

On Holocaust Education

There appear to be three central questions: why teach the Holocaust, what to teach, and how to teach it. The genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of Nazi Germany and its collaborators, which we commonly and inaccurately call the Holocaust, was the most extreme form of genocide to date. It was the most extreme case, not because of the suffering of the victims: there is no gradation of suffering, and Jews did not suffer more, or less, than other victims of other genocides. Nor is it because of the number of the victims – perhaps 5.7 or 5.8 million – nor because of the percentage of the murdered Jews out of the total number of the Jews in the world at the time – about 17 million. In the Armenian genocide, perhaps up to a million, perhaps more, Armenians were killed, or died as a result of the genocidal actions, and that was more than a third of the Armenians in Turkey; between 800,000 to a million Tutsi were killed in Rwanda in 1994, and that was some 90% of the Tutsi then living in Rwanda itself. And in China, the victims of the Great Leap Forward, which was what we call politicide, that is - a genocidal murder for political, social, or economic reasons - numbered considerably more than the victims of the Holocaust. No, the reasons are different. For the first time in history, every single person who was considered by the perpetrators to be a member of the targeted group, that is the Jews, was to be killed for the crime of having been born. For the first time in history, this was to have taken place everywhere the German writ ran – that is, ultimately, all over the globe. For the first time in history, the motivation had little, if anything, to do with economic or social factors, but was purely ideological, and the ideology was totally removed from any realistic situations. It took place in the context of a war which Nazi Germany initiated for reasons that, again, had little to do with real economic or social or political reasons – Nazi Germany started the war in order to conquer so-called living space; but it did not need that living space, because it could get the raw materials and the agricultural products through trade, and it did not need land for its peasants because there was no real surplus of labor in the German countryside. Germany today is a smaller country, with a larger population, and it is flourishing. Most Germans in 1939 did not want a war; they had bitter memories of the last one, World War I. The industrial and banking elite did not want a war, because they were doing quite well. Did the military want a war? No. In September, 1938, the German Chief of Staff, Ludwig Beck, and a

number of generals, were planning a putsch against Hitler, because they were afraid of a war against Britain and France, with the Soviets still against them. But Chamberlain and Daladier gave up on Czechoslovakia, and so there was no putsch. Of course, it is not clear whether a putsch like that would have taken place, or if it had taken place, whether it would have succeeded, but it is indicative of what Germany's top military leaders were thinking. So, who wanted a war? The answer of course is – Hitler; but surely, not just he. He was supported by the Party. The reason for the war is stated clearly in a memorandum Hitler wrote to Goering in August, 1936, which one can find in the Nuremberg Documents of 1945. Hitler, there, says that Germany has to prepare for war, because otherwise Bolshevism, which seeks to replace all the leadership groups in the world with international Jewry, will not only endanger Germany, but will annihilate the German people. Hitler and his closest supporters believed that a defeat of Jewish Bolshevism will enable Germany to expand to the East, settle the area with German colonists, and assure supply of food and raw materials that will guarantee Germany's predominance in Europe, and ultimately, with allies, in the world. All this can only be done by defeating international Jewry, which controls both Soviet Bolshevism and Western capitalism. The war, I would argue, was in its essence an ideological enterprise, and the economic and political elements were then worked in as enabling factors. The Holocaust, then, was a basically ideological project that was part of the ideologically motivated project of a war of a power-seeking expansion. Nazism was thus quite unprecedented, and that explains, to a large extent, why the Holocaust is the central issue in any educational process, and not only in Europe, that deals with the world in which we live. Antisemitism, and the Holocaust that was its result, was a central motivation for a war in which not only close to six million Jews were killed, but also some 29 million non-Jews, in Europe alone. That means that antisemitism, and the Holocaust, were basic reasons for the death of many millions of non-Jewish Europeans. It thus is a central issue for all of civilization, and certainly for European civilization; it is the most extreme form of genocide so far – again, not because the victims suffered more than other victims of other genocides, but because of its unprecedented motivations and character, and the global impact it had and has, as the paradigm of genocide generally, and thus of tremendous importance for all of us. That is why we teach it.

