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years that have elapsed since that time, the memorialization of the "Rape of Nanjing" has never extended beyond the regional confines of China, and, until recently, barely beyond the confines of Nanjing itself. The trauma contributed scarcely at all to the collective identity of the People's Republic of China, let alone to the self-conception of the postwar democratic government of Japan. As the most recent narrator of the massacre puts it, "Even by the standards of history's most destructive war, the Rape of Nanjing represents one of the worst instances of mass extermination" (Chang 1997: 5). Yet, though extraordinarily traumatic for the contemporary residents of Nanjing, it became "the forgotten Holocaust of World War II," and it remains an "obscure incident" today (ibid.: 6), the very existence of which is routinely and successfully denied by some of Japan's most powerful and esteemed public officials.

As I have suggested in this introductory chapter, such failures to recognize collective traumas, much less to incorporate their lessons into collective identity, do not result from the intrinsic nature of the original suffering. This is the naturalistic fallacy that follows from lay trauma theory. The failure stems, rather, from an inability to carry through what I have called a trauma process. In Japan and China, just as in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Guatemala, claims have certainly been made for the central relevance of such "distant sufferings" (Boltanski 1999).<sup>18</sup> But for both social structural and cultural reasons, carrier groups have not emerged with the resources, authority, or interpretive competence to powerfully disseminate these trauma claims. Sufficiently persuasive narratives have not been created, or they have not been successfully broadcast to wider audiences. Because of these failures, the perpetrators of these collective sufferings have not been compelled to accept moral responsibility, and the lessons of these social traumas have been neither memorialized nor ritualized. New definitions of moral responsibility have not been generated. Social solidarities have not been extended. More primordial and more particularistic collective identities have not been changed.

However tortuous the trauma process, however, it can allow collectivities to define new forms of moral responsibility and to redirect the course of political action. Collective traumas have no geographical or cultural limitations. They emerge when collectivities experience themselves as having sustained grave injuries, and when they draw, for better and for worse, on the moral lessons that seem to emanate from them.

## HOLOCAUST AND TRAUMA: MORAL UNIVERSALISM IN THE WEST

How did a specific and situated historical event, an event marked by ethnic and racial hatred, violence, and war, become transformed into a generalized symbol of human suffering and moral evil, a universalized symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic, racial, and religious justice, for mutual recognition, and for global conflicts becoming regulated in a more civil way?<sup>1</sup> This cultural transformation has been achieved because the originating historical event, traumatic in the extreme for a delimited particular group, has come over the last ~~sixty~~ years to be redefined as a traumatic event for all of humankind.<sup>2</sup> Now floating rather than situated – universal rather than particular – this traumatic event vividly "lives" in the memories of contemporaries whose parents and grandparents never felt themselves even remotely related to it.

In what follows, I explore the social creation of a cultural fact and the effects of this cultural fact on social and moral life.

In the beginning, in April 1945, the Holocaust was not the "Holocaust." In the torrent of newspaper, radio, and magazine stories reporting the discovery by American infantrymen of the Nazi concentration camps, the empirical remains of what had transpired were typified as "atrocities." Their obvious awfulness, and indeed their strangeness, placed them for contemporary observers at the borderline of the category of behavior known as "man's inhumanity to man." Nonetheless, qua atrocity, the discoveries were placed side-by-side – metonymically and semantically – with a whole series of other brutalities that were considered to be the natural results of the ill wind of this second, very unnatural, and most inhuman world war.

The first American reports on "atrocities" during that Second World War had not, in fact, even referred to actions by German Nazis, let alone to their Jewish victims, but to the Japanese army's brutal treatment of American and other allied prisoners of war after the loss of Corregidor in 1943. On January 27, 1944, the United States released sworn statements by military officers who had escaped the so-called Bataan Death March. In the words of contemporary journals and magazines, these officers had related "atrocities" revealing "the inhuman treatment and murder of American and Filipino soldiers who were taken prisoner when Bataan and Corregidor fell." In response to these accounts, the US State Department had lodged protests to the Japanese government about its failure to live up to the provisions of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention (*Current History*, March 1944: 249). Atrocities, in other words, were a signifier specifically connected to war. They referred to war-generated events that transgressed the rules circumscribing how national killing could normally be carried out.<sup>3</sup> Responding to the same incident, *Newsweek*, in a section entitled "The Enemy" and under the headline "Nation Replies in Grim Fury to Jap Brutality to Prisoners," reported that "with the first impact of the news, people had shuddered at the story of savage *atrocities* upon Allied prisoners of war by the Japanese" (February 7, 1944: 19, italics added).<sup>4</sup>

It is hardly surprising, then, that it was this nationally specific and particular war-related term that was employed to represent the grisly Jewish mass murders discovered by American GIs when they liberated the Nazi camps.<sup>5</sup> Through April 1945, as one camp after another was discovered, this collective representation was applied time after time.<sup>6</sup> When, toward the end of that month, a well-known Protestant minister explored the moral implications of the discoveries, he declared that, no matter how horrifying and repulsive, "it is important that the full truth be made known so that a clear indication may be had of the nature of the enemy we have been dealing with, as well of as a realization of *the sheer brutalities that have become the accompaniment of war.*" The *New York Times* reported this sermon under the headline "Bonnell Denounces German Atrocities" (April 23, 1945: 23, italics added). When alarmed members of the US Congress visited Buchenwald, the *Times* headlined that they had witnessed first hand the "*War Camp Horror*" (April 26, 1945: 12, italics added). When a few days later the US Army released a report on the extent of the killings in Buchenwald, the *Times* headlined it an "Atrocity Report" (April 29, 1945: 20). A few days after that, under the headline "Enemy Atrocities in France Bared," the *Times*

wrote that a just-released report had shown that "in France, German brutality was not limited to the French underground or even to the thousands of hostages whom the Germans killed for disorders they had nothing to do with, but was practiced almost systematically against entirely innocent French people" (May 4, 1945: 6).

The Nazis' anti-Jewish mass murders had once been only putative atrocities. From the late 1930s on, reports about them had been greeted with widespread public doubt about their authenticity. Analogies to the allegations about German atrocities during the First World War that later had been thoroughly discredited, they were dismissed as a kind of Jewish moral panic. Only three months before the GI's "discovery" of the camps, in introducing a first-hand report on Nazi mass murder from a Soviet-liberated camp in Poland, *Collier's* magazine acknowledged: "A lot of Americans simply do not believe the stories of Nazi mass executions of Jews and anti-Nazi Gentiles in eastern Europe by means of gas chambers, freight cars partly loaded with lime and other horrifying devices. These stories are so foreign to most Americans' experience of life in this country that they seem incredible. Then, too, some of the atrocity stories of World War I were later proved false" (January 6, 1945: 62).<sup>7</sup> From April 3, 1945, however, the date when the GIs first liberated the concentration camps, all such earlier reports were retrospectively accepted as facts, as the realistic signifiers of Peirce rather than the "arbitrary" symbols of Saussure. That systematic efforts at Jewish mass murder had occurred, and that the numerous victims and the few survivors had been severely traumatized, the American and world-wide audience now had little doubt.<sup>8</sup> Their particular and unique fate, however, even while it was widely recognized as representing the grossest of injustices, did not itself become a traumatic experience for the audience to which the mass media's collective representations were transmitted – that is, for those looking on, either from near or from far. Why this was not so defines my initial explanatory effort here.

For an audience to be traumatized by an experience that they themselves do not directly share, symbolic extension and psychological identification are required. This did not occur. For the American infantry who first made contact, for the general officers who supervised the rehabilitation, for the reporters who broadcast the descriptions, for the commissions of Congress and influentials who quickly traveled to Germany to conduct on-site investigations, the starving, depleted, often weird-looking and sometimes weird-acting Jewish camp survivors seemed like a foreign race. They could just as well have been from Mars, or from hell. The identities and characters

of these Jewish survivors rarely were personalized through interviews or individualized through biographical sketches; rather, they were presented as a mass, and often as a mess, a petrified, degrading, and smelly one, not only by newspaper reporters but also by some of the most powerful general officers in the Allied High Command. This depersonalization made it more difficult for the survivors' trauma to generate compelling identification.

Possibilities for universalizing the trauma were blocked not only by the depersonalization of its victims but also by their historical and sociological specification. As I have indicated, the mass murders semantically were immediately linked to other "horrors" in the bloody history of the century's second great war and to the historically specific national and ethnic conflicts that underlay it. Above all, it was never forgotten that these victims were Jews. In retrospect, it is bitterly ironic, but it is also sociologically understandable, that the American audience's sympathy and feelings of identity flowed much more easily to the non-Jewish survivors, whether German or Polish, who had been kept in better conditions and looked more "normal," more composed, more human. Jewish survivors were kept for weeks and sometimes even for months in the worst areas and under the worst conditions of what had become, temporarily, displaced persons' camps. American and British administrators felt impatient with many Jewish survivors, even personal repugnance for them, sometimes resorting to threats and even to punishing them.<sup>9</sup> The depth of this initial failure of identification can be seen in the fact that when American citizens and their leaders expressed opinions and made decisions about national quotas for emergency postwar immigration, displaced German citizens ranked first, Jewish survivors last.

How could this have happened? Was it not obvious to any human observer that this mass murder was fundamentally different from the other traumatic and bloody events in a modern history already dripping in blood, that it represented not simply evil but "radical evil," in Kant's remarkable phrase (Kant 1960),<sup>10</sup> that it was unique? To understand why none of this was obvious, to understand how and why each of these initial understandings and behaviors was radically changed, and how this transformation had vast repercussions for establishing not only new moral standards for social and political behavior but also unprecedented, if still embryonic, regulatory controls, it is important to see the inadequacy of commonsense understandings of traumatic events.

There are two kinds of commonsense thinking about trauma, forms of thinking that constitute what I called in Chapter 1 "lay

trauma theory." These commonsensical forms of reasoning have deeply informed thinking about the effects of the Holocaust. They are expressed in the following strikingly different conceptualizations of what happened after the revelations of the mass killings of Jews.

- *The Enlightenment version.* The "horror" of onlookers provoked the postwar end of anti-Semitism in the United States. The commonsense assumption here is that because people have a fundamentally "moral" nature — as a result of their rootedness in Enlightenment and religious traditions — they will perceive atrocities for what they are and react to them by attacking the belief systems that provided legitimation.
- *The psychoanalytic version.* When faced with the horror, Jews and non-Jews alike reacted not with criticism and decisive action but with silence and bewilderment. Only after two or even three decades of repression and denial were people finally able to begin talking about what happened and to take actions in response to this knowledge.

Enlightenment and psychoanalytic forms of lay trauma thinking have permeated academic efforts at understanding what happened after the death-camp revelations. One or the other version has informed not only every major discussion of the Holocaust but also virtually every contemporary effort to investigate trauma more generally, efforts that are, in fact, largely inspired by Holocaust debates.<sup>11</sup>

What is wrong with this lay trauma theory is that it is "naturalistic," either in the naively moral or the naively psychological sense. Lay trauma theory fails to see that there is an interpretive grid through which all "facts" about trauma are mediated, emotionally, cognitively, and morally. This grid has a supraindividual, cultural status; it is symbolically structured and sociologically determined. No trauma interprets itself: Before trauma can be experienced at the collective (not individual) level, there are essential questions that must be answered, and answers to these questions change over time.

## The Cultural Construction of Trauma

### *Coding, Weighting, Narrating*

Elie Wiesel, in a moving and influential statement in the late 1970s, asserted that the Holocaust represents an "ontological evil." From a

sociological perspective, however, evil is epistemological, not ontological. For a traumatic event to have the status of evil is a matter of its *becoming* evil. It is a matter of how the trauma is known, how it is coded.<sup>12</sup> "At first glance it may appear a paradox," Diner has noted – and certainly it does – but, considered only in and of itself, "Auschwitz has no appropriate narrative, only a set of statistics" (Diner 2000: 178). Becoming evil is a matter, first and foremost, of representation. Depending on the nature of representation, a traumatic event may be regarded as ontologically evil, or its badness, its "evilness," may be conceived as contingent and relative, as something that can be ameliorated and overcome. This distinction is theoretical, but it is also practical. In fact, decisions about the ontological versus contingent status of the Holocaust were of overriding importance in its changing representation.

If we can deconstruct this ontological assertion even further, I would like to suggest that the very existence of the category "evil" must be seen not as something that naturally exists but as an arbitrary construction, the product of cultural and sociological work. This contrived binary, which simplifies empirical complexity to two antagonistic forms and reduces every shade of gray between, has been an essential feature of all human societies but especially important in those Eisenstadt (1982) has called the Axial Age civilizations. This rigid opposition between the sacred and profane, which in Western philosophy has typically been constructed as a conflict between normativity and instrumentality, not only defines what people care about but also establishes vital safeguards around the shared normative "good." At the same time it places powerful, often aggressive barriers against anything that is construed as threatening the good, forces defined not merely as things to be avoided but as sources of horror and pollution that must be contained at all costs.

#### *The Material "Base":*

#### *Controlling the Means of Symbolic Production*

Yet if this grid is a kind of functional necessity, how it is applied very much depends on who is telling the story, and how. This is first of all a matter of cultural power in the most mundane, materialist sense: Who controls the means of symbolic production?<sup>13</sup> It was certainly not incidental to the public understanding of the Nazis' policies of mass murder, for example, that for an extended period of time it was the Nazis themselves who were in control of the physical and cultural terrain of their enactment. This fact of brute power made it much

more difficult to frame the mass killings in a distinctive way. Nor is it incidental that, once the extermination of the Jews was physically interrupted by Allied armies in 1945, it was America's "imperial republic" – the perspective of the triumphant, forward-looking, militantly and militarily democratic New World warrior – that directed the organizational and cultural responses to the mass murders and their survivors. The contingency of this knowledge is so powerful that it might well be said that, if the Allies had not won the war, the "Holocaust" would never have been discovered.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, if it had been the Soviets and not the Allies who "liberated" most of the camps, and not just those in the Eastern sector, what was discovered in those camps might never have been portrayed in a remotely similar way.<sup>15</sup> It was, in other words, precisely and only because the means of symbolic production were not controlled by a victorious postwar Nazi regime, or even by a triumphant communist one, that the mass killings could be called the Holocaust and coded as evil.

#### *Creating the Culture Structure*

Still, even when the means of symbolic production came to be controlled by "our side," even when the association between evil and what would become known as the Holocaust trauma was assured, this was only the beginning, not the end. After a phenomenon is coded as evil, the question that immediately follows is: How evil is it? In theorizing evil, this refers to the problem not of coding but of weighting. For there are degrees of evil, and these degrees have great implications in terms of responsibility, punishment, remedial action, and future behavior. Normal evil and radical evil cannot be the same.

Finally, alongside these problems of coding and weighting, the meaning of a trauma cannot be defined unless we determine exactly what the "it" is. This is a question of narrative: What were the evil and traumatizing actions in question? Who was responsible? Who were the victims? What were the immediate and long-term results of the traumatizing actions? What can be done by way of remediation or prevention?

What these theoretical considerations suggest is that even after the physical force of the Allied triumph and the physical discovery of the Nazi concentration camps, the nature of what was seen and discovered had to be coded, weighted, and narrated. This complex cultural construction, moreover, had to be achieved immediately. History does not wait; it demands that representations be made, and they will be. Whether or not some newly reported event is startling,

strange, terrible, or inexpressibly weird, it must be "typified," in the sense of Husserl and Schutz – that is, it must be explained as a typical and even anticipated example of some thing, or category that was known about before.<sup>16</sup> Even the vastly unfamiliar must somehow be made familiar. To the cultural process of coding, weighting, and narrating, in other words, what comes before is all-important. Historical background is critical, both for the first "view" of the traumatic event and, as "history" changes, for later views as well. Once again, these shifting cultural constructions are fatefully affected by the power and identity of the agents in charge, by the competition for symbolic control, and by the structures of power and distribution of resources that condition it.

### Background Constructions

#### *Nazism as the Representation of Absolute Evil*

What was the historical structure of "good and evil" within which, on April 3, 1945, the "news" of the Nazi concentration camps was first confirmed to the American audience? To answer this question, it is first necessary to describe what came before. In what follows I will venture some observations, which can hardly be considered definitive, about how social evil was coded, weighted, and narrated during the interwar period in Europe and the United States.

In the deeply disturbing wake of the First World War, there was a pervasive sense of disillusionment and cynicism among mass and elite members of the Western "audience," a distancing from protagonists and antagonists that, as Paul Fussell has shown, made irony the master trope of that first postwar era.<sup>17</sup> This trope transformed "demonology" – the very act of coding and weighting evil – into what many intellectuals and lay persons alike considered to be an act of bad faith. Once the coding and weighting of evil were de-legitimated, however, good and evil became less distinct from one another and relativism became the dominant motif of the time. In such conditions, coherent narration of contemporary events becomes difficult if not impossible. Thus it was that, not only for many intellectuals and artists of this period but for many ordinary people as well, the startling upheavals of these interwar years could not easily be sorted out in a conclusive and satisfying way.

It was in the context of this breakdown of representation that racism and revolution, whether fascist or communist, emerged as

compelling frames, not only in Europe but also in the United States. Against a revolutionary narrative of dogmatic and authoritarian modernism on the Left, there arose the narrative of reactionary modernism, equally revolutionary but fervently opposed to rationality and cosmopolitanism.<sup>18</sup> In this context, many democrats in Western Europe and the United States withdrew from the field of representation itself, becoming confused and equivocating advocates of disarmament, nonviolence, and peace "at any price." This formed the cultural frame for isolationist political policy in both Britain and the United States.

