Holocaust Scholarship

Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations

Christopher R. Browning
Susannah Heschel
Michael R. Marrus
Milton Shain

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Holocaust Scholarship

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Acknowledgements

Established in 1980 thanks to a gift from the Kaplan Kushlick Foundation in honour of the parents of Mendel and Robert Kaplan, the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research is an autonomous institute at the University of Cape Town, or UCT as it is known locally and abroad. It is the only centre of its kind in Africa. Committed to the advance of Jewish studies and excellence in Jewish scholarship not only within the University but also across the African continent, and with a special interest in South African Jewry, the Centre has operated for more than two decades under the leadership of Professor Milton Shain, UCT's Isidore and Theresa Cohen Professor of Jewish Civilisation.

One of the most successful activities of the Kaplan Centre has been the visits of distinguished Holocaust specialists who have participated in Professor Shain's regular course on the destruction of European Jewry during the Second World War. Many of these visitors, and some in related fields, joined the conference from which the chapters of this book have come. Preceded by such distinguished lecturers as Sir Martin Gilbert, George Mosse and David Bankier, the visitors have included Victoria Barnett, Yehuda Bauer, David Biale, Christopher R. Browning, David Cesarani, Robert Ericksen, Susannah Heschel, Paula Hyman, Steven Katz, Zeev Mankowitz, Michael R. Marrus, Aubrey Newman, Antony Polonsky, Mark Roseman and Karl Schleunes. Others who joined the events celebrating a milestone for the Centre included Steven Aschheim, Doris Bergen and Sir Richard Evans. To students at UCT, coming from all shades of what Desmond Tutu has called the 'rainbow nation', these visits have provided a remarkable opportunity to engage – often for the first time – with scholarly work on Holocaust themes that echo some of South Africa's experience of racial ideology and oppression. For the visitors, teaching in a Holocaust course at UCT – and visiting South Africa as well – was an experience that enlarged our perspectives on our subject, as we discovered when we compared notes about our experiences.

But there was something more. Virtually all of the veterans of these visits to UCT, as we discovered in reminiscing among ourselves, spoke with great affection of how warmly we were received by Milton himself and his assistant Janine Blumberg. Each of us came to feel a special bond

with the Kaplan Centre, which proved to be a gateway, under Milton's kindly and attentive oversight, not only to his classes and his distinguished home institution, but also to his city and country. To express our appreciation for all that had so graciously been extended to us, and for the opportunity to learn so much about the South African context of the Kaplan Centre, the 'alumni' of Milton's visits and several other colleagues who work in the Holocaust and related fields prevailed upon Milton to bring us all together, both to celebrate his leadership as he retires from the directorship of the Centre and also to thank him for the lasting benefits we all felt we had enjoyed during our visits to UCT. We decided to build a conference, held in August 2012, around the theme of 'Holocaust Scholarship: Personal Trajectories and Professional Interpretations'. And we also agreed that, for both our meeting and for the book of essays that would follow, we would broaden our theme to include 'South African perspectives'. The result is the present volume. It is dedicated to Milton Shain, in honour of his inspired teaching, his scholarly work, his visionary leadership of the Kaplan Centre and perhaps most of all his friendship – blended in service of each of the other achievements.

Christopher R. Browning
Susannah Heschel
Michael R. Marrus

Notes on Contributors

Steven E. Aschheim is Emeritus Professor of History at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, where he has taught Cultural and Intellectual History in the Department of History since 1982 and held the Vigevani Chair of European Studies. He also acted as the Director of the Franz Rosenzweig Research Centre for German Literature and Cultural History. He is the author of *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (1982); *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890–1990* (1992), which has been translated into German and Hebrew; *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises* (1996); *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans and Jews* (2001); *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times* (2001), which has also appeared in Italian; *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (2007); and *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German and Jewish History* (2012).

Doris L. Bergen is the Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor of Holocaust Studies in the Department of History at the University of Toronto, Canada. She is the author of *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (1996), translated into Dutch, and *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust* (2003 and 2009), available in Polish translation, and is the editor of *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the 21st Centuries* (2004) and *Lessons and Legacies VIII* (2008) A volume co-edited with Andrea Löw and Anna Hájkovà, *Alltag im Holocaust: Jüdisches Leben im Großdeutschen Reich 1941–45*, appeared in 2013.

Christopher R. Browning is Frank Porter Graham Professor of History Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has focused his research on four aspects of the Holocaust: the functioning and participation of the mid-level bureaucracy, the behaviour and motivation of the low-level perpetrators, the decision-making process and evolution of Nazi Jewish policy; and the experience and post-war testimony of Jewish slave labour. His publications include *The Final Solution*

and the German Foreign Office (1978); *Ordinary Men* (1992); *The Origins of the Final Solution* (2004); and *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp* (2010).

David Cesarani is Research Professor in History at Royal Holloway, University of London and Director of the Holocaust Research Centre. He has written several books on the fate of the Jews in the Nazi period and its aftermath, including *Final Solution: The Fate of the Jews 1933–1949* (2015); *Eichmann: His Life and Crimes* (2006 US National Book Award for History); and *Justice Delayed: How Britain Became a Refuge for Nazi War Criminals* (1992). He has also written and edited books on Anglo-Jewish history and exploring the relationship between Britain, British Jews and Zionism, including *Major Farran's Hat*: *Murder, Scandal and Britain's War against Jewish Terrorism 1945–1947* (2008); *'The Jewish Chronicle' and Anglo-Jewry* (1994); and *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (1990). In 1998, he published the controversial biography *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind*.

Robert P. Ericksen, Kurt Mayer Chair in Holocaust Studies at Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, WA, USA, earned his PhD at the London School of Economics. He is the author or editor of five books, including *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (1985), which was made into a documentary film by Vitalvisuals.com in 2005. His *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* appeared in February 2012. He has been a fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He is a founding member on the board of editors of *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* and he serves as Chair of the Church Relations Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. His next book will be *Christians in Nazi Germany.*

Susannah Heschel holds the Eli Black Professorship in Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College. Her publications include *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, which won a National Jewish Book Award, and *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*. She has also edited and co-edited several books, including *On Being a Jewish Feminist: A Reader*; *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: A Festschrift for E.P. Sanders*; *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays of Abraham Joshua Heschel*; and *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*. Together with Robert Ericksen, she has edited *Betrayal:*

German Churches and the Holocaust. Currently she is Guggenheim Fellow and is writing a book on the history of European Jewish scholarship on Islam from the 1830s to the 1930s. For this project, she received a Scholar's Grant in Islamic Studies from the Carnegie Foundation and was given a fellowship in 2011–12 to the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin.

Steven T. Katz holds the Slater Chair in Jewish and Holocaust Studies at Boston University and is the former Director of the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies. He is the Academic Advisor to the Chair of the 31 countries that belong to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), a member and former co-chair of the Academic Advisory Committee of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Chair of the Holocaust Commission of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture. A prolific author, he has published numerous works on the Holocaust and Jewish philosophy, including *Post-Holocaust Dialogues* (1983), which won the 1984 Jewish Book Award in Jewish thought; *Historicism, the Holocaust and Zionism* (1993); and *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, Vol. 1 (1994), which was selected as the 'Outstanding Book of 1994 in the Category of Philosophy and Religion' by the American Association of Publishers. He has also edited five important books on comparative mysticism, the prize-winning Vol. 4 of *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, and he founded and continues to edit the journal *Modern Judaism*, now in its thirty-fifth year of publication. He was awarded the University of Tübingen's Lucas Prize for Holocaust Studies in 1999, honorary doctorates by Gratz College (1987) and the University of Warwick, UK (July, 2014), and a Distinguished Achievement Award for Holocaust Studies and Research by the Holocaust Education Foundation at Northwestern University, 2014.

Michael R. Marrus is Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Professor Emeritus of Holocaust Studies and a Senior Fellow of Massey College at the University of Toronto. A fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a Member of the Order of Canada, he has been a Senior Associate Member of St Antony's College, Oxford, and a visiting professor at UCLA, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the University of Cape Town. He has written eight books on the Holocaust and related subjects. Among his works are *Vichy France and the Jews* (1981), with Robert O. Paxton; *The Holocaust in History* (1987); *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (1985); and *Some Measure of Justice: the Holocaust Era Restitution Campaign of the 1990s* (2009). His most recent book, just being

completed, is part memoir, part historical analysis and part critique of the discourse on the 'lessons of the Holocaust'.

Antony Polonsky is Albert Abramson Professor of Holocaust Studies at Brandeis University and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Chief Historian of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. He is Chair of the editorial board of *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* and author of such books as *Politics in Independent Poland* (1972); *The Little Dictators* (1975); and *The Great Powers and the Polish Question* (1976). His most recent work is *The Jews in Poland and Russia* (3 vols). He has been awarded the Officer's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, the Officer's Cross of the Order of Independent Lithuania, the Kulczycki Prize for the best work in 2011 in the field of Polish Studies and the Pro Historia Polonorum Prize awarded by the Polish Historical Association for the best book on the history of Poland published in a foreign language between 2007 and 2011.

Karl A. Schleunes, Professor Emeritus from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, began his teaching career in 1965 at the University of Illinois at Chicago as a German historian. His first book, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz*, was published in 1970. At the time, he knew neither that he was a 'Holocaust historian', nor that he was a 'functionalist'. Out of that innocent beginning, he also came to be a teacher of the Holocaust, teaching a course on that subject for 21 years until his retirement in 2010.

Milton Shain is Isidore and Theresa Cohen Professor of Jewish Civilisation in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, where he is also Director of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research. He has written and edited several books on South African Jewish history, South African politics and the history of antisemitism. Among them are *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (1994) and *The Jews in South Africa. An Illustrated History*, co-authored with Richard Mendelsohn. His most recent book, *Zakor v'Makor: Place and Displacement in Jewish History and Memory*, co-edited with David Cesarani and Tony Kushner, was runner-up in the 'Anthology and Collections' category of the National Jewish Book Award in the US for 2009. In 2014 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa.

David Welsh was born in Cape Town and studied at the Universities of Cape Town and Oxford. He joined the faculty of the University of

Cape Town in 1963 and retired in 1997 as Professor of Southern African Studies in the Political Studies Department. He is currently Professor Extraordinaire in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University. He has published extensively: his books include *The Roots of Segregation* (1971); *South Africa's Options* (with F. van Zyl Slabbert) (1979); *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (2009); and *Ending Apartheid* (with J.E. Spence) (2010). His current research is for a book entitled *Afrikaner Politics in the 20th Century*. He has also written over 100 journal articles, chapters and papers, and many newspaper articles.

Introduction

Christopher R. Browning, Susannah Heschel, Michael R. Marrus and Milton Shain

It has become a truism to talk of history as 'an argument without an end', a phrase coined by the distinguished Dutch historian Pieter Geyl. By its very nature, history is deeply contested and will always be rewritten as new documents, new questions and new perspectives ensure an ongoing debate. Historical facts too are not self-evident, as was explained the Cambridge historian E.H. Carr nearly 50 years ago, but interact in one way or another with the historian's life experience. 'Study the historian before you begin to study the facts', Carr famously advised.[1] Both Carr's and Geyl's observations come to mind in this collection of essays that arises from a conference held in 2012 at the University of Cape Town under the auspices of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research. Leading international Holocaust scholars met to reflect upon their personal experiences and professional trajectories over many decades of immersion in the field.

Steven Aschheim and Antony Polonsky in particular affirm Carr's observations. Both grew up in South Africa and their work reflects in subtle ways an engagement with that society. Aschheim asserts that modern and especially contemporary history 'will almost inevitably tend to be autobiographical and deal with issues of immediate moral and existential concern'. As the son of German Jewish refugees, he brought an additional dimension to his experience. This shaped his understanding of Israel, a country to which he emigrated after a rich experience in *Habonim*, a South African Zionist youth movement. Early societal experiences, silences in the home, as well as migration all

[1] See E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 23 (first published by Macmillan in 1961).

impacted on his scholarly sensitivities. A 'post-adolescent awakening to the fact that one's own society was based on an all-encompassing victimization of its non-white inhabitants' is specifically identified by Aschheim as an formative factor in his work. Even his current examination of 'empathy' as a phenomenon and his deep explorations of Central European intellectuals relate in one way or another to his understanding of post-apartheid South Africa.

Polonsky too drew lessons from his early experiences in apartheid South Africa. Having grown up as a privileged white in comfortable surroundings, he turned to Marxism and what he understood as its 'iron laws of history' to critique his environment, only to become disillusioned soon after embarking on postgraduate studies in London and living in Poland. Polonsky illustrates vividly the ongoing encounter of the historian with the present and how this informs his scholarship. A leading historian of Polish Jewry, Polonsky is at the cutting edge of debates on the nature of pre- and post-communist Polish society (including Polish–Jewish relations) and a deeply contested historiography. In a sophisticated and measured way, he introduces these highly charged issues, informed by his own contributions and engagement, not untouched by his South African roots, including his knowledge of Zionism, the significant involvement of Jews in the South African Communist Party, and the Holocaust.

For David Cesarani, it was a sense of silence around the Holocaust, coupled with the place of minorities in British society and the national historical narrative, that drove him intellectually. 'My starting point was always my sense of being an alien in England, and resentment that a chapter of my life story was deemed so irrelevant to society as a whole as to be made invisible.' He charts the almost accidental process by which he became a 'Holocaust historian' and his involvement in a sequence of controversies around the Nazi past that rumbled through the 1980s and 1990s. Subsequently, he has played a major role in articulating and defining its themes for the British public. Yet he acknowledges unease about the appropriation of the Holocaust for political ends.

Susannah Heschel's early life experiences obviously fashioned her intellectual curiosity. The daughter of the famed Abraham Joshua Heschel, an émigré German Jewish theologian to the US who bridged colour and religious divides – she was exasperated at the way in which important Christian scholars 'had misshaped our readings of history with biased categories and inappropriate questions'. As a graduate student, she was driven – and still remains determined – to explore the ways in which Christianity has distorted itself as well as Judaism for political

ends. She questions, for example, reasons for Christian theologians failing to support the Jews in Nazi Germany and asks why some collaborated in their persecution. In German archives she discovered evidence of a church-financed antisemitic propaganda institute that created a dejudaised New Testament and hymnal, as well as theological writings synthesizing Nazi antisemitism and Christianity. Such efforts, she argues, made Nazi actions against the Jews plausible and even acceptable to many Christians. Heschel's work is concerned with the ways in which religions define themselves through their views of other religious traditions, and she seeks positive models of inter-religious affirmations.

These issues similarly loom large in the work of Robert Ericksen, who for decades has immersed himself in German theology during the Nazi period and more recently has focused on the complicity of university professors as well as Church leaders under Nazism and their manifold compromises with the regime. Driven by a deep sense of ethics, he shows how the past has often been rewritten to suit the present and remains sceptical, if not disbelieving, of attempts to whitewash collaboration. Acknowledging the complexity of moral choices, Ericksen nevertheless concludes that 'pastors and professors inhaled the tainted air of Nazi Germany and that most of them stayed loyal to that regime'.

Of Mennonite background, Doris L. Bergen too engages with theological issues as part of her work in the field. While denying the direct impact of this tradition in her work, she nevertheless acknowledges that it has affected 'what I think about'. Important meetings with particular individuals ultimately led her into the field and encouraged the work on which she has embarked. Her intellectual odyssey reminds us of the role the institutionalisation of particular fields of knowledge can play. Among the many factors influencing her career was the 'growth of public interest in the Holocaust'.

This burgeoning public interest is apparent in the contributions of Christopher R. Browning, Karl Schleunes and Steven Katz. When Browning began an MA programme in modern European history, the field of Holocaust Studies did not exist. Over the next three decades, he not only contributed significantly to this field, but also established himself as a leader in it. One of the elements of this work, he notes, is that in it one's identity as a non-German or a non-Jew is simply irrelevant. In a deeply reflective way, Browning traces the byways through which he came to study the Holocaust. Initially focused on the Nazi decision-making process and the origins of the Final Solution, he has subsequently undertaken groundbreaking work on the behaviour of 'ordinary men' during the war. In his case the present also impacted on his thinking about

the past and the direction of his research. Particularly interesting are his observations on the historian's craft arising from his numerous and daunting engagements as an expert witness in Holocaust denial trials, most notably the case of David Irving versus Penguin Books.

Karl Schleunes too took up a Holocaust dissertation topic before the Holocaust had become a recognized independent field of study. His is a bird's eye view of developments over the decades, including the evolution of major debates in which he has played a seminal part. Indeed, the book he published in 1970, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz*, was definitive in the field and remains a major work to this day. While Schleunes reminds us of the unfolding functionalist/intentionalist debate as it was at the time he began his work, he also discusses the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. Today he is concerned with other important questions – those that cut to the 'ontological bone', as he puts it. The Christian legacy looms large, but Schleunes is careful to analyse a range of thinking on the subject in his quest to understand the enormity of the Holocaust.

Steven Katz, a philosopher of religion, has asked similar questions, although his work has widened into examining comparatively the phenomena of genocide and mass death. Having studied with the legendary Salo Baron in the US, Katz pursued a philosophical training at Cambridge under A.J. Ayer and completed a doctorate on Martin Buber and his particular brand of mysticism. He later moved into Holocaust and comparative genocide studies following an invitation to present a lecture in the Liss Lecture Series at the University of Notre Dame. As a subject, he chose to challenge Elie Wiesel's contention that the Holocaust was unique; however, he swiftly altered his views and is now one of the main proponents of the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust as the archetypical genocide. Thus began a now decades-old project on the Holocaust in comparative historical context. Katz's philosophical approach underpins all his work and the precise logic he brings to bear on it. In his case, Carr's dictum could well have been altered to emphasizing the importance of studying the training of the historian before the history.

Michael Marrus' contribution specifically reflects on the search for meaning in the Holocaust. Not for him the 'lessons of the Holocaust', commonly asserted as if these were a universally agreed-upon set of principles. In a brutally honest exposition, he argues that despite the exponential growth in the field of Holocaust Studies and its sophisticated levels of scholarship, it is hazardous to draw specific lessons. Such injunctions, he argues, are all over the map and should not depend upon the Holocaust as a source of authority. Ultimately, he writes, the

historian's task is to explain. In this, we have to be 'as faithful as we can to the events and circumstances of the Holocaust themselves, and to derive from then as deep and sophisticated and independent-minded understanding of these events as we can manage'. The Holocaust has become history and this will ensure it being remembered, he concludes.

* * *

Meeting in South Africa provided a special ambience as the country had emerged only two decades earlier from a race-based system – often compared to Hitler's racial state – defined by the United Nations as a crime against humanity. Apartheid was a universal term of opprobrium and it is not by chance that scholars have identified commonalities between Nazi ideology and apartheid's impulses.[2] But as David Welsh, a prominent liberal in the fight against apartheid, argues: 'South Africans could learn little from Nazi Germany about racism and racial discrimination.' Apartheid was rather a refinement of earlier colonialism and segregation, and not a product of Nazi ideology. This is not to say that Welsh fails to acknowledge the South African Radical Right of the 1930s and 1940s; these devotees of Hitler would have established a fascist state if given a chance. But the etiology of apartheid and Nazism were far apart. Nevertheless, as Milton Shain illustrates, Radical Right movements in South Africa did indeed echo their European fascist and Nazi mentors. Louis Weichardt, the leader of the Greyshirts, stands out in this regard. Had groups like the Greyshirts – or the *Ossewa-Brandwag* (Ox Wagon Sentinel) and the *Nuwe Orde* (New Order) – come to power, there would have been no place for Jews in South Africa.

Despite these differences, the Holocaust did impact on South African consciousness and on the ways in which South Africans engaged with their past.[3] As early as 1945, blacks appropriated the Holocaust in

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[2] See, for example, William Henry Vatcher, *White Laager: The Rise of Afrikaner Nationalism* (New York and London: Frederick Praeger, 1965); Brian Bunting, *The Rise of the South African Reich* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969); and Patrick J. Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1991).

[3] See Shirli Gilbert, 'Jews and the Racial State. Legacies of the Holocaust in Apartheid South Africa, 1945–60', *Jewish Social Studies*, 16(3) (2010), 32–64; and Milton Shain and Andrew Lamprecht, 'A Past that Must Not Go Away: Holocaust Denial in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa' in John K. Roth and Elizabeth Maxwell (eds), *Remembering the Future: The Holocaust in the Age of Genocide*, vol. 1 (London: Palgrave), 2001, pp. 858–69.

their struggle for human rights. In that year the Non-European Unity Movement drew up a document informing the United Nations of the similarities between South African race laws and Nazism and employed this critique in its efforts to gain support.[4] Similarities abounded, especially as 'Grand Apartheid' unfolded under the National Party which came to power in 1948. Although the trajectories of the Nazi state and apartheid South Africa were different, the abiding focus on race in the two societies cannot be minimized. Just over four decades after the advent of apartheid, a 'negotiated revolution' was initiated following the release from prison of Nelson Mandela and the normalization of South African society and politics.[5] In 1996 a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established as a means of healing the past. In a transition in which there was no victor and no vanquished, it was agreed that there would be no need for Nuremberg-like trials. Instead, a TRC was established to elicit a full disclosure of apartheid crimes. Nuremberg-like trials were ruled out.

The massive corpus of scholarly engagement with the Holocaust – with reverberations across the globe – has ensured that its study today is paradigmatic for scholars seeking to explore genocide and mass death, as well as questions surrounding perpetrators, bystanders and victims. The historiography of the Holocaust is lively, with debates and controversies, new archival discoveries and the application of methods drawn from a wide range of disciplines. Study of the Holocaust has stimulated scholars to examine other contexts of prejudice, genocide, trauma and reparation, and their work, in turn, broadens the significance of the Jewish experience. The field has widened greatly, fashioning a new generation of scholars shaped by new circumstances and perspectives. It continues to be a debate without an end.

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[4] See Milton Shain, 'South Africa' in David Wyman (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 680–81.

[5] See Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, *The Negotiated Revolution. Society and Politics in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1993).

1

Autobiography, Experience and the Writing of History

Steven E. Aschheim

I suppose I should begin with a caveat. This volume is about 'Holocaust Scholarship', but I am not strictly speaking a Holocaust scholar. My field is much more concentrated on European – especially German and Jewish – cultural and intellectual history. Still, in many explicit but also subtly implicit ways, the *Shoah* has impinged deeply both on my 'personal trajectory and professional interpretations' – just as its ideological exploitation has increasingly become a source of disturbance and, at times, even anger. But this will become clearer only in terms of relating the larger story and context of the link between biography and work.

Before I do so, however, a word of apology and potential exculpation is necessary. Upon telling friends and colleagues the title and subject of this volume – on the link between the personal and the professional – most have looked aghast. 'How egoistic, self-important, can one get?' they ask disdainfully. They do have a point; there is a clear and present solipsistic danger in such a self-centred presentation. I hope though that 'there is an important difference between a serious and conscious engagement in one's own experience, and an interest in oneself as an engrossing phenomenon'.[1] But, I am, in any case, convinced that the vocation of history is always an engaged, even an ethical, pursuit and activity. To be sure, one must exercise the critical (and, perhaps more importantly, the self-critical) faculty at all times and relate as scrupulously as possible to the evidence and documents. But the old-fashioned positivist 'objectivity' is a chimera; rather, what is required

[1] This is Robert Fothergill's distinction. See his *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 76–77.

is a form of 'Passionate Detachment'.[2] This is so because modern, and especially contemporary, history will almost inevitably tend to be autobiographical and deal with issues of immediate moral and existential concern.

This is a rather pretentious claim, so let me invoke the authority of those wiser than me to support it. The formidable Lionel Trilling declared that 'the more a writer takes pain with his work to remove from it the personal and subjective, the more . . . he will express his true unconscious'.[3] And as Martin Jay persuasively argues:

> However much we may disavow our own voice in the construction of allegedly impersonal, objective narratives, it returns to haunt our texts. Whom we choose to study, what stories we decide to tell, and the modes of emplotment, analysis and judgment we apply to them are determined at least in part by psychological prejudices that we only dimly perceive, if at all. Despite all of our efforts to bracket current prejudices and allow the past to reveal itself to us, we cannot entirely escape the effect of our identifications, idealizations and demonizations. Indeed, it is precisely because we can become so invested in figures, movements and events in the past that they invite our interest in the first place; the exigency to remember someone else's things past can only come from somewhere deep within ourselves.[4]

In the same sense, I have no doubt that my life experiences are inextricably intertwined with my scholarly career and that my 'personal trajectories and professional interpretations' are deeply linked. It is as a South African-born historian, child of German-Jewish refugees, deeply – if osmotically – affected by the gross inhumanity of the Holocaust, and as a citizen of Israel, beset by the seemingly intractable, dehumanizing Israeli–Palestinian conflict that my work and sensibilities have been shaped.

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[2] This is the way Ze'ev Mankowitz described the work of George Mosse, but it is surely far more generally applicable. See his 'George Mosse and Jewish History' in *George Mosse: On the Occasion of His Retirement. 17.6.1985* (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1986), p. xxiv.

[3] Quoted in Edward Mendelsohn, 'The Demonic Trilling', *New York Review of Books*, 7 June 2012, p. 58.

[4] See Martin Jay, 'Force Fields: The Ungrateful Dead', *Salmagundi*, 123 (Summer 1999), 28.

Let us begin then with childhood.[5] It was my parents' German accent, at once comfortingly familiar yet clearly foreign, which first alerted me to the 'alienness' of my background. I suppose it was this that in intuitive fashion first sensitized me to the complicated dynamics, the plight, pains, rewards and occasional narcissism of 'outsiderdom'. Certainly in the modern period, it is never easy to fix its always fluid boundaries.[6] As my brother-in-law once said to me: 'Steven, as an outsider, what do you think of the human race?' This sense of partial marginality no doubt helped to provide the first necessary key to the historian's vocation: a certain critical perspective upon one's own situation.

It was also tied to a burgeoning consciousness of Jewishness and, I think, to a later, more mature interest in the always complex deployments of selfhood and interconnections of Jews within Western culture. In all my writings I have been less interested in Judaism than in Jewishness as a psychological, sociological and, especially, intellectual predicament.[7] Jews in the modern period have constantly had to navigate the tensions between formal 'respectability' and unguarded intimacy, conformity and difference, expressiveness and restraint, outsiderdom and the mainstream.[8] The post-emancipation boundary situation of Jews thus generated a modicum of friction, confusion and anxiety, at times even murderousness, but also produced new alliances, some astonishingly creative intellectual and cultural projects and novel

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[5] The following account borrows from the essay 'Excursus: Growing up German Jewish in South Africa' that appeared in my *In Times of Crisis: Essays on European Culture, Germans, and Jews* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), pp. 59–63. A slightly different version was published under the title 'The German-Jewish Legacy beyond America' in *American Jewish Archives* (November 1988).

[6] See my 'Reflections on Insiders and Outsiders: A General Introduction' in Richard I. Cohen, Jonathan Frankel and Stefani Hoffman (eds), *Insiders and Outsiders: Dilemmas of East European Jewry* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010).

[7] This applies to all my works listed in this chapter. For another relevant two that here go unmentioned, see *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) and the edited collection *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[8] On these tensions, see 'Reflections on Theatricality, Identity and the Modern Jewish Experience' and 'Between Rights, Respectability, and Resistance: Reframing the German-Jewish Experience' in my *At the Edges of Liberalism: Junctions of European, German, and Jewish History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

fusions and formations of identity. Working out these contours remains a major professional – and existential – concern.

But let me return to my childhood. The fact of *German* foreignness was especially unforgivable in the years following the Second World War. In primary school, when asked where my parents came from, I murmured 'Australia'. How could a child, even around 1950, acknowledge German origins, admit that in some way *he* had been the mortal enemy? Of course, already at that age, one grasped the difference well enough, but it was well-nigh impossible to articulate that, no, one's parents were not the enemy but the victims (although incidentally they never presented themselves as such – self-pity was entirely absent from their emotional vocabulary) and that defining *them* as archetypal Germans was a kind of indecent irony. At other times, the antisemitic intent was less veiled and the anti-German, anti-Jewish thrust explicitly fused. One day, in the middle of a science class(!), the teacher settled his gaze directly at me and asked why I believed the Second World War had been fought. Without waiting for a reply, he himself provided the enlightening answer: 'Because of the Jews, Aschheim, because of the Jews.'

These kinds of incidents pushed me ever deeper into the Zionist youth movement, which at that time functioned as a kind of all-embracing counter-cultural institution, and which produced a curious combination of ecstatic idealism, deep friendships – that persist to this day – and a certain self-righteous dogmatism. At the same time, it encouraged an increasingly critical stance towards the overall system of racial injustice in South Africa.

Still, the particular German-Jewish background played a major role in the larger sensitizing process and thus in my later vocational choice. In the first place, the imprint, brutality and mystery (which endures until the present) of Nazism and the Holocaust have been with me ever since I can remember. These were topics that were never really analytically confronted at home, but were, nevertheless, somehow omnipresent, palpably transmitted through my parents' occasional comments about Germany and Germans (my father adamantly refused reparation money), their very infrequent, throwaway references to their previous lives in Kassel and Berlin and the move to South Africa, and an unstated (but quite unambivalent) message about the fragility of the Jewish condition. Nevertheless, their overwhelming emotion regarding the country that had given them shelter (and later financial success) was one of gratitude. These factors limited any inclination to generalize from their own experience of racial injustice in Germany and protest

what was happening in South Africa. But unlike my parents, I was not beholden to South Africa as a refugee and I could therefore translate this sense of vulnerability into quite different personal and professional terms.

The personal and the ironic mode characterized the background to my very first work, *Brothers and Strangers*, an examination of the protean, highly charged image that the East European Jew played within modern German and German-Jewish consciousness.[9] I had always taken my father's 'Germanness' for granted. True, his great warmth and humour seemed to point to the fundamental inaccuracy of the stiff Prussian or 'Yekke' stereotype. It was only years after his death that I discovered he was born an 'Ostjude', a Galizianer who had come to Kassel as a small boy and, like so many others, elegantly combined these two inheritances! It is true that many immigrant parents were loath to talk about their past (and were not sufficiently pressed by their children to do so). Still, the fact that he had chosen never to reveal these origins was made even more poignant by the fact that I learned all this as I was completing my dissertation on the convolutions of, and problematic interdependencies between, Eastern and Western Jewish identity!

