

REFLECTIONS ON THE
HOLOCAUST

THE ESSAYS COLLECTED IN THIS VOLUME DO NOT SET OUT TO FIND ANSWERS. INSTEAD THEY CHALLENGE THE READER TO ASK QUESTIONS, TO THINK CRITICALLY, AND ACT COURAGEOUSLY. THE ESSAYS HIGHLIGHT THE DANGERS OF STANDING BY, TOLERATING INJUSTICE, AND TURNING A BLIND EYE.

HUMANITY IN
ACTION



"HOW WONDERFUL IT IS THAT NOBODY NEED WAIT A SINGLE MOMENT BEFORE STARTING TO IMPROVE THE WORLD."

- ANNE FRANK

TO **JOAN RINGELHEIM**
Educator and Mentor to Humanity in Action
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

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HOLOCAUST

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EDITED BY JULIA ZARANKIN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	6
<i>Julia Zarankin</i>	

I. MEMORIALS, MONUMENTS AND MUSEUMS

A SELF-SERVING ADMISSION OF GUILT:	12
The Intention and Effects of Germany's New Memorial to the Murdered Jews	
<i>Sharon Chin, Fabian Franke and Sheri Halpern</i>	
AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU:	22
A Visitor's Manual	
<i>Tomasz Cebulski</i>	
VISITING THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM	34
<i>Judith Goldstein</i>	
JOURNEY TO AUSCHWITZ	44
<i>Julia Zarankin</i>	

2. THE CHALLENGES OF EDUCATING AND REMEMBERING

CHALLENGING DUTCH HOLOCAUST EDUCATION:	54
Towards a Curriculum Based on Moral Choices and Empathetic Capacity	
<i>Jacob Boersema and Noam Schimmel</i>	
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE:	68
Developing Holocaust Education for the Third Generation	
<i>Kelly Bunch, Matthew Canfield and Birte Schöler</i>	
UNTANGLING EMOTIONAL HISTORY:	80
How President Sarkozy's Failed Memory Initiative Illuminates France's Continuing Struggle with the Holocaust	
<i>Vera Jotanovic and Juliana Schnur</i>	
HEROISM IN DANISH CULTURE AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING:	96
The Problems of Writing the Rescue	
<i>Saskia Hansen and Julia Zarankin</i>	
A FOUNDING MYTH FOR THE NETHERLANDS:	106
The Second World War and the Victimization of Dutch Jews	
<i>Matthijs Kronemeijer and Darren Teshima</i>	

3. DRAWING LESSONS FROM THE HOLOCAUST

SIXTY-FIVE YEARS LATER:	120
The Meaning of Humanity in Action	
<i>Ed van Thijn</i>	
THE BANALITY OF GENOCIDE	133
<i>Konstanty Gebert</i>	
THE EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE	145
<i>Anders Jerichow</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS	156
ABOUT HUMANITY IN ACTION	160

INTRODUCTION

Julia Zarankin, HIA Senior Fellow

The essays collected in this volume were written by Humanity in Action (HIA) fellows, senior fellows, board members and lecturers who have participated in its educational programs from 1997 to 2010. HIA programs focus on the obligation to understand genocide, particularly the Holocaust, and other mass atrocities in the 20th and 21st centuries and connect them to the complex challenges of diversity in contemporary societies. Interdisciplinary and intellectually rigorous, these programs explore past and present models of resistance to injustice and emphasize the responsibility of future leaders to be active citizens and accountable decision-makers.

During the HIA annual summer programs, fellows have written essays about historical and contemporary issues focused on minorities. Since a study of the Holocaust provides the historic base for the HIA programs in Denmark, France, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands, a number of international teams of Fellows have conducted research and written about Holocaust education, memorialization and restitution issues.

HIA fellows write essays under unusual and particularly challenging circumstances. Fellows are given one week to research and write an investigative essay in international teams. At least one American and one European fellow write the essay together, which invites a host of linguistic and stylistic challenges to negotiate. The structure and intensity of the HIA summer program force fellows to jump into their topics with little preparation but a great deal of enthusiasm, as they gather information and interview experts, including survivors, librarians, professors, human rights activists, curators, politicians, etc. Very few fellows begin the writing process with background knowledge or expertise in the topic they ultimately choose to write about. The essays are the culmination of a month of (often heated) discussion about minority rights, diversity, challenges of democratic practices, human rights and the relevance of the past.

Each essay in this volume reflects upon the difficult necessity of understanding, teaching and memorializing the Holocaust. In addition, the essays consider our responsibility, as citizens living under democracies, to draw moral and ethical lessons from the Holocaust, as well as other mass genocides.

The volume presents a collection of distinct voices writing in a variety of genres. Not all of the essays in this volume are formal in nature; we have included transcripts of HIA lectures, reportage, and personal reflections. The essays approach the Holocaust by examining questions of representation, education and anthropology. Eighty percent of the articles in the volume were written as reports, by students in their 20s who participated in the HIA summer programs in Denmark, Germany, France and the Netherlands. These essays raise worthwhile and provocative questions; many issues in these reports are worthy of further consideration, research and analysis. The HIA fellows who wrote these reports have, for the most part, gone on to incorporate human rights activism in their professional lives. The last three essays are written by HIA lecturers of a different generation, each of whom focuses on larger ideas that underlie genocide: Ed van Thijn, Konstanty Gebert and Anders Jerichow write from the perspective of journalists and politicians whose life work has focused on advocating for human rights.

The first part of the volume, *MUSEUMS, MONUMENTS AND MEMORIALS*, explores the complexity behind visiting Holocaust memorials. In *A SELF-SERVING ADMISSION OF GUILT: THE INTENTION AND EFFECTS OF GERMANY'S NEW MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS*, Sharon Chin, Fabian Franke and Sheri Halpern (*HIA fellows from 2005*) examine the tensions behind the Holocaust memorial in Berlin. In a personal reflection, Julia Zarankin recounts her journey to Auschwitz on a study trip for HIA senior fellows in 2008.

Tomasz Cebulski was the guide who led the group of HIA senior fellows through Auschwitz. He has been leading tours of the concentration camp for the past ten years and grappling with the question of what constitutes an ethical visit. His essay, *A VISITOR'S MANUAL*, is an explication and a step-by-step manual for ethically visiting the world's most famous death camp. Tomasz greets tourists who arrive at Auschwitz with varying degrees of historical knowledge, and different motives for visiting the death camps: some come to mourn, some to commemorate relatives, others to learn, some simply to sightsee, but most come to witness. In addition to providing an astonishing number of historical facts and figures, he teaches visitors how to approach and examine a concentration camp, and reminds his group members that statistics do not explain the core underlying more disturbing questions of genocide. It is our job, as citizens, to ponder and address those questions long after the tour is over. Judith Goldstein's *VISITING THE UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM* was originally written as a memo to HIA fellows to prepare them for what they were about to witness in DC. She stresses the importance of examining the Holocaust as a devastating event that provides historical and moral foundations for facing critical contemporary issues.

The second group of essays confronts the challenges of educating and remembering the Holocaust in the Netherlands, Germany, France and Denmark. Jacob Boersema and Noam Schimmel's essay *CHALLENGING DUTCH HOLOCAUST EDUCATION: TOWARDS A CURRICULUM BASED ON MORAL CHOICES AND EMPATHETIC CAPACITY (HIA fellows 2001)* offers practical solutions for improving Dutch holocaust education. Kelly Bunch, Matthew Canfield and Birte Schöler (*HIA fellows 2005*) consider the difficulties facing German Holocaust education in *THE RESPONSIBILITY OF KNOWLEDGE: DEVELOPING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION FOR THE THIRD GENERATION*. Vera Jotanovic and Juliana Schnur (*HIA fellows*

2008) analyze political use and misuse of French Holocaust education mandates in *UNTANGLING EMOTIONAL HISTORY: HOW PRESIDENT SARKOZY'S FAILED MEMORY INITIATIVE ILLUMINATES FRANCE'S CONTINUING STRUGGLE WITH THE HOLOCAUST*. Saskia Hansen and Julia Zarankin (*HIA fellows 1997*) explore the cultural subtext behind Danish resistance to writing and teaching students about the Danish rescue of the Jews in 1943, in *HEROISM IN DANISH CULTURE AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING: THE PROBLEMS OF WRITING THE RESCUE*. Matthijs Kronemeijer and Darren Teshima (*HIA fellows 2000*) unearth the layers beneath the myth of Dutch citizens as resistance fighters and do-gooders during WWII in *A FOUNDING MYTH FOR THE NETHERLANDS: THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE VICTIMIZATION OF DUTCH JEWS*.

The volume's final three essays deal with ideas; they offer the reader models of how to draw lessons from the Holocaust to put humanity into action. Ed van Thijn, a child survivor, connects HIA goals with personal experience in *SIXTY-FIVE YEARS LATER: THE MEANING OF HUMANITY IN ACTION*. Konstanty Gebert's transcript of *THE BANALITY OF GENOCIDE*, a lecture he gave at the First International HIA Conference, highlights the dangers of becoming bystanders. Finally, Anders Jerichow's *THE EDUCATIONAL IMPERATIVE* leaves the reader with ideas of our role in preventing future genocides.

These essays do not set out to find answers. Instead, in the spirit of HIA, they challenge the reader to ask questions, to think critically, and act courageously. This volume of essays highlights the dangers of standing by, tolerating injustice, and turning a blind eye.

HIA is grateful for the support of the Dutch Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, especially the Department of War Victims and Remembrance, for the publication of the first edition of this volume.



MEMORIALS,
MONUMENTS, AND
MUSEUMS



MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE Photo: Ally Brantley (HIA 2009)

A SELF-SERVING ADMISSION OF GUILT: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INTENTIONS AND EFFECTS OF GERMANY'S NEW MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE

By: Sharon Chin, Fabian Franke, and Sheri Halpern

“We all recognize that a Holocaust memorial in Berlin is fundamentally different...the memorial can only be understood and accepted if it is the result of a fundamentally German initiative” - *Moshe Safadie*¹

¹Moshe Safadie is an Israeli-born architect whose design proposal for this memorial was rejected (Wollheim 2005).

Between the intersections of Hannah-Arendt Strasse, Cora-Berliner Strasse, and Behrenstrasse in Berlin, 2,711 gray concrete stelae of varying heights rise above the ground. This site is the Field of Stelae, otherwise known to the world as the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The Memorial commemorates the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and etches the event in the permanent memory of Germany's history and landscape. However, the abstract monument invites a series of questions since it bears no marker indicating the title or even the purpose of this massive memorial. Thus, although the Memorial was heralded to the world on May 10, 2005, an approaching visitor, unaware of the existence of such a monument, could remain bewildered about its purpose, meaning, and intended commemoration of the victims.

Peter Eisenman purposefully designed an abstract monument. Since "the enormity and scale of the horror of the Holocaust is such that any attempt to represent it by traditional means is inevitably inadequate," Eisenman deliberately broke from established concepts of memorialization and adopted a radical approach of avoiding all symbolism (*Japan Times* 2005). The number of slabs, differing heights, and grid-like structure do not have any representational significance (*Fleishman* 2005) and interpretation is left up to the viewer. The only concrete description of the site is in its nomenclature, which is not represented at the site itself.

The permanent nature of the structure productively challenges its audience to take ownership of the Holocaust in a new manner. Whereas guilt is an emotion that people attempt to absolve their minds of, this memorial allows for a sense of "collective responsibility," which "cannot be neatly ignored or packed away" (*Ourousoff* 2005). The transformation of

guilt into collective responsibility suggests that action must be taken to ensure that the negative events of the past do not happen again in the future. Germans have been incorporating this social conviction of "never again" into their national identity, a counterpoint to the argument that "a finished monument would, in effect, finish memory itself...this would not be a place where Germans would come to unshoulder their memorial burden" (*Young* 2000).

THE CONTROVERSY BEHIND THE MEMORIAL

Though not physically represented on the site, the memorial's title poses a semantic problem. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe connotes that the Memorial's purpose serves as an apology to the Jews for the atrocities Germany committed during the Holocaust. The title is misleading since it focuses on the recipients of the apology and ignores those apologizing, who in this case dominate the

other. This apology serves as a means through which Germany attempts to reconcile with its past. When one separates the effects of the Memorial from its intended purposes, one discovers that this memorial was not created for the murdered Jews, but rather on behalf of the murdered Jews and to the Germans.

Stephan Kramer, the General Secretary of the Central Council of the Jews, claims that the words "We did not ask for it. We do not need it" represent the Jewish community's adamant rejection of the Memorial proposal (*Kramer* 2005). Germany's choice in determining how it wishes to commemorate the Jewish victims of the Holocaust does not reflect the sentiments of its Jewish population. The community objected on the grounds that the memorial was conceived by Lea Rosh, a non-Jewish German. The Council, represented by President Paul Spiegel, suggested that promoting visits to actual, relevant Holocaust sites would bring about a more authentic form of remembrance than a Memorial. Other members of the Jewish community felt that more attention should be given to living Jews rather than highlighting their plight during World War II.

However, when one considers the purpose of the Memorial, as officially stated by the German parliament, the reaction of Germany's current Jewish population becomes largely irrelevant to the discourse on the Memorial's existence. The German parliament intended "to honor the murdered victims, keep alive the memory of...inconceivable events in German history and admonish all future generations never again to violate human rights, to defend the democratic constitutional state at all

times, to secure equality before the law for all people and to resist all forms of dictatorship and regimes based on violence" (*Bundestag Resolution* 1999). There is no reference to a specific portion of Germany's living population, Jewish or otherwise.

As the well-known German political commentator Hendrik M. Broder states, the Memorial is "not meant to commemorate the Jews," but rather "is meant to flatter the Germans" (*Santana* 2005). This opinion is representative of the overall argument that the Memorial serves as a convenient opportunity for the German public to "wash its hands clean" of the negative events that mar its past. The slabs of "dull grey concrete blocks that jut up irregularly like an other-worldly graveyard" (*Prince-Gibson* 2005) are permanent, implying that the memory of the Holocaust will become frozen, buried – never to be unearthed again. Having designated an impressive 27.6 million Euros for the project, a "millstone that the republic has demonstratively bound to its leg" (*FAZ* 2005), German government officials showed that this memorial was high on their agenda. In the words of Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, "the way for the Germans to re-establish themselves as an ethical community is to turn their cruelty, which is what tied them to the Jews, into repentance" (*Schofield* 2005).

PRACTICAL FUNCTIONS OF ABSTRACT ART

The location of the memorial site makes it a monument that Germans cannot ignore. In fact, many Germans feel that it enhances the aesthetics of their city, and appreciate the fact that it is a public space (*Memorial Site Surveys 2005*). The location could not be more central, politically speaking: both the Reichstag, Germany's seat of the lower house of parliament, and the Bundesrat, the upper house, are just a few meters away. Other historically renowned sites nearby include the Brandenburg Gate, Embassy Way, and the Potsdamer Platz. Most significantly, the memorial is located in the core where political planning of the Jewish extermination took place: Goebbels' bunker, unchanged to this day, lies directly beneath the Field of Stelae.

For Germans, the political significance of the location extends beyond the physical landmarks surrounding the site. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, a new Germany was envisioned. The reunification process overwhelmed and preoccupied the German public during the ensuing years, culminating in the transfer of the capital from Bonn to Berlin. The shift served to reconcile the old with the new, the East with the West. However, Lea Rosh, the most prominent and infamous impetus of the "initiative of civilians" (*Quack 2005*) for the Memorial, saw a growing danger that her country was looking into the future of a reunified Germany at the cost of remembering its past (*Apthorp 2005*). Therefore, in order for Germany not to forget the past amidst its transformation, she took it upon herself to create a central, physical place of remembrance in the heart of the nation's new capital.

On the international level, the Memorial serves as a way to improve Germany's image in the eyes of outsiders. The Memorial was the first of its kind to serve as an implicit apology to governments of other countries for its actions during World War II (*Leinemann 2005*). Nations throughout the world are responding positively to Germany's decision to create a memorial and are broadly sympathetic to the challenges of erecting a memorial involving such difficult subject matter.

COMMEMORATION WITHOUT EDUCATION?

When one considers that this memorial is categorized as a "Mahnmal," a memorial that is designed, beyond commemoration, to warn and admonish, the principle of education becomes one of its key goals (*Berg, 2005*). No argument reflects more strongly that this memorial was created for the German people, and not for the Jews, than the potential that such a memorial offers for keeping alive the memory, education, and potential lessons offered by the Holocaust. According to Sandra Anusiewicz, an education curator at the Jewish

Museum, the Jews "know about the Holocaust. We don't need a memorial to help us remember. We remember. The Holocaust memorial is for the Germans." (*Sawyer 2005*). The Memorial, to accommodate this desire for German Holocaust education, houses an underground Information Center. The Center seeks to provide the educational counterpart to the abstract Field of Stelae above it. Although Eisenman did not wish to include this Information Center, many argued that such an abstract design needed to be placed in context in order for it to have meaning. After much debate as to the proper scope of this memorial, a political compromise was made and the Information Center was added to the memorial's plans. As Quack stated, "One should not build a memorial without providing a formal, historically sound, and appropriately comprehensive explanation for it" (*Quack 2005*).

The Information Center seeks to provide a context for the Memorial through five rooms. These five rooms each present a different function: providing a brief overview of the events between 1933-1945;

² As of this date, the database only contains the names and stories of 800 Jewish victims. The ultimate goal of the room is to obtain a biography for every victim.

featuring fifteen excerpts from personal accounts written by Jewish men and women during the time of persecution; crafting an overview of Jewish family life in various countries; presenting an auditory reading of the names and short biographies of the six million victims;² offering a repository of victims' names from Yad Vashem; and supplying a database of Holocaust museums throughout Europe and Holocaust memorials and places where Jews were persecuted. This Information Center takes the abstract nature of the Field of Stelae above it and breaks it down to the level of the individual victim, thereby providing a bridge between the openness of the abstract architecture and the concrete reality of the Holocaust.

While political compromise brought about the existence of an Information Center, the compromise failed to integrate fully the principle of education into the Memorial. Since the Information Center lies under ground and is not immediately visible to the passer-by, many visitors do not take advantage of this resource. In fact, several interviewed visitors were unaware of the existence of the underground education facility (*Memorial Site Survey 2005*). This ignorance is particularly problematic since it prevents those visiting the site from attaining the desired effect. Initially, Markus Wachter, a photographer for the Berliner Zeitung newspaper, was not moved by the monument: "I can't find the special emotion related to the real Holocaust in this concrete field," he said. "You could think it's just a place for children to play hide-and-seek." However, a visit to the Information Center changed his response: "if you initially go to the museum and then view the memorial, it becomes very moving" (*The Nation 2005*).

and perhaps permanently, “cut the Jewish lobe of its culture from its brain. [It created a] Germany [that] suffers from a self-inflicted Jewish aphasia” (Young 2000). The result of the policy of Jewish extermination exposed the loss of the Jewish part of German culture, creating a “palpable and gaping wound in the German psyche... that must appear as such in Berlin’s otherwise reunified cityscape” (Young 2000). Additionally, “the murder of European Jewry was the most crucial topic within Nazi policy and ideology. It was THE symbol of Nazi atrocities” (Quack 2005). These factors, therefore, placed the murdered Jews in the first position of the hierarchy of those groups to be commemorated, although, among some, this remains contentious belief.

The need to distinguish among persecuted groups was also recognized and fueled by the failure of memorials “that tended to remember all victims of war” (Quack 2005). Memorials such as Die Neue Wache sought to pay tribute to all victims of war, and in this process, homologated all the victims; these “were memorials for everybody, as expressed through the symbol of a mater dolorosa” (Quack 2005). The commemorated populations in Neue Wache problematically include, alongside the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, all Germans who suffered through the bombings.

In addition to providing a context for the Stelae, the center connects the visitor to the actual authentic places of the Holocaust and inspires a desire to self-educate. The last room of the Information Center, the Holocaust Memorials Database, lists existing sites and Holocaust research institutions throughout Europe and reinforces Paul Spiegel’s desire to inspire visits to “former concentration and death camps, the mass graves, the places of execution, shooting and torture, the platforms from which people were carted away in cattle wagons.”

DISCRIMINATING AMONG VICTIMS

Commemorating only the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, as reflected in its title, the Memorial deliberately distinguishes the murdered Jews from other victimized groups, including homosexuals, Sinti (Roma), and mentally disabled individuals. The decision to focus only on Jews is a result of the sheer volume of Jewish victims and the consideration that “when Germany murdered half of its Jewish population, and sent the rest into exile, and set about murdering another 5.5 million European Jews, it deliberately,”

For the Federal Republic of Germany, a memorial designed to provide a place of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust could not conflate these victims with the perpetrators; to avoid this danger, Germany chose to specify (Brinkman 2005).

The seemingly simple choice to limit the Memorial’s scope to the murdered Jews, however, had divisive and politically relevant consequences. Kurt Julius Goldstein, a German Jew who survived 18 months of slave labor in Auschwitz, for example, states that he “lived through [the Holocaust], and [the Nazis] didn’t begin and end with the Jews.” He questions, “How can we focus on our own suffering and ignore that of the physically and mentally handicapped, the gays, the Gypsies, the communists, those who opposed them? This should be a place to unite us. Instead, just like before, it divides” (Schofield 2005). Others worry that this memorial will contribute to the ignorance regarding the full history of the Holocaust; many visitors fear that the focus on

the Jewish population will perpetuate the erroneous belief that the only victims of the Holocaust were the Jewish people (Memorial Site Survey 2005). The Memorial, in public discourse, is often referred to as the “Holocaust Memorial” (Quack 2005). One can only speculate whether this name, often replacing the memorial’s true title, is indicative of the perpetuation of the belief that Jews alone were victimized. Sergey Lagodinsky of the American-Jewish Committee, however, rejects these two fears with the following:

“The memorial is improving the discourse for the specific victims being memorialized and for all groups in general. As each group works towards having its own future memorial...we can see the differences and similarities in the ‘how’s and ‘why’s of each persecuted group. The discussion furthermore shows the singularity of the victimization that occurred for the Jewish people. We can see that this tragedy was unparalleled” (Lagodinsky 2005).

EVALUATING THE MEMORIAL’S SUCCESS

There is no universal definition for a “successful memorial,” as each memorial is measured against a unique context. One way to assess the memorial’s success is to measure it against the purpose stated by its creators. With this memorial, Germany expressed the desire to honor, to remember, and to admonish. However, to achieve these three aspirations, Germany adopted a radical approach which some believe has compromised its success.

