

AAARGH REPRINTS

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The author of this essay is plainly stupid. If Israelis do not want to be compared with Nazis, they can very simply stop behaving like them. One can see that the author has not yet reached the worst, the book by Tova Reich, *My Holocaust*, published earlier this year. Devastating.  
aaargh

## The Multiple Distortions of Holocaust Memory\*

Manfred Gerstenfeld

*Recent years have seen greatly increased attempts to manipulate Holocaust history and its memory. For several decades much attention has been devoted to Holocaust denial. Distortions of the Holocaust past, however, occur in many other ways. The number of mutations of such distortions is also expanding. Manipulations belong to several groupings, such as: Holocaust Promotion, Holocaust Denial, Holocaust Depreciation, Holocaust Deflection, Prewar and Wartime Holocaust Equivalence, Postwar Holocaust Equivalence, Holocaust Inversion, Accusations of Jewish Holocaust-Memory Abuse, Obliterating the Holocaust Memory, Holocaust-Memory Silencing, and Universalizing/Trivializing the Holocaust. One category of motivation for Holocaust distortion is political, which varies according to the perpetrators. A second type of motivation has anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli origins. A third involves absolving one's predecessors of national or personal guilt. Furthermore, copycatting of prevailing opinions occurs particularly among people who know little about the Holocaust, Nazism, and contemporary Israel. These often are influenced by members of the media and other societal elites who are Holocaust distorters.*

Recent years have seen greatly increased attempts to manipulate Holocaust history and its memory. For several decades much attention has been devoted to Holocaust Denial. Distortions of the Holocaust past, however, occur in many other ways. The number of mutations of such distortions is also expanding.

Many perpetrators come from the currently most prominent anti-Semitic circles, that is, those of the Arab and Muslim world, the extreme Left, and the extreme Right. Yet various distortions of Holocaust memory have permeated the narrative of the Western mainstream.

The assault on Holocaust memory can best be analyzed and exposed by dividing the distortion phenomenon into categories. Manipulations often belong to several of these groupings.

## **Holocaust: A Change of Terminology over Millennia**

The multiple attacks on the memory of the extermination of the Jews are only partly linked to the distortion of the term Holocaust, as it refers to the persecution and extermination of the Jews by the Germans, Austrians, and their supporters. This will become clear below.

One semantic issue to be kept in mind is that the term Holocaust existed before it was primarily used for the systematic genocide of six million Jews. Its meaning developed over many centuries. The expression *Holokauston* is found in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, where it translates the original Hebrew word *olah*, which signifies a burnt offering.

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

In France and many other places, the term Shoah is frequently preferred to Holocaust to avoid semantic misunderstanding. Claude Lanzmann, for instance, called his nine-hour movie *Shoah* rather than Holocaust. This essay, however, uses the latter term.

## **THE CATEGORIES OF MANIPULATION**

The main categories of Holocaust distortion will be discussed below.

### **1. Holocaust Promotion**

Holocaust Promotion is the encouragement of genocide against the Jews or Israel. Sometimes this is done explicitly; on other occasions it is the logical outcome of proposed policies.

Campaigning for the mass murder of Jews is often done without specific reference to the Holocaust. At other times the perpetrators refer to Hitler or the Germans having failed to complete the extermination of the Jews and say their programs should be continued. Such Holocaust Promotion is practiced mainly in the Arab and Muslim world and by neo-Nazis.

One prominent variant of Holocaust Promotion is propagating the view that the Jewish state has no right to exist and should be eliminated. This would have to involve elements of genocide and mass murder. In this context the perpetrators rarely if ever explicitly use the word Holocaust.

In a much-publicized example of such Holocaust Promotion, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad called in October 2005 for the elimination of Israel. Referring to Iran's former leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, he asserted, "As the Imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map." [2] Despite the fact that the leaders of many Western countries heavily criticized him, he repeated his words a few days later. [3]

An example of the many calls for a genocidal war against the Jews that do not specifically refer to Israel or the Holocaust came in 2004 from Dr. Ahmed

Abu Halabiyah, rector of advanced studies at the Islamic University of Gaza. In a Friday sermon on PA TV, the official television of the Palestinian Authority, he said:

