation, and repatriation of individuals both citizens and non-citizens. In the United States during World War II under the guise of war, through Executive Order 9066 Japanese and Japanese Americans were "removed and from the West-Coast" and interned in diverse relocation or concentration centers across the U.S. Dr. Chew's lecture illustrates the transnational participation and collaboration of Mexican and Latin American countries in stripping the civil liberties and the deportation of their Japanese populations to concentration camps on U.S. soil. This bold and in-depth discussion by Dr. Chew allowed for parallels to be made connecting the history of uprooting, immigration, racism, family separation, detention in American history, the broader history of WWII, and the Holocaust. While the EPHM had engaged conservatively to address other narratives and human rights abuses in the borderland, the museum has taken small, consistent steps to what can become a more inclusive institution, decentering whiteness to become a more self-reflexive and relevant institution in the borderland.

¹¹⁹ Selfa Chew, "On the History of Racism Against Asian-Americans in the Borderland," (lecture El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, May 24, 2021); For a deeper engagement see Selfa Chew, *Uprooting Community: Japanese Mexicans, World War II, and the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015).

Conclusion

Chapter one, engaged with the rise in Holocaust consciousness and the robust modes of the American Jewish community engagement and salience with the Holocaust in the immediate postwar period ranging from commemorations, Passover Haggadah's, poetry, memorial books to the creation of memorials in public and private spaces. It provided a historical trajectory of Holocaust museums in the southwest and at the national level. Although located along the U.S.-Mexico border, the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) and the El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM) are demographically, geographically, and politically different institutions tasked with both teaching about the Holocaust (to Jewish and non-Jewish audiences) and commemorating the Holocaust. EPHM's inception (1984-1994) and expansion (2001-2008) during the high point for Holocaust commemoration in the U.S., and Tucson's inception during the post-Holocaust memorial boom (2015), account for many of the differences in the two museums' programming, mission, and engagement with historiography. As Holocaust museums become more attuned to their communities and as the Holocaust becomes farther removed temporally from public memory, forming part of a different century, museums have tied their missions to educating against antisemitism, prejudice, and injustice by reflecting on the lessons of the Holocaust.

The El Paso Holocaust Museum and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center's educational focus is middle-high school students engaging with an experiential and multimodal museum tour ending with survivor testimonies, in person (Tucson) or recorded interviews (El Paso) with each receiving more than 10,000 visitors from local schools annually. The population in Tucson is more diverse where 45% are Latinx/Hispano population unlike El Paso whose population is 82% Latinx/Hispanic. Both Jewish communities are minorities within their

communities with Tucson constituting 4% of the population while El Paso is at 1%. El Paso does not have other public memorials and connections to Holocaust associations devoted to the Holocaust, or many survivors left. On the other hand, Tucson and southern Arizona have a large base of survivors, and the Jewish Community Center has one of the earliest commemoration sites whose architecture reflects Jewish history, the Holocaust, and the history of its city.

The TJMHC's diverse programming and actions are due to the extension of the museum's vision as a culturally specific institution as it is both a Jewish Museum and a Holocaust center where Jewish values, shared histories, antiracist practices, and testimonies create a cohesive synthesis across both campuses. The TJMHC, 60 miles away from the U.S. border, took on the representation of refugees at the height of the migration discourse as an extension of their mission to educate on the Holocaust and contemporary human rights abuses. While EPHM is 1.2 miles away from the nearest point of entry, and the city is 30 miles southeast of Tornillo, there was limited public and pedagogical engagement with refugees and the border crisis until 2021.

The national and regional response from museums such as the USHMM, the El Paso Holocaust Museum (EPHM), and the Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) illustrate their political, social, and economic realities.¹²⁰The TJMHC has had a continuous engagement with refugee crises curating three specific cases in their contemporary human rights gallery such as the 2015 Global Refugee Crisis. The EPHM's late involvement reveals the dynamics within the institution and which refugee crisis is deemed non-partisan, or which figure of the refugee is less politicized. In the case of EPHM, the Afghan refugee crisis was centered over the engagement with the Central American crisis which includes migrants and asylum

¹²⁰ Amy Sodaro Amy Sodaro, "Selective Memory: Memorial Museums, Human rights and Politics Victimhood," in *Museums and Sites of Persuasion*, 19-23.

seekers from Venezuela, Cuba, and the global south. ASILO/ASYLUM, therefore, only worked as well as it did in Tucson through its bold curatorial approach and considering how the community has decades of involvement with immigrants' rights, the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, and along trajectory of resettling and welcoming refugees even as the state of Arizona launched punitive and racist policies and is part of the global border surveillance and prison industrial complex.

Most importantly, the inception and opening of the Tucson Jewish History Museum, renamed the Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center (TJMHC) coincided with trends looking to the future of Holocaust memorialization and education and a museology shift to Human Rights and Genocide centers. The diversity and inclusion of endowed fellows, curators, committees, outreach coordinators and expansive outreach programming with a lens toward advocacy, and the museum's affiliation with sites of conscience, Council of American Jewish Museums (CAJM) reflect a museum at the forefront of museology—nurturing community partnerships, Holocaust education, engaging social justice and the enactment of Jewish values. However, the museum's social justice initiatives also reflect the limits of engaging with difficult histories and its antiracist practice as an institution, after the resignation of its former executive director Guguletho Moyo during a time of social and racial reckonings in the U.S.

The El Paso Holocaust Museum circumvented an active and critical engagement with the humanitarian crisis, Holocaust education and Holocaust memory through its broad on refugees. In fact, it was a different curatorial team and institution that historicized the refugee crisis. In 2019, Dr Yolanda Chávez Leyva and Dr. David Dorado Romo curated the “Uncaged Art” exhibit at the University of Texas El Paso's Centennial Museum to address the migration of unaccompanied migrant children across the U.S.- Mexico border to connect it to broader

historical examples of detention and concentration camps such as Japanese internment camps and the Terezin Ghetto by displaying children's art produced under detention through their bold vision. EPHM's proximity to the border and its nearness to the UTEP's Centennial Museum offered opportunities for conversations with contemporary history that remained unexplored and could have further established both institutions as democratizing spaces where complex histories of human rights violations, exclusion, and cultural resistance are centered. Additionally, EPHM's careful approach also shows the limits of its universal yet vague mission using the moral lessons of the Holocaust to teach against intolerance, racism, and othering, through their lack of engagement with the border crisis, human rights broadly, and the Holocaust, as a genocide. However, it also illustrates its gradual incorporation of differing narratives despite its limited staff and budget as a free-standing museum relying on grants and donations. Holocaust Museums such as the TJMHC and the Holocaust Museum Houston (HMH) engaged with border testimonies and the historical processes of exclusion and migration through "Seeking Refuge" showing that U.S border history and critical engagements with diverse narratives (multidirectional memory) can be represented at institutions devoted to Holocaust memory. These museums illustrate the complex processes and tensions of historical memory, the invocation and politicization of the Holocaust and its moral lessons at a time of a perceived national "refugee" crisis.

The responses of these museums located along the U.S-Mexico border make a stimulating case study in the use of Holocaust memory and the lessons of the Holocaust, as the national and international debates regarding Holocaust analogies and concentration camps being likened to detention centers occurred within a regional border context. This is important as Holocaust memory continues to be reshaped by Jewish communities, through commemoration

and individuals' direct experiences with the Holocaust (second-third generation survivors) and non-Jewish actors in public and private spaces.



Figure 1.1: EPHM Concentration Camps: replica of a barrack, diorama of Auschwitz-Monowitz.¹²¹

¹²¹ "Screenshot: Gallery- Permanent Exhibit Image 10 of 17," El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center, accessed July 23, 2022, <https://elpasoholocaustmuseum.org/gallery/>.



Figure 2.1: TJMHC Screenshot Holocaust Center Stages of Genocide; Root.¹²²



Figure 3.1: Screenshot TJMHC- ASILO/ASYLUM, Portraits, Never Again Action Protests- Never Again Means Now.¹²³

¹²² SBBL Architectural Shots and Photography, "Screenshot TJMHC Holocaust Center Permanent Exhibit," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://my.matterport.com/show/?m=JCL8QNLt9pv&sr=-2.97,-.04&ss=22>.

¹²³ "Screenshot ASILO/ASYLUM," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, Instagram, accessed April 24, 2022, <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17942769868339497/>.

Chapter 2: Holocaust Legacies in Jewish Community Actions During the Migration Crisis

Introduction

The Jewish communities in Tucson and El Paso responded to the 2018-2019 refugee/human rights crises along the U.S.-Mexico border in diverse ways. At the community and personal levels, the responses were part of a longer trajectory of confronting violence, policing, and detention at the border. This chapter first traces the history of Jewish civic engagement in the Tucson and El Paso communities regarding U.S. refugee and border policies historically, and then examines four community actions that took place in response to the border crisis and family separation in the late 2010s. By engaging with the oral histories of participants, news coverage of the events, and official statements by Jewish organizations, I discuss rabbis' visits to the Borderland through the "Let Our Families Go" & the HIAS/ T'ruah Rabbinic sponsored trip on November 3-6, 2019; the Tucson Jewish Museum & Holocaust Center's community visit to the Nogales Border on October 24, 2019; the Shut-Down Tornillo Coalition demonstration on December 15, 2019 in El Paso, Texas; and the Never Again Havdalah at Lions Plazita in July 2019, in El Paso.

Additionally, although not part of the community actions, I discuss the artwork entitled "The Art-Draft 1: An exploration of artwork from the children of Terezin and Tornillo - a work in progress" by Mindy Escobar-Leanse. I argue that her work makes direct parallels by its use of Holocaust iconography of children's art while in internment to the current crisis. Also included is Escobar-Leanse's restaging of the play *Last Rat of Theresienstadt* for a border audience. The inclusion of Escobar-Leanse's work is notable because art holds specific functions in society and culture, particularly in the reconstruction and reshaping of memory as

creative way to engage with the past. Illustrating that “memories are not only individual and collective, but they also become transformed over time.”¹²⁴ Thus, art as activism, through Escobar-Leanse’s performative pieces, embody the importance of cultural engagement with Holocaust memory and representations of the Holocaust through Terezin and Tornillo by borderlanders. However, not all art and protest were performed by those living along border cities. For example, Julie Weitz’s “My Golem” illustrates art as activism at the national level and probing Jewish history, solidarity movements, immigrants' rights, and the role of white Jews in organizing spaces.¹²⁵ Therefore, this chapter explores the personal motivations of Jews for participating in these actions by suggesting a “typology of activism” as well as the public ways in which Holocaust analogies were employed to create a connection between two temporal and geographically removed sites.

Moreover, this chapter also explores four narratives corresponding to three categories: The Civil/Human Rights (Humanitarian Activism) Rabbi Activists, the Grassroots Activists, and the Art Activists – all of which engaged with the humanitarian crises at the border. The narratives of Rabbi Stephanie Aaron, Rabbi Bruce Elder, Alison Westermann, and Mindy Escobar-Leanse provide a glimpse into wider instances of performing Jewish values, moral protest, and demonstrations at the national and regional level. For instance, as a second-

¹²⁴ Erika Bourguignon, “Bringing the Past into the Present: Family Narratives of the Holocaust, Exile, and Diaspora: Memory in an Amnesic World: Holocaust, Exile and the Return of the Suppressed. *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol 78. no. 1 (winter 2005), 63-88.

¹²⁵ Julie Weitz, “My Golem Melts ICE,” Vimeo, May 25, 2022, <https://vimeo.com/713737458>, Last accessed September 8, 2021. Weitz's Golem was a response to the Unite the Right Rally in Charlottesville and a call to action against the rise in antisemitism, xenophobia in the U.S. On November 25, 2019, in " My Golem at an Amazon Protest, " golem demonstrated alongside Jewish and interfaith clergy, and community advocates adorned with tallit/tzitzit. In 2020, "My Golem Melts ICE" as part of an abolish ICE campaign on Instagram and "My Golem" engaged with Holocaust memory by incorporating the "never again is now," postwar dictum decried by survivors connecting it to the migration discourse “free them all.”; and Julie Weitz, “Golem vs. Golem,” *Asylum Arts*, https://asylum-arts.org/special_projects/golem-v-golem/ Last accessed September 1, 2022. Golem vs. Golem was a collaborative project ASYLUM Arts for *Dwelling in the Times of Plagues*. On May 28, 2020, Weitz's "My Golem" protested outside the Adelanto detention facility.

generation survivor, Rabbi Elder of Rabbi of Congregation Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois, is driven by historical memory of the Holocaust, postmemory, and social justice. Rabbi Elder became a witness at the southern border out of responsibility of being a second-generation survivor and commitment to honor the memory of his father's eight-year-old sister who died in the Holocaust. Grassroots activism can be seen through Alison Westermann, an activist and transplant to El Paso's, continuous involvement with borderland issues, of which immigrants' rights and the humanitarian crisis are one component. Further embedded into the typology of activism are Laurie Melrood and former El Paso City Representative Peter Svarzbein. Melrood is a long-time community pillar in Tucson through her long trajectory as a social worker and committed social justice advocate for immigrants' rights in Tucson. Svarzbein is a third generation Holocaust survivor who identifies as a *fronterizo*.¹²⁶ The rabbis, in chronicling their experiences, become secondary witnesses to the inhumanity at the southern border and engaged in the incorporation and reproduction of narratives told to them by refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers as they visited shelters.¹²⁷ In these demonstrations and spaces, Jewish diasporic history and Holocaust memory were evoked.

¹²⁶ Hon. Raul Grijalva, Honoring Laurie Ann Melrood for Her Lifetime of Social Service as an Advocate and Educator for Social Justice in Latin America, on March 3, 2011, Cong Rec. vol.151., no. 31. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2011-03-03/html/CREC-2011-03-03-pt1-PgE409.htm> Melrood has actively engaged in multiple facets of advocacy since 1982-1995 in the Rio Grande Valley and in Tucson her current place of residence. Melrood has incorporated Jewish history, resistance, commemoration, and advocacy in her work and through her participation in diverse programming by the TJMHC including the virtual commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto incorporating consciousness raising for the Uyghur genocide and migrant advocacy in Tucson.; Also see "Warsaw Ghetto: Hope and Resistance," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center," Vimeo, May 3, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/544809488>.; Interview with Peter Svarzbein by Mayra Martinez, April 2022. Svarzbein is a third-generation Holocaust survivor, a *fronterizo*, son of Jewish immigrants and Holocaust survivors from Czechoslovakia and the Entre Rios Province in Argentina. He has been hosting and contextualizing the history and everyday life along the U.S-Mexico border to rabbinic-interfaith delegations. He's also involved with EPHM and community dialogue initiatives on antisemitism. In his capacity as City Rep for District 1, has engaged with different facets of the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

¹²⁷ At these sites and rallies Holocaust testimonies were evoked by second and third generation survivors. In some cases, the clergy visiting the border wove into their accounts the experiences of those victims of detention, of MPP, Title 42, Zero Tolerance, and deterrence policies. Deblinger's use of secondary witnessing reflects how philanthropic organizations and individuals visiting Displaced Person's camps engaged in the retelling of the

Jewish Civic Engagement in El Paso and Tucson

Civic engagement has been an important element of Jewish life in El Paso since Jewish settlement began in the city and can be broken into three phases: the activity of early settlers (1850s-1914), the era of the world wars and immigration restrictions (1914-1945), and the post-World War II, post-Holocaust era. In the following section, I describe the characteristics of these three eras as they relate to refugee aid and advocacy.

The era of unrestricted White European and Jewish migration to the U.S. spanned from the 1820s-1920s. However, early Jewish presence in the United States can be traced to the Jews who arrived in the Dutch Colony of New Amsterdam and the Jewish presence throughout the southwest can be traced to conversos (Crypto-Jews) who settled in New Spain during the colonial period and made their way to northern Mexico escaping the grasp of the Inquisition. El Paso's Jewish community greatly expanded in the 1850s when Jews from German and Czech-speaking lands of Central and Eastern Europe arrived in the city in an era where migration was not heavily restricted and civic engagement was not explicitly tied to migration.¹²⁸ Among the early settlers were several successful merchants and peddlers who became players in the economic and political life of the city, including two Jewish men who were elected mayor before the turn of the century.¹²⁹ Often, the wives of these members of the merchant class took up welfare and philanthropy.

experiences of direct witnesses of the Holocaust. These of narrative reconstructions were woven into speeches, newsletters, and fundraising campaigns to call attention to the humanitarian crisis. While not the same, the reconstruction and insertion of those with direct experiences of detention and denied the right to present asylum call attention to the moral and humanitarian crisis using individual narratives further humanizing the migrants and refugees. Deblinger, “in a world still trembling,” 35.

¹²⁸ Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) 172 and 184; and Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006)120.

