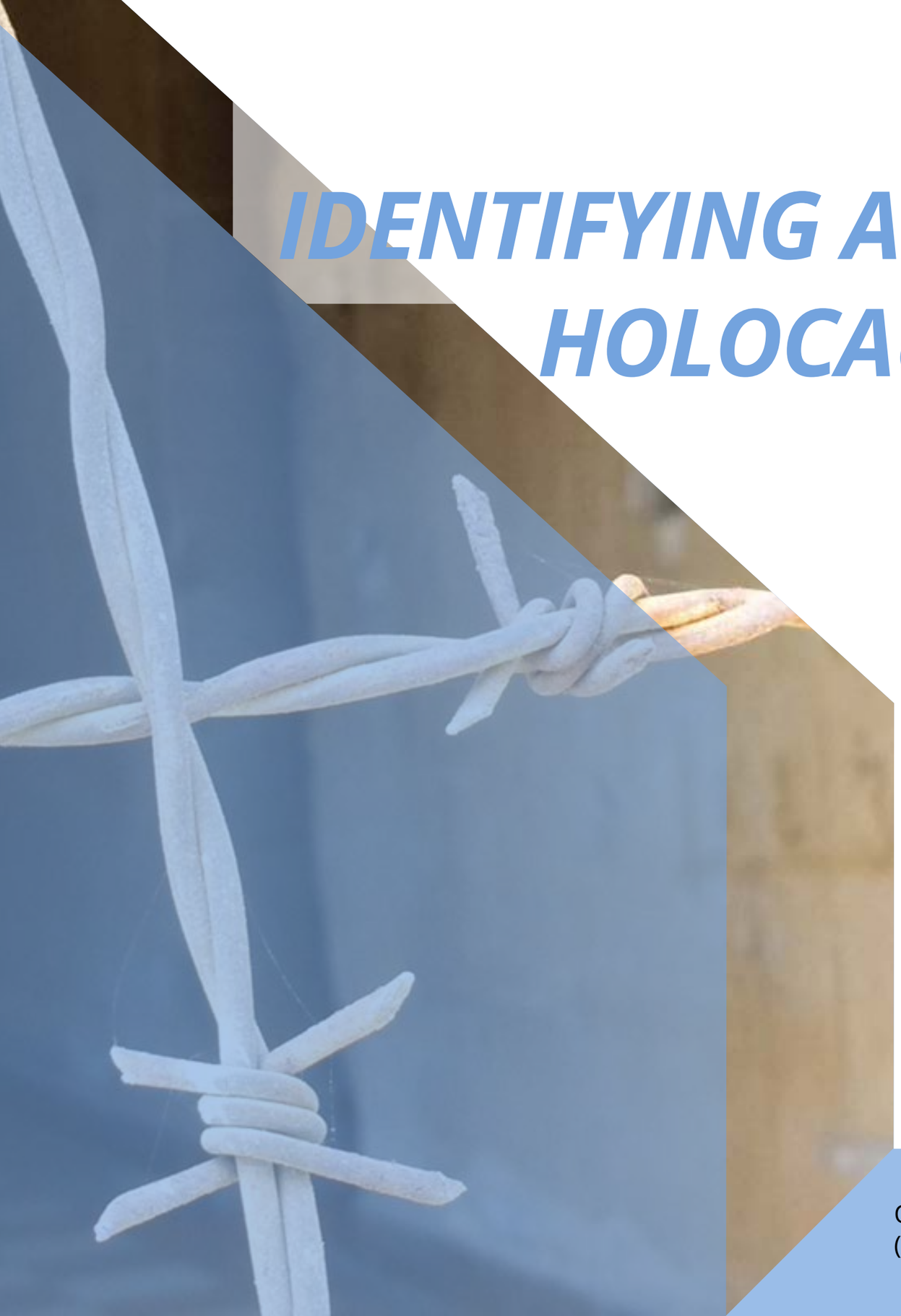


IDENTIFYING AND COUNTERING HOLOCAUST DISTORTION:

LESSONS FOR AND FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

On the cover: Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum.
(Credit: Rafal Pankowski)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

All titles are clickable!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The *Identifying and Countering Holocaust Distortion: Lessons for and from Southeast Asia* exhibition draws first from the Polish and Eastern European experience of the Holocaust, and second from the regional and national histories and legacies of Southeast Asia. The exhibition focuses on Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand.

While Southeast Asia shares a common, global experience with Central and Eastern Europe of the Second World War, each region simultaneously has its own distinct experience. The Holocaust was perpetrated primarily on Central and Eastern European soil, where between 1933 and 1945 Nazi Germany and its collaborators exterminated six million Jews in death camps or by execution on the spot. Eastern Europe—which has also experienced communism and totalitarianism—was forced to reckon with its difficult past; this involved engaging in difficult debates, including those on the role of the region's own occupied nations during the Holocaust; some were perpetrators, some were bystanders, and others rescuers and upstanders.

Although the Southeast Asian experience of the Second World War includes the Japanese occupation—as well as other conflicts and instances of genocide—awareness of the Holocaust remains low. This provides fertile ground for various kinds of distortion and trivialisation. Aside from historical ignorance, the absence of knowledge on Holocaust history, and the inability to apply the universal lessons of the Holocaust in non-European contexts, numerous examples also exist of Holocaust distortion in public and media discourses. By exchanging experiences and providing tools and arguments to address Holocaust distortion that are based on Eastern European debates, the exhibition aims to encourage critical discourses on dealing with the legacy of genocide in Southeast Asia.

Our aim is to dispel distortion, banalisation, and denial of the Holocaust and other genocides; to emphasise the significance of the Holocaust as universal heritage and as a point of reference in contemporary debates on human rights. We view genocide denial and distortion as a form of hatred that accompanies the dehumanisation of victims; one that is used to justify discrimination and other acts of violence against minorities.

This digital exhibition includes materials from the archive of the NEVER AGAIN Association as well as materials collected and shared by our colleagues from Southeast Asia.

The views expressed by the individual contributors to the exhibition do not necessarily reflect those of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Cambodia.

Supported by

"NEVER AGAIN" ASSOCIATION

INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE

Heinrich Böll Stiftung Cambodia

Exhibition contributors:
Venerable Lablu Barua (Wat Phrmarangsi Buddhist Monastery, Thailand), Ronan Lee (Loughborough University, UK), Rafal Pankowski (NEVER AGAIN Association, Poland), Patporn (Aor) Phoothong, (6 October Museum Project, Thailand), Sammy Samuels (Jewish Community of Myanmar), Sayana Ser (Peace Institute, Cambodia), Jean Sien Kin (TSGM, Cambodia), Natalia Sineaeva (NEVER AGAIN Association, Poland), Verita Sriratana (Chulalongkorn University, Thailand), Thet Swe Win (Synergy, Myanmar), Barbara Thimm (TSGM, Cambodia)

Translators:
Hay Mann Zu Zue, Khaing Khaing and Yaya (David) Aye Myat (Burmese language), Wirakarn Salmand (Thai language), Sayana Ser (Khmer language)

English editor: Kevin McRobb (UK/Poland)

Design: PDF layout design: Andrey Sergunkin (Memorial, Russia/Poland)
Web layout design: Dmitrii Arikov (Eco Tiras, Moldova), Vitalii Boico (Eco-Tiras, Moldova)

www.neveragainassociation.org
www.holocaustEducation-asia.org
www.holocaustremembrance.com

WHAT IS HOLOCAUST DENIAL AND DISTORTION?

For an internationally accepted definition see the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion.

1. What is Holocaust denial?

Denial is a common feature of genocide. Perpetrators themselves often become the first deniers as they attempt to whitewash their own crimes.

The founder of 'Genocide Watch', Gregory H. Stanton included 'denial' in his *10 stages of genocide*. He writes:

'DENIAL is the final stage that lasts throughout and always follows genocide. It is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres. The perpetrators of genocide dig up the mass graves, burn the bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses. They deny that they committed any crimes, and often blame what happened on the victims. They block investigations of the crimes, and continue to govern until driven from power by force, when they flee into exile. There they remain with impunity, like Pol Pot or Idi Amin, unless they are captured and a tribunal is established to try them.'

In the same way, the origins of Holocaust denial can be found among the perpetrators—the Nazis. They had already attempted to whitewash the evidence of their crimes during the Holocaust. No written orders existed from Adolf Hitler to murder the Jews; instead, the perpetrators used code words and euphemisms to conceal the extermination, such as 'Aussiedlung' ('evacuation'), 'Abschiebung' ('deportation'), and 'Endloesung' ('the Final Solution'). The Nazis organised the secret Aktion 1005 campaign from June 1942 until late 1944 to destroy evidence of the mass murder that had occurred under Operation Reinhard, which aimed to exterminate all Jews in occupied Poland. They exhumed mass graves and burned bodies, as well as destroying the death camps, which had been constructed in a way that allowed them to be demolished easily.

Soon after the Second World War, the popularity of Holocaust denial grew—particularly among former supporters and participants of the Nazi regime and among European collaborationist movements that refused to accept responsibility for genocide. Holocaust denial was a set of historical claims that presented the Nazi regime favourably and was born as a result of the political needs of neo-Nazi movements.

Professor Gregory H. Stanton, the founder of 'Genocide Watch' and 10 stages of genocide.
(Credit: Genocide Watch)

2. What do Holocaust deniers claim?

Holocaust denial (or negation) is considered the most extreme form of 'historical revisionism' that pertains to the Second World War. Although it is widely accepted that Holocaust denial and revisionism are distinct practices, the term, 'Holocaust revisionism' is occasionally used in academic and public discourses. Deniers prefer to call themselves 'revisionists'; in this way, they attempt legitimise themselves as genuine academics and historical researchers.

According to deniers, the Holocaust simply never occurred; it is a wholly fabricated story, which was invented in the interests of the state of Israel and the international Jewish conspiracy. Deniers minimise the number of victims, in addition to denying the existence of extermination plans and the use of the gas chambers at Auschwitz–Birkenau to murder Jews in such large numbers. They also minimise the amount of suffering and destruction that resulted from Nazi policies in Europe, instead claiming that the causalities were merely result of armed conflict and disease. They deny the intentional extermination of Jews by the Nazis. They also assert that the majority of Jews were allowed to emigrate to the USA and that the testimonies of survivors are exaggerated. They claim that *Anne Frank's diary* was false.

Deniers' arguments can be easily discredited by the following evidence:

- The Holocaust was very well documented, and many of these documents were captured by Allied troops before the Nazis had managed to destroy them. These include detailed report of mass murders and gassings. Some were presented by the prosecution during the Nuremburg Trials.
- The first-hand testimony of Holocaust survivors, including films and photographs of the killing, of which some were taken secretly; films and photos were also taken by the camps' liberators.
- Nazi Germany and its collaborators exterminated not only Jews who lived in Germany, but also those who lived across Europe; this informs the estimate of six million exterminated Jews.
- The mass killing of Jews by gassing with Zyklon B in death camps was proved by the testimony of the perpetrators themselves, as well as of prisoners and members of the 'Sonderkommando'—groups of inmates who were forced to remove the dead from the gas chambers and dispose of their bodies. Evidence was also uncovered due to archaeological works conducted at the sites of the Nazi death and concentration camps.
- Forensic experts and archaeologists have also investigated the sites of mass killings of Jews in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union, where German Nazis often killed Jews on the spot (by bullet). This also happened while Jews were being transported to camps in Poland.

Irving leads death camps tour

By Natalia Pankowska for Antifa-Net in Warsaw

DISGRACED AND DISCREDITED across much of Western Europe, the veteran revisionist historian David Irving continues to make a name for himself in Eastern Europe while now living in the USA.

In late September Irving organised a tour of death camps in Poland for 20 people at £1,300 a head excluding flights. The country suffered terribly during the Second World War but despite a campaign from Searchlight and Never Again the authorities refused to block Irving's visit. The police could have acted under a law banning the dissemination of antisemitic and racist ideas, and taken into account the views of Jewish and anti-fascist groups, but did not.

This latest excursion is not Irving's first visit to Poland. In 2007 he attended the International Book Fair in Warsaw to promote and sell his books, but was ejected as a result of a vociferous campaign by Never Again and the media. In 2008 the joint efforts of Never Again and the media prevented publication of the Polish translation of Irving's biography of Herman Goering by a publishing house owned by the Polish Ministry of Defence.

For his latest visit the Holocaust denier put himself forward as a guide to places connected with the Nazis' crimes in Poland, including Treblinka (in Irving's words "Himmler's real death camp"), the Belzec extermination camp, the Warsaw Ghetto and Hitler's WWII's Lair bunker in the north of Poland. Auschwitz, which he has described as a "tourist attraction" and like "Disneyland", did not figure in his itinerary.

Irving's party included fascists and extreme-right activists from Western Europe and the USA. His visits also tend to bring out local fascists and antisemites.

About 20 people attended Irving's secret lecture at the Marriot Hotel in Warsaw, according to a journalist from the Polish newspaper Rzeczpospolita who joined them. They included Irving's 25-year old assistant Joenelle Anton, several middle-aged men from the UK, Germany and the USA, the Polish translator of his books, Bartosiej Zborski, and a solitary Indian.

In his speech, Irving again defended Hitler, whitewashed his crimes and denied that there were gas chambers at Auschwitz. He blamed the Jewish authorities for allegedly killing Himmler. At the same time he continued to deny his antisemitic views and told his gullible listeners: "I deny that I am a Holocaust denier. How it is possible to call a person who says that two and half million Jews were murdered during Operation Reinhard and several hundreds of thousands of Jews died in Treblinka a denier?

Irving even called himself a traditional British liberal who is seeking and presenting "a true version of history" and suffering for the sake of "freedom of speech". He went on to whinge about his difficult financial situation, calling himself a victim of those who want to create obstacles for "true history". Irving also expressed his unhappiness with the media, which, he claims, "puts me down completely and publishes only lies".

Throughout the trip, Irving promoted and distributed his most famous book, *Hitler's War*, and proudly told the story of an old man who casually learned that he was in Poland and waited for several hours near the memorial site at Belzec to get Irving to autograph his copy of the book.

Irving's tour ended successfully without any intervention from the authorities. Interestingly, the Holocaust tourists visited Treblinka without Irving, who obviously feared some kind of protest.

Irving has already announced a further tour for 2011. Hopefully, this time it can be snapped in its tracks.

November 2010 | Searchlight | 9

N. Pankowska: Irving leads death camps tour. „Searchlight" [Great Britain], 11.2010 – archive of NEVER AGAIN. PDF

Resources about Holocaust denial:

- Teachers resources 'What is Holocaust Denial' by Simon Wiesenthal Center
- Prof Deborah Lipstadt's talk «Behind the Lies of Holocaust Denial» (video)
- The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's materials about Holocaust denial
- What is Holocaust denial? by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. What are the consequences of genocide denial?
2. What are the main arguments and strategies of deniers of atrocities/genocide in your country (e.g. atrocities against the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Khmer Rouge atrocities in Cambodia, the atrocities in Thailand) and what is their impact on society today?

3. What is Holocaust distortion and how does it differ from denial?

Holocaust denial is outright denial that the Holocaust happened; distortion, however, is more complex and more difficult to recognise. It is a phenomenon of distorting and manipulating historical facts. Distorters' arguments and tactics vary, depending on a country's historical, social and political background, and particularly its experiences during and after the Second World War: Was it a perpetrator state? Was it occupied by the Nazis or a member of the Axis Alliance? Was it neutral, or an Ally?

Holocaust trivialisation is another form of distortion. It involves using Holocaust terminology and symbols to banalise the Holocaust. Trivialisation might involve one or more of the following: 1) comparing the Nazi Holocaust to a much less severe event, or regularly occurring events; 2) reducing Holocaust resisters or those who rescued Jews to patriotic clichés, or instrumentalising them for nationalistic or ideological purposes; 3) describing any problematic or unfair behaviour as equivalent to Nazism; or 4) diminishing the importance of the Holocaust and its significance as an essential component of modern Jewish and global history.

Comparisons of the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities with conflicts in the Middle East exemplify another type of Holocaust distortion; one that is frequently motivated by antisemitism (a hatred against the Jews and the Jewish state, Israel) and can result from a lack of knowledge on the Holocaust and its context. In some cases, it can be categorised as Holocaust inversion, in which Jews are falsely accused of committing crimes similar to, or even more serious than, those to which they were subjected.
The production and trade of Holocaust souvenirs for profit also constitutes a dangerous form of commercialization and trivialisation.

Learn more about this and other forms of distortion in the IHRA publication.

While the events of the Holocaust have been discussed more frequently in the West since the 1970s, the subject has become a challenging one in Central and Eastern Europe since the fall of communism. There, re-examination of the past has been accompanied by victimhood rivalries and various types of Holocaust trivialisation and distortion, which filled the vacuum after the disintegration of those nations' grand narrative of national history.

Professor Michael Shafir is one of the leading scholars of antisemitism and the treatment of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe.
(Credit: eurolibera.org)

Professor Michael Shafir highlights the prevalence of 'selective negationism' in countries (such as Romania) that collaborated with or were occupied by the Nazis in Central and Eastern Europe; its advocates '***do not deny the Holocaust as having taken place elsewhere, but exclude any participation of members of one's own nation or seriously minimise it,'***. Another form defined by Shafir in the region is the 'comparative trivialisation' of the Holocaust. It aims to demonstrate that the ***'Holocaust was neither unprecedented as a genocide in history nor the most murderous among twentieth-century atrocities,'.***

Among the most recent examples of Holocaust trivialisation is the comparison by anti-vaccine protesters between the Nazis' persecution of the Jews and the preventive measures of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is exemplified by the protesters' use of Holocaust-era symbols, such as the yellow Star of David emblem, which European Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis as a method of humiliation. Anti-vaccine protesters call it a symbol of the 'persecution' of unvaccinated people by the rest of the world.

