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“A Hellish Nightmare’: The Swedish Press and the Construction of Early Holocaust Narratives, 1945 to 1950”

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Abstract

This article examines how the Swedish Press responded to and framed the Holocaust immediately after the war. The liberation of the camps, the role and guilt of ordinary Germans, the Nuremberg trials in 1945 and 1946, and the ongoing problem of Jewish DPs in Europe were the most important issues through which the Swedish press constructed the early post-war view of the Holocaust. Moreover, the fate of the Jews under Nazi Germany formed an important element of such reporting, as will be shown in this article. I argue that contrary to the dominant Anglo-American historiography, which holds that the first post-war decades were marked by silence surrounding the German genocide, the Swedish press wrote about the Holocaust often and in a more nuanced way than the dominant scholarly wisdom would have it. The reporting grappled with issues which today form the core of Holocaust studies: the victims’ identities and their experiences, including gender; the acts and motivations of perpetrators; and the Europe-wide geographical scope of the genocide.

Introduction

Allan Bell has written that ‘[j]ournalists do not write articles. They write stories. A story has structure, direction, point, viewpoint...Much of humanity’s most important experience has been embodied in stories.’¹ The aim of this article is to examine how the story of the Holocaust started to emerge on the pages of the Swedish press following the liberation of the concentration camps in spring 1945. Investigation into the Swedish press is important, especially given the dominant historical wisdom that the world’s press – especially the Anglo-American press – failed to respond to the Holocaust, and when it did, the ‘uniqueness of Jewish suffering’ did not stand out. Adhering to the well-established argument, Laurel Leff, writing on the *New York Times*’ response, has dryly noted that ‘the unique tragedy of the Jews did not emerge from the ashes of the liberated camps.’² While the Anglo-American press might have failed to report the Holocaust, for reasons which Tony Kushner has called ‘liberal imagination’, it does not mean that such failure was a universal trait. As Josef Gorny has remarked in relation to the Jewish press in Britain, the USA, the USSR

¹ Allan Bell, ‘News Stories as Narratives’, in Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland (eds.), *The Discourse Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 236.

² Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times: The Holocaust and America’s Most Important Newspaper* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 296. For earlier American and British studies with similar views, see Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: Free Press, 1986); Robert, Moses Shapiro, (ed.), *Why Didn’t the Press Shout? American and International Journalism During the Holocaust* (Jersey City, NJ: Yeshiva University Press, 2003); Julian Scott, *The British Press and the Holocaust 1942-1943*, unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Leicester, 1994; Tony Kushner, ‘Different Worlds: British Perceptions of the Final Solution during the Second World War’, in David Cesarani (ed.), *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994).

and Palestine, the Holocaust ‘was reported uninterruptedly and usually on the front pages.’³ In the same fashion, the Swedish press also responded to the Holocaust in its immediate aftermath with considerable interest and benevolence, as will be argued below.

The precedents of reporting on Jewish suffering in the post-war era Swedish press were set during the war. While the Swedish press was placed under censorship during the war, the policy did not shape the reporting on the war news or the Holocaust significantly. The current scholarly consensus largely agrees that during the war, the press reported the fate of Jews steadily and in an uncensored manner.⁴ If not before, then at least by November to December 1942, when the ‘*Judenaktion*’ began in Sweden’s neighboring Norway, public opinion was aroused.⁵ Yet, the discourse on Jews and their extermination in Nazi Germany was multi-layered and complex, and not always supportive of the idea that Jewish survivors should stay in Sweden, lest it stir local antisemitism.⁶ However, I will argue that contrary to the dominant Anglo-American historiography, which holds that the first post-war decades were marked by silence surrounding the German genocide, the Swedish press wrote about the Holocaust often and in a more nuanced way than the dominant scholarly wisdom would have it.⁷ The reporting grappled with issues which today form the core of Holocaust studies: the victims’ identities and their experiences, including gender; the acts and motivations of perpetrators; and the Europe-wide geographical scope of the genocide. On the whole, the Swedish way of grappling with the Holocaust was more inclusive than in neighboring Finland or in Britain and the United States. Perhaps nowhere was this more evident than in the case of Auschwitz, which received far more attention in the Swedish press than in other liberal press of the day. Similarly, the Swedish press paid more attention to Jews in general, and while portraying the victims in terms of their nationalities was the typical feature, it was nevertheless also a common feature to discuss the Jews as Jews. I will examine the following four themes in the chapter: Swedish reporting and the ways victim identities were discussed; the role and knowledge of the crimes by ordinary Germans and prevailing conditions inside Hitler’s

³ Yosef Gorny, *The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 269. On Tony Kushner’s ‘liberal imagination’, see Antero Holmila, *Reporting the Holocaust in the British, Swedish and Finnish Press, 1945-50* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), 21-2.

⁴ For example, see: Pontus Rudberg, *The Swedish Jews and the Holocaust* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017); Rundblom, ‘Sweden and the Holocaust’, pp.213-221, esp. pp. 217-18; Svanberg and Tydén, *Sverige och förintelsen*; Paul Levine, *From Indifference to Activism*, pp. 120-33; Malin Thor Tureby, ‘Svenska änglar och hyenor möter tacksamma flyktingar. Mottagningen av befriade koncentrationslägerfångar I skånsk press under året 1945’, *Historisk tidskrift* 135:2 (2015)

⁵ Svanberg and Tyden, 249.

⁶ Thor Tureby, ‘Svenska änglar och hyenor möter tacksamma flyktingar’.

⁷ The popular contemporary terminology used in the Swedish press to describe the Holocaust included especially the terms ‘utrotning’ (extermination) and ‘förföljelser’ (persecution).

Germany; depictions of the Holocaust during the Nuremberg trials in the Swedish press; and how the Swedish press reported about Jewish DPs and their desire to emigrate to Palestine. These themes were selected because they were the most significant themes through which the Swedes discussed the Nazi genocide. In addition, these themes are important for they all nuance – if not challenge – the more dominant Anglo-American perspectives which have argued that victims’ identities were obfuscated, the Holocaust did not feature at Nuremberg, and immediately after the war the Holocaust disappeared from the public view. All the cases illustrated above tells a more complex story.

