

**Shoah, Antisemitism, War, and Genocide: Text and the Context**  
**Keynote Lecture**  
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In August, 1936, Adolf Hitler wrote a very private and secret memorandum to his number two, Hermann Göring. It was the only memorandum he ever wrote himself, and it obviously was not intended for publication. The purpose was to explain to Göring that Germany must rearm in order to be ready for war within four years (this was later reduced to three). Hitler stated the reason for this: "Since the beginning of the French Revolution the world has been drifting with increasing speed towards a new conflict, whose most extreme solution is named Bolshevism, but whose content and aim is only the removal of those strata of society which gave the leadership to humanity up to the present, and their replacement by international Jewry...a victory of Bolshevism over Germany would not lead to a Versailles Treaty, but to the final destruction, even the extermination of the German people."<sup>1</sup> And on January 30, 1939, in a speech to the Reichstag which you can actually see because it was filmed, he added: 'If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.' The reason, then, why Germany should start the war is that otherwise international Jewry, which includes both the Bolsheviks and the West, will destroy or even annihilate the German people. In order to prevent that and assert German hegemony in Europe, living space must be obtained in the East so that Ukrainian agriculture, coal and steel, as well as oil from the Caucasus, should make German supremacy a reality. The enemy preventing the realization of this policy was Jewish Bolshevism and Western capitalism ruled by the Jews.

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<sup>1</sup> Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945, series E, vol. V, 2, 1977, pp. 793-795.

Of course, Germany was in no need of a war to get these materials. It could have obtained them easily enough by normal trade with the Soviet Union, which was eager to receive German industrial goods in return for its raw materials. Stalin was willing to sell not only his mother, but all Russian mothers, if he could prevent a war for which the Soviets were not prepared because of the brutal purges that killed most of the Soviet military leadership in 1937.

In Germany, who wanted a war? It is clear from quite unanimous reports of the many foreign journalists and diplomats in Germany in 1938/9, that the German population did not want a war – which is not surprising, as the last war, with its millions of casualties, had ended in 1918, only 21 years before 1939. It is equally clear, from archives of the great companies in the fields of industry, communications, trade, banking, and so on, that the captains of the German economy, overwhelmingly, did not want a war, because they were doing quite well in an economy that had risen out of the Great Depression. The top military leaders, with the Chief of Staff, General Ludwig Beck, at their head, planned a putsch against Hitler in September, 1938, because they were afraid that Germany would lose a two-front war. The putsch did not come about, because at Munich, in September-October 1938, Britain and France yielded to Hitler and handed over Czechoslovakia to the Germans. No military opposition would rebel against a successful government. But the leadership of the Nazi Party, with Hitler as the radicalizing factor, wanted a war. They wanted it in order to assure German hegemony in Europe, and that could only be achieved by defeating the great threat to such hegemony, namely the international Jewish capitalist-Bolshevik conspiracy. In Europe alone, 35 million people died in the war that ensued, close to six million of them Jews. 29 million were non-Jews, who died, in large part, because of the murderous antisemitism of the Nazis, which was a central part of the ideology that led to the war. Antisemitism kills Jews, but then it also kills huge number of others. It is a universal danger.

It becomes clear that the policy of expansion to the East which on the face of it seems to have been dictated by economic interests was in fact the result of an ideological imperative. The economic argument was subordinated to it. This is Marxism turned upside down: the ideological superstructure is the cause of changes in the material, socio-economic, and the political, basis, not the other way round. The overall conclusion is

obvious: World War II was initiated by Nazi Germany for reasons that were primarily ideological, and within that antisemitism played a central role.

