eurozine

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Postmemory, received history and the return of the Auschwitz code

Is there an appropiate way to conduct the memory of the Holocaust –both publicly and privately? Certainly, it has become the central, towering event of this century, which has been transfixed into a "code" of instantly recognisable pictures and texts. These fixed memories make it almost impossible to go beyond their discursive reign. And, does our memory of the Holocaust dominate the public consciousness to such an extent that we can only ever conceptualize a new catastrophe in comparison to the Holocaust?

> His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skywards. This storm is what we call progress (Walter Benjamin).

Introduction

> This is 1914 or 1939. The world isn't ever going to be the same again (Rose, 2001: 19).

One of the central debates on the politics of Shoah memory, inspired by Theodor Adorno's 1949 (often misunderstood) dictum that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, and fuelled by survivors like Elie Wiesel, who insist that only survivors are entitled to speak about the Shoah (Wiesel, 1984), is the question of the (im)possibility of speech, or discourse, about the Shoah. On one side of the debate stand those (eg Steiner, 1969: 165) who argue that the best response to the Shoah is silence. While studying the Shoah indeed includes the temptation to succumb to a Foucauldian 'archaeology of silence' (Foucault, 1967: xi), such an 'archaeology of silence' is itself an order, an organised language, a project, a syntax, a work, as argued by Derrida (1978: 25–6). I side with those (eg Celan, 1968; Langer, 1975) who argue, as Adorno himself later did (1962), that surrendering to silence would be a surrender to cynicism and, by implication, to the very forces that created Auschwitz in the first place. Despite the obvious poverty of discourse in the face of the historical

event, such an 'archaeology of silence' is not sufficient, nor is it ultimately possible, although there is an understandable tendency to regard the Shoah as 'unspeakable', and respond to it with silence, as many survivors have done for many years.

If it is fitting to ask questions about the inappropriateness of writing poetry after Auschwitz, questions must also be asked about the appropriateness of the Shoah as an object of theoretical discussions (Friedländer, 1992: 1), or, differently put, about the 'barbarity' of writing footnotes after Auschwitz (Hilberg, 1988: 25). I agree with Saul Friedländer that, although we are dealing with an event that tests conventional conceptual and representational categories, an 'event at the limits', the Shoah must be accessible to representation and interpretation. Zygmunt Bauman reminds us that, as the Shoah was 'born and executed in our modern rational society, at the high stage of our civilisation and at the peak of human cultural achievement' (Bauman, 1989: x), it is relevant to the main themes of sociological inquiry, as 'an outcome of a unique encounter between factors by themselves quite ordinary and common'. Every 'ingredient' of the Shoah – rationality, technology, bureaucracy, and state violence – was 'normal', in the sense of being fully in line with everything we know about our European civilization. However, what turned the 'Final Solution' into an 'event at the limit' was precisely it being a 'most radical form of genocide encountered in history: the wilful, systemic, industrially organised, largely successful attempt to totally exterminate an entire human group within twentieth–century Western society' (Friedländer, 1992: 3).

A further crisis in representation is the tension between historical 'facts' and interpretation, or the dilemma of historical relativism versus aesthetic experimentation in the face of the need for 'truth', on the one hand, and the problems raised by the opaqueness of the events and the opaqueness of language, on the other. Beyond the issue of historical relativism, this dilemma also necessitates consideration of the implications of constructing various historical narratives about Nazism and the Holocaust, providing the facts are not falsified. These implications include the existence (or non–existence) of limits to literary and artistic representations of the Shoah, and the contradictory implications of specific approaches to such renditions (humour, for example) [1](Friedländer, 1992: 4). Historical accounts have their own limits: the historian Raul Hilberg positions 'facts' versus 'narratives' by saying that despite the 'success' of his own historical accounts of the Shoah, 'historiography itself is a kind of fiction' (Hilberg, 1988: 273). Friedländer attempts to resolve the dilemmas of representation by linking the experiential and the historical, and insisting that 'the only concrete history that can be retrieved remains that carried by personal stories'. He suggests in the introduction to the first volume of *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, that his personal Shoah history 'cannot avoid a measure of "transference" vis–à–vis this past. Such involvement of necessity impinges upon the writing of history. But the historian's necessary measure of detachment is not thereby precluded, provided there is sufficient self–awareness' (Friedländer, 1997: 5–6).

Bauman, whose seminal book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1989) questions the belief that the movement of human history always spells progress, points to the 'proverbial puzzlement of historians who reportedly complain that, however hard they try, they cannot understand the most spectacular episode of the [twentieth] century' (Bauman, 1989: 212). This puzzlement may be linked to popular discourses of 'unspeakability', although the Shoah is spoken of much more than any other 'spectacular episode' European history has known.

Despite this reported confusion – due, according to Bauman, to our difficulty to accept that the concept of history itself is untenable – it is needless to recall that, despite the caution about banalisation, the study of the Shoah has produced hundreds of thousands of scholarly works, survivor testimony projects, commemorative projects, and works of fiction and art. One recent example, showing the uncanny link between past and present, is Costa Gavras's film *Amen*, which had its premiere in the Berlin Film Festival in February 2002. The film, aiming to tell the 'new story' of the conspiracy of silence between the Vatican and the Nazis, is based on *The Representative*, Rolf Hochhuth's 1963 play. The film's release is said to test, yet again, the limits of representation: 'Controversy was guaranteed the minute posters for *Amen* appeared. Posters hanging in Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, adjacent to the site of Hitler's bunker, show a red swastika with the bottom leg as an extended line. It takes only minutes to realise that it is a swastika/crucifix hybrid... The shocking logo has had the desired effect, and *Amen*, an examination of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust, is the talk of the Berlin Film Festival' (Scally, 2002: W4).