Eventually the aggressive military ambition of Nazism made such equivocation impossible to sustain. While racialism, relativism, and narrative confusion continued in the United States and Britain until the very beginning of the Second World War, and even continued well into it, these constructions were countered by increasingly forceful and confident representations of good and evil that coded liberal democracy and universalism as unalloyed goods and Nazism, racism, and prejudice as deeply corrosive representations of the polluting and profane.

From the late 1930s on, there emerged a strong, and eventually dominant, anti-fascist narrative in Western societies. Nazism was coded, weighted, and narrated in apocalyptic, Old Testament terms as "the dominant evil of our time." Because this radical evil aligned itself with violence and massive death, it not merely justified but also compelled the risking of life in opposing it, a compulsion that motivated and justified massive human sacrifice in what came later to be known as the last "good war."<sup>19</sup> That Nazism was an absolute, unmitigated evil, a radical evil that threatened the very future of human civilization, formed the presupposition of America's four-year prosecution of the world war.<sup>20</sup>

The representation of Nazism as an absolute evil emphasized not only its association with sustained coercion and violence but also, and perhaps even especially, the way Nazism linked violence with ethnic, racial, and religious hatred. In this way, the most conspicuous example of the practice of Nazi evil – its policy of systematic discrimination, coercion, and, eventually, mass violence against the Jews – was initially interpreted as "simply" another horrifying example of the subhumanism of Nazi action.

#### *Interpreting Kristallnacht: Nazi Evil as Anti-Semitism*

The American public's reaction to *Kristallnacht* demonstrates how important the Nazis' anti-Jewish activities were in crystallizing

the polluted status of Nazism in American eyes. It also provides a prototypical example of how such representations of the evils of anti-Semitism were folded into the broader and more encompassing symbolism of Nazism. *Kristallnacht* refers, of course, to the rhetorically virulent and physically violent expansion of the Nazi repression of Jews that unfolded throughout German towns and cities on November 9 and 10, 1938. These activities were widely recorded. "The morning editions of most American newspapers reported the *Kristallnacht* in banner headlines," according to one historian of that fateful event, "and the broadcasts of H. V. Kaltenborn and Raymond Gram Swing kept the radio public informed of Germany's latest adventure" (Diamond 1969: 198). Exactly why these events assumed such critical importance in the American public's continuing effort to understand "what Hitlerism stood for" (201) goes beyond the simple fact that violent and repressive activities were, perhaps for the first time, openly, even brazenly, displayed in direct view of the world public sphere. Equally important was the altered cultural framework within which these activities were observed. For *Kristallnacht* occurred just six weeks after the now infamous Munich agreements, acts of appeasing Hitler's expansion that were understood, not only by isolationists but also by many opponents of Nazism, indeed by the vast majority of the American people, as possibly reasonable accessions to a possibly reasonable man (197). In other words, *Kristallnacht* initiated a process of understanding fuelled by symbolic contrast, not simply observation.

What was interpretively constructed was the cultural difference between Germany's previously apparent cooperativeness and reasonableness – representations of the good in the discourse of American civil society – and its subsequent demonstration of violence and irrationality, which were taken to be representations of anti-civil evil. Central to the ability to draw this contrast was the ethnic and religious hatred Germans demonstrated in their violence against Jews. If one examines the American public's reactions, it clearly is this anti-Jewish violence that is taken to represent the evil of Nazism. It was with reference to this violence that the news stories of the *New York Times* employed the rhetoric of pollution to further code and weight Nazi evil: "No foreign propagandist bent upon blackening the name of Germany before the world could outdo the tale of beating, of blackguardly assaults upon defenseless and innocent people, which degraded that country yesterday" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 198). The *Times*'s controversial columnist Anne O'Hare McCormick wrote that "the suffering [the Germans] inflict on others, now that they are

on top, passes all understanding and mocks all sympathy," and she went on to label *Kristallnacht* "the darkest day Germany experienced in the whole post-war period" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 199). The *Washington Post* identified the Nazi activities as "one of the worst setbacks for mankind since the Massacre of St. Bartholomew" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 198–9).

This broadening identification of Nazism with evil, simultaneously triggered and reinforced by the anti-Jewish violence of *Kristallnacht*, stimulated influential political figures to make more definitive judgments about the antipathy between American democracy and German Nazism than they had up until that point. Speaking on NBC radio, Al Smith, former New York governor and democratic presidential candidate, observed that the events confirmed that the German people were "incapable of living under a democratic government" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 200). Following Smith on the same program, Thomas E. Dewey, soon to be New York governor and future presidential candidate, expressed the opinion that "the civilized world stands revolted by the bloody pogrom against a defenseless people . . . by a nation run by madmen" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 201). Having initially underplayed America's official reaction to the events, four days later President Franklin Roosevelt took advantage of the public outrage by emphasizing the purity of the American nation and its distance from this emerging representation of violence and ethnic hatred: "The news of the past few days from Germany deeply shocked public opinion in the United States . . . I myself could scarcely believe that such things could occur in a twentieth century civilization" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 205).

Judging from these reactions to the Nazi violence of *Kristallnacht*, it seems only logical that, as one historian has put it, "most American newspapers or journals" could "no longer . . . view Hitler as a pliable and reasonable man, but as an aggressive and contemptible dictator [who] would have to be restrained" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 207). What is equally striking, however, is that in almost none of the American public's statements of horror is there explicit reference to the identity of the victims of *Kristallnacht* as Jews. Instead they are referred to as a "defenseless and innocent people," as "others," and as a "defenseless people" (quoted in Diamond 1969: 198, 199, 201). In fact, in the public statement just quoted, President Roosevelt goes well out of his way to separate his moral outrage from any link to a specific concern for the fate of the Jews. "Such news from any part of the world," the President insists, "would inevitably produce similar profound reaction among Americans in any part of the nation"

(Diamond 1969: 205, italics added). In other words, despite the centrality of the Nazis' anti-Jewish violence to the emerging American symbolization of Nazism as evil, there existed – at that point in historical and cultural time – a reluctance for non-Jewish Americans to identify with Jewish people as such. Jews were highlighted as vital representations of the evils of Nazism: their fate would be understood only in relation to the German horror that threatened democratic civilization in America and Europe. This failure of identification would be reflected seven years later in the distancing of the American soldiers and domestic audience from the traumatized Jewish camp survivors and their even less fortunate Jewish compatriots whom the Nazis had killed.

### *Anti-Anti-Semitism: Fighting Nazi Evil by Fighting for the Jews*

It was also during the 1930s, in the context of the Nazi persecution of German Jews, that an historically unprecedented attack on anti-Semitism emerged in the United States. It was not that Christians suddenly felt genuine affection for, or identification with, those whom they had vilified for countless centuries as the killers of Christ.<sup>21</sup> It was that the logic of symbolic association had dramatically and fatefully changed. Nazism was increasingly viewed as the vile enemy of universalism, and the most hated enemies of Nazism were the Jews. The laws of symbolic antinomy and association thus were applied. If Nazism singled out the Jews, then the Jews must be singled out by democrats and anti-Nazis. Anti-Semitism, tolerated and condoned for centuries in every Western nation, and for the preceding fifty years embraced fervently by proponents of American "nativism," suddenly became distinctly unpopular in progressive circles throughout the United States (Gleason 1981; Higham 1984).<sup>22</sup>

What I will call "anti-anti-Semitism"<sup>23</sup> became particularly intense after the United States declared war on Nazi Germany. The nature of this concern is framed in a particularly clear manner by one leading historian of American Jewry: "The war saw the merging of Jewish and American fates. Nazi Germany was the greatest enemy of both Jewry and the United States" (Shapiro 1992: 16). For the first time, overtly positive representations of Jewish people proliferated in popular and high culture alike. It was during this period that the phrase "Judeo-Christian tradition" was born. It appeared as Americans tried to fend off the Nazi enemy that threatened to destroy the sacred foundations of Western democratic life (Silk 1984).

### **Mass Murder under the Progressive Narrative**

Nazism marked a traumatic epoch in modern history. Yet, while coded as evil and weighted in the most fundamental, *weltgeschichtliche* (world-historical) terms, it was narrated inside a framework that offered the promise of salvation and triggered actions that generated confidence and hope.<sup>24</sup> What I will call the "progressive narrative" proclaimed that the trauma created by social evil would be overcome, that Nazism would be defeated and eliminated from the world, that it would eventually be relegated to a traumatic past whose darkness would be obliterated by a new and powerful social light. The progressivity of this narrative depended on keeping Nazism situated and historical, which prevented this representation of absolute evil from being universalized and its cultural power from being equated, in any way, shape, or form, with the power possessed by the good. In narrative terms, this asymmetry, this insistence on Nazism's anomalous historical status, assured its ultimate defeat. In popular consciousness and in dramas created by cultural specialists, the origins of Nazism were linked to specific events in the interwar period and to particular organizations and actors within it, to a political party, to a crazy and inhuman leader, to an anomalous nation that had demonstrated militaristic and violent tendencies over the previous one hundred years.

Yes, Nazism had initiated a trauma in modern history, but it was a liminal trauma presenting "time out of time," in Victor Turner's sense.<sup>25</sup> The trauma was dark and threatening, but it was, at the same time, anomalous and, in principle at least, temporary. As such, the trauma could and would be removed via a just war and a wise and forgiving peace.<sup>26</sup> The vast human sacrifices demanded by the winds of war were measured and judged in terms of this progressive narrative and the salvation it promised. The blood spilled in the war sanctified the future peace and obliterated the past. The sacrifice of millions could be redeemed and the social salvation of their sacred souls achieved, not by dwelling in a lachrymose manner on their deaths but by eliminating Nazism, the force that had caused their deaths, and by planning the future that would establish a world in which there could never be Nazism again.

### *Framing Revelations about the Jewish Mass Murder*

While initially received with surprise, and always conceived with loathing, the gradual and halting but eventually definitive revelations



of Nazi plans for displacing, and quite possibly murdering, the entirety of European Jewry actually confirmed the categorizing of evil already in place: the coding, weighting, and narrating of Nazism as an inhuman, absolutely evil force. What had been experienced as an extraordinary trauma by the Jewish victims was experienced by the audience of others as a kind of categorical vindication.<sup>27</sup> In this way, and for this reason, the democratic audience for the reports on the mass murders experienced distance from, rather than identification with, the trauma's victims. The revelations had the effect, in some perverse sense, of normalizing the abnormal.

The empirical existence of Nazi plans for the "Final Solution," as well as extensive documentation of their ongoing extermination activities, had been publicly documented by June 1942 (Dawidowicz 1982; Laqueur 1980; Norich 1998-9). In July of that year more than twenty thousand persons rallied in Madison Square Garden to protest the Nazis' war against the Jews. Though he did not attend in person, President Franklin Roosevelt sent a special message that what he called "these crimes" would be redeemed by the "final accounting" following the Allied victory over Nazism. In March 1943 the American Jewish Congress announced that 2 million Jews had already been massacred and that millions more were slated for death. Its detailed descriptions of the "extermination" were widely reported in the American press.<sup>28</sup> Dawidowicz shows that, by March 1944, when the Germans occupied Hungary and their intention to liquidate its entire Jewish population became known, "Auschwitz was no longer an unfamiliar name" (Dawidowicz 1982).

Yet it was this very familiarity that seemed to undermine the sense of astonishment that might have stimulated immediate action. For Auschwitz was typified in terms of the progressive narrative of war, a narrative that made it impossible to denormalize the mass killings, to make the Holocaust into the "Holocaust." As I indicated in my earlier reconstruction of the discourse about atrocity, what eventually came to be called the Holocaust was reported to contemporaries as a war story, nothing less but nothing more. In private conferences with the US president, Jewish leaders demanded that Allied forces make special efforts to target and destroy the death camps. In describing these failed efforts to trigger intervention, a leading historian explains that the leaders "couldn't convince a preoccupied American President and the American public of the significance of Auschwitz for their time in history" (Feingold 1974: 250). In other words, while Auschwitz was coded as evil, it simply was not weighted in a sufficiently dire way.

In these symbolically mediated confrontations, attention was not focused on the mass killings in and of themselves. What was definitely not illuminated or asserted was the discovery of an evil unique in human history. The evil of that time had already been discovered, and it was Nazism, not the massive killing of European Jews. The trauma that this evil had created was a second world war. The trauma that the Jews experienced in the midst of their liquidation was represented as one among a series of effects of Nazi evil. When the *London Times* reported Adolf Hitler's death, on May 2, 1945 – in the month following the death-camp revelations – its obituary described the German dictator as "the incarnation of absolute evil" and only briefly mentioned Hitler's "fanatical aversion to Jews" (quoted in Benn 1995: 102). As one historian has put it, "the processed mass murders became merely another atrocity in a particularly cruel war" (quoted in Benn 1995: 102).<sup>29</sup> The mass murders were explained, and they would be redeemed, within the framework of the progressive struggle against Nazism.

To understand fully the initial, frame-establishing encounter between Americans and the Jewish mass murder, it is vital to remember that narratives, no matter how progressive and future oriented, are composed of both antagonists and protagonists. The antagonists and their crimes were well established: The German Nazis had murdered the Jews in a gigantic, heinous atrocity of war. The protagonists were the American GIs, and their entrance into the concentration camps was portrayed not only as a discovery of such horrendous atrocities but also as another, culminating stage in a long and equally well-known sequence of "liberation," with all the ameliorating expectations that utopian term implies.

"When the press entered the camps of the western front," the cultural historian Barbie Zelizer writes, "it found that the most effective way to tell the atrocity story was as a chronicle of liberation" (1998: 63). In fact, Zelizer entitles her own detailed reconstruction of these journalist encounters "Chronicles of Liberation" (63-85). When readers of the *New York Times* and *Los Angeles Times* were confronted, on April 16, 1945, with the photo from Buchenwald of bunk beds stuffed to overflowing with haunted, pathetically undernourished male prisoners, they were informed that they were looking at "freed slave laborers" (183). On May 5, the *Picture Post* published a six-page spread of atrocity photos. Framing the heart-wrenching visual images, the theme of forward progress was palpable. One collective caption read: "These Were Inmates of Prison Camps Set Free in the Allied Advance: For Many We Came Too Late" (129). Photos of dead

or tattered and starving victims were often juxtaposed with pictures of well-dressed, well-fed German citizens from the surrounding towns, pointedly linking the crime to the particular nature of the German people themselves. In a sidebar story entitled "The Problem That Makes All Europe Wonder," the *Picture Post* described "the horror that took place within the sight and sound of hundreds of thousands of seemingly normal, decent German people. How was it possible? What has happened to the minds of a whole nation that such things should have been tolerated for a day?" (quoted in Zelizer 1998: 128). The same photos often included a representative GI standing guard, passing judgment while looking on the scene. The text alongside another widely circulated photo in the *Picture Post* made the progressive answer to such questions perfectly plain. "It is not enough to be mad with rage. It is no help to shout about 'exterminating' Germany. Only one thing helps: the attempt to understand how men have sunk so far, and the firm resolve to face the trouble, the inconvenience and cost of seeing no nation gets the chance to be foul the world like this again" (quoted in Zelizer 1998: 129). It was within this highly particularized progressive narrative that the first steps toward universalization actually took place. Because the Jewish mass killings came at the chronological conclusion of the war, and because they without doubt represented the most gruesome illustration of Nazi atrocities, they came very quickly to be viewed not merely as symptoms but also as emblems and iconic representations of the evil that the progressive narrative promised to leave behind. As the novelist and war correspondent Meyer Levin wrote of his visit to Ohrdruf, the first camp American soldiers liberated, "it was as though we had penetrated at last to the center of the black heart, to the very crawling inside of the vicious heart" (quoted in Abzug 1985: 19). On the one hand, the trauma was localized and particularized – it occurred in this war, in this place, with these persons. On the other hand, the mass murder was universalized. Within months of the initial revelations, indeed, the murders frequently were framed by a new term, *genocide*, a crime defined as the effort to destroy an entire people, which, while introduced earlier, during the war period itself, came to be publicly available and widely employed only after the discovery of the Nazi atrocities.<sup>30</sup>

In response to this new representation, the scope of the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal was enlarged. Conceived as a principal vehicle for linking the postwar Allied cause to progressive redemption, the trials were now to go beyond prosecuting the Nazi leaders for crimes of war to considering their role in the mass murder of the Jewish people. Justice Robert Jackson, the chief American prosecutor,

promised that the trial would not only prosecute those responsible for the war but also would present "undeniable proofs of incredible events" – the Nazi crimes (quoted in Bann 1995: 102). The first three counts of the twenty-thousand-word indictment against the twenty-three high-ranking Nazi officials concerned the prosecution of the war itself. They charged conspiracy, conducting a war of aggression, and violating the rules of war. The fourth count, added only in the months immediately preceding the October trial in Nuremberg, accused the Nazi leaders of something new, namely of "crimes against humanity." This was the first step toward universalizing the public representation of the Jewish mass murder. From the perspective of the present day, however, it appears as a relatively limited one, for it functioned to confirm the innocent virtue and national ambitions of one particular side. In its first report on the indictments, for example, the *New York Times* linked the Jewish mass murder directly to the war itself and placed its punishment within the effort to prevent any future "war of aggression." Under the headline "The Coming War Trials," the paper noted that "the authority of this tribunal to inflict punishment is directly from victory in war" and that its goal was "to establish the principle that no nation shall ever again go to war, except when directly attacked or under the sanction of a world organization" (October 9, 1945: 20). The Nuremberg trials were not, in other words, perceived as preventing genocide or crimes against humanity as such. At that time the commission of such crimes could not be conceived apart from the Nazis and the recently concluded aggressive war.

