

## The Holocaust as Genocide

### Experiential Uniqueness and Integrated History

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THIS CHAPTER CONCERNS the complex, and at times fraught, relationship between the study of the Holocaust and what has come to be known as genocide studies. In principle, there should not be any tension here. The so-called Final Solution was clearly a genocide. Indeed, the term genocide was coined by Raphael Lemkin while the Holocaust was taking place, and he was obviously influenced in his thinking by this event. The Genocide Convention of 1948 was also agreed on by the United Nations very much under the shadow of the recent genocide of the Jews. But at the same time, both Lemkin and the member states that agreed on the convention understood the Holocaust to be one specific instance of genocide within the context of a series of such events.<sup>1</sup> The convention was meant to prevent the recurrence of genocide. Clearly, it failed in accomplishing this task. And thus we can say that genocide is a phenomenon that both preceded the Holocaust and has recurred many times since. Each genocide has its own unique characteristics. But they also have many features in common that make them part of the same phenomenon. The genocide of the Jews was one of them.<sup>2</sup>

All this would seem quite clear and obvious. But matters have been complicated both because of the evolving role of the Holocaust in our understanding of twentieth-century European history, and because of the reemergence of the concept of genocide as a paradigm for Western colonialism and hegemony. Within the framework of this chapter, I cannot do justice to this entire debate. My intention is merely to point out that the terms “uniqueness” and “integration,” which have often been seen as

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conflicting with each other, are better understood as complementary. While most historians will agree that unlike scientific experiments, historical events can never be precisely reenacted, the historical method is based on context and comparability. Hence, the notion of a unique event that is both incomparable and may not be contextualized threatens to extract it from the very fabric of history and catapult it into the spheres of metaphysics and myth. Conversely, recognition of the uniqueness of individual actors and experiences is crucial to the reconstruction of the past, especially when dealing with extreme events containing radically different perspectives, where one side attempts to eradicate another and thereby also to wipe out the record of its past existence and destruction—as in the case of genocide. Similarly, while the integration of events and perspectives into a larger matrix of the past is part and parcel of any historical reconstruction, by its very nature, the historical method also necessitates making distinctions between these events and perspectives in order to maintain nuance, facilitate judgment, and avoid falling into false or facile parallels.

Over the years, I have become increasingly aware of what I now perceive as the productive tension between experiential uniqueness and historical integration. But, clearly, it has also produced blind spots, misunderstandings, and disputes. When I arrived at Oxford in 1980 to write a dissertation in modern German history, the Holocaust did not feature on the history curriculum there. At the time, that did not strike me as anomalous. In Israel, where I had my undergraduate training, the Holocaust was still largely taught in departments of Jewish history rather than as a component of European history. This exclusion of the Holocaust from the history of Europe as a whole was common in most European and American universities as well, and was similarly reflected in historical monographs.<sup>3</sup> Personally, having grown up in Israel at a time when it was saturated with personal traumas and state mobilization of the Shoah, I was, in any case, skeptical about the viability of studying it as an academic field of inquiry. Instead, I chose to research the indoctrination of German combat troops and its impact on their conduct on the Eastern Front of World War II, a topic that interested me in part also because of my own experience in the Israeli military.

Over the next decade, I taught and wrote about the brutalization of Wehrmacht soldiers, the mass murder of Soviet prisoners of war and citizens, the visions of a demonic Judeo-Bolshevik enemy that permeated the minds of the troops, and the vigorous attempts by German veterans and

historians to suppress the war of extermination on the Eastern Front and create a myth of the Wehrmacht's "purity of arms." My work focused on a "view from below," an attempt to understand the mentality and conduct of troops in a number of selected formations. This entailed empathy—an effort to delve into the minds, grasp the daily experiences, and understand the motivation of those young German men who had internalized such views, committed these crimes, and themselves eventually died in large numbers on the battlefields of the Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1990s, I had become increasingly interested in the wider context of war crimes and genocide in the twentieth century. In particular, I explored the links between the industrial killing of World War I and the industrial murder of World War II, especially as individual experience and representation. In part because of my focus on the origins and nature of modern violence, I grew increasingly disenchanted with the common popular representations of the Holocaust, especially in the United States. It appeared to me, as I wrote at the time, that the "common tendency to view the Holocaust as a well-ordered plot, in which antisemitism led to Nazism, Nazism practiced genocide, and both were destroyed in a spectacular, 'happy' end," only "breeds complacency about our own world" and obscures the fact that "ultimately, the world we live in is the same that produced (and keeps producing) genocide."<sup>5</sup>

