The Holocaust
and the Foundation of
Jewish Identity

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The question of the place of the Holocaust in the formation of Jewish-Israeli identity is one of the most difficult and charged issues confronting Israeli society. From those dark days until today, the Jewish and Israeli public has grappled with the subject from various angles. In this essay, I seek to distinguish between two different questions that underlie this debate: The *factual question*—is the Holocaust indeed a formative event for Jewish-Israeli identity? And the *moral question*—ought this be so?

The first question is essentially the province of those engaged in the social sciences—sociologists, psychologists, historians, or political scientists; the second question, being a normative issue, is the concern of philosophers or critical theorists. As numerous studies make clear, the Holocaust had and still has a cardinal place in the formation of Jewish-Israeli identity. But this fact in and of itself does not substantiate the claim that the Holocaust *ought to* have such a defining role, as value judgments do not necessarily proceed from given facts. To deal with the moral question, then, we must examine how identity is established and what function it fulfills.

The model of identity on which my analysis is based originates in notions of existentialist thought that later made their way into social research and cultural criticism. According to this model, the primary contours on which individual or group identity is constituted are the past and the future. The past encompasses the culture into which one is born—the culture that shapes the language, memory, and basic orientation of the individual in the world. A human being is born into a past; in Heidegger's words, he is "thrown" (*geworfen*)—that is, he does not create himself, but rather finds himself enmeshed in memory, language, ethos, and myth. The opposite contour, the future, is a horizon of open possibilities, founded on man's being a creature of free will who may choose and mold his own life.

The possibilities with which man is faced in relation to the past are varied, ranging between two fundamental and contrasting poles—complete rejection or absolute adoption. Complete rejection of the past means detaching oneself from an essential element of one's being. The past, after all, is one of the foundational contours of man. Absolute adoption of the past, however, means surrendering one's freedom, giving up the ability to be master and sovereign of oneself.

The cultural identity model is located between these two contrasting options. It presupposes that an identity that is not alienated is based on continuous dialogue between past and present. An in-depth description of this dialogue was suggested by philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of the "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontyerschmelzung*).[1] According to Gadamer, the point of departure of the dialogue is the present; man returns to the past, to the culture in which he finds himself, out of the present in which he exists. This very present, however, is based both on a culture rooted in the past and on a conscious engagement with different contexts and cultures in the present, which man has internalized and turned into an integral part of his being. Identity, then, is not a given, static essence, but is rather established in a dynamic dialogical process within the cultural

field itself. This cultural field is formed by the merging of past and present. It is admittedly possible to establish an identity that is missing one of the contours, either past or present; but in cultural terms, such an identity constitutes a type of self-alienation, as it forfeits one of its founding elements.

Identity plays a central role in our lives. It provides us with *fundamental norms and values*. Admittedly, not all norms and values are grounded in identity. The values by which a bank clerk works, for example, do not necessarily stem from his identity—at least not from its very core. However, certain values and norms do indeed reflect identity itself, particularly those that apply to the totality of practices in our lives, or to which individuals and societies attribute a pivotal role in their actual being. Humans can change values and norms that are not central to their lives with relative ease; thus, in the above example of the bank clerk, the norms and values that guide him in his work may be easily replaced with a change of profession; assuming a new professional role does not necessarily alter one's other practices. In contrast, values and norms that reflect one's identity fulfill a more central role, and replacing them demands an extreme mental-existential effort. As the principal values and norms of our identity provide our basic orientation in the world, our immediate concepts of our surroundings, and our criteria for distinguishing right from wrong, their replacement often means a radical transformation of the worldview by which we function.

This conceptual framework allows us to return to the question of the proper place of the Holocaust in the constitution of identity. The debate surrounding this question, in accordance with the theory we have just outlined, is demarcated by two antithetical positions: The first seeks to ground all of Jewish identity in the Holocaust, while the second aims to remove the Holocaust from the purview of discussion completely. The former position was articulated by literary scholar Harold Fisch, who believed that the Holocaust was a turning point for Jewish identity:

If the Jewish life in Europe lay shattered by the Holocaust, then the dream of the Emancipation… lay shattered also…. The great liberal hope first proclaimed at the time of the revolution had come to an end. Europe had seemed, for a century and more, to be holding out a promise of liberty, fraternity, and equality, a secular messianism in which the differences between men, black and white, Jew and Gentile, would melt away. The Holocaust had changed all this. The remnant of European Jewry was sickened not only by its bereavement but also by the new glimpse it had had of the hidden face of Western culture…. It may be that Israel was not ready for the Jewish Messiah, but there would be no non-Jewish Messiah either.[2]

According to this position, the Holocaust serves as a decree of banishment of the Jew from the universal community of mankind. From now on, the Jew must form his identity in complete separation and isolation.

