

Research Forum - Holocaust and Genocide

Preface

On August 2, 1942, during the course of the mass expulsion from the Warsaw Ghetto, Chaim Kaplan wrote in his diary: “Let it be known, in all the annals of the evil rule of man over man there has never been such a cruel and barbaric expulsion as this one.”¹

That same year Karl Korsch, a German Marxist philosopher who fled to the USA in 1933, declared that “the innovation in totalitarian politics ... is simply that the Nazis have extended to the ‘civilized’ European nations the methods that until now were reserved for the ‘natives’ or ‘savages’ who lived beyond that which was termed civilization.”²

Both these writers wrote in reaction to the Nazi crimes of the fateful year of 1942. One was awaiting slaughter while the other had managed to escape in time from Nazi Germany. Kaplan, a Jew in Poland, stood at the heart of the storm as the Final Solution came to the Warsaw Ghetto. Korsch, a German political exile, wrote from the security of the United States. For the former, the Nazis’ crimes against the Jews were unprecedented in human history, while the latter saw them as an extension and continuation of the dark side of modern European history, which until that time had been manifested primarily in Europe’s treatment of non-Europeans. Each evinced a different form of historical understanding.

The question both addressed – whether the Holocaust was a unique event in history or a specific instance of a recurrent feature of human, and especially modern existence – has since become a continuing concern of scholars of the Jewish people, students of Europe and its culture, and investigators of the Holocaust and of other cases of genocide.

This is an issue with many dimensions, touching as it does on history, ethics, politics, and identity. Furthermore, over the years it has engendered a great many secondary questions. But the most significant question is, in fact, what do we actually ask? How should we begin to approach such a multi-faceted issue?

1 Chaim Aron Kaplan, “Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan” (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), p. 396.

2 Cited from Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York: New Press, 2003), p. 50.

Is the Holocaust the most extreme case of the phenomenon of genocide? Or is the Holocaust a paradigmatic case of genocide, in which the appalling contours of the phenomenon appear in their clearest form? Is the Holocaust a unique or “unprecedented” event? Can a line be drawn between the Holocaust and other similar historical phenomena, connecting them along some historical and conceptual continuum?

But perhaps the way in which this question is phrased, presenting the Holocaust as a singular yardstick of sorts against which other events should be measured, is fundamentally incorrect? Or even harmful? Perhaps one should ask the precisely opposite question: how did it come about that it was the Holocaust, one of many cases of genocide, albeit certainly one of the most extreme, that became so central a historical and ethical symbol? And from this follow further questions. Why and how did the Holocaust become the most studied event of the twentieth century, generating countless historical, cultural and popular discussions throughout the Western world, and increasingly in other parts of the world as well? And does the stress on the memory of the Holocaust perhaps tend to obscure and diminish memories of other genocides and thereby diminish them? Or perhaps it has the opposite effect, encouraging these other memories to surface and to claim their place in public discourse?

Should the Holocaust be located within its historical context as opposed to in relation to other genocides? In order to gain a historical understanding of the Holocaust as an extreme event in European and in Jewish history alike, for example, should we perhaps avoid focusing solely on Germany and on the war years, nor solely on the issue of antisemitism? Would it be best to focus on those *longue durée* processes without which the Holocaust could not have occurred? Perhaps we should also understand the Holocaust within wider contexts, such as total war, ethnic struggles, genocide, racism, imperialism, and colonialism, which are of vital importance in enabling us to plumb the depths of so extreme a phenomenon and to better explain what happened in mid-twentieth century Europe? Perhaps a comparative study of cases of genocide in addition to the Holocaust could afford a better understanding of each individual case as well as the overall phenomenon. Could such a study succeed in pointing to the singular aspects of each event while at the same time highlight shared traits?

Could focusing on these wider contexts distract the historical gaze from the salient issues essential to an understanding of the Holocaust and thus devalue it? Could so doing, in other words, divert our gaze from the singular aspects of the fate of the Jews in modern times, from the virulent antisemitism that evolved from the end of the nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, and in particular from Nazi antisemitism?

The debate over such questions has been intense and emotional and has surged in several waves from the time of the war to the present day. Since these are disturbing

and intractable questions that touch on the identities of Jews and non-Jews alike, they have been argued heatedly all over the world by historians, intellectuals, politicians, and the public at large.

During the last three decades, worldwide interest in the Holocaust has grown. The term “genocide” was coined by the Polish Jewish refugee jurist Raphael Lemkin in a book he published in the USA in 1944 (while many members of his family were murdered by the Nazis).³ But the term penetrated cultural and scholarly discourse only in the mid-1990s. This happened in the wake of widespread engagement with the topic of the extermination of the Jews, but in equal measure because of the genocides in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia and the resultant international war crimes trials. And while both these fields – study of the Holocaust and study of genocide – originated in the same event, the Final Solution of World War II, the relations between them are varied and complex.

The scholarly forum in this volume of *Dapim* is devoted to this charged issue. It presents a range of opinions that reflect the international discourse on the relationship between genocide and Holocaust and between the study of genocide and the study of the Holocaust. It goes without saying that the airing of these varied opinions in the forum is no indication of the outlook of the editors and the editorial board. *Dapim* is a journal that addresses primarily the Holocaust rather than genocide, and it is from this perspective that we have approached the debate. A journal engaged with the topic of genocide may well have framed this issue differently from the outset. We nevertheless believe that both students of the Holocaust and students of genocide will find much of interest in this forum. Although the present gathering cannot, of course, cover the entire complexity of the issue, it offers a survey of the current state of scholarly opinion. Its participants include several of the leading scholars who have engaged with these questions, and it addresses historical, ethical, identity-related and political issues. Our current forum thus provides a concise introduction to this cardinal issue of history and of historical consciousness at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

3 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).

Genocide Prevention in Historical Perspective

Yehuda Bauer

The Genocide Convention and Its Weaknesses

Academics love arguing about definitions. But definitions, certainly in the area of history and politics, are by definition abstractions from reality, and reality is always much more complicated than our definitions can be. All too often, we try to adapt reality to our abstractions rather than modifying our definitions to fit reality. This is what happened with the concept of genocide. The word was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish refugee lawyer in the United States, and was first used by him in print in 1944. The term was incorporated into the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, in December 1948 – but that document significantly redefined it. Promoted by what we would now call third-world countries (Panama, Brazil, and others), the Convention in its final form was the product of horse-trading between the West and the Soviet Union, and is very problematic. It does not provide for an effective preventive or corrective procedure. When a tragedy caused by humans is recognized as being a genocide, the United Nations, specifically the Security Council, is supposed to deal with it. But the Security Council, with its five permanent members wielding veto power, is hamstrung. If one or more of the permanent members, or a powerful coalition of Security Council member states without vetoes, have economic, political or strategic interests in the area in which the tragedy happens or is likely to happen, then no action is taken. This is what is now happening in Darfur, where Chinese oil interests, along with the support the genocidal regime in Khartoum enjoys from Russia and the Arab League, have rendered the Security Council impotent. It has thus not been able to invoke the Convention to stop a slaughter in which, according to Eric Reeves, more than 400,000 Darfurians have already been killed, while a slow genocidal attrition of the living is in progress. Some 2.7 million former farmers, chased away from their villages, are languishing in displaced persons' camps, while a continuing humanitarian crisis is killing off children. Large numbers of women are targeted for sexual assault. The cumulative result of all this is the destruction of families. In Rwanda, a lack of interest by another combination of powers and countries paradoxically led to a similar result. The United States government refused to recognize the tragedy as a genocide, because that, they erroneously thought, would have legally compelled it to take action to halt the killings,

even though no immediate American interests were involved. The administration, still smarting from its failure, just before the Rwandan genocide began, to impose order in Somalia, feared incurring any more American casualties. France supported the perpetrator side, and other countries were not interested enough to intervene.

In Kenya, in 2007, a murderous campaign of ethnic cleansing could have led to widespread unrest in neighboring countries and the destruction of a potentially prosperous trading partner. Nevertheless, none of the great powers had major economic or strategic interests there. Nor did any one of them have an interest in sabotaging preventive action. As a result, the UN was able to act consensually, and former Secretary-General Kofi Anan negotiated a compromise of sorts, though the danger has not passed by any means. There have been other, similar cases in which the Convention has been successfully invoked by the Security Council, such as Macedonia and East Timor. Clearly, the UN can intervene to halt a genocide, and perhaps succeed, only when no major power believes that such intervention could compromise its vital interests.

The alternative, circumventing the UN, and intervening unilaterally, involves great risks for any country or group of countries that chooses to do so. NATO intervened in the Balkans, with UN approval, but apparently largely because the EU and the United States had a manifest interest in doing so. Russia, the main supporter of Serbia, could not, at that time, risk a confrontation with the West. In Iraq, unilateral American intervention (with allies that have mostly abandoned the ship) will no doubt end in total disaster, though of course the Americans will deny that. The Afghan situation is even worse – there is not the slightest chance of an American victory. The impending American withdrawal will probably lead to a Taliban takeover and a genocide against ethnic minorities such as the Tadjiks, Uzbeks, and Hazars.

According to the Convention, genocide is defined as acting with the intent to annihilate ethnic, national, racial and religious groups, in part or in whole. It specifies five actions that, when taken against such a group, constitute an act of genocide: murder, serious physical or mental harm, deliberately inflicting conditions of life that make their survival impossible, preventing births, and forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. Political, social, and economic parties or classes were not defined as groups under the Convention, since if so defined several major powers would be liable to charges of genocide. But the exclusion makes little sense. For example, the Soviet regime embarked on the annihilation of the kulaks as a class (the term “class” was explicitly used). But the kulaks themselves did not share an identity, a consciousness of belonging to a cohesive group. Rather, a kulak was, more or less, a peasant who owned two cows instead of just one and did not want to

be part of a *kolkhoz*, a Soviet collective farm. But the regime defined a peasant who opposed collectivization as a kulak even if he owned only a single cow, or none. And if a peasant had two cows but was a Party member, joined a *kolkhoz*, and became, say, the village head, he was by definition not a kulak. Nevertheless, huge numbers of people branded as kulaks were persecuted, starved, and murdered, transforming that virtual class into a very real group of victims. Barbara Harff proposed the term “politicide” to denote mass murder committed against groups defined by their political beliefs or their social or economic class, even if they are virtual in the sense of lacking a collective consciousness. According to Harff, politicide should be considered no less a crime than genocide, despite its omission from the Convention. Most scholars now take this position, and so should we.

Another problem is that the five defining acts are unclear. Is one of them sufficient? Or are two or more required for a genocide? When hundreds of thousands of Jews were herded into gas chambers, did that create conditions of life that made the existence of the group impossible? And when the Nazis planned and carried out the murder of all Jewish women and children they could find, is it meaningful to talk about preventing births and kidnapping children? The Holocaust against the Jews and the *Zagłada* (annihilation) of Poles by Nazi Germany were central in the minds of the people who wrote the Convention, but that did not prevent the terms used from being elusive.

What, for example, is a “racial” group? The scientific and legal consensus today is that race is not a meaningful term in the context of human biology and society. DNA comparisons have proved that all humans alive today are descendants of a small group of *Homo sapiens* who lived in East Africa some 150,000 years ago, give or take some tens of thousands of years. The different skin colors and physiques we see among human beings today are the result of very minor mutations that occurred later. We are a single biological species, since indigenous Australians, African pygmies, Canadian Inuits, and Caucasian Harvard graduates may mate and produce healthy, viable offspring. Differences between cats are much larger than those between humans. Given the miniscule biological differences, there are clearly no grounds for distinguishing between human groups on a biological basis.

Yet racism certainly exists today. There was practically none in the ancient world, where free Africans who worshipped Roman gods could and did become Roman citizens. The prophet Amos explicitly spoke of the equality before God of people of color. Ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, or Hittites, were hardly blond-haired and blue-eyed Aryans. The Catholic Church revered a black saint, St. Mauritius, whose statue can be seen in many Gothic cathedrals. Modern racism began to develop only at the end of the fifteenth century, when the Iberian states began establishing colonies

in West African coastal areas and black slavery became institutionalized. Blacks were enslaved in the African interior, usually by other blacks, who then sold the slaves to Arab slave traders, who resold them to white merchants on the coast. From there the Europeans transported them to the New World under horrifying conditions that killed millions. To justify this treatment, slave-owning societies developed a theory of racial distinctions that designated black skin as a marker of biological inferiority. Black people were thus fit only to be slaves to whites. Racist behavior became legalized in post-1492 Spain by the rule of *limpieza de sangre*, whereby people of Jewish or Moorish (Arab) origin could not occupy high-level positions in Church and State.

Using the term “racial groups” in a UN document was understandable in 1948, when every ethnic or national group was called a “race.” It is unacceptable, however, in 2011, because it could be misunderstood as affirming that the salient difference between groups of human beings is the color of their skin, thus inadvertently confirming the premise of modern racism.

Another obvious problem with the Convention is that it hinges the charge of genocide on the concept of “intent.” Yet how can intent be proved if the relevant archives are closed, or if the instructions to murder were transmitted orally? Hitler never gave a written order to murder all the Jews. Intent can be proved by reference to the end result and by circumstantial evidence, and by documents that make it clear that such intent existed even if it was not explicitly stated. This was the kind of evidence accepted by the International Court that heard the Srebrenica case, and elsewhere as well.

So do we need the Convention? Yes, I think we do. It has become part of international law, and although it has never been invoked to prevent or punish a genocide, it has been referred to by international courts trying perpetrators after the event. Just recently, the Sudanese dictator, Omar al-Bashir, has been accused of genocide. Enforcement of the Convention thus indeed hangs over the heads of actual or potential perpetrators. While imperfect, it is a foundation on which to build.

Yet it must be built on – although, as it stands, it is woefully deficient. Theoretically, it needs to be revised, but it cannot be, in light of real-world economic and strategic interests, nationalism, and power struggles. My advice is to approach it with what I would call “morally-based practical cynicism.” I don’t believe in a good world, or in utopias; but I do believe we can make the world a tiny bit better than it is today, and that is our real purpose; it is something worth devoting one’s life to.

The Phenomenon of Genocide in a Global Context

Another issue needs to be touched on, if only in brief. International politics is developing dialectically, reflecting two contradictory global trends. The first is a move toward greater unification, and the second, opposing tendency is toward greater autonomy and independence for ethnic and national groups. The EU is an obvious example of the first. Slowly, with many zigzags, Europe is moving toward some sort of federal system. The motivation is largely economic, but a united Europe is also seen as a defensive asset against a perceived threat from a resurgent Russia and dangers looming farther afield. From the perspective of genocide prevention, the greater the possibility for a kind of European federal arrangement – provided of course it is efficient – the smaller the danger of an outbreak of inter-ethnic or inter-national mass violence in Europe itself, especially in the Balkans. Yet, in the same Europe, a growing number of ethnic, national, and even religious groups and minorities demand autonomy or independence. The Scots and the Welsh in Britain, the Basques in France and Spain, the Catalans in Spain, Hungarians in Slovakia, to name just a few, now demand some sort of autonomy or independence. Cultural autonomy for Europe's 23 million Muslims is also on the agenda.

In other parts of the world, these contradictions assume threatening proportions. There is, arguably, a chaotic move toward greater collaboration in Africa, and a slightly less chaotic one in Southeast Asia. The Arab League, a creation of British colonialism in 1945, has developed into a permanent body with some influence on the international scene and a lobby at the UN. But all this is being threatened by ethnic separatism in Africa and Asia, and in Latin America as well, if in this last in a different form. African states are very largely the result of the division of the continent by the colonial powers of the nineteenth century, and the borders between them completely disregard linguistic and ethnic boundaries. Independence was achieved within these artificial borders. Globalization has made some, or perhaps many, of these ethnic groups aware of their specific identity. Their struggles for recognition have the potential for causing increasingly violent conflicts that could threaten existing states or set off bloody wars between them. This is already happening in Kenya and, to some extent, in Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, and of course Nigeria. South Africa is also at risk. Ethnic and national groups are fighting for autonomy or independence in Myanmar, there are tensions in Iran, the Kurds are fighting for some sort of independence in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (marginally also in Syria), and Sudan's multiple ethnic groups have been at war, in that war's most recent incarnation, for nearly three decades. Were such inter-ethnic civil war to spread to India and Pakistan, this would constitute a major threat to world peace. Federal solutions, multi-ethnic accommodation within existing state

frameworks, and overall unification processes could and perhaps should be furthered in order to avoid this kind of danger. Little research has been devoted to this problem, and politicians deal with it piecemeal, in specific situations, apparently unaware of the ticking of a very large time bomb.

