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The Politics of the Holocaust in Estonia: Historical Memory and Social Divisions in Estonian Education

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In her April 24, 2002, remarks at the Stockholm Security Conference, Heather Conley, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, praised the three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—for the progress they had made to qualify for entry into NATO. She continued:

However, all the NATO aspirants need to do more to better prepare themselves for membership so that they are ready and able to contribute to European security in tangible ways. For the Baltic States, this means hard work—not just words but concrete action. (Embassy 2002)

The description of what was needed—hard work, concrete action, and tangible contributions to European security—creates an expectation that some military changes will be prescribed: better facilities, training, or hardware, for example, or perhaps even some specific contribution the Baltic states could make in Afghanistan or against Al Qaeda, the Taliban, or terror generally. The very first example she cited, however, of the concrete action and

hard work necessary to contribute to security in tangible ways, was (following directly from the previous quote)

on complex domestic issues like dealing with the history of the Holocaust.

However improbable this criterion may have seemed to those assembled, the message for aspirants to NATO was clear. Just a half year after the surprise attacks on the United States, the American government was willing to wield the promise of NATO membership as a carrot to influence domestic policies about history, historical commemoration, and education. Estonia obliged. Even before the next school year began, on August 6, 2002, the “Estonian government . . . named January 27—the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp—as official Holocaust Day” (*City Paper’s Baltics Worldwide* 2002).

While January 27 is the commemoration date for twelve other European countries, the date has no direct connection to Estonia, Estonia’s Jews, or the Estonians who participated in Holocaust atrocities (Zuroff 2005). The date that the announcement was made, however, is an important anniversary for Estonians: August 6, 1940, marked the day that “the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union met the ‘request of the Estonian people’ and incorporated Estonia into the Soviet Union” (Laur et al. 2002: 266). The juxtaposition of these two anniversaries—and the symbolic role they play in the competing narratives and meanings of World War II—tap into some of the deep divisions that linger both between the junior and senior members of NATO and the European Union (EU) and between Estonia’s ethnic Estonians and ethnic Russian minority. These differences, which impinge powerfully on concepts of national and civic identity, have profound implications for the future of democracy both within Estonia and in the EU.

To explicate these differences and the complexity of issues surrounding the adoption of Holocaust Day in Estonia, this chapter will first discuss the origins of this research and the involvement of foreign partners in Estonia. It will then explore the reactions to Holocaust Day in Estonia, ranging from the highest levels of government and media forums to the full range of education policy, from the Ministry of Education to classroom teachers. The chapter will focus particularly on the teachers and policymakers who participated in my multisited ethnographic study of the policy and practice of citizenship education in Estonia. It will then provide some historical context about the Soviet and Nazi occupations of Estonia that helps make sense of both Estonian reactions to Holocaust Day and the divisions in Estonian society and beyond.

**ADDRESSING THE HOLOCAUST: DEMOCRATIC
CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AND
RACIST EXTREMISM**

Though my research in Estonia concerned civic education generally and, in particular, its international dimensions, my initial questions dealt more with the democratic transition, the role of the Soviet legacy in it and the effectiveness of international cooperation in transforming that legacy: Were teachers' interpretations of the radical political and economic changes influenced by their indoctrination into Marxism/Leninism? Were international partners knowledgeable enough about the local languages, cultures, and issues to respond to local needs and to engage effectively with Estonians, or were they more concerned with advancing particular doctrines? I had no inkling when I began that the Holocaust would emerge as a major issue inextricably linked to my research. In fact, however, it both united my concerns with democratic citizenship education and racist extremism, and served as a window into many of the divisions that permeated Estonian society, from global geopolitics to ethnic relations.

My research focus on democratic citizenship education had grown out of encounters with racist extremism in the United States. A former student, Benjamin "August" Smith, and a former neighbor, Richard Baumhammers—both inspired by Hitler's racist ideology—independently launched racially motivated shooting sprees ten months apart, killing seven and wounding nine more between them. These men were well-educated products of elite American schools and good universities. Their actions made me question the ability of schooling to promote tolerance and to undermine antisocial ideologies. When I discovered that the United States had never attempted a nationwide program to overcome racism through schooling, I began to wonder what such an attempt to change attitudes and dispositions through schooling might look like. Believing that the same set of attitudes and dispositions is necessary both for developing tolerance and for sustaining a democratic society—the core mission of civic education—I set out to investigate how Estonia was trying to generate a democratic orientation through schooling in the wake of the country's liberation from the Soviet Union.

When I first visited Estonia, I was startled to see occasional swastikas among the graffiti on the sides of apartment buildings in the capital city, Tallinn. Fully aware of the horrors carried out by those who continue to be swayed by Nazi doctrine, I was reminded of media representations of East German skinheads perpetrating attacks on Turks. Though painting swastikas—the starkest symbol of vicious and virulent anti-Semitism—was clearly an act of hostility, it took some time for me to understand that this act of

hostility in this context was primarily directed not at Jews but at Russians. History is never far from the surface in Estonia, a place where most adults can recall life in the Soviet Union and many of the elderly have firsthand experience with war, Nazi and Soviet occupations, and deportations—all of which are related in complex ways with the issue of the Holocaust.

By invoking Estonia's treatment of the Holocaust, the international community laid bare fault lines that run through Estonian society and beyond. For Western Europe, the United States, Israel, and also Russia, the Nazis constitute the transcendent evil of world history. Yet for Europeans who endured a half century or longer of Soviet domination, personal experience and national narratives are often incompatible with this conception. For them, the Soviets generally constituted an equal or even greater evil. As a corollary, service with the Nazis may not represent for them complicity in advancing Hitler's aims but at worst a reasonable choice between two evils, and sometimes even heroic resistance to Soviet occupation. These views are not marginal among ethnic Estonians, the people about whom I will be primarily speaking here.

The fault lines evoked by discussion of the Holocaust extend beyond Estonians' resistance to pressure from their allies, the governments of the United States, Western Europe, and Israel. The issue of the Holocaust also hit at the core divisions between Estonians and the Russian-speaking residents of Estonia. Estonians' civic identity is closely linked with their cultural identity and language. To be able to incorporate Russians and other Russian-speaking minorities effectively, Estonia must develop a more inclusive civic identity that transcends ethnicity. For that end to be attainable, Estonians will have to accept that the future can be much different than the past, because Estonia's independence was gained largely by fighting off Soviet forces—mostly Russian—and was later lost to the Soviets—again mostly Russian. Indeed, Budryte (2005) notes the argument that "historical memory about the past wrongs committed by the former occupying powers is likely to be one of the sources of resistance to accepting the recommendations of outsiders to extend rights to the minorities associated with the former occupying powers" (7). Discussion of the Holocaust invariably draws increased attention to Estonia's troubled history. To the extent that Estonia's political existence and independence are bound up closely with Estonians' opposition to the Soviets and hence to Russians, focus on those key historical periods of gained and lost independence inevitably places Russians and Estonians on opposite sides.