Another central debate is the issue of continuity versus contingency (c.f. Diner, 2000), presented, on the one hand, by Emil Fackenheim's (1984) conceptualisation of the Shoah as 'a unique, epoch–making event that has irretrievably changed forever our trust in human nature'. On the other end of the spectrum stands Bauman's (1989) insistence that 'the Holocaust was not a *novum* in history but the outcome of the technological rationalism of modern society and the attendant normative socialisation of modern subjects'. While Fackenheim argues that after Auschwitz, the memory of the historical resistance of the victims provides the only remnant of human hope, Bauman – while welcoming Fackenheim's belief that ethical rationalism has been fatally compromised as a consequence of its complicity in the catastrophe – believes nonetheless that the study of the Shoah clears the ground for a new postmodern ethics, founded on Levinas's ethical phenomenology of the face–to–face (Gorman, 2000: 49).

I am in complete agreement with Bauman's thesis that the Shoah must be treated 'as a rare, yet significant and reliable, test of the hidden possibilities of modern society' (12). However, the recurring use of the Shoah as metaphor – for example, during the 1991 Gulf War (Zuckermann, 1993), during the current post–September 11 'war against terrorism', and also in relation to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict – brings me to suggest that in the plethora of narratives competing for our attention in the interpretation and re–interpretation of contemporary events, the Shoah, more than any other modern historical event, has been internalised as, perhaps, the only 'unique, epoch–making' metaphor, the recourse to which is irretrievably, and continually, testing our trust in human nature, but also, as Friedländer (1992) would say, 'probing the limits of representation'. More specifically, because in Auschwitz, as argued, among others, by Habermas, 'something happened, that up to now nobody considered as even possible...', and since 'Auschwitz has changed the basis for the continuity of the conditions of life within history' (Habermas, 1987: 163), Auschwitz, quite apart from its historical significance in the annals of the Nazi extermination, has become a metaphor, a code.

In this paper I do not discuss the role of the Shoah in the formation of contemporary identities – German, east European, Jewish, or Israeli. Nor will I discuss the ability or inability of discourse to convey the horrors, or the personal consequences of the legacy of the Shoah for the second–generation of survivors, as I do in my book *Israel and the Daughters of the Shoah:*

Reoccupying the Territories of Silence (2000). Nor will this paper deal with Holocaust denial, no doubt another prevalent form of Shoah representation.[2] In this paper, in an attempt to politicise the effects of the Shoah as 'received history' (Young, 2000) or 'postmemory' (Hirsch, 1997), I attempt to fathom the discursive legacy of the Shoah, Nazism, and Auschwitz, for present day politics by presenting a series of interrelated proposals. The first, and most urgent, proposal is that the 'Auschwitz code', invoked in relation to all 'unspeakable' catastrophes, does not help us remember the Shoah and its victims, but rather *erases* that memory, as do other representations, including Shoah photographs, but also Holocaust history itself. Since the Shoah has discursively overshadowed all other modern cataclysms, the second proposal is the question of whether the Nazis have succeeded not only in annihilating large proportions of the Jewish, Roma, homosexual, and other collectivities, but also in populating all our collective and individual imaginations with indelible images, which have impoverished our vocabulary so that every catastrophe becomes a holocaust. While this process is perhaps understandable in relation to European calamities [3] – my third question is whether this preoccupation is tenable also when comparing like with unlike, in the equation of, say, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, or Arafat, with Hitler? And does this point not only to the further impoverishment of our Western imaginations, but also to the West attempting to colonise the imaginations of the majority of the world through buying wholesale into Huntington's (1993) dubious 'clash of civilizations' thesis in the wake of the 'war against terrorism', urging the postcolonial majority of the world to dichotomise between itself and the West, just as the West has been doing in relation to Islam? Another issue I will touch on is the rise of anti–Semitism, evoked by the Israeli–Palestinian conflict post September 11.

Finally, this paper is part of an ongoing reflexive academic process, since, as James Young argues, academics 'have remained curiously blind to our own instrumentalisation of memory, to the ways an entire academic industry has grown up around the Holocaust' (Young, 2000: 11; see also Finkelstein, 2000). This imperative to remain reflexive in the face of historical and unfolding events is the main reason for yet another paper about the Shoah.

Postmemory and received history

> There are no extenuating circumstances for the Manhattan and Pentagon holocausts, any more than there are extenuating circumstances for what happened to Europe's Jews, and others, sixty years ago
> (Myers, 2001: 17).

> Nazi and Muslim extremist demons overlap. 'World Jewry' has survived the last world war as a Great Satan. Its headquarters have shifted from Moscow to New York. ...
> (Buruma, 2001).

James Young, in his study of second generation Shoah memorials (2000), notes that for many members of the second generation it is hard to 'remember' the Shoah outside of the ways it was passed on to them fifty years later. According to Young, second generation Holocaust art denotes a 'vicarious past', and derives from a 'received history', in the absence of first–hand knowledge of the events themselves: 'Our experience of the Holocaust is photographs, films, books, testimonies ... a mediated experience, the afterlife

of memory represented in history's after–images: the impressions retained in the mind's eye of a vivid sensation long after the original, external cause has been removed' (Young, 2000: 3–4).

