



LOOKING AT THE ONLOOKERS AND BYSTANDERS

Interdisciplinary approaches to the causes and
consequences of passivity.

Editor Henrik Edgren



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Germany, Cologne, 1937.

A big crowd of Germans participating in a Nazi Party rally.

Photo: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum/Julien Bryan

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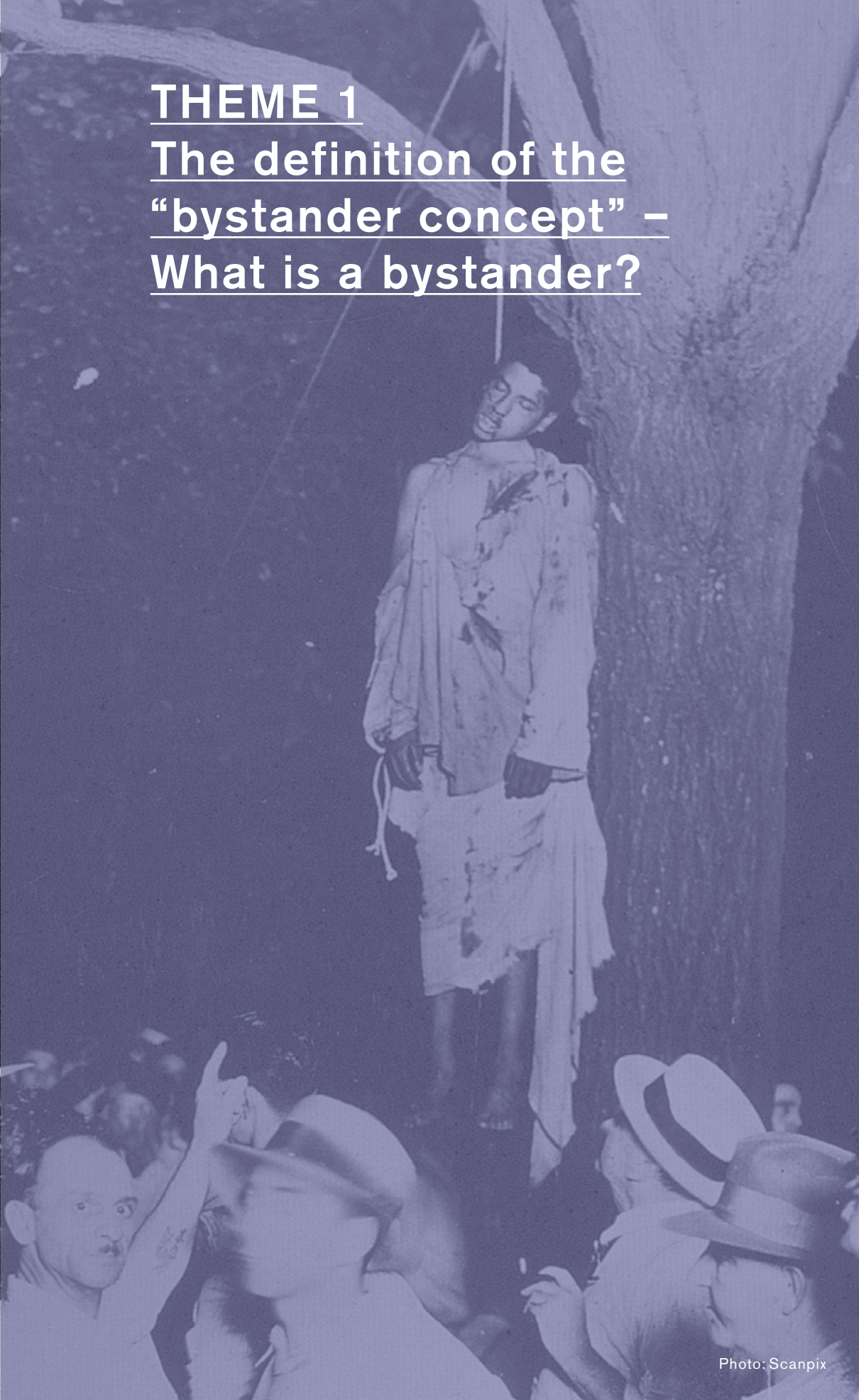
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Marion, Ind.
Aug. 1930.



THEME 1

The definition of the
“bystander concept” –
What is a bystander?



INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Eskil Franck

Director, The Living History Forum

The project “*Bystanders – Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) has been one of the major themes of the Living History Forum during the period 2008–2012 and is today part of the portfolio of pedagogical materials that we currently provide to Swedish school teachers and pupils in the ages 12 to 19. The project consists of a comprehensive educational material supported by teacher training, a permanent exhibition, a travelling exhibition and a research component.

Taking the Holocaust as its point of departure, the aim of the project was to create awareness about the role of the bystander. What does it mean to be a bystander? What stops us from intervening against bullies or in larger contexts when human rights are violated in a more serious way? How are we responsible when we do not intervene in some way?

Social norms and the normalization process are crucial factors in understanding why we become passive bystanders. The question of how norms and norm formation affect the actions of individuals and groups in situations where they can choose to be passive or active emerged as a key issue in the project. Norms and the formation of norms had a decisive impact on events such as the Holocaust, by facilitating a “production” of passive bystanders. Many institutions in the Third Reich – the education system, legislation and the legal system, the private sector etc. – acted in concert to change norms and enable a radical discrimination of German Jews. And today, norms and values have an impact on how we as human beings define what may be termed our “circle of responsibility”.

The research component of the Bystander project was intended to focus primarily on society, norms and norm formation by compiling existing research, encouraging further research in this field, and making research available to people outside the scientific community, for example schoolteachers. There are many research fields that are of relevance to the explanation of bystander behaviour, and the scientific disciplines of history, political science, psychology, social psychology and philosophy are all important in this regard.

One contribution to highlighting this field of research was an interdisciplinary research conference hosted by the Living History Forum in collaboration with the University of Uppsala. The conference was held at Uppsala University on October 17–18, 2008. Four main themes were central: the definition of the bystander concept; the norm shifting process and its implications for individual behaviour, methodological aspects of studying the bystander – from a specific to a more general approach, and pedagogical/didactical issues. These broad themes also form the basis for this bystander anthology.

Again, *“Does it matter?” (Spelar roll)* is truly an educational project and it has also been embraced by a large number of Swedish teachers who have taught their pupils about the causes and consequences of passivity. That is also how this anthology should be used, to enhance the knowledge of those who teach on these issues, thus bridging the gap between research and education.

THE PROJECT “BYSTANDERS – DOES IT MATTER?”

Henrik Edgren

This, this was the thing I had wanted to understand ever since the war. Nothing else. How a human being can remain indifferent. The executioners I understood, also the victims, though with more difficulty. For the others, all the others, those who were neither for nor against, those who sprawled in passive patience, those who told themselves, The storm will blow over and everything will be normal again, those who thought themselves above the battle, those who were permanently and merely spectators – all those were closed to me, incomprehensible.¹

In September of 2005 the Living History Forum started a project with the title, “*Bystanders – Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*). The project’s aim was to discuss, analyze and understand “the bystander”, whom Eli Wiesel above finds so incomprehensible. The project’s target groups were primarily comprised of teachers and students at Swedish secondary schools and further education. Taking the Holocaust as its point of departure, the Living History Forum wanted to illuminate all individuals who, in Wiesel’s words, “were neither for nor against, those who sprawled in passive patience and those who told themselves, ‘The storm will blow over’”. Important questions to be examined by the project included: Why were people bystanders while the members of groups such as Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and the disabled were harassed, deported and killed? Who were the bystanders and did they really have any opportunity to choose to intervene and make a difference? How did bystanders legitimize the perpetrators? In what way did changes in norms and attitudes influence the passivity of the bystander?²

The main focus of the project has been directed at the bystander as an individual, as a group or in the form of societal institutions, such as newspapers, radio, TV, the school system and the church. The project has resulted in exhibitions, school material, conferences and educational programs for both students and teachers. One important purpose has been to discuss and analyze the bystander in different historical and

present day contexts, and thus not only during the Holocaust. There are obviously many differences between a bystander of today in a “bullying situation” in a school yard or at a work place as compared to a bystander who watches people being deported and killed in a genocide. However, there are also a number of similarities, for example that a bystander passively watches and does not intervene when a fellow human being is attacked or offendend in one way or another.

Accordingly it has been important for the Living History Forum to emphasize both similarities and differences between bystanders in various historical and present day contexts. It has also been crucial not to moralise about the bystander’s passivity. Sometimes the bystander is almost seen as being more responsible for vicious crimes than the actual perpetrator and it is therefore important to stress the fact that the purpose of the project was not to put blame and guilt on the bystander. Instead, the aim has been to discuss why people become bystanders, the role of the passive bystander and the consequences of his or her inaction, and also whether there are feasible opportunities for the bystander to intervene in various situations.

In the initial phase of the project, it quickly became evident that the definition of the concept “bystander” needed to be scrutinized and perhaps modified. Bystanders in different contexts have different motives and different opportunities to intervene. It is also quite misleading to say that a bystander always remains in the same bystander position. In history, there are many examples of bystanders who have turned into rescuers and also, more tragically, who have become perpetrators. Accordingly, Eli Wiesel’s blaming judgement about “all the others” – referring to those who were neither victims nor perpetrators – needs to be questioned and nuanced. Part of *“Bystanders – Does it matter?”* has consequently involved conceptualizing the bystander. With this aim, the Living History Forum has worked together with researchers and scholars from different academic disciplines – such as history, social science, social psychology and philosophy – in Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Holland, the United Kingdom and the USA. This anthology represents a concrete result of that interdisciplinary collaboration.

Research about the bystander in different contexts

From the very beginning, it was important to obtain a picture of the research that had been conducted into the bystander

during the Holocaust. Therefore, the project's research work started with an overview of how the bystander has been discussed and described in Holocaust research.³ The scope of the project's focus on the bystander in different contexts has successively been expanded. As a consequence, the Living History Forum has initiated three studies whose objective was to look into the role of the bystander in the context of a number of major historical events where human rights have been seriously violated. Studies have therefore been written about the genocide of Christian Armenians in Turkey during World War I and about the brutal civil wars in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s.⁴ However, it must be emphasized that the intentions have not been to place these brutal historical events on an equal footing. The principal purpose was rather to investigate whether the bystander perspective was applicable at all. Following a number of scholarly seminars, where these studies were discussed, it became obvious that the bystander also needed to be elucidated from a social psychological perspective. Consequently, a report on this issue was also produced and was completed in the summer of 2009.⁵

Generally the bystander is seen as an individual, a group, an institution, an organisation, a state etc. that passively observes when the human rights of fellow human beings are violated. The bystander is not directly affected by the perpetrator's actions, but has some kind of opportunity to intervene on behalf of the victim.⁶ The size of this "window of opportunity" depends on the unique situation. A bystander is often defined on the basis of what he, she or it is not. Accordingly, the bystander is neither a perpetrator, nor a victim, nor a rescuer.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the bystander concept has been used more frequently in academic research, primarily in research about the Holocaust.⁷ One major problem with the concept as an analytical tool is that it is often linked with complicated ethical dilemmas. For example, some postulate that people who were neither victims nor perpetrators were simply bystanders with more or less responsibility in the persecutions and harassments against other fellow humans.⁸ Others say that we must contextualise the bystander and split the concept into different categories.⁹ Such categories could be helpers, gainers and onlookers. To accomplish this division, we need to ask questions about the unique contexts that bystanders lived in. For example, how much did the bystander see and know of what was happening? Did the bystander realise what was going to happen to the people who were harassed? What opportunities were there for the bystander to intervene to help the victims?

We also need to categorise the bystander on different levels such as individuals, groups, institutions, states, international organisations etc. Different ethical dilemmas apply to each level.

When we find answers to those questions we may conclude that some of the bystanders, but probably far from all, saw and understood a lot of what was going on. Maybe they even had opportunities and the abilities to react and help the individuals who were in danger. We then need to clarify why these bystanders remained passive. Perhaps they were satisfied with the situation. Maybe some bystanders even benefited financially as a result of acquiring their deported or killed neighbours' furniture, lucrative jobs or prestigious political positions. Other bystanders were perhaps ideologically convinced of the correctness of harassing or even killing the victims. A third group of bystanders maybe thought it was wrong, but did not dare to intervene as a result of different factors. Perhaps they did not want to oppose the opinions and actions of their families, their friends or important groups to which they belonged; perhaps they did not want to risk their jobs or the welfare of their families; perhaps they did not want to jeopardize their own lives etc.

The options available to the bystander are therefore not always evident, even though it sometimes seems like they are that when we, like Elie Wiesel in the quotation above, judge the bystander in retrospect. The unique historical or present-day situation is often much more complicated than a choice between two distinct categories such as those of perpetrator and rescuer. If we morally condemn every bystander and almost regard him or her as an accomplice to the terrible crimes associated with the serious violation of human rights, there is a danger that we will never understand why the bystander did not become a rescuer. When we disassociate ourselves from the complicated context of the bystander, we risk exercising unjust moral judgments. To really comprehend why people become bystanders, and not helpers, we need to problematize and contextualise the bystander's knowledge, motivation and opportunities to act in every single situation. This is why the question of why people become bystanders has been such an important one to discuss and elucidate in the Living History Forum project.

To begin with, there is a difference between societal and psychological explanations. When researchers explain the bystander from societal perspectives, they focus on how states are governed, the importance of ideologies such as anti-Semitism and nationalism, the impact and role of the mass media, the church, international organisations and other states

etc. Social psychological explanations focus on factors such as normalisation processes, group pressure, security dilemmas, the denial of facts, indifference, cognitive dissonance, emotional stress etc. There is usually no single factor that determines who becomes a perpetrator, a bystander or a rescuer. Societal and psychosocial factors are often intertwined.

One of the most important societal explanations for the passivity of the bystander is found in the totalitarian state. It has total control of the important institutions in society: the political system, the school system, the economy, the church, religion etc. The plans for action of the ruling party – there is usually only one political party allowed – are looked upon as an unquestionable truth. Consequently, there is no room for a critical discussion in a totalitarian society, which results in difficulties for the individual to criticize the policies of the ruling party. Accordingly, it is quite natural for the bystander to remain passive since it takes a lot of courage and determination to oppose the totalitarian state.

There are a large number of historical examples of brutal totalitarian regimes with no pluralistic political system. The genocide on the Christian Armenians in Turkey during World War I took place in the context of such a regime, where opposition against the Turkish government was rigorously harassed and punished. If a bystander actively wanted to help Christian Armenians whose situation was desperate, he or she ran the risk of being arrested and severely punished. Another example is the Nazi regime in Germany from the early 1930s, where competing political parties and political opposition were successively prohibited. The regime's anti-Semitic policies were very effectively mediated through the state bureaucracy and through universities, schools, youth organisations, newspapers, propaganda movies etc. It was easy to be a bystander to the atrocities committed against Jews and Gypsies, since the conditions in society were perceived as normal. In many ways life continued as usual and in the private sphere many bystanders could, at least during the 1930s, live in relative harmony and avoid confronting what was happening to their Jewish fellow citizens. Many Germans also benefited financially from the policies of the Nazi regime.

The pressure from a totalitarian state is sometimes so hard to endure that it is impossible, without risking your own life, to be more than a passive bystander at best. In some cases, the people who did not cooperate with the perpetrators were even killed. That was the case in Rwanda in 1994, where an enormous number of Hutus (including women and children) participated

in the murders of Tutsis. Usually these accomplices did not literally murder Tutsies, but they were helpful in conducting surveillance and in reporting the hiding places of Tutsies. Hutus who did not participate in the genocide were not primarily regarded as bystanders; they were rather seen as traitors.¹⁰ Accordingly, the “window of opportunity” for a bystander in Rwanda to intervene and help a victim was probably much smaller than “the window of opportunity” for a bystander in Germany in the 1930s.

Very often, the totalitarian state uses some kind of ideology to motivate why a group of people is persecuted and why bystanders should accept that human rights of fellow citizens are being violated. With the help of ideology people acquire visions of a better future. In Turkey, during World War I, such a vision was disseminated in the form of Turkish nationalism. Christian infidels, or “gavours”, had no place in the Turkish nation, where only Turkish-speaking Muslims were to be allowed. Accordingly, Christian Armenians were seen as a dangerous threat and it was therefore considered right to harass and even kill Armenians en masse. The perception of the Armenians as a major menace was often disseminated in political speeches, government propaganda and newspaper articles.¹¹

Nationalism and anti-Semitism in Germany during World War II were also important factors in convincing people not to assist Jews or Gypsies who were persecuted. In Germany during the 1930s, “Germanness” was in many ways defined in terms of hatred towards and the exclusion of Jews. Propaganda was spread in the form of eloquent political speeches, radio broadcasts, movies, plays, text books, newspaper reports etc. In Nazism, perpetrators and bystanders were taught to believe in the superiority of the German and Arian race with regard to character, competence, honour, loyalty, wisdom and intelligence. The “Gleichschaltung”, or Nazification, of German society made it easier for bystanders to accept the atrocities that were committed in the name of Nazism.

Ideology was frequently used in Rwanda as well, when Hutus – decades before 1994 – dehumanized Tutsies in political speeches, radio broadcasts and newspaper reports. In the civil war in Bosnia in the 1990s, too, the persecution of Bosnian Muslims, Christian-orthodox Serbs or Catholic Croats was justified on the basis of a nationalistic ideology where ethnical identity determined who would be a perpetrator and who a victim. Thus, from a Serbian perspective, a Bosnian Muslim was mainly seen as a perpetrator. From a Bosnian point of view, however, the Muslim was a victim of Serbian aggression.¹²

Sometimes, then, the existence of nationalistic ideology makes it very difficult to use the bystander concept at all, since there is only room for victims and perpetrators. Consequently, when bystanders are discussed in research on the civil war in Bosnia, the focus has been directed at the role of other states – such as the USA or Germany – or international organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union. In the case of Rwanda, there has been little focus on the individual bystander. Instead, scholars and journalists have written many books and articles about the responsibility of other states and international organisations.¹³

The fact that many people are often very reluctant to assist a victim, even in the complete absence of personal danger, can not be explained exclusively on the basis of societal factors such as the totalitarian state or a widespread ideology. Social psychological explanations must also be added. When people are harassed or even killed and bystanders do not intervene, there is often a need among the bystanders to justify their passivity. For example, it is easier for the bystander to accept the harassments of fellow human beings when the bystander is anonymous within a group. One sociopsychological explanation of this type of behaviour describes it in terms of the diffusion of responsibility. Group pressure can also force or convince the bystander to act contrary to his or her convictions. It takes a lot of courage to stand on your own and oppose the group you belong to: the family, work colleagues, associations etc.¹⁴

However, there are more social psychological explanations to bystander behaviour than group pressure. Dispositional theories focus on the psychological characteristics of the individual and explain why some individuals, but not all, act in accordance with prejudices and fascistic propaganda. In this perspective, a bystander's or a perpetrator's blind obedience to higher authorities is explained on the basis of the individual need for conformity, security and stability.¹⁵

Some scholars of social psychology focus on explaining the norm shifting processes that result in bystanders' acceptance of mass killings or genocides. For example, many of the gentiles in Germany or other parts of Europe during World War II did not see the murdering of Jews or Gypsies as unjust. Jews and Gypsies were successively dehumanized out of the universe of obligation; they were not regarded as fellow human beings. This kind of norm shifting process usually takes a while and the bystander comes, step by step, to accept the dehumanization of Armenians, Jews, Gypsies or Tutsies etc. The process begins with changes in minor attitudes and may, if

worse comes to worse, end in the acceptance of a genocide. A social psychological term used to describe this process is moral disengagement, which is often a result of feelings of cognitive dissonance. The bystander feels that the atrocities committed are wrong, but can not cope with the fact that he or she is not able to do anything about it. It is easier for the bystander, by means of moral disengagement, to accept the persecutions than to deal with the fact that he or she is not helping a fellow human being in a desperate situation.¹⁶

The conference and this anthology

As a consequence of the research overviews discussed above, the Living History Forum, in cooperation with the Historical department and the department of Education at Uppsala University, organised a scholar conference about the bystander. The conference took place in Uppsala in October 2008 and had a number of purposes. The most important one was to bring scholars together to discuss the concept of the “bystander” and how it may be used in different academic disciplines, such as history, social science, social psychology, ethics etc. Another purpose was to discuss pedagogical and didactical issues concerning teaching about bystanders in different historical and present-day contexts. The conference, which attracted participants from both Europe and the United States, had four leading themes:

- The definition of the “bystander concept – What is a bystander”?
- Different explanatory models relating to bystanders, e.g. norm shifting processes.
- Methodological aspects of studying the bystander. How do we tell the story of passivity or inaction?
- Didactical issues. How do we approach the bystander from an educational perspective?

The articles in this anthology are written by scholars who participated at the Uppsala conference. The first theme – What is a bystander? – deals with conceptual issues. In her article – “Reflections on the concept of ‘bystander’” – Victoria Barnett (researcher and staff director at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) asserts that one central reason for the enormous interest in the Holocaust over recent years comes from the large number of people who today identify themselves

with the bystander. We are haunted by many of the same questions that haunted people during World War II, so we turn to the history of the Holocaust in search of some answers. Barnett discusses the complexity of the bystander concept. She writes, for example, about how the lines between bystander and perpetrator, between passivity and active involvement, are often very blurred. Still, she says that the term “bystander” is a useful one, which should primarily be used to describe a process that shapes the behaviour of those involved, a process which is determined by numerous factors and dynamics. The need to understand why a bystander did not act draws us into the deeper questions of morality, psychology, and of good and evil. Barnett also emphasizes the importance of prejudices, and not least anti-Semitism during World War II. In many ways, she concludes that the bystander’s position is a result of values, behaviours and attitudes. In the dissemination of values and attitudes, the dynamics of a totalitarian state are often very effective and successful. Barnett focuses in particular on how the widespread support of Hitler and National Socialism in Germany during the 1930s convinced many bystanders to carry on their lives “normally” while Jews, Gypsies and others were persecuted and harassed.

In his conference lecture – “Understanding the ‘On-Looker’ in Holocaust History and Historiography” – Paul A. Levine (associate professor and senior lecturer, Ph.D. in history at Uppsala University) discussed the seemingly inhuman role of the bystander.¹⁷ For a long time, according to Levine, there has been a tendency rather to condemn than to understand the bystander, especially regarding the Holocaust. Levine emphasized the need to understand why people become bystanders, since a change of the bystander behaviour is necessary if we want to create a more tolerant and humane society. Levine noted that the concept “bystander” in fact is quite useless as an analytical tool for research. He stated that there are differences between “onlookers” and “bystanders”. “Onlookers” are physically present at the scene and their presence often strengthens the perpetrators, especially if the perpetrators are unsure about their actions. “Bystanders” are, on the other hand, more distant from the actions, and therefore they are able to act more objectively than onlookers. One other important conclusion of Levine’s lecture was how closeness or distance to a crime, when fellow human beings were seriously persecuted, made access to information very important. Karin Kvist Gevert’s (Ph.D. in History at Uppsala University) article, “Sweden and the Holocaust. An attempt to make sense

of problematic categories and ambivalent actors”, is also a part of the theme “What is a bystander?” Kvist Geverts stresses the importance of not viewing the bystander as a uniform category. Bystanders can, for example, be divided into those who became rescuers and those who remained indifferent. In line with this approach, Kvist Geverts presents examples of how Swedish government officials acted in relation to Jewish refugees from 1938–1944 and notes that a bystander position should not be regarded as permanent and unchangeable; instead the position occupied by bystanders is a changeable one. Consequently, she argues that the use of the term “bystander behaviours” is more appropriate when bystanders are analyzed in different historical and present-day contexts. Different bystander behaviours may express themselves in the individuals in question acting as helpers, gainers or onlookers. Swedish government officials, who decided whether Jews should be admitted to Sweden as political refugees during World War II, could be characterized as bystanders, since they very rarely categorized Jews as political refugees in order to allow them to enter Sweden. Kvist Geverts postulates that one important explanation for this “bystander behaviour”, which in fact changed to a more active behaviour towards the end of World War II, was the presence of a “background bustle of anti-Semitism”.

In his conference lecture “The enlargement of the circle of perpetrators of the Holocaust” Johannes Houwink ten Cate (professor in History at the University of Amsterdam and the department of Holocaust and Genocide studies) discussed the need for a new vocabulary of the Holocaust that indicates the responsibility of the populations of the occupied territories.¹⁸ His lecture was also a part of the theme “What is a bystander?” One of Houwink ten Cate’s main points was that over the course of the recent decades, the wider research community has not only unearthed many new sources about the implementation of the Holocaust, researchers have also broadened their definition of complicity by defining it as any form of action that furthers the goals of the perpetrator. Ten Cate emphasized the need for historians and social scientists to pay more attention to their terminology and to try to develop a more differentiated vocabulary in relation to the co-responsibility of those living in occupied countries during the Holocaust. A conscious and precise historical terminology could be constructed by means of referring to different types and degrees of criminal responsibility. Here, historians might be assisted by the work conducted in connection with the ICTY’s trials that have resulted from the war in Bosnia in the 1990s. This implies

a need to address questions such as the intent of the (co-) perpetrator, the accomplice, the aider and the bystander. Thus, the issues of the presence of possible constraints on individual actions, individual's assessments of the nature of their aid and assistance, their awareness of the intent of the perpetrator, and the question of their position in the agencies that implemented the orders of the occupier and the occupied must all be taken into account.

The second theme of the anthology is: *Different explanatory models relating to bystanders*. The main focus here is directed at social psychological explanations. In the article "Norm shifting and bystander intervention", Dennis T. Kahn (gradual student in social psychology at Tel Aviv University) emphasizes that social norms are immensely powerful factors in determining human behaviour. In fact, the vast majority of any given social group will agree and act in accordance with the social norms of the group.¹ In his text, Kahn elaborates on the question: How are regular, pro-social norms of behaviour transformed into dictates of unspeakable cruelty? One explanation emanates from the theory of cognitive dissonance, which assumes that we hold a strong motivation to maintain consistency between our cognitions and behaviours. Dissonance is an unpleasant state to be in and we therefore feel a need to resolve it. We can do this either by admitting that the behaviour that we have just performed runs counter to our beliefs and values, or by changing our attitudes to bring them in line with our performed behaviour. Due to the substantial psychological cost of admitting to having performed an action that we find adverse, people tend to modify their attitudes to be in line with their behaviour. Dennis T. Kahn argues that one way to resolve the dissonance is to convince ourselves that the victim deserved what he got, either because he did something to bring it upon himself, because he would have hurt us if we had not hurt him first, or simply because he is a reprehensible, dirty, evil person not deserving normal human compassion. Another way to handle the cognitive dissonance is by means of moral disengagement, i.e. by employing various social psychological strategies in order to convince ourselves that the normal norms do not apply to the specific situation we find ourselves in. The conduct itself may be reconstructed so that it is no longer regarded as immoral, the responsibility for the conduct can be displaced or diffused, the consequences of the action can be minimized and the victim can be dehumanized or blamed. The theme *Different explanatory models relating to bystanders*, continues with a text by Paul Slovic (professor in psychology

at the University of Oregon), who on the basis of behavioural decision theory discusses why so many people are deplorably indifferent or apathetic in relation to genocides. Why do not people care? Why are there so many bystanders? In his text, entitled “If I look at the mass I will never act”, Slovic notes that research shows that statistics relating to mass murder or genocide, no matter how large the numbers, fail to convey the true meaning of such atrocities. The numbers fail to trigger emotion or feelings and thus fail to motivate action. Slovic discusses a theoretical framework that describes the importance of emotions and feelings in guiding decision-making and behaviour. One important conclusion is that without affect, information lacks meaning and will not be used when making judgments and decisions. Although analysis is certainly important in many decision-making situations, reliance on affect and emotion is generally a quicker, easier and more efficient way to navigate our way through a complex, uncertain and sometimes dangerous world. Underlying the role of affect in the experimental system is the importance of images, to which positive or negative feelings become attached. Slovic concludes that numbers are important, but that they are not everything. For whatever reasons, images often make a more powerful and deeper impression than numbers. The most important image in representing a human life is that of a single human face. Slovic emphasizes that when it comes to eliciting compassion, the identified individual victim, with a face and a name, has no peer. The face does not even need to be human to motivate powerful intervention.

In his conference lecture, also on the theme *Why do people become bystanders*, Lars Dencik (professor in psychology at Roskilde University) started with a discussion on some historical examples when bystanders had turned into active participants in the persecution of fellow human beings.¹⁹ Dencik underlined that bystanders have an important role. During World War II there were many examples of how former neighbours, friends or colleagues suddenly regarded Jews as enemies and were capable of committing atrocities and persecutions against Jews. The kristallnacht, e.g., demonstrated how the passive bystander served to confirm the perpetrators’ opinions and justified their actions. Dencik presented five psychological processes that explain the change from a bystander to an active participant in the persecution: 1. Perceptual categorisation is essential in our thinking. Our cognitive and unconscious categories could change even if the objective reality remains the same. As a consequence, neighbours, friends and colleagues may suddenly be perceived as enemies. 2. Dencik noted the power of group

norms. Experiments in social psychology show how easy individuals adapt their norms to a group identity. The individual identity is consequently often primarily a question of group identification. 3. Dencik discussed the comfort of conformity. It is misleading to perceive bystander behaviour as a lack of civil courage, since the notion of civil courage presupposes a public opinion of what one should and should not do. That kind of public opinion does not exist, according to Dencik, in these situations. It is a well known fact that individuals are less likely to act when they are a part of a larger group of bystanders. Individuals seem often to think that others know better and feel insecure when they oppose the meaning of a majority of other people. 4. Blaming the victim is a common strategy for the individual to remove guilt and obligations to act. It is much easier to persecute someone who is already under attack. 5. The spiral of dehumanisation starts with social segregation which gradually evolves to marginalisation, radicalisation, rejection, fundamentalisation and finally in dehumanisation.

The third theme of the anthology is *Methodological aspects of studying the bystander*. Thomas Brudholm (associate professor of Minority Research Theory at the University of Copenhagen) looks for more cooperation between historians and philosophers when bystanders are studied in the context of historical research. In his article, Brudholm directs a critical perspective at historians and argues that morality and emotions are more important than historians often acknowledge. The problem with the work of many historians is not their judgment of the past as such, but the historically unenlightened and moralistic form of such judgments. Just as the historian might regret the degree to which “bad” historiography simplifies the past and its implications, so moral philosophers may regret the degree to which moralistic trends might give their own subject – the study of morality or ethics – a bad name. Obviously, the historian and the moral philosopher should be able to work together in the struggle against “moralistic” tendencies in the historiographical and public debate on the bystanders of the Holocaust. For example, the more complex perspective on the emotions includes a distinction between simply having an emotion and being unreasonably led by an emotion. Having an emotional attitude or understanding of a case does not necessarily imply that one is unable to reason or that one’s analysis of the case will be led by “blind” anger or displaced projections of outrage. In line with this, Brudholm’s article constitutes a plea for historians to develop a more nuanced acknowledgement of different modalities of moral concern and emotional response.

David Gaunt (professor in History at Södertörn University) also writes about the theme *Methodological aspects of studying the bystander*. In his article, Gaunt discusses the methodological aspects of applying a bystander perspective to the social history of genocide.²⁰ His sources are drawn from the Armenian genocide that took place in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. The Ottoman government was very successful in spreading the ideological image of the Armenian as the dangerous “other” among the Muslim population. Gaunt concentrates, as far as possible, on face-to-face situations in which a victim is subjected to violence or harassment, or is fleeing. It is possible to find such situations described in historical sources such as autobiographies and witness testimonies. When David Gaunt analyses the bystander, he uses a simple model taken from medical epidemiological studies of contagious disease, and applies it to genocide. His model resembles the different layers of an onion. Each layer is somewhat smaller than the preceding one. The onion itself represents the entire bystander population. Inside the onion, there is the large group who are unaware that anything wrong is going on; they see and hear nothing. The next level comprises those who are aware that something bad is going on, but who do not consider doing anything to stop it. The third level consists of those who are aware of the crime and plan to intervene, but who do not do so in the end. The fourth level is comprised of those who are aware of what is happening and who decide to intervene, but who are stopped by the perpetrators. The final core, which is quite small compared to the whole, consists of those who intervene and actually manage to rescue someone.

In his second conference lecture, “The expectations of Dutch Jews and gentiles of the fate of the Jews in the east according to their diaries (and according to the legal press)”, professor Johannes Houwink ten Cate provided an example of how bystanders, in this case Dutch gentiles during World War II, may be studied. Houwink ten Cate has investigated what Jews and gentiles in the occupied territories expected the fate of the Jewish deportees to be. One of the major problems faced by scholars investigating the perception of bystanders is that of finding source material in which the opinions and attitudes of bystanders are evident. Houwink ten Cate’s source material comprises war diaries written by Dutch gentiles. As in all types of historical source material, there are a number of methodological problems associated with the war diaries used in his study. For example they are relatively few in number: around 1,000. Many of them were sent to the Rijksinstituut Voor

Oorlogsdocumentatie (RIOD) after March, 1944. Accordingly, there are no guarantees that the diarists did not change the contents of their diaries as a result to how the war evolved. The diaries were also voluntarily sent to RIOD, which raises questions about the representativeness of the diaries in relation to public opinions about bystanders in Holland during World War II. Nevertheless, the war diaries provide a unique picture of what gentile bystanders knew about the fate of Jewish deportees. The diaries reflect a daily struggle to understand what was going on. The most important source of trusted information for the diarists was what family members and friends had seen with their own eyes. Houwink ten Cate concluded that even if most of the gentiles remained law abiding (it was considered a crime to help Jews) and appeared passive in the sense that most of them did not display public solidarity with the Jews, they were nevertheless emotionally engaged in the fate of the Jews. Some overtly passive gentiles were actually very distressed by the persecutions and harassments. These ostensibly passive individuals were indeed the first ones to reflect about the possibility that the Nazis would murder Jews: the more visible the persecutions, the more emotional the diaries.

Dienke Hondius (associate professor in history at Vrije University in Amsterdam) writes about Dutch gentile bystanders during World War II. Hondius' article – "Bystander memories. Unfolding and questioning eyewitness narratives on the deportation of the Jews" – is also linked to the third theme in the anthology: How do we conduct research on bystanders. Hondius emphasizes that researchers of oral history have been more interested in the role and apprehensions of perpetrators and bystanders during the Holocaust since the end of the 1990s. Several international projects, with the aim of recording eyewitness memories have been initiated in both the United States and Europe. Hondius' research group received more than 300 letters from eyewitnesses who wanted to be interviewed in the project. There are now a total of around 1,000 interviews that have been conducted in different European countries and the project is ongoing. An examination of these interviews provides unique knowledge about and insights into the experiences and memories of gentile bystanders and eyewitnesses to the Holocaust. Some important conclusions so far are that many of the people who wanted to be interviewed regarded themselves as onlookers, or "zushauers". They "had happened" to see something, often from behind a curtain, more than 60 years ago and they had lived quite ordinary lives,

in spite of the fact that many Jews around them were being deported to concentration camps. The self-perceptions of the onlookers, or bystanders, often implied powerlessness and sometimes also surprise. Occasionally there was fear in their stories. They often had limited opportunities to act. In some cases age was used as a justification for passivity. In general, the bystanders overlooked and rarely admitted the fact that they had sometimes benefited financially from the deportation of Jews when gentiles had acquired homes and possessions. Another significant element in the interviews was the sadness, among the bystanders, at the loss of a neighbour, classmate or colleague who had disappeared. Hondius also discusses the bystander and rescuer from a gendered perspective. She is convinced that the variation in the readiness to assist Jews in danger was highly gendered and connected to an individual's self-esteem and confidence. The women primarily became involved in helping activities when they were ordered or directed to do so by men, such as their bosses, their husbands, their fathers or other relatives.

The world we live in would certainly be better and more humane if people, instead of being passive bystanders, assumed responsibility and acted on behalf of fellow human beings in danger. However, the course of events both in history and today continuously demonstrates that this is as easy to postulate as it is difficult to realise. How would it be possible to minimize the number of bystanders and increase the number of helpers? How do individuals, institutions, states and organisations become – if we quote Zygmund Bauman – human and ethical beings characterised by empathy and unselfishness when individual rationality points in other directions?²¹ Research has demonstrated that it is important to train children in critical thinking. They have to learn how to make their own individual assessments and that they should not always trust higher authorities. The fourth theme of the anthology deals with *how we approach the bystander from an educational perspective*.

In his conference lecture, Mark Levine (Ph.D. in psychology at Lancaster University) presented how different social identities could be used to promote bystander intervention.²² Positive action has traditionally been linked to the individual identity and resulted in focus on teaching ethics individually. The social psychologists' picture of the group has, on the other hand, generally been negative, since the basic assumption has been that when we enter a group we leave our individual identity for a non-identity. The result is a loss of morality and a potential of inhuman action. Levine noted that many

psychological experiments demonstrate how easily the individual deserts the imagined moral. The main explanation is often obedience to authorities. Studies on individuals who refused to obey authorities, in situations where they were e.g. ordered to give electricity to a fellow human being, emphasizes the questioning at an early stage of the process as a condition for a later refusal to obey orders. Therefore, it is important to create educational environments where questioning and critical thinking is possible. Levine wanted to change the picture of the group as a negative force. Instead of seeing the group as a non-identity, he noted that it should be regarded as a group identity supplementing the individual one. In a positive way the group identity could be used to change norms and help people to intervene and become rescuers when fellow human beings were harassed or persecuted.

At the conference, Magnus Hermansson Adler (university lecturer in history didactics at Gothenburg University) also lectured on the fourth theme. He noted that students and teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools and further education had problems when they discussed such a complex and shifting concept as “the bystander”, especially concerning the moral meanings. Many of the students were incapable or unused to look beyond the categories of “the perpetrator” and “the victim”. One of the reasons behind this lack of understanding of the moral implications of the bystander, according to Hermansson Adler, was the shortcomings in history education. Time pressure also made it difficult – except in political, economical, social and cultural aspects of history – to discuss moral issues in history. Hopefully, more time for history education in Swedish schools would result in deeper discussions about the moral dilemmas of bystanders in different historical and present-day contexts.

The anthology text of Mats Andersson is also linked to the theme *how we approach the bystander from an educational perspective*. Andersson, who is a pedagogue (teacher in social science and history) at the Living History Forum, writes about how he and some colleagues wanted to create an interest in learning about the bystander among Swedish students in their final years of compulsory education. The main objective was to accomplish a critical discussion among the students about why we, as people, do not act but instead remain passive as bystanders. By illuminating the bystander from different perspectives, the students should be given the opportunity to reflect about themselves, the contemporary world and our common history. For Mats and his colleagues, it was important

to produce a teaching material that was not moralistic and that did not appear to be condemnatory for common behaviour, since many students had experienced the bystander position in everyday life.

In the final text of the anthology, Christina Gamstorp (project manager at the Living History Forum), discusses “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) in the broader educational context of the Living History Forum: to promote tolerance and democracy. For example, Gamstorp underlines the importance to focus on personal accounts and real events where complicated bystander situations have occurred. This is especially important in helping young people to relate to the role of the bystander. The project “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) was divided into three levels that eventually were merged into two, each capturing sociopsychological and societal factors that influence bystander behaviour. Educational material about group mechanisms and norm formation were accordingly important in enabling young students to explore their relationship to the group and the society.

NOTES

- 1 Wiesel, Elie, 1969, *The Town beyond the wall*, New York, p. 159.
- 2 About the project, see *Spelar roll*. Åskådaren undersöks. 2009. Stockholm: <http://www.levandehistoria.se>
- 3 Edgren, Henrik, Åskådare och folkmord. En forskningsöversikt. Stockholm 2007, Forum för Levande historia. See <http://www.levandehistoria.se>
- 4 About the genocide on Christian Armenians, Gaunt, David, Ottoman bystanders. Report for Forum för levande historia, Stockholm 2007, Forum för Levande historia. About the civil war in Bosnia, Lucic, Iva, Bystanders in the Bosnian war in the 1990s, Stockholm 2008, Forum för Levande historia. About the civil war in Rwanda, Kayumba, Kristopher and Kimonyo, Bystanders to the Rwandan Conflict & Genocide: Current state of research, Stockholm 2008, Forum för Levande historia. All these research surveys are published on <http://www.levandehistoria.se>
- 5 Kahn, Dennis T., 2009, Bystander intervention and norm shifting. A social psychological research overview, Stockholm, Living History Forum. Published at <http://www.levandehistoria.se>
- 6 This definition is very much like the one Ervin Staub stipulates. See Staub, Ervin, *The roots of evil. The Origins of Genocide and other Group Violence*, New York 1989, pp. 86.
- 7 Four of the first scholars who analytically used the bystander concept in their research were Michael Marrus, Ervin Staub, Samuel Oliner and Raoul Hilberg. See, Marrus, Michael, *The Holocaust in History*, New York 1989; Staub, 1989; Oliner, Samuel P., Oliner, Pearl M., *The altruistic*

- personality*. Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe, London 1988; Hilberg, Raoul, 1992, *Perpetrators, victims, bystanders: the Jewish catastrophe*, 1933-1945, New York 1992.
- 8 Wiesel, 1969, p. 159; Lipstadt, Deborah, "The Failure to Rescue and Contemporary American Jewish Historiography of the Holocaust: Judging From a Distance", in Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *The Bombing of Auschwitz*, New York, 2000, p. 2003. Friedländer, Saul 2010, p. 22-23. Bartov, Omer *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945*, Oxford 2001, pp. 152, where Bartov writes that the German army in the east can be said to have acted in strict accordance with the policies and ideology of Hitler's regime". Officers and soldiers treated the Russian POWs, guerilla fighters and especially civilians as "the Untermenschen" they had been taught to believe they were. In that way the Germans "wreaked destruction, death and misery on millions of men, women and children". In this context there could practically not exist a German bystander without at least a moral responsibility, since all the German soldiers and officers knew what was happening on the Eastern front.
 - 9 "Hilberg, 1992, p. xi; Cesarani, David and Levine, Paul, *"Bystanders" to the Holocaust: a re-evaluation*, London 2002, p. 3; Bloxham, Donald and Kushner, Tony, *The Holocaust: critical historical approaches*, Manchester 2004, p. 178.
 - 10 Kayumba and Kimonyo, 2008, p. 3.
 - 11 Gaunt, 2008, p 42.
 - 12 Lucic, 2008, p. 5.
 - 13 See for example: Prunier, Gerard, *The Rwanda crisis: History of a Genocide*, London 1995, 1997; Melvern, Linda, *A People Betrayed: the role of the west in Rwanda's genocide*, London 2005, 2006; Krosiak, Daniela, *The role of France in the Rwandan Genocide*, London, 2007.
 - 14 Kahn, 2008, p. 9.
 - 15 Kahn, 2008, pp. 17.
 - 16 Kahn, 2008, pp. 27.
 - 17 Levine's lecture is not published as an article in this anthology.
 - 18 Houwink ten Cate's lecture is not published as an article in this anthology.
 - 19 Lars Dencik's lecture is not published as an article in this anthology.
 - 20 The lecture of Houwink ten Cate is not published as an article in this anthology.
 - 21 Bauman, Zygmund, *Auschwitz och det moderna samhället*, Göteborg 1989, p. 267.
 - 22 Levine's lecture is not published as an article in this anthology.

