Yehuda Bauer: Scholar, Historian, Teacher, Friend, and Mensch

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Yehuda Bauer—teacher, scholar, friend—passed away in the embrace of his daughters and surrounded by his beloved descendants who were his pride and joy. With his passing the academic world and Yad Vashem lost one of the founders of Holocaust research and one of the leading voices in the study of genocide and antisemitism. We also lost a dear and beloved friend.

Yehuda Bauer was born in Prague on April 6, 1926, and immigrated with his family to Mandatory Palestine on March 15, 1939, evading the German troops that marched into Prague that day as Germany took control of Bohemia and Moravia. He later joined the Palmach and fought in Israel's War of Independence. He completed his BA and MA at the University of Cardiff in Wales (1946–1948; 1949–1950) and then joined Kibbutz Shoval in the Negev in 1952. Bauer completed his PhD at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1960 with a dissertation that focused on the the Hagana and the Palmach in Mandatory Palestine during World War II; it was later published as *From Diplomacy to Resistance: A History of Jewish Palestine, 1939–1945*.[1] In 1961, Bauer joined the faculty of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where he began teaching about the Holocaust several years later and until his retirement in 1995. Among his many awards in Israel, he received the Israel Prize for his contribution to the study of the history of the Jewish people in 1998, and, in 2001, he was elected a member of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

Bauer was one of the world's most influential historians of the Holocaust. His vast knowledge, sharp analytical capabilities, and unusual ability to synthesize many original sources and copious research into coherent observations, along with his remarkable facility with the written

1 Yehuda Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance: A History of Jewish Palestine, 1939–1945* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1970).

and spoken word and his dynamic teaching ability, helped him reach broad audiences in Israel and around the world. He was not only one of the major scholars of the Holocaust but also one of the most important and influential voices to raise consciousness of the event and its ongoing major global impact.

Apart from his towering intellectual achievements, Bauer was a wonderful person: a sworn humanist with a sense of humor and impressive musical vocal ability, a Jewish intellectual,[2] quintessentially secular,[3] and a Renaissance man in every sense of the term. Any topic, and particularly any person, piqued his interest. He had inexhaustible curiosity and an immense craving for knowledge. As he put it, "A good historian is a historian who knows he doesn't know much."[4] His breadth of knowledge stood in inverse proportion to his kindness and generosity toward young scholars.[5] Throughout his years he never stopped learning, reading, and updating his research outlooks as outgrowths of thorough criticism not only from others but also, and mainly, of himself. The ability

2 See the eulogy he wrote for himself three years before his passing, and published in this volume, "A Eulogy to Myself."

3 Yehuda Bauer, "Al Morashto Shel HaYehudi Hahiloni," in Yehoshua Rash, ed., *Kaze Re'e Vehadesh: HaYehudi Hahofshi Umorashto* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1987). Bauer adamantly stressed: "It's not that I don't believe in God. The truth is that I believe with fervor….that there is no God," in Yehuda Bauer, *The Jews: A Contrary People* (Zurich and Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2014), p. 57.

4 "Dyokano Shel Historion: Reayon Im Professor Yehuda Bauer" (Hebrew), interview by Hanna Yablonka, Guy Miron, and Iris Rachamimov, *Zmanim,* 138 (2017), p. 20.

5 Dalia Ofer, "Reflections on an Academic Path: The Inspiration of a Teacher and Mentor," *The Journal of Holocaust Research,* 36:1 (2022), pp. 7–15. The authors of this memorial article also had the great privilege of being Yehuda's friends. Havi: our friendship (unsurprisingly) began with Yehuda's graciousness and generosity. At the outset of my academic career, I was invited to his office, and he asked me if I truly intended to dedicate my professional life to Holocaust research. When I answered in the affirmative, he told me that his door would always be open for any question and advice—and so it was, literally until his last days. Despite the age difference between us (by the time I began my university studies he had already retired), Yehuda adopted me as a colleague and friend in every respect—a privilege that I will cherish forever. David: our relationship began with my first steps as a MA student at the Hebrew University, and, particularly, when we collaborated on the editorial board of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (1985). At that time, I learned about the world of academic publishing and embarked on the path to a years-long career as the editor of Yad Vashem's scholarly journal. I learned that researchers must aspire to objectivity in their analyses of a range of issues, including the Allies, the Holocaust in Hungary, the "Working Group" in Slovakia, the Judenräte, and others. And he taught us all the art of lecturing.