From Concentration Camps to Sweden: Jewish Survivors in Swedish Press Narratives

As Steven Koblik remarked in the first work written about Sweden and the Holocaust, news of the arrival of the rescued victims was nearly totally blacked out in the Swedish media until late April.⁸ Indeed, it is fair to say that Swedes came into contact with the liberation of the camps, including the first post-liberation portrayals, in a roundabout way. Initially, the news reports concerning the liberation of the Western camps — Buchenwald (11 April) by the Americans and Bergen-Belsen (15 April) by the British and Canadians — grappled with strong British reactions to the liberation news, rather than the news itself.⁹ The depictions of events led to debate between the conservative *Stockholms-Tidningen* and the liberal, newly-established *Expressen* when the former paper’s correspondent, Christer Jäderlund, in the face of British anger, defended ordinary Germans by saying they had not known about the atrocities. *Expressen* challenged Jäderlund’s ‘truth’ by noting that the majority of Jäderlund’s ‘good Germans’ had never protested Hitler’s actions, how antisemitism was widespread amongst Germans, and how ordinary Germans were also members of the Nazi party.¹⁰

Apart from relying on second-hand accounts, the other major reason behind the reserved attitude in the Swedish press was not because of an inability to grasp what was happening, discomfort in the face of gruesome facts, or willingness to downplay the catastrophe. Instead, the press silence was attributable to the Swedish rescue mission – the controversial ‘White Buses’ operation – which was underway in Germany at the same time. Since early 1945, in collaboration with the Swedish

⁸ Koblik, *The Stones Cry Out*, pp.134-5.

⁹ For example, *Svenska Dagbladet* [hereafter *SvD*], 15, 18 and 19 April 1945; *Dagens Nyheter* [hereafter *DN*], 19, 20 and 21, April 1945.

¹⁰ *Expressen*, 23 April 1945.

Red Cross and the World Jewish Congress (WJC), the Swedish government had been in touch with *Reichsführer* Himmler with the aim to free Scandinavian prisoners from German concentration camps. The success of these negotiations, as well as the whole mission, depended largely on the silence of the Swedish press.¹¹

When the Swedish journalists toured the liberated camps, their restrained attitude changed. A case in point, in fact the starting point of framing the liberation news which soon formed as a narrative, could be labelled as ‘Nordic brotherhood’, a concept first used by Paul Levine when he argued that in distinction to Jews in general Norwegian Jews were different. They belonged to a *broderfolk* (a fellow people); they were (or at least most of them were) fellow Scandinavians.¹² The idea of Nordic Brotherhood can be seen in *Dagens Nyheter’s* correspondent Daniel Wiklund’s first eye-witness account from Buchenwald, importantly published on the paper’s frontpage on 25 April 1945:

5 Norwegians – probably the only survivors of the approximately 1,000 deported Norwegian Jews – found their way here [Buchenwald] in January from the now disbanded “death camp” in Oswiecim...Nothing that British and American correspondents have written [over the last week] has been exaggerated...The 5 Norwegians here are students Samuel Steinmann from Oslo, and Assar Hirsch from Trondheim, clerks Asriel Hirsch and Julius Paltiel, both from Trondheim, and doctor Leo Eitinger from Molde.¹³

On examining the article, certain key issues emerge: the rate of survival was thought to be about five out of a thousand, Jews were clearly targeted for destruction, and the ‘death camp’ at Oswiecim was mentioned. Above all, the Jewish survivors’ humanity was restored as all of the five Norwegian Jews were named, as were their places of residence. Additionally, the reporting was not limited to

¹¹ For the polemics of the Swedish rescue mission to Germany, the literature is abundant – and contentious. See, for example, Ingrid Lomfors, *Blind fläck. Minne och glömska kring Svenska röda korsets hjälpinsats i Nazityskland 1945* (Stockholm: Atlantis, 2005); Koblik, *The Stones Cry Out*, Chapter 4; Sune Persson, ‘Folke Bernadotte and the White Buses’, David Cesarani and Paul Levine (eds.), *Bystanders to the Holocaust, A Re-evaluation* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp.237-71; Ulf Zander, ‘To Rescue or be Rescued: The Liberation of Bergen-Belsen and White Buses in British and Swedish Historical Culture’, in Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (eds.), *The Holocaust on Post-War Battlefields: Genocide as Historical Culture* (Malmö: Sekel, 2006), 343-83; Folke Bernadotte, *Slutet: Mina humanitära förhandlingar i Tyskland våren 1945 och deras politiska följder* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 1945); Felix Kersten, *The Kersten Memoirs, 1940-1945*, with an introduction by H.R. Trevor-Roper (London: Hutchinson, 1956); Norbert Masur, *En Jude talar med Himmler* (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1945).

¹² Paul A. Levine, *From Indifference to Activism: Swedish Diplomacy and the Holocaust, 1938-1945*, 2nd revised edition (Uppsala: Studia Historica Uppsaliensia 178, 1998), 140.

¹³ *DN*, 25 April 1945.

the liberal *Dagens Nyheter*, but other papers followed the same story, including the conservative *Stockholms-Tidningen*, which was known for its German sympathies. After the paper's foreign correspondent Hugo Björk had visited Buchenwald and interviewed the Norwegians, his paper published the story under the telling headline: 'Concentration camp was a hellish nightmare.' Like *Dagens Nyheter*, Björk told the readers that merely five out of 1,000 Norwegian deportees had survived.¹⁴

Now, the experiences of these five Norwegians raise the major issue within the case of Swedish responses to the Holocaust: to what extent did the fact that these survivors were Scandinavian help to bring their suffering into focus? According to Alf W. Johansson, 'The Swedish engagement [with the Holocaust] had...a regional character. It is the events in Norway which provoked the strongest reactions. The fate of the Polish Jews could not induce similar engagement.'¹⁵ Johansson's assessment relates to the events in 1942, but it does have a continuum into the post-war thinking too, as evinced by the keen interest the press showed towards the five Norwegian-Jewish survivors. No doubt, proximity bred interest and helped to conceptualize the horror better. *Stockholms-Tidningen* brought the point closer by noting that the five survivors had relatives in Sweden.¹⁶

The idea of 'Nordic Brotherhood' meant that as the ties between Scandinavian countries (including Finland) had been historically strong, encompassing all areas of life, from economy and politics to the society and culture, politicians and citizens were more sensitive to the problems within the Nordic region than in other areas, especially Eastern Europe. In many ways, the outbreak of World War II put the traditional ties to test. While national histories and war experiences, including the Holocaust, are widely different, an essential element of 'Norden' remained. On the one hand, while Sweden did not involve itself militarily in the Russo-Finnish Winter War in 1939 and 1940, 7,000 thousand volunteers left for Finland. The prominent slogan at the time was 'Finland's case is ours.'¹⁷ On the other hand, Sweden took nearly 70,000 Finnish children to safety during the course of World War II. Furthermore, at the early stages of the war (when more than 10,000 Finnish children had already been evacuated to Sweden), the Swedish government kept tightening its

¹⁴ *StT*, 25 April 1945.

¹⁵ Alf W. Johansson, *Den nazistiska utmaningen. Aspekter på andra världskriget*, 5th ed., (Stockholm: Prisma, 2000), p.256.

¹⁶ *StT*, 26 April 1945.

