

*JGR (JOURNAL OF GENOCIDE RESEARCH) AGAIN AND HOW THE
HOLOCAUST IS NO BIG DEAL*

Israel W. Charny

Response to a review essay on two books on the Holocaust:

Goldberg, Amos; Smith, Helmut Walser; Gigliotti, Simone; Buggein, Marc and Confino, Alon (2016): Alon Confino, *Foundational pasts: the Holocaust as historical understanding* (Cambridge University Press, 2012)* and *A world without Jews: the Nazi imagination from persecution to genocide* (Yale University Press, 2014).** Review in Book Forum, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 18 (1), 101-131. [*192 pp.] [**304 pp.]

Minimization of the significance of a genocide (the subject in this case is the Holocaust) has been clearly identified by many scholars as a form of denial of a good many genocides.

Regrettably, denials of genocide also appear in the statements of some bona fide genocide scholars,^{1 2 3 4} and it is clear that our professional and ethical responsibility calls for identifying such denials openly. The issue of such minimization-denial takes on a further and much larger significance when it becomes clear that it is a bona fide journal in the field of genocide studies

¹ Israel W. Charny. A classification of denials of the Holocaust and other genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 5, (2003), no. 1, 11-34. Reprinted in Totten, Samuel and Bartrop, Paul R. (Eds.) *The Genocide Studies Reader*. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 517-537.

² Israel W. Charny. (2012). A Classification of Denials of the Holocaust and Other Genocides - Updated 2012. Originally published in *Genocide Prevention Now* web magazine Issue 12 (2012) which is no longer available. Reprinted on the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide: <http://www.ihgilm.com/a-classification-of-denials-of-the-holocaust-and-other-genocides-updated-2012/>

³ Manfred Gerstenfeld. *The War of a Million Cuts: The Struggle Against the Deligitimization of Israel and the Jews and the Growth of New Anti-Semitism*. (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs and New York: RVP Publishers, 2016).

⁴ Richard Hovannisian. *Denial of the Armenian Genocide with some Comparisons to Holocaust Denial*. The Inaugural Armenian Genocide Commemorative Lecture. (Sydney, Australia: Macquarie University, April 28, 1996) (pamphlet).

that is undertaking systematically the publication of many articles minimizing the significance of a given genocide.

In two recent empirical studies by Charny of *JGR* (results are given in the first study for a group of 76 mostly scholars⁵ and in the second study for a group of 30 students⁶), 65% of the respondents judged the journal to minimize the Holocaust, 56% defined it as anti-Israel, and 28% identified an anti-Semitic bias.

The majority of the scholars were identifiable members of IAGS, a smaller number other scholars of Holocaust and genocide, and the students were enrolled in courses on Holocaust and genocide. The subjects were asked to evaluate synopses of each of seven articles in the journal and then the journal as a whole.

Given the alarming conclusion there was and should be considerable discussion and criticism of the studies. *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, the journal of IAGS (which parenthetically Israel Charny founded and whose initial editorial board he headed for two years) saw fit to publish a major rejoinder to the first study,⁷ but then - in some peoples' opinions

⁵ Israel W. Charny. Holocaust Minimization, Anti-Israel Themes and Antisemitism: Bias at the *Journal of Genocide Research (JGR)*. *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*, 7, no.1, (2016).

<http://jsantisemitism.org/images/journals/articles/Holocaust-Minimization-Anti-Israel-&-Antisemitism-at-JGR.pdf>. Reprinted on the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem:

<http://ihgilm.com/articles/Holocaust-Minimization-Anti-Israel-&-Antisemitism-at-JGR.pdf>

⁶ Israel W. Charny. A Further Study of Bias in Articles in the *Journal of Genocide Research (JGR)*. *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*, 7, no. 2, (2016). <http://jsantisemitism.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JGR-Suppl-Study-121216.pdf>. Reprinted on the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide,

<http://www.ihgilm.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JGR-Suppl-Study-121216.pdf>

⁷ Amos Goldberg; Thomas J Kehoe; Dirk A. Moses; Raz Segal; and Martin Shaw. Israel Charny's Attack on the *Journal of Genocide Research* and its Authors: A Response. *Genocide Studies and Prevention*, 10, no.2, (2016), article 4. <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/gsp/vol10/iss2/4>. Reprinted on the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem: <http://www.ihgilm.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Response-to-Charny-s-Attack-on-the-Journal-of-Genocide-Research.pdf>

unethically - declined to consider publication of his response to the above rejoinder. This response was then published in the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* and now also included a report of a second smaller study of thirty students in an American university where the results were entirely similar, so that results were now also given for all 106 subjects.⁸

The essence of his reply is that notwithstanding critiques of author bias and a skewed selection of subjects (many of the subjects were personally known by the researcher, but obviously this was an outcome of his leadership for many years in developing the new field of genocide studies), the ratings of *JGR* speak for themselves. The bottom line remains clearly that large numbers of bona fide scholars of genocide reach conclusions that, shamefully, a professional journal of genocide studies has been publishing one article after another that promotes minimization of the Holocaust, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic themes.

