

Current Research and Overall Implications of the Holocaust

It is estimated that about 27.000 books have been written about and around World War II; 40.000, apparently, have been written about or around the Holocaust. Much of that is fictional literature, much of it belongs to other disciplines, besides the historical one. But the output of historical research is huge, and no one person can encompass all of it, or even most of it. I will therefore deal only with a very few of what I believe to be the most important issues Holocaust history has to deal with.

In 2001, my most recent book was published, in English: 'Rethinking the Holocaust'. It was written, largely, in 1999, which is about eight years ago, and in the meantime a great deal more has been published which is of importance, so that I really should write another book, about the rethinking of the rethinking.

Schematically, commentators differentiate between perpetrators, victims and bystanders. This differentiation is faulty, because sometimes victims became perpetrators, and bystanders became either of the other two. However, I will use this schema for convenience's sake.

German and, to a large extent, American, historians have concentrated on the perpetrators. Behind that lies not only the desire and, indeed, the social and political need in Germany to deal with National Socialism and its genocidal policies, but also, there and elsewhere, to deal with extreme manifestations of evil, which is a fascinating topic, and a very old one, too. To my mind, this fascination ignores history. Humans are the only predatory mammals that kill each other in huge numbers, and they have been doing that since time immemorial, and most likely before that. We all have the potential to murder in us, and proof of that one finds in the fact that in all societies there are laws against murder. In the Decalogue you have a wrong translation of that injunction. The relevant commandment is translated as 'thou shalt not kill', but the Hebrew says quite clearly – 'thou shalt not murder'. Killing, or in other words the taking of someone else's life, is permitted, when there is self-defence against a real or imagined threat against the life of the individual or the group. There would be no need to have laws against murder, in practically every society on earth, if we were not inclined to commit it. And there is a sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit permission to kill other people, whether individually,

collectively, whether controlled or not, and in many societies judicial killing is permitted. Certain types of mass killings we call genocides, since that term was coined by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish Jewish refugee lawyer in the US, probably in 1942, or 1943. Why do we kill, or murder? I would like to present my hypothesis, which of course I cannot prove.

As far as we know, humans are descended from a group of maybe 20.000 individuals who roamed East Africa some half a million years ago, give or take a couple of hundred thousand years either way. Recent findings in China have produced the theory that humans intermingled with Neanderthals, but that does not change the earlier findings based on DNA probes. These early humans were weak predators, because they did not have the teeth of lions or the claws of bears. They had to rely on collective efforts to survive, by hunting and gathering. Because of their inherent physical weakness, they developed the tendency to react to any real or imagined threat to the individual, the core family group, or the larger group, by killing the intruder, unless the intruder could be absorbed, willingly or unwillingly. The killing instinct is, in my view, a basic defense mechanism of humans. One might conclude from this that there is no way of stopping genocides, because we are pre-programmed to murder all those whom we see as a threat, rightly or wrongly. However, the very reason for this behavior, namely the inherent weakness of the human predators, also forced them to develop cooperation, without which they could not survive. Cooperation meant also help, pleasantness, up to real sacrifice for anyone who might be considered a real or potential ally. This, I believe, expresses itself in the instinct of affirmation of life, which Freud probably interpreted in much too sexual terms, and that could be extended beyond the immediate family or group. I think that the fact that we have these two conflicting instinctual reactions within us explains both the tendency to genocidal behavior, **and** the possibility of rescuing others, even at the risk of our own lives. Evil, I think, is a social construct – that which we see as harmful to the individual or the group, rightly or wrongly, will be termed evil, and its opposite will be termed good. You will excuse me for saying so, but I find the endless preoccupation with the sources of evil not very satisfying. People say – how could the Nazis have done such things? But one good look at the history of mankind will show that murder, sadism, torture, brutality, has been prevalent all through the ages, and

the most awful scenes – and I can quote quite a number of descriptions from the Holocaust that make one lose one's sleep for not just one night – have their precedents. To deal with the perpetrators of the Holocaust in emotionally charged terms does little to explain the major question: why?