When dealing with the Holocaust, educators usually address three groups of people: perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. This is problematic, because when you look at this closely, these three categories are not precise, and they often tend to merge, or the borderlines between them become hazy. Thus, kapos in concentration camps were victims, but often perpetrators as well. The term bystanders includes such disparate groups as the Western Allies, the Soviet Union, Jewish organizations and institutions outside Nazi-controlled areas, Polish peasants most of whom were indifferent, some friendly, and many were hostile even when they did not kill Jews; it includes members of Christian churches who stood by while in front of their eyes Jews were being transported to their death or killed, and governments of neutral countries who could have helped but abstained from doing so. However, we use those terms despite the fact that we know they are inaccurate, because we have not developed better ones.

What, then, should we teach? After all, we cannot teach everything, because the series of contexts and events we call the Holocaust are so widespread, and so complicated, and there is so little time in any educational establishment to teach all of this. There were some 18.000 Central European Jewish refugees in Shanghai – should we teach about them? Latin American governments usually refused to accept Jewish refugees – is this a topic to be taught? Should we deal with the Jews of Thrace and Macedonia who were delivered into German hands by the Bulgarian police and army, or should we concentrate only on the rescue of the Jews in Bulgaria proper? Should we go into details regarding Greek, Czech, Italian, Norwegian, and other collaborators with the Germans? I think we have to adjust our teaching to local situation and local concerns. Teaching in Greece will probably mean that we have to emphasize the fate of the Jews of Thessaloniki, of Athens, Corfu and Rhodes, of the Greek collaborators and resistance movements, of the behavior of Jewish leadership groups and ordinary Jewish people, and point out the shades and differences, while being quite sure we do not diminish the direct criminal responsibility of the German institutions, organizations and individuals. In other countries, parallel emphases will be in order. But there is a danger in this, namely, that we deal with the trees and forget about the forest. There has to be an overall picture, beyond the national history.

We should aim at what one might call the globalization of Holocaust education. By that I mean that we should describe and analyze the Holocaust in its various contexts, vertically – that is, historically, and horizontally – that is, putting it into the global historical, economic, and political context, of its antecedents, its occurrence, and its impact. One does not have to deal with all this when teaching, not only because of the time constraints, but also because teachers are not trained to have the kind of knowledge that academics are spending their whole lives to acquire; but it is important to keep these dimensions in mind. On the perpetrators, one has to face the dilemma that in November, 1932, in the last free elections in pre-Hitler Germany, the National Socialists were, in effect, defeated – they lost two million votes and 34 seats in the German Reichstag. They seemed to be on their way out, to return to what they had been in 1928, when they collected just 2.8% of all the votes. In late 1932, the majority of Germans voted for parties that were either clearly anti-Nazi and opposed antisemitism, or at least did not support either: the social democrats, the communists, and the Catholic Center, and some remnants of middle-of-the-road parties. But less than six weeks later the Nazis were in power, not because of any victory at the polls, but because of the machinations of the conservative Right and the violent disagreements among the non-Nazis. By 1940-1941, there was no problem anymore in recruiting any number of Germans to become mass murderers. How does one explain this? German historians have pointed out that there was a combination of an economic upswing, and a very clever use of social policies that seemed to improve the lot of the Germans. They managed, to a considerable degree, to reestablish social cohesion which had been destroyed as a result of a lost war and two major economic crises, in the early twenties and from 1929 on. A resurgent Germany won cheap international victories, destroying the effects of the Versailles Treaty and reestablishing Germany as a major political and military European power. The rise from the economic crisis was not really the result of the regime's policies, but rather of the fact that prior to the Nazi accession to power the German economy had reached its lowest point and had begun to recover. The Nazis thus rode a wave of improvement, and some of their policies were in line with the rise in production, although there was no appreciable rise in the standard of living. But the absorption of the huge masses of unemployed into even low-paid jobs made the regime very popular indeed. In addition,