to critique his own earlier convictions was not a trait that he adopted after he cemented his academic status; rather, it guided his path from the outset of his career. For example, at a workshop in honor of the publication of his book on the *Brichah*[6] movement in the mid-1970s, he began by noting three salient deficiencies in the book and added, "Now that I've harshly criticized the *Brichah* book that I wrote, I ask everyone in attendance to join in and contribute their own criticism."[7]

The ambit of topics that Yehuda researched is exceedingly broad; hardly any subject in the study of the Jews' fate under Nazi occupation eluded his attention.[8] Bauer, however, considered himself foremost a "historian of Jews," and said, "I want to know first and foremost what the Jews did—but within a general framework, not uncoupled from its context."[9] Indeed, he made a point of investigating the Holocaust in multiple contexts—the Holocaust and genocide; the Holocaust and modern history; the Holocaust and Jewish history—and, from this point of departure, he wove the Holocaust into the memory of the Jewish people.[10] Drawing on this principled outlook, he—along with his friend and colleague Israel Gutman—established and shaped Holocaust research first in Israel and then worldwide.

In our current reality, where Holocaust research is supported by a variety of research institutions in Israel and abroad, in scientific journals in multiple languages, academic departments and degrees, teacher-training programs, and more, it is difficult to believe that even decades after the end of World War II, the Jews' experiences during the Holocaust—their fate, actions, and inaction—had hardly been researched. It was Bauer and Gutman who wrought the substantive change in this reality. From the 1960s on, in the Moreshet Circle[11] and afterward, in

6 Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue: Brichah* (New York: Random House, 1970).

7 *Yom Iyun Al Sifro Shel Yehuda Bauer, "HaBrichah" (Yemey Iyun Befarshiyot Historiyot Uve'ayot Yesod 11)* (Hebrew) (Ramat Efal: Yad Tabenkin, 1975), p. 6.

8 Antisemitism and Nazi ideology; the Judenräte and Jewish leadership; ghettos, reports and information; resistance and steadfastness; relations of Jews with their neighbors; rescue attempts in occupied Europe and elsewhere; the Kasztner affair; responses abroad; rehabilitation of the survivors and the *Brichah* movement; American Jewry and the Holocaust; Israeli society and the Holocaust; the SS; and many others.

9 "Dyokano Shel Historion," p. 24.

10 Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. xii.

11 See, for example, Adi Portugez, "Hame'afyanim Hahevratim, Hapolitim Vehaleumim Shel Anshe Hashomer Hatza'ir Mehavurat 'Moreshet,' 1963–1973" (Hebrew) (master's thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2003).

the 1970s and 1980s, they transformed the Hebrew University and Yad Vashem into the focal points of innovative research on the Holocaust of European Jewry,[12] formulating insightful and pathbreaking insights that today seem self-evident. For example, the very fact of dealing with the Jewish perspective, with what the Jews did and not only what was done to them, was a trailblazing angle of research. As a derivative of this approach, Bauer shattered the passive image of the Jewish victims, and, in 1975, when appointed to the Holocaust Studies chair at the Institute for Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University, he stated, "In the face of the terror that was the Holocaust… The facile explanations concerning the passive victim, the psychopathic murderer, or entire nations that stood by, collapse."[13] Thus Bauer not only urged researchers to relate to the actions of the Jews—as individuals, societies, and organizations—but also expressed his thorough disgust with the simplistic typology of victims-murderers-bystanders that was accepted at the time.

