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Original Article

Empathy - Angel of Humanity against Dehumanization - the Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse

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Abstract

This study sought to provide a better understanding of the way Jewish population used a series of internal resources to resist, survive and continue thereafter to lead a life as close to what we consider normal as possible.

Trying to identify a theory in order to explain human behavior in situations of terror drove to Terror Management Theory. Despite the diversity of cultures around the world there are some psychological defense mechanisms which have a unique role: defusing awareness of death through a set of beliefs that give meaning and value to life (Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski 1989). The starting point of this theory is the book written by Ernest Backer whose central idea was that awareness of death has a devastating effect, with the risk that the fear of death paralyzes the person (Becker 1976).

To check how the situation of the Jews imprisoned in concentration camps or work camps fits this theory I have used 15 interviews selected from the archives of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. I have done an initial encoding of 5 interviews obtaining several themes and subthemes. Next, I extended the coding to the rest of the interviews following only the most relevant 6 themes: genocide awareness, leadership, manifestations of empathy, heritage, faith and religious practices, gratitude. Religious beliefs (the promise of immortality, the belief in resurrection, eternal soul and surviving through legacy) seem to support individuals during traumatic experiences and I have examined them in the overall context of religious faith by performing a subsequent qualitative interpretation. Also, I considered following two of the essential virtues from the theory: empathy and gratitude for the preservation of life.

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The results of this qualitative research confirmed only in small measure the theory with regard to Holocaust situation. I assumed two possible explanations for this result: either the terror to which Jews were subjected surpassed the intensity of terror assumed by the theory or the time was a determinant factor (the amount of time during which they were subjected to dehumanizing treatment was too long for most protective mechanisms). Manifestations of empathy probably remain the most important resources.

Keywords: Terror Management Theory; Holocaust; empathy; genocide awareness; coping mechanism.

Introduction. Holocaust – a culmination of dehumanization

The Holocaust was a huge massacre in which there were 6 million victims, including 1.5 million children. The term "holocaust" does not have a Hebrew etymology but a Greek one ("holos" meaning complete and "kaustos" meaning burnt), delineating a ritual slaughter justified theologically. The Hebrew term is "shoa" - total catastrophe (Berenbaum, 2016). Although during the history of humanity many massacres occurred, they, unlike the Holocaust, had a limited extent in a particular geographic area (e.g. the massacre of 1.5 million Armenians by the Ottomans in 1915). The Holocaust was a decision that affected a whole population, wherever its members lived. Identification as a Jew by birth was equivalent to a death sentence. The action of extermination of the Jews was as systematic and complete as possible; there were "only" 6 million victims because the Germans did not have the necessary time to fulfill the entire plan.

Nazi ideology was based on the argument of race superiority and was transformed into a long-term state policy (Richards, 2004). Dehumanization reached the highest rates. Even the terms used are borrowed from the animal kingdom: before 1933 "extermination" was a term for the liquidation of insects. Using this term referring to Jewish promoted the use of dehumanization as a tool for stratifying the races. At the top of the pyramid was situated the German race and at its base, the Jews, a race considered "subhuman", which was a reason to be eliminated (Richards, 2004). Nazi ideology was based on some irrational myths promoting the global perspective about the danger represented by the Jews. The Nazis were planning a new organization of the world according to racial staggering (Friedlander 1995).

Dehumanization of Jews was achieved in several ways: not only by adopting explicit laws but also by imprisonment in concentration, labor, or extermination camps. The concentration camps and the work camps were not an invention of that time, being also used by other political regimes (for example by Stalinist regime in the USSR). However, the extermination camps were Hitler's invention and culminated in the use of modern technology to liquidate the prisoners physically and chemically. To some extent, throughout the war, the Jewish extermination was delayed for "technical" reasons: burying thousands of corpses had raised the danger of epidemics occurring. The technical solution was identified with gassing and burning (Mommsen 2015).

The demonization of the Jew was mainly based on antagonism Christianity - Judaism, Jews being often assimilated to the Devil. This could not have been done without a real propaganda machine. In Germany, Jews represented less than 1% of the population and it would be hard to believe that they could have posed a real threat to the majority.

Propaganda was made through various means (the media, movies, books for children) so that a normal society was put into service of a liquidation machine.

A symbolic representation of dehumanization was proposed by the anthropologist Ashley Montagu. He called the dehumanization "the fifth horseman of the apocalypse" because of the disastrous effects it has on the society. When some people come to be considered as things or animals they become dispensable and any atrocity can become possible (Montagu & Matson, 1983). The starting point is the myth of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse who are described in the last book of the New Testament of the Bible; they represent death, famine, war and conquest. This symbolic representation exists both in art and in film. There is a painting made in 1887 by Viktor Vasnetsov (London 2015) and a film produced by Julian Blaustein in 1962 ("The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" 2015), both with the same name.

The reason I consider the dehumanization phenomenon worthy researching is, on one hand, the fact that there are historical evidences of recurrences, and, on the other hand, the fact that it has deep roots within the inner human nature itself. The perception that some people are less human can have an anatomical and functional substrate as long as other perceptions and emotions are processed differently by people, as shown by neuroimaging studies through the different activation of some brain areas in the context of the same external information. functionally and anatomically through neuroimaging studies (Phan, Wager, Taylor, & Liberzon 2004). Other analyses revealed the medial prefrontal cortex activation of the subject when exposed to all social groups except extreme (low-low) out-groups, who especially activated insula and amygdala, a pattern consistent with disgust, the emotion predicted by the stereotype content model. The current results empirically support the idea of an anatomical substrate of dehumanization and are consistent with the subjects' verbal reports. By providing neural evidence of the phenomenon, these data go beyond verbal reports, which may be subject to self-presentational concerns. Furthermore, if replicated and extended, this kind of evidence could begin to help to explain the all-too-human ability to commit atrocities such as hate crimes, prisoner abuse, and genocide against people who are dehumanized (Harris & Fiske 2006). Identifying the neurobiological bases responsible for the emergence of dehumanization motivates the existence of such atrocities since early periods of the evolution of the human species. From this perspective, it becomes necessary to understand the phenomenon and to find ways to counteract.

People need to access a series of compensatory mechanisms to deal with terrible anxiety caused by direct observation of death or just thought that death will follow in a very short time. In the literature, different models and processes can be found through which people manage to adapt to thoughts and anxiety related to death; such a process was derived from TMT itself (Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg 1999). Continuing a somehow normal life, especially after the extremely traumatic experiences of the Holocaust, requires stronger resources. Theoretical aspects of how people react in terms of awareness of death are shown in the following.

