

“Against those who want to destroy me, I must be strong.”

What is the connection between Shoah-remembrance and Iran?

Matthias Küntzel interviews Holocaust survivor Fanny Englard.

The likelihood that negotiations will persuade Iran to change its nuclear programme is slim and the probability of an Israeli military strike against Iran correspondingly high. What are the implications of this for Germany, which has both strong economic ties with Tehran and a special relationship with Israel? As the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, referring explicitly to the Iranian nuclear programme, told the Israeli Parliament in March 2008, “Israel’s security is part of my country’s reason of state (...) Germany and Israel are and will remain, assuredly for ever, bound together in a particular way through the memory of the Shoah.” But what does Shoah-remembrance have to do with the Iranian crisis? I discussed this question with my friend, Fanny Englard, who was born in Cologne in 1925 and, as a Holocaust survivor, belongs to the leadership of the Israeli organization, *Perpetuation of Memory of the Holocaust*.

On 6 December 1941, 16-year old Fanny Englard was deported from Hamburg to Riga and on 8 March 1945 liberated by the Red Army. Her father died in the Warsaw Ghetto, her mother and 10-year old brother, along with her grandmother, aunts and cousins, were gassed in Belzec and her brothers Leo and Isi, 15 and 13 respectively, were shot near Minsk. “In 1947 I came to Israel and got married, in order to establish a new family as a replacement for the murdered one, which had fallen victim to Jew-hatred”, she told me in her apartment near Tel Aviv. “We did not survive and bring a new family into the world in order to sacrifice them once again to Jew-hatred. Jew-hatred compels us to engage in the struggle for a secure future for the new family.”

Q. In Germany, the attack on the Iranian nuclear installations advocated by some in the Israeli government would be considered an act of war.

It's not a war, it's a struggle for life. There's a difference between waging a war and fighting to survive. What we are facing here is the Jew-hatred of Hitler's Islamist heirs. Israeli actions against those who want to destroy us are not acts of war waged in order to kill others, but part of a struggle for life.

Q. Nonetheless, the Israeli military action in 2009 aimed at preventing the firing of rockets from Gaza into Israel was strongly criticized.

Those who criticize our struggle for life are attacking us. When we are attacked and act in self-defence, we are not committing war crimes. We have sworn "never again" and Israel is responsible for our vow; it is shaped by our vow.

Q. In Germany "never again" has a different meaning.

I know. For you, it means: no more war. For us it means: we will never again be the defenceless victims of Jew-hatred. The Germans must accept that too.

Q. Why?

Why? Because it was they who turned me into a victim. Their special historical responsibility obliges them to support the defence of Israel, to support the "never again."

Q. What does "support" mean?

I would put it like this: no one will fight on our behalf. We can wage our struggle by ourselves. It is important, however, that those who want to destroy us know that Germany feels responsible for our existence.

Q. In a letter to Harald Kindermann, the former German ambassador to Israel, you called for a stronger response to Ahmadinejad and wrote, "Germany owes us survivors a clear answer that shows that Germany is conscious of its responsibility for the past."

Yes, that is what I demand. The eternal responsibility for German history obliges the Germans to speak up for the future of the duty of remembrance. If anyone is not conscious of this, then, as a survivor, I denounce him or her.

Q. Don't Austrians or Lithuanians for example, whose ancestors took part in the massacres, also have this duty?

No. This responsibility belongs solely to the Germans. Sometimes I talk to people involved in the "Action Sühnezeichen". They want to do penance and atone for the guilt. But one cannot atone for what has happened. It has happened. Nor can things be put right. However, you are obliged to take responsibility for the future of the "never again". This "never again" is the atonement.

Q. Young people in Germany ask: why should I have this responsibility? All this happened 70 years ago.

My answer to that is: anyone who considers themselves to be German is not guilty, but responsible.

Q. How do you mean?

The instant you say you are German, then that's that. At that moment you have a responsibility for the past.

Q. You say that as a Holocaust survivor.

Yes.

Q. And what about when there are no more Holocaust survivors?

I have been working to make sure that this message is passed on from generation to generation for all eternity. Write that down!