The politics of commemoration, which are inherently divisive in Estonia, pose a direct challenge to the development of a common civic identity for today's Russian residents and Estonian citizens of Estonia. Several Estonians who work in the Ministry of Education or nongovernmental organizations that are involved in civic education have also been outspoken on the

issue or directly involved with international efforts concerning the Holocaust. History teachers, often the teachers responsible for teaching civic education, play a key role because the historical narratives that they accept and convey have implications for relations between groups in Estonia. The ability to work across such fault lines—to work across not only such different understandings but also sometimes distrust, opposition, and hostility—will be critical to the future of democracy both in multicultural states like Estonia and in the dramatically larger and more complex European Union. A central component of this task is making some sense of these widely divergent understandings.

These are important issues because tolerance, a precondition for a more inclusive democratic civic identity, remains elusive. According to a recent study, 53 percent of ethnic Estonians were classified as tolerant, while 47 percent were classified as exclusionary (Pettai 2002; cf. Poleshchuk 2005: 74). The exclusionary group breaks down to 28 percent who are less tolerant and 19 percent who are considered to be radical nationalists. (Among non-Estonians who are residents of Estonia, the numbers are 21 percent and 14 percent, respectively.) Furthermore, the cases of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania suggest that “inclusive citizenship laws and minority-friendly policies do not guarantee that tolerant multi-cultural communities will be created” (Budryte 2005: 9).

Previous experience suggests that foreign involvement in the issue of the Holocaust could have a positive effect. A study of ethnic policies in the Baltic states and Romania concludes that “the promise of EU membership and ‘concerted international efforts’ (the coordinated action of several international organizations) helped to subdue domestic opposition to policy changes that involved minority rights” (Budryte 2005: 2). In fact, however, the dynamics of this case are much more in line with the findings of Lynn Tesser. “Tesser argued that the elites in post-Communist countries chose to adopt European norms emphasizing minority rights for strategic reasons, such as trying to escape from Russia’s sphere of influence. This is why ethnic tolerance has been a ‘geopolitical matter’ that lacks genuine domestic support” (Budryte 2005: 3). These circumstances point to twin ironies: first, that in order to gain security from Russia and to escape its influence, Estonia accepted policies that are intended to make it more accommodating of its own Russian minority; second, that the adoption of Holocaust Day, one of whose goals is to promote tolerance within Estonia, exacerbates the historical tensions between Estonia’s majority and minority populations.

FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT IN HOLOCAUST ISSUES

The international community’s efforts regarding the Holocaust have been manifold. Through the Support for Eastern European Democracies (SEED)

initiative, the U.S. Embassy in Tallinn invested close to \$2.5 million in a wide variety of issues in Estonia between 1994 and 2004. Five of these early projects explicitly dealt with the Holocaust. First, the Embassy funded a research project called the President's Roundtable whose mission was to investigate the oppression of Estonian citizens between 1939 and 1991. The commission's task involved the investigation of both the Nazi and the Soviet occupations of Estonia. The embassy then sponsored a trilingual virtual exhibit on the Holocaust.¹ The embassy also supported the publication of several books, including a book about Jewish history for high schools, *Tell Ye Your Children*. Another volume, *Who Are the Jews and What Is the Holocaust?* was sponsored soon after. A third book's translation was funded by the embassy, bringing into Estonian the account of Holocaust survivor Benjamin Anolik, a Pole who had made it through camps in Estonia.²

The difficulty with producing such materials is that they may never be used. Civics teachers in particular have been provided with an enormous stock of resources, funded largely by groups across Europe and the United States, but they are allotted so little time in a curriculum whose required topics easily fill the classes that there is scant opportunity to use them, nonetheless look at them. In the six classrooms that I attended regularly to observe civic education classes, and in the ten I visited once or infrequently across Estonia, I never spotted a single copy of the embassy-supported materials. In the period following September 11, 2001, the embassy broadened its education activities related to the Holocaust beyond the production of materials and began pushing for more extensive treatment in schools.

Most visible in the international effort to promote the commemoration and study of the Holocaust were the Simon Wiesenthal Center's (SWC) Efraim Zuroff, who leads investigations into Nazi war crimes and tracks war criminals, and the U.S. Ambassador during this period, Joseph Michael DeThomas. Although they emphasized different priorities, from cooperating with international investigations and tracking down Nazi war crimes suspects to erecting monuments to victims of the Holocaust in Estonia, and although they represent different groups, both see as a central issue the instruction and commemoration of the Holocaust in schools. Simon Wiesenthal, who passed away in 2005 at the age of ninety-six, dedicated his life to tracking down Nazi war criminals and gave his name to the center, which bills itself as an "international Jewish human rights organization" whose mission has expanded beyond Nazi-hunting to include "Holocaust and tolerance education; Middle East Affairs; and extremist groups, neo-Nazism, and hate on the Internet" (Simon Wiesenthal Center, n.d.).

The ambassador, who built on the remarks by Conley and comments about the lingering traces of fascism in Eastern Europe that he quoted from Senator Joseph Biden, proposed in a newspaper column three "modest

steps": prosecuting those who had committed crimes, recognizing that the Holocaust was part of Estonia's history, and teaching children about it. He was not specific about the forms that historical acknowledgment and education should take, noting simply that "I have been told Estonian school textbooks treat the Holocaust in about one-and-a-half pages. If this is true for most of Estonia, I would suggest that history texts on this subject already in other states in this region be translated into Estonian for use here" (DeThomas 2002). He further suggested that Estonia participate in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research. Founded by the Swedes in 1998—although Sweden has received an F for "Total Failure" from the Simon Wiesenthal Center for its efforts and cooperation in the prosecution of war criminals—the task force had twenty members by September 2005, including Latvia and Lithuania, but not Estonia.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center also encouraged the implementation of a Holocaust Day in Estonia. When asked for his own vision for addressing the Holocaust in Estonian schools, Zuroff was not prescriptive but replied that it "can be based on the vast experience in teaching the Holocaust already acquired in Israel and the US. The best place to start is in junior high or high school. Estonian pupils should certainly know more about the history of Estonian Jewry and how Jewish history affected world history" (*Online Intervjuud* 2002). If the measures themselves seem modest, the response was unequivocally opposed. These measures were, in fact, highly contentious for Estonians.

THE ESTONIAN RESPONSE

The public was not at all receptive to Holocaust Day. One former Estonian prime minister, who was carrying and reading a recent book about the gulags when we spoke, insisted to me in an interview that Holocaust Day would never have been adopted under his administration.³ "I would not support it. During my government, I would not allow it. Mostly it feels that it is coming from outside so it is not helping. . . . The communist terror took more lives than the Holocaust. It must be combined with crimes against humanity" (interview transcript, June 2003).

Although this sentiment was widely shared, the depth of the resistance to foreign activity in Estonia concerning the Holocaust and the fault lines dividing outsiders from those in Estonia became evident in a shocking turn in January 2003—the week of the first official Holocaust Day in Estonian schools—when the SWC sought to publish an advertisement for its "Operation Last Chance," an effort to encourage people to come forward with information about Nazi war criminals so they could be brought to justice

before they died. As Radio Free Europe reported, "Chairwoman of the Estonian Jewish community Cilja Laud, Chairman of the Association of Former Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps Vladimir Perelman, and Rabbi Shmuel Kot sent a letter to the Media House advertising agency asking it not to publish the advertisements of the Simon Wiesenthal Center" ("Baltic States Report," 2003a). Estonia's own Jewish community split with the SWC, apparently rejecting the approach it took, and may have feared that its approach promoted antagonism within Estonia. Zuroff declared the refusal "shocking" and "unheard-of" ("Baltic States Report," 2003a).

