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On the future of a culture of remembrance of the Shoah

The *Cajewitz Foundation*, which has so wonderfully restored the Jewish orphanage in Pankow, where we are meeting here, and is now turning it into a place of understanding, has given the first volume of its publication series the title "Disturbed Childhoods". In the subtitle, she describes the orphanage as a "place of refuge, security and displacement". The book describes the brutality to which Jews, including Jewish children, were subjected in Nazi Germany, how they had to endure suffering and extermination and the generous new openness that the survivors were prepared to show towards Germans coming to terms with the past. When you read this book, it is all the more unbearable that Jews feel unsafe again in Germany as a result of developments after 7 October 2023! And it is necessary to think about the "future of a culture of remembrance of the Shoah". I would like to thank the *Cajewitz Foundation* and *Peter-Alexis Albrecht* for inviting me to reflect together.

Rescuing survivors' suffering and desire for reconciliation from oblivion and immortalising them as a legacy

The book "*Verstörte Kindheiten*" (Disturbed Childhoods) offers an important starting point for this. The fate of *Hilde Schoenfeld*, who spent some time in the orphanage, is described in the book and contains many things that belong together in the commemoration of the Shoah, and even more so in an entire culture of remembrance.

Hilde's parents rescued her from Nazi danger via a Kindertransport to Great Britain. In the initially possible but meagre communication during the war, the Red Cross was only allowed to pass messages of 25 words between *Hilde* and her family.

On 15 August 41, the parents write to *Hilde*:

"Dear Hildchen! Everything is fine. No news. Worried. Write to Granny. Danny has a golden curly mop of hair, chattering sweetly. Be grateful to your family."

In December 1941, *Hilde* writes to her family:

"My dears, very worried. I still love you very much. Want to be with you. Hope you are all together."

In July 1942 her mother writes:

"We are going on a journey. Happy to know what we have done for you. Daddy very ill. Worse than ever before. With love Mammy"

The coded message means that the father was murdered in the Auschwitz concentration camp, where the parents were with their little brother, and that the mother and brother were also about to be murdered.

Hilde Schoenfeld was one of the brave survivors of the orphanage who accepted the Cajewitz Foundation's invitation to Pankow on 10 May 2001, even though she was seriously ill. She was comforted to find her parents' names on a wall of the former orphanage when she returned to the place of her childhood. The fact that her parents are not forgotten, that they are remembered, makes her very happy. *Hilde Schoenfeld* died just a few days later, a few hours after returning to the UK from Berlin. This leaves us deeply saddened.

Not only the idea of saving the Jewish Orphanage as a building, but also the invitation to all survivors to explore their memories on site, to collect and preserve them as a treasure, testify to the Foundation's great sensitivity and foresight. It thus makes it possible to realise the first task of every commemoration: to rescue the victims from oblivion and to keep their unique personality, dignity and nature present. This focus on the individual person, their irreplaceability and their dignity is an indispensable basis for any appropriate commemoration. It affirms the uniqueness and irreplaceability of each person and thus also contains a central message.

As a rule, the memory of the Shoah is very quickly associated with the desire to draw political conclusions from it. This is not wrong in principle. But it requires an initial pause to ensure that justice is done to each individual victim, so that the people are not instrumentalised, no matter how good the cause.

For every human being, here I am borrowing from Emmanuel Kant, is an end in itself, above all other possible ends that he may serve. One may make use of his help if he provides it voluntarily, but one must not subordinate the commemoration of the Shoah, to which millions of individual people, with their ideas, wishes, desires, talents, pains and joys, fell victim, to a purpose outside of the people we are commemorating.

The deadly poison of enmity denies people a common future and leads to their empathy-less destruction

If we take this to heart, another thought arises. Because, of course, the sometimes somewhat hackneyed "Never again" immediately comes to mind. What happened in the Shoah, the systematic, efficient, empathy-free extermination of people with whom the German National Socialists did not want to share their world, must not happen, must never happen again. One cannot commemorate the Shoah without feeling a practical mission to oppose the beginnings.

Where are, where do the "beginnings" of the cold systematic extermination of people start? Only where they are harassed, discriminated against, killed? Or already where they are collectively rejected, where they are not prepared to live together peacefully, to share the common world? Hannah Arendt accused Adolf Eichmann of precisely this, that he did not want to share the world with those he murdered, and saw this as justification for the death sentence against him.

My attempt at an answer is: The "never again" already begins where people are denied their unique, irreplaceable personal value, where they are subjected to a collectively devaluing prejudice, more simply: where they are devalued across the board - explicitly or implicitly.

