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EURO-ZIONISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

For many years now 9 November, the anniversary of Kristallnacht, has been marked in Germany by public assemblies that have served not only to affirm historical condemnation of the Nazis' murderous policies, but also as an implacable rejection of contemporary forms of racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The targets of racist violence today are most likely to be Muslims or asylum seekers; and—though the structuring social determinants are entirely different from those of the 1930s—the assaults are not negligible. The arson attacks on immigrant hostels in Hoyerswerda and Rostock in the early 90s were cheered on by chanting crowds. Nor are these restricted to the eastern *Länder*: mosques in the Rhineland were targeted last summer as the trial began of a far-right cell member implicated in the serial killing of Turkish workers. Altogether there were thirty attacks on mosques in Germany last year, nine of them involving arson. The Kristallnacht anniversary marches have served both to commemorate those targeted by the Nazis and to demonstrate solidarity with those exposed to racist aggression today.

Over the past few years, however, the character of the 9 November gathering in Berlin has undergone a change. Blue and white Israeli flags, hoisted by a small but determined layer, have increasingly come to dominate the proceedings. Many of those involved in the commemorations—students, activists, community and anti-racist groups—have been uneasy at the thought that a gathering which was, in good part, a protest against recent attacks on Muslims should march behind the banner of a state whose air force had been raining white phosphorus down on Gaza. But naturally no one wanted things to come to blows, and the Zionization of the commemoration went unchallenged.

In a thought-provoking set of essays, the Hebrew poet and critic Yitzhak Laor sets out to explore what he calls this 'strident new pro-Israel tendency' in Western Europe.[1] Trumpeted complaints in the liberal media of a 'new anti-Semitism' are themselves aspects of a 'new philosemitism', Laor argues, which mobilizes a highly selective form of Holocaust remembrance, together with the noxious residues of European colonialism, in order to negate the reality of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Laor himself commands a position of signal importance in Israeli cultural life. He was born—like the state itself—in 1948, in Pardes Hannah, halfway between Haifa and Tel Aviv. His father, he writes in the Introduction to this collection, was a Jewish German factory worker and SPD militant, until he was asked in 1933 not to come to cell meetings any more because it was 'inconvenient'; his mother was from Riga, a member of Betar. Both got out of Europe 'in time'. Their son studied literature at Tel Aviv University and, in 1972, was sentenced to prison for refusing to render military service in the Occupied Territories. He went on to develop a powerful voice as a poet—his 1992 collection, *A Night in a Foreign Hotel*, is arguably one of the peaks of modern Hebrew literature.

The gamut of his activity has been equally impressive: novelist, playwright, translator, activist, editor and literary critic. His 1987 play, *Ephraim Goes Back to the Army*—the title is a reference to S. Yizhar's 1938 novella, *Ephraim Goes Back to the Alfalfa*—was initially banned by the state censors, who objected to the depiction of Israeli soldiers' brutality. *Narratives with No Natives* (1995), a collection of essays on Hebrew literature, remains a foundational critical text. In 2005 Laor launched the journal *Mitaam*, a 'review of literature and radical thought' that became a beacon of high culture in Israel. *Mitaam* allowed Laor to combine his gifts as editor, critic and outstanding translator into Hebrew, producing two potent special numbers on Pasolini and on Brecht. Not since the tragic suicide of Baruch Kurzweil in 1972 has there been such an incisive and iconoclastic voice in Israeli culture. There are obvious differences between them, yet the similarities are telling: both share a contempt for the purveyors of the ruling ideology and, above all, a sensitivity to the danger Judaism has faced from attempts to Zionize it.

[1] Yitzhak Laor, *The Myths of Liberal Zionism*, London and New York 2009; first published as *Le nouveau philosémitisme européen et le « camp de la paix » en Israël*, Paris 2007. Henceforth, MLZ.

Unlike Kurzweil, Laor is not religious, but neither is he a secular Zionist; he is intimately familiar with Jewish liturgy, theology and history. Cast in a different register, exemplified by the ire with which he reviewed Shlomo Sand's *Invention of the Jewish People* in *Haaretz*, his view on this issue is not unlike Kurzweil's.

A new identity?

Laor's non-fiction prose does not lend itself to succinct summary. Its forte is the juxtaposition of self-contained insights on a text—a film, a novel—or a fragment—a headline, a paragraph—which nevertheless cohere into a striking and original cultural critique. This is as true of *Myths of Liberal Zionism* as it was of *Narratives with No Natives*. Thus the lead essay in the latest collection, 'The Shoah Belongs to Us (Us, the Non-Muslims)', begins with the 'unprecedented spectacle' of the entire French political spectrum, including the racist extreme right, uniting in 2006 in a joint protest over the death of Ilan Halimi. This was unanimously described by the media as an anti-Semitic crime, even though the gang that abducted him may not have known at the time the young man was Jewish. Laor analyses the ideological uses to which the event was put: the 'new anti-Semitism' defined not by reference to the objective situation, but to an alleged perception ('many Jews see it as . . .'); the shadow of the Nazi past insistently presented as the immediate context—'Memories of the 1940s, when France collaborated with the Nazis and sent tens of thousands of French Jews to death camps, have come flooding back', wrote the *Haaretz* correspondent—even when the supposed new anti-Semites had nothing to do with Europe's fascist past, and when such memories were the preserve of the over-60s.

'Why now?' is the question Laor asks. 'Why the contemporary concern with the Jewish genocide, half a century after it took place?' During the War it had been 'at best a secondary preoccupation' for the Allies, and for decades afterwards the Shoah was 'kept out of sight or on the margins', its memory 'the prerogative of escaped Jews, anti-Nazis and other victims'.[2] But today, 'Auschwitz is everywhere'—on the upmarket French and German TV channels, in the big co-productions for European cinema, 'in political clichés, school syllabuses and state celebrations'—'it has become the symbol of the Second World War in its entirety'.

[2] MLZ, pp. 19, 22.

