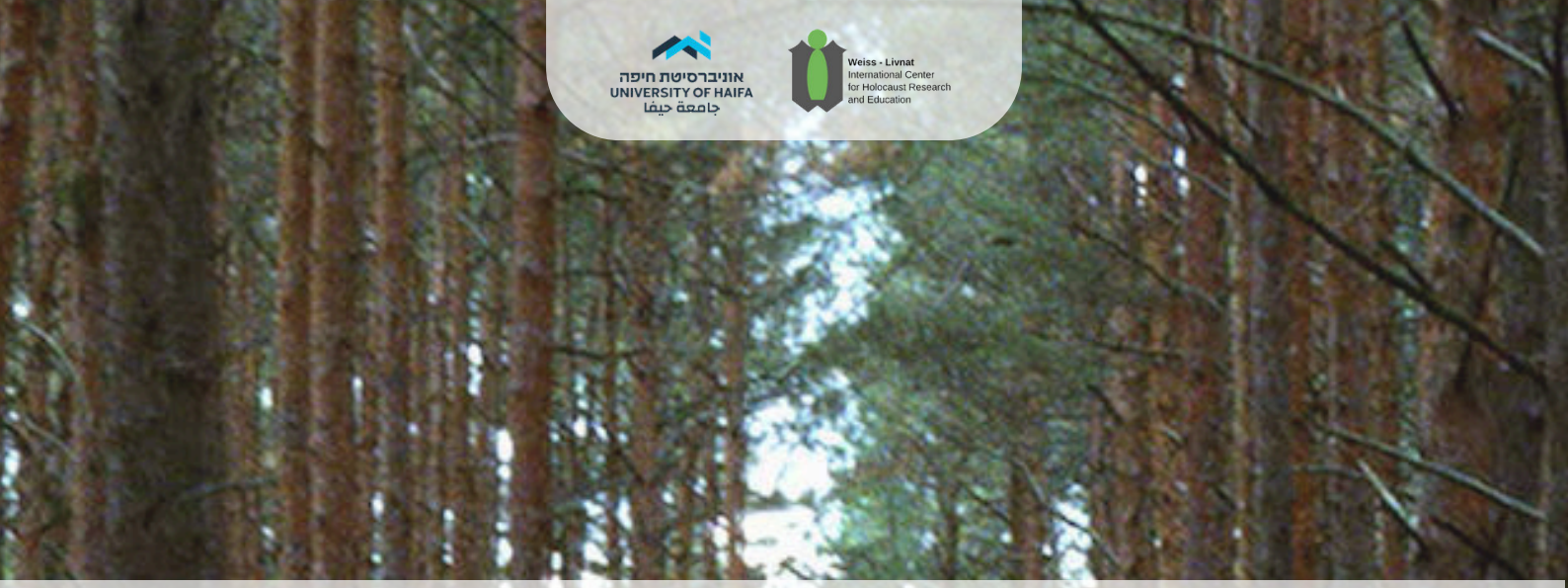


אוניברסיטת חיפה
UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA
جامعة حيفا

Weiss - Livnat
International Center
for Holocaust Research
and Education

International Weiss-Livnat Graduates Academic Seminar 2025

Holocaust Discourse and Commemoration after October 7

September 7-11, 2025

Seminar Summary



Executive Summary

The International Weiss-Livnat Graduates Academic Seminar 2025 brought together Holocaust educators, researchers, and museum professionals from around the world for an intensive five-day examination of how the October 7, 2023 attacks and subsequent Gaza war have impacted Holocaust memory, education, and public discourse. The seminar combined immersive site visits to affected communities in Southern Israel with academic lectures, participant presentations, and collaborative workshops, creating a comprehensive platform for international dialogue on these pressing issues.

Program Overview

The seminar addressed four interconnected themes:

- The use of Holocaust terminology in political discourse
- Challenges facing Holocaust educators in addressing current events alongside historical memory
- The proliferation of Holocaust references on social media
- How established commemoration traditions influence the memorialization of October 7

The program structure moved from direct engagement with October 7's impact to theoretical and practical discussions about Holocaust education and commemoration in this new context.



