

Contractarianism as an intervention. Exploring the need for pan European social contracts with Holocaust/genocide remembrance Sites.

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Abstract

This working paper explores the perceptions and potential impact of Governmental distancing and erosion of ‘social contracts’ in relation to Holocaust/genocide education and memorisation in Germany. The work is undertaken against the rise of right-wing populism in Germany and presence of political parties such as ‘Alternative for Germany’ (AfD), ‘Identitarian Movement of Germany (IBD), as well as contemporary antisemitism (Cârstocea, 2020; Nyhan et al., 2024) with the assertion that Holocaust is simply a political instrument (Lunday, 2025). The work is salient as ‘social contracts’ are agreements that drive how the state and society live and adapt together (McCandless, 2019) based on fundamental agreement (Levy, 2008) and universalist principles (Sik, 2023). To explore this we undertook a series of elite interviews and reveal for the first time that Holocaust/genocide memorial sites have not been ‘self-disciplined’ in preparing for the potential removal of social contracts. What were believed to be ‘cast iron’ and morally concrete social contracts are now subject to new political interpretation, and there is a genuine fear related to ‘extinction’ as atonement- a cultural obligation- is replaced with ethnocentric world views and ulterior values. Moreover, there is fear that the removal of social contracts will have implications for professional ethics, moral learning, diminution of crimes, curriculum mandates and building resistance to new social and political dialogues. However,

data thus far reveals that there is a desire for a normative, European mandate that is immune to malleable virtue, abstractions of utilitarianism and the normalisation of genocide diminution. There is a will for a stronger integrated relational policy that can counter historical denialism (Burchett, 2025), the new cult of national socialism (Heinemann, 2022) and the ‘far-right’ defining European politics (Lorimer and Cavallaro, 2025). The work thus far illuminates the reality of attempting to document and provide a greater understanding of the preservation of Holocaust/genocide education against the back drop of prospective governmental changes and normalisation of extremism.

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