

## THE ABUSE OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY

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THE ABUSE OF HOLOCAUST MEMORY  
DISTORTIONS AND RESPONSES

Manfred Gerstenfeld



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Institute for Global Jewish Affairs



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Dedicated to all those who fight the perpetrators  
of Holocaust justification, inversion, denial  
and other abuses of Holocaust memory.



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Manfred Gerstenfeld



Abraham H. Foxman

## Foreword

In this important addition to the body of knowledge and understanding of the denial and distortions of the Holocaust, Manfred Gerstenfeld challenges us to examine why it is that as the world's knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust continues to increase and become evermore accessible, the traditional well-known form of Holocaust denial — “it simply did not happen” — has morphed and metastasized into the various categories of abuse of historical fact he presents and analyzes in this unique volume.

Having spent my entire professional life working at the Anti-Defamation League to combat the lies, myths, distortions, and half-truths used by those who are filled with hate to demonize the ones they hate, I continue to be deeply troubled by the ease with which the truth about the greatest crime in history perpetrated against the Jews is ignored, overlooked, and twisted. Painful as this is for the remaining survivors and their children, if we do not confront it with all the tools available to us, the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust will perish a second time. It is our duty to prevent this from happening, not just for the Jewish people, but for all of humankind for generations to come who will be deprived of the crucial lessons of the Holocaust.

At a time when the president of Iran is the leading purveyor of Holocaust denial, using it as a weapon in his arsenal of state-sponsored anti-Semitism aimed at demonizing Israel and the Jewish people, there is an ever greater need to better and more fully grasp every aspect of this pernicious weapon. In an age where the Internet magnifies and propels around the globe expressions of hate of all kinds, Holocaust denial and other forms of anti-Semitism arrive in our homes uninvited and unexplained at a breathtaking volume and speed. This is the most difficult challenge in our effort to reverse the proliferation of hate-filled anti-Jewish sentiment. If the president of a country can spew Holocaust denial and is not confronted and condemned quickly and clearly, the lie can take hold and the germ of anti-Semitism can spread. The deeper our understanding of the latest variety of this centuries-old disease, the better equipped we are to meet the challenge. This book arrives at a time when it is sorely needed.

As Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel has said, “not all victims of the Nazis were Jews, but all Jews were victims.” A simple and very sad corollary to Prof. Wiesel's profound observation is that only Jews are the target of the deniers of the Holocaust. And here is where we find the basic anti-Semitic roots of Holocaust denial.

I have written about some of the aspects of Holocaust abuse and distortion

covered in this book — historical revisionism, trivialization, universalization — and, in our ongoing battle against the scourge of anti-Semitism, the ADL deals daily with each of the types presented by Manfred Gerstenfeld. Just in the year 2009 alone, from the Netherlands to Argentina, from France to Ukraine, from Russia to Venezuela, from Germany, Lithuania, Switzerland, Belarus, Thailand, and my own country, the United States, we saw an explosion of comparisons of Israel's actions to the behavior of the Nazis during the Holocaust and the use of Nazi imagery to describe Zionism.

Manifestations of anti-Semitism have grown, fueled by intense anti-Israeli sentiment. Nazi comparisons and anti-Semitic beliefs combine in a volatile mix, and this outpouring of anti-Jewish hate is generally met with little or no public condemnation. Chants of “Jews to the gas chambers” are heard routinely at anti-Israeli demonstrations in Europe and similar calls for death to Jews have been heard across the Arab and Muslim world. Newspapers in the Arab world and Latin America have published pieces making blatant comparisons between Israel and the Nazis' perpetration of the Holocaust. Caricatures that depict Israelis as Nazis are appearing daily in the Arab press, in Latin American, and even in some mainstream European newspapers. These comparisons and the imagery are reminiscent of the Nazis' use of *Der Stürmer* to feed the age-old myths of Jews as a satanic and conniving force whose goal is world domination.

Here are just a few examples of the manifestations of Holocaust abuse that the ADL noted in the first nine months of 2009:

*Voskresensk, Ukraine — Vandals defiled a Holocaust memorial. Swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti, including “Death to Jews” in German and Russian, were painted on the monument.*

*Bern, Switzerland — Anti-Israeli protesters carried signs equating Israel with Nazi Germany.*

*Petrozavodsk, Russia — A Holocaust memorial in a Jewish cemetery was vandalized.*

*Amsterdam, the Netherlands — At an anti-Israeli rally that included the participation of two Dutch legislators, part of the crowd chanted, “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas.”*

*Vezaiciai, Lithuania — A swastika and the Nazi slogan “Judens raus” were painted on a sign commemorating a site where Nazis murdered Jews.*

*Berlin, Germany — Berlin's Holocaust memorial was vandalized with anti-Semitic slogans and swastikas.*

*Drancy, France — A five-foot black swastika and several anti-Semitic slogans were painted on a railway wagon that was used to deport French Jews. Two other large swastikas were daubed on a commemorative monument and on the wall of a nearby shop.*

*Brest, Belarus — A Holocaust memorial was set on fire on the day commemorated as Victory Day over the Nazis.*

In my lifetime of work combating anti-Semitism, hatred, and bigotry of all kinds, I have been committed to overcoming these stubborn ingrained ills of society first by forthrightly identifying them and presenting the truth and then by activating and enlisting the support of good people who respect the truth to join me in the struggle against prejudice. In 2003, I wrote:

Within living memory, we've seen what can happen when a nation or a continent experiences an unrestrained outbreak of anti-Semitism. The Jews of the world – and all people of goodwill who share their desire for a just and free society – learned a series of critical lessons from the tragic history of the twentieth century. Today we understand how important it is to recognize the emergence of new forms of anti-Semitism so that we can warn the world and stave off the worst effects.

If we are to succeed in overcoming the atmosphere of permissiveness that has made it so much easier to diminish the meaning and lessons of the Holocaust, we must be able to clearly describe the phenomena of Holocaust denial, distortion, and abuse we face daily. As leaders in the fight against anti-Semitism, the ADL recognizes the need to have the best means possible to achieve that success. We are grateful to Manfred Gerstenfeld for providing a significant new tool to help us reach our goal.



# Introduction

The awareness of the Holocaust in the Western world has greatly increased since World War II. Leon Jick wrote that “in the years immediately following the end of the Second World War, consideration of the destruction of European Jewry was not merely avoided, it was repressed.”<sup>1</sup>

Michael Berenbaum, executive editor of the new edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, illustrated one aspect of this when speaking about Holocaust studies more than twenty-five years after World War II: “This field was in its infancy in the 1970s and was then taught in two American universities only. When the historian Raul Hilberg did his doctorate in the 1950s, his professor said that he could go ahead but it would be his academic funeral. Indeed he could only find a publisher for *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961, if its publication was subsidized.”<sup>2</sup>

The historian Peter Novick concluded that Hilberg’s book and the political theorist Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* caused a lot of debate and interest in the Holocaust in the US, but that it was not a lasting trend.<sup>3</sup>

Since the 1980s, the Holocaust has gradually become a more central element of collective memory in many countries.<sup>4</sup> This is particularly the case in Germany, the countries that were its wartime allies, as well as those that were occupied by it.

At the same time, collective memory in the Western world has to a large extent fragmented. There are fewer and fewer issues of the past that a majority of people in many countries know about at least in some detail. Increasing secularization is one reason for this decline in common memorial heritage. In many places there is no longer a widespread familiarity with the Bible. Christian value-concepts have also been diluted and no longer serve as a common bond in many Western nations.

In this growing historical vacuum where other elements of collective memory have faded away, the importance of the Holocaust has increased. The twentieth-century mass murder of the Jews stands out as a major historical event that many people have heard about in differing degrees. This is also true in the United States, which fought the Germans overseas and where religion occupies a greater place in society than in many European countries.

One of the many indicators of this is the large number of visitors — mostly non-Jews — to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.<sup>5</sup> Another such indicator was the large number of heads of state who participated in the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in 2000.

The extreme criminal character of the Holocaust and its many facets lend themselves well to metaphorical use; the more so as society requires a real or

imagined metaphor of absolute evil. An example of the latter in the Christian world was for a long time the Antichrist. Extreme racist nationalists invented the *Untermensch*, people of a subhuman race.

Aspects of the Holocaust are often correctly cited and accurately utilized. The wider familiarity with the subject, however, also makes it prone to a multitude of distortions. Its history and terminology are manipulated for a variety of purposes. This includes the abuse of elements of the Holocaust as a tool against one's enemies, and in particular Jews and Israel. Other Holocaust falsifications derive from a variety of motivations.

Information on and illustrations of the abuse of Holocaust memory could fill an encyclopedia. There is enough material for books about specific topics — for instance, Holocaust deflection, whitewashing, or equivalence. Concerning the means of counteracting abuses, a number of subjects also merit treatment in a book. One is the issue of apologies by the successors of governments, parliaments, institutions, and corporations that were perpetrators or bystanders during the Holocaust.

The material in this book can also be used for several other types of analysis. The nature of the abuses, their motivations, and the reactions to them provide prisms into various aspects of contemporary society. One of these is the better understanding of the broader issue of mutations in perceptions of the past.<sup>6</sup> For this the changes not only of Holocaust memory, but also of its abuses over time, could serve as a paradigm.

## **Categories of Abuse**

Hence, in this volume a strategic approach to the many issues at stake had to be taken. Holocaust distortions are grouped into eight categories. To better clarify these manipulations, they have frequently been illustrated with vignettes. The amount of information on some subjects, however, is so large that only a very small selection of examples could be included.

The analysis hereinafter also includes cases that, in the strict sense, are not abuses of the Holocaust but rather manipulations based on other elements of Germany's Nazi past. One example of this type of distortion is comparing persons with Hitler or other German leaders.

## **Recent Events**

Holocaust-memory-related events and distortions that occurred in the twelve months before the publication of this book reveal how the memory of the genocide has become an instrument for many purposes, and also an indicator of both values and their degradation in various societies. These are two of the many roles that aspects of the Holocaust fulfill in Western and sometimes also other societies.



A listing of some Holocaust-related issues that were picked up by the international media shows their great variety. In September 2008, the genocide-promoting Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad once more addressed the United Nations General Assembly. He again made anti-Semitic remarks and drew some applause from delegates.<sup>7</sup> In November, there were ceremonies to mark the lapse of seventy years since Kristallnacht. In many of these it was mentioned how this event was an indicator of developments to come in Hitler's Germany.

During Israel's Gaza campaign in late December 2008 and January 2009, there were many anti-Israeli demonstrations. In some of them, calls were heard for the extinction of Israel and the murder of the Jews. These were often made by Muslims. In a number of gatherings in Western cities, signs were carried equating Jews with the Nazis and the Star of David with the swastika.<sup>8</sup>

On 27 January 2009, the United Nations held its annual ceremony for International Holocaust Remembrance Day. General Assembly president Miguel d'Escoco Brockmann of Nicaragua skipped the event. He had hugged Ahmadinejad at the UN plenary and had often made virulent anti-Israeli statements. He inverted the Holocaust when he described the situation in Gaza as "genocide."<sup>9</sup> Various Jewish organizations had come out against his participation. A press release of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was titled: "General Assembly President Unfit to Participate in U.N. Holocaust Ceremony."<sup>10</sup>

## **Bishop Williamson, Durban 2**

In February, Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of four bishops of the fundamentalist Society of St. Pius X. One of these, Bishop Richard Williamson, is an outspoken Holocaust denier. Jewish organizations protested against this step. The canceling of Williamson's excommunication led to an international debate that included strong criticism of the pope, from both Catholics and other gentiles.

The Durban 2 review conference took place in Geneva in April 2009. It was supposed to deal with the battle against racism. Ahmadinejad, the world's leading inciter to genocide, was one of its most prominent speakers. Before the conference this Holocaust denier was received by Swiss president Hans-Rudolf Merz.

The conference also illustrated another development: increasingly, extreme positions of current Holocaust abusers are whitewashed in various ways. One example was when Ahmadinejad spoke at the Geneva conference and the Vatican representative remained in the room. The reason given was that the Iranian president left out a sentence from his draft speech about Holocaust denial. What remained of the text should have been more than sufficient for the Vatican diplomat to walk out.<sup>11</sup>

The United States, Canada, and several European countries did not attend the conference; the delegations of all other European Union states as well as

some others, walked out when Ahmadinejad spoke. The Swiss and Norwegians, however, were among those who stayed.<sup>12</sup> Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre criticized Ahmadinejad in his speech in the plenary. Many other delegates who remained in the hall applauded the man who, more than any other world leader, espouses the call for the mass murder of Jews.

### **The Pope, Facebook, Demjanjuk**

In the debate around the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority in May, much attention centered on his attitude toward the Holocaust. In connection to the visit, the Vatican first denied that the pope had ever been a member of the Hitler Youth but a few hours later said he had been forced to join the movement. This had been known for a long time.<sup>13</sup>

Many other recent events drew international attention to Holocaust issues and Holocaust distortion. Suspected Nazi death-camp guard John Demjanjuk was taken into custody in Germany in May 2009 after he was deported from the United States.<sup>14</sup> When German doctors decided in July 2009 that Demjanjuk was fit to stand trial, this again received much international media attention.<sup>15</sup>

A variety of media also reported on various Holocaust-denial groups on Facebook. The site managers refused to ban these groups unless they were based in a country where such denial is a criminal offense.<sup>16</sup>

The Holocaust was also a topic in a much-discussed speech by U.S. president Barack Obama in Cairo in June. Some of his remarks were misleading.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter the president went to Germany where he visited the concentration camp Buchenwald together with German chancellor Angela Merkel and Elie Wiesel.<sup>18</sup>

In the same month a white supremacist shot a security guard at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. This incident drew far more international attention than if a guard of any other American museum had been shot. Obama stated that the killing had saddened him.<sup>19</sup>

Also in June attention was given to the fact that Anne Frank, had she lived, would have been eighty years old. She was remembered on this occasion in many places around the world, some far-flung. One of these was Wayanad in the Indian province of Kerala. There a number of activities for youth aged fifteen to eighteen were planned in her memory.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of June, almost fifty countries participated in the Prague Conference, which urged governments to increase the care of Holocaust survivors. The conference also called for the return of or compensation for private property taken from Jews during the Holocaust. Poland, which participated in the gathering, was seen as the major offender on this issue as it has no private-property restitution laws.<sup>21</sup> This conference was mentioned in hundreds of media stories around the world.

In July, Bernie Ecclestone, a billionaire who holds part of the rights to the promotion of Formula One automobile racing, said that dictators like Adolf Hitler “got things done.” After much criticism Ecclestone withdrew his words and said, “I’m just sorry I was an idiot. I sincerely genuinely apologize.”<sup>22</sup>

The international references to the Holocaust and the Nazi period are extremely disparate. In July, for instance, German prosecutors launched an inquiry into whether an artist who had produced garden gnomes, raising their arms in a Hitler salute, and the Nuremberg gallery that exhibited them, were breaking the law.<sup>23</sup>

The next Holocaust-related item that drew some international attention was the burning down of the barracks where Anne Frank had worked in the Dutch transit camp Westerbork. The barracks had been used for decades as an agricultural warehouse but was soon to be reconstructed at the camp’s memorial site. Anne Frank was deported from Westerbork to the east. She later died in the German concentration camp Bergen-Belsen.<sup>24</sup>

A few days later attention was drawn to the mayor of the Romanian city Constanta, who was seen goose-stepping with his son in German army uniforms during a weekend fashion show. He was quoted as saying, “I wanted to dress like a Wehrmacht general because I’ve always liked this uniform, and admired the rigorous organization of the German army.”<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the month, the American Jewish Committee in Berlin filed a complaint against the German Amazon site. It asked prosecutors to investigate whether the site had broken German laws against Holocaust denial by selling books with far-Right content. Holocaust denial is a crime in Germany that can lead to punishment of several years in prison.<sup>26</sup>

At the beginning of August, the American talk-show host Rush Limbaugh wrote: “Obama’s got a health care logo that’s right out of Hitler’s playbook.” He went on to make a whole list of similarities between the Democratic Party and the Nazi Party in Germany. This drew attention from a variety of mainstream papers.<sup>27</sup>

Abraham Foxman, national director of the ADL, asserted, “Regardless of the political differences and the substantive differences in the debate over health care, the use of Nazi symbolism is outrageous, offensive and inappropriate.... Americans should be able to disagree on the issues without coloring it with Nazi imagery and comparisons to Hitler.”<sup>28</sup>

A few days later the Central Council of Jews in Germany, the roof organization of German Jewry, said it wanted Germany to lift the ban on publishing Hitler’s book *Mein Kampf*. The group’s secretary-general Stephan J. Kramer stated that a new scholarly edition of the book should contain comments that would educate future generations on the evils of Nazism.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Holocaust keeps regularly coming to the fore of the international media, there is simultaneously a certain Holocaust fatigue in parts of Western society. Many people do not want to be reminded of what happened and now seems long ago. Yet the past several months prove again that ongoing events

make mentioning the memory of the Holocaust — be it true or false — almost unavoidable and likely to remain so.

## **A Second Holocaust?**

The debate about whether the Holocaust can happen again has been waged for decades at differing levels of intensity, mainly among Jewish communities but also elsewhere. This discussion about a possible Second Holocaust again developed in the United States during the major outburst of anti-Semitism — only in part disguised as anti-Israelism — in the new century. In April 2002, American columnist Ron Rosenbaum stated that the “second Holocaust” was a phrase coined by Philip Roth in his 1993 novel *Operation Shylock*. Rosenbaum claimed it was likely — rather than novelistic — that sooner or later a nuclear weapon would be detonated by Arab fundamentalists in Tel Aviv.<sup>30</sup>

The writer Leon Wieseltier reacted to this and similar pessimistic articles by saying that the Jews had found both safety and strength. He concluded: “The Jewish genius for worry has served the Jews well, but Hitler is dead.”<sup>31</sup> Rosenbaum countered by claiming Wieseltier was fleeing into denial as there were many Hitler-like examples of demonization of the Jews in the Arab world. He referred to Palestinian justification of the Holocaust, the denial of the Holocaust by an Egyptian government paper while supporting Hitler if he had indeed exterminated the Jews, and a Saudi government broadcast of a cleric calling for the annihilation of the Jews.<sup>32</sup>

The genocidal remarks by Ahmadinejad have, however, stimulated the debate on the possibility of a Second Holocaust, which has increasingly become the subject of speculation.

The sociologist Zygmunt Baumann has offered another perspective linking the Holocaust to structural elements of modern society. He states that the Holocaust was a product of men who were educated in the most refined culture of Western society. It was thus a product of Western society and civilization. Since nothing fundamental has changed in Western societies, the study of the Holocaust is of more than academic interest. In Bauman’s view, even though another Holocaust may not occur, the infrastructure and mechanisms for a similar event are still in place.<sup>33</sup>

## **The Holocaust and Public Discourse**

The Holocaust will continue to play an important role in public discourse for a long time to come. The following analysis of the main categories of Holocaust distortion can help identify and interpret such manipulations. This may also facilitate responses against them.

The various reactions to such distortions also serve as an indicator of the mood of societies. Examples are the ways in which the Western world responded to Ahmadinejad's genocidal pronouncements.<sup>34</sup> The names of those in the Western world who have met with Ahmadinejad should be retained for the future. They can be confronted with their misbehavior, for instance, when they make public statements. The Mennonite Central Committee was among those particularly active in organizing meetings and events with Ahmadinejad.<sup>35</sup> Among the attendants were many prominent representatives of American churches.

We live in times of major flux and uncertainty. In such periods it is particularly important to document events. In this way the identity of the hate-mongers and distorters of Holocaust history will be preserved. This may help in the battle against future such distorters.

In reading this book, it will emerge how numerous are the abuses of Holocaust memory. With no detailed analysis available of many of the phenomena exposed, one cannot quantify their relative importance. The emphasis must be laid on qualitatively exposing as many aspects as possible instead of in-depth analysis of a few of them.

## Notes

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2. Manfred Gerstenfeld, "The Transformation of Jewish Knowledge over the Decades: The New Edition of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*," an interview with Michael Berenbaum, *Changing Jewish Communities*, 27, 16 December 2007.
3. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 134–142.
4. One definition of collective memory is  
 a set of ideas, stories, and representations of the past which are produced, reproduced and reshaped within a community or a group. Collective memory is thus a social construction of the past and is found in the cultural resources which the group (the community in question) shares. Working with the memory means selecting and storing information and using it on various occasions. In the same way that memory is part of human consciousness, collective memory is part of the group's or community's historical consciousness.  
 Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, "The Jedwabne Killings — a Challenge for Polish Collective Memory: The Polish Debate on *Neighbors*," in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander, eds., *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund, Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 2003), 143.
5. [www.ushmm.org/research/library/faq](http://www.ushmm.org/research/library/faq).
6. "An individual constantly orients himself on a temporal axis, interpreting the past, understanding the present and predicting the future by employing his historical consciousness. This is a process that can be more or less refined and more or less consciously carried out, but it is nonetheless always going on." Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 177.

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# Chapter One:

## Categories of Distortion

Recent years have seen greatly increased attempts to manipulate Holocaust history and its memory. Among the falsifications, Holocaust denial was the one that, for several decades, received the most attention. Other distortions of the Holocaust, however, have also become increasingly important. The number of their mutations is growing as well.

Many abusers of Holocaust memory come from the world's currently most prominent anti-Semitic circles: the Arab and Muslim world, the extreme Right, and the extreme Left. Yet falsifications of the history of the Holocaust have also permeated the Western narrative. Among the distorters are leading politicians, academics, journalists, and so on.

The assault on Holocaust memory can best be analyzed by categories of distortions. Some manipulations belong to more than one group.

### **Holocaust: A Term Changes Meaning**

The meaning of the term Holocaust has changed over the millennia. Nowadays it usually refers to the persecution and extermination of the Jews by the Germans and their allies and supporters during World War II.

The term Holocaust existed, however, long before it was used for the systematic genocide of six million Jews. Its meaning developed over many centuries. The expression *Holokauston* is found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, where it translates the Hebrew word *olah*, which signifies a burnt offering.

In the decades before the genocide of the Jews the term was used in disparate contexts referring, for instance, to such varied events as the 1914 San Francisco earthquake, a 1918 forest fire in Minnesota, and earlier to the Turkish massacre of the Armenians. After World War II, the word was frequently used for a potential nuclear war. Only after the 1960s did the word Holocaust take on its now-dominant meaning.<sup>1</sup>

In France and in a number of other places, scholars and others prefer to use the Hebrew word Shoah rather than Holocaust. The filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, for instance, called his nine-hour movie *Shoah*. Throughout this book, however, the term Holocaust will mainly be used.

In analyzing the abuses of Holocaust memory and history, its main categories will be discussed first.

## **Holocaust Justification and Promotion**

Holocaust justification consists of “explaining” that the Jews were the cause of their enemies’ anti-Semitism and later bore responsibility for their own destruction. The former claim was prominent outside Nazi circles as well even before World War II and occasionally returns nowadays. Blaming Jews for the hatred against them is a common theme in general anti-Semitism as well.

Holocaust promotion consists of the encouragement of genocide against the Jews or Israel. Sometimes this is done explicitly by stating that Jews should be killed. On other occasions it is the logical outcome of proposed policies.

Holocaust promotion is not necessarily accompanied by distortion of Holocaust memory or history. It has to be included in this volume because of its close relation to the abuses of memory and history that are analyzed.

Campaigning for the mass murder of Jews is often done without specific reference to the Holocaust. At other times the perpetrators refer to Hitler or the Germans having failed to complete the extermination of the Jews and say their activities should be continued. One prominent variant of Holocaust promotion is propagating the view that the Jewish state has no right to exist. The only way to achieve this would be by elements of genocide and mass murder. In this context the perpetrators rarely if ever explicitly use the word Holocaust.

## **Holocaust Denial**

Holocaust denial can be defined as the negation of the main facts of the extermination of the Jews in World War II. One frequent statement of deniers is that the Germans did not use gas chambers to kill people. This is often accompanied by another false claim that the majority of Jews died of illness contracted in camps. Other key motifs of such denial are that the Germans had no intention to kill Jews, or that Hitler did not know about the genocidal anti-Jewish measures, but that people lower in the German hierarchy made the decisions.

Another category of abuse of Holocaust memory closely linked to Holocaust denial and often overlapping with it is “minimalization” or “depreciation” of the Holocaust. This means claiming that far fewer Jews were murdered during World War II than the generally agreed figure of around six million.

## **Holocaust Deflection and Whitewashing**

Holocaust deflection entails admitting that the Holocaust happened while denying the complicity or responsibilities of specific groups or individuals. The Holocaust is then blamed on others. This, to a large extent, concerns those countries where,



during the war, Germans were helped greatly by local citizens in the despoliation, deportation, and killing of the Jews.

Many nations have tried to present themselves as victims of the Germans and denied or diluted their responsibility or that of their nationals for the Holocaust. One extreme case is Austria, which for many years portrayed itself as the first victim of the Nazis. Another such case is Romania, which under the communist regime denied or greatly downplayed its role in the Final Solution.<sup>2</sup>

Deflection also appears in different forms within countries. In West Germany many false claims were made that the Wehrmacht, the German army, did not participate in the atrocities.<sup>3</sup> This distorting phenomenon sometimes appears combined with other distortion mechanisms. It was official East German policy to de-Judaize the Holocaust. It also whitewashed its own population while blaming West Germany for inadequately dealing with the Nazi heritage.<sup>4</sup>

Whereas deflection consists of shifting the responsibilities of nations or specific persons to other parties, whitewashing aims at cleansing an individual of blame without necessarily accusing others.

## **Holocaust De-Judaization**

Holocaust de-Judaization consists of a variety of distortions of Holocaust memory. One type of de-Judaization is to void or minimize to a large extent the Jewish character of the victims. This is accompanied by stressing non-Jewish aspects of the Holocaust, taking it out of its specific historical context, and giving minimal attention to its uniqueness.

The Soviet Union made it a policy to de-Judaize the Holocaust by including Jewish victims among local ones. No attention was given to the fact that they had been murdered because they were Jewish.

De-Judaization also often results from the desire to draw an overall message for the human race from the genocide of the Jews. Another subcategory of Holocaust de-Judaization is the extension of the Holocaust to include many people other than Jews who were murdered or died in World War II. The actions against certain groups did indeed have a genocidal character, yet did not aim at their systematic and total extermination.

## **Holocaust Equivalence**

Within Holocaust equivalence there are a number of subcategories of distortion for which the motivations differ. Prewar and wartime Holocaust equivalence are based on the allegation that the Germans' genocidal behavior during World War II was similar to that of other nations before and during the war. The perpetrators of these distortions mainly aim to whitewash or diminish German crimes.

The postwar variant is based on the claim that there are many events in postwar society that are similar in nature or equivalent to those caused by Germany under Hitler's rule. This type of distortion is heterogeneous. One aspect of it is the broad claim that Nazism and communism were interchangeable. On the other end of the spectrum are one-line statements that may compare a person with Hitler or another German leader.

### **Holocaust Inversion**

Holocaust inversion is a category of abuse derived from Holocaust equivalence specifically targeting Jews and Israel. Demonization is applied against members of a group who were the major victims of the criminality of Nazi Germany. Holocaust inverters often claim that Israel behaves similarly toward the Palestinians to how Germany behaved toward the Jews in World War II. Frequently used slogans by the inverters include: "The victims have become perpetrators" or "The Jews and/or the Israelis have become the Nazis of today." These are expressions of rabid anti-Semitic concepts.<sup>5</sup>

Holocaust inversion manifests itself in many ways. It is expressed in speech, writing, and visual media, including cartoons, graffiti, and placards. It employs sinister characterizations of Israel and Israelis, Nazi symbols, and sometimes takes the form of Nazi genocidal terminology to describe Israel's actions.

This way of perverting the Holocaust — aimed at Israel — is particularly prevalent in the Arab and Muslim world, where it is far from limited to government officials, media, and religious authorities. Holocaust inversion often appears jointly with other Holocaust distortions. However mutually exclusive they may seem to be, Holocaust denial and Holocaust inversion are found together in the Arab world. Goetz Nordbruch points out that "articles denouncing Zionism as Nazism often include Holocaust denial as well."<sup>6</sup>

### **Holocaust Trivialization**

Holocaust trivialization is another category of abuse derived from Holocaust equivalence. It is a tool for some ideologically or politically motivated activists to metaphorically compare phenomena they oppose with the industrial-scale destruction of the Jews in World War II by the Germans and their allies. Examples include environmental problems, abortion, the slaughter of animals, the use of tobacco, and human rights abuses.

Those abusing Holocaust comparisons for their ideological purposes want to exaggerate the evil nature of a phenomenon they condemn. With the Holocaust symbolizing absolute evil for many, they thus use it as an instrument. Trivialization often does not stem from anti-Semitic motifs but from the perpetrators' desire to use the Holocaust for their purposes.

Holocaust trivialization manifests itself partly in the growing insertion of Holocaust issues into a large number of disparate events that have no connection to the genocide of Jews. Other trivializers operate out of commercial or artistic considerations, or out of a desire to draw attention or even provoke.

### **Obliterating Holocaust Memory**

The common heading of “obliterating Holocaust memory” groups a variety of different abuses and distortions. The maintaining of collective memory is attacked directly and indirectly, usually intentionally but not always. One type of direct attack is the besmirching or destruction of memorials. Another is disturbing Holocaust ceremonies. Yet another is trying to turn public Holocaust memorial ceremonies into more general remembrance events.

Another distortion mode that attempts to obliterate Holocaust memory is “Holocaust silencing.” This consists of stating that Jews talk about the Holocaust too often. One more form of trying to obliterate Holocaust memory is claiming that Jews abuse the Holocaust for various purposes.

Indirect attacks on Holocaust remembrance involve the disappearance of Jewish memorial sites. This occurs particularly in the former communist countries. It may include leveling former Jewish buildings for new construction without leaving a memorial plaque at the location. Or, for instance, it could be the removal of Jewish cemeteries for various local purposes.

### **Differences between Categories**

The aforementioned categories of abuse are not homogeneous. Nor are the perpetrators, who come from many different camps and also include some Jews. Some distortion categories are based on the extreme abuse of free speech, others on attempts to prevent people, in particular Jews, from expressing themselves. Some concern the forgery of history or interpreting it in extremely distorted ways. Others have more of a philosophical or “moral” emphasis. Yet others involve violence or calls for it.

Core elements of some abuses can sometimes be illustrated by analyzing a single case. The attitudes and narrative of Ahmadinejad embody many aspects of contemporary Holocaust promotion. Much of the quintessence of Holocaust denial can be analyzed on the basis of the defamation lawsuit that Holocaust-denier David Irving brought against historian Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher. Studying how the Anne Frank story has been interpreted over the decades yields a wealth of insight into the de-Judaization of the Holocaust and its motivations. Interpreting the fundamental nature of other abuses, however, requires piecing together disparate elements from many cases.

The scholarly attention given to distortions varies greatly among the categories. Holocaust denial has been the subject of overview books.<sup>7</sup> A number of essays on Holocaust deflection have appeared, concerning mainly Central and Eastern European countries. Other distortions such as Holocaust inversion and Holocaust trivialization have hardly been analyzed.

Various categories of distortion require widely disparate degrees of effort by perpetrators. Holocaust deflection may sometimes entail major research efforts so as to construct a thesis that shifts responsibility for a country's crimes to others. Some deniers also go to great lengths to construct their fabrications. On the other hand, many perpetrators of postwar equivalence or Holocaust trivialization limit themselves to extremely superficial remarks or acts.

### **A Distortion of Identity**

Not all abuses of Holocaust memory fall into the aforementioned eight categories. French sociologist Shmuel Trigano maintains that the way the Holocaust is represented in Europe and particularly in France leads to a structural distortion of the Jews' identity. He says:

When Europeans recall the Shoah they mainly stress aspects such as the Jews' suffering and sacrifice. This emphasis on victimhood enables suppressing the Shoah's political aspects.

In France in particular, the prevailing culture does not permit such a political expression. Remembering the Shoah is the only mode French culture can accept if the Jews want to manifest their collective identity. The memory of the Shoah becomes the only way for Europe to recognize the Jews as a people — a dead and suffering people.

Yet Jews still pay a heavy price, because their enemies now accuse them of promoting a collective identity by sacralizing the Shoah's memory.... If they presented their collective identity in any other way, they would incur even greater condemnation.

Trigano calls this attitude perverse, saying: "The compassion for the Jewish victims of the Shoah conceals in a sublimated way the non-recognition of the Jews as a people, as a political subject." In an interview later in this volume Trigano expounds on his views.

### **Obama's Speech in Cairo**

Another example of a Holocaust distortion that is not included in the above categories is found in President Obama's speech in Cairo in June 2009. The discourse was heavily criticized by experts on Islam who pointed to many

inaccuracies. Obama also connected the Holocaust to the establishment of Israel. Although Foxman praised the general tenor of the speech, he pointed out that the president, when speaking of America's ties to Israel, said they were based on the "recognition that the aspiration for a Jewish homeland is rooted in a tragic history that cannot be denied." Foxman wrote:

He then went on to talk about anti-Semitism in Europe for centuries which "culminated in an unprecedented Holocaust."

It is good that the President addressed these themes but it sends the wrong message to base Israel's legitimacy simply or essentially on this suffering. The Arab world for decades has argued that Israel was an illegitimate entity imposed on the Arab Middle East by the Europeans who, they claimed, were trying to atone for the murder of six million Jews on European soil. The Arabs argued: why should they pay the price for what the Europeans did to the Jews.

It is a phony argument which is not sustainable because the Jewish claim to Israel doesn't rest on the Holocaust, even if that tragedy played a role in the climate surrounding discussions about the idea of a Jewish state. Israel's legitimacy rests on the unbroken connection of the Jewish people to the land of Israel, a physical connection, a religious connection, a cultural connection, an existential connection. It is hardly too much to say that the Jewish people would not exist today as a people had we not held hope alive for 2,000 years about the return to Zion. In other words, there was Herzl before there was the Holocaust.<sup>8</sup>

## **Commemorating Dead Jews as an Alibi**

A category apart, in the margins of the subject dealt with in this volume, concerns the respect paid by anti-Israelis to Jews who died in the Holocaust. These people de facto use the genocide as a public "legitimization" to "prove" that they are not anti-Semites.

One among many examples can illustrate this. Norwegian finance minister Kristin Halvorsen is the leader of the Socialist Left Party. In January 2006, she supported a consumer boycott of Israel. She was probably the first Western government minister to do so. The daily *Aftenposten* reported that subsequently the U.S. secretary of state threatened Norway with "serious political consequences." The paper said this was conveyed to the Norwegian embassy in Washington. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre then wrote to the Israeli government saying Halvorsen's position did not represent his government's stance.<sup>9</sup>

Every year on Holocaust Memorial Day, a major commemorative event is held at the site of the Holocaust Memorial monument in the port area in Oslo from where the Norwegian Jews were deported in 1942–1943. At this event

a government minister gives a keynote speech. In 2007, Halvorsen was the government speaker at the ceremony.<sup>10</sup>

The Norwegian reactions to Israel's 2008–2009 Gaza campaign included a variety of incidents. Halvorsen was among those who participated in an anti-Israeli demonstration in Oslo in January. She was the only minister of a European country to do so. It was noted that there had been shouts of “Death to the Jews” at this gathering.<sup>11</sup>

A few months later a photograph of the rally was published, showing that someone standing very close to Halvorsen was holding a sign that read “The greatest axis of evil — USA and Israel.”<sup>12</sup> By not leaving such a gathering and not dissociating herself from it, Halvorsen must be considered as identifying with it.

## **The Motivations of the Distorters**

The modes used to spread Holocaust-distortion ideas vary. The classic media and books played a dominant role in the twentieth century. For categories of abuse such as Holocaust promotion, denial, and inversion, the Internet has become a major tool in recent years.

The perpetrators of the various Holocaust distortions have manifold motivations. The most extreme is a mixture of politics and anti-Semitism aiming at the destruction of Israel.

Although it is difficult to identify all the Holocaust distorters' motivations, a number of important categories are:

- Many major Holocaust manipulators are driven by anti-Semitism and/or its latest mutation anti-Israelism. To express this they may use Holocaust justification, promotion, denial, and/or inversion. Many anti-Semites believe that the Holocaust plays an important role in the attitudes of those who have positive perceptions of Jews and Israel. Others who hate Jews may use, for instance, elements of trivialization to provoke Jews or stir hatred against them.
- An assortment of political reasons. These vary according to the perpetrators and the environment where they seek to muster support. For the extreme Right the reasons are often associated with neo-Nazi or fascist ideas. Holocaust denial or minimization serves to weaken accusations against Hitler's Germany, which they admire.

One of Ahmadinejad's several aims in distorting the Holocaust is to enhance his standing in the Muslim world, which is so widely suffused with lies about the Holocaust. It may also help boost his position at times when his popularity at home is declining. A further political aim of the Iranian president is to raise his profile in the anti-American and

anti-Western struggle. Denying the Holocaust shows that he has no fear of any taboos.

For others, postwar Holocaust equivalence or trivialization can be political tools in their battle against certain people — for instance, politicians — or in favor of certain ideas. One aforementioned example is the battle against global warming presented as the “Climate Holocaust.”

- Absolving oneself, a country, or one’s ancestors of guilt. This historical cleansing or “absolution” pertains, for instance, to Holocaust deniers and whitewashers. The same motive may be shared by some inverters who claim that Jews also commit Nazi-type deeds. If everybody is guilty then no one is guilty. Perpetrators of Holocaust deflection and often also of Holocaust equivalence seek to direct the blame for the Holocaust at others, or to distribute it more widely and thus deny or diminish guilt.
- Peer pressure or copycatting. Many people know little about the Holocaust, Nazis, Jews, or contemporary Israel. Some consider that certain Holocaust distortions make them acceptable to groups they belong to. Others are influenced by members of the media and other societal elites who are Holocaust distorters.
- Distorting the Holocaust is sometimes also an instrument for assessing a third party’s attitudes toward it. One objective of Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust manipulations may well be to regularly test the West’s reactions to his statements about the destruction of Israel and Holocaust distortion. The fact that the reactions remain verbal may well indicate to him that not much will happen, either, if Iran goes ahead with nuclear armament. One might call this a “political litmus test.”<sup>13</sup>
- Provoking people and/or gaining publicity are among the other motivations for distortions of the Holocaust.

A variety of motivations thus lead to Holocaust distortion. The consequences of these manipulations are also manifold and disparate. One example is alleviating a personal or national conscience. Thus the motivation leads to the desired result. Others include promoting or supporting activities such as boycott, divestment, and sanction campaigns against Israel. Yet others involve furthering personal interests in circles where attacks on the Holocaust are viewed positively. Also in this case the motivation may yield the desired result.

The analysis of reactions to distortions is of great importance as well. It often enables improving methods of dealing with or responding to perpetrators. Furthermore, analyzing reactions to Holocaust-memory abuses can shed much light on the current societal environment in which these distortions occur. Also, the categories of distortion used in this volume are valid as well for the analysis of many other subjects unrelated to Holocaust memory and its abuse.

## Notes

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## Chapter Two: Holocaust Justification and Promotion

Holocaust justification consists of “explaining” that the Jews caused their enemies’ anti-Semitism and therefore were responsible for their own later destruction. The first part of this argument was prominent outside Nazi circles as well before World War II and occasionally returns nowadays.

Lipstadt says that:

The first generation of post-war deniers...justified Nazi anti-Semitism by asserting that the Jews were responsible for their own suffering, since they had caused Germany’s financial and political problems. Later deniers abandoned this line of argument, because they felt it undermined whatever credibility they had.<sup>1</sup>

Sergio Minerbi mentions that the postwar German historian Ernst Nolte claimed that “the reason for the persecution of the Jews was the provocative declarations made by the Jews themselves.”

Minerbi adds:

This is certainly not a new expedient — making the victim the guilty party is a well-known defamatory strategy. Nolte quotes the letter written by Chaim Weizmann in the British press in September 1939, in which he declared that in case of a future military conflict, the Jews would side with the democracies against Nazi Germany. Such an intention by a man, who did not even represent the majority of the Jews, seems sufficient to Nolte in order to justify the mass massacres committed in the second half of 1941 in occupied territories taken from the Soviet Union.

This is a baseless assertion. Not only was Weizmann a king without a kingdom at the time and could not commit all of the Jews, but he could not have any right to a war declaration, contrary to what Nolte writes.

Minerbi also notes that “the persecution of the Jews in Germany had commenced well before 1939.”<sup>2</sup>

### **A Variety of Postwar Hitler Supporters**

Reporting on the 1961 Eichmann trial, Arendt wrote:

The newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Jordan did not conceal either their sympathy for Eichmann nor their regret that he “did not finish

the job”; a radio broadcast from Cairo on the opening day of the trial even included a little sideswipe at the Germans, reproaching them for the fact that “in the last war, no German plane had flown over and bombed a Jewish settlement.”<sup>3</sup>

Since World War II some political leaders and others have expressed their sympathy for Hitler. On 11 September 1972, Ugandan president Idi Amin sent a telegram to UN secretary-general Kurt Waldheim in which he applauded the massacre of the Israeli Olympic athletes in Munich. Amin wrote that Germany was the most appropriate locale for this because it was where Hitler burned more than six million Jews. “It happened because Hitler and all of the German people knew that the Israelis are not a people who work for humanity and because of that they burned them alive and killed them with gas on the soil of Germany.”<sup>4</sup>

David Ahenakew, an aboriginal leader in Canada said in 2002 that “Jews were a ‘disease’ and that Adolf Hitler was trying to ‘clean up the world’ when he ‘fried’ 6 million of the ‘guys’ during World War II.” Initially Ahenakew was convicted of promoting hatred against an identifiable group, and had to pay a fine. He apologized but was stripped of the Order of Canada. The Saskatchewan court of appeals overturned the conviction, ruling that while the remarks about Jews were “shocking, brutal and hurtful,” they were not illegal.<sup>5</sup>

## Neo-Nazism

There are also those who think the Nazi government was a good one. In addition, there are moral relativists who argue that the Nazi government had its good sides. A 2001 poll of Germans aged fourteen to sixteen in former East Germany found that 15 percent thought the Nazi regime had been a good idea and 62 percent thought it “wasn’t all bad.” In a poll conducted by the Forsa Agency among 1,106 Germans in the 14–25 age group in 2001, 47 percent in former East Germany and 35 percent in former West Germany thought Nazism had its good points.<sup>6</sup>

In this cultural environment neo-Nazism is on the rise. The German Interior Ministry reported that in the first ten months of 2008, there were about twelve thousand incidents — the great majority not against Jews — by far-Right offenders, a 30 percent increase over the same period in 2007. Many believe that only a part of these hate-related offenses are recorded. A study found that in former East Germany prejudice against foreigners is over 30 percent, while in former West Germany it is 20 percent.<sup>7</sup>

## Holocaust Promotion

Holocaust promotion is the encouragement of genocide against the Jews or against Israel, the Jewish state. Sometimes this is done explicitly by promoting

the idea that Jews should be killed. On other occasions it is the logical outcome of proposed policies. Holocaust promotion is often not based on an abuse of Holocaust memory. It typically results from perverse “ideological” positions.

Holocaust promotion is not a “distortion category” in the sense in which the term is used in this book. Yet it has to be included and analyzed because it is often closely connected to the many abuses of Holocaust memory that are discussed here.

Campaigning for the mass murder of Jews is often done without specific reference to the Holocaust. Although most current Holocaust promotion focuses on the destruction of Israel, it also at times aims at Jews elsewhere. Sometimes the perpetrators refer to Hitler or the Germans as having failed to complete the extermination of the Jews and say their activities should be continued. One prominent variant of Holocaust promotion is propagating the view that the Jewish state is illegal and has no right to exist. The only possible way of achieving its elimination is by elements of genocide and mass murder, though this is not usually stated explicitly.

In the decades after World War II, the encouragement of the continuing murder of Jews came mainly from old Nazis, neo-Nazis, and some parts of the Muslim world. Holocaust promotion, however, remained a marginal phenomenon in the postwar period of the twentieth century.

Nowadays calling for the murder of Jews has become more commonplace. An example was San Francisco State University in 2002. Prof. Laurie Zoloth wrote an email about the violent threats there that was widely circulated on the Internet. It mentioned a meeting organized by the Jewish student organization Hillel after which about fifty participants remained for afternoon prayers. Thereafter “counter demonstrators poured into the plaza, screaming at the Jews to ‘Get out or we will kill you’ and ‘Hitler did not finish the job.’”<sup>8</sup>

### **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Calls for Genocide**

Ahmadinejad is the first head of state since World War II who regularly calls for actions that are tantamount to genocide. As such he is the prime contemporary example of a Holocaust promoter. His appeals of the last few years for the elimination of Israel — which is tantamount to mass murder — were preceded by those of Ayatollah Khomeini and several other Iranian leaders.

The current Iranian president has greatly increased the intensity of such calls. On 26 October 2005, he addressed the “World without Zionism” conference — which preceded the annual Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day established by Ayatollah Khomeini — at the Interior Ministry in Teheran stating:

Imam [Khomeini] said: “This regime that is occupying Quds [Jerusalem] must be eliminated from the pages of history.” This sentence is very wise....

Today, [Israel] seeks, satanically and deceitfully, to gain control of the front of war.... If someone is under the pressure of hegemonic power [i.e., the West] and understands that something is wrong, or he is naïve, or he is an egotist and his hedonism leads him to recognize the Zionist regime, he should know that he will burn in the fire of the Islamic Ummah [nation].... Oh dear people, look at this global arena. By whom are we confronted? We must understand the depth of the disgrace imposed on us by the enemy, until our holy hatred expands continuously and strikes like a wave.<sup>9</sup>

Other speakers at the event were terrorist leaders Hassan Nasrallah of Hizballah in Lebanon and Khaled Mash'al of Hamas, who lives in Syria. Before his statement, Ahmadinejad told the hundreds of students present to shout the slogan "Death to Israel."<sup>10</sup>

On 28 October of that year, as is usual on the fourth Friday of the month of Ramadan, the annual Al-Quds Day demonstrations took place in Teheran, with Ahmadinejad's participation. He rejected the West's condemnations and repeated his words against Israel. State television showed him surrounded by demonstrators with signs saying "Death to Israel, Death to America."<sup>11</sup>

The Iranian president has repeated his genocidal statements many times since. At the December 2006 Holocaust Conference in Teheran, Ahmadinejad said: "Just as the Soviet Union was wiped out and today does not exist, so will the Zionist regime soon be wiped out."<sup>12</sup>

## Other Iranian Leaders

With his calls for murder, Ahmadinejad followed in the footsteps of previous Iranian leaders including former president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who held office from 1989 till 1997. He had said in 2002: "If one day...the world of Islam comes to possess the weapons currently in Israel's possession [i.e., nuclear weapons] — on that day this method of global arrogance would come to a dead end. This...is because the use of a nuclear bomb in Israel will leave nothing on the ground, whereas it will only damage the world of Islam."<sup>13</sup> In 2000, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei told Muslim worshippers in Teheran, referring to Israel: "We have repeatedly said that the cancerous tumor of a state should be removed from the region."<sup>14</sup>

Ahmadinejad's genocidal remarks have drawn far more attention than those of his predecessors. One explanation may be that his statements are made more frequently. Also the statements of previous Iranian leaders had been much less watched in the West. Another factor is that — due to September 11 and terrorism — there is more sensitivity in the West to many problematic aspects of the world of Islam than there was ten years ago. Moreover, Ahmadinejad's reiteration of his genocidal statements combined with the strong impression that

Iran is on the way to develop nuclear weapons leads Westerners to observe his actions and statements.

Not only key Iranian leaders but also many lower-level officials call for genocide. For example, in June 2002, Iran held the “International Conference on Imam Khomeini and Support for Palestine,” in which Khamenei participated. “The Iranian organizer of the conference, Ali Akbar Mohtashemi-Pur, declared, ‘Israel is a cancerous tumor in the heart of the Muslim world which should be removed,’ and lauded the attacks carried out by Palestinian suicide bombers.”<sup>15</sup>

The leadership of the Iranian regime has encouraged a culture that stimulates calls for genocide. In fall 2005, Iranian state television broadcast a ten-minute animated film on a children’s program glorifying the actions of a boy who killed himself in a suicide action against Israel, as an example for other children to follow. When carrying out this action, the child shouts: “I place my trust in God. Allah Akbar.”<sup>16</sup>

Also in 2005, several commentators on Ahmadinejad’s statements noted that “a Shahab-3 ballistic missile (capable of reaching Israel) paraded in Teheran ... bore the slogan: ‘Israel Should Be Wiped Off the Map.’”<sup>17</sup>

Ahmadinejad has not only repeated his genocidal statements many times. He also uses other terminology typical of Nazis. The latter often labeled Jews “vermin”; Ahmadinejad in early 2008 called Israel “a filthy germ.” A few days before he made this comment, a top commander in Iran’s Revolutionary Guards dubbed Israel a “cancerous germ” that would be wiped out by Hizballah.<sup>18</sup>

## **Visiting New York and the United Nations**

Ahmadinejad has been widely condemned, mainly by Western leaders. Nevertheless he has been well received in many countries. In September 2007, he spoke at the General Assembly of the United Nations notwithstanding that he heads a country that aims to destroy another UN member state. He was even applauded by many present.

During that visit to the United States, Ahmadinejad also spoke at Columbia University, where part of the audience applauded. In his introduction to the event, the university’s president Lee Bollinger severely criticized Ahmadinejad. This does not change the fact that such speaking invitations legitimize a person who should have long ago been brought before an international tribunal.<sup>19</sup> However, there is no country that presently intends to do this.

A few days later more than a hundred Christian leaders participated in an interfaith meeting with Ahmadinejad in New York. This gathering was organized by the Mennonite Central Committee. Among its endorsers were Pax Christi USA and the World Council of Churches Commission on International Affairs.<sup>20</sup> Little if anything is known about criticism of Ahmadinejad by the Christian participants in this meeting.

Ahmadinejad also attended the Durban 2 review conference in April 2009, which was supposed to deal with the battle against racism. The EU representatives left the room in protest when he spoke. However, the Vatican, Swiss, and Norwegian representatives remained seated. Later Norwegian foreign minister Støre publicly criticized Ahmadinejad.<sup>21</sup> As mentioned earlier, before the conference the Iranian president had been received by Swiss president Hans-Rudolf Merz.<sup>22</sup>

## Arab and Muslim Supporters

Ahmadinejad and his followers are driven by an apocalyptic vision of Islam. Hate propaganda, lies, violence, destruction, murder, and even genocide are tools to achieve their aims. Ahmadinejad's genocidal calls against Israel have deep roots in fundamentalist Iran and many followers among radical Muslims in other countries.

