

# Israel Charny's Attack on the Journal of Genocide Research and its Authors: A Response

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## Abstract.

Israel Charny has published an article, "Holocaust Minimization, Anti-Israel Themes, and Antisemitism: Bias at the *Journal of Genocide Research*" (JGR) in the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*. His specific allegations are bundled together in a single sentence: "minimization of the Holocaust, delegitimization of the State of Israel, and repeat[ing] common themes of contemporary

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antisemitism". We write as the authors of articles and contributors to the *JGR* attacked by Charny. His allegations are false and we reject them. This article shows how they are based on distortions, misquotations, and falsifications of our work.

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Holocaust, genocide, antisemitism, historiography

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# Israel Charny's Attack on the Journal of Genocide Research and its Authors: A Response

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**Abstract:** Israel Charny has published an article, "Holocaust Minimization, Anti-Israel Themes, and Antisemitism: Bias at the Journal of Genocide Research" (JGR) in the Journal for the Study of Antisemitism. His specific allegations are bundled together in a single sentence: "minimization of the Holocaust, delegitimization of the State of Israel, and repeat[ing] common themes of contemporary antisemitism." We write as the authors of articles and contributors to the JGR attacked by Charny. His allegations are false and we reject them. This article shows how they are based on distortions, misquotations, and falsifications of our work.

**Keywords:** Holocaust, genocide, antisemitism, historiography

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Israel Charny has published an article, "Holocaust Minimization, Anti-Israel Themes, and Antisemitism: Bias at the *Journal of Genocide Research*" (JGR), based on a survey of genocide scholars, in the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* (JSA).<sup>2</sup> He summarized its arguments in a piece in the *Jerusalem Post Magazine* (JPM), and the JSA editor promoted it on the email listserv of the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS).<sup>3</sup> The JPM then published a letter by Yehuda Bauer criticizing its decision to publish such an attack on another journal, defending author Raz Segal, and questioning the methodology of Charny's survey. A week later, it printed an abridged

<sup>1</sup> Co-authorship does not imply assent to arguments contained in others' articles discussed here.

<sup>2</sup> Israel W. Charny, "Holocaust Minimization, Anti-Israel Themes, and Antisemitism: Bias at the *Journal of Genocide Research*," *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 7 (2016): 1–28, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.jsantisemitism.org/images/journals/articles/Holocaust-Minimization-Anti-Israel-&-Antisemitism-at-JGR.pdf>. References to this article will appear in parentheses in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Israel W. Charny, "Genocide Scholars Who Minimize the Holocaust—and Who are Coming to Town," *Jerusalem Post Magazine*, May 25, 2016; Letter from Steven Baum, Editor of the Journal for the Study of Antisemitism, IAGS listserv, June 5, 2016.

letter signed by 30 scholars that expressed shock at Charny's article and deplored its publication in the *JPM*.<sup>4</sup>

Evidently, these 30 scholars were struck by Charny's rhetorical excesses. Among them, his *JSA* article refers to *JGR* authors as "hate-mongering genocide scholars," and compares the president of the International Network of Genocide Scholars (INoGS) to the Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin (notes 1 and 23). "Antisemitism" in particular hangs in his article, never defined, never justified, and left to his respondents to rate, featuring in his title less as insinuation than denunciation. The specific allegations are bundled together in a single sentence: "minimization of the Holocaust, delegitimization of the State of Israel, and repeat[ing] common themes of contemporary antisemitism" (3).

We write as the authors of articles and contributors to the *JGR* attacked by Charny in the aforementioned publications. His allegations are false and we reject them. They are based on distortions, misquotations, and falsifications of our work. As such, his articles are thus unworthy of scholarly consideration. But as they are publicly accessible, and because he levels such grave accusations, we respond in detail, even though the academic community has already dismissed them. We proceed as follows: first, we analyze the methodology of his survey, and then each author dissects Charny's treatment of his article. We conclude by contextualizing Charny's article in various strands of Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

### The Survey

Charny conducted a scientifically meaningless survey of people he regards as genocide scholars. In the first instance, he personally invited a large number of people to take part (46 responded), and then another 30 apparently completed the survey after it was (inadvertently) advertised on the IAGS listserv. It broke most of the principal rules of social survey construction, which has well-established and accepted methodological standards.<sup>5</sup> We briefly itemize the flaws.

First, the survey was based on a biased sample. Because the sample aimed to represent the views of Holocaust and genocide scholars, it should have been based on a recognizable, inclusive, and verifiable list of the members of the field, such as the membership of the IAGS and INoGS. Instead, it was based on a personally selected mailing list that is unavailable to any other scholar to verify. Moreover, as Charny admits, the sample deliberately excluded those likely to present views contrary to his own, viz. members of INoGS, which publishes *JGR*, further skewing the sample.

Second, Charny prejudiced the survey further by advertising his own views when inviting people to participate; the respondents knew in advance the results he expected. Moreover, he "sent out [many of the invitations] individually often with personal comments added to the standard draft," possibly influencing the respondents' results further. He describes the second wave of respondents (who were not hand-picked) as championing the *JGR*: in other words, he explains the apparently more positive assessments by the second wave of respondents by depicting them as partial to the *JGR* rather than reflecting a less biased sample, thereby illustrating his own lack of open-mindedness on the issue.

Third, Charny selected a small sample of *JGR* articles on the basis of his own pre-occupations rather than offering a sample justified by a representative analysis of its content. He then provided the respondents with biased summaries and extracts of these articles; respondents were not furnished with the articles or their abstracts. (The bias of his summaries is analyzed in the following sections.)

Fourth, to evaluate the articles, Charny offered only three questionable categories, none of which is clearly defined. The first category, the "minimization of the Holocaust," seems to mean

<sup>4</sup> Yehuda Bauer, letter to the editor, *JPM*, June 10, 2016. Dirk Moses's letter was published next to Bauer's. "Shock" and "deplore" are taken from the collective letter published on June 17, distributed on the IAGS listserv on June 22; it appears as an appendix to this article with an extended list of scholars who agreed to add their name after its publication.

<sup>5</sup> Alan Aldridge, *Surveying The Social World: Principles and Practice in Survey Research* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 2001). A guide like Robert Lee Miller and John D Brewer, eds., *The A-Z of Social Research: A Dictionary of Key Social Science Research Concepts* (London: Sage, 2003) would have enabled Charny to avoid the elementary mistakes itemized below.

the minimization of its significance and implications, rather than of the events and their horror. Because this distinction was not made clear to the survey respondents, how they understood "minimization" is thus unknown. Even more opaque was the following option given to respondents in assessing the article summaries and extracts: "This is legitimate criticism of the Holocaust" (8). While, presumably, Charny meant legitimate criticism of Holocaust memory, this option injected another dose of uncertainty into how respondents understood the survey.

