

*Allemagne nazie et le
génocide Juif.*

UNANSWERED

Nazi Germany and

QUESTIONS

the Genocide of the Jews

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even the armed resistance movements (e.g., in Poland, or in Yugoslavia, respectively).

In every country a mood of "mitmachen"—to join the Nazis—partially accounts for the catastrophe, but this political vogue was greatly influenced by the strength of prewar Nazi-type movements. Thus, the Nazis could count on strong Hungarian National Socialist mass organizations, while in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia the absence of such prewar mass movements deprived the Germans of an organized, massive collaboration.

In at least three countries the bid for national independence exerted a favorable impact on the attitude toward the Nazis' Jewish policy: in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria the handling of the Jewish problem seismographically registered the degree of their dependence on Nazi Germany. In those countries where national sovereignty was not completely extirpated, a great deal of realpolitik, pragmatism, and opportunism determined the ups and downs in the collaboration with Germany, also in dealing with the Jews. The negative attitude toward Nazi Jewish policy was less motivated by humanitarian reasons and more by national considerations—at least in Romania and in pre-October 1944 Hungary. The endeavor to preserve a margin of freedom of action against Germany, and concern for their nation's future after the war, dictated the resistance to German pressures for the annihilation of the Jews in Romania and Hungary (in Bulgaria the humanitarian motives were not less important than the opportunistic reasons). This policy, partly successful, actually saved the lives of a fraction of the Jews in Hungary, and of the majority of the Jews in Bulgaria and in Romania.

While Nazi Germany planned and ignited the Holocaust, it could not have succeeded without the collaboration of its allies. The dimensions of the Holocaust were determined not exclusively by the Germans: collaboration in eastern Europe encouraged the Nazis, with disastrous consequences, while resistance, regardless of its motives, attenuated Nazi pressure and reduced the dimensions of the Jewish tragedy.

Jewish Resistance and Passivity in the Face of the Holocaust

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Nazi policy toward the Jews was not guided primarily by economic, political, or military considerations, but by a pseudoreligious ideology. Based on concepts derived from Christian Jew-hatred, Jews were seen as a satanic influence in history. Translated into secularist, anti-Christian, pseudoscientific concepts, Jews were defined as parasites, as an antirace corrupting and destroying healthy, "natural" races. Nazi racism's main differentiation was between Aryans and non-Aryans, and the only non-Aryans that had to be radically opposed were the Jews. In this sense anti-Semitism was not a logical outcome of Nazi racism; rather, racism made possible the pseudoscientific rationalization of Nazi anti-Semitism. Nazi internal and external policy was conducted with two aims in mind: one was the "positive" aim of establishing the rule of the Germanic peoples, with Germany as their core, over Europe and the world; but that aim could not be achieved unless the satanic parasitic element ruling the world in fact, namely the Jews, was first removed. The uniqueness of the Holocaust lies in its motivation—in the fact that for the Nazi regime the removal of the Jews was a sine qua non of the survival of mankind, a matter of global, if not cosmic, importance, and not an ordinary political matter. Nazi policies toward the Jews were never a tactical issue, though political tactics would dictate timing and some particular measures.

These policies were part of the central core of nazism, to be sidetracked by other considerations only temporarily.

At the same time, nazism developed two types of approaches to the final disposal of the Jews—that of extrusion, emigration, and sale against ransom, and that of murder. These attempts at solutions were pursued sometimes consecutively in time, and sometimes parallel in time. Both were based on the assumption that the Jews were not human beings, but only looked like humans; they were evil creatures whose tribe had introduced into humanity notions such as conscience, humanism, pacifism, socialism, and democracy, to corrupt mankind. They could either be chased out to purify the Germanic core of regenerated healthy, strong humanity and corrupt Germany's enemies who accepted them in the process, or be killed—or both in succession. Jews under the Nazi regime were therefore quite unlike all others perceived as enemies by the Nazis: the others, with the possible exception of the Gypsies, could escape if they changed their views, their attitudes, or their life-styles, or submitted unquestioningly to Nazi rule. Jews were punished because they were born with at least three Jewish grandparents and after 1941 all of these persons were to be punished by death for having been thus born.

Jewish reaction to Nazi policies was radically influenced by the lack of comprehension of the Nazi policies. Rational arguments and rational reasons were sought to explain policies that were essentially based on the practical application of a myth. It was therefore only after the mass murder of the Jews had already gone a long way that the Jews realized the fact of the total Nazi design of murder. Paradoxically, the Nazis themselves had no systematic extermination plans before 1941; until that time, extrusion by emigration or forced deportation abroad was the prevalent policy. Mass murder was inherent in Nazi ideology, but did not emerge into consciousness or practical policies until a situation arose in 1940–41 when extrusion could no longer serve as a practical means to make the Jews disappear, to use Himmler's phrase.¹ If the Nazis were not aware, until 1941, of their intent to murder the Jews, it is difficult retroactively to ask of their victims to be so aware.