Another version of this view was put forth by essayist Jean Améry, who discovered the inevitability of his Jewish identity in the wake of Auschwitz. He realized that he was a Jew not because he chose to be a Jew, but because the others—the Nazis—saw him as one. As far as Améry is concerned, he shares no cultural tradition or heritage with other Jews, and does not hesitate to argue that

If being a Jew means sharing a religious creed with other Jews, participating in Jewish cultural and family tradition, cultivating a Jewish national ideal, then I find myself in a hopeless situation…. If being a Jew implies having a cultural heritage or religious ties, then I was not one and can never become one.[3]

Moreover, recognizing the profound meaning of tradition, Améry rejects the possibility of readopting the Jewish heritage, since

One can reestablish the link with a tradition that one has lost, but one cannot freely invent it for oneself, that is the problem. Since I was not a Jew, I am not one; and since I am not one, I won't be able to become one…. To be who one is by becoming the person one should be and wants to be: for

me this dialectical process of self-realization is obstructed. Because being Something, not as metaphysical essence, but as the simple summation of early experience, absolutely has priority. Everyone must be who he was in the first years of his life, even if later these were buried under. No one can become what he cannot find in his memories.[4]

Both writers establish the Holocaust as the constitutive—and possibly exclusive—foundation of their Jewish identity. Fisch's position is that of a Jew who is in touch with the core of his historical being, always carrying the conscious burden of the past. In the face of the horrors of the Holocaust, such a Jew might choose to burn the bridge leading to the other side. Améry, by contrast, does not share Fisch's historical and cultural consciousness. He was not born into Jewish history and memory, and thus finds himself trapped in the same Jewish reality willingly embraced by Fisch. His sense of entrapment derives precisely from the fact that identity expresses the totality of the culture in which one lives and acts. Since Améry does not live in the cultural and historical space that circumscribes Jewish existence, he finds himself locked in an identity that is essentially foreign to him. And yet, surprisingly, it is precisely because of Auschwitz that he affirms his Jewishness for the very first time. Auschwitz imposes upon him the inevitability of being a Jew; he is a Jew not because he chose his Jewishness, but because this Jewishness has been forced upon him by his would-be murderers. He writes:

> I can speak solely for myself—and, even if with caution, for contemporaries, probably numbering into the millions, whose being Jewish burst upon them with elemental force…. For them, for me, being a Jew means feeling the tragedy of yesterday as an inner oppression. On my left forearm I bear the Auschwitz number; it reads more briefly than the Pentateuch or the Talmud and yet provides more thorough information. It is also more binding than basic formulas of Jewish existence…. If… I say: I am a Jew, then I mean that by those realities and possibilities that are summed up in the Auschwitz number.[5]

At the other end of the scale is the position that seeks to remove the Holocaust from the horizon of our identity. Yehuda Elkana, a noted Israeli scholar, eloquently defends this thesis in an inspiring essay titled "The Need to Forget":

> I see no greater threat to the future of the State of Israel than the fact that the Holocaust has systematically and forcefully penetrated the consciousness of the Israeli public, even that large segment that did not experience the Holocaust…. It may be that it is important for the world at large to remember. I am not even sure about that, but in any case it is not our problem. Every nation, including the Germans, will decide their own way, and on the basis of their own criteria, whether they want to remember or not. For our part, we must learn to forget! Today I see no more important political and educational task for the leaders of this nation than to take their stand on the side of life, to dedicate themselves to creating our future, and not to be preoccupied from morning to night with symbols, ceremonies, and lessons of the Holocaust. They must uproot the domination of that historical "remember!" over our lives.[6]