We are all aware of the great historiographical debate around the Holocaust, which posits two basic trends against each other: there are those who explain the Holocaust as a reaction to impasses of a socio-economic character in a crisis-ridden German society. It is these crisis-ridden structures and the attempts to solve structural issues that led to a radicalization of Nazi politics and to the ultimate radicalization leading to the genocide of the Jews. This is the functionalist or structuralist interpretation. The other trend argues that the genocide was the result of an ideology imposed by a leadership of the Nazi Party headed and radicalized by an all-powerful dictator, and this is the intentionalist view. Now, it is hard to find anyone today who will still defend these extreme positions. As to intentionalism, it is clear that Hitler did not plan the Holocaust, and that in fact it was not pre-planned at all. When he made the statement I quoted in which he threatened the Jews with annihilation, there was no planning behind it. Not even in 1940 was there any planning, as we know from a memorandum by Himmler, of May 25, 1940, in which he presented the Jewish “problem” as something that will be solved by deporting the European Jews to Africa. In that memorandum Himmler stated, explicitly, that the physical annihilation of a people was a Bolshevik method, un-German, and out of the question. Hitler approved of the memorandum. Later, there was indeed planning, but that happened parallel to the actual murder campaign, from mid-1941 on. By 1942, plans were developed for the total murder of European Jews, and intentions were made clear regarding the extension of the murder campaign to wherever in the world German influence would reach. While no planning occurred until 1941 at the earliest, there was a murderous ideology and, given the lack of other practical solutions, the genocide was inherent in it as an option that became actualized when the situation demanded it. Thus, the Holocaust was not pre-planned, but it was pre-figured.

The structuralist or functionalist interpretations are not convincing either. Structures don't kill; people do. And people have views and attitudes, as they act in a certain social environment. If they have strong views, it is likely that, given the chance, they will try to translate their ideologies into practical reality. The perpetrators murdered because they were convinced that that was the right thing to do. There was a consensus to

commit murder, and that consensus arose through the acceptance of an ideology, even if most people would not have been able to define what the ideology was saying. A major element in that ideology was the absolute belief in the charismatic Leader, elevating him to a divine status. It was he who, in most Germans' eyes, could do no wrong, and if he initiated or approved of the annihilation of the Jews, that was the right thing to do. I therefore think that the Holocaust was, primarily, the result of an ideology, and the structural elements, while undoubtedly important, were secondary.

This interpretation would also make it clear that if the Holocaust was primarily motivated by antisemitic ideology, it fits into the context of a war that also was primarily motivated by ideological considerations in which antisemitism played a central role, and only secondarily by material, military or immediate political motives, important as these may have been. This combination of an ideological genocide committed during a war fought, by the perpetrators, for ideological reasons, is unprecedented.

To be sure, the genocide of the Jews at the hand of National-Socialist Germany and its collaborators has to be seen in its various contexts. However, the first thing is to deal with the core, not the contexts. By core, I mean, among other things, the rise of Nazism, the situation of the Jews in various European countries, the persecutions of the thirties and the Jewish reactions to them, Jewish emigration, and the attitudes of the various outside powers and of Jewish communities to what was happening. Then come, among others, the developing Nazi plans regarding the Jews, ghettoization in Poland and later in other countries, forced labor and concentration camps, mass murder after the invasion of the USSR by Germany, the death camps, Jewish unarmed and armed reactions, the problem of the Jewish Councils, and the death marches at the war's end.

There has been, of late, a tendency to prefer dealing with the contexts, instead of looking first of all at the Holocaust itself and its immediate background in terms of ideology, politics, and the war, such as I have suggested above. Then, having first dealt with the core, we should deal with remote causes, comparisons with other genocides, human rights and their denial, psychological traumas that appear in the wake of tragedies, and so on. If you want to deal with the Holocaust you first of all have to learn what actually happened and why. For teachers especially, this methodological approach would seem to be crucial.

