

Amos Elon

## Politics of Memory

The theme this morning is memory. Memory has many uses and social functions. Hence, inevitably, politics of memory. This is my theme. Before I reach it I should point out that memory and history are not necessarily synonymous. Sometimes they are opposites. "Memory is life", Pierre Nora writes. "It is always carried by living people and therefore it is in permanent evolution". Memory is open to all kinds of uses and abuses, current interests, current hopes, fears, passions and manipulations. Above all, it always belongs to our own time. I'll be speaking this morning of two very different recent uses, the memory — not the history — of the Nazi holocaust. In Israel, where I live and where I've been looking into these things for years; and in Germany, where in the past nine months, as a fellow at this hospitable institute, I have been reading through the vast literature on the subject, travelling about the country, and talking to people of different backgrounds, *Ossies* and *Wessies*, old and young. It's not the first time I do this. In 1965 I spent a year in Germany trying to find out how Germans were coping, or not coping, with their past.

Now if you follow events in Germany, as I have over the years, with a mixture of surprise, hope and alarm, one thing inevitably springs to mind, namely that fifty years after its demise, the Third Reich is still alive and endowed with a kind of negative energy. More alive, it would seem, than, say, twenty-five years ago. Few people, if any, would have foreseen then that the past would still weigh so heavily as it does today on the public life and culture of Germany. It haunts and perplexes in turn. Not that there is any nostalgia — except perhaps in some small fringe groups. Nostalgia, in any case, would have been difficult. In modern eyes the Third Reich is likely to appear rather ridiculous with its square manners, its cult of sacrifice and mindless muscle-masculinity, its insistence on the subordinate social role of women as blue-eyed, blond and busty machines for bearing or nursing the male warrior, its worship of authority and war, or its rejection of modern art. Negative energy of the past implies both memory and repression. Repression is a fact. The vast literature on this subject bears witness to this. In some cases, memory is restructured to make it easier to bear as when people say that not six million died but only three or one; or, that they only heard about it after the war; or, that the concentration

camps were not a German but a British invention in the Boer war; or, that Hitler did not commit only evil but also some good etc. etc. Sometimes, memory is lip service. Max Horkheimer correctly foresaw more than thirty years ago a phenomenon occasionally witnessed today, when the ritualized lip service to guilt serves mostly to give the new nationalism and the new xenophobia a good conscience. Remembrance in Germany is often an intensive effort at forgetting, or at excusing, or explaining away, or at being sorry for oneself. As when, speaking of the murdered Jews, there are those who will shed tears over what "we have lost"; or, when you pass the site of a former synagogue, one of those destroyed during the so called *Reichskristallnacht* and you see signs that say "Hier wütete die Barbarei" ("here raged barbarism") and it is only the date— not always given - that allows you to guess the how, the when and the why.

That there is a politics of memory in Germany has long been evident. You see it in the nature of Reparation payments over the years. Jews benefited more than other victims of Nazism because there was a political interest in placating Jews rather than gypsies (who for decades had no political voice at all) or Polish slave laborers or Russian prisoners of war. There may have been a moral urge to compensate Poles and Russians but there was no political interest in doing so. Quite the contrary, Poland and Russia were on the other side of the Cold War front. Furthermore, the Poles were betrayed by their own governments. You will remember that Gierek, their Prime Minister, at one point accepted a one-off token payment on their behalf which never reached the victims but was squandered on grand socialist projects like Nova Huta or some similar venture.

This is one of the components of the argument I'll be sharing with you this morning. I have only an hour and must speak in shorthand. Some of my observations may seem rambling or disjointed. I look forward to arguing about them with you later on. I must emphasize their tentative nature. My work here is not finished. Also — and some of you know this better than I — Germany is a very imprecise country. Nor is memory the only subject I looked at while I was here. The demise of the GDR is another. A third is the new role of Germany as a dominant power in the heart of Europe. The unease about this new role among outsiders need not surprise Germans since so many Germans seem obsessed by it themselves. They seem to be saying: "Lock us into a united Europe — otherways we will become dangerous." A leading German politician opposed German participation in the Gulf war because, as he put it, you don't give a bottle of *Schnaps* to an alcoholic. Germans are not only haunted by their past. Sometimes they also hide behind it: during the Gulf war you could see large parts of the same nation that had once had an obsession with power deliberately, perhaps obsessively try to forget their own power. Use and