The Jews are the Jews.... They do not have any moderates or any advocates of peace. They are all liars. They must be butchered and must be killed.... The Jews are like a spring-as long as you step on it with your foot it doesn't move. But if you lift your foot from the spring, it hurts you and punishes you.... It is forbidden to have mercy in your hearts for the Jews in any place and in any land, make war on them anywhere that you find yourself. Any place that you meet them, kill them.[4]

### *The Hamas Charter*

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

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

The time will not come until Muslims will fight the Jews (and kill them); until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, which will cry: O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him! [5]

Related to the theme of Holocaust Promotion is that of Holocaust justification. This consists of "explaining" that the Jews were guilty of their own destruction. It was prominent in various non-Nazi circles during World War II and occasionally returns nowadays.

## **2. Holocaust Denial**

Holocaust Denial can be defined as the rejection of the main facts of the extermination of the Jews in World War II. This distortion began almost immediately after the war. Maurice Bardèche, a French fascist, asserted that people had only died in concentration camps because of war-related events but not because they were murdered. He claimed that when the Germans spoke about the "Final Solution of the Jewish problem" they meant that the Jews would be transferred to ghettos in Eastern Europe. Bardèche also said the gas chambers were used to "disinfect" the concentration camps' inmates and not to kill them.[6]

Several of the initial Holocaust deniers were French. Paul Rassinier, a prewar communist and later a socialist, had been a member of the French Resistance. He was arrested and interned in concentration camps, among them Buchenwald. In 1948 he published a book, *Crossing the Line*, in which he argued that while people had been killed in camps, the perpetrators had acted on their own and not on orders from above.[7] [*He did not say that.aaargh*]

Another well-known French Holocaust denier was Louis Darquier de Pellepoix, who had been the Vichy government's commissioner of Jewish affairs for several years. In a 1978 interview he told the French weekly *L'Express* that the Holocaust was a hoax and only lice were gassed at Auschwitz.[8]

A well-publicized, more recent French Holocaust denier is Robert Faurisson, who taught literature at Lyons 3 University. He often became the inspiration for Holocaust deniers in other countries.[9] Also in later years there have been several Holocaust-distortion incidents in that university. In 2001, French minister

of national education Jack Lang appointed a commission headed by the historian Henry Rousso to investigate racism and Holocaust denial at Lyons 3. The resulting report analyzes a number of such cases in detail.[10]

## The Irving Trial

The American historian Deborah Lipstadt has done major research on Holocaust Denial. [*Very superficial, in fact.aaargh*] She and her publisher Penguin Books subsequently became the defendants in a trial in London, brought against them by the Holocaust distorter and historical writer David Irving. He had, among other things, declared at a 1990 public meeting in Munich that there were no gas chambers at Auschwitz. For this Irving was found guilty by a German court in 1992 and banned from the country.

Charles Gray, the judge in the London trial, ruled that Lipstadt and the publisher had justified their claims. The proceeding and its aftermath gave Lipstadt the opportunity to expose not only Irving's methodology but also his motivations. She said:

He apparently loved the Nazis enough to actually want to reestablish National Socialism as a viable political system... Irving realized that a precondition for Nazism's resurrection was to strip and wash it of its worst elements. The first important tool to accomplish this was the creation of immoral equivalencies. For instance, in the same breath, one mentions that, while the Nazis bombarded London in 1940 the Allies bombed Germany in 1945.[11]

Like all major motifs of anti-Semitism, Holocaust Denial finds important promoters in the Arab and Muslim world. Goetz Nordbruch has analyzed the sociohistorical background of such denial in Arab countries. He points out that it is not an "argument applied temporarily within the Arab-Israeli conflict" but is omnipresent in Arab media.[12]

Holocaust deniers publicly express their views, however, in many other countries as well. For instance, there are three organizations in Australia for which "Holocaust denial is a central belief: the Australian League of Rights, the Australian Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and the Adelaide Institute." [13]

Holocaust Denial is a much more widespread phenomenon than is commonly known. An Italian poll by Paolo Merulla in fall 2003 found that 10 percent of Italians think Jews lie when they say that Nazism murdered millions of Jews.[14]