Another novel principle that Gutman and Bauer introduced was the use of testimonies as an essential methodological tool. In a research world that had relied for years on Raul Hilberg's book,[14] based on German documentation and devoid of recourse to testimonies, this was an immense shift. This methodological turning point induced scholars not only to humanize the victims, understand the complexity of their experiences, and empathize with them, but also to embrace the principle of viewing people's behavior during the Holocaust—Jews and non-Jews alike—at eye level, as one examines normal people thrust into abnormal circumstances. An example of the discussion of imperfect people who acted in extreme situations is Bauer's assessment of Israel Kasztner as neither a traitor nor a hero but, at the most, a tragic hero, a low-ranking leader who made a desperate attempt to exploit the imminent collapse of

12 See, for example, Dalia Ofer, "50 Shanim Shel Siah Yisraeli Al HaShoah: Me'afyanim Vedilemot," (Hebrew), in Dan Michman, ed., *HaShoah Bahistoria HaYehudit: Historiographia, Toda'a Ufarshanut* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), pp. 293–328; Dan Michman, "Holocaust Historiography between 1990 to 2021 in Context(s): New Insights, Perceptions, Understandings, and Avenues—An Overview and Analysis," *Search & Research,* 34 (2022); Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

13 Yehuda Bauer, "Trends in Holocaust Research," *Yad Vashem Studies*, 12 (1977), p. 34. The article is based on a lecture he gave in December 1975, on the occasion of his appointment to the chair.

14 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961; revised version: New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Nazi Germany in order to save as many Jews as he could. According to Bauer, Kasztner, like other Jewish leaders, deluded himself into believing that he had the ability to negotiate with the Nazis; in this respect he resembled other Jewish leaders across Europe, but was also different from them.[15] Adamantly ascribing humanness to the criminals too, Bauer helped debunk the image of the murderers as monsters. They were people who did monstrous things; therefore, they are much more frightening because they are much closer to us all. A third understanding that has gained acceptance among Holocaust scholars is the rejection of any hierarchy of suffering.[16] In a lecture he gave at the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Bauer said: "No genocide is better than any other, no murder of women and children is lighter than any other, no tortures are harsher than other tortures, and no extreme sadism is different from any other extreme sadism."[17] As he saw it, the unique characteristics of the Holocaust do not make other genocides any less tragic, and this approach has been accepted both historically and as a basic value.

In addition to his role as the main Israeli architect of Holocaust studies, Bauer is credited with the international tipping point on the topic of the Holocaust, which turned the Jews' disaster into a research and educational subject of global importance. Admittedly this global interest was the outcome of more than Yehuda's endeavors and the research void that had existed with regard to the Holocaust. It occurred at a time of worldwide trends that included the general efflorescence of Jewish studies, the growing power of social history, the development of history-of-daily-life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) studies, and the emergence, by the 1970s, of new generations that posed new questions and new needs—coinciding with the fall of the Iron Curtain and the opening of archives in Eastern Europe.

Yehuda was graced with intellectual honesty, a phenomenal memory, and impressive industriousness; in addition, he was a gifted storyteller. He had a captivating ability to tell a specific human story and use it to illuminate broad human insights without succumbing to what he called

15 Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi–Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 141–260.

16 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* p. 50.

17 Yehuda Bauer, "HaShoah Veretzah Am'" (Hebrew) (lecture at the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, September 2, 2012), https://www.academy.ac.il/SystemFiles/21527.pdf (accessed March 23, 2025).

"the menace of false universalization" (i.e., the blurring of concrete aspects).[18] By emphasizing the shared human aspects of Jews as human beings and affirming the relevance of the Holocaust to European societies, Yehuda became something of an echo chamber for Holocaust research worldwide. For ample reason he was awarded with a slew of decorations and accolades in Israel and abroad, including: the Israel Prize; the EMET Prize; the Grand Decoration of Honour in Gold for Services to the Republic of Austria; and the Illis quorum, a gold medal bestowed for an exceptional contribution to Swedish culture, science, or society—to name but a few. He was perceived—rightly—as a genuine authority on Holocaust research as well as on issues of memory and education and was a partner in conversation with kings, prime ministers, and presidents. When facing these grandees, however, Bauer maintained an academic tone of voice, a human gaze, and a total commitment to historical accuracy and the object of the investigation: the survivor, the person, the society—whose story he told. For example, he took every opportunity to appear before the leaders of the Western world and relay important lessons, like his appearance before the Bundestag in 1998. On that occasion he added three commandments to the Ten: "Never become perpetrators;…never, ever allow yourselves to become victims; and…never, *never* [emphasis in the original] be passive onlookers to mass murder, genocide, or…a Holocaust-like tragedy."[19]