When we begin to know what actually happened, when, by who, and what the victims' reactions were, we are ready for the first question, still within the core: why should we deal with the Holocaust at all? Why should we have special Memorial Days for that event? Why should we devote valuable schooling time to deal with it? The answer is that we deal with it because it was the most extreme form of genocidal killing until then, and arguably until today. Extreme, not because of the suffering of the victims; the suffering of victims of mass atrocities is always the same. There is no gradation of suffering, and Jews did not suffer more or less than Tutsi in Rwanda, Fur in Darfur, Khmer in Cambodia, or Russians, American Indians, or anyone else in situations of mass murder. Why then talk about the Holocaust as an extreme case? Let me put it this way: when you examine the elements that went into any genocidal situations at any time in history, you will always find similar elements in some other genocide, including the Holocaust. Take Rwanda as an example. Hutu and Tutsi are actually not ethnic groups. Originally, in pre-modern times, they were different social classes, with the Tutsi minority ruling the majority, the Hutus. They speak the same language, and they shared the same religious beliefs. Today, they belong to the same Christian denominations. The German, and later, the Belgian colonialists supported the aristocratic, wealthier, better educated Tutsi, as against the Hutu majority. Towards the end of their rule in 1958, the Belgians switched to support the Hutu, and when independence came, the Hutu majority came to rule. Enmity erupted, on the basis of the previously Tutsi-imposed inequality, and there were, between 1958 and 1994, several massacres of Tutsi. A Hutu dictatorship assumed power, led by descendants of Hutu groups that had never been part of the Tutsi-dominated pre-modern monarchy. A large number of Tutsi fled into neighboring countries, especially to Uganda. They organized there, and in 1990 invaded Rwanda from the North. International pressure forced the Hutu dictator to agree to a power-sharing compromise, but he was killed and a pre-planned genocidal massacre that was led by radicals calling themselves Hutu Power, began, supported by France. Against the background of tensions between Hutu and Tutsi as described here, the motivations were the fear of an advance of the Tutsi Army from the North and the attendant loss of power, and a desire to inherit the possessions of the Tutsi landowners and middle class (this is of course an oversimplification, because there were many poor Tutsi and many wealthy

Hutu, but there was nevertheless some substance to the accepted stereotypes). The elements that went into the genocide were the employment of special militias to commit most of the actual murders; the elimination of moderate and democratic Hutu opposed to genocidal killings; use of a bureaucratic system that had been developed by the Belgian colonialists; massive genocidal propaganda; the use of a radio station to incite the Hutu population, and an ideology that served to rationalize the killings, which saw the Tutsi as foreigners who were endangering the survival of the Hutu.

Every one of these elements can be found in other genocides: e.g., prior mass murders leading up to the genocide – in the Armenian case, or in the cases of American Indians; special militias – such militias were used against the Armenians, during the Holocaust, etc.; developed bureaucratic structures – in Nazi Germany, in the genocide of the Herrero in Namibia in 1904, in Ottoman Turkey; we find massive propaganda utilizing up-to-date technology in the Holocaust, against the kulaks in the Soviet Union in the early thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, etc. And so on.

However, in the case of the Holocaust, there are elements that one simply cannot find in genocides that preceded it. There are quite a number of these, but let me mention just a few: to start with, there was no precedent for a state-organized genocide where every single person of the targeted group as defined not by the individuals concerned but by the perpetrators was to be identified, marked, humiliated, dispossessed, concentrated, transported, and killed, everywhere on earth. Furthermore, the ideology that served as a motivation for the Holocaust had nothing at all to do with the real Jews. Nazi ideology spoke of a world Jewish conspiracy, of the control by Jews of both capitalism and Bolshevism, a conspiracy out to control the world – a mirror image of what the Nazis themselves wanted to do - a nightmarish fabrication. It spoke of Jews killing non-Jewish children to use their blood for ritual purposes – a continuation of the notorious blood libel accusations of the Middle Ages. It declared that the Jews were a satanic force corrupting civilizations, and therefore had to be annihilated, and that they were the sworn enemies of Germany – although 12.000 Jews had died for Germany on the battlefields of the first World War, out of the 100.000 Jews who served in the German forces (the whole Jewish population in Germany numbered only about 500.000), a disproportionately high number; the Jews were what one might call ‘desperately patriotic’ German citizens. All these

accusations were fabricated, nightmarish concoctions. They had nothing at all to do with real Jews and their communities. They were totally non-pragmatic. The Jews did not have a territory that could be coveted, and contrary to some legends, Jewish individuals did not control any major German industry. Nor did Jewish people control German banks. And, what is even more important, there was no Jewish political collectivity. There were German Jews, but there was no German Jewry: there was no public body that would represent all German Jews, or any body that represented all Jews worldwide – the Zionist Organization and various social welfare bodies represented sections of the Jewish people, never all or even most of them. A body representing most (not all) German Jews was set up for the first time some eight months after the Nazis came to power, as a necessary reaction to the Nazi persecutions. It is important to note, also, that such bodies representing all Jews in a certain country did not exist in almost any nation. Thus, for instance, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, founded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, never included all Jews. Some were always outside of it. Today, it represents only a certain percentage of British Jews, arguably not even a majority.