¹⁷ For Sweden and the Winter War, see especially Alf Johansson, *Finlands sak. Svensk politik och opinion under vinterkriget 1939-1940* (Stockholm: Allmänna förlaget, 1973). For the 'Finnish question' in Swedish politics, see Krister Wahlbäck, *Finlandsfrågan i Svensk politik 1937-1940* (Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1964).

refugee policies, mainly directed against European Jewry. As the war progressed, further manifestations of Nordic brotherhood were demonstrated. The failed rescue of Norwegian Jews caused a lot of dismay,¹⁸ while the successful rescue of the Danish Jews in 1943 remains another remarkable example of ‘Nordic brotherhood’, although the position of the Danish Jews was far more ambivalent than the role of ‘ethnic Danes.’¹⁹ It is certainly true that the concept of Nordic brotherhood was not fully applied to Jews, especially in terms of refugee policy; they were, in the words of Mikael Byström, ‘step-brothers’ who did not have a clear place in the ‘family.’ But it is also worth pointing out that especially in comparison to other liberal press responses, like in the cases of Britain and Finland, for example, seeing Nordic Jews as ‘half-brothers’ did not stop the mainstream press from recognizing the key issues that Holocaust scholarship has confronted ever since.²⁰

Unlike in the Anglo-American or Finnish press, for example, the focus on the individual stories of the Norwegian Jews (and occasionally others) enabled an important theme to emerge: the German camp system extended far beyond the liberated Western camps, Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen, which got the most attention in the British and American papers. While the Norwegians offered a regional (i.e. Scandinavian) focus on the liberation narrative, the geographical focus of their stories was not limited to their experiences in the Western camps. On the contrary, based on the accounts of the surviving Norwegian Jews, Auschwitz emerged as the most horrific camp.²¹ *Dagens Nyheter* described it as ‘Upper-Silesian horror-filled Himmler-hell (*fasansfulla Himmler-helvete*).’ Similarly, in accounts of the Nazi system of selection, they told how upon arrival Jews were ‘immediately divided into two groups: women and children in one group and men in another. After a fleeting medical examination most of the women and children were driven directly into the gas chambers and killed. Others were put in slave labor [only] to die after they were too tired to carry on.’ The article’s conclusion is worth emphasizing since, despite the ambivalence toward the Jews, the paper

¹⁸ Svanbeg and Tyden, *Sverige och förintelsen*, p. 251.

¹⁹ Mikael Byström, *En broder, gäst och parasit. Uppfattningar och föreställningar om utläningar, flyktingar och flyktingspolitik i svensk offentlig debatt 1942-1947* (Stockholm, 2006), 104-5 and 112-6; Svanberg and Tyden, *Sverige och förintelsen*, pp.312-25.

²⁰ For Nordic Jews and the concept of broderfolk, see Mikael Byström, ‘En talade tystnad? Ett antisemitik bakgrundsbrus i riksdagsdebatterna 1942-1947’ in Lars M. Anderson and Karin Kvist Geverts (eds.), *En Problematisk Relation? Flyktingspolitik och judiska flyktingar i Sverige 1920-1950* (Uppsala, 2008), esp. 129-30; Mikael Byström *En broder, gäst och parasit. Uppfattningar och föreställningar om utläningar, flyktingar och flyktingspolitik i svensk offentlig debatt 1942-1947* (Stockholm, 2006); Levine, *From Indifference to Activism*, 140.

²¹ For a similar assessment, see also Zander, ‘To Rescue or be Rescued’, 357.

noted emphatically that the Norwegians ‘*told their disclosures truly and objectively. But those who only have seen Buchenwald are prepared to believe them without any doubt.*’²²

On the whole, the liberation discourse of the popular Swedish press displayed a level of sensitivity to the Jewish plight not readily seen elsewhere, characterized by Deborah Lipstadt’s comment that journalists’ ‘failure to comprehend the Jewish aspect of this entire tragedy was reflected in their description of the victims and explanations of why they were in the camps.’²³

Apart from the depictions from Buchenwald, in early May, a heated debate about the suffering of the Jews erupted when the Swedish Nazi paper *Dagposten*, claimed that the Swedes had concocted totally unnecessary hassle over Count Bernadotte’s White Buses and the liberation of the camps, since the only thing wrong with the camps was that they were over-crowded.²⁴ The following day, *Dagens Nyheter* challenged the Nazi propagandists in its editorial, commenting that ‘The Red Cross expedition did not succeed in encountering Norwegian Jews... Apart from the five named surviving Jews in Buchenwald, two more stateless Jews who lived in Norway have been found. Put together, seven out of 784, barely one percent!’²⁵ Thus, the reality of the Nazi racial policy was explicitly accounted for in the Swedish press, and the fate of the five named Norwegian Jews – to whom the press returned – vividly illustrated the fact.

The Swedish papers estimated that in spring 1945, from late April to early May, over 15,000 camp survivors landed in Sweden.²⁶ Apart from instrumentalizing the fate of Norwegian Jews as the medium for constructing the early encounter with the Holocaust, the fact that southern Sweden virtually became a temporary haven for such a great number of survivors formed another medium. Once the story about the Bernadotte expedition became known in the media, the Holocaust became an explicitly Swedish story. When *Expressen* published a collage of photos from

²² *DN*, 3 May 1945. Emphasis added. See also *SvD*, 27 April 1945 ‘Sample card of circumstances in Jew camp’ (Provkarta på förhållandena i judeläger). Under the sub-heading of the article, the reporter tells how the conditions in Buchenwald can be used to imagine what conditions in ‘Jew camps’ like Auschwitz and Grossrosen might have been. On the whole, the reporter believes that Buchenwald is only a small part of network of German camps.

²³ Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, p.255; see also Holmila, *Framing Genocide*.

²⁴ *Dagposten*, 2 May 1945. *Dagposten* was the main Swedish paper supporting German Nazism and the Swedish National Socialist Party, *SNF* (*Sveriges Nationella Förbund*). See, for example, Stephane Bruchfeld, ‘Grusade drömmar. Svenska “nationella” och det tyska nederlaget 1945.’ On-line Publication Documentation System for Uppsala University. http://www.hist.uu.se/historikermote05/program/Politik2/P27_Bruchfeld.pdf. Last accessed, 29 July 2007.

²⁵ *DN*, 3 May 1945. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ For example, see *SvD*, 2 May 1945; *DN*, 3 May 1945.

