



The Center for the Study of
Contemporary European Jewry
The Lester and Sally Entin
Faculty of Humanities
Tel Aviv University

For a Righteous Cause

Annual Report 2025





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The Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University supports research on Jewish history, culture, and politics. In cooperation with the Irwin Cotler Institute for Democracy, Human Rights, and Justice, it publishes the flagship annual Antisemitism Worldwide Report. Every year, the Center organizes three seminars on Jewish affairs that are open to the public and publishes eight issues of Perspectives – analytic essays on contemporary Jewish life and thought.

The annual For a Righteous Cause Report, published by the Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry annually since 2022 on the eve of International Holocaust Remembrance Day, documents and analyzes some of the year's most important developments and initiatives in the fight against antisemitism and racism at large across the world. It explores educational programs, legislation, and judicial and political action with the aim to express gratitude to those who joined the righteous cause; encourage others to follow their example, and present policy proposals to improve existing programs.

A six-month team effort by nine experts based with the Center and beyond it, the Report relies on field observations, interviews, and diverse publications and data. It gives particular attention to initiatives in countries often overlooked by the media.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the tragedies of Muslim societies in our time is the proliferation of antisemitic rhetoric and Holocaust denial. These distortions not only feed publics with lunatic conspiracy theories and dehumanizing narratives and complicate efforts to bring peace to the Middle East but injure the dignity of those embracing them and stain Muslims with crimes largely originating from and committed by Europeans.

The popularity of such hateful discourses in Muslim countries makes the few efforts to offer credible information about the crimes of the Nazis commendable and crucial, even if their reach is small. A little light can dispel much darkness. The fourth annual For a Righteous Cause Report discusses Holocaust memorial museums in Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, and Albania.

The Indonesian museum, initiated by a local rabbi, Ya'akov Baruch, who leads a tiny Jewish community, was inaugurated amidst sharp criticism that claimed it serves Zionist interests. A visit to the museum and an interview with Baruch revealed how that criticism was overcome. The emoting exhibition has continued its physical and online presence in the largest majority-Muslim country in the world also after October 7 – albeit, in recent months, with smaller numbers of in-person visitors (p. 9).

The Dubai-based permanent exhibition on the Holocaust is the initiative of the Muslim Ahmad 'Ubayd al-Mansuri, a former parliament member, collector, and owner of the private Crossroad of Civilizations Museum. Al-Mansuri, a firm believer in humanity and in dialogue, opened the memorial exhibition in recognition of the singularity of the Holocaust and the need to further the knowledge of Arabs and others about the crimes of the Nazis. He spoke about the responses that the exhibition has evoked from visitors and what changed following the October 7 attack (p. 17).

Albanians can pride themselves for their conduct during the Holocaust. Albania is the only country in Europe where more Jews lived after the Second World War than before. Following the collapse of Communism, it presented a model for Islam that is moderate, peace-loving, and largely apolitical. Two new museums that are currently under construction in Albania will explore the unique culture and ethical codes that resulted in the protection of Jews in Albania and Kosovo. There is no better candidate to write about those projects than a former Tel Aviv University (TAU) student whose family took part in the efforts to save Jews 80 years ago (p. 20).

In telling the stories of Muslims who risked their lives to rescue Jews from harm, the exhibition in Dubai and the museums planned in Albania provide critical reminders that the single and most important divide within humanity is between people who can tell right from wrong and those who don't.

Our For a Righteous Cause report for 2024 highlighted the new zero-tolerance policy of the Dutch police against antisemitic football fans, but also noted the legal obstacles faced in implementing it. The violent attacks against Maccabi Tel Aviv fans in Amsterdam on November 7,

2024, in which pro-Hamas mobs of Middle Eastern descent forced Jews to show their passports and were brutally beaten, saw local police helpless, inefficient, and possibly indifferent. The events show that strong words against hate crimes mean little unless supported by firm, coordinated, and committed action by law enforcement. It was discouraging to see how quick commentators in Europe, and oddly enough in Israel, were to blame the victims. This is one root of the problem: hate crimes against Jews are explained and justified, whereas decent people should just condemn them unequivocally.

In November, a politician who incited a violent insurrection, threatened to lead another one, repeatedly engaged in or was tolerant of hate speech, and made antisemites welcomed members of his party, was elected for the second time President of the United States. This could not have happened in any healthy democracy. Donald Trump, while surrounded by isolationists, is a true friend of Israel. With the exception of anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox Jews, the vast majority of American Jews voted against him. Jews who learned the lessons of history know that as a minority, their best guarantee for freedom, security, and prosperity is to live in stable liberal-democratic societies. Bad days may be coming.

Jerry Seinfeld epitomized in the 1990s a new generation of carefree secular American Jews who took it for granted that their identity and American identity are one and the same. Following October 7, Seinfeld unequivocally and publicly stood by Israel, including through a visit to where the massacre took place. He spoke passionately about the rigor of his people, the Jewish people, and about his disappointment in seeing antisemitism reemerging. The political involvement of one of the greatest American icons of all time tells a bigger story than that of a comedian who speaks for a righteous cause, as an analysis of the treatment of Judaism in Seinfeld episodes reveals (p. 27).

The aftermath of October 7, which unleashed anti-liberal and anti-Zionist demons across the world, presented Jewish communities with difficult challenges. One alarming development in 2024 has been seeing Jewish and other supporters of Israel being discouraged, in some cases through bullying, from manifesting their identity and convictions in public spheres, including in places where pro-Hamas activists were given the fullest freedom, including through police protection, to spread their lies and incitement.

Gibraltar, a tiny British Overseas Territory, owes much of its survival as an autonomous realm and prosperity to its Jewish minority. Initially, the Gibraltar Jewish community decided not to respond to a pro-Hamas demonstration with a counter-demonstration in order to maintain social harmony on the rock. That gracious decision was greeted by another anti-Israel demonstration, at which time Jewish and other supporters of Israel decided they could no longer keep silent. The Jewish history of Gibraltar and how its Jewish community negotiated the post-October 7 realities are more than an exotic case study (p. 35).

Jewish educators faced particular challenges following October 7. Their students encountered antisemitism, some for the first time in their lives, and tried to make sense of a controversial war in an era of disinformation and direct exposure to horrific graphic images. The experiences of three Jewish educators in Britain and the United States reveal that the connections of some young Jews to Israel and to their Jewish roots grew because of the war. Yet it also alerted about

the ethical dilemmas the war in Gaza presented and about the danger that rallying against hate and a sense of victimhood would become the only definers of modern secular Jewish identity (p. 59).

Many of the people who call for the destruction of Israel in hate-mongering demonstrations, including on college campuses, notoriously keep silent about fascist Russia or Islamist Iran. They do not care about actual genocides that take place around the world, in particular, the Muslim world. Their pathetic, hypocritical, and often embarrassingly ignorant virtue-signaling is, for some reason, directed only against the one state Jews have. Perhaps it is time to concede that too much energy is wasted on debating them whether they are antisemites. Israel is the only country in the world that masses call for its annihilation on the streets of Europe, America, and Australia. This is unacceptable. This should not be normalized. And it must be stopped.

Projects of Holocaust remembrance in countries that the Nazis occupied, yet where significant portions of the populations took part in the German extermination efforts, face the complexity of a historical legacy of being both victims and villains. The establishment of the National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam in the spring of 2024 is commendable, all the more so given its declared objectives of informing about what made the Holocaust possible and who were the victims and perpetrators. Yet soon after its inauguration, a debate ensued about the minimal attention the museum gives to confirmed historical studies on the complacency and, in some cases, the enthused contribution of some in the Dutch population to the Nazi extermination machine. The debate reflects a broader controversy within the Netherlands. Perhaps it will serve to encourage modifications that will allow the museum to actualize its goals in a more profound way (p. 43).

In a political climate dominated by hate, it is easy to forget that compassion and respect for others are still strong currencies as well and that even the worst of racists are not necessarily incorrigible. The story of young Derek Black, a former leader of American white supremacism who became a crusader against that ideology, provides important lessons (p. 51).

Sir Max Hastings, the renowned British journalist, is one of the most prolific historians of the Second World War. His words, in a special interview for the For a Righteous Cause Report, against what he describes as the excessive attention given to the Holocaust in history classes, are certain to stir debate. Yet, they reflect a sentiment that exists within Western societies and deserves careful attention and consideration. Equally important is his analysis that Western democracies, in replication of their mistakes from the 1930s, are not investing enough in preparing for war against the forces that wish them harm (p. 63).

In our report for 2024, we called on the Israeli government to shut down the Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and Combating Antisemitism and to relegate work in these fields to the Foreign Ministry, which has experienced yet underfunded professionals with on-the-ground close relations with Jewish communities.

As could be expected, a year later, nothing has changed. The Diaspora Ministry still exists and still does not leave a mark other than by swallowing taxpayers' money and providing a job for a pompous backbencher. Israel still does not have a strategic, operational, and realistic plan for public diplomacy, for assisting Jewish communities, or for fighting antisemitism. This is a luxury it cannot afford.

THE MUSLIM WORLD

NEW HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUMS

Indonesia

I enter the small room that is the museum. The collection on display is impressive, with each piece carefully curated to educate and evoke knowledge and empathy. At the center of the room, a massive triple-decker wooden bunk bed that replicates the bunk beds used in Nazi concentration camps. A photo of Jewish prisoners living in horrible conditions, taken from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's website, is displayed on the middle bunk. Informational posters on the walls chronicle the rise of Adolf Hitler, the ideology of the Nazi regime, and the horrific crimes of the Holocaust. The posters feature several disturbing images, including black-and-white photographs of Nazi soldiers executing Jewish civilians and piles of corpses discovered in concentration camps.

None of this is unique in comparison to other Holocaust memorial museums. It is the location that makes this history museum historical in and of itself. The Indonesian Holocaust Museum, inaugurated in January 2022, is the first of its kind in the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, where the majority of the population either knows almost nothing about the crimes committed by the Nazis and their allies or, worse, entertains antisemitic notions and denies the Holocaust.

The founder of the museum is an Indonesian Rabbi, Ya'akov Baruch. It is part of the complex of the Sha'ar Hashamayim (The Gate of Heaven) synagogue, which Baruch opened in 2004 in Tondano, a secluded town with 68,000 residents on the island of Sulawesi in the predominantly Christian (67.3%) province of North Sulawesi in Indonesia.¹ Known for its natural splendor, the Province has a reputation for religious tourism and inter-faith tolerance.² The museum uses both Indonesian and English. Its construction took nearly three months.³ The inauguration took

- ¹ Jon Emont, "A Small Holocaust Museum Springs Up in a Remote Town – and Stirs a Big Backlash," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 12, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-small-holocaust-museum-springs-up-in-a-remote-townand-stirs-a-big-backlash-11644677414>; "Number of Population of Minahasa Regency by District (Souls), 2020-2022 [Indonesian]," *Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Minahasa*, November 3, 2023, <https://minahasakab.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/OTEjMg==/jumlah-penduduk-kabupaten-minahasa-menurut-kecamatan.html>; and "Percentage of Population by Regency/ City and Religion, 2022-2023 [Indonesian]," *Badan Pusat Statistik Provinsi Sulawesi Utara*, September 12, 2024, <https://sulut.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/NzMyZlI=/persentase-jumlah-penduduk-menurut-kabupaten-kota-dan-agama-yang-dianut.html>.
- ² "North Sulawesi Becomes the Proper Place for the Opening of a Holocaust Museum, Why? [Indonesian]," *KumparanNews*, January 29, 2022, <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/sulut-jadi-tempat-yang-pantas-untuk-pembukaan-museum-holocaust-kenapa-1xOzWiEWitO/full>.
- ³ Skivo Marcelino Mandey and Teuku Muhammad Valdy Arief, "Holocaust Museum is Built in Minahasa North Sulawesi, This Is Its Purpose [Indonesian]," *Kompas*, February 4, 2022, <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2022/02/04/060700878/museum-holocaust-didirikan-di-minahasa-sulut-ini-tujuannya?page=all#page2>.

place on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in a ceremony attended by the German Ambassador to Indonesia, Ina Lepel, and high-ranking local Indonesian government officials.⁴

Rabbi Baruch was born in 1982 in Jakarta to a Minahasan Protestant father and a Mongondow Muslim mother, Toar Palilingan. Raised a Christian, he only discovered his Jewish roots as a teenager in a conversation with his maternal grandmother, Sylvia van Beugen.⁵ She revealed to him that his relatives on his mother's side descended from a 19th-century Dutch Jewish immigrant named Elias van Beugen.⁶ He also learned that up to 40 of his relatives perished in the Holocaust, including in Auschwitz and Sobibor.

Acting upon this knowledge and his grandmother's wishes, Baruch adopted Judaism as his religion and took the initiative to open Sha'ar Hashamayim together with Oral Bollegraf, a Jew living in Manado.⁷ Since then, he has led a small congregation of Sephardic-Orthodox Indonesian Jews.

Baruch told me he decided to dedicate a museum to the Holocaust rather than to Judaism in general in order to highlight a universal message. The Holocaust, he said, serves as a stark warning to humanity about the dangers of hatred, racism, and religious intolerance that must never be forgotten.⁸

The synagogue complex where the museum is situated is guarded by metal fences that separate the site from the street, adding to its secluded atmosphere. A small black monolith resembling a guard post is situated near the entrance, while a handful of tiny surveillance cameras monitor the premises, ensuring the museum's and synagogue's security. The museum's physical presence is complemented by its online presence on platforms like Facebook and Instagram.

Admission to the museum, which is private and does not receive public funding, costs approximately one American dollar. Opening times are from Monday to Friday, from ten in the morning until six in the evening, but they are not strictly adhered to. For instance, during my visit, the gates were occasionally sealed and padlocked. This is because Baruch, who oversees the complex, lives in Manado, a city a few hours drive away, where he also serves as a lecturer at a local university. He attends the synagogue mainly on Friday evenings to lead the Shabbat service, returning to Manado after Shabbat concludes. This irregular schedule means visitors who arrive without prior notice may find themselves waiting at the locked gate. Locals, familiar with the situation, are generally sympathetic and direct visitors to a nearby Christian neighbor, Mr. Alfons, who serves as the caretaker in the rabbi's absence.

One particularly poignant experience for Baruch involved a group of conservative Muslim women in *hijabs* and *niqabs*. Upon seeing the photos of Jewish victims, they were moved to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Rizali Posumah, "Rabbi Yaakov Baruch, a Dutch Jewish Descendant Who Grew Up in an Interfaith Family [Indonesian]," *Tribun Manado*, July 14, 2022, <https://manado.tribunnews.com/2022/07/14/rabi-yaakov-baruch-keturunan-yahudi-belanda-yang-tumbuh-di-keluarga-beda-agama>.

⁶ Norimitsu Onishi, "In Silver of Indonesia, Public Embrace Judaism," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/23/world/asia/23indo.html>.

⁷ Interview by the author with Rabbi Ya'akov Baruch, September 21, 2024.

⁸ Interview by the author with Rabbi Ya'akov Baruch, June 26, 2024.

tears, unaware of the Holocaust before their visit.⁹ Baruch recalled how deeply this experience impacted him, as it was a profound reminder of the museum’s power to educate and inspire empathy, as well as a reminder of Indonesians’ unfamiliarity with the Holocaust.¹⁰

Another group of Indonesian elementary school children also left a lasting impression on the rabbi. Although he felt uneasy introducing young children to the horrors of the Holocaust, he believed it was a vital part of their learning experience, even if they left the museum somber.¹¹

In addition to educating visitors about the Holocaust, the museum also highlights the ongoing dangers of Nazi ideology. Several posters address modern manifestations of neo-Nazism, Holocaust denial, and the use of Nazi symbols. The posters avoid mentioning Israel, a decision that reflects the museum’s sensitivity to Indonesia’s official stance on the conflict in the Middle East.

The museum also features a collection of Judaica artifacts from the Nazi era. These include a *Chanukiah* from the Netherlands (1940), Shabbat candelabras, a 1940s shtreimel from Poland, and a memorial book listing the names of victims of Nazi persecution in the Netherlands, including those of the Rabbi’s family, the Van Beugens.

Despite the museum’s achievements, it faces challenges. Limited space has led to removing some exhibits, such as a video display featuring testimonies from Holocaust survivors. Additionally, the museum’s location in a small town means it is subject to occasional blackouts, and noise from the nearby street can disrupt the otherwise solemn atmosphere.

Visitor numbers have declined since the opening. To date, the museum has had as many as 2,000 visitors in three years of operation. After a busy start, the flow of visitors has gradually slowed from as many as 50 visitors a day to one visitor a day. Most visitors were from Indonesia, but others have come from Canada, the Netherlands, Australia, Singapore, the UK, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Israel. Baruch remains optimistic, stating that the message of the Holocaust has already reached many Indonesians.¹²

One visitor, Fernando Bororing, a Christian Minahasan from nearby Tomohon, told me he came because “I want to know the history.”¹³ Bororing said he learned about the Holocaust through YouTube videos but had never visited a museum dedicated to the subject. He was awestruck as he walked through the exhibits, touching the wooden bunks and examining the displays. The words “impressive” and “amazing” escaped his lips. His visit, he explained upon leaving, allowed him to experience history beyond what he had previously seen online. “In my heart, I feel relief that I can experience it and not only watch it on YouTube,” he said.¹⁴

The establishment of the museum and its continued operation have more than symbolic importance. Discussion of the Holocaust in public, the media, and among academics has been

⁹ Interviews by the author with Rabbi Ya’akov Baruch, June 26, 2024, and September 20, 2024.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Interviews by the author with Rabbi Ya’akov Baruch, September 20, 2024, and September 21, 2024.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview by the author with Fernando Bororing, September 20, 2024.

¹⁴ Ibid.

rare in Indonesia, and Holocaust education is almost non-existent, nowhere to be found in the pages of government-prepared history textbooks.¹⁵ There are few Indonesian resources and experts on the Holocaust, making accessing and acquiring knowledge difficult. When raised in academic discussions on Indonesian campuses, the Holocaust is usually discussed as part of a broader context, rarely treated on its own.

The lack of proper education on the Holocaust has resulted, as well as was encouraged, by the proliferation of antisemitic propaganda. Antisemitism is not a new phenomenon in Indonesia. It predated the Republic's founding, with influences reaching back to the colonial era.

In 1943, during the Japanese occupation of the Dutch East Indies, Sam Ratulangi, a teacher, journalist, and first governor of the Island of Sulawesi, considered today a “national hero” in Indonesia, introduced excerpts from *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in an article published in the journal *Asia Raya*. This publication, part of a Nazi-influenced Japanese propaganda campaign, marked the first time Indonesian readers encountered the notorious antisemitic forgery.¹⁶

Another Indonesian considered a “national hero,” the politician and diplomat Sukarjo Wiryopranoto, contributed to the spread of antisemitic ideas by depicting the Second World War as a conflict between Japanese collectivism (*Hakko Ichiu*) and Jewish individualism.¹⁷ Fascist-inspired political parties like *Parindra* and *Partai Fasis Indonesia* (PFI) emerged in the 1930s, adopting symbols and practices from European fascism, including the infamous Nazi salute.¹⁸

After the establishment of Israel in 1948, antisemitism in Indonesia was grounded primarily in anti-Israel sentiments. As the newly-independent, Muslim-majority nation aligned itself with the Arab world, Indonesian Jews were viewed with suspicion, including as agents of Israeli interests. Criticisms of Israel devolved into antisemitic rhetoric, with some Indonesians failing to distinguish between Judaism, Zionism, and the state of Israel.

Consequently, Indonesian Jews, some of whom descended from European colonists, became targets of hostility, linked to both Israel and colonialism. Rabbi Benjamin Meijer Verbrugge, an

¹⁵ Martina Safitry, Indah Wahyu Puji Utami & Zein Ilyas, *History* [Indonesian] (Jakarta, Pusat Perbukuan Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen, Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2021), <https://static.buku.kemdikbud.go.id/content/pdf/bukuteks/kurikulum21/Sejarah-BS-KLS-XI.pdf>, and “We Hope to Help Indonesian Teachers to Better Inform Their Students about the Holocaust and Genocide,” UNESCO, April 20, 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/we-hope-help-indonesian-teachers-better-inform-their-students-about-holocaust-and-genocide>.