In my view, the ideal solution is to foster what Jürgen Habermas calls *Verfassungspatriotismus*, loyalty to a constitution. This involves fostering loyalty to and identification with, in a multi-ethnic or multicultural polity, a state based on a democratic constitution, and a shared past, imagined or real. This is the way the United States developed. There is a strong national – some might say nationalistic – identity in the United States, based on loyalty to a constitution that is almost two-and-a-half centuries old. It functions, even if there are creaks and crises (including a bloody Civil War). In Switzerland, a shared history (real or imagined – see the contrived foundation story of the Rütli oath of 1291), dating from a pre-modern time when ethnicity played a very minor, if any role, in state formation, helped to develop a strong common identity. In Canada, a parallel development seems to be taking place, despite a constant threat of an ethnically-based Quebecois separatism. India has held together in part because of the legacy of British colonialism, and in part thanks to an invented but nevertheless strong feeling of solidarity. Even so, there are worrisome signs of stresses in Assam (Asom), the tribal areas of central India, and elsewhere. A rise in ethnic and national consciousness could become dangerous and threaten India's unity. The mess in Pakistan hardly needs mentioning.

All this has to do with what I would claim is a mistaken perception of the direction globalization leads us. From Benedict Anderson on, the idea took root that we live in an age of declining nationalism, and that the future belongs to non- or multi-national structures. The problem is not that this is wrong, but that it is only partly true. Western economic interests indeed tend toward globalization. The ethnic or national identity of the “captains of industry” (or of oil, or raw materials, or shipping, or banking) is irrelevant. But that is not the case with China, for instance. That country's imperialist stance, centered on its economic interests, is based on national identity. In history there is no linear development; development is dialectical, and ethnicity and nationalism are very much alive and kicking. And they have the potential to be the source of conflicts that could become genocidal. Preventive action is vital.

Like many of my colleagues, I believe that arguing over how to define genocide is largely futile and may be counterproductive. Yet we need to be clear about exactly what we want to do. We need to differentiate between conflicts and genocidal situations; it is the latter that we want to deal with. Conflicts, I would suggest, are struggles between two or more contestants, none of whom is able to exercise enough

power to annihilate its enemies “as such.” Conflicts can have the potential to be solved through negotiations, mediation, outside intervention to bring about a compromise, or a relative victory by one party that allows it to coexist with the defeated group or groups and perhaps even reach a reconciliation with them. But when a conflict escalates into a confrontation in which one party has overwhelming power, and the others little or none, a genocidal situation may develop. Such cases may quickly deteriorate into full-scale genocides under the Convention’s definition – the attempt to annihilate entire ethnic, national, “racial”, or religious groups – or politicide, or ethnic cleansing aimed at wiping out the targeted group, or policies inspired by genocidal ideologies aimed at world control through mass murder that have the characteristics of genocide. The terms I and some of my colleagues use are not definitions but rather descriptions. Nevertheless, they are clear enough. David Scheffer calls such crimes mass atrocities, Rudolph J. Rummel calls them democides – meaning the mass murder of human beings, I call them genocidal situations, but we all basically mean the same thing: intentional mass destruction, as such, of human groups, whether these groups are real or contrived. Versions of such a description have been around for a long time (see for instance the work of Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn), and they seem to me to be a practical way out of the definition controversies.

Increasingly, the concepts of crimes against humanity and genocide have become synonymous, or nearly so. Yet the distinction is still important. Descriptions of genocide emphasize the intent to annihilate groups as groups. Crimes against humanity may do this as well, but the category is a more general one that includes other forms of persecution. Furthermore, the targets may be individuals, not groups. In a sense, therefore, genocide is included under the category of crimes against humanity, but forms an extreme case of this general concept.

Genocides are often committed by ideological movements that acquire tremendous power and seek to control the world. While they may be motivated, often unconsciously, by economic, social, and political developments, their ideologies become independent factors and can be a major motivator of mass violence and genocide. This applies to the three major ideologies that appeared in the wake of World War I: Soviet Communism (the Bolshevik revolution, 1917), National Socialism (Hitler’s first political statement, 1919), and radical Islam (the foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 1928). All these sought (the latter still seeks) to subjugate the globe by force under an exclusivist and totalitarian creed. They are typified by an opposition to participatory government (Sunni radicalism has advisory boards, *shura*, nominated by clerics; radical Shi’a accepts limited representation, controlled by clerics, as in the Iranian Majlis), and democratic forms of government. Furthermore, they all, in different ways,

deny the right of self-determination to medium and small ethnic groups, nations, and states. Two of them are explicitly anti-feminist; all three are, or became, radically antisemitic, seeing the Jews as a satanic force to be eliminated. Finally, they all commit mass murder and genocide. Despite the huge differences between them, they worship force of arms and violence. Radical Islam is a major force within a huge population – the world's 1.3 billion Muslims – even if its core movements still constitute a relatively small minority in that religious community. It is growing, however, and its ideas are penetrating the Muslim mainstream. Yet Western policies based on force, are, in my view, futile against it. Radical Islam as a genocidal threat can only be countered in Europe by integration of the Muslim immigrants into European society, and in the Muslim world by an alliance with anti-radical Muslim elements.

To return to my main theme: since we address a continuum of a certain type of human action, the boundaries between mass murder, ethnic cleansing, genocidal massacres, and full-scale genocides cannot be accurately defined. They are fluid. Nor can numbers be used to distinguish between mass murder and genocide. The Serb forces in Bosnia murdered about 8,000 men in Srebrenica. During June 1944, the Nazis shipped up to 12,000 Jews to Auschwitz daily. Are these actions comparable? Were the Serb war in Bosnia and the Holocaust both genocidal events? I believe they were, but we should nevertheless be cognizant of the tremendous differences between them – differences that called for different kinds of responses.

My attempt above to distinguish between conflicts and genocides may sound artificial. Indeed, any attempt to make clear distinctions of this sort is inevitably artificial. What is important is that my distinction is practical enough to be of use. It implies, for example, that genocidal situations may de-escalate into manageable conflicts when the targeted group or groups gain enough power, by themselves or through third-party intervention, to prevent the potential perpetrator from committing mass atrocities. For example, the Darfur situation could, theoretically, de-escalate into a manageable conflict, if the targeted African groups could unite into a coalition that the Sudanese government and its local allies could not defeat. The aggressors would then have to accept some form of compromise. The same thing could happen if the UN or the AU (African Union) or another combination of third parties were to force the two sides to negotiate a real compromise. The same applies to East Congo, and to possible genocidal threats in the Balkans, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

The Nature of Genocide

Where does the propensity of humans to kill their own kind in large numbers come from? I suspect that it derives from our nature as predatory mammals who eat the flesh of other beings and collect the fruit of the earth and trees. We do not go out into the streets to hunt mammoths as our forefathers did; instead we drive to a supermarket and buy meat and fish from its shelves. In the end, it comes to the same thing. But we are weak predators. We do not have the teeth of tigers or the claws of bears, so we must act in bands – which are the kernel of what we today call ethnicities, tribes, or nations. Our bands, or herds, need to control territories where they can live safely, hunt, and gather, and so we are territorial. When another group enters our real or virtual territory, we have four options: we can absorb them, because they may strengthen us; we may let them in and enslave them because this may be useful for us; we may order them to leave, which they may or may not agree to do; or we can kill them. The instinct to murder results from a fear of being enslaved or killed ourselves, of losing our identity, or losing our capability to secure our economic, social and political survival. We are therefore the only predatory mammals who kill their own kind in huge numbers. The instinct to do this lies within all of us. Under certain conditions, with possibly different parentage and different socialization, we may become perpetrators.

All of us have a little Himmler or Eichmann within us. Humankind's brief tenure on this earth – only some 9000 years of so-called civilization, preceded by 140,000 years of development leading up to it – is replete with genocidal murder. The Decalogue includes the commandment “thou shalt not murder.” But it does not say, as the King James version renders it, “thou shalt not kill.” The Bible prohibits murder but permits – even approves of – killing, as, for example, when young people in funny clothes called uniforms are sent out to slay other young people dressed in funny clothes of a slightly different color. Killing is permitted murder; murder is forbidden killing. No society can survive if it makes killing a social norm. Therefore, killing within a band or tribe, or any type of human society, is permitted only as individual punishment for major transgressions; otherwise it becomes murder. Murder is permitted outside the tribe, and as such becomes killing. We seem to be programmed for this behavior. Recently, a Neolithic mass burial was discovered in a place called Talheim in Germany. An examination of the skeletons showed that a large number of men, women, children, and even babies had been murdered there by other human beings. Clearly, these are the remains of the annihilation of one group by another group some 20,000-30,000 years ago. The instinct that leads to mass murder of groups is as old as the human race, and probably older.

Is it therefore hopeless to try and limit genocidal behavior, or even stop it? I do not think so, because we have the opposite instinct within us as well. Hobbes was

only partly right. We cannot exist outside our tribe. We depend on cooperation, in hunting and gathering, and by extension in all occupations that ensure our survival. We therefore developed social organization, and that demanded, from our earliest beginnings, that we develop compassion, readiness to cooperate, sympathy, love, and care. We are even prepared, under certain conditions, to risk our very life to rescue others; we do that because we may thereby gain a reliable friend who will identify with us out of gratitude. And we develop religious or secular humanistic ideologies to explain to ourselves why we do this. We fashion moral attitudes that become a solid part of a desired order of things, because otherwise individual and social existence would become unbearable. We are therefore in constant conflict, within ourselves and between our groups about the ways to solve conflicts and respond to genocidal threats, a conflict growing out of the clash between our urge to kill and our urge to cooperate. Some argue that these instincts are coded into our genes – anthropologists have found that babies react to needs of the others by a show of desire to help. If true, this demonstrates that the “positive” instinct to help others coexists with the “negative” one that prefers one’s own tribe and views others as worthy of death. If so, we may find strategies that will enhance our instinct to preserve life and suppress the killer instinct that produced Srebrenica, Rwanda, and Treblinka.

Differences and Practicalities

This brings up the thorny issue of international law and the moral principles that underlie it. In my view, morality is a social convention based on the need to maintain society, but it then transcends convention to become a “super-structure” that exerts a very important influence over the socio-economic and political basis (to use Marxist terminology and turn it on its head). International law did not begin with Hugo Grotius in the seventeenth century. The concept can be found in ancient times, for instance in the Tel-El Amarna correspondence of the fourteenth century BCE. Then, as today, it was founded on a consensus that the preservation of individual and collective life depends on agreements about how social units, and the individuals that make them up, should behave in order to preserve a modicum of bearable existence. The problem lies in the breadth of the consensus. International law is wonderful when states and individuals observe it. But the means of enforcing it are, as we all know, not very strong or effective. There has certainly been progress, and it is much more enforceable today than it was, say, a century ago. But the global dangers have grown, too, as has the interdependence of human societies. Despite these advances, enforcement remains problematic, as the gridlock built into the rules of the Security Council demonstrates. The international community has not succeeded in laying down the law in Darfur,

Burma, or even Zimbabwe. And it has proven impotent when faced with a major local power with a genocidal ideology, such as Iran. Yet these are precisely the cases where enforcement is most needed. More and more institutions are being established to make international law more complicated and to broaden its scope, but this has not necessarily enhanced its effectiveness. As in the case of conflicts generally, it is enforceable mainly when the major powers have no interest in preventing its application. When they do, they freely circumvent it. Interests are thus a crucial factor. International law certainly should expand in scope, but if it is not cognizant of *realpolitik*, it will not get very far.

These are practical, not theoretical considerations. Where do they lead us, and what can be done? In the present situation, to reform the UN and its Security Council is a hopeless task. It has been attempted, and it has failed. To improve the Genocide Convention is an impossibility, as the General Assembly will never agree on an alternative version. Do we therefore give up on the UN? That would be a totally inexcusable mistake. The UN is the forum where different national interests meet, and where compromises and policies can be discussed and, sometimes, agreed upon. The UN may not be pretty, but it is all we have. How then do we square the circle? There is no simple panacea or recipe, but a few routes are worth trying.

1. We need to produce, and make available to policy makers, scientific, quantitative and qualitative analyses that will assess the risks of future mass atrocities. Some such studies have already been done, but we need more.

2. Public awareness of genocidal threats should be heightened in those countries where a free or relatively free media culture makes that possible. Publics may then press governments to take action to counter mass atrocities in process and prevent impending ones.

3. We need to educate public servants in democratic and semi-democratic countries – diplomats, civil servants, military and police personnel, journalists, and academics – to heighten their awareness of the potential threats that mass atrocities and genocidal acts present for all citizens of the world's ever more interrelated societies. The hope is that such educational efforts will percolate upward to decision makers.

4. The UN machinery should be used to pursue the first three projects, as well as to influence regional organizations recognized by the UN, such as the OAS (Organization of American States), the AU, ASEAN (Association of Southern Asian Nations), EU (European Union), and possibly others, to influence the Security Council and to act themselves to prevent genocide.

5. A World Humanitarian Fund needs to be established, despite or perhaps precisely because of the current world economic crisis. Such a body would be prepared to

offer immediate relief to fight starvation and disease in conflict zones and genocidal situations.

6. A united NGO (Nongovernmental Organization) front that can influence the Security Council and regional organizations should be formed to overcome mutual jealousy and suspicion among them.

7. Regional groups of governments that transcend borders of conflicting ideologies and political approaches should be formed to prevent mass killings everywhere on the globe. The establishment of such groups began, at the initiative of Switzerland and Argentina, in Buenos Aires in December 2008. This initiative should be expanded to other regions – Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Mediterranean, Africa, Europe, and North America. These regional groups might join together to lobby the UN to prevent genocide, accomplishing, as governments, what NGOs and individuals cannot.

8. All available diplomatic means must be used, relentlessly, to engage (perhaps “nag” would be a better term) major powers and groups of smaller ones, stressing the dangers of closing their eyes to genocidal threats. The key is not to sermonize, because that will achieve the opposite end. But the diplomats involved in this engagement must be motivated by a deep moral outrage at the mass murders of human beings that still take place worldwide. They must carefully analyze the economic, political and military interests involved in each such conflict, taking into account the internal stresses and problems faced by the societies and governments of the powers being engaged, and pursue diplomatic strategies to convince the powers that their interests will be served by countering and preventing genocide. This can be most effective with the smaller nations that lack major economic or strategic interests.

Finally, there is the vexing problem of comparing genocides or genocidal massacres, or mass atrocities committed against entire groups. This has been the subject of much scholarly work. But the question remains: is it really possible to make comparisons between such events? How can one contrast the razing of Carthage, the annihilation of the Buddhists in India at the hands of invading Muslims, the sack of Isfahan by the Mongols, the mass murder of African slaves in the Middle Passage, the Armenian and Herrero genocides, the Holocaust, Cambodia, and Rwanda? In my view we still do not have the necessary analytical criteria to do so. Nevertheless, brilliant minds are working on this and will probably come up with standards for comparison that will make the task less daunting. While this is not the place to go into details, clearly any preventive strategy must be able to make such comparisons in an objective way. In the meantime, I offer some thoughts of my own, based on my subjective intuitions, using Rwanda as a test case.

According to the standard account, Hutu and Tutsi are imagined ethnicities. They are actually different social classes that emerged in pre-modern Rwanda and solidified

into ethnic groups. They speak the same language and have always shared a religion – Christianity today. German and Belgian colonialists exploited these social divisions to divide and rule the territory, first supporting the Tutsi minority and then, in the latter stages of Belgian rule, the Hutu majority. The Hutu, who had been disadvantaged in the pre-colonial Rwandan kingdom ruled by the Tutsis, were joined by Hutus from the area that is now Rwanda's northwest region, but which had never been part of the Tutsi monarchy's territory. Upon independence, economic rivalry and power struggles led to repeated outbreaks of mass violence. Hutus predominated, and the victims came from the better-educated and more prosperous Tutsi minority. A Hutu Power ideology developed to justify the repeated massacres, charging the Tutsi with being foreign exploiters (in other words, Others). A dictatorship controlled by elements from the formerly independent northwest caused Tutsi – and opposition Hutu – refugees in Uganda to organize an armed force that invaded Rwanda in 1990. With the failure of attempts at conciliation, largely led by outside forces and supported by local Hutu opposition to the dictatorship, and with a Tutsi Army advancing from the north, the regime planned a genocide against the Tutsis, carried out by special militias supported by the army and certain civilian elements. Most of the killing was accomplished with fairly primitive weapons, with the help of the very highly-developed local bureaucracy and a major radio station that incited and directed the perpetrators.