Nazi policies social policies dealt, for the first time, rather effectively, with the problem of the millions of war widows and wounded ex-soldiers, by raising pensions. All this amounted, in a way, to bribing the population, and was accompanied by a massive ideological propaganda which reached into every family in every corner of the country. Some historians made a lot of the fact that many murderers were not directly ideologically educated; but they forget that the whole society had been under an ideological indoctrination campaign for 7-8 years, and on its margins – sometimes fairly wide margins – there was the continuous threat of an increasingly efficient terror machine that was used in a determined way to prevent any political or ideological opposition from taking root. Nazi policies were paid for by using up foreign currency reserves, and by an inflationary policy that was held back by milking the populace through a clever taxation policy. Real prosperity was aborted by massive rearmament, and thus the whole economic structure was endangered. War was aimed at, as already indicated, and was able to provide temporary solutions to an inevitable economic and financial crisis, simply by robbing the occupied, conquered, and allied countries, and first of all by taking away the property of the Jews.

The lynchpin in any interpretation of Nazi policies must be the story of the German intelligentsia. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, an increasing radicalization of the intelligentsia had taken place. Radical nationalism won out against a more liberal trend, and turned, gradually, into a racist chauvinism; not only in Germany, but in Austria as well. This became very clear during the Second Reich, between 1870 and 1914. The defeat in World War I exacerbated this trend, and by the twenties it was the universities and the schoolteachers' organizations that formed some of the chief bases for National Socialism. Without the support of the intelligentsia, the Nazi regime would not have achieved power, nor would it have been able to maintain it. It was the intelligentsia, from whose ranks the people who directed the Nazi crimes were recruited. The conclusion must surely be that knowledge by itself does not guarantee a humanistic approach to life, and that there is nothing as dangerous as intelligent mass murderers. Eichmann is an excellent example: he fooled brilliant people, such as the philosopher Hannah Arendt, into accepting his self-description as a mere cog in the machine, a banal personality who did evil because he was no ideologue and did not know any better. As a

matter of fact, Eichmann was a member of the Central Reich Security Office, the RSHA, which was composed of highly intelligent, radically racist, radically antisemitic and ideologically motivated individuals, who were the main core of the perpetrators' machine. They included the Security Police with its Gestapo Branch, the Criminal Police, and the intelligence units. They did a large part of the murdering. Eichmann may not himself had a university education, but the people around him did, and he himself could and did quote Kant and Hegel. He was no cog in the machine, he was part of the machine's control system. In a lecture he gave to top Nazi security personnel in November, 1937, he explained to them what the international Jewish conspiracy was all about. He was part of the hierarchy, and while he did receive general guidelines from his superior, he showed great intelligence and initiative to radicalize them. He gave orders; he did not only receive them – in any case, he rarely needed orders, because he fully identified with the general murderous policy, and he knew exactly that what he was doing was evil. Far from being a banal personality, he proved that evil is never banal. The real story of Eichmann can be used in education to show the exact opposite of the popular image that has been created by films and so-called documentaries. One can provide sources for all of this.

Is the story of Nazism and the Holocaust then a story of the bureaucracy, as so many people believe? When you teach about the Holocaust, you cannot avoid dealing with this question, and yes, bureaucracy, in its various aspects, was employed to great effect in order to murder. But bureaucracies don't kill; people kill. Bureaucrats may give orders, or instructions, but someone has to tell the bureaucrats to do that, or some of the bureaucrats may have to do that on their own. In other words, the will to murder has to be directed by people who know what they are doing and want to do it. Ideology, or ideological rationalization, or interests, move bureaucracies; when we say "interests", we mean an understanding of what is good or bad in the eyes of the people who make the decisions. In the case of the Nazis, I have already argued that they acted without regard to their material interests, or in other words, that they were motivated by a non-pragmatic or anti-pragmatic ideology. Once you have understood that, you can put the historical facts into context, and you can teach about the development of Nazi rule in Germany until the war, and about the stages in which the genocide of the Jews materialized. Indeed, you can

