PERMANENT EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM AND MEMORIAL IN SOBIBÓR TO BE COMPLETED SOON.

SINTI AND ROMA GENOCIDE REMEMBRANCE DAY

TOURISM WITH VALUES. INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTRE OF DIALOGUE AND PRAYER FR. JAN NOWAK.

HOW, NOT IF: REMEMBRANCE IN A DIGITAL ERA

JEWISH RESISTANCE TO THE HOLOCAUST. A NEW EXHIBITION AT THE WIENER HOLOCAUST LIBRARY IN LONDON.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent exhibition at the Memorial and Museum in Sobibór to be completed soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinti and Roma Genocide Remembrance Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism with Values. Interview with the director of the Centre of Dialogue and Prayer Fr. Jan Nowak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New online museum of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How, not if: Remembrance in a digital era</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We invite all of you to work closely with us. We would be grateful to receive information about events, projects, publications, exhibitions, conferences or research that we should share with our readers. We also accept proposals for articles.

Please do share information about this magazine with others, particularly via social media.

Paweł Sawicki, Editor-in-Chief

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All editions: memoria.auschwitz.org
During the Holocaust, Jewish partisan groups and underground resistance networks launched attacks, sabotage operations and rescue missions. Resistance groups in ghettos organised social, religious, cultural and educational activities and armed uprisings in defiance of their oppressors. In death camps, in the most extreme circumstances, resisters gathered evidence of Nazi atrocities and even mounted armed rebellions.

The Wiener Holocaust Library’s new exhibition draws upon the Library’s unique archival collections to tell the story of the Jewish men and women who, as the Holocaust unfolded around them, and at great personal risk, resisted the Nazis and their collaborators.

The Library reveals stories of endurance and bravery, including that of Tosia Altman in Nazi-occupied Poland, who travelled in and out of various ghettos on false papers, passing information, raising awareness and organising armed revolt. Altman smuggled weapons into the Warsaw Ghetto in preparation for the armed uprising. She escaped from the ghetto but was ultimately captured. Tosia Altman died of her injuries, sustained on the run, on 26 May 1943 at the age of 24.

The exhibition also explores individual acts of resistance: the maintenance of secret diaries by Ruth Wiener in Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen and Esther Pauline Lloyd, a Jewish woman deported from the Channel Islands in 1943 who recorded in great detail her experiences of the internment camps in France and Germany.

Philipp Manes, a German Jew and a prolific writer was deported to Theresienstadt ghetto with his wife, Gertrud, in July 1942. Whilst incarcerated, Manes was key to the cultural life in the ghetto and he documented his experiences in great detail. The Wiener Holocaust Library holds nine of his notebooks within the Philipp Manes Collection. This collection of documents and writings provides valuable insight into the artistic and intellectual endeavours of internees held in the ghetto. Manes’ Theresienstadt diaries also contain contributions by other incarcerated prisoners such as poems, letters, and drawings.

Manes’ final notebook breaks off mid-sentence. On 28 October 1944, Philipp and Gertrud were sent to Auschwitz in one of the last transports to leave Theresienstadt, where they were both murdered.

Jewish Resistance to the Holocaust features stories from The Wiener Holocaust Library’s collection of eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust, collected by Library staff in the 1950s. Many of these documents have never been on display before and were translated into English for the first time for this exhibition. The collection includes first-hand accounts from the survivors of armed
JEWISH RESISTANCE TO THE HOLOCAUST
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resistance groups, stories of the activities of the underground networks that rescued Jews, and the accounts of those who resisted the Nazis by going into hiding in German-occupied Europe.

The exhibition will be on show from 6 August – 30 November 2020. Please note that due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation the Library is only open to those who have pre-booked a viewing slot.