The text of the ad was likely similar to the one published in Lithuania, which had a large Jewish community: "'Jews of Lithuania did not disappear! They were mercilessly massacred in Vilnius, Kaunas, Siauliai and over 100 other places of mass murder,' read the text of the large black-and-white ad, featuring a photograph of Nazis beating Jews to death" (*City Paper's Baltics Worldwide* 2002). The Simon Wiesenthal Center acknowledged that the text included this line "During the Holocaust, Estonians murdered Jews in Estonia as well as in other countries" (*City Paper's Baltics Worldwide* 2003). The translation into Estonian introduced a key ambiguity. In the Estonian language, which does not use articles, *Estonians* can mean either "some" or "the" Estonians. Prominent Estonians went on record condemning the ad. Peeter Torop, the head of the prestigious Semiotics Department at Estonia's leading institution of higher education, Tartu University, "said that although the text of the advertisement does not call for violence, it instigates ethnic hatred and 'accuses Estonians as a nation of murdering Jews'" (*City Paper's Baltics Worldwide* 2003). The article mishap intersected with complex notions of collective suffering and responsibility.

An attempt was made to revise the ad. According to the Baltic News Service, the revisions meant that the ad "no longer says Estonians as a nation collaborated with Nazis but that some Nazi henchmen did" ("Baltic States Report," 2003b). Even so, the major newspapers still refused to publish the ad, claiming that printing the ad "would violate the law and good journalistic practice" ("Baltic States Report," 2003b).

THE ESTONIAN RESPONSE: THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DIRECTORS

The Holocaust Day policy was adopted, yet this recently restored democratic government was not carrying out the will of its people: public opinion steadfastly resented what they saw as foreign meddling and opposed the move, leading a frustrated Zuroff to claim that "93 percent of the [Estonian] public oppose the establishment of a memorial day for the victims of the Holocaust"⁴ (Simon Wiesenthal Center 2004).

Public opposition to foreign initiatives concerning the Holocaust put the government, and particularly the Ministry of Education, into a difficult position at a time when Estonia's memberships in both NATO and the European Union were pending. Officials sought ways to satisfy the demands on them for memberships in these organizations without alienating Estonian voters. The Ministry finessed the challenge effectively. As we will see, different messages went out to different audiences: foreign officials might hear one version in English, while the schools received a different one in Estonian. No effort was made to win public support for the policy, and it seems doubtful that there was ever any intention to see Holocaust Day through to full implementation or to ensure that it was carried out.

Even the timing of the announcement is significant. The unpopular policy was announced at the beginning of the month during which many Estonians vacation or begin extended stays in countryside homes. Announcing unpopular policies at such convenient times is an old tactic. But the date of the announcement also has symbolic value for Estonians. Announcing the policy on August 6, a day that evoked their half century of foreign domination, contextualized the unpopular policy in a larger historical frame; in this way, government officials could communicate implicitly with the national majority, almost as if in code, without tipping off the broader international audience.

The government's resistance to such a memorial day is also evident in its choice of January 27, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, to commemorate the Holocaust. January 27 had no relationship either to the fate of Estonia's Jews—because none of them were sent to Auschwitz—or to the crimes perpetrated by ethnic Estonians during the war (Zuroff 2005).

Estonian officials rejected a suggestion by the Simon Wiesenthal Center that they choose either 20 January, the date of the infamous Wannsee Conference in 1942, at which the implementation of the Final Solution was discussed and Estonia was declared *Judenrein* (free of Jews), or 7 August, the date on which the 36th Estonian Security Battalion murdered Jews in Nowogrudok, Belarus. (Zuroff 2005)

Such a decision distanced Estonia from the crimes it was to be commemorating, either by denying responsibility (August 7, which, it should be noted, would not be a school day) or by not associating Estonia with the fate of Estonia's Jewish population (January 20).

If the rejection of alternative dates was a relatively clear symbolic statement, the possible meanings evoked by the August 6 announcement's historical subtext can only be understood in the context of a complex web of interrelated ideas or themes that recur in Estonia's political discourse. These are not universal sentiments but prominent strands that are heard on a reg-

ular basis from the op-ed pages to the teachers' rooms. They include continued fear of Russian aggression, resentment of foreign interference in domestic affairs, and frustration with the Russian-speaking minorities "who have been here for fifty years and still not learned Estonian." The resentment of foreign meddling is augmented by a sense that Estonia is not understood or respected by outsiders, while its suffering and losses are held to be less important than those endured by others. This lack of understanding also contributes to a sense of freedom, the feeling that Estonia can pay lip service to foreign pressure while continuing to do what it sees fit. Such lip service is appropriate in part because Estonians also believe that they understand more clearly the true nature of oppression and of world events as a result of their experience under occupation. That the predominant historical narrative of the Estonian nation as a victim is being challenged—and by accusations that are perceived to imply collective guilt in certain atrocities of the Holocaust—only reinforces these notions.

The timing of the Holocaust Day policy announcement contextualizes both the policy itself and the international politics surrounding it within the historical experiences of the Estonian nation. This historical context thus makes the policy resonate with the common ideas and themes of Estonian discourse that were discussed above. On the one hand, the anniversary of Estonia's involuntary incorporation into the Soviet Union plays into Estonia's antipathy to foreign meddling of all kinds in its domestic affairs; this specific example—the Holocaust Day policy—emerges as a typical example of such meddling. The notions that Estonia's losses are unrecognized and that foreigners do not understand Estonia combine with the announcement's timing to produce a counterargument about the significance of the Holocaust; implicitly, they suggest that Nazi crimes were not any more deserving of attention than those inflicted on Estonians by the Soviet Union. Finally, calling to mind the Soviet Union's long-term dominance evokes both the continuing fear of Russia and the fact that Estonia was able to persevere through the occupation with its language and culture generally intact. Conjuring up the perceived dangers posed by Russia makes the announcement's timing seem to be a justification of the policy itself: the need to obtain security against Russia justifies Estonia's acquiescence in this minor policy matter, which it need not execute any more faithfully than it did Soviet doctrine. Estonia's perseverance through the half-century occupation also suggests that this matter is one that can be waited out, with Estonia paying lip service now and simply doing as it sees fit once this issue has passed.

Among those reacting negatively were the principals of two of Estonia's most elite high schools. These school directors have something like celebrity status in Estonia; they are public intellectuals, appearing frequently in the media, and are known to most Estonians (Baltic News Service, August

26, 2002). Under the headline "School-directors Condemn Holocaust Day," the two directors announced that they would do nothing to mark the newly declared Holocaust Day, one asserting that it was inappropriate to put someone else's horrors above Estonia's own. This declaration came just days before the school year was to begin and three weeks after the announcement of the establishment of Holocaust Day.

