

**The Burden of History:
On the Relationship between the Holocaust
and the Middle-East Conflict**

by

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third draft

comments welcome

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1. The Context of the Paper

The so called „Manifesto” on the relations between Germany and Israel of November 2006, a statement by 25 German political scientists and peace researchers in which I was involved to some extent, has released a highly controversial debate.¹ Major sub-themes of the controversy are the prudence and legitimacy of the Lebanon War, the assessment of threats to Israel from Iran and Islamic fundamentalist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, the freedom to criticize Israel in Germany, particularly the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, the legitimacy of such criticism, and finally as a kind of main idea the consequences from Germany’s historical responsibility for the Holocaust for its present policies vis-à-vis Israel and in the Middle East conflict. All these topics (and a few others as well) deserve an extended discussion in their own right, which – in my view – would now lead to a number of changes and corrections in the wording and even in some positions of the original document.²

As for criticism of the Lebanon War, public debate in Israel itself has rather confirmed many of the doubts presented in the “Manifesto”. As for a proper assessment of current and future threats to Israel, I would favour some changes in the document, yet views on Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran would probably remain controversial among the authors. As far as freedom of discourse in Germany is concerned, the “Manifesto’s” sweeping conclusions on this point probably need revision, they invite misunderstanding. There are no general constraints on the debate about Israel and the Middle East conflict in Germany; many newspapers write about these issues just as openly, as qualified, and as critical as about any other. Some restrictions do exist, however, which cannot be justified with the fight against anti-Semitism and which could have been spelt out more clearly. But then the “Manifesto” also might have discussed and taken issue with systematic misjudgement and prejudice against Israel among some political groups (not just on the far right) and in the public in more detail.

¹ Freundschaft und Kritik. Warum die „besonderen Beziehungen“ zwischen Deutschland und Israel überdacht werden müssen. Das Manifest der 25 (Friendship and Criticism – why the „special relationship“ between Germany and Israel has to be reconsidered. Manifesto of 25 German Peace Researchers), in: Frankfurter Rundschau, November 15, 2006; and the documentation (in German) of the debate by Reiner Steinweg (on behalf of the „Forum Crisis Prevention“): Das „Manifest der 25: Freundschaft und Kritik“ und die darauf folgende Debatte, www.crisis-prevention.info. I am grateful to Egbert Jahn and Reiner Steinweg for comments on earlier drafts.

² Only after writing this paper, which is partly based on older publications, the fascinating new book by Micha Brumlik, *Kritik des Zionismus*, Hamburg 2007, came to my attention. On a much smaller philosophical and historical basis, I come to similar conclusions in several important dimensions such as the role of the Holocaust and the causes of the Middle East conflict or the dilemmas of the Zionist project. Since the original “Manifesto” had provoked a harsh reaction from Brumlik, I consider this a quite fortunate development.

In this paper, I will concentrate on one major theme in the original document, i.e. the relationship between the Nazi era and the Middle East conflict. In the “Manifesto”, the discrimination, persecution and then annihilation of the European Jews by Nazi Germany is considered a major cause in the birth of the state of Israel and by implication the Middle East conflict, suggesting not only a special German responsibility to support Israel but also a special German concern for the plight of the Palestinians. I want to discuss the connection on three levels. I will (1) make a few remarks about the relationship in Israeli national discourse; I will then (2) discuss historical connections on the empirical level, and finally (3) broaden the time frame and examine changes in the prevailing historical contexts and thus the definition of the conflict and its major causes.

2. The Relationship in Israeli Discourse

I would like to begin by pointing out that constructing a relationship between the Holocaust and the foundation of Israel (and by implication the Middle East conflict) is by no means absurd and that the controversy is not between Jews on the one hand and non-Jews on the other; the topic is highly controversial in Israel itself. Nobody can deny the prominence of the Holocaust for the way Israel or rather its Jewish majority defines itself. It also forms the basis of the central paradox of Israel’s political culture, the confidence in military strength and superiority combined with a chronic sense of vulnerability. This cannot be deduced from the Holocaust alone, but it is one of its major sources.³ In the end, the Holocaust widely surpassed even Theodor Herzl’s worst presentiments, and they had been very bad indeed.

On the other hand, the Israeli Holocaust expert Dan Michman, by no means a post-Zionist, talks about what he calls the Zionist or Israeli national myth which not only legitimized Israel with the Holocaust and the fight of many Jews alongside the allies against Hitler, as indicated in the Israeli declaration of independence. Quite different traditions even presumed a direct (empirical) causal relationship, either in religious (as with the classical religious Zionists or even more fundamentally in Neo-Zionism) or in secular terms (as with some post-Zionists or even some Zionist historians such as Yehuda Bauer and his school):⁴

³ About the paradox see Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War – Wounds of Peace. The Arab-Israeli Tragedy*, London 2006, p. 51; or pp. XII and S. 382: „Zionism was the territorial answer to the Jewish fear and this fear has never subsided since.” (...) “Israel could never really decide whether she was an intimidating regional superpower or just an isolated and frightened Jewish ghetto waiting for the pogrom to happen.”

⁴ Dan Michman, The Causal Relationship between the Holocaust and the Birth of Israel: Historiography between Myth and Reality, in: idem, *Holocaust Historiography – A Jewish Perspective. Conceptualizations, Terminology,*

(...) The *Wiedergutmachung* negotiations and agreement with the Federal Republic of Germany in the early 1950s were based on the understanding that the State of Israel was the natural heir of the Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Gradually, especially from the 1960s onwards, Israel's image worldwide and in internal Israeli and Zionist interpretations of Jewish history and fate became linked to the Holocaust – by secularist educators, historians, lay people and religious thinkers (...) The fact that this mythical perception was so powerful and became widely accepted in Jewish circles and elsewhere very quickly proves, in my eyes, that for many people it satisfied an inner need to invest history with meaning. This 'meaning' of the Holocaust (with a 'happy ending') provided some solace for the tragedy of the past and justified massive self-mobilization for the collective ideals of the State especially when Israel had to contend with growing opposition beginning in the late 1960s.

Such myths often are understandable and in many cases respectable collective interpretations of the origins and purposes of nations, they can be found everywhere. One could even argue that nations are made and defined through collective myths. Very often these myths are not devoid of empirical reality or genuine collective experience altogether. As a counterpoint to what he considers a central part of Israeli mythology Michman mentions the widely held assumption on the Arab side, the Holocaust had been the major reason for a Western strategy „to impose the Jews on Palestine“. Here again, myth has become an instrument of legitimation and relief; against such a strategy the Arabs could only fail, without losing their honour.