Charny's second dimension, "delegitimization of the State of Israel," was defined in emotive terms that imported a political position into the criterion of scientific analysis:

The founding of Israel is no longer to be recognized as an expression of a heroic national movement called Zionism, or that the wish for a Jewish nation was in response to ongoing pogroms, mass killings and antisemitic events building up to the Holocaust. The attack on the basic legitimacy and moral justification of Israel sets a stage as well for far less [*sic.*] tears in the future should any of the current dangers to Israel's existence ever materialize (7).

The third dimension, repeating "common themes of contemporary antisemitism" (3) was again undefined. Charny appears to assume a version of the idea of the "new antisemitism," in which some types of criticism of Israel are axiomatically considered antisemitic, but he does not explain or engage with the difficulties of this highly contested idea.<sup>6</sup> Even the standard of the US State Department definition of antisemitism holds that "*criticism of Israel similar to that leveled against any other country cannot be regarded as anti-Semitic.*"<sup>7</sup> These considerations may have been evident to most of the survey respondents, for they disagreed with Charny's antisemitism allegation. They also may have registered that a miniscule number of pieces in the *JGR* touch on Israel: five out of some 130 since 2010.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, given the survey's construction, it is remarkable how many respondents did *not* follow Charny's assertions, undermining the article's major hypothesis about antisemitism. He does not recognize, let alone account for, this disjuncture between allegation and outcome, yet the former appears in the article's title as an implied fact. The *JSA* editor, Steven Baum, claimed on the IAGS listserv that Charny's study is an "objective, scientific study."<sup>9</sup> Plainly, it is no such thing.

### Raz Segal and Rethinking the Holocaust in Hungary

Charny begins with an article by Raz Segal that addresses a key question about the role of the Hungarian government in the mass deportations of Jews from Hungary during World War II.<sup>10</sup> What is striking here is that Charny does not actually refer to the article *at all*. He quotes a few sentences from the abstract—one is misquoted—disregarding the main arguments and the significant number of diverse primary sources in the article, including accounts by Jews.

One main argument in Segal's article is that wartime Hungarian authorities targeted Jews as part of a broader Hungarian policy of mass violence against non-Magyar groups, with the goal of

<sup>6</sup> The European Union dropped its working definition of antisemitism in 2013, a move criticized by the USA: Jewish Telegraphic Agency, "EU Drops its 'Working Definition' of Anti-Semitism," *Times of Israel*, December 5, 2013; "US Says Europe Needs 'Working Definition' of Anti-Semitism," *Jerusalem Post*, March 17, 2016, accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/US-says-Europe-needs-working-definition-of-anti-Semitism-448246>. Among his various pieces on the subject, see most recently Brian Klug, "What Do We Mean When We Say 'Antisemitism'? Echoes of Shattering Glass," accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.jmberlin.de/antisemitism-today/Klug.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Fact Sheet, Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, Washington, DC, June 8, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/fs/2010/122352.htm>. Italics in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Besides the pieces Charny attacks by Amos Goldberg (one with Bashir Bashir) and Martin Shaw, which are discussed below, there are: Zach Levey, "Israel, Nigeria and the Biafra Civil War, 1967–70," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, nos. 2–3 (2014): 263–280, and Daniel Blatman, "Holocaust Scholarship: Towards a Post-Uniqueness Era," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 1 (2015): 21–43.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Steven Baum, Editor of the Journal for the Study of Antisemitism, IAGS Listserv June 5, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Raz Segal, "Beyond Holocaust Studies: Rethinking the Holocaust in Hungary," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 1 (2014): 1–23.

using windows of opportunities during the war to establish an ethno-national “Greater Hungary.” This project, anchored in the modern history of Hungary, at times clashed with German interests and plans, and at times coincided with them. Thus, it was German authorities in east Galicia that *stopped* the mass deportations of Jews and Roma from Hungary, across the Carpathian Mountains, in July and August 1941, while a bit less than three years later, the Nazi genocide of the Jews intersected terribly successfully with what today we would call Hungarian designs of “ethnic cleansing.”

Charny, for his part, writes that understanding this complex history means nothing to the suffering of Jews. Yet, the suffering of victims—not only Jews—is *not* the subject of the article, and in fact, Segal has written extensively about Jews and their suffering during the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, describing and comprehending complex historical events and processes—as historians of any period and topic do—is of particular significance for Holocaust and genocide scholars: as we analyze states today poised to engage in mass violence, it is precisely such analyses that we hope will encourage efforts to prevent or at least minimize genocide and mass violence, and hence the suffering of victims.

What troubles Charny, however, is Segal’s use of quotation marks for the terms “final solution” and “the Holocaust.” It is unclear why putting a Nazi term—“final solution”—in quotation marks is problematic, and how precisely it gives the impression that the destruction of Jews in Hungary during World War II was “not that real” (3): it is standard in German-language historiography. Note how Charny in effect suggests that Segal is a Holocaust denier, but what scholars are signaling here is merely that they are using a Nazi term.

By contrast, Segal’s choice of “the Holocaust”—with quotation marks—serves to emphasize that it is a concept that could cloud more than clarify all the processes and events of genocidal violence that together we call “the Holocaust.” This is, to be clear, the exact opposite of saying that the Holocaust was not real; indeed, it is meant to uncover and explain *more* of its reality—in this case, how and why the mass murder of around half a million Jews from Hungary unfolded during World War II. Ironically, Charny’s distortion of Segal’s article stands as a stark disservice to the memory of the victims he allegedly so cherishes.

What is at stake here for Charny is the idea of the Holocaust as central, above and beyond any other event in history. It is, in other words, an attempt to maintain at all costs a hierarchy of mass violence, and it is dogmatic in its rejection of evidence to the contrary. Adhering to this dogma means that we simply miss a major part of the history of the Holocaust in Hungary—the drive to create a “Greater Hungary” with as small a non-Magyar population as possible. This does not at all mean that Jews were not targeted as Jews by the Hungarian state; the broader approach Segal adopts helps us understand *better* why and how they were targeted *as* Jews. It allows us to see how they were integral parts of multiethnic and multi-religious societies that the Hungarian state sought to destroy, independently of the twists and turns of German anti-Jewish policies. Holocaust historiography is advancing by integrating anti-Jewish policies and practices in these densely inter-related contexts. Charny’s zero-sum logic, in which attention to the fate of non-Jews somehow detracts from the specificity of Jewish experiences, stands in the way of this scholarship by tagging historians as antisemites.