If their departure signified a rebellion against official policy, little was made of it. On the contrary, the policy and its presentation seemed designed to pay lip service to the event while rejecting its premise that the Holocaust deserves consideration above and beyond Estonia's own troubles. One Internet commentator captured concisely a common interpretation by writing, "Holocaust day is the entry-ticket for NATO" (mauri [sic] 2003). This seems to have been the view of the Ministry of Education.

In its original announcement, the ministry framed the day in terms of foreign policy: "According to a Ministry of Education statement, its observance would foster understanding of genocide and would underline 'as an important foreign policy factor, solidarity with the European and transatlantic community'" (*City Paper's Baltics Worldwide* 2002). This explanation clearly did not make the case for establishing a Holocaust Day based on the intrinsic value of the subject. The extent to which the ministry actively wished to draw attention to the day is evident on its website, where this announcement was expunged from its extensive archive of press releases.⁵

Before the first day was officially carried out, the Minister of Education sent a clear message that victims of the Holocaust should not be singled out: "Education Minister Mailis Rand in a circular sent to the schools in the fall noted that not only the Nazi crimes against Jews but also all other victims persecuted for ethnic, racial, religious, and political reasons should be remembered. The ministry gave the schools a free hand in deciding how and in which classes the subject should be handled" ("Baltic States Report," 2003a).

This message explicitly rejected the notion that something distinguished the Holocaust from other atrocities and thus merited special attention in Estonian schools. As if to reinforce the point, the Ministry of Education's many press releases conspicuously pass over any acknowledgment of Holocaust Day.⁶ Only three references to Holocaust Day can be found on the entire site. Although the country prides itself on how well connected it and its schools are to the Internet, the ministry provides no guidance, information, or links to teachers about how they might carry out even the diluted recognition of the day discussed in the school flyer.

Attitudes had not shifted by the time late January arrived. A curriculum specialist was interested in this question and conducted some informal research about it. In an interview, the specialist explained:

When we at the Curriculum Development Center were having some lectures in Tartu University . . . and one of the homeworks for 30 different school directors and headmasters was to examine the way the Holocaust Day was spent the first time in Estonia in 2003. We asked them to get the information from another school: to ask how it was spent and what people were thinking about the Holocaust Day. People were very bitter, most of the people in their responses, they were very direct and very honest, saying that this is not the day that is celebrated in Estonian school, and not in a nice way. But public opinion and the opinion of teachers and head directors was that this came from outside . . . and from these 30 answers that we got, we had zero responses that this was an important day that we need to have in our school system.

Indeed, many teachers also had no qualms about publicly expressing their dissatisfaction with the day and its conception. The newspaper of one large city cited many of the arguments teachers used to justify their approaches to Holocaust Day:

"I think that holocaust day is nothing but an activity for activity's sake, nothing more," adding that it brought the theme to the students on just one day.

The Soviet occupation interests students more, because they have more connections with this, more relatives were deported.

You shouldn't traumatize a child with description of this, how a baby was thrown into the air as target practice, the idea of history is not to shock youth. Rather on this day we should emphasize the danger of all types of violence.

This is foolish, I'm not going to make the students march or do something else on Holocaust day; with this I would perhaps destroy the history period.

The uprising on Juri's Night⁷ took more Estonian lives, that could be commemorated by the government. Let every nation commemorate its own day of mourning. (Nielson 2003)

Even the country's main representative for an international network concerned with the Holocaust did not hold the view that the Holocaust itself was a qualitatively different event that should be discussed independently of other human rights violations. The official gave a presentation about the Holocaust and Estonia to this network. In keeping with the dominant sentiment within Estonia, she discussed the suffering not just of the Jews and not just the suffering inflicted by the Nazis.

They stopped me and said, "What are you speaking about?" And I said that I am speaking about the human rights violations that occurred in Estonia, as said by our President, Lennart Meri, and the commission that investigates human rights violations in Estonia, that we should speak about all of them side-by-side, and not single one out. And they yelled at me. It was horrible. It was a horrible experience.

This attempt to link the atrocities committed against the Jews and against the Estonians and to gain recognition for the suffering of Estonians under both the Nazis and Soviets may make the selection of this official for the leading position in a Holocaust network questionable. In fact, it would be hard to find a selection who was more sympathetic to the cause. Indeed, this official had been very much in favor of Holocaust programs:

The Swedish Institute just came to Estonia—they wanted to create a relationship and start a Holocaust program, a tolerance program and I know from Latvian colleagues that they were very successful in Latvia and I really just supported their idea because, as it worked in Latvia, it is important for us, too, because all the questions of violence in the classrooms and at school and tolerance and its all very much related, and we know what it means to be tolerant, but how to teach it, just methods or models or something we have to learn. (interview transcript, November 2004)

This case illustrates the challenge facing foreign groups who seek out partners in countries whose languages and cultures they do not understand: they often offer enticing opportunities—frequently including international travel that they would be unable to afford independently—while having no effective mechanism to consider the ideological or philosophical inclinations of those whom they select. Their results are inconsistent at best and can go badly astray. While such enticing opportunities may provide an incentive for partners in less privileged countries to downplay their philosophical differences, the prospect of greater economic security creates an even greater incentive. Economic pressures on those at the mercy of the market in transition economies are, by circumstance, often more willing to participate in projects with which they do not agree. While such foreign-funded projects—such as those dedicated to raising awareness of the Holocaust—can be quite valuable in the hands of effective advocates, a recent study of racist extremism in Central and Eastern Europe provides a hint about what can go wrong. The author of the chapter on racist extremism in Estonia, emphasizing that the “teaching of the Holocaust in Estonian schools . . . needs serious elaboration and change,” went on to cite as his illustration the fact that, “one of the local textbooks on history states that some Jews were killed as an act of revenge for Bolshevik abuses” (Poleshchuk 2005: 74). The author of this claim and of this textbook had been selected to lead the teacher-training sessions on the Holocaust in Estonia.

The importance of the Holocaust to foreigners is well understood. In 2006, the Foreign Ministry of Estonia put out a press release in English:

“During the Second World War, the Nazi regime systematically eliminated on the occupied Estonian territory both Estonian Jews, and those that had been brought here from elsewhere,” the statement read. “There is no justification

for the participation of anyone in these shameful and morally condemnable acts. Even if they have not directly shed the blood of anyone, they are nevertheless morally responsible. Knowing the past teaches tolerance and helps to achieve that the crimes of the last century will never be repeated," the statement said. (Estonian Ministry 2006)

It continued, "The Ministry of Education and Science called on all Estonian schools to explain to students the tragic events of the last century" (Estonian Ministry 2006). This precise line appeared in Estonian in the third paragraph of a brief article in one of Estonia's two leading papers. The other paper had no mention of this encouragement. The reference to "the tragic events of the last century" is open-ended; while a foreign reader would likely take this as an allusion to the Holocaust, Estonians might think first of the Soviet occupation.

If the Education Ministry did make such a bland and ambiguous announcement, it was subtle. No mention of the announcement was to be found in the ministry's own press release archive. In fact, all records of announcements related to Holocaust Day were scrubbed from the electronic archive of press releases.