Other historians, again mainly German ones, but also Americans and others have, over the past fifteen years or so, concentrated mainly on the problem of decision-making: when did the genocide begin, who ordered it, who was involved in it? The argument centered mainly on Hitler's involvement, and the question of dating, in the context of the war. I don't want to enter into these controversies – in my eyes they certainly are important, because historians have to be as clear as they possibly can regarding the decision-making process that led to a centrally important event such as the Holocaust. But in the end, what difference does it make? So we know now that Hitler never gave an order, but that he was involved as a radicalizing factor; we know that the Holocaust was not pre-planned, though it was pre-figured in the ideology of National Socialism – not explicitly, but implicitly; we know that it developed in stages, and we agonize over the problem exactly what these stages were, and how can they be dated, and how are they connected, if at all, to the military situation. I think, though, that all these issues are really on the margin, though an essential margin, of what we deal with when we deal with the genocide of the Jews. Let us assume that we find uncontested answers to these questions, what will we have gained? A better understanding of why the Holocaust occurred? I doubt it. The real questions are, I would suggest, these: why did the genocide take place? Why were the Jews its victims? How did the German society become a society, in its majority, of perpetrators and their supporters? More important even than these questions are the questions regarding the reaction of the Jews themselves – how did they react before they knew they were victims, and after they realized that they were the targets of a mass murder? What does their reaction tell us about societies threatened with genocide? Who were the few rescuers, and why did they rescue? What was the attitude of the non-German populations to the Jews in their midst during the genocide? How did the Allies and the neutrals react? And behind all these, and more, is the major question that troubles many of us: generally, why do genocides occur, and what can be done to stop them?

Let me deal with two interconnected issues regarding the perpetrators. Michael Wildt, in his book "Die Generation des Unbedingten", analyzed the central group of the perpetrators – the Reichssicherheitshauptamt (RSHA), the Central Reich Security Office, which included the Criminal Police, the Security Police, and the intelligence agency, the Sicherheitsdienst (SD). The RSHA comprised a few hundred individuals, and included the Gestapo, and was also responsible for the Einsatzgruppen, the main murder units in the Soviet Union. Wildt showed two very important things: one was that the RSHA was a murder organization of radical antisemitic ideologues. The other was that they wanted to transform Germany by in effect eradicating the old Prussian system of government which had maintained the legacy of a conservative, nationalist liberalism. In their view, the Folk Community (Volksgemeinschaft) of pure Nordic Aryans had a common will (Volkswille) – a distant memory of Rousseau – and that common will was represented by the Party, and the Leader expressed that will. Therefore, the Leader had to be completely free to make his decisions without any formal obstructions, and no laws could be allowed to stand in his way. This was an anti-normative norm, opposing even laws made by the National Socialists themselves if they were not in accord with the Leader's will. A typical expression of this tendency was the agreement between Himmler and Thierack, the German Minister of Justice, on September 28, 1942. In that agreement, all meaningful legal powers were in effect handed over to the SS. The ordinary courts could deal only with minor criminal or civil offences. Everything else was taken away from them, and the Minister of Justice himself was in full accord on these issues with Himmler. There you have the basic difference between National Socialism and Fascism, which elevated the state to almost divine stature – a distant echo of Hegel. National Socialism, as clearly expressed by the RSHA elite – many of them lawyers – wanted, in effect, to abolish the state, and replace it by a self-perpetuating elite ruling in the name of a popular will as expressed by the Leader. Wildt, to my mind, has stated, clearly, the central importance of ideology in the German Reich, and therefore in the development towards and the implementation of the genocide.

This question of the basic motivation of Nazism is crucial. Did economic, social, and political considerations lead to the Holocaust, or the ideology? I think that functionalist historians, from Hans Mommsen to Goetz Aly, have contributed greatly to

our understanding of the process. Their researches have shown that ideology was not the only factor in the equation, and that pragmatic considerations played an important role. However, I think that Wildt, Ian Kershaw, and Saul Friedlander, among others, have shown that while pragmatic elements were decisive whenever there was no clash between them and ideology, ideology prevailed whenever there was such a clash. I think that this can be shown in, for instance. Goetz Aly and Christian Gerlach have claimed that economic factors were the crucial element in the destruction of Hungarian Jews – though they did not ignore the ideological element completely. It is true that robbing the rich Jewish elite in Hungary was an important and promising aim; it is also true that economic considerations played an important role in framing German policies towards Horthy's Hungary generally. But the context was, of course, the well-founded suspicions that in 1943/44 Hungary was trying to jump off the German bandwagon, and the occupation of the country was a result of the deteriorating military situation of Germany. Jews were held responsible for Hungarian treachery. But all that does not explain why Hungarian Jews were to be murdered, in toto, in Auschwitz and elsewhere. They could have been enslaved, arrested, dispossessed, and so on. The murder was totally unpragmatic and stood in contradiction to the interests of German war policies. It can only be explained by the genocidal ideology that drove Nazi Germany.

