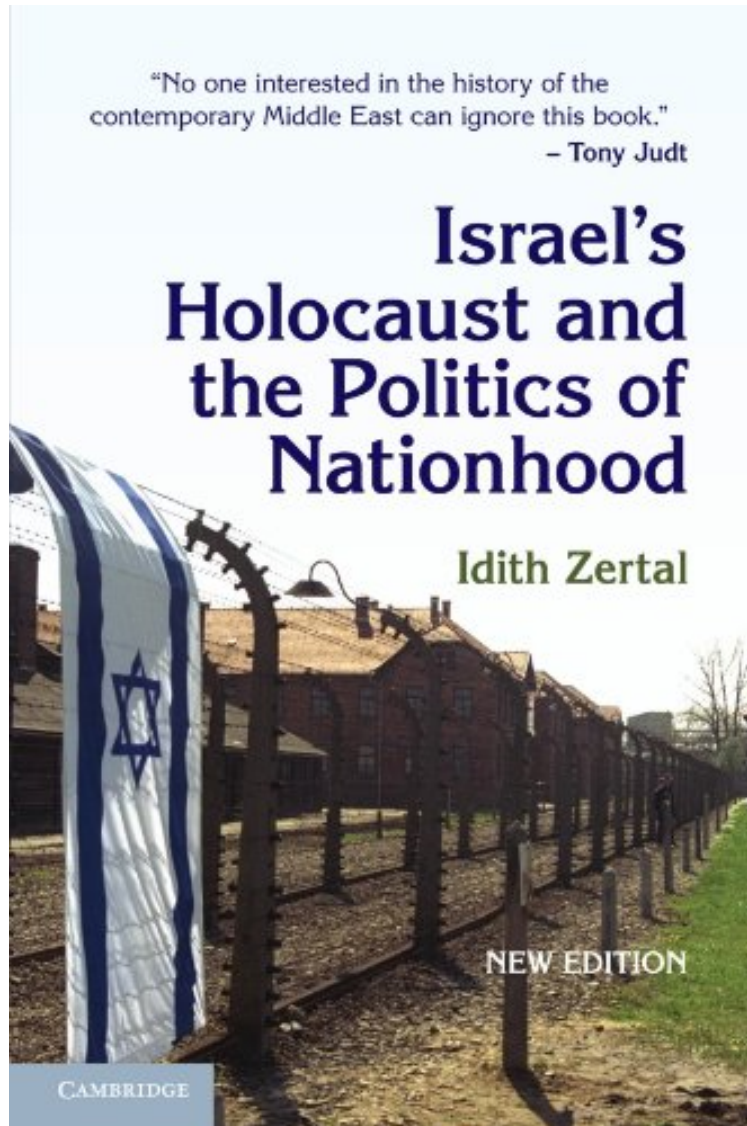


[Free] Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood (Cambridge Middle East Studies)

Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood (Cambridge Middle East Studies)

Idith Zertal

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Idith Zertal : Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood (Cambridge Middle East Studies) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood (Cambridge Middle East Studies):

1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Legacy of the Holocaust in Israel. Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Overrated. Jewish-Nazi Collaboration. The Kafr Qasim Massacre By Jan Peczkis This work focuses on the Holocaust

as the *raison d'être* of the State of Israel. It discusses Holocaust survivors, Israel's wars with her neighbors as a thwarting of a new Holocaust, the Eichmann trial, Hannah Arendt, and much more. It also emphasizes Jews who cooperated with the Nazis, and that is what I elaborate in my review. Instead of limiting myself to the contents of this book, I also relate its ideas to the collaboration of other peoples with the Nazis. Author Idith Zertal emphasizes the implication of the connection between Zionism and the Holocaust. For instance, Marek Edelman, until recently, had largely been ignored by Israelis, as he was not a Zionist and because he had stayed behind in Poland. (p. 35). In addition, Hannah Arendt, following the unwelcome criticism of Jewish conduct in her *EICHMANN IN JERUSALEM*, was never again invited by an Israeli academic institution to have her say after the publication of her book, either on the book or on any other subject. (p. 131). Only after the passage of forty years was her book translated into Hebrew. (p. 131).

THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING (1943), WHILE SYMBOLIC, SHOULD NOT BE OVER-HYPED Some recent media portrayals of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising have included statements to the effect that the Warsaw Jews resisted the Nazis longer than did the entire Polish Army in 1939. Such a comparison is patently ridiculous. In contrast, author Zertal keeps the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in proper perspective--a very small event. She writes, (quote) In purely military terms, the Warsaw ghetto uprising [sic] was not a major operation. It made no contribution towards shortening the war or vanquishing Nazism. It did not save Jewish lives and made no real difference in the process of systematic murder of the Jews of Europe. There are various estimates by survivors of the uprising, such as Antek Zuckerman, Israel Gutman, and Marek Edelman, which range from 220 fighters (Edelman) to 500 (Zuckerman). (unquote)(p. 27).

THEMES PERTAINING TO JEWISH SERVICE TO THE NAZIS AGAINST OTHER JEWS The issues raised in this book ask whether the collaborator who is a member of the victim group is truly a collaborator, and when and if collaboration can be excused because of the desperation of the situation, the actual or perceived goal of lessening the gravity of the situation, the breakdown in normal considerations of right and wrong, the lack of freedom to make independent choices, etc. However, the problem with such reasoning is that it can also be applied to the Nazi collaboration of other peoples (e.g., eastern Europeans). Either that, or the Jews and the Holocaust are so special and so different that one set of rules apply to Jews cooperating with the Nazis, and another set of rules apply to everyone else who cooperated with the Nazis. For more on all this, please click on, and read my detailed reviews, of *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel after the Holocaust and International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law (The Collected Courses of the Academy of European Law)*.

EXCULPATORY REASONING AS PER JEWISH-NAZI COLLABORATION The Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law, was passed by the Knesset in 1950. (p. 60). Zertal suggests that it came to be because Holocaust survivors demanded that Jewish collaborators be brought to justice (p. 62), and in order to appease Israeli disgust at Jewish conduct during the Holocaust. (p. 65). How serious was this effort? A series of trials took place in the 1950s and early 1960s, but in NO CASE was a Jewish defendant found guilty of the death of a single person. (p. 67). Prison sentences, when administered, were perfunctory. (p. 69). By the time of the Eichmann trial, the Holocaust was reckoned so unprecedented that Jewish conduct was [arguably conveniently] deemed impossible to judge. (p. 77). Can Jewish conduct summarily be excused simply because the defendants are Jews, and all Jews were victims of the Nazis? The brutal conduct of defendant Yehezkel Anigster, the Chief Kapo at two Silesian labor camps in 1943-1944, is instructive. Zertal asks, (quote) Were the only alternatives to serve the Nazis or face death, to subjugate fellow prisoners or face punitive action? Did they accept dubious positions to forestall potentially worse situation? In Anigster's case, prosecution witnesses, in describing the defendant's sadism, said there was no external pressure for the defendant's beatings, since in most cases the Germans were not present. Moreover, several witnesses claimed that no prisoner was forced to accept the position of kapo or Chief Kapo, and that there were some who refused and were not punished. (unquote)(pp. 72-73).