### **Thomas Kehoe on the Intentions behind Nazi Propaganda for the Arabs during World War Two**

Charny misquotes and consequently badly misrepresents Thomas Kehoe’s arguments about how the Nazis formulated their propaganda for the Arabs during World War Two.<sup>12</sup> His summation of Kehoe’s argument for participants was: “About Nazi propaganda for the Arabs in World War Two, ‘This study casts doubt...[that] the [Nazi] calls to violence [by the Arabs] were an effort to expand killing of Jews beyond Europe... Anti-Jewish rhetoric figured third [the implication is as a

<sup>11</sup> Raz Segal, *Days of Ruin: The Jews of Munkács during the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Publications, 2013); Segal, “The Jews of Huszt between the World Wars and in the Holocaust,” *Yalkut Moreshet: Holocaust Documentation and Research* 4 (2006): 80–119.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas J. Kehoe, “Fighting for Our Mutual Benefit: Understanding and Contextualizing the Intentions behind Nazi Propaganda for the Arabs during World War Two,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 137–157.



low priority] in the hierarchy of target themes" (13). Charny's misquoting is apparent from the full context in the section of Kehoe's article Charny dissected and reassembled:

Full of vitriol, violent invective and hate, there can be little doubt that Nazi Arabic propaganda aimed to incite an Arab revolt and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, including mass killing of Jews. Certain authors have addressed these *calls to violence as an effort to expand the killing of Jews beyond Europe*. The content study performed in this article *casts doubt* on the extent to which their analyses fully explain the propagandists' goals. Anti-Jewish rhetoric figured third in the hierarchy of target themes. Furthermore, the Nazi propagandists reshaped it from a paranoid, European anti-Semitism into a threat of foreign domination that complemented the dominant, anti-imperialist message focused on the British and US presence in Arab lands.<sup>13</sup>

In the next paragraph, Kehoe reiterates the Nazi focus on killing Jews and its significance to the Holocaust, writing: "[The Nazis] seized on well-known Arab anti-imperialist sentiment whilst simultaneously fanning the flames of Jew-hatred, all in the service of inciting Arab insurrection and violence".<sup>14</sup>

Beyond the blatant reorganization of Kehoe's words, when his writing is seen in its full context it should be apparent he did not argue that killing Jews was a "low priority" or that his study casts doubt on Nazi attempts to extend the Holocaust, as Charny claims (13). The opposite is the case. There is no doubt the Nazis were keen to encourage Arabs to murder Jews. Charny's assertion that Kehoe ignored the Nazis' Holocaust policies in the Middle East overlooks Kehoe's discussion of this issue in the first pages of the article. Indeed, he writes, "The Nazis almost assuredly intended the destruction of North African and Middle Eastern Jewry".<sup>15</sup>

Kehoe was concerned with the question of how the Nazis formulated their Arabic propaganda and their key aims. His analysis of this question was confined to the context of an ongoing war in North Africa, which he clearly explains. A simple analysis of the propaganda's content indicated a focus on anti-imperialist themes. This is a quantitative reality, and one that Jeffrey Herf, the other scholar to have written on this topic, also acknowledges as fact.<sup>16</sup>

The debate around how the Nazis constructed their Arabic propaganda is about formulation, not overarching intention. Kehoe agrees with the other scholars who have examined this propaganda that the Nazis intended Jewish extermination and tried to motivate Arabs to kill Jews. The reason Kehoe suggests for a high rate of anti-imperialist messages in the Arabic propaganda is developed from the consensus of analyses regarding how the Nazis formulated their propaganda, which holds that the Nazis targeted known sources of tension in their intended audience in order to shape actions they desired.<sup>17</sup> In the case of their Arabic propaganda, anti-imperialism was the issue the Nazi propagandists deemed most likely to provoke Arab support for the German war effort, which would of course have meant violence against Jews and Allied forces. The reason that "anti-Jewish rhetoric was third in the hierarchy of target themes", as Kehoe writes, was *not* because the murder of Jews was unimportant to the Nazis, but because the Nazis believed *other* themes would *more likely* motivate the violent responses they wanted from their Arab audience. This argument is further supported by documents from the Nazi Foreign Office. A memo from mid-1942 provided a step-by-step guide for constructing radio propaganda that targeted—what the Nazis believed to be—sources of Arab tension. Arab violence would have served a dual purpose, benefiting the immediate German war effort and killing Jews. If the Germans had won, there is no doubt Middle Eastern Jewry would have been destroyed.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Kehoe, "Fighting for Our Mutual Benefit," 152. Charny's selected parts are italicized.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arabs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Kehoe, "Fighting for Our Mutual Benefit," 140–141. See also Herf, *Nazi Propaganda*, 262–263.

<sup>18</sup> Kehoe, "Fighting for Our Mutual Benefit," 141.



Charny misquotes Kehoe, and in so doing misrepresents a nuanced argument about how the Nazis constructed their Arabic propaganda. He has consequently betrayed the fundamental principles of good scholarship and honest intellectual debate, creating a quintessential straw man. There is no doubt the Nazis sought the destruction of all Jews, a truly horrible intention and crime that should be remembered and memorialized forever. The dispassionate academic analysis of how they sought to achieve such ends, through waging a wider war of conquest, encouraging foreign support, and motivating different forms of violence, does not detract from this reality.

### Gerhard Wolf on the Wannsee Conference and Nazi Living Space

Regarding Gerhard Wolf's article, it seems that Charny is most appalled by Wolf's claim that the Wannsee Conference, and by extension the Holocaust, should be analyzed in the larger context of the quest for German living space.<sup>19</sup> When it comes to the Holocaust, this is by now a fairly uncontroversial argument, with the various steps of radicalization of anti-Jewish policy regularly explained as embedded in a complicated web of events at home, at the front, and in the occupied territories.<sup>20</sup> All were aimed, at least in part, at expanding the German *Volksgemeinschaft* beyond the borders of the Reich. Hardly any historian would question, for example, that it was the invasion of Poland that finally pushed the persecution of inmates of mental asylums and so-called asocials towards mass murder. And as we have known since at least Henry Friedlander's work from 1995, aptly titled *The Origins of Nazi Genocide*, techniques and procedures used to kill over two million Jews in places like Treblinka were pioneered here, during Action T4, the first mass murder campaign of the Nazi regime.<sup>21</sup> Before Herbert Lange became the first commander of the first extermination camp in Kulmhof, he headed a unit that had killed thousands of Polish inmates of mental asylums in a gas van. And when the regime opted to kill all Polish Jews, it was the T4 team that designed and staffed the extermination camps. Charny's claim that one of the reasons for the archetypal significance—read: uniqueness—of the Holocaust was the first use of gas chambers is another example of how unfamiliar he is with this research (19).