One reason why the Holocaust refused to recede into the historical past like most other events was that it became part of a fierce "competition of victimhood," in which past victimization was made into a central reference point for identity assertions and restitution claims, and the Holocaust came to be perceived as a measuring rod for all other cases of genocide and crimes against humanity.<sup>6</sup> As I argued in 1998, "in a century that produced more victims of war, genocide, and massacre than all of previous recorded history put together," the victim had become "both a trope and a reflection of reality." This, I thought, was "a dangerous prism through which to view the world, for victims are produced by enemies, and enemies eventually make for more victims."<sup>7</sup> It was for this reason, too, that I found assertions about the uniqueness of the Holocaust unhelpful, indeed harmful, not least because any ranking of victimhood is inherently pernicious and potentially provides license for a vicious cycle of endless retributive violence.<sup>8</sup>

In retrospect, it seems to me that over the years I had been trying to grapple with the phenomenon of modern violence from two distinct but related perspectives. One was that of the individual's experience, which

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was often obliterated by the vast forces put into play to wreak mass destruction; the other concerned the sociocultural context that bred and rationalized violence, and subsequently also determined the politics of memory.<sup>9</sup> I have come to view individual experience as both unique and representative of the fate of humanity in times of crisis; and I have conceptualized the larger context of violent events as a way of integrating cataclysmic moments of destruction into the historical record and thereby gaining a better understanding of them. Clearly, this double perspective was meant to counter the much-popularized notion that arose out of World War I—and was subsequently, albeit belatedly, elaborated with even greater force after the Holocaust—of an event so extreme and unique that it defies historical explanation, becomes culturally unrepresentable, and remains perpetually incommunicable as individual experience and thus incomprehensible to humanity as a whole.

As I saw it, both the popular morality tales about the Holocaust, which essentially removed it from the general record of the past by representing it as unique and incomparable, and the more sophisticated arguments about the event as indecipherable and ineffable, made it necessary to anchor the Shoah in a larger historical context. But what was the context of the Holocaust? Was it part of German, or Jewish history? Did it belong to the history of modern genocide, or perhaps of colonial-imperialist war and war crimes? Was it merely a European event or one with universal meanings and implications? The latter was, of course, an old question, manifested by the long-held discomfort of accommodating the Holocaust into specific academic disciplines.<sup>10</sup> And any choice of context had clear implications for the interpretation of the event's place in modern history and its relationship to other cases of genocide. My own approach to it has again been twofold. In recent years, I directed a multiyear project on interethnic coexistence and violence in Europe's eastern borderlands, which spoke to the larger context of modern violence in that region, specifically and more generally to the relationship between interethnic communities and genocide.<sup>11</sup> And at the present time, I am completing a monograph on communal violence in a single site with a focus on individual experience. By employing the method of "a view from below" that I had first used for my work on the Wehrmacht, I explore the collective "biography" of a multiethnic town over an extended period of time, seeking both what held it together and what eventually transformed it from a community of coexistence into a community of genocide. This work

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too has obvious ramifications for our understanding of numerous other cases of communal violence around the world.<sup>12</sup>

Especially as a consequence of working intensely with testimonies and other personal accounts by survivors of the Holocaust, in recent years, I have become all the more aware of the missing dimension of the individual voice of the victim in many studies of genocide, including the Holocaust. Many early works on the Final Solution focused primarily on the organization of genocide by the perpetrators.<sup>13</sup> More recently, attempts to integrate the multiple perspectives of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders have naturally focused on a single genocide, most often the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, studies that have tried to integrate several genocides in a comparative framework have felt unable to go beyond the perspective of the perpetrators.<sup>15</sup> This is primarily a methodological issue: even integrated studies of the Holocaust will often choose only certain types of victims' accounts, such as contemporary diaries, and leave out later testimonies and memoirs that are seen as tainted by time and external influences. And even comparative studies of genocide must choose some cases and omit others according to a more or less transparent set of categories.<sup>16</sup>

But here other arguments have also come into play. Some have averred that the Holocaust's claim to "uniqueness" casts a shadow on the study of other genocides and that it therefore must be properly contextualized. It has also been said that this uniqueness assertion emanates from a Western-centric view that perceives a European genocide as essentially different from other genocides; that this view originates in the kind of humanistic discourse that was at the root of colonial expansion, subjugation, and genocide, and that it continues to operate in our postcolonial world by relegating past and present genocides to a secondary position on the scale of inhumanity. Finally, it has been suggested that Israeli leaders and their supporters exploit the focus on the Holocaust to justify Zionist occupation policies of Palestinian lands.