I asked a curriculum specialist whether he had heard about any educational events or announcements connected to Holocaust Day in 2006. "Basically, Holocaust Day does not exist in Estonia," he replied.

HISTORY AND MEMORY: ESTONIA UNDER NAZI AND SOVIET OCCUPATIONS

To understand why Holocaust initiatives have faltered so badly in Estonia, we need to consider both the meanings of history for Estonians in light of current domestic politics and the missteps made by foreign actors.

In its February 2006 report on Estonia, in a subsection concerning anti-Semitism, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance states, disapprovingly, that "many Estonians view the Nazi occupation in a more positive light than the Soviet occupation" (European Commission 2006). The report never seems to stop to ask why that might be.

The apparent assumption that Estonians would draw the opposite conclusion if only they were better informed about the Holocaust seems to be at the root of many of the initiatives coming from outside Estonia. This assumption may well be incorrect. To understand why, we must consider the complicated history of a small country trapped between two great powers and two destructive ideologies.

Estonia first gained independence at the end of World War I. Estonian forces fended off German units and then the Soviet army. (An earlier

attempt to achieve autonomy from the Russian empire in 1905 had been suppressed.) Independence was achieved through military force that, generally speaking, pitted Estonian nationals against Russians. Soon after the war, the Soviet Union pledged in a peace treaty to respect Estonia's independence but two decades later broke that pledge. The Soviet occupation, though interrupted by the Nazis, would continue for a half century. As an Estonian civic education teacher with whom I worked liked to say, "For us, the Second World War ended when the Russian troops finally left in 1994." Mart Laar (2004), a historian who was twice prime minister of Estonia as head of the nationalist Fatherland Party, elaborated in the *Wall Street Journal* that for Estonia, "Aug. 31 1994 . . . is now marked as the end of World War II . . . with celebrations each year."

Hostility between Russia and the Baltic states did not end with the removal of Russian troops. Hundreds of thousands of Russians had been moved into Estonia during the Soviet period and remained after independence, a fact that provided Russia with a pretext to stay involved in Baltic affairs. Even today some of Russia's militant nationalists make menacing statements about retaking the Baltic states. (Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, deputy state chairman of Russia's lower house of parliament, the Duma, has spoken of annihilating Latvia, for example, as recently as 2004.)⁸ Estonian independence is thus inextricably linked to conflict with Russians and with strong Russian opposition. It is not only a consistent thread of Estonian history, but also an ever-present obstacle to social integration of the large Russian and Russian-speaking minorities who live in Estonia. Indeed, Estonia, with a population of 1.4 million, is home to fewer than one million ethnic Estonians; a large proportion of the ethnic minorities have no citizenship status whatsoever.⁹ The Russian-speaking peoples, whose numbers before the war were still quite small, are themselves constant reminders to the Estonians of the half-century Soviet occupation.

The long history of conflict and enmity with Russia explains in part the common sentiment among ethnic Estonians that holds the Soviet occupation in an even worse light than the Nazi occupation. Other factors include the lack of access to historical truth and the uneven distribution of casualties among different ethnic groups.

Two decades after Estonia first achieved independence, the Nazis and Soviets signed the secret protocols of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that divided Eastern Europe between these military powers; the Baltic states were quickly occupied by the Soviet Union and were involuntarily incorporated into the Soviet state. During the first year of the Soviet occupation, the Soviets killed or deported approximately sixty thousand of Estonia's population of one million (Estonia was about 90 percent ethnic Estonian at the time). These casualties were extensive enough to affect a great proportion of Estonia's families and communities.

There is disagreement over how well-known the provisions of the secret pact were to Estonians. A leading civics expert within the Ministry of Education explained in an interview to me that

it isn't true, what [historian and former Prime Minister] Mart Laar is saying, [that everyone knew about] . . . the case of the secret protocols of Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. My mother was an historian and these things were not discussed at home. . . . We didn't know about that, but probably they tried to save the younger generation because the situation was like it was. . . . Some people had literature at home, but not everybody was informed about the history. (interview transcript, August 2004)

If, indeed, most people were unaware of this secret agreement, then the Nazis' complicity in handing over the Baltic states to the Soviet Union was unknown to them. Tactically, this move worked effectively for the Nazis because when German armies arrived in Estonia to drive out the Soviet forces, they were often perceived as liberators. Even liberation may have been secondary to simply putting a stop to the horrors inflicted in that single year. Many Estonian men who were eager to defend Estonia enlisted with the Germans.

Although the Nazis occupied the Baltic states for three years before the Soviets retook control, memories of suffering under the Nazis do often pale next to the recollections of what was inflicted by the Soviets, who remained for a half century. The difference cannot be attributed to a lack of Nazi atrocities:

Some 125,000 people were executed in the concentration camps of Estonia during the years of German occupation. The bulk of these were Soviet prisoners of war and Jews from Western Europe. There were about 4,000-5,000 Estonians among those killed. The people carrying out the repression were mainly Estonians. (Laur et al. 2002: 270)

The Nazis were quite secretive about their crimes. As Singer (2002) puts it, even after eight years of propaganda and unopposed rule in Germany, the Nazis "did not dare be open about what they were doing to the Jews. Himmler told a group of SS leaders that their work in exterminating the Jews was 'an unwritten, never-to-be written, glorious page of our history'" (128). In addition to the issue of secrecy, the Nazis also had many fewer ethnic Estonian victims. Finally, despite Nazi atrocities, Soviet propaganda focused on fascism rather than the Holocaust itself. As effective a propaganda tool as the Holocaust could have been, the Soviets' strict control over information prevented widespread knowledge of those events. As Estonia's education minister said, "In Soviet times objective research into the events

of the Second World War was not possible. So we must undertake this now" (Education and Science Ministry, n.d.).

With research impossible and Western European historical narratives carefully kept out, the stories that did circulate stayed within circles of trust, most often families. While most families could claim a relative or ancestor lost to the Soviets or share stories of their own deportations to Siberia, fewer claim direct harm done by the Nazis. Remarkably, even in cases where people did lose ancestors to the Nazis or had Jewish relatives, the Holocaust is often still not held in different regard than the atrocities inflicted on other peoples. Perhaps this is because it is difficult to conclude that one crime is worse than others when each claimed relatives.

Laar (2004) tells his story this way:

My grandfather was shot by the Nazis. Two of my great-uncles were sent to Siberian death camps by the Soviets. My father-in-law was deported to Siberia as a nine-year-old boy, where he struggled to survive against death by starvation. Unknown to him, his hopes of seeing his father alive again were in vain; his father was shot early in 1941 by the KGB in Moscow's Kirov prison.

A civics official, after explaining how her Jewish grandmother's family had not been betrayed at the end of the war, when all the residents of Narva were driven out by German forces, continued by adding, "My other bloodline is Estonian-Swede and Catherine II deported them to Ukraine." She concluded, "If we continue along this path [of commemorating other peoples' suffering like the Holocaust Day], we will have nothing left but memorial days, or . . . The [Anniversary of the Deportations] suffices, for sure"¹⁰ (e-mail correspondence with the author).

