

Report of my participation to a ICMEMO Conference in Israel

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Introduction

The conference was organized by ICMEMO, a subcommittee of ICOM. "The mission of ICMEMO is to commemorate victims of State crimes, of socially-consented or of ideologically motivated crimes." The motto of the conference was "Memory, Art & Identity", and was held in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. I want to thank and congratulate the board of ICMEMO for this fantastic conference which combined a scientific part, as well as a discovery of the country with competent lecturers.



Arriving at the Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv is a pleasant surprise, it's light, spacious, clean and new. Since it was Saturday public transportation weren't running, I had to take a cab to reach my hotel. The advantage was that I could see better the surrounding and speak with the driver. The next big surprise were these freeways all around, they were also brand-new, wide and empty on this early Sabbath. It was going to change soon, and these wonderful empty roads will be full of cars, making serious traffic jams.

A further fact that I didn't expect was the human density reflected by myriad of buildings all over



This aerial view of Tel Aviv is rendering adequately the situation. You have the feeling to be in Manhattan, not in a city founded in a desert in the 1930s. It was very strong impressions within the first couple of hours spent in this country. Many houses are built in Bauhaus style, as my taxi driver explained me.

In the following days, I would see more freeways and landscape with a multitude of vehicles and people. Some of these places were still called kibbutz, but of agronomy was not much to see, at least in the northern half of the country that I visited.



Maybe it is time to consider a map. Looking at a map is for a foreigner scary, the country is so narrow and surrounded by Arab populations threatening Israel, inspite of the peace treaties signed with Egypt (1978), and Jordan (1994). Israel has an area of about 20,000 km² for a population of almost 9 million people. The density is very high, being 406 inhabitants pro square kilometer.

Conference

The conference was not easy to follow, the speakers were revealing so much horror, not only from Europe, but also from Latin America, and from Southeast Asia. It was three days of intensive lectures, with some parallel sessions, and panel discussions. The tens of presented papers will be published, so it is maybe appropriate to wait for the proceedings of the conference.

Let me say few words about three lectures which I especially appreciated.

Jean Paul Leon is Spanish artist, inspiring intercultural dialogue between the three monotheistic religions, promoting a lasting, peaceful understanding and not violent good arguments.



Jean Paul Leon on a panel discussion following his presentation, in which he also shared his memories of his Jewish grand father.

Michel Kichka is a graphic artist who was born in Belgium and live today in Israel. In his last book “ Second Generation” he is speaking about his father, a 92 year survivor of Buchenwald, and his almost mute relation to his son. Then after his younger brother committed suicide in 1988, the father started to speak about his own past.

A late afternoon, we had an excellent speaker and generous peace-loving Rabbi Uri REGEV.



The Rabbi defended his point of view to give the same right to every inhabitant of Israel. He gave an interesting example, the draft is compulsory for Jews of both genders, but not for Arab Israeli.

I had prepared a paper on "*Soviet Relics in Estonia, and Their Reception by Western Visitors*" Of which is here the **Abstract**:

« The different museums and tour operators in Estonia have developed and taught these past ten years a variety of guided tours on the history of Estonian in the Cold War era, like the Deportations, the GULAG, the KGB, Soviet Secret Cities, Soviet Architecture. They have increasingly sought to make their commented discovery tours more global, integrating not only the social and cultural clash resulting from the Soviet Russian occupation of the country, but also the personal conflicts of the passive and non collaborating majority and the struggles of individual freedom fighters. »

Museums and archives

The guided tours we had, were in many cases on the premises where we had the sessions of the conference. So we had tours before dinner or when we had a break.

One recurrent subject was *How To Teach Holocaust*. Not less present was the warning *Never Again*, and the danger of *neo Nazism*.

We had a guided tour and lectures at the *Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum*. After the conference's lectures about the atrocities of human beings towards other human beings, this Holocaust memorial was giving the material illustration of the horror. It is done without emotion, just the terribly horrible facts are displayed.

But not only Judaica and Holocaust are on display in Israel, contemporary art and ethnographic art are also exhibited, for example, at the *Israel Museum* in Jerusalem.



Beside gigantic contemporary artworks (picture above, *The Naked Black Migrant*, 2001, by Ohad MEROMI), the richness of the ethnographic collections is almost unexpected. So beside European ethnography is, for example, an Oceanian collection of masks, shields, weapons (Israel Museum).

Historical Places

Despite all new constructions, relics of the past are preciously preserved, so are Antiquity and Middle Age sites attractions for tourists and researchers.



Crusades and medieval fortress and churches, the Muslim conquest of the Levant and numerous mosques, much can be seen today. By the way, Israel has about 20% of Arabs, who are visible on the street as normal citizens, and as merchants on the markets. The picture above, shows a crusader-fortified entrance to a building, with in the courtyard Ottoman's arcades (Old Town of Acre, today Akko)

History is not only the distant past, but also what happened few hours ago. On that same Wednesday (October 17) that we visited the medieval city of Acre in the north of the country, rockets were launched from the Gaza Strip to Israel, like on this painting (2015) by Jewish Ukrainian artist Zoya CHERKASSKY-NNADI.

One rocket destroyed a house in the southern city of Beersheba. A single mother was living in that house with her three sons. At 3:40 the sirens warned the people, the mother had just time to force her sleepy boys into their bomb shelter before a rocket struck her house.



I take the picture below from *The Jerusalem Post* from the day before.



It is showing Mrs. Sofa Landver, Minister of Immigrant Absorption with French newcomers who start their new life with the compulsory military service (three years for men, two years for women).