

Trauma Construction and Moral Restriction:

The Ambiguity of the Holocaust for Israel

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Yad Vashem Fires Employee Who Compared Holocaust to Nakba

Haaretz, April 23, 2009: Yad Vashem has fired an instructor who compared the trauma of Jewish Holocaust survivors with the trauma experienced by the Palestinian people in Israel's War of Independence. Itamar Shapiro, 29, of Jerusalem, was fired before Passover from his job as a docent at the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, after a teacher with a group of yeshiva students from Efrat made a complaint. Shapiro had worked at Yad Vashem for three and a half year....

Shapira confirmed, in a telephone conversation with *Haaretz*, that he had spoken to visitors about the 1948 massacre at Deir Yassin. He said he did so because the ruins of the Arab village, today a part of Jerusalem's Givat Shaul neighborhood, can be seen as one leaves Yad Vashem. "Yad Vashem talks about the Holocaust survivors' arrival in Israel and about creating a refuge here for the world's Jews. I said there are people who lived on this land and mentioned that there are other traumas that provide other nations with motivation," Shapira said. "The Holocaust moved us to establish a Jewish state and the Palestinian nation's trauma is moving it to seek self-determination, identity, land and dignity, just as Zionism sought these things," he said.

The institution's position is that the Holocaust cannot be compared to any other event and that every visitor can draw his own political conclusions ... "Yad Vashem would have acted unprofessionally had Itamar Shapira continued his educational work for the institute," [Yad Vashem spokeswoman Iris] Rosenberg said. Yad Vashem employs workers and volunteers from the entire political and social spectrum, who know how to separate their personal position from their work, she said.

Shapira said Vad Yashem chooses to examine only some of the events that took place in the War of independence. "It is being hypocritical. I only tried to expose the visitors to the facts, not to political conclusions. If Yad Vashem chooses to ignore the facts, for example the massacre at Deir Yassin, or the Nakba ["The Catastrophe," the Palestinians' term for what happened to them after 1948], it means that it's afraid of something and that its historical approach is flawed," Shapiro said.

This disheartening report from Israel's most influential newspaper illustrates the idea that is at the core of this collective research project. References to trauma, and representations about it, are not

just individual but social and collective. Who was responsible for a collective trauma, who were its victims, and what the trauma's moral lessons for our own time – these are not simply theoretical or empirical issues for professional social scientists. They are fundamental concerns of everyday life, matters for reporting in daily newspapers and websites, and they powerfully affect contemporary conflicts at the individual, institutional, national, and global levels.

As this *Haaretz* report also demonstrates, however, the manner in which collective traumas are presented in everyday life is naturalistic, to the point of being dangerously naïve. Traumas are spoken about as if they are simply historical facts, as things that happened, clearly understand events, empirical things that can either be recognized or ignored. How we choose to react to the facts of trauma is presented as if it were simply a matter of personal, individual reflection.

According to the cultural-sociological approach, however, neither of these latter suppositions is correct. Collective traumas are not found, they are made. Something awful usually did occur, but how it is represented remains an open question, subject to whirling spirals of signification, fierce power contests, simplifying binaries, subtle stories, fickle audiences, and counter-narrations. Individuals do not respond to traumas but to trauma constructions. How they come to reflect upon them is certainly a matter for individual conscience, but it is also a massively collective thing. Individuals experience the pain and suffering of defeat, and the hopes for future emancipation, in terms of collective stories that engulf and instruct them, sometimes in positive, sometimes in frightening ways.

Earlier work on the Nazi murder of six million Jews¹ explored how the representation of this horrendous event shifted, in the half-century after it transpired, from “war crime” to “Holocaust.” As a heinous event associated with Nazism, the mass murder was initially contextualized inside the culture

¹ Alexander, “The Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust from War Crime to Trauma Drama,’” in Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Smelzer, and Sztompka, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004). See also Alexander, *Understanding the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford University Press, 2009), where that earlier piece is

structures that had framed the second World War, a civilization-versus-barbarism binary, on the one hand, and a progressive narrative of modern amelioration, on the other. For two decades afterward, this binary and narrative frame allowed Western nations to keep the mass murder of the Jews, even as it remained ferociously stigmatized, as an event very much relegated to the past. In the postwar period, people looked to the future and engaged in reconstruction. They saw themselves as building a new, modern, and civilized society, one in which Nazi genocide would never be allowed to happen again. These efforts at civil repair were not illusory. Democracies were reconstructed from dictatorships, and millennia long anti-Semitic barriers were overcome. Nevertheless, in the course of the 1960's this grand narrative of postwar progressive, which had sequestered racial, religious, and ethnic mass murder in a distant past began, began to be vulnerable and to change.

Collective traumas are complex symbolic-cum-emotional constructions that have significant autonomy from, and power over, social structure and interests in the more material sense. At the same time, however, trauma constructions are affected by the kinds of social groups that promote them, by the distribution of resources to broadcast them, and by the institutional structure of the social arenas in which their construction takes place. With the rise of anti-Western, anti-colonial movements abroad, and the emergence of anti-war movements racial and ethnic movements of liberation at home, the postwar protagonists of the progressive narrative were profoundly challenged. Their purity became polluted by association with their own ethnic, racial, and religious massacres, and their ability to maintain the civilization-barbarism binary destroyed. Rather than being seen as carriers of universalism, they were accused of being primordial and particularistic themselves. It was as these new understandings developed that the shift from “war crime” to “Holocaust” emerged. Rather than being relegated to the past, the dangers of massive racial, ethnic, and religious domination, and even mass murder, moved

subjected to intense debate. The present chapter draws from, revises, and substantially extends the Alexander's postscript to that volume.

forward into the present. They became part of modernity. For contemporaries, the Holocaust shifted from a progressive to a tragic narrative. It became a story about hubris and punishment. A trauma drama that evoked sorrow and pity, its victims became objects of universal identification and its perpetrators were now constructed as representing humanity rather than any particular national group. Its bathetic denouement provided a drama of eternal return to which contemporaries felt compelled to return over and over again. The Holocaust came to be seen as the singular representation of the darkness of the twentieth century, the humbling lesson upon which was erected post-modern doubt. Yet, this humbling and tragic lesson created a new, more universal standard of moral judgment for present and future humankind.

