

## **Commemorating the Holocaust**

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by David Matas

I am pleased to be back in Warsaw. I came here first in May 1989 as co-chair of the Canadian Helsinki Watch Group for the annual general meeting of the International Helsinki Federation. I came here again in October 2007 to address a conference in Parliament on Human Rights in China and the 2008 Olympics.

Tomorrow, January 27th, is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the day the United Nations General Assembly designated by a resolution passed in 2005 for commemorating the Holocaust. I, along with many others, will be going to Auschwitz tomorrow to remember that liberation in the place where it happened.

Today, I want to say a few words about best we can commemorate that horror. What should we remember when we remember the Holocaust? I suggest two things. We should remember what about the Holocaust was distinctive. And we should remember the lessons we can learn from the Holocaust to apply to other atrocities.

In talking about other atrocities, we have, regrettably, a wealth of examples from which to choose. I will focus on only one, as a case study, the compelling evidence that practitioners of Falun Gong have been killed in China in the tens of thousands for their organs which are sold to transplant patients. This is, I believe, an instructive example because the Nazis in Germany then were and the Communists in China now are in government in a country of global force.

The Holocaust was an experience unique in human annals. We must beware of false analogies, equating other atrocities with the Holocaust. Yet, we must not isolate the Holocaust from the rest of human experience.

The Holocaust was unique in its disconnection from reality. Other genocides grow out of political and ethnic conflicts. While the killing of innocents is always irrational, one can see, with other genocides, the politics which led to the genocide. In contrast, with Nazi Germany, there was no such context or explanation. Historian Yehuda Bauer writes:

"For the first time in history, the motivation [of the genocide] had little, if anything, to do with economic or social factors, but was purely ideological, and the ideology was totally removed from any realistic situations."

The genocide of the Jews was unprecedented in its scope, the attempt to kill every single Jew, no matter how old or young, no matter how distant from Judaism and the Jewish community. Conversion to Christianity or even to Nazism, inter-marriage, friends in Nazi high places, adoption of Jewish children by non-Jewish parents did not stop the Nazi killing machines. Nothing could.

The Auschwitz exhibit of children's shoes is striking not just because of the sheer number of shoes, but also because it is a visible reminder of the Nazi determination to kill children. Of the six million killed in the Holocaust, an estimated two million were children. Nazi field reports of the Jews they murdered made a point of listing the children killed to show that they were completing the task assigned to them.

In several other genocides, many children were killed. But in no prior genocide were children targeted for the sole reason that they were born. Historian Yehuda Bauer writes:

"For the first time in history, every single person who was considered by the perpetrators to be a member of the target group, that is the Jews, was to be killed for the crime of having been born."

Other mass killings both before and after World War II were local, territorial, national. The

Holocaust was unprecedented not only in its unlimited scope, but also in its unlimited reach.

Never before or since has a group of people attempted to conquer the world so that they could kill all and every member of another group. The Holocaust was a crime in which virtually every country in the globe was complicit either by participating in the killings or by denying refuge to those attempting to escape or by granting safe haven to Nazi mass murderers. The planet wide nature of the genocide, the hatred of a people that seeped into every nook and cranny of the globe, was unprecedented before the Holocaust and has not been replicated since. The Holocaust was not just a crime against humanity. It was a crime of humanity. The Holocaust was an act of insanity in which the whole world went mad.

What can the Holocaust experience tell us about the killing of Falun Gong for their organs? Unlike the Nazi perpetrators and their Jewish victims, the Communist Party of China is not attempting to conquer the world through force of arms to kill practitioners of Falun Gong wherever they may be found. Yet, the Chinese Communist Party and the Chinese state organs, through their embassies, consulates, state owned multinational conglomerate businesses and Confucius Institutes project incitement to hatred and discrimination against practitioners of Falun Gong world wide.

Unlike the Nazi perpetrators and their Jewish victims, the Chinese Communist Party and state will accept conversion. If a practitioner abandons Falun Gong, renounces it in writing, stops practising, praises the Communist Party and denounces fellow practitioners, the practitioner can avoid Communist Party inflicted torture, detention and arbitrary execution through the harvesting of organs.