Please visit their website for more information on opening times and new health and safety measures:

https://wienerlibrary.co.uk/Jewish-Resistance
In July 2017, works on securing the clearing where mass graves with the ashes of the victims are situated were completed. Dignified commemoration as well as protection and appropriate securing of this place constitute the most important element of the concept of establishing a new museum. The clearing was covered with layers of geotextile and white marble aggregates. The next stage included the construction of the premises of the Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór. In 2019, works connected with adapting them to museum activity were carried out. The building inscribes in the space of former German extermination camp with its shape. It consists of a glazed exhibition hall, where main exhibition is being prepared, as well as a multi-purpose space intended among others for conducting educational classes, lectures and seminars. The building also includes a visitor service centre as well as office space for the staff.
Scenario of the exhibition "SS-Sonderkommando Sobibor. German extermination camp 1942-1943" was prepared by the team of employees of the State Museum at Majdanek: Tomasz Kranz, PhD; Dariusz Libionka, PhD and Krzysztof Banach. The exposition will show the history of the extermination camp in Sobibór, including the fate of subsequent victims in the broad context of the functioning of Nazi apparatus of extermination of the Jewish population in Poland and in Europe.

The iconography will be based on newly discovered photographs and documents. The exhibition is going to present 500 artifacts discovered in the course of archaeological research, including in particular personal belongings of the victims.

In his introduction to the album "Extracted from the ashes. Personal belongings of the victims of German extermination camp in Sobibór" (Lublin, 2018), curator of the exhibition and at the same time Director of the State Museum at Majdanek Tomasz Kranz, emphasizes: "These relics are characterized by their unique power of expression and carry double message. On one hand, we perceive them as tangible proofs of extermination and on the other – as the last signs of the life of subsequent individuals, entire families and bigger communities. By being the evidence of death, they remind us of life. [...] Extracted from the ground, they constitute a silent, but so moving last will of those murdered that we need to read, implement and pass on to future generations."

Artistic design of the exhibition was selected in an international competition organized basing on funds from the grant provided by the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany through the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation. Main prize was awarded to the Kłaput Project s.c. company from Warsaw.

According to the winning exhibition design concept, its main part is going to be constituted by a glass case with the objects discovered during archaeological works. Exposition space will be divided according to subsequent themes describing the establishment, operation and liquidation of the German extermination camp in Sobibór.
The effects of some of the works connected with newly developed Museum and Memorial Site in Sobibór are already accessible to visitors. At the beginning of July 2020, we opened a modern and spacious visitor service centre where one can receive necessary information and purchase books published by the National Museum at Majdanek.

What is more, from Tuesday to Sunday, from 9.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m., open-air exhibition is available for visitors, entitled “Drawings on the scraps of life. Extermination of Jews in the Lublin region in the sketches by Józef Richter” and presenting scenes connected with the persecution and extermination of Jews in the Lublin region. Apart from the extermination in Sobibór, they also refer to the history of the ghettos and other places where extermination of Jews took place in the Lublin district.

In spite of the fact that the works at the Museum are still in progress, authenticity of the memorial site in Sobibór attracts the interest of visitors. In late July, nearly 1000 individuals visited the premises of the former German extermination camp.
August 2 is celebrated in Poland as the Sinti and Roma Genocide Remembrance Day. 76 years ago, on the night of August 2–3, 1944, the Germans liquidated the so-called Auschwitz II-Birkenau family camp for Gypsies (Zigeunerfamilienlager). About 4,300 children, women and men, the last Roma prisoners of the camp, were murdered in the gas chambers. Due to sanitary restrictions, part of the celebration was moved online. The victims were also commemorated on the grounds of the former German Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz II-Birkenau.

Several dozen people met at the monument commemorating the extermination of Roma and Sinti. Wreaths were laid and tribute was paid to the victims. As a result of the ongoing pandemic, most of the commemorative events were moved online. The virtual event commemorating 500,000 Sinti and Roma murdered in Nazi-occupied Europe is the focus of this year’s activities on the European Sinti and Roma Genocide Remembrance Day on August 2. On the special website https://www.roma-sinti-holocaust-memorial-day.eu/ you can find a wide range of information on the Sinti and Roma extermination. There you can also watch a multilingual memorial event open to an international audience.

