Introduction to Volume IV

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Zalman Gradowski, a member of the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz–Birkenau, noted in one of his secret notebooks that, when he was still surrounded by his loved ones, moonlight had been a "source of love and joy" for him.[1] Now, temporarily left alive but forced to burn bodies of Jewish men, women, and children, Gradowski experienced moonlight as a painful reminder of all that had been destroyed:

> Why do you let your light shine on this accursed hellish world, here where the night is lit by gigantic flames – by the fire of the burning victims, innocents who are murdered here? Why do you shine on this tragic plot of ground where every step, every tree, every blade of grass is soaked through with the blood of millions, millions of human lives? Why do you show yourself here where the air is full of death and extermination, where to the heavens rise the heartrending cries and screams of women and children, fathers and mothers, young and old, innocents driven to a bestial death? Here you ought not to shine!!! Here in this horrible corner of the earth, where people are tortured with savage atrocity, constantly sinking in a sea of blood and affliction and wait in fear of inescapable death, here, here you ought not to shine!!![2]

Angered that nature stayed its course unaffected by the human world that had been collapsing for him, Gradowski ultimately reconciled with the moon by assigning it a new purpose. From now on and for all time, Gradowski imagined, the moon would shine as the memorial light on the "grave of my people," to remind humanity of its genocidal capacities.[3] Gradowski stored his notes in an aluminum bottle and buried them in the ground at Birkenau, shortly before he was murdered in the prisoner uprising on 7 October 1944.

[1] Z. Gradowski, *The Last Consolation Vanished: The Testimony of a Sonderkommando in Auschwitz* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2022), p. 60.
[2] Ibid., p. 62. [3] Ibid., p. 67.

Other Jews trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe shared Gradowski's agonizing awareness that they were suffering an unprecedented event: the mass murder of Jews from across the European continent irrespective of gender, age, or physical strength for the sole purpose of wiping them from the face of the globe by mass shootings, starvation, disease, and "industrialized" forms of destruction. Jewish actors understood that, although a crime like this had once been unimaginable and was met with disbelief as it was unfolding, its occurrence would henceforth shape the human imagination. It was so destructive, so seismic in its wider implications for the human condition, that it would have repercussions for decades, even generations to come.

Indeed, Nazi Germany's attempt to eliminate the Jews of Europe (and perhaps eventually the entire world) had a profound and lasting impact on Europe, shaping everything from demographics to politics to culture. What is perhaps more surprising are the ways in which the Holocaust has become a truly global event in the years since 1945, shaping public discourse, historical pedagogy, and the political cultures of countries well beyond Europe and as diverse as Israel, the USA, Canada, and Australia.[4] Of course, it took time for the Holocaust to move from the periphery of culture and politics to the center, as criminal trials, scholarly research, commemorative rituals, political activism, public debates, and popular culture increasingly thematized the extermination of European Jewry. The Holocaust became, and remains, a "touchstone" in European culture, with states voicing their belonging to the European community of states through Holocaust memorial days and an allegiance to human rights.[5] However, this commitment to Holocaust memory is at times devoid of any Jewish content and often denies the fact that the victims of the Holocaust had been persecuted and murdered for their Jewish identity, not for being French people, Italians, Hungarians, or Poles. It also conveniently glosses over the inconvenient truths of local collaboration with Nazism in the mass murder of the Jews.

But the Holocaust has also come to symbolize a civilizational rupture (*Zivilisationsbruch*) throughout much of the world, a reference point for political evil and human catastrophe.[6] It has been used and abused by victims of mass violence and by political activists as a framing device for their own

[4] D. Levy and N. Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006).
[5] T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, Penguin, 2005), pp. 803–31.
[6] D. Diner, *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism, and the Holocaust* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000).

suffering.[7] At the same time, the "uniqueness" of the Holocaust has likewise become something of a truism in some circles, one that can and has been mobilized for contemporary political purposes.[8] But what both sides share is a sense that "the Holocaust" is a totemic term with deep cultural and political power. While the Holocaust has become a master metaphor for all evil, sometimes used responsibly but often used irresponsibly for the sake of distortion and political agitation, the event has also become detached from its proper historical context. This is possible because, despite the mounting public presence of the Holocaust, historical knowledge about the event and the context in which it occurred is in decline.

Over the past two decades, Holocaust studies shifted attention to the postwar period, which has become a field of study in its own right. It has branched out into sub-fields, among them legal studies, reparations and restitution, representation, literature, and the arts. These fields not only seem disconnected from one another, but have also sometimes lost touch with the historical event of the Holocaust itself. Scholars tend to study either the historical event or its repercussions and representations over the seven decades after the war, a period six times as long as the Nazi regime itself. This volume is, as part of the four-volume series, an attempt to integrate wartime and postwar periods and to put the vast array of different disciplinary approaches to the aftermath and the aftereffects of the Holocaust in conversation with one another. This volume pursues three axes of analysis: geography, typology, and temporality.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE AFTERMATH

The Holocaust was, first and foremost, a *European* event. To be sure, Jews outside of Europe were affected as well, especially those in North Africa.[9] The victims were *Jews* – by Nazi racial categorizations. In tandem with the mass murder of Jews, the Nazi regime pursued other exterminatory projects –

[7] R. Jinks, *Representing Genocide: The Holocaust as Paradigm?* (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
[8] S. Katz, 'The issue of the uniqueness of the Holocaust: After forty years of study', *Modern Judaism* 40:1 (2020), 48–70.
[9] See A. Boum and S. A. Stein (eds.), *The Holocaust and North Africa* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2019).

of people with disabilities and Sinti and Roma – and murdered countless other non-Jewish victims, also on a continental scale. The persecution of Jews began with the Jews of Germany, but the roughly 5.8 million Jews murdered in the Holocaust came from across the European continent.

The initiative for the extermination of the Jews came from the German government and involved hundreds of thousands of Germans and Austrians as perpetrators, and millions more as "bystanders," who supported or condoned the mass murder. But the continent-wide genocide was possible only because of the division of labor between Nazi perpetrators and their countless accomplices from the nations that were either allied with or occupied by Germany: Poles, Ukrainians, Hungarians, French, Dutch, among others. Indeed, "locals" from virtually every corner of occupied Europe helped facilitate the Nazi project of extermination.