For Elkana, the Holocaust is a symptom of the past, and dwelling on it means dwelling on the past. Yet life is based not on the past but on the future. Moreover, symbols and ceremonies, which are vital foundations of culture, should be grounded in a vision of the future rather than in lessons of the past. True, Elkana does not make his argument about the past in general, but focuses specifically on the issue of the Holocaust. His point, however, is clear: Society must be facing its future rather than its past. What is merely alluded to in Elkana's article is explicitly stated by sociologist Uri Ram, who argued in a similar vein that "secularism is the recognition of the absence of a given meaning in the world. Freedom is the creation of meaning out of one's own choices."[7]

My central claim is that these two opposing views present an inadequate perception of the past. The first reduces the entire past to one event, isolating it from the historical-cultural entirety that constitutes the foundation of

identity; the second does not properly recognize the crucial role of history, tradition, and heritage in defining identity. Contrary to these two positions, I would like to suggest a third approach, one which rejects the centrality of the Holocaust *in and of itself* in the formation of Jewish-Israeli identity, but at the same time sees it as an inherent part of Jewish tradition and culture.

The reasons for rejecting the Holocaust as a cornerstone of Jewish identity are several. First, perceiving the Holocaust as an independent and separate foundation for identity essentially dissociates it from its broader frame of reference. Placing the Holocaust at the center means placing death at the center, since isolating it from its context leaves only the conduct of the victims in the face of annihilation. In directing the memory to the event itself, the six million murdered and those who survived are stripped of their concrete historical existence, and labeled as nameless, faceless "victims." The space of Holocaust remembrance becomes, in anthropological terms, "sacred time," occurring in a "sacred place"; it is a space wholly removed from the fabric of life, a space distinguished by exceptional rules and unique ritualism whose purpose is to establish the status of the victims as victims. The Holocaust is regarded as an independent event that undergoes a process of ceremonization, and, like all rituals, requires objects left behind by the victims to symbolize death: pictures, personal items, letters, and the like. To use the terms coined by historian Saul Friedländer, this ritual reflects "kitsch and death." Death becomes an aesthetic phenomenon; it ceases to be "real death in its everyday horror and tragic banality," and becomes "but a ritualized, stylized, and aestheticized death, a death that wills itself the carrier of horror, decrepitude, and monstrosity, but which ultimately and definitely appears as a poisonous apotheosis."[8] Friedländer, of course, designated the term "kitsch and death" to describe certain aspects of Nazi culture, but I contend that—despite the fundamental difference between them—Nazism and the sacralization of the Holocaust have this element in common.

Historian Hanna Yablonka went even further in speaking of a "necro-philiac pornographic" attitude toward the Holocaust.[9]

Setting up the Holocaust as a foundation of identity is tantamount to a rejection of the historical past, with all of its multiple layers and meanings. In Yablonka's words, "from the rejection of exile we leaped to complete identification with the devastation of exile, without internalizing the wonderful cultural normative heritage that we had there"; and in a personal tone she adds, "this is perhaps the worst thing, that even today we make no reference to the cultural baggage that vanished with the victims. But what we do have is an almost obsessive occupation with the ways they were murdered."[10] The Holocaust, it seems, is an enclosed space, a sealed void, allowing for one's dissociation from the historic dimension of identity.[11] It is worth noting, in this context, an interesting empirical finding indicated by sociologist Yair Auron: Despite Israelis' growing identification with victims of the Holocaust, there is no parallel increase in identification with Jewish life in the diaspora.[12] This reinforces the assumption that the Holocaust is perceived as a closed, well-defined space, dedicated to death rather than to life, and thereby powerless to initiate a process of identity formation that encourages openness toward the past and toward life in the past.

Second, placing the Holocaust at the crux of Jewish identity means that this identity is determined from without, through an outsider's perspective and perception; the individual is defined and positioned by the other. Indeed, Jean-Paul Sartre described the Jew in much the same way: The Jew, he claimed, is he who is perceived as a Jew by others.[13] This assertion is based on a complete misunderstanding of the modes of Jewish identity established within a broad historical-cultural context. But grounding Jewish identity in the Holocaust goes even further than Sartre, for it perceives the Jew as he who was murdered by the other. It is not the interpreting gaze of the other that determines the Jewishness of the Jew, but the actual death of the Jew at the hands of the other. The murderer is granted monopoly over establishing one's Jewishness, a Jewishness of no inherent value or meaning. The Jew's

fate and consciousness are once more deposited in the hands of his killers. Only those who do not understand how identity is shaped—and the crucial role of culture and history in this process—would base the identity of the victims on the acts of their murderers.