On all three counts, the Memorial failed to realize its full potential. Too many interviewees left the memorial site confused or merely fascinated by the aesthetic impression of the structure. Some even reacted adversely, with revulsion, refusing to explore the site beyond the surface (Memorial Site Survey 2005), which leads to a superficial understanding of the monument. On a practical level, the Memorial needs signs pointing directly to the Information Center and needs to ensure that school visits include a mandatory visit center.

Before the design of the Memorial had been selected, there was a fear that the German public

would not accept it and, by its rejection, prove to the world that it remains an anti-Semitic country. However, “the public is accepting it very well, in the first month alone, as over 60,000 people visited the Information Center” (Keller 2005).

The most visible sign of this Memorial’s success is the dialogue spurred by the memorial-building process and continued by the Memorial’s physical presence. James Young noted that the Germans “may have failed to produce a monument [that satisfies everyone], but if you count the sheer number of design hours that 528 teams of artists and architects have already devoted to the memorial, it’s clear that your process has already generated more individual memory-work than a finished monument will inspire in its first ten years” (Young 2000). Individuals who visit the site often discover new facts or are exposed to personal stories that result in their leaving the site with “extraordinary experiences” that prompt further dialogue and thinking about the Holocaust (Keller 2005).

This Memorial is also valuable for its ability to bring the lessons of the Holocaust into the public's mind and to keep social action in the forefront of current national interest. The Memorial marks the acceptance of the Holocaust into Germany's permanent national identity in a manner that fuses German identity with a dedication to never forget the past in order to prevent such acts from happening again. It is a reminder of the German phrase, “Wehret den Anfängen,” or “Beware the Beginnings,” signifying that this Memorial is a reflection of the German's public consciousness and physical promise to stop human rights violations before they become acts of magnitude.

One might argue that this memorial came too late, sixty years after the end of World War II. After all, the firsthand witnesses would inevitably have had more extreme responses than their descendants. On the contrary, the Memorial did not come too late; it is designed for a specific subset of the pop-

ulation: the young Germans who call themselves the “Third Generation” (Marzynski 2005). These young Germans, the grandchildren of those who took part in World War II, are the ones who will live with the Memorial in spite of Eisenman's desire to keep the Memorial free from symbolism. It is their Memorial.

For the past sixty years, Germany dealt with the Holocaust primarily through guilt. *The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe* now presents the opportunity for catharsis, both through debate and by virtue of its presence; the memorial offers a path toward a more positive sense of national identity and provides a template that other countries may follow.

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GUARD TOWER, BIRKENAU Photo by Joseph Kolker (HIA 2010)

AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU
A Visitors' Manual

Tomasz Cebulski

Over the past ten years, I have been working as a guide for groups and individuals visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau. Though over a million people visit Auschwitz-Birkenau annually, there are very few short, condensed texts that could serve as a good introductory manual for the average visitor. This paper aims to provide such a manual.¹

IMPORTANCE OF THE SITE

Why is it that when people think of the Holocaust, Auschwitz and the iconography associated with the site immediately come to mind?

First of all, Auschwitz-Birkenau was the largest and the most efficient of all the German Nazi concentration and extermination camps built in occupied Europe. The sheer number of victims—close to 1.5 million—is not the only factor that renders the site unique. Auschwitz-Birkenau was one of the only two Nazi camps where the perpetrators merged two functions in one place:

mass incarceration of slave labor and mass extermination of people in gas chambers.² This is particularly important because between 1942 and 1944, when the gas chambers at Birkenau were active, as many as 120,000 prisoners in the vicinity worked as the slave workers of the concentration camp.³ These prisoners witnessed the selections and mass extermination. Of course towards the end of the camp, most of those inmates would have been killed or transferred, but still we estimate that in 1945 tens of thousands of Auschwitz survivors were alive in various parts of Poland and Germany.⁴ Those people had stories, testimonies and went on to write books and chronicle their lives in the camp. Their voices and the name Auschwitz could be heard globally; Auschwitz-Birkenau became synonymous with the Holocaust.⁵

Other German Nazi camps, including Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, and Chelmno have received little attention compared to Auschwitz, since they were built for the sole purpose of extermination. These camps were built as temporary structures in sparsely populated territories and often hidden in forests, far from Western Europe. Their sole function was to kill as many Jews from Nazi-occupied

Poland as possible and they were designed to be dismantled after the task was accomplished.⁶

Today, almost nothing remains of those camps' former existence. The German crime was not only the murder of those Jews, but also the eradication of the memory of their very existence and the manner in which they were killed. This was meant to be "the perfect crime," and its cover-up took tremendous effort. No images were left which could be used as iconography in the way we now perceive and remember the Holocaust. The low numbers of survivors ensured that their stories rarely became part of the global narrative of the Holocaust and the general commemorative culture. These camps sharply contrast Auschwitz, whose relatively high number of survivors is unique and well documented.

Auschwitz-Birkenau is now the best-preserved and best-documented former Nazi concentration-extermination camp, which contributes to its iconic status. Most of the camp structures remain relatively intact and contain artifacts, such as original documents, shorn hair and plundered victims' property. Visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum offers a chance to see physically the buildings, execution and imprisonment sites, and thousands of preserved objects. The visual aids tangibly help the visitor imagine and recreate an historical time when Auschwitz was functioning. It is even possible to locate certain survivors' narratives or camp stories in the remaining camp space.

The buildings and objects also offer material proof of the crimes committed, which is particularly important since we are probably the last generation to meet and hear Holocaust survivors tell their stories. In Auschwitz, visitors can physically enter the Crematorium Gas Chamber I and see the inside of a gas chamber and cremation ovens. One of two such German Nazi-built structures standing in the world today,⁷ the crematorium and gas chamber assumes a tremendous burden now that there is a growing wave of Holocaust revisionism.⁸ Equally important are the ruins of Crematorium Gas Chamber II, III, IV and V located far from Birkenau's iconic main entrance gate. Though the gas

⁶ Aktion Reinhard Camps, Treblinka, Belzec, Sobibor, Chelmno. <http://www.deathcamps.org/>. Web site Archived on December 2006. The list of extermination camps, with approximate time of operation, number of victims and number of survivors in 1945: CHELMNO-KULMHOF—16 months of operation, 150,000 people killed, 3 survivors. BELZEC—12 months of operation, 500,000 people killed, 7 survivors. SOBIBOR—19 months of operation, 200,000 people killed, 100 survivors. TREBLINKA—13 months of operation, 800,000 people killed, 60 survivors.

⁷ The other crematorium gas chamber still standing and visible is in Majdanek. Tomasz Kranz, *Extermination of Jews at the Majdanek Concentration Camp*, Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanku, Lublin, 2007.

⁸ Those are the only two existing examples of such structures built on the territory of German Nazi Concentration Camps and designed for the mass extermination of people. I don't include the existing euthanasia centers or gas chambers designed for the disinfection of objects, which, at times, were used for killing people.

¹ Annual report 2009, Record number of the visitors, Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2010.

² The other one is the German Nazi Concentration Camp Majdanek in what is now eastern Poland.

³ Auschwitz-Nazistowski Oboz Śmierci, *Liczba ofiar KL Auschwitz*, Franciszek Piper, Wydawnictwo Państwowego Muzeum Oświęcim-Brzezinka, 1998.

⁴ Pieter Lagrou, *Return to a Vanished World. European Societies and the Remnants of their Jewish Communities* The Jews are Coming Back edited by David Bankier, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 2005.

⁵ Deborah Dworak and Robert Jan van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, W.W.Norton & Company Inc., 2002.

chambers were blown up by the retreating Germans in 1945, they still communicate the meticulous nature of the perpetrators, the details and scope of the extermination process. Millions of visitors see these well-preserved sites thanks to the 1947 decision to establish the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum on the site of the former German Nazi camp.

Auschwitz remains the dominant site in the general memory of the Holocaust because the German Nazis decided to make it the central destination for prisoners and, later, victims from all over Europe. The majority of Poland's 3.3 million Jews were exterminated in the extermination camps mentioned above. Auschwitz-Birkenau's capacity was reserved mostly for Jewish transports from Western, Northern and Southern Europe. No other camp had so many nationalities crowded in one place and no other camp's lethal operation would cover almost the entire territory of Europe. There were Jews deported to Auschwitz from as far as Oslo, the Greek island of Corfu and the distant

French Atlantic Coast. After the war, when the European Jewish and non-Jewish survivors began to look for their missing relatives, the answer almost always pointed to Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁹ After the war, the words Auschwitz-Birkenau became synonymous with the incarnation of evil and became the icon of the German Nazi genocide.

VISIT AND EDUCATION – CHALLENGES

Today, most of the visitors to the Auschwitz Museum participate in a guided tour that lasts approximately three hours. Visitors spend the first two hours at Auschwitz I, examining the artifacts and historical exhibits, and the final hour on the territory of Auschwitz II-Birkenau. The three hours provide the bare minimum for familiarizing visitors with camp chronology, history and activity and constitute the very core of the institutional education process. I recommend that visitors acquaint themselves with the historical basics prior to the guided tour.¹⁰

The historical exhibit in Auschwitz-I does not offer a coherent narrative. There are almost no descriptions of sites, pictures, documents and artifacts. It is worth remembering that this exhibit was put together in the 1950's for

the generation that had firsthand memories of the war. Guides explain the primitive nature of the exhibit and enhance visitors' understanding of the authentic site of Nazi genocidal policy. Without proper guidance people often get lost in the complexity of the camp territory and history.

At first glance, Auschwitz II-Birkenau is a large open air museum made up of ruins of buildings or remaining camp structures scattered over a large area of 170 hectares (approx 420 acres). The best way to get a sense of the entire territory is to enter the central watchtower over the main entrance gate. However, the most important places in Birkenau are either in ruins or not visible at all. The actual site of former German Nazi mass genocide lies 1 km from the main gate. The ruins of the massive Crematoriums and Gas Chambers II, III, IV and V are located in the far reaches of Birkenau. The ashes of the majority of camp victims have been deposited in what is today the green, serene and almost idyllic forest, landing and water pond landscape. Little tangible evidence exists of the largest cemetery known to humanity, thanks to the German Nazi determination to cover up the crime scene. The illusive serenity of the site should always be contrasted with the established historical facts. This place, where what is invisible is most important, demands that the visitors pay tribute to the camp victims. The place itself makes these demands in a very metaphysical way because facing the enormous crime and having cognitive difficulties in understanding and explaining its enormity, visitors often retreat to certain culturally dictated commemorative gestures.¹¹

The last five years have witnessed an organizational framework for a more individual and formalized education at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. 2005 marked the official creation of the International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust. This evolving institution provides a counterpart to the drawbacks connected with mass tourism to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.¹²

REPRESENTATIONS OF AUSCHWITZ

What is Auschwitz-Birkenau today? The site of a former German Nazi Concentration-Extermination Camp, a

⁹ Martin Gilbert, *Atlas of the Holocaust*, William Morrow & Company, 1993.

¹⁰ The new Auschwitz Museum website provides necessary historical milestones: www.auschwitz.org.pl.

¹¹ James E. Young, *The Changing Shape of Holocaust Memory*, The American Jewish Committee, 2005.

¹² Annual Report 2009 – *International Center for Education about Auschwitz and the Holocaust*, Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, 2010.

Museum, the largest cemetery in the world, a WWII history icon, a religious challenge for Judaism and Christianity, material proof of the Nazi genocide, a site of mass education, a site of mass tourism, etc. These are just some of the functions of the site, which all coexist, are interrelated, and play into the frictions of the daily reality.

The diversity of visitors to Auschwitz is staggering. On any given day, one can encounter Auschwitz survivors and their families, family members of perpetrators, Holocaust historians, Holocaust revisionists, orthodox Jews, Catholics following the stations of the cross, Buddhists deeply into their meditations, leading world politicians, and thousands of accidental tourists who happen to be there only because the travel operator included the camp on their itinerary among five other sites to see the same day. Visitors come to Auschwitz for different reasons and the site has to accommodate them all. These colorful, loud masses, often strongly opinionated and convinced about

the importance of the site, have to coexist in the sobering physical space of Auschwitz-Birkenau today. The growth of mass tourism in the last ten years creates an enormous challenge for educators and technical problems for the museum, as well as large opportunities for the global community to be exposed to historical and contemporary cases of genocide.

Everybody has expectations before arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In some cases the fear and stigma generated for years and connected with the word Auschwitz makes people expect a metaphysical experience. At the end of their visit, those people exhibit all possible responses from disappointment (in most cases) to a form of personal catharsis after facing imagined evil. The iconography of the site created in the last 70 years is one of the strongest and most globally recognized symbols of genocide and WWII. At the same time, every passing day distances us from the event itself and leaves us with less and less survivors who can say "I have been there...I have experienced it...I can witness." The next generations will rely on secondary images of the Holocaust generated by historians, museums, documentation centers; on the global scale, memory will be generated by film and mass culture.

We must do everything in order to maintain a proper balance between the narratives provided by official historical facts and mass culture. In fact, we must ensure that the official historical narrative prevails. Holocaust museums around the world, universities and research institutions help bolster the historical narrative.¹³

The mass culture images of Auschwitz help spread knowledge about the genocide, but also run the risk of oversimplifying and misrepresenting history. The movie "Boy in the Striped Pajamas" offers an example of how secondary reality created by mass culture has little in common with the historical reality of Auschwitz. There is a danger that viewers take the facts pictured in this movie as a historical Holocaust narrative. On a factual level, the movie bears little resemblance to the real history of Auschwitz. This situation of selectively picking certain elements that imitate Auschwitz and intermingling them into the plot, which is a pure figment of somebody's imagination, creates a very dangerous and confusing mixture. The story is heartbreaking, it has a positive educational message, it sells, but completely disrespects the historical facts and disrespects the 1.5 million stories of victims whose ashes are still spread over the large territory of Birkenau. The film created a sort of secondary Auschwitz matrix reality. Are future generations doomed to such narratives? Will Auschwitz-Birkenau tour guides soon be forced to change their narrative to follow the imagined places and stories? Every day, visitors to Auschwitz ask to see sites pictured in the movie, which do not exist in reality.

Mass culture and information also creates a certain threat to the site itself. There are now people for whom stealing an object such as the "Arbeit Macht Frei" inscription from the main gate is not only imaginable, but also possible. Barbaric behaviors such as robbing the site are increasing; just a few weeks ago the Auschwitz Museum guards caught two Canadian teachers stealing metal parts of the Birkenau rail platform.¹⁴

Until recently, Museum authorities provided very few security measures at the site, and relied on visitors' common sense. To minimize the sense of visitors being watched

¹³In fact, the education does not have to happen at the Museum site itself. For example, the Facebook profile of State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, created two years ago, now has over 40,000 followers who are learning about the current daily challenges of commemorating the site of mass genocide. See: <http://www.facebook.com/auschwitzmemorial>

¹⁴Matthew Day, *Teachers 'arrested for stealing Auschwitz memento'*, Telegraph, 28 Jun 2010.

constantly—a highly inappropriate feeling at Auschwitz—security guards were almost invisible. However, recent acts of vandalism have forced the Museum to rethink its security system.

HOW TO VISIT AUSCHWITZ

Taking into account the multi-layered history of the site, the answer of “how one ought to visit Auschwitz” is complicated. The historical layer of the camp narrative is inseparable from current problems, conflicts and the physicality of the site. How can we adequately balance proper commemoration of the victims of mass extermination with the needs of contemporary mass tourism? When I lead tours, I suggest that the three most important issues to have in mind while visiting the site are historical awareness, respect and responsibility. I hope that building one’s individual visit on those three values as the base foundation of the entire time spent at the mass genocide site facilitates structuring the inevitable multitude of thoughts and emotions. Maintaining those three guiding principles will help one leave the Museum grounds and say “I have been there...I have experienced it...I can witness.”

Though historical awareness of the site builds over time, it is helpful to briefly review the most important facts about Auschwitz-Birkenau before visiting the site. It always helps to orient oneself better in the site complex and provides one with a certain comfort of knowing the chronology. Chronology becomes a foundation on which the experience of the site itself is based and then amplified, thanks to a guide’s narration.

Respect for the site, and its victims, does not mean one ought to spend the three hours in mourning. Respecting Auschwitz today is about remembering the history behind Auschwitz-Birkenau. In addition to respecting the site, I also urge visitors to respect other visitors around them. It is worth remembering that there are people with different needs and approaches to visiting the site. Some come to visit the cemetery of their beloved family members, while others visit the site as tourists. The less we imprint our own personality on this site and the more respectful we are of others around us, the better.

Responsibility for Auschwitz and its history is undoubtedly the most important task of the education process. Every visitor must feel responsible for bringing home a message about Auschwitz-Birkenau after the visit. I tell each visitor on my tours that they are becoming a modern witness to the past, which is now precarious, since Auschwitz survivors are passing away. Responsibility also means recognizing the consequences of our moral choices and realizing the sort of extremes that humanity is capable of under certain circumstances. Without this process a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau has no effect on the current world, and can lead to history repeating itself in the future.

Awareness, respect and responsibility are crucial to define today’s visit to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. They should be also adopted every time we approach other genocides in human history. A visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau can be a catalyst for focusing on the phenomenon of genocide in general, and drawing our attention to those crimes, which have been happening in the world over the last twenty years. Over the course of the last twenty years, Holocaust historians have been giving more space to document, talk and compare the Holocaust with other known genocides.¹⁵ Such work is necessary in order to reevaluate the history of sites like Auschwitz and to reflect on the responsibility of the global community. Auschwitz provides a genocidal model and could be the first step in working out a variety of global community responses to potential genocidal situations or behaviors. As we all create this global community, it is likely that visiting Auschwitz–Birkenau and understanding genocide phenomena can spark new anti-genocide legislation or government actions.

¹⁵ *Rethinking the Holocaust*, Yehuda Bauer, Yale University Press, 2000.



VISITING THE UNITED STATES

If we lived in a just and honorable world, this would not be our only museum visit in Washington DC. We would also be spending time at one dedicated to the history of black/white relations in the US. Unfortunately, such a museum does not yet exist, although an outstanding one is now being developed after years of preparation. Despite great gains finally realized in the Civil Rights movement, America has been reluctant to memorialize and acknowledge—in an official national setting—its history of slavery and subsequent pernicious attitudes and actions towards black Americans. Turning to another despicable aspect of American history, we could actually meet at the American Indian Museum close by on the Mall. However, this handsome institution is conceived in ways that basically and deliberately avoid recognition of the intended displacement and destruction of the American Indian population.

You might refer positively to American immigration and the lauded reputation of a successful heterogeneous population. Nonetheless, a close reading of American history reveals extended periods of hostile attitudes and behaviors towards certain immigrant populations. Fortunately, over the past decades integration has decreased many exclusionary and discriminatory practices. The history of immigration, however, is profoundly different from that concerning blacks and American Indians.

HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

Thus, we are here at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum which justly makes a powerful claim on our attention because of the universal aspects of its history. It is one of horrors: a ferocious ideology of destruction; a genocide built on the myths and inventions of race. For many years, visiting this Museum was a significant part of the HIA summer programs in Europe. The American Fellows would start here with three days of orientation and exploration before flying to Europe to join the other Fellows. Several months later, the European Fellows would make the reverse trip and visit DC, including three days at the Museum.

Now you are here only for one day—one day that may strike some of you as one day too long. You might ask: why focus on the Holocaust once again? And why in the US? I think we owe you our best attempts at cogent and thoughtful explanation. First of all, HIA was conceived and founded on an examination of issues, in Denmark and in the Netherlands, relating to World War II, the Holocaust and resistance to Nazi Germany's induced tyranny. That is a commitment that we honor to enhance the concerns and the values of those who initially supported the organization.

We also have to ask ourselves about the ongoing relevance and justification of that initial concept or formulation. Let me suggest that we look at the Holocaust—the attempt to destroy a particular minority—and the decades that have been shadowed by that catastrophe as providing the historical and moral foundations for facing critical contemporary issues. **THEY RAISE QUESTIONS** that are at the heart of HIA's raison d'être and its outreach to and impact on a broader public: engagement in minority issues predicated upon civic and moral responsibility.

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| <p>1 How do societies selectively interpret and design their histories?</p> <p>2 How are historical narratives used to meet or avoid meeting present needs?</p> <p>3 What are the early indications of the deterioration of civil society and the bulwarks against such disintegration?</p> | <p>4 How do nations incorporate universal values of human rights into their national goals and identities?</p> <p>5 Can international institutions compel nations to find common ground with regard to values, justice, the prevention of violence, genocide and mass atrocities, the punishment of crimes and the rehabilitation of victims?</p> <p>6 How do nations define majority and minority populations, and what are the rights of each?</p> |
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| <p>7 How does suspicion of different religious, racial, ethnic, political, gender and sexual minority groups lead to prejudice, discrimination, hatred, violence and, in some cases, to eliminationist or exterminationist ideas and methods?</p> <p>8 How do local, regional, national and international governmental bodies negotiate tensions among majority and minority populations and among minorities?</p> <p>9 What obligations do nations have with respect to histories of genocide, atrocity and violation of human rights?</p> | <p>10 Do minority groups with transnational identities have the right or obligation to judge and to hold accountable other nations for their treatment of minorities?</p> <p>11 How can American history, regarding Native Americans, slavery and segregation, enter the international human rights discourse, developed since World War II and the Holocaust, about racial, ethnic and religious violence and mass atrocities?</p> <p>12 How can study of the Holocaust, including histories of resistance, form a foundation for the active moral, political and social responsibilities of diverse, younger generations? How will Holocaust education change when there are no more survivors to provide testimony?</p> |
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THE QUESTIONS CONFRONT ALL OF OUR DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES. There are no exact or uniform answers, just various attempts at resolution—from the meager and ineffectual to the ambitious and bold. The challenge before us is to recognize the commonality of the tests and trials in the US and Europe. Let me suggest that the history of race relations in America is as important for Europeans to understand, as is the Holocaust for Americans. Destruction was not the intention for America's black population as it was for Native Americans. Yet, these three examples represent extremes of individual and collective evil in human behavior that enabled one group to devastate another.

We live in an era now when the established or traditional configurations of community are challenged again on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite its democratic and inclusive ideals, the US is enmeshed in tensions and uncertainties over illegal immigrants. Unresolved attitudes on health, welfare, employment and education reflect and often inflame convoluted legacies of race and class. In Europe, the presence of millions of immigrants and their progeny in the second and third generations evoke unanticipated, serious tensions over the nature of national identity, cohesion, the purposes and scope of the welfare state and, in the most extreme challenge, the actual physical security of the nation and its citizens.