One could point to very similar dynamics in the administration of the occupied territories, and in the way the war was waged. It is exceedingly obvious, for example, that the self-imposed constraints and dystopian aims of the Germanization policies in Poland and the failure of the ghettoization and deportation plans radicalized anti-Jewish policies there, and that the specific targeting of the civilian population, Jews and non-Jews alike, during the invasion of the Soviet Union first facilitated the murder of Jews in large numbers.

Wolf's re-interpretation of the Wannsee Conference is part of this wider discussion, i.e. the attempt to embed and analyze anti-Jewish policies in the wider context of violent German policies to remake the demographic composition of conquered Europe. Some of the arguments he presents are not even particularly new. Interrogating the role of the Wannsee Conference in the history of the Holocaust started decades ago. Most historians now agree that if it was an important milestone in the history of the Holocaust, this was less for any decision taken there, than for the successful attempt by Heydrich to have the state bureaucracy accept his coordinating role in anti-Jewish policy.

Charny also seems annoyed by Wolf's claim that Wannsee "did not call for a systematic and immediate mass murder of all Jews" (3). This discussion, too, has been underway for years. Wolf is by no means the first to argue that we should take the wording of the minutes more seriously. In the past, the most notorious passage about forcing "Jews fit to work ... eastwards constructing

<sup>19</sup> Gerhard Wolf, "The Wannsee Conference in 1942 and the National Socialist Living Space Dystopia," *Journal of Genocide Research* 17, no. 2 (2015): 153–175.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Peter Longerich, *Holocaust. The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939 – March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: from Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) and, more recently, Sara Berger, *Experten der Vernichtung: Das T4-Reinhardt-Netzwerk in den Lagern Belzec, Sobibor und Treblinka* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013).

roads"<sup>22</sup> was read as a badly veiled statement proposing the immediate killing of all European Jews in the extermination camps in the east. This consensus has now dissipated, with ever-more historians arguing that, when set against the developments within the SS apparatus and Himmler's ambitious plans to install the SS as a principal force in the Germanization and settlement of the occupied east, as detailed in the *Generalplan Ost*, the intention to use Jews as slave laborers and kill them through murderous building projects might accurately represent SS planning at the turn of the year 1941/42.<sup>23</sup>

Wolf's article builds on these discussions, showing that the impact of Germanization policies for understanding the Wannsee Conference might be even greater—a reflection not merely of plans for the future, but of lessons from the past, i.e., the shortcomings and failures in Poland. His article tries to show how intertwined were anti-Jewish and anti-Polish policies, and how both aimed at ethnically cleansing annexed Poland.

For Charny, in his follow-up article in the *JPM*, this notion is "crazy." He fears that showing that anti-Jewish policies were not formulated and did not operate in a vacuum would "minimize" the Holocaust.<sup>24</sup> Even more perversely, he also claims in this article that Wolf would argue that the "Wannsee Conference was not about Jews!"<sup>25</sup> The exact opposite is the case. What Wolf tries to show is that because of various developments—mainly the enforced cessation of deporting Poles and the further radicalization of antisemitic violence in other parts of the occupied east—Heydrich tried to reclaim lost influence by centralizing antisemitic policies in the RSHA. For this reason, the Wannsee Conference was solely about Jews, unlike the other two conferences he headed in the previous two years.

This argument has not been made before. Obviously, Wolf's interpretation is just one intervention into an ongoing discussion. Given that little material on Wannsee has survived, every analysis of the role of the conference is dependent on its perceived context. If, for example, one holds the position that the decision to kill all Jews had been taken already before the end of the year 1941—a position not primarily influenced by what happened at Wannsee—then one will be much more inclined to interpret the minutes as just another example of Nazi cover language. However, if one is open to the argument that this decision emerged a few months later—retroactively legitimizing crimes already under way, or even to a model that downplays discrete decisions and instead stresses the process of radicalization—then his explanation makes more sense.

What makes Charny's treatment of this article more outrageous still is that he is not content with insulting Wolf. He also denounces the entire University of Sussex as a "hotbed of anti-Israel and Holocaust downgrading scholars." Needless to say this claim, again, is not backed up by anything resembling evidence. As before, the opposite is correct. Only a few years after the university was established in 1961, the Columbus Centre for Studies of Persecution and Genocide was established, the first of its kind and a stimulating environment that produced pioneering studies like *The Aryan Myth* by Leon Poliakov and *Warrant for Genocide* by Norman Cohn, the center's founder.<sup>26</sup> During the following decades, the study of violence, genocide and the Holocaust became an important part of research across the university. Charny evidently knows none of this history.

He is equally ignorant of the present. He claims absurdly that Wolf argues that the Wannsee Conference "was not part of the final solution," only to then speculate what the staff of the Museum

<sup>22</sup> As reprinted in Mark Roseman, *The Villa, the Lake, the Meeting: Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 113.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Herman Kaienburg, "Vernichtung durch Arbeit": *Der Fall Neuengamme, die Wirtschaftsbestrebungen der SS und ihre Auswirkungen auf die Existenzbedingungen der KZ-Gefangenen* (Bonn: Dietz, 1990), Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941–44: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996) and Jan Erik Schulte, "Die Wannsee Konferenz und die Zwangsarbeit von Juden: Eine Fallstudie zur Judenverfolgung 1941/42," in *Interessen, Strukturen und Entscheidungsprozesse: Für eine politische Kontextualisierung des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Manfred Grieger, Christian Jansen and Irmtrud Wojak (Essen: Klartext, 2010), 57–90.

<sup>24</sup> Charny, "Genocide Scholars Who Minimize the Holocaust."

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist Ideas in Europe* (London: Chatto and Windus and Heinemann for Sussex University Press, 1974), and Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1967).

of the House of the Wannsee Conference would think of this notion. He seems ignorant of the fact that Wolf worked at the museum for eight years before starting at Sussex University. He seems also not to know that Wolf is the Deputy Director of the History Department's Centre for German-Jewish Studies at Sussex, the only one of its kind in the UK. Founded in 1994, the Centre's research focuses on the history of German-speaking Jewry in Europe, houses a large archive spanning over 300 years, and offers a wide teaching portfolio, from Moses Mendelssohn and the Haskalah to the so-called *Kristallnacht* pogrom and the Holocaust and to current Jewish life in Germany. In addition, the Centre hosts events aimed at a wider audience, like the annual Hannah Arendt Lecture and Holocaust Memorial Day, which attract hundreds of visitors from outside the university. Very recently, the History Department has also broadened its expertise in the research of Israel and the Middle East by appointing David Tal to the Yossi Harel Chair in Modern Israel Studies. This chair was made possible by generous donations by Lord Weidenfeld and others, who clearly did not think that Sussex was a "hotbed for anti-Israel scholars." We agree that antisemitism has not vanished and constitutes a serious problem in Europe and beyond. In combatting it, however, one is ill advised to cheapen the problem by hurling accusations of antisemitism at colleagues who do not necessarily share one's own partisan views. These unfounded accusations are not only inimical to any academic discussion, but also minimize the seriousness of the problems about which Charny himself claims to be concerned.