All these elements have their parallels in other genocides (including the Holocaust). Massacres and other violent conflicts preceded the genocides in Ottoman Turkey and many other places. Bureaucracy is an essential element in most genocides. Special death units are often players. In many cases, for example the Armenian case, the slaughter of the members of a targeted group is justified on the grounds that they will constitute a fifth column that will fight alongside the enemy in an anticipated foreign invasion. Economic considerations are also common. Comparisons such as this one have already been made (by Ted R. Gurr, for instance). They could well be expanded and used to identify areas prone to genocide.

Nevertheless, the Holocaust remains a special case. It contains many of the elements I identified in the Rwanda case, along with others that also appear in genocides and genocidal situations that preceded World War II. Yet it also displayed parameters that were hitherto unknown. I have detailed some of these elsewhere, for example in *Rethinking the Holocaust* (Yale 2001). Briefly, they include what I call totality, universality, non-pragmatic ideology, and racist content. By totality and universality I mean the stated intent to kill every single person of the targeted group everywhere on earth, an intent that can be documented and that has no historical precedent. By non-pragmatic ideology I mean the fact that the Jews had neither a territory nor an

army, and in fact had no collective political representation that could have endangered the perpetrators. A detailed analysis has shown that the Germans killed the Jews not to appropriate their property, but rather acquired their possessions as a byproduct of their primary intentional acts of deporting the Jews and then of killing them. In contradiction of their own economic and military interests, they killed Jewish slave laborers who were building important roads (e.g. Military Road No. 4 in the Southern Ukraine, in 1942) and Jewish slaves working in armaments factories (in Berlin in February 1943, for example, the Germans deported such Jewish workers even though, after Stalingrad, the Germans desperately needed to produce more arms). I know of no previous case in which huge numbers of people were killed for purely ideological reasons that had no pragmatic basis – that, in fact, was anti-pragmatic, anti-modern, and anti-cost-effective.

I would like to take advantage of this *Dapim* forum to offer an example from Martin Holler's article about the Nazi extermination of the Soviet Roma (Gypsies), which appeared in the previous issue (vol. 24). My purpose is to show how useful a comparative analysis based on the historical study of documents can be, while at the same time reasserting my claim of the special character of the Holocaust.

Holler correctly critiqued my understanding of Nazi policy against the Roma, on the grounds that I had not had access to Soviet material and based myself solely on German documents. He demonstrated a contradiction between Germany's declared policy, which distinguished between nomadic and non-nomadic Roma, and actual practice. According to German documents, the nomads were to be given the same treatment as the Jews (as stated explicitly in the order of the chief of the German Order Police [Orpo] in Poland of August 13, 1942). In contrast, the non-nomads were to be treated like the rest of the non-Jewish local population. Holler showed that, in practice, the Germans murdered the Roma in certain areas without distinguishing between nomads and non-nomads. I can only, then, correct what I have written in the past on this subject, and thank Holler for enlightening me.

But several questions remain. First, Holler examined the German zone of military rule, a broad swath of territory between the front and zones under civilian rule. He did not look at what happened in the latter very large area. Unquestionably it would be difficult to do so, but until such a study is undertaken, we cannot reach firm conclusions about German policy regarding the Roma in the occupied Soviet Union. The judgments made by military commanders may not necessarily have been identical to those made by various civilian bodies. In Poland, in any case, the Germans generally (although not always) acted in accordance with the declared policy. Furthermore, it is not clear if there were army commanders who did not act like the ones that Holler

documented. The only areas where we can be sure that Holler is unquestionably correct is Crimea and the northern Caucasus – that is, the area where *Einsatzgruppen D* was deployed. Were there Roma in other zones of military rule who were not exterminated, and if so, why? Holler addressed several cases, but he offered no overview. I am not criticizing him, since the labor is difficult, but it is important to note the limitations of his study.

So perhaps my claim that Nazi policy toward the Roma was confused and inconsistent, but the argument that they differentiated between settled and wandering Roma is correct after all? Holler himself wrote that, as far as the Nazis were concerned, the Roma were a very minor problem – the Jews were the central issue. About 43,000 Roma lived in the area of the expanded Reich, with another 100,000 or so, perhaps more, in the areas under full German control. Most of the Roma population lived in the Balkans. Romania conducted persecutions that led to the deaths of 11,000-12,000 Roma out of several hundred thousand, and there were considerably fewer victims in Hungary. Was the partial murder of Roma by the Nazis a genocide? Unquestionably so. Should it be compared to the annihilation of the Jews? Yes, it should; and if we do so we find that these two genocides were committed by the same perpetrators, largely in the same places, but for entirely different reasons, in entirely different dimensions, in entirely divergent ideological contexts, with different results.

None of this means that the Holocaust was in any sense unique, because uniqueness would indicate that it cannot be repeated. Yet all human actions can be repeated – never exactly, but approximately. The Holocaust was unprecedented in a very radical way, and precedents can have consequences. In fact, some of the elements of the Holocaust precedent have indeed been repeated. For example, Hutu Power wanted to murder every single Tutsi they could find in Rwanda – though, to the best of my knowledge, they did not dream of extending the genocide into neighboring countries. My claim, then, is that the Holocaust represents the most extreme form, to date, of a general human malady. To prevent genocide, we must remove humanity as far as we can from this extreme form of mass murder. We must and can compare genocides, but it is vital to stick to a scientifically verifiable analysis aimed at identifying elements that may be repeated.

An American sociologist, Rudolph J. Rummel, estimated that between 1900 and 1987 – the dates were chosen arbitrarily – 169 million civilians and unarmed POWs were murdered by governments or political groups. In comparison, 34 million soldiers fell in battle. In other words, four times as many civilians died as soldiers. Some 38 million of the civilians died in genocides as defined by the Convention. It makes no

difference, except to the victims, if his estimates were off by a factor of, say, ten percent in either direction. We are faced today with Darfur and Congo, and we will most certainly be faced by other tragedies tomorrow. We cannot avoid future genocides unless we work to avoid them. That is a tautology, but the advantage of a tautology is that it is true. This one certainly is.

Comparison and Contextualization in the Study of the Holocaust

Donald Bloxham

What is learned, or obscured, when we address the Holocaust within the broader context of genocide? Is conceptualizing the Holocaust as unique or unprecedented in any sense useful? In answering the first question I shall suggest some more and less beneficial avenues of inquiry. As to the second question, my opinion is this: the claim that some historical event is “unique” is an incomplete proposition, and not one that a historian can benefit from contemplating. Because there is no unitary meaning or significance of any event in historical terms, something can only be “unique” in such and such a respect, relative to a certain line of inquiry. But to use “unique” in that way is to use it in a more mundane sense than the way in which the word is generally used in relation to the Holocaust. Much the same considerations apply to the idea of the Holocaust as “unprecedented.” Indeed the word “unprecedented” could be substituted precisely for the word “unique” in my previous two sentences and my points would still, I think, stand. In any case, it is important to acknowledge that the claim of the Holocaust’s uniqueness can only be made in terms of comparative study (by differentiating the Holocaust from other genocides), but that is to distort comparative studies by making of it a one-or-the-other endeavour in which things are either entirely homogenized or radically differentiated. Furthermore, because of the implicitly comparative (or, rather, contrastive) basis of the “uniqueness” claim as it is often applied to the Holocaust at the level of the event as a whole, it implies some sort of normative statement about the special significance of the Holocaust in relation to other genocides, whether or not the proponents of uniqueness actually intend the implication. This is why some victims and students of other genocides and mass atrocities resent the claim.¹ Comparative study should accommodate *both* particular aspects and common patterns, but this can only work if the particular aspects are not promoted to the status of being automatically more important than any similarities – and vice versa.

1 For substantiation of the normative connotations and an examination and critique of the uses of “uniqueness,” see A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the Racial Century: Genocide of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36:4 (2002), pp. 7-36.

I think it inescapable that some aspects of the Holocaust will be obscured when it is viewed through a wider lens; equally, something will be gained. This will always be the case when any event is examined from new perspectives and at different focuses, though it is impossible to legislate in the abstract about what the losses and gains will be. There will inevitably be tensions between general and specific approaches, but tensions can be productive, as specialist and conceptualizer/generalizer hone each other's assumptions and methodology. So this does not mean we should only do one thing or the other. Commending – as I would – a greater preparedness to examine the Holocaust in wider contexts and in comparison with other genocides most definitely does not mean that the detailed research into the specifics of the Holocaust, both as perpetrated crime and as victims' experience, should not *also* continue to be pursued. A synergy of specialist and comparativist approaches depends on the advancement of each.

Comparative study stands or falls according to methodology and empirics. On the methodological side, precision in comparison and the way comparative questions are framed are vital. On the empirical side, the matter hinges on the comparability of primary and secondary material from which to establish the history of the component cases. There is an obvious practical problem with extensive study of the Holocaust as compared to other genocides, because the scholarship on the former is larger than on all others combined. Armenia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Yugoslavia, and now the Herero and Nama genocides occupy a distant second place, and innumerable other instances are barely known beyond small specialist or activist circles. This imbalance is only gradually being amended. Earlier comparative scholarship was also not well-placed to redress the balance because of the nature of prevailing approaches to genocide, which returns us to methodology.

Most of the early comparative questions concerned the causation and patterns of genocidal events at a very general level, partly because the early scholars tended to be social and political scientists who did not have much empirical data to work with.² Perhaps reflecting the levels and types of scholarship on different genocides, one important aspect of comparative scholarship has traditionally been less historical *per se* than *historiographical*. This has often been rather a unidirectional process, characterized by the deployment in the study of other genocides of analytical tools honed in the study of the Holocaust. As genocide studies develops empirically as

2 For a brief history of these historiographical relations, see the editors' introduction to Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

well as conceptually, however, the comparative historiographical process can also work in reverse, with the study of other genocides informing that of the Holocaust. For instance, one can detect a connection between the growing interest, in the 1990s, in the hands-on, neighbour-on-neighbour violence of the Holocaust in the killing fields of Eastern Europe (particularly eastern Poland, the Baltic States, Belarus and Ukraine) and the similar violence of the Rwandan and Yugoslavian genocides of the same decade.³ Study of the sexual violence of those recent genocides has also grown along with interest in the same issue as manifested in the Nazi period. Likewise, Roger Petersen's work on what he calls political emotions, assessing the relative significance of factors like inter-group resentment of perceived status differences, has influenced, for example, the work of Anton Weiss-Wendt on Estonian collaborators with the Nazis.⁴

Much of today's most sophisticated comparative scholarship hinges less on meta-level comparisons than on the more manageable meso-level themes represented by the aforementioned scholarship: particular structures and contexts of perpetration, types of perpetrator cohort, moments of precipitation, comparison of victims' experiences in specified circumstances, comparison of survivor testimony, and so on. One fruitful endeavor has been to use the concept of colonialism as a model for the relations and crises engendered by the structured process of territorial acquisition, exploitation and settlement. Colonialism also suggests itself as an ideal paradigm for domination that legitimates violence by the 'colonized' population irrespective of real power relations.⁵ Another promising avenue of study is exemplified by Benjamin Valentino's

3 This point cannot be empirically proven but nevertheless it seems probable. For a sample of the literature deemphasizing Auschwitz in the Final Solution, see the essays on eastern Europe in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1998).

4 Roger Petersen, *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred, and Resentment in Twentieth-Century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Weiss-Wendt's forthcoming study.

5 A selection: Richard H. King and Dan Stone (eds.), *Hannah Arendt and the Uses of History: Imperialism, Nation, Race, and Genocide* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007); Jürgen Zimmerer, "The Birth of the Ostland Out of the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial Perspective on the Nazi Policy of Conquest and Extermination," *Patterns of Prejudice* 2:39 (2005), pp. 202–24; A. Dirk Moses (ed.), *Empire, Colony, Genocide: Conquest, Occupation, and Subaltern Resistance in World History* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008); and Moses, "The Holocaust and Colonialism," in Peter Hayes and John Roth (eds.),

study of the strategic and functional purposes genocide can serve for political elites.⁶ Further examples of such meso-level studies are Michael Mann's interest in explosive moments of expanded political participation and contestation;⁷ Christian Gerlach's related focus on the role of social strata outside the realms of formal power;⁸ and Adam Jones and Elisa von Joeden-Foergey's consideration of the gendered aspects of perpetration as well as victimhood.⁹ These are just a sampling – other valuable works of this sort have taken up subjects such as the organization of genocidal states and the role of bureaucracies, paramilitaries, armies and police forces.¹⁰ Systemic shortcomings in such studies tend to arise only if their authors claim too great an explanatory potential in any given case. For instance, those studies that have gone furthest in putting Nazism into colonial perspective have indeed shed much light on European and Nazi colonialism, but German colonial designs and the Final Solution were not always interdependent, and the Final Solution indeed spread well beyond the space designated for the future German empire.

All that said about meso-level comparison, I absolutely do not advocate abandoning the macro-level comparison that inspired genocide studies as a discipline, since it is central to the moral imperative of envisaging patterns of genocide perpetration with a view to prevention. The very act of identifying broadly similar phenomena across time and space suggests that those phenomena – in this case, genocides – are not simply aberrations, but are somehow characteristic of broader historical patterns, wider trends in the history of human societies at certain moments. But I am glad that we have gotten beyond the early tendency toward basic taxonomies of genocide, where one case was,

The Oxford Handbook of Holocaust Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

- 6 Benjamin Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
- 7 Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 8 Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 9 Adam Jones (ed.), *Gendercide and Genocide* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004); Elisa von Joeden Forgey, "Gender and Genocide," in Bloxham and Moses (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, pp. 61-80.
- 10 Anton Weiss-Wendt, "The State and Genocide," in Bloxham and Moses (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, pp. 81-101; Donald Bloxham, "Organized Mass Murder: Structure, Participation, and Motivation in Comparative Perspective," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 22 (2008), pp. 203-45.

for example, bracketed as “colonial” versus another that was “bureaucratic,” or one was “ideological” versus another that was “pragmatic.” This was not helpful because, on closer inspection, these categories collapse into each other – pragmatism, economics, geopolitics, and all the others turn out to be impossible to insulate from culture and ideology.¹¹ Avoiding both the reductive tendency toward rigid taxonomy and the conceptual over-reach that can be involved in some of the most historically exhaustive accounts of genocide, for instance, Mark Levene provides a hugely ambitious and compelling explanation of the incidence of a whole variety of ostensibly different “types” of genocide in a modern competitive, globalizing nation-state system.¹²

My own recent book, *The Final Solution: A Genocide*, sought to apply to the examination of the Holocaust insights gleaned from recent advances in genocide studies and my own knowledge of both the Holocaust and other genocides. This was an attempt to enrich the study of the Holocaust and other genocides by asking some new questions. One avenue of inquiry was to apply, writ large, Henry Friedlander’s observation of sixteen years ago about the Nazi euthanasia campaign. Friedlander maintained that the Holocaust can only be understood in the context of other genocides and persecutions perpetrated by the Nazi state. I sought to expand the focus even further. I hoped to enrich genocide studies by incorporating more thoroughly than hitherto the one case – the Holocaust – that has not seemed to fit well into more general attempts to theorize or pattern the phenomenon of genocide. As I wrote on the book’s first page, “the genocide of the Jews had both specific and more general characteristics. In order not to lose sight of its specific features, the evolution and dynamics of the Final Solution are at the centre of the book, but that is to the larger end of asking how *and how far* the Holocaust fits into broader patterns of the human past.”¹³

11 Alison Palmer, *Colonial Genocide* (Adelaide: Crawford House, 2000), has pointed to the shortcomings of some of these broad taxonomies, as has A. Dirk Moses in “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36:4 (2002), pp. 7-36. For the taxonomies themselves, see e.g. that proposed by Kurt Jonassohn in Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn (eds.), *The History and Sociology of Genocide* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), and even Leo Kuper’s categorisation of genocides according to guiding ideology in his seminal *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

12 Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, Vols. 1 and 2 (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005).

13 Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); emphasis added.