These are not arguments that can or should be easily dismissed. As I have remarked elsewhere, like any other historical event, the Holocaust had unique features, such as the extermination camps, and features common to many other genocides, such as communal massacres; like any traumatic national event, it was and remains unique within its national context, particularly to the Jews and to some extent also to the Germans.<sup>17</sup> But while I continue to think that presenting the Holocaust as an

entirely unique event sacrifices its status as a concrete episode in the annals of human history, that does not mean that its specific historical characteristics should be discarded in order to fit it into an interpretive framework to which it may not necessarily belong. The perceived shadow cast by the Holocaust on other genocides should not compel us to extract it from its own context of origins and circumstances simply in order to minimize its magnitude or make it more easily comparable to other cases of genocide. Just as the long history of anti-Semitism is not a sufficient explanation for the Final Solution, so, too, the fact that colonialism predated the Holocaust does not mean that it originated it. This is not to say that the Holocaust was *sui generis*, but merely that, like all historical events, it had many origins, including imperialism and colonialism, anti-Semitism, and scientific racism, as well as the specific policies and circumstances of the Nazi regime. The very fact that Germany, which had the smallest and most short-lived colonial empire, conducted genocide in Europe, whereas France and Britain, with far larger and older empires, did not, indicates the limits of the colonial interpretation.

Western prejudices and racism certainly played a role in the differing perceptions by Europeans of crimes committed in the colonies and in Europe. That was why Europeans were more shocked by World War I, in which white men industrially slaughtered other white men (although many colonial soldiers were also involved), than by colonial wars, where white men massacred nonwhites in what appeared to many to be nothing more than a manifestation of Western superiority. Because the serial killing of Europeans by each other was more traumatizing to them than the killing of non-Europeans, the genocide of Jews in Europe by a perceived civilized European state in a modern, bureaucratic, and industrial manner was also shocking. And yet the responses of many Europeans to the “removal” of Jews from their midst also indicated that Jews were still seen by wide sectors of European society as alien, foreign, and potentially dangerous. It can also be argued that precisely because popular anti-Semitism had made the “disappearance” of the Jews more easily acceptable during the Holocaust, in the postwar period, the remnants of this sentiment, combined with the shame of complicity, contributed to the urge to universalize the Holocaust rather than viewing it as a specifically anti-Jewish undertaking in the heart of European civilization.

A rather different position contends that the Holocaust’s “claim to uniqueness” relates it to “a long tradition of the West’s attempts to universalize its own values,” and that it was “those very claims to univer-

salism” that “have themselves been at the heart of Europe’s violent interaction with the rest of the world.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, it has also argued that this claim to uniqueness creates a “benign view” of “colonial and imperial wars” and conflicts, which “precludes the question of genocide by equating it with the Holocaust of European Jewry.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, it is suggested that whether by evoking the universal (Western) implications of the Holocaust, or by emphasizing its unique extremity, crimes committed by colonial and postcolonial powers are marginalized and minimized. At the same time, attempts have been made to both find a direct link between colonial genocides and the Holocaust, and to present the Holocaust itself as a colonial undertaking.<sup>20</sup>

As I noted above, there is little doubt that violence against or by non-Western groups had often been and continues to be marginalized in the West for reasons that date back to colonial times, and clearly have to do with a Western sense of innate superiority and deeply ingrained notions about the depravity, backwardness, and violent predilections of non-Westerners. Whether assertions about the uniqueness of the Holocaust have much to do with this is less clear. It is also not entirely obvious that presenting the Holocaust as a colonial genocide akin to such events elsewhere has much analytical value. I have argued elsewhere that “the differences between what happened in Poland in 1939–44 and, say, German Southwest Africa in 1904, are so vast that putting them both in the same explanatory framework of genocidal colonialism does not appear particularly useful.”<sup>21</sup> This is, of course, not to deny that various connections might be traced between colonial genocides and the Holocaust, even though scholars have found it difficult to establish direct links.<sup>22</sup> Nor should one dismiss the importance of precedent and practice. Indeed, the genocide of 1904 had the distinction of being the first such case in the twentieth century, as well as of being carried out by a modern Western military organization that announced its intention to exterminate an African group. But a systematic comparison between colonial genocides and the Holocaust may well reveal more differences than similarities.

