

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

## Introduction

In late June 2012, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Salzburg Global Seminar co-sponsored the symposium *Learning from the Past: Global Perspectives on Holocaust Education*.<sup>1</sup> The symposium, with support from the Austrian Future Fund, the Austrian National Fund for the Victims of National Socialism, and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance,<sup>2</sup> convened experts and practitioners on Holocaust and genocide education from five continents. These experts discussed the value of the Holocaust as a topic of study to states outside of the general scope of Western Europe, North America, and Israel. The symposium was a first step in an effort to assist individuals and organizations who seek to understand the potential relevance of the Holocaust and its lessons to their particular culture.

Building on the symposium's insights, we now examine how national, regional, and international historical narratives impact the global understanding of the Holocaust. We survey the world's major regions, explore where the Holocaust is known and where it is not, and assess the major institutions responsible for the dissemination of knowledge about the Holocaust. In general, these institutions include the national and local education systems. As an embodiment of the state, the educational system is especially influential in shaping the local historical narrative of the Holocaust.

## Learning from the Past: The Salzburg Global Seminar

In the late 1990s, then-Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson learned that Holocaust denial proliferated among Swedish youth and convened the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup> In 1998, the forum officially established the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF).<sup>4</sup> The ITF, recently renamed the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), currently has 31 members—most of which are located in Western Europe—and is the only intergovernmental organization solely devoted to Holocaust remembrance and education. While educational initiatives around Holocaust memory in these 31 countries have been chronicled, far less is known about states outside the IHRA. This project seeks to fill that gap.

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<sup>1</sup> The full report on the symposium can be found here: [www.salzburgglobal.org/mediafiles/MEDIA68454.pdf](http://www.salzburgglobal.org/mediafiles/MEDIA68454.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Formerly the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

<sup>3</sup> From November 30 through December 3, 1998, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the United States Department of State convened the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets. Attendees devoted a day to the topics of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research, including the importance of Holocaust education and the goals of the newly established ITF. For more information, see *Proceedings of the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets* (Washington, DC, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> On Swedish Holocaust denial, see Geoffrey Short and Carole Ann Reed, *Issues in Holocaust Education* (Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 5. On the Stockholm forum, see *Proceedings*, Stockholm Forum on the Holocaust, 2000.

In 2012, representatives from states as diverse as Ecuador, Rwanda, and South Korea convened in Salzburg, Austria. Following four days of discussion, participants summarized the lessons the Holocaust offers their home countries, i.e., as a means

- to understand national identity and the impact of the Holocaust and Holocaust-related immigration;
- to illuminate traumatic discrimination in the country's past; and
- to serve as a prism for examining current issues in contemporary society.<sup>5</sup>

### **Understanding National Identity and the Impact of the Holocaust and Holocaust-related Immigration**

Though many of the states in which the Holocaust took place are members of the IHRA, a significant number of states have not joined the organization. Citizens in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, for instance, suffered anti-Jewish and anti-Slavic violence at the hands of the Nazis. Though the Soviet era's official interpretation of Nazi aggression as predominately anti-Communist complicates Holocaust memory in those states, the Holocaust is clearly relevant there.

Even in those places where the Holocaust did not directly take place, substantial pre-war Jewish populations and the immigration of both Holocaust survivors and perpetrators to some states led to a greater national memory of the Holocaust. Following the war, many Jewish Holocaust victims remained in Europe or settled in the United States and Palestine/Israel. However, significant numbers of Holocaust survivors also immigrated to South America, South Africa, and Australia. Areas with a history of receiving significant numbers of Jewish refugees tended to develop an interest in educating their citizens about the Holocaust. On the South American continent, Argentina received the most European immigrants after the war, including many Jewish refugees as well as Nazi war criminals attempting to flee prosecution. Argentina's interest in Holocaust education is evidenced by the fact that it is currently the only state outside of Europe, North America, and Israel that holds full membership in the IHRA. Australia offers another example of the impact of European Jewish immigration. By the 1970s, two-thirds of Australia's sizable post-World War II Jewish population was comprised of Holocaust survivors. Australia now has two Holocaust museums, which work closely with local schools to train teachers in Holocaust education.<sup>6</sup>

### **Illuminating Traumatic Discrimination in the Country's Past**

Some states with limited historical connection to the events of the Holocaust have nonetheless employed the history as an effort to understand and reconcile their own traumatic pasts. In these instances, the Holocaust serves as an example of the consequences of intolerance and racism and therefore, in the words of the Education Working Group (EWG) of IHRA, as the world's

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<sup>5</sup> SGS, Concluding Table Discussions, Permission Pending.