This research on Holocaust and trauma construction was conducted in the late 1990s. It was a time of cautious optimism. The American and European intervention in Kosovo seemed to provide singular evidence for the universalizing power of the Holocaust effect. Dictatorships were still being turned into democracies, and there was a bubbling effervescence about the emergence of global civil society. It was a time to focus on the emergence of global narratives about the possibility of justice, among which there was no more surprising and inspiring story than the transvaluation of the Jewish mass murder from an historically situated war crime into tragic trauma drama whose moral lessons had become central to all modernity. In the words of Bernhard Giesen, a principal collaborator in that earlier project, this transvaluation process provided “a new transnational paradigm of collective identity,” according to which the Holocaust became the “global icon of evil.” In Alexander put it, “a specific and situated historical event” had become “transformed into a generalized symbol of human suffering,” a “universal symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic,

racial, and religious justice, for mutual recognition, and for global conflicts becoming regulated in a more civil way.”²

We live now in a darker time, more divided, more violent, more tense. We have become much more cautious about the possibilities for a global civil society, more sensitive to the continuing festering of local wounds and their often explosive and debilitating world-wide effects. This is the time to explore the relationship between cultural trauma and collective identity in a different way, elaborating the theory so that it can explain not only more universalizing but more particularistic and deleterious results. In this chapter, we return to the historical genealogy of the Holocaust, but connect it with the emergence of a radically different carrier group, a drastically divergent social setting, and spirals of signification that depart sharply in their symbolic meanings and moral implications. We connect Holocaust symbolization not to pluralist Western democracies but to a democracy bent on securing the foundations of a single religion, not to a post-war national context but to a nation that founded in war, facing challenges to its very existence for decades after, right up until today. For this Jewish nation, despite its progressive aspirations, the memory of the Jewish mass murder connoted tragedy from the outset, and the catharsis produced by iterations of the trauma-drama sustained moral strictures of more particularistic and primordial than universal and civil kinds.

Tragic Dramas, Divergent Effects

Going beyond the progressive narrative to a tragic vision compels members of a collectivity to narrate and symbolically re-experience the suffering of a trauma’s victims. If, however, these victims are represented narrowly – as simply the story tellers themselves -- the tragic trauma-drama may not, in fact, have a sympathy-generating effect. It creates not identification with extended others but with ancestors, who share the same primordial identity as the story tellers themselves. The tragic trauma drama produces catharsis, but it is not the enlightening pity that Aristotle once described. It is more self-pity, a

² Giesen 2009, Alexander 2004.

sentiment that blocks identification and undermines the expansion of moral feeling that such contemporary neo-Aristotelians as Martha Nussbaum have prescribed. It is not a universalizing love for the other but a more restrictive self-love, a feeling that cuts experience short, encouraging emotional splitting and moral scapegoating.

In this emplotment, the moral implications of the drama of eternal return are inverted. Not being able to get beyond the originating trauma, feeling compelled again and again to return to it, actually reinforces the particularistic hatreds that inspired the aggression and murder of that earlier time. Narrowing rather than universalizing in morality and affect, earlier hatreds are reproduced, not overcome. Rather than expanded human sympathy for the other, we have Hitler revenging the defeated German people, Serbia's ethnic cleansing, and Hindu nationalism's bloody minded struggle against Islamic "intruders" today.³ We also have the *Nakba*, the catastrophe that Israeli's founding created for the Palestinian people, a trauma that inspired the violently anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli struggles by Palestinian people and Arab states against the Zionism and the Israeli state. These polarizing, trauma-inspired struggles have fuelled the tragic-cum-primordial narratives that prevent peace between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East today.

An Israeli Patriot's Lament

In the middle of 2007, David Remnick, the editor of the *New Yorker* magazine, published a controversial "Letter from Jerusalem." It was a conversation with Avraham Burg, once Speaker of the Israel Knesset and former director both of the World Zionist Organization and the Israeli Jewish

³ In a series of influential studies, the psychiatrist Vamik Volkan has explored such narrowing and particularistic responses to trauma and the manner in which they fuel violence and revenge, e.g., "Transgenerational Transmissions and Chosen Traumas: An Aspect of Large-Group Identity," *Group Analysis* 32 (1) 2001: 79-97. From an historical and cultural sociological perspective, however, Volkan's work is limited by the individualistic and naturalizing assumptions that seem endemic to the psychoanalytic perspective on collective life. These problems also affect, but in a less restrictive manner, the wide-ranging, politically engaged studies by Dan Bar-On and his colleagues, e.g., Sharon Shamir, Tali Yitzhaki-Verner, and Dan Bar-On, "'The Recruited Identity': The Influence of the Intifada on the Perception of the Peace Process from the Standpoint of the Individual" *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 6

Agency. Remnick's conversation with the now embittered Israeli leader points directly to the social processes **we** wish to illuminate here. "As of this moment," Burg observes, "Israel is a state of trauma in nearly every one of its dimensions." Insisting that this is "not just a theoretical question," he asks, "would our ability to cope with Iran not be much better if we renewed in Israel the ability to trust the world?" It is because Israelis identify the Holocaust with their betrayal by Christian Europe, Burg reasons, that they do not possess the necessary reserve of trust that could propel a process of peace. "We say we do not trust the world, they will abandon us," Burg explains. Seeing "Chamberlain returning from Munich with the black umbrella," Israelis draw the conclusion "we will bomb them alone."⁴ It is because of this trauma construction, Burg believes, that so many Israelis feel they must go it alone. He finds this path deeply self-defeating. "Would it not be more right," he asks, "if we didn't deal with the problem on our own but, rather, as part of a world alignment beginning with the Christian churches, going on to the governments and finally the armies?"

In its early "optimistic years," Burg tells Remnick, Israel was different. Paradoxically, "the farther we got from the camps and the gas chambers, the more pessimistic we became and the more untrusting we became toward the world." As Burg sees it, this narrative shift has produced chauvinism and selfishness. Today, the Holocaust trauma fragments and divides, allowing conservative Israelis to justify oppressing Palestinians. It is because of their Holocaust consciousness, Burg insists, that his contemporaries are not "sensitive enough to what happens to others and in many ways are too indifferent to the suffering of others. We confiscated, we monopolized, world suffering. We did not allow anybody else to call whatever suffering they have 'holocaust' or 'genocide,' be it Armenians, be it Kosovo, be it Darfur." The Holocaust trauma is remembered in a manner that makes a significant swath of Israeli

(3) 1996: 193-233 and Bar-On, "Israeli Society between the Culture of Death and the Culture of Life," *Israeli Studies* 2 (2) 1997: 88-112.