¹⁶ Jeffery Halder, “Translations of Antisemitism: Jews, the Chinese, and Violence in Colonial and Post-colonial Indonesia,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 32, no. 94 (Carfax Publishing, 2004), 292-313.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Rahadian Rundjan, “How People Understand Hitler in Indonesia [Indonesian],” *Deutsche Welle*, February 7, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/id/bagaimana-orang-orang-memahami-hitler-di-indonesia/a-42440753>, and Yannick Lengkeek, “Parindra’s Loyal Cadres. Fascism and Anticolonial Nationalism in Late Colonial Indonesia, 1935-1942,” *International Institute for Asian Studies The Newsletter* 83 (2019), 22-23.

Indonesian Jewish leader, lamented that “people call us bastards because our grandfathers occupied Indonesia.”¹⁹

In the 1980s and 1990s, antisemitism remained widespread, fueled by the revival of Islamist groups.²⁰ In 1992, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was translated into Indonesian, and various adaptations of the text spread.²¹ A republication of Ratulangi’s antisemitic article in 1993 underscored the persistence of these ideas, with Indonesian editors seemingly remaining unaware that the Protocols were an antisemitic fabrication.²²

In the 2000s, antisemitic activities took new directions. From 2005 to 2006, *Angkasa*, a military and aviation magazine, offered Nazi-themed souvenirs like Iron Crosses and Waffen-SS keychains to attract readers to a trilogy of issues on Nazi military history.²³ Several years later, the Indonesian-language version of Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* was published after years of being banned. The book quickly became a bestseller, selling over 15,000 copies.²⁴ In 2013, the closure of the Beth Hashem Synagogue in Surabaya was forced by Islamist extremists protesting Israel’s military actions in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead.²⁵ Despite being a historic site, the oldest synagogue in the country, and a cultural landmark, it was targeted during anti-Israel demonstrations and was eventually demolished.²⁶ That same year, global attention was drawn to the *Soldatenkaffe* in Bandung, West Java, after the *Jakarta Globe* exposed its Nazi-themed décor, which included Swastika flags, portraits of Adolf Hitler, and servers dressed as SS officers. It turned out that the café had operated as a Nazi-glorification hub for two years. International outrage forced it to close down.²⁷ A survey conducted in 2014 found that 48% of the adult population at the time harbored antisemitic sentiments.²⁸

Jews in Indonesia are too few to have a political impact. The origins of today’s Indonesian Jews can be traced to Ashkenazi Dutch and European Jewish migrants who came to the Dutch East

¹⁹ Sebastian Strangio, “Opening of Indonesian Holocaust Museum Met with Islamist Backlash,” *The Diplomat*, February 4, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/opening-of-indonesian-holocaust-museum-met-with-islamist-backlash/>.

²⁰ Halder, “Translations of Antisemitism.”

²¹ Anthony Reid, “Jewish Conspiracy Stories in Southeast Asia,” *Indonesia and the Malay World* 38, no. 112 (Routledge, 2010), 373-385.

²² Halder, “Translations of Antisemitism.”

²³ “The Superpower of Nazi Germany (1933-1945) [Indonesian],” *Edisi Koleksi Angkasa, Angkasa*, 2005; “The Nazi’s War Machines [Indonesian],” *Edisi Koleksi Angkasa, Angkasa*, 2006; “Nazi’s Special Forces Core Troops of Nazi’s Power [Indonesian],” *Edisi Koleksi Angkasa, Angkasa*, 2006; and “Angkasa: Doesn’t Subside Flying Across Time [Indonesian],” *KumparanNEWS*, February 9, 2017, <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/angkasa-tak-surut-terbang-lintasi-masa/full>.

²⁴ Abdul Khalik, “‘Mein Kampf,’ ‘Das Kapital’ Free for Sale in Indonesia,” *The Jakarta Post*, August 7, 2008, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2008/08/07/039mein-kampf039-039das-kapital039-free-sale-indonesia.html>.

²⁵ Sudarto Murtaufiq, “Anti-Israel Demonstrators Seal Synagogue,” *NU Online*, January 8, 2009, <https://en.nu.or.id/news/anti-israel-demonstrators-seal-synagogue-KHidG>.

²⁶ Indra Harsaputra, “Group Protests Synagogue Demolition,” *The Jakarta Post*, September 17, 2013, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/09/17/group-protests-synagogue-demolition.html>.

²⁷ Ynetnews with AFP, “Indonesia: Nazi-themed Café Sparks Outrage,” *Ynetnews*, July 23, 2013, <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4408386,00.html>.

²⁸ “Global 100: Indonesia,” *Anti-Defamation League*, 2014, <https://global100.adl.org/country/indonesia/2014>.

Indies in the 19th century.²⁹ They were also joined by Jews from Iraq, Aden, and other areas of the Middle East.³⁰ The number of Jews in the colony already exceeded 2,500 in the late 1930s.³¹ It declined sharply after the Second World War, and by 1963, only around 50 community members were left in Indonesia.³² The small Jewish population that exists in present-day Indonesia is estimated at around 500 people in a country of over 270 million.

Indonesia has not ratified the Stockholm Declaration of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and Judaism is not officially recognized as one of the country's six major religions, complicating efforts to address the circulation of Nazi and other antisemitic texts.³³

Days after the Holocaust Museum was officially inaugurated, several Muslim organizations in Indonesia protested, calling for its closure. Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim, Head of Foreign Relations and International Cooperation of the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI), the country's top Islamic clerical body, voiced opposition: "We demand any exhibition to be stopped, and the Museum to be discontinued."³⁴ He linked his disapproval to the suffering of Palestinians under Israeli occupation, arguing that Jewish communities worldwide, including those in Indonesia, should recognize what he described as the atrocities committed by Israeli Zionists against the Palestinian people since 1948.³⁵

Leaders in the Islamist political party, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), joined the criticism. Hidayat Nur Wahid (HNW), a senior PKS figure and Deputy Speaker of Indonesia's parliament, the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR-RI), argued that the museum was part of an effort to whitewash Israeli crimes in Palestine.³⁶ He noted that the museum was opened in cooperation with Israel's Yad Vashem, whose chairman, Dani Dayan, is a prominent supporter of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, which are considered illegal by the United Nations.³⁷ Wahid claimed that the museum undermined Indonesia's long-standing support for Palestinian

²⁹ Nugroho, "Indonesia's Jews Come Out."

³⁰ Rotem Kowner, "An Obscure History," *Inside Indonesia*, June 20, 2011, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/archive/articles/an-obscure-history>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Jordyn Haime, "Despite Unrest in Indonesia, a Jewish Community Finds Peace Among Other Faith Groups," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, November 29, 2023, <https://www.jta.org/2023/11/29/global/despite-unrest-in-indonesia-a-jewish-community-finds-peace-among-other-faith-groups>, and Rotem Kowner, "Indonesia's Jews," *Inside Indonesia*, June 20, 2011, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/archive/articles/indonesia-s-jews>.

³³ The People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia, "HNW: Closing Holocaust Museum Proof of Indonesia's Solidarity with Palestine [Indonesian]," *MPR-RI*, February 6th, 2022, <https://www.mpr.go.id/berita/HNW:-Tutup-Museum-Holocaust-Bukti-Solidaritas-Indonesia--Dengan-Palestina>; "Prosecuting Beliefs Indonesia's Blasphemy Laws," *Amnesty International*, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/asa210182014en.pdf>; Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs – East Java, 1965, <https://jatim.kemenag.go.id/file/file/Undangundang/owiz1398054257.pdf>; and Johannes Nugroho, "Indonesia's Jews Come Out," *Tablet*, March 21, 2023, <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/indonesia-jews-come-out>.

³⁴ Jordyn Haime, "Indonesia Muslim Groups Demand Closure of Country's First-ever Holocaust Exhibition," *The Times of Israel*, February 10, 2022, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/indonesia-muslim-groups-demand-closure-of-countrys-first-ever-holocaust-exhibition/>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The People's Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia, "HNW: Stop the Holocaust Museum at Tondano [Indonesian]," *MPR-RI*, January 31, 2022, <https://www.mpr.go.id/berita/HNW:-Stop-Museum-Holocaust-Di-Tondano>.

³⁷ Ibid.

independence and criticized it as counterproductive to the government’s efforts to advocate for Palestinian statehood.³⁸

However, not all Indonesians shared these sentiments. Some offered more nuanced perspectives, emphasizing the educational value of the Holocaust Museum. Mukti Ali Qusyairi, Head of *Lembaga Bahtsul Masail Nahdlatul Ulama* (LBMNU), Jakarta, a branch of the world’s largest Islamic organization, *Nahdlatul Ulama*, stated that having a Holocaust Museum was reasonable as long as it did not promote the political interests of any specific state. He stressed that the exhibition could offer important lessons about dehumanization.³⁹

In North Sulawesi, the local community largely embraced the museum, viewing it as a non-political initiative that conveyed universal humanitarian values. Steven Kandouw, the Vice Governor of North Sulawesi, expressed support, noting, “Mistakes of the past, especially regarding human rights, must be fought against.”⁴⁰ Sandra Rondonuwu, a politician from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and a member of North Sulawesi’s Regional House of Representatives, also voiced no objection to the museum, noting the importance of remembering dark chapters in history in a television interview.⁴¹

Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs chose to downplay the controversy. Ministry spokesman Teuku Faizasyah stated that the museum was a community’s social, cultural, and religious initiative and did not affect Indonesia’s position on the Israel-Palestine conflict. He emphasized that the country’s stance on Palestinian independence remained unchanged.⁴²

The museum also received initially some positive media coverage, with national outlets like Kompas, tvOne, and TribunNetwork expressing surprise, pride, and curiosity at the development. However, as protests grew, media coverage shifted, using terms like “controversy,” “polemic,” and “rejection” to describe the public reaction. On social media, opposition intensified, with the hashtag #TolakMuseumHolocaust (Reject Holocaust Museum) trending on X.⁴³ Some Indonesians speculated that the museum’s inauguration was part of a broader effort to normalize relations

³⁸ The People’s Consultative Assembly of the Republic of Indonesia, “HNW: Closing Holocaust Museum Proof of Indonesia’s Solidarity with Palestine [Indonesian],” *MPR-RI*, February 6, 2022, <https://www.mpr.go.id/berita/HNW:-Tutup-Museum-Holocaust-Bukti-Solidaritas-Indonesia--Dengan-Palestina>.

³⁹ Dedik Priyanto, “Polemic on Jewish Holocaust Museum in Minahasa, NU DKI Asks Not to Bring Interests of Certain State [Indonesian],” *KompasTV*, February 2, 2022, <https://www.kompas.tv/nasional/257602/polemik-museum-holocaust-yahudi-di-minahasa-nu-dki-minta-tidak-bawa-kepentingan-negara-tertentu?page=all>.

⁴⁰ Devira Prastiwi, “The First Jewish Holocaust Museum in Indonesia is Officially Opened in Minahasa [Indonesian],” *Liputan 6*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/4876893/museum-holocaust-yahudi-pertama-di-indonesia-resmi-dibuka-di-minahasa?page=2>.

⁴¹ tvOne, “MUI Criticizes Holocaust Museum [Indonesian],” *Kabar Petang*, February 2, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FwDPx_GLo1o&t=48s.

⁴² Fathiyah Wardah, “The First Holocaust Museum in Indonesia is Opened at Minahasa [Indonesian],” *VOA Indonesia*, January 29, 2022, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/museum-holocaust-pertama-di-indonesia-dibuka-di-minahasa/6418015.html>, and Larasati Dyah Utami, “Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Response to the Attendance of German Ambassador in the Inauguration of the Holocaust Museum in Minahasa [Indonesian],” *Tribunnews*, February 3, 2022, <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2022/02/03/respons-kemenlu-ri-sikap-kehadiran-dubes-jerman-dalam-peresmian-museum-holocaust-di-minahasa>.

⁴³ Dhea Alifia Firdausi and Nuraeni, “The Fight of Diasporic Jews against Antisemitism through Indonesian Holocaust Museum [Indonesian],” *Indonesian Journal of Religion and Society* 5, no. 2 (2023), 96-111.

Photos by Aryo Brahmantyo



The Indonesia Holocaust Museum, Tondano, Indonesia, September 2024

with Israel. These suspicions fed into pre-existing antisemitic stigmas, further complicating the museum's reception.

In response to the growing backlash, the news channel tvOne hosted a live debate on its program, *Catatan Demokrasi*, titled “Geger Museum Yahudi di Indonesia” (Jewish Museum in Indonesia Controversy).⁴⁴ Rabbi Baruch participated in the discussion, explaining his motivation for founding the museum, but was confronted with various forms of antisemitism and Holocaust denial.

One of the guests, Ustadz Haikal Hassan, made inflammatory remarks, calling the Holocaust “the greatest hoax” and claiming it was used to generate financial support for Israel. Hassan also questioned the historical accuracy of the confirmed historical depictions of the Holocaust. He presented distorted census data and said there may have been six million rats in Europe but not six million Jews.⁴⁵ He argued that supporting Holocaust education was equivalent to supporting Israel, reflecting the deep entanglement of the two issues in the minds of some Indonesians.⁴⁶

Despite the initial heated opposition, tensions gradually subsided after Baruch engaged in dialogue with museum critics, including representatives from MUI. In a phone call with Sudarnoto Abdul Hakim, he clarified that the museum had no connection to Zionism or Israeli politics.⁴⁷ He invited MUI representatives to visit the museum to address any misunderstandings.⁴⁸ Abdul Hakim appreciated the gesture, calling it a positive step towards resolving the issue through

⁴⁴ tvOne, “Uproar over Jewish Museum in Indonesia [Indonesian],” *Catatan Demokrasi tvOne*, February 8, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdIB_gkuGvs.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Fathiyah Wardah, “The Long Road Education Effort of Holocaust Museum [Indonesian],” *VOA Indonesia*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/jalan-panjang-upaya-edukasi-museum-holocaust/6464275.html>.

⁴⁸ Interview by the author with Rabbi Ya’akov Baruch, June 26, 2024.

dialogue. He also acknowledged the humanitarian message of the museum, stating, “The Holocaust is a crime against humanity that goes against all religions.”⁴⁹

Gradually, the controversy faded. Baruch attributes this success to the role of dialogue in dispelling misconceptions and reducing antisemitic sentiment. He explains: “In Indonesia, we just need to sit together and talk heart to heart, and all the problems will be solved.”⁵⁰

– **Aryo Brahmantyo**

The United Arab Emirates

In a year that witnessed the proliferation of antisemitic rhetoric in Arab countries, the continued existence of the Holocaust memorial exhibition entitled “We Remember” at the Crossroad of Civilizations Museum in Dubai was a source of encouragement. Opened in May 2021 following the signing of the Abraham Accords, the exhibition was – and, sadly, remains – one of its kind in the Arab world.

Its initiator, Ahmad ‘Ubayd al-Mansuri (b. 1971), served as a Member of Parliament from 2011 to 2015. A businessman who gives the impression of having landed in our era directly from Victorian times, he established the museum in 2012 as a private enterprise in a building provided by the authorities to present his eclectic, passionate collection, including a magnificent gallery rich with Islamic books and artifacts and an equally impressive gallery showcasing pearls and how their trade shaped the region.

The Center for Study of Contemporary European Jewry discussed the courageous exhibition on the Holocaust in its first For a Righteous Cause Report in 2022⁵¹ as well as in an issue of Perspectives in 2023.⁵² When we approached al-Mansuri in October 2024, he explained that it was and remains important to separate the teaching of the history of the Holocaust from politics, and emphasized the singularity of the crimes committed by the Nazis compared to other genocides.

It is not clear how many Arabs have visited the exhibition since it opened. When we visited the museum in the spring of 2022, we found in the guestbook almost only comments from Israelis: some emotional, some patronizing. In October 2024, al-Mansuri said that the war had caused a sharp decline in the number of Israeli visitors, but not in the number of other visitors.

Since the establishment of the exhibition, only one school has refused to visit it; al-Mansuri could not remember a single case of visitors leaving the exhibition in protest after seeing its

⁴⁹ “Pro Contra of Holocaust Museum by Jewish Community in Minahasa [Indonesian],” *CNN Indonesia*, February 3, 2024, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220203062643-20-754330/pro-kontra-museum-holocaust-oleh-komunitas-yahudi-di-minahasa>.

⁵⁰ Interview by the author with Rabbi Ya‘akov Baruch, June 26, 2024.

⁵¹ Ofir Winter, “Discovering the Past, Building a Future,” *For A Righteous Cause*, January 2022, 6-7, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/for-a-righteous-cause/>, and Uriya Shavit, “Notes From the Emirates,” *Perspectives* 23, April 2023, <https://cst.tau.ac.il/perspectives/notes-from-the-emirates/>.

⁵² Shavit, “Notes From the Emirates.”

contents. He estimated that, to date, some 2,500 people from the UAE and the Gulf at large have been to the exhibition, along with several thousand schoolchildren, but said it was hard to know how many of the latter are Arab because some schools in the UAE are mixed nationally. He holds that one of the most important contributions of the Museum are visits by Arab teachers, who know nothing or very little about the Holocaust.

Al-Mansuri told us that he did not receive a single demand or threat to close down the exhibition following October 7. It did result in one change of plans, as he decided not to hold Holocaust memorial events. He explained: “when Israel described what happened on October 7 as a Holocaust, it made my work more difficult. I deplore what happened [on October 7], I do not belittle it, but these statements mean that Holocaust memorial events will become politicized. The history of the Holocaust should be taught as history.”⁵³

In the more than three years that the exhibition has existed, al-Mansuri faced a few unexpected questions, although not from Arabs. He was surprised when Jewish visitors from Tel Aviv asked him why he did not dedicate space to teach about the *Nakba*. Ironically, it was for him to tell them that the *Nakba* occurred within the context of a war between two national movements, whereas the Nazis murdered Jews for no other reason than to see their total annihilation. He was equally surprised when several American Jews told him they had no idea that Jews lived in Palestine already before the Holocaust.

The exhibition includes information on the persecution of European Jews by Nazi Germany from Kristallnacht to the implementation of the Final Solution, photos and exhibits commemorating the 1.5 million Jewish children murdered in the Holocaust, including Anne Frank, and personal testimonies of Holocaust survivors. At the center of the exhibition hall is a full-size figure of one of the most heartbreaking images of the Holocaust – the boy who raises his hands in surrender after the crashing of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. The Mishnah saying “whoever saves one life saves the world entire” and its Quranic (5:32) equivalent are presented on a poster. Another poster explains that Jews were the only group singled out for systematic annihilation by the Nazis. On a poster in a glassed cabinet to which a Star of David is attached, the eternal lines of the Lutheran pastor Martin Niemöller: “First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.”

Al-Mansuri believes the history of the Holocaust should be conveyed primarily through the stories of heroes who fought evil, and that this approach can be useful in Israel as well. The exhibition thus tells the story of the hundreds of Jews who found refuge in Albania in 1943 and were welcomed by its majority-Muslim population. It also tells the story of individual heroes, including Muhammad Hilmi, an Egyptian medical doctor who lived in Berlin and, at great personal risk, saved the life of a Jewish friend, Anna Boros, and several members of her family. Hilmi, who was helped by a German friend, Frieda Szturmann, was the first Arab to be recognized by Yad Vashem as “Righteous Among the Nations.”

⁵³ Conversation with the authors, October 15, 2024.

Photos by Uriya Shavit



The Holocaust gallery at the Crossroads of Civilizations Museum, Dubai

A large, colorful mural created by Israeli and Emirati artists graces the museum courtyard. It shows two young men, an Emirati and an Israeli, chatting and drinking coffee together against the backdrop of a sunset and skyscrapers. Above them is the word “cousins” in Arabic and Hebrew. Al-Mansuri belongs to a small group, yet one that deserves more attention, of patriotic Arabs who believe that peace is something that requires constant effort and patience. The establishment and uninterrupted operation of his memorial exhibition could not take place in the UAE without the government’s consent, indicating the strength of the Abraham Accords.

