

Anti-semitism, Public Health and Genocide: From Racial Hygiene to the Culture of Death

Elihu D. Richter

Motifs of "cleansing" the body politic or society of filth, microbes, vermin, pests to protect public health were used by anti-semitic perpetrators of the Holocaust and by perpetrators of other genocides. In the Holocaust, public health motifs of getting rid of sickness in individuals mutated into getting rid of individuals and then to getting rid of groups of individuals. These motifs, together with eugenics, led to the barbarisms of Nazi medicine, starting with euthanasia of the mentally impaired. Promoting racial hygiene and public health by making society "Judenrein" –the predecessor of the term 'ethnic cleaning' - - was the rationale for mass murder of Jews, and its most energetic perpetrators included enthusiastic medical proponents of anti - smoking campaigns, improved nutrition and removal of carcinogens from the work environment. "Ethnic cleansing" –a euphemism for genocide derived from the term 'Judenrein' - has been the term used by perpetrators, accomplices, supporters, apologists and bystanders to promote, describe or sanitize subsequent genocides.

A major enduring lesson from the Holocaust is that hate language and mass incitement of followers using motifs of disease to stigmatize threatened communities is a precursor and early warning sign of genocide and genocidal terror. But today the motifs of a theocratic cult of death have replaced the cult of health and hygiene as the precursors. Hate language needs to be regarded as the most toxic and dangerous exposure of our time. Children and young adults exposed to such incitement are the most vulnerable sub - groups. The case for intervention to counter such hate language is based on

the catastrophic risks of ignoring this predictor of genocide and genocidal terror. The proposal to indict President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for incitement to genocide – defined by the International Criminal Code as a crime against humanity - - is the template model for such interventions.

Introduction:

The resurgence of anti-semitism, now projected in the form of extreme hostility towards Israel¹, requires us to recall its bizarre convergence with motifs of public health and environment and human rights. The convergence between “clean, green and wholesome” and anti-semitism led to the Holocaust. But today, in the Muslim world, there is a new coming together of anti-semitism with the culture of death and suicide terrorism.

Anti-semitism means singling out and blaming Jews –and today—Israel—for the problems of the world, the use of stereotypes to stigmatize Jews, the use of double standards for judging the behavior of Jews and Israel, and hatred and obsessive attitudes far beyond everyday prejudicial suspicions and dislikes of the "other."^{2,3} Today we should add that it also includes justifying, tolerating, or condoning acts of violence against Jews and Israel which would not be justified, tolerated or condoned against any defined community, the position of Tariq Ramadan, the European Islamist who sees himself bringing together Islam and modernity.⁴

Public health motifs of filth and disease merged with anti-semitism to provide the driving force of the Holocaust perpetrated by the Nazis against world Jewry. My thesis is that the re-emergence of these dehumanizing motifs, now allied - or perhaps alloyed - with a culture of death are warning signs for all genocides and genocidal terror. Dehumanization represents the top of an iceberg which starts with bigotry, and then goes on to disinformation, defamation, delegitimization and demonization - all of which sometimes go together. What can we do to counter this new mixture and to deter new perpetrators and promoters of genocidal terror - and the unprecedented threats of nuclear genocide?

Public Health, Eugenics, Nazi Medicine and Genocide. Public health - i.e., health protection and health promotion using community-wide approaches - has gone hand in hand with anti-semitism to promote genocide against Jews. Nazi theories of racial hygiene were the muscular expressions of distorted motifs in public health and medicine first appearing at the turn of the century, notably via eugenics. Eugenics, now regarded as a pseudo-science, flourished in the first 3 decades of the 20th century, and was endorsed by the elite figures of the American academic medical establishment into the early 1930's.⁵ Based on ideas going back to Francis Galton and misinterpretations of Darwinian evolutionary science, advocates of eugenics – who in the United States received the support of medical figures as illustrious as Walter Cannon of Harvard, William Welch of Johns Hopkins, and Haven Emerson of Columbia, sought to promote social progress and public health by improvement of the genetic stock of populations by selective breeding.⁶ Eugenic rationales led to selective and restrictive immigration policies in the United States and compulsory sterilization of mentally impaired inmates of psychiatric institutions in Europe, and of the mentally retarded in the U.S. The heady mix of genetic and social engineering fostered by the eugenics movement created a fertile environment for Nazi medicine's promotion of 'racial hygiene' to improve the genetic stock and health of the master race. Mass killing of psychiatric inmates and elimination by "scientific" selection of Jews, Gypsies and others in Nazi Germany in the years running up to the Holocaust and all through World War II was part of an ideology of redemption and purification.⁷