Therefore, not only the core countries where the event took place, the "bloodlands" (the term, of course, comes from Timothy Snyder) of central and eastern Europe, namely Germany, Poland, Hungary, and the Soviet Union, but also other parts of occupied Europe – we may call them the "deportation lands" – wrestled with the aftermath of the Holocaust from the moment the war ended.[10] Like eastern Europe, France, Holland, Italy, Greece, Denmark, and other countries all had to sort through the complex legacy of collaboration, victimization, indifference, and rescue.

From this European heartland, the postwar reverberations of the Holocaust spread globally, often following the migration of European diasporas. Jews had been fleeing Europe for decades already, especially to North America, Palestine, and Argentina. These Jewish communities had tracked the Holocaust as it was unfolding and had sought – with limited success – to mobilize support for European Jews prior to and during the war. After the war, Jewish survivors sought a place to go. It was a difficult challenge. Some were able to return to their prewar homes. There were countries, such as France or Italy, that more or less welcomed the return of what remained of their prewar Jewish communities. Other parts of Europe were not so welcoming. In much of eastern Europe, Poland especially, return was fraught and dangerous, with many Jews being massacred when they tried to restart life on Polish soil.[11] For many survivors, there could be no return to their prewar homes, because their families had been murdered and communities obliterated. With the growing political repression of the new communist

[10] See T. Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, Basic Books, 2012).
[11] J. Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (New York, Random House, 2006).

regimes, themselves increasingly antisemitic, Jews saw their future elsewhere.

The paths of emigration were diverse and difficult. Wartime immigration restrictions remained in place in many countries in the immediate postwar years, and the British sought to prevent Jewish immigration to mandatory Palestine. Eventually, though, hundreds of thousands of survivors managed to leave Europe. Israel and the USA became major destinations, with smaller numbers making their way to Canada, Australia, Latin America, and elsewhere. The legacy of the Holocaust was inescapable for these survivors, and it shaped their postwar lives. Necessarily, the memory of the Holocaust became a part of the public culture and politics of their new homes.[12]

Jewish survivors were not the only "people on the move" in Europe after 1945. Fourteen million ethnic Germans were expelled from eastern Europe as a form of retribution. Many other eastern European populations were also forcibly resettled as part of a broader project of ethnic homogenization. Numerous eastern Europeans often also wanted out of Europe altogether.[13] The communist takeover of eastern Europe and its incorporation into the Soviet sphere of influence made return unimaginable for many non-Jewish displaced persons (DPs). They also faced barriers to emigration; however, as anticommunism surged in the West, they often received an increasingly sympathetic hearing. As countries such as the USA, Canada, and Australia liberalized their immigration policies in the late 1940s and early 1950s in order to help resolve mounting labor shortages, they allowed large and growing numbers of eastern European migrants to enter. Around 157,000 European DPs made their way to Canada, starting in 1947.[14] Australia accepted some 170,000 DPs over the course of five years (1947–52).[15] Approximately 400,000 European DPs immigrated to the USA between

[12] B. Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2006); F. Ouzan, *How Young Holocaust Survivors Rebuilt Their Lives: France, the United States, and Israel* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2018).

[13] A. Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2011); D. Nasaw, *The Last Million: Europe's Displaced Persons from World War to Cold War* (New York, Penguin, 2020).

[14] Government of Canada, 'The arrival of displaced persons in Canada, 1945–1951', www.canada.ca/en/parks-canada/news/2016/02/the-arrival-of-displaced-persons-in-canada-1945-1951.html.

[15] National Archives of Australia, 'Refugees displaced by World War II', www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/immigration-and-citizenship/migrant-stories/refugees/refugees-displaced-world-war-ii.

1949 and 1952.[16] In all three cases, most of the migrants were non-Jews: Ukrainians, Poles, and people from the Baltic states in particular. These new eastern European immigrant communities also brought their wartime memories with them. These memories frequently downplayed Jewish suffering, in part because the non-Jewish migrants understandably prioritized their own experiences and recollections of horror, but also as a way to distract from the fact that too many of them had been directly or indirectly complicit in the extermination of the Jews. Many countries, such as Australia, Canada, and the USA, sought to screen out Nazis and other Holocaust perpetrators (as well as communist infiltrators), as part of their immigration systems. Yet their default position was one of sympathy for eastern European refugees from communism. The large numbers involved, and the breakdown in communication with the new communist regimes in eastern Europe, meant that security screenings were often inadequate. Consequently, many Nazis and eastern European collaborators ended up slipping through the system and settling into new lives around the world.[17] Some, such as Adolf Eichmann, emigrated using false papers; others, such as John Demjanjuk, had no need to hide their identity, as they were too obscure to attract any scrutiny. These non-Jewish emigres, including perpetrators, also brought memories of the Holocaust with them, ones that often led to a politics of denial and relativization. There was, for instance, considerable pushback from the Ukrainian diaspora against efforts to prosecute collaborators in Australia.[18]

The politics of Holocaust memory around the world were thus divided along the same lines as those that determined the dynamics of destruction itself. Perpetrators, collaborators, and survivors all engaged in acts of public memory making. Perversely, perpetrators and collaborators often sought to portray themselves as victims, while actual victims competed for public acknowledgment and recognition. The result was a plethora of memorial and representational strategies. These took many forms, ranging from Holocaust denial in places like Canada to the founding of Holocaust museums on the shores of countries far removed from the eastern European killing

[16] L. Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982).
[17] H. Margolian, *Unauthorized Entry: The Truth about Nazi War Criminals in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000); M. Aarons, *Sanctuary: Nazi Fugitives in Australia* (Melbourne, W. Heinemann, 1989).
[18] See D. Fraser, *Daviborshch's Cart: Narrating the Holocaust in Australian War Crimes Trials* (Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press, 2011).

fields.[19] Over time, the Holocaust became detached even from these ties to European diaspora communities. It evolved into a metaphor that could be used and abused, with little reference to the specific history of Nazi mass murder, operating more like a metonym for evil as such and a careless (or even dishonest) way to score political points. Everything from the guerilla war by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to abortion in the USA, to factory farming has been labeled a "Holocaust." As the legacy of the Holocaust became global, it also became detached from the specific historical referent, the German extermination of European Jewry.

