

WHY THE HOLOCAUST DOES NOT MATTER TO ESTONIANS

Anton Weiss-Wendt

Keywords: Estonia; Jewish minority; anti-Semitism; war crimes investigation; Holocaust denial; freedom of expression

This essay examines perceptions of the Holocaust in contemporary Estonia. To comprehend how Estonians have formed their views on the Holocaust is to understand how they conceive of their history. Whereas in Western Europe and North America the Holocaust is perceived as carrying a universalistic message, in Estonia and other East European countries it is ultimately linked to the Jewish minority. Thus, whatever Estonians think of the Jews as a group translates into their perceptions of the Holocaust and vice versa. Therefore it is essentially impossible to discuss what the Holocaust means to Estonians without assessing the levels of anti-Semitism in Estonian society today.

Unlike in neighboring Latvia and Lithuania, the Nazi mass murder of Jews has never become a subject of debate in Estonia. Most Estonians think of the Holocaust as a superimposed discourse that has no direct connection to their country. The lack of interest can be attributed to several factors. As far as Jewish history is concerned, Estonia is a marginal case. The Estonian Jewish community was small and inconspicuous. Even more significantly, in Estonia the Holocaust played out differently than elsewhere in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe. The implementation of the so-called Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Estonia was less visible than elsewhere and was witnessed by few people. Therefore, the Soviet investigation of war crimes committed in Estonia paid relatively little attention to the plight of the Jews. Even then, both the media and witnesses routinely portrayed Jewish victims as peaceful Soviet citizens murdered by German fascist invaders. These perceptions carried over into the post-1991 period.

Correspondence to: Anton Weiss-Wendt, Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities, Postboks 1168 Blindern, 0318 Oslo, Norway. Email: anton.weiss-wendt@hlsenteret.no

Peculiarities of the Holocaust in Estonia

The Estonian case poses a challenge to the generally accepted view of how the Holocaust was carried out in eastern Europe.¹ Unlike in Latvia and Lithuania, there were no anti-Jewish pogroms or ghettos; no death squads staffed and sometime managed by natives, like the Arājs Commando in Latvia or the Hamann Commando in Lithuania. The daylong mass executions of Jews at the Ninth Fort in Kaunas or Rumbuli near Riga did not happen in Estonia until a year later. Due to fierce Soviet resistance, roughly two-thirds of Estonia's Jews managed to escape to Russia during 1941. The remaining 1,000 or so were apprehended by the Estonian Security Police (a semi-independent subsidiary of the German Security Police), which subjected each individual to pseudo-legal investigation. Thus, Estonia was spared the atrocities and public humiliation that accompanied the Nazi mass murder of Jews in other east European countries. Most Estonians, if they bothered to think of it at all, believed that justice had been served and that the executed Jews were punished for a reason.

The two Jewish transports that arrived in Estonia in September 1942 from former Czechoslovakia and Germany respectively had been diverted from Riga. Only a few local people witnessed Jews disembarking at a small railway station not far from Tallinn. Upon arrival, almost 80% of the Jews, a total of 1,650, were executed by a special detachment of the Estonian Security Police. The rest of the prisoners, mainly young women, were later dispatched to Tallinn Battery prison. Finally, in September and October 1943, the Germans deported to Estonia over 9,000 Jews from the dismantled ghettos of Kaunas and Vilnius. While the extermination center at Auschwitz-Birkenau had been working at full capacity, receiving Jews from all corners of occupied Europe, these Polish and Lithuanian Jews sent to Estonia were meant to live. Alongside Soviet prisoners of war, Jews worked in the oil industry and built up defenses in northeastern Estonia. Jews were concentrated in 19 slave labor camps in an otherwise scarcely populated area. Three hundred men from Estonian police battalions 287 and 290 guarded the perimeter of the camps. Otherwise, these were run entirely by the German SS, which, with a few exceptions, carried out the selections, individual killings and mass executions of Jews that occurred during the summer and early fall of 1944. The largest single massacre on the territory of Estonia occurred at Klooga slave labor camp on 19 September 1944, and claimed the lives of 1,634 Jews and 150 Soviet POWs. The total death toll of Jews in Estonia in 1941–1944 could be as high as 8,500, with a death rate of 63%. In Latvia, at the same time, 65% or 61,000 Jews perished. The death rate among Lithuanian Jews was the highest anywhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, 95%, or 195,000.

The Estonian Security Police had a mostly bureaucratic mode of operation, and for this reason it drew only limited attention from the Soviet legal authorities. Furthermore, the commanding echelons of the Security Police and most of its rank-and-file had fled to the West. When interrogating members of the auxiliary police (*Omakaitse*) or police battalions, KGB investigators gave most emphasis to the killing of communists and Soviet paratroopers. In the open war-crimes trials that were staged throughout the Baltic region during the 1960s, however, mass murder of Jews played an important part. The four defendants who stood trial in Tallinn in 1961 (two of them in absentia) were implicated in the mass murder of Jews at Kalevi-Liiva in 1942,

whereas the three individuals (of whom only one was present in the courtroom) on trial in Tartu a year later were charged with running a local concentration camp and carrying out mass executions of prisoners. Despite Soviet claims to the contrary, a majority of the Estonian people had never embraced the so-called socialist justice; the ovation with which the audience met the verdict – invariable death sentence – fell short of expectations.

The Nazi mass murder of Jews in Estonia lacks clear markers that would make it easier for common people to grasp. The 963 Estonian Jews murdered in 1941 and 1942 constitute slightly over 10% of the victims of the Holocaust in Estonia. The rest were Polish, Lithuanian, Latvian, Czechoslovakian, German, French, Soviet and Hungarian nationals.² The physical space facilitating commemoration is missing in Estonia. One can visit the Maskavas neighborhood in Riga, Slobodka suburb in Kaunas, or the former Jewish quarters in Vilnius to see the places where the Jewish ghettos once used to be. No such place exists in Estonia. The former Tallinn Central prison where many male Jews were incarcerated prior to their execution in September 1941 was until very recently off limits to visitors. Situated between farmlands, swamps and industrial zones, the sites of former Jewish slave labor camps gradually decayed into oblivion. Finally, exhibits – a testimony to the crime in legal jargon – are hard to find in Estonia. Consider the following description of the pogrom that took place in Kaunas on 25 June 1941:

Women with children on their arms pushed their way to the front rows, while laughter and shouts of ‘bravo!’ echoed to the sound of the iron rods and wooden clubs used to beat the Jews to death. At intervals, one of the killers struck up the national anthem on his accordion, adding to the festive mood of the day. (Kwiet 1998, p. 14)

And then there are the visual images that can be neither denied nor easily forgotten. One photo depicts a healthy looking, blond Lithuanian with a crowbar posing next to the bodies of Jews whom he just had slain. Another photo shows a somewhat older man with rolled-up sleeves just seconds after he had struck a Jew lying on the ground. This did not happen in Estonia. There is no such striking evidence of the crimes committed. Instead, we can talk about a certain distance between perpetrators and victims. The way the Estonian Security Police handled the Jews more closely resembles the archetype of a desk murderer described in the 1960s by Raul Hilberg: those German bureaucrats who shuffled millions of people on paper, while sitting in the quiet of their Berlin offices (Hilberg 1993, pp. 20–50).

Independent Estonia has lacked well-publicized war crimes cases – such as those against Konrāds Kalējs in Latvia or Aleksandras Lileikis in Lithuania – which have sustained a public discussion on local collaboration in the Holocaust. Attempts to influence the Estonian authorities to prosecute former Estonian policeman Harry Männil, who became a successful businessman in Argentina after the War, failed miserably.³ Although the deportation of alleged war criminal Karl Linnas to the Soviet Union back in 1987 attracted much attention internationally, it is too distant a case to be remembered in today’s Estonia. Furthermore, mainstream Estonian journalists and historians-cum-politicians such as Mart Laar have validated the émigré notion of both KGB war crime investigations and American denaturalization trials as a hoax.⁴

Unsurprisingly, ordinary Estonians tend to share this view too. They dismiss legal investigations of war crimes, arguing that the Soviets had already prosecuted all the individuals suspected of any wrongdoings. Those who evaluate Soviet justice as fair at one time but biased at others obviously do not see the irony in their judgments.