Example 1. Usage of Holocaust-era yellow Star of David badge which European Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis by Anti-vax protesters. (Credit: ADL.org)

Recommended Reading:

- **Read one of the leading Holocaust scholars and the Honorary Chairman of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, Professor Yehuda Bauer's article, Creating a «Usable» Past: On Holocaust Denial and Distortion, in which he discusses the concept of a usable past and how it functions to support nationalistic agendas. Professor Bauer discusses the distinctions between denial and distortion, historical roots of denial. The essential background to the current rise in Holocaust distortion, he says, is 'the rise of authoritarianism, populism, dictatorial regimes, nationalism, and anti-liberalism that has been sweeping the world for the past two decades or so.'**
- **Learn more examples of Holocaust distortion from Understanding Holocaust Distortion - Contexts, Influences and Examples.**
- **Listen to Jan T. Gross's lecture at Moldova State University (with introduction of Rafał Pankowski), 14.09.17.**

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. **Can the silencing of certain themes or aspects of national history be a form of Holocaust/ genocide denial?**
2. **What are common features and arguments of Holocaust and genocide distorters?**
3. **What is the role of nationalism in genocide denial and distortion?**

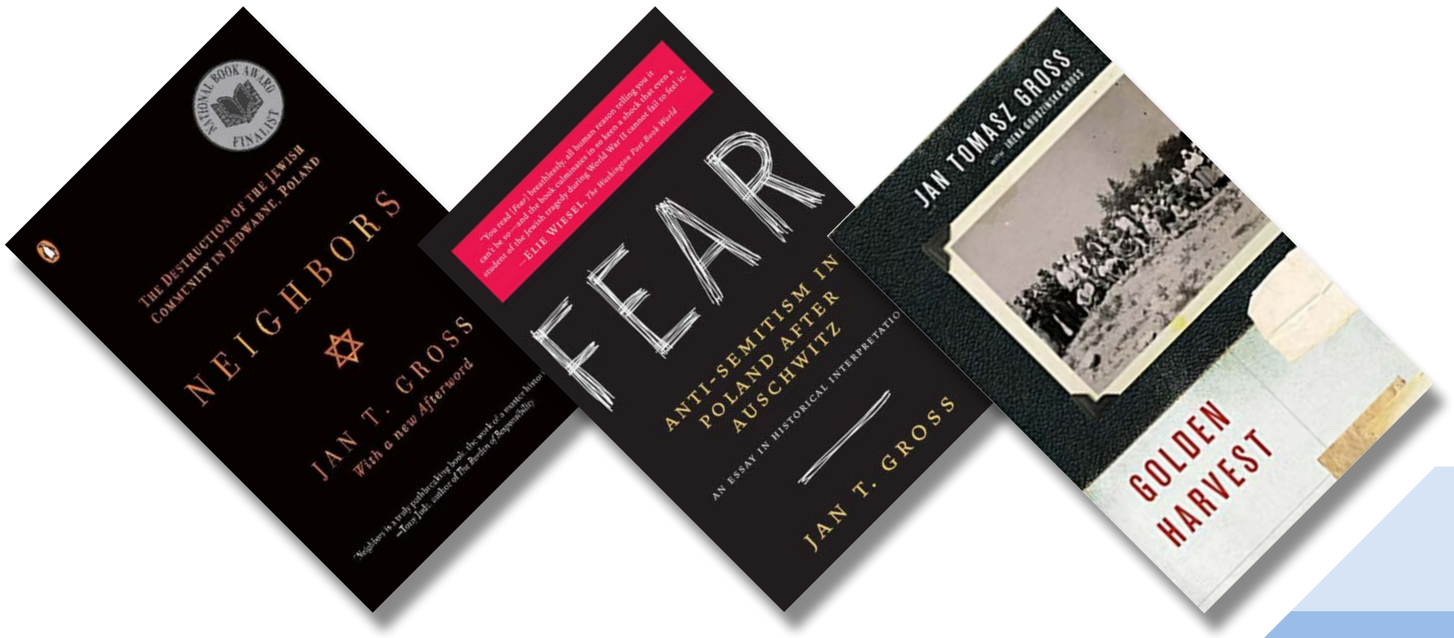
Example 2. Figurine of a "greedy Jew" sold in Poland: an example of commercialization of antisemitic stereotypes (Credit: Archive of NEVER AGAIN)

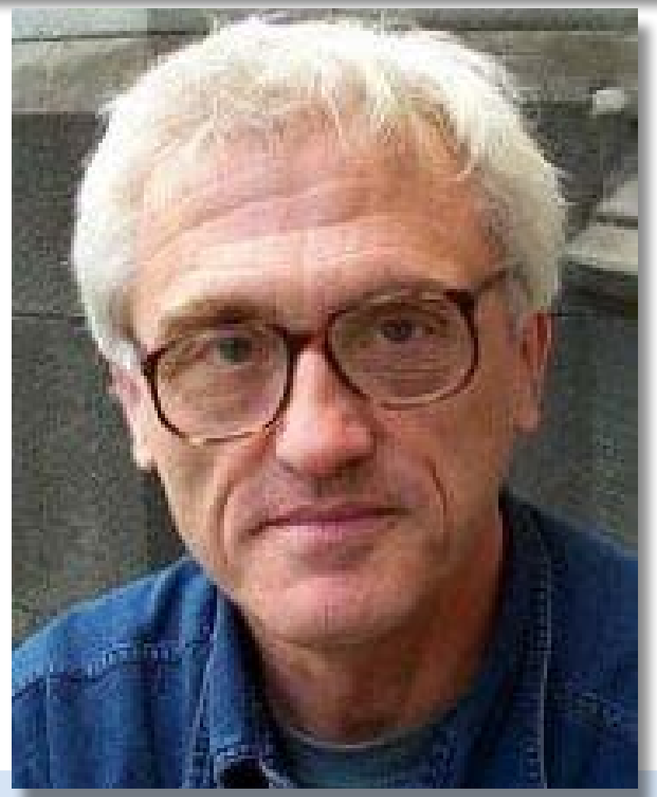
4. Holocaust distortion in Eastern Europe
Critical Debate Over Jan T. Gross's books
Early 2000s

Polish–American historian and Professor at Princeton University, Jan T. Gross played a crucial role in the process of dealing with the past and countering distortion of the Holocaust with his seminal books, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton, 2001); *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (Random House, 2006), and *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (co-authored with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Oxford University Press, 2012). Jan T. Gross researched previously neglected topics. Each of his books represents a different facet of the debate.

In *Neighbors*—which first was published in the Polish language in 2000, and the next year in English—Gross describes an anti-Jewish pogrom that occurred on 10 July, 1941 in Jedwabne, a small town in Eastern Poland. Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne and surrounding villages began to herd Jews from the town to the market square. There, the Jews were beaten and humiliated, and several of them killed. Later, all of the Jews who remained in the market square were rushed to a single barn, which was then soaked in paraffin and set alight. Germans were in the town, but did not directly participate in the pogrom.

Through *Neighbors*, Gross sparked a national discussion on the relationship between Jews and their Christian neighbours, antisemitism, and wartime violence against Jews in Poland and in other parts of Nazi-occupied Europe. The book also draws attention to the story of an ordinary community in the circumstances of war, destruction and brutalisation (Polish society itself was ruthlessly occupied by Nazi Germany during the Second World War).



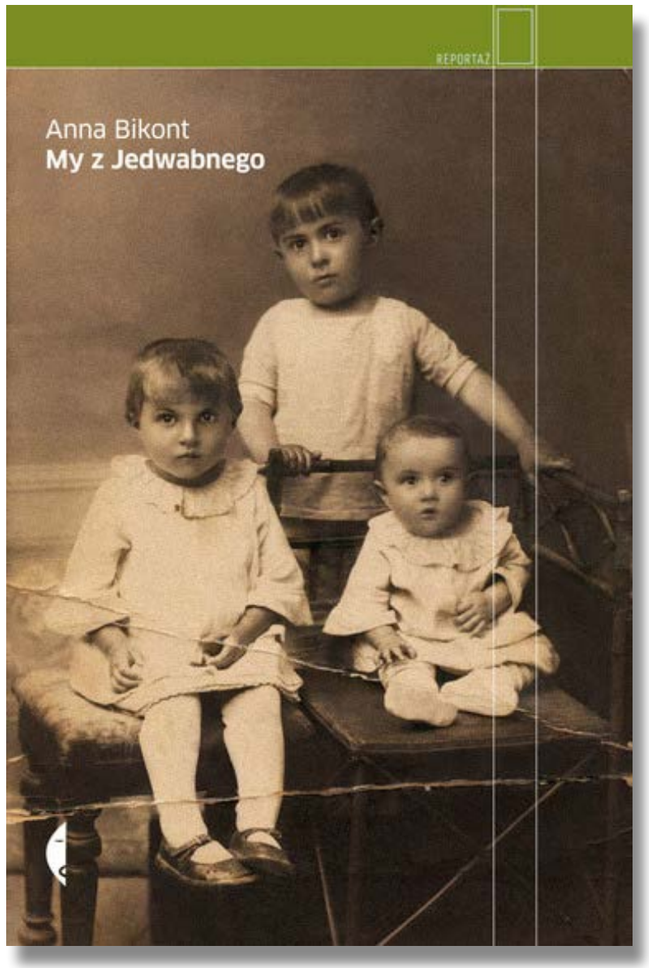


Professor Jan Tomasz Gross.
(Credit: Princeton University)

The debate divided Polish society deeply, and the book was met with both positive and negative reactions. Hundreds of anti-Gross publications appeared in subsequent years. Distorters accused Gross of generalisation, exaggeration of the facts, anti-Polonism and of being unacademic. They expressed competitive victim claims by emphasising the facts of ethnic Poles' suffering during the Second World War, denied the participation of ethnic Poles in anti-Jewish violence and focused exclusively on German guilt in the Jedwabne pogrom (selective negation).

Nevertheless, the Polish government commissioned an investigation led by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), which confirmed that Poles had participated directly in the pogrom.

A Polish journalist, Anna Bikont conducted her own investigations and interviewed residents of Jedwabne; in 2004, she published the book, *My z Jedwabnego* ('Jedwabne: Battlefield of Memory').



Anna Bikont. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

The monument in Jedwabne was unveiled in 2001 and it was accompanied by Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski's apology for the massacre of Jews in Jedwabne. The monument has the inscription: 'In memory of Jews from Jedwabne and its surroundings, men, women, and children, co-owners of this land, murdered, buried alive on this site on 10 July 1941. Jedwabne 10 July 2001.' It replaces a smaller one built in the 1960s blaming 'Gestapo and Nazi soldiers' for the killing and burning alive of 1,600 Jews in the village in 1941.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

2009/10

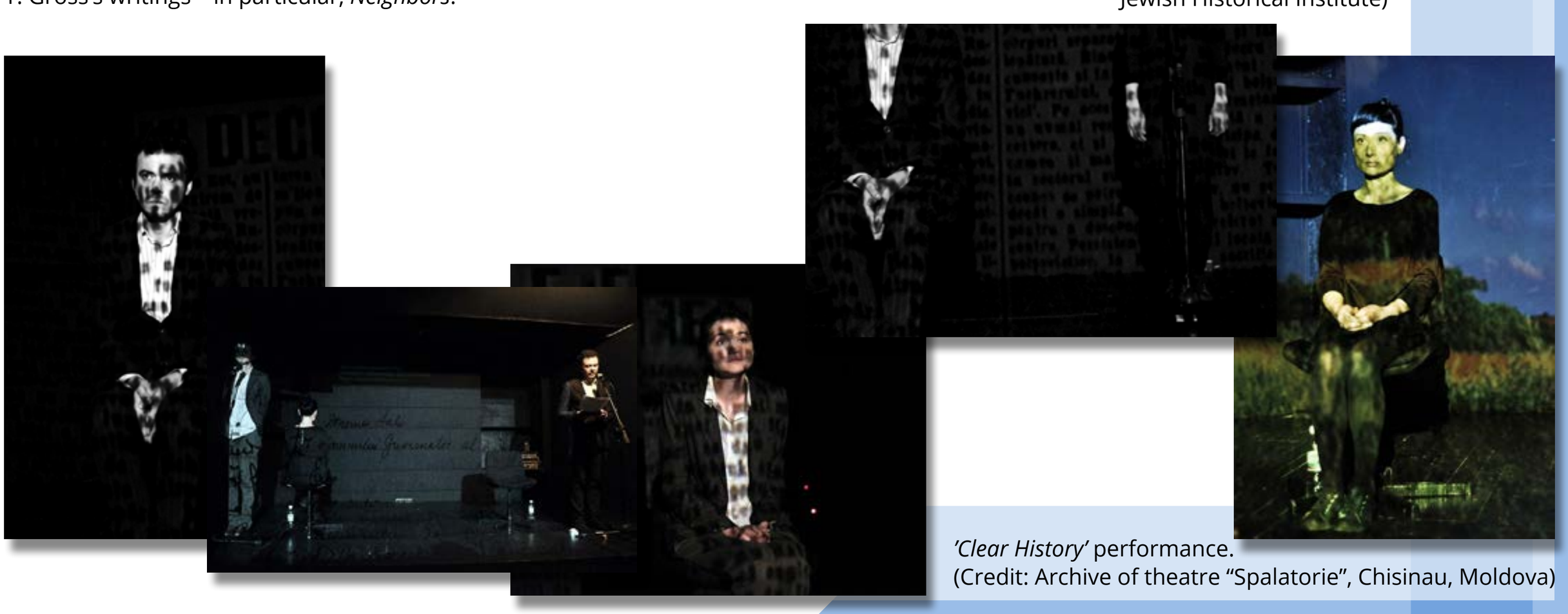
The theatre production, *Nasza klasa* ('Our Class') about a group of Polish and Jewish classmates and neighbours in Jedwabne since 1925 was written by Tadeusz Słobodzianek and performed in Polish theatres. It was the first play to discuss Jedwabne's atrocity and was inspired by Jan T. Gross's *Neighbors*.

2012

Neighbors inspired similar debates in other parts of Eastern Europe, including in Romania, Moldova and Lithuania—although their historical contexts differed. In 2012, Moldovan writer, Nicoleta Esinencu—who had learned of the Holocaust in her home country while in her late twenties in Germany—wrote and presented her play, *Clear History* about Romanian dictator and ally of Hitler, Ion Antonescu and the tragic fate of the Jews and the Roma people under his rule.

Moldovan historian, Diana Dumitru, who wrote a book on the role of the local population in the Holocaust in Romania, *The State, Antisemitism, and Collaboration in the Holocaust: The Borderlands of Romania and the Soviet Union* (2018) stated that she was inspired by Jan T. Gross's writings—in particular, *Neighbors*.

Polish (Jewish and Christian) schoolchildren with their teachers, Jedwabne, Poland, 1933. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons, source: Jewish Historical Institute)



'Clear History' performance.
(Credit: Archive of theatre "Spalatorie", Chisinau, Moldova)

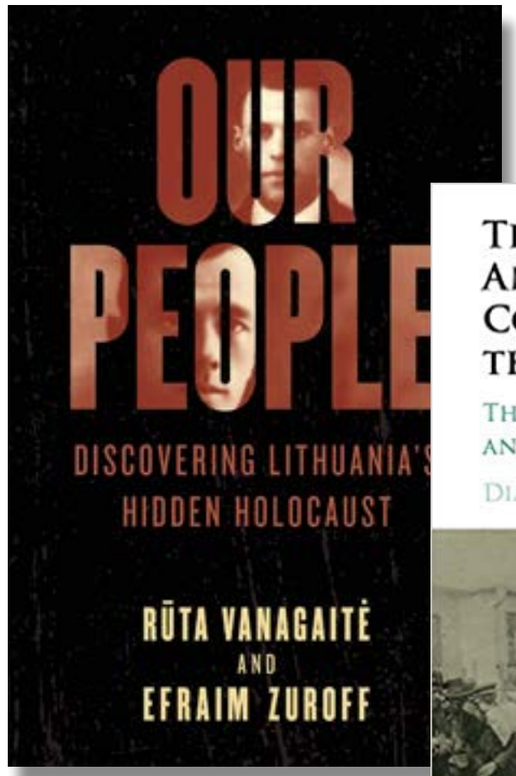
In Lithuania, a famous Nazi-hunter and descendent of Holocaust victims, Efraim Zuroff and a writer and descendent of Nazi collaborators, Rūta Vanagaitė jointly researched and published the book, *Our People. Discovering Lithuania's Hidden Holocaust* about the role of locals in the mass murder of Jews and Lithuanian officials' attempts to conceal the complicity of local collaborators.

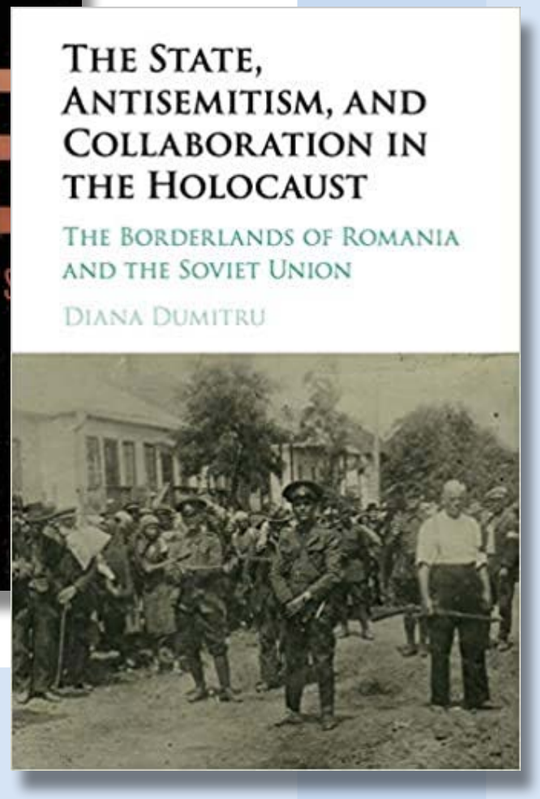
In his second book, 'Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland Shortly After the War', Gross brought another bloody pogrom to the fore, which had occurred in Kielce, Poland in 1946. Only ten percent of Polish Jews had survived the Holocaust. They began returning to their former homes, most of which had already been occupied by Poles. Jews were falsely accused of blood libel; some were murdered and beaten, and others decided to leave Poland permanently. The book tackles stereotypes, antisemitism and post-war brutalisation.
Learn more about the Kielce pogrom: *The USHMM about the Kielce pogrom*

2017

In 2017, NEVER AGAIN and its partners translated and published the book, *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (2011) by Jan T. Gross into the Russian and (partially) Romanian languages. The book discusses the story of Polish peasants who scavenged for gold teeth and other treasures from the ashes of the murdered Jews at Treblinka death camp. It is a story of hatred, persisting antisemitism and greed.
More: *NEVER AGAIN support Holocaust awareness in Eastern Europe.*
The translated book was launched in Moldova. It aimed to inspire the Moldovan public to discuss its own history more critically.

Nicoleta Esinencu is a Moldovan playwright and theatre founder and director. (Credit: Spalatorie)





Jan T. Gross sharing his experience of Polish debates with Moldovan academics, students, and civil society. Chisinau, 2017. A series of events was organised by the NEVER AGAIN Association with the support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Moldova. (Credit: NEVER AGAIN Association)

Listen to Jan T. Gross's lecture at Moldova State University, 14.09.17 : Lecture of Jan T. Gross at Moldova State University (with introduction of Rafał Pankowski),

Watch Jan T. Gross's presentation at the conference organised by the Liberation War Museum (Bangladesh) and NEVER AGAIN, 12.03.2021.

Why is the debate about Gross's books important?

- The debate revealed the complexity of the Holocaust perpetrated on Polish soil by Germans, when Poles held a variety of attitudes to the Jewish fate, ranging from compassion through indifference to hatred.
- The debate also contributed to changing Polish understanding of the Second World War and of society's need to remember the Holocaust from the perspective of its victims.
- The debate contributed to reconciliation between Poles and Jews in post-Communist Poland. Many Poles began to look critically at aspects of their past and identity.
- The debate increased the number of initiatives directed at constructing a pluralist and historically conscious society in Poland.

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. How do human relations change in wartime, and what impact can it have on minorities?
2. How can new research be helpful in the process of dealing with the past and contribute to critical debates? What challenges might that entail?
3. What would such a debate mean in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand, with their diverse populations and where there are many 'neighbours'?
4. Can such a debate counter distortion of the Holocaust and other atrocities?

Jan T. Gross's writings inspired other scholars and teachers in Eastern Europe. In the photograph, Moldovan history teacher, Natalia Caraion from Olanesti village in Moldova presenting flowers to Professor Jan T. Gross during his book presentation.
(Credit: NEVER AGAIN Association)

5. Is the Holocaust comparable? How can we avoid banalisation, instrumentalization of victims, trivialisation in comparison?

The Holocaust is often considered the paradigmatic genocide; the one that is best-positioned to help teachers and students understand other genocides and mass atrocities. It has been used as a starting point to discuss human rights violations and other contemporary sensitive issues in various contexts. One leading Holocaust scholar, Professor Yehuda Bauer argues that the Holocaust is a unique and unprecedented event—even if it shares some of its features with other genocides, such as 'a powerful genocidal central power, military supremacy, a war situation, and the economic utilisation of Jewish slaves before their annihilation,'. Bauer explains why:

- **During the Holocaust, factories were built to produce corpses for the first time in history. The purpose of those factories was to murder Jews.**
- **The aim of the Nazis was to kill every single Jew on Earth.**
- **The Holocaust was the first genocide to be committed for purely ideological motives. The ideology behind killing all Jews was not based on pragmatism nor economic intentions.**

Professor Bauer also states that the Holocaust as a genocide must be compared with other genocides, and that the universal dimension of comparability should concern everyone. No understanding of other genocides can exist without comparison. Comparison can help unrecognised genocides, such as the Rohingya genocide and the Bangladesh genocide of 1971, to become recognised. It is imperative that we understand that it did not happen only to 'us'. Victims of genocide understandably perceive their experiences as unique ones. Victims of genocide are not an anonymous mass, but individuals with their own stories. However, comparison can be dangerous when it pertains to the amount of suffering or the number of victims with the intention of establishing a hierarchy of suffering (competitive victimhood). Figures should not be the main point of reference in such debates. Polish–Jewish intellectual, Konstanty Gebert states that each genocide has its own name to draw attention to its uniqueness. Shoah is the Hebrew-language name for the genocide of the Jews and Porajamos is the Romani-language name for the genocide of the Roma.[1]

1 See Glossary

Yehuda Bauer is the leading Holocaust expert and IHRA's Honorary Chairman. (Credit: Yad Vashem)

Learn more

- **Watch Konstanty Gebert's lecture organised by NEVER AGAIN: The Holocaust and Other Genocides. Is Comparison Possible?**
- **Learn more about the Holocaust and Other Genocides: https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/educational-materials/holocaust-and-other-genocides**
- **Learn the results of the survey to see how various organisations understand and apply the lessons of the Holocaust in their work with other genocides and atrocities: IHRA: A Matter of Comparison: The Holocaust, Genocides and Crimes against Humanity**

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. **Why do we need to compare the Holocaust and other genocides?**
2. **Why is every genocide unique?**

6. How can we resist Holocaust deniers?

In many European countries, Holocaust denial is forbidden by law; many have also established broader legislation against racial and ethnic hatred. While outright Holocaust denial can be condemned easily, distortion and trivialisation are more challenging phenomena, and their subtle forms should be recognised first. They are phenomena that are frequently expressed in ways that cannot be punished by the law or similar measures. This is particularly relevant for Central and Eastern Europe, where societies are struggling to come to terms with their own pasts and find new expressions of national collective memory. The arguments of Holocaust revisionism 'help' them to deal with feelings of guilt for the diversity of their roles in the Holocaust. A danger exists that the original Holocaust denial laws, which protect historical facts from being misused, are being rewritten by governments to preserve national narratives on the Holocaust.