The Jews were, of course, an absolutely powerless minority in Europe. They numbered about 500,000 in Germany, 300,000 in France, 200,000 in the Netherlands and Belgium combined, and even in Poland they were a minority of 3.3 million, or 10 percent of the population. Including the USSR, there were about 8 million Jews among a European population of 500 million, scattered, without a government, without cohesion or identity of purpose. Contrary to legend, they were econom-

ically powerless: a few captains of industry and banking apart, Jews were a largely middle-class and lower-middle-class group, very visible because of their traditional middle-class position, and very vulnerable because of it. Their propensity for intellectual pursuit tended to make them prominent in the intellectual and professional life in Europe, thus strengthening both their visibility and their vulnerability.

A great deal has been researched and written about resistance in Europe under the Nazis. However, the term "resistance" as far as Jewish resistance is concerned has been used in a sense different from that used for the resistance of other people in the German occupation in Europe. Henri Michel, the doyen of resistance historians, wrote that to "accept defeat while still capable of fighting is to lose one's self-respect; self-respect dictates that one should not yield to the blandishments of collaboration."² Clearly, the Nazis did not use any blandishments of collaboration on the Jews, and therefore Michel's definition cannot be applicable to the Jewish case. I would define Jewish resistance during the Holocaust to be any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters. Obviously, in order to accept such a definition we have to subject it to the test of known facts.

It is much easier to check such a definition against the record of armed resistance than it is to do so regarding nonarmed resistance. I shall therefore start with Jewish armed resistance, although we shall see as we go along that that is by no means the only or the main form of Jewish resistance to the Nazis.

For reasons already stated it was difficult for Jews to collaborate consciously with the Germans. There was only one clear case of collaboration in the sense of identification with German war aims and a desire to help the Nazi regime to win the war. This occurred with a group known as the Thirteen (*Dos Dreizentel*) led by Avraham Gancwajch, in Warsaw. Gancwajch was convinced that the Nazis were going to win the war, and therefore he thought that the only way to assure the survival of the Jewish people would be to persuade the Nazis to accept them, on however lowly a level, within the Nazi scheme of things.³ If collaboration was impossible, so was armed resistance for most Jews during the Holocaust.⁴ A basic requirement for armed resistance was the support of the surrounding population and the existence of the possibility of acquiring arms. Jews locked in ghettos generally had no way to procure arms. The surrounding population in eastern Europe was largely indifferent, a fairly large minority was actively hostile to the Jews, and only a small minority

was actively friendly to them.⁴ Non-Jewish underground movements wanted to keep their own arms, and had no intention of handing them over to the hated Jews.⁵ To buy arms was extremely difficult, and to obtain arms by force from the Germans was a dream rather than a real possibility. The pervasiveness of Nazi terror and the stringency of security measures taken by the Nazis to guard the ghetto entrances insured that a minimum of arms could be smuggled into the ghetto from outside.

In Poland the Jews had no access to the arms buried by the collapsing Polish army in 1939, such as the access enjoyed by the budding Polish underground in 1940 and 1941. There had been very few Jewish officers in the Polish army, even fewer holding high rank, and the secret of the buried arms was kept by those who had hidden them. The official Polish government underground, the *Armia Krajowa*, did not buy arms from deserting German soldiers either. No partisan detachments of any importance were established before 1943, and in any case Jews were not only not accepted in AK ranks but a number of AK detachments were actively engaged in hunting down and murdering Jews.⁶ The Communist underground in Poland, later known as the *Armia Ludowa*, was founded as late as the spring of 1942. It was very weak, had few arms, and about half of its partisan forces were in fact Jewish detachments in the forests, mainly in the Lublin area. By the time the AL grew stronger, in 1943, the Jews were by and large no longer alive, but survivors did join the AL. Its weapons were bought or stolen from peasants; in most cases the weapons came originally from the Soviet Union, which dropped them by parachute.⁷ The AK had a policy of not fighting the Nazis unless they had to. As late as November 10, 1942, the AK Command issued an order that "the time of our uprising has not yet come." It added that "the occupant is exterminating the Jews" and warned Poles not to be drawn into "premature" action against the Germans.⁸ Orders were issued in 1943 by the AK to kill Jewish "bandits," who were supposedly robbing and otherwise endangering the Polish population.⁹

It is true to say, nevertheless, that without the help of that minority of the Polish population that was willing to support the Jews, at tremendous risk to themselves, Jewish resistance would have been much less than it actually was.¹⁰ In October 1942, after the destruction of most of the Warsaw ghetto in the preceding summer, a group of liberals, mainly Catholics and Social Democrats, established a group called *Żegota*, in which Jews and non-Jews cooperated in helping escapees to the non-Jewish side of Warsaw under the general aegis of the AK and its political

supervisory organization, the so-called *Delegatura*, which owed its allegiance to the Polish government-in-exile in London.¹¹