There have been some condemnations of Ahmadinejad's statements by Muslims, though the most important ones were not very explicit. In 2005, Turkey's Foreign Ministry's spokesman Narnik Tan said: "It is naturally impossible for us to approve such a statement.... Turkey...believes that regional conflicts can only be solved...through dialogue and peaceful means."<sup>23</sup>

Some Muslims supported Ahmadinejad when he made his initial genocidal statements. Farid Ahmad Pracha, a Pakistani parliamentarian, commented: "The words of Mr. Ahmadinejad are the heartfelt wish of all Muslims and are accepted by all Islamic entities around the world; we are in full support of the president and we back him up."<sup>24</sup>

On 6 November 2005, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the armed wing of the Fatah organization, became the first Palestinian group to openly support Iran's genocidal call. They distributed a leaflet in the Gaza Strip that endorsed the Iranian president's demand to wipe Israel off the map. It said: "We affirm our support and backing for the positions of the Iranian president toward the Zionist state which, by God's will, will cease to exist."<sup>25</sup>

## Murdering Jews

There are many in the Arab world whose extreme verbal attacks on Israel go hand in hand with similar ones on Jews. This can be illustrated by examples from the Hamas Charter. Its article 7 lays the groundwork for an ideology of genocide:

Hamas has been looking forward to implement Allah's promise whatever time it might take. The prophet, prayer and peace be upon him, said:

The time will not come until Muslims will fight the Jews (and kill them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him!<sup>26</sup>

One example of Palestinian calls for a genocidal war against the Jews came in 2004 from Dr. Ahmed Abu Halabiyah, rector of advanced studies at the Islamic University of Gaza. In a Friday sermon on PA TV, the official television of the Palestinian Authority, he said:

The Jews are the Jews.... They do not have any moderates or any advocates of peace. They are all liars. They must be butchered and must be killed.... The Jews are like a spring — as long as you step on it with your foot it doesn't move. But if you lift your foot from the spring, it hurts you and punishes you.... It is forbidden to have mercy in your hearts for the Jews in any place and in any land, make war on them anywhere that you find yourself. Any place that you meet them, kill them.<sup>27</sup>

When Israel undertook excavations outside the Temple compound in Jerusalem in 2007, Muslims claimed that it might affect the foundations of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Egyptian parliamentarian Mohammed el-Katatny of President Mubarak's National Democratic Party said, "Nothing will work with Israel except for a nuclear bomb that wipes it out of existence."<sup>28</sup>

In 2007, the ADL criticized the Egyptian Press Syndicate for awarding its top honor to the columnist Ahmed Ragab. Earlier in the year, Ragab had published a column titled "Thanks to Hitler" in the government daily *Al-Akhbar*, in which he praised Hitler for the murder of six million Jews and said "revenge on them was not enough."<sup>29</sup>

Even among Israeli Arabs only a small majority believes Israel has the right to exist as an independent country. A study by the University of Haifa in May 2009 found that 54 percent of Israeli Arabs think so.<sup>30</sup>

Another indication of widespread criminal inclinations is that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* enjoys popularity in many Muslim countries. It has, for instance, become a bestseller in Turkey where it can be bought in some of the largest supermarket chains and bookstores.<sup>31</sup>

## **The 2008–2009 Gaza War**

Israel's Gaza war at the end of December 2008 and beginning of 2009 brought Holocaust promotion and inversion into the public square of many Western cities. During anti-Israeli demonstrations there were often shouts of "Death to the Jews" or similar slogans. Several such protests turned violent. Holocaust inversion came to the fore through frequent equations of Israel with Nazi Germany.

After many decades, the slogan "Death to the Jews" returned to German towns, including Berlin. This time it was shouted mainly by Muslims.<sup>32</sup> These murderous calls were sometimes accompanied by efforts to remove any sign of Jewish or Israeli identity from the public square. During a pro-Palestinian march

in Duisburg, the German police removed two Israeli flags from the balconies of private apartments.<sup>33</sup>

## Western Politicians

As mentioned, Norway was the only Western country where a government minister, Finance Minister Kristin Halvorsen, leader of the Socialist Left Party, participated in an anti-Israeli demonstration where shouts of “Death to the Jews” were heard. This was initially largely ignored by the Norwegian media. An Israeli daily, however, published the story, also mentioning that the Israeli embassy had protested.<sup>34</sup>

In the Swedish town of Norrköping, a former Social Democrat party secretary, Lars Stjernkvist — who had also at one time been a parliamentarian — spoke at a demonstration where there was a Hizballah flag as well as swastikas in the background. A blogger captured this with his camera.<sup>35</sup> The local Social Democrat newspaper *Folkbladet* criticized the blogger for making an issue out of it.<sup>36</sup>

In Amsterdam, two parliamentarians of the extreme-Left Socialist Party, Harry van Bommel and Sadet Karabulut, joined with other demonstrators in shouting “Intifada, intifada, free Palestine.”<sup>37</sup> During that demonstration there were also shouts of “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas.”

## More Anti-Semitic Slogans

On 14 January, in the French town of Mulhouse in Alsace, slogans such as “Death to Israel,” “Long Live Palestine,” and “F--k France” were scrawled on the wall of the synagogue.<sup>38</sup> In the Turkish capital Ankara, a basketball game between the Turk Telekom and Israeli Bnei Hasharon teams was canceled after Turkish fans stormed the court shouting “Allahu Akbar” and “Death to the Jews.”<sup>39</sup>

On 30 December, at a busy intersection in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, a few hundred supporters of the Palestinians demonstrated against Israel. Besides the many inciting and aggressive hate manifestations, there were clear examples of the promotion of a holocaust against the state of Israel. One woman shouted “Nuke, nuke Israel” and also held up a sign with a similar message. Another woman shouted: “Go back to the oven...you need a big oven, that’s what you need.”<sup>40</sup>

Eyewitnesses in various countries say that in some cases shouts of “Death to the Jews,” the burning of Israeli flags, and banners equating Jews with Nazis go unmentioned in the media. For instance, Levi Salomon, a representative of the Berlin Jewish community, has given examples of such deficient reporting.<sup>41</sup>

A derivative of Holocaust promotion are graffiti of swastikas and other Nazi symbols on Jewish institutions and cemeteries. One example among many: in May



2009, black swastikas were painted on tombstones in the old Sofienberg Jewish cemetery in Oslo. This cemetery had been in use until 1917 and is considered a heritage site.<sup>42</sup>

### **Palestinian Extremists and “Moderates”**

The Palestinian incitement calling for genocide of the Jews goes back well before World War II. Haj Amin el-Husseini, the prewar mufti of Jerusalem, was the most prominent leader of the Palestinian Arab extremists before the War of Independence and supported Hitler’s actions against the Jews. In the late 1930s, he was financially and militarily assisted by Hitler’s Germany. As Matthias Kuntzel put it: “a biography of the Mufti published in 1943 clarified the closeness in world view between National Socialism and Islamism from a German perspective.”<sup>43</sup>

For a long time the leader of the Palestinian Arab “moderates” was Ragheb bey el-Nashashibi, the mayor of Jerusalem, who also came out in favor of the mass murder of Jews. After the 1929 riots in Mandatory Palestine, the non-Jewish French writer Albert Londres asked him why the Arabs had murdered the old, pious Jews in Hebron and Safed, with whom they had no quarrel.

The mayor answered: “In a way you behave like in a war. You don’t kill what you want. You kill what you find. Next time they will all be killed, young and old.” Later on, Londres spoke again to the mayor and tested him ironically by saying: “You cannot kill all the Jews. There are 150,000 of them.” Nashashibi answered “in a soft voice, ‘Oh no, it’ll take two days.’”<sup>44</sup>

This reflected a much broader Arab mindset. It was most succinctly put by Azzam Pasha, secretary of the Arab League, who announced during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war: “This will be a war of extermination and a momentous massacre which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades.”<sup>45</sup>

### **Arab Countries a Haven for Nazis**

Many Nazis who escaped from defeated Germany found a new home in Arab countries. Alois Brunner, an Austrian Nazi war criminal and assistant to Adolf Eichmann, fled to Syria in the mid-1950s and acted there as a government adviser.

Egypt in particular became a haven for Nazis. There, they continued their anti-Semitic activities. Among them was Johannes von Leers, a Goebbels collaborator, who was brought to Egypt by el-Husseini after World War II. He converted to Islam, changed his name to Omar Amin, and became a political adviser to the Information Bureau of the Egyptian government.<sup>46</sup>

When in 1953 there was a rumor that Hitler was still alive, Anwar al-Sadat, later president of Egypt, wrote in deference to him: “I congratulate you

wholeheartedly.... You can be proud of it that you will be the immortal Führer of Germany. We will not be surprised when we see you rise again or when after you a new Hitler emerges.”<sup>47</sup>

The historian Joel Fishman shows the important role of Nazi propagandists in transplanting their propaganda themes into the Middle East and particularly into the media war against Israel. He concludes: “If today’s Arab anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish propaganda strongly resembles that of the Third Reich, there is a good reason.”<sup>48</sup>

## Reactions to Holocaust Promotion

Although earlier expressions of Holocaust promotion could often be ignored by the international community, those of Ahmadinejad could not. His de facto calls for genocide necessitated official reactions. These were almost all limited to verbal condemnations by, among others, the United Nations Security Council and the European Union. No concrete measures were taken against Iran or its president.

Among the early private initiatives against Ahmadinejad in the Western world one stands out. In Rome, on 3 November 2005, a torchlight march was held near the Iranian embassy. This protest was initiated by Giuliano Ferrara, editor of the conservative daily *Il Foglio*. An estimated fifteen to twenty thousand people took part in the demonstration, among them cabinet minister Roberto Calderoli, who said he represented both the government and his Lega Nord party.

Ferrara, when asked why he took an initiative that, due to its size, was unique in the world, replied: “I felt it a political, cultural, and civil duty to organize a protest against Ahmadinejad’s call for genocide. I wanted this demonstration to have a simple goal: to proclaim that we uphold Israel’s right to exist and object to a head of state who denies this.”<sup>49</sup>

As to the murderous shouts during anti-Israeli demonstrations at the time of the Gaza campaign, in some countries complaints were submitted to antiracism bodies. On 16 February 2008, the CCOJB, the umbrella body of Belgian Jewish organizations, made a formal complaint concerning racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia to the Center for Equal Opportunities and the Fight against Racism. The CCOJB made accusations against three of the Wallonian parties — the socialist PS, the Christian CDH, and the Green Ecolo — as well as trade unions and eighty-six NGOs that had organized the demonstration in question.<sup>50</sup>

In the Netherlands, well-known lawyer Bram Moszkowicz filed a complaint with the attorney-general against the parliamentarians Van Bommel and Karabalut for incitement to hate, discrimination, and violence. He said they were both leaders of the demonstration, where shouts of “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas” could be heard in the background. According to Moszkowicz, since the two parliamentarians did not dissociate themselves from these calls, they should be

considered as identifying with them.<sup>51</sup> Among the thirty bodies that had sponsored this demonstration were several Muslim organizations.

## Using Legal Means

There are legal means that can be used against Holocaust promotion. However, courts often do not rule against such supporters of murder.

Kostas Plevris is a Greek Holocaust promoter. He has written a book, *Jews: The Whole Truth*, in which he calls Jews subhuman and says, “I constantly blame the German Nazis for not ridding our Europe of Jewish Zionism when it was in their power to do so.” As often happens, such perpetrators promote more than one Holocaust distortion. Plevris is also a Holocaust denier who wrote, “Free yourselves from Jewish propaganda that deceives you with falsehoods about concentration camps, gas chambers, ‘ovens’ and other fairy tales about the pseudo-holocaust.”<sup>52</sup>

In March 2009, a five-member appeals court in Athens acquitted Plevris of Holocaust denial. He had been convicted in December 2007 and sentenced to fourteen months in prison and three years’ probation. In a press release the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece expressed its concern that “a self-confessed promoter of Nazism and racism remains unpunished though he not only distorts proved historical evidence, but even worse, uses his pen to incite hatred and provoke discrimination and violence against citizens of Greece and Europe.”<sup>53</sup>

## Bringing Ahmadinejad before the International Court

In Ahmadinejad’s case, studies have shown that he could be brought before the International Court of Justice. Yet no nation, including those that always pretend to be in the forefront of human rights, has taken this initiative. Justus Weiner, an international human rights lawyer who coordinated an analysis of Ahmadinejad’s incitement to genocide, writes that:

One of the relevant legal sources is the convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which came into force on 12 January 1951. This Convention is one of the most widely accepted treaties in the realm of international law, having been ratified by 138 states, including Iran.

The Genocide Convention defines the crime of genocide, and stipulates that certain acts related to genocide are punishable. One of these prohibited acts is incitement to commit genocide. By including this as a crime the drafters sought to create an autonomous breach of international law, which is an inchoate crime — a crime in the absence of any substantive offence having

been committed or consummated. Thus, in order to succeed in a case of incitement, a prosecutor need not prove that genocide has in fact transpired. It is sufficient to prove that incitement to genocide has occurred.

In analyzing the Genocide Convention and relevant case law, it is indisputable that Ahmadinejad is engaged in and responsible for direct and public incitement to commit genocide. The challenge now is averting this imminent disaster. Sadly, the historical record shows that the international community has consistently delayed action until after thousands or even millions were already slain. This shameful record must be, and can be, improved upon, by implementing the existing international and/or national laws.<sup>54</sup>

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## Chapter Three: Holocaust Denial

Holocaust denial can be defined as the rejection of the main facts of the extermination of the Jews in World War II. One frequently heard statement is that the majority of them died of illnesses contracted in the death camps. Another argument central to denial is that the Nazis did not plan to kill all Jews. A third often-heard claim is that even if there was such a plan, there is no proof that Hitler knew about the crimes committed against the Jews.

The essence of Holocaust denial can be summarized in one sentence of the Holocaust-denier David Irving: “more women died in the backseat of Edward Kennedy’s car at Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz.”<sup>1</sup> One category of distortion closely linked to Holocaust denial and often overlapping with it is “minimalization” or “depreciation” of the Holocaust. This means claiming that far fewer Jews were murdered during that period than the generally agreed-upon figure of around six million.

These types of distortion were publicized almost immediately after the end of the war. Maurice Bardèche, a French fascist, asserted that people had only died in concentration camps because of war-related events but not because they were murdered. He claimed that when the Germans spoke about the “Final Solution of the Jewish problem,” they meant that the Jews would be transferred to ghettos in Eastern Europe. Bardèche also said the gas chambers were used to “disinfect” the concentration camps’ inmates and not to kill them.<sup>2</sup>

Several of the initial Holocaust deniers were French. Paul Rassinier, who had been a communist before the war and later became a socialist, had been a member of the French Resistance. He was arrested and interned in concentration camps, among them Buchenwald. In 1948 he published a book, *Crossing the Line*, in which he argued that while people had been killed in camps, the perpetrators had acted on their own and not on orders from above.<sup>3</sup>

Another well-known French Holocaust denier was Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, who had been the Vichy government’s commissioner of Jewish affairs for several years. In a 1978 interview, he told the French weekly *L’Express* that the Holocaust was a hoax and only lice were gassed at Auschwitz.<sup>4</sup>

Robert Faurisson is a well-publicized French Holocaust denier who taught literature at Lyons 3 University. He became the inspiration for several Holocaust deniers in other countries.<sup>5</sup> In later years there were also several other Holocaust-distortion incidents at that university. In 2001, the French minister of national education Jack Lang appointed a commission headed by the historian Henry Rousso to investigate racism and Holocaust denial at Lyons 3. The resulting report analyzes a number of such cases in detail.<sup>6</sup>

## **Ahmadinejad Gives New Impetus**

Holocaust deniers were largely marginal figures in society and for a long time were expected to remain so. President Ahmadinejad has, however, given a new impetus to Holocaust denial. He was the first head of state to say the Holocaust did not happen.

Ahmadinejad started his public Holocaust denial in December 2005 when he gave a press conference in Mecca. He attended an extraordinary meeting there of the fifty-seven members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. The conference was devoted to the Muslim world's need to fight — according to Saudi foreign minister Saud al-Faisal — against sentiments of hatred toward Islam. It was meant to be a show of Muslim moderation toward the outside world.

On 8 December, Ahmadinejad said: “Certain European countries insist on saying that Hitler has killed millions of Jews in gas chambers. They go so far as to say that whoever states the contrary must be condemned and thrown into prison.” He denied that the Holocaust had occurred: “We do not believe this assertion, but even if it were true, we ask the Europeans the following question: is the murder of innocent Jews by Hitler the reason for the support of the occupiers of Jerusalem?” Ahmadinejad added: “The Europeans should offer part of their territory, from Germany, Austria, or other countries, so that the Jews can install their state there.”<sup>7</sup>

On 13 December, Ahmadinejad repeated his Holocaust denial in Zahedan in southeastern Iran. There he also said the Europeans “created a myth in the name of the Holocaust and valued that higher than God, religion and the prophets.”<sup>8</sup> This speech was broadcast on Iranian television. Since then Ahmadinejad and other Iranian officials have expressed several variations on the same core motif. As mentioned earlier, Holocaust denial is a central element in the genocidal expressions toward Israel by the president of Iran.

## **Teheran Conference and Cartoon Competition**

A conference supposedly for the study of the Holocaust, but in fact focusing on its denial and minimization, was held on 11–12 December 2006 in Teheran. It was titled the “International Conference on Review of the Holocaust Global Vision.” This conference was one more step in Ahmadinejad's genocidal strategy against Israel. The organizer was the Foreign Office's Iranian Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS), headed by Rasul Mosavi.

The conference was opened by Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who said that questioning the Holocaust is one more way of attacking the United States, along with others such as criticizing the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> He also claimed that “if the official version of the Holocaust is thrown into doubt, then the identity and nature of Israel will be thrown into doubt. And if, during this



review, it is proved that the Holocaust was a historical reality, then what is the reason for the Muslim people of the region and the Palestinians having to pay the cost of the Nazis' crimes?"<sup>10</sup>

Cartoons are often an effective tool in understanding the essence of an issue. In August 2006, a Holocaust cartoon competition opened in Teheran. It was organized by the leading Iranian daily *Hamashahri*, owned by the Teheran municipality.

The cartoonist A-Chard of France won a shared second prize for a caricature expressing Holocaust denial. It showed a panel of smoking gas chambers lying on the ground. Written on its side was "The myth of the gas chambers." An ultra-Orthodox Jew asks, "Who has put it on the ground?" and somebody answers, "Faurisson." A-Chard is a regular cartoonist for *Rivarol*, a French extreme-Right publication.<sup>11</sup>

## **Muslim Promoters of Holocaust Denial**

Like all other major motifs of anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial has been promoted for many decades in the Arab and Muslim world. Nordbruch has analyzed the sociohistorical background of such denial in Arab countries. He points out that both Holocaust denial and revisionism are common, writing: "Far from being an argument applied temporarily within the Arab-Israeli conflict, various forms of Holocaust denying statements remain widespread."<sup>12</sup> He sees Holocaust denial as a binding element between different Arab political groups.<sup>13</sup> It "has to be explained within the context of more general ideological developments."<sup>14</sup>

Holocaust denial is widespread in Egypt as well, despite its being at peace with Israel. For instance, in 2005 Mohammed Mahdi Akef, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the main opposition party, said the Holocaust was a myth. He added: "Western democracies have slammed all those who don't see eye to eye with the Zionists regarding the myth of the Holocaust."<sup>15</sup> This text was published on the Brotherhood's official website.

During the same week the website carried an article by another leading Brotherhood member, Gaber Komeha. He claimed that the 1966 execution of the leading postwar ideologist of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayed Qutb, by the Egyptian regime of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, was a "Holocaust."<sup>16</sup>

## **Sheikh Zayed**

One well-known Arab sponsor of Holocaust denial was the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan al-Nahyan of the United Arab Emirates. This gained much attention when a student, Rachel Fish, fought his promised donation to Harvard Divinity School, which ultimately led to its withdrawal. Sheikh Zayed had become the dictatorial

ruler of the emirate of Abu Dhabi in 1966 and established a think tank called the Zayed Center of Coordination and Follow-up.

“Based in Abu Dhabi, the Zayed Center was headed by the deputy prime minister, Sheikh Zayed’s son. It was established in 1999 as the official think tank of the Arab League...and it represented, according to its website, ‘the fulfillment of the vision of the President of U.A.E. His Highness, Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan al-Nahyan.’”<sup>17</sup>

The Zayed Center has promoted Holocaust denial, anti-Semitism, anti-American conspiracy theories, and hate speech in its lectures, symposia, and publications. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted the center’s director as saying: “Jews are the enemies of all nations.”<sup>18</sup> Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter was one of those who lectured at the Zayed Center.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, in 1998, Zayed’s wife donated \$50,000 to the defense of Holocaust-denier Roger Garaudy in a French court. In his book *The Founding Myths of Modern Israel*, Garaudy maintained that there was no Nazi program of genocide during World War II and that Jews had fabricated the Holocaust.<sup>20</sup>

## Holocaust Denial among Israeli Arabs

A May 2009 poll by the University of Haifa showed both how profound Holocaust denial is even among Israeli Arabs and that it is expanding. It was found that over 40 percent of Israeli Arabs believe the Holocaust never happened, while in 2006 this was the case for 28 percent.<sup>21</sup>

Historian Mikael Tossavainen considers that

as Holocaust denial has developed and been refined internationally, the new forms of more sophisticated denial have also reached the Arab world. Outright denial of the Holocaust is something best kept for preaching to the faithful. When in mixed company, Holocaust deniers have developed a more sophisticated strategy which runs less of a risk of alienating their audiences. This strategy, cultivated internationally as well as in the Arab world, aims at minimizing the Holocaust, either by arguing that the Germans had no genocidal intent, and that Jews were not targeted qua Jews, or by minimizing the number of Jewish victims.<sup>22</sup>

He mentions that, in the Arab world, state-controlled media also propagate Holocaust denial. In 2004, the paper *Al-Liwaa Al-Islami*, of Egypt’s ruling National Democratic Party, published two articles by Dr. Rif’at Sayyed Ahmad who asserted that there had been no Holocaust. He wrote that there was no plan to kill the Jews and they were not targeted more than any other people.<sup>23</sup>

In 1983, Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas published a book in Arabic titled *The Other: The Secret Relations between Nazism and the Leadership of the Zionist Movement*, based on his doctoral dissertation at Moscow Oriental

College. In this book he denied that gas chambers were used to murder Jews, basing himself on Faurisson. He also claimed falsely that many scholars said the number of Jewish victims was a few hundred thousand.<sup>24</sup>

## Other Countries

Holocaust deniers express their views publicly in many countries. For instance, there are three organizations in Australia for which “Holocaust denial is a central belief: the Australian League of Rights, the Australian Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the Adelaide Institute.”<sup>25</sup>

These organizations have chosen rather neutral and inoffensive names to render a certain air of respectability to their work. This is a common strategy, also reflected in the American-based *Journal of Historical Review*, whose only purpose, in fact, is to spread Holocaust denial.<sup>26</sup>

There are also individual Holocaust deniers who do not operate in an organizational framework. One of them was the late world chess champion Bobby Fischer. This notorious anti-Semite of Jewish ancestry wrote on his website, “The so-called ‘Holocaust’ of the Jews during World War II is a complete hoax!... It never happened.”<sup>27</sup>

## The Lipstadt Trial

A London court case became a landmark in the battle against Holocaust denial. The historian Deborah Lipstadt and her publisher Penguin Books were the defendants in a trial initiated by the Holocaust distorter and historical writer David Irving. Irving claimed that they had participated in a “conspiracy” to ruin his career. Lipstadt had stated that Irving knew the evidence about the Holocaust period but distorted it until it coincided with his ideological leanings and political agenda.<sup>28</sup>

Irving had been found guilty by a German court in 1992, having declared at a 1990 public meeting in Munich that there had been no gas chambers at Auschwitz. After this verdict he was banned from Germany, and has since been refused entry to several other countries including Canada. Another of his central theses was that Hitler neither ordered nor approved the murder of the Jews. Irving further claimed that, for a long time, Hitler knew nothing about the killings and that those Germans who murdered Jews did so without authorization.

Irving further asserted that at most six hundred thousand Jews had been killed in the Holocaust and that Auschwitz was not a death camp but a slave-labor camp with a high mortality rate. This, and the huge death toll at Treblinka, were due to natural causes, such as typhus epidemics. In these positions he displayed all the key elements of Holocaust denial. Beyond that, Lipstadt also mentioned that Irving referred to the Jews as “the traditional enemies of the truth.”

Judge Charles Grey, in an over-three-hundred-page judgment in April 2000, described Irving as an anti-Semite who had “for his own ideological reasons, persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence.” He ruled that Holocaust denial can be defined as the rejection of the main facts of the extermination of the Jews in World War II. Grey also ruled that Lipstadt and the publisher had justified their claims.<sup>29</sup>

### **Motivations of the Deniers**

The proceeding and its aftermath gave Lipstadt the opportunity to expose not only Irving’s methodology but also his motivations. In an interview she said:

He apparently loved the Nazis enough to actually want to reestablish National Socialism as a viable political system.... Irving realized that a pre-condition for Nazism’s resurrection was to strip and wash it of its worst elements. The first important tool to accomplish this was the creation of immoral equivalencies. For instance, in the same breath, one mentions that, while the Nazis bombarded London in 1940 the Allies bombed Germany in 1945.<sup>30</sup>

The aim of many deniers is probably to rehabilitate the Third Reich or even to repeat Nazi crimes. The historical facts about the Holocaust are a hindrance to this. Casting doubt on them is thus essential. Lipstadt says that other false claims may include, for instance, that crimes were not committed mainly by Germans but by others “such as Estonians, Latvians, Ukrainians, as well as some rogue Germans.”

Another “supporting argument” is that toward the end of the war the Germans could not take care of the people detained in the camps because the Allies had bombed the roads toward them. This explains, according to deniers, why the survivors looked so terrible in the pictures. Lipstadt observes: “The final step in denial methodology concerns atrocities which simply cannot be excused by any of the above stratagems; hence they must be denied.”<sup>31</sup>

The Holocaust-denial propaganda emanating from Iran may influence anti-Israeli Westerners in various directions. This is explored by Dave Rich in an essay in the second part of this book. He writes:

It is the utility of Holocaust denial as an anti-Zionist propaganda weapon that leaves European leftists vulnerable to Iranian encouragement to challenge the scale, nature, meaning, and consequences of the Holocaust. This is not the usual dynamic of anti-Zionism leading to anti-Semitism; this is anti-Semitism being used to generate anti-Zionism, which could profoundly affect the direction and tone of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic activity in the West.<sup>32</sup>

## Holocaust Minimalization

Holocaust minimalization, also called “depreciation” or “downscaling,” refers to belittling the severity of the Holocaust. Jean Marie Le Pen, leader of the National Front Party in France, for instance, has expressed such attitudes a number of times.<sup>33</sup>

At the beginning of 2008, he was given a three-month suspended sentence and was also fined for calling the Nazi occupation of France “not particularly inhumane.” Le Pen made this comment in a 2005 interview with the earlier-mentioned *Rivarol*.<sup>34</sup> By that time he had been convicted at least six times for racism or anti-Semitism. Le Pen had also called the Nazi gas chambers “a detail of the history of World War II.”<sup>35</sup>

Holocaust denial and minimalization are more widespread phenomena than is commonly known. An Italian poll by Paolo Merulla in fall 2003 found that 10 percent of Italians think Jews are lying when they say that Nazism murdered millions of Jews.<sup>36</sup>

Another example of Holocaust minimalization was found by a 2003 poll of two thousand young Italians (aged fourteen to eighteen). Sponsored by the umbrella organization of Italian Jewry under the auspices of Italy’s President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, it showed that a significant percentage of Italian youth held beliefs based on anti-Semitic stereotypes. For instance, more than 17 percent of those polled believed that reports of the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust were “exaggerated.”<sup>37</sup>

## Methods of Distribution

Michael Whine, a senior executive of the Community Security Trust of Great Britain observes that

the media for promoting denial had been revamped in light of technological advances, just as the nature of the propaganda itself was changing. New forms of this propaganda encompassed pseudoscientific books and papers; crude denial material, usually published in leaflet form by small neo-Nazi groups; and what can be called political denial, which includes the most recent and increasingly potent source, namely, Islamists as well as Internet and television transmissions within some Muslim states.<sup>38</sup>

Whine observes that an increasing amount of Holocaust-denial propaganda comes from the Middle East. It is being transmitted primarily through the Internet, and also through print media and television. This, in turn, appears to be encouraging the far Right in several countries to resume promoting denial after a lull of several years, and even after the criminal convictions of some of its earlier proponents.<sup>39</sup>

He adds that a major challenge of “online Holocaust denial is one of jurisdiction, even if states have laws that criminalize it.... But jurisdictions stop at states’ borders. Hence, denial and racist sites have relocated to jurisdictions where no supervisory regime exists or where there are no legal sanctions.”<sup>40</sup>

## **Facebook**

In May 2009, a discussion developed about the frequent appearance of Holocaust denial on Facebook. At that time Facebook was encountering mounting criticism in many countries because they had refused to ban Holocaust-denial groups from the site. Facebook started to remove Holocaust-denial content in countries where it is illegal, such as Israel and Germany.

Facebook defended itself by saying that the goal of its policies “is to strike a very delicate balance between giving Facebook users the freedom to express their opinions and beliefs — even those that are controversial or that we may find repulsive — while also ensuring that individuals and groups of people do not feel threatened or endangered.”<sup>41</sup>

Andre Oboler, an expert on online anti-Semitism, commented:

Facebook has demonstrated once again that it is media pressure and not its own Terms of Service or ethical deliberations that cause action to be taken against online hate. The company has watered down the provisions against various types of hateful content and dropped its promise to provide a “safe place on the internet.” Most alarmingly, despite still prohibiting hateful content, Facebook has decided as policy to allow Holocaust denial on the platform. This demonstrates a lack of understanding regarding anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial in particular, and a lack of engagement with the problem of anti-Semitism 2.0.<sup>42</sup>

## **Denial Continues**

In the meantime Holocaust denial has been going on in many places, of which only some examples can be given. In 2006, a Holocaust denier named Larry Darby was the runner-up in the Democratic primary for Alabama attorney-general. In the vote, held on 6 June, he received 44 percent.

Darby had claimed that no more than 140,000 Jews died in the Holocaust. He added that there was no evidence of the mass extermination of Jews. In 2005, he had organized a meeting at which Irving was the keynote speaker.<sup>43</sup>

On 26 May 2009, TV2, Norway’s largest commercial television station, devoted more than fifteen minutes to an interview with Irving.<sup>44</sup> The station paid for his travel and hotel costs.<sup>45</sup> The journalist who interviewed him seemed to have little knowledge of the subject.

Bernt Hagtvedt, a Norwegian scholar, wrote that true Holocaust scholars are not flashy enough compared to Irving. He added: "Moreover there are no longer journalists [in Norway] who know enough to interview them.... There are journalists who are so lacking in knowledge that they only drift with the tide like seaweed, carried by the latest fashion.... Unnoticeably the decay in the Norwegian media had advanced so far as to allow Irving to dominate for days on end."<sup>46</sup>

### **The Williamson Affair**

One occurrence of Holocaust denial in 2009 received so much international exposure that it can serve as a case study for both this distortion method and society's reactions to it. It also shows that, while we live in times of a major erosion in values, we have not yet reached a situation where "everything goes."

In January 2009, Pope Benedict XVI lifted the excommunication of four bishops who had been consecrated by the ultraconservative Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. This was part of the pope's effort to end the conflict with the Society of St. Pius X, founded by Lefebvre, of which these bishops were spiritual leaders. One of them was the Holocaust-denier Richard Williamson.

In an interview broadcast on Swedish TV on 21 January 2009, Williamson had said that no Jews were gassed during the Holocaust and added that the number of those killed was not six million but about two hundred to three hundred thousand. Williamson had questioned the Holocaust earlier as well.<sup>47</sup>

The ADL stated that Williamson had declared that "Jews made up the Holocaust, Protestants get their orders from the devil and the Vatican has sold its soul to liberalism." This led to a number of condemnations, initially mainly from Jewish sources. There had already been much criticism earlier when the pope had readmitted the Latin Mass so as to accommodate the St. Pius X Society.<sup>48</sup>

The Williamson Holocaust-denial case rapidly caused outrage in wide circles internationally, including among some Catholics. French president Nicolas Sarkozy, a Catholic, criticized Williamson but did not refer to the role of the Vatican. He said: "It is incredible, shocking and inadmissible to be able to find in the 21st century somebody who dares question the gas chambers, the Holocaust, the martyrdom of Jews. It is inadmissible."<sup>49</sup> German chancellor Angela Merkel also condemned the Vatican.<sup>50</sup>

### **Reactions to Denial**

The hope of those who thought the Lipstadt trial would once and for all push Holocaust denial even more to the margins than it had been before has faded away. With the expansion of Holocaust denial, the arguments of deniers seem to be further permeating Western society.

This is partly indicative of a state of mind that comes with postmodern society. Anything that has happened can be denied, even if it occurred before our eyes. One only has to read the various books published in the West claiming the United States was behind the September 11 attack.<sup>51</sup> Similar opinions also prevail in unfree societies including many Muslim states. At the same time, Holocaust denial is also an indication of how important the Holocaust has become in contemporary society's historical consciousness.

With his Holocaust denial, Irving may have aimed to make neo-Nazism acceptable. Lipstadt remarked in this context that denial is a threat to documenting responsible history. "If one history can be denied, any history can be denied. History then becomes totally subjective. It becomes negotiable, i.e. whatever one states, it is."<sup>52</sup> Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman sum it up in a single sentence: "Holocaust denial is a harsh lesson in historical skepticism gone down the slippery slope into nihilism."<sup>53</sup>

This is one more example of the sensor role that Jews frequently play in Western society. The Jews are often among the first to be attacked, but they are rarely the last. The importance of the Irving trial for society at large, not only Jews, was recognized by Lipstadt's barrister Richard Rampton.

Lipstadt mentioned that Rampton, who is Scottish, said:

"We must fight the battle against deniers because otherwise none of us will be safe in our beds." When he said that, he was not expressing a personal fear of persecution. He was expressing his understanding of the kind of liberal democratic society in which he wants to live. That society is threatened by the likes of David Irving. I was very appreciative that Rampton realized that Holocaust denial is not only a threat to Jews, but also to his own society.<sup>54</sup>

## Setting up Data Banks

In 1945, when the American army liberated the concentration camps, General Dwight D. Eisenhower had the foresight to have the atrocities documented.<sup>55</sup> Denial of the Holocaust, however, continues, despite the huge amount of documentation available.

In recent years data banks and major websites have been set up to fight denial. Emory University operates a sizable website, "Holocaust Denial on Trial: Using History to Confront Distortions."<sup>56</sup> After the Holocaust Conference in Teheran in 2006, the university announced that it would translate its website into Farsi as well as Arabic and Russian. It said it hoped to expand the site into the languages of other countries where Holocaust denial is widespread.<sup>57</sup> In addition to the languages just mentioned, the site is now also available in Turkish.

In spring 2009, the Dutch Center for Information and Documentation Israel (CIDI) announced that, together with the umbrella organization of Dutch Jewry



(CJO), a data bank on the Holocaust has been established to counter the increase in Holocaust denial. CIDI's Elise Friedmann said this information is needed because negation of the Holocaust is very much alive.<sup>58</sup>

This battle has become necessary for the uninformed public. In its framework one also has to point out that Holocaust deniers act out of bad faith, knowing that they are wrong but trying to advance a political agenda that demands that the Holocaust be stricken from history.

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## Chapter Four: Holocaust Deflection and Whitewashing

Holocaust deflection entails admitting that the Holocaust happened while denying the complicity or various types of participation of countries, specific groups, or individuals, despite ample evidence to the contrary. Major examples of deflection occur in those countries where, during the war, Germans were helped by important segments of the local populations in the despoliation, deportation, and killing of the Jews.

Many European nations have tried to present themselves exclusively as victims of the Germans and have denied or diluted their participation and responsibility or that of their nationals for the role they played in the Holocaust. Michael Shafir calls this “deflective negationism.” He and others have analyzed the phenomenon in various countries of Eastern and Central Europe in the communist and post-communist periods.<sup>1</sup>

Shafir observes that

whereas outright negationism rejects the very existence of the Holocaust, its deflective alternative does not; or, to some extent it does, but more perversely so. Rather than negate the Holocaust, deflective negationism transfers the guilt for the perpetration of crimes to members of other nations or it minimizes own-nation participation in their perpetration to insignificant “aberrations.” It is thus particularistic rather than universal, as well as self-defensive.<sup>2</sup>

### **Perpetrator and Collaborator Countries**

Deflection mechanisms often lead to complex distortions of the Holocaust’s significance. Exposing them frequently requires an extensive study of how history has been corrupted or suppressed. For many who do not have detailed knowledge of the manipulated subject, deflection is difficult to detect. Among the contemporary Holocaust distortions this is the one that, to be counteracted, usually requires the most additional study.

One extreme case of Holocaust deflection is Austria, which portrayed itself for many years as a victim of the Nazis. Another is Romania, which, under its communist regimes, denied or greatly downplayed its role in the genocide of the Jews.<sup>3</sup> From here on, attention will be given to Holocaust deflection in a number of countries.<sup>4</sup>

An important differentiation, however, is between whether the beneficiaries of deflection are major perpetrators such as Germany or Austria or collaborators

such as Lithuania, Romania, or Hungary. Nor can the collaboration in a country such as Lithuania, where the collaborators were usually fully integrated in the killing mechanism, be compared with the collaboration of locals in, say, Poland where they were not.

For the countries under communist rule, its fall and the breakup of the Soviet Union were watershed events that made it possible to start facing their Holocaust past more honestly. Efraim Zuroff, who coordinates worldwide research on war crimes for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, considers that there are six stages in this process. The first is acknowledgment of complicity by the local population in the murder of the Jews and an apology for those crimes. The next is commemoration of the victims, followed by prosecution of the perpetrators. The fourth stage is the documentation of the crimes. Thereafter should follow the introduction of Holocaust education into the curriculum and the preparation of appropriate educational materials, as well as restitution of communal and individual property.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Restitution Negotiations**

The restitution negotiations of the 1990s played an important role in exposing attempts at Holocaust deflection and whitewashing by several countries. In many countries they also forced a change in attitudes toward their past. As Arieh Doobov notes: “At the London Conference on Nazi gold, delegation after delegation, with varying degrees of willingness, acceded to the consensus demand that light must be brought to national histories even when they are shameful. Only the Vatican declined.”<sup>6</sup>

Avi Beker, a former secretary-general of the World Jewish Congress who was involved in several restitution negotiations, says:

Austria created one of the strongest national myths, presenting itself as one of the Nazis’ first victims, rather than as their partner and fellow perpetrator. Another major legend was that Vichy France was not the “real” France. The Swiss national myth centered on its fake neutrality. Once organized Jewry presented claims based on documented figures, everyone realized that many countries still possessed major amounts of stolen Jewish property. The financial negotiations thereafter also led to a discussion of national myths.<sup>7</sup>

It is arguable whether the restitution negotiations were the dominant factor in fostering a more honest approach to the past or whether it derived mainly from other considerations. Beker also mentions other factors, one of which is that “the generation of those guilty or responsible for what happened during the war left the stage to younger representatives who were more willing to break longstanding national myths about the Second World War.”<sup>8</sup>

Admission of the historical truth by governments or parliaments is important for countering many of the Holocaust distortions including its denial,

minimization, deflection, and whitewashing. Although official admissions of a nation's Holocaust crimes are significant, apologies lend even greater emphasis to such confessions. These will remain well documented for future generations after all survivors have passed away.<sup>9</sup>

Zuroff mentions several frequently recurring factors in deflection attempts by Eastern European countries:

the attribution of Holocaust crimes entirely to German and Austrian Nazis (as opposed to locals); the exaggeration of the number of, and scope of, the assistance provided by local Righteous Gentiles; and attempts to claim that the only local participants in Holocaust crimes were criminals or totally peripheral elements of society.<sup>10</sup>

Instances of each tendency may be found in practically every post-Communist society. For example... in Lithuania, local officials opposed the inclusion of the phrase "and their local accomplices" on a memorial monument at Ponar (Paneriai), the site of the mass murder of the Jews of Vilnius, which attributed the killings to the Nazis.... In Estonia, the local media invested much effort to disprove the findings of the international commission of historians that established that the 36th battalion of the Estonian Security Police actively participated in the murder of the Jews of Nowogrudok, Belarus.<sup>11</sup>

The main characteristics of deflection can best be understood through examples from various European countries. In addition, some other cases illustrate how deflection has been applied to parts of societies as well as individuals.

## **Austria**

In presenting its Holocaust history, Austria was for a long time an extreme example of deflection of guilt. Simon Wiesenthal claimed that the Austrians were involved in killing nearly half of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> After the Anschluss, Austrians represented 8 percent of the German population; yet they constituted 40 percent of the staff and 75 percent of the commandants of the death camps. They were also notoriously overrepresented in the SS. The Austrian method of systematically robbing the Jews of all their possessions became a model for the German Nazis.<sup>13</sup>

In the Moscow Declaration that resulted from the Moscow Conference of 30 October 1943, Austria was described as the first country to fall victim to the aggression of Nazi Germany. This element was included in the Declaration of the Provisional Government of Austria of 27 April 1945.

For several decades many Austrian politicians, academics, and other public figures have been promoting the idea that the Austrian people were victims of the Nazis. With that came attacks on the Allies who had liberated Austria and installed

a four-power administration. This was then followed by the promotion of the perception that, once the Allied administration was removed, Austria had thereby “end[ed] a 17-year-long path of bondage full of thorns” as Austrian chancellor Leopold Figl put it at the time. He thus combined the Nazi period with the Allied period as two rather similar facets of foreign occupation. These views, in various degrees, represented the majority of Austrian public opinion.<sup>14</sup>

Deflection attitudes do not only concern the falsification of Holocaust history and the creation of a distorted collective memory. They may also have practical consequences. Zuroff says: “The number of Austrians was proportionately high among the main perpetrators of war crimes. Yet the country made a ‘career’ out of claiming to be a victim of Nazism. Its leaders had no political interest in investigating war criminals since prosecution would prove the opposite. On philosophical, moral and historical levels, that only changed in the 1990s.”<sup>15</sup>

## Romania

For many decades Romania, under the communist regime as well as later, denied or greatly downplayed its role in the Holocaust.<sup>16</sup> There were about eight hundred thousand Jews in prewar Romania, almost 5 percent of the general population. About half of the Jewish population were murdered in the Holocaust. As Romanian-born historian Radu Ioanid explained:

World War II transformed what might otherwise have remained a period of severe anti-Semitic outbreaks into a true Romanian Holocaust that, while part of the broader German-European Holocaust, remained at the same time a specifically Romanian story. As in Germany, the immediate background to Romania’s Holocaust tapped archaic anti-Semitic traditions and was crafted by militant agitation of anti-Semitic parties, itself followed by State legislation and then compounded by wartime circumstances. Bloody mob violence was the result, but now drawing in government elements, the riots took on the character of a social enterprise and thus invited takeover by the State.

This transition phase, when mass robbery and mass murder evolved from a societal to a governmental enterprise, took place in the months immediately preceding and immediately following Romania’s entrance into the war. The tempering of the Romanian-German diplomatic alliance into one of wartime fraternity augured more deliberate and more systematic ill for Romania’s Jews. Finally, during this time, the Antonescu regime became more directly involved in encouraging the violence, though still more in the sense of indirect inspiration. Soon, however, it would openly take things over.<sup>17</sup>

One typical example of an atrocity in which Romania’s Legionnaires were heavily involved was the pogrom in Iasi in June 1941. This pogrom was undertaken by

a combination of the local authorities, the Romanian army, the Legionnaires, as well as the SS. The number of Jews who were killed was estimated at eight to twelve thousand. Another almost three thousand died of thirst or asphyxiation while traveling for days in sealed cattle cars of trains. For decades communist historians blamed the pogrom largely on the German SS and reduced the number of victims.<sup>18</sup>

## Questioning the Holocaust

In mid-2001, a symposium was held in Bucharest that had the questionable title “Has There Been a Holocaust in Romania?” Its final resolution stated that Jews had “suffered almost everywhere in the Europe of those years, but not in Romania [*sic!*],” and it added that “the testimony of trustworthy Jews” demonstrates that “the Romanian people had in those years a behavior honoring the human dignity [*sic!*].”<sup>19</sup>

When asked in 2003 to clarify a Romanian government declaration that “within the borders of Romania between 1940 and 1945 there was no Holocaust,” then-Romanian president Ion Iliescu asserted: “The Holocaust was not unique to the Jewish population in Europe. Many others, including Poles, died in the same way.... Jews and Communists were treated equally.... However it is impossible to accuse the Romanian people and the Romanian society of this [massacre of Jews].”<sup>20</sup>

The deflection process in Romania was undermined when the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, chaired by Elie Wiesel, released a report in November 2004 that unequivocally points to Romanian culpability. It declares: “Of all the allies of Nazi Germany, Romania bears responsibility for the deaths of more Jews than any country other than Germany itself.”<sup>21</sup> The report recognizes the isolated examples of Romanian individuals and institutions who have struggled to correct the record, and whose influence on the general population had been marginal thus far.

Laurence Weinbaum writes:

Iliescu praised the commission’s findings and was himself praised in Jewish circles for convening it and accepting the results. However, in one of his last acts as president, he conferred the state’s prize for Faithful Service on Holocaust-denier [Gheorghe] Buzatu. He also awarded the state’s highest decoration, the Order of the Star of Romania, to Corneliu Vadim Tudor, the [far-Right party] Romania Mare leader long known for his virulent anti-Semitism. It was a fitting end to the Iliescu regime, one that epitomized its clumsy attempts to comply with international pressure while pandering to Romanian nationalist sentiment seemingly oblivious to the evident contradictions in such a policy.<sup>22</sup>



## Hungary

Hungary remained an ally of the Germans until 1944. The historian Randolph Braham asserts that the Hungarian method of deflection is partly based on conveying a generous and false picture of the way Hungary had treated its Jews since 1867. The whitewashing included “largely overlooking the many anti-Semitic legal and physical measures that were taken against them during all those years.”<sup>23</sup>

Braham claims that various judicial decisions and governmental policies in the postcommunist era have negatively affected the memory of the Holocaust as well as the interests of the Jewish community. These include court decisions in war-crimes cases, discriminatory handling of restitution issues, difficulties concerning the acquisition of archives, and the original plan for a new exhibit at the Hungarian pavilion in Auschwitz.

Material had been prepared for this new pavilion since 1998. When the proposed documentation was transmitted to five experts for evaluation, their main conclusions were that it falsified the history of the Jews in Hungary and, in particular, during the Holocaust. Furthermore, these experts concluded individually that the script’s political objective seemed to be the rehabilitation of the Horthy era, achieved by transferring almost all responsibility for whatever crimes had been committed in Hungary to the Germans.<sup>24</sup>

In 2001, Braham wrote about the then government of the right-wing FIDESZ party:

In the climate of political anti-Semitism fostered since the inauguration of the Orban government in 1998, history cleansers appear to have been given the green light to proceed with their drive to bring about the rehabilitation of the Horthy regime, including the major law-enforcement agencies that were involved in the Final Solution. As part of this drive, history cleansers have expended considerable effort to bring about the absolution of the gendarmerie — which played a crucial role in the roundup and deportation of the Jews — by placing all responsibility onto the Germans.<sup>25</sup>

Another highly controversial issue concerns the House of Terror. This museum was opened in 2001. It was supported by the then center-right government and directed by Maria Schmidt, an adviser to Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The museum documents the Arrow Cross terror of late 1944 as well as the Stalinist terror of the late 1940s to early 1950s, allegedly led by people whose Jewish origins are clearly evident. The museum ignores the anti-Semitic policies and legislation of the Horthy period.<sup>26</sup>

Braham sums up the Hungarian wartime history concerning the Jews:

The Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust of European Jewry constitutes not only the greatest tragedy in the history of Hungarian Jewry but also the

darkest chapter in the history of Hungary. Never before in the history of the Hungarian nation were so many people expropriated and murdered in so short a time as in 1944. In contrast to the calamities of the past, when Hungary was subjected to foreign occupation, the hundreds of thousands of people victimized in 1944 fell prey to the connivance of their own government.<sup>27</sup>

## Poland

For a long time, Polish society at large did not think it carried any guilt related to the Holocaust.

Historian James E. Young writes:

Martyrdom plays a central role in the Polish national consciousness, and this – in combination with the extremely harsh treatment of Poles by the Germans during the War – created a self-image among the Poles in the years immediately following the War of themselves as suffering at least en par with the Jews. Later, when confronted with the Jewish memories of the Holocaust, this created tension among some Poles since it challenged some deeply held understandings of themselves.<sup>28</sup>

Weinbaum formulates it differently:

Most Poles continued to see themselves as entirely blameless for the tragedy that had befallen the Jews of Poland; and continued to speak of Poland as a “land without Quislings.” If anything, much of Polish society saw Jews guilty of “anti-Polonism.” And here it is significant to point out that this view was shared by both dogmatic Communists and Catholics alike — whatever their differences on other issues.<sup>29</sup>

He adds: “...Jews living abroad had often presented bitter indictments of Poles, often accusing them of collaboration, not ‘merely’ crimes of omission (failing to rescue their neighbors) but also commission (actual murders). For the most part (but with notable exceptions), these accusations were never accepted by Polish society.”

Only after the fall of the communist regime did an opportunity arise for different attitudes. At the start of the year 2000, Polish-born American scholar Jan Tomasz Gross published his book *Sasiedzi (Neighbors)*, which would become a landmark in this process. It was followed by a similarly named movie by Agnieszka Arnold, which was shown on primetime national Polish television. The book revealed that, in the small town of Jedwabne in 1941, the local population had slaughtered the members of the Jewish community.