abuse of power bring us back to our theme. Nothing in Germany is as overshadowed by the past as Power. As one contemplates this new German role as a dominant power in Europe one is struck by an underlying irony. Germany's new continental predominance now appears to be falling almost inadvertently into her lap. But isn't this predominance the very thing — or at least an important component of it— that Germans have twice sought in vain to achieve in this century through the use of force? Here it is, and it seems to grow almost naturally — and without violence — from Germany's geography and from the seemingly overriding force of human, cultural and economic factors! Here it is, and not really because Germans wanted it so. This time they probably don't want it at all. Many may have been content to be another, larger Switzerland. The irony is that it might have come anyway. Hitler only delayed it by half a century. If Hitler had never been born, or if the 1929 crash had never occurred, would you have reached this point say in 1940? I must emphasize once again the tentative nature of these observations. They are the record of a search, a workshop report; in a certain sense, for a writer, and a Jew, an exercise in self-consciousness. I don't need to underline the emotional constraints that accompany an exercise such as this. Take language, as an example. German for me is a foreign language, yet it is my mother's tongue which I spoke almost exclusively during the first ten years of my life. Being here is at once a journalistic, or if you like, a scientific task and a kind of exorcism, working things out in yourself, always aware that in all such observations a kind of Heisenberg principle is at work, the observer affects the observed by his very presence. I remember vividly the first time I visited Berlin as a young student in 1947. The tramlines on the Kurfürstendamm were overgrown with weeds. People rummaged in mountains of dust and rubble. Refugees were sleeping on the steps leading down to the underground. It functioned, I remember wondering, with amazing efficiency. The subway stations were thick with people carrying rucksacks and potatoes in old sacks and wilted cabbages wrapped in torn newspapers. I remember sitting in the underground, looking at these people huddled in their rags and I would mentally redress them in my mind's eye: I would dress them up in brown and black uniforms. I would imagine them marching and cheering and screaming HEIL with a terrible appetite for blood.

The memory of that visit stayed with me for a long time afterwards. One of the first things I did when I arrived in Berlin this time was to take the same underground. A few hours later, here in the library, I happened upon Madame de Staël's famous *De l'Allemagne*. I noticed that she deplored the lack of gothic buildings in Berlin — a very French complaint! This was almost two hundred years ago. Berlin, she wrote, had no past, or not enough to speak of, "on n'y voit rien qui retrace les temps antérieurs". It's

the sort of line that sets your mind reeling. There is still, as you all know, very little gothic here but over the last sixty years there has certainly been more Past here than most people can stomach. The place is so saturated with it that one cannot really be blamed if one feels a natural urge to escape it. The Past isn't past and perhaps never will be. In a place like this one is tempted to use it to measure other pasts, other disasters. Measuring does not mean comparing. Comparing certainly does not mean placing different crimes on the same plane. Even so, it is a problematic thing to do. The problem, as you all know, was the subject of heated debates here in the *Historikerstreit*, a high point in the history of memory in this country. A high point also because it ended with the defeat of the revisionist school but not, unfortunately, before poisoning relations once again between Germans and others, whether victims of Nazism or not, and their descendants. One never hears of Russians who insist that the Gulag was not unique, or that it was a response, a reaction to outside threats. One never hears of anyone in Russia trying to rationalize Workuta through Buchenwald. Here is food for thought. I have seen the *Historikerstreit* compared to other historical debates in England or France, the notorious rows over the French Revolution or those between Arnold Toynbee and Trevor Roper or between A. J. P. Taylor and Trevor Roper on the origins of the Second World War. The comparison falls short of an essential element: what our own Anthony Long might call the identity-forming feature of the German argument. Perhaps this is why the *Historikerstreit* was so bitter and rancorous and produced such a sea of paper. The last count I have seen is more than 2000 publications. In such a brief span of time this would seem an unprecedented record.