Buchenwald and Bergen-Belsen in early May, the first picture depicted Folke Bernadotte, with the caption '[h]e tried to help everyone'.²⁷ Indeed, the Holocaust was domesticated by way of framing the story through Swedish humanitarian aid, as the *Dagens Nyheter* front page headline in early May exemplified: 'New clothes for 16,000 prisoners.'²⁸ The horror stories typically included an addendum that spoke about the positive self-image of the Swedes and Swedish humanism itself: that survival was often dependent on Swedish Red Cross (food) aid. According to Norwegian (non-Jewish) survivor, an anti-Nazi and anti-Church writer Arnulf Överland, it was not an exaggeration to say that the parcels saved the lives of 'hundreds and hundreds among us.'²⁹

Finally, while Danish and Norwegians were the main focus of the press reporting, it is not to say that the other survivor stories were totally left out.³⁰ After the Nordic victims, perhaps the second most frequent category was that of Polish Jews, especially women, who also cropped up in stories. For example, discussing the Bernadotte expedition, *Dagens Nyheter* wrote the following:

Polish Jewesses fill coach after coach, and they all come from Auschwitz (Oswiecim) and proudly show their number tattooed on their left forearms. The Jews had, according to a German principle, a special numbering system in these concentration camps...Every serial went up to 30,000. But there were many who never had a number tattooed, a young Jewess, a student of technical studies from Lvov said.³¹

The description, written by *Dagens Nyheter* correspondent Gunnar Gunnarson, may seem at odds with today's dominant Holocaust historiography, as the correspondent wrote how the survivors were proud to display their numbered forearms.³² While in historiography the silence and the embarrassment may be the dominant frame, epitomized by Primo Levi's comment that '[i]n the majority of cases, the hour of liberation was neither joyful nor lighthearted', Gunnarson's interviews depicted another sentiment.³³ Gunnarson's main frame was not triumphalist, but it did expose a fleeting sentiment of relief at being alive and spirited away from the horror as expressed

²⁷ *Expressen* 5 May, 1945.

²⁸ For example, *DN* headline on 3 May 1945 reads 'New clothes for 16,000 prisoners.'

²⁹ *DN*, 4 May 1945.

³⁰ Thor Tureby, 'Svenska änglar.'

³¹ Gunnar Gunnarson, 'Där är ett under att jag är här' *DN*, 5 May 1945, 7.

³² The exact phrase Gunnarson used was 'de kommer alla från Auschwitz (Oswiecim) och visar med stolthet upp sina på vänstra underarmen tattuerade nummer.'

³³ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Michael Joseph, 1988), 53.

by the Polish Jewish women he interviewed.³⁴ Another theme which the citation brought up – although implicitly, by discussing the German method of tattooing and the fact that not everyone was given a number — was the question of the German perpetrators.

German Perpetrators and the Swedish Press

Unlike in Britain, where press stories on the liberation of the camps primarily focused on the acts that Nazi's – or "Huns" – had committed, the main focus of the early liberation story in Sweden was on the victims and their experiences, followed by other themes, including the matters of German society's knowledge of the crimes and who were the perpetrators.³⁵ While the Swedish press argued strongly for the point that 'the truth about the Nazi regime is unpleasant'³⁶, for the most part, Germany was not viewed through the lenses of enemy images, as was the case in Britain. There was no conceptualization of Germans as the enemy. Immediately after the liberation of the camps, the Swedish press sought to domesticate the violence by referring to the unawareness of the ordinary Germans, although papers like *Expressen* took the more principled stance of laying the blame with all Germans, if in no other way than by pointing to the silence and passive acceptance of the masses.

For the Swedish right, traditionally sympathetic to Germany, the extent of ordinary Germans' role in the Holocaust presented a problem, and the response, too, was ambivalent. *Stockholms-Tidningen's* Christer Jäderlund caused controversy when he defended ordinary Germans immediately after the liberation, as has been noted above. He claimed that the handful of Nazis were imposters, pretending to represent the whole population, holding that 'the brown storm troopers "played people" on the stage' and that 'Germany was also, according to our standards, an occupied nation, so that in the concentration camps there were considerably more Germans than Jews!'³⁷ Also, in its editorial in late April, *Stockholms-Tidningen* discussed 'the other Germany.' Seeking to divert the attention from the Jews and other major groups of victims, the editorial told of a Weimar citizen who had been incarcerated in different camps during the twelve years of Hitler's reign. 'His own wish was now', the paper wrote, 'to be able to show the world that a Germany other than the Nazi

³⁴ For example,

³⁵ Holmila, 2011, esp, pp. 49-53.

³⁶ *DN*, 21 April 1945.

³⁷ *StT*, 14 April 1945.

one exists.³⁸ The left-liberal *Expressen* challenged *Stockholms-Tidningen's* editorial, arguing that *Stockholms-Tidningen* 'valiantly cultivates facts for "the other Germany", which their German correspondent has clearly been unable to find.'³⁹ Contributing to the Swedish debate on the question of German guilt and the future re-building, *Svenska Dagbladet* argued that Buchenwald would play a prominent role in the construction of the 'new Germany'. According to the paper, there was a well-organized anti-Nazi elite among the Buchenwald survivors, and their role would be to kindle the process of re-building post-war democratic German society.⁴⁰

However, the ambivalence was not limited to the right. For example, the initial reaction of the liberal *Dagens Nyheter* was narrated in the same fashion:

99 percent of the German population did not know what had happened [in the camps], but it is also surely true that they did not know because they did not have courage to find out...I believe now what I never believed before: not only the Germans, but the whole world will need the courage to find out and to understand the truth.⁴¹

In its efforts to understand the role of the ordinary Germans and the mass of society in the atrocities, the Swedish press utilized the frame of (mental) disease as an *explanatum*. According to *Dagens Nyheter*, the German population had 'ceased to think for themselves' because through incessant propaganda their brains were slowly 'scrubbed out.' As a consequence, by limiting the role of the collective German guilt, the paper simply argued that the people 'cannot be held responsible.' The message was reinforced by utilizing an account of a Dutch survivor who 'greatly emphasized that terror and atrocities were committed by the Nazis, not the German people.'⁴² Arnulf Överland also sought to explain the role of ordinary Germans through the mental analogy. He told *Dagens Nyheter* that the German national character had become sick. According to him, the whole nation had become collectively sick as it had identified with the Nazi ideology year after year, which was like swallowing 'stealthy poison'.⁴³ In other words, according to Överland's authoritative voice, the Germans could be understood as having swallowed poison almost accidentally – anyone could have done so.

³⁸ *StT*, 27 April 1945.

³⁹ *Expressen*, 28 April 1945.

⁴⁰ *SvD*, 28 April 1945.

⁴¹ *DN*, 18 April 1945.

⁴² *DN*, 27 April 1945.

⁴³ *DN*, 4 May 1945.