then talk about those stages, and show that the Holocaust was not pre-planned, contrary to much of the popular perceptions, though Hitler as an individual may have hoped that mass annihilation of Jews would take place. But the ideology was there, and when the occasion arose, it gave rise to the planning. In fact, to a considerable degree, the acts of mass murder came first, and the planning was its result. In this, as in so many other respects, the genocide of the Jews differs from most, or all, other genocides. When you then teach about ghettos, camps, death marches, and so on, it falls into place.

It is my view that the story of the victims is at least as important as that of the perpetrators. After all, the victims are always the majority, as compared to the perpetrators, and we all are more likely to be victims or bystanders, rather than perpetrators. From a humanistic point of view, it is crucial to understand who the victims were, why they became victims, what did they do before they became victims, at what point they understood that they were in danger of becoming victims to mass murder and genocide, and what they did in response to all of this. When we teach about the genocide of the Jews, we obviously have to deal with antisemitism; but there is a pitfall there, because the student, or the teacher as well, may then see the Jews simply as objects of hate, persecutions and murder, not as subjects of history with their own culture, traditions and aspirations, in other words as less than human beings. One therefore has to teach about the Jews as a historical people – and, of course, the same applies to other groups who were or are the objects of genocidal attack. That means that a teacher has to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of the history of the Jews. The other pitfall is that a student will ask – well, what did they do to be the object of such treatment? Apart from showing, from present discriminatory treatment of various groups of people, that this happens very often in human societies, it is important to try and clarify where antisemitism comes from. The simplest, and correct, answer is that while the Jews are neither better nor worse than anyone else, their culture and traditions are different. In Europe, they were the only non-European people until the arrival in the Balkans of the Roma, in about the 13th or 14th centuries, and they had a different culture which expressed itself in a different religion than that of the host societies. They also developed a different occupational structure, because the surrounding societies used them for specific economic purposes, limiting their occupational possibilities. At the same time, one has to

emphasize that the history of the Jews is very definitely not the history of their persecutions. In most places, at most times, they lived alongside their neighbors, not necessarily loved, but also not necessarily hated – they were useful, and were often invited into countries in order to fulfill certain economic and social functions. But when a society was hit by a crisis, which happened often enough, it was possible – but it often did not happen – that the Jews were a kind of a lightning rod to divert the crisis onto a group that every one knew about, that was familiar yet strange, and was always a minority and therefore easy to attack. These basic differences were accentuated by the Church, or after Luther by the Churches, for theological reasons that were intertwined with economic and social ones. It may be awkward to teach that, but it is inevitable.

Christian antisemitism never planned a genocide of the Jews; Jews, in the Christian view, had rejected the true Messiah, but they were humans with souls, and killing them was a cardinal sin. But they were possessed by Satan, were in fact a satanic menace to Christianity, and therefore they had to be oppressed, discriminated against, persecuted, exploited, driven out, dispossessed, whenever the occasion or the need arose. Accusations against them repeated the same theological arguments, but the non-theological accusations differed at different times, and in Nazism they reached an extreme point: they were contradictory in character, accusing the Jews of being both communists and capitalists, which of course could be maintained precisely because of their supposed satanic qualities. However, all these accusations, including even the racist ones, were based on theological precedents: thus, the accusation that there is a Jewish conspiracy to control the world can be found in early Christian writings; similarly, the idea that Jews corrupt societies and their cultures, or that they use children's blood to prepare their special foods, are of ancient or medieval provenance. In the sixteenth century and after, the purity of blood, *limpiezza de sangre*, that is proof that one was not descended from Jews or Moslems, was demanded in Spain for anyone aspiring to high office. The notion that Nazism was a neo-pagan ideology which had nothing to do with Christianity is only partly true: Christian antisemitism was a necessary, though not a sufficient, precondition of Nazism. Nazism turned against Christianity largely because it was based on Judaism and contained humanistic ideas that were abhorrent to the Nazis. It turned especially against the Catholic Church, whose divisions were not of the military

kind. But the Jews were caught in between: they were murdered by the Nazis, and were not protected by the Churches, although there were very many individual priests, pastors and higher Church officials who tried to save Jews, and a number of them sacrificed their lives to do so.