⁴ David Remnick, "The Apostate: A Zionist Politician Loses Faith in the Future," *The New Yorker*, July 30, 2007, pp. 32-37.

society impervious to criticism: “‘Occupation? You call this occupation? This is nothing compared to the absolute evil of the Holocaust!’ And if it is nothing compared to the Holocaust then you can continue. And since nothing, thank God, is comparable to the ultimate trauma it legitimizes many things.”

Jewish Dreams of Post-Tragedy

It might have seemed, from a more naturalistic perspective, that the Holocaust would be written directly on the body of Israel and its Jews, whether via first-hand experience or by primordial identification. From a cultural-sociological perspective, however, meaning-work is contingent. For Israel and its Jewish people, the meaning and message of the Holocaust has been up for grabs, crystallized in strikingly divergent ways. “The memory of the Holocaust and its victims,” Yechiam Weitz observes, “was accompanied by unending political strife;” these debates “were always bitter, full of tension and emotional,” and occasionally “violent and even deadly.”⁵

The millennia long sufferings of the Jewish people created an historical memory of persecution. These tragic iterations were ritualized in Jewish religious ceremonies, constituting a cultural legacy that seemed to demand not progress but eternal return. While the post-enlightenment European emancipation of ghettoized Jews triggered a more progressive narrative, the backlash against Jewish incorporation that exploded in the last decades of the 19th century, and accelerated during the early 20th, pushed European Jewry to look backward again. Zionism emerged in response to this stinging disappointment. It fought against not only anti-Semitism but the fatalism and pessimism that so often had marked the Jewish tradition itself. It promised that, if a homeland were regained, the Jewish people would be landed and

⁵ Yechiam Weitz, “Political Dimensions of Holocaust memory in Israel,” pp. 129-145 in Robert Wistrich and David Ohana, eds., *The Shaping of Israeli Identity: Myth, Memory and Trauma*, London: Frank Cass, 1995, p. 130. It is paradoxical that in her searching and original investigation *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), Idith Zertal insists on contrasting what she views as the truly “historical dimension of the events” with their “out-of-context use” in the new nation’s collective memory, which she condemns for having “transmuted” the facts (pp. 4-5). The position that informs our own approach is that history

cited, and their history rewound. The story of the Jewish people could start over again in a healthy and “normal” way.⁶

Zionist Struggles, Holocaust Memories

This historic dream came to earth in a land peopled mostly by others. Israel’s founding did instantiate the progressive narrative of Zionism, but in a decidedly triumphalist and militarized manner. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, growing Zionist settlement faced increasingly embittered antagonists, not only indigenous Palestinians but other, better organized Arab Muslim populations.⁷ Could the Zionists have understood their potential opponents in anything other than an antagonistic way? In fact, different sorts of relations were possible, and some were tried. Of course, the options narrowed substantially after the murder of six million. The heinous event gave an extraordinary urgency to the Jewish exodus from Europe, both inside and outside the Jewish community itself. The British folded up their Mandate and the UN declared a fragile, and almost universally unpopular, two-state solution. Even then, however, there was more than one path to take. Despite their territorial ambitions, the more left-wing, socialist, and democratic Israeli fighters conducted their struggles in less violent and pugnacious, more civilly-regulated ways. Right-wing Zionists, epitomized by the notorious Stern Gang, were more aggressively violent, demonstrating much less concern for non-Jewish life, whether British, Arab, Palestinian, Muslim or Christian.⁸

is never accessible as such. To make it seem so is to provide resources for the kind of ideology critique in which Zertal is so powerfully engaged.

⁶ For an account of this emancipation, its fateful disappointments, and the rise of Zionism as one among several Jewish responses, see Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, chapter 18. The idea of returning to Jerusalem had, of course, long been an essential idiom of diasporic Judaism.

⁷ For an account of this situation, see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

⁸ For a synthetic account of the significant contrast between the mentalities and fighting strategies of the left and right-wing Jewish forces fighting for the creation of the Jewish state, see Ian J. Bickerton and Carl L. Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002 (4th edition), especially pp. 100-115.

Amidst the chaotic conditions and competing ambitions of this postwar struggle, Israel declared its independence, the Arab states and Palestinians declared and acted upon their opposition, and the historical options narrowed further still. Zionist forces engaged in pitched battles against local Palestinian fighters and invading Arab armies. Jewish soldiers individually, and the emerging Jewish nation collectively, experienced this birth struggle as a matter of life or death. “We, the Jewish Israelis,” the psychiatrist Dan Bar-on recalled, “saw ourselves as surrounded by enemies and having to struggle, physically and mentally, for our lives and survival.”⁹ Making an analogy with the Holocaust, the only recently terminated and extraordinarily searing experience of racially-motivated mass murder, Israeli individuals and their nation identified themselves as victims. Feelings of compassion for displaced Palestinians -- who were equally endangered, and most directly by Israeli’s own army -- were cast aside.

Trauma and Primordiality

The Israeli state, established upon the blood sacrifice of its courageous but also ethnically cleansing army, honored its soldier-martyrs and inscribed in historical memory the trauma-inspired lesson that only military strength could prevent Jewish defilement and murder from ever happening again.¹⁰ For the new nation’s first two decades, the historical record shows, the school textbooks of

⁹ Bar-On 1997, p. 90.

¹⁰ For many contemporary friends of Israel – and **we** count ourselves among them -- such a characterization may appear harsh. It seems to us, however, the ineluctable conclusion from two decades of Israel’s own deeply revisionist, self-critical historiography. As such writers as Benny Morris (*The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) and Ilan Pappé (*The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-51*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1992) have documented in painstaking and painful empirical detail, the Independence conflict involved not just Palestinian residents’ voluntary flight but massive, Israeli-instigated population transfers, pushing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians off their land and wiping out the Palestinian identities of hundreds of once-Arab villages. None of this is to say that the historical events triggered by the UN’s two-state resolution were inevitable, nor is it to absolve the Palestinian and Arab parties of their own fateful responsibilities. For a collection of archival-based essays by Arab and Jewish scholars exploring this complex and deeply contradictory period, see Eugene L. Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. The collection is also notable for Edward Said’s “Afterward: The Consequences of 1948” (pp. 206-219). In one of the radical Palestinian critic’s last published essays, he lashes out at the repressive, anti-Semitic, and militaristic conditions that, in his view, had marked so much of Arab and Palestinian political and cultural life during the post-Independence period. For an insightful overview of the polarizing, if delayed, effects of Israeli’s “history wars” over its collective identity – and an argument that it is psychologically overdetermined – see Jose Brunner, “Contentious Origins: Psychoanalytic Comments on the Debate