All national myths serve important social functions, but they also create problems; especially in conflict relations. They conceal at least parts of reality, they impede critical self-reflection, and they make empathy more difficult. Yet not all collective myths are equally problematical. The myth held in parts of the Arab or Islamic world that the Holocaust itself was a myth, used by the Zionists and the West to support their imperialism, is morally much more reprehensible and politically much more dangerous than the more moderate myth about the relationship between the Holocaust and the Arab catastrophe of al-Nakba. On the Israeli side, myths about the “country without a people for a people without a country” or about the self-induced flight of the Palestinians in 1948 are also quite radical and certainly much more questionable than the one about the relationship between the Holocaust and the birth of the state of Israel.⁵

There *are* a number of empirical connections between the persecution and annihilation of the European Jews in the 30s and 40s of the 20th century and the foundation of the state of Israel (and by implication the Israeli-Arab conflict). „Anti-Semitism in Poland and Hitler's rise to power in Germany in 1933 brought ever increasing streams of migrant refugees to Palestine“,

Approaches and Fundamental Issues, London–Portland (Oregon) 2003, pp. 303-328; the quotation is on p. 317. The separation of religious and secular Zionism is artificial to some extent, a point made by Reiner Bernstein, *Der verborgene Frieden. Politik und Religion im Nahen Osten*, Berlin 2000, pp. 81-118 (chapter III: Die Rückkehr in die Tradition).

⁵ About collective myths in Israel see Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, London–New York 1995; on Arab, esp. Palestinian national mythology and their lack of self-reflection see Rashid Khalidi, *Iron Cage. The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, Boston 2006.

Gudrun Kraemer writes in a new standard reference book on the history of Palestine.⁶ Demographic correlations changed significantly, the share of the Jewish population in the British Mandate, which had remained constant for a long time, rose from close to 18 percent at the beginning to over 30 percent at the end of the 1930s. The importance of this dynamic was obvious to both sides: The Zionists became more confident that achievement of their own state was moving within sight, while the Arab side panicked. The report by the British Peel Commission of July 1937, which for the first time envisaged partition and a separate, although very small Jewish state essentially in Galilee and along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, established an early relationship between the new pressures on the Jews in Europe on the one hand and Palestine as a place of refuge on the other, even before the Holocaust, and it concluded: “If the Arabs could make a sacrifice and contribute to a solution to this problem, they would earn not only the Jews’ but the whole Western world’s gratitude.”⁷

In the 1940s, the Holocaust reinforced the urgency of the foundation of a Jewish state in the minds of the Zionists, inasmuch as the full extent of the persecution and annihilation gradually became known; it also strengthened the resolution of the Yishuv and later Israel vis-à-vis their Arab adversaries in the militarized disputes before the declaration of independence and in the Israeli-Arab war in 1948/49. According to Yehuda Bauer, the so called „Displaced Persons (DPs)“⁸ and other Jewish survivors, who immigrated after the end of World War II, played a very important role in these battles; their immigration contributed decisively to Israel’s victory. Towards the end of the first Israeli-Arab war, about one third of the soldiers in the Israeli Army were survivors.⁹

Finally, the Holocaust *did* play a role in the decision-making process in the UN and particularly in the United States on the partition of Palestine. Did not a large majority of world opinion outside the Arab region look favourably upon the Zionist project at the time, even if from a bad conscience towards the Jews? Had not President Roosevelt pointed out the Jews’ suffering from the hands of the Germans in his meeting with Ibn Saud in 1945, in order to convince the Arab potentate of a more positive attitude towards the Zionists? And had not John Foster Dulles, later President Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, tried to explain the U.S. posi-

⁶ Gudrun Krämer, *Geschichte Palästinas*, 3rd edition, Munich 2002, p. 280.

⁷ Ibidem, p. 330 (my retranslation).

⁸ “Displaced Persons“ are people of non-German citizenship whom either the German occupation forces had deported into the German Reich during World War II or who migrated there after it.

⁹ Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, New Haven and London 2001, p. 257 and the whole chapter 11 (From the Holocaust to the State of Israel).

tion to the Lebanese delegation at the UN in 1948, arguing the American people and government were convinced that the establishment of the State of Israel under liveable conditions was a historical necessity, even if this involved “certain injustices to the Arab world”?¹⁰

At a first glance at “real” history, the relationship between Nazi persecution of the German (and later the Austrian) Jews in the 1930s and the Holocaust in the 1940s on the one hand and the birth of Israel on the other thus seems plausible. But a first glance does not provide a durable basis for a serious historical argument. I will begin with the question of emigration from Germany to Palestine in the 1930s, since this had been a major point in the “Manifesto”.

3. Historical Analysis

3.1 Immigration in the 1930s and 40s

Reliable data on immigration in Palestine in the 1930s are not easy to get, it is a charged subject and the data are used in different analytical and political contexts. Several basic facts seem uncontroversial, though. The “fifth aliya” (the wave of Jewish immigrants in the 1930s) brought about 200.000 Jews into Palestine (net immigration) between 1932 and 1938, increasing the share of the Jewish population in the British Mandate, as stated above, from close to 18 percent in 1932 to around 30 percent in 1939. Immigration was particularly strong in the four years between 1933 and 1936. There is broad evidence that both sides, Jews and Arabs, were aware of the importance of the change in the “correlation of forces”. A few sources indeed indicate that this wave of immigrants was a result of Hitler’s rise to power and the discrimination and exclusion of the German Jews in the 1930s, as do the following two:¹¹

- (1) As German dictator Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party rose to power, about 144.000 Jews, primarily from Germany, immigrated to Palestine in the early 1930s to escape increasingly ruthless persecution.
- (2) Between 1933 and 1936, more than 164.250 Jews fled Germany and entered Palestine, thus doubling the size of the Yishuv.

In the early 1930s, people in the Yishuv itself often thought of the fifth aliya as the “German aliya”, the „aliya of the Yeckes“; yet the data in fact speak differently.¹² Historians from va-

¹⁰ For the meeting between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Ibn Saud see Lawrence Davidson, *America’s Palestine. Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*, Gainesville–Tallahassee–Tampa 2001, pp. 149-154 and for Dulles David Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel*, New York–Oxford 1993, p. 62.

¹¹ Both quotations are from websites, the first from msn Encarta, *Israel*, the second from David E. Lipman, *The Jews in Palestine respond to Nazi anti-Semitism and genocide, 1929–1945*, www.myjewishlearning.com. Both figures are much too high, it should say: “more than 164.250 Jews fled Europe”.

¹² Mordecai Naor, *Eretz Israel. Das 20. Jahrhundert*, Tel Aviv 1996, p. 178.

rious perspectives put the share of Germans in the immigration of the 1930s between 15 and 25 percent. Abu-Diab has about 120.000 immigrants altogether in 1933-1935, with slightly above 18.000 from Germany. According to Yehuda Bauer, 20 percent of the immigrants in 1933-1938 came from Germany.¹³ Timm writes the share of German, Austrian, and Czech immigrants, which usually had been around 2.5 percent, suddenly rose to about 25 percent in the early 1930s, and even up to 55 and 71 percent in 1938 and 1939. By then the absolute figures for total immigration had decreased significantly, however, and Timm adds that towards the end of the 1930s the German-speaking Jews were still a small minority in the Yishuv.¹⁴ Meier-Cronemeyer emphasizes that even in the strongest year of immigration less than 6.000 German citizens migrated to Palestine.¹⁵ While this ceiling seems much too low – more systematic studies list 7.600 immigrants from Germany for 1933, 9.800 for 1934, 8.600 for 1935, 8.000 (or 8700) for 1936, 3.700 for 1937 and 4.800 for 1938¹⁶ – the general trend in the empirical studies is clear.¹⁷

(...) the most important conclusion about Jewish migration to Palestine (...) is not in my view properly appreciated and will probably come as a considerable surprise to many readers, that 75 per cent of Jewish immigrants to Palestine in these years did *not* come from Germany. (...) While more German Jews migrated to Palestine in the years 1933-1936 than to any other country, the numbers are surprisingly small.