The book deployed both straightforwardly comparative approaches (in my study of perpetrator motivation in different genocides) and a more contextual, transnational approach. Using the latter, I considered the Holocaust's relation not just to other Nazi genocide programs and to World War II, but especially to the vast inter-group conflicts and state-sponsored genocides and ethnic cleansings that have characterized modern Europe at other recent moments of crisis, for example during World War I and the era of the late nineteenth-century Eastern Crisis. The book viewed the Holocaust as in some ways the culmination of a growing trend of violence emanating from the nexuses of a number of different contexts. That being the case, it argued that the Nazi genocide against the Jews could not be abstracted from those contexts. In other words, I tried to consider both the specificities of antisemitism and Nazi policy and the more general patterns of the politics of nationality and murderous prejudice across much of the continent. I hoped to shed light simultaneously on the Holocaust and the general history of extreme violence in late modern Europe. I here offer a brief sketch of some of the salient issues. Note, though, that while the book also dealt at length with the way Nazism and modern German history fit into this broad picture, in this brief response I set aside those better-known features so as to emphasize the international aspects that are the concern of this exchange in *Dapim*.

Despite the differences between the Holocaust and other instances of genocide in this period (not least the sheer scale of the Holocaust, and the extreme fervor of the Nazi pursuit of the Jews), the contextual approach seemed fruitful for two reasons. The first reason was that the Holocaust was an international crime – not only did its victims come from across Europe, but so did its perpetrators. Though the primary agent of genocide was Germany, the Holocaust was a multinational, multi-state phenomenon. Indeed, a writer on the Holocaust who addresses how the Romanians murdered a large portion of the Jews in their country, or who considers the Ustasha regime's murder of Croatia's Jews, or the Slovakian government's readiness to rid Slovakia of Jews, or the Hungarian murder of Jews at Novi Sad, must by necessity work as a comparative historian of what are, in some important ways, separate genocidal tendencies.

The second reason for the international, contextual approach was that it shed light on certain patterns that are not visible if one focuses overly on Germany and its policymakers. Despite the obviously imperial nature of the two most powerful states in Europe in the period, Germany and the USSR, the imprint of the nation-state system pioneered by Europe was evident in the way Germany's allies, satellites and dominions participated in the genocide. Heightened concerns about territorial integrity at a time of intense border competition, and concerns about uninhibited internal sovereignty and population homogeneity, were intertwined with wartime alliances. The politics

of statehood and “ethnopolitics” were inextricable, and together they determined why, say, Romania could kill more Jews than any other state apart from Germany, but still finish the war with one of the largest remaining Jewish populations in Europe; or why French officials could eagerly help deport certain categories of Jews, but at important points convince even the chief of the SS that it was not worth the risk to Franco-German relations to give priority to sending Jews with French citizenship to their deaths. In one important international pattern, Romanian, Bulgarian and even Hungarian Jews were at greater risk of deportation and murder if they lived on the contested territories that those states respectively gained or lost at the post-World War I settlement or in the boundary revisions of 1938-1941. The explanation is complex, but it cannot be entirely reduced to antisemitism, not least because these three states evinced very different levels of antisemitism at the beginning of the war. The murder of the Jews in these territories, or their surrender to Germany, was partly “legitimated” because, lying outside the national group, Jews were simply distrusted, just as were other “foreigners” who might threaten the consolidation of control of a border region. Furthermore, since such territories were freshly acquired, there were often fewer issues of citizenship and less residual compassion to give pause.

If we are to understand the multinational nature of the perpetration as well as the international experience of Jewish victimhood, we need to look to why so many states and peoples turned on what they called their “internal enemies” at this point. As the peoples of Eastern, Southeastern, and East-Central Europe tried more and less successfully to smash their way to nation-state status out of the hulks of the Romanov, Habsburg and Ottoman empires, and thereby to reconfigure “their” part of the political space of half a continent, demographic warfare became an expression of the quest for ethnic majoritarianism or exclusivity and the “nationalization” of economies. Jews had become particularly common targets of these developments in many places even before the Nazi rise to power, but they were not alone. The wartime Slovakian, Croatian, Romanian and Hungarian regimes murdered or deported for murder Roma as well as Jews, as did Nazi Germany itself. Ustasha anti-Serb violence was even more extensive than anti-Jewish violence; Ukrainian nationalist participation in the genocide of the Jews cannot really be understood outside the context of a Ukrainian nationalist struggle involving Poles; Bulgaria did not just follow up its territorial gains by allowing Germany to murder Jews from the Macedonian and Thracian territories acquired from Greece and Yugoslavia – when it acquired Dobruja from Romania, it instituted, according to the same logic of population homogenisation and territorial consolidation, a population exchange of Bulgarians and Romanians between the two states. These are just some examples. One of my central aims was

to explain such conjunctions. To do so, I had to depict the murder of the Jews as a not *completely* discrete episode in a wider and longer European process of violent flux and reconfiguration.

Where exactly one should begin the story is open to debate and I cannot, of course, claim that my interpretation is definitive. I searched for a point at which sufficient new elements had been introduced into the picture of European history to account not just for newly aggressive nationalisms but also for the transformation and exacerbation of established prejudices, especially Christian anti-Jewishness but also anti-Christian sentiment in the Muslim-dominated Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman Empire provided one (perhaps surprising) conceptual point of departure because it was the weakest link in the European great power system. It was the first of the older dynastic empires to crumble under the weight of industrial modernity and heightened international competition elsewhere on the continent and, in a related context, the development of nationalism among its subject peoples. The aforementioned Eastern Crisis of 1875-1878 was one chronological point of departure. It was the greatest single step toward the removal of the Ottoman Empire from mainland Europe. Furthermore, the violence of the process, as new Slavic states appeared on the map, foreshadowed the violence of the end of Romanov and Habsburg empires and the contested disposition of their lands in World War I and World War II. Modern European ethnic cleansing and coercive population exchanges were pioneered during the process of Ottoman decline to the east and west of the Black Sea.

Because of the Ottoman regime's weakness, the greatest violence of the later nineteenth century had Muslims as its victims. Tsarist Russia expanded its borders at the expense of the Ottomans and evicted millions of Muslims from the Caucasus, and the Christian nationalists of new Balkan states ethnically cleansed Muslims, who were associated with Ottoman dominance, from their lands. In turn, that empire's Christians endured the greatest massacres in the World War I era, when the Armenians and Assyrians were the targets of outright genocide. The same period of ethno-religious violence saw Tsarist and White Russian forces slaughter Jews in the turmoil of World War I and the Russian civil war, a particularly pronounced feature of the general mass anti-civilian violence in the wide western marches of the Romanov empire.

As the violent manifestations of the greater European crisis spread northward from the Ottoman realm, Jews were a particularly common target. Part of the reason was simple misfortune – the majority of the continent's Jews lived in and around the Pale of Settlement, squarely in the territory most affected, with the collapse of the Hapsburg and Romanov empires, by incessant war, migration, revolution, and changing state boundaries. The larger part of the reason was the interaction of culture with economic

and political contingencies. Like Christians in the Ottoman state, pre-existing cultural stereotypes, based particularly on commercial specialization and transnational diasporic affiliation, provided the template into which new nationalist and racist conceptions of their exploitative or disloyal otherness could fit. Like Ottoman Christians, the European Jews ultimately suffered more than they had ever done with the advent of a secularizing modernity that first promised to alleviate their situation by increasing emancipation, but ended up inducing accusations that they were using their notionally improved status for nefarious purposes.

The depressions of the 1870s-90s contributed to the traumas of modernisation and a backlash against liberalism. Rural antisemitism increased with rural poverty; in an update of the old economic stereotype, Jews were a target for those who had lost on the stock market or who feared for their 'organic' communities in the face of a burgeoning international economy. Some of the same blame-associations were at work in the interwar depression of which the industrial countries, Germany among them, were the primary casualties. International – supposedly Jewish – finance could be held responsible. Similar reactions can also be observed to the minorities treaties imposed on various new and older polities by the great powers at the end of the Eastern Crisis and again after World War I. The notion that Armenian Christians had broken their contract with a Muslim state by appealing to the great powers for the protections guaranteed by the Berlin Treaty of 1878 was key to the deterioration of relations that led to the World War I genocide. Likewise, at the height of the Holocaust in 1942, Ion Antonescu claimed that his predecessor as Romanian leader, the first Ion Bratianu, had, by his acquiescence to the Berlin Treaty terms, granted civil rights to Jews which "compromised the Romanian economy and the purity of our race," and that after World War I the Jews had conspired with Britain and America to dictate the treaty terms.

By the interwar era, against the longer-term backdrop of the French Revolutionary emancipation of Jews, the Bolshevik revolution was only the most potent recent indicator of the alleged rise to power of the Jews in modernity. Like the moral panic and conspiracy theories thrown up by the French revolution, the events of 1917 made many Europeans feel that established (Christian) verities were being assailed by hidden forces. If Napoleon had been the antichrist to the rulers of the German principalities, "Jewish Bolshevism," or Zhydo-Bolshevyzm, as the Ukrainians had it, was invoked across the occident, though to particular effect in those places that were re-conquered by the USSR after gaining brief independence from Russian rule in the civil war years or the whole interwar period. There was an element of contingency to Germany's leading the European assault on the Jews (in the rise to power in Germany of a particularly virulent and aggressive ethno-nationalist-racist movement), but it is

much less surprising that much of the continent as a whole turned upon the Jews at this time.

As in *some* ways one part of a wider and longer process, the Nazi murder of the Jews also remained in some measure contingent on wider European rhythms. My attempt at comparatively-influenced contextualization entailed showing how the actions and agendas of other states and peoples were not only influenced by Nazi Germany, *but also influenced German policy* at key stages of both the radicalization and the deceleration of the murder of the Jews. As with other murderous regimes, it was in the course of territorial expansion and military conflict, with Poland and particularly the Soviet Union, that the progression occurred from ethnic cleansing to outright genocide, but Nazi policy also maintained a two-way relationship with Germany's allies and collaborators. In their interactions with, for example, Romanian national forces at the outset of the war against the Soviet Union in summer 1941, German personnel were sometimes given a policy guide in extremism – at brief but seminal moments, non-Germans showed how ethnic slaughter could be expanded in scope. Moreover, the readiness of the Croatian, Romanian and Slovak governments to surrender their Jewish nationals within the Reich for deportation in autumn 1941 arguably helped usher in a more fully European-wide dimension to a German destruction process which until that point was more tightly focused on the territories under direct German control. To the mix we might add Baltic and Ukrainian nationalists who provided many, many thousands of collaborators and perpetrators, without whom the Final Solution simply could not have achieved the dimensions it did in the Soviet territories.

Conversely, as the war changed its course, so the agendas of other European states constrained even the murderous designs of the SS Reich Security Head Office, less out of humanitarian concern (of course) than opportunistic reasons of European nation-statecraft. Sometimes that statecraft was blended with an antisemitism that could perhaps under certain circumstances paradoxically work to help keep some Jews safe. It is worth considering whether Romania's less violent policies toward Jews in the second half of the war can partly be explained by the fact that the antisemites in the state's leadership feared that the Western Allies who looked the likely arbiters of the peace (and to whom Romania ultimately defected) were in fact influenced by Jewish power, and so would treat Romania in accordance with how Romania treated its Jews! In any case, looking at the Holocaust in the context of the national policies of a range of states illustrates how the comparative-contextual approach can shed light on the deceleration of genocide as well as its acceleration.

Antisemitism in Comparative Historical Perspective

Jeffrey Herf

In order to understand the historical specificity of the Holocaust, it is necessary to bring radical antisemitism, the ideological factor that inspired it, into the center of attention. While the Holocaust certainly has some features in common with other episodes of mass murder, its distinctiveness lies in the central role of that ideology which inspired and accompanied it. Comparison is inseparable from any historical interpretation. It is as beneficial for understanding the Holocaust as it is, for example, for understanding Stalin's implementation of the famine in the Ukraine in the early 1930s or the Khmer Rouge's mass murders of the 1970s. Yet the Holocaust remains the only instance in modern history of a policy whose purpose it was to eliminate an entire group of human beings from the face of the earth. This purpose was inseparable from radical antisemitic ideology, an ideology that did not inspire other much-discussed examples of mass murder.

The logic of Nazism's antisemitism when aimed at "international" Jewry was to extend the Final Solution beyond Europe to encompass Jews everywhere. Most other genocides have remained local events without global implications. If one wants to use the term "genocide" to refer to the crimes of Communism, then it would be the other ideological inspiration for mass murder with international implications. Communism sought an international revolution with the goal of destroying the bourgeoisie. Though it lasted much longer than Nazism and murdered many more people, the phrase "destruction of the bourgeoisie" did not always lead to actual murder of those said to be members of that social class; although in the Soviet Union, China and Cambodia in particular, many millions of people were in fact murdered in the name of some variation of class based hatred.¹ Recently, scholars have devoted attention to the ethnic dimensions of Soviet violence.² However, recent scholarship in "genocide studies" has not focused most of its attention on the crimes of Communism. Rather it has aimed at

- 1 For details see Stephanie Courtois (ed.), *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- 2 For example, Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

instances of mass murder connected with ethnic conflicts, racism and colonialism. In view of this focus, the following comments about similarities and differences between radical antisemitism and white racism are relevant.

The features of the Holocaust that seem to me to be the most important elements of its uniqueness are as follows.³ First, as the title “the Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe” indicated, the Holocaust differed from yet built on centuries of Jew-hatred in Europe. Christian inspired Jew-hatred had led to discrimination, ghettoization, denial of citizenship, periodic acts of murder of Jews who fell victim to blood libel accusations and occasional episodes of horrific mass violence in the form of pogroms. This traditional antisemitism, which had been typical of Europe before the era of the democratic revolutions, characterized the policies of the Nazi regime from 1933 to 1939. These years of persecution were a reactionary reversal of decades of emancipation of the Jews toward political, economic and social equality in Germany. During these years of persecution, humiliation and repression the Nazi regime murdered hundreds of Jews in concentration camps and most famously in the pogrom of November 9-10, 1938. Yet it did not engage in a policy of mass murder. The legislative aspect of Nazi persecution evident in the Nuremberg race laws bears comparison to the racist legislation of the post-Civil War South in the United States from the 1860s to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.⁴ In both cases, the purpose of legislation was to deny a particular group, respectively, the Jews and African-Americans, rights to equal citizenship and full economic and social equality. In both cases, the results were stunted lives, poor health, denial of opportunity, and elimination of political rights. Mass murder was not the outcome in either case.

The radical antisemitism of the Holocaust built on but also radicalized centuries of European Jew-hatred.⁵ It rested on a central accusation, namely that a political actor called “international Jewry” had launched World War II as a war of extermination against the German people. Because the Jews were declared guilty of this awful crime, Hitler and his associates implemented a policy of mass murder as an act of retaliation.

3 “A Comparative Perspective on Antisemitism, Radical Antisemitism in the Holocaust and American White Racism,” *The Journal of Genocide Research* 9:4 (December 2007), pp. 575-600

4 On this see, among much else, David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

5 I develop this argument in *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Mass murder was the logical implication of a policy based on such ideological postulates. The stunning speed of the Holocaust between June 1941 and spring 1945, with most of the victims killed by fall 1944, also reflected this unity of antisemitic ideology and Nazi policy. As half-measures over many centuries had failed to stop the Jews from their attacks on Christianity and on Germany, now a “final solution” was essential and it must, by definition, be a policy of mass murder. Because the Nazi leadership believed and repeatedly declared in public that the Jews were members of a powerful international conspiracy intent on murdering the Germans, only mass murder would suffice as a response to this evil threat. Moreover, and very importantly, the supposed international and global nature of the Jewish enemy demanded that the Final Solution of the Jewish Question be no less global in nature. The Final Solution in Europe would only be the first phase of a global genocide aimed at every Jew in the world. Nazi propaganda and policy aimed at the Jews in North Africa and the Middle East was brutally explicit about its intent to “kill the Jews” should its armed forces succeed in defeating the Allies in that region.⁶

This vision of a world – not only Germany or Europe but literally a world – without Jews was unique to the Holocaust. Other examples of mass murder before and since the Holocaust have been inspired by variations of local hatreds. Turks and Armenians, Hutu and Tutsi, Serbs and Bosnian Muslims, American white settlers and Native Americans, the Muslim government of Sudan and the African Christians of Darfur, and Belgian atrocities in the Congo were inspired by local hatreds and circumstances. They aimed at destruction in whole or part of an ethnic, religious or racial group in a particular geographical setting. None, so far as I know, were accompanied by arguments that the victim group was a significant, global power whose every member everywhere must be murdered. The famous lists of the Wannsee Conference that included small numbers of Jews to be killed in some countries was a sign of things to come if the Nazis had won World War II. Ethnic cleansing that sought a Germany, Serbia or Rwanda free of Jews, Muslims or Tutsis was not accompanied by ideological assertions that murdering the victim group would eliminate evil from the whole world. The Nazis made exactly that claim. They literally called the Jews “the world enemy,” which they would defeat in a “world struggle.” Comparison of the Holocaust to these

6 On this see Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, pb. 2010), and Martin Cüppers and Klaus Michael Mallman, *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews of Palestine*, trans. Krista Smith (New York: Enigma Books, 2010).

other examples of mass murder illustrates the differences between the Nazis' global ambitions and the localism of other cases.

