The Abuse of Holocaust Memory in 2011-2012
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The Holocaust has become a symbol of absolute evil in Western society. This has happened gradually over the past decades. One might have expected that more than sixty-five years after the end of the Second World War, the mention and memory of it would fade away. Indeed, “Holocaust fatigue” is widespread; many people do not want to hear anything more about the subject.

At the same time, many others increasingly mention and discuss the Holocaust. It took sixty years until in 2005, the United Nations General Assembly named 27 January as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Every UN member state also has an official obligation to honor the victims of the Nazi era and develop educational material about the Holocaust. In 2012, remembrance of the Holocaust was devoted to children. In his message, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said:

One and a half million Jewish children perished in the Holocaust – victims of persecution by the Nazis and their supporters. Tens of thousands of other children were also murdered. They included people with disabilities…as well as Roma and Sinti. All were victims of a hate-filled ideology that labeled them as “inferior.”

Why This Interest in the Holocaust?

What are the main reasons for this increasing interest in the Holocaust? We can list a number of them, but we do not know their relative weight in keeping the Holocaust a central issue in society. One very partial explanation is the memorial meetings that take place every year in many places. Some are very emotional. An annual one is held at the location of the former Paris cycling stadium. There, more than thirteen thousand Jews who had been arrested were brought together in July 1942 before being sent to German death camps. In 2012, French president François Hollande gave a moving speech at the memorial meeting. He noted that the arrests were carried out by French policemen, and added that not a single German soldier had to be mobilized.

This was a very important statement, as it highlighted France’s share in the responsibility for the murder of Jews during the Holocaust. It was even more significant because the last Socialist president, François Mitterrand, was unwilling to acknowledge France’s assistance in the crimes.

Hollande also said at the gathering that France would act with determination against anti-Semitism. Increased anti-Semitism in Europe is yet another reason for the Holocaust remaining a subject of considerable dialogue. This is the more so as on various occasions, anti-Semites make use of Nazi terminology.

New Monuments

New memorial centers are still being established and so are new monuments. In September 2012, a new Holocaust memorial center was inaugurated at Drancy, the major transit camp in France. There, 63,000 of the 76,000 deported Jews transited and almost all were sent to their deaths. Hollande said at the inauguration ceremony that the true facts about the Holocaust had been established. He observed that the main issue has now become to convey that truth.

During that same month, French prime minister Jean-Marc Ayrault inaugurated another memorial near Aix en Provence in the camp of Des Milles. Out of ten thousand people interned there, two
thousand were sent to Auschwitz. The inauguration date was 10 September 2012, seventy years after the last train left from there for Auschwitz.

In November 2012, the Dossin Baracks (Kazerne Dossin) in Mechelen, Belgium were reopened in the presence of King Albert. They have now become a full-fledged museum and documentation center about the Holocaust and human rights. From these barracks, 25,484 Belgian Jews and 352 gypsies were deported.

Another remarkable event was the visit by members of the British soccer team to Auschwitz before they participated in the European Championship.

Such events contribute to maintaining the interest in the Holocaust. However, memorial days and visits to extermination camps and monuments by well-known people usually only draw attention for short periods of time.

**Research**

New historical research about the war period is often being published. One important study was carried out by the Joint German-Italian Commission of Historians. In 2012, it came to the conclusion that every day between September 1943 and 8 May 1945, on the average, 165 Italian civilians, prisoners of war, and interned military or political deportees died as a result of German orders. That does not include Italian soldiers fighting the Germans, or partisans.

Significant new research about the Holocaust is also being published. Only a few examples can be given here to illustrate its diversity. One impressive work released in 2012 was the Dutch book In Memoriam by Guus Luijters. It lists the names of about eighteen thousand Dutch children, almost all Jewish, who were murdered during the war.

The German historian Joachim Scholtyssek published a major study about the Nazi past of the Quandt family, who control a huge business empire. He came to the conclusion that its leading figure during the war, Gunther Quandt, was an integral part of the Nazi regime.

New data has also been published about the Nazi past of certain individuals. In 2011, additional information became available about the involvement in a Swedish Nazi party of Ingvar Kamprad, the billionaire founder of the Ikea furniture group. A new book revealed that French anti-Semitic fashion designer Coco Chanel was a Nazi spy.