¹²⁹ Institute of Southern Jewish Life, “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities - El Paso, Texas,” *ISL*, <https://www.isjl.org/texas-el-paso-encyclopedia.html>. Last accessed December 1, 2021

Among the most important of El Paso's early Jewish philanthropists was Olga Kohlberg, who migrated from Germany to the southwest in 1884. In El Paso, she quickly began to organize civic and social gatherings and welfare projects to improve her surroundings. In 1892, Kohlberg was a key figure in establishing the Ladies Benevolent Association that opened the first hospital in El Paso. She was a founding member of the Women's Club of El Paso, which included both Jewish and non-Jewish members, and helped create the city's first kindergarten and public library.¹³⁰ The Kohlberg's were also active within organized Jewish life and supported the establishment of congregation Temple Mt. Sinai in 1898. Olga Kohlberg's civic engagement and involvement in welfare organizations illustrates that Jewish women and Jewish immigrants were deeply involved in the social, political, economic, educational, and philanthropic fiber of El Paso.

Tucson's Jewish community had a similar trajectory to El Paso's. Most of the first Jews to settle in the community were German-speaking migrants from Central Europe who arrived in the second half of the nineteenth century. Hasia Diner questions the Germanness of early Jewish settlers to the U.S and ascertains that most spoke limited German, as most would have been men seeking economic opportunity as peddlers at the U.S. frontier.¹³¹ These early settlers also took up similar causes, such as literacy. Charles Moses Strauss, who became mayor of Tucson in 1883, founded the city's first public library.¹³² Comparable to El Paso, Jewish women were essential in the construction and organization of Jewish life, including synagogues, burial societies, and

¹³⁰ Hollace Ava Weiner, "These One-Sex Organizations," *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas*, (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 20017), 69-70.; Abbie Weiser, "Woman's Club Members Shaped El Paso History." "El Paso Times," February 21, 2016, Retrieved Sept 7, 2022. <https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/local/community/2016/02/21/womans-club-members-shaped-el-paso-history/80650268/>

¹³¹ Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000*, 79-81; and 83-85.

¹³² "Charles Moses Strauss: First Jewish Mayor of Tucson in the Arizona Territory," Jewish Museum of the American West, <https://www.jmaw.org/strauss-jewish-tucson/>, Last accessed Sept 3, 2022.

women's groups such as the Hebrew Benevolent society.¹³³ The Ladies of the Hebrew Benevolent society fundraised in 1904 to create the first synagogue in Tucson, inspired by Rabbi Martin Zielonka of the Reform Congregation Temple Mt. Sinai in El Paso. The Jewish demography of the city changed over time, as Yiddish- and Polish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe arrived, escaping poverty and pogroms from the 1890s-1920s. The newcomers, who faced more barriers to migration and citizenship, established welfare and aid societies and shifted the focus of Jewish civic engagement towards refugee relief.¹³⁴

World Wars and Immigration Restrictions (1924-1945)

The 1920s -1930s signaled a turn towards refugee relief as immigration quotas, nativist sentiments, and border surveillance enforcement increased at a time where the U.S. closed its doors to refugees and immigrants. Exclusionary policies had become apparent throughout this decade as immigrant quotas, such as the Emergency Quota Act of 1921 and the Johnson Reed Act 1924, restricted immigration based on national origin. This severely impacted Eastern and Central European immigrants, including those of Jewish backgrounds. These restrictive quotas make it more difficult to immigrate; simultaneously, there was increased persecution, as well as economic and political crises in Europe against Jews and other ethnic groups that pushed people to migrate. Yet, consuls and immigration officials at the border and ports of entry reshaped who entered. These nativist immigration policies led to an increase of illegal White European entry and smuggling networks as the border patrol was focused on European apprehensions which

¹³³ "Temple Emanu-El," Southwest Jewish Archives, <https://swja.library.arizona.edu/content/temple-emanu-el> Last accessed Sept 3, 2022.; "Resource Guide 2022: and Congregations," <https://azjewishlife.com/resource-guide-2022-congregations/>, Last accessed Sept 3, 2022.

¹³⁴ Libby Garland, *After They Closed the Gates: Jewish Illegal Immigration to the United States, 1921–1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 48-54; Hasia Diner Hasia Diner, *The Jews of the United States*, 184.

included illegal Jewish immigration via Mexico and through El Paso.¹³⁵ Libby Garland noted that Jews navigated and eluded “the category of illegal alienness” despite their illicit entry into the U.S. In turn, Jewish organizations, rabbis, lawyers, and consuls rehabilitated /decoupled Jewish migration from other illegal immigration to the U.S.¹³⁶ It is important to note that Whiteness afforded mobility; and while Jews experienced antisemitism and discrimination in a racially coded White and Black binary, they were not excluded from exercising their rights or denied citizenship. Rather, Jews in America benefited from being categorized as White.¹³⁷

As Jewish refugee aid became a national concern, El Paso Jews took up the cause of both local and international refugee relief. Both Bna'i B'rith and National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), were important organizations for relief work through refugee resettlement, and were crucial in funding the rehabilitation of Jewish illegal immigration to the U.S. Rabbi Martin Zielonka of Congregation Temple Mt Sinai is the most notable actor whose multifaceted role in immigration-related issues (illegal Jewish immigration) developed vast transnational Jewish networks across the U.S. and Mexico through B'nai B'rith, HIAS, and NCJW contributing to the Jewish community in Mexico. Rabbi Zielonka joined the Reform congregation Temple Mt. Sinai in 1891. He quickly became a leading figure on Jewish immigration in the southwest. He collaborated with rabbis across Texas and advocated for those making unauthorized entries to the U.S. via Mexico within the bounds of a new immigration system advocating for a remain in

¹³⁵ Garland, *After They Closed the Gates*, 3.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, Garland, *After they Closed the Gates*, 13, and 66.

¹³⁷ Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006) 52,86 and 207-211; Hasia Diner, *How America Met the Jews*, (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies,2017), 18-19, 23-25, 121).. Both argue that by being cast as White or Hebrew, Jews in America gained mobility and privilege. Goldstein argues that Jewishness as an ethnicity gained traction in the 1930's-postwar period.

Mexico Policy, instead of deportations to Europe.¹³⁸ His advocacy stemmed from his unique position at the El Paso/Juárez border where the porousness and complexity of the border was palpable as “unauthorized Jewish crossers were decoupled from the category of illegal aliens unlike Mexicans and Asians who had been continuously excluded and arrested by border enforcement.”¹³⁹ Garland argues that Jewish immigration via the U.S.-Mexico border became rehabilitated through the work of Rabbi Zielonka and other Jewish organizations by presenting Jewish border crossers in Jewish communities at the border as law-abiding.

The National Council of Jewish Women’s chapter in El Paso created the Committee for the Service to the Foreign Born in 1917 and aided Jewish immigrants from 1920-1940s. The El Paso chapter provided counsel for legal and illegal Jewish immigration to the U.S. and often pleaded for leniency for their clients. Case workers, including Fanny Zlabovksy, corresponded with officials at the national office of the NCJW, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and other national and international organizations and foreign consulates, as well as with applicants themselves seeking to enter the U.S. via alternate routes such as Havana, the Philippines, and Mexico. Immigrants and later refugees from Nazism entering through Juarez on visitor visas from Mexico were granted a temporary stay of six months in which they could sort out their situation, partake in the Americanization process, and get used to life on the border.¹⁴⁰ The National Quota acts of 1920, 1924, and 1930’s created a humanitarian crisis as Jewish migrants,

¹³⁸ “Who We Are: History,” The Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso (Jewish El Paso), Accessed Sept. 28, 2022, <https://jewishelpaso.org/who-we-are/#history-button>; “History” *Temple Mt. Sinai*,” <https://www.templemountsinai.com/Who-We-Are/History/Early-History-1880's--1928>, Last accessed, Mar. 3, 2022,

¹³⁹ Garland *After They Closed the Gates*, 3-8, 14-23.

Selfa Alejandra Chew, “Race, Gender and Citizenship: The Removal of Japanese and Japanese Americans from the United States/Mexico Borderlands,” (PhD. Diss., University of Texas at El Paso, 2010) 10-12. Undocumented Chinese persons were persecuted and arrested by border patrol in the borderlands and argue that the Chinese Exclusion act enforced the militarization of the border and further exclusionary policies.

¹⁴⁰ Erin Doran, “The Border Between Remembering and Forgetting: El Paso, Texas and the Holocaust,” (M.A. Thesis, University of Texas San Antonio), 28-29.

“coded as future Americans,” and “refugees,” were stuck in port towns or third countries when the National Quotas went into effect. This redefined Jewish communal refugee relief and lobbying that would become a pillar throughout the Holocaust and postwar period.¹⁴¹ Germany and Austria had high comparatively numbers of nationality-based visas in 1939, which were nonetheless capped at 23,370; and from 1939-1941, about 300,000 German citizens filed for visas. These stringent quotas and hardened borders reflected anti-migrant sentiments that remained prevalent as the escalation of violence and restrictions against European Jewry under Nazism often created illegal entry to the U.S. via a third country due to paper walls and vetting procedures that remained until the postwar period.¹⁴²

The mass displacement and refugee crisis across Europe led to the continuation of local refugee resettlement and international aid organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), HIAS, and others created for postwar relief. These consisted of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) from 1943-1948 and The International Refugee Organization (IRO) from 1946-1952, tasked with the resettlement, repatriation, and rehabilitation of Jewish refugees as survivors while Jewish organizations and federations worked to transform survivors into new Americans.¹⁴³ The stringent immigration quotas of the previous decades shifted regarding the status of Jewish refugees due to the Allied powers winning the war

¹⁴¹Garland *After They Closed the Gates*, 77-78, 84.

¹⁴² “Schwartz, Meyer and Family, 1938-1939,” In Fanny Zlabovksy-National Council of Jewish Women case files, MS 508, C.L. Sonnichsen Special Collections Department. The University of Texas at El Paso, accessed, December 2, 2022, https://scholarworks.utep.edu/box_5/13/ In El Paso Maurice Schwartz sought legal advice from Zlabovksy and HIAS to secure affidavits, and alternate visas and routes for 36 relatives stranded in Europe as the Hungarian and Czechoslovakian quotas were capped.

¹⁴³ “International Refugee Organization (IRO) - to the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies,” UN Treaty Collection, August 16, 1949, https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=III-2-10&chapter=3&clang=_en; Peter Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 114-115 and 91-98. Gatrell draws attention to the limitations of these international organizations and of categorization (refugees, displaced etc.) in the immediate postwar period further highlighting the precarity of refugees which persists (who is excluded from protections and what are the bounds of resettlement).

and persistent lobbying efforts of the War Refugee Board and Jewish organizations. The executive directives of 1945 and 1948, issued by President Harry S. Truman, permitted the admittance of 200,000 refugees from 1949-1953.¹⁴⁴ According to Mimi Reisel Gladstein and Sylvia Deneer Cohen, the Jewish population in El Paso has remained at approximately 5,000 since WWII; due to the two waves of refugees where 80 Holocaust survivors settled in El Paso. The Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center approximates that over 260 survivors from eighteen countries settled in Southern Arizona.¹⁴⁵ Jewish women's organizations like the NCJW and members of the local Jewish community were deeply involved in helping Jewish immigrants and refugees become Americanized. Gladstein recalls that her father, Emil Reisel, took it upon himself to help resettle Jews in El Paso providing job opportunities as merchants or with local businessmen in the area. The Reisel sisters taught the new immigrants English while the ladies from the Jewish community taught them where to shop.¹⁴⁶ In Tucson, the Jewish Family and Children's Service (JFCS), which has operated under several different names since its founding in 1941, was heavily involved in refugee aid and resettlement by working on behalf of Holocaust survivors and Jewish refugees from the Soviet Union.¹⁴⁷ The JCFCS continues its work to resettle refugees across Southern Arizona including those displaced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Refugees, recast as "survivors," became integrated into American society and to life on the border. Survivors such as Larry Gladstone became prominent doctors while survivors like

¹⁴⁴ Beth B. Cohen, *Child Survivors of the Holocaust: The Youngest Remnant and the American Experience* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 8.

¹⁴⁵ Gladstein and Deneer Cohen, *El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center*, 5-8.; and "About the Museum," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center, <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/about>, Last accessed Mar 3, 2022,.

¹⁴⁶ Mimi. R Gladstein Interview by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, April 2022; and Nancy Nemeth-Jesurun, "*The third life: Sixteen Holocaust survivors in El Paso*" (PhD, Diss. University of Texas at El Paso, 2008) 83-87. <https://scholarworks.utep.edu/dissertations/AAI3311416>

¹⁴⁷ "Refugee Resettlement Tucson," Jewish Family and Children Services, <https://jfcstucson.org/services/refugee-services/refugee-resettlement-programs/> Last accessed Mar 3, 2022,

Henry Kellen, David Kaplan, and Mark Kupfer began their entrepreneurial endeavors as salesmen who later opened their own businesses, thereby, becoming successful businessmen and philanthropists. Drawing on the memory of the six million Jewish lives lost in the Holocaust, American Jews used their platforms aligning themselves with just causes since it ensured their freedom, well-being, and lot. Diner states that, “by working to change America and the world, the Jews of the U.S. acted in the name of the six million who had been killed by tyranny and racism. To them engaged civic activism constituted monuments in political time.”¹⁴⁸ This is evidenced as Jewish communities rallied around the Civil Rights Movement, evoking human rights and the Holocaust even when they did not have a name for the catastrophe, as the term Holocaust was not widely used.¹⁴⁹ Holocaust survivor Henry Kellen’s founding of the El Paso Holocaust Museum in 1984 is a key example of civic engagement at a time when Holocaust consciousness and Holocaust denial emerged. His desire to educate about the horrors of the Holocaust and to have a space dedicated to memory provided opportunities for students to learn about the Holocaust from 1984-present. Another influential powerhouse in the Jewish community, was Rabbi Gumbiner of Tucson, Arizona. Gumbiner was the spiritual leader of Temple Emanu-El (1942-1947) and was an advocate for racial and social justice by fostering connections with the Prince Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. His coalition building and “his activism on behalf of Black Americans” led to his resignation. His legacy of collaboration and advocacy was seen in the TJMHC’s dedication to racial and social justice in Southern Arizona.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Diner, *We Remember with Reverence*, 266-7.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *We Remember with Reverence*, 266-8.

¹⁵⁰ Phyllis Braun, “Remembering Rabbi Gumbiner: His Legacy and the Ongoing Struggle for Racial Justice,” Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Study Center (TJMHC), <https://www.jewishhistorymuseum.org/remembering-rabbi-gumbiner>, Last accessed Jan 3, 2022,

There has been a transition from Jewish refugee aid to a more inclusive form of refugee aid as exemplified by organizations such as HIAS created in 1891 to aid Jewish refugees and later provided aid to Vietnamese Refugees in 1975. HIAS has offices and legal representatives across the world including the U.S.-Mexico border. In the 21st century, it has evolved into “a multi-content, multi-pronged humanitarian aid and advocacy organization,” rooted in Jewish values.¹⁵¹ These shifts in refugee aid and solidarity movements are seen through the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, which advocated for central American migrants fleeing violence, civil war, state repression, and longstanding U.S. interventions in Latin America such as Guatemala (1960-1996), El Salvador (1980-1992) and Nicaragua (1960-1979) and U.S.-backed Contra conflict from (1979-1990). The 1980’s illustrate the complexities of asylum claims for refugees from central America categorized as economic migrants despite fleeing U.S.-backed interventions.¹⁵² Additionally, the 1980s led to the passing of the Refugee Act of 1980, establishing refugees as persons with “well-founded fear of persecution” (echoing the principle of non-refoulement),¹⁵³ as well as Temporary Protection Status (TPS), and immigration reform via (IRCA 1986) while restricting immigration and further militarizing the U.S.-Mexico border.¹⁵⁴

Tucson has been at the forefront of the Sanctuary movement as Southside Presbyterian Church became the first congregation to declare itself a public sanctuary in 1982. Subsequently,

¹⁵¹ “Our History,” Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, <https://hias.org/who/our-history/>, Last accessed Nov 22, 2022.

¹⁵² “El Salvador,” The Center for Justice and Accountability, <https://cja.org/where-we-work/el-salvador/>, Last accessed Dec 3, 2022.; Hector Perla Jr., and Susan Bibler Coutin, “Legacies and Origins of the 1980s US-Central American Sanctuary Movement,” *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*, Edited by Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag (New York: Routledge, 2013), 73-89.

¹⁵³ “1951 Convention: UNHCR,” United Nations High Commissioner Office of Refugees, <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/1951-refugee-convention.html>, Last accessed Jan 2, 2022. The “Principle of Non-refoulement” is enshrined in International human rights law and in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol decreeing that migrants and persons should not be returned to a country where they will suffer persecution, bodily harm, or punishment. Abuses at the southern border include flagrant denial of migrants presenting themselves at ports of entry to seek asylum, expedited trials, and repatriation.