TYPOLOGIES OF THE AFTERMATH

Just as the legacy of the Holocaust spread globally, so too did it extend into virtually all domains of public life. For countries directly involved in the Holocaust, the political challenges varied. The perpetrator countries of Germany and Austria had hundreds of thousands of former Nazis, many of them deeply implicated in mass murder, to purge, prosecute, reintegrate, and win over to new democratic or socialist political regimes. Countries with large survivor populations – Israel above all, but also, in its own way, the USA – faced different challenges. Integrating and, in some contexts, providing social and psychological support for deeply traumatized people was a daunting task. Israel faced the additional problem that its own national security was precarious in the early postwar years, not a situation designed to be reassuring to survivors.

Then there were what might be called the "empty" countries, the countries of Europe that had previously had large and vibrant Jewish communities that had been decimated by genocide, and whose survivors frequently were unable to return home in the face of continuing antisemitic assaults. Polish Jews had made up about half of the total number of victims in the Holocaust. In many parts of Europe, the Jewish presence had been wiped out forever, with over 90% of the Jewish population of Poland, the Baltic states, and Ukraine, over 80% of Greek Jews, and 75% of Dutch Jews

[19] See, for example, G. Weimann and C. Winn, *Hate on Trial: The Zündel Trial, the Media, and Public Opinion in Canada* (Toronto, Mosaic Press, 1986); E. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2001).

murdered.[20] Would such countries even acknowledge their own Jewish histories? Would governments in eastern Europe help the small numbers of survivors who chose to return or remain, or would they instead persecute their remaining Jewish citizens as part of the broader process of Stalinization? In the end, most eastern European regimes chose the latter policy over the former.

In purely economic terms, the biggest issue facing postwar societies was reparations and restitution. Reparations were primarily a West German matter, with the Konrad Adenauer government offering payments to the state of Israel and diaspora Jewish organizations represented by the Claims Conference under the Luxembourg Agreement in September 1952. Restitution – the return of confiscated, stolen, and heirless property – on the other hand, was a challenge not just for Germany (and, even less eagerly, Austria), but also for many formerly occupied countries, and for no small number of cultural institutions around the world that acquired art and artifacts stolen during the war and only reluctantly returned them, often only when forced to do so by the courts. Private corporations that had benefited from the use of slave labor during the war were among the last organizations to recognize their obligation to compensate victims for their wartime exploitation.[21]

Given the scale of the Holocaust and the challenge it posed to comforting Whig assumptions about civilization and progress, it is hardly surprising that it was a major theme in the postwar arts, literature, and culture. From poetry to opera, philosophy to sculpture, there was no arena of culture that did not wrestle repeatedly with the Holocaust. Questions of whether and how to represent the "unrepresentable" extermination of a people, of who could give voice to the dead, of whether the human condition had been fundamentally altered or merely revealed to have been far bleaker than previously assumed – all shaped postwar art and culture.[22]

Finally, the Holocaust was a legal conundrum. There was a broad consensus that the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime were crimes, but what kind? Many were clearly traditional war crimes, committed against foreign

[20] W. Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords: Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, Munich, and Boston, De Gruyter, 1991).
[21] R. Ludi, *Reparations for Nazi Victims in Postwar Europe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012); M. Marrus, *Some Measure of Justice: The Holocaust Era Restitution Campaign of the 1990s* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009); L. Bilsky, *The Holocaust, Corporations, and the Law: Unfinished Business* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2017). See Chapter 7 by Regula Ludi in this volume.
[22] See Part IV of this volume.

non-combatants during wartime. But what about crimes against German citizens, especially those committed before the war? Traditional international law was helpless. At the London Conference establishing the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg in August 1945, the negotiators established the charge of "crimes against humanity" to address this issue. The extermination of the Jews was a clear example of what the Polish-Jewish jurist Raphael Lemkin called "genocide" in 1944, a new term to enter the global lexicon. Unlike crimes against humanity, genocide would not be a formal charge in most of the postwar trials, but would enter into international law with the passage of the United Nations Genocide Convention in 1948. And the war itself? Was it not also a criminal enterprise? If so, what did that mean for international jurisdiction over other Nazi crimes? At the IMT at Nuremberg, there was a strong emphasis on the criminality of Nazi aggression, to the extent that other crimes were seen as derivative. These and other issues were adjudicated, at Nuremberg and before countless national tribunals. As a consequence, a modern jurisprudence of atrocity began to emerge.[23]

Thus the globalization of the Holocaust was not just geographic, but also cultural, as the moral and political issues raised by the Holocaust affected all domains of politics, economics, law, culture, art, and intellectual life. But what was the pace of this development?

PERIODIZING THE LEGACIES OF THE HOLOCAUST

If the memory of the Holocaust became globalized after the Second World War, it also evolved over time, from an initial, unsettled period of displacement and uncertainty to a period of regime consolidation and legitimation in the 1950s, to a global breakthrough in public awareness in the 1960s and 1970s, to a period marked by debates over representation and memory starting in the 1980s, and finally shifting to questions of postcolonial comparison from the 1990s.

[23] See Chapter 5 by Devin Pendas in this volume.