Asked why the existence of the exhibition about the Holocaust has been received so well in the UAE, as opposed to the controversies a similar enterprise initially stirred in Indonesia, al-Mansuri explained that his country allows people to develop in different ways, but not to attack others based on their race or religion: “We have people from places of conflict, for examples Indians and Pakistanis, Russians and Ukrainians, who live here in mutual respect. Here, it is not acceptable for Arabs to attack Jews or for Jews to attack Arabs.”⁵⁴

– Prof. Uriya Shavit and Dr. Ofir Winter

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Albania

The Albanian government is currently funding and promoting the construction of two museums in the country, one in the capital Tirana and one in the coastal city Vlora, dedicated to the history of the Albanian Jewish community and the story of how Jews in Albania were saved during the Holocaust. Slated to open by 2026 and by 2027, respectively, the museums will celebrate the traditional honor code “Besa,” which highlights trust, faith, and keeping promises in all aspects of life, and motivated Albanians to protect Jews during the Second World War.

During the Second World War, Albania was invaded by fascist Italy in 1939 and occupied by Nazi Germany in 1943.⁵⁵ Throughout the war, Albanians, Muslims and Christians alike, risked their lives by refusing to turn over lists of Jews to the Nazis, providing fake documentation to protect Jews, and sheltering Jewish citizens and Jewish refugees from deportation to concentration camps. Because they did so, Albania was the only country in Europe in which the Jewish population increased during the Second World War rather than decreased.⁵⁶

Protecting Jews was a matter of principle for Albanians. Their courage was grounded and born out of the centuries-old Besa code of honor.⁵⁷ Besa is rooted in the *Kanun* (Code) of Lekë Dukagjini, a 15th-century collection of customary laws that has governed Albanian society since.⁵⁸ Passed down through generations through proverbs and judgments until it was codified in the late 19th century, the *Kanun* serves as the foundation governing Albanian society and relationships between and among people, including sojourners and guests.

Under Besa, betraying a guest among Albanians is inviolable, as “the house of an Albanian belongs to God and to the guest.”⁵⁹ Moreover, according to the *Kanun*, “what is promised must be honored,” and giving one’s word forms an unbreakable pact. Failure to abide by this code of honor by disrespecting oaths or acting unfaithfully brings not only dishonor and shame but also community punishment on the one who transgresses.⁶⁰

Announced by Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama in 2023, the Besa Museum in Tirana will be situated in the historic House of Toptans in Tirana.⁶¹ The 19th-century residence belonged to the Toptani, a large noble Muslim landowning family in Ottoman and post-Ottoman Albania, several of whose members sheltered two Jewish families with whom they had no previous

⁵⁵ Bernd J. Fischer, *Albania at War, 1939-1945* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1999), 5, 157.

⁵⁶ Harvey Sarner, *Rescue in Albania: One Hundred Percent of Jews in Albania Rescued from Holocaust* (California: Brunswick Press, 1997), 63-65.

⁵⁷ Yad Vashem, “Besa – A Code of Honor,” nd, <https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/besa/index.asp>.

⁵⁸ Alma Kushova, “Besa,” OpenDemocracy.net, July 21, 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20151117234832/https://www.opendemocracy.net/arts/article_2114.jsp.

⁵⁹ Albana Mehmetaj, “Ernest Koliqi – Albanian Besa [Albanian],” *International Seminar for Albanian Language, Literature and Culture Journal* 37 (2018), 14, [https://web.archive.org/web/20191014210448/https://filologjia.uni-pr.edu/getattachment/Seminari/Seminari-37---v--2-\(per-shtyp\).pdf.aspx](https://web.archive.org/web/20191014210448/https://filologjia.uni-pr.edu/getattachment/Seminari/Seminari-37---v--2-(per-shtyp).pdf.aspx), and Tomer Misini, “Trust or Honor [Albanian],” Medium, February 16, 2019, <https://medium.com/@tomor73/besa-ose-nderi-1b4724a50de1>.

⁶⁰ Tonin Cobani, “Lekë Dukagjini [Albanian],” Kanuni.org, nd, <https://kanuni.org/lek%C3%AB-dukagjini>, and Elton Varfi, “Besa in the Canon of Lek Dukagjini [Albanian],” *Kronika Shqiptare*, June 12, 2011, <https://eltonvarfishqip.blogspot.com/2011/06/besa-ne-kanunin-e-lek-dukagjinit.html>.

⁶¹ Interview by the author with architect Jurtin Hajro, August 5, 2024.

relationship, the Levis and the Altaracs, out of their commitment to Besa.⁶² For their courageous act, Yad Vashem designated Atif and Ganimet Toptani as Righteous Among the Nations.⁶³

Designed by Oppenheim Architecture and funded by the Albanian government and private donations, the museum aims to commemorate Albanians who sheltered and rescued Jews during the Holocaust in embodiment of the spirit of Besa, and to highlight the broader historical context of Albania's relationship with the Jewish people and Jewish tradition, culture, and art.⁶⁴ Integrating the original architectural elements of the Toptani house with modern exhibition spaces, the museum will feature galleries that tell the story of Albanian hospitality, the concept of Besa, and the specific instances during which Albanians provided sanctuary to Jews.

The museum experience is planned to be immersive, including interactive exhibits that engage visitors in understanding the cultural and ethical significance of Besa. While the museum's construction has not garnered much press coverage to date, the Albanian government is firmly committed to its advancement as a means to highlight a proud historical moment for Albanians and pass its lessons on to the next generations.⁶⁵

In Vlora, the Albanian government is establishing the country's first Jewish Museum. Until the 1990s, the city was home to Albania's largest Jewish community. The museum will be housed in the historic synagogue located in the city's Old Town. Eneida Tarifi, the chairwoman of the Vlora Municipality's Committee for Education, Culture, and Sports, told me that the museum will be part of a larger cultural complex in the historical center of the city near three other museums: the National Museum of Independence, the Historical Museum, and the Ethnographic Museum.⁶⁶

Supported by the Albanian-American Development Foundation and the Albanian Jewish Community, and designed by the Israeli firm Kimmel Eshkolot Architects, the project has faced delays due to funding issues.⁶⁷ It will focus on the history of the Albanian Jewish community in the historical territory of Albania and the diaspora dating back to the second century, placing the Holocaust, Albanians' role in protecting Jews, and the concept of Besa within the context of this broader, longer history.⁶⁸

With the aim of becoming a cultural landmark, the Vlora Jewish Museum will highlight the long-standing coexistence of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Albania, showcasing the good relations and the mutual respect that have characterized their interactions for centuries. Its exhibitions will include personal stories, historical documents, and artifacts that illustrate the shared history of Albanians and Jews. The museum will serve as a center for education

⁶² Sarner, *Rescue in Albania*, 49-50.

⁶³ Yad Vashem, "Atif and Ganimet Toptani," nd, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/righteous/4021521>.

⁶⁴ Zvika Klein, "Albanian Gov't Announces Museum Celebrating Albanians Who Rescued Jews in WWII," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-733034>, and interview by the author with Jurtin Hajro, August 5, 2024.

⁶⁵ Klein, "Albanian Gov't Announces Museum."

⁶⁶ Interview by the author with Eneida Tarifi, August 8, 2024.

⁶⁷ Ibid. At present, the project has a 6.5-million-dollar budget.

⁶⁸ Zvika Klein, "Albania to Open Two New Jewish Museums in Vlora and Tirana," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 8, 2023, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/article-745686>, and interview by the author with Eneida Tarifi, August 8, 2024.

and reflection, emphasizing the importance of preserving these historical memories and the values of tolerance and humanity.⁶⁹

According to Tarifi, the local public has welcomed the project: “The Vlora Municipality, together with the Albanian people, will always be part of this cooperation [with the Albanian Jewish community], celebrating the connection between the two communities. We are very happy that this project will be in such a historic place as Vlora.”⁷⁰

There are good reasons for Albanians to be proud of their relations with and protection of Jews during the darkest days in modern history. Protecting the Jews who lived in their country already makes Albania shine as a force for good among European nations in the shameful historical chapter of the Holocaust. Protecting the Jewish refugees who entered it makes it all the more of an exception.

Under the rule of King Zog (September 1928 – April 1939), before the Italian takeover in 1939, the Albanian government welcomed and assisted Jewish refugees from neighboring countries, integrating them into the local Jewish communities, granting them visas and citizenship, and serving as a safe point of transit.⁷¹ By the eve of the Second World War, hundreds of Jews had found refuge in Albania, joining the country’s two-hundred-member community.⁷² During the Italian occupation (April 1939 – September 1943), hundreds more Jewish refugees continued to arrive in the country, and Albanian authorities ignored Italian orders to repatriate them to their countries of origin.⁷³

Under the Nazi occupation (September 1943 – November 1944), despite the risk and threat of death for anyone hiding Jews, Albanians remained steadfast in protecting and supporting hundreds of Jewish families and individuals. When upon the occupation, the Nazis asked for a list of Jews living in Albania, intending to deport them to concentration camps, the Albanian government refused.

The following spring, the Nazis demanded the Regent Mehdi Frashëri (head of the Albanian Government under their occupation) once again to list and to gather all the Jews. Jewish leaders in Albania, including Rafael Jakoeel and Mateo Matalia, appealed to Frashëri, who directed them to the Interior Minister, Xhafer Deva. Deva refused the Nazis’ request, arguing it violated Albania’s sovereignty and meddled in the country’s internal affairs, both of which, he claimed, violated the country’s agreement with the Germans. Deva also assured the Jewish community of their safety and that they would not be deported.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Interview by the author with Eneida Tarifi, August 8, 2024.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Sarner, *Rescue in Albania*, 42-44; David Cesarani, Daniel Fraenkel, Guy Miron, David Silberklang, and Aharon Weiss, “Albania,” in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, eds. Robert Rozett and Shmuel Spector (New York: Routledge, 2013), 104, and “Albania’s King Zog Extends Invitation to Jewish Settlers,” *The American Jewish World*, June 7, 1935, 3.

⁷² Yael Weinstock Mashbaum, “Jews in Albania,” Yad Vashem, nd. <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/general/jews-in-albania.html>.

⁷³ David Straub, “Jews in Albania,” in *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora: Origins, Experiences, and Culture*, ed. Mark Avrum Ehrlich (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 942-946.

⁷⁴ Sarner, *Rescue in Albania*, 42-44.

Photo by Shutterstock



Holocaust memorial for Jews deported during the Second World War, Tirana, Albania

While reporting Jews to Nazi authorities was theoretically possible, in practice, it was not – disgracing one’s family and village was out of the question. Adhering to and being motivated by Besa, Albanian Muslims and Christians inside and outside the country committed themselves to protecting their fellow Jewish Albanians and Jewish refugees fleeing persecution.

When the Axis powers invaded and occupied Yugoslavia in April 1941, hundreds of Jews from the country’s northern regions sought refuge in the Italian-controlled southern ethnic Albanian regions, which were annexed to following the Axis invasion to Italian-controlled Albania, joining some 90 Jewish families who lived there at the time.

The following year, the Nazis ordered the arrest of all Jews in Kosovo, prompting Albanian authorities to urge Jews to relocate to Albania proper. Approximately 500 Jews relocated and settled in Berat and Krujë, where local Albanians sheltered them. Those Jews who remained in Kosovo were afforded protection by Albanians there, who provided them with shelter and false documents.⁷⁵

Among those Albanians in Kosovo who helped the Jews were members of my mother’s family: Arif Alickaj, her grandfather, and Rexhep Cufë Lokaj, her great-uncle.

⁷⁵ Qazim Namani, “The Jews of Kosovo between the Two World Wars [Albanian],” *Izraeli Sot*, January 3, 2023, <https://www.izraelisot.com/2023/01/03/dr-qazim-namani-hebrenjte-e-kosoves-mes-dy-lufterave-boterore/>.

Arif Alickaj served as Executive Secretary in the Deçan Municipality and was one of the key collaborators in the effort to save Jews in Kosovo. His son, Skender Alickaj, recalled in our conversation that his father’s actions were driven by profound empathy and a deep sense of honor. Witnessing the brutal and senseless persecution of Jews, Arif Alickaj felt compelled to act. Guided by Besa, he undertook extraordinary measures to protect Jewish refugees arriving from Macedonia and Serbia.

Arif skillfully created fake identities and false documents, often assigning Muslim names to Jewish families. This clever disguise allowed them to blend in and avoid the watchful eyes of the Nazi forces, providing these desperate souls a chance to escape and survive.

In one of his documents, preserved by Skender, Arif wrote, “I provided identities to two, three Jewish families who came from Skopje, to hide from the Germans in the Roshkodol mountains.”⁷⁶

Rexhep Cufë Lokaj’s nephew Musa was a young boy during the Second World War. In our conversation, he recalled how his family opened their doors to two Jewish families from Skopje that Arif Alickaj had sent to his uncle for protection. Despite the risks, his uncle and the entire Lokaj family treated the two families as their own and sheltered them for several years. At the time, Musa was the same age as some of the Jewish children who found shelter with them, and they spent time together. When the Nazi occupation became more brutal in the winter of 1943-1944, Lokaj decided to send the Jewish families he sheltered to the Roshkodol Mountains because it was an isolated location out of reach for the Nazis. All survived the war and went on to live in the Americas.

Reflecting on this family legacy, Musa said, “In our culture and tradition, religious differences do not exist when someone needs help. For Albanians, tradition, culture, and honor come first, then other aspects like religion. The most important thing is ‘Besa’ – to help and protect those in need and to welcome them into our homes as honored guests.”⁷⁷

For their bravery, Arif and Rexhep are among those honored on the “Wall of Honor” in Pristina, the capital of Kosovo. Located in Pristina’s City Park, the wall bears the name of the twenty-three families of the Albanians of Kosovo who sacrificed or risked their own lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.⁷⁸

– **Premton Asllani**

⁷⁶ Interview by author with Skender Alickaj, July 4, 2024.

⁷⁷ Interview by author with Musa Lokaj, July 2, 2024.

⁷⁸ Sylejman Klllokoqi and L Lazar Semini, “Kosovo Inaugurates ‘Wall of Honor’ for 23 Albanians who Rescued Jews from Holocaust,” *Times of Israel*, August 24, 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/kosovo-inaugurates-wall-of-honor-for-23-albanians-who-rescued-jews-from-holocaust/>.

Policy Recommendations

1. Muslim societies, in particular where disgraceful and damaging antisemitic literature and Holocaust denial proliferate, will benefit from reliable education and information about the Holocaust. These efforts should not be linked to topical political debates or be oriented toward accomplishing political goals. Rather, facts should dispel lies, and empathy should dispel hatred.
2. Israeli and Zionist organizations should not be involved in Holocaust education in the Muslim world, as their contributions would be counter-productive in most cases. On the other hand, other Western governments and NGOs should, including through financial contributions and the conditioning of other forms of assistance on the provision of credible education on the Holocaust to schoolchildren.
3. The courageous and humanistic role played by some Muslim heroes in defending Jews during the Holocaust should be given due respect and highlighted in Israel and by Jewish organizations as a debt of gratitude, as well as a means to educate against essentializing depictions of Muslim societies.

THE UNITED STATES

SEINFELD RETURNS TO THE CHRONICLES

Seinfeld was not a show about nothing. Neither did it stand out from other popular sitcoms just because of Larry David's "no hugging, no learning" formula and the cynicism and anti-social behavior it displayed. Its best episodes, and there are dozens of them, have the psychological and philosophical depth of great literature, transforming depictions of daily routines into cultural canon. They hilariously and troublingly convey how the abundance of cultural references, the ease of duplication and imitation, and the breakdown of traditional institutions impose the Freudian *unheimlich*, the uncanniness generated by the familiar becoming unfamiliar, on urban souls. The carefree yet anxious, detached lives of the fabulous four reflected a *zeitgeist* without ever intending to, and, a moment before smartphones and social media took over, prophesied deepening crises.

I saw Jerry Seinfeld in real life just once, at a press conference in Tel Aviv in November 2007. He came to promote a now all-but-forgotten movie. Real-life John Cleese is as different from Basil Fawlty as any person can be. What struck me about Seinfeld was how much he was the exact same Seinfeld from the series. He was not acting on the set. He was himself.

The real Jerry Seinfeld grew up in Long Island, attended Hebrew school, had a Bar Mitzvah, and volunteered in Kibbutz Saar in northern Israel at the age of 16. Yet in his thirties, at the height of the series' success, there wasn't anything manifestly Jewish about him, and there wasn't anything manifestly Jewish about his fictional self, other than that they liked telling jokes for a living, which for some reason is considered a Jewish trait. The Seinfeld persona was made of all-American and New York icons and traditions, from baseball to cornflakes to Superman. No Star of David, no lighting of the candles when others have Christmas trees, no Yiddish phrases, no Hebrew, no rallying for Israel, no comical gigs inspired by Archie Bunker 1970s style prejudice directed against him.

In the series, his best friend, George, is questionably Jewish on his mother's side (search "was George Costanza..." and see how Google completes the sentence). There are plenty of Jewish characters throughout, from the distant relative who had a pony in Poland to the mohel with the shaking hands to the rabbi who cannot keep a secret to the dentist who converts so that he can tell jokes about Jews. They all comically pale compared to other supporting actors and are all very much external to the reality of fictional Jerry's life (or real Jerry's life), which at the time was devoid of Jewish symbols, sentiments, politics, or texts as a natural reflection of being bereft of any mature or serious commitments to anything but his comedy.

Being a Jew and an American was, in the 1990s, one and the same for the fictional Seinfeld, just as it was for the real one. Rather than the old deliberate distancing from one's roots for social gain, Seinfeld's casual approach to his roots was enabled by a social transformation: the emergence of secular Jews who felt fully accepted in American society.

True to its New York environment, the series was rich with ethnic characters, from Pakistanis (the unforgettable Babu Bhatt, played by the Jewish actor Brian George) to South Koreans to Puerto Ricans. Seinfeld and his gang often clashed with them because of cultural differences or because they were mean, but this was never a clash between a member of one minority group and a member of another. It was clear that the easy-going Jerry was master of the domain called New York, even when tricked or embarrassed by people with funny accents. There was no meaningful substance to Seinfeld's Jewishness in the 1990s because society made it possible for him not to be concerned with identity issues.

To appreciate how anything but obvious this positioning of an American Jew was, consider one of the most influential books in the history of Migration Studies, Nathan Glazer's and Daniel Patrick Moynihan's *Beyond the Melting Pot*, published in 1963.

The term "melting pot" was popularized in the early 1900s through a play by the same name written by the British-Jewish author Israel Zangwil, the leader of Territorialist Zionism. It depicted the integration-drama of a Russian-Jewish survivor of a pogrom in the United States.

Beyond the Melting Pot explored five ethnic groups in New York through field studies: African Americans (that is not the name they used), Puerto Ricans, Italians, Irish, and Jews. The main argument was that assimilation is a far-fetched concept and that hyphenated identities in America are more enduring than what people tend to think. According to Moynihan and Glazer, fourth- and fifth-generation Americans with migratory backgrounds were still attached, for various reasons, to their origins and a community that represented those origins.

In the 1990s, Seinfeld – and *Seinfeld* – confidently suggested that secular, urban Jews have become the pot itself in which others may or may not melt; that Jews stand for what America is and what being American is. For Jews who grew up in the days when golf clubs shunned them and family names were changed so they didn't ring Jewish, this was a revolution. For Jews who grew up in America of the 1970s, it seemed natural.

Israel is mentioned only twice in the series and only once directly by Seinfeld. The episode "The Cigar Store Indian" (74, aired December 1993, written by Tom Gammill and Max Pross) is one of the strongest and earliest warnings about the danger that political correctness would get out of hand. In one of the scenes, a mailman of Chinese extraction is upset with Jerry for asking him if there is a good Chinese restaurant in the neighborhood, precisely at the moment when Jerry tries to convince the Native American woman he wants to date that he is very much politically correct, very aware about identity issues.