In some ways, Nazi antisemitic ideology was similar to other such rationalizations of murderous actions, but in some ways it totally deviated from them. Like other such ideologies, for instance Marxist-Leninism and Radical Islam, it promised a utopia, in which a world society based on racism would be an earthly paradise for those who deserved it, namely the pick of the Aryan race. The struggle for ever-lasting happiness would be conducted against Satan and his minions, and Satan was the stereotypical Jew. There is a parallel here between Nazism and Stalinism, which saw the Jewish bourgeoisie supposedly controlling the capitalist West as the spearhead of the enemy that had to be defeated. Radical Islam today portrays the Jews (“Zionists”, but often they simply say “Jews”) as the element that controls the world they want to conquer, and therefore the Jews become the arch-enemy that prevents the establishment of the Islamic utopia. The Nazi version, with the Jews as the implacable, corrupt, and devious foe standing in the way of the realization of the racist utopia was easily understood by the German masses, as it derived from Christian antisemitism. Christian antisemitism had never planned or advocated a genocide of the Jews, but it had advocated persecution, discrimination, eviction of Jews, humiliation and dispossession. Christian antisemitism had formed the

necessary (though not the sufficient) background for the Nazi variety, contrary to the statements of the Catholic Church. Christian antisemitism saw the Jew as possessed by Satan. The accusation that the Jews had killed Christ was based on the belief that Satan wanted to control the world against God and the Jews were his tool, by killing God. More than that: the way I read it, the desire to force the emigration of Jews from Germany in the thirties, deportation to Poland in late 1939, the plans to deport them to Madagascar in 1940, or the Soviet Arctic in early 1941, and then the genocide itself, were also part of the wish to exorcise the devil from the midst of the Chosen People, namely the Nordic peoples of the Aryan race, as I will try to show. The Nazi genocide of the Jews was thus totally devoid of any pragmatic basis. Nazi ideology regarding the Jews was totally removed from the real Jews living in real places in and outside of Germany. The Jews owned no territory, did not control German or world economies, had no government, and were not an organized political group. The ideology was non- and anti-pragmatic. Certainly, the methods, the timing, the stages in which these policies developed, were determined by pragmatic considerations. Yet, whenever there was a clash between the purely ideological aim and practical economic or other considerations, the ideology always prevailed. Thus, the existence of major Polish ghettos, for instance in Bialystok and Lodz, was very important for the German war machine because they produced goods for the German Army, and was supported by local Nazi officials. Contrary to all modern capitalistic logic of cost-effectiveness, the ghettos were annihilated by orders from the Berlin center, in pursuance of ideological aims. Examples of this kind are legion.

Let me return here, for a moment, to my argument that the Nazis wanted to exorcise the Jews out of the German people. In the Middle Ages, Jews were sometimes burned on the stake, when they refused to convert to Christianity or when they wanted to return to Judaism after they had been converted, often by force. The emotional background was that Satan, or people possessed by Satan, were being burned. The fire would exorcise the Devil, the community would expiate its sins by burning the offending devilish creature that had polluted it. The same applied to Christian heretics, of course, such as the Waldensians in Southern France, and others, and to witches. When the Nazis gassed and burned their Jewish victims, is it possible that they were unconsciously repeating a type of action that had been part of European civilization all along? Jewish

bodies had to be totally consumed, by fire, and the Nazis set up a special SS unit, called Unit 2005, headed by a sadistic Nazi by the name of Paul Blobel, that tried to eliminate all traces of mass killings of Jews outside of the camps by digging up the bodies of murdered Jews at the hundreds of sites in Eastern Europe where these murders had taken place. These bodies were then burned. Is there then a link between the auto-da-fes of the Spanish Inquisition and the actions of the Nazis? It is, I think, worth examining.