The present article in response to a review essay in *JGR* is a further statement that *JGR* has since continued publishing explicit minimizations of the significance of the Holocaust. In the review essay of two books by Alon Confino, the journal has published and promoted further the concept that the Jews were not selected as such to be the Nazis' prime victims. One might say about *JGR* that "they're doing it again," both in a general sense, and specifically in the repetition of a thesis that Nazi persecution of Jews was derived or secondary to their persecutions of non-Aryans in general. Thus, in the several variations of minimization seen earlier in the journal, one presented by Gerhard Wolf claimed unbelievably and categorically that the Wannsee Conference was not about Jews, but about minorities as a whole in Europe.⁹ (Actually, the Wolf article was

⁸ Charny, *A Further Study of Bias*, 2016.

⁹ Gerhard Wolf. The Wannsee Conference in 1942 and the National Socialist Living Space Dystopia. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 17, no. 2 (2015), 153-175.

published by *JGR* too late to be included in the original study of seven articles, but this article was able to be included in the discussion of the original professional report of the study¹⁰).

The present extremely interesting, respectably multi-authored “Book Forum” reviews at length two books by Alon Confino who is no less than a professor of history both at Ben Gurion University in Israel as well as at the University of Virginia. The Confino books are reviewed very favorably by *JGR*. In the essay in which Confino is also listed as a co-author, the reviewers - including Confino - continue the thesis that the murders of the Jews were entirely secondary to an effete emphasis of Nazi policies towards many non-Aryan peoples. Once again the message gets across that the Holocaust was not really directed at Jews because they were Jews, rather they were to a great extent victims of another larger policy.

The agonized fates of the Jewish victims, because they are Jews, is nowhere to be recognized or experienced in these seemingly advanced intellectual analyses.¹¹ For the author of the present response to the review essay, any claims – whether by bona fide Israeli scholars or known anti-Semites – that the Jews were not persecuted, tortured and murdered precisely because they were Jews is akin to claims that the world is not round, human pollution is definitely not leading to climate change, or any number of other outrageous distortions of reality. Further, these claims ignore the obvious facts that hatred of the Jews was the guiding inspirational leitmotif of the Nazis in its own right, and by extension also the enabling emotional basis for other Nazi brutalities. See a recent book by an historian (that actually deals with the necessity of impeaching Donald Trump) in which the author writes –

¹⁰ Charny, *Holocaust Minimization*, 2016.

¹¹ One of the many thousands of documents of the suffering of the Jews as Jews will be found in the detailed account of the Treblinka death camp by one of its so few survivors: Yaakov Wernick, *A Year in Treblinka (Eye Witness Testimony)* (Tel Aviv: Dror L' Nefesh, 2011) (Hebrew).

The Nazis murdered many diverse people, but their Final Solution only targeted Jews for total annihilation. Submergence of the Final Solution within other Nazi atrocities is a tactic typical of Holocaust deniers.¹²

The journal is informing us, in astoundingly competent academic doubletalk that makes everything sound so intellectual and important while evading the reality of experience for human beings, that for all the evident antisemitism – because they obviously killed lots of Jews - the Holocaust is no less a function of German cultural metaphors. Translation: the Holocaust is not so much about hating Jews. The prime source of the Holocaust is “the logic of the modern nation-state seeking to get rid of its ‘others’”¹³ – obviously true but very much deflecting both intellectual and emotional awareness of the Jews as prime victims at the center of the German enthusiasm and devotion to killing.

The lead author of this book forum, Amos Goldberg, who is also a lecturer at an Israeli university (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), goes on to identify Confino’s historical account as “a major shift in Holocaust studies” in that it “differs significantly from traditional schools of Holocaust historiography, the intentionalist and the functionalist schools” and is more interested “in the cultural processes of creating meaning”.¹⁴ What meaning? What is this new central source meaning of the Holocaust that no one has understood before and which will revolutionize Holocaust studies? It is that “to understand the extermination of the Jews we must first and foremost understand how the Nazis made sense of the world, and not necessarily search for long

¹² Allan J Lichtman. *The Case for Impeachment*. London: William Collins (New York: Dey Street Books, 2017), 180.