On the whole, the Swedish press reactions in the wake of the liberation of the camps were more inquisitive about the role of the German society than about the sadistic traits of the German ‘Huns’, such as Josef Kramer, ‘the beast of Belsen’, and Irma Grese, ‘the bitch of Belsen’, the duo which in Britain came to symbolize German brutality.⁴⁴ What is more, interviews with the survivors also offered fragments of the Europe-wide dimension of the perpetration and the camp system. *Dagens Nyheter* wrote that ‘according to the unanimous testimony of many inmates’ who had survived in Buchenwald, the most brutal guards ‘were SS recruits from Belarus and Ukraine, although they always operated under German command.’⁴⁵ In another piece, *Dagens Nyheter* wrote about a Jewish camp survivor who described the camp-system in the following way: ‘every barrack... had a so-called “lagerälteste”. They were often criminal inmates... They were often brutal humans. The most brutal of them all were the Croats.’⁴⁶ However, while the focus was less on the brutal acts by the Germans, it did not mean that the Swedish press was uninterested in the Nazis. This became obvious during the Nuremberg trials in which Nazi criminality and Jewish suffering were both discussed against the background of newly-emerging legal concepts such as crimes against humanity and genocide.

The Swedish Press and the Holocaust at the International Military Tribunal

When the Nuremberg trials opened on 20 November 1945, attending was the largest group of journalists ever gathered to cover a single event.⁴⁷ At the time, it was widely believed that the purpose of the trial far exceeded the need to bring the leading Nazis to face judgement. Apart from justice, the major purpose of the trial was didactic: it would be an organized history lesson in which the Nazi system would be scrutinized and exposed for all the world to see. As Britain’s chief prosecutor, Sir Hartley Shawcross argued, the trial ‘would provide...an authoritative and impartial record to which future historians may turn for truth.’⁴⁸ Part of the record was the Nazi extermination policy.

In historiography, the ways in which the Holocaust was portrayed at the major war-crimes trials at Nuremberg has elicited diverse opinions and attitudes, ranging from the arguments that the

⁴⁴ Holmila 2011,

⁴⁵ *DN*, 27 April 1945.

⁴⁶ *DN*, 5 May 1945.

⁴⁷ Douglas, 11; Marrus, 242.

⁴⁸ Bradley Smith, *Reaching Judgment at Nuremberg* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 103.

Holocaust was downplayed or marginalized in the proceedings to more nuanced perceptions.⁴⁹ While the Swedish press' key interest revolved around the high politics of the Nazi regime, the personal lives and ties with Sweden of defendants like Göring, and relationships between the defendants, the extermination of the Jews was one of the most captivating issues throughout the trial, starting with Robert Jackson's opening statement and concluding with the verdicts – as we shall see.

In tying with the historiography of the Holocaust in general and the representations of the Holocaust at Nuremberg in particular, it is important to examine the way in which the Swedish press portrayed the Holocaust in the Nuremberg trials, for it adds more nuance to the current debates. Apart from the opening and closing speeches, the descriptions of the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, the testimonies of Nazi perpetrators Otto Ohlendorf, Dieter Wisliceny and Rudolf Höss offered gruesome details about the unfolding of the Jewish genocide. However, it should be pointed out that unlike in the case of the liberation of the camps, where the first focus was on the victims and in their stories, the trial concentrated on the deeds of the perpetrators while victims were rarely heard or offered a chance to testify. While the most important question regarding the whole venture in the Swedish press was its jurisprudential legitimacy, meaning the battling allegations of victors' justice and retroactive legislation, a big part of the legitimization strategy relied on the original Nazi documents and examining the deeds of the Nazis.⁵⁰

Ever since the trial began, the Swedish press recounted the defendants' attempts to exonerate themselves and their arguments that they were not accountable for the atrocities which were examined in the courtroom.⁵¹ According to the defendants, Hitler planned the war against peace, and the army had no choice but to obey, as they had sworn an oath of loyalty; then Hitler took control over military operations; Hitler only delegated his wishes to carry out the 'Final Solution' to very few people, and so on. 'Hitler-hostile group image amongst the Nuremberg prisoners' was how *Stockholms-Tidningen's* news article reported the growing attempts at self-exculpation of the men in the dock in December 1945.⁵²

⁴⁹ On the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trial see, Michael Marrus, Lawrence Douglas and Donald Bloxham. While Marrus and Douglas have been cautiously positive about the trial, Bloxham has been far more critical of the IMT's downplaying of the Holocaust, describing the trial as 'a tale of Jewish absence'.

⁵⁰ For the debates about the trial's legitimacy and victors' justice, see esp. *StT*, 3 February 1946 and *Expressen*, 6 February 1946.

⁵¹ Holmila 2011, 91-3.

⁵² *StT*, 13 December 1945; see also *StT* 18 December 1945; *GHT*, 4 January 1946; *Expressen* 20 January 1946

Importantly, the Nazi elite's attempts to exculpate themselves appeared ridiculous in the face of mounting evidence of the regime's brutality. Robert Jackson's opening statement on 21 November 1945 set the stage. His speech, which was about 20,000 words in length, lasted nearly a whole day and made frequent references to the Jews. On reporting the opening statement, *Stockholms-Tidningen* observed on a front page sub-heading the consistent theme of the trial: Nazi crimes 'culminated in the destruction of the Jews.'⁵³

The full horror of the Nazi extermination policies was further illustrated in mid-December 1945, when the prosecution detailed the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. According to Michael Marrus, the American prosecutor William Walsh's presentation was one of the key events at Nuremberg which offered intense and dramatic evidence on the Holocaust.⁵⁴ The presentation was also depicted in the Swedish press. Even the conservative and previously cautiously pro-German papers such as *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Stockholms-Tidningen* offered detailed commentary. The former noted that 'On 23 April [1943], Himmler ordered that the Warsaw Ghetto must be destroyed without mercy. I [Stroop] therefore decided to destroy the area by setting it on fire.'⁵⁵ *Stockholms Tidningen* also reported on the 'Warsaw ghetto's ghastly end' by noting that on Himmler's orders 56,000 Jews were burned and drowned in Warsaw.⁵⁶ Similarly, showing the importance of the Warsaw ghetto liquidation to the contemporary view, Victor Vinde dedicated the last 23 pages of his 1946 book 'Nurnberg in a Spotlight' to the topic of the Warsaw ghetto. Victor Vinde (1903-1970) was an experienced journalist who from 1937 to 1945 worked as *GHT*'s Paris correspondent and after the war worked for *Dagens Nyheter*. While France was his passion (he wrote eight accounts of France), he also authored timely works such as 'America at War' (1943) and his impressions on the Nuremberg trials, 'Nurnberg in a Spotlight'.⁵⁷ While this chapter is based on newspaper reporting, Vinde's book is worth illustrating here since it shows the contemporaneous writing of a journalist but with a more detailed and analytical bent than space offered in the pages of the

⁵³ *StT*, 22.11.1945, p. 1.

⁵⁴ Marrus, p. 13.

⁵⁵ "3 million people are living amongst the ruins", *SvD*, 14.12.1945, p. 3.

