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The Sacrosanctity of the Holocaust and its Influence on Judaism and the State of Israel

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Abstract

The Holocaust maintains a status of inviolability in the Christian religious public sphere and also the mainstream media. The scale, gravity and sheer atrocity of the Holocaust still commands a response. The article argues that questions demanded by the Holocaust of the Christian church and the free world's passivity in the face of genocide, led to a Christian support for the State of Israel driven by guilt and a sense of moral obligation which side-lined the impact of the State on the Palestinian people. With the Israel-Palestine conflict in its seventh decade, the imperative to overcome the hegemony of Holocaust memory is more urgent than ever. Seventy years after the Holocaust, its legacy in public and theological memory dominates questions of Judaism within the polity and the State of Israel. Two legal cases, which attracted media attention, illustrate how Holocaust memory is evoked in response to questions of Jewish practice in the European polity. Two further examples demonstrate how the pernicious influence of Holocaust memory and rhetoric colour responses to criticism of the State of Israel.

Keywords

Holocaust, Israel, anti-Semitism, Judaism, media

Introduction

The response of public theology to Holocaust memory is a complex and often contentious one. As public theology tends to relate to the Christian voice in the public sphere, the Holocaust has historically been met with responses from silence to guilt and compensatory support for the State of Israel, and only much later, and from individual theologians, reflections on the Church's responsibility to speak up for the plight of Palestinians.

It is not my intention to reflect here on the ambivalence of the Christian church during the Holocaust; much has been written on this already. Within the Christian faith, different denominations and individual Christian figures responded in several ways to the Nazi regime and its campaign against the Jews. It is recognized that there were numerous brave resisters, victims, and clandestine supporters and rescuers of Jews, who were driven by their Christian belief. It is also true, however, that for many churches and theologians in Nazi-occupied Europe, fear, a reluctance to risk protected statuses, or even deep-rooted anti-Jewish sentiment silenced criticism of the Nazis and their programme of genocide. In this article I discuss the post-Holocaust European context, and consider how memory of the Holocaust influences both Jewish and Christian responses to the State of Israel.

Finally, I discuss four cases featured in national and international news and social media, where the spectre of the Holocaust was raised in response to challenges to Jewish practice in Europe, and criticism of the State of Israel from British artists Gerald Scarfe and Roger Waters. I argue that the sacrosanctity of the Holocaust, made possible by both Jewish and Christian theological responses to it, have inhibited and censored public discourse and criticism of Jewish religious practices and policies of the State of Israel.¹

The Holocaust in Jewish Thought

¹ An abbreviated version of this article was presented at the Global Network of Public Theology consultation, 'The Word and The World: Global Public Theology in a Media Age', University of Chester, 6 September 2013.

Responding to the relationship between Jewish thought and the Jewish experience of the post-Holocaust era, former Chief Rabbi of Britain Jonathan Sacks asserts: ‘Rarely has Jewish thought had such urgent dialogue with Jewish existence’.² Sacks names the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel as the two events to raise ‘the most acute questions of Jewish theology: the suffering of the innocent, the nature of redemption and the signs and contours of the messianic age’.³ In the long history of Jewish life in the diaspora, the Holocaust is widely regarded in Jewish thought as the fundamental disruption, or caesura of modern times. The hurried ratification of the United Nations Resolution 181, naturally took on a theological language, as floods of Jewish refugees sought sanctuary in the biblical homeland.

In Jewish thought there are many so-called Holocaust theologies that place the event within a biblical framework, making an explicit connection to the ancient people of Israel and the physical location. Post-Holocaust Jewish theologians including Abraham Joshua Heschel, Hans Jonas and Sha’ar Yashuv Cohen, among others, espouse the belief in a divine connection between, or sense of purpose to be derived from the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel. Heschel allies his theological view with more secular thinkers in arguing that the Holocaust was the product of human sin. For other Jewish theologians, however, the Holocaust is elevated to a cosmological significance of its own. Cohen explicitly makes the connection between Jewish suffering in the diaspora with the return to Eretz Israel and the divine redemption of Jewish life in Israel following its destruction in Europe.⁴ Emil Fackenheim, one of the foremost post-Holocaust Jewish philosophers and theologians, asserts

² Jonathan Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant: Jewish Thought After the Holocaust* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), vi.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴ Sha’ar Yashuv Cohen, ‘The Holocaust and the Messiah’, in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *Holocaust Theology: A Reader* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), pp. 98-101. In the same volume see also Abraham Joshua Heschel, ‘The Holocaust and Sin’, pp. 202-04, and Hans Jonas, ‘God after Auschwitz,’ pp. 138-40, both originally in Albert Friedlander, ed., *Out of the Whirlwind* (New York: Schocken, 1976).

that the Holocaust paralysed Jewish and Christian theology for a significant time after.⁵ Yet, crucially, while theology was paralysed by shock and guilt, nation and state building began to take place in Israel almost immediately.

Fackenheim formulated the oft-cited ‘614th commandment’ to deny Hitler a posthumous victory by ensuring Judaism survives, to add to the 613 commandments received at Sinai.⁶ Holocaust survivor, author, and veritable celebrity in the USA, Elie Wiesel also claims that the Holocaust’s significance is equal to the revelation at Sinai in an article which was published in 1967, the year Israel believed itself once more to be on the brink of destruction, yet affirmed its power and tenacity in the Six Day War, capturing Sinai from Egypt.⁷ The Six Day War evoked the David and Goliath narrative, thus the bitter conflict over land became laden with biblical language. The same year Wiesel spoke at a symposium on Jewish values in the post-Holocaust future, alongside Fackenheim, arguing ‘We have to write a new Talmud just as we did after the destruction of the second temple.’⁸ Wiesel is just one of many to explicitly place the Holocaust in a continuum of Jewish suffering, biblical and historical. Holocaust historian Peter Novick discusses Wiesel’s literary identity, and his subsequent public persona as a Christ-like symbol of suffering. Novick also identifies the extent to which Wiesel’s construction of the Holocaust speaks to Christians as much as Jews. ‘For both Christians and Jews’ Novick asserts, ‘Wiesel has been, and remains not only the emblematic survivor but the most influential interpreter of the Holocaust as sacred mystery.’⁹ The challenge for Jewish, Christian and interfaith responses, is that when discussing the State

⁵ Emil Fackenheim, *To Mend the World: Foundations of Post-Holocaust Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982, 1994), xliv.