Similarly, Nazi genocidal policies in Poland, and in fact everywhere, simply cannot be understood at all unless one accepts the proposition that the basic motivation was ideological. This, however, is true not only regarding the policies towards the Jews, or even towards the Roma, the Russians, the Poles, or the Belarussians, and others. I think this is equally true of their policies generally. Ian Kershaw has, up to a point, shown this in his Hitler biography. But when you ask the question – why did Germany start the war? – you are at a loss for an explanation based on economics, social policies, or even political factors. After all, no one threatened Germany in 1939; Germany was threatening others, while it had emerged out of the economic crisis, had abolished unemployment, had reestablished its position as the main power on the European continent, and its elites, economic, social and military, did not want a war. Why, then, did war break out? The answer seems pretty obvious: not because of Danzig, or even German-Polish enmity – after all, there had been a neutrality treaty with Poland since 1934, and the Poles had

participated, enthusiastically, in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The reason was purely ideological, and was based on the ideas of racial war against the enemies, controlled by international Jewry, of the German, Nordic, people of the Aryan race. Hitler's famous memorandum to Goering, of August, 1936, shows this clearly. The conclusion I would draw is that the predominant factor not only of the genocide of the Jews, but of Nazi expansionism generally – and it was based on antisemitism – was ideological.

However, one of the most troubling questions was this: in November, 1932, in the last free elections of the Weimar Republic, the Nazis were defeated: they lost 34 seats in the Reichstag, and 2 million votes. They were on their way out, and the majority of the German electorate had voted for non-Nazi and anti-Nazi parties. Six weeks later Hitler became Chancellor, as a result of backstage maneuvers by the conservatives. Six years after that the German people, who had voted against the Nazis six years before that, became, in their apparently overwhelming majority, supporters of a genocidal regime, and soon after that supporters and executors of genocidal policies. How did this transformation come about? Goetz Aly proposes an answer. In his "Hitler's Volksstaat" he argued that, to put it simply, the Germans were bribed by the economic uplift, by increased pensions and social policies directed towards the poorer sections of the population, while the wealthy were taxed more heavily. The budgetary deficits were covered, to a not unimportant extent, by robbing the Jews. The war gave the Germans the possibility to rob the countries they invaded, again targeting first of all the Jews. It was through robbery that the economy of Germany was sustained to the extent that the support of the Germans for the regime was maintained. He does not actually say that the Holocaust was motivated by the desire to maintain the standard of living of the Germans, but this might perhaps be one of the logical conclusions from his argument. Aly's critics have deconstructed his argument by showing that some his statistics are wrong, that some of his arguments have been put forward in a much more solid way by others, and some of his conclusions are exaggerated. This may well be true, but it does not really invalidate his main point: by maintaining, through bribery and robbery, a reasonable standard of living in Germany throughout the war, the regime maintained its base of support. This eroded slowly, as he showed in a subsequent book, "Volkes Stimme"; but as he, and also

Jeffrey Herf and Bernward Dörner have recently shown, Nazi propaganda managed to convince the Germans that if they lost the war, the Jews would exact a terrible revenge and would annihilate the German people. These findings may well answer the question of how and why the Germans supported the genocidal regime, but of course not the main "why" question, namely, why the genocidal policies were engaged in in the first place. My argument would be that if you combine the insights of Aly and some others with the analyses of Friedlander, Kershaw, Herf, among others, you arrive at an overall explanation of German policies: genocidal ideology, with antisemitism at its core, was the basis, on which economic, social and political elements were brought into play to create what was probably the most terrible, anti-civilizational regime that ever disgraced the face of this earth. I might add that Yisrael Gutman and I have advocated a similar interpretation for many years, but I at least lacked the detailed expertise of our colleagues.

A second main theme is an interpretation of the policies of the Western Allies towards the Holocaust. One may here ignore the Soviet attitude, which showed total indifference as to the fate of the Jews – for the Soviets, the Jews, insofar as they were Soviet citizens, were no different from all the others. The special fate of the Jews, namely that all of them had been condemned to death for the crime of having been born, was ignored.