<sup>6</sup> See Suzanne Rutland, "Jewish Immigration after the Second World War: 'The Transformation of a Community,'" *Israel & Judaism Studies: The Education Website of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies*, [www.ijds.org.au/Jewish-Immigration-after-the-Second-World-War/default.aspx](http://www.ijds.org.au/Jewish-Immigration-after-the-Second-World-War/default.aspx), accessed June 1, 2012.

“paradigmatic genocide.”<sup>7</sup> In South Africa and Rwanda, attempts to reconcile divergent ethnic groups after the apartheid era and the genocide, respectively, have led to educational engagement with the Holocaust. These initiatives are intended to develop more compassionate societies in which diversity is respected. In South and Central America, the transition to democracy after a series of brutal military dictatorships and the end of state violence against mostly indigenous citizens spawned a renewed interest in human rights education. Several Latin American states have looked to the Holocaust as a way to think about their own pasts. In China, scholars have compared and contrasted the Holocaust with the atrocities committed by the Japanese military against civilians in Nanjing during World War II.

### **The Holocaust as a Prism for Understanding Current Issues in Society**

On the one hand, the increased interest in human rights in the past quarter century has led citizens, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and governments to incorporate the study of the Holocaust into the curriculum as a means to teach students to respect diversity. In Ecuador, for example, the Ministry of Education has promoted a curriculum that reflects on consequences of the Holocaust as a way to fight discrimination against indigenous peoples. In Mexico, recent pedagogical experiments highlight the Holocaust as a means to foster civic responsibility and combat violence.

On the other hand, the study of the Holocaust has been fraught with political tension. In some states in North Africa and the Middle East, conflict over the legitimacy of the state of Israel, which resulted from the UN partition of Palestine in the years immediately following World War II, has influenced some citizens and governments to diminish or to deny outright the accepted scholarly consensus on the events of the Holocaust. This interpretation is not without its exceptions, but its prevalence demonstrates that the memory of the Holocaust cannot be understood without accounting for local political considerations.

### **The Global Influence of Holocaust Education**

In the past decade, an international infrastructure has developed to extend awareness of the Holocaust to populations outside of IHRA states. The United Nations has played a major role in furthering Holocaust education. In 2005, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 60/7 entitled “Holocaust Remembrance,” making January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, International Holocaust Remembrance Day (IHRD). The Resolution also recommended that UN members mark the day with suitable events. In addition, the United Nations established an outreach program to “mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide.”<sup>8</sup> Since then, the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme has been involved in commemorative ceremonies around the globe, from Burma to Kenya.

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<sup>7</sup> IHRA Education Working Group, “Holocaust, Genocide, and Crimes against Humanity: Suggestions for Classroom Teachers,” 3, [www.holocausttaskforce.org/images/IHRA\\_data/EWG\\_Holocaust\\_and\\_Other\\_Genocides\\_copy.pdf](http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/images/IHRA_data/EWG_Holocaust_and_Other_Genocides_copy.pdf), accessed June 8, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> “Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on the Holocaust Remembrance (A/RES/60/7, 1 November 2005), [www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res607.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res607.shtml) accessed May 30, 2012.