Confessing that this 'new vocation of European Shoah culture provokes a certain unease in me, as in other Israelis', Laor goes on to argue:

> It would be facile to see this memorializing culture as a belated crisis of international conscience, or a sense of historical justice that took time to materialize . . . The majority of United Nations General Assembly members have emerged from a colonial past: they are the descendants of those who suffered genocides in Africa, Asia or Latin America. There should be no reason for the commemoration of the genocide of the Jews to block out the memory of these millions of Africans or Native Americans killed by the civilized Western invaders of their continents.[3]

Laor offers a possible explanation for the timing of what he drily terms 'this philosemitic offensive'. Throughout the Cold War period, the states of Western Europe had been united against the Communist threat. In 1989, with the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the familiar 'friend–enemy' opposition that had structured European identity was swept away. Yet:

> In the new moral universe of the 'end of history', there was one abomination—the Jewish genocide—that all could unite to condemn; equally important, it was now firmly in the past. Its commemoration would serve both to sacralize the new Europe's liberal-humanist tolerance of 'the other (who is like us)' and to redefine 'the other (who is different from us)' in terms of Muslim fundamentalism.[4]

Thus, Laor argues, during the unification of Europe in the 1990s, the Judeocide served in the ideological construction of a new European identity: 'The European subject who, at an earlier epoch, had succeeded so well in distancing himself from the Jew ("he is not like us"), is now eager to demonstrate how much he loves him: first because now "he is like us", and second because he no longer lives here.'[5] 'The Shoah Belongs to Us' then attempts to verify this hypothesis for three of the most important countries: Germany, Italy and France. This comparative assessment, though necessarily cursory, is one of the essay's great merits.

In the German case, Laor underlines the limited nature of de-Nazification under American tutelage and the substantial continuity of state personnel into the post-war years, symbolized by Hans Globke, the jurist who crafted Hitler's anti-Semitic legislation, serving as Adenauer's chief secretary even as the latter negotiated reparation payments to Israel (Ben-Gurion ordered the prosecution in the Eichmann trial to avoid mention

[3] MLZ, pp. 20–1. [4] MLZ, p. 31. [5] MLZ, p. 24.

of Globke's role in the Judeocide). Camp guards would be tried in the 1960s, but the powerful German firms that had provided the infrastructure for Nazi extermination programmes remained untouched. The upshot, as Laor summarizes it, was that:

> In lieu of any official self-examination, the German state has preferred to elide all the questions arising from the Nazi period into that of Auschwitz. No price would then need to be paid by the Globkes, the Krupps, IG Farben and the SS pensioners; nor would any compensation be paid to those who did resist.[6]

This process reached its apotheosis after German reunification, Laor argues. As a stable republic, solidly established within an institutionalized Europe, 'Germany moved to complete the reconstruction of the past'. Again, he builds his case around a telling fragment: the 1995 decision by the Kohl government to denominate 27 January, the date of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army, as the FRG's official Holocaust Remembrance Day. The choice, Laor suggests, demonstrates 'the process of amnesia through which remembrance constructs itself': Germany's rulers did not choose a day to remember all of the Nazis' crimes—the anniversary of Hitler's accession to power, for example, or the fall of the Third Reich. Instead, they worked to reduce the memory of Nazism to that of the genocide, and the genocide to the remembrance of Auschwitz—repeating the original move of relegating the horror to Poland, 'over there, outside the homeland, far away to the east among the "inferior Slavs"'.[7] At the same time, the image of the transported Jews was Europeanized: affluent Westerners predominate in the official iconography whereas, as Laor insists, most of the Nazis' victims were poor, traditional Jews, who 'looked very different from modern Europeans' and 'were mocked in the same manner that traditional Muslims are mocked today'.[8]

Today, the Israeli flag, as well as Berlin streets named after Yitzhak Rabin and Ben-Gurion, 'have become symbols through which German identity is thought'. Yet Laor insists that these questions need to be historicized: in the 1970s, 'young Germans could wear the *keffiyeh* as a mark of solidarity with the Palestinians, without being accused of anti-Semitism'; the left 'could pledge its support for the Palestinians—unlike its heirs, the Greens'. For obvious reasons, Laor argues, 'the culture of philosemitism takes on a particularly frenetic character' in

[6] MLZ, p. 26. [7] MLZ, pp. 26–7. [8] MLZ, pp. 5–6.

Berlin. In this respect, the Germans differ from other Europeans—'but only in degree'. This is also a city with one of the biggest Muslim populations in Europe, and a country in which racist attacks on them are on the rise. The reconstructed past serves here 'as a cover for a new Islamophobia, which cannot but recall attitudes that Europe once had towards the Jews'.[9]

Italy offers the most clear-cut illustration for the argument that Holocaust remembrance culture serves not only to foreclose a properly historical understanding of the past but to eclipse its living memory. Laor's starting-point here is Berlusconi's apology for a characteristic airbrushing of Italian fascism. Defending his decision to support the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, in the face of massive domestic opposition, Berlusconi had drawn a contrast between Saddam and Mussolini: the latter had not murdered anyone. Unsurprisingly, this created a scandal, and the Prime Minister duly apologized to Italy's Jewish community—not without good reason, Laor writes: it was Mussolini who passed the 1938 discrimination laws, and under his rule that thousands of Italian Jews were killed.

> But Berlusconi's apology said much about the memory wars that are being played out in Italian political and cultural circles. In a single political gesture, the fact that tens of thousands had been imprisoned, tortured or killed for having fought against fascism was swept aside. Berlusconi had nothing to say about the horrors of the Salò Republic or the invasion of Ethiopia and the use of poison gas against its population. With the collapse of the post-war order at the beginning of the 1990s, the old way of remembering these events is no longer operational. Instead, the conflicts of the past are covered up by recourse to the memory of the Jewish genocide.[10]

Yet Italy, unlike Germany, 'had never repressed the memory of the Second World War or the extermination of the Jews'. From 1945 onwards, Italian cinema—Rossellini, and later Visconti, Cavani, Pasolini—dealt uncompromisingly with the fascist era. Jewish writers like Giorgio Bassani and Primo Levi recounted their experience of the Shoah. Neither the Catholic Church, nor the Italian Communist Party and the broader Italian left had inhibitions about expressing support for the Palestinians. Yet in the 1990s, Italy 'not only turned pro-Israel, but abandoned its basic understanding of the Second World War in order to reduce the

[9] MLZ, pp. 28–9.