The force of the progressive narrative meant that while the 1945 revelations confirmed the Jewish mass murder, they did not create a trauma for the postwar audience. Victory and the Nuremberg war trials would put an end to Nazism and alleviate its evil effects. Postwar redemption depended on putting mass murder "behind us," moving on, and getting on with the construction of the new world.

From the end of the war until the early 1960s, a "can-do," optimistic spirit pervaded America. Those who had returned from the war were concerned with building a family and a career, not with dwelling on the horrors of the past . . . It did not seem to be an appropriate time to focus on a painful past, particularly a past which seemed to be of no direct concern to this country. This event had transpired on another continent. It had been committed by another country against "another" people. What relevance did it have for Americans? (Lipstadt 1996: 195–214).

[As for] the terms in which Americans of the mid-1950s were prepared to confront the Holocaust: a terrible event, yes, but ultimately not tragic or depressing; an experience shadowed by the specter of a cruel death, but at the same time not without the ability to inspire, console, uplift . . . Throughout the late 1940s and well into the '50s, a prevalent attitude was to put all of "that" behind one and get on with life. (Rosenfeld 1995: 37-8)

After the War, American Jewry turned - with great energy and generosity - to liquidating the legacy of the Holocaust by caring for the survivors [who] were urged to put the ghastly past behind them, to build new lives in their adopted homes . . . When a proposal for a Holocaust memorial in New York City came before representatives of the leading Jewish organizations in the late 1940s, they unanimously rejected the idea: it would, they said, give currency to the image of Jews as "helpless victims," an idea they wished to repudiate. (Novick 1994: 160)

It was neither emotional repression nor good moral sense that created the early responses to the mass murder of the Jews. It was, rather, a system of collective representations that focused its beam of narrative light on the triumphant expulsion of evil. Most Americans did not identify with the victims of the Jewish trauma. Far from being implicated in it, Americans had defeated those responsible for the mass murders and righteously engaged in restructuring the social and political arrangements that had facilitated them. This did not mean that the mass murder of Jews was viewed with relativism or equanimity. According to the progressive narrative, it was America's solemn task to redeem the sacrifice of this largest of all categories of Nazi victims. In postwar America, the public redeemed the sacrifices of war by demanding the thorough denazification not only of German but also of American society. As Sumner Welles eloquently framed the issue a month after the GIs had entered the Nazi death camps,

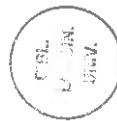
The crimes committed by the Nazis and by their accomplices against the Jewish people are indelible stains upon the whole of our modern civilization . . . They are stains which will shame our generation in the eyes of generations still unborn. For we and our governments, to which we have entrusted power during these years between the Great Wars, cannot shake off the responsibility for having permitted the growth of world conditions which made such horrors possible. The democracies cannot lightly attempt to shirk their responsibility. No recompense can be offered the dead . . . But such measure of recompense as can be offered surely constitutes the moral obligation of the free peoples of the earth as soon as their victory is won. (Welles 1945: 511)

### *Purifying America and Redeeming the Murder of the Jews*

Propelled by the logic of this progressive understanding of redemption, in America's immediate postwar years the public legitimization of anti-Semitism was repeatedly attacked and some of its central institutional manifestations destroyed. The long-standing anti-anti-Semitism framing the progressive narrative, and crystallized during the interwar years by leading figures in the American intellectual and cultural elite, culminated in the immediate postwar period in a massive shift of American public opinion on the Jewish question (Stember 1966). Only days after the hostilities ceased, in response to an appeal from the National Council of Christians and Jews, the three candidates for mayor of New York City pledged to "refrain from appeals to racial and religious divisiveness during the campaign." One of them made explicit the connection of this public anti-anti-Semitism to the effort to remain connected to, and enlarge on, the meaning of America's triumph in the anti-Nazi war.

This election will be the first held in the City of New York since our victory over nazism and Japanese fascism. It will therefore be an occasion for a practical demonstration of democracy in action - a democracy in which all are equal citizens, in which there is not and never must be a second class citizenship and in which . . . the religion of a candidate must play no part in the campaign. (*New York Times*, October 1, 1945: 32)

In an influential article, Leonard Dinnerstein has documented the vastly heightened political activism of Jewish groups in the immediate postwar period from 1945 to 1948 (Dinnerstein 1981-2). He records how these newly surfaced and often newly formed groups held conferences, wrote editorials, and issued specific proposals for legal and institutional changes. By 1950, these activities had successfully exposed and often defeated anti-Jewish quotas and, more generally, created an extraordinary shift in the practical and cultural position of American Jews. During the same month that New York's mayoral candidates announced their anti-anti-Semitism, the *American Mercury* published an article, "Discrimination in Medical Colleges," replete with graphs and copious documentation, detailing the existence of anti-Jewish quotas in some of America's most prestigious professional institutions. While the specific focus was anti-Jewish discrimination, these facts were narrated in terms of the overarching promise of America and democracy. The story began with a vignette



about "Leo, a bright and personable American lad" who "dreamed of becoming a great physician."

[He] made an excellent scholastic record [but] upon graduation . . . his first application for admission to a medical school . . . was mysteriously turned down. He filed another and another — at eighty-seven schools — always with the same heart-breaking result . . . not one of the schools had the courage to inform Leo frankly that he was being excluded because he was a Jew . . . The excuse for imposing a quota system usually advanced is that there ought to be some correlation between the number of physicians of any racial or religious strain and the proportion of that race or religion in the general population [but] the surface logic of this arithmetic collapses as soon as one subjects it to *democratic or sheerly human*, let alone scientific, tests. [It is] spurious and *un-American* arithmetic. (October, 1945: 391-9, italics added)<sup>31</sup>

Earlier that year, an "Independent Citizens Committee" had asked three hundred educators to speak out against restricting Jewish enrollment in the nation's schools. Ernest Hopkins, the president of Dartmouth College, refused, openly defending Dartmouth's Jewish quota on the grounds that German Nazism had been spurred because a large proportion of the German professions had become Jewish. A storm of public opprobrium followed Hopkins' remarks. The *New York Post* headlined, "Dartmouth Bars Jews 'To End Anti-Semitism,' Says Prexy." The next day, the rival tabloid, *PM*, placed Hopkins' picture side-by-side with the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and accused the Dartmouth president of "spouting the Hitler-Rosenberg line" (quoted in "Sense or Nonsense?" *Time*, August 20, 1945: 92. In an article entitled "Anti-Semitism at Dartmouth," the *New Republic* brought a progressive perspective to the controversy by suggesting that it could bring "us a step nearer to amelioration of one of the outstanding blots on American civilization *today*." Anti-Semitism belonged to the outmoded past that had been shattered by the anti-Nazi war: "We can *no longer* afford the luxury of these *obsolete* myths of racial differentiation, Mr Hopkins; if you don't believe it, ask Hitler" (August 20, 1945: 208-9, italics added).

In the years that followed, the fight against quotas continued to be informed by similar themes. In 1946, an educational sociologist wrote in the *American Scholar* that such restrictions were "in contradiction to the *growing* realization which has come as a result of the war." Quotas must be abolished if postwar progress were to be made.

*Today*, our society as a whole sees the relationship between social welfare and prejudices which thwart the development of the capacities of individuals. This threat to the basic concepts of democracy is so plain that almost all of us, except the vested interests, have seen it. The question is whether or not the colleges and universities have seen it and are willing to bring their practices into line with *present day* insights, even though some of their most precious traditions be jeopardized. (Dodson 1946: 268, italics added)

Similar connections between the anti-Nazi war, anti-quotas, and the progress of anti-anti-Semitism informed another popular magazine article the following year: "It is extremely regrettable that in 1946, the children of [parents] who are returning from all parts of the world where they have been engaged in mortal combat to preserve democracy, are confronted with the same closed doors that greeted their 'alien' fathers" (Hart 1947: 61). In 1949, *Collier's* published an article describing the "scores of college men to whom fraternities" for "full-blooded Aryans" are a little nauseating *in this day*." Quoting the finding of an Amherst College alumni committee that exclusive fraternities gave young men "a false and undemocratic sense of superiority," the article claimed that "the anti-discrimination movement is hopping from campus to campus" (Whitman 1949: 34-5).

While Jewish voluntary organizations had begun to organize in 1943-5, they entered the American public sphere as aggressive political advocates only after 1945, an intervention that marked the first time Jews had forcefully entered the civil sphere as advocates for their own rather than others' causes. In the prewar period, and even less in earlier times, such an explicit and aggressively Jewish public intervention would certainly have been repelled; in fact, it would only have made anti-Semitism worse. In the postwar period, however, despite their failure to identify with the Jewish victims of Nazism, the American non-Jewish audience was determined to redeem them. If, as Dimmerstein writes, Jewish groups intended to "mobilize public opinion against intolerance, and [thus to] utilize the courts and legislative bodies" (1981-2: 137) in their anti-Semitic fight they were able to carry on these political activities only because postwar public opinion had already been defined as committed to "tolerance."

Progress toward establishing civil relations between religious and ethnic groups was woven into the patriotic postwar narratives of the nation's mass-circulation magazines. *Better Homes and Gardens* ran such stories as "Do You Want Your Children to Be Tolerant?" "The old indifference and local absorption cannot continue. If we relapse

into our *before-the-war* attitudes and limitations, war will burst upon us as suddenly and as unexpectedly as the atomic bomb fell upon the people of Hiroshima – and we shall be as helpless” (Buck 1947: 135, italics added).

In another piece in *Better Homes and Gardens* the same year, “How to Stop the Hate Mongers in Your Home Town,” a writer observed: “I suspect that many a decent German burgher, hearing tales of Nazi gangs, likewise shrugged off the implications of uncurbed racial and religious persecution” (Carter 1947: 180). The following year, the *Saturday Evening Post* profiled “the story of the Jewish family of Jacob Golomb.” The lengthy article concluded with the by now widely expected forward-looking line:

As a family, the Golombs are more than just nice folks who lead busy, fruitful, decent lives; a family whose sons have sprung, in time of national emergency, with promptness to the defense of their country. As members of a race with a long history of persecution, they have kept the faith, since Abraham Golomb’s time, that the United States really was, or *would soon be*, the land of the genuinely free. They are still convinced. (Perry 1948: 96, italics added)

Four years later, America’s most popular photo magazine published “*Life* Goes to a Bar Mitzvah: A Boy Becomes a Man” (October 13, 1952: 170–6).

The anti-anti-Semitism theme also entered popular culture through the movies. In the 1945 box office hit *Pride of the Marines*, the Jewish protagonist Larry Diamond chided a friend for pessimism about the possibility of eliminating prejudice in the postwar years. He did so by connecting their present situation to the progressive ideals that had sustained their anti-Nazi war: “Ah, come on, climb out of your foxholes, what’s a matter you guys, don’t you think anybody learned anything since 1930? Think everybody’s had their eyes shut and brains in cold storage?” (Short 1981: 161). Diamond goes on to remark that, if and when prejudice and repression dare to show their ugly heads in the postwar United States, he will fight to defeat them, just as he has learned to fight in the war: “I fought for me, for the right to live in the USA. And when I get back into civilian life, if I don’t like the way things are going, OK it’s my country; I’ll stand on my own two legs and holler! If there’s enough of us hollering we’ll go places – Check?” (161). The narrative of progress is forcefully extended from the anti-Nazi war into the post-Nazi peace. Diamond had been “the pride of the marines,” and the war’s progressive narrative is fundamentally tied to assertions about

the utopian telos of the United States. As the movie’s closing music turns into “America the Beautiful,” Diamond wraps it up this way: “One happy afternoon when God was feeling good, he sat down and thought of a rich beautiful country and he named it the USA. All of it, Al, the hills, the rivers, the lands, the whole works. Don’t tell me we can’t make it work in peace like we do in war. Don’t tell me we can’t pull together. Don’t you see it guys, can’t you see it?” (161–2).

Two years later, a movie promoting anti-anti-Semitism, *Gentleman’s Agreement*, won the Academy Award for best motion picture, and another, *Crossfire*, had been nominated as well. Both are conspicuously progressive, forward-looking narratives. In the final dialogue of *Gentlemen’s Agreement*, the film’s future-oriented, utopian theme could not be more clear. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful,” Mrs Green asks Phil, “if it turned out to be everybody’s century, when people all over the world, free people, found a way to live together? I’d like to be around to see some of that, even a beginning” (quoted in Short 1981: 180).<sup>32</sup>

As they had immediately before and during the war, “Jews” held symbolic pride of place in these popular-culture narratives because their persecution had been pre-eminently associated with the Nazi evil. In fact, it was not tolerance as such that the progressive narrative demanded but tolerance of the Jews.<sup>33</sup> Thus, despite their feelings of solidarity with their foreign co-religionists, Jewish leaders carefully refrained from publicly endorsing the wholesale lifting of anti-immigration quotas after 1945. They realized that the idea of immigration remained so polluted by association with stigmatized others that it might have the power to counteract the ongoing purification of Jewishness. In the preceding half-century, anti-immigration and anti-Semitism had been closely linked, and Jews did not want to pollute “Jewishness” with this identity again. While demonstrating their support in private, Jewish leaders resolutely refused to make any public pronouncements about lifting the immigration quotas (Dinnerstein 1981–2: 140).

What Dinnerstein has called the “turnabout in anti-Semitic feelings” represented the triumph over Nazism, not recognition of the Holocaust trauma. News about the mass murder, and any ruminations about it, disappeared from newspapers and magazines rather quickly after the initial reports about the camps’ liberation, and the Nazis’ Jewish victims came to be represented as displaced persons, potential immigrants, and potential settlers in Palestine, where a majority of Americans wanted to see a new, and redemptive, Jewish

state. This interpretation suggests that it was by no means simply Realpolitik that led President Truman to champion, against his former French and British allies, the postwar creation of Israel, the new Jewish state. The progressive narrative demanded a future-oriented renewal. Zionists argued that the Jewish trauma could be redeemed, that Jews could both sanctify the victims and put the trauma behind them, only if they returned to Jerusalem. According to the Zionist world view, if Israel were allowed to exist, it would create a new race of confident and powerful Jewish farmer-warriors who would redeem the anti-Jewish atrocities by developing such an imposing military power that the massive murdering of the Jews would never, anywhere in the world, be allowed to happen again. In important respects, it was this convergence of progressive narratives in relation to the war and the Jewish mass killings that led the postwar paths of the United States and the state of Israel to become so fundamentally intertwined. Israel would have to prosper and survive for the redemptive telos of America's progressive narrative to be maintained.

These cultural-sociological considerations do not suggest that the postwar American fight against anti-Semitism was in any way morally inauthentic. It was triggered by grassroots feelings as deep as those that had motivated the earlier anti-Nazi fight. When one looks at these powerful new arguments against anti-Semitism, it is only retrospectively surprising to realize that the "atrocities" revealed in 1945 – the events and experiences that defined the trauma for European Jews – figure hardly at all. This absence is explained by the powerful symbolic logic of the progressive narrative, which already had been established in the prewar period. With the victory in 1945, the United States got down to the work of establishing the new world order. In creating a Nazi-free future, Jewishness came for the first time to be analogically connected with core American symbols of "democracy" and "nation."

In the course of this postwar transformation, American Jews also became identified with democracy in a more primordial and less universalistic way, namely as newly minted, patriotic representations of the nation. "After 1945," a leading historian of that period remarks, "other Americans no longer viewed the Jews as merely another of the many exotic groups within America's ethnic and religious mosaic. Instead, they were now seen as comprising one of the country's three major religions" (Shapiro 1992: 28). This patriotic-national definition was expressed by the Jewish theologian Will Herberg's insistence on the "Judeo-Christian" rather than

"Christian" identity of the religious heritage of the United States (53).<sup>34</sup> As I have indicated, what motivated this intense identification of anti-anti-Semitism with the American nation was neither simple emotional revulsion for the horrors of the Jewish mass killings nor commonsense morality. It was, rather, the progressive narrative frame. To end anti-Semitism, in President Truman's words, was to place America alongside "the moral forces of the world" (quoted in Shapiro 1992: 143). It was to redeem those who had sacrificed themselves for the American nation, and according to the teleology of the progressive narrative, this emphatically included the masses of murdered European Jews.

The critical point is this: What was a trauma for the victims was not a trauma for the audience.<sup>35</sup> In documenting this for the American case, I have examined the principal carrier group for the progressive narrative, the nation that in the immediate postwar world most conspicuously took the lead in "building the new world upon the ashes of the old." I have shown that the social agents, both Jewish and non-Jewish Americans, who took the lead in reconstructing a new moral order dedicated themselves to redeeming those who had been sacrificed to the anti-Nazi struggle, and most especially to the Jewish victims, by putting an end to anti-Semitism in the United States. The goal was focused not on the Holocaust but on the need to purge postwar society of Nazi-like pollution.