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REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF “BYSTANDER”

Victoria J. Barnett

The “bystander” is a very complex concept, both historically and ethically, and yet it is crucial to understanding what happened – particularly with regard to the behavior of “ordinary people” – during the Holocaust. Particularly in pedagogy, it may be more helpful to understand the term not as a reference to a particular group of individuals or institutions but rather as a process. Bystander behavior is a dynamic process that includes people’s responses to events and ideas over a period of time as well as the changes in their self-perception and identity that result. As such, it also includes the creation of a “moral narrative” about what is happening.

Any attempt at a historical study of “bystanders” during the Holocaust leads one quickly to the conclusion that this is an impossible group to define. The Holocaust – the persecution culminating in the genocide of millions of European Jews – occurred over a period of several years, across an entire continent, and under a variety of circumstances. We are looking at a history that encompasses not just the nation of Nazi Germany over a period of twelve years, but the rest of Europe and the larger international community as well. One could argue that this history goes back farther, since some of the factors that contributed to this genocide have their foundation in European religious, cultural and political history. In addition to the millions of victims, there were millions of other people from all walks of life who became part of this history, either as perpetrators or – to use this broad and complicated category – as bystanders.

The problems in defining the “bystander” derive from the twofold complexity of defining 1) who we are talking about and 2) what behavior we are attempting to describe. The “who” during the Holocaust includes a broad range of actors: individuals, institutions such as churches and universities, entire professions and businesses, and international bodies such as state governments, international banks, and aid organizations. Within each of these categories there are further complexities: an individual bystander may be a German bureaucrat, a Polish villager, or a British diplomat. There are significant differences

in the immediate circumstances, options, and challenges that confronted each of these individuals.

The “what” is equally broad, and in the context of the Holocaust, derives its historical significance from how it relates specifically to the persecution and genocide of the European Jews. In a study of bystanders during the Holocaust, the “what” may be the individual act of silently watching the public humiliation of local Jews, or the governmental refusal to change immigration quotas, or the corporation that derives direct financial gain from the stolen assets of victims. In his book *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*, Raul Hilberg often describes the “bystanders” in functional terms, even titling one chapter “Helpers, Gainers, Onlookers”.

Perhaps the greatest complexity here is the fact that we are looking at what the historian Michael Marrus has called “negative history”: the history of what did *not* happen.¹ In looking at the bystander, we are looking at what seems on the surface to be silence, indifference, apathy, and passivity – in other words, at a *lack* of action. The big question is: what lies beneath the surface? Fear? Prejudice? Hatred? Unseeing and unthinking obedience? Apathy?

The role of “bystanders”, then, encompasses a continuum of involvement and complicity, marked by an ever-changing vacillation between active and passive involvement, and it includes individual as well as institutional actors whose motives are often obscured. These complexities raise the question: is the term “bystander” even useful, either historically or ethically? My own answer to this question is a cautious one: it is indeed a useful term, but it will always be complicated by the necessary distinctions we need to make. For this reason I find it more helpful to define the “bystanders” not so much as a specific group of people, but rather in terms of a *process* that shapes the behavior of those involved, occurs over a period of time, and is determined by numerous factors and dynamics. The study of “bystanders” as a motif in the Holocaust must also examine these historical dynamics hand-in-hand with the creation of the larger historical narrative, including the moral narratives that emerge and the conclusions that are drawn. What happened? Why? Who is responsible? Who was involved? How were they involved? Does their involvement constitute complicity in the genocide? What conclusions – ethical, psychological, political – can we draw from this phenomenon?

We want to know what happened, and we want to understand, as best we can, why it happened. This need to understand takes us to the deeper questions: questions of morality, of psychology,

of good and evil. Whatever conclusions we draw need to be as historically accurate as possible, and they need to make sense, that is: they need to correspond to our understanding of human beings and human behavior. Part of the problem here is that the picture that emerges from the history of the Holocaust reveals a side of human nature that we don't like to acknowledge and that is very difficult to explain. Over a prolonged period of time, millions of innocent people were the targets of discrimination, exclusion, persecution, violence, and finally genocide. Millions more watched this happen and either did nothing overtly to stop it or were actually drawn in as participants or benefitted from what happened. On both sides, however, these "millions" were not just some amorphous mass at the mercy of history, but individual human beings, acting one by one. This is what bears examination and moral reflection. As we examine bystanders, the challenge is to understand both the larger sweep of history and its impact on the individual human lives involved in a way that is meaningful, both historically and morally.

Almost all definitions distinguish the "bystander" from someone who is actively involved – in the case of the Holocaust, from the perpetrators and victims. There are further ways of refining our definition. There is a difference between individual actions and those of a group, for example, both in their autonomy and in the diffusion of responsibility; there are differences between individual actions taken on one's own behalf and actions taken on behalf of an institution or a nation. In my own work², these distinctions led me to explore the different dynamics that affect human behavior on three different levels: the individual, the institutional, and the international. In his work *Perpetrators, Bystanders, Victims*³, the historian Raul Hilberg has also looked at these different levels of behavior but has focused more specifically on the bystanders' relationship to the victims – as rescuers or people who assisted, as people who benefited actively from the persecution of the victims, as "onlookers" who remained completely on the sidelines even as they witnessed what was happening.

It might also be helpful to define bystanders in terms of what they are not: perpetrators or victims. By definition bystanders are not themselves the target of the persecution, nor are they actively involved as perpetrators, and hence by definition the bystander retains the option of remaining on the sidelines. *The bystander has the option of passivity, that is, the option to accept the status quo, abide by the laws and decisions made by others, and not intervene.* Victims do not have these choices. Perpetrators by definition have crossed the line into involvement. Yet as we see

from the documented history of the Holocaust, this luxury of non-involvement gave bystanders other privileges that, in turn, pulled them into more active complicity. Particularly in Nazi Germany, bystanders benefited materially. At the very least, they were able to pursue their normal lives and advance their careers. As the persecution of Jews intensified, however, many “bystanders” benefitted materially, receiving apartments and jobs that had belonged to Jews. In a pre-genocidal or genocidal situation, these kinds of benefits make the line between bystander and perpetrator, between passivity and active involvement, a very blurred one indeed.

To look at an example that makes this distinction clearer, let us briefly examine the case of one individual who was not a bystander. Years ago when I was doing the research for my first book, I interviewed a woman in Berlin named Helene Jacobs, who during the war had been a member of a small resistance group in Berlin that helped Jews hide and escape.⁴

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Helene Jacobs was a student at the technical college in Berlin. One of the first Nazi measures that affected her directly was a new requirement that all students fill out a questionnaire about their family ancestry and sign certain forms. Helene Jacobs refused to fill out the form. As she told me – and these were her words: “Anywhere it said, ‘For Aryans only’, I said: ‘What’s that? There’s no such thing as an Aryan.’ I kept myself away from all such requirements.”

But when a college student refuses to even fill out the basic forms, her days as a student are numbered. Helene Jacobs had to leave the technical college. She then had trouble finding a job because she had no formal training and no certificates showing that she had completed her studies. Eventually a Jewish attorney hired her as a secretary. But, of course, the days of his law firm were numbered as well. Throughout the 1930s she supported herself by taking whatever menial jobs she could find, until she found her way into the resistance group. In 1943, the Gestapo uncovered their activities. The leader of the group was shot immediately. Helene Jacobs was imprisoned until the end of the Nazi regime.

But her story doesn’t really stop there, because in 1945, after her release from 2 1/2 years in a Gestapo prison, she tried to find a job and couldn’t get one – because she didn’t have any formal training or certification. Nor did she have any kind of steady employment record for the years between 1933 and 1945. In fact, her work record looked as though she had dropped off the map for twelve years.

And in 1945, of course, the vast majority of Germans did have those documents, the educational certificates, and the work records. Their normal lives had continued for twelve years.

After 1945, Helene Jacobs worked for a while as head secretary for another Jewish attorney, who had returned to Germany. Her dream was to study law, but what she ended up doing, between 1952 and her retirement in 1971, was working in the Berlin reparations office, which processed the claims of people who had been persecuted under the Nazi racial laws. And even here – not surprisingly – Helene Jacobs stood alone. Most of her colleagues, she told me, tried to use the fine print of the reparations laws to reject the victims' claims. She on the other hand did everything she could to make sure that the former victims of Nazism received something. So the last nineteen years of her working life were spent in an office where, as she told me, "I viewed most of my colleagues as my enemies."

The story of Helene Jacobs is remarkable because it illustrates graphically what life looks like for an individual who chooses *not* to be a bystander. After January 30, 1933, the proportion of Germans who refused to cooperate with any regulation that they found offensive must have been only a fraction of one percent. In 1933, most people who had this kind of critical and outspoken clarity about the new Nazi regime and its laws were either arrested immediately or went into exile.

But what this meant, of course, was that by 1945, the twelve year trajectory of most Germans was reflected in their school and employment records and in their professional certificates and degrees. The people with whom Helene Jacobs worked in the Berlin reparations office after 1952 had records of these kinds. Between January 30, 1933, and May 8, 1945, most Germans continued to live some kind of normal life. They remained a part of the society around them. The way they achieved this was both by accident of birth (normal life in Nazi Germany was not an option for Jews) *and* by cooperating in numerous ways, great and small, with what was happening around them.

And this laid the foundation for how these twelve years were portrayed and understood in Germany after 1945. As Helene Jacobs discovered in her post-war life, the system was organized to provide pensions to the families of SS officers who had died in battle. It was not organized to provide reparations to the victims of Nazism. More importantly, the *mentality* of the people who for twelve years had lived normal lives under Nazism was not geared towards critically confronting their past. The ways

in which they rationalized their complicity and cooperation under Nazism became, after 1945, the foundation of their understanding of this history and their role in it. When people later said that they had not known what was happening to the Jews, for example, it was because they had not wanted to know at the time.

The story of Helene Jacobs tells us something not only about the process by which bystanders become complicit in the events happening around them, but about the process by which they create the “moral narrative” about their lives in the context of this larger history.

The process of complicity begins with certain factors and motives that shape human behavior. In looking at “bystanders”, we need to focus on two kinds of factors: 1) the motives and attitudes held by the individuals themselves that pertain to the identification and exclusion of the victims, and 2) the more socially-oriented factors, i.e. the ways in which individuals define their role and relationship to the institutions and society to which they belong.

In the instance of the Holocaust, one of the most obvious motives relating to attitude is antisemitism and its centrality in Nazi racial ideology. The Nazi regime, of course, targeted numerous groups, including real and potential political opponents. The regime’s racial ideology – the categorization and ranking of people in terms of their “Aryan” or “non-Aryan” qualities – led to the euthanasia murders of institutionalized patients, the mass killings of the Roma/Sinti population, and the forced enslavement of eastern European civilians, who were viewed during the war as “subhuman”. Only the Jews, however, were targeted for complete and systematic annihilation. Moreover, the Aryan ideology of National Socialism fed on centuries of antisemitism throughout Europe, and after 1939 some of the people in occupied countries participated actively in the murders of Jews.

The study of prejudice is crucial to the understanding of any case of genocide and of the persecution of minorities. When genocide occurs, it is because a certain group has been singled out, turned into “the other”. Its victims are not randomly chosen. Their deaths are not accidental. The atrocities and the dehumanization of the victims are intentional. As in Nazi Germany, a number of other groups may be swept up in the violence, but there is something different about the deliberate targeting of a specific ethnic or religious group, because very often we find a web of prejudices and policies, sometimes going back centuries, that permeate the cultural and social structures.

This was certainly true of the genocide of the European Jews. Naturally there were related individual attitudes that converged with this antisemitism, including the widespread support among Germans for Nazi nationalism and its emphasis on restoring German pride. Yet for our purposes in the current context, it is the emphasis on the attitudes toward the excluded “other” – in this case the Jews – that is key to understanding the mentality of the bystander in justifying the Nazi measures.

Many of the socially-related factors that shape bystander behavior are straightforward products of the dynamics of socialization – the innate desire of human beings to find and secure their place within society, and the related values, behaviors, and attitudes that develop as a result. In looking at Nazi Germany, it is frightening to see how motives that are normally viewed as positive aspects of socialization – the desire to belong and be part of the group, the readiness to obey laws, etc. – facilitated the process by which people became murderers. Related factors include opportunism, conformity, and passivity. It was clear from the very beginning of the Nazi regime that dissent and public opposition to government measures would be met with imprisonment or worse. Thus, outward signs of conformity and passivity in this history may be indicative of fear rather than of active support. But the end effect is the same, for the ways in which we define our social roles and the decisions we make in turn shape our understanding of what is appropriate, of our values, options and goals in a particular situation.

It is easy to see how these factors are shaped by different levels of societal life. In the socialization process, our perceptions of our options, our obligations, our values, our role, is constantly being affirmed and shaped. If I get a raise from my boss, that’s a sign that I’m doing something right; this in turn makes it more likely that I will agree with the goals and practices of my workplace. Conversely, if I’m ostracized in society – if the people in my workplace, or my religious community, or my neighborhood react negatively to the way I act and think – then I will be challenged to defend myself. The alternative is either to withdraw into silence or publicly to change my mind and conform. It became very difficult for ordinary citizens in Nazi Germany to withstand such pressures, which were augmented by constant images of propaganda, widespread enthusiasm for the new Nazi society, and many opportunities to participate in this new society.

It is this ongoing interaction – this constant readjusting and re-evaluation of one’s position with respect to society and one’s neighbors – that constitutes the dynamics of complicity. As

such, the complicity of bystanders in the Holocaust was multi-level and multi-dimensional, affecting all facets of daily life. Just as importantly, it was incremental, both chronologically and in terms of an individual's own involvement in the larger event. It was over a period of time that ordinary Germans became, step by step, more passive and compliant with Nazism; a period in which ordinary Germans benefited from what was happening; a period in which other countries refused to take in emigrants fleeing Nazism; a period in which international leaders hoping to avert another European war made a number of concessions to the Nazi regime; a period in which the doors to rescue and resistance were closed and the doors to genocide were opened. This is a mirror of the incremental process by which Helene Jacobs moved along the path to resistance.

While I have just described these dynamics with respect to the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, they reflect certain dynamics that shape bystander behavior in any genocide:

- The creation and defining of a larger culture
- Prejudice/attitudes toward "the other"
- The defining of power relationships within that culture, and the setting of clear boundaries between insiders and outsiders
- Ongoing and mutual reinforcement of these attitudes and boundaries between the individual, institutional, and social/political levels
- The movement by bystanders along the spectrum of involvement: either toward greater participation or toward opposition to the broader social and political norms

The implications of this process are profound for the new *moral narrative* that is constructed through this same process. This is the narrative by which people who consider themselves civilized, good, and moral citizens justify their behavior under oppressive regimes or in a genocidal process. The contributions of psychologists and sociologists to the literature on the Holocaust and its lessons provide important insights into how this happens. The sociologist Herbert Kelman, for example, has listed three preconditions for the erosion of moral inhibitions against violent atrocities: 1) the authorization of violence, 2) the routinization of violent actions, and 3) the dehumanization of victims.⁵ Ervin Staub⁶ has described three processes that parallel Kelman's preconditions to some extent. The processes outlined by Staub, which describe how people justify what they are doing, are: 1) just-world thinking, whereby bystanders justify the exclusion of victims through the conviction that the inherent

order of things (and thereby the exclusion of victims) is just, 2) self-distancing (which is similar to Robert J. Lifton's notion of "doubling"⁷), as a means by which perpetrators distance themselves from the consequences of their actions, and finally 3) resocialization, which is the process by which individuals and institutions are reshaped by the social circumstances in which they participate, so that their attitudes toward victims and toward their own behavior are altered.

All the dynamics described so far are illustrated in a model developed by Robert M. Ehrenreich and Tim Cole, which portrays the interaction of bystanders, perpetrators, and victims in a genocidal situation.⁸ In this model, bystanders move along a spectrum of acquiescence that brings them closer either to direct participation (thus bringing them close to the perpetrator group) or to direct inhibition of the genocidal policies (thus moving them towards the rescue of the victims or resistance against the genocide). Perpetrators move along the spectrum of involvement, either coming closer to a position of only indirect involvement (which puts them closer to bystanders) or, at the other extreme, becoming leaders in the killing. Thus the bystanders and perpetrators intersect directly only at the point of the triangle: the point of "direct participation." This is the point at which the bystander becomes a perpetrator, and at which the perpetrator moves into a more passive stance and becomes a bystander. Both bystanders and perpetrators also intersect with the victims, however, at the opposite ends of their respective continua. For bystanders, the move towards the victim group occurs as they increasingly disagree with the genocide, thereby moving toward a stance of rescue or resistance. For perpetrators, the move towards their direct encounter with the victims comes as they move closer to the actual act of genocide. In this model, victims also move along a continuum, although as Ehrenreich and Cole note, they have fewer options and less autonomy. Their fate is ultimately dependent upon the ways in which the bystanders and perpetrators encounter them.

This model shows the incremental dynamic of individual behavior, but it also provides us with an insight into the larger historical consequences of the behavior of bystanders and perpetrators in the Nazi genocide. The gradual intensification of the Nazi persecution of the Jews had two clear historical consequences. Firstly, it enabled the development of a highly refined bureaucracy and of the technologies required to implement the genocidal policies. Because these genocidal policies evolved gradually, there was time to create an extensive



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bureaucracy, time to build death camps and to develop ever more precise methods of “extermination”. This bureaucracy of death and its deliberate refinement is one of the primary characteristics that distinguishes the Holocaust from other genocides.

Secondly, and more importantly, this incremental development meant that the genocidal policies became deeply rooted in all aspects of Nazi German society. In the process, German bureaucrats, doctors, church leaders and others became implicated in new ways as the expanding genocidal bureaucracy began to affect their own circles of work and expertise. The model shows how the responses of bystanders and perpetrators in particular move them closer to acquiescence and even involvement.

In other words, complicity is something more than socialized human behavior and the motivations behind it. More importantly, complicity in a dictatorship is not a single, one-time act. It begins with very small acts of cooperation, and this is what Helene Jacobs saw so clearly. For all too many of her compatriots, their passivity in relation to the persecution and genocide of the Jews began with a series of apparently simple steps that they didn’t think anything about. It consisted of turning in a certain direction in January 1933 and, with few exceptions, becoming increasingly involved as time went on. The Nazi persecution of the Jews began incrementally, with bureaucratic measures and laws and with what appeared to be random acts of violence and vandalism. It ended with a genocide that encompassed an entire continent and which actively involved hundreds of thousands of people who had started out as “bystanders”.

The historian Klemens von Klemperer once wrote that one factor that makes the history of Nazi Germany so complicated is that it was “consensual” – “a well nigh unique dictatorship *with* the people and not *against* the people.”⁹ On the one hand, Nazi Germany was indeed a dictatorship, a totalitarian regime that from the very beginning was quite ruthless in dealing with its opponents – both real and potential. Adolf Hitler was skilled at manipulating public opinion, with the demagogue’s gift for sensing and playing upon the dreams, fears, prejudices, and resentments of the German people. In turn, the vast majority of the German population welcomed the changes in 1933 and enthusiastically joined the associations and became active in the creation of the “new Germany”. There are various historical and cultural reasons for this, but they are not the focus of this essay. It is the process of conformity and complicity that is of interest

here. Yet we must remember that this was conformity and complicity *in a totalitarian situation*, and this is a significant factor in the creation of the moral narrative in this instance. The presence of widespread public support for Hitler and National Socialism makes the relevance of totalitarian dynamics a complicated issue. This was a regime that right from the start sent very clear signals about what would be tolerated. The early months of 1933 were marked by the widespread arrest of political opponents, the establishment of independent “concentration camps” run by local storm troopers throughout the country, and by other measures of intimidation. Among other things, these developments clearly indicated who was to be excluded in the new Germany. The response of the bystanders was to conform and stay out of trouble; at the same time, the pressures (and opportunities) to inform on one’s neighbours increased.

One thing we find in totalitarian societies is that people make a powerful distinction between their private lives and their public selves.¹⁰ This is done in the interests of “normalcy” – people try to keep their private lives normal, and the way to achieve this is by withdrawing as much as possible from what is happening around you in the public sphere. And this leads to a real passivity – in Gordon Horwitz’s study of Mauthausen¹¹ and in other, similar studies of local populations during the Holocaust, many people spoke about their sense of “powerlessness”.¹² Autonomy may be expressed privately, through the phenomenon of “inner resistance”, i.e. privately disagreeing with what is happening but not expressing this publicly. But if political resistance and opposition are only expressed privately, they remain ineffective, and the sense of “powerlessness” only deepens. The result of all this, as Hannah Arendt wrote, is that people in totalitarian situations are “caught” between two options – in her words, ultimately “they can only be executioners or victims.”¹³

And with such developments, non-Jewish Germans were laying the foundation for a far greater and more pervasive evil. But they were also finding a way to live with it, and constructing an alibi for what was happening in their society, and this, too, is an important element of complicity. People who find a way to carry on “normally” within a society that discriminates against and persecutes other people will also find a way to justify why this is the case. They will believe that their lives and their rights as citizens are all based upon legitimate principles. They will view people like Helene Jacobs as naive and foolish, or even criminal. This brings them to the next stage, in which murder

begins to seem not only “rational” – the inevitable outcome of the ongoing social/political dynamic – but morally justified. It “makes sense” to people; it doesn’t surprise them; they accept the reasons.

When things reach this stage, the persecution of the victims comes to be seen as legitimate, and the bystanders have moved firmly along the spectrum of acquiescence toward joining the perpetrators. The line between “insiders” and “outsiders” was drawn almost immediately in Nazi Germany – which is what Helene Jacobs recognized when she decided that, as far as she was concerned, there “was no such thing as an Aryan.” This division between those who were able to carry on with their normal lives and those who could not was epitomized by what I refer to as the construction of “parallel worlds”: the world of the bystanders and perpetrators, and the world of the victims.¹⁴

It is easy to see these as separate worlds because, in a sense, that is what they were. The world in which the Jews lived really was different from that of the non-Jewish Germans who were able to carry on with their normal lives. Yet these worlds were of course the same world. They were linked. You cannot look at the normal everyday history of Nazi Germany without seeing what was happening to the people it was excluding. The sense of entitlement, the prejudices and the actions of the one group enabled the genocide of the other. But it is important to recognize that from the perspective of the bystander, their everyday lives in many respects continued to bear all the hallmarks of normalcy. This remained true in Nazi Germany until the consequences of the war began to make themselves felt even there.

For this reason, the study of bystanders in the Holocaust is not just an historical endeavor, but quickly becomes a moral and ethical study: a study not of who is on the list of bystanders, but rather of how they got there, that is, of the ways in which people from all walks of life can become complicit. The complicity of bystanders during the Holocaust began with simple decisions; it ended with people who knew about or even witnessed what was happening and who did nothing, or who actively supported the Nazi regime and its measures.

I would like to conclude with three observations about the “lessons” that we can legitimately draw from our study of bystanders during the Holocaust, and about the ways in which our insights about bystanders in this particular history can inform our understanding of “the bystander” in other contexts.

The first observation is that I believe that one of the central reasons for the enormous interest that has been focused on

the Holocaust over recent years comes from an identification with the bystander. Through the extensive study and commemoration of the Holocaust, we have, in a sense, become “bystanders” to this history, and many of us respond by seeking to learn and implement the lessons of the Holocaust. We are haunted by many of the same questions that haunted people at the time, and so we turn to the history of the Holocaust in search of some answers. We do not want to be bystanders again.

And yet, of course, that is the position we find ourselves in. During the period in which I worked on my book on bystanders, the genocide in Rwanda took place — a genocide in which 800,000 people were slaughtered in 8 weeks: 100,000 a week, almost 15,000 every day. There was fairly strong consensus that this genocide could have been stopped by an international intervention.

My second observation is that we still don’t know how to intervene effectively to stop genocide. In the case of more recent examples, however, I don’t think that this is necessarily due to factors such as prejudice or a lack of concern. There was widespread outrage and despair about the killings in both Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The ongoing situation in the Sudan – first during the decades of civil war (which cost the lives of several million victims) and then during the genocide in Darfur – was the object of numerous attempts by international bodies and governments to respond. This ongoing failure to respond adequately to human rights emergencies elsewhere testifies to just how difficult it is to develop and implement an effective response policy, particularly in relation to genocide. Such responses and policies must be driven and supported by the concern and engagement of citizens – but ultimately their success rests not on the concern of the international community, but on the effectiveness of the policy.

My third observation is that if there are moral lessons to be learned from the study of ordinary “bystanders” during the Holocaust, the most effective and direct lessons may be those that are writ small. That is, we may get further if we reflect on the incremental choices that Helene Jacobs made than if we attempt to begin with grand moral conclusions about how we should or should not act. The German thinker Jürgen Habermas once wrote that the Holocaust was an event in which “the deep layer of solidarity among all that wears a human face” was broken.¹⁵ The numerous studies on the role of ordinary people during the Holocaust illustrate how this “deep layer of solidarity” is really about small, everyday things. It is about opposing evil where we can, rescuing who we can, speaking out when we can.

The development of our thinking on this issue – and perhaps the source of our urgent desire not to be bystanders – has very much been shaped by the voices and testimonies of the victims. A large and perhaps the most powerful part of the literature on the Holocaust has been the telling of this history by the victims and survivors, the voices that the Nazis sought to extinguish. The story that each individual has to tell is not a universal story. Each story has its uniqueness. In telling their story, they are not announcing who *we* are, but who *they* are; they are stepping out of forced anonymity to reappropriate their names and their own judgment on history.

Their story becomes “our” story to the extent that we accept its relevance for our own lives, and this may be the distinguishing factor that moved people like Helene Jacobs: the conscious decision or spontaneous action in which they made the link between their own lives and the lives of those around them, and decided to act in solidarity. In western society, we often tend to think of moral behavior in individualized terms. Yet the factor that makes it “moral” is its sociality. Morality and ethics by their very nature link our lives and choices to those around us. We do not live alone, we never act alone, and each of us is confronted by the particular challenges of our times. Ethics is social. Our ethical decisions always occur within a historical context, and they always connect our lives to those of others.

Bystander behavior, or rescuer behavior, or the actions of the perpetrators, is always ultimately – but never only – the action of individuals. It is part of a much greater whole, in just the same way as the larger genocidal dynamic is ultimately driven by numerous small acts of complicity as well as by the active participation of the killers.

NOTES

- 1 Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987), p. 157.
- 2 Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).
- 3 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Bystanders, Victims* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).
- 4 There are numerous passages from my interview with her in Barnett, *For the Soul of the People* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); see particularly pp. 31–32 and 231–32, 296–97.
- 5 Herbert C. Kelman, “Violence without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers”, *Journal of Social Issues* 29:4 (1973), pp. 25–49.
- 6 Ervin Staub, “Moral Exclusion, Personal Goal Theory, and Extreme Destructiveness”, *Journal of Social Issues* 46:1 (1990).
- 7 Lifton explains this concept in his book *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
- 8 Robert M. Ehrenreich and Tim Cole, “The Perpetrator-Bystanders-Victim Constellation: Rethinking Genocidal Relationships”, *Human Organization*, v. 64 (2005), pp. 213–24.
- 9 Klemens von Klemperer, “Church, Religion, and the German Resistance”, in Andrew Chandler, ed., *The Moral Imperative: New Essays on the Ethics of Resistance in National Socialist Germany, 1933–1945* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), p. 49.
- 10 See my chapter on this in *Bystanders*, particularly pp.
- 11 Gordon Horwitz, *In the Shadow of Death: Living outside the Gates of Mauthausen* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
- 12 Barnett, *Bystanders*, see particularly pp. 16–19, 51–52 and 166–68.
- 13 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 468.
- 14 Barnett, *Bystanders*, pp. 128–30.
- 15 Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historians’ Debate* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press), p. 251.

SWEDEN AND THE HOLOCAUST

An attempt to make sense of problematic categories and ambivalent actors

Karin Kvist Geverts

In the field of Holocaust studies, Sweden is often categorized as a bystander during the Holocaust. This categorization has been criticized by the historian Paul A. Levine, who argues that Sweden, as a result of changes during the war in the actions of Swedish diplomats, cannot be placed in the bystander category after 1942.¹ The findings in my own dissertation support Levine's view and suggest that we might better explain the Swedish behaviour by employing a process perspective.² In this article, I will be discussing why the bystander represents a problematic category. And I will be doing so by looking at the case of Sweden, or more specifically the Swedish decision-making process in relation to Jewish refugees, during the Second World War and the Holocaust. A study of the actions and whereabouts of the Swedish officials and bureaucrats who dealt with visa applications reveals the difficulties associated with applying problematic categories to ambivalent actors.

The bystander category

Before we turn our attention to the case of Sweden, however, we need to begin with a definition of the category of the bystander. One problem is that the bystander category seems to be very hard to define in a simple and definitive manner. If we look to previous research for guidance, we find that many academics define bystanders as comprising everyone who was not a victim or a perpetrator. Deborah Lipstadt, for instance, includes "neutral governments and agencies, Jews living in relative safety, occupied countries, ordinary Germans and ... the Allied governments".³ According to Michael Marrus, the bystander category includes "the responses of the Allies, the neutral powers, the Vatican, and the Jews of the 'free world'".⁴ If we apply these definitions to Sweden, the country could be defined as a bystander due to its neutral status.

Thus one problem is that these definitions are very wide, and these groups are therefore often split into two: First, the

Germans and the countries occupied by Germany and second, the democracies. Thereafter, the behaviour of the democracies is in turn split into allied responses and attempts at rescue.⁵ Raul Hilberg has employed the category of the bystander in an even wider sense, including helpers, gainers and onlookers, implying that the bystander category includes different degrees of passivity and activity.⁶ Using Hilberg's terminology, Sweden has been viewed as a passive onlooker.⁷

Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner criticize this categorization and write that "like has to be compared with like". They also argue that contextualization and time frame are decisive.⁸ David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine agree with Bloxham and Kushner but also direct our attention at the importance of distinguishing different kinds of bystanders. Their book derives from a colloquium at which the participants focused on democratic states and organizations that "because of their democratic character might have been expected to respond to the genocide differently" than those who were not democracies.⁹ In this way, Cesarani and Levine add a moral aspect to the bystander category.

This assumption includes an ethical dimension, in the form of assuming that this "different" reaction would in fact be the morally right one, and it is also implicitly understood that it would involve action rather than inaction or indifference. Viewed in this way, the bystanders can be divided into those who became rescuers and those who remained indifferent. Finally, Tony Kushner writes that "rather than nuancing our understanding of the complexity of human responses during the Holocaust, the bystander category is in danger of aiding the tendency to see the subject in Manichean terms, as a symbol of mass evil alongside much less prevalent absolute good".¹⁰ He also questions the "'balance sheet' approach" whereby an indifferent response at one time is balanced by a positive, rescue response at another time.¹¹ My interpretation of Kushner's critique is that the "balance sheet" approach fails to describe the reality, since the actions of individuals are complex and ambivalent rather than exclusively good or bad.¹²

This brief exposé of previous research shows that the democracies can be divided into neutrals and allies. They can react in different ways, with indifference or by taking action – such as rescue attempts. This has also been described in terms of actors being able to react in different ways – by providing help or assistance, by benefiting from the situation or by becoming onlookers and thus not reacting at all. Previous research has defined the bystander category with regard to the democracies,

but is this helpful when studying the Swedish response during the Second World War and the Holocaust? To answer this question we need to turn our attention to the case of Sweden and more specifically to Sweden's refugee policy.

The little picture: One of the refugees

The German Jew and commercial traveller Heinrich Reichwald had already arrived in Sweden when the Second World War started in September 1939. His family – his wife Augusta and their 18 year old daughter Madelaine – remained in Germany, but the whole family was in a queue for immigration to the United States, and all the paperwork was in order. The Reichwald family were so-called transmigrants – Jewish refugees seeking shelter in another country while awaiting an opportunity to go to the United States.¹³

Since Heinrich was in Sweden, he was the one completing all the applications for entry permits to Sweden for his family in April 1941. He answered the questions in the application, stating that his wife was a German citizen of the Mosaic confession. The application form also asked about the immigrants' "race", and Heinrich wrote "Jewish". Heinrich Reichwald had a steady income in Sweden and a brother staying here who could vouch for their stay if necessary. Heinrich also named a number of his business partners as references.

The application reached the immigration office at the Foreigners Bureau on April 21st, 1941, and the Bureau's recommendation to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was to reject the application. On May 12th this was what the Ministry did. There was no motivation for the rejection of the entry permit but the dossier contains some interesting remarks made by one of the officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Svante Hellstedt. Hellstedt wrote in March of 1941:

Mr Reichwald has already showed clear intentions to move to Sweden with his family and was given a permit to stay at the beginning of August 1939, with the condition that he should leave at the end of his short stay, and had the luck or ability to enter the country before the outbreak of the war, and then remained here. As time goes by, the case of his family seems very sympathetic – one of the many, many – but it is also, on the other hand, clear that if we let his wife in, the family will reside in Sweden; and this is not what we wish for at the moment. In similar cases we do let

the wife and children come to Sweden if the intention of the husband and the family to re-emigrate somewhere else is clear and the plans for this migration have advanced; but there are no signs of such an attitude in Reichwald.¹⁴

It is likely that these words from Hellstedt reached Heinrich Reichwald through his lawyer, because the next application is clear about the family's plans to re-emigrate. What happened, then, to Augusta and Madelaine? They were never given a permit to enter Sweden during the war, but they survived. We know this because Augusta received a visa in September of 1945 and Madelaine was allowed to enter Sweden in April of 1946. What then does the case of the Reichwald family tell us about Sweden's response to the Holocaust?

The big picture: Sweden's refugee policy at large

An understanding of the Swedish refugee policy during the Second World War and the Holocaust requires a knowledge of the situation in Swedish society around the year 1900. At that point, Sweden, along with virtually all the other countries of Europe, viewed itself primarily as a country of emigration, and there was therefore no need to control immigration. In the last decades of the 19th century, ideas of nationalism swept across Europe and the nationalist spirit pinpointed groups of "unwanted elements" which the Swedish state wanted to get rid of. Among these were the Eastern European Jews. To stop these categories from migrating to Sweden, a law was passed in 1914 that gave Swedish authorities the right to refuse entry to "unwanted foreigners" at the border.¹⁵

The first immigration law was enacted in 1927 (1927 års utlänningslag) with the aim of maintaining "the purity of the Swedish race" and protecting the Swedish labour market. In 1937, a second immigration law was passed (1937 års utlänningslag), which then remained in effect throughout the war. This second law also aimed to protect the Swedish labour market, but the aim of protecting the Swedish "race" was no longer an issue, at least not explicitly. Despite this, the notion of "race" was still apparent in the writing of the authorities, although from 1938 only in the form of encoded formulations. This can probably be explained by the fact that explicit utterances about "race" were no longer legitimate in Swedish society.¹⁶

The Swedish immigration authority was not the only one in Europe in struggling with the so-called "refugee problem" in

the 1930s. Jewish refugees were considered a particular problem because of the perception that Jews brought antisemitism with them. The key question at this time was whether or not the Jewish refugees should be regarded as political refugees. In Sweden, legislators left it to the authorities to make this definition. This decision proved to be fatal for the Jewish refugees, since in Sweden, as in other countries in Europe, Jewish refugees were not categorized as political refugees and were therefore not eligible for asylum.

In Swedish official statistics, Jews were defined in religious terms as Swedish citizens of the Mosaic confession. This definition also applied to foreign Jews. In February of 1939, however, the Foreigners Bureau undertook a census in which all foreigners were required to participate. The questions related to uncontroversial issues such as place of birth, nationality and religious faith, but also whether either of the individual's parents were Jews. The questionnaire changed the definition of "Jew" from a religious definition to a "racial" one based on the Nuremberg Laws of 1935.¹⁷

The use of "race" as a basis for statistics was recognized as a sensitive issue by the Swedish authorities and foreign newspapers, such as the British Daily Herald, accused Sweden of bending its knee to Nazi antisemitic theories. In Sweden, interestingly enough, no such accusations were made, and I would argue that the Foreigners Bureau interpreted this lack of criticism as a signal that the "racial" definition was viewed as legitimate by Swedish society.¹⁸

This changed over time, however. A lack of legitimacy became apparent in September of 1943, when Karin Kock, a political economist and frequent writer in the Social Democratic newspaper *Socialdemokraten*, published a series of articles accusing the authorities of antisemitism. This led to the abolition of the differentiation in official statistics. However, in unofficial documents the "racial" definition and categorization was still in use as late as February 1944. The differentiation was hierarchical, with Norwegian and Danish non-Jewish refugees given the highest rank, followed by Norwegian and Danish Jewish refugees, and finally, at the bottom, the stateless Jewish refugees who were fleeing from the Nordic countries.¹⁹

After the war, a National Commission was appointed, led by the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Richard Sandler, to investigate Swedish refugee policy. The Commission's report clearly showed that the "racially" influenced language and definitions were no longer legitimate after the war.²⁰

Discrimination of Jews and ambivalent actors

Swedish refugee policy was not shaped at the political level but rather on an administrative basis, and this gave freedom of action to the officials and bureaucrats involved. In Sweden, refugee policy was shaped in the procedures associated with the awarding of visas and permits to stay in the country. By examining the minutes and dossiers of the Jewish refugees on the basis of quantitative methods and then collecting this information in a database, I was able to conclude that there is a statistically significant correlation between refugees categorized as “Jews” and a much lower probability of admission to Sweden, by comparison with foreigners not categorized as Jews. Only 52 percent of the applications of the Jewish refugees were approved, as compared to 82 percent of the applications of other foreigners. Further, when other factors such as gender, age, nationality and the total number of applications were taken into account, the correlation remained unchanged. Thus it is clear that Jewish refugees were discriminated against with regard to the chances of having their applications approved when compared to other foreigners. The level of discrimination doubled in relation to applications from Eastern European Jews.²¹

Swedish refugee policy was shaped by guiding principles that evolved during 1930s and 1940s. These principles were outlined by the authorities who were responsible for immigration policy in Sweden, i.e. the Foreigners Bureau and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many of the policies stemmed from the established practice of the early 1930s, and this suggests continuity in Swedish refugee policy from the first Aliens Act of 1927. The official standpoint, as argued by the Bureau and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was that there were no principles for refugee policy, but rather that applications were dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

One unofficial guideline was that the Bureau preferred Jewish refugees to apply for visas before arriving in Sweden, thereby making it possible to pre-select the most desirable refugees and to reject those that were “unwanted”. Other demands were also made on Jewish refugees, such as their being required to have relatives in Sweden, to have financial guarantees in order to stay, and above all, that Sweden would only be a temporary place of refuge while they were awaiting transit to a third country. This last guideline was closely linked to the idea that Sweden was not perceived as a country of immigration. Only a small number of new guidelines developed during the period between 1939 and 1944, one of which was due to the impact of

the American immigration quota. Another principle was that Swedish visa forms required information on “race”. Although this had been proposed as early as November 1938, it did not become established practice until 1939. According to the officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the question of “race” contributed to a “safer processing” of the applications. My own interpretation is that this may be seen as a typical expression of the ideal that officials had in the 1930s and 1940s – to be strictly “professional” and “unbiased”.²²

Another important fact is that the actions of the officials were ambivalent. In many cases, the very same official could on the one hand actively help Jewish refugees seeking refuge, while on the other hand also delaying and sometimes even obstructing the application process. Investigations of the Jewish refugees fleeing from Norway and Denmark showed that even though the refugees from these countries were accepted, and in the Danish case even invited by the Swedish government, the “racial” categorization of the Jewish refugees remained. Thus the applications of Jewish refugees from Norway and Denmark were marked with (m) and described in a “racially” oriented language.²³

A slow process from discrimination to rescue attempts

Previous research has suggested that a shift took place in Swedish refugee policy in 1942–1943, but this view had not been empirically supported until the publication of my own study. Official statistics show that about 18,000 foreigners were resident in Sweden in October 1939, whereas this figure had increased to almost 100,000 by April 1945, indicating that there must have been a change in policy. My findings show that when the international refugee situation changed dramatically, Swedish officials developed a practice of postponing the processing of cases, not making a decision but instead biding their time. This occurred following the outbreak of war in 1939, following the occupation of Norway and Denmark in April 1940, and finally once again during the autumn of 1941, when Nazi Germany prohibited Jews from leaving Germany and the German occupied parts of Europe. From the autumn of 1941, this strategy of postponing decisions was combined with a note, written by the responsible officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, saying “postpone until the applicant calls for our attention”. This was a strategy intended to delay the application process and there are many similarities with strategies employed by the American authorities.²⁴

Another practice established during the autumn of 1941 was to motivate the rejection of applications by reference to the “the usual addendum”. This referred to the fact that Jewish refugees were forbidden to leave Germany from October 1941, and this was apparently known to the officials. But applications were also rejected without reference to this specific motivation throughout 1942 and as late as September of 1943. These examples show that a better description of Swedish refugee policy would be to characterize it as undergoing a slow process of change rather than a clear-cut shift. Despite this, the impression remains that the shift in policy came much earlier in Sweden than it did in Switzerland, Great Britain or the United States.²⁵

Throughout the entire period investigated, 1938–1944, it was legitimate to express moderate antisemitic perceptions, but illegitimate to admit that you were an antisemite. An illustrative example of this interpretation can be seen in a debate from 1943 regarding a proposed law against “racial hatred”. The main motive underlying this debate was the existence in society of antisemitism, but what is interesting is that the proposal only referred to propagandistic antisemitism. Utterances of antisemitism expressed by the authorities were not interpreted as antisemitism but rather as matter-of-fact statements, and were therefore not included either in the debate or in the law. In many ways, it could be said that the debate missed its target.²⁶

There was a clear dissociation from propagandistic antisemitism and it was taboo to admit to being an antisemite inside state agencies. There seems to have been a common agreement on the fact that as long as a person was not explicitly intent upon expressing aversion against Jews, then the utterances he or she made about Jews could not be interpreted as antisemitism.