### **Amos Goldberg, Yad Vashem, the Holocaust and the Nakba**

Charny attacks two of Amos Goldberg's articles. The first one critically analyses the Israeli Yad Vashem Holocaust museum. The article claims that the museum portrays what some theorists call "a redemptive narrative" which tends to deny any part of the story that distracts from its mythical mission.<sup>27</sup> Charny does not challenge Goldberg's overall thesis, but relates to his critique that the museum hardly relates to other victims of Nazism. Charny actually agrees with this critique. Moreover, he even goes as far as saying that "Goldberg is also correct in that Yad Vashem fails to confront criticisms of its ignoring other peoples" (5). However, Goldberg's way of making the argument was not to Charny's taste, and therefore he concludes: "but in his remarks there is a suggestion of a possible innuendo of joining in contemporary 'New Left' attacks on Israel" (5. Emphasis added). So here is the allegation: The article appears to express "a minimization of the Holocaust, delegitimization of the State of Israel, and repeat common themes of contemporary antisemitism" because it possibly suggests an innuendo that could be somehow considered as mirroring some vicious "contemporary 'New Left' attacks on Israel" (5).

What is this "contemporary 'New Left' attack on Israel"? Why is it an illegitimate critique? And how is Goldberg's wording associated with such an illegitimate attack? Charny fails to even hint at answers to these questions, leaving crucial gaps in his argument. In footnote 16, he repeats this structure once again and writes: "I consider the criticism of Yad Vashem for not relating its exhibition to the genocides of other peoples, as correct, but the statement *edges toward a possibly nasty twist*" (emphasis added). So this *possible* nasty twist (which again is not explained) is enough for Charny to define Goldberg as an antisemitic de-legitimater of the State of Israel, and a Holocaust minimizer.

The second article to which Charny refers was co-written by Goldberg and Bashir Bashir two years later.<sup>28</sup> It suggests a way for Jews and Palestinians to jointly deliberate on the Holocaust and the Nakba. The article suggests that only if the two peoples will acknowledge each other's traumatic histories may they attain a historical reconciliation. The article, which is theoretical in nature, explores the conditions for such a joint conversation. It repeatedly emphasizes that one cannot compare the two events, for obvious reasons. However, as they both function as the two nations' "foundational pasts" (Alon Confino),<sup>29</sup> they should be addressed together. Bashir and

<sup>27</sup> Amos Goldberg, "The 'Jewish Narrative' in the Yad Vashem Global Holocaust Museum," *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 187–213.

<sup>28</sup> Amos Goldberg and Bashir Bashir, "Deliberating the Holocaust and the Nakba: Disruptive Empathy and Binationalism in Israel/Palestine," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no. 1 (2014): 77–99.

<sup>29</sup> Alon Confino, *Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Goldberg mostly draw on Dominick La Capra's concept of "empathic unsettlement," which was coined by LaCapra in his writings on the Holocaust, and which means that in the wake of the Holocaust and other catastrophes of the twentieth century, a moral obligation exists to empathize with the other while acknowledging his utter otherness.<sup>30</sup>

However, Charny's main allegation here does not have to do with what is written, but with what Bashir and Goldberg fail to mention: that the Zionist Jews who committed the Nakba were actually the victims of the Arab assault that threatened to annihilate them once again three years after the end of the Holocaust.

As is well known, these issues are hotly debated among scholarly specialists on the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is beyond the scope of this article to rehash this debate in order to show how complex this chapter of history really was—far beyond Charny's ideological clichés. The major point that should be made here is that the article did not relate to the origins of the 1948 events. It tries to explain why Jews and Palestinians find it so difficult to talk about these historical events. It asserts that: "[t]he vast majority of Israeli Jews generally perceive the Holocaust as a catastrophe that justifies their Zionist position favoring a Jewish nation-state on the land of Israel/Palestine. There is a prevalent sense among many Jews, including many Holocaust survivors, that they must establish a robust sovereignty of their own in the wake of the Holocaust."<sup>31</sup> At the same time, "Many Palestinians ... regard Zionism and the State of Israel as bearing prime responsibility for their catastrophe and suffering."<sup>32</sup>

But the most absurd of his allegations comes when he claims that the authors fail to acknowledge "that the wish for a Jewish nation [sic] was in response to ongoing pogroms, mass killings and antisemitic events building up to the Holocaust" (7). This allegation is a complete absurdity, as this is precisely one of the major points of this article. Acknowledging the bloody history of the Jews in Europe disrupts the traditional Palestinian national narrative, just as acknowledging the Nakba disrupts the Zionist traditional narrative. This double move should lead, according to this article, to recognizing "the right to national self-determination of both national groups," while insisting on a solution along binational lines, while emphasizing "that this right ought not be realised in the form of an exclusive ethnic state."<sup>33</sup>

Thus the issue at stake here is not the history of Zionism and the conflict, but whether there is only one legitimate way to historically narrate Zionism and the conflict. It is time for Charny to acknowledge that while he might think "[t]he founding of Israel [should] ... be recognized as an expression of a heroic national movement called Zionism" (7), there are others who think differently—among them even Zionists. Not everyone who fails to tell the Zionist story the way Charny wishes it to be told is expressing antisemitism, delegitimizing Israel, or minimizing the Holocaust.

### **Martin Shaw and the Palestine-Israel Debate**

As we have seen, Charny has a highly idealized view of Zionism ("a heroic national movement") and sees the establishment of the State of Israel only as a "response to ongoing pogroms, mass killings and antisemitic events building up to the Holocaust." (7) Although he recognizes that Israel committed atrocities in its founding war, and refers to the "Nakba," his motivation in dealing with these issues is not to understand the tragic sequence of events through which the persecution and mass murder of European Jews were combined with the destruction of Arab society in Palestine, but to uphold "the basic legitimacy and moral justification of Israel" and ward off what he perceives as "the current dangers to Israel's existence" (7).