Israeli children were filled with deeply polluting descriptions of Arabs as savage, sly, cheat, thief, robber, provocateur, and terrorist. As one Israeli historian has suggested, during these early decades the national narrative hewed closely to the “tradition of depicting Jewish history as an uninterrupted record of anti-Semitism and persecution.”¹¹ The continuing Arab military campaign against Israel was represented inside this frame. Palestinian violence was analogized with pre-Independence ‘pogroms’ against Jews, and Palestinian and Arab leaders were depicted as only the most recent in “a long line of ‘oppressors’ of Jews during the course of their history.”¹²

Insofar as this trauma-construction conceived Israeli’s origin as an iteration of the Jewish Holocaust experience, an aggressive and military response to the “Palestinian problem” became the only conceivable “solution” to the subjective fears of Israelis and the objective dangers that a series of Arab attacks posed to their nation. And, indeed, so long as military power seemed a viable method of wiping the historical slate clean, even the progressive narrative of democratic Zionism was deeply compromised, linking “bereavement and triumph” in an inward turning, particularistic way.¹³ When Holocaust Day was officially declared in 1951, it was not considered a major event, its tragic narration sitting uncomfortably alongside Zionism’s future-oriented founding myth. One effort at metonymic

over Israeli’s Creation,” in John Bunzl and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, eds., *Psychoanalysis, Identity, and Ideology: Critical Essays on the Israel/Palestine Case*, Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002, pp. 107-135.

¹¹ Elie Podeh, “History and Memory in the Israeli Educational System: The Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948-2000),” *History and Memory* 12 (1) 2000: 65-100, quoting pp. 75-6.

¹² Ibid. This specifically Israeli-Jewish frame complemented the more broadly polluting binary of Western orientalism. Though sweeping and polemical, Said was not wrong when he suggested, thirty years ago in *The Palestinian Question*, that “between Zionism and the West there was and still is a community of language and of ideology [that] depends heavily on a remarkable tradition in the West of enmity toward Islam in particular and the Orient in general.” Asserting that Arabs were “practically the *only* ethnic about whom in the West racial slurs are tolerated, even encouraged,” Said suggested that “the Arabs and Islam represent viciousness, veniality, degenerate vice, lechery, and stupidity in popular and scholarly discourse” (*The Question of Palestine*, New York: Times Books, 1979, p. 26, original italics).

¹³ Avner Ben-Amos and Illana Bet-El, “Holocaust Day and Memorial Day in Israeli Schools: Ceremonies, Education and History,” *Israeli Studies* 4 (1) 1999: 258-284, quoting p. 267. See also Yoram Bilu and Eliezer Witztum, “War-Related Loss and Suffering in Israeli Society: An Historical Perspective,” *Israeli Studies* 5 (2) 2000: 1-31; Doron Bar, “Holocaust Commemoration in Israel during the 1950s: The Holocaust Cellar on Mount Zion,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, n.s. 12 (1) 2005: 16-38; and Dalia Ofer, “The Strength of

resolution placed Holocaust Day one week before the Memorial and Independence Day sequence, in the period that followed upon the Passover celebration of Jewish enslavement and emancipation.¹⁴ The Holocaust holiday, in other words, pointed backward and forward at the same time, and in both directions remained resolutely particularistic. In its tragic mode, it mourned “the modern attempt to annihilate the Jewish people;” in its progressive mode, it celebrated the Warsaw Ghetto uprising as “the heroic spark” that had reignited Israel’s birth.¹⁵

In fact, constructing parallels between the Holocaust and Israeli wars was more than a metonymic matter. Strong metaphorical resemblances were established between the holidays marking them as well. On the eve of both holidays, businesses, coffee shops and cinemas close early. Radio stations replace their regular broadcasting schedules with melancholic Israeli songs, and television channels feature documentaries about the Holocaust and the Israeli wars. Schools devote these holy days to commemoration and hold compulsory memorial ceremonies. Although these ceremonies are planned and conducted by representatives of the student body, they closely resemble one another, for drawing upon from the same limited, iconic cultural corpus. Many of the same poems are recited, many of the same songs are sung, similar imagery is projected, and parallel dress codes are required. A state ceremony is broadcasted live through most public TV and radio stations on both days¹⁶. Another feature the holidays share is the sirens that provide temporal and moral demarcation. "On the appointed minute, and for one minute's duration, siren blasts shriek in every village, town and city in the land.

Remembrance: Commemorating the Holocaust During the First Decade of Israel,” *Jewish Social Studies* 6 (2) 2000: 29-38.

¹⁴ Cf., Zertal, op. cit., p. 39 and Don Handelman and Elihu Katz, "State Ceremonies of Israel-Remembrance Day and Independence Day" in D. Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards Anthropology of Public Events*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 191-233. Handelman and Katz interpret this juxtaposition as having suggested that, for the Israelis, Holocaust Day signified an exit from the suffering of diasporic Jewry, framing the tragedy, in a progressive manner, as adumbrating the emergence of the Jewish state.

¹⁵ Ben-Amos and Bet-El, p. 272.

¹⁶ Handelman and Katz, pp. 192-195.

Human life stands still, people stop in their tracks, vehicles stop in mid-intersection... All is silent."¹⁷

This siren, which in other contexts and with different modulation serves as an air-raid warning, not only enforces the short period of shared commemoration; it also emphasizes the incorporation of the victims of the Holocaust into the Jewish-Israeli collectivity.¹⁸

At the heart of the Independence Day ritual is a binary that contrasts the “passive Diaspora Jewry” of the pre-Holocaust period – “sheep to the slaughter” – with the “active Zionism” of post-Holocaust Israel, “which had fought successfully for statehood.” For its part, the Holocaust memorial day ceremonies are often accompanied by a similar pairing. Such phrases as “from Holocaust to Heroism” and “from Holocaust to Revival/Establishment”¹⁹ signify a Zionist chronology that leads from Holocaust in the Diaspora to Jewish revival via the establishment of modern Israel. These binaries inspire a progressive narrative according to which “resistance fighters ... and soldiers in the War of Independence became the protagonists of the ceremony.” It was via such a political-cum-cultural process that youthful Israel, in Bar-On’s words, “crossed the fragile distinction from being morally right as a persecuted people” – for whom “persecution became imbedded in our internal representations throughout the ages of the Diaspora” -- to being a dominant and aggressive military power, one which did not “attempt to include the relevant 'other' but rather to ignore or disgorge him.”²⁰

This construction of a causal relationship between the Holocaust and Israeli wars was dramatized in a closely watched and influential television series. “Pillar of Fire” first aired in 1981 on what was then the nation’s only television channel, the government run Channel 1. This series narrates the history of the Jewish people in the first half of the 20th century from a distinctively Zionist perspective,

¹⁷ *ibid*, p. 193.