As to the Anglo-Americans, a whole group of first-rate historians have raised the accusation of the West having silenced the cry that came out of Europe, and having failed to rescue when they could and should have. The most powerful of these accusers is of course David S. Wyman, son of Swedish missionaries, in his book "The Abandonment of the Jews".

It is only relatively recently that I have come to rethink his, and other colleagues', analyses. It is of course quite true that, as he – in his other book, "Paper Walls" - and others say, the US could have absorbed many more Jews prior to 1941. But then, why should they have? These were neither US citizens nor were they, in the thirties, the only persecuted minority. Save their lives? Until 1939 there was antisemitism, and persecutions, not a danger of mass murder. Who could have known, before the war, that there would be a genocide, when not even Hitler threatened the Jews with murder before

January, 1939. The Roosevelt Administration was beleaguered not only by a recurrent economic depression, but internally by a population that was very definitely opposed to be engaged in another European conflict. In addition, antisemitism was growing in the US, and by 1944 would reach mass proportions, to the extent that, according to opinion polls, some 48% of the American public held fairly radical anti-Jewish views. The Jews were, still unknowingly, caught in a trap, which my colleague Shlomo Aharonson described in his recent work: an unpopular minority in whose name liberal politicians such as Roosevelt or Churchill could not and would not lead their populace into a terrible conflict, but in which the Jews were to be targeted as the only group that was targeted for annihilation. Proposals to take in a significant number of Jews into their countries before the war could and did encounter radical opposition, in the US much more than in the UK, where several tens of thousands of Central European Jews indeed found refuge. But even if the Anglo-Americans had opened their countries for Jews prior to the war, how many could have fled, out of the nine million Jews who were finally to be engulfed by the Nazi onslaught? The West could have saved some, but not the millions.

This becomes even more pronounced during the war itself. After September, 1939, no significant number of Jews could have escaped Europe. After the fall of France, Britain was fighting for her life, and any rescue of Jews became a total impossibility. The USA were neutral, distant, anti-war, and antisemitic. Between July and September, 1941, as Richard Breitman has convincingly shown, British intelligence decoded German police radio messages from recently occupied Soviet territories reporting massacres of civilians, some of which specifically mentioned Jews. One British analyst concluded that the Germans were killing all the Jews they could, and that report landed on Churchill's desk. From mid-September, these decodes no longer reached the British, because the Germans had taken precautions. Contrary to Breitman, I think that from these German decodes it was impossible to conclude what that one brilliant British analyst had concluded, more or less intuitively, for two reasons: first, because in the summer of 1941 there was still no German policy of total annihilation of all Jews, so that it was impossible to know what the Germans themselves did not know at the time; and two, because the decodes concerned the Soviet Union only, and at that time no mass murder actions had taken place elsewhere in German-dominated Europe.

Was it, at least, theoretically, possible to rescue European Jewry once the mass murders began to take place, first in the USSR, and then elsewhere? I would argue, in the light of what we know about the developing military situation, that between June, 1941, the date on the invasion of the Soviet Union by the Germans, and early 1944, no such rescue was feasible. Obviously, the German army ruled Europe, the Western Allies had no foothold there until September, 1943, when they invaded Italy, and the Soviets, who were oblivious to the fate of the Jews anyway, were fighting for their lives. No massive rescue operation was possible, even theoretically. The Western Allies could not bomb camps or railways in Poland, because these places were outside their reach. British Lancaster bombers could reach Poland and return, but without fighter escorts, which would have made them sitting ducks for the German air defense. This changed only when the Americans occupied the Italian air bases at Foggia, in central Italy, in November, 1943. It took them a few months before these airfields were again fully operational, and then indeed Poland could be reached. But by that time, all the Nazi extermination camps except for Auschwitz-Birkenau had ceased operations, and no detailed plans of Birkenau were available until the so-called Auschwitz protocols, the report by Vrba and Wetzler, two escapees from Auschwitz, reached the West in June, 1944. The Polish government-in-exile in London had received reports about the camp from the Polish underground, as a publication by the Auschwitz Museum of 1968 documents, but what happened to these reports, whether they reached the British and when, is still unclear. These reports included brief summaries of the murder of Jews by gassing, though the emphasis was on the killing of Polish prisoners. It is also unclear whether these reports included any detailed maps. Most probably they did not. Of course, the Anglo-Americans could have photographed the camp, if they had made a decision to bomb it, and indeed they did so in late June, 1944. After that, as a number of detailed analyses in the last ten years or so have shown, they could have targeted the Birkenau extermination camp. But, the Chiefs of Staffs in Washington had decided, in January, 1944, not to use military means for so-called "civilian" purposes, and Birkenau was not a military establishment. This decision had nothing to do with Jews, and was not taken for any antisemitic reasons, but it effectively prevented the bombing. The tragedy is that even had such bombing taken place, I doubt very much indeed whether it would have saved any Jews, even if,

