

The Holocaust is Still With Us



On August 21, 2015 the Israeli born actress Natalie Portman, who won an Oscar in 2011 for her role as an obsessed ballerina in the film *Black Swan*, made a controversial debut on the political stage. She commented that the Holocaust has been the focus of too much attention from some in the Jewish community, and that it should not be used as a paranoid way of thinking that we (Jews) are victims.

Ms. Portman is recognized as an impressive actress but her political views and the timing of her political statement would not receive an Oscar. Portman may not be obsessed by the question of the Holocaust, but other contrary views appeared virtually simultaneously. The Holocaust issue was ignited about the same time of her statement by non-Jews in two ways: one by the notorious British Holocaust denier David Irving; the other by the publication of extraordinary heartrending photographs of the humiliation and murder of Jews in Ukraine during World War II.

With brazen immodesty David Irving sells himself as the world's most respected historian, and the world's top expert on World War II. Most of the world thinks otherwise. He lost a court case when in 1996 he sued Professor Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin Books for defamation concerning his denial of the existence of Nazi gas chambers, and in another case was sentenced to three years imprisonment by an Austrian court in 2006 for denying the Holocaust.

In London in late July 2015, Irving addressed a secret meeting of 120 fascist sympathizers and neo-Nazis, some of whom wore black T-shirts with the logo of European fascist groups, and

others were dressed in camouflage with chains. Other speakers at this gathering of the most well known international holocaust deniers included an individual who describes himself as the "best friend" of Rudolf Hess, and the American Mark Weber, director of the Institute for Historical Review and publisher of a journal that promotes holocaust denial.

More startling than the disgraceful ignorance and bigotry of these Holocaust deniers is the publication in August 2015 in the London *Daily Mail* of evidence of the still not fully revealed enormity of the Holocaust in Ukraine. This evidence is mainly due to the work of a French Catholic priest Father Patrick Desbois, consultant to the Vatican and co-founder in 2004 of Yahad-in-Unum, whose objectives are to confront antisemitism and to further relations between Catholics and Jews.

Desbois a forensic anthropologist, published *Holocaust by Bullets*, on the Nazi mobile units that killed the Jewish population of small villages. Over the last decade he has been concerned with identifying and locating mass graves of Jews killed during the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. In careful research in Russia, Germany, and Washington D.C., and by inspections of villages across the Ukraine and Eastern Europe and interviews with residents, Father Desbois and his team of Yahad-in-Unum have uncovered 2,000 mass killing sites in the continent of extermination.

Unlike Natalie Portman and like-minded persons, Desbois wants to make the world more, not less, aware of the assassinations of Jews. He asserts that some of the facts of the genocide have not been declared. He estimates that more than 1.5 million, more than the usually quoted figure, of victims were buried in the graves he found in Ukraine. He is anxious to locate all the sites, there may be more than 6,000 other sites to be uncovered, before all the witnesses, who only recently were ending their vow of silence about the atrocities, have died. Thus history will not die with the witnesses. Desbois is

aware that otherwise the Holocaust deniers will overreact, as they have always done, and proclaim that Jews have falsified the story.

The sickening photographs and script made public in August 2015 reveal in horrifying detail the humiliation, public beatings in the street, whippings, and individual murder of perhaps as many as 1.6 million Jews who were summarily shot and buried in graves nearby. Often, Jews were forced to dig pits and to strip naked before being killed, or were buried alive. Jews were killed for fun, or because of boredom, anger, drunkenness, or to rape the girls. The perpetrators ransacked the clothes of the victims for cash and valuables.

Another interesting point emerges from this history. In the town of Rava Ruska the Germans killed 25,000 Soviet prisoners. There is now a memorial for those prisoners. But an even larger number of Jews were murdered there or in the area, and there are no memorials for the mass graves of the Jews.

The Nazis of course were responsible for the Holocaust, but the Ukrainian local Auxiliary Police forces, trained by the Nazis, played an active role. In Lyov, where more than 4,000 Jews were killed, a Ukrainian mob took part in the stripping and humiliation of Jewish women in the streets. It is horrifying to see the smiling faces of Ukrainian bystanders who watched Jewish men and women being humiliated. It is a reminder that about a quarter of all Jews killed in the genocide were Ukrainian Jews.

One remembers that Ukrainians suffered in the years of 1932-33 with the Holodomor, the intentional famine policy of Stalin, which they address as a genocide equal to that of the Nazi genocide. Nevertheless, it is disconcerting that Ukrainians spokespeople excuse their past and stress this while ignoring the antisemitism and the role Ukrainians played in the mass murder in their country.

Ukraine has yet come to terms with the past, as Germany and Poland have tried to do. Jews are still being assaulted in Kiev, Jewish synagogues, monuments and cemeteries are still being desecrated. Antisemitic pamphlets are being distributed. Ukrainian nationalists still express antisemitic sentiments. Oleh Tyahnybok, the leader of the political party Svoboda, called on the president of the country to end the "criminal activities of organized Jewry," as well as asserting that Ukraine was controlled by a "Moscow-Jewish Mafia."

Above all, there have been little or no official or unofficial apologies for the brutal actions of Ukrainians during the war, apologies that have come from other countries, especially France and Germany. At this moment when Ukraine seeks sympathy and American aid in its struggle with Russia, and when the U.S. considers its policy towards the area, it might do well to apologize for its misdeeds in the past and attempt to close the dark pages of its history.