Third, an identity must not be founded on trauma and tragedy. Such an identity will ultimately come to be dominated by trauma. It is a recipe for a neurotic, anxious, confined, spiritually stunted life, limiting one's capacity for agency and action. In the words of Amos Oz, "the major obstacle to our reentry into history is, ironically, our enslavement to the horrors of history. The addiction to memory has debilitated the addict. 'History poisoning' is an obstacle to making history."[14]

Moreover, forming an identity on the basis of catastrophe and trauma turns the Jew into an eternal victim. Victim mentality has severe moral ramifications. A particularly poignant warning against some of these ramifications was given in a Holocaust Remembrance Day and Memorial Day editorial in the newspaper *Hakibbutz* (1998):

> From the days of "Remember what Amalek did unto you" (Deuteronomy 25:17) to "Forever, my brother, I will always remember you" [from "Crying for You," an Israeli memorial song], from the *Yizkor* prayer in memory of the six million who were murdered in the Holocaust to the *Yizkor* prayer in commemoration of fallen IDF soldiers, a cloud of memories hangs over us and danger lurks at our doorstep—because memory can be the worst counselor of all, for a person as well as a nation. It can paralyze like venomous poison; it can make us obdurate to ourselves, our feelings, the pain and needs of others; it can bring us to total inaction, to apathy. But it can also constantly whisper in our ear: We always were and always will be the victim. The entire world is against us. In every generation. Forever shall the sword devour. And thus the response is: xenophobia, anger, vengeance, "an eye for an eye," and the resulting conclusion—to eternally remain locked in a cycle of violence and killing. To add more and more Days of Awe to the mountains of memory piling on top of us.[15]

Giving the Holocaust a central role in the formation of Jewish identity is problematic for one more reason. It places the Jew squarely within the realm of the just and the moral, since in the Holocaust the division between good and evil was absolute. The victim—and only he—is therefore identified with the good, while the murderer is identified with ultimate evil and abomination. Perceiving the Jew as right in the absolute sense might relieve him of the need to reexamine his moral positions in relation to others. In the Israeli reality of constant confrontation with the Palestinians, such an approach is particularly dangerous.

In sum, the constitution of an identity grounded in the Holocaust as a ritualized event forms an inadequate, shallow character that cannot open itself to the horizons of the past, and fails to contend properly with its existence in the present; a character that surrounds itself with walls of impenetrability and segregation, thus abandoning the faculty of self-reflection. Building identity on the basis of the Holocaust, it seems, is an extension of the Zionist effort to construct a national persona devoid of any historical depth. What began with a rejection of the past in order to create a "new Jew" and a new history, concludes with a return to a "mythic" past, to ritualistic and ahistorical sacred time—the Holocaust.[16]

The alternative attempt to establish an identity with no past and no memory is equally problematic. And though such a project is seemingly possible, it relies on a cultural misconception. Human existence with no past is fundamentally abstract; man is a historical being who creates and fashions himself through constant dialogue with the past, which harbors tradition, culture, memory, myth, and ethos. A future without a past is rootless. The presence of the past is essential, if only to be rejected in favor of another possibility. Moreover, tradition and culture supply the materials from which the individual chooses what he deems best. Even if one repudiates certain parts of the past, he may not necessarily reject it in its entirety. A future without a past is constant negation of the future itself, as every future

becomes a past, and if the past is discarded only because it is past, then one's life is formed as a perpetual rejection of his concrete existence.

Indeed, if the link to the past consists only of a return to the Holocaust as a mythical, sacred history, we would do better to adopt the imperative of forgetting. Returning to such a time means negating the real past, negating heritage and tradition. The conclusion of everything we have said thus far is that the Holocaust cannot serve as an independent foundation of identity. That is to say, one cannot refer to the Holocaust as an isolated event in Jewish history, and in that manner base one's identity on it. This does not mean, however, that one must forget the Holocaust and form an identity completely cut off from it. The Holocaust is part of Jewish history, and the constitution of Jewish identity requires forging a bond with the nation's history, heritage, and culture. A return to Jewish history requires a return to the Holocaust as well, as the closing chapter of one segment of that history—the period of exile, with all of its accomplishments and its downfalls. With such a return the victims reacquire their complex, human face. Thus the Holocaust is conceived no longer as a vision of "kitsch and death," but rather as the final note in the story of a world that was destroyed.