### Jewish Mass Murder under the Tragic Narrative

I will now show how a different kind of narrative developed in relation to the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews, one that gave the evil it represented significantly greater symbolic weight. I will treat this new culture structure both as cause and as effect. After reconstructing its internal contours, I will examine the kind of "symbolic action" it caused and how these new meanings compelled the trauma of the mass murders to be seen in a radically different way, with significant consequences for social and political action that continue to ramify to the present day.<sup>36</sup> After completing this analytic reconstruction of the new cultural configuration, I will proceed to a concrete examination of how it was constructed in real historical time, looking at changes in carrier groups, moral contexts, and social structural forces. Finally, I will examine some of the long-term ramifications of the highly general, decontextualized, and universal status that the trauma of the Holocaust came to assume.

### The New Culture Structure

Ever since Dilthey defined the method specific to the *Geisteswissenschaften* – literally “sciences of the spirit” but typically translated as “human sciences” – it has been clear that what distinguishes the hermeneutic from the natural scientific method is the challenge of penetrating beyond the external form to inner meaning of actions, events, and institutions. Yet to enter into this thicket of subjectivity is not to embrace impressionism and relativism. As Dilthey emphasized, meanings are governed by structures just as surely as are economic and political processes; they are just governed in different ways. Every effort at interpretive social science must begin with the reconstruction of this culture structure.<sup>37</sup>

*Deepening Evil.* In the formation of this new culture structure, the coding of the Jewish mass killings as evil remained, but its weighting substantially changed. It became burdened with extraordinary gravitas. The symbolization of the Jewish mass killings became generalized and reified, and in the process the evil done to the Jews became separated from the profanation of Nazism per se. Rather than seeming to “typify” Nazism, or even the nefarious machinations of any particular social movement, political formation, or historical time, the mass killings came to be seen as not being typical of anything at all. They came to be understood as a unique, historically unprecedented event, as evil on a scale that had never occurred before.<sup>38</sup> The mass killings entered into universal history, becoming a “world-historical” event in Hegel’s original sense, an event whose emergence onto the world stage threatened, or promised, to change the fundamental course of the world.<sup>39</sup> In the introduction to an English collection of his essays on Nazi history and the Holocaust, the German-Israeli historian Dan Diner observes that “well into the 1970s, wide-ranging portraits of the epoch would grant the Holocaust a modest (if any) mention.”<sup>40</sup> By contrast, “it now tends to fill the entire picture . . . The growing centrality of the Holocaust has altered the entire warp and woof of our sense of the passing century . . . The incriminated event has thus become the epoch’s marker, its final and inescapable wellspring” (Diner 2000: 1).

The Jewish mass killings became what we might identify, in Durkheimian terms, as a sacred-evil, an evil that recalled a trauma of such enormity and horror that it had to be radically set apart from the world and all of its other traumatizing events. It became inexplicable in ordinary, rational terms. As part of the Nazi scheme of world domination, the Jewish mass killing was heinous, but at least

it had been understandable. As a sacred-evil, set apart from ordinary evil things, it had become mysterious and inexplicable. One of the first to comment on, and thus to characterize, this postprogressive inexplicability was the Marxist historian Isaac Deutscher. This great biographer of Trotsky, who had already faced the consequences of Stalinism for the myth of communist progress, was no doubt preconditioned to see the tragic dimensions of the Holocaust. In 1968, in “The Jewish Tragedy and the Historian,” Deutscher suggested that comprehending the Holocaust “will not be just a matter of time.” What he meant was that there would not be progress.

I doubt whether even in a thousand years people will understand Hitler, Auschwitz, Majdanek, and Treblinka better than we do now. Will they have a better historical perspective? On the contrary, posterity may even understand it all even less than we do. Who can analyze the motives and the interests behind the enormities of Auschwitz . . . We are confronted here by a huge and ominous mystery of the generation of the human character that will forever baffle and terrify mankind. (Deutscher 1968: 163)

For Deutscher, such a huge and mysterious evil, so resistant to the normal progress of human rationality, suggested tragedy and art, not scientific fact gathering. “Perhaps a modern Aeschylus and Sophocles could cope with this theme,” he suggested, “but they would do so on a level different from that of historical interpretation and explanation” (1968: 164). Geoffrey Hartman, the literary theorist who has directed Yale University’s Video Archive for the Holocaust since 1981 and has been a major participant in post-sixties discussions of the trauma, points to the enigma that, while no historical event has ever “been so thoroughly documented and studied,” social and moral “understanding comes and goes; it has not been progressive.” By way of explaining this lack of progress, Hartman suggests that

The scholars most deeply involved often admit an “excess” that remains dark and frightful . . . Something in the . . . Shoah remains dark at the heart of the event . . . A comparison with the French Revolution is useful. The sequence *French Revolution: Enlightenment* cannot be matched by *Holocaust: Enlightenment*. What should be placed after the colon? “Eclipse of Enlightenment” or “Eclipse of God”? (Hartman 1996: 3–4)

To this day the Holocaust is almost never referred to without asserting its inexplicability. In the spring of 1999, a *New York Times* theater reviewer began his remarks on *The Gathering*, a newly

opened drama, by asserting that "the profound, agonizing mystery of the Holocaust echoes through the generations and across international borders," presenting "an awesome human and theological enigma as an old century prepares to give way to a new millennium" (van Gelder 1999: 1).

This separateness of sacred-evil demanded that the trauma be renamed, for the concept of "mass murder" and even the notion of "genocide" now appeared unacceptably to normalize the trauma, to place it too closely in proximity to the banal and mundane. In contrast, despite the fact that the word *holocaust* did have a formally established English meaning – according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "something wholly burnt up" (Garber and Zuckerman 1989: 199) – it no longer performed this sign function in everyday speech. Rather, the term entered into ordinary English usage in the early 1960s as a proper rather than a common noun.<sup>41</sup> Only several years after the Nazis' mass murder did Israelis begin to employ the Hebrew word *shoah*, the term by which the Torah evoked the kind of extraordinary sufferings God had periodically consigned to the Jews. In the official English translation of the phrase "Nazi *shoah*" in the preamble to the 1948 Israeli Declaration of Independence, one can already find the reference to "Nazi holocaust" (Novick 1999: 132). With the decline of the progressive narrative, in other words, as *Holocaust* became the dominant representation for the trauma, it implied the sacral mystery, the "awe-fullness," of the transcendental tradition. *Holocaust* became part of contemporary language as an English symbol that stood for that thing that could not be named.<sup>42</sup> As David Roskies once wrote, "it was precisely the nonreferential quality of 'Holocaust' that made it so appealing" (quoted in Garber and Zuckerman 1989: 201).

This new linguistic identity allowed the mass killings of the Jews to become what might be called a bridge metaphor: It provided the symbolic extension so necessary if the trauma of the Jewish people were to become a trauma for all humankind. The other necessary ingredient, psychological identification, was not far behind. It depended on configuring this newly weighted symbolization of evil in a different narrative frame.

*Suffering, Catharsis, and Identification.* The darkness of this new postwar symbolization of evil cast a shadow over the progressive story that had thus far narrated its course. The story of redeeming Nazism's victims by creating a progressive and democratic world order could be called an ascending narrative, for it pointed to the future and suggested confidence that things would be better over

time. Insofar as the mass killings were defined as a Holocaust, and insofar as it was the very emergence of this sacred-evil, not its eventual defeat, that threatened to become emblematic of "our time,"<sup>43</sup> the progressive narrative was blocked, and in some manner overwhelmed, by a sense of historical descent, by a falling away from the good. Recent Holocaust commentators have drawn this conclusion time and again. According to the progressive narrative, the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews would provide a lesson for all humankind, a decisive learning process on the way to a better world. Reflecting on the continuing fact of genocidal mass murders in the post-Holocaust world, Hartman revealingly suggests that "these developments raise questions about our species, our preconceptions that we are the human, the 'family of man.' Or less dramatically, we wonder about the veneer of progress, culture, and educability."

In dramaturgical terms, the issue concerns the position occupied by evil in the historical narrative. When Aristotle first defined tragedy in the *Poetics*, he linked what I have here called the weight of the representation of suffering to temporal location of an event in a plot:

Tragedy is the representation of a complete, i.e., whole action *which has some magnitude* (for there can be a whole action without magnitude).

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle and a conclusion. A beginning is that which itself does not of necessity follow something else, but after which there naturally is, or comes into being, something else. A conclusion, conversely, is that which itself naturally follows something else, either of necessity or for the most part, but has nothing else after it. A middle is that which itself naturally follows something else, and has something else after it. Well-constructed plots, then, should neither begin from a random point nor conclude at a random point, but should use the elements we have mentioned. (Aristotle 1987: 3.2.1, italics added)

In the progressive narrative frame, the Jewish mass killings were not an end but a beginning. They were part of the massive trauma of the Second World War, but in the postwar period they and related incidents of Nazi horror were regarded as a birth trauma, a crossroads in a chronology that would eventually be set right. By contrast, the newly emerging world-historical status of the mass murders suggested that they represented an end point, not a new beginning, a death trauma rather than a trauma of birth, a cause for despair, not the beginning of hope. In place of the progressive story, then, there began to emerge the narrative of tragedy. The end point of a narrative defines its telos. In the new tragic understanding of the Jewish mass



murder, suffering, not progress, became the telos toward which the narrative was aimed.

In this tragic narrative of sacred-evil, the Jewish mass killings become not an event in history but an archetype, an event out of time. As archetype, the evil evoked an experience of trauma greater than anything that could be defined by religion, race, class, region – indeed, by any conceivable sociological configuration or historical conjuncture. This transcendental status, this separation from the specifics of any particular time or space, provided the basis for psychological identification on an unprecedented scale. The contemporary audience cares little about the second and third installments of Sophocles' archetypal story of Oedipus, the tragic hero. What we are obsessed with is Oedipus' awful, unrecognized, and irredeemable mistake, how he finally comes to recognize his responsibility for it, and how he blinds himself from guilt when he understands its full meaning. Tragic narratives focus attention not on some future effort at reversal or amelioration – “progress,” in the terms I have employed here – but on the nature of the crime, its immediate aftermath, and on the motives and relationships that led up to it.

A tragic narrative offers no redemption in the traditionally religious, Judeo-Christian sense.<sup>44</sup> There is no happy ending, no sense that something else could have been done, and no belief that the future could, or can, necessarily be changed. Indeed, protagonists are tragic precisely because they have failed to exert control over events. They are in the grip of forces larger than themselves – impersonal, even inhuman forces that often are not only beyond control but, during the tragic action itself, beyond comprehension. This sense of being overwhelmed by unjust force or fate explains the abjection and helplessness that permeate the genre of tragedy and the experience of pity it arouses.

Instead of redemption through progress, the tragic narrative offers what Nietzsche called the drama of the eternal return. As it now came to be understood, there was no “getting beyond” the story of the Holocaust. There was only the possibility of returning to it: not transcendence but catharsis. Hartman resists “the call for closure” on just these grounds. “Wherever we look, the events of 1933–45 cannot be relegated to the past. They are not over; anyone who comes in contact with them is gripped, and finds detachment difficult.” Quoting from Lawrence Langer's *Admitting the Holocaust*, Hartman suggests that “those who study it must ‘reverse history and progress and find a way of restoring to the imagination of coming generations the depth of the catastrophe’” (Hartman 1996: 2, 5).

As Aristotle explained, catharsis clarifies feeling and emotion. It does not do so by allowing the audience to separate itself from the story's characters; a separation, according to Frye, that defines the very essence of comedy (Frye 1971 [1957]). Rather, catharsis clarifies feeling and emotion by forcing the audience to identify with the story's characters, compelling them to experience their suffering with them, and to learn, as often they did not, the true causes of their death. That we survive and they do not, that we can get up and leave the theater while they remain forever prostrate – this allows the possibility of catharsis, that strange combination of cleansing and relief, that humbling feeling of having been exposed to the dark and sinister forces that lie just beneath the surface of human life and of having survived.<sup>45</sup> We seek catharsis because our identification with the tragic narrative compels us to experience dark and sinister forces that are also inside of ourselves, not only inside others. We “redeem” tragedy by experiencing it, but despite this redemption, we do not get over it. Rather, to achieve redemption we are compelled to dramatize and redramatize, experience and reexperience the archetypal trauma. We pity the victims of the trauma, identifying and sympathizing with their horrible fate. Aristotle argued that the tragic genre could be utilized only for the “sorts of occurrence [that] arouse dread, or compassion in us” (Aristotle 1987: 4.1.2). The blackness of tragedy can be achieved only if, “first and foremost, the [suffering] characters should be good,” for “the plot should be constructed in such a way that, even without seeing it, someone who hears about the incidents will shudder and feel pity at the outcome, as someone may feel upon hearing the plot of the Oedipus” (4.2.1, 4.1.1.3). It is not only the fact of identification, however, but also its complexity that makes the experience of trauma as tragedy so central to the assumption of moral responsibility, for we identify not only with the victims but with the perpetrators as well. The creation of this cultural form allows the psychological activity of internalization rather than projection, acceptance rather than displacement.<sup>46</sup>

*The Trauma-Drama of Eternal Return.* In the tragic narration of the Holocaust, the primal event became a “trauma-drama” that the “audience” returned to time and time again. This became, paradoxically, the only way to ensure that such an event would happen “never again.” This quality of compulsively returning to the trauma-drama gave the story of the Holocaust a mythical status that transformed it into the archetypal sacred-evil of our time. Insofar as it achieved this status as a dominant myth, the tragedy of the Holocaust challenged the ethical self-identification, the self-esteem, of modernity – indeed,

the very self-confidence that such a thing as "modern progress" could continue to exist. For to return to the trauma-drama of the Holocaust, to identify over and over again with the suffering and helplessness of its victims, was in some sense to give that confidence-shattering event a continuing existence in contemporary life. It was, in effect, to acknowledge that it *could* happen again.

In this way, the tragic framing of the Holocaust fundamentally contributed to postmodern relativism and disquiet. Because the tragic replaced the progressive narrative of the Nazi mass murder, the ethical standards protecting good from evil seemed not nearly as powerful as modernity's confident pronouncements had promised they would be. When the progressive narrative had organized understanding, the Nazi crimes had been temporalized as "medieval," in order to contrast them with the supposedly civilizing standards of modernity. With the emergence of the more tragic perspective, the barbarism was lodged within the essential nature of modernity itself.<sup>47</sup> Rather than maintaining and perfecting modernity, as the postwar progressive narrative would have it, the path to a more just and peaceful society seemed now to lead to postmodern life (Bauman 1989).<sup>48</sup>

It would be wrong, however, to imagine that because a trauma-drama lies at the center of the Holocaust's tragic narration, with all the ambition of exciting pity and emotional catharsis that this implies, that this lachrymose narrative and symbol actually became disconnected from the ethical and the good.<sup>49</sup> While it is undeniable that the Jewish mass killings came to assume a dramaturgical form, their significance hardly became aestheticized — that is, turned into a free-floating, amoral symbol whose function was to entertain rather than to instruct.<sup>50</sup> The events of the Holocaust were not dramatized for the sake of drama itself but, rather, to provide what Martha Nussbaum once described as "the social benefits of pity" (Nussbaum 1992).<sup>51</sup> The project of renaming, dramatizing, reifying, and ritualizing the Holocaust contributed to a moral remaking of the (post)modern (Western) world. The Holocaust story has been told and retold in response not only to emotional need but also to moral ambition. Its characters, its plot, and its pitiable denouement have been transformed into a less nationally bound, less temporally specific, and more universal drama. This dramatic universalization has deepened contemporary sensitivity to social evil. The trauma-drama's message, like that of every tragedy, is that evil is inside all of us and in every society. If we are all the victims and all the perpetrators, then there is no audience that can legitimately distance itself from collective suffering, either from its victims or from its perpetrators.

