

## RECENT TRENDS IN HOLOCAUST RESEARCH

Unless one is blessed with the gift of prophecy it is hard to say exactly where research about the Holocaust is headed. It is possible, however, to look at what has been happening in the field during the last few years and point out some current trends, some (or more) of which will most likely continue in the immediate future. It is also possible to examine salient issues in public discourse about the Holocaust and suggest how they may influence scholarship in the immediate future.

Even in this time of pandemic, when we are largely housebound, there are available resources for exploring recent publications and the subjects of those publications. For this article, I have relied primarily on the *Yehuda Schwarzbaum Online Library Catalogue* at Yad Vashem, the online index of articles on Jewish subjects at the Jewish National Library – RAMBI, and the listing of publications in the most recent issue of *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, to get a feel for what has been published recently. In addition, the Israel Academy of Science published a report in 2020 entitled, *The State of Holocaust Studies in Research Universities and Colleges in Israel*, that also provides important insights regarding the field, chiefly in Israel, but also in other places.<sup>1</sup> Owing to the fact that that research about the Holocaust appears in a great many languages, and not all of the publications appear in the sources with which I worked, this is not an exhaustive study of the trends, but rather impressions garnered from the sources cited above.

Roughly speaking: there is continuity in a number of areas that have been at the heart of Holocaust studies for a long time; there are somewhat newer subject areas that continue to be explored; there are newer trends from the broader field of history that have made their way into the field of Holocaust research and the same can be said of some newer methodologies; postwar issues like commemoration and representation have become and continue to be a very central part of Holocaust research; and several important related fields of research and discussion continue to intersect with Holocaust studies.

Toward the end of the last decade several noteworthy general histories of the Holocaust appeared. The common thread in them was an attempt to provide more up-to-date presentations and analysis across the broad history of the Holocaust based on new scholarship. The first to appear in 2016 was the late David Cesarani's last book on the subject, *The Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933-1949*. Cesarani wove into his narrative many newer ideas among them the dysfunctionality of the Nazi regime and how that affected their anti-Jewish measures, the deep intertwining of the events of the war with those measures, and the centrality of Jewish voices to depicting and analyzing this history. His book was followed by a series of other one volume histories by Peter Hayes (2017), Laurence Rees (2017), Guenther Lowy (2017), Mary Fulbrook (2018) and David Crowe (2019), which not all aspired necessarily to be as comprehensive as Cesarani, but each of which covered much of the subject.<sup>2</sup> Projects to provide more up-to-date compendiums of the history of the Holocaust, are an ongoing phenomenon. At the time of this writing, for example, several of the major institutions dealing with the Holocaust, like the USHMM and Yad Vashem, have been working to update their online information, and

Cambridge University Press is preparing a four-volume history of the Holocaust by organized by broad subjects that reflects newer findings and understandings.

Holocaust research continues to grapple with some of the most fundamental issues regarding this watershed event, and this is clearly evident in publications from the last year or two. Certainly, one of the first issues that came to be explored is that of the German perpetrators, investigating what they did and why. There are many influential publications on this topic, beginning with the works of Leon Poliakov, *Harvest of Hate*, and Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution in the early 1950s*; continuing with Raul Hilberg's seminal study *The Destruction of the European Jews* and soon after, the problematic but also stimulating book by Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in the early 1960s; the focused study about the Commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka Franz Stangl, *Into That Darkness* by Gitta Sereny appeared the following decade; then the opposing ideas put forth in the 1990s by Christopher Browning in *Ordinary Men* and somewhat later by Daniel Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*; these were followed by the sophisticated analysis offered in the early 2000s by Yaacov Lozowick in *Hitler's Bureaucrats*, and David Cesarani in *Eichmann*.<sup>3</sup> Through these books, we have come to understand that the German perpetration of the Holocaust did not simply spring from a special trait in German society, like the vaunted Prussian military upbringing, but was a product of more complex social factors, the public discourse of the time, shifting values and the motivations of individuals, and of course within this, the centrality of Nazi racial antisemitic ideology and more traditional forms of antisemitism.