New documents are also being discovered. In one example among many, pictures taken by Hitler’s personal photographer Hugo Jaeger of Polish Jews in the ghetto of Kutno in 1939 and 1940 were released in October 2012. This was done to mark the official establishment of the Warsaw Ghetto in October 1940.

**After the War**

Additional information also became available about postwar events related to the Holocaust. The German weekly Der Spiegel published that in the 1990s, the German intelligence service BND destroyed its huge files on the mass murderer Alois Brunner, who had been Adolf Eichmann’s closest collaborator. Brunner had fled to Syria. It also emerged that the BND had employed SS officer Walther Rauff in the 1950s and 1960s. He had been involved in the development of vehicles in which Jews were gassed. Other members of the SS were also employed by the BND.
It was furthermore revealed from classified documents that the BND knew Eichmann’s location as early as 1952, eight years before Israeli agents captured him. Bettina Stangneth, a German historian, reacted to this news by stating that there was a lack of political will in West Germany to put him on trial. She added: “Who would have been interested in having an Eichmann trial when even the chancellor declared in early 1953 that all the talk of Nazis should stop?”17

Such research and discoveries are noted in the media, often drawing further interest in the Holocaust. So do apologies. The German fashion house Hugo Boss has apologized for the fact that its late founder, of the same name, was an early and loyal Nazi Party member. One of the company’s first big contracts was to supply brown shirts to the party; later they also supplied the SS with uniforms. A new book, Hugo Boss 1924-1945, was published by historian Roman Koester.18

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2012, Norwegian prime minister Jens Stoltenberg apologized for Norway’s role in deporting Jews to their deaths. He said: “It was the Norwegians who carried out the arrests, it was Norwegians who drove the trucks, and this happened in Norway.”19 Later that year, on 26 November 2012, Police Chief Odd Reidar Humlegaard made an apology, stating: “It is fitting that I express my regret for the role police played in the arrest and deportation of these completely innocent victims.” The date chosen for this apology was the seventieth anniversary of the Norwegian deportation of the first group of Jews to Auschwitz.20

Basic Questions

The aforementioned events and issues play a significant role in the increased curiosity about the Holocaust. At the same time, some of them are also a result of interest in the Holocaust.

That the Holocaust continues to hold a central position in European public discourse is also due to some other important developments. One is that European societies have become increasingly secular. That means their traditional norms and values have, to a large extent, broken down. In such an ideological and moral vacuum, a need is felt for standards on which many people largely agree. The Holocaust fulfills that function in part. It continues to play a role as a defining moment in European history.

The Holocaust touches upon very basic questions that many Europeans do not like to ask. What was it in European culture and societies that allowed the Holocaust to occur? Which movements demonized the Jews so profoundly and for so long that they laid the ideological basis for the Holocaust long before Nazism even emerged? This leads to a taboo question: to what extent are the elements that made the Holocaust possible still present in Europe? Part of the answer is evident: anti-Semitism is an integral part of European culture. To avoid any misunderstanding, one has to add that this does not mean most Europeans are anti-Semites.

Many European nations and individuals should ask these questions – first and foremost Germany and Austria. They do not, though, seem inclined to do so. The present generation in Europe should not be held responsible for what their forebears did. However, the Holocaust and Nazism cannot be eliminated from German and Austrian history. Many forebears of contemporary Germans and Austrians were Nazi enthusiasts. Numerous other Germans and Austrians collaborated with the Nazis without hesitation. Worse yet, many mass murderers were not put on trial after the war. It is naïve to assume that nothing of the attitudes of these people has remained in these countries’ contemporary societies.

Neo-Fascist Parties
Another important element related to the increasing interest in the Holocaust is the growing uncertainty in the world. This creates a need for points of reference to help assess a large number of new events. An example is the emergence of parties in European countries with many neo-fascist and neo-Nazi characteristics. It becomes even more problematic when these parties are elected to parliaments.

In the new century, neo-Nazism and fascism, sometimes only in slightly modified forms, have again emerged in force. Hungary is one country where this has happened. There, the neo-fascist and anti-Semitic Jobbik Party received nearly 17 percent of the votes in the 2010 parliamentary elections. It is the third largest party in Hungary.

More recently in Greece, the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn has seen a major increase in its power. It won seats in parliament during both elections held in 2012. By autumn 2012, Golden Dawn was receiving 14 percent in opinion polls. If this trend continues, in the next elections it will become the third largest party in Greece. There are also claims that Golden Dawn members have infiltrated the Greek police.