It could be argued that the Nazis invented their victims, in the sense that the Jews who they attacked were not necessarily the Jews who saw themselves as Jews. Of course, and this has to be pointed out in every educational context, the Jews were not a political collective. In Germany, for instance, a representation of all Jews never existed before the Nazis came to power. Nor was there one in interwar Poland. There were Jewish communities and organizations of different shades and hues, orthodox and liberal and non-religious, never completely united, not even in a country like France, where there was a rabbinical organization called the Consistoire, it only represented a minority of people who saw themselves as Jews. In Poland, for instance, a plurality of Jews, close to 40%, identified with the Bund Party, which was social-democratic and anti-communist, anti-Zionist and anti-religious. The Nazis, following older precedents, invented a Jewish political collective, even an international one, and paradoxically, the Jews then really tried to set up political and international organizations, in part in order to fight against the Nazi threat. Thus, the World Jewish Congress was set up in 1936, supposedly representing Jewish communities worldwide, but in fact only some of them joined, and others did not. The Zionist movement, an expression of rising Jewish nationalism – there were other expressions as well – was a minority among Jews. The Nazis murdered people whose grandparents had converted, because they regarded them as Jews. They killed people who had been born to Jewish parents, but identified as Poles, or Russians, or Italians, and who had cut all contacts with other Jews. Jewish religion no longer identified all, or arguably even most, Jews. Most Jews identified themselves as being Jews, but their interpretations of what that meant differed. Educators have to explain that one has to respect the way people define themselves, and not let them be defined by others, but that is precisely what the Nazis did. They invented a Jewish people that was only in part the people that most Jews identified with.

And yet, and this is the main point here, the reaction of the Jews to the persecutions, and then to the murder, was little short of amazing. German Jews, the

majority of whom were non-orthodox, stout German nationalists, turned back and tried, quite successfully, to reclaim their Jewish historical and, in part, religious identity, by developing a Jewish culture in the German language. The Bible was translated into German and intellectual and social life flourished in the thirties, despite increasing persecutions. After the outbreak of war, and especially in the larger Polish ghettos – but not only there - networks of social, economic, and cultural organizations came into being, trying to maintain morale and a semblance of civilized life, despite hunger, epidemics, beatings, and the threat of deportations to the unknown. There was no possibility of armed resistance, as the Jews were a small minority – even in Poland they were only 10% of the general population – had no access to arms and had not developed any military class; in addition, in most European countries they were ostracized by the majority populations, and were not supported by the Allies. Unarmed resistance was therefore the only possible option, and many Jewish communities developed just that. As far as I can tell, there is no parallel to this with other populations that were or are victims of genocidal crimes. I suggest that unarmed Jewish resistance should be one of the central topics in Holocaust education.

Of course, unarmed resistance did not happen everywhere. Under tremendous pressure by the Nazis and their local collaborators, there were also many cases of social disintegration, forced collaboration with the enemy, and betrayals. But that one can find in most other cases of genocide as well. One has to be careful not to label the Jewish Councils, set up by the Germans in order to facilitate German policies vis-à-vis the Jews, as collaborators. Some of them indeed yielded to German pressure without any resistance – in Amsterdam, for instance, or in Thessaloniki, or, arguably, in Lodz. But in most places, we now know, they tried to protect their communities as best they could, without of course open resistance against an overwhelming power – wherever resistance was tried, and there were many places like that, the Jewish Councils were deposed and in most instances murdered. In quite a number of places, however, these Councils tried to resist nevertheless, and in some towns and townships they organized armed rebellions. The Germans also set up Jewish police units in ghettos, and most of these did what the Germans demanded, and in a number of famous instances handed over Jews to the Germans. But it is very wrong to generalize. In most places, both in the East

