



The Holocaust was the moral death of Europe, one with which it has since struggled to cope, writes Professor Jeremy Black to mark Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day on 12th April 2018 (and the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising).

A continent whose leaders saw themselves as at the cutting-edge of history, and as destined to rule over much of the world, was horribly compromised for it was not only Germany (very much including Austria) that was responsible but also the many that actively co-operated. This row of infamy spanned Europe, from the authorities to France to the government of Romania. Just as many brave and worthy individuals risked much trying to thwart the Holocaust, so all too many were culpable, whether directly involved or by not doing what they could and should have done to oppose, limit or condemn the process. The excuses were to be many, as the Catholic hierarchy exemplified, but the reality as passing along on the other side of the road, if not, in some cases, crossing it to co-operate.

After the war, there was a process across much of Europe of amnesia as convenient myths were crafted: 'it was all the fault of Hitler,' 'the Wehrmacht was honorable; only the SS was bad,' 'no-one had collaborated.' And so on. Moreover, leaving aside the deniers (not mad as that is a calumny on the insane, but bad), Holocaust diminishment became active from the 1960s as the term was applied broadly, a process that has continued to the present, and, indeed, become more common. From the Left such comparison was a way of attacking whatever they disliked. Thus, in the 1960s, French policy in Algeria, Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique, American in Vietnam, and its hatred of Israeli as a whole, were all castigated accordingly. For example, in Germany, the terrorist Ulrike Meinhof referred to Moshe Dayan as 'Israel's Himmler.' This is a strand that, as the Labour Party in Britain now shows, has continued to the present and drawn on the reification of 'capitalism' and its use for anti-Semitic rhetoric. The anti-Semitism of the

radical Left and its shared of Israel is always linked to Holocaust diminishment.

A different strand of Left-wing Holocaust diminishment was that of the Soviet Union, a strand that continues to affect opinion. In its wartime propaganda, the Soviet Union downplayed the Holocaust, with Stalin redrafting war reports in order to direct attention from the extent to which Soviet victims of Nazi killing were Jews. Anti-Semitic policies were pursued by European Communist governments after the war. Zionism was a major charge against Jewish Communists who were purged, but, with a macabre twisting of truth, all too characteristic of both Communists and Nazis, some Jews were accused of wartime collaboration with the enemy. Subsequently, the support shown to Israel by the United States from 1967 and, conversely, Soviet backing for Egypt, Syria, and pan-Arabism, strengthened Communist anti-Semitism. Indeed, in the bizarre world of Soviet propaganda, Zionists were accused of cooperating with the Holocaust in order to give birth to Israel, an opinion recently voiced in Labour circles in Britain.

On the far-Right, there were also strands of diminishment. They looked back to pre-war anti-Semitism and to the attempt to vindicate wartime collaboration with Germany, notably in Croatia, France, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. There was also the emphasis, after the Cold War, not on Nazi killings but on Communist and Soviet oppression, a tendency that had earlier been pronounced among exiles. As Eastern Europeans came to see themselves as victims of Communist rule, who had played no role in the regime (often an overly convenient view), so the suffering of others was neglected. Moreover, the tendency seen earlier in the century to link Communism with Jews, a tendency very much pushed by Nazi Germany and its allies, was revived in the 1990s, with anti-Semitism playing an explicit or implicit role in some populist nationalism. Furthermore, the long-held tendency to emphasize Christian victims of Nazi persecution as much as, or more than, their Jewish counterparts continued. Denial of the Holocaust is currently a criminal offence in much of Eastern Europe, but that is only a limited guide to the diverse complexity of public memory about the war and its place in national historical narratives.

The situation has become even less happy in recent years. The situation in Europe has become more volatile. It is mistaken even to offer a mono-causal explanation whether in terms of a response to socio-economic problems, to hostility to mass-immigration, to a rise in populism/nationalism, or to a response to an uncertainty compounded by Russian expansionism and European Union pretensions. In practice, all play a role, and several elements are reminiscent of earlier periods in European history.