As an explanation for the contradictory and paradoxical results presented in my dissertation, I used the metaphor of antisemitism constituting a form of background noise. This metaphor makes it easier to understand how bureaucrats and politicians were able to express moderate antisemitic perceptions while at the same time explicitly and clearly distancing themselves from accusations of either antisemitism or of being antisemites. The metaphor also helps us to understand how antisemitic attitudes were able to co-exist with a shift in refugee policy toward a large-scale reception of refugees, Jewish as well as non-Jewish.²⁷

Swedish refugee policy was not only influenced by an antisemitic perspective, but also by pragmatic aims and humanitarian conditions. The shift in policy was clearly

influenced by the Nordic prerogative, a concept which refers to the way in which Sweden primarily saw itself as being responsible for the “ethnic Scandinavians” since these were regarded as belonging to the same Nordic “family”. In terms of this concept, Jews were only viewed as half-brothers and half-sisters, and as such they were not fully included in the family.²⁸

Sweden – a bystander nation?

Given the description presented above – where should Sweden, as a country, be located in relation to the category of the bystander? Previous research has characterized Sweden as having been a bystander until 1942, at which time there was a shift from a policy of restricting admissions to one of large-scale reception. I have argued that this change in policy should be described as a slow process, rather than as a clear-cut shift. I would therefore suggest that when the period is considered as a whole, Swedish behaviour went through a slow process of change, from bystander behaviour to rescue behaviour. I believe that a process perspective is necessary when studying the bystander. Because of this, I also prefer a separation between bystanders and rescuers, and thus to speak about four categories – perpetrators, victims, bystanders and rescuers. Another advantage associated with the process perspective is that it allows for a flexibility whereby states, institutions and individuals can shift from bystander behaviour to rescue behaviour and back again. There is thus no real end to the shifting between categories.

I agree that it is important to compare like with like, and to consider the time frame, and that it is necessary to contextualize what actors were able to think and to do. One of the difficulties is that I still find the category of the bystander problematic to use. I would therefore instead argue for the necessity of focusing on the behaviour of the actors, thus discussing bystander behaviour rather than bystander nations.

On the other hand, the behaviour of different officials and bureaucrats was indeed ambivalent, and it is therefore problematic to generalize individual officials' behaviour into the behaviour of Sweden as a whole. But being a historian means that part of my task is to generalize in order to be able to understand the behaviour of actors at a given point in time, and to then, in turn, be able to say something about how we behave today. On the basis of this point of departure, I would argue that it is possible to characterize Swedish behaviour as having

changed from a bystander behaviour to a rescue behaviour if our focus is directed at the period in question as a whole. Sweden's bystander behaviour should not be characterized as indifference, but rather as an active restrictiveness which took the form of discrimination in relation to Jewish refugees seeking visas in Sweden. If we also add the question of morality, this actually places the Swedish response in a worse situation than would otherwise have been anticipated. It is undoubtedly worse to practice active discrimination than to passively be an onlooker. And even Sweden's rescue behaviour is not exclusively positive. Swedish bureaucrats were not driven purely by humanitarian values, there were also pragmatic considerations involved.


On top of this, antisemitic perceptions of Jews existed and the bureaucrats distinguished between Jewish refugees and other refugees. To understand this behaviour I have employed the metaphor of antisemitic background noise. To this we should also add the question of time frame. From a moral perspective it is of course worse to be indifferent to genocide than to be indifferent to persecutions that could have led to death or murder, but which in most cases did not. From this perspective, the question of how Sweden and other "bystander nations" reacted during the period between 1941 and 1945 is of course of greater interest than the question of how they reacted during the period 1933–1941. On the other hand, it was more difficult to rescue Jews after the prohibition to leave Germany was introduced in the autumn of 1941 than it had been previously, since subsequent to this point, almost no one was allowed to leave.

Finally, my point here is not to judge the actors of the past but rather to nuance our understanding of their choices and their opportunities to act. As has been shown above, these opportunities were sometimes quite substantial but there was unfortunately little willingness to exploit them. And in other cases, the actors were influenced by antisemitic prejudice but overcame this and tried to help Jewish refugees anyway. Their ambivalent behaviour shows the difficulties associated with the use of categories such as the bystander. But if we talk about behaviour rather than categories, it is possible to argue that the Swedish behaviour underwent a change, from a bystander behaviour to a rescue behaviour.

NOTES

- 1 Paul A. Levine, *From Indifference to Activism. Swedish Diplomacy and the Holocaust; 1938–1944*, Uppsala, 1998.
- 2 Karin Kvist Geverts, *Ett främmande element i nationen. Svensk flyktingpolitik och de judiska flyktingarna 1938–1944*, Uppsala, 2008.
- 3 Donald Bloxham & Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust. Critical historical approaches*, Manchester & New York, 2005, p. 177.
- 4 David Cesarani & Paul A. Levine, "Introduction", in *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust. A Re-evaluation*, David Cesarani & Paul A. Levine (eds.), London & Portland, 2002, p. 1.
- 5 Ibid., p. 1.
- 6 Ibid., pp. 1–2.
- 7 This is also reflected in the title of Levine's dissertation, where the "indifference" – in "From Indifference to Activism" – refers to the expected bystander behaviour; see Levine 1998.
- 8 Bloxham & Kushner 2005, p. 178.
- 9 Cesarani & Levine 2002, p. 3.
- 10 Tony Kushner, "Pissing in the Wind? The Search for Nuance in the Study of Holocaust 'Bystanders'", in *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust. A Re-evaluation*, David Cesarani & Paul A. Levine (eds.), London & Portland, 2002, pp. 60–61.
- 11 Kushner 2002, p. 63.
- 12 For this argument, see in particular Kushner 2002, p. 69.
- 13 The case is based on the documents in Augusta and Madelaine Reichwald's personal dossier, see The National Archives in Sweden (*Riksarkivet*) (RA), Foreigners Commission (*Statens utlänningskommissions arkiv*) (SUK), Bureau for passports (*Passbyrå*), F 2 BA:72. The case has previously been published in my dissertation, see Kvist Geverts 2008.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., p. 285.
- 16 Ibid., p. 285–286
- 17 For a more concise discussion of this question, see my dissertation: Kvist Geverts 2008, Chapter 4.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., p. 286.
- 20 Ibid., p. 287.
- 21 Ibid., p. 287–288.
- 22 Ibid., p. 288.
- 23 Ibid., p. 289.
- 24 Ibid., p. 289–290.
- 25 Ibid., p. 290.
- 26 Mikael Byström, "En talande tystnad? Ett antisemitiskt bakgrundsbrus i riksdagsdebatterna 1942–1947", in *En problematisk relation? Flyktingpolitik och judiska flyktingar i Sverige 1920–1950*, Lars M. Andersson & Karin Kvist Geverts (eds.), *Opuscula Historica Upsaliensia* 36, Uppsala, 2008.
- 27 Kvist Geverts 2008, p. 291.
- 28 Mikael Byström & Karin Kvist Geverts, "Från en aktivism till en annan. Hur ska Sveriges agerande i flyktingfrågan under andra världskriget förklaras?", in *Sverige och Nazityskland. Skuldfrågor och moraldebatt*, Lars M. Andersson & Mattias Tydén (eds.), Stockholm, 2007.



A dense crowd of people, likely from the mid-20th century, is shown in profile and three-quarter views. They are wearing various styles of hats, including fedoras and bowlers, and suits. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant.

THEME 2

Different explanatory models relating to bystanders, e.g. norm shifting processes

NORM SHIFTING AND BYSTANDER INTERVENTION

Dennis T. Kahn

Social norms are immensely powerful factors in determining human behaviour. In fact, almost by definition, the vast majority of any given social group will agree and act in accordance with the social norms of the group. However, in spite of their apparent force and permanence, norms are continuously shifting over time. In cases where social norms have shifted to the point of distortion, this may lead to quite horrendous consequences. In his study of a group of Nazi executioners from the infamous *Einsatzgruppen*,² Harald Welzer^{3 4} convincingly shows that the norms in the group had been turned on their head to the point where the killing of defenceless Jews had become an admirable virtue rather than an immoral act. This represents an example of a situation where the social norms of a group can themselves dictate extremely violent behaviour. In cases like this, the power of social norms assists in turning murderous brutality into a mass phenomenon rather than isolated individual acts of aggression. How do regular, pro-social behavioural norms become transformed into dictates of unspeakable cruelty? In order to understand how a normative society can descend into genocidal madness, it is crucial to understand the mechanisms by which norms can shift in a setting characterised by extreme violence.

One of the key assumptions of the present chapter is that bystanders have a decisive influence on the development of social norms in a genocidal setting. I will attempt to show that, if bystanders respond with outrage and condemnation in relation to the atrocities committed, then the norm against such behaviour is strengthened, and an outbreak of genocide on a massive scale may still be avoided. If however bystanders fail to respond to initial acts of brutality, their silent approval may lead to a shift in prevailing norms, paving the way for the acceptance and justification of cruelty and persecution.

The literature in social psychology is largely lacking in research on the linkage between bystander intervention and norm shifting. When applied to genocidal settings, most theories on norm shifting and attitudinal change deal with the effects that the *perpetration* of violence has on normative and attitudinal changes, whereas very few refer to the ways in which

the passivity of onlookers in the face of violence may also affect these processes. However, many of the social psychological theories of norm shifting and attitude change can successfully be applied to inaction as well as action. In order to illustrate this, this chapter will first discuss some of the most central theories of norm shifting and attitude change and will then apply these to the conundrum of the non-intervening bystander with the help of historical examples.

I will begin, however, with some definitions and clarifications regarding the concepts of “bystanders” and “social norms”. The term bystander will be used to refer to *an individual who passively observes a victim in dire straits without intervening even though he has a clear opportunity to come to the aid of the ailing victim*. Bystander intervention is a classic research area in social psychology. The seminal studies of Darley and Latane⁵, Piliavin, Rodin and Piliavin⁶, Latane and Darley⁷ and Darley and Batson⁸ among others have given rise to an abundance of research into the factors that enhance and decrease the likelihood of the intervention of bystanders in an emergency.^{9 10 11 12 13} Some of the factors that have proven to be significant are the number of other non-intervening bystanders that are present¹⁴, time pressure¹⁵ and the acceptance of responsibility by an accepted authority¹⁶, to name a few classic examples. Although people may of course stay silent and refrain from intervening in many situations out of fear for their personal safety, these experiments show that there is more to the story than the threat of personal repercussions. Even though the bystanders in these experiments did not face any real risk, they were often very reluctant to intervene to help an ailing victim.

The study of social norms also has a long tradition in social psychology, starting with Sherif's definition of social norms as the “customs, traditions, standards, rules, values, fashions and all other criteria of conduct which are standardized as a consequence of the contact of the individuals”.¹⁷ Pepitone¹⁸ added that, “by normative, it means that such behavior is more characteristic (e.g. more uniform) of some socio-cultural unit than of individuals observed at random”. However, social norms have commonly been referred to as something more or less static, and research on shifts in norms is largely lacking in the literature. Two notable exceptions are Ervin Staub^{19 20} and Harald Welzer²¹, whose research has described the detrimental effects of the gradual shift that occurs in the norms of genocidal societies.

Staub describes the gradual dynamic process that propels a society towards genocide. He argues that against the backdrop

of a difficult life situation, hurt national pride and a highly hierarchical systemic organization, there occurs a re-socialization of the bystanders. This re-socialization consists in persuading the bystanders to devalue and delegitimize the victims, effectively undermining any feelings of guilt that they may feel in relation to the victims. This pacification of the bystanders gives the authorities breathing space and allows them to prepare their cadre of perpetrators of mass destruction. The passivity and inaction of the bystanders thus encourage the perpetrators to commit further atrocities.

Seemingly small acts, such as complying with the required “Heil Hitler” greeting in Nazi Germany, serve to involve the individual in the system, gradually incriminating the bystanders and thereby further decreasing their tendency to speak up and protest.²² This phenomenon may be explained by the social psychological phenomenon known as the “foot-in-the-door technique”.²³ The foot-in-the-door technique refers to the tendency to comply with ever larger requests, having first implicated oneself through the acceptance of a small one. When attempting to explain why a person fails to intervene when witnessing a cold-blooded murderous action, it is important to realize that this may represent the end product of an extensive process, which starts with a small act of compliance, and which then gradually involves and incriminates the person in the genocidal project. Each incremental step towards obedience and compliance locks the individual more and more tightly into the claws of the malevolent authority until he has passed the point of no return and will be able to mindlessly observe an act which, prior to the start of the process, would have given rise to anger and indignation.

Harald Welzer poses the provocative question of whether the Nazis were really breaking any social norms in their execution of the Holocaust. In his 2007 work *Gärningsmän* (Perpetrators)²⁴, he convincingly shows that the Nazis of the infamous *Einsatzgruppen* were in fact following the social norms that prevailed at the time. The question is thus not what caused them to act in breach of social norms, but rather how the norms were allowed to shift to such a degree that the attempt to annihilate an entire people became normalized.

Welzer vividly describes the alarming speed with which a society can change its norms, values, and ways of treating others. He argues that when an individual is faced with an order to perform an act that he perceives as immoral, he resolves the tug-o-war between morality and group pressure by on the one hand admitting that the act is immoral, but at the same

time seeing the action as being necessary in order to reach a higher goal. This achieves a double purpose. Firstly, his moral qualms over the action convince him that he is a decent and moral person. Secondly, the performance of the action in spite of these difficulties enables him to see himself as industrious and resolute, and as persevering in the face of adversity. In this context, the individual will not feel that he has broken any norms, but rather that he has overcome weaknesses and selfish interests for the sake of a greater goal. Thus, the parties involved in the genocidal situation, as counterintuitive as it may sound, are not breaking any social norms. They are rather obeying the norms and values of society, which have themselves become distorted in a context of extreme violence.

Although Welzer's analysis centres mainly on the *perpetrators* of the Holocaust, the bystanders are also seen as playing an integral part in the norm shifting process. The mass executions of the Einsatzgruppen were often witnessed by a crowd of onlookers, who were fascinated by the bloody spectacle being played out before their eyes. The presence of inactive bystanders created a frame of social confirmation for the executions, thereby contributing to a shift in the prevailing norms, and normalizing the horrific violence that was being perpetrated.²⁵

We generally assume that we perform a certain behaviour because we believe it to be appropriate and right. However, it may be equally likely that we, under certain circumstances, may start believing in the appropriateness and rightness of a morally dubious behaviour as a consequence of having performed it. The theory of Cognitive Dissonance, first expounded by Leon Festinger in 1957, starts from the basic assumption that we have a strong motivation to maintain consistency between our cognitions and behaviours.²⁶ If we experience inconsistency, for example, between an attitude that we hold and a counter-attitudinal behaviour, we experience cognitive dissonance. Dissonance is an unpleasant state to be in and we therefore feel the need to resolve it, either by admitting that the behaviour that we have just performed runs counter to our beliefs and values, or by changing our attitudes to be more in line with the performed behaviour. As a result of the substantial psychological cost of admitting to having performed an action that we find aversive, people tend to modify their attitudes to be in line with their performed behaviour.^{27 28 29 30}

In his seminal work "The Social Animal"³¹, Elliot Aronson links the theory of Cognitive Dissonance to cruelty, using the massacre committed at My Lai during the Vietnam War as an

example. In the My Lai massacre, which took place in March 1968 in South Vietnam, as many as 500 Vietnamese civilians were killed, a majority of whom were women, children and the elderly.³² The My Lai massacre serves as yet another example of an atrocity committed by ordinary individuals who would never dream of endorsing – much less actually performing – such abhorrent behaviour in their everyday lives.

In order to understand how the soldiers of the so-called Charlie Company came to embrace the twisted group norms which in the end enabled them to engage in murder on such a massive scale, Aronson points to the universal human need to convince ourselves that we are decent, fair and reasonable people. In a situation in which you have caused a great deal of real and unambiguous harm to an innocent person, the cognition “I am a decent, fair and reasonable person” becomes dissonant with the cognition “I have hurt an innocent person”. In a setting such as the one in which the soldiers of Charlie Company found themselves, these cognitions presumably came into intense conflict with one another. An effective way to reduce the level of dissonance experienced is to maximize the culpability of the victim of your actions - in other words, to convince yourself that the victim deserved what he got, either because he did something to bring it upon himself, because he would have hurt you if you had not hurt him first, or simply because he is a reprehensible person not deserving of normal human compassion. During the court-martial of Lieutenant William Calley, who acted as a commander in the My Lai massacre, his psychiatrist reported that the lieutenant came to regard the Vietnamese people as “less than human”.³³

A person engaged in a war in which his actions lead to immense human suffering has a very strong motivation to derogate the victims in order to justify his complicity. Indeed, it may be all but inevitable that the enemy is dehumanized in a military conflict setting. After all, in a war, soldiers are commonly ordered to break the most basic of moral commandments – thou shalt not kill – and are likely to be searching incessantly for a way to justify their actions while preserving their self-image as moral individuals.

A recent development in the theory of cognitive dissonance is the concept of *vicarious dissonance*,^{34 35} a concept that is intended to capture the tendency to experience dissonance as a result of having witnessed a significant other performing an immoral act. This concept is very helpful in the endeavour to understand how cognitive dissonance may be at work in the bystander situation. If you witness a valued in-group member perform

an act that runs counter to important group norms and values, then you experience vicarious dissonance on behalf of the other. Vicarious dissonance, like regular dissonance, is an aversive state to be in and begs to be resolved one way or the other. One can, of course, admit that the in-group member performed an immoral act. However, the devaluation or derogation of an in-group member – one of *us* – is very costly to our social identity and we are likely to go to great lengths to avoid it. Another more convenient way to resolve the dissonance is to change one's attitude in order to accommodate the behaviour and make it acceptable.^{36 37}

Vicarious dissonance could thus account for changes in attitudes that result from having passively observed atrocities committed by a member of one's own group. Since the same mechanisms that are at work when it comes to one's own self-image are also active in the bystander situation, being an unresponsive bystander can lead to a shift in one's attitudes and norms in the same way as the actual perpetration of counter-attitudinal behaviours.

Another influential theory for describing the apparent collapse of pro-social norms in the context of the performance of evil is the *Theory of Moral Disengagement* set out by Albert Bandura.³⁸ According to this theory, norms do not actually shift in a context characterised by extreme violence. Instead, the norms are retained, but we employ a number of social psychological strategies in order to convince ourselves that the regular norms do not in fact apply in the specific situation that we find ourselves in. Bandura proceeds from the assumption that we abstain from immoral behaviour and engage in moral behaviour as a result of a system of self regulation. In a healthy situation, the prospect of performing an evil act or of omitting to perform a moral duty creates anticipatory concern and self-condemnation. This results in self-sanctioning and an aversive attitude towards the immoral behaviour and/or an increased resolve to perform the moral behaviour.

However, self-regulatory mechanisms do not come into play unless they are instigated, and there are a number of social psychological manoeuvres that can be used to disengage moral self-sanctioning.³⁹ Instead of describing a shifting of norms, Bandura thus describes how people disengage from the retained norms with the help of a number of central disengagement techniques.

To further elaborate and exemplify some of these techniques, the conduct may be seen to be reconstrued through *moral justification* – the idea that the action serves a higher purpose,

and *euphemistic labelling* – sanitizing the action in more neutral words. The strategy of euphemistic labelling is very common in military settings in general, and in genocides in particular. The seemingly neutral term “the final solution of the Jewish question”, which was used by Nazi officials to refer to their ruthless attempt at the mass extermination of an entire people,⁴⁰ may serve as a salient example. Another way to re-construe the immoral conduct is by means of *advantageous comparison* – comparing the consequences of a violent action to an event that is even more gruesome in nature. In this case, the anticipated consequences of not performing the cruel action are commonly depicted as being graver than the consequences of performing it, as in the case of a surgeon inflicting pain in order to prevent more extensive injury. An example of this can be found in the widespread pre-genocide belief among the Rwandan Hutu majority, that the Tutsi minority would try to exterminate them if they did not kill the Tutsi first. This belief was consciously used by the Hutu leaders in order to defend the necessity of a pre-emptive strike against the Tutsi in the form of ethnic cleansing.⁴¹

In the case of *diffusion* and *displacement of responsibility*, the moral barrier becomes disengaged by people seeing themselves as the tools of someone else’s wishes or assuming that the moral obligation lies with other people. The recurrent claims of the perpetrators of brutal crimes that they were “only following orders” represents a prime example of this disengagement technique. The minimization of the gravity of the consequences of one’s actions is achieved by distancing oneself from these actions, both physically and psychologically. Finally, Bandura describes how the victim can be dehumanized and blamed for his own unfortunate fate. If the victim is seen as being less worthy or even deserving of punishment, then moral inhibitions can become substantially weakened, leaving the field open for violent and sadistic actions.

The theories of cognitive dissonance and moral disengagement can thus go a long way towards explaining how our need to maintain a self-image as consistent, moral, and just actors can cause us to change our attitudes. As social beings, we are also strongly affected by the workings of our surroundings, and are constantly trying to determine how others will judge our actions. People will go to great lengths in order to avoid embarrassment and isolation from their social surroundings. One example of how the fear of embarrassment may be considerably more potent than the fear of over-stepping moral boundaries can be found in the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the leading

architects of the Holocaust. During the trial, it is reported that Eichmann was able to listen to testimony about the most unspeakable cruelty without even the slightest display of emotion, but that he blushed with embarrassment when he was informed that he had forgotten to stand up during the reading of the verdict against him.⁴²

Another theorist who has focused on the fear of embarrassment in explaining the bystander dilemma is Dan Bar-On,⁴³ who has suggested that the idea of “minding your own business” may explain the phenomenon whereby bystanders to a crime tend to employ a strategy of taking the least possible action rather than risking the embarrassment of interfering in a situation that is essentially “none of their business”. There are powerful social psychological processes that hinder people from interrupting situations that do not directly concern them, and people are very reluctant to interfere in other people’s activities unless they absolutely have to. This key element could account for a great deal of the silence and inactivity of bystanders in emergency situations. Bar-On views this norm as having been introduced in order to protect individual integrity at a time when social control was overly strict. He further views it as a trademark of individualistic societies. The norm of minding your own business tells us that we should not interfere in events that are taking place between two unfamiliar people. Overcoming this norm requires a tremendous psychological effort, and the prospect of intervening in a situation where we are not wanted is seen as exceedingly embarrassing and is to be avoided at any cost.

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann has advanced a similar idea in her concept of “the spiral of silence”, a theory which asserts that a person is less likely to voice an opinion on a topic if he feels that he is in the minority, for fear of reprisals or isolation from the majority.^{44 45} This sense of being in a minority is furthermore a subjective perception and may not always be an accurate estimation of the actual norms or viewpoints of one’s peers. In some cases, in fact, a majority of the members of a group may privately reject a certain anti-social norm, but nonetheless incorrectly assume that most other group members accept it. This state is known as *pluralistic ignorance*.^{46 47 48} In other words, in a genocidal situation, a majority of the bystanders may privately hold the belief that the atrocities being committed are immoral, but may mistakenly assume that everyone else finds them acceptable. The individual thus interprets the silence of the majority as proof that a new social norm has been established. This faulty assumption in turn serves to perpetuate the very same anti-social norm.

However, despite the bleak picture that has been painted of the presence of a wide variety of social psychological forces that keep us from intervening in emergencies, bystanders do sometimes step out of their role as passive onlookers and intervene to help those in need. Those bystanders who do step out of their passivity and become helpers can play an equally crucial role in affecting the norm shifting process. The outspoken protest of an influential bystander may serve to strengthen pro-social norms in society and thereby counteract the anti-social norm shifting process.

This has been successfully demonstrated in a series of experiments conducted by a team of researchers at the Universities of St Andrews and Lancaster. These studies explored the positive effects of social identity on bystander intervention and have convincingly shown that a sense of group identification increases the tendency to help in-group members in an emergency, and that increasing the salience of more inclusive and universalistic social identities will serve to extend this helpfulness to other related groups.^{49 50 51 52}

The hypotheses of Levine et al. were applied to genocide in a case study of the actions of Bulgaria during World War II.⁵³ Appeals to nationalism and group belongingness were employed in the official debate regarding the fate of the Bulgarian Jews. This was achieved by the use of different rhetorical techniques, by including the Bulgarian Jews in the in-group as “fellow Bulgarians” and by using national heroes and symbols to rally people around national values of courage, humanism and helping the weak. This campaign resulted in the rescue of a much greater number of Jews in Bulgaria by comparison with most of the other Nazi-occupied countries in Eastern Europe.⁵⁴

Another example of the potential positive influence of a bystander intervention can be found in the book *The German Trauma*,⁵⁵ where Gitta Sereny describes a scene on the streets of Vienna following the Nazi *Anschluss*,⁵⁶ in which a group of Jews were publicly humiliated while a crowd of people stood passively by, observing and laughing. A young Sereny recognized one of the Jews as her old family doctor, who had once saved her life. She pointed this out to one of the uniformed men, who answered with an ominous, “How dare you?!” Sereny replied “How dare *you*?!” whereupon another spectator asked, “Is this what you call our liberation?” Two minutes later, the mob was dispersed and the humiliation aborted. This illustrates the power of the few to influence the many, who may just be looking for an excuse to do the right thing, but who feel trapped by the power of the situation until someone comes along and interrupts it.

This phenomenon is supported by the results of the seminal experiments conducted by Stanley Milgram.⁵⁷ The most often cited result from this series of experiments is that 65 percent of the participants gave innocent victims what they believed to be a lethal shock when induced to do so by a trusted authority figure. It is less well known that a version of the experiment was also conducted with a bystander present who protested at the cruelty of the proceedings. In this experiment, obedience to the malevolent authority shrank to a mere ten percent.⁵⁸

To summarize, we are exceedingly skilled at re-construing a genocidal reality to meet our need to retain a positive self-image as rational, moral and just actors. When we witness a brutal assault on a defenceless victim, we have a wealth of social psychological strategies and manoeuvres at our disposal that can help us to justify why there was never really anything that we could have done, why the violence that we witnessed was not really that bad after all or that the victim in fact brought his predicament upon himself or simply deserved the treatment that he received, as a result of his inferior status as a human being.

The theory of cognitive dissonance, which describes our tendency to change our attitudes in order to accommodate counter-attitudinal behaviour, may be enormously helpful in relation to attempts to understand these social psychological acrobatics.^{59 60}

^{61 62} Another theory that can greatly assist us in understanding these phenomena is Bandura's theory of moral disengagement, which describes how moral qualms about performing a proscribed moral action can be disengaged with the help of a number of social psychological strategies, such as relabeling the atrocities using clinically sounding euphemisms, minimizing one's own role in the atrocities or defending the brutality by reference to a comparison with even more gruesome events.

Further, we may sometimes falsely assume that we are the only ones who find the atrocities abhorrent and that a majority of the other bystanders do not oppose them. We may then refrain from speaking out as a result of fears of social isolation and embarrassment. The resulting silence on the part of the bystanders is consequently mistakenly taken as yet another confirmation of the majority's approval for the violence, which further facilitates the distortion of societal norms.^{64 65 66 67 68 69}

On the other hand, a decisive protest by an influential bystander at an early stage may hinder the outbreak of mass genocide before it is too late. This can be achieved by strengthening a more inclusive and universalistic social identity, or indeed through the powerful effect of an outspoken protest from a brave moral minority.

NOTES

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“IF I LOOK AT THE MASS I WILL NEVER ACT”: PSYCHIC NUMBING AND GENOCIDE

Paul Slovic¹

Preface

The article that follows is a revision of a paper published in 2007 in the journal *Judgment and Decision Making*. In this preface, I would like to relate the paper more specifically to the topic of this volume, “The Bystander.”

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines a “bystander” as: “one present but not taking part in a situation or event.”

When that situation or event is mass murder or genocide, the topics of my article, being an indifferent or apathetic bystander is deplorable. In Elie Wiesel’s view, “Indifference is the epitome of evil.” Yet indifference, tied to inaction, has been the overwhelming (non) response to genocide for more than a century.

In an earlier era, one could perhaps defend one’s inaction on the grounds of not having adequate information about the atrocities that were being committed. But even this is disputed in the case of the United States.² And, certainly, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 and the atrocities in Darfur during the past seven years demonstrate that apathy and nonresponse persist even when information is ample. Despite the failure of mainstream print and television media to give Darfur its due, the duration of the attacks, now in their sixth year, and the development of new forms of communication have actually led to the availability of considerable information about this genocide. Satellites beam images of burning villages to Google Earth.³ Celebrities such as Mia Farrow and George Clooney visit Darfur and Chad and provide regular reports on their websites (www.miafarrow.org, www.notonourwatchproject.org). Eric Reeves publishes meticulously detailed and up-to-date reports about Darfur on his website (www.sudanreeves.org). Former Marine captain Brian Steidle returned from Darfur with hundreds of brutally explicit photographs of the atrocities. Convinced that, when such images were released to the public, troops would be sent in to stop the killing, he publicized his photographs through the news media, a book,⁴ a movie, congressional testimony, and hundreds of speaking

engagements. There was little meaningful response; no serious movement for international intervention. As Richard Just has observed,⁵

... we are awash in information about Darfur... no genocide has ever been so thoroughly documented while it was taking place... but the genocide continues. We document what we do not stop. The truth does not set anybody free.⁶
... how could we have known so much and done so little?⁷

Richard Just's important question demands an answer, which the following article attempts to provide.

To avoid further disasters, we need political restraint on a world scale. But politics is not the whole story. We have experienced the results of technology in the service of the destructive side of human psychology. Something needs to be done about this fatal combination. The means for expressing cruelty and carrying out mass killing have been fully developed. It is too late to stop the technology. It is to the psychology that we should now turn.

1 Introduction

My title is taken from a statement by Mother Teresa: "If I look at the mass I will never act. If I look at the one, I will."

These two observations capture a powerful and deeply unsettling insight into human nature. Most people are caring and will exert great effort to rescue "the one" whose needy plight comes to their attention. These same good people, however, often become numbly indifferent to the plight of "the one" who is "one of many" in a much greater problem. Why does this occur? The answer to this question will help us answer a related question: Why do good people ignore mass murder and genocide?

There is no simple answer to this question. It is not because we are insensitive to the suffering of our fellow human beings – witness the extraordinary efforts we expend to rescue someone in distress. It is not because we only care about identifiable victims, of similar skin color, who live near us: witness the outpouring of aid to victims of the December 2004 tsunami in South Asia. Those of us in the United States cannot simply blame our political leaders. Although President Bush was quite unresponsive to the murder of hundreds of thousands of people in Darfur, it was Clinton who ignored Rwanda, and Roosevelt

who did little to stop the Holocaust. Behind every president who has ignored mass murder there were millions of citizens whose indifference allowed them to get away with it. It is not only the fear of losing soldiers' lives in battle that deters Americans from acting. We have not even taken quite safe steps that could save many lives, such as bombing the radio stations in Rwanda that were coordinating the slaughter by machete of 800,000 people in 100 days, or supporting the forces of the African Union in Darfur, or simply raising our powerful voices in a threatening shout – *Stop that killing!* – as opposed to turning away in silence.

Every episode of mass murder is unique and gives rise to unique social, economic, military, and political obstacles to intervention. But the repetitiveness of such atrocities, ignored by powerful people and nations, and also by the general public, calls for explanations that may reflect some fundamental deficiency in our humanity – a deficiency that, once identified, might possibly be overcome.

One fundamental mechanism that may play a role in many, if not all, episodes of indifference towards mass murder involves the capacity to experience *affect*, the positive and negative feelings that combine with reasoned analysis to guide our judgments, decisions and actions. Research shows that the statistics of mass murder or genocide, no matter how large the numbers, fail to convey the true meaning of such atrocities. The numbers fail to spark emotion or feeling and thus fail to motivate action. The genocide in Darfur is real, but we do not “feel” that reality. I shall explore here suggestions about how we might make genocide “feel real” and motivate appropriate interventions. Ultimately, however, I conclude that we cannot only depend on our feelings about these atrocities but, in addition, we must create and commit ourselves to institutional and political responses based upon reasoned analysis of our moral obligations to stop the mass annihilation of innocent people.

2 The lessons of genocide

Dubinsky⁸ reports a news story from *The Gazette* (Montreal; 29 April 1994, p. A8):

On April 28, 1994, the Associated Press (AP) bureau in Nairobi received a frantic call from a man in Kigali who described horrific scenes of concerted slaughter that had been unfolding in the Rwandan capital “every day, everywhere” for three weeks. “I saw people hacked to death, even babies, month-

old babies... Anybody who tried to flee was killed in the streets, and people who were hiding were found and massacred.”⁹

Dubinsky further notes that:

The caller’s story was dispatched on the AP newswire for the planet to read, and complemented an OXFAM statement from the same day declaring that the slaughter – the toll of which had already reached 200,000 – ‘amounts to genocide.’ The following day, UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali acknowledged the massacres and requested that the Security Council deploy a significant force, a week after the council had reduced the number of UN peacekeepers in Rwanda from 2,500 to 270.

Yet the killings continued for another two and a half months. By mid-July, when the government was finally routed by exiled Tutsi rebels, the slaughter had been quelled, and 800,000 were dead, reinforcements from the United Nations were only just arriving.¹⁰

In his review of the book *Conspiracy to Murder: The Rwandan Genocide*,¹¹ Dubinsky draws an ominous lesson from what happened in Rwanda:

Despite its morally unambiguous heinousness, despite overwhelming evidence of its occurrence (for example, two days into the Rwandan carnage, the US Defense Intelligence Agency possessed satellite photos showing sprawling massacre sites), and despite the relative ease with which it could have been abated (the UN commander in Rwanda felt a modest 5,500 reinforcements, had they arrived promptly, could have saved tens of thousands of lives) – despite all this, the world ignored genocide.¹²

Unfortunately, Rwanda is not an isolated incident of indifference to mass murder and genocide. In a deeply disturbing book entitled *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, the journalist Samantha Power documents in meticulous detail many of the numerous genocides that have occurred during the past century, beginning with the slaughter of two million Armenians by the Turks in 1915 (see Table 1). In every instance, the American response was inadequate. She concludes: “No U.S. president has ever made genocide prevention a priority, and no U.S. president has ever suffered politically for his indifference to its occurrence. It is thus no coincidence that genocide rages on.”¹³

A second lesson to emerge from the study of genocide is that media news coverage is inadequate. The past century has witnessed a remarkable transformation in the ability of the news media to learn about, and report on, world events. The

A Century of Genocide

1915	Armenia
1932–1933	Ukraine
World War II	Nazi Germany/Holocaust
1971	Bangladesh
1975–1979	Cambodia
1990s	Countries in the former Yugoslavia
1994	Rwanda
2000	Zimbabwe
Today	Congo
Today	Darfur
Tomorrow	?

Table 1. A Century of Genocide

System 1 Experiential System	System 2 Analytic System
Affective: pleasure-pain oriented	Logical: reason oriented (what is sensible)
Connections by association	Connections by logical assessment
Behavior mediated by feelings from past experiences	Behavior mediated by conscious appraisal of events
Encodes reality in images, metaphors, and narratives	Encodes reality in abstract symbols, words, and numbers
More rapid processing: oriented toward immediate action	Slower processing: oriented toward delayed action
Self-evidently valid: "experiencing is believing"	Requires justification via logic and evidence

Table 2. Two Modes of Thinking: Comparison of Experiential and Analytic Systems. Source: Adapted from Epstein (1994).

vivid, dramatic coverage of the December 2004 Tsunami in South Asia and the similarly intimate and exhaustive reporting of the destruction of lives and property by Hurricane Katrina in September 2005 demonstrate how thorough and how powerful news coverage of humanitarian disasters can be. But the intense coverage of recent natural disasters stands in sharp contrast to the paucity of reporting on the ongoing genocides in Darfur and other regions in Africa, in which hundreds of thousands of people have been murdered and millions forced to flee their villages and relocate to refugee camps.

Despite this lack of attention from the news media, U.S. government officials have been aware of the mass murders and genocides that have taken place during the past century. Power attempts to explain the failure to act on that knowledge in the following way:

... the atrocities that were known remained abstract and remote... Because the savagery of genocide so defies our everyday experience, many of us failed to wrap our minds around it... Bystanders were thus able to retreat to the “twilight between knowing and not knowing.”¹⁴

I shall argue below that the disengagement exemplified by failing to “wrap our minds” around genocide and by retreating to the “twilight between knowing and not knowing” lies at the heart of our failure to act against genocide. Samantha Power’s insightful explanation is supported by the research literature in cognitive and social psychology, as will be described in the sections that follow.

3 Lessons from psychological research

In 1994, Roméo Dallaire, the commander of the tiny U.N. peacekeeping mission in Rwanda, was forced to watch helplessly as the slaughter he had foreseen and warned about began to unfold. Writing of this massive humanitarian disaster a decade later, he encouraged scholars “to study this human tragedy and to contribute to our growing understanding of the genocide. If we do not understand what happened, how will we ever ensure it does not happen again?”¹⁵

Researchers in psychology, economics and a multidisciplinary field called behavioral decision theory have developed theories and produced findings that are, in part, beginning to explain the pervasive neglect of genocide.

3.1 Affect, attention, information and meaning

My search to identify a fundamental deficiency in human psychology that causes us to ignore mass murder and genocide has led me to a theoretical framework that describes the importance of emotions and feelings in guiding decision making and behavior. Perhaps the most basic form of feeling is affect, the sense (not necessarily conscious) that something is good or bad. Affective responses occur rapidly and automatically – note how quickly you sense the feelings associated with the word “treasure” or the word “hate.” A large research literature in psychology documents the importance of affect in conferring meaning on information and in motivating behavior.¹⁶ Without affect, information lacks meaning and will not be used in judgment and decision making.¹⁷

Affect plays a central role in what have come to be known as “dual-process theories” of thinking. As Seymour Epstein has observed: “There is no dearth of evidence in everyday life that people apprehend reality in two fundamentally different ways, one variously labelled intuitive, automatic, natural, non-verbal, narrative, and experiential, and the other analytical, deliberative, verbal, and rational.”¹⁸

Table 2, adapted from Epstein, further compares these two systems, which Stanovich and West¹⁹ have labelled *System 1* and *System 2*. One of the characteristics of the experiential system is its affective basis. Although analysis is certainly important in many decision-making circumstances, reliance on affect and emotion is generally a quicker, easier, and more efficient way to navigate in a complex, uncertain and sometimes dangerous world. Many theorists have given affect a direct and primary role in motivating behavior. Epstein’s view on this is as follows:

The experiential system is assumed to be intimately associated with the experience of affect,... which refer[s] to subtle feelings of which people are often unaware. When a person responds to an emotionally significant event ... The experiential system automatically searches its memory banks for related events, including their emotional accompaniments... If the activated feelings are pleasant, they motivate actions and thoughts anticipated to reproduce the feelings. If the feelings are unpleasant, they motivate actions and thoughts anticipated to avoid the feelings.²⁰

Underlying the role of affect in the experiential system is the importance of images, to which positive or negative feelings

become attached. Images in this system include not only visual images, important as these may be, but words, sounds, smells, memories and products of our imagination.