Grappling with the after–image of the Shoah in relation to children of Holocaust survivors, Marianne Hirsch (1997) posits the concept of 'postmemory', albeit 'with some hesitation, conscious that the prefix "post" could imply that we are beyond memory'. According to Hirsch, postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection: it is 'a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated, not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. ... Postmemory characterises the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated' (Hirsch, 1997: 22). Postmemory, Hirsch insists, is not 'absent memory', or the 'gaping black hole of the unmentionable years'.[4] Postmemory, not empty or absent, is obsessive and relentless and 'as full or as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself' (Hirsch, 1997: 22).

Writing about the inability to proceed from Shoah past to post–Shoah present, Lawrence Langer posits 'common memory' as opposed to 'deep memory'. Common memory 'urges us to regard the Auschwitz ordeal as part of a chronology, (freeing) us from the pain of remembering the unthinkable'. Deep memory, on the other hand, 'reminds us that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be' (Langer, 1991: xi). Attempting to combine both kinds of memory, and to build a coherent self founders on the 'intractable return of the repressed and recurring deep memory' (Friedländer, 1992: 41).

It is obviously impossible for any society to 'remember' the Shoah outside the ways and discourses used to narrate, or 'memorise' it. The Shoah has been 'remembered', 'forgotten', 're–interpreted', and 'historicised' in different historical periods and different social and political climates. However, judging by the huge proliferation of representations, the Shoah has clearly left traces of 'deep memory' beyond individual 'received history'. Friedländer, again linking the experiential and the historical, proposes a historiography that integrates common and deep memory, 'reminding readers that this history is being told by someone in a particular time and place... gesturing both to the existence of deep memory and to its capacity to deliver that memory' (Friedländer, 1992: 41).

There is a palpable contradiction between, on the one hand, the inability of discourse – verbal, written, or photographic – to help us never to forget (though it is not always clear whether this means forgetting the event itself, or its received after effects), and, on the other, what Rosenfeld (1985) terms the unending 'fascination of abomination'. Popular fiction that invokes Hitler, Rosenfeld argues, not only 'draws extensively upon Nazi symbolism' and revives antisemitic fantasies; it also exploits 'the savage horrors of the Holocaust', using, among other means, an abhorrent pornography of violence, 'itself the germ of an emerging erotics of Auschwitz'. The Holocaust after–images are both received history and obsession, as Auschwitz became part of the characteristic landscape of twentieth–century history (Rosenfeld, 1985: 48–55).

In his essay on kitsch and death, Friedländer (1982) uses psychoanalytic theory to fathom why Nazism – and by extension, the Holocaust – though past and

gone, continue to haunt us through ever increasing expressions, in history, literature, fine art, film, and television. While immediately after the war Nazism became a symbol of evil, in the 1960s the Nazi image changed in the West. Hitler, who became part of the entertainment industry, 'simultaneously haunts and defies the contemporary imagination, which, with respect to the whole Nazi past, seems drawn between a willed forgetfulness and a kind of mythologizing memory' (Rosenfeld, 1985). Positing a 'new discourse' on Nazism – developed on an emotional, imaginary level rather than a theoretical level – Friedländer points to a kind of aesthetic titillation, borne out of the association of Nazism with death; not everyday, banal death, but rather ritualistic, stylised, aestheticised death; and our contradictory attraction to it enables us to digest the horrific past. Just as Hitler hypnotised the German masses, Nazism – a dark mixture of kitsch and death – continues to fascinate us today, even as we are repelled by its evil horrors. Moreover, Friedländer argues that exorcizing the past does not mean being ready to face the past, but is rather a confrontation and the evasion of confrontation at the same time, which conceals the unbearable part of that past.

Holocaust history, Friedländer goes on to argue, rather than helping us to remember, actually removes us from the historical facts by its very rational use of language; and this very rationality distances us and protects us from the unbearable Nazi past. Like dreams, Holocaust discourses signify the return of the repressed – a repressed history, a past which is deeply hidden inside us, emanating from the coexistence of modernity's need for a sense of order and the erotic allure of violence and death.

Just as rational history distances us from the facts of the past, images also work *against* remembering, as Hirsch argues in relation to Holocaust photographs, one way through which 'received history', or 'postmemory' work. Holocaust photographs often serve as shorthand representations of the whole crime – 'If we see emaciated figures behind barbed wire, we "see" the Holocaust' (Achinger, 1999). However, Hirsch argues, after Kristeva (1987), that the profusion of visual Holocaust images, while extraordinarily powerful, 'have silenced us verbally, impairing the symbolic instruments that might have enabled us to process the apocalyptic events of our century' (Hirsch, 1997: 24). Moreover, she argues, after Barthes (1981), that Holocaust photographs as 'leftovers', and 'fragmentary sources', do not recall the past or facilitate the work of mourning, but rather *block* memory, and quickly become a counter–memory. Photographs are often a confirmation of death, and promote forgetting, by the onlooker's very knowledge that the people in the photographs did in effect die a horrible death.

The Holocaust, Bauman argues (2000: 15), continues to live life as a ghost, 'since its prophecies are not quite self–fulfilling, but they do fulfil – render plausible – the prospect of a world in which the Holocaust may never stop being prophesied, with all the deleterious and disastrous psychic, cultural, and political consequences which such prophecy is bound to bring forth and propagate'.