⁶ Emil Fackenheim, ‘Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future’ symposium (1967), cited in Michael L. Morgan, *Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 72-75.

⁷ Elie Wiesel, ‘Words from a Witness’, *Conservative Judaism* 21:9, (1967), 43, cited in Zoë Waxman ‘Testimonies as Sacred Texts: The Sanctification of Holocaust Writing’, *Past & Present* 206:5 (2010), 321-41 at 325.

⁸ Elie Wiesel, ‘Jewish Values in the Post-Holocaust Future: A Symposium,’ *Judaism* 16:3 (1967), 285, cited in Irving Abrahamson, ed., *Against Silence: the Voice and Vision of Elie Wiesel, Vol. I* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1985), 205.

⁹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), p. 274.

of Israel, the Holocaust's sacrosanctity is too often wielded as a shield, and is politicized by both critics and defenders of the State's policies.¹⁰

The Holocaust in Christian Thought

Forming a Christian response to the Holocaust is a delicate and often controversial exercise, yet amidst the continuing violence in the Middle East, the Christian voice remains a vital one. Theologically, the Holocaust prompted a challenge particularly to Catholic doctrine on the Jews and the extent to which contemporary anti-Semitism was made possible by the previous centuries of Christian anti-Judaism and such enduring assaults as the blood libel. In the post-Holocaust era of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*,¹¹ and the confrontation with Christian complicity in the Nazi assault on Judaism, attempts have been made to wrestle Holocaust memory from Jewish exclusivity. The controversial installation of the Auschwitz cross and convent met with the accusation of Christian responsibility for Jewish suffering in Auschwitz. Claims to the contrary from the Carmelite convent, that Auschwitz I was the site of many Polish Catholics' suffering, including the martyrdom of Maximilian Kolbe, as opposed to Birkenau where the majority of the prisoners were Jewish, were also criticized.¹² Andrew P. B. White and Stephen D. Smith note Christian belief in supersessionism and replacement theology as problematic for post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian relations.¹³ This sentiment was clear in the

¹⁰ This is raised by Ruth Langer, 'Theologies of the Land and State of Israel: The Role of the Secular in Jewish and Christian Understandings', *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, 3:1 (2008), 1-17. Jewish Theologian Marc Ellis polarizes opinion in his plea for a Jewish theology of liberation that is not uncritically bound to Israeli politics. See Marc Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004).

¹¹ Pope Paul VI, 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions *Nostra Aetate*', *The Vatican*, (1965), <http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html> [accessed 29 October 2014].

¹² Kolbe was arrested by the Gestapo for sheltering Jews and lost his life in Auschwitz after voluntarily taking the place of another prisoner sentenced to starve to death. Pope John Paul II canonized Kolbe in 1982, although there remains some dissonance between those who argue that, as Kolbe was not sentenced to death for his beliefs he is not a Christian martyr, and those who support his canonization as a martyr of charity.

¹³ Andrew P.B. White, 'Israel Within Jewish-Christian Relations', in James K. Aitken and Edward Kessler, eds, *Challenges of Jewish-Christian Relations* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006), pp. 125-3 at pp. 127, 132-33; Stephen

meeting of the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1954 where a group of delegates issued their own statement on the 'Hope of Israel'. Yet, as early as 1983 the WCC had recognized that the urge of Christians to purge themselves of guilt towards the Jews had led to uncritical support for the State of Israel, with little concern expressed towards the suffering of Palestinian civilians.¹⁴

Rosemary Radford Ruether and Martin Jaffee notably voiced concerns on these issues, and identified the political and cultural power that Holocaust memory and rhetoric possesses.¹⁵ These articles appeared in the years following the Six Day and Yom Kippur Wars, which had transformed global perceptions and Israel's self-perception as a military force. The Six Day War, as Sacks notes, was transformative in releasing 'a flood of messianic emotion'.¹⁶ It seemed to some, Sacks goes on, 'as if the beginning of redemption had arrived'.¹⁷ For Christian theology, supersessionism in the aftermath of the Holocaust was outmoded and loaded with Christian responsibility for anti-Semitism. To maintain its credibility after the Holocaust, and somewhat liberated from earlier Christian sentiment by Vatican II, which preceded the Six Day War, the State of Israel offered a 'redemptive tinge',¹⁸ which Christians could voice their support for. As Jaffee states:

In the post-Holocaust era Jews have found, to their surprise, that not a few Christians of influence define themselves as standing in a kind of communal solidarity with the Jews and have recommended such solidarity as a theological

D. Smith, 'The Effect of the Holocaust on Jewish-Christian Relations', in Aitken and Kessler, eds, *Challenges of Jewish-Christian Relations*, pp. 137-52 at p. 142.

¹⁴ Smith 'The Effects of the Holocaust on Jewish-Christian Relations', in Aitken and Kessler, eds, *Challenges of Jewish-Christian Relations*, p. 142.