Unlike the Nazi killing of the Jews, the killing of Falun Gong of their organs has a connection with reality, however perverse. Falun Gong is set of exercises with a spiritual foundation

begun in 1992 with the teachings of Li Hongzhi. It is a blending and updating of the Chinese exercise traditions, Buddhism and Taoism. It was initially encouraged by the Communist Party as beneficial to health, but banned in 1999.

The spirituality of Falun Gong stood in contrast to the atheism of the Communist Party. The connection of Falun Gong with Chinese traditions contrasted with the Westernism and modernism of Communism. Above all the rapidly expanding popularity of Falun Gong made the Communist Party jealous and fearful of its ability to maintain its own ideological supremacy.

The Party began a campaign of vilification against Falun Gong to justify the banning. This campaign of vilification led to depersonalization and dehumanization which made the killing of Falun Gong easier for their jailors to inflict. The withdrawal by the Communist Party of state funds from the health system as a result of its shift from socialism to capitalism meant hospitals and doctors were badly in need of funds, which the sale of organs from Falun Gong prisoners supplied.

Despite these differences between the Holocaust and the killing of Falun Gong for their organs, there are similarities. The Holocaust happened not just because there were racists in power in Germany, but because ordinary people around the world either collaborated or did nothing. It is misleading to think of the Holocaust as a tale of devils and angels, of monsters and heroes. It is above all a tale of ordinary people. It was ordinary Germans who were primarily responsible for the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> However, they were far from solely responsible.

Of the six million Jews killed in the Holocaust only 210,000 were Germans and Austrians. In

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Goldhagen Hitler's *Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1996

the other places the Nazis went, they did not know the languages, the places or the people. Wherever they went, they relied heavily on local police, administrative personnel and home grown fascists organized into militias to round up Jews for the death camps. Without the active collaboration of tens of thousands, and the passive indifference of millions, the Nazis could not have accomplished their mission of death.

Today we see foreign travel agents and brokers who arrange for transplant patients to receive organs in China, hospitals and doctors who provide training to Chinese professionals in transplant techniques, internet service providers who host Chinese transplant websites and universities who provide fora and even award honorary degrees to Chinese transplant professionals. Outside of the network of the complicit, there is massive ignorance or indifference.

Governments for decades did nothing to bring Nazi war criminals to justice; that inactivity was a reflection of public indifference to justice for the Holocaust. Today, the efforts world wide to bring perpetrators of the persecution inflicted on practitioners of Falun Gong to justice go nowhere.

The story of the Holocaust is, to be sure, the death of the Jews. But it is also the death of the illusion of the limits of evil. Because of the Holocaust, everything has changed. Our view of humanity can never be the same. Yet, if we put the Holocaust to one side nothing will change.

The Holocaust was the product of a civilization at the forefront of humanity's culture, technology, medicine, legal and administrative structures. Austria and Germany, at the time that they led the world to slaughter its Jews, were the countries of Beethoven, Bach, Mozart, Brahms, and Schubert; of Goethe, Schiller, Schopenhauer, Hegel and Kant.

Even during the midst of the Holocaust, many of the most highly educated of the day were among the most enthusiastic supporters of antisemitism, including the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, the American poet Ezra Pound and the French novelist Céline. The Holocaust tells us that neither education nor culture nor intellect can immunize us from evil.

Doctors, leaders of their profession world wide, in violation of professional ethics, turned their healing skills to barbaric experiments against unwilling subjects, killing them through the experiments. They slaughtered the handicapped under the doctrine "life unworthy of life". They engaged in eugenic sterilization so enthusiastically, on their own initiative, that the Nazi government felt constrained to rein them in. The Holocaust tells us that we cannot rely on medical ethics alone to prevent atrocities.

Technological developments do not change human nature. But they do change the ability to inflict harm. The progress of civilization made the Holocaust easier rather than harder to perpetrate. The elaborate organization and systematic execution of the plan to extinguish the Jews, the identification, the ghettoization, the trans-shipment, the death camps, the ovens, the gas chambers were the product of an advanced technological and industrial society. The Holocaust teaches us that industrial, technological development, while they increase our material well being, also increase our capacity for evil. In an advanced civilization, murderers can kill an entire world.

The development of transplant surgery has done much to improve the ability of humanity to cope with failing organs. But these developments in transplant surgery have not changed our way of thinking.