It is in this light that Charny approaches a contribution to *JGR* by Martin Shaw. He states that "an article was presented in which the author claimed from the outset that Zionism was based on a genocidal ideal, and that Israel's War of Independence in 1948 was in fulfillment of that intention"

<sup>30</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 40–42.

<sup>31</sup> Goldberg and Bashir, "Deliberating the Holocaust and the Nakba," 81.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.



(4). In fact, Shaw did not write an article in *JGR*, but engaged in a short debate (originally conducted by email) with Omer Bartov<sup>34</sup> about an article he had earlier published in *Holy Land Studies*.<sup>35</sup> As in the case of Segal, Charny does not appear to have read the article in which Shaw laid out his full case: he does not reference it, and is obviously ignorant of those of its arguments that were not repeated in the short *JGR* exchange. He merely presents three quotations from the debate out of context.

Charny charges Shaw with ignoring “the plain facts that the Nakba developed in response to the threatened destruction of the Jewish community in the newly founded State of Israel after Israel had accepted the U.N. partition into Jewish and Arab states” (6). However, these are not “plain facts,” as becomes clear once we admit other, related facts about the historical context: e.g. that the Arabs, the majority of Palestine’s population, rejected the plan because it gave the larger part of the territory to the Jewish minority; that (as Benny Morris documented 30 years ago) deliberate Zionist policies contributed to the removal and flight of the Palestinians in 1948;<sup>36</sup> and that the intentional character of the process was confirmed by Israel’s refusal to allow Palestinian return in the aftermath.

As to Charny’s allegations that Shaw stated that “Zionism was based on a genocidal ideal, and that Israel’s War of Independence in 1948 was in fulfilment of that intention” (4), if Charny had read the original article, he would have known that Shaw cited Morris to the effect that the 1948 war “was initiated by the Arab side”;<sup>37</sup> that he acknowledged that “Zionist rejection of coexistence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine was conditioned by Arab attacks on Jewish communities, especially during their 1929 uprising”<sup>38</sup>; and that he argued (citing Mark Levene) *against* the idea that the Zionist movement had a single, long-term “intention” to remove the Arab population.

Obviously, Charny’s main concern, reflecting his commitment to the State of Israel, is with Shaw’s application of the idea of genocide to Palestine. Shaw pointed out that “none of the ‘revisionist’ historians who now dominate the field doubts that deliberate Israeli policies made a substantial contribution to the destruction of the larger part of historical Arab society in Palestine.”<sup>39</sup> Shaw argued that this was true whether the 1948 removal was the result of Israel’s taking advantage of the “opportunity” to remove it, as Morris continues to argue,<sup>40</sup> or also of extensive “pre-planning,” as Ilan Pappé’s more recent research suggests.<sup>41</sup> In this light, Shaw proposed that, within the framework of a broad Lemkinian concept (in terms of which “ethnic cleansing” can be considered genocide<sup>42</sup>), there is “*prima facie* a strong case for considering the [1948] events partially within a genocide framework.”<sup>43</sup>

Charny is unable to engage with this proposition in conceptual or historical terms, but only through the starkly political lens of the “delegitimization” of the state. If Charny had paid attention, he would have seen that Shaw warned against politicizing genocide studies, and made it clear that for him the implication of his argument was only that Israel should “come to terms with the genocide of 1948 and its enduring injustice,” if it is to hope for security.<sup>44</sup> In response to Bartov, he

<sup>34</sup> Martin Shaw and Omer Bartov, “The Question of Genocide in Palestine in 1948: an Exchange Between Martin Shaw and Omer Bartov,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 12, nos. 3-4 (2010): 243-259.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Shaw, “Palestine in an International Historical Perspective on Genocide,” *Holy Land Studies* 9, no. 1 (2010): 1-24.

<sup>36</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

While Charny approves of Morris’s work, he does not engage with Shaw’s use of it.

<sup>37</sup> Shaw, “Palestine in an International Historical Perspective,” 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, cited in Shaw and Bartov, “The Question of Genocide,” 245.

<sup>40</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: One World, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Shaw, “Palestine in an International Historical Perspective,” 14-17; see also Martin Shaw, *What is Genocide?*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 66-83.

<sup>43</sup> Shaw, “Palestine in an International Historical perspective”. 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

explicitly refuted the contention of "delegitimization."<sup>45</sup> Elsewhere, he has publicly advocated a two-state solution.<sup>46</sup>

### Why Now? The Emotional Challenges of Studying Genocide<sup>47</sup>

As with any genocide, scholars need to approach the Holocaust with sensitivity because of the understandable emotions it evokes. It is not yet the kind of past about which all historians can easily write with detachment, as they do, say, of the sixteenth-century Reformation, which remained the subject of intense intra-Christian polemics until relatively recently. The Holocaust and other modern genocides remain instances of "hot" rather than "cold" memory, in part because scholars include(d) among their number surviving victims and perpetrators, witnesses, and their children, who, like everyone, are liable to the emotional pull of collective identification.<sup>48</sup> A vivid sense of the past's presence is conveyed by an online response to an article about Holocaust literature:

The Holocaust, at least for we Jews, is a very real event in our own personal history. It has meaning and consequences for our lives far more immediate than any fiction could represent. Not even historical scholarship is adequate to the event. For us our understanding of its lessons within the context of our Diaspora experience represents nothing less than life and death.<sup>49</sup>

Scholars should not deny others the intense emotions they may feel about the subject, whether existential angst or anticipatory fear; experiencing them is all too human. Nor can they extricate themselves entirely from such formative contexts, as the famous Israeli historian Jacob L. Talmon observed in an essay entitled "Uniqueness and Universality of Jewish History":

No historian ... can be a complete rationalist. He must be something of a poet, he must have a little of the philosopher, and he must be touched just a bit by some kind of mysticism. The sorting out of evidence, the detective's skill in ferreting out inaccuracy and inconsistency, are of little help when the historian strikes against the hard residue of mystery and enigma, the ultimate causes and the great problems of human life.<sup>50</sup>

Of the Jewish historian in particular, Talmon continued that he

becomes a kind of martyr in his [*sic*] permanent and anguished intimacy with the mystery of Jewish martyrdom and survival. Whether he be Orthodox in belief or has discarded all religious practice, he cannot help but be sustained by a faith which can neither be provided nor disproved.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Shaw and Bartov, "The Question of Genocide in Palestine," 258.

<sup>46</sup> Martin Shaw, "A Viable Two-State Solution Needs the Idealism and Utopianism of the One-State Idea", *Democratija* 19, Spring-Summer 2009, accessed July 15, 2016, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/1389827037d16Symposium.pdf](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/wp-content/files_mf/1389827037d16Symposium.pdf).