Once such parties succeed to enter a parliament, they subsequently attain international status. When one sees their increasing power, one is reminded of the 1930s and wonders what further promotion of racist and anti-Semitic hatred will follow. These two parties are one aspect of a much wider phenomenon, namely, the reemergence of criminal worldviews and ideologies in Europe. Current ideological developments in Europe are indeed worrisome.

There are also phenomena of individuals identifying with Nazism. In July 2012, Russian opera singer Evgeny Nikitin withdrew from the Bayreuth Opera Festival because of his Nazi-inspired tattoos. The festival spokesman said its directors were sensitive to issues related to the Nazi period. This was the more so as Hitler admired Wagner and often attended this festival. The postwar generation of Wagner descendants has made an effort to confront this connection to Hitler.

The Holocaust was a major aspect of the war, but far from the only one. Yet it seems that in contemporary public discourse, it is the one that most often comes to the fore. At the same time, other major aspects of the Second World War are increasingly referred to; Nazism comes to mind in particular.

Simultaneously with the growing interest in Holocaust, the distortion of its history and memory increases as well. To fight this effectively, one must first understand this phenomenon. To do so, one should investigate recent developments in the eight categories of distortion as defined in this author’s book, The Abuse of Holocaust Memory: Distortions and Responses. The examples of distortion of the Holocaust come from many countries and many different circles.

This author has already been observing these phenomena for a number of years. Although no quantitative data exist, it seems that Holocaust-abuse occurrences are on the rise. In the last year or two, there have been so many incidents that one can only describe a limited number of them.

Holocaust Promotion and Justification

The abuse of the Holocaust has become so major that within several categories of distortion, subcategories have emerged. This can be well illustrated from the first category of distortion, which concerns Holocaust promotion and justification.

The most extreme form of this is the promotion of a new Holocaust. This intense hate-mongering is mainly associated with sizable parts of the Muslim world. The main actors are the Iranian
government and the Palestinian Hamas movement. But there are many others. For instance, in October 2012, a video showed how Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi answered “Amen” to an imam who prayed, “Oh Allah, destroy the Jews and their supporters.”

The call for the murder of Jews is much more widespread in the Muslim world than many in the Western world wish to know, admit, or publicize. One reason is that from all these examples of Holocaust promotion, several conclusions can be drawn that are to a large extent politically incorrect or even taboo. The basis of the Western multicultural position is the false claim that all cultures are equal in value. A culture where many prominent people promote murder, however, is inferior to a democratic culture. This does not make individuals living in such a culture inferior human beings. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The flawed idea that all cultures at a given time in history are equivalent has absurd implications. One is that Nazi culture in the mid-twentieth century was equal to the democratic culture of the Allies. Murdering six million Jews in the Holocaust fit German culture at the time. If there is no hierarchy of cultures, then there was nothing reprehensible about this genocide. Such examples of indirect justification of the Holocaust merit further investigation.

Other Holocaust promoters can be found in neo-Nazi environments. There are also individuals or small groups who scrawl “Death to the Jews” graffiti, for instance. This also occurs frequently on social networks. “A good Jew” (“UnBonJuif”), which spread anti-Semitic jokes, became the third most popular hashtag among French Twitter users in October 2012. Several of them tweeted “A good Jew is a dead Jew.”

Comparing Islamism to Nazism

Some of those comparing attitudes of movements in the Islamic world to those of the Nazis present weighty arguments. Holocaust expert Yehuda Bauer points out:

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

Holocaust historian Robert Wistrich writes that hard-core anti-Semitism in the Arab and Muslim world is comparable only to that of Nazi Germany. Wistrich explains that Muslim hatred for Israel and Jews is “an eliminatory anti-Semitism with a genocidal dimension.” As common elements between Muslim and Nazi anti-Semitism, Wistrich lists fanaticism, the cult of death, the nihilistic wish for destruction, and the mad lust for world hegemony.

An article by Richard Prasquier, chairman of CRIF, the umbrella for French Jewish organizations, compares radical Islam to Nazism. He notes two important common features. The first is that the Jew is their prime enemy; for both movements, anti-Semitism is an essential component of their ideology. The other is that both Nazism and radical Islam dehumanize Jews.