There is a tendency to think of any new medical development as a benefit to humanity. That is certainly the intent of its developers. But medical research, no matter how far advanced, comes face to face with the same old capacity for good and evil.

More advanced techniques in transplant surgery in China do not mean a more advanced Chinese political system. The Communist system remains. Developments in transplant surgery in China fall prey to the cruelty, the corruption, the repression which pervades China. Advances in transplant surgery provide new means for old cadres to act out their venality and ideology. We should not be so naive as to think that just because transplant surgery was developed to do good, it can do no harm.

On the contrary, the evidence that the development of transplant surgery in China is being used to harvest organs from unwilling Falun Gong practitioners is just the acting out, in a new context, of a lesson the Holocaust has taught us. We have seen before that modern technologies developed for the benefit of humanity have been perverted to inflict harm. We should not be surprised if this has also happened to transplant surgery.

United States Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, who was Jewish and well familiar with antisemitism, when presented in 1942 with news of the Holocaust said to his informant: "I am unable to believe you." When confronted with the reliability of the information, he replied: "I did not say this young man is lying. I said I am unable to believe him. There is a difference."<sup>2</sup>

The Holocaust was such an incredible event that, to a cursory observer, even in retrospect it is almost impossible to fathom. It is one thing to hear about the Holocaust as a fact. It is quite another to accept and understand it as part of the human experience. Today, overwhelming evidence of the killing in China of prisoners of conscience for their organs is met with the same incredulity.

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<sup>2</sup> *Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust*, by E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1994; paperback February 1996). Copyright 1994 by E. Thomas Wood and Stanislaw M. Jankowski.

Before World War II, the planet was seething in ethnic, religious and ideological hatred. Incitement to hatred could be found everywhere.

Hatred of Jews had always victimized the Jewish community. But, before World War II, this hatred had mostly left non-Jews untouched. With the Nazis, that changed dramatically.

When the Nazis came to power in Germany in 1933, many people asked - why should we care about what the Nazis do to the Jews? What does it have to do with us?

The Nazis killed innocents everywhere they went. The death camps and death squads the Nazis organized for Jews killed more than Jews. The Nazi machinery of death crushed Romas, homosexuals, Jehovah witnesses, mentally and physically disabled as well as anti-Nazis. The killing of the disabled in Germany preceded the killing of Jews. The Nazis killed five million non-Jews in the Holocaust with the death camps and the roving killing squads, in addition to six million Jews, for a death toll in total of eleven million innocents.

The link between antisemitism and Nazi aggression was direct, because Nazi Germany invaded foreign countries to kill their Jews. Lucy Davidowicz, in her book *The War against the Jews 1933-1945* wrote that, in the minds of the Nazi German Leaders, World War II was a cover for its planned murder of the Jews<sup>3</sup>.

There was a direct link between antisemitism and Japanese aggression. The Japanese invasions in Asia were made possible by its Tripartite Pact with Italy and Germany and the power vacuum created in Asia by German attacks on the Asian colonial powers - France, the Netherlands and Britain. Hatred of Jews dragged the whole world down.

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<sup>3</sup> Bantam Edition, 1976, New York, page 122.



Antisemitism became a cancer which invaded and destroyed the whole body politic. Because of the Holocaust, a consciousness developed that it was impossible for humanity to destroy Jews without destroying itself. The Holocaust generated the human equivalent of the Gaia hypothesis, the realization that humanity is one organism that lives and dies together. After millennia of antisemitism, finally people realized that, if we kill the Jews we put our own safety in jeopardy.

We do not need China to invade foreign countries to kill practitioners of Falun Gong to realize the global danger the killing of prisoners of conscience for their organs poses. The Holocaust tells us that human rights violations are a spreading uncontrollable stain. Once human rights violations are the norm, no one is safe.

Although the Holocaust was the killing of millions in a few years, the consciousness that led to its inception and execution were decades in the making. The consciousness was one of eliminationist antisemitism, the culmination of racist thinking that began with prejudices and stereotypes but not with plans of murder. The Holocaust is the ultimate lesson in the dangers of incitement to hatred. It tells us as no other example can where incitement to hatred leads, why incitement to hatred must be avoided.