Holocaust distortion can be fought through critical debates (such as the ones surrounding Jan T. Gross's books), through developing critical thinking, and through supporting Holocaust research and researchers in the lands where it happened to investigate previously neglected issues. Education and awareness-raising campaigns similar to those led by the NEVER AGAIN Association are also of great importance.

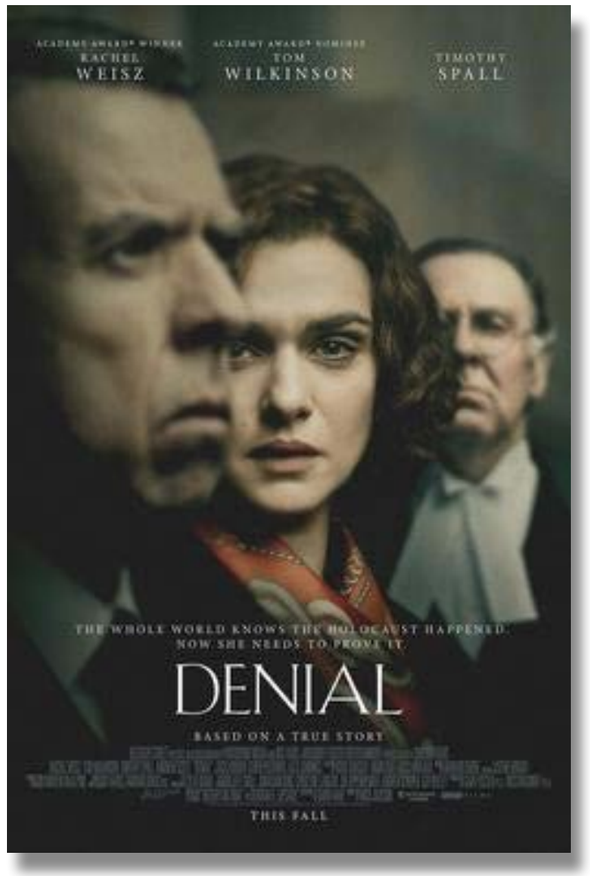
Learn more about global efforts to combat Holocaust denial and distortion on IHRA's website:
https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/task-force-against-holocaust-denial-and-distortion

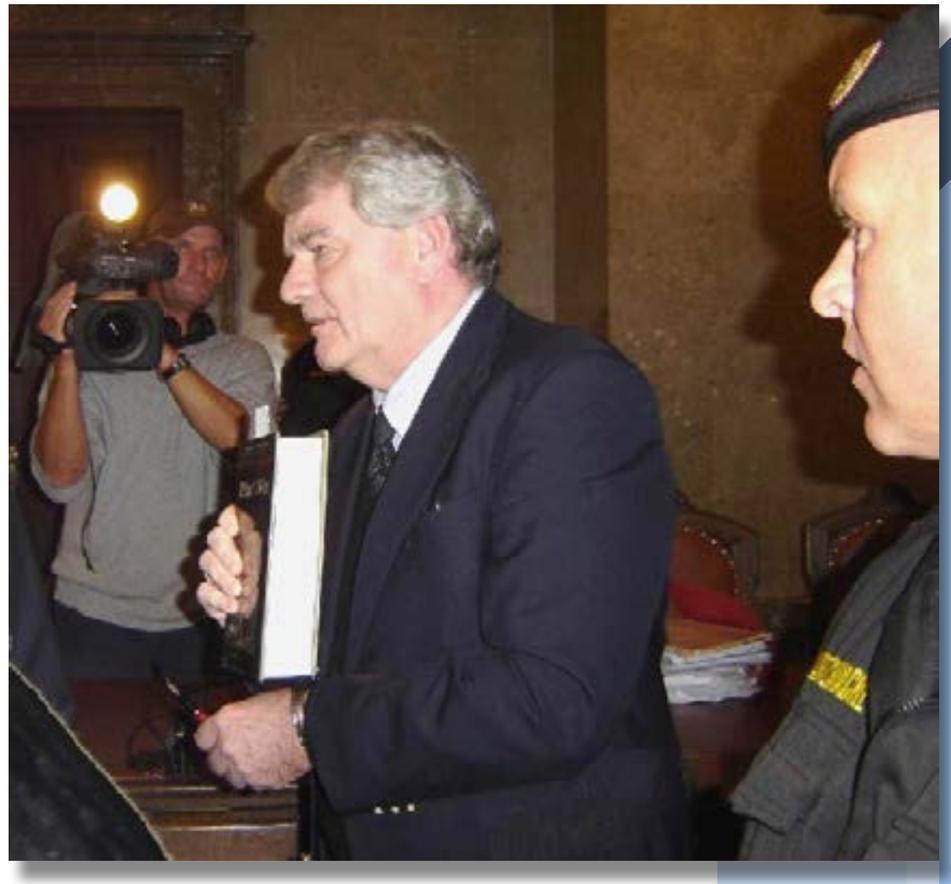
Professor Deborah Lipstadt, Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History and Holocaust Studies in Emory's Tam Institute for Jewish Studies and the Department of Religion and a renowned scholar of the Holocaust and modern antisemitism.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

IRVING TRIAL

In 1998, the best-known Holocaust denier, David Irving sued American scholar, Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin publishing house, claiming that they had libelled him in Lipstadt's book, *Denying the Holocaust*. Irving used the libel laws of the United Kingdom to file a suit for defamation. In her book, Lipstadt accused Irving of misrepresenting the evidence and called him, among other things, *'one of the most dangerous spokespersons for Holocaust denial'*. She also highlighted his links with neo-Nazi figures and organisations. David Irving's purposes were to silence criticism and to publicise his ideas more widely via the court case. Holocaust deniers appeal to freedom of speech in cases of refusal to present and discuss their ideas on an equal footing with others. As a result of the work of Lipstadt and other historians, Irving's suit was dismissed. In November 2005, David Irving was arrested when he travelled to Austria to deliver a lecture to a far-right student group. He was accused of denying the existence of gas chambers at Auschwitz during a speech he had delivered and a subsequent interview in Austria in 1989. He spent a year in prison there before being granted early release.

Watch a 2016 biographical movie 'Denial' directed by Mick Jackson and written by David Hare, based on Deborah Lipstadt's 2005 book "History on Trial: My Day in Court with a Holocaust Denier". It presents the Irving v Penguin Books Ltd case, in which Lipstadt, a Holocaust scholar, was sued by Holocaust denier David Irving for libel: https://bleeckerstreetmedia.com/denial





David Irving on trial in Vienna 2006.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. Do you know any example of the countering of denial and distortion of atrocities in your own country?
2. What are the main challenges in countering denial and how can they be tackled?
3. How would you counter denial and distortion?

Opening shot

DAVID IRVING MET WITH OUTRAGE IN POLAND

DAVID IRVING, the Holocaust revisionist writer, claimed he was surprised by the outraged reaction in Poland to the tour of Holocaust and Nazi sites he led last month.

The trip, for which enthusiasts from Britain, Germany, Australia and America paid £1,500 each excluding flights, was billed as an opportunity to experience "real history".

However officials at the former Treblinka extermination camp said they would not let Irving enter. And the director of the State Museum at Auschwitz said Irving cannot lead a tour group there because he is not a licensed guide.

Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich said: "Mr Irving is not a historian but a charlatan and a vicious liar". Dr Rafal Pankowski, of the Never Again Association, which campaigns against racism and antisemitism and has a close relationship with Searchlight, described Irving's presence in Poland as "unacceptable and offensive to the memory of the victims" of the war.

Irving claimed the Polish people should be grateful for his visit as he was "setting the record straight". He now claims to accept that Treblinka was a "real death camp", but still denigrates Auschwitz as a reconstructed "tourist attraction".

He went on to describe people who branded him a Holocaust denier as "criminal, lying lunatics". That would presumably include Mr Justice Gray who, ruling against Irving in his libel action against the American academic Deborah Lipstadt, described him as an "active Holocaust denier", an antisemite and racist who "associates with right-wing extremists who promote neo-Nazism" and who "for his own ideological reasons persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence".

It would also include the Austrian judges who imprisoned Irving in 2006 for denying the Holocaust and "glorifying and identifying with the German Nazi Party".

David Irving met with outrage in Poland. "Searchlight", 10.2010.

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Back to the Table of contents

COUNTRY FACT SHEETS (PROFILES)

CAMBODIA

In 2015, a memorial monument to the victims who perished at Security Centre S-21 was erected.
(Credit: Jean Sien Kin/Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 2022)

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Basic facts about the modern history of Cambodia and the main cases of mass violence

17 April, 1975 - 7 January, 1979: The Khmer Rouge regime and the Cambodian genocide: the systematic persecution and killing of ethnic Khmers, Vietnamese, Cham (Muslims), other minorities and foreigners.

In April 1975, after a five-year civil war, the Khmer Rouge movement led by Pol Pot seized power in Cambodia and established a totalitarian regime known as Democratic Kampuchea. In a short time, they eliminated private property, markets, the cultural scene, and educational and political institutions, and forced the urban population to work in agriculture under arduous conditions. The murderous regime caused an enormous population transfer: a massive and sudden displacement of people from towns and cities to the countryside. During the first stage of the genocide, the Khmer Rouge divided and classified society into 'them' and 'us'. They created the notion of external and internal enemies, who were portrayed as impure, different, and foreign, and who had allegedly betrayed and threatened *Angkar* ('the Organisation'). By imposing divisions in society, the Khmer Rouge also destroyed all kinds of solidarity among people, creating an atmosphere of constant fear and suspicion.

Soon, a quarter of the Cambodian population, up to two million people, was exterminated through forced labour, exploitation, starvation, and at sites of extermination, such as Security Centre S-21 (presently the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum), as well as other sites known as the Killing Fields.

See: *Chronology of key events*.

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. What were the main features of the Khmer Rouge genocide?
2. Is the Cambodian genocide sufficiently well known and recognised internationally?

Historiography: the main themes and elements of memorialisation

In postgenocide Cambodia, the former sites of destruction — Security Centre S-21 (presently the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum) and the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek - have become the central spaces of memory. Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek Killing Fields serve as unique testimonies.

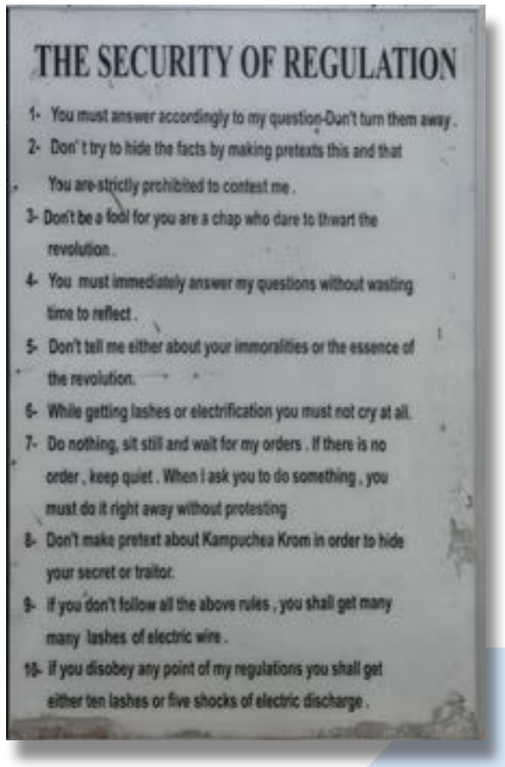
Although Rithy Panh's literary autobiographical account, *The Elimination* focuses on humans' survival in extreme circumstances under the murderous Khmer Rouge regime, it also demonstrates the universal significance of the Cambodian suffering. His documentary films on the Cambodian genocide include S-21: *The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine* and *Rice People*, the first Cambodian film to be nominated for an Oscar. Hollywood actress and human rights activist, Angelina Jolie's Netflix movie, *First They Killed My Father* is based on the testimony of Loung Ung, who survived the Khmer Rouge regime between the ages of five and ten years. The film brings the story of the Khmer Rouge and its murderous regime to a global audience.

Nearly eighty memorials have been built. Around 20,000 mass graves and sets of remains have been preserved.

Victim-survivors have coped with the past atrocities and memories using oral history, as well as different forms of art, poetry and theatre performance.

Rithy Panh with cofounder of NEVER AGAIN, Rafał Pankowski at the event' The Missing Picture: Rethinking Genocide Studies and Prevention' organised by International Association of Genocide Scholars, Phnom Penh, 2019. (Credit: NEVER AGAIN Association)

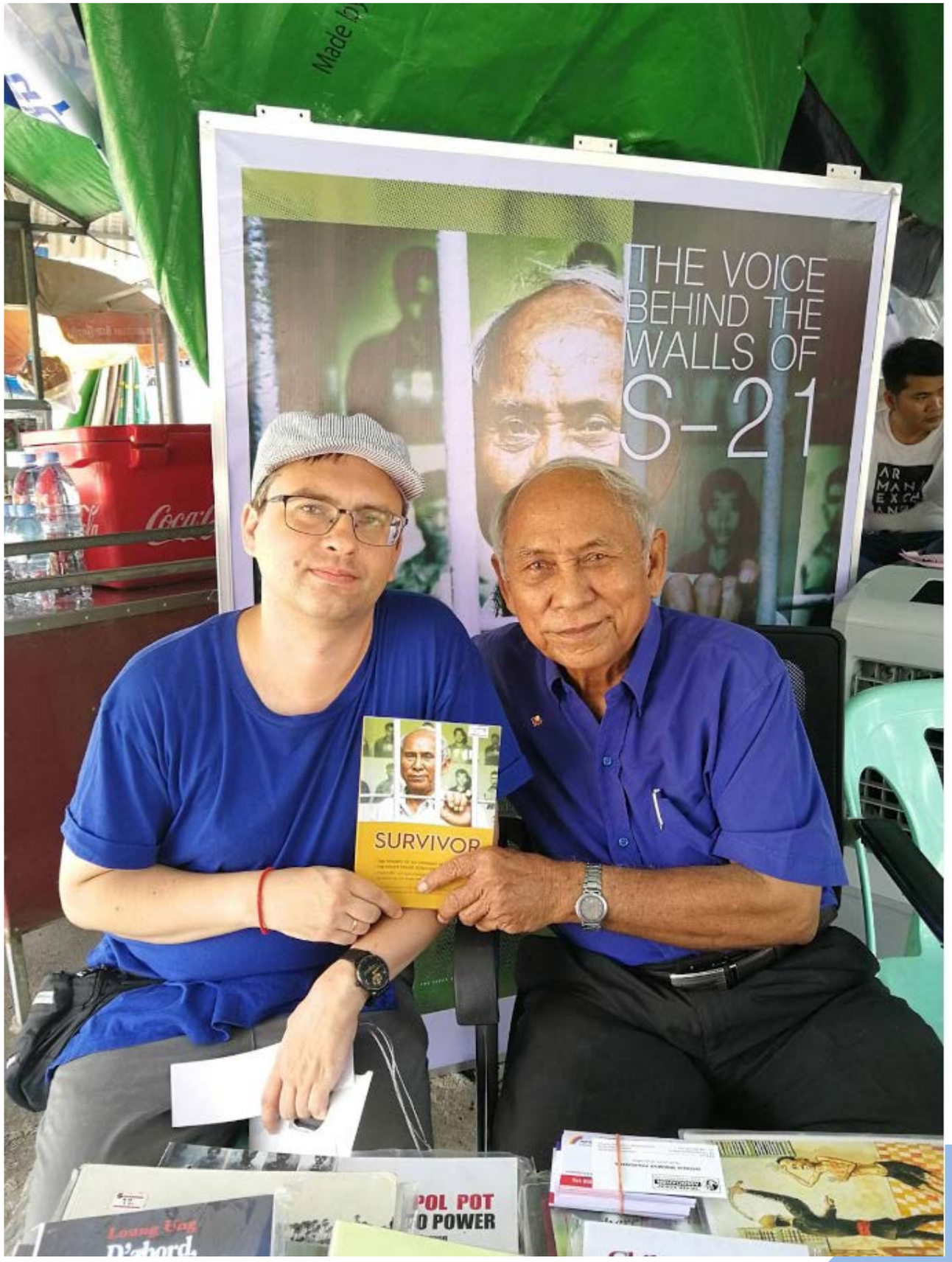
Tuol Sleng as a site of memory brings evidence of the cruelest genocidal atrocities perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge totalitarian regime against humanity. In 2015, a memorial monument to the victims who perished at Security Centre S-21 was erected. (Credit: Jean Sien Kin/ Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 2022)



Survived prison's concrete buildings, small cells, walls, graffiti, iron beds, instruments used for torture show the condition where genocide took place, suffering of the people and mistreatment and humiliation of the people. Security Centre S-21, Tuol Sleng.
(Credit: Jean Sien Kin/Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 2022)

The abandoned prison's buildings, blood traces on floors, and hundreds of mug shots, victims' belongings and inscriptions on the walls demonstrate extreme human suffering, loss, and destruction. (Credit: Jean Sien Kin/Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 2022)

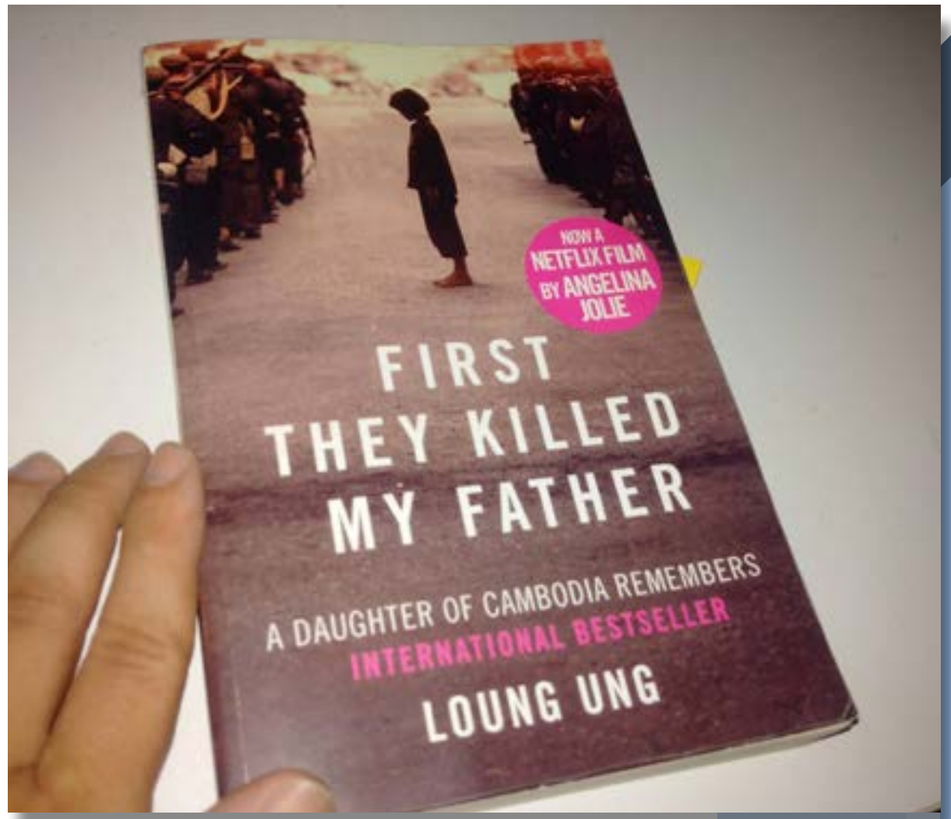
The entrance to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum. The former site of destruction and contemporary Museum forms a part of the city landscape. It is unique in its geographical and symbolic proximity to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) or Cambodia Khmer Rouge Tribunal, which was established as a court, by the Cambodian government and the United Nations to try the Khmer Rouge leadership responsible for crimes perpetrated during their reign.
(Credit: Jean Sien Kin/Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, 2022)



Chum Mey, pictured with the cofounder of NEVER AGAIN, is one of thousands who were imprisoned at S-21, and one of a very few to have survived the experience. Chum Mey was a mechanic before his imprisonment. He survived by being useful to the Khmer Rouge, helping to repair the typewriters used to note details of their interrogations. Tuol Sleng, 2018.
(Credit: NEVER AGAIN Association)

Valuable initiatives have been launched in commemoration of the Cambodian genocide through music. The Khmer Rouge sought to destroy the traditions of Khmer music and dance.