From another point of view, the question of timing was an essential problem. In very few cases did organization for armed resistance begin before the main so-called *Aktion*, or *Akcja*, as the Nazi extermination enterprise was known. Clearly, a population forming a minority in a country where it did not enjoy support from the surrounding population, without arms, without government or any central bodies, would not think of armed resistance unless it was obvious that the only other alternative was certain death. Jewish armed resistance, therefore, depended very largely on the perceived threat of extermination. The conviction that, contrary to all rational argumentations, the Nazis would devote material human resources and rolling stock in the midst of a war to destroy a population that might have worked for them dawned slowly. By the time the nuclei of Jewish armed resistance developed in eastern Europe, most of the Jewish populations there had either already been destroyed or were in the process of radical decimation. The radical despair engendered by this situation, the loss of families, the destruction of the internal workings of a whole community, did not make the decision to take up arms any easier. In fact, in eastern Europe, it was largely a matter of generational differences that prompted the establishment of underground movements. Young people could more easily perceive the threat to their existence and be rid of illusions still held by their elders. Ideological youth movements were more likely to reach the conclusion that armed resistance was the only possible response to a regime which they viewed as the embodiment of evil, in accordance with prewar ideology. This was true especially of left-wing Zionist movements, of Jewish Communists, of youth associated with the socialist anti-Zionist Jewish party, called the Bund, and to a certain extent also with right-wing Jewish Zionist nationalists of the Betar movement. These groups had compact organizational setups and leadership groups which had not cooperated with the Jewish councils set up by the Nazis to rule over the Jewish communities.¹² It was they, therefore, that in most cases originated the armed resistance to the Nazis in eastern Europe.

In Warsaw an alliance of Jewish Communists and left-wing Zionists¹ had established an antifascist bloc as early as March 1942. But these groups had no arms, and the Communist underground in Warsaw had none to smuggle to them either. In April and May of 1942 the Nazis, apparently following denunciations, effectively paralyzed the Communist

underground in the Warsaw ghetto, and the antifascist bloc ceased to operate.¹³ By July 1942, the Zionist groups, who had no previous paramilitary, military, or indeed underground experience, were at a loss as to how to obtain arms for the budding Jewish underground. On July 22, 1942, the great deportation from Warsaw began, and on July 28 the Jewish Fighters' Organization was founded by the Zionist youth movements. During the following weeks, ending September 12, the vast majority of Warsaw's Jewish population was sent to be killed in the Treblinka death camp.¹⁴ At the beginning of the deportation, the armed Jewish underground's arms cache consisted of one pistol. It was hardly surprising that the ghetto inhabitants did not heed the underground posters calling upon them to resist the Germans with their bare hands. Attempts by the underground to smuggle people out into the forests failed almost completely, as group after group of people were caught by the Nazis in trains and on roads leaving Warsaw. It was only by tremendous effort that in August 1942 the underground Zionist groups managed to obtain a few pistols, some hand-grenades, and some dynamite. Early in September, however, a young man who had been caught by the Nazis and tortured until he told his captors what he knew, led the Gestapo to a shop in the ghetto where one of the main leaders of the underground, Joseph Kaplan, was working. In order to protect the few arms that had been collected, a girl took the arms in a sack under a vegetable basket from the hideout in Kaplan's workplace to a new hiding place. On the way, she was apprehended by a Nazi patrol and the arms were lost. Another leader of the underground then emerged from a house and, accosted by Nazi policemen, tried to attack them with a knife. He was killed instantly.¹⁵ On one day then the few arms which had been collected and two of the main leaders of the Zionist youth groups were lost. When, therefore, on September 12 the roundup ended, and between 35,000 and 65,000 Jews were left in the remnant of the ghetto, the assembled surviving members of the Zionist youth movements were on the point of deciding to commit mass suicide by attacking the Germans in broad daylight on the street, with no arms. In a long and painful discussion, the remaining leaders convinced the youth to give up this idea and to start the process of organizing an armed underground from scratch.¹⁶ The result was the first armed action of the Jewish underground in Warsaw, in January 1942, and later of course the April 19 outbreak of the great Warsaw ghetto rebellion. By that time the underground had assembled one, possibly two, machine-guns, 14 rifles, possibly 500 handguns and a large number of homemade hand grenades. Of these no more than one machine-gun and

50 pistols had been supplied to the Jews by the AK. By way of comparison, the AK in 1941 claimed to possess 566 heavy machine-guns, 1,097 light machine-guns, 31,391 rifles, and 5 million rounds of ammunition.¹⁷ The Jewish underground in Warsaw, led by a young Jewish youth leader, Mordechai Anielewicz, of the left-wing Zionist movement, Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair, fought the German armed forces, which were supported by tanks and heavy guns, for more than six weeks. A second armed group of young Jews, the Jewish Military Organization, had in the meantime been established by the Betar movement, probably in October 1942. It had contacts with two small Polish groups loosely attached to the AK, and it supplied the one or two machine-guns mentioned above to the united movement, when the JMO and the JFO joined forces under Anielewicz in April. Even after the defeat of the rebellion, which the Nazis achieved mainly by setting fire to each building in the ghetto and forcing the Jews out of it, as well as by the introduction of poison gas into the underground bunkers (the only case of the use of poison gas in armed action during World War II), the remnants of the fighters and the other ghetto inhabitants continued to appear in the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto to fight the Germans as late as September, possibly October, 1943.¹⁸