and in the West, the Germans did not ask for collaboration of Councils or police, but took the Jews themselves, brutally and sadistically. The general image of Jewish police handing over other Jews is true for Warsaw, for instance, but not for Kaunas, and the whole argument is irrelevant for Belgium or the Netherlands. It is important to relate to such issues in an educational environment before they are even raised.

The reactions of the Jewish victims have to be related to the general context of Jewish-non-Jewish relations. It is clear that these relations were different in different countries. As is well known, Danish Jews were treated by Danish people as Danes, and therefore most of them were smuggled to neutral Sweden. In Bulgaria proper, the Jews were rescued by an unlikely coalition of members of the Fascist Party, the Orthodox Church, and the communist and social-democratic underground, or in other words, by representatives of the majority of the Bulgarian people. Less dramatic, but very marked pro-Jewish attitudes were shown by very many Serbs, Italians, Belgians, and French people. There was very little sympathy for Jews in Romania, the Ukraine, and the Baltic areas. Recent revisionist writing in Poland and in the Polish Diaspora more or less accuses the Jews of having killed themselves, or of refusing to be rescued by a huge number of Poles who were willing to help them. This is not only a total distortion of historical fact, but it also minimizes the real heroism of thousands of Poles who, despite being a minority among their fellow-ethnics, tried their best to come to the rescue of Jews, and in quite a number of cases paid for that with their lives. It also ignores regional differences – thus, there was a marked antisemitic attitude in Northeastern and South-Central Poland, where local populations betrayed Jews to the German and Polish police. The exact reasons for this have yet to be researched. On the other hand, the Polish minority in Eastern Galicia and Volhynia was much more friendly to Jews and in a number of cases Jews joined them in a common defense against Ukrainian nationalists and Germans. For educators, it is important to point out the danger of easy generalizations. It is, again, impossible for them to go into details, but the range of reactions has to be emphasized, and the reasons hinted at: a different past in different places had created different bases for attitudes that defined the possibilities of Jewish survival. In any case, the attitudes of the non-Jewish neighbors were in large part responsible for the death or survival of the Jewish minority.

It is important to point out that while there was no objective possibility of Jewish armed resistance, nevertheless, and contrary to all logic, Jewish armed resistance did take place, and much more of it than could reasonably be expected. The story of the Warsaw Ghetto Rebellion is important and must not be neglected, but it was by far not the only instance of its kind. There were rebellions or attempts at armed resistance in Vilna-Vilnius, Kaunas-Kovno, Bialystok, Svencionys-Svenciany, Cracow, Baranowicze, Lachwa, Tuczyn, and a number of other places in the East. In fact, in the area of Western Belarus alone there were some 63 small towns where such attempted or actualized armed resistance took place. It is estimated that between 20.000 and 30.000 Jews went to the forests to fight with the Soviet partisans; not very many survived. There were Jewish fighters and partisans in France, Belgium, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and the Romanian occupied areas of the Ukraine. In all these cases we are dealing with small numbers, and the important thing is not the damage they inflicted on the Germans and their helpers, but the fact that armed resistance was attempted at all. The importance is moral.