¹⁵ Martin S. Jaffee, 'The Victim Community in Myth and History: Holocaust Ritual, the Question of Palestine, and the Rhetoric of Christian Witness', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 28:2, (1991), 223-38; Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Invisible Palestinians: Ideology and Reality in Israel', *The Christian Century*, (1987), 587-91; Rosemary Ruether, 'Anti-Semitism and the State of Israel: Some Principles for Christians', *Christianity and Crisis*, 33:20 (1973), 240-44.

¹⁶ Sacks, *Crisis and Covenant*, p. 43.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Radford Ruether, 'Invisible Palestinians: Ideology and Reality in Israel', 590.

norm for the church as a whole in its effort to atone for the crimes of Christendom against the Jewish people.¹⁹

In the immediate aftermath of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Ruether writes that liberal Christians tend to have a ‘schizophrenic’ attitude towards Israel. ‘Christians inherit from Jews a story about Palestine as a Jewish Promised Land. But 20 centuries of anti-Semitism, culminating in the Russian pogroms and the Nazi Holocaust, rob them of credibility in speaking critically about Israel’s present policies’.²⁰ The present policies Radford Ruether grappled with in 1973 were the same to confront Jaffee in 1991 when he writes of a ‘moral asymmetry’ in post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian relations, and are the same issues perpetuating the conflict today.²¹ Despite his concerns that the Holocaust gives the Jewish partner the moral power over the Christian, and its power to shield ‘from scrutiny elements of the Zionist political and ideological program in the Land of Israel that truly demand critical reflection’,²² Jaffee is equally critical of attempts to draw comparisons between the Holocaust and the Palestinian experience of Israeli occupation, and of attempts to justify anti-Semitism in the guise of anti-Zionism.²³

The sanctification of Holocaust suffering noted by Novick as having a strikingly Christian edge to it, is also detected by Jaffee who, without mentioning Wiesel, hints at how the powerful rhetoric Wiesel’s Holocaust narratives present, are seductive to a theologian, whether Christian or Jewish.²⁴ ‘Victimization – whether spiritual or physical, moral or political – is easily thematized in memory and story as a moment of victory. That is, when transformed by the religious imagination into myth, the experience of victimization can

¹⁹ Jaffee, ‘The Victim Community in Myth and History’, 226.

²⁰ Radford Ruether, ‘Anti-Semitism and the State of Israel’, 240.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 227.

²² *Ibid.*, 225.

²³ *Ibid.*, 236.

²⁴ Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 11; Jaffee ‘The Victim-Community in Myth and History’, 234-35.

confer a kind of holiness and power upon the victim'.²⁵ Imagery in Elie Wiesel's *Night* is often read as an allegory of the crucifixion: a young boy, a *pipel*,²⁶ hanged in front of the prisoners, to their outraged demand to know where God is. Wiesel's alleged response that God is also on the gallows sanctifies the suffering of the victim and situates the Holocaust within a motif that Christians more than Jews recognize as sacred.²⁷ Confronted with the Holocaust, Jaffee asserts, 'the Christian partner in Holocaust discourse, standing before the Jew as heir and representative of the Christian culture in which the anti-Jewish destructiveness of the Holocaust was nurtured, must obediently hear, acknowledge and memorialize the truth of Jewish anguish and the legitimacy of Jewish outrage'.²⁸

Challenging Jewish Practice in the Shadow of the Holocaust: Germany and Poland

The exodus from Europe of many of the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust has globalized Holocaust memory and its interest to news and entertainment media. Recently however, European legislation has localized the issue and stirred up old memories in the former Nazi territory. No country so conscientiously works to commemorate and remember the Holocaust, and encourage the post-Holocaust generations to do the same, as Germany does. The situation of Germany and the Holocaust is admittedly unlike any other modern conflict, but no other country in the world has confronted its own guilt and responsibility so thoroughly and under such intense international scrutiny. From the earliest post-war years

²⁵ Jaffee, 'The Victim Community in Myth and History', 230.

²⁶ *Pipel* is the name given to adolescent boys in the concentration camps who earn their survival by serving the *Kapos*, the more privileged prisoners. Some *pipel* are abused, others well treated. Equally, some are feared as much as the *Kapos* by prisoners due to their position of privilege, while the child Wiesel refers to is described as being loved by all. In this passage, the *pipel* who is accused of being part of a plot to blow up a power station in the camp, in alliance with his equally loved *Oberkapo*, refuses to betray the plotters. His public hanging is horrifically slow due to his weight, but the child retains his silent dignity to death.

²⁷ Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (London: Penguin, 1972, 2006), pp. 63-65.

²⁸ Jaffee, 'The Victim Community in Myth and History', 227.

and into the period of re-unification, with Holocaust memory still raw it takes little incitement to remind Germany of its not-so-distant-past.

In 2012 a botched circumcision procedure on a Muslim child led to his hospitalization for severe blood-loss. Cologne district court subsequently banned circumcision of young boys on religious grounds. Situated in the recent European context of religion in the public sphere, there is an argument to be made that the court was simply falling into line with a continent-wide secular encroachment on religion in the polity.²⁹ Legislation ruling against a Jewish ritual in a country of Germany's history was, however, more sensitive than most cases, and the response to the court's decision suggests that the spectre of the Holocaust has not yet been exorcized from public discourse. One of the more outspoken articles to appear following the case, from journalist and analyst Ben Cohen, makes the connection with Germany's history explicit: 'Less than a century after the Nuremberg Laws, *Kristallnacht*, and the mass extermination of Europe's Jews [this proposition] still strikes one as a warped fantasy even after its reality has become clear'.³⁰ In fact, in December 2012 the German government ruled to permit circumcision across Germany when authorized by parents and performed by a trained practitioner.³¹ The original ruling in Cologne prompted a rapid response from the central government and once again placed Germany's tolerance of Jewish practice under international scrutiny.