As Robert Proctor has shown, Nazi medicine gave pride of place to public health. These preoccupations with health promotion and health protection had their antecedents in German social medicine going as far back to Bismarck and even earlier (Medical Police).⁸ In Nazi medicine, the same public health motifs that led to extraordinary advances in public health drove the Nazis' aggressive, and singleminded pursuit of genocidal agendas against Jews and other minorities. Leading medical doctors who were actors in the planning of the Holocaust genocide promoted anti-smoking campaigns to prevent lung cancer, nutrition campaigns for mothers and children, campaigns

of self-examinations for early detection of breast cancer, youth recreation camps in outdoor environments of fresh air (Kraft durch Freude) and funded pioneering intervention to restrict the hazards of asbestos. Drs. Leonardo Conti and Karl Astel, high ranking physicians involved in organizing the mass murders in the death camps, were strong proponents and funders of campaigns against smoking, the latter declaring tobacco an "enemy of the people" and the German Ministry of Health generously funded research on the occupational causes of cancer.⁹ The Nazi preoccupation with public health and environmental protection even attracted Dr Wilhelm Hueper, a German immigrant to the USA now revered as the father of research in occupational carcinogenesis, who for a while sought to return to Nazi Germany in September 1933 to contribute to the new environmentalism.

Nazi medicine's programs and campaigns had a strong commitment to protection and promotion at the level of the group, the Volk - the collective needs of which transcended those of its individual members. This commitment resonated with a core working principle of public health: that getting rid of disease in populations by going after the collective sources of their disease – i.e., preventing contaminated water, food or air, is much more effective and cost effective than treating disease in individuals. But *in Nazi medicine, getting rid of disease in individuals rapidly mutated into getting rid of sick individuals, which then mutated into getting rid of groups of sick individuals.....* Gassing - 'Euthanasia' of the mentally impaired and mass murder of Jews and Roma were the consequences. To promote racial hygiene, it was necessary to ensure that society would be 'judenrein' by getting rid of the defective group, so as to protect the genetic stock from contamination with that of the inferior species, or if the microbial analogy was used, the source of infection of the body politic.¹⁰

The motifs that drove Nazi medicine were strongly allied with political ecology and a certain romantic and a vaguely defined environmentalism. In 1936, Walter Gross, Head of the office of Race Policy of NSDAP, wrote that 'the basic thought of race policy results from the consciousness of unity and wholeness of life... and bridges the gap between matter and spirit... and race

doctrine embraces the wholeness of life, it never remains with the particular.”¹¹ In 1937, the entomologist Karl Friederichs regarded “ecology as a path to a total world view, in which everything is related to everything else, and the “ecological conception was spreading to all spheres of life,” and that “Ecology is the doctrine of blood and soil.”¹² In 1942, a zoologist, Herman Weber, taught that “life in a community has to be thought of as organismic and holistic” and restated the dictum that the terms “organism and environment” in biology were equivalent to “blood and soil” in politics.¹³

The yearning for holistic approaches, being in harmony with nature, and the quest for clean resurfaced in the political ecology of the German environmental movement in the 1980’s which advocated a new scientific era to replace causal reductionist science. It is not certain if its proponents were aware of the Nazi origins of these doctrines of biology and ecology.¹⁴

Public Health and Racial Hygiene: From ‘Judenrein’ in Germany to ‘Ethnic Cleansing’ in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda: It is instructive to summarize the past history of the flawed public health motifs that led to Nazi medicine and its promotion of racial hygiene, and thereafter to subsequent genocide and genocidal threats in the last 50 years. Perpetrators used such motifs to motivate followers during the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. The Young Turk regime in 1915 called the genocide of Armenians - - - the eradication of ‘dangerous microbes.’ The Nazi term ‘*Judenrein*’ in Western Europe, which means ‘Jew - free’ first stigmatized the victim group as a carrier of filth and disease, and then as the disease to be eradicated. Hitler called the Jews ‘parasites, plague, cancer, tumor, bacillus, bloodsucker, blood poisoner, lice, vermin, bedbugs, fleas, and racial tuberculosis’ on the German body that would supposedly be killed by the ‘Jewish disease.’¹⁵ In Rwanda, Hutu radio in 1994 - not so many years ago, used the term ‘cockroaches’ (*inyenzi*) to incite mass murder of Tutsis by machete-wielding militias.¹⁶