In his Nobel Prize Address, Daniel Kahneman notes that the operating characteristics of System 1 are similar to those of human perceptual processes.²¹ He points out that one of the functions of System 2 is to monitor the quality of the intuitive impressions formed by System 1. Kahneman and Frederick²² suggest that this monitoring is typically rather lax and allows many intuitive judgments to be expressed in behavior, including some that are erroneous. This point has important implications, which will be discussed later.

In addition to positive and negative affect, more nuanced feelings such as empathy, sympathy, compassion, sadness, pity and distress have also been found to be critical in motivating people to help others.²³ As Batson notes; "... considerable research suggests that we are more likely to help someone in need when we 'feel for' that person..."²⁴

One last important psychological element in this story is attention. Just as feelings are necessary to motivate helping behavior, attention is necessary for feelings.²⁵ Research shows that attention magnifies emotional responses to stimuli that are already emotionally charged.²⁶ The psychological story can be summarized by the diagram presented in Figure 1. Research that will be described in this paper demonstrates that imagery and feeling remain absent when large losses of life are represented simply as numbers or statistics. Other research shows that attention is greater in relation to individuals and loses focus and intensity when targeted at groups of people.²⁷ The foibles of imagery and attention impact upon feelings in a manner that can help explain apathy toward genocide.

Although the model sketched in Figure 1 could incorporate elements of System 1 thinking, System 2 thinking, or both, a careful analysis by Haidt²⁸ gives priority to System 1. Haidt argues that moral intuitions (akin to System 1) precede moral judgments. Specifically, he asserts that:

... moral intuition can be defined as the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgment, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike) without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence, or inferring a conclusion. Moral intuition is therefore... akin to aesthetic judgment. One sees or hears about a social event and one instantly feels approval or disapproval.

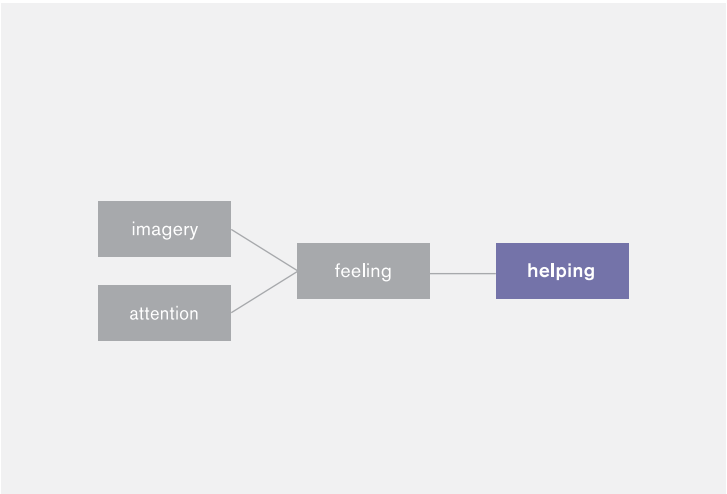


Figure 1: Imagery and attention produce feelings that motivate helping behavior.

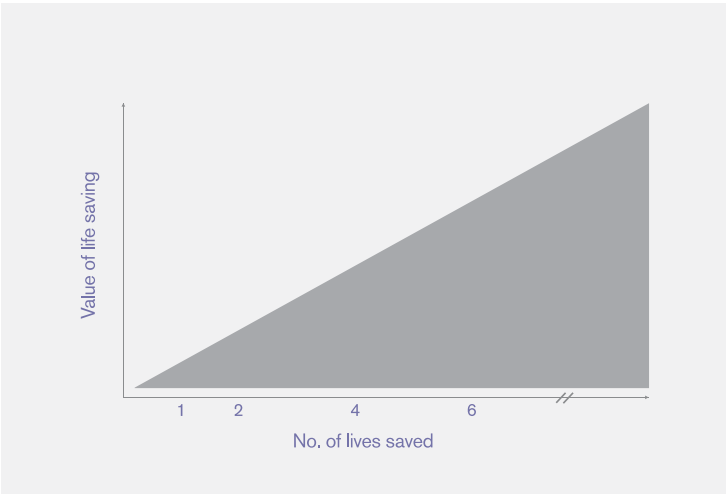


Figure 2: A normative model for valuing the saving of human lives. Every human life is of equal value.

4 Affect, analysis, and the value of human lives

How *should* we value the saving of human lives? If we believe that every human life is of equal value (a view likely endorsed by System 2 thinking), the value of saving N lives is N times the value of saving one life, as represented by the linear function described in Figure 2.

An argument can also be made for a model in which large losses of life are disproportionately more serious because they threaten the social fabric and viability of a community, as depicted in Figure 3.

How *do* we actually value human lives? I shall present evidence in support of two descriptive models, both linked to affect and System 1 thinking, that reflect values for life-saving profoundly different from the normative models shown in Figures 1 and 2. Both of these models are instructive with regard to apathy toward genocide.

4.1 The psychophysical model

Affect is a remarkable mechanism which enabled humans to survive the long course of evolution. Before there were sophisticated analytic tools such as probability theory, scientific risk assessment, and cost/benefit calculus, humans used their senses, honed by experience, to determine whether the animal lurking in the bushes was safe to approach or whether the murky water in the pond was safe to drink. Simply put, System 1 thinking evolved to protect individuals and their small family and community groups from present, visible, immediate dangers. This affective system did not evolve to help us respond to distant, mass murder. As a result, System 1 thinking responds to large-scale atrocities in ways that are less than desirable.

Fundamental qualities of human behavior are, of course, recognized by others besides scientists. The American writer Annie Dillard cleverly demonstrates the limitations of our affective system as she seeks to help us understand the humanity of the Chinese nation: “There are 1,198,500,000 people alive now in China. To get a *feel* for what this *means*, simply take yourself – in all your singularity, importance, complexity, and love – and multiply by 1,198,500,000. See? Nothing to it.”²⁹

We quickly recognize that Dillard is joking when she asserts “nothing to it.” We know, as she does, that we are incapable of *feeling* the humanity behind the number 1,198,500,000. The circuitry in our brain is not up to this task. This same

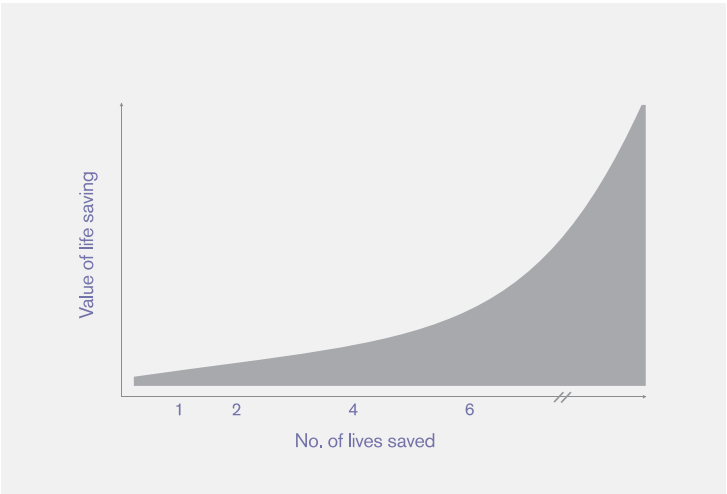


Figure 3: Another normative model: Large losses threaten the viability of the group or society (as with genocide).

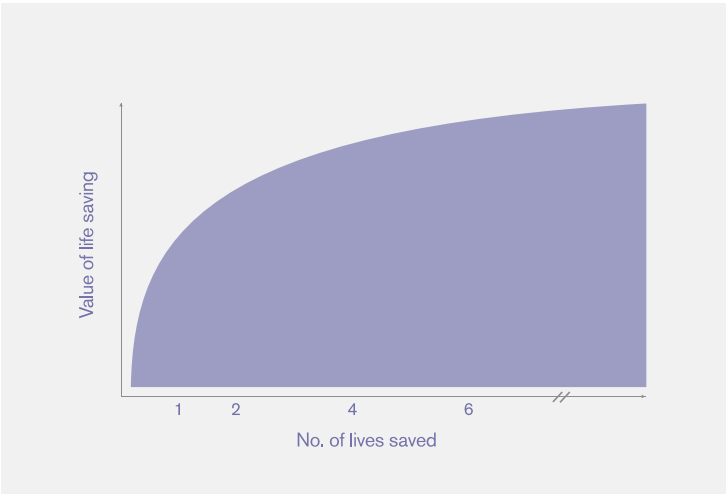


Figure 4: A psychophysical model describing how the saving of human lives may actually be valued.

incapacity is echoed by Nobel prize winning biochemist Albert Szent Gyorgi as he struggles to comprehend the possible consequences of nuclear war: “I am deeply moved if I see one man suffering and would risk my life for him. Then I talk impersonally about the possible pulverization of our big cities, with a hundred million dead. I am unable to multiply one man’s suffering by a hundred million.”

There is considerable evidence that our affective responses and the resulting value we place on saving human lives may follow the same sort of “psychophysical function” that characterizes our diminished sensitivity to a wide range of perceptual and cognitive entities – brightness, loudness, heaviness, and money – as their underlying magnitudes increase.

What psychological principles lie behind this insensitivity? In the 19th century, E. H. Weber and Gustav Fechner discovered a fundamental psychophysical principle that describes how we perceive changes in our environment. They found that people’s ability to detect changes in a physical stimulus rapidly decreases as the magnitude of the stimulus increases.³⁰ What is known today as “Weber’s law” states that in order for a change in a stimulus to become *just noticeable*, a fixed percentage must be added. Thus, perceived difference is a relative matter. To a small stimulus, only a small amount must be added in order for the change to become noticeable. To a large stimulus, a large amount must be added to be noticed.

Our cognitive and perceptual systems thus seem to be designed to sensitize us to small changes in our environment, possibly at the expense of making us less able to detect and respond to large changes. As the psychophysical research indicates, constant increases in the magnitude of a stimulus typically evoke smaller and smaller changes in response. Applying this principle to the valuing of human life suggests that a form of *psychophysical numbing* may result from our inability to appreciate losses of life as they become larger (see Figure 4). The function in Figure 4 represents a value structure in which the importance of saving one life is great when it is the first, or only, life saved, but diminishes marginally as the total number of lives saved increases. Thus, psychologically, the importance of saving one life is diminished against the background of a larger threat – we will likely not “feel” much different, nor value the difference, between saving 87 lives and saving 88, if these prospects are presented to us separately.

Kahneman and Tversky³¹ have incorporated this psychophysical principle of decreasing sensitivity into prospect

theory, a descriptive account of decision making under conditions of uncertainty. One major element of prospect theory is the value function, which relates subjective value to actual gains or losses. When applied to human lives, the value function implies that the subjective value of saving a specific number of lives is greater for a smaller tragedy than for a larger one.

Fetherstonhaugh, Slovic, Johnson and Friedrich³² documented this potential for diminished sensitivity to the value of life – i.e. “psychophysical numbing” – by evaluating people’s willingness to fund various life-saving medical treatments. In a study involving a hypothetical grant funding agency, respondents were asked to indicate the number of lives a medical research institute would have to save to merit the receipt of a \$10 million grant. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents raised their minimum benefit requirements to warrant funding when there was a larger at-risk population, with a median value of 9,000 lives needing to be saved when 15,000 were at risk, compared to a median of 100,000 lives needing to be saved out of 290,000 at risk. By implication, respondents saw saving 9,000 lives in the “smaller” population as more valuable than saving ten times as many lives in the largest.

Several other studies in the domain of life-saving interventions have documented similar psychophysical numbing or proportional reasoning effects.³³ For example, Fetherstonhaugh et al.³⁴ also found that people were less willing to send aid that would save 4,500 lives in Rwandan refugee camps as the size of the camps’ at-risk population increased. Friedrich et al.³⁵ found that people required more lives to be saved to justify mandatory antilock brakes on new cars when the alleged size of the at-risk pool (annual braking-related deaths) increased.

These diverse strategies of life-saving demonstrate that the *proportion* of lives saved often carries more weight than the *number* of lives saved when people evaluate interventions. Thus, extrapolating from Fetherstonhaugh et al., one would expect that, in separate evaluations, there would be more support for saving 80% of 100 lives at risk than for saving 20% of 1,000 lives at risk. This is consistent with an affective (System 1) account, in which the number of lives saved conveys little affect but the proportion saved carries much feeling: 80% is clearly “good” and 20% is “poor.”

Slovic, Finucane, Peters and MacGregor,³⁶ drawing upon the finding that proportions appear to convey more feeling than the number of lives saved, predicted (and found) that college students, in a between-groups design, would more strongly

support an airport-safety measure expected to save 98% of 150 lives at risk than a measure expected to save 150 lives. Saving 150 lives is diffusely good, and therefore somewhat hard to evaluate, whereas saving 98% of something is clearly very good because it is so close to the upper bound on the percentage scale, and is therefore highly weighted in the support judgment. The subsequent reduction of the proportion of 150 lives that would be saved to 95%, 90%, and 85% led to reduced support for the safety measure but each of these percentage conditions still garnered a higher mean level of support than did the “save 150 lives” condition (Figure 5).

This research on psychophysical numbing is important because it demonstrates that feelings necessary for motivating life-saving actions are not congruent with the normative models presented in Figures 2 and 3. The nonlinearity displayed in Figure 4 is consistent with the disregard for incremental loss of life against the background of a large tragedy. It explains why, when hearing that the death toll in Darfur is estimated at 400,000 rather than 200,000, we do not feel any different. However it does not fully explain the utter collapse of compassion represented by apathy toward genocide, because it implies that the response to an initial loss of life will be strong and that it will be maintained as the losses increase. Evidence for a second descriptive model, one better suited to explain the collapse of compassion, follows.

5 Numbers and numbness: Images and feeling

The behavioral theories and data confirm what keen observers of human behavior have known for a long time. Numerical representations of human lives do not necessarily convey the importance of those lives. All too often the numbers represent dry statistics, “human beings with the tears dried off”, that lack feeling and fail to motivate action.³⁷ How can we impart the feelings that are needed for rational action? There have been a variety of attempts to do this that may be instructive. Most of these involve highlighting the images that lie beneath the numbers. As the nature writer and conservationist Rick Bass observes in his plea to conserve the Yaak Valley in Montana: The numbers are important, and yet they are not everything. For whatever reasons, images often strike us more powerfully, more deeply than numbers. We seem unable to hold the emotions aroused by numbers for nearly as long as those of images. We quickly grow numb to the facts and the math.³⁸

Images seem to be the key to conveying affect and meaning, though some types of images are more powerful than others. After struggling to appreciate the mass of humanity in China, Annie Dillard turned her thoughts to April 30, 1991, when 138,000 people drowned in Bangladesh. At dinner, she mentioned to her seven-year-old daughter that it was hard to imagine 138,000 people drowning. “No, it’s easy,” her daughter replied, “Lots and lots of dots in blue water.”⁴⁰ Again we are confronted with impoverished meaning associated with large losses of life.

Other images may be more effective. The organizers of a rally designed to get Congress to do something about the 38,000 deaths caused by handguns each year piled 38,000 pairs of shoes in a mound in front of the Capitol Building. Students at a middle school in Tennessee, struggling to comprehend the magnitude of the holocaust, collected six million paper clips as a centrepiece for a memorial.⁴¹

Probably the most important image to represent a human life is that of a single human face. The journalist Paul Neville writes about the need to probe beneath the statistics of joblessness, homelessness, mental illness and poverty in his home state of Oregon, in order to discover the people behind the numbers – who they are, what they look like, how they sound, what they feel, what hopes and fears they harbor. He concludes: “I don’t know when we became a nation of statistics. But I know that the path to becoming a nation – and a community – of people, is remembering the faces behind the numbers.”⁴² Following the attacks of September 11, 2001, many newspapers published biographical sketches of the victims, together with photos, a dozen or so each day until all of them had been featured.

When it comes to eliciting compassion, the identified individual victim, with a face and a name, has no peer. Psychological experiments demonstrate this clearly, but we all know it as well from personal experience and media coverage of heroic efforts to save individual lives. One of the most publicized events occurred when an 18-month-old child, Jessica McClure, fell 22 feet into a narrow, abandoned well shaft. The world watched tensely as rescuers worked for two days to rescue her. Decades later, the joyous moment of Jessica’s rescue is portrayed with resurrection-like overtones on a website devoted to pictures of the event.⁴³

But the face need not even be human to motivate a powerful intervention. In 2001, an epidemic of foot and mouth disease raged throughout the United Kingdom. Millions of cattle were slaughtered to stop the spread of the contagion. The disease

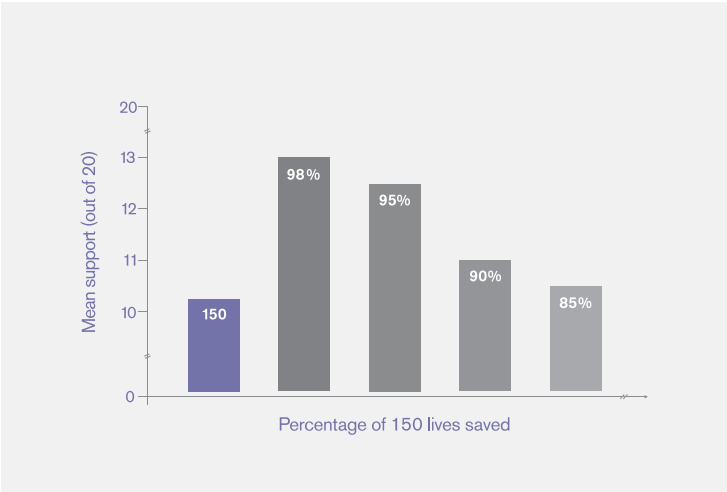


Figure 5: Airport safety study: Saving a percentage of 150 lives receives higher support ratings than does saving 150 lives. *Note.* Bars describe mean responses to the question, “How much would you support the proposed measure to purchase the new equipment?” The response scale ranged from 0 (*would not support at all*) to 20 (*very strong support*). Source: Slovic et al.

Statistical Lives

- Food shortages in Malawi are affecting more than 3 million children.
- In Zambia, severe rainfall deficits have resulted in a 42 percent drop in maize production from 2000. As a result, an estimated 3 million Zambians face hunger.
- Four millions Angolans – one third of the population – have been forced to flee their homes.
- More than 11 million people in Ethiopia need immediate food assistance.

Identifiable Lives

Rokia, a 7-year-old girl from Mali, Africa is desperately poor and faces a threat of severe hynger or even starvation. Her life will be changed for the better as a result of your financial gift. With your support, and the support of other caring sponser, Save the Children will work with Rokia's family and other members of the community to help feed her, provide her with education, as well as basic medical care and hygiene education.

Figure 6. Donating money to save statiscal and identified lives. Reprinted from Small et al. (2006), Copyright (2006), with permission from Elsevier.

waned and animal rights activists demanded an end to further killing. But the killings continued until a newspaper photo of a cute twelve-day-old calf named Phoenix being targeted for slaughter led the government to change its policy. Individual canine lives are highly valued, too. A dog stranded aboard a tanker adrift in the Pacific was the subject of one of the most costly animal rescue efforts ever. An Associated Press article disclosed that the cost of rescue attempts had already reached \$48,000 and the Coast Guard was prepared to spend more, while critics argued that the money would be better spent on children who go to bed hungry.⁴⁴

In a bizarre incident that nonetheless demonstrates the special value of an individual life, an article in the BBC News online edition of November 19, 2005, reports the emotional response in the Netherlands to the shooting of a sparrow that trespassed onto the site of a domino competition and knocked over 23,000 tiles. A website was set up in tribute to the bird and attracted tens of thousands of hits. The head of the Dutch Bird Protection Agency, appearing on television, said that although it was a very sad incident, it had been blown out of all proportion. "I just wish we could channel all this energy that went into one dead sparrow into saving the species," he said.⁴⁵

Going beyond faces, names and other simple images, writers and artists have long recognized the power of narrative to bring feelings and meaning to tragedy. Barbara Kingsolver makes this point eloquently in her book *High Tide in Tucson*:

The power of fiction is to create empathy. It lifts you away from your chair and stuffs you gently down inside someone else's point of view... A newspaper could tell you that one hundred people, say, in an airplane, or in Israel, or in Iraq, have died today. And you can think to yourself, "How very sad," then turn the page and see how the Wildcats fared. But a novel could take just one of those hundred lives and show you exactly how it felt to be that person rising from bed in the morning, watching the desert light on the tile of her doorway and on the curve of her daughter's cheek. You could taste that person's breakfast, and love her family, and sort through her worries as your own, and know that a death in that household will be the end of the only life that someone will ever have. As important as yours. As important as mine.⁴⁶

Showing an insight into the workings of our affective system as keen as any derived from the psychologist's laboratory, Kingsolver continues:

Confronted with knowledge of dozens of apparently random disasters each day, what can a human heart do but slam its

doors? No mortal can grieve that much. We didn't evolve to cope with tragedy on a global scale. Our defense is to pretend there's no thread of event that connects us, and that those lives are somehow not precious and real like our own. It's a practical strategy, to some ends, but the loss of empathy is also the loss of humanity, and that's no small tradeoff.

Art is the antidote that can call us back from the edge of numbness, restoring the ability to feel for another.⁴⁷

Although Kingsolver is describing the power of fiction, the non-fictional narrative can be just as effective. *The Diary of Anne Frank* and Elie Weisel's *Night* certainly convey, in a powerful way, the meaning of the Holocaust statistic "six million dead".

6 The collapse of compassion

Vivid images of recent natural disasters in South Asia and the American Gulf Coast, and stories of individual victims brought to us through relentless, courageous, and intimate news coverage, certainly unleashed a tidal wave of compassion and humanitarian aid from all over the world. Private donations to the victims of the December 2004 tsunami exceeded \$1 billion. Charities such as Save the Children have long recognized that it is better to entrust a donor with a single, named child to support than to ask for contributions to the bigger cause. Perhaps there is hope that vivid, personalized media coverage of genocide could motivate intervention.

Perhaps. But again we should look to research to assess these possibilities. Numerous experiments have demonstrated the "identifiable victim effect" that is also so evident outside the laboratory. People are much more willing to aid identified individuals than unidentified or statistical victims.⁴⁸ Small, Loewenstein and Slovic⁴⁹ gave people leaving a psychological experiment the opportunity to contribute up to \$5 of their earnings to Save the Children. The study consisted of three separate conditions: (1) identifiable victim, (2) statistical victims, and (3) identifiable victim with statistical information. The information provided for the identifiable and statistical conditions is shown in Figure 6. Participants in each condition were told that "any money donated will go toward relieving the severe food crisis in Southern Africa and Ethiopia." The donations in fact went to Save the Children, but they were earmarked specifically for Rokia in Conditions 1 and 3 and not specifically earmarked in Condition 2. The average donations are presented in Figure 7. Donations in response to the

identified individual, Rokia, were far greater than donations in response to the statistical portrayal of the food crisis. Most important, however, and most discouraging, was the fact that coupling the statistical realities with Rokia's story significantly *reduced* the contributions to Rokia. Alternatively, one could say that using Rokia's story to "put a face on the statistical problem" did not do much to increase donations (the difference between the mean donations of \$1.43 and \$1.14 was not statistically reliable).

Small et al.⁵⁰ also measured feelings of sympathy toward the cause (Rokia or the statistical victims). These feelings were most strongly correlated with donations when people were faced with an identifiable victim.

A follow-up experiment by Small et al. provided additional evidence for the importance of feelings. Before being given an opportunity to donate, study participants were either primed to feel ("Describe your feelings when you hear the word 'baby'", and similar items) or to answer five questions such as "If an object travels at five feet per minute, then by your calculations how many feet will it travel in 360 seconds?" Priming analytic thinking (calculation) reduced donations to the identifiable victim (Rokia) relative to the feeling-based-thinking prime. Yet the two primes had no distinct effect on statistical victims, which is symptomatic of the difficulty in generating feelings for such victims.

Annie Dillard reads in her newspaper the headline: "Head Spinning Numbers Cause Mind to Go Slack". She struggles to think straight about the great losses that the world ignores: "More than two million children die a year from diarrhea and eight hundred thousand from measles. Do we blink? Stalin starved seven million Ukrainians in one year, Pol Pot killed two million Cambodians..." She writes of "compassion fatigue" and asks, "At what number do other individuals blur for me?"⁵¹

An answer to Dillard's question is beginning to emerge from behavioral research. Studies by Hamilton and Sherman⁵² and Susskind et al.⁵³ have found that a single individual, unlike a group, is viewed as a psychologically coherent unit. This leads to more extensive processing of information and clearer impressions about individuals than about groups. Kogut and Ritov⁵⁴ hypothesized that the processing of information related to a single victim might be fundamentally different from the processing of information concerning a group of victims. They predicted that people will tend to feel more distress and compassion when considering an identified single victim than when considering a group of victims, even if these are identified,

resulting in a greater willingness to help the identified individual victim.

Kogut and Ritov⁵⁵ tested their predictions in a series of studies in which participants were asked to contribute to a costly life-saving treatment needed by a sick child or a group of eight sick children. The target amount needed to save the child (children) was the same in both conditions, 1.5 million Israeli Shekels (about \$300,000). All contributions were actually given to an organization that helps children with cancer. In addition to deciding whether or how much they wanted to contribute, participants in some studies rated their feelings of distress (feeling worried, upset, and sad) in relation to the sick child (children).

The mean contributions to the group of eight and to the individuals taken from the group respectively are shown in Figure 8 for one of the studies by Kogut & Ritov.⁵⁶ Contributions to the individuals in the group, as individuals, were far greater than were contributions to the entire group. In a separate study, ratings of distress (not shown in the figure) were also higher in the individual condition.

But could the results presented in Figure 9 be explained by the possibility that donors believed that families in the group condition would have an easier time obtaining the necessary money which, in fact, involved a smaller amount per child in that condition? Further testing ruled out this explanation. For example, Kogut and Ritov asked people to choose between donating to a single child from among the eight or donating to the remaining seven children. A much larger proportion (69%) chose to donate to the group, demonstrating a sensitivity to the number of victims in need that was not evident in the non-comparative evaluations. Kogut and Ritov concluded that the greater donations given to the single victim most likely stem from the stronger emotions evoked by such victims in conditions where donors evaluated only a single child or only the group.

Recall Samantha Power's assertion that those who know about genocide somehow "fail to wrap their minds around it." Perhaps this is a layperson's terminology for the less coherent processing of information about groups observed by Hamilton and Sherman⁵⁷ and Susskind et al.⁵⁸ And perhaps the beginning of this failure is evident with as few as eight victims.

Or perhaps the deterioration of compassion may appear in groups as small as two persons! A recent study suggests that this may be the case. Västfjäll, Peters and Slovic⁵⁹ decided to test whether the effect found by Kogut and Ritov would also occur in relation to donations to two starving children.

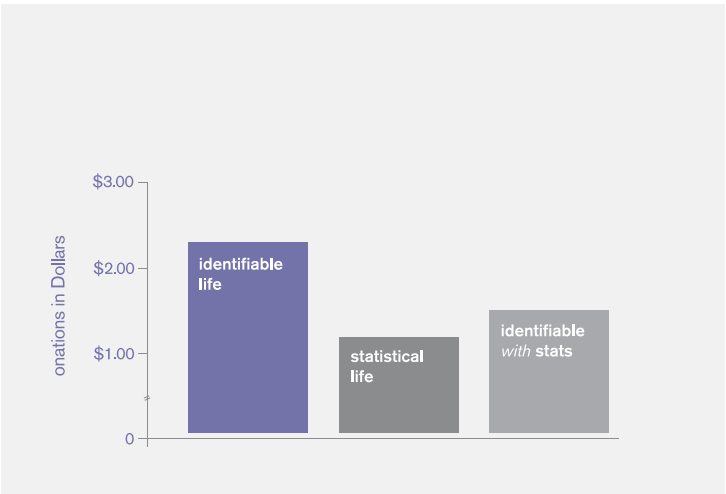


Figure 7: Mean donations. Source Small et al. (2007, op cit.).

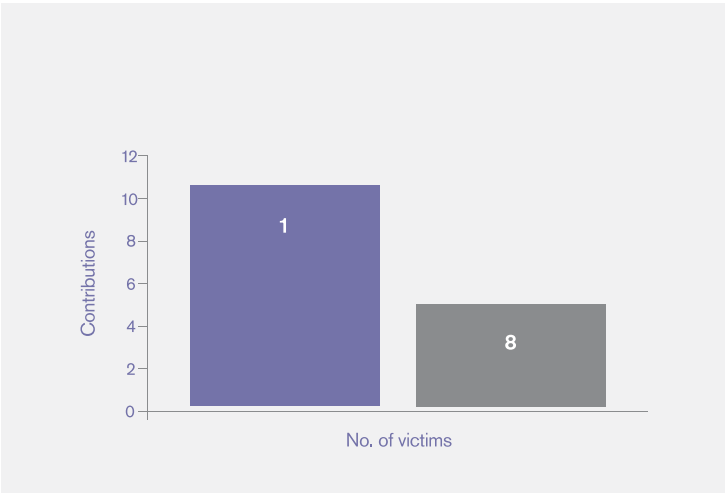


Figure 8: Mean contributions to individuals and their group. Source: Kogut & Ritov ("The Singularity").

Following the protocol designed by Small et al.,⁶⁰ they gave one group of Swedish students the opportunity to contribute their earnings from another experiment to Save the Children to aid Rokia, whose plight was described in the way presented in Figure 6. A second group was offered the opportunity to contribute their earnings to Save the Children to aid Moussa, a seven-year-old boy from Mali (photograph provided) who was similarly described as being in need of food aid. A third group was shown the vignettes and photos of Rokia and Moussa and was told that any donation would go to both of them, i.e. to Rokia *and* Moussa. The donations were real and were sent to Save the Children. Participants also rated their feelings about donating on a 1 (*negative*) to 5 (*positive*) scale. Affect was found to be least positive in the combined condition, and donations were smaller in that condition (see Figure 9). In the individual-child conditions, the size of the donation made was strongly correlated with rated feelings ($r = .52$ for Rokia; $r = .52$ for Moussa). However this correlation was much reduced ($r = .19$) in the combined condition.

As unsettling as the valuation of life-saving portrayed by the psychophysical model in Figure 4 may be, the studies just described suggest an even more disturbing psychological tendency. Our capacity to feel is limited. To the extent that the valuation of life-saving depends on feelings driven by attention or imagery (recall Figure 1), it might follow the function shown in Figure 10, where the emotion or affective feeling is greatest at $N = 1$ but begins to decline at $N = 2$ and collapses at some higher value of N that becomes simply “a statistic.” In other words, returning to Annie Dillard’s worry about compassion fatigue, perhaps the “blurring” of individuals begins at two! Whereas Robert J. Lifton⁶¹ coined the term “psychic numbing” to describe the “turning off” of feeling that enabled rescue workers to function during the horrific aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing, Figure 10 depicts a form of numbing that is not beneficial. Rather, it leads to apathy and inaction, consistent with what is seen repeatedly in response to mass murder and genocide.

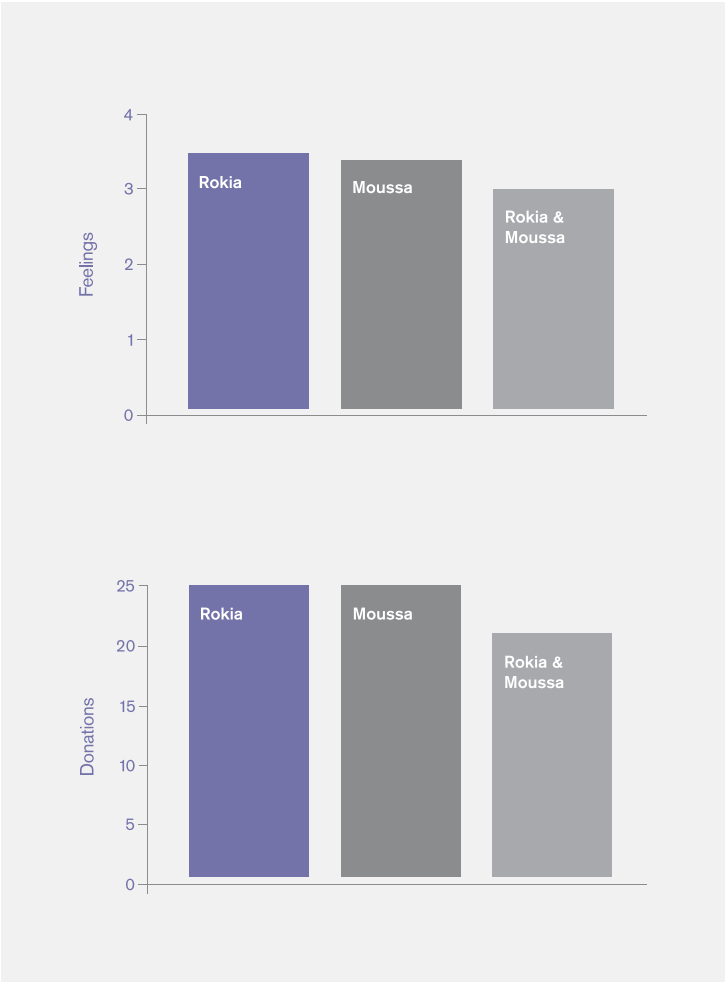


Figure 9: Mean affect ratings (top) and mean donations (bottom) for individuals and their combination. Source: Västfjäll et al. (op cit.).



Figure 10: A model depicting psychic numbing – the collapse of compassion – when valuing the saving of lives.

7 Facing genocide

Clearly there are political obstacles that pose challenges to those who would consider intervention in genocide, and physical risks as well. What I have tried to describe in this paper are the formidable psychological obstacles centred around the difficulties in wrapping our minds around genocide and forming the emotional connections to its victims that are necessary to motivate us to overcome these other obstacles.

Are we destined to stand numbly by and do nothing as genocide rages on for another century? Can we overcome the psychological obstacles to action? There are no simple solutions. One possibility is to infuse System 1 with powerful affective imagery such as that associated with Hurricane Katrina and the South Asian tsunami. This would require pressure on the media to do its job and report the slaughter of thousands of innocent people aggressively and vividly, as though it were real news. Nicholas Kristof, a columnist for the *New York Times*, provides us with a model to be emulated in his persistent and personalized reporting of the genocide in Darfur, but he is almost a lone voice in the mainstream American media. Another way to engage our experiential system would be to bring people from Darfur into our communities and our homes to tell their stories.

But, as powerful as System 1 is, when infused with vivid experiential stimulation (witness the moral outrage triggered by the photos of abuse at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq), it has a darker side. We cannot rely on it. It depends upon attention and feelings that may be hard to arouse and sustain over time for large numbers of victims, not to speak of numbers as small as two. Left to its own devices, System 1 will likely favor individual victims and sensational stories that are closer to home and easier to imagine. It will be distracted by images that produce strong, though erroneous, feelings, like percentages as opposed to actual numbers. Our sizable capacity to care for others may also be overridden by more pressing personal interests. Compassion for others has been characterized by Batson, O'Quin, Fultz, Vanderplas and Isen as "a fragile flower, easily crushed by self-concern".⁶² Faced with genocide, we cannot rely on our moral intuitions alone to guide us to act properly.

A more promising path might be to force System 2 to play a stronger role, and not just in providing us with reasons why genocide is wrong – these reasons are obvious and System 1 will appropriately sense their moral messages.⁶³ Instead, as Kahneman⁶⁴ argues, one of the important functions of System

2 is to monitor the quality of the mental operations and overt behaviors produced by System 1.⁶⁵

Most directly, reasoned analysis of the sobering messages contained in this paper should make it clear that we need to create laws and institutions that will *compel* appropriate action when information about genocide becomes known. I have drawn upon common observation and behavioral research to argue that we cannot depend only upon our moral feelings to motivate us to take proper actions against genocide. This places the burden of response squarely upon the shoulders of moral argument and international law. The genocide convention, implemented through the United Nations, was supposed to meet this need, but it has not been effective. It is time to re-examine this failure in light of the psychological deficiencies described here and to design legal and institutional mechanisms that will enforce a proper response to genocide and other crimes against humanity.

NOTES

- 1 I wish to thank the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and its president, Paul Brest, for support and encouragement in the writing of this paper. Additional support was provided by the National Science Foundation through grant SES-0241313. Many individuals have provided constructive criticism and helpful suggestions on earlier drafts as well as other valuable intellectual and logistical support. A partial list includes Dan Ariely, Peter Ayton, Jon Baron, Jon Haidt, Derek Jinks, Tehila Kogut, George Loewenstein, Ruth Marom, Ellen Peters, Ilana Ritov, Nils Eric Sahlin, Peter Singer, Scott Slovic, Deborah Small, Ola Svenson, Daniel Västfjäll, Leisha Wharfield and an anonymous reviewer. Address: Decision Research, 1201 Oak St., Suite 200, Eugene, OR, 97401, USA. Email: pslovic@uoregon.edu
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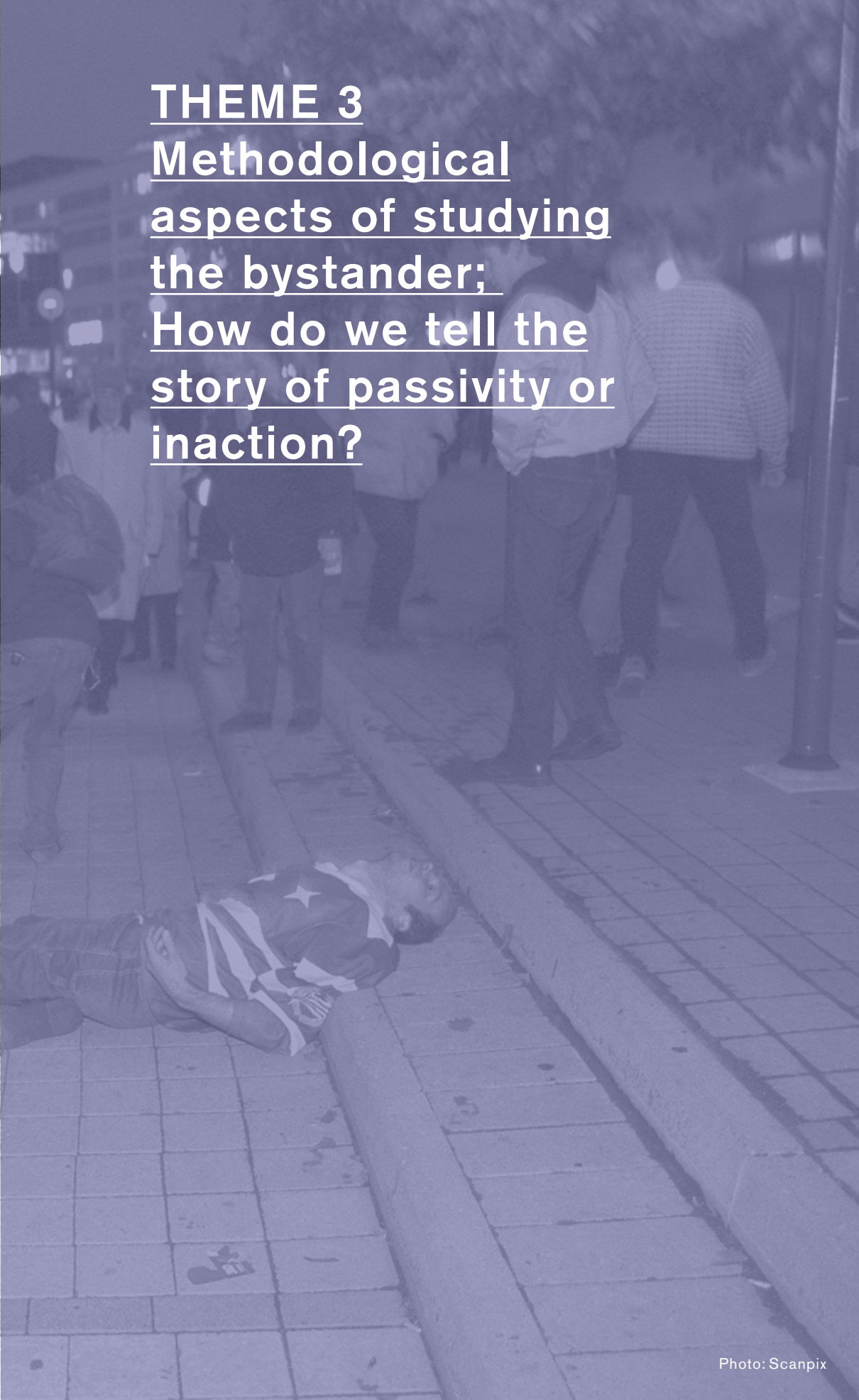
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THEME 3
Methodological
aspects of studying
the bystander;
How do we tell the
story of passivity or
inaction?