A new dimension of denial was reached when, at the end of 2005 for the first time, a head of state said the Holocaust had not occurred. On 8 December, Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad gave a press conference in Mecca where he was attending an extraordinary meeting of the fifty-seven members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. Ahmadinejad said he did not believe the assertion that Hitler had killed millions of Jews in gas chambers. He added that if it were true, instead of having the state of Israel, "the Europeans should offer part of their territory, from Germany, Austria, or other countries, so that the Jews can install their state there." [15]

Ahmadinejad has since repeated his Holocaust Denial and several other Iranian officials have expressed variations on the same core motif. In December 2006, his country's Foreign Office's Iranian Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) organized a conference on the Holocaust that was

attended by deniers from thirty countries. At its opening, Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki explained the conference's instrumental aim by saying that questioning the Holocaust was one more way of attacking the United States along with others such as criticizing the U.S. presence in Iraq and Afghanistan.[16]

### **3. Holocaust Depreciation**

Holocaust Depreciation, also called minimalization or downscaling, refers to belittling the severity of the Holocaust. This phenomenon is closely linked to Holocaust Denial and to some extent overlaps with it. In France it has often been expressed by National Front Party leader Jean Marie Le Pen, who came in second among all candidates in the 2002 presidential elections with close to 20 percent of the votes cast.

Le Pen has been convicted of racism and anti-Semitism a number of times. In 1987, he stated that the Nazi gas chambers were "a detail of history." Early in 2005, he asserted in an interview with the extreme-Right paper *Rivarol* that the Nazi occupation had not been particularly inhumane.[17]

The National Front's general delegate-that is, the party's number two, Bruno Gollnisch-declared in October 2004 that "there is no serious historian who integrally accepts the conclusions of the Nuremberg process." He added: "I do not put in doubt the existence of the concentration camps, but as far as the number of dead is concerned, the historians can discuss them. As for the existence of the gas chambers, it belongs to the historians to determine this."[18]

A 2003 poll of two thousand young Italians (aged fourteen to eighteen), sponsored by the umbrella organization of Italian Jewry under the auspices of Italy's president Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, showed substantial anti-Semitic stereotypes. For instance, more than 17 percent believed that reports of the extermination of Jews during the Holocaust are "exaggerated." [19]

### **4. Holocaust Deflection**

Holocaust Deflection entails admitting that the Holocaust happened while denying the complicity of specific groups in it even if there is ample evidence of their involvement. This partly concerns those countries where, during the war, Germans were helped massively in the killing, deportation, and despoliation of the Jews.

Many nations have tried to present themselves as victims of the Germans and denied or diluted their responsibility or that of their nationals for the Holocaust. One extreme case is Austria, which for many years portrayed itself as a victim of the Nazis. Another extreme case is Romania, which under the communist regime denied or greatly downplayed its role in the Final Solution.[20]

In communist East Germany, much of the blame for not properly dealing with the Holocaust aftermath was assigned to West Germany, which it tried to present as the successor state of Nazi Germany whereas the GDR supposedly constituted a radical break from the Nazi past. For instance, in 1965 the GDR published a *Brown Book* with incriminating material on the Nazi past of West German officials. The book aimed to convey the impression that the GDR had eliminated all Nazi influences.[21]

Besides Holocaust Deflection the official GDR policy also minimized the Holocaust. German anti-Semitism scholar Thomas Haury notes: "The GDR emphasized the workers, the party, and the Soviet population as having suffered most from National Socialism. The genocide of the European Jews was only one crime among many, to which the GDR hardly paid attention." Furthermore, "The GDR drew a clear line between the 'criminal Hitler regime' and the 'enticed German people,' declaring them innocent and indeed the first victims of Hitler's rule. In the eastern part of Germany there was no debate on the German people's participation in discrimination, confiscation, and mass murder until 1989." [22]

Within West Germany many false claims were made that the Wehrmacht, the German army, did not participate in the atrocities. The German historian Jan Philipp Reemtsma, in a major effort to inform the wider public about many of the Wehrmacht's criminal acts, organized a traveling exhibition on the subject. [23]

There are two important types of reactions to the denial, minimization, and deflection of the Holocaust. The first is the admission of the historical truth by governments or parliaments. This was done, for instance, by Austrian prime minister Victor Klima, who said at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in January 2000 that Austrians were both victims and perpetrators. [24] In 2006, Austrian president Heinz Fischer stated in an interview that his country's 1955 Declaration of Independence falsely represented Austria as a victim of the Nazis rather than as a cop perpetrator of crimes. [25]

On 16 July 1995, French president Jacques Chirac finally admitted France's role in the murder of Jews, whom it had not protected and instead delivered to their executioners. [26] His predecessor François Mitterrand had not wanted to admit postwar France's responsibility for the Vichy government's crimes. [27]

Even more important than the mere recognition of past injustice or even of a debt to the Jewish people are apologies for wartime behavior. These will remain well documented for future generations after all survivors have passed away. [28] Although official admissions of a nation's Holocaust crimes are important, apologies lend even greater emphasis to such confessions.