COMPLICITY IN THE HOLOCAUST. JEWS NOT GUILTY? THEN POLES ALSO NOT GUILTY Although Zertal does not mention Poles or Jedwabne, the decision of Judge Yosef Lamm, in the aforementioned Anigster case, has a direct bearing on accusations related to so-called complicity in the Holocaust. Chief Kapo Yehezkel Anigster was charged not only with brutal treatment of Jewish inmates, but also of contributing to their alarming death rate. (p. 71). However, Judge Yosef Lamm declared that Anigster had not intended to exterminate the civilian population and had made it easier for the Nazis to execute their plan to annihilate the Jewish people, thereby playing a terrible and heinous role, but with intentions utterly different from those of the Nazis, he [Anigster] was merely a Nazi accomplice. Lamm adjudged that in no way could Anigster be regarded as guilty of crimes against humanity. (p. 74). To apply the foregoing reasoning beyond its narrow Judeocentric context, let us consider the Poles and Jedwabne. Let us suppose that some ethnic Poles did indeed freely participate in the German-sponsored mass murder of Jews at Jedwabne and environs. As far as these Poles were concerned, they were merely taking revenge for the earlier Jewish-Soviet collaboration against fellow Poles, and nothing more. Their goals were completely different from those of the Nazis. Acting as they were in July 1941, which was before Nazi exterminatory policies against Jews became evident (late 1941 or early 1942), they could not possibly have had any inkling of the fact that their actions would contribute to the eventual systematic Nazi German extermination of 5-6 million Jews. On this basis, these Poles may be thought of as accomplices of the Nazis, but cannot be accused of crimes against humanity, let alone complicity in the Holocaust. And yet that is exactly what many Jews say about Poles.

AN IRONY

TO THE HOLOCAUST INDUSTRY Nowadays, we see various European nations blamed, to some degree, for the Holocaust, so that reparations money can be extorted from them. Interestingly, when reparations were originally demanded--from Holocaust-perpetrator Germany alone--in the early 1950s, some Jews saw even THAT as both hypocritical and self-serving. For instance, this was the view of Shmuel Tamir, who was in opposition to the Mapai ruling party in general and to David Ben Gurion in particular. [Note that Ben Gurion did little to alleviate the Holocaust then going on in Europe, which Zertal explains (or excuses) as a form of pragmatism. (p. 29)]. Zertal comments, (quote) Referring to the issue of German reparations, Tamir had written: And now, they want to protect their lying, parasitic regime by accepting reparations for [the] extermination in which they played a part reparations for the flesh and blood of the Jewish people maybe even for the flesh and blood of their own fathers and mothers. (unquote)(p. 89). [For a more detailed--though perhaps excessive--critique of Ben Gurion's conduct during the Holocaust, please click on, and read my detailed review, of Ben-Gurion's Scandals: How the Haganah and the Mossad Eliminated Jews]. Let us move beyond Ben Gurion and the Israeli politics of the 1950s. What would Shmuel Tamir say, today, were he alive to see the long-lasting and ever-expanding Holocaust Industry? JEWISH ATROCITIES AGAINST PALESTINIANS: THE KAFAR KASSEM (KAFR QASIM) MASSACRE The best-known Jewish massacre of Arab civilians was at Deir Yassin in 1948. Zertal does not mention this, but he instead brings up the mass murder of 41 Arab villagers, men, women, and children, in October 1956, at Kafar Kassem. (pp. 172-173). Jewish officer Shalom Ofer, and several of his men, conducted the deed a premeditated act of mass murder--based on the fact that some of the Arabs had failed to obey the curfew. Shalom Ofer was unrepentant of this crime, saying that We acted like Germans, automatically, we didn't think. (p. 172). In contrast, Rabbi Benyamin was quoted as saying, Soon we shall resemble Nazis and pogromists. Yeshayahu Leibovitz went as far as suggesting that the Nuremberg defendants will now have to be rehabilitated. (p. 172). 0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Politics of Victimhood By R. L. Huff Israeli journalist Idith Zertal has written a penetrating, definitive study of the politics of blood sacrifice as sanctifying the Israeli state; and of the general political manipulation of officially sanctioned death, the state's "murder of its sons." Beginning with the founding mythology of Yosef Trumpeldor at Tel-Hai, through the Warsaw Ghetto, into the trial of Eichmann and on into the Six-Day War, we see how Israeli nationhood and victimhood became, from the first, two sides of the same coin; that questioning the former is silenced as an act of betraying the latter. Of course there is nothing particularly Israeli in this process - the Cuban Revolution comes to mind also - but no modern state has made this such an unquestioned bedrock of its national psyche and had it so completely accepted on face value in the larger world. It has even spawned imitators, as witness the state-sanctioned mythology now shrouding the "Holodomor" of Ukraine (ironic in view of Ukrainian nationalists' own role in Nazi-occupied Europe.) It is evident, also, that there is really no hope for a practical solution to the grave issues of Israel and the Middle East until the mythology of sacred sacrifice is secularized, and the principle of living for one's country is seen as the higher goal. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. On Zionist Identification By N. Jones This is an incisive and powerful critique of the historical, metaphysical, and political damage done by the conflation of Jewish identity and Zionist Nationalist identity - a.k.a. the creation of the state of Israel. To site Talal Asad's reading of this book: "Idith Zertal describes the ideological use made of those who survived the Nazi mass murders--that is, the symbolic identification of their traumatic experience with Israel as a nation-state. The nation's leaders were not content to point to the many victims who survived the genocidal experience and who now lived in Israel but went on to claim the Israeli state as the symbolic survivor of that experience, as its historic fulfillment and redemption. Among other things, this has enabled the Palestinians (failed resisters of Israeli state power, defeated enemies of the Zionist project) to be represented as the present representatives of Nazi extremism." "Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood" is beautifully researched -- consistently using Knesset minutes and primary news sources -- and is an invaluable tool to anyone who wishes to disentangle their Jewish identity from Zionism. Also useful is Tom Segev's, the Seventh Million.