The English and French debates also lacked that extra-special psychological dimension which made the *Historikerstreit* in some cases transcend the purely scientific eagerness to get at the facts. Germans are tempted to emphasize the non-specificity of Nazi crimes; Jews are tempted to emphasize, and perhaps over-emphasize, their specificity. Germans are more prone, for understandable reasons, to historicize the holocaust, without necessarily denying responsibility for it, or even a form of collective guilt. It may be psychologically easier to bear the burden of guilt if others, in Moscow or Phnom Penh, share it. By the same token, Jews insist on the singularity of the crime committed against them. There is a syndrome here which I would call the chauvinism of the victim. If the crime is unique it may be easier to bear the pain. Between the two sides there exists a psychological gulf. I don't think it can ever be bridged. It reflects an intractable predicament. What the *Historikerstreit* might mean for the victims was brought home to me a few years ago by the story of a woman, a native of Hamburg who remembered the first time she had arrived at the gigantic,

ghostly railway station of Leipzig, as a fifteen-year old girl. It was pitch dark, in the middle of an air-raid, a few months before the end of the war. Her head was shaved, she was wearing the striped concentration camp uniform of Ravensbrück and was being transferred, together with a hundred or so other inmates, to some slave labor camp in Bavaria. There was total confusion in the station. The Russians were only a few miles away. Some of the deportees hoped to escape into the city and disappear. The SS guards were deserting. But a fairly large crowd of Leipzigers had come to the station and were helping the remaining guards to push the prisoners back into the cattle cars. When many years later that same woman told a West German her story he said: "What did you expect? The Jews declared war on Germany!" And he mentioned the name of a famous West German historian who had just made this claim and supplied the "proof".

A few years ago, the Munich historian Christian Meier went so far as to claim that the holocaust — the sense of shame and guilt over it — was now part of the national identity of modern Germany. I am in no condition to confirm or contradict this claim. But I think it is fair to say that if the last fifty years in Germany are an indication, the weight of the Nazi past gets heavier all the time. Whether you judge by the culture at large, by the books that are written and prominently reviewed, by what is published in the newspapers, by what you constantly see on television, clearly the weight of the past has become more burdensome over the years, not less. Under its avalanche people complain of boredom. I suspect that what many resist is the pain of remembering, the shock of recognizing it was not only Hitler and his henchmen who were responsible but, as has often been suggested, some flawed element in the culture, not just German culture. For that reason it might happen again and they might share again in the responsibility. Some years ago Martin Walser wrote: "In Auschwitz waren alle Deutschen Mitarbeiter". A very strong and not altogether fair judgement. But Horst Krüger was undoubtedly right, when he wrote, in anticipation of the coming avalanche of memory — thirty years ago this was far from certain — "Dieser Hitler, meine ich, der bleibt uns lebenslänglich." The English translation ("This Hitler, we'll stay in his shadow for all our lives") does scant justice to this chilling line. The German denotes a "life sentence". Krüger probably thought that he was talking mostly of his own war generation. But we are now entering the third generation after the war. The more time elapses the more demonic it all appears, a mystery play, endlessly confounding. And at a time when even the last trials of war criminals are practically over.

Twenty-five years ago when I first spent some time in Germany, mostly in Bonn, hardly anyone expected this to happen. In the early sixties Ger-