When we deal with the outside world, with the Western Powers and the Soviet Union, we are in effect discussing the present, because the major powers today face a somewhat parallel situation: they are bystanders in continuing genocidal situations. The differences between different forms of genocide are several. For one, with the Holocaust we talk of the behavior of the powers in a world conflagration, which of course is different from the situation today. It is a fact that while today we look at the Holocaust as a main, if not as the main event of the war, it was nothing but a marginal issue when it actually occurred. The Allies knew, certainly in general terms, what was happening, but they were fighting for their lives against a very formidable enemy, many leaders simply did not believe the information they received, and, mainly perhaps, the Nazis' opponents did not understand the central importance of Nazi ideology, which most of them saw as an instrument to gain and retain power, rather than as a deeply-held conviction that the Nazis would turn into reality if they could. We are in a somewhat similar situation today, when many of us believe that the genocidal propaganda of radical Islam is just talk, rather than realizing that it is an ideology that people wholeheartedly believe in and will act upon it if given the chance.

There is another aspect to this: many books have been written accusing the Western Powers of keeping silent in face of the genocide that was going on in front of their eyes, and of not using their military power to rescue the Jews. But the facts are quite different. There was no silence. When the information regarding the massive annihilation of the Jews was finally confirmed, in November, 1942, the Allies – including the Soviet Union – declared, on December 17, 1942, that the Germans were murdering the Jews, and that the people responsible would be punished – which of course, happened only to a small extent. No one censored any news on these matters as they came out from Europe – whether people believed in what they read is another matter. On the second issue, the Germans started murdering the Jews en masse upon their invasion of the Soviet Union, in June, 1941. The US was neutral, and the British had been forced to retreat to their islands, and were fighting for their own survival. The Soviets were being beaten, and in any case had no interest in the Jews as such. The US did not declare war on Germany; rather, the Americans were forced into the war by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and then Germany declared war on the US, not the other way round. Had this not happened, I don't know whether and when the US would have joined the fight. During the period of the greatest murder campaigns, in 1941, 1942, and most of 1943, there were no Allied armies anywhere near the destruction sites, and the German armies controlled most of Europe. The only Western bombers that could have reached the death camps situated in Poland were the British Lancaster bombers; but there were no fighter planes that could have accompanied them to these places. The situation only changed after the Allies had occupied the Italian airfields near Foggia, in November 1943. It then took a few months until they were usable, so that in practice the death camps could have been bombed only in 1944. By that time, only Auschwitz-Birkenau was still in operation. Birkenau could indeed have been attacked, after about May, 1944, especially after a detailed report on Auschwitz, brought by two Slovak Jewish escapees, Alfred Wetzler and Rudolf Vrba, became available in June, 1944. But then the Western military leaders decided that this was a civilian target, and they were going to use their air forces only against military targets.

Had the Western Air Forces – the Soviets, as I pointed out, could not have cared less – attacked Birkenau, would that have caused the Germans to stop murdering Jews? I

don't think so. The German perpetrators would have continued what they had been doing before, namely shoot their victims into pits or, as they did later, to march them to death. The idea that the West could have saved the Jews is popular, and populist, but not persuasive at all. On the other hand, while the West could not have saved the millions, it might have saved thousands, maybe more. They closed the gates of Palestine to Jews trying to escape through the Balkans, and they refused to guarantee to the neutrals, to Switzerland, Spain, Turkey, Sweden, and Portugal, to take care of any refugees arriving in these countries, and to find other places for them after the war – because of course the neutrals did not want any Jews in their countries. The attitude of the Soviets is still being investigated, but clearly, the whole Jewish issue was marginal for them, at best. Again, these are problems that can be translated in class into topical questions.

How do we teach the Holocaust? I am not a professional pedagogue or expert on didactics. But I do believe that the Holocaust should, in principle, be taught analytically, yet on the other hand also as the story of individuals who were caught up in it. A historian is someone who tells true stories. Unless a teacher uses this tool, no impression or effect will result. On the other hand, to just tell stories is counter-productive. Students must be encouraged to investigate the facts, the connections, the contexts. I believe in a combination of educational strategies. Another major consideration is to adjust teaching the Holocaust to the social, cultural and historical context of the students. If you teach in the Czech Republic, you need to take into account the fate of the Roma, who suffered a genocide that was different from the Holocaust, but occurred parallel to it, and almost all of the Czech Roma then living in what is now the Czech Republic were murdered. You will have to emphasize the fact that Terezin played a central role in the Holocaust in the Czech lands, and that there was a Czech collaborationist government with a limited autonomy that aided the Nazis in their policies. If you teach in the Netherlands, you have to emphasize the collaboration of the local administration with the genocide, and on the other hand the rescue of some 16.000 Dutch Jews by the local population. In both cases, you will have to emphasize the character of the local Jewish communities, and look at the contrasting behavior of the Judenraete in Terezin and in Amsterdam. But in all cases, and in all countries that you teach you have to be careful to present the overall picture of the Holocaust, and not remain imprisoned by the local history. The Holocaust was not a