In the aftermath of the depression, fascism and war, Western European nations agreed that they could not fight each other ever again. In the aftermath of the depression of the 30s and success of fascism, European nations agreed that they needed to stabilize and secure a decent standard of living for all of their inhabitants—irrespective of religion or ethnic affiliation. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, European nations signed the Declaration of Human Rights, an anti-Genocide convention, anti-racist strictures and the establishment of international legal entities to protect the democratic states and rights of individuals against unfair treatment by the state.

Minority problems have arisen within the interstices of these noble understandings and institutions—a post WWII template predicated on both the fear of repeating past mass and individual cruelty and idealistic expectations for the future. The problem is that the template ignores the profound difficulties inherent in differences and diversity: the ever-changing mysteries of community, traditions, trust, religion, secularism and identity; and the new fusion of suspicions, fears, discrimination, passivity, hatred and violence directed at and sometimes emanating from the “other” group. In theory and to a large degree, the welfare state is neutral—but people are not. The political philosopher and intellectual historian Sir Isaiah Berlin warned, in one of his probing essays, that human beings often want contradictory or even irreconcilable things—good things such as respect for the diversity of humankind on the global scale as well as the need for a collective national culture and reassuring identity.

THIS HOLOCAUST MUSEUM CAN ONLY SHOW YOU WHAT WENT VERY WRONG. The Holocaust was a unique genocide: the culmination of centuries of viewing Jews as different and threatening outsiders, habitually resistant to Christianity. Empires and nations experimented with devices of separation by placing limitations on Jews in regard to profession, property, education, clothing and political rights. According to the historian Ben Kaplan, centuries ago toleration, as opposed to tolerance, meant building recognizable boundaries to ensure separation and prevent integration and assimilation. When those boundaries were abandoned in the so-called modern age of democracy, liberalism and enlightenment of the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, Jews were, paradoxically, as threatening because they tried too hard—and seemingly successfully—to assimilate and to become indistinguishable from other citizens in their nation.

DEPRAVED HUMAN BEHAVIOR DEVELOPED IN THE MIDST OF SO-CALLED CIVILIZED SOCIETIES:

highly trained doctors used their skills to defile human beings; Bauhaus trained architects misused their modern sensibilities, once dedicated to imaginative design, to build primitive barracks at Birkenau; mediocre management agents organized mass deportations and killings; political ideologues and fanatic propagandists drove the power of a violent, predatory state into the psyche of the masses; and populations of bystanders, millions of little players on diverse national stages, profited from passive complicity.

While we have extensive knowledge about the Holocaust, we need to probe constantly for constructive meanings and implications. There are those who believe that the critical questions are asking ourselves how would we have behaved or what would we do in a similar situation. I do not agree. Instead, we need to concentrate on what can we learn from the Holocaust about human capacities for good and evil and how to sustain the values that militate against the fear and hatred towards a minority.

Despite the fact that we know a great deal about the Holocaust, there are a number of detrimental forces that diminish its importance and even provide fuel for the increase of anti-Semitism. One response is so-called Holocaust fatigue: enough on the subject; European nations have paid sufficient attention and money in restitution over almost 70 years; the burden of guilt is used up. Another response comes from many Muslim and Arab countries that oppose the Jewish state in the Middle East; they dismiss, distort and, at the extreme, even deny the existence of the Holocaust. A third response comes from a sense of futility and defeat: the Holocaust, having given birth to the commitment to “Never Again” to genocide, has not stopped it from occurring innumerable times in recent decades.

Although these dismissive attitudes often dominate current discussion about the Holocaust, they must not be allowed to submerge knowledge of a genocide directed against the Jewish minority in Europe—a genocide of universal significance that has profoundly shaped policies and attitudes that affect current minority issues that we must face now. In this respect, let me suggest a final set of questions that relate directly to you as members of an emerging group of young leaders:

- 1** How can innovative ideas and actions, generated by young and emerging leaders, strengthen diverse, democratic societies?
- 2** How can new technologies, the creative tools of younger generations, be used to address historical questions and to improve civic engagement and the relationships among minority and majority populations?
- 3** How can the international HIA network of engaged, young leaders—in its formal and informal actions and concerns—be a model for collaboration in support of diverse, democratic societies?

Albert Einstein has written: “History is replete with the struggle for human rights, an eternal struggle for which victory always eludes. Yet to tire in that struggle would mean to bring about the destruction of society.” Thus, we are in this museum for a very specific purpose. It is part of HIA’s ongoing task to provide programs and support that enable all of us to face conflicts, adhere to values and develop new norms of living with the inescapable and often promising reality of diversity.



JOURNEY TO AUSCHWITZ

Julia Zarankin

I TRAVELED TO AUSCHWITZ FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MARCH, 2008.

I had been postponing the trip for years, out of fear: I had no idea how I would react to what I saw and feared my own, subsequent powerlessness. I didn't want to visit Auschwitz alone and was equally reluctant to transform the trip into a religious pilgrimage of sorts. When HIA offered a study trip for senior fellows called Relevance of the Holocaust, I immediately applied. I needed to experience the site with like-minded, critical thinkers who would be prepared to discuss the landscape of horror, and think of how to turn their mourning into action.

I visited Auschwitz with 35 HIA senior fellows from the US, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Poland to discuss the impact of the Holocaust on contemporary European politics and history and anti-Semitism in the 21st century. Two days of pre-program discussions (in either Berlin, Copenhagen or Amsterdam) preceded our 6-day program in Krakow, which included a two-day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

My travels took me to Berlin, Krakow and Oswiecim. I spent the week shivering and feeling as though I were frozen inside, even though outside temperatures rose to the low 60s. The trip left me with more questions than answers. The minute I thought I understood the historical events, the statistics and mind-boggling numbers, a detail would catch me off guard: a swimming pool behind a barrack at Auschwitz, built especially for a sanita-

tion inspection at the camp, and later used for SS calisthenics. Just when I thought I had made sense of the surroundings, I found myself asking the same naïve questions. Why? How? Where was the rest of world? Who were these bystanders?

In Berlin, we began our pre-program discussions at the Anne Frank Center in the center of Mitte, formerly part of the GDR, which has now transformed into one of the city's trendiest, most coveted neighborhoods. It is home to Berlin's largest synagogue, art galleries and myriad memorial plaques for deported Jewish families. In the heart of this old Jewish neighborhood, we met to discuss the politics of memorialization, how different countries commemorate the Holocaust, what nations choose to forget or whitewash. On the second day of our pre-program, we boarded a commuter train for Oranienburg to visit Sachsenhausen, one of Germany's first concentration camps. Jet-lagged, I was expecting the train to Oranienburg to last hours. Instead, we arrived in just under forty minutes.

Already, my mind was playing tricks on me. Forty minutes away from Berlin, the nexus of German culture, home to some of Europe's greatest museums, illustrious intellectual establishments, stands the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. The juxtaposition startled me. The concentration camp itself was a twenty-five minute walk from

the train station, a carefully calculated move on the part of Nazi camp architecture and planning. In fact, over the course of the trip I realized a crucial feature of the perfected Nazi prison machine: they left absolutely nothing to chance. As prisoners were paraded through town on their way to the campgrounds, Oranienburg residents watched, threw stones, shouted or went about their business. It was a spectacle designed to involve the entire town. Before visiting Sachsenhausen, I hadn't considered to what extent the camp and town

were intertwined. Everybody participated in the camp's existence, if not physically, then by watching intently or, what is equally disturbing, by deliberately ignoring. And as I made my way toward the camp, I imagined what it must have felt like to be watched and surveyed constantly.

History has an internal recycling mechanism. I witnessed this first hand in Sachsenhausen. After the Nazis, the Red Army occupied Sachsenhausen and the communists continued to use it as a prison camp. Today, the Brandenburg police force uses the SS barracks as training grounds. Thankfully, the SS casino – a wooden structure called the Green Monster – stands in ruins. To me, it was a

fitting form of commemoration. Let their house of fun and entertainment hobble, exposed to the elements, a mound of detritus.

I found the camp's design impeccable: a semi-circular roll call area stands facing the watchtower with barracks along the periphery, radiating outward. Built as a panopticon, Sachsenhausen functioned as a model for future camp designs. From inside the camp, I could see Oranienburg houses; I imagined what people on the second floor witnessed and chose not to discuss. I grew numb.

We traveled onwards, on the night train from Berlin to Krakow. As we neared Krakow in the early morning, I realized that these were familiar train tracks. My family had emigrated from Ukraine in 1978. Our journey from Kharkov to Vienna led us along these same tracks, through Poland; border guards, passport control, steel faces interrogated us, halting our approach toward freedom. In Vienna we received passports that labeled us Staatenlos, country-less citizens. I was reliving a two-part past: my personal journey out of the Soviet Union and the journey of millions of European and East European Jews to their deaths.

Another peculiar instance of historical recycling welcomed me in Krakow. Our youth hostel in Krakow, located on 2 Pomorska Street, had formerly housed the Gestapo headquarters. The communist regime later recycled the building

and it became the KGB headquarters. I couldn't stop myself from wondering what conversations or acts of brutality had taken place in our bedroom and whether lives had been negotiated in the very place I rested my head.

Our tour guide in Krakow, Tomasz Cepulski, brought life to Kazimierz, the Jewish quarter in Krakow. He led us through the deserted streets while the wind blew from every direction and the rain drizzled, and, accompanied by his narrative, I began to imagine Ulica Szeroka, the wide street and former Jewish market place with three synagogues lining it, swell with life. We walked into the Remuh Synagogue, where Rabbi Moses Isserless' grave stands. The only synagogue still used for worship, it also has Krakow's oldest standing Jewish cemetery immediately behind it. I alternated between feeling like I was in a museum and feeling like I had entered the house of the dead. Krakow once boasted a Jewish community of nearly 70,000; it now numbered 180.

What our guide managed to do – and this was no small feat – was breathe life back into the city. Walking through streets named after Jacob, Isaac and Esther, I slowly began to imagine it – along with its seven synagogues, mikvah, market place – rife with excitement, promise and bustle. Leaving Szeroka Street we came upon a mural of the 18th annual 2007 Jewish festival in Krakow, where for ten days every June, Jewish life reanimated this part of the world with its loud, musical, frenzied

dancing and indomitable spirit. We walked through Kazimierz as the sun was setting, and there was something depressing about the names of restaurants – all Jewish – in a city that had almost no Jews left. Now, Kazimierz is one of Krakow's trendiest neighborhoods – a bohemian artist's haven. We saw the courtyard where Spielberg filmed *Schindler's List*. Krakow was the city that Hans Frank sought to make Judenrein (free of Jews), and here I was walking through the town and imagining it teeming with life.

We arrived in Auschwitz the following day. The countless images of the Arbeit Macht Frei gate that I had seen in photographs, books and movies didn't prepare me for what

I would experience as I walked through the gate myself. I felt like a pilgrim visiting a site of death and had no idea how to respond. My initial response was one of horror at the fact that I felt nothing. It wasn't until I realized how close the barbed wire fences were at all times, how they closed in on me, that I began to feel uneasy. Even when I closed my eyes to shut them out, the fences surrounded me, imprinted themselves in my mind. I had been prepared for the horrific numbers, the statistics, and even the artifacts – hair, shoes,

suitcases – but what I hadn't expected to see was Auschwitz bathed in early spring sunlight. Barbed wire fences – so close I could almost feel them against my skin – set against mid-afternoon sun demolished any idea I'd formerly had that I was prepared for what I would see at Auschwitz.

And yet, Auschwitz felt eerily familiar: architecturally, I recognized it from images, photographs, history textbooks, and films. Yet another incongruous recycling factoid: I learned that the buildings of Auschwitz had been used in the 1920s as a visa granting facility and quarantine for Jewish immigrants en route to Palestine and the United States. I shuddered at the irony.

After a day at Auschwitz, we toured the Jewish Centre in Oswiecim and I found myself in shock. The synagogue in the Jewish center has three Torah scrolls, and yet Oswiecim is not home to a single Jew. We ended the day with a celebration of Jewish life, since before the Holocaust the town had been 60% Jewish. It was helpful to debrief that evening as a group and share our thoughts on the day, while our emotions were still raw. Some cried, some were numb, most asked questions, some wanted to be alone, others couldn't stop talking, and some questioned our role as tourists at a site of genocide. We all shared a look of disbelief on our faces and an understanding of the lack of adequate vocabulary to describe what we'd seen. We spent the night in Oswiecim.

Nothing could have prepared me for the next day, for the sheer magnitude of Birkenau. Auschwitz had unfolded neatly, along a compact grid. Not a single centimeter was unaccounted for—every last detail played a key role in the killing machine. I began to understand the Nazi enterprise as a well-oiled killing machine. What I hadn't grasped from history books, but which I understood while visiting the sites of extermination, was that the concentration/extermination camps were works in progress. The Nazi regime was constantly perfecting the mechanics; leading scientists, doctors were continually ironing out kinks in the machine and speeding up the process.

We began our tour of Birkenau by climbing up into the watchtower and surveying the territory from above. I could barely see where the camp—a universe of terror—ended. I began shaking even before the hailstorm engulfed us. I entered barracks built like stables, wooden prefabricated buildings. I walked through the latrines and was reminded that bathrooms were the only place of relative privacy for prisoners, since the SS avoided them, for fear of contracting typhus. Bathrooms turned into an information circulation network. I stood in front of a wall of photographs and felt I could have been looking at pictures of my own relatives. I saw the gas chamber complexes and the pile of rubble left behind, as the Nazis burned everything and tried to cover up their traces. I saw

Kanada I and II, coveted work places for prisoners, where they sorted through belongings. I walked through a children's barrack with drawings on the walls. Of the many recycled buildings we saw, I noticed a true oddity: the old SS bunker at Birkenau now houses a church that regularly holds worship. I felt ashamed of a recurring thought I had throughout the day: the weather at Birkenau was perfect. A freezing rainstorm followed by hail, followed by unexplainable minutes

of brilliant spring sun that gave in to thunderous lightening and darkened skies. I staggered through the Birkenau mud, my shoes almost entirely submerged. I searched in vain for any sort of logic.

Our discussions, seminars and meetings with guest speakers, many of whom included young, vibrant Polish lawyers, professors, politicians, activists and educators, sparked productive exchange about the vital importance and relevance of Holocaust education

in contemporary Europe and North America. I found it helpful to distance ourselves from what we saw and discuss the actual sites of mass murder, destruction and utter dehumanization with a critical eye, but the shock of witnessing the physical sites escaped rationalization and intellectualization. I came home from the HIA trip with more questions than answers. It took months before I could open the Auschwitz file on my computer and peruse the photographs I had taken, and my worst fear was coming true. I was completely powerless.

I decided to make sense of my trip to Poland by taking small steps in my own life. I joined the planning committee for Holocaust Education Week in Toronto and began leading workshops about discrimination and racism in schools. As an educator, I consistently remind students of the power of words, and their role in racial discourse and in our treatment of minorities. Words are both powerful and terrifying tools. The killing machine that turned into Auschwitz began on a very small scale, and it began with harmful, hateful and dangerously manipulative words. Our power lies in not being seduced by racist discourse, which seeps into our language incrementally, but to fight against it. I remind students of the power of language to corrupt and corrode, but also to fight against injustice.

“ YOU **STAND** FOR DECENCY IN YOUR LIFE AND HOW TO DEAL WITH RIGHT AND WRONG, ETHICAL OR UNETHICAL...HOW YOU CAN APPLY THESE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE IS ALSO WHAT IT IS **ALL ABOUT**. YOU CAN ONLY GIVE THE SEEDS IN THE SCHOOLS...”

– FRIEDA MENCO

EDUCATION

JACOB BOERSEMA & NOAM SCHIMMEL¹

CHALLENGING

**DUTCH
HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION:**

**TOWARDS A
CURRICULUM
BASED
ON MORAL
CHOICES AND
EMPATHETIC
CAPACITY**

The primary task of education should be to prevent another Auschwitz. –Theodor Adorno

W

HAT enables people to make moral choices and take actions that reflect respect for the right of all people to live in freedom? Education offers society a way to protect itself against moral indifference. In particular, secondary school education is an essential agent for socialization

and values formation. During adolescence students learn to make critical moral choices, to analyze the role of morality in the development of their nation's history, and to enjoy the rights and challenges of democratic citizenship. Like the Dutch Holocaust survivor and educator Frieda Menco, we believe that empathy plays a key role in teaching students to think critically about ethical issues and develop respect for freedom and equality for all people.

This paper analyzes how the Holocaust is taught in fourth–sixth grade Dutch college preparatory secondary school history classes. We explore whether the Holocaust is used to engender a commitment to the principles of freedom and equality in secondary school students.

DUTCH PEDAGOGICAL GOALS The Dutch educational system is characterized by a strong commitment to promoting “active democratic citizenship” and liberal democratic values of tolerance for human difference in a “multi-cultural society.” The educational objectives outlined in the General Attainment Targets 1998-2003 call for consideration of moral choices in history curricula, where students are taught to “Recognize and deal with one’s own standards and values and those of other people.” Revisions of history curricula are also in accordance with objectives set out by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science: “Obtain insight into the way their own lives relate to historically related social phenomena and processes, taking due account of the nature of these phenomena and pro-

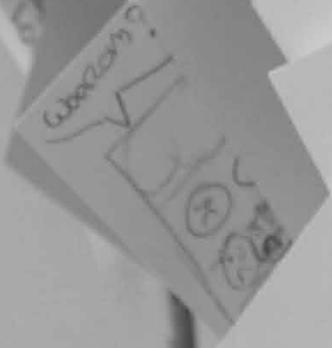
cesses” and “The development of an understanding of active citizenship in a democratic state and in the international community.” While impressive, student achievement rarely reflects these objectives.

PEDAGOGICAL FREEDOM FOR HISTORY TEACHERS: A THREAT TO HOLOCAUST EDUCATION? A fundamental value of the Dutch history curriculum is the freedom for teachers to determine both their methodology and class content. In the words of C. Fuykschot, the head of the Department of Special Educational Projects at the Ministry of Education, “Schools are 100% free to choose their method.” This freedom allows teachers to adopt creative approaches to their subject matter, but in the context of Holocaust education such freedom can also have negative consequences.

The state prescribes broad historical subjects to be addressed, including World War Two history, and lets teachers decide how to approach the themes. The preamble to the main educational targets states that: “Students should be able to mention certain consequences of the German occupation during the Second World War and the process of Nazification and the persecution of the Jews.” Students are also expected to be able to recognize different reactions of the Dutch population to German occupation. “They have to be able to explain different meanings of the remembrance of the Second World War and the image of Germany in Dutch society.” The statement that students should be able to recognize the different reactions of the Dutch population to the German occupation is of great importance. It acknowledges, after decades of ambivalence in Dutch schools and Dutch society generally, that students need to understand the moral choices made by the Dutch population. Students are expected to learn about the distinctive roles of victims, bystanders, and perpetrators in the history of the Holocaust.

My dreams are for a
future for every race & re
No one will forget the Hol
and hopefully nothing like it
happen again.

2010.



on the board of the De Rooy Committee, did not share that concern: "Prescribing to teach the most renowned facts and the most horrific ones I would regard as a serious offence towards any teacher," he said. Mijnhardt thinks that the absence of a state pedagogy is a "great privilege" and that Dutch history teaching is, and should be based on "trust". The danger, however, is that teachers may teach about the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis but ignore the role of Dutch collaborators and bystanders.

DUTCH HISTORY TEXTBOOKS: A PROBLEMATIC RESOURCE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS

The freedom given to teachers to determine the methodology and emphasis of Holocaust curriculum also applies to the writing of textbooks. While the textbooks superficially meet the government targets, in reality they fail to equip students with factual and conceptual objectives. In fact, many Dutch textbooks address the Holocaust only in passing, and offer contradictory historical facts. Holocaust history is a prerequisite for substantive educational programming about moral choices and civic responsibilities, and is valuable in its own right. But Dutch students fail to demonstrate even basic knowledge. A recent article in

HERE is no nationally mandated Holocaust curriculum, though some organizations, such as the Anne Frank Foundation, distribute their own Holocaust education materials to secondary schools throughout the country. Teachers told us that there was no mechanism to ensure that students learn about the Holocaust in a comprehensive manner. Professor Mijnhardt, currently

the NRC Handelsblad criticized Dutch ignorance of Holocaust history: "Holland does not have Holocaust education, but stresses in education the occupation of the Netherlands. Therefore the Holocaust loses attention... But we in the Netherlands do need that attention. The youth know what the occupation is but do not know what Jews are and their history."

Although the textbooks mention basic information about concentration camps in Poland there is little effort to explain the Holocaust as a broadly European phenomenon and avoid moral questions almost entirely. The Pharos textbook claims that "The Holocaust... was mainly the work of the terror organization SS (Schutzstaffeln)," which not only oversimplifies the Holocaust but also obscures the bystander issue and ignores questions about the extent of active support for the Nazis in both Germany and the Netherlands. Since Dutch textbooks provide little information about Jewish history and culture, it is difficult for students to develop empathy toward them and appreciate the magnitude of their destruction and its ramifications for European and Dutch history and culture.

That only one textbook, *Sprekend Verleden*, touches upon this very difficult issue of moral choices indicates that the Dutch ambivalence about the role of ordinary Dutchmen in collaborating with and accommodating the Nazi persecution is still a problem. Historian Chris van der Heijden says that in the past, "Nobody really wanted to show the real picture, because then we would know, that a great many (Dutch) people had butter on their heads [were deliberately ignoring their role in the war]." All of our interviewees stated that since the

1980s there has been a vast shift in public opinion, and a willingness to confront the less savory aspects of Dutch behavior during World War 2. But most noted that the ambivalence lingers. Kaen Polak said, "Twenty years ago the Holocaust was hardly mentioned at all. Maybe just for three sentences. Now there's an improvement, but it's very limited. There are 300 words now..."

According to Dr. Elise Storck, from the Interfaculty Center for Teacher Training at the University of Leiden (ICLON), the government has taken steps to remedy the situation and commissioned and distributed new educational curricula on the Holocaust for teachers. In response to a general lack of knowledge about the Holocaust, the government organized conferences specifically geared toward educators that were open to educators around the country who were asked how to implement an effective Holocaust education curriculum. The result was a highly successful handbook with sample lessons. Since 1988, however, no such initiative has been undertaken again and the materials from the handbook have not been integrated into textbooks, where they would reach a larger audience.