Jürgen Zimmerer, a German expert of Southwest Africa, has offered a judicious assessment of the relationship between the genocide of the Herero and the Holocaust. As he puts it, “there are no monocausal explanations for Nazi crimes, nor is there a linear progression from German colonialism to the murder of the European Jews.” Rather, “the colonial example illustrates the genocidal potential already present in parts of the bureaucratic and military institutions of Germany.” Furthermore, “colonialism

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produced a reservoir of cultural practices that the Nazi thugs could appropriate for themselves,” or could at least “legitimize their actions by pointing to similarities with colonial time.” Hence, “of the numerous routes that fed the criminal policies of National Socialism, one originated in the colonies, and that path was neither minor nor obscure.”<sup>23</sup> Here, Zimmerer illustrates both the value and the limitations of seeking the colonial roots of the Holocaust. He rightly implies that earlier generations of Holocaust scholars had missed this important connection; and yet he also concedes that no direct links between one event and another can be established or, indeed, need to be, not least because the genocide of the Jews also had deep European roots that were either only marginally or not at all related to overseas colonialism.

But can one see the Holocaust itself as a colonial undertaking, or part of an even vaster colonization project? This has certainly been argued by scholars of Nazi Germany and the Final Solution, who have suggested that the genocide of the Jews was part of a vast plan, the so-called General Plan East, to entirely alter the demographic structure of Eastern Europe by ethnically cleansing its mostly Slav populations and resettling it with ethnic Germans. The plan could not be implemented because of Germany’s inability to win the war against the Soviet Union, and the only part of it that was fully carried out was the extermination of the Jews. This is not the place to discuss this interpretation, which has fruitfully contextualized the Holocaust within German wartime and colonization policy, yet has also been shown to have significant limitations as a comprehensive explanation of the Nazi genocidal dynamic against the Jews. But it is an important contribution to our understanding, adding a Nazi colonial dimension that was lacking from earlier interpretations.<sup>24</sup>

Some genocide scholars have pushed this interpretation further than most German scholars would go, suggesting that the Nazi occupation of Europe as a whole was a colonial undertaking akin to overseas colonialism, in which Europeans suddenly found themselves treated as colonial subjects by the Germans, leading them to revolt against oppression and exploitation. This view seems to elide the vast differences between the German occupation of such countries in Eastern Europe as Poland, which was completely devastated, and such Western European countries as France, which officially collaborated with the Nazi regime and experienced little relative damage by the Germans. It also suggests that Nazi policies toward European Jews were essentially the same as those practiced against non-Jews, in that all were treated as colonial subjects, whereas in



fact, Jews were targeted for genocide and suffered greater relative loss of life than any other European group, with the possible exception of the much-smaller Sinti and Roma population. As one genocide scholar writes, “many Europeans were prepared to participate in the Nazi anti-Bolshevik reconfiguration of the continent and were only pushed into non-cooperation or resistance by the Nazis’ policies of plunder, which . . . were experienced as colonial”; they were “only shocked by Nazism when it treated them—including Jews—as colonial subjects to be exploited, enslaved and murdered.” But this equal treatment of all Europeans, it is claimed, “was screened out by depicting the Nazi genocide of the Jews as a massive hate crime.” And it was this focus on the Jews that subsequently “promoted blindness to genocidal episodes around the world because they did not resemble the Holocaust.”<sup>25</sup>

In his important study of the Nazi occupation of Europe, historian Mark Mazower has offered a useful distinction between the European overseas empires and Hitler’s Europe. The former, he writes, “had generally grown up over long periods of time, in what were still largely rural societies.” They “involved complex accommodations and compromises with local and native rulers, and . . . were themselves coming under strain in the interwar period from emergent colonial nationalist movements.” Conversely, the German occupiers of Europe “imposed their rule very suddenly in the midst of a war and . . . chose to inflict this on urbanized societies which had powerfully shaped and already formed senses of their own national identity. What was striking,” he stresses, “was not that Europeans resisted, but that they were mostly so hesitant to do so.”<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, Mazower is critical of Aimé Césaire, whose own ideas have influenced some current genocide scholars. Césaire, he writes, argued that Europeans “had needed Nazism, in a sense, to bring home to them what racial prejudice produced. They had failed to grasp the true nature of colonialism because racism had prevented them sympathizing with the plight of those they oppressed. They tolerated ‘Nazism before it was inflicted on them . . . because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples.’”<sup>27</sup> In fact, observes Mazower, “while Victorian international law legitimized colonial rule, it did so by holding out the promise of liberation,” even if this was “a theory that was generally honoured only in the breach.” Conversely, “it was this promise of eventual (if always tenuous) political redemption that Nazism decisively rejected,” since it was “based upon the immutable truths of racial hierarchy,” and “the only alternative it envisaged to domination was oppression and