The Atlantic Slave trade was a crime against humanity that endured for four centuries. During that time, historians estimate that between two and four million Africans died during the middle passage across the ocean. Obviously the result of enslavement, and then slavery itself, led to millions of further deaths. Yet the purpose of enslavement was not the murder of the slave but the unjust and arbitrary use of the slave's labor. Mass murder of slaves would have defeated the purpose of enslavement. Enslavement was the logical policy outcome of white racist beliefs towards blacks. White racism defined blacks as intellectually inferior and thus fit only for hard, physical labor. While plantation owners used force to suppress slave rebellions, the ideology of the slave-owning South did not present African-Americans as a whole as part of a dangerous, international conspiracy intent on exterminating white Americans. Just as enslavement and then subordination to second-class citizenship, not genocide, were the logical outcomes of white racist ideology, so the death camps and the mobile murder units of the SS were the logical outcome of Nazism's radical antisemitism. The enslavement of Africans by Europeans and Americans was a moral abomination, a gross injustice and a crime against humanity enduring over several centuries. At its end, millions of African-Americans existed in segregated, second-class status in the United States. By 1945, the Nazis had murdered two-thirds of Europe's Jews.

In summary, what distinguished the Holocaust from other episodes of mass murder and genocide was that it alone was motivated by the most extreme form of antisemitism while the other episodes were driven by ideologies that were more connected to local circumstances and that did not have the broad cultural echoes of antisemitism. Antisemitism is one of the significant cultural traditions of European history, both in its traditional Christian form and in the secular conspiracy theories present since the nineteenth century. Hence the relevant comparative perspective is not only or even primarily between the Holocaust and other episodes of mass murder. Rather it is between the Nazi form of Jew-hatred and contemporary, primarily Islamist forms of Jew-hatred. The latter has different cultural and religious inspirations but, like the radicalization of Christian themes in the Nazi experience, the radicalization of themes of Islam into the ideology of Islamism has given Jew-hatred a power and diffusion long after Nazism was defeated and discredited. Islamist Jew-hatred is not identical to the hatred that produced the Holocaust in Europe but it has advocates who openly speak of once again killing the Jews. In view of the open threats of mass murder and Holocaust denial coming especially from the government of Iran, this is not the time for the comparative historical method to fall into disuse. Placing the Holocaust

into a comparative context in our own time calls for examination of what is new and what is old in the history of antisemitism both in Europe as well as in the Middle East and in Iran.⁷ There, the conspiracy theories and open threats of murder that are part of Europe's past remain part of contemporary history. They are not absolutely identical to those of Germany's and Europe's mid-twentieth century, but neither are they wholly novel. It is the blend of old and new, radical antisemitism's European past and its Islamist present that makes it a distinctive and tragically still present danger.

7. For an extensive survey see Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York: Random House, 2010).

Holocaust Versus Genocide: Teaching Holocaust and Genocide in Israel

Yair Auron

Introduction

Violation of human rights and apathy in the face of other people's suffering endanger the very existence of human society. The Holocaust stands as the most extreme case of such a violation and the most appalling breakdown of human morality in recorded history. It is therefore vital that we confront the Holocaust in both its general and specifically Jewish contexts in order to enhance our appreciation of the importance of humanist and democratic values and even to provide tools for making moral decisions and assuming civil responsibility. In this article I address primarily the relationship between Holocaust and genocide in the Israeli context. I write from an Israeli perspective, fully aware of the special significance that these issues have for Israeli society and its institutions.

Peoples and ideologies strive to preserve significant historical events in their collective memories and to draw lessons from them. I focus here upon the ways in which messages relating to the Holocaust and genocide are transmitted to succeeding generations – to those who live in a world in which such atrocities continue to occur and whose history includes genocides that predate the Jewish Holocaust.

Education plays a key role in engraving historical events upon the collective memory of a specific group as well as upon the collective memory of the entire world. One of its cardinal objectives is to pass on national-collective memory to the next generation. The fulfillment of this task largely determines whether, how, and to what extent a particular historical event will be remembered in the future. We Israelis bear collective responsibility for ensuring that the Holocaust and the genocides committed against other groups are firmly ensconced in the memory and consciousness of Israeli society. Furthermore, we bear some of the responsibility for ensuring them a place in the memory and consciousness of all humankind.

The struggle for acknowledgement and commemoration of cases of genocide that occurred among other peoples is of singular importance in the State of Israel, home to the people that endured the Holocaust. The Holocaust plays a hugely important role in Israeli education and memory and in the Jewish identity of its citizens. Israel's Holocaust memorial institutions and government have long maintained that

the Holocaust was a unique, unparalleled event in world history. This premise has determined the way that the Holocaust and other cases of genocide are taught.¹ For years we have made an essentially legitimate assertion regarding the Holocaust's uniqueness while neglecting to reflect upon the implications of this assertion.

While mass exterminations have occurred throughout history, some historians contend that the twentieth century has witnessed more cases of genocide than any other and should therefore be called "the century of genocide" or "the century of violence." In that light, and with their experience of the Holocaust, Jews and Israelis ought to take a particular interest in studying and teaching about genocide.

I focus here on the ethical problems that this subject raises, on the lessons to be learned from it, and on the manner in which we – Israeli society in general and the educational system in particular – relate to cases of genocide experienced by other peoples.

Methodology and Terminology

In the wake of the Nazis' crimes, principally their extermination program against the Jews, the General Assembly of the United Nations, on December 9, 1948, adopted a Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The convention defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." These acts are: killing human beings; causing serious bodily or mental harm; deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction; imposing measures intended to prevent births; and forcibly transferring children of the target group to another group.

In recent years, scholars have engaged in an intermittent, acrimonious, but important terminological dispute about the distinction between the words "Holocaust" and "genocide." Some claim that the two concepts do not overlap at all – there have been many cases of genocide but only one Holocaust, which was a singular and exceptional event, *sui generis* in all of human history. Those who take this approach view genocide as a component of the Holocaust, but maintain that the Holocaust was a more comprehensive, total, and extensive crime than the term "genocide" denotes.

1 Yair Auron, *The Pain of Knowledge – Holocaust and Genocide Issues in Education*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2005). Also published in Hebrew, German and Russian.

In contrast, many other scholars – among them Jews living outside Israel as well as some Israelis – subsume the Holocaust under the general category of genocide. Some of these nevertheless maintain that the Holocaust is a singular instance of genocide, while others do not. Still others argue that every act of genocide is in some respect singular.

Historians, politicians and jurists often fail to agree about whether the term “genocide” is applicable to all the mass killings perpetrated during the twentieth century. Some argue, for example, that it is inappropriate to use it in connection with politically motivated state killings like those perpetrated by Stalin in the USSR and those that occurred in China and Cambodia. Those who seek to restrict the scope of the term have proposed additional terms or alternative concepts such as “politicide” in the case of genocide perpetrated in a political context; “ethnocide” to indicate a generally culture-related genocide or “murder of culture”; or the broad term “democide” (from the Greek *demos*, meaning population, a people), which encompasses “genocide,” “politicide” and “ethnocide.”

Yet, whatever the distinctions and semantic disagreements, it cannot be denied, in my opinion, that every case of genocide is a crime in which human beings of one ethnic, racial, national, or religious group murder innocent human beings solely because they belong to a different national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Thus, the German state under Nazi rule murdered Jews because of their race; the Ottoman Empire massacred Armenians because they belonged to a distinct national group (and a minority religion); and Hutus in Rwanda murdered their Tutsi countrymen owing to their different ethnic affiliation. The common point must be stressed: *in all these cases, the perpetrators excluded the victims from the universe of human obligation.*

To the victims and their loved ones it matters not at all whether they have been chosen to be murdered because the perpetrators view them as belonging to a racial group, or because they are members of a national minority or belong to a social class singled out for extermination. Opposition to acts of genocide must therefore be absolute and not subject to any form of relativity that regards some genocides to be “less” or “ostensibly less” than the Holocaust.

The Concepts of Holocaust and Genocide in Israel

The government of Israel signed the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and used it as a basis for its own Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide law, passed in 1950 by the Knesset (Israel’s parliament). During the debate over the bill, some legislators criticized the vagueness of the UN convention, while stressing how essential it was for Israel to ratify the convention

and enact its own, genocide law – one that would be more specific, at least regarding the punishment to be meted out to those guilty of such crimes. The legislators also emphasized the importance of the law and the convention for education. Both should be taught in Israeli schools, these parliamentarians said. Such education, they asserted, could help prevent future crimes of genocide.

It has not turned out that way. Both the name of the author of the draft of the convention submitted to the UN, Raphael Lemkin, and the convention itself are altogether unknown and untaught in Israel. Worse still, a great many young people have never encountered the concept of genocide and even some of those who have cannot cite specific acts of genocide. Why is this the case? And why can the term “genocide” not be applied to the Jewish case? Why should the expression “the Jewish Holocaust” not exist in parallel with “the Jewish genocide,” on the same pattern as “the Armenian genocide,” or “the Sinti and Roma genocide?” Some argue that use of the term “the Jewish genocide” devalues the status of the Holocaust. I myself tend to say “the Armenian genocide” rather than “the Armenian Holocaust,” but accept that scholars may legitimately refer to “the Armenian Holocaust” instead of “the Armenian genocide.” I refrain from using the expression “the Armenian Holocaust” because I am aware of how sensitive an issue this is among Jews. The terminological debate allows some of us Jews to sidestep some profound moral questions concerning our actions and attitude toward the acts of genocide suffered by other peoples, such as Israel’s denial of the Armenian genocide.

Some years ago, at a lecture in New York, an Armenian man in the audience asked me why I used the term “the Jewish Holocaust,” and on the other hand referred to “the Armenian genocide.” In a critical tone he enquired further, “do you [the Jews] have a monopoly over the term ‘Holocaust’?”

He was right – in fact, the word “Holocaust” was applied to the massacre of Armenians long before the Nazis formulated their plans to eliminate the Jewish race. As proof, he sent me a photostat of an article from the *New York Times* of September 10, 1895 with the headline “Another Armenian Holocaust” and the subhead “Five Villages Burned, Five Thousand Persons Made Homeless.” A thousand Turkish soldiers deployed in the Erzinzian region, the article reported, had tortured women and children and attacked four monasteries. This was one of the massacres of Armenians committed at the time of Abdul Hamid II, between 1894 and 1896, during the course of which an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 Armenians were massacred, years before the general slaughter now called the Armenian genocide or Holocaust.

Comparison is an essential tool of research. In making historical comparisons one does not imply that the two or more events are equivalent, nor does one seek to

blur the differences between them. On the contrary: comparison entails isolating and pinpointing similarities in order to appreciate the distinctiveness of each occurrence. Without comparing the Holocaust to other acts of genocide one cannot lay claim to its uniqueness. Only through comparison can one establish that the Holocaust is not identical to other cases of genocide. Israeli society has asserted its singularity while often neglecting to make the necessary comparisons and to learn about the other acts of genocide. One must bear in mind that similar cases are not indistinguishable cases. Analogy is not identity.

In my view, for example, the classic division of populations involved in genocide (i.e. into perpetrators, victims and third parties) applies equally to the Armenian and Rwandan genocides and to the Holocaust.

Comparison can uncover new aspects of the Holocaust and provide new insights into it that particular studies cannot offer. A further example: the “third generation” phenomenon has been found both in Armenian and Jewish society. Comparison between them may contribute a further dimension to research on the third generation.

As is the case in every historical event, the Holocaust exhibits unique historical components and attributes. These should be examined through historical observation undertaken within the conceptual frames and categories relevant to the Holocaust, while considering the option (and to my mind the need and obligation) of comparing the Holocaust to other cases of genocide. This task is of the utmost scientific importance. I contend, however, that in addressing the category of genocide we must constantly ask ourselves what it is that distinguishes each particular case of genocide. Each act of genocide has its own singular historical components and characteristics, as well as its own moral repercussions.

In addressing the singularity of the Holocaust one should note its totality, the intention of the perpetrators to exterminate an entire people – all the Jews on whom they could lay their hands – the racist ideology, and the conceptual theory underlying it. One should likewise address the manner in which this horrific crime was undertaken, namely the death industry.

One may likewise analyze these issues by means of three historical attributes: the indisputably extreme objective of the extermination; the systematic, “scientific” implementation of the extermination, unparalleled in human history; and the terrible outcome – six million dead, including over a million children.

To my mind the Holocaust should occupy a singular position within the category of genocide, rather than remaining outside of it. This matter is of scholarly significance and is furthermore of great ethical and moral importance.

The Difficulty of Teaching Genocide in Israel

Before undertaking to address the phenomenon of genocide, teachers and pupils in Israel and elsewhere should ask themselves at least two key questions, which may at first appear trivial. (I believe that we, scholars, teachers and students in Israel and elsewhere, should ask these questions before beginning to teach the Holocaust. Yet they are not asked in Israel, where the teaching of the Holocaust is generally accepted as a matter of course.) The two questions are:

1. Why do we teach or study the Holocaust? Why do we teach or not teach about genocide?
2. What are our primary didactic objectives in teaching or studying the subject?

There are two basic approaches to teaching about genocide in Israel. The first maintains that it should not be taught at all and that educators should concentrate solely on the Holocaust. The second accepts that the subject should indeed be taught, but insists that it should constitute an entirely separate subject from the Holocaust. In practice, the phenomenon of genocide has found no place in Israel's school curriculum nor in its academic institutions, apart from the courses taught by the non-traditional Open University.²

The appalling degree of ignorance in Israel about the genocides of other peoples therefore comes as no surprise. For example, in a survey conducted in 1996 of more than 800 graduate students at seven Israeli universities and colleges who were asked to state what they knew of the acts of genocide perpetrated against the Armenians and Gypsies, 86 percent had no knowledge at all of either crime.³

A similarly high level of ignorance has been found in subsequent surveys. Many students had never heard of the concept "genocide"; they were unable to impart even the most superficial information on cases of genocide that have occurred among other peoples, including those that occurred in the 1990s; they did not know that, in addition to the Jews, further groups of victims were ordered by the Nazis to wear an identification patch. May we be so bold as to wonder whether there are among

2 Yair Auron, *Regishut leSevel ba'Olam: Hashmadat 'Am beMai'ah Ha'Esrin* (Tel Aviv: Kibbutzim College, 1994). On this topic see also Arie Qiezel, *Historia Meshu'abedet (Nituah Biqorti Shel Tokhnit Limudim veSifrei Limud beHistoria Klalit, 1948-2006)* (Mofet Institute, 2008), "HaSho'ah Hi Raq Shelanu: Ha'alamat Retzah Ha'Am HaArmeni," pp. 119-28. The two courses on genocide taught at the Open University spark considerable interest.

3 Yair Auron, 1996 (unpublished).

us people and thinkers who prefer that our young people – high-school pupils and university and college students – should know nothing of other cases of genocide?

Most high-school pupils and most university students understandably think that the Holocaust was a unique phenomenon. Yet it is astounding that they know nothing of other cases of genocide. They maintain that the Holocaust is unique and are not even aware that one may reach this conclusion only upon comparing the Holocaust to other cases. Many Israelis even reject the very idea of making such a comparison.