<sup>47</sup> The conclusion draws on A. Dirk Moses, "Anxieties in Holocaust and Genocide Studies," in *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, ed. Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner, and Todd Presner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016 forthcoming), 332–354, 474–483.

<sup>48</sup> Charles S. Maier, "Heißes und kaltes Gedächtnis: Über die politische Halbwertszeit von Nazismus und Kommunismus," *Transit* 22 (2001/2002): 153–165.

<sup>49</sup> David Turner comment on Marc Tracy, "Higher Truth," *Tablet Magazine*, December 2, 2010, accessed December 2, 2010, <http://www.tabletmag.com/arts-and-culture/books/51978/higher-truth>. This was the original site, however, the comment is now on Turner's blog: <http://israelzionismdiaspora.blogspot.it/2010/12/conversations-with-holocaust-denier.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Jacob L. Talmon, "Uniqueness and Universality of Jewish History," in *The Unique and the Universal: Some Historical Reflections* (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1965), 89.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.



That Talmon, who was born in Poland in 1916, wrote in such terms fifty years ago is hardly surprising given the calamitous lows and dizzying highs of Jewish experiences in the first half of the twentieth century. But can historians like Talmon speak for the communities they purport to ventriloquize? We know many scholars of genocide who, though at times anguished, neither experience states of intimacy with mysteries of any kind, nor are tempted by the metaphysics of martyrdom.

Even so, continuing intense anxieties about trends in genocide research and status of Holocaust memory, evident in Charny's articles, indicates that Talmon's observations are pertinent. Take Walter Reich, former director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and currently Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Professor of International Affairs, Ethics and Human Behavior at George Washington University in the United States. He itemized those anxieties in the following terms:

- Distorting the very definition of the Holocaust—6 million vs. 11 million
- Trivializing Holocaust memory
- Dismissing the victimization of the Jews to advance the victimization of others
- Distorting the Holocaust in popular culture, especially film
- Academicizing the Holocaust
- The effects of Holocaust kitsch
- The effects of the seamier efforts to recover Holocaust assets
- The effects of using the Holocaust to achieve political, diplomatic, and military ends.<sup>52</sup>

Trivializing the Holocaust is a particularly common complaint, as is the objection to its categorization as “just another case of genocide” or an example of “man’s inhumanity to man.”<sup>53</sup>

For the traumatized subject and those who identify with them, these perceived trivializations seem outrageous. This subject requires absolute certainties as a psychologically essential cognitive structure. Without the consolation of abiding truths, the suffering of such subjects may be literally unbearable.<sup>54</sup> Scholarship is thereby confronted with a challenge, for it presumes that “the living inhabit the present and ... the dead inhabit the past.”<sup>55</sup> How does it deal with the fact that scholars of genocide can be emotionally implicated in its causes and consequences, and experience permanent and anguished intimacy with the mystery of martyrdom and survival?

The American-Polish writer Eva Hoffman, daughter of Holocaust survivors, responds to this dilemma by positing a scholarly maxim: “It behooves us, with utmost care and compassion, to use our vantage point outside traumatic history itself in order to bring to it interpretations that may not be available to the victims; and perhaps, even, in our thinking and analysis, to move beyond the point of trauma itself.”<sup>56</sup> The scholar need not be captured by the traumatic history, she is arguing.

Studying genocide, then, requires two operations: separating oneself from all participants’ perspectives, and engaging in comparative analysis in time and place. The benefit of hindsight confers an epistemological privilege: “An international, cross-cultural, or culturally intermingled perspective comes to us as easily as certain kinds of exclusive ethnic and religious attachments came to our ancestors,” writes Hoffman. “Translated backwards, this can lead to a comparative approach to history.”<sup>57</sup> Hoffman understands the social scientific challenge for all scholars of genocide: “If we want to call upon the Shoah to deepen our comprehension of atrocity, then we need to study not only anti-Semitism but the process of ethnic and religious hatred, the patterns of

<sup>52</sup> Walter Reich, “The Use and Abuse of Holocaust Memory,” American Enterprise Institute Online, November 14, 2005, accessed July 15, 2016, <https://www.aei.org/publication/the-use-and-abuse-of-holocaust-memory/>.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Shafir, “The ‘Comparative Trivialization’ of the Holocaust,” *East European Perspectives* 5, no. 2 (January 22, 2003), accessed July 15, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1342472.html>.

<sup>54</sup> A. Dirk Moses, “Genocide and the Terror of History,” *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 90–108.

<sup>55</sup> Chris Lorenz, “Blurred Lines: History, Memory and the Experience of Time,” *International Journal of History, Culture, and Modernity* 2, no. 1 (2014): 55.

<sup>56</sup> Eva Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 196.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 197–199.

fanatical belief, the causes of neighborly violence, and the mechanisms through which these can be contained.”<sup>58</sup> A scholar's analytical rather than affective self should be prioritized when publishing in an academic forum. Self-control and critical self-reflection are preconditions for non-dogmatic scholarship.

The potential for such scholarship is embedded in Charny's stated commitment to comparison and eschewal of uniqueness claims. He has promoted Genocide Studies in Israel, where it has been marginalized, and he has suffered at the hands of Israeli authorities for his advocacy of recognition for the Armenian genocide. He spoke from conviction when he averred that “He is committed to the ideal that understanding the processes which brought about the unbearable evil of the Holocaust be joined with the age-old Jewish tradition of contributing to the greater ethical development of human civilization, and that a unique memorial to the Holocaust be forged in the development of new concepts of prevention of genocide to all peoples.”<sup>59</sup> Holocaust memory is thus invested with a world-historical agenda of genocide prevention and the promotion of human rights, which will serve as a “unique memorial.” Functionally, his formulation repeats the idiom of uniqueness.

Anxiety about the viability of this agenda is apparent in Charny's indignation that negotiations over the Universal Declaration of Human Rights immediately after the war were not motivated or accompanied by expressions of outrage about the Holocaust (2, 4-5, 22). This conclusion he disparages is based on study of the thousands of pages of documentation from 1946 to 1948 that are freely available on the website of the United Nations (UN). At no point did UN delegates explicitly refer to the mass murder of Jews during the proceedings of the relevant UN committees even as they invoked other instances of Nazi crimes. The reasons for this silence at the UN suggest, among other factors, a climate of latent antisemitism, as well as the active and passive complicity of some UN member states in the Holocaust itself. This finding is in line with the great mass of publications on postwar Holocaust memory, according to which the annihilation of European Jewry was often conflated with Nazi evil generally during the 1940s, with the distinctive features of the Holocaust were omitted or obscured, particularly outside of Jewish milieux. It gives no-one pleasure to discover that the genocide of Jews was not spoken of as a discrete phenomenon at the UN during the drafting of the Universal Declaration, at least not according to official UN documents. The article in question is simply reporting empirical findings.<sup>60</sup> Charny criticizes it for not reproducing his own imagination of the way things were (4-5, 22). Scholarship is impossible under such conditions.

