

Border-crossings: Some Reflections on the Role of German Historians in Recent Public Debates on Nazi History¹

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As is well known, the German Federal Republic is famous for its lively intellectual culture in general and for the intensity of its debates on German history in particular. In a sense, the turmoil of the recent German past is reflected in these debates. And if this basic supposition is correct, the centrality of the Third Reich in the debates on German history is to be expected. However, emphasizing the centrality of the Third Reich is most definitely *not* the same as emphasizing the centrality of the Holocaust. In the following article I will apply three theses to this subject.

According to my *first* thesis the apparent centrality of the Holocaust in German history in recent decades is deceptive, because the Holocaust has been *referred* to rather than *researched*. The most remarkable phenomenon in German historical debate in the recent past is *the presence of the Holocaust by its absence*, or, in other words, its *repression*, symptomatic of its *traumatic quality*. Indications of this repression are the phenomena of “splitting off” (*Abspaltung*) and of projection, which can be observed both in the public debates and in the professional debates of the historians, who are fueling the public debates. Although the repression has never been *complete*, as Helmut Dubiel and Jeffrey Herf have recently argued, it has been the dominant characteristic of the German historical debate from 1945 onward.² Therefore, it can be taken as a first, general characterization.

My *second* thesis is that, although the repression of the Holocaust in German history has always been present, at the same time it has gone

though a *substantial process of change*, linked primarily to *time*. The specific forms of repression of the Holocaust have been primarily influenced by the *succession of generations*, whose influence has been more substantial than that of political ideologies and affiliations (broadly defined, “left” versus “right”). The general tendency has been a development from an *almost total* repression between 1945 and 1965—the period in which the generation of the perpetrators was still in full power—to a *partial* form of repression later on, in the period in which power was being transferred to the children of the perpetrators’ generation. However, only after the grandchildren of the generation of the perpetrators made their appearance on the historical scene—roughly from 1990—did this partial repression give way to something of a more or less *open attitude*. Nevertheless, they continued to exist alongside continuing forms of repression among the older generations. It makes sense, therefore, to distinguish three approximate periods in this respect, roughly corresponding to the dominance of the three generations: 1945 to 1965; 1965 to 1990; and from 1990 until the present.

My *third* thesis, then, is that, in the debate on German history, the Holocaust has, below the surface, been *linked to the “German ‘catastrophe’”*; meaning, the loss of independent statehood and the loss of unified nationhood for the Germans after 1945, as a consequence of their military defeat. Both “catastrophes,” so to speak, have basically been regarded by many German historians—especially those with “rightist” convictions—as *comparable phenomena*, keeping each other in balance and, in this sense, “compensating” for one another. From this perspective, therefore, both Jews and Germans had something important *in common*, i.e., being the main *victims* of World War II.

Although this subterranean linkage of the two “catastrophes” has also been subject to a process of erosion over time, it nevertheless survived the unification of 1990. This linkage may explain the remarkable fact that the intensity of the German debate on the Holocaust has *increased* since the German unification and not *decreased*, as was expected by most informed observers of the German scene. The explanation could be that the German “catastrophe” was “annulled” by German unification, while the Jewish “catastrophe” was not.

This linkage may also explain another remarkable and widely observed—though unaccounted for—fact: that conservative historians in Germany, who waged fierce battles on behalf of “the German nation” in the *Historikerstreit*, stayed out of the Goldhagen-debate. The explanation for this could be that their “case”—the German state and nation—had already been taken care of by recent history *itself*. There was no longer any need,

therefore, for historians to defend German nationalism against its (post-nationalist) critics on the liberal-left side of the political spectrum, as had been the case right up to the *Historikerstreit*.³

I will try to ground my view by presenting a simplified analysis of four public debates in which German historians have been involved during the last fifteen years. I refer to the *Historikerstreit* of 1986–87; the *Goldhagen-debate* of 1996–97; the *Wehrmacht-debate*, which has been going on since 1997; and the *debate on the role of German historians in National Socialism*, which began in 1998, and is still in progress. In my analysis, I shall focus on the fundamental connections between the questions and answers formulated in these debates.

I shall begin my analysis with the debate on the role of the German historians in National Socialism. This debate leads us directly to the heart of the matter; that is, to German historians who are at the same time both products and producers of German history. Next, I will try to uncover the typical arguments and presuppositions used by German historians after 1945, in postwar German historiography. Thereby, I will make a distinction between the direct postwar period of 1945 to 1965, and the period of 1965 to 1990. The changes in the historiography after 1990, will be dealt with next, in which I will draw some lines connecting the *Historikerstreit*, the Goldhagen-debate and the Wehrmacht-debate, leading to the present scene. Finally, I will attempt to arrive at certain conclusions.

The Role of German Historians in Nazi Germany

The first public debate can best be introduced with the help of two quotes. The first quote is from the English historian E. H. Carr: “Study the historian before you study the facts.”⁴ Carr’s quote rightly suggests an intimate relationship between the *contents* of history and its *producers*, the historians. The second quote is from the German sociologist Wolf Lepenies, who recently pointed to the paradoxical character of the ongoing debate on the role of historians in National Socialism. Lepenies remarked that, in comparison to other disciplines, German historians were very late in discovering that they, too, had been involved in National Socialism. “Could it be the case,” Lepenies asked, “that the discipline, that professionally deals with memory and remembrance, is also very apt to forget and repress?”⁵

Lepenies, following Nietzsche, justifiably called attention to the fact that all remembering presupposes forgetting, because it is impossible in principle to remember everything. He who remembers everything is con-

demned to permanent insomnia, according to Nietzsche. In the case of the Holocaust, this insight is even more important because, as Saul Friedländer remarked, the historiography of the Holocaust is still “caught between the impossibility of remembering and the impossibility of forgetting.”⁶ Therefore, in analyzing historiography, we always have to ask exactly *who* remembers *what*, and who forgets what, without falling into the trap of a reductionist sociology of knowledge.⁷ This is why Carr’s “Study the historian before you study the facts” is important advice, even after “the death of the author” has been widely proclaimed and the potential of discourse-analysis has been acknowledged.

The issue of “forgetting,” or repression, by historians is, of course, absolutely crucial. Professional historians usually justify the very *existence* of their discipline by pointing out that history is the most important *institutionalized safeguard* against selective “forgetting” and against collective amnesia. Therefore, “forgetting” or repression touches on the official *raison d’être* of professional academic history. For German historians this problem has acquired an added urgency since the unification of 1990, and since West German historians have turned into the judges of their former East German colleagues. German historians, therefore, have a stake in this debate about their role in National Socialism and their subsequent “forgetfulness” in that regard.

Now what exactly is this debate about?

The debate as such became public during the *Historikertag* in 1998, in the form of a panel, *Historiker im Nationalisozialismus*. The panel itself consisted of several (more or less) younger and marginal historians, such as Peter Schöttler, Götz Aly, Michael Fahlbusch, and Matthias Beer. They—and a few others, such as Ingo Haar, Martin Kröger, and Roland Thimme—had recently done research on German historians during the Third Reich and had produced unsettling results for the “official” history and image of the German historical profession.⁹

According to the “official” history of the profession, German historians in the Third Reich could be classified in three categories. The first category consisted of a tiny minority that had actively cooperated with the Nazis, such as Walter Frank. The second category consisted of an even smaller minority who had resisted the Nazis openly and who, for the most part, had left Nazi Germany. The third category consisted of the overwhelming majority of German historians, who had neither openly collaborated with the Nazis nor openly resisted them. They had, as the expression goes, “accommodated” to Nazi rule in a practical sense, while keeping Nazi ideology at a distance through “*innere Emigration*,” thus retaining their men-

tal autonomy. This idea of an “inner autonomy” under Nazi rule was later elaborated on in a broader context by Martin Broszat, who introduced the biological notion of *Resistenz*, suggesting an analogy between Germans under Nazi rule and organisms defending themselves against foreign and outside threats. *Resistenz* indicated the broad gray zone between full collaboration and full resistance.¹⁰

To sum up, the official history of the German historical profession during the Third Reich was based on *their own story*: there had been as little open collaboration with the Nazis as open resistance to Nazi rule; there had just been a great deal of “accommodation” and *Resistenz*. And, as was to be expected, the majority of the historians who rose to prominence in the Federal Republic directly after the war and who would then dominate the profession and remain in power until the 1970s, had been classified under the broad heading of “accommodating” historians. According to the “official” history, the historical profession had been purged of the few Nazis in its ranks and had continued its untainted traditions after 1945.

Although “normal” nationalism of a conservative blend belonged to these traditions, this had been worlds apart from the “abnormal” Nazi type of nationalism, which had led to such radical and murderous policies. This image of “normal” and “accommodating” nationalists, in contrast to “abnormal” and “collaborating” Nazis, also applied to the elite of the postwar historical profession, such as Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, and Karl Dietrich Erdmann, who have become the central figures in this new debate.

In Germany, recently, “new historians,” like Aly and Schöttler, did basically four things that set off this new debate: (1) They questioned the evidence for the supposed *Resistenz* of some prominent historians in the FRG, actually putting forward new material documenting an active support of and involvement in Nazi politics of these historians; (2) On the basis of their findings, they questioned the borderlines between the “normal” types of German nationalism and the “abnormal” Nazi type of German nationalism; (3) They asked why so much *Resistenz* among the German historians apparently led to so little *Résistance* during the war. Why, for example, had there been no Marc Bloch in Germany?; and (4) Why had the later pupils of Schieder, Conze, and Erdmann, who became the “critical” professors from the 1970s onward, uncritically swallowed and reproduced the wartime stories of *their* professors? For the present historical elite of the FRG, this question is the real nasty one.

The “official” images of Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze were severely attacked by Götz Aly in Frankfurt.¹¹ Schieder and Conze had been very influential in the historical profession of the Federal Republic both as

intellectuals and as scientific managers. Moreover, they had been, successively, the official chairs of the organized German historians between 1967 and 1977. Many of the historians who became professors in the 1970s had been their students and assistants. So Conze and Schieder had been shaping the postwar historical landscape of the FRG.

As so many of their contemporaries, after the war, they had not been very talkative about their activities during the war. Now Aly argued that both Schieder and Conze had had very good reasons for remaining silent about their wartime activities, because both had been active members of the Nazi party. And, what's more important, Schieder had been involved in "counseling" the Nazi regime in his field of specialization; that is, the ethnic and demographic history of Eastern Europe, and especially of Poland. Between 1939 and 1941, he had advised the Nazi regime to "solve the problem of overpopulation" in Eastern Europe. In the *Polendenkschrift*, discovered by Karl-Heinz Roth, it was advised to do so by "rearranging" and "removing" the ethnic Poles in order to "re-Germanize" the greater part of Poland (which was also one of Himmler's obsessions). The Poles should apparently be "moved" "eastward," and, in order to make room for them, they advised the "removal" of the Jews—the *Entjudung*—from the Polish villages and cities. Aly argued that historians such as Schieder had in this way created a "scientific" discourse and program in which demographic analyses were directly linked to the "Jewish problem" and its "solution."

This, of course, does *not* imply that the subsequent Nazi politics of extermination in Poland can be directly interpreted as the "implementation" of this demographic "program," but, according to Aly, it does mean that this way of thinking and speaking had *facilitated* and *legitimized* radical and destructive courses of action against the Jews and Poles. Aly, therefore, has labeled intellectuals such as Schieder as *Vordenker der Vernichtung*, a label that has since been widely contested.