improbably, they would have destroyed all four gassing installations in use in 1944. The Germans would have continued to murder them, probably reverting to starvation, forced marches, and machine guns, just as they did before and parallel to the use of gassing. However, bombing Birkenau would have made it clear that the Western Allies cared. But they did not, and thus acted contrary to their own war aims. Their failure was not technical, but moral.

When one considers these points, it is inevitable, I believe, to reach the conclusion that between mid-1941 and mid-1944, when most of the Jews murdered during the Holocaust perished, there was no way that the West could have rescued the Jewish masses. They could have rescued thousands, though, and they failed to do so, despite Jewish pleas. Jewish organizations asked the Allies to guarantee escape to neutral countries by committing themselves to neutral governments to feed such escapees, and find a home for them after the war – because the neutrals had no intention in any case to provide home for Jews in their countries if they could possibly help themselves. Britain did its utmost to prevent Jews from the Balkans from reaching Palestine, or indeed any other place in the Near East. These were conscious decisions, aimed at preventing the rescue of Jewish lives, and the moral failure, again, is there. The millions were doomed the moment the powerful German armies controlled Europe, and especially Eastern Europe.

I have left the main issue, the history of the victims, to the end, precisely because I believe this to be the central issue. Quite a number of authors, perhaps chief among them, very recently, Saul Friedlander, have made the point that the Jews were not just passive victims of what the Nazis and their collaborators did to them. But I think the issue is broader than that. For the Jews, obviously, the lives and deaths of that third of the Jewish people who were murdered is of tremendous individual and collective importance; for humanity at large, the lives and reactions of groups targeted in genocides are extremely significant, if only because there are always more victims than perpetrators, and genocide is one of the central problems for the contemporary world. In order to fight that disease, it is absolutely crucial to know why people become victims, and what the ways are in which such victims then react.

A series of detailed researches into various aspects of Jewish behavior in the face of this unexpected, surprising, and totally inexplicable – to them – onslaught have

contributed to dealing with these issues. Western and Central Europe have been covered fairly well, and we know today about the reactions of Jews in these countries to the threat as it developed. Generally speaking, Jews were taken by surprise, relatively few managed to escape from the Germans, and their reactions ranged from unrest, unarmed, and in a few cases armed resistance, to helpless surrender when there was no way out. There were few collaborators with the Germans, but the reactions of the leadership groups were very varied. In the Netherlands, there was complete institutional and moral collapse, in the context of the unhelpful attitude of the Dutch bureaucracy which cooperated with the Germans; however, a relatively large minority tried to hide with friendly Dutch families – again, in the context of a significant minority of pro-Nazi Dutch people. The obvious conclusion from reading these accounts is, in my view, that the Jewish population was much more willing to be active in their own rescue than one would conclude from the study only of their leadership. In Belgium, a much more differentiated, often friendly, attitude of the local bureaucracy can be discerned, especially in the Walloon areas. The population, with the exception of a significant minority of pro-Nazis and collaborators, was much more friendly than in many other countries, and a much larger percentage of Jews managed to hide among them. In this, the Jews were not at all passive recipients of favors – they initiated and were active in their own rescue, with the active help of non-Jewish friends and allies. In France, the situation changed over time. After the French defeat in 1940, a majority of Frenchmen, as the historical accounts show, supported the collaborationist Vichy regime. Anti-Jewish laws promulgated by Vichy were not opposed, though some provincial prefects tried to alleviate the suffering as much as possible. However, the combined German and Vichy effort at deporting the Jews to Poland, which began in July, 1942, was met with a growing opposition on the part of many French people, despite radical cooperation with the Germans, or at least acquiescence with their policies, by what must have been a significant minority of Frenchmen. Studies by Renee Poznanski, Yerachmiel-Richard Cohen, and a number of others, show the divisions among the Jews and their leadership groups, with a growing number of Jews identifying with attempts at hiding, engaging in underground work, and finally joining various resistance groups or founding their own, Jewish ones. The fact that about three quarters of the Jews in France escaped deportation clearly shows these two