Two new research works stand out that continue to explore these ideas, often focusing on individuals, not a single individual, but on each member of a defined group. This kind of eye-level research has been a staple of educational work since the dawn of the millennium and also has found its way into research. Ian Rich, in *Holocaust Perpetrators of the German Police Battalions: The Mass Murder of Jewish Civilians, 1940-1942*, expands on the work of Browning in *Ordinary Men* by examining policemen, and seeks to analyze the motivations and the influence of lower ranking policemen on their subordinates who murdered Jews in Poland and the Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> According to the publisher's information about the book it,

*"transcends anonymous group portraits and provides a micro-historical portrait of individual killers that offers broader insights into the overall actions of the SS and police under Heinrich Himmler. Rich's comprehensive analysis of SS and police personnel records and post-war trial investigations reveals the method by which police battalions were transformed into instruments of mass murder in the occupied east during the Second World War."*<sup>5</sup>

The prolific University College of London researcher Mary Fulbrook also addresses the self-understanding of perpetrators. In a very thought-provoking online exhibit that is meant to be used for educational purposes, entitled *Compromised Identities?* she and her team delve into

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1 Bartal 2020. The translations from this document are my own RR.

2 Cesarani 2016; Hayes 2017; Rees 2017; Lewy 2017; Fulbrook 2018; Crowe 2019.

3 Poliakov, 1954; Reitlinger 1953; Hilberg 1961; Arendt 1963; Sereny 1977; Browning 1992; Goldhagen 1996; Lozowick 2002; Cesarani 2004.

4 Rich 2018.

5 <https://www.amazon.com/Holocaust-Perpetrators-German-Police-Battalions/dp/1350038024>; accessed 21.10.20.

*“how perpetration and complicity are represented and understood both at the time and later [and]... consider ways in which individuals and others tell their stories about being involved in state-sponsored violence, and how the stories change over time... [And how] individuals and societies understand themselves and create identities through the narratives they tell.”*<sup>6</sup>

Since the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, regional studies about the events of the Holocaust have been produced and continue to be produced. For example, Avihu Ronen’s PhD thesis on Zagłębia (1989), Yehuda Bauer’s study of the shtetls in the Kresy (2009), David Silberklang’s study of the Lublin district (2013), and László Csósz’s study about Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok county in Hungary (2014).<sup>7</sup> In this vein appeared the English language version of Wolf Gruner’s study, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia*, which assesses the role of the Germans, the role of the local Czechs and the responses of the Jews.<sup>8</sup> Two studies also appeared that examine borderland areas and discuss the special dynamics of borderland areas during the Holocaust, echoing works by other earlier researchers like Bauer and the late Alexander Prusin.<sup>9</sup> Mihai I. Polic published, *The Holocaust in the Romanian Borderlands* and Gaëlle Fisher and Caroline Mezger edited a volume entitled *The Holocaust in the Borderlands; Interethnic relations and the Dynamics of Violence in Occupied Eastern Europe*.<sup>10</sup> The latter resulted from a workshop conducted through EHRI, European Holocaust Research Infrastructure, which seeks to provide a platform to make documentation about the Holocaust more readily accessible from archives throughout Europe and enhance research about the subject. The call for papers for this workshop constitutes a lucid explanation about the subject of borderlands, and evinces newer approaches to the study of the Holocaust by placing it within some significant intersecting contexts.

*“As recent research has shown, the Second World War, Nazi Germany’s occupational policies, and existing and shifting dynamics of local interethnic relations were crucial to the distinct unfolding of the Holocaust in different borderlands. This workshop sets out to explore this topic further and more systematically. It aims to bring together novel and critical insights on the borderlands of Eastern, Central, and Southeastern Europe and the growing body of research on the dynamics of violence in the wider region. By placing the Shoah into larger contexts of different military occupations and interethnic conflicts during World War II, this workshop seeks to problematize the relationship between state structures and popular mobilization — perspectives “from above” and “from below” — in the unfolding of Holocaust violence...”*<sup>11</sup>

A variant of a regional study that came out in 2019, is that of Geraldien von Frijtag Drabbe Künzel and Valeria Galimi, which compares and contrasts several cities, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Florence, Thessaloniki, Vienna and Warsaw.<sup>12</sup>