The influence of this background of course went beyond this irony. My receptivity to larger issues of German and German-Jewish history clearly springs from these domestic roots. With all their distaste for Germany, my parents carried Europe with them in a way that the Litvak majority of the South African Jewish never did. This cultural inheritance was transmitted to a child and adolescent in a variety of ways. For instance, my father would, effortless and quite unself-consciously, reel off reams of (to me rather incomprehensible, yet strangely attractive) poetry and sayings from the inevitable Goethe and Heine. Our house rang with the songs of Joseph Schmidt, Richard Tauber and Marcel Wittrisch, marvelous tenors whose 78 rpm records we possessed in abundance and which set the foundations, no doubt, for a later enduring passion for German classical music. Clearly, then, the impulse to study the German world and its culture flowed from the dual desire to comprehend (and perhaps commemorate) the lost reality from which my parents came, and at the same time to grasp what had made Nazism, its atrocities and the Holocaust possible.

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[9] See *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German-Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

To a young mind (perhaps even to an ageing one!), part of the fascination of and attraction to German culture lay in its compelling concern with, and combination of, the profound and the demonic. (I only discovered much later Thomas Mann's exploration of the necessary connection between the two in his *Dr. Faustus*). Not yet able to penetrate the esoteric language in which they wrote, to my uninitiated ears names like Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche possessed a kind of magic, an alluring and almost evil ring, resonant with the promise of both enlightenment and dark and dangerous brilliance. I tried to deal explicitly with the myriad and ambiguous connections between culture and catastrophe in a 1995 volume of that name, documenting, amongst other things, the manifold novelties of interpretation and philosophical difficulties to which it gave rise as well as the ideological dangers in wait once the Holocaust was unleashed into the political minefield of competitive and reparative victimization.[10] Before that, I sought to wrestle with the manifold adventures of infinitely adaptable Nietzschean impulses as they penetrated virtually every cranny of German political culture.[11]

There is still another pertinent, related level. It betrays a certain chauvinist parochialism, which I consciously try to resist in my scholarship but which is undoubtedly there. Since my student days I had, quite unconsciously, equated what I most valued in German thought with what I later understood to be a peculiar form of German-Jewish humanism. Even if one had not really read them, the giants who, in my mind at least, I associated with this legacy – Marx, Freud, Einstein and, in a rather different idiom, Franz Kafka – were heroic precisely because they were makers of modern secular thought, universal and radical in their outlook, and yet, in their different ways, quintessentially (or at least socio-psychologically) Jewish, embodiments of an always humanizing and moral impulse. Much the same can be said regarding the galaxy, the almost endless examples of Jewish intellectual and cultural creativity that was released as the ghetto walls fell beginning with the Enlightenment. If we just take the period of the Weimar Republic, astonishingly, we find names that remain iconic to Western intellectual life into the twenty-first century: a by no means exhaustive

[10] See my *Culture and Catastrophe: German and Jewish Confrontations with National Socialism and Other Crises* (New York University Press, 1996).
[11] See my *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890–1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

list would include Theodor Adorno, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Cassirer, Gershom Scholem and Leo Strauss.[12]

Similarly, it was also the work of other exiled post-Second World War Central European intellectuals that has acted as magnets, my emulative models: Jean Amery (Hans Meyer), Walter Laqueur, Raul Hilberg, George Steiner, Peter Gay and, of course, my great friend and mentor, George Mosse.[13] In the post-Holocaust era they were as much the incarnation of that Central European Jewish sensibility as they were chroniclers of its achievements, disaster and disappearance. I suppose that at a certain level, my work (however dwarfed in comparison to these giants) is animated by a desire to preserve this fragile, humanizing sensibility against the manifold totalitarian, racist and illiberal threats besetting it.

Clearly, this sensibility went hand in hand with a post-adolescent awakening to the fact that one's own society was based upon an all-encompassing victimization of its non-white inhabitants. This realization of the plight of the other was to have a later double effect upon both the personal and professional sides. Could it be that behind the decision to become an historian lies not only the drive to critically interrogate one's own narrative, but also a kind of empathetic compulsion to place oneself sympathetically in the position of other selves – what J.M. Coetzee in his novel *Summertime* calls *meegevoel*, feeling with.[14] The autobiographical moment does enter here. For all their radical differences, common to apartheid, the atrocities of Nazi Germany and the Israeli–Palestinian imbroglio, one finds either the incapacity or perhaps more pointedly the structured unwillingness of those in power to place oneself both cognitively and affectively in the position of the subjugated, to recognize their humanity and humiliation. Revealingly, the subject of Hendrik Verwoerd's doctoral dissertation in psychology was on the theme of 'The Blunting of the Emotions'. The political economy of empathy and its organized blunting, the fact that, as Michael Ignatieff perceptively notes, ethics typically follows ethnicity, that empathy typically takes root and is limited to tribal, ethnic or national boundaries[15]

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[12] I have examined this surprising phenomenon in Chapter 3 of *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

[13] See *ibid.*, Chapter 2.

[14] J.M. Coetzee, *Summertime* (London: Harvill Secker, 2009), p. 97.

[15] See Michael Ignatieff, 'The Danger of a World without Enemies', *The New Republic*, 224 (2001), 25–44.

has, of late, become my central preoccupation[16] (and looking back, in one way or another, has unconsciously permeated almost all my ventures).

I am fully aware of the hermeneutic difficulties involved in this conceit; there is a huge literature debating the degree to which such an empathic leap is at all possible. I realize too that my stipulative definition of empathy as 'the cognitive and affective attempt to place oneself in the position of the individual or collective other' is ethically ambiguous and not necessarily morally obligating. Indeed, torturers have to be empathic if they are to grasp the effect they exert on their victims;[17] surely, if the historian wants to comprehend the psychology and motivations of Nazi perpetrators, Russian rapists or Rwandan killers, this will involve a deliberate act of empathy – entering, so to speak, into their skin and shoes – but hardly one that entails ethical identification. Any political economy of empathy will have to take into account these ambiguities and, as Samuel Moyn has pointed out, will involve a crucial tripartite distinction between empathy 'as a burgeoning object of historical investigation . . . as a methodological requirement, and as a normative horizon of inquiry'.[18] For all that, it is true that the animating drive is also clearly an ethical one.

I have already referred to my choice of Zionism which seemed to be both a natural and a self-justifying moral one.[19] Let me clear about this. Zionism in South Africa (and clearly not only there) satisfied deep, authentic needs. Especially for youth, it provided a counter-sense of self, it distinguished us from our bourgeois elders, provided a rationalization that the militant anti-apartheid struggle was not our struggle and offered a utopia in which to believe. Zionism was about removing diasporic vulnerability, solving our 'Jewish Problem' and thereby becoming 'normal'. It profoundly changed the psychological grounds on which we stood (a truth that remains to this day). Moreover, as this occasion demands

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[16] I am very slowly working my way towards a book-length manuscript. In the meantime see my preliminary essay 'The Ambiguous Political Economy of Empathy' in *At the Edges of Liberalism*, pp. 133–42, notes 247–52.

[17] See Lou Agosta, *Empathy in the Context of Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 14.

[18] See Samuel Moyn, 'Empathy in History, Emphasizing with Humanity', *History and Theory*, 45 (October 2006), 397–415. The quote appears on p. 397.

[19] I have developed this theme at greater length in an interview (conducted on 30 December 2007) published in Stephen Hellmann and Lindsay Talmud (eds), *Ideally Speaking: Interviews with South African and Ex-South African Jews* (Douglas: Lexicon Books, 2011), pp. 107–19.

the somewhat embarrassing confessional mode and because my stance is in part a critical one, it is important to note that my personal life in Israel is both a satisfying and stimulating one. I find this necessary to add that – given the ever-growing crisis of legitimacy surrounding it – it is easy to overlook Israel's extraordinary vitality, its achievements in science, literature, music, technology and the humanities, and its dense, vibrant texture of interpersonal relationships.

For all that, it is clear that the Zionism of my youth was built on an obvious naïvete, as was the belief that in our case – as opposed to South Africa – justice and equality would obviously reign. We would have sullied our idealism had we stopped for a moment and recognized that nowhere 'has there ever been a process of state formation . . . that has not involved conquest, conflict, or at least a measure of coercion'.[20] It thus took considerable time before I became increasingly aware of the tragic ironies of victimization implicit in my own Zionist solution. It may be that a certain myopia, a selective blindness to the realities of the Palestinian presence, may have been a necessary condition for the realization of the Zionist project, but it is no less myopic for that.

This again is what I mean by the political economy of empathy – or of its absence. What were the forces that evoked our empathy with the victims of apartheid, but precluded it with those who – we were unwilling to see – had suffered from our own project? I am not suggesting at all that apartheid and Zionism are one; the structure of the political conflict is quite different. Moreover, having lived in both societies, it is clear that the existential and psychological weave of relationships and domination bear little resemblance to each other. Nor do I want to elide the tragic complexities and harsh realities of a still ongoing Israel–Arab national conflict (a quite different equation from the nakedly racist South African case).

Still, it is of course a general truth that 'normative' regimes of power will resist openly acknowledging the price exacted on defeated populations. This was – and is – an extremely difficult thing to do, even for historians trained to view matters from above and from a variety of perspectives. For historians, like other citizens, are 'embedded' in the societies in which they live. But they are supposed to be more than their mere reflections. The self-critical challenge is to rise above their conformities and to state that, as a moral quality, empathy becomes politically

[20] The quote originally appears as a question mark. I have turned it into a statement. See Toby Wilkinson, 'From Pots to Pyramids', *Times Literary Supplement*, 20 July 2012, p. 10.

relevant only when it demands and realizes access to those defined as 'other' – especially to those with whom one may be locked in conflict.

Of course, multiple problems and contradictions persist in any simplified schema of this nature. While empathy is not identical with pity, it can be closely linked, and over time pity can easily transmute into callousness and moral fatigue, and can turn into a patronizing resentment 'for the weak members of society, hatred for those who do not display a grateful attitude toward those who pity them, hatred for what pricks the conscience of people who finally realize that they are incapable of offering genuine help'.[21] On the other hand, if one desires to extend the horizons of political empathy, especially in situations of putative enmity, does this not demand reciprocity on both sides of the conflict? As one letter-writer in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* recently wrote with regard to the Palestinians: 'Why do we have to mark the day of their "disaster" which sprang from the failure of their attempts to massacre the Jewish *Yishuv* in 1948 and to annihilate it? Why do we have to tell, to pity, to recall and to feel the pain of those whose wishes, actions, education and prayers are aimed every day at getting rid of us from this land?'[22] The intractability is often compounded by the self-perception on both sides that one is a victim – a fact that diminishes both the sense of responsibility and the drive to empathy. Clearly it is easier for those in power to exercise empathy than those under its yoke. Yet not all victims are flawlessly moral and the subjugated need not feel free of their own sense of agency and moral freedom.

In addition, it may be that to occur at all, empathy will be the result rather than the cause of conflict resolution. Still, it may be a beginning, a suitable counter-tool to overcome the powerful identity-validating uses of the historical past, with its zero-sum narratives in which 'the memory of one group is viewed as undermining the memory of the other'.[23] At any rate, the post-apartheid South African case provides a

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[21] See Yitzhak Laor's analysis of some pro-Palestinian Israeli leftists (although these observations are obviously generally applicable), 'Making Art from Garbage', *Haaretz*, 3 August 2012, p. B6.

The word 'hatred' may be too strong – 'resentment' is perhaps more appropriate.

[22] Letter from Yisrael Hayun, 'Why Mark Nakba Day?', *Haaretz*, 18 May 2011, p. 7.

[23] The phrase is Alon Confino's. See his interesting 'On the Virtue and Tyranny of the Past' in Dan Diner, Gideon Reuveni and Yfaat Weiss (eds), *Deutsche Zeiten. Geschichte und Lebenswelt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2012), pp. 313–23. The quote appears on p. 318. Confino applies his categories to an analysis of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. In all political conflict, one should

salutary counter-example as to how generally one can extend our range of empathic and humanizing impulses. Enumerating the conditions for this to occur elsewhere will necessarily form part of any study of the political economy of empathy.

In this regard, in another earlier work, I tried to examine alternative foundational possibilities, particularly the role of early, highly committed Zionists, the radical group of mainly Central European intellectuals who formed the organizations *Brit Shalom* (Covenant of Peace) and, later, *Ichud*.[24] Their impressive number included Gershom Scholem, Martin Buber, Shmuel Hugo Bergman, Ernst Simon, Hans Kohn and others, while their activities were supported from afar by famous figures such as Albert Einstein and Hannah Arendt. Very early on, they were sensitive to the rights of the local Arab population – regarding this as *the* ethical question confronting Zionism. They proposed various forms of equal rights, federative arrangements or a bi-nationalism, all of which presupposed a principled rejection of ethnic statehood and a notion (however inchoate) of shared sovereignty. The options they proposed were often confused and the differences amongst them significant. But all, in one way or another, faced the moral and political quandary which Ernst Simon bluntly formulated in 1943: 'The Jewish State means Jewish domination over the Arabs, just as an Arab State means domination over the Jews.'[25]

To be sure, my treatment, while sympathetic, also took into account the innumerable failures and problems entailed in their quixotic enterprise: the lack at the time of other successful bi-national examples, the refusal of the Arab side to even countenance this possibility and the dismissal of these intellectuals by mainstream Zionists as moralistic impotents, quite unable to understand the need for and nature of

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add, each side will bring to bear its own versions, its own 'narratives' of the past, but all sides always share a common history. As Merav Michaeli put it recently with regard to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: 'And here we are, looking at the history of the Palestinians . . . and failing to understand that it is also our history . . . We don't understand that cutting Palestinians off from water supplies, destroying their homes and villages . . . is also part of our history . . . no less than they are part of the story of the Palestinians.' See her 'It's Also Our History', *Haaretz*, 5 August 2002, p. A5. The distinction between 'memory' and 'history' must surely hold.

[24] See *Aschheim, Beyond the Border*, Chapter 1, 'Bildung in Palestine: Zionism, Binationalism, and the Strains of German-Jewish Humanism'.

[25] Letter 58 to Walter Falk, 8 February 1943, in Ernst Simon, *Sechzig Jahre gegen den Strom. Briefe von 1917–1984* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), p. 120.

sovereign political power. Many of these objections continue to be raised today, compounded by the broader geopolitical context, the problematic, at times brutal, realities and practices of Middle Eastern societies. The still unpredictable outcome of the Arab Spring – dubbed by some now as an Islamic Summer – does not make this easier.

Perhaps part of my exploration of these Central European intellectuals was the South African example of a unitary non-racial state. But given my own continuing ambivalences and conflicts, I have traced their legacy less as a practical guide than as an example of a critical and humanizing impulse in the midst of increasing desperation, violence and inhumanity. These figures sought not to abolish nationalism, but rather to provide it with a more tolerant, gentle face – a goal that, in the present circumstances, may be exceedingly difficult, but no less admirable for that.

These ongoing ironies and ambivalences – perhaps irresolvable contradictions – are I suppose built into my personality and colour a great deal of my scholarship (perhaps not always entirely detrimentally). Let me, finally, illustrate this with regard to the *Shoah*, the central theme of this conference. It is surely unnecessary to remind *this* audience of its massively transgressive nature, the breakdown of all taboos and its unutterable cruelties. As valiantly as we try, we are faced with the virtual impossibility of satisfactorily understanding and explaining it. It has become a defining, almost obsessive fact of our consciousness. Indeed, the event was so beyond everything we regard as within the pale, so extreme that, as Michael Bernstein argues, it may hold no lesson for what we take to be 'normal', everyday life. One may wonder, he writes, 'whether genocide is ever revelatory of anything but itself, of the particular political system that perpetrated it, and the particular individuals who enacted it'.[26]

However, be that as may be, over the years, the study of the event itself has been overwhelmed by its instrumentalizing public representations, its ideological appropriations and nationalist exploitation. It was,

[26] See Michael Bernstein, 'Homage to the Extreme: The Shoah and the Rhetoric of Catastrophe', *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 March 1998, pp. 6–8. The quote appears on p. 7. On p. 8 he writes: 'Ruptures mesmerize us exactly to the extent that we are already convinced of the revelatory authority of the unique and inherently excessive over the typical and quotidian.' Bernstein points out some of the contradictions of the rhetoric of catastrophe, between the event as simultaneously unimaginable – and inevitable; unique – and paradigmatic; unspeakable – yet constantly talked about.

I suppose, inevitable that the Holocaust and apocalyptic rhetoric were unleashed into the competitive global political marketplace. So great is its symbolic power that it continues to be invoked as essential by collectivities seeking legitimacy for their suffering. But at the same time, it has been a major force in initiating and driving the overall battle over comparative victimization. We are thus constantly bombarded by those who respectively seek to invest this shattering event with some kind of politicized 'meaning', with particular or universal lessons, with those who seek to relativize or, on the other hand, endow it with some kind of 'unique', supra-historical status. These are almost always tied to one or other ideological agenda.

Therefore, that the *Shoah* would enter into the very marrow of Israel's culture is surely to be expected (even though this was a relatively late development, which, as each year goes by, has become ever more intense). Clearly, it represents an authentic transmitted national trauma. But precisely because of the fact that it is so closely tied to the country's legitimizing narrative and entangled with the endless political conflict, there is the danger that its valorization will so suffuse – indeed, overwhelm – the culture that it will channel virtually all its empathic energies into its memory and representation. This kind of self-referential collective empathy can easily muffle or mask or act as a preventive for the far more difficult task of *present* empathy for *contemporary* injustices. In this way, *Shoah* memorialization also functions – whether intentionally or not, explicitly or implicitly – as a counter-empathic narrative, a means of either minimizing or omitting the Palestinian narrative, a tool in the ongoing and unproductive battle of comparative victimization.

Let me state in conclusion that as an historian, my major, even compulsive, interest has not centred on the Middle East, but on the Jewish entanglements, the intertwined moments of belonging and estrangement, creativity and destructiveness, that occurred at the junctions of European and German history and culture. But those borders and perplexities have not been contained. They continue to reverberate to this day and resonate particularly strongly in Jerusalem, where they have become endowed with a particular sense of contemporary urgency. Because to a great extent my own personal conflicts and ethical and political dilemmas have been built into my intellectual inquiries and methodological proclivities, I may sound very much like Robert Frost's wry description of a liberal who cannot even take his own side in an argument. But for a historian, come to think of it, that may not be such a bad thing after all.

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From Johannesburg to Warsaw: An Ideological Journey

Antony Polonsky

Ralph Waldo Emerson has said that all history is autobiography. More than 50 years ago, I came to Warsaw on a bleak December day as a British Council exchange student to undertake research for my doctorate at the University of Oxford on the conflict between Józef Piłsudski and the Polish Parliament between 1926 and 1930 in the Historical Institute of Warsaw University. What brought me there? I did not come from a Polish-speaking background. My mother's family were Russified Jews from Lithuania and my father's were Yiddish-speakers from Grodno. They both emigrated to South Africa at the end of the nineteenth century. I grew up in very comfortable conditions in post-war South Africa. I soon became aware of the deep racial divisions in that society and came to feel considerable guilt at my parents' lifestyle, dependent as it was on African servants, whom they, as representatives of the liberal section of the English-speaking minority – friends of Helen Suzman, supporters of the Progressive Party – treated with, as they thought, great benevolence and in my eyes extreme paternalism.

Already at school, the oppressive nature of the system was brought home to me by a remarkable teacher at my high school, Theodore (Teddy) Gordon. He had studied history at the University of the Witwatersrand under Professor J.S (Etienne) Marais and had written an important study, *The Growth of Boer Opposition to Kruger, 1890–1895*. Teddy was an inspiring teacher. I remember his first class on European history. He said: 'We begin with the French Revolution. Before we can discuss this, we need to understand what constitutes a revolutionary situation.' We remained friendly after he and his wife emigrated to England, where he taught first at Oxford Comprehensive and then at the City of London School – here he taught English, a great waste of his enormous talent as a historian.

When I attended the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in the late 1950s, the main political division was between the liberals and the Marxist-Leninists. Those, like myself, who adhered to the latter group did so in rejection of the paternalism which we identified with our parents. Liberalism was merely a form of sympathy for Africans in their difficult plight, whereas we had aligned ourselves with the iron laws of history identified by Marx and Engels. These clearly demonstrated, we believed, that the conflict in South Africa was not racial (as was obvious to most people), but one of class in which we, mostly young Jews and Indians, could find our natural place in the struggle of the local proletariat, along with that of the whole world, for the socialist millenium.

I now joined the fellow-travelling Congress of Democrats and participated in a Marxist study circle at the University, which was led by leading members of the South African Communist Party. The one who had most influence on me was Jack Simons. Jack was an unusual character. He was born in Riversdale Cape in 1907 (the same place where my father was born in 1905). His mother came from an Afrikaner family – he later wrote proudly 'On my mother's side I belong to the original settlers who came out in the 1670–80 period from Holland'. He described his father as 'a more recent immigrant', omitting the fact that he was Jewish. Such marriages were certainly very unusual in the Cape at the turn of the century, but this one was probably possible because Jack's father was already well-established and was the town clerk of Riversdale as well as the owner and publisher of two local newspapers. Jack qualified first as a lawyer and then completed an MA in Political Philosophy at the Transvaal University College (later the University of Pretoria). He then went to the London School of Economics and Political Science on a scholarship, where he obtained his PhD with a thesis on 'The Criminal Law and its Application to the Natives of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Kenya'.

Jack returned to South Africa in 1937. In his view, the basic conflict in South Africa was not one of race, but of class. The University allowed him to teach without interference. However, his membership of the underground Communist Party made him anathema to the Nationalist government and he was banned from attending a meeting of more than three people, which made it impossible for him to continue teaching. As a result, he went into exile in 1965, first at Manchester University and subsequently at the University of Lusaka, where in 1967 he was appointed Reader and subsequently Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology (later Social Development Studies), posts he held

until 1975. It was now he co-authored with his wife Ray Alexander his most important work, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950* (1969), which set out his views on the relationship between class and racial conflict.

After the 1976 Soweto Uprising, a large number of 'young comrades' fled to the African National Congress (ANC) camps in Southern Angola, where an armed resistance movement, the Umkhonto we Sizwe, was established. Jack, now 70, became political commissar for these forces and spent two periods at the Novo Catengue camp from late 1977 until early 1978 and again from December 1978 to March 1979. He was able to return to Cape Town in March 1990 and died in July 1995. Reflecting on the failure of the communist experiment in an interview towards the end of his life, he observed:

> The collapse of Soviet Communism and of the East European Communist States had a great impact upon me. I came to the conclusion that their attempt to build Communism was premature; that the seizure of power in 1917 was a mistake – I have got lots of theoretical reasons for this – and that we shouldn't try to achieve this; it will fail. I believe, however, that we must keep the socialist idea in front of us because capitalism won't solve the problems.

Jack's relatively tolerant approach to Marxist theory had a significant impact on me. He always told us never to underestimate the enemy and always to understand its strengths and weaknesses. Once when we were discussing the South African Marxist obsession with demonstrating that what we were confronted with was a class and not a racial conflict, he observed: 'If you want to see how a class conflict is transformed so that it looks like an ethnic or racial struggle, you need to look at the history of [the] Tsarist and Habsburg Empires.' These words remained with me and were one of the reasons which ultimately led me to investigate the history of Poland.

I was still a Marxist-Leninist when I went to study at Oxford in the early 1960s. Coming from what we saw as a fascist country, when I began to look for a subject for my doctoral dissertation, I wanted to study the phenomenon of right-radicalism and fascism. I believed (wrongly) that all the interesting topics in the history of German National Socialism had already been investigated and was drawn to analyse what I thought were similar manifestations in Poland. As one who, in spite of my Marxist beliefs, rejected the rigid discipline and bureaucratic character of the Communist Party of South Africa, I was attracted

to what I thought was Władysław Gomułka's independent 'Polish Road to Socialism' and was also greatly impressed by the films of Andrzej Wajda, above all *A Generation* and *Ashes and Diamonds*. I accepted that in a socialist country like Poland, there was an inevitable price to be paid in the form of a loss of freedom. But I believed that this only affected the intelligentsia, which was any case hostile to socialism, and that this loss of freedom was compensated for by the higher rate of economic growth compared to the capitalist West, as well as the greater degree of social justice and equality.

I was quickly disillusioned. It became apparent to me that the loss of freedom affected the whole of society, that it was more far-reaching than in my native country and that it made serious and open discussion of the problems that Poland needed to confront in the period of the 'little stabilization' almost impossible. The economic system, with its shortages and distortions, was clearly much less efficient than that of the West, while Milovan Djilas had clearly been correct when he identified the emergence of new privileged class under socialism.

Under these circumstances, I was greatly impressed by the socialist critique of the regime for allegedly betraying the interests of the workers circulated in 1965 by two young party members, lecturers at Warsaw University, Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, for which they were imprisoned in July 1965 at the end of our first stay in Warsaw. I now began to write critically of Stalin's policies towards Poland during the Second World War and of the establishment and character of the communist system established in Poland after July 1944. I still believed that the communist system could be reformed from within. The years 1967–68 marked my final disillusionment. I was alarmed that the Soviet Union and its allies could pursue policies which seemed aimed at the destruction of the state of Israel, was disgusted that a faction of the Polish United Workers' Party could use crude antisemitic slogans in a bid for power and to discredit the student calls for democratization, and strongly identified with these calls and with Alexander Dubček's attempt to establish communism 'with a human face' in Czechoslovakia. It was particularly painful to me that the African National Congress and the Communist Party of South Africa issued a statement in early September 1968 welcoming the 'fraternal intervention' of the countries of the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia.

I now identified strongly with the developing opposition movement in Poland, with the Workers' Defence Committee and with the Solidarity movement. Like most Poles, I was shocked and surprised by the relative ease with which martial law had been established (I shouldn't

have been – the other side had an army, which we did not). I also now felt much more involved with Jewish life, as I found, to my surprise, that I cared deeply about the survival of the state of Israel and even considered volunteering in the run-up to the war which broke out in June 1967. A number of my friends believed that one of the reasons for the defeat of the first Solidarity movement had been its failure to make a proper reckoning with the chauvinistic and antisemitic currents in Polish life. They encouraged me to seek contacts within the Jewish world to alleviate the obvious gap between Poles and Jews insofar as these are separate and discrete groups, which was clearly not always the case.

They were right to point to the bitter feeling harboured on both sides of this divide. Since the Second World War, the interaction between Poles and Jews has taken place in a number of different arenas. In the first place, a fairly substantial Jewish community did emerge in post-war Poland, numbering at its height nearly 300,000. It proved very difficult to maintain its viability given the memory of the Holocaust, the persistence of antisemitism and the impact of communist politics. As a result, it suffered constant haemorrhaging of numbers, with waves of emigration, particularly after the Kielce pogrom in July 1946, in 1956–57 and in the aftermath of the 'anti-Zionist' campaign of 1968. The end of communism has led to a revival of Jewish life in Poland and today there are perhaps some 30,000 people connected in some way with Jewish life. Throughout the post-war period, Jews from Poland have played an important role both in the investigation of the Polish–Jewish past and in the evolution of Polish–Jewish relations.

Polish Jews were an important element in the *Yishuv* (the Jewish settlement in Palestine) from the beginnings of modern Zionism and their numbers increased after the Second World War and the establishment of the state of Israel. Many had played an important role both in Jewish politics and in Jewish scholarship in Poland, and they continued to do so in Israel. The Second World War saw the emergence of the US as the centre of the largest Jewish community of the diaspora, a community in which Jews from the lands of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth were a very significant element. The country was also the home of a very large Polonia. The US thus became an important area for Polish–Jewish interaction, as did Canada, in which many of the same conditions had developed. The exiled Polish communities in England and France whose members remained in the West after 1945 also played an important role both in the evolution of Polish politics and Polish–Jewish relations.

If one is to understand the evolution of Polish–Jewish relations in the post-war period, developments in all these areas and the interaction between them have to be taken into account. After 1945, Poles and Jews (insofar as these are mutually exclusive categories) were divided, above all, by their diametrically opposed and incompatible views of a shared but divisive past. The experiences of the war and the imposition on Poland of an unpopular and unrepresentative communist dictatorship gave a new lease of life to the 'romantic' view of Polish history, which saw Poland as the 'Christ of nations', a country of heroes and martyrs which had unstintingly sacrificed itself for Western values and whose efforts had never been appreciated or understood by the materialistic West. In this history, Jews figured in a largely negative way. Pre-partition Poland-Lithuania, in this view, had been a 'land without stakes', a country committed to religious toleration which had given the Jews shelter when they had been persecuted elsewhere. Jews had not appreciated this hospitality – they had always remained a people apart with their own language and culture and little sense of loyalty to Poland. They had been, for the most part, better off than most Poles and had always been ready to profit at the latter's expense. In the modern period, this was exemplified by the way in which they had prevented the formation of a 'native' middle class and their refusal to support Polish aspirations in the East at the end of the First World War. They had sought foreign intervention to guarantee them special protection in the inter-war period and had been a key element in the anti-national communist movement.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, Jews had welcomed the Red Army when it treacherously invaded eastern Poland and had collaborated on a large scale with the Soviet occupiers. Under Nazi occupation, Poles had suffered more than any other nation. They had refused to collaborate and their large-scale resistance had led to tremendous suffering, culminating in the German destruction of Warsaw. They were not implicated in the mass murder of Jews on Polish soil – on the contrary, many Poles lost their lives trying to save Jews. Nevertheless, Jews, in this view, played a prominent role in the communist regime after 1944 and in its security apparatus. In the West, Jews have shown little awareness of the complexities of the Polish situation and have constantly blackened the name of Poland.