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national death.” In this sense, the Nazis were “tearing down the whole noble façade of nineteenth-century international law.”<sup>28</sup>

This is an important distinction, and as Mazower also suggests, many Europeans, who were in fact treated by the Nazis neither as badly as certain colonial subjects nor, much more visibly, as their Jewish neighbors, eventually came to the conclusion that once the Jews were gone, they might be next.<sup>29</sup> But one should add that while this thinking applied to certain Slav populations, such as the Poles, who were from the beginning treated abysmally by the Germans—but not, for instance, to the Croats, who were allied with Germany—it did not quite apply to western and northern Europeans, who were never under any threat of extermination and, in many cases, would have been welcomed with open arms into the fold of an Aryan empire. Moreover, the growing resistance to collaboration with the Final Solution was largely fueled by rising fears of Allied retribution in view of an increasingly likely German defeat.

Alongside the view that the Holocaust can be related to past colonial genocides, and that it was itself part of a German colonial undertaking akin to other European colonial ventures, is the assertion that the genocide of the Jews, and especially insistence on its uniqueness, has served to justify the Zionist colonization of Palestine. This, too, is anything but a vacuous argument; there is little doubt that in Israeli political and educational rhetoric, the slogan “never again” has been used both to legitimize the existence of the state as a haven for the Jews, and for giving it license to use any means needed to protect its existence. Parallels made by Israeli leaders and propagandists between such Palestinian organizations as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas and the Nazis abound, just as Palestinian propaganda and anti-Israeli spokespeople and demonstrators in the West have a penchant for drawing parallels between Israeli and Nazi policies.

This kind of rhetoric is largely confined to the admittedly well-publicized realm of political demagoguery, indoctrination, and ideological overkill. There are certainly colonial and racist undertones to right-wing and settler pronouncements and actions in Israel; and there are clear anti-Semitic undertones to radical Islamic and European right- and left-wing anti-Israel rhetoric. The shadow of Nazism and the Holocaust rests heavily on everyone, and true to its nature, Nazism has a poisoning effect on all who exploit it. But the question is to what extent this predilection has also affected Holocaust historiography. To be sure, since the nineteenth century, historians have been deeply complicit, indeed, have often

played a major role in the creation of ethnocentric nationalism, and Israeli historians have been no exception. But it is clearly an exaggeration to suggest, as one scholar does, that Israeli Holocaust “historiography is as much an ethical discourse, indeed a political theology, as a secular investigation.”<sup>30</sup>

One must also doubt that most Holocaust scholars would see themselves as belonging to either one of the “two rival narratives about the meaning of the Holocaust and the course of modern global history” that ostensibly dominate the discourse: one that “links Holocaust memory both to the universal values of human rights and the particular geopolitical agenda of Israel”; and another that “regards the Holocaust less as a racially-driven genocide against a helpless minority than the logical outcome of imperial-racial conquests that it holds Zionism to embody.”<sup>31</sup> Instead, I would argue that this is a fatuous either-or view of Holocaust historiography, which reflects a tendency among some genocide scholars to perceive the Holocaust more as mobilized memory than as a historical event. In this sense, the call for the Holocaust to be “deprovincialized from its signification within an exclusively Jewish and western narrative about the triumphant achievement of human rights and genocide prevention” seems to reflect a frustration with the Holocaust as allegedly constituting an obstacle to fighting injustice in today’s world.<sup>32</sup>