This psychological identification with the Jewish mass killings and the symbolic extension of its moral implications beyond the immediate parties involved has stimulated an unprecedented universalization of political and moral responsibility. To have created this symbol of sacred-evil in contemporary time, then, is to have so enlarged the human imagination that it is capable, for the first time in human history, of identifying, understanding, and judging the kinds of genocidal mass killings in which national, ethnic, and ideological groupings continue to engage today.<sup>52</sup> This enlargement has made it possible to comprehend that heinous prejudice with the intent to commit mass murder is not something from an earlier, more "primitive" time or a different, "foreign" place, committed by people with values we do not share. The implication of the tragic narrative is not that progress has become impossible. It has had the salutary effect, rather, of demonstrating that progress is much more difficult to achieve than moderns once believed. If progress is to be made, morality must be universalized beyond any particular time and place.<sup>53</sup>

### The New Social Processes

Most Western people today would readily agree with the proposition that the Holocaust was a tragic, devastating event in human history. Surely it was, and is. One implication of my discussion, however, is that this perception of its moral status is not a natural reflection of the event itself. The Jewish mass killings first had to be dramatized — as a tragedy. Some of the most eloquent and influential Holocaust survivors and interpreters have disagreed sharply, and moralistically, with this perspective, insisting that fictional representations must not be allowed to influence the perception of historical reality. In 1978, Elie Wiesel excoriated NBC for producing the *Holocaust* miniseries, complaining that "it transforms an ontological event into soap-opera" and that "it is all make-believe." Because "the Holocaust transcends history," Wiesel argued, "it cannot be explained nor can it be visualized" (Wiesel 1978: 1). In response to *Schindler's List*, Claude Lanzman said much the same thing. Writing that the Holocaust "is above all unique in that it erects a ring of fire around itself," he claimed that "fiction is a transgression" and that "there are some things that cannot and should not be represented" (quoted in Hartman 1996: 84).<sup>54</sup>

I take a very different perspective here. Thus far I have reconstructed the internal patterning of the culture structure that allowed the new, tragic dramatization to take place. I would like now to turn to the historically specific social processes, both symbolic and social

structural, that made this new patterning attractive and, eventually, compelling. While my reference here is primarily to the United States, I believe some version of this analysis also applies to those other Western societies that attempted to reconstruct liberal democracies after the Second World War.<sup>55</sup>

I have earlier shown how the struggle against anti-Semitism became one of the primary vehicles by which the progressive narrative redeemed those who had been sacrificed in the war against Nazi evil. Fighting anti-Semitism was not the only path to redemption, of course; for America and its victorious allies, there was a whole new world to make. At the same time, the struggle against anti-Semitism had a special importance. The understanding of Nazism as an absolute evil stemmed not only from its general commitment to anti-civil domination but also from its effort to legitimate such violence according to the principles of prejudice and primordially. Because the Jewish people were by far the most conspicuous primordial target, symbolic logic dictated that to be anti-Nazi was to be anti-anti-Semitic.<sup>56</sup>

As I have also suggested, the rhetoric and policies of this anti-anti-Semitism did not require that non-Jewish Americans positively identify with Jews, any more than the role that the Holocaust played in the postwar progressive narrative depended on a sense of identification with the weary and bedraggled survivors in the concentration camps themselves. To narrate the Holocaust in a tragic manner, however, did depend on just such an identification being made. This identification was a long time in coming, and it depended on a number of factors unrelated to public opinion and cultural change.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, it certainly depended, in addition to such social structural factors, on the fact that the cultural idiom and the organizational apparatus of anti-Semitism had, indeed, been attacked and destroyed in the early "progressive" postwar years, and that, for the first time in American history, Jews seemed, to a majority of Christian Americans, not that much different from anybody else. As the tragic narrative crystallized, the Holocaust drama became, for an increasing number of Americans, and for significant proportions of Europeans as well, the most widely understood and emotionally compelling trauma of the twentieth century. These bathetic events, once experienced as traumatic only by Jewish victims, became generalized and universalized. Their representation no longer referred to events that took place at a particular time and place but to a trauma that had become emblematic, and iconic, of human suffering as such. The horrific trauma of the Jews became the trauma of all humankind.<sup>58</sup>

### The Production of New Social Dramas

How was this more generalized and universalized status achieved? Social narratives are not composed by some hidden hand of history. Nor do they appear all at once. The new trauma-drama emerged in bits and pieces. It was a matter of this story and that, this scene and that scene from this movie and that book, this television episode, and that theater performance, this photographic capturing of a moment of torture and suffering. Each of these glimpses into what Meyer Levin had called, in April 1945, "the very crawling inside of the vicious heart" contributed some element to the construction of this new sensibility, which highlighted suffering, helplessness, and dark inevitability and which, taken together and over time, reformulated the mass killing of the Jews as the most tragic event in Western history. It is not the purpose of the following to provide anything approaching a thick description of this process of symbolic reconstruction but only to identify the signposts along this new route and the changing "countryside" that surrounded it.

*Personalizing the Trauma and its Victims.* In the course of constructing and broadcasting the tragic narrative of the Holocaust, there were a handful of actual dramatizations – in books, movies, plays, and television shows – that played critically important roles. Initially formulated for an American audience, they were distributed world wide, seen by tens and possibly hundreds of millions of persons, and talked incessantly about by high-, middle-, and lowbrow audiences alike. In the present context, what seems most important about these dramas is that they achieved their effect by personalizing the trauma and its characters. This personalization brought the trauma-drama "back home." Rather than depicting the events on a vast historical scale, rather than focusing on larger-than-life leaders, mass movements, organizations, crowds, and ideologies, these dramas portrayed the events in terms of small groups, families and friends, parents and children, brothers and sisters. In this way, the victims of trauma became everyman and everywoman, every child and every parent.

The prototype of this personalizing genre was Anne Frank's famous *Diary*. First published in Holland in 1947,<sup>59</sup> the edited journals appeared in English in 1952. They became the basis for a Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway play in 1955 and in 1959 a highly acclaimed and equally popular but immensely more widely influential Hollywood movie. This collective representation began in Europe as the journal recorded by a young Dutch girl in hiding from the Nazis

and evolved, via a phase of Americanization, into a universal symbol of suffering and transcendence. This transmigration was possible, in the first place, precisely because Anne's daily jottings focused less on the external events of war and Holocaust – from which she was very much shut off – than on her inner psychological turmoil and the human relationships of those who shared her confinement. Anne's father, Otto Frank, the only family member surviving the camps, supervised the publications and dramatizations of his daughter's journals, and he perceived very clearly the relation between Anne's personal focus and the *Diary's* potentially universalizing appeal. Writing to Meyer Levin, a potential dramatist who insisted, by contrast, on the specifically Jewish quality of the reminiscence, Otto Frank replied that

as to the Jewish side you are right that I do not feel the same you do . . . I always said that Anne's book is not a war book. War is the background. It is not a Jewish book either, though [a] Jewish sphere, sentiment and surrounding is the background . . . It is read and understood more by gentiles than in Jewish circles. So do not make a Jewish play out of it. (Quoted in Doneson 1987: 152)<sup>60</sup>

When dramatists for the *Diary* were finally chosen – Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett – Frank criticized their initial drafts on similar grounds.

Having read thousands of reviews and hundreds of personal letters about Anne's book from different countries in the world, I know what creates the impression of it on people and their impressions ought to be conveyed by the play to the public. Young people identify themselves very frequently with Anne in their struggle during puberty and the problems of the relations [between] mother-daughter are existing all over the world. These and the love affair with Peter attract young people, whereas parents, teachers, and psychologists learn about the inner feelings of the young generation. When I talked to Mrs [Eleanor] Roosevelt about the book, she urged me to give permission for [the] play and film as only then we could reach the masses and influence them by the mission of the book which she saw in Anne's wish to work for mankind, to achieve something valuable still after her death, her horror against war and discrimination. (Quoted in Doneson 1987: 153)

This impulse to facilitate identification and moral extension prompted the dramatists to translate into English the *Diary's* pivotal Hanukkah song, which was sung, and printed, in the original Hebrew in the earlier book version. They explained their reasoning in a letter to Frank. To have left the song in its original Hebrew, they wrote,

would set the characters in the play apart from the people watching them . . . for the majority of our audience is not Jewish. And the thing that we have striven for, toiled for, fought for throughout the whole play is to make the audience understand and identify themselves . . . to make them one with them . . . that will make them feel "that, but for the grace of God, might have been I". (Quoted in Doneson 1987: 154)

Frank agreed, affirming that it "was my point of view to try to bring Anne's message to as many people as possible even if there are some who think it a sacrilege" from a religious point of view (quoted in Doneson 1987: 154). Years later, after the unprecedented success of both the theatre and screen plays, the dramatists continued to justify their decision to abandon Hebrew in the dramaturgic terms of facilitating psychological identification and symbolic extension.

What we all of us hoped, and prayed for, and what we are devoutly thankful to have achieved, is an identification of the audience with the people in hiding. They are seen, not as some strange people, but persons like themselves, thrown into this horrible situation. With them they suffer the deprivations, the terrors, the moments of tenderness, of exaltation and courage beyond belief. (Quoted in Doneson 1987: 155)

In the course of the 1960s, Anne Frank's tragic story laid the basis for psychological identification and symbolic extension on a mass scale. In 1995, the director of Jewish Studies at Indiana University reported that

*The Diary of a Young Girl* is . . . widely read in American schools, and American youngsters regularly see the stage and film versions as well. Their teachers encourage them to identify with Anne Frank and to write stories, essays, and poems about her. Some even see her as a kind of saint and pray to her. During their early adolescent years, many American girls view her story as their story, her fate as somehow bound up with their fate. (Rosenfeld 1995: 37)

The symbolic transformation effected by Anne Frank's *Diary* established the dramatic parameters and the stage for the rush of books, television shows, and movies that in the decades following crystallized the mass murder of the Jews as the central episode in a tragic rather than progressive social narrative. As this new genre became institutionalized, representation of Nazism and the Second World War focused less and less on the historical actors who had once been considered central. In 1953 the acclaimed Billy Wilder movie *Stalag 17* had portrayed the grueling plight of US soldiers in a German prisoner-of-war camp. It never mentioned the Jews (Shapiro 1992: 4).

In the early 1960s, a widely popular evening television show, *Hogan's Heroes*, also portrayed American soldiers in a Nazi prison. It didn't mention "Jews," either. Indeed, the prison camp functioned as a site for comedy, lampooning the misadventures arising from the casual intermingling of Americans with Nazi camp guards and often portraying the latter as bemusing, well-intended buffoons. By the late 1960s, neither comedy nor romance was a genre that audiences felt comfortable applying to that earlier historical time. Nor was it possible to leave out of any dramatization what by then was acknowledged to be the period's central historical actor, the concentration-camp Jews.<sup>61</sup>

This transition was solidified in Western popular culture by the miniseries *Holocaust*, the stark family drama that unfolded over successive evenings to a massive American audience in April 1978. This four-part, nine-and-a-half-hour drama, watched by nearly 100 million Americans, personalized the grisly and famous landmarks of the Third Reich, following ten years in the lives of two fictional families, one of assimilated Jews and the other of a high-ranking SS official.

This extraordinary public attention was repeated, to even greater cathartic effect, when the bathetic drama was later broadcast to record-breaking television audiences in Germany.<sup>62</sup> German critics, commentators, and large sections of the public at large were transfixed by what German commentators described as "the most controversial series of all times" and as "the series that moved the world." During and after this German broadcast, which was preceded by careful public preparation and accompanied by extensive private and public discussion, German social scientists conducted polls and interviews to trace its remarkable effects. They discovered that the resulting shift in public opinion had put a stop to a burgeoning "Hitler revival" and quelled long-standing partisan demands for "balance" in the presentation of the Jewish mass murder. In the wake of the drama, neutralizing terms like "the Final Solution" gave way in German popular and academic discussion to the English term *Holocaust*, and the German Reichstag removed the statute of limitations on Nazis who had participated in what were now defined not as war crimes but as crimes against humanity. The trauma-drama thus continued to work its universalizing effects.<sup>63</sup>

*Enlarging the Circle of Perpetrators.* Corresponding to the personalization that expanded identification with the victims of the tragedy, a new understanding developed of the perpetrators of the Holocaust that removed them from their historically specific particularities and made them into universal figures with whom members of widely

diverse groups felt capable not of sympathizing but of identifying. The critical event initiating this reconsideration was undoubtedly the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem. Here was a personal and singular representation of the Nazis' murders brought back into the present from the abstract mists of historical time, compelled to "face the music" after being captured by Israeli security forces in a daring extralegal mission right out of a spy novel or science fiction book. The trial received extraordinary press coverage in the United States. That summer, Gallup conducted a series of in-depth interviews with five hundred randomly selected residents of Oakland, California, and found that 84 percent of those sampled met the minimum criterion for awareness of this faraway event, a striking statistic, given American indifference to foreign affairs (Lipstadt 1996: 212, n. 54). At least seven books were published about Eichmann and his trial in the following year (1996).

The first legal confrontation with the Holocaust since Nuremberg, the trial was staged by Israel not to generalize away from the originating events but to get back to them. As Prime Minister Ben-Gurion put it, the trial would give "the generation that was born and educated after the Holocaust in Israel . . . an opportunity to get acquainted with the details of this tragedy about which they knew so little" (Braun 1994: 183). The lessons were to be drawn from, and directed to, particular places and particular peoples, to Germany, the Nazis, Israel, and the Jews — in Ben-Gurion's words, to "the dimensions of the tragedy which *our people* experienced" (Lipstadt 1996: 213, italics added). By the time it was over, however, the Eichmann trial paradoxically had initiated a massive universalization of Nazi evil, best captured by Hannah Arendt's enormously controversial insistence that the trial compelled recognition of the "banality of evil." This framing of Nazi guilt became highly influential, even as it was sharply and bitterly disputed by Jews and non-Jews alike. For as a banally evil person, Eichmann could be "everyman." Arendt herself had always wanted to make just such a point. In her earliest reaction to the Nazi murders, the philosopher had expressed horror and astonishment at the Nazis' absolute inhumanity. For this she was rebuked by her mentor and friend Karl Jaspers, who cautioned against making the Nazis into "monsters" and "supermen." To do so, Jaspers warned, would merely confirm the Nazis in their grandiose Nietzschean fantasies and relieve others of responsibility as well.<sup>64</sup> Because of Arendt's singular influence, the antagonists in the trauma began to seem not so different from anybody else.<sup>65</sup> The trial and its aftermath eventually became framed in a manner that narrowed the

once great distance between postwar democratic audience and evil Nazis, connecting them rather than isolating them from one another. This connection between audience and antagonist intensified the trauma's tragic dramaturgy.

During this same period, other forces also had the effect of widening the circle of "perpetrators." Most spectacularly, there was Stanley Milgram's experiment demonstrating that ordinary, well-educated adult men would "just follow the orders" of professional authority, even to the point of gravely endangering the lives of innocent people. These findings raised profoundly troubling questions about the "good nature" of all human beings and the democratic capacity of any human society. Milgram appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine, and "the Milgram experiment" became part of the folklore of the 1960s. It generalized the capacity for radical evil, first demonstrated by the Nazis, to the American population at large, synergistically interacting with the symbolic reconstruction of perpetrators that Arendt on Eichmann had begun. In one interview Milgram conducted with a volunteer after he had revealed to him the true nature of the experiment, the volunteer remarked: "As my wife said: 'You can call yourself Eichmann'" (quoted in Novick 1999: 137).<sup>66</sup>

In the decades that followed, other powerful cultural reconstructions of the perpetrators followed in this wake. In 1992, Christopher Browning published a widely discussed historical ethnography called *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Browning 1992), which focused on the everyday actions and motives of Germans who were neither members of the professional military nor particularly ideological but who nonetheless carried out systematic and murderous cleansings of the Jews. When four years later Daniel Goldhagen published *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), his aim was to shift blame back to what he described as the unprecedented and particular kind of anti-Semitism, what he called "eliminationist," of the Germans themselves. Browning's critical response to Goldhagen was based on historical evidence, but it also decried the moral particularity that Goldhagen's argument seemed to entail. Indeed, Browning connected his empirical findings about the "ordinariness" of perpetrators to the necessity for universalizing the moral implications of Nazi crimes, and in doing so he pointed all the way back to Milgram's earlier findings.

What allowed the Nazis to mobilize and harness the rest of society to the mass murder of European Jewry? Here I think that we historians

need to turn to the insights of social psychology – the study of psychological reactions to social situations . . . We must ask, what really is a human being? We must give up the comforting and distancing notions that the perpetrators of the Holocaust were fundamentally a different kind of people because they were products of a radically different culture. (Browning, 1996: A.72)<sup>67</sup>

In the realm of popular culture, Steven Spielberg's blockbuster movie *Schindler's List* must also be considered in this light. In a subtle but unmistakable manner, the movie deparтикуlarizes the perpetrators by showing the possibilities that "even Germans" could be good.<sup>68</sup>

### *Losing Control of the Means of Symbolic Production*

It was in this context of tragic transformation – as personalization of the drama increased identification beyond the Jewish victims themselves, and as the sense of moral culpability became fundamentally widened beyond the Nazis themselves – that the United States government, and the nation's authoritative interlocutors, lost control over the telling of the Holocaust story. When the American government and its allies defeated Nazi Germany in 1945 and seized control of strategic evidence from the death camps, they had taken control of the representation process away from the Nazis and assured that the Jewish mass murder would be presented in an anti-Nazi way. In this telling of the story, naturally enough, the former Allies – America most powerfully but Britain and France as well – presented themselves as the moral protagonists, purifying themselves as heroic carriers of the good. As the 1960s unfolded, the Western democracies were forced to concede this dominant narrative position. This time around, however, control over the means of symbolic production changed hands as much for cultural reasons as by the force of arms.<sup>69</sup>

In the "critical years" from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1970s, the United States experienced a sharp decline in its political, military, and moral prestige. It was during this period that, in the eyes of tens of millions of Americans and others, the domestic and international opposition to America's prosecution of the Vietnam War transformed the nation, and especially its government and armed forces, into a symbol not of salvational good but of apocalyptic evil. This transformation was intensified by other outcroppings of "the sixties," particularly the revolutionary impulses that emerged out of the student and black power movements inside the United States and guerilla movements outside it. These "real-world" problems allowed

the United States to be identified in terms that had, up until that time, been reserved exclusively for the Nazi perpetrators of the Holocaust. According to the progressive narrative, it could only be the Allies' Second World War enemy who represented radical evil. As America became "Amerika," however, napalm bombs were analogized with gas pellets and the flaming jungles of Vietnam with the gas chambers. The powerful American army that claimed to be prosecuting a "good war" against Vietnamese communists – in analogy with the lessons that Western democracies had learned in their earlier struggle against Nazism – came to be identified, by influential intellectuals and a wide swath of the educated Western public, as perpetrating genocide against the helpless and pathetic inhabitants of Vietnam. Bertrand Russell and Jean-Paul Sartre established a kind of counter-"War Crimes Tribunal" to apply the logic of Nuremberg to the United States. Indefensible incidents of civilian killings, like the My Lai massacre of 1968, were represented not as anomalous incidents, but as typifications of this new American-made tragedy.<sup>70</sup>

This process of material deconstruction and symbolic inversion further contributed to the universalization of the Holocaust: It allowed the moral criteria generated by its earlier interpretation to be applied in a less nationally specific and thus less particularistic way. This inversion undermined still further the progressive narrative under which the mass killings of the Jews had earlier been framed. The ability to leave the trauma-drama behind, and to press ahead toward the future, depended on the material and symbolic existence of an unsullied protagonist who could provide salvation for survivors by leading them into the promised land. "Vietnam" and "the sixties" undercut the main agent of this progressive narrative. The result was a dramatic decline in the confidence that a new world order could be constructed in opposition to violence and coercion; if the United States itself committed war crimes, what chance could there be for modern and democratic societies ever to leave mass murder safely behind?