Not surprisingly, this view of the Polish past was not shared by most Jews. Their image of Poland was shaped partly by their memories of Polish behaviour before, during and after the war and, more particularly, by the views expressed by Polish-Jewish survivors of the Holocaust. Nearly

90 per cent of Poland's three and a half million Jews perished during the Second World War and those who survived had, for the most part, bitter memories. They remembered the anti-Jewish violence which had accompanied the establishment of Polish independence and the intensification of antisemitism after the death of Piłsudski in 1935. They believed that most of their Polish fellow-citizens had been indifferent to the fate of the Jews under Nazi rule and that a significant minority had denounced Jews to the Nazis or had participated in anti-Jewish violence, those who fell into these categories far outnumbering the small number of rescuers. They were shocked by the persistence of antisemitism, as exemplified in the anti-Jewish violence after 1944 and the 'anti-Zionist' purge of 1968, and regarded the attempt to stigmatize the Jews for the behaviour of a small number of communists of Jewish origin as an anti-semitic reflex and an attempt at imposing collective responsibility on the Jews.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the situation began to change. In Poland a new willingness to examine the thorny and difficult problem of Polish–Jewish relations developed out of the growth of interest in the Polish-Jewish past which was a feature of those years. It was increasingly realized in Polish oppositional circles that Poland had been for nearly 700 years one of the main centres of the Jewish diaspora and from the early 1980s, the importance of the development of this community for Polish life was widely recognized. Departments of Jewish history were created at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the University of Warsaw, the University of Lublin and a number of other centres. Interest in the Jewish past became widespread. According to Józef Gierowski, who played a key role in the introduction of lectures on the history of the Polish Jews at the Jagiellonian University in the academic year 1983–84, 'enrollment surpassed our wildest expectations'.[1] Books on Jewish subjects disappeared rapidly from the shops, plays on Jewish themes were sold out, and performances of visiting Israeli dance companies or orchestras were greeted with rapturous applause. Jewish history and culture were also among the subjects studied by the underground 'flying university' in the late 1970s. Similarly, at that time, the Catholic Church and the opposition began to sponsor 'Weeks of Jewish

[1] J.A. Gierowski, 'The Scholarly Activities of Chone Shmeruk in Poland', *POLIN: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 16 (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2003), p. 515.

Culture' in a number of cities, during which schoolchildren and university students attended lectures on Jewish topics and participated in the restoration of Jewish cemeteries. Catholic monthlies like *Znak* and *Więź* devoted entire issues to Jewish topics, a phenomenon which has continued since the end of communism in 1989. One of its most striking manifestations has been the enormously popular annual Festival of Jewish Culture in Kraków.

This interest was partly nostalgic in character. Poland is today practically mono-ethnic and mono-religious (although this homogeneity should not be exaggerated) and there is a genuine sense of loss at the disappearance of the more colourful Poland of the past, with its mixture of religions and nationalities. It does, however, have a deeper character. The experiences of the Solidarity movement in 1980–81 gave the Poles a greater sense of self-esteem. In sharp contrast with the traditional stereotype of the Poles as quixotic and impractical political dreamers, in these years Poland astonished the world by its political maturity. A nonviolent movement challenged the might of the Soviet Empire for nearly a year and a half and though it was finally crushed, it paved the way for the negotiated end of communism less than ten years later. Under these conditions, there was a greater willingness to look at the more controversial aspects of the Polish past and to consider again more critically how the Poles had treated the other peoples alongside whom they had lived, above all the Jews and the Ukrainians.

Increasingly, too, particularly among the younger generation, there was a growing feeling of shame over the events of 1968. At the time, the prevailing mood was that this was merely a settling of accounts among the communist elite and that all the party factions fighting for power were equally tainted. By the late 1970s, however, the realization that one of the consequences of those years had been to deprive Poland of most of what remained of its Jewish intelligentsia and that society had allowed itself to be manipulated by the crude use of antisemitic slogans led to an increasing feeling of anger. The role of the 1968 crisis in depriving the communist regime of political legitimacy has, in general, been greatly underestimated.

In Israel, North America and Europe, there was also a growing awareness of the importance of the Polish-Jewish past. A number of Polish-trained historians had settled in Israel and played a crucial role in the development of the academic activities of Yad Vashem. One key figure here was Yisrael Gutman, who was born in Warsaw, participated in the Warsaw ghetto revolt, survived Auschwitz and wrote standard accounts

both of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and the experience of the Jews in Warsaw under Nazi occupation.[2] Another was Chone Shmeruk, who was born in Warsaw and who came to Israel in 1949. His academic interests covered all aspects of the Polish-Jewish past, from 'hasidism and the hasidim' and Haskalah to the development of modern Yiddish canonical and non-canonical literature both in Poland and the Soviet Union. He was one of the founders of the Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry in 1956 and was a key figure in the establishment in 1983 of the Centre for Study and Research on Polish Jewry at the Hebrew University in 1983.

In the US, the atmosphere was also changing. In September 1979, representatives of the American Jewish Committee and Polish-American cultural, religious and academic organizations met at St Mary's College, Orchard Lake, Michigan and established the Polish-American Jewish-American Task Force 'to overcome misunderstanding and to promote mutual respect' by exploring shared historical experiences and contemporary common concerns. They adopted a clear agenda in the Orchard Lake Statement: to combat the vicious circle of polemics between the communities, to generate a balanced view of the history of Polish–Jewish relations and to work together to advance human rights on a global scale. The hope was to overcome the bitterness of the recent past and to re-establish 'Polish–Jewish alliances of earlier centuries'.[3] By 1988, the organization was so well-established that it transformed itself into the National Polish-American Jewish-American Council (NPAJAC) with the backing of the Polish American Congress (PAC) and the American Jewish Committee. The PAC withdrew in 1996 after objections to the antisemitic utterances of its President, Edward Moskal, but the key Polish figures on the Council remained associated with it.

In 1981, the Task Force had proposed a national conference on Polish Christian–Jewish relations and this took place at Columbia University

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[2] His account in Hebrew of the Warsaw ghetto revolt, *Mered hanotsrim: Mordekhay Anielevich ve'milkhamot getto Varsha* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1963), and his English-language *The Jews of Warsaw 1939–1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982) are the standard works on the subject.

[3] *The Orchard Lake Statement on Polish-American–Jewish-American Relations,* 4. Central Connecticut State University, Polish American Archives, Revd. Leonard F. Chrobot (CP), Orchard Lake Statement File, quoted in S. Blejwas. 'The National Polish American-Jewish American Council: A Short History', *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 19 (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), p. 257.

in March 1983 on the theme of 'Poles and Jews: Myth and Reality in the Historical Context'. It was preceded by a pre-conference symposium, 'Poles and Jews in the New World', which showed how far apart the two sides still were and how much needed to be done to overcome mutual acrimony. The academic side of the conference was more successful in spite of the fact that the Polish authorities allowed only two participants from Poland to attend. It was opened by Salo Baron, the nestor of Jewish historiography in the US and the holder of the first chair in Jewish history here, and among those participating were many who were to play a key role in the development of Polish-Jewish studies in subsequent years.

The real breakthrough came in 1984. The first major event of this year was the tour of Poland organized in the spring by Chone Shmeruk, the Professor of Yiddish at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The impact on those who participated was enormous. According to one of them, David Assaf, this:

> was one of the formative experiences in my life. Since then, tens of thousands of Israelis have been to Poland. But at the time, relations between the two countries were in their early stages, and this was the first real contact between Israeli and Polish scholars since the Holocaust. The encounter with Poland (then still under Jaruzelski's martial regime) and its Jewish sites made an incredibly strong impression on me, a young Israeli who had grown up in a traditional home, with Yiddish-speaking parents originally from Poland, but whose ears were unattuned to anything that carried the flavour of *Galut*.[4]

Its impact on Polish scholars interested in the Polish-Jewish past was equally dramatic. To quote Józef Gierowski:

> [Professor Shmeruk] visited the Jagiellonian University and, if I may use the biblical phrase, he opened our eyes . . . [he] understood that cooperation between scholars from Israel and Poland was the necessary basis for the further development of this field of research, and an important goal of his visit to Poland was to pave the way for such cooperation. The attitude of Professor Shmeruk and his colleagues and the information on the activities of the Centre in Jerusalem facilitated our initial understanding and our decision to cooperate.[5]

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[4] Personal communication to the author.

[5] Gierowski, 'The Scholarly Activities of Chone Shmeruk in Poland', p. 516.

Then in late September, a second major academic conference on the theme of 'Polish–Jewish Relations in Modem History' was held in Oxford. A crucial role in its organization was played by Rafael Scharf, a Jew from Kraków who had settled in London. On this occasion, interventions with the Polish Embassy in London ensured the participation of a substantial number of scholars from Poland, including Jerzy Tomaszewski of Warsaw, Jozef Gierowski and Jerzy Turowicz, the editor of the liberal Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny.* This conference built on the experience of Columbia and the exchanges were both more honest and more sincere. In particular, the vexed question of the Holocaust was now discussed in a frank and empathetic manner. In Gierowski's words:

> The conference represented a crucial moment in the improvement of understanding and cooperation between Polish and Jewish scholars. Both sides agreed that objective research was the best way to overcome the mutually negative stereotypes existing in both nations. Only by searching for the truth and authenticating it can we promote better understanding. This principle would become the basis for all our subsequent joint activities.[6]

Further conferences followed. First, in the spring of 1986, 180 scholars gathered at Brandeis University for a conference devoted to 'The History of Jews in Poland between the World Wars'. At the end of September of that year, the first such conference to take place in Poland was held at the Jagiellonian University on the theme of 'Jewish Autonomy in Pre-partitioned Poland'. Rafael Scharf's comments on this occasion were apposite:

> What is happening at the conference is far less important than the fact that it is taking place at all. As I attend the lectures here and meet colleagues in the halls, I sometimes get the impression, for a few minutes at least, that this is just another normal academic conference, and then I remember that this is Poland, where so much has happened. And then I say to myself 'Think where this is taking place' and I feel it is incredible.[7]

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[6] *Ibid*.

[7] Quoted in Antony Polonsky, 'Kraków Conference on Jewish Autonomy in Prepartition Poland', *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 16(3) (1986), 49–53.

The culmination of this series of conferences took place in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University between 31 January and 5 February 1988. It was the largest and most ambitious conference and was attended by over 300 scholars (80 from Poland), who presented 170 papers in 44 sessions.

This sequence of conferences created a new situation. In the first place, it created an international cadre of scholars involved in Polish-Jewish history and provided them with a forum in which they could express their views. Before 1980, the number of publications in this field, particularly in English, was very small. Volumes were produced of the conference papers given at Oxford, Brandeis and Kraków. More importantly, at Oxford the decision was taken to establish a scholarly annual, first entitled *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies* and later renamed *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*. From its inception, its international editorial board transcended ideological and ethnic frontiers. It attempted to encourage research on an interdisciplinary basis and sought contributions from many disciplines – history, sociology, politics, anthropology, linguistics, literature and folklore – and from a wide variety of viewpoints. In the first issue, the editors wrote in their introductory statement:

> Today, when organized Jewish life barely survives on Polish soil, it is vital for Jews to preserve the memory of a world from which so many of us are descended and from which we derive so many of the vital springs of our being. Among Poles, too, there is a new willingness to investigate the past of a people who for ten centuries lived in close proximity to them and whose history constituted an integral part of the development of the Polish lands . . . Our aim is to preserve and enlarge our collective memory, to investigate all aspects of our common past. We believe that there should be no taboo subjects and no topics too sensitive to be discussed. Our columns are open to all those of good will. We ask only that they write honestly and with respect for historical facts.[8]

As one of its founders and its chief editor from its inception, I am not the right person to assess *Polin*'s achievements. Let me quote John Klier:

> While there had been other journals devoted in whole or in part of the Jews of Eastern Europe, they were either in languages inaccessible

[8] 'Statement from the Editors', *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, 1 (1986), 1–2.

> to the English-language reader, or focused more on current events. The growth and coverage of *Polin* has been truly remarkable . . . From the very beginning, *Polin* has defined its geographical and subject area as broadly as possible. Thus, virtually every territory that has been associated with Polish history and culture is considered to fall within the purview of the annual, not just ethnic Poland . . . The journal has produced a number of outstanding themed issues, such as those devoted to the Jews in Warsaw (no. 3) Lodz (no. 6), and Galicia (no. 12), in early modern (no. 10) and inter-war Poland (no. 8), as well as religion (no. 15) and popular culture (no. 16). The offerings of *Polin* have been rich enough to produce two spin-off collections, *The Jews in Warsaw* (1991) and *From Shtetl to Socialism: Studies from Polin* (1993). It is also important to note what is not in *Polin*, or rather, what does not submerge everything else, the Holocaust. This is not an issue which is ignored. Every single issue of *Polin* has had an article or book review on some aspect of the Holocaust on Polish soil. A special issue, no. 13, was devoted to 'The Holocaust and its Aftermath'. Nor has *Polin* skirted the most painful questions of Polish–Jewish relations during this period. The second issue (1987) carried a translation of Jan Błoński's famous essay, 'The Poor Poles Looks at the Ghetto', first published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, and which provoked such a stormy debate in Poland about Polish attitudes towards the destruction of Polish Jewry. Volume 13 contained articles on the Kielce pogrom of 1946, and a comparison of anti-Jewish violence in Poland in the two periods 1918–1939 and 1945–1947. The annual has carried articles on the controversies surrounding the memorialization of the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. *Polin*'s editors make no effort to disguise the significance of the Holocaust as the greatest problem bedeviling Polish–Jewish relations. Indeed, they have been prime movers in the insistence that true reconciliation cannot come about until these issues are forthrightly confronted and discussed with polemic. Yet, at the same time, the editors have not allowed the Holocaust to eclipse the full panoply of Jewish history and culture in Poland, or the pre-Holocaust relations of Christian Poles and Jewish Poles.[9]

The new degree of trust established by the exchanges and personal ties created by the series of conferences was reflected in the controversy

[9] J. Klier, 'Puck and the Fairies: Restoring the Jews to East European History', paper delivered at the International Conference on the History of the Jews in Kraków, Kraków, 2005.

over Claude Lanzmann's 1985 film *Shoah*. When it was first shown in Paris, it was bitterly attacked by the official Polish press as an anti-Polish provocation and the Polish government even delivered a note of protest to the French government, which had partly financed the film. However, in the spring of 1985, the Polish Embassy in London, whose minister counsellor had played a key role in facilitating the participation of scholars from Poland at the Oxford conference, approached the Institute for Polish Jewish Studies in Oxford and suggested that it organize a showing of the film in Oxford (in fact the British premiere of the film) at which prominent Polish and Jewish scholars would be present and would discuss the film. The showing took place with the participation of both the Polish and French Embassies on Sunday 22 September 1985. Among those who took part in the all-day discussion on Monday 23 September were Claude Lanzmann himself, Jerzy Turowicz, Professors Jerzy Tomaszewski of Warsaw and Józef Gierowski of Kraków, Józef Garliński and Rafael Scharf of London, Michał Borwicz of Paris and Abe Brumberg of Washington DC.

The discussion was heated, partly because of the abrasive personality of Lanzmann, but it enabled an important circle of opinion makers in Poland to see the film, which had been denounced but not shown in the country. The showing and discussion reached the Polish press, with articles in *Życie Warszawy* (27 September 1985) and *Polityka* (2 November 1985). The film had already been given a serious and favourable review in *Polityka* by Artur Sandauer on 3 August 1985. The Oxford showing was one of the factors which led the Polish government finally to allow the screening of the film in Poland.

When this took place, reactions were mixed. There was a favourable but critical review by Jerzy Turowicz in *Tygodnik Powszechny* on 10 November 2005 and a devastating attack on Kazimierz Kąkol's review in *Prawo i Życie* by Andrzej Krzysztof Wróblewski on 16 November 1985, in which he linked the campaign against *Shoah* with the 1968 anti-Zionist campaign. *Tygodnik Powszechny* published a second favourable review by Tadeusz Szyma on 2 March 1986. Most Poles rejected Lanzmann's division of European society during the Holocaust (particularly in Poland) into the murderers, their victims and the bystanders, largely unsympathetic to the fate of the Jews. Yet many were shocked by his interviews with Polish peasants living in the vicinity of the death camps, which revealed the persistence of crude antisemitic stereotypes in the Polish countryside. For Catholics, which of course meant the overwhelming majority of Poles, Lanzmann's argument that Nazi antisemitism was the logical culmination of Christian antisemitism

was also unacceptable. But it, too, forced a re-examination of many strongly held attitudes.

In the US, the controversy over *Shoah* was also, with some difficulty, directed into productive channels. Gary Rubin, the American Jewish Committee's (AJC) Deputy Director of National Affairs, issued a statement explaining why the Jewish community 'will see in *Shoah* a unique opportunity to interpret their continuing concern with the Holocaust to new audiences', but recognizing that there would be a 'more ambivalent' Polish-American response.[10] The Polish-American Jewish-American Task Force issued guidelines for local dialogues and urged that they be followed 'with great sensitivity to the deep meaning of this event to both Poles and Jews'. It was necessary 'to demolish the myths of Jewish passivity in the face of their own slaughter and Polish cooperation with the Nazis'. The general framework of dialogue should recognize 'the unique Nazi attack against the Jews aimed at their total annihilation', while the attack on 'the Polish nation aimed at the extermination of its leaders and the reduction of its people to slavery'. It was hoped that non-Polish and non-Jewish commentators would take into account Polish and Jewish sensitivities and, pointing to issues where Jews and Poles had cooperated, it concluded that 'we must continue working together on issues of mutual importance in the future at the same time we seek to understand our past'.[11]

In Chicago, a local 'Polish American/Jewish American Dialogue Constructed around *Shoah*' was established, which reached a consensus after difficult exchanges. The Polish-American participants expressed 'compassion for the Jewish grief and profound sense of loss over the systematic annihilation of six million of their people', recognition for the uniqueness of the Holocaust for Jews and understanding for Jewish indignation at the indifference to these events displayed by the leaders of Allied nations and others in positions of authority, and at East European antisemitism. In turn, the Jewish-American side expressed 'compassion toward the Polish Americans' sense of grief and loss over the death of three million non-Jewish Poles at the hands of [the] Nazis'. Both expressed the hope that American pluralism would enable Poles

[10] G. Rubin, 'The Film *Shoah*: Understanding Jewish and Polish Responses', Immigration History Research Centre, University of Minnesota (henceforth IHRC), Papers of Aloysius A. Mazewski (henceforth AAM), box 127, file 5.
[11] The Rev. Leonard F. Chrobot and Mr Harold Gales, 'Statement on Reactions to the Film *Shoah*', 21 February 1986. IHRC, AAM, box 127, file 4.

and Jews 'to move beyond the troubled past' to a a common future 'in America'.[12]

The Oxford conference was also a key factor in leading Jan Błoński to write his article 'Biedni Polacy patrzą na ghetto' ('The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto') in *Tygodnik Powszechny* on 11 January 1987, which was a major turning point in the discussion of Polish-Jewish issues in post-war Poland. At that conference, Rafael Scharf had delivered a speech with the telling title *Cum ira et studio*, in which he expressed his pain at the fact the 'fabric of Polish–Jewish cohabitation on Polish soil has been irreversibly destroyed'. He referred to the 'trauma of unreciprocated love' of the Jews of 'this last generation, nearing its close', who 'cannot erase from their hearts this country where 'they were born and grew up', where . . . they loved the landscape, the language, the poetry; where they were ready to shed their blood for Poland and to be her true sons. That this was evidently not enough leaves them broken-hearted'.

He concluded:

> The paths of 'two of the saddest nations on this earth' have parted for ever. I wonder how far the Poles are aware of the fact that with the

[12] Statement of the Chicago Polish American-Jewish American Dialogue around the the film Shoah'. IHRC, AAM, box 58, file 4; box 127, file 6. The signatories were: Jerry Biederman, former President, Chicago AJC Chapter; Edwin Chudecki (deceased) Vice-President of the Copernicus Foundation; Howard Gilbert, chair of the AJC National Jewish Communal Affairs Commission; Sharon Greenberg, the executive board of the AJC Chicago chapter; Matilda Jakubowski, commissioner of the Illinois Commission on Human Relations; Mitchel Kobelinski, President of the Chicago chapter of the American Foundation for Polish-Jewish Studies and of the Copernicus Foundation; John Kulczycki, Associate Professor of History, University of Illinois at Chicago; Marcia E. Lazar, President of the AJC Chicago chapter and Vice-President of the Chicago chapter of the American Foundation for Polish-Jewish Studies; Jonathan Levine, Midwest AJC Regional Director; Kazimierz Łukomski, national PAC Vice-President; Lucyna Migala, Vice-President and Program Director, WCEV Radio; Rev. John Pawlikowski, Professor of Social Ethics, Catholic Theological Union and member of the US Holocaust Memorial Council; alderman Roman Pucinski, President of PAC Illinois Division; David G. Roth, AJC National Ethnic Liaison; Rabbi Herman E. Schaalman, former national President of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and Vice-President of the Chicago AJC Chapter; Esta G. Star, Vice-President and Chair of the Chicago AJC Chapter Interreligious Affairs Commission; Dr Ewa Trzcinska-Meyerhoff, Vice-President of the Kościuszko Foundation's Chicago Chapter; Wojciech Wierzewski, editor of PNA *Zgoda*; and Maynard I. Wishner, honourary AJC President and former Chair of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago.

> Jews an authentic part of *their* Poland was obliterated. The question begs to be asked: Will that Poland one day be better, richer in spiritual and material goods, without the Jews?[13]

This evoked Błoński's response, in which he called on the Poles to accept some degree of responsibility for the fate of their Jewish fellow-citizens under the Nazi occupation. He explicitly referred to Scharf's speech as the spur which led him to take up his pen:

> I recall one moving speech at the Oxford conference, in which the speaker started by comparing the Jewish attitude to Poland to unrequited love. Despite the suffering and all the problems which beset our mutual relations, he continued, the Jewish community had a genuine attachment to their adopted country. Here they found a home, a sense of security. There was, conscious or unconscious, an expectation that their fate would improve, the burden of humilitation would lighten, that the futere would gradually become brighter. What actually happened was exactly the opposite. 'Nothing can ever change now', he concluded. 'Jews do not have an cannot have any future in Poland. Do tell us, though', he finally demanded, 'that what has happened to us was not our fault. We do not ask for anything else. But we do hope for such and acknowledgment'.

Błoński then went on to observe that any attempt by the Poles to discuss the Polish reactions to the Nazi anti-Jewish genocide, whether with Jews or with other people, very quickly degenerated into apologetics and attempts to justify Polish conduct. The reason for this, he claimed, was the Poles' fear, whether conscious or unconscious, of themselves being accused either of participation in this genocide or, at best, of observing it with acquiescence. This fear cannot be easily evaded, even if it is shared by the Poles with the rest of Europe. The only way to deal with it, he asserted, was for the Poles to 'stop haggling, trying to defend and justify ourselves. To stop arguing about the things that were beyond our power to do, during the occupation and beforehand. Nor to place blame on political, social and economic conditions. But to say first of all, "Yes, we are guilty"'.

This guilt did not consist, in his view, of involvement in the mass murder of the Jews, in which he claimed the Poles did not participate

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[13] Rafael Scharf, 'In Anger and in Sorrow', *Polin: A Journal of Polish-Jewish Studies*, 1 (1986), 270–77.

significantly. It had two aspects. First, there was the Poles' 'insufficient effort to resist', their 'holding back' from offering help to the Jews. This was the consequence of the second aspect – that the Poles had not in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created conditions in which the Jews could be integrated into the Polish national community:

> If only we had behaved more humanely in the past, had been wiser, more generous, then genocide would perhaps have been 'less imaginable', would probably have been considerably more difficult to carry out, and almost certainly would have met with much greater resistance than it did. To put it differently, it would not have met with the indifference and moral turpitude of the society in whose full view it took place.[14]

The controversy over Błoński's article revealed that the desire to come to terms with the more problematic aspects of the Polish-Jewish past was still to be found only within a minority of the Polish intelligentsia and was certainly not shared by society as a whole. Błoński's position was rejected by most of the 200 individuals who participated in the debate. Characteristically, similar criticism was voiced by people with very different ideological backgrounds, ranging from communist official circles to the right wing of Solidarity. Many accused Błoński and the editors of *Tygodnik Powszechny* of playing into the hands of Poland's enemies and of endorsing anti-Polish propaganda, and some even called for Błoński to be prosecuted under the Polish criminal code for 'slandering the Polish nation'.

The most articulate expression of this view was given by Władysław Siła-Nowicki. He attacked those who argued that the Polish record during the Second World War in relation to the Jews should be strongly assailed, arguing that such views played into the hands of Poland's enemies and lent credibility to 'anti-Polish propaganda'. He then rehearsed the basic arguments of Polish apologetics. For centuries, he asserted, when they were expelled elsewhere, Jews were able to settle in Poland and their numbers increased remarkably. The hostility they aroused before 1939 was moderate considering their privileged position. They 'dominated' certain professions and controlled a 'disproportionate part' of wealth in Poland. The pre-war quota on university admissions (the

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[14] English translation: Jan Błoński, 'The Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto' in Antony Polonsky (ed.), *'My Brother's Keeper?' Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 34–52.

numerus clausus) for Jews was justified since 'it is natural for a society to defend itself against the numerical domination of its intelligentsia'. During the war, no European nation did more to assist Jews than Poland, where the risk of such assistance was the greatest, the normal penalty being death – and death not only of the individual, but of his or her family as well. Polish suffering during the occupation was enormous, second only to that of the Jews. There were, he argued, no quislings in Poland, and the Polish underground sentenced those who betrayed Jews to the Nazis to death. It was the passivity of the Jews more than anything else that led to their destruction. Habits of accommodation, presumably different from those of the rebellious, insurrectionary Poles, led them to go to their deaths without offering resistance. He concluded defiantly (and inconsistently):

> I am proud of my nation's stance in every respect during the period of occupation and in this I include the attitude towards the tragedy of the Jewish nation. Obviously, attitudes towards the Jews during that period do not give us a particular reason to be proud, but neither are they any grounds for shame, and even less for ignominy. Simply, we could have done relatively little more than we actually did.[15]

Yet in spite of views of this sort, Błoński's article did signal a new attitude in Poland and was understood in this sense by those Jews involved in the Polish–Jewish interaction. Scharf was deeply affected by Błoński's article. He commented on it in his contribution to the discussion on 'Ethical Problems of the Holocaust' at the Jerusalem Conference in February 1988:

> I read Błoński's article, for the first time, with growing excitement and quickened pulse. At one point he makes reference to one of the speakers at the conference in Oxford in 1984, whose words, he said, inspired him to ponder these matters. From the words quoted by him it was clear that he was referring to me. I was startled and also moved to see how one word, a sentence, a thought can strike another man's mind, can germinate there and bear fruit beyond expectation. I was talking then, at least that is how Błoński understood it, to the effect that we Jews no longer expected anything from the Poles but the admission that they have been, in some way, at fault. For many years,

[15] English translation: Władysław Siła-Nowicki, 'A Reply to Jan Błoński' in Polonsky (ed.), *'My Brother's Keeper?'*, pp. 59–68.

> we listened, waited for a sign – but we heard no voices. In the end, I had thought that we would be straining our ears in vain. But now, at last, we hear the voice of Błoński . . .
>
> More than a year has passed since Błoński's voice sounded. I would like to assure all those who feared that it would have a harmful effect on Poland that quite the opposite has occurred. His article is seen, in itself, as a certain rehabilitation of sorts. When, paradoxiacally and undeservedly, I am put in the role of an *advocatus Poloniae*, I myself, in many instances, recall this article and those which followed. I maintain that one can no longer speak loosely about the Poles' opinion on the subject without taking into consideration these new voices, which save the reputation of Poland.[16]

The parameters of the debate in Poland in the 1990s seemed to have been set by Sila-Nowicki and Błoński. Indeed, the 1990s saw a series of set-piece debates similar to those aroused by Błoński's article, among them one initiated by the publication in the main Polish daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 29/30 January 1994 of an article by a young (non-Jewish) historian, Michał Cichy, which discussed anti-Jewish attitudes and actions by Polish military organizations and the civilian population during the 63-day Warsaw Uprising. A second was provoked by the exchange in the pages of the Roman Catholic *Tygodnik Powszechny* in late 1997 between Fathers Stanisław Musiał and Waldemar Chrostowski on the reaction of the Polish hierarchy to the antisemitic utterances of Solidarity hero Lech Wałęsa's Gdańsk priest, Father Henryk Jankowski, while a third was stimulated by sociologist Hanna Świda-Ziemba's article 'The Disgrace of Indifference' in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 17 August 1998, which repeated in sharper form the arguments set out by Błoński.

What is striking about these debates is their moral character. It is no accident that several of them took place in a Catholic periodical. They are mostly conducted by theologians, philosophers and literary critics. This is why Jerzy Turowicz, the veteran editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny* who died in 1998, found it necessary to point out that the argument between the two sides was 'conducted on totally different planes'.[17]

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[16] Rafael Scharf, 'Ethical Problems of the Holocaust in Poland' in Polonsky (ed.), '*My Brother's Keeper?*', pp. 196–97.

[17] Jerzy Turowicz, 'Polish Reasons and Jewish Reasons' in Polonsky (ed.), '*My Brother's Keeper?*', p. 138.

At the same time, two new developments stimulated a more fundamental rethinking of attitudes towards Jews and the 'Jewish question'. A large mass of new historical material has provided a much fuller picture of Polish–Jewish relations in the twentieth century, and the emergence of a new generation of Polish-Jewish writers has brought with it a new and unique voice to the debate.

From the new research, a clear and unambiguous picture is emerging. In an important review article in *Tygodnik Powszechny* on 22 October 2000, Maria Janion pointed out that although Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* has many flaws, his concept of 'eliminationist antisemitism' is a useful analytical tool. She argued that there are several stages before a society adopts such a stance: Jews are first seen as undesirable and unworthy of receiving full rights; then comes a demand for the voluntary or compulsory removal of the bulk of Jews from society; and only later does the move to mass murder occur. Janion argued persuasively that by the 1930s, the majority in Polish society and in Polish political parties had arrived at the position that the 'solution' of the 'Jewish problem' was the voluntary or compulsory removal of most Jews from Poland. These difficult conclusions were increasingly incorporated into the scholarly consensus in Poland in the 1990s.