MIND THE GAP(S)

Between Memory, History, and Philosophy

Thomas Brudholm

This article presents a philosophical response to historians' fatigue at certain shallow and judgemental trends in representations and discussions of the 'bystanders' to the Holocaust.¹ Several historians have bemoaned the gap between what the historian understands and what the broader public allegedly desires. On one side of this gap we find the scholarly search for nuance and the scholar's appreciation of ambiguity and complex explanation – the desire, for example, to explore the 'grey zone' between culpable perpetrators and innocent bystanders. On the other we find black-or-white representations of the bystanders, which either condemn them as accomplices or sanitize them as saints. Although this article endorses the discontented historians' critique of hasty and non-historical judgements, of refusals to consider the shades of grey, of sentimentalist commemorations and so on, it also turns the critical perspective back upon the historians themselves and on the ways in which they might unwittingly be maintaining the gap – not so much as a result of what is actually said in historians' writings and debates on the bystanders, but rather as a result of what is *not* addressed or considered. Therefore, and somewhat ironically, the following considerations as to how the gap could be bridged might appear to come dangerously close to the kind of shadow-boxing and normative thinking that have been identified by several historians as the pitfall of much historiography of Holocaust bystanders.²

Nevertheless, in this article I would like to make a plea that historians consider adopting a more nuanced acknowledgement of different modalities of moral concern and emotional response. More specifically, one finds first a suggestion not to forget that there is more to moral concern and reflection than the 'moralistic' tendencies present in many writings on bystanders. This is followed by an appeal to acknowledge that although emotions can undoubtedly assume excessive or irrational forms, emotion as such is not a phenomenon devoid of reason and rationality. Thirdly, the article presents an encouragement not to shy away from a public debate of the moral issues involved in the study of the bystanders – even when the conversation

becomes somewhat 'emotional'. Finally, the article concludes with a few more general thoughts on the potential value of a closer collaboration between philosophers and historians. Whereas the article as a whole is primarily focused on the possible usefulness of philosophy for history, the concluding section very briefly reverses this perspective to consider the ways in which philosophy could profit from history. The article begins, however, with a preliminary stipulation and discussion of the sense in which the term 'bystander' will subsequently be used.

Who is 'a Bystander'?

As has been noted by Deborah Lipstadt, discussions of Holocaust bystanders may include "neutral governments and agencies, Jews living in relative safety, occupied countries, ordinary Germans, and above all, the Allied governments."³ Thus the term 'bystanders' is applied to radically different kinds of agents (individuals as well as groups and organisations) positioned in radically different kinds of relations to ongoing atrocities (from actual witnesses, to what might be labelled 'distant' bystanders in countries far away from the criminal events). Attending to particular bystanders' spatial proximity or distance to the atrocities is clearly only the simplest and most obvious way in which one might try to distinguish between different kinds of relations to the acts of genocide. A number of other factors might also be examined. To exemplify, discussions about bystanders often focus on issues of responsibility, and an exploration along the lines of different categories of responsibility (moral, political and legal or official) would be interesting. Further, arguably our notion of who is a bystander is currently being expanded by the proliferation of 'bystanders by assignment'.⁴ That is to say, actors who are placed in the vicinity – or in the midst – of ongoing or imminent conflicts by official assignment, as international peacekeepers or other kinds of officially mandated 'third parties' to atrocities.⁵

In so far as one is concerned about the anatomy of the concept of the bystander, it is necessary to attend to the quite powerful value judgements that have become associated with the usage of the term. The term 'bystanders' is often used in a pejorative or normative sense, where to label somebody a 'bystander' implies a kind of shaming or a claim of failure. The addressee could and should have done something, yet did not. In this perspective, bystanders are responsible for 'sins' of omission

– for example for prioritising their own security or for being insensitive to the suffering of others. The moral denunciation or disappointment directed at the bystanders is often quite radical. One should “never but never”, as Yehuda Bauer has put it, “be a bystander”.⁶ Indeed, observing the “fact that so many people do not come to the aid of others under attack”⁷ can be truly depressing. At the same time, the bystander concept can also be used in a more analytical and comprehensive sense, i.e. in a way where the question about the moral standing of the bystander is not predetermined. In this usage, the term ‘bystanders’ encompasses the entire group of people who are neither perpetrators nor victims and thus not only those whom we are prone to blame as facilitators and accomplices. Using this broader sense of the term, a volume of ‘bystander studies’ can, for example, include articles on helpers and rescuers.⁸ If Yehuda Bauer’s statement exemplifies the pejorative use of the term, a statement by Deborah Lipstadt may function to provide an example of the more ambiguous use of the concept: “In the face of unmitigated evil, a bystander who takes no action becomes a facilitator.”⁹ This implies that one can be a ‘bystander’ and take action. Thus, the question of whether someone is a bystander is logically and normatively distinct from the question of how the person should be appraised. Arguing the case for the pejorative use of the concept, one could say that even though it must be acknowledged that not all bystanders to the Holocaust are blameworthy, the overwhelming majority certainly are. Moreover, the broader use of the term could be said to be *too* broad: the ‘rescuer’ is not a species of bystander, but a completely different category, and in so far as we want to subsume bystanders (in the pejorative sense) and rescuers under one concept, we would do better to revert to something like ‘third parties’. However, in this article I will be using the term in its broad sense. In so far as one of the problems associated with current debates and representations of bystanders has to do with an excess of cheap and hasty judgement, talking about ‘bystanders’ in the broad sense has a significant merit, since it means that questions about their moral standing are not decided *a priori*. Irrespective of whether one is speaking of the bystander position in general or of particular instances, the broad usage means that the issue of blameworthiness is not predetermined and that it is impossible, without contextual and moral qualifications, to say that one should never be a bystander. Furthermore, understanding ‘the bystanders’ requires attention to the entire range of acts, omissions and attitudes from passivity and indifference to intervention and solidarity. This is, I think, a

relevant point even if one is specifically interested in the sort of bystander who becomes a facilitator. Still, it remains somewhat counterintuitive to classify 'rescuers' as a species of bystanders: do bystanders who abandon passivity 'move' into a completely different category (for example, rescuers), or does such behaviour simply qualify the *kind* of bystander with which one is confronted (for example, the 'species' of responsive bystanders)? For the purposes of this article, these preliminary considerations will hopefully suffice.

It is, however, impossible to avoid noting that we have no more than scratched the surface of a number of challenging conceptual issues associated with different usages of the concept of 'bystanders' in relation to the Holocaust. As with so many other concepts that we employ in order to attempt to deal with the Holocaust, the practical origins of the use of the 'bystander' concept lie in a completely different and far less complex social context. Conventionally, a 'bystander' is somebody who is 'present without taking part in what is occurring'.¹⁰ The concept is relatively clear and functional as long as we are dealing with an onlooker to a single violent attack or accident. Yet, in relation to the enormity of the Nazi crimes against humanity, the notion of being present *at the scene* of a crime is clearly inapplicable (and the same goes for the implied notion of the bystander as a person). Moreover, the distinction between 'taking part' and 'not taking part' can be hard to draw in the face of collective mass crimes. Did Danish companies or industries that delivered goods to Nazi Germany 'take part' in the Holocaust, for example?¹¹ Historical case studies exploring the particular conditions and challenges associated with different types of bystanders are of course important, but so is the exploration of the very concept of the 'bystander', as well as the act of 'bystanding'. It is not clear to me whether attempts to clarify what we mean by these categories of witnessing or distanced presence should aim to produce a universal definition, or should rather aim to clarify the tensions and similarities that exist among a whole cluster of possible meanings. Sometimes, I cannot help wondering whether attempts to introduce nuances and distinctions into our notions of 'the bystander' are a little like rearranging the chairs on the deck of the Titanic – only treating the symptoms of a problem that should in fact be dealt with at the level of the more basic tripartite classificatory scheme of which the bystander category is a part. With this mixture of clarification and scepticism, we may return to the substantive issues referred to above.

'Pissing in the Wind'¹²

If there is one thing a philosopher is traditionally disposed to understand, it must be the scholars' sense of a gap between the understanding they have acquired and what allegedly less 'enlightened' people – the dwellers down in Plato's cave – seem to understand or crave. Reading the interesting articles edited by David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine in *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation*, I – a philosopher by training – could not help noticing the repeated expressions of frustration and fatigue at the lack of subtlety and nuance in both public and scholarly perspectives on Holocaust 'bystanders'. According to one of the editors, Paul A. Levine, the rise in the level of interest in the Holocaust witnessed over recent years has not been accompanied by a corresponding sophistication in the general historical consciousness of this aspect of the past:

[T]here remains a persistent and troubling gap between what historians understand about the event – its almost endless nuances and details – and what even the literate public appears to understand. This gap between history and memory seems especially wide regarding the bystander in Holocaust history.¹³

Similarly, in the anthology's most poignant perspective on this 'gap', Tony Kushner concludes that the search for nuance – paradoxically – “seems to slip further away as time progresses.”¹⁴ The tenor of Kushner's essay is clearly indicated by its title: “‘Pissing in the Wind’? The Search for Nuance in the Study of Holocaust ‘Bystanders’”. Yet at least as telling of Kushner's frustrations is the continued appearance in his essay of a certain (imagined) we-community – that is, the mentality against which the historian's search for nuance has to struggle: “we still prefer our killers to be presented as evil sadists”; “we like our bystanders to be as bifurcated as the categories of victim and perpetrator”, and “we ... increasingly take refuge in the creation of plaster saints.”¹⁵ Kushner argues that current representations of bystanders gloss over the very ambiguities and dilemmas that make the subject matter as interesting and relevant as it actually is. But Kushner is not only up against public perceptions and popular representations. Reviewing the historiography of the bystanders, he argues that much scholarly work is analytically unhelpful or “marred not just by its accusatory nature but by its lack of any wider sense of context.”¹⁶

Calls for nuance and cautions against self-righteous,

hypocritical or moralistic condemnation, against context insensitivity and non-historical 'presentism' are recurrent in historians' assessments of the historiography of 'bystander' history.¹⁷ In *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective*, Yehuda Bauer pointed to the value of differentiation (between motivations, actions, circumstances) and cautioned against generalisations that are "easy to utter and much more difficult to defend."¹⁸ About ten years later, in *The Holocaust in History*, Michael R. Marrus cautioned against a "strong tendency to condemn, rather than to explain" and against the pitfall of evaluating inaction and indifference from the vantage point of the present: "The temptation is the historians' form of hubris: to yield fully to it is to denounce the characters we describe for not being like ourselves."¹⁹

Let me, as a final example, turn to current public debates in Denmark, where the historian Hans Kirchhoff, in a manner comparable to Kushner and Marrus, has also urged caution against retrospective and hasty judgement, and against idealism and romanticism in the national narrative.²⁰ Over the last couple of years, Denmark's public debate has been marked by a number of heated moral and political debates on the acts and attitudes of the Danish government, public, industry and so forth during the Holocaust. The nation appears to be in the middle of a deconstruction of the traditional collective narrative or self-image, and in the course of the public debates about the national past, the already mentioned antagonisms between the historian's search for nuance and appreciation of ambiguity, and (political) abuses of the past have been played out. Although he has not invoked the sense of 'pissing in the wind', Hans Kirchhoff has complained that there is a danger that an old myth (of a heroic and humanistic nation unified in as much resistance as possible) will simply be replaced by a moralistic counter-myth rather than by a sober and realistic historical consciousness. The problem, according to Kirchhoff and other historians, is not the judgement of the past as such, but the historically unenlightened and moralistic form taken by some such judgements.²¹

The tendencies targeted by the historians are genuinely worthy of criticism, and I understand historians' fatigue in the face of developments that are apparently intensifying the problem. It is understandable that an atrocious political past cannot be dealt with in a detached and nuanced way only ten years after the horrors took place. But half a century after the Holocaust, one might perhaps expect otherwise. However, in the context of the holocaust, the passing of time in many ways

does not seem to work in its usual – diminishing – way. This being said, I will now turn the focus back upon the discontented historians themselves. In line with the three points to be argued, I will consider three ways in which historians could, in my opinion, try to reduce the above-mentioned sense of a ‘gap’. Firstly and secondly, I will present a number of considerations relating to a distinction between different modalities of morality and emotion; thirdly, I will suggest the need to engage, and the value of engaging, with philosophers in public reflection over the moral issues arising from the historical study of bystanders. As may already be clear, the aim is not to advocate any substantial methodological revisions of what it means to ‘do history’. The concerns addressed here lie on the margins of the historical craft. In so far as they are addressed in the writings of historians, it is most often in prefaces, introductions, conclusions and postscripts, or in oral addresses and debates with the wider public. The proposed acknowledgement of certain distinctions and particular kinds of reasoning has, rather, to do with the interface between history and other disciplines or other approaches to the past.

Beyond Moralism

Evidently, sober and thoughtful writing on the history of bystanders is incompatible with the moralistic attitudes and (ab)uses of history that are criticised by Kirchhoff, Kushner, Marrus and others. The prism through which the scholarly meritorious historian represents the past cannot go together with the ‘monochromatic’ perspective of the enraged and accusatory moralist. The search for nuance and comprehensive explanatory analyses cannot be reconciled with excessive and hasty urges to condemn, or with a craving for happy endings and the like. Such tendencies appear shallow and regrettable irrespective of whether one is assessing them as an historian or as a moral philosopher. Stipulating ‘moralism’ as morality badly practised, the moral philosopher may say that such tendencies constitute instances of moralism rather than of morality proper. From Socrates to the present, moral philosophy has focused critical attention on the nature and value of our moral concerns and on the fallacies and problems of our moral thinking. Moralism is related to the making of sweeping and hasty judgements, to a disregard of relevant contextual circumstances, to a blindness to one’s own shortcomings and to an urge to blame and judge that is not balanced by the exercise of empathy. Just as the historian

might regret the degree to which crude approaches to history simplify the past and its implications, so moral philosophers may regret the degree to which moralism gives ethics a bad name. Clearly the historian and the moral philosopher should be able to work together in the struggle against moralistic tendencies in the historiographical and public debates on the bystanders to the Holocaust. This requires, of course, that philosophers begin taking history seriously, but this is an issue that should be dealt with separately. Here I will limit my focus to historians and historiography.

It seems to me that historians sometimes fail to acknowledge that there is more to moral concern and reflection than is manifested in their moralistic instances. In other words, the legitimate struggle against moralism sometimes collapses the difference between moralism and more sober forms of moral concern and reflection. For example, when Tony Kushner talks of “the moral concern about the bystander”, all we hear about is a concern that comes out of a “rather complacent assumption”.²² More generally speaking – and on the basis of having followed historians’ debates about their own works and the public use of history – I believe that what is at work here is a reductive picture of our alternatives for approaching the past. Either, it seems, one can adopt the properly detached, analytical and objective position, or one indulges in the moralistic flood of indignation and accusation. Thus, critiques of moralistic tendencies are not supplemented with reflections about the nature and place of well-reasoned, context-sensitive and balanced performances of moral judgement or ethical reflection in relation to the historian’s concern with the past. In my experience, in so far as the critical assessments of moralistic leanings are supplemented with normative reflections, historians are more likely to remind their audiences about the values of description and explanation over condemnation and accusation. Alternatively, audiences may be cautioned not to judge at all or to judge only with great care and circumspection (the latter is of course uncontroversial).

What might be termed methodological amorality comes at a price, because there are a number of ‘non-complacent’ reasons for moral concern about bystanders. Indeed, to the degree that morality is about being concerned with the prevention of wrongdoing and suffering, ‘the bystanders’ constitute a topic of significant moral concern. The ways in which bystanders respond to ongoing atrocities are part of what determines how much violence and suffering a situation will come to involve.²³ Indeed, what might drive some historical studies of the bystanders is a genuinely moral concern, arising from the

conviction that a deeper understanding of the dynamics and political conditions of passivity and rescue could prove relevant to current endeavours focused on the prevention of genocide. The moral concern about bystanders might alternatively emerge from notions about what it is good or bad to be; that is, from some form of virtue ethics perspective. To stand passively or indifferently by when evil prevails may be viewed as reflecting an utterly loathsome moral character. The reasons for a moral concern with the bystanders to the Holocaust may also be rooted in a particular national process of reconciliation or in attempts to face and deal with the past.²⁴ Moreover, moral concern over bystanders can easily assume a more philosophically questioning nature. When we face the stories of the bystanders, we are confronted by tragic dilemmas and difficult moral issues, which call for conceptual analysis and reflection over and above any simple appeal to either intuition or specific moral theories. On the basis of what kinds of more general moral frameworks do common attitudes to bystanding make sense? What, most basically, do we owe each other? And is there a *duty* to rescue or is rescue in the face of grave danger a matter of so-called supererogation – an act beyond the call of duty?²⁵ In summary, when speaking of ‘moral concern’ in relation to the topic of the bystanders, one should, I think, pay heed to a variety of possible ways in which such concern can materialise, and to a number of motivating sources beyond moralism. I am not implying that Kushner is necessarily unaware of this, simply that his talk of ‘the moral concern about the bystanders’ would benefit from a greater appreciation of nuance.

What difference does the acknowledgement of (or disregard for) the distinction between moralism and more sober forms of moral judgement and reflection make? What are the implications when historians are inarticulate about ethics beyond moralism? In so far as sound varieties of moral concern and reflection remain in the shadow of moralism, the lack of a distinction might prevent us from posing the more interesting questions. When the distinct qualities of more sober moral reasoning disappear into the morass of moralism, the historian risks throwing out a precious baby (conscious attention to one’s moral concerns and well-considered deliberations over the moral issues raised by the study of the past) with the bathwater (moralism). For example, part of Tony Kushner’s concern about bystander historiography and representation can easily be conceptualised as being (genuinely) moral in nature. Kushner desires to prompt self-criticism and sensitivity to the dilemmas faced by the bystanders; his objection to what he calls the ‘balance-sheet

approach' has to do with its blindness to irresolvable tragedy and remainders.²⁶ If this was more explicitly acknowledged, an interesting dialogue might emerge with ethicists concerned about the place of dilemmas and value conflicts in moral thinking. In other words, in so far as the distinction is acknowledged, it becomes possible to both repudiate moralism and at the same time engage more effectively with the ways in which ethics or moral concerns might constitute a part of 'doing history'.²⁷ This is a theoretical-methodological point, but it seems to me to be of practical significance to the question of the perceived 'gap' between 'doing history' and being existentially or morally involved with a past. By acknowledging the reality and legitimacy of genuine moral concern about history (rather than simply or primarily denouncing 'moralistic' forms of concern and thinking), the historian would adopt another position vis-à-vis the morally interested public. More precisely, this would involve a shift from an attitude expressing distance to an attitude allowing for compatibility and, perhaps, overlap – compatibility because a collaboration between ethics and history is not excluded; overlap because it might be the case that some aspects of 'doing history' have more to do with 'doing ethics' than historians are conventionally prone to admit. As long as the public is fed with a discourse that apparently juxtaposes either moralistic or explanatory approaches to history, and as long as the public remains interested in the moral issues arising from history, the gap will be sustained. Thus, there is not only a need to chastise moralism, but also to go – in more elaborate ways – beyond it.

Reasoning with Emotion

Wonder is one of the few emotions not commonly considered to be an obstacle to rational understanding and scholarly debate.²⁸ In relation to our concerns here, and based on my experience of historical research communities, it is my impression that many historians think of emotion, or refer to emotion, as part of an explanation for why a particular debate went in the wrong direction, or as a hint to the reason why a scholarly exchange on a certain issue was more or less impossible to carry through. For example, during a conference on Srebrenica held in Sarajevo in July 2005, only ten years after the genocide, Norman M. Naimark opened a presentation by saying that even when the subject matter still stirs strong emotions of anger and sadness, the historian's task must be to analyse what happened – not to accuse.

Emotion can also be posited as a presumed psychic disturbance that makes reasonable progress difficult, as when a historian suggested that the lack of a serious – historically enlightened – confrontation with the national past (during the Holocaust) in Norway was evidence of some kind of ‘emotional disorder’ in the collective memory of the nation. Indeed, affect may be seen as a central reason for the existence of a gap that distances the ‘cold’ analyses of historians from the emotionally charged memories and concerns of the broader public. In other words, the basic problem with the public concern about the bystanders, and with the moralistic tendencies against which historians object, is the anger or resentment that permeates them; an anger that is revealed in excessively accusatory overtones or in sweeping condemnations and accusations. In relation to the study of rescuers more specifically, the gratitude of those rescued is sometimes seen as explaining their resistance to new and critical scholarly work.

There is a long tradition of viewing the emotions or passions as representing the opposite of reason and scholarly research – as being something totally and inherently irrational. More than this, in so far as emotions are thought only to be expressive of the inner, subjective, feelings of their holders, they may be viewed as disclosing nothing about the world. It seems to me that some historians’ notions of emotions cohere with this conventional perspective. In so far as this is the case, it is not surprising that historians invoke ‘emotion’ to explain the gap between history and memory. However, over recent decades, the nature and value of emotions have become a fashionable theme in philosophy. There is today a rich literature emphasising the mistaken nature of the perspective which views emotions as something antagonistic to thought or as inherently irrational. Emotions, as such, are not irrational either in the sense of being devoid of thought (like impulses), or in the sense of embodying defective thought (like phobias).²⁹ Irrespective of whether the emotion at issue is grief, resentment or gratitude, all these emotions incorporate thoughts or beliefs and evaluations. Indeed, cognition and beliefs play a central role in our identification and experience of specific emotions – resentment, for example, implies the belief that one has been wronged, guilt that one has done wrong. Against this background, emotions can be seen to be open to rational critique and evaluation.³⁰ Hatred is, in part, something we opt into, and a tear (to paraphrase William Blake) is, in part, an intellectual thing.³¹ Evidently none of this excludes the fact that anger, in particular instances, can be irrational or that there are passionate states which, as Kant wrote, “makes reflection impossible”.³²

In so far as historians may often be confronted with rash or irrational emotional responses, the argument that their communicative problems are the result of a clash between reason and irrationality may of course be completely to the point. It is, however, mistaken to pin the blame on emotion as such. The conception of emotions as being inherently irrational is simply a mistake of categories – a species is falsely thought to represent the genus. In this way, the point I would like to argue here is analogous to the point that there is more to morality than moralism. This more complex perspective on the emotions includes a distinction between simply having an emotion and being unreasonably led by an emotion. Having an emotional attitude or understanding of a case does not necessarily imply that one is unable to reason or that one's analysis of the case will be led by 'blind' anger or displaced projections of outrage. Emotions can sometimes incorporate defective and misleading thought or evaluations of worth or significance to which one should not subscribe. But they can also be rational and serve valuable functions – they may, for example, be preconditions of understanding or empathy, or they may serve important moral and social values (such as self-respect or the assertion of shared norms).³³ Arguably, such values are not and should not be the concern of the historian as such, but in the current context we are examining how the historian relates to non-historians or the broader public and this makes relevant other concerns than those which are 'immanent' to the discipline itself.

More concretely, however, what difference might it make if historians were to drop an exclusive focus on emotion as something irrational and were instead to assume the more complex and more appreciative perspective advocated by Martha Nussbaum, for example, or Jeffrie Murphy? What difference might it make if the legitimate critique of irrational manifestations of emotion were coupled with a more complex recognition of emotions when they appear to be legitimate and valuable? In my opinion, reductive conceptions of the emotions – as being inherently irrational and nothing but a cause of distraction and disturbance – are part of what *produces* the gap! These conceptions invite the adoption of what Peter F. Strawson has called the "objective attitude". In his highly influential essay 'Freedom and Resentment', Strawson has presented two opposing (but not mutually exclusive) sets of attitudes; the attitude of involvement or participation in human relationships, on the one hand, and the objective attitude on the other. As Strawson writes:

To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense might be called treatment; as something certainly to be taken into account, perhaps precautionary account of; to be managed or handled or cured or trained... If your attitude towards someone is wholly objective, then though you may fight him, you cannot quarrel with him, and though you may talk to him, even negotiate with him, you cannot reason with him.³⁴

I think that seeing survivors or their relatives or others with a strong emotional stake in the Holocaust as somehow being in the grip of something irrational, gravitates towards an adoption of the objective attitude. But as a response to perceived breaches of normative expectations, resentment and indignation involve a call for reassurance, recognition or accountability. If this communicative aspect of reactive emotional attitudes is met with the objective attitude, it may feel as though insult has been added to injury. Of course, as long as one views emotions as simply being irrational or blind psychological forces, the objective attitude appears to constitute the most appropriate frame for a response. However, if we acknowledge that emotions incorporate beliefs and evaluations that can be discussed rationally, then this more complex perspective invites attempts to address the reasons underlying anger. To take one example, if anger is inappropriate then one should attempt to criticise its constitutive beliefs and implied evaluations. Instead of frowning upon normative reasoning, it is possible to try to reason with emotion and this, I would argue, has the potential to reduce the distance between the two sides of the gap. For example, instead of simply being bothered by the gratitude which seems to make some survivors averse to historical studies that complicate their own narratives of suffering and liberation, the historian could engage directly in moral reasoning about the question of whether the unconditional sense of gratitude is appropriate or justified. Engaging in explicit moral reasoning across the alleged divide between history and memory has the advantage of meeting the 'other side' on an equal footing.

Before we proceed to the third and final section, it is necessary to touch briefly upon a normative methodological issue that might be conflated with the one discussed above, namely the question of the place of emotion in historiography. Even though emotions are not inherently irrational or bad, and even though historians would do well to adopt a more nuanced attitude to the emotional responses caused by their studies, the

question of whether we should also think differently about the place of emotion in historiography remains a separate issue. The question seems analogous to that of whether emotion has any place in law, e.g. in the process of criminal sentencing.³⁵ Just as one may ask whether criminal justice can be understood or practised without attention to emotion, so one can ask whether the normative ideal of dispassionate objectivity is desirable or even possible? To engage with this issue lies far beyond the confines of this article, however. In the current context it is sufficient to stress that I do not find the picture of the completely dispassionate historian convincing. Nor am I sure that a totally dispassionate analysis and study of Auschwitz would appear to constitute a better piece of scholarly work than one in which emotion plays a certain role. The *Orestia* is often used to illustrate the notion of justice as something that tames rather than banishes revenge.³⁶ In a similar vein, one could ask whether the better of two historical studies of the Holocaust is the one in which outrage is tamed, between the lines, rather than the one written completely *sine ira* (without anger)?³⁷ In short, instead of structuring the discussion as a dichotomy between examples of clearly exaggerated and irrational examples of overly emotional discourses, on the one hand, and an illusionary ideal of the scholar who leaves behind all emotion on the other, it would be more interesting, I think, to explore how emotion may be more sophisticatedly incorporated into sober and qualified examples of historiography. Of course, there is 'no free lunch' – opening the gates to emotion risks letting in the excesses of emotionalism.

Two Examples

In this section I will take into consideration two examples of the manner in which historians sometimes act quite straightforwardly as moralists or simply as scholars who are emotionally and existentially 'touched' by their subject matter. The first example takes the form of a statement by Yehuda Bauer, the second comprises a number of excerpts from the writings of the Danish historians Michael Mogensen and Hans Kirchhoff.

The following excerpt comes from a speech delivered by Yehuda Bauer to the Stockholm International Forum on 26 January, 2000. It may thus also be seen to represent an address to a wider audience: "Time has come to strengthen the Ten Commandments by three additional ones ... thou shalt not

be a perpetrator; thou shalt not be a victim; and thou shalt never, but never, be a bystander.”³⁸ Whether or not one thinks that it befits the historian to issue moral commandments, the quote does not appear to represent an example of moralistic or emotional excess. It is, however, a very brief statement. We hear nothing about the moral reasoning or experience behind the normative conclusion. From a moral philosophical point of view this is of course clearly insufficient; the most interesting aspects have been left out. However, I do not want to argue that Bauer should have added an explanatory footnote, expounding the premises for his conclusion. The philosophical insufficiency remains, but it must be the historian’s privilege to tell stories – or to present commandments. Thus I have no intention to ‘police’ the discourse or to blame historians for not being philosophers. However, in so far as such moral ‘conclusions’ can be seen as examples of historians reaching out ‘over’ the gap, one needs – or so I shall argue – to add and debate the moral reasoning behind them. This is the point in relation to which philosophers could play a valuable role. One way to start is to view and treat statements such as Bauer’s as an invitation to further – interdisciplinary or public – conversation. Of course, this is not the place for a genuine follow-up of Bauer’s thirteenth commandment, but let me indicate some of the ways in which the conversation could be taken further. From a rhetorical point of view, one might say that the strongest emphasis lies on the injunction not to be a bystander, and the philosophical question could take the lead from this: why is it the bystander – and not the perpetrator – that the audience is most strongly urged not to be? Can the shameful omission perhaps be as strong as the guilt of commission? Is indifference or passivity somehow or sometimes worse than actual wrongdoing? Bauer’s choice of emphasis can be seen as exemplifying more widespread tendencies in the field of Holocaust testimonies and reflections. In the essays of Jean Améry, for example, the memory of the passivity or indifference of individual bystanders is recalled with deep resentment:

My neighbor greets me in a friendly fashion, Bonjour Monsieur; I doff my hat, Bonjour Madame. But Madame and Monsieur are separated by interstellar distances; for yesterday a Madame looked away when they led off a Monsieur, and through the barred windows of a departing car a Monsieur viewed a Madame as if she were a stone angel from a bright and stern heaven, which is forever closed for the Jew.³⁹

A broader survey of Holocaust survivors' testimonies, as well as of comparative attention to responses to more recent cases of genocide and crimes against humanity, simply adds more weight to this question: Why is victims' anger toward those who stood by so deep? Why, indeed, does it sometimes seem as if the memory of the passive bystander has left deeper scars than that of the direct perpetrators? Why, to shift to the aftermath, do victims and survivors sometimes seem more concerned with former bystanders than with ex-perpetrators? There is a host of possible answers, but this is not the place to even begin weighing them; suffice it to note that the moral outrage against the bystander can be traced back a long way. In his *Divine Comedy*, Dante reserved the hottest place in hell for the neutrals, and what is the cry to heaven – the accusation of God for the evil apparently tolerated on earth (in spite of his unlimited power, knowledge and goodness) – other than an expression of outrage toward the bystander?⁴⁰ Perhaps we should be less surprised about the special lamentation and anger directed toward all-too-human bystanders. Or perhaps the emotions or attitudes commonly directed toward bystanders are more likely to constitute a form of intractable hatred (of betrayal) than a form of anger? This is at least an interesting possible explanation, and is inspired by Adam Smith's reflections on the different occasions for anger and hatred respectively, as described in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* from 1759.

I shall now turn to the Danish context. In and around October 2003, there was much talk in Denmark about the rescue of the Jews in the country 60 years earlier. I was surprised by the way in which several Danish historians repeatedly referred to the event as a "light in the darkness" and I have elsewhere examined their use of this platitude in some detail.⁴¹ Here, and somewhat paradoxically, I shall simply relate some of the conclusions drawn on the basis of this examination. What attracted my interest was the use of a sentimental platitude by historians who otherwise stressed the need to work against emotionally charged approaches to the national past. Hans Kirchhoff, for example, wrote that rescue is "a light in the darkness that makes it possible to bear the horrible."⁴² Another historian, Michael Mogensen, stressed that "the light kindled in 1943 stays on" in spite of certain revisions in the historical explanation of the rescue.⁴³ Danish historians – including Mogensen and Kirchhoff – have struggled against the established narrative of rescue by problematising the picture of all the helpers as heroic idealists and by reducing the significance of a Danish humanism in the explanation

of why the rescue became a success story. In my opinion, the historians' use of the picture of a light in the darkness is intended as a 'reaching out' to the public. Writing that the light still shines, Michael Mogensen tries, I think, to reassure a critical and emotionally charged public that the historical revisions of this past event do not undermine the value of what happened and the praiseworthiness of the people involved. The attempt to alleviate the effect of critical and demythologising historiography can also be found in Sofie Lene Bak's thesis on Danish and international perceptions of the rescue. As she reassures us near the end of her examination, her critique of idealist notions does not reflect a desire to "belittle the, in its own way, absolute honourableness of the efforts to rescue."⁴⁴ However, if one wants to mitigate or ward off an anticipated angry reaction, it is not sufficient simply to declare that research and respect are compatible or simply to state that one is not driven by ulterior motives. It would, I think, be more fruitful and interesting to try to bring out the reasons why the light still shines or what one means when speaking of 'absolute honourableness'. The justifiability of such statements does not seem self-evident – quite the opposite in fact. If the gap is to be lessened, we need to concern ourselves more explicitly with the normative premises that underlie the stated assessments and declarations, e.g. different notions of the preconditions for attributions of praise. What is, in general, the proper object of moral praise? What is it, for example, that accounts for the light in the darkness? Is it the goodwill of the rescuers or is it the successful consequences of their collective act (or some combination of the two)? If the praise for the rescuers is premised on the success of their efforts, and if historical research has shown that this success was to a significant extent actually due to factors beyond the control of these rescuers, are they then as praiseworthy as they have been thought to be? Again, this is not the place to deal with such questions in detail. What matters is rather to make the point, that *not* raising these questions seems to me to be one of the things that sustains the gap between historical research and collective memory.⁴⁵

History and Philosophy: Division and Collaboration

In this article I have tried to argue that there is more to morality and emotion than is often acknowledged by historians; if historians recognised this, perhaps they could contribute to the lessening of the gap between history and memory. The practical

implication is not a vision of a moral philosophical historian. A division of labour remains sensible and what I have in mind is rather a more daring willingness to meet at the borders of our respective disciplines and – on this basis – an increased collaboration and a better sense of the occasions where history calls for philosophy. At least speaking from within the Danish public scene, I think that more ‘joint ventures’, in both research and the dissemination of research, might represent one way of dealing with the fatigue mentioned in the first section of this article.

As was promised in the introduction, I shall now briefly consider the usefulness of history to philosophy. Evidently, the need for and the value of collaboration is not a one-way street. As John K. Roth has put it: “To encounter the Holocaust philosophically, one must study what happened, to whom, where, when, and how.”⁴⁶ As he adds, philosophers are often neither trained nor inclined to deal with particularity. However, sidestepping the study of history – or for that matter, the testimonies of the witnesses – is not only problematic for the trivial reason that one should know what one is talking about.⁴⁷ As Primo Levi once put it: “a new harsh language would have been born”⁴⁸ if the Nazi extermination camps had lasted longer. The philosopher who wants to confront the Holocaust needs, I think, to adopt an explorative and tentative approach to existing vocabularies and to be receptive to the possibility of dealing with a reality that escapes our traditions and concepts. This is one of the reasons why a philosophical concern with issues arising from the Holocaust, as well as other mass atrocities, should be historically and contextually informed. Moreover, when philosophers do not find it necessary to combine philosophical reflection with historical study, they cut themselves off from any interdisciplinary conversation with historians. The philosopher Berel Lang has written that the marginal role played by philosophy in studies of the Holocaust (historical studies in particular) may have to do with “a too narrow or purist view of itself by philosophy acting in concert with a too generous or ambitious view of itself by history.”⁴⁹ Lang also notes that historians have sometimes seemed “resistant to what philosophers might have had to say about their theoretical frameworks.”⁵⁰ This might well be part of the truth, although my own experience has for the most part been the reverse. Still, it should be added that what may have made historians resistant is the fact that some of the traits that characterise philosophical responses to the Holocaust are sometimes worse than boring. There is, for example, a tendency

to speak on behalf of humanity and to presume that one can speak interestingly about an all too real and particular historical event solely on the basis of readings in the philosophical tradition. However, a serious examination of the measure of sense and sensibility in philosophical reflections over the Holocaust deserves its own particular treatment.⁵¹

NOTES

- 1 This chapter is a revised version of an article that originally appeared in *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Winter 2005, pp. 1–23 (Vallentine Mitchell, London). Thanks to Thomas Cushman, Hans Kirchhoff, Berel Lang, Paul Levine and Jeffrie Murphy, for very helpful comments on earlier drafts. Without the help of both philosophers and historians I would not have dared to write this kind of article.
- 2 Cf. “In assessing this work [i.e. writings on bystanders to the Holocaust], we should note that many of these analyses centre explicitly on what did not happen – an awkward approach for the historian ... It is, essentially, a negative report – the history of inaction, indifference, and insensitivity.” Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (New York: Meridian, 1989), pp. 156–7.
- 3 Deborah Lipstadt, “The Failure to Rescue and Contemporary American Jewish Historiography of the Holocaust: Judging from a Distance”, in Michael J. Neufeld and Michael Berenbaum (eds.), *The Bombing of Auschwitz: Should the Allies Have Attempted It?* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 2000), p. 228.
- 4 See Arne Johan Vetlesen, “Genocide: A Case for the Responsibility of the Bystander”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2000), pp. 519–32. Vetlesen’s article focuses on the case of Srebrenica.
- 5 For another discussion of distinctions between different kinds of bystander agents, see the entry on “Bystanders” in Dinah L. Shelton (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* (New York: Thomson Gale, 2005).
- 6 The Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, <http://www.holocausttaskforce.org>, accessed 1 September, 2002.
- 7 See Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference* (London: Verso, 1999), p. 26.
- 8 See, for example, David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine (eds.), *‘Bystanders’ to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).
- 9 Lipstadt, ‘The Failure to Rescue and Contemporary American Jewish Historiography of the Holocaust’, p. 229.
- 10 See the entry on ‘Bystanders’ in *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, pp. 137–40.
- 11 Debates about such issues seem most fundamentally to be about differing conceptions of what one should do in the face of evil; what we owe one another or what one ought to pay allegiance to – for example, a moral vision of the Other as a being about whom one should feel responsible

(cf. the often used quote by John Donne – “No Man is an Iland, intire of it selfe”). See Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust* (London: Sage, 2000), p. xiii.

- 12 The quote comes from the title of Tony Kushner’s contribution to Cesarani and Levine, *‘Bystanders’ to the Holocaust*, “‘Pissing in the Wind’? The Search for Nuance in the Study of Holocaust ‘Bystanders’”.
- 13 Cesarani and Levine, *‘Bystanders’*, p. 212.
- 14 Kushner, *‘Pissing in the Wind’*, p. 72
- 15 Ibid., pp. 59, 60 and 72.
- 16 Ibid., p. 64.
- 17 The expression ‘presentism’ appears in Lipstadt’s ‘The Failure to Rescue and Contemporary American Jewish Historiography of the Holocaust’, but the phenomenon of context-insensitive judgement with hindsight has been widely addressed.
- 18 See Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), p. 91.
- 19 See Marrus, *The Holocaust in History*, p. 157.
- 20 Unfortunately, we are here dealing with publications in Danish as they are specifically addressed to a Danish audience. See Hans Kirchhoff, *Samarbejde og modstand under besættelsen* [Collaboration and Resistance During the Occupation] (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 2001); idem, ‘Forsvar for historikerne’ [In Defence of the Historians], column in *Politiken* (28 May, 2005).
- 21 See Kirchhoff, *Samarbejde og modstand under besættelsen*, pp. 342ff.
- 22 See Kushner, “Pissing in the Wind”, p. 60. The statement is taken from the following passage: “The moral concern about the bystanders comes out of the rather complacent assumption that few of us will become perpetrators, and an equal optimism that we will not become victims, while at the same time we are aware that in an age of almost instant global communications, we are all co-presents witnessing, even if only through the media, the genocides, ethnic cleansing, and other manifestations of extreme racism that besmirch the contemporary world.”
- 23 See Vertlesen, ‘Genocide’.
- 24 One might, for example, consider including rescuers and passive bystanders (e.g. present beneficiaries of past injustice) in a national truth commission process.
- 25 Cf. Ernest J. Weinrib, “The Case for a Duty to Rescue”, in Joel Feinberg and Jules Coleman (eds.), *Philosophy of Law*, 6th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000), pp. 625–45.
- 26 For an ethical-philosophical critique of what Kushner calls the ‘balance-sheet’ approach, see Martha Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). For the question of moral and emotional remainders, see Bernard Williams, ‘Ethical Consistency’, in idem, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).
- 27 Howard Marchitello (ed.), *What Happens to History: The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
- 28 Concerning wonder, see Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
- 29 Martha Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 10.
- 30 Jeffrie Murphy, *Getting Even: Forgiveness and its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 22.