Much of this debate curiously boils down to a very specific historical question, namely, did the Nazis target the Jews for genocide in a manner that was essentially different from their treatment of any other group under their rule? This purely factual question appears to be important not only in analyzing Nazi policies but also because different answers to it seem to affect the status of the Holocaust as unique. There can be little doubt that the Jews played a singular role in the Nazi *imaginaire* and that German Jewish policies distinguished them within the Nazi universe of murder and fantasy;<sup>33</sup> but other groups clearly have been similarly targeted in other genocides. Hence, in order to assert the comparability of the Final Solution with other genocidal undertakings, there is no need to speak of a “uniqueness myth that the Nazis intended the total destruction of the Jews,”<sup>34</sup> not least because most scholars of Nazism and the Holocaust would agree that the Nazi genocidal project was no myth.<sup>35</sup> Nor do all genocide scholars agree on this point. As one prominent historian asserts, he had “always recognized the extremity of the Holocaust relative to other genocides . . . the extreme fervor of the Nazi pursuit of Jews across national boundaries, and the totality of the desire . . . to

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murder all Jews on whom hands could be laid.” He thus rightly concludes that “the extent of the ‘final solution’ was . . . shaped by an antisemitism that was colored by a different element over and above the racism and ethno-nationalism that explains the murder of other groups by Nazi Germany—that element being the view of ‘the Jews’ as an implacable, collective world enemy.”<sup>36</sup>

To be sure, this makes the Holocaust unique only within the context of the Nazi empire—and even under Hitler’s rule, things may have transpired differently under different circumstances—but not a unique, albeit certainly a very extreme form of genocide, if one may apply such an adjective to the “crime of crimes.” It certainly should not give license to create “a hierarchy that hinders the integrated study of genocides.”<sup>37</sup> But while this warning by genocide scholars should be heeded, there does not seem to be much danger of such a hierarchy being maintained within the scholarly community (as opposed to political rhetoric). The difficult task is rather to create integrated histories of genocide—specific cases as well as comparative studies—that would do justice both to the perspectives of all protagonists and that would analytically sketch out differences and similarities between the variety of genocides that have plagued and keep plaguing our world.

The Holocaust was one of several major genocides in the twentieth century. As noted, it was particularly extreme, and aspects of it were and have remained unprecedented, most especially the extermination camps. Some aspects of it were remarkably similar to other genocides, and have repeatedly occurred, such as communal massacres. As an event, it was highly complex and transpired in a variety of very different contexts—the killing of Jews in a little town in Galicia, the transport of Jews from Paris to Auschwitz, the Romanian massacres of Jews in Transnistria, and the starvation of Jews in the ghettos of Poland were all part of the same genocide but also vastly different, as were the Jewish communities that experienced these atrocities.

To my mind, the history of the Holocaust, which was a European genocide in the middle of the twentieth century, is quite different from that of the Herero genocide in German Southwest Africa at the beginning of that century, or that of the Rwandan genocide toward its end. They were, of course, connected in various ways, although these links are often difficult to establish.<sup>38</sup> But they were also related to their own particular histories, and must be analyzed and understood within their specific historical and geographical contexts. For this purpose, they need to be

studied not just by scholars of Holocaust studies or genocide studies, but by area specialists who know the languages and histories of the perpetrators and victims. I still believe, as I did at the beginning of my own scholarly journey, that historians should not start off by specializing in an event but rather in a place and a time. Most important, they should be careful and meticulous with their facts, especially when these facts concern the mass murder of millions.

Having spent decades studying modern violence, I am still grappling with the complexities of writing an integrated history of genocide. Over the years, I have always sought to identify the individual human being on whom history is enacted, but who, at the same time, is also its maker. I have never believed in unique events, but always highlighted the singular, personal experience that, collectively, makes up the fabric of human history. Perhaps because of my current preoccupation with the history of communal violence in a single town, I have become increasingly aware, as I commented some time ago, that “from the local perspective, it does not matter much which genocide one writes about; we will often encounter the same ethnically and religiously mixed communities, external forces triggering outbursts of communal massacres, and many instances of complicity and rescue, collaboration and resistance. But the witnesses of such events will also bring out the uniqueness of their experiences as individuals, as members of communities, of groups, of nations—a uniqueness that was denied them by the killers.”<sup>39</sup> As I see it, precisely because genocide is about the destruction of groups as such, it is the duty of the historian to rescue these groups from oblivion, even if only in history and memory. One way to oppose the will of the *génocidaires* to obliterate both the existence *and* the memory of their victims is to let the victims speak and to listen to their voices, not least because they demand to be heard, and then to write down their accounts and integrate them into the historical record for the sake of a fuller reconstruction of the event. It is not true that history is always the story of the powerful and victorious; but it is up to historians to collect and record, write and integrate the fates of those who were trampled on and destroyed.<sup>40</sup>