The 'Auschwitz code' revisited

> All the talk about Saddam Hussein as Hitler's heir is not a journalistic metaphor or a propagandist exaggeration... the Germans were the Iraqis between 1938 and 1945
> (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 1991: 26–28, cited in

Zuckermann, 1993: 62–5)

I think that in some ways Saddam Hussein follows in Hitler's footsteps. But I don't want to compare the two. Not because of the moral aspect, but because of the scale of Hitler's crime (Amos Oz, cited in Zuckermann, 1993: 76).

Unlike the Vietcong, the Taliban have little popular support. In fact, they appear to have boiled down almost to their equivalent of Hitler's SS (Quinn, 2001: 17).

Welcome to our concentration camp. What the Germans did to us, we'll do to you (Sergei, IDF officer, cited in Levy, 2002: 16).

Zygmunt Bauman doubts the possibility of exorcising the ghost of the Holocaust, because 'being possessed means seeing the world as one–dimensional' (Bauman, 2000: 15). This possession, as well as the view of the world as one–dimensional, is illustrated by Moshe Zuckermann's (1993) notion of 'cultural memory' as a *code*, which allows us to conceive of the inconceivable precisely because memory itself remains inaccessible. Just as the survivor cannot afford to remember the horrors of her Holocaust past in her everyday existence, so too the collective tends to replace 'collective memory' – complete with ceremonies, images, rituals and memorials – for the actual memory of the catastrophe.[5] But while the individual survivor has no option but to repress the memory of the horrors of the Shoah so as to avoid madness and be able to live after the Nazi hell, the collective has a vested interest in repression, so that the memory of that hell does not pollute the 'new page' it wishes to turn in constructing its history. Zuckermann is not speaking about denying the actual historical event, but about the attempt to expel the Shoah from our consciousness by reducing it to a set of ideological codes (Zuckermann, 1993: 21). The ideological use of memory serves different purposes for different collectives; but everywhere the Shoah is transformed into a political ideology, a code: the Shoah myth replaces the Shoah itself.

Zuckermann's book *The Holocaust in a Sealed Room* analyses the inappropriate equation of Saddam Hussein with Hitler in the Israeli press during the 1991 Gulf War. His more general argument is that since it is impossible to remember the Shoah as concrete reality, and Auschwitz as a concrete, routinised death factory, all that is left is to remember the Shoah as a paradigm for the human condition, a matrix which symbolises the perpetual threat to humanity. If 'the Shoah is the most extreme objectivisation of the relationship between murderers and murdered, between perpetrators and their victims, by symbolizing the apex of oppression', then particularistic lessons (such as the Israeli–Jewish imperative that 'it' would 'never again' happen 'to us') negate the universalist edict about the sanctity of human life: 'people who use the excuse "my logic was burnt in Auschwitz" as a justification for acts of oppression, ... damage the very memory of the victims' (Zuckermann, 1993: 28–30). In other words, Zuckermann argues, in line with Young and Hirsch, that representations of the past bring about the erasure of the past from our memory, rather than its commemoration.

Taking Young's argument about 'received history' from the individual to the political, I would suggest that telling and re–telling the Shoah has been employed not only in order to construct a particular kind of memory, but also

to justify certain acts, perhaps because no other lexicon is available to the Western imagination to narrate catastrophe. Thus, in the case of the state of Israel, the memory of the Shoah is routinely employed to justify the Israel versus the diaspora dichotomy, and – inadvertently, but inevitably – the continuation and excesses of the occupation.[6]

According to Zuckermann (1993: 28), Israel, while using the 'lessons of Auschwitz' in shaping its politics, has never remembered the Shoah. One painful recent example of the extreme uses of the 'Auschwitz code' was the suggestion, during the second year of the al–Asqa Intifada, by a senior Israel Defence Forces (IDF) officer that, in order to conquer a Palestinian refugee camp or the Nablus Casbah without casualties (I presume he meant Israeli casualties), he had to also study how the German army put down the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. Commenting on this, *Ha'aretz* journalist Amir Oren said this IDF officer was not alone; other officers said similar things and their deliberations point to wider dilemmas, such as the appropriateness of using German reparation funds: 'military aid, and if so, which (submarines from the fleet of Reichsadmiral Dönitz – no; aid from defence minister Franz Joseph Strauss for the nuclear plant in Dimona – yes)'? (Oren, 2002: B6).[7]

Israel may not have a colonial past, but, according to Israeli writer Itzhak Laor, 'we do have our memory of evil. Does this explain why Israeli soldiers stamped ID numbers on Palestinian arms? Or why the most recent Holocaust Day drew a ridiculous comparison between those of us in the besieged Warsaw Ghetto and those of us surrounding the besieged Jenin refugee camp?' (Laor, 2000).

Though Israelis feel extremely uncomfortable with any comparisons with the Shoah, the Auschwitz code resurfaces in everyday confrontations between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians. According to the Palestinian human rights activist, Abed al Ahmad, administratively detained without charge for the fourth time just as he was planning to marry his Jewish–American lawyer fiancée, in May 2002 an IDF officer named Sergei told a group of Palestinian detainees in Ofer detention camp, having just been made to sit for 16 hours on the floor, blindfolded and tied: 'Welcome to our concentration camp. What the Germans did to us, we'll to do you. What we experienced, you will experience. Then you can look for another nation to torture as we shall torture you'. The IDF spokesperson denied it happened and at the same time condemned any such utterances; comparisons are indeed blood curdling (Levy, 2002: 16). In Germany the Shoah poses ongoing questions about guilt, blame, collusion, perpetration, and the impossibility of commemorating absence. Speaking about his novel, *The Reader* (1997), in which actual illiteracy becomes a metaphor for the Third Reich's moral illiteracy, Bernard Schlink comments on the attempts by his generation to come to terms with their parents' role in Nazi crimes: 'In '68 we had the ambition to deal with all this. But what we have to live with is that there is no solution' (Wroe, 2002: 6). By making comparisons with East Germany's communist past, and by the universalist commitment to a human rights discourse, West Germany, according to Zuckermann, 'normalised' its Nazi past (Zuckermann, 1993: 36).