Kocka, for instance, has criticized the application of this label to Schieder on the basis that there is a fundamental difference between advising the "removal" of specific groups and advising that they be systematically killed.¹² Peter Schöttler and Michael Fahlbusch argued that many other known German historians had played a similar practical and legitimizing role in the Nazi politics of expansion outside Poland. Both focused on the interdisciplinary brain trusts and research teams (so-called *Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften*) that were busy solving "ethnic problems" all over Europe and legitimizing German territorial expansion by "scientific" means. After the war, most of these specialists continued their careers in the FRG. These research teams contained hundreds of specialists in all of

the human sciences, and, even more significantly, they were heavily funded by the Nazi regime during the war, documenting their practical value for Nazi politics.¹³

Although it was not discussed in the Frankfurt conference, part of this last debate is the role of Karl Dieter Erdmann. This historian also exercised considerable influence on the historical profession of the FRG during the 1960s and 1970s, and was the official chair of the German historians between 1962 and 1967, i.e., just before Schieder and Conze took over the job. This trio, then, had headed the historical profession in the FRG during the fifteen years between 1962 and 1977. Contrary to Schieder and Conze, Erdmann had advertised his wartime story after 1945. He boasted that his hands had not been tainted by any Nazi dirt (although, of course, he had done his duty in the Wehrmacht, ending up a major). He had always pointed to the fact that he had not made a career as a historian in the Third Reich, contrary to Schieder and Conze, who had acquired their first professorial chairs at the time, as proof of his ideological and mental distance from the Nazi regime. Thus, Erdmann made a distinction between himself and most of his “accommodating” colleagues and positioned himself somewhere in between the common *Resistenz* and the almost-absent *Résistance*.

Until two young historians, Martin Kröger and Roland Thimme, investigated the evidence recently, Erdmann’s wartime story had been widely accepted.¹⁴ Of course, some of his critical colleagues had had doubts in the past about the remarkable way he had handled a crucial source—the *Riezler*-diaries—during and after the *Fischer-controversy*, but this doubt had been “local” rather than global.¹⁵ Kröger and Thimme researched the unpublished correspondence and writings that Erdmann had produced in the Nazi years and discovered some pretty disturbing ideas and material. Between 1933 and 1945, Erdmann had been writing on topics such as blood, race, soil, and fatherland in a manner that could hardly be distinguished from the official Nazi discourse. They found out that, although Erdmann had not made a career at the time as a historian, this definitely did *not* mean that he had not been seriously trying. Even in April 1945, he had found flattering words for the *Führer*. So, to all appearances, Erdmann had simply whitewashed his own past; the abyss between his personal wartime story and the Nazi regime and Nazi ideology had apparently been constructed only *after the fact*.

While the practice of whitewashing personal history was, of course, quite common in the early years after the war, for the reputation of historians as *professional historians*, whitewashing is deadly. It constitutes *the* “Profes-

sional Historian's Mortal Sin." It is ironic that many German historians themselves had stated exactly this view directly after the war, identifying Nazi rule as the rule of lies, propaganda, and deceit, while claiming "truth" for "real" academic history—meaning themselves.¹⁶

This is a border that cannot be crossed without undermining the foundations and credentials of history as a *scientific* discipline. Accepting white-washing—even if it concerns one's own *Doktorvater*—is probably not deadly, but it is a serious problem for professional historians nonetheless. So there is something at stake in this debate on the role of historians in National Socialism for both the founder generation of FRG history and for its immediate successors. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that some of the pupils of Schieder, Conze, and Erdmann—notably, Schieder's former student and assistant Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Erdmann's students Eberhard Jäckel and Agnes Blansdorf—have rushed to the defense of their intellectual fathers and have tried to protect them from these assaults. They pointed out that the incriminated publications of both Schieder and Erdmann had been collective "team products," in which it is difficult to identify individual responsibilities. Moreover, in Erdmann's case, the incriminating book was also "reworked" by the publisher, making the attribution of the individual authors' responsibility even harder. These defenses, however, often border on the apologetic, and their success until now has therefore been doubtful.¹⁷

This debate sent something of a shock wave through the German historical profession, especially through the "old guard" of critical social history, like Wehler, Hans and Wolfgang Mommsen, and Kocka, who were used to being the critics and not the object of criticism. There is, therefore, also a definite element of *Schadenfreude* and of settling old scores with former opponents in this new debate.¹⁸

The new insight, however, is definitely *not* that all German social historians now actually appear to have Nazi dirt on their hands (as is nowadays sometimes suggested), but only that the borderlines between "critical" social history and "conservative" history will have to be rethought, just like the borderlines between "normal" and Nazi history. Therefore, not only are the "*missing wartime years*" in the biographies of former leading historians of the FRG at stake, but also the "*missing link*" in postwar FRG historiography between the *kampfende Geschichtswissenschaft* (the *Volksgeschichte*) of the Nazi era and of postwar, "objective" history.¹⁹ The lines that used to be drawn in this historiographical area do not stand up to critical scrutiny, as has become so clear in the meantime. This conclusion is also backed up by other recent analyses, which cover the total historical profession and even the

neighboring *Geisteswissenschaften*. These include Ursula Woll's book on German historians in the Third Reich and Frank Hausmann's study on the *Kriegseinsatz der Geisteswissenschaften*.²⁰

During the heated debates of the Frankfurt conference, it became quite clear that the "official" history of FRG historiography would have to be rewritten. Now that the Nazi past of three of the FRG figureheads—Schieder, Conze, and Erdmann—has been documented, it will no longer be possible to state that the influence of Nazi ideology on German historians was restricted to a small lunatic fringe while the majority remained *resistant*.

Hans Mommsen hit the nail on the head when he criticized those colleagues who tried to control the damage for the profession with the usual arguments that most of the facts had been "known for a long time" (given the known "confessions" of historians like Heimpel and Aubin). Therefore, the official storyline of the German historical profession would remain "basically the same," although, of course, "some accents" would change, as one would expect in "normal science." Perhaps the distance between some individual historians and the Nazi regime was smaller than presumed until now, but, of course, it was impossible to generalize from a "handful of individual cases." Judgment would have to be deferred until "more and thorough research" had been done, because "journalists" such as Aly relied on an *assoziative Kollagetechnik* (Christoph Dipper). Against this professional defense mechanism, and referring to Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze, Hans Mommsen countered: "This is not *proximity* to National Socialism, this *is* National Socialism."²¹

This direct and personal Nazi involvement of FRG historians who led the profession up until the 1970s, and which has now been uncovered, helps to explain why the Holocaust was "forgotten" and hardly made it to their research agenda. Holocaust research in Germany was left, by and large, to its survivors, as Dieter Pohl recently observed.²² And it is equally significant to note, as Alf Lüdtke recently did, that survivors' testimonies in the late 1940s and 1950s were largely set aside by the German historical profession as "emotional" and "not distanced" and, therefore, as "not objective."²³

This disqualification of the perspectives of the Holocaust victims as "not scientific" and "subjective" is surely a symptom of the phase of almost total repression. However, it proved to be long-lived, as the discussion between Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer in 1988 illustrates. Broszat's argument, as Friedländer pointed out, suggested a direct relationship between Jewish perspectives on the Holocaust and "mythic remembrance," at the same time implying that German perspectives lead to more "scientific" results.²⁴ Remarkably, in this context, when Germans appeared as victims

in front of German historians—as was the case in the multi-volume *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa* project—their subjectivity was *not* regarded as a serious impediment for “objectivity.” In time, however, German historians began to perceive the Jewish “other,” although at first only under the guise of their “fellow countrymen.”

The German and the Jewish “Catastrophes,” Part 1 (1945–1965)

Most FRG German historians of the founding generation, such as Gerhard Ritter and Friedrich Meinecke, spent their energy during the first twenty years after 1945, on “rescuing” modern German history from the “Nazi ‘catastrophe,’” just as most German historians had been trying to “rescue” German history from the Versailles Treaty after World War I. Arguing for both the *legitimacy* and the *normalcy of the German state and nation* since 1871 was their fundamental historiographical concern, even when they appeared to be arguing in favor of supra-national perspectives and frameworks, such as “Europe,” the “Christian *Abendland*,” or, later, the “free, democratic West.”²⁵ The “Nazi ‘catastrophe,’” as they understood it, basically meant the *German military defeat* and its *consequences*; i.e., the *loss of the independent statehood of Germany*, the *partition of Germany*, and the *loss of East European territories*—and, thus, *not the Holocaust*. Therefore, dealing with this “catastrophe” in German historiography boiled down to a “search for the Lost Nation”—*die Suche nach der verlorenen Nation*, as Sebastian Conrad aptly put it recently.

Symptomatic of this concern were the discussions that postwar German historians soon staged on the “father” of the German nation-state, Otto von Bismarck. In various ways, historians like Gerhard Ritter, Hans Rothfels, and Ludwig Dehio tried to fit recent German history into a pattern of general European or world history. In this way, they were normalizing Germany and saving Bismarck and his creation from the widespread (Allied) critique of militarism that evolved into two world wars within three decades. The liberal use of explanatory categories, like *Katastrophe* (Meinecke), *Schicksal* and *Dämonie der Macht* (Ritter), or the use of *volcanic metaphors* for politics (Dehio) systematically involved the bracketing of all questions of German responsibility. The recourse to anonymous *Strukturen* (Schieder/Conze), supposedly characteristic of “modern mass society” in general, had the same effect²⁶ (as had the recourse to anonymous “capitalism” and abstract “modernity” later). In the dominant German historiographical discourse, centered on the nation-state, the Jews therefore

remained practically voiceless for almost two decades after 1945.²⁷

Friedrich Meinecke's book, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, published in 1946, represents a clear example of the German "catastrophic"-view. Meinecke basically presented a book-length apology for the German *Geist* and nation, which had suffered so much from Hitler and the Nazi regime. He feared the identification of Germany with Nazism by the victorious Allies and its consequences. Therefore, he emphasized the almost complete "un-German" character of Nazism, illustrated vividly by the cruel fate Hitler had bestowed on Germany and the Germans, who now faced a "complete annihilation" in the East.²⁸ Eye to eye with this imminent catastrophe, he tried to remind the *western* Allies of Germany's indispensable contribution to European culture, not to mention the German contribution to the basic value of the *Abendland*, diversity in unity. At times Meinecke even suggests that the Allies had defeated the *common* enemy of "European culture" and only finished a job that the Germans were busy handling themselves.²⁹ This appeal to the common "European heritage" would still be used by Hillgruber forty years later.