Displacement and Uncertainty

Although liberation from Nazi rule and the end of warfare occurred at different moments in time between June 1944 and May 1945, depending on location, the "aftermath" of the Holocaust can be said to have truly begun with Germany's unconditional surrender to the Western powers on 8 May 1945 and to the Soviets on the following day. Some twenty million people were on the move in formerly German-controlled areas, including liberated concentration camp inmates, forced laborers, POWs, demobilized soldiers, and expelled ethnic Germans. Many of them were ill, most were malnourished, and all of them were traumatized.[24] The victorious Allies faced vast logistical and practical challenges that needed to be met, everything from finding food and shelter in a war-ravaged continent to identifying survivors (and the dead) and helping them to locate remaining family and friends, when possible. They set up vast DP camps, most in the western zones of occupied Germany, sometimes in former concentration and labor camps. The International Tracing Service was established to help survivors locate one another.[25] Efforts at documenting and interpreting the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities, which had already begun during the war, continued and picked up steam.[26]

The late 1940s also marked the highpoint of efforts to prosecute Nazi crimes throughout Europe. Tribunals – ranging from the world-famous IMT at Nuremberg to national military and state courts, to small Jewish communal "honor courts" in the DP camps and reemerging Jewish communities – pursued justice to the limits of their abilities.[27] While many of these trials focused on crimes other than the Holocaust, evidence of the Nazi extermination of the Jews was omnipresent in these proceedings, even if it was only

[24] See Chapter 1 by Kata Bohus and Atina Grossmann in this volume.
[25] S. Brown-Fleming, *Nazi Persecution and Postwar Repercussions: The International Tracing Service Archive and Holocaust Research* (Lanham, Rowan and Littlefield, 2016).
[26] D. Pendas, '"Final Solution," Holocaust, Shoah, or genocide: From separate to integrated histories', in H. Earl and S. Gigliotti (eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Holocaust* (Hoboken, NJ, Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), pp. 21–44; L. Jockusch, *Collect and Record: Jewish Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2012).
[27] See Chapter 5 by Devin Pendas in this volume. On Nuremberg, the standard work is K. C. Priemel, *The Betrayal: The Nuremberg Trials and German Divergence* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016). For honor courts, see L. Jockusch and G. Finder (eds.), *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2015).

rarely highlighted in its specificity. In this regard, these early postwar trials set the stage for the emergence of a more robust judicial reckoning with the Holocaust specifically in the 1960s.

Consolidation and Legitimation

Following the crisis period of the early postwar years, many states entered a period of reconstruction and regime consolidation in the 1950s. For both perpetrator states (Germany and Austria) and countries formerly allied with and occupied by Germany, the Holocaust posed a foundational challenge to this project, albeit in different ways. In most cases, countries "solved" this challenge by forging comforting myths. Nowhere is this more clear than in the case of Austria, which quickly asserted its status as "Hitler's first victim."[28] The provisional government, in announcing the formation of the Austrian Second Republic on 27 April 1945, declared "Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Third Reich deprived the people of Austria of their power and freedom to express their will, and led them into a senseless and pointless war of conquest, which no one in Austria wanted to take part in."[29] This founding myth remained dominant in Austria until at least the Waldheim Affair in the mid 1980s. (Kurt Waldheim, former UN Secretary General and then President of Austria, was revealed to have been a member of the SA and to have served in the Wehrmacht in the Balkans, where he was alleged to have at least passively accepted German atrocities.)

In (West) Germany, the myth making had to be somewhat subtler. It would have been both implausible (to say the least) to simply deny Germany's role in Nazi atrocities and politically untenable, as West Germany sought a rapprochement with western Europe and the USA. Thus, Konrad Adenauer, chancellor of the newly formed Federal Republic of Germany, acknowledged the evils of the Third Reich, and actively pursued the integration of West Germany into the emerging Western military alliance system (NATO) and the nascent European economic community, as a hedge against revanchism and a Nazi revival. At the same time, he blamed

[28] G. Bischoff and A. Pelinka (eds.), *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity* (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 1997).
[29] 'Proklamation der zweiten Republik Österreich', www.cvce.eu/obj/proklamation_der_zweiten_republik_osterreich_wien_27_april_1945-de-a49eaade-2468-46fd-80ad-000d471beb0b.html.

the horrors of Nazism on a small clique around Hitler and a handful of "real" criminals. He pushed hard for an end to the Allied denazification program and an amnesty for convicted Nazi criminals. He supported legislation to restore former Nazis removed from the civil service by denazification to office.[30] In this way, he hoped to reconcile former Nazis to the new state and avoid the kind of democratic collapse he had seen in the Weimar Republic. In short, he pursued what Jeffrey Herf has called "democratization via integration."[31]

In East Germany, the process of postwar mythologization faced rather different challenges. On the one hand, the German Democratic Republic also faced the problem of what to do about former Nazis, including Holocaust perpetrators. On the other hand, local communists and their Soviet sponsors were trying to construct a new dictatorship on the ruins of the former one. While East German officials were happy to pursue a more vigorous denazification program than their Western counterparts, especially because they could fold it into the process of purging potential anticommunist opponents, they were also desperate to find some basis of popular legitimacy among a largely disinterested or hostile population.[32] So the East Germans promulgated amnesties for "nominal" Nazis, much as their Western counterparts had done. While this ultimately did little to improve the popular legitimacy of the communist dictatorship, it did call for justification. In this regard, the East Germans had a ready foundation for their own postwar mythologizing. Nazism, they declared in accordance with Marxist-Leninist dogma, had been nothing more than the (final) expression of monopoly capitalism and imperialism. Since East Germany was neither capitalist nor imperialist – the Soviet empire in eastern Europe was recast as "solidarity" among socialist states – it was free of the taint of Nazism. It was, in the eyes of East German communists, an "antifascist" state and society, unlike West Germany, which, being capitalist and in cahoots with American imperialism, was simply a continuation of Nazism by other means. The all too real presence of former Nazis in positions of authority in the Federal Republic leant a gloss of plausibility to this mythologizing.[33]

[30] N. Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past : The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2002).
[31] J. Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 289.
[32] H. A. Welsh, *Revolutionärer Wandel auf Befehl?: Entnazifizierungs- und Personalpolitik in Thüringen und Sachsen (1945–1948)* (Munich, Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1989).
[33] M. Fulbrook, 'Reframing the past: Justice, guilt, and consolidation in East and West Germany after Nazism', *Central European History* 53:2 (2020), 294–313.