Estonian Historiography of the Holocaust

In marked contrast to Lithuania and Latvia, very little has been published on the Holocaust in Estonia since 1991. The first, and until recently the only, book on the mass murder of Estonian Jews was written in 1994 by the former head of the Estonian Jewish community Eugenia Gurin-Loov. Essentially, it is a collection of documents supplemented by a brief history of Jews in Estonia and their destruction during the German occupation. Gurin-Loov should be credited for discovering the investigation files of the Estonian Security Police, which provide a unique perspective on the extermination of Jews in eastern Europe. At the same time she has unwittingly decontextualized the mass murder of Estonian Jews in 1941 by examining it in isolation from the remaining story of the Holocaust in Estonia. Contrary to expectations, the pioneering study by Gurin-Loov has generated no debate. Financed by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York and the Estonian Jewish community, the book was available in just a handful of bookstores and has remained largely unnoticed. The only review of the book to be published locally appeared in a history journal produced by Tartu University; two more reviews followed in English.⁵ Peeter Puide – an Estonian writer living in Sweden – has touched upon the subject of collaboration in the Holocaust by using some of the documents uncovered by Gurin-Loov in his novel published in Stockholm in 1997 (Puide 1997). The novel has attracted considerable attention in Sweden, but not in Estonia.

The Estonian edition of the best-selling book by Stéphane Bruchfeld and Paul Levine, *Tell Your Children About It: A Book About the Holocaust in Europe, 1933–1945* (2003), features a fairly comprehensive chapter on Estonia. Its author, Sulev Valdmaa of the Jaan Tõnisson Institute in Tallinn, did not shy away from discussing the issue of collaboration. Valdmaa addressed this problem from a humanistic point of view, without resorting to moralizing. Numerous quotations from original documents further strengthened his argument. Perhaps the only statement in the book that cannot be corroborated by primary sources is Valdmaa's claim that ordinary Estonians extended substantial support to imperiled local Jews. Tartu University professor Uku Masing, whom Valdmaa mentions, is in fact one of only three Estonians recognized by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem as a Righteous Among the Nations (Bruchfeld & Levine 2003, pp. 85–93). The official number of individuals who assisted Jews in Lithuania and Latvia is 693 and 103 respectively.

In 2001, the Estonian literary magazine *Vikerkaar* printed a special issue dedicated to the Holocaust. Alongside excerpts from books by renowned authors such as Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, Victor Klemperer and Raul Hilberg, the magazine featured two articles by Estonian historians. Meelis Maripuu and Riho Västriik provided an overview of the Nazi Final Solution in Estonia, paying particular attention to the problem of local collaboration. An extended version of the articles appeared six years later in

English translation, in a single volume published under the aegis of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity. Incredible as it may sound, the reports of the Commission, printed in 2006 in Tallinn under the title *Estonia, 1940–1945*, represent the first and only scholarly treatment of the Holocaust by Estonian historians (Hiio *et al.* 2006). Any attempt to produce an ultimate collection of knowledge, semi-legal in status and symbolically approved by the international community, poses certain problems. Concerns about the mandate of the Commission and the relation between high politics and history writing, however, have been brushed off as overblown.⁶

The Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity

The Commission was convened in 1998, and was the first such body in the Baltic, as has been emphasized. The date is significant, as Estonia was entering into talks with the EU and NATO regarding membership in these two organizations. Brussels and Washington hinted that the chances of east European countries becoming club members would increase if they set their historical record straight, first and foremost with regard to indigenous collaboration in the Nazi mass murder of Jews. This explains why the Commission began immediately to investigate crimes committed in Estonia during the German occupation, leaving the period of Soviet occupation for later. For the same reason, the reports have been translated into English. The full name of the working group – the Estonian *International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* [italics added] – is somewhat misleading. Of the six international members of the Commission only three were historians, and none of them was an expert on either Soviet or Nazi policies. It was an open secret that they were selected on the basis of their ‘friendliness’ towards Estonia. Furthermore, all of the research was carried out by a team of Estonian historians, mainly MA and PhD students, who were not officially members of the Commission. Unlike the equivalent commissions in Lithuania and Latvia, which featured a mixture of local, émigré and foreign scholars, the Estonian team consisted solely of Estonian nationals.

The volume looks impressive: 1,357 pages printed on high-quality paper with an excellent selection of photographs, good graphs and maps. Weighing 3.5 kg and containing a total of 69 articles divided into six sections, the book reads as an encyclopedia containing everything that one needs to know about the Soviet and German occupations of Estonia. The historians affiliated with the Commission did a good job of combing through Estonian, German and partially Latvian archives. They provide a fairly comprehensive, factual overview, showing a good command of primary sources. The section entitled ‘German Occupation of Estonia’ consists of 19 articles over 225 pages. In addition to the articles that deal with Soviet investigations of war crimes, seven articles discuss the various stages of the Holocaust in Estonia. The main authors are Maripuu and Västriik. What is missing in this particular section, and throughout the volume, is analysis and interpretation. The reader is left with a massive body of facts, which are often nothing

more than statistics. The issue of motivation, which is central to the whole discussion of local collaboration, is only scantily touched upon. The conclusions are almost stereotypical – brutalization brought about by warfare and the desire to avenge the victims of the Soviet regime (Maripuu 2006, p. 661). To explain this and other lacunae in the Reports one needs to take a closer look at the Commission.

The preamble to the Reports is most instructive, as it explains the *raison d'être* of the Commission. In an opening 'Word of Address' to its members, the then President of Estonia Lennart Meri stated that the Commission would not act as a judicial or prosecutorial body. In this regard, one can observe certain parallels with Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, except that in the Estonian case reconciliation was not on the agenda. The 'Statement' by the Commission that follows Meri's introduction, however, strikes a different line from that of the President. It urges the collection of *all* available documentary evidence and calls for the interviewing of all *possible* witnesses, giving the Reports the appearance of legal proceedings. This contravenes a self-evident fact that history cannot be presented as absolute truth, and hence any history work is incomplete. Unfortunately, the Estonian Commission did not take this into consideration when seeking to present as proof the body of facts that it had collected.

The volume displays a tendency to appropriate history. In the 'Reports' that precede the scholarly part of the Commission's publication, the contributing historians assess the degree of criminal responsibility of particular individuals and agencies. In so doing, they unwittingly capitalize on the Nuremberg model. Much like the German SS and the Security Service at Nuremberg, the B-IV department of the Estonian Security Police is proclaimed to be a criminal organization. Once again, they acquire a judicial rather than an interpretive tone. A verdict – guilty or not – has an apparent legal aspect to it. The 'Reports' also contain awkward sentences such as 'we recognize that Estonia and Estonians were a victim nation', which could have been safely omitted for the benefit of solid research done by historians themselves. Even the use of the word 'Estonian' by the Commission is debatable. By considering citizenship rather than ethnicity as a prime form of identification, it has superimposed modern discourse where it does not apply.

More problems appear when the Commission attempts to define the crimes perpetrated against the Jews and other groups in legal terms. The official title, Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of *Crimes Against Humanity* [italics added], is a misnomer. The Commission contradicts itself by acknowledging that the mass murder of Jews and Roma (Gypsies) constitutes genocide and that the deliberate starvation of Soviet prisoners of war is a war crime. To be on the safe side, the Reports reprint the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, in particular the articles that deal with crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes. In the final analysis, however, the Commission fails to fit their findings into the context of international law. Humble attempts to put Nazi and Soviet crimes in a historical perspective proved to be unsuccessful. This comes as no surprise considering the peculiarities of some of the laws that have been enacted in the Baltic states since 1991.