Additionally, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) works closely with its member states' specialized organizations and the Holocaust and the UN Outreach Programme to promote Holocaust awareness. General Resolution 34c/61 (2007) asked the Director-General of UNESCO to consult with the Secretary-General of the UN regarding the Outreach Programme with the view to contributing to the promotion of Holocaust education and the confrontation of Holocaust denial. UNESCO's many contributions include the 2009 experts meeting "Combating Intolerance, Exclusion, and Violence through Holocaust Education," which looked particularly at the potential of Holocaust education in Africa; a 2010 double issue of the organization's journal, *Prospects*, devoted to international perspectives on Holocaust education; a 2011 symposium titled "Teaching Difficult Issues in Primary Schools: the Example of the Holocaust;" a January 2012 international conference titled "International Dimensions of Holocaust Education;" and the April 2012 experts meeting "Holocaust Education in a Global Context." The latter initiative is part of an ongoing UNESCO effort to map and assess formal Holocaust education worldwide.<sup>9</sup>

NGOs have similarly contributed to expanding the global influence of Holocaust education, in particular, using the Holocaust as a case study to understand and prevent genocide. The more prominent efforts in this field are represented by a number of significant international organizations,<sup>10</sup> including:

- Aegis Trust
- Anne Frank House
- Auschwitz-Birkenau State Memorial and Museum
- Facing History and Ourselves
- Mémorial de la Shoah
- Salzburg Global Seminar's Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention Initiative
- The Aladdin Project
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
- USC Shoah Foundation
- Yad Vashem

Another global influence in furthering awareness of the Holocaust is popular culture. The influence of popular culture is difficult to document, but cultural productions about the Holocaust, originating mostly from Europe and the United States, have reached millions of people around the world. In short, popular culture since World War II and especially in the past quarter century has brought the Holocaust into a variety of national contexts. *The Diary of Anne*

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<sup>9</sup> *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education* 153 (March 2010) and 154 (June 2010); "Holocaust Education in a Global Context" program, [www.holocausttaskforce.org/images/IHRA\\_data/documents/08\\_news/holocaust%20ed-last%20version.pdf](http://www.holocausttaskforce.org/images/IHRA_data/documents/08_news/holocaust%20ed-last%20version.pdf), accessed May 30, 2012; Karel Fracapane suggestions on paper at SGS, permission pending.

<sup>10</sup> Left from the list above of international organizations and the list below of nongovernmental organizations is the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA). Operating primarily within Europe, the FRA's substantial contribution to Holocaust education, remembrance, and research overlaps with that of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Notably, Action 4 of the Europe for Citizens Programme offers grants for remembrance of the European past, including the preservation of sites linked to Nazism, and the FRA has developed educational materials and publishes an annual report on antisemitism in Europe.

*Frank*, first published in Dutch in 1947 and first translated into English in 1952, has since become available worldwide and has stimulated Holocaust education. The diary has been translated into more than 60 languages, including Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Armenian, and Afrikaans. It is currently used pedagogically in South African schools, for instance, and in the early 2000s, the Documentation Center of Cambodia translated the book into Khmer and distributed it to schools in Phnom Penh to facilitate discussion about the 1970s genocide in Cambodia.<sup>11</sup>

Popular films about the Holocaust have also contributed to historical consciousness of the period. The film adaptation of William Styron's novel *Sophie's Choice* (1982) and Claude Lanzmann's nine-hour documentary *Shoah* (1985) were some of the first internationally acclaimed films about the Holocaust. In 1993, Steven Spielberg's Academy Award-winning *Schindler's List* reached countries around the world and is still screened in many countries, as is Roberto Benigni's *La Vita È Bella* (1997) and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* (2002).

### **Regional Framework**

In the pages that follow, we have built on the insights from the Salzburg symposium in order to consider the current state of Holocaust education outside the United States, Canada, Western Europe, and Israel. We have approached this study through the lens of the following eight geographical regions:

1. South America
2. Central America, the Caribbean, and Mexico
3. the Middle East and North Africa
4. Sub-Saharan Africa
5. Asia
6. Russia and Eastern Europe
7. the Balkans and the Caucasus
8. Australia and New Zealand

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<sup>11</sup> Table Discussions, "What Have We Learned," SGS, permission pending from South African, Armenian, Korean, Cambodian, Venezuelan delegations.