¹⁸ As Zertal notes, it has been proposed that all six million Jewish casualties be granted Israeli citizenships, see Idit Zertal, *Death and the Nation: History, Memory, Politics* [Hebrew]. Or Yehuda: Dvir Publishing House, 2002: p. 16.

¹⁹ The Hebrew phrase “M’shoah L’tkuma” is polysemic. The word “Tkuma” can be translated both as *revival* and as *establishment* (specifically regarding the establishment of the state of Israel).

²⁰ Amir et al, “Recruited Identity,” p. 195.

encapsulating what later come to be criticized as the hegemonic Israeli narrative.²¹ “Pillars of Fire” led the viewer from the tragedy of the Final Solution to the heroic Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; from there to the Jewish Brigades, which volunteered to serve in the British army and assist the Allied forces in their war against Germany; onward towards the struggle of the Zionist leadership against the British forces who prevented Jews from immigrating to Palestine; concluding with Israel’s the declaration of independence and the ensuing war with the Arab nations.

This historical account rests upon a self-justifying, narrowly particularistic, and deeply primordial reconstruction of the Holocaust trauma, one that has continued to exert great influence today. The Jewish fighters are the protagonists of this drama. Arrayed against them is the long list of their historical antagonists: the Germans and their accomplices; the British, who stood between Jewish refugees and the soon-to-be Israelis; the Allied Forces, who intervened too late and failed to save European Jews from the Final Solution; Arab-Palestinians and the surrounding nations, who opposed the establishment of the Jewish State; and Europeans, who resented the Jewish survivors and greeted their return to their original residences with several post-war Pogroms. The binary of Jew and Gentile, a defining characteristic of most Jewish communities since biblical times, is thus reformulated inside the Zionist narrative. Instead of leading, as it did in earlier times, to social seclusion, on the one hand, and moral calls for a more just and universal order, on the other, the new Jewish-Israeli narrative reinforces the militaristic and exclusionary aspects of Zionism. Foreign nations have proven to be untrustworthy. Israel can rely only on the resources of the Jewish people and its own military strength to defend itself.

Shifting Constructions, New Sympathies

Only later, as Israel became more embattled and militarized Zionism stymied and wounded, did this ambiguous and narrow reconstruction of the Jewish nation’s founding began to falter. It is revealing

²¹ Amit M. Shejter, "The Pillar of Fire by Night, to Shew them Light." *Media, Culture & Society*, n.s. 29(6) 2007: 916-933.

that Holocaust Day became more culturally significant as the trauma-drama framing it became more insistently pessimistic, and there were a series of symbolic developments that contributed to darkening before the social arena for the performance of militarized Zionism actually change. For example, the trial of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi official publicly tried for war crimes in 1961, exposed the Israeli public to a multitude of testimonies which brought to light the horrendous war experiences of Holocaust survivors. After more than a decade in which the personal stories were belittled in favor of the collective progressive narrative, these relived testimonies set in motion a new, more privatizing Holocaust memory. Not only a national disaster brought on by the passiveness of Diasporic Jewry, the Holocaust now became a collection of personal tragedies, to be sympathized with, commemorated, and also avenged.²²

This turn toward tragedy deepened after the Yom Kippur war in 1973, when Israel barely escaped a catastrophic military defeat. With this event, the social arena for the performance of collective trauma was changed. The war experience allowed the particularistic approach to the identities at stake to be challenged in a subtle but powerful way. A newly experienced “feeling of dread,” according to a contemporary Israeli observer, meant “diminished importance of the fighter as a Zionist role model” and the corresponding reconstruction of the Holocaust drama in a manner – complementary to the post-Eichman privatization -- that “placed a bolder emphasis on the suffering of the victims and focused greater attention on daily life in the ghettos and camps.” As a consequence, “a different type of bravery was now given prominence – one that was non-military, but involved survival under oppressive conditions.”²³

²² For an elaborate discussion of the privatization of the Holocaust memory in Israeli society, see Anita Shapira, “The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memories.” *Jewish Social Studies* 4(2), 1998, pp. 40-58.

²³ Ben-Amos and Bet-El, p. 270. Bilu and Witztum note, for example, that the psychiatric diagnosis of Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder could only emerge in the wake of the Yom Kippur war, for it implied a weakening of the indomitable Israeli protagonist’s military strength: “The myth of heroism, and with it the layers of disregard and denial that had hidden combat stress reactions from the public eye in the preceding wars, were extensively eroded in the 1973 War. Following the utter surprise and confusion at the onset of the war, the military defeats in the first days

It is from this point onward that the enduring conflict between more particularizing and more universalizing constructions of the Jewish trauma-drama became crystallized inside Israeli society. Of course, a sense of victimhood continued to permeate political discourse in Israel's third decade. The Six-Day War of 1967, the 1967-1970 War of Attrition, the Munich Massacre of 1972, the Entebbe Operation of 1976, and the punctuating acts of terrorism undertaken by the Palestine Liberation Organization left deep marks on Israeli society, becoming frequent trauma-recalling and trauma-inducing features of public discourse. Conservative Prime Minister Menachem Begin made prominent use of Holocaust imagery in his political speeches, warning time and again against the "return of Auschwitz" in reference to threats from the Palestinians and Arab nations. The leading Labor politician Abba Eban famously compared the option of a return to the pre-1967 borders of Israel to a return to the borders of Auschwitz.²⁴ When speaking of the Arab-Israeli conflict, soldiers and politicians frequently expressed concerns about a Holocaust-like disaster looming over their heads²⁵. Such narrative inscriptions of Holocaust tragedy inside the long-suffering history of Jewish suffering provided further justification for violent resistance against those were perceived as purely external threats.

The new post-1973 context, however, also allowed the tragic trauma construction to provide a different kind of script, one that could connect Jewish Israelis with Palestinian suffering. An Israeli peace movement emerged that put land for peace on the table, and a new generation of critical historians righteously exposed Israeli complicity in Palestinian expulsion. Leftist intellectuals introduced such

of fighting, and the heavy toll of casualties – more than 2500 soldiers killed and about 7000 wounded – the war was inscribed in the national consciousness as a massive trauma” (loc. cit., p. 20).