many was not yet a fully sovereign country. The place was reverberating with voices that called on Germany to draw a line under the past, a finishing line, a *Schlußstrich*. It was time, so the saying went, for Germany to become a "normal country", like all others. This was a fairly common demand. However much it was repeated, however much the memory was repressed — West German society, West German culture succumbed again and again to a Return of the repressed. There was a noted theorist who suggested that repressing the past was a constructive social device that helped integrate the mass of former Nazis into the new democracy, "the productive power of the negative". All this and much more, and yet there is no denying, I think, that the older — some will say the more mature — the Bundesrepublik became the more painfully present was that Past, which was variously called the holocaust, the lost war, or most commonly the German catastrophe. Some of those who tried hardest to bury the past only caused it in the end to be dug up again. If in the fifties one still referred to crimes committed "in the German name", in more recent years these same crimes are seen by many young people as part of their own history, for which many feel a measure, not of guilt, but of personal if distant responsibility. The generational conflict must have had a lot to do with this. Witness Günter Grass's famous magic lenses in *Dog Years*. I don't think there is a country where that conflict was more vehemently played out than in Germany after 1968. The generation that had directly witnessed, or shared in the disaster, perhaps it had to start dying out for the more responsible "we" to emerge. Could it be that as time went on people began to take a tougher view of former Nazis because there were not so many of them around any more? In the past there seemed to be more readiness for lenient judgement. In the most recent trial, a Nazi mass murderer received a life sentence. In the nineteen sixties such men, found guilty of the murder "of an indefinite number of people but not fewer than 5000 or 10000" would often come away with six or ten years in jail. I attended the notorious Auschwitz trial in 1965. Within a few years after the verdict nearly all the defendants were free again to pursue respectable careers, one as an import-export businessman, another as a dentist or an engineer. The man who recently received a life sentence was in his eighties. He may be the last mass murderer to have been tried. I don't know if it was because he was the last, or his advanced age that induced the judges to impose the maximum sentence. But I think it's safe to say there is a greater severity now. Take the case of the television man Werner Höfer. In the sixties I appeared several times on his Sunday talk show. Shortly before I left Germany I received an anonymous letter. The writer inquired if I knew that Höfer had been a Nazi propagandist, of the more elegant kind — the kind that wrote for Goebbels's *Das Reich*, a haven for the half-hearted or

opportunistic. In that publication Höfer was said to have unctuously lauded the hanging of a young pianist, allegedly for having made critical remarks about the Führer. I confronted other panellists with the contents of this letter. "Oh, we know all about this", they said. "It was in the newspapers a long time ago. Höfer is innocent. Those lines about the young pianist were added by Goebbels's men against Höfer's will". Well, this may or may not have been the case. Höfer remained a top star on German television and even became *Intendant* of the *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*. But twenty years later *Der Spiegel* republished the same old allegation. Corporate opinion on Channel One now proved much less lenient, perhaps because public opinion was now less forgiving than it had been twenty-five years before. Höfer was forced to resign. A spectacular career suffered a sudden, unexpected end. Most recently we witnessed the Just case. The tough reactions in Just's case — Just was forced to resign — are noteworthy if we bear in mind that in the fifties and sixties many former Nazis from Globke to Oberlander occupied top positions in government. Nobody could touch them. Theodor Heuss, who had voted for the Enabling Law of 1933, was Federal President.

In Israel after the war there was, at first, a stunned silence. The first years were marked by pangs of conscience and guilt at not having been able to do something to prevent the disaster or at least reduce its dimensions. There was also an inability, frequently noted, of younger, native born Israelis to confront survivors of the holocaust. Diaspora Jews, they were said to have gone like sheep to the slaughter. I remember a Hebrew syntax textbook, widely used in Israeli high schools until at least the late fifties, which included an analysis of Bialik's great lament on the Kishinev pogrom of 1903. None before Bialik nor after had expressed the Jewish will to live in words and rhymes of such beauty and poetic force. The analysis read: "This poem describes the mean brutality of the assailants and the disgraceful shame and cowardice of the Jews of the Diaspora shtetl". In this odd text, 'disgraceful', 'shame' and 'cowardice' were key terms that pointed to the heart of Zionist education and propaganda in their early stages. In the shifting moods of remembrance and rejection, younger Israelis were at first torn between anger and shame at having such a cursed past. Older people, including some leading politicians, were haunted by an anguish, which some of them could never resolve, that they might perhaps have done more to diminish, even marginally, the extent of the tragedy. The first foreign minister Moshe Sharret was obsessed by such questions to the last of his days. He agonized for years over the case of Joel Brand,

the controversial emissary who came out of Hungary in 1944 with Eichmann's offer to exchange lives for trucks. The British held Brand in a military prison in Aleppo. Sharret interrogated him there and came away convinced of Brand's honesty and of the need, not to accept Eichmann's offer, of course, but to continue talking and bluffing in order to gain time. The Russians were, after all, advancing into Hungary. The British would not hear of it. The rescue of Jews was subsidiary in their eyes to the main task of defeating the Nazis. Moreover, the Russians were vehemently against a deal and deeply suspicious of a possible separate Anglo-American-German peace. Sharret later reproached himself for perhaps not having been dramatic enough in his desperate appeals, or too disciplined in his loyalty to the Western allies.