Between Holocaust and Genocide in the Context of Jewish Identity

The special importance of the Holocaust to Jews derives not from its undoubted singularity among genocides, but rather from its problematic embedding in our (Jewish) *historical consciousness*, in which it is deemed to be a decisive component. It goes without saying that recognition or non-recognition of a crime committed against a person or group is in all cases a most important and often cardinal factor in the consciousness of the victim or victims and in their world-view.⁴

Why do we seek to remember the Holocaust as something unique? Why do we find it so difficult to accept the fact that a singular phenomenon occurred in Rwanda, for example, where between 800,000 and a million human beings (we shall probably never know the exact figure!) were murdered in the space of a hundred days? This was in all probability the most rapid genocide in human history, performed by primitive means rather than sophisticated technology. People murdered their close family members, their neighbors and relatives. What does this tell us about human nature?

The assertion of the Holocaust's uniqueness seems, then, to extend beyond its factual basis. It strikes deeper chords in Israeli society, and is associated with the Jews' traditional sense of themselves as "the chosen people," and as "a people that dwells alone." It resonates with national myths such as the view that "all the world's against us" and with the seclusion and isolation from the world that characterizes substantial sections of Israeli society.

We should force ourselves to provide answers to some awkward questions: how do we react to other victims who justifiably demand that the perpetrators or their heirs admit to the crimes that they committed? How do we relate to their demand that the world recognize also the acts of genocide perpetrated against them? How do we relate to their demand that we, in our collective embodiment as the state of Israel, recognize

4 Jean-Michel Chaumont, *La Concurrence de Victimes: Génocide, Identité, Reconnaissance* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997), pp. 7-8.

the crimes committed against them? A current issue of this sort is the question of how we should respond to the not unfounded assertion that Israel has been complicit, directly or indirectly, in the Turkish campaign to deny the occurrence of the genocide that they perpetrated against the Armenians.⁵

Certainly, young Israelis should know more about the Holocaust than about the catastrophes that have occurred to other peoples; the Holocaust happened to us. Yet should we, a people of survivors of extermination in whose national identity the Holocaust occupies so prominent a position, not be more sensitive to the tragedies of other peoples?

The Equal Value of Human Life

I believe that we should develop a greater sensitivity among Israeli youngsters to the suffering of others, and should reinforce the universal humanist values deeply rooted in Jewish tradition.

Again, the Holocaust constitutes an important and central component of Jewish identity. Nevertheless, Israel must seek a more appropriate balance between the Zionist, Jewish and universal lessons to be learned from it. The message imparted by the teaching of the Holocaust and conveying its memory to succeeding generations should be that *all human life is of equal value*. This applies to all nations and groups, be they Jews, Sinti, Roma, Armenians or Palestinians. This goal may be achieved by adhering to a set of fundamental principles that appear on the surface to contradict one another. First, educators must underline unique historical characteristics of the Holocaust and its uniqueness in the history of humanity, in Jewish history, and to our Jewish identity today. On the other hand, young Israelis must be encouraged to identify with the catastrophes suffered by others, including genocides committed against other nations and groups. In fact, these two principles are compatible and complement each other by integrating the specific and the universal.

We bear collective responsibility for the way in which the Holocaust and other acts of genocide are fixed in the historical memory of young people and in their historical awareness. At base, the lesson that needs to be taught is the simple one envisioned by the members of the Knesset who passed the country's genocide law – as one step toward ensuring that such acts do not recur Israelis must acknowledge and know about genocide as a phenomenon.

5 Yair Auron, *The Banality of Denial: Israel and the Armenian Genocide* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publications, 2005). This is the English version of the original Hebrew work.

We should, as Israelis, make it our business to find an appropriate balance among the Zionist, Jewish and universal lessons to be drawn from the Holocaust, while adopting the basic principle that the life of every human being is of equal value. This is a vital point, so let me state it again: we must comprehend the singular characteristics of the Jewish tragedy of the Holocaust at the same time as we study and sympathize with other victims of genocide.

By and large, the world has recognized the Jewish Holocaust as both a Jewish tragedy and a general human tragedy, one that has left its mark on humanity as a whole. It is the greatest moral failure that humankind has ever known. We thus correctly combat Holocaust denial in all its manifestations. Yet, ironically, as we do so we participate in the denial of the genocide committed against other peoples. This contradiction will inevitably hamper our efforts to fight Holocaust denial. Beyond that, it represents a moral flaw. To be effective, claims based on morality must be consistent. To my mind, *Israel's denial of another people's genocide diminishes not only the victims whose catastrophe is denied; it likewise diminishes the memory and heritage of the Holocaust.*

Israelis should hold themselves to more stringent moral standards than other peoples precisely because we are all, as a collective, Holocaust victims, and also because of our Jewish heritage and tradition. Not all Jews accept this view. Regrettably, we Israeli Jews have failed to maintain high moral standards by disregarding acts of genocide such as those perpetrated in Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, and the Tibetan ethnocide. Unless we fundamentally revise our attitude toward the catastrophes of others, we will be unable to ensure that the memory of the Holocaust endures among all humankind.

We must teach the Holocaust, we must also teach genocide, and we must confront through education, in a profound and systematic manner, the phenomenon of racism in all its manifestations, both the general and universal and the singular and particular manifestations prevalent in Israeli society.

Becoming familiar with other cases of genocide does not diminish the significance of the Holocaust, nor its unique characteristics. Rather, it enhances the sense of urgency regarding the danger that a further genocide or Holocaust may occur. And we may assume that if it does, it will assume a different form, occur in a different location, be implemented by different perpetrators and in all probability against a different group of victims. As we have seen in our newspapers and on our television screens in the last years, genocide continues to be an almost routine event in our times.

Encouragingly, there are signs that some young Israeli Jews are seeking to shed the classic Israeli self-image of the Jews as victims, an image that has been nurtured,

sometimes manipulatively, by some of the country's leaders. These young people seek to redefine the Israeli ethos by taking on the role of an involved third party that is able to assist the weak and needy other. Teaching about the Holocaust and genocide can significantly contribute to understanding the phenomena. It is a necessary although naturally not a sufficient condition for attempting to prevent genocide, or at least to reduce acts of genocide.

Translation: Avner Greenberg

Is the Holocaust a Unique and Unprecedented Tragedy? On Holocaust Politics and Genocide

Annegret Ehmann

In Israel, the United States, and most of the Western world, the Holocaust is interpreted as a unique and unprecedented historical event that should not and cannot be compared to any other case of genocide. The most adamant adherent of this tenet has been Germany, the country of the descendants of the perpetrators – for reasons that should be obvious.

The claim that the Holocaust is *sui generis* – the only or major paradigmatic genocide worthy of global institutional remembrance – has been lent an international imprimatur by the UN General Assembly, which on Nov 21, 2005 declared January 27 to be an “annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.”¹

This decision was the culmination of a three-decade-long effort to establish international Holocaust education, remembrance, and research institutions. The date chosen – the date on which Auschwitz was liberated – had earlier, in 1996, been designated by the German federal parliament as a Memorial Day for the Victims of National Socialism. The German commemoration, initiated by the then president of Germany, Roman Herzog, very quickly came to be called Holocaust Memorial Day by the public at large. Yet the significance of this change in terminology – which turned a day meant to commemorate *all victims of Nazi crimes against humanity* into one commemorating specifically the Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide program – has not been grasped by many. This shift has been of major consequence for the public culture of memory in Germany and around the world, even though the UN Resolution refers explicitly to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. But this reference, like the resolution’s declaration that one of its motives is the “intention of preventing future genocide,” is really nothing but lip service or wishful thinking. Serious violations of human rights and pre-genocidal policies by national

1 Annex I–A/RES/60/7, in Kimberly Mann (ed.), *The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Program Discussion Papers Journal* (New York: United Nations, 2009), pp. 99-100.

governments are still deemed by the international community to be “internal matters,” and intervention against such regimes is motivated, when it occurs at all, not by these international charters nor by moral standards but rather by the political or economic interests of the countries involved.

Decisive steps preceding to the creation of this worldwide Holocaust Memorial Day were made in Stockholm in May 1998, with the establishment of a Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Remembrance and Research (ITF) by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, American President Bill Clinton, and Prime Minister Göran Persson of Sweden. They were assisted by Prof. Yehuda Bauer of Yad Vashem, who served as an “independent” advisor to the group. In December 1998, the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets focused on the urgent need for the international community to attend to “long neglected issues of the Holocaust-era assets” and to expand and “reinforce the historic meaning and enduring lessons of the Holocaust (‘Shoah’) and to combat its denial.”

At the Yad Vashem International Conference on Holocaust Education in October 1999, however, David Caesarani, a British Holocaust historian, questioned whether the efforts to make the Holocaust a focus of public attention might not be counterproductive.

In January 2000, with Sweden again as the host, 48 countries, mostly Western ones, and four international organizations – the United Nations, UNESCO, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – gathered, in the framework of the Stockholm International Forum, for a conference, ‘The Holocaust – Education, Remembrance and Research’. It produced what has come to be called the Stockholm Declaration, initiated largely by Yehuda Bauer and Elie Wiesel. The participating countries signed and accepted, willingly or after submitting to moral pressure, definitions like these:²

1. The Holocaust (Shoah) fundamentally challenges the foundations of civilization. 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 terrible suffering of the many millions of other victims of the Nazis has left an indelible scar across Europe as well.

2 *The Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust: A Conference on Education, Remembrance and Research*, Stockholm, Sweden, 26-28 January, 2000, Proceedings (Stockholm: Regeringskansliet, 2000), p. 3.

2. The magnitude of the Holocaust, planned and carried out by the Nazis, must be forever seared in our collective memory....
3. With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils...

This exclusive focus on the Holocaust unequivocally sets it apart from all other genocides, past, present, and future, and especially from the Nazis' racism and genocidal policies toward other groups of victims. The declaration only vaguely refers to the "suffering of millions of others," without mentioning who these other victims are. It is highly problematic from a historical, political and, especially, moral and educational perspective. The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF), established at the Stockholm conference, has operated primarily via diplomatic channels, not in public. It has worked with closed circles of experts in order to influence educational policies, by, for example, having Holocaust interpretation integrated into curricula, school books and conference programs.

The exceptionality has already entered schoolbooks. It is expounded, for example, by a bilingual French-German high school history textbook.³ The chapter dealing with the memory of World War II and the obligation of remembrance is devoted exclusively to the "commemoration of the Shoah," i.e. the genocide against the Jews. Both text and pictures refer only to the world's new Holocaust memorials, at Yad Vashem and in Paris, Washington, and Berlin. The only authentic memorial site depicted is Auschwitz, represented by a small photo with a description questioning Polish memorial politics and mentioning, in half a sentence, an exhibition about the "genocide of Sinti and Roma" that has been mounted at the death camp museum since 2001. While the volume covers the era from 1814 to 1945, the genocide of the Armenians 1915-17 under Ottoman rule is not mentioned at all. This is inexplicable, given that France is home to the largest Armenian diaspora community in Europe, that this genocide was formally recognized by French lawmakers in 2001, and that France is home to an Armenian memorial.

3 Cf. Guillaume Le Quintrec and Peter Geiss (eds.), *Histoire/Geschichte, Europa und die Welt seit 1945* (Stuttgart, Leipzig: Ernst Klett Schulbuchverlage, 2006); Daniel Henry, Guillaume le Quintrec and Peter Geiss (eds.), *Histoire/Geschichte. Europa und die Welt vom Wiener Kongress bis 1945* (Stuttgart, Leipzig: Ernst Klett Schulbuchverlage, 2008).

The Task Force Policy

It is interesting to consider the terminology the ITF uses to promote Holocaust uniqueness and awareness – terms like “task force,” “field mission,” and “strategic and implementation working group (SIWG)” are borrowed from military and police jargon. Note that the German word for “task force” is “*Einsatzgruppe*” or “*Einsatzkommando*” – a dubious choice in this context. In 2000, immediately following the Stockholm conference, the ITF website made explicit its definition of the Holocaust and the ITF’s intention to prevent comparisons:

When we talk of the Holocaust we speak of something quite *unprecedented in human history*. This is the name ascribed to the process and implementation of mass death upon all Jews *without exception* in Nazi-occupied Europe. The singularly ferocious and largely successful attack on Jews resulted in the infamy of Auschwitz as we know it, and the existence of Belzec, Treblinka, Chelmno, Sobibor and similar centers of murder, which otherwise would not have existed. Therefore, when we talk of the Holocaust we refer *only to the mass destruction of European Jewry*. Mass murder was also afflicted upon a variety of ethnic communities, political groups and unarmed military personal also. Their deaths must be seen as crimes against humanity or as *acts of genocide in their own right*, and should be remembered as such. A broad “all victims of Nazism” definition of the Holocaust defeats the purpose of the term, as this term did not come into being to describe all suffering everywhere.⁴

The ITF’s paternalistic proposal to implement “Holocaust education” in the post-Communist states under the instruction and guidance of educational experts from Western states was problematic, if not arrogant.

But to make a comparison between the Holocaust against the Jews and other genocides is not to say that all the cases are identical. It means, rather, that there are sufficient similarities to make the contrast enlightening. There is no contradiction between comparing the Holocaust to other cases of genocide and pointing out specific differences. The French historian Alfred Grosser states that the two terms used most widely in the debate about the Holocaust, “incomparable” and “inconceivable,” are

4 ITF Website: “Education,” *Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust – Education, Remembrance and Research*, <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/education.html>.

meaningless.⁵ To assert this, one must have already made a comparison and found the cases to be very different, or simply intend to impose a dogma of singularity without first examining to see if the Holocaust is, in fact, empirically unlike all other genocides. After all, if the Holocaust is unique and could only happen to Jews, it is questionable whether it can be the source of universal lessons that might prevent other genocides against other groups of human beings, or crimes against humanity.

The ideological battle to disconnect the Holocaust from other genocides is irrational and contrary to the aim of promoting worldwide awareness of the crime of genocide and the need to prevent it. The many so-called historical arguments for the Holocaust's unique and unprecedented nature made in recent decades are devoid of convincing factual evidence. Rather, they are ahistorical and pseudo-religious claims.

Historical narratives as such are constructions. Each historical event has its unique aspects. The historian reconstructs the past on the basis of a variety of sources and fills in the gaps as best he or she can. It does not provide eternal truths. Interpretations or convictions cannot be decreed or preached. At best they can be offered through a process of open learning and evaluation aimed at understanding not only the past but also the present. Present and future generations will, in any case, interpret history in accordance with their world views and experiences.

Last but not least, the terminology now in use causes confusion. What makes a holocaust so different from a genocide? But anyone who asks that question risks being accused of antisemitism and Holocaust denial.⁶

The ITF's Education Working Group recently posted on the organization's website a new paper on the Holocaust and other genocides. As the paper states from the start, it is meant to respond to educators and students who seemed to have voiced problems asking why they should teach and learn about the Holocaust when other crimes against humanity are perpetrated today. But the answer the paper offers is, though rich in words, poor in thought, as unfounded and unsatisfactory as the ITF statements of ten years ago quoted above.⁷

5 Alfred Grosser, "Vergleichen," in *Von Auschwitz nach Jerusalem: Über Deutschland und Israel* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2009), pp. 71ff.

6 Moshe Zuckermann, "Antisemit!": *ein Vorwurf als Herrschaftsinstrument* (Wien: Promedia, 2010).

7 "Education Working Group Paper on the Holocaust and Other Genocides," *Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research*, accessed March 9, 2011, http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/images/itf_data/EWG_Holocaust_and_Other_Genocides_copy.pdf.

The paper asserts that “a clear and well-informed understanding of the Holocaust, the paradigmatic genocide, may help educators and students understand other genocides, mass atrocities, and human rights violations.” Yet the report’s first page includes a disclaimer at the bottom of the page that shows that the defenders of the uniqueness claim have not changed their dogmatic credo: “This report is provided for information purposes only. Statements of fact have been obtained from experts. No representation is made by the ITF as to their completeness, opinion or accuracy. Neither this report, nor any opinion expressed herein, should be construed as an official position of ITF or its Member Countries.”