It is true that only 750 people at most were members of the Jewish underground in the Warsaw ghetto. However, this was not a fight of a few hundred youngsters against the Nazis; it was rather the fight of tens of thousands of unarmed people, who hid rather than hand themselves over to the Nazis, and who were looking for arms but did not have them. Among these were 750 who had some kind of arms at their disposal and were more than willing to use them. The Warsaw ghetto was the first armed urban uprising in Europe under the Nazis, but it was by no means the only ghetto armed resistance during the Holocaust. In central Poland—the so-called General Government—there were three armed rebellions, four attempted rebellions, and seventeen places where armed resistance groups existed and from where they left for the forests. In eastern Poland, which had been occupied by the Soviet Union in September 1939, armed resistance was even more widespread because of the forests, which did not abound in central Poland. There is evidence of armed underground groups in ninety-one ghettos in the western Belorussian area alone, and in sixty-one of these ghettos there were actual organized underground movements. In a few of these places, such as in Tuczyn, Łachwa, and Mir, there were armed rebellions or attempts at armed rebellions, whereas in other places action usually took the form of escaping into the surrounding forests. Sometimes, as in Nieswiez, there

was a combination of the two, because armed rebellion was followed by an escape into the forests. In central Poland we know of thirty Jewish partisan detachments, most of them connected with the AL, and a further twenty-one detachments in which Jews formed over 30 percent of the members. The total number of Jewish fighters in central Poland during World War II, including the ghetto rebellions, was about 5,000, of whom 4,000 were killed in the fighting. In eastern Poland and the western USSR, especially in the area of Belorussia and Volhynia, there were probably around 15,000 partisans out of the 47,000 who managed to escape in the forests. Most of these, of course, did not survive to the end of the war.¹⁹

There were only four ghettos in Lithuania after the first mass-murder campaign there by the Nazis in 1941, and in three out of these four, namely in Vilna, Kovno, and Oszmiana, there were armed underground groups. In Vilna, which was the seat of the first Jewish underground organization, called the FPO, the attempt to call upon the ghetto inhabitants to rebel against the Nazis failed. Contrary to the situation in Warsaw, in Vilna the Jewish fighters found themselves isolated and opposed by the ghetto population. Therefore, after a short armed engagement in September 1943, the Jewish fighters left the ghetto through underground sewers and escaped into the forests of eastern Lithuania, to fight the Nazis from there.²⁰ From the very beginning the Kovno underground had no intention of fighting in the ghetto itself and organized a gradual mass escape of hundreds of people into two areas in Lithuania, where they joined existing partisan detachments or founded their own detachments.²¹

A major rebellion occurred in Białystok, which was neither a part of central Poland nor of occupied Russia. It was, in fact, part of East Prussia under the Nazis. A rebellion there, in August 1943, was led by the same kind of combination of forces as existed in the ghettos already mentioned—namely, under the leadership of left-wing Zionists, a coalition of youth groups of various ideological convictions.²²

In the original Soviet area, somewhat similar forms of resistance developed. In the ghetto of Minsk, the fourth-largest ghetto in Europe, with over 80,000 inhabitants, an armed resistance group led by Jewish Communists, joined and aided by the Jewish council of the ghetto, organized a mass escape into the surrounding forests, thereby enabling 6,000 to 8,000 Jews to try their luck in joining the partisans.²³ Most of them did not make it—whether for lack of arms or for other reasons—but those who did joined Soviet partisan detachments, which already

contained a number of Jews. We have no real knowledge of the participation of Jewish fighters escaping from ghettos in the Russian areas occupied by the Nazis, their number or the weight of their participation in the Soviet detachments. We do know that there were large numbers of them, but because of the Soviet policy of neither permitting research in Soviet archives nor presenting information regarding the breakup of the partisan detachments or their exact histories, it is, at this stage, impossible to give an estimate regarding the Soviet area proper.

In eastern Europe we are talking of Jews who, by and large, acted within Jewish environments, such as ghettos or Jewish detachments, or joined mixed Soviet or Polish left-wing partisan detachments as Jews. In other words, they were set apart quite clearly from the rest of the population, whether they acted separately or within general units. There were few exceptions and these usually concerned either people who were hiding their Jewish identity or individuals who saw themselves as Communists, internationalists, and saw their Jewishness as nothing but an accident of birth. These were relatively few in number. Detailed analyses of these individuals would probably show that even in that situation, their Jewishness was more than accidental in the way they behaved, both before and during the war, and in their motivation for fighting the Nazis. In the case of the rebellion in camps, this, of course, applies even more. In the camps the only rebellions which took place against Nazi rule were engineered and executed by Jews. This applies to the two rebellions in the death camps of Sobibór and Treblinka, in the summer and autumn of 1943, as well as to the chaotic fight of the Sonderkommando in the gas chambers of Auschwitz in October 1944.²⁴ There was no ideological motivation there, nor was the organization based on any prewar political groupings. It was simply a matter of people who knew that their death was approaching and who decided to rebel against the Nazis, whether motivated by a vague hope of escape or simply to sell their lives as dearly as possible. At Treblinka and Sobibór rather large numbers of people managed to break out, but many of them were caught afterward and only a few dozen of them survived. In the case of Auschwitz no survivor of the actual rebellion is known to us. Other rebellions, some of them unarmed, took place at Kruszyna, Krychow, and Lublin prisoner-of-war camp, the Kopernik camp at Minsk-Mazowiecki, at Sachsenhausen, and perhaps elsewhere.²⁵ Non-Jewish underground organizations in concentration and death camps, such as at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, did not act against the Nazis for a number of reasons, and in Auschwitz a promise by the general underground to support the Jewish rebels was not kept.