Weinbaum observes:

Significantly, this was largely an internal debate. People living outside Poland (Jews and non-Jews) did contribute to the discussion, but above all it

was Polish voices coming from within Poland that dominated the discourse. The Polish intelligentsia had been grappling with many of these issues for some years before but the Jedwabne revelations finally brought them to the grassroots level.<sup>30</sup>

The historian Joanna Michlic considers the debate on the book and the Jedwabne massacre

a reflection of the process of democratization of Poland's political and social life after 1989. Moreover, it reflects the increasing importance of the critical approach toward the previous biased representation of Polish-Jewish relations and toward the collective self-image of Poles as victims. The critical approach was endorsed by segments of the mainstream political and cultural elite, as well as others, particularly in the younger generation. The investigation into the massacre by the IPN [Institute of National Memory], and the sixtieth anniversary commemoration show beyond doubt that an important part of Polish elites is capable of coming to terms with the country's dark past.<sup>31</sup>

Michlic, however, balances her judgment, noting that the truth about the Jedwabne massacre was rejected by the nationalist and conservative political elite and certain important church representatives, while the fact that respectable historians also took the same position made the matter even worse.<sup>32</sup> Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski, however, apologized "in the name of those Poles whose conscience is moved by the crime."<sup>33</sup>

As we have seen, far from all Poles were moved. Barbara Törnquist-Pleva suggests that the memory of Jedwabne served various groups in different ways:

Historians wanted to establish facts and discuss various interpretations of the past (the scholarly use of history). They were encouraged by broad groups in society who were eager to deal with the lies and silences in history writing, to rehabilitate victims and seek reconciliation (the moral use of history). Groups within the political élite and intellectuals used the memory of Jedwabne in order to give legitimacy to their ideas and visions of society and/or acquire a positive political image at home and abroad (the ideological and political use of history). Perhaps the most important function of the use of history in this context was that it became the catalyst for a broad discussion, albeit led by intellectuals, about Polish national identity, its contents and its future (the existential use of history).<sup>34</sup>

## **Lithuania**

In Lithuania, more than 95 percent of the 220,000 Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Zuroff says: "A significant part of those victims were murdered

by fellow Lithuanians, initially in spontaneous pogroms led primarily by armed vigilantes, and later by security police units.”<sup>35</sup>

The massacres of the Jews were started by the local population before the German army arrived in June 1941. Dov Levin, an expert on the Holocaust in the country, said: “The local population, the Lithuanians, helped the Nazis. Before the first German soldier entered Lithuania, the Lithuanians, at different levels of organization, already harassed the Jews.” He added: “Once the Germans arrived, Lithuanian collaborators ‘not only murdered, but murdered and stole and raped. Even the military and police helped the Germans.’”<sup>36</sup>

On 8 May 1990, the Lithuanian Supreme Council passed a declaration condemning “the annihilation of the Jewish people during the years of the Nazi occupation in Lithuania.” Zuroff observes that

though the declaration specifically stated that it was being issued “on behalf of the Lithuanian people,” it attributes guilt for the crimes committed in Lithuania during the Holocaust to “Lithuanian citizens,” a category clearly not restricted to those of Lithuanian nationality, which could even (by a twist of perverted logic) include Jews. Thus the Lithuanian parliament sought to differentiate between the ostensibly blameless “Lithuanian people” and the murderers who were “Lithuanian citizens,” a distinction that is not supported by the historical record.<sup>37</sup>

Zuroff remarks:

The government’s approach to Lithuania’s Holocaust past reveals a stubborn reluctance to honestly confront the crimes committed by local Nazi collaborators, and what amounts to an aggressive campaign to minimize Lithuanian guilt by distorting history.... When Lithuania was admitted to NATO and the European Union, things only became worse. Freed from their fear of failing to become part of these bodies, the Lithuanians began an aggressive campaign to downplay their responsibility for Holocaust atrocities, and maximize recognition for their suffering under the Soviets.<sup>38</sup>

In the Lithuanian case Holocaust deflection is largely combined with postwar Holocaust equivalence. This issue will be discussed in more detail later in this volume. This blend of abuses also exists in Latvia and Estonia.

Yet another version of deflection and whitewashing had its origins in the communist world. It was practiced by Soviet ideologues, other communists, as well as a number of Trotskyites in the Western world. As Braham writes:

While the representatives of the extreme left do not deny the atrocities committed by the Nazis, they are involved in another historical obscenity: they place much of the blame for the Holocaust on the Zionists, who are accused not only of collaboration with the Nazis during the pre- and wartime periods, but also of pursuing — through Israel — a racist-imperialist policy

after the war. In several socialist countries, above all the Soviet Union, the Holocaust is sunk in the memory hole of history.<sup>39</sup>

## East Germany

In communist East Germany, much of the blame for not properly dealing with the Holocaust aftermath was assigned to West Germany. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) supposedly constituted a radical break from the Nazi past. It tried to present West Germany as the successor state of Nazi Germany.

In this ideological framework the GDR published a *Brown Book* in 1965 with incriminating material on the Nazi past of West German officials. It aimed to convey the impression that the GDR had eliminated all Nazi influences.<sup>40</sup>

Besides Holocaust deflection the official GDR policy also minimized attention to the Holocaust. As Thomas Haury, a German scholar of anti-Semitism, notes: “The GDR emphasized the workers, the party, and the Soviet population as having suffered most from National Socialism. The genocide of the European Jews was only one crime among many, to which the GDR hardly paid attention.”

Haury adds: “The GDR drew a clear line between the ‘criminal Hitler regime’ and the ‘enticed German people,’ declaring them innocent and indeed the first victims of Hitler’s rule. In the eastern part of Germany there was no debate on the German people’s participation in discrimination, confiscation, and mass murder until 1989.”<sup>41</sup>

## The Wehrmacht in West Germany

In West Germany, it was long maintained by many that the mass murders of the Jews during the Holocaust had been executed by the SS and the SA (storm troopers), who in many countries were helped by locals. However, historians had long known that the Wehrmacht (the regular German army) had been involved in the mass murders to a great extent.

In 1995, under the leadership of its founder Jan Philipp Reemtsma, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research put together an exhibition based on already available material. Titled “War of Annihilation, Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941–1944” (“Vernichtungskrieg, Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944”), it sparked a huge debate in German society. Neo-Nazis demonstrated against the exhibition at venues where it was shown.<sup>42</sup>

The initial exhibition contained a number of substantial errors that damaged its credibility. In November 1999, the exhibition was withdrawn.<sup>43</sup> It would take two years until it was reopened. In 2007, the German ZDF television channel broadcast a series of documentaries about the Wehrmacht. It brought out new material about the regular German army’s substantial involvement in the murder

of Jews. One of these was a protocol in which the Wehrmacht general Dietrich von Choltitz said the liquidation of the Jews had been his most difficult assignment. He added that he had executed it until its “final consequences.”<sup>44</sup>

### **Heidegger’s Projection**

German historian Clemens Heni tells how the German philosopher Martin Heidegger deflected German guilt. In a lecture published in 1949, he said: “Agriculture is nowadays a motorized nutritional industry, by nature the same as the production of corpses in gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockade and the starving out of countries, the same as the production of the H-bomb.”<sup>45</sup>

Heni observes:

Beyond [the] well-known projection of guilt on the USSR and the USA, something else stands out: the unprecedented crime of the destruction of European Jews in the gas chambers is equated with modern agriculture. This represented a new kind of anti-Semitism, which Heidegger promoted in 1949, a few years after the Shoah....

For scientific research Heidegger’s 1949 lecture is of great importance, not only because Heidegger is arguably the world’s most widely taught philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also and especially because he was one of the founders of the concept of rejection and universalization of German guilt. He attributed the responsibility for the crimes of the Second World War on modernity in general, which then made it possible to deemphasize the responsibility of the German mass murderers.<sup>46</sup>

### **Franklin D. Roosevelt**

Many cases of Holocaust deflection consist of countries or major bodies blaming a third party for war crimes. There are also examples of individuals whose responsibilities during the Holocaust have been deflected to others. So, for instance, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park, New York, has long blamed the State Department for American inaction during the Holocaust. Whereas the above cases deal with the deflection of responsibilities of perpetrators and collaborators, this case concerns a bystander who could have acted far more than he did.

In 2005, a number of historians wrote a letter, under the auspices of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, to the Roosevelt Museum. They mentioned that there was a panel in the museum on the Holocaust that stated:

During the 1930s, as many European Jews were looking for a safe haven from official anti-Semitism, members of the State Department enforced the bloodless immigration laws with cold rigidity. Yet even Roosevelt's bitterest critics concede that nothing he could have done — including bombing the rails leading to Auschwitz in 1944 — would have saved significant numbers from annihilation. Let alone dissuaded the Nazis from doing what they were so intent on doing.<sup>47</sup>

The historians' letter asserted that these statements were inaccurate. It said the American immigration policy — “which kept immigration far below the legal limits set by Congress — had the full knowledge and approval of President Roosevelt himself through the Holocaust years.”<sup>48</sup>

The historians added:

There are numerous steps that the Roosevelt administration could have taken to save lives, such as granting refugees temporary haven in America or in Allied-controlled regions; pressuring the British to open Palestine to refugees; ordering the bombing of the gas chambers at Auschwitz or the railways leading to them; and giving broader funding and power to the War Refugee Board.<sup>49</sup>

The historians requested that the wording of the panel be corrected.

The museum replied two weeks later to say the wording of the panel had been changed as follows: “Historians today continue to debate whether specific actions FDR and the United States could have taken — including bombing the rails leading to Auschwitz in 1944 — might have saved significant numbers from annihilation.”<sup>50</sup>

## **Holocaust Whitewashing**

Whitewashing is a type of Holocaust distortion that aims at cleansing certain groups or persons of blame regarding the Holocaust without necessarily accusing others. There are many examples of this, a few of which convey the nature of this distortion phenomenon.

One such case concerned U.S. president Ronald Reagan's 1985 visit to the German military cemetery of Bitburg. When his visit to Germany was announced, it was also specifically mentioned that he would not visit a concentration camp. Initially the impression was that only soldiers and officers of the Wehrmacht were buried in this cemetery. This planned visit was a clear act of whitewashing. The Wehrmacht gave support to the SS, which carried out most of the mass murder of Jews. Only years later would it become more widely known that the Wehrmacht itself had played such a major part in the murders.<sup>51</sup>

Shortly after the visit was announced, it transpired that members of the

Waffen SS were also buried in this cemetery. This led to huge protests against the visit. Reagan had agreed to go to Bitburg in order to show that the United States now had normal relations with Germany and its pro-American chancellor Helmut Kohl. Because of the protests he later visited the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen as well.

In his memoirs Elie Wiesel devotes an entire chapter to the Bitburg affair. He summarizes the essence of whitewashing:

The German tactic is obvious; to whitewash the SS. It is the final step in a carefully conceived plan. To begin with, Germany rehabilitated the “gentle,” “innocent” Wehrmacht. And now, thanks to Kohl, it was the turn of the SS. First of all, the “good” ones. And then would come the turn of the others. And once the door was open, the torturers and the murderers would be allowed in as well. Bitburg is meant to open that door.... Officials in the State Department tell me that Kohl bears full responsibility for this debacle; he convinced Reagan that if the visit were canceled it would be his, Kohl’s defeat, and hence that of the alliance between the United States and Germany.<sup>52</sup>

## **Kurt Waldheim**

Kurt Waldheim, the former UN secretary-general and Austrian president, is a paradigmatic figure for whitewashing one’s wartime past by the omission of essential data. The historian Robert Edwin Herzstein is quoted as saying, “Kurt Waldheim did not, in fact, order, incite or personally commit what is commonly called a war crime.... But this non-guilt must not be confused with innocence. The fact that Waldheim played a significant role in military units that unquestionably committed war crimes makes him at the very least morally complicit in those crimes.”<sup>53</sup>

One of Waldheim’s lies was the claim that he had never been a member of a Nazi-affiliated organization. In fact he had enrolled in the National Socialist German Students League. He also became a member of the paramilitary Sturmabteilung (SA), known as the Brownshirts.

Waldheim was wounded during his military service in Russia at the end of 1941. After the war he falsely claimed that his military service concluded at that time. Actually he became an intelligence officer in the Balkans. When information about his service there became known, Waldheim denied it until documents proved the contrary. Both the U.S. and Soviet intelligence services had damaging information about his wartime past, but did not disclose it, while his career progressed.<sup>54</sup>

In 1987, in the second year of his Austrian presidency, the U.S. Justice Department barred Waldheim’s entry into the country. In 1988, an Austrian-appointed international commission of historians concluded that he must have



been aware of atrocities committed and had facilitated these crimes by doing nothing about them. Waldheim, however, continued to insist on his innocence, blaming an American Jewish conspiracy for his being barred from the United States.<sup>55</sup>

### **Vatican Pressure on Yad Vashem**

Another example of attempts at whitewashing is the Vatican's pressure on the Israeli memorial institute Yad Vashem to change the text under a picture of Pope Pius XII in its museum. The caption says:

Pius XII's reaction to the murder of the Jews during the Holocaust is a matter of controversy. In 1933, when he was secretary of the Vatican State, he was active in obtaining a Concordat with the German regime to preserve the Church's rights in Germany, even if this meant recognizing the Nazi racist regime. When he was elected Pope in 1939, he shelved a letter against racism and anti-Semitism that his predecessor had prepared. Even when reports about the murder of Jews reached the Vatican, the Pope did not protest either verbally or in writing. In December 1942, he abstained from signing the Allied declaration condemning the extermination of the Jews. When Jews were deported from Rome to Auschwitz, the Pope did not intervene. The Pope maintained his neutral position throughout the war, with the exception of appeals to the rulers of Hungary and Slovakia toward its end. His silence and the absence of guidelines obliged churchmen throughout Europe to decide on their own how to react.<sup>56</sup>

In 2007, the Papal Nuncio in Israel, Antonio Franco, said he would not attend the annual Holocaust Remembrance Day state ceremony at Yad Vashem because the museum had rejected his demand to alter the caption. He later changed his mind. Yad Vashem reacted to the Nuncio's initial statement saying that it was inconceivable that diplomatic pressure should be used on a matter of historical research. It also had informed the Vatican representative that the caption accurately reflected history and that Yad Vashem would be willing to reconsider if the Vatican would open its archives to its researchers. These archives still remain closed after almost sixty-five years.<sup>57</sup>

During the war Pope Pius XII had an ambivalent attitude toward Ante Pavelić, who headed a Croatian Catholic regime that committed many cruel murders and other extreme crimes. The historian Robert Wistrich points out that the pope never publicly censored Pavelić's atrocities. He adds: "The Vatican is alleged to have helped him and some of his murderous henchmen to escape justice and flee to South America after 1945 — a point that has yet to be convincingly refuted."<sup>58</sup> After the war Catholic officials also helped some other major war criminals escape to South America. This issue has not been fully investigated.

The major efforts to whitewash the pope's silence during World War II must be seen in the framework of the Vatican's desire to have Pius XII beatified. The Catholic Church can make this pope a saint in view of what he did for the Church. This is an internal religious process in which outsiders should have no say. However, the Church is well aware that in the public eye such an act would prompt many negative reactions — and not only from Jews — regarding this pope's historical record toward the extermination of the Jews during the Holocaust.

### **Knut Hamsun**

The attempts to whitewash Waldheim's past were mainly his own doing.

The partial whitewashing of Knut Hamsun, a Norwegian Nobel Prize winner for literature, was a national government-sponsored effort. The *New York Times* noted that he “welcomed the brutal German occupation of Norway during World War II and gave his Nobel Prize in Literature as a gift to the Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels. Hamsun later flew to meet Hitler at Hitler's mountain lair in Bavaria.”<sup>59</sup>

In February 2009, Norway's Queen Sonja opened the “year-long, publicly financed commemoration of Hamsun's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday called Hamsun 2009...the queen spent a highly specific half-hour with Hamsun family members at the National Library. Together they viewed the author's handwritten manuscripts.”<sup>60</sup> The *Times* added: “It's all you would expect of a national jubilee: street theater, brass bands, exhibitions and commemorative coins. A statue is to be unveiled, and a \$20 million architectural gem of a museum is under construction.”<sup>61</sup>

There is more than one level of significance to this act. First, a Labor-dominated government rehabilitates an admirer of Hitler and the National Socialists. Second, the queen participates in the celebration, as if the royal family did not flee abroad when the Germans conquered their homeland in 1940 and then brutally abused it.

The German Jewish author Max Tau, who fled to Norway before the war, tells how Hamsun — a former friend of his — was despised by many Norwegians when he showed his sympathy for Hitler-ruled Germany after its invasion of Norway. A friend of Tau, the medical head of a hospital, told him, “Today I have burned all Hamsun's books.” Others told him they would never read one more sentence Hamsun had written.<sup>62</sup>

### **Whitewashing in Contemporary Germany**

Heni discusses a case of whitewashing of the Holocaust past in contemporary Germany.

The most important prize for literature in Germany is the Büchner prize, named after the famous revolutionary Georg Büchner, who lived in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The prizewinner in 2007 was German writer Martin Mosebach, a little-known author. This announcement was a surprise for many.<sup>63</sup>

In his acceptance speech he compared a 1793 text by the French Revolutionary Saint-Just in which he threatened his rivals with violence and death, with an unprecedented address in modern world history — the speeches of the chief of the SS Heinrich Himmler in Posen in October 1943. There, the chief of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) praised German mass murderers having “behaved themselves.” The Shoah is justified and for him, German perpetrators are heroes.

To compare these unprecedented crimes with a typical text of the French Revolution has two effects: first, the remembrance of the crimes Germans committed is reduced and veiled, if one can compare one of the ugliest speeches in world history with any text of the French Revolution. Second, conservative Mosebach pleads for an aggressive anti-Utopian stance, because in his view both the French Revolution and National Socialism were results of utopian ideas.

This specifically ignores the anti-Semitic impact of right-wing extremism before 1933 as well as between 1933–45. Decades ago in his *Jenseits von Schuld und Sühne* (Beyond Guilt and Atonement), Holocaust survivor Jean Améry foresaw this kind of anti-Semitism:

“Hitler’s empire... will first continue to pass as an accident in the workings of history. But, finally it will be regarded as history pure and simple, neither better nor worse than any other dramatic historical period. Even stained with blood, the empire will have had its daily life, its family life. The picture of grandfather in SS uniform will be hung in the place of honor, and schoolchildren will hear less about the selections that took place on the ramps [of Auschwitz] than about the surprising victory over an all-pervasive unemployment. Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, Kaltenbrunner will become names like Napoleon, Fouché, Robespierre, and Saint-Just.”<sup>64</sup>

Heni concludes: “Améry’s terrible premonition became reality in the Berlin Republic, and was even rewarded with a prize.”<sup>65</sup>

It emerges, then, that Holocaust deflection and whitewashing are related. Yet the two also appear in combination with other Holocaust distortions such as Holocaust denial and postwar Holocaust equivalence. Denial is an aggrandized form of whitewashing. If the Holocaust never happened, then hardly any crimes were committed, nobody has to be absolved of guilt and specific whitewashing is superfluous.

## Notes

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- Europe (Part 1): The Germans Did It Alone,” *East European Perspectives*, Vol. 4, No. 18, 5 Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, September 2002.
2. Ibid.
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  4. Michael Shafir, *East European Perspectives*, Vol. 4, No. 20, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, 2 October 2002.
  5. Efraim Zuroff, “Eastern Europe: Anti-Semitism in the Wake of Holocaust-Related Issues,” *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 17, Nos. 1–2 (Spring 2005): 63–79.
  6. Arieh Doobov, “The Vatican and the Shoah,” in Avi Beker, ed., *The Plunder of Jewish Property during the Holocaust* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 324–325.
  7. Manfred Gerstenfeld, “Restitution Issues Destroy National Myths,” interview with Avi Beker, in *Europe’s Crumbling Myths* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2003), 163.
  8. Ibid., 162.
  9. Gerstenfeld, *Europe’s Crumbling Myths*, 31–32.
  10. Zuroff, “Eastern Europe,” 72.
  11. Zuroff writes:  

The Estonian daily *Eesti Päevaleht* was so intent on discrediting the findings of the international commission regarding the participation of the Estonian 36th battalion in the murders at Nowogrudok, that it featured an interview with Vassili Arula who served in the unit and denied its involvement, but whose testimony in this regard was of little relevance since he only joined the battalion long after the murders had taken place.

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  12. Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 297.
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  16. Weinbaum, “Banality of History.”
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## Chapter Five: Holocaust De-Judaization

Holocaust de-Judaization consists of a variety of distortions of Holocaust memory. These include the broadening of the term Holocaust to various extents to include people other than Jews who were part of a genocide, or were murdered or died in World War II. A second type of de-Judaization is to void or minimize to a large extent the Jewish character of the victims. This is accompanied by stressing non-Jewish aspects of the Holocaust, taking it out of its specific historical context, and giving minimal attention to its uniqueness. This is often done in an attempt to promote an overall message for the human race. Sometimes these abuses overlap.

This de-Judaization should, however, not be confused with the laudable effort to draw conclusions for all humanity from the genocidal catastrophe caused to the Jewish people. One major aspect of humanity at large trying to integrate the Holocaust's lessons into moral standards, is its having become an icon of absolute evil in many societies. That the Jews are often among the first to be attacked or victimized but never the last is an observation that can be proved from many other historical events.

Certain explanations of the Holocaust, however, lead implicitly to its de-Judaization. One such explanation, for instance, involves stressing the process of wartime brutalization instead of a premeditated plan to kill the Jews. This leads to the conclusion that the Jews were "accidental victims" of the Nazis, and that another group could have ended up in their position, or that their fate was the product of a development governed by chance. This is untrue. The Catholic Church and others had carried out a centuries-long demonization of the Jews that did not aim to kill them but was occasionally accompanied by pogroms. In European societies there existed a unique societal mental infrastructure concerning the Jews that others could further develop in the direction of trying to exterminate them.

One, but far from the only aspect of de-Judaization of the Holocaust, is the attempt to rob the Jews of their painful memories or to weaken their perceived hold on the memory of this genocide so as to use the memory of the Holocaust for some other purpose — sometimes even inversion, that is, accusing Israel of behaving like Nazis. The distortion of emptying the Holocaust of its Jewish content so as to universalize it is not only a historical falsification. It often also lays the infrastructure for distorted conclusions, including renewed anti-Semitism.

## The Uniqueness of the Holocaust

There is a legitimate academic debate about whether the Holocaust was unique and to what extent. That some arguments from this debate are used for the abuse of Holocaust memory is a different matter. The scholars involved in the academic debate should not be associated with those who twist their words for sinister purposes.

Analyzing the nature of the various de-Judaizing distortions requires first defining the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Steven Katz pointed out that “the Holocaust is phenomenologically unique by virtue of the fact that never before has a state set out, as a matter of intentional principle and actualized policy, to annihilate physically every man, woman and child belonging to a specific people.”<sup>1</sup> It would be too limited to say that this uniqueness consists solely in all Jews being targets of extermination.

Grobman elaborates that no other groups

were the primary target of the Nazis — not the mentally disabled, who were killed in the euthanasia centers in Germany (here it is to be noted that the Nazis did not export this program to the civilian populations outside the Reich); not the homosexuals, who were regarded as social deviants but for whom the Nazis did not have a consistent policy (homosexuals were persecuted only in the Reich and in areas annexed to it but not in countries the Germans occupied); not the Gypsies, who were partly seen as “asocial” aliens and Aryans within society and therefore did not have to be annihilated completely; and not the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who had refused to swear allegiance to Hitler and who declined to serve in the German army, but who were not marked for extinction; in fact, only a small number were incarcerated in the camps, and most of them were German nationals. The Nazis also did not single out every socialist, communist, trade unionist, or dissident — just those they perceived as a threat to the Reich. The Jews alone were the primary target of the Nazis.<sup>2</sup>

Although there is broad agreement on many core elements of the uniqueness of the Holocaust, scholars may differ on other specifics. Lipstadt says:

The true uniqueness of the Holocaust starts only after 1941, with the Nazi implementation of a systematic plan of murder. No other example exists of a modern government using all its forces (including post offices, banks, army, etc.) to annihilate an entire people: men, women, and children. This genocide occurred inside and outside Germany’s borders.

It is not the industrial and technological elements of the Holocaust which make it unique. If the Germans hadn’t created the gas chambers, they would have continued to kill people *en masse* like the Einsatzgruppen did. They probably would have murdered far fewer people in four years.



While there is no example of a situation that comprises all elements of the Holocaust, we can still use the Armenian genocide as a comparative tool. Likewise there are places in Bosnia where one may conduct a similar analysis, as that too included some elements of genocide.<sup>3</sup>

## **Bauer's Viewpoint**

Yehuda Bauer, professor emeritus of Holocaust studies at Hebrew University, says:

The nonpragmatic character of the genocide of the Jews is one of the elements that differentiate it from other genocides. Other elements were the totality, that is, the desire to annihilate every single Jew defined as such by the Nazis; the universality, namely the idea, developed in stages, that Jews everywhere should be treated the same way that they were being treated in Nazi Europe; and the fact that special industrial enterprises were set up, in the death camps, for the purpose of producing (Jewish) corpses — an unprecedented historical fact.<sup>4</sup>

...The methods, timing, and stages in which these policies developed were determined by pragmatic considerations. The aim, however, was entirely nonpragmatic and, as noted, purely ideological. Thus the existence of ghettos, for instance in Bialystok and Lodz, was very important for the German war machine and was supported by local Nazi officials. Contrary to all modern capitalistic logic of cost-effectiveness, the ghettos were annihilated, whether by orders from the Berlin center, or as a result of local initiatives responding to a consensus that developed in pursuance of ideological aims. Examples of this kind are legion.

...It is clear to all that the Shoah was a genocide, and as such it not only can, but must be compared with other genocides. Only then can it be determined whether it was different, and to what extent. Uniqueness generally means a onetime thing. If that is what the Shoah was, then it would never happen again, to anyone; it then would become irrelevant for the present and the future, and could be safely relegated to yearly liturgical observances, memorials, and the spouting of worn-out clichés, as our politicians are wont to do. Moreover, every historical event is unique, every people and their fate are unique.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, a number of criteria can be gleaned from these scholars of the Holocaust: totality (all Jews), universality (Jews everywhere), priority (all branches of the state were involved), industrial character, nonpracticality (instead of exploiting Jewish labor, they were killed). All these factors together make the Holocaust unprecedented. It is not unique, though, as it could happen again, both to Jews and others.

### **Emil L. Fackenheim**

David Patterson writes that, when comparing the Shoah to other genocides, the philosopher Emil L. Fackenheim notes that

the Armenian genocide, for instance, was confined to the Turkish Empire,<sup>6</sup> whereas the Nazis set out to exterminate *every* Jew on the face of the earth (this geographical confinement also applies to genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and the Sudan). He points out that the “North American Indians have survived in reservations; Jewish reservations in a victorious Nazi empire are inconceivable. Thus the Holocaust may be said to belong, with other catastrophes, to the species *genocide*. Within the species, defined as intended, planned and largely executed extermination, it is without precedent and, thus far at least, without sequel. It is — here the term really must be employed — unique.”<sup>7</sup>

Patterson expanded on Fackenheim’s views:

I would go even further and insist that the Holocaust is not reducible to a case of genocide, any more than it is reducible to any other historical or political phenomenon, in the strict sense, although it certainly includes those elements. The Nazis set out to annihilate *more* than a people. As we have maintained, they set out to annihilate a fundamental principle; to obliterate millennia of Jewish teaching and testimony; to destroy the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; to eradicate a way of understanding God, world, and humanity embodied by the Jews *in particular*.<sup>8</sup>

Shafir addresses the difference between the Nazis’ crimes and those of the communists:

What does, indeed, make the Holocaust unique is the third dimension, which, unlike the Communist one, allowed no escape for the targeted victim. No Jew could ever become a “Nazi New Man,” no matter how much he or she might have been willing to undergo the transformation. Not so with the communist “class enemy.” The difference, I believe, pales all others, including the dispute on whether or not industrial mass murder is essentially different from other forms of physical destruction.<sup>9</sup>

### **Other Victims of Genocide by the Germans**

It should be stressed that, for instance, both Roma and homosexuals suffered greatly at the hands of the Germans and many were murdered in camps. On a personal level, suffering cannot, and should not, be compared — that would be obscene. However, on a collective level, there are differences in the Jewish case and, for purposes of historical clarity, they should be noted.

The Nazi policy toward the Roma of Europe was ambivalent. There were some voices in the Nazi hierarchy that saw them as Aryans and thus worthy of living, but the line that won the day said their behavioral pattern should decide if they were to live or die. (In this they shared the fate of so-called “quarter-Jews” of German descent, who were only classified as Jews if they identified culturally with the Jewish community.)

For the Roma, this meant in practice that a distinction was made between vagrant and settled Roma. In some parts of occupied Europe, the vagrants were sent to camps, and in other parts the settled ones (who then presumably were seen to have degenerated from their natural, pure state). Those Roma who did end up in camps suffered a fate similar to that of the Jews, namely, death by gassing, and very few survived. The distinction lies in the policy that led to whether they were deported or not.

German — and later, during the war, Aryan — homosexuals were sent to concentration camps where they suffered greatly, at the hands of both the SS guards and other prisoners, who often were violently homophobic. Such violence was encouraged by the SS in the camps. Another reason that life in the camps was extra hard for homosexuals was that they did not have a community to fall back on for support (as did most others, such as the Poles or even the Jews).

As a result, most of the homosexual men who ended up in the camps wearing a pink triangle perished. Only homosexuality among men was a punishable offense in Nazi Germany, and only homosexuality among Aryans. This was because homosexuality was seen as something that weakened the race, and thus it did not matter if Poles, Russians, or other lower races were homosexuals; their race was considered to be weak anyway. Lesbianism was not a crime in Nazi Germany since women could always be forced to have children; nonetheless, openly gay women were sent to concentration camps as antisocials.<sup>10</sup>

## **Eastern Europe**

The Soviet Union made it a policy to systematically de-Judaize the Holocaust in a different way. Jewish victims were included along with local victims and no attention was given to their being murdered because of their being Jewish.

Ivan Ceresnjes summarized it by saying: “In the communist view the suffering of one group of citizens under Nazi Germany and its allies could not be separated from that of others. People were told that all citizens had suffered from both external and internal enemies.”<sup>11</sup>

Shafir explains that there were two different methods of de-Judaization: “Except for the very first postwar years, Soviet historiography and its imposed model strove to both ‘nationalize’ and ‘internationalize’ the Holocaust. ‘Nationalization’ amounted to transforming Jewish victims into local victims.

‘Internationalization’ derived from those regimes’ ideologically determined ‘definition’ of ‘Fascism.’”<sup>12</sup>

Shafir referred to Babi Yar, one of the most notorious places for the murder of Jews in the Ukraine.

Thanks to Evgenii Yevtushenko, the case of Babi Yar, where Soviet authorities constantly sought to blur the record of the victims’ Jewish identity, acquired world notoriety. When in 1961 Yevtushenko bewailed the fact that “no monument stands over Babi Yar,” little did he know that “no monument” was better than “any monument.” The one finally erected on the site of the massacre in 1976 specified that the Germans had executed there “over 100,000 citizens of Kiev and prisoners of war.” It bears no trace of specific Jewish suffering.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Anne Frank Story**

A major example of the de-Judaization of the Holocaust is how the Anne Frank story has been presented over the decades. She gradually became a major icon of Holocaust remembrance and her de-Judaization process covers a long period. A book titled *Anne Frank: For Beginners and Advanced*, by the Dutch political scientist David Barnouw, focuses on postwar developments and gives many examples of this de-Judaization.<sup>14</sup>

After the Frank family and others in hiding with them were arrested on 4 August 1944, Miep Gies, who had helped them, found Anne’s diaries. In August 1945, she gave them to Anne’s father Otto, the family’s sole survivor. It would take two years until they were published, after several publishers had rejected the manuscript.<sup>15</sup>

Several of the initial reviews in Dutch papers made no mention of the fact that Anne was Jewish, nor of the persecution of the Jews.<sup>16</sup> Three years later a German edition was published, the foreword of which was written by the German author Albrecht Goes.<sup>17</sup> Here also there was no explicit reference to the suffering of the Jews and only one mention of the word Israel (used as a substitute for “the Jewish people”).

In 1952, an English translation titled *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* was published for the American market. The foreword was written by Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of the wartime president Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In this text, the terms Jew or “persecution” of Jews were not mentioned. Later the playwright Meyer Levin wrote a script for a play based on the book, but it was rejected by many producers.<sup>18</sup>

A new script was written by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett, and the play premiered in 1955 in New York. Barnouw writes, “Of course the adaptation of a book or in this case a diary [to a stage play], cannot be totally true to the

original. But the fact that there was a Hitler and national socialism as well as anti-Semitism, and that Anne was persecuted as a Jewish girl has been pushed to the background.”<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile Levin had brought a court case against Otto Frank and Kermet Bloomgarden, the producer of the play. He also published articles and pamphlets on the subject. In one of them he wrote that there were two ways to exterminate Jewish life: one was physical as the Nazis had done; the second was by the disappearance or extermination of Jewish culture. He claimed that the rejection of his play was an example of an attempt at the latter.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Play Determined Anne’s Image**

The perception of Anne Frank in the United States developed in the context of how the Holocaust is viewed in that country. Alvin Rosenfeld explains: “In the Americanized narration of the Holocaust, there is a tendency to downplay the dark and brutal aspects of the genocide, and instead focus on acts of moral or physical courage that lead to redemption. The Holocaust is thereby fit into the greater American narrative of the individual’s ability to change his destiny and create a better future for himself.”<sup>21</sup> Such an attitude structurally incentivizes the abuse of Holocaust memory.

The historian Tim Cole observes: “the contemporary lesson of tolerance demands that Anne’s words be rewritten to include members of ‘this or that minority’ and yet that makes a mockery of the historical reality.” He adds: “Given its mythical status, the ‘Holocaust’ risks becoming a popular past used to serve all sorts of present needs. In particular, the needs of contemporary liberalism tends to latch onto a powerful tale in the past and universalize it so as to produce a set of universal lessons.” Cole attacks this liberalism, concluding: “If there is one lesson that can be drawn from the Holocaust it is precisely that the optimism of Anne Frank was woefully misplaced.”<sup>22</sup>

Barnouw concludes that the play, even more than the book, has determined the image of Anne Frank for the public at large. She is a happy girl who falls in love and sometimes has deep thoughts. “Anne Frank is by now more a symbol of the universal suffering of man than ‘the voice of six million vanished [Jewish] souls.’”<sup>23</sup> In 1997, the play was revised and again performed. It is now re-Judaized, a Chanukah song is sung in Hebrew, and one of the other people in hiding appears in one scene wearing a *talit* (prayer shawl).<sup>24</sup> For Barnouw this indicates that to be Jewish had become politically correct in the 1990s.<sup>25</sup>

The experience of Dutch film director Willy Lindwer suggests that the management of the Anne Frank House also intentionally presented only a partial picture. When he approached the director of the Anne Frank Foundation in the mid-1980s for help on his movie on the last seven months of Anne’s life in a concentration camp, he was rebuffed. Lindwer was not even allowed to film

inside the house. The director made comments along the lines of: “Anne Frank is a symbol. Symbols should not be shown to die in a concentration camp.” Undeterred, Lindwer went on to make his movie *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank*, for which he received the 1998 International EMMY award for best documentary.<sup>26</sup>

## The Dutch Myth

Fishman summed up another aspect of distortion:

What makes *The Diary of Anne Frank* special from a historical point of view is that — for at least two generations — it helped form the views of millions of readers, movie audiences and theater goers. The *Diary* has become one of the main sources for propagating the optimistic and positive image of the Netherlands as a country which had “done the right thing” — rising en masse against the German oppressor and hiding their fellow Jewish citizens at risk to their lives.

In Holland, if Anne Frank’s teenage view of the outside world was primarily limited to cramped quarters, the reality which she could not have known was far more complicated. Some scholars are now coming to recognize contradictions in the historical record in Holland. Yet for reasons of expedience, at best, these contradictions have rarely, if ever, been publicly challenged by those with the responsibility to do so.<sup>27</sup>

Journalist Elma Verhey deflated part of the Dutch Holocaust myth:

Holland did not join the resistance in massive numbers, as Anne suggested in her diary. Actually, very few extended a helping hand when their Jewish neighbors or colleagues were deported. Indeed, the Netherlands holds the record for the highest percentage of victims of all the occupied countries of Western Europe. Dutch civil servants supplied Jewish addresses, Dutch policemen forcibly removed them from their homes. Dutch tram conductors transported them to the train stations, and the Dutch Railways sent itemized invoices to the Nazi headquarters for adding extra trains to the Westerbork transit camp.... Without the cooperation of the Dutch civil service and its bureaucracy, the extermination of more than one hundred thousand Jews — some eighty percent of all Jews who lived in Holland before the war — could not have been possible.<sup>28</sup>

Verhey also discusses the role of the Anne Frank Foundation:

Not all Dutchmen find it fitting that the Anne Frank House has developed into one of the most important tourist attractions of Amsterdam. Many Dutch Jews avoid the Anne Frank House because of some of the myths created by

her diary. Moreover, there has been concern that the Foundation has in the past paid more attention to a handful of neo-Nazis in Germany, as well as focused more on the plight of the Palestinians, than on the state-sponsored anti-Semitism of the former Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup>

### **Pope John Paul II at Auschwitz**

There are many other examples of de-Judaization as well. Pope John Paul II partly “nationalized” the Jewish suffering in 1979 during his visit to Auschwitz. He said: “There are six million Poles who lost their lives during the Second World War: the fifth part of the nation.”

Minerbi analyzed this: “In this way the Jews, who were not considered part of the Polish nation while they lived, are assimilated to it after their death. More important, this is yet another instance of the appropriation of Jewish symbols by the Church, which goes back many centuries.”<sup>30</sup>

After the fall of communism, Jewish victims were gradually memorialized specifically. Yet, at the same time, the de-Judaization from the communist days continued.

### **A French Example**

In the Western world, de-Judaizing the victims of the Holocaust is usually done in an indirect manner. One example is given by Trigano:

A comment from Jean Matteoli, head of the committee charged with probing the fate of Jewish property stolen in France, indicated how profoundly anti-Semitic ideas have permeated French society. In an interview with the Swiss paper *Le Temps* in March 1999, he said: “The French Jews are Jews, but they are also French. To make a distinction for comparable damages between French Jews and French Catholics, or whoever, creates a very facetious precedent of which the Jews could finally become victims themselves. In France there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews.... It is the Germans who have made this distinction....”

The construct of Matteoli, a member of the Resistance himself, is that, while French Jews were killed by the Germans for belonging to the Jewish *people* French citizens died there as anonymous *individuals*. In other words, the French Republic cannot accept the evident reality of Jews having died as such during the Holocaust. Only Frenchmen were supposed to die, not Jews. Even if killed by the Nazis because they were Jews, deprived of their citizenship, they must still be considered only as French citizens.<sup>31</sup>

## Notes

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23. Barnouw, *Anne Frank*, 37.
24. *Ibid.*, 38.
25. *Ibid.*, 38.
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27. Grobman and Fishman, *Anne Frank*, 2.



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## Chapter Six: Holocaust Equivalence

Within the broad category of abuse of Holocaust equivalence, there are a number of subcategories of manipulations of history whose motivations differ. Prewar and wartime Holocaust equivalence are based on the allegation that the Germans' genocidal behavior during World War II was similar to that of other nations before and during the war. The perpetrators of these distortions mainly aim to whitewash or diminish German crimes.

As the Holocaust is both the summit and the symbol of modern evil, the promoting of prewar equivalence is also an attack on the uniqueness of the Jews' victimization.

The postwar variant is based on a number of claims. One is that communist rule after the war was similar to that of the Nazis. Another is that there are many events in today's society that are similar in nature or equivalent to those caused by Germany under Hitler's rule. Another element of postwar Holocaust equivalence is that some contemporary organizations or individuals have the same character traits or attitudes as the Nazis. It is thus claimed that various actions or attitudes since the end of World War II are equivalent to what the Germans did during the war. Many, but far from all of these comparisons, refer to what Germany did to the Jews.

The three components of Holocaust equivalence have to be analyzed separately because their motivations and aims differ.

### **Prewar Holocaust Equivalence**

A major claim of perpetrators of prewar Holocaust equivalence is that Hitler's Germany did not act differently from what other nations had done earlier. The motivation for this claim is simple. If others had invented and carried out the murderous acts that were later copied by the Germans, why should the latter be blamed specifically? If these were such horrible crimes, those who had been the first to commit them should carry most of the blame and not the Germans who were followers and not initiators. A second line of defending German behavior would then be that, if these were acts frequently seen in times of war or ethnic tension, they should not be singled out for extreme blame.

An example of prewar Holocaust equivalence was mentioned by Lipstadt. She noted that a few years after the war, the French Holocaust-denier Paul Rassinier claimed that the concentration camps were not a German invention and

many other countries had used them, including France.<sup>1</sup> The uniqueness of the integrated and multifaceted complex of crimes committed by the Germans and their allies against the Jews does not, however, exclude that some elements had already been used by others earlier.

Lipstadt, for whom the uniqueness of the Holocaust starts in 1941, mentions some of the similarities between prewar German behavior and that of others:

If one stops the comparison at 1939, one finds strong parallels between apartheid policies in South Africa and Nazi attitudes toward the Jews. There were times when the apartheid government convinced blacks that they were being taken to new homesteads. The authorities, however, took them to the bush and left them there without food and water. They died by the thousands, which was a limited form of genocide. Of course, the apartheid government was not intent on destroying the entire black population, because they needed them to do the work that sustained the country. Consequently, it was not a full-fledged genocide. It was horrible, it was inhumane, it was anti-democratic; but it was not intended to wipe out the black population.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Historikerstreit**

One well-known example of prewar Holocaust equivalence is the claim that Hitler followed Stalin's example when establishing concentration camps. This argument was part of the *Historikerstreit* (the historians' debate) that raged in West Germany in the mid-1980s, especially in 1986–1989. This debate should be seen against the backdrop of the friction between Left and Right in the German political landscape, where conservative German historians were perceived, rightly or wrongly, as trying to exonerate the German history.

The historian Ernst Nolte started the debate by claiming that the Germans turned to Nazism because they were afraid of Bolshevism. In his view, the Holocaust or "race murder" was a response to the Soviet "class murder" perpetrated in the Gulag. In 1985, he wrote: "Auschwitz...was above all a reaction born out of the annihilating occurrences of the Russian Revolution...the so-called annihilation of the Jews during the Third Reich was a reaction or a distorted copy and not a first act or an original."<sup>3</sup>

The philosopher Jürgen Habermas rejected this way of understanding German history by the "canceling out of damages," seeing it as part of conservative whitewashing of Germany's Nazi past.<sup>4</sup> The debate was conducted in the German press, and centered mostly on issues concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust, the place of the Holocaust in German history — an exception or a logical outcome — and the issue of whether the German people as a whole bore a special burden following the Holocaust. Besides Nolte and Habermas, a number of others also contributed to the sometimes bitter and personal debate.

## Wartime Equivalence

The perpetrators of this type of Holocaust equivalence claim that there were no radical differences between the behavior of the major participants in World War II. This false narrative aims to lead to the conclusion that there is no reason for specific culpability of Germany when compared to its opponents.

During the Eichmann trial in 1961, the accused claimed that there was no basic difference between the two sides in World War II. Judge Benjamin Halevi confronted Eichmann, saying:

You have often compared the extermination of the Jews with the bombing raids on German cities and you compared the murder of Jewish women and children with the death of German women in aerial bombardments. Surely it must be clear to you that there is a basic distinction between these two things. On the one hand the bombing is used as an instrument of forcing the enemy to surrender. Just as the Germans tried to force the British to surrender by their bombing. In that case it is a war objective to bring an armed enemy to his knees.

On the other hand, when you take unarmed Jewish men, women, and children from their homes, hand them over to the Gestapo, and then send them to Auschwitz for extermination it is an entirely different thing, is it not?<sup>5</sup>

The use of the wartime-equivalence type of Holocaust distortion is currently increasing in German society. German historian Susanne Y. Urban discusses a bestselling book of another German historian, Jörg Friedrich:<sup>6</sup>

Friedrich's popularized style helped this book become a bestseller. He uses terms that for decades were associated with Nazi persecution and the Shoah; thus, cellars and air-raid shelters in which Germans died are "crematoria," an RAF bomber group is an *Einsatzgruppe*, and the destruction of libraries during the bombings constitutes *Bücherverbrennungen*. In this way the Shoah is minimized through language.<sup>7</sup>

Urban also discusses a second book by Friedrich, who depicts the Germans in World War II as victims:<sup>8</sup>

There are no SA men, no SS, no soldiers involved in persecution, murder, and "aryanization." The book contains horrifying photos of the effects of the Allied bombings of Germany. Ruins, burnt bodies, and ashes everywhere evoke associations with the Warsaw Ghetto after its liquidation in 1943 and well-known images from Auschwitz and other extermination camps. Friedrich even declared openly, in several television interviews in winter 2002: "Churchill was the greatest child-slaughterer of all time. He slaughtered 76,000 children." Yet Friedrich, formerly known as a serious historian, never devotes a single word to the 1.5 million murdered Jewish children.<sup>9</sup>

Lipstadt identifies another link between Holocaust equivalence and deniers. The latter may admit that “the Nazis had concentration camps, which were terrible places, but then assert that nobody was murdered there. One can then ‘balance’ this by mentioning that the Americans had camps for Americans citizens of Japanese descent.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Postwar Equivalence**

The core element of what a variety of perpetrators of postwar Holocaust equivalence allege is that certain actions or attitudes of others since the end of World War II are equivalent to those of the Germans during the war. Holocaust psychologist Nathan Durst observes: “When one calls everything Auschwitz, you deny the Holocaust. As everything becomes terrible, there is no absolute evil anymore. This is a great relief for the heirs of guilt.”<sup>11</sup>

Postwar Holocaust equivalence, however, often has different motivations from the two equivalence subcategories mentioned earlier. Many of those who practice it do not particularly care about either Germans or Jews. They are looking for the strongest possible metaphors to illustrate the evil character of those they condemn.

Nazism has become the contemporary symbol of absolute evil. Thus when wanting to demonize others in the strongest way possible, the comparison with the Nazis or their actions is often used. The comparisons are usually very brief without any attempt to provide a detailed analogy.

Such manifestations of postwar Holocaust equivalence include comparisons of living persons with Hitler or other Nazis. Another manifestation is the comparison of acts of governments or others with those of Germany under Hitler’s rule. Often there is little or no proof to support these remarks.

## **Comparing Communism to Nazism**

One of the most sophisticated types of postwar Holocaust equivalence is to present the victimization of people by communism in the same way as that of the Holocaust. The Baltic countries and in particular Lithuania are in the forefront of this effort.

Zuroff wrote that

the theory of the “double genocide” or the symmetry between Nazi and Communist crimes was particularly strong in Lithuania, where it became prominent in the wake of the revelations by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in 1991 that the Lithuanian government had granted rehabilitation to numerous local Nazi collaborators.

Part of the response to these accusations was to emphasize the role of Jewish Communists as a participant in Soviet crimes committed in Lithuania as a counterbalance and/or as justification for the participation of Lithuanians in Holocaust crimes, a tendency that remains strong in Lithuania.

Along the same lines, in the wake of the apology for the crimes of the Shoah proffered by President Brazauskas in Israel, numerous Lithuanians countered by pointing to Jewish participation in Communist crimes, asking, “Who will apologize to the Lithuanian nation?”<sup>12</sup>

Zuroff recounts that in the early 1990s he met in Vilnius with Vytautas Landsbergis, the then Lithuanian head of state. When Zuroff gave him a volume on Holocaust research, Landsbergis in turn gave him a book on the mass deportations of Lithuanians to Siberia and referred to that as “our Holocaust.”<sup>13</sup>

Concerning Estonia, Zuroff says the decision “to observe a memorial day for the victims of the Holocaust aroused considerable controversy and was singularly unpopular.”<sup>14</sup> For example, typical of the local reactions to the decision was this question posed to an official of the Simon Wiesenthal Center who had lobbied the government to choose a special day to commemorate the Holocaust:

“You’re demanding that all the peoples of the world including Estonia introduce the Jewish Holocaust memorial day. I’m wondering when will the memorial day for [the] Estonian mass deportations of 1941 and 1949 be introduced in Israel. Do you think that the war sufferings of one nation should be put above others and the suffering of other nations are nothing to speak of?”<sup>15</sup>

Zuroff also reports about a reunion of Waffen SS veterans in summer 2009:

Estonia hosted its annual reunion of Waffen-SS veterans at Sinimäe, the site of one of the fiercest battles fought by the 20<sup>th</sup> Waffen-SS Grenadier Division (also known as the First Estonian Division) against the Soviets in the latter stages of World War II. SS veterans from other European countries, in which such gatherings are illegal, were only too happy to join in the festivities in a country where their service on behalf of the Third Reich is considered by many to be worthy, rather than denigrated.

The existence of such a reunion, however, is only part of the story. The attitude of the local authorities to the SS veterans and their supporters on the one hand and to those opposed to such gatherings on the others [*sic*], is indicative of the distorted view on history currently prevalent in Tallinn. Thus, for example, foreign SS veterans who came to the reunion, as well as younger persons sympathetic to them, were welcome guests in Estonia. Foreign and even local anti-fascists who sought to demonstrate against the reunion, on the other hand, were treated very harshly in a manner totally unbecoming a country which is a member of NATO and the European Union.<sup>16</sup>

About Latvia, Zuroff writes:

Another example of equating Communist crimes with those of the Holocaust occurred at the very highest level in Latvia.<sup>17</sup> In January 2004, at a conference sponsored by the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education Remembrance and Research, Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga emphasized two major points: that Communist crimes were just as terrible as those of the Holocaust and that the measures taken by the Communists in Latvia constituted genocide. Despite the relevance of the Holocaust in this context, the Latvian president only mentioned it once in passing, with nary a word about Latvian complicity in Shoah crimes.<sup>18</sup> When an official of the Simon Wiesenthal Center explained in an op-ed that the president's presentation did not accurately reflect the historical events<sup>19</sup> there were calls for his murder, as well as various anti-Semitic comments on a prominent Latvian news website.<sup>20</sup>

### **Creating a System of Equivalence**

Zuroff has analyzed the various elements of the system by which Baltic leaders create postwar Holocaust equivalence. One is the almost total failure to prosecute local Nazi war criminals. Another is the efforts to falsely blame Germans and Austrians almost exclusively for the murder of Lithuanian Jews, much of which was carried out by locals. A third element is the establishment of genocide or occupation museums. These ignore local Holocaust crimes and Nazi collaboration.

