

Dehumanization and the Holocaust: Revisiting Forgotten Hate in Light of October 7

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The Nazi dehumanization of Jewish People during the Holocaust was an essential starting point that would slowly evolve and lead to the Holocaust. Furthermore, the process of dehumanization would enable the barbaric and unethical actions carried out by the Nazis and would justify the use of violence and oppression against Jewish families and communities to many Germans, especially after 1938. Following the devastating attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, the dehumanization and delegitimization of the Jewish People has continued to be used to justify the hate and antisemitic actions towards the Jewish people and around the community in Israel. This rings eerily similar to the systematic dehumanization enacted during the Holocaust. Furthering this issue is the fact that the act of dehumanizing individuals is no longer confined to print media (radio, cinema, and newspapers) propaganda as it was in the 1930s and 1940s by Joseph Goebbels, who was the Minister of Propaganda in Nazi Germany. Antisemitic incidents now include webcasted public protests, and online and social media campaigns (Carpi, 2014).

These technologically advanced methods prevent Jewish People from escaping these constant threats to their daily lives. While such actions echo the dehumanizing propaganda tactics of the Nazi era, these new strategies are being observed and are being understood to contribute to the persistent nature of antisemitism. This essay will reflect on the enduring nature of Jewish dehumanization, from the Holocaust to the aftermath of October 7.

Just as significant as Nazi Germany invading Poland on September 1, 1939, the significance of October 7 will remain a day in history remembered as when the terrorist group, Hamas, attacked Israel, resulting in massive civilian casualties (Siegel-Itzkovich, 2022). According to B'nai B'rith Canada, over 1200 Israelis were massacred, including Jews, Arabs, and other groups that live in Israel. This caused a rapid escalation in the current Middle East conflict, exacerbating widespread violence and antisemitism. Consequently, the antisemitism was not

contained. According to the Government of Canada (2024), hate crimes against Jewish people in Canada increased by 71% from October 2023 to September 2024 compared to the previous year. In fact, the United States of America fared no better; antisemitism post-October 7 reached historic proportions, experiencing a 200% increase in antisemitic incidents during this same period (Gilad, 2024). This is majority due to the access and widespread availability of the internet. The media amplifies hate and dehumanization worldwide, allowing misinformation to spread rapidly.

Dehumanization is a term referring to the cruel process by which individuals or groups are stripped and degraded of their humanity, often through media, propaganda, and physical violence (Landry, 2022). As dehumanization is used to vindicate morally unethical actions, making it psychologically comfortable for those who continue to treat the Jewish community in such horrific ways, this enabled the violence and accompanied the antisemitism in the Holocaust and today. “Dehumanization is implicated in some of the most urgent problems faced by human societies, such as hate speech, discrimination, political polarization, violent crime, war, extremism, and genocide.” (Landry, 2022). It was hoped that the degradation and inhumanity of these actions during the Holocaust would never happen again (Rieff, 2011). However, in the wake of the October 7 attacks in 2023, a concerning number of reoccurrences of dehumanizing behaviour towards Jewish communities have reemerged (Gilad, 2024).

When re-examining the atrocities of the Holocaust, dehumanization was repeatedly used throughout the antisemitic systematic process of this war. “Proponents claim that the denial of their victims’ humanity enables perpetrators to overcome moral inhibitions against harming conspecifics” (Landry, 2022). Jewish communities were stripped of their humanity and treated as lesser beings. Under Adolf Hitler’s regime, these same individuals were systematically

dehumanized through state-sponsored propaganda, violence, and accessible media such as newspapers (Steizinger, 2018). When probing deeper into the government and methodical process during the Holocaust, Hitler's Nazi government engaged in significant animalistic dehumanization against groups they identified as inferior, specifically Jewish individuals (Maynard & Luft, 2023). According to Hodson and Dhont (2023), animalistic dehumanization is a form of dehumanization where individuals or groups are perceived as animals, lacking human traits like civility. Denying another's mind undermines moral concern for those individuals and has been claimed to facilitate extreme violence (Landry, 2022). Through dehumanizing the victims of the Holocaust, the perpetrators could easily lean into the justification of their actions, which further eroded empathy among other citizens.

When comparing dehumanization throughout the Holocaust to a contemporary perspective, it is found to share common themes. These include similar portrayals of Jewish individuals as less than human, justifications of violence and harm against Jewish individuals, and the use of propaganda to spread hateful ideologies (Landry, 2022). The one striking difference between dehumanization in the 1940s to 2025 is the heavy use of technology and social media to share misinformation. After October 7, 2023, digital propaganda amplified and broadened the spread of hate and dehumanization, posing countless challenges for combating the oppression experienced by Jewish individuals. Where dehumanization of Jewish communities throughout the Holocaust relied on print materials such as newspapers and flyers available at local levels, in the 21st century, access to misinformation and propaganda has become easier than ever to distribute worldwide in only a matter of seconds (Gilad, 2024).

Dehumanization is a malicious and degrading process, stripping individuals of their humanity. During the Holocaust, dehumanization served as an excuse for the unethical and

morally wrong actions carried out by the perpetrators. Yehuda Bauer states that, “the horror of the Holocaust is not that it deviated from human norms; the horror is that it didn’t”. Despite promises in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, dehumanization of Jewish people in the Holocaust remains comparably similar to the dehumanization of Jewish individuals today, in a post-October 7 society. As witnessed by the world following the fatal attack on Israel on October 7, the dehumanizing practices from the Holocaust are emerging once again, but with technological advancements meant to amplify the spread of hateful and incorrect information. In March 2024, I had the opportunity to attend a school-led trip to Poland, Slovakia, and Vienna to explore Holocaust sites and memorials. As I travelled along with my peers to each unique site, I discovered the importance of individual responsibility to effectively combat hate and antisemitism. I personally experienced the necessity of recognizing and remembering the past and how doing so helps to establish and strengthen compassion for others. Our group observed several forms of present-day antisemitism and witnessed firsthand the required security measures still needed to ensure safety when simply expressing religion. While it is difficult to conclude on an issue so openly harmful, by examining the enduring nature of dehumanization at these two moments in history, we can gain a deeper understanding of the psychological context and how dehumanization has, and continues, to facilitate hatred and mass violence throughout the world.

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