¹³ Goldberg et al., Israel Charny’s Attack, 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

or short-term chains of historical causality”¹⁵. Indeed, “it is not that the past (of antisemitism) produced the [Nazi] present (of the execution), not that the ancient hatred led to the Holocaust but that the Nazis interpreted anew the past of Jewish German and Christian relations to fit their vision of creating a new world.”¹⁶

The above are so many words that one can no longer hear the cries of despair and torment of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, nor of the other victims – for indeed there were also significant non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust who must be remembered and honored,¹⁷ and clearly the Nazis also murdered indiscriminately millions of people without specification of any religious/national/ethnic/political/or gender identity. All of the above non-Jewish victims actually outnumber the six million Jewish victims, and yet the Jews are there to be killed not because of god knows what geopolitical and cultural goals of the German state, but specifically because *they are Jewish*.

The Nazis themselves tell us over and over again and fully explicitly that they hate Jews. It is because of the justification that the Jews are horrors, and in effect a disease, that they are humiliated, tortured and then hauled off to death at every stage of the Holocaust.

In his own contribution to this forum, the author of the two books, Alon Confino, notes entirely correctly that “there were a multitude of factors that made the Holocaust,” an important truth with which most scholars agree emphatically. Confino goes on to say that his interpretation

¹⁵ Quotation is from Confino as cited by Goldberg, et al., p.103.

¹⁶ Quotation is from Confino as cited by Goldberg, et al., *ibid*.

¹⁷ Michael Berenbaum. *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*. (New York: NYU Press 1992). See also Berenbaum, Michael. The Holocaust, Non-Jewish Victims. In *Encyclopedia of Genocide*. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 1999), 324–327.

“should be seen as giving one answer to an event caused by a combination of factors.”¹⁸ He then goes on to assert definitively that there are two concepts of the Holocaust that are “outright wrong”: The first is that the Holocaust was a result rather than a goal of Nazism, but in this writer’s judgment it is obvious that the Holocaust was *both* a goal and the result of a process. The second claim by Confino is that another outright incorrect view is that the Holocaust was “a result of the accumulation of centuries of antisemitism (an interpretation especially associated with Yad Vashem).”¹⁹ There is almost an anti-Semitic sound to this insistence that the Jews are over-emphasizing antisemitism through the centuries. In this connection it can be noted that researcher, Daniel Goldhagen,²⁰ has been soundly criticized by many scholars (including this writer) for his similarly one-sided view but one which over-emphasizes antisemitism as virtually the only causal source of the Holocaust, but clearly his basic emphasis on historic antisemitism as a critical major cause and the overwhelming major central dynamic of the Holocaust cannot be disputed rationally.

In sum, the minimization of the Holocaust both in this *JGR* review and in the books reviewed includes -

- claims that deaths took place almost inadvertently under conditions other than an intention to commit genocide against a specifically targeted people;
- periodic acknowledgments of the truth and reality of the Holocaust in order to appear fair and accurate, but then overwhelming swings back into statements of denial, almost

¹⁸ Alon Confino. *A Nazi tale of Germans, Jews and time: Interpreting the Holocaust*. In Goldberg et al., *Israel Charny’s Attack* (2016), 123.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 123.

²⁰ Daniel Goldhagen. *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

reaching a point of claiming that the executions were carried out as kind of expected or understandable acts of government and not for the horrid purpose of killing the victims for who they were;

- denial in the service of self-styled display of one's pseudo-advanced intellectualism;
- deconstruction, relativization and contextualization of the Holocaust as if there is nothing new about it in the broad range of human history (where indeed there is a great deal of genocide of so many peoples, yet where each case has its own particular, even unique, configuration of events and dynamics as certainly the Holocaust does).

All of the above have been recognized for some time as characteristic dimensions of the multifaceted phenomena of denials of genocide.²¹ Thus, in Charny's most recent classification of denials of genocide²² - the original classification published no less than in an earlier era of the same journal under the original founding editor of *JGR*, Henry Huttenbach,²³ - there is an entry about relativizers and deconstructionists that defines this type of denial as follows:

²¹ Among early works on the subject, see Israel W. Charny in collaboration with Vartan Gregorian and Marjorie Housepian-Dobkin: Israel W. Charny (1999). *Templates for Gross Denials of a Known Genocide: A Manual. Encyclopedia of Genocide*, 168. These templates were developed several years earlier in a dialogue with Vartan Gregorian, then president of the New York Public Library, and were also based on joint research with Marjorie Housepian-Dobkin, author of the classic article, "*The Unremembered Genocide*," published in *Commentary* magazine in 1966.