Roman Kwiatkowski, the president of the Roma Association in Poland, said: “Memory and the past constitute the foundations on which we base the consciousness of our nation. But it is the present and the future when we will pursue our ambitions, common
life in line with the harmony surrounding us. Our rights and obligations not only as Roma, but as members of communities we live in. Indifference is a great temptation, but indifference today means approval for discrimination.

Romani Rose, chairman of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, underlines the importance of joint celebrations commemorating these events. “Today, Europe is facing a new nationalism, antigypsyism and antisemitism again. Recently, we have witnessed many right-wing terrorist attacks in Germany and other European countries. Commemorating historical events is our duty now and in the future. Remembering the crimes of National Socialism and the Holocaust today, we must simultaneously defend democracy and the rule of law,” said Rose.

“Discrimination against Sinti and Roma society is present almost all over Europe, in many countries. Whether we want to remember it or not, there are countries, regions, cities where ghettos still exist today, perhaps not de jure, but de facto, where Roma, Sinti, Gitans, Manouches are closed, all those we call sometimes romantically traveling people, who we don’t really accept in our communities based on full citizenship rights. Remember - discrimination causes exclusion that leads to dehumanization, and that ends with genocide,” said the director of the Auschwitz Museum, Piotr M.A. Cywiński, PhD.

“It is easy to imagine that it is quiet and peaceful because we live in a new Europe. There is no such thing as a new Europe. Two or three generations is definitely not enough to change some basic vectors of human behaviour. Especially if these behaviours are combined with completely basic human feelings. Such as pride, vainglory, fear or aversion. We live in Europe that continues to create and tolerate discrimination,” added director Cywiński.

The Nazis regarded Roma as a “hostile element”, “by inheritance” conditioned by propensity to commit crimes and anti-social behaviour. From 1933, alongside Jews, they became the target of racist persecution: first through registration, deprivation of the right to practice certain professions, prohibition of mixed marriages, then forced labour, and finally imprisonment in concentration camps.

With the outbreak of World War II, a decision was made to relocate German Roma to occupied Poland. The German police authorities began to arrest and execute Roma in the occupied territories, including those at the rear of the eastern front, where they were murdered en masse by the so-called Einsatzkommandos.

After Heinrich Himmler issued an order to send them to Auschwitz, from 1943 Sinti and Roma, mainly from Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Poland, were deported there. In total, the Germans deported about 23,000 Roma to Auschwitz, of which 2,000 were murdered without being entered into the camp records. Twenty-one thousand people were registered in the camp, of which about 19,000 died - they died of starvation and diseases, and were murdered in the gas chamber at the time of the liquidation of the “Gypsy camp”.

Today, at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, in block 13, you can see an exhibition commemorating the extermination of Roma and Sinti, which shows the extent of the genocide committed against Roma in German-occupied Europe. In the former Birkenau camp, in sector Bile, there is a monument commemorating the victims of the Roma nationality.
When reading about the Centre for Dialogue and Prayer, one can see two interpenetrating spheres - the sphere of tourism and the sphere of reflection. I will talk about tourism in a while, but first I would like to ask, for which reflection was the Centre created?

The Centre for Dialogue and Prayer in Oswiecim was established for all those who were moved by a visit to the former German Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, and who find it difficult to leave in a car, train or coach right away and drive off without putting their thoughts in order or calming their emotions. A visit to such a place is profoundly memorable and raises many questions. We all experience emotions in different ways; however, the most important thing is to allow personal time and space, and at the same time, be ready to listen and talk. Our mission is to create a place for dialogue between people of different cultures, beliefs and religions.

Indeed, the proximity of the Memorial itself, as well as the constant cooperation with the Museum, encourages reflection.

Yes, we can look at the “proximity” of the Centre for Dialogue to the Auschwitz Memorial in two perspectives. Geographical, since the distance between us, is merely 750 m, which is a “walking distance”. On the other hand, the “closeness” of our institutions necessitates long-term cooperation based on mutual trust, focused on education about genocide and the Holocaust, resulting in numerous international projects or conferences. Seizing the opportunity, I would like to thank the management of the Museum for their sympathy for our Institution and empathy in various situations.
So, let us look at the tourism sphere. What do visitors to the Centre have at their disposal? What do you have prepared for groups and individuals?