In formerly occupied Europe, there was a parallel process of mythologization and regime consolidation. Across the formerly occupied countries of both western and eastern Europe, the core issue was what to do about the legacy of collaboration. No occupied territory in Europe had been entirely immune to local cooperation with the Germans, motivated sometimes by pragmatic accommodation, sometimes by ideological affinity with anti-communism and antisemitism. Yet no country in postwar Europe was willing to be too public in acknowledging this fact. In many cases, the very real legacy of active resistance to the Nazis provided a way out of the dilemma. Because some had fought back against the Nazis, the fact that others had helped the occupiers could be effaced. The precise form of this "myth of resistance" varied from country to country. In the West, the central role played by the communists in the resistance needed to be repressed no less than the reality of collaboration.[34] In eastern Europe, the communist resistance could, of course, be freely glorified. Yet, both in western and in eastern Europe, the specificity of the Nazi genocide of the Jews had to be downplayed, both because any explicit acknowledgment would necessarily highlight the role of local collaborators in persecuting local Jews and because emphasizing Jewish suffering risked undermining the significance of non-Jewish suffering and the myth of heroic resistance by virtually everyone.[35]

In consolidating their postwar social order, states across Europe retreated into comforting myths. The local population had overwhelmingly opposed the Nazis and active resistance had been massive and effective. (Even the Germans claimed this for themselves.) The Germans had imposed their will on the local population exclusively through brute force. Collaboration, to the extent that it was acknowledged at all, was viewed as a marginal phenomenon, limited to the fringes of society. If Jews suffered, so too did the non-Jewish population, in almost equal measure. In this context, there was little space for the emergence of widespread awareness of the Holocaust as a distinct element of Nazi terror, of the specific role that the extermination of the Jews played in Nazi policy. The extermination of European Jewry was

[34] P. Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000); R. N. Lebow, W. Kansteiner, and C. Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2009).

[35] K. Bohus, P. Hallama, and S. Stach (eds.), *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest, Central European University Press, 2022). See Chapter 11 by Joanna B. Michlic and Per A. Rudling in this volume.

not passed over in total silence, but it was folded into broader narratives of *European* suffering and resistance.[36]

In the Jewish world, there was awareness of the centrality of the Holocaust as a transnational, continent-wide event, one that, although initiated and perpetrated by the Nazi state, could only have been implemented because of the assistance of local non-Jews. As the remnant of European Jews was grappling with destruction, trauma, and loss, their narratives of distinct victimization *as Jews* were not heard by their surrounding societies, unless they tied their suffering of racial persecution and systematic mass murder to larger narratives of resistance, antifascist combat, and their country's liberation from Nazi rule. This led Jews to keep the discourse about their wartime experiences to their own circles, along with working through the past in memorial events, *Yisker* (memorial) books, memoirs, and historical studies.[37] Jewish communities also entered a process of soul-searching around the rifts that the persecution and loss of agency, and the randomness of survival had caused; many survivors wrongly blamed Jewish communal leaders and prisoner functionaries, rather than the Nazi perpetrators, for the scale of destruction they had suffered, misjudging the power relations between Jewish communities and their Nazi oppressors. Only over time would the perception change. Jews in "privileged" positions came to also be seen as victims, and it became clear that Jewish leaders for the most part had acted for the communal benefit in an ever-worsening situation of genocidal repression.[38]

In the newly founded state of Israel, which had absorbed large numbers of Holocaust survivors, public perceptions of survivors were polarized. Public perception of survivors was filtered through the lens of Zionist ideology, which saw diaspora Jews as "passive" and diaspora Jewish life as harmful to Jewish existence. Survivors who had been ghetto fighters and partisans enjoyed public attention and respect for allegedly having "saved the honor" of the Jewish people through armed resistance, while "ordinary" survivors, those who did not have the credentials of "resisters," were charged with "passivity" and "collaboration." In Israel as elsewhere, public discourse about survivors and their experiences evinced little understanding of the

[36] R. Stauber (ed.), *Collaboration with the Nazis: Public Discourse after the Holocaust* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2011).
[37] E. Gallas and L. Jockusch, 'Anything but silent: Jewish responses to the Holocaust', in S. Gigliotti and H. Earl (eds.), *A Companion to the Holocaust* (New York, Wiley Blackwell, 2020), pp. 311–30.
[38] A. Brown, *Judging "Privileged" Jews: Holocaust Ethics, Representation, and the "Grey Zone"* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2013).

complexity of the historical situation. There was little recognition that Jews engaged in many different forms of resistance, armed resistance being only one of them. There were a number of prominent court cases alleging "collaboration" with the Nazis against some Holocaust survivors.[39]

The Global Breakthrough

The 1960s and 1970s marked a breakthrough period for global Holocaust awareness. The myths and evasions of the 1950s became harder to sustain in the face of a series of highly public events that put the Holocaust at the center of public debates. Among these, perhaps the most significant were the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961), the first Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial (1963–5), and the screening of the American television miniseries *Holocaust* (1978).

Adolf Eichmann, kidnapped in Argentina in May 1960 by Israeli secret agents and brought to Israel to stand trial, had been a mid-ranking SS officer, not a major decision-maker, but an able and ambitious bureaucrat who worked out the logistics of implementing the "Final Solution." He was the paradigmatic "desk murderer." Eichmann was tried between April and August 1961. He was found guilty, sentenced to death, and hanged. The case was significant not only because Eichmann was the first and only Nazi perpetrator to be tried in Israel. It was also the first true "Holocaust trial" in that it addressed the Nazi mass murder of European Jews in its entirety. Moreover, it departed from previous war crime trials in that the prosecution based its case primarily on oral evidence from 108 Holocaust survivors whose testimony represented different countries and diverse wartime experiences, establishing a general understanding of the scope and complexity of the Holocaust.[40] This emphasis on survivor testimony also highlighted the human dimensions of the Holocaust. Although survivors had told their stories before, they were now listened to for the first time. Their longstanding efforts to force a public reckoning with the Holocaust bore fruit. The Israeli audience responded with shock and emotional turmoil, but also

[39] D. Porat, *Bitter Reckoning: Israel Tries Holocaust Survivors as Nazi Collaborators* (Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press, 2019). See also Chapter 10 by Laura Jockusch and Avinoam J. Patt in this volume.
[40] L. Bilsky, 'The "Eichmann" Trial: Towards a jurisprudence of eyewitness testimony of atrocities', *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 12:1 (2014), 27–57.

empathized and identified with survivors, recognizing the Holocaust as a foundational Israeli experience. The trial fostered Israelis' historical knowledge, softening the "resisters" versus "victims"/"collaborators" dichotomy, adding complexity and nuance to the public discourse about the past. Having attracted an international audience and wide international press coverage, the Eichmann trial also had a wide-ranging impact beyond Israel, creating a more widespread and nuanced historical understanding of the Holocaust.[41]