Terror management theory - possible explanation of human behavior in the face of death

Terror Management Theory (TMT) was developed in 1986 by American psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski and Sheldon Solomon. They designed it from the writings of Ernest Becker, an American anthropologist, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in 1974 for his

book "The Denial of Death". The defining human trait, according to this theory, it is self-consciousness. Besides its positive aspects, self-consciousness brings to awareness that death is an inevitable event towards which we can exercise no control. Awareness of death has a devastating effect, with the risk that the fear of death paralyzes us (Becker 1976). The same author concludes that man, as a mortal creature, finds himself in the dignified posture of managing to ignore his own fate. He also may feel most free when he leads a secure life, when his life is in his own possession (Becker 1976). In the most general terms, TMT is based on the theory that man is an animal and, like other animals, has a survival instinct. What makes it different is man's ability to think critically about his own being that ultimately brings awareness of own death. We can talk about a conflict between biological survival instincts and conscious fear of death; without some compensatory mechanisms, this might produce paralysis caused by this terror.

Terror management theory explains how people manage to overcome the terrifying fear of death without being paralyzed by anxiety. TMT argues that humans have developed an ingenious unconscious method to manage this anxiety: culture and self-esteem. "Culture" depicts a set of beliefs about reality shared by many people, in order to provide the feeling that the universe has a meaning and an orderliness and that immortality is a possible outcome. Within this paradigm, self-esteem could be defined as a feeling of contempt about one's own person derived from one's values being in accord to the cultural role. Thus, the subject may lead a secure existence and accede immortality. For the purpose of this paper, culture would be defined as a system of beliefs (what is true), of values (what is important) and of expectations (what happens when we engage in certain behaviors) developed by and for a group of people (countries, regions, social groups) to provide the requirements of living (food, water, security, social belonging, respect and meaning) (Bierbrauer 2006).

By developing beliefs shared by a number of individuals forming a group, people succeed to overcome the fear of death; these cultural perspectives give meaning to life through a set of beliefs concerning issues as the origin of the universe, the desirable behavior in life, the promise of immortality in one form or another. Perhaps religious belief systems provide for the most extensive source of worldviews. Those who live up to the religious standards are promised literal immortality, or an afterlife or oneness with the universe, depending on the religious orientation (Bierbrauer 2006).

People have the ability to reflect on their own lives and on their possible dead. In this way, a series of terrible experiences can trigger anxiety related to death. This anxiety related to permanent threat against life is represented by the term "terror" in the Terror Management Theory. Constant reminder of the fact that death can occur at any time and especially in extreme situations causes the "paralysis" described in the theory. Man, can move forward only by activating compensatory mechanisms. In theory, the trigger element is the awareness of death. I followed this idea which I called ***genocide awareness*** in my work with analyzing the interviews.

According with TMT, despite the diversity of cultures around the world, they have a unique role as a psychological defense mechanism: defusing awareness of death through a set of beliefs that give meaning and value to life. All the cultural perspectives on the world are "fictions shared", they continue to exist as a result of social consensus (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski 1998). This is essential for the functioning of the defense mechanism, because when everyone around one person has similar beliefs, it is more likely that that person is convinced of the truth of one's own beliefs. A cultural

perspective on the world promises immortality. This acts as a buffer against anxiety caused by the fact that we live in a universe where death is the only certainty. Therefore, when the fear of death comes up, we cling to our cultural perspective with an unprecedented tenacity.

A series of experiments have tried to demonstrate the validity of terror management theory. The first evidence of the validity of this theory came from an experiment conducted in 1989. Researchers have hypothesized that exposure to stimuli that lead to awareness of the moment of the subject's own death ("mortality salience") would lead to the automatic response of strengthening the cultural beliefs used by that person as a defense mechanism against the fear of death. The first study was conducted on 22 Americans judges. They were divided into two groups and asked to complete a personality test. Questionnaires in both groups were identical, except for two questions that only one group was asked. These were intended to remind to the subjects about their own death - for example, they were asked to describe in detail what would happen to their bodies when they die and how they would feel when they think of this. The next task was to study the case of a woman accused of prostitution to determine the amount she should be bailed. The results were that judges who have not thought of death had settled, on average, a 50 $ bail, while those who were aware of their own death decided, on average, a 455 $ bail. The authors' conclusion was that our moral principles protect us from the anxiety of death. The prospect of own mortality increased the need for judges to believe in moral standards. This amplified the desire to punish anyone who violated these values (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989). This study also included 6 other experiments, of which two demonstrated the role the fear of death has in determining social behaviors.

The same authors conducted subsequent research consisting of three experiments which demonstrated the way the remembrance of death increased attention toward the group of people who shared the same beliefs. It appears that validation of beliefs by consensus that were not observed against the group which does not share the same ideas (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon 1990).

The theory about how the idea of imminent or unavoidable death has been tested in multiple social situations. It appears it acts on the behaviors and practices of individuals by reactivating pre-existing cultural patterns. The interest in TMT is still high. There even has been conducted a meta-analysis which demonstrates that it is a robust theory. It explains how death-related thought in different contexts can generate moderate or large effects on behaviors and cognitions (Burke, Martens, & Faucher 2010). The conclusion of this meta-analysis is translated into a quote by Irvin Yalom, psychiatrist and psychotherapist: "*Though the fact, the physicality, of death destroys us, the idea of death may save us*"(Yalom 2008). Although the literature is full of studies on TMT in social "usual" situations, I have not managed to identify any paper that questions its validity in "exceptional" situations like concentration camps, war theater or genocide.

One of the areas where TMTenables the understanding of human behavior is politics. Ernest Becker argued in his writings that in times of crisis, when the fear of death is more pronounced within the population, people are more willing to accept a leader who gives them psychological comfort by making them feel they participate in a great mission against evil. That is why I tried to discover whether in concentration camps and labor camps leaders were selected, and if so, how they contributed to the survival of the prisoners. ***Leader selection*** was one of the themes encoded in my research.

Many people all adhere to a set of beliefs that motivates us and promises us that, one way or another, life will not end with biological death of the body. Cultural, religious, or philosophical systems permanently existed throughout the history of humanity. These beliefs can take various forms depending on the religion a person adheres to: some people go to church, others to mosque or synagogue. Generally speaking, these beliefs bring hope that soul will continue to exist in another place or that another life will start after the end of the current one. If the religious system is not a choice people may consider an ideal diet or a healthy lifestyle in order to keep death as far as possible. Choosing to have children, to support them and encourage them, can have a similar purpose: children may continue life in form of a genetic inheritance.