Cohen questions whether Cologne's initial ban intended to treat German Jews as collateral damage, or as a way to evade the criticism that Germany would be acting out of Islamophobia, given that the Muslim population in Europe is approximately ten times the size of the Jewish population, and concerns about the relationship between Islam and Europe is

²⁹ The last decade has seen debates arise across Europe on the right to wear visible religious symbols at work, the right to wear the burka or niqab in public places, on protests against minarets on mosques, and on ritual slaughter of animals in countries bound by EU regulations. Some of these issues are referenced in Langer, 'Theologies of the Land and State of Israel', 8.

³⁰ Ben Cohen, 'Europe's Assault on Jewish Ritual', *Commentary*, 134:4 (2012), 16-20 at 17.

³¹ Kay-Alexander Scholz, 'Circumcision Remains Legal in Germany', *DW.de*, (12 December 2012), para. 2, <<http://www.dw.de/circumcision-remains-legal-in-germany/a-16399336>> [accessed 25 October 2014].

now well-trodden ground. Cohen moots the notion that an explicit outlawing of Muslim ritual would be unacceptable discrimination against one minority group, whereas to attack more generically rituals such as animal slaughter and infant circumcision, which are deemed contrary to secular values, but which have a significant impact on the practices of Muslim and Jewish faiths, evades this appearance of targeted discrimination, yet serves the same ultimate goal of assailing religious ritual. Countering this suggestion, Cohen cites the banning of ritual slaughter in several European counties as exclusively against the Jewish tradition that prohibits stunning animals before slaughter, which is permissible under European and Islamic law.

A second case that draws Cohen's criticism is the Polish government's decision not to protect ritual slaughter against imposing EU regulations in 2013. Calling Poland the 'cradle of the Holocaust' Cohen concludes that post-Holocaust Poland, with all its claims for a rejuvenation of Jewish life there, 'finds the task of being nice to dead Jews far more appealing than guaranteeing the rights of living ones.'³² There is, of course, no homogenous response to this issue from the Jewish communities of Europe. Philosophy and Jewish thought scholar Oliver Leaman, observes the disparity in Jewish thought and behaviour in the diaspora, which continues after the Holocaust:

Some have argued that the Jews are in themselves a distinct group and should preserve their differences, not to the extent perhaps of failing to make a contribution to social and economic life, but by maintaining a distinct religion and lifestyle. Others see in that distinctness something of greater moment.³³

³² Ben Cohen, 'Poland Bans Kosher Slaughter', *Commentary*, (15 May 2013), para. 8, <<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2013/07/15/poland-bans-kosher-slaughter/>> [accessed 14 October 2013]

³³ Oliver Leaman, *Jewish Thought: An Introduction* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), p. 150.

In both of Cohen's articles Hitler's banning of ritual slaughter in 1933 and its feature in Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda is raised, with the contentious claim that modern anti-ritualists largely think in the same terms as Nazi propagandists, even if these campaigners deny the anti-Semitic origins of their belief. What Cohen fails to interrogate is the difference between how secularity performs in the public arena in Europe, which he denounces as largely anti-ritual, and in the constitutionally defined USA, which he celebrates as having successfully marginalized the anti-ritual campaign.³⁴ What Cohen correctly observes is that the invocation of anti-Semitism has the power to silence criticism of both the 'ancient religious rites of the Jewish people, or Israeli foreign policy'.³⁵ Cohen cites University of Passau Professor of Law, Holm Putzke, who defended the Cologne court for refusing to 'allow itself to be scared by the fear of being criticized as anti-Semitic or opposed to religion.'³⁶

In Germany and Poland the landscapes are marked with the reality of where anti-Semitism has led in the past, and such accusations are not taken lightly. There is clearly an argument that the accusation of anti-Semitism can however be made too easily, and too defensively against what should be legitimate issues for discussion. Public theology has a right and a responsibility to be involved in these discussions as much as legal and political entities. Jewish responses to these issues many naturally err towards a protective defence of their traditions, coloured by memory of their recent history, but I contend that the Christian voice is too often silenced by the emotive weight of the Holocaust.

Holocaust Memory in Israel

³⁴ Ben Cohen, 'Europe's Assault on Jewish Ritual', 20.

³⁵ Ibid., 18.

³⁶ Ibid.

The modern State of Israel was born of the most extreme social experiment in modern history. Zionism as a political and theological ideology predates the Holocaust but Israel, the modern state reborn in the Holy Land, is sanctified by the memory of six million souls who would never walk on its soil. Ben Gurion called the Jewish State the ‘heir to six million’,³⁷ and although his attempt to grant all Jewish Holocaust victims posthumous Israeli citizenship was blocked until 1985, the foundations of the Israeli state are embedded in Holocaust memory: the Creation of the Nazi and Nazi Collaborators Punishment Law of 1950; Holocaust Memorial Law 1953, Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day Law 1959. At the opening of Adolf Eichmann’s 1961 trial in Jerusalem, Attorney General Gideon Hausner ‘placed Eichmann in a genealogy that extended from Pharaoh through Haman, Chmielnicki and Petlura.’³⁸ Elie Wiesel echoes this biblical continuum when he states, ‘Pharaoh began by killing children. So did Haman. So did Hitler.’³⁹ That Hannah Arendt was so scathingly attacked after her coverage of Eichmann’s trial could be attributed to her identification of Eichmann as a banal and alarmingly normal bureaucrat, an identity that undermined the paradigm of evil Hausner situated Eichmann within. This paradigm was without doubt deemed necessary to justify Israel’s kidnap and extradition of the so-called architect of the Holocaust with questionable legal jurisdiction to do so, placing itself as the highest moral authority and the only one capable of judging the most wanted of Nazi figures.