Reflecting on this encounter hours later, Jerry laments to George that everyone is becoming too sensitive, adding, "somebody asks me which way is Israel, I don't fly off the handle." Israel is on his mind as something that belongs to him, but only as a distant abstraction, a jesting reference. Political correctness is strange to him because he feels secure in the place his ethnicity acquired in American society in a way the Chinese mailman or the Native American are still not.

In the one-before-final episode in the series, the Puerto Ricans march, and Seinfeld and his gang end up stuck in traffic jams on their way home. Seinfeld does not march in the series with his people on Israel's Independence Day. He does not feel he needs to.



There is no better demonstration of *Seinfeld's* and Seinfeld's confident and carefree detachment from the burdens of the Jewish hyphen and Jewish memory during the 1990s than the treatment of the Holocaust and antisemitism in the series. That treatment offers astute observations about totalitarianism, neo-Nazism, and Holocaust education. Yet, in line with Seinfeld's general alienation at the time from rootedness of any sort, let alone one that calls for political commitment, it also testifies to how convinced Seinfeld was, at the time, that the past is no particular concern of his, how unburdened he was.

"The Soup Nazi," one of the most celebrated *Seinfeld* episodes (116, aired November 1995, written by Spike Feresten), is a shrewd comment about how easily people resign to submissive, herd behavior and how one free spirit can destroy an entire tyrannical order. The conformist Jerry follows the bizarre and condescending procedures imposed by the eccentric and masterful owner of a soup stand, just like his nemesis Newman does. Kramer, the outcast and conspiracy theories fan, not only submits, but also identifies with the dictator. George is more than willing to submit after his chutzpah fails him at first and is satisfied that giving up his pride for a brief culinary delight is worth it. In contrast, Elaine stands alone, just, in insisting there are bigger things in life than soup, such as dignity and freedom of expression. When a rare act of kindness by the authoritarian soup maker inadvertently lands her his secret recipes, his entire regime collapses and he flees to another country.

One of the things that made this episode iconic within weeks of its airing was that it was based on a real soup stand and a real-life character, the Persian-American Ali Yeganeh, who was furious with the cast rather than happy with the glory that befell him and its potential rewards. Whether or not he was actually so rude has become a matter of controversy.

Funny as the "Soup Nazi" may be, there is a caveat. Seinfeld was not the first great comedian to make a joke of Nazism. Yet whereas in Mel Brook's *The Producers* the comical usage of Nazism was essential for the movie's sub-textual comments about the concealed fascist essence of musicals and popular culture at large and about the thin line between being a joke and making a joke, and whereas in *Fawlty Tower's* episode "The Germans" the usage of Nazism was essential to make the point about Britain's desperate hanging to its past, the "Soup Nazi's" take on despotism and submissiveness would have worked well also without the vendor's depiction as a Nazi.

Seinfeld did not introduce the use of "Nazi" as a joking pejorative term for everyday life situations involving rude, meticulous, and imposing personalities. Still, the unfortunate cultural impact of the episode was that it legitimized the comical, casual usage of the term in popular culture. This could not have happened unless for Seinfeld, at that time, the term was just another taboo to break. That mainstream television, and a Jew, were so comfortable with such a usage meant everyone might legitimately feel the same.

"The Limo" (19, aired February 1992, story by Marc Jaffe and teleplay by Larry Charles) has George pretending to be the never-seen-in-public-before Donald O'Brien, the leader of the

Aryan Union and author of the antisemitic manifesto “The Big Game.” The childish trick is played so that he and Jerry can enjoy a free ride in a limousine from the airport.

This was the first Seinfeld episode with a sophisticated, dark plot, an urban-legend bent, and an *unheimlich* scent, as George turns out to be comfortable as an impostor of a neo-Nazi leader, and the four friends display how little they actually know about the other and how little trust they have in each other. As the “The Soup Nazi,” the episode is a sharp social commentary, exposing the intellectual laziness and fetishism of American white supremacists. The scene where Eva, a member of the party, passionately flirts with George is one of the best in the series, and so is the one where George receives the draft of the anti-Jewish speech he is supposed to deliver shortly.

One thing missing, however, is a direct reference to Jerry’s Jewishness in all of this. He finds the neo-Nazis in the limo funny at first and then, when things get out of hand, is terrified by them. But he is not terrified as Jerry the Jew. It is remarkable that in an episode that almost begs that reference, Seinfeld’s Judaism is only in the background.

“The Raincoats,” a double-episode (82, 83, aired in April 1994, written by Tom Gammill, Max Pross, Larry David, and Jerry Seinfeld), centers on Aaron, a close-talker dating Elaine, who is exceptionally selfless and kind-hearted. Jerry’s Jewish parents are staying over, making it impossible for him to make out with his Jewish girlfriend. He finally manages to fool around with her in the darkness of a movie theater while watching *Schindler’s List*, which they go to only because his parents insist it’s a must-watch. His shame is exposed by his nemesis, Newman. (In that news conference in Tel Aviv I attended, asking Seinfeld questions about *Seinfeld* was strictly forbidden. One journalist nevertheless asked whether the Jerry Seinfeld who just visited Yad Vashem was the same Jerry Seinfeld who made out during *Schindler’s List*. The crack was too good for Seinfeld not to appreciate).

As in the “Soup Nazi” and “The Limo,” in “The Raincoats,” too, there is more sophistication than first meets the eye. The episode can be interpreted as a well-deserved criticism of the transformation of the memory of the Holocaust into symbolic capital. “The must-watch movie” about the Holocaust, which does not really represent its horrors, is the currency through which “the must-be-earned prize” is awarded, the six million are thanked and parents and educators are satisfied that they took care of heritage-education for their children, even though they did not.

The fictional Seinfeld appears so sincere in his lack of interest in *Schindler’s List*. The reason does not seem to be that he is fed up with learning about the Holocaust or because it is too painful for him to learn about it at all. Fictional Seinfeld doesn’t care about Holocaust movies because he doesn’t care about anything; because that is the core of his personality. The episode and the real Seinfeld were more than content with telling the world that indifference to the memory of the Holocaust is no different than not caring about anything that rings serious in general.

The scriptwriters could not resist drawing a comical comparison between Aaron, the selfless close-talker, and Oscar Schindler, the righteous among the nations. The joke is not funny not

only because it is too blunt and artificial, but also because there is a fine line between sticking a pin in the balloon of virtue signaling and the memory of the Holocaust itself. That fine line could not have been blurred if the Jerry Seinfeld of the mid-1990s, that is, the real Jerry Seinfeld, was not the American comedian who just happened to be Jewish.



After *Seinfeld* ended in 1998, Seinfeld got married and seemed content with the realization that he would never achieve anything bigger in life. One would think that the time had come for him to leave behind the persona of the adolescent and use his fame and money for good causes – for example, as Christopher Reeve did. While it was not his favorite superhero who said so, it is still true: with great power comes great responsibility.

That did not happen. Throughout the first two decades of the new millennium, Seinfeld the husband, the father, the celebrity, said almost nothing meaningful about any global or local cause, including Middle Eastern affairs and the state of Israel. He could not bring himself even to say something about the Trump phenomenon (good, bad, mixed, something). He supported a post his Jewish wife, the author of several cookbooks, Jessica, published against antisemitism on Instagram in 2022, but did so in the most unemotional, cautious way, celebrating its lack of aggressiveness. “I am just a comedian” was his unofficial slogan. It seemed helpless; Seinfeld and *Seinfeld* would always remain on the bench.

All of that makes what happened with Seinfeld after October 7 all the more remarkable.

Discussing the abundance of antisemitic attacks in America following the Gaza War and their impact on Jewish families, Franklin Foer wrote in *The Atlantic* that “the golden age of American Jews is ending.” For several generations, he argued, Jews in America enjoyed safety, prosperity, and political influence without having to relinquish their identity. “But that era is drawing to a close” in the face of growing extremism and mob behavior from both left and right, raising alarm about the future of Jews in America – and the future of America itself.¹

Witnessing the comeback of antisemitism and feeling under threat, some American Jews have begun to engage more profoundly with their roots and identity and have vowed to take action. Bret Stephens of the *New York Times* wrote about “The Year American Jews Woke Up.” For years, he argued, American Jews knew that antisemitism and prejudice against them still existed, but only “after October 7, it became personal,” transforming them into “October 8 Jews” who are forced to reckon with the prevalence of hate against them.²

This depiction fits Seinfeld well.

On October 10, 2023, Seinfeld released the following post on Instagram: “I lived and worked on a Kibbutz in Israel when I was 16 and I have loved our Jewish homeland ever since. My

¹ Franklin Foer, “The Golden Age of American Jews Is Ending,” *The Atlantic*, April 2024, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2024/04/us-anti-semitism-jewish-american-safety/677469/>.

² Bret Stephens, “The Year American Jews Woke Up,” *The New York Times*, October 4, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/04/opinion/israel-jews-antisemitism.html?unlocked_article_code=1.Pk4.Ldpe.2hbtssa9cDRW&smid=nytcore-ios-share&referringSource=articleShare.

heart is breaking from these attacks and atrocities. But we are also a very strong people in our hearts and minds. We believe in justice, freedom and equality. We survive and flourish no matter what. I will always stand with Israel and the Jewish people.” Attached was a poster of a girl covered with the Israeli flag and the banner “I stand with Israel.”³

Seinfeld also joined in the immediate aftermath of the attack some 700 people from the Hollywood entertainment industry in signing a strong-worded open letter condemning Hamas and calling for the immediate release of the hostages held in Gaza. It asked the entertainment community to speak out forcefully against the Islamist terror organization, to support Israel, and to refrain from sharing misinformation about the war. There were some big names there, but none was as big as Seinfeld’s.⁴

Two months later, Seinfeld, accompanied by his wife, visited Israel in a show of solidarity. He traveled to Kibbutz Beeri on the Gaza border and met with family members of hostages. He expressed his horror and reiterated his commitment to the people of Israel and to spreading the truth about what happened around the world. He mainly listened and talked little, as American guests tend to do in formal visits, often to the surprise of their Israeli hosts. There was no hugging, it seemed, but there was some learning.⁵

Then came what was probably the most overflowing public display of emotion in his life, when Seinfeld was on the verge of tearing up while reflecting on his visit to Israel in an interview on Bari Weiss’ *Honestly* podcast series. He described the tour as “the most powerful experience of my life.” Unable to explain the experience in words, his broken voice and struggle to control himself spoke instead.⁶

The reaction to his unequivocal pro-Israel position could only be expected. The heckling, the booing, the allegations that he supports genocide. For some, it wasn’t just his fame that made his involvement so outrageous, but his decision to finally take a side in a public debate regarding a conflict they believed was nuanced.

Seinfeld did not back down or offer any yes-but rhetoric intended to make everyone happy. You’d expect the Jerry of the 1990s, the fictitious and the real, would have. In an interview with *GQ*, he said that while he was aware antisemitism existed before October 7, it never crossed his mind, just as it never crossed the minds of other Jews from his generation, that people would ever treat him based on his Judaism and in antisemitic language. He made clear he did not regret speaking his mind and that his feelings were very strong.⁷

³ Jerry Seinfeld (@jerryseinfeld), “I lived and worked...,” Instagram, October 10, 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CyMsO2drCgH/>.

⁴ Elizabeth Wagmeister, “Gal Gadot, Chris Pine and 700 Hollywood Figures Condemn Hamas, Demand Return of Hostages: ‘This Is Terrorism. This Is Evil,’” *Variety*, October 12, 2023, <https://variety.com/2023/tv/news/hollywood-open-letter-israel-support-hamas-war-1235753904/>.

⁵ Uri Sela, “Seinfeld Visited Beeri: Devastated from What I Saw, but Uplifted from the Sturdiness of the Inhabitants [Hebrew],” *Walla*, December 19, 2023, <https://e.walla.co.il/item/3629923>.

⁶ The Free Press, “Jerry Seinfeld on the Rules of Comedy – and Life | Honestly with Bari Weiss,” YouTube, May 28, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXAvkqXD-Fc>.

⁷ Brett Martin, “Jerry Seinfeld Says Movies Are Over. Here’s Why He Made One Anyway,” *GQ*, April 22, 2024, <https://www.gq.com/story/jerry-seinfeld-gq-hyp>.

But he also made clear that he was not the champion of a cause, and pretended – or did he? – that he was surprised people aim at him, as if the words of a comedian like him carry any importance. I watched the commencement address he gave in May 2024 at Duke University. He was noticeably apolitical and avoided controversy. He did not make up his mind whether he wanted to be funny or inspirational, and ended up being neither, with sentences like “Don’t think about having, think about becoming.”⁸ A few students, who probably could not tell the river from the sea, left in protest when he was invited to speak, booing. Seinfeld seemed nervous, but it appeared to be not because of the faint pro-Hamas demonstration, but because of the posh setting (what is it about professors with funny hats that makes people tremble? Roger Federer, another usually cool guy, gave a commencement speech at Dartmouth in June 2024, and also seemed a nervous wreck).

People do not change in old age. Seinfeld celebrated his 70th in April 2024, half a year before the October 7 attack. His transformation owed to the gravity of the circumstances. He could not remain a cynical observer when the foundations of what allowed that position in the first place – the confidence in the place Jews acquired in American society, the confidence that Israel will always be there for them, just in case – were shattered. Thus the discarding, even if hesitant, of the identity of the all-American comedian who just happened to be Jewish and the reemergence as a Jewish-American comedian, a proud Jewish-American comedian, who stands with his people and explains his doing so by the phrase, “I’m Jewish.”

There is a troubling aspect to all of this. The circumstances in which Seinfeld became manifestly and publicly Jewish reinforce the old question of whether secular American Jewishness can exist and thrive as a meaningful identity without antisemitism or Israel as rallying causes. Is there anything else? It’s got to be about something.

– **Prof. Uriya Shavit**



⁸ Duke University, “Jerry Seinfeld | Duke’s 2024 Commencement Address,” YouTube, May 12, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76QV2SrSgq>.

GIBRALTAR DILEMMA ON THE ROCK

The war crimes committed by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and the immediate wave of anti-Zionist activism they unleashed across the world, forced large and small Jewish communities to decide if and how to manifest their identity and their support for Israel. Gibraltar, where the relative number of Jews is larger than in any other country except for Israel, is an example.

On March 18, approximately 300 pro-Hamas Gibraltarians, some Arab in traditional attire, participated in a demonstration rally organized by the Gibraltar for Palestine group across Main Street, the commercial and political hub of the tiny British Overseas Territory. They waved Palestinian flags and called to “free Palestine” and for a ceasefire that would land the terror group a crucial victory in its long-term effort to destroy Israel.¹

Demonstrations, let alone such that export far-away conflicts, are a rarity in the prosperous and culturally harmonious territory that has an elected parliament and government, but where the British-appointed Governor-General is more than a symbolic figure. The Jewish population, comprising approximately 1,000 Gibraltarians, including around 200 Israeli citizens, faced a dilemma. To mobilize for Israel risked escalating tensions, in particular with the approximately 1,000 Gibraltarians of Arab extraction. To keep silent would project cowardice and concede the fight for public opinion.

At first, the community decided not to launch a counter-demonstration in order to send a “powerful message of unity and peace” from Gibraltar to the world. Its managing board (MBJC) described deep concern about the pro-Hamas rally, which, it stated, had “challenged” Gibraltar’s “defining trait” of setting aside cultural differences to unite for a common purpose. The MBJC stated that “practically every member in the Jewish Community is closely connected to someone in Israel directly affected by the massacre of October 7, whether killed, injured or currently held hostage in Gaza.” It also noted that “we have been confronted with words and chants in Gibraltar that we have never imagined would echo through our streets, chants that suggest the annihilation of the Israeli people and the destruction of their state” and which are not “merely slogans; they are war cries that have, around the world, incited acts of violence and discord.” Still, the MBJC recognized “the potential consequences: a series of demonstrations, however peaceful in intention, can inflame tensions further and contribute to an escalation.”²

The initial Jewish decision not to respond to the pro-Hamas demonstration was supported – or, perhaps, encouraged – by the Gibraltarian leadership, including its Governor, Vice Admiral Sir David Steel, and its Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo. Regrettably, an anti-Western terror

¹ Eyleen Gomez and Brian Reyes, “Around 300 People March for Palestine and Peace,” *Gibraltar Chronicle*, March 19, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.gi/around-300-people-march-for-palestine-and-peace/>.

² Chronicle Staff, “Gibraltar’s Jewish Community Focuses on ‘Unity and Peace’ after Monday’s Pro-Palestine March,” *Gibraltar Chronicle*, March 21, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.gi/gibraltars-jewish-community-focuses-on-unity-and-peace-after-mondays-pro-palestine-march/>.

organization that led a massacre and a democratic state defending itself were seen as two equal sides to a conflict.

The Jewish olive branch was not well received. When two months later, the pro-Hamas activists decided to march again, emphasizing without a shred of self-consciousness that they oppose an ideology and not a religion, members of the Jewish community decided, following some internal debate, to organize a public response, under the banner “bring them home now.” They stated that until the hostages taken by Hamas are released, any talk of peace “lacks legitimacy.”

And so, on May 20, Main Street witnessed an unprecedented sight: several dozen Jews and pro-Israel demonstrators waving Israeli flags in front of several dozen marching anti-Israel protestors whose cynical concern for human rights precludes Israeli Jews.³

Contrary to the concerns of some, the dual demonstration did not involve physical attacks or direct verbal assaults. The day not only ended peacefully, it was also the last of its kind. Ever since there have been no pro-Israel or anti-Israel events held in the territory. Posters were hanged by both parties in different locations, and graffiti was painted. Only a few, supporting the Palestinians, are still visible.

In September 2024, we spoke with 11 Gibraltarian and Gibraltar-based Jews about the demonstrations and the broader impact of October 7 on their identity and activism. “Things calmed down because people like it quiet in Gibraltar,” said Dan Hassan, a banker, 11th generation in the territory, who was on his way to take his young son to his Saturday football match with Maccabi Gibraltar.⁴

Moses Benady, a solicitor whose family has lived in Gibraltar for 250 years, explained that the local Jews demonstrated only once because “we didn’t want to bring the problems of the Middle East” to Gibraltar. The counter-demonstration, which focused on the call to release the hostages, was for him a moment of pride: pride that Jews stand quietly in solidarity with the hostages in the face of the shouting and jeering of the pro-Palestinian demonstrators, and pride that some non-Jews joined them, including some encouraged by local Catholic churches. He said that following the start of the war, he was surprised at what he heard about Jews, including from people he thought he knew well. Still, there was not a single antisemitic attack in the territory.⁵

Joshua Lhote, a 42-year-old lawyer, was born in Israel, where he studied in a Yeshiva in his teens. He grew up in France and in Gibraltar, where his parents were envoys of the Jewish Agency. He is the founder of the think tank Understanding Gibraltar. The history of the territory and Jewish thought are his great passions.

A modern Orthodox French-Ashkenazi married to a Sephardic Gibraltarian and a firm critic of Itamar Ben Gvir and the type of Judaism he represents, Lhote said that living in France as

³ Gabreilla Peralta, “Dual Demonstrations Spotlight Polarized Views on Gaza, amid Fears of Community Division,” *Gibraltar Chronicle*, May 20, 2024, <https://www.chronicle.gi/dual-demonstrations-spotlight-polarised-views-on-gaza-conflict-amid-fears-of-community-division/>.

⁴ Interview by the authors with Dan Hassan, September 29, 2024.

⁵ Interview by the authors with Joshua Lhote, September 29, 2024.

a child, he got into fights with Muslims almost on a daily basis because of the kippah on his head. Arriving in Gibraltar as a teenager, “I saw a place where Jews live in peace. I saw Jews who are friends with Christians, friends with Indians.”