⁵⁶ *StT*, 14 December 1945,

⁵⁷ Victor Vinde's books included *Revolution i Paris: tre kapitel om en kris* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1935); *Det franska sammanbrottet* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1940); *En stormakts fall* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1941); *Frankrike efter nederlaget* (Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska institutet, 1941); *Amerika slår till* (Stockholm: Norstedt, 1943); *Det fria Frankrike* (Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska institutet, 1944); *Nürnberg i blyttljus* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1946); *Det nya Frankrike* (Stockholm: Utrikespolitiska institutet, 1947); *Revolution i Algeriet* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1958); *De Gaulle och Frankrike* (Uppsala: Verdandi, 1962); *Vietnam - det smutsiga kriget* (Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren, 1966).

press. It is worth noting that while his book had no conclusion as such, the last section of the book which dealt with the Warsaw ghetto worked as an epitaph for the whole Nazi era:

With this document [Stroop's report], the Germans have unwittingly erected a monument to those men and women, '*Juden, Banditer und Untermenschen*', who the murderers' bullets killed. They fought for their freedom and for their people – alone, encircled, abandoned and they died like free people should. *Their memory must live on.*⁵⁸

While the destruction of the ghetto captured the cruelty of the nature of the crimes that had been committed, the testimonies of Otto Ohlendorf and Dieter Wisliceny were significant, for they illustrated the multi-national and Europe-wide organizational aspects of the crime, and indicated that systematic extermination was part of the Nazi policy. In historiography, Ohlendorf's testimony has been characterized as 'astonishing' and 'most notable.'⁵⁹ The press commentary in Sweden discussed his testimony prominently, offering a glimpse into the abyss of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. *Svenska Dagbladet* reported how under Ohlendorf's leadership 90,000 men, women and children were killed in Russia. The same story also noted that Adolf Eichmann had the death of at least five million Jews on his conscience.⁶⁰ *Stockholms-Tidningen* wrote in a bold caption that "38-year-old ... Otto Ohlendorf gave a terrifying testimony about the German mass killings of Jews in the occupied Soviet territory."⁶¹

Further evidence of these tendencies was supplied in connection to Dieter Wisliceny's extraordinary testimony, and the Swedish press did not fail to grasp its significance.⁶² After chronicling the "path to genocide" — reasonably accurately within current historical understanding — the article told how Wisliceny, working on Eichmann's orders, had organized the transportation of the Jews of Salonika to the "death factory" Auschwitz.

Overall, these testimonies were significant for a number of reasons. First, they were a reminder of the Europe-wide dimension of the Holocaust: Ohlendorf's testimony covered a lot of the Soviet Union, sections on Eichmann captured the tragedy of the Hungarian Jews, and Wisliceny's

⁵⁸ Vinde, *Nürnberg*, p.185. Emphasis added. Vinde had earlier discussed the destruction of the ghetto, arguing that the killing of innocent men, women and children by the troops which were armed to teeth, and then making it into a heroic tale represented 'the deepest depravity to which any nation or tribe had ever sunken...' See, p.57.

⁵⁹ Lawrence Douglas, *The Memory of Judgement: Making Law and History in the Trials of the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 69.

⁶⁰ "Slaughtering resulted in the death of 5 million Jews", *SvD*, 4.1.1946, p. 6.

⁶¹ "Execution groups followed the German Army", *StT*, 4.1.1946, p. 3.

⁶² *StT*, *supra nota* 35, p.3.

testimony reached to Southern Europe. Second, in the press commentary, Auschwitz formed a central point in the extermination process; whether it was the deportations of the Hungarian Jews or of the Greek ones, all Nazi roads seemed to lead, momentarily at least, to Auschwitz. Third, as has been illustrated in connection to *Stockholm-Tidningen's* report, the murder of Jews was based on (as the current understanding on crimes against humanity has it) their belonging to a certain group rather than their personal traits.⁶³

During spring and early summer 1946, the reports from Nuremberg in general were short, more infrequent and confined to the inner pages of newspapers. Only on one occasion, albeit briefly, did the reporting from Nuremberg attain any interest and was more vividly portrayed. Significantly, it was Rudolf Höss' testimony — accounting for the role of Auschwitz — that temporarily revived the wilting press interest in the trial. *Dagens Nyheter's* report ran as 'Auschwitz boss confesses the murder of 2 million Jews' and its by-line was bland, characterizing the image of Höss: "Were you the commandant of Auschwitz from 1940 to the end of 1943?" "Yes." "Is it true that two million Jews died there during that period?" "Yes." What followed, was chilling reporting on Auschwitz, reiterating many of the central themes with regard to the camp: two million Jews were murdered there (in reality the figure is about one million and a quarter),⁶⁴ the doors to the gas chambers had signs saying either 'shower' or 'delousing' in numerous languages, and the people in the vicinity of the camp knew what was happening because of the sickening smell that the burning bodies emitted.⁶⁵ *Svenska Dagbladet* reminded its readers about the abominable nature of the Nazi violence. First it was told that 2,000 people were murdered everyday, followed by the conceptualization of the cruelty: 'dying took 3-5 minutes and shouts from the gas chambers could be heard.'⁶⁶

On the whole, the Swedish press reporting about the Nuremberg trials shows that the Holocaust was depicted as an important part of the Nazi regime and the significance of the genocide was also understood, as illustrated with reference to Vinde and other issues, although the matter was not elaborated to a great extent. The final evidence of the press attitude can be gauged from the press coverage of the closing of the trials. After the judgement, *Stockholms-Tidningen* contextualized the foundations for the death penalties, and the extermination of the Jews assumed high priority in the scheme. On Goering's sentence, the paper wrote 'he was the director of the slave labor

⁶³ ", *StT*, 4.1.1946

⁶⁴ The death toll of the murdered Jews in Auschwitz has been estimated at 1,250,000. See, for example, Ronnie S. Landau, *The Nazi Holocaust* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992), p. 177.

⁶⁵ For example, see "Auschwitz boss confesses the murder of 2 million Jews", *DN*, 16.4.1946, p. 9.

⁶⁶ "3 Million murdered or died in the horror camp Auschwitz", *SvD*, 16.4.1946, p. 6. The paper misquoted Höss, for he in fact said that it took 3–15 minutes for victims to die.

program and the instigator of the tyranny against the Jews.’ Discussing von Ribbentrop’s role, it told how he ‘played an important role in Hitler’s Final Solution of the Jewish Question.’ Kaltenbrunner, the paper argued in bold print, ‘murdered approximately four million Jews in concentration camps’ while Rosenberg’s ‘subordinates were involved in the mass murder of the Jews.’⁶⁷ Similar comments were also made about Streicher, Frank and Seyss-Inquart. Thus, crimes against humanity – essentially the Holocaust – underlined the whole purpose of the proceedings; as Vinde pleaded, the Jewish victims’ memory must live on.