Despite having become 'commercialised, metaphored out of reality, glamorised, ... severed off from the historical fact', the Shoah, according to poet and child survivor Irena Klepfisz, 'was not an event that ended in 1945 – at least not for the survivors. Not for me'. Raging at the 'mainstreaming' and 'dilution' of the Shoah, Klepfisz wants to yell: 'You're fucking around with my pain, with my real pain, my real life. Forget the metaphor. Think about reality'

(Klepfisz, 1990: 64–6).

Beyond the 'Holocaust life as a ghost', one must ask whether the dualism of the (alluring) dream of total power and the fear thereof, which Friedländer (1985) argues characterises our ongoing fascination with Nazism and the Shoah, also entails a need to go on representing the world as a 'clash of civilizations', which returns us to the metaphorical world of Nazism whenever our world order seems threatened. There is a link between the racialisation and othering processes in the current 'war against terrorism' in the aftermath of the September 11 bombing and the ensuing war against Afghanistan (and the 'war against terrorism' in the Middle East), and the inadvertent return to the metaphorical world of Nazism and the 'Auschwitz code' as a central metaphorical discourse.

Racialisation and the 'clash of civilizations'

> When you think Taliban, think Nazis. When you think Bin Laden, think Hitler. And when you think 'the people of Afghanistan' think 'the Jews in the concentration camps'
> (Ansary, 2001).

> The values that the terrorist attacked last week were human rights, democracy and the rule of law... they are the same values that inspired the British left in the 1930s to fight fascism in Spain and oppose appeasement of the Nazis
> (Hain, 2001).

Historians have a stake in dividing world history into eras and phases.[8] In his 1993 essay, Samuel Huntington posits a new phase in world history, in which the main source of conflict will not be ideological or economic, but rather cultural. In a post–Cold War world, 'the cultural division between western Christianity and Orthodox Christianity and Islam has re–emerged' (Huntington, 2001: 4). Huntington's thesis was adopted enthusiastically by western politicians and media in its twenty–first century war against Islamist terrorism. Such a clash, western commentators claim, has been eagerly adopted by Bin Laden and his networks (Steinberger, 2001:28). Characterising the conflict as civilizations clashing homogenises both 'the West' and 'the rest' and resonates with the discursive binary construction of the Nazis versus the allies.

The Holocaust was one of several post–September 11 discourses, as the quotations I use through this paper indicate.[9] In an internet article, the Afghan–American writer Tamin Ansary (2001) makes the comparison by separating Bin Laden and the Taliban from the rest of Afghanistan, an argument often made, and rejected, by post–war Germans for whom the Nazis have victimised, first and foremost, Germany itself. Thus Ansary's 'when you think Taliban, think Nazis. When you think Bin Laden, think Hitler. And when you think "the people of Afghanistan" think "the Jews in the concentration camps"' illustrates the inability, by western and non–western commentators alike, to progress beyond the discursive reign of the Holocaust in our collective imaginations.

However, comparisons between Bin Laden and Hitler, or between the Israelis, or the Palestinians and the Nazis, do pose serious questions, not only about the limits of comparability, but also about current conflicts as *'lieux de mémoire'* (Nora, 1996), created, according to Pierre Nora, 'by a play of memory and

history'. Invested with a 'symbolic aura', *'lieux de mémoire'* can function to block the work of forgetting' (Nora, 1989: 19; cited in Hirsch, 1997: 22). Moreover, I would argue that the recurrent use of the metaphorical language of the Shoah is part of its erasure, as Friedländer, Hirsch, Zuckermann, and Klepfisz argue.

Anti–Semitism, anti–Zionism, anti–Semitisation

> Mr Sharon said, 'don't repeat the terrible mistake of 1938 when the enlightened democracies of Europe decided to sacrifice Czechoslovakia for a temporary solution. Do not try to placate the Arabs at our expense... Israel will not be Czechoslovakia' (Goldenberg, 2001).

Another way of dragging the Holocaust into contemporary debates is a renewed Jewish preoccupation with the Shoah, kindled by post–September 11 manifestations of anti–Semitism. According to a poll conducted at the end of October 2001 by the World Jewish Congress, 57 per cent of Israelis thought anti–Semitism was more prevalent now than ten years ago (Salpeter, 2001: A5). *Ha'aretz* journalist Eliahu Salpeter cites an article in *The New York Times* by Jonathan Rosen who writes of the threat of Islamic anti–Semitism and the spurious claim that it was Jews who planned and executed the bombing of the Twin Towers: 'I grew up with the idea that I am living in a post–Shoah world, and I am finding out that it is more and more like the world on the eve of the Shoah'. According to Salpeter, French Jews are experiencing their worst time since the Nazi occupation, with 150 acts of racist violence against Jewish people and institutions, including 43 arson attacks on synagogues. Swiss Jews are also feeling threatened by Muslim Fundamentalist anti–Semitism: 'Zigi Feigel, the honorary president of the Zurich community, said last month in a Jewish communities convention, that "for us Jews, Hitler has not yet died"' (Salpeter, 2001: A5).