[10] MLZ, p. 30.

whole experience to the Holocaust.' Gianfranco Fini, leader of the ex-fascist National Alliance and self-proclaimed heir to Mussolini, made a well-publicized trip to Israel, where a visit to Yad Vashem was sufficient to equip him with the necessary liberal-humanist credentials.

The case of France is tackled through the pronouncements of Alain Finkielkraut, the perfect illustration of Laor's thesis that the new culture of Holocaust remembrance, proposing unconditional support for Israel as the only balm for Europe's guilty conscience over the crimes of Nazism, also provides a cover for neo-colonial racist attitudes towards Europe's Muslim immigrants. For Finkielkraut, anti-racism is the 'new totalitarianism':

> Anti-racism will be to the 21st century what Communism was to the 20th: a source of violence. It is in the name of the fight against racism that Jews are attacked today: the Separation Wall and Zionism are portrayed as racism. This is what is going on in France—we ought to be very wary of the ideology of anti-racism.[11]

Finkielkraut's explanation for the *banlieue* riots of 2005 was very simple: hatred for France, as the old colonial power, a European country and a bastion of 'Christian or Judeo-Christian tradition'.[12] He lamented the excessive concessions France had made to its former subjects: the teaching of colonial history in French schools concentrated too much on negative aspects, without stressing the positive role played by Europe and the US. Finkielkraut's 2003 essay, 'In the Name of the Other', had saluted François Furet for recognizing that 'the memory of Auschwitz' was becoming 'ever more significant, as the negative accompaniment of the democratic conscience'. Finkielkraut duly differentiated between the Western democracies, with their official Holocaust observance, and the non-democratic regimes—Iraq in the forefront—which were effectively the 'continuers of Auschwitz'. Within the new narrative thus constructed, the Judeocide constitutes the unique test for human freedom; Europe and America, in Finkielkraut's words, 'recharge their common principles in the commemoration of the Shoah'. On this basis, Laor comments, it is possible to level the charge of anti-Semitism against anyone who criticizes the US or Israel for the treatment of the Palestinian people:

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[11] MLZ, p. 33.

[12] For an analysis of the mid-20th-century construction of the latter, see Mark Silk, 'Notes on the Judeo-Christian Tradition in America', *American Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 1, 1984.

> This is not really about perpetuating the memory of the genocide but about consolidating a new ideology of exclusion. Now it is the Jews who are the insiders. What our leaders asked for, it seems, was not the rights of man, but the right to belong to the elite. We can now participate in violating the rights of others.[13]

Going blonde

Laor is at his Gramscian best when he turns to examine the role of the Israeli Peace Camp intellectuals—A. B. Yehoshua, David Grossman, Amos Oz—in the service of hegemony, with a keen eye for that which ideology represents as self-evident. He details the way in which Oz, in particular, 'utilizes the arsenal of colonial stereotypes' to disparage Palestinian claims for independence. By contrast Jews, and Israeli Jews in particular, are successfully portrayed and accepted in the West as 'white people'. Laor gives a wonderful account of the Aryanization of the Israeli-born Jew in modern Hebrew literature, packed with 'blue-eyed blonds', and the 'magnificent youths' in the work of Oz and Moshe Shamir, 'whose tans glow with golden down'.[14] Yet he also discerns a calculable political effect:

> When we tot up the balance sheet, after all the moaning and whining about 'new anti-Semitism' and the anti-Israeli media, Westerners remember the victims of every suicide bombing, as if they were nice Parisians or New Yorkers, far better than they remember all the horrors seen on TV of the rivers of blood in Palestine, in Iraq, in Lebanon. Israeli victims—that is, Jewish victims—are never taken for granted, in the manner of Arabs, Africans or Asians.[15]

In a closely documented analysis, Laor identifies a particular genre of 'Israeli writing in the West'—offering a truly kitsch example from one of Grossman's columns in the European press—which addresses 'the good conscience of the liberal reader', always repeating the same story: 'We are the survivors, there is no place for us but in the Middle East, yet we are Westerners like yourselves, we have the same values as you do.'[16] Laor comments that the shared values evidently don't extend to the notion that 'a state of all its citizens' is a legitimate political idea:

> Of course the Israeli Peace Camp figures do not have the same values as the liberal readers of *Le Monde*, *Libération*, the *Guardian* or *La Repubblica* . . .

[13] MLZ, pp. 34–5. [14] MLZ, p. xxii. [15] MLZ, pp. 39–40. [16] MLZ, p. 56.

> not one of those readers would publicly demand the sort of constitution those writers support in Israel . . . Nor would they dare support in their own countries religious matrimonial laws of the type we have in Israel, or property laws under which Arabs are prevented from purchasing land, not to mention Israel's laws of citizenship that discriminate against non-Jews.[17]

Laor offers a discerning account of what Israeli political discourse calls *hasbara*—literally 'explanation', but in essence, 'successful propaganda'—focused on the services rendered to the state by Yehoshua, Grossman and Oz after the 2000 Camp David talks. Missing from their hand-wringing over the fact that 'Arafat said No' was any recognition of the bantustan-like accord on offer, or acknowledgement that Barak was luring Arafat into a predictable failure. The head of Israeli military intelligence at the time, Amos Malka, later revealed the murderous response the IDF had prepared for the Palestinian unrest that greeted Sharon's deliberately provocative display at the Temple Mount, once Arafat had fulfilled their expectations: some 1.3 million bullets were fired at the Palestinians in the first month of the Second Intifada. Yet as Laor shows, a feature of this genre is that Israelis are depicted as the eternal victims of the Palestinians. The theme of 'colonial anxiety' was apparent in the *hasbara*'s obsessive stress on the return of Palestinian refugees which, as Laor points out, was scarcely even mooted at Camp David. 'They will drown us', 'it will be the liquidation of Israel', Oz proclaims, his words echoed by Arno Klarsfeld, Bernard-Henri Lévy and Claude Lanzmann in *Le Monde*: 'the return of the refugees is the death of Israel'. All this, Laor writes, 'during the raids of F-16s on homes and shacks in Palestine, during curfews and hunger, during the long winter without electricity'.[18]

'Why was it so easy to spread these particular lies?', Laor asks. Why were these representatives of Israel so easily accepted by the French media, using such cheap arguments? 'The discourse was stuffed with primitive images, nourished by the French racist fear of immigrants.' With the spectre of 'millions of refugees' turning Israel into an Arab country, 'the "non-European danger" was already in the air. In fact, it had never really disappeared, only now the old xenophobia had found itself new prophets.'[19] Yet ultimate responsibility lies across the Atlantic:

> Israel would not behave the way it did if US political society did not let it have its way. For years what was called the Israeli left waited for American

[17] MLZ, pp. 57–8. [18] MLZ, pp. 68–70. [19] MLZ, p. 71.