As a result of these material and symbolic events, the contemporary representatives of the historic enemies of Nazism lost control over the means of symbolic production. The power to present itself as the purified protagonist in the world-wide struggle against evil slipped out of the hands of the American government and patriotic representatives more generally, even as the framing of the drama's triggering trauma shifted from progress to tragedy. The ability to cast and produce the trauma-drama, to compel identification and channel catharsis, spread to other nations and to anti-government groups, and even to historic

enemies of the Jewish people. The archetypal trauma-drama of the twentieth century became ever more generalized and more accessible, and the criteria for moral responsibility in social relations, once closely tied to American perspectives and interests, came to be defined in a more evenhanded, more egalitarian, more self-critical – in short, a more universalistic – way.

Perhaps the most visible and paradoxical effect of this loss of the American government's control over the means of symbolic production control was that the morality of American leadership in the Second World War came to be questioned in a manner that established polluting analogies with Nazism.<sup>71</sup> One issue that now became "troubling," for example, was the justification for the Allied firebombings of Dresden and Tokyo. The growing climate of relativism and reconfiguration threatened to undermine the coding, weightings, and narrating that once had provided a compelling rationale for those earlier events that were in themselves so massively destructive of civilian life. In a similar manner, but with much more significant repercussions, the symbolic implications of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki began to be fundamentally reconfigured.

From being conceived as stages in the unfolding of the progressive narrative, influential groups of Westerners came to understand the atomic bombings as vast human tragedies. Younger generations of Americans, in fact, were increasingly responsive to the view of these events that had once been promoted exclusively by Japan, the fascist Axis power against which their elders had waged war. The interpretation of the suffering caused by the atomic bombings became separated from the historical specifics of time and place. With this generalization, the very events that had once appeared as high points of the progressive narrative came to be constructed as unjustifiable, as human tragedies, as slaughters of hundreds of thousands of innocent and pathetic human beings – in short, as typifications of a "Holocaust."<sup>72</sup>

Perhaps the most pointed example of what could happen after America lost control over the Holocaust story was the way in which its redemptive role in the narrative was challenged. Rather than being portrayed as the chief prosecutor of Nazi perpetrators – as chief prosecutor, the narrative's protagonist along with the victims themselves – the American and the British wartime governments were accused of having at least indirect responsibility for allowing the Nazis to carry out their brutal work. A steady stream of revisionist historical scholarship emerged, beginning in the 1970s, suggesting that the anti-Semitism of Roosevelt and Churchill and of American and British

citizens had prevented them from acting to block the mass killings; for they had received authenticated information about German plans and activities as early as June 1942.<sup>73</sup>

For many, this analogical linkage between the Allies and the perpetrators quickly became accepted as historical fact. On September 27, 1979, when the President's Commission on the Victims of the Holocaust issued a report recommending the American establishment of a Holocaust Museum, it listed as one of its primary justifications that such a public construction would give the American nation an opportunity to compensate for its early, "disastrous" indifference to the plight of the Jews (quoted in Linenthal 1995: 37). When the museum itself was eventually constructed, it enshrined this inversion of the progressive narrative in the exhibitions themselves. The third floor of the museum is filled with powerfully negative images of the death camps, and is attached by an internal bridge to a tower whose rooms display actual artifacts from the camps. As visitors approach this bridge, in the midst of the iconic representations of evil, they confront a photomural of a US Air Force intelligence photograph of Auschwitz-Birkenau, taken on May 31, 1944. The text attached to the mural informs visitors: "Two freight trains with Hungarian Jews arrived in Birkenau that day; the large-scale gassing of these Jews was beginning. The four Birkenau crematoria are visible at the top of the photograph" (quoted in Linenthal 1995: 217). Placed next to the photomural is what the principal ethnographer of the museum project, Edward Linenthal, has called "an artifactual indictment of American indifference." It is a letter, dated August 14, 1944, from John J. McCloy, assistant secretary of war. According to the text, McCloy "rejected a request by the World Jewish Congress to bomb the Auschwitz concentration camp." This rejection is framed in the context not of physical impossibility, or in terms of the vicissitudes of a world war, but as the result of moral diminution. Visitors are informed that the US Air Force "could have bombed Auschwitz as early as May 1944," since US bombers had "struck Buna, a synthetic-rubber works relying on slave labor, located less than five miles east of Auschwitz-Birkenau." But despite this physical possibility, the text goes on to note, the death camp "remained untouched." The effective alignment of Allied armies with Nazi perpetrators is more than implicit: "Although bombing Auschwitz would have killed many prisoners, it would also have halted the operation of the gas chambers and, ultimately, saved the lives of many more" (quoted in Linenthal 1995: 217-18). This authoritative reconstruction is not a brute empirical fact, any more than the framework that had previ-

ous sway. In fact, within the discipline of American history, the issue of Allied indifference remains subject to intensive debate (Linenthal 1995: 219-24).<sup>74</sup> At every point in the construction of a public discourse, factual chronicles must be encased in symbolically coded and narrated frames.

Eventually, this revision of the progressive narrative about exclusively Nazi perpetrators extended, with perhaps even more profound consequences, to other Allied powers and to the neutrals in that earlier conflict as well. As the charismatic symbol of French resistance to German occupation, Charles de Gaulle had woven a narrative, during and after the war, that purified his nation by describing it as first the victim and later the courageous opponent of Nazi domination and the "foreign" collaborators in Vichy.<sup>75</sup> By the late 1970s and 1980s, however, a younger generation of French and non-French historians challenged this definition, seriously polluting the earlier Republican government, and even some of its postwar socialist successors, by documenting massive French collaboration with the anti-democratic, anti-Semitic regime.<sup>76</sup>

In the wake of these reversals, it seemed only a matter of time until the nations who had been "neutral" during the earlier conflict would also be forced to relinquish symbolic control over how their own stories were told, at least in the theater of Western opinion, if not on their own national stage. Austria, for example, had long depicted itself as a helpless victim of Nazi Germany. When Kurt Waldheim ascended to the position of secretary-general of the United Nations, however, his hidden association with the Hitler regime was revealed, and the symbolic status of the Austrian nation, which rallied behind their ex-president, began to be publicly polluted as a result.<sup>77</sup> Less than a decade later, Switzerland became subject to similar inversion of its symbolic fortunes. The tiny republic had prided itself on its long history of decentralized canton democracy and the benevolent, universalizing neutrality of its Red Cross. In the mid-nineties, journalists and historians documented that the wartime Swiss government had "purified" Nazi gold. In return for gold that had been plundered from the bodies of condemned and already dead Jews, Swiss bankers gave to Nazi authorities acceptable, unmarked currency that could much more readily be used to finance the war.

This discussion of how the non-Jewish agents of the progressive narrative were undercut by "real-world" developments would be incomplete without some mention of how the Israeli government, which represented the other principal agent of the early, progressive Holocaust story, also came to be threatened with symbolic



reconfiguration. The rise of Palestinian liberation movements inverted the Jewish nation's progressive myth of origin, for it suggested, at least to more liberally inclined groups, an equation between Nazi and Israeli treatment of subordinate ethnic and religious groups. The battle for cultural position was not, of course, given up without a fight. When Helmut Schmidt, chancellor of West Germany, spoke of Palestinian rights, Menachem Begin, prime minister of Israel, retorted that Schmidt, a Wehrmacht officer in the Second World War, had "remained faithful to Hitler until the last moment," insisting that the Palestine Liberation Organization was a "neo-Nazi organization" (quoted in Novick 1994: 161). This symbolic inversion *vis-à-vis* the newly generalized and reconfigured Holocaust symbol was deepened by the not-unrelated complicity of Israel in the massacres that followed the Lebanon invasion and by the documented reports of Palestinian torture and occasional death in Israeli prisons.

### The Holocaust as Bridging Metaphor

Each of the cultural transformations and social processes I have described has had the effect of universalizing the moral questions provoked by the mass killings of the Jews, of detaching the issues surrounding the systematic exercise of violence against ethnic groups from any particular ethnicity, religion, nationality, time, or place. These processes of detachment and deepening emotional identification are thoroughly intertwined. If the Holocaust were not conceived as a tragedy, it would not attract such continuous, even obsessive attention; this attention would not be rewarded, in turn, if the Holocaust were not understood in a detached and universalizing way. Symbolic extension and emotional identification both are necessary if the audience for a trauma, and its social relevance, are to be dramatically enlarged. I will call the effects of this enlargement the "engorgement of evil."

Norms provide standards for moral judgment. What is defined as evil in any historical period provides the most transcendental content for such judgments. What Kant called radical evil, and what I have called here, drawing on Durkheim, sacred-evil, refers to something considered absolutely essential to defining the good "in our time." Insofar as the "Holocaust" came to define inhumanity in our time, then, it served a fundamental moral function. "Post-Holocaust morality"<sup>78</sup> could perform this role, however, only in a sociological way: it became a bridging metaphor that social groups of uneven power and legitimacy applied to parse ongoing events as good and evil in real

historical time. What the "Holocaust" named as the most fundamental evil was the intentional, systematic, and organized employment of violence against members of a stigmatized collective group, whether defined in a primordial or an ideological way. Not only did this representation identify as radical evil the perpetrators and their actions but it polluted bystanders as well. According to the standards of post-Holocaust morality, one became normatively required to make an effort to intervene against any holocaust, regardless of personal consequences and cost. For as a crime against humanity, a "holocaust" is taken to be a threat to the continuing existence of humanity itself. It is impossible, in this sense, to imagine a sacrifice that would be too great when humanity itself is at stake.<sup>79</sup>

Despite the moral content of the Holocaust symbol, then, the primary, first-order effects of this sacred-evil do not work in a ratiocinative way. Radical evil is a philosophical term, and it suggests that evil's moral content can be defined and discussed rationally. Sacred-evil, by contrast, is a sociological term, and it suggests that defining radical evil, and applying it, involves motives and relationships, and institutions, that work more like those associated with religious institutions than with ethical doctrine. In order for a prohibited social action to be powerfully moralized, the symbol of this evil must become engorged. An engorged evil overflows with badness. Evil becomes labile and liquid; it drips and seeps, ruining everything it touches. Under the sign of the tragic narrative, the Holocaust did become engorged, and its seepage polluted everything with which it came into contact.

### Metonymy

This contact pollution established the basis for what might be called metonymic guilt. Under the progressive narrative, guilt for the genocidal mass killings depended on being directly and narrowly responsible in the legal sense worked out and applied at the Nuremberg trials. It was not a matter simply of being "associated" with mass murders. In this legal framework, any notion of collective responsibility, the guilt of the Nazi party, the German government, much less the German nation, was ruled as unfair, as out of bounds. But as the Holocaust became engorged with evil, and as post-Holocaust morality developed, guilt could no longer be so narrowly confined. Guilt now came from simple propinquity, in semiotic terms from metonymic association.

To be guilty of sacred-evil did not mean, anymore, that one had committed a legal crime. It was about the imputation of a moral

one. One cannot defend oneself against an imputed moral crime by pointing to exculpating circumstances or lack of direct involvement. The issue is one of pollution, guilt by actual association. The solution is not the rational demonstration of innocence but ritual cleansing: purification. In the face of metonymic association with evil, one must engage in performative actions, not only in ratiocinative, cognitive arguments. As the "moral conscience of Germany," the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, put it during the now famous *Historischstreit* among German historians during the 1980s, the point is to "attempt to expel shame," not to engage in "empty phrases" (quoted in Kampe 1987: 63). One must *do* justice and *be* righteousness. This performative purification is achieved by returning to the past, entering symbolically into the tragedy, and developing a new relation to the archetypal characters and crimes. Habermas wrote that it was "only after and through Auschwitz" that postwar Germany could once again attach itself "to the political culture of the West" (quoted in Kampe 1987: 63). Retrospection is an effective path toward purification because it provides for catharsis, although of course it doesn't guarantee it. The evidence for having achieved catharsis is confession. If there is neither the acknowledgment of guilt nor sincere apology, punishment in the legal sense may be prevented, but the symbolic and moral taint will always remain.

Once the trauma had been dramatized as a tragic event in human history, the engorgement of evil compelled contemporaries to return to the originating trauma-drama and to rejudge every individual or collective entity who was, or might have been, even remotely involved. Many individual reputations became sullied in this way. The list of once admired figures who were "outed" as apologists for, or participants in, the anti-Jewish mass murders stretched from such philosophers as Martin Heidegger to such literary figures as Paul de Man and such political leaders as Kurt Waldheim. In the defenses mounted by these tarnished figures or their supporters, the suggestion was never advanced that the Holocaust does not incarnate evil – an inhibition that implicitly reveals the trauma's engorged, sacred quality. The only possible defense was that the accused had, in fact, never been associated with the trauma in any way.

More than two decades ago, the US Justice Department established the Office of Special Investigation, the sole purpose of which was to track down and expel not only major but also minor figures who had been associated in some manner with Holocaust crimes. Since then, the bitter denunciations of deportation hearings have echoed throughout virtually every Western country. In such proceedings, the

emotional-cum-normative imperative is to assert the moral requirements for humanity. Media stories revolve around questions of the "normal," as in how could somebody who seems like a human being, who since the Second World War has been an upstanding member of the (French, American, Argentinian) community, have ever been involved in what now is universally regarded as an anti-human event? Issues of legality are often overlooked, for the issue is purification of the community through expulsion of a polluted object.<sup>80</sup> Frequently, those who are so polluted give up without a fight. In the space of recent disclosures about Jewish art appropriated by Nazis and currently belonging to Western museums, directors have responded simply by asking for time to catalogue the marked holdings to make them available to be retrieved.

### Analogy

The direct, metonymic association with Nazi crimes is the most overt effect of the way evil seeps from the engorged Holocaust symbol, but it is not the cultural process most often employed. The bridging metaphor works much more typically, and profoundly, through the device of analogy. In the 1960s and 1970s, such analogical bridging powerfully contributed to a fundamental revision in moral understandings of the historical treatment of minorities inside the United States. Critics of earlier American policy, and representatives of minority groups themselves, began to suggest analogies between various minority "victims" of white American expansion and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. This was particularly true of Native Americans, who argued that genocide had been committed against them, an idea that gained wide currency and that eventually generated massive efforts at legal repair and monetary payments.<sup>81</sup> Another striking example of this domestic inversion was the dramatic reconfiguration, in the 1970s and 1980s, of the American government's internment of Japanese-American citizens during the Second World War. Parallels between this action and Nazi prejudice and exclusion became widespread, and the internment camps became reconfigured as concentration camps. What followed from this symbolic transformation were not only formal governmental "apologies" to the Japanese-American people but also actual monetary "reparations."

In the 1980s, the engorged, free-floating Holocaust symbol became analogically associated with the movement against nuclear power and nuclear testing and, more generally, with the ecological movements

that emerged during that time. Politicians and intellectuals gained influence in their campaigns against the testing and deployment of nuclear weapons by telling stories about the "nuclear holocaust" that would be unleashed if their own, democratic governments continued their nuclear policies. By invoking this Holocaust-inspired narrative, they were imagining a disaster that would have such generalized, supranational effects that the historical particularities of ideological rightness and wrongness, winners and losers, would no longer matter. In a similar manner, the activists' evocative depictions of the "nuclear winter" that would result from the nuclear holocaust gained striking support from the images of "Auschwitz," the iconic representations of which were rapidly becoming a universal medium for expressing demented violence, abject human suffering, and "meaningless" death. In the environmental movement, claims were advanced that the industrial societies were committing "ecological genocide" against species of plant and animal life and that there was a danger that Earth itself would be exterminated.