Several articles in the Israeli and European press have equated, yet again, anti–Zionsim with anti–Semitism. *Ha'aretz* cites a *Le Monde* article on French Jewish fears of the new anti–Semitism: Esther Ben Bassa, a French Jewish academic is quoted as saying about French Jews: 'Recently all that interests them is anti–Semitism and the Shoah, even the young are fascinated by the burning of Jews in Auschwitz, and Judaism is linked in their minds only with the Shoah, as if there was nothing else. I blame Jewish leaders who for years had fanned the flames of the Shoah and anti–Semitism ... First the Jews re–found religion; then they made the Shoah the focus of worship; and now they are having nightmares about concentration camps under the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs Elysées' (Ben Simon, 2002: B9).[10] *Ha'aretz* also wrote about the new British anti–Semitism, naming *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, and the BBC, as 'wittingly or not, stoking the inferno of anti–Semitism'. Greville Janner M.P., a former president of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, accused *The Guardian* of being 'viciously and notoriously anti–Israel'. *Ha'aretz* lists the 'left–liberal media' as well as Britain's two million Muslims as being lumped together by worried British Jews. Commenting on the accusations, a *Guardian* editorial (2002: 21), while agreeing that post–September 11 saw a troubling 'lowering of barriers' inhibiting anti–Semitism, urges the un–lumping of the legitimate critique of Ariel Sharon's policies and the duty to guard British Jews against anti–Semitism. Rabbi David Goldberg, writing in *The Guardian*, while acknowledging the seriousness of the charges 'less than sixty years after the Nazi Holocaust', joins the editorial writer in calling for a 'sense of proportion':

> We do ourselves a disservice if we cry "anti–Semite!" with the same stridency at a liberal commentator who criticises the Israeli army's disproportionate response to terrorist outrages, and at a National Front lout who asserts that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is a genuine document; if we try equally vehemently to silence a Holocaust denier and proven liar like David Irving, and the ideologically left–wing Tom Paulin, who last year wrote an angry and not very good poem that compared Israeli soldiers to Nazis (Goldberg, 2002: 20).

The post September 11 anti–Semitic manifestations have been dubbed 'the new anti–Semitism'. According to The International Council Against Anti–Semitism, convened by Israel's deputy Foreign Minister Michael Malchior, the 'new anti–Semitism' targets not individual Jews, but Jewish collectivities, including the state of Israel. While similar to the 'old anti–Semitism' in manifesting itself in arson attacks and daubing incidents against synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, the target is no longer Jews as a foreign minority, since most of it is carried out by Muslims, themselves a hated minority in Europe, and the context is the recent violence in the Middle East. According to Malchior, the focus is the delegitimisation of the state of Israel. In order to explain what he means, Malchior too resorts to the 'Auschwitz code': 'Auschwitz did not begin with Auschwitz. Not that we are talking about the same thing, but Auschwitz too began with the delegitimisation of the Jews, moved on to their dehumanisation and ended with their demonisation'. Furthermore, Malchior, who says he has no problem with strong political criticism of Israel, and opposes Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, argues that the level of coverage given to the current phase of the conflict feeds the hatred: 'When people are constantly fed with images of Israeli tanks and planes attacking Palestinian cities, and of the destruction in Jenin, it affects their position... And the fact that the Jewish people, thank God, is not helpless as in the past, and that the state of Israel knows how to use force, adds to the hostility' (Sheleg, 2000: 5).

Professor Dina Porat, director of the Institute for the Study of anti–Semitism in Tel–Aviv University, links the 'new anti–Semitism' to the demographic rise of Islam in Europe: 'This has sharpened the discussion about European racism, and anti–racist groups find themselves at the forefront of the struggle against Israel, whom the Arabs have managed to include under the tag of "racism"... Then there is also the link between the anti–globalisation movement and the fight to return Jewish property stolen during the Shoah' (Sheleg, 2002: 5).

I have a problem with equating anti–Zionism with anti–Semitism. As the Israeli peace activist Yehudit Harel, a bereaved mother and a daughter of Shoah survivors, cautions, we must not use the Shoah in opposing Israel's policies, as 'neither Arafat nor Sharon are Hitler and neither the Israelis nor the Palestinians are Nazis' (personal communication). Irena Klepfisz, though supporting the Israeli peace camp, says that comparing the Israelis with the Nazis nullifies the Holocaust: 'If Israelis or Jews are really Nazis, then the murder of six millions of their parents and grandparents is not so tragic after all' (Klepfisz, 1990b: 130).[11] However, Itzhak Laor, writing about the world after Jenin, argues that Israelis 'look to punish anyone who undermines our image of ourselves as victims. Nobody is allowed to take this image from us... When a cabinet minister from a former socialist republic compared Arafat to Hitler he was applauded. Why? Because this is the way the world should see us, rising from the ashes... it seems that what we have internalised of the memory of the Holocaust is that any evil whose extent is smaller is acceptable'

(Laor, 2002).

Zuckermann points to the German tendency to maintain support for the state of Israel as part of working through the Nazi past. While acknowledging that anti–Semitism can be disguised as anti–Zionism, Zuckermann warns against the 'anti–Semitsation' involved in the ideological conditioning of the memory of the Holocaust in an unconditional support for Israel and Zionism (Zuckermann, 1993: 327, n.45).