²⁴ For a detailed account of this change in the Israeli attitude towards the memory of the Holocaust, see Hanna Yablonka, "The Holocaust Consciousness in the Third Decade: From 'There' to 'Here and Now'," in Z. Zameret and H. Yablonka, eds., *The Third Decade* [Hebrew], Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2008, pp. 364-378.

²⁵ A collection of testimonies and experiences from the Six-Day War provides numerous examples: A. Shapira, ed., *Warriors' Discourse: Chapters in Listening and Meditation [Siyach Lochamim: Pirkey Hakshava Vehitbonenut]* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Kvutzat Chaverim Tzeirim Mehatnua Hakibutzit, 1968, pp. 160-170.

new critical concepts as “cognitive militarism.”²⁶ More moderate observers spoke about the decline of “collective commemoration” and the growth of a more individual centered, rights-based political culture.²⁷

The “devaluation of the myth of heroism”²⁸ intensified after the 1982 Lebanon War, whose military frustrations produced feelings of futility and whose massacres at Sabra and Shatila ignited feelings of humiliation. In its initial response to the massacres, conservative Likud government officials lashed out against accusations of Israeli complicity. They described them as “a blood libel against the Jewish state and its Government,” framing them in terms of historical anti-Semitism against the Jewish people. In response to this defensive and narrowly primordial construction, some 300,000 Israelis organized a massive protest in Tel Aviv. This unprecedented expression of criticisms and anti-war feeling triggered the creation of a Commission of Inquiry. Chaired by former Supreme Court Justice Yitzhak Kahan, the investigation produced sharply critical findings and made significant recommendations for reform. While it was Lebanese Phalangists who had carried out the massacre against Palestinians, the Kahan Commission found that the Jewish government had “indirect personal responsibility” and accused Ariel Sharon, then Minister of Defense, of “direct personal responsibility.”²⁹ The events surrounding the Lebanon invasion and the self-critical reaction to it not only created more universalizing trauma constructions inside Israel. They triggered also a global reaction that, according to one French observer, allowed the normative symbolization of Holocaust “to be turned against those to whom it hitherto protected.” For the first time, “large swathes of international public opinion distanced

²⁶ Victor Azarya and Baruch Kimmerling “Cognitive Permeability of Civil-Military Boundaries: Expectations from Military Service in Israel,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*. 20 (4) 1985-86: 42-63; Kimmerling, “Patterns of Militarism in Israel,” *European Journal of Sociology* 2 (1993): 1-28 and “Political Subcultures and Civilian Militarism in A Settler-Immigrant Society,” in D. Bar-Tal, D. Jacobson and A. Kliemann, eds., *Concerned with Security: Learning from Israel's Experience*, Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1998, pp. 395-416.

²⁷ Bilu and Witztum, p. 25.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁹ Kahan Commission, *Israeli's Lebanon War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, pp. 283-84.

themselves from the policy of Israel.”³⁰ Two decades later, the Israeli feminist critic Ronit Lentin asserted that this new spiral of signification had made an expanded solidarity possible.

After Lebanon, for the first time, the suffering of others, particularly of Palestinian children, not Jewish suffering, was the principal subject of Israeli literary and poetic discourses. The death of Palestinians was described using Shoah images; their fate was equated with the fate of the Jews as Israeli poets and playwrights reflected and compelled Jewish understanding of the suffering of the Palestinians³¹.

Palestinian Counter-Narrative of Trauma

Throughout this period of symbolic reconstruction, the emergent Palestinian national movement played a significant role, creating new “realities on the ground” that provided a new dramatic field of performative possibilities. Its energetic and aggressive ideology, and often murderous tactics, presented undeniable evidence of a previously “invisible” nation and people, making it more difficult, though not of course impossible, to narrate a progressive story of emancipation on the Israeli side. Yet, the PLO’s terrorism severely restricted its dramatic appeal. In the late 1970s, the world’s best known Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said, declared that, while “we have gained the support of all the peoples of the Third World,” the “remarkable national resurgence” of the “Palestinian *idea*” had not yet succeeded, for “we have been unable to interest the West very much in the justice of our cause.”³² While acknowledging how much he resented “the ways in which the whole grisly matter is stripped of all its resonances and its often morally confusing detail, and compressed simply, comfortably, inevitably under the rubric of ‘Palestinian terror’,” Said declared himself “horrificed at the hijacking of planes, the suicidal

³⁰ Michel Wieviorka, *The Lure of Anti-Semitism: Hatred of Jews in Present-Day France*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007, p. 59.

³¹ Ronit Lentin, *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah: Reoccupying the Territories of Silence*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2000, p. 145. The empathy-creating possibilities of Holocaust memory is ignored by Zertal’s reconstruction, whose cultural history has no place for the peace movement.

³² Said, *The Palestinian Question*, pp. xi-x, original italics.

missions, the assassinations, the bombing of schools and hotels.” Said believed that this performative failure would have to be redressed. In order to attract a Western audience, the trauma-drama of Palestinian suffering would have to be told in a different way. For there to be “some sense of the larger Palestinian story from which all these things came,” Said explained, there must be a new and more compelling focus on “the reality of a collective national trauma [that is] contained for every Palestinian in the question of Palestine.”³³ A new progressive counter-trauma narrative was projected, describing Palestinian suffering, Western/Israeli domination, and a heroic anti-colonial movement for liberation. It provided a new symbolic protagonist with whom a widening circle of Western citizens, and the developing group of self-critical Israelis, could identify, or at least ambivalently support. This possibility deepened among many Israelis in the wake of the first Intifada, the relatively non-violent Palestinian uprising that began in 1987. The expanding structure of solidary feeling became powerfully institutionalized in the treaties and ceremonies marking the Oslo peace process in 1993.

Right-Wing Backlash

What has been described as the emergence of “post-Zionism” was constrained, though not entirely cut short, by the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995.³⁴ Rabin’s cruelly calculated murder managed to short-circuit processes of civil repair that had, in no small part, been fuelled by the manner which the Holocaust trauma specifically, and Jewish suffering more generally, was being symbolically and morally recast. This murderous short-circuiting demonstrated the ambiguous and contradictory trauma construction that responded to Israeli’s post-1967 history. While the earlier, more particularistic trauma drama had been challenged, its narrowly primordial power had certainly remained. There is no inherent correlation between narrative form and moral aspiration. Indeed, even as the Yom Kippur war and the difficulties that unfolded in its aftermath allowed the

³³ Ibid., p. xii.