The ghost of the Holocaust is ever present in Israel, in the lives and nightmares of the survivors and in the absence of the victims. In this compelling and disturbing analysis, Idith Zertal, a leading member of the new generation of revisionist historians in Israel, considers the ways Israel has used the memory of the Holocaust to define and legitimize its existence and politics. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the author exposes the pivotal role of the Holocaust in Israel's public sphere, in its project of nation building, its politics of power, and its perception of the conflict with the Palestinians. She argues that the centrality of the Holocaust has led to a culture of death and victimhood that permeates Israel's society and self-image. For the updated paperback edition of the book, Tony Judt, the world-renowned historian and political commentator, has contributed a foreword in which he writes of Zertal's courage, the originality of her work, and the "unforgiving honesty with which she looks at the moral condition of her own country."

"This is a brilliant and unsettling book that charts new, deeply submerged territories of the collective consciousness and sub-consciousness of Israeli society. The book is a major contribution to our understanding of the history of Israeli life and mentality." Shlomo Ben Ami, Emeritus Professor of Modern History, Tel Aviv University, and former foreign minister of Israel "The book is admirably perceptive, nuanced, and sophisticated... Dr Zertal is not a linear historian or

mere chronicler of events. She is an intellectual and cultural historian of the highest distinction." Avi Shlaim, Professor of International Relations, University of Oxford "A moving and profound reflection on the role of mourning, death and victimhood in Israel." Henry Rousso, L'Express "Idith Zertal's excellent book follows the history of the manipulation of the Holocaust from the inception of Israel to the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin." --Ilan Pappé, Bookforum Oct/Nov 2005 For those seeking insight into the differences in current Israeli politics, Zertal provides a unique analysis of the intersection between past and present. Highly recommended. Choice "A major contribution to a debate and conversation which will only grow more important in years to come...No one interested in the history and politics of the contemporary Middle East can ignore this book." -Tony Judt, University Professor and Director of the Remarque Institute, New York University About the Author Idith Zertal is an Israeli historian and essayist, the author of many books and articles on Jewish, Zionist and Israeli history. She is currently teaching at the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland. Her works include *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (1998), and *Lords of the Land: The War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007* (co-authored with Akiva Eldar, 2007). *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* has been published in eight languages.