The Baltic legislation on crimes against humanity, genocide, and work crimes entail peculiar interpretations that would make experts on international law raise their eyebrows. For example, the law on the responsibility for the genocide perpetrated

against the inhabitants of Lithuania, enacted in April 1992, interprets the destruction of human beings for any purposes as genocide. Therefore, Soviet mass deportations, according to this law, constitute genocide. In May 1998 the then chairman of the Lithuanian parliament Vytautas Landsbergis signed a resolution that declared mass deportations a war crime displaying characteristics of genocide. Another Lithuanian law from June 1997 combines crimes against humanity and war crimes in a single term, 'war crimes against humankind'. To make the application of these and similar laws easier, in July 1998 the President of Lithuania declared the NKVD and KGB criminal organizations that had committed genocide and war crimes against Lithuanian citizens (Lithuanian Parliament 2000, *passim*). Estonian legislation prescribes the intentional killing of anti-Soviet partisans as a crime against humanity. Several judgments in criminal cases resulting in the conviction of defendants have made use of this interpretation.⁷ Such legalistic lapses lead to an absurd situation when, for example, in Lithuania most cases evoking charges of genocide deal with crimes committed during the Soviet rather than the Nazi occupation. Turned upside-down, the law prescribes the indictment of individual Jews for genocide of the Lithuanian people (Krichevsky 1997; Tracevskis 2000).

The larger question is whether the Commission has achieved its objectives and if its work has furthered Holocaust awareness among the Estonian population. The main goal has definitely been attained – to show the Western European and American political establishment that the Baltic governments are ready to submit even the most complex aspects of recent history to critical examination. Ironically, the Reports were published *after* Estonia officially joined the NATO and the EU. After all, setting the historical record straight was not the most important criterion for admission. What about the impact of the volume on the historical consciousness of the Estonians? I do not share the cautious optimism of Matthew Kott, who believes that the publication of the Reports will stimulate innovative Holocaust research in Estonia.⁸ The Commission set out to produce a definitive study which was factually accurate and legalistically correct. However, one does not usually question a reference work, particularly if it has been approved for publication by an international body. The Commission failed to resolve a dilemma it had been facing since its inception, namely how to reconcile history and law. The way the Commission treated the Holocaust does not open new vistas but rather reinforces old misconceptions. Estonian scholars compartmentalized the history of the Holocaust by dealing separately with the Estonian, Czech/German, Polish/Lithuanian and French Jews. As we know all too well, the Nazis were exterminating the Jewish people not as Estonian, Lithuanian, French, etc. nationals but as Jews. Finally there is a question of accessibility: how many Estonian readers would be willing to spend 750 Estonian crowns (around one-fifth of the minimum wage) for an encyclopedic volume in English that contains information on both Soviet and Nazi occupations?

The Zuroff Controversy and *Vox Populi*

The treatment of the Holocaust in Estonian historiography suggests certain tendencies. However, the works of historians may not always accurately reflect the

views of the general public. Because of the marginality of the Holocaust in Estonia, we do not have any official opinion polls to fall back on. The advance of electronic media, however, has provided us with one other source that makes it easier to examine the so-called *vox populi*. Since the late 1990s, nearly all Estonian newspapers have given their readers the option of commenting on any article of interest. Until very recently, the rules and regulations governing the electronic media in Estonia were not strictly enforced, enabling internet users to exchange extreme views.

I have examined the commentaries submitted by the readers of Estonia's two larger dailies and one weekly. I looked specifically at the Holocaust-related articles that were published between 2001 and 2003 in *Postimees*, *Päevaleht* and *Eesti Ekspress*. The fact that of all east European countries Estonia has the highest number of internet users per thousand inhabitants (after Slovenia) makes it a fairly representative sample of the Estonian population. Altogether I read through some 3,000 electronic submissions. Most of the authors use nicknames or do not disclose their identity at all. Frivolous names refer to the younger cohort, whereas older commentators tend to sign their own names. Some names appear more than once, which attests to their interest in the subject. So what are the issues that trigger discussion? Phrased differently and in different contexts, the problem may be formulated as follows: what is the Estonian share in the Holocaust and what should be done with indigenous collaborators, if anything?

The rise of interest, or I should rather say emotions, towards the subject of the Holocaust in Estonia around the year 2002 is not accidental. A particular individual responsible for this development is Efraim Zuroff, the director of the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Having committed his life to hunting former Nazis and their collaborators, Zuroff accused the Estonian authorities of harboring war criminals. Zuroff has leveled similar accusations against the Latvians and the Lithuanians. In the summer of 2002 the US ambassador in Tallinn further inflamed passions by lamenting Estonia's reluctance to prosecute Nazi collaborators. Frustrated by the failure to influence the Baltic governments to open investigations against certain individuals, Zuroff took an unprecedented step by offering a \$10,000 reward to anyone who assisted his office in gathering incriminating evidence leading to a successful prosecution. Zuroff called the campaign that he had launched 'The Last Chance'.

The violent response to Zuroff's demarche would surprise even the most experienced scholars of anti-Semitism. All of the centuries-old stereotypes came to the fore: deicide, ritual murder, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, etc. A number of readers suggested Zuroff should be gassed, processed into soap, or at least declared *persona non grata*. One *Päevaleht* reader asked: 'why is the Jewish nation hated around the world? Are there any wars that have not been organized at least by a few Jews?' 'Europeans hate the Jews', another reader echoed, while one reader, who wrote under the name 'Anti-Juden', declared that 'Zyklon-B would be a good solution – let us just pour it over Jerusalem, only in the Jewish quarters of course'. The following quotation covers pretty much all of the main themes in anti-Semitic folklore in Estonia: 'The Jews want to make Europeans serve them. This is why they are making a good use of the Holocaust myth. They will not be able to play this trick on Estonians, however. We are not going to fall on our knees, begging forgiveness for the

non-existent crimes. The Jews have killed Estonians and other peoples en masse, which cries out for another Nuremberg.' One other commentator tried to prove that the USA is essentially a 'Jewish State': 'in some non-Jewish schools one celebrates Hanukkah instead of Christmas!' What is particularly troubling is the resort to crude ethnic stereotypes. For the first time ever members of the Estonian cultural elite such as Eri Klaas and Eino Baskin were addressed as 'Jews' and not as persons.

Most Estonians deny any responsibility for the crimes committed during the Second World War. According to a legalistic argument, Estonia was an occupied country. This supposedly exempts its citizens from personal responsibility and simultaneously denies the Wiesenthal Center the right to appeal to the Estonian state regarding alleged war criminals. According to the 'humanitarian' argument, it does not make any sense whatsoever to prosecute the old men who are going to die soon anyway. If nothing else could stop Zuroff in pursuit of his mission, several readers suggested just ignoring him.

Another peculiar feature of the Holocaust discussion in Estonia during 2002 was its pronounced anti-Russian character. The line of argumentation was as follows: Jewish claims regarding Estonian accountability for wartime atrocities are part and parcel of a plan to prevent Estonia joining the EU and NATO. Of all the international players, Russia is the most interested in cutting short the Estonian *tour de force*. Thus, it is argued, Efraim Zuroff (Efrem Zurov) must be in conspiracy with the Russian Security Service. One reader even remembered having personally known one of Zuroff's relatives who had allegedly resided in the formerly Estonian province of Pechory. 'It is all about politics,' wrote another: 'first there was the Russian minority-discrimination myth, and now it is the Jewish theme'. Bitter at Russia's refusal to acknowledge crimes committed on Estonian territory, several participants in the exchange tried to challenge Zuroff by suggesting his office should start operations in the Russian Federation. At this point it should be noted that local Russians have for the most part refrained from participating in the discussion. The local Russian press, however, seized the opportunity to stress the plight of the ethnic Russian community (more so in Latvia than in Estonia or Lithuania), referring to the 'innate' anti-Semitism of the Baltic peoples as a proof of malicious intent.