Participants of the 2025 Graduates Seminar

Day 1, September 7

Site Visits: Understanding the Context

The seminar opened with an immersive journey into the communities most directly affected by October 7, establishing essential context for the academic discussions that would follow. The first day combined personal testimony, military-strategic analysis, museum practice, and emerging commemoration initiatives to provide participants with direct encounter with the events themselves—their scale, impact, and the immediate questions they raise about memory, documentation, and memorialization.

For international participants, many encountering these sites and stories for the first time, the day established foundational understanding that would inform all subsequent discussions about Holocaust discourse, political terminology, and educational responses.

Personal Testimony on the Events of October 7

The seminar began with departure from Tel Aviv to Yad Mordechai in Southern Israel. After welcome and introductions, participants heard a personal testimony from Tlalit Kitzoni, one of the participants of the seminar, about the events of October 7, that she had experienced in the Kibbutz Kfar Aza. This provided immediate human context to the academic discussions that would follow.

Lecture: October 7 – What the hell Happened?

Colonel (Res.) Reuven Ben-Shalom delivered a lecture titled "October 7 - What the Hell Happened?" offering military and strategic perspective on the attacks of October 7th and the war that followed afterwards.

Yad Mordechai Museum- Addressing October 7

The group then visited the Yad Mordechai Museum to examine how the museum, that portrays the history of the Holocaust and is situated in the Gazan Envelope, now integrates addressing October 7 in their exhibition contexts.

Site Visits: Understanding the Context

Panel Discussion: Commemorating and Documenting October 7

A panel discussion featuring **Dr. Noam Tirosh** from Ben Gurion University, architect **Leora Berry** (memory and heritage consultant for kibbutzim in the Gaza envelope) and **Yaniv Hegyi** from the 7/10 documentation project, to explore emerging approaches to memorialization and the challenges of documenting contemporary trauma.

Dr. Tirosh presented his research on commemoration stickers, examining how they have become a prominent form of memorializing victims of the October 7th massacre and the war. He explained how these stickers function as a hybrid memory space that bridges the physical and digital realms, while revealing the role of "memory activists" in shaping collective remembrance in Israeli society.

Berry spoke about her challenging role in navigating the conflicting interests within the communities, balancing the needs of those who seek to preserve commemoration sites, those who desire a “fresh start”, and the various stakeholders involved in shaping the memory of these traumatized places.

Hegyi spoke about his initiative to collect the WhatsApp messages of victims, to document the hours of horror when Hamas terrorists went from house to house murdering, raping, pillaging and kidnapping. Many of these messages are from people who were either murdered or kidnapped. These digital communications represent an unprecedented primary source for research and commemoration, offering real-time testimony of the victims' final moments and experiences with an immediacy and authenticity that traditional documentation cannot replicate.



Panel discussion (right to left): host Yoav Yaron, Yaniv Hegyi, Dr. Tirosh, Leora Beery



“Sticker Wall”, the focus of Dr. Tirosh’s research, as presented in the panel

Day 2, September 8

Site Visits: Survivor Testimonies and Affected Communities

The second day deepened participants' engagement with October 7's impact through direct encounters with survivors, affected communities, and sites of violence. Building on the previous day's contextual foundation, the focus shifted to personal stories and material traces of trauma, exploring how individuals and communities are documenting, preserving, and beginning to process their experiences.

Holocaust survivor and October 7

The second day began with a documentary screening and discussion about Holocaust survivors and October 7, highlighting the vulnerability and trauma experienced by this population during the attacks.



Burnt house in Kibbutz Nir Oz



The Kedem-Siman Tov family home, Kibbutz Nir Oz

Visit and Guided Tour of Nir Oz

The centerpiece of the day was an extended visit and tour of Kibbutz Nir Oz, led by Yuval Danzig and Dr. Nirit Shalev-Khalifa. Yuval is the son of Alex, a Holocaust educator working with Yad Vashem for over 30 years who was kidnapped on 7 October from his home in Kibbutz Nir Oz, and was murdered in captivity. Yuval also shared the stories of his other family members in Nir Oz. Dr. Shalev-Khalifa, who heads the Visual History Department at Yad Ben-Zvi, the Jerusalem-based state research, culture, and education institution, showed the groups the great efforts that she and her team have undertaken sifting through the detritus of October 7 to find objects that can testify to that terrible day. This direct engagement with one of the most severely affected communities provided participants with profound insights into the ongoing impact of October 7.