Unlike most, but not all, previous Nazi trials in West Germany, the first Auschwitz Trial focused centrally on the Holocaust.[42] Twenty-two men were initially indicted, and twenty stood trial. All were charged with murder or being an accessory to murder. Many were indicted for crimes directly related to the extermination process, ranging from helping to "select" new arrivals for the gas chambers to killing prisoners too weak to work with an injection of phenol directly into the heart. Others were indicted for "excesses," including torture and extrajudicial killings. Seventeen of the twenty defendants were convicted, but what is striking about the final verdicts is that those convicted of murder and thus subjected to a mandatory life sentence were all convicted for "excess" acts, either exclusively or in connection with their genocidal activities. Those convicted only of genocidal homicide were treated as accomplices and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 3.5 to 14 years.

This peculiarity of the verdict in the trial helps explain the nature of the public's reaction. Although not quite the global media sensation that the Eichmann Trial was, the Auschwitz Trial received considerable international press and overwhelming coverage within West Germany itself. On the one hand, the press coverage made it overwhelmingly clear that Auschwitz had been a site not just of mass murder, but of genocidal extermination focused primarily on Jews. The tragic stories of numerous witnesses (over 200 survivors testified, 90 of them Jewish) appeared almost daily in the West German media. On the other hand, the court's need to probe the very specific motives of the defendants to distinguish perpetrators from accomplices gave the impression that the true "evil" of Auschwitz lay in the psychopathology of individual killers, rather than in the genocidal nature of the Nazi regime as such.

[41] H. Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann* (New York, Schocken Books, 2004).
[42] See D. O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965: Genocide, History and the Limits of the Law* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006); R. Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2005).

So, while the Auschwitz Trial challenged the Adenauer myth that Nazi criminality consisted mainly of wartime excesses and revealed the mechanics of extermination with horrifying clarity, it continued to enable a certain kind of public evasion. The "real" criminals were sadistic deviants. Ordinary Germans had, at worst, been reluctant accomplices, and most had been innocent bystanders. This was a shift in public perception, but not yet a fundamental confrontation with the widespread complicity and broad support enjoyed by the Nazi regime.

Ironically, it would take a television melodrama to truly break through the veil of mythologizing surrounding the Holocaust, especially in Germany. First broadcast in the USA in 1978 and in Germany in 1979, *Holocaust* the miniseries was in many ways stereotypical television fare for the era. Over four parts, the series traces the lives of two families, one Jewish, one German, across the major events of the Holocaust. The families are intended to be "representative" of larger groups. The head of the German family becomes a major perpetrator and architect of the extermination campaign. Members of the Jewish family are present at every major catastrophe, from Kristallnacht to Babyn Iar, to the Warsaw ghetto uprising, to Auschwitz.

The filmmaking is standard Hollywood style, the story-telling workmanlike at best. It was precisely the predictable nature of the story-telling, however, that made the series so resonant. As with the miniseries *Roots* addressing the horrors of American slavery broadcast a year earlier, turning historical catastrophe into a melodramatic cliché rendered it accessible to a broad audience, in a way that more modernist or avant-garde cultural products were not.[43] Especially in West Germany, the public reaction was overwhelming.[44] Paradoxically, by allowing Germans to emotionally identify with the Jewish victims, the series also forced them to confront the reality of the German perpetrators to a greater extent than most Germans had previously been willing to do. By rendering the extermination of European Jewry in a globalized American pop culture idiom, the miniseries *Holocaust* helped solidify the historical event as a cultural touchstone, broadly recognized and increasingly available for political and cultural appropriation.

[43] A. Huyssen, 'The politics of identification: "Holocaust" and West German drama', *New German Critique* 19 (1980), 117–36.
[44] P. Märthesheimer and I. Frenzel (eds.), *Im Kreuzfeuer: Der Fernsehfilm Holocaust: Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1979).

Memory Wars of the 1980s and 1990s

The global breakthrough of Holocaust awareness in the 1960s and 1970s was so powerful that, by the mid 1990s, the Catholic intellectual Richard John Neuhaus could remark that "The Holocaust is . . . our only culturally available icon of absolute evil."[45] Yet, even at the pinnacle of its cultural influence, Holocaust memory was hardly unitary or uncontested. The 1980s and 1990s saw a series of controversial debates concerning the comparability or uniqueness of the Holocaust, on the one hand, and the proper historical methodology for analyzing the extermination of the Jews, on the other. These debates were to a degree empirical, but, more fundamentally, they concerned morality and politics. The first comparability debate was primarily Anglophone and was concerned with the similarities and differences between the Holocaust and colonial genocides. The second was German, and focused on the relationship between the Holocaust and Soviet mass murder. Both asked whether the Holocaust was "unique" and, if so, in what sense? Finally, there was a methodological and ethical debate over the usefulness (or not) of using postmodernism to study the Holocaust. Was postmodernism, with its emphasis on the constructed nature of knowledge and the ways in which it was defined by power relations, ever an appropriate way to study the Holocaust, or did it necessarily lead to minimizing and relativizing the horrors of that event? Might it not even lead to Holocaust denial?

Starting in the late 1980s, scholars began to debate the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Broadly speaking, scholars on one side argued that one or more aspects of the Holocaust – whether its scope and intensity, the novel use of modern technology and logistics for the killing operations, or the totalizing intent of Nazi genocidal ideology – made it unlike any other incident of mass killing in human history. On the other side were scholars who argued that the Holocaust, while horrific and appalling, was but one instance in a litany of other similar genocides.[46]

Some of the issues raised, such as the relative percentages of populations killed in various genocides, could be resolved through empirical research. Others, such as the precise intentions of the perpetrators or the moral weight of the mass murder itself, were open to interpretation and tended to

[45] R. J. Neuhaus, 'Daniel Goldhagen's Holocaust', *First Things* (August 1996), www.firstthings.com/article/1996/08/daniel-goldhagens-holocaust.