When we summarize the motivations of Jewish resistance fighters in eastern Europe, we find that hopes for survival were a factor in eastern Poland and in some of the camps. Elsewhere, it was more a matter of selling one's life at the highest possible price, and also the desire to defend what was regarded as the honor of the Jewish people in those circumstances. Overwhelming everywhere, however, was the desire for revenge, and this motivated the Jewish fighters in most of the cases.

• In western Europe the situation was different in that most Jews fighting the Nazis with arms in hand were members of general underground movements rather than Jewish ones. There were some exceptions to this rule, as in France, for instance. There a small group, calling itself the *Armée Juive*, existed in the south of France and was rather active not only in armed resistance proper but also in large-scale escape movements of Jews to Spain. However, insofar as one talks about Communist underground movements, many Jews in France, for instance, were members of the MOI, which was a front organization of the party for people of foreign nationality who were living in France. There were Poles and Romanians, Greeks and Armenians, and others, but a fairly large proportion of the leadership and the membership of the organizations were Jews. Jewish units were established where the prevailing language was Yiddish, and these groups participated from the very beginning in armed activities against the German occupant. The first armed actions in Paris were carried out by groups of the MOI and, as far as I know, the first French resister to the Nazis killed in the course of armed action or its aftermath was Szmul Tyszelman.²⁶ One could, of course, argue that there was a certain contradiction between the internationalist and territorial ideology of the Communist Party, which was opposed to ethnically defined units, and the existence of just such units in France, among them rather prominently the Jewish ones. The claim made at the time and later by participants and others, that these Jews participated in the armed resistance not as Jews but as Communists or Frenchmen, looks rather like a rationalization and not the psychological truth. The number of Jewish participants in the French underground, both Communist and non-Communist, was very high, though I do not possess any accurate figures. From a formal point of view it is undoubtedly true that the Jews did not fight, by and large, in Jewish units and that they participated in the underground as individuals, as loyal French citizens or as members of a particular ideological direction. In this of course there is a great difference between the situations in western and eastern Europe. Jewish participation in armed action against the Nazis can be documented on a

fairly large scale in Italy, where indeed the Jews did not participate as Jews but as members of the Italian underground, and in Yugoslavia, where approximately 6,000 Jews out of a population of 75,000 (most of whom were murdered by the Nazis) participated in the partisan detachments of Tito.²⁷ Jewish participation in armed fighting by Bulgarian and Greek partisans is also documented, though not sufficiently to give exact figures or ratios of participation. Jews formed a very important segment of the participants in the Slovak national uprising in August 1944, and there was even a specific Jewish unit which participated in a battle near the town then called Batovo (now renamed Partizanske).²⁸ After the rebellion was put down by the Nazis, in October 1944, probably up to 2,000 Jews carried on within the partisan detachments, mostly commanded by Soviet partisans who fought on in the Tatra Mountains until liberation.

We are confronted by the paradox that while all the conditions in Europe, especially in eastern Europe, militated against the mass participation of Jews in armed action against the Nazis, we nevertheless find precisely such large-scale participation. The question therefore arises as to why and how the Jews participated in such high ratios, and occasionally even in large absolute numbers, in armed underground operations and in guerrilla fighting against the Germans. Jews, of course, were more threatened than others, and once they realized that that was the situation, there was greater incentive for them, in comparison with others, to participate in armed action. The relatively strong cohesion of the Jewish family was originally one of the reasons that young Jewish men and women found it extremely difficult to join underground organizations, thereby abandoning their parents or siblings to murder by the Nazis. However, as the destruction of the Jewish populations proceeded apace, some young people found themselves without their families, who had been deported to their deaths. Thus, released from all family responsibility, or, in other cases, prompted by the fierce desire to cut themselves loose from their families, these youngsters were able to act against the Nazis in radical fashion, whether in ghettos or in partisan units.

In the Soviet Union, the partisan units came into existence as a large-scale phenomenon rather late. In 1941 and 1942 there were but the beginnings of such units in the forests, especially of Belorussia and Russia proper. Large-scale partisan activities occurred only from the winter of 1942-43 on. By that time, of course, Jewish ghettos no longer existed (except for the one at Minsk, which was finally liquidated in October 1943), and the number of Jewish labor camps was also diminish-

ing rapidly. As a matter of hypothetical guesswork, which of course is hardly in line with historical research, one might argue that had partisan units in the Soviet Union come into existence earlier than they did, larger numbers of Jews would have joined them. As it was, however, they came too late to provide a solution for many Jews who had thus far survived. Also, anti-Semitism was rampant in many of these Soviet units, especially at the beginning, before the Soviet High Command managed to make its weight felt among these groups that had arisen in various ways and under different conditions from one place to the other. With all these obstacles in mind, it is again a surprise to note the phenomenon of relatively large numbers and ratios of Jewish participants in partisan fights. The explanation seems to be that, for those who survived the first mass-murder actions and the later systematic destruction of the community remnants, which in fact means for a fairly large number of mostly young people, there was literally no other way of survival but escape into the forests and the attempt to either hide or fight, or both.

