

Home and Belonging – 27th January as a reminder of the outcome of exclusion of populations from the public sphere

by Avraham Weber, New York¹

On January 27th, the UN will hold its yearly International remembrance day of the Holocaust. The theme this year was Home and Belonging, entailing perhaps the main effect of the Holocaust on European Jews. Prior to the Holocaust, Europe served as the main center of Jewish life. Jews were highly integrated in many European countries, in almost all fields of society. Some of them, became an integral part of their homelands culture, heritage and being.

The coming of Nazi's in power, and the introduction of the so called Nurnberg legislation of 1935, allowed to create a dual state society in Germany, later on in other occupied Nazi territories or influenced states such as Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria. The creation of a legal mechanism to restrict or limit the access of the Jewish nationals to their own legal system and the protection of their civil basic rights, signaled the start of a process that rapidly developed in deporting and limiting Jews from the public sphere and existence.

At first, Jews were excluded from performing public and open professions, then excluded from the public via limitation of their personal freedoms, all this in the form of a State official ban on their rights to be in public places such as parks, theaters, restaurants of other businesses. Nazis continued also to remove Jewish presence from cultural public areas such as academia and art Jews were expelled from their academic institutions, degrees were revoked, and Jewish artists work were removed from open display.

Two important decisions of the Third Reich marked the end of the Jewish presence in the public. The decision of Heidrich and Goring to introduce the obligation for Jews to carry a publicly open mark on their cloths to ensure that the General population would be aware of a presence of Jews in the public sphere – a decision taken as early as 1937 in a interministerial meeting under Goering in his gigantic Luftraumministerium (today Federal Ministry of Finance). The second would be Heidrich Schnell brief of 21st September 1939, calling for the Ghettoization of the Jewish population in Poland.

Both these decisions demonstrate how the Nazi ideology and strategy focused in eliminating the Jews from the public eye. Once no Jews were to be seen around, who would care or notice that they were gone?

But why does Home and belonging serve a purpose? Post war Jewish life in Europe was of stateless refugees, many of them refused legal rights in their own states, some still in 1946 undergoing pogroms in their own countries such as the case of Polish Jews in the city of Keltze, or Dutch survivors returning from the camps receiving tax liability for not paying their taxes while incarcerated in concentration camps, losing their homes and the rest of their belonging.

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The tragic scope of the devastation of European Jewish life, and the scope of devastation, is still unclear to our day and age. Home and belonging, reminds us, the scope of loss, perhaps a lost that cannot be ever fully recovered. Little can be done in order to come to terms with one's loss of his entire identity, a lost caused by measures imposed by the Nazis and their culprits. These actions, as described in Heidrich Schnellbrief, a strategic commanding paper (that I have mentioned earlier in this blog) were systematical acts of exercising of State power against a specific targeted group of its citizens.

The road to eliminate the Jews from this world, undoubt a key ingredient of Nazi ideology and state affairs were best to be achieved by erasing them from the public sphere. The Reich also invested in promoting this master plan in the east, in the form of introducing "Jewish Advisors" to countries such as Romania and Bulgaria to better execute this master plan.

On 27th January 2023, we remember where all this began. It began with the historical treason of Nation States in their Jewish Fellow nationals and statement, all this under strong Nazi influence. We remember that Jews were once a vital and integral pillar of European Society and were an integral part of European Culture. The failure of Europe to uphold to basic moral obligations towards its Jewish nationals, lead to the systematic extermination of the Jews, as once physically eliminated from their homes and belonging the road to Holocaust was short. Those who do not exist, those who are not among us, cannot express their voices or fight for their existence.

Perhaps, therefore, the most important lesson to be taken from this year's international Holocaust remembrance day is to understand and grasp the scope of the atrocities caused by Nazis, again, not only the individual loss of life and property of Jews, but the cultural and national loss of the nation's themselves due to them betray of basic rights of its Jewish nationals.