Several questions must be asked in relation to the current re–invocations of the memory of the Shoah and its victims. By putting the Shoah at the centre of post–September 11 Jewish fears, understandable as they are, are Jewish people remembering the Holocaust, or rather minimalising its memory? The more general issues raised by this paper are how the Shoah can be remembered without being 'memorised', in the sense of 'learning by rote', and employed whenever the world is short of 'catastrophic' metaphors. And how the Shoah should be commemorated as a process, in which the reasons for remembrance are clearly, and specifically, spelt out, as James Young stipulated as a condition for joining the Findungskommission to select the finalist for the Berlin 'Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe':

> Are [the reasons for building the memorial] redemptory, part of a mourning process, pedagogical, self–aggrandizing, or inspiration against contemporary xenophobia? To what national and social ends will this memorial be built? Just how compensatory a gesture will it be? How antiredemptory can it be? Will it be a place for Jews to mourn lost Jews, a place for Germans to mourn lost Jews, or a place for Jews to remember what Germans once did to them? (Young, 2000: 197).

Conclusion: Postmemory and academic reflexivity

Like James Young, I too grew up 'playing' with the Holocaust. Not lightheartedly, but 'in the obsessive earnestness of children trying to work through a family's trauma' (Young, 2000: 42). Like the boy Momik, in David Grossman's *See Under Love* (1986), who keeps the 'Nazi beast' in the cellar in order to tame it, a whole world of images – in my case about Transnistria, the series of ghettos and camps to which the Jews of Bukovina and Bessarabia, including several members of my family, were exiled by the Romanians during the war – populated my childish imagination, even though the Shoah was not spoken about, yet was a constant presence. Unbeknownst to me, through listening, but not hearing the stories of Mother's relatives upon their arrival in Israel from 'there' in the 1950s, Transnistria had been imprinted on my memory. As Nava Semel says: 'for years, since I was a child, I heard the name Transnistria, Transnistria. I wasn't sure it was a real place. But Transnistria *does* exist' (Semel, in Simyonovics, 1999). As I was listening to the accounts of women survivors of Transnistria who I interviewed in 2000–01 for a research project on testimonies of Transnistria girlhoods (Lentin, 2001), in the belief that personal narratives are one way 'into' a memory of the Shoah, I encountered many personal landmarks.

One story in particular overwhelmed me. Most of the narrators told about people who helped them along the way, often rescuing them from death, once their parents were no longer alive. Ruth Glassberg–Gold (1999) tells of a couple she calls Mr. and Mrs. Sattinger, who looked after her after her mother's

death. Glassberg–Gold describes Mrs. Sattinger as 'not particularly friendly, perhaps because of her lameness,' and her husband Marcus. Even after the death of their own little girl, the Sattingers fulfilled the promise they made to Ruth's mother and found Ruth a home and eventually brought her to an orphanage, and thus saved her life. To my amazement, Mrs. Sattinger turned out to be my mother's lame aunt Rebecca, who came from Transnistria to Israel in the 1950s, having lost her daughter and husband, sent on a labour detail never to return. The final chapter of my novel *Night Train to Mother* (Lentin, 1989) is about Hetti, based on aunt Rebecca. But I was unable to describe 'the place', Transnistria itself, perhaps because of 'vicarious memory', based not only on 'received history', but also on a series of disavowals of Transnistria, accounts of which have only begun being told long after the silence about the Shoah had been broken in Israeli society. Instead I wrote about Hetti's 'life as a ghost', her 'after image' of Transnistria, as she muses aloud about her dead husband, and about the indelibility of deep memory:

> Sometimes in the early morning, when she cannot sleep, she imagines Menashe hadn't died. That he is alive somewhere in Russia or Romania with another family. That he was told that it was she who died. But it makes no difference which of them died. And so she continues to live with his fading features... and with the scar across her stomach and a brace. And that, as they say, is it (Lentin, 1989: 216).

I have one photograph of Tante Rebecca in which she looks at the camera tacitly, but with a great extent of disappointment and anger. Does the photograph help me remember her? Or does Glassberg–Gold's account make Rebecca's Transnistria more real? I need to think about it much more deeply to understand. For now, what is clear is that, attempting to find a discourse to remember something that was but 'postmemory', sharp and painful as it was, all I had was an after–image, arguably the only appropriate representation of the Shoah for the twenty–first century.

And my preoccupation continues. In December 2001 I visited Berlin for a conference. Ironically – an irony lost on most of the participants – the conference took place in Wannsee, the site of the political architecture of the 'Final Solution'. Berlin is always fascinating in the way it overlays history at every turn, offering the visitor a glimpse – via diverse everyday acts of commemoration and forgetfulness – of a postmodern reconstruction of the discontents of modernity.

Two momentous yet routine sets of events took place during the conference. The first, a Neo Nazi demonstration against the *Wehrmacht* exhibition, not outside the exhibition site, rather outside the Oranienburgstrasse synagogue; and the anti–globalisation counter–demonstration, which targeted not the Neo Nazis, but local capitalist sites, banks, restaurants, shops. Routine Berlin occurrences, according to Berlin friends. The second set of events, which we learnt about on CNN, were the two suicide bombs in Jerusalem and Haifa, and the Israeli counter–attacks on the Palestinian Authority headquarters in Gaza and Ramallah, attacks and counter–attacks which were to be repeated many times in the following months. Another routine act in the Israeli–Palestinian *pas de deux*. Ostensibly unconnected, these two sets of events, and the heady mixture of Neo Nazism and violence, sharpened the focus of my Berlin gaze. At the entry to the Wittenbergplatz U–Bahn station a very ordinary sign exhorts passers by never to forget: the sign lists the main concentration camps,

headed by Auschwitz, a word–visual which always arrests the gaze despite the desperate banality of the metal sign. For me, this city – where postmodern architecture quotes and re–quotes historical sites (for example the glass dome of the new Reichstag building, which quotes the old Reichstag glass dome, re–quoted, this time inverted, in the Lafayette Department store) makes one ask, to quote Young, 'how does a city "house" the memory of a people no longer "at home" there? How does a city like Berlin invite a people like the Jews back into its official past after having driven them so murderously from it?' (Young, 2000: 152).