Armed Jewish resistance, therefore, was much wider and much more intensive than the first historians recording the facts of antinazism generally, and the Holocaust specifically, thought. We find ourselves asking questions opposite in character to those that we asked originally: we no longer ask "Why did the Jews not resist," but the opposite question, "Why did so many resist by force of arms?" In this area, much further research is needed to answer questions, especially for the territory of the pre-1939 Soviet Union. As we now turn to unarmed resistance, we in fact must move chronologically back from armed resistance, which obviously was the last stage and in many places was preceded by other forms of resistance to the Nazi occupiers. Again, one must remember that until the summer of 1942 Jews in central Poland were generally unaware of the murderous intent of the Nazi regime. In eastern Poland, the Baltic countries, and the pre-1939 Soviet regions, realization of these intentions came only with the actual murder, so that no time was left to prepare for any kind of reaction. The Germans made every attempt to prevent effective communications between different Jewish centers, so that these centers, mostly ghettos, were isolated from each other and from other concentrations of Jews in other countries. Information or knowledge gained in eastern Poland or the Baltic countries took a long time to penetrate into central and western Poland, and an even longer time to penetrate a consciousness which refused to accept the information thus received. The preceding era, namely the one between the conquest of the different countries and the beginning of what the Nazis termed the

"Final Solution," is the period in which unarmed resistance took place. The areas covered by such resistance were hinted at in my definition of resistance at the beginning of this paper. Unaware that Nazi policies had developed from persecution to mass murder, Jewish communities, including both leaders and the general population, thought in terms of outlasting a regime of oppression, brutalization, mass starvation, and epidemics. There was never a doubt in the minds of all but a tiny minority that Germany would lose the war and that the only problem they had to solve was how to act in such a way as to ensure that the majority of the Jewish population would survive to the end of the war.

The problem of unarmed resistance has to be examined both regionally, because different conditions obtained in different parts of Europe, or in other words "horizontally," and also vertically, in order to observe the reactions of the Jewish leaderships, the so-called *Judenräte*, on the one hand, and of the general Jewish population on the other hand. Brutal Nazi police actions in Poland, as well as laws and regulations issued by the leaders of the General Government there, would have caused the destruction of the Jewish community and most probably the quick demise of the Jewish population had all these laws and orders been obeyed by the Jews. To give just one example, had the Jews lived on the official rations that the Germans allowed them, they would have simply died quickly in vast numbers. The official caloric value of the rations allotted to the Jews in Warsaw was 220.²⁹ Social or economic intercourse with the surrounding population was forbidden, as was education (until September 1941 in Warsaw) and religious life. By 1942 the worst of the typhoid and typhus epidemics had been overcome, the mass deaths that had occurred in 1940 and 1941 had receded to a considerable extent, education, though illegal, was widespread, a religious life had been reactivated, and social aid by half-legal or illegal groups and organizations was alleviating at least some of the prevalent misery.

The attitudes and policies of the *Judenräte* varied greatly in that period. Some of the *Judenräte* were absolutely helpless in the face of the mounting problems, whereas others were seeking more or less ingenious ways of circumventing Nazi orders and regulations. Most of them occupied a position in between, yielding to the Germans on the one hand, and trying to save as many as they could from German policies on the other. A good example of this is the *Judenrat* in Bialystok led by Ephraim Barash, which tried to save the Jewish population by making the ghetto economically useful to the Germans. Of course, this rational policy did not take into account the irrational basis of Nazi attitudes toward the

Jews. Yet for quite a long time the policy actually achieved some measure of success. Except for Łódź and Będzin, Białystok was the last ghetto in the former Polish area to survive and was not destroyed until August 1943. On the face of it, all the activities of the Białystok *Judenrat* were within the framework of Nazi regulations. The *Judenrat* even went so far as to try to refuse acceptance into the ghetto of refugees from other places, so as not to arouse the wrath of the Nazi authorities. Yet at the same time, Barash also maintained close ties with the underground organizations in the ghetto, providing them with illegal papers, receiving reports on illegal operations, and providing them with food and other necessities to enable them to carry on their work.³⁰ But the main burden of unarmed resistance was shouldered by organizations that in general did not participate in the *Judenrat* system but were independent of it, partly or wholly. The main organization in this area was the JDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee), a social agency, which had a Warsaw bureau and had given the directors of that bureau, *nolens volens*, a more or less free hand in their operations after the outbreak of the war. The JDC received part of its funds legally, but a very considerable proportion of the monies it used were recruited in a strictly illegal way. It fought starvation and epidemics by a series of measures which, insufficient as they were to save the lives of tens of thousands of victims, were yet important not only in saving the lives of many others but also in providing the Jews in Poland with hope and a trust in their own group, that they would not be left to die helplessly. In Warsaw the JDC not only financed a whole illegal educational system and provided the where-withal for intensive cultural activity, consciously directed against the perceived Nazi intent to demoralize the Jewish population, but also organized so-called house committees. In these house committees people organized themselves, by living quarters, to provide each other with much needed material and moral support, including the education of children.³¹ We find basically the same kind of structure of Jewish reaction in other countries of Europe. The *Judenräte* were bound, after all, by German regulations, and while they tried on the whole to help the Jewish population materially as much as they could, they were, when all is said and done, subject to German control. On the other hand, unofficial organizations, sometimes legal, sometimes illegal, were able to provide the Jewish populations with the needed leadership and direction to contravene Nazi intentions. Thus, in France, the UGIF, the official *Judenrat*, provided children's homes, social aid, and other services. But it was the half-legal OSE, an agency for looking after children, which proved

to be a mainstay of operations, attempting to hide people, or to smuggle them across the borders to neutral Switzerland or Spain.³² In western, northern, and southern Europe, where there were populations that were not, on the whole, unfriendly to the Jews, hiding and flight were clearly unarmed reactions to German intent and foiled Nazi murder plans.

