It is not a common occurrence that left-wing politician Tamar Zandberg rebukes Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for not being nationalistic enough. But that is exactly what happen this week after Netanyahu’s office issued a clarification that he had not characterized “The Poles” as Nazi collaborators but only stated that some “Poles” had collaborated. In response, Zandberg reprimanded him: “The Prime Minister of the Jewish state sells out the memory of the Holocaust for a dubious alliance with an anti-Semitic leader.”

Zandberg was not alone in condemning Netanyahu. After Poland’s prime minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, declined to participate in a summit of Central European leaders scheduled to take place in Israel, opposition leader Yair Lapid stated that Netanyahu should have told the Polish premier something else: “Don't come here, because we don't grovel over the memory of the Holocaust and don't conduct negotiations over it because we have national pride and honor, and we honor the memory of those who perished.”

The key issue for all these politicians, whether right or left wing, is not the historical truth of the Holocaust but rather Israeli (and Polish) contemporary national pride. The Holocaust is the only historical event with which almost all Israeli Jews can identify. They can hardly unite around any other historical event. Some Israelis see the 1948 war as the War of Independence while others see it as the Nakba; some see the 1967 war as a miraculous redemption while others see it as the cause for an immoral occupation; some see the 1990s Oslo agreements as a criminal act while others see it as a missed opportunity for peace. It is only the Holocaust around which the range of otherwise divided social groups of Israeli Jews can agree and in which they can find a basis for their common historical identity.

And this collective memory constitutes Jews as the ultimate victims, whereas “the Poles” are a nation of collaborators. But history is always more complex than such simplistic characterizations. Indeed, Jews were victims, but Poles suffered as well. Polish intellectuals and Polish clergy were executed by Hitler’s henchmen, just as thousands of Poles were murdered by Stalin’s forces. Poles did collaborate but so too did many individual Jews; in the Warsaw Ghetto, Jewish members of the ‘Group 13’ network served as Gestapo agents and surrendered other Jews to the Nazis.

Many will argue that the Nazis targeted the Jews as a group: Jews had no way to escape while the millions of Poles who died during Nazi occupation were not targeted as a group. They will also argue that those individual Jews who collaborated did so to save their lives and the lives of their family members. In contrast, Poles surrendered Jews with no such death threat hanging over their head.

They are right. But suffering cannot and should not be measured in collective terms. It should be and must be remembered in individual terms. The loss of a father is first and foremost painful to his or her son or daughter. The loss of a sister is a tragedy felt by her siblings. The competition over who suffered more—or who collaborated more—seems to overshadow the true consequences of those actions: the hunger of a child, the pain felt by a parent.

Today, in both Israel and Poland the memory of the Holocaust promotes national identity. It is difficult to imagine a greater paradox. One of the worst crimes in history, perpetrated and organized by forces propelled by extreme nationalism, serves today as the basis for the national pride of two nations that suffered at its hands. It is time that Israelis and Poles acknowledge each other’s individual suffering and set aside the use of the Holocaust to promote nationalism and its dangers.