aspects of Jewish reaction: the increasing number of French people willing to come to the aid of the Jews, and 'considerable Jewish initiative in self-rescue and a relatively high contribution to the 'Resistance' – as already Henri Michel had shown decades ago. Even the French Judenrat, the UGIF, has had its defenders, until Poznanski came to give us a balanced, authoritative picture. This organization, dominated by Jews who saw themselves, first of all, as Frenchmen, was rent between loyalty to then legitimate government at Vichy, and the growing realization of the existential dangers that such cooperation meant. Within the organization, as well as outside it, a growing number of Jews engaged in illegal, life-saving activities. This did not stop the leadership from cooperating with Vichy, and they paid for it with their lives. One hesitates between wondering at their blindness and admiring their self-sacrificial devotion to what they believed was the interest of the Jews in France. It was a tragedy of choices, but at least in Western Europe there were choices one could make. This was much less so in Eastern Europe.

The murder took place not in the West, but in the East, on occupied Polish, Soviet and Baltic territories. The whole total Jewish population of the three main Western countries was only slightly larger than that of the Warsaw ghetto. It is in Eastern Europe that the main historiographical issues regarding Jewish reactions have to be dealt with. A series of detailed histories of the main ghettos in Poland and Lithuania, as well as two analyses of the developments in Romania, and some in the USSR, have made it possible to reconstruct the history of Jews in these areas during the Holocaust. Works on Warsaw (Yisrael Gutman), Lodz (Michal Unger), Bialystok (Sarah Bender), Vilno-Vilnius (Yitzhak Arad), Kovno-Kaunas (edited by Dina Porat), and a number of others, have made the discussions on Jewish life and reactions more penetrating and accessible. The problem is that, to date, most of these monographs are available only in Hebrew. They point to a different picture of the leadership groups concentrated in the Jewish Councils from the purely negative ones one saw in the sixties, seventies and early eighties. These Judenraete faced what has been described as choiceless choices. Yielding to the Germans as well as opposition to them meant death, in both cases, for the individuals as well as for the communities they represented. Yet two themes emerge from this picture. One is that the choice most of the Judenraete made, to try and rescue the Jews by slaving for the

Germans, was actually not so hopeless as past researches seem to have indicated. In Lodz and Bialystok, for instance, there grew a tendency to keep the ghettos going, for pragmatic reasons – the German army was interested in the production that was going on there, and the local Nazis profited hugely, privately, from bribes and loot of Jewish property. The Jewish leaders feared, but could not know, that these pragmatic considerations would finally be overruled by the ideologically-driven central Nazi authorities. Nevertheless, it is a fact that the more this slave labor was effective, the later the destruction came, and the larger, consequently, the remnant that finally survived in Nazi camps. The second point is, as Aharon Weiss showed already in the early seventies, that most Judenraete, at least the initial ones- because most of them were replaced later by more submissive leaders – were actually judged positively by the survivors. This is true of some of the Judenraete of the larger ghettos, especially Kovno, and of a large number of middling and small ghettos in Poland (in its prewar borders) and Lithuania. Recent researches tend to confirm this picture. At the same time, these researches also point to the fact that there was corruption and collapse of morality in many places, and that there were Gestapo agents among the Jews to whom the Germans promised their lives in return for collaboration, a promise which of course was broken.

The situation was quite different in the smaller places, especially in the more backward Eastern areas of Poland and the Western Soviet Union. Not much was known about these places, which contained some 30-40% of the prewar Polish Jewish population, but recent detailed accounts, some of them by myself, of some of these townships have raised a number of important issues. It seems quite impossible to generalize about the behavior of the Judenraete in these areas and townships. The behavior ranges from total collaboration, corruption, and moral collapse, to heroic opposition, unarmed and even armed, and everything in between. One can only surmise, in expectation of further research, that these differences have to do with two factors that are not usually adduced as explanations by historians: personal character and, simply, chance or luck or the lack of it. Other elements, such as the reaction of the surrounding populations, the behavior of the German rulers, and similar objective factors seem to have played a minor role. The same type of Jews confronted the same type of Germans, Poles,

Ukrainians, Belarussians, and so on, in adjoining and similar townships, and yet behaved differently from place to place.