The next stage in the popular discussion, predictably, was to link political discourse with a stereotype of money-greedy Jews. Some people argued that the Wiesenthal Center has been investigating Nazi and not Soviet crimes because there were many Jews among the communists. Many communists have entered Israel amongst the masses of Jewish emigrants from the former Soviet Union. Therefore, it is naive to expect that Jewish organizations would support the search for collaborators with the Soviet regime. Even after the last Nazi criminal has died, it is argued, Zuroff would have to find one in order to keep himself busy, that is, to retain his source of income.

The overwhelmingly negative response is suggestive of a very narrow, *quid pro quo* conception of justice and of a tendency to see history in black-and-white terms. Those who do not resort to juxtaposition, it seems, find refuge in relativism. Normally, this proceeds from the general to particular, stating that Jews are not the only ethnic/religious group in human history that has endured suffering, and that

conferring a special status upon the Jews would therefore be unfair with respect to Native Americans, Armenians, Gypsies, etc. Other discussants had an altogether different proposition: 'What is important is to concentrate on all things Estonian, while leaving aside others' problems and suffering. There is simply not enough time, money and energy to share it equally among all.' Many Estonians are eager to engage in a rather unproductive comparative victimization contest. In the course of the heated online exchange it was claimed, among other things, that the Estonian nation, which was arguably subjected to genocide, had in fact endured the most suffering in the history of humankind. In this regard, it was predictable that Judeo-Bolshevism should become the next subject for discussion, with claims that the Jews had played a prominent role in dismantling the Estonian State in 1940. By way of illustration, some newspaper readers 'pasted in' extensive excerpts about this or that Soviet official who happened to be Jewish. Finally, the contributors displayed a tendency – widespread in today's Europe – to attack Israel for its policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians. The message could be translated as follows: you, the Jews, have no moral right to judge us!

However vague the idea of justice held by many ordinary Estonians, Zuroff's approach appears to have been equally misguided. According to Zuroff, he pursued a threefold objective when he first came to Estonia: to press for legal investigation in the case of one particular individual; to launch an educational program; and to have justice run its course. Unfortunately, the tactics adopted by Zuroff rendered his efforts futile. What should rightly have become the subject of investigation by legal experts was presented to the general public by Zuroff as a definite proof. In doing this he ignored one of the basic principles of justice – the presumption of innocence. (Zuroff told journalists that he would publicly apologize if his allegations were proved false.) Several discussants pointed out the factual errors in his statements. By offering money in exchange for information, Zuroff also unwittingly invoked the much-despised idea of denunciation, which had been introduced in Estonia mainly by the Soviets. The few sober voices emerging from an otherwise militant public debate hinted that Zuroff might have gained more support if he had chosen a 'more elegant' form of language.

The contribution of Estonian intellectuals to the discussion was at best disappointing. Unable to provide a viable analysis, most newspaper articles and editorials simply ridiculed Zuroff's statements. The authors have failed to find the right language to address the audience and therefore preferred to follow the mainstream. Perhaps the only Estonian intellectual who has made a genuine attempt to reach deep into the Estonian collective memory is Jaan Kaplinski. He has chosen the language of metaphor and hyperbole to deliver his annihilating commentary on Holocaust revisionism, and he does not have any inhibitions when discussing bigotry in contemporary Estonian society. He argues that in order to be able to put national history into perspective, the Estonians have first to remove certain ideological barriers.⁹ The problem is that the kind of people who usually read Kaplinski's writings do not need to be convinced. Those who tend to think in black-and-white categories, however, refuse to listen. As one *Delfi* reader commented in May 2007: 'Kaplinski has never thought of Estonians, but only appealed on behalf of the Jews and the Russians'.

The Estonian Jewish Community

The Estonian Jewish community has remained for the most part passive when it comes to the examination of the most tragic period in its history. Less than 5,000 strong, the local Jewish community stood at the forefront of the minority movement in Estonia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Alongside Swedish, German, Belorussian, Tartar and other numerically insignificant ethnic groups, the Jews have been viewed by the government as a loyal minority, in contrast to the large Russian minority, which has maintained links to Russia. The minority legislation that has been enacted in independent Estonia caters mainly to the former group, addressing in the first place their cultural needs. Although predominantly Russian-speaking, the Estonian Jews have been careful to distance themselves from any forms of separatism arising from within the local Russian community. At the same time, they have not developed their own agenda for the study and teaching of Jewish history in Estonia, including the Holocaust. In comparison, the Lithuanian Jewish community, which is only marginally larger than its Estonian counterpart, has, since the late 1980s, maintained its own museum with a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust in Lithuania.

The lack of a well-defined position on issues of history (which in eastern Europe tends to be interwoven with politics) came back to haunt Estonia's Jews during the Zuroff controversy, when the community found itself caught between the hammer and the anvil. Zuroff emphasized that he was working in close cooperation with the local Jewish community, and gave the phone number of a Jewish organization in the advertisement that his office had published in newspapers. This elicited a negative response within public opinion, which sought to imply that the local Jewish community was responsible for anything Zuroff had said. Unable to withstand the pressure, the head of the community, Cilja Laud, made a 'gesture of reconciliation', arguing that the Soviet practice of banning Jewish language and culture had amounted to a *cultural Holocaust*. Next, Laud assured the Estonian majority that she personally did not believe that any collaborators in the Holocaust were still alive. Finally, referring to the results of a linguistic study that was commissioned specifically for the purpose, she announced in the name of the Estonian Jewish community that she did not consider the publication of the advertisement by the Wiesenthal Center altogether appropriate. This action definitely improved the image of 'our Jews' in the eyes of some Estonian commentators, but put the semi-independent status of minorities in Estonia in question. If anything, the nature of the discussion suggested that the titular population did not consider the Jews a part of Estonian history.

In this respect, it is notable that a recent initiative to memorialize the sites of Jewish slave labor camps in Estonia originated not in Estonia but in the USA.¹⁰ It was neither the Estonian government nor the local Jewish community but the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad that had decided to erect markers at these sites, pursuant to a bilateral agreement between Estonia and the USA signed in January 2003. The Commission was established in 1985 with the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage of American citizens of east and central European descent, first and foremost the Holocaust sites. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Commission has been pursuing a secondary objective of helping those nations aspiring to membership of NATO and the EU to raise the

standards of treatment of ethnic and religious minorities. As of 2004, the Commission has identified 5,000 sites in 11 countries (US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad 2004). While striving for historical accuracy, the Commission has not chosen the most efficient mode of operation. When it comes to Holocaust sites, the Commission has established a practice of using local Jewish communities as proxies, including in Estonia. The Jewish communal leaders are expected to collect additional evidence from survivors and their relatives. The problem is that as of 2005 there were only 15 Holocaust survivors in Estonia. Most, if not all, of them had moved to Estonia after the Second World War from other parts of the Soviet Union, and therefore can be of little help when it comes to establishing the facts. At the same time, the invaluable data collected by local enthusiasts such as Boris Lipkin in Sillamäe have remained unutilized.¹¹ Acting on behalf of the US Commission, the Estonian Jewish community relied on the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity for information, without trying to engage with other historians working on the subject. In short, one would expect a more rigorous approach on the part of the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad in pursuit of its objectives.

Without knowing the context, one might be surprised to hear the explanation of Alexander Dusman, the head of the Jewish communities in East Viru Province, regarding the delay in erecting cenotaphs at the sites of the slave labor camps. He said, among other things, that it was not the best time and that there were some political aspects involved. Otherwise, one would think that the only issue at stake was that of historical memory. Dusman was apparently referring to the controversy surrounding the monument to Estonians who had fought in the ranks of the German *Waffen-SS*, which was erected at Lihula in August of 2004. The monument was established at the initiative of the local mayor, the notorious nationalist and ardent anti-Semite Tiit Madisson. The then Estonian Prime Minister, apprehensive of negative reactions abroad, ordered the dismantling of the monument, causing a public outcry and a minor government crisis. Nationalist sentiments, peppered by occasional anti-Semitic remarks, flared. Ironically, in October 2005 the monument was re-erected in the grounds of a privately owned museum at Lagedi near Tallinn, without attracting much public attention.¹² The sociologist Andrus Saar warned that in the ideologically charged environment created by the Lihula affair, the erection of new memorials could strain interethnic relations.¹³ What both Dusman and Saar meant was that the radical elements in Estonian society would object to the commemoration of Jewish victimhood while the true Estonian patriots, as they see them, are not being acknowledged by their own government. The memory of the Holocaust has prompted a bitter reaction from some Estonians who feel robbed of their status as a victim. The ill-conceived balance theory has also extended into commemoration: if communist crimes were as gruesome as Nazi crimes, then the perpetrators of the latter can only be punished if the perpetrators of the former are put into the dock.