This and other above-mentioned anxieties have a history. Ran Zwigenberg's book about Hiroshima and the Holocaust provides important context for the current anxieties in Holocaust and genocide studies.<sup>61</sup> Briefly, he identifies three stages in memory work concerning victims of the American atomic attacks on Japan and the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In the first, from 1945 to the 1960s, triumphalist narratives incorporated the collective of victims into the risen/surviving nation. Individual survivors were largely ignored in this period of reconstruction that celebrated the pacifist or the partisan. In the second, which lasted until the late 1970s, the victims' voices came to the fore as subjects of identification and empathy; now they were the heroes. Since the 1980s, in the third and ongoing phrase, other victim groups emerged to challenge Japanese and Jewish claims to unique victim status. This skeletal version of the argument allows us to detect in the various defenses of Holocaust monumentalization the nostalgia of some scholars for the second memory phase, during which many of them were socialized.

The cultural contingency of such interpretations about the world historical status of major events or phenomena is indicated by the half-forgotten point that as late as the 1980s, “Hiroshima” (that is, atomic weapons) was routinely paired with “Auschwitz” (that is, the Holocaust) as the

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Israel W. Charny, “Narrative Biography,” *Prevent Genocide*, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://preventgenocide.org/education/events/charnyCV2000.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> Marco Duranti, “The Holocaust, the Legacy of 1789, and the Birth of International Human Rights Law: Revisiting the Foundation Myth,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 14, no. 2 (2012): 159–186.

<sup>61</sup> Ran Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

principal challenge to human civilization.<sup>62</sup> Beliefs about historical significance can change: this is the source of anxiety, as Zwigenberg found when he compared memories of the Holocaust and Hiroshima:

Bringing back Hiroshima does not diminish the importance of the Holocaust. This is not the view of many of my compatriots. For many in Israel, and among Jews especially in the USA, the Holocaust was a unique event that cannot be compared or tied to any other tragedy. This view is the lynchpin of a peculiar form of Jewish nationalism that centers on victimization and precludes any wider view of the tragedy. In the many presentations and talks I have given on the topic, I have always been confronted by some version of that view. In some cases, even the possibility of comparison is frowned upon. Many Israelis and Jews seem to fear even the suggestion of looking at the Holocaust in the context of postwar history in general; fearing context might lead to relativization and downgrading of the horror.<sup>63</sup>

Zwigenberg's report of his experiences mirror ours: judging by Charny's article and its resonance with some readers, conducting research on the Holocaust threatens "a peculiar form of Jewish nationalism that centers on victimization and precludes any wider view of the tragedy," as Zwigenberg puts it.<sup>64</sup> This nationalism may indeed be one of the strongest influences on this perspective on the Holocaust. But, like many discourses, it has gained a wider currency, informing the common sense in the Holocaust Studies field, and complicating the conversation with Genocide Studies.

## Conclusion

The current controversy shows that the marginal genre of feeling and reasoning that perceives enemies behind every corner is trying to set the general agenda of Genocide Studies. So far, the evidence suggests that this attempt has failed. This failure is an opportunity to reflect on the challenges of the field. Given our subject matter, intensity of commitments and emotions is hardly surprising. Hyper-vigilance can intrude into scholarship wherever the fate of human groups is at stake. We believe that good scholarship heeds the advice of Eva Hoffman, whose reflective capacities honed by the professional study of literature enable her to articulate and practice the necessary, almost austere self-discipline to temper hyper-vigilance: "we need to achieve a certain thoughtful separation from received ideas as, in our personal lives, we needed to separate ourselves, thoughtfully and with sympathy, from our persecuted parents."<sup>65</sup> In other words, our professional disciplining promotes our analytical self over our affective self, or at least separates them as much as possible. We control the latter, not only for the sake of our scholarship, but also to avoid the unconscious cultivation of aggression experienced as self-defense against putative attacks.

Such an approach entails studying the circumstances in which lethal ideologies of difference are generated, rather than taking their existence for granted. This is the program that Raphael Lemkin entreated in the scholarly study of genocide.<sup>66</sup> In following Lemkin, Genocide Studies has made great strides in the last fifteen years; never before has the field been so plural and global. True, by treating the Holocaust like other historical events, these developments challenge the hegemonic status of Israel Charny's favored memory regime, namely the compensatory redemptive narrative that he and others have invested in the Holocaust's incalculable suffering. Robust debate about all these issues is essential to the vitality of Holocaust and Genocide Studies. Attacking colleagues and arguments in the manner we have experienced recently is not the way to engage in scholarly and intellectual exchange.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Examples: Bertrand Russell, "The Bomb and Civilization," *Forward* 39 (August 18, 1945); E. P. Thompson, *Exterminism and Cold War* (London: Verso, 1982), 1–34.

<sup>63</sup> Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima*, 9.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Hoffman, *After Such Knowledge*, 197–199.

<sup>66</sup> A. Dirk Moses, "The Holocaust and World History: Raphael Lemkin and Comparative Methodology," in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2012), 272–289.

<sup>67</sup> Donald Bloxham, "Holocaust Studies and Genocide Studies: Past, Present and Future," in *Genocide Matters: Ongoing*

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## Appendix

The *Jerusalem Post Magazine* (June 17, 2016, p. 6) published an abridged version of this letter. The number of signers has been augmented by the names of scholars who wished to join the list.

### HOLOCAUST 'MINIMIZED'

We, the undersigned scholars of Jewish and European history, many of whom deal with the Holocaust and other genocides, were shocked by Israel Charny's article ("Genocide scholars who minimize the Holocaust – and some who are coming to town") in the *The Jerusalem Post* (May 25, 2016), and deplore the decision of this reputable newspaper to publish it. We support the eminent *Journal of Genocide Research* and we stand behind the scholars who publish their research in it. Our field enjoys a range of perspectives and methodological approaches, and this diversity is key to its vitality and continuing relevance. We are dismayed by Mr. Charny's (who is not a Holocaust scholar) partisan orthodoxy that seeks to morally discredit those he accuses of biases—including antisemitism. And, although Mr. Charny is no statistician either, he grounds his claims in figures that lend an aura of credibility but in fact mean nothing. Far from advancing scholarship, Mr. Charny chills the room with character assassination.

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Prof. Paul Betts, University of Oxford

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