Blum et al have called attention to the fact the use of the term ‘ethnic cleansing’ – like ‘Judenrein’ - - expropriates pseudo - medical terminology to justify massacres by ridding a society of threats from filth and disease; terms

such as “filth” and “disease” are used to incite young male perpetrators are markers of genocidal intent. Because the term “ethnic cleansing” conduces to bystander inaction or indifference, Blum et al have noted that it, like the term 'Judenrein,' was used all too often in the context of genocidal denial.¹⁷ There is a need to be alert to the genocidal potential of code words, terms, and reverse slang that promote a deranged version of “clean and green” as part of a distorted quest for so - called holistic harmony, wholeness, and oneness.

From hygiene vs. filth to death vs. filth Motifs of filth and disease, together with anti-semitism, and making the world Judenrein to cleanse it, were needed to promote the industrialized mass murder of the Holocaust. They figure prominently today in the anti-semitic imagery used to incite to genocidal terror. Today Islamofascism in the Mideast recycles anti-Semitic motifs of filth and disease that were exported into the region in the 1930's by Nazi propaganda. Some examples:

Filth: “The Jews are a filthy people, (Ahmadinejad)¹⁸;

Disease (Imam Ibrahim Madiras, a Muslim cleric employed by the Palestinian Authority, "The Jews are a cancer." "Muslims will kill the Jews....[and] and rejoice in Allah's victory")

Mortal danger (Iranian TV series, Zahra's Blue Eyes portrays "Zionists" kidnapping Palestinian children and harvesting their organs;

Jews use the blood of non-Jews to make Passover matzot (-in Horseman without a Horse: Egyptian TV program based on *Protocols of Elders of Zion*).¹⁹

But now these motifs have coalesced with the culture of death and martyrdom of genocidal terror.²⁰ *A theocratic cult of martyrdom through killing Jews, the source of filth, disease and mortal danger, to achieve redemption and salvation in Paradise in the world to come has replaced the Nazi's pagan - based worship of health and hygiene in this world.*

The use of such motifs in schools, mosques, media and youth movements are not only early warning signs of genocidal threats, but worse, promote intergenerational transmission of the agendas of the perpetrators. Furthermore, as Paul Berman has pointed out, it is alarming that the threats from suicide terrorism - - and direct physical threats - appear to have intimidated many western intellectuals from speaking about their dangers. Berman castigates Ian Baruma, Professor of Human Rights at Bard College, along with Garton Ash, for their attacks on what they call the "extremism" of Hirsi Ali, the Moslem feminist who had to flee to the US because of threats on her life and their going easy on Tariq Ramadan's defense of Islamic law on stoning of women.²¹ Ramadan's statement about "armed resistance [being] incumbent so that the plans of the terrorists of Irgun *and all Zionist colonizers* would be faced up to"the real meaning of prayer being giving strength, in humility to the meaning of an entire life"²², seems to have little to do with life, hygiene and health, but something beyond life, and to bluntly state the principle that injunctions against using terror do not apply when Israelis, i.e., Jews, are targeted. Ian Baruma now advises Israelis paternalistically to not to be alarmed by Ahmadinejad's threats and its implications for assessing the existential nature of the Iranian nuclear threat.²³

State-sponsored hate language and incitement using terms such as those used by the Nazis, to advance 'racial hygiene,' and now by Islamic theologians preaching the culture of death, have become the most toxic and dangerous exposures of our time - not only for Jewish communities everywhere, but indeed for modern post-industrial western democracy and freedom as we have come to know them. As with exposures to toxic agents of a chemical nature, it is the children and young adults who are the most vulnerable and in whom the effects are most long lasting.²⁴ We have yet to ask ourselves how wide and pervasive the effects are, and what has to be done to undo these effects.

24

There is no justification for failure of the world community to recognize that genocidal potential of anti-semitic hate language and incitement, now endemic in the sermons, texts and media of the Muslim world, and corrupts and undermines the core ethics and values of the social contract of modern Western society. What is blared on the loudspeakers, radio, and TV screens reaching tens to hundreds of millions, and not what diplomats whisper to each other is what shapes the environment of the new anti-semitic attacks on Israel and the world Jewish community.