The second important development was the emergence of some new Polish-Jewish writers and the more widespread distribution in Poland of the works of already-established Polish-Jewish authors. The 1990s were marked by an outburst of creativity by Hanna Krall and Henryk Grynberg, and the publication of important new writers like Wilhelm Dichter and works by authors like Michał Głowiński, who dealt extensively with their previously concealed Jewish backgrounds. All had in common their experience in the war as children hidden on the 'Aryan' side and their maturing into adults in the complex post-war years. Their work gave a graphic and largely negative picture of what it was like to be a Jew in a hostile environment both during the war and under communism.

This is the context for the debate provoked by the publication of Jan Gross' *Neighbors* (2001), first published as *Sąsiedzi: Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (*Neighbors: The History of the Destruction of a Jewish Shtetl*, 2000). On the basis of evidence produced for a trial in 1949, the book describes in detail an incident in 1941 in the town of Jedwabne in the north-east of today's Poland in which, with some German incitement but little actual assistance, the local population brutally murdered the overwhelming majority of its Jewish neighbours. Almost the entire Jewish population, along with many Jewish refugees from other localities, were driven out of their homes and herded to the

marketplace. Many were beaten to death with poles, brooms or axes. Some were murdered at the Jewish cemetery. The vast majority of them (perhaps as many as 700) were forced to enter a barn near the cemetery, which was then set on fire, burning alive those inside.

The debate on Jedwabne has been the most serious, protracted and profound on the issue of Polish–Jewish relations since the end of the war. At the commemoration service held in Jedwabne in July 2001, the sixtieth anniversary of the massacre, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski gave an address:

> We express our pain and shame, we give expression to our determination in seeking to learn the truth, our courage in overcoming an evil past, our unbending will for understanding and harmony. Because of this crime we should beg the shadows of the dead and their families for forgiveness. Therefore, today, as a citizen and as the President of the Polish Republic, I apologize. I apologize in the name of those Poles whose conscience is moved by that crime.[18]

The Church was more equivocal. In particular, Cardinal Jozef Glemp, then the Primate of the Polish Roman Catholic Church, failed to provide a clear lead. Although he acknowledged in a statement on 4 March 2001 the seriousness of what had happened in Jedwabne, on 14 May of that year, after promising that the Church would apologize for wrongs to the Jews, he asked rhetorically: 'We wonder if the Jews shouldn't recognize their own guilt toward the Poles – particularly for cooperating with Bolsheviks, sending Poles to prison and degrading so many of their fellow citizens.' Some members of the hierarchy expressed more contrition. Archbishop Henryk Muszyński, in an interview with *Tygodnik Powszechny* on 25 March 2001, admitted that 'some Polish residents of Jedwabne' were 'direct perpetrators of the crime' and referred to the removal of the old monument in Jedwabne, holding the Germans responsible for the massacre, as 'symbolic of the beginning of the end of the era of falsification, instrumentalization, and the ideologizing of the truth'. For this process to continue, Poles, like the Pope, would have to ask for forgiveness for 'wrongdoing and sins against the Jews'. This should take the form of joint participation with Jews in a 'community of prayer'.

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[18] The speech is reproduced in Antony Polonsky and Joanna Michlic (eds), *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 130–32.

It is not clear how far Polish society has followed the lead given, not umabiguously, by members of its elite. In an article which appeared in late April 2001 in the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*, the historian Andrzej Paczkowski presented a typology of the discussion which, as he rightly observed, concerned less the events as such than the 'range, intensity and nature of Polish antisemitism'. He identified four categories: first, the 'affirmative', which upholds Gross' basic premises and is particularly concerned about their moral ramifications; second, the 'defensive open' genre, which accepts some of Gross' conclusions, but raises questions about his research priorities and methods, and stresses the nature of German participation in the atrocity; third, the 'defensive closed', which generally portrays some Poles as, at worst, unwitting helpers of the Nazis or as motivated largely by a desire to retaliate for the various wrongs perpetrated against them by Jews who worked for the Soviet forces and the Soviet secret police in 1939–41; and, finally, the letters and articles aiming to refute Gross' book *tout court*, often resorting to established antisemitic tropes, from deicide to the mounting of perfidious conspiracies against Poland.

In scholarly terms, the debate has largely been settled by the publication of the two-volume report of the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (IPN), *Wokół Jedwabnego* (*About Jedwabne*, 2002), edited by Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak. The first volume consists of eight essays by members of the IPN staff, while the second provides documents with commentaries grouped under three headings: Polish–Jewish relations during the Soviet occupation; the operations of the Wehrmacht and police units in the area in 1941; and records of post-war trials. Also of importance is Anna Bikont's *My z Jedwabnego* (*We from Jedwabne*, 2004), an investigation by a well-known journalist into the memory of the massacre in contemporary Jedwabne.

Popular attitudes are more confused, although it does seem that the debate was the start of a process by which the larger society has also begun to come to terms with the 'dark' side of its past. Ultimately, what the debate revealed, both in the scholarly community and in society at large, was a division over attitudes to the past which went beyond the Jewish issue. According to Andrzej Paczkowski, one of 'the most significant phenomena of the last fifteen years has been the emergence, concretization (also in political life) of competing positions in the sphere of memory and in relation to the national past'.[19] At the

[19] *Ibid*., passim.

same time, that part of society willing to accept a self-critical attitude to the Polish past does appear to be the larger and seems to be growing. It seems to me that in spite of the many discordant voices, the response of Polish society has been positive and has led to a new awareness of the need to confront the more problematic aspects of the national past which have affected not only our understanding of the Polish-Jewish past but also of Polish–German and Polish–Ukrainian relations.

An encouraging aspect of the debate about Jedwabne was the more nuanced understanding of the Polish situation in the Jewish world that it revealed. The reaction to the publication of Gross' book in an English translation in 2002 did not fulfil the alarmist predictions of those who feared that it would lead to a widespread assumption in the Jewish world that the Poles were as guilty as the Germans for the mass murder of the Jews during the Second World War. On the contrary, there was considerable understanding in the Jewish world for the way in which the Poles reacted to the exposé of the tragic events in Jewabne. The American Jewish Committee organized a delegation of Polish Americans and American Jews to attend the dedication of the monument in Jedwabne in July 2001. In the introduction to the pamphlet written by one member of this group, Professor Alvin Rosenfeld of Indiana University, David Harris, the AJC Executive Director, wrote:

> The need to heal the wounds stretches from President Kwatniewski to the townspeople of Jedwabne and the surrounding villages and reaches around the world, where Polish and Jewish descendants seek paths to reconciliation . . . Today, while Jedwabne is judenrein, remarkably Jewish life in other parts of Poland is beginning to stir. If the ghosts of the past are properly exhumed and courageously confronted – and, fortunately, there are a number of Poles dedicated to this goal, with whom we collaborate closely – who knows if there will not be another glorious chapter in Jewish-Polish history ahead?

To be sure, there was an acrimonious correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement* following Abraham Brumberg's review of Gross' book. This reflected some of the sentiments that the revelations of the Jedwabne massacre and the subsequent debate provoked among surviving Polish Jews. Yet most Jewish responses were more moderate. In Israel the tone was set by the introductions written by Israel Gutman and David Engel to the Hebrew edition of *Neighbors*. Gutman stressed the

importance of coming to terms with the past and stated that it was not possible to hold all Poles responsible for the massacre. Engel, for his part, compared the debate to that provoked by the revisionist 'new historians' in Israel.

In the US, the responses were similar. Samuel Kassow, writing in *Forwards*, asserted: 'In fairness, Jedwabne was more the exception than the rule. Indifference rather than murder best characterized Polish attitudes, and Poland still furnished more "righteous gentiles" than any other occupied country. But the murder of Jews certainly created new and unforeseen opportunities for neighbors who were otherwise decent people.'

The Jewish response was perhaps best summed up by Rabbi Jacob Baker, who left Jedwabne shortly before the war and who spoke movingly at the commemoration service of the long history of the Jews in the area. In his interview with Krzysztof Darewicz of Rzeczpospolita on 10 March 2001, he remarked: 'The most important thing is that the silence has been broken. That you have begun to tell the truth about Jedwabne, for it was not possible to wait any longer. Of those Jews born in Jedwabne only a handful remain. But their families number in the thousands, maybe tens of thousands. They deserve that truth above all. But so do all Jews and all Poles also. For only on this basis is it possible to build anew the friendship between us.'

This was clear in the debate over Gross' next book, first published in English in June 2006 as *Fear* and in January 2008 in a slightly different version in Polish as *Strach*. It describes the anti-Jewish violence in Poland after the Second World War, focusing on the Kielce pogrom of July 1946. The neo-nationalist right mounted a concerted campaign against the book, which was published by Znak, a leading Catholic publishing house, and even attempted (unsuccessfully) to have Gross tried for defaming the Polish nation under a law passed by the government of Lech Kaczyński. Yet although some more moderate historians criticized Gross for excessive moralization, there was little reaction from the wider society and younger Poles in particular seem to have accepted his damning account of the persistence of antisemitism and anti-Jewish violence in the post-war years, and of the failure of the Church to act effectively to curb it. According to Henryk Woźniakowski, the Director of Znak: 'The basic reason we published the book was to promote the truth about history, to overcome the vestiges of antisemitism that continue to linger in our society, as well as to confirm our commitment to the Christian moral principles on which those who created our organization drew, and

to which we, in the new conditions of today, are attempting to remain faithful.'[20]

Indeed, Gross' work, including his most recent book (written with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *Złote Zniwo: rzecz o tym, co się działo na obrzeżach zagłady Żydów* (2011) and translated into English as *Golden Harvest: Events at the Periphery of the Holocaust* (2012)), which describes how looters attempted to find Jewish valuables on the terrain of the former death camps, has stimulated a new school of Holocaust historians in Poland at the *Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów* (Centre for Studies of the Jewish Holocaust) in Warsaw, who have concentrated on the final stage of the Holocaust in Poland which took place after the liquidation of the ghettos in the large towns. In the smaller towns of Poland, the ghettos were more porous and many Jews were able to escape them – one of these historians, Andrzej Żbikowski, estimates this figure as being over 300,000. However, Polish–Jewish relations in these towns had been more distant before the war. The Jews who sought shelter among the local population often did not find it and fewer than 50,000, according to his estimate, survived to the end of the war, being hunted down by the German occupying authorities and often betrayed by the local population and, in some well-documented cases, murdered by Home Army units.[21] Such was the fate of the Trinczer family in Gniewczyna in south-east Poland, described in the Catholic monthly *Znak* in 2008 in articles by Dariusz Libionka and Tadeusz Markiel, an eye-witness. It has now been the subject of a book-length study by Alina Skibińska and Tadeusz Markiel.[22]

This is not to say that the process of achieving mutual understanding between Poles and Jews has always proceeded smoothly. The year 2013 was marked by two developments which pointed in radically different directions. April saw the opening on the seventieth anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising of the impressive building of the long-planned Museum of the History of Polish Jews. It is located on the highly symbolic *Płac bohaterów getta* (Ghetto Heroes Square), the site of the imposing monument of Natan Rappoport to the 'Jewish People, its

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[20] Quoted in *Gazeta*, 16(1) (Spring 2008).

[21] Andrzej Żbikowski, '"Night Guard": Holocaust Mechanisms in the Polish Rural Areas, 1942–1945', *East European Politics and Societies*, 25(3) (2011), 512–29.

[22] Alina Skibińska and Tadeusz Markiel, *Jakie to ma znaczenie, czy zrobili to z chciwości? Zagłada domu Trynczerów* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011).

Martyrs and Fighters' and also of monuments to Jan Karski and Willy Brandt, as well as a passageway named after Irena Sendler, who was responsible for rescuing a large number of Jewish children from the Warsaw ghetto. It is a stone's throw away from 18 Miła Street, the site of the bunker which housed Mordekhai Anieliewicz, the leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising who committed suicide rather than be captured by the Germans. The permanent exhibition, which opened on 28 November 2014, provides a comprehensive account of the history of Polish Jews from the tenth century to the present day. Making use of innovative techniques and based on the best recent research, it will offer a vivid picture of the complex past of what was once the largest Jewish community in the world and will transform the way in which the history of Polish Jews is understood and appreciated in Poland and the world, for Poles, Jews and the international public.

In July 2013, the Polish Parliament voted to prohibit animal slaughter unless the animal had been stunned before being killed, thereby making illegal Jewish (and Muslim) methods of animal slaughter. This decision was taken in response to alleged abuses in the large-scale export of kosher and halal meat from Poland which had developed since the entry of Poland to the European Union. However, when Rabbi Michael Schudrich, the Chief Rabbi of Poland, protested, he was met with a storm of antisemitic abuse. The ban also caused shock and dismay in Israel and the Jewish diaspora, calling to mind the earlier partial ban on shekhita imposed by the Polish government in 1936. The government then asked the Constitution Court to rule on the question of whether the legislation is compatible with the law of 1997 granting Jews the right to slaughter animals according to the rules of shekhita. The court has now ruled and it has decided in favour of the legality of shekhita. However, the controversy showed how easily feelings can be inflamed,

Nevertheless, it is the debate that has now opened among historians, both Polish and Jewish, that offers the best chance to move forward. It is part of a general process that could begin only after the collapse of the communist system – a coming to terms with many neglected and taboo aspects of the Polish past. Among these are the history of Poles beyond the borders of present-day Poland, above all in the former Soviet Union, and relations between Poles and Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Germans and Russians. For too long, these topics have been the subject of much mythologization. The first stage of approaching such issues has to be a moral point of view – a settlement of long-overdue accounts.

In the case of Polish–Jewish relations, we are now beginning to enter a second stage where apologetics will increasingly be replaced by careful

and detailed research and reliable and nuanced first-hand testimony. Insofar as I played a role in this process, I attribute this to my South African experience, which made it possible for me to see Jews not only as victims but also as part of an oppressive system. I also still believe that in spite of all the crimes which have been committed in the name of Marxism, the attempt of those movements which took this ideology as their guide to transcend a narrow nationalist view of the world should not be forgotten. It is my hope that it will now be possible in Poland to move beyond strongly held competing and incompatible narratives of the past and to reach some consensus that will be acceptable to all people of good will and will bring about a degree of normalization both in Poles' attitudes to the past and in Polish–Jewish relations.

What this normalization should mean was summed up by a young Polish historian, Sławomir Sierakowski, editor of *Krytyka Polityczna*, who in the course of a debate on Polish–Ukrainian relations (another bitterly contested topic) expressed the following sentiments in *Gazeta Wyborcza* on 11 June 2003:

> I want something more! A fundamental paradigm shift. My generation needs something more than merely a precise calculation of losses and a historical truth created as a result of a balance of wrongs. We need to transcend the logic of national suffering . . . We want to replace a history is primarily concerned with confrontation and the defence of national honour – a paper war instead of the former confrontation on the battlefield – with a post-holocaust unversalism, directed towards the future of the generations to come.

3

The Personal Contexts of a Holocaust Historian: War, Politics, Trials and Professional Rivalry

Christopher R. Browning

The single most predictable and consistently repeated question that I face when giving public presentations is quite simple: why and how did I become a Holocaust historian? The answer to that question is fundamentally autobiographical, but it is not the only point in my career when my personal experiences have provided an important context for understanding my professional development. Looking back, I think four particular factors – the Vietnam War, Watergate politics, serving as an expert witness in various trials, as well as the usual professional debates and rivalries – have provided crucial context for understanding key points in the development of my career as a Holocaust historian. I would like to explore some of the major developments in Holocaust historiography through the lens of my own personal experience.

Several Israeli colleagues of my generation have noted the impact of the Eichmann trial in stirring their academic interest in the Holocaust. And some scholars have emphasized the Six-Day War, once again raising the spectre of Jewish catastrophe, as triggering a new interest in the Holocaust among young people in the 1960s. Neither of these events was formative for me. As with most American college students at that time, the course on Western Civilization that I had taken as an undergraduate made no mention of the Holocaust. My upper-level course on Modern German History had one lecture devoted to 'the SS State', but even it scarcely touched upon the Final Solution as distinct from police state repression and the concentration camp system. In a seminar on European fascism, we read Sartre's *Anti-semite and*

Jew,[1] but overwhelmingly concentrated on studying fascism through interpretations focusing on the social composition of voters and party members on the one hand and anti-modernism on the other, not racism and antisemitism. Nazism was seen as a predominately lower-middle class, anti-modern counter-revolution, not an attempted racial and demographic revolution transcending class divisions.

Entering graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall of 1967, I focused on the then still prestigious field of diplomatic history, writing my MA on the arcane topic of the policies of the French premier, Edouard Herriot, at the 1932 Geneva Disarmament Conference. It was at that point that war – not the Six-Day War, but in my case the Vietnam War – decisively impacted my life and future career. In the fall of 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced that graduate student deferments from the military draft would not be renewed in the following year for my cohort that had just entered graduate school. In the spring of 1968, Wisconsin became a key primary state in Eugene McCarthy's anti-war campaign against the incumbent President. Like many students on the Madison campus, I enthusiastically supported the anti-war movement, worked for McCarthy's campaign and welcomed Johnson's announcement on the eve of an imminent primary defeat that he was no longer seeking re-election. But Johnson's withdrawal and the subsequent string of tragedies and disasters that befell American politics – the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy, the demonstrations and police riots outside the Democratic Convention in Chicago, and the election of Richard Nixon – did not alter the fact that the Vietnam War and the military draft would continue, but my graduate education would not.

It was a stroke of individual luck for me – a true historical contingency, if you will – that the draft board in the Chicago area with which I had registered as an 18 year old was one of the few in the country that, due to a serious shortage in that region, was still granting deferments to teachers. I defended my MA thesis in the summer of 1968 and just two weeks before my student deferment expired, I was offered a high school teaching job that I accepted with alacrity. During this year, I applied for various temporary, entry-level college teaching jobs. This was still one year before the great 1970 job market crash at the college level in the US, and I was in fact offered a temporary position as instructor at

[1] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-semite and Jew*, George Joseph Becker (trans.) (New York: Schocken Books, 1948).

Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, though I had only an MA degree, one year of graduate study and no college teaching experience. Two years later, in 1971, I would be replaced by a student of Gordon Craig with a PhD in hand from Stanford University. I was to teach numerous introductory sections of Western Civilization, but my new employers also asked if I could teach an upper-level course in Modern German History. Having had a single semester of Modern German History as an undergraduate, I naturally replied 'of course'.

I then began reading feverishly and, on the recommendation of a former professor, included Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[2] I knew nothing of the controversy that surrounded the book, particularly the bitter reaction to her evaluation of the Jewish councils. I was ignorant of the overall topic, but was nonetheless fascinated by the book and especially by Arendt's notion of the 'banality of evil', which seemed all too applicable to the American misadventure in Vietnam at that time, into which the 'best and the brightest' of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had led the country, and the spectre of which continued to loom over me. I resolved to read further.

Arendt occasionally referred to a book by Raul Hilberg, entitled *The Destruction of the European Jews*,[3] which I ordered. To my dismay, the book turned out to be over 800 pages of miniscule print in double columns, and I despaired of ever finding time to read it, given the pressure of preparing for my first year of college teaching. At that point, however, I contracted a severe illness and was bed-ridden for a month. Hilberg's book was lying on the side table by my bed. When I felt well enough to read, it was the only book I could reach. I began to read and could not put it down. Quite simply, it was a book that changed my life.

If Arendt had been fascinating, Hilberg was to me both electrifying and overwhelming. He convincingly portrayed the Holocaust as a vast bureaucratic and administrative process employing a cross-section of German society, not the aberrational accomplishment of a few ideological fanatics. The Holocaust was, in short, historically important – not just a freak, pathological event. I could no longer conceive of returning to the study of French diplomatic history after discovering that the destruction of the European Jews could be a legitimate topic of academic research and analysis that probed the most basic questions about the legacy of Western civilization, the mobilization capacities of

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[2] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

[3] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (London: W.H. Allen, 1961).

the nation-state, and human nature. I met with my MA thesis adviser, Robert Koehl, who in addition to specializing in the study of the Nazi SS also supervised graduate thesis topics in European diplomatic history. I told him of my desire to switch fields and undertake my PhD thesis on some aspect of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. We did not use the term 'Holocaust'. As I already had experience in diplomatic history and Koehl specialized in the SS, I suggested a thesis on the 'Jewish experts' of the German Foreign Office who were the official liaison to Eichmann and the SS. Koehl's response was mixed. It was a good dissertation topic, he said, but one that had 'no professional future'.

At the time, of course, his warning quite accurately reflected the non-existence of what we now call Holocaust Studies. No courses were taught on American campuses. Virtually the only venue for offering professional papers on the topic was the conference on 'The Holocaust and the Church Struggle', which had its first meeting in 1970. *Yad Vashem Studies*, appearing once a year in Israel, was the only journal devoted to its study. Scholarly monographs on the subject occupied scant shelf space. I would be specializing in a topic that for all practical purposes had none of the infrastructure that provides academic legitimacy and standing in American higher education.

Despite his warning, Koehl advised me to go ahead with the topic if I really wanted to. The most important thing was to be truly interested, whatever the dissertation topic chosen, and there was no fate worse than trying to write a dissertation if one's heart was not in it. After a three-year hiatus, I returned to graduate school in the fall of 1971, and Koehl proved to be a most supportive and careful adviser of my proposed dissertation, clumsily entitled 'Referat D III of Abteilung Deutschland and the Jewish Policy of the German Foreign Office, 1940–1943'. It was to be a case study that focused on how and why a small group of bureaucrats – who trained as lawyers and joined the NSDAP as 'bandwagon' Nazis in the spring of 1933 – became involved in the mass murder of Europe's Jews.

If the Vietnam War was an omnipresent background factor that shaped my perceptions and choices at the very beginning of my career, politics in the form of the Watergate affair impacted the writing of my dissertation quite directly. On Sunday morning, 18 June 1972, as my wife and I prepared to depart for my year of dissertation research in Germany, we sat on the porch at her parents' house and read in the newspaper a bizarre story about the arrest of burglars at the Washington DC Democratic headquarters in the early hours of the preceding day. Two years later, in the first week of August 1974, I turned in the

completed draft of my dissertation. We then packed up our belongings and drove out of Madison, heading for Tacoma, Washington, to take up my first tenure-track teaching job at Pacific Lutheran University. Just before our departure, on 9 August, Nixon resigned from the presidency, bringing the Watergate crisis to an end. However, the eerie coincidence between the Watergate affair and the research and writing of my dissertation was not just a matter of chronological overlap. The parallels between the criminal bureaucrats of the Nazi regime whom I was studying and the criminal political operatives of the Nixon regime, the news reports about whom I had been following avidly for two years, were to me inescapable.

The four most important members of the Jewish Desk of the German Foreign Office were well-educated. Three – Franz Rademacher, Herbert Müller and Fritz-Gebhardt von Hahn – had law degrees, and the fourth – Karl Klingenfuss – a doctorate in anthropology. All had ambitions for a career in government and all joined the NSDAP in the spring of 1933 as so-called 'March casualties' or bandwagon Nazis, a move that undoubtedly advanced their career prospects under the new regime. None had demonstrated any particular interest or expertise in Jewish policy until they were appointed to the Foreign Office Jewish Desk. Thereafter, Rademacher and von Hahn strove to distinguish themselves as self-made, professional antisemites, while the less enthusiastic Müller and Klingenfuss cautiously sought and eventually obtained re-assignment. But while at the Jewish Desk, all performed their duties conscientiously regardless of their personal disposition.

Their direct boss was Undersecretary Martin Luther, head of *Abteilung Deutschland*, an improbable upstart by traditional Foreign Office standards. A 'high school drop-out' who had left Gymnasium before completing his *Abitur* in order to fight in the First World War, he had an up-and-down though eventually successful business career in the 1920s. In 1932 he ingratiated himself first with Frau Ribbentrop through his ability to help her furnish her new Dahlem villa, and then with Joachim von Ribbentrop, for whom he became the indispensable hatchet-man for the vicious political infighting of the Third Reich. Brought into the Foreign Office when Ribbentrop became Foreign Minister and eventually promoted to the rank of Undersecretary, he managed virtually all aspects of Ribbentrop's relationships with other Party organizations, especially the SS, and all policies related to domestic or internal affairs, including Jewish policy. He tenaciously defended Foreign Office jurisdiction in Nazi 'turf battles', despite the incompetence of his preening boss and the declining importance of that institution after 1939. His

tactics included close cooperation with Reinhard Heydrich in making the Foreign Office an accomplice in implementing the Final Solution, pressuring recalcitrant allies and satellites, warding off external inquiries and protests, and swelling the pool of victims whenever possible. For this he required no direct or explicit orders from above, merely an understanding of regime priorities and what was expected of him on the one hand, and a determination to take whatever initiatives were necessary to preserve his own position and that of his boss on the other.

As I sought to unravel the political dynamics behind Foreign Office participation in criminality, the Watergate drama unfolded. At the lower echelons of the various 'dirty tricks' operations of the Nixon re-election campaign were a group of ambitious young men with law degrees, who had come to Washington to make their career and – as they later explained – found it necessary to be loyal 'team players' if they were to get ahead, even if that meant – by standards other than those of the Nixon Whitehouse – engaging in unethical and even criminal activities. Working for the White House, they felt themselves to be above the law. As one of the most ambitious and vicious among them, Charles Colson, later admitted, he would have run over his grandmother to get the President re-elected.

The energies and ambitions of these 'team players' were harnessed and directed by callous and arrogant political operatives of the Nixon regime, particularly Bob Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and John Mitchell, who again needed no micro-managing and direct orders from Nixon, merely the exhortations of their boss that the re-election of the President had to be assured and no surprises from the opposition would be tolerated. In a toxic atmosphere in which Nixon exhibited no small measure of paranoia and proclaimed his loathing for all sorts of people he had placed on his infamous 'enemies list', it was simply understood among those around him that no niceties of ethics and legality were to inhibit the taking of political scalps or ensuring the President's re-election. None of the above is meant to imply a moral or historical equivalency between the Holocaust and Watergate criminality. Genocide and the attempted subversion of American democracy are crimes of entirely different magnitudes and consequences. But for me, the autobiographical coincidence of researching and writing my thesis on one aspect of the Jewish policy of the Third Reich in the midst of the Watergate scandal certainly made me sensitive to certain mundane political processes they shared in common.

At that point in the evolution of Holocaust historiography, assertions about the comprehensive 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust were common.

The Holocaust as 'uniquely unique' was one such characterization at that time. Likewise, there was considerable resistance to Arendt's notion of 'banality of evil' being applied to the Holocaust, particularly when her concept was misunderstood as trivializing Holocaust evil rather than pointing to the explanatory dilemma posed by the yawning gap between the extraordinary evil of the Holocaust itself and the banal nature of so many of the perpetrators who caused it. The mid-1970s was also the point at which Lucy Dawidowicz's *The War against the Jews*,[4] with its emphatic prioritizing of the Hitler's ideological antisemitism over all other factors, was a best-seller. As an as yet unpublished but aspiring scholar in an as yet non-existent field of Holocaust Studies, I was potentially swimming against the tide in several ways. I was asserting the importance of the political dynamics of the Third Reich for understanding how Hitler's ideological obsession had been translated into policy implementation. I was also implying that while some aspects of the Holocaust might be unique, this did not mean that it was unique in all ways, particularly in terms of the middle- and lower-echelon perpetrators. Indeed, in my case study of the Foreign Office Jewish Desk, the 'desk killers' were for the most part rather ordinary bureaucrats who became accomplices to mass murder through all too commonplace political processes. Though the precise terms of the debates changed over time as the field of Holocaust Studies emerged, these basic issues remained the grounds of historiographical controversy and professional rivalry for much of my subsequent career.

The relationship between academic controversy, professional rivalry and the production of scholarship is not simple or straightforward. In my own career, it has played out in three distinct phases in quite different ways. The first came close to also being the last. In my initial attempt at publishing my first book, I submitted the revised manuscript of my dissertation to Princeton University Press, where it was rejected. In a four-page, single-spaced evaluation, simultaneously scathing and dismissive, the anonymous reader who recommended against publication argued that any work that did not focus on the SS and antisemitism was inconsequential. Furthermore, the report wrongly claimed that I had not researched beyond already well-known Nuremberg documents, when in reality I had consulted the entire Foreign Office archival record beyond those selected as Nuremberg documents and had been

[4] Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews, 1933–1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975).

the first scholar to make use of an entire set of post-war German trial records for Holocaust research – in this case, the two trials of Franz Rademacher, the trial of Fritz-Gebhardt von Hahn and the judicial investigations of other members of the Foreign Office Jewish Desk (D III) that did not come to trial. The report concluded that my case study of Foreign Office bureaucrats 'cannot be regarded as providing any contribution, no matter how minor, to scholarship in the field'.[5] The 'anonymous' reader, who was in fact easily identifiable by style, tone and interpretation, publicly excoriated the historical profession for ignoring the Holocaust while simultaneously attempting to destroy the careers of any young scholar who had the temerity to tread on her turf or disagree with her interpretations.[6] Accordingly, my friend and colleague, Karl Schleunes, had experienced a similar reaction to his pioneering book, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz*.[7]

A second press, Holmes & Meier, to which I sent the manuscript, consulted Raul Hilberg, who recommended for publication. Our subsequent correspondence began an important professional and personal relationship that lasted until his death in 2007. In addition to Hilberg's support, I had the exceptional good fortune to receive help from two other senior scholars very early in my career. George Mosse, a member of my dissertation committee at the University of Wisconsin, was consistently supportive. And by virtue of Mosse's advocacy, I was approached by Yehuda Bauer and made my first contact with the Israeli community of Holocaust scholars. All three of these men – Hilberg, Mosse and Bauer – became not just helpful colleagues but also valued, lifelong friends. As in any profession, who are one's friends and who are one's enemies matters, and at no time more so than at the beginning of one's career.

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[5] Published in 1978 as *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*, the book was translated and published in Germany 32 years later in anticipation of the controversy that was sparked by an official commission report on the role of the German Foreign Office in the Third Reich and the continuity of its personnel into the Adenauer era. See Christopher R. Browning, *Die 'Endlösung' und das Auswärtige Amt* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlichte Buchgesellschaft, 2010), and Eckart Conze, Norbert Frei, Peter Hayes and Moshe Zimmermann, *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit. Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Karl Blessing Verlag, 2010).