When making a connection between the Holocaust and Estonian history, ordinary Estonians, local politicians, amateur historians and homegrown revisionists tend to speak the same language. The leader of a political party answered the question of

why the Holocaust has never become a subject of discussion in Estonia as follows: 'For fifty years the Estonians have been occupied and persecuted by the Soviet power. The West did not help us when Estonians were deported to Siberia. Back then no one protested Therefore only few people [in Estonia today] are concerned about the crimes committed during the period of German occupation, however horrible they were' (Kubu 2000, p. 44). A majority of online readers reacted negatively to the introduction of the Holocaust Memorial Day in 2003. The commentators stuck to the 'all-suffered' argument, while alluding to the past experience of official Soviet holidays that had been observed only insincerely. The Estonian officials echoed these sentiments in their statements. In October 2000 the then Minister of Education, Tõnis Lukas, declared that he did not see the need to study the Holocaust or to mark Auschwitz Day in schools. His successor Toivo Maimets three years later suggested linking the commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day in schools with events marking the mass deportation of Estonians in 1941 and 1949 (The Stephen Roth Institute 2004, 2005). In January 2002 the Jewish community in Tallinn hosted a traveling exhibition about the life of Anne Frank. All of the local Russian schools visited the exhibition, but not a single Estonian school.¹⁴

Holocaust Denial

Popular attitudes towards the Holocaust and its commemoration in Estonia often carry over into the historical profession. For example, a local historian, Ivika Maidre, argued against what she called 'double marking' of the sites of former Jewish slave labor camps in Estonia. Maidre appears both arrogant and cynical in her argumentation. 'I would understand if those monuments had been put up by some kind of UFOs, but they were actually erected by people', she said about the Soviet-era memorials marking some of the camp sites. According to Maidre, the memorial stone at Vaivara that was erected by the Jewish community in 1994 'had a Star of David and even a piece of barbed wire engraved on it. In other words, everything is already there'. As far as the main camp at Vaivara is concerned, Maidre believes that 'many have an impression that it had been something horrible'. She backs her argument by referring to the fact that the former head of Vaivara camp, Helmut Schnabel, had been sentenced to 16 years of jail, but served only six: 'since he had not been incriminated in anything much after the war, it appears that things were not actually that bad'.¹⁵

Holocaust denial began making inroads in Estonia in the late 1990s, and has been firmly established since then. The publication of the Estonian translation of Jürgen Graf's infamous *Der Holocaust Schwindel* in 2001 helped to spread the message and to secure a following. In November 2002 the Swiss 'revisionist' made a blitz visit to the Estonian capital and even received an hour on Estonian state TV. The undeserved attention that Graf received in Estonia made some of the participants in the discussion embrace the pseudo-scientific theories that he has been promoting as an authoritative source, though it is mainly Graf's image as a martyr rather than his poorly constructed arguments that appeals to some nationalist Estonians. In 2005 the Estonian revisionists received an institutional cover in the form of a website called

Sõltumatu Infokeskus (Independent Information Center). The Independent Information Center is a reincarnation of an organization established under the same name in 1988, except that it no longer adheres to the guiding principle of 'not promoting ideas that incite violence, racism, and chauvinism'.¹⁶ In the best tradition of the California-based Institute for Historical Review, the Independent Information Center nominally promotes free speech but actually engages with conspiracy theories of various kinds, including 'the Holocaust myth'.¹⁷

Remarkably, the two best known anti-Semites and Holocaust deniers in Estonia, Jüri Lina (b. 1949) and Tiit Madisson (b. 1950), are former dissidents who at one point were forced to emigrate (Madisson also served a six-year prison sentence). With the Soviet Union gone for good, they have discovered for themselves new enemies in the form of Jews and Freemasons. Lina and Madisson have contributed to the body of revisionist literature by each authoring several books of an anti-Semitic nature. Lina's *Under the Sign of the Scorpion: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Power* (2003) and Madisson's *The New World Order: Secret Activities of the Judaists and Freemasons to Subjugate Nations and States* (2004) and *The Holocaust: The Most Dispiriting Zionist Lie of the 20th Century* (2006) offer the usual mélange of insinuations and untruths from the repertoire of Holocaust deniers. According to Madisson, Hitler's *Mein Kampf* did not contain calls to destroy the Jews; the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of 1938 was a Zionist provocation; the Wannsee Conference had nothing to do with the mass murder of Jews; no Jews were gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau; and the Nuremberg Tribunal was a hoax; etc. Most of his sources, predictably, come from the internet. Madisson urges his readers to stop cringing before Zionists, as they did in the past before communists, and to break away from the 'Holocaust industry' (referring to the term coined by Norman Finkelstein). Why do Estonians have to commemorate Auschwitz Day and learn about the Holocaust in schools, he asks, while the mass deportation of Estonians has not been attached a universal significance. 'Perhaps because our pain does not matter to the world', Madisson speculates.¹⁸ The latest opus by Madisson – which is designated as 'a book for those who think' – became a bestseller in the bookstore chain *Rahva Raamat* and received several positive reviews.¹⁹ Lina and Madisson appear to be the only east Europeans to enter the pantheon of Holocaust deniers. They have the dubious honor of being listed in an informal top-20 alongside Jean-Marie Le Pen, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ernst Zündel and David Irving.

Holocaust denial is not criminalized in Estonia. Legal mechanisms that would effectively prevent the distribution of this kind of literature are missing (Poleshchuk 2006). The government refuses to interfere, referring to freedom of the press. In spring 1993, bookstores in the Estonian capital received a shipment of anti-Semitic pamphlets called *The Program of Jewish World Conquest* (a reprint from a publication banned in Estonia in 1933). The Justice Ministry had just one suggestion of how to address this issue – to file a court case. In the end, the store managers yielded to the request of a member of the local Jewish community to remove the pamphlet from the shelves. Two months later, however, the same lampoon was printed in Tartu under the title *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The publisher ended up in court; the court of first instance in Tartu dismissed the case, but the court of second instance prohibited the circulation (Saks 2003).

Anti-Semitism in Estonia: Aberration or Tendency?

How far has anti-Semitism permeated the fabric of Estonian society? The reluctance to reopen war crime cases, the rise of Holocaust denial, the lack of comprehensive historical studies and the failure to see the long-term benefits of Holocaust education can all be viewed as part of a larger phenomenon. As always, it is most difficult to make generalizations about the so-called 'ordinary people', the 'common folk', or simply the 'masses'. The aggressive response to Zuroff's campaign might be circumstantial, and the anti-Russian attitudes might be caused by anxiety on the eve of joining the EU, as some newspaper readers did indeed suggest. To check whether this explanation holds water, I chose at random an article on a relevant topic a few years down the line. My eye caught an article with a provocative title, 'Are the Estonians Judeophobes?', which appeared on 3 March 2005, on the *Delfi* internet portal. By that time Estonia had already become an EU member, the Zuroff controversy no longer received prime-time coverage, and the Lihula affair was almost a year old. In other words, there was nothing that could spark immediate reaction. The article itself was less instructive than the responses it had generated – to be precise 422 commentaries at the time of reading – which shows a profound interest on the part of the readers.