Holocaust Justification

Holocaust promotion is not necessarily accompanied by the distortion of Holocaust memory or history. This type of incitement has to be included in the analysis of Holocaust abuse because of the
close relationship to it. The advancing of a new Holocaust can also be done indirectly. If one asserts that Jews have no right to self-determination, that means the Jewish state has no right to exist. As Israel already exists, one is here not only making an anti-Semitic statement but also indirectly justifying a second Holocaust. The only way to eliminate the existing Jewish state is through mass murder or genocide.

One of the prominent variants of direct Holocaust justification asserts that Hitler failed to complete the extermination of the Jews. As time passes, new aspects of this subcategory emerge. In February 2011, a Palestinian magazine published an article by a ten-year-old Palestinian girl who recounted a dream in which Hitler told her: “Yes. I killed them [the Jews] so you would all know that they are a nation who spreads destruction all over the world.” This magazine was subsidized by UNESCO. After protests, UNESCO stopped funding this publication in December 2011.31

There are also “soft ways” to convey Holocaust promotion and justification messages. In the 2011 Berlin state elections, the far-right National Democratic Party used the slogan “Give Gas.” An election ad showed party leader Udo Voigt on a motorcycle with a jacket resembling an SS uniform. The ad contained the “Give Gas” slogan as well.32

**Holocaust Denial**

Holocaust denial can be defined as the rejection of the main facts of the extermination of the Jews in the Second World War. The essence of Holocaust denial can be illustrated with a sentence from Holocaust-denier David Irving: “More women died in the back seat of Edward Kennedy’s car at Chappaquiddick than ever died in a gas chamber at Auschwitz.”33

Holocaust denial can be regarded as perhaps the most far-reaching anti-Semitic lie. What it says in essence is that the Jews are the greatest liars around. They have invented a terrible, inhuman persecution that never took place.

Holocaust denial continues to resurface. One positive development in 2012 was that the extremist Catholic Society of Pius X finally expelled English bishop Richard Williamson. He is not only a Holocaust denier but also falsely claims that The Protocols of the Elders of Zion are authentic.34

Holocaust denial is widespread in Muslim countries and is extensive among neo-Nazis. But it also seems to be fairly common among Muslim immigrants in Western countries. An interview with a young ex-Muslim woman in the Netherlands, who chose the pseudonym Samar, bears this out. During her adolescence she began to realize how deep was the hatred of Jews among almost all other young Muslims she met.

Samar started to monitor this hatred among Muslim students. She says:

> During my years at university, I spoke with an estimated 150-200 Muslims. It struck me that almost all held the same opinions. It didn’t matter whether they were Moroccans, Turks, Kurds, or Muslims from Suriname. In all those years, I only met two Muslims who did not hate Jews or Israel.

> Almost all Muslim youngsters I met at university denied the Holocaust. They did not believe in the so-called “two-state solution” for Israelis and Palestinians. They wanted Israel wiped off the map. They believed Jews had to be driven out of Israel so that it could again become a Muslim state.
Holocaust Deflection and Whitewashing

Yet another category of Holocaust distortion concerns deflection and whitewashing. One typical example of Holocaust deflection is: “The Holocaust happened, but our country was not involved in it.” For decades Austrian governments maintained that their country was a victim of Germany and Nazi rule. After many years of denial, Austrian presidents and prime ministers finally admitted the truth. Major examples of deflection still occur in those countries where, during the war, Germans were helped by important segments of the local populations in the despoliation, deportation, and murder of the Jews.

Another subcategory closely related to deflection is Holocaust whitewashing. It aims at cleansing certain groups or persons of blame regarding the Holocaust without necessarily accusing others. Former UN secretary-general and Austrian president Kurt Waldheim was one of the internationally best-known whitewashers of his Nazi past. He was an officer in a German military unit that committed war crimes.

One of Waldheim’s other lies was that he had never been a member of a Nazi-affiliated organization. Both the U.S and Soviet intelligence services had damaging information about his wartime past but did not disclose it, while his career progressed.

Holocaust whitewashing surfaces in many ways. One of them is honoring former Nazis or their supporters. Several Hungarian parliamentarians participated in a memorial ceremony for Jozsef Nyiro, a member of the Hungarian parliament during the Second World War who had supported Hitler. Thereupon Elie Wiesel returned Hungary’s highest award, the Order of Merit Grand Cross, which he had received in 2004. There are many examples of whitewashing, only a few of which can be mentioned here.