[6] Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[7] Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy towards German Jews, 1933–1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

The publication of my first book, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office*, in 1978 coincided with a phenomenal growth of interest in the Holocaust.[8] On the academic side in the US, successive Holocaust conferences were held in New York in 1975 and San Jose in 1977 and 1978.[9] Outside the academic world, a similar trend could be observed. NBC showed its 'Holocaust' docudrama, President Jimmy Carter formed the commission that eventually led to the creation of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, and following congressional passage of the Holtzman amendment to American immigration law, the Office of Special Investigations began its work within the Justice Department. In 1977 David Irving also published his notorious claim that Hitler neither ordered the Final Solution nor even knew what was being done behind his back by zealous underlings until late 1943. As a publicity stunt, Irving flaunted the offer of an immediate £1,000 reward for anyone who could produce the Hitler order.

Irving's claim of Hitlerian ignorance and innocence of the Final Solution was rebutted by Martin Broszat. However, at the same time, Broszat advanced the argument that neither Hitler nor anyone else had given a comprehensive order for the systematic mass murder. The Final Solution had emerged out of a sequence of events. The deportation of Jews eastward in the fall of 1941 – envisaged as a prelude to expulsion into Siberia – had backed up when the Blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union failed. Killings initiated by local commanders to deal with the logjam of surplus Jews evolved into a programme of total extermination that no one had ordered or planned beforehand. For Broszat, the conception of a comprehensive programme of mass murder followed escalating local improvisation.[10]

The Broszat thesis opened up an academic debate on the decision-making process behind the Final Solution and the question of Hitler's direct role therein. It also offered me, as a young scholar who had carried out recent archival research relevant to the issue, the opportunity to make a serious contribution. Though I was in considerable sympathy

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[8] Christopher Browning, *The Final Solution and the German Foreign Office: A Study of Referat Diii of Obteilung Deutschland 1940–43* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978).

[9] Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rosenstreich (eds), *The Holocaust as Historical Experience* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1981); Henry Friedlander and Sybil Milton (eds), *The Holocaust: Ideology, Bureaucracy, and Genocide: The San Jose Papers* (New York: Kraus International Publications, 1980).

[10] Martin Broszat, 'Hitler und die Genesis der "Endlösung". Aus Anlass der Thesen von David Irving', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 25(4) (1978), 739–75.

with much of Broszat's general interpretational approach to the history of National Socialism, I could not accept his argument in regard to Hitler and the decision-making process behind the Final Solution. With considerable trepidation, I wrote a critical reply and submitted it to Broszat's own journal. Broszat promptly published it – an act of academic integrity and graciousness that stood in stark contrast to the reaction of my Princeton University Press reviewer.[11] My 'reply to Martin Broszat' proved to be a turning point in my career in two ways. First, I was approached and then contracted by Yad Vashem in Israel to take part in their projected, multi-volume 'Comprehensive History of the Holocaust' by writing the volume on 'The Origins of the Final Solution', which finally appeared 25 years later in 2004.[12] Second, when Broszat fell ill in the spring of 1982, I was invited as a last-minute replacement to deliver a paper on the decision-making process for the Final Solution at a conference in Paris organized by Francois Furet and Saul Friedländer.

At the Paris conference, I took the terms 'intentionalism' and 'functionalism' – first employed by Tim Mason to identify the two current historiographical approaches to Nazi Germany – and applied them for the first time to the debate over Hitler and the Final Solution. In this debate I articulated a 'moderate functionalist' position between the ultra-intentionalist position of Lucy Dawidowicz that Hitler consciously aimed at the systematic mass murder of the Jews from the beginning of his political career in 1919, and the ultra-functionalist position of Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen that the Final Solution emerged through improvisation from below – without comprehensive decisions and orders by Hitler – in response to the thwarted expectations of Blitzkrieg victory and Jewish expulsion in the fall of 1941. I argued on the one hand that the Final Solution emerged out of a series of decisions taken in the particular circumstances of 1941 and was not simply the implementation of a premeditated grand design, and on the other hand that Hitler was very much at the centre of this evolving and contingent decision-making process.[13]

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[11] Christopher R. Browning, 'Zur Genesis der "Endlösung". Eine Antwort an Martin Broszat', *Vierteljarhshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 29(1) (1981), 97–109. For an expanded English version of this article, see 'The Genesis of the Final Solution. A Reply to Martin Broszat,' *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual*, I (l984), 113–32.

[12] Later published as Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (London: Random House, 2005).

[13] Christopher R. Browning, 'The Decision Concerning the Final Solution' in Francois Furet (ed.), *Unanswered Questions: Nazi Gemany and the Genocide of the Jews* (New York: Schocken, 1989), pp. 96–118.

Ian Kershaw has recently reminded us that as late as 1979, in the famous debate at the Cumberland Lodge over conflicting interpretations of Hitler and the Nazi state, where Tim Mason first introduced the terms 'intentionalism' and 'functionalism', the Holocaust was not even mentioned.[14] In the aftermath of the Paris conference, such an omission was unthinkable. On the contrary, henceforth, the centrality of the Holocaust to understanding the historical significance of not just National Socialism but also twentieth-century European history was unquestioned. In hindsight it is easy to see that the 'intentionalist-functionalist' controversy was unnecessarily and was artificially polarized around extreme positions that cried out for synthesis. But the harping criticism that it was a 'sterile' debate is, in my opinion, utter nonsense. The sometimes hair-splitting and scholastic qualities of that debate should not obscure our appreciation of two important consequences, namely the extraordinary wave of fruitful research that the debate stimulated and the fact that Holocaust Studies had come of age. Thereafter Nazi racial policy and the Final Solution obtained equal standing with the old issues about the Nazi rise to power and the path to and waging of the Second World War, even for mainstream historians of Nazi Germany. Rarely have academic controversy, professional rivalry and the production of scholarship worked together with such positive synergy.

The emotional intensity of the 'intentionalist-functionalist' debate was subsequently eclipsed by the so-called *Historikerstreit* – a bitter dispute in Germany over the relativization and trivialization of the Holocaust triggered by the increasingly dubious publications of Ernst Nolte – in the latter half of the 1980s, but two important aspects of the debate over the decision-making process have continued to this day. One such aspect has been the ongoing debate over the timing of the decisions for the Final Solution, in which I have had the privilege of courteous and civil disagreement with Richard Breitman, Philippe Burrin, Christian Gerlach and Peter Longerich among others. The second aspect of the debate over the decision-making process involves the relative roles of the centre and the periphery, in which a generation of younger German historians in particular has pursued a 'neo-Broszatian' approach that tends to downplay Hitler's role and to emphasize the piecemeal improvisations of local authorities. Arguments over whether key decisions were taken in this or that month of 1941 have been

[14] Ian Kershaw, *Hitler, the Germans, and the Final Solution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

criticized as excessive hair-splitting. But in my opinion, the issue of timing in 1941 is not simply a quibble over a few meaningless months. Because the situation changed so rapidly over a very short period, it is rather an argument about the wider historical context that is essential to our understanding of why Hitler and the Nazis did what they did. And the debate over Hitler's role is not just the illusory search for an incriminating 'smoking pistol', but is also crucial to understanding how the Nazi system worked and hence how the leadership of a modern nation-state can harness its bureaucracy, military and population to the enterprise of total genocide. These are not arcane issues.

It should also be noted, I think, that regardless of the continuing debates concerning both timing on the one hand and the relative weighting of the roles of the centre and the periphery on the other, significant agreement has been reached on a number of issues. First, most historians agree that there is no 'big bang' theory for the origins of the Final Solution, predicated on a single decision made at a single moment in time, but rather that there was a prolonged and incremental decision-making process. Second, most historians accept a considerable continuity, with the Nazis' earlier expulsion plans and visions of demographic engineering being seen as key steps in the escalation and radicalization toward the Final Solution. Finally, most historians agree that a form of 'consensus politics' between Nazi participants of all kinds – the SS, the civil administration, the military, the police, economic planners and local collaborators – in support of the Final Solution transcended their differences.

The third occasion in which I found myself caught up in the vortex of academic controversy, professional rivalry and the production of scholarship resulted from the publication of *Ordinary Men* in 1992 and Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in 1996.[15] Beginning with my case study of the middle-echelon bureaucrats of the Foreign Office Jewish Desk, I had subsequently pursued a number of other case studies of small clusters of perpetrators: the military administration that authorized the mass shooting of the male Jews and 'Gypsies' of Serbia within the framework of Wehrmacht reprisal policy, the motor pool mechanics of the Security Police and scientific experts of the Criminal Technical Institute in Berlin who together designed and built the gas van, the public health doctors of the General Government who produced the very epidemics they were supposed to be combatting by supporting

[15] Daniel J. Godldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

the ghettoization of the Jews as a quarantine measure, the ghetto administrators of Lodz and Warsaw who created ghetto economies to sustain their interned Jews while simultaneously urging their deportation as an ultimate solution, and the occupation authorities in Brest-Litovsk who wanted to construct an industrial complex based on Jewish labour, but obediently carried out a so-called '100 per cent' solution instead. But clearly in my own career, one case study of Holocaust perpetrators has eclipsed all others, namely that of the 'ordinary men' of Reserve Police Battalion 101 who cleared small-town ghettos and murdered Jewish villagers in the Lublin district of the General Government.

My attempt to confront and portray the human face of the perpetrators and my approach, which assumed that I was dealing with basic facets of human nature, were not uncontested. At the initial 'Lessons and Legacies' conference at Northwestern University in the fall of 1989, where I presented my first paper on the battalion,[16] Saul Friedländer spoke about the difficulties that Holocaust historians encounter when faced on the one hand with the 'human ordinariness of the perpetrators' and on the other hand with our 'feelings of strangeness and horror' that their actions arouse and our inability 'to find the point of psychological identity' with men motivated in his view by *Führerbinding* (emotional identification with Hitler) and elation. Faced with a 'blocking of intuitive comprehension of events that happened more or less during his or her lifetime', Friedländer noted that Holocaust historians took refuge in the 'conceptual fuzziness of the "banality of evil"' – a notion that we all share 'common propensities' with the potential to commit such criminal acts.[17]

If Friedländer was arguing for a certain incomprehensibility of the perpetrators because he doubted that the historian could establish 'psychological identity' with them in the way that he or she does with other historical actors, my approach soon faced a second critique that the perpetrators were in fact easily understandable, but that I had simply gotten it totally wrong. At this same 'Lessons and Legacies' conference in 1989, a young man approached me and succinctly introduced himself: 'I'm Daniel Goldhagen. You scooped me.' After the publication of *Ordinary Men*, Goldhagen published a review in *The New Republic*. My book

[16] Christopher R. Browning, 'One Day in Jozefow: Initiation to Mass Murder' in Peter Hayes (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991), pp. 196–209.
[17] Saul Friedländer, 'The "Final Solution": On the Unease in Historical Interpretation' in Hayes (ed.), *Lessons and Legacies*, pp. 25–31.

was both methodologically and conceptually flawed, he argued. I had been duped by the problematic German testimonies, whose systemically mendacious nature I did not fully understand. And I had mistakenly conceived of the perpetrators as 'ordinary men' rather than 'ordinary Germans', who were the carriers of a unique German antisemitism imprinted by a unique German culture. It was erroneous, he argued, to explain these Holocaust perpetrators' behaviour in more universalistic and situational terms.[18]

Several years later, in the footnotes of *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Goldhagen summarily dismissed and disparaged the work of a number of Holocaust scholars, but certainly focused his criticisms foremost on me. In addition to arguing that the German perpetrators were 'ordinary Germans' but not 'ordinary men', he formulated four other – in my opinion – very dubious theses: first, that antisemitism was the leitmotif of German history; second, that the Hitler dictatorship was not formative, but merely 'unleashed' and 'unschackled' Germans to do what they had always yearned to do; third, that the Final Solution is best conceived of as a gigantic pogrom, an explosion of hatred, of which the initial June 1941 massacre in Bialystok was the best paradigm; and, fourth, that Germans were totally 'deprogramed' from the cultural imprint of centuries of eliminationist antisemitism by Allied re-education programmes in the late 1940s and overnight became just like everyone else.

Despite a spectacular popular reception in both the US and Germany, the book faced growing rejection in academic circles, and Goldhagen lashed out at his critics. In one particularly careless paragraph, he not only dismissed my work as incompetent but also accused me of failing 'to present any actual evidence' and constructing my theses 'out of thin air'. This reprehensible charge of academic dishonesty, which he later grudgingly disavowed, basically ended any further discussion between us.[19]

In retrospect, the Goldhagen controversy certainly brought attention to the field and stimulated other scholars to become involved in perpetrator research with fruitful results. For me personally, it brought a sustained increase in the sales of *Ordinary Men* as well as greater attention professionally, and was quite possibly a deciding factor in my being

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[18] Daniel Goldhagen, 'The Evil of Banality,' *The New Republic*, 13 and 20 July 1992, pp. 49–52.

[19] Daniel Goldhagen, 'A Reply to My Critics: Motives, Causes and Alibi', *The New Republic*, 23 December 1996, pp. 37–45. My letter to the editor and Goldhagen's reply can be found in *The New Republic*, 10 February 1997, pp. 4–5.

offered an endowed chair at a major research university after 27 years of strictly undergraduate teaching. Here is a case where I should have been as grateful for my critic as I was for my friends. But the totally unnecessary degree to which personal acrimony and publicity hype tainted the controversy still leaves a bad taste in my mouth.

As a Holocaust historian, I have had an opportunity – unusual for most historians in other fields – to engage in a kind of 'applied' history by virtue of serving as an expert witness in various court cases. Most of these have involved the trial of aged suspects following the change in the legal landscape in many countries. In the late 1970s, the Holtzman amendment provided for the investigation, denaturalization and deportation of Nazis and collaborators who had entered the US illegally. In the 1980s in Canada, Australia and Great Britain, legislation granted their courts direct jurisdiction over suspected Nazi criminals who had chosen to reside on their soil. Between 1992 and 1999, I was engaged as an expert witness for the Heinrich Wagner case in Australia, the Radislav Grujicic and Serge Kisluk cases in Canada, and the Simon Serafimovich and Andrei Sawoniuk cases in England. My role in all of these cases was to provide the court with historical background information on the nature of Nazi policies and occupation authorities in order to help it understand and assess the credibility of eye-witness testimony. With the exception of assessing files from the Belgrade Special Police in the Grujicic case, I was not involved in providing evidence about the guilt or innocence of the individual defendants, which depended upon eye-witness testimony concerning their activities as auxiliary policemen in Belarus or Ukraine.

Due to his declining health, the Grujicic case was dropped before I could give testimony in court. For the Wagner and Serafimovich cases, I testified in magistrates' hearings that established that there was sufficient evidence to bring these cases to court, but once again the deteriorating health of the defendants intervened to preclude trial. Kisluk and Sawoniuk came to trial in 1998 and 1998 respectively, and I appeared as an expert witness in each case. Both were convicted.

In addition, I served as an expert witness in two even more unusual court cases, the so-called 'Holocaust denial' trials of *R v Ernst Zündel* in Toronto in 1988 and *Irving v Penguin Books Ltd* in London in 2000. The first case was a felony trial for Zündel's alleged violation of Canada's antiquated 'false news' law, while the second was a civil suit for libel undertaken at Irving's initiative with Lipstadt as the defendant. In both cases the crux of the issue before the court was not to prove that the Holocaust had happened, but rather to prove that the deniers made

their claims in bad faith. In this sense, it was not the Holocaust but the practice of history that was on trial. Could historians acting as expert witnesses provide the means for the court to make a viable distinction between honest history and dishonest falsification? And, ultimately, in addition to laying out the evidence available to any reasonable historian and exposing the contrived allegations of the deniers as conscious falsification, the job of the historical expert witness was to set the standard of historical competence and integrity in their reports and courtroom testimony against which the deniers of the Holocaust could be measured and found wanting.[20]

I suspect that the years I spent in the role of expert witness in all of these trials affected the way in which I have practised history. Historians can make qualified arguments based on degrees of probability or plausibility, they can intentionally advance provocative interpretations to stimulate and open up productive research and discussion, and they can accept that many debates – over issues such as the role of Hitler or perpetrator motivation – will never reach closure. In contrast, in writing my reports for the courts, I was acutely aware that the standards for judging evidence and reaching conclusions would often be more stringent in the courtroom. In all the felony cases in which I was involved, the prosecution had to meet a burden of proof that was 'beyond reasonable doubt' and even in the Irving libel trial it was one of 'clear, cogent, and convincing'. And trials reach some kind of closure. Even the protracted Zündel case, which involved two trials and many appeals, was finally and legally laid to rest when the Canadian Supreme Court voided the law on which his two convictions had been obtained. Historians, in contrast, can almost never say 'case closed'.

The historian in the courtroom must also become accustomed to a very different pace. In the leisurely world of academics, exchanges play out over years, and one can undertake new research, consult colleagues and fly trial balloons in the form of conference papers along the way. Before trial, the expert witness faces a specific and definitive deadline for producing a report, and under cross-examination on the stand, one has the disconcerting experience of having only seconds to formulate replies

[20] Christopher R. Browning, 'Law, History, and Holocaust Denial in the Courtroom: The Zündel and Irving Cases' in Nathan Stoltzfus and Henry Friedlander (eds), *Nazi Crimes and the Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 197–215. For the Irving trial, see also Deborah Lipstadt, *History on Trial* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005) and Richard Evans, *Lying about Hitler: History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

to a series of questions consciously designed to unravel and discredit the written report. Even at an academic conference, verbal exchanges take a few minutes at the end of a panel session. In the courtroom, relentless cross-examination can go on for days. The historian as expert witness must live with a very different sense of time.

Beginning with the Zündel trial in 1988 and running through the Goldhagen challenge in the 1990s to the Irving trial in 2000, I grew increasingly aware that others were scrutinizing my work, in some cases down to the last detail and footnote, with the explicit goal of discrediting my scholarship and academic reputation. Whether by the cadres of volunteers working for Zündel and Irving examining everything I had written on Hitler's decision making on the one hand, or by Goldhagen combing the court records of Reserve Police Battalion 101 on the other, I do believe that my publications have been the target of a highly motivated search for error to a degree quite unusual in our profession. It is gratifying to know that by and large these searches were not successful. Has this experience, at least subconsciously, had a stunting affect? At a stage in my career when many historians have moved from detailed, archival studies to broader syntheses and more sweeping and daring interpretations, I have clung closely to my documents in carrying out carefully delimited research projects. Have I, like the doctor who in fear of malpractice suits practises 'defensive medicine', similarly practised a kind of 'defensive history writing' in anticipation of another Goldhagen-like critique or courtroom cross-examination? I do not know. But I do know that I do not wish to make it easy for those who stand ready to pounce on avoidable mistakes or cynically misrepresent what I have written.

For most of my career, I worked on what is now called 'perpetrator history', studying the evolution of Nazi Jewish policy and decision making on the one hand and various categories of participants on the other. Other scholars, with a different set of interests and language skills, worked on the Jewish experience: life in the ghettos, Jewish councils, resistance, survival in hiding, etc. And still others worked on a wide variety of so-called 'bystanders' and 'rescuers' as well as 'collaborators' and 'profiteers'. The potential number of subfields of Holocaust Studies, to say nothing of the number of languages potentially needed for research, was vast. Several approaches to overcome this fragmentation have recently been attempted. Most notable, of course, is Saul Friedländer's epic 'integrated history' of the Holocaust in two volumes, the latter spanning the entire continent over the six years of the

Second World War.[21] Friedländer constructs a huge 'mosaic' out of fragments of contemporary documents, especially Jewish diaries and letters rather than post-war memoirs and testimonies, trying to capture the shifting perceptions of all the participants – perpetrators, victims and bystanders – unfiltered by hindsight. This technique creates a glittering surface, but by virtue of its ambitious scope and breadth must forgo depth and detail.

A second approach is the micro-historical case study that, consulting a mixed source base, examines the interaction of all the various historical actors in a single place to obtain depth rather than breadth. This is the avenue I have pursued.[22] I came across the shocking acquittal verdict of the German police chief of Starachowice during the same summer of 1986 in Ludwigsburg when I also first encountered the indictment of members of Reserve Police Battalion 101. I resolved to pursue each case further, fortunately beginning with the latter. By the time I returned to my study of Starachowice, two things had happened. First, the projects for gathering survival testimony had accelerated in the interim and, as a result, the number of survivor testimonies that were my primary source had nearly doubled between 1986 and 2000. Second, the shift in focus towards Eastern Europe as well as much greater interest in the economic dimensions of the Holocaust meant that the time was ripe for a case study of a complex of factory slave labour camps in central Poland that examined Jewish post-war testimonies in order to illuminate the Jews' struggle for survival within the context of their interaction with not only their German persecutors, but also their Polish neighbours and their Ukrainian guards.

Finally, I would conclude with a brief comment on one other autobiographical aspect of my own position as a Holocaust historian. When I began my career, I was unusual for being both a non-Jew and a non-German in a field in which most active scholars were either Jews (American or Israeli) or Germans. This had both advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, even as a very junior scholar, I was invited to important international conferences such as Paris in 1982 and Stuttgart in 1984 and was given the opportunity to present, which would not

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[21] Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*: vol. I, *The Years of Persecution 1933–39*; vol. II, *The Years of Extermination 1939–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997 and 2007).

[22] Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave Labor Camp* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).

have been available to me in a well-established and crowded field. In addition to the fact that the field of Holocaust Studies was just beginning to emerge and there were simply not that many of us undertaking archival research, I suspect that my status both created curiosity and was welcomed as confirmation that the Holocaust was a key event of modern European history that transcended both German and Jewish history. However, there was also a 'glass ceiling' that blocked professional advancement. On the one hand, I was never seriously considered for the specifically endowed Holocaust chairs that were created in the 1980s and 1990s. In the words of a surprisingly frank search committee member for one such chair, any viable candidate had to be deeply grounded in the Jewish tradition. On the other hand, it was not until the end of the century, when I took up a position at the University of North Carolina in 1999 and Omer Bartov took up his position at Brown University in 2000, that regular departmental slots in German history at research universities were filled with scholars who specialized in the Holocaust and could now help prepare a new generation of graduate students in that field. One of the most heartening and positive developments in the field of Holocaust Studies is that this issue has become virtually irrelevant and it is no longer unusual or professionally disadvantageous for a non-German, non-Jew to specialize in the study of the Holocaust. If my graduate students are asked the question with which I began, namely why have they become interested in the Holocaust, that question is no longer motivated by same puzzled curiosity that I faced. And that, I think, is a very positive development.

4

Autobiographical Reflections on Writing History, the Holocaust and Hairdressing*

David Cesarani

In February 2006, I went to Buckingham Palace to be presented with the Order of the British Empire for services to Holocaust education and commemoration. From his seat in the audience, my father watched as Her Majesty the Queen attached the medal to the lapel of my rather splendid morning suit, specially hired for the day. I mention this not out of a sense of vanity or overweening pride, but because the events of that day were so unexpected and unpredictable. My father was the son of an Italian immigrant, who like his father had worked as a ladies' hairdresser, and held left-wing views all his life. I grew up in a suburb of north-west London with a significant Jewish population, but in a home in which Judaism was of marginal importance and the Soviet Union bulked larger than the State of Israel. I was drawn to Zionism, but through an involvement with the Zionist movement paradoxically became interested in the history of the Jews in Britain – the story of my community, my family and my own lifetime. Nothing pointed me in the direction of Holocaust history. So, precisely because it was at odds with where I started in life, the award serves as a useful departure point for exploring my formation as an historian who eventually, and rather unexpectedly, came to work on the fate of the Jews during the Nazi era and its repercussions.

Also, for the reasons given above, some family history is in order. My father, Henry Cesarani, was born in London in 1921. He had one brother, Ralph, who was four years older. Their father, Achilles Cesarani, was an Italian immigrant from Voghera, an agricultural town in Lombardy situated midway between Milan and Genoa. Born in 1887,

*Dedicated to the memory of William J. Fishman (1921–2014).

he arrived in England some time before the First World War and set up a hairdressing salon in Hammersmith. He was not Jewish.

Achilles met and married Anna Rachel Teiman during the First World War. Anna was born in Belfast in 1893, probably while her family was en route to America. Her father, a soap maker, was one of the few Jews who went to New York and lost his fortune. The family returned to England, to East India Dock Road, a poor area of East London not favoured by Jews if they could avoid it. Somehow Anna met Achilles and escaped from Poplar. They married despite the fact that he was nominally Roman Catholic and she came from an Orthodox Jewish family. Meanwhile, Achilles purchased a building on Spring Street, off Praed Street in Paddington, and established a hairdressing business. His clientele included *grandes dames* and prostitutes.

From the late 1920s to the early 1930s, the family lived in Westcliffe-on-Sea, Southend. Apart from a brief spell at a Jewish day school in Bayswater, neither Ralph nor Henry had any Jewish education, although Henry could dimly recall being taken, as a child, to *seder* nights at his grandparents' flat in East London. Neither he nor Ralph had a bar mitzvah. However, Southend was home to a community of transplanted East End Jews and Henry mingled with the Jewish kids from these families. They comprised the main constituent of the local Communist Party (CP) group and from an early age both Ralph and Henry were drawn to the CP. The attraction was partly because the people involved with it were fun, but it was also a reaction to the poverty and misery of the Depression. They never suffered from deprivation (in fact, they benefited from the dire economic conditions in South Wales in the form of a Welsh maid), but they were acutely aware of the crisis and were politicized by what they knew. Later on, the CP held their allegiance because it was a vehicle for anti-fascism.

By 1937, the family was back in London, now domiciled in Dollis Hill. This part of north-west London also had large community of mainly ex-East End Jews. Henry and Ralph participated in regular meetings of the local CP branch and campaigned for Republican Spain. Almost all of the CP activists they knew were Jewish. My father was thus drawn into a community of Jews thanks to communism and it was through them that he, in a sense, made up for the Jewish education and Jewish connections he never had as a child.

In 1939, Ralph, who had studied graphic design at art school, volunteered for the army. He served in France as a motorcycle despatch rider and was amongst those evacuated from Dunkirk. At around the same time, Achilles' nephew, Flaviano Fannucci, became an officer in

an Italian armoured unit that was sent to Albania. He was killed in combat at Scutari in 1941 and was awarded a posthumous medal by Mussolini. Meanwhile, Henry went to work in a war industry, thus toeing the Party line, which was to help to defeat fascism without directly assisting the British in their imperialistic war. His military service was deferred until October 1941, when he entered the Royal Army Medical Corps. In August 1944, he was posted to Egypt. For the next two years, he was stationed at a base hospital at Qassasin (Tel-el-Kebir), a vast British army depot in the Suez Canal Zone. Amongst his duties was caring for wounded and shell-shocked Black South Africans evacuated from Italy (where the 6th South African Armoured Division fought). In October 1944, he accompanied South African casualties on a hospital ship to Durban. Decades later, he could vividly recall landing there, being met by ladies of the Jewish community and enjoying a wonderful week of leave.

By this time, my father had officially become 'Jewish'. It was the religion listed in his army pay book and indented on his dog-tags. He opted for this identity, he told me, because being Jewish meant being on the side of the underdog; to him, it was almost synonymous with being a communist and anti-fascist. During 1945, he twice went on leave to Palestine. He rarely spoke of these trips, but they may have had a profound influence because some 40 years later, he retired to Netanya and lived there for six years.

Following his demobilization in September 1946, Henry started an apprenticeship with a hairdresser in Golders Green and progressed to the establishment of 'Professor' Adolph Cohen on the Whitechapel Road. In 1950, he worked at the salon in the Cumberland Hotel, Bournemouth, run by a Viennese Jew with the unlikely sobriquet of Tony Standish. Standish was an associate of the most famous hairstylist of his day, Raymond 'Teasy Weasy' Bessone. He was permitted to open the place by trading on Raymond's reputation, but without the use of his name. After four years, Henry was engaged by Raymond himself to work at his salon in Grafton Street, Mayfair. This sprawling enterprise, extending over several floors, was the glamorous and profitable heart of Teasy Weasy's hairdressing empire. Since there was already one stylist there called Henry, my father adopted the name Michel. When Achilles died in 1959, he took over his father's enterprise on Spring Street. He renamed it 'Michel Henry Hair Fashions'.[1]

[1] I would like to thank Aubrey Nelson for this information on British hairdressing in London in the 1950s.

Henry met my mother, Sylvia Packman, while he was working at Adolph Cohen's. She was born in the East End in 1921 and grew up in Stepney. Her father, Isidor Packman, was from Biala Podlaska, a town situated a few miles west of Brest-Litovsk. In 1931, over 60 per cent of the population, numbering about 11,000, were Jews. Isidor Packman left Poland before the First World War and travelled to South America; his sojourn there was not successful and he eventually settled in London. His brother, Jankel, emigrated to Paris. Isidor brought his sister to London. The rest of the family remained in Biala Podlaska.

Isidor was a coat maker and ran his own workshop. He married Dora Gafson, who was born in Whitechapel; her parents were Jews of Lithuanian and Swedish origin. Isidor and Dora had three children: my mother Sylvia, and twin sisters. Sylvia attended Raines Foundation School, the best school in the East End, where she excelled. But the family could not afford to send her to university, so she got work as a secretary. For a while she had a job with Victor Gollancz, the left-wing publisher. Gollancz was progenitor of the Left Book Club and while Sylvia was working for him, my father and uncle were filling their bookshelves with volumes from the Left Book Club. During the war, Sylvia was employed by Stepney Borough Council. She stayed in London throughout the conflict and by all accounts had a busy social life when the capital filled up with good-looking Canadian and American servicemen, including many who were Jewish. She was engaged at least once before she settled down with my father.

Henry and Sylvia married in 1951. It was a traditional Jewish wedding, though my father had no knowledge of Judaism. They moved directly to a new-build semi-detached Costain house in Kenton, a freshly developed suburb with a fair sprinkling of Jewish families. While Henry was mildly anti-religious, my mother nurtured a bundle of East End Jewish superstitions. She lit candles for the Sabbath, but signed me up for a scout troop that met on Friday nights. She only bought kosher meat, although it was considered completely acceptable to eat *trefe* (non-kosher meat or foods prohibited under the Jewish dietary laws) outside the home. Sylvia was almost certainly responsible for our membership of Kenton District Synagogue, which stood at the far end of our road.[2] Although he still interpreted the world through pro-Soviet and socialist lenses, my father was no longer involved in politics; by contrast, my

[2] The rabbi for most of the time we lived in the district was Cyril Harris, later Chief Rabbi of South Africa.

mother was well on the way to becoming fiercely anti-communist. Most of the members of their social circle were Jewish and most of the men were hairdressers. They were all rather camp if not actually gay. Most of them were somewhere on a left-wing spectrum of opinion. Hence, I arrived into a Jewish home in an increasingly Jewish area defined in an ethnic rather than a religious sense. Location, employment patterns and politics were all ingredients of being Jewish.

I was born in November 1956 and attended the local junior and primary school, Mount Stewart. Only a small minority of pupils were Jewish. During the act of worship, every morning the dozen or so Jewish children sat on benches on the other side of a glass partition that closed off the assembly hall. This made me very conscious of being different because I was Jewish, although what that meant was not exactly clear. Until my bar mitzvah, I was sent to *cheder* at Kenton United District Synagogue: a miserable and unenlightening experience. We only attended synagogue services as a family on the high holy days. These occasions were an agony for my father and a source of painful embarrassment for me while I observed his discomfort and isolation. My extended family assembled twice a year – on Christmas Day and the first night of Passover.

In 1967, I started at Latymer Upper School, a direct grant school in Hammersmith. It operated a Jewish quota and I encountered plenty of antisemitism from the boys, especially in my first two years (in my first class I was the only Jew out of 30 boys). As at my primary school, I was excused the general morning assembly and sat in a classroom with the other Jewish pupils, idling away the time. Occasionally an envoy of some anonymous Jewish outreach organization would pop in to give a talk about Judaism. Otherwise, the 'Jewish assembly' only served to mark out our difference without giving it any appreciable rationale. Towards the end of my years at the school, a Jewish teacher joined the staff and attempted to inject some meaning to the morning gathering, but by that time for me being Jewish mainly entailed feeling uncomfortable, self-conscious and vulnerable to varying forms of verbal or physical abuse. While I was at school, I cannot recall hearing anything about Jewish history or the persecution of the Jews under the Nazis; what I later came to appreciate as *my* history was unvalued and untaught. It simply did not exist.[3]

[3] Ironically, the school had a large proportion of boys from Polish backgrounds whose parents had settled in west London. Their fathers were veterans of the

Until I started at Latymer, I thought that almost all Jewish men were hairdressers, camp and hated Tories. I barely connect the Jews I knew with the Jewish state. Neither my father nor my mother showed much interest in Israel. As far as I can recall, we did not have a blue and white JNF tin in our house. For my father, the Soviet Union was the idealised territory, if not quite a homeland. I often heard him say: 'If it had not been for the Red Army we would be dead.' 'We' meant the Jews. Stalin remained for him 'Uncle Joe'. The first new car he bought was a Skoda – his personal contribution to COMECON. It was a wretchedly unreliable vehicle and he spent an inordinate amount of time in its gearbox. But my father loved continental driving holidays: first in the Skoda, then in a Ford Cortina GT, followed by Fiat and Lancia saloons. Every August we took to the road, heading almost always for Italy. When I was little, we would stop over in Rapallo, where Henry's relatives had a summer flat. That was the main contact that we had with the Italian family. For three years running in the early 1970s, we stayed at Makarska, a barely developed resort on the Dalmatian coast. Henry admired Tito, Yugoslavia was a communist country and it was very, very cheap.

Gradually, though, Israel did impinge on us. The June 1967 War occasioned my first venture into print: an article for the synagogue magazine on 'Why I am Proud to Be a Jew'. During the 1973 Yom Kippur War, almost every Jew in our neighbourhood packed an emergency fundraising meeting at the synagogue. By this time, I had graduated to a class at Latymer with a high proportion of Jewish boys and we were gripped by the war news. A group of us decided that we had to go to Israel to do our bit. Of course, that was impossible at the time, so we made contact with the London representatives of the kibbutz movement and arranged to spend the summer of 1974 on Kibbutz Mashabeh Sadeh in the Negev. Our little party was boosted by the addition of one of my cousins and two of her friends.

Those six weeks in the Negev were the most exciting experience of my life so far and I fell madly in love with Israel. For the next five years, I was a Zionist activist. I took a year off between school and university to attend the *ulpan* on Kibbutz Givat Hayyim Ichud and work as a volunteer growing cotton. While I was at the University of Cambridge, I served two years on the executive of the Union of Jewish Students (UJS). During this period, I was on the front line of the 'campus war'

Polish units that had fought under British command during the Second World War and they had a keener sense of the recent past and the tragic events in Eastern Europe under the German occupation than I did.

of 1978–9, when Jewish students fought to oppose motions at student unions to ban Israel and Jewish societies on the grounds that Zionism was a form of racism and the National Union of Students had a policy of 'No platform for racists'.

However, my involvement in Zionism was accompanied by nagging doubts over what I had seen in Israel, notably the disrespectful treatment of local Arabs. I was also shocked to discover that the *kibbutzniks* had been less than honest about the topography of the cotton fields on which I laboured. They had informed me that the rock-strewn hill overlooking the field called Qaqun was the site of a crusader castle. However, at the Fresher's Fair during my first week at university, I stopped by the stall of the General Union of Palestinian Students and perused a map of Arab villages destroyed in 1948 – and there was Qaqun. As a member of the UJS executive, I advocated and helped to achieve what was then the radical policy of 'mutual recognition' between Israel and the Palestinians. This was seen as the necessary precursor to dialogue – which was then officially prohibited by Israel and the Zionist movement.

In the summer of 1978, I started reading about Jewish history and Zionism (as against propaganda brochures). My self-education began with Amos Elon's *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (1971) and Maxime Rodinson's *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (1973). These books piqued my interest in the origins of Zionism and I decided that I wanted to do a PhD on the history of Jewish nationalism. Since I had no background in Jewish history and there was nowhere to acquire it in the UK, except the fusty Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London, I used a trip to the US in summer 1978 to visit Columbia University and make inquiries about going there for an MA. It did not occur to me to study the fate of the Jews under Nazism specifically. While on kibbutz, I had attended a two-day course at Yad Vashem taught by two young scholars, Yehuda Bauer and Zeev Mankowitz, but I barely related this to my own experiences or my family history. I was interested in the Jewish future, not the Jewish past. I wanted to resolve the ambiguity and almost physical discomfort that I felt about my identity as a Jew in Britain.[4]

[4] There were no courses on Jewish history or the Holocaust when I was studying history at Cambridge. The nearest thing was the forbidding special subject on the Third Reich taught by Norman Stone. I toyed with the idea of taking it, but Stone required knowledge of German, which I did not have. I touched on Nazism and

During my year at Columbia (1979–80), I took a course on Jewish history and a seminar on Jewish historiography with Paula Hyman. I spent a semester studying Zionism with Arthur Herzberg, who was attached to the Jewish Theological Seminary down the road, and wrote my MA dissertation for him on Palestinian Arabs in the ideology of American Zionism 1890–1940. The content was heavily influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, which had recently appeared, reinforced by my attendance at several of his lectures. My disillusionment with Zionism was reaching its zenith at this point and I wore a *keffiah*, a souvenir from Israel, over my shoulders. I was probably the only student listening to Said adorned with the Palestinian emblem.

Paula Hyman got us to read Hannah Arendt's *Eichmann in Jerusalem* for the historiography course, but otherwise I did not read much on the period 1933–45. Through a friend who was making a film about wartime efforts to rescue Jews from Europe, I met Hillel Kook (aka Peter Bergson) and was inspired by his story. Still, I didn't feel any great attraction to the subject. In 1980, I returned to the UK to take up a place at St Antony's College, Oxford to research the history of Zionism. Eventually I narrowed my topic down to Zionism in Britain between the wars – something that allowed me to investigate Zionism and dig into British Jewish history, which was, after all, my history. My first supervisor was Peter Pulzer (at Christ Church), the Viennese-born historian and pioneer of research into modern antisemitism. It says something about the significance of British Jewish history and the history of Zionism that he was the only person that the Oxford History Faculty could find to take on the task. He joked to me that his main qualification was the time he had spent in steam baths in the East End when he had first arrived in London as a refugee, overhearing conversations in Yiddish between the denizens of Whitechapel. After a year, I was passed on to Chimen Abramsky, an honorary fellow of St Antony's, though he was based at UCL. Chimen knew a great deal about early Zionist ideology and figures such as Weizmann, but made it clear that he had scant regard for my specific subject matter.

In 1983, I was appointed the first Montague Burton Fellow in Jewish Studies at Leeds University. It was there that I started teaching the fate of the Jews during the 1930s and 1940s in the context of a course on modern Jewish history. Still this was not what animated me as a researcher.

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antisemitism in an essay on fascism, but that was the extent of my exposure to the subject.

In the course of writing up my PhD, I realized that what truly interested me was the transformation of Jewish life in Britain between the great immigration of 1882–1914 and the era of post-war suburbanization. My mother, and to some extent my father, had come out of the former, while I came out of the latter. I had also stumbled across anti-alienism, a native strand of hostility towards Jews that had until then been almost entirely neglected by historians. My first academic publications were on anti-alienism, antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Britain.[5] My first book was an edited work on modern British Jewish history that was largely based on original research presented at two conferences that I was able to organize in 1986 and 1987 while I was in Leeds. These were exciting events that brought together a new generation of historians from Jewish communities across the country: Tony Kushner, Bryan Cheyette, Rickie Burman, Anne Kershen, Rosalyn Livshin and David Feldman. Bill Williams, the founder of the Manchester Jewish Museum, a pioneer of oral history and the inspiration for the Manchester local history unit, was our guiding light.[6]

In 1986, I succeeded Bill Fishman as the Barnett Shine Research Fellow and lecturer in the Politics Department at Queen Mary College (QMC), University of London. My brief was to teach the history of immigration and settlement in East London from the Huguenots to the Bangladeshis, and to develop a course on ethnicity and politics. Bill was my mentor. He was a pioneer of British-Jewish historiography who, along with Lloyd Gartner, opened up the subject of Jewish immigration and the social history of East London Jews. His walking tours of the East End were revelatory. It was from him that I learned the importance of seeing history, quite literally, from street level.

While I was at QMC, I was drawn into a controversy around an anti-Zionist play that was due to be performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London. *Perdition*, written by the Trotskyist playwright Jim Allen and directed by his long-time collaborator Ken Loach, was driven by animosity towards Israel. But it hinged on the accusation that Zionists had collaborated with the Nazis in the destruction of Jewish populations

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[5] 'Anti-Zionist Politics and Political Anti-semitism in England, 1920–1924', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 23(1) (1989), 28–45; 'The Anti-Jewish Career of Sir William Joynson-Hicks, Cabinet Minister', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 24(4) (1989), 61–82; 'The East End of Simon Blumenfeld's *Jew Boy* – East London Jewry between the Wars', *London Journal*, 13(1) (1987–88), 25–37; 'Anti-alienism in England after the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 6(1) (1987), 5–29.

[6] D. Cersarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

during the Second World War in order to win sympathy for the creation of a Jewish state that aped Nazi ideology. The script raised the hackles of various Jewish board members at the Royal Court, who demanded that it be submitted to experts for their scrutiny. Martin Gilbert expressed a negative opinion, but was vague on detail, so a friend of mine who was PA to Max Stafford Clark, Artistic Director of the Theatre, suggested that I look it over. She knew that I had studied Zionism and also knew a bit about the fate of the Jews under Nazism. Apparently, at that time there was almost no one else in London apart from Martin who possessed such knowledge! My report pointed out that in addition to historical inaccuracies, *Perdition* was riddled with antisemitic tropes. Extracts from my commentary found their way into a Sunday paper and all hell broke loose. The Royal Court Theatre decided to cancel its production of the play, occasioning cries of censorship and dark hints that it had bowed to pressure from wealthy and powerful Jews. A controversy raged in the press for several weeks; there was even a TV debate about the play.[7]

Not long after this, I was approached by Greville Janner, the country's leading Jewish Member of Parliament and former President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Janner was then a vice president of the World Jewish Congress, which was just getting interested in alleged Nazi war criminals who had evaded justice at the end of the war and ended up in the US, Canada and Australia. He had set up an All-Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group and wanted a trained historian to pop into the Public Records Office (now the National Archives of the UK) to see if there was any evidence that ex-Nazi malefactors had come to Britain after 1945. I thought the notion was lunatic, but agreed to have a look. To my astonishment, I found files bulging with relevant evidence. On the strength of my preliminary investigation, I was appointed chief researcher for the All-Party Group and assembled a team of researchers to dig out more documents. When our report was published in November 1988 it created a sensation. Suddenly I became an expert on the Holocaust. This was fortuitous timing because in 1989 my contract at QMC was due to expire and I had applied for the newly created post of Director of Studies at the Wiener Library and Institute for Contemporary History. Until this point, I had visited the library only once (for a commemoration

[7] Jim Allen, *Perdition. A Play in Two Acts* (London: Pluto Press, 1987). This edition contains a very full compilation of letters to the press and articles that appeared for and against the play. For an account of the controversy, see David Cesarani, 'The Perdition Affair' in R. Wistrich (ed.), *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 53–60.

of *Kristallnacht* in November 1988) and barely knew anything about it, even though it was one of the oldest collections of documents and books about the Nazi era in the world and had supplied material for dozens of key studies on the period.[8]

Nevertheless, I was selected for the post and once ensconced at the Library in 4 Devonshire Street, it was natural for me to research and write on topics connected with the Nazi years. This never came naturally or easily. Apart from a couple of essays on the unification of Germany that I wrote for Richard Overy (who was my supervisor for modern European history at Cambridge) and some German social history that I did with David Crew at Columbia, I had never studied the German past. So, I divided my activity into two parts. Taking advantage of one anniversary after another, I convened conferences and edited books on aspects of the 'Final Solution', racism and antisemitism.[9] Meanwhile, my own research focused on British responses to Nazism during and after the war. My first single-authored book, *Justice Delayed: How Britain Became a Refuge for Nazi War Criminals* (1992), built on the work I had done for the All-Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group, but it also reflected my interest in the British Jewish experience. I tried to show that the British had only dimly grasped the dimensions of the Jewish catastrophe during the war and afterwards continued to view Jews as problematic, not least because of the conflict over the Palestine mandate between 1945 and 1948. Thanks to this distorted perception as well as the exigencies of the Cold War, Britain accepted tens of thousands of Eastern Europeans as labour, including many who had collaborated with the Germans, while excluding Jewish survivors of Nazi persecution. The nonchalant treatment of Nazi collaborators was mirrored by the marginality of Jews in Britain, the cowed and defensive community from which I had sprung.[10]

The more I learned about the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the more I wondered at its absence from the history I had been taught at school

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[8] Ben Barkow, *Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1997).

[9] With T. Kushner, *The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Frank Cass, 1993); *The Final Solution: Origins and Implementation* (London: Routledge, 1994); with T. Kushner, J. Reilly and C. Richmond, *Belsen in History and Memory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997); *Genocide and Rescue: The Holocaust in Hungary, 1944* (Oxford: Berg, 1997); with Paul Levine, *'Bystanders' to the Holocaust: A Re-evaluation* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

[10] *Justice Delayed: How Britain Became a Refuge for Nazi War Criminals* (London: Heinemann, 1992; 2nd revised edn 2000).

and at university, not to mention its scanty presence in popular culture. The screening of *Shoah* in London in 1986, and *Schindler's List* in 1993 only served to highlight the apparent absence of any precursors. Why had the fate of Europe's Jews in the Nazi era been invisible for most of my lifetime? And why was there so much opposition amongst parliamentarians and media commentators to proposed legislation that would make it possible to prosecute persons domiciled in the UK who had allegedly committed war crimes between 1939 and 1945 outside of UK jurisdiction, against non-UK nationals, at a time when they were not UK citizens?

I believed that opposition to the government's War Crimes Bill, introduced into the House of Commons in 1990 in response to the campaign by the All-Party Group and the findings of an official inquiry, was not just based on lawyerly objections to retrospective and selective legislation. Nor was it merely principled resistance to a judicial measure that after such a long passage of time since the alleged offences were committed would be dangerous if not impossible to put into effect. The opponents of the Bill routinely depicted it as a Jewish measure inspired by vengeance. They referred to Jews as a ruthless, selfish and clannish group that was not properly English, with international connections, determined to impose alien values on a Christian country that put forgiveness above unrelenting justice. The debate over the War Crimes Bill, in which I participated through numerous TV and radio encounters as well as many articles in the press, seemed to expose the perpetuation of an ethno-religious hegemony that did not admit space to Jewish particularity and that dressed itself up in the garb of liberal universalism. Taking the long view, I perceived an attitudinal transmission line from the arguments about the re-admission of the Jews to England in the mid-seventeenth century, through the prolonged controversy over Jewish emancipation in the mid-nineteenth century and the debates about Eastern European Jewish immigration at the turn of the twentieth century, to the impasse over the war crimes legislation. Running parallel to these disputes over the acceptable dimensions and character of the Jewish presence in the nation were the efforts of Jews to shape themselves to the majority culture rather than unapologetically assert an ethnic identity and pursue unashamedly particularistic goals (like Jews in the US).[11]

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[11] 'The Dynamics of Diaspora: The Transformation of British Jewish Identity', *Jewish History and Culture*, 4(1) (2001), 53–64; 'Social Memory, History, and British

Yet my indictment of British society and culture begged the question of what I myself had known about the recent Jewish past as a child and what I had been told by my parents. It seemed that I had always known the Germans were 'bad'. During all our continental holidays, we avoided Germany. We did spend a few days in Vienna, en route to Yugoslavia, but Austria was deemed different. My father never considered purchasing a German car and my mother ensured that we had no German appliances. Henry loved music, but he sorted composers, conductors and musicians according to the 'Jewish question' or where they stood between 1933 and 1945. Wagner was a guilty pleasure. Toscanini and Otto Klemperer were rated more highly than William Furtwangler and von Karajan.[12] My mother had told me that after the war, she went to France and while there tried to find out what had happened to her uncle, aunt and cousin – Jankel, Liza and Bertha Packman. I knew from her that they had been 'deported' and I understood vaguely that my great uncle had died in Auschwitz. I did not know how they were taken, by whom or when. Nor did I know what happened to the rest of the family in Poland; all I knew was they were gone.

Once I was based at the Wiener Library, I was able to find out much more. One of the first things I located was the deportation list of the convoy of 15 August 1942 from Drancy to Auschwitz carrying Jankel and Liza Packman to their deaths. It was in *Vichy-Auschwitz*, the tome collated by Serge Klarsfeld. In 1993, after I had participated in a conference in Warsaw to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the ghetto uprising, I travelled to Biala Podlaska with my wife. It was a dispiriting, unhelpful pilgrimage, but at least I could now understand why

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Jewish Identity' in Glenda Abramson (ed.), *Modern Jewish Mythologies* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), pp. 15–36; 'British Jews' in Rainer Liedtke and Stephan Wendehorst (eds), *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews and Protestants. Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 33–55; 'British War Crimes Policy and National Memory of the Second World War' in K Lunn and M Evans (eds), *War and Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 1997), pp. 27–42; 'Great Britain' in David Wyman (ed.), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 599–641; '"Le crime contra l'Occident": les reactions britanniques a la "liberation" des camps de concentration nazis en 1945' in E. Lynch and M.-A. Matard-Bonnuci (eds), *La Liberation des camps et le Retour des Deportés* (Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1995), pp. 238–49.

[12] My father and uncle had collected jazz records since before the war. Part of their enthusiasm for jazz lay in their identification with the suffering and struggles of African Americans. Paul Robeson was one of Henry's heroes.

my grandfather had left. Three years later, I attended a conference in Paris organized by the *Mémorial de la Shoah*. Serge Klarsfeld was there and since he had recently published his memorial book for the Jewish children deported from France, I asked him if he had any information about the daughter of Jankel and Liza Packman. A few hours later, while I was actually on a panel under the gaze of a packed auditorium, he came up to the platform and slipped a piece of paper to me across the table: it was a photograph of Bertha Packman aged 11. It was the first time I had ever seen what she looked like or had confirmation of her fate. From that point on, it was quite hard for me to go on with the session.

The personal is political. In January 1995, I presented a TV documentary for BBC2 arguing the case that Britain should have a Holocaust museum. The Holocaust, I argued, was a part of British history, as it touched the lives of those who had come to the UK as refugees from Nazism and survivors, as well as the troops who liberated the camps and all those who took part in the struggle against German fascism. And it was a part of my story.[13] I was increasingly irate that the tragedy which had overwhelmed Europe's Jewish population had been almost utterly concealed from me in my childhood and youth, an occlusion that I blamed on the smothering dominance of a certain kind of Britishness – white, Christian and exclusive. I wanted the national story to embrace the Jewish historical experience of migration and settlement, including antisemitism as well as Jewish 'achievements', and memory of the Jewish catastrophe. The history that I was doing – in conjunction with friends and colleagues – was part of an agenda for constructing a more inclusive and multi-cultural British identity.

Thus, my approach to the Holocaust was not an outcome of fascination with German history. I was not seeking to answer the hoary questions of 'why antisemitism?' or 'why Germany?'. My starting point was always my sense of being an alien in England, and resentment that a chapter of my life story was deemed so irrelevant to society as a whole as to be made invisible. While it had huge intrinsic value, for me, Holocaust Studies was always an adjunct to reshaping British society, culture and politics. However, over the last decade, I have begun to ask whether it was fit for the purpose I envisaged or whether its instrumentalization has been not only inappropriate but also inept.

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[13] 'Should Britain Have a National Holocaust Museum?' *Journal of Holocaust Education*, 7(3) (1998), 17–27.

Thanks to my role as Director of the Wiener Library and a pundit on Nazi-era questions, I was invited by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to attend the London Conference on 'Nazi Gold' in December 1997 as an observer. Subsequently, the FCO asked me to join the official delegation to the Washington Conference on Nazi-era assets in December 1998 and the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in January 2000. At Stockholm, Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, announced the Labour government's intention to establish a Holocaust Memorial Day. I contributed to the consultation process that anticipated this move and afterwards wrote and spoke in its favour. From the outset, there were many critics who derided the notion of 'a Holocaust day'. Some suggested that it would offer a moment of ritual obeisance and would detract from any real action against institutional racism or the iniquities of British foreign policy. If it did not help them to forget, it would make people 'feel good' without actually doing anything positive. I retorted that the Holocaust was not something that happened far away and long ago; it was a part of British history and touched the lives of British citizens. A memorial day would challenge the far-right (then enjoying a periodic revival across Europe), antisemitism, racism and 'Holocaust denial'. Genocide in the mid-1990s in Bosnia and Rwanda, and continuing atrocities in other places made it imperative to remember, study and understand the archetypal extermination of the twentieth century.[14]

Soon after the Stockholm Forum, I was invited by the Home Office to join a task force to establish a Holocaust memorial day and organize the first national ceremony to inaugurate it on 27 January 2001. I subsequently served on various Home Office committees for another four years, including the working group that established the autonomous Trust that is now responsible for delivering Holocaust Memorial Day each year. I was elected a Trustee in 2006 and served until 2013. Over these years, I worked with the personnel of the Race and Equality Unit at the Home Office and later the Community Cohesion Unit of the Department for Communities and Local Government. This was where government thought the memory of the Holocaust fitted into

[14] For example, Dan Stone, 'Day of Remembering or Day of Forgetting? Or Why Britain Does Not Need a Holocaust Memorial Day', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 34(4) (2000), 53–59. Cf. David Cesarani, 'Seizing the Day: Why Britain Will Benefit from Holocaust Memorial Day', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 34(4) (2000), 61–66 and 'Memorializing the Holocaust in Britain: A Critical Response to Nira Yuval Davis and Max Silverman', *Ethnicities*, 2(1) (2002), 124–31.

the greater scheme of things: commemoration of the Nazi mass murder of Europe's Jews was harnessed to anti-racism work. After 9/11 (2001), but less so after 7/7 (2005), it was deemed crucial to include Muslims in the memorialization of the Holocaust – although not particularly to inoculate their community against anti-Jewish prejudice. Rather, the objective was to mobilize the history of Jewish persecution against a growing tide of prejudice against Islam and its adherents. I now started to feel uneasy about the appropriation of the Holocaust for political ends.

I had become involved in studying and researching the fate of Europe's Jews largely as a side-effect of contesting the marginalization of the Jewish historical experience in Britain. Yet, like the many others who argued for including the Holocaust in the national curriculum, creating a permanent exhibition on the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum and establishing a Holocaust Memorial Day, I had consistently framed the case in universalistic terms. We ended up creating an educational and memorial culture that was only partly about commemorating Jewish suffering and loss or about appreciating the specificity of Nazi antisemitism. Instead, we had inadvertently reinforced the tendency to relativize and therefore to some extent obfuscate and even diminish the distinctiveness of Jewish history and culture. This was a richly ironic outcome.

British Jews of my generation grew up at a time when the events of the Nazi era were already less immediate; they had to be learned rather than absorbed. We came to maturity in the decade of successive administrations dominated by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, when 'the empire struck back'. This was a period marked by anti-immigrant rhetoric, immigration controls and a British Nationality Act.[15] For us, the multi-culturalism practised by the Labour Party-controlled city councils in the 1980s and early 1990s was a form of resistance. Municipal multi-culturalism provided a space into which to insert a multitude of Jewish identities. For those of us who became academics in this phase, the 'multi-culti' programme enjoined attention to Jewish and not just Commonwealth mass immigration, to anti-alienism, fascism, antisemitism and responses to the persecution of the Jews in Europe. It carried with it a raft of concrete activities and policies: demanding

[15] On the significance of these trends, see D. Cesarani, 'The Changing Character of Citizenship and Nationality in Britain' in D. Cesarani and M. Fulbrook (eds), *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 57–73.

a discrete Jewish representation in all areas of public life, building up Jewish archives, constructing and regenerating Jewish museums, organizing festivals of Jewish culture, supporting a Jewish presence in the arts, especially on TV and, crucially, commemorating the Holocaust.[16]

Unfortunately, we forgot that the main reason to commemorate was to remember. Remembrance became secondary to instrumentalization. The dead became props for a bewildering variety of causes – from opposing immigration controls to the prevention of bullying in the school playground. While it always seemed to me legitimate to use the example of Nazism as a tocsin to warn against homophobia, anti-black racism, prejudice against the disabled and the infringement of human and civil rights, it seems misguided at best to harness abhorrence of Nazi racism to resisting Islamophobia, imperialism and colonialism in general (not to mention a critique of modernity and the Enlightenment). I now wonder whether it is not better to let history remain in the past, whether the utilization of history for whatever purpose inexorably degrades it. Looking back on my accidental career as a 'Holocaust Historian', I think we need to clarify the rationale of both Holocaust Studies and Holocaust commemoration, and to disentangle one from the other, or risk compromising both.

[16] See D. Cesarani, 'Dual Heritage or Duel of Heritages? Englishness and Jewishness in the Heritage Industry' in T. Kushner (ed.), *The Jewish Heritage in British History: Englishness and Jewishness* (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp. 29–41 and the other essays in this collection.

5
On the Holocaust and Comparative History

Steven T. Katz

In college – at Rutgers University, from which I graduated in 1966 – I studied philosophy and Jewish studies. In my senior year, I had the good fortune to be the Henry Rutgers Scholar and spent a portion of my time that year working with the great Jewish historian Salo Baron, who had retired from Columbia and was a visiting professor at Rutgers. My work with him concentrated on modern biblical studies and criticism.

Now fate or luck entered my life in a decisive way that would, unbeknownst to me at the time, be life-altering. Professor Baron had offered to take me on as a graduate student at Columbia, and so I applied there. But, at the same time, I was nominated for a number of international fellowships and therefore also kept open these possibilities. As it turned out, Columbia lost my application – I never heard from them – and when I discovered this very late in the year, I had already accepted a place at the University of Cambridge for my graduate work.

Between 1967 and 1972, I was a student at Jesus College and pursued a doctorate in the Philosophy of Religion, studying with a number of highly distinguished philosophers, including John Wisdom, Bernard Williams, Elizabeth Anscombe and Donald MacKinnon, the latter two serving as my advisors. I decided to write my thesis on 'The Philosophy of Martin Buber'. This led to my spending several months each year in Jerusalem, where I had the good fortune to study with Professors Gershom Scholem, Natan Rotensteich and Zwi Werblowsky, among other luminaries. My thesis was submitted in June 1972 and in September 1972 I had my 'defence' with Emmanuel Levinas coming from Paris to be my external examiner. My viva was very odd. It was held on the afternoon of the day before Yom Kippur, which was due to start a few hours later. Therefore, because I was flying back to the US from Israel via London, and Professor Levinas was flying in from Paris, it was

held in a suite at a hotel at Heathrow Airport so that Levinas and others (including myself) could get where we needed to be for Kol Nidre that evening.

Two months after this exam, I received a telegram from Professor MacKinnon telling me that the examiners had passed the thesis and I was therefore a PhD. The work on Buber's writings that I did for my thesis has also led me to a second academic speciality that I have pursued in addition to my work on Jewish and Holocaust Studies, namely, comparative mysticism. My work in this field, which includes four widely used volumes which I edited and to which I contributed chapters, is read in most courses in the philosophy of religion in America and Europe. My interpretive position is usually described as 'the Katzian approach' and is opposed to the more traditional ways of interpreting mysticism advanced by William James and a host of other well-known interpreters of religious experience.

Perhaps the most interesting oddity of my years as a graduate student at Cambridge was that I played cricket for my college, Jesus College, and am therefore probably the only Jewish scholar who can say that 'he was the wicket keeper for Jesus'.