A more realistic attitude developed with some difficulty later on. It did not come gradually. It moved forward in spurts, like the hands of clocks at railway stations, sometimes abruptly. By the late fifties it was common to speak of the holocaust as a central trauma of Israeli society. It is impossible to exaggerate its effect on the process of nation-building. De Tocqueville's observation that the growth of nations resembled the growth of men came to mind. As in the development of men and women the circumstances at birth contribute to the development of nations. One does not have to accept literally this early attempt at psychoanalysing a collective to see that, in Israel, the images cast upon the dark mirrors of the mind at an early formative stage, during which a national ethos and much of the political idiom were born, were those of a veritable hell. The early Zionists had intended Israel to serve as a safe haven for persecuted Jews. But Israel had come into existence too late to save the dead millions. To this day there is a latent hysteria in Israeli life that stems directly from this source. It explains the paranoic loneliness, a main characteristic of the Israeli temper since 1948. It accounts for the towering suspicions, the obsessive urge for self reliance, the fear — which sometimes collapses into contempt — of outsiders, especially of Arabs, and lately of Palestinians. Behind each Arab or Palestinian, Israelis tended to see SS men bent on pushing them once again into gas chambers and crematoria.

Once again, the first thing to remember here is the uniqueness of the holocaust, in Israelis' eyes, as an experience, or memory, within the history of a living people. They are not the only people of course who live under the shadow of a traumatic past. In Europe, the self-image of, say, the Poles or the Irish is rooted in similar notions of historic suffering and martyrdom. The Armenians are perhaps the closest parallel. Their genocide was perpetrated years before that term was coined. It is said to have prompted Hitler to remark: "Who remembers the Armenian massacres?" — so the Jews could safely be annihilated, too. But if others had also been

annihilated, the Jews' case nevertheless seems different — and not only in Jewish or Israeli eyes — because (with the exception of the gypsies) they alone were singled out for extermination as a people, as an alleged "species". Generations of Israelis have been brought up on this sombre faith: Jews had been singled out to die not because of their religion, or their politics or because of what they did, but simply because they were there, they existed.

This message has been instilled in them for years and with far-reaching political, cultural and religious consequences. The combined impact, in the light of hair-raising Arab threats and wanton acts of violence, has been so overwhelming that to successive generations it has assumed the form of an eternal, immutable fate. Out of it grew a distinct political philosophy, a bleak, hard, pessimistic view of life. The late historian Jacob Talmon, described this view, approvingly, as a "divine and creative madness which not only stills all fear and hesitation but also makes for clarity of vision in a landscape bathed in a lurid, distorting light". Talmon wrote these words in 1960. Before he died twenty years later, he had come to regret them. For, if the prevailing trauma of the Nazi holocaust had become more profound and widespread over the years, it was now also manipulated and instrumentalized by politicians and ideologists. And it became more salient, paradoxically, after Israel's lightning victory over three powerful Arab states in 1967. Talmon's "divine and creative madness" had accounted for much of the daring and energy of the young state. After 1967 it was also one of the root causes for much of the narrow-mindedness and nationalist sacro-egoism that came in the wake of the Six Day and the Yom Kippur wars, the paranoia, the xenophobia, the disregard of Palestinian rights and of international opinion. Israeli politics were caught up in their own contradictions. The same right of self-determination Israelis claimed for themselves they now denied to others — in the name of memory. While opposing any attempt to relativize, or historicize the Nazi holocaust, insisting that it was absolutely incomparable and unique — they themselves could call the Arabs Nazis and Arafat another Hitler. In a well-known letter to Ronald Reagan during the Lebanon war, Menachem Begin wrote that when Israeli tanks were rolling into Beirut he felt as though he were breaking into Berlin to catch Hitler in his bunker. Nor was this rhetoric a Likud or a Begin speciality. Abba Eban, the most moderate of all Labour politicians, defined the pre-1967 frontiers, frontiers that had enabled Israel to beat three Arab states in only six days, "Auschwitz borders".