Those traditions have since been recreated and celebrated through the work of Cambodian Living Arts, established by Arn Chorn-Pond, who as a child survived the genocide:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHd8-zseEaU



Arn Chorn-Pond, a Khmer Rouge survivor and cofounder of Cambodian Living Arts. (Credit: VOA/Irwin Loy, Wikimedia Commons)

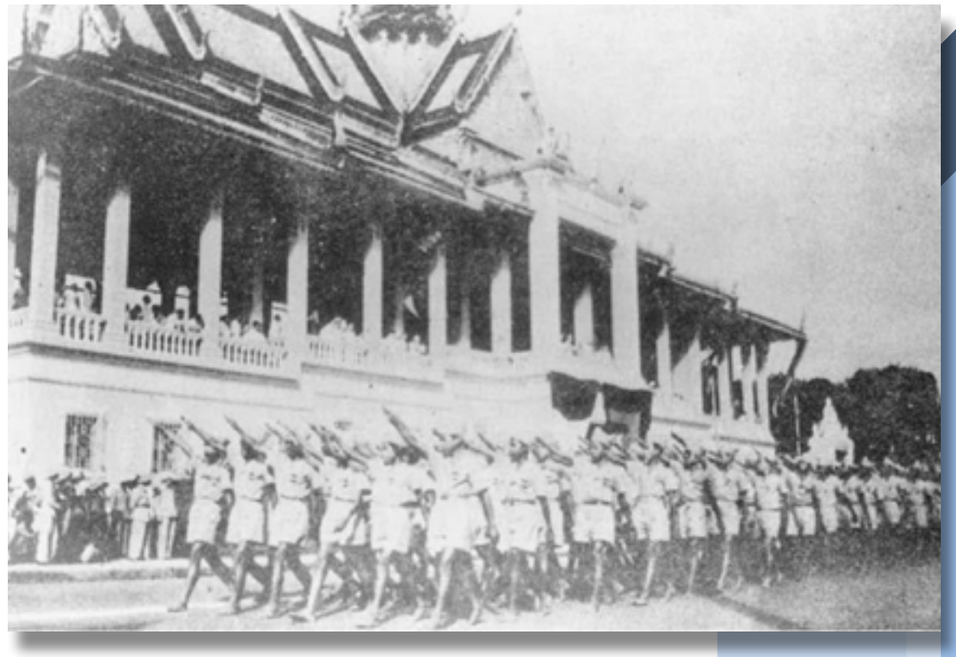
Kak Channthy.
(Credit: Julien Poulson, Cambodian Space Project)

The rock band, ***The Cambodian Space Project*** has endeavoured to revive and celebrate the memory of the Cambodian rock 'n' roll and pop scene that thrived in the 1960s and 1970s, and included figures such as **Ros Serey Sothea, the singer who perished at the hands of the Khmer Rouge. The lead singer of Cambodian Space Project,** Kak Channthy died in an accident in 2018. Her legacy continues.
Listen to The Cambodian Space Project: *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=noM82VINHRE*

The role of Cambodia in the Second World War; memorialisation of the Second World War: does it exist? In what forms?

From the late nineteenth until the mid-twentieth century, Cambodia was colonised by France. During the Second World War, the French Vichy regime (which was subordinate to Nazi Germany) nominally maintained the French protectorate over Cambodia and other parts of Indochina. The fascist model of political mobilisation was introduced to Cambodia by the French colonial authorities of that time. Fascism found support among Cambodian activists who viewed the model as a modernising ideology. Led by the French governor, Jean Decoux, this led to the formation of the Khmer youth movement, Yuvan (based on the European model, complete with symbolism such as the 'Roman salute'). The exclusion of Jews from the colonial service was accompanied by the dissemination of antisemitic propaganda, which echoed the French far-right discourse predominant in the metropole.

After French colonial control was succeeded by a Japanese occupation, the emerging radical nationalist movement embraced the opportunity to grow. The pro-Japanese radicals gradually expanded their influence and staged a coup d'état in August 1945. They remained in power until October 1945, when French control was reestablished. This is arguably a unique case of a pro-fascist movement seizing power during the final days of the Second World War.



Members of the Yuvan youth organisation march in support of the Vichy government in France. (John Tully, A Short History of Cambodia: From Empire to Survival. (2006). Allen & Unwin)

The Second World War is not widely remembered in Cambodia, and no monuments or memorials of that period exist in the country. One of the few known examples of memorialisation of the conflict is the publication of Anne Frank's diary in the Khmer language.

Later, the memory of the Second World War in Cambodia was overshadowed by other tragic events: the Cambodian Civil War and the Khmer Rouge genocide.

Nevertheless, the Khmer Rouge leader, Pol Pot displayed somewhat of an obsession with Adolf Hitler in his speeches and private talks, according to King Norodom Sihanouk's memoir published in 1980.

Question for Critical Thinking:

Look at the photographs of the two monuments: the Memorial sculpture To Those Who Are No Longer Here created by French-Cambodian artist Séra and the Roundabout Statue Celebrating the Overthrow of the Khmer Rouge by Vietnam. What role do these monuments play in constructing collective memory about the Khmer Rouge and its atrocities?

Read more about To Those Who Are No Longer Here

To Those Who Are No Longer Here memorial created by French-Cambodian artist Séra and the Roundabout Statue Celebrating the Overthrow of the Khmer Rouge by Vietnam. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Aspects of social diversity, the main minorities in the country, cases of persecution after 1945

Although minorities have been present in the country, the majority of the Cambodian population are ethnic Khmer followers of Buddhism. The largest minorities in Cambodia are the Cham Muslim community, ethnic Chinese and ethnic Vietnamese, as well as numerous smaller indigenous groups, such as the Khmer Krom and the Kuy. Under the Khmer Rouge regime, the Cham and Vietnamese, specifically, were targeted for extermination. The last surviving leader of the Khmer Rouge, Khieu Samphan was convicted for genocide against Cambodia's Muslim Cham and ethnic Vietnamese by the international Tribunal for Khmer Rouge crimes in 2018.

Explore more: *Minorities and indigenous people in Cambodia*

Gathering of Muslim men in Cambodia. (Credit: Sayana Ser)

Cambodia has 884 mosques and 314 Islamic schools, according to figures from the Ministry of Cults and Religion in Cambodia. (Credit: Sayana Ser)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. How can war affect minorities? Are they especially vulnerable?

2. What preventive measures to protect minorities might exist in times of conflict?

2. EXISTING TYPES OF HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE DENIAL AND DISTORTION

Multideniers

Some of the discursive strategies of Holocaust deniers are similar to those used by those who deny the Cambodian genocide. In some cases, the denial or distortion of both is even promoted by the same actors, who can be described as ***multideniers***. The phenomenon concerns Cambodia particularly.

1

Khieu Samphan was the nominal head of state during the time of the Khmer Rouge regime. He was later convicted for crimes against humanity. His writings are a classic example of genocide denial or distortion: materials in which the author uses arguments that are highly typical of those who deny or distort the Holocaust in Europe. Samphan deflects guilt, a common strategy identified by scholars, such as Michael Shafir in cases of Holocaust denial and distortion. Samphan attempts to shift the guilt to other individuals, such as Pol Pot and to Vietnam, claiming that the worst crimes and atrocities were not committed by the Khmer Rouge regime, but by the Vietnamese army. This kind of blame shifting is highly characteristic of Holocaust deniers and distorters in Europe.

Khieu Samphan, Khmer Rouge head of state of Cambodia, 1978.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Case 002 Initial Hearing Khieu Samphan.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

2

Jacques Verges, who is of Thai origin, defended many problematic individuals, such as criminals and dictators. As well as representing the leaders of the Khmer Rouge, he also defended Klaus Barbie, a notorious Nazi criminal, who was eventually arrested and sentenced in the 1980s for his role in the extermination of French Jews. In the course of defending the Khmer Rouge leaders, Verges resorted to discursive strategies that were tantamount to genocide denial or trivialisation and minimisation.

3

Jan Myrdal was a Swedish public figure, author and activist. Myrdal displayed a clear antipathy against Jews and, in particular, against Israel. He was fascinated with the Khmer Rouge regime and for many years was involved in denying the reality of its crimes in Cambodia, as well as promoting a radical anti-Zionist version of Holocaust distortion, claiming that Israel was exaggerating the Holocaust for its own benefit.

Jan Myrdal. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

21 November, 2011: Jacques Verges, the French international defence lawyer for Khieu Samphan during the first day of the opening statements in Case 002. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

4

Israel Shamir, who is of Russian Jewish origin and has lived in several countries, including Israel and Sweden, is one of the symbols of the contemporary antisemitic movement. He accuses the Jews and Israel of exaggerating the Holocaust for its own benefit. He has also written articles claiming that the crimes against humanity committed by the Khmer Rouge never occurred. He is a prime example of a multidenier who denies or minimises genocides and abuses of human rights, both during the Second World War and in Cambodia in the 1970s.

5

Noam Chomski is one of the most significant intellectuals of our era. He is not a genocide denier. However, some of his statements, especially those he made in the late 1970s, could be interpreted as minimisation of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. He has since partially retracted some of those statements. His role during that time concerning the Cambodian genocide, however, remains problematic, as do several of his statements concerning Holocaust denial. Chomsky wrote the preface to an infamous book authored by Robert Faurisson, a French Holocaust denier, who was suspended from his university teaching position and brought before a court for denying that the Nazi gas chambers had existed. Chomsky claimed that he offered the preface in the name of freedom of speech; nevertheless, he was criticised heavily for his role in legitimising some forms of Holocaust denial and distortion, as well as distortion of the Cambodian genocide.

Israel Shamir. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Noam Chomski.
(Credit: Augusto Starita / Ministerio de Cultura de la Nación/Wikimedia Commons)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. Can one form of genocide denial and distortion lead to other forms?
2. What similarities are there between different forms of genocide denial and distortion across the world?

Potential local tools for Cambodia to counter denial and distortion: The issue of responsibility and resistance against the Khmer Rouge

Through a complex process of dealing with the past, Cambodians are able to discuss difficult subjects, such as their own responsibility during the time of the Khmer Rouge regime, as well as the population's resistance during the genocide.

The resilience of Holocaust survivors can act as a reference and an inspiration to Cambodians in overcoming their own difficult past.

Resistance occurred under the Khmer Rouge, and some refused to stay silent during the atrocities. Read the story of Bophana, a twenty-five-year old woman who wrote forbidden letters in prison, and was executed by the Khmer Rouge.

Bophana. (Credit: Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center)

Watch the Symposium presentations:

- **'Globalisation of genocide denial. The case of genocide multideniers' by Professor Rafal Pankowski, cofounder, NEVER AGAIN Association, Warsaw, Poland.**
- **'Dealing with the past in Cambodia in the context of genocide distortion' by Sayana Ser, Peace Institute Cambodia, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**
- **'Bophana Center's work against the denial and distortion of Khmer Rouge atrocities' by Sopheap Chea, Executive Director at Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center, Phnom Penh, Cambodia.**

PLAY VIDEO

Watch the Symposium Keynote talk about genocide distortion and denial in Southeast Asia and worldwide by Professor Ben Kiernan, Professor of International and Area Studies, Director of the Genocide Studies Program at Yale University, USA.

PLAY VIDEO

The online event was organized by the NEVER AGAIN Association in cooperation with the Balac Program of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok (Thailand) and the American University of Phnom Penh (Cambodia), with the support of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Cambodia.

STORIES OF MINORITY WOMEN'S RESILIENCE AND RESISTANCE UNDER THE KHMER ROUGE

Around seventy percent of the survivors of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia were women; most were widows. Since the collapse of the regime in 1979, women have been the key actors in mobilising society and rebuilding the nation. They reshaped Cambodia's economy during the chaotic 1980s and 1990s, when civil war with the Khmer Rouge raged and economic sanctions restricted opportunities for development.

Moreover, it was through women's unwavering efforts that Cambodian culture, education and traditions were reinstituted into the social structure of daily life. Under these difficult circumstances, the women of Cambodia demonstrated impressive strength and resilience.

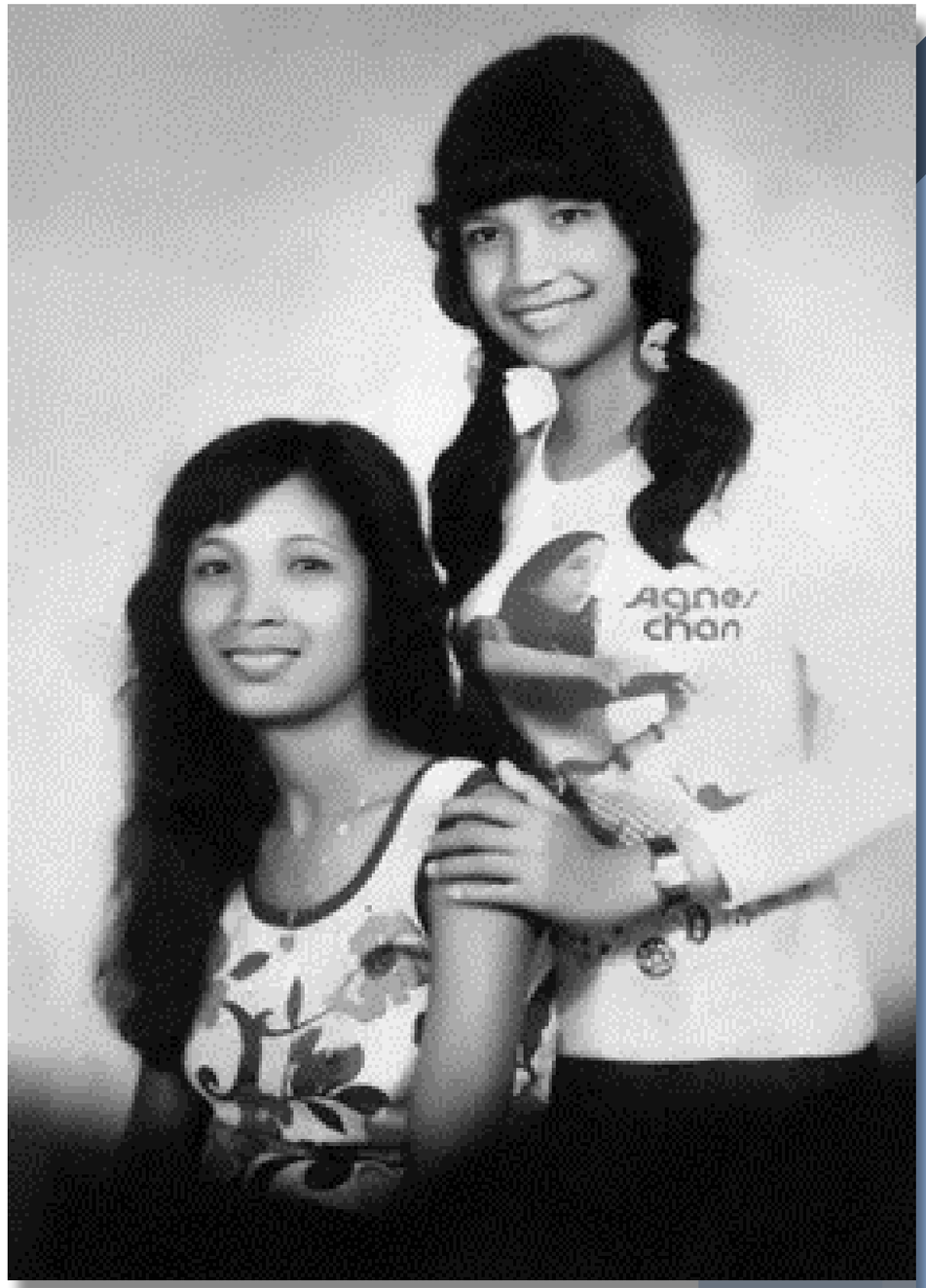
Many stories exist of Cambodian women survivors who must deal with the past; one of suffering, loss and pain. Here is a story of two widows who had suffered a great deal during the Khmer Rouge struggling to survive with the responsibility for their children and relatives.

Sim Maryyah, 73, is a Cambodian Muslim woman of Malay–Javanese background. She is the first born among ten siblings in family of merchants. She married Long Sae, a Cambodian–Chinese man. They had four sons and a daughter.

During the time of the Khmer Rouge, Maryyah had to change her name to Sem Mary for fear of being forced to eat pork and enduring other impositions at the hands of the Khmer Rouge if they knew she continued to hold religious beliefs. Like all women during that period, she had to have her long dark hair, which she loved, cut short. Her female teenage siblings, who were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, had to lie that they were married and that their husbands had been sent to work in other brigades.

The Khmer Rouge refused to allow any personal belief, nor ownership of one's private belongings or property; everything belonged to the *Angkar*, including the children. They also had to work at the cooperatives and in the rice fields, carrying food to soldiers on the front lines. They were deprived of all their rights and separated from their parents.

Mary's father died from illness without treatment during the time of the Khmer Rouge. She also lost two sons and a daughter to the regime from malnutrition and sickness. The Khmer Rouge brought Long Sae to be executed near a pit in Kandal province because he had become weak from overwork in the rice fields, as well as building a dam and a water irrigation system.



Sim Maryyah, or Sem Mary (left) and her younger sister Sothea Sem. The photograph was taken before the Khmer Rouge in 1974.
(Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

The Khmer Rouge considered those who were too weak or sick to work in the fields or those who did not know how to cultivate rice as city people; those who had white skin or wore glasses were considered social worms, capitalists or enemies.
The Khmer Rouge almost took Mary's life when she begged them for information on her husband's fate.

'I was dragged to be killed too. I thought I would die then because I tried to ask them about my husband, but my two little sons of six and eight years old were crying and hugging their legs and begged the Khmer Rouge to release me: "please let my mother go. If you took her away nobody would take care of me, please have pity on us…",'

Somehow, Mary was released and warned after a Khmer Rouge guard hit her with his rifle, causing her head to bleed. Mary also had her hair pulled by the Khmer Rouge cadres or soldiers and was dragged into a pit.

After the regime collapsed, Mary was reunited with her mother and siblings. Mary had to take care of nine family members, including her widowed mother, two sons, a younger brother, four younger sisters, and a young niece whose parents had been killed by the regime. Mary had been working hard as a salesperson — a business she had inherited from her father. She sold mainly herbal and traditional medicines, as well as clothes. She would travel to the provinces, walking from house to house, and made friends or asked friendly people to provide her with shelter for a few nights to stay in for compensation. Mary faced many hardships and struggles, but she overcame all of them to earn a living to take care of her loved ones who were young and orphaned; they all depended on her. Her sons and youngest brother went to school, graduated and pursued higher education abroad. Her hard work paid off and all of her siblings and niece now have their own families.

Although today, Mary is living in freedom with the family of her older son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren, her physical and mental health has weakened and the shadow of a traumatic and painful past remains embedded in her memories.

'My husband was a decent man. He had fair skin and a nice complexion, since he was of Chinese descent. We loved each other. Even today, I dream of meeting him. I want to see him. I imagine his face and what our life would be like if he were still alive.'

Mary (first left), Sothea (first right) with their mother and siblings during their nephew's wedding.
(Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

Mary with her grandchildren in front of their house. She has lower back pain and diagnosed with arthritis.
(Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

Neak Tiream (Ou Ream), 70. After the Khmer Rouge fell, ***Neak Ti Ream*** reunited with some of her siblings, nieces and nephews, and continued searching for other family members. She had been taking care of seven orphans whose parents had been killed by the Khmer Rouge.

