

Preface

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Let us begin with a timely cultural puzzle, one that throws into relief the built-in historical, political, linguistic, and cosmopolitan contradictions of viewing the Holocaust as a global property.

The October 2013 conference of the Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO) was held in Harbin and Shanghai, China. At first glance this might seem a bit strange; what does the Holocaust have to do with China? The Chinese were unquestionably not involved in the Holocaust and apparently are not affected by it. They have their own history and their own genocidal tragedies to remember. Why would they be interested in the Holocaust so much so that they would establish an institution to commemorate it by? And why is this institution affiliated with an international organization to the extent that it hosts this organization's conference?

Is this what we mean when we talk about the globalization of Holocaust memory? Let us take a closer look at the umbrella organization, the AHO. Perhaps it could teach us something else about this alleged global Holocaust memory.

First the date that it was established: 1985. Why then? What happened in those years that encouraged the founding of such an international organization for Holocaust education? Let us recall that in the same year *Shoah* was released by Claude Lanzmann and the Bitburg affair erupted. One year later David Grossman's *See Under: Love* was first published in Hebrew (to be translated in the coming years into many other languages) and the *Historikerstreit* erupted in West Germany. This does not seem to be accidental. What happened in those years that made the world so concerned with the Holocaust?

Now let us also consider the capacity of this organization. In 2011 the AHO included 250 worldwide organizations that were linked in one way or

another to Holocaust education.¹ By February 2013 the website had already listed over 300 of them, located in 33 countries.² Quite a lot! One can certainly doubt that there is anything of this kind in relation to any other event in history. Moreover, this does not show the full magnitude of the picture. South Africa, for example, is represented in the list by only one organization, the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation, whereas in fact there are three Holocaust centers in the country—in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg³—each of which houses its own museum.

So there seems to be a rapidly growing worldwide interest in the Holocaust, amplified and institutionalized on an international scale. But does that make Holocaust memory global? Let us peruse the AHO directory list. This could offer some more hints as to the character of this phenomenon.

Of the more than 300 institutions included, more than 200 (which constitute approximately two-thirds) are based in the United States (in 42 states) and only one in Africa. None of these Holocaust centers are situated in Arab or Muslim countries, and only three Asian countries are represented—Israel, China, and Japan. Only eight of the institutions are located in Latin America (in Argentina, Chile, Brazil, and Uruguay).

So how global, actually, is this memory? Are we not conflating “global” with “Western” or perhaps even “American”? And what is the content of this allegedly global memory? If we go back to the Harbin and Shanghai seven-day conference program, we realize that the first session after the keynote address was dedicated to “The Jews in China—Introduction of Jews in Kafeng, Harbin, Tianjin & Shanghai,” while the second session was about the “Japanese Genocide in China.” Neither of these two issues, as with most of the other topics of this conference, directly addressed the Holocaust. They gave the impression that the “Holocaust” stands for something else, perhaps many other things, which are all beyond the scope of the historical event that struck the Jews in Europe between 1939 and 1945. Therefore, it was taken as a trigger for local Jewish history and a local genocide. Nonetheless, there seemed to be local political sponsorship for this event, as the evening of Sunday 13 October was dedicated to a “Welcome dinner by Shanghai Government.” So we may ask, is the global Holocaust memory about Jews? Is it about Jewish history? Would it concern other genocides? And how political and politicized is this “global memory”?

One item, however, was very much missing in this program—there was no mention of “human rights.” On the one hand, this is hardly surprising, given the place of the conference, but on the other hand, “human rights” is a signifier often connected to the “global memory of the Holocaust.” It is clearly stated, for example, in the UN General Assembly resolution on Holocaust remembrance that was adopted on 1 November 2005, which, among other things, announced 27 January as an International Holocaust Remembrance Day. The resolution begins by explicitly “[r]eaffirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that everyone is entitled to all the rights and

freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, religion or other status.”

So, is this global memory really about “human rights”? According to Levy and Sznajder, who offer the first thorough and comprehensive analysis of Holocaust memory as a global memory,⁴ the answer is in the affirmative, as they argue that the Holocaust lies at the foundation of the postwar human rights regime. Their thesis is that in light of the collapse and breakdown of the great ideological narratives and the destabilization of national narratives, a new mythology organized around the Holocaust has emerged suggesting a basis for a fresh political ethic. Levi and Sznajder celebrate this as a new diasporic, humanistic moral order signaling a better world.

Following the questions broached above, this volume endeavors to critically explore these and other notions of the alleged “global Holocaust memory” as articulated by Levy and Sznajder and many others. Is it so prevalent? What does it actually mean? How does it function on various social, cultural, and political grounds? How is it related to other memories? What does its vocabulary consist of? To what extent is it truly global, and how does it encounter local traditions? How is it globally reproduced, and how is it formulated, compromised, negotiated, or subverted? And what are its moral, political, and cultural roots and ramifications?

These questions and their like were explored during the years 2008–9 by a research group composed of Israeli scholars coming from various academic fields under the auspices of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. The group also invited four renowned guest scholars to participate in a conference held in Jerusalem in 2009 on these issues. This volume is the outcome of this joint scholarly project. We would like to pay special tribute to one of those scholars—Peter Novick, whose contribution to the debate was invaluable, but, to our great sorrow, who passed away in February 2012. The volume is dedicated to his memory.

The volume is divided into five sections. The first is an introduction consisting of two chapters. The first of these is a chapter oriented in cultural studies by cultural historian Amos Goldberg, who unravels the tensions between the Holocaust global memory’s ethico-political dimensions and its “Western” identity formation consequences. The second, by social anthropologist Haim Hazan, presents the inherent theoretical aporia that is at the heart of this implausible juxtaposition of “Holocaust” and “globalization.” These two chapters propose an overview of the phenomenon at stake and its basic problematizations.