In the particularly strong immigration years the by far largest group, more than 40 percent, came from Poland to Palestine.¹⁸ The Polish emigration may have been influenced by developments in Germany to some extent, yet it was essentially a reaction to Polish anti-Semitism and the politics of “Polonization” there.

One might as well discuss why so *few* German Jews emigrated to Palestine in these years, in spite of the relatively favourable economic conditions there (Palestine was in a boom phase in 1929-1935) and a generous immigration policy by the then British High Commissioner, and in spite of the (relative) support which the relevant German ministries and the traditional bureaucracy granted Jews who wished to emigrate, and the importance which the Nazi leadership itself set on the emigration of Jewish Germans to Palestine in the 1930s, resulting in a di-

¹³ Both cited in Lenni Brenner, *Zionism in the Age of the Dictators. 13: Choosing the Chosen People – The Doctrine of “Zionist Cruelty”*, www.marxists.org. The article is from the *Middle East Archive of the Encyclopedia of Trotskyism*, so it does represent an unusual point of view. Yet the tendency does not influence the presentation of the data mentioned.

¹⁴ Angelika Timm, *Israel. Geschichte des Staates seit seiner Gründung*, Bonn 1998, p. 32f.

¹⁵ Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer, *Geschichte des Staates Israel I*, 3rd edition, Schwalbach 1997, p. 91.

¹⁶ William D. Rubinstein, *The Myth of Rescue: Why the Democracies Could Not Have Saved More Jews from the Nazis*, New York 1997, p. 31; Hagit Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe. The Distinctive Path of German Zionism*, Jerusalem-Detroit 1996, p. 252.

¹⁷ Rubinstein, *Myth*, p. [...]

¹⁸ Brenner, *Zionism*, and Naor, *Eretz Israel*, p. 177 plus the graph p. 185; Meier-Cronemeyer, *Geschichte*, p. 194.

plomatic agreement with the Zionists on economic transfer (to avoid capital flight), negotiated in 1933, and further cooperation throughout the 1930s.¹⁹ One reason is that the professional profile of many German Jews did not match with the needs of Palestine and that emigration would in all likelihood have meant social decline. Political Zionism was not very strong in Germany, most German Jews regarded themselves as assimilated Jews; and most hoped it would not come to the worst or even that the bad would soon be over.

This was quite unfortunate, but understandable. In the 1930s, people did not have advance knowledge of the Holocaust, not even the Nazis. Many Jews in Germany saw the discrimination and exclusion as something they knew from Jewish history, including German history, and from parallel situations in eastern Europe. Like the non-Zionist Jewish organizations in Poland, many German Jews were against emigration also for political reasons. While they lost more and more of their rights as citizens, they tried to preserve at least their status as a recognized, even if discriminated minority, and as such to survive the National Socialist period.²⁰ Still, a large number of Jewish Germans did leave the “Reich”, migrating to 80 different countries. Total figures vary considerably in the literature; I have found 168.000 (1933-38) and 280.000 (Nazi Germany after 1933). Of these between 45.000 and 55.000 went to Palestine.²¹

When the pressure to emigrate increased on the German and on the Austrian Jews after the “Anschluss” and the November pogroms in 1938, and when relatively orderly emigration became near to impossible and was replaced by forced emigration (“Austreibung”) and complete dispossession of the “emigrating” Jews, now organized by the SS; just then the doors for immigration closed. The years of the Arab revolt in Palestine 1936-1939 had not been good for immigration anyway, and in their White Paper of 1939 the British government drastically reduced their quota for the Mandate, for reasons of empire and in order to placate the Arabs and to avoid their alliance with the Axis powers. The international community was not helpful either, as the Evian Conference in 1938 demonstrated; a conference which the State Department hoped would deflect pressure on the United States government to change its restrictive immigration policies of the Emigration Act of 1924 with its implicit intention to ward off

¹⁹ See the detailed study, based mostly on archival sources, by Francis R. J. Nicosia, *Zionism in National Socialist Jewish Policy in Germany, 1933-38*, *The Journal of Modern History*, 50:4 (December 1978), on demand supplement, pp. D 1253 - D 1282.

²⁰ Dan Diner, *Die Katastrophe vor der Katastrophe: Auswanderung ohne Einwanderung*, in: Dirk Blasius/Dan Diner (eds.), *Zerbrochene Geschichte. Leben und Selbstverständnis der Juden in Deutschland*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, pp. 138-160, p. 149.

²¹ Figures for total Jewish emigration as in Lavsky, *Before Catastrophe*, p. 252; and Jochen Oltmer, *Migration und Zwangswanderungen im Nationalsozialismus*, www.bpb.de/themen/WTCUS2.html; Jewish emigration to Palestine as in Lavsky and Rubinstein, *Myth*, p. 31.

Italian and Jewish immigrants. The conference was a complete failure. Apart from the Dominican Republic, none of the 32 delegations present was prepared to accept refugees from Germany or Austria which the Nazis had made homeless, stateless, and left without means. National egoism, economic problems, xenophobia, including anti-Semitism, and the dilemma that an internationalization of the Jewish emigration problem in central Europe would increase the pressures on Jews in Poland and Romania also to emigrate, led to the “Katastrophe vor der Katastrophe”, i.e. emigration without immigration, or at best illegal immigration.²²

I am not saying this to shift blame; the “Austreibung” (forced emigration) was and remains Nazi Germany’s responsibility, which was the original cause of the problem, of course. Yet the denial of urgently needed help became part of the Jewish experience and has been a strong argument for the Zionist cause to this day.

Help was also needed after World War II. (During the war, only about 5.000 Jews were brought to Palestine.) About 200.000 Jews survived the concentration camps, slave labour, and the death marches.²³ Ten thousands of them went to their former homes in eastern Europe, others went to the camps for “displaced persons”, mostly in the American zone of occupation. Of the 11 million DPs in Germany and Austria altogether, most had quickly been repatriated; Jewish survivors at first were a small minority among the 800.000 remaining DPs. Then small groups of Jewish survivors came who had hidden in Poland, and Jewish soldiers from the Polish communist forces or remnants of the Jewish partisans in Poland. In late 1945 and in 1946 about 175.000 Jews who had fled to Central Asia in 1941 or who were released from the Gulag returned to Poland, as a result of an agreement on population exchange between the Soviet Union and the pro-communist Polish government. They found conditions at home very inhospitable. Families and relatives could no longer be found, in many cases homes were occupied by new owners not inclined to move out, personal security was endangered:²⁴

A pogrom in August 1946 in Kielce, a city with a significant prewar Jewish population to which a handful of survivors had returned, triggered a wave of emigration from Poland and southeast Europe. In Poland it was clear that the newly-installed communist government was helpless to maintain order, let alone suppress the ingrained anti-Semitism of a population who believed the Jews had gone for good. (...) the Kielce tragedy was a watershed: most of the surviving Polish Jews were quickly disabused of any notion that they might reconstruct their lives in Poland.

²² Diner, *Katastrophe*, p. 154-160.

²³ The following mostly according to Bauer, *Holocaust*, pp. 246-248.