Day 2, September 8 (cont.)

Site Visits: Survivor Testimonies and Affected Communities

Presentation: "Objects of Trauma"

Dr. Shalev-Khalifa later then led a presentation and workshop on "Objects of Trauma," exploring how material culture and artifacts carry and communicate traumatic experiences.

Visit to the Nova Festival Site

The day concluded with a visit to the Nova Festival site, where 364 young people were murdered, offering a stark reminder of the scale and nature of the violence.



Mailboxes in Kibbutz Nir Oz, with stickers showing kibbutz's members faiths (e.g. murdered, kidnapped, released)

Day 3, September 9

Political Discourse and Holocaust Terminology

After two intensive days in the Gaza envelope region, the seminar relocated to the University of Haifa, shifting from direct engagement with October 7's impact to theoretical and analytical examination. The day focused on how Holocaust terminology has been deployed in political discourse surrounding October 7 and the Gaza war—a phenomenon with profound implications for Holocaust memory, contemporary political debate, and the work of Holocaust educators globally.

The weaponization of Holocaust language in political contexts is not new, but the events of October 7 have intensified these dynamics dramatically. Across the political spectrum and in diverse national contexts, Holocaust terminology and frameworks have been invoked to describe, condemn, or justify current events. These comparisons—whether applied to the October 7 attacks or the humanitarian situation in Gaza—carry enormous rhetorical power while often lacking historical precision.

The day's programming provided participants with analytical tools for navigating these complex questions through keynote scholarship, comparative international case studies, and collaborative workshop analysis of global media and political statements.



Participants presentations

Day 3, September 9 (cont.)

Political Discourse and Holocaust Terminology

Lecture: "Holocaust, Genocide, and October 7: Between Comparison, Present Challenges, and Their Instrumental Uses"

Professor Havi Dreifuss from Tel Aviv University delivered the keynote lecture "Holocaust, Genocide, and October 7: Between Comparison, Present Challenges, and Their Instrumental Uses," addressing fundamental questions about the appropriate frameworks for understanding the events of October 7 and the war in Gaza. In this insightful lecture, Prof. Dreifuss provided a nuanced analysis of why neither the October 7th massacre nor the humanitarian situation in Gaza can be appropriately compared to the Holocaust, carefully examining arguments from multiple perspectives. She dissected issues that are frequently weaponized in academic and political discourse, offering a balanced critique that acknowledged competing viewpoints while providing clear analytical frameworks for thinking about current discussions on these issues.



Antisemitic graffiti in at the Furuset metro station in Oslo, Norway, 2023

Political Discourse and Holocaust Terminology

Participant Presentations: Political Discourse and Holocaust Terminology

Following the lecture, some of the participants presented diverse international perspectives on how Holocaust language has been employed in political discourse following October 7:

Alisa Gadas examined Holocaust and WWII rhetoric in Russian discourse since October 7, analyzing how Russian political and media narratives frame contemporary conflicts through WWII memory.

Aliena Stürzer explored political messaging at Holocaust memorial sites during 2025's liberation anniversaries (Dachau, Ravensbrück, and Buchenwald), examining how these sites address October 7 within commemorative programming and comparing this with messaging regarding the AfD's rise and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Lekë Rezniqi addressed Holocaust education gaps and misinterpretation in countries with limited historical connection to the Holocaust, examining common misinterpretations and problematic comparisons.

Ivan Toyos-Aranda analyzed Holocaust terminology in Spanish political discourse, exploring how Spanish politicians and media employ Holocaust-related language to frame contemporary events.

Soumyaditya Saha examined the Indian response to October 7, particularly following the April 2025 Pahalgam massacre of Hindu tourists, exploring how global narratives of victimhood are shaped by Holocaust memory across different cultural contexts.

Indra Wussow analyzed South Africa's response to October 7 and the Gaza war, centering on the genocide case against Israel at the ICJ, examining inconsistencies in South Africa's international stance and impacts on South African Jewish identity.

Day 3, September 9 (cont.)