The article was written by Aavo Savitsch, who signed in using the pseudonym 'person interested in history' (*ajaloohuviline*). Since the time of writing Savitsch has developed into a full-fledged Holocaust denier. Although Savitsch does not directly address the question he has posed, the arguments used suggest a positive answer. The arguments are old: Jews suffered but so did other nations, including the Estonians; individual Jews who served in the NKVD tortured Estonians; the more we hear about the six million victims of the Holocaust, the more exaggerated that number appears; so many decades have elapsed since the end of World War Two that we should let the dead rest in peace and not work them into the foundation of a certain state (Savitsch 2005).

The commentaries can be divided by major themes, which are as easily identifiable as they are predictable. Judging by the number of messages that attack Zuroff, he has left a lasting impression on the Estonians. The readers prove quite imaginative, fantasizing about tortures to which they want to subject Zuroff. 'Thank you, Efroim, for having taught us to hate Jews!' concludes one contributor. Jews supposedly hate all other nations, and also themselves. What is even worse, 'a few among the Jews who mistreated Estonians are certainly still around'.

Some of the discussants suggest a 'final solution to the Jewish problem' either in the form of emigration or physical violence. A reader who identified himself as 'Liberty' exclaimed: 'the article gets ten points, and all the Zionists get the hell out of here!' 'SS' puts it more eloquently: 'Every Jew is a moving advertisement for the next Holocaust!' Attempts to appeal to well-known historical facts prompt even more hostile reactions. Thus, 'Gabriel' wrote that thousands of Jews had been murdered in Estonia with the help of the locals, and that Estonia was the first country in Europe proclaimed *judenfrei*. In response, someone threatens: 'we will kill even more [of them] if you do not shut up!'

Particularly striking is the inability to sustain a dialog. Those who share the views expressed in the article (an overwhelming majority) rarely cross swords

with opponents. Inattentive to what the other side is saying, discussants immediately propose to put their antagonists against the wall. A certain Aleksandrov, writing entirely in capital letters, praises the French law on Holocaust denial and laments the negative effects of freedom of speech in Estonia, claiming that those individuals who maintain that the Nazis did not seek the annihilation of Jews should be fined, jailed or even executed. In response, someone suggests killing off people like Aleksandrov who 'promote the Holocaust myth'. Another contributor, meanwhile, threatens to start 'hanging all the damn NKVD people' who insist that Estonians are Judeophobes.

Although homophobic attitudes do not transpire in the discussion surrounding the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, anti-Russian sentiments feature prominently. One contributor, for instance, wonders where anti-Semitism came from: 'Ten years ago there was no other hostility but hostility towards the Russians. Jews should probably blame themselves for that'. Another states plainly that, 'Estonians [only] hate Russians. Jews do not belong under discussion'. Several readers believe that anti-Semitism has been deliberately promoted in Estonia by the Russian security service in an attempt 'to spread hostile information about Estonians' and 'to pitch Jews and Israel against Estonia and vice versa'. As often happens, those who preach anti-Semitism also tend to be xenophobic. The way 'Rgu' and 'Ma' write about Africans refers to the same phenomenon. 'Rgu': 'I like Arabs even less. Even Negroes are ok'; 'Ma': 'False political correctness is when you cannot tell a Negro he is a Negro, since it is considered offensive . . . I used to have a positive attitude towards the Jews. Now, however, my blood pressure rises when I hear the word "Jew". In no time I have turned into a Jew-hater'.

Those among the Estonians who have been unable to face the Holocaust are employing the usual set of arguments to negate it. The most predictable is denial. For a particular individual Savitsch's article was a revelation: 'I am very glad that someone has dared to describe also the other side, and not what Jews have been telling [us]'. Many readers are eager to engage in the number-game: 'The figure, six million Jews, has been falsified. In reality, the Nazis killed a few thousand communists, whom Estonians would have cleansed sooner or later anyway'. The ongoing conflict in the Middle East provides a further excuse for ignorance: 'The number of Jewish victims in Germany is bluff, chutzpah'. '[E]in Mensch' went further than any other commentator-denier, by praising Hitler and his policies: 'Such extraordinary individuals like Hitler get born once in hundreds of thousands of years. Hitler sacrificed his country and himself to save Europe from destruction. If it had not been for him, we would not be speaking Estonian now. Hitler was aware what he did when he adopted his racial laws. It was simply a question of survival. If it had not been for Hitler, the Jews would have seized power in Germany, and history would have turned bloodier . . .' Remarkably, 'ein Mensch' has drawn some criticism from his pen pals, not because of his bigotry, though, but rather because of his adoration of all things German.

The most potent conduit of Holocaust denial in Estonia is, however, historical relativism. A majority of Estonians have used the recent history of their country, the Soviet period in particular, as a measuring stick of human suffering/cruelty. This attitude was spelled out in a sentence by one of the contributors: 'As if we had

not suffered!’ The online readers keep repeating the same argument over and over again: ‘Believe me, Estonians suffered more than the Jews during the war and the subsequent Soviet occupation’; ‘Estonians did not have it easy either. We have been terrorized for long fifty years, but carry on living and do not whimper much. You better shut up, Jews!’ One can often encounter the following exposition: ‘What is so special about the Jews, that the international media is talking about them and their problems all the time? Why not other nations and their problems? For example, why have those who murdered Estonians not been prosecuted in Russia?’ The idea of Estonia as a victim nation makes commemoration of the Holocaust redundant. As one of the *Delfi* discussants stated: ‘True Estonians will never lower their heads before Jewish suffering because we have endured even worse suffering. Americans and Jews do not understand that!’ One after another, commentators discard the Holocaust and its commemoration as something that allegedly belittles the Estonians’ trauma and provokes resentment. The discussion stalls when someone suggests: ‘Commemorate your Holocaust – why should we be bothered – but do not expect us to howl along!’ Some argued that, ‘the time has come to close this chapter and carry on with one’s life’. The older generation of internet users not only reject the need for Holocaust education but also assert their right to impose this view on their offspring. ‘Capone’ sides with Holocaust deniers when he exclaims: ‘And why should my children study... this shit, which is apparently exaggerated and sometimes built directly on lies?’

It would be erroneous to conclude that anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial in Estonia is nothing but a result of the collective trauma inflicted by the Stalinist USSR. Even if we decide for a moment to overlook the most extreme views, popular opinion superimposes the notion that Jews do not belong to Estonian history. The following commentary by one of the *Delfi* contributors is fairly representative of that mindset: ‘For some reason, the discussion as to whether Estonians are anti-Semites reoccurs when we commemorate our history and suffering. Jews do not respect other peoples’ history. Otherwise why do they consider themselves the chosen people?’ Commentaries such as ‘I do not believe that this problem will disappear until after the last Jew has vanished from planet earth’ sound almost weird in the Estonian context. The Estonian Jewish community has shrunk by more than 50% (from 4,613 to 1,818) over the past 18 years, becoming virtually invisible. At the same time, many online readers argue that their attitudes towards the Jews started changing for the worse only recently. The irony is that as soon as Jews attempted to assert their identity – of which the Holocaust is an essential part – emerging from the rubble of the ‘family of Soviet peoples’ myth, they made many of their former ‘relatives’ feel uncomfortable. The numbers do not actually matter. Jean-Paul Sartre had pointedly described this phenomenon in his essay, ‘Anti-Semite and Jew’ (1948). Circumstances and names change but the emotional response stays the same. The name of this negative emotion is anti-Semitism, and there are many people in Estonia who harbor it.

Naturally, not all of the individuals who express their opinion on the internet are hostile towards the Jews. The minority of voices that are not sound depressed and pessimistic: ‘Just read those commentaries. Hostility is definitely there. Do Estonians themselves not like [discussing] the theme of deportation and suffering? Continually! All the time! Do you not get tired of it?’ Someone had followed the discussion

very closely: 'At the moment we have got 387 commentaries, 95 percent of which condemn the Zionist cult of Holocaust as pseudoscientific, among them school kids and people with somewhat better writing skills'. One other reader went even further in his or her conclusions: 'Most (perhaps 99 percent) commentators who have been bashing Jews in Delfi.ee have not acquired even basic norms of ethics and behavior. It is unfortunate that people of the older generation harbor hatred and hostility. I think that one should be blaming one's parents, not the Jews'. The saddest part is that during the entire discussion only one individual was able to explain what makes the Holocaust different from other forms of mass violence: 'You should understand that whether Jews were killed on a lesser or larger scale than the others does not matter. What matters is that were killed because of their ETHNICITY!'