## 5. Prewar and Wartime Holocaust Equivalence

Prewar and Wartime Holocaust Equivalence alleges that the Germans' murderous behavior was similar to that of others before and during World War II. A few years after the war, Rassinier claimed that the concentration camps were not a German invention and many other countries had used them, including France.

Holocaust Equivalence is currently increasing in German society. German historian Susanne Urban discusses a bestselling book of another German historian, Jörg Friedrich:

Friedrich's popularized style helped this book become a bestseller. He uses terms that for decades were associated with Nazi persecution and the Shoah; thus, cellars and air-raid shelters in which Germans died are "crematoria," an RAF bomber group is an *Einsatzgruppe*, and the destruction of libraries during the bombings constitutes *Bücherverbrennungen*. In this way the Shoah is minimized through language. [29]

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

There are no SA men, no SS, no soldiers involved in persecution, murder, and "aryanization." The book contains horrifying photos of the effects of the Allied bombings of Germany. Ruins, burnt bodies, and ashes everywhere evoke associations with the Warsaw Ghetto after its liquidation in 1943 and well-known images from Auschwitz and other extermination camps. Friedrich even declared openly, in several television interviews in winter 2002: "Churchill was the greatest child-slaughterer of all time. He slaughtered 76,000 children." Yet Friedrich, formerly known as a serious historian, never devotes a single word to the 1.5 million murdered Jewish children.[30]

## 6. Postwar Holocaust Equivalence

Postwar Holocaust Equivalence claims that various actions or attitudes since the end of World War II are equivalent to what the Germans did during the war, particularly to the Jews though not necessarily only to them.

Not only Holocaust deniers but also communists used Holocaust Equivalence early, aiming at Jews. In 1953, the Soviet Union's daily *Pravda* published alleged information about a conspiracy of mainly Jewish doctors to kill communist leaders through wrong diagnoses and sabotage in treatment.[31]

Simcha Epstein, a scholar of anti-Semitism at the Hebrew University, noted:

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

The message of the speakers was frightening. Many explained that it was normal to suspect doctors of poisoning people: one only had to look at Mengele's role in Auschwitz. If he was capable of what he did, why should other physicians not use poison? A Jewish physician was among those who publicly took such a stand. As a medical doctor, he bore witness that the charge was not absurd. He also based his position on the misconduct of German physicians during the Second World War, stating that it could not be definitely excluded that Jews or Zionists decided to poison Soviet personalities.[32]

One of the many current manifestations of postwar Holocaust Equivalence is comparison of U.S. president George W. Bush with Hitler, or of the actions of the United States and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan with those of Nazi Germany. Many of the perpetrators are on the extreme Left.

## 7. Holocaust Inversion

Holocaust Inversion differs from Holocaust Equivalence in specifically targeting the Jews and Israel. It claims that Israel behaves similarly toward the Palestinians as Germany did toward the Jews in World War II. One frequently used slogan of the inverters is "The victims have become perpetrators." Another is "The Jews and/or the Israelis have become the Nazis of today."

These are rabid anti-Semitic concepts. Nowadays the most common way to identify anti-Semitic attitudes is to assess them according to the definition of anti-Semitism of the EUMC (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia). It states, among other things: "Examples of the ways in which anti-Semitism manifests itself with regard to the state of Israel taking into

account the overall context could include:...Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis." [33]

The core motif of anti-Semitism over more than two millennia was that the Jews embody the most extreme evil. The perception of absolute malevolence has varied over the centuries. For a long time it focused on the alleged eternal responsibility of all Jews-unless they converted-for the death of the founder of Christianity. In postwar society, Nazi behavior has gradually become the paradigm for extreme evil. Comparing Israel's conduct to their actions is thus a new mutation of the ancient anti-Semitic theme.