- 31 Jerome Neu uses the phrase in the title of his book, *A Tear Is an Intellectual Thing: The Meanings of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- 32 Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), p. 156.
- 33 Jeffrie Murphy, for example, has written important works exploring the nature and value of vindictive emotions. See Murphy, *Getting Even*. I have elsewhere explored the moral significance of the victim's preservation of resentment, cf. Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008).
- 34 Peter F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1974), p. 9.
- 35 Murphy, *Getting Even*, p. 27.
- 36 See, for example, *ibid.*, p. 20.
- 37 An interesting discussion of this question can be found in the exchange between Eric Voegelin and Hannah Arendt on the appropriateness of the emotional tones of *Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1985). See L.J. Disch, 'More Truth than Fact: Storytelling as Critical Understanding in the Writings of Hannah Arendt', *Political Theory*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Nov. 1993), pp. 665–94.
- 38 See note 5, <http://holocausttaskforce.org>. A slight variation appears in a speech delivered to the German Bundestag on the occasion of the commemoration of the victims of National Socialism: "You, your children, and your children's children shall never become perpetrators"; "You, your children, and your children's children shall never allow yourselves to become victims"; and "You, your children, and your children's children shall never, never, be passive onlookers to mass murder, genocide, or (may it never be repeated) a Holocaust-like tragedy." See *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New York: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 273.
- 39 Jean Améry, *At The Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 95.
- 40 The third canto of Dante's *Inferno* leaves no doubt about the misery of the apathetic soul. Just inside the Gate to Hell, yet still outside the *Inferno* which lies on the other side of the river Acheron, Dante is brought to tears by the "sighs and cries and wails" which "coiled and recoiled on the starless air." It is the souls of "the nearly soulless whose lives concluded neither blame nor praise" and of the angels "who were neither for God nor Satan but only for themselves." These 'wretches' are wanted neither by Heaven nor by Hell, because they are so hated and miserable that their presence in Hell would make the wicked there feel glory.
- 41 See Thomas Brudholm, "'A Light in the Darkness'? Philosophical Reflections on Historians' Assessments of the Rescue of the Jews in Denmark in 1943", in Robin M. Schott and Kirsten Klercke (eds.), *Philosophy at the Border* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, forthcoming 2007).
- 42 Hans Kirchhoff, "Endlösung over Danmark", in Hans Sode-Madsen (ed.), *I Hitler-Tysklands skygge: Dramaet om de danske jøder 1933–1945* (Copenhagen: Aschehoug, 2003), p. 180.
- 43 Michael Mogensen, "Et lys i mørket", entry in a booklet published for the Danish commemoration of 27 January, 2003, edited by Thomas

- Brudholm and others, p. 9.
- 44 Sofie Lene Bak, *Jødeaktionen 1943: Forestillinger i offentlighed og forskning* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), p. 175.
- 45 The redemptive-existential tone in Hans Kirchoff's talk of "light in the darkness" signals another kind of use of the picture. In contrast to the examples provided by Mogensen, Kirchoff's posits the rescue – qua light in the darkness – as a source of existential support. Kirchoff has repeatedly insisted that sentimentalism should be cleansed from our picture of our past. However, with these utterances, he seems to make an exception. I have explored Kirchoff's existential use of the picture in Brudholm, "A Light in the Darkness"?
- 46 John K. Roth, "The Holocaust and Philosophy", in Peter Hayes (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies*, Vol.III (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999), p.43.
- 47 Tony Kushner hints at the problem that some philosophical reflections on the Holocaust are plagued by insufficient knowledge of their historical subject matter. See 'Pissing in the Wind'.
- 48 Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Collier Books, 1987), p.113.
- 49 Berel Lang, "Philosophy and Holocaust Studies", in E. Garrad and G. Scarre (eds.), *Moral Philosophy and the Holocaust* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.4.
- 50 Ibid.
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ENFORCING A BYSTANDER REGIME DURING GENOCIDE: THE CASE OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

David Gaunt

Much of the scholarly interest in the phenomenon of bystanders to genocide has focused on the ethics and morals of not intervening in a heinous crime. In historical studies, governments have been accused of “bystanderism” when they have failed to act despite having relatively accurate information on the character of the mass murder taking place. The implication has often been that being passive – particularly in the case of well-informed and powerful governments, politicians, or high officials – is morally wrong and almost constitutes a crime in itself.¹ In several ways, this type of historical analysis devolves into an argument that the foreign policy of many great powers has been overly cautious and that this caution should be replaced by a greater concern for the defence of humanitarian causes. This line of reasoning is convincing as far as it relates to statesmen, and it has led to a legitimate critique of governmental non-intervention and has occasionally revealed how behind-the-scenes aid has been given to the perpetrators of genocide. Although it has great bearing at the level of national governments, however, the bystander principle has yet to be convincingly applied to individuals, who as a rule lack the information and power of governments.

The objective of this article is to discuss the methodological aspects of applying a bystander perspective to the social history of genocide. The discussion is illustrated with examples drawn from the Armenian genocide that took place in the Ottoman Empire during World War I. In order to make the discussion meaningful, I will be concentrating as far as possible on face-to-face situations in which a victim is subject to violence or harassment, or is fleeing. In such situations is it arguable that the intervention of an individual non-perpetrator can make a substantial difference to the fate of a targeted victim. Descriptions of such situations can be found in historical sources such as autobiographies and witness testimonies. Moreover, the study of such sources is revealing not only in relation to bystanders themselves, but also in relation to how oppressor regimes have enforced social control and how the

rules established by the perpetrators serve to create involuntary bystanders. Genocide tends to be associated with a rigid social control that makes bystanders of ordinary, concerned people who would otherwise intervene. I refer to this social control as the “bystander regime”.

From a psychological perspective, we know that given certain conditions, just about anyone can become a perpetrator of genocide.² And in the right circumstances, just about any group that is identifiable as “the other” can become targeted as the victims of genocide. For the circumstances to be right, of course, the potential perpetrator must be mentally prepared, and the victim group must be already stigmatized. My hypothesis is that anyone can be forced into passivity if the conditions are appropriate. In this article, I will be trying to delineate some of these conditions. The perpetrators create and restrict the situations that prohibit or allow onlookers to shed their passivity. A morally troubled witness often has only a few brief windows of opportunity in which it is possible to act without facing grave danger. These face-to-face situations are qualitatively very different from those experienced by distant foreign politicians or officials, who are able to calmly ponder the pros and cons of intervention.

The bystander regime combines propaganda, disinformation and brute force. The elaborate planning of genocide is not just focused on killing the victims, but is also directed at blocking the likelihood that concerned persons will act to save the victims. Tactics range from disinformation, e.g. in the form of statements that the target group is simply being resettled, to the execution of any rescuers who are detected in order to set an example. Further, dehumanization of the victim is a proven tactic for the prevention of bystander intervention, because it produces a situation where the bystander quite simply no longer perceives the victim as human.

One aspect of researching the social history of bystanders involves identifying what constituted the windows of opportunity in a given case; what framed these windows of opportunity, how often did they occur and how long were they open? The more organized the genocide, the fewer the windows of opportunity that will open. Sometimes the window of opportunity may last a few weeks, as was the case for the Japanese and Dutch consuls in Kaunas, Sugihara and Zwartendijk, who utilized the final days of the Lithuanian republic in 1940 to issue visas and transit permits to several thousand Jews.³ The Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg's mission in Budapest was made possible by Germany's

permission to provide protective passports to a specified number of Jews who could document some kind of connection to Sweden. Similar permission was granted to Switzerland, Portugal and the Vatican.⁴

An Epidemiological Model

In most genocides, the act of rescuing victims is criminalized and involves the risk of imprisonment, loss of property or even death. The perpetrators are usually heavily armed, and intervention when the soldiers are present is thus foolhardy. However, in all the major religions, the act of saving an innocent victim is highly valued as a righteous deed. It becomes all the more righteous if it involves danger to oneself. Thus the potential group of righteous individuals is very large almost everywhere. In the Ottoman context of the Armenian genocide, some Muslims did dare to provide small services. One deported woman testified that when her group passed through the city of Erzincan, “amidst the shouts and insults of the people, who stoned and spat upon us. One Turkish lady, however, it is a matter of note, threw us from her roof many loaves of bread, and, assisted by little girls and children, by means of cords lowered us pails of water to quench our thirst. When we thanked her warmly she replied. ‘My friends, I am doing no more than my duty.’”⁵

I will use a simple model taken from medical epidemiological studies of contagious diseases. In any large population there will be some who are never exposed to a specific disease; then there are those who are exposed to the disease but do not fall ill, and those who fall ill but recover; finally there is the smaller group who fall ill and die. In the context of genocide, there are often three distinct populations. One comprises the perpetrators, who are usually armed and have full control over the territory, acting in the name of the local authorities. The second is the targeted group, which is destined for extinction. This group is usually distinguishable from the rest of society in some way – on the basis of religion, language or skin-colour. The third population is comprised of the non-perpetrators who are not part of the target group. The relative size of these populations can vary. In the case of the Jewish Holocaust in Eastern Europe, the death squads were quite small, and thus the size of the potential bystander group in towns and villages was large. But in the case of Rwanda, the Hutu population that participated in the genocide of the Tutsi minority was quite large, and thus the size of the bystander population was small. At the other end of

the scale, Bulgaria during the Holocaust showed that potential bystanders could mobilize and stop the ongoing deportation of victims. As a result of massive protests from nearly all sectors of Bulgarian society, the government, although an ally of Nazi Germany, backed away from agreed plans to turn over its Jewish citizens to the Germans for transport to Auschwitz. Pressure from politicians and the leadership of the Orthodox Church, together with street protests, led to the cancellation of the deportation, which had already been initiated. Similar bystander mobilizations can be observed in Hungary, where Horthy's regime refused to allow the destruction of its Jewish citizens, and in Bosnia, where the Muslim leadership obtained the release of Muslim Roma Gypsies from the Jasenovac concentration camp.

Applying the epidemiological model to genocide, there are various different levels within the bystander population that may be compared to the layers of an onion. Each level is somewhat smaller than the preceding level. The onion itself represents the entire bystander population. The first level down comprises the large group of individuals who are unaware that anything wrong is going on; they see and hear nothing. The next level is comprised of those who are aware that something bad is going on, but who do not consider doing anything to stop it. The third level consists of those who are aware of the genocide and who consider intervention, but who do not in the end actually intervene. The fourth level consists of those who are aware and who decide to intervene, but who are stopped by the perpetrators. The final core, which is quite small by comparison with the size of the whole, comprises those who intervene and who actually manage to rescue someone.

Methodologically speaking, research based on historical documents can deal with two aspects of the bystander regime. The first involves the factors that prevent those who are morally concerned from acting. The second involves the way morally indifferent bystanders are produced by means of propaganda that dehumanizes the victim. Historical sources allow us to study the concerned bystander who is on the verge of becoming a rescuer. Many autobiographical sources narrate situations in which a non-involved bystander reacts as a result of a moral concern for the victim – an altruistic intervention. Sometimes this action is successful and sometimes it fails. Those who fail often never try again and they feel a need to explain their impotence.

Genocide in the Wartime Ottoman Empire

The Ottoman Empire entered World War I in November 1914 on the side of the Central Powers. The government was at that time in the hands of a radical nationalistic clique comprised of military officers and civil servants, who called themselves the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP). The leading persons were Talaat Pasha, Minister of the Interior, and Enver Pasha, Minister of War. A secret protocol was signed to enter the war alongside Germany and Austria. Following Turkish provocations, Tsarist Russia declared war and its allies France and Britain followed suit. It is hard to pinpoint exactly when an aggressive anti-Armenian policy was introduced, but most observers have identified a shift in the aftermath of a crushing Russian military victory in early January 1915. In February, orders were issued to remove Armenian soldiers from important posts and soon afterwards they were ordered to be shot. In May, Talaat Pasha, the Interior Minister, ordered the deportation of all Armenian residents to sparsely inhabited regions in the Arabian provinces. The reason given was an accusation that the entire Armenian population had rebelled or were enemy sympathizers.

Although these Turkish accusations of a general Armenian rebellion were a figment of the imagination, a real battle did take place in the eastern city of Van starting on April 20, 1915. Here the Armenians had access to some weapons and made effective use of them for three weeks until the arrival of a Russian relief force that included Armenian volunteers. This event convinced the Ottoman leadership that a long-feared general Armenian rebellion, with the aim of supporting the Russians, had started. On April 24, hundreds of Constantinople's leading Armenians were arrested and many of them were murdered. They included politicians, lawyers, journalists, teachers, and physicians.

In the distant provinces, Christian notables were arrested, accused of having contacts with the enemy, and of hiding bombs and weapons, and they were thrown into local prisons. These persons included journalists, educators, clergymen and tradesmen. They were often held in prison for a number of days, and torture was used to obtain confessions relating to plots against the regime. After a few days, the prisoners were bound together and marched out of the town under the pretence that they were being sent to another location. Their guards then killed them at convenient locations along the way. Depending on the size of the town, there were sometimes several waves of arrests and executions. On May 27, 1915,

Talaat Pasha issued the first official order for the deportation of Armenian citizens, but by this time, massacres had actually been ongoing for some time.⁶

The mass deportation of Armenian women and children was organized after the men had been murdered. The deportation usually took the form of death marches involving several hundred persons, and sometimes many thousands. Most travelled on foot taking with them only what they could carry.

The easternmost provinces were “ethnically cleansed” during the early summer of 1915. Deportations and massacres occurred side by side. In some places, groups of families to be deported were organized in the town centre, but as soon as the march left the town, most of the males were separated from the rest of the group and shot, leaving only old men, women and children. These then walked south. Along the way they were subject to attack by local people, nomadic tribes and bandits. Survivors tell of daily incidents of plunder, rape, and the kidnapping of children, who were sold as slaves to the highest bidder. The deportees received little food, water, or medical care, and the attrition rate was very high. Of the 1,700 Armenians who were dispatched from the town of Siirt in June 1915, for example, only between six and seven hundred arrived in Mosul at the end of an eight day march. Towards the end of August, large numbers of survivors flooded into concentration camps in the Syrian Desert. But the 160,000 who survived were a mere fraction of the more than one million people who had been deported.

The next phase, which occurred between August and October of 1915, affected the western provinces. In some places it was possible to use the completed sections of the Baghdad railway for part of the journey, but everyone had to go on foot through the mountainous terrain where the railway was still unfinished. Travellers were able to see thousands of destitute Armenians near the stations of the Baghdad railway, begging for food. Upon reaching Syria, they were placed under armed guard in a gulag of makeshift camps. The size of the camps varied, since the commanders often ordered exterminations on the pretext of combating disease. Conditions were deplorable. A German military doctor deemed the town of Deyr Zor (the most often named destination) to constitute a death camp: “There is no regular organization for the large number of people. Not enough food... the lack of bread and vegetables is manifest. Three hospitals are filled to the brim with over a thousand sick people. [Only] One general practitioner, one military doctor, a nearly empty pharmacy... the daily mortality amounts to 150-200 individuals.”⁷

There was a short pause in the massacres and deportations between the end of 1915 and the spring of 1916, at which time they resumed. The second phase targeted the few people who had been allowed to remain behind, stragglers and persons who had been stranded during transit. Constantinople and Smyrna were the only places in which some Armenians remained in place. Otherwise the survivors were concentrated to Syria and Iraq.

Figures for the number of deaths that resulted from massacres, executions, armed conflict, rape, murder, hunger, exhaustion and disease are not easy to calculate. The deaths of Armenians and Assyrians began during the early stages of the war and continued until the armistice in the autumn of 1918. In some places, the killing continued during the 1920s. As early as the end of 1915, the Armenian patriarchy calculated the number of victims to be “not less than one million” and the second phase had not yet begun.⁸ At the end of the war, Assyrian representatives calculated their losses at a quarter of a million people.⁹

Aspects of the Bystander Regime

One basic element of the bystander regime is the proclamation by the genocidal authorities of their intent to criminalize any help given to the targeted victims. On May 23, 1915, Minister of the Interior Talaat sent a directive to the Fourth Army. The army was ordered to conduct house-to-house searches, looking for Christian collaborators. The search was also to encompass any “Muslim partners” who were suspected of aiding them. These “partners” would then be tried in military courts if they were found to be hiding Christians, and they risked both death for themselves and disinheritance for their children.¹⁰

This decree was applied to Osman, the Kurdish chief of the Hadide and Atamissa tribes. In June 1915, he lost his life for having hidden his good Assyrian friend, the Chaldean archbishop of Siirt, Addai Sher. He had helped the bishop escape the massacres in the town by disguising him in Kurdish clothes. After a number of days they were discovered, however, with the bishop and the Kurdish chief then being shot.¹¹

A deported woman testified that she and some friends had managed to run away from a death-march, but that she had been in a state of near nudity, since her clothes had been plundered. As she then wandered on, she saw a Kurdish man whom she recognized. “Next day we saw a Kurd Shepard of the village of Bekand whom I knew and who had frequently come to my house at Siirt. He recognized me, and, seeing my

lamentable state, cried out and covered his face not to see me thus. He took us to the Sheikh [a religious leader], who, touched with pity at our condition, ordered bread and curdled milk to be given us. He also found us some old garments with which to cover ourselves. Having allowed us time to sleep, Sheikh Asso summoned us the next day and said he was going to send us to Bekand. 'I am forced to do so,' he added, 'because to give hospitality to Christians would be to bring me into grave displeasure with the government. I shall give you four men to take you to your destination. When you get there give them each a little money lest they kill you.'¹² Sometimes Muslim households would contain a number of Christian refugees/ hostages (mostly women and children), but in order for it not to appear as though they were hiding them, the Christians were strongly pressured to convert to Islam. If they did convert they were given new names. Those who refused to convert ran a great risk of being killed.

Foreign citizens from neutral countries were subject to special social controls. Members of foreign religious missions often included doctors and nurses, but these were expressly hindered from helping the deportees and they were closely watched. Often missions did not even succeed in protecting their own Armenian employees at the various colleges and hospitals. William Dodd, a physician at the American hospital in Konia, was forbidden by the provincial governor to provide any medical aid or merely to inspect the deportees.¹³ The prohibition against helping the Armenians remained in place even once they had reached their destinations in the desert. Sven Hedin, the famous Swedish explorer, was travelling by raft along the Euphrates River at the time and arrived at the Syrian town of Rakka in the summer of 1916. The town was filled with destitute refugees, more than 1,500 in the town and another 5,000 in a makeshift camp along the river. Hedin had heard that a German military officer had distributed money to the refugees some weeks earlier, and he asked the local governor for permission to donate 30 Turkish lira in silver coin. The governor said that he was grateful for the offer and had nothing against it, but that he had "just received a telegram from the provincial governor in Urfa forbidding the distribution of gifts to the banished without consulting with the provincial governor." The provincial governor then said no, and Hedin was blocked. He broke this prohibition, however. While walking through the town, Hedin found himself surrounded by children and women begging. He saw a shop selling bread, and acting on impulse he bought the entire stock and distributed it to the hungry. He concludes his

description of this episode by noting: "It makes you happy to see them eat and think with pain and sympathy of the five thousand who suffer on the other side of the river. But even if we had taken everything we had and distributed it among the poor, it still would not have been enough, for they were so many."¹⁴

Alma Johansson, the Swedish director of a German orphanage for Armenian children in provincial Mush, was unsuccessful in her negotiations with the local authorities to save her charges. The district governor insisted that the Armenian orphans must "perish with their nation." When she was banished from Mush, Johansson travelled towards Constantinople and passed desperate Armenians along the entire route who were begging for food and water. "We are not allowed to give them anything, we are not allowed to take them in, in fact we are forbidden to do anything for them and they die outside. If only permission could be obtained from the authorities to help them! If we cannot endure the sight of these poor people's sufferings, what must it be like for the sufferers themselves?"

Even highly placed Ottoman officials had no way of circumventing the government-enforced bystander regime. The provincial governor of Baghdad, Suleyman Nazif, who was of Kurdish origin and a member of the ruling Committee for Union and Progress, was travelling through the neighbouring province of Diyarbakir on official business. On July 16, 1915, he met with a convoy of Armenian women trudging towards Viranşehir under the control of the provincial chief of police. Nazif realized that the women were in danger and he tried to pull rank on the police chief, saying that he would take over the convoy and lead it into his home jurisdiction, where they could be freed. The police chief showed him an order for the women's deaths signed by the Governor of Diyarbakir, the notorious Reshid Bey. Nazif pleaded: "let me do as I want and save these unfortunate Christians as best I can." In response, he was warned: "Watch yourself. Otherwise I will let the soldiers arrest you and take you under guard to Diyarbakir." Suleyman had to back down and the deportees were massacred the following day.¹⁶

Aware and Concerned

Some of the best objects of bystander research are those individuals who are "aware and concerned", and who try to intervene but are prevented from doing so, and who then never renew their attempts to help. This also provides an insight into the frame that is established by the perpetrators.

The historian Ahmet Refik served as an army officer at the important railway junction of Eskişehir in western Anatolia. He symbolizes concerned and outraged Turkish opinion, but he was rejected by the very persons he most wanted to save. From the time of his arrival in the summer of 1915, he daily observed the Armenian deportees who camped in their thousands in the open near the railway station, waiting for the trains that would take them south. His memoir provides many insights into the sadness that some Turks experienced at the plight of the Christians. "Now the convoys coming out consisted of children, women, old men and young women. This small convoy constituted such a sad, such a painful view that it would break your heart to see small children embracing their mothers with their soft arms, under the scorching sun of June, hungry and bowing their necks. Was that all, one would wonder? It was said that 'They were going to Konia'. But in their pockets there was no money for the train tickets. And they were all poor, unfortunate villagers. In the train station, in front of the railing, an old woman with a blond blue-eyed girl, five or six years of age, in her lap and next to her a boy, sitting bow-necked. I inquired. They were a family of a [Armenian] soldier; their father was taken to the army. Their mother had died. She [the old woman] was raising these unlucky orphans. I asked the girl's name: – Siranoush! The poor innocent child, in her hand a dry piece of bread dipped into water and she ate it that way. I found food for Siranoush, I embraced and caressed her... But Siranoush would never smile. In her glance, in her eyebrows, in her face, there was melancholy, there was grief. Her soul was crushed by this deportation, this oppressive action and her innocent heart was broken. When she used to see the food I gave her, as though she deeply felt hatred towards the nation I am a member of, without smiling, without looking at my face, with her tiny fingers, she would put it to her mouth." When the old woman and the girl were to be sent away, Ahmet Refik tried to get the old woman to let him take care of the children, but she refused, saying, "we will all die together."¹⁷

On another occasion, Refik noted the arrival in the night of a large convoy signalling that an enormous wave of deportees was on its way. "Along the train line a cry of lament was heard. From the side of the station facing the valley cries of help could be heard. I ran. It was such a sad sight. There was no lantern, no lights, no guide; there was nothing. Women crying with their children in their arms, priests with disheveled beards, gathering their robes, tossing their loads on to their backs, mothers streaming in perspiration trying to unload their belongings, carrying their sick, their daughters, their children; poor, rich,

hungry, destitute, thousands of families trying to get out of the cargo cars, struggling not to lose their children, their mothers, their belongings. It was not possible to see this sight – tears were shed uncontrollably from their eyes; it was not possible to help anyone. It was not possible to come to the aid of anyone. Even if help was offered, no one accepted it. This unjust oppression has created such a deep enmity that even if one wanted to help, the most helpless, pitiful woman who had no kith or kin, would frown, look at our faces with hatred and with her firm heart, hurt soul, walk fearlessly towards disaster, hunger and death.”¹⁸ Refik is frozen by the enormity of the task and by the previous rejection of his attempt to help.

The Norwegian nurse Flora Wedel-Jarlsberg, who worked for a German humanitarian organization, heard from soldiers of the 86th cavalry brigade that they had been ordered to execute defenceless Armenians at a location on the Euphrates River. One soldier testified that, “It was horrible. I could not fire, I only pretended.” Wedel-Jarlsberg continued, “For that matter, we have often heard Turks express their disapproval and pity.”¹⁹ Wedel-Jarlsberg, who worked for a German organization in Erzurum, reported that “the Red Cross staff were forbidden to have any relations with the exiles, and prohibited to make any excursions on foot or horseback beyond a certain radius.”²⁰ Despite these regulations, foreign missionaries did try to save small groups of Armenian children, although these were often taken from them after a short period of time. By means of a bribe, Wedel-Jarlsberg and a colleague managed to obtain the release of a group of six Armenian orphans from the guards conducting a death march. But when she arrived at the nearest administrative centre, the district governor upbraided her. “Women have no business to meddle with politics, but ought to respect the government... He forbade us to take the children away, and at once sent a gendarme to carry them off from our room.” The children were immediately murdered.

Instances of Moral Indignation

Foreign diplomats representing allied or neutral countries were in position to know of the extent of the killing. The large powers had a network of provincial consuls who reported regularly about local events. Diplomats also received complaints and desperate appeals from their nationals who lived in Turkey. Many diplomats urged their governments to intervene, but they often found that the protests of foreign countries had no effect.

In Budapest during World War II, Swedish and Swiss diplomats were able to approach the Nazi authorities that were organizing the transport of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz. They could obtain their release by placing certain qualified persons under the protection of a neutral government. In Kaunas, the Japanese and Dutch consuls working in tandem were able to grant visas to Jews allowing them to escape from certain death. But this sort of diplomatic activity proved impossible in Ottoman territory. The interventions of foreign diplomats were barely tolerated, much less respected, and diplomats were threatened. The diplomatic reports from neutral countries and even from Turkey's allies were filled with disappointment and dejection over being forced into passivity.

At the peak of the deportations and massacres in July 1915, many ambassadors based in Constantinople protested formally to the Ottoman government over the brutal treatment of the Christians. On many occasions the ambassadors of both the United States and Bulgaria had tried to intervene, but their words fell on deaf ears. Talaat Pasha would always respond that the treatment of the Christians was an internal affair and that no foreign power had any legal right to interfere in such matters. This was also the answer repeatedly given during the summer of 1915 to the German ambassador Baron Wangenheim and his successors Prince Hohenlohe-Langenburg and Count Wolff-Metternich. The latter summed up his impressions in a final report: "Turkey is set on fulfilling, in its own way. A policy that will solve the Armenian question by destroying the Armenian people. Neither our intercession, nor the protests of the American ambassador, nor even the threat of enemy force... have succeeded in turning Turkey from this path, and nor will they succeed at a later date."²¹

German consuls in Erzurum and Mosul managed to use embassy funds to feed and clothe the Armenian deportees. Sometimes they also tried to intervene when they were travelling outside their home bases. Alma Johansson records that Mosul's German consul was horrified by the sight of the maltreatment of the soldiers of Armenian labour battalions in Mush. "However much he stood on the Turkish side what he had to witness became too much for him. One day he saw how Armenian soldiers were carrying wheat through the town. While they were carrying heavy burdens, armed Turkish boys who guarded them, took pleasure in hitting them with their rifle-butts when they did not walk fast enough. The consul went twice to the governor and pleaded for better treatment of the Armenians, but after this they let him understand, that he was no longer a desired guest."²²

On a much larger scale, the American ambassador to Turkey, Henry Morgenthau, in September proposed a gigantic rescue effort intending to bring all of the remaining Turkish Armenians to the United States. But the Ottomans refused to allow the Armenians to leave.²³ Morgenthau reported on the horrible treatment of the Armenians to his government. But the American administration would not intervene, wanting to remain friendly with the Ottoman government. After two years of growing frustration Morgenthau resigned his post. "My failure to stop the destruction of the Armenians had made Turkey for me a place of horror – I had reached the end of my resources."²⁴

During the autumn of 1915, the Vatican began to put pressure on the Austrian government to use its influence with its Ottoman ally to end the persecution and the atrocities being perpetrated against the Christians. On October 24, 1915, the Vatican ambassador to the Viennese court approached Foreign Minister Stephan von Burian to intervene at the Sublime Porte on behalf of the Armenians. Burian replied that the Austrians had been trying for months to make an impact on the Ottoman government. But they had made no progress as the Turks always claimed that "Armenian attacks on the peaceful Turkish population motivated such measures."²⁵

Energetic Vatican involvement was triggered by the murder of the Armenian Catholic archbishop of Mardin. Trying to correspond as the highest Catholic leader with the highest Muslim leader, Pope Benedict XV sent a personal letter to Sultan Mahmud V on September 10, 1915, protesting that innocent Christians were being treated barbarously and appealing to the Sultan for clemency.²⁶ Other dispatches from Vatican diplomats indicate a deep concern for a "threatening destruction of an entire people." It had become a case of collective punishment with no distinction as to religion or whether the victims were women, children or priests.²⁷ The Austrian diplomats even had difficulty in delivering the Pope's letter personally to the Sultan as a result of government obstruction. But when the letter was finally delivered, the Sultan replied that it had unfortunately not been possible to distinguish the "peaceful elements from those who were in rebellion" and thus the punishment of the Armenians had to be collective.²⁸

One of the most striking aspects of the deportations was the refusal by the government to allow help to the deportees while they were on their journey. In itself this indicates an intention to annihilate as many people as possible before they arrived at the designated settlement areas. This also corresponds with

Article IIb of the United Nations Declaration against Genocide since it involved placing a people in conditions in which it could not survive.

When the German consul in Aleppo tried to intervene to save the lives of two of the most well known Armenian politicians, Zorab and Wartkes, from a certain death, he was rebuffed, and they were murdered.²⁹ Even symbolic gestures, such as relief efforts for the few survivors, would be rejected. This was the case with a U.S. offer of humanitarian aid for the starving survivors in Syria.³⁰ In April 1916, Turkey rejected an offer from the German Orient-Mission to send an expedition to help the Armenian women and children who had arrived in Syria and Mesopotamia. The reason given for this rejection was that “the Turkish Government would not permit any help activity that would raise the hopes of the Armenians for support from foreign countries.” A joint German-American plan also received the same negative response.³¹

The many Germans who tried to assist the refugees were extremely frustrated by their failure to do so and by the compact resistance of the authorities. A group of German teachers in Aleppo reacted when a large building opposite their school was filled with refugees and they were unable to do anything to help. Dr. Martin Niepage, who was a lecturer, acted as the group’s spokesman when they petitioned the German government in October 1915. “How can we as teachers read fairy tales with our pupils or relate the Biblical story of the Good Samaritan? How can we decline and conjugate meaningless words, when all around the German school’s schoolyard the kinsmen of our pupils are slowly wasting away through starvation? We are giving our schoolwork and all true morality a slap in the face and it becomes an insult to all human feeling. And these unfortunates, who have been forced through the town or its vicinity out into the desert, almost only women and children, what will become of them? They are driven from place to place, until of a thousand has become a hundred, until of a hundred only a little group is left. And even this little group is pushed further, until even the last are dead. Only then have they reached the goal for the migration, when they have reached ‘the new designated settlements for the Armenians,’ which the Turkish officials speak of in the German press.”³²

Nothing came of this petition and Niepage considered leaving his teaching position in protest. But he was convinced by the other teachers to remain as they argued that it was valuable to have eyewitnesses inside the country, whose presence might also serve to ameliorate the situation. After a time however,

Niepage concluded that he for “too long was a silent witness to all this injustice. Nothing has been improved by our presence, and what we ourselves have been able to do has been thoroughly meaningless. Frau Spiecker, our energetic, brave colleague, bought soap, and the women and children (there were no men left) were washed and freed from lice. Frau Spiecker got some women to cook soup for those who were still able to eat any food. I myself distributed, each evening for six weeks, two buckets of tea, cheese and softened bread among the dying children. But as hunger or typhus spread to the town from this home of death, we became ill along with five of our colleagues and had to discontinue our assistance. For the deportees who arrived in Aleppo, all help was hopeless. These persons destined for death, received no more from us than a meagre comfort in their dying need. What we saw in Aleppo with our own eyes was only the final scene in that grand tragedy, called the extermination of the Armenians, only a small fraction of the terror that went on inside the other Turkish provinces. The engineers constructing the Baghdad railway, or German travellers who had met with the deportation caravans on their route, told of even more terrible things when they came home. Many of these gentlemen could not eat for several days after the horrible things they had seen. Herr Greif from Aleppo told of how masses of mutilated and naked female corpses lay along the railway at Tel Abiad and Ras ul Ayn [an important railhead].”³³

A German businessman, Franz Eckart, who managed a carpet factory in Urfa, testified that he had tried to help an Armenian woman who was about to be raped. Two young Turks had snatched the woman away from a passing death march and had dragged her into the German’s garden. Alarmed by the cries of his wife and children, Eckart took some workers and rushed to the spot, freed the woman and took her into his house. But the two rapists soon returned accompanied by four others and demanded with threats that they turn over the Armenian woman. Eckart’s workers were harassed and chased away. In the end Eckart was forced to ask the German government for protection.³⁴

Two elderly American protestant missionaries in Mardin, Alpheus Andrus and Dr. D. M. B. Thom, who were safeguarding some of the deported Armenians’ savings, were punished by being banished from the town in humiliating circumstances. In mid-July of 1915, the U.S. consul in Harput expressed concern for the safety of all the American missionaries in his jurisdiction and advised them not to intercede on behalf of the Christians: “I do think that the life of every American here is in danger and

that the anger is increasing. If all the missionaries can get away safely I shall feel greatly relieved. It is not only that the present situation is very critical, but they are constantly doing things that are more or less imprudent. The entire colony may suffer for the imprudence of one person. It is quite natural that they should sympathize with the people [Armenians] among whom they have been working and want to aid and protect them, but there is great danger of carrying their zeal too far and getting into trouble themselves.”³⁵

Dehumanizing Propaganda

One major factor, which may perhaps explain the large number of bystanders, is that the Ottoman government was so successful in imprinting the image of the Armenian as the dangerous “other” upon the Muslim population.³⁶ This necessitated a shift in traditional values, away from viewing Armenians and Assyrians as worthy neighbours and friends. They were accused of treason, of plotting to destroy the Empire, even of plotting to destroy the world of Islam. This process made all Armenians suspect, along with virtually all other Christians as well. The rage of the government was directed at the whole population, not the few activists.

Ottoman bystanders must have experienced considerable moral problems in relation to the ongoing genocide. Since the time of Mohammed, the Muslim tradition had been that non-Muslims who lived in a country with Muslim rule would be protected.³⁷ The so-called contract of Caliph Omar guaranteed protection as long as the non-Muslims paid a special tax and behaved with deference. There are examples of local religious leaders, such as Sheikh Fatullah of the Muhalleme, who ordered his devotees not to participate in the killing. Hussain, the Sheriff of Mecca, issued a similar order to all Arab tribes to protect the Armenians and Assyrians. These tradition-based appeals were drowned in a massive amount of modern, nationalistic propaganda, which was focused on showing that the targeted groups had broken their part of the contract by no longer showing deference and by having contacts with foreign countries.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, secular Turkish political parties in the Ottoman Empire played on religious divisions by turning them into ethnic divisions. One motive was to create a strong public opinion in favour of the Young Turk government, and in this case the largest opinion base

was Muslim. Thus it proved useful to play on socio-economic conflicts with the non-Muslims, who appeared to have become economically successful and could show some upward social mobility. An already considerable popular antipathy towards non-Muslims then intensified during the years leading up to World War I. *Gavur* is a very derogatory Turkish word, commonly used even today to designate an infidel. When Muslim mobs attacked the Armenians, they simply shouted “Down with the gavurs.” And it became inevitable that other Christian groups would also be victimized.³⁸

One populist argument was that the Christians were conspiring to destroy Islam. Bahaettin Şakir, a leading member of the ruling CUP, wrote to the Turks of Azerbaijan appealing to them as fellow Muslims, united in opposition to the Armenians: “Do you not see that the Armenians are not working to ease the burden of human sorrow or for the progress of industry, but to produce the tools of destruction that will kill their Muslim neighbours easily and in large numbers... Beginning with the assumption that you are Muslims, each and every one of you should consider the atrocities committed by the revolutionary Armenians, who are enemies of your religion, not only against the Muslims of the Caucasus, but against your coreligionists within the Ottoman state and against the Islamic Sultanate.”³⁹

When reporting on atrocities alleged to have been perpetrated by Armenian partisans, the governor of Van stressed that the Armenians were out to destroy the entire Muslim world. Their actions were deemed a “real insult to sacred Islamic principles... The Armenians with their actions have not only assaulted Islam but the world of Islam... Their changing of mosques into stables, their forcing students to accept Christianity, and their obscene insults to [named religious leaders] are all epitomies of treachery. Armenians’ vile attacks on religion, and on the Muslims constitute an unlimited subject.”⁴⁰

During the nineteenth century, it was common to refer to the Armenians as the most loyal of all the non-Muslims. This was probably intended as a contrast to the Bulgarians, Greeks, Romanians and Serbs, who rose up in arms. And most Ottoman Armenians were in fact loyal administrators, clergymen, conservative businessmen or simple tillers of the soil. On the eve of World War I, the Armenian political parties were working for reform and striving to achieve regional autonomy inside the empire rather than looking for complete independence outside of it.

For the genocide to take place, the Ottoman government needed to challenge this positive image of Armenian loyalty. Thus a great deal of effort was devoted to showing the

Armenians to be the enemies of the state and the Turkish people. Taner Akçam points to the activities of a department inside the War Ministry, which coordinated the anti-Christian propaganda via journals disseminated within the army.⁴¹ The historian Ahmet Refik was aware that the government was mounting a massive press campaign to portray the Christians as disloyal. "In Istanbul, the propaganda work necessary to justify an enormous crime was fully prepared: the Armenians had united with the enemy, revolution was about to break out in Istanbul, they were going to kill the CUP leaders, they were going to force open the Straits."⁴²

This hostile message was hammered home repeatedly. Photographs published in the newspapers purported to prove the existence of Armenian bombs and weapons, or massacres committed by the Armenians. Doctor Dodd of the American hospital in Konia noted the growing debilitating impact of this propaganda. "The Turks of Konia have been noted for their mildness and opposition to such measures [deportations], but their temper we can see is changing. The papers are publishing articles against the Armenians as traitors, as revolutionists, telling of atrocities committed by them in Van, 60,000 Turks killed by them etc., everything to inflame their minds and poison their thoughts. It is the same course that I saw at the time of the massacres twenty years ago."⁴³

Racist thinking was not widespread within the Ottoman Empire at that time. However, some of the most radical activists involved in the genocide had knowledge of racial thinking as a result of having studied in Europe or through the natural sciences. Many of the most rabid anti-Armenians were medical doctors and had been exposed to Social Darwinist thinking. Perhaps the most extreme of these was Mehmet Reshid, the provincial governor of Diyarbakir, who had attended the school for military medicine. During his reign of terror between 1915 and early 1916, nearly two hundred thousand Armenians were killed within his jurisdiction. This extreme bloodshed came to the attention of the government, and after the war he was actually put on trial in a Turkish court for his crimes.

Late in 1915, Reshid was summoned to Istanbul to be interrogated by the CUP General-Secretary, Mithat Şükrü Bleda, in order to explain the killing, which in the eyes of the committee appeared excessive. Reshid was questioned harshly about how he could reconcile the extermination of Christians with his profession as a doctor. He defended himself by saying, "I thought to myself: Hey Doctor Reshid! There are two alternatives. Either the Armenians liquidate the Turks, or the Turks them!

Placed before this necessity, I did not hesitate. My Turkishness triumphed over my medical identity. Before they did away with us, we should remove them, I said to myself... But this act neither pleases my personal pride, nor has it enriched me. I saw, that the fatherland was on the verge of being lost, therefore with my eyes closed and with no hindsight I continued in the conviction that I acted for the well-being of the nation.... The Armenian bandits were a bunch of dangerous microbes that infected the body of the fatherland. Is it not the duty of a doctor to kill microbes?"⁴⁴

Another Turkish physician expressed similar thoughts, but in more brutal Social Darwinist language. He was the superintendent of hospitals in Bitlis province. "On one occasion the superintendent of hospitals, a Turk, said to Mr. Knapp in the presence of all us Americans, that these ignorant village Armenians were not fit to live – they ought to die."⁴⁵ According to Kuşçubaşı Eşref, who orchestrated some of the deportations, the Christians were "internal tumours" that needed "to be cleaned".⁴⁶ Thus there are several instances when scientific vocabulary was used to dehumanize.

Even after death, the Armenians were treated as less worthy. In the Syrian Desert, the local government refused to bury the dead Christians. Rössler, the German consul in Aleppo, reported finding a corpse. When he asked the district governor why he had not "at least seen to a burial, as is described in the Quran, he replied, that he could not determine if it was the body of a Christian or a Muslim (the sexual organs had been cut off). He would only bury a Muslim."⁴⁷

During the nineteenth century reform period, the leading nationalist idea constituted an appeal to unity and was termed "Ottomanism". The concept called for the union of all the peoples who lived within the Ottoman Empire, whatever their language or religion. It envisioned a form of imperial citizenship in which there was equality and where all were equally loyal to the sultan and his government. This vision had broken down by the early twentieth century, since it had become clear that too many groups were struggling for their autonomy or independence. The result was a shift on the part of the majority to "Pan-Turkish" nationalism, which involved building a homogeneous core out of the largest ethnic group, and trying to "Turkify" as many other groups as possible. Turkification meant sharing the common Turkish language and the Muslim religion. This change resulted in a need to portray the non-Turkish peoples as a serious problem. One of the leading ideologues, Ziya Gökalp, equated ethnicity with religion, stating that "Turkism is simultaneously Islamism."⁴⁸

The CUP declared Ottomanism bankrupt before the outbreak of World War I. It abandoned its attempts to create a union because of the opposition on the part of the various ethnic communities. Talaat was reported to have given a speech stating that: "You are aware that by terms of the Constitution, equality of Mussulman and Gavour was affirmed by you. One and all know and feel that this is an unrealizable idea. The Shariat, our whole past history and the sentiments of hundreds of thousands of Mussulmans and even the sentiments of the Gavours themselves, who stubbornly resist every effort to Ottomanize them, present an impenetrable barrier to the establishment of real equality. We have made unsuccessful attempts to convert the Gavour into a loyal Osmanli and all such efforts must inevitably fail... There can therefore be no question of equality."⁴⁹

Conclusion

This article shows the extent of the Ottoman government's "bystander regime". It criminalized help to the Armenians, used propaganda designed to dehumanize the victims and gravely limited the possibility of providing help to the targeted Armenians. This regime reveals the degree to which the genocide was coordinated by the government.

The bystander regime criminalized virtually all forms of substantive help that could be given to the victims. This also meant that any form of systematic aid was impossible. The negative attitude towards the victims was backed up by a variety of forms of disinformation portraying the Armenians as traitors. Pseudo-scientific metaphors were used to brand the victims as microbes and tumours. This propaganda had the effect of reducing the willingness of observers to help in any way.