The Origin of the Uniqueness Claim

In Germany of the 1960s and 1970s, the word “Auschwitz” did not designate only the physical death camp. It was used metonymically to refer to the entire range of the Nazis’ crimes against humanity, and in particular the policy of industrialized mass murder and genocide. News coverage of the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt (1963-1965) and Peter Weiss’s play based on the trials, *The Investigation* (1965), provided most Germans in West and East Germany with their first tangible acquaintance with the genocidal crimes that Auschwitz typified. The play provoked heated criticism not only in West Germany but also in the United States. Elie Wiesel denounced Weiss for a “shameless attempt to deprive the Jewish victims of their memory,” James Young claimed that the play was “*judenrein*,” just like vast swathes of Europe after the Holocaust.⁸

In the United States, Holocaust remembrance was, for a long time, an internal Jewish community issue. But Israel’s precarious situation following the Yom Kippur War of 1973 persuaded American Jewish organizations and communities in the US that Holocaust remembrance and solidarity with Israel needed to be instilled in the non-Jewish public. They initiated inter-religious commemorations, exhibitions, developed school curricula, and the TV series *Holocaust* of 1978. The terms “Holocaust” and “Shoah” came into common usage in the wider non-Jewish world in Europe only in the 1980s, by way of two films with those respective titles. These foreign terms, used exclusively for the genocide of the Jews, have now been incorporated in historical literature as symbols, and their meaning is never questioned. Yet both terms exclude contexts essential to grasp completely the extent of Nazi genocidal policy and practice:

8 James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” *Critical Inquiry* 18:2 (1992), pp. 267-96; cf. Jens-Fietje Dwars, *Dennoch Hoffnung* and Peter Weiss: *Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2007), p. 171, footnotes 36, 37.

- The murder of the physically and mentally handicapped, commonly known as the “euthanasia” program, the world’s first bureaucratically planned and executed policy of mass murder, which served as the prototype for the liquidation of racially-defined groups.
- The genocide of Sinti and Roma in Nazi-occupied Europe
- The murder of millions of Slavic civilians and Soviet POWs as part of the *Generalplan Ost*, the war of extermination in Eastern Europe, which was conducted quite differently from the war on the western front.

The terms “Holocaust” and “Shoah” are manifestly religious or pseudo-religious and serve as metaphors in their modern usage. Their literal translations are, respectively, “burnt offering” and “catastrophe.” “Holocaust” implies that the Jews were offered to God as a sacrifice, an idea as dangerously false as the notion that the Nazis’ industrialized mass murder was tantamount to a natural disaster. The use of the term, especially in Germany, not only excludes remembrance of other victims of Nazi racial genocide, but also creates a morally problematical hierarchy among the various victim groups. It also impedes fundamental understanding of the common ideological basis for Nazi mass murder, despite the different political roles of the victimized groups.

Genocide is not a modern innovation. As Hannah Arendt pointed out (to much criticism) in 1951, Nazi genocide is a modern development, but it evolved from historical precedents set outside Europe during the era of European imperialism and colonialism.⁹ The horrors and inhumanity of colonial genocides and atrocities were committed in the name of humanity and civilization, utilizing advanced technology against the so called “brutes” in Africa.¹⁰

The Nazis went one step further when they used technology and a smoothly-functioning state apparatus in Central and Eastern Europe to exterminate their targeted victims. Indeed, technology is what made annihilation possible. What we now call

9 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken, 1951), revised edition: New York: Schocken, 2004 (includes all the prefaces and additions from the 1958, 1968, and 1972 editions).

10 Sven Lindqvist, *Exterminate all the Brutes* (London: Granta Books, 1997), original Swedish edition: *Utrota varenda Javel* (Stockholm: Albert Bonniers Förlag AB, 1992). The statement used by Lindqvist for the title of his book alludes to Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*, in which Conrad accuses Europe’s colonial powers of a policy of genocide.

“Holocaust” is the best known, most thoroughly researched, and most intensively discussed modern genocide, precisely because it took place in the heart of Europe, a continent that has for centuries claimed to be civilized.¹¹

In the 1980s, Dan Diner interpreted the “Holocaust”, as *Zivilisationsbruch* (the breakdown of modern enlightened civilization), now a term first used by Hannah Arendt, but now attributed to Diner. It has since taken on an almost mantra-like status in German memorial speeches, but clearly stands for an ethno- and Eurocentric perspective. Were not the colonial genocides previously committed by Europeans already a negation of human civilization? Apparently, genocide only became a “unique” and “incomparable” crime against humanity when committed in the middle of Europe by ostensibly civilized Caucasians.

Modern Western civilization, based on the humanistic heritage of the Enlightenment, brings with it the potential and capacity for technological mass destruction, and contains the kernel of genocide.

Nazi mass murder and genocide was a bureaucratically-planned process of exclusion of groups of human beings, carried out by a state authority with unrestricted police and military power. The Nazi state dehumanized its chosen victims using a staged process that began with defamation; continued with the deprivation of civil and human rights, expropriation, deportation; and culminated in physical extermination of groups it had defined as “dangerous,” “unfit,” “criminal,” “asocial,” “useless eaters,” or “superfluous.” It operated according to the old rule of divide and rule. The Nazi genocidal policy went far beyond the extermination of the European Jews.

In his book *The Origins of Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (1995),¹² Henry Friedlander, himself a survivor, convincingly demonstrated that Nazi genocide was targeted nearly identically against three biologically-determined groups:

- 11 Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, reissued with a new afterword (Cambridge: Cambridge Polity Press, 2000), German edition: *Dialektik der Ordnung: Die Moderne und der Holocaust* (Hamburg: Europäische Verl.-Anst, 2002); Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2007), German edition: *Erde und Blut. Völkermord und Vernichtung von der Antike bis heute* (Munich: DVA, 2009).
- 12 Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), German edition: *Der Weg zum NS-Genozid: Von der Euthanasie zur Endlösung* (Berlin: Berlin Verlag, 1997).

the handicapped, the Sinti and Roma, and the Jews. They were all murdered for being what they were. But the defenders of the Holocaust's singularity ostracized Friedlander for daring to publish such research.

The claim that the Holocaust must not be compared to other genocides means that students who learn about the Holocaust through curricula that follow the lines of the Stockholm conference and those of the ITF do not necessarily have to know or learn anything about any other genocide. Benjamin Neuberger made this point in an article published in 2006 in *Ha'aretz*, "Our Holocaust – and Others."¹³ "Teaching of the 'Holocaust' in a way that presents only Jewish uniqueness," Neuberger argued, "leads to a conviction that the Jewish people are and will always be different from the gentiles, and universal morality and international law are of no importance." Awareness of the Holocaust, he asserts, should lead to "respect for every human being and every people and opposition to all discrimination, racism and oppression. Such an awareness can be instilled by means of teaching the Holocaust alongside the study of other cases of genocide."

Changing Paradigms of Memory in Europe

Insisting on the terms "Holocaust" or "Shoah," and the dogma that the genocide of the Jews was unique and unprecedented rather than just one instance of the ordinary general phenomenon of genocide, may already be a lost cause. Over the last decade, an increasing number of books have appeared that make such comparisons and, in particular, examine the impact of precedents and antecedents of twentieth-century genocides in global and specifically colonial history.

Europe is now in the midst of a decisive change in the general parameters of its memorial culture. Not only in the context of the process that gradually evolved after the end of the Cold War in 1989 in the former Communist state, but also in the context of globalization, the debate about European colonialism and its place in Europe's memorial culture is being discussed in scholarly conferences and its acknowledgment is demanded in publications.¹⁴

13 Benjamin Neuberger, "Our Holocaust – and Others," *Ha'aretz*, April 28, 2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/our-holocaust-and-others-1.186432>

14 Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Helma Lutz and Katrin Gawarecki (eds.), *Kolonialismus und Erinnerungskultur, Die Kolonialvergangenheit im kollektiven Gedächtnis der deutschen und niederländischen Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (Münster: Waxmann, 2005).

Only in 2004 did a German political official accept and apologize for – a century after the fact – the German nation’s responsibility for the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples in its former colony of German Southwest Africa, today’s Namibia. When Germany’s president, Roman Herzog, visited Namibia in 1996 after the territory gained independence, he refused to visit the memorial to the Herero, remarking that what had happened to them was “normal policy” at that time. To this day, universities and museums in Germany preserve human specimens from former colonies, originally collected for the purpose of “scientific research. Post-colonial demands are still far down on the list of international political priorities despite the fact that many new immigrants from the former European colonies and their children are now citizens of Europe. They can and will claim the right to have colonial history and its memory integrated into the European narrative.

Although German public memorial rituals and programs in historical and political education still place the Nazi era front and center, with the main emphasis on the genocide of the Jews, a shift away from the increasingly inappropriate ITF concept of “Holocaust education” to curricula that stress education in democracy and human rights is in the offing.

In April 2009, the post-Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe successfully sponsored the passage of a resolution by the European parliament declaring that the two rival master narratives, that of the Holocaust and that of totalitarianism, should be equally respected and commemorated in the European Union, thus putting an end to a “hierarchy of victims of crimes against humanity.” The defenders of the Holocaust’s privileged status will have to cope with this, like it or not. For the victims of the Stalinist *Holodomor* in the Ukraine (with a death toll, by premeditated, calculated starvation, of between 2.5 and 5 million) and their descendants, or the victims of the Nazi Germany’s siege of Leningrad (where an estimated 800,000 to 1.1 million civilians died from artillery shells, starvation, and the cold), and the millions of civilian victims of the “pacification of villages” in Poland, Byelorussia and the Soviet Union (between 20 and 27 million, including 3.7 million POWs), the ideology or regime in the name of which they were killed is irrelevant. Trauma and suffering cannot be ranked.

Only belatedly, yet still marginally, the racially-motivated mass murders and genocides of the Sinti and Roma peoples (for which Germany, in the person of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, officially acknowledged responsibility only in 1982), of the physically and mentally handicapped, and of Poles, Russians, and countless civilians of other countries occupied by Nazi Germany are beginning to receive equal recognition. This year, for the first time, a Sinto, Johan “Zoni” Weiss from Holland,

the sole survivor of his family murdered in Auschwitz, gave the Holocaust Memorial Day speech at the Bundestag on January 28. Germany has finally acknowledged that the Jewish Holocaust is not a unique tragedy and only genocide that must be commemorated.

Between Uniqueness and Universalization: Holocaust Memory at a Dialectical Crossroads

Gavriel D. Rosenfeld

For a generation or more, scholars have passionately argued about the question of the Holocaust's uniqueness. This debate has gone through several phases. Originating among Jewish scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the debate was joined by others in the 1990s, at which point it entered a sharply polemical phase. During this period, in which scholarly discourse was strongly colored by multiculturalism, those who insisted the Holocaust was a unique event and those who claimed that it was not hurled bitter invective at one another as to the Holocaust's status both in history and in memory. The intensity of the debate, like the polarized positions of its participants, testified to its dialectical origins and seemed to indicate that it would not subside any time soon. Yet, since the turn of the millennium, the intensity of the dispute has unexpectedly ebbed – so much so that it seems to be approaching a point of synthesis characterized more by consensus than controversy. This essay surveys some of the more notable recent contributions to the uniqueness debate, with a specific eye toward one of its central issues – the relative merits and drawbacks of Holocaust memory. I argue that at least some scholars have successfully transcended the polarized positions of earlier decades and staked out a new and more moderate middle ground. Yet I am not at all sure that the new tranquility will last.

The dialectical nature of the uniqueness debate has been apparent since its inception. Although the claim that the Holocaust was an unparalleled historical event dates back to the early postwar period, it first gained significant support among scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s. At that time, the claim was part of a defensive response to two larger trends that were widely perceived as downplaying, if not altogether effacing, the Holocaust's Jewish specificity.¹ One of these consisted of efforts on the part of scholars

1 Many Jews, of course, had long claimed that the Holocaust was unique. These included survivors like Elie Wiesel, who conceived of its singularity in a metaphysical way, and politicians, such as David Ben-Gurion, who made the claim for political reasons. Wiesel maintained that the Holocaust's extremity necessitated a stance of "silence." See Elie Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 197. At the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel in 1961, Ben-Gurion described the

to *historicize* the Holocaust with the aid of broader theoretical concepts, such as totalitarianism, fascism, functionalism, modernity, and genocide. The other involved efforts on the part of groups and individuals outside of the academy to *politicize* the Holocaust by de-Judaizing, Americanizing, stealing, denying, and normalizing it.² These trends alarmed many scholars, particularly in the field of Jewish studies. Believing that the Holocaust's specifically Jewish dimensions were in danger of being obscured, figures such as Emil Fackenheim, Lucy Dawidowicz, Saul Friedländer, Yehuda Bauer, Steven Katz, Deborah Lipstadt, and Daniel Goldhagen published, during the 1980s and 1990s, studies that argued for the Holocaust's singularity. Although diverse in focus, these works asserted that the Holocaust was unique, both in the context of World War II and in all of human history. The genocide perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews, they maintained, differed fundamentally from what the Nazis did to other groups that they persecuted and killed – for example the mentally and physically handicapped, Sinti and Roma, Slavs, and homosexuals. Uniquely, and critically, the Jews alone were slated for total extermination. On the same grounds, the Holocaust could not be likened to other mass killings of recent history – such as the Turkish CUP's slaughter of the Armenians, the Khmer Rouge regime's massacre of fellow Cambodians, and the bloodbath the Hutus perpetrated against the Tutsis in Rwanda. Controversially, Steven Katz argued that because the utter annihilation of the victim ethnic group was not a declared goal, none of these atrocities qualified as genuine cases of genocide.³

The response came in the 1990s from an array of scholars outside of the field of Jewish studies. They attacked the uniqueness claim on multiple fronts. Two figures from the field of American history, David Stannard and Ward Churchill, asserted that the decimation of Native American populations by European settlers over the course of half a millennium qualified, both quantitatively and qualitatively, as a case of genocide every bit as severe as the Nazi Holocaust.⁴ More importantly, Stannard and Churchill

Holocaust as “a unique episode that has no equal.” This rhetoric formed part of his effort to use the event to forge a stronger sense of national identity for the young country. See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 329.

2 For a more detailed discussion, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 1 (Spring 1999), pp. 28-61.

3 *Ibid.*, pp. 35-7.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 38-42.

were joined by others, such as Peter Novick and Norman Finkelstein, in advancing a second claim – that the scholarship produced by the supporters of uniqueness was not just bad history, but also bad for memory. These writers argued, each in his own way, that the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness both served to trivialize, if not deny, the sufferings of other peoples and to suppress public awareness of them. They further alleged that the idea of uniqueness was politically reactionary, as it provided states with a useful screen behind which they could evade responsibility for past and present misdeeds. The opponents of uniqueness offered numerous examples of just this dynamic. For example, they maintained that the U.S. government’s lavishing of attention on the Holocaust (epitomized by the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993) enabled it to ignore the crimes that the United States itself had perpetrated against Native Americans and African slaves; that various Israeli governments invoked the Holocaust’s uniqueness in order to distract attention from the plight of the Palestinians; and that the conviction of numerous Western governments that the Nazi genocide against the Jews was *sui generis* allowed them to shirk their responsibilities to halt the occurrence of supposedly “lesser” atrocities in such places as Biafra, Cambodia, Rwanda, and Bosnia.⁵ Significantly, these critiques, which hailed from the political left, were joined by others from the right, such as Stéphane Courtois’s anthology, *The Black Book of Communism* (1999), which claimed that the “single-minded focus on the Jewish genocide ... as a unique atrocity has ... prevented an assessment of other episodes of comparable magnitude in the Communist world.”⁶ In short, because of its alleged culpability in impeding the recognition of other historic injustices, the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness – and, by extension, Holocaust memory at large – was sharply condemned as historically, morally, and politically flawed.

Since the turn of the millennium, however, the debate over uniqueness has faded in intensity.⁷ Recent writers on the subject have put forward a more nuanced set of arguments that share a number of traits. While they largely reject the concept of

5 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), pp. 248-57; Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (London: Verso, 2000).

6 Stéphane Courtois et al. (eds.), *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 23.

7 This is not to say that critics of uniqueness and of Holocaust memory no longer exist. See, for example, Tony Judt, “The ‘Problem of Evil’ in Postwar Europe,” *The New York Review of Books*, Feb. 14, 2008.

uniqueness, they also reject critics' claims that the concept has siphoned attention away from other groups' historical experiences. Indeed, many argue the opposite – that popular awareness of these experiences has intensified precisely *because* of the spread of “Holocaust consciousness.” These scholars justify their upbeat assessment by pointing to the global “memory boom” of the turn of the millennium, which was marked by an explosion of reparations claims advanced by various groups, many of which were inspired by the precedents set by the Holocaust-related settlements that Germany had reached with the Jews and other parties.⁸ Many scholars now speak of the globalization of Holocaust memory, proposing that its legacy has created the basis for a new universal standard of morality. In short, they observe that the idea of the Holocaust's uniqueness, by inviting comparisons to other historical injustices, has paradoxically led the Nazis' murder of the Jews to be understood as an event of universal, rather than particular, import. The result is that people everywhere have become more sensitive to, and aware of, the tragedies suffered by other peoples.