The next step in this process occurred when the Baltic countries increased their efforts to create official symmetry between communism and Nazism. Zuroff writes:

Their first major success was the 3 June 2008 "Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism" signed by Václav Havel and numerous members of the European Parliament, which called for the establishment of 23 August as an official day of remembrance for Nazi and communist victims "in the same way Europe remembers the victims of the Holocaust on 27 January," as well as an "Institute of European Memory and Conscience" to serve as a museum, research, and educational center on these crimes. The rationale presented for these steps points to the "substantial similarities between Nazism and communism" and warns that "Europe will not be united unless it is able to reunite its history [and] recognize communism and Nazism as a common legacy."<sup>21</sup>

The following step occurred on 23 September 2008 when more than four hundred members of the European Parliament signed a declaration supporting the

establishment of 23 August as the European Day of Remembrance of Stalinism and Nazism. Then, on 2 April 2009, a resolution was adopted in the European Parliament that was similar to the Prague Declaration. Five hundred thirty-three members voted in favor, forty-four voted against, and thirty-three abstained.<sup>22</sup>

Zuroff sees a risk that in a number of years Holocaust Memorial Day will be abandoned and 23 August will become the joint memorial day for all victims of Nazism and communism.

## **A Communist Application**

Some communists applied this type of Holocaust equivalence early, aiming at Jews. In 1953, the Soviet Union's daily *Pravda* published alleged information about a conspiracy of mainly Jewish doctors to kill communist leaders through wrong diagnoses and sabotage in treatment.<sup>23</sup>

Israeli anti-Semitism scholar Simcha Epstein noted:

French communist intellectuals organized a major solidarity rally in Paris in support of the official Soviet position on the "doctors" plot.

The message of the speakers was frightening. Many explained that it was normal to suspect doctors of poisoning people: one only had to look at Mengele's role in Auschwitz. If he was capable of what he did, why should other physicians not use poison? A Jewish physician was among those who publicly took such a stand. As a medical doctor, he bore witness that the charge was not absurd. He also based his position on the misconduct of German physicians during the Second World War, stating that it could not be definitely excluded that Jews or Zionists decided to poison Soviet personalities.<sup>24</sup>

## **Nazi Imagery in American Political Discourse**

In recent years Nazi imagery has crept into American congressional debates. Foxman said, after a number of incidents: "This kind of language makes no sense. America's elected officials must refrain from invoking Hitler, the Nazis and the Holocaust, which have no place in our nation's political discourse."<sup>25</sup>

Foxman made these remarks after Republican Senator Rick Santorum had in 2005 compared the Democrats' use of the filibuster to oppose judicial nominees with "the equivalent of Adolf Hitler in 1942." Santorum later apologized, saying the reference "was meant to dramatize the principle of an argument, not to characterize my Democratic colleagues.... Nevertheless, it was a mistake and I meant no offense."<sup>26</sup>

Earlier that year West Virginia Democratic Senator Robert Byrd had compared a Senate ruling on discontinuing a debate on judicial nominations with Hitler's



use of constitutional means to get legislation adopted quickly in the German Reichstag at the beginning of the Nazis' rule.<sup>27</sup>

## Political Discourse Elsewhere

Similar examples can be brought from many other countries. Irish president Mary McAleese, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, said that the Nazis "gave to their children an irrational hatred of Jews in the same way that people in Northern Ireland transmitted to their children an irrational hatred, for example, of Catholics, in the same way that people give to their children an outrageous and irrational hatred of those who are of different colour and all of those things." These remarks led to a furor and she apologized, saying that she had not intended to make a connection between Protestantism and Nazism. She added: "I was trying to make a point and I made it very clumsily indeed."<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of 2008, former Quebec premier Bernard Landry of the Parti Quebecois said in a lecture to students that, on the occasion of the 1982 constitutional changes, the then Canadian premier Pierre Elliott Trudeau had stated that "this Constitution will last 1,000 years." Landry added: "He drew inspiration, I am afraid, from one of the most horrible people of Western history and I don't need to say his name."<sup>29</sup>

Eddie Goldenberg, chief of staff of former Canadian prime minister Jean Chretien, said of Landry in reaction: "When he used a quote from Trudeau to compare him with Adolf Hitler, I found that absolutely disgusting and I wish he would apologize to the Trudeau family." This led to a further heated exchange of words, and Landry said that blaming Trudeau "for a poor expression is not comparing him to one of the most despicable people in history."<sup>30</sup>

Already early in Obama's presidency a Nazi comparison came up. At a "tea party" of the Republican Party in Duval County, Florida, some participants carried signs with slogans relating to the Holocaust. Two of them showed Obama in Nazi garb.<sup>31</sup>

Sometimes comparisons have a little bit more depth and have been thought through to some extent. At the end of 2008, for instance, British defense secretary John Hutton compared Taliban fighters in Afghanistan with Nazis, calling the battle against them "a vital national security mission" like that against Hitler. He added that "it is a struggle against fanatics that may not challenge our borders but challenges our way of life in the same way the Nazis did."<sup>32</sup>

## Germany

In Germany the mention of Holocaust equivalence often touches a particularly sensitive nerve. In September 2002, Social Democratic justice minister Herta

Daübler-Gmelin said President George W. Bush was exploiting the possibility of a war against Saddam Hussein's Iraq in order to diminish his domestic problems. She added that such diversionary tactics had been regularly used since Hitler. She later explained that she was comparing Hitler's methods with those of Bush, without equating the persons. After her statement, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder did not include her in the new cabinet that he formed a few weeks later.<sup>33</sup>

In 2008, Hans-Werner Sinn, head of the Munich IFO Institute for Economic Research, compared the criticism of German managers after the autumn economic crisis with the persecution of the Jews. This led to very sharp reactions from politicians, representatives of churches, and of the Jewish community. For instance, government spokesman Ulrich Wilhelm said that "in view of German history this [comparison] was inadmissible and false."

Sebastian Edathy, chairman of the Interior Committee of the parliament, said that "in view of such statements one has the impression that Mr. Sinn is not mentally sane."<sup>34</sup> The Central Council of Jews in Germany called on Sinn to apologize immediately.<sup>35</sup> In view of the criticism, Sinn then asked forgiveness in a letter to Charlotte Knobloch, head of the Central Council. She accepted it and said that such events must not be repeated.<sup>36</sup>

## **A Frequent Phenomenon**

There are an almost unlimited number of contemporary expressions of postwar Holocaust equivalence. In recent years there were frequent comparisons of Bush with Hitler, or of the actions of the United States and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan with those of Nazi Germany. Many, but far from all, perpetrators are from the extreme Left.

Mike Godwin, an American lawyer, concluded that the longer a discussion continues on the Internet, the more probable it becomes that a comparison with Nazis will be made. He added that those who make the comparison lose the argument. Whether his judgment is valid remains to be seen over the coming years.<sup>37</sup>

Many examples thus indicate how, in a fragmented world, World War II and particularly the Holocaust have become instruments for insults.

Holocaust inversion is an even more perverse category of Holocaust equivalence. It says that Jews and Israel behave like Nazis. This Nazifying of Israel is discussed in the following chapter. Holocaust trivialization is yet another category of postwar Holocaust equivalence. It metaphorically compares phenomena strongly opposed by the perpetrators of this distortion with the industrial-scale destruction of the Jews in World War II by Germans, Austrians, and their allies. This abuse of Holocaust memory is also discussed in a separate chapter.

## Notes

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4. Jürgen Habermas, "Eine Art Schadenabwicklung: Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung," *Die Zeit*, 18 July 1986. [German]
5. Michael Shermer and Alex Grobman, *Denying History: Who Says the Holocaust Never Happened and Why Do They Say It?* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 105.
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9. Urban, "Anti-Semitism," 124.
10. Gerstenfeld, interview with Lipstadt.
11. Manfred Gerstenfeld, "Europe: From Guilt Feelings to Repackaging Anti-Semitism," an interview with Nathan Durst, in *Europe's Crumbling Myths* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2003), 135.
12. Efraim Zuroff, "Eastern Europe: Anti-Semitism in the Wake of Holocaust-Related Issues," *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 17, Nos. 1–2 (Spring 2005): 71.
13. Efraim Zuroff, "A Combined Day of Commemoration for the Victims of Nazism and Communism?" *Jerusalem Post*, 12 July 2009.
14. Zuroff, "Eastern Europe," 67–68.
15. "Efraim Zuroff Online: Answers in English," *Eesti Paevaleht*, 8 August 2002, 6.
16. Efraim Zuroff, "Rewriting Shoah History in Estonia," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 August 2009.
17. Zuroff, "Eastern Europe," 71.
18. Address by H. E. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, president of the Republic of Latvia at the "International Forum on Preventing Genocide: Threats and Responsibilities," Stockholm, 26 January 2004.
19. Efraim Zuroff, "Misleading Comparisons of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Tragedies," *Baltic Times*, 19–25 February 2004.
20. Among the comments on [www.delfi.lv](http://www.delfi.lv) were the following: (1) "To the wall [to be shot] this person and finish [him off]" (20 February 2004, 9:31); (2) "Zuroff thinks the only nation that suffered in world history are the zhids [derogatory term for Jews], All the other people are their butchers.... Jews were always successful in trade and usury" (20 February 2004, 9:33); (3) "It is written in the Bible that Zhids are an experimental mistake. G-d himself wanted to annihilate them because the nation is wicked, without honor and virtue. All their history is war, killings, and treachery. We must state clearly: Zuroff and the zhid government in Israel are criminals" (20 February 2004, 16:27).
21. Zuroff, "A Combined Day."
22. Ibid.
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# Chapter Seven:

## Holocaust Inversion:

### The Portraying of Israel and Jews as Nazis

Holocaust inversion seeks to delegitimize Israel by associating it with the epitome of evil and criminal behavior, Nazi Germany. It attacks and humiliates the Jewish people by equating them with the perpetrators of the brutal genocide whose goal was the complete extermination of the Jews. It also serves to sanitize Germany's huge crimes and those of other European countries by accusing Israel of acting similarly.

The false accusation of Holocaust inversion — the portraying of Israel, Israelis, and Jews as Nazis — is another extreme distortion of history. Those who apply this anti-Semitic concept claim that Israel behaves against the Palestinians as Germany did to the Jews in World War II. “The victims have become perpetrators” is one major slogan of the inverters. As mentioned earlier, Holocaust inversion is part of the broader distortion category of Holocaust equivalence. By shifting the moral responsibility for genocide, Holocaust inversion also contains elements of Holocaust denial.

Holocaust inverters come, to a large extent, from Muslim circles. Many others come from the extreme Left in the West. A variety of Western mainstream public figures have also made Holocaust-inversion statements, including politicians, academics, authors, journalists as well as the occasional Jew or Israeli.

Actually, the world's current major contemporary propagators of Nazi-type ideologies live outside Europe. The most powerful ones can be found mainly in the Muslim world. Palestinian anti-Semitic incitement, often genocidal, is part of a broader picture of a widespread, partly theocratic, Muslim totalitarianism.

#### **Definitions of Anti-Semitism**

In 2001, Irwin Cotler, who later became Canada's justice minister, identified the anti-Semitic character of Holocaust inversion. He pointed to several relatively new aspects of anti-Semitism such as calls for the destruction of Israel and the Jewish people, the portrayal of Israel as a Nazi state, and the discriminatory treatment of Israel through denial of equality before the law.<sup>1</sup>

Natan Sharansky, when he was the Israeli minister for Jerusalem and Diaspora affairs, developed a simple formula that he called the “3D test” to help distinguish legitimate criticism of Israel from anti-Semitism: demonization, double standards, and delegitimization.

Sharansky included the portrayal of Israel as a Nazi state within his definition of “demonization”: “When the Jewish state is being demonized; when Israel’s actions are blown out of all sensible proportion; when comparisons are made between Israelis and Nazis and between Palestinian refugee camps and Auschwitz — this is antisemitism, not legitimate criticism of Israel.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The EUMC Working Definition of Anti-Semitism**

In its 2004 report on anti-Semitism, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) noted the lack of a common characterization of anti-Semitism. This led to the EUMC working definition, which has subsequently been widely accepted.<sup>3</sup> It states: “Anti-Semitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.... In addition, such manifestations could also target the state of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity.”

The document that contains this working definition also offers examples of contemporary anti-Semitism. One of these is: “Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.”<sup>4</sup>

This text also states that “criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.” It lists examples of how anti-Semitism can manifest itself toward Israel:

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel....
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy with that of the Nazis.
- Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.<sup>5</sup>

The core motif of classic anti-Semitism was that Jews embody the most extreme malevolence. During the post-World War II era, the Nazi regime has become the paradigm for absolute evil. Comparing Israel’s conduct with Nazi actions is a new mutation of the ancient anti-Semitic theme.

### **Anti-Zionists as Anti-Semites**

Wistrich writes:

“Anti-Zionists” who insist on comparing Zionism and the Jews with Hitler and the Third Reich appear unmistakably to be de facto anti-Semites, even

if they vehemently deny the fact! This is largely because they knowingly exploit the reality that Nazism in the postwar world has become the defining metaphor of absolute evil. For if Zionists are “Nazis” and if Sharon really is Hitler, then it becomes a moral obligation to wage war against Israel. That is the bottom line of much contemporary anti-Zionism. In practice, this has become the most potent form of contemporary anti-Semitism.<sup>6</sup>

French linguist Georges-Elia Sarfati points out that the term anti-Zionism was pioneered by the Soviet Union’s Information Ministry after the Six Day War. Researching the matter, he found that the word did not appear in dictionaries until the 1970s. He observes that “a number of key equations dominate the anti-Zionist discourse. The master one — which transversally commands all others — is ‘Zionism equals Nazism.’ ... the anti-Zionist propaganda conveys that you have only to be against, for instance against Nazism — and who is not? — to be an anti-Zionist.”<sup>7</sup>

Fishman asserts that “inversion of reality” constitutes the basic principle of current anti-Israeli propaganda, noting:

One of its most frequent expressions has been the accusation that the Jewish people, victims of the Nazis, have now become the new Nazis, aggressors and oppressors of the Palestinian Arabs. Contemporary observers have identified this method and described it as an “inversion of reality,” an “intellectual confidence trick,” “reversing moral responsibility,” or “twisted logic.” Because Israel’s enemies have, for nearly half a century, repeated such libels without being challenged, they have gradually gained credence.<sup>8</sup>

## **Manifestations and Motivations**

Holocaust inversion manifests itself in many ways. It is expressed in speech, writing, and visual media, including cartoons, graffiti, and placards. It employs sinister characterizations of Israel and Israelis, Nazi symbols, and sometimes uses Nazi genocidal terminology to describe Israel’s actions.

The motivations of the Holocaust inverters are manifold. The most extreme aim at the destruction of Israel and seek to lay the infrastructure for its moral delegitimization through demonization. Many Western Holocaust inverters also aim to bolster the Arab and Palestinian cause by demonizing Israel. Other Westerners seem to act out of anti-Semitic motivations. They show little or no interest in the frequent murdering of Palestinians by other Palestinians, nor in the plight of Palestinians killed and persecuted elsewhere — for instance, in Iraq. This indifference also pertains, of course, to the murdering of Israelis by Palestinians.

Yet other perpetrators know little about the Holocaust, the Nazis, and contemporary Israel. They are influenced by the media and other societal elites who are Holocaust inverters.

## Relieving Guilt Feelings

Absolving one's ancestors of guilt is another motif of many Holocaust inverters. The Holocaust was far from being exclusively the work of Germany — which incorporated Austria — as well as several nations allied with it. Large numbers of Europeans in occupied countries collaborated with the Germans. The most effective way to neutralize this burden is to shift the moral responsibility to Israel by claiming that what was done by the perpetrators is widespread and now practiced primarily by Israelis and Jews.

This malicious identification of Israelis as Nazis is intended to free Europeans of their remorse and shame for their centuries-long history of lethal anti-Semitism. Above all, it liberates Europeans from any residual guilt they might have experienced in the wake of the Shoah. If the Israelis — who are, after all, mostly Jews — can be depicted as Nazis, then not having helped them during World War II might not have been such a terrible thing. Or, if one does not want to go that far, one can at least seek to prevent Jews from taking the moral high road in comparison to Europe, as a result of what others did to them during the Holocaust.

Durst related European expressions with anti-Semitic undertones to guilt toward the Holocaust. “If the guilty person is bad, the Jewish victim becomes good. The moment it can be shown the latter is bad too, the ‘other’ — that is, the European — is relieved of his guilt feelings. To claim that Israelis behave like Nazis reduces the sin of the grandparents. Then the children of the victims can no longer be the accusers. This equalizes everybody.”<sup>9</sup>

Jeffrey Gedmin, the American president of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, observes: “It is very helpful for a certain ideology in European political culture to see the Palestinians as helpless underdogs being repressed by the Israelis. This thesis enables many Europeans to relativize, or even balance, Europe's guilt.”

He adds:

This reflects further European hypocrisy...since there is no passion in either Germany or Europe for independent Kurdish or Basque states. There is no concern for Tibetan underdogs. One can only conclude that the reasons Europeans consider the Palestinian cause for independence central are their cultural bias, burdens of the past and anti-Semitic feelings. It would be much more logical to see the Israelis as underdogs, a small democracy in a large, hostile Arab environment.<sup>10</sup>

## Visual Forms of Holocaust Inversion

An effective way to grasp the main modes of Holocaust inversion is by analyzing posters and cartoons. These rely on familiar and immediately perceived core



stereotypes of hatred, of which the number is limited. Such an iconography must appeal to ideas with which the public at large is familiar. This pertains particularly to Arab societies where so many people are illiterate.

In many anti-Israeli demonstrations, banners are carried showing the Star of David as equivalent to the swastika. This phenomenon is international. At a demonstration in the Place de la République in Paris on 7 October 2000, a placard carried the slogan “Stop the Jewish Hitlerian terrorism!” Below the words a Star of David was drawn as equaling a swastika.<sup>11</sup>

That same year a placard in French at a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Brussels read: “The years change, the executioners change.”<sup>12</sup> Under it was a Star of David, an equal sign, and the SS symbol. At the September 2001 UN World Conference against Racism in Durban (hereinafter Durban conference), among numerous similar examples, supporters of the Palestinians carried a banner saying “1940s Hitler, 2000s Sharon.”<sup>13</sup>

Another example among many occurred at a 2002 demonstration in Washington, where a young woman who appeared to be Arab held a placard designed as the Israeli flag, reading “Hitler & Sharon are the same.” A swastika appeared on the flag instead of the Star of David.<sup>14</sup>

In cartoons, too, this equation is a frequently recurring theme. At the Hamashahri Holocaust-cartoon exhibition in Teheran, a drawing by the Algerian Choukri Bellahadi showed an Israeli flag turning into one with a swastika.<sup>15</sup>

## **Israeli Leaders Resemble Hitler**

Comparisons between Israelis and Nazis, and of swastikas and the Star of David, are especially commonplace in the Arab world. For many years the ADL has been monitoring and reporting on anti-Semitic cartoons in the Arab media. In his book on Arab anti-Semitic cartoons, the Belgian political scientist Jöel Kotek devotes a section to Holocaust inversion. In 1996, the major Egyptian daily *Al-Gomhouriya* published a cartoon showing Hitler saying to Shimon Peres: “I made a mistake by not appraising the importance of American support.”<sup>16</sup>

Israeli leaders shown as being like Hitler or Nazis is a regularly recurring motif. A cartoon in the Egyptian daily *Al-Akhbar* in 2000 shows Israel’s then-prime minister Ehud Barak dressed as a Nazi with a Hitler mustache.<sup>17</sup>

Ariel Sharon was perhaps the Israeli prime minister most often depicted as a Nazi. In four pictures, the well-known Lebanese cartoonist Jabra Stavro, in Lebanon’s *Daily Star* in 2002, transformed Sharon with his white hair into Hitler with a mustache and black hair. A Star of David on Sharon’s collar is also transformed into a swastika.<sup>18</sup> The Teheran exhibition included a caricature by Bahraini Mohammed Amano showing Sharon in Nazi uniform wearing a skullcap.

These phenomena are far from limited to the Arab world. In Norway, anti-

Semitic cartoons appear regularly in several of the major papers. In July 2006, the *Dagbladet* daily, Norway's third largest paper, carried a drawing by Finn Graff of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert as a Nazi.<sup>19</sup> To add insult to injury, this cartoonist was made a knight in the prestigious Royal Norwegian Order of St. Olav by King Harald V for his contribution as an artist.<sup>20</sup>

### Israel Worse than the Nazis

Sometimes cartoons even present Israelis as worse than Nazis. Kotek says: "A 1993 cartoon in the Syrian daily *Teshreen* shows one soldier with a Star of David on his helmet and another with a swastika on his helmet. The caption reads: 'The Security Council has studied the case of genocide of the Palestinians.' The long list is of Israeli crimes; the small list of Nazi crimes."<sup>21</sup>

The claim that Israel is worse than the Nazis also appeared in the Hamashahri competition. The Moroccan cartoonist Naji Benaji was awarded a special prize for his drawing of two bottles. One, on which "Holocaust" is written, contains a few skulls; the second carries the Palestinian flag and is filled with skulls.<sup>22</sup>

The number of cartoon variations on the core motif of Holocaust inversion is virtually unlimited. Kotek cites the Brazilian Carlos Latuff as a well-known anti-Semitic caricaturist who has been producing such works for many years.<sup>23</sup> He won a shared second prize in the Teheran competition for a cartoon showing an Arab as a concentration-camp inmate.<sup>24</sup>

A 2002 cartoon in the Greek daily *Ethnos*, close to the then-ruling Pasok socialist party, has become a classic of twenty-first-century anti-Semitism. It shows two Jewish soldiers dressed as Nazis, with Stars of David on their helmets, thrusting knives into Arabs. Its caption reads: "Do not feel yourself guilty, my brother. We were not in Auschwitz and Dachau to suffer, but to learn."<sup>25</sup>

These were preceded in 1988 by the Kuwaiti paper *Al Rai-Al Aam*, which published a caricature of a soldier with a gun, kippa, and long nose shoving a child into a furnace. The image alluded to both the Shoah and the ancient anti-Semitic blood libel that Jews use children to bake matzo.<sup>26</sup>

### The British Roots of "Zionism Is Nazism"

Wistrich points out that Holocaust inversion has British roots:

It is important to remember that in the 1940s the "Zionism is Nazism" libel was rather popular among highly placed Englishmen. True, the Nazi-Zionist equation was predominantly a Soviet contribution to postwar antisemitism. But it did not originate there. Indeed, a number of Britishers can claim first-class honors in this field. An example is Sir John Glubb Pasha, who was

commander of the Arab Jordanian Legion fighting against Israel in 1948. He was an upper-class conservative Englishman and a lifelong Arabophile, with a special love for desert Arabs. He was also a convinced anti-Semite.

Glubb was obsessed with the idea that Jews had anticipated Hitler's master race theory. Nazism, in his view, was a pale copy of the Hebrew original as revealed in Old Testament sources. In memos he sent to London he branded Jews as Nazis who combined their East European fanaticism with a narrow Hebraic cast of mind, based on biblical vengeance and hatred. He described Israel from the outset as a Nazi state, as the historian Benny Morris has demonstrated.

Glubb was not alone. One can find in British documents similar statements from high-ranking officials in the Palestine administration. Most probably when all the papers of the High Commissioner for Palestine from the last years of the Mandate are revealed, further statements of this kind will come to light. One figure high up in the Palestine administration was Sir Edward Grigg, later Lord Altrincham. He referred to what he called the National Socialist character of what became the Israeli Labor Party (Mapai) and of the Hagana (the core of the Israeli army). He saw in the Zionist youth movements a copy of the Hitler Youth.<sup>27</sup>

## **Toynbee, European Communists**

The well-known British historian Arnold Toynbee, a notorious anti-Semite, claimed in his major work *A Study of History* that the Israeli treatment of Arabs during the 1948 war was morally comparable with the Nazi treatment of the Jews. He repeated this accusation in a 1961 debate with the then Israeli ambassador to Canada, Jacob Herzog, who asserted that the Nazi murder of six million Jews was incomparable with the unfortunate uprooting of Arab communities.<sup>28</sup>

Presenting Israelis as Nazis was also widespread in the communist world. In 1968, Simon Wiesenthal stated that East Germany's news service was far more anti-Israeli than that of other communist countries. This was because of the former Nazi propagandists it employed. "On 14 July 1967, for example, a cartoon appeared in the *Berliner Zeitung*, depicting a flying Moshe Dayan, with his hands stretched out toward Gaza and Jerusalem. Next to him stood Adolf Hitler in an advanced state of decomposition. He encouraged Dayan with the words: 'Carry on, colleague Dayan!'"<sup>29</sup>

In a famous 1968 open letter, British philosopher Bertrand Russell accosted Polish prime minister Wladyslaw Gomulka: "By some twisted logic, all Jews are now Zionists, Zionists are fascists, fascists are Nazis and Jews therefore are to be identified with the very criminals who only recently sought to eliminate Polish Jewry."<sup>30</sup>

## The West European Mainstream

The Holocaust-inversion theme has appeared in the West European mainstream for several decades. Leading European politicians such as the late Swedish Social Democrat prime minister Olof Palme<sup>31</sup> and the late Greek socialist prime minister Andreas Papandreou both accused Israel of using Nazi methods.<sup>32</sup>

In recent years such charges have become more widespread. American congressman and Holocaust-survivor Tom Lantos described the distortions of the Holocaust at the 2001 Durban conference. He also noted that at a preparatory emergency conference in Geneva in June 2001, the UN high commissioner for human rights and former Irish president Mary Robinson “refused to reject the twisted notion that the wrong done to the Jews in the Holocaust was equivalent to the pain suffered by the Palestinians in the Middle East. Instead she discussed ‘the historical wounds of anti-Semitism and of the Holocaust on the one hand, and the accumulated wounds of displacement and military occupation on the other.’”<sup>33</sup>

Senior members of the Greek Socialist Party often use Holocaust rhetoric to describe Israeli military actions.<sup>34</sup> In March 2002, parliamentary speaker Apostolos Kaklamanis referred to the “genocide” of the Palestinians. He was backed by the government spokesman, Christos Protopapas, who said that Kaklamanis spoke “with sensitivity and responsibility, expressing the sentiments of the Parliament and Greek people.”<sup>35</sup>

One only has to read the judgment of the International Court of Justice on the Srebrenica mass murder to understand what genocide is and how perverse the genocide accusations against Israel are.<sup>36</sup>

In April 2002, Franco Cavalli spoke at a demonstration of the Swiss-Palestinian Society in Bern. He was then parliamentary leader of the Social Democratic Party (SP), which is part of the Swiss governing coalition. He claimed that Israel “very purposefully massacres an entire people” and undertakes “the systematic extermination of the Palestinians.” At the rally Israeli flags were torched.<sup>37</sup> That same year British poet and Oxford academic Tom Paulin told an Egyptian newspaper that Jewish settlers in the West Bank are “Nazis and racists [who] should be shot dead.”<sup>38</sup>

Using Nazi genocidal language for Israel’s actions is another tool of Holocaust inversion. The most effective way to sanitize Germany’s immense crimes is to accuse Israel of acting similarly. In 2002, Norbert Blüm, a former German Christian Democrat minister of labor, charged that the Jewish state was conducting a “*Vernichtungskrieg*” — a “war of destruction” against the Palestinians. This is the Nazi expression for a war of extermination.<sup>39</sup> The Christian Democrat Party expelled parliamentarian Martin Hohmann in 2003, months after he called Israelis a nation of criminals, using the expression “*Taetervolk*” — “a nation of perpetrators” — a term commonly reserved for Nazi Germany.<sup>40</sup>

Holocaust inversion has made major inroads in the Western world, as shown,

for example, by German survey data. The major GMF poll in 2004 interviewed 2,656 representatively selected German-speaking people in the country.<sup>41</sup> Sixty-eight percent agreed that: “Israel undertakes a war of destruction against the Palestinians.” Fifty-one percent agreed that: “What the state of Israel does today to the Palestinians, is in principle not different from what the Nazis did in the Third Reich to the Jews.”<sup>42</sup>

On 26 January 2007 — one day before the United Nations’ International Day of Commemoration for the victims of the Holocaust — the 192-member UN General Assembly approved a resolution by consensus, introduced by the United States. It condemned “without any reservation any denial of the Holocaust.” It did not mention any country. Iran reacted by stating that the Holocaust should be examined to determine its scope. Mario Palavicini, the delegate from Venezuela, supported the resolution but also inverted the Holocaust by saying that Israel’s “excesses under the pretext of legitimate defense has led to a new holocaust against the Palestinian people.”<sup>43</sup>

### **Inverting Holocaust Remembrance Day**

In Spain in 2006, there was an attempt to invert the day of official Holocaust remembrance. Susana Leon Gordillo, a member of Prime Minister Zapatero’s ruling Socialist Party (PSOE) and mayor of the Madrid suburb of Ciempozuelos, decided to commemorate the “genocide of the Palestinian people” in his town. At the request of the Spanish Foreign Ministry, “Palestine Genocide Day” was canceled. References to the affair were taken off the Ciempozuelos municipality website.<sup>44</sup>

The ADL condemned the mayor’s Holocaust-inversion attempt and addressed him in a letter:

Your attempt to equate the industrialized mass murder of six million Jewish women, men and children, as well as millions of others, with the situation of the Palestinian people is shameful. It reflects an extremely disturbing tendency, which is particularly visible in Europe to dishonor the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and de-legitimize the State of Israel by seeking to eradicate the clear moral difference between the Holocaust and the loss of Palestinian lives as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>45</sup>

There are some Jewish Holocaust inverters as well. One is Sara Roy, a senior research scholar at the Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies. A child of Holocaust survivors herself, she used a Holocaust Memorial Lecture to suggest that Israelis are Nazis, saying: “Within the Jewish community it has always been considered a form of heresy to compare Israeli actions or policies with those of the Nazis and certainly one must be very careful in doing so.” She then insinuated that they are comparable, quoting as proof — a figment of Palestinian

propaganda — that “Israeli soldiers openly admit to shooting Palestinian children for sport.”<sup>46</sup>

Fishman, in an essay on the Cold War origins of contemporary anti-Semitic terminology, lists a variety of Israelis, academics and others, who have made Holocaust-inverting remarks.<sup>47</sup>

### **Comparing Palestinians with Shoah Victims**

Many Holocaust symbols have also been inverted. In Amsterdam in February 2007, graffiti appeared showing Anne Frank with a keffiyah. One regularly finds cartoons or pictures comparing Palestinian cities and towns with the Warsaw Ghetto,<sup>48</sup> and attempts to compare the killing of the Palestinian child Mohammed al-Dura — who probably died from a Palestinian bullet — with the iconic Jewish child raising his hands in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>49</sup>

Comparing the situation of the Palestinians with that of the Jews in ghettos or concentration camps is by now a regular manifestation of Holocaust inversion. Portuguese Nobel Prize-winning author José Saramago, a communist, compared the blockaded Palestinian city of Ramallah with Auschwitz.<sup>50</sup> While visiting Brazil he declared that the Jewish people no longer deserve sympathy for the suffering they endured during the Holocaust.<sup>51</sup>

Wistrich notes that the Anglican *Church Times* chose to mark Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Day with a particularly malevolent article by the Rev. Richard Spencer, who described events in Ramallah as a “suffering and deprivation that I could only imagine in Auschwitz.”<sup>52</sup>

In another case of Holocaust inversion by a Protestant representative, Doris Pagelkopf, vice-chairperson of the Young Women’s Christian Association, declared in 2005, after a visit to the Palestinian Authority: “I have strongly felt the correlation with the Second World War. During that time Hitler tried to exterminate the Jews and today a group of Israelis are trying to remove the Palestinians from the country.”<sup>53</sup>

In 2007, representatives of all twenty-seven German Catholic bishoprics visited Israel. They also went to Ramallah, after which one of the bishops, Gregor Maria Hanke said: “During the visit we saw at Yad Vashem the pictures from the Warsaw Ghetto and in the evening we are traveling to Ghetto Ramallah.” The German embassy in Tel Aviv expressed its consternation about his remarks.<sup>54</sup>

### **The 2008–2009 Gaza War**

The Gaza war of December 2008–January 2009 again brought to the fore many examples of equations of Israel with Nazi Germany. In Rome, thousands marched carrying signs that “showed swastikas superimposed on the Star of David.”<sup>55</sup>

The umbrella body of Belgian Jewish organizations, the CCOJB, noted that a supposedly “peaceful” demonstration against Israel during the war had turned into a major outburst of anti-Semitism on the streets of Brussels. Banners showed Jews as devils, or equated them with Nazis; others referred to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Yet other signs compared Gaza with Auschwitz. The CCOJB stated that these were both morally and legally condemnable.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of 2008, the Israeli embassy in Norway protested against a comparison of the situation in Gaza with the Warsaw Ghetto by the mayor of Tromsø, Arild Hausberg of the Labor Party.<sup>57</sup>

Trine Lilleng, a first secretary in the Norwegian embassy in Saudi Arabia, sent an email from her account in which she juxtaposed pictures of slain children in Gaza with “photos of Holocaust victims in seemingly correlating situations.” The Norwegian daily *Aftenposten* printed some of these juxtapositions.<sup>58</sup> If one analyzes these pictures, one sees that they concern very different situations.

A spokesman of Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial institute, came out with a strong condemnation of Lilleng and stated:

That a Norwegian Foreign Ministry official is disseminating such distortions is appalling and smacks of anti-Semitism.... Instead of working toward understanding, she is fanning the flames of hatred.... There is no comparison between the systematic plan, based on a murderous ideology, to murder every single Jewish person, everywhere, and a long political and military conflict between two peoples.... Coming on the heels of other examples of anti-Semitic incitement, it raises red flags as to what is apparently happening in Norway.

The Yad Vashem spokesman added that such “manipulative abuse” of the Holocaust inevitably leads to violence.<sup>59</sup>

When Norwegian foreign minister Støre came to Israel a few weeks later, he was interviewed by the daily *Maariv*. He was quoted as saying that Lilleng was no longer in Riyadh.<sup>60</sup> One would indeed have expected that Norway would not want to have a Holocaust inverter as a diplomatic representative.

This would have been even more embarrassing in view of the fact that, by March 2009, Norway was chairing the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. It later turned out, however, that contrary to what had been reported, the Norwegian Foreign Ministry had maintained Lilleng in Riyadh and that in July 2009 she was still employed at the embassy there.<sup>61</sup>

## **The Nazareth Holocaust Museum**

Attorney Khaled Mahamid, an Israeli Arab, has founded a Holocaust museum in Nazareth. The ADL, while praising the existence of an Arab museum in Israel

commemorating the Holocaust, expressed its deep concern that its approach undid much of the benefit it could have.

The ADL statement continued that the museum was based

on the false premise that the Palestinian people are paying the price for European guilt over the Holocaust by having what they believe is an illegitimate Jewish state in the heart of the Arab world. By placing the PLO flag at the museum as well as posters of Palestinian refugees and photos of Palestinian victims of violence juxtaposed next to Jewish victims of the Holocaust, Mr. Mahamid also seeks to create a totally inappropriate connection between the plight of the Palestinians and the Jewish Holocaust victims.<sup>62</sup>

### **The Arab World**

Holocaust denial and Holocaust inversion are frequently found together in the Arab world. This is seemingly strange yet reflects the perpetrators' aim of maximum demonization of Israel. Nordbruch points out that "articles denouncing Zionism as Nazism often include Holocaust denial as well."<sup>63</sup>

The aforementioned Hamas Charter is one of a large number of Arab sources that are permeated with Holocaust inversion. Its article 20 states: "The Nazism of the Jews does not skip women and children, it scares everyone. They make war against people's livelihood, plunder their moneys and threaten their honor. In their horrible actions they mistreat people like the more horrendous war criminals."

The charter is repetitive; its article 31 says: "The Nazi Zionist practices against our people will not last the lifetime of their invasion, for 'states built upon oppression last only one hour, states based upon justice will last until the hour of Resurrection.'"<sup>64</sup>

### **The Muslim World and the Nazis**

Even superficial analysis shows that the main ideological similarity to Nazi thought and behavior is nowadays found in parts of the Muslim world. The influence of neo-Nazi movements in the Western world is small compared to the prominence of Nazi-like ideas among Muslim societies.

Bauer says:

Today for the first time since 1945, Jews are again threatened, openly, by a radical Islamic genocidal ideology whose murderous rantings must be taken more seriously than the Nazi ones were two and more generations ago. The direct connection between World War II, the Shoah, and present-day genocidal events and threats is more than obvious. The Shoah was unprecedented; but it was a precedent, and that precedent is being followed.<sup>65</sup>



The dominant example of a Muslim genocide promoter is Ahmadinejad. His genocidal threats and incitement against Israel have deep roots both in fundamentalist Iran and among radical Muslim figures in other countries.<sup>66</sup> By highlighting this, one better understands the criminal worldview of Holocaust inverters.

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## Chapter Eight: Holocaust Trivialization

Holocaust trivialization is a tool for some ideologically or politically motivated activists to metaphorically compare phenomena they oppose with the industrial-scale extermination of the Jews in World War II by Germans and their allies. Examples of such comparisons include environmental problems, abortion, the slaughter of animals, the use of tobacco, and human rights abuses. None of these, in their basic characteristics, resemble the man-made genocide of the 1940s. In commercial trivialization, imagery or themes from the Holocaust are used for purposes of publicity. Another type of Holocaust trivialization involves making fun of Holocaust victims or survivors.

Those who abuse Holocaust comparisons for their ideological purposes wish to exaggerate the evil nature of a phenomenon they condemn. With the Holocaust symbolizing absolute evil for many, they use it as an instrument for their purposes and thus abuse the centrality of the Holocaust discourse in contemporary society. The perceived evil with which they compare the Holocaust does not and cannot share its major characteristics, such as the systematic demonization, exclusion, torturing, and destruction of specific people in a society, while targeting all belonging to this category.

Trivialization goes beyond hurting the sensitivities of Jews. It abuses the memory of the murdered. It is also an insult to the Righteous Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews and the millions of soldiers who fought against Germany and its allies. As will be seen, far from all of those who trivialize the Holocaust do so out of anti-Semitic motives, nor do they target Jews specifically.

These distortions and others led Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor Eli Wiesel to write as early as 1988:

I cannot use [the word Holocaust] anymore. First, because there are no words, and also because it has become so trivialized that I cannot use it anymore. Whatever mishap occurs now, they call it “holocaust.” I have seen it myself in television in the country in which I live. A commentator describing the defeat of a sports team, somewhere, called it a “holocaust.”<sup>1</sup>

The trivializing comparisons with the Holocaust are rarely elaborated on. A characteristic of the manipulation is that the desired effect is achieved mainly by the abusive mention of the Holocaust. The manipulation is therefore relatively easy to expose, by pointing out that crucial criminal components of the Holocaust are lacking in what is being compared with it.

## Environmentalists

Environmentalists are one group among which Holocaust trivializers are found. They often regard global warming as the main contemporary threat to humanity. Ellen Goodman, a *Boston Globe* columnist, wrote that it is no longer possible to deny global warming. She invoked the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which claimed it was 90 percent certain that global warming was the result of human activity.

From there she moved on: “I would like to say we’re at a point where global warming is impossible to deny. Let’s just say that global warming deniers are now on a par with Holocaust deniers, though one denies the past and the other denies the present and future.”<sup>2</sup>

Well-known talk-show host Dennis Prager responded by castigating Goodman’s statement. He first noted that it reflected the fact that most people on the Left see “their ideological adversaries as bad people.” On the other hand, “those on the Right tend to view their adversaries as wrong, perhaps even dangerous, but not usually as bad.”

It might be inconceivable to Goodman, Prager observed, that one could disagree with global warming without evil motives. He further asserted that contemporary liberalism would tend to question the moral authority of Judeo-Christian religions or of any secular conservative authority, but not of “any other authority” such as the United Nations.

Prager also pointed out that “If questioning global warming is on ‘a par’ with questioning the Holocaust, how bad can questioning the Holocaust really be?” It is similarly easy to claim that many people in the world die as a result of poor health, malnourishment, and inappropriate diets. Given today’s societal mood we may well read one day about the “diet Holocaust” or the “hamburger Holocaust.”<sup>3</sup>

## Al Gore

Comparing potential ecological disaster to the Holocaust is not a new phenomenon. On 19 March 1989, the then senator from Tennessee, Al Gore, published an op-ed in the *New York Times* titled “An Ecological Kristallnacht. Listen.” Gore called upon all humankind to heed the warning: “the evidence is as clear as the sounds of glass shattering in Berlin.”<sup>4</sup>

In 2007, Gore, by then a Nobel Laureate and former vice-president, continued to use Holocaust imagery for environmental purposes. As part of his advocacy, twice in December 2007 he criticized many world leaders for ignoring the threat of climate change in the same way that former British prime minister Neville Chamberlain and other world leaders had ignored the dangers posed by Hitler. Gore voiced the same sentiments as almost two decades earlier: “Once again world leaders waffle, hoping the danger will dissipate.”

Canadian Green Party leader Elizabeth May justified Gore's remarks, explaining: "It's not a literal comparison that says somehow climate change is like Hitler. Climate change is not like Hitler. Hitler is an individual who managed to construct a political party and then, through democratic elections, a nation that was prepared to go along with genocide. This is not like that. But the moral failure of those who stand by — that's the comparison."<sup>5</sup>

A representative of an umbrella organization for Canadian Jewish groups responded that May's statements supported positions that were "obscene and absolutely unnecessary" for anyone, even Gore.<sup>6</sup>

Glenn Beck, a television and radio host and author, compared Gore's campaign against global warming to elements of the Holocaust, saying: "Al Gore's not going to be rounding up Jews and exterminating them; it is the same tactic however. The goal is different. The goal is globalization. The goal is global carbon tax. The goal is the United Nations running the world."

The ADL denounced Beck's remarks and said they were part of "a troubling epidemic on the airwaves, where comparisons to Hitler and the Holocaust are becoming all-too facile." Foxman asserted: "Glenn Beck's linkage of Hitler's plan to round up and exterminate Jews with Al Gore's efforts to raise awareness of global warming is outrageous, insensitive, and deeply offensive."<sup>7</sup>

Opponents of environmental measures sometimes also refer abusively to the Holocaust. In 2004, Andrei Illarionov, an economic adviser to President Putin, recommended that Russia not sign the Kyoto Protocol, which he called a death pact that would "strangle economic growth and economic activity in countries that accept the protocol's requirements." He likened the protocol to Auschwitz.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Abortion Holocaust**

Opposition to abortion has probably mobilized the best-known distorters of Holocaust history. Pope John Paul II, in his 2005 book *Memory and Identity*, compared abortion to the Holocaust. He wrote that both abortion and the murder of six million Jews were the result of humans under the guise of democracy usurping the "law of God."<sup>9</sup> Then-cardinal Josef Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, claimed at the launching of the Pope's book that the Pope was not equating abortion with the Holocaust.<sup>10</sup>

In another incident the Archbishop of Cologne in Germany, Cardinal Joachim Meisner said he considered women who had had an abortion as the equivalent of mass murderers like Hitler, Stalin, and Herod. Meisner also compared abortion with the Holocaust and the abortion pill with Zyklon B, the gas used by the Nazis in the extermination camps.

Condemnation of the cardinal came even from groups that some may have expected to be supportive. The ecumenical movement Initiative Kirche von unten (IKvu) told the press, "Meisner has completely lost his authority as a bishop and

has publicly done a great wrong to the Catholic Church and to dialogue between Jews and Christians.”

Paul Spiegel, the then president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, said the cardinal had insulted the millions of victims of the Holocaust. He added that “The Catholic Church does not understand or does not want to understand that there is an enormous difference between mass genocide and what women do with their bodies.” Spiegel also linked the pope’s remarks to the earlier statements by Cardinal Meisner.<sup>11</sup>

Jim Hughes of the International Right to Life Federation said, “In today’s relativistic times, it seems the only evil which still touches people whose hearts have grown cold are the atrocities of Hitler. The comparison not only fits like a glove, but is necessary to bring people out of their blissfully ignorant slumber.”<sup>12</sup>

On many other occasions abortion and other phenomena have been compared with genocide and mass murder, rather than specifically with the Holocaust. The Associated Press reported that “Displays of bloody fetuses next to pictures of the collapsing World Trade Center, a black lynching victim hanging from a tree and corpses at a concentration camp were among the disturbing billboards at the University of New Hampshire put up by a national anti-abortion group, the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform.”<sup>13</sup> These billboards liken the genocide of the Holocaust to abortion and victims of 9/11 and racism.

In 2007, during the Republican primaries for the upcoming presidential elections, contender Mike Huckabee linked abortion to the Holocaust in a conference hosted by the Family Research Council. He said: “sometimes we talk about why we’re importing so many people in our work force.... It might be for the last 35 years, we have aborted more than a million people who would have been in our work force had we not had the holocaust of liberalized abortion under a flawed Supreme Court ruling in 1973.”<sup>14</sup>

## **The Animal Holocaust**

One category of Holocaust trivialization that has gained much publicity is comparing the slaughter of animals with the murder of Jews in the Holocaust. It is here that one finds the most detailed and perverse attempts at comparison with the Holocaust. One well-known author who compared Jewish suffering with the promotion of animal rights is the South African-born Nobel Prize winner J. M. Coetzee, who is a vegetarian.

He wrote about the Holocaust:

Of course we cried out in horror when we found out what they had been up to. What a terrible crime to treat human beings like cattle — if we had only known beforehand. But our cry should more accurately have been: What a

terrible crime to treat human beings like units in an industrial process. And that cry should have had a postscript: What a terrible crime — come to think of it, a crime against nature — to treat any living being like a unit in an industrial process.<sup>15</sup>

Much attention was garnered by the exhibition “Holocaust on Your Plate” by the animal rights organization People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). *The Guardian* wrote that the exhibition

juxtaposes harrowing images of people in concentration camps with disturbing pictures of animals on farms. One photograph showing an emaciated man is next to another of a starving cow. Another shows a pile of naked human beings, next to a shot of a heap of pig carcasses.... Other images compare children behind barbed wire with a picture of pigs looking out from behind bars; crowds of people, with cattle being herded into transports; and people crammed into bunks, with chickens in a battery farm.<sup>16</sup>

PETA founder and director Ingrid Newkirk said: “People in their own time can look back and they can so readily condemn the atrocities of the past.”<sup>17</sup> Additionally, PETA representative Mark Prescott wrote in a released statement: “The very same mind-set that made the Holocaust possible — that we can do anything we want to those we decide are ‘different or inferior’—is what allows us to commit atrocities against animals every single day.” Prescott went on to note that members of his family were murdered in the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup>

Many attacked the PETA campaign and advertisements. Foxman stated:

The effort by PETA to compare the deliberate systematic murder of millions of Jews to the issue of animal rights is abhorrent. PETA’s effort to seek “approval” for their “Holocaust on Your Plate” campaign is outrageous, offensive and takeschutzpah to new heights.

...Abusive treatment of animals should be opposed, but cannot and must not be compared to the Holocaust. The uniqueness of human life is the moral underpinning for those who resisted the hatred of Nazis and others ready to commit genocide even today.<sup>19</sup>

Finally Newkirk, on behalf of PETA, apologized, writing:

Our mission is a profoundly human one at its heart, yet we know that we have caused pain. This was never our intention, and we are deeply sorry. We hope that you can understand that although we embarked on the “Holocaust on Your Plate” project with misconceptions about what its impact would be, we always try to act with integrity, with the goal of improving the lives of those who suffer.<sup>20</sup>

Yet Newkirk had already claimed in 1983 that animals were similar to humans, stating: “A rat is a pig is a boy” and “Six million people died in concentration camps, but six billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses.”<sup>21</sup>



In response to the “Holocaust on Your Plate” campaign, Roberta Kalechofsky, a vegetarian and animal rights activist for more than twenty years, published the booklet *Animal Suffering and the Holocaust: The Problem with Comparisons*. She is the founder of Jews for Animal Rights (JAR) and has published numerous articles on the topic of animal suffering from various perspectives. In the booklet she explores this subject relative to that of the Holocaust and remarks:

There is no proof that the flesh of a burning human being is hotter than the flesh of a burning animal. We may think so because the human race has left a record of its suffering, and the animals have not. They have lived their pain, in secret places, with little trace on human consciousness. The human gifts of language and writing — in short, of history — have brought for us greater attention and consciousness of our suffering, while animal suffering is barely accorded knowledge. It is history which separates animal suffering from the Holocaust.<sup>22</sup>

Nobel Prize-winning author Isaac Bashevis Singer had one of his fictional characters, Herman Gombiner, say in the story “The Letter Writer” that toward animals all humans are Nazis, and for animals every day is Treblinka. Karen Davis, who runs a sanctuary for chickens, makes a lengthy case for comparing animal suffering with the Holocaust. It contains one of the more perverse attacks on the memory of Holocaust victims, while referring to poultry:

The methods of the Holocaust exist today in the form of factory farming where billions of innocent, feeling beings are taken from their families, trucked hundreds of miles through all weather extremes, confined in cramped, filthy conditions, and herded to their deaths. During the Holocaust, hundreds of thousands of men, women and children died from heat exhaustion, dehydration, starvation or from freezing to the sides of cattle cars. Those who arrived at the concentration camps alive were forced into cramped bunkers where they lived on top of other dead victims, covered in their own feces and urine.<sup>23</sup>

A similar type of Holocaust trivialization is expressed by Charles Patterson, who according to his online biography is a social historian and a graduate of the Yad Vashem Institute for Holocaust Education.<sup>24</sup> In his book *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, he argues that “A holocaust occurs while meat eaters turn the other way, denying that such horrors could possibly exist. Were the German and Polish people who knew the fate of those trucked to Buchenwald and Treblinka any less moral or guilty than those who comprehend the truth about what really happens to farm animals?”<sup>25</sup>

In essence, the animal rights supporters who trivialize the Holocaust humanize animals to develop their flawed and perverse discourse.

## The Nuclear Holocaust

The aforementioned modes of Holocaust trivialization reflect attitudes that have permeated public discourse to some extent. Three other, less frequently mentioned categories are: the use of nuclear bombs, smoking, and alleged transgressions of international human rights laws.