And this happens every day, even under democratic conditions! The deadly poison lies in the willingness to harbour derogatory prejudices. Prejudice is always pejorative. This distinguishes them from preconceptions, which we cannot do without in our view of the world and

our relationship with our fellow human beings. But while we can easily correct these if reality and new findings speak against them, we recognise prejudices and their inherent devaluation by the fact that their carriers are determined to maintain them against the facts and prefer to distort the facts.

This beginning with prejudice increases dangerously when the political dispute is carried out in a hostile manner, when political opponents - even in democracies - are declared enemies, and the dispute aims to deny a common future, to completely eliminate the opponents. And this also happens frequently. The temptation to do so is great, especially in a heated atmosphere.

It makes sense to briefly mention *Carl Schmitt* here. He succinctly formulated and propagated a definition of the political in which political opponents are fundamentally to be understood as enemies simply because they are political opponents. This follows from his definition of politics. The political opponent is therefore to be understood as the "other", as an existential enemy, and in Schmitt's view this enmity can legitimately go as far as annihilation. Legal barriers, on the other hand, are theoretically inconceivable for him

Carl Schmitt was a National Socialist and, as far as I know, never renounced this idea. After the war, however, recognised theorists and philosophers who could not be suspected of National Socialism, such as *Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde* or *Otto Kirchheimer*, held him in high esteem because of his analytical acuity and - at least analytically - continued to refer to him.

With his intellectual acuity, he demonstrates how widespread, but also attractive, how appealing and at the same time dangerous the stigmatisation of the opponent as an enemy who can be destroyed still is today, not only in Germany, but everywhere in the world.

If we take "never again" seriously, we must not only explicitly reject - at least in normative terms - Schmitt's understanding of politics, which historically has its origins in the last century with its two world wars. In the terrible wars of our time, we must also distance ourselves from ideas of the total annihilation of the enemy as well as a "total victory". For they entail the dissolution of the enemy's boundaries, and thus the dissolution of the boundaries of war and the ruthless destruction of all those who can be suspected of being the enemy, including the civilian population, with all

the inhumane consequences. Today's wars are generally no longer "containable" wars between national armies, but usually also contain elements of civil war in which the transition to violence against the civilian population is inscribed.

A culture of remembrance of the Shoah must therefore reject the idea of a systematic annihilation of the political opponent and thus a total victory, even rhetorically, from the outset, and must resist the temptation of Carl Schmitt's thinking with its harsh distinction between friend and foe.

But wasn't Hitler's deadly regime only ended thanks to the total military victory of a global coalition with the unconditional surrender of the German Wehrmacht? Yes, in response to Goebbels' call for a "total war", which the National Socialists frenetically applauded in the Berlin Sports Palace in 1943, the Allies were left with only the "unconditional surrender" of the German Wehrmacht to end it. But it was not about the total annihilation of the Germans.

So is there no chance for the descendants of the "Shoah" to really protect from those who want to destroy Israel and thus also the Jews living in Israel?

Only a path of mutual security prevents a war without end

Describing the essence of such an opportunity is my third element in characterising a culture of remembrance of the Shoah. After all, the demand for "Never again!" must also include the demand that Jews must never again suffer something like the Shoah.

The idea after the murder of the European Jews was that the state of Israel should provide security. From my perspective as a German, I agree that Jews absolutely need Israel as a safe haven. However, the Israeli state in its current constitution obviously does not offer such security. Since the attack on 7 October 2022, there are again Jews who are emigrating from Israel, some of them to Europe, in order to live safely. Two ways are proposed: Firstly, to make Israel so strong that no one dares to attack Jews again. Security through deterrence. Experience in the Middle East conflict shows that this will not succeed if the state does not offer Palestinians the same freedom and security. Otherwise the constant danger of militant underground and terrorism remains.

At present, radical Hamas and the Israeli government are not pursuing the path of equal security on both sides. With its actions in the West Bank, the Israeli government is deliberately seeking to expel the Palestinians who remain in Israel. It does not explain how this is supposed to lead to success for the safety of Jews.

A commemoration of the Shoah that focuses on "never again" for the future must work on a different policy, one in which Jews find security by ensuring that Palestinians can also live in security. And vice versa, of course, the same applies: Palestinians, too, will only find their security in freedom if they in turn abandon *Carl Schmitt* and the slogan of driving the Jews into the sea in favour of a "common security". After everything that has happened in the last two and a half years, it is difficult to believe in this path. But the alternative is war without end.

Lesson from the Shoah: When you start wanting to eliminate or destroy people, there is no stopping you.