Tiream lost many of her family members and relatives during the time of the Khmer Rouge. Her husband was a government official and the regime accused him of treachery. He was sent for re-education; in most cases, that means death. Tiream's brother-in-law was working as an inspector during the time of the Lon Nol regime. Both he and Tiream's older sister were killed by the Khmer Rouge, orphaning their two daughters. Three other siblings who worked and occupied positions in the old government were also traced and killed. Tiream's younger brother was a student and was also abducted by the Khmer Rouge.

An antipublic educational Khmer Rouge slogan stated 'there are no diplomas, only diplomas one can visualise. If you wish to get a Baccalaureate, you must get it at dams or canals,'. Another stated 'Study is not important. What's important is work and revolution'. As a result, formal schools were entirely prohibited under the Khmer Rouge's dictatorial and murderous rule. The regime transformed public schools and pagodas into prisons, stables and warehouses.

Henceforth, Tiream had to take care of two young boys and five young girls. One of the girls was born deaf and mute. She sent the children to school, and all can read and write. She travels back and forth between home in the outskirts of Phnom Penh and Chhnok Trou in Kampong Chhnang province. She works there as a vendor, trading and selling small freshwater snails and clams collected from Tonlé Sap river.
Tiream has worked very hard to earn a living and feed the children. She does not have much time to take care of herself, so she always keeps her hair in a men's style and wears only trousers. According to her siblings, Tiream used to be a pretty woman, who had fairer skin than her siblings and beautiful hair. She once had the appearance of an elegant woman.

Presently, although all the orphans have grown up, got married and had children (except the mute one, who now lives with her oldest sister), Tiream continues to travel occasionally between the two locations to earn a living. Her health has deteriorated since she had a stroke, which caused her face and lip to slump to one side. She continues trying to make physical movements using her own strength, motivation and courage.

Tiream could afford to keep only two possessions during the time of the Khmer Rouge: a blanket that she would use as a pillow or as a sheet to spread on the ground for sleeping at night, and a spoon that she would tie around her neck to prevent it from being lost or stolen.

Neak Ti Ream or Ou Ream (left) and her close friend Long Yah, pre-Khmer Rouge time.
(Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

Neak Ti Ream going to Mecca, with family at Phnom Penh International Airport.
(Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

State and nongovernmental initiatives to prevent/counter denial

Examples of state initiatives:

- The People's Revolutionary Tribunal was established to try Pol Pot and Ieng Sary for genocide in absentia seven months after the overthrow of Khmer Rouge in 1979.
- The Renakse documents: Cambodian survivors made around 1.6 million petitions between 1983 and 1984 to encourage the United Nations to acknowledge the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. The petitions describe the atrocities against Cambodians, the methods and the number of people killed, the locations of the killings, and the people's suffering.
- National Day of Remembrance (20th May) was established in 1984 to help survivors find reconciliation and speak out about their painful experiences.
- The Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields of Choeung Ek are sites of evidence of murder and destruction, as well as important venues of collective memory.
- The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), or the Cambodia Khmer Rouge Tribunal, was established by the Cambodian government and the United Nations in 2003 to try the Khmer Rouge leadership for crimes perpetrated during their reign.

Neak Tiream's blanket from the period of Khmer Rouge. (Credit: Sayana Ser)

Neak Ti Ream with her sister-in-law.
(Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

Neak Ti Ream (center) with Sayana Ser (first right) and her family. (Credit: Family archive of Sayana Ser)

Examples of civil society initiatives:

- The Khmer Rouge History Application was launched on 1st November, 2017 by Bophana Center. It can be accessed from smart devices. It helps young people to learn about the history of the Khmer Rouge, as well as justice, human rights and peace from survivors.
- The Diary of a Young Girl, also known as The Diary of Anne Frank is a Dutch-language diary kept by Jewish thirteen-year-old, Anne Frank while she was in hiding for two years with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. The family was captured in 1944 and sent to Auschwitz - Birkenau concentration and extermination camp. Anne Frank was once again deported to Bergen - Belsen concentration camp, where she died of typhus in 1945. Her writings were preserved by helpers and presented to her father, Otto Frank, the family's only survivor. Anne's diary has since been published in more than seventy languages, In 2002, the Documentation Center of Cambodia published a Khmer-language version of the diary and distributed it among 200 schools and libraries. The diary was translated by a then-sixteen-year old member of the Cham Muslim community in Cambodia, Sayana Ser.
- In 2019, the NEVER AGAIN Association and Heinrich Boell Stiftung Cambodia organised a series of seminars on the Holocaust for Cambodians in the Khmer and English languages in Phnom Penh the first of their kind in Cambodia. As a follow-up, Heinrich Boell Stiftung Cambodia published a second edition of The Diary of a Young Girl in Khmer language in 2020.

https://www.nigdywiecej.org/en/our-news/177-articles-from-2019/4226-the-missing-picture-rethinking-genocide-studies-and-prevention

Cham Muslim school girls in Svay Khleang.
(Credit: Archive of Sayana Ser)

Participants of the seminar about the Holocaust in Phnom Penh, coorganised by the NEVER AGAIN Association and the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Cambodia, July 2019. (Credit: NEVER AGAIN Association)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. Is The Diary of a Young Girl relevant to Cambodian readers?
2. How can personal stories promote empathy between different groups of victims of genocide?

Covers of the first and second editions of *Anne Frank's Diary* in Khmer (2002, 2020).

ស្នៀវភៅកំណត់ហេតុរបស់ក្មេងស្រី អាន់ ហ្វ្រង់

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ថ្ងៃព្រហស្បតិ៍ ទី06 ខែសីហា ឆ្នាំ2020

ស្នៀវភៅកំណត់ហេតុរបស់ក្មេងស្រីអាន់ហ្វ្រង់ ត្រូវបានបកប្រែជាភាសាខ្មែរលើកទី២

រោយៈរស្មី

ភ្នំពេញ៖ ស្នៀវភៅកំណត់ហេតុរបស់ក្មេងស្រីម្នាក់ដែលមានឈ្មោះថា អាន់ហ្វ្រង់ ត្រូវបានបកប្រែជាភាសាខ្មែរ បញ្ចូលខ្លឹមសារ ឯកសារបន្ថែមជាលើកទី២ ដើម្បីឱ្យអត្ថន័យ និងខ្លឹមសារសំខាន់ៗក្នុងសាច់រឿងឱ្យកាន់តែស៊ីជម្រៅ ដែលអ្នកអានបានទទួលបានទាំងភាពរីករាយ និងពិសេសបានទទួលសាច់រឿងថ្មីៗគ្រប់ជ្រុងជ្រោយបន្ថែមទៀត ។

កញ្ញាសេសាយ្យាណា ដែលជាអ្នកបកប្រែស្នៀវភៅ អាន់ហ្វ្រង់ បានឱ្យដឹងថា ស្នៀវភៅកំណត់ហេតុរបស់ក្មេងស្រីជនជាតិអាល្លឺម៉ង់ម្នាក់នេះ មានភាពល្បីល្បាញឈ្មោះណាស់ដែល ត្រូវបានគេបកប្រែជាង ៦០ភាសា ហើយត្រូវបានគេនិយមចូលចិត្តអានតាមរយៈពិភពលោក ។

តទៅទំព័រ 16

The publication of the Diary of a Young Girl in Khmer was covered in Cambodian media. (Credit: Sayana Ser)

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

Books

Chandler, David. (2009). *A History of Cambodia*, Phnom Penh: Center for Khmer Studies

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Other publications

Exhibition Catalogue 40 Years: Remembering the Victims of S-21. 2019-2020. Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts (in English and Khmer)

Dealing with the Past: Aspects of Trauma and Healing. On limitations: Lessons learnt and lessons not learnt from German history. (2018-19). Edited by Alice Murage, Ali Al-Nasani and Dara Bramson. Heinrich Böll Foundation Cambodia Office ***LINK***

Back to the Table of contents

COUNTRY FACT SHEETS (PROFILES)

MYANMAR (BURMA)[1]

The Burma–Siam 'Death Railway', Myanmar (Burma).
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

1 *Burma and Myanmar are used interchangeably in this text*

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Basic facts about the modern history of Myanmar and the main cases of mass violence

In 1948, Burma (now Myanmar) gained its independence from British colonial rule and sought to establish a federal democracy. The nation lived under military rule and isolation for nearly half a century, until international sanctions were lifted in 2011. Its story is one of a highly diverse nation that moved from the colonial era, through the Japanese occupation, the Cold War, self-isolation and semi-democratisation, to a military coup in 2021.

In short, Myanmar faces challenges such as:

- **political divisions between its military and the opposition**
- **armed conflict between groups that possess different historical identities and differing views of the past; a fragile state (national) identity**
- **nationalist tendencies and religious tensions between Buddhists and Muslims, including hate speech and genocidal violence against the predominantly Muslim Rohingya community; the presence of perpetrators of past human rights abuses in government structures.**

The period of the military regime, the Tatmadaw (the armed forces of Myanmar) and isolation was accompanied by violations of human rights. In 1988, antigovernment protests were violently dispersed by the army. At least 3,000 people lost their lives and many were arrested. The newly established State Law and Order Council declared martial law and banned all political activity. In 1990, the National League for Democracy won an election, but the State Law and Order Council refused to hand over power. In 2007, mass protests were organised in the country. Many, including Buddhist monks, protested against the military government's decision to raise oil and gas prices, and asserted prodemocracy demands; the military, in turn, dispersed the demonstrations and organised repressions against the protesters. These events have come to be known as the 'Saffron Revolution' (named after the traditional colour of monks' robes).

In 2017, a massive wave of attacks was orchestrated by the Myanmar military against the Rohingya population. Thousands of Rohingya were killed and more than 700,000 refugees fled abroad—the majority to Bangladesh. In 2020, the International Court of Justice ordered Myanmar to prevent genocidal violence against its Rohingya minority and to preserve evidence of past attacks.

A new wave of violence occurred in February 2021, when the armed forces refused to acknowledge the electoral victory of the National League for Democracy and seized power in a coup.

Myanmar is one of the world's most diverse countries, with as many as 135 ethnic and religious minority groups and subgroups including the Karen, the Shan, the Rakhine, the Mon, the Chin, and the Kachin. Minorities constitute 40% of Myanmar's population, and most are represented by Buddhist Burmans. Armed conflict continues between the central Burmese government and the largest ethnic groups, who fight for autonomy and self-determination. This has occurred in Arakan (Rahkine) State, Chin State, Karenni (Kayah) State, Karen State, Mon State, Kachin State and Shan State.

Information about historiography: the main themes, the key elements of memorialisation

The history of Myanmar is riddled with tragic events that can be memorialised. Nongovernmental initiatives include documenting the stories of survivors and witnesses of past violence, as well as calling for justice. Organisations such as '88 Generation Peace and Open Society hold annual commemorations of the violence and student protests in 1988, which centre around Burma Human Rights Day (13 March)—the date of the death of a young protester.

In recent years, Rohingya groups and their allies worldwide have organised commemorations of the Rohingya genocide. They declared 25 August to be Rohingya Genocide Remembrance Day; on the same day in 2017, the Myanmar army commenced a brutal crackdown against Rohingya civilians, forcing more than 750,000 people to flee to neighbouring Bangladesh in the space of a few days.

The Myanmar Jewish community also organises initiatives to commemorate the Holocaust.

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. Under what conditions can diversity be a source of conflict? Under what conditions can it be a source of prosperity and peaceful progress?
2. How can faith leaders (e.g. Buddhist monks) contribute positively to social change and democratisation?
3. Why is religion so often cited as a reason for intercommunal tensions and violence (e.g. the violence against the Rohingya community committed by Buddhists)? Can religious differences be reconciled through a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence?

The role of the Myanmar in the Second World War; memorialisation of the Second World War: does it exist? In what forms?

From 1942 to 1945, Burma was occupied by the Empire of Japan, Hitler's ally. Burma became one of the most violent theatres of the conflict. The Burmese civilian population, including its minorities, suffered atrocities and economic disaster.

Yet at the beginning of the war, the Bamar majority and the Burma Independence Army, under the guidance of general Aung San, supported the Japanese, who had trained them; for some Burmese activists, this presented an opportunity to gain independence from the British.

They later realised that this was not the case, and began to fight against the Japanese. General Aung San formed and led the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, an underground resistance movement in 1944.

During the war, the ethnic minorities generally fought on the Allied side. Burma remained a British colony until 1948. British colonists favoured minorities for various positions, and this created tensions between the Bamar majority and minorities in the following years. Uniquely for Southeast Asia, Burma also had its own well-established Jewish population. The Japanese declined to adopt an overtly racist, antisemitic approach towards the Jews who lived in the country; regardless, they treated them as they did those who were loyal to the British. As a result, many Jews left the country (see our subchapter on Jews in Myanmar).
Currently, memorialisation of the Second World War on the territory of Myanmar focuses primarily on British military history at the expense of local Burmese experiences. Memories of the Second World War differ between the ethnic majority and minorities such as the Karen, who commemorate the war as a point of reference to current conflicts. The subject is not widely discussed and has not been presented at the National Museum in Yangon.

The events of the Second World War in Myanmar might facilitate an interesting connection to the Holocaust in Europe.

The Burma Star memorial. The Burma Star Association was formed in 1951 for Burma campaign veterans of the Second World War.
(Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

The Burma-Thailand railway

In 1942–43, the Japanese constructed the Burma–Thailand railway, also known as the Burma–Siam railway. Its strategic aim was to supply the Japanese forces in Burma while avoiding sea routes. The Japanese army forced approximately 60,000 Allied prisoners of war—including 13,000 Australians, many Dutch, and roughly 200,000 civilians (mostly Burmese and Malayans)—to work on the railway's construction. Many died as a result of disease and arduous conditions[1]. Memorialisation mostly focuses on Australian and Dutch prisoners of war due to the interest of their governments and families; the fate of Asian prisoners remains much less researched and known.

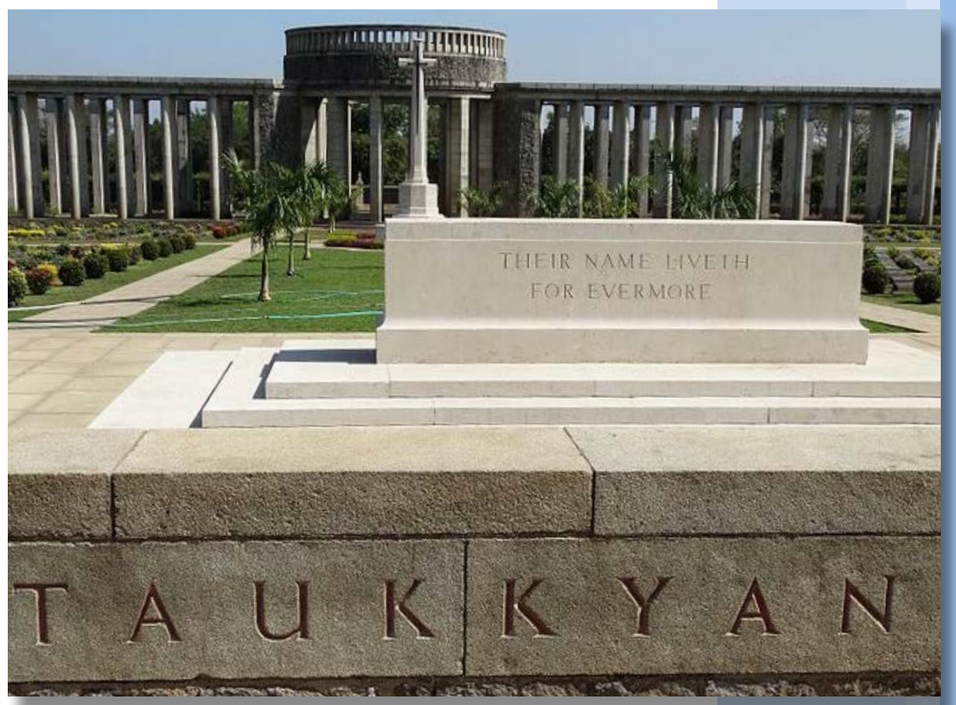
The tiny Jewish Community of Myanmar commemorates the Holocaust and its victims in Yangon. Anne Frank's Diary has been translated and published in the Burmese language. In the past, Anne Frank House in cooperation with *U Thant House*—a leading centre for learning and dialogue in Yangon—has focused on the key challenges facing Myanmar today, in addition to organising workshops for young people in Yangon. The Burmese government, the United Nations, and Yad Vashem once co-organised a Holocaust commemoration programme. It included seminars on the Holocaust for young people in Yangon.

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. How can common memory of the Second World War contribute to the construction of a unifying national identity in Myanmar?
2. Can historical memory contribute to a better understanding of postcolonial conflicts in Myanmar?
3. What forms of memorialisation of the Second World War as a global conflict might be valuable for Myanmar's democratic culture today?

1 Defining Moments: Burma–Thailand Railway, National Museum of Australia, Assessed on 3 January 2022 https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/burma-thailand-railway

The Burma–Siam 'Death Railway', Myanmar (Burma). (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)



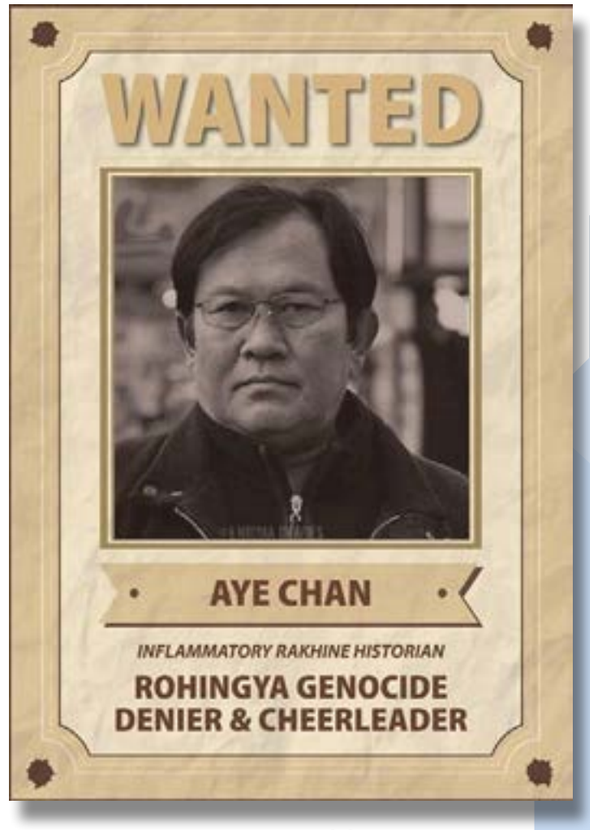
The Taukkyan War Cemetery is a cemetery for Allied soldiers from the British Commonwealh who died in battle in Burma during the Second World War. The cemetery is in the village of Taukkyan, about 25 kilometres north of Yangon. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

2. EXISTING TYPES OF HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE DENIAL AND DISTORTION

The existing culture of denial around the Rohingya people and denial of atrocities against the Rohingya

'Rohingya' is an ethno-religious term that describes the predominantly Muslim minority whose ancestral home is the province of Arakan. Under the 1974 Emergency Immigration Act, and later under the Citizen Act of 1982, the Rohingya were denied citizenship of Myanmar. The Rohingya as a group have been denied their historical existence and incorrectly labelled as Bengali (Bangladeshi).

Some academics have played crucial roles in the forming of this culture of denial. For example, Aye Chan at Kanda University of International Studies in Chiba City, Japan, has repeatedly denied the Rohingya of separate historical roots and claims that there is no known reference to the ethnicity before the 1950s. The authorities and large sections of the Myanmar political spectrum deny the facts of the atrocities and the genocidal attacks committed against the Rohingya in recent years.



A poster prepared by Burmese human rights activists and distributed online

Nazi symbols

The swastika has been used in Buddhist tradition for centuries; its use in a predominantly Buddhist country is unsurprising and, in that context, bears no relation to Nazi ideology. In some cases, however, the swastika and other problematic symbols appear in contexts that are unrelated to the old Buddhist symbolism. Despite the devastating impact of the Second World War on Burma, the existence of a historical Jewish community, and nongovernmental and governmental initiatives to teach and commemorate the Holocaust, Nazi symbols continue be used publicly. For example, a Burmese version of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* without any contemporary commentary has been published, and it it possible to buy t-shirts and other merchandise adorned with swastikas in local shops. As suggested by Verita Sriratana of Chulalongkorn University, the presence of Nazi symbolism in popular culture relates to the popularity of authoritarian military leaders in Southeast Asia.