¹⁵⁴ Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the US Border Around the World*, (London: Verso Books, 2019) 35.

more than 500 congregations and around 60 synagogues across the U.S. from 1985-1987 became sanctuary spaces, as noted by T'ruah. Throughout 1981 and 1982 Jim Corbett, John Fife and the Friends of Society worked to create a wider network to transport refugees and find safe avenues willing to provide shelter in two phases, privately (1981) and publicly (1982), which developed the movement in the Rio Grande Valley as one “which provided sanctuary in more covert ways.”¹⁵⁵ Following the influence of John Fife and the work of the Roman Catholic Diocese, Jewish social justice advocates like social worker and immigrants’ rights advocate Laurie Melrood, mobilized to provide sanctuary. Melrood’s activism and enactment of Jewish values connecting Jewish history, Holocaust memory, and resistance weaves diverse experiences of the border in Tucson and the southwest.¹⁵⁶ In the Rio Grande Valley, the Sanctuary Movement was very politicized and led to the arrests of advocates transporting and sheltering unauthorized migrants and refugees. For example, the Casa Oscar Romero shelter, which was named after slain NLF Salvadoran church leader, opened on Dec. 2, 1982, and was crucial in providing sanctuary to refugees from Nicaragua and El Salvador, shut down in 1986 due to political divisions.¹⁵⁷ Its director Jack Elder (1983-1985), like the leaders of the Sanctuary Movement in Tucson was arrested for transporting and harboring undocumented migrants in 1985.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Ariel Goldberg and Laurie Melrood, in “Sanctuary,” in *Protocols* no.5 (2019), <https://prtcls.com/article/sanctuary/>, Last accessed Nov 22, 2021,

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., Goldberg and Melrood, “Sanctuary,” In conversation with Ariel Goldberg, longtime activist and social worker Laurie Melrood recounts her work with the Sanctuary Movement in the Rio Grande Valley inspired by John Fife’s letter to interfaith groups. Heeding the call, she engaged in correspondence which led her to the RGV, as a “visibly Jewish person with all her multiple identities.” Her narrative connects the sanctuary movement, Jewish history, migration, Holocaust memory and resistance and the enactment of Jewish values in Texas, and her trajectory with migrants and advocacy initiatives in Tucson.

¹⁵⁷ Caryle Murphy, “Casa Romero: A Safe Port on the Texas Border,” *The Washington Post*, September 4, 1984. And Peter Applebome, “Sanctuary Closing Highlights Cultural Tension in South Texas,” November 3, 1986. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/11/03/us/sanctuary-closing-highlights-cultural-tension-in-south-texas.html>

¹⁵⁸ Darcy Sprague, “Old School Activism: The Story of Jack Elder,” *Echoes: H.E. Butt Foundation Magazine*, July 2017, <https://hebfdn.org/echoes/old-school-activism-the-story-of-jack-elder/>, Last accessed January 2, 2022

The Rio Grande Valley, like Tucson and El Paso, is at the crux of the refugee and migrant detention and human rights violations.¹⁵⁹ Longstanding activists, such as Sister Norma Pimentel, remain active despite the Catholic Diocese Charities shelter being shut down in February 2019 by the McAllen City Commission. The New Sanctuary Movement, a network of faith-based organizations in support of immigration reform, reemerged in 2007. In 2014, vulnerable groups sought sanctuary due to “increased policing, and profiling under Sherriff Joe Arpaio,” in Arizona. Currently there are 70 synagogues committed to the Jewish Synagogue Sanctuary Movement to provide aid in diverse forms (funds, training, accompanying migrants to court and rallying in spaces).¹⁶⁰

Migration Crisis

From 2014-2019, there was an upsurge in unaccompanied youth, primarily boys, and families arriving at the U.S border. Deterrence policies and the expansion of the for-profit detention centers were seen under the Obama administration, which built on the legacy of previous administrations’ punitive border security apparatus. Privatization of for-profit detention and holding centers were exacerbated under the Trump administration with the asylum ban, zero tolerance, remain in Mexico, and Title 42. "The borderland became the testing site of racist

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Rabbi Ben Zeidman by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, April 2023. Bishop Mark Seitz continuously advocates for human rights, migrants and asylum seekers in the El Paso-Juarez Metroplex Area along with interfaith clergy such as Reverend Michael Grady and Rabbi Ben Zeidman.; Also see, Oscar J. Martinez. *Border People Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994) 220-227. Annunciation House has been an important hub for dignity and respect sheltering migrants, refugees, and marginalized persons since 1975. In the 1980’s, Nicaraguan migrants fleeing the Sandinista government were hosted at Annunciation house continuing to make El Paso an important entry port toward for migrants and refugees from Latin America on their way to the interior.

¹⁶⁰ Lev Meiowitz- Nelson and Salem Pearce, *Mikdash: A Jewish Guide to the New Sanctuary Movement*, (New York: T’ruah, 2019), 10-12.

policies” and the family separation pilot program under the Obama administration.¹⁶¹ The El Paso sector, which encompasses El Paso and Southern New Mexico covering 264 border miles, became the “laboratory for its brutal model of immigration enforcement[...] nationalizing patterns of abuse” further, “solidifying an iron triangle of deterrence against asylum seekers forcing them to make the painful choice between deportation or prolonged detention.”¹⁶² The Tucson Sector encompasses most of Arizona and covers 262 border miles where migrants and asylum seekers have been forced into dangerous terrain as part of deterrence policies from the 1990s. According to Colibri Center, a human rights organization dedicated to identifying migrant deaths, 3,241 migrants have died crossing the desert in Southern Arizona.¹⁶³ Narratives in the previous chapter of migrant youth detained at Eloy and Florence Detention centers and featured at the TJMHC illustrate the extensive detention network and the work of non-profits immigrants’ rights organizations like the Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project.

At the height of the Trump Administration’s 2018 Zero-Tolerance Policy, which aimed at curtailing immigration through criminalizing migration resulting in family separation policy, the Florence Immigrants’ Rights project had denounced family separations rendering children

¹⁶¹ Interview with Rabbi Bruce Elder by Mayra Martinez, Glencoe Illinois, Oct. 20, 2021.; and “Hope and Resistance at the Border,” Hope Border Institute, (El Paso: Hope Border, 2019), 1-48. Rabbi Elder was part of the rabbinic delegation visiting the border and mentioned in the report.; The report is based on 500 documented cases showing the vulnerability of migrants and asylum seekers and the extent of “immigration enforcement” extending to immigration courts. It overviews cases, site visits to Tornillo and observations by lawyers and activists. <https://www.hopeborder.org/hope-and-resistance-report>; and “Sealing the Border: The Criminalization of Asylum Seekers in the Trump Era,” Hope Border Institute, (El Paso: Hope Border, 2021), 1-55. https://www.hopeborder.org/files/ugd/e07ba9_909b9230ae734e179cda4574ef4b6d6bb.pdf, Last accessed, Oct 20, 2021. Sealing the border is based on 300 documented cases that shows the El Paso sector as a testing site “brutal immigration enforcement,” and continuous human rights violations against migrants and asylum seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border.

¹⁶² “Sealing the Border,” 1-5.

¹⁶³ “El Paso Sector,” U.S. Customs and Border Protection, <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/border-patrol-sectors/el-paso-sector-texas> Last accessed Oct 20, 2021; “Tucson Sector Arizona,” U.S Customs and Border Protection,. <https://www.cbp.gov/border-security/along-us-borders/border-patrol-sectors/tucson-sector-arizona>, Last accessed Oct 20, 2021
Last accessed Oct 20, 2021

unaccompanied by November 2017, a year before it was officially announced to resolve the border crisis by attorney General Jeff Sessions.¹⁶⁴ Sessions stated: “those who choose to illegally cross our border...who challenge the Trump Administration’s commitment to public safety, national security...I warn you: illegally entering this country will not be rewarded.”¹⁶⁵ In one example, “Freddy,” an unaccompanied youth, made the perilous trek from Honduras, aware of the Trump administration’s anti-immigrant rhetoric and crossed through Guatemala and Mexico to escape poverty, corruption, and gang violence.¹⁶⁶ His trajectory revealed that fleeing was the last choice for survival. Accounts like his highlight the deplorable conditions and abuse migrants and asylum seekers face once apprehended at the border, or when they voluntarily surrender to Customs and Border Patrol. Migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers suffer the trauma of family separation, prolonged detention, and overcrowding in facilities known as the *hieleras* and the *perreras* where they are fingerprinted before being transferred to other sites or released. At Florence Detention Center in Tucson, children ranging from one-years-old and those with disabilities separated from relatives navigated court proceedings that requested them to seek voluntary departure, with limited counsel while some were represented by nonprofits like the Florence Project.¹⁶⁷

Laura Briggs, author of *Taking Children*, chronicles the long historical trajectory of forcefully taking children from vulnerable groups and criminalizing families of color have been

¹⁶⁴ Colibri Center for Human Rights, <https://colibricenter.org/>, Last accessed Jan 2, 2023,

¹⁶⁵ “Attorney General Announces Zero-Tolerance Policy for Criminal Illegal Entry,” Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs, April 6, 2018, accessed January 3, 2022, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-announces-zero-tolerance-policy-criminal-illegal-entry>

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Freddy by Alejandra Zavala, El Paso, Texas, April 13, 2019, Institute of Oral History University of Texas El Paso. Interview provided by the TJMHC’ for the “Jewish Museum Milwaukee’s Virtual Passport Series: ASILO/ASYLUM Virtual Tour,” April 6, 2021. <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82695804888?pwd=YzIiRSZlMaGRYQVN2d2wyNzF0QTgzQT09>

¹⁶⁷ Florence Immigrant and Refugee Rights Project, “Together: The Florence Project’s Response to the Family Separation Crisis,” Jan 2, 2023, <https://firrp.org/family-separation-2/> 14-18.

standard practices in the United States. Forced family separations include the removal and sale of the enslaved African Americans, as well as the removal of Indigenous children and youths from their communities across North America.¹⁶⁸ Briggs argues that family separation includes the mass incarceration of people of color from the 1970s to the present. “Secretary of State Kirstjen Nielsen stated that separating children from parents seeking asylum “was no different than what we do every day...in the U.S. when an adult commits a crime.”¹⁶⁹ The criminalization of asylum and detention of children made unaccompanied reached its peak during the Trump administration as the government pushed the boundaries of nationalist and xenophobic policies to curtail immigration and asylum claims.

Briggs, notes the evolution of militarization of the border, the shifting patterns of women and children filing for asylum in the late 1980s -2000s, the detention of children and punitive border policies ranging from the Clinton to the Trump Administration. Briggs states, “As soon as there were significant numbers of Central Americans in the Southwest, there were children in detention camps and separated from their parents;” and between 1987-1993, approximately 7,400-8,500 children were “detained and released to sponsors.”¹⁷⁰ However, not all minors reunited with sponsors. For instance, Jenny Lisette Flores, 15, lingered in indefinite detention due to the fear of apprehension and deportation of sponsors. The INS’s detainment of Flores and refusal to release her to an aunt living in the U.S. sparked the *Flores v. Meese (1988)* lawsuit. Similar practices were in effect at facilities like Tornillo and the vast network of detention sites where the mixed immigration status of sponsors prevented reunification. In 2008, the time for processing and releasing migrants was set for 12 hours and by 2018, it was 72 hrs. As shown by

¹⁶⁸ Laura Briggs, *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* (Oakland: University of California Press,2020), 10-15.

¹⁶⁹ Laura Briggs, *Taking Children*, 103-105.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, *Taking Children*, 134-136

Briggs, appeals to the Flores Settlement revealed subsequent administrations' defense of incarcerating minors if conditions were "humane."¹⁷¹ However, human rights activists and watch groups like Amnesty International and the ACLU continue to condemn the jailing of unaccompanied minors and documenting such abuses. From the early inception of detention centers in the late 1980s-present, each administration has expanded detention and shaped how the influx of refugees and migrants were perceived.¹⁷² For instance, during the current humanitarian crisis children and refugees were seen as "a border surge" flooding the U.S. border fueling the crisis narrative.

Communal Response to the Border Crisis

In the following sections, I describe the Jewish communal response to the border humanitarian crisis and the four community actions attended by diverse actors from the Jewish community. This includes local and national rabbis and activists performing Jewish values to advocate for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers victims of punitive immigration policies connecting it to broader Jewish history of migration and textual history. Advocating for the victims of punitive immigration policies connects it to responsibility towards the stranger (*ger*) found thirty-six times in Jewish scripture. Delegations of rabbis making the moral pilgrimage to the U.S.-Mexico border at Juarez/El Paso were hosted by local synagogues such as Temple Mt. Sinai and the conservative congregation Temple B'nai Zion. While these synagogues did not make a communal statement, the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso released a statement condemning the Trump administration's Zero Tolerance Policy issued in November 2018.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., *Taking Children*, 135-138; and 139-145.

¹⁷² Ibid, *Taking Children*, 139-145.

The influx of refugees and diverse groups of migrants and refugees fleeing state and gang violence to seek asylum at the border via international ports of entry was coded as the “refugee crisis” and “invasion” of the country by media outlets and politicians. On the other hand, it was seen as a humanitarian crisis by various activists and groups. For many, including Jewish organizations such as T’ruah (The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights), HIAS, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (along with congregations from diverse streams of Judaism) and youth with Never Again Action across the U.S, the humanitarian crisis became a “moral crisis” that needed a response.

Many Jews who acted were themselves inspired by the long tradition of American Jewish organizations and rabbis involved in welfare programs, social, racial, and economic justice, the Civil Rights movement, and the sanctuary movement of the 1980s. Many heeded the words of Rabbi Joshua Heschel who marched at Selma calling on President Kennedy “to declare a moral state of emergency,” urging clergy to move beyond “solemn declaration(s)” through action and financial support.”¹⁷³ Similarly, Rabbi Prinz, who escaped Nazi Germany in 1937 and was present at the March on Washington, recognized the importance of solidarity to ensure the welfare for all. He exclaimed that “America must not become a nation of onlookers.”¹⁷⁴ For Rabbi Prinz, protest and dissent against hatred and bigotry meant a moral and collective responsibility to the neighbor: “neighbor is not a geographical term it is a moral concept... for the preservation of man's dignity and integrity.”¹⁷⁵ Both rabbis connected the moral responsibility to the stranger and relied on personal experiences during the Holocaust to

¹⁷³ Rabbi Abraham Heschel, “Telegram to President John F. Kennedy,” *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writings*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2011), 64-65.

¹⁷⁴ Jewish Women’s Archive, “Rabbi Joachim Prinz’s Speech at the March on Washington, 1963.” <https://jwa.org/media/rabbi-joachim-prinz-speech-at-march-on-washington>

¹⁷⁵ *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Essential Writing*, 22-25.

advocate, as White Jews, against systemic oppression and racism—the moral crisis of the times. While the circumstances are not the same, the moral example shown by the rabbis, interfaith clergy, and Jewish protesters illustrate the legacy and tensions of coalition building. The rabbinic grassroots delegations addressing the humanitarian crisis were not part of a national movement like the Civil Rights Movement/ Yet showed the enactment and interpretation of Jewish values through advocacy and solidarity networks seen in the sanctuary movement of the 1980s and the longstanding Jewish tradition of seeking justice (Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof) and its varied interpretation to encompass social justice.¹⁷⁶

Four Community Actions: Activating Jewish Values and Social Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border

One avenue of response on the part of rabbis throughout the country was to make moral and spiritual pilgrimages to the US-Mexico border and to chronicle their accounts via blogs and op-eds in Jewish and non-Jewish avenues to call attention to the humanitarian crisis. Other methods of response from Jewish communities, organizations, and houses of worship were to engage in tzedakah to provide aid to organizations engaged in welcoming refugees and access to services needed. Congregations like Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois, created education and social

¹⁷⁶ “Tzedek, Tzedek Tirdof in Context,” Sefaria, <https://www.sefaria.org/sheets/76024?lang=bi>

Deuteronomy 16:18-20 and translate to “Justice, Justice, You Shall Pursue.”; *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives: Migration, Citizenship, and Social Movements*, edited by Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 93- 134. These articles link the social movement and qualities of advocacy that the new sanctuary movement utilizes. ; Norma Stoltz Chinchilla, Nora Hamilton, and James Loucky, “The Sanctuary Movement and Central American Activism in Los Angeles,” *Latin American Perspectives*, 36, no 6 (November 2009): 115-119. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20684688> The links between the old sanctuary practices and the new forms of advocacy reveal the continuous engagement and importance of Jewish tradition in providing sanctuary, connecting oppression to the memory of the Holocaust. This is seen in the sanctuary movement in Los Angeles through Jewish congregants and clergy participating in sanctuary practices in the 1980s which included gatherings on education and dissemination of information regarding the refugee crisis, engagement with narratives or plays evoking the memory of the Holocaust in these organizing spaces, or through speeches and newsletters. Further engagement is beyond the scope of this research but part of a future article.

justice committees to learn and engage with the moral and humanitarian crises in their communities and at the southern border.¹⁷⁷ The rabbinic human rights tours of the borderland included interfaith clergy united to exert their moral voice against unjust and punitive policies criminalizing migrants and asylum seekers and the dehumanizing conditions at holding facilities at the southern border such as the effects of the Trump administration’s Zero Tolerance Policies. These tours were coordinated by HIAS/ T’ruah and local partners such as Hope Border Institute and Border Network for Human Rights (BNHR). These delegations toured the border wall, visited local houses of hospitality in El Paso and Juarez, and toured detention centers such as the Otero County Detention Center in Southern New Mexico.¹⁷⁸ The rabbis became *secondary witnesses* to the inhumanity at the southern border, and engaged in the incorporation and reproduction of narratives told to them by refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers while visiting shelters and advocacy organizations like Las Americas.¹⁷⁹ Delegations of rabbis were hosted by local synagogues such as reform congregation Temple Mt. Sinai and the conservative congregation Temple B’nai Zion. In Tucson, the TJMC has hosted community forums on immigration policies, hosted delegation visiting the border, and engaged in border justice programming continuously since 2019.¹⁸⁰ Yet the limited involvement of the synagogues

¹⁷⁷ “Justice” Congregation Hakafa, <https://www.hakafa.org/justice>, Last accessed January 4, 2023. Congregation Hakafa has diverse social and racial justice committees centering on education, support and aid heeding the call against indifference: Immigration Justice Committee, Refugee Sponsorship (Welcoming Refugees).