The net effect has been to see an embrace of a present-day blood-and-soil nationalism that has important implications including for the relationship between the past and the present. This relationship is not necessarily explicitly anti-Semitic, although that element is very much there, as in the 2018 Hungarian election. The vindication of earlier movements with which links are drawn, for example Vichy in France, has a clear anti-Semitic dimension. In the 2017 general election there were calls to defend the 'honor' of German soldiers in the war; which is at clear variance with the major scholarly emphasis since the 1990s on Wehrmacht complicity in mass-slaughter.

Another strand of anti-Semitism is new to Europe, that of the growing Muslim population. Holocaust denial, in some form or other, is far from a fringe opinion in the Muslim community. Moreover, this is part of a more general Muslim pattern of the portrayal of Jewish history; for example, the denial of a positive, or any, Jewish role or place in the Moorish-ruled medieval al-Andalus (Andalusia). In France, Muslims have vociferously resisted the emphasis on the

Holocaust in the educational process and in public commemoration. 'Death to the Jews!' and 'Gas the Jews!' were shouts at pro-Palestinian rallies in Belgium, France, and Germany in 2014, and the French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, referred to a 'new anti-Semitism.' The following year, Robert Badinter, former Minister of Justice, at a speech in Lyon to mark the anniversary of the 1943 round-up of Jews who were taken then to Drancy and Auschwitz, placed anti-Semitism 'masquerading under the name of anti-Zionism' in a sequence: 'When Mohammed Merah, in a Jewish high school in Toulouse, chased and caught a little girl aged eight as she tried to run away, grabbed her by the hair, and shot her point-blank in the head, he was re-enacting the deeds of the SS Einsatzgruppen.'

There are repeated signs of anti-Semitism across Europe and of accompanying physical manifestations in the form of frequent harassment of Jews, especially those distinguished by dress as Orthodox Jews, and attacks on Jewish institutions and memorials, notably gravestones but also synagogues. A greatly disproportionate amount of this violence comes from Muslims and inter-faith collaborative crisis groups have failed to rise to the occasion, in part due to the attitude of many Muslim community leaders. Moreover, European publics have not responded well to the challenge of defending their own civil societies from assault.

On January 24, 2005, in an address to a special session of the United Nations held to commemorate the Holocaust, Secretary General Kofi Annan, declared that: 'the evil which destroyed six million Jews and others in these camps still threatens all of us today; the crimes of the Nazis are nothing that we may ascribe to a distant past in order to forget it. It falls to us, the successor generations, to lift high the torch of remembrance, and to live our lives by its light.'

On the global scale, however, the Western culture for which the Holocaust is a key symbol and warning is of receding consequence. This is particularly true of the rapidly declining demographic, economic, political, cultural, and intellectual significance of Europe; for, in Europe, a major, albeit badly flawed, attempt has been belatedly made to establish the Holocaust as a touchstone against which modern European civil society should be defined. There is also the issue of weakening American power and influence. Instead, the demographic, economic and political weight of China and India are of growing relative importance. For neither state, nor for Japan, is the Holocaust a prominent issue.

Asian views and the technological and social implications of social media present two among the many challenges confronting Holocaust consciousness. It is also necessary to consider how best to address rising generations. Here, popular culture can be arresting. 'Daleks in Manhattan, I,' an episode of the highly popular British television series (for adults as well as children) Doctor Who, was broadcast on April 21, 2007. This had the evil Daleks, the quintessential and longstanding villains who hate everything, embark on 'The Final Experiment.' Their victims are divided between those turned into slaves and others intended as food for the experiment. However flawed, these comparisons indicate the extent to which Nazi policy has become the axis of depravity, and the Holocaust its center, making indeed a hell on Earth.

Professor Jeremy Black addressed a U K Defence Forum briefing dinner in Parliament on 31st January 2018. He is the 2018 Templeton Fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute www.fpri.org

and Professor of History at the University of Exeter, UK. He is the author of The Holocaust. History and Memory (Indiana UP).