The original difficulty in confronting memory left an imprint on Israeli historiography too. During the first two decades historiography was handicapped by truisms derived from mainstream Zionist ideology. The result was a series of ideological and apologetic works aimed at proving

the historic need for a Jewish state. The details can be found in an important study by Tom Segev, a leading Israeli scholar in this field, entitled *The Seventh Million, Israel and the Holocaust*. I would strongly recommend it for its wealth of information and careful analysis. Segev shows how early Israeli research on Nazism was also affected. It is a fact that most books by Jewish authors on Nazism were written by non-Israelis; only a handful of those were translated into Hebrew, almost always belatedly. Raul Hilberg's monumental work was never translated. Alan Bullock's book on Hitler came out in Hebrew only after a twenty year delay, Joachim Fest's *Hitler* first in 1986 — in Fest's case, the Israeli publisher saw it fit to add a subtitle that contradicted the book's main thesis — "Portrait of a Non-Human". I mention these antics and delays only as a characteristic of the tendency at that time to prefer simplistic versions to more differentiated ones. It took more than a generation to produce Israeli historians able to detach the history of the holocaust from their own biographies. Only in the eighties was there a real breakthrough in this field. The importance of this breakthrough is self-evident. The writing of history, we all know, is one way of ridding oneself of the crushing, often debilitating weight of the past; in Benedetto Croce's words, "it liberates us from history". The Israeli political class was less able to free itself from clichés. The rightwing government that came into power in 1978 saw fit to legally expropriate the holocaust from historiography. A law passed in 1981 made it a criminal offence to deny the holocaust, as though that event was no longer a matter for historians but was now, in Segev's words, a "doctrine" of national truth anchored in law, a state religion. (The doctrine seems better protected under Israeli law even than religion. Maximum penalty for "gross violation of religious sentiment", including presumably denying there is a God, is one year in jail; the mandatory punishment for denying the holocaust is five years. Both laws are part of the political rhetoric. Nobody has ever been tried under either.) The prevailing political rhetoric is still filled with some of the early clichés. Only a few weeks ago General Ehud Barak, chief of staff of the Israeli army, was on an official visit in Poland. With his entourage of adjutants and television and newspaper reporters he toured Auschwitz where he announced: "We came here fifty years too late".

By the same token, it was only very slowly, that a way was opened in Israel for a fuller, more differentiated understanding of the Federal Republic: that it was a new beginning, and not such a bad one after all, an open society and a fairly well-functioning democracy, a complicated place, not a painting by Otto Dix or George Grosz but, say, by Anselm Kiefer. On the German question, David Ben Gurion was the great exception among politicians. He often contradicted the prevailing view of West Germany. He did so mostly for reasons of state, but also because he was

convinced that there was now "another" Germany. He did not get very far, even within his own party. And he failed to convince his successor. Let me cite an occasion, at which I was present, during Konrad Adenauer's visit to Israel in 1966. At a state dinner in his honour in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, reading a prepared text, hailed Adenauer for his past and present record and then declared that "penance is impossible... Israel seeks proof that Germany deserves to return to the family of nations". Adenauer put down his fork and told Eshkol that he was breaking off his visit; in his statement, he said, Eshkol had denied his life's work.

Eshkol was flabbergasted. The guests at the table looked at one another with pained faces. Eshkol did not understand what had gone wrong. He tried to placate Adenauer: "But I praised you personally", he said. This seemed to make things worse. Adenauer announced that he was ordering his airplane to stand ready for departure early next morning. In the end Adenauer did not cut short his visit. The ambassadors of both sides huddled in the next room and found a reconciling formula. But the incident was indicative. It was not just the slip of a speech writer or the fatigue, or absentmindedness of a politician. Levi Eshkol was a singularly humane, moderate and conciliatory man. He was one of the early, by now legendary, wave of pioneers who had settled in the country before the First World War and founded the first kibbutz. Unlike Begin or Shamir he had had no personal experience of Nazism. But he was a true representative of Israelis of all ages, all backgrounds and all ethnic origins at that time for whom, long before, the holocaust had become larger than a personal trauma. It had become one of three main pillars of collective identity; the other two were nationalism and religion. The holocaust was an event many native Israelis felt they had experienced vicariously, as it were, irrespective of age, origin or education. Even non-Jewish Israelis, Arabs or Druze, shared in it by osmosis.

