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Nuremberg, Holocaust Memory and the Politics of “Never Again” in the Age of Gaza

The movie, ‘*Nuremberg*’ (2025), directed by James Vanderbilt, is a recent release, set in Nazi Germany, in which Russell Crowe plays the role of Nazi Reichsmarshall Hermann Göring, who surrenders to US forces in Austria with his family a day before Nazi Germany surrenders to the Allies. Rami Malek essays the role of Douglas Kelley, a US Army Psychiatrist, who is brought to help the army in the psychological assessment of imprisoned Nazi leaders, including Göring. Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson fights to establish an international tribunal to try the Nazi leaders instead of carrying out summary executions, as many call for. *Nuremberg* finds these trials to be both a necessary evil and an experiment upon which many eyes are fixed. Göring is shown as cunning, egotistical, and as one who seeks to deflect the blame for Nazi crimes, not out of guilt but after realising that the trial is hypocritical to what the Allies themselves believed in and preached. Kelley’s growing emotional involvement with Goring highlights the dangers of the intellectual fascination with evil, while the prosecutors’ struggles reveal how justice can be undermined by ego and rhetoric as much as by force.

My critique approaches *Nuremberg* less as a historical drama and more as a contemporary artefact situated within the politics of memory. The hegemonic control over collective memory and the weaponisation of memory as a political tool, in this context, are core issues I intend to highlight in relation to this particular movie. Tracing back the genealogy of such filmmaking to “The Holocaust Industry” by Norman Finkelstein, the contention is to outline the connotations and contradictions this movie carries with it.

As is generally the case with period dramasⁱ, factual inaccuracy is evident throughout the movie, such as the neatly furnished trial room, which doesn’t resemble a building that was bombed, and the gallows, which were actually a gymnasium of the jail where Nazi leaders were hanged. The movie depicts Nazi leaders emotionally breaking down and refusing to dress, while an American sergeant of Jewish origin consoles them, highlighting a theme of forgiveness. However, this portrayal oversimplifies the historical facts. The available accountsⁱⁱ

on the Nuremberg Trials suggest stoicism, defiance, or even theatrical behaviour on the part of Nazi leaders rather than emotional collapse.

Felicitous release in the backdrop of rising anti-Israel sentiments?

The movie comes off as propaganda to refresh the memories of the Nazi holocaust of Jewish people, against the backdropⁱⁱⁱ of the Israeli genocide of the Palestinians, and to counter the rising anti-Israeli sentiments^{iv} around the globe. It is akin to scores of such movies, TV shows, and documentaries made or financed by the Zionist lobby^v that present a narrative to help curate an image around the political goals of the Israeli state and other Zionist organizations^{vi}, often by simplifying complex historical events or portraying a one-sided view of the conflict or, at worst, whitewashing the crimes of the Israeli state.

The discourse of “Never Again^{vii}” is reintroduced by the movie, further cemented into mainstream by scores of reviews (Fox News^{viii}, The Wall Street Journal^{ix}, The New York Times^x, The Guardian^{xi}, Time^{xii}) in leading papers and media outlets, refreshing the memories and gore visualisations of the Nazi era in the minds of the audience. The movie tends to produce a message which critics such as Matt Zoller Seitz read as the “inherent dangers in dreams of reclaiming past glory” in the backdrop of contemporary US politics, while drawing no relevance to the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians by the same people who claim to be the perpetual victims of the holocaust. This factor alone leaves the audience wondering about the story's objective.

Seitz draws a parallel^{xiii} between the events from Nazi Germany and the current kidnapping and detainment without trial of US citizens, as well as immigrants, by agents of the state. The appalling intellectual dishonesty behind such claims is by far unparalleled. If the cacophony of “never again” does not remind these intellectuals of the horrors committed by the Israeli state and society upon Palestinians, but it reminds them of MAGA rallies and ICE actions in the USA, then this whole holocaust caterwauling appears as mere whitewashing of the ongoing genocide of the Palestinians.

As Mira Fox argues^{xiv} that Nuremberg prefers didactic exposition over cinematic depth, reducing the film to mere lecture rather than an experiential narrative, while reproducing a Holocaust genre so over-saturated that it struggles to explore new meaning. The film’s compulsion to reiterate on scale of violence, she suggests, stems less from artistic demands

than from a perceived moral duty and the inherited sanctity of the subject. What makes her critique so important is the fact that it comes from within liberal–Jewish cultural commentary itself, underscoring that the film is aesthetically stagnant and ideologically repetitive. It demonstrates that the exhaustion of Holocaust storytelling is not merely a Third World or postcolonial critique, but also expressed by Western and Jewish critics who recognise that repetition without reflection risks turning moral remembrance into narrative inertia.