> pressure. It never arrived . . . The natural allies of Israel in the US are those fervent Zionists among the Jewish community. I can hardly find words for them. I am sure they are willing to see the fighting continue until the last drop of our—both Palestinian and Jewish—blood is spilt, here in a place where they, the US Zionists, could not stand to live.[20]

By any measure, this is a powerful and passionate indictment of the aggressive new pro-Israel consensus in Europe and of its intimate collusion with settler-colonial ideology and practice in the Middle East. A poet's eye for the telling instance, and the analytical strengths of a first-rate cultural critic, are animated here by an intransigent moral conviction: that true recognition of the suffering of the Jews commits us to a universal fight against oppression. For the agony of his people to be parlayed instead into a pretext for the suppression of another is, for Laor, ethically intolerable. In advancing this position, he reanimates and renews a tradition that was once common sense for the radical Jewish intelligentsia and for the broader left as a whole—a tradition that has been successfully marginalized by the concerted efforts of organized Zionism to reduce that universalist commitment to unqualified support for Israel. Laor's contribution therefore deserves more sustained engagement and critical attention than it has so far received.

How, then, should we assess his central claim, that the explanation for Europe's new philosemitism and its concomitant historical revisionism—the reduction of its convulsive 20th-century political struggles to 'Auschwitz', with 'Israel' as its mandatory solution—lies in the post-Cold War construction of a new European identity? In what follows, I will argue that Laor overlooks the prior construction and institutionalization of an Israelo-centric Holocaust culture in Israel itself and in the United States, Europe's hegemonic master; and that he pays insufficient attention to the different national cultures and chronologies in his three case-studies, Germany, Italy and France. First, though, it is worth noting how well the most influential accounts of contemporary Europe bear him out.

Textbook account

A prime example would be Tony Judt's much-praised *Postwar*, which supports Laor's argument both in the authorial consciousness it evinces

[20] MLZ, p. xxx.

and in the information it conveys. In an Epilogue entitled 'From the House of the Dead: an Essay on Modern European Memory', Judt explains that 'the recovered memory of Europe's dead Jews has become the very definition and guarantee of the continent's restored humanity'.[21] Holocaust remembrance is the essential criterion for membership of the family of Europe, indeed for membership of humanity and civilization. Surveying one country after another, Judt's narrative strives indefatigably towards the point at which all wider memories of World War Two, of atrocities, fascism and dictatorship, have become subordinated to that of the Shoah. Strangely enough, however, the activity of living Jews is almost entirely absent from Judt's story. Equally conspicuous is the absence of Europe's colonial legacy: as Hannah Arendt argued, the genocide in Eastern Europe built upon a long history of deportations and massacres in the colonies. Why should not recognition of these deaths also be a criterion for civilization and humanity: why should they be considered extrinsic to European history—'over there'—if the Judeocide, as Judt rightly insists, must be intrinsic to it? The absent colonial dimension, a feature of current liberal ideology, is well illustrated by Judt's treatment of France. A central plank of his argument here is that 'Vichy' and 'France' are indistinguishable; thus, the lesson to be drawn from the 1997 trial of Maurice Papon was that:

> It demonstrated conclusively that the fine distinction between 'Vichy' and 'France', so carefully drawn by everyone from De Gaulle to Mitterrand, had never existed. Papon was a Frenchman who served the Vichy regime and the subsequent French Republic: both of which were fully aware of his activities in the Bordeaux prefecture and neither of which was troubled by them.[22]

So far, so good. Yet if collapsing the convenient distinction between France and French Vichy is pivotal for Judt's purifying *mission civilisatrice*, what of the no less convenient distinction between France and French Indochina, France and French Africa and, most glaringly, France and French Algeria? Papon himself was not only a top official in Bordeaux under the Vichy regime, who dispatched Jews to Drancy for deportation; he was also a colonial prefect and torturer in Morocco and in Algeria, during the war for independence; and as Paris police chief in the 1960s he was responsible for the massacre of Algerians there in 1961 and the

[21] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, London 2005, p. 804. For an evaluation of Judt's *oeuvre*, including *Postwar*, see Dylan Riley, 'Tony Judt: A Cooler Look', NLR 71, Sept–Oct 2011.
[22] Judt, *Postwar*, p. 819.

shooting of anti-OAS demonstrators at the Charonne *métro* in 1962. It is telling that Judt's one veiled reference to colonialism—'no-one wanted to talk about the "dirty wars" in Indochina and Algeria, much less the torture practised there by the army'—frames it as something extrinsic: deplorable, no doubt, but not needing to be owned as 'French', unlike Vichy's participation in the killing of the Jews.[23] Here again, as Laor posits, the Jews are retrospectively whitened and Europeanized; the genocide against them has become an internal European affair, which falls within what Benedict Anderson called, in a different but not unrelated context, the reassurance of fratricide. Recognizing that colonialism—with its daily visible presence in European cities—is intrinsic to European history and identity would pose more disconcerting questions.