The Holocaust was the most extreme form of genocide to date. It was not unique, because if that had been so, we would not have to bother about it, as it would have been a singular case never to be repeated. But everything that humans do can be repeated, though never in exactly the same way; and the Holocaust was committed by humans, not by some God or Satan. It was unprecedented, not unique, which means that it can be repeated in some way, and that answers the original question I posed, namely why we should teach it. We live in a world where something like that not only can happen again, but where things that are somewhat similar, though not quite parallel, are indeed happening all around us. The Holocaust happened in the midst of the most advanced civilization of its time, and came out of a country which had rightly been proud of its liberalism, of its tremendous achievements in arts, in music, in literature and philosophy. It presents a tremendous problem and a challenge to civilization. The people who committed the crimes, the people who supported the murderers in some way or another, the people who knew and looked away and refused to react, were all baptized into Christianity. To quote Franklin H. Littell, a Methodist Minister and a Holocaust scholar: they were “baptized heathen”. This goes far beyond the argument whether the wartime pope, Pius XII, did whatever he could to help or whether he kept silent and is therefore, in part at least, culpable. It concerns the roots of Christianity, in that nineteen hundred years after the appearance of the Christian Messiah, his people were murdered by people who had been raised believing in his message. It raises the question – to quote Littell again – of the credibility of Christianity. It also raises the credibility of Judaism, but that is a different story.

In World War II, Nazi Germany wanted to destroy liberalism, democracy, pacifism, socialism, conservatism, Christianity – all those things that we inaccurately call Western civilization. Germany’s war was to clear the way for the conquest of Europe as a

whole, and then, with allies, of the whole world. A new system of values was to be imposed on humanity, a racist hierarchy, with the Nordic peoples of the Aryan race on top, and everyone else in a hierarchical order under them. No Jews, because all Jews would by then be annihilated. This racist world was a completely new utopia. Mankind has experienced uncounted attempts to substitute one religion for another, destroy one nation or empire by another, or one social class by another. But Nazism was new; the establishment of a racial hierarchy was utterly novel – although we know today that races do not exist, because we all come originally from East Africa, as DNA research has shown. Nazism was therefore a truly revolutionary attempt, possibly the only really revolutionary attempt in the last two hundred years. This revolutionary attempt was directed against ‘Western civilization’. More specifically, it was directed against the legacy of the French and American Revolutions, and traditions of British democracy. All these had been based on older traditions, deriving their legitimacy from Greece – for aesthetics, literature, and philosophy; from Rome – for law and order, the state, architecture, literature and the arts; and Jerusalem – for the ethics of the biblical prophets. The people who now live in Greece and Rome or Italy speak languages that are derivatives from the ancient forms, but they are different; they pray to different gods and they write different literatures. But the Jews are still there, speaking and writing the same language, writing literature that is directly connected to the biblical forms. The Nazis, as I said, wanted to destroy these legacies, and that civilization. The Jews were a symbol of what the Nazis wanted to destroy, because of the moral teachings their culture had produced had produced. Also, the ideological, religious, basis for all of modern Western civilization was the Bible, and for Christians, or people like the German Nazis who had been raised in that culture before they abandoned it, it had two parts: the Old and the New Testament, and both were written largely by Jews. There was a certain logic in the Nazi ideology: if you want to destroy the Western tradition, you start with the annihilation of one of its founders, namely the Jews.. .

The direct connection between World War II, the Shoah, and present-day genocidal events and threats is more than obvious. There are repetitions today that hark back to the genocide of the Jews. The Shoah was unprecedented. But it was a precedent,

and that precedent is unfortunately being followed, in the Balkans, in Darfur, and elsewhere.