Lack of novelty in storytelling and exclusion of the Global South’s understanding of the trial as “victor’s justice”

Furthermore, a large part of the film also has to do with its dependence on a very familiar moral syntax of ‘Jewish victimhood’ and ‘Nazi brutality’, a moral register which, as historically accurate and morally mandatory, rests on the film’s surface without any surprising or risky interpretations. *Nuremberg* relies on a set of familiar visual and moral tropes, exemplary barbarism, monumentalised evil, and the redemptive power of liberal justice, without exploring how such devices have become a convention of cinematic representation. This has the effect of closing down on the film, different possibilities of a historical consciousness, particularly those arising out of the Global South^{xv}, which have always been ambivalent and critical of the Nuremberg Trials alike, with admiration and disdain. There's no attention paid either to the critical discourse^{xvi} on the moral bankruptcy of the Nuremberg Trials as a form of ‘victors’ justice, which chooses not to place any accountability on colonial violence, the war crimes committed by the Allies, and racialised hierarchies of suffering. The effect of such a noticeable absence is obviously not historiographic but ideological. The film inscribes a Eurocentric moral order in which justice is meted out without questioning structural inequality, only through the victorious side’s valorisation. This raises the question of whether *Nuremberg* can actually access any kind of more reflective or globally translatable interpretation of the justice meted out on a very large scale.

Reproduction at the risk of repetition

The movie's devotion to reproducing the gore imagery of Nuremberg also raises the larger question of intention. What is the purpose of reproduction itself when it comes at the expense of aesthetic and moral fatigue? Through *Nuremberg*'s faithfulness to recreating familiar scenes of judicial adventurism and moral didacticism, the movie suggests not curiosity so much as conviction. Its reproductive endeavour, loyal to the archive yet timid in interpretation, seems

to express a nervousness that suggests that to deviate would compromise the sanctity of memory. But when reproduction becomes the goal and not the means to an end, the act itself becomes a form of ritualised memory that doesn't inform as much as reassure. The moral dilemma here is not the denial of memory so much as its accommodation: atrocity becomes legible, orderly, and safely distanced within a narrative that the viewing subject already comprehends in terms of its own narrative digestibility. The moral reservation here is that the movie shirks the duty to investigate for whom the reiteration of this memory and these visions becomes necessary on the same terms and the same ethics as previously proposed. Given the discernible shift in American political landscape, reflecting the sharp decline within younger generations^{xvii} of the earlier moral posture toward Israel that derived from the automatic moral remit^{xviii} that accompanied the acknowledgment of post-Holocaust survivors' atrocity—there seems little doubt that for a generation for whom World War II is not a vivid memory so much as the actions of Israeli state that are no longer to be judged through the predicate of victimhood so much as through the lens of power and accountability.

By sticking to an unaltered moral script rooted in mid-twentieth-century certainties, *Nuremberg* insulates its narrative from this changing ethical landscape, transforming reproduction into a conservative gesture, one that preserves authority and stabilises meaning while deflecting the unsettling questions that young, globally dispersed audiences now bring to fore.

Conclusion

Nuremberg exposes more about the politics of memory today than it does about historical justice or injustice. The movie reflects what critics^{xix} have called a Zionist moral economy that aims to reserve the status of perpetual victimhood solely for Jewish suffering and, consequently, for the State of Israel. The recurring focus on the compassionate, morally upright and ethically conscious American sergeant of Jewish descent serves not only as character development but also as narrative reassurance—an attempt to rekindle sympathy and moral identification in an audience whose ethical convictions are becoming more and more shaken by Israel's actions in Gaza and the support it receives from sizable segments of Israeli civil society. In this way, the movie takes a defensive stance, trying to maintain an inherited moral hierarchy even as it is clearly collapsing.

The claim that the Holocaust was a unique and unparalleled atrocity—important mainly because it targeted Jews—no longer has the unquestionable authority it formerly held. The

genocide in Gaza and the persistent military and political backing of the United States have severely undermined that moral dogma. Hitler and Nazism were mobilised for decades by neoconservative ideology^{xx} as the ultimate moral perversion, a symbolic tool used to justify humanitarian interventions and regime-change conflicts. However, the idea of pure evil is no longer rooted in the past for a generation that has no living experience of the Holocaust and only a few survivors. It is experienced in real time through livestreamed bombardment, collective punishment, and dehumanising terminology^{xxi} that is linked to Israel's and the IDF's activities rather than vanquished fascist regimes.

The erosion of the Holocaust's special moral status and the ideological cover it has long provided for Palestinian repression are what Israel's most ardent supporters see as the real tragedy of Gaza, as one former Obama administration official recently bemoaned^{xxii}. This inversion and duplicity is aptly noted in one of the seminal works, “The Holocaust Industry”^{xxiii} by Norman Finkelstein. He argues that the memory of the Holocaust has been exploited as an intellectual weapon to justify oppression, brutality, and humiliation. Thus, *Nuremberg* retreats into repetition, finding solace in a familiar past rather than confronting the ethical reckoning required by the present, by refusing to face this breakdown of moral authority.

ⁱPierre Sorlin, *The Film in History: Restaging the Past* (1st edn, Blackwell 1980) 31.