²⁴ Elihu Bergman, *Adversaries and facilitators. The Unconventional Diplomacy of Illegal Immigration to Palestine, 1945-48*, Israel Affairs, 8:3 (March 2002), pp. 1-46, p. 7.

Many of these Poles also fled to the US-directed DP camps in Germany and Austria, and by 1947, according to Yehuda Bauer's calculations, about 250.000 Jews resided in Germany, Austria, and Italy, mostly in US-directed DP camps, plus about 50.000 in France and the Low Countries. Many of them were or had become Zionists and wanted to leave, either for Palestine or the United States. In the end, about one third went to U.S., two thirds to Palestine or (later) to Israel. (According to Bauer, the relation may have been different, had U.S. immigration quota been more generous.) Other European Jews felt the need to leave as well. In Romania, the imposition of a communist system, which would probably dispossess the predominantly middle-class Romanian Jews, triggered another large flight wave in 1947.²⁵

As for Palestine as a refuge or a new home, the problem was that Britain was adamantly opposed to further Jewish immigration and tried to enforce the ban through diplomacy and naval control. The Mossad organized illegal immigration on a grand scale and moved between 70.000 and 80.000 Jewish refugees in the years between the end of World War II and the foundation of Israel, only part of which managed to enter Palestine during the end-phase of the Mandate. In this project, financial support from American Jewry was essential, as was more or less open tolerance or even assistance from different governments, including France, Italy, and the Soviet Union – for humanitarian, political, or economic reasons, or from a pragmatic convergence of interests between regimes shunning the burden of refugees (or Jewish refugees) and the Zionists who wanted to save Jewish lives, strengthen the Yishuv, and/or demonstrate the necessity of a Jewish state to world opinion.²⁶

As far as this immigration between the end of the World War II and Israeli independence or the end of the first Israeli-Arab war is concerned, Dan Michman disputes Yehuda Bauer's conceptualization of the connection between the Holocaust and the DPs, arguing that Polish anti-Semitism after 1945, which was responsible for a large number of new Jewish refugees, had nothing to do with the Holocaust but was based on eastern European traditions.²⁷ This may be a bit too strong a statement. Poland had suffered tremendously under the Nazi occupation and the war, not only Polish Jews but also "ethnic" Poles. These extreme circumstances, "the experience of cruelty beyond understanding" (Michlic), certainly contributed materially

²⁵ Op. cit., p. 25.

²⁶ For details about British policy and the spectrum of spoilers and supporters see Bergman. The demonstration effect, for which probably the British themselves unwillingly did much more with the "Exodus" affair, is a point in Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel*, Berkeley 1998, and in Hanna Yablonka, *Survivors of the Holocaust: Israel after the War*, New York 1999.

²⁷ Michman, *Holocaust Historiography*, pp. 308-311.

and psychologically to general insecurity, to fear for life and health, and to susceptibility to prejudice and xenophobia; all the more so, since circumstances after the war and the Holocaust, with parts of Poland in ruins, the geographic westward shift of the whole country, massive population transfers, civil war, the communist takeover and thus a new dictatorship, and again occupation by a foreign power, were extreme as well.

However, these circumstances alone do not explain the outburst of anti-Semitic sentiment and violence in Poland in the early post-war period, of which the Kielce pogrom only was the proverbial tip of the iceberg. While a few staunch voices, mainly from the left and from liberal Catholics, condemned anti-Semitism, and while the communist party to some extent tried to maintain the image of solidarity and brotherhood comprising all ethnic groups in Poland, large sections of the population, the national opposition, the Catholic church and also major sections of the communists, rank and file as well as leadership, propagated “national homogenization” and the exclusion of minorities. The familiar arsenal of pre-war anti-Semitic stereotypes was played out again: the image of the Judaeo-Commune, i.e. identification of the communists (and thus the new enemy from within and without) with the Jews (which made important sections of the communist party all the more so play the card of nationalism); the “moral panic”, i.e. the image of the Jews as physically threatening ethnic Poles, including widespread belief in ritual murder (a rumour which led to the Kielce pogrom), hardly ever countered but very often supported by Church and clergy; the playing down of anti-Jewish violence or blaming it on the Jews themselves, even its heroisation:²⁸

(...) in contrast to the wartime anti-Jewish violence in Lomza, the early postwar anti-Jewish violence in Poland constituted more of a classic case of ethnic cleansing. Its intent, despite its severe brutality, was not to kill all Jews but to force them to leave Poland. Because of its intent this violence can be seen as similar to the anti-Jewish violence of the interwar period. The practice of ethnic cleansing in early postwar Poland was extremely effective.

Still, the controversy between Michman and Bauer is probably less dramatic than Michman sees it, because Bauer does not deny developments in Poland (or in other parts of eastern and south-eastern Europe) after the war and their contribution to substantial new Jewish emigration. As mentioned above, Bauer regards the contribution of new immigrants to the victory in

²⁸ On the situation in Poland after the war see Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other. The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, Lincoln–London 2006, chapter 6 (Old Wine in a New Bottle), the quotation on p. 217. For the general current discourse on the past in Poland see now the excellent paper by Reiner Steinweg, *Polen*, in: Jörg Zagel/Reiner Steinweg (eds.), *Vergangenheitsdiskurse in der Ostseeregion*, vol. 2, Berlin 2008 (in print).

the first Israeli-Arab war as important, but – like Michman – he does not consider the Holocaust the major factor in the establishment of Israel.²⁹

The State of Israel is, first and foremost, the creation of the generations that preceded the Holocaust and that created in Palestine a basis for the struggle for independence. Because of that foundation, the survivors could make an impact.

In this connection it should also be noted that the by far largest mass immigration of Jews from Europe and from Arab and other Islamic countries occurred in the early years after the establishment of Israel, again from a mix of motivations in which the Holocaust was one, but one among several, or none at all.

In a discussion about the importance of immigration by discriminated, persecuted, or surviving Jews for a potential connection between the Nazi era, the foundation of the State of Israel, and the Middle East conflict, factors also need to be taken into account which *prevented* migration to Palestine. This refers not only to the restrictions by Great Britain, it basically refers to the Holocaust itself. Yehuda Bauer has argued that on balance the Holocaust obstructed rather than helped the prospect of a permanent national Jewish home in Palestine; Israel came about *in spite of* the Holocaust. The connection could also be examined through counterfactual analysis, but this raises a number of serious methodological problems. How would the Zionist project have developed, if there had been no Holocaust (and no World War II?; and no East-West conflict?). One point in any counterfactual analysis seems clear: had the British not stopped the German advance in northern Africa through Egypt, the Nazis would have destroyed the Yishuv; they already had their advance commandos for a Holocaust in Palestine in place.³⁰

Most experts would probably agree with Dan Michman that the Holocaust had paradoxical effects on Zionism. On the one hand, the Holocaust strengthened it. The major rivals within Jewish nationalism disappeared, they had literally been removed by the Nazis (some also by the Communists); and many formerly non-nationalist Jews came to support Zionism because of the Holocaust, in particular American Jewry. At the same time, Zionism was greatly weakened, because of the mass murder of eastern European Jewry, its mainstay.

²⁹ Bauer, *Holocaust*, p. 260.

³⁰ See Brumlik, *Kritik des Zionismus*, p. 102.