The path history charts to the Holocaust is not one of ritual; it has no initiation ceremonies à la The March of the Living, nor does it sanctify the Holocaust and its accessories. This path seeks to properly understand the real history of the Jewish people in the diaspora, a history that includes times of life and creativity that came to an abrupt end in the death camps. By this account, the Holocaust is located within Jewish history, not outside of it, not on "another planet" (to use the term coined by the author Yehiel Dinur for Auschwitz). One must confront it not through emotional manipulation or shock therapy, but by in-depth study of its history in the context of Jewish existence on the one hand, and the place of that existence within world history on the other.

Such an exploration is an ongoing process—not an isolated event taking place at given times and through certain ceremonies. In his book *Zakhor*, historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi sought to distinguish between cultural

memory and scientific historiography.[17] Such a distinction might be tempting in our case, but it would not be valid. Cultural memory, as a component of identity, must be shaped through the rigorous historical study of the Jewish past, in which the Holocaust is the terrible finale of a two-thousand-year journey.

This basic analysis allows us to take one step further in formulating the relationship between Holocaust and identity. Sociologist Moshe Zuckermann argued that the fundamental meaning of the Holocaust is found in its universal nature:

> It is certainly possible to see the Holocaust as the first climax of a continuous civilization-wide process, an intensifying human practice, which gradually draws to the complete elimination of the individual, his sweeping transformation into a speck swallowed up by a "totally administered world."[18]
>
> The Hitlerian phenomenon was a rupture in civilization. It was the first time in history that a people was destroyed by an administrative order, in a planned and industrial manner.[19]

According to this view, Holocaust commemoration ought to focus on its universalistic aspects—the devaluation of man on the one hand, and the domination of technology on the other. In contrast to Yehuda Elkana, who urged us to forget the past, Zuckermann encourages remembrance, yet he too underscores the memory and conception of the Holocaust as a decontextualized occurrence:

> I believe it is important to remember. The question is how to remember. First, I would like the Holocaust to be taught chapter by chapter, as an action done by men to other men, and not as something done by fiends to human beings. One must teach how the Holocaust was conceived and what was the ideology that drove its planners, how it was carried out and what the world's reaction was…. Second, I would like teachers and

political leaders to inculcate in us the understanding that what happened in the Holocaust could have happened and may still happen, anywhere in the world, to all peoples.[20]

Isolating the Holocaust and viewing it as an expression of a general human phenomenon minimizes its particularistic Jewish aspects in favor of universalistic elements, which, for Zuckermann, are more important. And indeed, when the interviewer challenged him as to the absurdity of the demand "that any nation draw from its devastation universal lessons and store in its collective memory not only its tragedy but the tragedy of all humanity," Zuckermann answered that "perhaps I am making an unprecedented demand. Though we were the primary sufferers, the meaning of the event is nonetheless universal."[21]

Underlying this view is the assumption that universal aspects are alone of value, or at least that they are of greater value than particular ones. And indeed, historian Tom Segev, whose opinion on the matter is similar to Zuckermann's, does not hesitate to assert:

> The Israeli perception of the Holocaust would be not only more universal but also more fair and correct if it were to learn from memorial institutes abroad, including Jewish organizations. Not far from Anne Frank's home in Amsterdam there is a monument in memory of the homosexuals killed in the Holocaust.…[22]

Attributing such extreme importance to universality is first and foremost an assertion of what constitutes moral validity. Like the proponents of the Enlightenment before them, Zuckermann, Segev, and those holding their position maintain that a claim of moral value is always universal. Hence, if the Holocaust is to serve as the ultimate representation of evil, it cannot be limited to the space of Jewish life; the evil would not be absolute evil, and the struggle against it would not be an absolute struggle, if it were evil directed only toward Jews. The aggrandizement of personal evil obstructs the war against universal evil.