NOTES

- 1 This is a basic theme of Samantha Power, in “*A Problem from Hell*” *America and the Age of Genocide* (N. Y.: Basic Books, 2002), and many others. Relevant critiques of governments that remained passive during the Armenian genocide can be found in Peter Balakian’s *The Burning Tigris: the Armenian Genocide and America’s Response* (New York: Harper Collins 2003) and in Jay Winter (ed.) *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003)
- 2 See Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 261–281.
- 3 Alfred Erich Senn, *Lithuania 1940. Revolution from Above*, (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 230–31.
- 4 Laura Palosuo, *Yellow Stars and Trouser Inspections. Jewish Testimonies from Hungary 1920–1945*, (Uppsala: Department of History, 2008), p. 132.
- 5 Joseph Nayeem, *Shall this Nation Die?* (New York: Chaldean Rescue, 1920), p. 239.
- 6 Ottoman Archives, Istanbul BOA. DH. SFR 53/129. This decree was entitled “Regulation for resettlement of Armenians relocated to other places because of war conditions and emergency political requirements”.
- 7 Report of Dr. Schacht, November 11, 1915. Cited in Johannes Lepsius, (ed.), *Deutschland und Armenien. Sammlung diplomatischer Aktenstücke*, (Potsdam: Tempelverlag, 1919), pp. 195–198.
- 8 Patriarch Zaven to Archimandrite Vegunin, December 28, 1915. Cited in David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors. Muslim-Christian Relations in Eastern Anatolia during World War I*, (Piscataway, N. J.: Gorgias Press, 2006), pp. 68–69.
- 9 *La question Assyro-Chaldéenne devant la conférence de la paix*, (Paris), 16 July, 1919.
- 10 Ottoman Archives, Istanbul BOA. DH. ŞFR 58/85.
- 11 David Gaunt, *Massacres, Resistance, Protectors*, p. 253.
- 12 Joseph Nayeem, *Shall this Nation Die?* (New York: Chaldean Rescue, 1920), p. 156.
- 13 William S. Dodd to Henry Morgenthau, May 6, 1915, in *United States Official Records on the Armenian Genocide*, p. 36.
- 14 Sven Hedin, *Bagdad, Babylon, Ninive*, (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1917), pp. 114–116.
- 15 Statement by Alma Johansson, November 1915, in Lord James Bryce & Arnold Toynbee, (eds.), *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915–1916*, Uncensored edition, (Princeton: Gomidas Institute, 2000, originally 1916), p. 127; a similar statement by Johansson can be found in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, pp. 181–182. See also Alma Johansson, *Ett folk i landsflykt*, (Stockholm: Kvinnliga missionsarbetare, 1930).
- 16 Ishaq Armalto, *Al Quosara fi nakabat an-nasara*, (Beirut, 1919).
- 17 Ahmet Refik, *Two Committees, Two Massacres*, (London: Firodil, 2006), pp. 27 & 36. Refik later became Professor of History at Istanbul University. His book was originally published in 1919.
- 18 Ibid., p. 28.
- 19 Statement of Flora Wedel-Jarlsberg, August 21, 1915, in *Treatment of Armenians*, pp. 277–278.
- 20 Ibid., p. 276.

- 21 Cited in Taner Akçam, *A Shameful Act. The Armenian Genocide and the Question of Turkish Responsibility*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006), p. 177.
- 22 Alma Johansson, *Ett folk i landsflykt*, p. 9.
- 23 *New York Times*, September 14, 1915, and October 19, 1915.
- 24 Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story*, (Reading: Taderon Press, 2000), p. 385.
- 25 Artem Ogandzhanyan, *1915 god neosporimye svidetel'stva. Avstriiskie dokumenty o genotside armyan*, (Saint Petersburg: Armenian Apostolic Church, 2005), p. 189.
- 26 Benedict XV to Mahumd V, September 10, 1915, cited in Andrea Riccardi, *Mediterraneo. Cristianesimo e islam tra coabitazione e conflitto*, (Milano: Guerini, 1997), p. 122.
- 27 Cardinal Gasparri to Monsignor Scapinelli, September 15, 1915, *ibid.*, p. 121.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 122.
- 29 Walter Rössler to the German Ambassador, June 29, 1915, in *Deutschland und Armenien*, p. 93.
- 30 Communique, August 14, 1916, in *Deutschland und Armenien*, p. 287.
- 31 Ambassador Metternich to Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, April 28, 1916, in *Deutschland und Armenien*, p. 257.
- 32 I have used the Swedish translation of a German brochure: Martin Niepage, *Vad en tysk lektor i asiatiska Turkiet upplevde år 1915*, (Stockholm: Birkagården, 1921), p. 6; also Martin Niepage to German Foreign Office, October 15, 1915, in *Deutschland und Armenien*, pp. 165–167.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.
- 34 Franz Eckart to German consulate in Aleppo, August 5, 1915, in Lepsius, *Deutschland und Armenien*, p. 131.
- 35 Leslie A. Davis to Henry Morgenthau, July 11, 1915, in *U.S. Official Records*, p. 176.
- 36 Ayla Göl, “Imagining the Turkish Nation through othering Armenians”, *Nations and Nationalism* 11:1 (2005), pp. 12–139.
- 37 Benjamin Braude and Bernard Lewis, (eds.), *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire. The Functioning of a Plural Society*, (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982).
- 38 Jakob Künzler, *Im Lande des Blutes und der Tränen. Erlebnisse in Mesopotamien während des Weltkrieges (1914–1918)*, (Zurich: Chronos, 2004, originally Potsdam: Tempel-Verlag, 1921), p. 49.
- 39 Hikmet Yusuf Bayur, *Türk İnkılabı Tarihi*, (Ankara: TTK, 1983), vol 1, pp. 372–373.
- 40 Governor of Van vilayet, March 14, 1915, *Arşiv Belgeleriye Ermeni Faaliyetleri 1914–1918*, Volume 1, pp. 90–91.
- 41 Akçam, *Shameful Act*, pp. 125–126.
- 42 Refik, *Two Committees, Two Massacres*, p. 44.
- 43 William S. Dodd to Henry Mongenthau, August 15, 1915, in *U.S. Official Records*, p. 194.
- 44 Cited from Salâhattin Güngör, “Bir Canlı Tarih Konuşuyor,” *Resimli Tarih*, (July 5, 1953), p. 2444.
- 45 Statement of Myrtle O. Shane, printed in James L. Barton, compiler, *“Turkish Atrocities” Statements of American Missionaries on the Destruction of Christian Communities in Ottoman Turkey, 1915–1917*, (Ann Arbor: Gomidas, 1998), p. 7.

- 46 Cited in Akçam, *Shameful Act*, p. 92.
- 47 Rössler to Bethmann Hollweg, July 17, 1915, in Wardges Mikaeljan, (ed.), *Die armenische Frage und der Genozid an den Armeniern in der Türkei (1913–1919)*, (Yerevan: Institute for History, Armenian Academy of Science, 2004), p. 161.
- 48 Cited in Akçam, *Shameful Act*, p. 84.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 75–76.

BYSTANDER MEMORIES

Unfolding and Questioning Eyewitness Narratives on the Deportation of the Jews

Dienke Hondius

Silence and passivity change bystanders, whether they are individuals or whole nations. They can diminish the subsequent likelihood of protest and punitive action by them. In turn, they encourage perpetrators, who often interpret silence as support for their policies. Complicity by bystanders is likely to encourage perpetrators even more. (Ervin Staub 2003, p. 309)

The historiography of the Holocaust has been dominated by the division into two groups: people who were good in the Second World War and people who weren't. In the first two decades after 1945, patriotic memory, the cold war, and ongoing tribunals resulted in a focus on only the most explicit perpetrators being brought to justice.¹

From the early 1960s, this group of perpetrators somehow became neglected and a new focus emerged on the wider groups that were present around the history of the Shoah, including national governments and populations, which then expanded to include most of the people who could have known, who sometimes saw or could have seen, or who were aware or could have been aware, of the deportation and murder of the Jews. In films, books and trials, questions have been raised about who knew what, at what stage and where. These were haunting questions for a new generation, both in relation to their parents and in terms of the questions they raised about what they would, could and should do if something like the Shoah were to happen again. This shift did not immediately result in oral history projects; it appears that the 'war generation' came to the end of their working lives around the year 1980, and that until then their memories and testimonies for the most part remained in the private sphere of their families and small circles of friends. This changed dramatically from the 1980s onwards, however, when the value of eyewitness accounts, survivor testimony and oral history came to be explored for the first time by a new generation of researchers, filmmakers and journalists. These have addressed and questioned their aging

parents' or grandparents' generations, have invited eyewitnesses to participate in various ways as experts, have initiated new interview projects, and in doing so have often expressed a sense of urgency in relation to their attempts to gather information and testimony.²

The approach in itself was not entirely new; there were a number of historians and filmmakers who had used ego-documents and interviews as sources of information before, but prior to the 1980s there were not many. A fairly large number of crucial eyewitnesses, who would have been able to share what they had seen and done with a wider audience had already died, but a lot of people were still alive and in good health.

In his pioneering film *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann showed the world what a rich source of primary information the survivors represented. As a sideline in his magnum opus, Lanzmann took an initial look at the bystanders as well, i.e. the Polish villagers that he interviewed in front of a church. These images provoked critical reactions to the film as a whole. The first social scientist to refer to bystanders as an important social category in relation to the Holocaust was the American historian and political scientist Raul Hilberg, with his famous division of people into *perpetrators*, *victims* and *bystanders*. But Hilberg's work was not published until the 1990s.³ Passive onlookers are increasingly viewed as being *almost wrong*. Remaining passive, even though one is not actively causing harm to others, is increasingly viewed as something shameful. Shame, as the Dutch sociologist Joop Goudsblom has noted, can be defined as social pain.⁴ The links between shame and memory represent an important topic for further research. Memories of passivity may have become more painful as evidence has emerged about the activities of others who helped the Jews, and about the opportunities that existed to intervene more actively at the time. The links between shame, responsibility and changing social norms would also bear further exploration. Here I would recommend a comparative study of eyewitness testimony, memoirs, and memories described at interview on the one hand, and of contemporary sources, such as diaries and news reports, on the other.

The Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer formulates the new judgement on being a bystander as a strong moral norm, and makes an analogy to the biblical Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all, thou shalt not be a bystander."⁵ If this new norm were to be more widely acknowledged and accepted as a moral guideline, this might have a double effect: the shame associated with being a bystander would grow and people would be less willing to be

interviewed about their memories. When we contact people for interviews, we note that the *bystander stigma norm* has not yet spread throughout society and that people are generally still willing to be interviewed.

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing recognition of the value of eyewitness testimony to the persecution, and particularly of the testimony of Jewish survivors. Oral history and other interview projects rapidly expanded, culminating in the vast Visual History Foundation project initiated by Steven Spielberg, in which approximately 50,000 Jewish survivors were interviewed. The other groups of social actors, the perpetrators and the bystanders, first became a focus for researchers at the end of the 1990s. One example of the international project to record eyewitness memories of the persecution of the Jews was called *Project Eyewitnesses*, and was coordinated by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Oral History Department in Washington DC.⁶ I facilitated the work of this project in the Netherlands through VU University. An initial press statement resulted in more than 300 very serious letters being sent by eyewitnesses who were willing to be interviewed. Thirty-three of these have been interviewed on film and another thirty in audio only.⁷ Internationally, there are now around 1000 interviews that have been conducted in various European countries, and the project is still ongoing. Studying these testimonies allows us to obtain knowledge and gain insights into the experiences and memories of gentile bystanders and eyewitnesses to the Shoah. The many different languages in which the interviews are conducted still represent an obstacle in relation to the accessing of these insights and knowledge. Over the coming years we hope to be able to resolve these practical problems and to stimulate and facilitate a comparative study and an international conference focused on the results.

It should be possible to identify more variation among the bystanders and to adopt a more dynamic approach. The term bystanders is static and somewhat fatalistic and generalist. Once a bystander, always a bystander? There are important variations in their levels of knowledge, complicity and awareness. It is also clear that bystanders react differently to what they see. Bystanders do not just stand still, they also move; they are *mitlaufer*, *meelopers*; they go along with what others do; they do not protest; they are onlookers, or they look away (*wegkijken*, *zuschauen*, *abschauen*). Bystanders ignore, deny, look away, refuse to see, but they do not always do so of course: the effect of being an eyewitness varies from on the one hand turning away

or blaming the victim, to making an active attempt to help the other. The social psychologist Ervin Staub makes further divisions within the bystander category.⁸ He distinguishes the *heroic helpers* as representing a separate group, and he distinguishes between *internal* and *external* bystanders, the insiders being those who are close to a situation of genocide, and the outsiders, such as other nations or groups, being those who are more distant. He refers to some of the groups that are close to the genocide as *semi-active participants*, e.g. German bystanders: “They boycotted Jewish stores and broke intimate relationships and friendships with Jews. Many benefited in some way from the Jews’ fate, by assuming their jobs and buying their businesses.”⁹ One of Staub’s insights is that it is quite difficult to separate passive bystanders from bystanders who were supportive of the perpetrators. This is particularly difficult because passivity in a situation of genocide may be all that the perpetrator needs in order to prevent resistance. Staub shows that bystanders “have great potential powers to influence events. However, whether individuals, groups or nations, they frequently remain passive. This allows perpetrators to see their destructive actions as acceptable and even right.”¹⁰ According to Staub, people tend to continue their behaviour in the direction they have taken, and to become firmer and less likely to change their behaviour over time. His general rule is that people *learn by doing*, for better or for worse. People learn and change as a result of their own actions, and this is true of perpetrators and bystanders alike.

If a passive reaction is the first response after seeing an event, being an eyewitness to an atrocity, people then tend to retain this passivity.¹¹ This insight of Staub’s shows how crucial it is to recognize bystander behaviour, mechanisms and options as early as possible. “The earlier bystanders speak out and act, the more likely that they can counteract prior steps along the continuum of destruction or inhibit further evolution.”¹² Bystanders influence each other, Staub notes, and in both directions. If bystanders remain passive, they substantially reduce the likelihood that other bystanders will respond. But as soon as some bystanders become active, others are apt to be activated as well. These findings bring us one step closer to the crucial issue of the conditions under which it is possible to activate passive bystanders. Early awareness and action and general education are crucial in preparing the ground for potential bystander activation. *Act early* is the first rule. And raising the awareness of common humanity is crucial. People – children, adults, whole societies – can “develop an awareness of their common

humanity with other people, as well as of the psychological processes in themselves that turn them against others.”¹³ With these general insights in mind, and with an appropriate level of caution with regard to both self-deception and other-deception in memories of such sensitive subjects, as well as with regard to the representativeness of volunteer respondents, let us turn to some of the initial results of our interviews.

The letter writers, who were writing us in around 2005 about their memories of more than sixty years earlier, presented themselves as *zuschauer*, onlookers. They had *happened to* see something. This self-perception implies a certain powerlessness and sometimes also surprise. Sometimes, but not nearly always, there is also fear. One woman [V. M.] had gone every day from suburban Amstelveen to an Amsterdam secondary school. Near Haarlemmermeer Station she remembers seeing “a group of at least a hundred poor Jews, maybe even 200, there was no end to it.”

They were driven right in front of our noses by German soldiers every ten metres next to them on both sides, hitting them... It was so threatening. In our ranks (she was with a group of schoolchildren) there was a kind of zooming sound, a humming of dismay, of horror. Immediately the guns – with the barrels – were now pointed at us. Any resistance and they would have gunned us down just like that... Yes, what could you do? Courageously shout something and then be shot down?... I see myself still standing there, fifteen I was, and the tears streaming down my face without a sound.

Age is an important factor in the role that bystanders attribute to their passivity. People born in the 1930s are reporting their childhood memories. However, we also find that age can be used as an alibi, a justification of passivity. One woman clearly thought of herself as a child of fifteen, although she was actually talking about incidents that had taken place when she was eighteen and working outside the home, still living with her parents but obviously able to go about her own business in many ways. In talking about the sensitive issue of moving into an apartment that had belonged to a Jewish family, however, she used her age as an alibi: “Well you know, of course, I was only fifteen, and you don’t know, you don’t realize then... what is happening...”

Fear at the time should be distinguished from the memory of fear, or fear as a justification of passivity. I find that fear is an even more flexible category in the context of memory. The more

painful questions about the deportations, such as “*What did you do?*”, “*How did you react when you saw that?*”, “*What did you know?*”, can now quite easily be brushed off in the interviews by referring to one’s age or one’s fear at the time. One man born in 1936 [T.] was a schoolboy when he saw his downstairs neighbours being arrested.

Before my very eyes, I can still see the whole family being very quickly taken out of the apartment – they could not take anything with them any more, and the father wanted to drink something. And I see those soldiers in the long green coats and helmets standing right in front of me. They could have taken me as well.

Another memory of fear was recalled by another man [De N.]. During a *razzia* or roundup in Rivierenbuurt in South Amsterdam, he was having dinner with his family when suddenly the Dutch SD came up and shouted, “You are Jews!” It turned out they were looking for a family that lived ten houses further down the street, and they left as soon as they realized this. They had the wrong number. In the meantime, De N. writes, people were able to warn the Jewish family, and they got away.

To a certain extent, gentiles benefited from the deportation of the Jews, by acquiring their housing and possessions. This aspect is generally overlooked and rarely admitted. We have to formulate specific questions to get at it. Some people do mention having benefited, although usually in an implicit way (cf. Götz Aly, *Judenmord*). In Dutch historiography, this is virtually unknown territory. We all know how “Jews were replaced by Nazis” in Germany, for example at universities and schools or in political positions. The benefits obtained by gentiles in the Netherlands have not yet been referred to as such. One woman, B., explains how she *happened to* see some aspects of the persecution because she worked downtown in the old Jewish neighbourhood, across from the Portuguese synagogue, for a small Jewish company that made feather decorations for clothing from goose, swan and duck feathers and fur (which were then attached to coats, hats, children’s clothes etc). She had been seventeen when she came to work there in 1941 or ‘42. She came from a very poor Roman Catholic family in the Jordaan, and apart from the Jewish shopkeepers and market salesmen in the neighbourhood, she did not know any Jews personally. I asked her how she had got the job. She says,

Through a cousin who was the office boy there, doing all sorts of things, running errands. Jewish boys and girls were not allowed to work any more. My sister joined us later, she worked there as well.

That is the way things are in a city: there was a job and she took it. Something similar happened in the interview when I expressed my surprise that she knew what was happening on the other side of the city, since it was a long way from where she had lived or worked. Then she says, "I lived on Transvaalplein." (I say, surprised, "I thought you lived on Lindengracht? When did you move to Transvaalplein?") She says,

I think in '43, something like that. It was a Jewish apartment of course that we moved into. Yes. It had been empty for some time and then rented out again. The apartments were also rented to people from the coast who had to move. (What was the number?) Sixteen, Transvaalplein sixteen. It was actually a smaller apartment, but it was a split level, on the first and second floor.

This is just one small example of what can be referred to as benefiting. It also provides insights into everyday city life, how this woman and her cousin and sister had found jobs in 1942 and 1943, and how their family had moved across town to another apartment.

Another woman [O.-C.] writes that there were also Jews in the Lutheran Church in her neighbourhood on Dintelstraat, "who wore a Jewish star because it was compulsory. These people were hoping, as became clear to me later, that by staying at this church they would not be picked up and deported. In retrospect nobody realized what was happening," she writes. She has a very distinct memory of how she was on the street with her girlfriends immediately after the roundups, looking for money and jewellery that had fallen or been thrown onto the street or into the bushes. This mention of having looked for money or jewellery or other goods is rare. Robbery by others is mentioned several times. One woman [S.] lived in Disteldorp in North Amsterdam. "An old couple was still living at the end of the street that I walked down every day. One afternoon, I passed the house and someone called me through the letterbox!" The couple were hiding there and they asked [S.] do to some shopping. On two occasions, she did some shopping for the Jewish couple and delivered the food behind the house. They were later deported and "the house was emptied completely by the next-door neighbours."

One fascinating aspect of these memories is the way they simultaneously contain both a closeness or lack of distance but also a sense of distance. Although people were often physically very close to the deportations, they write as if they had occurred at a tremendous distance. They had watched the deportations from behind a curtain, from around the corner, from the neighbours' house, from downstairs or from next door. As if they were not there? As if they were very far away? As if there was a wall in between? The woman who worked for a Jewish family [B.] noticed the family being deported. They were "gone," is how she describes it. One Jewish man who was married to a gentile woman was able to continue the business after his wife revealed that their daughter was not his, but was actually the daughter of a gentile man. She was punished and sent to Ravensbrück, but the Jewish man survived. The rest of the Portuguese Jewish family was also "taken away".

They – that family – were taken away quite soon. The son, who was a rabbi, the youngest Portuguese rabbi in Amsterdam, as well. His wife and children went along as well. I thought then, in my innocence, that they were being sent to a work camp. You could almost say they had left voluntarily.

She repeats five times that at the time she did not know, did not realize what was going to happen. She describes the most terrible things that she saw and heard. There was a roundup in East Amsterdam one Sunday morning. She was staying with her sister in an apartment near the ground floor. They had to stay inside and saw Jews being taken away. They could not believe the rumours about the camps and the arrests of Jews and about babies having their little heads beaten on the stone floors. The next story relates to what she had seen downtown when she was at work. It was the deportation in open trucks of Jewish children, probably from the Jewish girls' orphanage on Waterloooplein or Rapenburgerstraat. In plain daylight, her colleague who was standing on the sidewalk had recognized the faces of children she knew and she had cried out.

In the back of those large trucks were those children. And she (her colleague) shouted, "There go those children! There are the children! There are those children! And what about those parents!" And then she fainted. She fell down on the sidewalk. And we came out and helped her back inside... (Did you see it yourself?) I stood more in the back of the

house. They were standing in front of me, taller people. Children of different ages. The children were standing, laughing, shouting, singing in the back of the truck, happy to be in the truck! ... It happened quickly. I don't know if they were girls. They came from around the corner and the trucks passed quickly, they did not drive slowly. I wonder about the drivers. What they thought, driving the trucks. They must have had children of their own.

Distance is difficult to specify. I asked her how her parents reacted to the persecutions. In her answer, she evokes the sadness and surprise in the voices of her parents.

They thought it was terrible. 'You know who is gone as well? And him, he's gone too. I haven't seen him in weeks. And she is gone too. And *Moffie*! German Jews. Gone as well. *Pulsed* too.'¹⁴

Then I asked her directly about what she herself saw of the deportations. (And those acquaintances and neighbours, did you see from nearby that they left?) In her answer, she confirms both the nearness and at the same time the distance. The names of additional colleagues are mentioned.

I did see it, yes. And your own bosses... (pensive). You are all woven into it, and yet you are not. Let me say it this way. You keep it away somehow. Because if there are people you love and they are being taken away, well I don't think you can come to terms with that so easily! Yes. *Duiffe* was a sweetheart. She was a colleague. Her husband was gone already. So you had incomplete families. She came to work there as well.

She pulls herself out of the memory again. She explains the distance between herself and the persecuted Jews. She was not one of them but, "You come into a Jewish atmosphere, you become familiar with it, like home, you feel more for it." In the case of her and her sister, there was considerable closeness, yet apparently not enough to become involved in protest or resistance activities. For this woman, it has remained a very sad memory, one that she is only prepared to share after considerable hesitation.

This sadness, which may perhaps be a form of mourning, many decades after the event, represents a significant element in the collection of interviews that have been conducted

internationally in the context of this project. The awareness of loss, of a vanished neighbour, classmate or colleague, and of the majority of the Jewish community, is given a voice in these interviews with non-Jews. The question of how this sentiment of loss is voiced is one that would require a comparative study. Nathan Beyrak, the project's international coordinator, remarks that loss was not only a sentiment in memory, but was a material, concrete element in his interviews with non-Jews all over Europe as well. It would be one-sided, he argued, to only look for those elements focused on how people profited and benefited from the disappearance of the Jews. In smaller towns and villages, the deportation of the one Jewish shopkeeper or doctor resulted in an immediate and sometimes lasting lack of access to food or health among the rest of the villagers. Not every Jewish family was immediately replaced by a non-Jewish profiteer, Beyrak noted. According to Beyrak, the material aspects of the loss that followed the deportation and killing of the Jews could be particularly significant in rural areas. The local economy deteriorated, which resulted in suffering for the remaining inhabitants.¹⁵

In their study of the interviews with non-Jews from Amsterdam, Lennaert Heine and Tanya Keppel Hesselink mention the following significant elements. Many eyewitnesses mention the loss of Jewish friends and classmates; people from the neighbourhood, friends, acquaintances. They describe the emptiness in the area after the deportations, and their emotions of missing people, and feeling powerless. Some remember the news of Jewish neighbours who committed suicide. More than 100 Jews in Amsterdam committed suicide shortly after May 1940.¹⁶ Many of the arrests were conducted quickly, just one or a few families in a street at a time, and no group deportations. On the other hand, deportations from institutions such as the Jewish hospitals could take a whole day, with many people being able to see. Many arrests were quiet; there was not much noise. Shouting and violence appear to have been rare, and they are remembered. The apartments of Jewish families were not immediately emptied after an arrest; there was usually some time, at least a few days, between deportation and the arrival of new neighbours. In the meantime the houses were emptied, by furniture moving companies such as "Puls", but also by individuals. There are memories of seeing people going into the houses to take things. And there are memories of seeing new neighbours after the Jews were deported. New neighbours might be people who had been evacuated from the coastal areas, or women who

were having affairs with members of the German military. In urban settings, apartments do not usually remain empty for long. Heine and Keppel Hesselink conclude that these Amsterdam memories of the disappearance of the Amsterdam Jewry from a very close distance remain for the most part very sad memories, without consolation.¹⁷

Under what circumstances do witnesses become helpers and under what circumstances do they become or remain passive? What people see, what people allow themselves to overlook, what they take in, what they decide to act upon – all these separate and crucial steps are deserving topics for further research. The relationship between attitudes and action is an old theme in the field of sociology. *What We Say / What We Do – Sentiments and Acts* is a study written by Erwin Deutscher in 1973.¹⁸ Deutscher notes the crucial importance of opportunity: recognizing an opportunity to act is a condition for becoming active. Not everyone recognizes their own opportunities. I am convinced that this variation in the readiness to act is also gendered. It is connected to a person's level of self-esteem and confidence. The awareness that one is capable, has the possibility to act, is allowed to act, required to act, forced to act often still requires a question, an invitation, a request, a plea.

A series of interviews conducted by Katinka Omon with women who worked outside the home in the war years and who were eyewitnesses to deportations confirms this theory of opportunity, of the importance of self-esteem and the need to be asked. Most of the women somehow became involved in helping, by taking care of Jews in hiding, e.g. by bringing food, doing the laundry or visiting. These interviews show a clear pattern. Without exception, the women became involved in these activities when asked or ordered to do so by men, i.e. their boss, employer, husband, father or a friend of the family. Once they had been 'activated', they were able to continue and to take the initiative and develop their activities independently, but the first step from being passive to becoming active was only taken after a man had asked or ordered them or given them permission to do so.

In the vicinity of *Muiderpoort* train station in East Amsterdam, people saw groups of Jews who had been arrested being taken by foot to the trains following roundups in South and East Amsterdam. Most of the letters we received about this refer to a sense of powerlessness, either at the time or in retrospect. A man [Van S.] born in 1935 had stood on a balcony on Amsteldijk as a child, watching Jews walk to the station.

“A long procession of people passed by our house. Then came the soldiers with guns. There was a woman who didn’t look Jewish, as my mother commented, and she was pregnant. She was carrying a suitcase of baby clothes with her. The suitcase fell open and my father hurried downstairs to help her. The soldier told my father in German that if he did not go away immediately, he could join the crowd right now.” He continues (in a letter): “We could not do anything. (He underlines this). They were in power. My mother said they were mainly picking up poor Jews, because the rich ones had already left. They (his parents) did not like the Jews. My mother found them arrogant and selfish, but in spite of that they found it terrible,” he writes.

A somewhat older man, born in 1928 [T.], also stresses his aloofness as a spectator and his powerlessness. On Polderweg, he writes, he regularly saw “groups of people, Jews with suitcases and other luggage and winter coats I remember, who were waiting there for deportation. We didn’t know anything about the atrocities of the concentration camps, but I remember having a very worried feeling. I was fourteen or fifteen and could not have done anything anyway – we were living the four of us in a tiny three-room apartment.” One woman [Mrs. B. interviewed by Katinka Omon] remembers seeing a “very big roundup” that lasted

a whole Sunday in July; all the streets were blocked and all the bridges were raised around all the Jewish neighbourhoods, and then all those Jews were taken away. You could see if you were standing downstairs, because the station was somewhat higher; you saw that all those Jews had to throw all their luggage on a pile (silence). And then they were put in that train, in those cattle cars, and it was blistering hot weather, and all day long the trains were full. Up until the evening, those people had to stand in the trains; I found that so terrible. Because there were children too, and you have to relieve yourself; how could that be done, inhuman. You could see that car closing, with that child sitting there like this – well this I did not see, but that is what happened. And yes, you stood there watching, but you were powerless.

What did she know?

Yes, you knew of course that it would get worse and worse. There were also some Jewish people who didn't take things so seriously. They said, 'In a week we'll be back.' But on the other hand, you would see announcements in the newspaper that many people had committed suicide.

Another woman [S.] describes the deportation of her neighbours.

We were witnesses to all kind of events that we were of course totally powerless to stop, but we did feel despair. The worst memory is when we saw the last of our neighbours, an elderly grandmother, taken away in a Puls truck, the same truck that also took away all the furniture."¹⁹ ... "Our Jewish neighbours gave people in the neighbourhood all sorts of beautiful things in safekeeping for when they returned! I still have a few very beautiful tablecloths.

One man [De L.] saw his Jewish neighbours and acquaintances (Hogeweg and Pythagorasstraat in Watergraafsmeer) being arrested, including two elderly Jewish ladies for example.

One by one they shuffled with a very small bundle, a small wicker suitcase, a single bag, up the foot plank to the wooden benches in the truck. My mother, an uncle who lives with us, our maid and I watched through the curtains.

This image, of watching through the curtains, is a recurrent one in the interviews. Quite a few of the interviewees refer to having seen arrests and transports from behind curtains. One woman [Van D.] waved at the Jews in a train shunting yard. She and her mother kept waving at the Jews in Watergraafsmeer, whenever there was a train there. One day a Jew escaped from the train. After that there was always a green-uniformed policeman with a machine gun guarding the trains, and she was no longer allowed to wave. From the third storey on Vechtstraat, where she lived, another woman [K.] saw people being taken from a tall apartment building called the Skyscraper to Amstel Station.

I was not supposed to look out the window. A German sound truck had driven around to announce this prohibition in the neighbourhood. Of course as a child that makes you want to look anyway through the crack

of the curtain, and that is how I could see what is now Vrijheidslaan. What I saw was etched in my memory. There was a group of Jewish adults and children, at least five people walking next to each other, with suitcases and bags, the children with toys, in the direction of Berlage Bridge. Our neighbours must have been there as well, because for weeks we had been able to see a festively set breakfast table.

Several people wrote about having to stay inside during the roundups of Jews. During the deportations on Nieuwe Herengracht, a man [S.], who was eighteen at the time, lived next to Café De Druif and looked out on the sluice in front of the house.

I saw some Jews taken out of their homes on Nieuwe Herengracht and gathered near that sluice. There were maybe fifty of them. They didn't have much with them, perhaps a few bags. They looked scared and apparently tried to find out what was going to happen to them. I remember a sexy Jewish girl who tried in vain to get the Germans to change their minds. After some time the group was driven away in trucks. ... That same morning we had orders from the German SA to stay inside. This prohibition against going out was lifted after the arrests. Then it was sad to see the vacated houses being plundered.

A woman who was nineteen at the time [Van Z.] saw the deportations on Pretoriusplein in Transvaalbuurt.

At our square there was a public garden in the middle. There was an air-raid shelter underneath it. One night the Jews from the neighbourhood were driven into the shelter, and later they were taken away by trucks, with a lot of shouting. I slept at the front of the house and was awakened by the shouting. I knew what it meant. Another roundup, people from the neighbourhood being taken away again.

This was also how it went in the summer of 1944, during the final arrests in this popular neighbourhood.

German trucks came down the streets with loudspeakers. No one was allowed to leave their house. The trams were waiting.

Some eyewitnesses present themselves as victims. One woman [H.], now ninety-two years old, went to work and back twice a day by bicycle. She always passed the Dutch Theatre, *Hollandse Schouwburg*, which was where the arrested Jews were gathered before being taken to the train stations. She would see trucks being loaded, all sorts of things. Because of what she saw, she now regards herself as a victim of the Second World War. My colleague asks her why she kept taking the same route to work and back. Couldn't she take another route? Her answer is simply: "It was the shortest way to get there." When people appropriate the role of victim in retrospect and claim to have been traumatized, more questioning may be justified.

As is the case with the element of distance and closeness, there are intriguing variations in what people see, observe, notice, happen to see, glance away from and so forth. I was struck by a letter from a man [H.] who lived throughout the war near the *Nieuwmarkt* area downtown, which was a Jewish neighbourhood. He writes about the ordinariness of life during the deportations. There was usually not a lot to see if you were just walking or bicycling around in the city, just as we do today, through the same streets. He writes:

You might think I must have been a good eyewitness. I wasn't. Everything happened around me. I knew what was happening. If I saw something when I walked around the city, I would turn left or right, or I would turn around. Only one time a Dutch police officer was standing in front of an open door leading to a staircase. I could not keep from saying something to him. They were taking away the Jews who lived upstairs. He said something like, 'If you want to, you can join them straightaway.' I was afraid and went on walking. Very sensible, but I still have a sense of guilt about it to this very day.²⁰

The betrayal of Jews by non-Jews is a topic on which little research has yet been conducted. In a study of the Dutch interviews, Machlien Vlasblom examines the recent literature. Ad van Liempt, a research journalist and television series producer represents an exception with his study of a group of "Jew hunters" in Amsterdam. In the interviews with non-Jews, there are many opportunities to find out more about betrayal. This is not because the interviewees themselves admit to having been involved in betrayal, but because of what they remember from their immediate surroundings. According to the dissertation of Marnix Croes and Peter Tammes, 11,895

Jews were arrested in hiding from 21 April 1943 onwards.²¹ This figure is based on their total of 14,869 Jews arrested subsequent to April 1943. Van Liempt calculates that the ‘Jew hunters’ alone had already arrested between 8,000 and 9,000 Jews.²² This would lead us to conclude that they were responsible for the majority of the arrests. However, this small group could not have been as effective as they were without the help of individual betrayals, anonymous tips and suggestions from the population. Moore suggests that approximately two-thirds of the arrests were based on betrayal. Non-Jews who betrayed Jews could expect a financial reward.²³ Anonymous betrayal could not be rewarded, however, and Moore also mentions other motives for betrayal, including the wish of a non-Jewish mother to end a daughter’s relationship with a Jewish man, and the wish of an anti-Semitic non-Jewish man to help make his neighbourhood free from Jews. Van Liempt mentions a Jewish woman who betrayed the hiding place of other Jews after she had been arrested and threatened with deportation. Non-Jewish families who had provided hiding places were also pressurized into betrayal, as Van Liempt also shows.²⁴ Van Liempt also mentions a woman who betrayed the Jews she was hiding because, as she put it, “the Jews made her life so difficult that it drove her crazy”.²⁵

In a book based on ten of the project’s interviews, as well as additional interviews and research, Anna Timmerman also investigates the question of betrayal. One non-Jewish woman remembers what happened to the family of her Jewish fiancé. When they found a hiding place, the non-Jews who hid them exploited them first financially and later betrayed them by informing on them to a cousin who was a Sicherheitsdienst agent, after which the family was arrested.²⁶

Machlien Vlasblom notes that in the interviews, the non-Jews who had betrayed Jews included several former resistance fighters, a married couple who had provided a hiding place to Jews, as well as a non-Jewish domestic help. They were motivated by emotional and financial rather than anti-Jewish motives, and often in circumstances where they had been put under pressure by Nazis. Vlasblom, Timmerman and Van Liempt agree in their conclusions that more research into betrayal is both possible and necessary.

As we continue this research project, we note that the memories of bystanders have a very direct, local and national impact and significance, as well as universal qualifications. Bystander behaviour, attitudes and memories can be studied comparatively as well as across different times and places. In her

study *Bystanders: Conscience and Complicity during the Holocaust*, the American philosopher Victoria Barnett notes that among gentiles, empathy with the Jews was a factor in becoming active, but that mere empathy was not enough. What was needed is what Barnett calls “disruptive empathy: empathy that is willing to publicly challenge majority ideologies and fears.”²⁷ This can be seen as a combination of empathy, opportunity, a willingness to put oneself in other people’s position and to actively imagine what they are experiencing, and the courage to act.

The other side of the empathy coin, i.e. the side that contrasts with inclusion or a sense of obligation, consists in the exclusion of others from a circle of obligation and from moral consciousness. The American historian Claudia Koonz refers to the Nazi morality and moral ideal in her new book *Nazi Conscience*.²⁸ Her analysis is that an inner conviction of the correctness of the Nazi ideals helped the gentile majority to exclude Jews from their moral consciousness. Koonz stresses that this inner conviction did not take much time to develop. This process of exclusion can happen overnight and almost spontaneously, which makes it all the more frightening and important to study. Empathy and exclusion from moral consciousness are both in evidence in our interviews. It is hoped that in a continuing comparative study, more links between non-Jews who remember the Shoah can be studied in terms of what the German sociologist Ulrike Jureit has labelled a community of memory, an *Erinnerungsgemeinschaft*. Furthermore, it will be intriguing to see to what extent the memories of bystanders have been shared in what Jureit has labelled a community of telling one another, “*Erzähl-Gemeinschaft*”, and what the results have been in the context of a shared language, or, alternatively, to what extent these memories have remained somewhat frozen in time, as a result of not having actively been shared with others over recent decades.²⁹ There is still a great potential to discover new aspects of this difficult period in history and memory. The accumulated and still growing collection of interviews with eyewitnesses across Europe represents an invaluable resource for further research and for obtaining insights into how people remember the process of exclusion, and how they reflect upon their own role in retrospect.

