The Globalization of *Wiedergutmachung*

Principal Investigators:

José Brunner, Tel Aviv University

Norbert Frei, Friedrich-Schiller Universität, Jena

Constantin Goschler, Ruhr-Universität, Bochum

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This project constitutes a follow-up on the GIF research project, entitled "The Practice of *Wiedergutmachung* for Nazi Victims in Israel and Germany, 1952-2002", which started in January 2003 and came to a close in December 2006. That previous project regarded the practices of individual compensation as both constitutive of, and embedded in, a continuously changing but always critical and complex encounter between Nazi victims, and bureaucratic and legal institutions in Germany and Israel. As the research showed, this encounter was not only fraught with multiple layers of conflicting purposes, interests and feelings, suspicions and tensions, memories and misunderstandings between the actors involved, it also gave rise to conflicting emotions and concerns experienced by the various actors. This actor-centered perspective was pursued in a series of detailed microstudies, conducted by a total of 14 researchers from Israel and Germany, which aimed to undermine sweeping generalizations and formal categories by focusing on the diverse and often contradictory roles and tasks of the various individuals and groups involved in the process of compensation, such as claimants, politicians, administrators, lawyers, judges, and medical experts. In these microstudies the various sides involved in this encounter were taken under close scrutiny, as well as the shifting modalities and
results of these encounters, by following the journeys of a large number of claimants with differing identities through the highly complicated and often long lasting legal and medical procedures that were involved in the assessment of compensation claims. Taken as a whole, the research conducted by the Israeli and German members of the GIF team followed the flow of individual compensation, as it were, from the legislation in Germany and Israel through the administrative practices in both countries to the multiple meanings that the actual compensation proceedings had (and still have) for various groups of claimants in their varying respective social contexts from the fifties to today.

The two Principal Investigators as well as the senior German researcher of the abovementioned project, who are the three PIs of the current proposal, designed the previous project while assuming one continuous learning process during what can be called the "classical period" of *Wiedergutmachung* since 1952. While our project aimed to cover the five decades until 2002, in the course of the research it became increasingly clear to us that the fall of the Iron Curtain, the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the Communist bloc and of the Soviet Union, which ended the Cold War and turned the US into the only remaining superpower, ushering in what commonly has come to be known as the age of globalization, led to a deep and significant shift in the operative framework and the political and cultural constellations within which the practices of *Wiedergutmachung* take place. With the end of the Cold War the practices of German restitution both for Jewish and non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, which originally had been designed in the 1950s, underwent a profound change in all their facets, since they came to be performed in an enlarged, global arena.

Hence, the new research project will build on the insights and conclusions of the previous one, while focusing the research on one decisive question: How did globalization transform and shape the practices of *Wiedergutmachung* since the beginning of the 1990s?

This question will be explored by examining five dimensions in which the effects of globalization on all forms of *Wiedergutmachung* can be determined.
1. **New Political Constellations:** The fall of the Iron Curtain, the reunification of Germany, as well as the re-emergence of old-new states in Eastern Europe, exacerbated tensions between post-Holocaust and post-Communist politics not only in Germany, but also in a number of Eastern European countries, especially Poland and former Yugoslavia.

2. **New Organizations:** Since the 1990s *Wiedergutmachung* has undergone a form of privatization. Industrial corporations, insurance companies and banks on the one hand, and US-dominated transnational organizations like the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) founded in 1992, on the other hand, have become increasingly important and highly visible in matters of restitution of private and communal Jewish property. As a result, a number of new interlocking global organizational networks have emerged, some of which play a highly complex role in processes of *Wiedergutmachung*, since they simultaneously act as negotiators with governments, solicitors of reparation claims from victims, and as distributors of monies that they allocate to victims.

3. **New Forms of Communication:** The preponderant role of the US in world politics after 1990 has led to the dominance of an "American-style" political discourse in the media, in which legal claims as well as a strongly morally charged arguments play an important part. The medialization of negotiations on *Wiedergutmachung* has undoubtedly come to play a major role in negotiations on restitution between survivor organizations and economic corporations, such as banks and insurance companies. At the same time, the Internet has achieved a pivotal role as a means of disseminating claim forms and information on restitution proceedings, as well as testimonies, research and protocols of international conferences. Databases of art looted by the Nazis, the creation of global virtual communities of claimants, as well as the possibility of communicating on-line with a variety of organizations representing victims of Nazi persecution, may also have had an impact on how *Wiedergutmachung* has been conducted and experienced by claimants during the nineties.

4. **New Claimants and New Values:** Much of post-1990 restitution involves not only new groups of Nazi victims who have become eligible for compensation by a change of standards, and also increasingly a new generation of claimants who differ from the older generation in being the heirs of the victims rather than the victims themselves.
Contemporary *Wiedergutmachung* seems to be guided by a somewhat different way of thinking concerning symbolic reparation, and a different set of values with reference to private property that characterizes both sides in the restitution process.

5. **New Experts:** Medical experts played a central role in the earlier paradigm of *Wiedergutmachung*, determining lasting damages to the health of victims due to persecution, including mental damages, for which individual compensation was paid. Though the medical certification of health damages still does play a role, it has become increasingly marginalized in compensation proceedings. Instead, historians with a wide variety of specialization, such as historians of the Jewish people, Nazism, economics and art, have become the main group of experts involved in restitution and compensation claims, and in commissions of inquiry appointed by corporations and government ministries after 1990.