Lhote was one of the Gibraltarian Jews who hesitated whether holding a counter-demonstration was the right thing to do. “Because Jews live here in peace, we need to give careful thought to what we do. The way [the counter-demonstration] turned out was good. But it was not good, at first, that some Jews distinguished between us, the Gibraltarians, and them, the Arabs who oppose Israel. The reality is that some Gibraltarians [who are not Arab] oppose Israel, and some Arabs [in Gibraltar] do not support Hamas.” He believes the demonstrations against Israel were led by Gibraltarians of Moroccan extraction who are not confident about their identity and assert it through expressing hate toward the Jewish state.⁶

According to Lhote, Gibraltar should serve as a role model for humanity at large for religious and ethnic coexistence. He believes that it also provides a lesson for Jews about what it takes from them to survive under unfavorable conditions: they need to be essential for the majority society.

Perhaps he makes too much of the singular story of a miniature entity. Yet, for sure, the survival of Jews in Gibraltar was unlikely, and Gibraltar would not have survived without them.

The British Empire is a historical abnormality. It continues to exist after it ceased to exist. King Charles III is today the non-constitutional head of a British Commonwealth that comprises 56 countries, as well as the sovereign of 15 realms, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Jamaica, and 14 Overseas Territories that enjoy varying degrees of self-governance, including the Pitcairn Islands, populated by the descendants of the Mutiny on the Bounty, the Falkland Islands, the theater of the last British imperial war – and Gibraltar.

You need to see this phenomenon of nature, this phenomenon of politics, to believe it is real. A territory with its own government, parliament, flag, national anthem (“May you be forever free, Gibraltar! Gibraltar, my own Land!”), a daily newspaper, and a national football team – yet with just over 34,000 residents who live on a rock that rises above a bay of some 15 kilometers in length separating Europe from Africa, as well as on a narrow stretch of land underneath that rock. Within the rock are massive tunnels dug by the Royal Canadian Engineers during the Second World War and one of the world’s most beautiful stalactite caves. On top of it is a natural colony of dozens of adorable monkeys, who are funny, except when they want your food, or handy. At the bottom is the Jews’ Gate Cemetery, which dates back to 1726 at least and closed in 1848. There is a reason why it was located there, relatively far (although not really far) from mainland Spain.

The rock, strategically important because of its command of the naval movements to and from the Mediterranean, was taken over from Spain by a British-Dutch fleet in 1704 during the War of the Spanish Succession. Following its conquest, several dozen Jewish merchants from Morocco settled in Gibraltar.

⁶ Ibid.

In the Treaties of Utrecht (1713), Gibraltar was officially conceded to Britain. The concession was, however, not without conditions. Article X stated in words that could not be clearer that “Her Britannic Majesty, at the request of the Catholic King, does consent and agree, that no leave shall be given, under any pretense whatsoever, either to Jews or Moors, to reside or have their dwellings in the said town of Gibraltar.”⁷

In a lecture he delivered to the Jewish Historical Society of England in 1963, Sir Joshua Hassan – remember that name – explained why and how Article X was repeatedly ignored and a permanent and prosperous settlement of Jews in Gibraltar developed. Because Spain was reluctant to accept the concession of the rock to a Protestant Kingdom from day one, the staying power of the British garrison relied on supplies from Morocco. The Sultan, Isma‘il b. Sharif, fourth in the dynasty that still rules Morocco today and has been known for its good relations with the Jewish minority, was adamant that he would only provide Gibraltar with the goods it desperately needed if the territory remained open to the Jewish and Muslim subjects who settled there after the 1704 conquest.⁸

Consequently, while Britain kept reassuring Spain that it would respect Article X and expel the Jews from Gibraltar, it also kept finding excuses for not doing so. In 1724, the first synagogue was established in the territory – Sha‘ar Hashamayim (The Gate of Heaven). It still exists today. By August 1725, there were 1,113 civilian inhabitants in Gibraltar, including 137 Jews and 113 Brits; the largest groups were Genoese (440) and Spaniards (414).⁹

In 1728, following a Spanish blockade of the territory, Britain issued an eviction order for the Jewish and Muslim residents of Gibraltar; yet seeing that Spain would still not allow the transport of goods from the mainland to the territory and that they remained dependent on Morocco, the order was delayed. A year later, Britain and Morocco signed an agreement that gave Jews and Muslims the right to reside in Gibraltar for a temporary period of no more than 30 days while specifically denying their right to reside on the rock permanently. Once a legal footing, however narrow, for the Jewish presence in the territory was established, their expulsion was off the table. By the time Spain besieged the rock again in 1779 in what came to be known as the Great Siege, already some 1,000 Jews lived in the territory – similar to their number today.¹⁰

By the mid-19th century, the Jewish population reached its peak, comprising as many as one-third of the territory’s mix of ethnicities, religions, and languages that began to develop their own identity. During the Second World War, Britain managed to maintain its control of the rock, saving its Jews from the hands of the Nazis and their allies. Yet hundreds were evacuated to other countries, along with non-Jewish subjects, to make room for soldiers, and only a minority returned when the war was over.

The Jewish contribution to Gibraltar was not just in economic development. The most influential Gibraltarian public figure in the second half of the 20th century was a Jew. Joshua Hassan’s

⁷ Sir Joshua Hassan, *The Treaty of Utrecht 1713 And the Jews of Gibraltar* (London: The Jewish Historical Society of England, 1970; text of a lecture delivered in London on May 15, 1963), 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

studies of the history of the Jews on the rock were only a hobby. Born in 1915 in Gibraltar to a Sephardic family and a trained lawyer, he was one of the few Gibraltarians not evacuated from the territory during the Second World War and served as a gunner in the local defense force. In the early 1940s, he entered public life as one of the leaders of The Association for the Advancement of Civil Rights in Gibraltar, a political party that sought greater autonomy for the territory. In 1955, he was elected the first mayor of Gibraltar. In 1964, he was elected its first Chief Minister (the equivalent of prime minister), a role he held with only a three-year break until 1987.

As the dominant Gibraltarian following the breakdown of the Empire, Hassan secured two complementary processes. On the one hand, self-governance in internal affairs, which helped Gibraltar become one of the most prosperous political entities on earth, combining a strong economy that relies on finances, shipping, and tourism (GDP per capita for 2024 was 85,614 pounds). On the other hand, firm rejection of Spanish aspirations to reunite the rock with the mainland.

In a referendum held in September 1967, Gibraltarians were given two options: become Spanish territory or remain a self-governing British territory. The results, following massive displays of British patriotism, were taken from the Assad family guidebooks: 12,138 (99.98%) wanted to remain under Britain, while only 44 desired reunification with Spain.¹¹ The territory's first constitution, adopted in 1968, which Hassan took part in drafting, was unequivocal about the right of the small population to determine its future.

Hassan died in 1997. His political legacy has lived on. In a referendum held in November 2022, 98.97% of the participants rejected a proposal by the British government for shared sovereignty with Spain. While Madrid has not given up its demand to terminate the Utrecht treaty, which it claims Britain breached, and while there are concerns in Gibraltar that Britain is tiring of the last remains of its colonial responsibilities, a change of the status of the territory is very unlikely, at least in the next few decades.

Hassan had two daughters. Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, who made Aliyah in 2001, served as deputy mayor of Jerusalem from 2018 to 2023, representing a liberal party, Awakening. Marlene Dinah Esther Hassan-Nahon, a historian and journalist, served in the Gibraltarian parliament from 2015 to 2023 and, in 2018, formed a new social-democratic and socially progressive political party, Together Gibraltar.

Jews and Judaism are very much visually present in Gibraltar, although perhaps less than what some tour guides suggest. Their prosperity is evident in the number of Jews wearing kippahs walking along Main Street and the number of shops that announce their closure on Saturday and Jewish holidays. Saturday is the busiest commercial day, with thousands of tourists flocking Main Street.

¹¹ Gareth Stockey, *Gibraltar, 'A Dagger in the Spine of Spain?'* (Brighton and Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 231, and "From the Archives: Gibraltar Votes to Remain with Britain – 1967," *The Guardian*, September 11, 1967, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/11/gibraltar-votes-to-remain-with-britain-archive-1967>.

Photos by Uriya Shavit



The Sha'ar Hashamayim Synagogue; iconic Gibraltarian scenery

With few exceptions, the community is Orthodox. It is predominately Sephardic, although mixed marriages and migration from England and Israel are changing its composition. There are four synagogues, one kosher supermarket, one kosher café, a Jewish preschool and school, a kollel, a mikveh, and the Maccabi Club. The synagogues are secured, but not heavily. Secular Israeli-Jews, some of whom commute daily from Spain, are not part of the community.

Lhote and others told us a few Hebrew words entered the spoken Gibraltarian language, which combines English with some Spanish. For example, ma'ot (money or coins) is used for cash. “You’ll tell a taxi driver I don’t have ma’ot with me,” explained Lhote. It is worth mentioning that in Israel, using this word in a taxi is unlikely to take you far.

Lhote believes the community is relatively cohesive and its Jewish identity remained intact because of its shared religiosity. “In the 1970s, you could see a Jewish man married to a non-Jew attending synagogue three times a day. You would never see this in France. Then came a less liberal rabbinic leadership. The sons of mixed marriages, for example, were not permitted to be called up to the reading of the Torah. Perhaps the conservatism helped preserve the community.”¹²

¹² Interview by the authors with Joshua Lhote, September 29, 2024.

The combination of a somewhat libertarian capitalist economy and a generous welfare society, coupled with a spirit of multiculturalism and the absence of pronounced manifestations of antisemitism, has made Gibraltar attractive for its Jewish population. Still, for some, Israel is a second homeland, and a potential land of promise.

Gabriel Benady, Moses' son, said that while he avoided publicly campaigning for Israel, "We pray for Israel every day." He has visited Israel seven or eight times already. This is where he feels he belongs and would like to settle down ultimately.

Lhote said he saw his future in Gibraltar, but that his 16-year-old son is pondering about his ultimate destination. "For me, Gibraltar is a universal role model. For him, it is just a small village. He takes what Gibraltar has to offer for granted, and it offers a lot. He intends to travel to Israel and volunteer for the IDF in two years. It is something he has been talking about for a long time, already before October 7."¹³

– **Prof. Uriya Shavit** and **Dr. Carl Yonker**

Policy Recommendations

1. It is the responsibility of governments to ensure that Jews, as communities or individuals, can speak their minds on any issue, including their support for Israel. It is sad and alarming that the political environment in a British realm discouraged them from doing so, let alone after pro-Hamas demonstrators were allowed to promote their anti-Israel agenda at the heart of the territory. Equally sad and alarming is for a British realm to consider people who call for the annihilation of a state and the defenders of that state as two sides of a legitimate discourse.
2. The events in Gibraltar in 2024 demonstrate that there are no vacuums: where the friends of Israel will not make their voice heard, its enemies will, and where the friends of Israel will keep silent, its enemies will be encouraged to spread lies with greater vigor.
3. The story of Jews in Gibraltar exemplifies the significant impact Jews have had on European societies, Jewish endurance and resourcefulness, and the good relations Jews enjoyed in the past with Muslims. It deserves more attention, scholarly and educational, outside the territory.
4. The life of Jewish communities in the West, especially predominantly religious ones, revolve around synagogues and other religious establishments. This is partially the reason why secular and traditional Israeli migrants do not integrate into those communities. The cultivation of Jewish-Israeli identity outside Israel is a matter that deserves more attention and creative thinking on the part of the migrants and Israeli agencies.

¹³ Ibid.

THE NETHERLANDS

A MUSEUM, AND A CONTROVERSY

During the Second World War, about 75% of Jews in the Netherlands were murdered, the highest percentage in Western Europe. This high number was attributed in part to the obedience of Dutch civil servants to Nazi commands and the efficiency in implementing them. In a post-war interview, Adolf Eichmann said about the Netherlands that the transports there were running so smoothly that it was “a pleasure to watch.”¹

In March 2024, following years of planning and construction, a National Holocaust Museum opened in Amsterdam. The museum was designed with the explicit aim to teach schoolchildren and others “how the Holocaust could happen, about its victims and perpetrators,” and most importantly, to teach “how to prevent it all from happening again.”² Its establishment was a milestone in the Dutch commitment to inform about the darkest times in European history, and as such, is commendable.

Yet soon after its inauguration, the museum sparked a controversy, raising questions about historical memory and responsibility and a dilemma not unique to the Dutch case: how should countries occupied by the Nazis engage with the vicious and massive crimes committed through the cooperation and, in some cases, initiative, of their own people against the Jewish population?

Israeli columnist Chaim Levinson, who visited the museum shortly after it opened, argued in *Haaretz*, the leading Israeli liberal newspaper, that Dutch perpetrators and collaborators are “completely absent” from the museum’s exhibition.

Levinson raised very good questions: “Moving on to the question of responsibility – how, in fact, did the Holocaust take place in the Netherlands? Why did they see the Jews, who were their allies and flesh of their flesh, as an enemy that should be destroyed and eliminated? What were the opinions and worldviews behind the Holocaust of Dutch Jews? Could it have taken place in England, too?”³

According to Levinson, a visitor to the Dutch Holocaust Museum will not walk away with answers to these questions and won’t learn anything about the role or responsibility of Dutch perpetrators in the Shoah.

Christophe Busch, director of the Hannah Arendt Institute in Mechelen (Belgium), observed that only one section of the museum, called “wallpaper of crimes,” is dedicated to the Nazis

¹ Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, “The Netherlands: The Highest Number of Jewish Victims in Western Europe,” Anne Frank House publication, <https://www.annefrank.org/en/anne-frank/go-in-depth/netherlands-greatest-number-jewish-victims-western-europe/>.

² See the official website: <https://jck.nl/en/location/national-holocaust-museum>.

³ Chaim Levinson “Missing at Amsterdam’s New Holocaust Museum: The Dutch Collaborators,” *Haaretz*, August 19, 2024, <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/2024-08-19/ty-article/.premium/one-thing-is-missing-at-amsterdams-new-holocaust-museum-dutch-collaborators/00000191-6a71-db7c-afdf-fe713eec0000>.

and their collaborators. That section sheds light on the perpetrators in all their diversity, albeit briefly and without much explanation. He noted that this part of the museum touches on a complexity that the museum’s curators believe should be tackled in a thorough and nuanced way only within its educational work rather than through exhibitions.⁴

Similar criticisms were offered regarding a Dutch historical television drama about the Jewish Council that was broadcast around the time of the museum’s opening. The Jewish Council was formed by the Nazis in the Netherlands in order to utilize the country’s Jewish leadership to organize deportations with the least resistance. Although the series was widely praised for representing the dilemmas of the Council, it failed to present two critical historical factors that explain the Council’s tragedy: the context of the isolation of the Dutch Jewish community by 1942 and the cooperation of Dutch civil servants in the persecution of the Jews.

Dutch historian and professor of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, Johannes Houwink ten Cates, said: “With the exception of a few professors and their students in Leiden and Delft, and later the churches, hardly anyone stood up for the Jews [...] why is this not mentioned earlier in the series?” Moreover, “during the first three hours of this historical television drama, there is absolutely no reference to the cooperation of Dutch civil servants in the persecution. Cooperation in registering as Jews, in enforcing segregation, in removing Jewish children from education, in issuing identity cards (marked with a J for ‘Jew’), in arrests (also by the Amsterdam municipal police) and in transports to the transit camps on the way to the East. In my opinion, this is a serious lack of historical context, because the help of Dutch civil servants in the persecution and the transports was more important to the occupiers than that of the Jewish Council [...] The official collaboration went unpunished after the liberation. So many non-Jewish villains and their accomplices [...] went free.”⁵

Although Dutch co-responsibility for and complicity in the deportation of the country’s Jews has been discussed, researched, and publicly acknowledged in the Netherlands, there is no unanimous agreement on the extent to which this topic should be broached in the national memory of the Second World War.

Responding to the criticism, the National Holocaust Museum’s chief curator, Annemiek Gringold, argued that the museum does not overlook the complicity of the Dutch in the deportation of the country’s Jews. She pointed out that the museum does explore “this very dark part of the Netherlands’ history, as well as antisemitism in Dutch society before, during, and after the Shoah.” She refers to the museum’s “wallpaper of crimes” as “one of its most prominent sections,” explaining that it exhibits Nazi artifacts of both German and Dutch origin and offers more than 50 digital portraits of perpetrators. “About one-third of the portraits are of Dutch collaborators,” she argued. “They include Dutch Jew hunters, both civilians and police officers, Dutch SS officials, Dutch guards at concentration camps and Dutch volunteers in the German Einsatzgruppen that rounded up and shot Jews and others in Eastern Europe in their millions

⁴ Christophe Busch, “The Janus face of the National Holocaust Museum [Dutch],” *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, April 30, 2024, <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/de-januskop-van-het-nationaal-holocaustmuseum/>.

⁵ “The Jewish Council is once again the scapegoat [Dutch],” *Historisch Nieuwsblad*, April 2, 2024, <https://www.historischnieuwsblad.nl/de-joodse-raad-is-toch-weer-de-zondebok/>.

Photos by Fridolin Sablatnig



The National Holocaust Museum, Amsterdam

[...] In addition to these accomplices' acts of betrayal, looting, abuse, and deportation, the exhibition also provides dozens of personal accounts of Jewish victims.”⁶

The Director of Amsterdam's Jewish Cultural Quarter,⁷ Emile Schrijver, clarified that one of the museum's main intentions was to focus on the victims and “to return humanity to those who were deprived of their humanity by zooming in on individual lives” and telling individual stories through personal artifacts.⁸

The construction of memory inevitably involves contestation. Memory scholars have established that there will always be multiple memories of the same event and that struggles and negotiations take place between them.⁹ This is also the case in the Netherlands, after decades of self-reflection and a gradual attempt to commemorate the persecution of Jews in the most proper way.

The rather belatedly established National Holocaust Museum is the Netherlands' first museum solely dedicated to the persecution of the Jews in the country. It complements a string of other places of commemoration that keep the memory of the Second World War alive, the main ones being the Amsterdam Resistance Museum, the Anne Frank House, the Auschwitz Monument, the Westerbork transit camp, the Amersfoort concentration camp, and the Hollandsche Schouwburg, the Amsterdam theater that the Nazis used as an assembly space for nearly 50,000 Dutch Jews before they were deported to transit Camp Westerbork in the east of the country and then to the concentration and extermination camps in Eastern Europe. Younger Jewish

⁶ Annemiek Gringold, “Dutch Collaborators Do Play a Prominent Role at Amsterdam's New Holocaust Museum,” *Haaretz*, August 26, 2024, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2024-08-26/ty-article-opinion/.premium/dutch-collaborators-do-play-a-prominent-role-at-amsterdams-new-holocaust-museum/00000191-89cc-d954-add7-8fdec4870000>.

⁷ The National Holocaust Museum and the recently renovated memorial in the Hollandsche Schouwburg are part of the so-called “Jewish Cultural Quarter” (JCK) in Amsterdam that also includes the Jewish Historic Museum, the Children's Museum, and the Portuguese Synagogue with its historic Jewish library Ets Haim.

⁸ “National Holocaust Museum full of stories [Dutch],” *Benjamin*, March 27, 2024, <https://joodswelzijn.nl/benjamin/nationaal-holocaustmuseum-vol-verhalen/>.

⁹ Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997), 1398.

children were assembled in the nursery across the street from the theater, and most of them were murdered. After the war, the Hollandsche Schouwburg, with its haunting memories, was left deserted and abandoned for years until finally, in 1962, the auditorium of the theater was dedicated as a memorial to the Dutch victims of the Holocaust.¹⁰

The new National Holocaust Museum is located across the street from this memorial, in the “Hervormde Kweekschool” – a former Protestant seminary that had a garden adjacent to the nursery where the Jewish children were gathered. The seminary was a crucial part of a rescue operation in which its directors, students, and employees, in cooperation with the Dutch resistance, managed to save about 600 Jewish children from the nursery and transfer them to places of hiding with Dutch families all over the country. The rescue operation was led by Johan van Hulst, who later became a senator and was named Righteous Among the Nations. He died in 2018, aged 107. Also involved in the efforts were Henriëtte Pimentell, the director of the nursery who was murdered in Auschwitz in September 1943, and Walter Süskind, a Jewish council member who died in February 1945 in or near Auschwitz.