NOTES

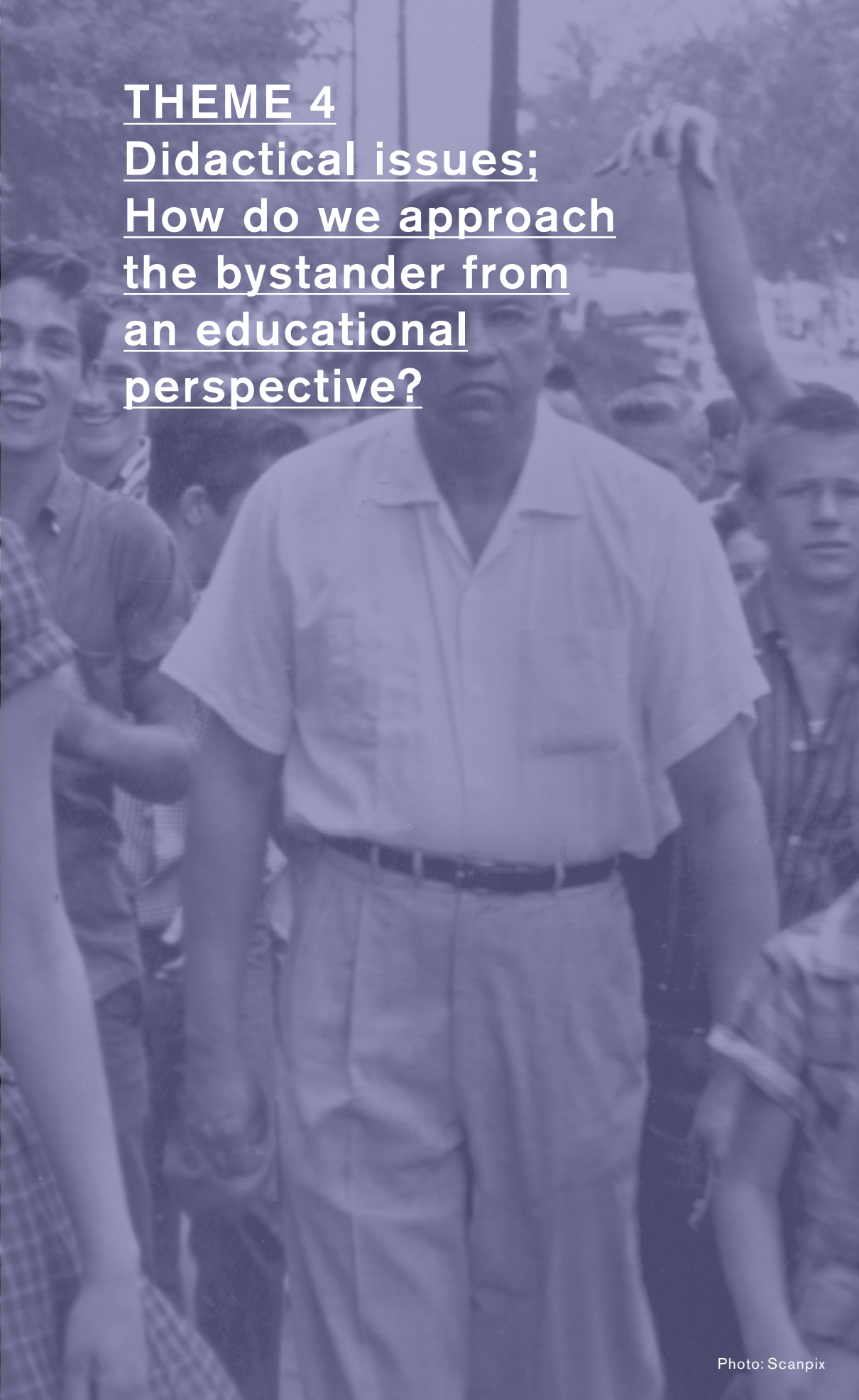
- 1 I am grateful for the contributions of everyone involved in the Eyewitness project of the USHMM, including Nathan Beyrak, Anna Timmerman, the team of Interakt BV Amsterdam, Joan Ringelheim, Katinka Omon, Dennis de Lange, Anouk Eigenraam, Lennaert Heine, Tanya Keppel Hesselink and Machlien Vlasblom.
- 2 I have analysed the history of an educational memorial culture about the Second World War and the Shoah, in Dienke Hondius, *Oorlogslessen. Onderwijs over de oorlog sinds 1945*. Bert Bakker, Amsterdam 2010. One of my observations is a clear shift in perspective during the period 1977-1985.
- 3 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).
- 4 Johan Goudsblom, Schaamte als sociale pijn. In: idem, *Het regime van de tijd*, Chapter 1, (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1997).
- 5 Yehuda Bauer, *Remembrance and Beyond*, speech given at the Holocaust Remembrance Day Ceremony, General Assembly Hall, United Nations Headquarters, New York City, 27 January 2006. Text: <http://www.un.org/holocaustremembrance/events/bauer.htm>.
- 6 United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, Oral History Department. The director of this program is Dr. Joan Ringelheim, and the international coordinator is Dr. Nathan Beyrak. The films and tapes produced in the project are stored at the USHMM archives for further research.
- 7 These interviews with eyewitnesses of the Shoah in the Netherlands, conducted in the Oral History project of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, have been digitized and transcribed, and are available with time coded notes and summaries and reports online through the Netherlands Academy of Sciences website: Project *Bystander Memories* <https://easy.dans.knaw.nl/ui/datasets/id/easy-dataset:41860>. Permission to view and use the interviews can be granted by contacting the author online: d.g.hondius@vu.nl
- 8 Ervin Staub, The Psychology of Bystanders, Perpetrators, and Heroic Helpers. In: Staub, E., *The Psychology of Good and Evil. Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others*, (Cambridge UP 2003).
- 9 Staub 2003, p. 309.
- 10 Staub 2003, p. 292.
- 11 Staub: "As a result of their passivity in the face of others' suffering, bystanders change: they come to accept the persecution and suffering of victims, and some even join the perpetrators"(p. 292). People are able to reduce empathy quickly, Staub notes: "Passivity in the face of others' suffering makes it difficult to remain in internal opposition to the perpetrators and to feel empathy for the victims. To reduce their own feelings of empathic distress and guilt, passive bystanders will distance themselves from victims" (p. 306). "Silence and passivity change bystanders, whether they are individuals or whole nations. They can diminish the subsequent likelihood of protest and punitive action by them. In turn, they encourage perpetrators, who often interpret silence as support for their policies. Complicity by bystanders is likely to encourage perpetrators even more" (p. 309).
- 12 Staub 2003, p. 310.
- 13 Based on a wealth of scientific experiments, Staub recommends the

- following crucial steps: Healing from past victimization, building systems of positive reciprocity, creating cross-cutting relations between groups and developing joint projects and superordinate goals (p. 318).
- 14 “Puls” refers to the name of an Amsterdam removals firm who during and after the deportations of Jews went to their houses to empty the apartments of furniture and other belongings. “To Puls” became an infamous verb in Amsterdam. The possessions of Dutch Jews were usually shipped to Germany.
 - 15 Nathan Beyrak, conversation with the author, Amsterdam, 8 October 2009.
 - 16 Meershoek, *Dienaren van het gezag*, p. 116.
 - 17 Lennaert Heijne and Tanya Keppel Hesselink, unpublished report, observations and analysis of interviews with non-Jewish Amsterdammers of their memories of the deportations. VU University, Amsterdam, 2006.
 - 18 Erwin Deutscher, *What We Say/What We Do: Sentiments and Acts*, (Glenview/Brighton: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1973).
 - 19 Puls: see note 12.
 - 20 Quotes from letters to the Eyewitness Project / Project Ooggetuigen, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Faculty of Arts, De Boelelaan 1105, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2005.
 - 21 Marnix Croes and Peter Tammes, ‘*Gif laten wij niet voortbestaan. Een onderzoek naar de overlevingskansen van joden in Nederlandse gemeenten, 1940-1945.*’ PhD thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, Nijmegen 2004. Second edition, Aksant Publishers, Amsterdam 2006, Online at <http://ics.uda.ub.rug.nl/FILES/root/Dissertations/2004/CroesMT/CroesM-Gif-Thesis-2ndEdition.pdf>
 - 22 Ad van Liempt, *Kopgeld. Nederlandse premiejagers op zoek naar joden, 1943*. Balans, Amsterdam 2003, p. 54. A new study about the so-called ‘Jew-hunters’ in the Netherlands has just appeared, based on extensive archive research at the National Archives: Ad van Liempt, Jan Kompagnie, *Jodenjacht. De onthutsende rol van de Nederlandse politie in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* Uitgeverij Balans (Amsterdam 2011). ISBN 978 94 600 3368 1
 - 23 Ibid., p. 72.
 - 24 Machlien Vlasblom, unpublished report, observations and analysis of interviews with non-Jewish Dutch about the deportations of Jews. Utrecht University and VU University Amsterdam, 2006, pp. 17–18. Machlien Vlasblom conducted the digitization and transcription of this interview collection mentioned in note 7.
 - 25 Van Liempt, p. 76.
 - 26 Anna Timmerman, *Machteloos? Ooggetuigen van de Jodenvervolgung*, (Athenaeum Polak & Van Gennep publishers, Amsterdam, 2007, Chapter 5).
 - 27 Victoria J. Barnett, *Bystanders. Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*, (Westport/London: Greenwood Press, 1999).
 - 28 Claudia Koonz, *Nazi Conscience*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).
 - 29 Ulrike Jureit, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, Hamburg. Lecture and discussion, Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam, 25 September 2009. Ulrike Jureit and Michael Wildt, *Generationen: Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs*, (Hamburger Edition, Hamburg, 2005). Ulrike Jureit, Generationen-Gedächtnis. Überlegungen zu einem Konzept kommunikativer Vergemeinschaftungen. In: Lu Seegers and Jürgen Reulecke (eds.), *“Generation der Kriegskinder”. Historische Hintergründe und Deutungen*, (Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2009, pp. 125–137).



THEME 4

Didactical issues;
How do we approach
the bystander from
an educational
perspective?



HOW WE GOT THE BYSTANDER INTO THE CLASSROOM

Mats Andersson

At first sight it is easy to ask whether Swedish school students should be working with the “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) project’s material on bystanders. Is the subject matter relevant, and above all is the subject sufficiently important to be given time in the classroom, since this will inevitably be at the expense of other subjects?

Another problem is that the bystander is rarely visible. There are no bystanders in the teaching materials used in schools. This was confirmed by a review of teaching materials employed in the social science subjects in compulsory school and further education that was conducted within the framework of the “*Does it matter?*” project.

The more the theme was analysed and illuminated from a didactic perspective, the clearer it became that the subject matter was highly relevant for the intended target group. First and foremost, it represented part of their own reality. The vast majority of students had experienced situations in which the bystander had been present, and in many cases the students perceived having found themselves in this role. In other words, for students in compulsory education, there were clear links to their own lives and experiences. This has also been confirmed in all of the various contexts in which we have presented and worked with the bystander. The vast majority recognise their own experiences in the problems that are highlighted in the project, irrespective of their age, education, sex and so on.

Since the students who were the intended target group so clearly recognised the victim-perpetrator-bystander situations¹ that were presented to them, there were good opportunities to awaken an interest in learning about the bystander. Quite simply, they might very well benefit quite directly from learning more about the subject. The next time they found themselves in a situation of this kind, they might have more options open to them than they perceived themselves to have had before.

In the context of this analytical work focused on the bystander from a teaching perspective, it became increasingly clear that the subject matter was central to a range of different theoretical fields. The explanations of bystander behaviour

are primarily found within the field of social psychology. The normative perspective is also central, since a society's norms can play a decisive role in creating opportunities for and in limiting the actions taken by citizens. One of the clearest examples of this is what took place in Nazi Germany. The historical perspective is also of major value in relation to the bystander theme. It provides an opportunity to shift the focus to a context characterised by completely different conditions, and then to attempt to reflect on how and why those who lived in that time and place acted as they did.

Our initial uncertainty about the relevance of the bystander as a teaching subject was replaced by a conclusion that this area really does contain important knowledge that students at all levels should be given the opportunity to learn about. The strength of the subject matter of the "*Does it matter?*" project is that it covers such a broad range, from the universally applicable and easily recognisable to the abstractedly theoretical. Everyone can begin to work with the material on the basis of their own knowledge, and the analysis of e.g. causes can be pursued more or less indefinitely.

The question that virtually everyone faced with the bystander problem as it is explored in the "*Does it matter?*" project asks themselves, and a question that also represents one of the fundamental issues at the heart of the project, is:

– Why is it that we, as people, do not act but instead remain passive as bystanders?

One might imagine that the ideal would instead be to take action; that the desire to intervene and change the situation should be the most obvious choice. Yet this is not what we do; what then becomes interesting is looking for an answer to the question: Why?

"I am passive because that's part of being human"²

This quotation is very illustrative of what is universal and easily identifiable in the bystander theme. As has already been noted, the theme includes a general, universal perspective; it focuses on a behaviour that is common and that many people are able to recognise in themselves.

Finding oneself in a situation where one for various reasons fails to act when someone is exposed to some form of violation is something the majority of us have experienced. It can

therefore be interesting to try and understand what causes people, more or less consciously, to choose to assume the position of bystander. Developing a broader understanding of the complexity of the bystander role can also produce a more nuanced understanding of people's actions in relation to both historical events and everyday situations.

In the project, the bystander is defined at the level of both the individual and the group; the bystander exists in a context where there is both a victim and a perpetrator. Our sense is that all students have a certain understanding of what being a bystander involves. It is not certain that all young people have experienced a situation where they have themselves either been a victim or a perpetrator, but it is very likely that they have been bystanders. In order to create an interest in learning about the bystander, it is important to build on this experience within our target group, i.e. students in their final years of compulsory education. This link to their own reality in itself also motivates the relevance of working with the subject.

It was important to create a teaching material that was not perceived as moralistic and that did not appear to be condemnatory of what is a common behaviour. Nor was the material to encourage young people to shift position and act if they found themselves in situations where they were bystanders.

Instead the goal has to be to create an understanding for a form of action that should be regarded as universal. By illuminating the bystander from several different perspectives, the students are given the opportunity to reflect about themselves, the contemporary world and our common history. An awareness of the fact that passivity has an effect on situations or series of events constitutes an important element in this reflection. The bystander matters – for the victims' sense of their vulnerability, for the perpetrator's sense of power and for the ways in which other bystanders take action or refrain from doing so. This should not however be seen as meaning that the bystander necessarily bears a responsibility for what happens.

The knowledge gained can be useful for the students' ability to understand the situations they face and can broaden their repertoire of alternatives for action. Taking direct action and intervening to stop what is happening in a given situation is not the only alternative for action. Calling for help may represent another option. What is central is the ability to read the situation and to see what is happening or is about to happen and to understand one's own significance in all of this. Taking the students' own reality as the point of departure creates an interest that is based on the students' own preconceptions. In

order to challenge these preconceptions and produce learning, the students' own experiences and ideas have to be challenged. The challenge must be appropriate to the level at which the students in question are studying.

There are goals in a range of compulsory school subjects that can be achieved by working with the bystander perspective. This represents an important motivation for working with this subject and above all it gives the teacher an opportunity to include the subject matter in the context of the regular syllabus, rather than as an extra project that is conducted in addition to everything else. In order to assist teachers in this, the material includes suggestions for how these links to the regular syllabus can be made.

The construction of a bystander

The bystander can be difficult to grasp. In the context of any sequence of events, the roles are often dynamic and it is not unusual for those involved to shift positions. It is also difficult to say what is going on in the heads of those who find themselves in a given situation. How much can we say, for example, about the motivations of the individuals involved in an historical scenario. What is important is that we clarify that being bystanders is not a behaviour but rather a dynamic form of action that changes depending on the circumstances. The following points of departure are therefore important for creating opportunities for reflection and for an improved understanding of the bystander role.

The frozen moment

In order to be able to use certain situations in the context of the "*Does it matter?*" project's perspective, it has been necessary to freeze time. In order to illustrate the bystander situation, a sequence of events has been frozen so that it can be analysed. Things that have happened prior to the situation, and what happens next, have therefore been left out of the picture. The goal of this construction has been to make it possible to focus specifically on the passive bystander. Otherwise it is easy for the bystander to disappear in the "noise" of what is happening. In this way, reality is constructed in a form that is suitable for the work of the project. This need not be a problem as long as we remain aware that this is what has been done. It also becomes possible to go in at a later stage and specifically discuss the fact

that it is a construction, by asking what happened prior to and after the situation in question.

Timelessness

Learning from history is one of the missions of the Living History Forum and in this context, the timelessness of the bystander phenomenon creates an opportunity whereby students, by studying the Second World War, for example, are able to gain an understanding of situations that they have experienced themselves. By learning about history, the students can develop an historical awareness that helps them to understand the period in which they are living today and which by extension will also help them to cope better with the future. This is one of the central motivations for the teaching of history in the Swedish school system. In this context, it is important to continue to see and judge the historical situation and the people who are acting in that situation on the basis of the opportunities for action that were available at that time. We must not relativise history and assume that the people involved thought the way we do and thus had the same options open to them as we would have.

Being a passive bystander is a behaviour that has not only occurred in our own time. If we look back at historical events in the 20th century alone we find several examples in which the bystander turns up. During the Second World War, enormous numbers of people remained passive as their former workmates, neighbours and friends were transported away to concentration and extermination camps. In Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, we see similar phenomena, where the inaction of large numbers of people made it possible for others to be subjected to oppression. Forms of oppression such as bullying and harassment appear throughout history and there is often a passive bystander, or group of bystanders, who are aware of what is happening and who could be of significance to the situation.

At the same time as the bystander phenomenon contains an element of timelessness, it is not necessarily the case that the bystander has the same significance irrespective of which historical period we look at. There are similarities in the phenomenon itself, but at the same time the behaviour is associated with different causes in different historical contexts, and also with different consequences. Views of people and views about relations between people have changed through history, and for this reason a phenomenon such as the bystander has to be viewed in its

historical context. Factors such as a society's political system and power structure also have an effect. The causes and consequences of being a bystander in a democratic society differ from those associated with being a bystander in a totalitarian system.

Authenticity

Is it necessary for all of the stories, cases and so on presented in the material to be authentic? It is self-evident that all of the examples that have been taken from reality, either historical or contemporary, must be authentic and correctly described. The question is rather whether made-up examples work as well and give rise to similarly important ideas among students as authentic ones. One danger is that examples that are constructed may be instrumental and push in the direction of a certain answer. Does this then mean that a situation in which the bystander and the other parties are present cannot be constructed? These are, as has been noted, situations that virtually everybody has experienced and that take place many times every day at many places all over the country. In this context, a construction need not necessarily produce a situation where there is only one answer.

In the project, the dominant perspective has not been “either/or” but rather “both the one and the other”. There was an aspiration that the authentic examples should be the ones that were first and foremost included in the material. In the final material, all of the longer narratives, situations, films and images are based on authentic events. The shorter value exercises have also often been based on someone's experiences. These do however include some non-authentic situations, which have been constructed on the basis of general perceptions and many people's experiences of what can take place in a schoolyard, in a classroom, at a party, and so on.

The learning process

All teaching materials must proceed from an idea about learning and a view of knowledge. Pedagogic theories about how people learn and what knowledge consists in change over time. The current Swedish national curriculum has very clear views on knowledge. It proceeds from a constructionist idea of knowledge and argues that as people, we create knowledge in the encounter with facts that we acquire by observing what is going on around us. The creation process is itself central to this

view of knowledge. Being able to relate or repeat what we have read or heard does not constitute knowledge according to this way of viewing knowledge and learning; to speak of knowledge requires the presence of an understanding and an ability to apply what has been learned.

The point of departure for the “*Does it matter?*” project is found in three key-words that describe the view of learning employed in the exercises included in the teaching material; arouse interest, challenge and learn. It proceeds from the fact that everyone has preconceptions about the content of what is to be taught. By challenging these preconceptions a process is initiated in which the individual has to create new structures of thought.

Arouse interest

It is important to find a way of arousing the students’ interest so that they will begin to make use of their preconceptions. In the “*Does it matter?*” project it is easy to find elements of this kind that arouse the students’ interest because of the high recognition factor associated with the links to the students’ own experiences.

Challenge

Preconceptions are the thought structures that individuals bring with them into the learning situation. They may involve ideas about how Sweden is governed, why the Second World War started, or about the function of tears. These perceptions and preconceptions can be challenged. In this context, the term challenge refers to an intellectual process in which thought structures are “rebuilt”. By providing examples of perspectives other than those that the students have themselves, we challenge the image students have of a certain phenomenon. Sometimes the challenge may consist in presenting facts that were hitherto unknown to the students.

Learn

On the basis of this perspective, learning may be said to have occurred when the students’ preconceptions about a certain phenomenon have been changed. When I think differently about the Swedish constitution or the functions of the body,

we can say that I have learned something. The students may of course have the same feelings about the phenomenon, but their intellectual understanding has been changed.

The teaching material

This view of knowledge and learning naturally has consequences for the contents of the teaching material employed in “*Does it matter?*” The material must provide teachers with the opportunity to find ways of arousing interest and challenging the students’ preconceptions about the bystander.

Thus the material needed to be active for the students’ part, i.e. it needed to contain exercises in which the students had to participate in the learning process with their own ideas and feelings. Questions and exercises had to be rich in content in order to open the way for several different possible answers and perspectives. The teaching material also had to meet the need to use different methods, since students have different learning styles and experiences. In order to be able to arouse an interest in as many students as possible, the teacher must be able to choose between different exercises that give rise to feelings in different ways.

Many of the exercises comprise different forms of value exercises that elicit, challenge and encourage reflection in relation to the values and ideas that the students have about their lives. The material includes a broad range of exercises. Some proceed from tests, others from pictures, still others from films and there are a large number that proceed from the students’ own preconceptions. The methods for working and for presenting the results of the work also vary. Some of the tasks are solved by the students on their own, others in groups. And they employ both written and verbal forms of presentation. The use of the case method and drama exercises have shown themselves to be particularly well-suited to this subject matter.

The material gives teachers the option of choosing exercises and adapting them to their own group of students and teaching situation. Teachers are free to create a structure that is suited to their own context. Once the students’ preconceptions have been examined, it will be possible, irrespective of who is participating, to summarise the results of this process in a number of central headings. The idea is then to link these to theories about the phenomenon. The material is put together in such a way that the teaching goes via the students’ own

feelings and experiences/perceptions in order to arrive at the “substance”.

The pilot phase

It was eventually decided that the target group for the project would comprise students in their final years of compulsory education, i.e. years six through nine. The idea had initially been to focus primarily on students in further education. The attitude survey conducted at the beginning of the project was therefore directed at this older group of students. In further education in Sweden, the subjects are organised in courses, and different study programs include different courses. The upper secondary schools responsible for further education also have the freedom to place the courses in more or less any order they like. This makes it difficult for a project such as “*Does it matter?*”, which extends across subject boundaries. Quite simply, it can be difficult to find a place where the work would fit into the teaching.

In the compulsory school system, the social science subjects are often read in blocks, which means it may be easier to introduce a theme that spans across different subject areas. It may also be good for students to begin working with the material covered by the project early, in order to give them knowledge they can use to analyse situations and to act. Attitudes and values begin to crystallise at an early age. It would therefore be interesting to start at even younger ages in order to reach even further. This has been discussed within the project, and remains as a possible way of developing the project further.

In order to gain insights into how students at these levels of education “think”, reflect and discuss, visits were made to the classroom. This was necessary since nobody from the project had professional experience at this level. These visits produced an understanding of the type of questions that could be posed, and of the methods and exercises that would make the material attractive to this target group.

The material was tested by a number of pilot schools in order to collect the views of teachers and students. The teachers who piloted the material were given the opportunity to participate in a course focused on the bystander. During this course, they were also able to test some of the exercises that had been developed at that time. They were also asked to do the exercises with their students in some form. They then gave us feedback so that we could further adapt the material on the basis of their

experiences. We also participated ourselves on a number of occasions in order to observe how the pilot teachers chose to use the material and how this worked out. This method of working showed itself to be very enriching and fruitful and it contributed to the way in which the teaching material has been so well received by both teachers and students.

Course for teachers

During our meetings with the pilot teachers, a conviction developed that the material should not simply be distributed to teachers who wanted to include the bystander in their teaching, but that teachers should only be able to obtain the material by going on a one-day course. The form taken by these courses was the same as the course given in connection with the pilot phase, but they were shorter, taking a single day instead of two.

The principal objective was to give the teachers a head start in relation to their students. The material in focus is in part a construction and it may therefore be difficult for teachers to find the material they need to develop an understanding of the subject matter. The course provided the teachers with an opportunity to work with exercises and to themselves develop a view on many of the questions that they would then be presenting to their students. The courses always included a theoretical section so that the teachers could update themselves on one of the subject areas covered by the bystander issue. The most common theme covered in these theoretical sessions has been the social psychological aspects of the phenomenon. This was primarily because the field of social psychology provides the most fruitful explanations for why people become bystanders, but also because psychology is not included in the curriculum at the compulsory school level. The teachers may therefore need to acquire knowledge in this area.

The organisation of the teaching material

The teaching material for “*Does it matter?*” has been structured into four parts. The first part, *General exercises*, involves exercises that proceed from the everyday world of the students, i.e. from the preconceptions that they already have about the phenomenon. By means of these exercises, which focus on the more universal aspects of the phenomenon, the students see that it is something that happens often, that it is everywhere and that it is something

they themselves may have experienced. The results of the reflections and discussions can then be used to provide structure for the more theoretical aspects of the subject matter.

The second part consists of exercises in which the phenomenon is illuminated from an historical perspective. Here the students work with and analyse concrete events from history. The goal of the exercises is to look at the bystander from a different perspective, to see that there is a timeless dimension to being a bystander. The students are also given the opportunity to reflect on how different societal systems at different times change the conditions of people's lives.

The third part focuses on norms and how these influence the role of the bystander. This includes exercises which focus on factors that lie outside of the individual person and that may influence his or her actions. The bystander is illuminated from a group and societal perspective.

The fourth part of the material involves exercises focused on the individual and group levels. Here the students work with a psychological perspective.

Does the “*Does it matter?*” project still have relevance today?

The conclusions that were drawn about the importance of the bystander for learning have been confirmed during the years that have passed since the project was first presented. The courses for teachers are still being given, and now in a number of different forms. The theme is more relevant than ever and links into current social phenomena. To take one example, there is still an ongoing debate as to whether Sweden should have some form of law that forces people to intervene. A moral-courage law of this kind is high on the agenda of certain political parties. In the media we still sadly see a large number of abuses of various kinds, where the passiveness of the bystander is astonishing. And in the area of Holocaust research, the bystander is today among the research fields that receives the most attention.

The project has been developed to include new exercises, and the project leadership, which remains in place, has several ideas about how the teaching material can be further developed in the future. These include a focus on new target groups and updating the material, for example.

Being part of this project, and spending a long time working with these questions, has forced upon those of us who have participated in the work a capacity to identify when bystander

situations arise and what they consist in. With this ability follows a greater *incapacity* to remain passive. The situations become so obvious that it is difficult not to act in some way. Not doing so would also leave you feeling rather empty, not least the next time you were responsible for conducting a teachers' course.

“Does it matter?” has given students and teachers a common conceptual foundation in relation to something that used to be quite alien to us, but which now feels invaluable.
Victoria, a teacher from Tungelsta who participated in the pilot phase.

NOTES

- 1 These three roles must all be filled in order for the bystander to be of interest within the “Does it matter?” project. In other words, the work has primarily focused on the bystander viewed from an individual level perspective. States as bystanders have fallen outside of the project’s focus, for example.
- 2 Quotation from a participant in the teacher training for the project.

WHO CARES ABOUT THE BYSTANDER?

Christina Gamstorp

The Living History Forum was founded on 1 June, 2003. Taking the Holocaust as its point of departure, the mandate of this government organisation was, and still is, that of promoting tolerance and democracy. The Holocaust and other crimes against humanity force us to reflect on the things we encounter in our everyday lives – general issues relating to justice, identity, personal responsibility and what it means to be a fellow human being. And on how it was possible – how it still is possible – for people to abandon themselves and their values and to carry out acts of unspeakable cruelty against others, their friends, neighbours and colleagues; or to choose to stand by and allow the unspeakable to take place.

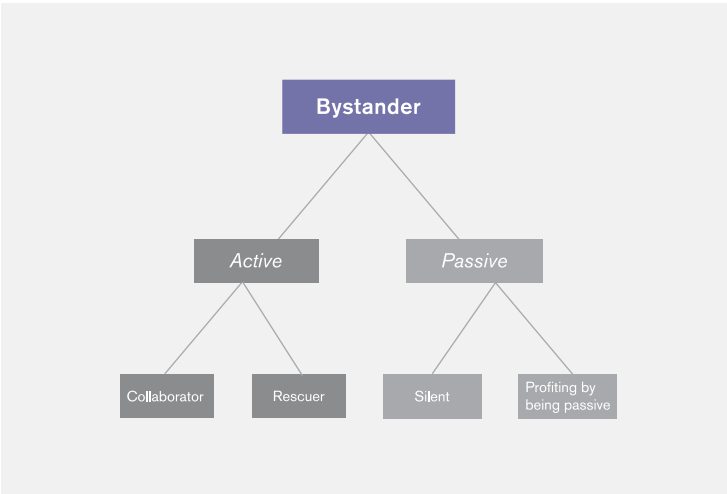
The so-called “bystander perspective” in relation to historical events such as the Holocaust was developed into one of the primary themes of the Living History Forum from the year 2007. Originally, the “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) project was designed around an educational concept focused on pupils aged between twelve and fifteen years.

Within the field of Holocaust research, the concepts of perpetrator, victim and rescuer have been used to describe the actions of people, organisations and nations during the Holocaust. It was not until 1987 that Michael Marrus established a fourth category – bystanders – and thereby established that those who stood and watched, without participating, also played a part in the Holocaust. Since then, this term has been used by researchers, including Raul Hilberg in his book *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders*.

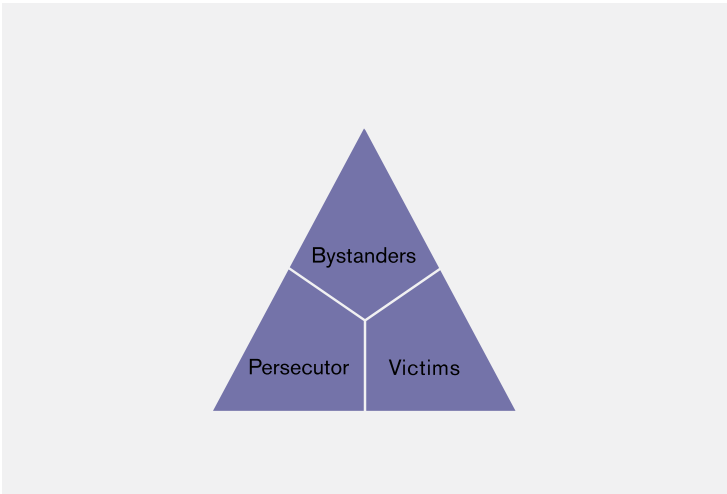
A bystander usually signifies someone who is neither a perpetrator, a rescuer or a victim. In other words, the category consists of a residue of all those who do not fit into any of the other categories. This definition of a whole group, however, in itself encompasses a wide variety of alternative actions, and a plethora of motives for choosing to be a bystander.

The diagram below is an attempt to differentiate between some of the roles included in the concept.

Thus the role of bystander can be divided into the sub-categories passive and active. The passive role may be silent, but may also encompass the choice to be silent with the aim



Role of the bystander can be divided into different categories, depending on the specific circumstances and motives.



Bystander triangle.

of profiting from the situation. Many people opted for this alternative during the Holocaust, when the persecution of Jews often provided “Aryan” bystanders with opportunities to take over Jewish property. Similarly, an active bystander may choose to be either a rescuer or a collaborator. Thus the diagram illustrates how the bystander role involves an array of choices for the individual. It also clarifies the various motives that may lie behind these choices.

It is also essential to underline the fact that the bystander role must be seen in context, along with the other roles: perpetrator, victim and possibly even rescuer. In fact, the true significance of the term bystander is only revealed in the context of a triangular relationship. Very early in the project, the “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) triangle was established in order to define the boundaries of the “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) bystander.

The purpose of “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) was to generate knowledge and an understanding of the so-called bystander role – its existence and the fact that passivity is an action in itself. The project was to isolate and highlight conscious and unconscious choices that might be involved in the bystander role. The project would also attempt to reveal the appeal of being a bystander and how this impacts on individual choices.

As a starting point for the development of the project, an attitude survey was conducted, which indicated that the bystander issue aroused strong feelings among young people, for example in relation to bullying, violence or simply situations where the individual is faced with a choice. What is my responsibility? What are other people doing? Why do we do what we do? And what can we learn from events such as the Holocaust? What prevents us from taking action when fellow human beings are being persecuted in different ways?

In a historical perspective, the bystander issue also raises general questions regarding personal responsibility and what it entails to be a bystander in everyday situations. The project would therefore generate a reflective process concerning the bystander role and its implications with regard to the equal value of all human beings. Everyone who comes into contact with the project should be prompted to reflect on their personal responsibility and the extent of this responsibility. With this as the starting point, the bystander perspective should generate discussions on current issues such as racism and Nazism, bullying, civil courage, and so on.

One important point of departure for addressing the bystander – or rather the causes and consequences of passivity – was that the bystander position is not a neutral one. Being

passive also has an impact: on the perpetrator, thus emphasising his or her sense of legitimacy, on the victim, by adding to his sense of vulnerability and of getting what he deserves, and also on other bystanders. To reflect on the impact of passivity was one of the most important goals of the project. The human being's potential for change (exchanging one role for another – from passive to active) permeated the entire project. Thus, participation, personal reflection and awareness were essential starting points for the bystander project. It is intended to present tools/methods for long-term work with the target groups, including opportunities to continue working on these topics within the project even after the project round has been completed.

Another starting point for the bystander project was the potential for personal identification. Personal accounts and real events will be essential in helping young people in particular to relate to the role of bystander. Personal identification formed one of the core principles of the entire project as a way of deepening the understanding of the bystander's choices and room for manoeuvre. In this respect, authenticity and authentic narratives formed an integral part of both the educational material and the exhibition.

A further important point of departure was that when addressing the bystander, it was of crucial importance to underscore the fact that we were looking at human behaviour, not at a characteristic of human beings, thus underlining the dynamics of being a bystander, i.e. that the bystander and the bystander role should be regarded as involving a dynamic behaviour that is dependent on the context. Norms, our own values and the behaviour of other individuals together form the basis for action or inaction. The dynamic aspect of the role also means that it is possible to alternate between different roles. This project, however, focuses primarily on examining the bystander role, not what happens when someone leaves the bystander role and becomes, say, a rescuer. It is the passive function and the responsibility associated with inaction that was the focus.

This implied that bystander behaviour could only be captured and understood in a given situation. In the project, we called this "the frozen moment". By discussing a number of different situations, and by elaborating on factors that may influence such situations, some general knowledge on bystander behaviour would be generated.

Given the points of departure for exploring the bystander position, the project was divided into three levels that were eventually merged into two, each of which attempted to capture

factors that would influence bystander behaviour. And why we do not always act in accordance with our own values and norms.

Starting with socio-psychological factors, the behaviour of both individuals and groups was explored. In 1964, Kitty Genovese was murdered in New York City. Her murder, which was witnessed by as many as 38 witnesses, spurred a great deal of interest in research on the bystander phenomenon, which identified human behavioural mechanisms such as the diffusion of responsibility and the so-called bystander effect. Group mechanisms, which are particularly important among adolescents, also constituted a major focus for the educational material, enabling young students to explore their own relationships with the group, individual behaviour within the group and prevalent group norms.

From a psychological point of view, there are several mechanisms that may explain why an individual chooses to look on and not get involved. Issues that might be worth highlighting include: What mechanisms of denial are involved? What makes people go into denial, and why? When and how do we distance ourselves from our fellow human beings? How significant are identification and spatial proximity? How do we deal with authorities? Why do we want to belong to a group? Why is conformism important? What happens to those who do not belong to a group? How is a group identity created?

However, people's choices are also influenced by the surrounding society, which constituted the second perspective employed in our attempts to frame bystander behaviour. Social norms and the normalization process are crucial factors in understanding why we become passive bystanders. The question of how norms and norm formation affect the actions of individuals and groups in situations where they can choose to be passive or active emerged as a key issue in the project. Norms and the formation of norms had a decisive impact on events such as the Holocaust, by facilitating a "production" of passive bystanders. Many institutions in the Third Reich – the education system, legislation and the legal system, the private sector etc. – acted in concert to change norms and enable a radical discrimination of German Jews. And today, norms and values have an impact on how we as human beings define what may be termed our "circle of responsibility".

Since the bystander issue is complex and needs to be discussed primarily on the basis of the individual's own thoughts and behaviour, the primary target group for the project was adolescents at the secondary school level and adults working with these young people.

The illustration on page 209 highlights the outline of the project's approach to the bystander.

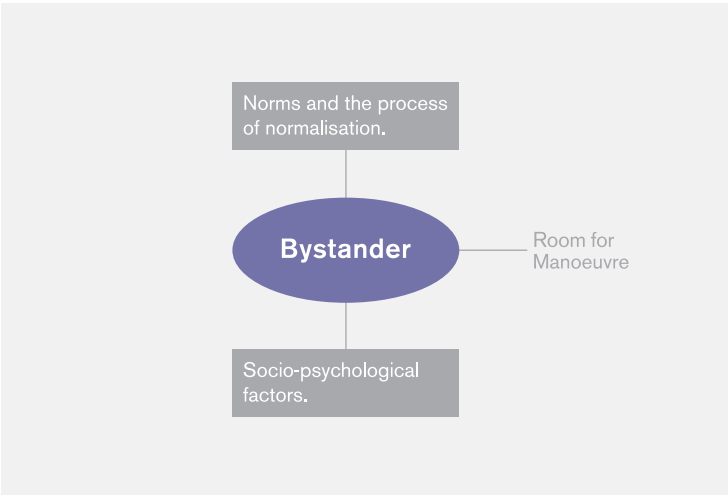
The project was divided into different parts. First, the educational material was also divided into four segments; a brief introductory segment, which enabled the pupils to identify with the bystander; a segment on individual and group behaviour, one on norms and values in society and finally, one which captured the "history of the bystander", thus enabling the Living History Forum to use history as a tool to improve knowledge on human behaviour.

In order to ensure that the quality of the educational material was high, the material was produced in close collaboration with a number of pilot schools, which tested the material throughout the trial period. Their views and suggestions were subsequently integrated into the final version.

Furthermore, a teacher-training component was also developed and was made mandatory in connection with the use of the educational material. The reason for this was simple; the issues associated with passivity are complex and challenging and the teachers need to be well prepared and to have time to reflect on these issues before entering into teaching activities. Thus the teacher training was focused on reflection and identification.

In addition to the educational material, a major exhibition was created. The exhibition took as its starting point the norms and values embedded in different societies, and the students who visited the exhibition were almost able to enter into specific bystander situations, thus providing them with the opportunity to have a thorough discussion of what makes people bystanders in certain circumstances. A number of specific situations were chosen: Elenore Gusenbauer, who lived outside the gates of the concentration camp Mathausen, a lynching in Duluth in the USA in the 1920s, and recurrent situations in which young people have been either bystanders or victims. An educational workshop was linked to the exhibition, allowing students to dwell on a number of the issues that emerged from the different "bystander situations".

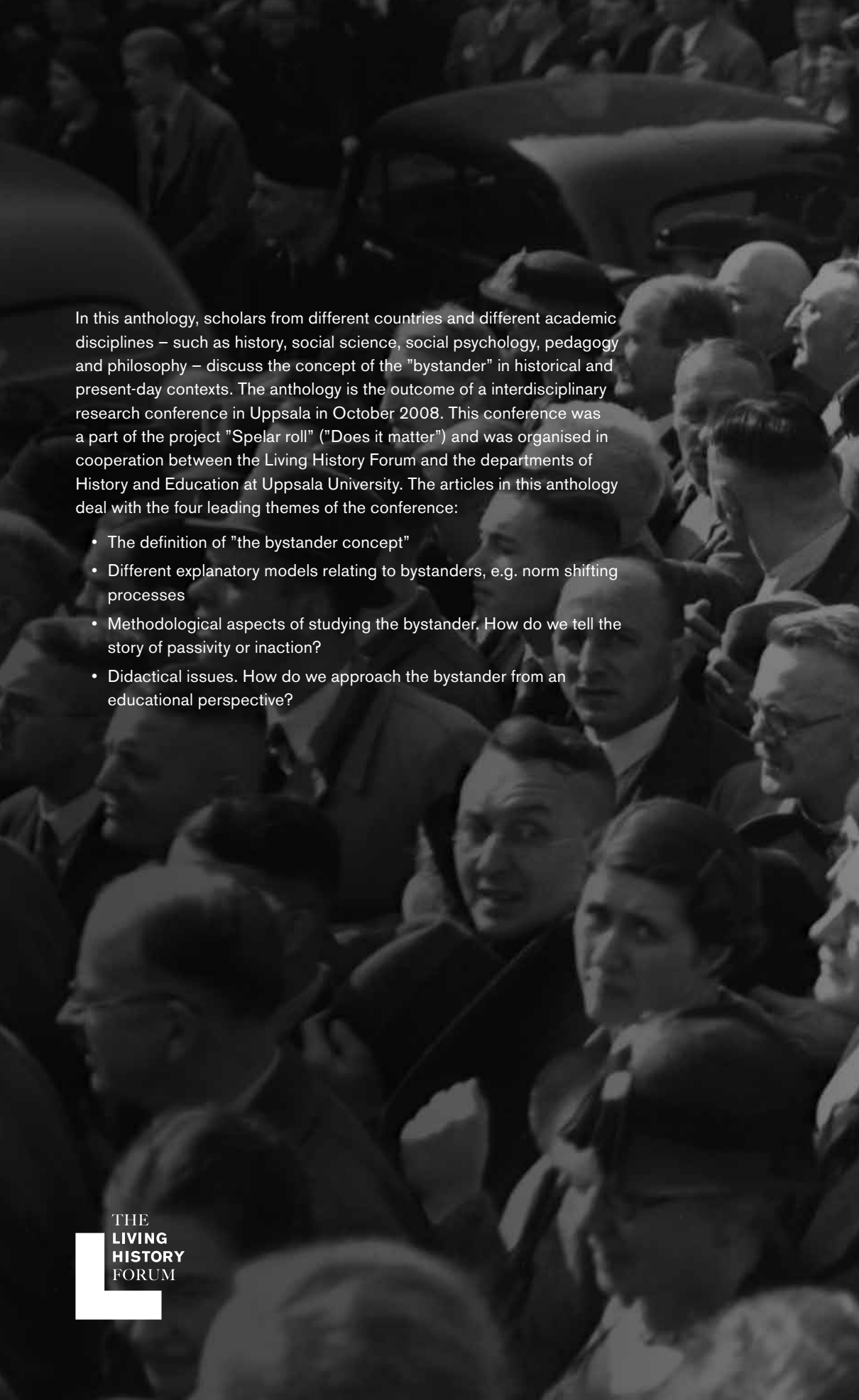
Finally, a research component was also added to the project. This was intended to focus primarily on society, norms and norm formation by compiling existing research, encouraging further research in this field, and then making it available to people outside the scientific community, for example schoolteachers. There are many research fields that are of relevance to the explanation of bystander behaviour, and the scientific disciplines of history, psychology, social psychology and philosophy are all important in this regard.



The bystander concept in “*Does it matter?*” (*Spelar roll*) can be captured through understanding bystander behavior from two perspectives; society and its norms, as well as from a psychological and social-psychological perspective.

Finally, a word on the project's "hidden agenda". The Living History Forum is an organization which bases its work on the Holocaust and other genocides, and which attempts to identify mechanisms and processes that can produce generalised learning experiences. Embedded in the Holocaust is a strong moral imperative to learn from what happened in order to prevent anything similar happening again. Similarly embedded in the "*Does it matter?*" (*Spelar roll*) project is the urge to train young people in the notion of civil courage, to stand up for what they think is right and to assume the responsibility that constitutes an essential part of democratic society. However, in order to avoid making the project overly moralistic, this was not made explicit in the project's educational components. What *was* made explicit was that the goal of the project was to enhance the participants' room for manoeuvre in a bystander situation, by improving their knowledge of human behaviour and by triggering a reflective process about some of the barriers to actual intervention.

The project will also serve as one of the cornerstones for the Living History Forum's future activities. Given the general nature of this issue, the bystander perspective and the processes that may conceivably be linked to the choice of being a bystander – distancing oneself, violence, dehumanisation, the capacity to liberate oneself from the group, etc. – may also serve as a starting point and methodology for activities that have not yet been initiated.



In this anthology, scholars from different countries and different academic disciplines – such as history, social science, social psychology, pedagogy and philosophy – discuss the concept of the "bystander" in historical and present-day contexts. The anthology is the outcome of an interdisciplinary research conference in Uppsala in October 2008. This conference was a part of the project "Spelar roll" ("Does it matter") and was organised in cooperation between the Living History Forum and the departments of History and Education at Uppsala University. The articles in this anthology deal with the four leading themes of the conference:

- The definition of "the bystander concept"
- Different explanatory models relating to bystanders, e.g. norm shifting processes
- Methodological aspects of studying the bystander. How do we tell the story of passivity or inaction?
- Didactical issues. How do we approach the bystander from an educational perspective?