The failure of both to warn the world community of the dangers of intergenerational effects of such hate language and incitement is inexplicable—and could be catastrophic.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Code specifies that incitement to genocide is a crime against humanity.²⁵ There is a need to apply this statute to counter the genocidal threats from the new tidal wave of anti-semitism. The indictments of Rwandan journalists and radio broadcasters for inciting to genocide are the legal precedent.²⁶

Using the Precautionary Principle:

The Precautionary Principle states that when there is uncertainty concerning the possibly a catastrophic event, the costs of inaction to prevent it are more costly than action to prevent it.^{27 28} There is no outcome more dangerous than the possibility of nuclear genocide against Israel. The proposal to indict the Iranian President, Mahmud Ahmadinejad for incitement to commit genocide is the template case in the use of the Precautionary Principle, by taking legal action to stop incitement to genocide before, not after, it takes place. This proposal, endorsed in a Resolution of the US House of Representatives by a vote of 402 to 2 in June 2007,²⁹ goes beyond the Rwandan precedent by moving the focus of action against genocide to predict and prevent from proof of intent after the event.

Ahmadinejad's statements are the top of an iceberg of endemic toxic anti-semitic hatred that the world community has come to accept as part of the normal background level of what now is euphemistically called 'engagement.' Because the mean determines the range, there will be no progress towards any settlements of the conflicts in the Mideast between Israel and the Muslim world until there is concerted international action to rid the latter of this everyday background level of toxic incitement.

Conclusion: Security Council Resolution 1674 states the responsibility to protect vulnerable communities from genocidal threats.³⁰ The history of modern anti-semitism shows that such hate language mobilizes the motifs of public health to engender hate towards entire communities by stigmatizing them as threats to health and hygiene. But hate language – once integral of an ideology of racial hygiene to stigmatize Jews, led to the Holocaust, and now is part of a culture of death that stigmatizes "Zionists" and "Israel." It has led to genocidal terror and is leading to the danger of a nuclear genocide.

Rwanda bespeaks to the catastrophic failures in applying the UN Convention on Genocide and call attention to the need to prevent and punish incitement and the use of hate language and the genocidal crimes that follow. When such incitement and hate language includes terms such as filth, disease, rats, vermin, lice, we have a clear alarm bell triggering the need for effective deterrent action by international law.

The lesson of the Holocaust is that prevention of genocide, the most violent assault on human life, requires preventing mass incitement and hate language, the most toxic exposures of our time. Israel and the world Jewish community have to address the explicit threats of hate language and incitement to our existence and safety. Action at the international level to redefine the unacceptability of the endemic use of hate language directed against Israel and world Jewish communities is necessary not only to "save Israel," but also to establish the precedent of applying the Precautionary Principle to predict and prevent genocidal threats directed at other vulnerable communities, in keeping with the intent of Security Council Resolution 1674.

In so doing, *we will be empowering the memory of the Holocaust to protect not only ourselves and other threatened communities.*

In the 1990's, the world failed to apply this lesson of the Holocaust on the dangers of incitement to prevent the Rwandan Genocide. 800,000 died over a period of 4 months. Nuclear genocide could end the lives of hundreds of thousands within minutes. Will the world fail to apply the lesson of the Rwandan genocide to the threats posed by the anti-semitic incitement and hate language now endemic in the Moslem world?

Acknowledgements: I am indebted to Ute Deichman's unpublished notes for the references 11 - 13, to Dr Arthur Frank of Drexel University for calling my attention to Paul Berman's essay on Tariq Ramadan, and to Professor Irvin Cotler and Dr Rony Blum for helpful comments.



Professor Elihu D Richter MD MPH is Editor and Director of *GPN World Genocide Situation Room* and Associate Director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem. He is head of the Genocide Prevention Program at Hebrew University-Hadassah School of Public Health and Community Medicine and former head of the Unit of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. He has published and lectured on the use of public health models for the prediction and prevention of genocide.

References

¹ Kaplan EH, Small CA. Anti-Israel Sentiment Predicts Anti-Israel Sentiment in Europe. *J Conflict Resolution*. 2006; 50: 4: 548-561