³⁴ See, e.g., Erik Cohen, “Israel as a Post-Zionist Society,” pp. 203-213 in Wistrich and Ohana, loc. cit.

creation of a more universalizing tragic narrative, they also energized a much more particularistic kind of tragic story, one that was distinctively more anti-civil than the Israeli nation's ambiguously progressive founding myth. And even as the emerging Palestinian movement provided opportunities for cross-national solidarity, it also had an equal and opposite effect. Alongside and competing with the Palestinian protagonist with whom the left could identify, Palestinian actions offered the growing backlash movement a more sharply defined, polluted antagonist against whom to carry on Israel's long-standing primordial fight.

In 1977, the right-wing Likud party took power on a platform demanding continued occupation and usurpation of the "holy lands," its leaders and supporters fervently opposed to any Palestinian accord. During this of backlash movement there also emerged Gush Emunim – literally "Block of the Faithful" -- whose supporters began a decades long, highly successful campaign to take Jewish possession of occupied Palestinian lands. The religious Zionist ideology initially inspiring Gush Emunim was not militarist. Emerging in response to the seemingly "miraculous" 1967 war, it narrated the acquisition of Judea, Samaria and Sinai – which had taken just six days -- as a millennial sign of the Jewish people's imminent salvation. In opposition to the traditional views of Orthodox Judaism, for Gush Emunim building, settling and developing – whether in pre-war Israel or in the Occupied Territories – became a positively sanctioned commandment. The movement's activity's soon generated intense opposition nonetheless. Illegal settlements were forcibly removed time and again, only to be reinstated by Gush Emunim. Public opinion remained largely unsupportive, the expected salvation did not arrive, and Egyptian-Israeli peace accord forced withdrawal from Sinai and the first massive settlement removal in 1982. Its messianic aspirations thwarted, Gush Emunim turned from messianic to militaristic narrations of expanded settlement as a result.³⁵

³⁵ For an elaborate account of the first years of Gush Emunim and of the religious and political context out of which it had emerged see Gideon Aran, *From Religious Zionism to a Zionist Religion: The Roots of Gush Emunim and its*

In the years that followed, “settler” became as ubiquitous a trope in conservative Israeli society as “survivor.” Indeed, the former collective representation drew its symbolic strength from the latter. For the Israeli right, Jews needed desperately to annex every inch of Palestinian land that surrounded them, for every non-Jewish person was a potential enemy. They had learned this deeply anti-civil lesson from their tragic, and primordial, reconstruction of the Holocaust trauma. Because they experienced the Jewish victimhood of those terrible days as never having gone away, they could glean no bridging metaphors from their re-experience of trauma. Instead, they felt compelled to frame every conflict with outsiders in a boundary-making way.

When the Likud Minister of Education delivered her Holocaust Day speech on 2001, she proclaimed complete identification with the protagonists in the original trauma. “We shouldn’t suppose,” she insisted, “that we differ from our grandfathers and grandparents who went to the gas chambers.” Rejecting a progressive narrative that would dramatize the distance between the situation of Jews then and now, she insisted “what separates us from them is not that we are some sort of new Jew.” What has changed is not the opposition between Jew and Gentile, but its asymmetry. The Jewish side can now be armed. The Minister explained: “The main difference is external: we have a state, a flag and army.” During the historical Holocaust, by contrast, the Jews had been “caught in their tragedy, [for]

Culture [Hebrew]. Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987. The turn from a messianic religious discourse to a militaristic discourse in the political culture of Gush Emunim was pointed out in Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Battle for the Meaning of Zionism* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv: Miskal, 2007. If the polarizing effects of the Israeli trauma drama’s shifting retellings were deepened by more “fundamentalist,” and often more eschatological, versions of Jewish religion, the same can be said for the Palestinian trauma. More radical and rejectionist elements, publicly dedicated to the annihilation of Israel, increasingly experienced the sources of their trauma, and its possible resolution, through Islamicist faith. For this intertwining of the religious extremes, see Roger Friedland and Richard Hecht, *To Rule Jerusalem*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, e.g., pp. 168-170 and 355ff.

they lacked all three.”³⁶ The trauma drama points toward an ineluctable solution: It is only power and violence that can save contemporary Jews from suffering their ancestors’ fate.

Caught up inside this narrowly constructed trauma drama, the Israeli right has identified the peace process with Jewish annihilation. In the months before Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination, ultra-orthodox and right-wing magazines attacked the general-turned-peacemaker as a “traitor” and “madman,” suggesting he was “anti-religious” and even “non-Jewish.” He and his Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, were depicted as members of the *Judenrat* and *Kapos*, the infamous Nazi-appointed Jewish leaders who had collaborated in the administration of the death camps. At the anti-government demonstrations that grew increasingly aggressive in the months and weeks before his murder, Rabin was portrayed in posters wearing an SS uniform and cap.³⁷

These disturbing images point to the construction of a trauma drama that is increasingly radical and particularist. Mainstream Zionism casts Israeli Jews as protagonists and Arabs as antagonists. The new conception marks Israeli settlers as victims, and any political or military party which attempts to evict them as Nazis. This trauma rhetoric framed resistance to the first large-scale eviction of Israeli settlers, from the Sinai as part of the peace agreement with Egypt in 1982. In the final clash between the settlers and Israeli military forces who forcibly removed them, the settlers placed yellow stars on their chests, echoing the emblems that European Jews had been forced to wear under Nazi occupation.

Since 1982, the settlement movement has grown considerably not only in size but influence. In the 2005 “Disengagement,” Israeli forces withdrew unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and Northern Samaria, and 25 settlements were dismantled. These powerful challenges to the anti-Palestinian land movement triggered more intense invocations of the Holocaust trauma in response. Soldiers sent to

³⁶ Limor Livnat, “Of Holocaust and Heroism,” *Ha’aretz*, April 19, 2001, quoted in Jackie Feldman, “Marking the Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Israeli Collective through the Poland Experience,” *Israeli Studies* 7 (2) 2002: 1-31, p. 1.

³⁷ Lentin, loc. cit., p. 148.

forcibly evict settlements were met with sobbing children wearing yellow stars, asking with raised hands "Have you come to take us to the gas chamber?" Settlers prepared Auschwitz-like uniforms to be worn on eviction day. Right-wing activists broadly referred to soldiers and Israeli leaders as Judenrat, which drew censure from Holocaust survivors and left-wing political activists alike.³⁸ The mainstream Zionist invocation of the Holocaust trauma drama justified anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian violence in the name of creating and defending Israel. The right-wing pro-settlement variation on this theme understands such violence differently, as an act of defiance. As the Nazis obliterated Jewish communities in Europe, so are Israeli leaders planning to destroy the Jewish communities in the Occupied Territories.