Paradigms

Judt's liberal teleology naturalizes the current ideology of Shoah remembrance as the truth to which all good European countries must trend. Laor is sharply aware that it is a cultural construct, yet he barely touches on two key aspects of its diffusion. The first is the central role played by Israel itself. Laor recalls vividly that 'Israeli Jews like myself grew up in the 1950s in an atmosphere saturated with chaotic, almost anarchic images of the genocide. They were progressively arranged into a fixed form by the dominant ideology: a structured narrative similar in many respects to that which has been created in Europe over the past twenty years.'[24] Yet that narrative similarity is hardly a coincidence. Israel's claim to be sole proprietor of Holocaust remembrance is now seen in much of the world as a natural and normal state of affairs, but it is nothing of the sort. It was deliberately asserted by the Ben-Gurion government in 1953, as part of a very conscious process of national-identity construction by the infant state of Israel, once the first task—seizing the land from the native

[23] War and torture seem to have replaced patriotism as the liberal scoundrel's last refuge. War implies a reciprocal and external conflict, whose ethics can then be discussed—which is why writers like Michael Walzer and Avishai Margalit ('Israel: Civilians and Combatants', *New York Review of Books*, 14 May 2009) attempted to portray Operation Cast Lead as a war waged on foreign territory, and then proceeded to censure the IDF for not adhering to more stringent rules of engagement. From Camus to those American intellectuals who have rediscovered him in the wake of the War on Terror, torture conveniently offers not only an obvious object of condemnation, but also a conduit for symmetry that facilitates the concomitant condemnation of the resistance of the colonized.

[24] MLZ, pp. 19–20.

Palestinians—had been accomplished. The bill on the commemoration of the Shoah was one of three foundational laws promulgated by Ben-Zion Dinur, Ben-Gurion's Minister of Education and Culture.[25] Introducing the bill to the Knesset, Dinur explained that its purpose was 'to gather the memory to the homeland' and that the title of the project, Yad Vashem (meaning place and name), 'designates it as Jerusalem—the heart of the nation, the heart of Israel, where all must be concentrated'.[26]

Jerusalem was at the time, of course, partitioned by concrete and barbed wire; the Old City, with its majority-Palestinian population, was under Jordanian rule. It had no more territorial connection than did London or New York to the horrors that had been perpetrated in Europe. That the Shoah would be remembered by the Jewish population there went without saying. That it should be endowed with exclusive authority to carry collective memory, as Dinur insisted, was merely a nationalist assertion; part of the institutionalization of the Zionist logic whereby all things Jewish—history, experience, memory; ideally, people and resources—ineluctably flow to Israel. Laor at times suggests that Israel has been 'assigned' a 'Western role' vis-à-vis the Arabs, as though it were a passive recipient. In fact it has actively demanded that role, proclaiming itself the sole shore to which all pro-Jewish waves of sympathy must wash. Prominent in this was the appropriation by the newly founded state of the authority to remember the Shoah, to speak on behalf of its victims and to teach the world its lessons. Those claims would be internationalized with the Eichmann trial—asserting Israeli jurisdiction over crimes committed in Europe—and institutionalized in the material reparations agreement with West Germany, which in the early 1960s was expanded to include weaponry.

Laor examines Europe's Holocaust culture without considering that of the United States, yet the two can hardly be understood in isolation. A starting point here is the pioneering work of the historian Peter Novick,

[25] The other two laws would establish the Academy of the Hebrew Language and define the mandatory elements of the school curriculum: Bible, Motherland, Jewish History—the latter defined by Dinur as uniformly shaped, during the millennia of exile, by the inner essence of the Jewish nation, rather than by the external circumstances of the myriad 'host countries' as Dinur's teacher, the great Jewish historian Eugen Täubler (1879–1953), founder of the Berlin Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, had argued.

[26] See also Piterberg, *The Returns of Zionism: Myths, Politics and Scholarship in Israel*, London and New York 2008, especially ch. 4, 'Myth and History on Mount Scopus'.

who explored the processes by which the Judeocide has come to play such a prominent role in US culture in his meticulously documented *The Holocaust in American Life*. Novick shows that Holocaust remembrance as an American—not just Jewish—civic duty was the result of strategic decisions taken by American Jewish institutions in the 1970s, backed by a concerted mobilization of resources. There was, he notes, very little public discussion of the Shoah in the first decades after the Second World War; Jewish organizations—the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress and others—blocked a proposed memorial in New York City in 1948, on the grounds that it would create an image of Jews as victims.[27] It was only with the Eichmann trial—Ben-Gurion arranged for courtroom footage to be flown to the US every evening—that the word 'holocaust', referring specifically to the killing of the Jews, entered American parlance.

The turning point came with the 1967 War, when Israel moved to the top of the agenda of organized American Jewry, and it seemed that the Zionist folk-theology of Holocaust and Redemption (in Israel) had been validated. But the crucial catalyst, Novick argues, was the 1973 War, when Israel had to be rescued by a large-scale American airlift:

> The implications of the war, for both Israelis and Americans, were far-reaching. Illusions of Israeli invincibility and self-sufficiency were among the casualties of this war. A related casualty was the contrast, traditionally drawn by Zionists, between the vulnerability of Jews in the Diaspora, culminating in the Holocaust, and the security that Jews could find in the Jewish homeland. Clearly there was no place in the world less secure for Jews than in Israel.[28]

The ensuing OPEC price hikes also threatened to alter the calculus of American interests in the Middle East. Novick records the internal debates which led to 'massive investments by Jewish communal organizations in promoting Holocaust consciousness' as a way to 'make the case for Israel', ensuring continuing American support. The arguments were set out by two ADL officials, Arnold Foster and Benjamin Epstein, in *The New Anti-Semitism* (1974), as the ADL embarked on 'an ambitious venture of Holocaust programming'.[29] Novick describes what followed as the deliberate creation of a 'collective memory' of the Nazi atrocities,

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[27] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, New York 1999, p. 123.
[28] Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, pp. 145, 148–51.
[29] Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, pp. 152, 155

in the sense of an ahistorical—even anti-historical—construction of an 'eternal' truth or identity, answering primarily to present-day concerns. It established a view of the Shoah as a unique and incomparable atrocity, the determining event of the twentieth century, to which the only permissible response was unconditional support for Israel. Early fruits of the project included the TV mini-series *Holocaust* (1978) and Carter's establishment of an official US Commission on the Holocaust (1979).