Politically and demographically, the dominant presence of Holocaust memory is inescapable within Israel. Theologically, voices from outside the State increasingly acknowledge these issues, as Christian and Jewish perspectives on Zionism and Israel identify that the Holocaust has a tendency to forbid critical discussion of the destructive impact of Zionism on the indigenous population of Palestine, and of Israel’s aggressive

³⁷ Yoram Hazony, *The Jewish State: The Struggle for Israel’s Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 272.

³⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, p. 132.

³⁹ Elie Wiesel, ‘Art and Culture after the Holocaust’, in Eva Fleischner, ed. *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust* (Jersey City: Ktav, 1977), pp. 403-15 at p. 412.

policies of settlement building. Even attempts in Israel to understand the impact of the Holocaust on the indigenous and occupied people of Palestine, acknowledging the Palestinian *Nakba*, result in reinstating the hegemony of Holocaust memory.⁴⁰ Israeli writer Shira Stav studies Israeli film and literature, an accessible and influential form of entertainment media. Stav observes that in Israeli narratives on Nakba which are so frequently framed by a Holocaust narrative: ‘the Nakba is thus diminished and turned into an internal event of Jewish history, as if ‘their’ catastrophe is impossible to understand without ‘our’ catastrophe, which is, of course, *the* catastrophe.’⁴¹

Stav cites Israeli author and former IDF soldier Noam Chayut’s identification of the Holocaust as a ‘the most precious emotional and spiritual possession’ he had inherited in his book *The Girl Who Stole My Holocaust*, the absolute evil that Israel must fight forevermore.⁴² This cosmological imagery, much like Wiesel’s first generation work raises the Holocaust to a metaphysical status. Chayut does not try to raise the Holocaust to a level above critique, but suggests that the barrier to Israelis and Palestinians being able to properly recognize the suffering of the other is that Israel’s capacity to recognize its impact on Palestine is inescapably limited by the Holocaust, such has been its presence in public discourse. Chayut’s recognition of the on-going damage caused by the Israeli military, driven by a fear and protectiveness exacerbated by Holocaust memory, is such that he co-founded *Breaking the Silence*, an organization dedicated to providing a public platform for former Israeli soldiers to testify to their involvement of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

⁴⁰ *Nakba* is an Arabic term meaning ‘catastrophe’ and relates to the creation of the Jewish state, encapsulating the sorrow, upheaval and disenfranchisement experienced by Palestinians who were left stateless after fleeing or being expelled from their homes during the War of Independence in 1948. Arab Israelis and Palestinians commemorate *Yawm an-Nakba*, the Day of Catastrophe, the day after Israel’s Independence Day.

⁴¹ Shira Stav, ‘Nakba and Holocaust: Mechanisms of Comparison and Denial in the Israeli Literary Imagination’, *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society*, 18:3 (2012), 85-98 at 89 (original italics).

⁴² Noam Chayut, *The Girl Who Stole My Holocaust*, trans. Tal Haran (London and New York: Verso, 2013), p. 51.

Such is disparity between Israeli public perceptions of the occupation, assisted in no small way by attempts to censor *Breaking the Silence*, and the reality of the situation, an independent public and social media platform is necessary to speak out.⁴³ In 1987 Radford Ruether mounted a robust and convincing argument against the censorship within the Israeli and global media of the mistreatment of Palestinians, and identified the impact this has on the Christian voice in the west. ‘Western journalists sense that Israeli treatment of Palestinians is a topic too hot to handle [...] At the same time many progressive Christians are convinced that Christian sins against the Jews, culminating in the Holocaust somehow forbid critical discussion of Israel. Few dare to question this non sequitur’.⁴⁴ Chayut was a child when Ruether’s article appeared in *The Christian Century*, yet both figures, at a distance of some thirty years, identify the grip Holocaust memory maintains on Israeli discourse.

Holocaust Rhetoric in Public Responses to Israel

Finally I wish to draw attention to two cases in the news and social media of Holocaust discourse obstructing commentary on Israel. The first is illustrator Gerald Scarfe’s satirical cartoon, which was published in *The Sunday Times* newspaper on 27 January 2013. The cartoon, a commentary on Benjamin Netanyahu’s aggressive policies towards Palestine, was a response to the Israeli elections taking place at the time. It portrayed Netanyahu, dressed as a builder, constructing a wall through which the heads of Palestinians are trapped, their blood becoming the cement of the wall. The caption reads: ‘Will Cementing the Peace Continue?’ Scarfe submits a weekly satirical cartoon for the newspaper, and the Sunday closest to Israel’s elections, 27 January, is Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK and Europe. The cartoon was published in *The Sunday Times* only two weeks after another of Scarfe’s cartoons, of a

⁴³ Breaking the Silence, ‘Organization’, *Breaking the Silence*, (n.d.), paras 1-4, <<http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/about/organization>> [accessed 25 October 2014].

⁴⁴ Radford Ruether, ‘Invisible Palestinians: Ideology and Reality in Israel’, 588.

blood-soaked Syrian President Assad next to a pile of corpses. Yet it was the association of the Israeli Prime Minister and blood that caused the controversy, resurrecting the argument that the imagery of blood in association with a critical stance of a Jewish figure amounted to a blood libel. Scarfe's brutal portrayals of war and those behind conflicts are well known. He recorded the Vietnam War for the UK press and his Netanyahu cartoon bears some resemblance to a 1964 cartoon of the Berlin Wall commissioned by *Esquire* magazine. Scarfe chose to draw the spot where two years earlier an 18-year-old East German was shot trying to climb the wall and was left to bleed to death at its foot. The 1964 cartoon also portrays a white, blood stained wall.