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

This way of perverting the Holocaust-aimed at Israel-is particularly vicious in the Arab and Muslim world, where it is far from limited to government officials, media, and religious authorities.

### **Inversion in the Western World**

In the Western world, perpetrators of Holocaust Inversion include many seemingly respectable personalities such as mainstream politicians, major media figures, and well-known intellectuals. In this way it differs from Holocaust Denial or downscaling, which usually are expressed by persons at the margins of society. [34]

This anti-Semitic motif has already appeared in the European mainstream for decades. In the early 1980s, leading European socialist politicians such as French president François Mitterrand, Swedish prime minister Olaf Palme, [35] and Greek socialist prime minister Andreas Papandreu accused Israel of using Nazi methods. [36]

Holocaust Inversion has made major inroads in the Western world. This is manifested in German poll data. The 2004 GMF survey interviewed 2,656 representatively selected German-speaking people in the country. [37] Sixty-eight percent agreed that: "Israel undertakes a war of destruction against the Palestinians." Fifty-one percent agreed that: "What the state of Israel does today to the Palestinians, is in principle not different from what the Nazis did in the Third Reich to the Jews." [38]

There are several Jewish Holocaust inverters as well. One is Sara Roy, a senior research scholar at the Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies. She exploits being a child of Holocaust survivors and used a Holocaust memorial lecture to suggest that Israelis are Nazis: "Within the Jewish community it has always been considered a form of heresy to compare Israeli actions or policies with those of the Nazis and certainly one must be very careful in doing so." She then insinuated that they are comparable, quoting as proof-a figment of Palestinian propaganda-that "Israeli soldiers openly admit to shooting Palestinian children for sport." [39]

### **Comparing Palestinians to Holocaust Victims**

Another manifestation of Holocaust Inversion is comparing the situation of the Palestinians to that of the Jews in concentration camps. In 2002, Portuguese Nobel Prize-winning author Jose Saramago, a communist, compared the

blockaded Palestinian city of Ramallah to Auschwitz.[40] One can only wonder how it is that hardly any Palestinians have been killed by Israel in Ramallah since. When visiting Brazil, Saramago declared that the Jewish people no longer deserve sympathy for the suffering they endured during the Holocaust.[41]

Israeli historian Robert Wistrich noted that the Anglican *Church Times* chose to mark Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day with a particularly malevolent article by the Reverend Richard Spencer, who described events in Ramallah as a "suffering and deprivation that I could only imagine in Auschwitz." [42]

## Arab Cartoons

The nature of Holocaust Inversion is most clearly evident when analyzing Arab cartoons that use this approach. Such caricatures also offer insight into a society's culture. Their iconography must appeal to notions with which the general public is familiar. This particularly pertains to Arab societies where so many people are illiterate.

In 1996, the important Egyptian daily *Al-Goumhouriya* published a cartoon with Hitler saying to Shimon Peres: "I made a mistake by not appraising the importance of American support." [43] Another Egyptian daily, *Al-Akhbar*, printed in October 2000 a caricature of Ehud Barak with a Hitler moustache, an SS uniform, and blood dripping from his fingers. [44] Comparisons between Sharon and Hitler, Israelis and Nazis, swastikas and Stars of David are commonplace in the Arab world. Since succeeding Sharon as prime minister, Ehud Olmert has been similarly depicted in Arab cartoons.

These phenomena were preceded in 1988 by the Kuwaiti *Al Rai-Al Aam*, which offered a caricature of a Jew with a kippa and long nose shoving a child into a furnace. The image alluded both to the Holocaust and the ancient anti-Semitic libel of Jews using children to bake matzah. These are but three among thousands of Arab anti-Semitic cartoons that Belgian political scientist Joel Kotek has collected over the years, a selection of which he presented in his French book *In the Name of Anti-Zionism*.

Kotek points out that the theme of the Israeli as a Nazi was extant in Arab caricature long before Sharon became prime minister. According to these caricatures, all Zionists-including Barak and Peres-are inspired by Nazi methods. He writes that the "paradox is so evident if one considers the Arab sympathies for the Nazis during World War II and of the later support for Holocaust denial, rarely denounced, among Arab intellectuals." It is in this light, Kotek explains, that the Zionist deeds are portrayed as being worse than those of the Nazis.