In 1978, with the sharp turn to the right in Israeli politics, remembrance was further institutionalized within the national ritual and the educational system. The history of the holocaust had always been taught in the schools as a part of the regular history curriculum. It now became a subject not only in history, but in citizenship classes and religion classes as well. The "lessons" and "values" of the holocaust, its religious "meaning" were discussed in these classes. As Eastern Europe opened to Israeli tourism in the mid-eighties, holocaust studies in the classroom were supplemented by government-subsidized school tours to Poland. Every year, thousands of high-school students took part in these tours. Entitled "Marches of the Living" they were accompanied by special guides, former concentration camp inmates. The participants flew to Warsaw, visited the site of the former ghetto and continued from there to Treblinka and Auschwitz. Ausch-

witz was the high point. Singing Israeli songs, waving the Israeli national flag and wearing T-shirts emblazoned with a big Star of David and the inscription ISRAEL or ISRAEL LIVES, the young visitors would march through the Auschwitz *Stammlager* guided by a former inmate. At nearby Birkenau they inspected the railroad ramp. They would hoist their flags at the former crematoria and intone a special prayer for the safety of soldiers in the Israeli army, wherever they may be. Then, they recited the *kaddish*, the traditional Jewish prayer to the dead. Upon their return from Poland, some of the young participants on these tours told the press that on the site of the former extermination camp they had become "better" Zionists; they had become convinced that Israel must keep every square centimetre of Eretz Israel; territorial compromise was impossible. They carried with them guidebooks and textbooks, issued specially for these trips by a branch of the Israeli ministry of education. According to one such text Auschwitz exemplified the immutable hatred for Jews, a hatred which has always existed and will always exist as long as there are Gentiles and Jews. Another text states:

"We stand, with bitter hearts and tearful eyes, by the crematoria in the extermination camp and mourn the terrible end of European Jewry. But even as we cry and mourn, our hearts fill with pride and happiness at the privilege we enjoy as citizens of the independent State of Israel. As we raise our national flag over the crematoria and death pits we stand taller in pride and proclaim: The People of Israel Lives. To the millions of our dead we swear: If we forget thee, Oh Jerusalem, may our right hands wither... In our minds' ears we hear their souls responding: Save and Protect the State of Israel. We answer and promise with all our hearts: Long Live the State of Israel for ever and ever".

The same booklet decries current Polish anti-semitism and the fact that even after the fall of Communism, the Polish government recognizes the Palestinians' right of self-determination, as though the two were one and the same thing.

(Thousands of American Jews also travel every year to Auschwitz on organized tours. These are often fundraising operations; such things seem inevitable nowadays. From Auschwitz the participants fly to Israel for a brief stay. Both stages of the trip are marked by an almost religious solemnity. It is a kind of pilgrimage; first to the camps — the Stations of the Cross, as it were and from there on to Israel and the Redemption. But this is another story).

The atmosphere that has generated these tours, and that which they generate in turn, have been the subject of heavy criticism in recent years. The debate was opened a few years ago by a leading Israeli educator, Professor Yehuda Elkana of Tel Aviv university, himself a survivor of Auschwitz.