¹⁷⁸ “Jewish Clergy Visit the U.S.-Mexico Border to Examine Human Rights Issues,” HIAS, April 2, 2019, <https://www.hias.org/blog/jewish-clergy-us-mexico-border-examine-human-rights-issues>, Last accessed Nov 21, 2021.

¹⁷⁹ At these sites, Holocaust narratives and memory are evoked by 2G and 3G survivors. In some cases, the clergy visiting the border wove into their accounts the experiences of those victims of detention, MPP, Title 42, Zero Tolerance, and deterrence policies. Deblinger’s use of secondary witnessing shows how philanthropic organizations and individuals visiting Displaced Person’s camps engaged in the retelling of the experiences of survivors to call attention to the humanitarian crisis. While not the same, the reconstruction and insertion of narratives of those with direct experiences of detention and denied the right to present asylum call attention to the moral and humanitarian crisis through further humanizing asylum seekers.

¹⁸⁰ Debe Campbell, “Community forum explores immigration policies, experiences,” Arizona Jewish Post, May 3, 2019, <https://azjewishpost.com/2019/community-forum-explores-immigration-policies-experiences/>, Last accessed November 13, 2021.

throughout the migration crisis illustrates the politicization of human rights, the asylum process, and divided communal bodies along political parties. For houses of prayer like Temple Mt. Sinai, supporting organizations and individuals working within the complex and evolving immigration and asylum system guarantees the work is done by those with the capacity to do so.¹⁸¹

*Rabbi Caravans to the TX/Mexico Border -Nov 14, 2018 – Let Our Families Go*¹⁸²

On November 15, 2018, a caravan coalition of rabbis, interfaith clergy, allies, and immigrants' rights advocates led a series of rallies on route to protest the expansion of the temporary influx care facility for unaccompanied minors (unaccompanied alien children) or (UAC)¹⁸³ run by Office of Refugee Resettlement, known as "Tent City," at Tornillo, Texas at the Marcelino Serna Point of Entry. Jewish congregations from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and

¹⁸¹ Interview with Rabbi Ben Zeidman by Mayra Martinez, April 2021. Congregation Temple Mt. Sinai hosted delegations of Rabbis visiting the southern border, engaged in symbolic acts with immigration issues through Refugee Shabbat, by providing meals for migrants and shelters, and supporting diverse organizations involved in advocacy.

¹⁸² "Let Our Families Go Indianapolis Rally," Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation, *Facebook*, November 6, 2018, [https://www.facebook.com/events/1984635484962161/?source=3&source_newsfeed_story_type=regular&action_history=\[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22newsfeed%22%2C%22mechanism%22%3A%22feed_story%22%2C%22extra_data%22%3A%20\[%20%7D\]&has_source=1&hc_ref=ARQTYkLRTQVOuwkjaMVcpYTn_KSW0-TMbAtIyvTZw0VWIXa9eH44dqa8vnhfdKSTqWk&ref=nf_target](https://www.facebook.com/events/1984635484962161/?source=3&source_newsfeed_story_type=regular&action_history=[%7B%22surface%22%3A%22newsfeed%22%2C%22mechanism%22%3A%22feed_story%22%2C%22extra_data%22%3A%20[%20%7D]&has_source=1&hc_ref=ARQTYkLRTQVOuwkjaMVcpYTn_KSW0-TMbAtIyvTZw0VWIXa9eH44dqa8vnhfdKSTqWk&ref=nf_target), accessed Nov 22, 2022.

¹⁸³ US Department of Health and Human Services: Office of the Inspector General, report to Lynn Johnson. *The Tornillo Influx Care Facility: Concerns About Staff Background Checks and Number of Clinicians on Staff (A-12-19-20000)*" report by Daniel R. Levinson, November 27, 2018, <https://oig.hhs.gov/oas/reports/region12/121920000.pdf> Accessed January 3, 2021, US Department of Health and Human Services, "Fact Sheet: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Unaccompanied Alien Children sheltered at Tornillo LPOE, Tornillo, Texas," December 26, 2018, accessed Nov 22, 2022, <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/Unaccompanied-Alien-Children-Sheltered-at-Tornillo-LPOE-Fact-Sheet.pdf>; DHHS defines unaccompanied minors as, "unaccompanied alien child, that has no lawful immigration status in the U.S.; has not attained 18 years of age; and, who does not have a parent or legal guardian in the U.S, or has no parent or legal guardian available to provide care and physical custody." I use the term unaccompanied minors, to refer to children/youth migrating to the U.S. by virtue of seeking refuge without legal guardians and those separated by zero tolerance policies. It is important to note, that Tornillo did not detain unaccompanied youth affected by zero tolerance. Most of the unaccompanied minors at influx sites were boys ages 12-17 allegedly close to being released to a sponsor.; and "The Written Testimony of Clara Long for a Hearing on: ' Kids in Cages: Inhumane Treatment at the Border,'" Human Rights Watch, July 10, 2019, accessed Nov 22, 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/07/11/written-testimony-kids-cages-inhumane-treatment-border> She was among an envoy of lawyers documenting the Clint Border Patrol Station, the El Paso Station, and Santa Teresa Border Patrol Station from June 17-19, 2019 on behalf of children protected by the Flores Settlement Agreement. Young children separated from their families were held at these detention facilities.

California participated in the “Let Our families Go,” caravan beginning on November 12-15, which made stops in St. Louis, MO, Tulsa, OK, and Dallas, TX. These groups were split into three converging delegations at Tornillo. The “Let Our Families Go” Caravan rallies were organized by Rabbi Miriam Terlinchamp of Temple Sholom in Cincinnati, Ohio and Rabbi Josh Whinston from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Rabbi Bruce Elder from Chicago, Illinois to 1) demand the reunification of kids with their sponsors; 2) end the criminalization of migration and the detention of children in for-profit prisons; and 3) to protest policies thwarting of asylum. Propelled by Jewish scripture to “welcome the stranger” and shared histories of oppression, Jewish and non-Jewish advocates protested outside Tornillo to show dissent against a broken immigration system unable to treat refugees with dignity.¹⁸⁴ Their visit represents individual and collective responsibility to the *stranger* and the reach of humanitarian/ social justice coalitions which they represent in their communities.

Jewish clergy, laypersons, allies, and Jewish organizations recognizing the importance of providing a moral witness embedded in Jewish tradition to stand against injustice convened at the border to learn about the humanitarian crisis. Rabbi Barry Bloch, the representative of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), signaled three aspects that rabbis and their communities were rallying against: “1) The asylum seekers languishing on the El Paso-Juarez bridge; 2) teenagers confined to a tent city surrounded by barbed wire in Tornillo; and 3) the humanitarian crisis in El Paso where immigrants are released without resources.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ “Let Our Families Go: Indianapolis Rally Monday Nov. 12,” Indianapolis Hebrew Congregation, Facebook, Last accessed February 2, 2022.

¹⁸⁵ Barry Bloch, “Tornillo: Shut it Down! And the Rest is Commentary,” Central Conference of American Rabbis, Dec 13, 2018. <https://ravblog.ccarnet.org/author/bblock/page/2/> According to rabbi Bloch the Reform Movement officially joined The Shut Tornillo Down Coalition.; For more on the event see, Elliot Levy, “Let Our Families Go: Rabbis to Lead Pilgrimage to the Southern Border,” Central Conference of American Rabbis, November 2018, <https://www.ccarnet.org/let-our-families-go-rabbis-to-lead-pilgrimage-to-tx-mexico-border/> Last accessed, October 31, 2021. The CCAR was represented by rabbi Barry Block of Congregation B’nai Israel in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Men, women, and minors seeking asylum have been held under the U.S. International bridge repeatedly since 2019. The Migrant Caravans from 2018, comprised of caravanistas from Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala, were first detained at the Guatemala/Mexico border. They were held at the Suchiate bridge at the Tecun Uman and Tapachula border after trekking from San Pedro Sula, Honduras on October 13, 2018. The arrival of approximately 7,000 *caravanistas*, trekking from Honduras toward San Diego-Tijuana, and the southern border, received extensive media coverage due to the change in the migration group patterns. Traveling as a collective offered the migrants a sense of safety as they traversed across Mexico where they are often met with violence and extortion by gangs, state police, and traffickers. The *caravanistas* held at the Guatemala/Mexico border highlight the extent of border protection initiatives like the Merida Initiative established in 2007 that trained Mexican and Guatemalan authorities to act as buffer zones to curtail immigrant flows into the U.S. Accentuating that the “that the U.S. southern border extends to Chiapas” and border externalization/defense extends “as far down as Peru.”¹⁸⁶ This illustrates that border imperialism, as argued by Todd Miller, is the most palpable in Central America.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the Trump Administration’s crisis rhetoric and deployment of the national guard served to create the humanitarian crisis at the border where the right to seek asylum enshrined in the refugee convention of 1951, its subsequent iteration in 1967, and in international law was denied by turning asylum seekers away to a third country: Mexico.

¹⁸⁶ Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders: The Expansion of the US Border Around the World* (London: Verso Books, 2019) 35-36.

¹⁸⁷ David Fitzgerald, “Asylum Processing & Migration: The Migrant Caravan to the Border Teach- In,” The Center for U.S.- Mexican Studies, University of San Diego, <https://usmex.ucsd.edu/research/migration/asylum-processing-migration.html>, Last accessed Jan 2, 2022. Fitzgerald quotes Alan Bersin, DHS Assistant Secretary for Policy, 2012.; Todd Miller, *Empire of Borders*: 36-8.

According to Rabbi Whinston, who has been active in social justice and immigrants' rights, the pilgrimage to Juarez/El Paso, was "a fulfillment of our obligation as religious leaders to support the most vulnerable among us...and end to the outrageous practices that keep asylum seekers and immigrant teens in poverty or locked in prison camps."¹⁸⁸ This pilgrimage further connects the immigrant experience and diasporic history of American Jews and Jewish textual history. Jewish congregations echoed similar sentiments. For example, Congregation Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois joined the "Let Our Families Go Caravan" to call attention to the injustice at the southern border, and as part of their wider social and racial justice initiative and as concerned American citizens. In the November 2018 Hakafa Newsletter, Rabbi Bruce Elder writes:

Members of Hakafa are going to Tornillo on November 15 to protest the idea of Tornillo because the very existence of Tornillo and other prisons, like it, is wrong. We are going to fight the unnecessary traumatization of vulnerable children and the continued vilification of them [...] We are going because America is better than this. We are going because we must.¹⁸⁹

For Rabbi Elder, the individual trips as part of the HIAS/Delegations to the U.S.-Mexico border, the "Let our Families Go Caravan," and the Shut Tornillo Down Coalition with members of Congregation Hakafa carry additional meaning. His father experienced the loss of Hungarian citizenship, deportation to Auschwitz, the trauma and pangs of family separation, the transfer to Dachau and the responsibility of being a survivor by the age of "fourteen."¹⁹⁰ By leading a clergy caravan, not only were the rabbis and allies acting in solidarity and performing Jewish values, but their actions subverted the negative and xenophobic connotation of Caravans being

¹⁸⁸ Elliot Levy, "Let Our Families Go: Rabbi's to Lead a Pilgrimage to the TX-Mexico Border," Central Conference of American Rabbis, <https://www.ccarnet.org/let-our-families-go-rabbis-to-lead-pilgrimage-to-tx-mexico-border/>, Last accessed Oct. 23, 2021.

¹⁸⁹ Bruce Elder, "D'varim: Tornillo." The Circle: Congregation Hakafa Newsletter, November 2018 Cheshvan/Kislev 5770, accessed November 21, 2021.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Rabbi Bruce Elder by Mayra Martinez, Glencoe Illinois, Oct. 20, 2021. The Dachau records indicate that Elder's father experienced deportation and loss all by the age of 16.

associated with mobs of criminals, waves of immigrants, and “bad hombres” waiting to overtake the border. Instead, a coalition of peaceful protestors held signs demanding liberation, family reunification, and justice by singing “*Olam Chesed Yibaneh*/ [we will] Build this world from love.”¹⁹¹ African American spirituals associated with protests like “Go Down Moses” further linked the contemporary moment to Jewish textual history and to the abolitionist movement and plight of the enslaved to reclaim power and freedom. The humanitarian crisis propelled other delegations to bear witness and to engage with the complex fate of those seeking asylum and humanitarian aid—subsequent trips to the U.S./Mexico border as caravanistas and asylum seekers from Venezuela are met with violence in 2022-23.

“*This Is Why We Went*”¹⁹²: *Moral and religious Voice: T’ruah Rabbi’s at the Border*

I just returned from El Paso, where T’ruah and HIAS jointly brought a group of 23 Jewish leaders [...] to witness the desperate situation on the Mexican border, and to bring our collective moral voice to stand with immigrants and asylum seekers. We heard from advocates on the ground that they ...are desperate for a moral and religious voice. That ’s why we went. - Rabbi Jill Jacobs

On November 3-6, 2019, Rabbi Jill Jacobs and a delegation of rabbis and cantors visited the U.S.-Mexico border accompanied by staff from HIAS and T’ruah. By March 2019, T’ruah/HIAS had sent five delegations of rabbis to bear witness and learn about the plight of migrants and

¹⁹¹ Rabbi Menachem Creditor, “Olam Chesed Yibaneh (A World of Love),” Track 26 on *There is Hope*, November 8, 2016. “I will build this world from love/ And you must build this world from love/ And if we build this world from love/ Then G-d will build this world from love.”; And Rabbi Creditor’s song was also part of the order of service for the Lion’s Plazita Havdalah. Never Again El Paso. “ July 6, 2019 Never Again Havdalah Song sheet ,” Facebook, July 8, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=488921828579335&set=ecnf.100076163301007>, Last Accessed February 2, 2021.

¹⁹² “Why we went” by rabbi Jill Jacobs evokes the written justification of 15 Jewish Rabbis arrested at St. Augustine protesting segregation.; ‘Why We Went: A Joint Letter from the Rabbis Arrested in St. Augustine’ on June 19, 1964,” Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, <https://rac.org/why-we-went-joint-letter-rabbis-arrested-st-augustine>, Last Accessed March 3, 2021. “We came because we realized that injustice in St. Augustine, as anywhere else, diminishes the humanity of each of us.” The rabbi’s answered the national call to clergy to bear witness by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. “based on our joint convictions of equality and justice.”

asylum seekers dealing with punitive policies such detention and Remain in Mexico. In her communique, rabbi Jacobs addressed the uncertainty that asylum seekers face as a consequence of these policies including violence and extortion from gangs, police, and traffickers. Metering practices and overcrowding in shelters forced migrants to live in tents. All these conditions led migrants to yearn “to be in ICE detention” rather “than to be stuck in Mexico.”¹⁹³ This statement from asylum seekers shows their precarity being denied the right to asylum and the desperation to be within the confines of U.S detention and its culture of abuse.

Otero County Detention Center- “Euphemisms and Land of Disenchantment”

For Rabbis and cantors who chronicled their experiences visiting the border – the wall, the humanitarian houses of hospitality, and shelters in El Paso such as Annunciation House and Casa del Migrante, the Leona Vicario Shelter in Juarez, and the Otero County Detention Center —what remains engrained was touring the Otero Detention Center, and witnessing the sentencing of four defendants.¹⁹⁴ Rabbi Jacobs and clergy like rabbi Stephanie Aaron of Congregation Chaverim in Tucson, paid closed attention to the euphemisms and deceit surrounding their visit to the Otero County Detention Center in southern New Mexico with its “Believe it or Not I care” (BIONIC) suicide prevention motto. The incongruity of the facility on paper and Otero the physical prison presents the complexity and deception of its public representation. Rabbi Jennifer Kaluzny recalls, “Had I not seen it for myself and felt it viscerally I would not have grasped the situation.” The detainees at Otero Detention Center were men and youths without prior criminal history and first-time unauthorized crossers which is a

¹⁹³ Jill Jacobs, “Report from El Paso,” *T’ruah*, November 2019, <https://truah.org/report-from-el-paso/>, Last accessed March 3,

¹⁹⁴ Arnold M. Eisen, “Jews at the Border.” Jewish Theological Seminary. November 15, 2019. <https://www.jtsa.edu/jews-at-the-border/>, Last accessed March 3, 2021.

misdemeanor offense.¹⁹⁵ These thoughts and sentiments are echoed by Rabbi Aaron, who had previously toured the Nogales border with the Tucson Jewish Museum & Holocaust Center's border justice community outreach connecting the ASILO/ASYLUM Exhibit to the long history of immigration.