Bauer was also known for taking clear stands on a variety of historical issues. As he disseminated Holocaust studies in Israel and abroad, he confronted outlooks and scholars with whom he disagreed. (About one of them he said: "He dismisses my views respectfully, and I'll try to behave similarly."[20]) Yehuda vehemently opposed any attempt

18 The menace of false universalization in Holocaust research concerns an attempt to blur the uniquenesses of the Holocaust. This approach, sometimes tracing to sincere and moral motives of comparative analysis, impairs our understanding of the event for what it was: unprecedented, total, and ideological in the extreme. Accordingly, it flattens the unique human story of the victims of the Holocaust and the depth of the evil that underlay the Nazi extermination mechanism, and endangers our ability to learn from the Holocaust. A "general universal lesson" may blunt deep understanding of the concrete social, political, and ideological forces that made the Holocaust possible.

19 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* p. 273.

20 Yehuda Bauer, "Kal Yoter Levatel Et HaYehudiyut Shel HaShoah" (Hebrew), *Haaretz,* November 14, 2022, https://www.haaretz.co.il/opinions/2022-11-14/ty-article-opinion/.premium/00000184-7672-d74d-a7e5-7f72f77e0000 (accessed March 23, 2025).

to mystify the Holocaust: "To say that the Holocaust is inexplicable, in the last resort, is to justify it," he wrote.[21] He also attacked simplistic utterances about complex historical reality.[22]

Within this framework he thought it important to share his research with the public and acted to dislodge popular misapprehensions. As a case in point, he challenged the notion that the State of Israel had come into being due to the Holocaust. It is the other way around, he said: The Holocaust did not strengthen Zionism but impaired it by destroying the population on which the Zionist movement was based. What is more, contrary to the conventional wisdom, "the world" did not suffer pangs of conscience over the murder of the Jews pursuant to the Holocaust.[23]

Similarly, he boldly fought against myths such as the perception of the victims as angels and the murderers as human animals. Bauer claimed, "Using terms such as *beastly* and *bestiality* [emphasis is the original] to describe the Nazis is an insult to the animal kingdom… because animals do not do things like that. The behavior of the Nazis was not 'inhuman.' It was only too human."[24] Above all Bauer inveighed against Holocaust distortion and the use of the Holocaust as a political tool (creating a "usable past") in various countries (for example, Poland, Hungary, Lithuania, and others)—and no less in Israel and within Israeli society. In the last years of his life, he thought it more dangerous to distort the Holocaust than to deny it. In his many lectures and speeches before the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) and other forums, Bauer decried attempts by several leaders and societies to deny their peoples' involvement in the Holocaust by arguing that they had been victims, and that a victim cannot be a murderer or a murderer's accomplice, and the like.

21 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* p. 38; See also, Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), see in particular the chapter: "Against Mystification: The Holocaust as a Historical Phenomenon," pp. 30–49.

22 Yehuda Bauer, "Creating a 'Usable' Past: On Holocaust Denial and Distortion," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs,* 14:2 (2020), pp. 209–227; Yehuda Bauer, "Genocide Prevention in Historical Perspective, *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust,* 25 (2011), p. 305; Yehuda Bauer, "Genocide and Genocide Prevention," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 16:3 (2022), p. 189.

23 See, for example, Yehuda Bauer, "The Impact of the Holocaust on the Establishment of the State of Israel," in Israel Gutman, ed., *Major Changes within the Jewish People in the Wake of the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996), pp. 545–552.

24 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* p. 20–21; See also Yehuda Bauer, "Is the Holocaust Explicable?," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 5:2 (1990), p. 148.