Holocaust awareness culture, Novick argues, also offered a unifying symbol for American Jews, at a time of declining religiosity and rising inter-marriage. In an era of minority politics based on victimhood, an identity anchored in the agony of European Jewry could stake a claim for what was otherwise the best-educated, wealthiest and most successful group in American society. As criticism of the treatment of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories mounted, 'the black-and-white moral clarity' of Holocaust memory came to be a strategic asset for Israel, a form of moral capital. In 1978, when the Israel-lobby group AIPAC was campaigning against US aircraft sales to Saudi Arabia, it sent the novel of the *Holocaust* series to every member of Congress. In the 80s and 90s, the collective memory became progressively more central to mainstream American culture: mandatory in school curricula, institutionalized in the Washington Holocaust Museum, supported by a growing cadre of Holocaust-memory professionals.[30]

What is unique to the Holocaust's use in America is the astonishing degree of its discrepancy with the lived reality there. In any construction of identity there is an uneasy play between a province of reality and its ideological manipulation. In this case false consciousness has been having a field day. It is not just that the Judeocide occurred in Europe, 5,000 miles away, and as a result of specific historical circumstances, the catastrophic final gasp of European imperialism opening the way to the genocidal Nazi fantasy of racial purity; nor that survivors from the camps have made up only a tiny fraction of American Jewry. Hallucinatory anxiety about resurgent anti-Semitism rose in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, in tandem with the growth of American Jewry's prosperity and power. Meanwhile the degree of irrationality that attends what Novick calls the 'sacralization' of the Shoah—along with its vulgarization—leads to any

[30] Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, pp. 3, 7, 9, 155–6, 213–4. These developments are also explored by Norman Finkelstein in *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, London and New York 2000.

attempt at historicization being decried as anti-Semitic. Novick cites the dismay of Jonathan Sarna, a leading historian of American Jewry, who remarked of a recent crop of books on American anti-Semitism: 'influenced by the current obsession with the Holocaust, they ask only one question: could it happen here? And to this question they have only one answer: yes.'[31]

Novick downplays the effect of this culture on American foreign policy, but the facts speak for themselves. Since the 1970s Israel has been by far the largest recipient of US military aid, getting around a fifth of the total budget, and is the only country that does not have to account for how the money is spent. The US has vetoed over thirty UN Security Council resolutions critical of Israel over the last forty years and has consistently shielded its nuclear programme from inspection. AIPAC has come to exercise a vice-like grip on Congress, which on Israel, as Nancy Pelosi puts it, 'speaks with one voice'. The American-led strangulation of Iran and decimation of Iraq have been long-term Israeli policies.[32] In sum, there can be little doubt that no small part of US policy in the Middle East is explicable rather by the active role of pro-Israeli institutions in America—AIPAC, but also many others—than by rational imperial interests.

Old world contrasts

Consideration of the development of American Holocaust culture inevitably alters our view of Europe's. The post-Cold War reshaping of European identity may be one factor in play, as Laor argues; but this is a culmination rather than a cause. The lived realities of the Second World War, the complicities of local elites in the Shoah and internal reckonings with them in the post-war period, the states' foreign-policy interests in the Middle East and the relative social leverage of the national Jewish communities all need to be taken into account if we are to grasp the cultural meanings of 'Euro-philosemitism' today. There are clear contrasts here with the US, where complicity was largely limited to Roosevelt's restrictions on refugee entry, while the American Jewish community is the largest in the world, over 5 million strong, and Jews occupy important positions in US politics, law, finance, publishing and the media. There is no space in this

[31] Novick, *Holocaust in American Life*, p. 175.
[32] For a detailed account see John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, New York 2008.

review to do more than indicate the main features involved, but it should be noted that the configuration of these determinants in each of the three states Laor examines—Germany, Italy, France—has been quite distinct.

Germany, of course, bore maximum responsibility for the killing of the Jews. Its internal reckoning was famously delayed, as Laor describes, by US requirements for a 'stable' partner in the Cold War. The Nuremberg trials were imposed by the victors and penitence expressed by payments to the Israeli state. The 1960s new left was the first generation to challenge the collusive silence that saw ex-Nazi CDU Chancellor Kiesinger preside over a coalition with the SPD. Its protests were met by Brandt's *Radikalenerlass* and brutal police repression. Up to the late 70s, hegemonic cultural representations of the Judeocide came from outside: the US series *Holocaust* was watched by 20 million viewers. The 1980s witnessed a breakthrough in public discussion of the Nazi era. Yet the influential position articulated by Jürgen Habermas in the mid-80s *Historikerstreit*—that it was unthinkable to situate or contextualize the crimes of Nazism, whose evil was unique and unfathomable—itself reproduced the thematics of American Holocaust culture, even as it echoed the irrationalist strand in German thought. With German reunification, this became the hegemonic national ideology. It was given a particularly virulent twist by the Antideutsch politics of the 1990s. At first a left-wing anti-nationalist protest against Kohl's Anschluss policies towards the GDR, this hardened into a *sui generis* Zionist current that threw itself into support for the invasion of Iraq and opposed any criticism of Wall Street as 'anti-Semitic'. Laor is surely right to feel a sense of unease at this shrill philosemitism, brandished as an almost superstitious defence against the spectre of a still-unresolved national question. The hounding of Günter Grass last year for his mention of Israel's bomb is indicative of its vigilantism.