-
- ² Almog. S, 1988. *Antisemitism through the Ages*. Oxford: Pergamon UK
- ³ Wistrich R ed. *Anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in the Modern World*. 1990, London: Macmillan
- ⁴ See Paul Berman, Who's Afraid of Tariq Ramadan, *New Republic* June 4 2007, pp 37-63
- ⁵ Carlson E A. *The Unfit; History of a Bad Idea*. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press. 2001 451 pp.
- ⁶ Gould SJ. *The Mismeasure of Man*: London: Penguin 1981
- ⁷ Muller-Hill B. *Murderous Science: Elimination by Scientific Selection of Jews, Gypsies and Others in Germany in 1933-1945*. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press. 1998. 256 pp
- ⁸ Proctor RN. *The Nazi War on Cancer*. Princeton NJ 1999 Princeton Univ Press
- ⁹ Deichman U. Political Ecology and environmental biology: The case of Nazi Germany, Presented at Sidney Edelstein Center, Hebrew University Workshop, Nov 1999.
- ¹⁰ Ali, GA, Chroust P, Pross C Eds. *Cleansing in the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene*, tr. Belinda Cooper, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994: 104-105.
- ¹¹ Gross, W *Volkischer Beobachter* 16 May 1936, quoted after Julius Schaxel, 1938 cited in Deichman
- ¹² Friederichs K *Okoloige als Wissenschaft von der Natur*, Leopizig 1937
- ¹³ Weber H. *Orgtanismus and Umwelt*, *Der Biologie* 1942, 11, p 57
- ¹⁴ Trommer, G, Bezuge der NS-Lebenskunde zur Okoloige, in Meinel, Christopher and Voswinkel, Peter, *Medizin, Naturwissenschaft, Technik and Nationalsozilasmus, Kontinuitaten und Diskontinuitaten*, Stuttgart, 1994. See also Anna Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century. A History*. New Haven 1989.
- ¹⁵ Hitler A. 1924. *Mein Kampf*. I, 11, 285-329: Nation and Race.
- ¹⁶ Power S. *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide*: New York: Basic Books, 2000; 330.
- ¹⁷ Blum R, Stanton GH, Richter ED. Ethnic Cleansing Bleachers the Atrocities of Genocide. *European J Public Health* June 2007.
- ¹⁸ Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. Incitement necessitates Indictment. See www.JCPA.org.
- ¹⁹ Facts and Logic about the MidEast. www.factsandlogic.org
- ²⁰ Al Hamid al Ansari, Abd. We need to make our young people love life. *Al Siyasa* (Kuwait) Translated May 15. www.memri.org
- ²¹ Ash wrote admiringly of Ramadan's great uncle, Shiekh Gamal Al Banna, the younger brother of Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Moslem Brotherhood, who it turned out, had praised the Sept 11 attackers "extremely courageous action."
- ²² See P Berman, op cit
- ²³ See Ian Baruma's op-ed in *Haaretz*. (www.haaretz.com, June 28 2007).)
- ²⁴ Richter ED.. Environmental toxicology *WHO Bridges Israeli-Palestinian Health Cooperation*. Oct –Dec 2006
- ²⁵ Blum R, Stanton G, Richter ED, Charny, I Ahmadinejad - incitement deserves indictment. *Jerusalem Post*

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1138622572519&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

²⁶ Hebrew University-Hadassah Unit of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and Center for Injury Prevention-Genocide Prevention Program Jan 15, 2006. Recommendations to the UN, other major international organizations and governments. Indict Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of Iran, for Incitement to Commit Genocide - a Crime against Humanity; and Impose immediate sanctions against the government of Iran to prevent Iranian development of nuclear weapons.

²⁷ Richter ED, Laster R. The Precautionary Principle and the ethics of delay *Int J Occup Med Environ Health*. 2004; 17(1):9-16.

²⁸ Richter ED, Berman T. Genocide and Genocidal Terror: From post-disaster emergency response to prediction and prevention: the Need for a Public Health Approach, Abstract. Proceedings of the International Association for Genocide Scholars Sixth Biennial Conference. Florida State University, Boca Raton, FL, 2005. Richter ED, Blum R. "Genocide Prevention Brief. Memorandum submitted via Paul Foldi (US Senate Foreign Relations Committee) to US Council of Foreign Relations, Mar 6 2006 (3 pp) (Available from authors), also Richter ED, Blum R, Berman T, Stanton G. The Precautionary Principle: Environmental Epidemiology's Gift to Genocide Prevention, (Poster abstract), International Society for Environmental Epidemiology Abstracts Sept 2006, available as powerpoint from authors.

²⁹ U.S. House of Representatives. Calling on the United Nations Security Council to charge Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad with violating the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the United Nations Charter because of his calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. **Sponsor:** Rep Rothman, Steven R. [NJ-9] (introduced 1/9/2007) accessed June 30 2007, www.thomas.loc.gov. **H.CON.RES.21**

³⁰ www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/united_nations/794?theme=alt1 - 20k –and

www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/civil_society_statements/42