Detailed criticism of this meta-ethical position is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that even if the primary principles upon which a moral claim rests must be universal, it does not necessarily follow that the secondary principles should also be so. The first principle in the moral judgment of the Holocaust regards—and ought to regard—the general prohibition against murder of human beings. But the second, factual principle can relate to the fact that in the Holocaust Jews were killed because they were Jews, not because they were human beings. In fact, from the Nazis' perspective, they were killed because they were *not* human beings. The Nazis, too, in their perverse minds, knew that it was forbidden to kill human beings, so they excluded the Jews from the community of mankind. The evil of the Holocaust is precisely this act of exclusion, a point that must not be overlooked in the moral judgment of the event. The same holds for other cases of genocide: Condemning the extermination of the Jews does not mean that atrocities against other groups have not been committed. Recognizing the evil done to the Jews does not depend, and ought not depend, on the moral judgment of other evils perpetrated during the Holocaust. One evil does not cancel out another.

But the rejection of the emphasis on the Jewish tragedy bespeaks more than just a unique meta-ethic. It also, and perhaps especially, reflects a certain attitude toward the question of human identity. The memory of the Holocaust and its horrors, needless to say, sears the heart and mind of every Jew. This is particularly true of anyone who has lost family and friends in the Holocaust. The experience of loss has very often shaped the identities of Holocaust survivors, and has even gone on to shape the identities of those born into the second and third generations. It is wrong to deny people their memories and their consciousness, imprinted with the recollection of real loss, and demand that they forsake their concrete, actual existence in favor of a universalistic humanism. In this respect, the call for a commemoration that rejects or minimizes the particularistic aspects of the Holocaust is another deadly blow to those who have died and an offense against those

still living. The victims of the Holocaust were not nondescript people who just happened to be Jews; not at all! Though members of other nations were murdered in the Holocaust, it was also—and primarily—Jews who were killed, *because* they were Jews. Turning the victims into "mere" human beings, thereby invalidating their Jewishness, is in essence a second murder, a symptom of typical self-negation, one which banishes the past not only from the present, but also from the past itself, by creating an imaginary history. In the Holocaust, so this history goes, "people" were killed (and let it not dare be mentioned that those people were also—and primarily—Jews). Such a view is rooted in a denial of the past that actually took place. It deconstructs it completely, so as to claim that the past is no more than a projection of the present. It allows for the creation of a discourse in which the victims of the Holocaust are referred to as "people" and nothing more.

This position, in the final analysis, is founded on a misunderstanding of human identity. Human beings are members of more than one human community: As human beings, they are members, in one sense or another, of the universal community of humankind. But this membership does not come at the expense of membership in such particularistic communities as families, societies, or nations. The approach outlined above rejects all particularistic elements of human identity, for the affirmation of particularistic identity demands that one take into account the identities of those who died and the place they fill in the identities of those who remember: Those who died were Jews whose identity—or, at least, identification—was Jewish.[23]

This was the case, generally, for the victims themselves, this was the case for the Nazis, and this was the case in the memory of those who remember—in which Jewish fathers, Jewish mothers, and Jewish children were the ones who died. The claim that the lessons of the Holocaust should ignore its Jewish aspect denies the value and significance of the particularistic identity of human beings. The attempt to universalize the Holocaust stems from the desire to eliminate the particularity of identity.

Such a desire is based first and foremost on a concept of identity defined by self-negation, on the belief in the basic human aspiration to transcend the particular toward what is truly meaningful—universality. This view is easily disprovable: The rejection of particularism is a rejection of memory, of real history, of the specific time and space in which actual people live. Particular values and perspectives are no less important than universal ones, and ultimately, there is no absolute criterion for what has value and what does not. Living human beings, experiencing specific cultures and contexts, determine what has value for them.[24] Only an ardent advocate of pure rationalism can confidently argue that the universal alone is important.

Zuckermann repeatedly accuses Israeli society of exploiting the Holocaust in the service of the Zionist project, which has nothing to do with it.[25] He too, however, places the Holocaust within a universalist framework that fails to account for actual events: Namely, the death of Jews and the demise of a Jewish world. In response to what he calls "the instrumentalization of the Holocaust in the service of a Zionist ethos," he engages in an instrumentalization no less severe: turning the Jew into a means toward the end of a universalization of humanity.