Left-Wing Inhibition

Faced with such powerfully reactionary trauma constructions, the response of the left would seem clear. Drawing upon the relatively autonomous cultural power of Holocaust symbolism, it could challenge the social instantiations upon which right-wing deployments of the narrative rest. Building upon the earlier peace movement, it could broaden solidarity by identifying the Palestinians as the victims of a Holocaust-like disaster themselves. That such counter-narratives only rarely appear in the highly polarized political conflicts that mark contemporary Israel, even among fierce opponents of the settlement movement, is not only a politically debilitating but an empirically perplexing fact.

Western critics of Israel's occupation policy, whether Jewish or not, do not share this difficulty. In the 2008 animated pseudo-documentary "Waltz with Bashir," Israeli journalist Ron Ben-Yshay recounts his arrival at Sabra and Shatilla at the massacre's end. "Do you remember the photo from the Warsaw Ghetto? The one with the kid raising his hands?" he asks his interviewer. The next shot shows a group of Palestinian women and children raising their hands while being led by gun-bearing Phalangists to their certain deaths. The following shot is a close up of one of this group of victims, a solemn child of

³⁸ "The Difficult Scenes which will never Relent" [Hebrew], *Maariv*, August 8, 2005; "Moving to a New Home is not Similar to Crematoriums and Gas Chambers" [Hebrew], *Maariv*, December 21, 2004; "Settlers: We'll Greet the

approximately the same age as the Jewish child from the Warsaw Ghetto. This potently inverted analogy strongly appeals to critical audiences outside of Israel. "Waltz with Bashir" was nominated for an Academy Award. Such inversion, however, rarely surfaces inside Jewish-Israeli discourse itself.

Post-Zionist scholars have certainly deconstructed the once widely accepted causal relationship between the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel. They have challenged the Zionist founder's claim that the establishment of Israel was the only possible response to the Holocaust and the only feasible solution to the anti-Semitism of the Diaspora.³⁹ While these radical arguments have not been universally accepted among critical Israelis, they reveal the widespread identification of the Israeli left with the suffering of the Palestinians.

Yet, when speaking out publicly against the occupation, critical Israelis rarely evoke rhetorical solidarity with Palestinians. When Holocaust imagery is employed, it is directed inwards, towards Jewish-Israeli leaders and institutions, identifying them as anti-Palestinian "perpetrators." Philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz publicly called Israeli military units "Judeo-Nazis."⁴⁰ Historian Moshe Zimmerman asserted that his ability to study extremist settlers was limited because the Jewish children of occupied Hebron resemble Hitler Youth. The Leibowitz interview became notorious. Zimmerman was sued for libel.⁴¹ In a similar incident, scandal erupted and legal proceedings ensued over a letter addressed to a settler in "KZ Kiryat Arba," widely understood as "Concentration Camp Kiryat Arba," an identification that clearly equated Jewish settlement with Nazi Holocaust crimes. While acknowledging that "doubtlessly, the defendant intended to claim that the plaintiff is an evil man," the presiding judge in the case adamantly maintained that, no matter how evil the settler seemed, the defendant could not have

Soldiers in Auschwitz Uniforms" [Hebrew], *Yediot Aharonot*, July 28, 2005.

³⁹ Moshe Zimmerman, "'Post-Zionism' and Post-Zionism" [Hebrew], *Theory and Criticism* 12-13: 487-496.

⁴⁰ "Yeshayahu Leibowitz, 91, Iconoclastic Israeli Thinker." *New York Times*, August 19, 1994.

⁴¹ The statement was originally published in Moshe Zimmerman, "The Children of Hebron Resemble Hitler Youth." [Hebrew] *Jerusalem* April 28, 1995. Court proceedings in this matter are in Civil Complaint (Tel Aviv) 2313/00 Zimmermann vs. Yedioth Communication Inc., 2005 [Hebrew].

intended to link him with Nazism -- "He did not mean to say that the plaintiff is, God forbid, a Nazi." The judge's reasoning underscores the difficulty of universalizing the Holocaust trauma in Israel today. "As a Jew," he explained, "the plaintiff cannot be anything but a victim of the Nazis."⁴²

There are several reasons for this discursive inhibition. One undoubtedly is that Israel's inability to come to terms with the Palestinian question has produced increasing radicalism, violence, and anti-Israeli, and often anti-Semitic stereotypes among a significant part of the Palestinian resistance. Another, less noted reason has to do with the centrality of the army in Israeli society. Most Israeli Jews, both men and women, have compulsory military duty of two to three years starting at the age of 18. Many voluntarily extend their service to gain benefits and professional development, and most remain in reserve duty until the age of 40. To severely criticize the military by comparing it to the bitterest antagonist in modern Jewish history is to pollute not only the military *per se* but, indirectly, the whole of Israeli society. Institutional setting plays a vital role in trauma construction, filtering and tilting the spiral of signification.

Whatever the causes, the result of this constraint on the signification process has been to deprive Israeli critics of a potent political weapon. Criticizing the intertwining of Holocaust and national founding narrative as a forced marriage, post-Zionists generally avoid evoking the trauma drama in any political context. This has allowed the meaning of the Holocaust to be monopolized by nationalist and conservative forces.

According to the Israeli right, to recognize the rights of Palestinians is to become an enemy of the Jewish people. Solidarity cannot extend beyond the boundaries of one's own group. It must be primordial, not civil. So reconstructed, the trauma drama of the Holocaust is a recipe for conflict without end. If this view should prevail, it would not only be severely destabilizing in

⁴² Civil Complaint (Jerusalem) 552/84 Haetzni vs. Tomarkin, 1986 [Hebrew].

geo-political terms. It would assault the universalizing moral principles that the memory of the Holocaust calls upon us to sustain.

The Cultural Trauma of Katyn Massacre

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“The worst was the silence, the prohibition against speaking openly of their death, of a dignified burial, for half a century. It was forbidden even to visit the places of execution. My younger sister, Zosia, always envied those friends of hers whose parents had died in Auschwitz. They at least could go to the grave sites, and didn’t have to hide the truth...”

Stanislawa Dec quoted in *Children of the Katyn Massacre* Teresa Kaczorowska Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company 2006:150.

“The Katyn massacre is the only international crime in world history where two nations disputed the guilt”

U.S. Congressman Ray Madden 1952, cited in *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940* George Sanford London: Routledge 2005:124.