

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION: Trends, Patterns, and Practices, a publication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Salzburg Global Seminar, 2013

Prologue

How do you teach about the Holocaust in countries that were not directly affected by it? Do the lessons of this largely Europe-based event help us to understand contemporary instances of genocide or mass violence, such as those in Rwanda, Cambodia, and Darfur? And vice versa, how does our evolving understanding of contemporary genocide contribute to an evolving understanding of the Holocaust?

There are no easy answers to these and other questions raised by the topic of Holocaust education, but they serve as parameters to compare and evaluate the expertise developed around the globe. While the Holocaust was largely a Europe-based event, it has become a global reference for many discussions in the 21st century.

The Salzburg Initiative on Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention explores these global connections, and divisions, between the fields of Holocaust education, genocide prevention, and human rights. The Initiative has been developed jointly by the Salzburg Global Seminar and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Since 2010, we have convened a series of meetings and conferences that have brought together experts and practitioners of Holocaust, genocide, and human rights education from close to 30 countries. The purpose of this multiyear initiative is to create a space in which experts from various fields can interact across disciplinary boundaries to develop educational models and approaches that help to deepen Holocaust education and contribute to the prevention of genocide and its precursors.

Our meetings in Salzburg are not conferences in the traditional sense. They are based on the strong belief in the value of in-depth conversations and nurture a space in which aspirations, challenges, and failures can be reflected upon in a global dialogue.

As chair of this initiative, I am grateful for this opportunity to describe how we started, developed, and today define our specific contribution to the field of Holocaust and genocide education.

How did we start?

At the 2010 founding conference, which brought together 50 international experts, we allowed ourselves the luxury of addressing large topics: the roots of genocide; the connections between justice and genocide prevention; the relationship between trauma and reconciliation. Our discussions frequently returned to the complex relationship between teaching about the Holocaust and learning from the Holocaust. We investigated the compatibility of Holocaust and human rights education, as well as rising Holocaust denial and distortion.

The conference developed key recommendations on education and prevention and led to a clearer understanding of the need for a long-term initiative. Additionally, some of the themes discussed, such as the fate of women during the Holocaust and later genocides, the need for comparative genocide studies, or the relevance of regional networks have been further developed by participants since then in a variety of forums.

Following the 2010 founding conference, we addressed—in consecutive planning meetings in March and June 2011—the hard question: How can we effect change?

We looked closely at other initiatives, especially at the 31 member-state International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). We were inspired by the 2010 IHRA paper on the *Holocaust and Other Genocides* and related debates under the 2011 Dutch IHRA presidency. After the luxury of scanning the broad field of what had been done, we were looking for what might be lacking, and how we could make a specific contribution to a more connected network of Holocaust, genocide, and human rights experts.

In 2012, we decided to query experts from outside the established IHRA framework in order to better understand how the Holocaust and other genocides are being taught outside its geographic parameters. We see the lack of knowledge about this expertise, and of a network linking those concerned, as one important obstacle to the development of a truly global conversation about Holocaust education and the potential of training as a form of genocide prevention.

Points of departure

The Holocaust is not the first genocide in history. But as Yehuda Bauer stated, while the Holocaust is a genocide, no other genocide has been a Holocaust: The Holocaust was the attempt based on ideology—not pragmatic, economic, or power interests—to eliminate a group entirely, throughout the world. Genocides happen within mostly national or regional borders; the Holocaust intended a total destruction of one group everywhere. The Wannsee protocol did not just list the Jewish communities of Germany or German-occupied territories, but was envisioning the “Final Solution” of the “Jewish question.” The Holocaust changed our perception of humanity. Hannah Arendt described it as “a crime against humanity perpetrated upon the body of the Jewish people.” Countless members of other groups—Roma and Sinti, the disabled, homosexuals, and Soviet prisoners of war, among many others—were murdered as well.

The suffering of individuals, in whatever genocidal context, is horrific and cannot be measured against each other. We do not differentiate genocides to develop a hierarchy of victims, but to understand the tools and mechanisms used by perpetrators. Clearly we are not the only ones who can learn from such an analysis. Throughout the 20th century and now into the 21st, we have witnessed another learning process: that of perpetrators learning from each other, copying and extending their methods of dehumanization.

Much of the debate in recent years has investigated whether, and how, we can move from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. Both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention were adopted in 1948 linking the Holocaust, history, and human

rights. Despite our vow of “never again” we have failed to match these two instruments with decisive action. Since 1948, millions more have lost their lives as a result of mass killings.

Some of the colleagues attending our meetings live and work in countries that have experienced ethnic conflict or genocide: we learned much from them about the challenges of reconciliation. The effects of genocide do not end when violence stops. Survivors live with trauma and loss; a community that has lost its civil core takes generations to rebuild.

While the International Criminal Court and the United Nations have taken relevant steps forward, we are still struggling with bringing perpetrators of genocidal acts to justice—a critical step in establishing the rule of law. Governments have embraced the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm, progress in the area of comparative risk assessment. The issue now seems less the lack of a generalized normative consensus, but effective implementation. Some countries are in the process of establishing protocols and government agencies to assess early genocide warnings and engage before military intervention becomes the only remaining option.

As participants in our 2010 and 2012 conferences pointed out, teaching about the Holocaust and learning from the Holocaust define two, often quite different, pedagogical approaches that may be easier to align in our aspirations than in a school environment. Teacher training, student-centered learning methods, accessibility of resources and funds, national curricula: Holocaust education is as much defined by the changing parameters of a national education system as by national perspectives on its relevance.