Meinecke devoted a lot of his energy to sketching the recent and imminent catastrophes that were threatening the Germans. The Nazis, who had succeeded in "deluding" "the masses" of Germany for a short time, had plunged them in a stupidly planned war, which led to the "*Katastrophe von Stalingrad*" and to the "*Mythos vom Endsiege noch einige Wochen vor der Endkatastrophe*." Meinecke gave the military, which made the attempt on Hitler in 1944, the heroic credit of trying to save Germany from "*der größten Katastrophe seiner Geschichte*." "*Viele Städte aber wären unzerstört, viele Tausende von Menschenleben bewahrt geblieben*"; if only the attempt on Hitler's life had succeeded.³⁰ The "Jewish catastrophe," which was practically complete by 1944, remained totally absent from Meinecke's book. Although Meinecke outrightly rejected racial and antisemitic thinking, his sketch of the fate of "the Jews" in Germany, treated as a collective with collective inclinations, remains rather ambivalent.³¹

Much the same goes for German political discourse, although Herf has rightly pointed to the existence of a minority tradition in this respect that was explicit about the Jews and their fate.³² Symptomatic in this context, however, is the fact that, when the fate of the German Jews was brought up in parliament, they were generally referred to as (former) members of the German nation and not as Jews.³³

The German state and nation remained by and large the fundamental frame of reference for both German historiography and German politics after 1945, just as had been the case before 1945. This does not mean that

research on the Holocaust was *completely* absent in Germany during the first twenty years after the war, but, rather, that it was rare.³⁴ Thus, in historiographical practice, the usual reference to the Holocaust in postwar Germany as “unspeakable crimes,” “committed in the name of Germany” basically meant *silence* about the German perpetrators and their Jewish victims and much writing about the problematic normality of “Germany.”³⁵

Historiographical and political discourse, between 1945 and 1965, were thus both characterized by a fundamental *repression* with regard to the Holocaust, which manifested itself basically in three mechanisms.³⁶ The first mechanism in this case is “splitting off,” or *Abspaltung*, by which the guilt and responsibility for the “unspeakable crimes” was completely transferred to Hitler, the Nazi elite, and the SS. The political leadership was “split off” from “the German nation.” Crucial to this interpretative operation was that the Wehrmacht, too, consisting of some twenty million Germans, was split off from the Nazi regime. Both the German nation and the Wehrmacht were represented as being led treacherously into the bloody “abyss” (*Abgrund*) by an Austrian “demon,” or a “new Genghis Khan” (Ritter) and his criminal bunch.³⁷ Splitting off thus resulted in the *claim of victim status* by Germans and was dependent on these interpretative steps.³⁸ And since Hitler and a few of his direct associates were dead or had been put on trial after 1945, justice was done and that was the end of it. And since the guilty Germans were dead or had been sentenced, the rest of the Germans were not guilty *by implication*. “The masses,” although frequently *referred* to by historians such as Ritter and Meinecke as the source of most modern evils, such as totalitarian dictatorship, were not yet transformed into an object of historical *research*.³⁹ It would not be until the 1980s—with the advent of the history of mentalities and of the *Alltagsgeschichte*—before the historical gaze was lowered and the life and world of “the masses” really came into the historiographical focus (and not only in Germany).

The second mechanism is *projection*. This mechanism is at work in the frequent denials of the *Kollektivschuldthese*. The remarkable fact about these denials is that the Germans in this case were defending themselves against an accusation that nobody had formulated. The accusation, therefore, was an obsessive product of the defenders’ imagination.⁴⁰ The same mechanism is at work when the responsibility for the Holocaust is projected on others—such as the communists, the Jews themselves, or the Soviet Union. Traditionally, this type of argument has been wrapped in the form of some *Präventivkriegthese*.

The third mechanism is relativization by *Aufrechnung*. This mechanism boils down to balancing the suffering *of* Germans because of others with

the suffering inflicted *by* Germans on others. The question of temporal order is, of course, not asked and, therefore, the extensive research project concerning the expulsion of Germans from Eastern Europe in 1944–45 did not need any moral legitimization vis-à-vis the Holocaust.⁴¹

All three mechanisms of repression can be observed in German historiography and in public debates on the Nazi past right up to the very present, although, over time, in an ever-lessening degree. The remarkable fixation on the German nation and state also persists to the present. This even holds true for the famous *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* from Bielefeld and Berlin, as Paul Nolte recently has noted, since the *Gesellschaft* implied in the *Gesellschaftsgeschichte* was no other than the traditional nation-state.⁴²

Up to the 1970s, the “German ‘catastrophe’” was conceived by most German historians as far more important than the “Jewish ‘catastrophe.’” Self-pity, not pity for another, was the dominant historiographical sentiment.⁴³ The “German nation” and its Wehrmacht could, at times, be presented as “the first victims” of the Nazis, who had “lived through” a terrible experience *because of* the Holocaust. In less extreme cases, the hierarchy of victims was hidden with more subtlety by broadening the category of victims in such a way as to include those who had died while doing service in the Wehrmacht and the SS.⁴⁴ Andreas Hillgruber’s book *Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums*, published in 1987, codifies this view in a pure form. Hillgruber, known for serious scholarship before the *Historikerstreit*, in *Zweierlei Untergang* simply juxtaposed the wartime “catastrophic” fates of the German population (including the Wehrmacht) and those of the Jews in separate chapters. The author made no direct connections between the two (thereby unleashing the infamous *Historikerstreit*), while elevating the loss of the German East European territories as *die wohl gravierendste Kriegsfolge*.⁴⁵ Only in the 1990s would the issue of the “victimhood” of the Germans and their military be seriously debated by German historians.⁴⁶

The Jewish and German “Catastrophes,” Part 2 (1965–1990)

From the 1960s onward, and accelerating in the reform era of Willy Brandt, fundamental and complex developments began to change the German historiographical landscape. These would fundamentally alter the places of the German and Jewish “catastrophes.” In this framework, a few remarks must suffice.

First and foremost, beginning in the 1960s, there was a *generation shift*.⁴⁷ Now that the generation born around 1930, with no active involvement in the Nazi regime, was making its way to the professorial chairs, it became possible to face the Nazi Reich for the first time and put an end to its almost complete public repression. Slowly but surely, more and more Germans came to accept an *abstract* and general German responsibility for the Nazi crimes and their consequences. Generally, however, they evaded the question of the *concrete* perpetrators—except for the ones put on trial, whose complicity in mass murder could be framed in *juridical* terms (such as the camp guards, etc.). In these trials, the attention that was formerly given to the *German* victims of the KZ system shifted to the *German* perpetrators, but the perspectives of the *non-German* victims were still largely left out of the picture.⁴⁸ German historiography basically shared this juridical shift in perspective, because it was directly linked to the juridical process (in the form of expert reports, etc.). Consequently, the victim-perspective was absent from German historiography at the time.⁴⁹

Very typically for FRG historiography, the *Holocaust* was thus basically treated as some kind of *background* to the Third Reich, as an *implicit point of reference* and not as a fundamental and central feature of this system. In his exchange with Saul Friedländer, Martin Broszat would later justify the *fundamental “eccentricity” of the Holocaust in German history and historiography* with an “objective” appeal to “historical method”: because most Germans were not aware of the Holocaust during the war, professional historians could not transform the Holocaust into the central event in, and the central characteristic of, Nazi Germany *after the fact*.⁵⁰ The Holocaust was thus still referred to—outside the tiny group of specialists—as an abstract, “unspeakable phenomenon,” which was identified but not researched and analyzed. This remarkable phenomenon, which I would like to label as a *presence by absence*, may be illustrated in two central domains of modern German historiography: in the *Sonderweg*-discussion; and in the debate on the *structure of the Nazi state* between so-called intentionalists and structuralists.⁵¹

Crucial for all later developments in German historiography was, of course, the *Fischer-controversy* of 1961–62, named after its initiator, Fritz Fischer, who started the debate with his book *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18*. In retrospect, one of the most interesting characteristics of this debate is that while, ostensibly, the subject of the debate was the war aims of Imperial Germany in 1914, the actual but hidden subject was Fischer’s implied thesis that the war aims of Imperial Germany had been similar to the war aims of Nazi Germany. So,

actually, the wartime policies of *Nazi Germany* were put on the agenda by Fischer by discussing the policies of *Imperial Germany*. Retrospectively, therefore, the debate can be decoded as a kind of historiographical shadow-boxing, in which Imperial Germany and World War I have functioned as “historiographical stand-ins” for Nazi Germany and World War II.

This remarkable *transfer from Nazi Germany to Imperial Germany* may explain, firstly, why German academic historians have primarily been researching and discussing *Bismarck* instead of *Hitler* in light of Auschwitz from the 1960s until the 1990s. And, secondly, it explains why German historians spent most of their energy on charting the presumably long “road to Auschwitz” before 1918, instead of on Auschwitz *itself*. This transfer of historiographical energy from National Socialism to “proto-fascism” has proven a lasting feature of the debate on the so-called *Sonderweg* of modern German history (that is, the idea that modern German history took a peculiarly fateful turn up to 1945). In this context it is significant that the most famous proponents of the (critical) *Sonderweg*-view, Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Jürgen Kocka, up to now, have only written studies on the *pre*-history of Nazi Germany and not on Nazi history itself.⁵²

This *virtual absence of the Third Reich and the Holocaust* in the actual research of the critical *Sonderweg*-school is all the more remarkable because of their critique of Marxist approaches. Their critique on Marxist approaches boiled down to the argument that the typical Marxist reduction of National Socialism to capitalism repressed the specific racial and genocidal characteristics of the Nazi regime. So, Marxists of all persuasions, and in particular those Marxists who were critical of the *Sonderweg*-view, such as Geoff Eley, were castigated for their blindness to Auschwitz, which was supposedly central to the *Sonderweg* interpretation.⁵³

The *second* domain of modern German historiography, where one can observe a similar transfer of Auschwitz, is the *debate on the structure of the Nazi state* between so-called intentionalists and structuralists. Intentionalist historians, such as Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand, tried to explain the working of the Nazi state primarily on the basis of the intentions of the leading Nazis in general and of Hitler in particular. The basic explanatory scheme of intentionalism is simple: because the intentions of the Nazi elite were murderous, Nazi practice was murderous—with the Holocaust as a result. On the contrary, structuralist historians, such as Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen, have tried to explain the functioning of the Nazi state primarily on the basis of the specific structure of the Nazi state, thereby bringing the complicity of the German *Funktionseiliten* into the Holocaust-picture, albeit by implication. According to structuralist histori-

ans, the mass murders by the Nazis were not so much planned a long time before, but were rather the result of *unintended* processes of “cumulative radicalization” during the war. This “cumulative radicalization” was an unintended consequence of the double structure of the Nazi state, in which a structure of organizations and persons originating from the Nazi party was attached to the existing state structure. Being unintended, this process, paradoxically, implied a “*guiltless guilt*” of the Germans involved.

Now, what is remarkable for *both* intentionalist and structuralist interpretations is that, paradoxically, the actual Holocaust—the practice of mass murder—is more or less *left out of the picture*. Both explanatory schemes, in fact, focus on the ideological or institutional *conditions* and *mechanisms* that made the Holocaust *possible* instead of focusing on the *actual* Holocaust. As Ulrich Herbert observes: “Attention to the mass murder itself, to the direct perpetrators and their victims was viewed as unworthy of scholarly treatment and even as ‘voyeuristic’ (as Hans Mommsen has characterized it).”⁵⁴

In *both* intentionalist and structuralist interpretations, the actual executioners of the Holocaust outside the SS and the SD—“the men who pulled the trigger”—were absent. This “omission” went more or less unnoticed until Christopher Browning and Daniel Goldhagen came along from the United States, in 1992 and 1996, with their books *Ordinary Men* and *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, respectively.

Therefore, we are faced with the apparent paradox that the Holocaust seems to be largely missing from many studies of the German historians dealing with the Third Reich, because they have transferred their energy from the investigation of the Holocaust itself to its ideological and institutional conditions. Of course, these studies on the structure of the “Nazi-state,” including Karl-Dieter Bracher’s *The German Dictatorship* and Helmut Krausnick’s *Anatomy of the SS- State*, immensely improved the historical understanding of Nazi Germany. However, the leading question was not “who exactly has done what and when to the Jews in Europe between 1933 and 1945?” or “who has suffered what fate, where and when at the hands of the Germans and their allies?” but “how was IT possible?” The IT itself was largely taken for granted. Thus, again, we observe the *presence* of the Holocaust by its *absence* in German historiography, even among historians dealing with the question whether there has been a *Führerbefehl* for the Holocaust or not.