However, there are centrally important issues beyond the behavior of leadership groups. What about the Jewish communities as such? Did they succeed in preserving cohesion and group solidarity, or did they disintegrate into an atomized number of families and individuals, trying to survive, as families and individuals, as best they could? The answers are not easy to come by, and anything that can be said on the basis of the contemporary state of research will be partial at best. In some of the large ghettos, cohesion and solidarity were, indeed, maintained, to a surprisingly large degree. I have called this type of reaction "Amidah", which means, in this context, "standing up as against" (- i.e. against real or perceived existential threats). Especially in places like Warsaw, Kovno, Bialystok, Vilna, and even in Lodz (despite the despotic internal dictatorship of the Jewish head of the ghetto, Rumkowski) one can see this type of reaction; less so in other places, such as Radom, Lublin, Cracow, or Czestochowa. In the smaller, or small, ghettos, there is a bewildering variety of responses – from total disintegration on the one hand (Kzemieniec, Buczacz, and other places), to heroic solidarity and communal cohesion on the other hand (Baranowicze, Tuczyn, and other places). Here, it seems, one of the basic questions was whether there was actual starvation, induced by the Germans, because in impossible physical conditions any actions of mutual help and solidarity became difficult at best. Minimal supply of food depended largely on the German authorities, and slight variations in behavior between such persons and groups could make all the difference. One could perhaps suggest a hypothetical answer by saying that, probably, wherever there were such minimal conditions, Jewish reactions tended to be similar, in some ways at least, to the "Amidah" described above.

Armed resistance was much more widespread than originally thought. The reason for this misunderstanding lies in the fact that relatively few people survived of the tens of thousands who escaped to the forests of Eastern Poland and the Western Soviet areas, mainly the Belorussian ones, where such forests are plentiful. Shalom Cholawsky has identified 63 small ghettos in today's Western Belorussia where armed groups were organized, and he estimated the number of people who escaped to the forests in that

region at about 20.000. I found such groups even in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, where the forests are much less prevalent, and the attitude of the local Ukrainian population was largely hostile. It is illogical to measure the importance of these groups by the number of enemies killed, as some commentators have done. Clearly, from a German point of view, these efforts at armed resistance were marginal. But it is exactly the German point of view that should, in this case, be secondary, or marginal. These efforts are very significant from the Jewish point of view, and from a broader perspective, a universal point of view of looking at the reaction of victim groups in genocidal situations.

On the question of relations with East European ethnic and national groups, a great deal of work has been and is being done; however, even more still awaits to be achieved. A recent attempt by some Polish scholars to overestimate Polish help to Jews is clearly politically motivated. Some even claim that up to 600.000 Poles tried to help Jews. If this had been so, there would not have been a Holocaust. On the other hand, some Israeli politicians – but no historians, as far as I am aware – continue to hold on to the stereotype of Poles as accessories to murder. Neither of these generalizations holds water. Serious Polish historians such as Dariusz Libionka, Barbara Engelkind-Boni, Jakub Petelewicz, and others, have shown that the majority of Poles, themselves targeted for a form of genocide – different from the Jewish one, but extremely grim nonetheless – were indifferent, mostly in an unfriendly way, to the plight of their Jewish neighbors. A large minority applauded the German policies or even actively participated in them (many of the so-called "Blue" Polish police, the extreme right-wing underground force NSZ, many groups of the mainstream Armia Krajowa, etc.); a smaller, but significant minority was willing to help Jews, and many of those also to hide and rescue them at tremendous risk to themselves. This latter pattern of behavior was especially marked – and this is something I found in my own researches – in rural areas of formerly Eastern Poland, where the majority was Ukrainian or Belarussian. Simply put, a Polish minority that faced life-threatening situations, especially in the Ukrainian areas, sometimes, and possibly even often, saw in the Jews potential allies, and behaved accordingly. Ukrainian attitudes to Jews differed, and with the spread of Ukrainian nationalism, became increasingly hostile. However, there seem to have been regional differences, but these have not been analyzed as yet, and the reasons for them are not clear. Thus, there were

hardly any rescuers in the central areas of Volhynia, though the Ukrainian nationalists never managed to control the area. Conversely, in Eastern Galicia, with its record of mass support for murderous nationalists, there appear to have been areas with more rescuers than one would have thought (in the area of Buczacz-Czortkow for instance). Overall, the proportion of helpers among Ukrainians was much smaller than among Poles, whereas amongst Belarussians help tended to be relatively much more widespread. There were Lithuanians and Latvians who helped Jews, but there again the proportion seems to have been very small. More objective research is necessary to clarify these issues.