Now to some of the contexts: one of them is connected to present international politics. The after-effects of the Shoah and of World War II are very much with us – this is a past that is present, a past that still has a future, and there is a major issue that is beginning to be addressed, but that needs to be explored much more seriously, namely – the comparison between the two totalitarian regimes, National Socialism and Stalinist Communism, and the comparison between both of these and present-day Radical Islam. I have no time here to discuss this latter issue, so I will concentrate on the first. The parallels between the two totalitarian regimes of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are obvious: a one-party dictatorship with a half-mythical dictator at the top, the existence of a massive terror machine of a well-organized police state, an ideology that became the substitute for an exclusivist religion, and so on. The differences have not been properly explored, and all I can do here is to hint at some of the issues. The Soviet Union was a centralized state with a centralized economy, with an inbuilt tendency to massive corruption and economic inefficiency. Nazi Germany was a basically polycratic regime, where vassal fiefdoms competed for the attention of the all-powerful dictator, but which was built on a combination of powerful private enterprise and a clever manipulation by central fiscal authorities. Private property, especially that of big industrial, agricultural and banking enterprises, flourished. Inefficiency was the result not of the economic structure, but of the intervention in the economy of an ideology-motivated political dictatorship. During the war, ideology-driven political inefficiency decisively influenced military planning and execution as well. These were faulty, as we now know; German efficiency was partial and was attended by a catastrophic lack of proper oversight. Nevertheless, both regimes could overcome these deficiencies in the short and medium term by tremendous efforts emanating from the center.

Stalinism has rightly been accused of many acts of politicide – a term coined by Barbara Harff, meaning the destruction of groups of humans for political, ideological, economic or social reasons. Thus, huge numbers of so-called kulaks, i.e. peasants who refused to collaborate with collectivization of agriculture, were starved, deported, or killed. Real and imagined political opponents were annihilated in huge numbers, too.

There can hardly be any doubt but that the number of victims of Soviet oppression far surpasses the number of dead in Nazi concentration camps, even if you include the victims of the genocide of the Jews. But there can equally be no doubt that the number of victims of a World War that was initiated, willed, and prosecuted by Nazi Germany, far surpasses the number of victims of the Gulag and the Soviet oppression. The numbers game here, as elsewhere, does not lead us anywhere.

Germany, with the help of many other states, engaged in what the 1948 United Nations Convention called genocide: against the Roma, the Poles and, primarily, totally unpragmatically and purely ideologically, against all Jews. The Soviets did nothing of the kind.

Had the Germans not attacked the Soviet Union in June, 1941, after almost two years of a fairly close alliance, would there have been a permanent collusion between the two totalitarianisms? I don't think so. It was quite clear to both elites, that the alliance was temporary, and that sooner or later they would clash. When they did, the Germans almost overwhelmed the Soviet state. Many people think that the alliance forged between the West and the Soviets was an unnatural one in terms of political cultures and far-reaching aims. But in actual fact it was, in many ways, not unnatural that a regime that threatened all of the achievements of 'Western civilization' should be opposed by all of those who, in their different and contradictory ways, wanted to continue that civilization, even in a very distorted form, as the Soviets did. The war was, in the end, won mainly by the Soviets. The West helped by supplying them with crucially important armaments, and its help shortened the war. The invasion of Western Europe contributed markedly to the final victory. But the war was won by the Red Army, which defeated the main German forces, at tremendous cost. The Soviet Union liberated the world from the threat of another long period of the darkest ages imaginable. This is the perception of recent history prevalent in many quarters, indeed in the world, and it determines Western historical memory. It is true even in, say, the Ukraine, where the Germans were originally enthusiastically welcomed by most people, though even there there was an important though unquantifiable pro-Soviet minority as early as 1941, when the Germans invaded. Ukrainians in large numbers participated in the murder of the Jews, volunteered for pro-German police, collaborated with the German administration – but soon deep

disenchantment took over. The Germans did not permit any kind of Ukrainian autonomy, treated Ukrainians as lesser beings, and then deported hundreds of thousands of them as forced laborers. The mood changed rapidly.

Both many Ukrainians and many of the peoples in the Baltic areas collaborated in the destruction and deportation of the Jews in order to gain autonomy from Germany. But it did not work as they had hoped.

After the war, the further west one went from the real Soviet Union, the greater the enthusiasm for the Soviet liberators. For the Jews, it was even simpler. German rule meant certain death. Soviet rule meant ethnic oppression, and later on, between 1947 and Stalin's death in 1953, violent and murderous antisemitism as well. But the only hope for survival was Soviet victory. All Jewish survivors owed their lives to the Red Army. After the war, in their majority, these survivors concentrated in displaced persons camps in Central Europe, and were a major factor in the establishment of Israel. The Soviet victory made that possible. The Soviets really did liberate Europe, however problematic that liberation was. In the Baltic States the perception is different: there, the view is that there were three occupations, a Soviet one, between 1940 and 1941, a German one, between 1941 and 1944, and a second Soviet one between 1944 and 1989/90. The second Soviet one lasted for decades and in the eyes of many Baltic people was worse than the German one. The choice, it is felt there, was between two totalitarian regimes, but it was thought – mistakenly – that the German variety did not endanger the basic fabric of society. The Soviet regime, on the other hand, represented, in part at least, by Baltic communists, violently oppressed the Baltic nationalities, in part also by introducing people from other Soviet nationalities, especially Russians, threatening to overwhelm the local ethnic groups.