Political Discourse and Holocaust Terminology

Workshop: "Holocaust Terminology in Global Political Response to October 7"

After the presentations and discussions Yoav Yaron and Lisa Schulz-Yatsiv from the Weiss-Livnat Center team facilitated a workshop. The workshop enabled an analysis of international media, diplomatic statements, and Holocaust scholarship.



"The Holocaust serves Israel as a Lesson for lack of humanity" (Headline from Der Speigel, January 2024)

Meeting with Doron and Marianne Livnat

The day concluded with a meaningful meeting with Doron Livnat and his wife Marianne. Doron and Marianne shared their personal experiences of the October 7th events and discussed how they perceive the discourse surrounding Israel and the war in Gaza both domestically and internationally. They were particularly interested in hearing about the participants' experiences in their respective countries and their ideas for fostering a more multiperspective and nuanced discourse about Israel and the Gaza war within what they described as a heavily biased anti-Israeli environment in the Western world.

Day 4, September 10

Social Media and Holocaust Discourse

The fourth day examined how Holocaust memory is being transformed and weaponized in digital spaces following October 7. Social media platforms have become primary sites where millions encounter Holocaust references, yet these environments prioritize virality over accuracy and emotional resonance over historical nuance. Holocaust terminology and imagery are being instrumentalized across the political spectrum, antisemitic tropes are gaining renewed circulation, and historically inaccurate comparisons proliferate unchecked.

The day's programming combined research findings from multiple countries with institutional case studies and curatorial perspectives, providing participants with frameworks for understanding and countering digital Holocaust distortion. Presentations revealed how these dynamics manifest differently across national contexts while highlighting common patterns in how algorithms amplify polarization and misinformation.

Lecture: Holocaust References in Social Media Responses to October 7 and the war in Gaza

Dr. Sophie Schmalenberger from the University of Duisburg-Essen delivered a Zoom lecture on "Holocaust References in Social Media Responses to October 7 and the War in Gaza," examining how Holocaust references are instrumentalized and misappropriated in online discourse about these events, how antisemitic tropes are being deployed and amplified in this context, and how the dynamics of social media algorithms exacerbate the problem by promoting polarizing content and enabling the rapid spread of distorted historical comparisons.

Social Media and Holocaust Discourse

Participant Presentations: Social Media and Holocaust Discourse

Following the lecture participants that had focused on Holocaust-Related Discourse on social media following October 7 presented their conclusions.

Akanksha Raina examined digital Holocaust memory and social media's role in shaping post-October 7 narratives in India, addressing challenges in countries where young people encounter Holocaust references without adequate historical education.

Eugenia Mihaleea shared findings from her study on hate speech on Romanian social media platforms following October 7, documenting antisemitic content, Holocaust distortion, and inflammatory rhetoric.

Erika Evdokimenko analyzed antisemitism in Muslim regions of Russia after October 7, particularly the October 2023 Makhachkala airport events, investigating how social media disinformation rapidly mobilized antisemitic violence.

Edda Fogarollo examined Holocaust discourse on Italian social media following October 7, analyzing how Italian users, influencers, and media outlets employed Holocaust terminology and imagery.

Gil Filar explored Canadian social media responses, investigating how Canadian users, institutions, and media outlets employed historical references in their responses to current events.

Day 4, September 10 (cont.)

Social Media and Holocaust Discourse

Workshop: "Can I intern in Gaza?"

Following the participant's presentations, Yoav Yaron presented the reactions of the last two years to the social media campaign from the Weiss-Livnat International MA Program to recruit new students. The reactions showed the widespread use of Holocaust comparison, Holocaust denial and antisemitic tropes of social media users and how much the field of Holocaust Studies has turned into a political battlefield.

Lecture: Curating an Exhibition About October 7:

Concluding the fourth day of the seminar, Michal Houminer, curator of the "October Seventh" exhibition at ANU Museum, presented on curating an exhibition about October 7, followed by a discussion exploring curatorial challenges, ethical considerations and effective use of such a tool.



Student's presentations

Day 5, September 11

Educational Challenges after October 7

The final day of the seminar shifted focus from analysis to action, examining educational responses and charting future directions for Holocaust education in the post-October 7 landscape.