Jews Outside the Courtroom: The Swedish Press and the DPs in Germany

The complex ways in which the Swedish press discussed the Holocaust apart from the Nuremberg trials, especially in connection with the problem of Europe’s displaced persons and the Jewish desire to emigrate to Palestine, cannot be fully accounted for here, so the argument is limited to two illustrative events.⁶⁸ These are the so-called (controversial) Harrison report, which was published in the European press in fall 1945 and detailed the conditions of Jewish DPs in the camps, and the other is the sorry tale of the Exodus ships carrying Jewish immigrants to Palestine, which eventually returned to Hamburg in summer 1947.

When concentration camps were liberated and Jews were placed into the DP camps, their numbers were around 150,000, peaking in early 1947 at 250,000.⁶⁹ In historiography, it is now well-known that the surviving remnants of Europe’s Jewry were ‘liberated but not free.’ The Jews were assembled in makeshift DP camps and divided between national groups, meaning that Jewish victims and their ex-guards could be found under the same roof.⁷⁰ In 1946, Zorach Warhaftig’s book *Uprooted: Jewish Refugees and Displaced Persons after Liberation* was published in order to bring the plight of Europe’s displaced persons to the attention of the First Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations.⁷¹ In the book, the lawyer from Warsaw, who was a native of Byelorussia, a

⁶⁷ *StT*, 2 October 1946.

⁶⁸ For more detailed examinations, see Holmila 2011, esp. pp. 125-172; Antero Holmila, ‘The Holocaust and the Birth of Israel in British, Swedish and Finnish press discourse, 1947-1948’, *European Review of History – Revue européenne d’histoire*, 16 (2), 2009, 183-200.

⁶⁹ Yehuda Bauer, *Out of the Ashes: The Impact of American Jews on Post-Holocaust European Jewry* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989), p.45

⁷⁰ Arieh J. Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics: Britain, the United States, and Jewish Refugees, 1945-1948* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p.89; Brenner, 10-15. For a current synthesis of the liberation, see Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2015).

⁷¹ Zorach Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted: Jewish Refugees and Displaced Persons after Liberation* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs, 1946).

Zionist, and later became Minister for Religious Affairs in the Israeli Government, simply pointed out the situation which European Jewry was facing: '[e]ighteen months after liberation the war is not yet over.'⁷²

In an atmosphere of chaotic material conditions, rumors about the mistreatment of Jews, prevailing antisemitism, and a general sense of post-war crisis, the Truman Administration decided to investigate the conditions in the camps, with special attention given to the Jews.⁷³ The dean of the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Earl G. Harrison, who had also represented the USA in the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees, was appointed to the task. During summer 1945, Harrison toured the camps and his report was published in the European press at the turn of September and October 1945. Many a paper placed the news on the front page, as well as gave it editorial attention. His conclusion – which largely concentrated on the United States' handling of the camps – was not only critical of the US management, but also advocated sweeping changes to US policy, writing that

[t]he first and plainest need of these people is a recognition of their actual status and by this I mean their status as Jews...Jews as Jews (not as members of their nationality groups) have been more severely victimized than the non-Jewish members of the same or other nationalities.⁷⁴

Dagens Nyheter quoted Harrison in the now famous passage: 'As matters now stand, we appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis treated them except we do not exterminate them.'⁷⁵ The news was on the front page. The same line was also published in *GHT*'s main foreign news section under a heading 'Truman criticizes the handling of the Jews: circumstances in the camps barely better than under Nazis.'⁷⁶ *Stockholms- Tidningen*'s news article cited in bold a comment made by Jewish Agency representative Alexander Easterman that 'Belsen had become a Jewish prison camp' and 'A number of prominent Jews who participate in relief work in Lüneburg have described the

⁷²Zorach Wahrhaftig, *Uprooted*, p.39.

⁷³ Kochavi, *Post-Holocaust Politics*, p.89.

⁷⁴ Cited in Wyman, *DPs*, p.136. For the full report see for example, Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), appendix B, pp.291-305. It is also accessible on-line at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/truman_on_harrison.html. Last accessed: 19 June 2007.

⁷⁵ *DN*, 30 September 1945; Wyman, *DPs*, p.135.

⁷⁶ *GHT*, 1 October 1945.

complaints against the circumstances under which 60,000 transfer Jews in the British, American and French Zones live.⁷⁷

Apart from discussing the plight of the Jews, the report – essentially by the way in which it was described in the press – also brought put a spotlight on the mounting tensions between the British and American administrations over the question of Palestine’s future. For example, *GHT* observed the British press’ reaction to the report by citing the *Daily Mail*: ‘England should not be responsible for Palestine alone. If the USA will give advice, it should also take over [some] obligations.’⁷⁸ *GHT*’s London correspondent wrote a lengthy column dealing with the issue. It told how ‘President Truman’s intervention in the Palestine question has got a cold reception in London.’⁷⁹ The heart of the matter was the immediate entry of 100,000 displaced Jews into Palestine and the British reaction to it. In a sense, the humanitarian problem was overshadowed by ‘the new Palestine crisis’ (as the column’s title suggested). The ‘new crisis’ now referred to as the rift between British and American policies towards the Jews and Palestine, and not so much as the Jewish DPs’ misery.

What press discourses on the Harrison report pointed out was the overwhelming Jewish desire to emigrate to Palestine, and between 1946 and 1948 – until the establishment of the state of Israel – the majority of news relating to Jews grappled with this issue. Simply put, the fact that the number of Jewish DPs was increasing while the number of non-Jewish DPs was diminishing partially helped to keep the question of Jewish immigration to Palestine acute. What is more, the link between Jewish DPs and Palestine was growing more important by the day. Nowhere else was the triangle between the DP problem, Palestine and the Holocaust as prominent as in the case of the so-called ‘Exodus affair’ in summer 1947.

On 11 July 1947, the steam ship *Exodus 1947*, previously called the *President Warfield*, carrying over 4,500 Jewish immigrants willing to go to Palestine departed from France towards Palestine. The voyage is now remembered as the Exodus affair – made famous by Leon Uris’ 1958 bestseller novel *Exodus*, followed by Otto Preminger’s 1960 film, starring Paul Newman.⁸⁰ At the time, in 1947, it was the very occasion that highlighted the connection between the Jewish DP problem

⁷⁷ *StT*, 1 October 1945.

⁷⁸ *GHT*, 1 October 1945.

⁷⁹ *GHT*, 1 October 1945.