Scarfe's is not the first cartoon published in the news media to have been accused of being anti-Semitic. In 2003 Dave Brown's cartoon of Ariel Sharon, wearing only a campaign rosette, eating a child amidst the destruction of Gaza, parodying Goya's painting of *Saturn Devouring his Son*, was published in *The Independent*. Brown's cartoon was also published on 27 January, again in response to the Israeli elections that were taking place at the time of air strikes over Gaza city. Legal representatives of Sharon and the Embassy of Israel referred Brown's cartoon to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC), but the complaint was not upheld. The blood libel claim clearly was not persuasive enough. The PCC accepted that the caption about 'never seeing a politician kissing babies before' amounted to a clear enough indication that the cartoon referred to Sharon's aggressive electioneering, and the inscription 'After Goya' explicitly demonstrated its influence.⁴⁵

The Sunday Times acting editor Martin Ivens initially responded to complaints about Scarfe's cartoon by iterating that it was directed squarely at Netanyahu and his policies, not at Israel or the Jewish people. Publication owner Rupert Murdoch, however, issued an

⁴⁵ The Independent, 'Press watchdog says *Independent* cartoon of Israeli PM was not anti-semitic', *The Independent*, (21 May 2003), para. 9, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press-watchdog-says-independent-cartoon-of-israeli-pm-was-not-antisemitic-8810359.html>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

apology to Benjamin Netanyahu and days after its publication, the newspaper issued a formal apology, stating

It is one thing for a newspaper to attack and caricature a leader – and it is as legitimate to attack Israeli leaders in cartoons as it is anyone else. But it is another thing to reflect in a caricature, even unintentionally, historical iconography that is persecutory or anti-Semitic. The image we published of Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, which appeared to show him revelling in the blood of Palestinians, crossed a line. Publication of the cartoon would have been a mistake on any day but the fact that last Sunday was Holocaust Memorial Day compounded the error.⁴⁶

Here is where the problems of disentangling the Holocaust from Israel arise. *The Sunday Times* legitimately defends its right to criticize an Israeli politician as it would any other state's leader. Furthermore it suggests that the controversy arose largely due to the timing of publishing the cartoon on Holocaust Memorial Day. Thus, the Holocaust functions in public discourse on Israel as a diplomatic bulwark. 27 January (the date of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet army) is not Holocaust Memorial Day in Israel; Israeli *Yom HaShoah* takes place in April, one week before Independence Day, a significant arrangement politically and theologically if reading the Holocaust within a biblical continuum or from a religious-Zionist perspective. The suggestion, which is hesitantly implied in *The Sunday Times'* apology, that legitimate criticism of either the theology or politics which have caused the undeniable suffering of Palestinians may be suspended on days of Holocaust commemoration, explicitly binds the Holocaust to Zionist and political

⁴⁶ Martin Ivens, *The Sunday Times*, 'Netanyahu cartoon: an apology', *The Sunday Times*, (3 February 2013), paras 2-3, <<http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/comment/leaders/article1206546.ece>> [accessed 25 October 2014].

policy in Israel, and uses the respect rightly given to Holocaust commemoration, as a political commodity and a public relations tool.

A further criticism of Scarfe's cartoon related to what accusers including the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Jewish Chronicle deemed persecutory and anti-Semitic, simply the use of blood in the cartoon, which the ADL condemned as 'a modern day evocation of the ancient blood libel charge levelled at Jews.'⁴⁷ What no criticism of Scarfe's use of blood mentioned, is what Reza Barmaki asserts, that:

'Blood' is the general term used in reference to criminality and lawlessness in the Hebrew Bible (Isa. 1:15; Prov. 1:16, 18). Criminals are referred to as 'men of blood' (II Sam. 16:7-8; Prov. 29:10) and a place where corruption and wickedness is rampant is referred to as 'the bloody city' (Nah. 3:1).⁴⁸

There can be little doubting the intent of Scarfe, or indeed Brown, to portray Netanyahu, Sharon and Assad as criminals, yet in the case of the portrayals of Sharon and Netanyahu the blood spilled was read by critics as being a metaphor for the ancient blood libel, and not literally as the blood of the Palestinian victims of the conflict.

Chief Rabbi at the time Jonathan Sacks entered the debate but stopped short of calling Scarfe or his work anti-Semitic. Yet, Sacks also drew the protective name of the Holocaust around the State of Israel, writing on his official website that the cartoon 'reinforced a great slander of our time: that Jews, victims of the Holocaust, are now perpetrators of a similar

⁴⁷ Anti-Defamation League, 'Anti-Semitic Cartoon in *The Sunday Times*, Letter to the Editor', *The Anti-Defamation League*, (28 January 2013), para. 1, <<http://www.adl.org/press-center/c/the-sunday-times-cartoon.html>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁴⁸ Reza Barmaki, 'Murder in Judaism: A Theological Perspective', *International Journal of Public Theology*, 7:2 (2013), 157-73 at 161.

crime.⁴⁹ Sacks, naturally expected to add his voice to the public debate, succeeded only to muddy the waters by failing to make any distinction between ‘the Jews’ and the State of Israel, and in his implication that there can be no greater crime than the Holocaust while making no comment on the human rights abuses taking place in Palestine which Scarfe was responding to in the first place.