For Rabbi Aaron, the forcefully rehabilitated image of Otero deserved deeper engagement. The eerie façade and euphemisms at the Otero Detention center evoked parallels to Nazism and the Holocaust, which led her to publish her account to bear witness to the dire circumstance of those punished for seeking asylum.¹⁹⁶ The blatant staging led her to ask: “why isn't it called a prison? Why is everyone, from the warden to the guards [and] our guide putting on happy faces?” Her reflections illustrate the extent to which the privately owned facility's management engaged in a public performance to appease the delegation. Rabbi Aaron noted,

We are in a “dorm.” This euphemism causes my very bones to shake. The last time we Jews encountered this much distortion of words and their meanings, we were in Nazi Germany heading for disaster. This is a men's dorm, yet I am certain that the man/boy's eyes I look into are younger than eighteen.

In this sense, Otero the processing facility, its “BIONIC”¹⁹⁷ motivational suicide prevention motto, and its physical characteristics of barbed wire, “holding cells,” and “dorms,” evoke the shrouded language of destruction, concentration camps, and “transports to the East,” employed by Nazi Germany and Third Reich Collaborators during the Holocaust. It evoked the infamous words “Work will set you free,” the idea of “model camps,” and the ruse of relocations under the

¹⁹⁵ Stacy Gittelman, “Rabbi Jennifer Kaluzny of Temple Israel Travels to U.S.-Mexico Border,” *The Detroit Jewish News*, January 16, 2020, <https://thejewishnews.com/2020/01/16/rabbi-jennifer-kaluzny-of-temple-israel-travels-to-u-s-mexico-border/> Last accessed March 3, 2021.; Eisen, “Jews at the Border.”

¹⁹⁶ Stephanie Aaron, “On visit to migrant detention center, recognizing our collective responsibility,” November 22, 2019, <https://azjewishpost.com/2019/on-visit-to-migrant-detention-center-recognizing-our-collective-responsibility/> Accessed November 16, 2021.; and Eisen, “Jews at the Border.”

¹⁹⁷ BIONIC or Believe It or Not I Care is a motivational and suicide prevention slogan introduced into the detention facilities like Otero Detention Center. Suicides, hunger strikes, and bodily harm and mental health issues are prevalent in detention centers due to isolation, prolonged detention, abuse and human rights violations, and inadequate care for migrants and refugees.

pretensions of work. While those imprisoned at the Otero County Detention Center were not stripped of citizenship, nor were they in concentration camps, the carceral practice criminalizing migration and the performance of labor for less than 2 U.S. dollars were alarming. The visit to these detention centers led Rabbi Aaron to further engage with the collective responsibility toward seeking justice.

Additionally, Rabbi Kaluzny from Congregation Beth Israel, in Detroit, Michigan, described the complexity of the border through an exchange on the plane with a CBP/BP agent calling for more punitive immigration policies. Another encounter was with a prosecutor in charge of an immigration proceeding the group had witnessed and whom they would see at the synagogue hosting them. These two exchanges require further context of the binational relationship between the El Paso-Juarez Metroplex Area, Jewish identity at the border, the border industrial complex, the recruitment of Latinx and other minorities by CPB/ICE, and the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, which are beyond the scope of this research. In this vein, as the rabbis toured the border, Peter Svarzbein, City Representative of District 1, expressed “that recent policy changes had done serious damage,” to the binational flow of residents from both sides of the border and to “not demonize anyone you meet. The matter is complex.”¹⁹⁸ Although El Paso votes largely democratic, there are diverse existing attitudes toward migration, refugees, and border enforcement from the Jewish and non-Jewish community. The visit to these detention centers and performance of dignified holding led rabbis to further question and confront what they had witnessed: human rights violations, solitary confinement, and the criminalization of migration without fair immigration proceedings.

¹⁹⁸ Peter Svarzbein as quoted in Eisen’s, “Jews at the Border,” Jewish Theological Seminary, Nov. 15, 2019, <https://www.jtsa.edu/jews-at-the-border/>, Last accessed March 3, 2021.

Shut Tornillo Down Rally: Marcelino Serna Port of Entry -Tornillo, Texas Dec. 15, 2018

On December 15, 2018, a delegation led by U.S. Rep. Beto O'Rourke (D-TX 16), toured the Tornillo facility known as "Tent City" along with U.S. Senator Tina Smith (MN), U.S. Rep. Judy Chu (D-CA 27), U.S. Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-HI), and U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley (D-OR). The event was organized by activists such as social worker Ashley Heidebrecht, Camilo Perez - Bustillo from Hope Border Institute, and was attended by other activists, clergy, and members of the community who had direct experience with immigration and volunteers. Also, in attendance was Joshua Rubin, an activist from New York, and other Jewish community members who made direct connections to the Holocaust via historic examples of internment, or through family narratives and experience of the Holocaust such as Ophra Leyser Whalen, who placed the Holocaust within a continuum of genocides."¹⁹⁹ For three months, Rubin witnessed at Tornillo and chronicled the movement of children and the facility's expansion. His dedication to freeing the children resulted in local and national media attention. In December 2018, Rubin poignantly adapted the African American Spiritual "Go down Moses," to describe the oppressive conditions of the children held at Tornillo. In the context of the following sentences, "Across the road and over the fence/The children live in prison tents/We stand outside the prison walls/We'll stand until this prison closes/Let My People Go," the administration becomes a tyrant like pharaoh. Witnessing for Rubin meant "seeing what others don't want you to see," such as the secretive flow of children being bused to and from Tornillo. Responsibility to memory and social justice drives Rabbi Elder to engage with historic examples of detention. For Elder states: "we should not shy away from using the language, these are concentration camps and internment camps

¹⁹⁹ "LIVE: Tornillo, Texas @BetoORourke @JeffMerkley rally to shut detention facility housing children," *act.tv*, YouTube. Dec. 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlnewV7Rf_o Last accessed, Nov. 3, 2020. Additionally, Leyser-Whalen's sign whose sign read "I have zero-tolerance for this zero-tolerance connects the rhetoric of protest and with the personal narrative and engagement with Holocaust memory and migration.

where kids are detained.” Rabbi Elder further connects the camps, detention centers and the history of internment camps in the U.S.: “We haven’t had any kind of prison or internment camps on our soil since World War II with Japanese Americans [...] There’s no reason[...] to be having them again.”²⁰⁰ Thus, as a second-generation survivor and activist, he connects the transnational and global history of detainment and exclusion of undesired groups and refugees.

Further, El Paso/Ft. Bliss community members demonstrating outside the Tornillo facility made connections to the broader history of concentration camps across Poland and Germany. Some demonstrators spoke about the role of guards during the Holocaust and those operating these detention sites, further connecting carceral practices, human rights abuses and violence at isolated sites like Abu Ghraib.²⁰¹ This engagement with dark heritage tours of the sites of atrocity being linked to the remoteness of the temporary influx facility holding children in deplorable conditions illustrates how public and historical memory were being evoked in politically charged sites by non-academics and the public, whose knowledge of the Holocaust is mediated through media, public and private representations and pre-packaged heritage tours.

TJMHC’s Education & Community Outreach Trip to the Ambos Nogales Border-Oct. 24, 2019

In October 2019, The Tucson Jewish History Museum and Holocaust center, as part of the museum’s outreach and education programming, arranged a community trip to the U.S.-Mexico border at Nogales. The TJMHC extended its gaze toward education, social justice, and outreach by organizing two events focusing on humanitarian work, refugees, migration, and

²⁰⁰ Brian L. Cox, “Glencoe/Winnetka congregation visits children detained in Texas, rabbi calls for justice,” November 26, 2018, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/winnetka/ct-wtk-congregation-hafaka-immigrants-tl-1129-story.html>, accessed August 2021.

²⁰¹ LIVE: Tornillo, Texas @BetoORourke @JeffMerkley rally to shut detainment facility housing children,” *act.tv*, YouTube. Dec. 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlnewV7Rf_o Accessed, Nov. 3, 2020.

borders throughout September and October 2019. These two programs further engaged with the threads and themes addressed in ASILO/ASYLUM (2019-2021). On September 2019, the TJMHC hosted its 2019-2020 Gallery Season opening by inviting Dr. Scott Warren to the museum campus. Warren, a humanitarian aid volunteer, and geographer faced “criminal charges for harboring and conspiracy to harbor” offering aid to migrants in 2018. Additionally, members of the Jewish community and individual advocates organized to protest Warren’s arrest as humanitarian aid (*pikuach Nefesh* saving a life) enacts Jewish values.

On October 24, 2019, TJMHC staff, donors, Jewish community members, and allies visited the U.S. Border at Nogales as an extension of its education outreach and communal action engaging with the complexity of migration, refugees, asylum, and border justice. The museum community and allies toured the border wall and met with the Mexican Consulate General in Nogales, Arizona who delved into the composition of groups seeking asylum where the majority were from Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Venezuela. Activists like Eduardo Garcia, from the Alliance for Global Justice Prison Imperialism Project Tucson, and Joshua Dunlap, from the non-profit BorderLinks, provided historical context of the U.S-Mexico border to address the current immigration system from the 1990s deterrence policies to the transnational border security expansion. The museum delegation then attended the U.S. Federal Courthouse to witness speedy immigration trials where local Tucson Immigration Lawyer, Mo Goldman, explained the complexity of U.S. immigration law and asylum. Lastly, the groups visited Casa Alitas migrant shelter in Tucson for which the Jewish community in southern Arizona raised monetary and clothing donations. The trip was organized by Community Engagement Intern Josie Shapiro, and the TJMHC, and was funded by community members and

Stanley Feldman. These two events highlight the museum's focus on education and advocacy on humanitarian issues directly affecting their community.²⁰²

Lions Plazita Never Again Action Havdalah, El Paso, TX July 6, 2019

In March 2019, migrants and asylum-seeking families, children, and men were detained under the Santa Fe bridge, exposed to the elements in makeshift pens. Migrants who fled persecution, violence, and corruption in their countries described being held in pens as far worse than they had endured. This led the El Paso community to evoke “never again for anyone,” and rally around human rights and the ACLU’s condemnation and investigation of CPB’s practices of the “unprecedented assault of their basic human rights.”²⁰³

On July 6, 2019, members of the Jewish community of El Paso and allies from across the city organized a peaceful Havdalah service to protest the inhumane treatment of migrants and asylum seekers at the border and those held under the International Bridge. The “Never Again Havdalah” service and the “Never Again Action” group in El Paso were initiated by Alison Westermann, activist, LGBTQIA advocate, and transplant to El Paso from Naperville, Illinois, and Jordyn Rozensky, writer/photographer living in El Paso.²⁰⁴ The reluctance of local Jewish organizations in El Paso, (i.e., Jewish Community Foundation and the Jewish Federation of Greater El Paso) to provide additional statements and greater resistance to the human rights abuses by Customs and Border Patrol against immigrants propelled concerned Jewish

²⁰² Debe Campbell, “JHM learning trip digs deep into southern border migration issues,” Arizona Jewish Post, November 8, 2019, <https://azjewishpost.com/2019/jhm-learning-trip-digs-deep-into-southern-border-migration-issues/> Accessed, August 27, 2020.

²⁰³ Robert Moore, “‘They Treated Us Like We Are Animals’: Holding Pen for Migrant Families in El Paso Shut Down,” *Texas Monthly*. Mar. 31, 2019. <https://www.texasmonthly.com/news-politics/holding-pen-migrant-families-shut-down-el-paso/> Accessed September 17, 2022.

²⁰⁴ “Jordyn Rozensky,” accessed Jan 2, 2022, <https://ro.co/health-guide/bio/jordyn/s> ; Photographer Jordyn Rozensky last month captured brief reunions between family members separated but the US-Mexico border, “CNN Instagram, November 18, 2018 <https://www.instagram.com/p/BqDQ5xbhpf-/> January 2, 2022.

community members into action. To protest in peaceful manner that what is being done is “not in our name.” Westermann states:

The discovery of refugees held under the bridge lit a fire...in a lot of people, [many] Jews and allies saw the legacy organizations not taking a stand on what was an absolute moral outrage. The congregations and the [Jewish Community Relations Council] weren't releasing statements...everyone was being very morally cowardly. I said, ‘We don't even have to release a statement. We can just get together, have Havdalah,’ and that will be enough.²⁰⁵

With a borrowed *Havdalah* set from Temple Mt. Sinai, and an order of service, members of the El Paso Jewish Community, allies, and the press gathered there at Lions Plaza to engage in prayer, songs, and to call attention to the plight of refugees and migrants. This group included journalist Debbie Nathan, rabbis and members of the local synagogues, immigration lawyer Carlos Spector, City Council Rep. Peter Svarzbein, and members of the community whose families were Holocaust survivors, engaged in retelling stories of migration, including their testimony. Never Again Havdalah, served as a space to connect the local and national chapters of the Never Again rallies happening across the U.S. as well as to connect the transnational and diasporic aspect of the Holocaust to the border crisis, family separation, and refugees of Nazism seeking asylum to exclaim that “Never Again Means Close the Camps” and “Never Again is Now,” in more than symbolic actions.

While the event came about organically for Westermann, the silence and reluctance of the Jewish community and organizations illustrate the different opinions regarding asylum, migration, open borders, and Holocaust being evoked when addressing the refugee crisis and detention centers. This speaks to debates over Holocaust memory, especially over the uniqueness of the Holocaust, where events past or present are incomparable. For those focused on the

²⁰⁵ Interview with Alison Westermann by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, February 12, 2022.; and Never Again El Paso, “Never Again Havdalah,” Facebook, July 6, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/neveragainelpaso/>.

uniqueness model, engagement with memory of the Holocaust may lead to trivialization or viewed as such by survivors families, as migration on the border has historically been linked to exclusion, racialization, violence, and illegality for certain groups. A prime example, over the concern of Holocaust trivialization is illustrated by renowned Jewish Studies and Holocaust historian Deborah Lipstadt's 2019 article for *The Atlantic* recognizing the horrors of family separation and condemning the use of Holocaust analogies to situations and policies that "are not genocide nor a Holocaust."²⁰⁶ For Lipstadt, the conflation of both temporally distant sites decontextualizes the scope of Nazi genocidal practices and migrant children used for political leverage through imperfect parallels. The concern over whether family separation is not a genocide, or a Holocaust shows the limits of Holocaust memory and its representation. This punitive policy reveals a broken immigration system and an administration intent to destabilize an already fragmented migrant and refugee family unit (through taking children, forced sterilization, and repatriation) and resurfacing the uniqueness of the Holocaust that renders comparisons off limits. What then are the moral lessons extracted from the Holocaust? The museum's careful approach was echoed in the EPHM's response toward Central American migrants and refugees by centering Afghan Refugees at Ft. Bliss and seeking public donations to shelters like Annunciation house in 2021.

²⁰⁶ Lipstadt, Deborah. "Family separation Is Not the Holocaust." *The Atlantic*. June 22, 2018. Retrieved July 2, 2020.; For more on the effects of family separation and deterrence policies see, "Sealing the Border: The Criminalization of Asylum Seekers in the Trump Era," Hope Border Institute, (El Paso, Tx: Hope Border, 2018), https://www.hopeborder.org/files/ugd/e07ba9_909b9230ae734e179cda4574ef4b6dbb.pdf; Also see, Mark Lusk, and Georgina Sanchez Garcia, "Witness to Forced Migration: The Paradox of Resilience," Hope Border Institute, (El Paso, Tx: Hope Border, 2021), <https://www.hopeborder.org/witness-to-forced-migration>, Last accessed, Oct 20, 2021.

*The Art Draft 1 & The Last Rat - Art Activism*²⁰⁷

Art plays a significant role in people's lives as a way to make connections and understand the world and events around us. On Sept 26, 2021, "The Art-Draft 1: An exploration of artwork from the children of Terezin and Tornillo - a work in progress" was uploaded by Mindy Escobar-Leanse to the streaming site *Vimeo*. Escobar-Leanse is an American actor, puppeteer, and voice actor actively involved in the El Paso Jewish community. This short, mixed media and audio-visual video-clip opens with a dramatized narration of the "The Butterfly," by Pavel Friedmann, who wrote the piece while interned at the *Terezin* Ghetto. Escobar-Leanse's work further moves to incorporate works from "Uncaged Art," drawn by anonymous unaccompanied youth interned at the Tornillo Influx Facility, near El Paso, Texas.

"The Butterfly."