It has continued ever since. In an article published in *Haaretz*, entitled "The Need to Forget", Elkana protested the current uses of memory for political purposes. He warned of their possible political and psychological consequences. "What are children to do with such memories? The sombre injunction, Remember! may easily be interpreted as a call for blind hatred. It is possible that the world at large must remember ... But for ourselves. I see no greater educational task than to stand up for life, to build our future in this land without wallowing day in day out in ghastly symbols, harrowing ceremonies and sombre lessons of the holocaust ... The deepest political and social factor that motivates much of Israeli society in its relation with the Palestinians is a profound existential 'Angst' fed by a particular interpretation of the lessons of the holocaust and the readiness to believe that the whole world is against us, that we are the eternal victim. In this ancient belief, shared by many today, I see the tragic and paradoxical victory of Hitler. Two nations, metaphorically speaking, emerged from the ashes of Auschwitz: a minority who assert 'this must never happen again' and a frightened and haunted majority who assert 'this must never happen again to us'. If these are the only possible lessons, I for one have always held with the former. I have seen the latter as catastrophic. History and collective memory are an inseparable part of any culture; but the past is not and must not be allowed to become the dominant element determining the future of society and the destiny of a people". (Emphasis mine, A. E.)

This is a view I would wholeheartedly endorse. Elkana was savagely criticized. He was not alone, in recent years, to admonish Israelis, in Carlyle's well known phrase, wisely to remember and wisely also to forget. Some cite Nietzsche's well-known argument that life in any true sense is impossible without some forgetfulness. "There is a degree of sleeplessness, of rumination, of 'historical sense' that (in the victim, at least) injures the living thing, be it a man, or a people, or a system of culture".

I have lived in Israel most of my life and have come to the conclusion that where there is so much traumatic memory, so much pain, so much memory innocently, or deliberately instrumentalized for political purposes, a little forgetfulness might finally be in order. This should not be seen as a kitschy plea to "forgive and forget". Forgiveness has nothing to do with it. While remembrance is often a form of vengeance it also, paradoxically, is the basis of reconciliation. I plea for a shift in emphasis and proportions, and for that equilibrium between memory and hope which is, or should be, a requirement of justice.

You will now all ask how this is to be done. On this, the most difficult of questions, I must plead with you to grant me the basic human right to be at a loss. I just don't know. I know that the means will be partly political. In this sense the recent change of government in Israelis a good omen. Shula-

mit Aloni, Rabin's new minister of education has been arguing on lines similar to those of Elkana. She has cancelled all organized schooltours to Auschwitz. Her declared position is: The state school system must not propagate so-called "values of the holocaust". The very term made her shudder. The holocaust had no values. She said that instead of curing the wounds Israelis were constantly tearing them open again. Israel was like a psychiatrist who instead of lifting the weight of a patient's traumas, was all the time shoving them back into him again. It was time to move forward from administrating the trauma to beginning to cure it. To achieve this, politics is only one means. Peace and a lot of luck are also needed; luck and hope. Luck is not a scientifically measurable value. Hope is probably a poetic quality. Let me therefore conclude with a few familiar lines by a man you all know well and for whom hope was more than a psychological need:

*Die Wurzel der Geschichte aber ist der arbeitende, schaffende, die Gegebenheiten umbildende und überholende Mensch. Hat er sich erfaßt, und das Seine ohne Entäußerung und Entfremdung in realer Demokratie begründet, .so entsteht in der Welt etwas, das allen in die Kindheit scheint und worin noch niemand war: Heimat.*  
(E. Bloch)

European University at Saint-Petersburg, Russia Department of History, Professor; European University at Saint-Petersburg. Russia, Center for the Study of Cultural Memory and Symbolic Politics, Academic Director. Affiliation. ResearcherID: Z-1451-2019 Scopus AuthorID: 56321369000. Contacts. Tel.: +7 (812) 386-7634 E-mail: [email protected] Address: European University at St. Petersburg, 6/1A Gagarinskaya Street, 191187 St. Petersburg, Russia. The author thanks the participants in the situational analysis "The Historical Memory Policy" held on April 8, 2013, who contributed to the discussion of Jelin / THE POLITICS OF MEMORY 39. Up to the mid-1980s, human rights activists and organizations felt the urgency of learning and publicizing the nature of the massive and systematic violations of human rights during the military dictatorship-the demand for "truth"-and of seeing that the guilty were punished-the demand for "justice." Since then, the claims have been extended to include the vindication of the historical and collective memory struggling against oblivion. The plea for justice and punishment, the future projection of human rights in education and in new legal p