²² Charny, *A Classification of Denials*, 2012.

²³ Charny, *A classification of denials*, 2003. Reprinted in Totten, Samuel and Bartrop, Paul R. (Eds.) *The Genocide Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 517-537.

Mass deaths that took place, however unfortunate, and perhaps even genocide, are no different than countless historical events of mass murder and do not justify undue emphasis.²⁴

In Charny's updating of the classification some years later where a few new categories were added, he also relates to the psychology of bizarre evasions and denials of the reality of an absolutely known genocide in the following description of another type of denial:

Anything goes – just because I want to – for known political motives or often truly to be a show-off who draws a great deal of public attention by saying interestingly bizarre things; but often enough... as an expression of an omnipotent *can say anything I want to* narcissism about one's own mind products.²⁵

Conclusions:

Although we – especially Americans for whom free speech is enshrined almost as an absolute ideal - are constrained by democratic laws of free speech, there 'oughta be a law' against serious denials of mass murders of groups of human beings. Granted, in the American tradition, this type of denial may not be elevated to an actual legal principle, but it should guide all thinking people who are genuinely committed to protecting human life. Even if not a law it certainly would be a relief to have this concept adopted more systematically in the intellectual world, perhaps even in the codes of ethics of several professions. Such a 'law' indeed would include minimizations of the significance, immorality and suffering of a genocide. At the same time, it should be noted, particularly for Americans, that in many European countries there are

²⁴ Ibid 2003 and 2012 - clause 11.03 in classification

²⁵ Charny, 2012 - clause 14 in classification

actual laws especially about manifest denials of the Holocaust and sometimes also about the Armenian Genocide.^{26 27}

Charny has further proposed that in America too, there should be laws to cover incitement, meaning explicit and implicit calls to commit new crimes of violence and genocide against targeted groups. As is well known, even in the current American legal culture, there is a basis for laws against screaming out “Fire, Fire” in a crowded theater, meaning inciting violence.²⁸

There is no doubt that all sides to varying interpretations of genocides need to be heard and published as a basis for informed consideration and evaluation by all genocide scholars, but this also includes our responsibility to identify manifest denials of genocides even by prominent scholars. See, for example, the cases of Bernard Lewis on the Armenian Genocide²⁹ and Noam Chomsky on the Holocaust,³⁰ also the Cambodian genocide,³¹ and the genocide in Rwanda.³²

²⁶ Michael J. Bazyler. Holocaust Denial Laws and Other Legislation Criminalizing Promotion of Nazism Originally published in *Genocide Prevention Now* web magazine Issue 1 (2010) which is no longer available. Reprinted on the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide. <http://www.ihgilm.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Holocaust-Denial-Laws.pdf>.

²⁷ Jacqueline Lechtholz-Zey. The Laws Banning Holocaust Denial Originally published in *Genocide Prevention Now* web magazine Issue 3 (2010) which is no longer available. Reprinted on the website of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide. http://www.ihgilm.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Laws_Banning_Holocaust_Denial.pdf.

²⁸ Israel W. Charny. Legislating about genocide denial. *Politique Internationale*, (2015). English 29-46; French, 31-48.

²⁹ Richard Hovannisian. *Denial of the Armenian Genocide with some Comparisons to Holocaust Denial*. The Inaugural Armenian Genocide Commemorative Lecture. (Sydney, Australia: Macquarie University, April 28, 1996) (pamphlet).

³⁰ Alan M. Dershowitz. Holocaust denial in the marketplace of ideas. *Times Literary Supplement*, March 20, 2017. <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/dershowitz-fake-news-holocaust-denial/>

Denials of genocide by reputable scholars and or by publications and institutions that are devoted to genocide studies deserve the greater and special attention.³³ At the same time there is no doubt that all sides to such issues indeed should be heard and published as a basis for informed consideration and evaluation by all genocides scholars.

Word count: 3,865

³¹ Donald Beachler. How the West missed the horrors of Cambodia. *Daily Beast*. September 5, 2016. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/how-the-west-missed-the-horrors-of-cambodia>

³² George Monbiot. My fight may be hopeless but it is as necessary as ever. *The Guardian*, May 21, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/may/21/ratko-mladic-genocide-denial>

³³ For an outstanding book on denials of the Holocaust which named among others an historian, David Irving as a denier and Irving then sued the author but lost resoundingly, see: Deborah Lipstadt. *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory*. (New York: Free Press, 1993).

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