There is also widespread whitewashing of Nazism. A poll by the French weekly Paris Match found that about one-half of Belgians think Nazism contains “interesting ideas,” even if one should reject its essence or part of it. Forty-four percent were of the opinion that the ideology has to be rejected entirely. Those who consider that Nazism has a certain legitimacy focus mainly on its nationalist principles and those meant to strengthen the national economy. To a lesser extent, they mention the priority that has to be given to a country’s own population.

A majority of French-speaking Belgians and 32 percent of the Flemish population believe that the present reality in Belgium is propitious for the revival of ideologies with a Nazi inspiration. More than half of those under twenty-five did not know that anti-Semitism was an integral part of Nazi ideology.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands has become a country where another type of whitewashing is being promoted by several local authorities. They wish to commemorate their own and Allied victims, together with the dead of the German occupiers. National Memorial Day, the 4th of May, is designated to commemorate the many victims of the German occupier. The more than one hundred thousand Dutch Jews murdered – more than 70 percent of its prewar community – were by far the largest group of victims.
The municipality to which the small town of Vorden belongs decided that those participating in the 2012 ceremony for Dutch victims could also jointly visit the graves of German soldiers who are buried there. Originally it was intended that the local choir would sing a German song at the graves. This led to many protests. A court judgment forbade the mayor of the town to go to the German graves.

In October, it became known that in Geffen, another Dutch location, a new war memorial would go up. The municipality intended to put both the names of Jewish victims of the town and the names of the German soldiers who fell in that place on the plaque. It was one more case in the Netherlands of intending to mix the memory of the victims with that of the perpetrators. After protests from Jewish organizations, it was decided that no names would go on the monument.

It is not by chance that this whitewashing of the past happens from time to time in the Netherlands. Postwar Dutch governments have never admitted that the Dutch government in exile in London hardly made any effort to help its own persecuted Jews. There was also major collaboration by Dutch authorities in the Netherlands with the German occupiers. In almost all countries, postwar governments have admitted the parts their countrymen played in the persecution of the Jews and have apologized. But if one refuses to apologize, it is not surprising that one falsifies history even further by mixing the memory of victims and of perpetrators together.

Abuse of Holocaust Memorial Meetings

There are also falsifications of memorial meetings that fall into various categories of Holocaust distortion. In the Netherlands, the antidiscrimination group Nederland Bekent Kleur (Netherlands Shows Color) organized annual Kristallnacht memorial meetings until 2001. In the last few years, sympathizers with Hamas and Hezbollah were among the speakers, and they compared the Holocaust to the oppression of Muslims. Finally, the Jewish community refused to cooperate with the organizers. A number of years later the CJO, the umbrella of Dutch Jewish organizations, started to organize its own annual Kristallnacht memorial meetings.

Italian journalist Angelo Pezzana details how International Holocaust Remembrance Day is abused in many parts of Italy:

Marking the 27th of January as a day of remembrance has turned it into a national event where everyone can express his opinion, however miserable. The latter happens mostly in schools. Meetings are held with hundreds of students present, where extreme leftist professors are invited to speak. They present the Shoah in a distorted way. This leads to a public debate usually linking the crimes of the Nazis to Israeli policies.

In Helsingborg, Sweden, the Jewish community refused to participate in the 2012 Kristallnacht memorial. The local paper, Helsingborgs Dagblad, noted that the community’s leader Jussi Tyger said the memorial meeting was organized by left-wing parties and Muslims who are known to be the most racist against Jews.

On 26 November 2012, a memorial meeting took place in Bergen, Norway, on the seventh anniversary of the deportation of more than five hundred Jews from Norway to Germany. Among the speakers were two leading anti-Israelis, the leader of the Left Socialists Audun Lysbakken and former Conservative prime minister Kåre Willoch. Jewish protests against this abuse of the memory of the dead were ignored.

Holocaust De-Judaization
The main proponent of Holocaust de-Judaization, the Soviet Union, has been disbanded. Its communist satellites have become democracies. Hence the strongest forces committed to voiding or minimizing the Jewish character of the victims are no longer there.