In Italy, the experience was quite different. As Laor underlines, militant anti-fascist resistance played a constitutive role in the post-war social order, buttressing the position of the left. Dependent on Libyan oil and Algerian gas, Italian foreign policy during the Cold War was officially 'balanced' on the Middle East: speaking up occasionally for Palestinian rights and hosting a PLO office in Rome, while maintaining trade relations with Israel. Sympathy for the Palestinians' plight was widespread in Italian society: Europe's largest demonstrations against Israeli repression of the first Intifada were held in Rome, with not a few

Jews taking part. After broadcasting *Holocaust* in 1979, Italian TV ran a special report on 'Palestinians of the Diaspora'.[33] The impetus towards the institutionalization of Holocaust culture came in the 1990s. Its enabling condition was neither a pro-Israel campaign by domestic Jewish organizations, as in the US, nor the need for a prophylactic against unresolved nationalist issues, as in Germany, but the recomposition of the political landscape after the collapse of the First Republic amid the Tangentopoli scandals of 1992–93. The place of the Mussolini era and the Resistance in Italian national identity became highly charged issues as the PCI dissolved itself and the ex-fascist National Alliance entered government with Berlusconi's Forza Italia. A concerted ideological offensive from the right took aim at the more mythologized aspects of the anti-fascist resistance narrative, with the ulterior aim of reducing it to the moral equivalent of its enemy. The PCI, in dissolution and halfway to embracing similar positions itself, was incapable of mounting a counter-attack.

This left the ideological field open to a US initiative. The Task Force for Internationalizing Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, established in Washington in 1998, was already championing the idea of 27 January as a remembrance day. The Italian parliament passed the law in 2000, with all-party support. Since the overthrow of fascism is already celebrated on Liberation Day, 25 April—anniversary of the uprising against the Salò Republic—27 January could be uncontroversially dedicated to 'victims': the thousands of Jews, tens of thousands of political prisoners and hundreds of thousands of military internees. The *giorno della memoria* was initiated in 2001, marked by various events including an exhibition in the former Gestapo headquarters on the Jews of Rome, 1938–44, sponsored by the Steven Spielberg Shoah Foundation.[34]

The pattern in France is different again. The Hexagon is home to nearly half a million Jews, the world's third largest community, after the US and Israel; it had won emancipation in the 18th century. An influx of migrants from Germany and eastern Europe during the inter-war period raised the population to around 300,000 by 1940. Notoriously, French officials took the initiative in rounding up foreign Jews, in

[33] Jacob Abadi, 'Constraints and Adjustments in Italy's Policy towards Israel', *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2002, p. 84.
[34] Robert Gordon, 'The Holocaust in Italian Collective Memory: *Il giorno della memoria*, 27 January 2001', *Modern Italy*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2006.

particular: some 75,000 were dispatched to the camps, of whom only a few thousand returned. In the 1950s, however, the arrival of an estimated 230,000 Sephardics from Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, later Algeria, dynamized the community: more observant than many French Jews, they transformed the character of synagogues, schools and cultural centres.[35] At state level, relations with Israel were close: the Algerian war helped to forge strong military and political links at a time when many in the US political establishment considered the Jewish state an appendage of Moscow. In part through Algeria, the Zionist emphasis on Jewish martial spirit—Ben-Gurion's distrust of the 'weakness' of diaspora Jewry—had a more direct impact here than in the US. In 1966 Jean-François Steiner, a young journalist, published a semi-fictionalized account of the revolt at Treblinka. Steiner, whose father had perished in Auschwitz, had been hardened by service in a parachute regiment during the Algerian war and had spent a year and a half in Israel. Dissatisfied with a Jewish identity marred, in his eyes, by passivity in the face of Nazi terror, Steiner sought in the insurrection of the *Sonderkommandos* at Treblinka a transformative moment of heroic inspiration that was uniquely Jewish rather than universal.[36]

As in the US, the 1967 war was a turning point in French Jewish consciousness.[37] A young Communist, Pierre Goldman, described the 'joyous fury' of a pro-Israel demonstration on the boulevard Saint-Michel, where he encountered other comrades, 'Marxist-Leninists and supposed anti-Zionists, rejoicing in the warrior skills of Dayan's troops'. But the political reaction of the Elysée to the 1967 war was the opposite to that of the White House. Alarmed that Israel was upsetting the balance of power in the Middle East, de Gaulle condemned the aggression, describing the Jews as 'an elite people, sure of itself and domineering'. French Jewish organizations that had taken a pro-Israel foreign policy for granted began to organize on a political basis for the first time, as Pompidou and Giscard continued de Gaulle's arms embargo into the 70s. In 1976 the Jewish Action Committee (CJA) organized a 'day for Israel' which mobilized 100,000 people. In 1977 the formerly quietist

[35] Samuel Ghiles-Meilhac, *Le CRIF, de la résistance juive à la tentation du lobby, de 1943 à nos jours*, Paris 2011, chapter 1.

[36] The Warsaw Ghetto uprising was, in Steiner's view, 'very "goy" as a revolt': see Samuel Moyn, *A Holocaust Controversy: The Treblinka Affair in Postwar France*, Hanover and London 2005, p. 6.

[37] The following paragraphs draw on Ghiles-Meilhac, *Le CRIF*, chapters 2 and 3.

CRIF, representative council of some sixty Jewish bodies, produced a new charter denouncing France's 'abandonment of Israel', published by *Le Monde* as a document of record. In the 1981 presidential election the CJA founder, Henri Hajdenberg, led a high-profile campaign for a Jewish vote against Giscard; Mitterrand won by a margin of 3 per cent. The boycott was lifted, and Mitterrand became the first French president to visit Israel. Warm relations were sealed between the CRIF and the Socialist Party elite, and a tactful veil of silence drawn over Mitterrand's war-time role as a Vichy official.

The ideological backdrop to this was the liberal offensive of the late 70s that has been dubbed the 'anti-totalitarian moment' in France.[38] The spectre of a Socialist–Communist government galvanized a virulent Cold War campaign against the anti-capitalist and anti-colonial left—and against the republican historiography of the 1789 Revolution—which led to a paradigm shift in French intellectual culture. In its vanguard were self-styled *nouveaux philosophes* such as André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy, whose later pronouncements Laor so incisively scrutinizes. In their writings, the charge of anti-Semitism was applied without compunction to anyone with whom they disagreed. Critics of Israeli aggression were tarred with the same brush—Finkielkraut depicting all those who raised their voices against the 1982 massacre at Sabra and Shatila as anti-Semitic. From there, it would be only a short step to portraying them as—witting or unwitting—proponents of a new holocaust. Though Finkielkraut may be an extreme case, the choice of France to exemplify Laor's argument is apt, for no other Western European society has experienced the vanishing of a vigorous anti-colonial left as untraceably as the French.