Conclusions

Not without reason, anti-Semitism has been described as a litmus test for any given nation. The perceptions of the Holocaust in Estonia thus project the views of ordinary Estonians with regard to their history. The Estonians seem to be engrossed in their past. Age difference appears to play no role in the popular perception of communism as a quintessential evil. The reflections on recent history, unexpectedly, have given a boost to latent anti-Semitism. Peculiar to Estonia, Stars of David (along with friendly advice to leave for Israel) that occasionally appear on the walls of buildings in larger cities sometimes contain swastikas, at other times a hammer and a sickle. The discussion on the Holocaust in Estonia has also revealed certain insecurities about regained independence. One internet commentator argued that altogether the Estonians have an inferiority complex. Many Estonians are afraid to acknowledge that some of their countrymen committed crimes against the Jews because they believe that by so doing they would stain the reputation of the new democracy. In effect, this makes it even harder to get out of the state of denial and to face the challenges posed by modernity.

The Holocaust runs counter to the Estonian (read: Baltic) national narrative. The Jews, who had been marginalized as a minority, appear to have claimed a victim status reserved for the titular population. This has served to revive old stereotypes, from deicide and treachery to greed and behind-the-scenes manipulation. In the current political context, the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism has been replaced (or rather augmented) by a similar myth of the Russo-Jewish conspiracy. Some Estonians suspect the hand of Moscow behind the calls of the Simon Wiesenthal Center to prosecute the few surviving Nazi collaborators. Ironically, the upsurge of anti-Semitism occurred in the run-up to EU ascension. The peculiarity of anti-Jewish sentiment in Estonia, marked by the references to the Soviet occupation period, adds value to Sartre's analysis of 'anti-Semitism without Jews'. No matter what the primary cause, latent anti-Semitism may come to the fore when and where we least expect it. Unfortunately, the Estonian case teaches us exactly that.

We should thus abandon the fiction that Estonia and Estonians are somehow unique in the context of eastern Europe, and immune to the bacillus of anti-Semitism. The references to the benevolent treatment of the Jewish minority and low levels of

anti-Semitism in interwar Estonia obscure rather than help to explain the reasons why some Estonians decided to collaborate in the Nazi mass murder of Jews. The figures of economic growth, high computer literacy, political stability and journalistic transparency cannot, and should not, deflect attention from the problems intrinsically connected to recent Estonian history and its interpretations. One needs simply to scratch the surface in order to find lurking behind it banal, blatant, inexplicable anti-Semitism. At the same time I acknowledge the limitations of my analysis. What cannot be answered with certainty is whether Estonians are more anti-Semitic now than they were, say, 15 years ago. One can only speculate what the electronic media could have revealed if it were as advanced in 1991 as it is in 2007.

In the face of rising anti-Semitism in Estonia, the position adopted by the representatives of the local Jewish community leaves one puzzled. The head of the Estonian Jewish community keeps pronouncing from high tribunes that the Estonian government has condemned anti-Semitism in Estonia, that the Jewish community is highly regarded in Estonia, and that the Estonians are learning how to appreciate the suffering of other peoples. Simultaneously, she has emphasized that one cannot learn only from negative examples, encouraging her audiences not to base their conclusions about the level of anti-Semitism in Estonia on 'single negative incidents'.²⁰ It appears almost as if the leadership of the Jewish community has bought into the popular anti-Semitic discourse. As one internet user urged: 'Estonian Jews: do not submit yourself to Zuroff's provocations, but continue living your life in peace. Zuroffs do not care about you or the Holocaust. They are using the Holocaust as their last chance to squeeze money from other nations'. I cannot help wondering whether this is blindness, self-deception or a deliberate attempt to pass over a problem in silence.

The greatest challenge is to explain to Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians the difference between Auschwitz and Kolyma, without rushing to emphasize the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust. The context is everything. There is a strong need to put the Holocaust, as it played out in the Baltic, into the general history of the Nazi Final Solution. In other words, the Baltic scholarly community has to help the critical mass of citizens to break through the narrow confines of national history. Only then may ordinary Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians be able to face the issue of collaboration and the lasting consequences of denial *sine ira et studio*. Although the new status of EU member state has not performed miracles in this respect, it may prove beneficial in the long run. It is also clear that due to latent anti-Semitism anything coming from Jewish groups will be considered biased in Estonia. This automatically increases the role of local agencies – historians, intellectuals, politicians, NGOs, etc. An emphasis on the rule of law and constructive debate, macro thinking and universal justice would make Estonia's entry into the era of globalization smoother. And who said that history is not part of the globalization process?

Notes

- 1 The facts are derived from my forthcoming book, *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse University Press).
- 2 Eight Jews were deported to Estonia from Finland in November 1942, but none of these held Finnish citizenship. Upon arrival, all of them were executed.

- 3 Männil was one of several deserters from the Red Army hidden by a Jewish woman, Miriam Lepp, in the summer of 1941. She was executed on 13 July 1942. One can only speculate whether Männil as a policeman was aware of her arrest and whether he did anything to save her from death.
- 4 See, for example: Lepassalu (1998, pp. 1–2); Kaldre (1998, pp. 1–7); Jõgeda (2000). Laar wrote that Tallinn Police Prefect Evald Mikson was not guilty (*Miksonil ei ole süüid*). In December 1941 the German Security Police arrested Mikson on charges of torturing prisoners and misappropriating their valuables. He was not released until two years later. The Estonian State Archives in Tallinn contain several documents from August and September 1941 with Mikson's signature authorizing the execution of individual Jews.
- 5 Weiss-Wendt (1997, pp. 53–5); Levin (1997, pp. 297–300); Weiss-Wendt (1998, pp. 193–95).
- 6 See the exchange between A. Weiss-Wendt and T. Hiio in *Vikerkaar* (Weiss-Wendt & Hiio 2001).
- 7 A. Jaarma, 'Nõukogude okupatsiooni poolt 1940–1950-ndail aastail Eestis toime pandud sõja- ja inimsusevastaste kuritegude uurimine ja inimsusevastaste kuritegude eest vastutusele võtmine', lecture delivered at the Estonian National Library in Tallinn on 24 April 2001.
- 8 See Kott's book review in *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (2007, p. 323). Eva-Clarita Onken, who evaluated the volume as part of a recent review article in *Journal of Baltic Studies*, is also pessimistic about its ability to encourage debate and critical reflection (Onken 2007, p. 112).
- 9 See Kaplinski's exposé, for example, in *Vikerkaar* (2001, pp. 214–19).
- 10 There were 19 such camps in Estonia (going from east to west): Narva, Narva-Jõesuu, Auvere, Putke, Vaivara, Viivikonna, Soska, Kuremäe, Jõhvi, Ereda, Kohtla, Saka, Kiviõli, Sonda, Aseri, Kunda, Jägala, Lagedi and Klooga. Jägala and Lagedi were not, strictly speaking, 'labor camps'. Larger camps such as Viivikonna, Kiviõli and Ereda were effectively subdivided into two sections; hence the disparity in numbers of Jewish slave labor camps in Estonia as they appear in various accounts. In addition, the Germans operated five smaller camps in northwestern Russia, southern Estonia and northern Latvia, which were in existence for only a brief period.
- 11 Starting from the late 1980s Lipkin, who is not affiliated with the Jewish community, began mapping the former sites of Jewish slave labor camps at Viivikonna and Vaivara and interviewing farmers who had lived in the vicinity of the camps. The material thus collected has been published in a local newspaper and is available at a local museum.
- 12 Between 29 July and 18 September 1944, Lagedi was the site of a makeshift Jewish camp. The camp was located across from the train station and housed 2,050 Jewish prisoners from Ereda who were awaiting a further deportation to Stutthof concentration camp. On 18 September an estimated 426 Jews who had been previously transferred to Lagedi from Klooga were executed in a nearby forest. *Põhjarannik*, 18 September 2004; *Postimees*, 10 September 2004.
- 13 The Round Table meeting on minority issues by the Estonian President (2002) minutes, 10 June, available at: <http://vp2001-2006.vpk.ee/et/institutsioonid/ymarlaud.php?gid=24080>, accessed 5 July 2007. This does not imply that ethnic Russians on the whole are less prone to anti-Semitism than Estonians.