Defenders of Scarfe’s reputation include *The Catholic Herald’s* William Oddie,⁵⁰ and *Haaretz’s* Anshel Pfeffer, who gives four reasons he believes the cartoon is not anti-Semitic, and calls the pillorying of Scarfe as an anti-Semite the cheapening of a noble cause. Pfeffer’s four reasons are that it is not specifically directed at Jews and there is no Jewish iconography in the cartoon; there is no use of Holocaust imagery; there is no discrimination, by which Pfeffer explains, Scarfe is not known for gentle portraits of his subjects, and there is no special vitriol reserved for Netanyahu or any campaign against Israeli figures in Scarfe’s career; and finally, this is not what the blood libel looks like.⁵¹ The defences of Scarfe, from the theological and political press formed a cohesive response to the accusation of anti-Semitism, with Oddie and Pfeffer largely making the same argument in support of the legitimacy of political criticism of the Israeli state and the erroneousness of calling this criticism anti-Semitic. What is notable in Pfeffer’s article is that his second point in defence of Scarfe, that the cartoon contains no Holocaust imagery thus cannot be considered anti-Semitic, indicates the pervasiveness of Holocaust memory when it comes to questions of anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, and Israel. The Holocaust naturally holds a particular

⁴⁹ Jonathan Sacks, cited by Jennifer Lipman, ‘Chief Rabbi weighs into Sunday Times Scarfe cartoon row’, *The Jewish Chronicle Online*, (29 January 2013), para. 3, <<http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/101181/chief-rabbi-weighs-sunday-times-scarfe-cartoon-row>> [accessed 14 October 2013]. With a new Chief Rabbi incumbent, Lord Sacks’ webpage for the office of Chief Rabbi is now unavailable.

⁵⁰ William Oddie, ‘Not only was Gerald Scarfe’s cartoon not anti-Semitic; hysterically saying it was makes any rational criticism of it impossible’, *The Catholic Herald*, (31 January 2013), <<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2013/01/31/not-only-was-gerald-scarfes-cartoon-not-anti-semitic-hysterically-saying-it-was-makes-any-rational-criticism-of-it-impossible/>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁵¹ Anshel Pfeffer, ‘Four reasons why U.K. Cartoon of Netanyahu isn’t anti-Semitic in any way’, *Haaretz*, (28 January 2013), paras 4-8, <<http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/four-reasons-why-u-k-cartoon-of-netanyahu-isn-t-anti-semitic-in-any-way.premium-1.496880>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

significance for the Jewish State, yet the sacrosanctity of Holocaust memory within the cultural discourse, should not transform the entire political state into a sanctified realm, above political satire or critical commentary.

The final and most recent example of Holocaust memory becoming embroiled in issues of religion in the polity relates to another project with which Gerald Scarfe has been involved, a performance of *The Wall*, the Pink Floyd musical and film, the animations for which were created by Scarfe.⁵² The album, film, and original tour were explicitly coloured by songwriter and former band member Roger Waters' trauma of losing his father at Anzio in 1944 when he was a baby, and World War II memory dominates the narrative. Waters' modernized, solo *The Wall* tour, which ran from 2010 to 2013, is much more a commentary on contemporary conflict and social divides, with the projections and animations reflecting this. On his webpage Waters explains why, after several decades, it was time to regenerate *The Wall* and present it to a new audience:

I recently came across this quote of mine from 22 years ago: 'What it comes down to for me is this: Will the technologies of communication in our culture, serve to enlighten us and help us to understand one another better, or will they deceive us and keep us apart?'⁵³

Waters' question, reposed 2010 preceded an online media storm which exploded largely because of these technologies of communication.

⁵² Scarfe's illustrations for *The Wall* were noted in Pfeffer's defence of his Netanyahu cartoon, identifying that although some critics may have read the wall in the offending cartoon as reminiscent of a ghetto wall, it is a motif Scarfe has famously used in the past. Pfeffer, 'Four Reasons why U.K. Cartoon of Netanyahu isn't anti-Semitic in any way', para. 6.

⁵³ Roger Waters 'Why am I doing The Wall again now?' *Roger Waters The Wall Live*, (2010), para. 1, <<http://www.rogerwaters.com/why.php>> [accessed 25 October 2014].

Included in show is a piece of Pink Floyd history: an inflatable pig, which made its debut in 1976 on the cover of the *Animals* album. In Waters' live shows the pig often functions as a vehicle for socio-political commentary; during *The Wall* tour it was inscribed with symbols including the hammer and sickle, the US dollar, the Mercedes star, the Cross, the Crescent and Star, and the Star of David. These same icons and symbols were projected onto the wall, forming a visual backdrop to Waters' performance.

In July 2013 at a show in Belgium, the pig, and specifically the Star of David inscribed on it, was filmed by an Israeli fan and submitted it to an Israeli newspaper. Directed to the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, Associate Dean of the Center Rabbi Abraham Cooper responded to the footage in an email to the *Algemeiner* newspaper:

With this disgusting display, Roger Waters has made it crystal clear. Forget Israel, never mind 'limited boycotts promoting Middle East Peace.' Waters is an open hater of the Jews. [...] The video is beyond shocking. The only books this bigot should be getting should be with the Mullahs in Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.⁵⁴

Cooper's email prompted a predictably vigorous response from Waters himself, who is a vocal supporter of boycotts, divestments and sanctions (BDS) against Israel and addressed the United Nations on this issue in November 2012. Furthermore, Cooper attacks the BDS campaign, calling it is disrespectful of Zionism and a denial of Israel's right to exist.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ The Algemeiner, 'Pig Balloon at Roger Waters Concert Features Star of David; Wiesenthal Center Calls Him 'Open Hater of Jews'', *The Algemeiner*, (24 July 2013), para. 2, <<http://www.algemeiner.com/2013/07/24/massive-pig-balloon-at-roger-waters-concert-features-star-of-david-video/>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁵⁵ Abraham Cooper cited in The Algemeiner, 'SWC Blasts 'Horrible Anti-Semitic Character' Roger Waters as 'Disconnected From Reality' After BDS Call During Peace Talks', *The Algemeiner*, (20 August 2013), para. 9, <<http://www.algemeiner.com/2013/08/20/swc-blasts-%E2%80%98horrible-anti-semitic-character%E2%80%99-roger-waters-as-%E2%80%98disconnected-from-reality%E2%80%99-after-new-bds-call-amid-peace-talks/>>; The Algemeiner, 'SWC's Rabbi Cooper Responds to Roger Waters's Open Letter: 'He Needs a Reality

Waters' defence identifies the problematic nature of the Star of David's dual function as a religious and state symbol, and the complexities of theocracy, something inherently evident in Cooper's reference to Zionism and criticism of the politics of Israel.