Nazi symbols have also made appearances in youth subculture—a phenomenon that has also been observed in the West. Young people have worn the symbols, not knowing about the Holocaust or the true history behind them. A leading punk rock band from Myanmar, *Rebel Riot*, has repeatedly spoken out against the use of Nazi symbolism and the culture of genocide denial.

Genocide—a song by a punk band from Yangon Rebel Riot

The Burmese version of Hitler's Mein Kampf. (Credit: Maung Zarni)

Yangon Rebel Riot.
(Credit: uniteasia.org)

Sittwe's Jama Mosque, built in the nineteenth century, is a powerful symbol of long-term and legitimate Rohingya residency, but access has been blocked by the authorities since 2012. (Credit: Archive of Ronan Lee)

Kutupalong and nearby refugee camps, close to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, are now home to more than one million Rohingya refugees. (Credit: Archive of Ronan Lee)

In Sittwe, a few hundred metres from the Rohingya ghetto, empty former Rohingya stores were defaced with anti-Rohingya graffiti, reminiscent of Nazi vandalism of Jewish businesses. (Credit: Archive of Ronan Lee)

Humanitarian groups struggled to deal with the scale of the displacement of Rohingya from Myanmar during 2017. (Credit: Archive of Ronan Lee)

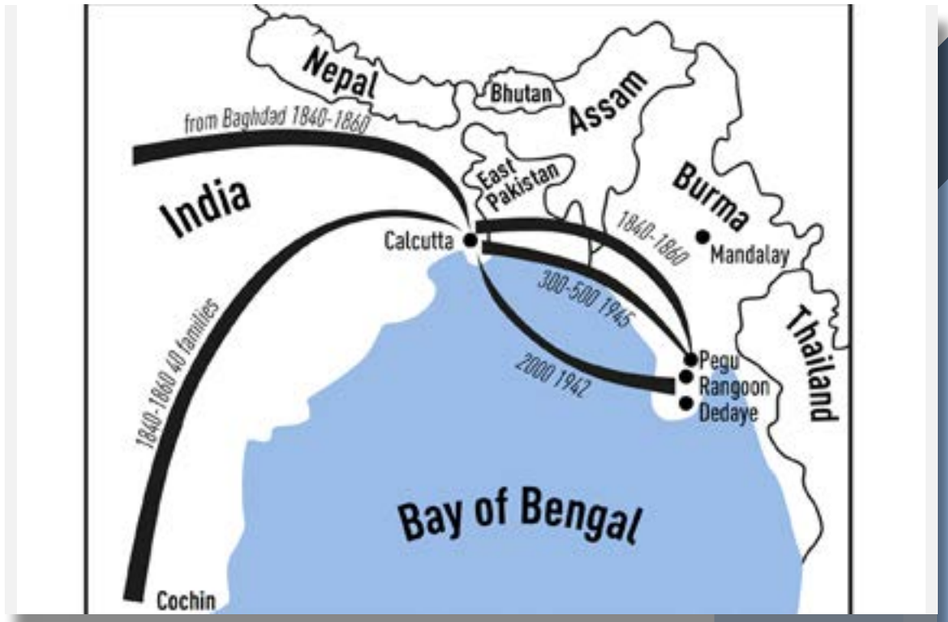
3. WHAT THEMES FROM CONTEMPORARY HISTORY ARE RELEVANT TO OUR WORK AGAINST HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE DENIAL AND DISTORTION?

Myanmar can be proud of its historical diversity, including its Jewish legacy and the locals' resistance to violence.

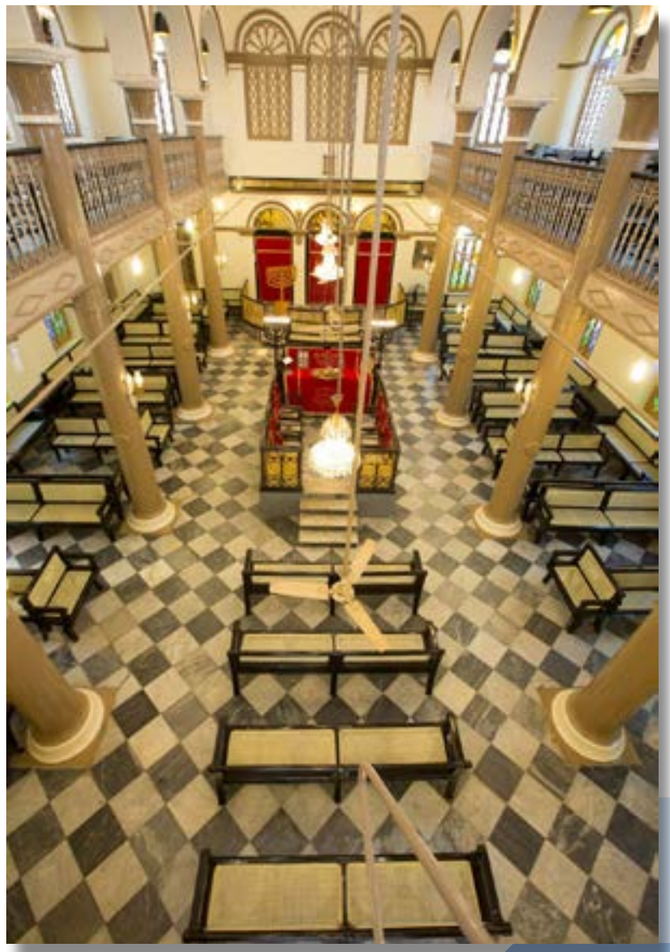
Jews as part of a pluralist society in Myanmar

Watch Sammy Samuels' presentation about the Jewish community in Myanmar at the symposium, Identifying and countering Holocaust distortion: Lessons for and from Southeast Asia, 25 November 202

Jews represent the smallest religious minority in Myanmar today—comprising only twenty local people in a nation of 52 million. Burma once had the largest Jewish population in Southeast Asia; at its peak, up to 3,000 Jews lived in the country.



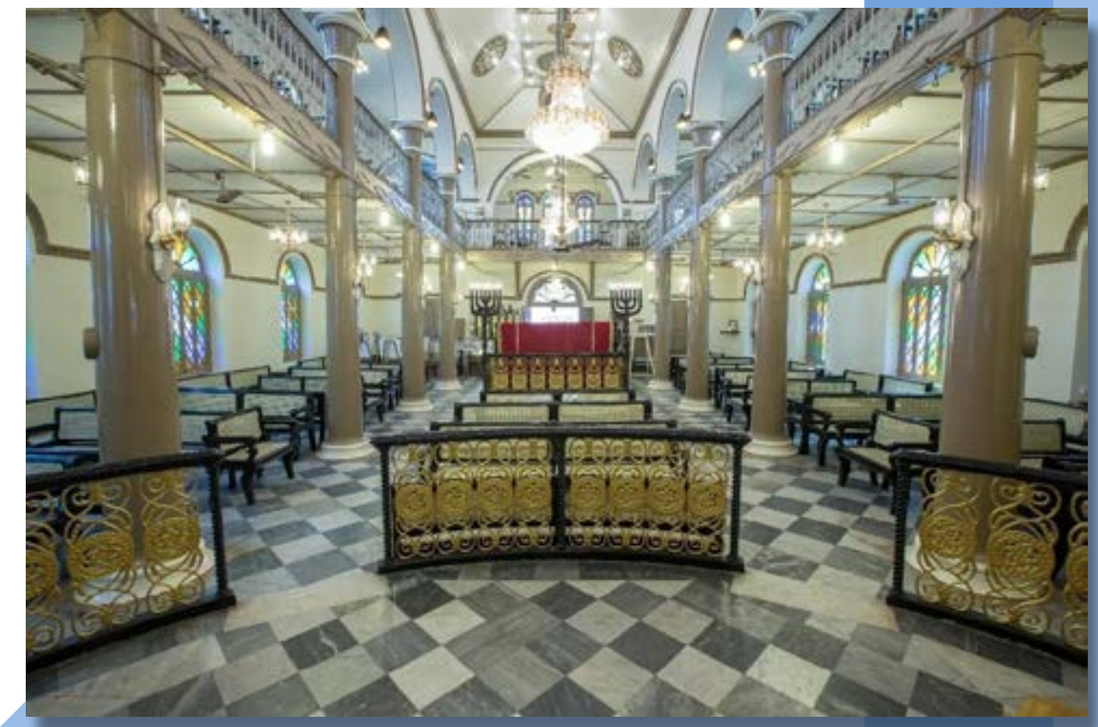
Movement of Jews to and from Burma in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Credit: https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/myanmar-virtual-jewish-history-tour)



Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue is one of 188 sites on the list of Yangon Heritage Buildings. (Credit: Sammy Samuels; NEVER AGAIN)


MUSMEAH YESHUA SYNAGOGUE
NO-85, 2 TREET


ရန်ကုန်မြို့ပြအမွေအနှစ်
မတ်စ်မီးယား ရေရှုအာ ဂျူးဘုရားကျောင်း
၁၈၉၆
Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue
1896
မြန်မာနိုင်ငံ၏ တစ်ခုတည်းသော ဂျူးဘုရားကျောင်းဖြစ်သည်။
ဒုတိယကမ္ဘာစစ် မတိုင်မီ ရန်ကုန်မြို့တွင် ဂျူးလူမျိုး ၂၅၀၀ ခန့်
အခြေစိုက်ခဲ့သည်။ ဤဂျူးဘုရားကျောင်းကို ရန်ကုန်မြို့တွင်
ကျန်ရှိသည့် ဂျူးမိသားစုများမှ တစ်ခုဖြစ်သည့် ဆမ်မြူရယ်မိသားစုက
မျိုးဆိုးစဉ်ဆက် ထိန်းသိမ်းစောင့်ရှောက်ထားသည်။
This is the only synagogue in Myanmar.
Yangon's Jewish community once numbered
2500 before mass migration during WWII.
The Samuels, one of the city's last remaining Jewish
families, has maintained the synagogue for generations.
YANGON CITY HERITAGE



Who were the first Jews in Burma?

The first recorded Jew in the country was Solomon Gabirol, who served as a commander in the army of King Alaungpaya in the eighteenth century. He was a descendent of the Bene Israel, a group of Indian Jews. Later, the bulk of the Jewish community in Burma descended from Iraqi Jews. Links to Galicia (Eastern Europe; presently in Poland) and Romania also existed. A Romanian–Jewish merchant, Goldenberg also visited Burma. Solomon Reineman of Galicia arrived in Rangoon in 1851 as a supplier to the British army and opened stores in various places. His 'Masot Shelomo' ('Solomon's Travels') of 1884 contains chapters on Burma (the first Hebrew account of the country), as well as China and India.

The majority of Jews in Burma travelled from Baghdad to Rangoon/Yangon. Burma at that time was an attractive destination for them due to the economic opportunities it offered. Some merchants from Calcutta travelled, but did not settle. Settlement increased after 1824, when Burma became a British colony. The Burmese people proved to be warm hosts for the Jews at that time; the nation was highly tolerant for more than 150 years.
No caste system existed as in India, and a more favourable climate for business had been cultivated. One more synagogue was built in the 1930s.

Yangon Jewish Cemetery has more than 700 tombs.
(Credit: Sammy Samuels)

Who were the Baghdadi Jews?

The Baghdadi Jews were Sephardic—a small minority in Southeast Asia. Most of them arrived from Baghdad or Basra, but many had ancestors from the Iberian Peninsula who had been persecuted and expelled from Spain during the Middle Ages. Many settled in the Ottoman empire, including in Iraq and in Southeast Europe.

The earliest Baghdadi settlement in Burma probably dates back to 1841

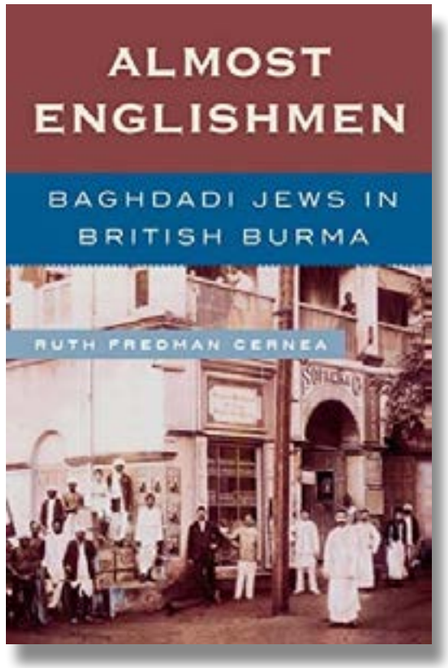
When Jews arrived in a new place, they always built a cemetery, a mikveh (a ritual bath), and a synagogue (a place of Jewish prayer, study and education). Burmese Jews lived mostly in Rangoon (Yangon), and in other places, such as Mandalay. The first synagogue was established in Rangoon in 1857, and was named Musmeah Yeshua Synagogue (Hebrew: 'brings forth salvation'). The synagogue was initially wooden before being rebuilt from stone.

What was the position of Jews in Burmese society during the British rule?

In her book, *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma*, Ruth Fredman Cernea wrote that in the hierarchy of colonial society, Jews were considered above the Burmese, but never equal to the Christians (the British).

The Jewish community was diverse:

- The Jewish identity was complex. It incroporated their Baghdadi heritage, new Burmese influences, being British subjects, and speaking various languages. A small number of Indian Jews, the Bene Israel, were literate in English and worked for the British in Rangoon and in Mandalay.
- The community once had 126 Sifrei Torah, a Talmud Torah, a Zionist group, and numerous charitable and communal organisations.
- Jews were involved in fields such as trade, textiles and administration. They held a designated seat on the Rangoon Municipal Committee. The community once had a Jewish school, which, at its peak in 1910, taught 200 students. Two cities had Jewish mayors: R.A. John Raphael in Bassein, and David Sophaer in Rangoon during the 1930s.



The Sofaers were one of the leading Jewish families in British Burma. David Sofaer served briefly as mayor and the stunning Sofaer building still stands on the corner of Pansodan (Phayre Street) and Merchant Street. This photograph is of an early Sofaer business along Merchant Street.
(Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

First Coca-Cola shop in Rangoon by Solomon's limited. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

The Jewish community donated generously to local schools, libraries and hospitals, and helped the Burmese in a variety of ways. The Baghdadi Jews in Burma lived in a highly diverse, cosmopolitan climate of Burman, Armenian, Indian and Chinese neighbours.

R.A. Raphael (John), Jewish Mayor of Bassein (Pathein), 1930-37. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

What happened during the Second World War?

As a result of the Japanese occupation of 1942–1945, many Jews had to leave Burma as British subjects. Some of them, perhaps 500, returned after the war to discover that their homes had been occupied and looted by the Burmese. In some places, including Mandalay, the Jewish community ceased to exist.

Those who stayed or returned assisted in the establishment of Israeli–Burmese relations, including in Burma becoming the first country in Asia to recognise the newly independent State of Israel in 1949. In 1955, Burmese prime minister, U Nu became the first foreign head of state to visit Israel. In 1961, Israeli prime minister, David Ben Gurion spent two weeks in Burma. Israeli leaders, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres also visited the country. However, many Jews were forced to leave again after 1962 following a military coup, when Buddhist nationalism was on the rise and the position of minorities in Burma worsened alongside the nation's economy. Most Jews left for Israel, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Presently, the descendants of Burmese Jews have a unique Baghdadi–Burmese–Jewish identity beyond Myanmar—a subject that is worthy of further study.

Prime Minister U Nu of Burma rides down Allenby Road in Tel-Aviv, 29 May 1995. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Prime Minister of Burma U-Nu, is greeted by Prime Minister Moshe Sharret at Lod Airport, 29 May 1955. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion dressed in Burmese national costume during his visit to Rangoon as guest of Prime Minister U Nu in Burma, 1 May 1961. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion visiting the Shwedagon Pagoda.
(Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

4 THE SAMUELS FAMILY

The Samuels are one of many historically renowned Jewish families in Burma. Moses Samuels became the leader of the Jewish community in 1978. With his wife, two daughters and one son, he oversaw the Musmeah Yeshua synagogue and the Jewish cemetery, which contains more than 600 gravestones. The synagogue remains open to some families that continue to live in Yangon, Jewish tourists from abroad, diplomats, and foreigners living in Myanmar. It is almost impossible to achieve *minyan* (a group of ten Jewish male adults that is needed to conduct some religious practices) for daily service; the synagogue nevertheless continues to exist as a symbol of Jewish identity and as a site of multicultural events.

After Moses Samuels died in 2015, his son Sammy Samuels became the leader of the community. He studied at a *yeshiva* while living in New York, but returned to Myanmar to continue the Jewish tradition. For this purpose, he established a travel agency, Shalom, in 2006 to promote Jewish life in Myanmar. Thanks to Sammy and other Jews, the community has aroused international interest in recent years. The Myanmar Jewish community is part of Euro–Asian Jewish Congress and other Jewish organisations.

Myanmar is likely the only Southeast Asian country where information about the Holocaust has been mentioned in the school curriculum; knowledge about the Holocaust, however, remains low. That is why the Jewish community has been engaged in promoting the historical and contemporary diversity of Myanmar among Burmese people and in organising commemorative and educational events on the Holocaust for students.

Burmese Jewish family.
(Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Sammy Samuels, the leader of the Jewish Community in Myanmar. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

"Every year, we organise events for Holocaust Remembrance Day, 27 January for students from Yangon University and other universities, with 300–400 participants. We show them the synagogue, tell them about Judaism, and then we may take them to the church, the monastery and the nearby mosque, and many of them are for the first time there"

Sammy Samuels, the leader of the Jewish Community

Interfaith Ceremony at State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi Residence. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Visitors at Yangon Synagogue. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Visitors at Yangon Synagogue. (Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Sammy Samuels meeting with Pope Francis during his visit to Myanmar in 2017.
(Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

"The We Remember Campaign, which we organise annually, is not only about the Holocaust, but also about the present; we draw attention to current atrocities, to other persecuted ethnic minorities in Burma. We are speaking up for them"

Sammy Samuels, the leader of the Jewish Community

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. What is missing from current knowledge and public discourse on minorities in Myanmar?
2. How can we use the Jewish legacy to create a pluralist, open-minded and tolerant society in Myanmar?
3. How can Holocaust education be relevant in teaching about the atrocities against the Rohingya in Myanmar?

WeRemember (Holocaust remembrance) campaign across Myanmar.
(Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Hanukkah Celebration at Yangon Synagogue, 2019. (Credit: Sammy Samuels)

Yangon Synagogue hosting the First Jewish exhibition: People, Book, Land.
The 3500 year relationship of the Jewish people with the Holy Land.
(Credit: Archive of Sammy Samuels)

Local resistance

The White Rose Campaign aimed to spread interfaith harmony and peace in Myanmar, and to show solidarity with Muslim minorities—including the Rohingya. White roses were distributed by Buddhists to Muslims near mosques after the Muslims' prayers. Interfaith activists launched the White Rose campaign shortly after Muslims' temporary prayer sites were forced to close by nationalist Buddhist monks, who led supporters into three Muslim areas of the South Dagon township in Yangon on the nights of 14 and 15 May, 2019. The White Rose campaign was initiated by a Buddhist monk, Venerable Ashin Seindita and other faith leaders. It started in Yangon before quickly spreading to other cities: Sagaing, Mawlamyine, Mandalay, Bago, Naypyitaw and Pyay.

Watch Thet Swe Win, an interfaith activist and the founder and executive director of Synergy Social Harmony Organization, who tells us about the campaign

The contemporary White Rose campaign in Myanmar was inspired by the symbolism of the anti-Nazi student opposition group, White Rose, which was formed in 1942. The underground movement promoted nonviolent resistance as a means of opposing the Nazi regime in Germany.

The White Rose campaign in Yangon and other cities in Myanmar.
(Credit: Archive of Thet Swe Win)

The German White Rose group:

- **produced leaflets encouraging Germans to join them in resisting the Nazi regime**
- **disseminated the leaflets to addresses selected randomly from telephone books, at universities, and other places**
- **scrawled the words, 'Down with Hitler' and 'Freedom' on walls across Munich.**

This story can serve as an interesting starting point for teaching the Holocaust with contemporary references to Myanmar and Southeast Asia.
Learn more about the White Rose anti-Nazi student opposition movement:
https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/white-rose

White roses were distributed by Buddhists to Muslims near mosques after the Muslims' prayers. Thet Swe Win and his family members presenting flowers to Muslims in Yangon. (Credit: Archive of Thet Swe Win)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. What methods and tools can be used to oppose violence and hatred against minorities today?
2. How can the White Rose movement from Germany serve as an example for young people in Myanmar and other countries today?