Did the Soviets commit genocide, or something approaching that, during their two occupations of the Baltic countries? Let me take Latvia, as an example; other nations in Eastern Europe are not that much different. I rely here on the results of the admirable work of the Latvian Historical Commission, that is, those parts of the work that I could read in English. There were close to two million people in Latvia in 1939, about 75% of whom were ethnic Latvians; the rest were mainly Russians, Germans, and close to 95.000, or about 5%, were Jews. The Soviets repressed and persecuted some 3000

persons during the first occupation, and deported 15.400 more, together less than 1% of the population. The majority of the deportees survived, under terrible conditions, suffering great physical and mental anguish. But of these 15.400 deportees, 11.7% were Jews, so the number of persecuted and deported Jews was more than twice their proportion of the population. The Soviets did not abolish the Latvian language, and they more often transformed than abolished local cultural institutions. But they forbade Hebrew, and in time effectively suppressed Yiddish; they dissolved all specifically Jewish institutions, though they did not formally abolish Jewish religious worship. Jewish communities were not transformed, but eradicated. During the second occupation, in the late forties, the Soviets deported 43.000 Latvian citizens, and again, an unknown proportion of these were non-ethnic inhabitants of Latvia. Together with the first wave in 1941, the total amounted to roughly 3.3% of the population or, say, 2.5% of the Latvian people. And though the Germans, with local help, had by then murdered almost all Latvian Jews, there were quite a number of Jews even among the deportees of the second wave. One can hardly talk of an anti-Latvian genocide. If there was anything approaching cultural elimination at Soviet hands, it was that of the Jews, not of the Latvians, although Latvian culture was diminished and attacked. Latvian historians have also deconstructed the myth about significant Jewish participation in Soviet governmental and police organs. That turns out to have been another antisemitic legend, because while it is true that there were Jews in the Soviet organs of repression, they were relatively few. The vast majority were Russians, Ukrainians, and local Latvian communists. The same picture emerges, for instance, in the formerly Polish territories of western Belarus and the western Ukraine. There, according to Polish figures, of the roughly 800.000 deportees to Siberia in 1939-1941, 30% were Jews, though Jews were only 10% of the population. All this amounts to oppression and persecution, not to genocide. In addition, in the occupied Baltic areas, because of the relatively higher economic and social standards, there was mass immigration of non-Baltics from inside the Soviet Union. The question is still open whether this was intentional or not; probably it was a mixture of both. All this was very bad, but it was certainly not genocide, not even of the Jews. Had there been a genocide of the Baltic peoples, there could have been no independence movement that was finally victorious, between 1987 and 1991. It was then that the regime collapsed under its own

weight of inefficiency, and political and moral corruption. Apart from the murder of several thousand wandering Roma, the only genocide that happened in the Baltic States was that of the Jews.

Two major problems emerge: one, the collaboration of the majority of Baltic peoples with the Germans, not necessarily because of any sympathy with Germany or with Nazism, but as a result of the political, ethnic and economic situation determined by geography and history. This again resulted in the collaboration of large numbers of them, actively or by silent agreement, in the annihilation of the Jews; and two, and this is the reason for a disconnect between Baltic perceptions of the past and those of the rest of Europe, and indeed the world: different perceptions of the historical role of the Soviet Union in the war against Nazi Germany. This is not to be taken lightly. Good and evil can seldom be painted in black and white. However, the Nazi regime, with its near-absolute evil, is an exception. Most educated people in the world see World War II as a very central point of historical and political reference, and many see the Shoah as the pivotal event in it. They see the Soviet Union, historically, as a crucial partner, a liberator, though an extremely problematic one, in the rescue of the world from a potential threat to its very existence at Nazi hands. A continued disconnect between the historical consciousness of the Baltic States and that of the rest of the Western world would be a tragedy, mainly for the Baltic peoples themselves.