According to Polak, the Netherlands lacks "a proper Holocaust education curriculum for secondary schools." The lack of a textbook that addresses the Holocaust adequately makes the task of Holocaust education for teachers extremely difficult. "What we need in Holland is a guideline for teachers", said Polak. The government-produced handbook from 1988 needs updating, in order to include essays that examine the role of moral choices in the actions of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders.

Polak observed that even teacher training institutes pay minimal and often inadequate attention to Holocaust education. Teachers who are ignorant of the subject pass their ignorance on to the students. Polak said, "It's not central in the teaching at the colleges. It depends on the teachers who trained them. It's not compulsory." This comment highlights the recurring problem in Dutch Holocaust education: the refusal to enforce official requirements on teachers leads to poor Holocaust education.

GOVERNMENT OBJECTIVES

VS. CLASSROOM REALITY Currently, history curricula guidelines proposed by the government set out to cover too much ground. Time devoted to the study of history is limited and it is extremely difficult to teach students the diversity of subjects that a secondary school graduate is expected to master. In an attempt to cover the entire curriculum, little time remains to be devoted to the Holocaust: “Teachers have to work very hard to make time for the Holocaust,” Theo van Praag, coordinator

International Relations at the Hoogeschool of Rotterdam, said. Evelien van den Boom, a history teacher at the Keizer Karel College in Amstelveen, lamented that teachers must teach students twentieth century world history in only one and a half hours a week, a virtually impossible task. Consequently, she can only spend one lesson on the Holocaust.

The De Rooy Committee has attempted to address the overly ambitious history curricula by proposing to focus history lessons on developing a common set of historical references among students, and limiting the number of topics to be covered. The committee advocated for a need to teach students “genocide (especially of the Jews) as the consequence of discrimination and racism” and “German occupation in the Netherlands.” However, the Committee merely reaffirmed these broad requirements without suggesting how to teach them more effectively or providing resources for doing so.

In general, professors and other educators that we spoke to confirmed Storck’s statement that the Holocaust is rarely addressed in depth because of time constraints. They also confirmed the disturbing reality that if the Holocaust were to be treated in a comprehensive way it would be impossible to address other subjects adequately. According to Polak, basic Holocaust education requires time: “I would say that if you want to teach it sensitively you need 4-6 lessons, ideally 12 but that’s not realistic.”

The moral and ethical issues involved, the challenge of cultivating empathy, and the knowledge necessary to address the subject with depth and sensitivity all require a substantial devotion of time, far more than the typical Dutch student is exposed to today.

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ARTICULARISM VS. UNIVERSALISM One of the difficulties inherent in Holocaust education, particularly when taught within a moral and civic framework that emphasizes democratic values, is the tension between its particular and universal character and implications. Professor of Intercultural and Holocaust Education Ido Abram expressed concern that the Holocaust is often taught from such a universalistic perspective that its particular character is lost. He explained, for example, that students will learn about the Holocaust without learning much

about Judaism and the Jewish people and understanding how they were integrated into European society. Consequently, students view the Holocaust as just another human tragedy without understanding the historical conditions that made it possible—such as the effects of anti-Semitism on European attitudes towards the Jews.

Abram criticized the Anne Frank Stichting for exemplifying this attitude. He questioned the moral and intellectual integrity of its rush to universalize. “I have an argument with the Anne Frank Stichting. I am not satisfied with the content. [Of the Anne Frank House exhibit and of their educational curricula generally and the magazine that is mailed to Dutch elementary schools.] All the Jewish elements of the girl have disappeared in the exhibition. They are only interested in what is generally human in her, not what is Jewish in her... The way they speak about the Second World War there is no mentioning of Jews. It is *Judenrein*.” This, he stressed, has an enormous effect on Dutch educational programs on the Holocaust because thousands of Dutch students visit the Anne Frank House annually and hundreds of schools use educational curricula from the Anne Frank Stichting.

We recognize that by teaching about the Holocaust from a universalistic perspective certain issues such as racism and inequality may initially resonate more strongly with students. Nevertheless, we adamantly believe that the challenge of effective Holocaust education is to teach students to empathize across divisions of ethnicity and religion, and not to obfuscate these very real differences. This does indeed make the educational challenge greater, but ultimately it yields a far more transformative and meaningful experience for the student. Karen Polak explained that the attitude of the Anne Frank Stichting on this matter is both pragmatic and principled, and that our stance, and that of Abram’s, was too idealistic and unresponsive to the present Dutch reality. Polak is probably partially right, but we believe that education is an inherently progressive enterprise that is meant to inspire change and to push the intellectual and moral capacities of individuals and societies beyond their present point.

The important thing is the possibility of identification. It is so difficult to understand. They can only identify with stories that help them imagine 'how would I have been, what would I have done'? —Frieda Menco

CULTIVATING EMPATHY

Having learned basic Holocaust history students should have the opportunity to discuss the possible motives people would have for making certain moral choices, good and bad. Karen Polak explained that until recently Holocaust education was focused on teaching students about the moral choices made by resisters to Nazi oppression. Students rarely learned about how and why perpetrators made their moral choices. Ido Abram said, "You have to understand the perpetrators. There is no serious attempt to understand people like Hitler and Himmler." For students to understand the Holocaust they must not dehumanize the perpetrators but recognize their humanity. This lesson is just as fundamental as empathizing with the victims because students need to learn that the capacity for evil rests within everyone. Elisa Storck wanted her students not to perceive Hitler, for example, as a monster but as a very real human. She said that she wanted students to ask, "What were the

motives, how did it work that people were cooperating, were bystanders, just let it happen..." and to realize that, "they could do that too." This notion, that the Dutch people, consisting of eleven million autonomous individuals during World War 2 that all made moral choices during the war has still failed to take root in Holocaust education curriculum.

Of all the educational objectives of Holocaust education we think the ability and willingness to empathize with others is most valuable. Empathy allows individuals to find the universal within the particular, to respect that which makes people different but to recognize their common humanity. According to Abram, it is, "The ability to place the Holocaust inside their world rather than to keep it outside." The capacity to empathize is an important component of sound moral decision making. Through empathy we extend our sphere of moral responsibility outwards, towards society at large. The relationship between the capacity for empathy and just action is a direct one. Although not all people need to empathize with others to assist them in times of suffering, empathy creates an impetus to action, an urgency that is critical in times of great moral stress. Rescuers during the Holocaust often explain their actions simply: that they recognized their common humanity with the Jews or another oppressed people, and that this basic empathy spurred them to action. As students learn to think critically about moral issues and to debate their relative value, they need to be able to grasp the human implications of seemingly abstract moral choices.

CONCLUSION In response to the challenges faced by Dutch Holocaust education, we suggest that the Holocaust be integrated into the curriculum of the new course developed for 16 year olds (the Dutch fourth grade) that addresses civics. This will address the rights and duties for citizens in Dutch society, political rights in a parliamentary democracy, social rights of the welfare state, and cultural law that addresses the rights and responsibilities of living in a multicultural society. We believe that teaching all Dutch students about the Holocaust in the context of a course on civics would be an ideal way to ensure that every Dutch student experiences a sound Holocaust education. We recommend the Facing History and Ourselves program, based in the United States and with a European office in Switzerland because its content and philosophy are so similar to both our educational objectives and those of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The introduction to the Facing History curriculum states that, "By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of collective violence students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives." Facing History integrates the study of human behavior with the study of the history of the Holocaust and teaches students to consider and develop their capacity for moral agency and to be aware

of the consequences of their actions. The curriculum is informed by cognitive and moral development theory and practice and emphasizes the importance of analyzing differing perspectives, competing truths, and one's own motivations and those of others. In its

attention to moral choices and empathy, the way it links past and present and makes history relevant to students, and its commitment to nurturing respect for democratic principles and for the rights of minorities it would be appropriate for the new course proposed by the De Rooy Committee. The Facing History and Ourselves program has been used successfully in Scandinavia and in several European countries and is adaptable for the Netherlands.

Holocaust education and education in ethics and civics is not only a project for the schools. It is the mandate of a democratic society that celebrates its commitment to freedom and tolerance to actively nurture these values throughout its culture.

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THE RESPONSIBILITY OF

KNOWLEDGE:

Developing Holocaust Education for the Third Generation

Kelly Bunch, Matthew Canfield, and Birte Schöler

In a radio address in 1966, Theodor Adorno declared his dissatisfaction with the state of Holocaust consciousness. He claimed that ignorance of the barbarity of the Holocaust is “itself a symptom of the continuing potential for its recurrence as far as peoples’ conscious and unconscious is concerned” (Adorno, *Education After Auschwitz*).

He envisioned education as the institution that bears greatest responsibility for instilling values in the masses to equip them with agency to oppose barbarism. Adorno not only wished to educate children, but also hoped for “general enlightenment that provides an intellectual, cultural, and social climate in which a recurrence would no longer be possible.” Forty years later, Holocaust education remains essential not only to combat another genocide, but also to provide students with a consciousness of human rights.

The controversial link between the Holocaust and contemporary issues became clear during the Kosovo crisis when foreign minister Joschka Fischer compared the situation in the former Yugoslavia to “Auschwitz,” and justified NATO’s intervention. Fischer brought the Holocaust back into the political dialogue. For the first time, the Holocaust was openly discussed in relative terms, creating space within the public sphere to debate the political aspects of this memory and the related moral taboos. Claudia Lohrenscheid, the director of Human Rights education at the German Institute of Human Rights, notes that Holocaust education ultimately has two goals. To some, they appear to conflict. First, the goal of Holocaust education is to instruct the public “never to forget.” Second, the education is necessary to “develop competencies so that it never happens again.” Thus, Holocaust education, she believes, can be a tool for teaching democracy. As for the status quo, however, she laments that currently, Holocaust education only “imbues a sense of history, while human rights education gives the power to act.” Ideally, the two should not be mutually exclusive.

German Holocaust education is in a state of constant evolution. As survivors die and the third generation slowly drifts out of the Holocaust’s shadow, education must be buttressed with an understanding of the applicable lessons and principles that derived from the Holocaust.

The German word for education, “bildung,” is a concept or theory of development that empowers youth with all the characteristics necessary to succeed in life. Traditionally linked to the concept of emancipation, it is assumed that with knowledge comes freedom. The responsibility that the Holocaust instills is far greater than simply learning the facts. The current state of immigration has changed the social landscape of Germany, requiring an education that gives students the requisite tools to live in a pluralistic society complicated by a history of discrimination. In this context it is crucial to evaluate Holocaust education as well as the taboos that have been created in the evolution of

German memory. Ultimately, Holocaust education faces the dual challenge of embedding history within the collective memory, while teaching the mechanisms that brought about monstrous acts. Holocaust education must avoid desensitization and find ways to empower youth with the tools of human rights.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION TODAY Immediately after the Second World War, the Allies imposed a new educational program aimed at creating and sustaining a democratic Germany. The post-war “denazification” program presented gruesome pictures and captions to combat the feigned ignorance of the German population. This program, however, only abetted a culture of silence that was not broken in West Germany until the 1960’s. In the East, an emphasis on creating a Socialist government and emphasizing the perception of Communism under siege, pushed the history of the

Holocaust to the side. In 1968, a clash broke out in West Germany, when students, frustrated by their relatives’ inability to talk about World War II, demanded dialogue with their parents about what had happened during the War and their participation in the Holocaust.

Although the ’68 movement was large in size, it was only successful within the realm of the private sphere. However, it laid the groundwork for future public discussion. It was not until “Holocaust,” an American TV mini-series premiered in 1979, that the history of the Holocaust fully entered the public sphere. It was only at that moment, when re-configuring the collective memory and acknowledging this dark time in history, that Holocaust education began.

CHALLENGES: HOLOCAUST AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

The connection between the Holocaust and human rights presents a dilemma in the classroom. Assuming that Holocaust education may serve as a platform to demonstrate the necessity for individual decision-making and thus “teach democracy”, one has to draw connections with great care. “A concentration camp is not the right place for teaching democracy in my eyes,” says Matthias Heyl, curator of the former concentration camp Ravensbrück, since choices were limited for both victims and perpetrators. Heyl would rather teach the importance of individual decision-making in sites where they might have a positive influence, in order to encourage students to engage in democracy.

The danger of counterproductive effects is inherent in each connection and demands particular sensitivity on the part of educators. Simplified comparisons bear the risk of communicating the wrong message. For example, Matthias Heyl sometimes hears, “Back then it was the Jews, now it is the refugees,” – a statement made with the intention of raising awareness among pupils concerning current problems of discrimination. “But by telling immigrants that they are the Jews of today,” he remarks, “you basically tell them Auschwitz is their future.” Confronting students with such visions of the future strains them, especially during a time when Germany is struggling to accept itself as an immigration country.

At the Wannsee Conference Center, Elke Gryglewski recognized similar pedagogical mistakes. Her experience shows another danger: when teachers compare the situation of immigrants today with that of the Jews under the Nürnberg laws, students often react dismissively. It is extremely difficult for teachers to teach the Holocaust without implanting feelings of guilt. While still making them aware of actual problems such as xenophobia and racism, “students feel as if they are responsible and that learning about history carries a huge bag of morals and doctrine.”



CZECHOSŁOWACJA

FRANCJA

JUGOSŁAWIA

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There is not a single project in German schools that addresses the perpetrators' point of view, even though children are extremely interested in the motivation of perpetrators. Dealing with these issues is crucial to understanding the mechanisms behind the genocide that are difficult to grasp for the third generation. There is a fine line between imbuing students with the facts of history, self-consciousness, and the ability to be critical of one's milieu without creating a feeling of guilt and defensiveness. Germany needs to develop new ways of teaching and understanding the Holocaust now that the generation of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders is passing away and new challenges, such as immigration, confront German society.

PRAGMATIC OBSTACLES In addition to conceptual obstacles surrounding Holocaust education, pragmatic issues also need to be considered. The real problem that emerges is the inconsistency of Holocaust education for teachers and students. This can be seen in the divisive structure of German education, the absence of a standardized or specific Holocaust education requirement, regional differences in the understanding of German history, and the absence of educational training for teachers to teach the Holocaust. Even beyond these obstacles of inconsistencies, cultural divisions exist in the classroom that prompt uneasiness surrounding the implications of the Holocaust and its impact on the understanding of current national attitudes.

While there are several programs dedicated to Holocaust education, many teachers are not trained or equipped to deal with the subject. Holocaust education is not a required field of study for prospective teachers, nor can teachers simply rely on a set curriculum or textbooks. Claudia Lohrensheit lamented: "I researched the textbooks, and I have not found enough." Yet Lohrensheit points to certain indicators that signify that teachers are in fact interested in topics of discrimination and human rights. For instance, over 30 percent of German schoolteachers are members of Amnesty International. Thus, one might conclude that while the tools and literature exist, a disconnect remains between programs developed to help teachers and the implementation of their methodology in the classroom.

An explanation for this disconnect is quite possibly linked to the structural inconsistency in the German educational system. While the majority of educators cover the Holocaust, the education is often left solely up to the responsibility of the teacher. German schools divide students according to their abilities: high achievers attend the academically oriented *Gymnasium*, while lower achievers attend vocational secondary schools *Hauptschule* and *Realschule*. The Department of Interior of Berlin published a statistic claiming that only four percent of those who committed rightist crimes went to *Gymnasium* (high school), while sixty percent attended *Hauptschule*. It is due to a deeper social structure that students from *Hauptschule* are left unemployed, less educated, and, ultimately, more

susceptible to propaganda. With this division of schools, it would be hard to regulate any sort of standard Holocaust education even if one did exist. In addition, German students are taught to learn in homogenous groups.

Many experts in this field address the difference between the way Holocaust education is implemented in the East and West. Andrej Goetze noted different preconditions because the teachers and students might relate to the current Federal Republic differently. Many East Germans feel like three-time victims: first because of World War II; second, as the victims of the GDR; and third, as victims of German reunification. The idea that the Nazis were only in Western Germany is a prevalent theme in Holocaust education in the East, along with the emphasis on the political victims in the war. In contrast, West Germans learned less about the political victims and more about the Jewish victims, causing a hypersensitivity and sacredness about the Holocaust. Many teachers in East Germany still refer to the "Jewish Problem" in their classrooms due to their lack of exposure to more politically correct terms used by Western German educators.

Another obstacle to teaching the Holocaust is the absence of Jews and Jewish culture in German education. Since many German students may never encounter a Jewish person in their lifetime, more focus is placed on the role of Jew as victim of the Holocaust rather than as a living, vital community in present and past times.

Educators have to be very careful when teaching a multicultural classroom about the history of the Holocaust and its relevance to German society today in order not to alienate the descendants of its victims and perpetrators. Viola Georgi created a study about minorities' historical knowledge and association with the Holocaust. From this study she created a model with four different types of minority reactions. The first type of reaction strongly identifies with the victims, critically observes and relates to their own future. The second type includes those who, after having seen the concentration camps and learning the history of the Holocaust, feel closer to German culture. Often this type even goes so far as to accept "historical myths" frequently propagated by older generations who do not want to confront the responsibility of the Holocaust. The third type features minorities who reject the history of the Holocaust and of Germany and are more concerned with their own background and the histories of their native land. Finally, the fourth type consists of those who feel alienated because of their neutral background and their undefined role in society. This type is often referred to as the post-national ethnic perspective, in which they do not see the Holocaust as German Nazis killing Jews, communists, homosexuals, or Poles, but as humanity killing humanity. Most of these model identities emerge from relating and

comparing the history of the Holocaust to current German society. Her study shows that despite problems with teaching the Holocaust in diverse classrooms, various opportunities arise for minority students to connect to German history.

DEVELOPING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION FOR THE FUTURE

Holocaust education remains inconsistent in Germany. Several methods exist to ease the burden on teachers as well as help avoid conceptual problems.

The collage method, developed by the Wannsee Conference Center, is the first solution to a problem Viola Georgi points out. She asserts that children do not enter the classroom with a tabula rasa; instead children come to the classroom with histories and biases of their own. They gain knowledge from their families and also the media, an important and powerful source. Teaching must be adjusted for each class, yet it is often difficult to determine the needs of the individual class. The Wannsee Conference uses a collage of historic events and asks students to pick one that has meaning for them and to share its significance. Students will automatically draw parallels to either their personal history or the present. Though this is often a problem for the public, students do not have the social consciousness about the taboos of society. This method not only helps teachers understand individual backgrounds, but also sensitizes the teacher to notions of guilt. It also allows them to collect information about previous exposure as well as address historical myth.

The collage method is not a teaching tool. Rather, it is a diagnostic tool for teachers, one that is particularly helpful for teachers of multi-cultural classrooms. Students are enthusiastic about sharing their own stories, and the collage method gives them an outlet to do so.

One approach that may follow the collage method is called personalization, which offers the students an opportunity to learn about the life and decisions of someone of their age or sex. Jan Krebs, director of the Anne Frank Zentrum, claims that the center is successful because "people know Anne Frank's face." The center tells the story of one person and, by revealing her life, demonstrates that individual choices or lack thereof can indeed make a difference. The method allows students to follow the story of one person, and limits the perspective of the war. The personalization method is one way of involving children within the story of the Holocaust, and often triggers their interest in the larger context. It often becomes the impetus for questions about what their role would be and forces questions about their own decisions.

The method favored in the US, called "Facing History and Ourselves," was developed in Boston as a method of personalization to use in the classroom. Researcher Dr. Viola Georgi states that, "as US programs usually do, 'Facing history' concentrates on the individual, by allowing people to make their very own experiences with history." This approach has now also been adapted within Germany

by the Fritz Baur Institute, called "Konfrontationen." The method focuses first on the individual and then on the larger context. It emphasizes the idea of choice among the individual and is an important form of empowerment. The question "who is responsible?" is extra sensitive and allows students to evaluate the choices that individuals make. In "Konfrontationen," small scripts are handed out to students who create a role for this character. This is clearly important as students take a new identity, it helps to avoid feelings of guilt that may lead to escapism.

The "Konfrontationen" approach is extremely important to create a direct link to the present, but often, to avoid escapism, it does not focus on the true identities of students and does not expose their own biases. Claudia Lohrenscheit favors a method developed in the United States known as Anti-Bias education. This method was adopted by South Africa to "re-educate" after the system of Apartheid (as developed through the book "Shifting Paradigms" Early Resource Learning Unit). The deconstruction of identity not only makes children aware of their own identities, but also the gray area in between. Taking the model from South Africa, which has created curriculum to come to terms with a society inhabited by both victims and perpetrators, the curriculum of anti-bias education is designed to make children aware of how they think. It is an important tool

because it utilizes methods from Facing History, such as role-playing, but also clearly involves the participant. It allows students to share their own backgrounds and makes them aware of discrimination in today's society.

Yet Matthias Heyl worries that German educators and students shy away from any form of education that makes them think too critically about their own history.

Children are not confronted with their own past – the German past, that is the history of the perpetrators. Germans have appropriated a history of the victim, or more fairly, of trying to understand the Holocaust through empathy. Instead, he advocates showing complicity in the Holocaust, the mechanisms by which ordinary people committed such atrocities. Heyl's method demonstrates an important parallel with the anti-bias approach.

"Shifting Paradigms" uses a flower diagram to pull out forms of identity, ultimately to make a child conscious of the differences that create bias. Heyl uses venn diagrams to show the different players and the complexity of acting within the Holocaust. Concentric circles show that as a bystander one might play many roles – slowly breaking down the rigid construction of victim and perpetrator. The method teaches children that their identity, their feelings, and their actions, cannot be assigned easily

to a single domain; children aren't merely white or black, Jewish or Christian, young or old. Nor were people victims or perpetrators. Even bystanders have been broken down into different categories. In these exercises, Jan Krebs points out, pupils learn something about the "process of discrimination," a key part that was missing in education.

Heyl demonstrates that this multiplicity of educational approaches makes it hard for regular teachers to teach the Holocaust effectively or to link it with human rights responsibly. Through evaluating choices and identity, and through finding the gray areas in between what seem to be opposing constructs, the connection between the past and the present can be made very organically. For if it is not, the words of Primo Levy will become a self-fulfilled prophesy, that if "the Holocaust happened so it can happen again." Perhaps an amalgamation of these teaching methods would be the most powerful program, but Viola Georgi sees another way. She argues that students will profit most if they are not taught about the Holocaust with only one focus. Instead, the Holocaust and human rights should be part of all lessons. If these different methods are all used and consider problems of simplification, guilt, and historical myth, Holocaust education can become a tool for empowerment.