The last, the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
against a white stone...
Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.
It went away I'm sure because it wished
to kiss the world goodbye.
For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Penned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions call to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.
That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto... Pavel Friedmann 4.6.1942²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Mindy Escobar Leanse, The Art-Draft 1: An exploration of artwork from the children of Terezin and Tornillo - a work in progress," Vimeo, September 26, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/615420017>.

²⁰⁸ *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944*, Edited by Ana Volavkova, (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 19.

Images of a fluttering yellow butterfly float on top of art created at *Terezin*—and which speaks to the trauma of internment, deportation, longing, nostalgia, playfulness, and hope in the face of starvation, labor, and an uncertain future. Yet, the children interned created art and their art provide a glimpse into a small portion of the complexity of cultural life in the ghetto. The butterfly suddenly flutters over a vibrant scenery and setting featuring a “Pink Tree” created by the unaccompanied youth from the Northern Triangle-Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala held at Tornillo. The “Pink Tree,” with surrounding mountain peaks and with a backdrop of a sky colored by golden and red hues—is a stark contrast to the desert vegetation, and white tents at Tornillo.²⁰⁹ The narration and visuals come to a stop, and the next frame is met with muffled background audio on historic racist border policies along the southern border (Chinese Exclusion Act, the National Origins Quotas, Japanese Internment during WWII) while the screen pans to a 3D model of a Catholic Church composed on an unaccompanied minor restroom sign subverting the language of internment [Unaccompanied Alien Child]. Soil is thrown on top of a charcoal painting of a landscape, as whispers of a rosary echo while a colorful and rhythmic song chronicling movement and procession plays in the background: “Mis sueños me dicen no vayas/ mis piernas dicen tantito//Y cuando me doy cuenta caramba/ me muevo poco a poquito.”²¹⁰ The butterfly flutters over the mock burial site. Ominous music and the colorful houses and trees set the staging back to the black and brown lifeless tracks and buildings of the transit ghetto and iconography of the Holocaust. The pieces depict the arrival and deportation process to and from

²⁰⁹ Yolanda Chávez Leyva, “‘Behind each beautiful painting is a child longing to be free’: Deep visual listening and children’s art during times of crisis,” *Global Studies of Childhood* 2021, vol. 11 no.2 (June 2021), 123–141, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20436106211023509>, Last accessed Oct. 22, 2022.

²¹⁰ “Zapata Se Queda,” Lila Downs, Celso Piña y Totó la Momposina, YouTube, June 7, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beuRgIqxTnY> Escobar-Leanse’s choice connects migration and movement as revolutionary—through the figure of Mexican Revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata and the global and cultural nature of music through the collaboration with afro-Colombian singer Toto la Momposina.

the transit ghetto while German opera plays in the background signifying the importance that the arts and culture held. This short piece comprised of images, sounds, text, and art created by children and youth in detention while under duress also signifies hope, nostalgia, and a longing for home, family, and freedom. Unlike the children at Tornillo, the children at *Terezin* ventured to write and represent their internment and surroundings. Friedmann's "The Butterfly," depicts the timeline of internment: "For seven weeks I've lived in here/ Penned up inside this ghetto/ But I have found my people here..." The children and youth saw beauty, hope, and despair in the face of death and an unknown fate. The children at Tornillo were instructed to draw what made them proud and their pieces remained anonymous. Like the children's art in *Terezin*, the pieces created by the children at Tornillo were a product of education classes; however, they both were created in detention facilities in remote locations under vastly different circumstances. Unlike the children interned at *Terezin* who faced deportations to concentration and death camps, the children interned at influx facilities awaited deportation to their home countries, asylum, or reunification with sponsors under constant surveillance and inadequate care. Their art was mediated through a sense of belonging and nostalgia and served to call attention to the experiences of children fleeing violence, war, and the history of incarcerating and separating children.

Terezin was a fortress established by Emperor Joseph II of Austria at Terezin, Czechoslovakia, located 60 km from Prague prior to being used as transit camp for Czech Jews.²¹¹ Terezin, or the German Theresienstadt, "operated under the Nazis from 1941 to May 1945, and functioned as a transit ghetto, a camp for the elderly, a propaganda ghetto (model

²¹¹ Anna Hajkova, "Introduction," *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2, and 6-7.

camp for IRC visits), and camp to hold Jews for exchange.”²¹² By October 1942, most were sent to Auschwitz Birkenau on 63 transports.²¹³ Additionally, during the beautification process, as noted by Anna Hajkova, Jews were sent to Auschwitz to appease the delegations of the German Red Cross and the International Red Cross who inspected the camp in June 1943 and June 1944. The visits showcased how international aid organizations found things to be less than acceptable but functional.²¹⁴ This resonates with the less than acceptable conditions at detention centers run by ICE and CBP and influx centers run by ORR. Delegations (lawyers, local social justice groups) inspecting these sites found conditions in which migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers were detained acceptable initially and later found unacceptable.

Accounts by lawyers reveal that at Tornillo, and detention centers, guards would terrorize and enforce a system where older children were rewarded with extra food by overseeing the cell, delegating duties, and supervising younger children. When a “seven-year-old saw [a seventeen-year-old] getting more food by being helpful, he asked if he could help clean up the room, so he too could get extra food...he was chastised.”²¹⁵ In the end, the boy’s older brother got involved and both brothers were reprimanded by the guard in charge. Although there was no self-governing body in these detention facilities, the skewed power dynamics created by guards pitted vulnerable unaccompanied minors against each other. For the lawyers involved in these cases, the manipulation of the guards toward prisoners evoked the manipulation and coercion of

²¹² Ibid., Introduction, 7-10.

²¹³ Ibid., Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 27; “The Ghetto,” The Terezin Memorial, <https://www.pamatnik-terezin.cz/terezin-ghetto>. The Terezin memorial further delves into the fate of the children 7,590 were deported.

²¹⁴ Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 10-11.; see also Barry Block, “Tornillo: Shut it Down! And the Rest is Commentary,” Central Conference of American Rabbis, Dec 13, 2018. <https://ravblog.ccarnet.org/author/bblock/page/2/> rabbi Block mentions that Rabbi Zeidman of Temple Mt. Sinai and a delegation of local advocates toured the detention facility before conditions worsened. This highlights the artificiality and carefully curated versions of these facilities for delegation representatives and advocates.

²¹⁵ Isaac Chatiner, “Inside a Texas Building Where the Government is Holding Immigrant Children,” *The New Yorker*, June 22, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/inside-a-texas-building-where-the-government-is-holding-immigrant-children> Last accessed August 4, 2021.

guards during the Holocaust: “You’ve got a guard manipulating these kids very similar to what we hear about in the concentration camps. I am not calling these concentration camps.”²¹⁶ However, because patterns are reflected in the modern, it does not create a direct parallel to conditions in a transit and labor ghetto. For instance, the nature of Terezin was such that the interned functioned as a self-governing body, with hierarchies laden with tensions (power, class, ethnic and gender dynamics) the context of war, deportations, and genocide.²¹⁷ However, the camps at the border had no self-governing bodies with hierarchies, nor were the children detained in the context of war. According to Hajkova, the children and youth in the youth homes in the ghetto likewise engaged in these ethnic hierarchies, power dynamics and othering.

A careful and critical engagement with the present allowed for the play *The Last Rat of Theresienstadt* by Hilary Chaplain to be performed in the borderland. This is significant as *The Last Rat* was filmed and adapted at El Paso Holocaust Museum (for the museum). *The Rat* was staged and performed at the University of Texas at El Paso on May 6, 2021, at the renaming ceremony of the Department of Theater Studio as the June Sadowski Kruszewski Studio Theatre by Mindy Escobar-Leanse.²¹⁸ The Kruszewski’s experiences were shaped by the occupation of Poland and WWII. June survived the occupation while Tony Kruszewski was molded by his participation in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Subsequently, he joined the Polish army under British command and as a war veteran was allowed to entry to the U.S. Both June and Tony Kruszewski were committed to justice and education at UTEP and the borderland.²¹⁹ Both

²¹⁶ Ibid, “Inside a Texas Building.”

²¹⁷ Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 22-24; The Children reproduced cultural, ethnic, and linguistic asymmetrical power dynamics and biases 81-82.

²¹⁸ Interview with Mindy Escobar-Leanse by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, October 19, 2021.

²¹⁹ “Dr. Kruszewski ‘SOTU’ Speech,” UTEP Political Science Newsletter, https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/political-science/news/newsletters/2015/dr_kruszewskis_sotu_speech.html, Last accessed Nov 3, 2022.

adaptations aimed to “honor the victims of the Holocaust while addressing themes that are relevant in the contemporary moment such as racism, xenophobia and antisemitism.”²²⁰ *The Last Rat* ponders the many ways in which diverse people coped with internment and uncertainty; when faced with starvation, disease and devastation, the prisoners of Theresienstadt found joy where they could - in art, cabaret, song, and story.²²¹ This representation also speaks to the power of Holocaust theater, its historical and cultural outreach, and implications. As previously mentioned, art for those at Terezin “served as catharsis, to show beauty, barter, and as a form of distraction and reprieve, reinforce class, and to foster a “connection to home.”²²² However, as Hajkova argues, “art does not stand alone,”²²³ and it obfuscates the complexity of the ghetto, its dynamics and heterogeneity (class, country, religion) and as a site of “transnational encounters,” through “the lens of a small minority” and through the postwar canon’s focus on art and performance.²²⁴

Typology of Activism

Rabbi Bruce Elder- Humanitarian Activism (Civil/Human Rights)

As the son of a Holocaust survivor, Rabbi Elder’s activism and involvement in bearing witness and social justice initiatives is driven by memory and responsibility to memory.

Additionally, his activism and involvement in racial justice and immigrant rights is mediated

²²⁰ Ibid., interview with Mindy Escobar-Leanse.

²²¹ Hilary Chaplain, “Bio,” <https://hilarychaplain.com/bio/> Last accessed Oct. 12, 2022

The Last Rat of Theresienstadt according to Chaplain, “the play explores how humor and art can heal and create resilience in the face of adversity.”

²²² 176-178.

²²³ Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 172-174.; 225-227.

²²⁴ Ibid., Hajkova, *The Last Ghetto*, 25-27.

through his role as a rabbi, his time at the Jewish Council of Urban Affairs, and the work of Rabbi Marx enacting solidary, building community and coalitions in the pursuit of justice beyond a moral imperative.²²⁵ Rabbi Bruce Elder grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, in a small Jewish community. His father was a Holocaust survivor, and his mother was an only child in the only Jewish family in three counties in Western Ohio. Rabbi Elder pursued a degree in History, Psychology, and Jewish Studies at Indiana University. After moving to Chicago, he became involved with social justice movement and the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA). In 1990, he became coordinator for outreach at the JCUA. He attended the Hebrew Union College and was ordained in 1996. In 2002, he rejoined Congregation Hakafa in Glencoe, Illinois as Rabbi where he currently serves.

Rabbi Elder has a legacy of involvement with social justice and humanitarian aid and advocating for the plight of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in his community and at the U.S.-Mexico border. In 2010, Rabbi Elder was among rabbis, activists, and demonstrators arrested for disorderly conduct at an immigrant rights rally in Chicago against the "stringent Arizona law" such as SB 1070 and HB 2162 known as the "show me your papers" laws. These laws raised questions on racial profiling of the Latino/Hispanic population, the loose interpretation of immigrant status, "and the narrow list of documents eligible to demonstrate lawful presence."²²⁶ Rabbi Elder condemned the racist policies at the community prayer vigil. He articulated, "I'm not here to say, 'shame on Arizona.' I'm here to say, 'shame on America' for allowing Arizona to happen." This statement reflects his stance on responsibility and disdain on

²²⁵ The Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA) was founded by Rabbi Robert J. Marx (z"l). Rabbi Marx was at the forefront of justice movements in Chicago and across the country. He championed for civil rights, racial equity, worker justice, women's equality, and economic opportunity.

²²⁶ "Arizona's Immigration Enforcement Laws," Arizona Enforcement Laws, accessed Oct 15, 2022. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/immigration/analysis-of-arizonas-immigration-law.aspx>

“issues of collective imprisonment and oppression.”²²⁷ His activism spans over 20 years and continues to focus on community and coalition building that extends to the future. Rabbi Elder has been part of Interfaith coalitions demonstrating along the U.S.-Mexico Border.

In June and August 2018, Rabbi Elder learned of the expansion of Tornillo Children’s Detention Facility through the *New York Times*. Rabbi Elder’s activism against this expansion and in other racial and social justice initiatives is driven by a commitment to memory and responsibility shaped by being a second-generation survivor and the burden of “both being survival and [being] responsible for survival.”²²⁸ Deportations and “actions to remove Jews from Hungary” began as early as 1938.²²⁹ However, Hungarian Jews were ghettoized and deported to Auschwitz *en masse* from April 7-Sept 1944.²³⁰ Rabbi Elder’s father, the son of Hungarian Jews, and his family were deported to Auschwitz in 1944.²³¹ As a result, his immediate family was ruptured upon the selection process at Auschwitz. In July 1944, traumatized and alone, he was transferred to Dachau.²³² In remembering his father, who survived both Auschwitz and Dachau, Rabbi Elder stated:

²²⁷ Rabbi Bruce Elder, Interview with Mayra Martinez, Glencoe Illinois, Oct. 20, 2021.

²²⁸ Ibid. Rabbi Elder Interview.

²²⁹ Leslie Waters, *Borders on the Move: Territorial Change and Forced Migration in the Hungarian-Slovak Borderlands, 1938-1948*, MS, (April 2019), 26.; Ern Munkcsi, Nina Munk, Ferenc Laczó, *How It Happened: Documenting the Tragedy of Hungarian Jewry*, (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018) xxiv-xxv; xxv-xliv. Two dates of deportations were May 15-July 9, 1944, and July- September 19, 1944. Antisemitic legislation and exclusionary practices gradually increased in 1938 and 1941 since the numerus clausus in the 1920s.

²³⁰ Ern Munkcsi, et.al., *How It Happened: Documenting*, xxv-xvli.

²³¹ “The Holocaust in Hungary: Frequently Asked Questions,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <https://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/special-focus/the-holocaust-in-hungary/the-holocaust-in-hungary-frequently-asked-questions#4>, Last accessed Jan 3, 2023. From May 15- September 19, 1944, 437,402 Hungarian Jews were deported to Auschwitz on 147 trains. Further, antisemitic legislation had been passed from May 1939 -1944.

²³² “Dachau Concentration Camp Records,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, RG-67.034, https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source_view.php?SourceId=20803, Last accessed Jan 4, 2023. Elders’ father was transferred to Dachau in July 1944 and liberated in May of 1945 by Allied troops.; and Eliezer Schwartz, “The Death Marches from Dachau Camps to the Alps during the Final Days of World War II, accessed February 2, 2022, <https://www.nli.org.il/en/articles/RAMBI990005137440705171/NLI> Schwartz notes that inmates from Dachau in 1944 were part of death marches or transports to the Bavarian and Tyrolean Alps.

I am not suggesting Tornillo was Auschwitz or Dachau but when it expanded from a 380-bed facility to a 3800-bed facility [and used] as a test case to create a line of concentration camps for immigrants of dark skin [along our] southern border, I felt that as a son of a survivor, that I couldn't sit by and let that happen. My father watched his mother and [eight-year-old] sister go to the gas chambers. And so, I have always had a sensitivity to issues of child imprisonment, collective imprisonment, and oppression.²³³

Elder draws connections from his own experience and that of border narratives—carrying their family’s trauma and the intersectionality of the two. He recounts, “I was born with the Holocaust [...] I carried the burden from a very young age and other than my family [...] the most important person in my life was my father’s sister.”²³⁴ Intergenerational trauma can be defined as a secondary form of trauma that results from the transfer of traumatic experiences from parents to their children. In this context, Holocaust memory and knowledge of the Holocaust have been passed down through family narratives, photographs, commemorations and silences, nightmares, and personal pursuit of this history. According to Hirsch, “postmemory describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before.²³⁵ For Rabbi Elder, the shared histories of migration of refugees and migrants connects to Jewish history “not just from the Holocaust but from 120 years ago [but] our attempts to leave the pale of settlement in Russia [...] and being able to integrate and succeed should not be limited to us...we need to be part of the solution instead of the problem.” Rabbi Elder asserted how Jewish textual history mentions thirty-six times, “You shall not oppress the stranger.” The stranger, in this context, is the figure of the immigrant, the refugee in search for the American dream—families and youth escaping state violence and poverty. Jewish

²³³ Interview with Rabbi Bruce Elder by Mayra Martinez, Glencoe, Illinois, Oct. 20, 2021.

²³⁴ Ibid., Interview with Rabbi Bruce Elder.

²³⁵ Marianne Hirsch, “postmemory,” <https://postmemory.net/> Last Accessed Oct 7, 2022.