The other deportation that she cites, the one conducted under Catherine II, again involves the Russians. Two related issues are at play here. One concerns whose suffering is most important and the other involves whose crimes are paramount. Operating in the background is an assumption that the Jews constitute a single, separate nation—even though they were not centered in one place. The Estonians' status as a nation is thus perceived to be no different than the Jews' status as a nation. This civics official cited a different case of national suffering: "I was in Armenia during the Karabach crisis and I don't think at all that the Armenian people's fate is any less worthy of memory." For many Estonians, the Jewish Holocaust is one atrocity among many. The question then becomes "whose suffering do we recognize?" The attempt to give special attention to one nation's suffering is taken to be an assertion that some other population is more important than they are. One of the curriculum specialists in civic education whom I interviewed is much more of a cosmopolitan than a nationalist. Enamored with travel and a fluent speaker of several languages, the specialist expressed it this way:

A lot of people really think that Syrians and Vietnamese and Chinese and Armenians have been very treated badly through history and now why Jews? It wasn't anti-Semitism or anything, but it wasn't clear and isn't clear for me as well . . . for me, the Estonians, I would compare it . . . it was tragic for Jewish people had their own holocaust, Latvians had, Lithuanians had, some were even worse; it is not logical that we should pick up one nation's misery among 100 or 200 people's miseries. (interview transcript, April 15, 2006)

If there is a hierarchy of crimes for the Estonians, there is little question that the Soviet crimes rank much higher than the Nazis'. As one Estonian friend remarked, "We must be the only people in the world who don't hate our former masters." (Estonians lived as serfs under German lords for centuries.) Not only is there little animus toward the Nazis, but it is not terribly unusual to encounter positive memories from the Nazi occupation.

A fellow American ethnographer who worked at one of the same schools that I did shared this account that she heard from a teacher there:

I was waiting at the bus stop, talking to the math teacher at the Oak school, and it was in the context of learning German at the school, and she was saying that they had always been pretty conversant in German. Because they knew German, it made things very different during World War II; they could talk to the German soldiers. That's when she said that, "I remember very clearly the Germans knocking at our door and asking for honey and cream." She remembered that there was one soldier in particular who would always come by and he said he had three children of his own in Germany and he missed them so much. "And that's just the way they were. And everything changed when the Russians came. They would sleep in the barns, and they were drunk and they would bang in the doors with their rifles. They demanded bread and milk, and they came in and raped and murdered." (personal correspondence with the author, April 26, 2006)

Polite and civil German soldiers constitute just one side of the complex attitudes toward the Germans and the Nazi era in particular.

Having a father or a grandfather who fought for Estonian independence alongside the German/Nazi forces further complicates the issue. One Estonian civics teacher had recently uncovered his grandfather's possessions, including some items he carried with him during World War II. "He fought with the German army," he explained. The choice of words was very important: he was not referred to as a Nazi or someone who served with the Nazi army. After the war, Estonians who served with the Nazi forces and remained in Estonia were ordered to report to the Soviets and were often deported. To descendants who have learned of their experiences and know them as elderly men and as family members, it is easier to see them as victims than as perpetrators of war crimes.

For Estonians, those who fought against the Soviets and the half-century occupation of Estonia are heroes. That they fought primarily with the Nazis is, for them, largely incidental. Conversely, for Russians and Russian speakers who served with the Soviet army during what they call the Great Fatherland War, nothing is more glorious or celebrated than the defeat of the Nazis, who are typically referred to as the “fascists.” When anniversaries of the war come around, when the politics of memorials are debated, when attention is given to war crimes, one side’s war dead are the other’s war criminals who died in the service of the most evil regime in human history. These issues all evoke the opposition between sides, and this strains the tenuous bonds that permit some semblance of a common civic identity to reach beyond ethnic Estonians who speak fluent Estonian.

AN ESTONIAN HOLOCAUST?

Among those who resisted the Soviets were the Forest Brothers, a band of men who took to the woods to resist the Soviet occupation. While some went to the woods already during the first year of the Soviet occupation (and often enlisted with the German/Nazi forces to fight the Soviets), the Forest Brothers became increasingly important after the return of Soviet forces toward the end of the war. The story of one Forest Brother, Alfred Kaarmann, recently entered the global English-language media. “In a land tossed between one occupier or another, Mr. Kaarmann makes no secret of preferring the Germans. “The conquerors from the West tried to enslave us,” he said. “The conquerors from the East had another approach. They tried to kill as many of us as possible—to wipe us off the face of the earth” (Wines 2003). Kaarmann thus makes a claim that is often unspoken but that has adherents. And it may have even more sympathizers. Kaarmann suggests that the Soviet approach to the Estonians was essentially genocidal.

The reporter who quoted him immediately adds, “This is, of course, an exaggeration” (Wines 2003). But it is not at all clear that the claim is obviously an exaggeration for many Estonians. Many Estonians feel that Russia was and is dedicated to the elimination of Estonia. Population data show that “between 1940 and 1945 the population seems to have declined by a minimum of 200,000” (Raun 1991: 181). For a country with barely a million Estonians, that loss constituted a large proportion of the population. It got worse, however: the “demographic consequences of Stalinism in peacetime proved even more devastating to the population of Estonia than the upheavals of World War II” (Raun 1991: 181).

Indeed, it is exactly this perception that what the Estonian nation suffered was not wholly dissimilar to what Jews suffered in the Holocaust that allows some to appropriate the language of the Holocaust or of genocide

to describe what happened to them. One curriculum specialist who worked in citizenship education explained the resistance to accepting Holocaust Day. "We have two days like this already, for us the Holocaust was the deportation, when we had massive deportation in '41 and '49, and these are opportunities for us to talk about humanity" (interview transcript, April 16, 2006). While many fled and died during the war, in the postwar Stalin years the Soviets also deported or sent to labor camps more than fifty thousand Estonians (Raun 1991: 236). And while the crimes against Estonia's Jews by the Nazis could not be taken as targeting Estonians as a whole, the Soviets' deportations are understood to constitute a collective assault on Estonians. Additionally, so many Russians and Russian speakers were settled in Estonia that the native population dropped from approximately 94 percent to 76 percent between 1945 and 1950, prompting questions about whether "Moscow was following a purposeful long-range Russification policy" (Raun 1991: 182). As Budryte points out, the Baltic states' experiences of "the Stalinist deportations, planned immigration, and russification policies were remembered as an attempt at nation killing, or genocide" (Budryte 2005: 8).

For a small nation once pinned between the Nazis and the Soviets, the perceived threat to the language, culture, and people of Estonia was extreme. These conditions may explain why many there are reluctant to attribute unique status to the Holocaust or to accept that it constituted something qualitatively different than the targeting of Estonians. Kaarmann expanded on his remarks about the Nazis and Soviets in an interview with the BBC. "The difference between them was that the Germans enslaved us and took our land. But the Russians destroyed the Estonian nation. They opposed—and still oppose—Estonian independence" (Fish 2003). He did not speak about the Soviets or the Soviet Union or even Russia. He spoke of Russians, and the reference was contemporary. He certainly meant Russians in Russia, but he by no means excluded Russians within Estonia. This case reveals the ways that attention to history can reinforce the divisions between Russians and Estonians within Estonia.