The generation shift from that of the perpetrators—the Schieder, Conze, Erdmann generation, born between 1900 and 1910—to the generation of their sons and daughters—the Mommsens, Broszat, Wehler, etc., born between 1930 and 1940—has apparently not been sufficient to effect

a fundamental change in this respect. Although the historians of the later generation *did* put the Third Reich on the historical agenda, and some historians did extensive research on it, they have, by and large, avoided research on the actual execution of the Holocaust outside the SS and SD. Paradoxical as it may seem, all the discussions in the 1970s on “fascism” brought empirical research of “fascism” almost to a halt. This actually lends some credibility to Herbert’s idea of a second repression of the Nazi past under the guise of a permanent discussion.⁵⁵

Only this “omission” explains why the success of Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* could be experienced by the German historical profession both as a shock and as a failure; and only this “omission” explains the remarkable fact that public intellectuals like Habermas and Reemtsma have welcomed the *effect* of Goldhagen’s infamous book on the debate in Germany while remaining silent about its academic qualities. Perhaps the explanation for this “omission” must be sought in the circumstance that most FRG German historians of this first postwar generation were still not psychologically capable of facing the horrendous deeds of their elder generation. The understandable avoidance of the direct confrontation with massive horror inflicted by direct relatives—*das Nichtdurchhaltenkönnen* and *das Nichtertragenkönnen*, which has been mentioned in interviews by many belonging to this generation—may explain the *avoidance* of the Holocaust and the tendency toward its *abstraction* in the historiography.

Dubiel suggests an explanation along these lines. In his opinion, the collective guilt of Germany was simply too great for Germans to accept after the war.⁵⁶ And since Germans were not able to accept the guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust, they were unable to interpret Nazi history as their own. Instead of “taking over” Nazi history as *their-German-history*, they sought refuge in *Ersatzidentitäten*, in identifications with either their victims or their victors. This is what *anti-totalitarianism* in the FRG and *anti-fascism* in the GDR amounted to over a period of four decades. As Dubiel points out, the interpretation of National Socialism as a form of totalitarianism enabled Germans both to distance the FRG from the Nazi period *and* to compensate for their Nazi past by waging war on “the other form of totalitarian dictatorship,” i.e., “communism,” side by side with the victorious United States. Part and parcel of this interpretation was also the legend that the Weimar democracy had been overturned by an alliance between “brown” and “red fascists,” in this way obfuscating and exonerating the historical role of the German elites as the ones who helped Hitler to political power.⁵⁷ A similar story was developed for anti-fascism in the GDR, which enabled the Germans in the east to take distance from their past and

to identify with the other victor, the Soviet Union.

Dubiel, however, does not explore more cynical interpretations of the same set of facts, such as the possibility that many Germans rejected guilt for the Holocaust simply because they *felt no guilt*, or because they still regarded their actions as somehow “legitimate.” In that case, those Germans might have adopted new individual and collective identities simply because of *juridical* and *strategical* reasons. Dubiel does not consider this “cynical” (or “Austrian”) interpretation, because he has limited his research to the parliamentary, i.e., the *public* debates. And “post-conventional” and “post-national” arguments are, of course, more likely to be used in the Bundestag than at the *Stammtisch*. From this perspective, Germans with the mindset of Hans Schneider/Hans Schwerte, who for a very long time did not show pity or regret, enter into the picture of postwar Germany.⁵⁸

A last explanatory factor for the “omission” of the Holocaust in FRG historiography may be the circumstance that most historians of this generation saw the legitimization of the FRG as their lifelong project, as Paul Nolte suggested recently.⁵⁹ Therefore, the foundational myths of the early FRG, especially the myth of the *saubere Wehrmacht*, were put on ice by most of them until the next generation of historians came along, i.e., from the 1980s onward.⁶⁰

The Public Debates and the German Historians (1986 –Present)

When we turn from academic historiography proper to the *great public debates* on the Third Reich from the 1980s onward, we can observe that, at first sight, the public taboo on discussing the Holocaust is disappearing. The number of public debates related to the Holocaust has been growing as time progresses, and, in that sense, the 1980s have really made a difference with regard to the period before. It was then that the second postwar generation made its appearance in the public sphere and in the historiography.

A veritable public Holocaust-discourse has emerged in Germany from the 1980s, in which *German identity* was sometimes even reformulated into that of “*the Holocaust-nation*,” deserving a “split” existence in two states as some kind of punishment for the Holocaust. Because many Jews, inside and outside Israel, had also increasingly redefined their identity in relationship to the Holocaust, Dan Diner has coined the “*negative symbiosis*” between Germans and Jews in this context.⁶¹ In the same period the “German ‘catastrophe’” receded into the background as a result of the economic suc-

cess of the FRG and of the successful *Ostpolitik*, leading to the de facto recognition of the GDR. A constantly dwindling number of Germans continued to long for Silesia.

And then, suddenly, came the political earthquake of 1989, which changed the coordinates of the postwar era in a hitherto unimaginable way. After the unexpected unification of the two German states in 1990, one of two “catastrophes”—the “German” one—disappeared just as unexpectedly into thin air: the *Schlussstrich* under the Nazi past, which had so often been demanded, now showed up as a gift from History itself. The unification thus effected a *fundamental change in the coordinates of public German debate*. Now that the two German states and nations had been united, both state and nation ceased to be the fundamental problems that had preoccupied most German historians since 1945—except for a few radical right-wingers, who kept longing for a self-conscious German *Machtstaat*.⁶² Consequently, the “burden of Nazi history” *after 1990* consists of only *one* “catastrophe,” i.e., the Jewish one.

This very new circumstance may explain why, after 1990, the German confrontation with the Nazi legacy has been steadily *increasing* in intensity instead of *decreasing*. It was rather unexpected to see the new unified German Republic stumbling from one debate on the Holocaust to another. The debates named after Goldhagen, Walser and Bubis, and Peter Sloterdijk, have, combined with the *Mahnmal*-debate and the Wehrmacht-debate, almost overlapped one another, not to mention the discussions on Nazi gold, life-insurance policies, and the compensation of forced and slave labor. So the paradoxical effect of what appears to be “the Final Solution of the German problem” since 1990, is that the Nazi German “Final Solution of the Jewish problem” has come closer to the German present than ever before 1945. One is tempted to interpret this remarkable phenomenon as “the return of the repressed.”⁶³

The three great debates since 1990 seem to support this view of a *decreasing* distance from the Nazi past and, at the same time, a growing openness on the side of German historians to confronting the Holocaust. The *Historikerstreit* of 1986–87 can be seen as the last massive attempt of the conservative fraction within the German historical profession under the “Old Regime” to put the Holocaust vigorously at a distance. As is known, they tried to do so by moving the Holocaust to the terrain of “comparative genocide studies” and by projecting the responsibility for the Holocaust on the Soviet Union, testifying to the old mechanisms of denial and projection.⁶⁴ And, as is known, this attempt also failed.

The Goldhagen-debate, a decade later, can be seen as a somewhat be-

lated reaction to the crucial question that had *not* been asked in the *Historikerstreit*: the question of “who did IT?—the Holocaust—except for the SD and the SS?”⁶⁵ Although, in the *Historikerstreit*, all the energy had been invested in debating the “singularity” of the Holocaust, the actual perpetrators of the Holocaust were kept out of the discussion. Therefore, *in the context of German public debate*, Goldhagen did ask a crucial question, namely, “who actually did IT— except for the SD and the SS?” Now, of course, Goldhagen’s answer to that question: “The ordinary Germans did IT, because Germans are born anti-Semites” was very simplified and, thus, very wrong. Nevertheless, the ensuing debate around this very wrong answer made perfectly clear that German historians had not invested much time in looking for the right answers, simply because only very few had *asked that question*. The police units on which Goldhagen had done his research were hardly researched before, and the same goes for Goldhagen’s “death-marches.” And the involvement of the presumably “normal,” “professional” Wehrmacht in the Holocaust has, as Omer Bartov recently observed, long retained its status of an absolute taboo.⁶⁶

The recent Wehrmacht-debate more or less confirms this picture—although the company of the German historians has become quite mixed in the meantime. Since the 1980s, and especially under the influence of the history of mentalities and of the *Alltagsgeschichte*, a growing number of German historians have included ever-more categories of Nazi victims in the picture, such as the physically and mentally “unfit,” Sinti and Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, forced labor and “*Asoziale*.” And the *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt*, under the guidance of Manfred Messerschmidt, produced valuable volumes on the intimate relationships between the Wehrmacht and the Nazi regime.

Significantly, however, the Wehrmacht-debate still shares several characteristics with the *Historikerstreit* and with the Goldhagen-debate: they were all initiated *outside* the German historical profession and were confronted with massive opposition from *within* this profession. The Wehrmacht-debate, as is known, refers to a photographic exhibition organized by the Hamburg Institut für Sozialforschung, documenting the involvement of Wehrmacht units in the murder of civilians in Eastern Europe, among them Jews. The name of the exhibition is *Vernichtungskrieg. Die Verbrechen der Wehrmacht in Osteuropa 1941–1944*. Actually, this debate can be interpreted as a direct sequel to the Goldhagen-debate, because the exhibition provides a clear-cut answer to Goldhagen’s question “Who has done IT—except for the SD and the SS?”

The Wehrmacht exhibition’s answer to this question is as simple as it is

lucid: “Foremost German military, who were at the scene of the crime at the time of the crime; in other words, foremost members of the German Wehrmacht.” Given the fact that some twenty million Germans did their service in the Wehrmacht during the war, and given the fact that the “splitting off” of the “clean” Wehrmacht from the “dirty” SS has been the postwar myth of the generation of the perpetrators, this exhibition hit a very sensitive nerve in the self-image of postwar Germany. The same goes for the explicit inclusion of the military who staged the failed attempt on Hitler in 1944 in the “dirty” Wehrmacht—traditionally presented as representing the “other Germany”—because of their early knowledge of the mass killings of Jews and other civilians behind the eastern front.⁶⁷

Recently, those resisting and criticizing the exhibition have cried victory because some ten photos out of a total of some 800 have probably been wrongly interpreted. Two articles by Bogdan Musial and Krisztian Ungvary, criticizing the exhibition, have sparked a new phase in the discussion, leading to the temporary closure of the exhibition by the organizing Institut für Sozialforschung in order to reassess all the exhibited material.⁶⁸ Some photos do not show the Wehrmacht military, but its Finnish and Hungarian allies, and, more importantly, some photos show civilians killed by the Soviet secret police during its retreat from the rapidly advancing German army.