This analysis does not necessarily lend itself to the conclusion that the Holocaust has no universal aspects. My point is more modest: In its real cultural context, the Holocaust has particular Jewish significance: Jews were murdered because of their Jewishness. The Holocaust is not "just" a moment in a universal human dialectic, even if it has such implications. Fixing it as such a moment means instrumentalizing it within a broader framework. By contrast, integrating the Holocaust in the particularistic memory does not remove it from human history. Quite the opposite; real historical memory is by nature particular. We remember places and times, myths and ideologies, practices and beliefs that are ultimately located within specific contexts. Universality is more often than not an expression of the need to escape the historical and the real.

Nevertheless, and despite the Holocaust's deep imprint in our people's memory, it must not become the cornerstone of Jewish identity. Establishing it as such is tantamount to its sweeping universalization: Both trends seek to constitute human existence outside the horizons of real historical being, stretched, as they are, between the future and the past.

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Notes

1. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

2. Harold Fisch, *The Zionist Revolution: A New Perspective* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), pp. 86-87.

3. Jean Améry, *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and Its Realities*, trans. Sidney Rosenfeld and Stella P. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1980), p. 83.

4. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, p. 84.

5. Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, p. 94.

6. Yehuda Elkana, "The Need to Forget," *Haaretz*, March 2, 1988 [Hebrew]. For an English translation, see www.einsteinforum.de/fileadmin/einsteinforum/downloads/victims_elkana.pdf.

7. Uri Ram, "The Right to Forget," in Adi Ophir, ed., *Fifty to Forty-Eight: Critical Moments in the History of the State of Israel*, special issue of *Theory and Criticism* 12-13 (Jerusalem: Van Leer, 1999), p. 357 [Hebrew].

8. Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 43.

9. Hanna Yablonka, "From 'Sheep to the Slaughter' to 'Holy Sheep,'" in Yona Hadari-Ramage, ed., *Thinking It Over: Conflicts in Israeli Public Thought* (Ramat Efal: Yad Tebenkin, 1994), p. 250 [Hebrew].

10. Yablonka, "From 'Sheep to the Slaughter,'" pp. 249-250.

11. Eliezer Schweid, *Zionism in a Post-Modern Era* (Jerusalem: Hasifria Hatzionit, 1996), pp. 94-96 [Hebrew].

12. Yair Auron, *Jewish-Israeli Identity* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1993), p. 106 [Hebrew].

13. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1948), pp. 69-76.

14. Amos Oz, *The Slopes of Lebanon*, trans. Maurie Goldberg-Bartura (New York: Vintage International, 1992), p. 121.

15. Ora Arnomi, "To Remember and Flourish," *Hakibbutz*, April 22, 1998 [Hebrew]. For a description of this lifestyle, see Améry, *At the Mind's Limits*, pp. 94-96.

16. For a perceptive, in-depth analysis of other problems associated with the Holocaust and its place in Israeli discourse, see Adi Ophir, *Working for the Present: Essays on Contemporary Israeli Culture* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2001), pp. 29-50 [Hebrew].

17. See Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1982).

18. Moshe Zuckermann, *On the Fabrication of Israelism: Myths and Ideology in a Society at Conflict* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2001), p. 75 [Hebrew].

19. Moshe Zuckermann, "Actions That Men Did to Men," interview with Yaron London, *Yediot Aharonot*, April 8, 1994 [Hebrew].

20. Moshe Zuckermann, "Actions That Men Did to Men."

21. Moshe Zuckermann, "Actions That Men Did to Men."

22. Tom Segev, "They Too Had Names," *Haaretz*, April 26, 1995 [Hebrew]. See also Ilan Gur-Ze'ev, *Toward Diasporic Education* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2004), pp. 129-138 [Hebrew].

23. On the distinction between identity and identification, see Avi Sagi, *The Jewish-Israeli Voyage: Culture and Identity* (Jerusalem: Shalom Hartman Institute, 2006), ch. 9.

24. See Sagi, *Jewish-Israeli Voyage*, ch. 8.

25. See Zuckermann, *On the Fabrication of Israelism*, pp. 73-137.