Zuroff rejected the idea of a Baltic genocide just two days after Estonia announced the creation of Holocaust Day: "[W]hat happened in Estonia was not a Holocaust or even close to one. The suffering of Estonians was appalling, but it does not mean that historically-false symetries [*sic*] with other far worse suffering should be created" (*Online Intervjuud* 2002). U.S. Ambassador DeThomas (2002) also argued in his column that "the Holocaust is a crime of unique proportions." Zuroff (2005) elaborated in an article that "one of the most prevalent tendencies in post-Communist Eastern Europe has been the attempt to create a false symmetry between Nazi and Communist crimes, and the erroneous classification of the latter as genocide [the 'double genocide' theory]."

Debates over where to draw the line in the definition of genocide date back to drafting of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. According to Article 2, "genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such: . . . (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." How big must a part be to meet the definition is not stated. The prevailing sentiment in Estonia holds that such intent existed, and that the deportations constituted element c.

Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term, conceived of genocide as a multifaceted assault that contains many elements familiar to Estonians. He saw *genocide* as

a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups. (Lemkin 1944, cited in Nersessian 2005)

This broader definition, which makes clear the cultural and linguistic elements of genocide, was initially included in the draft of the 1948 convention but omitted with the intention that it be left to separate conventions. Proponents of exclusion argued "forcefully that it defied both logic and proportion 'to include in the same convention both mass murders in gas chambers and the closing of libraries'" (Nersessian 2005). The problem raised "by limiting genocide to its physical and biological manifestations [is that] a group can be kept physically and biologically intact even as its collective identity suffers in a fundamental and irremediable manner. Put another way, the present understanding of genocide preserves the body of the group but allows its very soul to be destroyed" (Nersessian 2005).

The "false symmetry" question may be no more than a quest for recognition for the suffering and losses endured by long-occupied peoples. Attempts to link the Holocaust to the suffering of the Baltic nations may not imply that the Holocaust was in fact equivalent or identical to the Soviet crimes. By linking the crimes together, Estonians and the other Baltic nations are able to seek recognition for their own stories while offering recognition to the issue of the Holocaust. The long-term members of the European Union may have to open themselves up to new versions of the history of World War II, as this report from the BBC suggests:

On 14 June 1941 more than 30,000 were deported from the Baltic countries to prison camps in Siberia. At a ceremony in Tallinn, the Estonian President,

Arnold Ruutel, said the victims of the Stalinist deportations would be remembered forever. But controversy surrounds a plan to put up a plaque at the European Parliament. Some Socialists in the European parliament are blocking the plan, saying that it would lead to a plethora of memorials. But Baltic MEPs say they feel it is important that older members of the EU learn about the history of new member countries, to understand them better. ("Baltic Victims of USSR Remembered," 2006)

The Baltic states may recognize better than most that there is value in allowing different understandings of history to stand side by side. Budryte (2005) notes that the "consequences of forced integration of Russians into the Estonian demos . . . would have been grave," particularly if it had involved the "imposition of Estonian commemorative practices, as well as one version of Estonian history" (9).

Difficulties seem to arise not from attempts to link these sets of crimes but in approaches that seem to differentiate between victims. American engagement in Estonia seemed to many Estonians not to promote even-handed justice but rather ethnic favoritism. Proponents of this position felt that the foreign focus on the Holocaust inappropriately privileged one set of victims and one type of suffering over others, namely, their own victims and suffering. This view was articulated clearly to the ambassador in an anonymous, Internet based question-and-answer forum:

Mr. Ambassador: while this writer fully acknowledges the horror of what the Nazis and their accomplices did to Jews, Gypsies and Estonians during the three years of German WW II occupation of Estonia, the number of lives lost and the duration of the combined Soviet occupations enormously eclipse the Nazi period. When will the US Embassy begin dedicating time to these dark chapters in proportion to their significance to the host country? When will the US begin funding an Office of Soviet Investigations or an Office of Communist Investigations designed to systematically condemn and bring to justice [sic] the few surviving communist war criminals, torturers and executioners who terrorized Central and Eastern Europe (and Cambodia and several other victim societies?). A few more years and it will be too late. Is this the objective? Surely it must be the gravity of the offenses and even-handed consistency of approach that interests the US government—a country that practices and advocates the rule of law—and not the ethnic origin or the religious orientation of the victims? Even-handedness is what we're asking for. Most Estonians are in agreement that German atrocities and Soviet Russian atrocities must be handled using the same legal yardsticks, and that the consequences for the perpetrators should be the same. (*Online Intervjuud* 2003)

Implicit is the idea that Soviet criminals should not be placed second in the quest for justice behind the Nazis in Estonia. An appropriate application of justice in Estonia, the reasoning goes, would not treat Estonians as inferior

or less important victims than the Jewish victims, but would respect each victim's suffering and death equally by pursuing justice equally and pursuing each criminal with equal dedication.

DeThomas explained the U.S. focus on the Holocaust in this way when he was asked why a similar standard was not applied to other human rights atrocities, like those perpetrated by the Soviets:

You are correct that there were many crimes against humanity. I have personally participated in events commemorating victims of Soviet crimes in Estonia. However, the legal structures the US government pursues regarding the Holocaust are unique to that particular set of crimes. In large part, this is because many survivors of the Holocaust fled to the US and are now U.S. citizens. They look to U.S. law for redress. (*Online Intervjuud* 2003)

The international effort to bring to justice those Estonians who were involved in war crimes related to the Holocaust is thus taken to reflect a lack of foreign understanding about the suffering endured by Estonians as a whole under the Soviets. Such an emphasis calls attention only to Estonian criminals with no acknowledgment that most Estonians were victims. Since most Estonians today have connections to victims of atrocities, and the number of war criminals is drastically smaller, this emphasis can feel like a collective accusation. For Estonians, the dominant story is of Estonians as victims, while a tiny minority, trapped between two powers, was complicit in the Holocaust. Furthermore, no foreign powers are seeking to bring Soviet war criminals who executed or deported Estonians to justice. The combination of these facts—the pursuit of Estonians who committed war crimes and the disregard for criminals who victimized Estonians—suggests that Estonians don't matter to the rest of the world. It is frequently taken to belittle Estonians' own suffering by implying that the one category of "other" victims is more important than their own. Worse, it replaces the Estonian nation's identity as a victim with an accusation that is perceived to imply collective guilt or criminality. Finally, it makes the United States appear to be more concerned with advancing the interests of one group than it is with principles of justice.

Estonians may cling to the notion that they survived a genocidal regime, that the Soviets had in mind to destroy the Estonian nation, whether through occupation, deportations, assimilation, executions, or any of the other tactics brought to bear on them. Families' memories of loss and suffering may never cede pride of place to victims of the Holocaust. And they may never accept the notion that Soviet criminals were any less terrible than Nazi criminals.