[46] For a useful overview, see A. S. Rosenbaum (ed.), *Is the Holocaust Unique: Perspectives on Comparative Genocide*, 3rd ed. (Boulder, Westview Press, 2009).

implicate present-day political debates (e.g., over Israel/Palestine or postcolonial politics). This explains the persistence of the uniqueness debate, the way in which it crops up in unexpected contexts and seems to recur every few years.[47] The frustrating inconclusiveness of the debate is perhaps unsurprising, given that the Holocaust, like any such event, was both unique and yet shared some attributes with other instances of mass killing. The very claim of uniqueness is itself a comparative claim. So, in the end, the various parties to the debate were frequently talking past one another, rather than engaging in a productive conversation.

A related but not identical controversy erupted in West Germany in the 1980s, the so-called *Historikerstreit* (historians' controversy).[48] This controversy pitted conservative historians, who argued that the Holocaust was not fundamentally different from the mass murders conducted by the Soviet state under Stalin, against liberals who insisted that the Holocaust was distinct, and that comparison to Soviet violence both relativized and trivialized Nazi genocide. In contrast to the broader uniqueness debate, with which it shares key features, the *Historikerstreit* was more overtly political. The conservatives explicitly sought to "normalize" the German past for the sake of legitimating contemporary German nationalism (patriotism, as they termed it). The liberals, in turn, feared that any relativization of the Holocaust would lead to a return of authoritarian politics in Germany. The controversy also differed from the uniqueness debate in that at least some of the conservative historians involved argued not just that the Holocaust was similar to Soviet mass murder, but that it was a direct response to the threat of "Asiatic" barbarism coming from the Soviet Union.[49] On this view, the Holocaust was essentially a preemptive genocide against the Soviet threat. That this view recapitulates the logic of Nazi ideology should be clear. And this was precisely what worried the liberal opponents of this view. In this regard, the *Historikerstreit* was not so much a historical debate as it was a political fight.

[47] For a very recent example, see the contretemps around A. D. Moses, 'The German Catechism', https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism. For a useful overview of the entire debate, see D. Stone, 'Paranoia and the perils of misreading', www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/dan-stone-holocaust-dirk-moses-german-news-germany-jewish-history-world-news-73492.

[48] For an overview, see C. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1988). Most of the relevant contributions are collected in R. Augstein, K. D. Bracher, M. Broszat et al., *"Historikerstreit": Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, Piper, 1987).

[49] E. Nolte, 'Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 1986.

The 1990s also saw postmodern or post-structuralist approaches applied to the study of the Holocaust, with ensuing debates over "relativism" and the truthful depiction of the Holocaust. In a seminal but controversial essay, Hayden White helped initiate the debate. There is, he argued, an "inexpugnable relativity in every representation of historical phenomena."[50] Although White was careful to note that historical facts are not open to debate (thus foreclosing the possibility that Holocaust denial could be protected by the umbrella of relativism), he nevertheless maintained that, when it came to the interpretation of historical facts, "there are no grounds to be found in the historical record itself for preferring one way of construing its meaning over another."[51] There was, in this view, no objective way to distinguish between true or false narratives of the Holocaust (provided they were factually accurate). The choice, according to White, was essentially aesthetic.

Not everyone was comfortable with this degree of relativism, despite White's assurances that it did not enable outright Holocaust denial. Perhaps no historian has been more critical of postmodernism in general, and its potential to abet Holocaust denial in particular, than Deborah Lipstadt. "[D]constructionist history at its worst," she insists, means that "no fact, no event, and no aspect of history has any fixed meaning or content. Any truth can be retold. Any fact can be recast .... Holocaust denial is part of this phenomenon."[52] Similarly, Richard Evans blames the "increase in the scope and intensity of the Holocaust deniers' activities since the mid-1970s" on the "postmodernist intellectual climate, above all in the United States."[53]

As with the controversies around comparative approaches to the study of the Holocaust, politics were close to the surface in the debates over postmodernism and relativism. The critique of postmodern relativism leading to Holocaust denial signaled an unease (to say the least) at the way postmodernist theory had shaped academic politics since the 1980s, and a desire to

[50] H. White, 'Historical emplotment and the problem of truth', in S. Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 37.
[51] H. White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p. 74.
[52] D. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York, The Free Press, 1993), pp. 19–20.
[53] R. J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1999), p. 208.

defend an older methodological approach that also reinforced the (neo)liberal status quo against attacks from the left.[54]

Whatever the merits or demerits of postmodernism as a methodology for studying the Holocaust (or anything else), there can be no doubt that it helped spur interest in new topics. As the so-called linguistic turn gave rise to what Lynn Hunt termed the "new cultural history" in the course of the 1990s, Holocaust historians increasingly turned their attention to the postwar period and questions of representation.[55] Alongside continued interest in the concrete unfolding of the extermination itself and how to explain perpetrator behavior – whether through ideology (e.g., the distinct nature of German antisemitism), or through circumstantial factors (e.g., peer pressure, military hierarchy, or gender stereotypes) – new aspects emerged. Attention shifted from elite Nazis to ordinary Germans.[56] With the fall of communism, the sites of mass murder became accessible, as did vast archival repositories. As a result, research began to shift its focus from Germany to Europe and especially eastern Europe. These sources highlighted new aspects of different kinds of German institutions and perpetrators in occupied territories, the connections between the murder of the Jews and the fate of other victim groups, especially people with disabilities, and Nazi Germany's colonial projects that involved "Germanization" policies, population transfers, and slave labor, and opened up the discussion on local collaboration. It was the widespread use of sexual violence as a tool of warfare and genocide in Yugoslavia and Rwanda which led Holocaust historians to incorporate gender-based violence into the study of the Holocaust. Closely related was the exploration of women's and gender histories of Nazi atrocities. Moreover, scholars began to question the prioritization of "objective" Nazi documents over "subjective" victim sources that had been dominant practice in Holocaust studies. As a result, they began to integrate both types of sources into the historical narrative and merged "top down" with "bottom up" perspectives.[57] One manifestation was a growing interest in the history of everyday life.[58]

[54] Paradigmatic here is K. Windschuttle, *The Killing of History: How Literary Critics and Social Theorists are Murdering Our Past* (New York, The Free Press, 1997). For a powerful defense of postmodernism, see R. Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004).

