The Holocaust as a Regional History
Explaining the Bloodlands

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In early spring 1933, as the weather warmed and the soil softened, a Ukrainian man dug his own grave. By this time about 2 million inhabitants of Soviet Ukraine had already died of starvation in Joseph Stalin's deliberate campaign of hunger. The man hoped to maintain his individual dignity. The bodies of those starved to death in Soviet Ukraine in early 1933 would be found later in a field or by the road. Each corpse would be thrown into the back of one of the carts that came every week or so. Then the body would be buried in mass graves along with many people unknown to the deceased, and in some place where his or her family, if there were any surviving family members, would never be able to find it. So he dug his own grave.

In April 1940 a Polish army officer, like many other officers in the Polish army, kept a diary. Most Polish officers during the war were reservists—people with a university education, who, by definition, were called up in 1939. This was an age of letters, and educated people kept diaries. The second to last entry of this officer's diary reads: "They asked for my wedding ring which I…" and then it trails off. It does not trail off, I believe, because the officer found it difficult to talk about his wife. Nor does it trail off because the symbol of the wedding ring meant so much to the officer. He was at a place called Katyn, and he rightly suspected that he would soon be executed. He probably knew that the Soviet NKVD officers, in whose custody he was, were asking for his valuables preparatory to killing him. So, his diary entry ends most likely because he hid his wedding ring so they would not find it. Almost certainly they did. But his diary was also found on his body after it was exhumed a couple of years later and we have it.

In September 1942, the surviving Jews of Kovel, a town now in Western Ukraine, were locked inside the synagogue. At the time Kovel was in German-occupied eastern Poland. It was late enough in the events that we call the Holocaust that Kovel's Jews knew what would soon befall them. They would be taken out and shot. And so, locked in their synagogue, they left messages with bits of porcelain or with glass or with stones, scratching messages on the walls. One young woman, speaking for herself and her two sisters, left a message for her mother. It said, "We are so sorry you could not be here with us." This sentiment might seem strange under the circumstances, but it conveys something fundamental about the Holocaust that we forget: people tended to want to be with their families. The last line reads: "we kiss you over and over." When the Soviets drove the Germans from Kovel, in 1944, a Soviet officer found and recorded these words in the synagogue. The Soviets used the Kovel synagogue as a grain silo thereafter.[1]

These were three of about 14 million people who were murdered as a matter of Nazi or Soviet policy in the years 1933 to 1945 in the region that I call the Bloodlands.[2] In the past generation, the study of the fate of the people who lived in these lands—today's Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, western Russia, and the Baltic states—has taken a decided turn toward the local. We have no national histories of the Holocaust in most of these countries, and my book was the first to discuss the Holocaust on the lands where it took place. It arose, from among many other impulses, the conviction that we must, I believe, consider the regional history of mass killing even as we make the move to examine mass killing on the more local level. My specific concern in our consideration of the history of mass killing, and specifically of the Holocaust, is that we have imported the preoccupations of now-unfashionable macrohistories into the now-fashionable microhistories, without first adequately applying what we must come to learn about the middle level, the meso-level, the region, the zone where the global and the local factors meet.

A region is not always what we think. Usually we consider regions according to groups of provinces, or states, or empires, or perhaps if we are very adventurous, as zones on the border of two empires. But if our subject is mass killing, we should define a region as where mass killing took place. The "Bloodlands" are a fairly significant area, but compared to all of the territory that the Germans and the Soviets ruled from 1940 to 1942—territory stretching from France to Siberia, they are actually quite small and compact. Nevertheless, the vast majority of German and Soviet killing happened precisely here. In the entire stretch of territory controlled by one regime or the other, some 17 million people were deliberately killed by the two regimes between 1933 and 1945. But of that 17 million, 14 million died in the Bloodlands region. We need to understand this region in order to understand the victims and the regimes that killed them.

There must be something about this place, it would seem, or something about events that happened in this place, that made it distinctive. Three seemingly distinct conceptual geographies return us to the same place. The first I have already stressed: 14 million people in all, an astonishing number, died here. Second, this is where the entirety of the Holocaust took place.[3] Most Jews killed here lived here because this territory was, once, the world homeland of the Jews. We tend to think of Jewish history in an unterritorial way, but there was indeed a place, here, where more Jews lived than in any other. Finally, the Bloodlands were where German and Soviet power overlapped. Both regimes were present. There were many places where the Nazis ruled and Soviet power did not extend: most of Germany itself, France, the Low Countries, and so on. Meanwhile, most of the Soviet Union was never touched by German power. Places that were touched only by German or Soviet power were difficult, desperate places, but they were not nearly so dangerous for Jews and for everyone else as the places where both of these states were present. We thus face three necessarily related questions: why did the Holocaust happen? Why were so many non-Jews killed in the same places where the Holocaust happened? And why did this killing happen on lands that were touched by both Nazi and Soviet power?

The introductory claims have been simple matters of chronology, geography, and arithmetic, none of which is the least bit controversial or contested. But if Christopher Browning is correct, and he is, that this was the greatest moral and demographic catastrophe in the history of Europe, why has it never been seen in this way? Why have we not noticed? On the lands where about 5.4 million Jews were deliberately killed in the Holocaust, during the years when Hitler was in power more than 8 million people who were not Jews were also killed as a matter of deliberate policy. Even if all one studies is the Holocaust, one must still explain why there were so many other bodies, so to speak, lying about. It has taken a lot of methodological trouble to ignore those bodies: the 5 million victims of German policies of starvation and German "reprisals," as well as the 4 million victims of Soviet policies of starvation and Soviet terror. It is a trend that must be undone in the name of common sense and historical explanation, and not least in the name of respect to everyone concerned. But there is also work that must be done before we can seriously consider performing microhistories throughout the region.

Imagine a crime scene in an apartment building. Five people, clearly all belonging to one family, have all been murdered. Another five people, who do not seem to belong to the same family, also seem to have been murdered by the same person. Still another four people, not belonging to the same family but apparently killed by someone else, are also in the apartment building. A police officer filing a report would presumably mention all of the murders and would presume that there was some relationship between all of the killings. There are

powerful reasons why we do not see the history of the Bloodlands in this way. First, we understand history nationally, as the history of the Jews or the Poles or the Ukrainians or the Russians or the Germans, and we also use the language of our one group as though it held all the lessons to their history. Each national history casts its own villains and heroes. If we push national histories together, they repel each other. Nor can we simply drop a book of Polish history on top of a book of Jewish history on top of a book of German history and Ukrainian history and get a history of Eastern Europe. Each national history operated according to its own logic. One of the problems with microhistory, as it is often written now, is that it simply replicates the problems and the assumptions of national history rather than confronting them.

Given the way that the world is still structured, with national states and national educational systems and national memory ministries and so on, a national way of understanding these events prevails in a seemingly natural and straightforward, but ultimately unhelpful, way. I say "ultimately unhelpful" because it cannot answer key questions. National history is very good at asking questions that it cannot answer, at bringing us to doorways through which we then must pass on our own, without its assistance. Consider the elemental questions: why were the victims the victims? Why were we the perpetrators the perpetrators? Why did others stand by and do nothing? National history asks these morally urgent questions, but it cannot provide answers because the answers transcend national narratives. We do not like to think about the problem in this way. Nations, we think, have sovereign histories. This is the very traditional assumption that slips through from macro- to microhistories.[4]

The other difficulty in studying regional history lies in the bipolarity of modern mass politics. The tendency since the French Revolution, strengthened by the experience of fascism and anti-fascism, is to apprehend politics in terms of left and right. We tend to understand the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany in these terms, as if the essence of the regimes themselves had little contact with one another. If we were only interested in ideas, it would be plausible, though perhaps not advisable, to write a book about National Socialism and not mention the Soviet Union or vice versa. However, if the subject is the Holocaust or ethnic cleansing or mass killing in the most afflicted part of Europe, we cannot keep the USSR and Nazi Germany apart. These two regimes, different as they were in terms of ideas and systems, had territory in common. In the Bloodlands, the places both regimes ruled, everyone made contact with both systems. Everyone who lived in this territory, so long as they lived, compared these two systems because they had to. As historians, we have the luxury of separating the two systems as if they did not overlap geographically. To do so falls within our comfort zones of national narratives and left–right politics. But history is fundamentally uncomfortable. Although the Germans now lead the way in Holocaust history, we cannot count on this problem being solved in

Germany. In Germany, national and the political problems profoundly reinforce each other, which means that politically careful public discourse and historically valuable scholarship keep their distance one from the other. It seems safest to write national history, because it seems necessary to preserve the peculiarities of German history, a negative *Sonderweg*.[5]

How might we undo this trend and write a history that has a chance of truly describing and explaining these terrible events? What might a truly regional history look like? What is the preparation that is truly necessary before we make the move to microhistory? Any sound interpretation of events of such scale must work as global history, rather than simply against national and ideological histories. I have tried to avoid national exceptionalism in my work, not because nationalism is unimportant, but because I have sought that larger framework. National history stops at the point where it cannot answer its own questions, and pretends that this is the end of history; we must go further. *Bloodlands,* although very much about Jews, Poles, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and Russians, does not start from Jewish, Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, or Russian history. This may seem like a simple point, but in fact it is not.

If we proceed from the question as to why 14 million people were killed in the region, we begin from a very different point than traditional Jewish history narratives do. If we were to start from Jewish narratives, we might ask what the Holocaust has in common with the Khmelnitsky Uprising or the history of pogroms. If we start from the framework of Polish history, we would ask what Katyn has in common with the failed Polish uprisings of the nineteenth century. And histories of national suffering do not take us very far.[6] The sweep of Ukrainian history cannot explain why 3 million Ukrainians were deliberately starved in 1933. The same point can be made about perpetrators. A German history that plots a course of teleological murder works just as poorly, though events from 1933 to 1939 remain important in explaining the German turn to murder.

I suggest that we proceed from the lives and deaths of everyone who was in the region. These regional experiences, much more than our conventional national paradigms, prepare us more properly for microhistorical approaches. There was a larger calamity of which the Holocaust was the worst and distinct part, and we must explain all the parts on the basis of Jewish and non-Jewish experiences. These experiences will attune us to the German and Soviet (and other) policies that we must account for. If we think back to the apartment house with the imaginary crime victims, such an approach is simply intuitive. If we know that the Holocaust happened in the time and place where so many other people died, the way that those people died, why they died, might have something to do with why so many Jews died. At the very least, we must be sure we understand these experiences before we seek to write microhistory. Otherwise we run the risk of attributing national motivations to others simply

because we are ignorant of the crucial structures of experience, or of misunderstanding national motivations when they are indeed the relevant ones.

In other words, we can think of regional history as the necessary intellectual exercise that prepares us for microhistory. It can help us see that the mental habits that national and ideological history permit are not really acceptable in the history of atrocity. One of these mental habits is that of dialectics. There are at least three such exercises that have clouded our understanding of these events. The first is a Soviet apologist dialectic, which reads: "Granted, the Soviet authorities killed millions of civilians in the 1930s. But the Red Army won the Second World War." This is a logical non sequitur. But the deeper problem of method is this: we simply cannot explain why something happened in 1933 by referring to events in 1945. The second is the Nazi apologist dialectic, which borrows from Ernst Nolte's notion that the Nazis, in comparison with the Soviets, were not so bad after all.[7] The Nazi and Communist systems were not in some sort of fatal Hegelian relationship. They were distinct political orders animated by very different leaders with very different ideas. They sometimes competed, sometimes cooperated, and sometimes interacted. Just when and how they interacted is an empirical question, not one to be resolved by intuitions developed by dialectical thinking and in more or less complete ignorance, in Nolte's case, of the history of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. But it is one that we must resolve before we undertake serious microhistory, since the localities touched by the Holocaust were generally also touched by Soviet power, but cannot themselves provide the sources we need to see the larger patterns.

A third dialectic is that of decadent liberalism, that of our own moment, fairly common among historians of Germany writing in English. This is the notion that, since the Soviets and the Germans were so different, somehow they met in the middle of Europe and cancelled each other out. The visual image of this dialectical myth is the Red Army's liberation of Auschwitz, which somehow is supposed to allow us to think that the two regimes were not in contact with each other, or were each other's dialectical opposites. Indeed, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz—after waiting about an hour's drive away for several months while the Nazis gassed the Hungarian Jews already in Auschwitz and the Jews of the Łódź Ghetto, Theresienstadt, and Slovakia who were deported there while the Red Army waited. The Soviets had no policy to rescue Jews, and their Polish Communist clients set about memorializing Auschwitz (once they had ceased using it as a camp) as a site of universal (not Jewish) suffering.

The reason, I think, why we find this last dialect comforting is that it would allow us to proceed with microhistory just on the basis of what we think we know about German history. If the German national narrative is a sufficient explanation of the Holocaust, then all we need to do is export familiar actors, motivations, and concepts to places beyond Germany. Or, in an even more de-

plorable error, we can use only German language sources as we try to ascertain what happened in these localities, thereby risking that Nazi colonial thinking shapes our own analysis. Far from undoing the consequences of previous occupations, later occupations exacerbated them. Understanding the Holocaust means understanding that Jewish survival rates were lowest in zones of multiple occupation.

I emphasize regional history as method, but not to the exclusion of ideas. Ideas, Nazi or Stalinist, are a standard explanation of mass killing. But ideas do not kill anyone on their own. If East European antisemitism killed just by virtue of being East European antisemitism, there would be no Jewish history. Alone, it cannot explain the Holocaust any more than air alone can explain a tornado. Ideas, to be lethal, must be incorporated by institutions. In the case of the Holocaust an antisemitic state made war on its neighbors, where Jews lived, and destroyed the states where Jews had been citizens. The Holocaust took place in a kind of stateless zone. Collaboration, in the sense of cooperation with policies of killing that come from the outside, simply cannot be explained by ideology alone, not because there was so little collaboration, but because there was so much. Collaboration only makes sense if we can answer the question: "collaboration with what?" Almost no one aspires to become a collaborator. Collaboration can only happen when a foreign power animated by a certain ideology becomes present. If it happened here, many of us would collaborate because that is what people tend to do. So, the question of collaboration must also begin with the question of the meaning of the destruction of prewar institutions by Soviet or Nazi power, and then ask which institutions, animated by which ideology, are present in the region at the crucial moments.

If we wish to make a plausible connection between ideas and actions, we must also grasp how these institutions, Soviet or Nazi, understood time. One way in which Stalinism and Nazism differed was the manner by which they understood the past and the future. For Soviets in the Stalinist era, the revolution that mattered was that of 1917. It was in the past. Stalin viewed himself—while industrializing, collectivizing, controlling land, and in carrying out policies of terror—as securing socialism in one country. All of the Soviet killing occurred in the decade before the war, and almost all of it was within Soviet borders. For Hitler, revolution meant something different. It could only happen in the future, and during war. Hitler, Himmler, Heydrich, and the rest understood that the only way they could transform society the way they wanted to was through war.

German historians have indeed led the way in seeing that both ideologies had economic components. Each—when we scrape away the ideological expression on which we tend to focus, also contained projects for global transformation that in practice had a certain regional emphasis. National Socialism centered on racial war in which the Jews were to be eliminated, but it

also looked to the economic project of colonizing much of Eastern Europe. It sought to balance the industrial modernity in Germany with pastoral peaceful countryside from which the Germans could remove everyone else and purify themselves.[8] Soviet ideology was one of class war, but Stalinist class war had a desired endpoint: a Socialist, industrialized society in which the state took control of agriculture and use it to modernize. Control of the countryside and the peasants meant control of agricultural profits to finance industry. While Nazism envisioned an anti-modern bucolic utopia, Soviet ideology sought to modernize a backward country. Both ideologies also set their regional aims within a global vision. The Nazis imagined a true global war to be won against the British and the Americans, and a world in which all Jews would be eliminated or be under their control. The Soviets too had a global view. Their revolution, they thought, came early, but other revolutions would eventually follow in a world revolution. In the meantime, they aimed to collectivize agriculture while industrializing. These two sets of visions, which we tend to compartmentalize intellectually, intersected in a place, above all in Ukraine. And though we as historians tend to separate ideas, the people who matter in this story had no such luxury. Thus Jews from Ukraine, when asked to recount their lives as Holocaust testimony, very often begin by discussing the deliberate Soviet famine of 1933. Ukrainians, meanwhile, remember being starved by both regimes.

Thus the region faced two very different, but fantastically ambitious, neo-colonial projects. It is not surprising that so many died here. Nor is it surprising, given that both ideologies fixated on fertile soil, that the primary method of mass murder in the 1930s and 1940s was starvation. The two regimes could cooperate on one important matter: the destruction of independent Poland. From the point of view of both Moscow and Berlin, Polish statehood was awkward and paved the way for the Soviet-German alliance in 1939. But Hitler and Stalin could not agree about Ukraine. For Germany, Ukraine was the breadbasket needed to balance industry. For the Soviets, Ukraine was the breadbasket needed to build industry. The purposes and the ideologies were different, as were the visions. But the land is the same and only one regime could control it.

What did it all mean for the Jews? Two major preconditions were met for a Holocaust to take place, and a regional approach helps us to see them both. The first was Nazism's special enmity to the Jews, in which all German failures were the Jews' doing. Nazi antisemitism also touched—and this is the second precondition—the lands where Jews lived. Nazi antisemitic ideas alone could not have brought about a Holocaust; only one-quarter of one percent of Germany's population was Jewish in 1939. When the Holocaust eventually occurred, 97 percent of its victims were people who did not know the German language and who lived beyond Central and Western Europe. The Jews were predominantly an Eastern European people. There were not very many Jews in Western Europe; even if all of them had been killed—including those rescued

in Denmark—these calculations would be essentially the same. Jews were killed en masse in the places where they lived in high numbers. To understand how it could happen, we must understand the special German enmity toward Jews, but also why there was such a conflict in the world homeland of the Jews.

This is an argument that is not explicitly in *Bloodlands,* but it helps to explain, I think, why the book works as regional history. The book goes through each of these killing policies in turn, beginning with the famine in Soviet Ukraine and the two policies of the Great Terror in the Soviet Union, namely, the mass murder of politically suspect peasants and the mass murder of politically suspect ethnic minorities. The 1939 Nazi-Soviet alliance is especially important because it moved Soviet power westward, allowing the Soviet Union to incorporate eastern Poland and the Baltics. German power here became truly murderous. With the invasion of Poland, the Einsatzgruppen went into action. World War II, meanwhile, might have begun in some other way, but the fact that it began with the Nazi-Soviet alliance was very telling and important, not just for the non-Jewish nations in whose national histories it looms large, while usually being completely absent in histories of the Holocaust.

Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, and Estonians all especially want us to remember the Nazi-Soviet alliance because it destroyed their states. Ironically, though, the destruction of these states mattered more for the Jews than for anyone else. In general terms, and here Hannah Arendt was absolutely right, the fate of the Jews in World War II rose and fell with the nation-states.[9] A Jew's chance of survival depended on the degree and character of state destruction. The Holocaust began where the state was twice destroyed, first by the Soviet Union and then by Nazi Germany. But we can extend this point. Jews in parts of Europe where state institutions were removed or displaced had a one in twenty chance of survival. Jews in places where state institutions remained, even if that state was a Nazi ally—Romania, Italy, Hungary, Bulgaria—and even if that state was Nazi Germany itself, had a one in two chance of survival. A 50 percent survival rate is horrible and worse than the survival chances of any other national group in World War II. But it is hugely better than 5 percent. Given the centrality of the state to political thought in general and Jewish political thought in particular, it is surprising how little attention we pay to the destruction of states in 1939 and after. I fear that it is one of many ways that our view of mass killing has been, so to speak, "Nazified." We see only Eastern European ethnicities, rarely Eastern European institutions. One of the dangers of microhistory is that it allows us to overlook prewar institutions, whose destruction (and sometimes perversion) was a crucial part of the history of the Holocaust.

I try also to explain how the Holocaust occured in regional terms. The Nazis believed from the beginning that the Jews had to be eliminated from Europe. But how were the Nazis to do this? At first they considered deportation, imagining the General Government as a dumping ground. This was not very

satisfactory. They turned next to Madagascar, off the southeast African coast, which seemed plausible after the defeat of France. But a maritime deportation required British acquiescence, which was not forthcoming. Another idea was to deport the Jews to their Soviet ally; Eichmann contacted Moscow and asked the Soviets to take 2 million Jews. The answer, unsurprisingly, was negative. Finally, the project centered on driving the Jews eastward with the invasion of the Soviet Union. This idea was a fourth iteration of the Final Solution.

When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, they realized the limitations of their own ambitions, thus escalating and accelerating the Final Solution, now the murder of Jews, as the war continued. The Germans initially thought they would destroy the Red Army and the Soviet state in nine weeks, starve 30 million Soviet citizens in the first winter, begin a general colonization policy in which they would starve and move tens of millions more people and, as I already said, resolve the Jewish problem. But the Red Army resisted, the Soviet state did not collapse, and the Germans could not starve people to the extent they had hoped—though they starved very large numbers. The Jews, meanwhile, were supposedly responsible for every defeat and identified with the Soviet state besides. They were killed in large numbers for the first time when the invasion began and then again as the offensive renewed in the autumn. At some point between the fall of 1941 and the spring of 1942, Hitler communicated the policy that Jews, wherever they lived, were to be killed. This was the fifth iteration of the Final Solution—what we call the Holocaust.

Regional history brings some air into the Hitlerian vacuum. It helps us to understand the progression of the Holocaust where written orders are scarce. The Baltics are especially important, particularly Lithuania and Latvia. But what happened there only makes sense if we have the whole region in view. The Holocaust in the sense of the mass murder of Jews began in Lithuania for several reasons. The German army's failure to take Leningrad was one factor. Another was Lithuanian collaboration enabled by the prior Soviet destruction of the Lithuanian state. The Germans, seen as liberators, could pick and choose among Lithuania's troubled and decimated political class. Many Lithuanians who had in fact collaborated with Soviet power collaborated with the Germans to cleanse themselves of having done so. Double occupation meant double collaboration.[10]

What is, and what is not, regional history? The approach, although it may permit comparisons, is not simply a comparative approach. We do not yet know all we need to know about either the Nazis or the Soviets. One of the most important aspects of each regime was the design of each on Eastern Europe and the way the two regimes encountered each other there. So my approach is more about overlap and interaction than comparison. I think that we have a lot of work to do before we can make meaningful comparisons. But if we do not allow ourselves to compare, we are in no position to say anything of interest or persuasive about the Holocaust or about any of these crimes.

After all, if one claims that the Holocaust was worse than any other atrocity, one makes a comparison. It would be best if it were an informed one. Very often it is not. So while my own approach is not chiefly comparative, it is also clear that the taboo on historical comparisons to the Holocaust makes serious historical work in this field impossible. We cannot, after all, police our own minds. If we know that the Soviets carried out policies of ethnic mass killing before the Nazis, we have made a comparison willing or not. If we know that the Soviet Gulag system had over a million people in 1939 and German concentration camps in that year had about twenty thousand, we have also made a comparison. And the problem further resides within the sources themselves. Anyone who has spent time with Holocaust survivor testimonies knows that Jews compared power systems in Eastern Europe, just like everybody else who lived through one and anticipated another. If one remembered Soviet rule, one also had every reason to wonder what it would be like when the Germans came and to plan accordingly. Responses ranged from fleeing to building bunkers to making friends with local notables. Comparison thus runs through the sources as an inherent part of the history. We should not prevent comparisons that people in that time and place could not. To place a taboo upon comparison is to deny the lived experience of almost all of the victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

The hesitation about comparison concerns the fear of minimizing one experience by bringing in another. But this problem works in multiple ways. Many critics say that my book minimizes Stalinism, because I make Stalinism seem rational and because I lower the estimate of those killed by the Stalinist system.[11] The Holocaust, of course is another matter. Historians of the Holocaust have argued that, though Stalinism killed more people in aggregate, the Holocaust remains distinct as the only attempt to exterminate an entire population.[12] Yet in fact the Soviets did not kill more people than the Germans. And within the Bloodlands, the Holocaust alone killed more people than all Soviet policies of mass killing put together. Here the Holocaust was not only qualitatively but quantitatively worse. And it is regional history that permits us to see this. It is the most radical defense of the unprecedented character of the Holocaust, precisely because it considers all of the policies of mass killing. Transnational history allows for firmer conclusions than national history, and regional history delivers findings that we need as we shift from the macrohistorical to the microhistorical level.

The macrohistorical level is in some sense more important, since killing was a result of policy. The micro level indeed allows us to apprehend experience in part. But we cannot apprehend experience fully if we do not know what the victims knew, if our methods prevent us from seeing what was most important to them, if we do not understand the full setting. I hope that my approach places the victims at the center of the story more clearly: lost neither

in the heights of the history of decision making, nor in the haze of local history without broader context.

History as a humanity must recognize that numbers are not just quantitative but qualitative. Large numbers are made up of small numbers—units of one where the one is not just a generic person or a generic Jew. That individuality, which we have to remember, also has to count. The difference between zero and one, in other words, is a kind of infinity and it is our job to recall that infinity over and over again because if we cannot and we do not have the sense for what was lost then we have not done our work as humanists. So in that spirit I name the people I mentioned at the beginning, because of course each of the 14 million people murdered had a name. The Ukrainian who dug his own grave, his name was Petro Veldii. The Pole who kept a diary was Adam Solski. And the young Jewish woman who scratched a note to her mother on the wall of the Kovel synagogue a few hours before she was shot was Dobcia Kagan.

Notes

1. For the primary sources see Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010). I begin with the same anecdotes in a response to German critics. In that text, written in German, I am chiefly concerned with the issues of comparison rather than with the issue of the starting point for microhistory, but I use some of the same arguments there as here. Both texts began with notes from a lecture that I delivered in Germany. "Das Bild ist größer, als man denkt. Eine Antwort auf manche Kritiken an *Bloodlands*," *Journal of Modern European History* 11, no. 1 (2013): 1–22.

2. *Bloodlands* has subsequently been published in thirty-five other languages, including the languages of the region it concerns—in this historiographical sense, it has become regional history.

3. If the Holocaust is understood as the German policy of killing all Jews under German control. Romanian policy was also to kill Jews; including the Romanian killings increases the number of Holocaust victims from c. 5.4 million to c. 5.7 million. Notably, almost all Romanian killing of Jews took place on lands that were either lost to the Soviet Union in 1940 or were taken from the Soviet Union by Romania in 1941. For recent treatments see Jean Ancel, *The History of the Holocaust in Romania,* trans. Yaffah Murciano (Lincoln, NE, 2011); Simon Geissbühler, *Blutiger Juli: Rumäniens Vernichtungskrieg und der vergessene Massenmord an den Juden 1941* (Paderborn, 2013).

4. I make these claims as a practitioner of microhistory who was led to conclude that some of the essential features of local killing episodes could only be described and explained at a higher scale. See for example three of my articles on the fates of Jews, Ukrainians, and Poles that preceded, and for me necessitated, *Bloodlands*: "'To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem Once and for All': The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland, 1943-1947," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 1, no. 2 (1999): 86–120; "The Causes of Ukrainian-Polish Ethnic Cleansing, 1943," *Past and Present* 179, no. 1 (2003): 197–234; "The Life and Death of West Volhynian Jews, 1921-1945," in *The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, and Memorialization,* ed. Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower (Bloomington, IN, 2008), 77–113.

5. This is the theme of Timothy Snyder "The Problem of Commemorative Causality in the Holocaust," *Modernism/Modernity* 20, no. 1 (2013): 77–93.

6. While it is difficult to retrodict from lachrymose histories in general, there can be particular precedents that are worthy of attention. In the case of the Holocaust, the generation of the

Judeo-Bolshevik trope during the Russian Imperial expulsions of the Jews, the October Revolution, and the civil wars is obviously of significance. For the necessary background see Oleg Budnitskii's important 2005 study, now translated into English as *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*, trans. Timothy J. Portice (Philadelphia, 2012). See also Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge, MA, 2003). Similarly, it does help to understand that the historical basis of violence in rural Ukraine was the effort to control fertile territory. See the classic treatment by Daniel Beauvois, *La bataille de la terre en Ukraine: les Polonais et les conflits socio-ethniques, 1863-1914* (Lille, 1993).

7. What Nolte and his contemporary critics had in common was the treatment of the entire issue as a matter of German ethics and German history. For discussions see Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: Holocaust, History, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA, 1987); Peter Baldwin, ed., *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate* (Boston, 1990).

8. The turning point was probably Christian Gerlach's *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg, 1999). See also Gerlach's *Krieg, Ernährung, Volkermord: Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1998).

9. This is an argument that appears throughout her writings: in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in the *Jewish Writings*, and in *Origins of Totalitarianism*. In the last, for example, she writes: "the Jews, the only non-national European people, were threatened more than any other by the collapse of the system of nation-states." She sees statelessness as a result of the extrusion of Jews from the rule of law or from the state itself, but the main source of statelessness was the destruction of states themselves. Mark Mazower approaches this argument not from the experience of Jews but from the history of international law in in his *Hitler's Empire* (New York, 2008) and before that in Mark Mazower, "An International Civilization? Europe, Internationalism, and the Crisis of the Mid-Twentieth Century," *International Affairs* 82, no. 3 (2006): 553–66. The thread he is following is Czesław Madajczyk, "Legal Conceptions in the Third Reich and its Conquests," *Michael: On the History of Jews in the Diaspora* 13, no. 3, (1993): 131–59. The masterful source text of Majdanczyk is Alfons Klafkowski, *Okupacja niemiecka w Polsce w świetle prawa narodów* (Poznań, 1946). This powerful response to Carl Schmitt and his German colleagues, composed, astoundingly, during the war itself, is, unfortunately, not translated and thus not generally known.

10. Christoph Dieckmann's recent history of the Holocaust in Lithuania will come to be seen, I believe, as one of the major studies of the Holocaust itself. Though it is concerned with one (major) case, it is unsurpassed in its use of primary sources and in its conceptual range. *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941-1944* (Göttingen, 2011).

11. As practically every Eastern European reviewer has noticed.

12. Yehuda Bauer's formulation of the Holocaust as "unprecedented" seems well chosen. See Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, CT, 2002), 39–67.