Deeply interconnected with both the subject of perpetration of the Holocaust and regional studies is the growing body of work that examines the role of local people outside of Germany in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors. This, too, is not a new subject, and it particularly came to the fore at the start of this century with the appearance of the book *Neighbors* by Jan Tomasz Gross in 2000.<sup>13</sup> It has been followed by a number of important studies since then by Jan Grabowski, Barbara Engelking, Christoph Diekmann and others that highlight the role of local in the persecution of their Jewish neighbors.<sup>14</sup> In 2018 Grabowski and Engelking edited two

thick volumes in Polish followed by the English version *Night Without End*, about the fate of Jews who tried to survive the murders in Poland, and which highlights the role played by their Polish neighbors in their suffering and usually, death.<sup>15</sup> Grabowski followed this volume in 2020 with his book in Polish about the Polish Blue Police, who collaborated with the occupation regime in their murderous anti-Jewish measures.<sup>16</sup> Other new studies have also explored the role of the locals in additional venues. Based on their personal records, Yuri Radchenko wrote an article about members of the OUN-M, Ukrainian nationalists and their role in the persecution of Jews; Efraim Zuroff and Rūta Vanagaitė searched out sites of murder in Lithuania and highlighted the involvement of Lithuanians in the murder of the Jews there; Laurent Joly analyzed the role of French bureaucrats in anti-Jewish persecution; and Simon Levis Sullam published a monograph that should help put an end to the entrenched myth that the Italians were exceptionally benevolent toward their Jewish neighbors.<sup>17</sup>

Especially in the wake of the writings of Hilberg and Arendt in the early 1960s that cast Jewish leaders during the Holocaust in a negative light, and because of the common public perception that Jews had passively gone to their deaths like sheep to the slaughter, a body of research emerged that regarded Jews as subjects and not just objects, and investigated the wide range and multilayered dynamics of Jewish responses and behavior during the Holocaust. The concept of *Amidah* (standing up), which entailed many forms of resistance, began to gain traction by the late 1960s, and as time went on a more refined discussion of Jewish behavior began to appear.<sup>18</sup> The new book *Resisting Persecution, Jews and their Petitions during the Holocaust*, edited Thomas Peglow Kaplan and Wolf Gruner explores a kind of *Amidah* that up to now has received little exposure, attempts by Jews to use the system to give them protection.<sup>19</sup> Reviewing the volume Marion Kaplan wrote:

*“In exploring how persecuted Jews petitioned Nazi officials – and, in some cases, Jewish leaders – for justice, rights, and mercy, editors Wolf Gruner and Thomas Pegelow Kaplan have initiated a thought-provoking and entirely new approach to Holocaust Studies. Challenging those who claim Jews were ‘passive’ victims or that only political or armed defiance can ‘count’ as resistance, this volume distinctly reveals that despite having far less power than the authorities, Jews demonstrated agency, protested -- even defied -- persecution, and, in some instances, succeeded. These eye-opening essays highlight a spectrum of responses over geographical regions and over time, becoming ever more urgent. Here we see active Jewish individuals and groups grasping at the kind of actions available to them, contesting oppression as it increased exponentially.”*<sup>20</sup> (<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/KaplanResisting>, accessed 21.10.20)

Other recent and current research also focuses on Jewish behavior and responses from various perspectives. Gruner has continued publishing in this vein and his newest book *Resisters, How Ordinary Jews Fought Persecution in Hitler’s Germany*, focuses on acts of defiance and eye-level resistance. For his forthcoming PhD dissertation at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Yaron Nir Freisinger is researching Josef Zerkowicz and the Circle of Intellectuals with which he was associated in the Lodz Ghetto; whereas Hans Schippers returned to the story of the West-erweel Group which was involved in rescuing mostly young Jews in the Netherlands, and he focused on the dynamics in a group that was composed of Jews and Christians.<sup>21</sup>

6 <https://compromised-identities.org/>; accessed 12.10.20.

7 Ronen 1989; Bauer 2009; Silberklang 2013; Csósz 2014.

8 Gruner 2019.

9 Prusin 2010.

10 Poliec 2019; Fisher – Mezger 2019.

11 <https://www.ehri-project.eu/holocaust-borderlands-interethnic-relations-and-dynamics-violence-occupied-eastern-europe/>; accessed 20.10.20.

12 Von Frijtag – Künzel – Galimi 2019.

13 Gross 2001. The original Polish version *Sasiedzi* published in 2000.

14 Grabowski 2013; Engelking-Boni 2016; Dieckmann 2011.

15 Grabowski – Engelking 2018, English edition 2022

16 Grabowski 2020.

17 Radchenko 2019; Vanagaitė – Zuroff 2020; Joly 2019; Levis Sullam 2018.

18 For more about the concept of *Amidah* see Rozett R. 2004.

19 Pegelow Kaplan – Gruner 2020.

20 <https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/KaplanResisting>; accessed 21.10.20.

21 Gruner, 2023. Freisinger (in progress); Schippers 2019.

Undoubtedly there is some behavior that is very difficult to categorize or even fathom. The issue of Jewish Kappos is such a topic. In her monograph from 2019, *Bitter Reckoning: Israel Tries Holocaust Survivors as Nazi Collaborators*, Dina Porat evokes the atmosphere around Kappo trials in Israel in the immediate postwar years. She shows how the trials actually shifted public opinion from seeing the Kappos as brutal traitors to seeing them as victims.<sup>22</sup> In an article from the volume based on a Yad Vashem conference on Jewish Solidarity, Vera Buser sees the Kappos in a more complex way. She demonstrates that in Blechhammer, Karl Demeter displayed brutality, but at least at times he did so for a positive reason. Apparently, in some cases he hoped his brutality would prevent the German guards from being even more violent toward a given prisoner, and in other cases his brutality was a ruse to convince the guards that he was with them and not against them. This was so that he could continue to serve as a functionary with the goal of blocking the worst of the violence against the prisoners in his charge.<sup>23</sup>

Probing the Holocaust through trials and legal issues is one of the oldest approaches in the field of Holocaust research that also continues today. Although it was not always the main focus, the Holocaust was clearly present in the first volumes that appeared regarding the Nuremberg Trials and the subsequent legal proceedings.<sup>24</sup> Two significant books that discuss law and justice that appeared in 2019 are Christian Rabi, *Mauthausen Vor Gericht*,<sup>25</sup> and Rajika L. Shah et. al. *Searching for Justice after the Holocaust, Fulfilling the Terezin Declaration and Immovable Property Restitution*. Although it is not inconceivable that there will be new trials of perpetrators, it is clear that the time for such trials is rapidly nearing an end. Nonetheless, the trials that were held and the material that was gathered for them remain important sources for historical inquiry. Moreover, issues like restitution of property remain very current. For example, the Reuters news service reported last spring, that in the recent Polish elections, the return of property to the Jewish heirs of the victims was very contentious. Polish television, Reuters reported, accused the opposition candidate of putting foreign interests above Polish interests when back in 2015 the spoke of the need to address the issue forthrightly.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, Holocaust research does not take place in a vacuum, and therefore, it is also influenced by wider trends and newer methods in historical research, and most likely it is reasonable to assume that these trends will continue in the foreseeable future. On the one hand, time has always been an element of historical inquiry in general and of the Holocaust in particular. Yet on the other hand, it has only been delineated more recently as a distinct aperture for exploration.<sup>27</sup> The same can be said for a number of other subjects that have been specified in a volume published in 2018 and edited by Marek Tamm and Peter Burke, *Debating New Approaches to History*. The essays in this volume discuss some of the newer ways that history is being investigated or how certain topics have been rearticulated. Among other topics, the volume includes articles on perspectives of gender, post-colonial history, the history of emotions and the history of memory, which have also found expression in recent years in Holocaust research.<sup>28</sup>

In December 2018, Yad Vashem held a conference entitled “The Time Dimension During and Regarding the Holocaust: In Real-Time and in Retrospect.” The call for papers conveyed the various aspects of time in relation to the Holocaust that the conference addressed:

22 Porat 2019.

23 Buser 2022.

24 Gilbert. 1947; Jackson 1949; T Taylor. 1952.

25 Rabi 2019; Shah – Bazylar – Boyd – Nelson 2019.

26 Reuters June 15, 2020.

27 Tamm – Olivier 2019.

28 Tamm – Burke 2018.

“a) The experience of waiting and ‘non-moving time’ in ghettos, in hiding, and in camps; b) Controlling time as a tool for perpetrators; c) The historiographical question of defining the time-frames of the Holocaust and defining the Holocaust as a ‘period;’ d) The cycle of life and the calendar cycle in Jewish life as a tool for preserving identity; e) Ways of measuring time in extreme situations; f) Linear line and circular time in the self-consciousness of the Jews; and g) The acceleration and slowing-down of time in the Jewish experience and consciousness.”<sup>29</sup>

Geography is another old/new prism applied to researching the Holocaust. Regarding using it as a vehicle for exploration, nearly a quarter of a century ago Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt analyzed the Auschwitz Birkenau Extermination Camp through the lenses of geography and urban planning in their groundbreaking book *Auschwitz, 1270 to the Present*.<sup>30</sup> This was followed several years later, by Tim Cole’s geographical study of Budapest during the Holocaust, *Holocaust City, The Making of a Jewish Ghetto*.<sup>31</sup> Cole essentially mapped the creation of the Jewish starred houses and the Budapest Ghetto, and from that derived important insights about the nature of the Nazi and Hungarian regimes in 1944 and into 1945.

In 2018, Zoltán Kékesi, also returned to Budapest’s geography, but with a twist, in his article, “By the Footsteps: Spatial Imagination, Cultural Production, and Anti-Jewish Politics in Budapest.” He added an aspect of imagination. According to the article abstract:

“By focusing on Budapest as an imagined space, this article attempts to contribute to the application of spatial theories to Holocaust research. The article places the outlines of the Budapest ghettos on the ‘historical maps’ of local anti-Jewish urban imaginations. By doing so, it argues that anti-Jewish spatial policies in 1944 relied, in part, on a symbolic topography created by a long tradition of cultural representations. At the same time, it presents examples that confirm Michel de Certeau’s statement that city spaces, imagined or real, are produced on ‘ground level’—namely, by footsteps. Antisemites, too, were walkers in the city and created racialized images of the city ‘from the bottom up’.”<sup>32</sup>

An article by Annette Finley-Croswhite and Gayle K. Brunelle in 2019 suggests that an early and seminal event in Paris during the Holocaust actually created a landscape. According to their article abstract, the bombing of six synagogues by the French right-wing Mouvement Social Révolutionnaire in October 1941,

“created a ‘Holocaust Landscape’ in Paris, with serious implications for Jews in Occupied and Unoccupied France. [And] several threads of the narrative thus interject the story of the bombings into the larger history of the Shoah.”<sup>33</sup>

Within the framework of a larger ongoing digital undertaking about history and geography at Stanford University, that is innovative in both approach and methodology, there is an ongoing project, “The Holocaust Geography Collaborative”. The official explanation for the project elucidates these newer approaches. According to its website, the project

“argues for how the key geographic concepts of location, scale, resolution, territoriality and the space/place dichotomy are fundamental to an expanded understanding of the genocide. Central to all of these terms and to the original case studies of our collaborative were also the question of time and place. When something happened was just as crucial as where something occurred. The very nature of the geographic focus of our projects require either an emphasis on dynamic mapping that shows change over time or a focus on the relationship of the individual’s experience of

29 The time dimension during and regarding the Holocaust: in real-time and in retrospect. <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/events-of-the-international-institute/conferences/time-dimension.html>; accessed 25.10.20.

30 Dwork – Van Pelt 1996.

31 Cole 2003.

32 Kékesi 2018: 91.

33 Finley – Croswhite – Brunelle 2019.

movement through a particular space. The temporal scales involved in dynamic mapping or the movement of peoples (as we believe it to have occurred) can be described but not captured easily in a print format. The dynamic digital environment and the use of GI Science allow for visualizations of these spatial concerns in more robust and innovative ways.”<sup>34</sup>

Their first findings were already published in *Geographies of the Holocaust* in 2014.<sup>35</sup> They also have produced GIS (Graphic Information System) databases about deportees from Italy and Jewish survivors in Budapest. Most recently Simone Gigliotti and Alberto Giordano, both who have been involved in the Collaborative, are embarking on a GIS project about Jews who sailed to Shanghai during the Holocaust period.<sup>36</sup>

As with time and geography, emotions have often been integral to historical discourse, and like them, they have only really been articulated as an angle of inquiry during the last decade or two. Writing in *The Journal of Contemporary European History* in 2016, Christian Bail reviewed a number of books on this topic that have appeared since the start of the twenty-first century. He notes that it is a complicated subject that is still in the process of coalescing:

“What exactly is the history of emotions? This question, often still encountered by historians working in the field, suggests that the history of emotions is difficult to understand yet hard to ignore. Historians active in other areas may have noticed the recent founding (and funding) of emotions research centers by Queen Mary, University of London, the Max Planck Society and the Australian Research Council. Yet the emergence of a critical mass of emotions researchers has not altogether dispelled concerns that emotions are not really accessible to the historian or worthy of sustained and serious consideration. Even a pioneer of the once dubious field of cultural history such as Peter Burke has wondered about the history of emotions’ viability while recognizing its promise. As he sees it, if historians regard emotions as stable across time (and thus pre-cultural, it seems) then all they can do is chart changing attitudes to these constant emotions. This leaves historians writing intellectual history but not the history of emotions. If historians, by contrast, treat emotions as historically variable then they may deliver more innovative work, but they may also end up struggling to find evidence for their conclusions.”<sup>37</sup>

About ten years ago in a print discussion with a number of scholars, Alon Confino proposed the possibilities for the history of emotions in research about the Nazi period. Confino wrote:

“A history of sensibilities goes beyond the logic of ideological thinking into those emotions and memories that make human motivations and actions, into those images of the self, collectivity and the past that cannot be reduced to ideology. This adds new perspectives to the history of twentieth-century Germany, creating new links (as well as ruptures) among the various ideological regimes. It makes us able to capture that which it was possible to experience, feel and perceive in a given society and regime, and that which it was not, drawing out more clearly, for example, the emotional configuration in the Third Reich compared to what came before and after.”<sup>38</sup>

Since then, it seems that only a few works have been published in this vein about the Holocaust period. Among them, Simone Gigliotti, now of Royal Holloway, wrote an article entitled “Emotional History and Dramatic Disruption” in 2016. At the conference of the American Historical Association (AHA) in New York City early in 2020, the Harvard scholar Jan Burzlaff gave a paper entitled “Totalitarianism from Below: Toward a History of Emotions of German Jews.” According to the article synopsis, he addressed how German Jews reacted to the unfolding persecution:

“This paper offers the first insights into what aims to be a history of the emotions of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, a field merely in its infancy. Based upon a dozen personal memoirs submitted by German Jewish émigrés to the so-called Harvard contest in 1941, the paper argues that the social exclusion of German Jews after 1933 is a powerfully emotional process.”<sup>39</sup>

In 2020 Marion Kaplan published a monograph about the hope and anxiety Jewish refugees felt in Portugal during the war years, two emotions that are obviously fundamental any discussion of emotions.<sup>40</sup> In addition, during summer 2020 Yad Vashem held an online conference on the subject of Ego Documents. Such documents are firsthand accounts that include elements of introspection, which is certainly part of the history of emotions. As an example of what was discussed, one of the sessions combined the subject of ego documents with the subject of Jewish functionaries – Kappos and others. Among the presentations was that of Daniela Ozacky-Stern, “It is Our Duty to Save the Strong and the Young’: Revisiting a Controversial Ego-Document about the *Aktion* in the Oszmiana Ghetto”. In this *Aktion*, Jewish policemen from Vilna were sent to choose among the weaker ghetto residents to be handed over to the Germans in an attempt to keep as many others as possible alive. The subject of Sarah Cushman’s paper, also presented in the session, was “Privileged Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau and Their Ego-documents.” This was a micro study about the dynamics between several women with more protected positions in the camp, and how they saw themselves.

The study of the Holocaust through the lens of different groups in society is ongoing, and developing more and more. Subjects like women, family, and children have been and continue to be investigated from new vantage points. In spring 2020, the entire issue of the journal *Nashim (Women)* was addressed to women health care providers during the Holocaust era.<sup>41</sup> In 2019, Sharon Kangisser Cohen and Dalia Ofer edited a volume about the rehabilitation of child survivors in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust.<sup>42</sup> Dalia Ofer also published an article about children and solidarity within Jewish families in Warsaw during the Holocaust.<sup>43</sup> In 2020 Yad Vashem issued a call for articles for Yad Vashem Studies about another important group in society, the elderly. Of course, the definition of elderly is not necessarily what we would use in our more normative world. In the fire storm of the Holocaust years any survivor over 50 was considered elderly. It is also worth mentioning that other victims of the Nazis, like the disabled continue to be researched and discussed in conjunction with the murder of the Jews. In 2019 IHRA published a volume based on a conference it sponsored on this topic.<sup>44</sup>

Newer methods of research often are tied to newer resources that have become available. The advent of EHRI, as was mentioned above, provides an unmatched portal to archives with material about the Holocaust, and as it continues to develop, will increasingly allow scholars to discover new material. Similarly, International Tracing Service material which was digitized a number of years ago and is now open to the public at large contains tens of thousands of records about individuals. This compendium facilitates engaging in micro history, and allows researchers to uncover common threads or variations between a great many individuals. Although it has not yet been digitized, the opening of the Vatican archives also promises to yield important information about the important subject of the Vatican’s and Catholic Church’s actions and attitudes during the Holocaust era.

34 Spatial History 2020.

35 Knowles – Cole – Giordano 2014.

36 The Holocaust at Sea 2020.

37 Bailly 2016: online extract.

38 Confino 2011: 76.

39 Burzlaff 2020.

40 Kaplan 2020.

41 Nashim 2020.

42 Kangisser Cohen – Ofer 2019.

43 Ofer 2022.

44 Bailer – Wetzel 2019.

The digitation of resources allows for new ways to explore material and present information, and has engendered a new field, digital history. According to one of the centers that works in this new realm, the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University:

*"Digital history is an approach to examining and representing the past that takes advantage of new communication technologies such as computers and the Web. It draws on essential features of the digital realm, such as databases, hypertextualization, and networks, to create and share historical knowledge."*<sup>45</sup>

At Yad Vashem there are ongoing digital database history projects. The Transports to Extinction or Deportations of Jews project,

*"examines the transports as an historic event that is significant in its own right, not just as a technical stage during which Jews were transported from one place to another. Indeed, the transports played an important role in translating the grim theory of the 'Final Solution of the Jewish Problem' into reality and enabling it to spread its tentacles to the very edges of the territories controlled by the Third Reich...The aim of the resulting database is to reconstruct all the transports that took place during the Holocaust from territories of the Third Reich, countries under German occupation, Axis states, and satellite states. The database has been constructed on the basis of information from a wide variety of documents, research, legal material, survivors' testimonies, and memoirs."*<sup>46</sup> ()

And the Online Guide to of Murder Sites of Jews in the Former USSR, alongside the Yad Vashem project The Untold Stories,

*"combine the results of historical research with documents reflecting personal experience, to provide concise information on the location of murder sites, the identity of the perpetrators, the number of victims and how the Jews were murdered."*<sup>47</sup>

In my own research I have found that the metadata from digital archives, libraries and other databases is a very useful tool for exploring history. The idea of bibliometrics, using statistical methods to analyze publications, is not new, but the digital environment makes it easier and presents more possibilities to map what, and how much, has been published about a given subject. I first tried this regarding survivor memoirs back at the start of this millenia, using the digital Yad Vashem Library catalog.<sup>48</sup> In other later research projects I have also mined digital databases. For my monograph *Conscripted Slaves, Hungarian Jewish Forced Laborers on the Eastern Front during the Second World War*, I used the digitized card index of the Hungarian military for those laborers who either were killed or were missing in action. This allowed me to trace the path companies followed on the Eastern Front, to map out how many men were killed or missing in action at a given time or place, explore the age distribution of the forced laborers and analyze other factors.<sup>49</sup> More recently in an article I wrote about the moment of liberation for Hungarian Jewish survivors, using Yad Vashem's databases and the Degob website, I was able to identify sites of liberation, indications of relative proportions of survivors in those places, and then specific testimonies of survivors to add descriptive details.<sup>50</sup>