The choice of location for the Holocaust Museum raises the question whether its curators sought to highlight this story of resistance against the dark background of the persecution of Dutch Jewry that is presented in the museum itself. This question is especially worth raising given the tendency in the Netherlands, certainly in the past, to give resistance and hiding the more prominent place in the national commemoration of the Second World War.

This was especially true in the first decades after the war when the perception prevailed that everyone in the Netherlands had had it bad; some suffered more than others, but everyone was more or less equal in their suffering. Resistance during the war was glorified and amplified to inaccurate proportions.

From the 1960s onwards, public consciousness of the Shoah increased, accompanied by feelings of bewilderment and shame, as the public was confronted with the first classic historical works and television documentaries on the fate of the Dutch Jews. This was followed by intensive scientific research on the topic.

In the 1980s and 1990s, it was widely recognized in the Dutch public discourse that an obedient Dutch administrative apparatus had significantly contributed to the efficiency of the deportations in the Netherlands; that from top to bottom, Dutch civil servants, railway personnel, and police officers had actively participated in the preparations and facilitation of the persecution of Jews, while the population passively watched.¹¹

Officials began to publicly recognize the Dutch complicity in the deportation of the Jews. Queen Beatrix addressed the Knesset in March 1995 and cautiously noted that the Dutch who

¹⁰ For two in-depth studies, see: David Duindam, *Fragments of the Holocaust: The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg as a Site of Memory* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018) and *Site of Deportation, Site of Memory: The Amsterdam Hollandsche Schouwburg and the Holocaust*, ed. David Duindam, Hetty Berg, Frank van Vree (Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

¹¹ Margreet Fogteloo, “Finally Room [Dutch],” *De Groene Amsterdammer*, no. 17, April 24, 2019, <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/eindelijk-ruimte>.

saved Jews were the exception during the years of occupation while not directly recognizing that there were those who willingly cooperated with evil.¹²

Her speech was followed by various initiatives for compensation and restitution schemes.¹³ On the National Remembrance Day of May 4, 2020, King Willem-Alexander publicly acknowledged that his own grandmother, Queen Juliana, may not have done enough for her subjects who were in need, who “felt abandoned, not heard enough, not supported enough, even if only with words.”¹⁴ In the same year, Prime Minister Mark Rutte publicly apologized for the role of the Dutch government in the persecution of the Jews.¹⁵ This was followed by the unveiling of the Holocaust Names Monument in Amsterdam in 2021 and, finally, the opening of the National Holocaust Museum in 2024.

Memory and heritage scholar David Duindam observed that the self-critical view of the Holocaust reflected a broader political tendency to acknowledge the painful and embarrassing parts of Dutch national history. Another aspect of this tendency is the way the Dutch colonial past has been extensively addressed over the last decade. There is an urge to make room for these histories that used to be marginal and to present them to a large audience in national places.¹⁶

However, Dutch historian Johannes Houwink ten Cate notes that this fixation on injustice, characteristic of the present “age of apology,” also has a converse effect. With regard to the Second World War, he argues, the new tendency to trivialize resistance and to present collaboration as if it was the norm is being resisted by large segments of the Dutch public.¹⁷

Ten Cate observes that feelings of guilt and shame about the Holocaust have been disappearing from the public debate. For example, it is common to express the idea that the Dutch lack of solidarity with the Jews is a myth. Likewise, the distinction between good and evil has become blurred. Dutch writer and artist Chaja Polak identifies this as part of a broader tendency to manipulate history and a dormant forgetting of the Shoah.

According to historian Frank van der Vree, who recently published his volume *The Netherlands and the Memory of the Persecution of the Jews 1945-2024*, a common sentiment in the Netherlands remains that “this was done to the Netherlands as a nation. The Dutch are not collectively looking away from the Holocaust, and the persecution of the country’s Jews is not denied or repressed, but at the same time, the specific character of the mass murder of Jews receives little attention.”¹⁸

¹² For the text of Her Majesty’s speech on March 28, 1995: <https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/Documents/SpeechPdf/Beatrix.pdf>.

¹³ Rianne Oosterom, “Why the Netherlands is only now getting a National Holocaust Museum [Dutch],” *Trouw*, March 8, 2024.

¹⁴ Speech by King Willem-Alexander, National Remembrance Day [Dutch], May 4, 2020, <https://www.koninklijkhuis.nl/documenten/toespraken/2020/05/04/toespraak-van-koning-willem-alexander-nationale-herdenking-4-mei-2020>.

¹⁵ Speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte at the National Commemoration at the Auschwitz Monument, Amsterdam, January 26, 2020, <https://www.government.nl/documents/speeches/2020/01/26/speech-by-prime-minister-mark-rutte-at-the-national-commemoration-at-the-auschwitz-monument-amsterdam>.

¹⁶ Oosterom, “Why the Netherlands is only now getting a National Holocaust Museum.”

¹⁷ Fogteloo, “Finally Room.”

¹⁸ Oosterom, “Why the Netherlands is only now getting a National Holocaust Museum.”

According to a study by the Claims Conference published in January 2023, only 44% of Dutch Millennials and Gen Z and only half (50%) of all Dutch respondents support recent efforts by Dutch leaders to acknowledge and apologize for the Netherlands' failure to protect Jews during the Holocaust; 39% of Dutch Millennials and Gen Z and 31% of all Dutch respondents opposed such acknowledgments and apologies, while 17% of Dutch Millennials and Gen Z and 19% of all Dutch respondents said they were not sure.

The same study showed shortcomings in historical knowledge about the Holocaust in the Netherlands, especially among young people. Twelve percent of all respondents believe the Holocaust is a myth or the number of Jews killed has been greatly exaggerated, while 9% are unsure. These numbers are higher among Dutch Millennials and Gen Z, where 23% believe the Holocaust is a myth or the number of Jews murdered has been greatly exaggerated, while 12% are unsure. More than half of all respondents (54% of all respondents and 59% of Millennials and Gen Z) do not know that six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust.¹⁹

This reality is accompanied by an ongoing controversy surrounding Holocaust education and sensitivities involving the wars in the Middle East, which conflated in an unfortunate way at the opening of the National Holocaust Museum on March 10, 2024.

During the inauguration, a crowd of anti-Israel demonstrators gathered in the street, demonstrating against the war in Gaza as well as the arrival of Israeli President Yitzhak Herzog, who attended the opening of the museum. At this vulnerable moment for the last survivors of the concentration camps, the Hitler salute was seen several times. Palestinian flags were waved, and “From the River to the Sea” was chanted.

The shouts of the crowd even drowned out the words of the King of the Netherlands, who was trying to address local television reporters. The demonstrators' verbal attacks on a Holocaust survivor and his great-granddaughter who received the honor of attaching a mezuzah to the museum's entrance and who were then rushed through a small opening in the angry crowd with their heads bowed evoked painful memories of something the museum is trying to educate against.

In the aftermath of the event, the Dutch Jewish community expressed its shock at the public aversion against Jews in front of this symbolic museum. It raised the question of how long Dutch civil society and the city's leaders “will continue to accept the demonization of Jews” and when they would finally take a stance to protect the Jews.²⁰ This call is a stark echo of the past, when most Dutch Jews felt entirely abandoned by their leaders and fellow citizens in the Second World War.

Historian David Wertheim, Director of the Menasseh ben Israel Institute for Jewish Studies, commented: “The fear is very existential. It stems from the traumatic experiences of the

¹⁹ Claims Conference Netherlands Holocaust Poll, January 2023, <https://www.claimscon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Claims-Conference-Netherlands-Dual-Topline-1.pdf>.

²⁰ Naomi Italiaander, “Enough is Enough [Dutch],” *Jonet*, March 12, 2024, <https://jonet.nl/de-maat-is-vol-column-naomi-italiaander/>.

Shoah: the idea that the Jewish community thought it was safe and it wasn't."²¹ Levinson, in his *Haaretz* column, touched on these feelings by asking: "Why were the Jews considered such a disturbance to this calm and pleasant life, both then and today?" and "Why is the most heavily guarded building in central Amsterdam a Holocaust museum?"²²

– **Dr. Joyce van de Bildt**, with contribution from **Fridolin Sablatnig**

Policy Recommendations

1. Complicated histories should be taught exactly for what they are: complicated histories. There are countries in Europe that were occupied by the Nazis and, as such, were victims, yet where large segments of the population cooperated with evil more, at times much more, than they were forced to. Focusing on one side of the coin while obscuring the other is not the teaching of history but the distortion of history.
2. The exceptional heroes who saved Jews during the Holocaust should be a highlight in any exhibition in their homeland that explores the history of the Shoah as both a debt of gratitude – and as role models. Yet, the attention they deserve should not result in neglecting to recognize the crimes of others duly.
3. History and memorial museums should not be about what people are willing to hear but about facts presented in a correct, nuanced, and contextualized manner under the guidance of confirmed historians. Exhibitions, including permanent ones, are a work in progress; the leaders of the Dutch National Holocaust Museum will do well to pay attention to criticism and, following additional research and dialogue, consider with open hearts and minds whether the current structure of their museum serves its declared objectives.

²¹ "Don't Say: You are an Antisemite. But: What You Said is Antisemitic [Dutch]," *Nederlands Dagblad*, November 6, 2023.

²² Haim Levinson "Missing at Amsterdam's New Holocaust Museum: The Dutch Collaborators."

THE UNITED STATES

THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF A RACIST

Derek Black was once the heir apparent to lead the white nationalist movement in the United States. Born in 1989 into an infamous white nationalist family, Derek was considered a prodigy in the movement. He had his own radio show and a website that targeted young people and worked to make white nationalism more palatable to a mainstream audience. In 2013, however, he publicly renounced his white nationalist beliefs. It was a watershed moment in a gradual awakening, which in 2024 turned into a national crusade against racism.¹

Derek's journey from being a leading young voice of the white nationalist movement to being one of its most vocal opponents offers valuable insights into the mechanisms of how white nationalism is propagated and what makes it appealing and suggests pathways for how people can escape its grip. His story demonstrates that people can change their views, but doing so is not easy and can be isolating. It highlights the power of community, engagement in dialogue, education, and empathy in challenging racist ideologies.

These insights form the core of Derek's recently published memoir, *The Klansman's Son: My Journey from White Nationalism to Antiracism – A Memoir* (Abrams Books, 2024). They were expanded on in an interview he gave last summer for the *For a Righteous Cause Report*.

In the memoir, Derek came out as transgender while not considering that aspect of identity crucial to a remarkable political transformation. Today, Derek uses they/them and she/her pronouns. This article will use masculine pronouns in discussing Derek's years as a leading racist activist.

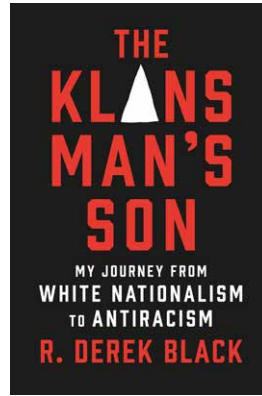
White nationalism is a social movement with an ideology that promotes the belief that white people constitute a distinct and superior racial group. It advocates for the preservation of white cultural and political dominance. It considers race a biological category that divides humanity into distinct groups and predicts their behaviors and capabilities. It sees Jews as non-white and in control of global media and finance, propagates the notions that white culture and "whiteness" are under attack and must be defended and preserved, and, in some of its manifestations, calls for the establishment of a white-only nation or the segregation of races, based on the perceived threat of multiculturalism and immigration to white identity.

Like other extremist ideologies, white nationalism draws people in through a combination of psychological and sociopolitical factors. One of its key attractions is the sense of community, belonging, identity, and meaning it offers. It appeals in particular to young white men who feel alienated and increasingly isolated and seek to find unambiguous answers to their pressing questions about the world that are not provided by their existing communities or the ones in which they were raised.²

¹ Southern Poverty Law Center, "Leaving White Nationalism," Intelligence Report, 2013 Fall Issue (August 21, 2013), <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2013/leaving-white-nationalism>.

² Interview by the author with Derek Black, August 22, 2024.

Photo by Torstein Olav Eriksen



R. Derek Black.

These young men gravitate toward white nationalism because it gratifies their ego with little effort on their part. It infuses in them a sense of value by creating a shared identity with other disaffected white men through the belief that

only they and their look-alike are worthy, only they understand reality for what it is, and only they are willing to make the necessary sacrifices for civilization to survive.³ White nationalists believe they are working to bring about an “apocalyptic future they all believe is inevitable” and are no longer passive participants in the world.⁴

However, the factors that usually draw people to the movement were experienced in an entirely different way by Derek Black – an insider in the white nationalist movement, not an outsider drawn to and joining it. Derek was immersed in the culture of supremacist racism from an early age, internalizing its beliefs, participating in its community, and becoming a key figure in the movement.

Derek’s father, Don Black, is a former leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), one of several organizations that claim the mantle of the infamous 19th-century organization, and the founder of Stormfront, the first major white nationalist website, which has served as a hub for racists, neo-Nazis, and other far-right extremists since the early 1990s under its motto “white pride world wide.”⁵ Derek’s godfather is David Duke, the former founder and leader of the Knights of the KKK, and his father’s oldest friend.⁶

Actually, Duke was more than just a “godfather.” He was also a mentor and even a second dad to Derek. Duke and Don Black met as teenagers in the white supremacy movement in the 1960s, and they became close friends. While Don attended the University of Alabama, Duke attended Louisiana State University, where he met and married Chloe Hardin, a fellow believer in racial segregation and white supremacy. They had two daughters before divorcing.

After the divorce, Chloe reconnected with Don Black, and with Duke’s blessing, they began dating, eventually marrying in the late 1980s, with Duke as the best man. Derek was born shortly after, and the families merged. Duke frequently spent holidays with the Blacks, and both men worked together to advance their white nationalist agenda and educate Derek.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more on Stormfront see: “Stormfront,” Southern Poverty Law Center, nd, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/stormfront>.

⁶ For more on David Duke, see: “David Duke,” Southern Poverty Law Center, nd, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/david-duke>.

Derek was raised in West Palm Beach, Florida, a diverse town with a sizable Jewish population and Haitian and Hispanic immigrants, where Chloe was born. After Derek finished third grade, Chloe and Don pulled him out of the public school system, concerned it would corrupt his beliefs, and he was homeschooled through high school.⁷

At school, Derek had been friends with Black, Jewish, and Hispanic kids, always polite, friendly, and pleasant in personal interactions. Derek recalled that it seemed very normal to be living in a community with so many Jews and getting holidays off in the fall, despite his family being “obsessed with Jews...this Jewish conspiracy that the world is run by Jewish people.”⁸

However, he maintained a distance and separation – no Jewish or non-white friends visited his home, while his white nationalism was kept separate from his interactions with those friends.⁹ This duality – separating between parts of his life that stood at complete odds, essentially cultivating two identities – would characterize Derek’s life until he left the movement.

For Derek, being born into and growing up in the movement was akin to growing up in a religious community – most are very comfortable in the environment in which they were raised, not really questioning the worldview, beliefs, and understandings that define it. Yet, unlike the ability to be passively part of a religious community, being part of the white nationalist movement is “a fundamentally activist” form of affiliation.¹⁰ Derek went beyond basic active participation and “ended up leaning very hard into the activism aspect of it, becoming a spokesperson, running for office, and becoming more publicly visible” than others who grow up in the movement whose parents are major activists.¹¹

Don Black never forced his son into the spotlight. But by the time Derek arrived at university in 2010, he had spent more than a decade transforming into an internationally recognized celebrity in the white nationalist movement his parents and Duke helped create. At age 10, Derek set up the website Stormfront for Kids and, several years later, established a radio show, first on Stormfront and then on an AM station that broadcasted in South Florida.¹² The deep involvement strengthened his confidence in his family’s and the movement’s ideology and strengthened his conviction he would one day lead it.¹³

Critical to Derek’s and Don’s efforts to grow the movement was to constantly refine the message of white nationalism so that it would have broader appeal. They rebranded it as a more mainstream and intellectual movement. Eschewing the use of overtly racist language, epithets, and threats of violence, Don and Derek sought to present their ideas as legitimate intellectual debates about culture, demographics, and the future of Western civilization. Under the veneer of intellectualism and rationalizations, they also framed their ideology not as one of hate and

⁷ Eli Saslow, *Rising Out of Hatred – The Awakening of a Former White Nationalist* (New York: Doubleday, 2018), 12.

⁸ Interview by the author with Derek Black, August 22, 2024.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² R. Derek Black, *The Klansman’s Son: My Journey from White Nationalism to Antiracism – A Memoir* (New York: Abrams Books, 2024), 42, 82, 89.

¹³ Black, *The Klansman’s Son*, 6.

violence, but as a defensive, rational, data-driven argument about preserving cultural heritage and identity.

For Derek and Don, it was about fighting for the rights of whites and protecting white heritage, not fighting against minority rights.¹⁴ Derek reflected how he was “drawn to and affirmed by going to conferences and white nationalist events with [my] dad [featuring] tenured professors who are credentialed in ways that anyone in society theoretically respects and says, ‘oh, that’s an expert’ [...] So I felt I was the person... who had all this factual support behind [my ideology].”¹⁵

In 2008, Derek won a seat on the Palm Beach County Republican Executive Committee, winning 167 of 287 votes in his precinct after canvassing the neighborhood, going door to door asking for votes using all the movement’s talking points. Yet, in the end, the Republican party refused to seat him because he declined to sign a loyalty oath to the party. However, it was a moment that reaffirmed in Derek’s and Don’s minds that mainstreaming their ideology within the Republican party was the correct approach.¹⁶

And then, a shift occurred. It wasn’t a sudden awakening, far from that. The turning point in Derek’s journey as heir apparent to Don’s legacy began when he arrived at New College of Florida in Sarasota in the fall of 2010 to complete his bachelor’s degree.

Derek had been unsure about attending college, but his mother insisted. Initially, he enrolled in a community college. After seeing his high grades, his parents encouraged him to transfer to a four-year school, believing a degree would bolster Derek’s bonafides as a white nationalist intellectual.

New College of Florida is known for being affordable, highly ranked, and an eccentric haven for non-traditional students, especially homeschooled ones like Derek, who were accustomed to self-directed learning. There, Derek studied German and medieval history. Despite New College’s liberal and multicultural reputation, Derek’s parents were unconcerned and unworried about its potential to change or challenge Derek’s white nationalist beliefs. On the contrary, they believed it was Derek who would impact and influence the thinking of people on campus.¹⁷

They were wrong.

At the small liberal arts school, Derek, at the time 21 years old, began more closely interacting with people of diverse backgrounds and worldviews, building new relationships and a community separate from his family and white nationalist ones.

Initially, Derek also kept his white nationalist beliefs hidden. In his first semester in the fall of 2010, he bonded with another student, a Peruvian immigrant named Juan, who had transferred from a community college. He also bonded with an Orthodox Jew named Matthew Stevenson over a shared love of music. He even briefly dated a Jewish girl.

¹⁴ Saslow, *Rising out of Hatred*, 13.

¹⁵ Interview by the author with Derek Black, August 22, 2024.

¹⁶ Black, *The Klansman’s Son*, 82-92.

¹⁷ Saslow, *Rising Out of Hatred*, 22.

Derek recalled that despite arriving at New College with deeply antisemitic views, he discarded his anti-Jewish beliefs quickly, ceasing to see Jews and Judaism as something alien or strange while maintaining his other white nationalist beliefs.¹⁸ He also recalled the disconnect he felt when realizing that the Jewish global conspiracy, which he and his family believed existed, never manifested itself or seemed real on a day-to-day basis and personal level.¹⁹

But his ability to keep his two identities and lives separate changed dramatically in early 2011 when he was “outed” on the university’s online forum as a racist white nationalist while studying abroad in Munich. At that point, Derek’s worlds collided, and he was confronted by his friends’ confusion, hurt, and questions.