In the Egyptian *Al-Ahram* weekly in October 2000, cartoonist Gomaa depicted Hitler, Sharon, and Barak together as accomplices in the killing of Mohammed al-Dura. In the Lebanese *Daily Star*, a cartoonist transformed in four pictures Sharon with his white hair into Hitler with a moustache and black hair, and the Magen David on Sharon's collar into a swastika.

In the Syrian *Tishreen*, a cartoon showed two cases of genocide brought before the United Nations. An Israeli soldier wearing a helmet with a Star of David carries a long list; a Nazi soldier wearing a helmet with a swastika carries a short list. [45] This is an example of Arab propaganda in which Israel is worse than the Nazis.

Similar cartoons can also be found in mainstream Western papers albeit in smaller numbers. They appear often particularly in Norway [46] and Greece.

## The Aims of Those Who Nazify Israel

The "Nazification" of Israel makes it possible to kill three birds with one stone. The first objective is to delegitimize Israel by associating it with the symbol of evil par excellence. Second, one can attack and humiliate the Jewish people by equating them with the perpetrators of the brutal genocide that nearly succeeded in exterminating the Jews.

Finally, the malicious analogy between Israelis and Nazis frees Europeans of any remorse or shame for their history of a lethal anti-Semitism that lasted centuries. Above all, it liberates Europeans from any residual guilt they might have experienced in the wake of the Holocaust. If the Israelis—who are mostly Jews, after all—can be depicted as Nazis, then not having helped them during World War II might not have been such a bad thing after all.

The most effective approach to sanitizing Germany's immense crimes is to accuse Israel of acting similarly. In 2002, Norbert Blum, a former German Christian Democrat minister of labor, declared that the Jewish state was conducting a *Vernichtungskrieg* against the Palestinians. This is the Nazi expression for a war of extermination. The Christian Democrat Party expelled parliamentarian Martin Hohmann many months after he had called Israelis in 2003 a nation of criminals, using the expression *Taetervolk* that is commonly reserved for Nazi Germany.

Israeli psychologist Nathan Durst has analyzed one underlying motive:

Outbursts with anti-Semitic undertones are also connected to Europe's guilt vis-à-vis the Holocaust. If the guilty person is bad, the Jewish victim becomes good. The moment it can be shown the latter is bad too, the "other"—that is, the European—is relieved of his guilt feelings. To claim that Israelis behave like Nazis reduces the sin of the grandparents. Then the children of the victims can no longer be the accusers. This equalizes everybody... When one calls everything Auschwitz, you deny the Holocaust. As everything becomes terrible, there is no absolute evil anymore. This is a great relief for the heirs of guilt.

Durst concludes that it is impossible to digest the Holocaust's lessons intellectually: "One cannot believe that one's father, grandfather or so many others of their contemporaries were eager murderers, or their assistants and supporters. It is impossible to live with the feeling that 'my grandfather has quietly murdered people.'"[47]

Holocaust Inversion often appears jointly with other Holocaust distortions. However mutually exclusive they may seem to be, Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Inversion are found in the Arab world together. Nordbruch points out that "articles denouncing Zionism as Nazism often include Holocaust denial as well."[48]

## **8. Accusing the Jews of Holocaust Memory Abuse**

Another manipulative category is the claim that Jews abuse the memory of the Holocaust. Sergio Romano, one of Italy's foremost mainstream historians, insinuated in his book *A Letter to a Hebrew Friend* that the Jews are responsible for the Shoah's inversion by emphasizing its remembrance.[49]

The best-known academic promoting this manipulation is a Jew, Norman Finkelstein of De Paul University in Chicago. He has built his dubious claim to

fame on this practice. Among Finkelstein's books is one titled *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*. [50]

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

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

The core of Finkelstein's argument is that a cabal of Jewish leaders conspired to extort money from European governments, under the pretext of claiming material compensation for the losses of the Holocaust and for the benefit of the survivors. Once their claims were successful, these organizations then kept the money to themselves and paid the survivors only a pittance. Summarized in this form, the accusation is so unbelievably and totally without foundation that I looked once again at the third chapter of *The Holocaust Industry* to ensure that I had not parodied Finkelstein's argument. But the summary fairly represents what he wrote. [51]

## **9. Obliterating the Holocaust Memory**

Those who understand that the Holocaust should not be forgotten have worked hard to establish memorials and museums. The Holocaust is also commemorated annually in many countries. In 2005 in particular, sixty years after the war ended, much additional emphasis was placed on this commemoration. This occurred partly in the context of ceremonies recalling the liberation of Auschwitz and other camps.