“The paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who came after. The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies, threatening sometimes to overshadow and overwhelm our own lives. But we did not see them, suffer through them, experience their impact directly. Our relationship [...] has been defined by our very ‘post-ness.’”

immigrants came searching for economic opportunity; thus, escaping pogroms, poverty, and state violence. During the Holocaust and postwar period Jewish refugees became immigrants and new Americans. Additionally, rabbi Elder considers that faith, ritual, and scripture require action:

I learned ritual has to manifested in how we work in the world and how we work in the world has to be manifested in the ritual. How can I be called a religious person— if I am not on the streets calling out in the name of our traditions— what we are supposed to be doing in this world.²³⁶

Therefore, social action carries a moral, religious, and personal approach to transformative justice and liberation. Although family experiences have shaped Rabbi Elder’s work, coalition building is also at the center of his advocacy and Jewish values. Coalition building has been an essential component of his work as seen through his involvement with the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs, interfaith work in his community, work with immigrants’ and LGBTQIA rights, and the “Shut Tornillo Down Coalition,” among others. Rabbi Elder’s observations after bearing witness at Tornillo on November 15, 2018, and later at Matamoros/Brownsville, provide insight on how the United States “scapegoats and demonizes migrants and asylum seekers. First, through the Muslim Ban, then family separation and zero-tolerance policies” and convey the disbelief that the same country that gave his father refuge after surviving the Holocaust was the same country incarcerating children and denying refugees the right to present asylum claims.

For Rabbi Elder, who has been involved in immigrants’ rights and social justice coalition for over twenty years, witnessing at the border meant prioritizing community organizations like Hope Border Institute in El Paso and Team Brownsville in the Rio Grande Valley. Most

²³⁶ Rabbi Bruce Elder interview with Lynn Sanders, “Shutting It Down- the VUU #244,” Church of the Larger Fellowship, YouTube, uploaded Jan.17, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTohWmOkS5Y> Rabbi Elder talks about the coalitions around Shut Tornillo Down, the diverse letters addressing BCFCS, legislators, and the bittersweet moment as Tornillo shut down as other detention centers opened. He reiterates his personal investment against collective imprisonment and oppression. Elder highlights the importance and investment of long-term coalitions and interfaith groups to enact change in policy.

importantly, he recalled an experience calling for self-awareness, power dynamics and white privilege to support local organizers and women of color in organizing spaces. He poignantly states:

My training is to not become a white savior, but to support grassroots organizations. This work is really tough work. We were a group of older white people taking the lead of Hope Border Institute. When women of color, came down to the border to witness and tried to assert power, there was a lot of tension. And that hurt on a lot of different levels... When it came to witnessing at Homestead. I was clear that I wasn't going [...] the local people didn't want us. And being caught in the complexity [of it] caused a little schism between Josh [Rubin] and me. His point was, 'There are kids in kids' prisons. I got to get them out.' [there was] so much passion and so much tension, all of it so necessary [...]²³⁷

This approach taken by diverse actors illustrated the complexity of grassroots organizing and the tensions associated with witnessing and entering a community and solidarity work.

Rabbi Stephanie Aaron- Humanitarian Activism (Civil/ Human Rights)

Rabbi Stephanie Aaron and her commitment to Holocaust education, social justice, and witnessing at the U.S Mexico border connects Jewish tradition and memory and thus, translating it into action. Rabbi Aaron was born in Indianapolis in the mid-1960s. Her family moved to Phoenix and settled in Tucson when she was young. She attended the University of Arizona and received her Rabbinic education at Aleph B'nai, a "yeshiva without walls."²³⁸ She has been the Rabbi at Congregation Chaverim in Tucson, Arizona for 30 years since her ordination in 1998.

²³⁷ Interview with Rabbi Bruce Elder by Mayra Martinez, Glencoe, Illinois, Oct. 20, 2021

²³⁸ "About: History of the Aleph Ordination Program" Aleph Ordination Program, Last accessed May 3, 2021, <https://aleph.org/aop/history-of-the-aleph-ordination-program/>. 1978, Rabbis Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, Arthur Green, et, al., created the "Seminary Without Walls."; Interview with Rabbi Stephanie Aaron by Mayra Martinez April 2022. Rabbi Aaron's mentor Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi helped recognize her passion for Holocaust education leading to her participation in a trip to Auschwitz with an international Buddhist delegation in 2001. Additional trips led to an encounter German collective historical guilt illustrating the complexities of individual and collective trauma and the mediation of Jewish values as she embraced a young German despite the reluctance to engage with his apology.

She has been actively involved in Holocaust Education, humanitarian endeavors, and organizations supporting immigrants' rights in Southern Arizona. Her work with humanitarian aid, which is grounded in Jewish texts (*pikuach Nefesh*) extends to providing water for migrants. However, her passion for Holocaust education and human rights began as an eighteen-year-old student in Tucson.

In 1985, the leading organizations and clergy of the Sanctuary movement such as Southside Presbyterian Church held the First Inter-American Symposium on Sanctuary at Temple Emanu-El with Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel as the keynote speaker.²³⁹ For Rabbi Aaron this encounter cemented her commitment to honoring survivors and seeing humanitarian aid as core Jewish values. She states:

When I was a freshman in college, Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel came to Tucson. [Hearing] him speak was a very transformative experience... I knew then that part of who I was supposed to be [at eighteen] was a person who was willing to stand with survivors to hear their stories, support them in their lives and their families, and to accompany them as they returned to Poland and other death camps... [when Wiesel stated] 'For the dead and the living we must bear witness.'" I made the conscious decision to bear witness to the Holocaust [...].²⁴⁰

This transformative experience illustrates the power of Holocaust survivors and the effect learning from living witnesses can have on an individual, which is a premise in Holocaust education and memorialization projects. This event further linked Holocaust memory and never

²³⁹ Debe Campbell, "Local Call to Goes Out Make Never Again Now," *The Arizona Jewish Post*. August. 16, 2019, <https://azjewishpost.com/2019/local-call-goes-out-to-make-never-again-now/>, Last accessed July 2021. The Jewish History Museum unveils banner "No Human Is Illegal," as response to the rise in xenophobia, anti-immigrant, antisemitism, and gun violence in the U.S after the El Paso Shooting on August 3, 2019, and the Tree of Life Synagogue on Oct. 28, 2018. The Phrase was used by Elie Wiesel during the sanctuary movement while visiting Tucson in 1985. Also see Lev Meirovitz- Nelson and Salem Pearce, *Mikdash: A Jewish Guide to the New Sanctuary Movement*, (New York: T'ruah, 2019), 10-12; Ari Goldman, "U.S Clerics Debating Ethics of Giving Sanctuary to Aliens," *The New York Times*, August 23, 1985, <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/08/23/us/us-clerics-debating-ethics-of-giving-sanctuary-to-aliens.html>. Holocaust survivor Wiesel empathized with the plight of Central American refugees as a former refugee. However, his approach was one within the bounds of policy change and following the law "by harboring the refugees in places of worship [...]". Sanctuary and cities of refuge are rooted and exemplified in biblical tradition for those fleeing persecution under Mosaic law.

²⁴⁰ Interview with Rabbi Stephanie Aaron by Mayra Martinez, Tucson, Arizona, April. 4, 2022.

again to the Sanctuary Movement of the 1980s, migration and refuge translating universalization of one event to call attention to the diverse facets of dehumanization present at the border. Rabbi Aaron supported Holocaust survivors and members of the Jewish community members to engage with the Holocaust. She led trips to sites of atrocity as part of the March of the Living campaign where the commemorative journey starts in Poland and Auschwitz culminating in Israel. This campaign pledges to honor the “legacy of the multitudes of our Jewish people who perished in the Holocaust,” and committing to fighting “discrimination against any religion, nationality, or ethnic group” by turning memory into action.²⁴¹ These trips are an essential aspect of Rabbi Aaron’s sacred work of memory in Southern Arizona.

Witnessing at the U.S.-Mexico border with a delegation of cantors, rabbis, and activists sponsored by HIAS and T’ruah throughout the border crisis calls to memory a pivotal piece in Rabbi Aaron’s journey—her work with the Sanctuary Movement in the 1980s. Inspired by the work of the Sanctuary movement leaders like John Fife, she engaged in stake outs and transporting migrants in the desert which could have led to an arrest and criminal charges. Her desire to provide aid propelled her to action.²⁴²

I would go with another member and drive down and get refugees, and drive back. You could never cross the border except for walking. I remember many times; I was surrounded by families and young children hiding. And seeing the cream truck of the Border Patrol going by us, I will never forget the fear. I thought [my heart] would pump right out of my chest... It was very risky because I had two young children. What if I would have been arrested and sent to prison? There were a lot of what ifs, but I just had to do something, and I was able to do

²⁴¹ “About,” The March of the Living, accessed April 7, 2021, <https://www.motl.org/>

The March of the Living established in 1988 is an educational program which takes individuals/groups to Poland and Israel to study the history of the Holocaust.

²⁴²Miriam Davidson, *The Beloved Border*, (Tucson: Arizona University Press, 2021),121, and 145-147; Reverend John Fife led the establishment of the Sanctuary Movement. He is the cofounder of the aid group Samaritans. In 1986, Fife was convicted with seven others on alien-smuggling charges. He served a five-year probation sentence. Humane Borders and No More Deaths are humanitarian organization under the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson with a mission to end death and suffering of migrants in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. For more on Fife and the genesis of the movement see Miriam Davidson’s, *Convictions of the Heart*, (Tucson: Arizona University Press, 1988).

something. I feel it is a lot more difficult now, especially with the way the border is. Now, I have been on water runs [with] humane borders.²⁴³

This is significant as activists and advocates behind the sanctuary movement, immigrants' rights, and human rights organizations have adapted to the changing conditions on the border and immigrant flows. Her trajectory extends to interfaith rallies calling out for justice and peace in her community and advocating for activists, such as Scott Warren (2019) who faced trial for providing aid to migrants on counts of "conspiracy to transport and harbor undocumented immigrants."²⁴⁴ Rabbi Aaron's involvement with border justice spans over 20 years, while her work in Holocaust education to combat the "plagues of apathy, antisemitism and racism," spans over 30 years. The visit to the Leona Vicario shelter in Juarez during her trip with HIAS/T'ruah evoked her work with asylum seekers from Guatemala and El Salvador in the 1980s. This visit chronicles her trajectory with humanitarian aid and responsibility to the "stranger," "the migrant," as core Jewish values.

When I hear the word crisis on the border in Nogales, California and in Texas. I think about how in the Torah, we are commanded over thirty-six times, to 'remember the stranger, you were strangers.' You must feel empathy for the stranger. That's me. That's a *we*. 'Love the stranger,' sometimes it says, 'love *your stranger*'—it sets up a relationship. When I journeyed to our border, I've felt that pain of the stranger, when visiting the huge shelter in Juarez [with] families seeking refuge.

²⁴³ Interview with Rabbi Stephanie Aaron, by Mayra Martinez, April 4, 2021.

²⁴⁴ Ryan Deveraux, "Humanitarian Volunteer Scott Warren Reflects on the Borderlands and Two years of Government Persecution," *The Intercept*, accessed April 7, 2022, <https://theintercept.com/2019/11/23/scott-warren-verdict-immigration-border/>; Debe Campbell, "Tucson interfaith rally draws scores to support activist Warren," *Arizona Jewish Post*, Jun 13, 2019, <https://azjewishpost.com/2019/tucson-interfaith-rally-draws-scores-to-support-activist-warren-at-trial/>. Last accessed Feb. 3, 2021. Rabbi Aaron's statement reflects her humanitarian approach and trajectory to love and protect the stranger commanded in Jewish scripture. "We will act so any stranger will find our open hearts and hands to love, cherish, give food and water. We laud the actions taken by Dr. Warren and link our souls to him in unity."

Additionally, “never again,” for Rabbi Aaron, implies we will never again permit another genocide. She states, “These rallying words, never again a genocide, though we know there have been genocides since... but what we want to say to other people, [is] we're with you.” Rabbi Aaron believes that bearing witness means solidarity, responsibility to memory, and compassion that propels action at the collective and individual level. Her narrative reflects an active engagement with the past and Holocaust memory, education, and human rights to address othering, racism, antisemitism, and anti-immigrant sentiment. She illustrates advocacy for diverse groups engaging in a multidirectional approach that does not pit human suffering and histories against each other but informs such groups’ violent histories with historical precedents and careful comparisons. Her advocacy is embedded in Jewish tradition to “love the stranger.”

Alison Westermann- Grassroots Activist

You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it. - Pirkei Avot (2:21)

Alison Westermann is a social justice activist and educational justice, and LGBTQIA advocate residing in the borderland. Westermann received her B.A. in Political Science from the University of Illinois Urbana- Champagne. She has been involved in diverse advocacy endeavors including migrant advocacy since her arrival to El Paso in 2007. She was the Program Director at the Borderland Rainbow Center, Youth Director at Temple Mt. Sinai, and the PJ Library program. Westermann grew up in Naperville, Illinois but has resided in El Paso for over thirteen years. Westermann was influenced by Sal Alinsky’s grassroots organizing method in Illinois and is present in her advocacy. Her activism is driven by Jewish values (*tikkun olam*-repairing the world and the pursuit of Justice) with elements of the Ethics of our Fathers and Dr. Martin

Luther King’s “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”²⁴⁵ For Westermann, these quotes reflect a focus on ethics and moral imperatives guided through action to denounce inhumanity and injustice in the pursuit of justice, equity, and preserving humanity.

Before coordinating the Never Again Havdalah, Westermann was a volunteer coordinator at the Loretto Retirement Center's House of Hospitality part of the Annunciation House network. Annunciation House has been crucial in providing faith-based care, shelter, and respect to migrants released into the community since 1977, and is a key site visited by human rights delegations.²⁴⁶ As a volunteer coordinator, she trained approximately 100 volunteers over a two-week period. Such demanding work schedules and tensions with volunteers led to activism burnout evident in her narrative.

I recruited, and background checked over 100 volunteers [...] assigning shifts, [setting] reminder calls, texts, emails. You know, it felt good to be doing something like that and then burned out quickly because it was incredibly intense work. The kids went back to school and life became so much more complicated.²⁴⁷

Both Westermann’s and rabbi Elder’s narratives regarding advocacy reveal the tensions of working in communities of color, power and gender dynamics, and white privilege. For Westermann, as a Jewish person being perceived as a white savior by persons of color; was an experience that continues to resonate.

It was very strange to me as a Jew. To be perceived as white and to be cast in that role was new. And so, for a person of color to accuse me of being a white savior—was very strange. And I mean, it still sticks with me today and makes me reluctant to get involved in certain things because of that experience.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ “Pirkei Avot 2:16,” Sefaria, accessed Feb 1, 2022, https://www.sefaria.org/Pirkei_Avot.2.16?lang=bi, Rabbi Tarfon’s commentary (Ch 2:16) “It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it;” Tikkun Olam -repairing the world; to engage in activity that will improve the world.

²⁴⁶ “About Annunciation House,” Annunciation House, <https://annunciationhouse.org/about/history/>, Last accessed February 2, 2022,

²⁴⁷ Interview with Alison Westermann by Mayra Martinez, February 12, 2022.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. Interview with Westermann.

While her work with asylum seekers and refugees ended on a conflicting note, her anecdote illustrates the complexity of navigating multiple identities and being coded as a white Jewish [Ashkenazi] person in an 82% Latinx border city with a 1% Jewish community population. In these exchanges the nuances that being ethnically, culturally, secular, or religiously Jewish imply and the intersections of class, race, and gender are ignored. Scholars have argued that Jews in America ascribe to whiteness and have gained mobility unlike other ethnic groups.²⁴⁹ These instances show how Jewish individuals have asserted their “white privilege,” to advocate for marginalized groups, and served to reflect on whiteness. This experience did not deter her organizing and advocacy efforts as seen through the *Never Again Havdalah* and through support of meaningful organizations. This included supporting grassroots organizations centering border narratives like “Justicia Fronteriza” and “El Paso for Just Schools” and current work with *El Paso Matters*. For Westermann, the border encompasses acknowledging the complex border history and systems of oppression and raising children aware of these tensions. The border also represents the continuation of Jewish tradition, community and transnational ties with Mexico, and the Jewish Diaspora in contested spaces.

Shofars Across Borders connects Jewish tradition and fosters the continuation of transnational ties with Jews and B’nei Anusim (conversos and returnees to Judaism) from across Northern Mexico, Torreón, El Paso, and Southern New Mexico. *Across Borders* was established in 2015 by Peter Svarzbein while an active board member of the Jewish Federation. The Shofar is blown at the Historic Border Marker No. 1 to mark the Jewish New Year.²⁵⁰ Those who have

²⁴⁹ Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 120.; Hasia Diner, *Jews of the United States*, 268-269. Jews joined the Civil Rights movement as white Liberals, and secular Jews.; On intersectionality see David Schraub, “White Jews: An Intersectional Approach,” *AJS Review* vol.43, no.2 (November 2019), 379-407.