After his views were exposed, peers and friends at New College openly grappled on the Forum with how best to address the situation, the debate open for him to see. Some thought outing him was inappropriate; some hoped New College could be the source of transformation for him. Some argued Derek should be ostracized, urging their classmates to consider how his presence on campus could affect the experience of minority students.²⁰ The final point impacted Derek the most – it made him uncomfortable to think he was harming a community and people he genuinely cared about, and it hurt him to see people he knew and cared about recoil from him and not come to his defense.

Despite this, Derek’s white nationalist convictions remained largely unmoved. He believed he could navigate and weather the storm, remaining part of both communities that held nothing in common but to which he was deeply committed. When Derek returned to campus in the fall of 2011, some ostracized him, but some did not.

Two Jewish New College students, Stevenson and Moshe Ash, made a decision to engage Derek directly. They did so regularly, inviting him to Shabbat dinners and other social gatherings. These interactions were not framed as debates or attempts to convert him but rather as opportunities for him to engage with others as a person, not as an ideology. The first dinner set the framework for those that followed – Derek joined Stevenson, Ash, and Juan at Stevenson’s place on campus, where they ate and discussed an array of topics they shared an interest in, from mundane campus gossip to class schedules, studying abroad, music, religious history, theology, and history.

This is not to say Stevenson and Ash were not prepared to discuss ideology; they were, having read more than 4,000 of Derek’s posts on Stormfront and listening to episodes of his radio program. Yet they were convinced a non-confrontational, relational approach would be most effective at chipping away at Derek’s beliefs.²¹ Stevenson believed that by not getting into arguments, Derek would keep returning and stay engaged. It wasn’t about building a case to convince Derek, but building a relationship that made Jews and other minorities more human to him and thereby dismantle his racist, conspiratorial views.

¹⁸ Interview by the author with Derek Black, August 22, 2024.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Black, *The Klansman’s Son*, 131-132.

²¹ Black, *The Klansman’s Son*, 165-168.

To those who criticized his decision not to confront Derek, Stevenson countered that the dinners and relationship-building themselves were subversive acts that would undermine his worldview. Another friend, Allison, took a more direct approach but also did so in a respectful and relational manner. She directly engaged Derek in ideological discussions and challenged his core convictions. Allison initially opposed Stevenson’s idea to engage with Derek and invite him to Shabbat dinners. However, she eventually changed her mind and became the most engaged in challenging his views in their conversations.

It’s rare and challenging to change people’s minds by presenting arguments or telling them they are wrong. The real difficulty lies in getting them to reconsider who and what they care about. Through the meetings with his friends, Derek realized his belief system was not based on facts or logic but was tied to a deep commitment to his family and to a community that cared about him and that he cared about in return.²²

Coming to terms with this was destabilizing because Derek had always considered himself someone who formed beliefs based on reason and was open to changing his mind. This caused his commitment to the white nationalist community to waver, and he became more open to the arguments Allison and others were posing.

At first, Derek remained active in the white nationalist movement, even organizing a large conference. With time, however, he slowly became less active. He stopped posting on Stormfront and neglected his co-hosting duties with his father on their radio program.

Derek’s “slow disaffiliation from white nationalism” continued as his sense of personal responsibility grew for the harm and hurt he had caused. He recognized that his involvement in the white nationalist movement had contributed to a culture of hate and division, and he felt a moral obligation to make amends.

The most painful realization for Derek was knowing that by renouncing his beliefs, he was necessarily separating himself from his family and community. Indeed, up until Derek’s public rebuke of white nationalism in August 2013, he had “been unwilling to drive a wedge between [himself] and [his] family.”²³

This was the most difficult part of leaving the movement, more so than realizing his beliefs and community were wrong. In our conversation, Derek noted, “It was a really traumatizing thing to ultimately separate from my family and the community, but the individual facts, the arguments [of white nationalism] didn’t feel dangerous to contradict. I attribute it to [feeling like], ‘well, I was raised in a community and I didn’t come up with these things or seek them out,’ so finding out they were wrong was not earth shattering.”²⁴

Derek’s experience highlights the complexity of disassociating from deeply rooted ideologies, especially when family and community ties are involved. His story demonstrates the need for both preventative measures and support systems for those affected by extremist ideologies. Change is possible but requires intentional community involvement and institutional support.

²² Black, *The Klansman’s Son*, 231.

²³ Black, *The Klansman’s Son*, 233.

²⁴ Interview by the author with Derek Black, August 22, 2024.

Beyond the lessons that can be drawn about leaving white nationalism, Derek's life story also warns of the broader societal danger of the mainstreaming of white nationalism. The white nationalism of Derek Black, Don Black, and David Duke is dressed in a suit and tie, made to look respectable and intellectual rather than overtly racist in order to appeal to more moderate and conservative listeners. Cloaking extremist views in palatable rhetoric, Derek and other white nationalists sought to normalize the movement's talking points on immigration, multiculturalism, and race in the mainstream political discourse of the conservative movement, overtaking it from within.

The past several years have unfortunately borne witness to the efficacy of this strategy as white nationalists like Don observe with pleasure how their ideas have seeped into the mainstream, advanced by influential conservatives like Tucker Carlson and others.

After leaving the movement, Derek initially remained silent, believing he had caused too much harm by speaking publicly in the past and would only exacerbate that harm by speaking in the future.

However, hearing the white nationalist rhetoric seep into the rhetoric of the Republican party and the January 6 insurrection sparked a conviction in Derek that he needed to share his story, shed light on the dangers of white nationalism, and actively fight hate, oppression, and injustice. The racists are encroaching on the mainstream of American politics, making Derek's crusade for the righteous cause even more crucial.

– **Dr. Carl Yonker**

Policy Proposals

1. Community-based dialogue programs should be developed, encouraging individuals with extremist views to engage with diverse groups in safe environments. These programs would allow for relationship-building and gradual ideological shifts, as seen in Derek Black's experience at college.
2. Support networks for those leaving extremist movements are crucial. Individuals like Black, who break away from extremist communities, face isolation and emotional distress. Offering counseling, peer support, and resources to help with social reintegration can ease the transition.
3. Education initiatives focused on critical thinking and empathy-building should be prioritized in schools. By teaching young people how to critically assess information and fostering respect for diversity, these programs can help prevent the initial draw of extremist ideologies, addressing the root causes before they take hold.

BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES

THE NEWFOUND IDENTITY OF

JEWISH YOUTH

Following October 7, Jewish educators in Western countries faced difficult challenges. One was the direct antisemitism Jewish children encountered, which for some was a first-of-its-kind experience. Another was that children who grew up in a world where Israel's existence was a given, providing them confidence and moments of pride, had to cope with a new realization that the Jewish State was still existentially threatened. Yet another was that because of the accessibility to social media, children were exposed to traumatic images. The more they were engrossed with events, the more horrific documentation they saw.

Complicating matters further are, on the one hand, the culture of regulated speech, which makes moral clarity almost impossible, and on the other hand, the culture of manufactured emotions, which makes distinguishing authentic sentiments from artificial ones difficult.

One result of the troubling times was that some Jewish kids grew closer to their Jewish identity and particularly developed a greater sense of affinity to Israel, as suggested by conversations with three Jewish educators in London and in California. Yet the conversations also alerted about the ethical dilemmas the war in Gaza presented and about the danger that rallying against hate and a sense of victimhood would become the only definers of modern secular Jewish identity.

Yehuda Fink, from North London, is the Director of Education at StandWithUs UK, the British branch of the international, nonpartisan education organization that promotes instructional and informative programs on Israel and on fighting antisemitism for teachers, schoolchildren, and university students.

A former high school teacher, Fink, married and in his thirties, taught junior high school and high school Hebrew and history, with a focus on Jewish history. As the Director of Education at StandWithUs UK his primary duty is overseeing the contents offered to schoolchildren and university students, but he often delivers classes himself.

According to Fink, October 7 was a transformational moment for some young Jewish Brits. "The first reaction from pupils was asking what they could do to help. We did not hesitate to show them what had happened, and their response was a realization that they needed to take ownership.

"In the past, it has been difficult to educate and engage Jewish children with Israel. However, post-October 7, there has been a hunger from the vast majority of Jewish kids to understand why Israel is relevant to them. The engagement among Jews has increased. There seems to be a greater level of interest and more of a desire to be present in a safe Jewish space."¹

¹ Interview by the author with Yehuda Fink, August 20, 2024.

The interest in the events in the Middle East also involved doubts about the way Israel has conducted the war. “Some children have asked me why so many people are being killed on both sides and how any killing can be justified. For some, this is their first real experience of war. What we once saw from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan was really quite limited. We didn’t have social media and so we didn’t see graphic videos of people being killed.

“There is a lot of anger among various communities. We tell children that we must not allow this war to become a new normal and that we must not get used to hostages being held in Gaza. We focus on trying to be brave enough to raise awareness. Most importantly, Jewish educators are more heavily highlighting that we must all act in a dignified manner.”²

Rabbi Motte Fradkin is a 43-year-old youth community rabbi and Judaic teacher at Chabad’s San Diego-based Hebrew Academy, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish school and high school with 350 pupils. A father of four children, he was born and bred in California before moving to New York City for yeshiva and to France and Australia for rabbinical training. His brother, Rabbi Josef Fradkin, is the Chabad Hebrew Academy Head of School; his father was the founder; his wife is the Judaic Principal.

Fradkin says the war impacted all of his students. “Unlike the previous years of peace between communities here in California, since October 7, all of my students have either witnessed antisemitism or have fallen victim to it. Never in all of these years have I had to ask my students if they feel genuinely safe. In the past, students have been almost completely unaware of the concept of antisemitism; year after year, we have had discussions about Jew-hatred, but the students have always told me how unrelatable it felt.

“One young male high school student, a ‘cool kid’ with a lot of friends, told me about his non-Jewish friends posting hateful antisemitic content. He approached me looking upset but later told me that his confidence was reassured after he spoke to one of his friends and changed his mind. I had taught this boy for two years, but that conversation on having to tackle antisemitism will remain the one I remember.”³

A challenge for Fradkin was how to educate his students not to allow the rage over October 7 to overcome their humanity. “It is important to remember that the Jewish people are not about hate. I always reflect with my classes on the words of Golda Meir. She taught us that we, as Jews, do not want fighting. The first lesson I teach to new classes is that if our enemies put down their arms, there would be peace in a second.

“To ensure my students respect others and avoid confrontation, I make it fundamentally clear that we, as Jews, have nothing against any other communities. To hate is not who we are. The lesson I teach to my students is that people are people, and humans are humans. I have these conversations over and over again with students of all ages. I have not experienced any Jewish student inflicting hate.

² Ibid.

³ Interview by the author with Rabbi Motte Fradkin, August 12, 2024.

“The bigger problem here is that some people are ignorant. We work towards making sure that our youth are not. We put steps in place to add to our existing classes [on the conflict] and use the study of portions of the Torah to teach peace-induced values.”⁴

“Life will never be the same for our youth, but I am seeing a trend where school children are prouder than ever to be Jewish. There are a few kids who are neutral in their stance towards this war, but it is impossible to stay neutral forever.”

Thirty-six-year-old Rabbi Zevi New, the father of three, founded, in 2012, together with his wife Musy, the Youth Action Movement (YAM), an organization dedicated to empowering and energizing Jewish teenagers from San Diego to develop their understanding of what it means to live with a sense of purpose and commitment to Jewish values. The organization advocates mainly in-person and through lectures and seminars in high schools. Each week, YAM hosts Teen Community Shabbats, where educators have the opportunity to reach out to teenagers and impart advice, knowledge, and coping strategies for the current political and social climate. The Judaism he advances emphasizes religious practices in a way some Jewish families will not identify with.

He believes October 7 was a game changer. “The perception of what Israel means to students is the biggest change I have seen since October 2023. Israel is no longer just a place on the map but a place deep in students’ hearts. This tiny little country has really unearthed a component of Jewish life that is so important. I watch as students defend a place that they don’t know.

“San Diego represents the prime location for secular Judaism. In my teaching, I want to change the game and place a new cover on an old book. When Jewish students take their Stars of David outside from underneath their shirts, I consider them taking a giant leap. They become more passionate and find their identity.

“Already prior to October 7, I was so pleased to hear about a group of Jewish students challenging a high school newspaper publication that featured anti-Israel rhetoric. The students organized a march in protest and met with the school principal. Post-October 7, I’ve seen that style of thinking completely skyrocket. Every single student has become more in tune with their Jewish identity.

“The teens have taken to heart the defacing of posters of the hostages. That is easily the issue that I am most commonly encountered with by them. A casual joke about the Holocaust is very regular for the Jewish students, but the defacing have caused outrage.

“A former student of mine was studying at Stanford University and was in the class where the professor wanted to segregate Jewish students. The student told me that she would now always visibly wear her Star of David so that others on her campus feel represented.”⁵

I attended a Shabbat dinner organized by Rabbi New and learned how present the conflict in the Middle East has been in the lives of some Jewish high school students. A 16-year-old girl who studies in a non-Jewish school told me about her inability to control her emotions post-

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Interview by the author with Rabbi Zevi New, September 12, 2024.

October 7. “If I see anyone supporting Palestine, I scream at them,” she said. “I was in school and shouted at another girl wearing a pro-Palestine sticker. I was so angry.”⁶

A 15-year-old boy born in Israel, also studying in a non-Jewish school, said he had approached a girl who spoke against Israel and asked her if she “supported Hamas.” That question was enough to result in his brief suspension, but he does not regret what he did.⁷

Another 15-year-old boy recounted that he reported a classmate for painting a swastika in the school bathroom. “The school Principal personally thanked me,” he said.⁸

– **Noah Abrahams**

Policy Recommendations

1. The stronger identification with Israel by some young Jews in the West following October 7 creates an historical opportunity that should not be squandered. Lectures, workshops, movies, and other informational content are all important, but nothing can help establish a connection with the State of the Jews as visits to the country and thorough engagement with its rich history, diverse communities, and thrilling youth culture.
2. Support for Israel and participation in the fight against anti-Zionism and antisemitism are rallying points for Jews, but Jewish organizations should avoid the temptation of having them as the only common ground for activity. In particular, there is a need for more meaningful development of non-rabbinic aspects of modern Jewish identity.

⁶ Interview by the author, September 27, 2024.

⁷ Interview by the author, September 27, 2024.

⁸ Interview by the author, September 27, 2024.

HISTORICAL DECLINE

Sir Max Hastings is one of the leading historians of the Second World War. His many bestsellers include *All Hell Let Loose: The World at War 1939-1945*, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany 1944-1945*, *Finest Years: Churchill as Warlord 1940-45*, *Nemesis: The Battle for Japan 1944-1945*, and most recently, *Operation Biting: The 1942 Parachute Assault to Capture Hitler's Radar*. He also published studies on The First World War, The Korean War, The Vietnam War, and The Falklands War, as well as a biography of Yonatan Netanyahu. A former international correspondent with the BBC, he later served as the editor-in-chief of the Daily Telegraph and the editor of The Evening Standard.

In a special interview for the For a Righteous Cause Report with the Head of the Center, **Prof. Uriya Shavit**, that is certain to stir controversy, Sir Hastings (b. 1945) presented unorthodox views about the teaching of the history of the Holocaust in schools. He also expressed grave concerns about the fighting abilities and willpower of the Western World. Portions of the interview were edited for clarity and style.

You've lamented the downgrading of the teaching of history, not just military history, but history in general.

Well, there's an irony: in Europe and the United States, books about history continue to sell pretty well, but the teaching of history is at a pretty low ebb. I'm appalled that I have a teenage grandson who's at a very expensive private school, and this year, he's doing almost no history at all. They're all busy doing computer studies and gender studies, and God knows what, but they're not studying history the way we did.

Now, what one has to accept, I think, is that the way we were all taught in my generation, which is the linear approach – that you start with the Romans and you work through the Dark Ages, the Middle Ages, and so on – nowadays I don't think you can expect school children or even university students to engage in history taught in that way. Nonetheless, having that sense of the span of history does seem enormously important.

I make myself very unpopular sometimes when I say, well, of course, the business of white or black slavery was a terrible business that reflected a deep discredit on European civilizations. But the whole of human history is a story of the exploitation of the weak by the strong. And if you look, for instance, so much is being taught now about white-on-black slavery. I think people should learn a bit more about other forms of slavery, for example, in the Industrial Revolution and the conditions in which millions of industrial workers [were employed], especially in the United States and Britain, and also agricultural workers. It was something very close to slavery, and it existed for centuries. It just seems to me terribly important that one has that sense of context of trying to look at some broad span, which nobody is trying to do [anymore].

And you are also unhappy with the way the Holocaust is taught.

Holocaust studies are very big in Britain, the United States, and so on. And God knows one is not suggesting that the Holocaust should not be taught. But again, the business of context seems enormously important. First of all, the study of what? I would like to see the teaching of the Holocaust framed in the context of, for instance, what Stalin had been doing in Russia, and what Mao did in China at the same time; there were huge genocides taking place in other places. Up to 1942, let's say, Stalin undoubtedly killed more of his people than Hitler had tried to do at that stage. And, of course, most historians of China believe that Mao was responsible for far more deaths than Hitler.

Now, I know you won't suppose for a moment that one is seeking here to downgrade the Holocaust. I was thinking about this when I was walking my dogs this morning. I think it is true to say that the Holocaust is the only example in human history where camps served as death facilities that were explicitly created to kill people on the scale that they were at Auschwitz. But also, I have imprinted on my mind the memory of the number of non-Jewish Poles who were killed in Auschwitz alongside Jews. One is always thinking about the Armenian massacres by the Turks. And again, one has to keep repeating this mantra – none of this is to downplay the Holocaust. It's just trying to see the Holocaust again in the context of what human beings have done to each other in other circumstances. And God knows I have actually read several of the books about what the Turks did to the Armenians, and that, in itself, is an unspeakable story, as I am sure you know.

The Holocaust is an exceptional crime in the annals of history. Can't we acknowledge and teach its exceptionalism as well as teach about other genocides?

Of course. But, my point is that as things stand at the moment... For example, I would say that most reasonably well-educated schoolchildren believe that the Second World War was about Jews, and, of course, it wasn't. The Second World War was about power and territorial conquest in the original, and the whole business of the Holocaust was an act of insanity.

One particular aspect of the insanity is, to me, to have diverted the resources that the Nazis did to killing Jews in the middle of the war when logic might have told Hitler that if he could only achieve military dominance first, then he could do whatever he liked to the Jews, or for that matter to anybody else. But to divert resources in the middle of the war? It's something that still puzzles me because the whole business of the Holocaust and the killing of the Jews was

an act of such stupendous irrationality as well as wickedness. It's almost impossible to look for rationality in the midst of it, but nonetheless, one is always interested in these questions.

I often wonder, and so does my Jewish wife: If Britain had been occupied by the Nazis, would the British people have behaved better than, let's say, the French did in [failing to] protect Jews? And the answer is we can't know, we can't be sure. We have to accept the fact – this is another point that I'm always strongly in favor of being taught – that antisemitism remained well into my lifetime a real factor. Not in the violent sense; I don't mean that British people wanted to see Jews taken away in cattle trucks. But casual social antisemitism is something that one has seen in my lifetime among all sorts of circles of people who should know better. I've spent a lot of time studying the issue of the French and their behavior, and it is absolutely terrifying to see what they did.

But I think one good thing is that we have become more aware, and even the French have become more aware of how appallingly the French behaved. And some other nations too, as we know, that the Dutch did not behave entirely impeccably towards their Jews and so on...

Well, that is an understatement. You know, there is more teaching of the Holocaust than ever before, and there is more antisemitism than at any given time after the Second World War, so does that perhaps say that there is little point in studying history because the lessons are not learned?

Again, another difficult issue on which it's easier to pose the issue than to come up with answers is the degree to which antisemitism and anti-Zionism have become entangled. And of course, I don't think there's any secret about the fact that all my life, I've loathed Bibi Netanyahu, who I used to know in my younger days. And, of course, for him and people like him, it always suited their interests to seek to entwine antisemitism and opposition to the policies pursued by him and his kind.