⁸⁰ Leon Uris, *Exodus* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1958); Otto Preminger

and the rising tensions in Palestine.⁸¹ The beginning of the Exodus voyage was similar to other organized illegal voyages of Jewish immigration, which the (particularly British) press had grown accustomed to publicizing. As Idith Zertal has observed, there was nothing clandestine about the journey, but from the outset it was a demonstration, ‘a journey of political protest.’⁸² The first time that the affair received more than a short news commentary was in the second half of July when the British Navy boarded the ship, resulting in the death of one crew member and two immigrants. News commentary of the tumult was publicized in the world’s press. *Svenska Dagbladet*’s news article, with a Jerusalem dateline, was a typical one and could be repeated many times over, when it told about the ‘fight with tear gas and smoke bombs when the Jewish immigration boat was boarded.’⁸³ A few days later, the paper told the obvious when it stated that the British policy towards (what now were called) ‘illegal’ immigrants was becoming more forceful. ‘Contrary to earlier practice,’ the paper said, ‘the last contingents of illegal immigrants to Palestine have been returned to France in greatest secrecy.’⁸⁴

Contrary to the *SvD* article, the operation was not a secret one. The Jews were taken to three British ships and sent back to France where the French authorities said they would only receive the immigrants if they disembarked voluntarily. None of them did, and the determination of the Jews (with or without Zionist/Haganah pressure) together with their worsening situation inside the ships guaranteed global press publicity. As the *Svenska Dagbladet* front page comment made clear: “‘Rather dead than disembark” say the returned Jews.’⁸⁵ More often than not, the press was sympathetic to the plight of the passengers. The Swedish afternoon paper *Expressen* published an interview with a Jew who had been landed in France. The interviewee told how there was no food on the ships and that Jews who were kept in cages were dying.⁸⁶ The liberal *GHT* reported about the international reactions to the landings, noting that there had been a Jewish demonstration against Britain in New York where people were carrying banners saying ‘Englishmen in the Nazis’ footsteps.’⁸⁷

⁸¹ For example, Ruth Gruber, *Exodus 1947: The Ship That Launched a Nation* (New York: Times Books, 1999).

⁸² Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.44. p.45.

⁸³ *SvD*, 19 July 1947.

⁸⁴ *SvD*, 21 July 1947.

⁸⁵ *SvD*, 30 July 1947.

⁸⁶ Cited in Nicholas Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle: The Struggle Between the British, the Jews and the Arabs 1935-48* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979), p.336.

⁸⁷ *GHT*, 2 August 1947.

The sorry finale for the debacle was the British government's decision to return the Jews to Germany, the land of the extermination of their brethren – a gruesome irony which did not escape the press.⁸⁸ On arriving to Hamburg, according to the *Manchester Guardian*, 170 journalists were waiting to witness such a tragedy loaded with Holocaust symbolism as the Jews were herded from one form of transportation to the next, heading to Bergen-Belsen, now a British-run DP camp. The unloading of the first two ships took place without anticipated conflict. However, when the last vessel, *S/S Runnymede Park*, was unloaded, violence erupted. *GHT* reported how one of the Zionists onboard shouted 'here come the Nazis! Remember Belsen!' when British troops 'scrambled' on him.⁸⁹ *Expressen* focused on the Jews when they were put in trains. Under the sub-heading, 'I was in Auschwitz,' the paper quoted a Jewish girl as follows: 'I have been in Auschwitz together with my sister...since then, we have always been together. You cannot separate us now.'⁹⁰ Further, *Expressen* also editorialized the incident. Under the title 'Operation Oasis', which referred to the cover name for the British action against the Exodus Jews, the paper wrote that the action

was most of all a terrible human tragedy. It is tragic that Englishmen in their bitterness resort to the final solution (*en ultima ratio*) and it is awful that the 4,500 refugees, most of them with experiences of Auschwitz and other concentration camps behind them, are forced to return to the very country which was the root and the source of their affliction...⁹¹

Thus, what *Expressen's* article revealed was that already in the 1940s the press was sensitive to and fully aware of the plight of the Jews and the sorry irony which the Exodus affair symbolized. While the full details of Auschwitz and Belsen were still unknown –to be uncovered over decades of research – it is nevertheless significant that they were used as the axiom for the Holocaust's horror.

Conclusion

As I have argued in this article, the Swedish press responded to the Holocaust with considerable interest. Importantly, its focus varied and changed from the Jewish victims to Nazi perpetrators. The narrative construction of the liberation of the camps first focused on Jewish survivors and

⁸⁸ See Holmila 2011. The British decision marked a new phase in their Palestine policy and was taken in the middle of the rising Jewish terrorism in Palestine.

⁸⁹ *GHT*, 10 September 1947.

⁹⁰ *Expressen*, 8 September 1947.

⁹¹ *Expressen*, 8 September 1947.

their experiences. Significantly, going against the grain of the dominant wisdom in the Holocaust literature regarding the bystanders' attitudes, the Swedish press was in fact interested in the victims' experiences: who they were, where they came from, what they had endured, and how they had survived. Thinking about the emerging view of the Holocaust, it can be said that it was a story with a structure, direction and viewpoint. Unlike in the Anglo-American paradigm, in the Swedish case the horror the Jews had faced was above all contextualized through the lens of Nordic brotherhood, which offered an intimate level of meaning and gravity to the reports. The link to fellow Scandinavians offered the structure and viewpoint for understanding the event of liberation. As I have written above, an important part of the Nordic brotherhood was the extensive reporting on the role of the Swedish humanitarian aid in the form of Swedish Red Cross parcels. They functioned as an intimate tie between Nordic countries, connecting Swedes to the plight of Norwegian and Danish Jews, thereby making the Holocaust a part of Swedish historical experience, too.

In contrast, at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, the focus changed, and the Nazi perpetrators were given a spotlight in the Swedish press. However, the issue was decidedly tied with the tribunal's logic which sought to establish maximum credence to the shaky jurisdictional ground on which the IMT operated. In such schema, the legal opinion at the time was that it was best to concentrate on the documentary evidence, gathered from Nazi archives, rather than on victim testimonies. But it is still worth remembering that the fate of the Jews also structured the depictions of Nazi criminality. It was through a number of notable perpetrator testimonies, like those of Otto Ohlendorf, Dieter Wisliceny and Rudolf Höss, that key tenets of the Holocaust emerged: the murder was systematic, zealously executed, efficient and covered the whole continent. Also, as the press narratives on the tribunal's opening statements and final verdict indicated, the Holocaust played a prominent part in shaping the judgement.

Finally, at the same time as the IMT was in session, the surviving Jewish remnants lingered in DP camps across the German occupation zones. Again, it was the fate of the survivors which offered the structure and viewpoint for the Swedish press' story, as DPs' increasing willingness to immigrate to Palestine and mounting tensions between the British authorities and Jews kept Jewish affairs on the pages of the Swedish press. As the two important media events, the publication of the Harrison report and the Exodus affair vividly portrayed, the Swedish press was acutely aware of the recent suffering of European Jewry, and it formed the backdrop for all current affairs discussions about the future of the Jews stuck in Europe until 1948.