[55] See L. Hunt (ed.), *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989).

[56] C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, HarperCollins, 1992).

[57] S. Friedländer, 'An integrated history of the Holocaust: Some methodological challenges', in D. Stone (ed.), *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2022), pp. 181–9.

[58] D. Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1987); M. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1998).

Holocaust memory became a discrete topic of inquiry. The "era of the witness" was defined as a distinct period during which Holocaust survivors had moved from the periphery to the center of public attention and became valorized as moral authority figures.[59] Memorial institutions as well as grassroots initiatives invested in gathering vast collections of Holocaust testimonies that established a new genre of audio and video testimony which also became definitive for other persecuted groups to narrate their traumatic pasts. At the same time, the 1990s saw an increased scholarly interest in memorials and museums, art and literature and the post-history of the Holocaust became a central part of the study of the Holocaust.[60]

Into the Twenty-First Century

The legacy of the Holocaust has always been caught up in contemporary politics, but the politicization of Holocaust memory seems, if anything, to be growing in the twenty-first century. In different ways, and for opposed purposes, both right-wing populists and left-wing activists have increasingly sought to control the narrative of the Holocaust.

Perhaps the most glaring example of this dynamic has been the (previous) Polish government's efforts to use legislation to dictate what can and cannot be said about the Holocaust.[61] In February 2018, the then ruling Law and Justice party passed legislation making it illegal to "claim, publicly and contrary to the facts, that the Polish Nation or the Republic of Poland is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes."[62] In other words, publicly discussing Polish collaboration with the Germans, including in the Holocaust, was criminalized. Although, to be fair, under American pressure, the Polish government subsequently amended the law to remove the most dire portions. However, this does not prevent individuals, with support of the Law and Justice party, from prosecuting historians through defamation lawsuits. Similar laws

[59] A. Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2006 [1998]); C. J. Dean, *The Moral Witness: Trials and Testimony after Genocide* (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2019).
[60] R. Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013); J. E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993). See Chapters 17 and 18 by Todd Presner and Natasha Goldman, respectively, in this volume.
[61] See Chapter 11 by Joanna B. Michlic and Per A. Rudling in this volume.
[62] 'Full text of Poland's controversial Holocaust legislation', *Times of Israel*, 1 February 2018, www.timesofisrael.com/full-text-of-polands-controversial-holocaust-legislation.

were passed in Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia. One can add to these legal measures strong state support for "approved" versions of Holocaust history, ones that, for instance, emphasize Polish rescue of Jews exclusively, with no acknowledgment of individual collaboration.

Some of this is simply the appropriation of Western mythologies about resistance and victimization for use in postcommunist eastern Europe (long after they fell out of favor in the West). But these eastern European strategies of obfuscation and distortion are intended less to consolidate a liberal-democratic order – as their earlier western European versions had done – than to help sustain an increasingly authoritarian populism. It is part and parcel of a revival of ethnonationalism and "illiberal democracy" (to borrow Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's phrase). (The results of the October 2023 Polish parliamentary election seem to have changed this trajectory, though further developments remain to be seen.)

The politicization of Holocaust remembrance in eastern Europe makes some sense, because many of these states were directly implicated in the complex dynamics of destruction, as collaborators, but also as targets of German violence. As Russia's February 2022 attack on Ukraine has shown, the (not entirely untrue) charge of Ukrainian collaboration during the Second World War can be used as a pretext for unilateral aggression today. The left-wing politicization of the Holocaust also has a certain geopolitical logic, especially insofar as it is mobilized in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Claims about the genocidal character of "settler colonialism" can be uprooted from discussions of the Americas or South Africa and applied ahistorically to Israel as a political strategy. They cease to be comparative claims about historical events and transform into polemical assertions of contemporary interests.

In this regard, it makes sense that this newly vigorous politicization is happening at a moment when the Holocaust has moved firmly from the realm of living memory into the domain of history. With the passing of the generation of the survivors – indeed all "contemporaries," including perpetrators and bystanders – no one with first-hand experience, direct knowledge, or personal memory will be left. This means the end of testimony because there will be no one left to testify about their lived experience. It also means the end of criminal trials related to Nazi crimes, since there will be no perpetrators to be tried and no witnesses to take the stand. This marks the end of record creation for historical research. The event truly passes into history and the realm of post-memory. This is the context for the hyper-politicization of Holocaust discourse. Many people who are neither directly

implicated nor particularly knowledgeable engage in Holocaust debates that, at the end of the day, have little to do with the Holocaust and everything to do with current culture war politics.

Efforts to "eternalize" Holocaust memory, by creating "living witnesses" using AI and holograms that can seemingly answer audience questions, are an attempt to offset these challenges.[63] Given the growing culture of mistrust in much of the Western world, and the myriad ways in which this is likely to be exacerbated, rather than ameliorated, by the increasing use of AI, the long term of success of such efforts is uncertain at best. Indeed, the ability to create authentic seeming but artificial testimony opens up new possibilities for Holocaust deniers as much as it does for those wishing to preserve authentic memory.

After nearly eight decades of research, historical scholarship on the Holocaust has never been richer or more geographically and methodologically diverse than now. Yet at the same time there is a disconnect between scholarship and society. In public discourse and popular culture the Holocaust is omnipresent – in the entertainment industry, political rhetoric, and especially social media – but its complex history is less and less understood. Historical knowledge of the event is declining dramatically, especially among millennials and Gen Z.[64] The Holocaust has become a "free-floating signifier," a "metaphor" that is detached from its distinct meaning and concrete context, removed from actual historical events. Debates about the Holocaust have become political, not historical. It is therefore all the more imperative that historical research continues, in the most rigorous, grounded, and analytical manner possible. Even if much of the public is disinterested in scholarship, it remains a powerful tool – perhaps the only one – to counter distortions, political manipulation, and equivocation.

[63] See Chapter 17 by Todd Presner in this volume.
[64] See, for example, the 2020 study by the Claims Conference covering all fifty states in the USA, in addition to the Netherlands, the UK, France, Austria, and Canada, www.claimscon.org/millennial-study.