3.2 International Decision-Making

To what extent the vote in the United Nations in 1947 in favour of division and an Israeli state was influenced by the Holocaust, has long been controversial. More recent scholarship only allows for a small, certainly not a decisive role.³¹ Michman argues that decision-making in the UN was “wholly uninfluenced by the issue of the Holocaust, let alone by guilt feelings”.³²

What finally tipped the scales (...) were general issues related to the beginnings of the Cold War, the decolonization process, a certain Christian pro-Judaism (in some cases), other minor considerations, and a series of mistakes made by the British and the Arabs.

While this now seems to be consensual, it ought to be mentioned that UNSCOP had been aware of the situation in the DP camps, which delegates from the committee had visited. It is quite remarkable, in light of later developments, that, at the time, the issue of decolonization was working in favour of partition and thus a Jewish (and a Palestinian) state, at least in some places – one of the many ironies in the history of the Middle East conflict.

As for the major great powers and their positions, the Soviet Union was the only country to my knowledge which openly used the Holocaust as an argument for division. Its vote for Israel, which came as quite a surprise, carried special political and legal weight, of course, but it seems to have been clear to everybody involved that the Soviet Foreign Minister, Andrej Gromyko, was crying crocodile tears in the UN. The USSR’s decision was primarily based on considerations of power politics; Stalin hoped to weaken British imperialism with his vote for Israel. His “Realpolitik” with the focus on getting the British out of Palestine was the driving factor behind Soviet Middle East policy, leading to a “marriage of convenience” between the USSR and the Yishuv/Israel, including the (deceptive) prospect of a long-term relationship.³³

New archival research also shows that the Soviets started to link the effects of the Nazi persecution of the Jews with the establishment of a Jewish state as early as 1943. The Soviet Union was concerned about the “burden” of uprooted Jews in its coming post-war sphere of influence, which also shows in its at least tacit support, probably even encouragement of Jewish emigration (or expulsion) from Poland and the Balkans towards the DP camps or directly to Palestine in 1945-48. It should also be noted that during the war leaders in the Yishuv and

³¹ See already Evyatar Friesel, *The Holocaust: Factor in the Birth of Israel?*, in: Yisrael Gutman (Ed.), *Major Changes within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust. Proceedings of the Ninth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference*, Jerusalem 1996, pp. 519-544.

³² Michman, *Holocaust Historiography*, p. 310.

³³ For details about Soviet decision-making see Gabriel Gorodetsky, *The Soviet Union’s Role in the Creation of the State of Israel*, *Journal of Israeli History*, 22:1 (March 2003), pp. 4-20.

Ben-Gurion himself had carefully tried to convince important Soviet diplomats of the mutual benefits of a more positive relationship. The Yishuv's economic and political advances in Palestine, the seeming affinity in socialist outlook, and the absorption capacity of the country for Jewish immigrants did make an impression on Soviet diplomacy, which had favoured the (Palestinian) Arabs during their revolt in the 1930s.³⁴

As far as the decision by the United States is concerned, American diplomacy had not been in favour of a Jewish state in unison and all the time. There was strong opposition to partition in the Truman Administration, particularly from the State and the Defense Departments, mostly based on strategic concerns (good relations with the Arabs, the importance of oil, the spectre of having to defend the Yishuv or a weak and endangered Jewish state) but also to some extent on principles (self-determination) and on irrational fears nourished by the British (communist leanings among Zionism). Harry Truman as the president also had to take domestic considerations into account, such as the Jewish vote in crucial states of the union and widespread sympathy for the Zionist cause. American Jewry heavily lobbied the president, who was neither pro nor against Zionism per se, who had Jewish and pro-Zionist friends and advisors, but who also did not like to be pushed. In the end, a mixture of moral concerns and pragmatic domestic and international calculations made him come out in favour of partition.³⁵ The final vote for the state of Israel was based on domestic considerations to some extent, but essentially on pressing external concerns: a) the latent and then manifest civil war in Palestine with the Cold War looming in the background and b) the question of DPs in US-governed camps, who definitely wanted to leave Germany but whom Congress did not wish to let into the United States (until 1948, when immigration laws were changed). Had Great Britain accepted, as the United States had demanded, to let 100.000 DPs enter Palestine legally, US decision-making might have taken a different turn.³⁶

With the Balfour Declaration and with long-term support for the Yishuv and Jewish immigration – putting the Arabs at a disadvantage and ignoring not only their positions and interventions but also many recommendations from their own commissions of enquiry on the conflicts in the Mandate – the United Kingdom had laid the foundations for the Jewish state. Its brutal

³⁴ See Michman, *Holocaust Historiography*, p. 320, and Matityahu Mintz, *Ben-Gurion and the Soviet Union's Involvement in the Effort to Establish a Jewish State in Palestine*, *Journal of Israeli History*, 26:1 (March 2007), pp. 67-78.

³⁵ US decision-making is covered in several monographs. I have used Michael T. Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel*, Westport, Conn. 1997 and J. Garry Clifford, *Review: A Second Chance for American Zionists*, *Reviews in American History*, 19:3 (Sept. 1991), pp. 426-431.

³⁶ For details see also Schoenbaum, *United States and Israel*.

defeat of the Palestinians in their uprising in 1936-39 gained special importance as a precondition for their renewed defeat and their great „catastrophe“ (al-Nakba) in 1947/48.³⁷ With the prospect of a major international war against Nazi Germany looming, Great Britain, for reasons of overall strategy, took Arab interests into more serious consideration and in 1939 imposed strict limits on Jewish immigration. After the war, the British labour government at first tried to maintain the empire's position, although with a more gentle imperial approach favouring development, partnership, and reform. This strategy completely failed; Britain no longer had the resources for it and it could not overcome resentment against British domination in the Arab world and elsewhere. Exhausted by the war and the emancipation of its colonies, under pressure from the war-like troubles in Palestine and from Jewish terror against its rule, and with growing irritations on the part of the Americans, who were not to be alienated in the developing Cold War, the United Kingdom handed the conflict over to the United Nations and finally withdrew from Palestine. In the decisive UN vote on division, Great Britain abstained.

I can base the summary of my arguments in this chapter on Dan Michman. I essentially agree with his conclusion that the Holocaust was not the major factor in the establishment of the State of Israel (and by implication the Middle East conflict), although he downgrades its influence on the international debate too much. There *are* many connections between the Holocaust and the birth of Israel, but they are stronger on the Jewish (and ambivalent) than on the international side.³⁸

(...) most important, of course, were some general factors. We have mentioned the general process of decolonization, which in Britain was accompanied by weariness of international affairs after the demanding years of World War II. Then there was the general Arab weakness, with the additional reservations evoked among the Western powers by the role played by the Mufti as a fanatical supporter of Hitler during the war. And then there was what actually happened when war broke out in Palestine after the UN resolution in 1947. The Yishuv infrastructure, developed over decades by the Zionist movement, was of major importance. Another factor was the capability demonstrated by Israeli diplomacy and military experts to obtain sufficient finances and supply routes for the newly established army despite a UN-imposed embargo. Moreover, immigration by many Jews from oriental countries shortly after independence helped to stabilize the state. (...) Israel was established neither as a colonial trick nor as a 'reparation gift' to the Jews from the Western world as compensation for the Holocaust.