Why is this important for teaching the Holocaust? Because quite recently, in April 2009, the European parliament passed a resolution to commemorate August 23, the day on which in 1939 the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed, which enabled Nazi Germany to start World War II. The purpose, the resolution said, is to properly commemorate, equally, the victims of the two totalitarian regimes. The Holocaust, it says, has to be remembered as a special case. Victims of German Nazism are equated with victims of Soviet oppression. But this is a travesty of historical truth. World War II was initiated and pursued by Nazi Germany, not the Soviet Union. Nazi Germany committed genocides, not only against Jews, but against Poles ad Roma as well. Moreover, they concocted a plan, called Generalplan Ost, which provided for the elimination of the three Baltic nationalities. These nations would be absorbed into the German people, opponents killed or exiled beyond the Urals. Poles would become a

population of slaves, without any education. The Czech people were to be eliminated in much the same way as the Baltic nations. The Soviets never planned anything like that. The Soviet dictatorship, brutal and oppressive as it was, was a deadly mutation of an ideology, Marxism, that had emerged from the legacy of the French Revolution, and was eager to acknowledge that. Nazism was diametrically opposed to that revolution's legacy. To equate Stalinist oppression with Nazi genocide is understandable, from the point of view of nationalities that had to suffer from Soviet oppression for decades, but it cannot be accepted.

Finally, I want to discuss an issue that lies somewhere between core and context, as it is especially important, I think, for teachers: the relationship between human rights and their denial, and the Holocaust. There is a tendency to argue that denial of human rights is a first step towards mass destruction, the Holocaust, and Holocaust-like events. There can be no doubt that human rights and teaching about the Holocaust are related issues. The persecution of German Jews did indeed begin with a denial of their civic and human rights. But there was no necessary linear development between that persecution and the Holocaust. If the major powers of the day, Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, had come to an agreement to stop German expansionism – and negotiations took place as late as the spring of 1939 to perhaps reach such an agreement – then the Holocaust would most likely have been avoided. In that case, the denial of rights of the small Jewish minority in Germany would have remained another case of oppression, but not of a necessary preamble to a genocide. Denial of human rights is bad in itself, but not necessarily connected to genocide. Moreover, once the Holocaust was enacted, it was no longer a matter of denial of human rights. The victims no longer had any rights that could be denied, and killing them was not a denial of rights but a matter of murder. You cannot start teaching the Holocaust from a basis of argument about human rights, because this is simply not true. What is true is that denial of human rights preceded that murder, and was one of the preparatory steps, though it did not necessarily lead to it. What you can do, is to say that the Holocaust teaches us that observation of human rights is and should be a basic obligation that can do much to prevent a development towards a genocide. In other words, don't start from human rights to teach the Holocaust, but use the Holocaust story to emphasize that when human rights are successfully defended, that creates an almost

insurmountable obstacle against mass murder. So, do not start with humans rights – end with them.

### *Conclusions*

The conclusions from all this are, first of all, the realization that World War II was conducted by Nazi Germany for mainly ideological reasons; that was the context for the Shoah—the ideologically motivated annihilation of the Jews – which was an end in itself. Second, that antisemitism was the basic motivation, and has deep historical roots; and that it did and does endanger the life of huge numbers of non-Jews. Third, that both parallels and also very considerable differences emerge between that genocide and other genocides, which still remain to be researched. Four, that this cannot be done without a comparison between Nazi Germany and the Soviet empire. Five, that it was the Soviet Union, an oppressive and murderous dictatorship, that defeated Germany, rescued the remnant of the Jews of Europe, prevented the horror of decades of Nazi rule over large parts of the world, though it institute a totalitarian regime over Eastern Europe. Six, that a simplistic equation between Nazism and Stalinism is wrong, and that one of the proofs of that is the Holocaust. Eight, and most importantly, that when you teach the Holocaust, you have to start from the core, from the text, before you can approach the context.