The day's programming recognized that Holocaust educators worldwide face unprecedented challenges as they navigate the intersection of historical memory and contemporary trauma. The events of October 7 and the subsequent war in Gaza have fundamentally altered the landscape in which Holocaust education operates, creating both obstacles and opportunities that demand thoughtful, collaborative responses. Educators must now contend with heightened political polarization, increased antisemitism, student questions about comparative trauma, and institutional pressures, all while maintaining the integrity and pedagogical purpose of Holocaust education.



Student's presentations

Educational Challenges after October 7

Participant Presentations: Educational Challenges for Holocaust Education

Eva Zeleznikow addressed immediate challenges facing Holocaust educators and museums, examining how the Holocaust Museum in Melbourne navigates post-October 7 challenges.

Jessica Handler shared the LA Holocaust Museum's experiences with educational and institutional responses to challenges after October 7.

Lindsay Shapiro examined October 7's impact on Jewish identity, presenting observations of international Jewish visitors to ANU and exploring how previously disconnected young Jews have found stronger identity through contemporary trauma, drawing parallels with post-WWII Jewish identity formation.

Ella Imgart discussed her experience with school groups at Bergen-Belsen memorial site, addressing challenges in German memorial site work and German commemoration's traditional avoidance of present-day connections.

Hila Weisz-Gut examined Israeli-Polish perspectives on Holocaust memory and the transformations that have occurred since October 7, addressing the educational challenges she faces at the Jewish Museum in Oświęcim, particularly regarding visits from German school classes.

Justyna Witkowska presented Claims Conference guidelines for integrating October 7 into Holocaust education projects, providing examples of successful integration alongside problematic approaches.

Day 5, September 11 (cont.)

Educational Challenges after October 7

Expert Panel: Museums, Educators, and Poland Tours in the Post-October 7 Era

The core program for the day was an expert panel featuring Dr. Yael Richler-Friedman (Yad Vashem), Dr. David Ayash (high school history teacher), Yaron Zur and Racheli Nofach (Ghetto Fighters' House Museum), and Miriam Holzman (educational tour guide to Poland), addressing the challenges facing museums, educators, and Poland tours in the post-October 7 era.

The panel explored the distinct challenges educators face when working with different audiences: Israeli groups, international Jewish communities, and international non-Jewish groups, each requiring tailored approaches and sensitivities. Panelists emphasized the critical need for international cooperation now more than ever, particularly given the heightened atmosphere of antisemitism and isolation. They highlighted the necessity of maintaining clear historical distinctions while simultaneously developing the capacity to address emotional comparisons, especially when engaging with October 7 victims and their families who may draw parallels between their experiences and Holocaust history.

The seminar concluded with closing reflections, allowing participants to synthesize learning and commit to ongoing collaboration.



Experts panel (right to left: host Lisa Schulz-Yatsiv, Dr. Richler Feldman, Racheli Nofach, Yaron Zur, Dr. Ayash, Miriam Holzman

Conclusion

The International Weiss-Livnat Alumni Academic Seminar 2025 successfully created a space for critical examination of how October 7 has impacted Holocaust discourse, education, and commemoration globally. By combining immersive experiences in affected communities with rigorous academic analysis and international participant presentations, the seminar fostered both emotional understanding and intellectual engagement with these complex issues.

Participant presentations revealed the global diversity in how Holocaust terminology is employed when discussing October 7—from Russian WWII rhetoric to South African ICJ proceedings, from Indian narratives of victimhood to Spanish political discourse. The examination of social media revealed how digital platforms simultaneously amplify Holocaust education and enable distortion, from hate speech in Romania to disinformation-driven violence in Russia. Holocaust educators and museums worldwide—from Melbourne to Los Angeles, Bergen-Belsen to Oświęcim—face unprecedented pressure in addressing October 7 while maintaining educational integrity. They must navigate between acknowledging contemporary Jewish trauma and avoiding instrumentalization of Holocaust memory, all within an increasingly polarized environment where Holocaust institutions themselves have become sites of political contestation.