Quite independent of the controversy about the importance of the Holocaust, the establishment of the Jewish state was by no means a foregone conclusion. The Zionists pushed through their national project at first with and then against Great Britain, against the Palestinian Arabs, and finally against the military attack of the neighbouring Arab states. They were successful because of their economic, political-organizational, and military superiority. They were more

³⁷ See Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, for details.

³⁸ Michman, *Holocaust Historiography*, p. 321, the following quotation on pp. 320-321.

competent in military strategy and their soldiers were better motivated and often better equipped. The international arms embargo harmed the Arabs much more than the Jews. Crucial weapons deliveries for the Jewish side were bought from Czechoslovakia, with at least Soviet knowledge if not open support, including some weaponry left behind in the German retreat. In the end, Israel's victory was likely, but by no means assured. Another crucial factor was a "window of opportunity" in world politics: the consent of the future two superpowers to division and their early recognition of the State of Israel. The coincidence of their behaviour was rather fortuitous, certainly no longer a product of their anti-Fascist alliance in World War II; the Israeli-Arab conflict was soon to be integrated into the East-West conflict.

4. Broadening the Historical Perspective

Weighing the importance of the Nazi era and the Holocaust as a factor in the foundation of the State of Israel (and by implication the Middle East conflict) requires an examination of empirical history of the years 1933-1949 and a consideration of their prevailing and changing historical contexts. These are central requirements according to Dan Michman, who provides a highly plausible example of such differentiated historical analysis. (E.g., the Yishuv's decision to "go for the state" was taken toward the end of the 1930s and in the early 40s, when the full dimensions of the Holocaust had not been widely known; the Arab revolt and the British White Paper of 1939 strongly influenced this decision.) Broadening the historical perspective by including the years before and after the Nazi era will underline the value of a periodical approach integrating different historical contexts.

In any discussion of the origins of the Middle East conflict, fundamental prerequisites need to be taken into account without which the Zionist project would not have come into existence or at least not gotten underway seriously.³⁹ (It was only one of several reactions among Jewry to modernization and the crisis of traditional identities anyway.) European nationalism and anti-Semitism should be mentioned first; but also its colonialism and imperialism. The project of systematic Jewish settlement in Palestine aiming at a „national home for the Jewish people" and thus to all intents and purposes their own national state, as an answer to the „Jewish question“, could only succeed a) against promises of self-government to the Arabs, b) with political, economic, and military support from outside and, in the end, c) through violent majoritization. Except for small minorities on both sides, neither Jews nor Arabs wanted a bi-national

³⁹ When I use the terms Zionism or Zionist project in this paper, I refer to the dominating national state-building variant of Zionism.

state. Obviously, the Arabs would never voluntarily accept a state dominated by the Jews. No less a person than Zeev Jabotinsky, president of the „Revisionists“, Likud’s kind of predecessors, already discussed this openly in the mid-20s; he favoured a policy of military strength which would leave the Arabs no alternative but to accept a permanent Jewish presence in form of their own State in all of Palestine. The Zionist majority around David Ben-Gurion essentially accepted this position in the course of the 1930s, although it was more flexible on the size of the Jewish territory, at least tactically.⁴⁰

As the Arab revolt of 1936-1939 demonstrated, a peaceful regulation of the conflict between the Yishuv and the no longer to be overlooked Arab national movement, which would leave the core of the Zionist program basically intact, had become highly unlikely; the conflict between both nations about territory and rule would almost certainly have to be decided by force. At any rate, the Yishuv, which cooperated with Britain in the defeat of the Arab revolt, prepared itself thoroughly for the coming confrontation. In the civil war between the Yishuv and the Palestinians and the war between Israel and the Arabs in 1947-49, the Jews and the Palestinian Arabs both fought for their political, perhaps even their physical survival, at least in the sense of who would live where or was allowed to stay. Israel became a predominantly Jewish state not only because many Palestinians fled their homes but also through violent expulsion, the destruction of hundreds of Arab villages, the taking over of Arab houses and apartments in towns and cities, and a permanent ban on return.⁴¹

Zionism was a settler movement without a mother country of its own. That is its specific difference from other national movements: the former Jewish homeland, which had become the really existing homeland of a different people,⁴² had to be regained, through buying soil and turning it into national territory, through transfer of the indigenous population, or through conquest. (Other dispersed nations such as the Greeks or the Armenians at least had retained major connected settled areas in their old home countries.) Nevertheless, it did have a kind of substitute for the missing colonial metropole in form of the Zionist world movement and pro-Zionist tendencies in the United States and in Great Britain, which were not only motivated

⁴⁰ See also Brumlik, *Kritik*, pp. 45-70 about the Zionists’ fundamental national dilemma and their reaction to it.

⁴¹ Cf. the works by Benny Morris, e.g. his summary in *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict. 1881-2001*, New York 2001, pp. 252-258. See also the general overviews already mentioned by Kraemer or Ben-Ami. More pointedly critical is Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Oxford 2006.

⁴² After the first Zionist Congress at Basel in 1897, two representatives of the Rabbis of Vienna took off to Palestine to explore Herzl’s ideas. Their fact-finding mission resulted in a cable to Vienna which said: „The bride is beautiful, but she is married to another man“. Cf. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, New York-London 2000, p. 3.

by Christian or other philo-Semitic sentiments but also based on anti-Semitism to some extent. (One consideration, even if not the major one, behind the Balfour Declaration was concern over Jewish immigration to London from eastern Europe.) Without support from British imperialism and the Zionist world movement, the settlers in Palestine would not have been able to lay the foundations for their state, their undeniable pioneering achievements notwithstanding. Had the Arabs been seriously permitted a collective voice in all this, the idea of a Jewish national home would have been unrealistic from the very beginning, even if we allow for individual Arabs who acknowledged the historical legitimacy of a politically organized Jewish presence in Palestine. Under today's conditions, the Zionist program, which arose in the late 19th century, would no longer be possible, which throws a dark shadow on Western promises of self-determination or of "making the world safe for democracy" during and after World War I. At the time, these promises did not apply to what would later be called the "third world" or the "developing countries", and thus did not include most of the Arab region.

Western diplomacy knew about the dilemma. As the King/Crane Commission, convened by Woodrow Wilson himself to examine the question of the Mandate for Palestine, reported in August 1919: to subject nine-tenth of the population to unlimited Jewish immigration and to financial and social pressure to give up their land would be a gross violation of the principles which the American president himself had put forward. The Peace Conference in Paris should note that feelings not only in Palestine but also in all of Syria were intensely anti-Zionist. Not one of the British officers consulted had believed that the Zionist program could be carried out except by force of arms. The document also stated that the initial claim often submitted by Zionist representatives that they had a right to Palestine based on an occupation two thousand years ago, could "hardly be seriously considered". And the commission concluded:⁴³

In view of all these considerations, and with a deep sense of sympathy for the Jewish cause, the Commissioners feel bound to recommend that only a greatly reduced Zionist program be attempted by the Peace Conference and even that, only very gradually initiated. This would have to mean that Jewish immigration should be definitely limited, and that the project for making Palestine distinctly a Jewish commonwealth should be given up.