Nuclear bombing is probably the one threat that comes closest in its effects to the Holocaust though still lacking many of its elements. Probably the best-known use of the expression “nuclear holocaust” was President George W. Bush’s statement in 2007 that Iran’s nuclear program threatened to put “a region already known for instability and violence under the shadow of a nuclear Holocaust.”<sup>26</sup>

The expression “nuclear holocaust” has long been in use. The BBC noted that already in the 1960s government officials at the Scottish office discussed “the somewhat apocalyptic question of how to bury all the dead after a nuclear holocaust, and who would be responsible was at the centre of a flurry of memos and meetings.”<sup>27</sup> In 2002, the BBC reported that during American-South Korean military exercises the North Koreans responded that “the drills were preparations to launch a ‘nuclear holocaust’ on the peninsula.”<sup>28</sup>

## Tobacco and Human Rights Comparisons

Another abusive use of the term Holocaust is the “tobacco Holocaust” developed by Michael Rabinoff in his book, *Ending the Tobacco Holocaust: How Big Tobacco Affects Our Health, Pocketbook, and Political Freedom, and What We Can Do about It*. The author discusses the horrors of tobacco noting that, according to the World Health Organization, one billion people will die from smoking in this century.<sup>29</sup>

The comparison is abusive because the damages of smoking result largely from voluntary actions that people inflict upon themselves; one immediately sees that a main element of the Holocaust is missing — that it was imposed on the victims by others.

In 2005, Prof. F. Rüter of Amsterdam University said the United States’ treatment of the prisoners in Guantánamo resembled the Nazis’ treatment of those they detained. Needless to say, if that were true many, if not most, of the prisoners would have been dead by the time the Dutch academic made this statement, let alone by now.<sup>30</sup>

In 2005, U.S. Democratic Senator Richard J. Durbin compared the alleged abuse of prisoners at Guantánamo with techniques used by “the Nazis, the Soviets and Khmer Rouge.” Under strong Republican attack, he apologized in particular to Holocaust victims and U.S. troops.<sup>31</sup>

## Miscellaneous

There are also more isolated examples of Holocaust trivialization that get media attention because they are made by individuals with public visibility. One such case was when Representative Steve King (R-IA) asserted in 2006 that “illegal immigrants are responsible for the deaths of 25 Americans a day through drug trafficking, drunk driving and sex crimes.”

He added that this was a “slow-motion Holocaust,” and was criticized by the ADL and others. Foxman wrote to King: “Your reference to a ‘slow-motion Holocaust’ demonstrates a profound lack of understanding about the nature and the magnitude of the crimes against humanity undertaken by Hitler and his regime.”<sup>32</sup>

That same year Maryland lieutenant governor Michael S. Steele equated the science involved in embryonic stem cell research with the Nazi experimentation on Jewish prisoners during the Holocaust. He made this comment after being asked about embryonic stem cell research at a meeting with the Baltimore Jewish Council.<sup>33</sup> Steele apologized after he was criticized by the Jewish community and various politicians.<sup>34</sup>

Sometimes prominent figures trivialize the Holocaust by applying it to a particular situation. One person who made light of the Holocaust and was well aware that he was breaking a taboo was former French Socialist prime minister Michel Rocard. He remarked that he and his followers in the Socialist Party said among themselves that, in the party, they were “like those wearing the yellow star” and “this comparison may be repugnant but it describes the atmosphere well.”<sup>35</sup>

## Commercial Trivialization

Holocaust images have crossed into additional realms outside of politics and history such as the fashion world, advertising, and general merchandising. Several examples are notable in both the Western and the Muslim world.

*Cafepress.com* is an American online marketplace with 2.5 million members offering “unique merchandise across virtually every topic.”<sup>36</sup> In 2006, this retailer carried products advertised as “Auschwitz souvenir T-shirts.” One example of these T-shirts included the message: “My grandparents went to Auschwitz...and all I got was this lousy T-shirt.” Across the shirt were the infamous words “Arbeit macht frei” from the entrance gate to Auschwitz. After the ADL contacted *Cafepress.com*, the offensive items were removed.<sup>37</sup>

Zara is a Spanish flagship clothing-chain company with over a thousand stores, including branches in Israel. In fall 2006, a handbag with a swastika design was sold in their stores but, after complaints, the company removed it. Esprit, an apparel manufacturer headquartered in Germany, carried jackets with swastikas

imprinted on the buttons. The company stated that it was an error of production and recalled the jackets and the catalogs carrying pictures of this product.<sup>38</sup>

Although both firms withdrew their offensive products, the fact that such incidents occur in major companies reveals modern-day insensitivity toward anti-Semitic imagery. On the other hand, the fact that they were almost forced to recall and realized this also reflects an awareness of how sensitive the issue is in contemporary society.

An Indian furniture dealer used swastikas and the title “NAZI collection” as part of a bedspread design. In reaction, the Indian Jewish community announced that it would file a suit against the company. The company said it had no intention of insensitivity toward Jews, that NAZI stood for “New Arrival Zone for India,” and that the swastika was originally an ancient Hindu symbol that was appropriated by the Nazis. The latter is true, but the company’s overall claim was made ridiculous by their explanation of the word Nazi.<sup>39</sup>

Nazi symbols and Hitler icons can be found around the world in apparel, restaurants, bars, and as separate items for sale — a global indicator of the phenomenon of Holocaust trivialization for monetary gain. There are too many examples to list them all, including a Nazi chess set for sale in a market in Istanbul,<sup>40</sup> a South Korean Nazi-themed bar,<sup>41</sup> and swastika-print garments worn in London’s trendy Soho neighborhood.<sup>42</sup>

## Advertising

Images of the Holocaust have crossed over into marketing and advertising all over the world. An advertisement for Solo Mobile, a wireless division of Bell Canada that was featured in fifty-one locations around Toronto and Vancouver, depicted a woman wearing a series of buttons.<sup>43</sup> One of the buttons read: “Belsen was a gas.” It referred to a contentious song by the Sex Pistols about Bergen-Belsen, a German concentration camp. These advertisements first went up at Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and were removed after the controversial images were brought to the attention of Bell Canada.<sup>44</sup>

After receiving complaints from the Jewish community, a pizza chain in New Zealand, Hell Pizza, removed billboards of a cartoon-Hitler holding a slice of their pizza and saluting.<sup>45</sup> Kirk MacGibbon of the Auckland-based advertising agency said: “[We] thought that people would be able to see a funny side to a guy doing a ‘Sieg Heil’ salute with a piece of pizza in his hand.... If you laugh at something, you take its power away. But there are certain things we are still unable to laugh about.”<sup>46</sup>

This food company is far from alone. Using Hitler to promote companies and products is a worldwide phenomenon. Conqueror Real Estate, a property firm in Dubai, stood by its national campaign in the United Arab Emirates. The advertisement featured Hitler next to the tagline: “Conqueror, The World Is

Yours.” The general manager of the company said: “I’m making business, I don’t have a political opinion. He’s a famous person — bad or good, I don’t care — and I want to attract the attention of readers. And yesterday we had a lot of response. We had complaints, but it was one of the busiest days of the year, too, so it has an effect.”<sup>47</sup>

### **The Otto Jespersen Affair**

Not all trivializers are repentant when faced with the offense and hurt that their words or actions have stirred up. The Norwegian comedian Otto Jespersen was at the center of a Holocaust-trivializing controversy in Norway.<sup>48</sup> On 27 November 2008, he said on TV 2, the country’s largest commercial television station: “I would like to take the opportunity to remember all the billions of fleas and lice that lost their lives in German gas chambers, without having done anything wrong other than settling on persons of Jewish background.”<sup>49</sup> Much worse, however, was that the director of the television station defended this expression of “satire” from criticism.<sup>50</sup>

A week later Jespersen, in his weekly television appearance, gave a “satiric” monologue of mixed anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli remarks. He concluded by wishing the Jews a happy Christmas. But then as an afterthought, he said that this was not proper as the Jews had murdered Jesus. Two years earlier the same comedian had burned pages from the Hebrew Bible in front of a television camera. It was no reason for the Norwegian television company to terminate his employment. Jespersen also explained that he would not burn the Koran, as he wanted to live longer than a week.<sup>51</sup>

The reaction from Jewish sources, however, was effective. TV2’s attitude toward this anti-Semitic hate speech led an Auschwitz survivor, Imre Hercz, the Jewish community (Det Mosaiske Trossamfund or DMT), and the Norwegian Center against Antisemitism to complain to the Pressens Faglige Utvalg (PFU), a media organization that deals with complaints against journalists and the media. At the end of February 2009, the PFU unanimously decided to condemn Jespersen.<sup>52</sup> It was the first time ever that this body took such a decision regarding ostensible satire.

In May 2006, a Dutch court sentenced a twenty-three-year old student to forty hours of community service for making an anti-Jewish video called “Housewitz.” It invited people to a fictitious techno-music festival that was an Auschwitz-themed party. The video included pictures of gas chambers, with captions such as “hot showers, free of charge.” The student made an apology before the court after he was condemned.<sup>53</sup>

Holocaust trivialization also occurs in art. One much-publicized case concerned German author and film director Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s 1985 play *Der Müll, die Stadt und der Tod* (Garbage, the Town and Death). Its main

character — perhaps modeled on German Jewish communal leader Ignatz Bubis — was a Jewish property speculator about whom one character said, “Had he been gassed, I could sleep more peacefully tonight.” Members of Frankfurt’s Jewish community, including Bubis, occupied the theater’s stage to prevent the performance. Eventually the play was banned in Frankfurt.<sup>54</sup>

### **Jewish Trivialization of the Holocaust**

Some Jews also trivialize the Holocaust. Problems currently facing the Jewish people cannot be compared to the mass murder of six million. An article by Ohr Samayach, a Jerusalem-based Jewish outreach organization, calls the assimilation of Jews “the holocaust of assimilation.”<sup>55</sup> But the voluntary abandonment of Jewish practices and identity is very remote from undergoing an imposed genocide.

Uri Orbach is a well-known Israeli religious journalist who became a member of the Israeli parliament in 2009. He referred to the problem of Jewish intermarriage as the “‘White Holocaust’ or ‘Silent Holocaust,’ the one that annually takes away many thousands of Jews who chose to intermarry.”<sup>56</sup> However, mixed marriages are a free choice *and* part of a process that has nothing of the cruelty of helpless Jews who were murdered because of their identity.

Sarah Silverman, an American Jewish comedian, regularly jokes about the Holocaust. She mentions a Holocaust-survivor grandmother “who went to one of the ‘better’ concentration camps and got a tattoo that read ‘bedazzled.’”<sup>57</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The above examples demonstrate that trivialization occurs in many and varied situations. They show that, contrary to most other distortions of the Holocaust, the trivializers usually do not target Jews.

Holocaust trivialization very often selects a single element that somewhat resembles a component of the Holocaust as the basis of its abusive comparison. The essence of the distortion is that there are so many cruel elements of the Holocaust with which the compared phenomenon has no similarity.

As Holocaust trivialization is almost always based on a superficial use of comparisons, those who confront the trivializers limit themselves to ad hoc refutations of their claims or demands to stop commercialization and other abuses. In many cases, but not always, this leads to apologies by those responsible.

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## Chapter Nine: Obliterating Holocaust Memory

The category of “obliterating Holocaust memory” groups a number of disparate abuses and distortions of Holocaust history. Collective memory is attacked directly and indirectly. One type of the former is the besmirching and destruction of memorials. Another is disturbing Holocaust ceremonies. A further one is trying to turn such public ceremonies into events that also — and sometimes even only — memorialize other historical events.

Another mode of obliterating Holocaust memory is “Holocaust silencing.” This consists of stating that Jews mention the Holocaust too often. When discussing this with Germans, they often agree that many of their friends say “the Holocaust is a chapter that should be closed.” One more approach to try and obliterate Holocaust memory is to claim that Jews abuse it for various purposes including political ones.

Indirect attacks on Holocaust remembrance involve the fading away of Jewish memorial sites. This particularly occurs in the former communist countries. It may include the pulling down of former Jewish public buildings for new construction without leaving a memorial plaque on the location. Another example is the removal of Jewish cemeteries for public or commercial purposes.

Contrary to most direct attacks, the indirect ones do not necessarily derive from anti-Semitic motives. They may stem from a lack of sensitivity to the importance of commemoration and preservation, or from the desire to cash in on business opportunities.

### **Destroying and Besmirching Memorials**

There is a long list of Holocaust memorials that have been intentionally besmirched or destroyed. Only a few can be mentioned here.

In April 2000, the Holocaust Memorial in Salonika to the fifty thousand Jewish inhabitants deported and murdered during the Nazi era was desecrated.<sup>1</sup> In May 2000, anti-Semitic slogans such as “Juden Raus” and SS symbols appeared on the Holocaust memorial in Athens.<sup>2</sup> The Holocaust monument in Kastoria was also daubed with swastikas.<sup>3</sup>

On 15 April 2002 — one day after a Holocaust commemoration service at the monument — the Holocaust memorial in Salonika was again desecrated with red paint to suggest bloodshed.<sup>4</sup> In July 2002, parts of the Holocaust memorial in Rhodes were irreversibly destroyed. It had only been officially unveiled a few

weeks earlier on 23 June. The Jewish community had reported that the harassment of the workers during the monument's construction necessitated twenty-four-hour police protection.<sup>5</sup> In both 2002 and 2004, the Holocaust memorial in the northern Greek city of Drama was daubed with anti-Semitic slogans.<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes individuals take initiatives to establish memorials. In 1990, French Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld put up his own memorial plaque in the Hôtel du Parc in Vichy, home of Pétain's wartime government. He did not request permission because he knew it would not have been granted. The residents of the apartments into which the hotel had been converted were outraged, and the plaque was defaced. In July 2001, Klarsfeld "organized a solid stone memorial facing the former hotel. This time he informed the municipality, who dared not refuse. Klarsfeld's memorial bears witness to the 75,000 Jews deported from France. This cenotaph, too, is regularly attacked. The desecrators are never pursued."<sup>7</sup>

### **Disrupting Memorial Meetings**

In various places, World War II or Holocaust memorial ceremonies have been disturbed. On 4 May 2003 — the Netherlands' National Memorial Day for the victims of World War II — several ceremonies in Amsterdam were disrupted. In one area of the city, during the two minutes of silence for remembering the dead, youngsters shouted about twenty times "Jews have to be killed!" The perpetrators were young Dutchmen of Moroccan descent. In another part of town, Moroccan youngsters played soccer with the wreaths that had been laid on the memorial.<sup>8</sup>

On 9 November 2003, a memorial meeting for Kristallnacht in Vienna was disrupted by the Sedunia group, who shouted through loudspeakers. They had to be pushed away by the participants of the meeting. Sedunia is an organization of Muslim immigrants or their progeny as well as Austrian converts to Islam.<sup>9</sup>

In May 2009, a group of five teenagers gave Nazi salutes and shouted "Heil Hitler" at the Ebensee concentration camp — which had been a satellite of the Mauthausen camp. This incident took place before a commemoration of the sixty-first anniversary of the liberation of the Austrian concentration camps. Regional police chief Alois Lissl said the actions were a "clear violation of the law" banning neo-Nazi activities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Voiding Holocaust Ceremonies of Content**

Yet another attempt to obliterate Holocaust memory by distorting its meaning came from the Muslim Council of Britain. In January 2005, the organization's secretary-general Iqbal Sacranie wrote to the British minister Charles Clarke that his organization would not attend the commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz unless it included the "holocaust" of the Palestinian intifada.<sup>11</sup>

In September of that year, a committee of Muslim advisers to Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested that Holocaust Memorial Day be abolished and replaced by a Genocide Day that would also commemorate the mass murder of Muslims in Palestine, Chechnya, and Bosnia.<sup>12</sup>

For six years the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the largest Muslim organization in the country, continued to boycott Holocaust Memorial Day. One of those who condemned the MCB for this was British minister Ruth Kelly, when she held the position of communities' secretary. Finally, at the end of 2007, the MCB abandoned this position. Even then the organization said they would have preferred to have the day replaced by a genocide memorial day.<sup>13</sup>

Under Muslim influence, the Bolton local council did not hold Holocaust Memorial Day in 2007 and replaced it with a Genocide Memorial Day. The following year they marked both.<sup>14</sup> The Holocaust-inversion attempt to commemorate the "Palestinian genocide" on the official Spanish Holocaust Memorial Day was mentioned earlier.

## Silencing Holocaust Memory

Another tool of those who wish to silence Holocaust memory is claiming that Jews mention the Holocaust too much. Before Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2004, a survey was released that was conducted by the Ipsos Research Institute for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in Italy, France, Belgium, Austria, Spain, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, and Britain. Of those polled, 35 percent believed that Jews should stop "playing the victim" regarding the Holocaust and its persecutions of sixty years ago. The poll found that, in all countries, anti-Semitic sentiment paralleled anti-Israeli sentiment.<sup>15</sup>

The German GMF poll found that 62 percent of Germans are fed up with hearing about the German crimes against the Jews.<sup>16</sup> This is not only a German attitude. A 2005 ADL survey shows that it is widespread. Large portions of the European public believe that Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust. Overall, 42 percent of those surveyed believe this is "probably true." Indeed, a plurality of respondents in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland believe this notion to be true.<sup>17</sup>

A 2007 ADL survey in five European countries confirmed that large parts of the population consider it "probably true" that "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust." The figures were 40 percent in France (compared to 34 percent in 2005), 45 percent in Germany (48 percent in 2005), 46 percent in Italy (49 percent in 2005), 46 percent in Spain (no change), and 58 percent in Poland (52 percent in 2005).<sup>18</sup>

Sergio Romano, one of Italy's foremost mainstream historians, insinuated in his book *A Letter to a Jewish Friend* that the Jews cause renewed anti-Semitism

by emphasizing Holocaust remembrance. This is an innovative mutation of the old canard that anti-Semitism is the result of Jewish behavior.<sup>19</sup>

### Ukrainian Party Complains

Another type of Holocaust silencing occurred in the Ukrainian town of Lviv at the end of 2008. There members of the Freedom Party in the city council asked the prosecutor's office to start an inquiry against the Jewish Lviv Hased Ariye organization. They complained that it had screened a movie titled *Two Tangos* on the Holocaust in the Ukraine. It showed that the majority of Jews in Lviv were murdered by Germans with the assistance of local collaborators. The council members said this was ethnic incitement and also claimed that many Jewish Soviet officials were responsible for the famine under the Soviet regime in 1932–1933.<sup>20</sup>

The Freedom Party calls for “Ukraine for the Ukrainians.” The party's publications say that a disproportionately large percentage of the wealth of the country is in the hands of non-Ukrainians. Its leader Oleh Tyahnybok has called for “merciless” action against such Jews and Russians.

In the present European reality, the claim that Jews overly mention the Holocaust can easily be countered by saying: “This is necessary not because of the past but because of the future. Although it is not probable that Europeans will murder large number of Jews again, a significant number might help in various ways those who want to do so, namely radicals and their sympathizers in the Arab and Muslim world.”

In various countries some Muslim parents and children oppose the teaching of the Holocaust in schools. In 2005, Fenny Brinkman, who taught for some time at an Amsterdam Muslim school, published a book on her experiences there titled *Haram* (Impure). She tells how a colleague taught about the Holocaust in one of the classes. The next day several fathers complained about it. The head of the school then decided that in the future, attention would only be given to the persecution of Gypsies because Jews were evil people.<sup>21</sup>

Tossavainen writes about Sweden: “One Holocaust survivor, who gives lectures at schools all over the country about his experiences during the Shoah, tells of Arab and Muslim pupils who stay away from his talks, sometimes at their parents' request. Pupils, he says, who do attend rarely express hostility, but those who do are exclusively ‘of Middle Eastern origin.’”

Tossavainen tells of a case that also has to be categorized as Holocaust promotion. After his lectures a Swedish survivor usually asks for the listeners' evaluations, and once a school pupil from an Iraqi family wrote:

That, which happened in the Second World War I think it was a good thing of Hitler to treat the Jews that way because I hate Jews. After the war they

tried to get a country because they didn't have a country and so they took a part of Palestine and they created little Israel because Hitler threw them out of every country and that thing today [the lecture by the survivor] was only crap. The film was bad and I think what Hitler did to the Jews served them right and I don't care what you [the survivor] talked about and I wish that the Palestinian people kill all the Jews. Jews are the most disgusting people in the world and the biggest cowards and because of what happened today I wasn't going to come to school because an ugly Jew comes to school.<sup>22</sup>

### **Accusing Jews of Holocaust-Memory Abuse**

Another way to try to silence Jews is to claim that they abuse the Holocaust for a multitude of other purposes. A major proponent of this is Norman Finkelstein, formerly an assistant professor at DePaul University in Chicago. One of his books is titled *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*.<sup>23</sup>

Israeli historian Ronald Zweig, who reviewed the book, wrote:

Finkelstein argues that the contemporary use of the Holocaust has created an entire "industry" which, in the best manner of exploitative capitalism, is not only politically useful but also financially rewarding. Himself Jewish and the son of Holocaust survivors, Finkelstein could allow himself to articulate what many people believe but do not dare say in public. This is especially true in Britain, where socialist circles are anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian de rigueur but struggle to avoid being tarred with the brush of anti-Semitism.

The core of Finkelstein's argument is that a cabal of Jewish leaders conspired to extort money from European governments, under the pretext of claiming material compensation for the losses of the Holocaust and for the benefit of the survivors. Once their claims were successful, these organizations then kept the money to themselves and paid the survivors only a pittance. Summarized in this form, the accusation is so unbelievably and totally without foundation that I looked once again at the third chapter of *The Holocaust Industry* to ensure that I had not parodied Finkelstein's argument. But the summary fairly represents what he wrote.<sup>24</sup>

### **Indirect Attacks**

Not only the existence of Jewish memorials, but also that of formerly Jewish sites, plays an important role in making people recall the mass murder of the Jews during the Holocaust. This is particularly the case in the former communist countries where the great majority of Jews were murdered. Of the remainder many



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# Chapter Ten:

## The Importance of Apologies

In the struggle against Holocaust distorters, particular attention should be given to the official apologies by nations and institutions that were perpetrators, accomplices, or bystanders in the Holocaust. A few examples will illustrate their importance.

Apologies to a large extent bring closure to part of the debate. Those who represent the ones who committed crimes against humanity, collaborated, or were negligent on the one hand, and those who represent the victims on the other, have jointly agreed on their interpretation of part of the past. Apologies for past injustice remain important for future generations in particular if made by governments and parliaments, as one can refer to them in future debates.

Such steps are often also accompanied by additional documentation on prewar, wartime, and postwar failures. These documents will remain as well for future generations, after all survivors have passed away.<sup>1</sup> Although official admissions of a nation's Holocaust crimes or shortcomings are also important, apologies lend even greater emphasis to such confessions.

### **Austria**

Several declarations of former Austrian leaders, such as Prime Ministers Franz Vranitzky<sup>2</sup> and Victor Klima<sup>3</sup> as well as President Thomas Klestil,<sup>4</sup> reveal the paradigmatic sequence of apologies for prewar, wartime, and postwar failures: relating the facts, explaining who failed, taking responsibility for the failures, apologizing and stating that these apologies are belated, analyzing what risks the past derelictions pose for today, and finally suggesting what these apologies mean regarding steps to take for the future.

Klima said at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in January 2000:

In the awareness of both historical truths — that Austrians were victims and that they were perpetrators — and in view of our responsibility for the future, there must be no doubt about the continuation of the critical confrontation with the Nazi past.... Only if we can explain to the coming generations what happened and how it could happen, can we develop in them the ability to resist any form of inhuman ideologies.... We need symbolic acts of common remembrance and collective warning never again to stray from the path of democracy and freedom.<sup>5</sup>



Stressing the truth once again in 2006, Austrian president Heinz Fischer said in an interview that his country's 1955 Declaration of Independence falsely represented Austria as a victim of the Nazis rather than as a coperpetrator of crimes. He also referred to the Moscow Declaration of 1943, in which the Allied leaders asserted that Austria was the first victim of National Socialism. This, he noted, led to a situation where the perpetrator-role of many Austrians was set aside for a long time.<sup>6</sup>

## France

On 16 July 1995, French president Jacques Chirac finally admitted France's role in the murder of Jews, whom it had not protected and instead delivered to their executioners.<sup>7</sup> This was the more important as his Socialist predecessor François Mitterrand had not wanted to admit postwar France's responsibility for the Vichy government's crimes.<sup>8</sup>

Chirac, when he spoke at a memorial ceremony in the Paris stadium Vélodrome d'Hiver where the Jews detained in the first French roundup had been held, stopped short of an apology. He mentioned the assistance France had given the Nazis in arresting Jews as a step on the way to their murder: "France, the homeland of Light and Human Rights, land of welcome and asylum, France, that day committed the irremediable. It broke its word and delivered those it protected to their executioners." He added: "We maintain toward them an unforgivable debt."<sup>9</sup>

Two years later, Socialist prime minister Lionel Jospin was even more explicit. He said the initial arrests were "decided, planned, and realized by Frenchmen. Politicians, administrators, policemen, and gendarmes took part in them. Not even one German soldier was necessary to carry out this disgrace."<sup>10</sup>

## Mitterrand's Denial

These admissions of responsibility came after more than fifty years of French denial of its guilt. Canadian Holocaust scholar Michael Marrus has pointed out that, at Nuremberg, most prosecutors spoke in detail about the suffering of the Jews. He added that

there was one exception to the respectful inclusion of the fate of European Jewry. Remarkably, in an introductory speech that lasted for several hours and treated Nazi criminality in the most wide-ranging fashion — and which was meant to deal with both war crimes and crimes against humanity — François de Menthon [the French prosecutor] devoted only a single sentence to Jews, a somewhat off-target reference to Nazi persecutions: "It is also known

that racial discriminations were provoked against citizens of the occupied countries who were catalogued as Jews, measures particularly hateful, damaging to their personal rights and human dignity.” The lapse is curious, though not untypical, probably relating to the unease in postwar France and elsewhere on Jewish issues, and to distortions of the popular memory having to do with wartime collaboration and popular antisemitism.<sup>11</sup>

Beker said that Mitterrand was “a typical example of France’s longstanding inability to confront this indelible stain on its history. In 1994 Pierre Péan published a study which proved that, in his youth, Mitterrand had been an extreme rightist, employed within Vichy structures. Later he changed sides and joined the Resistance.”

Beker adds: “Mitterrand even voiced his opinion that reopening unhealed wounds was wrong. He claimed it was bad for France’s memory and sense of cohesiveness. The press and public intellectuals collaborated with this attitude, both out of respect for Mitterrand and an inability to confront their country’s complicity in what had happened.”<sup>12</sup>

Trigano says that Mitterrand

had a rather ambiguous personality. He systematically refused to discuss this issue, not wanting to admit that the French Republic was responsible for Vichy’s crimes. He refused to equate the Vichy regime with the French Republic, arguing that the latter should therefore not assume its responsibility.

This argument — that the Republic cannot be guilty as it did not betray the Jews — was false. The Third Republic’s parliament had voted, with a great majority, to give Pétain absolute powers. He thus arrived at the head of the Vichy regime democratically and not by a coup d’état. Yet it remained inconceivable for many decades that the Republic could be guilty, irrespective of whether it was republican, monarchical or fascist.<sup>13</sup>

The lengthy denial of France’s responsibility for part of the wartime persecution of the Jews emphasizes the importance of the country’s belated admission of responsibility. This was further underlined by a new, ongoing eruption of anti-Semitism in France at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Jospin government tried to hide it from the public. The Jewish community, however, missed the opportunity to stress that this represented a new denial of the truth by a French government.

At the beginning of 2003, there were anti-Israeli boycott attempts at French universities. Philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy made the connection with the attitude toward wartime behavior and said: “The French university is the only major institution that has not repented its mistakes under the Vichy regime. In this context the boycott [of Israeli universities] by Paris 6 seems even more shameful.”<sup>14</sup>

## The French Church

The climate created in France by Chirac's declaration of 1995 facilitated other important statements. In autumn 1997, the Catholic bishops issued a *Declaration of Repentance*. Later that year Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger published a text on the unique character of the Holocaust.

Trigano observes that there was significant opposition to these declarations; nor were they entirely altruistic.

It is not generally known, but it is none the less recognized by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, that the *Declaration of Repentance* issued by the Catholic episcopate was followed by a campaign of protest letters from simple believers to their bishops, stigmatizing their Church's unwarranted action, and denying any Church responsibility for the fate of the Jews. Even Jacques Chirac's actions cannot be totally separated from their French political context and the need to distinguish the liberal right from any connection with Le Pen.<sup>15</sup>

Yet admitting responsibility is no substitute for apologies. At a time, however, when the president of Iran and many others, not only in the Arab and Muslim world, unashamedly deny the Holocaust while at the same time promoting a new one, official apologies and their historic weight assume an even greater importance than in the past.

## Denmark

One of the countries that has a relatively good Holocaust record is Denmark. Yet there are also negative elements in its World War II history. As Vilhjálmur Órn Vilhjálmsson and Bent Blüdnikow note, "new findings over the past decade have revealed problematic aspects of Denmark's World War II legacy. Having been neglected for various reasons, these are finally emerging and being addressed."<sup>16</sup>

When Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen spoke at a ceremony at a war monument in Copenhagen in May 2006, he officially apologized for the extradition of innocent people, Jews and others, to Germany during the war. He said:

The memory of the shady sides of the occupation period also belongs to the commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation. This is why I want...on behalf [of] the government and therefore of the Danish state to express my regret and apologies for these acts. An apology cannot change history, but it can contribute to recognize mistakes made in history and hopefully help future generations to avoid similar mistakes.

In an interview with the daily *Berlingske Tidende*, Rasmussen attacked the policy of Denmark's wartime collaboration with Nazi Germany. He called this policy

“naïve” and “dishonorable.” He condemned the “elite then in power, which was not just neutral, but led an extremely active policy of accommodation, with wide-reaching consequences for Jewish refugees and forced labourers.... I would even go as far as to say that Denmark, by collaborating as we did, allowed Germany to free up resources to throw onto the battlefields of Europe.”<sup>17</sup>

## **Belgium**

One politician who has very consciously decided to apologize for the wartime failures of his predecessors is the former Belgian liberal prime minister Guy Verhofstadt. On 8 May 2007, he spoke at a ceremony in honor of the Righteous Gentiles in Belgium, saying:

Today the report...on the responsibilities of the Belgian authorities in the Holocaust is presented as a book. This report states that the authorities were too docile. Worse even, in a number of cases they even participated in the deportation and the persecution of the Jews in Belgium during the Nazi occupation.

It is a black page in the history of our country. We do not want to just turn this page. I want today to repeat the apologies which I expressed in 2002 in Mechelen on the occasion of 60 years since the deportation of Jews from Belgium. I repeated those apologies in 2005 at Yad Vashem in front of the international community. It is only by recognizing the responsibility of the then-authorities that we can build a future where this never happens again.<sup>18</sup>

In 2007, Patrick Janssens, the Socialist mayor of Antwerp, apologized for the involvement of the Antwerp municipality in the persecution of the Jews during the war. For instance, during the roundup of the Jews in the summer of 1942, more than 1,200 Jews were arrested. The Germans had only asked for 1,000 Jews to be picked up. Antwerp policemen actively helped in gathering up the Jews. In Brussels, however, the neighborhood mayors refused to collaborate with the Germans.

Janssens said this was one of the blackest pages in the history of the city: “We have to admit today that the municipal authorities and the police played an active role in those dramatic days.”<sup>19</sup>

## **The Dutch Government’s Position**

The Dutch government’s attitude is remote from that of Belgium. The Dutch wartime government in exile in London largely ignored the persecution of the country’s Jewish citizens even when they were sent to their death. Successive Dutch governments ignored the misbehavior of their wartime predecessors. In

2000, the Dutch government apologized for the misbehavior in the restitution process after the war. Yet it has never expressed its apologies for the total disinterest in the fate of the Dutch Jews during the war by the Dutch government in exile in London.

Such apologies usually do not come by themselves. They are the result of the Jewish community or organizations requesting that they are made. The Dutch Jewish community, however, has not made significant efforts to achieve this.

There are several former Dutch cabinet members who would support such an apology. For instance, former deputy prime minister and finance minister Gerrit Zalm said, "I wouldn't have had any difficulty in making such an apology. If the CJO [the umbrella body of the Dutch Jewish community] would raise this issue now, I would support it."<sup>20</sup>

### **Will the Dutch Government Ever Apologize?**

The Dutch historian Dienke Hondius, who has researched the reception of the Holocaust survivors in Dutch postwar society, mentions that the Dutch government in exile in London did not do the little it could have to help Jews. It rejected requests for help from Jews who had escaped from Holland to elsewhere during the war.<sup>21</sup>

Hondius writes, based on earlier research by Lou de Jong:

The persecution of the Jews was never on the agenda of the exiled Dutch cabinet during the war years. Although the deportations had started in July 1942, it took more than a year and a half before the Dutch government officially contacted the Polish government-in-exile for information about Dutch deportees in Poland. The lengthy delay is all the more significant given the fact that both governments were housed in the same building, Stratton House in London.<sup>22</sup>

Until now it seemed that only ongoing third-party exposure of the issue might lead the Dutch government finally to apologize. The precedent of the Dutch Railways, as shown below, demonstrates that there is also another possibility: a feeling of moral commitment to do so. Perhaps one day there will be a Dutch prime minister who will present his apologies to the Jewish community, not because he is under pressure but because he has the inner need to admit to the guilt of the Dutch wartime government.

### **The Dutch Railways Apologizes**

One interesting case of apologies in recent years concerns the Dutch Railways. On 29 September 2005, Aad Veenman, president of the Nederlandse Spoorwegen

(NS, Dutch Railways), unexpectedly offered an apology to the Jewish community for his company's behavior during the war.<sup>23</sup> Until then, the Dutch Railways management had denied that it would apologize for the services its wartime predecessors had provided, without any protest, in the deportation process of most of Dutch Jewry.

On German orders, the railways had transported the Dutch Jews to the transit camp Westerbork in the eastern part of the country. A subsidiary of Dutch Railways also used Jews confined in the camp as forced laborers to construct a railway line to Westerbork to facilitate the transport of the detained Jews.

Almost all Jews in Westerbork were deported by Dutch Railways in cattle wagons on the first part of their journey to what would become for the overwhelming majority the places of their murder, mainly the extermination camps Auschwitz and Sobibor. Dutch engine drivers drove these trains to Nieuweschans at the Dutch-German border, where German drivers took over. Approximately 105,000 Jews were sent eastward, of whom more than 100,000 were murdered.

Veenman explained his decision to apologize:

By defining our role at that time, we can close a painful chapter in our history. We can now face each other in a better way and with renewed confidence. Furthermore we want, together with the Dutch Jewish community, to focus on the future of our community. For instance, to warn Dutch youngsters about the hatred and fascism that continually reappear in new forms. In this way our experiences from the past find a meaningful place in the present. Clarity and transparency provide one with equilibrium. It typifies a mature organization, with an important public role at the center of society.

Veenman also mentioned that he had hesitated about whether to apologize. "Should the NS today present its apologies?... It can be considered as another contribution to the 'culture of being apologetic about everything,' and about a subject that is so precarious and calls up so many emotions, both in Dutch society and in our company. Perhaps whatever one might do, will not be right."

He concluded: "We are talking more than sixty years after the events. I can only make statements that fit in today's context. Therefore, from the depth of my heart, and in all humility, on behalf of Dutch Railways I offer my sincere apologies to the Jewish community and other groups concerned."<sup>24</sup>

## **Eastern Europe**

Apologies from Eastern European governments require separate study. Since the fall of communism, these countries have developed new collective memories. Zuroff states that "invariably, the first step that had to be taken in the process

of facing the past was to acknowledge the crimes of the Holocaust and the participation of locals in the murder of Jews. In many instances such an apology was made in the framework of a visit by the head of state to Israel, although there were also cases in which the local parliament passed such a resolution.”

He observes that these statements

were often distinctly unpopular and severely criticized at home, where nationalist and other elements either denied the historical facts or asserted that reciprocal apologies for crimes by Jewish Communists should have been made by Israeli leaders. For example, both [Prime Minister] Slezevicius and [President] Brazauskas were roundly criticized for their apologies by a wide spectrum of Lithuanian public opinion, as was Polish President Lech Walesa for asking for forgiveness from the podium of the Israeli Knesset.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Gyula Horn was sued by the publisher of a local edition of *Mein Kampf*, who argued that by apologizing for Hungarian Holocaust crimes the premier had violated his personal rights by suggesting that he was a member of a guilty nation.<sup>25</sup>

Several Hungarian prime ministers have either confirmed the country’s war crimes or have expressed apologies. When the Budapest Holocaust Museum and Documentation Center was inaugurated in 2004, the then prime minister Péter Medgyessy said: “I declare that this heinous crime was committed by Hungarians against Hungarians. There is no excuse or explanation.... Forgetting is the ally of tyranny; forgiveness and remembrance — of freedom. We have a task to search and tell the truth.”<sup>26</sup>

On 5 May 2005, then-prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsany spoke at the Auschwitz Holocaust Memorial Ceremony. He quoted the Nobel Prize-winning Hungarian author Imre Kertesz: “‘Survivors must come to terms with the fact that with every passing year their ever-weakened hands will lose their grip on Auschwitz. But to whom will Auschwitz belong?’ he asks and then answers it right away: ‘There’s no question it will belong to the next generations, provided, of course, they stake a claim to it.’”

Gyurcsany added:

Those who would deny Auschwitz do not only deny the Holocaust but also the future. Let us defend this future, our children, our humanity. I am standing here as a repentant and grieving fellow citizen, a Hungarian and European survivor, who bows his head before Hungarians, Europeans, Hungarian and European Jews. Also, before the memory of your and our loved ones. Please forgive us all.<sup>27</sup>

## Poland

Apologies give an extra emphasis in a debate in which those who support the truth are engaged against those who oppose it. At the ceremony on 10 July 2001 in memory of the massacre of the Jews of Jedwabne by their Polish neighbors, Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski said:

Thanks to the great national debate on the crime of 10 July 1941, much has changed in our lives in this year 2001, the first year of the new millennium. We have come to realize our responsibilities for our attitudes toward the black pages of our history. We have understood that those who counsel the nation to reject this past serve the nation ill. Such a posture leads to moral destruction. . . . We express our pain and shame and give expression to our determination in seeking to learn the truth. We express our courage to overcome the bad past and our unbending will for understanding and harmony. Because of this crime we should beg the shadows of the dead and their families' forgiveness. Because of that, today, as a citizen and the President of the Polish Republic, I apologize. I apologize in the name of those Poles whose conscience is moved by the crime. In name of those who believe that one cannot be proud of the magnificent Polish history without feeling simultaneously pain and shame for wrongs that Poles caused to others.<sup>28</sup>

## Bulgaria

During a visit to Israel in March 2008, Bulgarian president Georgi Parvanov accepted responsibility for the genocide of eleven thousand Jews living in the areas of Thrace in Greece and Macedonia in Yugoslavia, which had been annexed to Bulgaria in 1941. These people were arrested by Bulgarian police on German orders. They were then transported to Treblinka where they were murdered. Bulgaria saved the forty-eight thousand Jews who had been living in Bulgaria proper, despite the Germans' demand that they also be deported to the death camps.

During earlier visits to Israel, Bulgarian leaders had refused to take responsibility for the rounding-up of the Jews in the annexed territories. Parvanov said, in a ceremony at the Israeli president's residence, "When we express justifiable pride at what we have done to save Jews, we do not forget that at the same time there was an anti-Semitic regime in Bulgaria and we do not shirk our responsibility for the fate of more than 11,000 Jews who were deported from Thrace and Macedonia to death camps."<sup>29</sup>

A year earlier, also at the president's residence, Latvian president Vaira Vike-Freiberga had apologized for her country's war crimes against Jews, saying: "We are deeply sorry about the participation of Latvia in the atrocities of the Holocaust."<sup>30</sup>



## **Croatia**

In 2001, Stjepan Mesic, president of Croatia, said to the Knesset, Israel's parliament:

I am standing before you as the first President of the Republic of Croatia to visit the State of Israel. I am profoundly aware of the historic significance of this moment, and sincerely grateful for the opportunity given me to address you. This is the proper place and the proper occasion to get rid of the ballast of the past, which placed a strain on our relations over the last years. This is the proper time and place for saying what has to be said so that Israel can accept my country as a sincere friend and, I hope, future partner — not only in the interest of our two countries, but also in the interest of security and peace in the region and worldwide. What I am going to say, I will say with complete openness and sincerely, because in this regard there is not and there should not be place for any unclarities or doubts.

I am speaking on behalf of democratic Croatia, which upholds the traditions of antifascist and freedom-loving Croatia from the times of the Second World War. I am speaking on behalf of that Croatia which bows with respect and reverence to the memory of the millions of the victims of the Holocaust. Let me, first of all, repeat literally what I said yesterday to President Katsav: I am using every opportunity to ask for forgiveness from all those who were harmed by the Croats at any time. Of course — from Jews in the first place.

Mesic also referred to the postcommunist period, saying:

Over a short period of time, in the struggle for independence and directly thereafter, the tragically misdesigned concept of unity of all Croats resulted, on the one hand, in the denial of the dark pages of our history, and, on the other, in the search for models precisely in such pages. That time passed and will not come back. We are fully aware of our responsibility in investigating, trying and convicting war criminals, regardless of their nationality and of the time when those crimes were committed. There is never too late for trying war criminals.<sup>31</sup>

Several other Eastern European countries have expressed apologies for their crimes against the Jews during World War II.

## **The Catholic Church**

A number of churches and institutions have also grappled with their attitude toward the Jews during the Holocaust. Some have made formal apologies. For others the situation is more complex, particularly for the Catholic Church. Many scholars consider that the hate and discriminatory elements in its teachings over

the centuries made a major contribution to the societal environment in which the Holocaust became possible. The issue that the New Testament itself is anti-Semitic has been the subject of numerous theological debates.<sup>32</sup>

Pieter van der Horst, a Dutch expert in early Christian and Jewish studies says: “The New Testament has several anti-Semitic elements in its chronologically latest documents. The Gospel of John has Jesus call the Jews ‘sons of the devil.’ There is also a case of an anti-Jewish outburst by the Apostle Paul.” He adds: “Toward the end of the fourth century, much-publicized sermons of the church father John Chrysostom combined Christian anti-Jewish elements derived from the New Testament with earlier pagan ones. These themes were gradually integrated into the anti-Jewish discourse of the church.”<sup>33</sup>

The Second Vatican Council showed a change in attitude toward the Jews. In 1965, Pope Paul VI proclaimed the *Nostra Aetate*, a declaration on the Church’s relation to non-Christian religions. Regarding the Jews this text still put blame on certain Jews living at the time of Jesus, while at the same time freeing later generations from it:

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.

In the same text the pope added: “Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel’s spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.”<sup>34</sup>

## Reflection on the Shoah

In 1998, the Church’s Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews published a document titled “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah.” It said, among other things, “We would risk causing the victims of the most atrocious deaths to die again if we do not have an ardent desire for justice, if we do not commit ourselves to ensure that evil does not prevail over good as it did for millions of the children of the Jewish people.... Humanity cannot permit all that to happen again.”<sup>35</sup>

In March 2000, during Pope John Paul II’s visit to Israel, he expressed grief at the Christian persecution of Jews. He said, “I assure the Jewish people that the Catholic Church...is deeply saddened by the hatred, acts of persecution and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews by Christians at any time and in any place.”<sup>36</sup>

In autumn 1997, as aforementioned, the French Catholic bishops had issued a *Declaration of Repentance*. In 2000, the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland prepared a letter of apology that was read in the Polish churches. They asked forgiveness for historical failings among the clergy and their followers, including the tolerance of anti-Semitism. They added that this was despite the noble efforts made by some Poles to save Jews during World War II.<sup>37</sup>

## Protestant Churches

The Synod of the Evangelical Church in the German Rhineland area had taken a much clearer position in 1980, stating: “We confess, with dismay, the co-responsibility and guilt of German Christianity for the Holocaust.”<sup>38</sup> Various other European Protestant churches have apologized in different ways.

Finland had until a few years ago the reputation of a country that protected all its Jews except for eight Central European Jewish refugees who were handed over in November 1942 to the Gestapo in Estonia. Seven of them perished in concentration camps.

Historian Serah Beizer says:

Almost fifty-eight years after the deportation, in 2000, a monument to their memory was set up in Helsinki harbor. The then prime minister, Paavo Lipponen, apologized to the Jewish community. It also took until 2000 for the Evangelical Lutheran Church to make an official statement on this matter. This text, approved by its synod, stated: “The church admits to having remained silent about the persecution of the Jews and wishes to apologize to the Jewish community for this.... The handover, even of one single Jew was a sin...more instruction on Judaism and the common roots of Judaism and Christianity...should be given in the parishes.” The church also declared that Luther’s attitude toward Judaism “should be reexamined.”

The image of Finland’s war record toward Jews has changed somewhat since it became known that it had handed over more than two thousand Russian prisoners of war to the Germans among whom were an unknown number of Jews. Their fate is not known but it can be assumed that most if not all perished or were murdered.<sup>39</sup>

## Other Institutions

Various other institutions have admitted their failures during World War II. In a press conference in 1995, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Cornelio Sommaruga, for the first time briefly mentioned the institution’s moral failure with regard to the Holocaust. He said this was because the Red

Cross “did not succeed in moving beyond the limited legal framework established by the States. Today’s ICRC can only regret the possible omissions and errors of the past!”<sup>40</sup>

In 1997, the director of archives of the International Red Cross, George Willemin, repeated that his organization had morally failed during World War II, when he participated in a ceremony at Yad Vashem where he handed over sixty thousand pages of Red Cross documents to be given to three Jewish museums: Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, and the Center for Jewish Documentation in Paris. Among the Red Cross’s many failures toward the Jews was that as late as 1944 it had reported that allegations of extermination camps were unfounded.<sup>41</sup>

Another body among an increasing number acknowledging their Nazi past is the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. In 2007, on the occasion of its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it performed under the British-born conductor Sir Simon Rattle. The program consisted of works banned as “degenerate” by Hitler. Seventy years earlier the orchestra had played birthday concerts for Hitler under the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler.<sup>42</sup>

## **The Debate about Apologies**

As World War II and the Holocaust recede in time, bringing memory more in line with history becomes an increasingly important challenge. In this context, apologies such as those of the Dutch Railways are of great significance. They represent an unequivocal declaration of failure and guilt toward Jewish compatriots. Such apologies do not end the historical debate but channel its continuation within an agreed normative framework.<sup>43</sup>

Some critics argue that Jews should not request apologies because deciding whether or not to apologize is a matter of conscience. Others claim that those who apologize are not the ones who are guilty. Although that is true, they do, however, represent the same institutions. Yet other critics say that many of the apologies made — for instance, those during the restitution negotiations — were not morally motivated, but rather reflected political pressure or fear of economic boycotts in the United States.

One such critic is Bauer, who stated:

The apologies of some Eastern European governments are insignificant symbolic acts, mainly designed to help those countries become NATO members. Those in power today are not the ones who murdered 6 million Jews. They can not request forgiveness for a generation to which they do not belong and which did not authorize them to seek forgiveness. Who is guilty? Not they, but those who murdered the Jews at the time. What price does an Austrian Chancellor have to pay when he finally apologizes on behalf of

Austria? He is not the spokesman of the Austrian mass murderers, because he opposes their mass murders.<sup>44</sup>

While these arguments have their validity, they do not address the role these apologies play as potential anchors in collective memory. Official national apologies will be preserved in archives and become an important source for historians. They will remain well documented for future generations. That is also why they are often opposed by deniers, ultranationalists, and others in the countries on whose behalf the apologies are being made.

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## Chapter Eleven: What Can and Should Be Done?

As time passes Holocaust history lends itself more to manipulations, despite the increase in historical information. This process will not stop, and this consideration has to be the starting point for the development of policies on how to preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

Testimonies of witnesses have been a crucial element in building and maintaining a correct collective memory of the Shoah. Of those who consciously experienced World War II, few still occupy positions of importance in society. The number of surviving witnesses of the horrors of the Holocaust is rapidly declining. This is happening in a societal environment where the overall uncertainty about the future is growing and moral relativism is rife. Anti-Semitism frequently increases in such a situation.

Thus the struggle for maintaining the memory of the Holocaust, as well as the fight against its distortion, is likely to become more difficult, as the last survivors and other eyewitnesses pass away. One will increasingly have to explain the reasons for keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive and why this is important not only for the Jews but also for society at large.

Those engaged in preserving the memory of the Holocaust, then, need to be active in the public debate about it and related issues. These include, for instance, museum curators, specialized academics, artists, educators, and survivors. The major fields of public discourse that are relevant in terms of preserving the memory of the Holocaust will be touched upon below. Various ways in which the participants in this discourse can safeguard the memory of the Holocaust and ensure that it is not manipulated, misrepresented, or abused will also be discussed.

### **Maintaining Memory**

One major reason for maintaining the memory of the Holocaust is a moral obligation toward those who perished. Forgetting them also means the fading away of the crimes committed, thus facilitating their return in various forms in contemporary society. There is a second moral obligation — the one toward those who survived and suffered the consequences of their Holocaust experience for the rest of their lives.

Similarly, there is a commitment toward the Righteous Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews, as well as to the soldiers who fought against Nazi Germany and its allies.

## **Fackenheim's 614<sup>th</sup> Commandment**

According to the tradition, the Torah contains 613 commandments Jews have to obey. Fackenheim defined remembering the Holocaust as the 614<sup>th</sup> commandment, formulating it as: "Thou Shalt Not Give Hitler a Posthumous Victory." He explained:

We are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, second, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories.<sup>1</sup>

Tossavainen observes: "commemoration, which — together with other ritual practices — is a central part of civil religion, fulfils many important needs in a societal context. Commemoration forges a sense of unity and continuity and at the same time is a great educational opportunity, helping to develop and sustain values that can be passed on from generation to generation."<sup>2</sup>

## **The Gentile World**

A further reason for fostering commemoration of the Holocaust is that in those countries where Jews were persecuted and perished their story should be part of the collective memory and national history. There are many who would like to erase the crimes of their forefathers. Most likely, the less these crimes are confronted the easier it will be for similar criminality to develop in the future. In the battle against the distortion of Holocaust memory, maintaining the truth about what happened is essential.

The remembrance of the Holocaust is also important for society at large. Almost sixty-five years after the war, many have learned few lessons from history and are inclined to repeat, in today's changed environment, the mistakes of the past. Maintaining Holocaust memory is a tool that can perhaps to some extent prevent this.

In postmodern society, distortion has fragmented and will proliferate further. Thus the battle against distortion must be fought on a great many fronts. It cannot be seen as incidental or occurring in isolation. It is one major issue in the framework of the correct memory of the Shoah.



## **Modes of Action**

The analysis in the previous chapters has provided insight not only into the many categories of distortion but also into what motivates many distorters. It has further shown a variety of reactions to the distortions. Using this infrastructure one can better understand how to battle the many manipulations of the Holocaust.

In order to develop an integrated approach to combating the distortion of the Holocaust, a large number of institutions and individuals must be involved. In addition to those institutions focusing specifically on the Holocaust, these should include governments, parliaments, the judiciary, media, and so on.