The offer is addressed to individual visitors and organised groups of over 10 people. We have two large rooms equipped with multimedia equipment for conferences, meditations and meetings. Additionally, 6 small rooms are available for educational workshops and group work. In our facility, guests will find a thematic library related to the Second World War as well as the possibility to use the resources of the film archive.
We offer 50 guest rooms, including 46 standard rooms, 4 suites. We have single, double, triple and six-bed rooms. A total of 115 beds. Our accommodation offer is enriched by catering: tasty meals prepared on-site taking into account diet, food allergies and respect for religious beliefs. We provide transportation by minibuses and coaches.

Depending on the needs, it may be a typical overnight stay, or even an extended conference, educational stay, etc.

For several years, we have partnered or organised numerous, cyclical projects. We offer international educational workshops, study tours, meetings and one-day lectures. The Centre has permanent and temporary exhibitions. Conferences, seminars, educational projects are carried out through cooperation with the Auschwitz Museum, Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow as well as many educational institutions and universities in Poland and abroad.

A lot has changed during the pandemic - including the way we travel. Will those who use tents or campers also find a place at the Centre?

The campsite, located in a beautiful garden adjacent to our building, is equipped with full sanitary and electrical facilities. Visitors to the Auschwitz Museum can stop their camper vans and stay overnight in tents. We invite visitors to the campsite from April to November. The 24-hour reception desk provides assistance and tourist information.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the financial situation of the Centre. The implementation of cyclical educational projects, as well as newly planned projects, has been suspended, thus depriving us of the primary source of funding. I make no secret of the fact that we are in a difficult financial situation, and therefore we ask all our friends and people of goodwill to support us both prayerfully and materially.

VISIT THE WEBSITE OF THE CENTRE OF DIALOGUE AND PRAYER
The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research announces the inauguration of its landmark YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum, which is being made available free of charge to the global public at museum.yivo.org.

A broad-ranging educational initiative, the YIVO Cernia Slovin Online Museum’s inaugural interactive exhibition *Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl* explores East European Jewish life in the 20th and 21st centuries through the true story of one teenage girl.

The exhibition, developed by YIVO in consultation with scholars and Beba Epstein’s family, delivers an exciting leap forward for digital museums in an experiential format. Karolina Ziulkoski, the museum’s Chief Curator and a Webby award-winning interactive designer, has combined innovative technology with engaging storytelling to showcase rare materials from YIVO’s archive of more than 23 million documents and artifacts. This is the first public presentation of Beba’s own childhood autobiography from the 1930s.

“The launch of the YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum initiates an exciting new chapter in YIVO’s history by dramatically expanding our ability to fulfill YIVO’s historic mission through digital means,” said Jonathan Brent, Executive Director and CEO, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

“YIVO is increasingly using digital technologies and online learning to provide wide-spread public access to the treasures in our collections. The YIVO Cernia Slovin Online Museum will transform the ways audiences of all ages and backgrounds think about and understand Jewish history.”

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**Portrait of Nazi Politician**
Circa 1940s. Painting on the back of a Torah scroll.

**Nazi Uniforms**
Circa 1940s. Jacket and side caps.

**Auschwitz Block 8 Logbook**
Circa 1940s. Logbook.

**Concentration Camp Uniforms**
Circa 1940s. Three uniforms.
connect with Jewish history. Much of this priceless original material had never before been available to the general public."

"Beba Epstein lived through extraordinary times, but as her autobiography shows, she was also a regular fifth-grader who loved her summer holidays and spending time with her family. By making her firsthand account and other rare contemporaneous materials available to viewers with the click of a mouse, we hope to inspire empathy and instill understanding that discrimination can alter the course of a single life and whole communities’ fate, and no one is immune from it,” said Karolina Ziulkoski, Chief Curator, YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum.

Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl was developed from its inception as a digitally native project. Rather than following an object-based approach, the exhibition is divided into ten chapters that span Beba’s life, using interactive storytelling to unite over 200 artifacts from YIVO’s archives. Within the exhibition, users are able to explore various depths of information at their own pace.

Beba Epstein’s autobiography, the centerpiece of the exhibition, was written as a submission to an autobiography competition held by YIVO in the 1930s to understand and document the lives of Jewish teens across Eastern Europe.

Beba produced her autobiography when she was a fifth-grader, before the start of World War II. It was discovered in May 2017 at the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania among 170,000 pages of previously unknown YIVO materials thought to have been destroyed by the Nazis. These materials are now part of the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections project, a major initiative launched in 2015 through the generosity of Edward Blank and Family.
Additional materials available for viewers to explore in Beba Epstein: The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Girl include videos of Jewish family life in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, several notebooks from Jewish schools including Beba’s primary school, and rare documents like the record book of the study house of the 18th Century Vilna Gaon, the most influential rabbi of his time.

Through Beba’s story, the audience will learn about many aspects of Jewish life in Eastern Europe including family dynamics, the school system and curriculum, leisure activities, immigration, as well as antisemitism and the Holocaust.

The YIVO Bruce and Francesca Cernia Slovin Online Museum was established in 2018 with a generous $3 million gift from Bruce Slovin in memory of his late wife Francesca Cernia Slovin for the purpose of telling the story of Jewish life in Eastern Europe and Russia through YIVO’s world-renowned archival and library collections. Future exhibitions planned for the YIVO Cernia Slovin Online Museum will span the history of East European Jewish life over four centuries, drawing from the expansive YIVO archives to create a variety of English language experiential exhibitions.

About The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
The YIVO Institute for Jewish Research was founded in Berlin, Warsaw, and in Vilnius (Vilna) in 1925 with the support of leading intellectuals such as Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. Its mission is to document, study, and preserve Ashkenazi Jewish civilization in all its aspects, from culture and history to language, literature, and political movements. YIVO’s headquarters were relocated to New York City in 1940 in response to WWII.

Today, YIVO is renowned for its role as a research institute, educational center, and cultural organization, with a library of over 400,000 volumes in addition to its unparalleled archive with over 23 million documents and artifacts. YIVO is dedicated to digitizing and preserving its collections for current and future generations worldwide. YIVO also keeps this heritage alive through its countless public and educational programs, which are conducted in person and digitally for a global community.
I always wonder: do the children even believe me? Does it sound credible when a survivor recounts what they went through in a camp? I don’t know. I’m not in the children’s shoes.
—Abba Naor

I find what Mr Naor has just said quite remarkable, that as a survivor he worries about how others perceive his story and whether they even believe it. I think it’s a very moving experience to hear the words of a survivor. Of course you believe them.
—Emely Fuchs

92-year-old Holocaust survivor Abba Naor and German high-school student Emely Fuchs created a profound moment that held the promise of continuous remembrance – 75 years after the last NS concentration camp was liberated and amid an increase in anti-Semitism in Germany and elsewhere. As part of a round-table discussion organised by the Goethe-Institut, Naor and Fuchs came together with Pawel Sawicki from the Auschwitz Memorial, Ernst Hüttl of LediZ (Learning with Digital Testimonies) and myself as the moderator to talk about remembrance in a digital age.

Digital memory in the shape of virtual-reality and three-dimensional tools has become topical in research and society as, in Sawicki’s words, “[r]ight now, we have the honour of meeting a Holocaust survivor, Mr Naor, but such conversations will not be possible anymore in twenty years.” At the same time, for young people like Fuchs – the generations upon whom future remembrance and a vocal stance against anti-Semitism will hinge – digital tools have become key to their understanding of the world. From childhood to old age, digital devices have been and will be shaping their lives.