Some take individual initiatives to establish memorials. In 1990, French Nazi-hunter Serge Klarsfeld put up his own memorial plaque in the Hôtel du Parc in Vichy, home of Pétain's wartime government. He did not request permission because he knew it would not have been granted. The residents of the apartments into which the hotel had been converted were outraged, and the plaque was defaced. In July 2001, Klarsfeld "organized a solid stone memorial facing the former hotel. This time he informed the municipality, who dared not refuse. Klarsfeld's memorial bears witness to the 75,000 Jews deported from France. This cenotaph, too, is regularly attacked. The desecrators are never pursued." [52]

Holocaust memory is being attacked in various ways. The most violent are the attempts to destroy or damage Holocaust memorials, of which there have been numerous cases in many countries in recent years. Greece is among those where this occurs regularly. In July 2002, for instance, parts of the Holocaust Memorial in Rhodes were irreversibly destroyed. It had only been officially unveiled a few weeks earlier on 23 June. The Jewish community had reported that harassment of the workers during the monument's construction necessitated twenty-four-hour police protection. [53] The perpetrators of such ideological vandalism are rarely caught.

Attacks on Holocaust memory also take various new directions. On 4 May 2003-the Netherlands' National Memorial Day for the victims of World War II-

several ceremonies in Amsterdam were disrupted. In one area of the city, during the two minutes of silence for remembering the dead, youngsters shouted about twenty times "Jews have to be killed!" The perpetrators were, specifically, young Dutchmen of Moroccan descent. In another part of town, Moroccan youngsters played soccer with the wreaths that had been laid on the memorial.[54]

On 9 November 2003 in Vienna, a memorial meeting for Kristallnacht was disrupted by the Sedunia group, who shouted through loudspeakers. They had to be pushed away by the participants of the meeting. Sedunia is an organization of Muslims and Austrian converts to Islam.[55]

Yet another attempt to obliterate Holocaust memory by distorting its meaning came from the Muslim Council of Britain. In January 2005, the organization's secretary-general Iqbal Sacranie wrote to the British minister Charles Clarke that his organization would not attend the commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz unless it included the "holocaust" of the Palestinian intifada.[56]

In July 2005, Muslim suicide bombers blew themselves up in the London Underground. In September, a committee of Muslim advisers to Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested that Holocaust Day be abolished and replaced by a Genocide Day that would also commemorate the mass murder of Muslims in Palestine, Chechnya, and Bosnia.[57]

## **10. Silencing Holocaust Memory**

Yet another manipulation of the memory of the Holocaust involves saying that the Jews mention the Holocaust too often. When discussing this with Germans, they often agree that many of their friends say "the Holocaust is a chapter that should be closed." The abovementioned 2004 GMF poll found that 62 percent of Germans are fed up with hearing about the German crimes against the Jews.[58]

This manipulation is not only a German one; as a 2005 ADL survey shows, it is widespread. Large portions of the European public believe that Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust. Overall, 42 percent of those surveyed believe this is "probably true." Indeed, a plurality of respondents in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland believe this notion to be true.[59] The GMF survey came up with a similar result.

A 2007 ADL survey in five European countries confirmed that large parts of the population consider it "probably true" that "Jews still talk too much about what happened to them in the Holocaust." The figures were 40 percent in France (compared to 34 percent in 2005), 45 percent in Germany (48 percent in 2005), 46 percent in Italy (49 percent in 2005), 46 percent in Spain (no change), and 58 percent in Poland (52 percent in 2005).[60]

Before Holocaust Day, 27 January 2004, a survey was released that was conducted by the Ipsos Research Institute for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* in Italy, France, Belgium, Austria, Spain, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, and Britain. Of those polled, 35 percent believed that the Jews should stop "playing the victim" regarding the Holocaust and its persecutions of sixty years ago. In all countries, anti-Semitic sentiment paralleled anti-Israeli sentiment.[61],

In the present European reality, the claim that Jews overly mention the Holocaust can easily be countered by saying: "This is necessary not because of the past but because of the future. Although it is not probable that Europeans will murder the Jews again, a substantial number of the present generation are

capable of helping in various ways those who want to do so, namely, the radicals in the Arab and Muslim world."