The maintenance of the memory of the Holocaust consists of many types of actions, all of which are practiced today to varying degrees. Within the framework of this struggle, a number of endeavors play an important role.

### **“Market Research”**

A major effort must be made to better understand current attitudes toward the Holocaust. This will require what can best be called “market research.” One important source could be a study among those who work at concentration-camp memorial sites and other institutions that play a role in memorializing the Shoah.

To give one example, during a visit to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 2005 this author had an informal conversation with one of the staff members of the memorial center. It was clear that many inhabitants of the neighboring town of Celle were not particularly enchanted with the institution. Citizens of that town had at their own initiative participated in the murder of many deportees, in what became known as the “Hare Hunt of Celle” (Die Celler Hasenjagd).<sup>3</sup>

## **Research**

Holocaust research provides an improved factual infrastructure to combat distortion. Much of such research has been carried out over the past two decades. The scholarly interest in the Holocaust has grown considerably in parallel to the increased attention given to the Nazi-era murder of the Jews in society at large. Nevertheless, much research still remains to be done. The quantity of information on certain countries is very limited. Bauer says, for instance, that only minimal material is available on a number of countries such as the Ukraine, Greece, and Croatia.<sup>4</sup>

At the time he also said that the history of inner Jewish life in destroyed communities remained largely unresearched. Bauer pointed out that detailed studies were necessary because otherwise general pictures might remain distorted.

This is the more so as Jews behaved differently in various places and they also viewed the surrounding societies differently.<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes studies on a specific issue can alter perceptions in a major way. One very important example was Gross's book *Neighbors*. It exposed one major subject — the collective murder of the Jews of Jedwabne by their ethnic-Polish neighbors.

Michlic summarized the book's impact:

Gross's narration challenges the self-image of Poles as only victims. Ethnic Poles from Jedwabne are depicted as vicious murderers who showed no mercy to their Jewish victims. These images provide a shocking contrast to the cherished self-image of Poles as martyrs and heroes, and the interlinked image of Poles as key witnesses to the Holocaust who overwhelmingly demonstrated solidarity toward the Polish Jews.<sup>6</sup>

The Dutch Holocaust expert Johannes Houwink ten Cate points to one among several important developments in Holocaust research:

The creation of a world-wide research community, which now includes scholars from Israel, the US, the UK, both Western and Eastern Europe, and Canada and Australia. Not yet included are scholars from Africa and Asia. The boundaries of this community are essentially the boundaries of that part of the world that during the Cold War was named "The Free West" and Eastern Europe.

This points to the fact that Holocaust awareness is a way to discuss the political values of the West. It also is an instrument to strengthen democratic awareness in Eastern Europe. My students study the Holocaust because they want to understand why humans kill.<sup>7</sup>

He added:

We see — in a number of countries but by no means everywhere — a strong interaction between Holocaust research and research on other modern genocides, while the Holocaust remains the paradigmatic genocide, if only because of the ideological radicalism of Nazism and the sheer number of its Jewish victims. Since Rwanda, for example, there has been a strong focus on open-air executions in the Holocaust. Scholars of modern genocides draw heavily upon the highly sophisticated historiography of the Holocaust. By doing this they have made enormous progress. This is especially evident in the research of the Armenian and Rwandan genocides.<sup>8</sup>

## Developments in Perception

When discussing differences concerning social environment and the development of research between the two editions of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Berenbaum

said one important issue was the relationship between the Holocaust and the law.

Those who wrote [an entry on “Holocaust and Law”] in the previous edition described the Nazi deeds as an outlaw phenomenon. The transition in this edition is dramatic because it tries to show laws as instruments of persecution. The Nazis tried to give a façade of legality to everything they did. Consequently one had less of a prosecution brief against them. Instead, we present an extended essay on how legal means and the legal profession were used as an instrumentality of destruction.<sup>9</sup>

These examples can only give a glimpse of how important research is for laying an improved infrastructure for the battle against Holocaust distortion. They also show how views evolve over time. A more fundamental question is to what extent Holocaust studies will survive as a separate discipline within the framework of modern historical research. A number of centers address other genocides in addition to the Holocaust. These genocides’ place in the future of historical research may not be assured either.

## **Documentation**

Survivors’ testimonies play an important role in Holocaust research. They do so as well in education, at ceremonies, and in several other categories. Their importance derives from the fact that the survivors are the last eyewitnesses who can tell personal stories of what happened. What will happen once they are gone is a problem that increasingly engages people devoted to preserving the memory of the Holocaust (for instance, at Yad Vashem, where survivors’ testimonies are seen as a central part of its educational efforts).

Three major projects, and also some more limited ones, have collected survivors’ testimonies. Yad Vashem contains over 125 million pages of documentary evidence, 420,000 photographs, and over 100,000 survivor testimonies. Established in 1953, the archives also hold filmed footage. The library contains over 120,000 publications in fifty-four languages including survivor memoirs, Yizkor (remembrance) books, Nazi publications, newspapers, and journals from the era. It includes much information on pre-Holocaust Jewish life in Poland and other centers of Jewish life, emphasizing what was lost.

Yad Vashem’s Hall of Names contains over three million names of Holocaust victims and, for many of them, additional personal information. Yad Vashem seeks to provide information that contributes to Holocaust awareness and to combating Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism. It stresses that films have the power to combine historical facts with emotional impact and through this medium, uses the testimonies and other images to paint a picture of the atrocities that took place.<sup>10</sup>

In 1994, the Steven Spielberg Foundation started to collect testimonies of survivors of the Holocaust and other genocides. The project, which is now closed, interviewed fifty-two thousand survivors. It merged with the University of Southern California to ensure a sustained “preservation and access” to the digital archives. The foundation is aimed at overcoming “prejudice, intolerance and bigotry.” It seeks to educate the student body, researchers, and educators. Its digital capabilities make it far easier for more and more people to access testimonies around the world. It offers access in a number of languages, and to over fifty-eight collections in twenty-two countries. By 2009, the project had reached over seventy-eight thousand schools.<sup>11</sup>

A project at Yale University aims to collect video testimonies from survivors in more than twenty-five countries. Besides the Holocaust it also addresses other genocides, though it does have a specific research program on the Holocaust. It focuses on the study of psychiatric patients in Israel with a Holocaust past.

Based on research on nine hundred Israeli citizens, the project claims that had these people managed to express themselves and give their testimonies, their rehabilitation would have been somewhat eased. They are now focusing on analyzing the videotexts to define exactly which types of psychotic disorder these people are most likely to suffer from.<sup>12</sup>

An example of a more limited project is the Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program of the Azrieli Foundation in Canada. It was established in 2005 and aims “to collect, preserve and share the memoirs and diaries written by survivors of the twentieth-century Nazi genocide of the Jews of Europe who later made their way to Canada.”<sup>13</sup>

## **The Holocaust Restitution Process**

Some developments lead to periods of renewed interest in the Holocaust. One major case concerns the debate on restitution in the second half of the 1990s and early twenty-first century. It has also played an important role in bringing forth documentation. In many of the countries where there were Jewish claims of funds relating to the Holocaust, major historical research was undertaken. Tens of thousands of pages have been published since the subject of restitution again received major attention.

The restitution issue also concerns countries that were not occupied by Germany. Helen Junz, who served as a member of the Bergier Commission, which was given a wide mandate to cover Swiss history, writes:

While the tightening of Swiss admission policies in 1938 was similar to that in other countries, only Switzerland, and Sweden until 1942, applied racist selection criteria based on Nazi definitions. One example was the

introduction of a visa for German “non-Aryans” in October 1938, with which the Nuremberg laws were incorporated into Swiss immigration requirements.

In 1942 the authorities closed Swiss borders altogether, though well aware of the tragic consequences of this act and in the face of increasing public protest. The Commission thus concluded that “By...making it more difficult for refugees to reach safety, and by handing over the refugees caught directly to their persecutors, the Swiss authorities were instrumental in helping the Nazi regime to attain its goals.”<sup>14</sup>

## Education

Learning about the Holocaust can be part of both formal and informal education. In a number of countries the Holocaust is taught in the mandatory school system. Holocaust education can also be part of voluntary efforts in the framework of special projects. Yad Vashem, for instance, held sixty international teachers’ seminars in 2008. For Jewish children Holocaust education may take place in summer camps, after-school programs, Sunday school, Hebrew school, and so on.

Beyond hearing testimonies of Holocaust survivors, one of the educational experiences with the strongest impact on youth is visits to various concentration or extermination camps. Such visits, undertaken by Jewish and non-Jewish school pupils and university students from many different countries, have increased over the past decades — in part thanks to the increased accessibility of camps in the former communist countries.

The largest single annual event of this kind is the March of the Living, which takes thousands of students to Auschwitz in Poland, and then to Israel for Israeli Independence Day celebrations. The trip is popular among many Jewish youth groups. It has also drawn criticism — for instance, for being a mass-event where the educational aspect is somewhat lost in pageantry. Others take exception to the direct Zionist lesson drawn from the Holocaust; ending with a visit in Israel implies that a strong, independent Jewish state is the only response to a catastrophe like the Holocaust.

Different pupils come away with diverse experiences and conclusions from the visits to these camps, depending on their level of knowledge, whether they have a personal family connection to the Holocaust, and also from which countries they come. But undoubtedly, such visits serve to increase Holocaust awareness among the younger generations, giving them an opportunity to commemorate the Holocaust and anchoring that memory to their historical consciousness and collective memory. Experience shows that the better the preparation before such trips, the more participants reap from them.

## Effectiveness of Education

Not all Holocaust education is effective. Urban, in an essay in this volume, criticizes certain aspects of Holocaust education in Germany and observes:

Classroom teaching on the Holocaust often was, and still is, deficient. It focused on statistics and dry descriptions of deportations or how the persecution developed through the racial and anti-Jewish laws. The courses generally culminated in Auschwitz by showing a documentary or some photos of piles of dead bodies.

This approach often had no effect on the students; learning facts and statistics was not connected to personal experience and did not lead them to see the Holocaust as part of their own history, identity, and national consciousness. Immigrant students also often did not gain a connection to the Holocaust because they were not taught about it as something not only connected to Germany and Germans but also part of a European and worldwide legacy.

An even more guarded attitude is taken by Stephen Smith, a practicing Christian who, together with his brother James, founded the Beth Shalom Holocaust Memorial and Education Center in Nottingham, UK:

There is a very big leap between knowing about the Holocaust and being changed by it. There is a presumption that, if you teach the Holocaust, it makes for a better world; but I don't buy it. We need to know what happened; but there's a big leap between knowing what happened and acting on it. I am less worried about what the grandparents of our young generation did sixty years ago; I am more concerned about what this generation's grandchildren will do. Will they have learned anything?<sup>15</sup>

When reading the words of literary scholar Lawrence L. Langer, one senses his hesitation about how to make Holocaust education effective after having taught Holocaust history classes for almost thirty years.

I have always believed that students flock to Holocaust courses not because such courses are fashionable but because they have a deep-lying interest in the Final Solution's criminals and victims, so one of my main goals as a teacher of the Holocaust has been to subvert stereotypical thinking; for example, that only sadists could organize and execute an atrocity like the murder of European Jewry or that all victims went unresistingly to their deaths. But perhaps most important in the list of misunderstood matters is the demise of significant choice for the inmates of the deathcamps.<sup>16</sup>

## Sarkozy's Proposal

At a dinner of CRIF, the umbrella body of French Jewish organizations on 13 February 2008, President Nicolas Sarkozy presented a new proposal for education on the Holocaust. He suggested that at the beginning of the school year, each child in fourth grade should start to study the memory of one of the eleven thousand French Jewish children who were victims of the Holocaust. A 2000 poll had found that more than 50 percent of the youngsters aged sixteen to twenty-four had said they were underinformed on the subject.

The proposition was badly received in general. The very young age group of targeted nine-year-olds was one, but far from the only, problem. Only 6 percent of those polled on behalf of the daily *Le Parisien* were in favor of the proposal. Thirty-one percent thought the whole class should study the fate of one child victim of the Holocaust, while 61 percent opposed both ideas. On the other hand, 61 percent said it was important to pass on the memory of the children of the Holocaust to the next generation; 36 percent were opposed.<sup>17</sup>

There was also much criticism from intellectuals as well as teachers' unions, which saw Sarkozy's proposal as interference in education. Education Minister Xavier Darcos thereupon appointed a commission to study the matter.

## The International Task Force (ITF)

The ITF (Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research) plays an important role in addressing several of the key aspects of the Holocaust in our time. It was initiated by Swedish prime minister Göran Persson in 1998. He did so because of his concern about neo-Nazism among youngsters and the influence of Holocaust deniers in Sweden.

A Swedish initiative was a book titled *Tell ye your children...* that was widely distributed throughout the country. Persson said in the Swedish parliament:

In hundreds of thousands of Swedish homes and thousands of classrooms, the book titled *Tell ye your children...* has formed the basis for a discussion between the generations about fundamental democratic and humanistic values, about right and wrong.

Pupils and teachers, parents and children, politicians and experts — all of us need to discuss the connections between the horrors of our past and the dangers we face today. We have to try to understand the underlying mechanisms.<sup>18</sup>

In January 2000, Persson organized the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust. Bauer observes: "It was the first time in history that politicians, among

them many heads of state, met to discuss education. The subject of that unique event was the Holocaust.”<sup>19</sup>

The Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust has a number of components. Its opening statement asserts: “The unprecedented character of the Holocaust will always hold universal meaning. After half a century, it remains an event close enough in time that survivors can still bear witness to the horrors that engulfed the Jewish people.” The declaration mentions the need to battle genocide and anti-Semitism, as well as understanding the causes of the Holocaust and reflecting on its consequences. It also contains a pledge to promote Holocaust education in schools, universities, and communities, and to encourage research and remembrance.<sup>20</sup>

In 2009, the ITF had twenty-seven member states, mainly European ones but also Argentina, Canada, and the United States. The members represent governments as well as governmental organizations and NGOs. Membership is open to all countries provided they are committed to the above declaration of the Stockholm Forum.<sup>21</sup>

### **Norway’s Moral Relativism**

The chairmanship of the Task Force changes every year. In March 2009, Norway became the chair, which, for many reasons, was a poor choice. A month earlier Norway had inaugurated the Hamsun year, in honor of the pro-Nazi author and Hitler admirer. The festivities were opened by the Norwegian queen. Whitewashing a Nazi supporter, no matter how important he may be as an author, is the opposite of what the ITF stands for.

In one reaction Rafael Medoff, director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Washington wrote:

Each of the countries belonging to the task force has pledged to carry out the eight-point final declaration of the Stockholm Conference. Point number six is particularly relevant to the Knut Hamsun controversy: “We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honor those who stood against it.”

This puts the Norwegian government in something of a bind, because instead of honoring “those who stood against the Holocaust,” such as [Norwegian Nobel Prize in Literature winner Sigrid] Undset, it is honoring someone who stood for it. In the 1940s, Undset and Hamsun made their choices. Undset sided with good, Hamsun with evil. Today, Norway too must make a choice, between venerating the memory of the Holocaust, and desecrating it. It cannot do both.<sup>22</sup>

This controversy was just one of the many reasons the country was a poor choice for the chairmanship. Others include the government’s attitude toward the Holocaust-



inverting diplomat Trine Lilleng and Minister Halvorsen's participation in an anti-Israeli demonstration where there were shouts of "Death to the Jews."<sup>23</sup>

## Museums

Different museums clearly have different agendas and goals, but in general museums aim to educate, to commemorate, and to engage their visitors. By their nature, museums can shape the public's understanding of the past; they can create, strengthen, or challenge a historical narrative. (Museums share this capacity with the media, for instance.) The number of Holocaust museums has increased greatly in recent decades.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of several museums in maintaining Holocaust remembrance is evident from the large numbers of people who visit them. A major example is the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. It opened in April 1993 and, by 1 January 2009, had had over twenty-eight million visitors. Of these 88 percent were Americans and 34 percent school-age children. More than 3,500 officials, including eighty-eight heads of state or governments, had visited the museum.<sup>25</sup>

In Israel a visit to Yad Vashem is, for state visits, *de facto* protocol. This visit symbolizes Israel's worldview. Taking an official guest to a memorial to six million civilians — including the elderly, women, and children — intentionally murdered for who they were, emphasizes a central element of Israel's collective memory.

## Yad Vashem

Arguably the most important Holocaust museum is Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. It was established by a law passed by the Israeli parliament, the Knesset, in the 1950s and is not merely a museum but an institution dedicated to commemoration, research, and education. The museum, albeit probably the best known of its kind, is a part of that larger endeavor.

Yad Vashem's location also has a symbolic meaning. It is situated on Har Hazikaron, the Mount of Memory, on what once were the western outskirts of Jerusalem. Next to the Yad Vashem complex is Mount Herzl, on the summit of which Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism, is buried. He is surrounded by presidents, prime ministers, and speakers of the Knesset. On the slopes of Mount Herzl there is also a large military cemetery.

The area of Har Hazikaron is the physical focus of national commemorations and celebrations in the week that constitutes the annual high point of the Israeli "civil religion." That week starts with Holocaust Remembrance Day and ends with Israeli Independence Day, preceded by Memorial Day for Israel's Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terror.

By placing the commemoration of the Holocaust in such close proximity, both in space and time, to the commemoration of the fallen soldiers and the celebration of the reestablishment of national freedom, these elements are made part of a common narrative framework. This framework suggests that, following the suffering in the Holocaust, the Jewish people fought even harder for their independence and, finally, many could leave the Diaspora and reestablish a sovereign state in the Land of Israel.

In this way, the Holocaust has become a central part of Israeli national self-understanding and collective memory. This goes even beyond the many Israeli citizens' personal loss of family and friends in the Holocaust.

As mentioned earlier, a visit to Yad Vashem is included in every official visit by foreign dignitaries to the state of Israel. In this way, the Foreign Ministry signals to these officials the centrality of the Holocaust and also that the Jewish people has not forgotten what it is like to be a defenseless people in a largely hostile or indifferent world. The state of Israel thus shows that it considers its security, and that of the Jewish people, of prime importance.

There are many other aspects of such visits; for instance, the emphasis on how Jews lived during the Holocaust years and not just how they died. Another concerns the Righteous among the Nations. There is the universal message of the Holocaust, as well as the particularistic one concerning the Jewish people, and so on.

## **Monuments and Memorials**

Although monuments and memorials are quite similar in practical terms, they are not completely interchangeable: "Monuments are usually built to commemorate a significant person or event in history, or a period of time. Memorials are usually related to death and destruction. But the distinction between the two sometimes is blurred."<sup>26</sup>

Monuments and memorials are more restricted in their capacity than museums. Since they are much smaller in scope, they serve merely to show and remind of — much as their names indicate — a specific aspect of history such as a person, group of people, or event.

In the case of the Holocaust, monuments and memorials remind the public primarily of some particular aspect of the genocide. They often list the names of those murdered in a certain city or area. They can hardly shape the historical narrative, but only relate to it — either by strengthening and confirming it or by challenging it.

There are many memorials to the Holocaust all over the world. Many Jewish cemeteries throughout Europe have such memorials, some large and splendid and some more modest, reminding the visitors of the murdered, many of whom have no burial place. Another common form of memorial relating to the Holocaust is

that of plaques set up on buildings where Jews lived, to which they were brought, or from which they were deported to their deaths. There is a distinct difference between memorials that are in a Jewish location and those in the public domain, addressing society at large.

There are fewer monuments dedicated to the Holocaust. Many of them are in memory of those who resisted the Germans and their helpers in some way — either by organizing and taking part in armed resistance or by aiding Jews to escape the Holocaust. A well-known example of the former is Nathan Rapaport's monument to the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, at the site of the ghetto.

Among the more recent and less well-known monuments is the Raoul Wallenberg monument in Stockholm, erected in the 1990s. It commemorates the heroism of the Swedish businessman-turned-diplomat who saved thousands of Hungarian Jews from deportation to Auschwitz in the last months of the war.

## **Ceremonies/Remembrance Days**

Much like monuments, ceremonies serve to anchor historical events in the collective memory and reconfirm or challenge the hegemonic historical narrative. However, since such commemorations are more flexible, they can in fact do more to conduct a dialogue with that narrative. On the other hand, ceremonies, as opposed to monuments, are short-lived.

One important step in maintaining Holocaust memory was the institution of an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January by the United Nations, as designated by a UN General Assembly Resolution in November 2005. This date was chosen as on it the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp was liberated. This decision should be valued. Previously, various countries had already established a specific day to remember the Holocaust. Retaining and safeguarding such achievements is a constant battle, since there are those who would like to either dilute or alter the message of Holocaust commemoration.

Nowadays the Holocaust is commemorated annually in many countries. In 2005 in particular, sixty years after the war ended, much additional emphasis was placed on this commemoration. This occurred partly in the context of ceremonies recalling the liberation of Auschwitz and other camps.

## **Art**

Holocaust art has much in common with monuments and memorials — which often are works of art — but also reaches beyond them. Some works of art do not necessarily refer to the Holocaust but, because they were shaped at that time, they remind the public of it. Others recall the Holocaust because the artist honored was killed during it. This is, for instance, the case in the Felix Nussbaum House in his

town of birth, Osnabruck. Those who visit this museum are confronted with the painter's murder in Auschwitz.

Similarly there is always a confrontation with the lethal aspects of the Holocaust when Viktor Ullmann's *The Emperor of Atlantis* is performed. He composed this opera during his detention in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Ullman was later murdered in Auschwitz.

A similar Holocaust association is raised when the children's opera *Brundibár* is staged. It was composed in 1938 by Hans Krasa and was first performed in a Jewish orphanage in Prague. By then the composer had already been deported to Theresienstadt. Most of the children performers followed later. Krasa and most of the cast were murdered in Auschwitz.<sup>27</sup>

## Literature

Literature is probably the most expressive and complex way to convey a certain message or historical narrative. The poet and Holocaust survivor Paul Celan gave a powerful expression to World War II history in his "Todesfuge" (Fugue of Death), where he wrote, "Death is a master from Germany."

Initially Holocaust literature consisted of documentation and first-person accounts. Later this was followed by a flow of fiction. Literature scholar Elrud Ibsch has pointed out that the fictional use of the Shoah as a theme meant the loss of moral superiority inherent in its documentation.<sup>28</sup>

An even more fundamental issue concerns the role of aesthetics in society after the Holocaust, as addressed, for instance, by Theodor W. Adorno. Well remembered is his statement: "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today."<sup>29</sup>

One wonders whether all the written fantasies of authors, creating characters who experienced the Shoah, are anything more than structurally inadequate and failed attempts to address a theme that requires ongoing rational analysis, far more than the novelist's inventiveness. The endless fantasies on the struggle for survival and human relations, sometimes including love affairs between perpetrators and victims, pale next to the actual stories of the murder of millions of people. Sometimes the works of art even pervert their memory.

Cole writes that "Hollywood from 'Anne Frank' to 'Oskar Schindler' offers a 'Holocaust' which 'still believes that humans are good at heart.' It constructs an 'Auschwitz' and a 'Holocaust' it can come to terms with.... And as those who died in Auschwitz-Birkenau are nothing more than ashes now, contemporary Hollywood can ignore them."<sup>30</sup>

Yet art is often a major factor in the change of perceptions. This has also been the case here. It is television series such as NBC's *Holocaust* and movies such as

*Schindler's List* that probably have done more for the globalization of Holocaust memory than many other, far more accurate efforts to inform the public about it. In this case art has perhaps changed society more than documentation, though that would not have been possible without the major efforts invested in Holocaust research and documentation.

Novick mentions that nearly one hundred million Americans watched all or most of the four-part nine-and-a-half-hour miniseries *Holocaust* in April 1978.

As was often observed at the time, more information about the Holocaust was imparted to more Americans over those four nights than over all the preceding thirty years...the series was able to cover all of the principal landmarks: the Nuremberg Laws, Kristallnacht, the Wannsee Conference, Babi Yar, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Buchenwald, Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. The miniseries was a mini-survey course.<sup>31</sup>

Beker gives two examples of how Holocaust movies have influenced individuals in their actions. Bjarte Bruland, a student at Norway's Bergen University researched the confiscating of Jewish property in Norway after seeing Lanzmann's *Shoah*. In 1997, Christopher Meili, a security guard at the Union Bank of Switzerland, exposed the destruction of wartime documents by his employers after having been affected by *Schindler's List*.<sup>32</sup>

### **Hochhuth's *The Deputy***

The public perception of the attitude of Pope Pius XII during the war was greatly changed when in 1963, the controversial German author Rolf Hochhuth published his theater play *Der Stellvertreter (The Deputy)*. It had a major negative impact on the image of this pope.

Novick described it as "a savage indictment of Pius' inaction, attributing it to his Germanophilia, his anti-Sovietism, and the preeminent importance he attached to the narrowest of Vatican interests. In Europe the performance of the play had everywhere produced angry confrontations, including violence: the antagonists were usually Protestants and Catholics, with Jews on the sidelines."<sup>33</sup>

Wistrich wrote that this semidocumentary play "almost single-handedly transformed Pius XII from a 'good guy' basking in almost universal approval at the height of the Cold War to a cold, calculating and callous figure. He suddenly appeared as a man of near-criminal weakness and shocking indifference to the fate of the Jews during the Holocaust."<sup>34</sup>

### **Commemorative Projects**

Commemorative projects are often educational, that is, they recognize the value in

commemorating and instilling a lesson from the past for the public good. Others are existential, stemming from a personal need to remember and commemorate. Such individual projects can also be brought into the framework of education, museums, monuments, art, and ceremonies.

One private initiative that drew worldwide attention became known as the Paper Clips Project. In the small town of Whitwell, Tennessee, a Holocaust education class was started in 1998 in the local middle school. The students asked the teacher if they could collect something that related to the Holocaust. They decided to gather six million paper clips to represent the six million Jews murdered. The project gradually became known. It was written about in 2001 in the *Washington Post* and later information about it was broadcast on NBC News.<sup>35</sup> An estimated thirty million paper clips have been collected.

A movie titled *Paper Clips* was produced about the project. After it had run commercially, the ADL developed an educational program to accompany a DVD version of the film. The program and DVD have been made available to middle and high schools, and this has helped make the project even more widely known.<sup>36</sup>

Another private initiative that has developed into an international Holocaust memorial project is that of the “stumbling blocks” (*Stolpersteine*). It was developed by the German sculptor Gunter Demnig. The project consists of brass-covered stones placed in pavements in front of buildings where people who were murdered by the Nazis had lived. Most of these are in memory of Jews, but there are “stumbling blocks” for others as well. Many thousands have been installed in Germany and the project has now been expanded to include other countries as well. The text on a typical brass-covered stone includes the name of the person remembered, his/her birthdate and, if known, the date of death.<sup>37</sup>

One innovative program is the Crocus Project in Ireland. The Holocaust Education Trust of Ireland provides schools with yellow crocus bulbs to plant in autumn. This is done in memory of the 1.5 million Jewish children and thousands of others who died in the Holocaust. The yellow color of the flowers symbolizes the yellow Star of David all Jews were forced to wear under Nazi rule.

The Crocus Project is meant for pupils aged eleven to twelve and introduces these children to the Holocaust. In Ireland the crocus blooms at the end of January around the time of International Holocaust Memorial Day (27 January). When people admire the flowers, the children can explain what they represent. Other countries have also become involved in this project.<sup>38</sup>

Another program of great consequence is the planting of trees at Yad Vashem in memory of specific Righteous Gentiles. Martin Gilbert points out the importance of remembering these Righteous for society at large:

When the Holocaust is finally beyond living memory, the desire to remember and honour those who extended a helping hand will remain. This is a question not only of recognizing individual bravery, but of providing a reminder that

it is possible for human beings, in situations where civilized values are being undermined, to find the strength of character and purpose to resist the evil impulses of the age, and to try to rescue the victims of barbarity.<sup>39</sup>

## Legislation

Making laws in connection to preserving the memory of the Holocaust usually comes in two forms. One is by setting up institutions for Holocaust commemoration. Examples are Israel's Yad Vashem Law of 1953 and Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day Law of 1959, as well as various countries' decisions to make 27 January their Holocaust Memorial Day. A second is by creating legislation banning Holocaust denial. This last aspect touches upon a larger issue of freedom of speech and what kind of repellent opinions should be allowed in public without harming the necessary openness of a liberal, democratic society.

Holocaust-law expert Michael Bazylar writes:

As a result of the enormous suffering inflicted upon the world by the Nazi regime, and especially Europe, a number of European countries have enacted laws criminalizing both the denial of the Holocaust and the promotion of Nazi ideology.

The aim of these laws is to prevent the resurrection of Nazism in Europe by stamping out at the earliest opportunity — or to use the phrase “to nip it in the bud” — any public reemergence of Nazi views, whether through speech, symbols, or public association....

The anti-Nazi laws do not exist in every European country. Presently, the following European countries have some legislation criminalizing the Nazi message, including denial of the Holocaust: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Switzerland. Holocaust denial is also illegal in Israel.

Some of these countries, like Germany and Austria, take these laws very seriously and vigilantly prosecute both speech and behavior having any reference to Nazis and Nazism. Others, like Lithuania and Romania, despite laws on the books, enforce them sporadically.

A last set of countries put a higher value on free speech over suppression of neo-Nazism and freely allow promotion of the Nazi message. In these countries, freedom of the press and freedom of speech are vehemently upheld even to the detriment of other rights. These countries include the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Scandinavian nations.<sup>40</sup>

In a symposium on the subject, law professor Alan Dershowitz claimed that it would be wrong to prohibit Holocaust denial, saying: “Experience has shown

that it is far better to live in a society in which false facts — even facts as false as Holocaust denial — are not criminalized, than in a society that puts people in jail for the malicious lies.”<sup>41</sup>

This opinion might be considered a typically American one as free speech is one of the most highly valued foundational principles of this society. European experience based on the pre-Holocaust period does not bear out this position. At present free speech is most endangered by forces from the Muslim world. They want to limit it in order to avoid the increasing criticism of Islam. This creates counterforces in European society who turn free speech into a battle horse. Holocaust abuses such as denial may well become one of the best indicators of where this battle stands.

Holocaust inversion is at least as dangerous as Holocaust denial. It is included in the common definition of anti-Semitism as used increasingly in international gatherings, yet nowhere is it a punishable offense. Another growing area where legislation has been falling short is cyberspace. The problems with hate speech there are likely to grow. This may well lead to increasing abuses of Holocaust memory.

## **Free Speech and the Internet**

Unlimited free speech allows the spread of even the most extreme distortions of Holocaust memory. There is a major difference of views here between Americans and many Europeans. The United States Constitution stipulates the right to free speech. This leads to a tolerant position toward hate propagation. Many racist Internet sites from Europe have therefore sought refuge in the United States.

As Rabbi Abraham Cooper put it,

Elsewhere in the world, attitudes about where to draw the line between free speech and the rhetoric of hate have evolved quite differently from the U.S. German authorities, for example, have complained for a long time that many neo-Nazi sites targeting German kids in German were supported by providers in the United States. The German authorities monitor over 3,000 websites, of which only a few are Islamic ones. All German governments have made a very fundamental commitment to fight Nazism, and the law makes expression of it illegal.<sup>42</sup>

With the growth in the new media, these will have to play an increasing role in the battle against abuse of Holocaust memory. It will be necessary to post accurate information and documentation on the web — especially in many languages so people can learn about the Holocaust in their native tongue. And while many new threats will develop on the interactive Internet, it will also provide important opportunities.



## **The Prosecution of War Criminals**

Some actions that draw attention to the Holocaust will fade away with time. One example is the battle for the prosecution of Holocaust war criminals. This still is significant today, even if it only concerns a negligible percentage of those who committed crimes.

Zuroff stresses that this activity is not only part of the fight for justice, but also an important component of the struggle for historical truth. In addition, he thinks it will help foster Holocaust education and combat anti-Semitism.

He observes:

The battle for historical accuracy and historical truth is currently taking place primarily in post-Communist Europe. These countries, where significant sectors of the local population assisted the Nazis, have become independent and mostly democratic in the last fifteen years. Now for the first time, they can honestly confront the complicity of their own population in the Shoah. They are currently writing their textbooks anew and establishing a new national narrative.

In 2002, the Simon Wiesenthal Center Israel and the Targum Shlishi Foundation in Miami launched Operation: Last Chance to help facilitate the prosecution of Nazi war criminals, primarily in postcommunist Europe. Zuroff says: "It is very important that the issue of local complicity be dealt with and that the truth be widely disseminated. Operation: Last Chance attempts to put this issue at the top of the national agenda." The educational aspects of the program were designed to sensitize people to the history of the Holocaust and focus public attention on the questions that people in these countries should be asking themselves.<sup>43</sup>

## **Innovative Attempts**

As new distortions of the Holocaust appear, and neo-Nazism manifests itself increasingly, one will see in many situations innovative attempts to develop responses. Some will be successful, some will not. One case in 2009 that backfired was the well-intentioned reaction to the adoption of part of a highway outside Springfield, in the state of Missouri, by a group of neo-Nazis.<sup>44</sup>

In the past Missouri officials had tried in vain to block the Ku Klux Klan from adopting a highway as this infringed on free speech. Now the Missouri legislature took a different approach and voted to name this part of the road after the Jewish theologian Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. In this way the legislature sought to embarrass the Nazis. The rabbi's daughter Susannah Heschel, who teaches Jewish studies at Dartmouth University, said that while she appreciated the intention, "it's inappropriate. I don't think that my father would have felt honored by this."<sup>45</sup>

## The Public Discourse

This book has presented many examples of how the Holocaust has been manipulated. This has been a growing trend, and there are many indications that it will continue to increase. Such a growth in Holocaust manipulation is in part an accompanying phenomenon of the increased interest in the Holocaust in society at large in recent decades. As long as people find the Holocaust interesting or relevant, others are going to abuse it for their own purposes, whether anti-Semitic or not.

Hence it remains important that those who do care about the memory of the Holocaust are active in the public discourse, speaking up when the Holocaust is abused or manipulated in various ways. This chapter has given some examples of main areas where such watchfulness is required, and where a constant critical debate about Holocaust abuse will be essential — but also where such debate will have the chance to do considerable good.

Those who feel committed to preserving the memory of the Holocaust should also take an active role in shaping the public discourse about the commemoration of the Holocaust, its meaning, and what lessons are to be drawn from it.

## Conclusion

In an increasingly uncertain world, the Holocaust is likely to continue to play an important role as the metaphor of absolute evil. This is true despite a certain fatigue in some Western circles regarding the mention of the Holocaust and its consequences.

As threats of genocide have again become part of public statements, this in itself will direct attention to the Holocaust, which remains the paradigm of genocide. The expansion of overall research in the field of genocide studies also brings with it additional interest in the Holocaust.

In line with these developments, the universe of Holocaust distortion is also expanding. The most effective first step to cope with these manipulations is developing the structural scheme laid down in this book, which attempts to view the phenomenon of Holocaust-memory abuse as a whole.

In conclusion, fighting the main manipulations of the Holocaust requires first understanding the nature of the abuses. This has to be followed by exposing the perpetrators, who must then be turned into the accused.

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# ESSAYS AND INTERVIEWS



## An Interview with Shmuel Trigano

# Europe's Distortion of the Meaning of the Shoah's Memory and Its Consequences for the Jews and Israel

The title of one of Shmuel Trigano's recent books (in French) is *The Auschwitz Frontiers*.<sup>1</sup> It refers to Europe's desire to have Israel return to its indefensible 1967 borders, understood as metaphysical borders of its sacrificial condition. In the book Trigano discusses "the New Jewish Question," which he defines as the denial of the moral, historical, and political legitimacy of the Jewish existence as a people and therefore the negation of the state of Israel's right to sovereignty.

Trigano explains the essence of his thoughts on the relationship to the Shoah. "The 'Shoah's memory' and with it the expression 'the duty of remembrance' are European concepts that developed mainly since the mid-1980s. These are imprecise terms as the major issue at stake for the Jews is not to remember what happened in the Shoah or to construct monuments. Forgetting the Shoah, or denying it has happened, are far more European problems than Jewish ones."

Trigano says that for decades the discourse on "the Shoah's memory" has avoided confronting the main problem the Jewish people are facing in European society. His thesis is that "the real challenge the Shoah and its memory present for the Jews concerns the legitimacy of the Jewish people, i.e., its right to exist as a people.

"For the Jews the key question concerning the Shoah is not the subject of the study of the 'absolute evil.' This belongs to the metaphysical or religious spheres, and especially to a Gnostic wisdom that presents the good and the evil as two opposed, eternally contending forces. The religious and philosophical discussion on the Shoah is an ideological delusion. Far more important is the political condition of the Jews in modernity. The Shoah occurred in this world and in the political realm, not in the skies."

### **The Problems Resulting from Emancipation**

Trigano explains: "The way the Shoah's memory is dealt with in European society reflects this current Jewish problem. This has deep historical roots and can be traced back to the emancipation of the Jews in 1791 in France. The aim was to give citizenship to the Jews as individuals while ending the Jewish existence as

a people.<sup>2</sup> The Jews in Europe subsequently obtained neither legitimacy nor an existential framework for their political and historical condition.

“It has not been possible, however, to abolish the Jewish people by an ideological diktat or the enactment of a law. The French Revolution’s program of the ‘regeneration of the Jews’ collided with a historical reality. This reality continued to exist even if many Jews were trying to escape it. After the emancipation, Jewish individuals had the possibility to enter the public sphere of the larger society. The Jewish people, however, remained in a no-man’s-land.

“The Shoah made it clear that the Jewish people was not recognized as such by Europe even 150 years after the emancipation’s beginning. Far worse, the Jewish people was destined to be destroyed. It did not matter whether a Jew felt attached to the Jewish community or tried to escape belonging to it. Even the most remotely connected Jews in Europe became victims of a collective Jewish destiny during the Shoah.

“In the Shoah it further became clear that the Jews were not even recognized as individual citizens like other individuals in European society. Their civil rights were abolished because they belonged to a specific group. The thus-defined individuals were assembled and destroyed as belonging to the Jewish people. Most Jews neither comprehended nor accepted the historical and political dimension of this disaster — that the Jewish people had no possibility to exist as such in European political modernity. Belonging to this did not depend on one’s will: it was an irreducible Jewish collective fate.”

## **Lefort and Arendt**

“For Europe the Shoah meant the collapse of democracy, which had failed to protect the Jews and many others in adversity. In Europe’s democratic societies totalitarianism had successfully developed. The French philosopher Claude Lefort shows how totalitarianism is a permanent challenge to modernity and democratic societies.

“He wrote that democracy embodies two seemingly contradictory principles. First, it derives its power from the people, which is no more than a collection of individuals. Second, democratic power does not belong to anybody. This creates a void that is the condition of freedom. In turn, however, it may create both a desire and an opportunity for totalitarianism, when there is a need to fill this distressing void.<sup>3</sup>

“Another important author on this subject is the philosopher Hannah Arendt. One can criticize her for many reasons, yet in her book on anti-Semitism she realized that the Jews’ condition as a people is at the core of their destruction. This simple truth is not understood by many. The first book of her trilogy on totalitarianism, *On Anti-Semitism*, is devoted to this subject.



“In it Arendt illustrates how the Jews were not emancipated on the basis of a ‘right’ but of a ‘privilege,’ how the European nation-state policy and economy needed the continuity of an excluded Jewish people to carry out (economic) functions that the national citizens were unwilling to undertake, and how the 1914–1918 war ended this system and doomed the Jewish people to destruction.”

### **Suppressing the Shoah’s Political Dimension**

“European societies remember the Shoah nowadays in a way that suppresses both the political dimension of the Jews’ existence in Europe and the political lesson from the Jews’ destruction. The problems associated with the Jewish people’s inability to find its place in modern European society are thus resurfacing in a distorted and indirect fashion.

“Nowadays anti-Zionism questions the right of the Jews to constitute as a state. The Jews’ enemies accuse them of using the Shoah as a tool to establish their collective identity, as a political instrument, and for economic purposes, therefore betraying the victims’ memory. These ongoing attacks on the Jews may, again, have severe political consequences.

“When Europeans recall the Shoah they mainly stress aspects such as the Jews’ suffering and sacrifice. This emphasis on victimhood enables suppressing the Shoah’s political aspects. In France in particular, the prevailing culture does not permit such a political expression. Remembering the Shoah is the only mode French culture can accept if the Jews want to manifest their collective identity. The memory of the Shoah becomes the only way for Europe to recognize the Jews as a people — a dead and suffering people.

“Yet Jews still pay a heavy price, because their enemies now accuse them of promoting a collective identity by sacralizing the Shoah’s memory. The Jews, however, are left with no other means to express their distinctiveness in the environment in which they live. If they presented their collective identity in any other way, they would incur even greater condemnation. The European reality thus leads to the distortion that the Jewish collective identity can only express itself by referring to sacrifice and victimhood.”

Trigano calls this attitude perverse. “The compassion for the Jewish victims of the Shoah conceals in a sublimated way the nonrecognition of the Jews as a people, as a political subject.

“This manifests itself indirectly through anti-Zionism, which means attacking the strongest contemporary expression of the Jewish collectivity. This anti-Zionism directly concerns the European Jews. They are viewed through their relationship with Israel. The Jews’ connection with Zionism, along with the memory of the Shoah, expresses the Jewish collective identity. This bond, however, strongly contradicts the victimhood memory because it brings the suppressed political dimension of the Shoah to the surface.

“In the Shoah, the Jews’ purely individual status in Europe, since the emancipation, was jeopardized. The fatal destiny of the collective Jewish condition emerged. The identification with Israel made it possible to reestablish it. This explains why since the 1950s increasingly more Jews are Zionists and identify with Israel.

“In Europe it has become the main positive expression of one’s link to the Jewish people. But in the past five years European public opinion and governments have reemphasized the Jews’ status as victims, and simultaneously condemned Israel. In France, both ways of reconstructing Jewish life after the Shoah were condemned, with the community accused of tribalism. One was the Jewish communal structure in France, the other was Israel.”

### **Christianity’s Symbolic System**

When asked why Europe is unwilling to recognize the political dimension of the Jewish people, Trigano says there are two major explanations. “The first one derives from Christianity. Its origins are thus ancient. In one of my books I explain how the Apostle Paul — a Jew himself — established a symbolic system whose political consequences for the Jews continued even in the modern era.<sup>4</sup>

“Christianity aimed to replace the eternal Israel. In the supersession theology it had to reject Jewish peoplehood by — in Paul’s language — giving all nations the possibility to belong to the chosen Israel, in fact becoming the new Israel. Paul falsely stated that the Jews aimed to appropriate all salvation, leaving nothing for others. For the Jews, indeed, the people of Israel is the place where God reveals himself. For this Paul substituted Christ.

“Christianity’s major problem was that the Jews did not disappear. Their continuity as a people constituted a scandal for the new Israel that the Church wanted to embody. This became the basis of two thousand years of persecution.

“Till the Reformation, the Jews were — under the Church’s auspices — socially ghettoized in the double-swords empire (the Papacy and the Holy Roman German Empire). In the medieval state, the Jews were outside the universal fraternity. They were the paradigm of the ‘other’ in Europe, the only ‘people’ in the Holy Roman German Empire.

“The Reformation ended this. The Holy Roman German Empire collapsed and so did the pope’s central political position. The European nations emerged. Now the Jews were less and less perceived as the solitary people they were throughout the Middle Ages, but rather as individuals adhering to the Jewish religious denomination. When the Jews entered modernity, their peoplehood dimension was officially, rationally, and consciously eliminated as all Europe turned into nation-states. This laid the basis for the tragedy of Jewish existence in modernity.”

### “The Jewish Conspiracy”

“In modernity, however, matters did not evolve as expected. After a few decades a new type of hatred against the Jews emerged: political anti-Semitism. Its specific target for attack became the Jewish *people*. The political anti-Semites did not aim at the Jewish people as it was, but first created a distorted version of it. They developed the concept of the Jewish conspiracy aiming to rule the world.

“It claimed that the Jews — citizens of various countries — forge secret, conspiratorial bonds between them. The Jewish people was viewed in this caricatured way in Europe. While, after the emancipation, the Jews reformed themselves to become individual citizens, their maltreatment continued. The appearance of anti-Semitism is linked to this reform of the Jews, to the abandonment of the condition of ‘people’ despite its continuity in reality.

“In France there were anti-Jewish outbursts every forty to fifty years after the Jews’ emancipation. The socialism that emerged after the 1848 revolution was accompanied by violent ideological attacks on the Jews. Charles Fourier and Alphonse Toussenel were two extreme examples. The latter’s *The Jews, Kings of the Epoch* appeared in 1844. In 1886, Edouard Drumont’s book *Jewish France* launched a major anti-Semitic struggle, with the 1894 Dreyfus affair as the apex. In the 1930s anti-Semitism again developed rapidly, further intensifying under the Vichy government.

“This persecution culminated in the Shoah. It made clear that while the emancipation had liberated the Jews to some extent individually, the subsequent process had led to the Jewish people’s exclusion from society followed by their partial destruction.

“In the 1970s in France and elsewhere, anti-Semitism emerged from Third Worldist anti-Zionism. This was the prelude to the UN’s 1975 ‘Zionism is racism’ resolution. In that period also de Gaulle’s earlier incendiary remarks about the Jews opened other avenues of suspecting the Jews’ double loyalty and stigmatizing Israel.”

### Modernity

Trigano says the second reason that Europe refuses to recognize the Jews’ political dimension is much more complex and directly linked to modernity. “I have tried to demonstrate that in my book *The Democratic Ideal and the Shoah: The Unthought in Political Modernity*, which was recently translated into English.<sup>5</sup> A key factor is that the human rights theory is incapable of founding the identity of a collective.”

Trigano explains: “The idea of the social contract from which the modern state originates supposes that the latter’s authority derives from individuals’ agreement about constitutional principles. It is based on the assumption that the collectivity

is the rational result of the individuals' convergence of ideas. Philosophically this sounds beautiful but in reality matters did not evolve that way.

“The ideal of a human collective being based entirely on rationalism and individualism doesn't function in the real world. Rousseau already understood that bonds, based solely on democratic individualism, cannot keep societies together. Therefore Rousseau reintroduced a new religion, a civil religion — because only a religion can teach how to obey. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim said society is more than the sum total of its individual members. The human rights philosophy has been unable to take this into account.

“After the Jews' emancipation, anti-Semitism and nationalism emerged simultaneously. This also was not foreseen by modernity. These developments had nothing to do with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. It turned out that this declaration failed to administrate a people or even a society.”

### **Sociology versus Philosophy**

Trigano stresses that sociologists can contribute much more to understanding this than philosophers. “The sociological approach of political philosophy tells us that all societies and human collectivities have a not entirely rational identity. The latter derives from heritage, history, and the resulting sediments over the years.

“In France this irrational identity can be demonstrated in terms of the relationship between democracy and the nation. Does democracy mean that the country must receive everybody, including immigrants from all over the world as the Declaration of Human Rights supposed? It is indeed directed to all humanity but gave rise to a specific national state that, with Napoleon, became a conquering empire.”

### **The Gap between Nationality and Citizenship**

“All the above illustrates that in political modernity a gap exists between nationality and citizenship. During the Shoah the Jews lived this reality in a dramatic way. They thought that because they were German or French citizens they also belonged to these nations.

“They wanted to be more German than the Germans, more French than the French. They discovered, however, that the nationalists didn't accept them as part of their nation. Political anti-Semitism illustrated the gap between citizenship and nationality. The problem raised by the recent wave of immigration to Europe is a new illustration of this question.”

Trigano sums up: “These two causes, the Christian heritage and the failure of modernity, led inevitably to the Shoah. The catastrophe was underpinned by the widespread suspicion that the Jews, while living as individuals, were a

people united by a conspiracy. The Vichy regime on its own initiative — without being asked to do so by the Germans — decided that the Jews would lose their citizenship rights. Vichy's minister Xavier Vallat, the first commissary for the Jews, said Jews were 'a foreign people among us.'

"The Shoah is in many ways related to the crisis in which Europe finds itself. One facet is the consistent effort to misinterpret the Shoah's meaning. It was presented as a Jewish problem rather than a Western one. Another aspect is the emphasis placed on remembering what had happened rather than on its political and permanent aspects. A third one is the accusation that the Jews abuse the Shoah's memory while the true issue is the repression of the democratic conscience."

### **Europe's Distorted Matrix of Identity**

Trigano concludes that from its very foundation, the matrix of European identity included a distorted vision of the Jews that has manifested itself over the centuries in many ways. "By now Europe has a soul that is so heavily historically loaded that it cannot change.

"I believe that the major identity crisis in the first decade of twenty-first-century Europe centered on America's overtaking it. A new 'empire,' the European Union, aims to establish itself today in Europe. It may or may not emerge, but it leads Europe into rivalry with the United States. In this process the Jews fulfill a symbolic role because they are intimately linked to European identity's own rationale while being identified with the Americans via American Jewry and its supposed influence on Washington.

"Even if there will be no Jews left in Europe, there will be a Jewish question. In Poland where once millions of Jews lived and now hardly any do, this was very evident in the 1960s. There is much anti-Semitism there with almost no Jews in the country."

Trigano adds: "Europe is again dangerous for the Jews. The first years of the new century have amply demonstrated what it harbors. The Jews have become a symbolical tool for Europeans to avoid confronting as long as possible the problems posed to them by the Arab and Muslim immigration. The Middle East conflict has become a tool to mediate the complex of relationships between Europe and this immigrant population. Condemning Israel is a way for Europe to keep civil peace at home."

### **Denying Aggressors Were Muslims**

"In 2001, French Jews suffered numerous aggressions against them. They stated that many aggressors were Muslims. Public opinion, instead of helping the Jews, initially accused them of being racists and tribalists.

“These accusations should have been addressed univocally against the criminal aggressors, but the Jews are the weak link in European society, which can most easily be turned into scapegoats. The French Jews were entirely powerless in confronting this. They thus become again a tool in a discourse that they have to accept passively.

“The second danger is the way in which Europe, feeling guilty, has a need to cultivate the image of the suffering Jewish victim. On the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, an entire continent came to celebrate the Jews' victimhood. This was done in an excessively sacral way, the more unhealthy because it came so abruptly after an ongoing period of violent hostility of European opinion toward Israel and the Jewish communities. Only the dead Jewish peoplehood is recognized in the memory of the Shoah and its ceremonials. The living one is a problem.”