Czech, or Dutch, or Polish event, it was a global event that happened in Europe, in all of Europe, and beyond Europe. That requires pedagogic adaptations, and that is what the ITF is doing and should do. In the end, what you teach are dilemmas, impossible dilemmas that people should never be required to confront. Let me give you a well-known example:

In the ghetto of what is now Vilnius in Lithuania, there was a resistance organization called the FPO, which arose from a coalition of Jewish youth movements, from the extreme left to the extreme right. The commander that was chosen was a Jewish communist, Itzik Wittenberg. The reasons for the choice were, on the one hand, that he was a very popular and charismatic young man, and on the other hand, that the only hope of any help for the resisters was the Red Army. It was thought that choosing a communist would help in establishing relations with the Soviets. The Germans caught a Lithuanian communist on the Aryan side in Vilnius who, under torture, named Wittenberg as a party member and a resister. The Germans did not know about the FPO, but they now knew about Wittenberg, and demanded of the ghetto leader, Jacob Gens, to hand him over to them. Gens, who had some contact with the FPO, invited the FPO leaders to a midnight meeting at the Judenrat, and a Lithuanian collaborationist unit who hid in the building then burst into the room and arrested Wittenberg. On the way to the ghetto gate, FPO members overwhelmed the Lithuanians and liberated Wittenberg, who was then hidden in a small room in the ghetto. The Germans announced, publicly, that if Wittenberg was not handed over, they would murder the ghetto inhabitants. Gens appealed to the population to find Wittenberg, so their lives would be saved, and the ghetto Jews, fearing for the lives of their families, sought out the FPO members – it was not very difficult, in the small ghetto, to identify young people who belonged to the FPO – and attacked them, beating them up and demanding that Wittenberg should surrender to the Germans. The FPO leaders faced the choice of either handing over their commander, or having to use their weapons to fight the desperate Jews. In the end, they turned to the communist cell of the FPO, consisting of two young women and one man, to make the decision. The cell decided that Wittenberg must surrender himself. He was given a cyanide pill, and walked, proudly, to the ghetto gate, the way lined with a silent ghetto population. He was taken away, and when he arrived at the prison, he committed suicide.

Is there a way, was there a way, out of the dilemma? How do we judge Gens, the population, the FPO leadership, all of which except for Wittenberg was Zionist, what do we say about the three cell members who decided Wittenberg's fate? In two parallel cases, one in Minsk and one in the Belorussian town of Baranowicze, two exactly parallel cases occurred. In Minsk, the Judenrat used the body of a dead Jew into whose pockets the identity card of the underground commander was inserted, to fool the Germans and save the commander. In Baranowicze, where the population acted in the same way as the Vilnius Jews did, the Judenrat bribed the German police commander and thus rescued the resistance member. We have three cases, three dilemmas. One ended tragically, the two others less tragically. The German intent to murder every Jew they could find was the same. Who was right? Can one compare? That is the real story of the Holocaust, and those are the kinds of stories that should accompany teaching it.

In the Jewish tradition, the sage Hillel, some 200 years before the Christian era, was asked to sum up all the Torah teachings standing on one foot. He said, famously: do not do to others what you would not have done to yourself. That is all the Torah, and the rest is commentary. And now, he said, go and learn. So now, my friends, go and learn.