In the 1990s, the evil that seeped from the engorged metaphor provided the most compelling analogical framework for framing the Balkan events. While there certainly was dispute over which historical signifier of violence would provide the "correct" analogical reference – dictatorial purge, ethnic rampage, civil war, ethnic cleansing, or genocide – it was the engorged Holocaust symbol that propelled first American diplomatic and then American-European military intervention against Serbian ethnic violence.<sup>82</sup> The part played by this symbolic analogy was demonstrated during the early US Senate debate in 1992. Citing "atrocities" attributed to Serbian forces, Senator Joseph Lieberman told reporters that "we hear echoes of conflicts in Europe little more than fifty years ago." During the same period, the Democratic presidential nominee, Bill Clinton, asserted that "history has shown us that you can't allow the mass extermination of people and just sit by and watch it happen." The candidate promised, if elected, to "begin with air power against the Serbs to try to restore the basic conditions of humanity," employing antipathy to distance himself from the polluting passivity that had retrospectively been attributed to the Allies during the initial trauma-drama itself (quoted in *Congressional Quarterly*, August 8, 1992: 2374). While President Clinton initially proved more reluctant than candidate Clinton to put this metaphorical linkage into material form – with the resulting deaths of tens of thousands of innocents – it was the threat of just such military deployment that eventually forced Serbia to sign the Dayton Accords and to stop what were widely represented, in the

American and European media, as its genocidal activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

When the Serbians threatened to enter Kosovo, the allied bombing campaign was initiated and justified by evoking the same symbolic analogies and antipathies. The military attacks were represented as responding to the widely experienced horror that the trauma-drama of the Holocaust was being reenacted "before our very eyes." Speaking to a veterans' group at the height of the bombing campaign, President Clinton engaged in analogical bridging to explain why the current Balkan confrontation should not be understood, and thus tolerated, as "the inevitable result . . . of centuries-old animosities." He insisted that these murderous events were unprecedented because they were a "systematic slaughter," carried out by "people with organized, political and military power," under the exclusive control of a ruthless dictator, Slobodan Milosevic. "You think the Germans would have perpetrated the Holocaust on their own without Hitler? Was there something in the history of the German race that made them do this? No. We've got to get straight about this. This is something political leaders do" (*New York Times*, May 14, 1999: A 12).

The same day in Germany, Joschka Fischer, foreign minister in the coalition "Red-Green" government, appeared before a special congress of his Green Party to defend the allied air campaign. He, too, insisted that the uniqueness of Serbian evil made it possible to draw analogies with the Holocaust. Fischer's deputy foreign minister and party ally, Ludger Volmer, drew rousing applause when, in describing President Milosevic's systematic cleansing policy, he declared: "My friends, there is only one word for this, and that word is Fascism." A leading opponent of the military intervention tried to block the bridging process by symbolic antipathy. "We are against drawing comparisons between the murderous Milosevic regime and the Holocaust," he proclaimed, because "doing so would mean an unacceptable diminishment of the horror of Nazi Fascism and the genocide against European Jews." Arguing that the Kosovars were not the Jews and Milosevic not Hitler protected the sacred-evil of the Holocaust, but the attempted antipathy was ultimately unconvincing. About 60 percent of the Green Party delegates believed the analogies were valid and voted to support Fischer's position.<sup>83</sup>

Two weeks later, when the allied bombing campaign had not yet succeeded in bringing Milosevic to heel, President Clinton asked Elie Wiesel to make a three-day tour of the Kosovar Albanians' refugee camps. A spokesperson for the US embassy in Macedonia explained that "people have lost focus on why we are doing what we are doing."

in the bombing campaign. The proper analogy, in other words, was not being consistently made. The solution was to create direct, metonymic association. "You need a person like Wiesel," the spokesperson continued, "to keep your moral philosophy on track." In the lead sentence of its report on the tour, the *New York Times* described Wiesel as "the Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner." Despite Wiesel's own assertion that "I don't believe in drawing analogies," after visiting the camps analogizing was precisely the rhetoric in which he engaged. Wiesel declared that "I've learned something from my experiences as a contemporary of so many events." What he had learned was to apply the post-Holocaust morality derived from the originating trauma-drama: "When evil shows its face, you don't wait, you don't let it gain strength. You must intervene" (Rohde 1999: 1).

During that tour of a camp in Macedonia, Elie Wiesel had insisted that "the world had changed fifty years after the Holocaust" and that "Washington's response in Kosovo was far better than the ambivalence it showed during the Holocaust." When, two weeks later, the air war, and the growing threat of a ground invasion, finally succeeded in expelling the Serbian forces from Kosovo, the *New York Times* "Week in Review" section reiterated the famous survivor's confidence that the Holocaust trauma had not been in vain, that the drama erected on its ashes had fundamentally changed the world, or at least the West. The Kosovo war had demonstrated that analogies were valid and that the lessons of post-Holocaust morality could be carried out in the most utterly practical way.

It was a signal week for the West, no doubt about it. Fifty-four years after the Holocaust revelations, America and Europe had finally said "enough," and struck a blow against a revival of genocide. Serbian ethnic cleansers were now routed; ethnic Albanians would be spared further murders and rapes. Germany was exorcising a few of its Nazi ghosts. Human rights had been elevated to a military priority and a pre-eminent Western value. (Wines 1999: 1)

Twenty-two months later, after Western support had facilitated the electoral defeat of Milosevic and the accession to the Yugoslav presidency of the reformer Vojislav Kostunica, the former Serbian president and accused war criminal was arrested and forcibly taken to jail. While President Kostunica did not personally subscribe to the authority of the war crimes tribunal in The Hague, there was little doubt that he had authorized Milosevic's imprisonment under intensive American pressure. Though initiated by the Congress rather than the US President, George W. Bush responded to the arrest by

Holocaust typification. He spoke of the "chilling images of terrified women and children herded into trains, emaciated prisoners interned behind barbed wire and mass graves unearthed by United Nations investigators," all traceable to Milosevic's "brutal dictatorship" (quoted in Perlez 2001: 6). Even among those Serbian intellectuals, like Aleksa Djilas, who criticized the Hague tribunal as essentially a political and thus particularistic court, there was recognition that the events took place within a symbolic framework that would inevitably universalize them and contribute to the possibility of a new moral order on a less particularist scale. "There will be a blessing in disguise through his trial," Djilas told a reporter on the day after Milosevic's arrest. "Some kind of new international order is being constructed, intentionally or not . . . Something will crystallize: what kinds of nationalism are justified or not, what kinds of intervention are justified or not, how much are great powers entitled to respond, and how. It will not be a sterile exercise" (Erlanger 2001: 8).

In the 1940s, the mass murder of the Jews had been viewed as a typification of the Nazi war machine, an identification that had limited its moral implications. Fifty years later, the Holocaust itself had displaced its historical context. It had itself become the master symbol of evil in relation to which new instances of grievous mass injury would be typified.<sup>84</sup>

### Legality

As the rhetoric of this triumphant declaration indicates, the generalization of the Holocaust trauma-drama has found expression in the new vocabulary of "universal human rights." In some part, this trope has simply degenerated the Enlightenment commitment to "the universal rights of man" first formulated in the French Revolution. In some other part, it blurs the issue of genocide with social demands for health and basic economic subsistence. Yet from the beginning of its systematic employment in the postwar period, the phrase has also referred specifically to a new legal standard for international behavior that would simultaneously generalize and make more precise and binding what came to be regarded as the "lessons" of the Holocaust events. Representatives of various organizations, both governmental and nongovernmental, have made sporadic but persistent efforts to formulate specific, morally binding codes, and eventually international laws, to institutionalize the moral judgments triggered by metonymic and analogic association with the engorged symbol of evil. This possibility has inspired the noted legal theorist Martha

Minow to suggest an unorthodox answer to the familiar question: "Will the twentieth century be most remembered for its mass atrocities?" "A century marked by human slaughter and torture, sadly, is not a unique century in human history. Perhaps more unusual than the facts of genocides and regimes of torture marking this era is the invention of new and distinctive legal forms of response" (Minow 1998: 1).

This generalizing process began at Nuremberg in 1945, when the long-planned trial of Nazi war leaders was expanded to include the moral principle that certain heinous acts are "crimes against humanity" and must be recognized as such by everyone (Drinan 1987: 334). In its first report on those indictments, the *New York Times* insisted that while "the authority of this tribunal to inflict punishment is directly derived from victory in war," it derived "indirectly from an intangible but nevertheless very real factor which might be called the dawn of a world conscience" (October 9, 1945: 20). This universalizing process continued the following year, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 95, committing the international body to "the principles of international law recognized by the charter of the Nuremberg Tribunal and the judgment of the Tribunal" (quoted in Drinan 1987: 334).<sup>85</sup> Two years later, the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose opening preamble evoked the memory of "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind."<sup>86</sup> In 1950, the International Law Commission of the United Nations adopted a statement spelling out the principles that the Declaration implied. "The core of these principles states that leaders and nations can be punished for their violations of international law and for their crimes against humanity. In addition, it is not a defense for a person to state that he or she was required to do what was done because of an order from a military or civilian superior" (quoted in Drinan 1987: 334).

In the years since, despite President Truman's recommendation that the United States draft a code of international criminal law around these principles, despite the "human rights" foreign policy of a later Democratic president, Jimmy Carter, and despite the nineteen UN treaties and covenants condemning genocide and exalting the new mandate for human rights, new international legal codes were never drafted (Drinan 1987: 334). Still, over the same period, an increasingly thick body of "customary law" was developed that militated *against* nonintervention in the affairs of sovereign states when they engage in systematic human rights violations.

The long-term historical significance of the rights revolution of the last fifty years is that it has begun to erode the sanctity of state sovereignty and to justify effective political and military intervention. Would there have been American intervention in Bosnia without nearly fifty years of accumulated international opinion to the effect that there are crimes against humanity and violations of human rights which must be punished wherever they arise? Would there be a safe haven for the Kurds in northern Iraq? Would we be in Kosovo? (Ignatieff 1999: 62)<sup>87</sup>

When the former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet was arrested in Britain and detained for more than a year in response to an extradition request by a judge in Spain, the reach of this customary law and its possible enforcement by national police first became crystallized in the global public sphere. It was at about the same time that the first internationally sanctioned War Crimes Tribunal since Nuremberg began meeting in The Hague to prosecute those who had violated human rights on any and all sides of the decade's Balkan wars.

### *The Dilemma of Uniqueness*

As the engorged symbol bridging the distance between radical evil and what at some earlier point was considered normal or normally criminal behavior, the reconstructed Holocaust trauma became enmeshed in what might be called the dilemma of uniqueness. The trauma-drama could not function as a metaphor of archetypal tragedy unless it were regarded as radically different from any other evil act in modern times. Yet it was this very status – as a unique event – that eventually compelled it to become generalized and depicularized. For as a metaphor for radical evil, the Holocaust provided a standard of evaluation for judging the evil of other threatening acts. By providing such a standard for comparative judgment, the Holocaust became a norm, initiating a succession of metonymic, analogic, and legal evaluations that deprived it of "uniqueness" by establishing its degrees of likeness or unlikeness to other possible manifestations of evil.

In this regard, it is certainly ironic that this bridging process, so central to universalizing critical moral judgment in the post-Holocaust world, has time after time been attacked as depriving the Holocaust of its significance. Yet these very attacks have often revealed, despite themselves, the trauma-drama's new centrality in ordinary thought and action. One historically oriented critic, for example, mocked the new "Holocaust consciousness" in the United States, citing the fact that the Holocaust "is invoked as reference point in discussions

of everything from AIDS to abortion" (Novick 1994: 159). A literature professor complained about the fact that "the language of 'Holocaust'" is now "regularly invoked by people who want to draw public attention to human-rights abuses, social inequalities suffered by racial and ethnic minorities and women, environmental disasters, AIDS, and a whole host of other things" (Rosenfeld 1995: 35). Another scholar decried the fact that "any evil that befalls anyone anywhere becomes a Holocaust" (quoted in Rosenfeld 1995: 35).<sup>88</sup>

While no doubt well-intentioned in a moral sense, such complaints miss the sociological complexities that underlie the kind of cultural-moral process I am exploring here. Evoking the Holocaust to measure the evil of a non-Holocaust event is nothing more, and nothing less, than to employ a powerful bridging metaphor to make sense of social life. The effort to qualify as the referent of this metaphor is bound to entail sharp social conflict, and in this sense social relativization, for successful metaphorical embodiment brings legitimacy and resources. The premise of these relativizing social conflicts is that the Holocaust provides an absolute and nonrelative measure of evil. But the effects of the conflict are to relativize the application of this standard to any particular social event. The Holocaust is unique and not unique at the same time. This insoluble dilemma marks the life history of the Holocaust, once it had become a tragic archetype and a central component of moral judgment in our time.<sup>89</sup> Inga Clendinnen has described this dilemma in a particularly acute way, and her observations exemplify the metaphorical bridging process I have tried to describe here.

There have been too many recent horrors, in Rwanda, in Burundi, in one-time Yugoslavia, with victims equally innocent, killers and torturers equally devoted, to ascribe uniqueness to any one set of atrocities on the grounds of their exemplary cruelty. I find the near-random terror practiced by the Argentinean military, especially their penchant for torturing children before their parents, to be as horrible, as "unimaginable," as the horrible and unimaginable things done by Germans to their Jewish compatriots. Certainly the scale is different – but how much does scale matter to the individual perpetrator or the individual victim?

Again, the willful obliteration of long-enduring communities is surely a vast offence, but for three years we watched the carpet-bombings of Cambodia, when the bombs fell on villagers who could not have had the least understanding of the nature of their offence. *When we think of innocence afflicted, we see those unforgettable children of the Holocaust staring wide-eyed into the camera of their killers, but we also see the image of the little Vietnamese girl, naked, screaming, running*

*down a dusty road, her back aflame with American napalm. If we grant that "holocaust," the total consumption of offerings by fire, is sinisterly appropriate for the murder of those millions who found their only graves in the air, it is equally appropriate for the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Dresden [and for] Picasso's horses and humans screaming [in *Guernica*] under attack from untouchable murderers in the sky.* (Clendinnen 1999: 14, italics added)

## Forgetting or Remembering?

### *Routinization and Institutionalization*

As the sense that the Holocaust was a unique event in human history crystallized and its moral implications became paradoxically generalized, the tragic trauma-drama became increasingly subject to memorialization. Special research centers were funded to investigate its most minute details and to sponsor debates about its wider applications. College courses were devoted to it, and everything, from university chairs to streets and parks, was named for it. Monuments were constructed to honor the tragedy's victims. Major urban centers in the United States, and many outside it as well, constructed vastly expensive, and vastly expansive, museums to make permanent its moral lessons. The US military distributed instructions for conducting "Days of Remembrance," and commemorative ceremonies were held annually in the Capitol Rotunda.

Because of the dilemma of uniqueness, all of these generalizing processes were controversial; they suggested to many observers that the Holocaust was being instrumentalized and commodified, that its morality and affect were being displaced by specialists in profit-making on the one hand and by specialists in merely cognitive expertise on the other. In recent years, indeed, the idea has grown that the charisma of the original trauma-drama is being routinized in a regrettrably, but predictably, Weberian way.<sup>90</sup>

The moral learning process that I have described in the preceding pages does not necessarily deny the possibility that instrumentalization develops *after* a trauma-drama has been created and *after* its moral lessons have been externalized and internalized. In American history, for example, even the most sacred of the founding national traumas, the Revolution and the Civil War, have faded as objects of communal affect and collective remembering, and the dramas associated with them have become commodified as well. Still, the

implications of what I have presented here suggest that such routinization, even when it takes a monetized and commodified form, does not necessarily indicate meaninglessness. Metaphorical bridging shifts symbolic significance, and audience attention, from the originating trauma to the traumas that follow in a sequence of analogical associations. But it does not, for that, inevitably erase or invert the meanings associated with the trauma that was first in the associational line. Nor does the effort to concretize the cultural meanings of the trauma in monumental forms have this effect. The American Revolution and the Civil War both remain resources for triumphant and tragic narration, in popular and high culture venues. It is only very infrequently, and very controversially, that these trauma-dramas are subjected to the kind of comic framing that would invert their still sacred place in American collective identity. As I have mentioned earlier, it is not commodification, but "comedization" – a change in the cultural framing, not a change in economic status – that indicates trivialization and forgetting.

#### *Memorials and Museums: Crystallizing Collective Sentiment*

A less Weberian, more Durkheimian understanding of routinization is needed. When they are first created, sacred-good and sacred-evil are labile and liquid. Objectification can point to the sturdier embodiment of these moral values, and even of the experiences they imply. Currently, the intensifying momentum to memorialize the Holocaust indicates a deepening institutionalization of its moral lessons and the continued recalling of its dramatic experiences rather than their routinization and forgetting. When, after years of conflict, the German parliament approved a plan for erecting a vast memorial of two thousand stone pillars to the victims of the Holocaust in the heart of Berlin, a leading politician proclaimed: "We are not building this monument solely for the Jews. We are building it for ourselves. It will help us confront a chapter in our history" (Cohen 1999: 3).

In the Holocaust museums that are sprouting up throughout the Western world, the design is not to distance the viewer from the object in a dry, deracinated, or "purely factual" way. To the contrary, as a European researcher into this phenomenon has remarked, "Holocaust museums favor strategies designed to arouse strong emotions and particular immersion of the visitor into the past" (Baer 1999).<sup>91</sup> The informational brochure to the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, which houses the West Coast's largest Holocaust exhibition, promotes itself as a "high tech,

hands-on experiential museum that focuses on . . . themes through interactive exhibits" (Baer 1999).