Ali Al-Nasani, director of Heinrich Böll Stiftung Cambodia, sharing the story of the White Rose Movement with Cambodians, 2019. (Credit: NEVER AGAIN Associaion)

Asia Light Sayadaw Badata Seindita presenting white roses to KAICIID Secretary General, H.E Faisal Bin Muaammar and Senior Advisor, Professor Mohammed Abu-Nimer. (Credit: White Rose Facebook group)

NEVER AGAIN's Rafal Pankowski wearing a t-shirt of the Myanmar White Rose campaign with Rohingya refugee children in Bangladesh, November 2019. (Credit: NEVER AGAIN Association)

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

Books

Campagnac-Carney, Sandra. (2014). *Burma Memories WWII*. Lulu.com

Cernea, Ruth. (2007). *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma.* Lanham: Lexington Books

Charney, Michael W. (2015). *A History of Modern Burma*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Charmaine, Craig. (2017). *Miss Burma.* New York: Grove Press ***LINK***

— Inspired by the remarkable true story of Craig's mother, whose father was Indian Jewish and whose mother was from the Karen minority in southern Burma, this novel deftly mixes fact and fiction. It relates the story of Craig's mother from her childhood and time as a 1950s beauty queen and film star, up to the point where she renounced her glamorous Rangoon life to become a commander in a guerrilla army fighting for an independent Karen state (Guardian)

Lee, Ronan. (2021). *Myanmar's Rohingya Genocide: Identity, History and Hate Speech.* London: I.B. Tauris

Ibrahim, Azeem. (2018). *The Rohingyas: Inside Myanmar's Genocide.* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Frank, Ben G. (2012). *Scattered Tribe. Travelling the Diaspora from Cuba to India to Tahiti&Beyond.* Globe Pequot Press

— a guide for the Jewish traveler to Russia (including Siberia), Tahiti, Vietnam, Burma-Myanmar, India, Morocco (and Algeria, albeit briefly), Cuba, and Israel

Thant, Myint-U. (2020). *The Hidden History of Burma. Race, Capitalism and the Crisis of Democracy in the 21st Century.* London: Atlantic Books

Zarni, Maung, Brinham, Natalie. (2019). *Essays on Myanmar's Genocide of Rohingyas* (2012-2018). Dhaka: Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit

Journal Articles

Kozłowska, Magdalena, Lubina, Michał. *"The Burmese road to Israeli-style cooperative settlements: The Namsang project, 1956–63"* in Journal in Southeast Asian Studies, Cambridge University Press, Volume 52 , Issue 4 , December 2021 , pp. 701 - 725

Back to the Table of contents

COUNTRY FACT SHEETS (PROFILES)

THAILAND

The facade of the building of the Thailand–Burma Railway Centre. (Credit: Thailand–Burma Railway Centre)

1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Basic facts about the modern history of Thailand and the main cases of mass violence

Thailand is the only country in Southeast Asia that was never colonised. The nation abolished its absolute monarchy in 1932. Since then, *'the country has had twenty charters and constitutions, twelve coups d'état, and thirty-four years of military rule'.*[1]

These events have positioned the military as an integral part of Thailand's political establishment. ***Most cases of violence are connected to the authorities' opposition to public protests for democracy and human rights. The protests and their legacies are contested in Thai public discourse.*** These include:

- **The student protests of 1973 demanded that the military government step down and that a new constitution be introduced. The government ordered the army to open fire on protestors. In total, seventy-seven protestors died and eighty were injured. In 1974, a new constitution was enforced and the military regime was overthrown.**
- **The Thammasat University massacre of 6 October, 1976 took place following a mass protest, which opposed the return from exile of the former military dictator, Thanom Kittikachorn. The protesting students were attacked and massacred by a rightwing mob. At least forty-six students lost their lives, and many were injured or arrested. Nobody was held accountable nor punished for the violence.**
- **Bloody May 1992—another example of a violent crackdown on prodemocracy mass protests.**
- **The Deep South conflict—Thailand is predominantly a Buddhist country. It also serves as a point of reference for Buddhists beyond its borders. Nevertheless, Thailand's population is diverse, and includes various indigenous and ethnic groups, such as the Hmong, Karen, Muslim Malays and others. The Muslim population has lived in the south of the country (known as the Deep South)—which borders Malaysia in Pattani, Yala and Narathiwat provinces—for a very long time. The protracted conflict in the Deep South is a highly sensitive and emotive one. It comprises many components, including ethnic and religious differences, and political conflict between Malay Muslims—who want to maintain their own identity on similar terms as the Thai Buddhist identity—and Thai Buddhist rule. The region has experienced tensions, violence and insurgency against the state. The Tak Bai Incident occurred on 25 October, 2004 in Narathiwat. Around 1,500 Muslims protested against the detention of their peers. The protest turned violent when the crowd threw rocks at the police, who responded with gunfire. Eighty-five Muslims and Buddhists died of suffocation and crush injuries while being transported to a military base. Once again, nobody was held accountable for the aggression.**

Massacre of 6 October, 1976 Memorial at Thammasat University, Bangkok. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. How can past experience of military rule impact the development of Thailand in the context of interethnic peace?
2. Is accountability for past human rights abuses necessary for national reconciliation?

1 The State of Conflict and Violence in Asia, Assessed on 3 January, 2022, *https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Thailand-StateofConflictandViolence.pdf*

Historiography: the main themes, the main elements of memorialisation

A number of nongovernmental projects that memorialise contested events, such as the *6 October Museum Project: Documentation, Archives* exist in Thailand. The project started in 2019 and includes an exhibition at Thammasat University. Through photographs and sound clips, the exhibition tells the story of 6 October, 1976 from the perspective of individual victims of state violence—primarily students who witnessed the events. It is also a safe space for reflection and discussion of critical subjects from Thailand's present and past. The exhibition incorporates numerous panel discussions, film screenings, performances and concerts by *Rap Against Dictatorship* and the *Commoner Band*.

Read more about the 6 October Museum Project and exhibition and see more images: Thammasat University massacre remembered.

Watch Patporn (Aor) Phoothong's presentation of the 6 October Museum Project during a symposium organised by the NEVER AGAIN Association on 26 November, 2021. Patporn Phoothong is a researcher who focuses on museums and archives of past political violence and ongoing violent conflicts, and is one of the project leaders.

One initiative is attempting to create a *Deep South Museum and Archives* to establish a sociopolitical public space in which the conflict, and particularly the *Tak Bai Incident*, are represented. The initiative also promotes democratisation, inclusion and polyphony for local communities affected by the conflict in southern Thailand.

Question for Critical Thinking:

How can the commemoration of past human rights abuses contribute to contemporary democratic culture?

A guided tour of the 6 October, 1976 exhibition.
It is a safe space for reflection and discussion of critical subjects from Thailand's present and past.
(Credit: Archive of 6 October Museum Project)

'Red Gate'. Two victims were found hanged on the gate on 24 September, 1976, after they had spread posters protesting the return of Thanom Kittikachorn.
(Credit: Archive of 6 October Museum Project)

The exhibition uses augmented technology to present the events.
(Credit: Archive of 6 October Museum Project)

Victims' possessions.
(Credit: Archive of 6 October Museum Project)

The role of Thailand in the Second World War; memorialisation of the Second World War: does it exist? In what forms?

Thailand (known as Siam until 1939) was a neutral state until it was invaded by the Japanese military on 8 December, 1941. After a short conflict, it formed an alliance with Japan and became its puppet state. On 25 January, 1942, Thailand declared war on the Allies.
Although the Second World War is present in Thai history books and several monuments commemorate it, it is effectively downplayed in public discourse. Historical memory and many aspects of Thailand's participation in the war are silenced, unknown to the public and not commonly debated. These include Thailand's participation in the war on the side of Japan and the bombing of Bangkok by the Allies. The official discourse justifies Thailand's participation in the war on the side of the Japanese for pragmatic reasons.

Kanchanaburi, a town in the west of Thailand on the border with Myanmar, was the site of notable events during the Second World War and is sometimes cited in the context of Holocaust education and historical memory in Thailand and Southeast Asia. Among its heritage sites is the 'River Kwai bridge', the 1944 Japanese memorial and the Allied War Cemetery. It also contains several museums that memorialise and present aspects of the Second World War. Two of them deserve special attention: the ***Hell Fire Pass Memorial Museum*** and the ***Thai–Burma Railway Centre***.

The Hell Fire Pass Memorial Museum was established as a memorial to the Australian and Allied Prisoners of War (PoWs) who were forced by the Japanese military to build 415 kilometres of the Thai–Burma railway. The railway was the main transportation route for supplying the Japanese during the war. The memorial has been sponsored and supported by the Australian government.

A monument erected to commemorate the Thai military youth in their struggle against Japanese invaders of Thailand in December 1941, near Chumphon city. (Credit: Wikimedia Commons)

The Thailand–Burma Railway Centre is involved in researching the subject, and has compiled and expanded the personal data of 106,000 former PoWs in Southeast Asia (predominantly those who constructed the Thai–Burma railway). It opened in 2003 as a privately operated museum, and information and research facility. All exhibition captions and information at the museum is presented in the English and Thai languages. The museum allows free entry to children who attend Thai state schools. It is located 200 metres from the site of the railway and 100 meters from the adjoining cemetery. The exhibition focuses on victims and their perspectives. It shows the severity of their working conditions (diseases, starvation, poor sanitation and accommodation, overwork and exhaustion) and the brutality they suffered. The exhibition also demonstrates that this history was well documented. Those working at the museum often have family connections to its history. The Australian, Dutch and British governments support the museum's activities. More than 13,000 British, Dutch, Australian and American PoWs perished there between mid-1942 and August 1945. ***The Asian slave laborers from Burma, Java and Malaya, however, constitute the largest group of victims: around 240,000 people and 100,000 deaths, according to the centre. Little is known nor written about this aspect at the exhibition and beyond.***

Read a brief history of the Thai–Burma railway and the Thailand–Burma Railway Centre: *http://www.tbrconline.com/history.htm*

The facade of the building of the Thailand–Burma Railway Centre. (Credit: Thailand–Burma Railway Centre)

The beginning of the exhibition. (Credit: Thailand–Burma Railway Centre)

The Summary Of Deaths gallery and the human cost of constructing the railway.
(Credit: Thailand–Burma Railway Centre)

Verita Sriratana analyses the third museum located in Kanchanaburi: the World War II Art Gallery and War Museum, established in 1995 by jewelry entrepreneur, Aran Chansiri. Sriratana is rather critical of the institution, and writes about attempts to 'museumise' and enshrine the image of Hitler[2]. The museum is located near the 'River Kwai bridge' that overlooks the Kwai Yai river. Sriratana asserts that the bridge was an outcome of the Thai government's effort in 1960 to promote and cater a sanitised version of Second World War history to tourists familiar with the famous 1957 film, *Bridge on the River Kwai*. Apart from this attempt to erase the Thai government's close collaboration with Japan during the conflict and the existence of Asian slave workers from history, the Thai government also renamed Kanchanaburi's rivers in 1960 to fit the popular image presented by the film.[3]

Fabrication of war history in Thailand does not end with the attempts of the Thai authorities to rename bridges and rivers. The World War II Art Gallery and War Museum is an extension of the oldest museum in Kanchanaburi, problematically named the 'JEATH War Museum', a historically misleading acronym (which intentionally rhymes with the word, 'death') for Japan, England, America, Australia, Thailand and Holland, built in 1977 by the chief abbot of Wat Chaichumpol[4], a Buddhist temple. In the JEATH section, visitors can walk through an imitation of the huts where, it was envisioned, Thailand–Burma railway PoWs were held. Among the eclectic hoard of objects on display—including stamps, coins, musical instruments and stuffed animals—scattered in a group of exhibition houses near the shrine that commemorates the Burmese–Siamese wars, are Buddhist-temple-style decorative stucco figures of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin. The biography, of Stalin, presented in both Thai and English, fails to mention the Gulag; Hitler's fails to mention the Holocaust. As a seeming afterthought, news article clippings about Auschwitz concentration camp are pasted near Hitler's stucco figure in the Thai language.

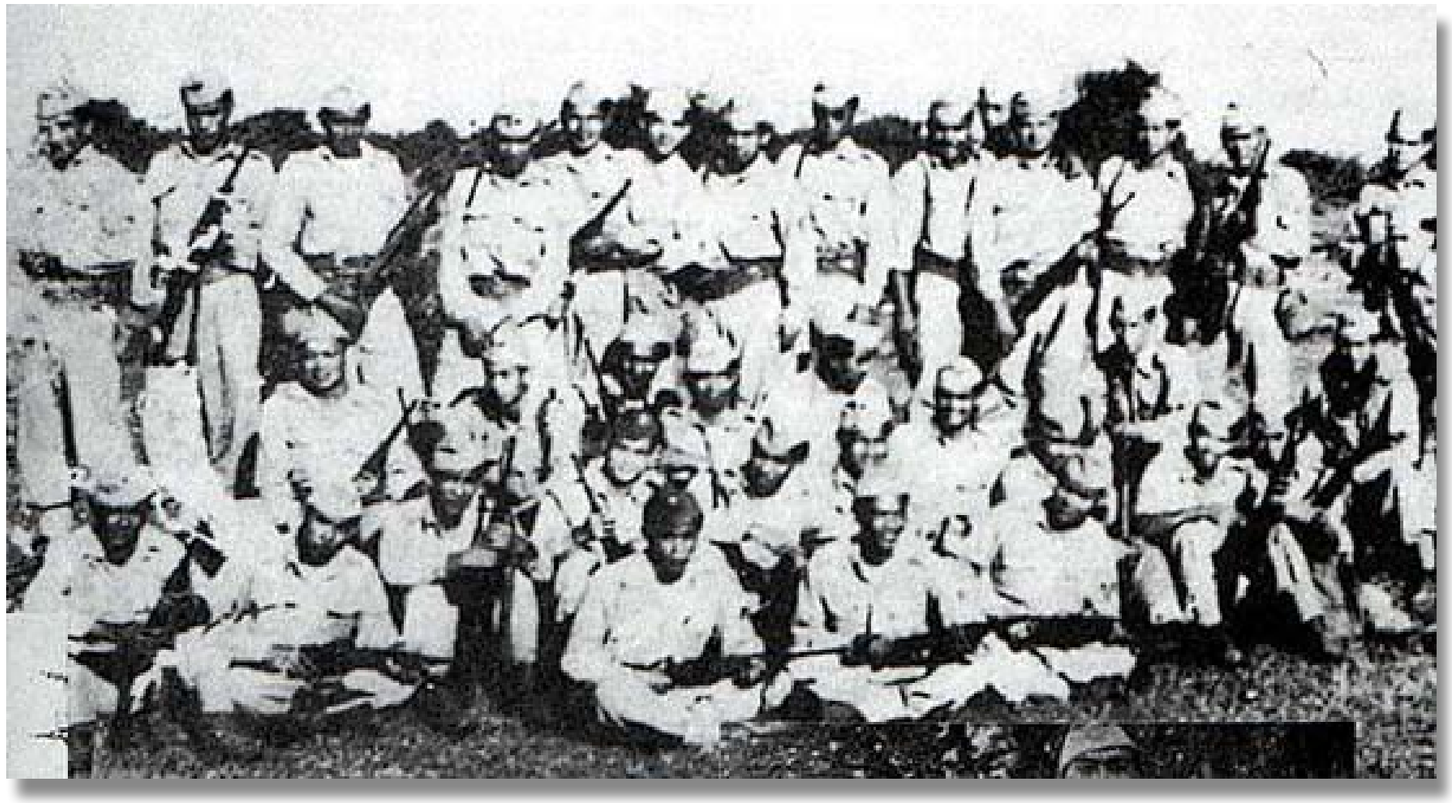
As the JEATH acronym testifies, the museum propagates and artificially reconstructs the myth of the Thailand–Burma railway claiming only PoWs from Allied countries as victims. Thailand's glorification of the Japanese army is also implied in the inclusion of the letter, *J* for Japan. Such a narrative masks the truth that Asian labourers, coerced as well as recruited with the promise of higher wages, also suffered and died during the construction of the railway.

Photographs of Buddhist-temple-style decorative stucco figures of Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin with news article clippings and biographies at the World War II Art Gallery and War Museum, Kanchanaburi.
(Credit: Verita Sriratana)

2 Symposium presentation, 23-26 November 2021.
3 Braithwaite, R.W. Leiper, Neil. 'Contests on the River Kwai: How a Wartime Tragedy Became a Recreational, Commercial and Nationalistic Plaything'. Current Issues in Tourism. Vol. 13. No. 4 (July 2010) Taylor & Francis, p.323.
4 Lenon, John. 'Kanchanaburi and the Thai-Burma Railway: Disputed Narratives in the Interpretation of War'. International Journal of Tourism Cities. International Tourism Studies Association. Vol. 4. No. 1 (2018): p.147.

The *Seri Thai* ***resistance movement***, or the ***Free Thai Movement***, was a Thai underground resistance group that fought against Japanese forces during the Second World War. The ***Seri Thai resistance*** movement is commemorated in cooperation with the US Embassy in Thailand, and is considered a unifying aspect between Thailand and the US.
The website of the US embassy states:
'Thai students studying in the United States at such prestigious universities as Cornell, Caltech, and MIT volunteered to receive military training and return home to Thailand to fight for its freedom. These were the first members of what would become the Seri Thai force. The Seri Thai volunteers played an invaluable role in preparing the ground for the restoration of Thailand's sovereignty'[5].

5 'Commemoration of Seri Thai Movement', Assessed on January, 2022, *https://th.usembassy.gov/commemoration-seri-thai-movement/*



The Free Thai Movement during Japanese occupation between 1941 and 1945.
(Credit: Unknown author, Wikimedia Commons)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. What are the main challenges in commemorating Thailand's complex role during the Second World War?
2. Does the silencing of the Asian labour slaves in the construction of the Thailand–Burma railway constitute distortion, or even denial, of violence? How can they be integrated into the narrative? Can they be represented?

Aspects of social diversity: the main minorities in the country, cases of persecution after 1945

Various minority and indigenous communities exist in Thailand: 13 million Thai Isan/Thai Lao, 9.5 million of Chinese descent (approximately 14% of the population), 1.5 million Malay Muslims, 1.4 million Khmer, 923,257 members of highland indigenous groups and 10,000 members of indigenous sea nomad groups.
Read more about minorities in Thailand: *https://minorityrights.org/country/thailand/*

Patani Artspace was established by Arjan Jehabdulloh Jehorhoh, who wanted to create opportunities for young artists of minority backgrounds or members of underprivileged groups in the southern provinces of Thailand. Here, art is a medium for dialogue, mediation and the memorialisation of past violence.
Follow Patani Artspace on Facebook: *https://www.facebook.com/PataniArtspaceArtMuseum* ***and watch Arjan Jehabdulloh Jehorhoh's*** *presentation* ***at a symposium organised by the NEVER AGAIN Association on 26 November, 2021.***

Jews have never been a prominent group in Thailand, aside from a scattering of immigrants and Jewish tourists from Israel, the United States, Australia and elsewhere. Today, the Jewish community is represented by the Jewish Association of Thailand. Several hundred Jews live in the country—mostly in Bangkok. Historically, Jewish merchants lived in the Siamese Kingdom of Ayutthaya. At the end of the eighteenth century and after the First World War, more Jews arrived in the country from Eastern Europe and Russia. In the 1930s, some Jews escaping persecution in Nazi Germany found their sanctuary in Thailand.
After the Second World War, some American Jews, as well as those from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan settled in the country. They were involved in various enterprises, contributed to the Thai economy and considered Thailand a tolerant nation.
During the Second World War, the Jews were considered enemies and were suspected by the Japanese of supporting the Allies (this was also the case among Burmese Jews). Some Jewish soldiers were held in the Japanese PoW camp in Kanchanaburi—a subject that is worthy of further research.
Read more about the Jewish community in Thailand: *https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about/communities/TH*

Question for Critical Thinking:

How can Thailand's cultural diversity help in understanding and commemorating the Holocaust and other atrocities?