The Shoah is unique

Q. But there have been other atrocities....

It is impermissible to compare the Shoah to other events. It bears no comparison.

Q. To compare is not the same as to equate.

As soon as you compare the Shoah with another event, you banalize it. There is no foundation for such comparisons.

Q. Could one compare it to the massacre of the Armenians?

No, absolutely not.

Q. Why not?

Because the Shoah is not comparable to anything. I view it as the continuation of the Jewish destiny. In every generation, Jews have faced persecution. The Shoah continues this line of oppression – flight from Egypt, Inquisition, pogroms. If I abuse the Shoah to make comparisons, then I separate it from the fate of the Jewish people. It is true that the Armenians were persecuted, but their destiny was not the Shoah. The Armenians could run away, could hide. I could not.

Q. So, can I say, in comparison with the Shoah...

No! The “memory” bears no comparison. The final cry in the gas chambers... the Shoah was the fate of the Jewish people. There were other victims of the Nazis – gypsies or political prisoners for example. We all took the same path to death – but not for the same reason. Each for a different reason. And therefore we must keep things separate.

Q. I can compare the fate of the Roma and Sinti with that of the Jews....

No, no, no. I was to be destroyed as a Jew. The word kosher means: keep milk and meat apart from one another. The tragedies of the victims of the Nazis must be kept apart in the same way.

Q. But you think that one should also remember the murdered Roma and Sinti.

Yes, of course! But not as victims of the Shoah, but as victims of the Nazis. It cannot be compared. That’s what I insist on.

Display strength – that is the way to beat the Islamists

Q. Are you hoping that Germany will support any eventual military action against Iran?

No. But people in Germany must understand that Israel is shaped by the duty of remembrance. The world does not understand that. Jews always have to fight for their lives. This makes us different from other peoples. We have learned from the Shoah. We will never again allow others to take away our right to live. Before we were exile Jews. Today we are free Jews. When we are struck, we strike back. So we are always tough when we are attacked. No one will succeed in conquering Israel because it will never allow the duty of remembrance to be forgotten.

Q. Is that a hope or a conviction?

A conviction. The Shoah is our spiritual strength not to give up. Whenever we are attacked, volunteers come from abroad to fight for Israel's existence, to fight for our "to be or not to be". I must be strong against those who want to destroy me. The person who fights to survive is stronger than the person who wants to destroy him. When the issue is pure existence, when one only wants to survive, no laws apply.

Q. What do you expect from Germany?

Germany must not allow the Islamists free rein. These Nazi-Islamists must know that they cannot get anywhere. This is not a matter of responsibility for the past but of responsibility for the future. The cry of "never again" must be so loud that Hitler's Islamist heirs recognize: we have no scope.

That is what I am striving to do today, to ensure that Germany is committed to applying the principle of "never again" to the Islamists as well. The neo-Nazis are also a threat, but the main issue today is Hitler's Islamist heirs. Woe betide if, from fear, Germany, Britain or France surrender to the Islamists' hatred. My explanation ought to have made it clear: one must not show the Islamists fear because, like all Nazis,

they are cowards. They will not openly oppose those stronger than them. This is why Israel too must always show that it is strong. Display strength – this is the way to beat the Islamists.

Q. Do you think that the Nazis were cowards?

Yes. Faced with old, sick and weak people they were tough. And I see the same thing again today with the fanatical antisemitic Islamists. They are tough when facing people who display fear. It is essential to stand one's ground. My concern is that in Germany today people are surrendering to Islamist violence. That must not be allowed to happen. Behaving like that strengthens the Islamists.

Q. What do you propose?

Be strong. For the time being there will be no peace. For where hatred is sown, no peace can be reaped. That is the situation here. I cannot expect help from outside, also not from Germany, but only from our armed forces. Once upon a time I was naïve. In the winter of 1944 I sat in the Sophienwalde labour camp and thought: where is the world's voice? They surely don't know where we are. But the world knew it. The world knew about Auschwitz and all the rest. Since then I have known: If I rely on others, I am lost.

Our conscience is clear. We owe the world nothing. When our security is at stake, only we know what we need to do. No one can decide in our name. All that I ask of you out there is that you understand why we are doing what we must do.

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