Chapter 9

The Ongoing Major Distortion of the Holocaust

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes mainly recent developments of the various types of distortions of the Holocaust. The analysis follows the main categories of the author’s earlier book, The Abuse of the Holocaust Memory: Distortions and Responses (2009). These are justification of the Holocaust or promoting a new one, Holocaust denial or its minimization, deflection or whitewashing of guilt, Holocaust de-Judaization in part through its universalization, Holocaust equivalence, Holocaust inversion, Holocaust trivialization, and obliterating Holocaust memory. The abuse keeps increasing at a rather fast rate and has permeated several quarters of mainstream society. It is feared that manipulation of the truth may become a substantial part of the debate on the Holocaust. This will be even more possible when all surviving Holocaust victims are very old. It is difficult to see how in a more and more chaotic world this trend could be halted. It is recommended that Holocaust memorial institutions start to systematically and professionally monitor abuse in their respective countries and categorize them.

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INTRODUCTION

The abuse and distortion of the Holocaust has many facets. A basic analysis of this has been made in this author’s 2009 book *The Abuse of Holocaust Memory; Distortions and Responses* (Gerstenfeld, 2009). In that publication, events, statements and incidents were grouped into eight main categories. In the past few years, however, the number of incidents has greatly increased and unless systematic ongoing monitoring is put in place by an institution, it is impossible to professionally oversee the entire area. This means that salient developments have also become partly obscured. An additional aspect of this is that manipulation of the truth may become a substantial part of the debate on the Holocaust. This will be even more possible when, say within ten years all surviving Holocaust victims will be very old.

In order to study this subject in a more detailed and systematic way, one has to categorize the Holocaust’s abuse. In the analysis hereunder the same categories defined by this author in his original book are followed. There, eight such categories were suggested: justification of the Holocaust or promoting a new one, Holocaust denial or its minimization, deflection or whitewashing of guilt, Holocaust de-Judaization in part through its universalization, Holocaust equivalence, Holocaust inversion, Holocaust trivialization and obliterating Holocaust memory.

Yet among the newer developments there is an increasing mixing of categories. Chinese tourists were arrested in August 2017 after they took a selfie making the Hitler salute outside the Reichstag in Berlin. One might categorize them as indirect Holocaust promoters of a primitive kind, or equally as indirect trivializers of the Holocaust, or just as fools (*The Guardian*, August 5, 2017). One would have to know more about them in order to understand in which category they best belong. In addition, categories tend to fragment while new types of abuse have emerged. Some fall clearly in the earlier defined categories, others not. The research for this essay has thus identified structural changes in the subject of study. The examples hereunder are taken mainly but not exclusively from the period since the original book was published.

One wonders why the memory of the Holocaust does not fade away in time. That is the nature of historical events in general. Why is the opposite happening with the Holocaust and several related World War II events and aspects? Why do they draw increased attention?

Even though one cannot quantify the phenomenon, the qualitative indications of the increase of Holocaust abuse are often evident. It is only when one starts researching it, that one begins to realize how frequent and diverse the phenomenon is. When looking for possible reasons, a number of disparate possible causes emerge. One is a trend toward increasing chaos in the world. A second is the increased removal of barriers of what is acceptable in the public domain or in certain environments.
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