These experiences need not be set against each other. As Margaret Buber-Neumann wrote, after surviving Stalin's prisons only to be handed over to the Nazi camps,

"I asked myself which is really worse: the lice-infested corn-cob-walled cabins in Birma [Kazakhstan] or the nightmare-order of Ravensbruck. . . . It is hard to decide which is the least humane—to gas people in five minutes, or to strangle them slowly, over the course of three months, by hunger?" (in Ferguson 2002: 27).

Linking the horrors, which often shared time and space, need not imply equivalency or symmetry. The atrocities suffered by the Estonians at Soviet hands could be used as an entrée to the horrors of the Holocaust. This approach was used by the U.S. embassy, which supported the foundation of the Estonian International Commission for Investigation of Crimes against Humanity in 1998. The commission, which investigated the periods of occupation under both the Nazis and the Soviets, was able simultaneously to give recognition to Estonian victims of the Soviet occupation while at the same time confronting the events of the Holocaust on Estonian soil and perpetrated by Estonians. For foreigners concerned with the Holocaust, the fact that the commission placed those events in a larger context that did not single out Estonian criminals while ignoring Estonian victims allowed attention to be brought to the issue. For Estonians, the connection of the two in this context served to legitimize their attempts to link the Holocaust and the Soviet occupations.

A similar approach was taken by a museum in Tallinn. Because it is all but impossible to celebrate the ideology for which anyone fought, since combatants fought under the swastika or under the hammer and sickle, people's individual sacrifices are commemorated with respect to what they fought against. Families' fallen members are honored for defeating fascism or for resisting Soviet occupation. Honoring the fallen for defeating fascism or resisting the Soviets, however, is often taken as a dishonor to those who fought on the other side, if not a celebration of the cause for which they fought.

When the Soviet occupation was nearing its end and Gorbachev had declared a period of openness, the monuments to the Soviet Union in Estonia began to be removed. The exception to the rule was the preservation of monuments to those who died in World War II. One such Soviet-era monument, a memorial of a soldier with his head lowered, has been the site of rallies and of vandalism.¹¹ Across the square, with support from the foundation of a member of the Estonian diaspora who has lived for decades in the United States, Estonia built a Museum of Occupations. Locating the museum so close to the Soviet-era monument may be a way of challenging the Russian narrative of World War II. Russia certainly interpreted it that way:

The Russian Foreign Ministry released a statement . . . accusing the Estonian authorities of attempting to raise again the theme of Soviet occupation . . .

[and] called the opening of the Museum of Occupation in Tallinn and the unveiling of a monument to the forest brothers killed by the Red Army in May 1945 actions which cast doubt on the sincerity of the assurances of Estonian leaders that they are loyal to European principles. The statement further condemns the efforts of "Estonian nationalists to glorify Estonian Nazi henchmen as fighters for Estonia's freedom and against the Soviet occupation. ("Baltic States Report," 2003c)

In the museum, two large, dark, and identical trains stand together. One bears a swastika; the other the Soviet red star. "In Western and Central Europe, the image of the cattle wagon is immediately associated with the memory of the deportation and destruction of the European Jews by Nazi Germany. In the Baltic states, the image of a cattle wagon is a symbol of suffering during the Stalinist times and deportation to the *gulag*" (Budryte 2005: 187). The stories told by the trains honors the suffering of all of the victims of destructive ideologies during the Soviet and Nazi periods. The stories told by the trains narrow the gap between Estonians and their Western European and American allies. Locating Estonians' suffering among other crimes against humanity simultaneously seeks recognition while acknowledging what other peoples have endured. It may also facilitate Estonia's task of crafting a common civic identity that is not rooted in the narrow historic, binary opposition between Russians and Estonians.

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NOTES

This research was made possible by the generous support of a predissertation grant from Indiana University's Office of International Programs, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a Professional Development Fellowship. A study of the policy and practice of civic education in Estonia, including its transnational elements, this research involved participation in and observations of a broad range of international events, seminars, teacher-training sessions, and classrooms over three years. Officials and teachers across the entire range of the policy process were interviewed as well. Because Estonia is a small country and the number of people involved in these issues was relatively small, it is a challenge to provide detailed information and anonymity at the same time. Individual participants in this study are therefore referred to in very general terms (an official, a textbook author, etc.), without, I hope, much loss to the overall arguments.

1. This exhibit can be seen at www.muuseum.harju.ee/holokaust/.
2. These projects are detailed at <http://estonia.usembassy.gov/assist.php>.
3. This interview took place in 2003. Like all interviews conducted during my research, names would not be provided, even if the interviewees, as in this case, insisted that they stood by their statements publicly and such anonymity was unnecessary.
4. The source for this claim was never located. It is not inconsistent with the prevailing sentiments that I encountered.
5. See, for example, www.hm.ee/index.php?03122.
6. Last retrieved in November 2005, from www.hm.ee/uus/hm/client/index.php?035265513313142003. This link is no longer operative. Months after purging the website of most mentions of Holocaust Day, the entire press release archive has been removed from a revamped website.
7. This refers to a struggle against Germans that took place more than six centuries earlier, in 1343–1345.
8. *City Paper* assembled a page of "Zhirinovskiyisms" up through 1996, including his claim that "I'm doing everything possible to liquidate the Baltic states. . . . You are directly on our path to the sea. Russia needs ports and therefore the occupation of the Baltic states is inevitable. . . . War is inevitable, and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will disappear completely and finally from the political map of world." See www.balticworldwide.com/quotes/zhirinovskiyisms.htm. More recently, in 2004, he threatened, "Latvia will be destroyed. . . . Absolutely nothing will remain from Latvia. Everybody will forget the words 'Latvia' and 'the Latvian language.'"

There will be nothing in Latvia, forever. We will destroy everything. If you touch Russians and Russian schools. I assure you. Nothing will remain." "Latvia Will Be Destroyed," *Pravda*, March 27, 2004, http://english.pravda.ru/world/20/92/372/12363_Latvia.html.

9. Estonia's leading newspaper, quoting the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance report, claims approximately 139,000 residents lack citizenship. "Euroopa Nõukogu komisjon kritiseeris Eestit," *Postimees*, February 21, 2006, www.postimees.ee/220206/esileht/siseuudised/192821.php.

10. June 14, now a national day of commemoration, represented both the first major deportation and the day with the largest number deported. Approximately ten thousand Estonians were deported on that one night in 1941 alone, about 1 percent of the population, while roughly four hundred Jews were deported as well, a sum that amounted to 10 percent of the entire Jewish population of Estonia. Jewish suffering at the hands of the Soviets was not limited to the deportations. (Information provided by the Estonia Institute and hosted by the Jewish Virtual Library, a division of the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise; "The Jewish Virtual History Tour: Estonia," www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Estonia.html). In July 1940, Jewish cultural autonomy was eliminated, and all Jewish institutions were eliminated. All organizations were eliminated in the same year. Soviet policy remained inhospitable to Jewish organizations; Soviet passports, which categorized people by citizenship (Soviet) and nationality, listed Estonian and Jewish as separate categories.

11. A spherical view of the monument during a rally is available for viewing at http://ww2panorama.org/panos/andrei_bordov_tallinn1.html.