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AS A BASE FOR A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE

While it is clear that the memory of the Holocaust is important in public dialogue, the connection between the past and the future is not explicit. Therefore an awareness of the Holocaust is being perpetuated to support educational

initiatives. In May 2005, the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe opened. Situated in the heart of Berlin, between the Reichstag, the Brandenburg Gate and the United States Embassy, the location provides visibility with human rights responsibly. It serves an important symbolic purpose, says Professor Sibylle Quack, the former director of the organization that built the monument. Even though the monument and the information center do not directly link current human rights and the Holocaust, its constant presence, between government institutions, tourist attractions, and residential spaces promotes "remembering the past for the future," she explains.

To promote the benefits of Holocaust education, the third generation requires a new form of education with a more explicit link. In general, as Germany evolves – as it reunites the East and West and absorbs new immigrant populations – it is important that Germany acknowledges its history and the role of democracy.

Democracy demands citizenship of its subjects. Participation and knowledge are essential. Holocaust education and human rights education play an important role in teaching citizenship and the uses of democracy. Thus, the question of integrating these two domains is pertinent to the political future of Germany and to ending discrimination.

INTERVIEWS

Friday, June 25, 2005, 11:00

ANDREJ GOETZE, museum pedagogue at the "Deutsches Historisches Museum"

Friday, June 25, 2005

DR. CLAUDIA LOHRENSCHEIT, director of human rights education at the German Institute of Human Rights

Saturday, June 26, 2005

JAN KREBS, head of the Anne Frank Zentrum Berlin e.V.

Monday, June 28, 2005

PROF. DR. SIBYLLE QUACK, founding director of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Tuesday, June 29, 2005

DR. MATTHIAS HEYL, director of pedagogical service at the memorial site of the former concentration camp Ravensbrück

Tuesday, June 19, 2005

DR. VIOLA B. GEORGI, researcher

Wednesday, June 30th, 10:00

ELKE GRYGLEWSKI, researcher at the "Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz"

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UNTANGLING EMOTIONAL HISTORY: How President Sarkozy's Failed Memory initiative Illuminates France's Continuing struggle with the Holocaust

Vera Jotanovic and Juliana Schnur

ON FEBRUARY 13, 2008 French President Nicolas Sarkozy planned to make history. Twice. By choosing to accept a long-standing invitation to the annual dinner of the Conseil Représentatif des Institutions Juives de France (CRIF), President Sarkozy became the first leader of the Fifth Republic to attend this event. His predecessors, including Presidents Jacques Chirac and Francois Mitterand, had declined the invitation while in office. To them, participation in that kind of fundraiser by elected officials constituted a breach of the secularism demanded by the government. Sarkozy, a president infinitely more vociferous about religion than his forerunners, saw no conflict of interest and alluded to such objections in his speech before the CRIF. Referring to his

recent dialogue with the Pope in Rome (for which he received a barrage of domestic criticism), Sarkozy queried, "Should it oblige the President of the Republic, if he is to be republican, to talk only about road safety, purchasing power, and planning without ever mentioning what could be seen as basics such as life, civilization, love and hope? Have we become so sectarian and blind as to ban these fundamental questions from the political arena?"¹ Such rhetoric clearly endeavored to justify his attendance at the dinner while simultaneously highlighting his ongoing struggle to balance religiosity and republicanism in office.

Accepting the CRIF's invitation, however, was not the only way Sarkozy made headlines. At the end of a lengthy speech that addressed issues including secularism, Israeli-Palestinian relations, the 2001 Durban Conference, and a host of other issues central to the French Jewish community, Sarkozy turned to Holocaust education. Branding this curriculum as the "strongest weapon against racism and anti-Semitism and the only protection against a repeat of those events," the President insisted that only by inculcating a total rejection of intolerance in the youngest students would France begin to combat hatred. For this reason,

²Speech by Nicolas Sarkozy at Annual CRIF Dinner. <http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/President-Sarkozy-s-speech-to.html?var_recherche=sarkozy%27s%20speech%20at%20crif>

³A. Vidalie. <http://www.lexpress.fr/actualite/societe/shoah-en-cm2-simone-veil-fustige-l-idee-de-sarkozy_470240.html>

⁴Interview June 28, 2008.

he announced, “I have asked the government, in particular the Minister of Education, Xavier Darcos, to see to it that every year, starting at the beginning of the 2008-2009 school year, every ten-year-old schoolchild is entrusted with the memory of one of the 11,000 French child victims of the Holocaust.”²

PRESIDENT SARKOZY’S speech was greeted with a standing ovation. Observers from the dinner noted that all but one stood to applaud Sarkozy’s support for the Jewish people, the state of Israel and his continuing commitment to Holocaust education. But that one abstention was as significant as the roomful of supporters, for it signaled the silent objection of an Auschwitz survivor, former President of the European Parliament and former Minister of Health, Simone Veil. Interviewed in the aftermath of this

declaration on the website of the French magazine *L’Express*, Ms. Veil explained that upon hearing Sarkozy’s words, “her blood turned to ice.”³ She continued, “It is unimaginable, unbearable, tragic and above all unjust. You cannot inflict this on little ones of ten years old! You cannot ask a child to identify with a dead child. The weight of this memory is too heavy to bear.” Veil, the Chairwoman of honor at the Foundation for the Memory of the Shoah and the de facto leader of the French survivor community, was not alone in condemning

Sarkozy. Despite the overwhelming commendation Sarkozy received at the dinner, polls indicated that eighty percent of French citizens opposed the initiative.

A QUESTION OF TRAUMA

A large community of psychologists condemned the program, agreeing with Veil that the memory of a dead child could have traumatic consequences. Dr. Martine Reinecke, a psychologist who specializes in death and terminal illness, elaborates on the detrimental implications of this program:

“You can’t impose the memory of another child on a child. It’s totally impossible. Why? First, it’s a sad story. You can imagine for a child how they can feel sorry and full emotion and compassion and at the same time they can imagine it’s possible again. If it belongs to the past it can exist in the present or even their future. They have this story and they can identify themselves to this child. They can imagine plenty of things like why someone hasn’t reacted enough and why people stayed silent. And we haven’t enough answers to make them feel secure enough in the present. When you read a good book with any hero you identify yourself to this person and that’s a process of growing. But if in this story the hero dies, it is difficult to build something else, like how the story follows. This is the risky part. When the protagonist dies, in this case the deported child, it can stop the living child’s own process of growing. This is the most difficult. How can you explain to the child that they can grow and be different and everything will be all right while they have this story paralleling their own life? In their own psychic growth, it is not suitable for them.”⁴

Dr. Reinecke's hesitation, though expressed from a personal standpoint, is an objection shared by many in her field. Psychologists are not alone in their beliefs that a ten-year old is simply too young to deal with genocide at such a personal and intense level. In the late 1970s and early 1980s many teachers realized that the Nazi genocide of the Jews was not being adequately addressed in the classrooms of young students. Dr. Chaim Schatzker, a professor of Education at Hebrew University, explained in his 1980 article, "The Teaching of the Holocaust: Dilemmas and Considerations," that "Careful attention should be paid to the proper age of the students and to those contents with which he can be confronted

without causing harm and without leading to a total rejection of the entire subject. The problem is how to present the truth without causing dangerous mental consequences – how to impress without traumatizing." Schatzker understood that the Holocaust, due to its violence and proximity in time and space, required much greater sensitivity than topics like the Crusades or the Spanish Inquisition. For this reason certain elements of the tragedy would need to be censored for the youngest learners. To contemporary psychologists, Sarkozy's initiative was an uncensored curriculum that could devastate the most vulnerable students. In addition, the teaching community voiced objections in unison.

NO EDUCATION MANDATE

The education sector also expressed outrage at Sarkozy's usurpation of control over the history curriculum. Marie-Cécile Maday, a history teacher at the Collège la Grange aux Belles in Paris explains, "National Education says that the freedom of the teacher is the most important point. Of course there is a national curriculum but the teacher is absolutely free to choose how to transmit the program. This license of teachers in the classroom is of prime importance in the education system in France."⁵ Since 2002, fifth graders have studied the Holocaust as a crime against humanity. Teachers were offended by Sarkozy's declaration, for neither the Ministry of Education nor a panel of teachers had been consulted beforehand. Véronique Brisson, a fifth-grade teacher at École Jeanne d'Arc Notre Dame de Chatou, echoed Maday's opinion saying, "Each teacher organizes her class with liberty, and she is required to ensure that the basic lessons are learned.

All the teachers in the schools work together to make programs and the pupils don't have to do the same thing in every class. The teachers must agree on what to do."⁶

Teachers felt that the President violated this sacrosanct notion of jurisdiction in the classroom and objected to the impulsive nature of the announcement.

The Ministry of Education produces a document called the Common Base of Knowledge and Skills, which determines the overall curriculum for mandatory education (ages 6–16). The program for each grade is established by a group of experts, presided over by a university professor or an inspector, all appointed by the Minister of Education. This group consults with teachers, parents and students before submitting the curriculum to the High Council of Education, which, along with the Minister, decides on its implementation.

It is clear from the language of the declaration ("I have asked the government") and the manner in which it was publicized that Sarkozy circumvented the Ministry's standard protocol for education reform. A genuine proposition for long-term change in the history program would require consultation with a number of parties, none of which had been approached by the President.

Though Minister Darcos established a task force to consider implementing the memory program, the committee announced on June 19, just four months after Sarkozy's speech, that classrooms would not study individual identities, but would learn about children as a collective. In considering the short life of this idea and the nature of its proposal, one wonders what Sarkozy truly intended. If the Holocaust curriculum was not his real target, what was Sarkozy's objective?

HISTORICAL SENSITIVITY VS. POLITICAL STRATEGY

Though theories about Sarkozy's motives abound, the French public comes to one striking consensus: Sarkozy has a strong tendency to manipulate emotionally sensitive topics in order to advance his political agenda. Director of the European Humanity in Action Center in Europe and former teacher Anne-Lorraine Bujon questions Sarkozy's motives: "In a way he's pushing



and pulling the French public by telling them things they're not used to hearing. Which side is he on? It's concerted political tactics. He's using gaps and identity anxieties to further his political agenda."⁷ To illustrate this idea, Bujon referenced another similar history initiative, which Sarkozy implemented on his first day in office. Just hours after his inauguration on

May 16, 2007, Sarkozy attempted to require that all high school students read a letter written by Guy Môquet, a 17-year old French 'résistant' (freedom fighter). Historians assert that Môquet was a pacifist, not an active freedom fighter, who was murdered by the Nazis in a reprisal for the death of a German soldier in a communist ambush. In the farewell letter to his parents and brother, Môquet expresses hope that he would die with courage and that his murder would serve a purpose.

Sarkozy sees Môquet as a figure of national heroism to which French youth should aspire and demanded his last words be read each year on the anniversary of his death (October 22). Surveys indicate that 30% of teachers read the letter aloud in their classrooms. Some teachers, like Maday, objected to Sarkozy's infringement on their teaching authority as they did with the memory program, and pointed to other problematic aspects of the initiative. Since World War II is taught in the spring, the letter would be introduced completely out of context for most students (during lessons about World War I

or the USSR). Compared to the memory program, however, Guy Môquet's letter received less criticism and even found support. Some teachers compared the letter to the Diary of Anne Frank, explaining that such historical objects speak to the complexities of World War II and have a framework. Unlike memory, which is subjective, these documents invite objective analysis and consideration and can be appropriate for high school students. The statistics do speak loudly, however, and the fact that a majority of the educational community has opposed his initiatives remains significant.

In referencing Guy Môquet, Bujon, Maday and others demonstrate how Sarkozy has repeatedly used World War II, especially the death of children and teenagers, in order to stir public conscience. These teachers find Sarkozy's tactic both reprehensible and manipulative, as the Holocaust in France is such a delicate and emotionally charged topic. Whether Sarkozy seeks to inspire patriotism among his youngest constituents, to strengthen his image as a "sensitive" leader or to ingratiate himself with a powerful Jewish community (a belief held widely about his CRIF speech), many believe that the President's approach borders on reckless when it comes to World War II history.

THE ROLE OF MEMORY IN A HISTORY CURRICULUM

Dr. Reinecke, Bujon and various history teachers agree that Sarkozy is trying to position himself in a contemporary context vis-à-vis the Second World War and that he uses this history to "solve his personal puzzle." But Sarkozy's frequent placement of this history in his arsenal of political weaponry begs the question: What is the purpose of World War II and Holocaust education in the classroom?

Based on the first two initiatives introduced by Sarkozy (perhaps there are more to come), World War II and the Holocaust are located on a delicate continuum between history and memory that is still being explored. Educators have not yet arrived at a consensus about whether these two ideas are inextricably linked to one another or not. Reading Guy Môquet's letter does more than provide pupils with Sarkozy's template for admirable patriotism; it allows them to fulfill the last wish of this martyr by giving meaning to his death. Each time a student recites the words, "What I want with all my heart is that my death serves some purpose,"⁸ and then proceeds to learn about the historic context in which those words were last uttered, he does more than learn, he memorializes. This mix of history and memory poses a real difficulty for teachers who want to separate the facts from the emotions. Maday explains, "History is not

memory. It is analysis in order to understand the mechanisms that lead to events. Memory is a collection of feelings and emotions and things that have been lived. It is far from reason. History is far more than memory and above all it is non-compassionate analysis, while memory is compassionate by nature.”⁹ Maday believes that Sarkozy appeals more to passion than to reason. The memory program introduced at the CRIF dinner highlights this issue. Pairing a child with a deported victim draws no distinction between the emotions of memory and the stoicism of history. As Dr. Reinecke explained, for a young child to internalize such a dark moment leaves no room for growth or analysis. The death of the “hero” is so powerful that the memorializing ultimately overwhelms the historicizing. Herein lies the continuing debate in French Holocaust education – where does history end and memorializing begin?

In 1995, when President Chirac officially acknowledged French collaboration with the Nazis in deporting Jews to their deaths, he opened the door for drastic changes in the French history curriculum. One might imagine how the Holocaust would be taught differently once a nation transforms from victim and bystander to perpetrator. In France, however,

no such official changes were made in response to this declaration. The history curriculum was updated in 2002 to include Holocaust education in the program for ten-year olds, but the teacher continues to retain complete authority over which content she uses and how. Anne du Monteil, the mother of a ten-year-old child in the French school system, explains, “Teachers are very special in France. Those who decide to teach enter the profession so that they can do whatever they want. They have complete control.”¹⁰ Du Monteil mentioned that her ten-year old daughter, Toscán, has not visited Le Mont Valérien resistance memorial while her neighbor’s child has. Thus, while some teachers choose to incorporate letters, videos and memorials in their curricula, and perhaps even address France’s accountability, others may decide to limit their discussions to history textbooks that rely on candid statistics.

Ultimately, the structure of the French education system seems to prevent a national consensus on how best to distinguish between memory and history. Because the classroom is such a sensitive domain for educators, students will have vastly different experiences depending on their school or teacher. How history and memory are taught will therefore

depend upon the way that the institution (in the case of Véronique Brisson’s school) or the educator (in the case of Marie-Cécile Maday’s school) interprets the purpose of memory in the curriculum. History is a

national requirement according to the Ministry of Education; memory, however, is not. When asked about the function of taught memory in the curriculum, university student Alix Zuinghedau responded:

“The most important thing is not to commemorate for the sake of commemorating. You always have to ask yourself, ‘Why am I commemorating?’ Otherwise you sacralize the topic and you only commemorate in order to replicate an action. Though commemorating can be very dangerous, it is also necessary. For this reason we must find the proper equilibrium between experts who research and teachers who disseminate information.”¹¹

Choosing whether or not to memorialize the Holocaust is a personal choice for teachers, and Zuinghedau underscores the variety of approaches chosen by educators. Though French educators collectively recognize the importance of World War II and the Holocaust in history, many have other priorities when it comes to commemoration. French teachers, parents and students from a variety of backgrounds have expressed disappointment with the lack of diversity in genocide education. They ask why the Algerian War, and the Rwandan and Armenian genocides receive no attention, while the Holocaust is

taught three times at ages 10, 15 and 17. The complexity of memorializing in the school is augmented by its emotional, and thus personal nature.

Sarkozy's memory initiative struck more than one sensitive nerve in the public. Preliminary analysis demonstrated that this hasty initiative was threatening to teachers who consider their classrooms as sacred territory and to psychologists who worry about the traumatic potential of the Holocaust on young children. For the nation as a whole, however, this initiative served as a subtle, yet inescapable reminder that France has yet to

come to terms with its own role in the Holocaust. **There is no better testimony to a country's perception of history than the curriculum it impresses upon its most malleable minds. The continuing disparity in the French Holocaust program is evidence of a country that remains divided on the issue of just how much of its history it chooses to remember.**

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PATRICK VEIL, Historian, Director of CEPIC at the Sorbonne (June 25).

JOAN RINGELHEIM, Consultant, USHMM (June 27)

ANASTASIA CHELINI, Student at Institut Catholique de Paris (June 27).

SANDRA SOSCERIA KATZ, BA Princeton University (June 27).

MARTIN FAVREAU, Student at Paris 8 Vincennes (June 27).

SAMIRA ZAID, Student at University of Cergy Pontoise (June 27).

ANNE DU MONTEIL, Mother of ten-year old child (June 27).

GILLES DU MONTEIL, Father of ten-year old child (June 27).

TOSCÂN DU MONTEIL, ten-year old French student (June 27).

DR. MARTINE REINECKE, Psychologist (June 28).

ISABELLE BERGER, History teacher at École Saint Dominique in Neuilly (July 29).

TOUFIK EL-OUARDANI, MA University Paris 12 (June 29).

MARY-CÉCILE MADAY, History Teacher at Collège la Grange aux Belles (June 29).

ANNE-LORRAINE BUJON, Director, European Center Humanity in Action (June 30).

ALIX ZUINGHEDAU, HIA Senior Fellow (July 1).

STÉPHANIE GRUET, Doctoral Candidate at University of Poitiers (July 1).

VÉRONIQUE BRISSON, Teacher at École Jeanne d'Arc Notre Dame du Chatou (July 1).



HEROISM IN DANISH CULTURE AND SELF-UNDERSTANDING:

THE PROBLEMS OF WRITING THE RESCUE *Julia Zarankin and Saskia Hansen* The Danish Rescue of the Jews in 1943 is viewed as an act of indisputable heroism by many nations, among them Israel and the United States. After three years of limited interference with Danish internal politics, Hitler issued an order to make Denmark *Judenrein* in the fall of 1943. The roundup of the Jews was to take place on Rosh Hashanah, on October 1 and 2, 1943. G.F. Duckwitz leaked this information to Hans Hedtoft and H.C. Hansen, two Danish politicians who subsequently warned the Jewish community of the impending danger prior to the scheduled roundup. During the next month, almost all of the Jews were transported to safety across the sound to Sweden. These transports depended primarily on the unconditional help of Danish civilians, who were often complete strangers.

Literature often reflects upon historical events and how they shape national consciousness. What is particularly curious about Denmark is that although WWII and the resistance frequently appear in novels, the rescue of the Jews is virtually absent from creative literature. Not a single contemporary Danish novel is set against the events of the rescue. Perhaps the lack of creative response to the rescue of the Danish Jews in 1943 is symptomatic of Danish mentality, and of the unease with which Danes are faced when discussing what the rest of the world would call heroism.

Although historical accounts of the rescue exist in both America and in Denmark, it is primarily in the US that the rescue is used as a point of departure for fictional works, including children's literature. This dichotomy not only illustrates differences in evaluating the rescue, but also sheds light on diverging cultural conceptions of heroism.

THE RESCUE AS AN EVENT One hypothesis as to

why the rescue has yielded little creative literature lies in the fact that the Danes do not consider the rescue as an outstanding or particularly heroic event in their history. Using the rescue as raw material for fiction would force the author to bring out both positive and negative aspects of Denmark's WWII record, which is far from glorious.

Ulf Haxen, the Orientalia and Judaica librarian, commented on the lack of creative literature pertaining to the Danish Rescue: "Danish shyness of exposing themselves...A Danish trait that they don't want to expose themselves." A simple question yielded an anthropological answer. Perhaps unknowingly, Haxen's answer provided a short analysis of Danish mentality. The question we are pursuing—why no fiction has been written—will lead us to a discussion of Danish mentality at large through an analysis of contemporary Danish views on heroism.

When the German forces marched into Denmark on April 9, 1940, they were met with minimal resistance, and managed to occupy their northern neighbor within few hours. The official policy advocated resigning and simply hoping for the best by letting the Germans peacefully occupy Denmark. Arguably, this decision saved many lives, but nevertheless, Denmark's honor was tarnished on an international scale. From this point in time, Denmark's position in international eyes was ambiguous: since Denmark never actively opposed or rebelled against the Germans prior to 1943, their governmental policies were perceived as collaborative. Until August 29, 1943 Denmark never clearly defined its stance to the international community.