In March 2004, two individuals were detained in Sillamäe – a city with a predominantly Russian-speaking population – for painting anti-Semitic slogans and swastikas on the walls of a building.

- 15 *Põhjarannik*, 18 September 2004. Schnabel had been part of the Nazi camp administration since 1934, first at Sulza in Thuringia and then at Buchenwald. Many Holocaust survivors have identified Schnabel as the individual who had carried out selections at Vaivara. He was implicated in homicide at Viivikonna and Narva camps and oversaw the liquidation of Ereda camp.
- 16 <http://si.kongress.ee/?a=page&page=43e129325acc205ba5ece&subpage=42f293855c1750876fbc>, accessed 2 August 2007.
- 17 See organization website at: <http://si.kongress.ee/>. According to the website, the organization was founded in response to the parliament's decision to drop the territorial claims to Russia (based on the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920). The unilateral decision of the Estonian President to seek membership in the EU was cited as another unlawful act that warranted intervention.
- 18 Lina (2003); Madisson (2004, 2006). See also Lina's article in *Eesti Aeg*, 8 April 1992. In his first book Madisson blamed the Jews for masterminding both World Wars and the Bolshevik Revolution, financing Hitler, and planning a conspiracy to rule the world.
- 19 See, for example, Piirisild (2006) and A. Savitsch's review on the website of the Independent Information Center, 1 August 2007, available at: <http://si.kongress.ee/?a=page&page=42e12d241a164247355b6&subpage=45016c51ddfee722755eb>, accessed 1 August 2007.
- 20 'Statement by the President of the Estonian Jewish Community Mrs. Cilja Laud', delivered on her behalf at the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism in Cordoba on 8 June 2005, available at: http://www.osce.org/documents/cio/2005/06/15052_en.pdf+Statement+by+the+President+of+the+Estonian+Jewish+Community+Mrs.+Cilja+Laud%E2%80%90, &hl=no&ct=clnk&cd=1&gl=ee, accessed 30 July 2007.

References

- Bruchfeld, S. & Levine, P. (2003) *Jutustage sellest oma lastele: Raamat holokaustist Euroopas aastatel 1933–1945* (Tartu, Israeli Sõbrad), pp. 85–93.
- Hiio, T., et al. (2006) *Estonia, 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* (Tallinn, Tallinn Publishing House).
- Hilberg, R. (1993) *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (London, Lime Tree).
- Jõgeda, T. (2000) 'Kuidas Tartu koonduslaagri ülemast Karl Linnasest nõukogude sõjatrofee tehti', *Kes/Kus*, May.
- Kaldre, P. (1998) 'Wiesenthali vendeta', *Luup*, 12, June, pp. 1–7.
- Kaplinski, J. (2001) 'Mida need juudid ometi tahavad?', *Vikerkaar*, 15, 8–9, August–September, pp. 214–19.
- Kott, M. (2007) 'Book review (*Estonia 1940–1945: Reports of the Estonian International Commission for the Investigation of Crimes Against Humanity* (Tallinn: Tallinn Publishing House, 2006)', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21, 2, Fall, p. 323.

- Krichevsky, L. (1997) 'Lithuania May Indict Jews for Genocide', *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix*, 50, 11, December.
- Kubu, M. (2000) *Sverige og Estland/Rootsi ja Eesti* (Trelleborg, The Swedish Institute), p. 44.
- Kwiet, K. (1998) 'Rehearsing for Murder: The Beginning of the Final Solution in Lithuania in June 1941', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 12, 1, Spring, p. 14.
- Lepassalu, V. (1998) 'Kas eestlased olid massimõrvarid?', *Luup*, 9, May, pp. 1–2.
- Levin, D. (1997) 'Book Review, The Holocaust of the Estonian Jews, 1941', in Frankel, J. (ed.) (1997) *The Fate of the European Jews, 1939–45: Continuity or Contingency?* (New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press), pp. 297–300.
- Lina, J. (2003) *Skorpionid märgi all: Nõukogude võimu tõus ja langus* (Stockholm, Referent).
- Lithuanian Parliament (2000) *Foreign Power: Excerpts from Lithuanian Laws on Communism, Occupation, Resistance* (Vilnius, Lithuanian Parliament).
- Madisson, T. (2004) *Maailma uus kord: Judaiistide ja vabamüürlaste varjatud tegevus rahvaste ning riikide allutamisel* (Lihula, Ohvrikivi).
- Madisson, T. (2006) *Holokaust: XX sajandi masendavaim sionistlik vale* (Lihula, Ohvrikivi).
- Maripuu, M. (2006) 'Execution of Estonian Jews in Local Detention Institutions in 1941–42', in Hiio, T. et al. (2006), p. 661.
- Onken, E.-C. (2007) 'The Politics of Finding Historical Truth: Reviewing Baltic History Commissions and their Work', *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 38, 1, March, p. 112.
- Piirisild, J. (2006) 'Tiit Madisson juutide vandenõust', *Pärnu Postimees*, 19 April.
- Poleshchuk, V. (2006) *Estonian Minority Population and Non-Discrimination*, Report (Tallinn, Legal Information Center for Human Rights), p. 21f, available at: <http://www.lichr.ee/docs/cerd-final.pdf>, accessed 1 August 2007.
- Puide, P. (1997) *Samuil Braschinskys försvunna vrede. Dokumentärroman* (Stockholm, Norstedts).
- Saks, E. (2003) *Kes on juudid ja mis on Holokaust?* (Tallinn, Sild), p. 147.
- Savitsch, A. (2005) 'Kas eestlased on juudivaenulikud? 3 March, available at: <http://www.delfi.ee/archives/print.php?id=9888280>, accessed 29 July 2007.
- The Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University (2004, 2005) *Annual Report: Baltic States*, available at: <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/>; <http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/asw2005/baltics.htm>, accessed 2 August 2007.
- Tracevskis, M. (2000) 'Law Opens Way for Genocide Home Trials', *The Baltic Times*, 16–22 March.
- US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (2004) *Report to the Congress and the President of the United States of America, 2–7, 20–21*, available at: http://www.heritageabroad.gov/reports/doc/2004_Report.pdf, accessed 7 July 2007.
- Weiss-Wendt, A. (1997) 'Eestlased, lätlased ja Holokaust', *Kleio*, 19, 1, pp. 53–5.
- Weiss-Wendt, A. (1998) 'Book review (Eugenia Gurin-Loov, *Suur Häving: Eesti juutide katastroof/The Holocaust of the Estonian Jews*)', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 12, 1, Spring, pp. 193–5.
- Weiss-Wendt, A. (2009) *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY, Syracuse University Press).
- Weiss-Wendt, A. & Hiio, T. (2001) 'Inimsusevastaste Kuritegude Uurimise Eesti Rahvusvahelise Komisjoni tööst', *Vikerkaar*, 15, 8–9, August–September, pp. 220–24.

Anton Weiss-Wendt received a PhD in modern Jewish history from Brandeis University. Before joining the Norwegian Holocaust Centre in Oslo he taught Soviet history at Keele University in the UK. He has published in *Journal of Genocide Research*, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, *Nationalities Papers*, *East European Jewish Affairs*, *Yad Vashem Studies* and *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*. His book, *Murder Without Hatred: Estonians and the Holocaust*, will be published in 2009 by Syracuse University Press. He is currently writing a book on the Soviet Union and the UN Genocide Convention. (anton.weiss-wendt@hlsenteret.no)