Even as late as 1947, Gordon Merriam, an official from the staff of the Division for Near Eastern Affairs in the State Department, addressed the question of the division of Palestine in a memorandum as follows:⁴⁴

⁴³ Walter Laqueur/Barry Rubin (Eds.), *The Israel-Arab Reader. A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 6th edition, New York-London-Victoria 2001, pp. 24-25, the quotation on p. 25. The report had no impact whatsoever, and it was published only years after the Paris conference.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Lawrence Davidson, *America's Palestine. Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*, Gainesville-Tallahassee-Tampa 2001, p. 182 (my emphasis).

U.S. support for partition of Palestine (...) can be justified only on the basis of Arab and Jewish consent. Otherwise we should violate the principle of self-determination which has been written into the Atlantic Charter, the Declaration of the United Nations, and the United Nations Charter – a principle that is deeply imbedded in our foreign policy. *Even a United Nations determination in favour of partition would be, in the absence of such consent, a stultification and violation of UN's own charter.*

Assistant Secretary Loy Henderson shared Merriam's concerns and passed them on to Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State's deputy. Acheson insisted not to file the memo and to destroy all copies.

In these contradictions I see the major guilt *vis-à-vis the Palestinians* of the whole West (here in the sense of Occident, including Zionism, and Russia) which delegated its own internal national conflicts between Non-Jews and Jews, or – more precisely – its incompetence to integrate its Jewish citizens peacefully and enduringly, to the “South” (in this case the Orient).⁴⁵ Those mostly affected by this delegation, the Arabs, were refused to have a say, ignoring international legal obligations and repeated political assurances. The majority vote in the United Nations, against the vote of all Arab member countries, was understandable in light of the confrontation and the irreconcilable differences between the conflicting parties, but it was not without problems and the Arab position, which claimed that it should not simply be overruled on such an existential question, not at all implausible. This all-Western guilt towards the Arabs, the Palestinian Arabs in particular, in my view requires some kind of compensation, at least an open recognition (as indicated in the above quoted statement by John Foster Dulles), in addition to central pragmatic compromises as envisaged and laid down in many papers, the Geneva Initiative, e.g.⁴⁶ It requires, above all, a definitive end to the on-going discrimination against and dispossession of the Palestinians.

This historical dimension had not and probably could not have been included adequately in the „Manifesto“. Another one had only been hinted at: the very old conflict between Occident and Orient. Arab or Islamic fundamentalists often connect the Middle East conflict with the medieval crusades, but this tradition also played an important role in the American and the British interpretation of developments in Palestine before, during, and after World War I. It is still relevant among evangelical Christians in the United States, a major group in the Republican Party, who are very critical of the peace process and support a Greater Israel, even

⁴⁵ To be sure, Arab governments very often placed their own state and power interests above or against those of the Palestinians. That does not change the conclusions in my analysis, however.

⁴⁶ Cf. Reiner Bernstein, *Von Gaza nach Genf. Die Genfer Friedensinitiative von Israelis und Palästinensern*, Schwalbach/Ts. 2006.

if for non-altruistic reasons concerning their own dispensationalist agenda.⁴⁷ The connection can also be found in the sub-text of quasi-official appeals to Western unity in the “war” against Islamic terrorism. Defining such boundaries between a Judeo-Christian and an Islamic civilization ignores (among other things) that many occidental Jews had fallen victim to the historical crusades, particularly in France and in the west of the Holy Roman Empire, and that sometimes Jews and Muslims had stood united in fighting Christian crusaders.

Imbedding the conflicts between pre-state Zionism and the Arabs in Palestine in the West’s colonial history⁴⁸ does not change one iota of Nazi-Germany’s (and its accomplices’) much greater guilt towards the Jews. There is a fundamental difference between expulsion and annihilation, namely life versus death. And it does not put in question, as I want to emphasize just as strongly, the legitimacy of the State of Israel, which today comprises far more than its Zionist origins; it can be justified from a post-Zionist point of view as well, if you will. Not only in terms of power politics, but also in terms of international law and in terms of morality; the latter not only with the historical persecutions, but also with the number of generations which have now acquired their own national rights to their new homeland (certainly within the borders before 1967, but also within any other mutually agreed borders), or with the immigration of a large number of Jews from Arab (or other predominantly Islamic) countries after independence and during or after the first Israeli-Arab war (and later Israeli-Arab wars) – much or even most of it not voluntarily but under severe pressure from Arab or Muslim majorities or their governments. It may not be altogether improper, although somewhat simplistic, to speak of a kind of (involuntary) population exchange between the Yishuv/Israel, which thus became overwhelmingly Jewish, and their already largely non-Jewish Arab and/or Muslim environment as far as Morocco. The story of the Jewish refugees from Arab or Muslim countries is hardly ever mentioned by the Arab/Islamic side (nor in the UN for that matter), and certainly not by anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic people such as the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Yet Israel is also reluctant to play this card, for its own reasons.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Colin Shindler, „Likud and the Christian Dispensationalists: A Symbiotic Relationship“, *Israel Studies*, 5:1 (Spring 2000), pp. 153-182.

⁴⁸ Brumlik, *Kritik des Zionismus*, pp. 131-150 presents an even broader and deeper perspective of historical structure: Israel as (one of) the latest manifestation of (colonial) globalization out of Europe since the 16th century. From this perspective, the Zionist dilemma is a historical “Ungleichzeitigkeit”, a disparity of long historical trajectories, since this process of (colonial) globalization out of Europe was actually coming to its end. Israel was founded in 1948, the year in which India became independent.

⁴⁹ For the basic story as such and about some asymmetries (an important one is that Israel welcomed and integrated the Jewish refugees, even if they were not ardent Zionists) see Avi Beker, “The Forgotten Narrative: Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries”, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, 17:3-4 (Fall 2005), www.jcpa.org/jpsr/jpsr-beker-f05.htm.

Taking into account that about 20 percent of Israeli citizens are Arabs, who in spite of their structural discrimination and their sympathies for the Palestinian cause mostly prefer Israel, and recognizing that about 35 to 40 percent of Israel's Jews are immigrants or refugees and their descendants from Arab countries, who are even more critical of them than Israelis of European origin or descent, one might as well regard the Middle East conflict at least in part as an intra-oriental conflict. This may sound absurd to one or the other reader, but I want to underline that the Middle East conflict has left its pre-state origins to a large extent and dramatically so, even if not completely.⁵⁰ To insist on the imperialist paradigm or even to regard Israel as a late crusader state amounts to a strange misrepresentation of history and to absurd mythology.

5. Conclusions

My personal conclusions from the discussion are ambivalent. On the one hand, I have become more reluctant to accept (or take seriously) the sometimes vehement criticism of the “sin” of establishing the connection between the Holocaust and the foundation of the State of Israel (and the Middle East conflict), particularly since it is so strong in Zionist and Israeli discourse itself. Quite independent of the question of a *causal* connection and the debate about it, the moral and political symbolism (even if sometimes misused for domestic or nationalistic purposes) of Israel as a haven for Jews is so obvious and legitimate that a *special responsibility for Germans and for Germany* to accept and support this general idea (even if it is partly a national mythology), particularly to strongly support the rights of Jews to live in peace and unharmed in Israel and everywhere else, remains beyond any doubt. This has never been disputed by my colleagues or by myself; quite to the contrary, we have always emphasized it strongly. The debate is about the best and most legitimate ways to secure these rights. On the other hand, I have also become much more reluctant to hold on to one of the central points in the original document (the “Manifesto”), which is a special German responsibility not only for the Holocaust but also for the Middle East conflict and the drama of the Palestinians.