### **The Passion Play of the Jews**

Trigano explains that this is the recycling of a profound Christian motif. “Only if one identifies with the suffering of Jesus can one find salvation. Now this theme resurfaces in a contemporary attire. If a Westerner identifies with the suffering of the Shoah he can redeem himself of the Nazis' culpability. The memory of the Shoah becomes a modern version of the Passion of Christ. The victims are recognized as dead bodies – as much as Christ's corpse on the cross is recognized as Jewish.

“Contemporary Jews do not have to accept the imposed role of (sacral) corpses. Unfortunately, all the Jewish institutions and much of the Jewish public are willing to play today this dangerous — both for their political condition and mental health — part. Here we face a conflict between two strategies: the memory of the Shoah as a basis for legitimizing the Jewish right to exist, and the Zionist position that founds this right on a positive, historical, and political (democratic!) basis.

“The creation of the Jewish state has shown to the Europeans that the old Israel has not definitively died in the Shoah, and that the Diaspora is not eternal as a punishment for deicide. This is difficult to accept for old Europe. That makes the Israeli soldier a monster in the new Passion Play, in which the dead Jewish people takes the place of the Christ. They ask, how can the victim carry a gun?

“According to Europe's moral requirements and its need to virginize itself anew through identification with Jewish victims, Europeans can represent Israel only as a refugee camp.

“When one identifies with the victim one is no longer an executioner. But if the victim no longer wants to play this role in today's society, then he appears and must be presented as an executioner. Many Europeans consider Israelis as persecutors only because they are no longer mainly victims. It has little to do

with the Europeans' attitude toward the Palestinians, about whom they do not care at all. They became the new victims to be exalted so as to cleanse European culpability. The Zionist Jews, however, do not want to fulfill the role destined for the Jewish people in the European mythology.”

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Mikael Tossavainen

## The Holocaust in Arab Public Discourse: Historicized Politics and Politicized History

In the last few decades, interest in the Holocaust has increased worldwide. This tendency was already apparent in the early 1980s, in the wake of the broadcasting of the television series *Holocaust* in North America and Western Europe. About a decade later, with the fall of the Iron Curtain, this renewed interest spread eastward into the former communist countries as well. The reawakening of these countries from state-imposed ideological amnesia, where history was only interpreted through the prism of narrow historical materialism, has led to the return of old conflicts and ethnic divisions thought by many to have been dead and buried in the 1940s.

One of the issues that resurfaced after the lifting of the heavy hand of historical materialism was the Holocaust. The former communist countries had to bring their narratives of World War II atrocities into line with those in the Western world, where ideology and political censorship had not stifled open historical debate in the years following the end of the war. This process of reassessment of the past was part of the general closing of the gap that had been the result of nearly four decades of a divided Europe.

Many Eastern European countries had to rewrite their wartime past, and in some cases this resulted in painful revisions of previous grand narratives of sublime national suffering under fascist occupation. One clear example is Poland, where the population had to start to grapple with the fact that many of the “Polish” victims of the Nazi occupation had in fact been Polish Jews, and that the lion’s share of those who perished in the gas chambers at Auschwitz and other death camps on Polish soil had been Jews. To add insult to injury, they had to face the fact that some Poles had even collaborated with the Germans in their genocidal designs. At times, the radical revision of the previous historical narrative has led to negative reactions such as Holocaust denial and other forms of anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, a new and sometimes painful understanding of the past has already made considerable headway in Eastern European society, but much work still remains to be done.

### **The Holocaust as the Symbol of Absolute Evil**

The increased interest in the Nazi-orchestrated annihilation of European Jewry during World War II has put a new focus on the Holocaust. The Holocaust has



become a touchstone in European history and culture in the early twenty-first century. Auschwitz has become the very symbol of absolute evil, and the most obvious example of barbarism or inhumanity to be drawn upon in any political, historical, cultural, or ethical debate, whatever the context. This omnipresence of the Holocaust in historical consciousness and public debate has been decried by some, who see it merely as cheap rhetoric and cynical abuse of the memory of the victims. However, taking into account that the Holocaust has assumed such a central place in Western historical culture, where it now represents absolute evil, it seems only logical that it should also be invoked in contexts where it might seem less appropriate. The abandonment of historical exactitude is the price that has to be paid for this centrality of the Holocaust, which has become an event outside, or above, history with a universal and eternal message. The controversy over what this message might be is political or perhaps ethical, but hardly a historical debate.

### **The Holocaust and the Middle East**

The increased international interest in the Holocaust can be discerned in the Arab world as well, but there it manifests itself quite differently than it does north of the Mediterranean. Instead of adopting the Holocaust as the symbol of absolute evil, a unifying reference to man's inhumanity to man, Arab public discourse displays considerable difficulty in finding a way to deal with the genocide against the Jews during World War II. Because of its omnipresence, the Holocaust cannot be ignored, but the Western view of the event is unacceptable in the Arab world, since the Jews are impossible to cast in the role of innocent victims in any narrative that will have claims to a general following in that world. Such a victim role for the Jews would go against years of intense anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic propaganda in Arab public discourse, propaganda that even increased in intensity in the years following the Holocaust.

One school of thought holds that the main reason for this increasing hostility toward Jews in the Arab world is to be found in the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. Once this issue is settled, the Jewish state will be accepted in mainstream Arab culture and this will in turn also have a positive effect on how Jews and Jewish issues — such as the Holocaust — are treated in Arab public discourse. Others regard this position as overly optimistic, and instead stress that animosity toward the Jewish state stems from an Arab view that the state of Israel is an unnatural usurper situated in the middle of the Arab heartland. From this perspective, the incapacity to come to terms with Israel's existence, together with traditional Muslim as well as imported European racially inspired anti-Semitism are the main causes of a situation where it seems all but impossible to deal with the Holocaust in a rational fashion in Arab public discourse.<sup>1</sup>

Matthias Küntzel, associate researcher at the Vidal Sassoon International

Center for the Study of Anti-Semitism at the Hebrew University, has analyzed attitudes toward the Holocaust in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where the religious and political circumstances with regard to the Jews and their state are similar to those in the Arab world in general. Küntzel points to a paradox in the public discourse in the Middle East dealing with the Holocaust. On the one hand, Holocaust denial is widespread, but on the other Hitler is admired for having murdered so many Jews. The common ground uniting these two conflicting perceptions is anti-Semitism.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional anti-Semitism has been part of Iranian culture for hundreds of years, and Iran today is a society where anti-Semitism is prevalent in the mainstream public discourse.<sup>3</sup> However, with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president, anti-Semitism has taken a prominent place in public discourse at the highest level of the state. Küntzel concludes that:

Since December 2005, the Iranian President has placed the denial of the Holocaust at the center of his agitation. During this time, the Iranian regime has spared no effort to establish the “exposure” of the “Holocaust Myth” as a new historiographical paradigm. Thus the “lie about the Holocaust” has become a regular topic on televised Friday sermons. Talk shows on public television feature a parade of historians who mock the “fairy tale about the gas chambers.” The Iranian state press agency has developed into a platform for Holocaust deniers from all over the world.<sup>4</sup>

According to Küntzel, the public discourse on the Holocaust in the Middle East contains some central elements. Among these is the aforementioned paradox of denial and praise for the Holocaust; the allegation that “the Zionists” have created “the Holocaust myth” and that Israel is benefiting from it; the notion that the Holocaust was the product of a collusion between the Nazis and the Zionists; and last, but certainly not least, the assertion that Israel today is carrying out a Holocaust against the Palestinians that exceeds what the Nazis did to the Jews.<sup>5</sup> The following analysis will focus on some key themes in Arab public discourse on the Holocaust, and shed light on the political, or rather politicized, framework of this discourse.

## **Denying the Holocaust**

Holocaust denial is widespread in the Arab world, and criticism of this phenomenon is rare.<sup>6</sup> However, as Holocaust denial has developed and been refined internationally, the new forms of more sophisticated denial have also reached the Arab world. Outright denial of the Holocaust is something best kept for preaching to the faithful. When in mixed company, Holocaust deniers have developed a more sophisticated strategy that runs less of a risk of alienating their audiences. This strategy, cultivated internationally as well as in the Arab world,

aims at minimizing the Holocaust, either by arguing that the Germans had no genocidal intent, and that Jews were not targeted qua Jews, or by minimizing the number of Jewish victims. Among prominent Arab public figures who foster minimization is Dr. Musa al-Zu'but, chairman of the Education Committee of the Palestinian Legislative Council, a man with considerable influence over the education of Palestinian schoolchildren.<sup>7</sup>

In the Arab world, Holocaust denial and revisionism is far from a fringe phenomenon found only in less reputable media outlets. Even state-controlled media propagate Holocaust denial. In 2004, Egypt's ruling National Democratic Party newspaper *Al-Liwa Al-Islami* published two articles by Dr. Rif'at Sayyed Ahmad called "The Lie about the Burning of the Jews," where he claimed that there was no such thing as the Holocaust as commonly understood. Instead, he emphasized the two key minimizing aspects mentioned above. He asserted that the Jews died during the war because of reasons of war, not because of a plan to kill Jews, and that they were not targeted more than any other people; Hitler hated all non-Germans and had no special animus toward Jews. At the end of the article, he added that in the West one can blaspheme and curse religion (Islam), but one cannot question the Holocaust, and concluded: "All this proves that we are standing before new Western idol-worship that requires a genuine cultural revolution within it in order to destroy it."<sup>8</sup>

More sophisticated Holocaust deniers and minimizers try to make their claims as believable as possible. One way to do so is by referring to recognized scholars in the field of Holocaust studies. It is especially useful to invoke arguments used by Jewish scholars, since this — in the opinion of some — renders the argument immune to accusations of anti-Semitism. In 2006, Lebanon's New TV employed this strategy. The channel broadcast a show where it was stated, falsely, that the noted Holocaust scholar Raul Hilberg would have claimed that only fifty thousand Jews perished in the Holocaust. New TV stressed that Hilberg and Norman Finkelstein (also adduced in the program) are Jewish. Both Hilberg and Finkelstein were used to legitimize claims that the Holocaust never occurred, or has been manipulated and exaggerated. Both of these men are indeed Jews, but while Hilberg has a solid reputation as a Holocaust scholar, Finkelstein's only connections to the issue are his Jewishness, his starkly worded and oft-repeated anti-Zionism,<sup>9</sup> and his charges of Jewish manipulation of the genocide.

Of course, not everyone is interested in sophistry and subtle forms of undermining the veracity of the Holocaust. Outright denial of the genocide of the Jews is also common in Arab public discourse and invokes well-known deniers. In 1999, for instance, the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Manar* asserted that the Holocaust is a myth and that deniers such as Fred Leuchter, Roger Garaudy, Robert Faurisson, and Ernst Zündel are modern-day versions of Galileo Galilei who are silenced forcefully when they try to speak the truth.<sup>10</sup>

On 6 September 2000, the English-language *Syria Times*, owned by the Syrian government, published an article called "Holocaust!!!?" by Mohammad Daoud.

In this clearly anti-Semitic piece, Daoud wrote that “history has not witnessed a people who have mastered lying, dodgery, and myth making such as the Israelis.” He continued: “Their most famous myth is that of the so-called Holocaust,” and asserted that “Since the invention of this word, they have been living on it and blackmailing the whole world.” He concluded that “due to this alleged Holocaust, the Palestinian people were and still are exposed to inhuman practices by the Israelis.”<sup>11</sup> This article features many of the elements that are central to Arab attitudes toward the Holocaust, as will become apparent further on.

### **Israel Exploits the Holocaust**

The key sentence in Daoud’s article, capturing a central aspect of Arab attitudes toward the Holocaust, is: “Since the invention of this word, they have been living on it and blackmailing the whole world.”<sup>12</sup> The Israelis or the Jews are portrayed as ruthless and unscrupulous people, making up a lie about a massive genocide in Europe so as to obtain either money or political support. The Jews, the argument goes, cynically claim fake compensation from various European government and banks, bullying them to pay what effectively is extortion money to Jewish organizations. Political support is garnered by Israel and its supporters abroad by invoking the fabricated memory of the Holocaust as a *carte blanche* for the Jewish state to do whatever it sees fit to guarantee that another Holocaust will never happen. In this vein, *Al-Manar* wrote in the spring of 1999: “Since the end of WWII, the victors have imposed their hegemony over history, and forged the legend of the Holocaust to extort the entire world, using the face of the ugly Nazi.”<sup>13</sup>

In Arab public discourse, the charge that Israel exploits the Holocaust myth for its own sinister purposes is a major argument against Holocaust education. It is claimed that the Holocaust did not happen in the first place, and even if it did, talking about it or educating future generations about it will only play into the hands of the Jewish state.

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that in 2003, when Archimandrite Emil Shoufani of the Greek Orthodox Church suggested that Palestinian pupils should visit Auschwitz, this met with strong opposition. Palestinian historian Dr. Isam Sisalem claimed that “the Zionist movement exploited [the Holocaust] in order to cover up its loathsome crimes in Palestine. It also continues to extort the European states to this very day.” Tamim Mansour, a high school teacher in Tira and lecturer at Beit Berl College in Kfar Saba (both Israeli towns) echoed these sentiments, saying that “The Zionist enterprise uses [the Holocaust] to justify Israel’s crimes today.... In my opinion, Israel can use a project of this sort to reinforce the victim psychology in Israeli society much more than we can use it to bring about openness in Israeli society.” The then Israeli Arab Member of Knesset Azmi Bishara was also critical, warning of Israeli exploitation of the Holocaust:

To date, when other people took an interest in the Holocaust, the result was that Israel turned this opportunity into an instrument. A situation arose in which the more you understand the history of the persecution of the Jews [the more] you must justify and understand Israel and its behavior today. This is what they call instrumentalization of the Holocaust. There are two great crimes regarding the Holocaust — denying it and [using it] as it is being used.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Israelis Are like the Nazis**

Israel's supposed heinous criminality is a theme that runs through all the abovementioned reactions to Holocaust education. The idea that Israelis are criminals, even comparable to the Nazis, is a strong element in Arab public discourse on the Holocaust on general. This sometimes goes beyond mere false comparisons to claiming that the Jews themselves supported or participated in the Holocaust; this accusation is often directed at Zionists to connect Zionism to Nazism.

For instance, the above-quoted Daoud claims that Zionists in the Land of Israel “expressed its desire to take part in the battles on Germany’s side.”<sup>15</sup> In 2001, Palestinian Authority television broadcast a Friday sermon by Sheikh Ibrahim Madhi, a lecturer at Al-Aqsa University in Gaza, in which he asserted that “One of the Jews’ evil deeds is what has come to be called ‘the Holocaust,’ that is, the slaughter of the Jews by Nazism. However, revisionist [historians] have proven that this crime, carried out against some of the Jews, was planned by the Jews’ leaders, and was part of their policy.”<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, a Hamas leader in Gaza, maintained that the Zionists were the ones who bore the actual responsibility for the Holocaust. In 2003, he wrote in the Hamas weekly *Al-Risala*:

It is no longer a secret that the Zionists were behind the Nazis’ murder of many Jews, and agreed to it, with the aim of intimidating [the Jews] and forcing them to immigrate to Palestine. Every time they failed to persuade a group of Jews to immigrate [to Palestine], they unhesitatingly sentenced [them] to death. Afterwards, they would organize great propaganda campaigns, to cash in on their blood. The Nazis received tremendous financial aid from the Zionist banks and monopolies, and this contributed to their rise to power.... There is no doubt that this great financial aid helped the Nazis build the military and economic force it needed to destroy Europe and annihilate millions.<sup>17</sup>

Rantisi combined the claim that Zionists were responsible for the Holocaust with the claim that Israel exploits the Holocaust today. He continued:

When we compare the Zionists to the Nazis, we insult the Nazis.... The crimes perpetrated by the Nazis against humanity, with all their atrocities,

are no more than a tiny particle compared to the Zionists' terror against the Palestinian people. While disagreement proliferates about the veracity of the Zionist charges regarding the Nazis' deeds, no one denies the abhorrent Zionist crimes, some of which camera lenses have managed to document.<sup>18</sup>

On 6 July 2006, the English-language edition of *Al-Hayat*, the London-based Arabic newspaper, published an article by columnist and former editor Jihad al-Khazen titled "From One Intifada to Another." In it al-Khazen does not deny the Holocaust but instead turns the genocide against the Jews, writing that "about six million Jews lost their lives in the Nazi Holocaust...there are obvious similarities between what the Jews suffered under Nazism and what the descendants of the Holocaust victims are inflicting on the Palestinians." He elaborates: "The whole Gaza Strip is a Nazi-like concentration camp, just as the Warsaw Ghetto was after the German occupation of Poland.... The numbers are different, but all the other details are similar. I think that the government of 'Führer' Olmert will not send the people of Gaza to gas camps [*sic*] because oil is too expensive."<sup>19</sup>

Later that same month, on 24 July 2006, al-Khazen took equating Nazi Germany with Israel one step further. He launched a theory that the Nazis who carried out the Holocaust actually escaped justice and clandestinely moved to Israel:

Ehud Olmert's government perpetrates definite Nazi practices against the Palestinians and the Lebanese. He is a young Führer, and his generals, like Dan Halutz and Moshe Kaplinsky, are commando generals. The question now is: Is it logical for the survivors of the Holocaust and their descendants to do what the Nazis had done to them?... Historically, six million Jews died in the Holocaust, and 97.5 percent of the Polish Jews were killed in the gas chambers, and by other means. My explanation is that the number of the Jews who were killed might be higher. All the Polish Jews might have been killed, too, and the Nazi political and military leaders might have realized since 1944 that defeat was imminent and, therefore, assumed the identity of Jews and then fled to Palestine as Jews who had survived the Holocaust.<sup>20</sup>

This, in al-Khazen's view, would provide the only "logical reason for Israel's Nazi-like practices."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Palestinians Are the Victims of the Holocaust**

If the Israelis are the Nazis of today, then the Palestinians must be the true victims of the Holocaust. This view was manifested in several of the above-quoted articles, such as Daoud's in the *Syria Times*, and in the reactions to the proposal to provide Palestinian pupils with Holocaust education.<sup>22</sup>

In 2004, the abovementioned Egyptian *Al-Liwaa Al-Islami* managed both to

deny the Holocaust and claim that Israel is perpetrating a Holocaust-type slaughter of the Palestinians.<sup>23</sup> A similar position was expressed, for instance, by Dr. Hayat al-Hwayek Atiya, a “researcher on Zionism” and follower of French Holocaust-denier Roger Garaudy. In 2001, she participated in a televised Al Jazeera debate where she asserted that the Germans did not carry out any genocide against the Jews during World War II, but that Israel is in fact a perpetrator of genocide. She concluded: “This is the Holocaust, this is the Holocaust. There is no Jewish Holocaust, there is only a Palestinian Holocaust.”<sup>24</sup>

### **The Holocaust as a Political Weapon**

As this overview clearly shows, there is often an explicit linkage between the Arab-Israeli conflict and the way the Holocaust is treated in Arab public discourse. Indeed, in the Arab world, the issue of the Holocaust can hardly be separated from the highly politicized anti-Israeli discourse. Seemingly no Jewish issue, not even the Holocaust, can be debated without connecting it to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Arab interpretations of this conflict.

Time and again, reporters and public figures return to the issue of Israel when discussing the Holocaust, and their negative views of the Jewish state influence how they interpret and understand the Holocaust. As illustrated above, this fosters a situation where the Holocaust can be denied or minimized, or blamed on Zionists, that is, the forerunners of today’s Israelis; Israel can be accused of exploiting the Holocaust for its own financial and political gain, or can be seen as the successor state to Nazi Germany; and the Palestinians can be described as the true victims of the Holocaust.

The widespread Holocaust denial in the Arab world is sometimes criticized by Arab journalists or public figures themselves. This does not, however, mean that all those who accept the Holocaust as a historical fact are willing to discuss it outside of the anti-Israeli context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, on 15 April 2000, al-Khazen wrote in *Al-Hayat*: “Personally, I think the Holocaust occurred and I have no reason to doubt the number of victims.” This statement apparently met with protests from his readers, and he responded to the criticism in his column a week later:

The strangest thing about the Holocaust of the Jews committed by the Nazis, is that some Arabs insist on denying it with an enthusiasm that equals that of the neo-Nazis.... The Arab attitude toward the Holocaust should not be reduced to its denial. Rather, the Arabs should question how a people that suffered such massacres can take the role of the executioner and persecute other people.... The only rational possible Arab approach toward the Holocaust is to point out to the Jews and to others that a people saved from the Holocaust persecutes other nations now and treats them in the same manner from which it has suffered itself.<sup>25</sup>

Here too al-Khazen does not deny the Holocaust, but — probably recognizing its international importance and stark moral lesson for posterity — instead he turns it against the Jews and uses it as a political weapon against them in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Thus, without denying the Holocaust outright, he distorts it, falsely equating Israeli and Nazi policies when he concludes that “it is inconceivable that a people that was saved from the Holocaust persecutes another people, deports it, destroys its property, and steals its land.”<sup>26</sup>

The benefit of this politicized use of the Holocaust as a weapon against Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict was mentioned explicitly by Atiya in the abovementioned Al Jazeera broadcast. She claimed that equating Israel with Nazi Germany serves the interests of the Palestinians and the Arabs in general, and explained: “The comparison of Zionism to Nazism in the media is a blow to Western psychology, because the Western conscience is particularly sensitive to the Nazis.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, Atiya explicitly recognizes the importance of the Holocaust in international historical consciousness, but her conclusion is completely different from that prevalent in the West. She strives to employ the significance of the Holocaust in the struggle against Israel.

### **Arab Criticisms of Arab Holocaust Abuse**

However, Atiya’s approach was met by criticism on the same Al Jazeera program. The liberal Tunisian intellectual Lafif Lakhdar objected to her proposed strategy of employing the Holocaust as a weapon against Israel. Yet, even though he also stressed his disgust at Nazism, his main argument against such a politicized use of the Holocaust was not that it would be ethically problematic. Instead, Lakhdar pointed out that Atiya’s strategy was bound to fail:

If we adopt the Nazis’ garbage...we will lose on our issue, namely the liberation of the Arab lands occupied in 1967.... Politically, if we support revisionism and Holocaust deniers...we will lose international diplomacy.... The main thing for us is the struggle against the occupation and the settlements. What is the point, then, to constantly say: Israel is Nazi, Israel is worse than Nazism, Israel is worse than fascism, etc. We cannot fight against international diplomacy, because then we will lose our cause.<sup>28</sup>

Lakhdar’s approach, which is more attuned to Western sensitivities regarding the Holocaust, and is based on an understanding of the boundaries of the international Holocaust discourse, seems to be gaining ground also among certain circles of Arab intellectuals, most notably those who live in, or have connections to, the West. Yigal Carmon suggests that this new development might result from increased awareness of Arab public discourse in the West. In his view, the exposure of Arab Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism “induces shapers of Arab public opinion to



back down from their antisemitic stances — or at least to refrain from making antisemitic statements.”<sup>29</sup>

One example of this increased sensitivity is the reaction to a vulgar approach to the Holocaust in the Arab public discourse. In 2003, the news of a planned Holocaust-denial conference in Beirut met with protests from certain Arab intellectuals. One was *Al-Hayat* columnist Joseph Samaha. In his criticism, he echoes Lakhdar’s concerns about the damage to the Arab cause from wielding the political weapon of the Holocaust. Samaha wrote:

Holding the conference in Beirut brings no honor to the Lebanese capital. Perhaps its conceptual, political, and economic damage are inestimably greater than its benefit, which from the outside was nearly nonexistent. The conference will convene forgers of history who have stood trial in their own countries. This is, in effect, a conference against the truth. This is a conference against consciousness.... Some Arab intellectuals have condemned, and rightly so, the dubious call to convene a conference in Beirut with the aim of casting doubt upon the Jewish Holocaust [carried out] by the Nazis.... While this conference will make no impression on the issue of the Holocaust, the damage caused to Lebanon will be certain.<sup>30</sup>

The plans for a Holocaust-denial conference in Beirut were eventually dropped in March 2003 by the then Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri. However, some three years later, such a conference did take place in Teheran. Similar criticism was voiced. For example, British Arab journalist Adel Darwish asserted in the London daily *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat* that Ahmadinejad “only caused damage to his country, which is [going through] a difficult period in [terms of] its foreign [relations]. He also caused severe damage to the Muslims by creating a political-cultural climate in which feelings of hate drown out the Muslims’ noble and humane sentiments.” This criticism, which once again focuses on the damage of this strategy to the Arab or Muslim cause, and not on its inherent ethical flaw, was also put forth by others.<sup>31</sup>

The fact that the Holocaust is constantly seen in the political context of the Middle East conflict does not, however, always hinder criticism of Holocaust denial per se. On 17 December 2006, Kuwaiti journalist Dr. Khaled al-Janfawi stated in the newspaper *Al-Siyassa* regarding the Teheran conference:

Holding a conference devoted to Holocaust denial reflects a lack of cultural and human sensitivity which may exacerbate hatred among human beings.... We Muslims need to display human, cultural, and moral sensitivity in order to be a positive force in a humane world that no longer tolerates ethnic and religious conflict. We must stay away from anything that generates conflict among human beings.... Holding a Holocaust [denial] conference in Iran is adding fuel to the fire.... Some of the participants were agitators, and [others]

were [individuals] involved in racist discrimination against [minorities] other than the Jews, such as the African-Americans in the U.S.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite such hopeful expressions of rejection of Holocaust denial and racism, there is cause for concern when reviewing the Arab public discourse on the Holocaust. It is largely detached not only from the dominant Western view of the genocide of the Jews, but also from accepted international scholarship and the lessons of universal tolerance, antiracism, and nonviolence embedded in most international commemorations of these appalling events of World War II. Clearly, the politicized and hostile tenor in which Jewish matters are discussed in Arab public discourse has influenced the treatment of the Holocaust as well. When Jews are seen as aggressive, hostile, deviant, or evil, it is difficult to depict them as the victims of ultimate evil.

What can be done to alter this situation? One school of thought claims that the solving of the Arab-Israeli conflict would not only lead to general peace in the Middle East but also to a normalization of Arab attitudes toward Jews, including the attitude toward the Holocaust. Considering, however, the proportions of the hostility toward Jews and Israel in Arab public discourse, it is far from certain that any settling of the Arab-Israeli conflict would make it disappear. Since a solution to the conflict does not seem to be imminent, probably the best that can be hoped for is a clearer distinction between history and politics in the Arab world, so that the Holocaust could be treated separately from any quarrels with the state of Israel. Only time will tell whether this is possible, and whether international Holocaust commemoration with its message of universal tolerance and antiracism will make inroads in Arab public discourse as well.

## Notes

1. See, e.g., Goetz Nordbruch, "The Socio-Historical Background of Holocaust Denial in Arab Countries: Arab Reactions to Roger Garaudy's *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics*," ACTA, 17 (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2001).
2. Matthias Küntzel, "Unholy Hatreds: Holocaust Denial and Antisemitism in Iran," Posen Papers in Contemporary Antisemitism, 8 (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2007), 4.
3. *Ibid.*, 6.
4. *Ibid.*, 14.
5. *Ibid.*, 5.
6. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 89, 28 April 2000.
7. Aluma Solnick, "An Israeli Arab Initiative to Visit Auschwitz," MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis Series*, 136, 25 April 2003.
8. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 756, 30 July 2004.
9. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 1194, 29 June 2006.

10. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 33, 20 May 1999.
11. Muhammad Daoud, "Holocaust!!!??" *Syria Times*, 6 September 2000.
12. Ibid.
13. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 33, 20 May 1999.
14. Solnick, "Israeli Arab Initiative."
15. Daoud, "Holocaust!!!??"
16. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 276, 25 September 2001.
17. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 558, 27 August 2003.
18. Ibid.
19. Jihad al-Khazen, "From One Intifada to Another," *Al-Hayat*, 6 July 2006.
20. Jihad al-Khazen, "Is It Logical for the Survivors of the Holocaust and Their Descendants to Do What the Nazis Had Done to Them?" *Al-Hayat*, 24 July 2006.
21. Ibid.
22. See, e.g., Daoud, "Holocaust!!!??" and Solnick, "Israeli Arab Initiative."
23. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 756, 30 July 2004.
24. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 225, 6 June 2001.
25. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 89, 28 April 2000.
26. Ibid.
27. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 225, 6 June 2001.
28. Ibid.
29. Yigal Carmon, "Harbingers of Change in the Antisemitic Discourse in the Arab World," MEMRI, *Inquiry and Analysis Series*, 135, 23 April 2003.
30. Ibid.
31. MEMRI, *Special Dispatch Series*, 1425, 16 January 2007.
32. Ibid.

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Susanne Y. Urban

## Representations of the Holocaust in Today's Germany: Between Justification and Empathy

In Germany, the narrative of the Holocaust and how it is passed on from one generation to another depends on various factors. There are official politics and ceremonies on Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January and on the Kristallnacht Remembrance Day, 9 November. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, the latter has been observed mainly by the Jewish community.

Public events and discourses have changed the German perspective on the Holocaust and will have long-term effects on how the country's population deals with the subject, including how World War II and the Holocaust are taught in schools and elsewhere. That, in turn, will influence the perceptions of succeeding generations.

### Public Discourses

The German public discourse on the Holocaust and World War II began with the screening of the television series *Holocaust* in 1979–1980. It continued with the Historikerstreit (Historians' Quarrel) of 1986, which was mainly propelled by an article by the historian Ernst Nolte in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Nolte portrayed the National Socialist state and its terror as a mere reaction to the Bolshevik threat. He characterized the persecution of Jews and the Shoah itself as a genocide among others and not, as Yehuda Bauer wrote, "unanimous, total and universal" and therefore "paradigmatic."<sup>1</sup>

The next major controversy in this realm was the Bubis-Walser debate of 1998. In October that year, the writer Martin Walser was honored with the Peace Prize of German Publishers. In his speech he expressed his weariness at being confronted time and again with Auschwitz and with what he called the "moral club," causing him to want to avoid the subject.

Walser received a standing ovation from the 1,200 guests from the business, cultural, media, and political elites. But Ignatz Bubis, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, and his wife Ida did not applaud, remaining the only ones seated. Bubis was the first to articulate his anger and protest. Most of his supporters were also Jews; others who agreed with him told him so in private, not wanting it to be known publicly.

Bubis died in 1999, but the debate between him and Walser was never

resolved. A few weeks before his death, Bubis summed up his lifelong work on Jewish-German reconciliation with his well-known statement: "I did not or nearly did not succeed in my efforts." Despite strongly advocating Jewish life in Germany after 1945, he did not want to be buried in the country and his funeral took place in Israel.

In summer and fall 2007, the Jewish Museum of Frankfurt honored Bubis and the debates he promoted or took part in.<sup>2</sup> Walser, who was interviewed for the exhibit, expressed in the short feature screened there a certain regret that he was unable to resolve the debate during Bubis's lifetime. He never, however, hinted at a sincere apology.

What was Walser's point in mentioning that he had not had the chance to speak again with Bubis? The impression given was that Walser did not really regret anything, and perhaps would have met again with Bubis but still held the same viewpoint about Auschwitz and the Shoah.

Walser also visited the museum a few days after the exhibit opened. He rushed to the display on the famous debate and left quickly. He was accompanied by bodyguards and did not talk to the journalists whom they ushered away. Why did Walser, who is never accompanied by bodyguards, make an exception for this visit? One can only speculate, but he may have wanted to underline that as an antagonist of Bubis he did not feel secure in the Jewish Museum. In any case it was a strange, even absurd sight.<sup>3</sup>

In summer 2007, Walser met Nobel Prize-winning author Günter Grass for a discussion between friends in the weekly *Die Zeit*. An impression was conveyed of two old friends chatting about literature and sharing thoughts and memories. World War II, however, was mentioned only casually, as if not really connected to them.<sup>4</sup> A year earlier Grass had finally revealed in his memoirs having been an SS member during the last weeks of the war. Also in summer 2007, the weekly *Der Spiegel* revealed that Walser, like other leading German writers, had been a member of the Nazi Party. These long-hidden facts had never inhibited Walser or Grass from pontificating to others about the German past or present U.S. and Israeli policies.

Linked to these topics is also the discourse about German wartime suffering, which might be called the self-victimization of Germany. As Anne Applebaum noted: "The country's collective conscience was enlightened by the TV-serial *Holocaust* to an extent that could never have been achieved by historical science and all its publications. What imperative message, fuelled by emotionalism, is carried by today's self-reconciliation trend? The discussion on victimhood has now been extended to include the perpetrators."<sup>5</sup>

Germany has far more memorials and museums for the former concentration camps, as well as Jewish museums, than other European countries. Much Holocaust education is given in schools and other learning institutions. Conferences and workshops are devoted to the subject to an extent that is nearly unique in Europe. Nevertheless, a clear self-perception prevails of the Germans as victims.

Despite supposedly being taboo, this theme has been one of the dominant narratives among German families since 1945.<sup>6</sup> Starting in the mid-1990s, it was embraced in the political and educational domains as well. But as narratives changed under the impact of historical debates and political developments, some of the German attitudes toward the Holocaust, the war, and issues such as flight and expulsion changed as well.

## **Holocaust Education in Germany**

For a long time after 1945, commemoration in both Germanys was only a political issue. East Germany neglected the unique character of the Shoah and conflated it with fascism according to communist dogmas. West Germany took certain measures of remembrance and reconciliation in the 1950s, but there was no real public interest in questions of guilt and responsibility in the historical context.

Both German populations indulged for decades in a conspiracy of silence. A public discourse of the Holocaust did not exist. The Shoah and other German crimes against humanity were not present in textbooks or curricula in general.

It was only after the showing of *Holocaust* on television that West Germany's curricula began to change. Many educators, however, were bewildered as to how to teach the subject. Abstract phrases such as "Never again" and "Learning from the past" were used that did not give students a real connection to the past or to the impact of the Shoah in the present.

Classroom teaching on the Holocaust often was, and still is, deficient. It focused on statistics and dry descriptions of deportations or how the persecution developed through the racial and anti-Jewish laws. The courses generally culminated in Auschwitz by showing a documentary or some photos of piles of dead bodies. This approach often had no effect on the students; learning facts and statistics was not connected to personal experience and did not lead them to see the Holocaust as part of their own history, identity, and national consciousness. Immigrant students also often did not gain a connection to the Holocaust because they were not taught about it as something not only connected to Germany and Germans but also part of a European and worldwide legacy.

A major chance to improve Holocaust education was missed when *Schindler's List* was first screened in 1994. This could have been an important opportunity to explore the theme of the "Righteous among the Nations" and why some chose to be rescuers instead of bystanders or perpetrators. The movie demonstrates that helping Jews was possible; by 2007 Yad Vashem had honored up to twenty thousand Righteous Gentiles in all of Europe. Yet the official narrative in Germany still upholds the claim that there was not much people could do, and Schindler is often characterized as a unique sort of hero.

If the movie had been accompanied with better educational material in

Germany, it would have been possible to counteract the excuse of helplessness and the portrayal of Righteous Gentiles as heroes instead of human beings who wanted to help others. Many Holocaust educators in Germany now screen the movie to “prepare” students for a visit to a museum or memorial site but not as a tool for teaching values and responsibility.<sup>7</sup>

Although public discourse on the Nazi past intensified after the German unification in 1990, this did not mean issues of responsibility and victimhood were dealt with appropriately. Many educators mean well and go to teachers’ trainings and seminars about the Holocaust. Many educators belong to national and even international educational networks and know how to teach about the Holocaust so as to prevent minimization or indifference. But such educators are not the only ones who influence the young generation.

A major opportunity for those who teach about the Holocaust is the Memorial for the Murdered Jews in Europe that opened in Berlin in 2005. The “information center” that is located underneath the memorial enables visitors to obtain various types of information about the Shoah and, particularly important, the individuals involved including victims, perpetrators, Righteous Gentiles, and so on.<sup>8</sup>

## **Barriers to Overcome in Holocaust Education**

The attitude of the young generation is also influenced by extreme positions. These have been gaining force in several regards:

1. Right-wing extremism and anti-Semitism have steadily increased since 1990.<sup>9</sup> Studies by various institutes confirm a stable anti-Semitism that has reached new dimensions. One survey found that 23 percent of the population are openly anti-Semitic and about 30–40 percent harbor hidden anti-Semitism.<sup>10</sup> Another survey by *Stern* in October 2007 found that 25 percent of the German population believes that National Socialism had its “good aspects.”<sup>11</sup> Harald Welzer, a social psychologist who has published books on the German narrative of the war and the Holocaust, suggested that this “low” rate is only based on political correctness and that the actual number holding such views is higher.<sup>12</sup>

In two federal states in eastern Germany, the ultranationalist NPD has won parliamentary seats. They use their democratically legitimated power to minimize the Holocaust and distort Holocaust commemoration, for example, by calling the Allied bombing of Germany the “Bomb Holocaust.”

2. Anti-Israeli/anti-Zionist, and therefore anti-Semitic, attitudes have increased in Germany since 2000. The outbreak of the Second Intifada, and the political and military reactions in Israel, prompted responses in Germany that were not confined to right-wing or left-wing extremists. Successful Holocaust education is not promoted when comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany, or between Israeli soldiers and Wehrmacht soldiers, abound in the media and public discourse. In May 2002, *Der Spiegel* published a survey by NFO

Infratest in which 25 percent agreed that “what the state of Israel does to the Palestinians is no different than what the Nazis did during the Third Reich to the Jews.”<sup>13</sup>

Teachers, journalists, and above all Holocaust education must make a clear distinction: the Arab-Israeli conflict has *nothing* in common with the Holocaust. The Shoah is a paradigmatic genocide. Bauer, as noted, has maintained that in its scope, scale, and totality it is the paradigmatic genocide in human history. The Shoah was genocide, but no other genocide was the Shoah. All other genocides share *aspects* of the paradigmatic one. Understanding the unique characteristics of these other genocides does not entail minimizing the Shoah.<sup>14</sup> To compare, however, the situation of the Palestinians with that of the Jews in Europe after 1933 is a blatant distortion.

3. Debates on restitution, art looting, and Aryanization still deeply affect the public discourse. Media coverage of the stories promotes prejudices such as that “the Jews” still gain money from the Holocaust, use the Holocaust against Germany and Europe for their own benefit, and loot European museums as, for example, in the 2006 case of Gustav Klimt’s *Golden Adele* in Vienna. The restitution to an heir of the woman portrayed in the painting was seen in Austria and also in part of German society as a theft.<sup>15</sup> The case of a painting by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner that had to be returned from Berlin to the heir of the former owner elicited similar reactions.

4. Because of the trend of self-victimization, the Allied bombing of Dresden, the sinking of ships with German refugees during the war, and the flight and expulsion of Germans from the east during and after the war often are not seen as a result of Nazi policies and German choices after 1933. Without clear differentiation, a common, global culture of suffering emerges. One can then excuse the genocide of the Armenians and not blame the Turkish policies of the time. One can equalize the Shoah and the expulsion of the Germans. One can ignore that it was the Hutus who slaughtered the Tutsis in Rwanda. One then fails, however, to learn any lessons about victims, perpetrators, bystanders, rescuers, and the reality of choosing among the different alternatives.

5. Immigrant children who are confronted with xenophobia also show tendencies to self-victimization, claiming that they are the Jews of today. This too is a minimization of the Shoah and the Jewish experience in Germany after 1933. If such attitudes spread, it means well-intended “preventive pedagogy” has failed. Xenophobia and Nazi anti-Semitism are different things. Present-day racism in Germany makes it difficult for colored or foreign people or immigrants to live in the country. But the situation is not as in Nazi Germany.

6. Immigrant students of Muslim background must be included in Holocaust education and not excluded on the basis that they had nothing to do with the crimes. There were righteous Muslims in Yugoslavia and Tunisia. There were Muslims who were bystanders and those who saved lives. Immigrant students should learn that their former countries, such as Tunisia, Morocco, or Bosnia,



lost their Jewish communities as well, and that the Holocaust has a universal meaning: one can each and every day choose between being a bystander and helping people.

In some cases hatred of Jews unites radical Islamic youngsters with neo-Nazis; both groups want to eliminate Holocaust commemoration as well as Israel. Since spring 2007 a T-shirt has been visible that shows the face of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the slogan “My best friend is a foreigner,” although Nazis normally dislike foreigners.

7. Another outcome of errant Holocaust education and media messages is the curse heard in schools throughout Germany, not only in the lower-class suburbs: “You Jew!” or “You victim!” It is bad and contemptible to be a Jew or a victim. The Jew symbolizes what is deviant and ugly, the antithesis of one’s own group. The Jew is also the evil Israeli. And if the victim is a detestable figure, perhaps it is desirable to be a perpetrator?

Teachers’ strategies to prevent these tendencies often use problematic examples or express helplessness. Many teachers read *The Diary of Anne Frank* to ninth-grade classes when students are about fourteen. But Anne Frank was a girl and it is difficult for boys at that age to feel empathy for her. The approach to teaching these topics also tends to be far too intellectual for ninth grade.

Anne Frank, viewed almost as a saint in Holocaust iconography, is often reduced to her statement that ultimately she believes in the good of mankind. Her doubts and anger are marginalized. Moreover, in the end she died, and children do not gain a sense of hope and survival that is important for dealing with the Holocaust at such an age.

Furthermore, she is a Jew and a victim and the curse “You Jew!” or “You victim!” is already common in the schoolyards. Holocaust education must avoid emotionally overwhelming students with the Anne Frank icon. Children often are urged to identify with her, but there is no way to identify with someone who eventually died in a camp.

Instead of identification the goal should be empathy, and there are many other biographies and diaries of boys and girls during the Shoah. There are stories about rescued children and even children who rescued others. Such accounts make clear that no one was born a perpetrator or a bystander, and one has a choice. In addition to *Schindler’s List*, an appropriate movie that is used seriously in classrooms, there are also films such as *Under the Mulberry Tree* by Gila Almagor or documentaries such as *Into the Arms of Strangers* on the Kindertransport in 1938–1939. These and others tell about the Holocaust from a personal viewpoint — about rescue, survival, or coping with life after losing one’s parents. Such works help students develop empathy by seeing through the eyes of youngsters their own age what the Holocaust meant on the personal level.

Holocaust education that excludes empathy or alternatively tries to overpower students with emotions, or that does not build on individual stories but instead uses statistics and harsh descriptions or images, will not succeed. The present

Holocaust education does not prevent most students from adopting from their families the falsehoods they hear about these families' behavior during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust.<sup>16</sup>

Holocaust education should portray Jews, and victims generally, as people who lived full lives with dreams, hopes, and talents, before or apart from their eventual victimhood. Students should be taught how not to be perpetrators or bystanders, how to be honest and caring individuals. The Holocaust also should be taught as a universal lesson for preventing segregation, dehumanization, and criminal behavior toward groups. The ideal should not be a utopian, multicultural society that embraces everyone, but the responsible citizen with humane values.

### **German Narratives Today**

The mixture of a lack of knowledge, feeling fed up with the subject, and the discomfort many students experience toward it leads, together with the public discourse, to anti-Semitic stereotypes, comparisons between Israelis and Nazis and between Israel and Nazi Germany, and to the belief that Jews profit from the Holocaust. In 2005, 48 percent of Germans said Jews still "talk too much" about the Shoah.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, 65 percent would like to stop dealing with the years 1933–1945.<sup>18</sup>

Holocaust education can be a major factor in instilling greater concern for the past and hence also for the Jewish present. A barrier, however, is the traditional German narrative within the family. Since the war, German families have developed a perspective on the Holocaust that often justifies individual behavior during the Nazi era. Often it is claimed that one opposed the Nazis but due to circumstances could not do anything to help Jews or other persecuted people.<sup>19</sup> This narrative is already deeply rooted in German society. Harald Welzer has called it "cumulative idolization."<sup>20</sup>

These notions transform the then German society from 1933 to 1945 into one that overall did not go along with the Nazis. The figures below reflect the image of German society from the standpoint of today's narratives:

- 26 percent of Germans helped persecuted people.
- 13 percent of Germans were active in the resistance.
- Around 9 percent of Germans prayed for the persecuted.
- 17 percent of Germans always openly objected to Nazi propaganda.
- Only 1 percent of Germans were involved in crimes and only 3 percent were anti-Semites.<sup>21</sup>

Under the influence of these narratives and myths, less than 10 percent of Germans believe that their relatives were members of the Nazi Party.

The stories told in families sometimes adduce famous works such as the play *The Devil's General* by Carl Zuckmayer, a German émigré, in which a German air force general commits suicide out of guilt. Well-known stories about hiding and rescue also are woven into these narratives in which families after many years “reveal” their heroic assistance to Jews during the war.

The Jews, then, are not as important as the aims of the Germans. Proofs are not needed; it is enough to tell about a piece of bread or some other assistance that was supposedly given to some camp inmate who was in the city to clear rubble after the Allied bombing, and the like. Many stories also focus on a Jew who was on the verge of deportation and received a warm coat, a last kind word, and so on.

According to this outlook, anti-Semites, perpetrators, and bystanders were a tiny minority — the “other,” not oneself. It is therefore not surprising that books by, for example, Peter Longerich, Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, or Robert Gellately on the bystanders, the pressure from the German people themselves for more anti-Jewish laws, and so on are not bestsellers, whereas author Jörg Friedrich with his comparisons between the bombing of German cities and the crematories of Auschwitz has sold tens of thousands of copies.<sup>22</sup>

Most Germans now believe there is too much talking and teaching about the Holocaust and want to set a limit. At the same time, mainstream Germany has produced a fairytale about the role of society at large during the Nazi period.

It appears, then, that native-German students of the third and fourth generations talk about the Holocaust and the victims in a way that their great-grandparents already did.<sup>23</sup> This means adopting the justifications of the bystanders and the perpetrators: no resistance was possible, Germans had to obey and would have been shot or deported to a concentration camp if they had done or said anything that was prohibited. The responsibility for the persecution and the Holocaust is mainly ascribed to Hitler and his close entourage while ordinary people are absolved.

In reality, after 1933 and above all during the war, nearly every German family engaged in profiteering by obtaining furniture, clothes, even cutlery, and so on from the storerooms where the property of the deported and murdered European Jews was piling up. But such facts and even knowledge are pushed aside. Instead, “alibis are adopted. Excuses are internalized.”<sup>24</sup>

Historian Guido Knopp, who is director for the public station ZDF of a large number of television series on aspects of World War II, the Holocaust, the Third Reich, and its leaders, does much to promote this trend of rationalizing one's own behavior. His documentaries often deny that there was any possibility to act against the Nazis. He and many other historians often distinguish sharply between Nazis and Germans. Thus, those who lost their homes or even families in the Allied bombing or were expelled after 1945 are “Germans.” The Nazis are people such as Adolf Eichmann or ghetto administrators.

Indeed, history requires distinctions and not every German was a Nazi; some were persecuted or executed for political reasons. The Nazis, however,

clearly were Germans (and Austrians, as well as collaborators from all over Europe).

Knopp presents in one of his numerous productions, a six-part series on the Holocaust, a former female camp guard from Bergen-Belsen named Helga Bothe who justifies her actions. She says she was not guilty because she only obeyed orders, and otherwise she would have been sent to a camp as well.<sup>25</sup> Her statement is shown without comment or contrast — such as a guard who helped inmates, a bystander who chose to help, a story of a Bergen-Belsen inmate, and so on. This fosters an impression of a National Socialism without National Socialists, a Holocaust without or nearly without perpetrators. Such narratives can be viewed as modern German myths.

Immigrant Muslim students in middle schools often either neglect or do not even attend the Holocaust lessons. In high schools, however, immigrant Muslims from the middle and upper class often side with the victims, primarily the Jews, to distinguish themselves from the German students.<sup>26</sup> The education system and individual teachers need to study both tendencies and deal with them appropriately.

Common goals of Holocaust education should be:

1. To give back to the victims their stories and history
2. To read and listen to their perspectives as a counterpart to the perpetrators' views
3. To teach responsibility for one's own attitudes and actions
4. To teach about the Righteous Gentiles as a way of demonstrating that one has a choice, that life is not deterministic and whether one is Christian, Muslim, atheist, or whatever, respecting the other means respecting humanity
5. To show how many individuals were lost in Europe — from France to Greece, from Tunisia to former Yugoslavia, from Poland to Ukraine. All these individuals participated in European culture, enriching societies and countries.

The attitude that should be adopted is well summarized in the “Living Legacy” of Holocaust survivors, proclaimed at Yad Vashem in 2002:

In Jewish tradition, the command to remember is absolute. But its obligation does not end with the cognitive act of memory — it must be connected to both meaning and action.... We pass to you as well, the fundamental lesson of Judaism, that memory must be accompanied by action of ethical and moral intent.... The Holocaust showed the world the extent of the destructive power of antisemitism and racism. Holocaust denial, as well as minimization and banalization of the Holocaust provide a means of avoiding the evident conclusions and learning the lessons for the future.... The Holocaust, which established the standard for absolute evil, is the universal heritage of all

civilized people. The lessons of the Holocaust must form the cultural code for education toward humane values, democracy, human rights, tolerance and patience and opposition to racism and totalitarian ideologies.

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## An Interview with Ivan Ceresnjes

# The Destruction of the Memory of Jewish Presence in Eastern Europe; A Case Study: Former Yugoslavia

“The memory of the large prewar Jewish presence in Eastern Europe is increasingly being destroyed. Part of this process is intentional; part because of neglect of Jewish sites and memorials. To understand the various factors at work, one can best look at the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Its breakup over the past two decades has accelerated processes that are slower elsewhere. This concerns both attempts to change the collective memory of citizens as well as the physical degradation of Jewish sites, monuments, and memorials. Monuments are usually built to commemorate a significant person or event in history, or a period of time. Memorials are usually related to death and destruction. But the distinction between the two sometimes is blurred.”

Ivan Ceresnjes assists the U.S. Congressional Commission for Protecting and Preserving American Property Abroad. Despite its name, this commission was created in 1985 for the survey and research of Jewish cemeteries, monuments, and memorials. Almost its entire emphasis is on Eastern Europe, because it is mainly there that this infrastructure is rapidly disappearing.

He remarks: “When people in Eastern Europe see or hear the words ‘American property’ it has a magic effect on them. Often when one tells that one is Jewish and has come to research the documentation of Jewish monuments, tombstones, and memorials, the reception is unfriendly. However, if you say that you are coming on behalf of the American government you are much better received.”

### **The Role of Collective Memory**

Ceresnjes reflects on the role of collective memory in society: “The upsurge of nationalism in Eastern Europe has led to an ideology of memory. In its most extreme form, nationalist ideologues consider that the main role of each generation is to transmit the memories of the previous one to the next.

“This ideological position claims that nations mainly exist to remember their past. In its extreme version the state, society, and economy are largely tools for promoting national memory. Economic growth frees people to spend their time on

the recovery of memory. These ideologues say that societies should be dominated by memory-related activities.