Rescue was much more prevalent in Northern and Southern Europe. Despite a very active pro-Nazi segment of the population, the large majority of Norwegians, for instance, opposed the German occupation and the underground rescued half of the very small Jewish population there. The Danish rescue of the Jews, who also were a very small group of people, is well known. The important fact there is that help by Danes was largely spontaneous and massive. Swedish reluctance to accept or help Jews changed as the war progressed, and it was due to this changed attitude and the Swedish decision to brave possible German retaliation that the Norwegian and Danish Jews were rescued. A small number of historians are dealing with these issues in the relevant countries. They also concentrate on Danish and Norwegian collaboration with Nazi Germany, and on Swedish pro-German "neutrality" in the early stages of the war, and the impact of these policies on the Jews.

Italian attitudes to Jews have been the topic of quite a number of researches, among whom perhaps those of Susan Zuccotti and Liliana Fargion come to mind. The original view was that most Italians, including those in the armed forces, showed sympathy with the Jews and that, on the whole, the Italian population tended towards rescue of Jews. Of course, the number of Jews in Italy was only about 40.000. Recent research has somewhat changed this emphasis, and has concentrated on many cases of active collaboration with the Germans in hunting down Jews during the last phases of the war, in the areas where the so-called Salo Republic headed by Mussolini held some sway. Yet I think that this does not really lead to radically different conclusions from the ones that were enunciated decades ago; it only introduces differentiations that prevent us from

making untenable generalizations: most Italians, including a large number of Catholic clergy, were more likely than not to help .

In recent years, the argument about the attitude of the Churches, especially the Vatican, and more especially of Pope Pius XII, has grown in intensity. The refusal of the Vatican to grant access to its wartime archives has prevented a more thorough investigation of its policies, including the activities of a number of courageous churchmen who helped Jews. My own conclusions from the available, very voluminous literature, is that Pius was not an antisemite in the modern, nationalistic or racial sense, but rather a devoted Catholic intellectual who did not like Jews – after all, they had rejected Jesus as the Messiah. He was probably influenced by the anti-Jewish and anti-Judaic predisposition of a Church that had developed Church antisemitism over many centuries. But in his world, Jews were a minor issue, and he was there as the Vicar of Christ on earth, as the holder of the keys of St. Peter, and he was responsible for maintaining the Church, the body of Christ. He wanted to help arrange a peace between the West and Nazi Germany, most probably because the main danger to Christendom were the Bolsheviks. He did recognize the danger from the Nazis as well, and was no friend of the racial Nazi ideology. He did not speak out for the Jews, but then neither did he speak out for the persecuted Polish Catholic Church. He was probably torn between his Christian obligation to defend all humans against mass murder, and his defense of the Church. Had he spoken out in favor of the Jews, would he have saved any Jews? Who would have heard a broadcast from Radio Vatican, in December 1942? Who did hear what he actually did say then? Apparently, no German soldiers heard him. He could have demanded from the top clergy to read out a message in churches. Who would have heard them, in December, 1942, before they were silenced, as they undoubtedly would have been, by the Nazi security organs? I don't believe he would have saved a single Jew; but, from his own, Catholic perspective, he might have saved his soul.

It seems, to me, that it is only the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust that can explain it – and, as in my previous writings, I utterly reject the argument that there is something inexplicable about it. I believe satisfactory explanations of why it happened and how it happened can be achieved, over time of course. There will always be heated arguments about these matters, as there should be. But, in principle, the problem is not

that the Nazis were inhuman, but quite the contrary: the problem is that they were human, and that the Holocaust was the most extreme form of genocide – and one has to add: to date. It is there that the Holocaust becomes a way to understand genocide generally, and to try to at least limit these tragedies, if not stop them altogether. Dealing with the Holocaust does not mean that the other genocides or near-genocides, or genocidal massacres, are any less horrible, or that one should not study them in order to deal with them. The Holocaust was, after all, a genocide, and one should not isolate it from other genocides. But the Holocaust is the starting point for all serious work on genocide generally. And this work shows, I think, that the Jewish specificity and the universal implications of the genocide of the Jews are two sides of the same coin.