British philosopher Stephen Cave studied the numerous ways people imagine that they will live forever. Based on the TMT, he discovered that they all fall into four categories, describing them as "the dream to stay alive", "faith in the resurrection", "idea of the existence of the soul" and "heritage" in his book named *Immortality*, published by Crown Publishing in 2012(Cave 2012).

The dream to stay alive springs from human instincts and occurs in all cultures. Searching for the elixir of youth is a myth that humanity has followed along the centuries. Modern medicine is trying to understand the physiological mechanisms that govern the aging of body in order to slow this process. Belief in immortality is a "promise" the monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) employ for maintaining permanent followers. In modern times, especially in case of diseases like cancer, people begin to resort to some promising techniques which are not yet validated. Cryogenics is such a technique. The third belief is the existing of soul as a form of transcending death. Anyhow, scientists failed to confirm the existence of soul, so that in the end, the idea of heritage is the most plausible one for many people. Inheritance may take an individual or group form. We can talk about partially passing our genes to our children, as we can speak about a continuation of existence through inputs we make to our own culture (writings, artwork, various achievements, and fame).

Stephen Cave considers the four narrative structures as the basis of wishful thinking. Although they do not allow us to live forever, they may be used to defeat the paralysis induced by the idea of death, as the terror management theory assumes. To defeat the fear of death, Cave proposes the use of a number of virtues (Barnett, 2012). The empathy reduces our fear of death by orientation to others, by altruistically helping them. Orientation to the immediate present (here and now) may help as enjoy every moment we live, which ensures the resources to continue the fight for survival. The third virtue, called gratitude, depicts our awareness about the fact that life is a chance. All of this prompted me to look in the interviews with survivors of Nazi camps searching for *manifestations of empathy or gratitude, for the existence of an appeal to faith or for heritage as a means of resistance.*

The definition of empathy evolved over time. Carl Rogers was the first to introduce the term in 1957. He defined the empathy or the state of being empathic as a perception of the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto, as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition. Thus, it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased and so forth. If this

"as if" quality is lost, then the state is one of identification (Center for Building a Culture of Empathy 2016). Empathy can be understood in many ways depending on the prevailing side: cognitive or emotional. For the purposes of my work, I have chosen to consider the following perspective on empathy:

- Knowing another person's internal state, including thoughts and feelings
- Coming to feel as another person feels
- Feeling distress at witnessing another person's suffering
- Feeling for another person who is suffering (empathic concern). An oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone in need. Includes feeling sympathy, compassion, tenderness and the like (i.e. feeling for the other, and not feeling as the other)

Methodology

Qualitative data provides an overview of the social situations. Further, using our own experience, we may elicit those facts, feelings and actions that represent important starting points. In the case of a serious and extremely complex issue like the Holocaust, there may be difficult to divide the individualized research topics. Even when trying to follow previously well-defined themes, they may not go in parallel lines but may strongly confound each other. People's reaction in the face of death is a constant concern throughout history and even more so in dramatic historical periods in which the number of casualties is high. The ways people have managed to cope with terrifying situations, along with historical memory, may be used as valuable knowledge.

Given my training base as a physician, which I later completed with clinical psychology, my interest was initially oriented to watched medical conditions and treatments offered during incarceration in the camps, as framed it in the rigors and standards of those times. For this purpose, I have made a search in the database of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The query of the database for oral histories retrieved 136 results. Search was done using the keywords: *camp + medical conditions*. Of the interviews, I only selected 20 documents containing many details, in a narrative style, that I saw as "life stories". This approach was useful because I felt that I wanted to see and understand where these people came from, whether they had previous contact with health services, whether they had parents who professed medicine or related professions or could give relevant information in this regard. I have excluded the short interviews with timely responses on places of origin, the camp where they were deported, dates and exact answers to many technical questions. They sounded to me as a testimony before a court, which can be very useful for historical research, but not so much in a qualitative one. In the end, the analysis was performed on 15 interviews.

I started with a codification of the first five interviews; I used a ground coding system (line by line) noting what I considered to be the important themes and their subthemes. I gave these themes symbolical names according to my own perception. For example, I coded the situations referring to death salience (as established in theory) as "awareness of death" or "genocide awareness". At the same time, these issues were viewed chronologically as a global phenomenon of oppression, and they were subjected to analyze according to the progressive increase in intensity.

Some of the initial themes and subthemes, as I coded them, were:

- origins (childhood, positive emotions)

- hiding in community (positive emotions, trust, hide, ethnicity)
- work – first stage (volunteer, medical condition, fright, "joking about himself")
- hiding (trust, community, keeping "the faith", betrayal, communication, differentiation young/old people, family, arrest, hiding "in family", loss of family, false Christianity – hiding religion, war industry for German, hiding ethnicity, new family – positive emotions, confusion, worries about family)
- transport – earlier dehumanization (transport conditions, nationality does not matter, desire to help – repression)
- last stage of dehumanization (first impact with camp, conditions, end of identity, end of human being, "long time for healing", question about "guilt" – surviving, thoughts about survival, work – humility, cruelty in hunger situations, humiliation, medical general rules vs. no standards, cruelty, hopelessness)
- genocide awareness (despair, hopelessness, desire to help, thoughts on survival)
- the way back (losing the notion of time, rename: "death march", physical exhaustion: death, leave behind, battlefield with unarmed people)
- liberation – resuscitation of humanity (logic and opportunity: treatment depending on severity, immediate help, proper treatment in condition of war (primary hygiene), non-discriminatory treatment (including Nazis), transforming a place of horror in a place of healing, reconnecting with people, struggle for life, recoupling with national identity, eustress – positive emotions, propagation of humanity regardless of borders, transfer to home keeping contact for farther support – extension of aid after initial intervention).

I chose to present this list (even if it is not incomplete) to show the complexity of the phenomenon and especially the multitude of information that an interview with a survivor contains. The themes are strongly linked and separation is not only difficult but perhaps unnecessary.

In the beginning, I wanted to address issues regarding the circumstances of medical practice in the concentration and work camps. I later noticed that information is relatively scarce and mainly refers to poor standards or even nonexistent treatments, even according to the rigors of medical practice of the time.

The circumstances in which the Jews lived were of the worst: extremely low temperatures, a minimum of clothes for a long time, food devoid of nutritional value and low in terms of calories. The physical body was subjected to real torture while the psychological life was the subject of a real terror. Death was not just a thought but a continuous presence. Interviews offer an apocalyptic picture, a culmination of dehumanization and un unimaginable suffering. Under these circumstances, the apparent normality these people manifested at the time the interview was taken is surprising. They recount about the way they resumed their lives and about the way they raised their children and they cast messages for future generations. It is almost impossible to identify hate or desire for revenge in anything they say. Legitimate questions arise:

> How did anxiety related to death not cause paralysis? How did these men continue to fight for their lives? Why did the phenomenon of suicide did not become a choice for these people (this phenomenon, although present, was rare – there are stories attesting that they were urged by their guardians to throw themselves to the electric fence)?
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> Is terror management theory able to explain how they coped such horrors?

Which were the resources that Jews used to be able to overcome the horror to which they were subjected?

Starting from the terror management theory I recoded all the interviews according to the following themes: genocide awareness (death salience), leadership, manifestations of empathy, heritage (legacy), faith and religious practices and gratitude.

Awareness of imminent death triggers a series of emotional and behavioral reactions, designed to reduce anxiety, and allow the continuation of the struggle for survival. I considered this as the starting point in analyzing the validity of the theory. Extremely difficult periods are considered favorable for the emergence of leaders (visionary, authoritarian, or otherwise). This leaders' role is mainly to guide the group towards achieving its objectives or maintaining its values. The rest of the themes I have analyzed may be considered virtues or resources the group uses for more easily tolerating situations in vicinity of death, in order to allow individual or group life to continue, as normal as possible.

My goals were to observe how these themes are represented in the stories of survivors and whether there is evidence that they functioned as important resources during incarceration in the camps. There is solid theoretical evidence that these resources work during "ordinary" social situations, nevertheless, to date, I could not find literature proofs to confirm the validity of the theory during "exceptional" terror situations as the Holocaust.

Findings - Results and Discussion

Genocide awareness – looking death in the face

For the beginning, I tried to find evidence to prove that the Jews were aware of the actions of the Nazi extermination policy. Death awareness is the starting point of terror management theory. It determines several changes in behaviors that may pursue survival as the final aim.

In the interview with Hanni Krispin[1], it is clear that the Jews had knowledge of the Nazi plan since the period before deportation. In this way, they could mobilize resources in the community and try a resistance movement:

> "*She recalls hearing Hitler's speech about the destruction of the Jews on Christmas Day 1941, on a secret radio. The role of the underground was to be there for each other, and to revive the spirit of Zionism. They wrote secret newspapers which had been buried and were found after the war*".

Also, it is shown a symbolic antagonism between Christianity and Judaism: destruction of the Jews was planned to happen on Christmas Day 1941.

Awareness of the dramatic situation was present in all stages. Shortly after the German army withdrawal, when they barely glimpsed the release, the Jews could see a large number of corpses. Waiting for the death became consciously verbalized, as shown in the interview with Arie Kalbenberg[2]:

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[1] Interview with Hanni Krispin, October 3, 1993 – RG-50.029*0034, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

[2] Interview with Arie Kalbenberg, January 31, 1991 – RG-50.028*0024, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

> *"Many of the remaining prisoners died there. The survivors in the morning had to crawl over feces and corpses. There were no longer any guards. "You waited for death"".*

The situation was similar in all camps, regardless of the authority under which they operated. Even though the circumstances were somehow different, reality of death represented a constant. Sonja Gottlieb Ludsin[3] tells us about hopelessness and continuing fear of death in her camp in Latvia:

> *"There was no way for anybody to be saved. And we knew we were going to die, which, at that time, was actually a relief, because we were starved to death."*

Terror management theory uses the term death or mortality salience. This term represents the awareness of theirs one's own death, in a social context, that trigger various emotional and behavioral changes to reduce the anxiety of the individual. The most common outcome is strengthening their own convictions or beliefs that are part of a solid cultural background. The situation is more dramatic for Holocaust. It is not only about remembering the idea of death (which may recur with a certain frequency along the whole life) but about a direct observation of suppression of life in a large number of people, part of the family, children, or neighbors, without any identifiable rule or fault. I could not find in the interviews stories about how Jews activated or modified certain beliefs such as religious beliefs. My feeling is that they told the story of how they managed to survive each day. The story consists mainly in facts and less in metacognitions of the thoughts, reflections and ideas derived from the internalized situations. The severity of the situation required probably other protective measures.

The leadership role in a convicted society

Hanni's story[1] is relevant with regard to this subject. The resistance movement was led by the formal leaders of Jewish communities and aimed at continuing the Jewish cultural traditions. They were able to manifest only in the early days of the Holocaust, in a clandestine form. It is hard to believe, nor do we have clear evidence, that there was a selection of some leaders in the extremely hostile environment in concentration camps:

> *"Leaders of the Jewish Aeltestenrat (Council of Jewish Elders) would not select the 10,000 Jews as demanded by the Germans; therefore, the Germans took 12,000. After this, the Zionists reorganized in the ghetto. The group was not involved in fighting, but in a battle for the human spirit. The preservation of Hebrew culture and language was their focus, and they taught Hebrew literature to children when possible".*

The resistance movement was a peaceful one; It was politically orientated in attempt to establish good connections with the German authorities. The main purpose was to continue the cultural roots. There are recounted situations where adults read books to children in an organized way. Survival mainly concerned the whole population and was less directed to the individual taken separately (from the interview cited above):

> *"Hanni thinks that ghetto leaders always acted in the best interests of the people. She responds yes when considering the very stressful conditions. She mentions that*

[3] Interview with Sonja Gottlieb Ludsin, July 13, 1994 – RG-50.030*0262, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

the leadership, including Dr. Elkes, had helped to establish good relations with the Germans, even with the police. There were several underground groups, including Abezia (?).(...)

The role of the underground was to be there for each other, and to revive the spirit of Zionism. They wrote secret newspapers which had been buried and were found after the war".

Identification of religious leaders and their actions is difficult. There are only short accounts where we can see the power of their voice in the community, although the message is filled with despair. Rabbi's powerful voice is not just a physical characteristic but it represents a the symbolic power of the leader who continues his mission even during the transportation to the camp and subsequent incarceration. Such an image appears in the interview with Joseph Neuman[4]:

"He especially remembered one transport from Paris because it had a Rabbi on it that had a powerful voice." "Skies should have come down."

Hans Herzber[5] recounts aspects of his family life before being deported. Although families were already affected by the arrests of members and the situation in their communities and living up to that time was very difficult, the family institution had not entered a dissolution. A family member, in this case the mother, was forced to take over the role of a binder, to keep them all in a secure environment, as far as possible:

"Q. And so, how was your mother able to cope with this?

A. Mother was very strong. A strength we had never recognized. At this point I became the head of the household."[5]

Discovering the signs of empathy

It is very difficult to differentiate clear manifestations of empathy. We can easily find evidence of support and help among people subjected to an extreme situation. All people formed a kind of death sentenced community, who's each individual fought for a common goal: survival. The manifestation of empathy means putting oneself in the situation of another human, understanding his suffering and emotions, without one being in that situation. All these people were, after all, in the same terrible situation. Abandoning a group member was reducing the chances of achieving the common objectives:

"All night, the prisoners waited in the rain on the ground. They were then taken to a big barn for the night. Next morning they began walking in rows of five, which was very difficult for Hanni's mother who asked to be left, but was helped by the others."[1]

The most important aim was maintaining work capacity, without which the "selection" process that led to the killing would have followed. The work became an object of exchange for survival. Maintaining group cohesion and a degree of hope were obtained by circulation of information about the attempted assassination of Hitler or about the defeat of the German army. The aid to maintain the ability to work took many forms: from

[4] Interview with Joseph Neuman, May 2, 1990 – RG-50.031*0051, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

[5] Interview with Hans Herzberg, April 7, 1991 – RG-50.031*0029, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

the support of a body with one's own body, as a "crutch", to medical treatment, no matter how poor it was.

> *"Hanni heard from another prisoner about the attempted assassination of Hitler in July, 1944. She talks about how joyous the prisoners were to learn this. Rumors were circulating that it was better to work in trenches, even if very sick, than to wait to be selected, which meant going to the crematorium. Hanni had hurt her knee, it became infected, and she was seen by a Jewish doctor. This doctor also showed her mother how to limp as little as possible."*[1]

The signs of empathy may seem much clearer in the case of people who occupied "favored" positions in the bearing structure. One example is the so-called "runner", who partially detour their responsibilities for helping others Jews who are in more serious situations. Obviously, they exposed themselves to a life threat by helping them co-suffers. Nevertheless, these signs of empathy sprang from a deep understanding of other people and from there humanitarian spirit. Even offering food and helping those in the camp hospital was a heroic gesture, not only because it was an act punishable but also because the lack of food was dramatic to all.

> *"Hanni describes how a "runner" who lived in the revier (concentration camp hospital) would go around the camp, collecting people who needed to go to the hospital. Hanni's mother was met by one of these runners (someone who had gone to school with Hanni) who took her to the revier and had her legs bandaged. This runner found Hanni and brought her to see her mother. Hanni was able to get into this revier and be with her mother because a runner did not have to identify the individuals she moved, only to have the numbers going in and out of the revier match."*[1]
>
> *"Arie became very ill, so that he fainted on the Appellplatz. A J.W. risking his own life in this way, took him to the infirmary, where Arie was unconscious for two nights and three days. When he became conscious the first sight, he saw was that of a man's extremely swollen buttocks, due to a severe beating. He next saw the face of another J.W. who had visited him daily and daily had left him a bit of food."*[2]

The image of a mother who sees her dead newborn baby and the reaction of the other women in the barracks are especially impressive. At one time they seem to be a unified body in front of an agonizing pain:

> *"She had to let the baby die. And we all died with it. I mean, that was so horrible. We listened, the baby was crying, and crying, and crying. And no food was given to her, and she died. And we had to comfort the mother. We were a lot of women in that bunk. But were all like one, all like one."*[3]

Manifestations of empathy from the Germans and especially from the representatives of SS is somehow unexpected within that creepy landscape. However, there are such stories which demonstrate once again that humanity has not completely vanished even in that period. The SS soldier who helps the inmates with little things (the indulgence of some pieces of bread) and then avoids introducing them in the gas chamber represents a great hope for humanity as a whole. The two categories of people, SS and Jews, are obviously in antagonistic positions. Providing help in this situation is remarkable and it may only arise as a manifestation of empathy. Sonja tells us that such "favors" were not done as an exchange for anything.

"Once I got those extra few slices of bread, I was able to give my brother the bread that I got, legally. But how do I get to my brother? I cannot go downstairs. So, this SS man, when he spoke to me, and he gave me the orders, and he told me what to do, and who to tell what they have to do, he spoke to me very nicely. And I said to him, "You know what you did was wonderful. And being as you are so wonderful, can you help me to get my slice of bread to my brother?" And he says, "Yes, I will." (...) And I threw that bread under that machine. And my brother got the bread. And I did it as often I could.(...)

She was not as badly infected as I was, with the body rash, and she was walking step into step, and covering my – the front of my body, so the SS men would not put me in the shower. For whatever, we knew it was for death. We knew it wasn't for anything but death. By her covering me, I think it saved me. So, we went to the left, she went to the left, and the others went to the right, which was to the gas chamber."[3]

Stories like this are scarce and not widely debated. Some of them are even less credible. Such a statement made by Daniel Chanoch[6] has in its center Dr. Mengele:

"He followed Daniel, asking about the 'blond boy'. When Daniel took ill with chicken-pox and was hospitalized briefly, someone came for him with medicine. Daniel thinks that Mengele sent it."

A larger number of manifestations of empathy from the non-Jewish population can be identifies during the period before their deportation (when Jews were hidden to protect them) and at the time of their release. Max Roisman[7]'s story is edifying in this regard:

"Finally, I told them who I am. And she says, "It's unbelievable." She called her husband. He was a real angel, a man. He didn't get, if you hear, if you hear sometimes, gallbladder, he didn't get a gall. [chuckles] Heh! Which it is good, a real nice man. There, they rescued me a few times. They hide us. They did. I have to admit. I wouldn't say that's, that they didn't want something for this, but we didn't get it. (...)

They warmed the water and they washed me. They put me to bed, and they called a doctor. He saw the condition. The doctor recognized me right away, because he knows us before the war. And he says, "You have infected. You need attention." I says, "Doctor, I don't have any money. When I'll get on my feet, I'll reward you." He says, "I don't want anything." And he treated me, and after a few days, I was on my feet."

The receiving of Jews by the German population at the time of their release is deeply emotional. There are clear evidences of empathy and rebirth of humanity. This moment remains deeply marked in memory of Hans Herzberg[5] as evidence that there are people who care about the suffering of their fellow men:

"A. The first thing is that I found out that my mother had sent a small amount of money to the camp so that I could take a train home. I looked like an absolute mess. I went to Berlin and then on to Hanover. By the way, in Berlin we had a very touching experience; the people came to the station and waited with food and money and offers of housing.

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[6] Interview with Daniel Chanoch, April 7, 1991 – RG-50.120*0226, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

[7] Interview with Max Roisman, April 22 1985 – RG-50.462*0095, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

Q. Who was these people?
A. Germans. Non-Jews waiting for the prisoners. This was quite a contrast from what I had just experienced - it was very touching. It sticks out in my memory that these people did exist, there were people who did care."

Clear signs of empathy occurred within communities before deportation. There are stories about community members who risk their freedom and life to help their fellows. Max Roisman[7] was lucky to receive practical help from a community non-Jew member and more than that, from an SS officer with Jewish origins. The first helped him to feed his family and the second helper made a real plan to escape. Max's story is especially moving, as the one who helps him, the Jewish SS officer, exposed himself to a denouncement that could be virtually be equated with a conviction:

"For about a year. At this time I was, get acquaint--I got acquainted with another man of my profession, a tailor, and he gave me a room. And he says, "You can work with me, and we will share what we will get." He got a lot of work and he couldn't manage, especially when the Germans, the border guards over there, choose him as their tailor. And there weren't too many other ones which they could do the work. We never got paid from them anything, but, if any of them brought a loaf of bread, he shared with me. (...)
S.S. Now, later we founded out that this guy, Schossi, has Jewish inheritance. But one time, when it was really a bad situation, and he knew what it was coming, he warned me in advance to run away. I says, "Look, if I'm gonna run, and this, the town is gonna be circled around with Gestapo and S.S., how am I gonna get out?" He says, "I'll take the post here, and you will run. And when I'll shoot, I'll shoot in the air. Don't worry. Run." And I did. And I survived this time."

The clearest manifestations of empathy come from some people imprisoned in concentration camps who, despite the harsh circumstances they also suffered, lived more intensely the suffering of their fellows subjected to even higher atrocities. The true meaning of a wish to switch places with someone in deep suffering, when oneself is in a position close to death, remains difficult to understand. The story of Joseph Neuman[4] illustrates this:

"Joseph was beaten badly and a nice Kapo, who had been a "German Flyer," took him to the hospital. He had a high temperature. The doctor took a bottle of blood from him. In there, he met a kind Jewish boy named Wessler from Slovakia. When the boy was taken away, Joseph felt "terrible, I wanted to die with him.""

In the same line of thought is manifestation of the generosity by the Jews who, although working in the most macabre place (in the gas chamber), were somehow "favored". Risking their own lives, they were sharing food with other prisoners. After a hard-working day, they could find the strength to walk long distances, late at night, in order to offer food to people in other barracks. Though regarded by the story teller as a singular situation, it is an important to be noticed as a sign of humanity. Lily Blayer[8] says:

"I was helped and she risked her life. There were three lagers, ABC. I was in the A and she came from the C at 4:00 AM or 3:00 AM and brought something for us because her brother was in the gas chamber and so he was a commander and they

[8] Interview with Lily Blayer, August 21, 1988 – RG-50.031*0005, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

> *have a chance to get some food so she brought me. It was the only person who helped and some others didn't have any and you couldn't get a contact and the best food."*

Perhaps empathetic manifestations remain some of the most touching testimonies, attesting for the maintenance of humanity in the most adverse conditions. Helping and empathy in various circumstances was essential for physical survival but, more than this, the perception that humans remain humans under harsh times offered hope and maintained early life pure beliefs.

Heritage – a motivation for survival and a legacy to the descendants

It was difficult to identify proofs to demonstrate that the legacy which the Jews leave to the posterity or their children was a resource in their fight for survival. In the spirit of the terror management theory, legacy is an important issue. During the initial period of the pogrom families strived to fight for their children's lives. This behavior is common and general for human species and is certainly met in the animal's world too, in an instinctual way. There are countless stories in which Jews sold their objects just to get something to eat for themselves and their families, run away or hide from oppressions. In addition, separation of the families was a common situation with the lack of information regarding one's family members. The desire to see one's own children in the last moment of life is a common cultural element and is narrated by Zvi Naor[9]:

> *"Suddenly I saw my mother. She didn't see me. I heard her saying: "if I only could see my children for one more time". When Motel came back, I went with him to bring my sister and her friends before she is going to Warsaw. (...)*
>
> *My mother was shot in her back. I heard her last words: "Oyi maiener kinder" (my children). My sister and I continue to run. Then we lied between the dead people and spread some blood on our face, pretending that we were dead too."*

The thought of children and families stopped Hans Herzberg[5] to make an extreme gesture, as opposed to some others who, falling in despair, committed suicide. Although I have not found many such explicit stories, it this possible that they exist and are equally touching:

> *"People were encouraged to run into the fence and electrocute themselves, which some did. I guess the thought of my family kept me from doing these things. I was determined to see my family."* [5]

In all the interviews, survivors' express gratitude for managing to go through and later leading a mostly normal life. The message they cast is very strong and advocates to the collective memory, so that such atrocities do not happen again. The messages urge to normality and appreciation of life; life must go on. Hope and prayer are central in the lives of people who have survived and are now in old age:

> *"It's very important that people should know what happened and that it shouldn't happen again because we allowed evidence and experience in our life. It's very*

[9] Interview with Zvi Naor, N.A. – RG-50.120*111, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

scary. Very many...and it's very hard to see it going on again and fight again...Let's hope and pray.(...)

I wish I could tell you some better things. We survived and we lead a normal life...we call it normal. I have a very good husband who takes all the trouble with me and I have a son who is nice and we have grandchildren and we try to enjoy what we have. That's all we can do. Life is for living. A normal condition...you have to go on living." [8]

Some of the survivors have developed a set of rules or a motivational phrase to accompany their children during their lifetime. Their torment would become useless if their message remains unheard. Thoughts about what they would leave behind are much more present nowadays in the survivors' minds than during the Holocaust. It might be the fact that now they managed to process the information, while during that times, imminent death did not allow insights:

"- I can't see how people throw away food. I have to finish everything from my plate.

- I taught my kids to be strong, to protect themselves.

- The word "I can't" is not in my vocabulary and so I educated my children.

- I'll never be late" [9]

"people should eat today, save a little for tomorrow if you can, but don't make plans for the next generation." [4]

The messages contain fear that such atrocities may repeat and urges active and constant actions against politics that could lead to genocide again:

"All I can say is that genocide is possible at any time. "Do not be quiet... It will not blow over." [4]

"To me, this is the biggest, the best thing that could have happened." [3]

"Our revenge is to be strong in order to ensure that things such as the Holocaust will never happened again. I taught my children not to be afraid. When I made a bath to my son, I wash him with hot water and then with cold water, so he will be strong and brave."[9]

The legacy of the Holocaust survivors is a thinking which goes far beyond the framework of their own generation or their ethnic group. They call to the memory of recent history, a time when abominable deeds happened, even not to the same extent. Hence, their appeal is firm and strong, as without this heritage their life would have no meaning. Their messages reach to the humanity as a whole; their legacy is the same for every person on the planet. A profound appeal to history is made by Philip Solomon[10]:

"(...) Never Again!" I, inside my own mind, it translates to, "Ever Again!" Because with what I predicted in that letter, almost from the day that World War II ended, there has been genocide from, on every continent on this earth. In Africa, from the northern, from Libya on the shores of the Mediterranean, all, Uganda—where they...killed millions of their own people, the entire continent of Africa, the Middle East. Right at this moment in 1987 the genocide that's going on in, say in

[10] Interview with Philip Solomon, May 28, 1987 – RG-50.120*111, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

Afghanistan. And I think probably the worst of all, on a per capita basis, probably much, much worse than the Holocaust in Nazi Germany, the genocide in the Southeast Asia—Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, where again, they consume their own people, by the millions. South America, the Argentine, and Chile. And my total thinking there is that this is going on and going on, something that I thought would have to end. And my feeling is that as long, relating all this to the phrase, "Never Again!" my feeling is that as long as genocide is permitted to exist on, in, against any people, anywhere on this earth, it can happen again to any other people anywhere else on this earth. (...)"

Faith and religious practices - Factors of stability

Religious ideas are part of the deep culture and represented a central element of resistance. Although they have been forced to renounce their faith, Jews continued to believe in their true God, despite the enormous fear they felt. The importance of faith was even greater if we think that in an extremely hostile environment, one where every piece of bread was gained through fight, these people risked their lives in hiding Bibles and spreading the faith among prisoners. Arie Kelbenberg[2] says that he could not have survived without his faith:

"Asked about his reaction and thoughts at this time, Arie responds that his reaction consisted of a mixture of pride on his belief, and following the true God, and of enormous fear. In Sachsenhausen the J.W.s were originally kept together, but later on they were spread around the camp. This allowed arie to "spread" the word. He did talk Bible with other prisoners, although possession of the bible was forbidden. Some J.W. got together in the morning and gave each a daily text for study. (...)

In Vught and in Sachsenhausen he, and all J.W.s were asked to renounce his faith. They refused. (...) Arie states that he is convinced that without Jehovah he could not have survived."

In some cases, faith is the last resource to reframe the whole existence and hierarchy of values. Being together with family members is regarded as the greatest treasure. Material possessions were practically of no importance. Biblical themes such as punishment are looked at as possible reasons for the horrors that were happening. This explanation, no matter how irrational or inconclusive, provided for the opportunity to continue the fight.

"We only said, please God, let us only be left together. We did not care what we left behind. Material things don't mean anything anymore, If you fight for life, and the ghetto life was not – it horrible, but it wasn't – because we didn't believe it was going to get any worse. We felt, oh, this is going to be our punishment. And after that, the War will be over, and we will be saved." [3]

Jews relationship with faith may be circular. In the worst circumstances faith, may be compared to a skeleton that supports the entire body and becomes stronger once the danger has passed. It is a message, a legacy which does not refer to people, their children, or ethnic groups but rather to the very essence of their inner beings, their cultural heritage. A message devoid of hatred, no longer looking for any guilt, refers to the atrocity as to something that ultimately strengthened the Jewish faith.

"I don't know of any one of the Jewish religions who said, "Hey, we better give this up, we might be next." I think if anything, my own feeling, my own faith is stronger than ever, because haven't we gone through this all through history and

survived? This, certainly, there was no, never anything comparable to this, but I think, you know, to answer the question, no, my faith is stronger than ever because of this." [10]

Religious ideas neither do constantly appear through the interviews, nor are extensive in their amount. For this reason, they may not be considered an essential resource in overcoming the crisis in the face of death. I would say they occurred sporadically or were even absent. There are moments when religious ideas are even put into question or divine existence falls into doubt. We might expect that certain individual resources helped people to cope better with the anxiety of death. Nonetheless, it seems that neither the level of education, nor the social status or beliefs durability were essential factors.

"When asked why he survived, Neumann responded by saying that "more educated...more smart people died...People ask me why and I have to ask myself why. We must believe in something." (...) "Some believe that there is "no God", others say it kept me alive." (...) When asked if Elie Wiesel statement that Auschwitz was of another planet, Neumann responded by saying "he described it well." "It was survival at all costs." Competition to survive. Joseph said that when new transports came, they were all equal. But time distinguished and separated who could make it or die." [4]

The existence of God falling into doubt, luck, chance, or hazard replaced it. The human system of beliefs and values cannot tolerate the existence of a God who abandons his servants. Thereof, the psyche must find a breakthrough to keep its balance:

"It was luck. Just luck. A matter of luck. There was no way to get out. I feel that if I had to wait for the US to liberate, I didn't have any strength left. I was fading away. (...) We didn't get help from anywhere. (...) And there was a God. We looked up many times and thought it was the same sky that we saw at home." [8]

Challenging the faith and replacing it by chance in the cognitive process the person leads a legacy to future generations. In the end, there appears a possibility that so many peoples' death could be tolerated (although not accepted). In this context, it is likely that religious ideas have been less a resource compared to the legacy for the descendants:

"-Did you lose faith in Auschwitz?

-Yes, definitely. I tried to keep it. Mainly, when I came back and saw what happened because you don't visualize. You see it but you don't visualize it when you come back to the emptiness. And I said, "What is this all about?" I was first fasting on Yom Kippur in Auschwitz, but I haven't fasted since I came back. I don't feel guilty. I talked to others a long time ago, we don't talk about it now and we do the same thing.

-Survivors?

-We fasted enough. We did our share and we don't want to fast. That's all. It's not that we're convinced that they don't have to do this. It's just bitterness. It will stay with us until the end.

-What would you say to future generations?

-Try to do everything so that it shouldn't happen again. That's why I am here. I will come because I can't take this..." [8]

At the time of release from the extermination camp, there appear the dawn of normalization. The former inmates resumed the course of their religious beliefs and practices. Liberators and liberated participated in a common ritual in front of collective graves. Death was present all around, both as a thought and as an overwhelming entity, in the presence of so many bodies. It may be that the religious systems are functional in many conditions but, during huge atrocities, they become ineffective or are abandoned. From the interview with Dr. Charles Frog[11] we find:

> "Dr. Froug and the other Jewish members of the unit, about 18 doctors, accompanied them to say the Kaddish prayer for the dead, who could not yet be buried because of the Sabbath. Sunday morning, 8,000 people were marched from the city to dig a large, single grave, 200 by 50 by 10 feet."

No matter how affected faith is in horrible situations, it is part of human heritage and is passed on. Faith might not have been an important resource during the Holocaust, nonetheless it has a particular importance when resuming to a normal life.

> *"And I'll go out, and one time, when he did come in, on a Friday night, when the candles was lighted with my wife and by my boss' wife, and we feel uncomfortable. I am not a fanatic Orthodox, especially when I was younger, I was more liberated in Judaism than I am now. But when he says something, and he says, "I swear by the holy candles," our suspicious that come through with this. This is Jewish roots somewhere." [7]*

Gratitude - useful virtue in dealing with death

According of the principles of the TMT, gratitude for being alive despite heavy ordeals may play an important role in reducing anxiety towards death. It was difficult to identify experiences that prove such an interpretation. It is true that there are stories on the aid received from community members, Hebrew and non-Hebrew, or saving interventions during concentration. Strong emotional outbursts by the survivors took place when meeting rescuers after the end of the Holocaust. Rescuers association with divinity was not incidental under the circumstances. Considering all these aspects, it is difficult to appreciate that the theoretical grounds were fulfilled with the particular situation of terror within the Nazi camps. I chose two illustrative examples in this regard:

> *"He saved me. He was alive until recently. I saw him, and I thanked him, again, and again, and again. (...) I spoke to him over the phone, and I thanked him. And I told him I will never forget him, as long as I live. And I didn't, because he saved my life. (...) He saved me. He told the other SS man not to kill me. And it was like God sent somebody to take this person, to live, which was another miracle. And we were in the death camp." [3]*
>
> *"Yeah, she grabbed me by my shoulders, and she was yelling, "I've found my liberator!" She was just totally hysterical. She was screaming, "I've found my liberator!" I, she was crying and screaming, "I've found my liberator!" And she was hugging me and shaking my shoulders. By that time, there must have been like 500 people in this hall, and her husband quick jumped up, grabbed her, led her back to her seat." [10]*

[11] Interview with Dr. Charles Froug, N.A. – RG-50.035.01*0001, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Retrieved from: http://collections.ushmm.org

Conclusion and further directions of research

TMT is a solid theory for the mechanisms a person employs in facing death during usual social situations. It explains the way certain behaviors modify when people face the idea of death.

The main theoretical resources that a person engages for diminishing death anxiety are empathy, gratitude, leadership, legacy, and religious faith. The trigger for activating these resources is death awareness.

I conducted qualitative research using the components of this theory as themes for encoding 15 interviews with Holocaust survivors. The findings of this research show that the coping mechanism used during extreme terror do not entirely fit the TMT model.

I could not find in the interviews stories about how Jews activated or modified certain beliefs such as religious beliefs. They told the story of how they managed to survive each day. The story consists mainly in facts and less in metacognitions of the thoughts, reflections and ideas derived from the internalized situations. The severity of the situation required probably other protective measures.

The resistance movement was led by the formal leaders of Jewish communities and aimed at continuing the Jewish cultural traditions. They were manifest only in the early days of the Holocaust, in a clandestine form. It is hard to believe, nor do we have clear evidence, that there was a selection of some leaders in the extremely hostile environment in concentration camps. Identification of religious leaders and their actions is difficult. There are only short accounts where we can see the power of their voice in the community.

It is very difficult to differentiate clear manifestations of empathy. We can easily find evidence of support and help among people subjected to an extreme situation. Clear instances of empathy are those implying actions of "favored" inmates, who helped their co-sufferers with the risk on their own life. Empathetic manifestations remain some of the most touching testimonies, attesting for the maintenance of humanity in the most adverse conditions. Helping and empathy in various circumstances was essential for physical survival but, more than this, the perception that humans remain humans under harsh times offered hope and maintained early life pure beliefs. The mechanism of empathic action fit's best with the theory thus justifying the chosen title: "*Empathy - angel of humanity against Dehumanization - the fifth horseman of the Apocalypse*"

The legacy of the Holocaust survivors is a thinking which goes far beyond the framework of their own generation or their ethnic group. They call to the memory of recent history, a time when abominable deeds happened, even not to the same extent. Hence, their appeal is firm and strong, as without this heritage their life would have no meaning. Their messages reach to the humanity as a whole; their legacy is the same for every person on the planet.

Religious ideas neither do constantly appear through the interviews, nor are extensive in their amount. For this reason, they may not be considered an essential resource in overcoming the crisis in the face of death. I would say they occurred sporadically or were even absent. There are moments when religious ideas are even put into question or divine existence falls into doubt. We might expect that certain individual resources helped people to cope better with the anxiety of death. Nonetheless, it seems that neither the level of education, nor the social status or beliefs durability were essential factors.

According of the principles of the TMT, gratitude for being alive despite heavy ordeals may play an important role in reducing anxiety towards death. It was difficult to identify experiences that prove such an interpretation. It is true that there are stories on the aid received from community members, Hebrew and non-Hebrew, or saving interventions during concentration. Strong emotional outbursts by the survivors took place when meeting rescuers after the end of the Holocaust. Rescuers association with divinity was not incidental under the circumstances. Considering all these aspects, it is difficult to appreciate that the theoretical grounds were fulfilled with the particular situation of terror within the Nazi camps.

The results of this qualitative research confirmed only in small measure the theory with regard to Holocaust situation. I assumed two possible explanations for this result: either the terror to which Jews were subjected surpassed the intensity of terror assumed by the theory or the time was a determinant factor (the amount of time during which they were subjected to dehumanizing treatment was too long for most protective mechanisms). Manifestations of empathy probably remain the most important resources.

A general overview of survivors' cognitions shows that positively centering the thoughts upon external issues (others – empathy, leadership, and gratitude, future – heritage and religious beliefs) may be a protection factor against death during extreme terror. This is also confirmed by Beck's(Beck & Haaga, 1995) theory of depression and leads to the conclusion that fight for survival may be lost due to depressive traits. Further research using Beck's theory for encoding the interviews (positive/negative vison on self, the others and the future) may lead to a better explanation of the leading psychological mechanisms that predict the survival under terror.

Studies that show how people cope with the atrocities of war and their exposure in the face of death are justified in the current geopolitical instability situation and resurgence of terrorism.

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