“One does not even have to go that far. There is, for instance, the more moderate position that the recovery of memory in Eastern Europe was the essence of national liberation. Indeed, one of Stalin’s major crimes was his destruction of national memories.”

Ceresnjes comments: “However, focusing exclusively on changing collective memory without linking it to moral judgment remains highly problematic. In this context, attitudes in various countries toward Holocaust memorials need to be assessed. The case of Yugoslavia’s successor states illustrates this in many ways.”

### **Politically Correct Memorializing**

“Similar to other once-communist countries, in former Yugoslavia memorializing has developed in new directions from the politically correct, general approach of the past. In the communist view the suffering of one group of citizens under Nazi Germany and its allies could not be separated from that of others. People were told that all citizens had suffered from both external and internal enemies.

“Many Europeans collaborated with the Germans. Croatia, for instance, had a murderous nationalist government of Nazi puppets. In most areas of Yugoslavia, members of several specific groups of people were murdered at the same time. It was rare to find a location where only Serbs, only Jews, only Gypsies, or only Croats were killed. Usually it was an ethnic mixture of people that might also have included — according to the local population configuration — Muslims, other enemies of Nazism, as well as fascists.

“After the Holocaust a new form of Jewish memorializing slowly emerged. It took place exclusively within the family at home. The next step was that memorials and monuments were gradually erected in places owned and used by Jews, such as synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. The latter were the more important since very few functioning synagogues remained in Yugoslavia. Putting up a memorial plaque was even considered a kind of protest against the communists because the Soviet Union usually didn’t allow it. One would gradually find more memorial plaques or specific monuments, which mainly gave the numbers of Jews killed and listed their names.

“Very slowly in the early 1950s, specific monuments for Jews started to appear in public places as well as memorial plaques on institutions, not specifically connected to Jews. Thus, Jews were given a place in national history. Memorializing in Eastern European countries is closely connected to nationalism, which had been strongly suppressed under communist rule. The Soviet Union under Stalin had even annihilated a number of nations. Broadly speaking, however, Holocaust memorials were found only in very few places where the Soviet Union and communism ruled.”<sup>1</sup>



## Fragmentation of Holocaust Memory

“After the demise of communism, the outburst of suppressed nationalism destroyed the Federation of Yugoslavia. Seven independent countries have emerged, each of which rewrites its history. In Bosnia-Herzegovina the situation is even more complex. It is officially one country, but is inhabited by three nations — Muslims, Serbs, and Croats — who are writing their parallel histories that differ from each other in many ways. In this process, each one changes the names of streets and institutions, thus planting the seeds for a new collective memory.

“The memory of the Holocaust is thus also fragmented according to the national context. In the history of humanity, the Holocaust is an unprecedented mega-event. This larger understanding, however, gets lost in societies where no historical research has been undertaken since World War II.

“Nations also manipulate the count of victims. The numbers given for people brutally murdered at Jasenovac, a major Croatian concentration camp on the border of that country and Bosnia, vary from 50,000 to 1,200,000, with the most reliable estimate apparently being about 500,000.”

## Unattended Sites

Ceresnjes observes: “The murder of six million Jews in Europe has not only dramatically affected their families. It also meant that the great majority of Jewish sites in Eastern Europe became unattended. This includes a large number of synagogues, communal buildings, cemeteries, and other places that could become memorials of the former Jewish presence. In some countries the national Jewish community takes care of putting some plaques on buildings that were once synagogues, but this is a rather rare phenomenon.

“Sometimes governments or local authorities mark Jewish places. They frequently do so because they want to catch the attention of the Western world and show that the Jews are part of their history. Often, though, they nurture the memory of the murdered Jews and the communities that disappeared without elaborating on how and why this happened.

“Germany is the one country where a large part of the remnants of the Jewish past is relatively well taken care of. On Kristallnacht, 9–10 November 1938, many synagogues were burned, which was part of the erasure of Jewish presence and memory. Over the past fifteen years we have documented over one thousand rural Jewish synagogues and several thousand Jewish cemeteries in Germany. The overwhelming majority of these are well maintained by the local municipalities.

“In Eastern Europe two major factors are at work regarding Jewish memorials. The first is that usually no specific monuments to murdered Jews were established. The second is that memorial sites where Jews were murdered are being destroyed or disappearing.

“The emergence of suppressed nationalism in the successor states to Yugoslavia has created the desire to rewrite history. This affects the history and memory of the Jews. It is a fairly widespread phenomenon that specific nations try to erase all victims of the Nazis other than those from their own nation. In this process the names of Jewish victims also disappear.

“Sometimes in Serbia, for instance, the names of Jews are maintained next to those of Serbs, while those of victims of all other nationalities are deleted. Furthermore, often monuments throughout Yugoslavia that were damaged during the wars of the 1990s are not being repaired because of a lack of consensus on what should be memorialized on them. Understanding the developments and the current situation requires discussing individual countries.”

## **Serbia**

“Before World War II there was a strong Jewish community in Serbia. It numbered thirty thousand, of whom six thousand survived. Jews also have an important place in Serbian history. Like the Serbs they were oppressed by the Ottomans. Jews started getting civil rights in the Serbian kingdom, which were only fully granted before World War I. These were maintained in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, which was established in 1919.

“During World War II, Serbia was a puppet state ruled nominally by collaborating Serbs but, in actuality, by Germans. Serbs, except in some extreme cases, did not themselves kill Jews. In northern Serbia many local Jews were murdered by Germans and Hungarians. In February 1942, in Novi Sad, the Hungarian occupiers gathered Jews and some Serbs, brought them to the middle of the frozen Danube where they had dug a hole in the ice, and killed four thousand people. Elsewhere Serbs gathered Jews and handed them over to the Germans, a crime that is suppressed and forgotten in Serbian history.

“In the Jewish cemetery in Belgrade there is a monument to the Jewish soldiers who fell in World War I. In almost every Jewish cemetery the dead of that war are remembered. As far as the two Balkan wars are concerned, there is only one monument in Serbia that explicitly mentions the Jews. It is in a public space by the town of Nish near the country’s eastern border. It commemorates those who died in the battles against the Bulgarians in the 1913 Second Balkan War. Three sides of the monument have plaques with Serbian names; the fourth has Jewish names. At its bottom is written: ‘They fought and died for the homeland.’

“In Nish, about a thousand Jews were butchered to death during World War II; only one member of the community survived. The Jewish cemetery in the town dates back to the seventeenth century, but it has been destroyed because Gypsies have settled on it in recent decades. There are other towns in former Yugoslavia where Gypsies have set up their villages on Jewish cemeteries because they know

nobody will come to reclaim them. Among these are Djurdjevac in Croatia, Zabalj in Serbia, and Dojran in Macedonia.

“On Serbian monuments to the fallen in World War II, Serbs and Jews are presented in various ways such as victims of ‘Nazism, Croatian Nazism, European Nazism, German Nazism, Hungarian Nazism,’ and so on. When the Serbian nationalist movement began at the end of the 1980s, a new Serbian-Jewish Friendship Society was created that erected some war memorials. It was quite strong during the 1990s but by now has few members left.”

### **Jews Are Again Guilty**

“For the Jewish community of former Yugoslavia, interethnic ties of this kind were generally attempts to manipulate and misuse Jews in wider ethnic conflicts in a country that was collapsing and disintegrating. In Croatia there is a Croatian-Jewish society that supported the Croatian fight against Serbian domination. I consider it a major success that in Bosnia-Herzegovina the Jewish community managed not to be dragged into supporting one side or the other.

“Since Serbia lost the recent wars, its history had to be twisted and hence its collective memory as well. Somebody had to be blamed for the loss of Serbian supremacy in Yugoslavia, the defeat in the recent wars, and the outcome of the Kosovo crisis when Serbia was aerielly bombarded by the Western powers. These were Serbia’s former allies in the fight against Germany during World War II.

“One then started to hear in some circles that the Jews had played a major role in Serbia’s defeat. Henry Kissinger was a famous American name in Serbia, though he has been out of government for a long time. In the Clinton administration, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke, and Defense Secretary William Cohen were all perceived as Jews. Thus, in several Serbian blogs and Internet forums one could read that Jews created the crisis in Serbia, organized its bombardment, and were responsible for its defeat.”

### **Bosnia-Herzegovina**

“During World War II most of what is now Bosnia-Herzegovina belonged to the Croatian puppet state. The exception was part of Herzegovina, which was governed by the Italians until 1943, after which it passed under direct German rule.

“Before the war there were twenty-eight thousand Jews in the country, three thousand of whom survived. Most Jews lived in Sarajevo; all other communities were small. The main war monuments in Sarajevo were built by the communist

government. The Jews built one on the grounds of their huge sixteenth-century Sephardic cemetery there. In the war of the mid-1990s, both Bosnian Serbs and Muslims engaged in the battle for Sarajevo trained their artillery on the monument.

“In Travnik, one of the smaller Bosnian communities, a monument to the murdered Jews was created by putting the three oldest tombstones together and making them into a Holocaust memorial in the Jewish cemetery. The head of the Jewish community did not participate in this project, but gave his approval.

“In Banja Luka, the Jewish cemetery was erased to make room for a tennis court. In the general cemetery there is now a small Jewish compound where there is a monument to those Jews who fought in World War II as well as those who died in the Holocaust.

“In Mostar, there is a memorial cemetery for partisans who fought against the Germans. In the town’s Jewish cemetery there is a modest monument to the Jewish partisans only. There, also a few years ago, the small Jewish community of Mostar erected a monument memorializing the victims of the Holocaust.

“The town of Donji Vakuf is now in the Muslim part of Bosnia. When the original war memorial was built in 1965 it contained the names of the victims of all nationalities. Now it is one of those memorials where only Muslim names remain.

“Sometimes one finds people who go out of their way to preserve Jewish memory. In the town of Brcko on the Sava River in northern Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Jewish cemetery has been destroyed as part of the town’s urbanization plan. The Orthodox parish priest requested my permission and rescued four tombstones there that he turned into a Holocaust memorial, which is now located in the Bosnian-Serb cemetery.”

## Sarajevo

“In Sarajevo, the Jewish community was forced to donate the largest synagogue to the city in 1965. Later it was turned into a cultural center. There a stone *menorah* (candelabrum) was set up, which indicates that this building had earlier been the town’s largest synagogue.

“The major World War II memorial in the Bosnian capital of Sarajevo is in a dilapidated state. Fourteen thousand people murdered in the war are memorialized there. There is an inner section that recalls the Jewish victims specifically, with over seven thousand names. This memorializing of the Jews in the general section, even though there is also a special section for them, is unique in the world.

“The memorial was severely damaged in the war of the mid-1990s as it is adjacent to a fortress. Many letters fell off the memorial because of explosions and, after the war, almost all of them disappeared. In its Holocaust sections only a few stone letters remain from the names of the local Jews who were murdered.

If one visits there today and doesn't know what was there originally, one will not recognize that it was a specific monument to the Holocaust. The removed letters are sometimes affixed to crosses, which is an ultimate insult. It shows that the Jewish past is not part of the collective memory.

"The monument is likely to be rebuilt and the Bosnian government is applying for funding internationally. I'm concerned that there will be additions relating to the war of the 1990s and also, insofar as World War II is concerned, new political choices about who were the perpetrators and who the victims.

"In the Croatian part of Bosnia-Herzegovina there is only one partisan memorial that also mentions Jews. That area was overwhelmingly pro-Nazi during the war when it belonged to Croatia. Hardly any partisans there were memorialized after the war. Since the fall of communism, these partisans have been seen as enemies because they were communists who killed priests, monks, and other Croats.

"There are about twenty small sites that were either concentration and extermination camps or prisons scattered all over Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia. In none of these are the Jewish victims mentioned specifically. A typical example is a 'small' extermination camp, Kruscica, near Travnik in Bosnia. There three thousand people were killed by the local residents during the two months of its functioning, among them one thousand Jews. The Italian occupation army was located only twenty kilometers from there and, after they complained about the cruelties, the camp was closed.

"Two entire Jewish communities were murdered there yet Jews are not referred to on the Kruscica monument, which only mentions the Serbian and 'communist' victims. The latter usually refers to Muslims. Those now living near the site are the children or grandchildren of the murderers."

## **Changing Collective Memory**

Ceresnjes explains that the Bosnian Muslim authorities want to find a new place for their country in history. "They are creating monuments that are connected solely to Islam. They aim to have the outside world recognize that Bosnia is a purely Islamic region of Europe. One example concerns the ancient market area of the country's capital, Sarajevo. It was burned down after World War II by the communist authorities, despite the fact that it had major artistic and historic value.

"For the communists this past had to make place for an area that was indicative of the bright-red-painted future their rule would bring. Twenty-five to thirty years ago the old market area was restored. It is now a center for kitsch where souvenirs and cheap merchandise are sold.

"When I was chairman of the Bosnian Jewish community I claimed that there were Jewish buildings and sites from our five-hundred-year-old history that met the highest criteria of UNESCO's World Heritage List. When I applied for

their restoration, the then Bosnian authorities told me that the market complex of Sarajevo had their highest priority.

“The Old Sephardic synagogue of Sarajevo dates from 1567 and was in use until 1941. By then it was the oldest synagogue in the Balkans as all others had either been rebuilt, redone, or destroyed. It took us twenty years to convert it from an empty ruin to the Jewish museum that it now houses.

“In Bosnia a clash of collective memories takes place. Muslim collective memory is different from that of Christians and Jews. History, however, is very different from memory. Until 1991, Bosnia was perhaps the most ethnically mixed society in Europe. Thus not only the telling of history but also collective memory should reflect that fact, even if Bosnian society is now sharply divided along ethnic lines.”

## Croatia

“Before the war there were twenty-eight thousand Jews in Croatia of whom four thousand survived. Today very few Jews remain in Croatia, most of them living in Zagreb. There are also three small communities on the coast in Split, Dubrovnik, and Rijeka.

“The situation in Croatia is very different from that in many other parts of former Yugoslavia. The Croats are very well aware that Jasenovac, because of the brutality of the killing, is among the notorious concentration camps of World War II. Franjo Tudjman, the first Croatian president after the country broke away from Yugoslavia, falsified history. Against the overstated claim of the Serbs that in Jasenovac 1,200,000 were murdered, he strongly understated the number of victims as 20,000–50,000. He then claimed that only a few thousand of them were Jews and accused them of having been *kapos* and responsible for the killings there.

“Tudjman even published this in a book, leading to an outcry among international Jewish organizations. Tudjman then dropped the chapter where it was mentioned, also because he wanted to establish relations with Israel.

“In the Serbo-Croatian war of the 1990s the Jewish community of Croatia decided to be politically correct. They issued a number of strong statements against Serbian attacks and the occupation of part of Croatia. Hence, during that war they had an honorable place in Croatian society.

“After it ended the Jews raised the issue of restitution for Jewish assets that had been stolen by Croats during World War II. The authorities discreetly warned the Jewish community that they should not make too much noise. If the Jews were to regain factories and other properties, it might lead to many Croats losing their jobs as the new owners could then choose who would work for them. Restitution with support from the outside might spark a reaction in Croatia that could endanger the remaining Jews.”

## Telling History

“Nowadays history is told more or less correctly in Croatia. Monuments commemorating the Holocaust were not destroyed during the war with Serbia. This, however, is mainly because there were so few to begin with. In Jasenovac in the early 1970s, a monument was built to the victims and it mentioned the Jews as well. It listed Serbs, Jews, Gypsies, Croats, and communists, but only in general as victims of fascism. There were no names and no numbers.

“The word Holocaust has been mentioned there only in the last few years, after the memorial was repaired because of extensive damages it suffered during the war in 1992–1995. The whole concept was then altered and now only numbers are on display, without names and nationalities of the victims. There is no separate memorial for the Jews. The most accurate estimate of Jews murdered in Jasenovac is in the area of twenty-five thousand.

“In recent years Holocaust monuments have been regularly vandalized and covered with graffiti. This is done by neo-Nazis who use the ‘U’ symbol for the Ustashe movement, which collaborated with the Nazis during World War II. Swastikas are another symbol frequently used in vandalizing memorials. They are also put on other monuments to those murdered by Germans and their allies in World War II.

“One sign of change in collective memory is that the Croats are increasingly bringing up the story of the murders in Bleiburg in Austria. After World War II the British allowed Tito’s army to cross into their zone of Austria. There they slaughtered a mixed group of German allies including Serbian nationalists, members of the Croatian Ustashe, White Guards of Slovenia, Muslim pro-Nazi militias, ethnic Germans, and so on. Among them were also civilians including politicians, peasants, women, and children — almost anyone.”

## Macedonia

“In Macedonia before World War II there were seven thousand Jews. About half of them managed to escape to Albania where they were safe. During the war Macedonia became part of greater Albania; yet it was the Bulgarian government that ruled there. While it protected the Jews in prewar Bulgaria, those in Macedonia were transferred to the Germans who sent them to their death in Treblinka.

“There is a Jewish memorial in all Macedonian towns where there was a Jewish community before the war whose members were murdered, such as Bitola (Monastir), Shtip, Idrizovo, and others. It is usually located where the Jews gathered for deportation or where the synagogue was. There are also plaques at other locales.

“In the capital, Skopje, the Jewish cemetery was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake in 1966. A very distinguished war memorial was erected in the

new section of the Jewish cemetery. There are three memorials for the Jews in the town: at the place where the Jews were gathered for deportation, at the location of the communal buildings, and in the former cemetery.”

### **Other Successor States**

“Slovenia was under German rule during World War II. The small Slovenian Jewish community numbered 250 before the war. Of these about fifty survived, most of whom had fled to Italy. Many Jews fought in the anti-Nazi partisan units. Toward the end of the war the partisans threw out anyone who didn’t have a Slovenian name. The Jews were all Ashkenazi and had German or Hungarian names, and the Slovenian partisans killed most of them.

“Before the war the number of Jews in Montenegro was very small. The country had maintained an anti-Jewish policy over hundreds of years. Already 350 years ago the Orthodox prince-bishop ruler decided that no Jews should live in the country because they were ‘Satan’s seed.’ There were only some Jews who lived in the Catholic areas near the sea.

“During World War II the Italians were in control in Montenegro but the Germans were present. Wherever Italians put Jews along with communists in prisons, the Germans would kill them. These were Jews from other parts of Yugoslavia captured in the territory of Montenegro. The estimated number of Jews murdered is about twenty. The main prison, Bogdanov kraj near Cetinje, has no memorial and nobody tends to it. But for the Jews it is a place that should be memorialized.

“In Kosovo there were about 500 Jews before World War II, of whom 250 were handed over to the Germans by Kosovar Albanians. There were also a few examples where Kosovars killed Jews, and there was also a Kosovar SS unit. About twenty Righteous Gentiles helped the other 250 Jews escape to Albania where the Jews were protected.

“After the war, in Kosovo’s capital, Pristina, a huge memorial was erected for all victims of Nazism including the partisans and the Jews. When the Serbian-Albanian fighting broke out in Kosovo in 1999, almost all names were removed, also including most of the Albanians who were considered communists. Kosovo is such a tightly knit society that everyone knows who was or wasn’t a communist.”

### **The Jew as an Instrument in National Policies**

“Jews are instruments in the current politics of the successor states of Yugoslavia. This is part of these states’ international positioning. If you visit Bosnia today and say you are a Jew, you will be told that Jews came there five hundred years ago and were embraced. They will add that Muslims and Jews were the best friends in



the world. This is a fallacy because Jews were second-class citizens like anyone who was not a Muslim.

“Even worse, when one looks at pictures from 1941 of the looting of Jewish synagogues, shops, and apartments, one sees people wearing a fez. Germans didn’t wear fezzes, neither did Croats, only Muslims did.

“When the Republic of Bosnia was established in 1992, only three constituting minorities were given the right to elect members of parliament: Muslims, Serbs, and Croats. There are, however, twenty other minorities in the state such as Poles, Slovenians, Jews, and Gypsies, who are not necessarily happy with this arrangement. They can only be elected if one of the three larger minorities elects them. So, for instance, the present Bosnian foreign minister — a Jew, Sven Alkalay — joined the Muslim government party SBiH (Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina) of Prime Minister Haris Silajdzic.

“In Serbia there was a Jewish deputy prime minister, Zarko Korac (2002–2003). Even under the anti-Semitic President Tudjman in Croatia there were Jewish ministers — Nenad Poroges, economy, and Andrija Hebrang, health and social policy — in two successive governments from 1990 to 1998. These are examples of showcasing and one wonders whether these appointees actually do any good for the Jewish community.

“The situation in all these countries is in flux. Questions will increasingly be asked about the erasing of names of other nationals by the various successor states. Collective memory has changed and will change further. Yet monuments, if not harmed or altered, stand while societies change.

“One can only wonder what will be the role of the Jews while new collective memories are developing. For that reason, too, it is important that the physical Jewish infrastructure is not further degraded and that memorial sites in Jewish locations are well kept. The memorials remind local people what happened to the Jews. For many, the existence of a Jewish memorial does not allow them to forget.”

## Notes

1. See, e.g., Mordechai Altshuler, “Jewish Holocaust Commemoration Activity in the USSR under Stalin,” Shoah Research Center, Yad Vashem, [www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205422.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205422.pdf).

*Ivan Ceresnjes was the head of the Jewish community of Bosnia-Herzegovina and a vice-chairman of the Yugoslav Federation of Jewish Communities until his emigration to Israel in 1996. During the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina he organized rescue efforts to evacuate Jews and non-Jews and also organized nonsectarian humanitarian relief for citizens of the besieged city and other parts of the country. An architect by profession, he is presently employed by the Center for Jewish Art of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. There he documents Jewish infrastructural objects such as synagogues, ritual buildings, and cemeteries in Eastern Europe. He also maps Holocaust memorials and monuments.*

Dave Rich

## The Holocaust as an Anti-Zionist and Antiimperialist Tool for the British Left

### Introduction

The promotion of Holocaust denial by Iran's President Ahmadinejad as part of his policy toward Israel has significant consequences for the Jewish world, Holocaust commemoration, and the struggle against anti-Semitism. Although Holocaust denial is commonplace in the Arab and Muslim world, it is still largely taboo in Europe and the West. However, among European anti-Zionists there is a deep-rooted and growing suspicion of official Holocaust remembrance, which is viewed as part of Israel's propaganda armory, despite the fact that many of these anti-Zionists also consider themselves to be antifascists.

It is the utility of Holocaust denial as an anti-Zionist propaganda weapon that leaves European leftists vulnerable to Iranian encouragement to challenge the scale, nature, meaning, and consequences of the Holocaust. This is not the usual dynamic of anti-Zionism leading to anti-Semitism; this is anti-Semitism being used to generate anti-Zionism, which could profoundly affect the direction and tone of anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic activity in the West.

### Holocaust Denial and the Iranian State

Given the extent of outrage and media attention attracted by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's repeated denial of the Holocaust, one might think this was a new development in Iranian politics. However, the Iranian president is merely repeating an opinion that has been common in Iran for many years. Ahmadinejad's main rival in the 2005 presidential elections, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, whom much of the Western media portrayed during the election campaign as a relative moderate, is also a Holocaust denier. He marked the Iranian Al-Quds (Jerusalem) Day rally in 1998 with a speech claiming that only two hundred thousand Jews died during the war.<sup>1</sup> In 2000, the Swiss denier Jurgen Graf absconded to Iran after a Swiss court sentenced him to fifteen months in prison. That same year the Iranian embassy in Vienna had given refuge to an Austrian denier, Wolfgang Frohlich.<sup>2</sup>

Western Holocaust deniers frequently appear in the Iranian media where they are treated as experts not just on the Holocaust but on other subjects as well.

Mark Weber, director of the Institute for Historical Review in California, was interviewed by Iran's Mehr news agency to give his thoughts on Israel's war against Hizballah in 2006.<sup>3</sup> Michele Renouf, who has become Britain's foremost Holocaust-denial activist, appeared on Iran's Sahar TV to discuss the French presidential elections.<sup>4</sup> Iran's overseas English-language television station, Press TV, has promoted the work of British Holocaust Denier Nicholas Kollerstrom.<sup>5</sup>

What is perhaps different about President Ahmadinejad's approach is that he has promoted Holocaust denial as a centerpiece of his stated policy on Israel. In his 2007 Al-Quds Day speech, Ahmadinejad repeated his view that the Holocaust is a "myth" and that Western governments "are in the grips of the claws of Zionism," before proposing that Israeli Jews be deported en masse to Canada and Alaska.<sup>6</sup>

The highpoint of his strategy was the hosting in Teheran of the International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust in December 2006, attended by notorious Holocaust deniers from around the world including Robert Faurrison, David Duke, Michele Renouf, Frederick Toben, and Ahmed Rami. The conference was organized by the previously well-respected Institute for Political and International Studies, which is linked to the Iranian Foreign Ministry, and much of the financial cost was covered by the Iranian government. The conference program included discussion of whether the Holocaust happened and sessions on anti-Semitism, Nazi-Zionist collaboration, and what has been dubbed "the Holocaust industry."

## **Holocaust Denial after Teheran**

The most significant outcome of the conference was the establishment of the World Foundation for Holocaust Studies, to be run by a five-person committee who are all Holocaust deniers from Western countries: Michele Renouf of Britain, Fredrick Toben of Australia, Serge Thion of France, Christian Lindtner of Denmark, and Bernhard Schaub of Switzerland. The Iranian official appointed as general secretary of the foundation, Mohammad Ali Ramin, is not only a Holocaust denier but also claims that AIDS, SARS, and bird flu are "interrelated" with the Holocaust story.<sup>7</sup> The foundation's plans include holding another conference, the production and distribution of denial propaganda, and other activities all potentially funded by the Iranian government.

Renouf first came to prominence as a regular observer in court during David Irving's failed libel trial against Deborah Lipstadt in 2000. The following year, she was at the center of an ambitious plan to secure funding for Irving from Prince Fahd bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, son of the governor of Riyadh and eldest nephew of King Fahd. Renouf arranged for Irving and Fahd to meet and terms for the funding were agreed, but the prince died before any money changed hands.<sup>8</sup>

Since then Irving has spent time in an Austrian prison for denying the

Holocaust in a 1989 speech, but since his release he has wasted no time resuming activity. He visited Hungary, where he has a new publisher, in March 2007, and addressed a public rally organized by the far-Right Hungarian Justice and Life Party to mark Hungary's National Day. The rally later degenerated into a riot between far-Right supporters and the police.<sup>9</sup>

Irving also has visited Poland, twice, where he was expelled from the International Book Fair in Warsaw, the United States, and Spain, and held a speaking tour of the UK with the intention of relaunching his career in his home country. This included a controversial, and fiercely protested, appearance at the prestigious Oxford Union on 26 November 2007 along with the leader of the far-Right British National Party, Nick Griffin.

Meanwhile Irving has attempted to refine his views on the Holocaust. He has conceded that somewhere in the region of 2.5 million Jews were killed in Sobibor, Belzec, and Treblinka, but not at Auschwitz — and Hitler was “completely in the dark” about these killings.<sup>10</sup> This marks something of a return for Irving to his position on publication of his *Hitler's War* in 1977 — that there were mass killings of Jews of which Hitler was entirely ignorant — before his shift to outright Holocaust denial on publication of *The Leuchter Report*<sup>11</sup> in 1988. Irving has presumably made this concession for tactical reasons as he tries to recover his shattered reputation, but his website is still full of Holocaust-denial material.<sup>12</sup>

There is no evidence of Iranian backing for Irving, who raises all his money from private donations and book sales. It seems, though, that Iranian promotion of Holocaust denial has breathed new life into a movement that was, in Europe at least, moribund. International denial conferences have since been proposed — though not, at the time of writing, convened — in Argentina and Italy, where Faurisson was prevented from delivering a lecture at the University of Teramo when the university authorities closed the campus for the day.<sup>13</sup>

## **Anti-Zionism and the Holocaust**

The idea that Holocaust denial is a way to undermine Israel's legitimacy is a seductive one, and not just for Iran. Official Holocaust commemoration in Britain was formalized in 2001 around Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD), but is under attack from many in the Muslim community and on the far Left who see it as being linked to support for Israel. In January 2007, the local authority in Bolton, a town in the northwest of England, canceled the town's HMD event in favor of a more general Genocide Memorial Day, a move that the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and others have called for on a national scale for some time. Bolton's Genocide Memorial Day — Britain's first — was held in June 2007 and organized as a multifaith event.<sup>14</sup> That Bolton Council's decision to cancel their HMD event was, in part, a protest against Israeli policy was made clear by

the secretary of the local interfaith council who said “the war in Lebanon had influenced my decision and others.”<sup>15</sup>

The British government is firm in its commitment to HMD as a national event. In October 2006, the then secretary of state for communities and local government, Ruth Kelly, cited the MCB’s refusal to attend HMD as one of the reasons why the government decided to break off relations with them. The MCB eventually bowed to government pressure and attended HMD in 2008, but then again boycotted the ceremony in January 2009, seemingly in protest against Israel’s actions in Gaza earlier that month.

Despite its establishment origins, the creation of HMD would appear to be a victory, and a useful tool, for antifascist campaigning. But the growing hostility of parts of the Left to official Holocaust commemorations reveals much about changing attitudes toward Jews.

In January 2007, during Holocaust Memorial Week (HMW), the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC) organized a series of readings of Jim Allen’s play *Perdition*, which uses the complex case of Rudolf Kastner and the destruction of Hungarian Jewry to charge that Zionists collaborated with the Nazis in implementing the Holocaust.<sup>16</sup> The play was strongly challenged on factual grounds, most notably by Sir Martin Gilbert<sup>17</sup> and David Cesarani,<sup>18</sup> but remains a powerful piece of anti-Zionist propaganda. The allegation of collaboration between Zionists and Nazis as “a means of morally discrediting the Jewish people and delegitimizing the state of Israel”<sup>19</sup> is an invention of Soviet anti-Zionism that has outlived its creator.

In addition to readings of *Perdition*, the SPSC also organized meetings featuring Lenni Brenner, author of *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators*,<sup>20</sup> which formed the basis for much of *Perdition*. Brighton and Hove PSC did the same, inviting Brenner to speak on “Zionist Collaboration with Nazi Germany.” It may well be that the current Iranian promotion of outright Holocaust denial, and the growing support in parts of the British Left for Hizballah and Iran, is what has given the SPSC and others the confidence to challenge mainstream Holocaust commemoration head-on.

The recasting of Holocaust commemoration from an anti-Zionist perspective is more than just an anti-Israeli propaganda tactic. Holocaust denial and Holocaust commemoration possibly constitute the last taboo in the Left’s attitude toward Jews, and it is being broken. The Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPACUK)<sup>21</sup> has suffered no political cost whatsoever within the anti-Zionist world for the financial support given to David Irving by its founder and leading activist, Asghar Bukhari.<sup>22</sup> MP George Galloway’s Respect Party and the Stop the War Coalition have little to say about Iranian state support for Holocaust denial. Galloway remains a presenter on Press TV.

The anti-Zionist utility of Holocaust denial increasingly outweighs the need to remember the victims of Nazism in some political circles, where subverting mainstream Holocaust remembrance is seen as an anti-Israeli act. Even those

within the anti-Zionist Left who object to this rarely do so on principle. One Socialist Workers Party (SWP) activist who publicly objected to the SPSC's plans wrote that: "My qualms about the staging of *Perdition* during HMW are tactical. The Zionists have certainly controlled the discourse about Holocaust remembrance for many years, and have aggressively quashed the truth about Zionist collaboration with Nazis."<sup>23</sup>

The truth about Zionist, non-Zionist, and anti-Zionist behavior during the Holocaust has been researched and written about extensively elsewhere. The aim here is not to set straight the distortions of Brenner, Allen, and others but to shed some light on where their obsessions might lead. For while the SWP worried about tactics, the strategic aims of the SPSC were revealed by its chair, Mick Napier, in a letter to *Socialist Worker* defending the SPSC's actions. Napier argued that Holocaust commemoration was used "to 'justify' the mass murder and expropriation of the Palestinians," and that "An accurate understanding of the Nazi Holocaust is essential to grasp modern Israeli savagery towards the Palestinian people. The political link between Palestine and the Nazi mass murder of Jews in 1942–5 is not the prerogative of the SPSC."<sup>24</sup>

### **Antiimperialism and the Holocaust**

The idea that Holocaust denial can be a central part of the struggle against Israel has long been the basis of a sustained marketing campaign by neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers to potential sources of funding and support in the Arab and Muslim world. Typical of this was Ernst Zündel's open letter to the Muslim world, *The West, War, and Islam*, which set out the full scope of the international Jewish conspiracy under such headings as "The International Zionists," "The International Secret Societies," "The International Bankers," and "International Communism," and then concluded with an appeal for funds:

The Islamic world has the financial means to publish, broadcast or otherwise disseminate the historical, factual data leading to the truth.... There are at this moment already in existence organizations which, if properly funded, could become the nucleus of an independent, worldwide information network capable of countering the now virtually unopposed Zionist disinformation and hate propaganda networks. One such example is the Zundelsite, a United States based website that has exposed the so-called "Holocaust" as an extortion tool...that yields Israel the money, power and excuse to occupy the Palestinians and to intimidate its neighbors such as Syria, Lebanon, Iran and other Arab nations.... Take the Holocaust away, and you will have severed the financial water well that feeds an evil oligarchy and repressive system!<sup>25</sup>

For neo-Nazis, Zionism encompasses much more than just Israel and its supporters,

and Holocaust denial is about much more than just undermining Israel. The Western response to the Holocaust forms the basis of the entire postwar European liberal consensus and the multiethnic societies that neo-Nazis so despise. As British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin wrote, in the days before he felt it politically expedient to mask his party's anti-Semitism:

For the last fifty years the vision underlying all the vile sickness of this Age of Ruins has been the so-called "Holocaust." There is no need to elaborate on the way in which the work of revisionist historians and forensic examinations have nailed the absurd lie that Nazi Germany, in the midst of a wartime shortage of labor and materials, gassed or otherwise systematically exterminated six million Jews. What does need to be stressed is the extent to which this nonsense underpins not just the Zionist state of Israel and Jewish power worldwide but the entire edifice of global liberalism.... The New World struggling to be born cannot do so until this lie is publicly exposed, ridiculed and destroyed...members of the British National Party have a duty to be involved as active participants in the revisionist struggle.<sup>26</sup>

Hatred of liberal democracies is not limited to the far Right, and Holocaust denial has more than just an anti-Zionist utility. The high-profile promotion of Holocaust denial by Ahmadinejad has taken Holocaust denial out of the hands of the far Right and put it firmly on the agenda of the leftists and Islamists who make up the new global antiimperialism. Some, like Paul Eisen of Deir Yassin Remembered, are sympathetic to outright Holocaust denial.<sup>27</sup>

Most, like Norman Finkelstein, do not deny the facts of the Holocaust but have the same political purpose: to attack the "Holocaust industry" that they see as propping up Israel, Zionism, and organized Jewish power. In this formulation, Holocaust denial is about denying the meaning and consequences of the Holocaust rather than necessarily denying the facts of the Holocaust itself. For the SPSC, Holocaust commemoration is little more than a cynical propaganda tool of the Western powers:

Increasingly, Holocaust Commemoration has become a travesty, devoid of any moral compass that condemns today's mass killing of brown-skinned people for oil or strategic goals. Holocaust commemoration has been embraced by our Government, currently involved in the genocidal occupation of Iraq, and Zionists who defend Israel's ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The Israeli Declaration of Independence claims the Holocaust as a justification for this apartheid state. Tony Blair's ministers attend Holocaust Commemorations one day and then the next day they ratchet up the rhetoric against asylum seekers and immigrants that the extreme right, including the Nazi BNP, are feeding on.<sup>28</sup>

The collapse of traditional divisions between Right and Left and the political confusion engendered by 9/11 and subsequent events, have led to the growth of a

political subculture that is home to the antiwar movement, antiglobalizers, radical street politics, and populist political leaders. The appetite within this amorphous movement for conspiracy theories and the instinctive mistrust of official accounts of contemporary and historical events has opened up a political space beyond the far Right in which questioning and denying the Holocaust is no longer the anathema it once was.

The musician Gilad Atzmon performed regularly at SWP events despite having called for Holocaust deniers to be encouraged as assets in the struggle against Anglo-American policy in the Middle East.<sup>29</sup> The SWP only dropped Atzmon after protests from Jewish anti-Zionists within their political circles. The newly-formed Committee for Open Discussion of Zionism — “a group of scholars, campaigners and lawyers...which aims to defend the principle of free speech on debate over Israel,”<sup>30</sup> is eerily reminiscent of the Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust, one of the oldest Holocaust-denial websites. Few on the anti-Zionist Left are ready to denounce Holocaust denial — or indeed any form of anti-Semitism — when it comes in antiimperialist packaging.

### **Contemporary Leftist Attitudes toward Jews**

Older generations on the Left took part in a sympathy for Israel that was linked to the emotional power of the Holocaust. Whereas, for these generations, the Holocaust and subsequent birth of Israel were tangible events, for the younger generation it is increasingly a source of resentment. This is a generation for whom the universal messages of the Holocaust are axiomatic, but the particularist Jewish messages are poorly understood and seem anachronistic and unnecessary.

The image of Israel as a perpetrator of “Nazi-lite” ethnic cleansing facilitates the role-reversal in Napier’s claim that “An accurate understanding of the Nazi Holocaust is essential to grasp modern Israeli savagery towards the Palestinian people.” In this version of Holocaust remembrance, history is not studied so as to understand Jewish suffering at the hands of European anti-Semitism. Instead it is the Palestinians who are the “true victims” of the Holocaust, are still suffering its consequences today, and to whom Europe owes its historic “moral debt.” This is particularly the case in Britain, which has no history of Nazi occupation and collaboration but instead carries “the colonial guilt” of the Balfour Declaration.

Some of those who compare Israel to Nazi Germany acknowledge that they do so for tactical reasons, rather than because they believe the comparison to be factually accurate. For example, Richard Falk, the UN special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian territories, admitted invoking the Israel-Nazism comparison because “you have to shout to be heard”: accusing the Jewish state of behaving like Nazis gets attention, he argued, even if “The references to the Holocaust and to the Nazi policies were not meant to be literal comparisons.”<sup>31</sup> However, the claim that Zionists, having collaborated with Nazis in perpetrating



the Holocaust, are now inflicting similar misery on the Palestinians, serves another purpose, neatly solving the moral dissonance for those who define themselves as both antifascist and anti-Zionist. Reinterpreting the Holocaust as a Zionist crime is in itself a form of Holocaust denial, the purpose of which is to erase the link between the destruction of European Jewry and its rebirth in Israel.

This also profoundly affects attitudes toward Jews within parts of the Left. First, the notion that the Zionist movement could act as equal partners with Nazi Germany, at a time when ordinary Jews were at their most powerless and desperate, raises Zionism to a level of power and malevolence that traces a direct line to *Protocols*-style conspiracy theories. This has strong resonance in a political milieu that accepts conspiracy theories about Zionist or Jewish control of American foreign policy and the Iraq war.

Second, this determination to bracket together Zionism and Nazism has led to inevitable claims that their contemporary adherents, in the form of Israel and its supporters on the one hand, and neo-Nazis on the other, are in practical alliance. Thus the SPSC website gave these three reasons for the importance of their Holocaust Memorial Week events: “Open, ethnic cleansers now occupy senior positions in the nuclear-armed Israel government; Racist, extreme-right parties inspired by the Nazis are now growing across Europe; Political Zionism and extreme right-wing parties have usually cooperated against the left.”<sup>32</sup>

Articles in the far-Left press have even suggested the prospect of British Jews voting in significant numbers for the BNP.<sup>33</sup> It is true that the BNP currently claims that its obsessive anti-Semitism is now consigned to its past. In a bizarre twist, however, the only people who take this seriously are anti-Zionists excited by the illusory prospect of such an alliance, which would allow them to marry together the two sides of their political identity.

The significance of this is more than just rhetorical. Leftists view Nazism as the ultimate evil and neo-Nazism as a movement that must be opposed at all costs. That Zionists could, in the leftist imagination, cooperate with and support the contemporary far Right, just as their forebears are accused of doing during the Holocaust, is proof that Zionists are beyond redemption.

Furthermore, in Western Europe neo-Nazis are regularly denied the same freedom of association and freedom of speech that others enjoy, as part of the legal and policing framework that exists in many countries to prevent Nazism’s return to power. By associating Israel and its supporters — in reality, the overwhelming majority of Jews and their mainstream institutions — with the contemporary far Right, and thereby labeling them as racists or fascists, anti-Zionists build the rationale for arguing that Jews, too, should be denied these basic rights unless they disassociate themselves from Israel and Zionism.

This has been the logic behind repeated attempts to ban, or severely limit the activities of, Jewish societies at British universities since the 1970s.<sup>34</sup> This dynamic reached its peak during and after Israel’s war against Hamas in Gaza in January 2009. The Israel-Nazi comparison was ubiquitous in anti-Israeli discourse

during that period, and there was a significant growth in the anti-Israeli boycott movement, which, if it gains mass support, will inevitably have a negative impact on Jewish communal life in the UK.<sup>35</sup>

## **Conclusion: Legal and Educational Responses**

If the memory and meaning of the Holocaust has become a key battleground, then Jewish communities need to recognize that and prepare accordingly. Responses to Holocaust denial traditionally follow two paths: prosecution and education. Many European countries have laws against Holocaust denial that were introduced in the early 1990s to combat a resurgent neo-Nazi movement, and there have been prosecutions for Holocaust denial in several European countries. All EU states are now required to have laws that are capable of prosecuting Holocaust denial where it can be shown to be inciting racial hatred.

It is questionable, though, whether this approach is the most appropriate way to deal with those who question or deny the Holocaust so as to attack Zionism and Israel. Prosecutions for Holocaust denial can even be counterproductive in a post-Danish-cartoons world, allowing Islamist groups to argue, however inaccurately, that Europe has double standards when it comes to free speech.<sup>36</sup>

For this and other reasons, prosecutions are probably not the right way to counter this new assault on the memory of the Holocaust. Education will bring greater benefits; but, again, the Holocaust education that has won the Jewish community allies against neo-Nazi anti-Semitism is not necessarily appropriate for dealing with those who attack the memory of the Holocaust as a way of undermining Israel. Holocaust education has always emphasized its universalist messages, to great effect in building broad coalitions against the far Right. However, the specifically Jewish messages about the Holocaust and its meaning for Diaspora Jewish life, Zionism, and the need for Israel are not widely understood outside the Jewish world.

To counter the anti-Zionist interpretations, distortions, and denial of the Holocaust, Jewish communities should be bolder in promoting these messages alongside their existing educational work. Holocaust denial, like much of contemporary anti-Semitism, may look as it always has done, but it has adapted subtly to fit the times. The Jewish response needs to do the same if it is to meet this challenge.

## **Notes**

1. "Rafsanjani Supports French Muslim Author, Condemns 'Zionist Propaganda,'" BBC Monitoring, 26 January 1998, transcribed and translated from a speech broadcast on Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 23 January 1998.

2. "Swiss Revisionist Forced into Exile for 'Thought Crime,'" Institute for Historical Review, [www.ihr.org](http://www.ihr.org), 24 December 2000.
3. Mehr News Agency, "Hezbollah Fights with Remarkable Determination against Zionist Enemy," 1 August 2006.
4. See [www.youtube.com/view\\_play\\_list?p=FC70E9DF0175965C](http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=FC70E9DF0175965C) (viewed 19 October 2007).
5. Nicholas Kollerstrom, "The Walls of Auschwitz," 18 May 2008, [www.presstv.com/Detail.aspx?id=56287&sectionid=3510303](http://www.presstv.com/Detail.aspx?id=56287&sectionid=3510303) (viewed 4 August 2009).
6. "The Holocaust an 'Infallible Fabrication' of the West — Iran President," BBC Monitoring, 5 October 2007, transcribed and translated from a speech broadcast on Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
7. MEMRI Special Dispatch Series 1186, "Iranian Presidential Advisor Mohammad Ali Ramin: 'The Resolution of the Holocaust Issue Will End in the Destruction of Israel,'" 15 June 2006.
8. D. D. Guttenplan and Martin Bright, "David Irving's Secret Backers," *The Observer*, 3 March 2002.
9. "Hungarian Protests Turn Violent," *BBC Online*, 15 March 2007.
10. Matthew Taylor, "Discredited Irving Plans Comeback Tour," *The Guardian*, 29 September 2007.
11. A work by Fred A. Leuchter claiming there were no homicidal gas chambers at Auschwitz. Irving published the book in the UK, writing a foreword for it.
12. [www.fpp.co.uk](http://www.fpp.co.uk).
13. Marta Falconi, "Italian University Bars Holocaust Denier," Associated Press, 18 May 2007.
14. Amanda Smith, "Town Marks Genocide Memorial Day," *Bolton News*, 15 July 2007.
15. Rachel Fletcher, "'Sacks Told Blair: We Do Not Need Holocaust Day,'" *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 February 2007.
16. Jim Allen, *Perdition* (London: Ithaca Press, 1987).
17. Martin Gilbert, "To Stage or Not to Stage: The Case of *Perdition*," Britain/Israel Public Affairs Committee, March 1987.
18. David Cesarani, "The Perdition Affair," in Robert Wistrich, ed., *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 53–60.
19. Robert Wistrich, "The New War against the Jews," *Commentary*, May 1985.
20. Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators* (London: Croom Helm, 1983).
21. Not related to the American organization of the same name.
22. Jamie Doward, "Muslim Leader Sent Funds to Irving," *The Observer*, 19 November 2006.
23. "SWP Force Resignation of Member from the Scottish PSC over *Perdition*," *Harry's Place*, 19 January 2007.
24. Mick Napier, "Raising the Issues over Holocaust Memorial Day," *Socialist Worker*, 27 January 2007.
25. Ernst Zündel, *The West, War, and Islam*, 1980; updated (2005) edition available at [www.vho.org/aaargh/fran/livres5/zunwestwarislam.pdf](http://www.vho.org/aaargh/fran/livres5/zunwestwarislam.pdf) (viewed 29 November 2007).
26. Nick Griffin, "'Populism' or Power?" *Spearhead*, 324, February 1996.
27. "...Palestinians must know that they are not just facing the might of the Israeli state but also the power of organized world Jewry and its primary arm, the Holocaust. Perhaps Palestinians should consider lobbing a few stones in that direction. Perhaps we all should." Paul Eisen, "The Holocaust Wars," 20 May 2005, [www.zundel.org/zundel\\_persecuted/may20-05\\_eisen.html](http://www.zundel.org/zundel_persecuted/may20-05_eisen.html) (viewed 29 November 2007).
28. "Holocaust Commemoration Week Events in Scotland, 2007 Jan 20–28," Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, [www.scottishpsc.org.uk](http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk) (viewed 13 December 2006).

29. I tend to believe that the Holocaust narrative that is forcefully imposed on us all is there to silence some alternative interpretations of WWII events. I do believe that if we really want to stop Anglo-Americans from killing in the name of democracy we better re-open a genuine debate. Stopping Bush and Blair in Iraq, stopping those warmongers from proceeding to Iran and Syria is a must. If history shapes the future, we need to liberate our perspective of the past, rather than arresting revisionists, we simply need many more of them. We must let go; we must Re-arrange the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Gilad Atzmon, "Re-Arranging the 20th Century: Allegro, Non Troppo," [www.gilad.co.uk](http://www.gilad.co.uk), 23 February 2006 (viewed 19 October 2007).

30. David Castle, "Pluto Threatened over Israel Book," [www.redpepper.org.uk/article609.html](http://www.redpepper.org.uk/article609.html) (viewed 25 October 2007).
31. Linda Mamoun, "A Conversation with Richard Falk," *The Nation*, 17 June 2008.
32. [www.scottishpsc.org.uk](http://www.scottishpsc.org.uk) (viewed 22 January 2007).

33. It remains to be seen how the BNP will continue to evolve under Griffin's leadership. However, given its current political trajectory, the possibility of the BNP making a pitch for the support of a right-wing minority within the Jewish community on an anti-Muslim programme, as the far-right party Vlaams Belang has successfully done in Belgium, cannot be excluded. Indeed, BNP member and veteran fascist John Bean recently made the point that, "minus the anti-Semitism," a section of the Jewish community will "like much of what we have to say. The mere fact of our opposition to the Muslim threat, which lusts to wipe them off the face of the earth, guarantees some do." Such an alliance is, at any rate, a lot more likely than the so-called "symbiotic relationship" between the BNP and Muslim extremists that exists only in the imagination of the all-party parliamentary inquiry into anti-Semitism.

Geoff Brown, "Why Muslims Are These Men's Current Target," *Morning Star*, 20 September 2006.

34. Most British university student unions, including the National Union of Students, have policies that prevent racists or fascists from organizing or speaking on campus. The 1975 UN Resolution 3379 that defined Zionism as a form of racism enabled anti-Zionist activists to argue that Zionist speakers and organizations — in practice, the Union of Jewish Students and individual Jewish societies — should be prevented from operating on university campuses under this "no platform" policy.

There have been two waves of explicit attempts to ban Jewish societies at British universities: 1977 (Brighton Polytechnic, the School of Oriental and African Studies, Warwick University, Salford University, Bristol University, Hatfield Polytechnic, North London Polytechnic, and York University) and 1985–1986 (Sunderland Polytechnic, Birmingham University, the School of Oriental and African Studies, South Bank Polytechnic, City of London Polytechnic, and Heriot-Watt University). Other attempts to ban Jewish societies or limit their activities to exclude anything related to Israel and Zionism have included Warwick University (1974 and 1981), Coventry Polytechnic (1975), Wolverhampton Polytechnic (1979), North London Polytechnic (1980), South Bank Polytechnic (1983), the London School of Economics (1989), and Leeds University (2006).

These lists are not exhaustive. It should be noted that most of these efforts failed when put to the vote in their student unions. There have been many more motions put to student unions that have branded Zionism as racism but not explicitly called for the Jewish society to be excluded.

35. For further discussion, see Dave Rich, "Holocaust Resonance," [www.hurryupharry.org/2009/02/26/holocaust-resonance/](http://www.hurryupharry.org/2009/02/26/holocaust-resonance/) 26 February 2009 (viewed 4 August 2009).

36. It is worth noting that Holocaust denial is subject to prosecution not because it offends Jews but in cases where it potentially incites anti-Semitism and encourages neo-Nazism among non-Jews. This is an important distinction when compared to the Danish cartoons of Mohammed, which provoked protests from Muslim communities on the basis that they offended their religious sensibilities.

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