How many photos will turn out to be dubious still has to be assessed, but most typical at the moment are the reactions of several German historians to the few proven factual errors. They were used by prominent historians such as Michael Stürmer, Horst Möller, director of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, Rolf-Dieter Müller of the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, and Lothar Gall, former chair of the Verein der Historiker Deutschlands, to bolster the conclusion that the exhibition is essentially an amateurish fake and to plea for its final closure.⁶⁹

In my view, these reactions by leading German specialists in contemporary and military history again betray the traditional *mechanism of transfer* in action. Instead of discussing the actual role of the Wehrmacht in the Holocaust on the basis of solid available evidence, this debate is avoided and transferred to some ten mistaken photos documenting the minor involvement of Finnish and Hungarian military and killings by the Soviet secret police. And, significantly, nobody poses the question of how Finnish and Hungarian troops ended up in the heart of Russia—although the answer is quite obvious. Implicitly or explicitly, the message seems to be, again, that, although a few Wehrmacht-military may have been involved in dirty business, the exact role of the Wehrmacht vis-à-vis the civilian population in

occupied Eastern Europe is not in need of any research.

Exactly for this reason, Reinhart Koselleck's recent article, "*Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung*," has added fuel to this fire. This famous historian from Bielefeld presented a veteran perspective on World War II, while reproducing the clichés about the ignorance of the *saubere Wehrmacht* to what was happening behind its back. The *Todesfurcht* of the German soldiers for the Red Army, the *complete* absence of *any* knowledge of German soldiers with regard to the death camps and the Holocaust, the large number of German civilian victims because of Allied bombing, expulsion and mass rape, the impossibility to understand the Holocaust, and even the formal juridical exoneration of SS-killers all loom large in Koselleck's wartime story. And all this without much empathy regarding the victims of the Germans and the other side of the front line. Symptomatically, Koselleck's wartime story does not start in June 1941, but in May 1945.⁷⁰

In summary, like the Goldhagen-debate, the Wehrmacht-debate has documented the continuing "forgetfulness" of a part of the German historians.⁷¹ The fact is that research on the actual perpetrators of the Holocaust outside the SS and SD is still avoided by many of the "official" specialists in the field of military history of World War II. The eight volumes of *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweiten Weltkrieg*, published by the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, does not contain a single chapter on the involvement of the Wehrmacht in the murder of the Jews, as Bartov observed. The same holds true for more than three million Soviet prisoners of war who were killed in one way or another by the Wehrmacht.⁷²

If appearances do not deceive, however, times have been changing since 1990. A younger generation of German historians, represented by historians such as Christian Gerlach, Ulrich Herbert, Dieter Pohl, and Thomas Sandkühler, has begun to "fill in" this blank spot on the map with detailed studies of the German occupation policies in Eastern Europe and to integrate the policies of extermination, including the Holocaust, into this picture. Like Götz Aly, who also develops this new, "integrated" approach, they emphasize the interwovenness of warfare, the ruthless economic exploitation of occupied territories in order to feed and supply the German army, and the extermination policy toward "useless eaters" combined with a political fantasy with regard to a "racially cleansed" and German-dominated "East." These "useless eaters" did not only consist of the Jews, but also of 60 percent of the Soviet prisoners of war, large numbers of the Russian civilian population—in White Russia some 20 percent of the total population was killed in one way or another—the handicapped, and several other groups of people. These studies have revealed the close collaboration of *all*

German institutions involved—military and civilian, also with regard to the Holocaust—and show an unsettling amount of initiatives at all policy-making levels.⁷³

Other younger historians, such as Klaus Latzel and Ulrike Jureit, inspired by the history of mentalities and the *Alltagsgeschichte*, have been working on the reconstruction of the experience and the worldview of the Wehrmacht generation, using their letters as the primary source. In this way they are trying to trace, among other things, the influence of Nazi ideology on ordinary Germans and to free the reconstructions of the war from the ex post perspectives of veterans (including faked letters) and their ritualized memoirs, which have dominated the military history of World War II for decades. In this way they are trying to get beyond the traditional self-stylizations of Germans as the “first victims” of Nazism, going back to the war period itself. The recent interest in the history of the deserters signals the same interest in trying to get away from the traditional clichés and to chart the “gray zone” between perpetrators and victims.⁷⁴ Thus, all in all, there has been a considerable widening of perspectives in the recent German historiography of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, Omer Bartov’s plea for a complete integration of the perspectives of the perpetrators and victims still seems to be a while off.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Is there any conclusion to be drawn from this sobering analysis? Well, my conclusion is entailed by my analysis, so the best I can do is to summarize my three theses. According to thesis number one, the Holocaust has been *present by its absence* in the debates on German history, i.e., by its *repression*. The centrality of the Third Reich in these debates has *not* implied the centrality of the Holocaust. The problem of the “central focus” of Holocaust historiography and of the integration of the “voices” of the perpetrators and victims is thus still to be solved. Even at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Holocaust in German history still appears to be faced with the entanglement of “not being able to fully remember” and “not being able to fully forget.” The most recent debates in case, the Wehrmacht discussion and the debate on the role of German historians in National Socialism, testify to that.

According to thesis number two, the repression of the Holocaust has been subject to a substantial *process of change*, linked to the *succession of generations*. This change has gradually eroded the taboo and silence and, in the meantime,

brought about a considerable openness toward the Third Reich and an impressive amount of research. Splitting off and projection are disappearing as mechanisms of repression in serious academic historiography, leading to new research in which the question “Who actually did IT?” is no longer evaded and is directly confronted. Naturalistic metaphors of “catastrophes,” “Hitlerist” schemes, and “anonymous structures” no longer carry the burden of explanation in the historiography of the second postwar generation of German historians. Nevertheless, even now, many German grandsons of the actual generation of the perpetrators still have major problems in facing the Holocaust, as is testified by the most recent public debates.

According to thesis number three, the *linkage between the Holocaust and the “German ‘catastrophe,’”* present especially in rightist historiography, may explain the remarkable fact that the Holocaust has become more present in unified Germany than ever before. Since the disappearance of the German “counterweight” for the Holocaust—that is, their own “catastrophe”—the Holocaust has been “unleashed” in German public debate, so to speak.

What we are witnessing in debates like the one on the role of historians in National Socialism is, perhaps, the last phase of “working through” the Nazi past. What distinguishes this phase from the previous ones is not only the acknowledgement that the perpetrators of the Holocaust belong to the generation of one’s own grandfathers and fathers and condemning them for that, but, at the same time, the desire to understand them.⁷⁶ After the initial, complete repression of the Holocaust after 1945, and then the partial repression during the 1970s, in the form of the total moral condemnation of the whole perpetrator generation, often combined with a ritual form of identification with the Nazi victims and of the *Betroffenheits*-culture, this more or less open attitude is surely something new. Probably we should regard the fact that some younger German historians have recently put the “forgetfulness” of both their intellectual fathers and grandfathers on the agenda from that perspective.

Of course, less optimistic diagnoses of the present state of the Berlin Republic can also be argued—as has been done, for instance, by Omer Bartov and Moshe Zuckermann—because there are also phenomena that point in the direction of continuing repression, albeit in more subtle forms. The remarkable renaissance of “totalitarianism” as the interpretative scheme for “both German dictatorships” and the equally remarkable zeal to equate the Nazi past and the GDR past, both in need of a similar *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, is a case in point. The same goes for the remarkable reception of Victor Klemperer’s diaries, of Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, or of Schlink’s *Der Vorleser*, not to mention the continuing and excessive preoc-

cupation with the *Normalität* of Germany and the constant reference to Nazi Germany during international conflicts in the 1990s (during the Gulf War, for instance, and recently in Kosovo = Auschwitz).⁷⁷

However, “normalcy” is, of course, always a *relative* notion and *any* judgment on the German historians and their way of handling the Holocaust can therefore only be based on systematic *comparisons* with the historiographical ways in which other nations have handled *their* involvement in the Holocaust or in comparable ordeals. This project has hardly begun.⁷⁸ On the whole, Germany’s historiographical record on this score probably compares quite favorably.⁷⁹

In any case, I have a very strong feeling that the “Frankfurt Agenda” will stay with the German historical profession. As Jürgen Kocka suggested, “it is probably easier to kill your grandfather than to kill your father.” If that is true, and to all appearances it is, time—helped by a new generation of German historians—will tell.

Notes

- 1 I want to thank Jeffrey Herf, Manfred Hettling, Stefan Berger, David Lindenfeld, Peter Schöttler, Sebastian Conrad, and Daniel Levy for their critical comments on an earlier version of this article. Unless stated otherwise, “Germany” after 1945, refers to the Federal Republic Germany (FRG); I will not go into the complex relationship between the FRG and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) vis-à-vis the Holocaust here, although it is not unimportant.
- 2 Cf. the historiographical approaches of Dominick LaCapra and Saul Friedländer; see D. LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust. History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca: 1994), esp. pp. 43–69 and 205–225, and S. Friedländer, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe* (Bloomington: 1993). See also Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte. Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages* (Munich: 1999). For the public debates in Germany, see J. Herf, *Divided Memory. The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Massachusetts: 1997), and idem, “Legacies of Commemoration: German Debates on the Holocaust in the 1990’s,” in *The Dilemmas of Commemoration: German Debates on the Holocaust in the 1990’s*, a special issue of *German Politics and Society*, vol. 17 (1999), pp. 3, 9–35. For recent overviews on the role of the Holocaust in German historiography, see U. Herbert, “Der Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” in U. Herbert and O. Groehler, eds., *Zweierlei Bewältigung. Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten* (Hamburg: 1992), pp. 67–87, and D. Pohl, “Die Holocaust-Forschung und Goldhagen’s Thesen,” in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 45, no. 1 (1997), pp. 1–49.

- 3 I will not deal here with the question of whether the German “left” has changed its attitude toward the nation and nationalism. According to most observers, liberal and left-ist German historians have silently abandoned the idea of post-nationalism after the unification and have returned to some form of traditional nationalism. See St. Berger, *The Search for Normality. National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany Since 1800* (Providence/Oxford: 1997), pp. 198–230, and K. Jarausch, “Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung? Zur Umdeutung der deutschen Vergangenheit,” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 21 (1995), pp. 571–584. For a very critical view, see also M. Zuckermann, *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie. Ein Essay zur neuen deutschen Normalität* (Berlin: 1999).
- 4 E. H. Carr, *What is history?* (Harmondsworth: 1961), p. 23.
- 5 Lepenies, cited in Zuckerman, *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie*, p. 34.
- 6 S. Friedländer, *History, Memory and the Extermination of the Jews in Europe* (Bloomington: 1993), p. 2.
- 7 I think Dan Diner falls victim to this reductionist figure of thought when he links the intentionalist and structuralist approaches to the Third Reich directly to the “collective affiliation” of the historian. His thesis that German historians are prone to focus on the “circumstances” of the Holocaust, while Jewish historians are prone to focus on the “motives” behind it, on grounds of their “collective affiliations,” is problematic, because *both* the intentionalist and the structuralist approaches were developed by German historians. See his “Guilt Discourse and Other Narratives. Epistemological Observations Regarding the Holocaust,” in G. Ne’eman Arad, ed., *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust Beyond Memory. In Honor of Saul Friedländer on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday (History & Memory)*, vol. 9, no.1/2 (1997), pp. 301–321, esp. pp. 308–309.
- 8 The original contributions to the Frankfurt section have been published, together with some new comments, in W. Schulze and O-G. Oexle, eds., *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: 1999). An avalanche of comments on the panel have been published in German and German-language newspapers and weeklies, such as *FAZ*, *Die Zeit*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, *Tagespiegel* and *NZZ*. See also the interviews “Fragen, die nicht gestellt wurden” with prominent German historians on the website H-SozKult. A (very critical) analysis of this debate is given by Wulf Kansteiner in “Mandarins in the Public Sphere: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the Paradigm of Social History in the Federal Republic of Germany” in *Dilemmas of Commemoration*, pp. 84–121. The panel in Frankfurt was a sequel to a conference in Berlin, held in June 1997, at the *Arbeitsstelle für Vergleichende Gesellschaftsgeschichte* in Berlin, organized by Jürgen Kocka, who was also the commentator on the panel in Frankfurt. In light of this subsequent debate, it is a bit ironical that Aly has been able to write his *Habil “Endlösung.” Volkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1995) with the help of Kocka.
- 9 For the “new” picture of the German historical profession in the Nazi period, see P. Schöttler, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationswissenschaft 1918–1945* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1997). For the “new” picture of the German universities in the Nazi period, see H. König, et al., eds., *Vertuschte Vergangenheit. Der Fall Schwerte und der NS-Vergangenheit der deutschen Hochschulen* (Munich: 1997). The traditional, “official” picture of the German historical profession has been documented in countless historiographical overviews written by promi-

ment members of the German historical profession since 1945. For a critical overview and analysis of the traditional overviews, see S. Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan 1945–1960* (Göttingen: 1999). An early exception to the rule is Karl Ferdinand Werner's overview "Die deutsche Historiographie unter Hitler," in B. Faulenbach, ed., *Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland. Traditionelle Positionen und gegenwärtige Aufgaben* (Munich: 1974), pp. 86–96, esp. p. 87: "Die Professoren- und Lehrerschaft huldigte, was den nationalen Kern in der NS-Doktrin anging, seit langem verwandten Idealen, so dass sie in dieser Hinsicht nicht überzeugt zu werden brauchten."

- 10 For Martin Broszat, see my article "Has the Third Reich Become History? Martin Broszat as Historian and Pedagogue" in *Bulletin of the Arnold and Leona Finkler Institute of Holocaust Research* (Bar-Ilan University), no. 8 (1998), xxvii–xlv.
- 11 G. Aly, "Theodor Schieder. Werner Conze oder die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 183–215.
- 12 J. Kocka, "Zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Bundesrepublik. Ein Kommentar," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 340–358.
- 13 P. Schöttler, "Von der rheinischen Landesgeschichte zur nazistischen Volksgeschichte oder die unhörbare Stimme des Blutes," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 89–114; M. Fahlbusch, "Die 'Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft.' Politische Beratung und NS-Volkstumpolitik," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 241–265.
- 14 M. Kröger and R. Thimme, *Die Geschichtsbilder des Historiker Karl Dietrich Erdmann. Vom Dritten Reich zur Bundesrepublik* (Munich: 1996). Winfried Schulze wrote a preface to this book.
- 15 See B. Sösemann, "Die Tagebücher Kurt Riezlers. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Echtheit und Edition," in *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 236 (1983), pp. 327–369.
- 16 For an overview, see Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*, pp. 146–159, esp. p. 150: "Die wissenschaftliche Form der Auseinandersetzung mit der Geschichte hatte, so lautete das Selbstverständnis der Zunft, die Distanz zum Nationalsozialismus ermöglicht, und auch nach 1945 versetzte sie den Historiker in die Lage, das allgemeine Geschichtsbewusstsein zu transzendieren." Typical of this stance was Friedrich Meinecke, who, in 1946, like many of his colleagues, claimed to have recognized the true character of Nazism all the time; see Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*, p. 149: "Wenn Friedrich Meinecke betonte: 'Es ist das geistige und politische Gegenlager zu Hitler, das (14) hier zu Worte kommt,' dann war die Betonung der eigenen Immunität gegenüber der 'grossen Täuschung' nicht nur eine moralische Rechtfertigung, sondern gleichzeitig eine epistemologische Operation, die historische Wahrheit erst möglich zu machen schien"; and p. 214: "Die Biographie wurde, wenn man so will, zur Epistemologie."
- 17 For Wehler, see his "Nationalsozialismus und Historiker," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 306–340; for a critique of Wehler's defense of Conze and Schieder, see Zuckerman, *Gedenken*, pp. 33–61, and Götz Aly, "Stakkato der Vertreibung, Pizzikato der Entlastung," *FAZ*, February 3, 1999. For Jäckel and Blansdorf, see their discussion with Kröger and Thimme in "Karl Dietrich Erdmann und der Nationalsozialismus" in *Geschichte im Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, vol. 48, no. 4 (1997), pp. 220–240; *GWU*, vol. 48, no. 7/8 (1997), pp. 462–478; and *GWU*, vol. 48, 12 (1997), pp. 744–747.

- 18 Kansteiner's analysis of the debate is clearly tinged by this *Schadenfreude*. And the proponents of the *Alltagsgeschichte* have probably not forgotten how they were criticized by Wehler in the 1980s.
- 19 See Ingo Haar, "Kämpfende Wissenschaft'. Entstehung und Niedergang der völkischen Geschichtswissenschaft im Wechsel der Systeme," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 215–241.
- 20 See U. Wolff, *Litteris et Patriae. Das Janusgesicht der Historie* (Stuttgart: 1996); Fr. Hausmann, "Der 'Kriegseinsatz' der Deutschen Geisteswissenschaften im Zweiten Weltkrieg (1940–1945)," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 63–89.
- 21 See also his "Der faustische Pakt der Ostforschung mit dem NS-Regime," in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 265–274. For a thorough analysis of the recent literature on the German historians in National Socialism, see also St. Berger, "Nationalism and Historiography," in *German History*, vol. 18, no. 2 (2000), pp. 239–259.
- 22 Pohl, "Holocaustforschung," p. 3. This pattern, however, was also characteristic of postwar historiography *outside* Germany. For the Netherlands, see I. de Haan, "The Construction of a National Trauma. The Memory of the Jews in the Netherlands," in *The Netherlands Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 34, no. 2 (1998), pp. 196–218.
- 23 A. Lüdtke, "Coming to Terms with the Past': Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany," in *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 65 (1993), p. 550. However, this was also done by non-German historians.
- 24 See M. Broszat and S. Friedländer, "Um die 'Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus.' Eine Briefwechsel," in *Vierteljahrshefte zur Zeitgeschichte*, 36 (1988), 2, pp. 346–347, 352–353. Cf. J. Rüsen, "The Logic of Historicization. Metahistorical Reflections on the Debate Between Friedländer and Broszat," in Ne'eman Arad, ed., *Passing into History*, pp. 113–147.
- 25 This is convincingly argued by Sebastian Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*, esp. pp. 59–88, 133–159. The quest for normalcy has remained a fundamental concern of German historians ever since, as Stefan Berger argues in his book *The Search for Normality*.
- 26 For the early postwar period, see K. Kwiet, "Die NS-Zeit in der westdeutschen Forschung 1945–1961," in E. Schulin, ed., *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg (1945–1965)* (Munich: 1989), pp. 191–199. I have dealt with the explanatory strategies of Ritter, Dehio, and Schieder/Conze in "De *Sonderweg* in de Duitse historiografie. Posities, problemen en discussies," in H. Belieën and G-J. van Setten, *Geschiedschrijving in de twintigste eeuw. Discussie zonder eind* (Amsterdam: 1991), pp. 141–181. For Conze and Schieder, see foremost Jin-Sung Chun, *Das Bild der Moderne in der Nachkriegszeit. Die westdeutsche Strukturgeschichte im Spannungsfeld von Modernitätskritik und wissenschaftlicher Innovation 1948–1962* (München: 2000).
- 27 Kwiet, "Die NS-Zeit in der westdeutschen Forschung," pp. 195–96: "Die deutschen Historiker waren von jeher weder in der Lage noch willens gewesen, Bereiche der Judenverfolgung, des Antisemitismus und der deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte in den Kanon der erforschungswürdigen Gegenstände zu erheben. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der 'Judenfrage' implizierte die Frage nach den eigenen Einstellungen und Verhaltensweisen."

- 28 Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen* (Wiesbaden: 1946), p. 111, where he states that “die grenzdeutsch-kämpferische Form des Völkischen (YA) gar nicht einmal etwas spezifisch Deutsches” was but a general characteristic of “Osteuropa.” This characteristic led to “die Verhärtung und Verewigung der nationalen Feindschaften, bis es etwas gelingt den Gegener völlig zu vernichten—wie es uns jetzt im Ostraum droht.” He acknowledges, however, that this “fate” “uns leider nicht schuldlos trifft.”
- 29 See *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, p. 141, where he refers to the Nazis as “jenen Verbrecherklub,” “der das deutsche Volk zu umklammern und auszusaugen vermöchte.” This “bunch of criminals” embraced Hitler, because “Mit dem an der Spitze schmeißen wir es, erobern wir uns Deutschland.” Consequently, the struggle against these “criminals” was a common one: “So ging nun die Aufgabe, das Giftgewächs des Nationalsozialismus auszurotten, in die Hände der Sieger über. Das erschwerte sie seelisch für uns, die wir bisher im stillen gehofft hatten, sie mit eigener Kraft zu lösen” (p. 151).
- 30 Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, pp. 146–148.
- 31 Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*, p. 29: “Die Juden, die dazu neigen, eine ihnen einmal lächelnde Gunst der Konjunktur unbedacht zu genießen, hatten mancherlei Anstoß erregt seit ihrer vollen Emanzipation. Sie haben viel beigetragen zu jener allmählichen Entwertung und Diskreditierung der liberalen Gedankenwelt, die seit dem Ausgange des 19. Jahrhunderts eingetreten ist. Daß sie neben dieser negativen und zersetzenden Wirkung auch recht viel Positives für den Geist und das Wirtschaftsleben Deutschlands geleistet haben, wurde von den Massen derer, die die Schäden des jüdischen Wesens jetzt bekämpften, vergessen.”
- 32 See Herf, *Divided Memory*.
- 33 Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, p. 45.
- 34 For an overview of this period, see M. Broszat, “‘Holocaust’ und die Geschichtswissenschaft,” in idem, *Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte* (Munich: 1988), pp. 102–119. Ulrich Herbert, “Holocaust in der BRD,” pp. 71–72, points out another important feature of early German historiography: even those rare historical books that dealt directly with the SS and the camps, such as Eugen Kogon’s *Der SS-Staat*, dealt primarily with concentration camps and not with death camps. They focused, therefore, on categories of victims other than the Jews. German political prisoners were far more central in early postwar historiography in *both* German states.
- 35 Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*, pp. 135, 160, and 215, justifiably remarks that the widely observed “repression” (*Verdrängung*) of the Nazi past by German historians only refers to the selective ways in which they handled it, not to a sheer avoidance of the topic. Cf. Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, p. 40, on the political debates: “Die Selbstwahrnehmung der Deutschen als Opfer und die Abwehr der Kollektivschuldthese bestimmen nahezu alle Reden, die im frühen Bundestag auf die Vorgeschichte der neuen Republik beziehen”; and p. 275: “Das Ergebnis dieser Rekonstruktion ist nicht eindeutig. Zum einen bleibt das Erstaunen, wie sehr es den Politikern, zumal in den ersten Jahrzehnten, unmöglich war, in den ersten Person plural (*Wir haben das getan*) von dem Völkermord zu sprechen, den Deutsche begangen hatten. Gleichwohl wäre die pauschale Behauptung, die Generation der Nachkriegspolitikern hätte die ihnen vorausgehende Epoche einfach verschwiegen, schlicht falsch.”
- 36 Here I am in agreement with Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, and not in agreement with Ulrich Herbert, “Der Holocaust in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung,” p.

68, who holds that “*der Begriff ‘Verdrängung’ eine unzureichende Zusammenfassung darstellt.*” Of course, it is insufficient, but with Dubiel I think it is the most apt concept for the phenomena in case.

I am not implying that repression *only* occurred in Germany; it was definitely *not*. Most of the formerly Nazi-occupied countries had their *own* reasons for keeping silent about the fate of their former Jewish citizens.

- 37 It is remarkable that this view was even supported by some former emigrants, such as Golo Mann. See his widely sold *Deutsche Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1958), esp. pp. 863–867, for the widespread “Hitlerist” argument. According to Mann, National Socialism boiled down to Hitler’s “will to power” and thus had disappeared with him: “*Eine Wille von furchtbarer Intensität, der nur sich selber wollte und daher eins war mit zynischen Opportunismus—dies war der ‘Nationalsozialismus’ in seiner Spitze; und ohne ihn war er überhaupt nicht. Deshalb ist er im Nichts verschwunden, sobald H, tot war, und sahen die Leute sich verdutzt an, als erwachten sie aus langer Verzauberung?*” (p. 865); “*Die Nazis lebten im Land wie fremde Eroberer?*” (p. 866). Mann’s picture of the Third Reich was basically similar to that of Meinecke’s *Deutsche Katastrophe*.
- 38 With regard to the victim status of the FRG, Austria and the GDR are the most interesting cases for comparison. Both Austria and the GDR refrained from *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* until recently (that is, around 1990): Austria, because it was granted the status of Nazi victim by the Allies in 1943 (!); and the GDR because the FRG was the “official” (and juridical) successor state of the Third Reich. The GDR, therefore, could immerse itself in a complete identification with the victorious Soviet Union—retrospectively. For Austria, see G. Botz, “Österreich und die NS-Vergangenheit Verdrängung, Pflichterfüllung, Geschichtsklitterung” in D. Diner, ed., *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1987), pp. 141–153; and R. Wistrich, *Austria and the Legacy of the Holocaust* (New York: 1999). For the GDR, see O. Groehler, “Antifaschismus—vom Umgang mit einem Begriff,” and “Der Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung der DDR,” in Herbert and Groehler, *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, pp. 29–41 and 41–67.
- 39 In the domain of historiography, the *Abspaltung* may even take an institutional form when “Jewish history” is split off from German history and when the Holocaust is transferred from the latter to the former domain. Cf. O. Bartov, “Wem gehört die Geschichte? Wehrmacht und Geschichtswissenschaft,” in H. Heer and Kl. Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: 1995), p. 611: “*Diese Geschichte [of the Holocaust—ChL], so scheint es, gehört anderen (Historikern des Holocaust?, Jüdischen Historikern?, Nichtdeutschen Historikern?)*.” This “splitting off” of Holocaust history can also be observed *outside* Germany, for instance in the Netherlands. See de Haan, “Construction of a National Trauma,” p. 201: “With regard to the separation between Jews and non-Jews, the historiography of the persecution and its history were alike. Herzberg was right to conclude that ‘it is Jewish history, not Dutch’ (...) Non-Jews did not write the history of the persecution because it was considered ‘Jewish history’. And Jews wrote about the history of the persecution as something that bore no relation to Dutch society.” Sebastian Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*, pp. 219–268, argues that the institutionalization of the *Zeitgeschichte* is also a consequence of splitting off the “*Hitler-Zeit*” from the rest of German history.

- 40 Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, p. 71: “Die geradezu obsessive Abwehr eines Vorwurfs, den niemand erhoben hatte, erlaubt einzig die psychoanalytische Deutung als ‘Projektion’. In dieser Abwehr wird nämlich die vielfältige—nach überkommenen moralischen und politischen Kriterien kaum deutbare—Verstrickung zahlloser Deutscher in die historisch beispiellosen Verbrechen ihres Staates indirekt eingestanden.” Although Herbert has his doubts about the concept of *Verdrängung*, he, too, basically observes both mechanisms at work in “Der Holocaust in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung,” pp. 72–73: “Die akademische Zeitgeschichtsforschung jener Jahre [1945–1957—ChL] konzentrierte sich hingegen vor allem auf zwei Punkte, die beide im Zusammenhang mit der nach dem Kriege aufgekommene ‘Kollektivschuldthese’ standen: auf den konservativen Widerstand, um die Existenz des ‘anderen Deutschlands’ nachzuweisen, und auf die SS, die gleichsam aus der deutschen Gesellschaft herausinterpretiert und gleichsam als Residualkategorie des Abnormen für die Massenverbrechen allein verantwortlich gemacht wurde. Zugleich half die Betonung der Allmacht von SS und Sicherheitspolizei auch den ausgebliebenen Widerstand aus dem Volk erklären und wirkte so wie ein Schutzschild gegen alle erhobenen oder befürchteten Vorwürfe gegen die Deutschen.” Remarkably, however, Herbert at the same time characterizes the 1970s as “eine Phase der zweiten Verdrängung,” because the debates on “fascism” and its relationship to “capitalism” remained highly abstract. In a later article on the Goldhagen-debate Herbert seems to have dropped his earlier reservations about the use of psychoanalytical concepts in the German historiographical context, using the concepts of “defensive mechanism” and “denial discourse”; see U. Herbert, “Academic and Public Discourses on the Holocaust. The Goldhagen Debate in Germany,” in *German Politics and Society*, 17 (1999), 3, p. 44. Aleida Assmann has—unsuccessfully, in my view—recently argued that the *Kollektivschuldthese* was real and not imagined by the Germans; see her “Ein deutsches Trauma? Die Kollektivschuldthese zwischen Erinnern und Vergessen,” in *Merkur*, vol. 53, no. 12 (1999), pp. 1142–1155.
- 41 See M. Beer, “Die ‘Neuanfang’ der Zeitgeschichte nach 1945. Zum Verhältnis von nationalsozialistischer Umsiedlungs- und Vernichtungspolitik und der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ostmitteleuropa,” in Schulze and Oexle, pp. 274–302.
- 42 P. Nolte, “Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick auf eine ‘lange Generation,’” in *Merkur*, vol. 53, no. 5 (1999), p. 420: “Zum anderen sind viele derjenigen Historiker, die in den siebziger Jahren unter der Flagge der ‘Historischen Sozialwissenschaft’ mitsegelten, nie Sozialhistoriker gewesen, sondern Politikhistoriker in einem fast schon klassischen Sinne.” For the same diagnosis, see Lutz Raphael, “Anstelle eines ‘Editorials’. Nationalzentrierte Sozialgeschichte in programmatischer Absicht: Die Zeitschrift ‘Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für Historische Sozialwissenschaft’ in den ersten 25 Jahren ihres Bestehens,” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 25 (1999), pp. 5–37.
- 43 See the contributions of W. Benz, D. Diner, and K. Kwiet to Diner, ed., *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?*; see also R. Moeller, “War Stories. The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany,” in *American Historical Review*, vol. 101 (1996), pp. 1008–1148.
- 44 The discussions related to *Der neue Wache* and other memorials in Germany after 1990 indicate that the distinction between perpetrators and victims was by no means settled after the *Historikertreit*.

- 45 Hillgruber's booklet also represents the aforementioned "splitting-off" mechanisms in a pure form, splitting off both the German population and the Wehrmacht from the Nazi regime and identifying himself with the Wehrmacht; see *Zweierlei Untergang*, pp. 13–26.
- 46 See, for an overview, M. Hettling, "Täter und Opfer? Die deutschen Soldaten in Stalingrad," in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 35 (1995), pp. 515–531.
- 47 See Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, p. 105, for practically the same periodization in political discourse. Between 1960 and 1965, the perspective from which the Nazi past was looked at changed fundamentally from wholly German-centered to partly non-German-centered. What triggered this change of perspective according to Dubiel were the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials.
- 48 Herbert, "Der Holocaust," p. 75.
- 49 See Broszat, "Holocaust und Geschichtsschreibung," p. 117: "Basierend vor allem auf amtlichen deutschen Quellen aus der NS-Zeit, blieb die Verfolger-Perspektive dieser Quellengrundlage auch für die Darstellung des Themas weitgehend massgeblich. Die jüdischen Opfer kommen meist nur schemenhaft vor, als Objekte der Verfolgung. Nicht Geschichte des Holocausts, sondern der 'Endlösung' wurde geschrieben, auch in den Schulbüchern."
- 50 See M. Broszat and S. Friedländer, "Um die 'Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus'. Eine Briefwechsel," in *Vierteljahrshefte zur Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 36, no. 2 (1988), pp. 352–353. To what degree Germans actually knew about the Holocaust during the war is still a matter of research and of controversy. Significantly, according to von Weizsäcker, in his famous speech in 1985, the majority *did* know.
In this context there is a hitherto unnoticed commonality between the type of argument used by Broszat and that used by Hillgruber in *Zweierlei Untergang*; both historians were trying to justify a specific, German-centered historiographical perspective with an unmediated appeal to the character of "historical reality." Friedländer and later, also, Dan Diner did not accept Broszat's arguments in case, characterizing the Holocaust as a systematic mass murder based on a systematic, that is, societal, division of labor—and rightly so. The problem of the "central focus" in historiography can *never* be justified by an appeal to historical reality itself, because reality *never* dictates the ways in which it must be represented. For this problem, see my article "Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality. A Plea for 'Internal Realism,'" in B. Fay et al., eds., *History and Theory. Contemporary Readings* (Oxford: 1998), pp. 342–377, and my *Konstruktion der Vergangenheit* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: 1997), chapters 2 and 3.
- 51 Herbert, "Academic and Public Discourses on the Holocaust," p. 37, has also drawn attention to the abstract and unreal character of the Nazi past in general and the Holocaust in particular in German academic and public discourse, robbing them of all historical concreteness.
- 52 H-U. Wehler, however, has dealt with the German minority in former Yugoslavia also during the Third Reich in his *Nationalitätenpolitik in Jugoslawien. Die deutsche Minderheit 1918–1978* (Göttingen: 1980). He will further deal with the Third Reich in a future volume of his *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Kocka up till now has only dealt with the history of the German *Angestellten* during the Third Reich (with Michael Prinz as co-author) in *Die Angestellten in der deutschen Geschichte 1850–1980. Vom Privatbeamten zum angestellten Ar-*

beitnehmer (Göttingen: 1981), pp. 171–230. For overviews of Wehler’s and Kocka’s historiographical positions, see my articles in K. Boyd, ed., *Encyclopedia of Historians and History Writing* (London: 1999), pp. 1289–1290 and 650–652, respectively.