Our work is guided by the large questions: if, how, and what we learn from history. In our discussions we often felt it was vital to ask the right questions, in order to address the complexity at stake, and to understand different perspectives and answers. One of the major issues discussed during both conferences and the interim meetings was the question of whether by connecting past genocides and contemporary human rights violations we improve our understanding of both topics, or whether we thereby endanger the recognition of their vast differences.

Seemingly, the Holocaust echoes more strongly than ever in the world: as the lowest point of humanity; as a central memory in Western culture, politics, and legislation; and increasingly as a global frame of reference for contemporary genocide, ethnic conflict, and human rights violations.

A recurrent theme in Holocaust and genocide education is the hope that it can contribute to strengthening tolerance. But can we substantiate the assumption that it is effective against racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, or homophobia? The connections between education, social and civic engagement, and social norms need further exploration and study.

What does it mean, then, that Holocaust denial seems to grow worldwide? Holocaust denial and antisemitism have been embedded in Western societies ever since 1945, and traditional European antisemitism remains a powerful source of prejudice and hate. Increasingly, Western Holocaust denial is adopted and utilized by Muslim fundamentalist voices. For the first time since Nazi Germany collapsed, a state, Iran, aggressively sponsors Holocaust denial as a government objective. Social media has become a major tool for education, and for denial. If such a fully

documented genocide as the Holocaust can be denied, what does that mean for the remembrance of other genocides, or massive human rights violations?

Education as prevention?

Within the IHRA, guidelines have been developed on how to strengthen Holocaust education. However, its 31 member states by no means form a unified body. Rather they remain separate nation states reflecting upon the Holocaust within their national histories. Holocaust education in Germany is different from what it is in Israel, or the United States, or Argentina. Increasingly, we explore if and how Holocaust education can be used as a tool for addressing other, more recent genocides and human rights abuses.

What we are missing is up-to-date knowledge of how the Holocaust is referenced and/or used in education outside IHRA member countries. The UN's global mandate as stated in General Assembly Resolution 60/7 (2005) "Holocaust Remembrance," urges member states to develop educational programs that "will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to prevent future acts of genocide."

Local circumstances and conditions shape the ways in which the Holocaust, other genocides, and human rights issues can be, and are, taught. We do not seek any "one size fits all" model. Rather, we are interested in creating a global forum in which educators, policymakers, and activists can explore what they share, develop a common vocabulary, and discuss best practices.

As a result of our conversations, we changed the course of the Salzburg Initiative and decided to focus the 2012 session on expertise that exists outside the established frame of the IHRA. Inviting colleagues from outside the alliance, we gained new perspectives, gathered information on best practices, and were challenged by the expertise that has been building in countries from the Global South, as well as in Eastern Europe and former Soviet states.

Encouraged by the results, we decided to undertake an unprecedented global survey of Holocaust education. By bringing together so much extensive data, which will be available online and added to in the future, we hope to make a concrete and lasting contribution to the field and improve global documentation and awareness of Holocaust and genocide initiatives.

Through the 2010 and 2012 conferences and successive conversations, we learned that our colleagues involved in Holocaust and genocide remembrance outside the IHRA geographical framework face daunting obstacles. Emerging networks in non-Western countries, where Holocaust and genocide experts are often working with limited resources and little or no government or civil society support, e.g. Chile, China, Mexico, Morocco, Rwanda, or South Korea, are in need of cross-border and global networking, access to resources, and technical assistance. There is a strong desire for cooperation in Africa, Latin America, and Asia among organizations addressing Holocaust and genocide awareness. Colleagues want to learn from others working on similar initiatives.

In societies struggling with their own legacies of genocide and human rights abuses, for example in Rwanda, Cambodia, or South Africa, educators themselves struggle to understand how such

traumatic events were allowed to happen. They point out that Holocaust studies and remembrance can provide orientation and possibly a framework for understanding genocides, and for dealing with other histories of human rights abuses. While Holocaust education, research, and remembrance was indicated as a potentially helpful model, colleagues from post-genocidal countries also emphasized that within this dialogue it is important to consider the particular historical, social, cultural, and political dynamics in each genocidal event.

Innovative work and different educational practices are developed outside the IHRA network and are vital contributions to a growing global conversation on the Holocaust and other genocides. Within the IHRA, however, little is known about work taking place in countries such as South Africa, Ecuador, Armenia, Mexico, Morocco, Ukraine, Cambodia, or Rwanda. We hope that the Salzburg Initiative can contribute to a collegial dialogue on Holocaust and genocide remembrance activities around the world, and an exchange on resources and best practices.

In today's world, Holocaust and genocide denial, distortion, and/or minimization have become global phenomena. Colleagues from countries as diverse as Morocco, China, Turkey, or South Africa stressed the need to develop effective strategies to combat the growing assault on historical truth.

Building on the expertise of our colleagues within the Salzburg Initiative network, we have developed two resources, which we hope will be helpful in addressing some of the shortcomings listed above. This publication, "Global Perspectives in Holocaust Education" is composed of two sections: (1) a comprehensive survey of practices around the globe; (2) an encyclopedia/directory of regional and country-specific resources. We acknowledge the work of many colleagues who contributed to these publications.

Hannah Arendt's description of the Holocaust as a "crime against humanity" helped to frame our understanding of genocide today as an assault on the very essence of mankind: human diversity. Based on this understanding, we hope the Salzburg Initiative helps to nurture a truly global conversation on the Holocaust and other genocides in the 21st century, and that—geographically and otherwise—it will include a more and more diverse multitude of voices and visions in the years to come.

Dr. Klaus Mueller
Chair, Salzburg Initiative on Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention
Representative for Europe, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum