

# Nooit Meer Auschwitz Lezing 2017

by Professor dr. Timothy D. Snyder

Amsterdam, 25 januari 2017



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**Laudatio Annetje Fels-Kupferschmid Award 2017**  
**Timothy Snyder**

Excellencies, distinguished guests, friends, ladies and gentlemen,

“Conventional wisdom is like a sheet of ice, covering the dark sea of the undiscovered”. “Does the narrative [offered by the historian] move like an icebreaker?” “Does it leave in its wake a view of the deep, black line through white ice – a passage, that others may follow?”

These words come from one of the books by Professor Timothy Snyder. I thank the jury of the Annetje Fels-Kupferschmidt Award for asking me to talk about this scholar and public intellectual, whose work I have been following for fifteen years. The quoted passage applies very well to him. Through his consistently excellent publications and presentations, about the Holocaust and mass violence in general, all of which receiving a huge audience, Timothy Snyder has indeed been just that – an icebreaker.

More than anyone else, this laureate of the award has brought together two distinct scholarly universes. There is the universe of Holocaust Studies and German Studies, on the one hand. And there is the universe of scholarship on Eastern Europe under Communist rule, on the other. More convincingly and effectively than anyone else, Snyder has drawn the attention of specialists and laypeople alike to the lands of Europe where the regimes of Hitler and Stalin committed mass murder. That body of work has transformed Holocaust studies and a host of other fields. And it has reshaped the historical consciousness of Europeans, Americans, and others.

Timothy Snyder was born in the state of Ohio in the United States. Home for him he has written, is “an interstate highway in the middle of the country after dark.” For a long time now, he has also been one of us – us Europeans. This American is incredibly articulate and well-informed about our European past and our current affairs.

He developed a fascination with Eastern Europe in 1989, when the Iron Curtain fell, without adopting the defensiveness one sometimes encounters. There are east Europeans who worry that their region has not produced truly original ideas. Snyder would argue that the lands between Germany and Russia are of interest precisely because many political theories that arose elsewhere, such as Marxism and national self-determination, were put into practice there.

His book *The Reconstruction of Nations* (2003) describes inter-ethnic relations over the course of four centuries, in the lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that was created in the sixteenth century. It includes the first scholarly history in English of Ukrainian-Polish mutual ethnic cleansing, carried out during the 1940s. Already in this early book, one encounters a gifted writer. He writes that after the last rebellion by Polish nobles against Russian rule, in 1863, “modern national ideas embraced the mass population.” But after 1945, “mass populations embraced modern national ideas.”

Snyder wrote three outstanding biographies of east Europeans who advocated granting more, or equal rights to subjugated groups such as the Ukrainians. One such person is Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, a nineteenth-century Polish sociologist and a pioneer in the study of nationalism. The second biography, the page-turner *Sketches from a Secret War* (2005), focuses on Henryk Józewski, a bilingual Pole born in Kiev, who supported the Ukrainian movement for independence from Russia, and then, during the 1930s as regional governor in Poland, advocated increased Ukrainian autonomy. *The Red Prince* (2008) tells the story of Archduke Wilhelm von Habsburg, who repudiated his family and fought for Ukrainian independence during the First World War.

Snyder became well known in 2009, when the *New York Review of Books* published his essay “Holocaust: The Ignored Reality.” He became famous in 2010, when *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* appeared, instantly drawing enthusiastic reviews and massive attention. The essay, the book, and Snyder’s countless lectures offer a compelling message: you know less than you think. You have read and thought about Europe’s bloody twentieth century, and you are commemorating it. But: you are studying and commemorating what are merely its fragments. Worse, those fragments are not even the main parts. Look away, for a moment, from the familiar – from Germany, from German Jews, from concentration camps, and yes, even from Auschwitz.

As Snyder puts it, “in histories of the Holocaust, everything happens in Germany – until it doesn’t. Eastern Jews (the huge majority of the victims) and other east Europeans are absent from the story until German eyes see them and German stenographers record those perceptions.” It is a moral problem, for “the individuals belonging to the very large victim groups will be far less real to the reader than leading Nazis, Germans generally, or German Jews, who have all been present in the story for six or eight years.”

German Jews were not at all typical Holocaust victims – in various senses. Quoting our laureate again: “More east European Jews were killed within two months of contact with German power in the summer of 1941 than were German Jews

during the Holocaust as a whole.” And: “German Jews survived in Germany for reasons that would have been unthinkable further east, such as being married to a non-Jew.”

Bloodlands also de-emphasizes the camps, where, in Snyder’s words, “the horror of the twentieth century is thought to be located.” The vast majority of the mortal victims of the Nazi and Soviet regimes never even saw camps. Among you, the audience, will be those who read the gripping books on the Gulag by Alexander Solzhenitsyn or Anne Applebaum. Well, now you are told, or at the very least reminded, that the word Gulag cannot usefully symbolize Stalinist murder because those killings mostly took place somewhere else. Its geographical center was not the Russian Soviet republic, but its western neighbors within the Soviet Union, particularly Soviet Ukraine. And Auschwitz as a symbol is flawed too, Snyder argues, if it makes the Holocaust seem industrial and distant. We need to talk a lot more about the mass shootings.

“Mass killing happened, predominantly, in the parts of Europe between Germany and Russia, not in Germany and Russia themselves.” Therefore – I am quoting Snyder again – “the emphasis on Auschwitz and the Gulag understates the numbers of Europeans killed, and shifts the geographical focus of the killing to the German Reich and the Russian East. Like Auschwitz, which draws our attention to the Western European victims of the Nazi empire, the Gulag, with its notorious Siberian camps, also distracts us from the geographical center of Soviet killing policies.”

Bloodlands is brilliantly researched and composed, and does far more than provoke. It breaks the ice, as the only comprehensive, territorial, and transnational history of the large, single territory where Stalin’s and Hitler’s regimes were both present at some stage and where they committed political mass murder. Snyder describes numerous cases of Nazi-Soviet entanglement and complicity. Meanwhile, he also shows that the Germans did not simply learn from Stalin, and that the Holocaust was more comprehensive than any other mass killing.

Another innovation is the imaginative use of numbers. Reviewers hailed the arrival of a new genre – a blend of excellent writing and statistics. Numerical observations follow each other in rapid succession, but they never detract. For instance, in the late 1930s, the most persecuted European national minority were the 600,000 Poles in the Soviet Union, not Germany’s 400,000 Jews. More Jews fought in the Warsaw uprising of August 1944 than in the Warsaw Ghetto uprising preceding it, of April 1943.

Snyder uses a specific definition of the Holocaust, as the final manifestation of the Final Solution. To him, Holocaust describes the murder of the Jews in Europe as

carried out by Germans using guns and gas, beginning in summer 1941 in the occupied Soviet Union, and unfolding exclusively in lands that later ended up behind the Iron Curtain. So yes, German Jews, or Dutch Jews, were systematically discriminated and separated. But they were not the first or near-first victims of the Holocaust. They could not observe “the onset of the Holocaust, until and unless they themselves were deported to the East.”

Specialists of east European history have enjoyed seeing the German studies community put on the defensive by Snyder’s brilliant book. Soon after its release, a prominent scholar in Holocaust studies told an international audience in the Netherlands that Auschwitz will always remain the main symbol of the Holocaust, simply because the “other” Holocaust, the one by bullets and carried out in eastern Europe, although important, lacks the traditional narrative elements that humans need, such as a journey. There simply is, the scholar said, “no story to be told.”

Particularly welcome has also been Snyder’s condemnation of “the unapologetic use of German-language sources to describe events that took place beyond Germany and affected non-Germans.” Historians must be multilingual.

Snyder has developed his views on the Holocaust in another well-written book, *Black Earth* (2015). Among its many thought-provoking observations, I mention here his emphasis on citizenship and statehood. In recent years, various scholars in the field of Genocide Studies have been explaining mass violence less by the actions of states, and more by the absence of state organizations. Snyder urges scholars now to think more about the impact of the creation of stateless zones. Mass murder on the scale of the Holocaust requires some form of state destruction and anarchy. Put simply, the Nazis simply could not have killed the German Jews in a German state.

Public memory is often simplistic and often appeals to the emotions. Snyder has expressed skepticism about the ability of historical research, with its multiple layers of explanation, to shape public memory. One can only hope that his work, read by so many, will have a long-lasting impact. This also applies to his warning of the danger of new mass murder, whereby perpetrators are motivated by their sense of a scarcity of resources.

Less known to you, perhaps, are two other sides to Snyder. He is not only a brilliant specialist of eastern Europe. He is also extremely well informed and thoughtful about European intellectual history as a whole. Just have a look at the book *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (2012), which he crafted with, and for, the fatally ill British historian Tony Judt.



Another side to Snyder is his activity as a public intellectual and citizen in support of security and human rights. He has always called the current project to build a Ukrainian state the keystone of European security in the twenty-first century. He warns of the threats to the European order, and those threats include radical nationalists who proclaim a national innocence, be it in Russia, Ukraine, Poland, or elsewhere. In May 2014, Ukraine faced aggression from Putin's Russia, but Snyder co-organized a meeting in Kiev of prominent intellectuals from Europe, the US, Ukraine, and Russia, so as to demonstrate solidarity.

A few months ago, the world discovered who would become the next president of the United States. At once, Snyder put out widely read observations in the social media. An article about an unidentified Him begins as follows: "His election that November came as a surprise. The conservative intellectuals had made telling arguments against his racism and conspiracy thinking. Rival nationalists had mocked his affection for a foreign tyrant. Businessmen had explained that economic isolation could only harm an export economy. All to no avail."

And Snyder offered brief and practical lessons from our European twentieth century. For instance: "Do not obey in advance." "Defend an institution," for "institutions don't protect themselves." "When listening to politicians, distinguish certain words. Look out for the expansive use of 'terrorism' and 'extremism'." "Be calm when the unthinkable arrives. When the terrorist attack comes, remember that all authoritarians at all times either await or plan such events in order to consolidate power." "Believe in truth. To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power."

Thank you, Timothy Snyder, for your work, for breaking the ice – and also for doing so without any false pathos, and gracefully.

Dr. Karel Berkhoff



**Auschwitz Never Again Lecture**

Annetje Fels-Kupferschmidt Award  
of the Netherlands Auschwitz Committee  
Amsterdam, January 25, 2017  
Timothy D. Snyder

**Black Earth**  
by  
Professor dr. Timothy D. Snyder

Whatever conclusions we draw from history, the facts start with individuals. Therefore, I would like to start with a single individual – her name was Irena Lipszyc – and see where her story will lead us. I think it can lead us very far.

Irena Lipszyc was a Warsaw Jew. She lived in independent Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. When Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, she fled eastward. She was among the approximately 250,000 Polish Jews, Jews of Polish citizenship, who fled the Wehrmacht by going east. Most of these people were received by the local Jewish communities in eastern Poland – in the homes, villages, *stetlakh* of eastern Poland – for as long as that was possible. What these refugees from German power could not have known, could not have anticipated, was that on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 17 days after the German invasion, the Red Army invaded from the East. All of these refugees, a quarter of a million Polish Jews, found themselves under a new regime. They were no longer in Eastern Poland, but in expanded Soviet Republics: Soviet Belorussia and Soviet Ukraine. She found herself in a tiny place called Vystots'k (in Polish Wysock), which is in what is now northwestern Ukraine, close to what is now the Ukrainian-Belarusian border, near the Polesian marshes, forests and swamps. She lived there with local Jews for about two years.

In June of 1941, Germany began a second major eastern invasion. In Operation Barbarossa, the Wehrmacht pushed forward a second time, now into the Soviet Union. And so Irena Lipszyc, along with the local Jews in Wiessels, and millions of other Jews and refugees, found themselves under German power. In September 1942, the Jews of Wysock, along with Irena, were gathered up to be executed by the Germans and their local helpers. She fled into the swamps and forests.

She spent a few days living only on the berries and mushrooms she could find. Irena Lipszyc was a city person. One can tell from her story that she did not know much about the countryside or living in small towns. She realized that this was not a tenable way to continue life, and in her desperation, made the decision to simply find the first road. It was not really a road. In the swamps, we are not really talking about roads, we are talking about paths. We are talking about dirt paths, trod by individual people or sometimes by horses. Irena decided that she would simply stand by the first one she found, put out her hand, and ask for help. And that is what she did. She stood on the path and waited. Over the horizon came a single man. As he approached her, she saw that he was carrying a double-barreled shotgun over his shoulder. She asked him for help.

What can we see from this story? What does Irena's story tell us about the Holocaust? We are a long way away from the familiar conceptions. We are a long way away from Auschwitz. We are very far away from Auschwitz in simple terms of physical distance. We are also far away from Auschwitz in terms of time, in terms of chronology. Auschwitz at the moment I am describing to you – 1939, the German-Soviet invasions; 1941 the German invasion of the Soviet Union; 1942 the mass murder of the Jews of Vysok – Auschwitz at this time was not a major killing center for Jews. It was a camp, but not a major killing center for Jews.

We are also a long way away from familiar national histories. One of the ways that we try to understand the Holocaust and other areas of history is by seeking out national compartments, looking for national villains and national victims. Irena's story alone, just the story of this one woman, is enough to remind us just how international any element of the Holocaust has to be. After all, she was a Jew, but a Polish speaking Jew. She fled in 1939 from a German invasion. She ended up in a little village where Jews spoke Yiddish and Russian, where in the countryside people spoke dialects of Ukrainian very close to Belarusian (or vice versa). She found herself under a Soviet regime, rule by people from the east who spoke Russian. Then came a German invasion again, and she fled into the swamps, the swamps of Polesie -- a place famous in Europe for its inhabitants lacking a known national identity. And there she was all alone, with one of them. Where was the nation then?

We are also very far indeed from Germany. In distance and identity. Irena, was of course, not a German Jew. The tremendous majority of Jews affected by the Holocaust were not German Jews. Ninety-seven percent of the Jews killed in the Holocaust had nothing to do with Germany except for the fundamental fact that German policy brought their lives to an end. In this sense, Irena was very typical. A Polish victim is a typical victim of the Holocaust. The majority of the victims were Polish Jews. She fled eastward into lands that became the Soviet Union, the

second largest number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust were Soviet Jews. It is not so simple to see what Germany has to do with the scene that I am describing.

The German history of the 1930s is obviously crucial to the Holocaust. But when we begin to see the Holocaust for what it was, we begin to think differently about Germany. We want to think that Germany was a very efficient state. We want to think that Germany was an extreme example of nationalism, or authoritarianism. We would like to imagine that in 1938 or in 1939, when the Second World War began, that Germany was some kind of perfect killing machine. But this was simply not the case. The Holocaust did not happen in Germany between 1933 and 1939. It could not have happened just because most Jews lived beyond Germany. But it could not have happened for another reason as well. Germany was incapable of carrying out massive killing policies against Jews on its own territory. All of the killing policies, those directed against Jews and those directed against others, all took place in zones beyond pre-war Germany. All of them took place in zones, very special zones, that German policy deliberately made stateless. All the killing of Jews, almost all the killing of German victims in general, took place in stateless zones.

Now this may seem like something that runs against our intuitions, that perhaps runs against our prejudices about orderly Germans, that perhaps contradicts our intuitions, perhaps our unduly ethnic intuitions about what Germans are and about how they behave. In fact, if we take our eyes for a moment away from the Holocaust, and consider the whole scholarship of ethnic cleansing and genocide just for a moment, we learn something that is extremely interesting that leads us to Irena's story and which might lead us to a greater understanding. In the last twenty-five years, people who are not historians have been examining mass killings. Those people include sociologists, political scientists, and anthropologists, and they have been studying analytical categories that they call ethnic cleansing or genocide. Essentially this study started with the mass killing in Yugoslavia, when the term ethnic cleansing shifted from being a term of art to being a term of analysis. The major finding of social scientists is that a strong authoritarian state is not closely associated with ethnic cleansing and genocide. What is most closely associated, historically speaking, with ethnic cleansing, genocide, and mass killing is state failure, state breakdown, and the collapse of institutions.

Now, how can that finding possibly help us to understand the Holocaust? It can, if we consider it alongside what historians have to say about mass killings. What do historians have to say about mass killings? Well, whenever social scientists have a generalization, like the one that I've just presented, the job of historians is to say: "I know an exception." And historians do know exceptions. There are important cases where states have killed large number of their own citizens without state

failure, without collapse, and without anarchy. The major examples are the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, and Cambodia. Now, putting the politics of this aside, what is interesting about these places is that they are party-states. They are places where the most important relationship between the individual and the political system is not the state itself, but the party. Why is that so interesting? Because National Socialism, Nazi Germany, was also a party state.

We often present National Socialism as unique, with the implication that it is somehow beyond historical or social scientific analysis. On the contrary. Its uniqueness resides in the fact that it confirms the findings of both the historians and the social scientists. What is actually exceptional about National Socialism, about Nazi Germany, is that it unites the two lines of causality that we know about mass killings, which at first glance seem separate and irreconcilable. Nazi Germany, is unique in that it was a party-state that, for ideological reasons, deliberately induced state collapse among its neighbors. And in that zone where it deliberately induced state collapse, the Holocaust could take place.

Now, if I am right, and it is conditions of deliberate anarchy, and conditions of manufactured state destruction, that permit the mass killings of civilians, you should rightly ask, "why the Jews?" Here we have to speak about ideology, because party states are different. A party state is different from another because one ideology is different from another ideology. What was specific about National Socialist ideology was its attitude towards Jews.

Think of Irena Lipszyc. Think of her eating berries and mushrooms in the swamp. The thinker in the twentieth century who defined precisely that as normal was Adolf Hitler. As you all know, the main idea of Hitlerian ideology is the racial struggle: that you belong to one race and that other people belong to another race, and we should only ever experience racial solidarity and racial enmity. Hitler's idea of the world was a fundamentally ecological one. There is only so much space, there is only so much land, and there is only so much potential for food, and our destinies as members of races is to behave just as if we are different species and fight to the death for that land. Adolf Hitler's general idea of a Final Solution, which became fatally specific in 1941 and 1942, was that Jews would be pushed into a situation where they had to carry out a natural struggle with everyone else for land, and in that situation they would lose.

Now, where does antisemitism come into this? Right into the very middle. Hitler's idea of racial struggle is the same as his idea of antisemitism. The idea of antisemitism is specific, and very deep, and unfortunately, very coherent. Hitler's claim is that any idea that contravenes racial struggle -- a religious idea of mercy, a constitutional idea of a social contract, a philosophical idea of ethics, whatever it

might be, whether it is Saint Paul or whether it is Trotsky – who Hitler says were the same person, by the way – whatever the idea is, if it allows you to experience solidarity with other human beings, if it allows you to understand the human species as a whole, rather than as racial parts, that idea, says Hitler, is Jewish. What this means is that anything that is holding people away from the racial struggle is a Jewish idea. The fact that the racial struggle is not now unfolding as it should is the fault of the Jews.

What follows from this ideology, as Hitler describes in *Mein Kampf*, is that the Jews have to be removed from the planet to restore humanity to its proper state of nature and to restore the planet itself. So for Hitler the stakes are very high. They are as high as they can be.

Now, how can something like this ideology work as politics? You might think that it is absurd. But is it all really so entirely alien? Let me describe the emotions associated with this ideology, and let us ask if they are really so distant from emotions that we are capable of feeling? The political project that arose from the notion of racial struggle was called *Lebensraum* -- space for life, living space, habitat.

On the one hand, living space was all about anxiety. You are members of a race, there is only so much land. It is natural that you feel anxiety, dread, concern, anger about the possible shortage of food for your children and grandchildren. Fear is the natural state of affairs. That's one version of *Lebensraum*. At the same time, says Hitler, it is also natural if you are covetous, if you are jealous, if you want ever more, if you are not concerned so much about biological life, as about standard of living or life style. In his second book, Hitler makes very clear that it's normal for Germans to want to have the same standard of living as Americans. And not just objectively. It's normal for Germans to want to feel that they have the highest standard of living in the world. So *lebensraum* is an appeal simultaneously to fear and anxiety and to jealousy and envy. Very powerful political emotions.

But how could such an ideology, coherent as it might be and as emotionally appealing as it might be, how could it make its way into politics? Here is where we have to reconsider Germany in the 1930s. I would like to ask you to think about Germany in the 1930s not in terms of some kind of authoritarian state. There were plenty of authoritarian states in interwar Europe and none of them did the things that Nazi Germany did. I would like to ask you to think about it not just as an example of extreme nationalism. There are plenty of extreme nationalist parties in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s, and none of them did the precise things that Nazi Germany did.

What was special about Nazi Germany in the 1930s was that it was a racial state in a very precise, institutional sense. The ideas that I am describing to you are not simply words on a page or concepts in a mind, or a thousand minds, or a million minds. They also have an institution, and that institution is the SS. In Germany, in the 1930s, state authorities did not deal with violence in the normal way that state authorities do. A normal modern state aspires to monopolize violence. A normal modern state wants to be the only unit which can legitimately apply violence. Nazi Germany in the 1930s was something else. There was the state of course. There was the very functional German state, the army, the police. But there was also the SS. And the SS had the right to use violence even though it was not the state. This is very important. It had the right to carry out certain kinds of verdicts. And where? In the concentration camps.

The concentration camps are extremely important for the history of the Holocaust, but not for the reasons we think. Jews did not die in large numbers in the concentration camps in the 1930s. That is not the path by which the Holocaust took place. The concentration camps are important for an entirely different reason. The concentration camps were the model, inside Nazi Germany, of what lawlessness looks like. That is the legal definition of a concentration camp: where the law does not apply, where the state is absent. In Nazi Germany in the 1930s, it was the SS that filled the concentration camps with racial content. The concentration camps were a model. They were a template, a microcosm of what German power was going to look like after it went beyond Germany.

One way to think about this is the fate of the German Jews themselves. I have already said that the German Jews are a rather small part of the Holocaust. About three percent of the victims would be German Jews. The percentage of Jews in the German population in 1939 was about one quarter of one percent. It was a very small percentage of the population. If you look at the total numbers of Jews in Germany in 1933 when Hitler came to power, most of them were going to survive. But the ones who perished, where were they murdered? Beyond the borders of prewar Germany. They were going to die in places like Riga, and in some sense the question to ask is: "how did the German Jews get to Riga?" The answer is not so simple. They were taken by trains beginning in September 1941. How do we get from 1939 when the war starts to 1941 when the Holocaust starts? How do we get from the moment when Irena flees from Warsaw to the moment when Jews are being killed in the tens of hundreds of thousands and then in the millions?

To answer that question, to understand how the Holocaust could have proceeded from 1939 to 1941, we have to have a sense of Jewish life. We have to have some notion of how Jews lived in Europe in 1939, and not only in Germany.



The vast majority of books about the Holocaust, the vast majority of convincing and powerful narratives about the Holocaust, pay attention to German Jews. But German Jews were not very typical. Most of them were going to survive, and there were not very many of them; and when they died, they were going to die beyond Germany. So we have to have a sense of how Jews lived in places like Austria, or Czechoslovakia, or the Baltic states, or Poland, or the Soviet Union, which is not to say that those regimes were the same. Czechoslovakia's was a democracy; Austria was a right-wing authoritarian regime; Poland was a managed democracy that became ever more authoritarian; the Soviet Union was a communist party state; the Baltic states were personal dictatorships. In all of these places where the Holocaust progressed towards mass murder, Jews were living in considerable number through the 1930s. We have to start there. Why? Because the persecution of Jews went beyond Germany, and it was as German power began to realize itself in the destruction of neighboring states that we see the repression of Jews truly escalate.

In Germany, by 1939 the repression of Jews had hit a bottleneck. Repression of Jews had reached a summit with Kristallnacht, a nation-wide pogrom which occurred on the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1938. It was unclear how Jews in Germany could be repressed more than they already were. Kristallnacht was as bad as it got, and that was the murder of two hundred people. A horrifying tragedy and an international scandal by the standards of the time but, by our much sadder standards, not a Holocaust. So, when we consider the history of the Holocaust, we have to look at German power extending beyond Germany and remember that there were societies and states there that German power transformed or destroyed.

Take first the case of Austria. Austria hardly ever figures in the history of the Holocaust until the day, March 11, 1938, when Austria was destroyed. Until the day, infamous from the pictures, when the Jews of Vienna were taken out of their homes, and were stopped on the street, and were forced to scrub the streets of Vienna. This is a very important moment. In the next six weeks, Jews in Austria were going to suffer about as much as Jews in Germany had suffered in the previous six years, which is an extraordinary thing. The discrimination of Jews in Austria moved much faster than the discrimination of Jews in Germany.

Why was that? It was because the Austrian state ceased to exist from one day to the next. The whole history of the Nuremberg Laws, Aryanization, the familiar progression of Nazi Germany did not happen in Austria. What did happen in Austria was that from one day to the next, from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 1938, the Austrian state ended. It was a Friday evening, a Shabbat evening, and Jews were breaking the rules of the Sabbath and listening to the radio to find out what was going to happen, and the Austrian chancellor made the announcement

at 17:57 that the Austrian state had in effect ceased to exist. The very next morning, the Jews were being humiliated on the streets of Vienna. And not just humiliated – this is important – the Jews who were scrubbing the streets of Vienna were not just cleaning the streets, they were scrubbing a particular word off the streets, and that word was *Austerreich* – Austria. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of June 1938 there was to have been a referendum on Austrian independence – which, by the way, would almost certainly have passed, although they would have faked the result if necessary. The propaganda for the referendum was one word “*Austerreich*.” When the Jews were scrubbing that word from the streets, what was happening was the politics of statelessness, the politics of a new regime. For a moment, no one was a citizen. Everyone knew that the old regime was gone. Everyone knew that Nazi power was coming. And the way that the non-Jews reacted to this was by blaming the previous regime on the Jews. And its fate would be their fate.

Consider Czechoslovakia. If we think of Austria and Czechoslovakia we think of them only in national terms. We think of Anschluss as the end of Austria. We think of Munich as the trial of Czechoslovakia. But what about the perspective of the citizens? What about the perspective of the Jewish citizens? From the point of view of the Jewish citizens, the end of Czechoslovakia meant the end of citizenship, and the end of citizenship meant the end of something very significant.

Let me give you an example that will seem obscure at the beginning but that I hope will quickly seem enlightening. The example of Sub Carpathian Ruthenia. What happened in Sub Carpathian Ruthenia was extremely important for the whole development of the Holocaust. Not just for its logic, but in its actual beginning. Much of Sub Carpathian Ruthenia, the far eastern part of Czechoslovakia, was given to Hungary.

What did Hungary do with the Jews on this territory? It did not acknowledge them as its citizens at all. It treated them as “stateless people.” As “refugees,” even though they had never gone anywhere. When the moment arrived, when this was possible, Hungary deported them. In which direction? East. Where? Into Soviet Ukraine. When? At the moment that Germany was invading the Soviet Union, in the summer of 1941. It was these people who became the victims of the first mass shootings, shootings of more than ten thousand people at once. Likely the first mass shooting in the history of the world, and certainly the first mass shooting in the history of the Holocaust. The beginning of the Holocaust was in mass shooting, and these were the first victims. These people whose history goes back to the destruction of Czechoslovakia.

Then consider Poland. What is special about Poland of course is that Poland was the place in September of 1939 where Germany destroyed a state by force.

Austria did not resist. Czechoslovakia did not resist. In each case, the persecution of Jews could be escalated significantly, as compared to Nazi Germany itself. But the destruction of Poland was yet another major step forward because in the destruction of Poland, in September 1939, the Germans were able to mobilize conventional state power – the Wehrmacht – to defeat the Polish army. Simultaneously, they brought the SS to bear massively and violently for the first time. In Poland, the Einsatzgruppen were used for the first time as mass murder units in September of 1939. Their assignment was to murder the Polish political class to make it impossible for there to be a Polish political state.

They were quite literally state destroyers. That was their mission. Now the idea that the Polish state should not exist was no metaphorical overstretch on my part. That was exactly the German line. The German line when Germany invaded Poland was: we are not invading a state. There is no Polish state. We are arriving in territory that is occupied by nebulous and indefinable human beings. What we are carrying out is not an occupation because in order for there to be an occupation there must be a state that you were occupying. This was quite literally the German legal position about what they were doing in September 1939.

This of course had probable implications for everyone because no one was a citizen any longer. Everyone was a kind of colonial subject, and it had the greatest implications for Jews. Think of ghettoization: the most manifest oppression of Jews in Poland. Jews were forced into ghettos in late 1940 and early 1941. What ghettoization was, among other things, was the loss of the right to do what you want with your body, and the loss of your property rights. Jews lost all of their property rights just when the Polish government lost all of its property in September 1939. The forced movement of Jews from the villages, from the edges of the cities, from the other districts of the cities, into ghettos in late 1940-41 was, among other things, a consequence of the end of the Polish state.

The destruction of a state has to be seen as a shattering. It left fragments. Institutions that had functioned one way before the war now functioned very differently. Consider the Jewish councils in the Polish ghettos, the Judenräte. Who were these Jewish elders? In large measure the same men who had run Jewish communal autonomy in prewar Poland. The very same people. When the institutions changed, their roles changed. The same men who had been responsible for the preservation of Jewish culture in 1938 were those who helped to organize deportations in 1942. A similar point can be made about the police. The Polish policemen, the so called blue policemen who surrounded the ghetto, and in that sense contributed to making the ghettos possible, who were all these people? For the most part, they were Polish interwar policemen. Very often the same people who had guarded Jewish markets in the 1930s, who had worked against pogroms.

Without the Polish state, without the previous hierarchy, now that they were subordinate to Himmler's apparatus, what they did was very different.

Poland was invaded in 1939. The mass murder of Polish Jews began in earnest in early 1942, around two and a half years later. When and how precisely did the Holocaust begin? What were its fundamental causes? Here Irena's story will help us again. Remember her predicament because her predicament was absolutely typical of this region and it reveals the politics that we have to understand. She left Warsaw and went east. There was a German invasion from the west. Then there was a Soviet invasion from the east. What did this mean for politics?

Why am I stressing this as politics? Something very unusual was happening when Germany invaded the Soviet Union. It was not only that when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941 that it was killing Jews in large numbers for the first time. It was killing them in large numbers for the first time because they were defined as part of the political class. The Einsatzgruppen when they enter the Soviet Union in June 1941 have the same kinds of orders as they had in September of 1939 when they entered Poland. Murder the political class. The difference is that in the Soviet Union, Germans defined Jews as part of the political class. Einsatzgruppen were murdering Jews from the beginning of the German invasion but, beyond that, you have a very special kind of politics that comes from the fact that the Soviet Union had invaded right before the German invasion.

If you think of the Jedwabne pogrom in 1941, how did that pogrom unfold? It unfolded according to a German model in Białystok where the Germans killed thousands of Jews themselves after having forced them into a synagogue and about twenty smaller synagogues, forcing them to sing or play Soviet songs, forcing them to carry red banners and then burning the synagogues and shooting the people who came out. In a couple of dozen other places, Poles followed the same scenography with the Jews. Why is that significant? It does not at all reduce the murderousness of these pogroms to point to the fact that this is politics. It is the same politics as Vienna in 1938. Polish peasants in the summer of 1941 reacted to regime change, reacted to the politics of statelessness pretty much the same way as the Viennese middle class in 1938: We are not the people who supported the previous regime. The Jews are the people who supported the previous regime.

In 1941 this is much more dangerous and much more murderous than in 1938 because the Germans are already killing Jews, and what the Germans are consciously trying to do is to find a way to bring locals in to killing Jews. The pogroms don't work as well as they expect, but what the Germans find as they

work their way into the Baltic states is that the pogroms can serve as a kind of selection, a kind of training ground, where they can extract people who will take part in much larger and much more murderous actions.

Why in the Baltic States? Again, it was in considerable measure about the politics of double state destruction. It was not that in the Baltic States there was more antisemitism than there was in say Poland. That would be absurd. It was not that in the Baltic States there was more antisemitism than there was in say France, also not true. What was special about the Baltic States was that these were the only independent states to be destroyed in their entirety by the Soviet Union. This means that when the Germans entered in 1941 they could do more than exploit local people as propagandists, they could mobilize emotions that we do not understand; emotions that were very real and that we hopefully will never have to understand. These were the emotions that were generated by the total destruction of a national state: national shame, feelings of humiliation, and most importantly, the desire to undo one's own collaboration with the prior occupier.

The single most important collaborator in the Baltic States, and indeed the single most important collaborator in the Holocaust as a whole, was a man called Viktor Arajs in Latvia. What was he doing under the Soviet occupation? He was a communist party member. He earned a law degree, writing his dissertation on the Soviet constitution of 1936. What was Arajs doing before the Soviets arrived? He was a policeman for the independent Latvian state. There was very little to connect him with any kind of ideological conviction. There was a huge amount to connect him to the negative opportunism of double collaboration.

All throughout this zone where Soviet power had stretched and then German power replaced it, you see massive double collaboration. And where do you see it now? In the Jewish sources. In the Jewish sources in Russian. In the Jewish sources in Polish. In the Jewish sources in Yiddish. Because the Jews were the ones, and not the Germans, who would notice that their neighbor first collaborated with the Soviets and then with the Germans. Jews were the ones who would complain: "My neighbor first collaborated with the Soviets and now blames me for having done so." This appears over and over again in the Jewish sources. So this phenomenon of double collaboration was one of the reasons the Holocaust progressed in the east.

The other reason is what you might call self-recruitment. If you consider the doom of those Jews of eastern Czechoslovakia, of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, they were killed, along with local Jews, in August of 1941. A total of 23,600 people were killed in a place called Kamianats' Podil'skyi. They were killed by members of the SS, German policemen, the German Wehrmacht, and local collaborators.

In other words, in the east, Germans cooperated in the Holocaust in ways that their own leaders did not anticipate. The SS was able, in the zone of statelessness in the invaded Soviet Union, to recruit the army and the police to the task of mass murder, and were able to do so very quickly. So at Kamianiat Podils'kyi in August 1941 or at Riga in November and December of 1941, we see a method that involves multiple German institutions with the help of large numbers of local people who are organized into commandos or militias carrying out industrial scale mass-murder of the Jews.

It was this period, it was this moment, that was decisive for the Holocaust. It was in late 1941 that the final solution, the general idea of removing Jews from the planet, Hitler's ideology from the beginning, becomes the reality that we call the Holocaust. The mass murder of Jews: the murder so massive that it can convey the idea that all Jews under German power can be murdered. And indeed, that is what German policy became as early as 1942.

In Poland, the Holocaust now proceeded two and a half years after the German invasion, and a year or more after ghettoization -- but immediately after the lesson had been learned in the east, in the occupied Soviet Union, that mass murder was possible. It proceeded according to a different technique. The Jews, already having been gathered in large ghettos, could be sent to killing facilities such as Treblinka, Bełżec, Sobibor, and most of the Polish Jews, the huge majority, around ninety-five percent, would be killed. Note the percentage of Polish Jews under German occupation and the percentage of Soviet Jews under German occupation who died in essentially exactly the same way.

Now, the German policy was general. The principle was the absolute physical extermination of all of the Jews under German control. It was applied not just to Poland, but to the entirety of European territory that the Germans controlled. What is striking though is that this policy, although it is general in principle, in practice was very irregular in its application. It varied from place to place, from zone to zone. The extent to which it could be implemented was very different. To give just a rough idea, in the places where the state had been destroyed, or the German aspiration was to destroy the state, the chance of a Jew surviving was one in twenty. In the places where a state persisted -- even if it was a flawed state, an authoritarian state, an antisemitic state, a state allied with Nazi Germany, Nazi Germany itself -- the chances of a Jew surviving were about one in two. One in two is awful. It was worse than any other victim group in occupied Europe, but it was also very different from one in twenty. This is the situation which I describe as the Auschwitz paradox. Auschwitz represents on the one hand the aspiration to exterminate all of the Jews, but on the other hand, the unevenness and the irregularity of the implementation.

Why was this? Well, there are several ways to think about this. One is the numbers, as I've already said. The other is to consider the chronology. The way that Germany invaded Poland and the Soviet Union in 1939 and 1941 was special. The aspiration to totally destroy the political system was special. The use of the Einsatzgruppen to physically exterminate a political class was special. These things were not done in Belgium, or France, or Denmark, or the Netherlands. And since they had not been done in 1940, they could not, so to speak, be done afterward. The countries could not be reinvaded. That's one way to think about it.

Another way to think about it is in terms of institutions. The basic institutions of sovereignty make a tremendous difference. A country with an antisemitic ruling class and government, like Romania, a country that was carrying out a policy of the mass murder of Jews, like Romania, could switch policy orientations, and for that reason could change policy towards Jews. Therefore, it made all the difference in the world what passport you held. The Holocaust only proceeded so far when Jews were not recognized by states. If you were a Romanian Jew, just to stay with the Romanian example, in 1943, and the French government sent you to the French transit camp to Auschwitz, the Germans would not kill you at Auschwitz because the Romanian government did not wish it so. If you were a Jew and had membership in a state that the Germans recognized as a state, they would not kill you. So papers meant everything in the way that Jews and everyone else in Eastern Europe knew, and this appears over and over again in the sources.

What about bureaucracy? Bureaucracy has a very bad name. We have our own self interested reasons for not liking bureaucracy. Who likes bureaucracy? The thing that is worse than bureaucracy is having no bureaucracy. It was actually very difficult to go through the tiresome bureaucratic process, which was tiresome even in Nazi Germany. There, bureaucratically speaking, they never actually managed to define precisely who was a Jew. It was much harder to go through a process of excluding and bureaucratically discriminating against, oppressing Jews, than it was to destroy the state and to create a bureaucracy-free zone. Remember, for German Jews to be killed they had to be extracted from the German bureaucracy and sent someplace, some place like Riga, or Minsk where the Austrian Jews were sent, where bureaucracy never functioned. Not because these were wild places where there never was any bureaucracy but because the Germans destroyed the local state apparatus. Bureaucracy-free zones were where people were killed.

Another way to make this point is by considering comparisons. The comparisons reveal that some of our intuitions about what might be responsible for higher death rates are not accurate. I have already mentioned that Poland and the Soviet Union have exactly the same death rates for Jews. So if you think that Polish antisemitism is the explanation, that requires a lot of work on the Soviet side to

make that explanation work. What Poland and the Soviet Union had in common was that these were the major states that Germany tried to destroy. Or consider in Western Europe, maybe more familiar cases, the Netherlands and France. The Netherlands were probably the least antisemitic place in Western Europe. The one place where people actually protested on the street about antisemitic policies when German occupation came. Seventy-five percent of the Jews died. In France, which everyone considered then and now to have had a much more significant antisemitic problem than the Netherlands, seventy-five percent of the Jews would survive. Why? Because the occupation regime was different. In the Netherlands the SS ran the occupation regime. The government left. In France they had a sovereign state – and again, one does not have to like these governments – with a fairly conventional military occupation and that was what made the difference.

For an extreme example, consider Denmark and Estonia: Two states on the Baltic Sea, relatively small populations of Jews, relatively weak traditions of antisemitism. In Denmark, ninety-nine percent of the Danish citizens who are Jewish would survive. In Estonia, ninety-nine percent of the Jews who were present when the Germans arrive were going to be killed. Ninety-nine percent. That cannot be explained by any pre-war phenomenon. What you have instead are the extremes of occupation. Denmark was the most conventional, traditional, and gentle occupation regime. There was a parliamentary government, there were elections. In Estonia you have the extreme opposite. You have double occupations, Soviet destruction of the Estonian state, and all the associated consequences.

A final way to make this point is to consider regions. You probably know the nice story of Bulgaria. The nice story of Bulgaria is that the king did not want to kill the Jews. This is partially true. But everywhere in Bulgaria where territory changed hands, where there was that particular and specific devastating moment when sovereignty was for a moment in flux, everywhere where that was true, the Jews died. So everywhere Bulgaria gained territory, including Thrace in Macedonia, they sent their Jews to Auschwitz to die. And this was the general pattern. Even if you consider Romania, which is usually not considered in the same breath as Bulgaria, in this sense it is the same: almost all of the Romanian Jews that were killed by Romania were killed in territories which were lost and then regained. Almost all of them. Well over ninety-five percent. And this was true everywhere in the region.

The same logic applies to cities. Who was in the most danger in Paris, to take an important example? What was the largest victim group of the French Holocaust? Polish Jews. I do not mean just proportionately. I mean in absolute numbers more Polish Jews were killed than French Jews in the French Holocaust. Why was that? It didn't have anything to do with Polish antisemitism, real though that is as a



phenomenon. It had to do with the fact that those Jews were not recognized by any state.

Where does this leave us? It leads us to a moment and opportunity to reconsider what we mean by “rescue”: What “rescue” did mean historically and what it perhaps ought to mean for us now. Who could rescue you? Diplomats. Diplomats could rescue you because you could not take their citizenship away. In the Netherlands, the people who tried to rescue Anne Frank were not prosecuted because what they did was not a crime. They were citizens. If you were a citizen it was much easier to rescue a Jew than if you lived in a colonial stateless zone where no one was a citizen. The citizens of France were citizens. The inhabitants of Poland were nothing. A diplomat was someone from whom you could not extract citizenship. And the diplomat was someone who, as it were, could magically extend state recognition to other people. So whether it was the Chinese consul in Vienna or the Japanese consul in Lithuania, it was the diplomats who could rescue more than a hundred people. Almost all of the rescuers of more than a hundred people were diplomats. When you move down the scale of rescuers what you see is the confirmation of the general argument: the more the people can depend on the state, the less difficult it is for them to rescue. As you move into institutions like partisan armies or churches, institutions that are a bit like a state, you find that sometimes they kill and sometimes they rescue. As you move closer and closer to anarchy where there are no institutions, where there is no law, almost no one rescues. Very few people rescue. A few people do. The people in the book I call the righteous few. A few people show that Hitler was wrong about what happens in conditions of manufactured anarchy, but they are precious few, which brings me to the end of Irena’s story.

Irena stopped the first person she saw walking down this path in the middle of the swamp. It was a man with a double-barreled shotgun over his shoulder. She stopped him and asked him for help. Without batting an eye, he agreed immediately to help her. He took her in. They built a bunker. She stayed on his property for a very long time. She was going to survive the war. Over the course of her acquaintance she learned some interesting things about this man, one interesting thing really, and that was that he defied all authority. In interwar Poland, in this town, this region, these swamps, he had defied the Polish government by sheltering communists. When the Soviet Union came in 1939, he had defied the Soviets in their deportation policies by sheltering Poles. When the Germans came in 1941 he defied the killing policy that we call the Holocaust by sheltering Jews. He defied all authority. Not all rescuers had this kind of adventurous attitude towards authority, but what they did share, something very rare, was some kind of internal commitment to a certain sort of moral order which did not change when the circumstances around them changed. And this, I am afraid, was very rare.

In the Jewish sources, Jews have even more difficulties than the rescuers themselves defining the motivations of the rescuers. They use words like “humanity,” this word appears a lot, and essentially what it means is that these were people who did not change when the circumstances around them changed. But they were very few. Irena, in her testimony, which she gave in late 1945 in Warsaw, excluded something very interesting from her recounting. She left out one thing: She did not give us the man’s name. There was an obvious reason for this, and that is that whatever the next authority was going to be, which was going to be Soviet authority, he was going to continue to try to smuggle and make moonshine, which was how he made his living, he was going to continue to defy whatever the authority was. That was the obvious reason.

But there is something else that I want you to consider. She does not leave us a name, and by doing so, she does not leave us with the idea that there was one single person who redeemed whatever it might be, whatever nation he belonged to, we do not know that either. Whether he believed that he belonged to a nation at all, we do not know. But his namelessness, his anonymity, his ineffability, suggest to us there is no person who can redeem a Polish nation, or a Belarusian nation, or a Ukrainian nation, or any nation. There is no person who, by his or her good action, can redeem the killing in the Holocaust, the crime of the Holocaust; from a Christian point of view, the sin of the Holocaust. There is no way that the story can be brought to any kind of satisfactory ending.

What we see in the Holocaust is that people behaved very similarly in similar circumstances, which means that when we think of rescue we have to think not just of individuals, exceptional individuals, we have to think that we and the people we know would very likely not behave that way in similar circumstances. And I think that we have to consider that the way to think about rescue is political. The way to think about the future, the way to think about preventing catastrophes of this kind, cannot reside only in the emulation of models. It has to also reside in commitments to the kind of structures that make this kind of action less likely. That is a less glamorous ending than a happy ending, or a redeeming ending, but there are no happy endings to this, there are no redeeming endings to this.

But there are lessons.

**Professor dr. Timothy D. Snyder**

Timothy Snyder is een beroemd Amerikaans hoogleraar geschiedenis, gespecialiseerd in Holocaust studies en Oost-Europa. Zijn boeken zijn in vele landen uitgegeven en onderscheiden met prestigieuze prijzen. Meest bekend zijn *Bloedlanden: Europa tussen Hitler en Stalin* uit 2010 en *Zwarte aarde: De Holocaust als geschiedenis en waarschuwing* uit 2015. Prof. Snyder doet research in 10 Europese talen en is hierdoor uitzonderlijk goed in staat bronnen en archieven in Centraal – en Oost-Europa te onderzoeken. Hij onderzoekt de moord op 14 miljoen mensen tijdens en direct voorafgaand aan WOII en beschrijft welke condities het mogelijk hebben gemaakt dat dergelijke ongekende terreur van het Nazisme en Communisme kon gebeuren. Hij vertelt ons welke lessen wij kunnen leren over de oorzaken en de gevolgen hiervan. Dit zijn waarschuwingen voor de wereldleiders en voor ons allen voor de huidige conflicten in de wereld en voor post-conflict situaties. Verder is hij o.a. actief in het verzorgen van onderwijs over de Holocaust wereldwijd, neemt deel aan conferenties, geeft lezingen, schrijft in prestigieuze bladen, is actief voor het US Holocaust Memorial Museum en is adviseur voor meerdere internationale organisaties die zich bezig houden met Joodse -, Slavische-, Oost-Europese en Euro-Aziatische studies. Voor zijn vele werkzaamheden over de Holocaust zal Timothy Snyder de Annetje Fels Kupferschmidt onderscheiding ontvangen

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