The complexity of the reality in question, however, was most strongly expressed in his studies, in which he flatly rejected simplistic explanations and demanded—of his students, his colleagues, and above all of himself—complex answers. His intellectual depth emerges, for example, in his extensive occupation with American Jewry in the context of the Holocaust. This topic, originating in a comprehensive review of the successes and limitations of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's (JDC) efforts from the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, to the eruption of World War II, and published in his book *My Brother's Keeper*, expanded into a comprehensive discussion of actions, attempts, successes, and failures of American Jewry during and after World War II, which he published in two books: *American Jewry and the Holocaust* and *Out of the Ashes*.[25]

In his many studies over the years, Bauer painstakingly examined the JDC's activities, its relief and rescue efforts, the diplomatic and political challenges that American Jewry faced, and the impact of all of these on shaping American Jewish identity. Basing himself on a thoroughgoing analysis, he claimed that American Jewry, while not resting on its laurels during the Holocaust, lacked real power to make any perceptible impact on American policy.[26]

It was unrealistic, Bauer argued, to expect the United States to rescue European Jewry. Why did the Allies not try to do more to save the Jews? Why did they not bomb Auschwitz? While holding that the Roosevelt administration could have done more, he asserts that the United States had no real ability to save the Jews even had it wanted to do so, and that American Jewry could not have forced it to act even if they had tried. Among other things, Bauer always insisted on relating any question about the Allies' responses to the Holocaust to the state of the war. For example, by the time the Allies condemned the murder

25 Yehuda Bauer, *My Brother's Keeper: A History of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee 1929–1939* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973); Yehuda Bauer, *American Jewry and the Holocaust: The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939–1945* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982); Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989).

26 For Bauer's reference to actions of the Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine, see "He'arot Al Hamerhak Sheben Meda Veyedi'a, Shetika Vehashtaka, Yedi'a Ufe'ula" (Hebrew), in Hanna Herzog and Kinneret Lahad, eds., *Yod'im Veshotkim: Mangenone Hashtaka Vehakhhasha Bahevra HaYisraelit* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2006), pp. 39–43.

of the Jews in a joint statement on December 17, 1942,[27] more than four million Jews had been murdered, but no Allied forces were close enough to any murder site in order to intervene. The Allies, headed by the Americans, could not have saved the Jews at that time, did not wish to save them, and did not try, Bauer concludes. Nevertheless, he claimed that the Allies should have strived to bomb the gas chambers. Although they could not have saved Jews (the Germans would have been no less murderous without the gas chambers), by so doing they would have sent a sharp and clear moral message: the murder of the Jews is seen in some quarters as an indescribable crime. Even when Bauer revisited the topic in recent years, he did not revise his main conclusion: The Allies might have been able to save thousands but could not have saved European Jewry. Still, they should have tried. The failure was chiefly moral.[28]

No less complex was Bauer's answer to the question of the relationship of the Holocaust to other genocides. First, it should be stated that he saw no contradiction between discussing the specificity of the Jewish Holocaust and the universal moral warning it issues to humankind at large.[29] To his way of thinking, the Holocaust was not unique, but rather unprecedented, and, as such, it should be examined in the context of other genocides. He considered the Holocaust the most extreme genocide perpetrated thus far,[30] and, even if it was unprecedented, it could occur again, and there was no knowing who might be the future victims or the future perpetrators. He regarded the Holocaust as unprecedented not because the victims were Jewish but because of its radicality, which he characterized in several dimensions:

27 "11 Allies Condemn Nazi War On Jews; United Nations Issue Joint Declaration of Protest on 'Cold-Blooded Extermination,'" *The New York Times*, December 18, 1942, https://www.nytimes.com/1942/12/18/archives/11-allies-condemn-nazi-war-on-jews-united-nations-issue-joint.html (accessed March 23, 2025); see also the declaration and debate in the British House of Commons, "United Nations Declaration," UK Parliament, https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1942/dec/17/united-nations-declaration (accessed January 27, 2025).

28 Yehuda Bauer, *Could the US Government Have Rescued European Jewry?* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2017); Yehuda Bauer, "How to Misinterpret History: On 'The Holocaust, America, and American Jewry,' Revisited," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs,* 6:3 (2012), pp. 137–150.

29 "Dyokano Shel Historion," p. 27.