²⁵⁰ The Shofar is a religious instrument made of a ram’s horn and blown like a trumpet during Rosh Hashanah to mark the end of Yom Kippur. The shofar serves as call to action, introspection, and repentance.

gathered to celebrate the Jewish New Year have witnessed first-hand the evolution of the border wall's construction through its in person and online events. Westermann is one of the few women to blow the Shofar in the region. In 2019-2020, she and the other shofar blowers were invited to meet at the Historic Marker No.1 but were forced to take an alternate route through the IBWC "across the river and over the dam" as the path ran through private property and the owner "was antisemitic and wouldn't let us pass."²⁵¹ For Westermann, the border and shofar become a site and a tool of/for action, community, and resistance. The border wall displays the outward manifestation of the racist policies and rhetoric meant to deter migration and divide binational, and bicultural communities.

When Border Patrol opened the gate...It was so menacing being there again with this wall that symbolized hatred and fear [...] All of that money [for the wall] was raised with crisis rhetoric. Being there as I was blowing the shofar it felt like Jericho. Like, I wanted the wall to fall down. I have happy memories of shofars across borders [it shows] the connections between Jewish communities across Juarez and El Paso built by Rabbi Leon.²⁵² [Rabbi Stephen Leon has taught conversos in the Southwest since the 1980s.²⁵³

The historic marker through these symbolic acts, therefore, takes on new meanings as shared histories become engulfed in contesting the commemoration of violent and racist immigration policies. Westermann's engagements with border history and activism illustrate one individual's role in advocating for migrants and social justice across diverse platforms. And the

²⁵¹ Shelby Kapp, "Border monument access dispute heats up" [https://www.ktsm.com/local/el-paso-news/lack-of-access-to-historical-marker-has-visitors-stepping-onto-private-property-stirring-a-debate/Historic Marker No. 1](https://www.ktsm.com/local/el-paso-news/lack-of-access-to-historical-marker-has-visitors-stepping-onto-private-property-stirring-a-debate/Historic%20Marker%20No.%201) Build the Wall who funded the border wall came to an agreement with the International Boundary and Water Commission to keep the gate open during the weekdays. Borderland residents are denied access to the historic site via a safe route based on political affiliation, ethnicity, and religion. For more on the contested border history and militarization of the border marker #1 see Marla Miller and Sarah A. Leavitt, "Militarizing Memory at International Boundary Marker #1" National Council on Public History, Oct 7, 2020. <https://ncph.org/history-at-work/international-boundary-marker-1/>

²⁵² Interview with Alison Westermann by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, February 12, 2022

²⁵³ Stephen Leon Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation B'nei Zion is one of the leading Rabbi's teaching crypto-Jews of the southwest. He opened the ANUSIM Center where he led members of the Hispanic/Latina/o community of El Paso/Juarez and New Mexico back to their "Jewish roots." In 2017, he published *The Third Commandment and the Return of the Anusim: A Rabbi's Memoir of an Incredible People*. He was featured in Isaac Artenstein's *A Long Journey: The Hidden Jews of the Southwest* in 2021.

efforts to bring awareness to issues border-landers from diverse walks of life across both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities who may be indifferent.

Mindy Escobar- Leanse - Artist Activist

Mindy Escobar-Leanse’s artistic endeavors and activism reflect the multilayered engagement of borderlanders with the contemporary migration discourse, representation activism, and Holocaust memory. Escobar-Leanse was born in Dallas, Texas in 1988 and moved to El Paso, Texas as an infant. She grew up in a Conservadox household and navigated Jewish life on the border entrenched in Mexican culture. She attended the University of Texas at El Paso in 2006 and the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in 2007.²⁵⁴ Escobar-Leanse received the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center scholarship and has performed in spaces throughout the U.S., Israel, and Europe.

For Escobar-Leanse, art and puppetry allowed her to connect to multiple historical and public memory processes connected to the border, Jewish history, family histories of migration, and Jewish values such as *tikkun olam* (*the act of repairing the world*), personal responsibility to the other—neighbor, the stranger, the immigrant, and refugee. Never again, as a border-dweller and as a member of a Jewish minority (less than 1%)—"means never again is happening right now," that requires action and careful engagement with broader historical context of the Holocaust and other genocides.²⁵⁵ She was involved with EPHM’s *Community Encounters* outreach program that engages with difficult topics and advocates for inclusion. For Escobar-Leanse, the border crisis is 1) the lack of funding for the arts and opportunities for flourishing

²⁵⁴ Interview with Mindy Escobar-Leanse by Mayra Martinez, El Paso, Texas, Oct. 19, 2021
Combination of Conservative and Orthodox streams of Judaism and where certain aspects of both streams of Judaism are observed.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., Interview with Mindy Escobar-Leanse.

artists; 2) the continued treatment of bilingual individuals and people living in the borderland as second-class citizens (food insecurity and lack of access to art); and 3) the humanitarian crisis encompassing the precarity of asylum seekers at the southern border and the lack of information surrounding it.²⁵⁶

Conclusion

This chapter was about Jewish community actions regarding migration activism. It provided historical context and then focused on actions that have occurred since 2016. It used interviews with community leaders, provided a typology of activism, and described a number of different responses to the migration crisis in El Paso and Tucson. The actions taken by communal organizations and individual actors described in the chapter speak to the silences and tensions found in communities such as El Paso—where direct engagement with the refugee crisis, activism, and advocacy are mediated more cautiously and privately—opting for supporting and uplifting organizations dedicated to advocacy, unlike Tucson whose engagement with border justice, humanitarian aid permeates aspects of communal and educational response ranging from the THJMC, the synagogues and the Jewish Philanthropies of southern Arizona. This chapter also illustrated the influence of Jewish advocacy, Holocaust memory, Jewish values, and diasporic history and the diverse threads tying social justice and interfaith movements such as the sanctuary movement of the 1980s and its current iteration of the New Sanctuary movement focusing on advocacy—radical accompaniment and witnessing at the border within the bounds of biblical tradition.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., Interview with Mindy Escobar-Leanse.

Conclusion

The Jewish History Museum & Holocaust Center in Tucson, Arizona, similar to the El Paso Holocaust Museum, is uniquely positioned in a binational, multilingual, and bicultural transnational border at the Southwestern United States. These two cities are in close proximity to the northern Mexican states of Sonora and Chihuahua, as well as the Sonoran & Chihuahuan Deserts. The U.S.-Mexico border is a space often seen by the media and right-wing groups through the prism of the rhetoric of violence, immigration, and anti-Mexican sentiment that dehumanizes refugees and further marginalizes underrepresented communities. Historically, the border has been a site of exclusion and inclusion, resistance, and hybridity. The border has been a testing ground for racist policies which persists as seen through migration deterrence policies which began in 1994-to the present and exemplified through Tornillo 2018-2019, and the August 3, 2019, domestic racial attack on the El Paso Latinx/Hispanic community. Both borderland communities have dealt with racism, xenophobia, and prevention through deterrence policies such as Family separation, Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), Operation Streamline, and a rhetoric of violence; yet, both have engaged differently to complex border issues and humanitarian crises, and the Holocaust museums have taken different approaches through their programming and outreach to represent the refugee crisis, the intersections of Holocaust memory, Jewish diasporic history and advocacy in their communities. As a response to Tornillo, and the humanitarian crises at the border Jewish activists, in El Paso and Tucson, and at the national level became secondary witnesses through their engagement with rallies and protests, consciousness raising events focused on addressing a broken immigration system, indefinite detention, zero-tolerance policy, Operation streamline trials and punitive policies designed to curtail the asylum process. Additionally, I look at how and where Holocaust memory is evoked,

and how Holocaust memory relates to the refugee crisis through its representation in Holocaust Museum spaces and activism spaces.

Although both museums are located along the 2,000 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border, their proximity to the border, board and committee dynamics, and mission determined how to address the humanitarian/refugee crises at the southern border as both museum's took contrasting positions to address such issues, indirectly and directly. Sites and detention facilities such as *Tornillo* were not the exception in a hyper-militarized border as policing and border technologies intrude the binational communities everyday lives.²⁵⁷ These sites and human rights abuses for some members of the borderland community, have not gone unmarked. This is seen through the *Never Again Action Havdalah* in El Paso held on July 6, 2019, and one of the *Shut Tornillo Down Coalition* rallies on December 15, 2018, which involved *Witness at the Border* and groups of local activists. National attention regarding human rights abuses is obscured and downplayed by anti-immigrant, xenophobic sentiments and crisis rhetoric driven by racist practices of exclusion and violence in the name of national security.

This crisis rhetoric of a border surge and invasion led to a terrorist attack on the 82% Latinx transnational, multilingual border community in a racially motivated mass shooting where 23 individuals of the border community were murdered. What role did the Holocaust and Holocaust education play in a community grappled with a collective historical trauma of

²⁵⁷ Jon Herskowitz, "Tent City for Migrant Children puts Texas Border Town in the Limelight," Reuters, June 18, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-tornillo/tent-city-for-migrant-children-puts-texas-border-town-in-limelight-idUSKBN1JG32L>, Last accessed July, 2021

Tornillo known as "Tent City" was a temporary housing facility meant to hold the overflow of migrants—more specifically for "unaccompanied alien children" in June 2018 and closed in Jan 2019. Tornillo was operated by BCFS, a nonprofit group through the department of Health and Human Services and the Office of Refugee Resettlement. "Sealing the Border Report," Hope Border Institute. The facility held unaccompanied minors as an extension of zero tolerance policies aimed to criminalize and deter migration. Although detention centers were expanded and built by the Obama administration, family separation and the mistreatment of unaccompanied children were exacerbated by the Trump administration.

colonization, violence, displacement, and policing by Texas Rangers (even through the use of surveillance technologies) while living through a racially motivated mass shooting? How did Holocaust museums and their mission of fighting discrimination, racism, hate, and injustice illuminate shared histories of trauma and empathy while being at the frontlines of the inhumane and highly politicized treatment of migrants and asylum seekers at the border? Further, how did Jewish communities respond to "migrant caravans," and the "refugee crisis?" How did Jewish institutions such as: Jewish Federations and the Community Relations Council, the Holocaust Museums, Synagogues, religious and Jewish secular organizations respond to the humanitarian crisis? This research ponders the role of Holocaust memory regarding human rights abuses at the U.S.- Mexico border, when looking at borders broadly, violence, and humanitarian issues.²⁵⁸

The museums' response to the migration crisis reveals their community's response to the refugee crises, to Holocaust memory, and detention centers being compared to concentration camps, and engagement with the ongoing humanitarian crisis featuring migrants and asylum seekers from the global south. There was no blueprint for Holocaust museums on how to engage with the humanitarian crises/ "refugee crises" or the public and politicized debates throughout 2018-2019 over Holocaust memory in the context of detention centers being compared to concentration camps, nor how to address punitive policies denying the right to seek asylum at the U.S.-Mexico border. As mentioned in chapter one, The El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center (EPHM) took a conservative approach to the migration crisis. EPHM released a statement

²⁵⁸ The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict and conflation of any criticism toward the state of Israel as antisemitic, anti-Jewish, however nuanced critique is beyond the scope of this research. Regardless these issues are important to members of the Jewish community in the borderland seen in the 2019 community study; See Karla Martinez, 2019 Greater El Paso Jewish Demographic Study, 44. Community respondents mentioned the lack of information of the Federation in immigration/social justice initiatives, and limited engagement with borders like El Paso/Juarez and Israel/Palestine. Also, discussion on Israeli surveillance technologies, and the military industrial complex along the U.S.- Mexico border (including Jewish response) is beyond the scope of this research, but it is not lost on the author. Additionally, Todd Miller's *Empire of Borders*, and Harsha Walia's *Border and Rule* further address hardening borders, border externalization, immigration, and practices of exclusion.

in 2018 on World Refugee Day to condemn family separation centering migration and asylum through Japanese internment during WWII. The museum organized two programs focusing on the Afghan Refugee crisis as the refugees were temporarily housed at Ft. Bliss.

The institution that took the initiative to engage with Holocaust memory, the history of concentration camps was the University of Texas El Paso's Centennial Museum through the curatorial approach of Yolanda Chávez Leyva and David Dorado Romo in *Uncaged Art*, featuring the art of migrant children in detention in Tornillo and providing the historical trajectory of placing children behind barbed wire connecting it to Terezin. Mindy Escobar Leanse's engagement through art with the Holocaust and Grassroots activist, Alison Westermann's narrative challenge the silence of a politicized and ambivalent community in El Paso, over human rights, advocacy, and the right to seek asylum.

In Tucson, the TJMHC hosted community forums on immigration and delegation visits to the border, as well as engaged in border justice programming including *ASILO/ASYLUM*, Dr. Warren's lecture, and the communal tour of the Ambos Nogales border. In 2019, the Museum also engaged with migration through a participatory sculpture *Sukkah* entitled "Clamor en el Desierto" by Mirta Kupferminc, which further engages with the right to seek refuge. It challenges witnesses not to be bystanders, thereby linking human rights rhetoric throughout the installation, Jewish tradition, Holocaust memory, and migration (as Kupferminc is the daughter of Holocaust survivors). More poignantly, this participatory sukkah according to the artist and the TJMHC utilizes materials used to erect barriers to deter migration.²⁵⁹

ASILO/ASYLUM, therefore, only worked as well as it did in Tucson through its bold curatorial approach and considering how the community has decades of involvement with

²⁵⁹ "Virtual Tour: Clamor in the Desert with Mirta Kupferminc," Tucson Jewish Museum and Holocaust Center. Vimeo, Oct. 15, 2020. <https://vimeo.com/468637461>, Last accessed Feb.25, 2021.

immigrants' rights, the 1980s Sanctuary Movement, and long trajectory resettling and welcoming refugees even as the state of Arizona launched punitive and racist policies and is part of the global border surveillance and prison industrial complex.

Chapter two delves into how Jewish communities along the U.S.- Mexico border have responded to the migration crisis, activism, and engagement with Holocaust memory. These narratives provide an insight into culture, historical memory, and the multiple historical processes further illustrating that collective and popular memory are not static. Official state representation of the Holocaust as seen through the memory debates of 2018-2019 regarding Holocaust analogies and detention centers was contested and politicized in public spaces by those with ties to the Holocaust and leading institutions devoted to memory and education to “unequivocally reject Holocaust analogies,” in an attempt to contain and reshape popular memory. At these sites and through these acts of witnessing, resistance, solidarity, and enactment of Jewish values (*tikkun olam*, *Tzedek /justice*), Jewish diasporic history and Holocaust memory were evoked. Holocaust analogies and narratives of family persecution and immigration escaping Nazism were employed to create a connection between two temporal and geographically removed sites pointing to dehumanizing practices of detention—trauma, squalor, and in certain cases, death. In some cases, historical precedents in the U.S. were called upon regarding the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II to establish a connection to diverse iterations of the carceral practices and “concentration camp continuum” of which Auschwitz, death, and labor camps” are one of many.²⁶⁰

The typology of activism in chapter two explores three categories: The Humanitarian Rabbi Activists, the Grassroots Activists, and the Art Activists demonstrating and witnessing at

²⁶⁰ Dan Stone, *Concentration Camps: A Short History*, 3-10, and 74.

the southern border. The narratives of Rabbi Stephanie Aaron, Rabbi Bruce Elder, Alison Westermann, and Mindy Escobar-Leanse and social and migrant Justice advocate Laurie Melrood illustrate what working toward making “never again,” a reality looks like. Overall, this thesis illustrates the importance of Holocaust memory and the tensions associated with the invocation of the Holocaust in public discourse in relation to the contemporary migration crises at the U.S.- Mexico Southern border. This also shows how Holocaust memory continues to be reshaped by Jewish communities through their engagement with commemoration, institutions devoted to Holocaust memory and individuals’ direct experiences with the Holocaust (second-third generation survivors) and non-Jewish actors in public and private spaces—in advocacy, protests utilizing the rhetoric of never again, and direct experiences with the Holocaust.

Future avenues of research would include a more specific focus on multidirectional memory, Holocaust memory, and Jewish communities (El Paso and Tucson's) engagement with the end of Title 42, the ongoing humanitarian and refugee crises, and their representation in Jewish spaces. Further engagement with the rabbis, Jewish religious, communal, and legal aid organizations—their continuous engagement with the moral and humanitarian crises at the border would be a future project.²⁶¹ This research aims to connect wider transnational studies on refugees, children in detention, crises rhetoric, and Holocaust memory through the representation of the humanitarian crisis in Holocaust museums in the Southwest and the invocation of the Holocaust in advocacy spaces from a borderland perspective, human rights, and Jewish history

²⁶¹ Ayelet Press, “The Biden Administration’s ” Asylum Ban,”” Hebrew immigrant Aid Society,” <https://hias.org/news/biden-administrations-asylum-ban-explained/> Last accessed May 1, 2023. In 2023, The Biden-Harris Administration proposed restrictions on asylum with the end of Title 42 on May 11, 2023, that would combine “third country transit ban and entry ban,” and focus on expedited removal. Title 42, a public health provision which denies entry to unauthorized persons (migrants, asylum seekers) was invoked and implemented at the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

as critical engagement remains absent in certain academic and public spaces concerned over the trivialization of the Holocaust that contribute to its reification.

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Vita

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