Extending the question to a nation, a world, we need to ask many questions about remembering and forgetting, about representing and commemorating as political acts of incorporating, without redemption, the lessons of the Shoah in a post–Shoah world. How does a post–Shoah world accommodate and remember both evil and absence? And how do we avoid quoting and re–quoting the Shoah, often in inverted form? Is an aesthetic obsession with fascism a reflection on fascism or an extension of it?

After Auschwitz, art and history cannot supply an answer; indeed, after the Holocaust there can be no closure, no 'Final Solutions' to the question of representation. Reflecting on my own preoccupation, I must include myself in the questions posed above. Like the difficulty Young (2000: 194) had in remaining aloof from his critical stance as to whether a central monument to the murdered Jews of Europe would mark their memory or bury it altogether, I too am not a disinterested party in this debate. Fifty–five years after the defeat of Nazism, Israeli society still has difficulty separating the annihilation of a third of the Jewish people from its present–day politics, and German artists still have difficulty separating the monument from its fascist past: 'a monument against fascism would have to be a monument against itself, against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate – and finally, against the authoritative propensity in monumental spaces that reduces viewers to passive spectators'(Young, 2000: 96). Is 'countermonument', which would not do the memory work for us, therefore the only method of commemoration?

Just as Benjamin's *flâneur* turns his back to the crowd even as he is propelled and swept by it, so his 'angel of history', who looks at nothing but the expanse of ruins of the past, is blown backwards into the future by the storm of progress (Arendt, 1999: 19). The challenge is to keep the Shoah past in our sights while keeping a close watch on how we discursively employ that past to construct the future. The continuous use of the 'Auschwitz code', and its discursive political evocation in relation to present–day conflicts, and the racialising reality for present–day refugees, as well as the West's 'others', are omens of the shape of memory, counter–memory, and postmemory for the twenty–first century.

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1 The debate as to 'who can laugh at Hitler' was conducted differently in the US and in Germany in relation to the Broadway musical 'Hogan's Heroes': 'perhaps humour offers Americans a lighter, more liberating perspective than that available to Germans, for whom the Hitler period continues to be a source of a complex of deep emotions'. On the other hand, the musical offered some Germans, not used to laughing at the past or at themselves, a way of confronting their past, and liberated them from the homogeneous image of their fathers, not all of whom were evil; some indeed were jokers and clowns (Cowell, 2001: B11). Roland White (2001) discusses humorous Bin Laden websites – another interesting link of humour and terror.

2 Which too many people, alas, think is 'the view of the other side', as Deborah Lipstadt discovered while completing *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory (1993).*

3 As Achinger (1999, forthcoming) argues regarding the equation of Milosevic with Hitler.

4 Which is how Nadine Fresco, on the basis of her work with children of survivors, describes the silence that swallows up the survivors' past (Fresco, 1984: 417–27). See also Nava Semel's narrative in Lentin, 2000, in which she refers to the 'black hole' in her mother's Shoah biography.

5 See also Nava Semel's argument about the stifling of 'intimate memory' in favour of 'ceremonial memory' in Israeli society (Lentin, 2000: 50−1)

6 The Israeli writer A. B. Yehoshua has another take on the stakes of Shoah memory: 'After the Shoah we all swore, never again another Shoah. But we do not think ... that precisely because such an extreme holocaust was enabled at the heart of Europe it was plausible for part of the Arab world that perhaps it was not unlikely to bring about another Jewish holocaust. The historical fact of the successful Shoah might have led to legitimating its repetition' (Yehoshua, 2002: 19).

7 Commenting on the article, Tal Inbar, in a letter to *Ha'aretz*'s editor, is shocked not only by Nazism as a source of inspiration for IDF officers, but also by the officers' ignorance: 'One wonders about the lessons learnt in the IDF not from the acts of the *Wehrmacht* and the SS, but from the annual visits by trainee officers to the death camps in Poland, and about the general standard of the study of history by senior IDF officers' (Inbar, 2002: B16).

8 Similarly it can be argued that social scientists, in their anxiety to use categories and sub−divisions, and by presenting 'race' as a category, have contributed a great deal to the invention of racism, and to its formulation as doctrine and scholarly theory (Wieviorka, 1995: 3).

9 Pearl Harbor was another major discourse; see, for example, Whitacker, 2001.

[10] On the other hand, MRAP, the French Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peoples, has condemned attacks by Jewish 'pro–Israel fascists' on their premises, because of the organisation's support for peace in Palestine: 'MRAP deplores the invocation of anti–Semitism against organisations which defend the peace process in Palestine. Such instrumentalisation of anti–Semitism and the Shoah, for political and religious ends, inevitably leads to the banalisation of anti–Semitism' www.mrap.asso.fr/mrap.htm. I am indebted to Alana Lentin for this information.

[11] This over–preoccupation with anti–Semitism tends to obscure the fact that post–September 11 it was Muslims and Arabs, rather than Jews, who were racialised and targeted (see, for example, Chrisafis, 2001 on the growing violence against Muslims in Britain, and Abdo, 2001, on post–September 11 violence against Arabs in North America).

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