On the level of popular reaction, one should perhaps mention the tremendous effort by the Jewish population, especially in eastern Europe, to smuggle food into closed ghetto areas. This was often done by children, and the most famous stories are concerned with those children. But one must also mention the adult smugglers, people who were, before the war, usually counted among the criminal or semicriminal elements in Jewish society, whose activities during the war helped to maintain large parts of the ghetto populations. In some places, such as in Kovno, the ghetto police, itself a part of the Jewish armed underground, aided in smuggling food into closed areas. Diarists such as Haim A. Kaplan of Warsaw recorded in their notebooks that the reactions of the general Jewish population was one of determination not to succumb to a perceived Nazi intention to kill them off by starvation, humiliation, and disease. One should conclude from this description that the morale of the population was maintained at a consistently high level. Far from it. There were areas, towns, countries, and periods where the opposite was the case. Many of the *Judenrat* organizations were perforce subject to corruption introduced by the Nazi system. Corruption then spread from these centers into the general population. This in itself is hardly surprising, but what is perhaps surprising is the fact that there were cells of resistance to this process and, on the whole, corruption and degeneration were met by increasingly stiff opposition.

Armed resistance, where it could and did take place, was itself proof that unarmed organization and opposition to the Nazis had preceded it. Armed resistance could hardly have developed without a base in unarmed reaction before its rise.

Let me conclude with one concrete example, which concerns the ghetto of Częstochowa, where unarmed resistance to the Nazis was ended by a tragic armed rebellion. In Częstochowa the ghetto wasn't sealed off until April 1941. Starvation and epidemics on the scale of Warsaw never occurred in Częstochowa, partly perhaps because of the lateness in establishing the ghetto, partly also because the Jews were employed there in arms factories and other economic enterprises that proved to be useful to the German war machine. A meek and submissive *Judenrat* was opposed by a workers' council, which forced the *Judenrat* at various times into

granting greater rations of bread obtained by various means, and also into carrying out a series of social measures helpful to refugees from other places and to the local population as well. These achievements were the result, in part, of strike actions, unheard of anywhere else in Poland. Youth groups—Zionist, Communist, and Bundist—were part and parcel of this rebellious intermediary body. From these groups an underground organization developed, originally active in propaganda and adult education and later concentrating on preparations for armed resistance. In June 1943 the Nazis discovered the underground organization and managed to surprise its commander, who was guarding the main arms cache. Most of the members of the organization were apprehended and the rebellion failed. However, groups of members of the organization staged armed actions against the Germans after the failure of the main attempt at rebellion, and two groups managed to escape from the ghetto and attempted, one successfully and one unsuccessfully, to maintain themselves in forested areas until the end of the war. In this case, as in so many others, armed action was prepared by educational activity, economic and social aid, and other forms of social organization, which stood in stark contradiction to Nazi intentions.

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The picture that we obtain from all I have tried to depict in this brief outline may well be different from the accepted picture in general histories of World War II. There is no doubt that the Jews were victims, but they were not passive victims. They were destroyed by the overwhelming power of Nazi Germany, which had conquered most of Europe, crushing in a very short time mighty armies and great countries. There was absolutely no way in which the Jews could have physically resisted their fate. Even in western Europe, with populations relatively friendly to the Jews, there was a high percentage of victimization. But the percentage was higher in eastern Europe, where the populations were generally indifferent or hostile. The small Jewish minority was in a hopeless situation, and one could well have understood the spread of complete and total despair and demoralization. The extent of armed and unarmed resistance to the Nazis is perhaps evidence of a culture that refused to die. That, however, is quite a different statement from one that would argue that the Jewish culture of Europe did not, in fact, die. The Nazis succeeded to a great extent. The unarmed and armed resistance of the Jews proved to be futile, because the focus aligned against it were too powerful to be opposed by these means. When all is said and done, Jewish resistance of

all kinds to the Nazis is but a small footnote to what happened to all of Europe generally, and to the Jewish population in particular. For Jews it is a very important footnote, because it indicates possible ways of rebuilding and regenerating the Jewish people. For non-Jews it should be equally important or even more so. What happened to the Jews might well happen to others. What are the means, if any, to oppose ideologically motivated tyranny? More importantly, what may be the means of avoiding a situation where such a tyranny can operate? Those are some of the questions that a study of Jewish resistance may well arouse.

86. See my "The Ambiguity of Collaborationism: The Center of the Jews in Romania (1942-1944)," in *Patterns of Nazi Leadership in Europe, 1933-1945* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), pp. 287-309.