- 53 See H-U. Wehler, “‘Deutscher Sonderweg’ oder allgemeine Probleme des westlichen Kapitalismus?,” in idem, *Preussen ist wieder chic (14) Politik und Polemik* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1983), pp. 19–33; and H.A. Winkler, “Die ‘neue Linke’ und der Faschismus. Zur kritik neomarxistischer Theorien über den Nationalsozialismus,” in idem, *Revolution, Staat, Faschismus. Zur Revision des Historischen Materialismus* (Göttingen: 1978), pp. 65–118. For a recent evaluation of the Sonderwegview, see J. Kocka, “Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German Sonderweg,” in *History and Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1999), pp. 40–51. For Geoff Eley, see his “German History and the Contradictions of Modernity: The Bourgeoisie, the State and the Mastery of Reform,” in Geoff Eley, ed. (...) *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany 1870–1930* (Ann Arbor: 1996), pp. 67–105.
- 54 Herbert, “Academic and Public Discourses,” p. 42.
- 55 See note 40. Moshe Zuckermann defends a very similar thesis with regard to the recent debates, such as about the Holocaust-*Mahnmal* in Berlin: by discussing the *Mahnmal* permanently, the representation diverts all attention from what it is supposed to represent. See his *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie*, p. 99: “Dabei [in discussions like the *Mahnmal* debate—ChL] entfaltet sich sehr bald eine Eigendynamik der Diskussion, die zum einen den Eindruck einer selbstreferentiellen Lust am debattieren erweckt, zum anderen aber (wie immer vor- oder unbewusst) darauf angelegt zu sein scheint, das eigentlich zu konfrontierende mit Heteronomem zu überfrachten.”
- 56 See Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, p. 286: “Die kollektive Identität der Nachkriegsdeutschen war also durch ihre Unfähigkeit zur Schuldakzeptanz oder auch durch die objektive Schwierigkeit, eine so grosse Schuld anzunehmen, nachlässig gestört.” See also Omer Bartov, “German Soldiers and the Holocaust. Historiography, Research and Implications,” in Gulie Ne’eman Arad, ed., *Passing into History*, p. 164: “What was lacking in those first two decades was scholarly interest, not evidence (...)”
- 57 Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, p. 121: “Diese totalitarismustheoretische Figur hat die bemerkenswerte Kraft, die deutsche Schuld so in die Abstraktion zu führen und auf andere Schultern zu laden, dass sich selbst diejenigen, die aktive Nazis waren, von ihrer politischen Verantwortung entbunden fühlen können und sich frei fühlen können für eine ganz neue Rechnung.”
- 58 For Schneider/Schwerte in context, see König, ed., *Vertuschte Vergangenheit*.
- 59 P. Nolte, “Die Historiker der Bundesrepublik. Rückblick auf eine ‘lange Generation,’ ” in *Merkur*, vol. 60 (1999), p. 428: “Es ist die erste Generation der Bundesrepublik und zugleich die letzte, für die die Zeit davor noch einen Teil der Lebenserfahrung bildete. Deshalb sind die Historiker dieser Generation so dezidiert zu Historikern der Bundesrepublik geworden.”
- 60 Christian Streit’s book *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941–1945* (Stuttgart: 1978), is an exception to this rule. Streit, significantly, made no professional academic career as a historian. For the output of the professional military historians, see below.
- 61 D. Diner, “Negative Symbiose. Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz,” in idem, ed., *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?*, pp. 185–198. For the place of the Holocaust in Israeli

- history, see T. Segev, *The Seventh Million. The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: 1993). For a recent comparison of the German and Israeli “re-workings” of the Holocaust, see also M. Zuckermann, *Zweierlei Holocaust. Der Holocaust in den politischen Kulturen Israels und Deutschlands* (Göttingen: 1998).
- 62 For a sketch of the rebirth of nationalist, right-wing history since 1990, see W. Wipperman, *Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen Kontroverse* (Berlin: 1997). For a more solid analysis, see Berger, “Nationalism and historiography.” For the role of Ernst Nolte, see M. Schneider, “‘Volkspädagogik von Rechts’. Ernst Nolte, die Bemühungen um die ‘Historisierung’ des Nationalsozialismus und die selbstbewusste Nation,” in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, vol. 35 (1995), pp. 532–581. For Nolte’s recent attempts to reduce antisemitism, including its genocidal consequences in Nazi Germany, to the Jews themselves, see my review of his book *Historische Existenz* in *NRC-Handelsblad, Boekenbijlage*, November 5, 1999.
- 63 Of course, the “re-working” of the GDR past since 1990, and the role played in it by FDR historians as judges of their GDR colleagues, is also an explanatory factor for the increasing self-examination of the FRG historians.
- 64 The amount of literature on the *Historikerstreit* and the Goldhagen-debate is immense. For the literature on the *Historikerstreit*, see R. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow. West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape the Nazi Past* (London: 1989); and Ch. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1988). See also my analysis of the presuppositions of this debate in “Historical Knowledge and Historical Reality.” Collections of critiques of Goldhagen include J. Schoeps, ed., *Ein Volk von Mördern?, Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust* (Hamburg: 1997); R. Shandley, ed., *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate* (Minneapolis: 1998); J. Heil and R. Erb, eds., *Geschichtswissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit. Der Streit um Daniel J. Goldhagen* (Frankfurt a. M.: 1998).
- 65 Cf. Herbert, “Academic and Public Discourses on the Holocaust,” p. 47: “To this extent, Jäckels dictum, ‘simply a bad book’, misses the point: it is bad, but not simply bad.”
- 66 See H. Heer, “Killing fields. Die Wehrmacht und der Holocaust,” in Heer and Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg*, pp. 57–78; and Bartov, “German Soldiers and the Holocaust,” p. 170: “If the argument that the Wehrmacht’s soldiers were involved in war crimes was already explosive and has indeed met with a great deal of resistance in Germany, associating the army with the Holocaust is far more disturbing (...) Precisely because in Germany the Holocaust was seen as the epitome of evil, it had to be ascribed to perpetrators kept rigidly apart from the rest of the population; linking it with the Wehrmacht therefore opens the floodgates and erases all distinctions, for the army included (virtually) everyone, and the survivors of the war became the founders of the two postwar Germanys.”
- 67 See Christian Gerlach, “Männer des 20. Juli und der Krieg gegen die Sowjetunion,” in Heer und Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg*, pp. 427–447.
- 68 For the old discussion, see H-G. Thiele, ed., *Die Wehrmachtausstellung. Dokumentation einer Kontroverse* (Bremen: 1997). For the start of the new discussion, see B. Musial, “Bilder

- einer Ausstellung. Kritische Anmerkungen zur Wanderausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944,' in *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 47, no. 4 (1999), pp. 563–591; and K. Ungvary, "Echte Bilder –problematische Aussagen. Eine quantitative und qualitative Analyse des Bildmaterials der Ausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg—Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944,'" in *Geschichte im Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, vol. 50, no. 10 (1999), pp. 584–595.
- 69 For Stürmer, see *Die Welt*, October 28, 1999; for Möller, see *Focus*, October 23, 1999; for Gall, see *Amberger Nachrichten*, November 5, 1999; for Müller, see *Spiegel*, 23/1999 (Müller reproduces all the clichés of the *Partisanenkrieg*, suggesting that mass killings of civilians are a normal feature of much "modern" warfare). For overviews of the new debate, see V. Ullrich, "Von Bildern und Legenden," *Die Zeit*, October 28, 1999, and U. Schmitt, "Vorwürfe und Mutmassungen," *Die Welt*, December 10, 1999.
- 70 R. Koselleck, "Die Diskontinuität der Erinnerung," in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 47 (1999), pp. 213–222. Koselleck tells about his own wartime experiences, a story he has also told on other occasions. See p. 213: "Ich bin am 10. Mai 1945 als Gefangener der Russen in Auschwitz eingeliefert worden, und ich hatte den Namen von Auschwitz bis dahin nie gehört, ich wusste nichts von der Existenz dieses KZs, und das war wohl generell die Erfahrung meiner Mitgefangenen, ungefähr 30.000, die im Stammlager landeten"; p. 215: "Die Verbrechen des Dritten Reiches sind als solche nicht nachvollziehbar, unverständlich"; p. 217: "(...) Nicht jeder SS-Mann war als Individuum ein Verbrecher (YA) Und wir wissen alle dass die zurückgekehrten wirklichen Mörder nicht alle ohne weiteres als Kriminelle im alltäglichen Sinne definiert werden können, denn nachdem sie zurückgekehrt sind, waren sie wieder normale Bürger und im Sinne des Strafrechts keineswegs rückfällige Täter. Das ist ja das Problem: daß der normale Bürger derjenige war, der die Verbrechen vollzogen hatte. Das ist die These, die Goldhagen partiell zu Recht in Erinnerung ruft." Basically, Koselleck's veteran perspective is not very different from Hillgruber's in *Zweierlei Untergang*.
- 71 See Herbert, "Der Holocaust," pp. 80–81: "Gleichwohl blieb die Beschäftigung mit dem Holocaust in der westdeutschen Wissenschaft das Metier sehr weniger Spezialisten."
- 72 See Christian Gerlach, "In der Steppe versickert. Es geht nicht bloss um Foto's, es geht um die Wehrmacht," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, November 30, 1999. Gerlach notes that, because of the enormous amount of critique, the MGFA has announced the incorporation of a chapter on the Wehrmacht and the Holocaust in its series; significantly, it is to be written by an outside expert.
- 73 For a collection of "new" approaches, see U. Herbert, ed., *Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1998); see, further, Chr. Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: 1998).
- 74 See Hettling, "Täter und Opfer?"; Kl. Latzel, "Wehrmachtsoldaten zwischen 'Normalität' und NS-Ideologie, oder: Was sucht die Forschung in der Feldpost?," in R-D. Müller and H-E. Volkmann, eds., *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität* (Munich: 1999), pp. 573–588; and the special issue *Feldpostbriefe* of *Werkstattgeschichte*, vol. 22 (1999), pp. 7–75, edited by Ulrike Jureit.
- 75 Bartov, "German Soldiers and the Holocaust," pp. 175–181. Of course, one should re-

alize that the dichotomy victims versus perpetrators only demarcates a continuum and may be a simplification in cases where victims turn into perpetrators or the other way around.

- 76 Cf. Diner, “Negative Symbiose,” p. 196, on the dilemma of the younger generation of Germans: “(...) *die Empathie mit den Opfern scheint den Weg zu den Eltern zu versperren; und die Versöhnung mit den Eltern erweckt den Eindruck des Verrats an der Empathie mit den Opfern. Heute neigt sich die Gefühlswaage in Richtung Normalität, in Richtung von Versöhnung mit sich und der nationalen Geschichte.*”
- 77 See Zuckermann, *Gedenken und Kulturindustrie*, pp. 103–127; E. Richards, “National Identity and Recovering Memories in Contemporary Germany. The Reception of Victor Klemperer’s Diaries in Germany,” in *German Politics and Society*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1999), pp. 121–142; and Omer Bartov, “Germany as a Victim,” to be published in idem, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide and Modern Identity* (Oxford: 2000). Bartov’s article deals with the remarkable recent success of Bernard Schlink’s book *Der Vorleser* in Germany, in which Germans of the war and of the postwar generation, including a former female camp guard, the main character in the book, are depicted as victims of the “circumstances.” Therefore, the book and its public success can be seen as an indication of the continuing existence of the tradition of German, postwar self-pity.
- 78 Remarkably, this has hardly been done until now; comparative historiography hardly exists. See the forum and my article: “Comparative Historiography: Problems and Perspectives,” in *History and Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1999), pp. 25–40. For comparative studies of postwar German historiography: R. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima. Historywriting and the Second World War 1945–1990* (London: 1993); Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*; St. Berger, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Critical’ Historiography? Some Reflections on the Historiographical Agenda of the Left in Britain, France and Germany at the End of the Twentieth Century,” in *European Review of History—Revue européenne d’Histoire*, vol. 3, no. 2 (1996), pp. 213–232; D. Levy, “The Future of the Past: Historiographical Disputes and Competing Memories in Germany and Israel,” in *History and Theory*, vol. 38, no. 1 (1999), pp. 51–67.
- 79 See Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima*; Conrad, *Verlorene Nation*; and I. Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt* (London: 1994).