One of the first works to put forth these views was sociologist John Torpey. In his article, “Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: Reflections on Reparations” (2001),⁹ Torpey took aim at the allegations of scholars such as Novick and Courtois, arguing that “contrary to those who regard the Holocaust as a sponge of historical memory that sucks the juices out of alternative commemorative and reparations projects, the very opposite is the case.”¹⁰ “Far from obscuring [the] suffering [of other groups],” he declared, “the emblematic status ... of the Jewish Holocaust has helped others who have been subjected to state-sponsored atrocities to gain attention

8 Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, “A Looming Crash or a Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory ‘Industry,’” *The Journal of Modern History* 81 (March 2009), pp. 122-58.

9 John Torpey, “Making Whole What Has Been Smashed: Reflections on Reparations,” *The Journal of Modern History* 73:2 (June 2001), pp. 333-58. Also deserving mention is Elazar Barkan's *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), which provided the most extensive account of some of the major episodes of the memory boom. Barkan, too, recognized that the Holocaust had become “the symbol, the metaphor, and the manifestation ... for ... modern existence” (Barkan, pp. 110-11). He further showed how Holocaust consciousness inspired other groups, such as Japanese Americans and African Americans, to advance their own reparations claims. Barkan, however, neither engaged the question of the Holocaust's uniqueness nor critics' claims that the concept suppressed attention to other groups' historical experiences.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 337.

for those calamities.”¹¹ Torpey justified his assertion by pointing to the recent global wave of reparations claims, all of which shared “the common characteristic that the Holocaust is regarded as the standard for judging the seriousness of past injustices and as a template for claiming compensation.”¹² For example, the fact that, in demanding compensation for the crimes of slavery and colonialism various African groups often invoked the Nazi persecution of the Jews, proved, he maintained, that “the Holocaust has become the central metaphor for all politics concerned with [historical reparations].”¹³ Even more broadly, Torpey noted that “the Holocaust has emerged as the touchstone of a ‘consciousness of catastrophe’ that has been perhaps the principal legacy of the twentieth century with respect to the way our contemporaries think about the past.”¹⁴ In presenting this assessment, Torpey devoted little attention to the idea of uniqueness. Convinced that the Holocaust had actually “encourage[d] attention to other catastrophic pasts,” he had little reason to criticize claims of its singularity, noting simply that the idea had been merely “undermine[d]” and “overtaken” by the Holocaust’s broader universalization.¹⁵ Torpey’s essay thus testified to the memory boom’s role in neutralizing the idea of uniqueness as a political lightning rod.

Not long after the appearance of Torpey’s article, sociologists Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider advanced similar conclusions in their book, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (2006).¹⁶ This work of comparative historical sociology chronicled the formation of Holocaust memory in Germany, the United States, and Israel in order to show how the memory of the Nazi genocide had escaped its previous national confines, become “de-territorialized,” and assumed a new “cosmopolitan” form. The chief hallmark of this cosmopolitan memory was the shared belief that the Nazi genocide represented the epitome of evil and formed the basis of a new universal morality. Arguing that “the Holocaust has become a moral certainty that stretches across national boundaries and unites Europe and other parts of the world,” Levy

11 Ibid., p. 341.

12 Ibid., pp. 337-8.

13 Ibid., p. 338.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., p. 341.

16 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006). For an earlier articulation of their ideas, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, “Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5:1 (2002), pp. 87-106.

and Sznajder argued that Holocaust memory had helped “facilitate the formation of transnational memory cultures, which in turn have the potential to become the cultural foundation for global human-rights politics.”¹⁷ Unlike Torpey, Levy and Sznajder did not extensively cite present-day examples of groups pressing reparations claims, although they singled out how Serb atrocities during the Yugoslav civil war revived memories of the Holocaust among Western Europeans and Americans, eventually prompting them to intervene during the Kosovo crisis of 1998-1999.¹⁸ In making these claims, Levy and Sznajder did not take an explicit stance on the merits or drawbacks of uniqueness. Fleeting remarks in their book linking uniqueness to conservative political agendas implied that they were unsympathetic to the idea.¹⁹ Yet they remained convinced of the importance of Holocaust consciousness, explicitly rejecting the claims of “those who argue that there is now a surfeit of memory.”²⁰ Levy and Sznajder thus sided with Torpey in concluding that the Holocaust’s universalization had rendered the issue of uniqueness largely moot.

Around the same time that Levy and Sznajder were publishing these conclusions, political scientist William F. S. Miles was extending them into a new, non-Western cultural context in his article “Third World Views of the Holocaust.”²¹ Agreeing that the forces of globalization were contributing to the Holocaust’s universalization, Miles focused specifically on the “extension of Holocaust consciousness to the Third World.” This process, according to Miles, was defined by a pattern of “intellectual nativization” in which “the Third World *indigenizes* the Holocaust and its [multiple] legacies” by tailoring them to its own concerns.²² An early example of this “progressive expansion of Holocaust consciousness” emerged soon after World War II, Miles argued, when Third World supporters of decolonization cited the Nazis’ racist crimes against the Jews in order to draw attention to European colonial-era crimes against Africans. More recent examples included groups in Africa and Asia pursuing reparations claims after being inspired by the precedent of German agreements with

17 Levy and Sznajder, *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, pp. 18, 4.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 165-79.

19 For example, they pointed out how American Jews’ embrace of uniqueness during the Vietnam War enabled them to side with those who rejected claims that the U.S. government’s policies were genocidal. *Ibid.*, p. 115.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

21 William F. S. Miles, “Third World Views of the Holocaust,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 6:3 (Sept. 2004), pp. 371-93.

22 *Ibid.*, pp. 371, 379; emphasis in original.

Israel and other Jewish groups.²³ Pointing to these instances, Miles drew the larger conclusion that “few instances of historical atrocity have been invoked to draw as many lessons for international morality, politics, and justice as the Holocaust.”²⁴ This positive assessment, in turn, explained why Miles did not devote much attention to criticizing the idea of uniqueness. Although he viewed it skeptically – a fact shown by his observation that the idea was easily exploited by the “apologists for genocide” in places like Japan and Turkey, both of whose governments supported the idea in order “to downplay ... large-scale killings” in the early twentieth century – Miles’s positive assessment of the memory boom prevented him from following the lead of earlier critics and condemning Holocaust consciousness altogether.²⁵ In the end, he, too, recognized that the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness had been effectively neutralized by the Holocaust’s universalization.

Like Miles, only coming from the field of literature, Michael Rothberg examined the Holocaust’s universalization in a non-Western context, specifically that of early postwar decolonization, in his book *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009).²⁶ In contrast to Miles and others, however, he positioned his work explicitly against the idea of uniqueness. According to Rothberg, the time had come to move “beyond the uniqueness paradigm” because of its role in leading remembrance to be narrowly perceived as a “competitive” endeavor. In this sense remembrance was akin to a zero-sum game in which one group’s quest for recognition came at the expense of another’s.²⁷ In making this recommendation, Rothberg criticized scholars like Stannard and Novick who, in his view, were guilty of throwing the baby of Holocaust consciousness out with the bathwater of uniqueness. Like other recent scholars, Rothberg declared that “the emergence of Holocaust memory on a global scale has contributed to the articulation of other ... histories [of victimization].”²⁸ Yet, unlike Torpey and Miles, he did not focus on recent reparations claims but rather on the interrelationship between Jewish and non-Western memories of historic injustice during the early postwar period. In doing so, Rothberg arrived at

23 Ibid., pp. 380, 381.

24 Ibid., p. 389.

25 Ibid., p. 386.

26 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009).

27 Ibid., pp. 179, 11. Rothberg opposed uniqueness because it created a “hierarchy of suffering,” p. 9.

28 Ibid., p. 6.

a new and important insight: Holocaust memories, he argued, do not merely flow in a unilinear direction, drawing attention to the injustices suffered by others (especially in the context of colonialism/decolonization); rather, both sets of memories worked dialogically – or to use Rothberg’s term, “multidirectionally” – to sustain and stimulate one another. To demonstrate this, Rothberg pointed to early postwar France, where the violent struggle over Algerian independence, marked as it was by the French government’s use of repression, racism, and torture, helped trigger and bring to public attention long-suppressed memories of the Holocaust (just as those same memories offered a paradigm for subsequent French memory work on the Algerian trauma several decades later).²⁹ In doing so, Rothberg offered a more nuanced reading of the Holocaust’s universalization, concluding that “the Holocaust does not simply become a universal moral standard that can ... be applied to other histories; rather, some of those *other histories help produce a sense of the Holocaust’s particularity*.”³⁰ In short, Rothberg’s idea of memory’s multidirectionality represented an effort to split the difference between the Holocaust’s uniqueness and its universalization.³¹

The same year that Rothberg’s study appeared, sociologist Jeffrey Alexander prompted a larger discussion of Holocaust memory with his book, *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate*.³² In this volume, Alexander evinced less interest in evaluating whether or not the Holocaust was unique than in emphasizing its positive effects on Western memory. He explicitly rejected Novick’s skeptical claim that the Holocaust’s extremity prevented it from offering any larger lessons.³³ Instead, Alexander perceptively argued that the Holocaust’s very extremity had dialectically promoted its “dramatic universalization” into “a generalized symbol of human suffering” that has

29 Rothberg cites many examples of this confrontation: Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin’s film, *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961), Charlotte Delbo’s book, *Les Belles Lettres* (1961), Marguerite Duras’s essay, “Two Ghettos” (1961), and media coverage of the October 17, 1961 massacre of Algerian demonstrators in Paris, all of which advanced comparisons between the Algerian crisis and the Holocaust. On the later French confrontation with the Algerian legacy, see pp. 229-34.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 244; emphasis in original.

31 Rothberg’s argument is a convincing one, although his favored term, “multidirectionality,” suffers from being at once too all-encompassing and non-descriptive.

32 Jeffrey Alexander, *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

33 *Ibid.*, note 57, pp. 85-8.

helped “deepen ... contemporary sensitivity to social evil.”³⁴ By inviting comparisons to other atrocities and injustices, the Holocaust had come to function as a “bridging metaphor” that had contributed to a new moral understanding of minority grievances in the United States and beyond.³⁵ Alexander observed, notably, that the Holocaust only became a universal symbol of evil *because* of its perceived uniqueness; solely thanks to its singular extremity did it become a normative baseline for measuring other historical injustices. Significantly, this was not the only paradoxical feature of Holocaust consciousness identified by Alexander. For, as he concluded, the very comparisons that were inspired by the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness ultimately served to diminish it.³⁶ In the end, uniqueness inevitably yielded to universalization.

As is shown by the works discussed above, a strong consensus has recently been established on the question of the Holocaust’s uniqueness. In contrast to the bitterly polemical disputes of the 1990s, recent scholars have forged a new middle ground. They have rejected the view that the Nazi genocide was unique, while also rejecting the view that uniqueness has inhibited the remembrance of other historical injustices. This nuanced perspective can be credited to the “memory boom” of the turn of the millennium, which witnessed various groups invoking the Holocaust as a standard of morality and a source of inspiration for new reparations claims. This development disproved the allegations made by the critics of uniqueness that remembering the Holocaust marginalized awareness of other historical atrocities; and it further convinced scholars that a more optimistic assessment of Holocaust consciousness was in order. Most importantly, the memory boom led scholars to understand how the Holocaust’s universalization dialectically grew out of perceptions of its uniqueness.

How long this consensual moment of dialectical synthesis will last remains to be seen. But there are indications that it may be short-lived. One reason is that the historical context that inspired much of the recent literature has changed. Alexander alluded to this point in his book’s concluding section, in which he responded to critics’ charges that his essay ignored the political uses of Holocaust memory. Semi-apologetically, he declared that he wrote much of his book in the late 1990s, against the hopeful backdrop of the memory boom.³⁷ But he conceded that, because “we now live

34 Ibid., pp. 3, 35.

35 Ibid., pp. 49, 52.

36 Ibid., pp. 58-9.

37 Robert Manne’s essay, “On the Political Corruptions of a Moral Universal,” charged Alexander with “underestim[at]ing] how divisive the claim of uniqueness ... has ... often proved,” pointing to its instrumentalization in contemporary Israeli politics

in a darker time,” shaped by the events of the post-9/11 world and the ongoing crisis in the Middle East, he had since become more pessimistic about the virtues of Holocaust memory.³⁸ One issue of special concern for him was the tendency of “conservative Israelis” to use the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness for nationalistic purposes in their conflict with the Palestinians, a development he condemned for “assault[ing] the universalizing moral principles that the memory of the Holocaust calls upon all of us to sustain.”³⁹ Only by opposing the particularistic usage of memory, which produced “social splitting and antagonism,” in favor of its universalization, which fostered a “sympathy-generating effect,” could the cause of “ethnic, racial, and religious justice” be advanced.⁴⁰ Alexander’s about-face may be significant. For if such a scholar can change his mind about the virtues of Holocaust memory and embrace the more skeptical attitude of earlier critics, so other like-minded scholars may be influenced by current events to become more critical as well. Should this happen, the idea of uniqueness, like Holocaust memory in general, may come under increasing fire.

This possible development, in turn, will likely call forth a response by the defenders of uniqueness. During the last decade, they have been relatively quiet. But external events may well spur them to renewed activism, for in different parts of the world efforts to universalize and relativize the Holocaust’s significance continue apace. In recent years in the United States, liberal and conservative opponents of Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama have frequently drawn analogies between their administrations’ respective policies and the Holocaust – for example, likening the U. S. military prison at Guantanamo Bay to Nazi concentration camps and comparing health care reform to the Nazi euthanasia program, T4. Such comparisons highlight the perils of universalization when taken to a logical extreme. While they may be inspired by sincere moral outrage and a desire to direct public attention to serious issues, their trivialization of Nazism’s extreme criminality and their fostering of baseless cynicism towards America’s governing institutions reveals how universalization may lead to an exaggerated sense of alarmism that obfuscates rather than clarifies the past’s relationship with the present. Not surprisingly, such extreme examples of universalizing

and its role in abetting Turkey’s denial of the Armenian genocide (Manne, pp. 142-5). Bernard Giesen’s essay, “From Denial to Confessions of Guilt: The German Case,” also called attention to Alexander’s failure to explain the ongoing denial of the Armenian genocide by the Turks, Giesen, pp. 119-22.

38 Alexander, p. 177.

39 Ibid., p. 185.

40 Ibid., pp. 177-8.

the Holocaust have already called forth responses from critics who have insisted upon its historic specificity.⁴¹ The same is true in Eastern Europe, where recent efforts by the Baltic nations to equate the legacies of Communism and Nazism – asserting, among other things, that both Stalin and Hitler were guilty of perpetrating “double genocide” in the Second World War – have led others to redouble their efforts to insist upon the Holocaust’s uniqueness.⁴² Add to these trends the forthcoming publication of new works on uniqueness and it is likely that the debate may intensify in the near future.⁴³ If and when it does, scholars would do well to remember the polemical excesses of the 1990s and do their best to avoid repeating them. It would be ironic, to say the least, if the next phase in the debate about Holocaust memory is marked by forgetfulness.

41 The Anti-Defamation League has taken the lead in opposing the reckless use of Holocaust analogies on the American political scene. See the “Holocaust/Nazis press release archive” of the ADL at http://www.adl.org/PresRele/HolNa_52/default.htm, accessed Dec. 30, 2010.

42 On the broader trends in Eastern Europe, see Heidemarie Uhl, “Conflicting Cultures of Memory in Europe: New Borders between East and West?” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 3:3 (2009), pp. 59-72. A defense of uniqueness was penned by Dovid Katz, “Why Red is not Brown in the Baltics,” *The Guardian*, Sept. 30, 2010. See also Yehuda Bauer, “Reviewing the Holocaust Anew in Multiple Contexts,” *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs* 80 (May 2009), http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=3&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=624&PID=0&IID=2927&TTL=Reviewing_the_Holocaust_Anew_in_Multiple_Contexts, accessed Dec. 30, 2010.

43 The second volume of Steven Katz’s massive study of the Holocaust in its historical context is described as “forthcoming” (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Steven-T-Katz/109315052421281>).