12 / Jewish Resistance and Passivity in the Face of the Holocaust

A Balance

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1. Himmler's response to General von Ginant's memo (of September 9, 1942), October 9, 1942, NO-1611.
2. Henri Michel, *The Shadow War* (London, 1965), p. 297.
3. Abraham Rosenberg (Adam Rutkowski), "Dos Drayzentl," *Bleter far Goszichte* 5, nos. 1-2 (1952), pp. 187-225; 5, no. 3, pp. 116-48.
4. See Joseph Kermisz's "Postscript," in Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War* (New York, 1976), pp. 275-315; Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide* (New York, 1979), pp. 257-61; Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle, 1978), pp. 50-61.
5. Israel Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw, 1939-1943* (Bloomington, 1982), pp. 297-301, 320-23, 355-63; Ringelblum, *op. cit.*, p. 218 n. (By Shmuel Krakowski); Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
6. Shmuel Krakowski, *Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942-1944* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 17-45.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 22; 340-41.
8. Ireneusz Caban and Zygmunt Mankowski, *Zwiazek Walki Zbrojnej i Armia Arajowa Okregu lubelskim*, pt. 2, Lublin, Dokumenty, pp. 60, 504-5.
9. AK order no. 116 of September 15, 1943, by Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, quoted by I. Gutman and S. Krakowski in their forthcoming book, *Polish-Jewish Relations* (New York: Holocaust Library), chap. 6. Source: *Polski Sily Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Swiatowej* vol. 3, (London, 1973), p. 431.
10. Gutman, *op. cit.*, Ringelblum, *op. cit.*; Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, *He Who Saves One Life* (New York, 1971).
11. Gutman, *op. cit.*, pp. 265, 355-56.
12. The literature on this aspect is largely in Hebrew, but cf. Gutman, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-44; Yitzhak Arad, *Ghetto in Flames* (Jerusalem, 1980), pp. 221-38; and Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews* (London, 1975), pp. 261-340.
13. Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982), p. 256.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 258.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 258-59.
17. Ringelblum, *op. cit.*, p. 173 n.
18. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, pp. 262-64.
19. Shalom Cholawsky, *The Jews in Belorussia During World War II* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1982), p. 338; Shmuel Spector, "The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews" (in Hebrew) (Ph.D. thesis, Hebrew University, June 1982).
20. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, pp. 268-70; cf. also Arad, *op. cit.*
21. Zvi Brown and Dov Levin, *The Story of an Underground* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1962).
22. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, pp. 265-68.
23. Shalom Cholawsky, "The Judenrat in Minsk," in Israel Gutman and Cynthia J. Raft, eds., *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 113-32; also Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, pp. 166-67.

24. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, pp. 272-74; Yuri Suhl, *They Fought Back* (New York, 1967), pp. 7-50, 128-135, 219-25.
25. Krakowski, *Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland*, pp. 269-309; Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, p. 273.
26. Cf. Jacques Rabine, *La Résistance organisée des Juifs en France* (Paris, 1973).
27. Jasa Romano, *Jevrei Jugoslavije 1941-1945: Zrtve Genocida* (Belgrade: Jevrejski Istorijski Muzej, Savez Jevrejskih opstina Jugoslavije, 1980).
28. A. Benček et al., *Osvobozeni Ceskoslovenska Rudou Armadou* (Prague, 1965), pp. 86-87; Ladislav Lipsher, "Helkan shel hayehudim bemilchemet hamagen ha'anti-fashistit be'Slovakia," in *Yalkut Moreshet* 14 (1972), pp. 117-42.
29. Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, p. 170.
30. Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat* (New York, 1972), pp. 468-69.
31. Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich, eds., *The Holocaust as Historical Experience* (New York, 1981), pp. 95-108.
32. Cf. Abraham I. Katsh, ed. and trans., *The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (New York, 1973).

13 / The Jewish Councils

An Overview

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1. The SS, and the Germans generally, alternately referred to the council as the *Judenrat* (Jewish council) or *Ältestenrat* (council of elders).
2. Trials of this kind were actually held in many parts of liberated Europe, reflecting to some extent the triumph of leftist politics. During the anti-Nazi euphoria of the first postwar years, it was quite fashionable to identify the activities of all Jewish council members as collaborationist. Jewish council members and leaders, as well as ghetto policemen, were tried in regular and Jewish courts of honor in a number of countries, including Greece, Holland, Israel, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. For some details, see *Patterns of Jewish Leadership in Nazi Europe, 1933-1945* (hereafter *PJL*) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1979), *passim*.
3. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963), p. 104.
4. Shalom Cholawsky, "The Judenrat in Minsk," in *PJL*, p. 118.
5. For details on the Final Solution in Serbia, see Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), pp. 433-42.
6. Maxine Steinberg, "The Trap of Legality: The Association of the Jews of Belgium," in *PJL*, p. 361.
7. Yitzhak Arad, "The Judenräte in the Lithuanian Ghettos of Kovno and Vilna," in *PJL*, p. 99.
8. In Italy and in the Italian-occupied territories of Greece, Slovenia, and southern France, the communal leaderships reflected the prewar customs and arrangements. The Italians did not call for the establishment of special Jewish councils. Jacob Robinson, "The State of Research into the *Judenräte*: A Report," in *Imposed Jewish Governing Bodies Under Nazi Rule* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1972), p. 32.
9. Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), p. 372.
10. Hannah Arendt claims that Finland "was the one country the Nazis never even approached on the Jewish question." See her *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, p. 153. For documentation relating to the deportation of the refugees and "Jewish criminals," consult Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 35-37.