Holocaust de-Judaization in the Western world has often involved the memory of Anne Frank. While she has become a universal icon, the fact that she was persecuted as a Jew is often minimized or omitted. This is particularly important because Anne Frank continues to hold a much-publicized place in Western society. In 2012, for instance, a wax figure of her was installed in the Berlin Madame Tussaud Museum.47

Holocaust Equivalence

One subcategory of Holocaust equivalence that is quickly growing is postwar Holocaust equivalence. This involves claiming that some contemporary organizations or individuals have the same character traits or attitudes as the Nazis. Another variant alleges that many events in today’s society are similar in nature or equivalent to those caused by Germany under Hitler’s rule.

Increasingly over the years, American presidents have been called Nazis. Reagan, Clinton, and above all George W. Bush were called Nazis, or Hitler by some. The same has happened with Obama.48 For instance, U.S. country music star Hank Williams, Jr., compared the current U.S. president to Hitler on Fox News. He later apologized.49 American broadcaster Rush Limbaugh publicized the term “Femi-Nazis” for extreme feminists. In 2011, American actress Susan Sarandon called Pope Benedict a Nazi.50

This trend of calling people Nazis seems to be widening. One of the places where one sees it most vividly is Greece. The country’s economic crisis has led to frequent comparisons of contemporary Germany to Nazi Germany. There have been many pictures in Greek papers and on websites of German chancellor Angela Merkel dressed up as a Nazi.51

When Merkel visited Portugal in November 2012, there were also some cases where she was referred to as a Nazi. When her motorcade passed in Lisbon, a man held up a banner stating: “Hitler Go Home.” Two others made the “Heil Hitler” salute.52

Such comparisons are bizarre because the current German government does not seek to rob the Greeks or any other nation of their freedom and possessions. On the contrary, it provides them with funding to help ease their financial crisis.

One example of how this equivalence has entered the mainstream concerns former German Social Democrat chancellor Helmut Schmidt. On a leading German TV station, he said Merkel herself was partly guilty for some European countries depicting her with a swastika armband. Schmidt explained his scandalous remark by saying that “she focuses too much on herself.”53

At the Christmas party of the German Association of Medical Doctors belonging to the health fund, the organization’s chairman Andreas Köhler said, “Julius Caesar, Charles the Great, Napoleon, Adolf Hitler, Angela Merkel, the list of politicians who tried to unify Europe is very long. These efforts always failed because no one can imagine living together in the same European home.”54

In January 2012, the senior Labour MP Tom Harris prepared a satiric online video in which Scottish prime minister Alex Salmond was depicted as Hitler. Harris was subsequently forced to resign as Labour social media adviser in Scotland.55
Austrian foreign minister Maria Fekter of the Austrian People’s Party (OVP) said that in Europe, hostile images of banks and rich people were being disseminated as had been the case with Jews in the past. After receiving strong criticism of her remark, she added later on the same day that the period of National Socialism, with its cruelties and in particular the Holocaust, was incomparable to anything else.56

Cases of Holocaust equivalence also occur in Israel. During a basketball game Guy Pnini, captain of the Maccabi Tel Aviv team, was caught on camera calling a player of Swedish background a German Nazi. Pnini was suspended by his team for several games, severely fined, and stripped of his role as captain.57

**Holocaust Equivalence Spreads**

As comparisons of political figures to Hitler become more frequent, this phenomenon has also spread elsewhere. In Oslo, Norwegian neighbors of a German man, living in the town for many years, had a dispute with him about the height of his hedge. They threw a Hitler doll into his garden, with a note attached stating that the man’s real name was now Hitler.58

The far-right Austrian Freedom Party organized a ball in Vienna on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January 2012. It triggered a major counterdemonstration of more than 2,500 people. The party’s leader Heinz-Christian Strache was overheard comparing the protests with Kristallnacht and saying, “We are the new Jews.”59

Muslims at a demonstration against discrimination in Switzerland wore stickers with yellow Stars of David and the word Muslim printed on them. This sparked criticism.60 A former Spanish ambassador and former mayor of La Coruna, Francisco Vasquez, told a TV station that there was “no difference between a Jewish yellow star used by the Nazis and a child punished for speaking Catalan Castillian in the schoolyard.” Politicians from the Socialist Party, to which Vasquez belongs, strongly condemned the remark.61

Holocaust distorters using false equivalence rarely explain their statements in any detail. If they do, like Schmidt, their reasoning is often vicious.

**Holocaust Inversion**

Holocaust inversion is a derivative of Holocaust equivalence and the most extreme category of Holocaust abuse. Inverters state that Jews and Israel behave like Nazis. In this way, victims of genocide are presented as perpetrators. In the most prevalent European definition of anti-Semitism, one of the examples given is drawing comparisons between Israel’s policies and Nazi policies.

It is commonly thought that Holocaust denial is the worst distortion of the Holocaust. Holocaust inversion, however, is an even more extreme form. It is a modern mutation of the core element of two-thousand-year-old anti-Semitism: the Jews represent absolute evil. In our time, Nazism represents absolute evil. By saying that Israelis are Nazis, one claims that they represent absolute evil.

Rock musician Roger Waters has compared Israel to the Nazis. The watchdog group Eye on the UN said he has become “a hero to genocidal terrorists.”62
The German Holocaust foundation Remembrance, Responsibility, Future (EVZ) has used public funds to finance hatred of Israel. It provided more than twenty thousand euros for a 2010-2011 student exchange program. Participants included an East German high school and an Israeli Arab school. The project organizers published a brochure that demonized Israel and compared it to the former communist East German state.

The same agency financed a program for the Anne Frank School in Gutersloh that hosted the Dutch Jewish Holocaust survivor and known anti-Israeli hate-monger Hajo Meyer. There he equated the suffering of the Palestinians with the persecution and mass murder of Jews in the Holocaust. He also termed Israel a “criminal state.”

Leon de Winter, a bestselling Dutch Jewish novelist, said that Meyer suffers from extreme “survival guilt.” He noted that all Israel-bashing groups love Meyer because of the added factor of his being a Jew and a Holocaust survivor.63

Ideological criminality is on the increase in Europe. The more it develops, the more Israel is accused through hate-mongering – of which Holocaust inversion is one extreme tool – or by using double standards against it. For many, this is a necessity in order to whitewash both the past and present European societies.

Holocaust Trivialization

Holocaust trivialization has a number of subcategories too. One is the abuse of the Holocaust by comparing various situations in society to it. For instance, environmental problems become an “environmental Holocaust.” Similarly, there are the abortion, animal, tobacco, and human rights “Holocausts.”

Yet another subcategory is making fun of Holocaust victims or survivors; another is imitating Nazi habits. There are now teens who consider it fashionable to have an Adolf Hitler haircut. A New York barber says that they ask for a “Hitler Youth.”64

British Conservative parliamentarian Aidan Burley was seen in a video wearing an SS uniform and toasting the Third Reich and Hitler. Burley said he was influenced by “clearly inappropriate behavior by several of the other guests.” Prime Minister David Cameron fired him as an aide to the transport secretary.65

In a sports day at a Catholic school in Chiang Mai, Thailand, students wore Nazi uniforms and/or made the Nazi salute. Some had swastikas painted on their faces. Later, both students and the school apologized.66

Commercial Purposes

A third subcategory that also seems to be growing is the trivialization of the Holocaust for commercial purposes. Many Holocaust trivializers are small operators. One story that went around the world was that of Rajesh Shah, the owner of a clothes store called “Hitler” in Ahmedabad, Gujarat in India. Initially, in view of the pressure, he realized that he had to change the store’s name. Later, however, he said he would not change it unless he was paid.67

There is indeed concern about the emergence of Hitler as a popular role model in Indian business. Taking action, the Simon Wiesenthal Center brought an exhibition of two hundred photographs of Holocaust history to Mumbai in November 2012.68
In Taiwan, a store sold Hitler look-alike dolls, made in Japan. Also in Taiwan in 1999, subway advertisements for German-made space heaters included a picture of Hitler.69

Much larger companies have been known to trivialize the Holocaust. Amazon, which has been involved in quite a few Holocaust-related scandals, put a jigsaw puzzle on sale depicting ovens in the Dachau crematorium. Amazon sold it on its American website as suitable for children eight years and older.70

There are many other examples of Holocaust trivialization. In November 2012, the memorial center at the former Dutch concentration camp Amersfoort wanted to sell small pieces of the barbed wire that had surrounded the camp. After protests from Jewish, Sinti, and Roma organizations, this project was canceled.71