From its very inception in 1979, the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, was metonymically connected to the engorged symbolism of evil. According to the official report submitted to President Jimmy Carter by the President's Commission on the Victims of the Holocaust, the purpose of the museum was to "protect against future evil" (quoted in Linenthal 1995: 37). The goal was to create a building through which visitors would reexperience the original tragedy, to find "a means," as some central staff members had once put it, "to convey both dramatically and soberly the enormity of the human tragedy in the death camps" (quoted in Linenthal 1995: 212).<sup>92</sup> Rather than instrumentalizing or commodifying, in other words, the construction was conceived as a critical means for deepening psychological identification and broadening symbolic extension. According to the ethnographer of the fifteen-year planning and construction process, the design team insisted that the museum's interior mood should be so "visceral" that, as the ethnographer of the construction put it, museum visitors "would gain no respite from the narrative."

The feel and rhythm of space and the setting of mood were important. [The designers] identified different qualities of space that helped to mediate the narrative: constructive space on the third floor, for example, where as visitors enter the world of the death camps, the space becomes tight and mean, with a feeling of heavy darkness. Indeed, walls were not painted, pipes were left exposed, and, except for fire exits and hidden elevators on the fourth and third floors for people who, for one reason or another, had to leave, there is no escape (quoted in Linenthal 1995: 169)

According to the Museum's head designer,

the exhibition was intended to take visitors on a journey . . . We followed those people under all that pressure as they moved from their normal lives into ghettos, out of ghettos onto trains, from trains to camps, within the pathways of the camps, until finally to the end . . . If visitors could take that same journey, they would understand the story because they will have experienced the story. (Quoted in Linenthal 1995: 174)<sup>93</sup>

The dramatization of the tragic journey is in many respects quite literal, and this fosters identification. The visitor receives a photo passport/identity card representing a victim of the Holocaust, and the museum's permanent exhibition is divided into chronological sections. The fourth floor is "The Assault: 1933–9," the third floor "The

Holocaust: 1940-4," and the second floor "Bearing Witness: 1945." At the end of each floor, visitors are asked to insert their passports to find out what happened to their identity-card "alter egos" during that particular phase of the Holocaust tragedy. By the time visitors have passed through the entire exhibit, they will know whether or not the person with whom they have been symbolically identified survived the horror or perished (Linenthal 1995: 169).

The identification process is deepened by the dramatic technique of personalization. The key, in the words of the project director, was connecting museum visitors to the "real faces of real people" (Linenthal, 1995: 181).<sup>94</sup>

Faces of Holocaust victims in the exhibition are shattering in their power . . . Polish school teachers, moments before their execution, look at visitors in agony, sullen anger, and despair . . . Two brothers, dressed alike in matching coats and caps, fear etched on their faces, gaze at the camera, into the eyes of the visitors . . . The Faces . . . assault, challenge, accuse, and profoundly sadden visitors throughout the exhibition. (174)<sup>95</sup>

At every point, design decisions about dramatization were made with the narrative of tragedy firmly in mind. Exhibit designers carefully avoided displaying any of the camp prisoners' "passive resistance," for fear it would trigger progressive narratives of heroism and romance. As an historian associated with such decisions remarked, the fear was that such displays might contribute to an "epic" Holocaust narrative in which resistance would gain "equal time" with the narrative of destruction (Linenthal 1995: 192). This dark dramatization, however, could not descend into a mere series of grossly displayed horrors, for this would undermine the identification on which the very communication of the tragic lessons of the Holocaust would depend.

The design team faced a difficult decision regarding the presentation of horror. Why put so much effort into constructing an exhibition that was so horrible that people would not visit? They worried about word-of-mouth evaluation after opening, and feared that the first visitors would tell family and friends, "Don't go, it's too horrible." . . . The museum's mission was to teach people about the Holocaust and bring about civic transformation; yet . . . the public had to desire to visit. (198)

It seems evident that such memorializations aim to create structures that dramatize the tragedy of the Holocaust and provide opportunities for contemporaries, now so far removed from the original

scene, powerfully to reexperience it. In these efforts, personalization remains an immensely important dramatic vehicle, and it continues to provide the opportunity for identification so crucial to the project of universalization. In each Holocaust museum, the fate of the Jews functions as a metaphorical bridge to the treatment of other ethnic, religious, and racial minorities.<sup>96</sup> The aim is manifestly not to "promote" the Holocaust as an important event in earlier historical time, but to contribute to the possibilities of pluralism and justice in the world of today.

#### *From Liberators to Survivors: Witness Testimonies*

Routinization of charisma is certainly an inevitable fact of social life, and memorialization a much-preferred way to understand that it can institutionalize, and not only undermine, the labile collective sentiments that once circulated in a liquid form. It is important also not to view the outcome of such processes in a naturalistic, noncultural way. It is not "meaning" that is crystallized but particular meanings. In terms of Holocaust memorialization and routinization, it is the objectification of a narrative about tragedy that has been memorialized, not a narrative about progress.

The postwar memorials to the Second World War were, and are, about heroism and liberation. They centered on American GIs and the victims they helped. If the Holocaust had continued to be narrated within the progressive framework of the anti-Nazi war, it would no doubt have been memorialized in much the same way. Of course, the very effect of the progressive narrative was to make the Holocaust less visible and central, with the result that, as long as representations of contemporary history remained within the progressive framework, few efforts to memorialize the Holocaust were made. For that very reason, the few that were attempted are highly revealing. In Liberty State Park, in New Jersey, within visual sight of the proud and patriotic Statue of Liberty, there stands a statue called *Liberation*. The metal sculpture portrays two figures. The larger, a solemn American GI, walks deliberately forward, his eyes on the ground. He cradles a smaller figure, a concentration camp victim, whose skeletal chest, shredded prison garb, outstretched arms, and vacantly staring eyes exemplify his helplessness (Young 1993: 320-32). Commissioned not only by the State of New Jersey but also by a coalition of American Legion and other veterans' organizations, the monument was dedicated only in 1985. During the ceremony, the state's governor made a speech seeking to reconnect the progressive narrative still embodied



by the "last good war" to the growing centrality of the Holocaust narrative, whose symbolic and moral importance had by then already begun to far outstrip it. The defensive and patriotic tone of the speech indicates that, via this symbolic linkage, the state official sought to resist the skepticism about America's place in the world, the very critical attitude that had helped frame the Holocaust in a narrative of tragedy.

To me, this monument is an affirmation of my American heritage. It causes me to feel deep pride in my American values. The monument says that we, as a collective people, stand for freedom. We, as Americans, are not oppressors, and we, as Americans, do not engage in military conflict for the purpose of conquest. Our role in the world is to preserve and promote that precious, precious thing that we consider to be a free democracy. Today we will remember those who gave their lives for freedom. (321)

The *Liberation* monument, and the particularist and progressive sentiments it crystallized, could not be further removed from the memorial processes that have crystallized in the years since. Propelled by the tragic transformation of the Jewish mass murder, in these memorials the actions and beliefs of Americans are often implicitly analogized with those of the perpetrators, and the US Army's liberation of the camps plays only a minimal role, if any. In these more universalized settings, the focus is on the broader, world-historical causes and moral implications of the tragic event, on creating symbolic extension by providing opportunities for contemporaries to experience emotional identification with the suffering of the victims.

It was in the context of this transformation that there emerged a new genre of Holocaust writing and memorializing, one that focuses on a new kind of historical evidence, direct "testimony," and a new kind of historical actor, the "survivor." Defined as persons who lived through the camp experiences, survivors provide a tactile link with the tragic event. As their social and personal role was defined, they began to write books, give speeches to local and national communities, and record their memories of camp experiences on tape and video. These testimonies have become sacralized repositories of the core tragic experience, with all the moral implications that this suffering has come to entail. They have been the object of two amply funded recording enterprises. One, organized by the Yale University Video Archive of the Holocaust, was already begun in 1981. The other, the Shoah Visual History Foundation, was organized by the

film director Steven Spielberg in 1994, in the wake of the world-wide effects of his movie *Schindler's List*.

Despite the publicity these enterprises have aroused and the celebrity that has accrued to the new survivor identity, it is important to see that this new genre of memorialization has inverted the language of liberation that was so fundamental to the earlier, progressive form. It has created not heroes but anti-heroes. Indeed, those who have created and shaped this new genre are decidedly critical of what they see as the "style of revisionism that crept into Holocaust writing after the liberation of the camps." They describe this style as a "natural but misguided impulse to romanticize staying alive and to interpret painful endurance as a form of defiance or resistance" (Langer, 2000: xiv). Arguing that survivor testimony reveals tragedy, not triumph, they suggest that it demands the rejection of any progressive frame.

No one speaks of having survived through bravery or courage. These are hard assessments for us to accept. We want to believe in a universe that rewards good character and exemplary behavior. We want to believe in the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity. It is difficult to live with the thought that human nature may not be noble or heroic and that under extreme conditions we, too, might turn brutal, selfish, "too inhuman." (Greene and Kumar, 2000: xxv-xxvi)

In reacting against the heroic, progressive frame some of these commentators go so far as to insist on the inherent "meaninglessness" of the Holocaust, suggesting that the testimonies reveal "unsaturated and unredeemable suffering" (Langer 2000: xv). Yet it seems clear that the very effort to create survivor testimony is an effort to maintain the vitality of the experience by objectifying and, in effect, depersonalizing it. As such, it helps to sustain the tragic trauma-drama, which allows an ever-wider audience redemption through suffering. It does so by suggesting the survival not of a few scattered and particular victims but of humanity as such.

The power of testimony is that it requires little commentary, for witnesses are the experts and they tell their own stories in their own words. The perpetrators work diligently to silence their victims by taking away their names, homes, families, friends, possessions, and lives. The intent was to deny their victims any sense of humanness, to erase their individuality and rob them of all personal voice. Testimony reestablishes the individuality of the victims who survived – and in some instances of those who were killed – and demonstrates the power of their voices. (Greene and Kumar, 2000: xxiv)

Those involved directly in this memorializing process see their own work in exactly the same way. Geoffrey Hartman, the director of the Yale Video Archive, speaks about a new "narrative that emerges through the alliance of witness and interviewer" (Hartman 1996: 153), a narrative based on the reconstruction of a human community.

However many times the interviewer may have heard similar accounts, they are received as though for the first time. This is possible because, while the facts are known, while historians have labored – and are still laboring – to establish every detail, each of these histories is animated by something in addition to historical knowledge: there is a quest to recover or reconstruct a recipient, an "affective community" . . . and [thus] the renewal of compassionate feelings. (153–4)

However "grim its contents," Hartman insists, testimony does not represent an "impersonal historical digest" but, rather, "that most natural and flexible of human communications, a story – a story, moreover, that, even if it describes a universe of death, is communicated by a living person who answers, recalls, thinks, cries, carries on" (Hartman 1996: 154). The president of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation, Michael Berenbaum, suggests that the goal of the Spielberg group is "to catalogue and to disseminate the testimonies to as many remote sites as technology and budget will permit, [a]ll in the service of education," ties the contemporary moral meaning of the historical events to the opportunity for immediate emotional identification that testimonies provide: "In classrooms throughout the world, the encounter between survivors and children [has] become electrifying, the transmission of memory, a discussion of values, a warning against prejudice, anti-semitism, racism, and indifference" (Berenbaum, 1998: xi).

### Is the Holocaust Western?

While the rhetoric of Holocaust generalization refers to its *Weltgeschichte* relevance – its world-historical relevance – throughout this chapter I have tried to be careful in noting that this universalization has primarily been confined to the West. Universalization, as I have described it, depends on symbolically generated, emotionally vicarious participation in the trauma-drama of the mass murder of the Jews. The degree to which this participation is differentially distributed throughout the West is itself a question that further research

will have to pursue. This "remembering" is much more pronounced in Western Europe and North America than in Latin America. Mexicans, preoccupied with their national traumas dating back to the European conquest, are much less attached to the "Holocaust" than their northern neighbors – against whose very mythologies Mexicans often define themselves. The result may be that Mexican political culture is informed to a significantly lesser degree by "post-Holocaust morality." On the other hand, it is also possible that Mexicans translate certain aspects of post-Holocaust morality into local terms – for example, into the willingness to limit claims to national sovereignty in the face of demands by indigenous groups legitimating themselves in terms of broadly human rights.

Such variation is that much more intense when we expand our assessment to non-Western areas. What are the degrees of attachment to, vicarious participation in, and lessons drawn from the Holocaust trauma in non-Western civilizations? In Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Islamic, African, and still-communist regions and regimes, reference to the Holocaust, when made at all, is by literary and intellectual elites with markedly atypical levels of participation in a global discourse that remains dominated by the United States and Western Europe. Of course, non-Western regions and nations have their own identity-defining trauma-dramas (see Chapter 4, below). What is unclear is the degree to which the cultural work that constructs these traumas, and responds to them, reaches beyond issues of national identity and sovereignty to the universalizing, supranational ethical imperatives increasingly associated with the "lessons of post-Holocaust morality" in the West.

The authorized spokespersons for Japan, for example, have rarely acknowledged the empirical reality of the horrific mass murder their soldiers inflicted on native Chinese in Nanjing, China, during the runup to the Second World War – the "Rape of Nanjing." Much less have they apologized for it, or made efforts to share in the suffering of the Chinese people in a manner that would point to a universalizing ethic by which members of different Asian national and ethnic groupings could be commonly judged. Instead, the atomic bombings of Hiroshima have become an originating trauma for postwar Japanese identity. While producing an extraordinary commitment to pacifism, the dramatization of this trauma, which was inflicted on Japan by its wartime enemy, the United States, has had the effect of confirming rather than dislodging Japan in its role as narrative agent (Hashimoto 2011). The trauma has functioned, in other words, to block any effort to widen the circle of perpetrators, making it less

likely that the national history of Japan will be submitted to some kind of supranational standard of judgment.

Such submission is very difficult, of course, in any strongly national context, in the West as well as in the East. Nonetheless, the analysis presented here compels us to ask this question: Can countries or civilizations that do not acknowledge the Holocaust develop universalistic political moralities? Obviously, non-Western nations cannot "remember" the Holocaust, but in the context of cultural globalization they certainly have become gradually aware of its symbolic meaning and social significance. It might also be the case that non-Western nations can develop trauma-dramas that are functional equivalents to the Holocaust (see Chapter 5 below: The Partition chapter). It has been the thesis of this chapter that moral universalism rests on social processes that construct and channel cultural trauma. If this is indeed the case, then globalization will have to involve a very different kind of social process than the ones that students of this supranational development have talked about so far: East and West, North and South must learn to share the experiences of one another's traumas and to take vicarious responsibility for the other's afflictions (see Chapter 6, below).

Geoffrey Hartman has recently likened the pervasive status of the Holocaust in contemporary society to a barely articulated but nonetheless powerful and pervasive legend. "In Greek tragedy . . . with its moments of highly condensed dialogue, the framing legend is so well known that it does not have to be emphasized. A powerful abstraction, or simplification, takes over. In this sense, and in this sense only, the Holocaust is on the way to becoming a legendary event" (Hartman 2000: 16).

Human beings are storytelling animals. We tell stories about our triumphs. We tell stories about tragedies. We like to believe in the verisimilitude of our accounts, but it is the moral frameworks themselves that are real and constant, not the factual material that we employ them to describe. In the history of human societies, it has often been the case that narrative accounts of the same event compete with one another, and that they eventually displace one another over historical time. In the case of the Nazis' mass murder of the Jews, what was once described as a prelude and incitement to moral and social progress has come to be reconstructed as a decisive demonstration that not even the most "modern" improvements in the condition of humanity can ensure advancement in anything other than a purely technical sense. It is paradoxical that a decided increase in moral and social justice may eventually be the unintended result.

## HOLOCAUST AND TRAUMA: MORAL RESTRICTION IN ISRAEL

(with Shai M. Dromi)

"*Yad Vashem Fires Employee Who Compared Holocaust to Nakba*"  
Yad Vashem has fired an instructor who compared the trauma of Jewish Holocaust survivors with the trauma experienced by the Palestinian people in Israel's War of Independence. Itamar Shapira, 29, of Jerusalem, was fired before Passover from his job as a docent at the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, after a teacher with a group of yeshiva students from Efrat made a complaint. Shapira had worked at Yad Vashem for three and a half years . . .

Shapira confirmed, in a telephone conversation with Haaretz, that he had spoken to visitors about the 1948 massacre at Deir Yassin. He said he did so because the ruins of the Arab village, today a part of Jerusalem's Givat Shaul neighborhood, can be seen as one leaves Yad Vashem. "Yad Vashem talks about the Holocaust survivors' arrival in Israel and about creating a refuge here for the world's Jews. I said there are people who lived on this land and mentioned that there are other traumas that provide other nations with motivation," Shapira said. "The Holocaust moved us to establish a Jewish state and the Palestinian nation's trauma is moving it to seek self-determination, identity, land and dignity, just as Zionism sought these things," he said. The institution's position is that the Holocaust cannot be compared to any other event and that every visitor can draw his own political conclusions . . . "Yad Vashem would have acted unprofessionally had Itamar Shapira continued his educational work for the institute," [Yad Vashem spokeswoman Iris] Rosenberg said. Yad Vashem employs workers and volunteers from the entire political and social spectrum, who know how to separate their personal position from their work, she said.

Shapira said Yad Vashem chooses to examine only some of the events that took place in the War of Independence. "It is being hypocritical. I only tried to expose the visitors to the facts, not to political conclusions. If Yad Vashem chooses to ignore the facts, for example the massacre at