The killing of practitioners Falun Gong for their organs is an abuse the Communist Party of China denies. They cannot deny incitement to hatred against Falun Gong. It is a matter of daily public record. Chinese Communist Party propaganda against Falun Gong is everyday discourse.

If there is one thing we could have done to reverse the Holocaust, it would have been this: protest vigorously and globally the Nazi victimization of Jews from the minute it started. We can not, of course, reverse history. But we can learn from it. If there is one lesson

that humanity should learn from World War II, it is that state hatred of a disadvantaged minority in a repressive country can wreak global damage.

The Holocaust was exceptionally well documented, in part, because the Nazis were defeated and all their records became available. We cannot now see Chinese government records. Yet, it would be a mistake to compare the records we have now of Nazi abuse with the records we have now of Chinese Communist Party abuse. A better point of comparison would be the records we had of the Holocaust while the Nazis held power.

The Red Cross conducted an inspection of Theresienstadt ghetto/camp in June 1944. The Nazis created in Theresienstadt a Potemkin village; they beautified the camp to mislead the Red Cross into thinking that Jews were being well treated. And the Red Cross was misled.

The Red Cross also visited Auschwitz in September 1944 but did not notice the gas chambers. The Red Cross reported:

"Not only the washing places, but installations for baths, showers and laundry were inspected by the delegates. They had often to take action to have fixtures made less primitive, and to get them repaired or enlarged"<sup>4</sup>

The Red Cross representatives did not realize that the shower heads in the gas chambers did not work because they were fake.

The International Committee of the Red Cross is not allowed to visit prisoners in China. Nor is any other organization concerned with human rights of prisoners.

Speaking to US journalists in November 1993, in answer to a question about the desire by rights groups to inspect prisons, then Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen said, "I believe that if the Red Cross does put forward such a request..., we would give positive

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<sup>4</sup> Activities of the ICRC during the Second World War, Volume III, page 594

consideration to that request." The Red Cross did put forward such a request, and there was no positive consideration.

The UN Special Rapporteur on torture and the UN Special Rapporteur on religious intolerance in 2007 and 2008 both asked the Chinese Government to explain the discrepancy between its huge volume of transplants and its comparatively tiny volume of acknowledged sources. The Committee against Torture established under the Convention against Torture in December 2008 called on the Government of China to cooperate with an independent investigation into the sourcing of organs for transplants. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has received a petition from one and a half million individuals around the world asking him to conduct his own investigation on the subject.

The European Parliament, by resolution passed in December 2013 called for a full and transparent investigation by the European Union into organ transplant practices in China. The Parliament further called on the Chinese authorities to allow the UN rapporteurs on torture and religious intolerance to conduct an investigation into organ transplant practices in China.

There have already been several independent investigations into organ transplant practices in China which have concluded that prisoners of conscience, primarily but not only Falun Gong, are being killed *en masse* for their organs to be sold to transplant patients. The Chinese government has cooperated with none of these investigations. On the contrary, the more the evidence accumulates, the more the Party/State tries to cover up what is going on.

The Red Cross investigation of Nazi atrocities was so blinkered and naive that it has become today a favoured source for neo-Nazi Holocaust denial propaganda. We should learn from that experience something I would have thought that the Red Cross at the time should have

already known, that perpetrators try to cover up and disguise their crimes. A modern independent investigation into evidence of atrocities in Communist China has to penetrate beyond Chinese Communist Party/State cover up, double speak and disguise.

The phrase "Never again" is often repeated. Yet, history never repeats itself in exactly the same way. Restricting the phrase "Never again" only to an exact replica of the Holocaust is a recipe for doing nothing ever again. To give the phrase "Never again" meaning we have to learn general lessons from the Holocaust we can adapt to present circumstances.

The killing of prisoners of conscience in China for their organs is not the Holocaust. Yet, it would disrespect the legacy of the Holocaust to ignore the evidence of these killings and do nothing. We honour the memory of the victims of the Holocaust best by keeping the legacy of the Holocaust alive.

Poland and the Jewish community both have a special role in keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive, the Jewish community as the people to whom it happened and Poland as the place, more than any other, where it happened. I welcome the opportunity to come to Poland to share here the memory and contemporary relevance of the Holocaust.

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