It is sometimes genuinely very difficult to disentangle, and it's still difficult in the dialogue in Europe to disentangle antisemitism from opposition to the Israeli Government's policies. So, I'm just not sure if there is more antisemitism. I mean, I think the evidence, for example, attacks on synagogues and so on in Europe, I think the evidence probably is that there is more antisemitism, but I think one thing that's very difficult... this issue is not an easy one. It would be stupid to deny that what's gone on in Gaza has obviously dramatically increased antisemitism as well as anti-Zionism. But where one...

When a synagogue is attacked in London, that is antisemitism. They attack it because it's Jewish; they have no idea if the people there are for or against the Israeli government. But to go back to my previous question, what's the point of studying history if it doesn't impact the way young people think?

The study of history does not provide answers because if it did provide answers, each generation would not go on repeating the same mistakes in many countries. But what it can do is at least teach you to be aware of the questions that one should ask. And I'd be the first to say that I don't think the fact that I've devoted a lot of my life to studying history has made me a fount of wisdom. But it has made me more aware of how difficult many questions are, whereas, of

course, one of the things that goes on, and always goes on, especially with the kids and the young, is they always want simple answers, and the answers are never simple.

For example, I often say in lectures that in international affairs, the word “solution” should be barred from the discourse because in all difficult issues, above all, in the Middle East, there is no solution. What you’re always discussing is how you can manage very difficult problems. When people start using the word solution, it means they expect that there will be satisfactory answers. And one thing one can certainly say about everything to do with the Middle East is that there can’t possibly be a solution. It’s a question of how you achieve some tolerable way of managing [the conflict]. But I don’t see how, for a start, one could possibly hope to have an intelligent conversation, whether statesmen or ordinary citizens, about what happens in the Middle East without knowing the history of the 20th century.

History should always be taught with humility, with no grown-up historian professing to be telling students the truth. We are all – each generation – making a guess at truth, a grab at truth. But humility, I think, is terribly important. I think I’ve written some decent books, but never for a moment would I make the claim that what I’ve written is the truth about the events I’m describing, because it’s not like that. Each generation passes its own judgments. But to me, it’s shocking that there should be a belief now that it’s only the present and the future that we need to concern ourselves with. How can one possibly make intelligent judgments about what the present looks like, never mind the future, without knowing something about where we’ve come from?

One reason why schools focus on teaching the history of the Holocaust, including in Israel, is that everything else became so controversial. The Holocaust has remained the one thing where there is consensus about what is evil and what is righteous.

I think that is an extremely valid point. I think that’s an extremely shrewd comment, and I would go along. I was one of the first historians in Britain to quite prominently write about the Bengal Famine. I’m sure you were aware that this was the great blot on Churchill. At least a million and perhaps more Indians died in the Bengal Famine when India was under British control.

There’s no doubt that Churchill’s behavior over that [period] was very ugly. But I think one should also desperately try to teach children, which they don’t do at the moment, that we can only judge each age by its own standards. We cannot judge them by ours. And with Churchill, when people say Churchill was a racist, I say, of course, he was a racist. Everybody of his age group, of his generation, young cavalry officers in India, were racists. That’s what they were. This is awful to us now, but this was how people behaved. In the same way, they hanged homosexuals. We don’t think this is a good thing now, but this is how they thought. So I think that would be one of my foremost pleas in teaching history, teach people that each generation must judge its own generation.

Bottom line, if you were appointed Secretary of State for Education tomorrow, how would you like the Second World War and the Holocaust to be taught in schools?

It’s all a matter of nuance. A French philosopher said in the early 19th century [that] all the great truths in life are to be found in nuances. This is also true of the teaching of the Second World

War. I would love to think that, of course, any schoolchild must learn about the Holocaust. But I think it's important they should also know about the Nazi-Soviet Pact. They should also know about what happened in the 1930s.

I would say that at the moment, if you ask most British schoolchildren to write an essay saying what [they] know about the Second World War, they'll probably say, "The Second World War was about Jews." Well, it was a little more complicated than that.

So that there is no misrepresentation of your thoughts, I just want to clarify that you do think that every European schoolboy and schoolgirl should learn about the Holocaust in depth.

Yes, I think it is critically important that every child is taught about the Holocaust. I just wish to God they learned about some other things as well.

Going back to the utility of teaching history, some Israeli intelligence officers are well educated, academically, about the history of the Middle East. It did not help much on October 7.

Again, I do not believe that the knowledge of history means that you automatically come up with the answers, but it should at least empower one to ask the right questions.

I suppose I've lived for many years steeped in the history of the Middle East. Recently, I haven't been there very much; I think 2007 was the last time I was there. But when I was younger, I used to travel a lot all over the Middle East, and one couldn't make any sense of anything in the Middle East unless you had some knowledge of history. So it seems to me knowing some history does not, as I said, make you a fount of wisdom, but at least it should prevent you from making some of the worst mistakes.

I remember, actually, when I was dealing with the Netanyahus all those years ago in the late 1970s, I remember they were always giving me copies of books about Israel's right to the West Bank and all that sort of stuff. I read them all in those days, and I've still got some upstairs. Some of them are pretty mad books about Israel's claims of a Greater Israel from those days. Although this may sound odd to you, while those books that they gave me in those days were pretty mad, I'm not sorry I read them because you need to know. It helps me understand, even today, what goes on in the minds of some of those people in the Israeli cabinet alongside Netanyahu.

I'll share with you something personal. Whenever I'm in London and stand in front of Westminster, I have tears in my eyes, and I'll tell you why. There was a moment in history when pure evil was about to take over the world, and there was this one island that stood alone against it. And I, as a Jew, would not be alive and having this conversation with you had it not been for that Island. And I feel you are frustrated that the heroism, courage, and endurance that, in the end, Britain manifested and was alone in manifesting at that crucial moment in history is not conveyed to schoolchildren today.

I'm passionate, as you know.... There are a lot of historians these days who are very much against the great man theory of history or the great person theory of history. They believe that

the pattern of events is decided by great movements, not by the doings of individuals. I am, on the whole, inclined to disagree with that. I think there have been [great men who changed history]. Among many reasons I revere Churchill so much is that I think Churchill almost alone convinced the British people, or certainly convinced the British Parliament, that we could and should continue to resist [Nazi Germany]. There's no doubt in my mind that under a different British leader, Britain would have sought some sort of deal with the Nazis.

I'm always very struck by an early opinion poll in Britain, Mass Observation, the first sort of system of opinion polling in Britain that started in about 1936 or 1937. Mass Observation did a poll in November 1939 about attitudes to the war. And this was during the so-called phony war before Hitler invaded the West. This poll found that a lot of British people couldn't understand why we were going on with the war; that we'd gone to war to save Poland, and Poland was gone.

The British and French armies were confronting the Germans in the West, but they didn't seem to be getting any place, and many people interviewed by the Mass Observation poll said that they hoped some deal could be stitched up with Herr Hitler sooner rather than later. And of course, this was also true of the City of London, where a lot of the most prominent businessmen and so on in the winter of 1939, early 1940, desperately wanted a compromise peace.

Now, what changed was that in the summer of 1940, when Hitler started raining bombs down on Europe and then on Britain, he actually did Churchill the biggest favor because the British people were forced to confront the fact that there were only two choices: one was to give in, and the other was to resist.

And if Hitler had been smart, which, thank God, he was not, he would have just left Britain alone to rot in the summer of 1940. He would have turned east if he wanted to turn east. He could have done stuff in the Mediterranean, which we need not go into in detail. But if he'd simply left the British to rot [it is not certain that] Churchill could have kept control of the agenda and so on.

So I personally believe, going back to your point, that that was one of those moments in history where the fact that Britain continued to resist owed almost everything to Churchill's extraordinary personality and to what he did. And most of the rest of them would have given in. Everybody says there was this cabinet meeting, I forget the exact date, May the 28th, I think, at which Churchill persuaded the cabinet to carry on, but any idea that the appeasement camp was sort of over after that, [well,] it wasn't. There were still many people saying in corners, why can't we just make a deal because there's no rational way of keeping this going. So this is why I'm almost, I won't quite say, a worshiper of Churchill, but nonetheless, why my admiration for him is almost unbounded.

Other than Churchill, there were hundreds of thousands who sacrificed their lives for the cause; I mean, they...

Most of them, I mean, well, I don't know. It's a very long conversation. Those four years during which Britain [was under attack], most British people this day don't realize how fortunate we were by comparison to the peoples of Europe, who were either occupied or remained...one does understand this huge Russian sense of resentment that we don't give sufficient credit

to the fact that the Russians took this stupendous toll of casualties while we were sitting in relative comfort in Britain. And there is still this huge resentment in Russia about that.

If you say, what about the Nazi-Soviet Pact? Well, of course, they [the Russians] know nothing about the Nazi-Soviet Pact and so on, but nonetheless, the British people still don't realize how extraordinarily fortunate we were.

A lot of British people study the Battle of Britain, but [not] the plight of the peoples of occupied Europe. I don't just mean those who were sent to concentration camps or to death camps, but to be occupied by people of such unspeakable cruelty as the Nazis and to endure what they did.

Even though I'm about to be 79 and I've been writing books about all this for a very long time, I never cease to be awed by what people endured and suffered. And I'm never surprised by the moral compromises that a lot of them made. Yes, one is still dismayed and surprised by the attitude of the French to their Jews, but I'm not surprised by the degree of collaboration. I suspect the same would have happened in Britain.

When I observe European politics today, it always fascinates me how much the Second World War is still present. Whether it's debating migration policies or Russia's aggression, it's as if the Second World War has ended just yesterday. Also, on bookshelves, and your works are evidence of that, I think there are more books on that period than on any other. There are far more books published on the Second World War than, say, the Great War. Why is that?

I think it's because there's still a belief among Europeans, rightly or wrongly, that the two wars were of a morally different order. Most people in Britain grow up, in my view, in many ways wrongly believing that we should not have gotten involved in the First World War and that we could have somehow stayed out of it.

They don't see the Kaiser's Germany as an evil remotely comparable with Hitler's Germany, and they're sort of half right about that. I mean, nobody in their right mind would compare the Kaiser's Germany with Hitler's Germany in terms of the evil of the Nazis, but I think they're very naive in supposing that we could have stayed out of the First World War.

Be that as it may, they are still pretty confident the Second World War was "the good war," whereas they're much less confident about the First World War in that way. And in a way, they're half right because, thank God, they do realize that the Second World War had to be fought. They do realize that Hitler was an evil with whom and with which there could be no possible compromise.

But again, I go back to the fact that to me, at the heart of Churchill's genius is his understanding that there could be no compromise with the evil of Nazis at a time when there was still an enormous number of people, far more than we would care to think today, who did believe that there could be some sort of compromise with evil.

Going back to your question about the First and Second World Wars, I don't think it's too surprising. [Aside from believing it was a just and essential war, there are other reasons why it is studied so extensively]. It sounds like a frivolous thing to say, but the Second World War was

an unspeakable experience for everybody engaged in the Eastern Front almost from beginning to end, but for a lot of people in the West, by comparison to the First World War, it wasn't so bad. I mean, the casualties were not nearly so ghastly, and people find redeeming interests and excitements in the story of the Second World War. [Also], the First World War, they feel all the battles were the same. They were all bloodbaths in which nobody ultimately prevailed.

In America, you've got Midway on the Coral Sea; people see redeeming quality, and actually, they're wrong to see that. There's a great phrase and I'm trying to quote this from memory, but which is always imprinted on my brain; it was said by a Norwegian resistance hero, and I've quoted him in my books. But again, I'm forgetting his name for now. I think his name was Hansen. He wrote in his memoirs in about 1948 that "although wars bring adventures that stir the heart, the true nature of war is composed of innumerable personal tragedies and sacrifices, wholly evil and not redeemed by glory."

And I think one has to... In my books, I keep repeating, even though I write all those books about these things, that any idea that there is any sort of redemption to be found in war is deeply flawed and that, in the end, wars are ghastly. I always remember most of the men in my family had, dare I say it, rather enjoyable wars and exciting wars. They won decorations, and they did exciting things, and so on. One of my cousins was in the SAS. So my mother used to say to me when I was a child, "Don't listen to your father and his cousins talking about the war and saying what an exciting time they had." She said that war was absolutely ghastly. And, of course, my mother was absolutely dead right.

Going back to this business of context, when I started writing books, which was a very long time ago, I was stupid enough to think that the history of war is mostly about men, the protagonists, and the soldiers. And actually, it's not. Soldiers are always a relatively small minority in all wars. In the end, if one's going to write the true story of any war, it must be about victims, and especially women. But it took me years to understand that. And I think one of many things I understand in the 21st century, which I did not understand [earlier in my career], is that for my books to have any value at all, they need to address the predicament of victims, the predicament especially of women, as well as what young men did.

Another phrase of one of my heroes among historians is by Professor Sir Michael Howard, who died some years ago. Michael, who himself fought in the [Second World] War, used to say that it's amazing how many young men will do stupidly brave things on the battlefield. When you're 20 years old, there's almost no act of stupidity you won't commit to win a military cross, and he won a Military Cross when he was 20 years old. And that remark of Michael's made a great impression on me, too.

So, when I'm lecturing or writing about war now, I think I am doing so in a very different spirit from when I was young. I'll go back to Israel's history. I was a correspondent in 1973 in Israel. And at that time, I was in love with the idea [of war]. And because Israel was in such chaos in 1973, I was able to get much closer to the action than one ever normally can in Israel's wars. I got to the Golan, and later, I was down at Suez. Looking back, I wrote in almost adulatory terms about what I'd seen the IDF doing, especially up on the Golan. I look back, and I was

so young then and so stupid. I did see a glory in war, which I'm rather ashamed to look back on. And you know, one should have been more grown up and had a better sense of person.

Well, the other side of the coin is this: my impression when I speak with young Europeans today, also young Brits, is that the idea that they might have to at some point wear a uniform to defend their independence and freedom – it's not even that it's terrifying for them, it's incomprehensible, it's bizarre.

It's absolutely true and certainly it goes for my children and grandchildren. I grew up with a sense of romance about military affairs, which again was entirely and deeply flawed. And I look back in embarrassment. But the worst aspect today is that there is resistance throughout Europe, including Britain, to the need for adopting a military means to defend oneself and protect oneself.

I've often raged in my columns in *The Times* about the gulf between European promises to Ukraine and the reality of what's been delivered. That again and again, the words have been cheap. That many successive British prime ministers have pledged undying support for Ukraine, but the actual deliveries of weapons have fallen far, far behind, and I've repeated many times that without the Americans, Ukraine would be toast and its...

That's very dangerous, isn't it?

Incredibly dangerous. I write in *The Times* about once every couple of months arguing that unless we start to take defense seriously, we, or our children or grandchildren, are going to be terribly, terribly shocked by what aggressors are capable of doing to us. Putin thinks that we are decadent and thus vulnerable.

Why are young Europeans today so averse to the lessons of history, which are that sometimes you have to fight if you want to remain free?

Hard to say, but again, I went too far the other way when I was young; I saw the romance I felt when I was briefly attached to our Parachute Regiment, and I thought that parachuting and, you know, wearing the red beret, and so on, that this was something very romantic and exciting. I look back now, and I went far too far in that direction. I used to think that to show oneself a real man when one was young, one had to do dangerous things and probably be shot at. And nowadays, very sensibly now, my children or grandchildren don't think that, of course. They don't understand there is a middle ground between my stupidity in one direction when I was young and their stupidity in another direction today.

The difficulty of mustering any political support for a serious defense policy is worse in Europe. You know, I mean, I'm constantly looking at the statistics, and the Europeans are doing almost nothing about defense. I never believed that the Germans would make good on those pledges [they made to Ukraine], and of course, they haven't, and especially now that the German economy is in considerable trouble.

Again, why?

Politics is mostly about telling electorates what they want to hear. The idea of leadership of the kind that Churchill displayed is deeply unfashionable, and there is a great unwillingness among national leaders, except in the Nordic countries [to support Ukraine].

Nordic countries are behaving much more intelligently and there is a much more real understanding there of how serious the threat from aggressors, especially the Russians, is. But we are, I fear, probably after I'm dead, headed for some terrible, cruel shocks when we discover that to abandon violence, to abandon the use of force, it requires two people. And it's no good us saying, well, we've decided that [using violence is] a barbaric practice.

The other thing that we don't learn, of course, is that having appeased Hitler in the 1930s, we were phenomenally lucky in 1940. From 1940 to 1944, Britain was able to rearm. In a book I'm writing at the moment, I've said it's quite extraordinary that Britain and the Americans were granted four years to repair to return to fight Hitler on the continent. Four years of doing almost nothing.

Now people say but we were fighting in the Mediterranean or in this, that or the other, but this was on a tiny scale compared with what was going on elsewhere. We were granted these four years to rearm and prepare to engage the German army on terms that suited us. Well, in real life, in normal circumstances, you do not get granted that much time to prepare.

There's no chance now that we will be given anything like that sort of time [in future conflicts]. The state of preparedness of the British Army [today] is almost moribund. I mean, we sent most of our effective weapons systems to aid Ukraine, and they have not been replaced since the Ukraine war started. One big contract has been placed with British firms for 155mm artillery ammunition to replace stocks sent to [Ukraine]. One contract. I frequently ask my military friends if that has changed. Have any more contracts been signed? And the answer is no.

Again, I write in *The Times* probably about every two months saying we have to get real about defense and rearmament, not just on a British scale, but in Europe too, but there is just not the will to listen.

People nod and say, "Oh, good article in *The Times*, Max." But of course, no one will do anything about it. And the politicians are overwhelmingly preoccupied and it's what I call – I referred earlier to that poll – the "bomb problem." Because no bombs are falling as they weren't in November 1939, people can't see why they need to do anything. It's only when bombs are falling that people tend to get real about defense.

If I were a populist, I would say it's TikTok's fault; that it's a spoiled generation. But the fact is, 90 years ago, people made the same mistake in England as they do today.

I agree with you totally. And I hate to think how many words I've expended talking about and writing about this. And there are, of course, other people [who write this]. I don't mean I'm all alone. I mean, there are people like me who have some knowledge of history and defense.

The one thing Trump is right about, big time, is that the Europeans have had a free ride since the 1950s in terms of defense and security, which the Americans have looked after. And again, a point that we ought to make, is that the time is over when the Americans are prepared to do

our defense for us and pay for our defense. We're going to have to do it ourselves, and there is no real will or understanding of this in Europe. This is very depressing.

If Argentina was to invade the Falklands tomorrow, would there be a will to fight back and reclaim it? And then, even if there is the will, is there the ability?

I don't think so. I think that the Falklands was a one-off, and it was an extraordinary war. All wars are political, but the Falklands was completely [political]. The Falklands was an act of madness, and most of us who were down there understood at the time that this was mad because Britain had no real strategic interest in the Falklands at all.

The South Atlantic was meaningless in those days of the Cold War, and in those days, most of the armed forces, as well as most of the body politic, thought that, frankly, it was a lost cause. In the end, the best reason for fighting the war was that it empowered Margaret Thatcher to do many very good things for Britain in the decade that followed.

But at the time, I remember many conversations I had down South with the people who were fighting the war, and most of us realized it was, in a sense, a ridiculous war. But it sort of did good things. It did good things morally.

I mean, at the time we went down South, the British people were terribly resigned to failure – economic failure, political failure, and so on. Well, the terrific lift that it gave, I mean, the mood when they came back, the triumphalism. In fact, Michael Howard said to me a few years before his death – because he was violently opposed to Brexit, to Britain's departure from the European Union, as I was, as I am – he said, “such a pity about victory in the Falklands. Just at the time when the British were getting realistic about our diminished place in the world, we go and win this little war down South, and we convince ourselves that we're a great imperial power again.”

I see that war differently. It brought down a murderous junta and it reestablished the principle that liberal democracies fight back, and I don't know if the entire wonderful decade of the 1980s, the revolutions across the world, would have happened if Thatcher were not there.

Of course, you're right. You're absolutely right. I've written that, too. I've always said we owe a great debt to the Argentine junta... they did wonderful things for Britain.

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