**Sports and Art**

One also finds examples of the trivialization of the Holocaust in other areas including sports and art. In what was a mixture of Holocaust promotion and trivialization, fans of the English soccer club West Ham sang during a match in November 2012 against Tottenham Hotspur: “Adolf Hitler, he’s coming for you.” They also hissed a number of times, alluding to the gassing of Jews in concentration camps. The Telegraph’s reporter at the game, Jonathan Liew, said: “Let us be clear about this. We are not talking about a few isolated singers here. A significant proportion of West Ham’s travelling support participated…. The songs rang out loudly and clearly.”72

In December 2012, the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan placed a statue of Hitler in a building outside the former Warsaw Ghetto. It depicts Hitler kneeling. Efraim Zuroff, the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Israel director, called the statue “a tasteless misuse of art.”73

With the passage of time, examples of Holocaust trivialization seem to get more extreme. In Lund, Sweden, on 10 November 2012, gallery owner Martin Bryder held an exhibition of the painter Carl Michael von Hauswolff. It included nine paintings in which the artist said he had mixed water with ashes taken in 1989 from a crematorium in the Majdanek extermination camp.

Simon Samuels of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre stated: “Mr. von Hauswolff, you, like the Nazis’ use of human skin for lampshades and fat to produce soap, have similarly twice murdered the bodies that were once the ashes you have desecrated, turning art into an abomination.”

The Swedish police decided not to investigate whether the paintings broke their country’s law that “protects the peace of the dead.” They gave as a reason that if there was a crime, it had been committed outside of Sweden’s borders. After much criticism, the gallery owner ended the exhibition a few days before the official closing date of 15 December 2012.74

**Obliterating Holocaust Memory**

The eighth and final category, obliterating Holocaust memory, includes a number of disparate abuses and distortions of Holocaust history. Collective memory is attacked directly and indirectly. One type of the former is the besmirching and destruction of memorials. There are many examples of this every year. In the summer of 2011, a swastika and anti-Semitic slogans appeared on the memorial monument at Jedwabne in Poland. In that town in 1941, hundreds of Jews were burned alive by their Polish neighbors.75 In October 2012, the memorial monument for murdered Jews on the Greek island of Rhodes was vandalized again.76
Increasingly, stumbling stones to memorialize individual Jews are being placed on pavements in front of buildings where people who were murdered by the Nazis had lived. Occasionally, some of them are being removed from the pavement. In Greifswald, Germany, that happened in November 2012 on the night of the commemoration of Kristallnacht and was probably carried out by right-wing extremists. The municipality offered an award to those who could help find the culprits.77

Another example is disruption of Holocaust ceremonies. Still another is attempts at turning public ceremonies into events that also – and sometimes only – memorialize other historical events.

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

Indirect attacks on Holocaust remembrance involve the fading away of Jewish memorial sites through neglect. This occurs particularly in former communist countries. It is a complex subject, which requires a detailed study.

Conclusions

To the aforementioned examples, many others can be added. When this author’s book The Abuse of Holocaust Memory was published in 2009, it was already clear that the struggle to maintain Holocaust memory, and to counteract its distortion, would become more difficult. One significant reason for this is that many survivors have already died and the remaining ones – among other types of witnesses – are now elderly.

Growing polarization in Western society is just one of several reasons for the increase in Holocaust abuse. More people are being falsely blamed as being or behaving like Nazis. Another, more specific reason is the explosion of anti-Semitism – often disguised as anti-Israelism – in Western society. This leads to an increase in Holocaust promotion and, above all, of Holocaust inversion – comparing Israelis to Nazis.

The massive abuse of the Holocaust poses the question: what can one do about it? There is no single way to fight against it. Education is very important, as are memorials, monuments, and many other activities. However, a crucial point remains that people should make an effort to prevent the abuse of Holocaust from entering into public debate. When this happens, it should be fought intensely.

Such actions often produce results, even if they arrive late. One example has already been mentioned: in October 2012, four years after he had said that there were no gas chambers, the extreme-conservative Catholic Society of Pius X removed Holocaust-denier Bishop Richard Williamson from its ranks.78

An important step would be for the nations of the world to live up to their commitments under the UN Genocide Convention and bring Iranian leaders Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad before an international court.79 The same should be done with the Hamas organization and its genocide promoters. That could become the beginning of a much wider struggle against Holocaust distortion.

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