The second section critically explores the validity, the meaning, and the capacity of the global memory of the Holocaust. Historian Peter Novick refutes the very existence of such a global or even American memory. He claims that this is an optical illusion caused by the predominance of individual Jews in American cultural institutions and particularly in the film industry. Historian Alon Confino, on the other hand, suggests that the Holocaust is an event

that replaced the French Revolution as the West's "foundational past," as he coins it. Philosopher Ronit Peleg follows Confino to see the theme of "after Auschwitz" as a turning point in moral Continental philosophy, which she explores through Lyotard's and Blanchot's philosophical writings. While Peleg's chapter is very much poststructuralist oriented, social anthropologist Nigel Rapport's chapter is existential in nature. Rapport contends that, functioning as a trope, the Holocaust serves as a global fund of knowledge, or a memory bank, that is large, ominous, awful, ambiguous, and conflicted enough to hold all that we know of being human, including and most significantly its contradictoriness.

The third section considers some key words in the commonplace vocabulary making up the language of the globalized Holocaust, such as testimony, trauma, human rights, and collective memory. These are examined vis-à-vis other, mostly non-Western, cultural expressions and memories. Political theorist Michal Givoni studies the ethics of witnessing the French section of the now multinational humanitarian movement Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) to conclude that not only does its genealogy have very little to do with the Holocaust, but that "for testimony to go global and become the practical infrastructure of a new cosmopolitics . . . the ethical legacy of the Holocaust had, in many respects, to be bypassed." Anthropologist Carol A. Kidron compares patterns of intergenerational transmission of the genocide legacy in Jewish Israeli and Cambodian second generations. She concludes that though very different from each other, both are very much culturally constructed and hence deviate from the globally disseminated reductionist profile of pathologically captivated trauma descendants. Louise Bethlehem, a postcolonial literary scholar, discusses some dimensions of postcolonial theory and its unacknowledged or even denied debt to Holocaust studies. She advocates a closer exchange between the two mutually inclusive fields that will enrich both. In the next chapter the communication scholar Tamar Katriel compares the establishment of two events on the UN ceremonial calendar: the International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the International Day of Non-Violence commemorating Mahatma Gandhi. In the closing chapter of this section, cultural historian Michael Rothberg addresses anew his extremely influential concept of "multidirectional memory," which powerfully resonates in many of this volume's chapters. In the second part of his chapter, Rothberg investigates the political repercussions of his concept through the analysis of Sebald's writings and the works of the British Israeli visual artist Alan Schechner.

The fourth section is about the poetics of the Holocaust as a global event. It portrays some of the major global Holocaust artists—none of whom is a Holocaust survivor, but all of whom are seeking new poetic avenues in their critical exploration of the nonrepresentational grand traumatic event. The literature scholar Rina Dudai disentangles the nexus of pain and pleasure in Spielberg's famous film *Schindler's List*, which evolves, according to Dudai, into a tangle of kitsch and simulacra. She does this by following the critical video artwork

Spielberg's List by the video artist Omer Fast. The theater scholar Shulamith Lev-Aladgem takes a different track. She analyzes the work of the controversial British Jewish playwright George Tabori on the Holocaust. Appreciating his bent to universalize the Holocaust and to break every possible taboo of its memory, she nonetheless acknowledges and respects, as a descendant of Holocaust survivors, those who object to such artistic manifestations. If there is a writer who stands in stark opposition to Tabori, it is W. G. Sebald, who is preoccupied with issues of unresolved trauma and melancholia. In his analysis, the German literature scholar Jakob Hessing maintains that Sebald's poetics are indeed universal and diasporic, but at a price: the law of dispersion drives Sebald's characters beyond the point of no return, and his prose brings to us the voices of the dead. The literature scholar Batya Shimony takes us back to the Israeli local scale, where the tension of the global and the local are manifested and dismantled. Shimony investigates Israeli Mizrahi writers who adopt and emulate various poetic strategies in coming to terms with an omnipresent memory turned major Jewish symbolic capital from which they are excluded.

The fifth and last section is a closure. Social anthropologist Emanuel Marx turns his gaze back to the November 1938 *Kristallnacht*, to which he was a witness. In his chapter Marx upholds that this event was a crucial symbolic turning point on the twisted road to the Holocaust and to other genocides that the Nazis perpetrated. His chapter oscillates between the personal and the universal meanings of this event. Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, the group's senior Holocaust scholar, who has written extensively on Holocaust literature since the 1970s, brings us in her postscript back to the place where this project started—to Jerusalem. She distinguishes between an open and creative centrifugal memory, defined as the “comic,” and a melancholic dead-end centripetal memory, regarded as sacrificial in nature. She warns us of the catastrophic political and ethical consequences of the latter, especially when it is conflated with another Jewish sacrificial myth—that of the Temple Mount. Hence, the gamut of chapters in this volume ranges from the assumed global to the essential local, thereby propounding a vicious circle interlocking a perpetual momentum of universal and particular, centrifugal and centripetal, quiddity and liquidity, engraving and deleting, inculcating and denying. These dialectics imprint the reverberations of the Holocaust as an increasingly cultural text.

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Notes

1. Alvin Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 11. Rosenfeld does not state when his counting actually took place.

2. See <http://www.ahoinfo.org>.

3. An extremely interesting one is the museum currently being built in Johannesburg, which will be dedicated the Holocaust as well as to the Rwandan genocide. Its opening is scheduled for the mid-2015.

4. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (2001; repr., Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).

Bibliography

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