Digital technology rendered the round-table discussion possible in the first place. After emails, WhatsApp messages and WhatsApp calls, we met in the early days of the Covid-19
pandemic in a Skype conference call, connecting us in Israel, Poland and Germany. Whereas this digitally afforded opportunity was welcome, the conversation addressed more intricate issues with regard to broader social media communication and technologies such as 3-D testimonies: What is possible? What is ethical? (How) can digital technology do justice to remembrance of the Holocaust? How does Naor as a survivor view digital methods of remembrance? And how to get through to today’s adolescents and young adults who, according to studies on Germany and other countries, frequently have enormous knowledge gaps regarding the Holocaust?

Speaking about social media, the panellists impart that the answers do not lie in a categorical decision between embracing and dismissing Twitter, Instagram and others. To them, the crux is how to make use of these communication systems, their features and languages while navigating the concomitant dangers.

Sawicki, who is in charge of the social media channels for the Auschwitz Memorial, argues that social media have become such a vital part of the world that memory work cannot ignore them: “We should be aware of limitations, vulnerabilities and challenges, yet if someone searches for information from the Auschwitz Memorial, we should be there.”

On these platforms, respect and reflection manifest themselves differently from analogue approaches to the Holocaust but must be translated and read accordingly, says Sawicki. On the social media channels he oversees, a “like” represents a public affirmation of remembrance. When asked about hashtags such as #Holocaust, Hüttl postulates that “meaning depends on use.” Whether or not the hashtag is appropriate would be subject to the content of the tagged post.

Sawicki and Hüttl agree that in the case of abuse of hashtags like #Holocaust and #Auschwitz, you cannot leave the interpretation to anti-Semites. On the contrary, you should continue to connect these hashtags to the contexts of raising awareness, distributing knowledge and encouraging remembrance. Naor, who survived a ghetto, different concentration camps and two death marches, expresses a clear opinion on the subject: “As for anti-Semitism, I have to say it’s not my problem at all, it’s the anti-Semites’ problem. They still have to look at us. They have to live with this hatred.” His and Fuchs’s focus is on involving young people. Fuchs, who has been part of a permanent school project on remembrance, asserts that social media can be highly valuable for engaging youth.
In the discussion of 3-D technology, once again, the importance of the little but essential word “how” crystallises: of how the technology is contextualised and applied. The panellists are mindful of what such digital methods can and cannot achieve. At the Ludwig-Maximilian-Universität München, the project LediZ of Hüttl and his colleagues captures the testimonies of Holocaust survivors in 3-D as they reply to roughly 1,000 questions each. When the resulting 3-D testimony is exhibited, visitors themselves can address it with questions. It is able to recognise thousands of alternatives to those on which the recording was based. The digital appearance of the survivor will respond with matching answers. Hüttl highlights that his team refrains from referring to this experience as “a conversation” since the 3-D testimony is not able to pose any questions in return. Naor travelled to the recording studio in England to participate in the project. He stresses the need for survivors to pass on their stories in person as long they can but wishes that his digital testimony will also help people learn and authentically engage with his story and the Holocaust. He underlines that hearing about history from a historian is a far cry from listening to a survivor. Sawicki and Fuchs recommend that school classes and museum visitors should receive guidance in order to have respectful and meaningful encounters with 3-D and VR representations of survivors. Fuchs believes that such technologies could then have an emotional effect on young people and make them relate as these methods ensure that “they perceive [survivors] as persons and not as mere stories.”

In the course of the conversation, Naor worried whether the Holocaust would vanish from people’s consciousness in the future. All four panellists have been committed to preventing this from happening. Long after the designated time of our discussion had passed, we kept talking. We asked questions, we listened, we paused for thought, and, a few times, we were left speechless before we resumed talking. Because we must. Because we cannot be silent on the Holocaust. Ever. Keep talking.

This article is based on a round-table discussion and the corresponding multimedia article by Elisa Jochum for the Goethe-Institut. For the original article including further discussion points such as image manipulation and research guidance for teenagers, go to: Shift Society: Retweet and Remember – Digital Approaches to the Holocaust.