In a functioning theocracy it is almost inevitable that the symbol of the religion becomes confused with the symbol of the state. [...] Like it or not, the Star of David represents Israel and its policies and is legitimately subject to any and all forms of nonviolent protest.⁵⁶

Waters does not disguise his criticism of religion in the public sphere and although critics may dispute his definition of Israel as a theocracy, he is not alone in identifying the complexities of religious identity in the ostensibly secular state. Oliver Leaman, for example, identifies: 'the flag is a combination of the prayer shawl and a Jewish symbol, the Star of David, and the national anthem, the *hatikvah*, exclusively refers to Jews, so it is an awkward anthem for the 20 percent of the population who are not Jewish'.⁵⁷

Although the secular symbols emblazoned on the pig were mentioned by *The Algemeiner*, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the ADL, no mention was given to the presence of the Cross and the Crescent and Star, making the implication that the symbol of the Jewish faith had been singled out for criticism in the show. Waters' response to criticism levelled against him identifies the nature of the theocratic state, which in Israel, like Pakistan, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, displays the symbol of the religion on the flag, and the challenge therein of separating the polity from the religious identity of the state. In an article unrelated

Check'', *The Algemeiner* (1 August 2013), para. 7, <<http://www.algemeiner.com/2013/08/01/swcs-rabbi-cooper-responds-to-roger-waters-open-letter-he-needs-a-reality-check/>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁵⁶ Roger Waters, 'An Open Letter from Roger Waters', *Facebook*, (1 August 2013), para. 10. <<http://www.facebook.com/notes/roger-waters-the-wall/an-open-letter-from-roger-waters/688037331210720>> [accessed 14 October 2013].

⁵⁷ Oliver Leaman, *Jewish Thought*, p. 152.

to Waters' performance, Israeli professor in Jewish philosophy Menachem Lorberbaum challenges this same issue of the inextricable marriage of religion and state in Israel which, he identifies, is the only western democracy to fund an educational system 'that teaches its students to disregard the authority of state law', and rewards them with an exemption from military service. Lorberbaum refers to the costly and controversial exemption from national service and work for the ultra-Orthodox Haredim. 'Given the consequences, we might argue that the Israeli political system's continuous reluctance to address the adequate place of religion in the polity is nothing short of criminal.'⁵⁸

Conclusion

One need only briefly read the comments sections of the news articles cited to discover the scale of public engagement with online news and social media. The speed and relative anonymity granted by the Internet do encourage the promotion of extreme and highly contentious views, which would be censored by traditional news media. What the online responses to Waters' protest primarily, but also the other cases identified here, reveal is the scale of interest globally, of the role of religious identity in the Jewish state, and its impact upon Arab Israeli and Palestinian civilians. What is also demonstrated is the power of a public figure in harnessing media interest and encouraging engagement with the issue. The role that the newspaper websites, online watchdog sites and social networking play in perpetuating the debate on anti-Semitism and the right to criticize the Israeli State permit a provocative discussion which at times has led to the publication of anti-Semitic views. Yet, what these news stories have achieved is a widely accessible public debate on such politically and theologically intimidating issues as theocracy and the right to freedom of religious

⁵⁸ Menachem Lorberbaum, 'Religion and State in Israel', in Moshe Halbertal and Donniel Hartman, eds, *Judaism and the Challenges of Modern Life* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 152-64 at p. 154.

expression more broadly, and anti-Semitism and the State of Israel more specifically. The Jewish faith has explored the impact of the Holocaust for decades, yet Christian public theology has struggled to find its voice in this debate with the confidence that artists, Scarfe and Waters have demonstrated. The technologies of communication that Waters had set out to explore proved themselves to be successful in bringing together a global audience prepared to challenge these issues, even if the points of view propagated were polarized.

Such is the scale and nature of the Holocaust, it problematizes vital issues which public theology should be addressing, such as the relationship between religion and the state, and the fraught crisis in the Middle East. Former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Immanuel Jakobovits, who fled Nazi Germany, writes of his doubts about the sacrosanctity of the Holocaust and its use as ‘cardinal doctrine.’⁵⁹ Using the Holocaust as a shield against serious political and theological debate is disingenuous and evasive. Furthermore, it performs a disservice to all the victims and survivors, and as Jakobovits expressed, does not heal old ‘wounds inflicted on the morale and spirit’ of the Jewish people.⁶⁰ I conclude with a response to Elie Wiesel who has so often pleaded for silence and restraint against attempts to de-mystify the Holocaust, and who vows in his memoir that ‘we must never use the Holocaust for political purposes.’⁶¹ That the Holocaust continues to be used for political purposes in relation to religion in the public sphere is evident. It is necessary to recognize that this occurs and to challenge the political and theological taboo, which inhibits public debate on these themes. This is not to deny the authority of individuals like Wiesel or their importance in maintaining a sensitive and respectful Holocaust memory in the public sphere, but to encourage what is clearly a challenging yet engaging public debate.

⁵⁹ Immanuel Jakobovits ‘Faith, Ethics and the Holocaust: Some personal, theological and religious reflections to the Holocaust’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 3:4 (1988), 371-81 at 371.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Elie Wiesel, *And the Sea is Never Full: Memoirs 1969* – (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 182.