30 Yehuda Bauer, "On the Place of the Holocaust in History: In Honour of Franklin H. Littell," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 2:2 (1988), pp. 209–220.

- **Totality and globality:** Bauer explained the goal of the total extermination of all Jews, everywhere, irrespective of their actions, religious beliefs, or locations, unable to secede from or avoid being part of the threatened group (for example, by converting or by emigrating),[31] as a unique characteristic.
- Bauer also dwelled on the murderous patterns of the **Nazi ideology,** which he characterized as **non-pragmatic and irrational antisemitism.** The Nazi worldview was not powered by a quest for financial or political gains but perceived the Jews as an existential threat—as an anti-race, an incorrigibly invidious element at loose in the world, and the bearers of universal values and ideas that—both the ideas and the Jews themselves—must be annihilated.
- Furthermore, for Bauer, the advancement of these ideas (including pseudo-scientific theories that led to dehumanization) **by a mobilized modern and bureaucratic state** led to industrialized murder (in gas chambers and crematoria)[32] that also diverges from methods of murder in other genocides.

While noting the singular characteristics of the unprecedented Holocaust, Bauer was mindful of the limitations of his definitions and did not obscure them with components shared with other genocides. For example, he made sure to note that, while more than two million Jews were murdered in shooting pits (a wholly non-industrial method), the genocide in Rwanda involved the murder of almost a million people within some 100 days (mainly Tutsi, a minority Hutu) with machetes, making it a massive genocide carried out in primitive ways. In fact Bauer saw the genocide in Rwanda as an example of how the Holocaust, itself an unprecedented event for its time, became a murderous precedent. Indeed, over the years Bauer was a prominent voice among Holocaust scholars who promoted comparative genocide studies and viewed the Holocaust as a gateway to understanding other cases of genocide. This approach is reflected in his work as the founding editor of the important journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* in 1985, which, by virtue of its

31 Yehuda Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 75.

32 Yehuda Bauer, "HaShoah Veretzah Am'" (Hebrew) (lecture at the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Jerusalem, September 2, 2012), https://www.academy.ac.il/SystemFiles/21527.pdf (accessed March 23, 2025).

title, tackled these very topics,[33] and in his publications, which subject the Nazis' policies toward the Jews, the Roma, and the Slavs to detailed and in-depth comparative analysis.[34]

Additional examples of Bauer's complex analyses are his outlooks on the Holocaust and antisemitism. First, he promoted the use of the term as one word rather than the hyphenated version (anti-Semitism). After all, he explained, "Antisemites do not hate Semites; they hate Jews."[35] His stance on antisemitism, however, was predicated on the view that antisemitism figured prominently in Nazi ideology and in mobilizing the peoples of Europe to help persecute the Jews—or at least to tolerate their persecution. Furthermore, he said, antisemitism was and remains a problem of non-Jewish society;[36] hatred of Jews imperiled not only the Jews themselves but also exacted a steep price in blood from all of humankind. Bauer's occupation with antisemitism was also broad and transcended discussion of the Holocaust itself: alongside discussing traditional Jew-hatred, modern antisemitism, and its Nazi manifestation, he dealt with popular antisemitism, progressive antisemitism (which years ago he already called "new antisemitism"), and the antisemitism of radical Islam.[37]

As in other cases, Yehuda's perceptions of antisemitism as a threat to both the Jewish and the non-Jewish worlds rested on analysis of archival sources, including Hitler's August 1936 memorandum to Göring,[38] in which he explained that Nazi Germany had to launch a war against Judaism in order to thwart "the extermination [*Ausrottung*] of the German people." The transformation of antisemitism into an official state ideology,

33 For Bauer's role in the journal *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* and in the editorial of its inaugural edition, see Yehuda Bauer, "Editor's Introduction," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* 1:1 (1986), pp. 1–2.

34 Yehuda Bauer, "Jews, Gypsies and Slavs: Policies of the Third Reich," *UNESCO Yearbook on Peace and Conflict Studies 1985*, 6 (1987), pp. 73–100.

35 Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, p. 8, starred footnote.