At the outset of the war, the Danish population was hardly touched by the war; other than rations on certain commodities such as

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cigarettes and coffee, little changed in day-to-day life. According to Axel Ljungquist, a member of the Danish Holger Danske resistance group, before August 29, 1943, the resistance could not rely on help from the general public. Moreover, many Danes were quite happy about the German occupation because they were able to profit from the rising wartime agricultural prices, while things were still peaceful: "A large part of the population didn't care about the occupation, since they were making money...at first, the workers were even against the saboteurs." This collaborative tendency made the popularity of a resistance movement nearly impossible in the early years of the occupation, where no decisive actions were undertaken. Seen in this light, the summer of 1943 marked a major breakthrough in Danish attitudes towards the occupying forces. The Germans began imposing and dictating policies, including capital punishment, which resulted in the resignation of the Danish government. This instilled a feeling of wanting to combat the rising terror all over Europe, and above all, in the words of Ljungquist, of "wanting to fight against the Germans." Finally, the prosecution of the Jews was the last straw for the Danes and ushered in a popular movement to do their utmost to help the Jews. By helping them, not only were the Danes saving their fellow citizens, but they were also, in a sense, helping their enemy's enemy: this created a double bond between the Danish Jews and the Danish rescuers. However, Danes have a hard time perceiving the rescue as a heroic act because the occupying Germans might have closed their eyes, or at least momentarily shifted their gaze, from the rescue

Danes have a hard time perceiving the rescue as a heroic act because the occupying Germans might have closed their eyes, or at least momentarily shifted their gaze, from the rescue operation.

operation. It does seem unbelievable that boats could have departed from the Copenhagen harbor without being stopped, with German guards ever so close. More incredible still is the fact that the Germans docked all of their patrol boats just a few days prior to the scheduled roundup. Not only did the Germans close an eye, but some fishermen transporting Jews across the sound to Sweden charged exorbitant sums of money for the rescue operation. However, despite these critical analyses some indisputably extraordinary events did transpire. Besides 7200 saved Jewish lives, the particularly outstanding aspect of the rescue lies in the way the Jews were welcomed back to Denmark. Norway had confiscated all Jewish property and auctioned away Jewish possessions. Denmark chose to keep businesses and bank accounts intact, maintain property and return almost everything to the Jews upon their arrival in 1945. As former chief rabbi Bent Melchior states, the Copenhagen municipality "even paid the rent in full for the temporarily exiled Jews." These elements, unique in Europe during WWII, are what constitute a heroic portrait of Denmark in American eyes. In Denmark however, those directly implicated in the events, and those reflecting upon them from a contemporary vantage point, tend to speak of decency rather than heroism. Per Nytrup, a senior lecturer in history, simply believes that the Danes were "helping people who were in trouble", in other words, helping their fellow Danes. **DANISH VALUES AND MENTALITY** The international community has chosen to label the events of October 1943 as heroic, whereas Danes themselves use more moderate language

When Americans refer to the rescue as “heroic,” the Danes merely shrug and say that it just “needed to be done.”

to describe rescue. From an American standpoint, Danes seem self-critical and tend to downplay the significance of their actions during the rescue. However, a Danish perspective reveals that their inability to acknowledge outstanding or heroic events is based on internal mechanisms such as language, the laws of Jante and the welfare state’s ideology of equality. When faced with the term “heroism,” the Danish language itself presents an obstacle. Language has an effect on one’s perception of the world, and offers an indispensable commentary on the people who speak it. Journalist Bjørn Bredal believes that the Danish language treats pathos ironically and sees a “kind of understatement in Danish ways of expressing themselves...it has to do with culture, history and language.” Danish is a language firmly rooted in the concrete, the practical, and uses abstractions and superlatives sparingly. Describing the rescue events of 1943 as “small acts of decency” rather than “heroic” or “extraordinary” presents less of a cultural dilemma for Danes. When Americans refer to the rescue as “heroic,” the Danes merely shrug and say that it just “needed to be done.” History has taught the Danes to downplay heroism, since, according to Bredal, “[Danish] history is the story of being once important, and now being very small.” Denmark has now chosen to make an ideal of its small size, in which heroism - as a linguistic or cultural concept - has no place. Ulf Haxen draws a link between this historical background and the development of what he coins a “merchant mentality”, which focuses primarily on what benefits Denmark in a pragmatic sense. In other words, Danish mentality urges them to avoid extremes at all costs in favor of a safer middle ground. Haxen’s opinion recalls Grundtvig’s Danish maxim, “Ved jorden at blive, det tjener os bedst”

(remaining on the ground will do us best) as well as the Jante Law. Danish distaste for “heroism” is partially rooted in the Jante Law – a code of conduct specific to Denmark. Though the Jante law does not explain Danish mentality at large, it nevertheless elucidates various patterns of behavior. The Jante law was first introduced in Aksel Sandemose’s 1933 novel *A Fugitive Crosses his Tracks*. Composed of commandments, the first one states: “Don’t think that you are anything” and the rest follow in the same vein. Of course, the law does not exist as such, but once internalized, it fosters an additional sense of equality among Danes in all spheres of society, in the sense that no one should stand out. Although the application of the Jante law strives to consider all people as equals, the law inadvertently ends up leveling the people. This pattern can be detected in various societal institutions, including education. Bredal pushed the discussion of leveling even further by referring to Danish culture as “the culture of consensus” since “Danes don’t like conflicts.” Such thinking extends to the realm of democracy. Contrary to the American vision of democracy as a way of disagreeing, Danes see it as a means of agreeing, and furthermore, a way of adopting the same views. “If they [the Danes] are not convinced at the end, then something is wrong with them,” says Bredal of Danish debate strategy. A look at the Danish education system reveals how ideals of equality and similarity among students foster an atmosphere in which outstanding behavior and heroism have little place.

WHEN EQUALITY AND THE JANTE LAW ENTER THE CLASSROOM How do Danish children develop into adults with a deep-seeded respect for equality and an equally deep aversion to heroism? By focusing on equality, heroism is

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inherently left out, partly because it would breed a certain hierarchy, which the education system deliberately strives to combat. "In the educational system one has a deep day-to-day aversion to hierarchy, to displaying differences. It all has to be *ligheds-hygge*, [equality-coziness]," says social anthropologist Anne Knudsen in a Politiken interview (June 24, 1997). She continues: "Teachers want to create equality by not drawing attention to differences between students." By erasing differences one is neither aware of the best nor of the worst aspects of Danish society. Instead, nothing in Danish society is clear-cut and, as Bredal says, "everything happens in a vague way," ultimately in order to avoid conflicts.

One of the central problems in Danish schools today, according to Per Nytrup, is that they are geared towards helping the weaker students and end up focusing on the lowest common denominator. This admirable desire to help the weak at all costs is now becoming a problem since it inhibits the more intelligent students from developing further skills. As a result of the infamous Jante law "Don't think you are anything," Nytrup feels that Danish students "always have to lower down expectations of themselves." The Jante law also breeds a dangerous blurring of the distinctions between equality and similarity. Although the Danish welfare state proclaims the equality of its individuals, it also assumes homogeneity among its equal individuals. How could heroism ever have a place in a culture where all strive to be not only equal, but also similar?

Teaching the rescue presents a problem in Danish schools. Per Nytrup explains: "When I team-taught a history course on the Holocaust with an American teacher, I planned to devote 5-10 minutes to the story of the Danish Rescue. He wanted to discuss it for two hours."



*in Sweden glossing over Holocaust history
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that the Holocaust actually took place,
the remaining third are in doubt”*

This reinforces the hypothesis that to an American, the rescue plays a much greater part than to a Dane. Nytrup's experiences teaching the rescue to future history teachers proves how selective Danish history teaching has become: the teachers-to-be knew absolutely nothing of the rescue. Here we are faced with a problem analogous to the question of creative literature. Whether it is because the Danes downplay WWII along with the problematic questions it raises with regard to honor and collaboration or, on a slightly more positive note, because they are uncomfortable with the notion of heroism, the problem of ignorance of WWII remains. Former chief rabbi Bent Melchior addresses this lack of knowledge by saying that “it is ok for young people not to know of the rescue, although that might seem strange [to the outside world] but what bothers me is that they don't know what Nazism means.” Both Axel Ljungquist and Bent Melchior, who visit schools to educate students about the resistance, attribute this staggering ignorance to the way history is taught today. Would the quest for general consensus make it too difficult to present the multiple facets of the Danish involvement in WWII? The easy solution is to simply gloss over it entirely. Unfortunately, in Sweden glossing over Holocaust history has led to frightening statistics where only “66% of 12-18 year olds are convinced that the Holocaust actually took place, the remaining third are in doubt” (*Politiken*, June 14, 1997). **CONCLUSION**

Although there is no single answer to the initial question of why no creative literature has been written on the rescue, and why Danes today seem to view the rescue with slight indifference, many factors help us make sense of the landscape. Perhaps neither Jews nor rescuers have used the rescue as raw material for creative work because they fear not only dishonoring those who died during the Holocaust, but also the resistance fighters who died.

However, this does not explain why the event remains neglected in literature to this day. It is now difficult to write of or teach WWII history because one is faced with Denmark's blurred role, where collaboration went hand in hand with resistance. Due to this ambiguity, the focus on heroism feels almost impossible in Danish eyes. Such a focus would imply acknowledging the darker issues as well, whereas ignoring it and brushing it aside leaves us in a less problematic middle-ground arena.

It remains a mystery why the Danish rescue has offered contemporary novelists little creative inspiration, and we are left only to speculate. Perhaps writing about the rescue would present a challenge to the Danes by forcing them to re-think and re-examine their conception of heroism as well as come to terms with the darker side of Denmark's WWII record. Beyond that, it would also force them to look critically at themselves, and to delve deeper into what lies behind the self-image of which Danes are so proud. Once again, we are left with a situation where Denmark has experienced events which, in light of the Holocaust, the rest of the world considers heroic, and which the Danes simply shrug off as decent. Writing of it would imply leaving behind traditionally Danish notions of modesty, and approaching the American notion of heroism. Could the Danes ever be ready for this radical leap? This would doubtfully occur since we are confronted with two different cultural perceptions of heroism, within fundamentally different societal contexts. Where the American one tends more easily towards extremes, the Danish one, to a larger extent, abides by the age old saying “the higher you fly, the farther you fall” and leans toward a safer middle-ground.

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BREDAL, BJØRN: Editor at *Politiken*.

HAXEN, ULF: Librarian at the Oriental and Judaica Collection, Royal Library in Copenhagen.

LEHMAN, MARIANNE: Ministry of Education.

LJUNGQUIST, AXEL AND KIRSTEN: Former members of the Holger Danske, Danish resistance group.

MELCHIOR, BENT: Chief Rabbi Emeritus.

METZ, GEORG: Senior Editor of Information.

PER NYTRUP: Senior Lecturer in History and Political Science, College of Education in Aalborg; former employee at the Danish Resistance Museum.

A FOUNDING MYTH FOR THE NETHERLANDS:

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND THE VICTIMIZATION OF DUTCH JEWS

Matthijs Kronemeijer and Darren Teshima

Since the end of the Second World War, there has been a tendency in Dutch society to characterize the Netherlands' role in the war in a positive and heroic light. Individual stories of resistance against the Nazi regime and efforts to hide Dutch Jews have been documented and celebrated. As Frank Bovenkerk noted, "Long after the end of the Second World War and the German occupation, the Dutch were still congratulating themselves on their heroic stance regarding the persecution of their Jewish countrymen" (Bovenkerk, 1999).



This positive image of the Netherlands' role in the Second World War and its opposition to the evil of the Nazi persecution of the Jews has become a founding myth for the Dutch nation. According to this myth, Dutch society was united in its resistance to anti-Jewish actions and in its collective opposition to German occupying forces. The myth further propagates the idea that Dutch society as a whole – and not Dutch Jews alone – was victimized by the Nazi regime. Since the end of the Second World War, Dutch society has been viewed largely as a collective body with a singular national history, in which collective resistance to the Holocaust is central. However, Jewish victimization has been denied a distinct place in this founding myth. This article explores the development of the founding myth and examines its consequences for Dutch society. Specifically, the article focuses on the way Jewish victimization has been constructed and perpetuated by the national myth.

The memory of the Second World War serves as a unifying memory that creates a sense of solidarity and national identity in the Netherlands. As a myth, a national memory of

past events takes on a life of its own, separate and distinct from the historical context in which the events took place. In addition, the myth is used to justify present social conditions and affects public consciousness on various levels. The founding myth about the Second World War in the Netherlands states that all of Dutch society was united against the evil of the Nazi regime and Dutch society as a whole suffered from this evil. Its aim to create national unity in the aftermath of the war has been of central importance, even at the expense of historical accuracy.

The founding myth of the Second World War in the Netherlands did not develop immediately after the end of the war. In the aftermath of the war, the Netherlands, like the other European countries, faced the difficult task of rebuilding a society destroyed by war. In addition to rebuilding society according to the strict ideological and religious divides that characterized the Dutch "pillarized" society, the Netherlands also had to deal with two colonial

wars in Indonesia. At the time, remembering or memorializing the war and the experiences of the Dutch Jews was not a priority. Although literary and historical narratives from concentration camp survivors received attention and the prosecution of war criminals was publicized, society tended not to focus on the experience of the war.

As Dutch society attempted to move beyond the destruction of the war, Holocaust survivors attempted to rebuild their lives. For many individuals and the nation as a whole, the best way to move forward was to suppress their terrible memories and focus on the present. As one psychotrauma expert has noted, “The victim and his immediate social environment have a common interest in suppressing the threatening memories of the war and the more recent feelings of despair and confusion. In this way a ‘conspiracy of silence’ develops” (Begemann, 1985, quoted in De Haan, 1998). Frieda Menco, a survivor of Auschwitz, describes how the experience of the Holocaust was not discussed in her family even though her husband was also a survivor of Auschwitz. In her family, it was not a subject that was spoken about; rather, there was “deafening silence” (Menco, 1997). In an interview, Bill Minco, a Jewish resistance fighter and Auschwitz survivor, stated that after the war, Jews and others were too busy trying to get their lives back in order to focus on what they had endured. He also suggested that, at the official level, the “conspiracy of silence” was maintained because many of the same Dutch officials who were in office before the war returned to their positions and did not want to look to the past for fear that what they might find would damage their public image.

“The victim and his immediate social environment have a common interest in suppressing the threatening memories of the war and the more recent feelings of despair and confusion. In this way a ‘conspiracy of silence’ develops”

MYTHOLOGIZING RESISTANCE

The “conspiracy of silence” after the end of the war saw the formation of views that would later become central to the founding myth. Chief among these views was the belief that many Dutch citizens risked their lives in the resistance movement against the Nazi regime. Many stories of heroism during the war emerged and these examples helped shape what Dienke Hondius has coined “the resistance norm” (Hondius, 2000), which effectively created a standard for evaluating war-time conduct in terms of “goodness” and “wrongness.” Although some Dutch individuals were singled out as wrongdoers and condemned by society, they were viewed as exceptions to the general standard of resistance that placed the Netherlands as a nation on the right side of the war, fighting for the good

of all its citizens. Acts of individual heroism and resistance were not only celebrated, but also appeared to emblemize the Dutch nation as a whole. The notion of collective resistance has become a cornerstone of the founding myth.

Accepting the idea that Dutch society as a whole was on the right side of the war and that solidarity with the Jews was the norm rather than the exception only compounded the silence surrounding the Jews’ experiences. Not only did Dutch Jews return home to a nation in the process of attempting to rebuild itself, they also returned home to an unwelcoming and unsympathetic Dutch society. Supposedly so helpful to its Jewish countrymen in the face of Nazi persecution, Dutch society now expected gratitude from Jews for the assistance they received during the war. Furthermore, Dutch society suppressed Jews from publically voicing attempts to receive special treatment as victims. In July of 1945, the resistance magazine “De Patriot” stressed the proper role of Jews in post-war Dutch society: “Now is the time for Jews to remind themselves all the time that they have to be thankful. And they have to show their gratitude first of all by making up what has to be made up to those who have become victims on behalf of Jews. They may thank God that they came out alive. It is also possible to lose sympathy... They are certainly not the only ones who had a bad time and who suffered” (*qtd. in Hondius, 2000*).

This post-war sentiment certainly differs from what one would expect from a supposedly heroic and good Dutch society. Instead, post-war attitudes foreground and celebrate the non-Jewish members of Dutch society. Jews are not considered as specific victims with unique experiences, but rather as people whose survival has been contingent upon Dutch goodness. According to Hondius, the belief that Jews owed their existence to the heroism of their non-Jewish Dutchmen and that these Dutch knew what was best for the Jews eventually led to a denial of Jewish identity and community within post-war Dutch society.

The 1960s marked a turning point in attitudes toward the study of the Holocaust. At this time, the general public began to focus its attention on the fate of the Jews. The Holocaust became viewed as a unique experience that required specific scholarly attention. More than simply becoming a subject of academic interest, it became an almost metaphysical or sacred entity, existing beyond any historical framework. Interest in the Holocaust as a historical event for study and scrutiny was fostered by a number of factors. First, in 1961, the trial of Adolf Eichmann sparked public interest. Also, the societal factors that had earlier created this barrier of silence began to diminish. As a nation, the Netherlands was moving along with rebuilding itself and coming to terms with the loss of Indonesia. Greater numbers of survivors also began to give their testimonies about their experiences to an increasingly interested public audience.

It is plausible to trace a basic dichotomy in Dutch memory of the Holocaust back to the works of two Dutch-Jewish historians, Jacques Presser (1899-1970) and Loe de Jong (1914-2005). De Jong claimed that the war and, by consequence, the Holocaust, was the outcome of a German (or Fascist) struggle

against the rest of Europe. De Jong's broad view of the resistance gave the Dutch a way to think of themselves as "good guys" fighting against the German "bad guys." Presser, on the other hand, considered the Holocaust as a human tragedy that would likely seriously challenge any faith in humanity, and that he had to describe as well as he could. He also raised the issue of Dutch complicity in discrimination and persecution.

Although both scholarly and public interest in the Holocaust exposed less than favorable facts about the Dutch involvement in the war to the image of a collective resistance-oriented nation, the founding myth of the Dutch as do-gooders continued to influence Dutch society. In an interview, Peter van Rooden went so far as to state that the remembrance of the Second World War is the first Dutch national memory.

The founding myth justified an equal treatment policy that had been required during pillarization and had the same effect of denying the unique suffering of the Dutch Jewish community. According to Ido de Haan, this resulted in "hardly any leeway for remembering the persecution of the Jews...The persecution as part of the arbitrariness

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of the past, and one of the main factors to legitimate the new system of social rights was that it did not distinguish between groups of citizens" (De Haan, 1998). The end of the pillar system did not bring about a change in the treatment of Jews as a distinct group of war victims. Instead, the desire to construct the Second World War as a national memory and unify Dutch society supported the notion that wartime Dutch society was united in the fight against Nazism and that all Dutch citizens, including, but not limited to Dutch Jews, were victims of the war.

THE MYTH OF COLLECTIVE SUFFERING

The construction of the Second World War as a national memory marks the second phase in the development of the founding myth. According to this part of the myth, all Dutch citizens, Jews and non-Jews, were victims of the national trauma that was the Holocaust. Even after the wall of silence surrounding the fate of the Dutch Jews came down, the construction of the Holocaust as a national trauma, or psychiatric experience, allowed for the possibility that all Dutch citizens could be united in their claims of victimization. As Ido de Haan writes, "while the vocabulary

of psychiatry initially functioned as a medium for the public recognition of the persecution, it gradually became a medium to deprive Jewish victims of the attributes of victimhood. As a result of the dominance of the psychiatric vocabulary, the persecution became a national trauma anyone could suffer from" (De Haan, 1998).

By converting the Holocaust into a national trauma, the founding myth erased differences between victims and their victimization. The language of national trauma only reinforced the myth that all members of Dutch society were victims of the Nazi occupation and therefore could not have played a role in the persecution of the Jews. Not only is this notion historically inaccurate, it also relativizes the suffering of Jews and the Jewish community. As a community, Dutch Jewry suffered an incomparable loss to the loss of the rest of Dutch society. Seventy-five percent of the Dutch Jewish population was murdered during the war (Bovenkerk, 1999).

However, the most offensive consequence of this myth of collective suffering is that it obscures the

fact that Dutch society was hardly innocent in its role in the persecution of the Jews. Although the myth speaks about heroism and resistance, in truth, only a small percentage of the Dutch population actually participated in the resistance movement while the majority of the population stood by and did nothing. By claiming that the persecution of the Jews was a national trauma suffered by all of Dutch society, the myth allows for the possibility of labeling Dutch perpetrators and bystanders as “victims” along with Dutch Jews. De Haan correctly points out that the “very same Dutch society that is said to have suffered so much from the persecution of the Jews was also the context for its effective execution” (De Haan, 1998). In this way, the founding myth dishonors the memory of Jewish suffering and also denies the historical reality of Dutch participation in causing this suffering.

CORRECTING THE MYTH AND THE DANGERS OF RE-VICTIMIZING DUTCH JEWS

Since the 1980s, there has been a trend to confront the historical inaccuracies of the founding myth. David Barnouw of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation stated in an interview that Dutch society is now in a period of feeling guilty about its role in the persecution of the Jews, as historical facts break through the façade of the founding myth. The process of demystification, however, has been slow and impact of the founding myth is still evident in Dutch society. Bill Minco stated that it is still somewhat uncomfortable in Dutch society

to speak about and come to terms with the fact that some of the Dutch helped carry out the persecution of the Jews in the Netherlands. “The Dutch did not hide the Jews,” Minco said, “but they are now hiding the past” (Minco Interview, 2000).

The trend of demystification has led to an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of the Jewish experience as victims of the Holocaust, as the recent settlement of reparation payments demonstrates. However, the recognition of Jewish victimization has the possible negative effect of once again victimizing Jews. If Jews are seen primarily as victims, there is the danger that they will not be seen as individuals, but rather reduced to a generalized conception of victimhood. Feelings of guilt about the past may lead some non-Jewish Dutch to want to acknowledge the victimization of Jews at the hands of Dutch society, but it may also lead others to once again construct the social role for Jews instead of respecting their individuality and agency. In this way, Dutch society may again patronize Jews, as it did in the decades following the war. Bill Minco stated that he has often felt this patronizing view that sees him particularly as a victim. For him, this characterization is a form of “positive anti-Semitism.” The legacy of the founding myth, therefore, could be that, in an attempt to demystify the past and come to terms with the Dutch role in the persecution of the Jews, Dutch society has actually managed to re-victimize Jews, by characterizing them solely as victims.

The importance of anti-Semitism is such that a closer investigation of this new phenomenon, so-called positive anti-Semitism,

would warrant further investigation. In order to do so it is necessary to consider the varieties of meaning the word ‘victimization’ can have. In one sense, victimization can refer to the fact that a person is a victim, usually of a crime, an accident, or a natural disaster. In any case, it applies to a form of human suffering that is arbitrary; it may strike any person, without respect to personal character and position.

This matter-of-fact meaning obviously applies to the Dutch Jews: they were victims of Nazi persecution and extermination. But it can also be applied to Dutch society as a whole. Such use of the term actually happened in the decade and a half after the War. Dutch society correctly viewed itself as victims of Nazi terror. In this same period, however, the Dutch behaved badly to those Jews who returned from hiding and from the German camps, despite the fact that these people had been hit much worse during the war than the general population.

There is an interesting paradox here. There are two groups of ‘victims’, but no solidarity between them. Their respective claims of victimhood seem to mutually exclude, or at least compete with, each other.