## **11. Universalizing/Trivializing the Holocaust**

Holocaust Trivialization and Universalization are two related distortions of Holocaust memory. The former manifests itself in the growing use of language that relates to the industrial-scale destruction of the Jews in World War II by the Germans, Austrians, and their allies, yet is used for a large number of purposes that have no connection to this genocide.

One category is alleged transgressions of international human rights law. There is a long way between most of these and the practices of the Nazi regime. Yet the comparison is often made. In 2005, as an almost random example, Prof. F. Röter of Amsterdam University said the United States' treatment of the prisoners in Guantanamo resembled the Nazis' treatment of those they detained. Needless to say, if that were true many if not most of the prisoners would have been dead by the time the Dutch academic made this statement, let alone at present.<sup>63</sup>

Sometimes those who banalize the Holocaust are well aware that they are breaking a taboo. For instance, former French socialist prime minister Michel Rocard remarked that he and his followers in the Socialist Party said among themselves that they were in the party "like those wearing the yellow star" and "this comparison may be repugnant but it describes the atmosphere well."<sup>64</sup>

Expressions such as the "Abortion Holocaust" or the "Climate Holocaust" are typical of those involving both Trivialization and Universalization of the Holocaust.

### **The Motivations of the Distorters**

The perpetrators of the most severe Holocaust distortions have manifold motivations. The most extreme aim at the destruction of Israel. In Tehran in 2006, at the International Conference to Review the Global Vision of the Holocaust, Foreign Minister Mottaki said that "if the official version of the Holocaust is thrown into doubt, then the identity and nature of Israel will be thrown into doubt."<sup>65</sup>

The main motivations for these Holocaust distortions can be summarized as follows:

1. A variety of political reasons. These vary according to the perpetrators. For the extreme Right often associated with neo-Nazi or fascist ideas, Holocaust denial or minimization serves to weaken accusations against themselves. For others, Postwar Holocaust Equivalence and Holocaust Universalization are tools in their battle against certain people—for instance, Bush—or in favor of certain ideas such as the battle against global warming presented as the "Climate Holocaust."
2. Anti-Semitic/anti-Israeli reasons, particularly involving Holocaust Inversion, Accusations of Jewish Holocaust-Memory Abuse, and Holocaust-Memory Silencing. These serve anti-Semites, who believe the Holocaust plays an important role for those who have positive perceptions of Jews and Israel. On the borderline, overlapping both political and anti-Semitic reasons, is the aim to bolster the Arab and Palestinian cause by demonizing Israel.
3. Absolving one's ancestors of national or personal guilt. This pertains, for instance, to Holocaust deniers, but also to inverters who claim that Jews also

commit Nazi-type deeds. If all are guilty, then no one is guilty. In addition, Holocaust Deflection and Prewar and Wartime Holocaust Equivalence often seek to direct the blame for the Holocaust at others, or to distribute it more widely and thus deny or diminish guilt.

4. Copycatting. Many people know little about the Holocaust, Nazis, or contemporary Israel. They are often influenced by members of the media and other societal elites who are Holocaust distorters.

### What Can Be Done?

It is impossible to work in isolation against the distortion of Holocaust memory. Holocaust Denial is a criminal offense in various European countries including Germany, France, and Austria, as well as in Israel. Yet, while the Holocaust-Inversion category is at least as dangerous and is included in the common definition of anti-Semitism as used increasingly in international gatherings, it is not a punishable offense.

The manipulation of Holocaust memory is a symptom of a much larger problem in society, of which anti-Semitism is a major aspect. The commemorations of the Holocaust contribute to counteracting this and should be valued. The United Nations' establishment of an international Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January is another small step forward.

Mike Godwin, an American lawyer, concluded that the longer a discussion continues on the Internet, the more probable it becomes that a comparison with Nazis will be made. He added that those who make the comparison lose the argument. Whether his judgment is valid remains to be seen over the coming years. 66

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### Notes

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