36 Yehuda Bauer, "Be'ayot Beheker Haantishemiyut" (Hebrew), *Michael: Ma'asaf Letoldot HaYehudim Batefutzot*, 13 (1993), p. 50.

37 Yehuda Bauer, *Antisemitism Today: Myth and Reality* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, 1985).

38 "Aufzeichnung ohne Unterschrift" (August 1936), in *Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, 1918–1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1977), Series C, *1933–1936, Das Dritte Reich: Die Ersten Jahre, Volume V2, 26. Mai bis 31. Oktober 1936*, Document no. 490, pp. 793–801; Yehuda Bauer, "Mi Haya Ahra'i Umatai? Hazara El Bedikat Hashe'ela Shel Hapitron Hasofi Lenohah Kama Te'udot Yedu'ot Heytev" (Hebrew), *Yalkut Moreshet,* 51 (1992), pp. 9–23.

Bauer wrote, precipitated a ghastly world war that cost twenty-nine million non-Jews their lives.[39] "Is this not a rather convincing reason to oppose antisemitism in all its forms?"[40] he asked from diverse platforms.

It is not enough, Yehuda believed, to analyze the past; one should also understand its moral implications for posterity. He explained, "*The horror of the Holocaust is not that it deviated from human norms; the horror is that it didn't* [emphasis in the original]."[41] Derived from this was his outlook on the moral responsibility of academics, including Holocaust scholars, to influence their surroundings.[42] Graced with impressive abilities to persuade and mobilize, he established organizations in every field in which he dealt. In 1982, aided by a donation from Vidal Sassoon, he founded the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, an academic research center at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem that has published multiple studies on the history of antisemitism and aspects of the phenomenon. In 1998, in conjunction with the Prime Minister of Sweden Göran Persson, he established the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF).[43] Its first member states were Sweden, the United States, the UK, Germany, and Israel, and Bauer was its academic advisor. Its purpose was to induce countries around the world to invest resources in Holocaust education, commemoration, and education. Many countries applied to join the ITF over the years, and today there are thirty-five member states. The organization is now known by its new name, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA, nicknamed "Ira") since 2013, has indeed been influential. Its two most conspicuous achievements—among many accomplishments in which Yehuda played an important role—are the acceptance of definitions of Holocaust distortion and denial and of antisemitism. Another international organization initiated by Bauer with partners from around the world, of which he was particularly proud, is the Genocide Prevention Advisory Network (GPANet), an informal group

39 Bauer, "Be'ayot Beheker Haantishemiyut," p. 51.

40 Yehuda Bauer, *Haam Hamehutsaf Ba'kefar Haglobali* (Hebrew) (Binyamina: Nahar Books, 2019), p. 203.

41 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, p. 42.

42 Bauer, *The Jews: A Contrary People*, p. 259.

43 For more information on the establishment of the organization, see Richelle Budd Caplan's article in this volume, "Yehuda Bauer's Contribution to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)."

of scholars that tries to develop tools for the prevention of genocide and to advise governments around the globe on the topic. "We need political tools, international tools, to at least limit and then perhaps, in a more distant future, eliminate the threat of massive mutual slaughter," Yehuda sincerely believed.[44]

By using his international stature to promote Holocaust studies, Bauer became a genuine initiator of remembrance and commemoration. His public endeavors flowed directly from his academic work; that is, his research spurred his public action, rather than public action leading to research. He was a true public intellectual, in the full sense of the word. However, it was not his outspokenness that lent him his status; his international stature enabled him to speak out forcefully. He predicated the organizations that he established on decades of deep academic probing of the Holocaust, antisemitism, and genocide. His public activity did not dictate his research agenda; it remained subordinate to his studies on the topic. This is an incomparably important principle.

In his research, his teachings, the organizations he established and actively led or was a senior partner in, and in his extensive public work, Yehuda sought to contribute his part to creating a better world—a world in which the instances of mass crimes and genocide would be reduced. In his writing and teaching, Yehuda also emphasized why we study the Holocaust—in order to collectively learn and understand enough to prevent a recurrence. He also taught to strive to maintain the delicate balance between sufficient academic distance in order to undertake the research and writing and sufficient human involvement so as not to dehumanize the victims into abstract objects of research.