The seminar established foundations for ongoing international collaboration, with participants committed to translating insights into practical applications within their professional contexts through four collaborative projects. The professional networks and initiatives launched during this seminar represent essential steps toward sustaining rigorous Holocaust education in an era of heightened political polarization and historical distortion.

Participant feedback

Professional Networking and Shared Challenges

"One of the most valuable aspects of the program was connecting with Holocaust educators from around the world who are facing similar challenges at their institutions. It made me feel less alone—many of the issues I thought were unique to my museum turned out to be shared experiences across different contexts. Having the space to exchange ideas and reflect together, both individually and as a group, was incredibly meaningful and helpful."

Jessica Handler
LA Holocaust Museum, USA

"There's something so important and moving about meeting with people who have something in common, but also a lot of differences in where they come from, in their work, and in the challenges they face. I hope there will be more seminars in the future that I can participate in. It's truly a gift that the program enables such an alumni seminar."

Tlalit Kitzoni
ConAct, Germany

Overall Program Impact

"The program brilliantly put together so many issues to process, but I left inspired and looking forward to the next steps. A follow-up seminar I am finding crucial."

Lekë Rezniqi
Kosovo

Practical Applications and Institutional Impact

"I am about to present at an all-staff meeting about my learnings from the conference. It's been particularly useful gaining support in how to navigate the current conflict whilst working at a Holocaust museum."

Eva Zeleznikow
Melbourne Holocaust Museum, Australia

"I've already given a presentation to my colleagues about everything we went through, about the people we met, about the questions and thoughts that came up during the seminar. I'm going to use the connections I made with some of the participants and also with some of the lecturers for my work at ConAct. One of my roles in the organization is dealing with shared Holocaust memory in meetings between Israelis and Germans, and the topic of October 7 and its effects is currently a central issue where there are more questions than answers. The seminar undoubtedly allowed me to put together a few more pieces of this puzzle."

Tlalit Kitzoni
ConAct, Germany

"I especially appreciated all of the productive workshops, initiatives, and programs being done now by the presenters we met with and by our colleagues. There were direct ways that we could stay in contact with the programs happening and forming now. That, for me, was super useful."

Lindsay Shapiro
ANU Museum of the Jewish People, Israel

Participant feedback

Site Visits and Emotional Impact

"It was profoundly impactful to travel to the south and witness the Nova Festival site and Kibbutz Nir Oz firsthand. I left the program feeling reinvigorated to continue educating about October 7—not by comparing it to the Holocaust, but by exploring how we can remember October 7 through the lens of Holocaust remembrance and what we can learn from both events."

Jessica Handler
LA Holocaust Museum, USA

Innovative Documentation Methods

"The panel discussion on commemorating and documenting October 7 was fascinating for me personally, being a scholar of history. Particularly, the WhatsApp documentation endeavor is eye-opening in so many ways. Historians are always discussing historical research methods and sources, and digital humanities, and this project has massive importance to the discipline of history. That WhatsApp chats can be pieces of memory and historical sources that could be used to write history in the coming decades did not really cross my mind in this way. This is of the same significance as, imagine, Holocaust victims in the shower room just before being killed, writing their last thoughts, their last messages to their loved ones in some form, and years later, historians finding this cache of historical sources to reconstruct those moments. Even filmmakers will find this useful. Really a very interesting and important talk."

Soumyaditya Saha
University of Toronto, India/Canada

International Perspectives and Learning

"The five-day seminar was an intense and enlightening experience, combining stark reality with crucial insights into the events that have shaped and continue to shape significant narratives. Attending this seminar was profoundly important, offering a firsthand look at critical issues and underscoring the need to disseminate accurate information in a world prone to misinformation and fake news. As an alumnus of the seminar, I garnered substantial knowledge and learning that I can apply in my future endeavors. The teachings and discussions from the seminar will be invaluable in conversations in India, enabling me to present a clear and nuanced viewpoint and narrative."

Akanksha Raina
India

"Each presentation was particularly meaningful and unique. It was very interesting to understand what is happening on the other side of the world, in the Mediterranean area and in other European countries, in the East and in many other countries. All the presentations made a deep impression on me. It would be very important to be able to study them in depth and use them as international teaching material."

Edda Fogarollo
Teacher and President of a Christian Organization for Israel, Italy