Upon completing my doctoral studies, my first full-time academic appointment brought me back to America to teach at Dartmouth College beginning in September 1972. It was at Dartmouth, with the encouragement of a group of wonderful colleagues – and reflective of the Zeitgeist – that I began to interest myself in the Holocaust. This led to my first book, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues*, which dealt with the major Jewish thinkers who were wrestling with the meaning of the *Shoah*, e.g., Emil Fackenheim, Richard Rubenstein and Eliezer Berkovitz.[1] The success of this initial publication – it won a National Jewish Book Award – led me deeper into the subject, the seriousness and depth of which I now began to fully appreciate. And this, in turn, led to a decisive event in my general academic career and my engagement with the Holocaust in particular.

In 1981, I was asked to give the annual Jewish lecture to the Theology Department at Notre Dame University. After accepting the invitation, I had to find a subject, but this presented a serious conundrum: what Jewish topic could I talk about that would make sense to a Catholic audience at Notre Dame? While wrestling with this problem and seeking

[1] Steven T. Katz, *Post-Holocaust Dialogues: Critical Studies in Modern Jewish Thought* (New York University Press, 1985).

some guidance, I asked my hosts at Notre Dame what the previous year's speaker had talked about. I was told that the speaker had been Elie Wiesel and that he had spoken about his view of the unique and apophatic nature of the Holocaust. Armed with this information, I decided, even though I had not heard or read Elie's lecture, that I knew, based on my reading of his work in general and our friendship and many conversations, what he would have said, and so I decided, partly as a result of having been a former Yeshiva student, that I would present the opposite view, i.e., I would say that the Holocaust was *not* unique.[2]

But then came my research. For six months, I probed and explored and looked at what would now be identified as the early historical literature on comparative mass murder and genocide that then existed. After this intensive study, I realized that I was wrong and that Elie Wiesel was right, but, in my academic judgment, he was right for reasons different from those he gave.[3] In other words, by this point in my research, I had come to realize that in order to make the scholarly case for the Holocaust's uniqueness, one had to do rigorous and in-depth historical study and had to be willing to historicize every aspect of the 'war against the Jews'. It was, as I was beginning to understand, if only 'through a glass darkly' at this early stage, that one had to submit the Holocaust to the most detailed historicization and to bracket – if not altogether reject – apophatic claims if one wanted the argument for uniqueness to be conceptually valuable and a claim that could, and would, be accepted as a respectable position within the world of academia.

And so I gave the lecture at Notre Dame on 'The Uniqueness of the Holocaust', incorporating into the issue the still very limited insight that I had gained. At the same time, I called a friend, Arthur Samuelson, then editor at Schocken Books, and asked him if he wanted a short study on the subject of my lecture that would be ready in six months. The public interest in the Holocaust was then beginning to take off and he said 'sure', he would be delighted to have the monograph. Six months later, I called him back and, with considerable embarrassment, told him that there would be no book as I had come to realize that I did not know even how to begin to do the historical and conceptual work that needed to be done in order to make a reasonable, coherent and knowledgeable case for my conclusion.

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[2] This is the view in most of the Orthodox theological world.

[3] I appreciated that he spoke and wrote as a survivor who had already thought about – and lived – these issues for decades and that, in contrast, I was a young American scholar with no personal experience of the *Shoah*.

Now, more than 30 years later and having written many thousands of pages in manuscript, with only a fifth of this material so far in print – a portion of this is in volume 1 of my *The Holocaust in Historical Context*[4] – I am beginning to grasp what the right questions are and to have some, at least minimal, grasp of the methodological and hermeneutical issues that confront and challenge this scholarly undertaking.

Let me conclude these brief opening biographical comments by simply observing that all of this labour over the past three decades has been energized by my unwavering sense of the academic and ethical significance of the study of the *Shoah*. As many of you know, I have also written and edited books and essays on Jewish philosophy and Jewish history, for example, volume 4 of the *Cambridge History of Judaism* on the rabbinic era that had the good fortune to win another National Jewish Book Prize. I have also, as already mentioned, worked in detail on comparative mysticism, but no subject has so gripped my imagination and dominated my intellectual life, because of its absolute seriousness, as the destruction of European Jewry.

Now, what have I learnt that is of more than personal interest? I will describe what I think is important about my work under three headings, beginning with the issue of *method*.

Method

First, I have come to understand that one must never make *moral* comparisons between mass tragedies. The death of an Armenian woman or child, or a Native American woman or child, or a black woman and child caught up in New World slavery, or women and children trapped in the Gulag, East Timor or Rwanda are all morally and humanly equal. I know of no way to quantify evil such that one could create a moral hierarchy of evils. Second, and related, one should never engage in conversations about comparative suffering, for this too is a subject beyond quantification and legitimate comparison.

Third, I have learnt both that, as my friend the great historian of Stalinism, Moshe Levin, insisted, if you don't compare things, you don't fully understand them, and before you compare two things, you should know something about at least one of them. I would emphasize this second point because most of the comparative work done, much of it (indeed, too much of it) by sociologists, is historically uninformed

[4] Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context: The Holocaust and Mass Death before the Modern Age* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

and full of both historical errors and false generalizations. One needs to do the required comparative work properly, to be the master of all the details and subtleties not only of the Holocaust but also of the tragedies to which the Holocaust is compared. Otherwise you get the gross distortions found, for example, in David Stannard's and Ward Churchill's work on the history and tragedy of Native Americans. In their historical reconstruction, they completely ignore, among other critical things, the missionary aspects of Spanish (and Portuguese) colonialism, the unintentional character of the main killer of the native peoples, namely disease, and they misrepresent the nature of American government policy from Thomas Jefferson to the twentieth century, including the Indian wars and the crucial subject of reservations. Here it is necessary to know that by 1887, there were 138 million acres of land devoted to reservations that they do not mention. Then there is – usually in the context of the study of the medieval witch craze and its victims – the ideologically driven, monumental historical ignorance of Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin and others, who have argued that there were 9,000,000 women killed during the European witch craze and therefore one can, and should, create a new subject of study called 'gynocide'. I will return to this issue in more detail in a moment.

More significant is the repeated misrepresentation of the Armenian tragedy in the First World War by numerous authors who fail to appreciate that the largest Armenian community in the Ottoman Empire, numbering some 250,000 persons, was not violated by the Young Turks (with minor exceptions that took place at the end of the war), that several hundred thousand Armenians were forcibly converted to Islam – a terrible act, but a contra-genocidal one – and that approximately 50 per cent of the population forced marched across Mesopotamia survived. Then, too, there are scholars like Richard Rubenstein and Adam Jones, who mistakenly compare the *Shoah* and New World black slavery and who do not appear to know that 400,000 African men, women and children were imported into the US over the centuries and that by 1860 and the Emancipation Proclamation, there were over four million blacks in America. That means, as compared to the exterminatory demand of the Third Reich, that all Jewish women and children be murdered so as to ensure that history would become *judenrein*, slaveholders usually did everything they could to *increase* the slave population and offered incentives to slave women to have children. Thus, whatever else slavery as an institution was in the US, it was not genocidal. This inventory of ignorance that passes for scholarship could be extended, almost without end, to include those who do not know that most Albigensians and

Cathars were not murdered by the medieval Church, that most *conversos* were not killed by the Inquisition, that most Kulaks and the majority of the populations of the national minority groups deported by Stalin were *not* killed by him, that he had no intention of killing them, and that, contrary to A. Dirk Moses' extraordinary misrepresentations of the Holocaust (and many other things), the crimes of New World colonialism are phenomenologically distinct from those committed by the Third Reich.

On the dialectic of mass murder

I have gained an understanding, however partial and still incomplete, regarding the structures of almost all historical instances of mass murder relative to the structure of the Holocaust. This has taught me that there is a defining dialectic that operates in the many non-Holocaust cases that we are all familiar with that explains the nature and morphology of these terrible historical events, but which did not exist in the Holocaust.

What I refer to here is this: usually it is the ideology, the central idea that causes the violence and mass death in a given instance and also, perhaps ironically, limits it. Consider, for example, the very interesting and challenging example of the witch craze that has already been mentioned.

This craze, which spread across Europe and to the Americas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was rooted in Christian misogynism. This misogynism was newly energized by the breakdown of medieval Christendom and the need to explain why 'the body of Christ', which was the Christian Community, was unraveling. In this historical-theological context, an explanation was at hand in the biblical and extra-biblical traditions of Eve and Lilith, i.e., the stereotypical image of women as embodiments of inexhaustible negativity, which explained who the enemies of Christ and Christendom were. Women, in league with the Devil, were the cause of the societal and religious disarray that was occurring. They were, as Augustine had taught, *non posse non peccare* (incapable of not sinning). Just as Eve at the beginning of time was the subtle, insidious tool of Satan in the Garden of Eden, so every generation knows the unsanctified alliance of its womenfolk with the Devil. Playing upon congenital feminine weaknesses, Lucifer involves them in unholy ritual intercourse with himself, violates them and draws them into his cabal against Christendom. Thus, the witch craze was, in the eyes of its proponents, a justified defensive action by the Church. And it claimed up to 50,000 (or so) female victims.

This angry, menacing description of women is, however, only a partially accurate account of the medieval Christian image of women, and it ultimately fails to be a true portrait because it altogether ignores the more encompassing ideology that governed and defined the real position of women in medieval society. The whole truth comes into focus only by recognizing that the adversarial conception of woman as witch, as sorcerer, as numinous being was juxtaposed and profoundly mediated in medieval and Reformation Christendom by a whole series of countervailing understandings and their institutionalization, whose purpose was to fully integrate women in a 'non-terrifying' way into the larger communal fabric.

Women, in effect, were perceived to lose their sybaritic indecency by entering into, by being absorbed within, various anodyne structures whose very existence – as understood by the Church – was tied to their ability to assure just such a transmutational result. From sensual and devouring creatures of ordinary and extraordinary ability, women become domesticated (i.e., sexually controlled and subordinated) by entering into societal arrangements designed to ensure just this austere transformation. So the institution of the family – of women as wives and mothers and economic partners in nearly every trade and task – and the institution of the nunnery, with its idealized sublimation of female sexuality for unmarried women, particularly of the upper and middle classes, came into being and had their sacred function. These culturally defined roles acted to neutralize women's inherently anarchic libido, to subdue the undesirable qualities of feminine nature and hence to curtail the feminine threat to the divine order.

Within socially constructed parameters, women were to be protected and loved. Marriage, even if viewed as an exchange of women by men, was, in society's estimation, a divine blessing, having the status of a sacrament. Later, for Martin Luther and the reformers, though marriage was no longer a sacrament per se – Protestantism having eliminated such sacraments – it was a great good, 'the commonest, noblest state'. Sexuality when expressed within matrimony was a sacred action blessed by God with children and the cycle of responsibility and care that such procreative activities engendered. Medieval philosophers and mystics alike saw motherhood in positive terms and described it through such affirmative attributes as generation and sacrifice, love and tenderness, nurturing and selflessness.

In sum, the family unit was intended to serve as the medium through which female nature and female sexuality were controlled and transformed. And it appears, largely, to have succeeded in this ambition. The

roles of mother and wife had the desired prophylactic impact and guaranteed both the proper control of women by men as well as the creation of bonds of mutual affection that served to protect women in moments of societal crisis. Insofar as nearly all women entered into and performed these pre-established, publicly defined roles, they were, with very small statistical exceptions, thus protected. The system worked.

Complementing the integrative function of the family was the socio-doctrinal role of the nunnery, predicated upon the dominant critical Christian view of sexuality, coupled with the transcendental meaning of the virginity of Mary, 'the Mother of God'. As a result of this two-sided Christian view of women, I estimate that less than 1/27th of 1 per cent of the late medieval female population were executed as witches. Christian safeguards were socially effective. There was no all-encompassing 'gynocide'.

This same type of dialectic of theologically rooted aggression and limit also applied in the cases of medieval antisemitism – remember that Jews survived about 1,500 years of Christian domination despite the dark image of the Jew that runs from the *Adversus Judaeos* writings of the Church Fathers into Protestantism through Luther's invective, and despite the pogroms, blood libels and other manifestations of prejudice. Here the dialectic that creates this possibility of survival lies in the Pauline roots of Christianity and its theology of Israel in Romans 9:11 and elsewhere, and Augustine's teaching about Jews that demanded of Christians that they *not* destroy the Jewish people. A similar complex circumstance existed via-à-vis the medieval Church's response to heretics. This assault, too, was created as well as limited by Christian beliefs and values. In a manner that appears to us as paradoxical, the *mentalité* of the medieval Church sought the conversion of the non-believer and the abjuration of the heretic rather than his or her death. Indeed, even for those entire communities that proved unassimilable and unconvertible, like the Jews, the ultimate medieval solution was expulsion, hence the long history of medieval Jewish expulsions beginning with the exile from England in 1290 and culminating in the expulsion from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1496. This is because, for all the real and symbolic violence manifest in this civilization, the social order was controlled and constrained by a heteronomous Christian, moral vision that – however often forgotten, ignored, abused or contorted – neither encouraged nor permitted physical genocide.

The inseparable link of aggression and restraint of the sort that I have pointed to here vis-à-vis major persecutions of the medieval era is also present in the various modern cases usually raised in discussions of

historical comparisons to the Holocaust. I include here Stalin's war on the Soviet Union's peasantry and the four centuries-long crime of New World black slavery. In this last case, for example, the driving force was material gain. The entire enterprise of Atlantic slavery, both in Africa and the New World, was energized by the desire of certain individuals (and nations) to enrich themselves at the expense of others. Because of this callous self-interest, millions of human beings were enslaved in Africa by other Africans, turned into 'chattels', sent across the sea in the 'Middle Passage' and brought as property to work for the remainder of their lives as unfree labourers in the plantations of North and South America and the Caribbean. In the course of this cycle, millions upon millions of individuals were killed, giving rise to claims of a reasonable comparison to the Holocaust. But the dialectic operative in this historical context required that a sufficient number of those enslaved be kept alive – and encouraged to 'breed' – in order to fulfil the intentions of the entire slave system. There was no profit in dead slaves. Thus, economic self-interest caused a massive loss of human life, but it also limited this loss. This limit, this self-interest in the survival of the oppressed and subjugated group, did not exist vis-à-vis Jews within the universe of National Socialism. There was no dialectical that worked to save Jewish lives or encourage Jewish reproduction.

Again, consider the dialectic embodied and played out in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War that centres around the main – though not only – *cause* of this tragedy: nationalism. Though there are real and significant similarities between the Armenian tragedy and the *Shoah*, there is a decisive difference that results from the nationalist rather than racial priority in the former event. The Young Turks persecuted and sought to uproot the Armenians out of fear of Armenian nationalism, which they believed had led to treason and revolution in a time of war. The primary intention behind Turkish inhumanity was essentially a profound concern to prevent further dismemberment and diminution of the Ottoman Empire/Turkey. And this ambition led, under the exigencies of war, to the attempted destruction of Armenian nationalism that, of course, also meant killing Armenians – but within limits.

The importance of recognizing the political cum nationalist configuration of this historical event lies in the fact that it provides the proper and necessary frame of reference for analysing and evaluating Turkish behaviour. Malevolent though it certainly was, it makes it possible to recognize that the Young Turks had limited objections to Armenians per se or, put more appropriately, against 'Armenianism', for example, the Armenian population of Russia or the US. Rather, they now objected

to Armenians on Turkish soil, seeing them as a vital source of the betrayal of Turkish destiny and integrity. Thus – and this is the essential matter in this context – one could satisfy Turkish interests through several processes that, though destructive and immoral, did not require the murder of all Armenians resident in Turkey. The most salient of these state actions in terms of their life-saving significance were as follows:

- Deportations of Armenians: the cruelty of these forced marches and evacuations, which included rape, theft, murder and famine, is not to be underestimated. Yet the principle of deportation logically allowed for continued life at the journey's end and, indeed, several hundred thousand Armenians survived these journeys. The Armenian population throughout the Middle East, in Paris and Boston, among other places, is proof enough of this. Had the Turks intended a total Armenian genocide, the deportations, as well as their 'destinations', would have been different.
- The forced conversion of Armenians: hundreds of thousands of Armenians were converted. All the Western Christian powers complained about this policy of forced conversion. This was an ugly, but lifesaving, phenomenon.
- The non-attack on Constantinople's 250,000 Armenian population.

Thus, at least 50 per cent, if not up to 65 per cent, of the Turkish Armenian population survived the onslaught against them, despite contrary Armenian claims and ignoring Turkish falsifications.

In relation to Stalin's crimes, particularly regarding the Kulaks, the dialectic turns on issues of class. In this case, it is necessary to recognize that class, unlike race, allows for 'conversion' and 're-education', and so it is not necessary to murder all members of the 'offending class'. And, in fact, the majority of these class enemies, though subject to brutal, violent persecution, were *not* murdered in the Soviet Union between the late 1920s and Stalin's death in 1953. Stalin needed these peasants to farm Russia's vast agricultural lands. And this same type of dialectical action and constraint holds, I would specifically add, for the Ukrainian tragedy between 1932 and 1935. Here, once again, the issue was nationalism – this time Ukrainian nationalism – and this Stalin could decapitate without undertaking a fully genocidal assault.[5]

[5] For the moment, I will ignore the complex arguments regarding the cause of the famine, some of which seek to essentially exonerate Stalin.

When the famine was finally brought to an end, approximately 4–5 million individuals, the equivalent of 10–12.5 per cent of the Ukrainian population, had died. This was, of course, a vast tragedy, involving much criminality by Soviet officials and the Soviet state, but in the end, 87.5 per cent (or more) of the Ukrainian people remained alive.

I would also point out that this 'rule', i.e., the dialectic of causation and limitation, even applied in the Gulag, where economics was more important than politics. The Gulag, in its vastness, existed to meet *real*, economically significant quotas: to extract minerals necessary for the national good; to mine gold needed by the national treasury; to fell timber for export; and to supply labour that could be exploited in the name of rapid industrialization. In this environment, utilitarian motives, however base, counted against ideological fantasies and death. Collective gain, wealth, production, industrialization and socialist modernization were the justification for the violence. It was this immanent, practical, economic and industrial design to produce raw materials rather than exterminate the labour force that defined the Gulag. As a result, many millions of Russians, of all nationalities and ethnic and religious groups, survived the cruel Soviet camp system.

The issue of 'mediation'

The third thing that I have learned that I believe is significant in relation to the study of the Holocaust and the subject of comparative genocide is what I call 'mediation' – that is, searching out those factors in historical contexts of mass murder that work against and restrain genocide. Here, for example, consider the issues of profitability and the preservation of capital, the value of reproduction, the significance of miscegenation and the connection between sex and manumission in the universe of black slavery; the role of family life, sexuality and Christian ethical norms during the medieval era of the witch craze; the possibility of, and actual historical role of, expulsion rather than extermination in the many cases of medieval antisemitism from the thirteenth century to the end of the fifteenth century; the case of the forced migration rather than the annihilation of five Southern Indian tribes under President Andrew Jackson, the establishment of hundreds of Native American reservations in the history of the relationship between the US government and the Native American peoples within its borders, the role of disease and then inoculation in the demographic history of the Native American community and the limited nature of the Indian wars carried on by the US military; and the deportation – not extermination – of the minority nationalities

under Stalin. Only in the *Shoah* – and with recognition of the killings in Rwanda – was 'mediation' essentially absent. This was true even with regard – or should we say disregard – to Jewish labour that was so desperately needed during the war by the Hitler state – a large subject that I do not have time to explore here.

Understanding the Third Reich

My study of the Holocaust, and of its singularity centring around the fate of the Jewish people, has given me a way of interpreting the phenomenon of Nazism more generally. While recognizing that monocausal explanations of Nazism are inadequate, the Holocaust points to the absolute centrality – not exclusiveness – of racial antisemitism in the construction of the Third Reich and the policies it pursued.

I would here mention three major issues illuminated in fundamental and distinctive ways as a result of the concentration on the unique Nazi assault against world Jewry:

1) At the centre of the Nazi worldview stood a massive project of racial engineering and population restructuring, at the core of which was an unyielding racial antisemitism that was at the apex of this racial hierarchy. In this schema the Jew was the main source of all national and international political, social and economic problems. As such, Jews had to be removed completely in order to 'liberate' history from their controlling, deforming and destructive presence. According to Hitler's worldview, this became the blueprint for the building of the Third Reich; all other interests, motives, policies, agendas, intentions and goals were secondary to this absolute requirement. The extraction and elimination of 'der Jude' was the necessary precondition for all other cultural, socio-economic and political progress.

   This cardinal belief impacted, directly or indirectly, on just about everything that was significant in Nazi Germany and within all the territories conquered by the armies of the Hitler state. It was now insisted that all normative values and all practical undertakings be brought into conformity with this foundational racial belief. Anything else was treason against the natural order and against the National Socialist state that was created to pursue and defend this natural order. And when the lethal ends dictated by this unshakeable obsession clashed with other ends or ambitions, it was almost always the other goals, the alternative objectives, that had to give way. Making Europe free of Jews was far more important to the Führer, and

hence to the workings and predetermined teleology of the Third Reich, than more mundane political or economic aims.

2) In the long-running and consequential debate between 'intentionalists' and 'functionalists' that, despite the view of many contemporary scholars, is neither unimportant nor transcended by more recent scholarship, the 'functionalist' position must be judged insufficient, while what Christopher R. Browning has labelled 'ultra-functionalism' is, in its rigidity and extremism, dysfunctional. The key to events in the Second World War from the German side were almost always the result of a decision or series of decisions made by the Nationalist Socialist leadership in Berlin. What generally happened on the ground was the consequence of decisions and choices made at the 'centre' of the Reich rather than at its 'periphery', even while all that occurred at the periphery is recognized as being relevant for an accurate and full understanding of the entire historical narrative. Moreover, in every significant instance where decisions were made and choices decided, the role and implications of racial antisemitism in Amt IV (the Nazi office in Berlin dealing with the 'Final Solution') and elsewhere in Berlin was a pre-eminent factor. If conflicts arose between the cardinal racial imperatives held by the Hitler state and other interests and goals of the state, it was the former that almost always held sway, and the course of action taken was consistent with its requirements.

   Thus, while Christopher R. Browning has described himself as a 'moderate functionalist', I would describe myself as a 'moderate intentionalist'. In doing so, I must first say that I have enormous regard for Browning's work. Through reading his research studies, as well as in many private conversations over many years, he has taught me a great deal of the real history of the Nazi state. Moreover, he has convinced me that 'the Jewish Policy of Hitler and the regime evolved in response to changing situations and previous failures' and that his 'moderate functionalist' approach is important not only insofar as it 'tried to answer not only the questions about Hitler's role and the centrality of his anti-Semitism' – and here Browning reached a conclusion not particularly different from mine – but also helped answer the question of 'how it was possible to put such an incredible policy into practice'.[6] Thus, to this degree, he, and other friends like Martin Dean and Jurgen Matthias at the United States Holocaust

[6] Personal communication with the author, November 2013.

Memorial Museum, have made me less of an undiluted 'intentionalist' and have transformed me into what I have just described as 'a moderate intentionalist'.

That said, without getting into the fine print here, I would emphasize that in my view, three things must be given primacy in deconstructing the Third Reich: first, to repeat, decisions made in Berlin were not only central but were also decisive to events on the ground; second, ideology was a determinative factor in planning and carrying out the murder of European Jewry; and, third, this ideology was a distinctive form of racial-metaphysical antisemitism.

3) Here I would remind everyone of the following in support of these three claims:

   a. The assault on Jewry was pan-European.
   b. The formation and activities of the *Einsatzgruppen* was the result of plans made in Berlin.
   c. The events leading up to and away from the Wannsee Conference – i.e., the fateful decision on the 'Final Solution' and its implementation – are a testament to centralized planning, predicated on the dominant, foundational antisemitic beliefs of the leadership of the Third Reich.
   d. The issue of the creation of approximately 1,200 ghettos across all areas of Poland, the Baltic States and the conquered territories in Belarus and Ukraine is an uncertain matter. There is no document that I can point to that ordered the establishment of ghettos throughout Eastern Europe. Moreover, there is no doubt that local actors were important in deciding aspects of the individual histories of the ghettos. Thus, a less 'intentionalist', more functionalist explanation may be correct as to the creation of the ghettos. At the same time, however, I would argue that the liquidation of the ghettos between late 1942 and the end of 1944 came about directly as a result of an order by Heinrich Himmler.
   e. Then there is the last great paroxysm of violence of the *Shoah*: the murder of Hungarian Jewry in the spring and early summer of 1944. It was the arrival of Adolf Eichmann with his *Sonderkommando* in March 1944 – on the Führer's orders and for ideological reasons only – that led inexorably to the movement of over 437,000 Hungarian Jews, primarily to Auschwitz, where about 90 per cent of these individuals were murdered.
   f. And, finally, there are the death camps. These have become the symbol par excellence, above all else, of what Nazism

> stood for and what it most distinctively achieved. Their coming into existence was not the result of local decisions made by marginal actors; rather, they were the incarnation of Hitler's (and Himmler's) most cherished beliefs.
>
> In regard to all of these major, central matters, recognizing the *unique* role of racial antisemitism within the Hitler state and the uniqueness of the project that was the 'Endlösung', helps to explain the nature of the Third Reich as nothing else does.

Elements within each of these three items can be enriched by the details emphasized by functionalist interpreters, but in their totality, only an intelligently formulated *intentionalist* interpretive schema can explain all here that requires explaining.

Conclusion

Given all that has already been said and supported by much that I have learned that has here remained unsaid, and contrary to much that is uninformed and even foolish that has been written about studying the Holocaust in comparative perspective, I am still willing to defend, after decades of close study, the uniqueness of the *Shoah* as an historical event. I would moreover conclude that a comparative approach to the study of the Holocaust (and Nazism and the Second World War), in concert with other approaches, sheds light on the events under consideration in a particular, distinctive and especially helpful way.

I would therefore recommend it to others.

6

Historiosophy as a Response to Catastrophe: Studying Nazi Christians as a Jew

Susannah Heschel

One of the earliest historians of the Holocaust, Philip Friedman, himself a survivor, wrote in 1958 that 'every generation creates its own historiosophical doctrine as well as research methods compatible with its spirit'.[1] Note that Friedman does not use the term 'historiography', but rather 'historiosophy', a somewhat obscure term for the philosophy of history, but one brought into Jewish discourse by Gershom Scholem in his best-known book, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, published just a few years before Friedman's book. In discussing sixteenth-century Lurianic mysticism's myth of creation as divine catastrophe, Scholem argued that kabbalists were using metaphysics to reify historical reality. Friedman may have had the same understanding in his use of the term: historians do not simply describe or interpret an event; rather, they bring what is unknown or forgotten into reality. Such was certainly the case in Friedman's day. He was one of the earliest historians of the Holocaust, and much of what he wrote about was unknown, suppressed or simply lost with the lives that had been extinguished. His careful research brought into reality events that had occurred, studying the Jews 'not only as tragic victims but as bearers of a communal existence with all the manifold and numerous aspects involved'.[2]

Yet Friedman also pointed out that each generation creates its own historiosophy – that is, our choice of the events that we historians select for study is shaped by factors that are both personal and political. Some

[1] Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust*, Ada June Eber-Friedman (ed.) (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1980), p. 554.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 561.

historians, for example, search for the rational in the Holocaust, focusing on bureaucracies that, once set in motion, became relentless engines of destruction. Then there are those who want to preserve an intact German culture from imbrication in Nazism: the distinguished historian Friedrich Meineke, for whom Nazism was a 'German catastrophe', or Ernst Nolte, for whom the Holocaust was an 'Asiatic deed', not a German one. Historians of the churches are similarly divided between those who claim that Nazism was a pagan movement that sought the destruction of the church as well as the Jews, and those who argue that centuries of Christian denigrations of Judaism and persecution of Jews contributed to Nazi antisemitism. To what extent was the church responsible for making Nazi actions against the Jews plausible to the many Germans who participated or simply tolerated those actions? The answer bears far greater significance than a debate over the past; it bears significance for the moral standing of the church and the continued validity of its leadership. Indeed, the historian's conclusions are historiosophic in that they change the very nature of how we regard Christianity's role in history.

The studies that I have pursued examine Protestant theologians during the Third Reich and the ways in which a significant number of them lent support to National Socialist antisemitic ideology. I learned in the early 1990s about the existence of an institute financed by the Protestant Church that produced antisemitic propaganda written by theologians, pastors and students of theology. The institute, founded in 1939, called itself 'Institut zur Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben' (Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life). At the time that I began my interest in its work, I was informed by historians in Germany and in North America that it had been an inconsequential, short-lived, marginal phenomenon whose archives had long been lost. Still, I pursued my curiosity and discovered documents pertaining to the Institute in church archives in Berlin and also in Eisenach, where it had been headquartered in the villa of the *Predigerseminar* (the pastors' training seminary) of Thuringia. Gaining the confidence of the church archivist in Eisenach took years, and only gradually did he allow me access to the important documents demonstrating the Institute's remarkable influence in the six years of its existence, and the continued careers within the Protestant Church of its leaders and major contributors in post-war East and West Germany.

The bureaucratic machinery that carried out the murder of six million Jews had no need of pastors or theologians. However, National

Socialism seemed to many pastors and theologians in Germany to offer a great opportunity for reviving the church. Racial theory seemed modern and scientific, just what might wake up a tired Protestant theology. The Nazi party platform affirmed support for 'positive Christianity', and church leaders responded with their own support for the Nazi principles of manliness, militarism and antisemitism, the three pillars of the so-called 'Deutsche Christen' (DC), the German Christian movement, a pro-Nazi movement within the Protestant Church that quickly gained control of many of the regional churches and theological faculties. Most important was its control of the regional church of the large and wealthy Old Prussian Union, with its wealth and influence. With 600,000 formally enrolled members, the DC's influence extended more broadly through its publications, both scholarly and popular, and its use of Nazi symbols – until banned by the party in 1936, swastikas appeared on church altars, church newspapers and on the flags and banners of the DC movement that decorated their mass meetings and flew from churches.

The pinnacle of the DC was reached in 1939, with the opening of the Institute. Headquartered in Eisenach, Thuringia, in offices of the *Predigerseminar*, the Institute pursued both political and theological goals. Preparing a dejudaized Christianity for Germany, it sought to 'liberate' all of Europe from Jewish influence, claiming that Germany was fighting both military and spiritual battles. To that end, members of the Institute rejected the Old Testament and published a version of the New Testament purged of all Jewish references, which it sold to churches throughout the Reich.