> You must learn so that a flicker of a chance may exist that we may avoid a repetition. Who can tell who the Jews will be next time? We must be aware of the danger of the morass of footnoting. We must approach the Holocaust from both ends. The Jewish people were caught in a cage; they had no way out. The hopelessness of their situation, the problems they faced, their behavior in the face of death, all these cannot be relegated to our historical research alone. You cannot approach an understanding of the Holocaust without the soul-searing writings of those who were there and of those who learned from them. So we have to do both. I would

44 Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* p. xiii.

> argue in favor of an alliance of the Chronicler with Job, as a way of approaching the problems of the Holocaust?[45]

Yehuda's death marks the end of an era.

It is true that Yehuda bequeathed to us a solid and flourishing discipline in Israel and abroad, yet we are also facing difficult challenges. First, Holocaust research in the future will take place in a world with no survivors, a circumstance with profound and immensely meaningful implications. Second, the world of knowledge—both academic and popular—is changing before our eyes. The democratization of information (in the form of Wikipedia, for example) and the rapid development of AI are creating a reality in which knowledge is more available than ever before but much of it is erroneous; even Holocaust studies are not exempt from this problem. Third, Holocaust studies—as a research discipline—face growing delegitimization: It is held in some quarters that dealing with the Holocaust blurs and impairs the discussion of other genocides and therefore should be minimized.[46] Others contend that the Holocaust can and should be studied only within a certain framework—one that considers colonialism and imperialism, ethnic struggles, Global North and Global South, and so on, and that dealing with the Jews' fate within other boxes (for example, as a chapter of modern Jewish history) is a worthless Judeocentric endeavor doomed to wither.[47]

Yehuda assailed these views vehemently and believed that the wish to narrow the discussion of the Holocaust is often meant to lighten the burden of remembering the crimes against the Jews.[48] Concurrently he insisted that any attempt to dictate a unitary academic discourse on the Holocaust—all the more so when made by governments—is fundamentally illegitimate and must be vehemently opposed. Whereas political discourse has always been an inseparable part of discussion

45 Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, p. 49.

46 See, A. Dirk Moses, *The Problems of Genocide: Permanent Security and the Language of Transgression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

47 See, for example, Yehuda Bauer, Donald Bloxham, Jeffrey Herf, Yair Auron, Annegret Ehmann, and Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "Research Forum: Holocaust and Genocide," *Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust,* 25 (2011), p. 301; Amos Goldberg, "Holocaust Studies after October 7 and the Gaza War: Initial Thoughts," (paper presented at the International Conference Decentering Holocaust History?: Holocaust Studies and its Future since the 1990s, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, September 16, 2024).

48 Bauer, "Kal Yoter Levatel Et HaYehudiyut Shel HaShoah."

of the Holocaust, we are duty-bound to ensure that political or social motives do not shape the outcomes of our research.

Bauer also advocated approaching the subject of the Holocaust with awe and humility. He often related a conversation with Abba Kovner in the 1960s, in which he explained his hesitation to engage in studying the Holocaust as based on his being "scared." Perhaps one of his most poignant observations on what the world has learned from that terrible event was his ongoing comment: "I am still scared."

Yehuda set an unsurpassed professional and human standard for us and prodded us to abandon myths, ask piercing questions, and offer complex explanations for horrifying human events.

Yehuda Bauer was a historian of the Jewish people, a man who bundled intellectual depth with human integrity and tethered research to moral activism. He was a man of pleasant ways who dealt with one of the most benighted periods in human history, a supremely gifted speaker who knew how to conquer world leaders and students alike with his words. He was a revered teacher who taught us to research with integrity and depth, to behave modestly and kindly, and to brook no compromise in the quest for truth. His academic legacy lives on not only in classrooms, books, and the impressive body of knowledge that he created, but also in the hearts of generations of students and colleagues.

Yehuda Bauer was a friend, a teacher, a guide—and we miss him dearly.

Parts of this memorial article were translated from the Hebrew by Naftali Greenwood