ⁱⁱ‘Final moments of Nazis executed at Nuremberg’ (The Guardian, 11 September 2009) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/sep/11/nazis-nuremberg-executed-hermann-goring> accessed 23 March 2026.

ⁱⁱⁱYousef Munayyer, ‘US support for Israel is collapsing. And Aipac knows it’ (*The Guardian*, 7 August 2024) <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/aug/07/us-support-for-israel-is-collapsing-and-aipac-knows-it> accessed 23 March 2026.

^{iv}‘Global outrage at Israel is about Gaza, not antisemitism’ (*Haaretz*, 17 September 2025) <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2025-09-17/ty-article/.premium/global-outrage-at-israel-is-about-gaza-not-antisemitism/00000199-57dd-d907-a5db-77ffc9330000> accessed 23 March 2026.

^vGiora Goodman, ‘“Operation Exodus”: Israeli government involvement in the production of Otto Preminger’s Film *Exodus* (1960)’ (2014) 33(2) *Journal of Israeli History* 209 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13531042.2014.946301> accessed 23 March 2026.

^{vi}Tony Shaw and Giora Goodman, ‘Star power: Kirk Douglas, celebrity activism and the Hollywood–Israel connection’ (2020) 93(259) *Historical Research* 153 <https://academic.oup.com/histres/article/93/259/153/5713392> accessed 23 March 2026.

^{vii}Omer Bartov, ‘Weaponizing Language: Misuses of Holocaust Memory and the Never Again Syndrome’ (Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, 2024) <https://home.watson.brown.edu/research/research-briefs/weaponizing-language> accessed 23 March 2026.

^{viii}‘Russell Crowe shines in James Vanderbilt’s gripping film *Nuremberg*’ (FOX 2 Now, 2025) <https://fox2now.com/am-show/movie-reviews/russell-crowe-shines-in-james-vanderbilts-gripping-film-nuremberg/> accessed 23 March 2026.

^{ix}‘*Nuremberg* Review: Russell Crowe’s Wily Nazi on Trial’ (*The Wall Street Journal*, 2025) <https://www.wsj.com/arts-culture/film/nuremberg-review-russell-crowes-wily-nazi-on-trial-63fc2aac> accessed 23 March 2026.

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- ^x‘Nuremberg Review: Russell Crowe and Rami Malek in a Flawed Holocaust Drama’ (*The New York Times*, 6 November 2025) <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/06/movies/nuremberg-review.html> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xi}Peter Bradshaw, ‘Nuremberg review – Russell Crowe is top notch as an on-trial Göring but Rami Malek lets side down’ (*The Guardian*, 14 November 2025) <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/nov/14/nuremberg-review-russell-crowe-is-top-notch-as-an-on-trial-goring-but-rami-malek-lets-side-down> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xii}Olivia B. Waxman, ‘The Real Psychiatrist Who Inspired *Nuremberg*’ (*TIME*, 2025) <https://time.com/7331917/nuremberg-movie-true-story/> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xiii}Matt Zoller Seitz, ‘Nuremberg’ (*RogerEbert.com*, 7 November 2025) <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/nuremberg-russell-crowe-film-review-2025> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xiv}Mira Fox, PJ Grisar and Olivia Haynie, ‘Is *Nuremberg* the Holocaust movie we need right now?’ (*The Forward*, 11 November 2025) <https://forward.com/culture/782548/nuremberg-going-russell-crowe-rami-malek/> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xv}Sujith Xavier, ‘Locating and Situating Justice Pal: TWAAIL, International Criminal Tribunals, and Judicial Powers’ (2022) 12(2) *Asian Journal of International Law* 292 <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/asian-journal-of-international-law/article/locating-and-situating-justice-pal-twail-international-criminal-tribunals-and-judicial-powers/EE3DB400E069AF725129E529E0794AF1> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xvi}Richard Falk, ‘War, War Crimes, Power and Justice: Toward a Jurisprudence of Conscience’ (2012) 10(4) *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, art 3681 <https://apjif.org/2012/10/4/richard-falk/3681/article> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xvii}Laura Silver, ‘Younger Americans stand out in their views of the Israel-Hamas war’ (Pew Research Center, 2 April 2024) <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/04/02/younger-americans-stand-out-in-their-views-of-the-israel-hamas-war/> accessed 23 March 2026.
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- ^{xx}Eric Loefflad, ‘The United States, Israel, and the Affective Lives of Moral Injury: A Genealogy of Lawfare’s Emotional Presuppositions’ (2025) 5(1) *Athena: Critical Inquiries in Law, Philosophy and Globalization* 1 <https://athena.unibo.it/article/view/21443> accessed 23 March 2026.
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- ^{xxii}Spencer Ackerman, ‘Sarah Hurwitz Profanes the Holocaust’ (*Forever Wars*, 21 November 2025) <https://www.forever-wars.com/sarah-hurwitz-profanes-the-holocaust/> accessed 23 March 2026.
- ^{xxiii}Norman G Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (Verso Books 2000) <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/233020/the-holocaust-industry-by-norman-g-finkelstein/> accessed 23 March 2026.