Yet the field is by no means uncontested. A recent essay by Eric Hazan and Alain Badiou offers a trenchant critique of the politics of the new Euro-Zionism, opening with CRIF president Roger Cukierman's welcome of Le Pen's success in the 2002 elections, on the grounds that it would send a strong message to Muslims, and so reduce anti-Semitism in France. The notion that the country is inflamed with prejudice against the Jews was widely reported in the American press at the time of the invasion of Iraq, in which Chirac refused to participate. In 2004 Ariel Sharon spoke of 'one of the wildest anti-Semitisms' spreading in France

[38] Powerfully analysed in Michael Scott Christofferson, *French Intellectuals against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s*, Oxford 2004.

and warned French Jews to get out as soon as they could.[39] The authors combat this fantasy by offering a useful analysis of 'real and imaginary anti-Semitism': the former certainly exists, as they rightly insist, and though small-scale—hostile graffiti, wooden crates burned outside synagogues, fights among youths—is not to be taken lightly; yet it pales against the systematic police harassment of the much larger and poorer population of Maghrebine and African descent.

Purely rhetorical accusations of anti-Semitism, on the other hand, have become the stock in trade of some of France's major cultural custodians: should anyone utter the word 'Auschwitz', Claude Lanzmann will consider whether this was in a permissible context, and if he decides that the author has transgressed, 'he takes up his trumpet and sends *Le Monde* an article that is always published in a good position'. For a book, it might be Eric Marty, for a broadcast, Bernard-Henri Lévy. All are influential gatekeepers in the French media: Finkielkraut has a weekly programme on France Culture; Lévy is on the supervisory board of *Le Monde*, has a column in *Le Point*, his magazine *La Règle du jeu*, and a major position with the publishing house Grasset; 'Jean Birnbaum edits the "Essais" page in *Le Monde des livres*, which allows him to censor books that do not conform to his views. Alexandre Adler has free entry to *Le Figaro*.'[40]

In 2009 a striking analysis of this ideological grouping appeared: Ivan Segré's *The Philosemitic Reaction: Treason of the Intellectuals*. The fruit of his doctoral research with Daniel Bensaïd, Segré's study argues that, while this current has been criticized in France for its communitarian particularism, it in fact involves a reactionary betrayal of Jewish particularism in the name of the 'defence of the West'—a position quite close to that of Kurzweil and Laor.[41] Characterizing the 'philosemitic reaction' as having 'the intellectual, social and institutional vocation of presenting an authorized discourse', Segré proceeds to a close textual analysis of representative works by Raphaël Draï, Shmuel Trigano, Alexandre Adler, Emmanuel Brenner, Pierre-André Taguieff and others. The section on

[39] Very few followed his advice. An average of 2,182 French Jews made the *aliyah* every year between 2000 and 2009, the number falling below 1,900 in the last few years: Erik Cohen, *The Jews of France Today: Identity and Values*, Leiden 2011, p. 90.

[40] Alain Badiou and Eric Hazan, '"Anti-Semitism Everywhere" in France Today', in Badiou, Hazan and Ivan Segré, *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, London and New York 2013, pp. 35–6.

[41] Ivan Segré, 'The Philo-Semitic Reaction', now in Badiou, Hazan and Segré, *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, pp. 45–232.

Emmanuel Brenner's *Les Territoires perdus de la République* is a highly effective deconstruction of this inflated sociology of Islamist penetration of the French school system.[42] There seems little doubt that this is just the start of the debate.

Another remembrance

The origins of contemporary Holocaust remembrance culture are thus more political than Laor suggests: Israeli nationalism, together with the concerted efforts of American and French Jewish organizations, underpins its centrality to the new European identity. It is possible to remember the Shoah in another way. A case in point is Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, who died on 2 October 2009. Edelman was a member of the anti-Zionist Bund, the General Workers Union of Poland, and played a leading role in the ZOB (Jewish Combat Organization), which launched the Ghetto uprising in 1943. After the War he stayed on in Poland, working as a cardiologist. He lost his job in a purge in 1967, and his wife and two children emigrated to France. Edelman, however, remained, explaining that 'someone had to stay with all those who died here'. In 2002 he wrote an open letter to the Palestinian guerrilla organizations, in which he addressed them as comrades-in-arms and recognized their struggle as legitimate, even as he beseeched them to desist from suicide bombing. The letter was headed: 'To all the leaders of Palestinian military, paramilitary and guerrilla organizations; to all soldiers of Palestinian militant groups.' The terms were a clear reference to the ZOB, which he had led in the Ghetto uprising.

Edelman's death revealed the highly ideological character of remembrance Laor dissects in his book. With the expected exceptions—Tony Greenstein, John Rose, Idith Zertal and Laor himself—he was almost entirely ignored, a 'non-person' as Greenstein bitterly commented.[43] Instead, the Warsaw Ghetto uprising is chiefly associated with another leader, Mordechai Anielewicz, a Zionist, after whom a kibbutz—Yad Mordechai—is named. Edelman's example threatens to undermine

[42] Emmanuel Brenner is the pseudonym of the historian Georges Bensoussan.

[43] See the blogposts by Tony Greenstein, 7 October 2009, and Bill Weinberg, 15 October 2009, John Rose's obituary in the *Independent*, 7 October 2009, and the discussion in Idith Zertal's *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge 2005, pp. 34ff.

the hegemonic ideology's underlying axis: Holocaust remembrance, Zionism/Israel, resentment of the colonized, past and present. His role in Poland as a young man is a standing rebuke to the myth that Zionism led the anti-Nazi resistance. As an old man, he touched a raw nerve by serving as a connection between anti-Nazi resistance in the Shoah and sympathy for Palestinian anti-colonial resistance under Israeli occupation. Edelman exemplified the simple historical truth of the anti-Zionist Jewish left, according to which one fights injustice and racism—of the anti-Semitic ilk and all others—by fighting injustice and racism, not by replicating them elsewhere. For this reason he was ignored during his lifetime and it might seem that his memory is doomed to oblivion. It deserves to be honoured.