2. EXISTING TYPES OF HOLOCAUST AND GENOCIDE DENIAL AND DISTORTION

Knowledge and interest in Jewish history and culture, and the European Holocaust is limited in Thailand. Holocaust knowledge is typically derived from popular culture, including movies such as *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful*. *Anne Frank's Diary* has been translated into the Thai language. Standard history textbooks contain basic information about the Holocaust.

The embassies of Central and Eastern European countries have become a key source of information about the Holocaust and the Second World War through their organising of exhibitions and lectures; however, the embassies often present interpretations of facts that suit their national (or nationalistic) narratives. Such events typically focus on positive aspects, such as the 'Righteous among the Nations', but avoid discussing the complexity of the Holocaust—including the diverse roles of their own populations.

Various types of Holocaust distortion can be observed in public discourse: Holocaust trivialisation, normalisation of Nazism and Hitler, fascination ('Nazi chic'), and various conspiracy theories about Jews.

The trend of Nazi chic has become a mainstay in the extracurricular activities of Thai schools and universities: Nazi symbols can be seen during school parades, university events and graduation ceremonies. In Thailand, the Nazi uniform and iconography (replicas of the black swastika and the ***Reichsadler***, or ***'Imperial Eagle'***) are deemed part of the aesthetic of some events; a mere accessory for a performer in an entertainment show or a celebratory parade. This could be observed during a 2019 Christmas display at a major department store in central Bangkok (as shown in the photograph below). The same year, a member of BNK48, a domestic franchise of the Japanese girlband AKB48, wore a Nazi-themed shirt during a performance that was broadcast on television two days before International Holocaust Remembrance Day[6]. Though some BNK48 fans defended the singer on the grounds of ignorance, stating that they were also unaware of the meaning of the Nazi symbol ***('Thai Girl Band BNK48 Sorry for Nazi T-Shirt Controversy')***, it is likely that some claimed ignorance as a mere excuse.

BNK48 member, Pichayapa Natha wearing a t-shirt depicting a Nazi flag on stage.
(Credit: *https://www.khaosodenglish.com/*)

6 The United Nations General Assembly resolution 60/7 on 1 November 2005 designated 27 January of each year, which was the day that Auschwitz concentration camp was liberated by the Red Army in 1945, as International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Our *project* researcher, Verita Sriratana of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok explains the root causes of the fascination and normalisation of Nazism and Hitler in Thailand and the wider region:

'Thailand's romanticisation of WWII strongmen leaders like Hitler and Stalin is a reflection of the country's long history of having been ruled under absolute monarchy's internal colonisation, bureaucratic polity's patronage system and military authoritarianism. Having weathered thirteen "successful" coups d'état since 1932 (and counting), one can find discourses where past and present democides [killings of person(s) by their government] and the Holocaust are justified in the name of national security and to the credit of the past and present leaders, as well as "semi-divine" figures.'

The wartime actions of the Japanese are the most immediate prism through which many view the region's history; Hitler was in Europe and the Holocaust was organised in Europe. In this way, Thais are typically unable to draw any immediate association between Hitler and the murder of six million Jews in Europe. Verita Sriratana explains:

'The room in question, which was given the name, 'Communist room', was known to be popular among guests ("Outrage over love hotel's Hitler Room"). In the photograph, one can see that the room contains the pictures and symbols which would have been an extreme anomaly in Europe: Adolf Hitler with red stars and the hammer & sickle. The room epitomises and sets up the backdrop to my analysis of the cultural trends of Nazi chic and Communist cool in Thailand. I contend that such trends constitute the problems of personality cult and ignorance of the Second World War history in Thailand and can be seen as a result and reflection of the country's long history of having been ruled under absolute monarchy's internal colonisation, bureaucratic polity's patronage system and military authoritarianism. The 'Communist room' with the Hitler portrait as decoration, a transitory place designed to cater to sordid desires, can be seen as a mere secularised and commodified version of the cult of Hitler and Stalin'.

Watch Verita Sriratana's presentation 'The Land of Smiles, Nazi Chic and Communist Cool' during a Symposium organised by the NEVER AGAIN Association.

Common global prejudices exist in Thailand and the wider region, such as the blaming of American Jews for political turmoil in Thailand[7]. Conspiracy theories invariably result in the scapegoating of groups, such as the Jewish minority. Individuals often turn to conspiracy theories during crises and the blaming of minorities has a long history. Anti-minority propaganda and fake news (disinformation) are often spread in Southeast Asia through social media. It is possible for religious leaders to be both victims and perpetrators. This can be counteracted through education that provides individuals with the tools necessary to distinguish between true and false information, develop critical thinking skills, recognise facts that are supported by testimony and research, and use different perspectives to discover reliable sources of information.

Photo from Lovevillahotel.com via the Bangkok Post (Credit: *https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1553074/outrage-over-love-hotels-hitler-room*)

Thai men dressed as Nazis during a Christmas display at a Bangkok Department Store in 2019. (Credit: Twitter (Stickboy Bangkok)

7 Are you serious? Thai royalists blame Jews for political unrest', *https://www.ucanews.com/news/are-you-serious-thai-royalists-blame-jews-for-political-unrest/90213#*, Assessed on 1 August, 2021.

Photograph of Hitler fried chicken
(later renamed ‘H-ler’ fried chicken) in 2013. The chain of restaurants, located in the provinces of Ubon Ratchathani and Chiang Rai, has since closed down.
(Credit: Shuo & Zhaokun; Verita Sriratana)

A group of students in Red Guard uniforms performing a Nazi salute.
(Credit: Washirawit Santipiboon (Facebook)
https://www.khaosodenglish.com/politics/2017/01/28/contrition-silpakorns-nazi-chic-stink-falls-short-holocaust-memorial-day, Assessed on 1 August, 2021)

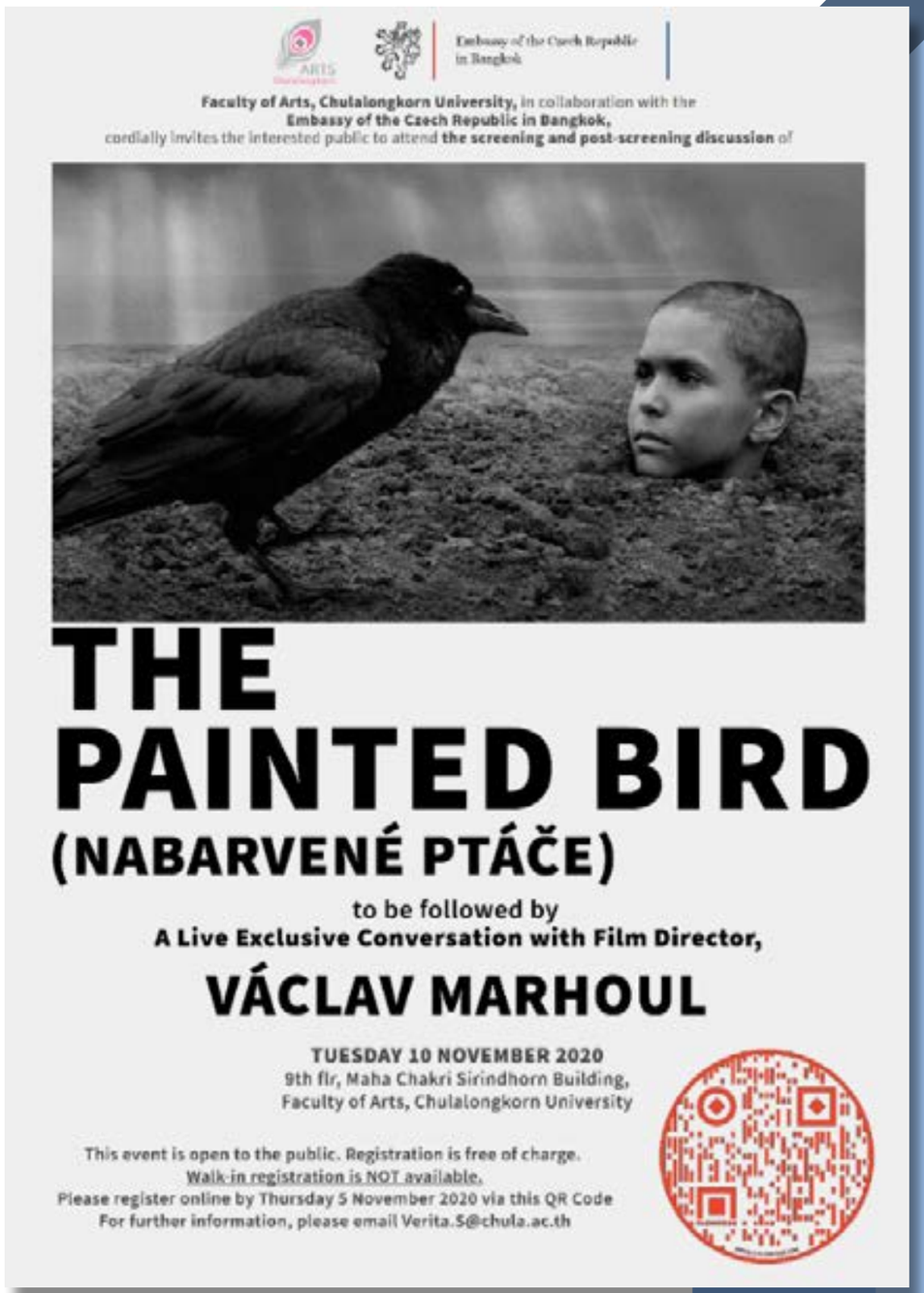
3. GOVERNMENTAL AND NONGOVERNMENTAL INITIATIVES TO PREVENT AND COUNTER DENIAL

Despite all of these challenges, Thailand is the headquarters for many human rights organisations in Southeast Asia, such as Fortify Rights. One of the region's leading higher education institutions, Mahidol University, runs a human rights and peace programme in Thailand. The embassies of Israel and other nations regularly organise Holocaust commemoration events, to which governmental representatives are also invited. It seems that Thailand exhibits high potential to develop and support future Holocaust education.

Our collaborator, Dr Verita Sriratana of Chulalongkorn University, stresses the promotion of Central and Eastern European Studies in Thailand as a way to help the Thai public question and deconstruct its tendency to glorify totalitarian regimes. This can be achieved through training programmes for Thai teachers and students, and through extracurricular cultural activities in which books and talks on Central and Eastern European history, and films about the atrocities of the Second World War—particularly the Holocaust (including the persecution of the LGBT and Roma communities, which is not common knowledge in Thailand)—can be presented and discussed.

A recent example of the impact of Central and Eastern European Studies in Thailand on the deconstruction of Nazi chic and Communist cool is the public screening of the 2019 film, *Nabarvené ptáče*, ('The Painted Bird') at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Arts. The screening was followed by a discussion with the film's director, Václav Marhoul.
A controversial film about the atrocities of both the Nazi and the Communist regimes, which is loosely based on Jerzy Kosiński's novel of the same name, *Nabarvené ptáče* is the story of a Jewish boy who had to find ways to survive in wartorn Central and Eastern Europe. *Medžuslovjansky* (Interslavic language) is utilised throughout the film to avoid pinpointing specific locations, as the film focuses on Central and Eastern European collective grief and the cross-border transcendence of the cruelty of war.

The NEVER AGAIN Association cooperates with Thailand-based Buddhist monks from Thailand, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Venerable Lablu Barua Thirasattho Bhikkhu of Wat Phrmarangsi Buddhist Monastery has organised lectures and discussions about the Holocaust and interfaith dialogue for Buddhist monks and students at the International Buddhist College of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Ayutthaya. He has invited NEVER AGAIN members, Sydney-based interfaith expert and leader of the Jewish Community Jeremy Jones, and chief rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich as speakers at these events.



Venerable Lablu Barua holding
a WeRemember (Holocaust remembrance)
campaign poster at his Monastery
in Bangkok, 27 January, 2019.
(Credit: Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury)

Venerable Lablu Barua (second left) during his study visit to Poland,
with NEVER AGAIN members in Warsaw.
(November 2019, Credit: Natalia Sineaeva)

Questions for Critical Thinking:

1. What can be done to tackle the presence of ‘Nazi chic’ in the popular culture of Thailand and Southeast Asian countries?
2. What is the role of faith leaders, such as Buddhist monks, in identifying and confronting Holocaust denial and distortion?

Venerable Lablu Barua visits Warsaw’s historical ghetto and the Monument to Warsaw Ghetto Fighters, November 2019. (Credit: Natalia Sineaeva)

Online discussion of Venerable Lablu Barua (third left), Buddhist monks, and NEVER AGAIN’s Natalia Sineaeva about genocide, interfaith and peace education. (Credit: Archive of Lablu Barua)

Interfaith meeting of Venerable Lablu Barua, Buddhist scholar Sanjoy Barua Chowdhury, and Jeremy Jones (centre), Bangkok, January 2020. (Credit: Archive of Lablu Barua)

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

Books

McCargo, Duncan (Editor). (2007). *Rethinking Thailand's Southern Violence.* Singapore: National University of Singapore Press

Winichakul, Thongchai. (2020). *Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976, Massacre in Bangkok.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press

Strate, Shane, Chandler, David. (2015). *The Lost Territories: Thailand's History of National Humiliation.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press

Journal Articles

Braithwaite, R.W. and Neil Leiper. *"Contests on the River Kwai: How a Wartime Tragedy Became a Recreational, Commercial and Nationalistic Plaything"*. Current Issues in Tourism, Taylor & Francis, Vol. 13. No. 4, July 2010, pp. 311-332

Lenon, John. *"Kanchanaburi and the Thai-Burma Railway: Disputed Narratives in the Interpretation of War".* International Journal of Tourism Cities. International Tourism Studies Association. Vol. 4. No. 1, 2018, pp. 140-155

Back to the Table of contents

GLOSSARY OF TERMS RELATED TO THE HOLOCAUST

Antisemitism—hatred and prejudice towards Jewish people as a religious or ethnic group. Antisemitism takes many different forms and has developed over time. Its roots lie in anti-Judaism. Judaism is the faith of the Jewish people and the oldest monotheistic religion. For much of their history, Jews lived on territories governed by other religious groups, such as Christians. Jews were often treated as 'the Others' in those territories. They did not accept Christianity and became scapegoats for the misfortunes of the societies in which they lived. Continual and growing rumors, myths and misinformation about the Jews have existed throughout history; many of them persist to this day. This hatred has frequently led to discrimination and violence. Modern, racist antisemitism is based on hatred against Jews on the basis of their 'biological' difference; of their belonging to an 'inferior' race. Antisemitism is closely connected to conspiracy theories. Another term used is eliminationist antisemitism—a reference to Nazi antisemitism and their aim to exterminate all Jews. Anti-Zionism describes hatred against the Jewish state of Israel.
See the IHRA definition of antisemitism

Antisemitic conspiracy theories—antisemitic myths and lies that Jews use their power and influence to manipulate and control world governments. The conspiracy theories are rooted in old anti-Jewish hostility and modern antisemitism. An important element of conspiracy theories is blood libel: false allegations that Jews use the blood of non-Jewish, usually Christian, children for ritual purposes. Blood libel rumours were propagated widely by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Examples of such myths can also be found in the contemporary world.

Auschwitz–Birkenau extermination camp—the largest death and concentration camp used during the Second World War (now a museum). Over 1.1 million men, women and children lost their lives here. It has since become a prominent symbol of the Holocaust.

Axis powers—a coalition led by Germany, Italy and Japan that opposed the Allies during the Second World War. Other members included Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Finland.

Bystanders—those who remained passive and indifferent towards the persecution of Jews during the Second World War for various reasons. It is said that bystanders constituted the largest section of society. Individuals and groups need not belong only to one category; during the Holocaust, they had a variety of choices available to them.
Learn more: *https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/bystanders*

Collaborators—European countries belonging to the Axis powers cooperated with the German Nazi regime by enforcing anti-Jewish legislation. Vichy France was the name given to the officially-independent French state headed by Marshal Philippe Pétain during the Second World War. It adopted a policy of collaboration with Nazi Germany, which occupied its northern and western parts. Within nations occupied by the Axis powers, some individuals and organisations—primarily motivated by nationalism, antisemitism and anticommunism—collaborated with the Nazis.

Death camps—the Nazis built five camps in occupied Poland in late 1941 and early 1942 whose purpose was to kill humans on an industrial scale. Belzec, Chełmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, Maidanek, and Auschwitz–Birkenau were constructed to murder hundreds of thousands of people using carbon monoxide gas. They were located in heavily wooded areas, isolated from the outside world, but connected by railway.

Fascism—a political ideology and mass movement that was prevalent in several European states between 1919 and 1945. It espoused extreme militaristic nationalism, cultural homogeneity and hostility to democracy.

Genocide—lawyer Rafael Lemkin introduced the concept, 'genocide' in 1943. The term was chiefly based on the politics of the Nazis toward the Jews during the Second World War. The concept is utilised in the UN Convention on the Persecution and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948). It entails a broader meaning than the concept of 'the Holocaust', and reaches more widely than the crime of murder. Genocide is the deliberate and systematic destruction, in whole or in part, of an ethnic, racial, religious, national, socially constructed or cultural group. It is the gravest of all crimes against humanity.

The Holocaust—the state-sponsored and systematic persecution and extermination of European Jews between 1933 and 1945 by the Nazi regime and its allies in occupied Europe. Some define the term, 'Holocaust' more broadly to include other victims: Roma people, homosexuals, disabled people and other groups. The term was used by Romanian Holocaust survivor, Elie Wiesel at the beginning of 1960s as a metaphor that symbolises the burning of whole peoples in the crematories of the Nazi death camps. Shoah is the Hebrew name for the Holocaust, and refers exclusively to the extermination of the Jewish people.

Holocaust Denial—a set of false claims that the Holocaust never occurred and is a wholly fabricated story.
See the *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of Holocaust Denial and Distortion.*

Holocaust Distortion—the distortion and manipulation of historical facts about the Holocaust. It incroporates various types, including Holocaust trivialisation and banalisation, and diminishing the importance of the Holocaust.

International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)—known as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (the ITF) until January 2013, this is an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1998, which unites governments and experts to strengthen, advance and promote Holocaust education, research and remembrance worldwide, and to uphold the commitments of the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust.

Nazism/Nazi—National Socialism (German: Nationalsozialismus), the ideology and practices associated with Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in Nazi Germany (1933–1945). It is a form of fascism; one that opposes liberal democracy and the parliamentary system.
It incorporates racist antisemitism, anticommunism and scientific racism.

Neo-Nazi movements—postwar militant, social and political movements that admire Hitler and seek to revive Nazism. Neo-Nazism promotes hatred and white supremacy. Its advocates attack racial and ethnic minorities, including Jews, Roma and Muslims. They can be found in all regions of the world.

The Nuremberg Trial—held between 1945 and 1946, persecuted twenty-four high-profile Nazi perpetrators for crimes against peace, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It was the first international tribunal conducted by the Allied countries and representatives of Nazi-occupied countries to be used as a postwar mechanism for bringing national leaders to justice via imprisonment or capital punishment.

Porajamos—the Romani name for the Nazi genocide of the Romani and Sinti people. It is a neologism translated as 'devouring' or 'destruction'. The Nazis considered the Roma and the Sinti to be racially inferior and antisocial.
Learn more: *https://www.romarchive.eu/en/voices-of-the-victims/genocide-holocaust-porajmos-samudaripen*.

Operation Reinhard—a Nazi plan to exterminate all of Poland's Jewish population.
Learn more: *https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/operation-reinhard-einsatz-reinhard*

Swastika—once an ancient symbol used in Buddhism and Hinduism, the Nazis adopted it as their own symbol. In Europe, it is associated with Nazism and the Holocaust.

The Righteous Among the Nations—non-Jews who helped Jews being persecuted by the Nazis during the Second World War. Rescuers of Jews can be granted the status of the Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem in Israel.

Upstanders—those who resisted the actions of the perpetrators and/or rescued victims during the Second World War. The term is also applicable to other situations, including in the contemporary world.

WeRemember Campaign—The United Nations designated January 27 as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. It is the day when Auschwitz–Birkenau, the largest death and concentration camp, was liberated. The World Jewish Congress launched the annual WeRemember campaign to commemorate that day. Millions commemorate the victims by holding signs that read '#WeRemember' and posting images of them on social media.