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Victimization can also mean the process by which an individual or a group is viewed as victims by other people. The group in question can either claim this as a sort of status, or the members of this group can be forced into the role of victims regardless if they want this status or not. Both senses of the term victimization appear in Dutch national history. To apply this term may help to clarify the behavior of the Dutch toward their Jewish fellow citizens.

In the first period, from the end of the war till the 1960s onwards, the Dutch used their own national image as a victimized nation as an excuse not to give their Jews the additional support they needed to rebuild their lives. Then, from 1965 onwards, the Jewish claim to extra help was recognized, but the Dutch didn’t actually listen to what the Jews wanted or needed. Instead, they patronized the Jews and force them into the role of victims. There was no place for Jews to enter the discussion and their voices were discounted. Thus, Jews had no chance to prove the extent of Dutch collaboration with the Nazi’s or to protest against the treatment they received after the war. This position would have challenged the founding myth of united Dutch “goodness” during the war, a myth that was needed to give the country a sense of unity.

It was not until the 1980s that the surviving Jews made their voices heard. The result is well known: a huge debate, official apologies, significant reparation payments after prolonged negotiations in which the World Jewish Congress played an influential role. The outcome of the process is certainly positive, justice demands no less. Still, it might well be that the process had the negative effect to lead to a new pattern of victimization of the Jews in Dutch society, comparable to the positive anti-Semitism that Bill Minco described.

Even among Dutch people who sympathize with the Jewish cause, the process of negotiation has been shown to lead to misunderstandings about the strength and organization of the Jewish community in the Netherlands. Some people have gotten the impression that there is a strong, determined and well-articulated Jewish community in the Netherlands. As Bill Minco stated, there are only a few representatives of some organizations with strong voices, but they do not represent all the Dutch Jews. It was they who argued the cause for reparations. The most reasonable explanation for this phenomenon would be that it stems from fear. Fear for the enormity of the crimes, fear for the possible extent of the reparation claims and their practical legacy, and fear that a strong group with help from outside would use their victim status as a claim to be the moral standard of 'our' Dutch society. This is the sort of fear that fosters anti-Semitic feelings, without anything positive about it at all.

By attempting to create a story of national unity and solidarity, the national myth has ignored the crucial differences between Jews and non-Jews in their experiences of the war.

The experience of the Second World War left Dutch society searching for a national identity from which a new period in their history could begin. This identity was built upon the heroic stories of resistance in the Netherlands to the Nazi regime and the belief that Dutch society had stood by and protected its Jewish citizens. While individual acts of heroism and resistance certainly existed, the formation of a national myth focused upon these acts, and extending this heroism to describe the entire Dutch nation, obfuscated the truth of the war experience. By attempting to create a story of national unity and solidarity, the national myth has ignored the crucial differences between Jews and non-Jews in their experiences of the war. While the attempt to demystify the past is a crucial step for Dutch society in moving forward while not forgetting the past, it is also vital that Jewish survivors are not simply labeled as victims. To do so would be to expose them to the same process of identity construction that has formed the myth, where Jewish identity was constructed and therefore Jewish suffering was denied.

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INTERVIEWS

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“THE ONLY LOGIC BEHIND COMMEMORATING THE HOLOCAUST, YEAR AFTER YEAR, IS TO PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THE ETHICAL CHOICES THAT WERE MADE UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES BY ALL THE MAIN ACTORS: BY PERPETRATORS, BY COLLABORATORS, BY VICTIMS, BY RESISTANCE WORKERS, BY RESCUERS AND BY-THE LARGE MAJORITY OF-BYSTANDERS.”

- ED VAN THIJN

IDEAS

{ SIXTY-FIVE YEARS LATER }
THE MEANING OF
HUMANITY IN ACTION
Ed Van Thijn

**MY INVOLVEMENT
WITH HIA IS
INFORMED BY MY
STORY AS A CHILD.**

IT HAS BEEN DIFFICULT FOR ME TO DISCUSS MY CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

I hid from German occupiers and their Dutch collaborators, fled from one place to another, and lived at 18 different addresses. I was betrayed, arrested, I spent time in a prison cell with three adults before arriving at the camp where it all began in the summer of 1943. I remember the horrifying deportation train that I had seen with my own eyes. As a child-survivor, I was fortunate. I was rescued by a number of people: resistance workers, ordinary families, and, last but not least, by my own father, who jumped from the train, and managed to help my mother and me escape from the camp in 1943, the very day our name was on the deportation list.

This experience became my source of inspiration. It marked the beginning of my involvement in the fight against racism and discrimination and the violation of human rights and human dignity. From the beginning, I considered discrimination a universal problem, not a Jewish problem, but a matter that concerns all minority groups, worldwide. A nation's degree of civilization is measured by the way majorities treat their minorities. A decent society is a society without first- and second-class citizens, without *Übermenschen* and *Untermenschen*. This is key.

For many reasons, it has been difficult for me to discuss my childhood experiences. First of all, I was a child. How relevant is a child's memory? Second, I survived. Shouldn't I just be grateful, since so many were less fortunate? Third, I talked of facts and figures beyond human imagination. People had no idea how to respond and often preferred to change the subject. A conspiracy of silence began. We should be future

oriented, people said. Fourth, as a child survivor, I feared I was being too subjective, too emotional and that I had no right to speak out, certainly not about related, present-day issues. Yes, I could speak up once a year, on Commemoration Day, but that is it. Enough is enough. We shouldn't live in the past. Finally, people like me who are obsessed by moral issues and consider WWII as an ethical compass always see things in terms of Good or Evil. We are politically correct, and as the years passed, political correctness became a term of abuse. We became responsible for introducing taboos, preventing people from speaking, calling them racists when they just wanted to express their worries about foreigners, immigration and multicultural society. (Could this be the blackmail of history?)

The core question for me is: should the Holocaust still be seen as an ethical compass and the spiritual foundation of a contemporary democratic civilisation? Are there any lessons to be drawn from this blackest page in history? The answer is not straightforward. First of all, in order to learn, one requires an explanation; however, many authors, including Primo Levi, tell us there are no explanations: *Hier gibt es kein Warum*—here, there is no why. Second, the explanations we had been able to come up with are no longer relevant. The Holocaust is a unique phenomenon, and by unique, I mean incomparable. Each comparison with contemporary atrocities, ethnic cleansing, genocide, or what have you, is false.

Peter Hayes, the editor of the reader *Lessons and Legacy* asks valid question: "Can we afford to be empty-handed when future generations ask painful and relevant questions?" Even when the Holocaust as a conglomerate



DEN OPFERN DES KZ SACHSENHAUSEN
IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF SACHSENHAUSEN CONCENTRATION CAMP
1936-1945



THE MECHANISM OF DEHUMANISATION IS STILL AT WORK IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD TODAY

of events is incomprehensible and unique in itself, we still have a duty to unravel the clues and figure out where each of the threads stem from. The clues and threads are abundant: the flare up of nationalism after the humiliation of the Treaty of Versailles, huge mass-unemployment and unbridled inflation during the 1930s, fascination with German mythology, Sturm-und-Drang magic among artists and intellectuals, institutional weakness of the Weimar Republic, incompetence of the ruling parties and above all, as Daniel Goldhagen has pointed out, virulent anti-Semitism, deeply rooted in the German-Christian traditions. Terror in the streets increases, mainly directed against Jews, fellow citizens were silent, felt intimidated, looked away. In his controversial book, Hitler's Willing Executioners, Goldhagen stressed an important point: It was not Hitler who invented anti-Semitism, it was anti-Semitism that invented Hitler. Though this does not explain the Holocaust as such, it explains why so many people, ordinary citizens in Germany and all over Europe, were willing to undertake the job of annihilating an entire people, killing with pleasure, as a daily routine. Hannah Arendt has described the workings behind the mechanism: Once you dehumanise people and turn them into inferior beings, the next step of killing them does not seem so atrocious.

This is, of course, a very confrontational explanation because the mechanism of dehumanisation is still at work in many parts of the world today. Racism, xenophobia, and human degradation are the order of the day and have intensified since 9/11. Though the Holocaust remains unique, the ultimate evil, and resists comparison with other genocides, we continue to search for comparable trends, traces, root causes, and mechanisms:

degrading people, violating human dignity, creating racial policies are such mechanisms.

Here we are: the main lesson to be learned from the Holocaust is that we should fight any form of racism. Because it should never happen again. However, things are not as simple as that. Sixty-five years later, three generations after the Holocaust, mainstream thinking and the definition of racism have changed drastically. What was seen as racism in the 60s was defined as xenophobia (or even Fremdenangst) in the 80s and populism today. What is wrong with populism? Shouldn't politicians grant a voice to the men in the street? Shouldn't we get rid of all these taboos of former generations? This logic has resulted in the emergence of a new taboo: racism.

Historical comparisons, historical parallels are now highly controversial and elicit a great deal of anger. A famous Dutch novelist, Joost Zwagerman, wrote a booklet titled "Hitler in Holland" and quoted a number of striking examples of abuse of the Holocaust in politics today. At the extreme right end of the political spectrum, Geert Wilders compared the Koran to Mein Kampf in his short film, Fitna (2008); the extreme left used the slogan Hamas, Hamas, Joden aan het gas (Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas). Another controversial event was Mark Rutte's proposal, as leader of the liberal party, to remove all judicial restrictions from freedom of expression. Asked during his press conference whether this means that the denial of the Holocaust from now on will not be a penal offense anymore he answered, "Yes," upsetting his rank and file. Obsessive defenders of the freedom of expression as a fundamental

WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LIVE IN THE PAST, EVEN NOT WHEN THE PAST LIVES IN US

right without any restriction should be aware of the fact that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are given free hand. One of the main issues today is the question: is it correct to compare Islamophobia with anti-Semitism? I do think that both phenomena are varieties of the same kind of mechanism, putting one group of citizens in one basket as a whole and accusing each of them being inferior because they belong to that group. But that is, certainly within the Jewish community, a controversial opinion. And to make things even more complicated: Mr. Wilders, our champion in Muslim-bashing, is a close friend of Israel. Maybe it is time to listen to the advice of the well-respected former left-wing politician, Abram Burg, who wrote a sensational book, concluding that his countrymen are kept hostage by their trauma. The book is titled: The Holocaust is Over: We Must Rise from its Ashes.

It is now sixty-five years after the Holocaust. The child I was in those years is now 75. And I tell you: If we really do want to keep the message behind WWII alive, we have to admit that the world has changed enormously since 1945. We cannot afford to live in the past, even not when the past lives in us (as in my case). For most people today, WWII is just a page in a history book, assuming that they have ever seen one. The present generation cannot be held responsible for what happened then. Apart from the question if it has been fair to speak of a collective guilt in the past, it would certainly be unfair to blame Germany today.

Today, Germany belongs to the most decent countries in Europe. Later generations invested a great deal in coping with the past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung), more than any other country (including the Netherlands).

In recent days, Germany has even become a pacifist country and voted against the war in Iraq, an action that received unjust criticism from former allies. On the other side of the spectrum, we are confused by the fact of former victims waging war in the Middle East, suppressing the rights of the Palestinians, occupying part of their territories and violating human rights. Although we are all shocked by the fact that anti-Semitism (especially the new anti-Semitism, as it is called) has resurfaced, this phenomenon is overshadowed by a new kind of racism: Islamophobia. This phantom has dominated the scene since September 11, and Islamophobia reached new heights after the assassination of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh on November 2, 2004. The Netherlands became the most intolerant country in Europe as far as Islam is concerned. It looks as if the clash between civilisations, predicted by Huntington, is overmastering us, based on stereotypes and prejudices from both sides.

Some believe that freedom of expression includes the right to insult and that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are part of the game. On the other hand, a university professor's farewell speech was censored recently because he claimed that there is a direct link between anti-Semitism in the 1930s (all Jews are cannibals) in the Third Reich and anti-Semitism in the Arab world today. Fortunately President Obama introduced a new age in Western-Muslim relations on the same day that Wilders' party became second in the Netherlands at the European elections.

Times have changed, but history has not. There are lessons to be learned which are relevant today. A scary tendency exists among modern historians to change history, when they write about the need to "normalize"

TAKING A STAND AGAINST THE MAINSTREAM DEMANDS CIVIL COURAGE

WWII. They are looking at the facts and figures without a moral imperative, abstracting themselves from the notions of good and bad; they write history without emotion and without moral judgment. "This quest for scientific knowledge without the compass of morality and the rudder of ethics may be a deadly passion," writes Franklin H. Littell in Lessons and Legacies. Story-telling is not enough. "We reach for lessons that will help the next generations to find their way to better years than we in our generation have lived through in this century of genocide." I agree with this warning.

The only logic behind commemorating the Holocaust, year after year, is to provide insight into the ethical choices that were made under those circumstances by all the main actors: by perpetrators, by collaborators, by victims, by resistance workers, by rescuers and by—the large majority of—bystanders. Facing history and ourselves. What would we have done under those circumstances? And what are we doing today, when new forms of genocide are on the rise? And, most importantly, what do we do with the mechanism that preceded this human catastrophe: the mechanism of dehumanisation, of degrading people, of racism and discrimination, of dividing the world into superior and inferior people, superior and inferior races, superior and inferior civilisations?

The Holocaust was a breaking point in the history of humanity. Some pessimistic voices declared the Holocaust as the end of civilisation. I have a more optimistic view. For me, the end is the beginning of civilisation, for two reasons. First of all, immediately after WWII, humankind became aware of the crucial importance of a number of basic

values. They were codified in several international treaties, ratified by most of the nation-states all over the world: the Universal Declaration of Fundamental Human Rights, the treaty to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination, the Convention on Refugees, the Charter of the United Nations, the Treaty against Genocide, the European Convention of Human Rights, the brand new European Charter, and so on and so forth. Together, they form the basis of the acquis humanitaire—the humanitarian legacy—the corner-stone of the beginning of an international order, which we have to respect. The process of implementation is far from perfect. But the norms are there. The ethical compass is available and cannot be ignored. Second, the implementation of these norms asks for a permanent fight. An uphill battle, when positions have to be taken, sometimes against the mainstream of public opinion. This is certainly true today. Taking a stand against the mainstream demands civil courage. The easiest way to behave is standing by, looking away. But, as George Bernard Shaw once said, the worst sin against humanity is not hatred, but indifference. Of course, any comparison with resistance workers during WWII is false, because they risked their life in the middle of terror and oppression, as did my many rescuers, some of them paying with their life. They died while I survived. It is not easy to live with that idea sixty-five years later. The best we can do to honour them is to identify ourselves with the ethical compass they were bearing, and pass it on from one generation to the next. This is what Humanity in Action is about.

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Konstanty Gebert

General Roméo Dallaire was the commander of the UN military force sent into Rwanda to prevent a new outbreak of the civil war and monitor the implementation of the peace process. What he discovered was a genocide in preparation. His efforts to warn the international community to act against the genocide proved fruitless, and he became the powerless witness to what was the concluding genocide of the 20th century—the century that brought us genocide.

In his book *Shake Hands with the Devil*, Dallaire notes a strange piece of information that came into his hands in February 1994 in Kigali. One of his informants told him that teachers in schools in Rwanda had been instructed by the Ministry of Education to draw up lists of Tutsi and Hutu students and pass these on to the Ministry.

The Tutsi and the Hutu were the two main *socio-ethnic* groups in Rwanda, not ethnic groups in the European sense. Both Tutsi and Hutu share the same culture, same religion and same background. In Rwanda's extremely complex social system, these were originally two different social groups. They were permutated into ethnic groups under Belgian colonial rule, and every adult Rwandan had to carry an ID card that contained the mention of his or her ethnicity: Tutsi, Hutu or Twa, the third, tiniest group.

However, children did not carry ID cards. Therefore, in order to know which children to kill, the government—which was preparing

the genocide—had to have lists of names. And this is why the teachers were asked to draw up lists of Tutsi and Hutu students.

I often think about those teachers. I imagine myself being a teacher in Kigali in 1994, and receiving the circular from the Ministry of Education. There are so many rational reasons that the Ministry might have been asking for this information. So why not provide it? When genocide happens, the *final* perpetrators of the genocide are the people who actually go there and kill, or chop people to pieces, or put people into gas chambers, or starve people to death—depending on the technology of the genocide. But for a genocide to be possible at all, it needs those teachers. It needs us. The preparatory period for the genocide, the one that precedes the actual murder, is one in which the institutions of a normal, functioning state and civil society are being used to prepare the murder.

Klemperer, a German linguist, wrote a fascinating book about the coming and growth of Nazism in Germany in the interwar period called *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, “The Language of the Third Empire,” meaning the Third Reich. In his book, Klemperer—a German philologist of Jewish extraction, who, somewhat by surprise, finds himself labeled as a Jew and then has to suffer what the Jews have to suffer—documents the development of public language in Germany. He notes with some amusement that the term “Jew,” which was a religious or possibly an ethnic designation, had acquired legal meaning. Once you are classified as a Jew, there are

certain things you are not allowed to do and other things that you have to do. He notes funny jokes that would arise in Germany when Jews became a legal category, because how do you decide who is a Jew? Just what percentage of Jewish blood do you have? And what is Jewish blood anyway?

But then “Jew” becomes part of the accepted language. He notes that once, inadvertently, in a public park, he sat on a bench marked as forbidden for Jews. A sweet old lady passing by noticed this and pointed this out to him. “Sir, you’re sitting on the wrong bench. You’re not allowed to sit here.” That sweet lady, of course, had no idea at all that her action, in a very small way, was making the genocide possible by internalizing it and making her own the mental categories and ideas that stood behind the genocide.

The preparatory period for the genocide, the one that precedes the actual murder, is one in which the institutions of a normal, functioning state and civil society are being used to prepare the murder.

In Germany, the interesting thing about Hitler’s anti-Semitism is that it starts out with an almost clinical detachment. Some of you might have read *Mein Kampf*. If you have not, read it. It is available in libraries. It is interesting. It is a terribly disappointing book in a way. It is horribly, badly written and, frankly, stupid. You think, “And this book changed the world? In a horrible

way, but changed the world?” It does not make sense. But the interesting thing that you will find in *Mein Kampf* is Hitler’s approach to the Jews. He says that in the way that a doctor who wants to save a human being has to be merciless towards the bacteria that make the human being sick, politicians who want to save Western civilization have to be merciless against the Jewish bacteria. In one of his asides, Hitler writes: “It’s no fault of the Jew that he is a Jew, but it is no fault of human beings that they want to be rid of the Jewish bacteria that are destroying them. It’s nothing personal. It’s just another implementation of the Enlightenment idea that we, the government, are responsible for improving the lot of society. If there is a group that refuses to be re-socialized for the common good, or stands in the way of the common good, it is indeed a good thing to have this group eliminated.”

This is why the analogy that people sometimes make between genocides—which are a 20th-century phenomenon—and massacres, which have been the standard fare of human history since time immemorial, is false. Read descriptions of massacres. Medieval chronicles are full of them. What you will almost universally discover is that your usual massacre is relatively short-lived. The city has been besieged for months, it finally falls, the conquering army enters, and then it does what conquering armies do: murders, rapes and loots. The murder, rape and looting goes on for three days, four days or five days – but,

ARBEIT
MACHT FREI

ultimately, there can be too much of a good thing. How many people are you going to torture, rape and murder before you are fed up? Eventually, after you are satiated, you will let whoever survives live. The idea of massacre is about immediate gratification. Once your feelings, your lusts are gratified, there is really no reason to continue—until next time, at least. The historically accepted way of making amends for having participated in a massacre was to then make religious donations to the temple, church, or mosque. This implies the people making such donations felt some kind of moral unease.

I remember having a conversation last year in Kigali, Rwanda, with a gentleman who had just emerged from jail having been sentenced for thirteen years for participation in the genocide. Very sweet gentleman; we had a very nice talk over some beers. He was explaining to me—he had not read *Mein Kampf*—but he told me: “You know, you know how we call the Tutsis? We call them *inyenzi*, cockroaches. Do you think it is just by chance that his particular group gets called cockroaches? You know, in one newspaper there was a very good article I recommend you read. It says, “The way that the cockroach cannot give birth to a butterfly, an *inyenzi* will always remain an *inyenzi*.” In court I was framed, I didn’t kill anybody - but you know they accuse us of being murderers. Mister, believe me, the people who did the work”—that is the term he used, *l’tavail*, the work—“they worked hard. It is hard, physical labor. It was no fun at all, but somebody had to do it, because

people have the right not to live with cockroaches, *inyenzi*, in their homes.”

This was more or less the same language I heard in Bosnia from the perpetrators of the Bosnian genocide. It was described, in the starkest of details, in a book by Christopher Browning, the American historian of the Shoah, called *Ordinary Men*. Brown tells the history of Reserve Police Battalion 101 from the city of Hamburg. The battalion, in the summer of 1942 around the small Polish town of Józefów, murdered some 25,000 Jews. The battalion was a reserve police battalion. This was not the Gestapo, this was not the SS nor was this even the Wehrmacht. It was middle-aged gentlemen, aged 45 and up, too old to be drafted, who were taken into the police battalion and sent to occupied Poland to do their police work, which, in this case, meant killing Jews. They came from all walks of life. They could have been teachers, clerks, engineers, bus-drivers or longshoremen, almost all of them married with children.

In a way, mass-murders and massacres—which also occur in our times as they occurred throughout history—are not banal. They are extraordinary events that both the perpetrators and the victims conceptualize as extraordinary events.

The men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, when orders came that they were to execute the Jews, were given a choice by their commanders. They said, “If you don’t think you are up to it, you can say that you will not par-

ticipate and you will be transferred to another unit.” There was no penalty attached. Nobody went to jail for refusing to murder people. The worst that would happen would be that you were transferred to another unit. These were *not* fanatics. These were not ideologues. These were you and I; these were ordinary men. There were a few cases of people refusing, but for the most part they did not want to let the others down. It was simply not decent, not fair, to let the others do the dirty work while you enjoyed a more privileged posting. Bottom line: these were *moral* people, who did what they did not because they lusted for murder, but because they felt solidarity with others. They did it for what they believed is a moral purpose: the betterment of humanity. The elimination of the Jews served to improve the lot of humanity.