In December 2019 the Israeli Academy of Sciences published a report *The State of Holocaust Studies in Research Universities and Colleges in Israel*. Among the many important elements that surfaced in the report is that more than half of the courses taught in Israel at the university and college levels are about commemoration and representation, which is indicative of the trend not only in Holocaust teaching but in research, too. Out of all the research papers that were written in academic institutions in recent years in by Israeli scholars, the report cited that about a third deal with the events and other aspects of the Holocaust itself, about a third deal with historical and ideological contexts of the Holocaust, and about a third with Holocaust representation and commemoration.<sup>51</sup> This direction in research is also clearly evident in the RAMBI articles database for 2018–2019, where the most prominent topics under the keyword Holocaust are representation, commemoration and other post-war issues.

Among other issues touched upon in the report is that academic and public discourse about the Holocaust is most likely influencing research, but it is hard to gauge just how much. The relationship between Holocaust and Genocide is one such significant discussion in both academia and the public spheres. In Israel, according to the report,

*"it appeared that there is a fundamental disagreement among the community of Israeli researchers – between those who think that the Holocaust should be studied as a subject of knowledge that stands on its own, and those who are sure that Holocaust research should be merged with Genocide Studies. These positions are contiguous to the narrowly focused debate among researchers of the subject regarding the question whether the Holocaust is unique and unprecedented, or an event that is part of the series of genocides."*<sup>52</sup>

Other subjects such as the relationship between the Holocaust and colonialization, and the Holocaust and racism, have found expression in publications in recent years. The monograph, *Decolonizing Auschwitz? Komparativ-postkolonial Ansaetze in der Holocaustforschung*, by Steffen Klaevers from 2019, and the volume *Holocaust Memory and Racism in the Modern World*, by Shirli Gilbert et.al. are salient examples of these topics in academic discourse.<sup>53</sup>

Competing narratives about the Holocaust, some of which are clearly a distortion of the historical record, is also a heated issue of late. So far most of the publishing on this subject has been in journals, such as the special volume of "" entitled *Disputed Holocaust Memory in Poland*, and the articles I wrote for the *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 2019 "Distorting the Holocaust and Whitewashing History: Toward a Typology, and 2022, "Competitive Victimhood and Holocaust Distortion."<sup>54</sup> It is hard to tell where these controversies may lead in terms of research and scholarship, but it does not seem at the moment that they will be resolved anytime soon.

Lastly, it is important to pay attention to a major point in the Israeli report about the need to provide better and more focused academic training to ensure that the level of scholarship about the Holocaust will remain high. The report emphasized the importance of context for the scholarship about the Holocaust. According to the report,

45 <https://cperrier.edublogs.org/2018/04/15/12-digital-history-projects-that-will-make-you-say-wow/>; accessed 12.10.20.

46 <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/research-projects.html>.

47 <https://www.yadvashem.org/research/research-projects.html>.

48 Rozett 2001.

49 (Rozett 2013).

50 Rozett 2018.

51 Bartal 2020: 29.

52 Bartal 2020: 9.

53 Klaevers 2019; Gilbert et.al 2019.

54 *Holocaust Studies* 2019; Rozett 2019: 23–36 and 2022: 65–82.

"seven historical and ideological contexts have been defined for which familiarity and understanding are essential for Holocaust research: Nazism, racism, antisemitism, twentieth century Europe, the Second World War, genocide, and relevant phenomena before the Holocaust and after it ended." It went on to note that in addition, researchers need knowledge and familiarity about a number of other subjects for the places and topics they are investigating, including: modern European history in general and that of the specific place, general and local Jewish history, sociology and culture, relations between Jews and non-Jews, Jewish integration into and contribution to the prevailing non-Jewish cultural life, wider national movements, inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations, and political trends.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, how we teach and what we teach certainly will have a significant effect on future research.

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