The Holocaust definitely strengthened the legitimization (and the legitimacy) of the Zionist cause (and of Israel) among Jewry in general. It strengthened not only the Zionists' desperation, but also their sense of purpose, their determination and resolution vis-à-vis the Arabs

⁵⁰ The Middle East conflict may have seen, at least in part, another transformation in the last 20-30 years: from a conflict between essentially secular nationalist movements to one between politicized religious-fundamentalist world-views.

(and the British) in the civil war and the war of independence – and beyond. And it has made world opinion and international political decision-making more sympathetic to the Zionist purpose. Yet it was almost certainly not the decisive factor in the establishment of Israel (and by implication the Middle East conflict).

As for immigration from Germany in the 1930s, a time of discrimination and exclusion for the German Jews, it *was* important for the growth and the economic viability of the Yishuv (and for the development of its conflict with the Arabs), but again not decisive. And we need to take into account that the increase in Jewish immigration in the early 1930s and the reaction to it from the Arabs also was a major reason for Britain to strictly curtail Jewish immigration later. If we broaden the time-frame, we must regard the immigration of the 1930s as *one of several* important “aliyot” from the end of the 19th century into the late 1940s/early 1950s (and later on), relating to anti-Semitism and pogroms in Eastern Europe, including those in Poland after World War II, and to pressure and persecution in Arab countries as well. *Growth rates* of the Jewish population in Palestine had also been very high in 1925 and 1926, and in 1925 higher than in any year in the 1930s – although though from a much smaller base. And we should not forget that the Holocaust destroyed not only much of European Jewry (we know that), but with it the mainstay of Zionism. In this sense the Holocaust contributed to the potential *prevention* of a Jewish state in Palestine and by implication the Middle East conflict – which explains the sad fact of sympathy for Hitler among many Arabs.

While the Holocaust is definitely connected to the conflict, on both levels of collective narratives/understandings and of material historical development, I regard the material historical connections not obvious and strong enough to justify the extension. I place the responsibilities for the current conflict on the major conflicting parties themselves (to what degree on which side being a question of legitimate controversy) plus regional and external actors (Germany being of minor importance in this context), and for its historical origins and thus by implication the origins of the plight of the Palestinians on the more general problems of European nationalism, anti-Semitism, and colonialism. There certainly is a special *European* (in which I include Zionism) historical responsibility for the conflict, beginning with the Balfour declaration and reaching into the 1960s. Responsibilities of individual European countries for these historical origins of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict vary, to be sure. Denmark, Bulgaria, or Italy were much more positively disposed towards their Jewish citizens in general than were France, central and eastern Europe. Theodor Herzl’s plea for a Jewish state was not only a

reaction to the Dreyfus affair, but as least as much a response to Dr. Lueger's, the mayor of Vienna's and one of Hitler's teachers', vitriolic anti-Semitism or to the quite common "Juden raus" in the Berlin of the Kaiserreich.

So I include traditional German and Austrian anti-Semitism among the general European origins of the Middle East conflict, but I suggest that we stop talking of a *special German* historical responsibility for it, while of course maintaining a *special German* responsibility to fight anti-Semitism and to support the rights of Jews to live in peace and unharmed as a central obligation from the Holocaust. There is also a special Arab responsibility for the Middle East conflict, beginning with the Mufti's political rigidity and his cooperation and association with Nazi Germany, the pressure on and expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Jews in the late 1940s and the 1950s from Arab countries, and the in parts continuing denial of Israel's right to exist. All of this does neither exclude a strong emphasis on non-violent solutions to the Middle East conflict nor special concern for the observance of basic human rights, both of which can also be legitimized or reinforced as consequences from Germany's darkest period, but can just as well be based on general philosophical, religious, or political traditions.

I would finally like to put up for discussion an attitude towards the Middle East conflict which ignores the burden of its historical origins, focusing on current responsibilities of both sides for its present configuration and exertion instead. I do believe that some of the deep historical structures of this conflict need to be addressed in some form, symbolically and also in part materially, if one wants a lasting settlement. This can probably not be achieved without recognition of and respect for the stories of suffering by *both* people and their integration into the relationship between Occident and Orient. But approaches neglecting the shadows of deep structure, concentrating on the political and the psychological problems and traumas of the more recent history of the conflict, may be just as valid.⁵¹ To give an example, I would like to use a recent article by Nicholas D. Kristof in the New York Times. Kristof, a friend of Israel to be sure, makes an argument quite similar to the „Manifesto“. True friendship does not mean to agree with everything, and the American non-debate about Israel's role and policies was detrimental to the United States, to the peace process in the Middle East, and to Israel itself.⁵²

⁵¹ Dan Bar-On presents an integrated view focusing on the traumatisation by the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians since the War of Independence, but including older traumatic experience: "Israeli Society between the Culture of Death and the Culture of Life", *Israel Studies*, 2:2 (Fall 1997), pp. 88-112.

⁵² Insert from the New York Times to the Süddeutsche Zeitung, April 2, 2007, p. 2.

Hard-line Israeli policies have profoundly harmed that country's long-term security by adding vulnerable settlements, radicalizing young Palestinians, empowering Hamas and Hezbollah, isolating Israel in the world and nurturing another generation of terrorists in Lebanon. The Israeli right's aggressive approach has only hurt Israeli security, just as President Bush's invasion of Iraq ended up harming U.S. interests. (...) Last summer, after Hezbollah killed three Israeli soldiers and kidnapped two others, Prime Minister Olmert invaded Lebanon and thus transformed Hezbollah into a heroic force in much of the Arab world. President Bush would have been a much better friend to Israel if he had tried to rein in Mr. Olmert. So let's be better friends — and stop biting our tongues.

Why is concern about Israel's short- and long-term security, concern about all people in the region, concern about the extremely difficult and partly desperate situation of the Palestinians, concern about the development of relations between „the West“ and Arab or Islamic countries not enough reason to ask questions about the policies of a country which Germany feels close to for all kinds of reasons, not only historical and not only responsibilities; policies in the conflict with the Palestinians which many people, political lay persons as well as experts on the region, consider imprudent, illegal, and immoral in several respects? Certainly, people in Germany should understand why many Israelis are sceptical about peace and about restraint in the face of danger; there are more than enough historical and current reasons for such reluctance. Israel has every right to defend itself with all necessary and legitimate means. Yet full rights to exist (territorially, politically, and economically) apply to the Palestinians (and their future state) as well. Everyday reality of Israel's occupation, control, and settlement policies is still far away from recognizing these rights.⁵³ As Roger Cohen, another strong friend and supporter of Israel, has said recently about Barack Obama and his attitude towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a potential future President of the United States: “Nor is he blind to the fact that backing Israel is not enough if the backing gives carte blanche for the subjugation of another people.”⁵⁴

⁵³ For a detailed and substantial criticism not only of the settler movement but also of Israel's settlement policy see Idith Zertal/Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land. The War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007*, New York 2007.

⁵⁴ Roger Cohen, No Manchurian Candidate, *International Herald Tribune*, February 11, 2008, p. 6.