They thought of themselves in heroic terms. In a famous speech given to the top SS leadership in the Polish occupied city of Poznań in 1943, Heinrich Himmler said, “We are all here because we have all participated in a glorious page of German history, which will never be written. It will never be written because we cannot expect lesser men to understand the nobility and the glory of the enterprise, but it is a noble and glorious enterprise.” This is just as the killers of the Tutsi in Rwanda believed they were participating in the glorious enterprise, even if they had no fun at all. And they had no fun at all. There was the occasional cow you could loot, occasional woman you could rape or

someone you didn’t like whom you could murder, but chopping people to death with machetes is very hard, physical labor. If you have to do it day-in and day-out, nine to five (it was very well organized), it is no fun at all. You do it because you are a moral person, because you believe that somebody has to do the hard work for the greater common good. Ultimately, because you believe the government has the right to ask you which children in your classroom are Tutsi and which are Hutu.

This is what I would call, referring to Hannah Arendt’s ground-breaking work on the Eichmann trial when she wrote *The Banality of Evil*, the banality of genocide. In a way, mass-murders and massacres—which also occur in our times as they occurred throughout history—are not banal. They are extraordinary events that both the perpetrators and the victims conceptualize as extraordinary events. Genocide, in a way, is incipient in the everyday institutions of a well-organized state and a well-organized civil society. Once we accept the principle that the government, which is responsible for the common good, has the right to conduct certain actions concerning certain special groups of people, the first step has been made.

Going back to Rwanda, which I find a fascinating case: the Tutsi and the Hutu were part of an extremely complex social structure that included categories such as access to power and type of labor done. It was not ethnic in any measurable sense. Those groups share the same language, the same culture, they have no

traditions that one group came from here and the other group came from there. Essentially—and I am simplifying it very drastically—if you were a farmer, you were probably Hutu, and if you were a herder you were probably Tutsi. It was by and large better to be Tutsi than to be Hutu, because the kings were always Tutsi.

The Belgians took over Rwanda in 1919 as war compensation from Germany, something I find very sweet: the taking of a third country as compensation from a second country to the first country. Belgium had been thoroughly shocked by the revelation of the horrors of Belgian rule in the Congo, and the Belgian approach to Rwanda was: “This time we’re going to do it right.” They did most of the right things: they built hospitals, schools, roads, bridges and educated Rwandan kids. They found this unholy mess of Tutsi and Hutu, a terribly complex situation. They decided that this should be set right scientifically.

For ten years, teams of anthropologists from Belgium would crisscross Rwanda measuring the angle of people’s noses, the curliness of their hair and the color of their eyes, scientifically, finally to ascertain who is Tutsi and who is Hutu. Their identities were put on their ID cards: Enough of this African mess of somebody being Tutsi today and Hutu tomorrow.

Those ID cards were a European invention brought into Rwanda with the best possible intentions. But without the ID cards with either a Tutsi or Hutu mark, the genocide would not have been

possible. Thanks to the wonderful introduction of European science, it became very simple to conduct a genocide. ID cards alone could not do it. Belgians brought formal European education to Rwanda, and were very good at it. They taught the history of Rwanda. Rwanda was an oral society. There was no written history, only vague myths. Belgians brought European science and history to Rwanda, and they taught the history of Rwanda the way they thought it happened.

There was a completely invented history, thought-up by John Speke, a British adventurer who was the first European to enter Rwanda in the mid-19th century. Speke noticed that some Rwandans are taller than others and have slightly lighter skins. These are obviously “whiter” Rwandans, and this explains why they have a state. They have almost-white people. So he decided that the Tutsis, a greater number of whom were tall and light-skinned compared to the Hutus, were really invaders from the north—maybe from Ethiopia, maybe from the Mediterranean coast, from closer to Europe, from closer to civilization—who had come south and conquered this barbaric country, and that is why it has a state system. There is not a shred of evidence for that. Not one popular legend, not one belief about invaders from the north, nothing. It’s pure fiction.

This is the fiction the Belgians taught in schools. They taught mainly Tutsi children, because the Tutsi of course are whiter and therefore better, that they are a superior race. By virtue of

being superior, they have the right and the destiny to rule over the Hutus. As you can possibly understand, the Hutu did not very much enjoy being told they were an inferior race.

After World War II, Belgium continued to run Rwanda, but Belgium had a major internal change of system: the Flemish majority, which had been dominated by the Walloon minority, gained power. Most of the personnel sent from Belgium to Rwanda were Catholic missionaries, often from Flanders. They started viewing the situation in Rwanda through the prism of the situation in Belgium. You had a majority, the Hutu, who were oppressed by a minority. It is time for the majority to stand up. The same Belgians who first taught the Tutsi that they are a superior race and the Hutu that they are an inferior race, then started teaching the Hutu: You are a majority! You have democratic rights! You should be the masters of the land and they, the foreign invaders, should know their place.

Those ID cards were a European invention brought into Rwanda with the best possible intentions. But without the ID cards with either a Tutsi or Hutu mark, the genocide would not have been possible.

The first massacres on a mass scale occurred on the last months of Belgian rule in Rwanda, and the Belgians let it happen: it was just the majority asserting itself. All this was a European import. The idea that

Rwanda was some kind of “typical African massacre” (some people seem to think “it massacres” in Africa the way it rains in England—it is just the natural way of things) is ridiculous. All this was a European import.

The final element, to clinch it all, was the media. After 1989, the French, who had taken over from the Belgians the *patronage* over formerly independent Rwanda, forced the then-Rwandan dictator General Habyarimana to liberalize laws on the media, liberalize laws on the parties and create a democracy. Very soon a populist broadsheet appeared called *Kangura*. “Kangura” in Kinyarwanda means “wake him up.” Some of you might hear echoes of things that Klemperer described: Deutschland erwache. Wake him up!

Kangura was teaching its mainly Hutu readership the evils of the Tutsi. There is even a text published in *Kangura* called “The Ten Commandments of the Hutu.” It says that the Hutus must know that the Tutsis, all of them, are enemies who try to dominate the Hutu people. Two or three of the commandments are specifically about Tutsi women, who are particularly dangerous. Tutsi women corrupt Hutu males by pulling them away from their racial solidarity. Again, this recalls a myth you can find very easily in the German anti-Semitic propaganda of the ‘20s and ‘30s. “The Ten Commandments” stress that *all* Hutus must consider *all* Tutsis evil.

Without this combination—modern science, modern education and modern media—the Rwandan

genocide could not have happened. All those institutions are part of a legacy of the Enlightenment. It would be, of course, extremely easy to bash the Enlightenment as such, to show just how evil this entire enterprise has been. The fact that there is a pathological consequence of something doesn't make that something pathological. It needs, however, to make us terribly aware of the incipient dangers in seemingly innocent things. What we are taught in schools about ourselves and about others is not innocent. It is not innocent when, in the media, we start reading about a certain group (ethnic, religious, sexual, whatever) described as animals or insects.

Language is one of the key elements here. It was fascinating to see my Rwandan friends, who had not heard of Klemperer, read him and say, "But this is about us! This is how it happened here!"

There is one more thing about language, and on this I would like to conclude. There is one more perverse aspect to the history of genocide. Genocide can become a success story. If you look at the public reception of the Shoah, of the extermination of the Jews by the Germans in World War II, it is in fact a success story. Never before in human history had the suffering of an oppressed group been universally recognized the way that group recognizes it itself. The history of Jewish suffering the way the Jews remember it has become the universal history of Jewish suffering. This had never happened before. This is an incredible success, and everybody envies the Jews their success.

If you go out on the street, not necessarily only here in Amsterdam, but in any major European capital, and you ask about the Holocaust, most people will know that the Holocaust was about the Germans killing the Jews. If you conduct a public opinion poll about who killed whom in Rwanda, was the Tutsis killing Hutu or the Hutu killing Tutsis – and does it matter? – probably, most of the responses will be: "I don't know, and I don't care." To this very day the Armenians cannot get their genocide recognized by the descendants of the perpetrators. The Shoah is recognized. The Shoah is remembered the ways Jews remember it and it has generated something which I, slightly perversely, call "Shoah-envy," "Holocaust-envy." I would more than happily trade the success story for the six million, but nobody's offering.

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The bottom line is that this trivialization of the Holocaust trivializes not only the term, but also the very concept. This not only insults the memory of the victims; it makes us insensitive to the chance that we might witness another genocide—probably not in Europe, although the one before

last, in Rwanda, was in Europe, in Bosnia. Just as we need to be very vigilant and very sensitive to forerunners of genocide in public discourse and public institutions, we must be vigilant and sensitive to the banalization of the term and of the concept in public discourse.

Finally, genocide is one of the great contributions of the 20th century to the history of mankind. This is a novel phenomenon. It did not occur before, but I fear this is not the last that we've heard of it. It is so easy and, unless you have the bad luck of losing a war in the process, you can probably get away with it. The German leaders lost a war and got Nuremberg. The Hutu *genocidaires* lost a war, and some of them are on trial while others are on the run.

Because it is easy, because it stems from so much of the logic of the Enlightenment state and because you can get away with it, we will see more of it. The only thing that really stands between a genocide happening and not, is this teacher who gets a directive from the Ministry of Education: Draw up a list of Hutu and Tutsi students in your class. Imagine being that teacher, and imagine telling yourself: "Hell no, I'm not going to do this, and no I don't need to explain my motives. They better explain why they want this information in the first place." What we need are not good civil servants who will perform the instructions from the Ministry. What we need are people who will not do things that feel wrong, *even* if they look right. Be those people.

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The Holocaust did not just happen or happen by accident – nor did the Iraqi genocide of Kurds 1988, the Rwandan genocide 1995 or the one in Srebrenica 1995. They happened according to plans initiated by politicians and bureaucrats and were all carried out by willing killers.

Each genocide differed from the others. And it makes no sense to cut across all genocides and see them as one similar piece of crime. In fact, that is where genocide has its roots: When society starts seeing groups of people or certain minorities as a sort or species, not as a group of individuals with individual rights, there is reason to worry.

Each of the six million people killed in the Jewish Holocaust had individual rights. And although the butchers, to a great extent, were made responsible for mass killings, every single killing was individual – with a single perpetrator and a single victim. Someone committed a murder. Someone was killed.

These genocides do, however, have at least two things in common – probably more. First: meticulous planning. Second: the widespread willingness of surrounding society not to see what was in the making. Both rely on what is called ‘civil’ society. And both, in fact, apply to civil society’s approach to ‘the other’.

When Jews of Germany and parts of Austria were attacked in the streets during *Kristallnacht* (November 9-10, 1938), at least 96 people were killed, about 1,000 synagogues were set on fire, about 7,500 Jewish shops and businesses were destroyed, and 30,000 Jews were sent to concentration camps. It was treated as news, but in fact it wasn’t new.

Ever since the beginning of Adolph Hitler’s reign, new discriminatory laws and practices – one after another – were put in place against Jews. Kosher butchering was banned in 1933. That same year, registration of Jewish children began in German schools. From 1935, German Jews were deprived of citizenship. In 1936, Jews couldn’t participate in political elections. In 1938 Jews had to carry a special identity card.

Did the Holocaust start with the first murder of a Jewish citizen? Did it start by the first legal discrimination of Jews? Or did it start by the passive acceptance of civil society to differentiate in talk and law between the majority and a specific minority, perhaps unknowingly – perhaps ignorant – that it might pave the way for a deliberate catastrophe?

When Kurds of Northern Iraq were killed in 1988 – the number still remains unknown, but figures amount to 100,000-188,000 individual victims – it wasn’t treated as news at all. Only when Iranian authorities allowed scores of photographers into the village of Halabja, when 5,000 Kurds had been gassed to death, did the news reach the world press. But still, it wasn’t new.

For years, Saddam Hussein had singled out Kurds as responsible for treason against Iraq and Arab society. And when soldiers were sent to “Kurdistan” in the north of Iraq, they only acted according to plans.

Hassan al-Majid, then commander of Northern Iraq, had issued rules in 1986 which made it legal to take cows, sheep, goats, and sometimes even women, from Kurdish citizens. For years, loyal bureaucrats to the dictatorship in Baghdad had worked on a master plan for Operation Anfal. Carefully, they calculated how many lorries they would need to bring to the North to pick up people, live or dead, to bring them to other locations, where mass graves would be dug. Villages had to be 'cleaned' for villagers that had to be killed, (i.e. not only lorries would be needed). You would need soldiers, weapons, ammunition, helicopters, and gas canisters. And plans were made to empty thousands of villages of their inhabitants.

Did the Operation Anfal – named after and legitimized by a chapter in the Quran about the battle of Badr 624 AD – start with the killings in Halabja? Did it start by the regime's legal discrimination? Or did it start by the accusation of Kurdish disloyalty and the deliberate encouragement of non-Kurdish Iraqis to participate in discrimination against Kurds?

When the beautiful mountain village of Srebrenica was transformed from a UN declared 'safe area' to a slaughterhouse of 8,000 men in July 1995, it certainly didn't happen silently. The Bosnian war had raged for several years. And Bosnian Serbic forces left no doubt that they wanted to eliminate Muslims and Muslim identity from their territory.

Two years earlier, the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) had announced that its force of 400 soldiers was protecting the Bosnian Muslims of the neighborhood. But when the Army of 'Republika Srpska' led by General Ratko Mladic in July 1995 rounded up male Muslims in Srebrenica, the UN forces turned their back on the atrocities.

The Serb forces ordered women and children out of Srebrenica and selectively murdered the 8,000 male Muslims—military as well as civilian – and buried them in mass graves outside the village. All were men, most were adults, but children below the age of 15 and even babies were killed.

The mass murder caused an international outcry as the largest mass murder in Europe since the Holocaust, and the International Court of Justice declared it genocide, due to the deliberate intent to destroy the Muslim society of Bosnia.

But did the genocide of Srebrenica start accidentally on July 13th 1995? Was it initiated several years earlier by the promise or campaigns of 'Republika Srpska' to eradicate Muslim identity from Bosnia and Herzegovina? And would it have happened at all if the UN Forces had honored its promise to protect the civil population of Srebrenica instead of ignoring the fatal operation or the Serb forces?

When 800,000 were killed in Rwanda in 1994, other UN forces had decided to withdraw and leave people to their fate. The two population groups, Hutus and Tutsis, largely were an invention of Belgian colonial forces in the beginning of the same century. Still, discrimination between the two came to the forefront of events, when the killings began.

Most killers, but certainly not all, were Hutus – and most victims were Tutsis. The atrocity was ignited by the explosion of Hutu president Juvenal Habyarimana's plane on April 6, 1994. Then Tutsi rebel leader – today's president – Paul Kagame was blamed for the explosion. The leaders of the Kigali opposition were murdered shortly after the plane exploded, and very soon mass killings of Tutsis started all over Rwanda. In just three months, nearly 800,000 people had been killed, most of them through the use of knives and clubs, many with guns. UN forces nearby alerted the UN headquarters in New York to no avail. Additional forces weren't dispatched to enforce law; instead, the UN forces had to observe the Rwandans falling prey to their killers.



The genocide made the headlines of international politics and the media. The neighboring state of Burundi in fact had lived through two similar mass killings, one of Hutus by the Tutsi army in 1972 and one of Tutsis by Hutus in 1994. In Rwanda, the genocide probably had a social and economic aspect. Weapons had been distributed to thousands of army members. And the distribution of ID cards beforehand made it possible for the perpetrators to identify whom to kill and whom to leave in peace, acknowledging that physical features didn't always make it possible to distinguish between Hutu and Tutsi. Hutu generals and politicians appear responsible for having distributed leaflets encouraging violence against Tutsis, and two radio stations in particular—Radio Rwanda and Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines—distributed mass amounts of hate speech against the Tutsis.

To that extent it is fair to ask: Did the genocide of Rwanda start on April 6, 1994 with the assassination of president Habyarimana? Was it initiated by the campaigns of government strongmen to prepare for violence against Tutsis? Did the media prepare the ground for genocide by its distribution of virulent hate speech? And again: Would it have happened if the UN had ensured sufficient peace and protected the citizens of Rwanda against one another?

The Holocaust, as well as the three subsequent genocides (a term coined in 1944 by Jewish-Polish Raphael Lemkin by combining the Greek word for race, 'geno', with the Latin term for killing 'cide') in Iraq, Rwanda and Bosnia are all well documented. Even so, the genocides are disputed locally as well as internationally by people who question these specific historic facts.

One wonders why anyone would be inspired to raise doubt as to whether six million Jews were murdered by the Nazi regime or any Jews deliberately killed at all. The horrors of Auschwitz-Birkenau and other death camps are well documented. Today, "Holocaust denial" seems mostly appreciated by anti-Semites and enemies of the state of Israel.

It seems equally extraordinary to question whether Kurds of Northern Iraq were butchered by Saddam Hussein, keeping in mind that mass graves have been opened, and the murdered people of Halabja photographed in their agony. In this case as well, mostly people critical of Kurdish calls for equal rights seem to appreciate the voices trying to silence the memory of the Anfal Operation.

Why would anyone question that 800,000 people of Rwanda were killed? After all, plenty of documentation and photographs exist in this case as well. True, most of the people charged with murder haven't been sentenced yet, and Rwanda today is in a process of reconciliation and reconstruction. Anyway, what would be the value of reconciliation if the horrific events of the genocide are ignored or even denied?

When the killing in Srebrenica was taking place, UN soldiers withdrew although they knew what could happen – and did happen. At the time of writing these words, some fifteen years later, the mastermind of the genocide, general Ratko Mladic, is still on the run. 'Srebrenica' isn't the subject of pleasant dinner table conversations.

Considering that murder in most countries, if not all, may lead to prosecution for the rest of a killer's life, it is extraordinary that political mass murder often does not lead to a court case. While one murder is a crime, genocide may still be a matter of statistics, as it has been claimed.

When the world realized that Karl Adolf Eichmann, the chief operator of the Holocaust, only amounted to a 'normal' man, not a beast, Hannah Arendt coined the famous phrase about the "Banality of Evil". In the right (or rather wrong) circumstances, many, if not most or all people, may be capable of killing. And in the right, (i.e. wrong) circumstances, most people may be capable of turning their back on killings, as well as preparations for genocide.

After all, the Holocaust or later genocides might not have happened, if people locally or internationally had reacted to preparations being made – or objected to current hate speech and legal discrimination injected in the rule of law.

Why study? Why keep talking about the Holocaust or later genocides? Why keep talking about the genocide of a million Armenians or one and a half million Armenians three decades prior to the Holocaust?

It is hardly a secret that the Armenian fate is still an explosive issue in current politics in Turkey and Armenia. The question of numbers, of what really happened, of perpetrators and of responsibility remains sensitive. So is the Holocaust; even if current democratic Germany has honorably tried to settle the scores of the Nazi Third Reich, the Holocaust still remains in the memory of survivors of World War II. And the very existence of Holocaust Denial calls for continued interest in the lessons of the Holocaust.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, in Rwanda and in Srebrenica, the wounds are still open; bodies are still retrieved and new graves are still being dug.

Do we really have reason to hope that humanity is able to close the book of Genocide and leave it to history? Do we really have reason to believe that humanity today is more clever, more sensitive and better prepared to prevent another Genocide?

Ask the people of Darfur, the Sudanese province where three or four hundred thousand people have been killed in this current decade in what amounts to genocide. Ask the Darfuris if the international civil society was ready to protect people and prevent mass murder. Ask the Darfuris about the sensitivity of the world. Ask the Darfuris about mass killings taking place while the international community did not succeed in finding peace by enabling soldiers to hold back the killers.

Alas, the world is the same as before the Armenian Genocide, before the Holocaust, before Kurdistan, Rwanda and Srebrenica.

What coming generations need to study is not only how civil society, to a great extent, turned its back on Genocide; what is needed is how to detect hate speech, intolerance and discrimination in the future.

Media, politicians and bureaucracy share an evident responsibility. Do media stay back from stigmatizing minority groups? Do politicians avoid instigating or nourishing conflicts between communal groups? Does bureaucracy retract from treating individual citizens merely as parts of communal groups?

Schools share a parallel responsibility. Do schools offer children the same education and the same introduction to society regardless of the student's religious, ethnic, racial background or sexual orientation? Do schools open the eyes of students to the requirements of human rights?

Teacher, student, citizen, we bear the greatest, most obvious responsibility. Do we react to what always comes first in the case of genocide: Hate speech, intolerance and discrimination?

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HUMANITY IN ACTION

HUMANITY IN ACTION (HIA) is an international educational organization that educates, inspires and develops a network of students, young professionals, and established leaders committed to protecting minorities and promoting human rights—in their own communities and around the world.

HIA has educated over 1,000 emerging leaders in their 20s and 30s who now form a unique international network. It contributes in innovative ways to advance human rights and democratic freedoms.

HIA's annual fellowship programs bring together more than 100 European and American university students and young professionals each summer in Denmark, France, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, and the United States to discuss, learn and research in international groups. HIA Fellows meet with leading experts and activists to study the Holocaust and contemporary challenges to minority rights. Fellows write research-based articles and develop teaching tools to share what they learned in their programs. HIA supports all Fellows financially for the duration of their programs, allowing for the merit-based selection of diverse applicants.

HIA also provides professional development opportunities. It maintains an international network of students, young professionals, established leaders, experts and partners for which it organizes a range of educational and professional opportunities, including international seminars and one-week study trips, lecture and discussion series, and fellowship positions at the European Parliament, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, Anne Frank Foundation and the U.S. Congress. These opportunities encourage emerging leaders to develop their professional abilities and introduce established leaders to the ideas of the younger generation.

HIA's network of leaders is a valuable resource to policy-makers, diplomats, educators, business leaders, and civic-minded individuals and organizations. Despite an average age of only 27, HIA Senior Fellows, the organization's alumni,

have built schools and libraries in the developing world, created coalitions to fight racism and xenophobia, published scholarship on genocide and Holocaust education, clerked at the U.S. Supreme Court, won election to the European Parliament and European and American municipal governments, and founded their own non-for-profits and social enterprises. By the end of the decade, HIA will connect over 2,500 professionals working in all sectors, on a range of critical issues, in countries around the world.

▲ Acceptance into the summer programs is considered by American academic fellowship offices as a comparable competitive distinction to the Marshall, Mitchell, Waston, Truman and Fulbright awards.

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▲ HIA has changed the career path of one in three Senior Fellows and has provided a formative professional opportunity for nearly 60% of all Senior Fellows.

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▲ Two of three Senior Fellows retain an active affiliation with HIA, even years after their fellowship has ended.

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HIA is a non-profit, non-partisan, non-advocacy organization with governing and advisory Boards in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and the United States. HIA's international headquarters is in New York City. Major supporters of HIA have included the Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Remembrance Foundation (EVZ), Dutch Ministry for Health, Welfare and Sport and the U.S. Department of State. Over 12 years, HIA has raised more than \$12 million for its work.