Members of the Institute included approximately 60 university professors and *Dozenten*, students of theology, pastors, bishops and teachers of religion. The funding for the Institute was generous and came from the *Landeskirchen*. Institute publications included its own version of a dejudaized New Testament, hymnal and catechism, which were sold to churches; scholarly publications of Institute-sponsored conferences; and small pamphlets for a popular readership that explained the Institute's goals. All can be described as Nazi ideals expressed in Christian language. For example, Institute publications described Jesus as a non-Jew – a Galilean or Aryan – who fell as victim to the Jews, who sought to destroy him. Germans today, Institute propaganda proclaimed, were obligated to take up Christ's struggle against the Jews, who were seeking Germany's destruction.

Historians of National Socialism are increasingly interested in the role played by religion in the Third Reich and in Nazi ideology. In the past,

historians have too often suffered from a Kantianism that inflicted them with a 'blindness to religion, the irrational, and history'.[3] Culture surely cannot be understood apart from religion, the glue that links beliefs with rituals, deeds and actions, the irrational with the performative. At the same time, vague generalizations about 'political religion' that ignore the specific teachings put forward in Nazi Germany by Christian pastors and theologians neglect the very specific influence on the persecution and destruction of the Jews that was pursued by many in the church. For example, Michael Burleigh characterizes the Nazi mobilization of emotional enthusiasm as a form of religious appeal,[4] and Philippe Burrin writes of the Nazis' 'feelings and attitudes of exaltation, fascination and reverence, typical of the religious experience'.[5] Wolfgang Hardtwig describes Nazi rallies as reflecting a kind of messianic fervor[6] and Jane Caplan sees a Nazi parasitism of Christian symbols expressed in a myth of rebirth that, she argues, was the 'key overlap between Nazi and Christian ideology'.[7]

Identifying the passion for National Socialism as 'religious' hides from view the specific teachings around which Nazism and Christianity joined hands. Religion is more than emotion; it is a set of propositions. The philosopher of religion Nancy Frankenberry has argued that religion must be understood as a communal system or propositional attitudes – beliefs, hopes, fears, desires – that are related to superhuman agents. In other words, religion has propositional content: symbolic truth without literal semantic mooring is blind.[8] With this definition, religion cannot be diluted into a vague 'ultimate concern' or equated with political 'Schwaermerei'; rather, it is the propositional content of religion that must be examined by the historian. Given the extensive endorsement by

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[3] Cited by Anson Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 46.

[4] Michael Burleigh, 'National Socialism as Political Religion', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1(2) (Autumn 2000), 1–26, at 7.

[5] Philippe Burrin, 'Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept', *History and Memory*, 9(1–2) (1997), 321–24.

[6] Wolfgang Hardtwig, 'Political Religion in Modern Germany: Reflections on Nationalism, Socialism, and National Socialism', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* (2001), 3–27 at 10–11.

[7] Jane Caplan, 'Politics, Religion, and Ideology: A Comment on Wolfgang Hardtwig', *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* (2001), 28–36 at 35, 34.

[8] Nancy K. Frankenberry, *Radical Interpretation in Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 169.

Christian theologians of Nazi antisemitism, we can sharpen our understanding of the relationship between Nazism and religion, and ask in what ways Christianity itself was reshaped by the Third Reich. Historians will never be able to measure with any precision the influence of propaganda, whether it came from Joseph Goebbels or from pastors preaching an Aryan Christ who sought the destruction of the Jews. However, newer historical studies of the churches have demonstrated that the churches did not stand in opposition to Hitler, nor were they neutral forces observing the destruction of the Jews without intervening; rather, numerous theologians strove mightily in support of the Nazi eradication of the Jews. My own efforts, and those of Robert Ericksen and Doris Bergen, two other important historians of the churches during the Third Reich, were historiosophical, in Philip Friedman's understanding: we have brought into existence ugly aspects of the history of Christian theology that had long been suppressed and 'forgotten'.

When I first started exploring the archives of the former East Germany in the early 1990s, not long after the Berlin Wall had fallen, I felt I was entering an earlier era. Thuringia in those days had too many buildings still standing, seemingly untouched, where meetings of Nazi officials had taken place, and the towns of Eisenach and Jena seemed suspended in time. What in the world was I doing, I asked myself as I first handled Nazi documents; why was I there? In surveying my work, I realize that my decision to write about the Nazi era was influenced by my childhood background, by my childhood home that was populated by family friends who were European Jewish refugee scholars, and by the experience of my own father, Abraham Joshua Heschel, a theologian who studied in Germany from 1927 to 1938 and came to the US in 1940 as a penniless refugee. Other relatives were refugees, too, but I also grew up with the presence of those who had been killed – my grandmother, three aunts and other extended family, as well as my father's teachers and friends, whom he remembered and spoke of frequently. My project felt like an effort to explore the world in which my father had lived, but also to expose, as a historian and not without anger, the Christian theologians who had not simply failed to defend and protect the Jews, but who had actively supported their persecution.

As the daughter of a refugee scholar from Hitler's Europe, I grew up in two worlds. Physically, we lived on the Upper West Side of New York City. Spiritually, my parents were living in Europe. My father was a professor of Jewish philosophy at a rabbinical seminary, my mother was a pianist, and our household was quiet and academic. I grew up hearing about German literature, music and philosophy, and about great rabbis

and Jewish scholars. Nearly all of my parents' friends were Jewish scholars who had escaped Europe, and they talked constantly about pre-war Jewish life, and about professors and colleagues and rabbis they had known in Europe. What they could never understand was why it was all destroyed. The most frequently discussed book by my parents' friends was Max Weinreich's 1946 study, *Hitler's Professors*, which detailed the Nazification of the universities, and the enthusiasm and collaboration of many of the most distinguished German scholars with Hitler's antisemitism, including their own teachers. Many of these individuals had been the teachers of my parents' friends, and they spoke with disbelief – how could such learned teachers, professors at German universities, have become Nazis? Everything had a question mark – no question was ever answered.

The cultural signifiers in my childhood were all European – Goethe, Schiller, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Stefan George, Stefan Zweig, Feuchtwanger and so many others – whereas American writers were rarely mentioned, and I doubt these European refugees had ever read Hawthorne, Melville, Hemingway or James Fennimore Cooper. There was sadness that they were describing a world that no longer existed, but their vividness seemed to keep that world alive, and I grew up feeling like a tourist in America, intrigued by Americans, who seemed like foreigners.

Part of the European ethos that was central to my growing-up years was the notion that a professor was the noblest figure in any society. Scholarship was the greatest calling and intellectuals bore an aura of the elect. That they should have corrupted themselves with Nazism was vile, and that antisemitism should have infiltrated their work was the greatest pollution. Such were the attitudes I imbibed at home; they have determined, to a great extent, the agenda of my own research and the emotional reactions I have had to the discoveries I have made about antisemitism among German Protestant theologians. An additional and important factor was my father's own involvement in politics – in the ecumenical movement, in the Civil Rights Movement and the effort to stop the war in Vietnam. He had close friends who were Christian theologians, including Reinhold Niebuhr, Father Hesburgh, Richard John Neuhaus and William Sloane Coffin, and Christians frequently joined us for Sabbath dinners and Passover *seders*. My father's friendship with Martin Luther King, Jr. was an example for me of the power of religion to soften hardened hearts and triumph over racism.

An important intellectual turning point came during my first year of college, when I took a class on 'Introduction to the New Testament'.

We were assigned to read Rudolf Bultmann's famous book, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, which was originally published as *Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen* in 1944.[9] The book was presented by our professor as a great classic of historical scholarship, describing the emergence of the Jesus movement into full-fledged Christianity. It seemed that I was the only one who reacted to the book's depiction of first-century Judaism's 'legalism' as if I were reading an antisemitic tract.[10] The depiction of a degenerate 'late' Judaism, in contrast to the religious revival allegedly brought about by Jesus and Paul, was accepted as historical fact by my fellow students and by our professor. According to Bultmann, the Jews' observance of the commandments 'meant making life an intolerable burden' (p. 66); 'The motive of ethics was obedience' (p. 68); 'The ritual commandments having lost their original meaning, man's relation to God was inevitably conceived in legalistic terms' (p. 68); 'For Judaism God has become remote' (p. 79). By contrast, Jesus was 'a tremendous protest against contemporary Jewish legalism' (p. 72); in Jesus' teachings, God is concerned with 'inner motive' (p. 72); Jesus 'brought God out of the false transcendence to which he had been relegated by Judaism and made him near at hand again' (p. 77); Jesus taught that 'God is near, and hears the petitions we address to him as a father listens to the requests of his children' (pp. 77–78). To me, each of Bultmann's derogatory statements about Judaism, its rabbis, God and commandments, felt like a personal assault, as if my body and my life were being hacked up by his words. It was my first personal experience of Christian anti-Judaism. Until that point, I had been raised in a parental home in which Christian theologians visited with enormous respect and genuine interest in Judaism. Here, suddenly, was another, quite ugly side of Christian theology.

My studies led me away from my interest in the biblical period and its texts, and instead to the question of how scholars had misshaped our readings of history with biased categories and inappropriate questions. Judaism was portrayed as 'late', dessicated and legalistic – all in the service of elevating Jesus and early Christianity. I decided to examine the history of scholarship to understand the factors that had distorted the

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[9] Rudolf Bultmann, *Primitive Christianity in its Contemporary Setting*, R.H. Fuller (trans.) (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1956).

[10] Peter von der Osten-Sacken, 'Rückzug ins Wesen und aus der Geschichte', *Wissenschaft und Praxis in Kirche und Gesellschaft*, 67 (1978), 106–22; Dieter Georgi, 'The Interest in Life of Jesus Theology as a Paradigm for the Social History of Biblical Criticism', *Harvard Theological Review*, 85(1) (1992), 51–83.

field. For that, nineteenth-century Germany was key: this was the place and time that scholarship on the Bible – and religion more generally – arose and set forth the parameters of the field. I completed a master's degree in theology at Harvard Divinity School, a superb course of study, and then left for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where I took classes on modern Jewish thought. While in Israel, I decided to pursue doctoral studies at the University of Pennsylvania, in its Department of Religious Studies, a small department with a strong emphasis on theory and methods in the study of religion. Uriel Tal, one of the towering figures in German thought, was a visiting professor from Tel Aviv University, and studying with him and the other professors in the Department was a great education. Towards the end of my course work, I signed up for a year-long seminar in modern Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary, in New York, taught by Ismar Schorsch. It was a very special experience. My assignment in the seminar was to make a formal presentation on the work of the twentieth-century German-Jewish scholar Leo Baeck, who had written extensively on early Judaism, Christian origins and also a critique of the work of Adolf von Harnack, the most distinguished scholar of early Christianity in his day. Baeck's work intrigued me and I decided to write my doctoral dissertation about him. But as I explored the work of his predecessors, I came to realize that his arguments were derived from those of Abraham Geiger, a leader of liberal Judaism in the nineteenth century who was also a prolific and highly original scholar of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Geiger, I discovered, had closely monitored the writings of his contemporary Christian theologians, criticizing their misrepresentations of Judaism and misreadings of Jewish sources. He noted that their unjustified identification of the Pharisees as hypocrites had led to all sorts of twisted readings of ancient texts, just as the failure of New Testament scholars to read rabbinic literature left them unable to place Gospel passages within what he saw as their proper context. I wrote my dissertation on Geiger, which I later revised into a book, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, which won prizes and was translated into German. Geiger was a forgotten figure when I wrote my book, but I had known his name since my childhood, having heard it often from my father and his German-Jewish refugee scholar friends.

During the course of my research on Geiger and the reception of his work among Christian theologians of the nineteenth century, I happened to visit a library in Berlin belonging to the Center for Research on Antisemitism, part of the Technical University. While browsing in the library's collection, I came across several volumes of essays published in

Germany during the Second World War by prominent Protestant theologians. Curious to see what they were writing during those difficult years, I began to read and discovered vicious antisemitic propaganda. The volumes, I noticed, had been published by the 'Institute for the Study of Jewish Influence on German Religious Life' and edited by a professor of the New Testament at the University of Jena, Walter Grundmann. I had never heard of that institute and began to look for information about it in the numerous and thorough histories of the church during the Third Reich. I found only one or two small footnotes that mentioned the Institute, which was founded in 1939 by members of the German Christian movement.

During the summer of 1991, I was able to spend several weeks in Germany, examining archival materials at the Central Archives of the Protestant Church, located in the former West Berlin. Going through papers from the Nazi era, I found documents concerning the Institute, including discussions among high church officials about its establishment, in the spring of 1939, and evidence that funding for the Institute had come from regional churches, funnelled through church headquarters in Berlin. At a conference on the theological faculties during the Third Reich, I asked one of Germany's most distinguished church historians, who has written extensively on the Nazi era, if any of the Institute's own archives were extant. No, he told me, everything had been destroyed. Undaunted, I still hoped to find at least some traces that might indicate who had been involved in its work, and the extent of its activities, by visiting the church archives of the state of Thuringia, where the Institute's headquarters had been located. When I arrived at the archives in Eisenach in the summer of 1991, I was the first American and the first Jew the archivist had ever met – and with the first laptop he had ever seen. My area of interest was of interest to him as well, since he himself had studied theology during the post-war years with Walter Grundmann and other theologians from the Institute. He was reluctant, though, to show me materials, quite defensive about Grundmann and the church, and at first rather hostile to my interest in antisemitism and the Holocaust. He only showed me a few documents at first, and I had to secure grants every year or two to return to Germany and ask him for additional material. Eventually, after several years, he admitted to holding a vast cache of material that he allowed me to examine, and my efforts to bring the Institute's history into being began to take shape.

The Institute was founded at the initiative of a wide group of bishops, pastors and professors, and functioned actively from 1939 to 1945, producing a de-Judaized hymnal and New Testament, a catechism and

various other educational materials proclaiming Jesus' opposition to Judaism and status as an Aryan, and a host of pamphlets and books describing the horrors of Judaism. For example, in 1942, Grundmann, together with Karl Euler, instructor in the Old Testament at the University of Giessen, published a book, *The Religious Face of Judaism*, in which they declared:

> a healthy Volk must and will reject Judaism in every form . . . If someone is upset about Germany's attitude toward Judaism, Germany has the historical justification and historical authorization for the fight against Judaism on its side! . . . So this work serves the great fateful fight of the German nation for its political and economic, spiritual and cultural and also its religious freedom.[11]

In a series of pamphlets and articles designed to justify the war from a Christian perspective, Grundmann argued that the Jews are violent and dangerous: 'We know that Jewry wants the destruction [Vernichtung] of Germany.'[12] 'To this very day the Jews persecute Jesus and all who follow him with unreconcilable hatred.'[13]

The goal of the Institute was to alleviate any tension between National Socialism and Christianity. Grundmann had long been enamoured of Hitler as a man of God, writing in 1933:

> We also know from men who are close to the Führer that he knows of his inner connection with God. He knows himself to be the instrument of God and has the clear, simple trust in God of a man who – as the Bible puts it – is reconciled with God . . . When one experiences this man for the first time, he certainly feels one thing: the deep humility of the man which is at the same time completely consistent with his higher commission. This oneness of man with his God is a symbol of what the old church teachers intended to say with the Trinity.[14]

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[11] Walter Grundmann and Karl Friedrich Euler, *Das religiöse Gesicht des Judentums: Entstehung und Art* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1942), foreword.
[12] Walter Grundmann, 'Das Heil Kommt von den Juden: Eine Schicksalsfrage an die Christen deutscher Nation', *Deutsche Frömmigkeit*, 9 (September 1938), 1.
[13] Walter Grundmann, Wilhelm Büchner *et al*. (eds), *Deutsche mit Gott: Ein deutsches Glaubensbuch* (Weimar: Verlag Deutsche Christen, 1941), p. 46.
[14] Walter Grundmann, 'Führererlebnis und Priestertum', *Glaube und Volk*, 2 (1933), 148. Similar tributes to Hitler as a divine saviour are expressed by Grundmann in his article 'Die Neubesinnung der Theologie', 39–54.

Six years later, Grundmann's Institute established a commission to develop a racial approach to the origins of Christianity; its members were professors, including Gerhard Delling (NT, Leipzig),[15] Herbert Preisker (NT, Breslau),[16] Carl Schneider (NT, Königsberg),[17] Rudolf Meyer (NT, Leipzig),[18] Georg Bertram (NT, Giessen)[19] and Grundmann. Another commission investigated the alleged opposition between Aryan and Semitic religiosity. Two scholars of Semitics, Rudi Paret,[20] who was appointed Professor of Semitics and Islamic Studies at the University of Bonn in 1940, and Erwin Kiefer,[21] instructor of Hebrew philology at the University of Heidelberg, directed a committee to study hostility towards Jews and Judaism from the Greco-Roman world of late antiquity until the sixteenth century.

Publications and conferences abounded, and the Institute was successful in promoting its message. Funding was readily available, and Institute members went on lecture trips – for instance, Wolf Meyer-Erlach, Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Jena, lectured German troops on the Judaization of England, and Grundmann spoke to groups of pastors about the dangers of 'the Jew', who, he said, was waging war against Germany. Institute conferences also offered students and younger faculty members an opportunity to present their work, meet church leaders and scholars, and form relationships that were crucial, after the war, to furthering their careers.

Indeed, the post-war years brought professional advancement to Institute members in both East and West Germany. Werner Petersmann, a pastor and Institute member from Breslau, retained his politics after the war. In a 1975 publication, he defended South African apartheid and racism on Christian grounds. The liberalism of the French Enlightenment had led to communism, and while Hitler 'went too far' with his

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[15] Gerhard Delling became Professor of the New Testament at the University of Greifswald in 1947.

[16] Herbert Preisker succeeded Grundmann as Professor of the New Testament at the University of Jena in 1947.

[17] Carl Schneider was director of the Evangelische Akademie in Enkenbach after the war.

[18] Rudolf Meyer was appointed Professor of the Old Testament at the University of Jena in 1947.

[19] Bertram joined the NS Lehrerbund on 1 December 1933; membership 227 288. BDC, Bertram materials.

[20] Rudi Paret joined the National Socialists on 20 July 1934. BDC, Paret materials.

[21] Erwin Kiefer joined the National Socialists on 10 July 1937; University of Heidelberg archive, Bestand PA-B3099: Personalakten Erwin Kiefer.

antisemitism, Petersmann wrote, 'anti-Hitler hysteria' kept people from recognizing that Nazi racial principles were fundamentally correct.[22]

Martin Redeker, another Institute member, retained his professorship in systematic theology at the University of Kiel after the war, despite letters of complaint sent to church officials. The Bishop of Schleswig-Holstein, in a 1947 letter, explained that Redeker had denied any personal involvement in the Institute, claiming he had been sent by church officials simply to observe what was taking place.[23] In the 1950s, Redeker became active in the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party politics and was elected four times between 1954 and 1967 to the Schleswig-Holstein Parliament. In 1967, he was awarded the *Bundesverdienstkreuz*. However, in 1968 students at Kiel exposed his Nazi-era activities. Despite that, he retained his position at the University as Professor and Dean of the theological faculty.

Herbert Preisker was appointed Professor of the New Testament at Jena after the war; Karl Heussi, the church historian who served as Dean of the theological faculty, falsely claimed that Preisker had never had Nazi affiliations. In fact, Preisker was known for his Nazi sympathies and his activities in the German Christian movement.[24] He was active in the Institute as well, editing its dejudaized New Testament and serving as head of its commission to study the origins of Christianity 'from a racial perspective'. Preisker had received a professorship of the New Testament at the University of Breslau in 1936 after his predecessor, Ernst Lohmeyer, was expelled for his anti-Nazi stance.[25] As Dean from 1936 to 1945, Preisker Nazified the theological faculty at Breslau, so that it was one of the very few not closed by Reich officials during the war.[26]

In his major study of New Testament history published in 1937, Preisker presented Christianity as overcoming both Hellenism and Judaism through the figure of the resurrected Christ (not the Jewish Jesus of history): 'Arising on Jewish ground, *early Christianity is the*

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[22] Werner Petersmann, *Wider Die 'Irrlehre' Des Weltkirchenrates: Zur Rassengliederung in Südafrika* (Goslar: Hübener, 1975), pp. 18, 25.

[23] Niedersaechsische evangelische Kirchenarchiv (NEK), Archives of the Confessing Church of Schleswig-Holstein, p. 72.

[24] BDC, Preisker files.

[25] Ulrich Hutter-Wolandt, *Die evangelische Kirche Schlesiens im Wandel der Zeiten: Studien und Quellen zur Geschichte einer Territorialkirche* (Dortmund: Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa, 1991), pp. 251–53.

[26] Report from Martin Bormann, dated 23 June 1939, of a conference held on 6 April 1939 on the consolidation of the theological faculties (Bundesarchiv Potsdam. 62Di1, 56/4).

radical overcoming of Judaism.'[27] He also published a pamphlet attempting to reconcile the New Testament 'work ethic' with that of National Socialism, and a small book attempting to reconcile the gospels with the *Heliand*, a ninth-century Saxonian text about a saviour figure.[28] Preisker's efforts were well regarded; in October 1942, he was proposed by Alfred Rosenberg's Office of Ideological Information to be one of several instructors for a course planned for pastors.[29] In October 1946, Heussi wrote to the Soviet occupying authorities to insist that Preisker was never a member of the Nazi Party or of any associated organization. He required no rehabilitation, Heussi wrote, because 'Professor Preisker is in no way tarnished and there is nothing to rehabilitate'.[30] In 1951, Heussi again testified that Preisker's political position was 'according to my observations irreproachably correct. He is outspokenly antifascist and exerts a definite positive influence on the students in terms of political viewpoint'.[31] In 1952, Preisker left Jena for a professorship at Halle, where he had assumed the prestigious directorship of the Corpus Judaeo-Hellenisticum, a major research project on Hellenistic-era texts. He died there suddenly on 24 December 1952.

Walter Grundmann, Academic Director of the Institute, received an easy denazification, despite having joined the Nazi Party in 1930 and becoming a supporting member of the SS in 1934. Because of his early membership in the National Socialists, Grundmann lost his professorship in Jena, but was instead appointed by the Thuringian Church as rector of a seminary for religion teachers and church organists. His denazification was supported by his friends and colleagues, most of whom had also been active Nazis. Typical is a letter from Waldemar

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[27] Herbert Preisker, *Neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte* (Brlin: Töpelmann, 1937), p. 297, italics in original.

[28] Herbert Preisker, *Das Ethos Der Arbeit Im Neuen Testament*, ed. Werner Petersmann, vol. 19, *Aufbau Im 'Positiven Christentum'* (Gnadenfrei in Schlesien: Gustav Winter, 1936).

[29] The proposal regarding Preisker came from Wilhelm Brachmann, director of the division on the Study of Religion (Bundesarchiv Potsdam, 62Di1, 56/4). Report from Brachmann, Insitute director, dated October 1, 1942, concerning a plan for a course of instruction on the study of religion for instructors and teaching institutes.

[30] Letter from Heussi, Dean, to Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone, Berlin (UAJ D 986).

[31] Letter from Heussi to Berlin, dated September 30, 1951. For more on Presiker, see Hutter-Wolandt, 'Spagat Zwischen Wissenschaft Und Anpassung: Die Breslauer Evangelische Theologische Fakultät Unter Ihrem Dekan Herbert Preisker Von 1936 Bis 1945'.

Macholz, a former colleague at the University of Jena, who asserted that although Grundmann had been a member of the National Socialists, he was 'kein Aktivist'. Hans Mieskes, a former student who was now assistant to the Dean at the University of Jena's Faculty of Social Pedagogy, wrote that Grundmann had really not been a racist. Grundmann himself argued that he had fought against National Socialism: 'Together with other scholars, the undersigned created a spiritual-scholarly movement of opposition against tendencies imperiling German culture, German spiritual life, and the German soul.'[32]

The accumulated letters on Grundmann's behalf led the state of Thuringia, in September 1946, to urge the church to reinstate him. State officials wrote that Grundmann was an 'unworldly' theologian who joined the Nazi Party out of idealism and had fought a 'manly battle . . . against Nazi ideology'.[33] The Bishop of the Thuringian Church, Moritz Mitzenheim, then concluded that Grundmann 'stood in a struggle against the Nazi Party, as only a few other courageous people within the party did'.[34] This was a falsehood that was known to members of the Thuringian Church Council.[35] Gerhard Gloege, a former Confessing Church pastor who became Professor of Practical Theology at the University of Jena after the war, found Grundmann's repentance insincere – 'He tries to vindicate himself and to emphasize the theological legitimacy of his prior actions' – yet recommended his reinstatement as pastor so that the church might control him: 'One never knows with Grundmann where his sharp intellect will turn, if someone does not lead him in the right direction and take him under their wing.'[36]

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[32] Letter from Grundmann dated 20 January 1946; Thüringisches Hauptstaatsarchiv Weimar; Land Thueringen Ministerium fuer Volksbildung 3426, Blatt 114–20.

[33] Letter from senior privy councillor Erle, President of the state of Thuringia, to the regional Church Council, dated 10 September 1946 (LKA Eisenach, Personalakten Grundmann; ThHStA, Grundmann PA).

[34] Landeskirchen Archiv (LKA) Eisenach G 2402, no. 25.

[35] A sole dissenting voice was church councillor Gerhard Lotz, who in September 1946 strongly disagreed that Grundmann could be seen as a nominal Nazi Party member: 'As director of the dejudaization Institute he strengthened, built up, and scientifically strengthened racism within the church.' Lotz was appalled to see scholars with minimal Nazi involvement lose their professorships and livelihoods, while an old party member such as Grundmann was given employment by the church. Report by Lotz about Grundmann, 10 September 1946 (LKA Eisenach G 2402, no. 29).

[36] Letter from Gloege to Mitzenheim, 15 July 1949 (LKA Eisenach PA Grundmann G 2402, 54).

That concern, as Thomas Seidel has pointed out, had already been voiced by the Nazi bishop Martin Sasse in 1936 when Grundmann was under consideration for the professorship in Jena: 'Be careful with Grundmann!'[37]

Despite this impressive rehabilitation, Grundmann nursed an abiding resentment toward Thuringian Church officials, who were former members of the Confessing Church, his one-time adversaries. His resentment laid the foundation for his second, flourishing post-war career as a secret informer to the Stasi, the East German communist regime's pervasive and powerful secret police. That he had been a Nazi was of course known to Stasi officials, who found him eager to meet and supply details about the church's activities.[38] 'His is that of a typical scholar. He is desperate for admiration and has an inclination for intrigue.'[39] The Stasi quickly learned that Grundmann resented the post-war control of the church by former Confessing Church members, while German Christian members were excluded from positions of power; he is reported to have stated that Confessing Church pastors 'during the Nazi period blessed Hitler from the chancel in just the same way'. His resentment led Grundmann to report to the Stasi on church activities as an unofficial informant. In exchange, the Stasi gave him permission to travel to international theological conferences, which enhanced his reputation as the leading theological scholar of East Germany. Grundmann's political intrigues in East Germany were similar to those he undertook during the Third Reich, and he used the same tactics to achieve power in the two ideologically opposed states. In both regimes he used his position within the church as a base for political influence within the state, and exploited his reputation as a respected figure within the state to achieve power within the church. Never was he asked to recant his Nazi-era antisemitism,

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[37] Thomas Seidel, 'Die "Entnazifizierungs-Akte Grundmanns": Anmerkungen Zur Karriere Eines Vormals Führenden DC-Theologen' in Volker Leppin Roland Deines, and Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr (eds), *Walter Grundmann: Ein Neutestamentler in Dritten Reich* (Leipzig: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 2007), p. 349.

[38] Grundmann informed the Stasi, for example, that a reactionary Church circle had developed in Magdeburg, with followers in Eisenach, and gave the names of Church officials in the West who, he alleged, were trying to rehabilitate the German Christians (Grundmann's Stasi file, 24 September 1956).

[39] Bundesbeauftragte fuer die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehem. DDR, Zentralarchive (BStU, ZA), AIM 2455/69, Bd. 1, 35; see Lukas Bormann, 'Walter Grundmann und das Ministerium fuer Staatssicherheit – Chronik einer Zusammenarbeit aus Ueberzeugung (1956–1969)', *Zeitschrift fuer kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* (Autumn 2009), 23.

either by the church or the state. In a 1969 unpublished autobiography, Grundmann barely refers to the era of the Third Reich, writing only that he had made some mistakes.

What is the significance of Walter Grundmann and his Nazi activities? First, we can see how easily he was able to bring together Christian theology with Nazi ideology. He and his fellow members of the Institute used Christianity to promote Nazi ideology, and they used Nazism to ignore all the historical scholarship on Christian origins and invent a myth of Jesus as an antisemite. Second, we learn that the Institute was not a marginal phenomenon, but received funding and support from large numbers of theologians, bishops, pastors and lay people. Its publications did not evoke outrage before or after 1945, and the church never repudiated its dejudaization efforts.

Where, I ask myself, does this history leave me, as a scholar of religion whose scholarship focuses on Jews and Christians in Germany, and as a child of the post-war era whose very existence is a consequence of having escaped the intentions of the Nazis to murder my father as well as the rest of his family. One of the great shocks for me when I first began studying these Nazi theologians was their use of religion to justify racism. During my childhood, my father was involved, as a Jewish theologian, in the Civil Rights Movement, and it was clear to me at that time that religion was the most important force against racism. When I heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak, his words and those of the biblical prophets flowed together in remarkable ways; he made the Bible come alive. Reading the work of Christian theologians who perverted their religion, which owes its origins to Judaism, into an attack on the Jews, showed me a pathology that I would never have imagined. Rejecting the Old Testament, calling Jesus an Aryan, insisting that Jews were waging war against Germany – all of this in the context of Nazi persecution of Jews that led ultimately to the Holocaust – left me stunned. Rudolf Bultmann, whose work first awakened me to Christian anti-Judaism, was not a Nazi or a supporter of Grundmann and his cohort. However, I could see clearly the dangers of Christian negations of Judaism over the centuries. For many Jews, the Nazi years led them to reject any possible theological cooperation with Christians. For my father, however, it was precisely Nazism that made him realize the urgency of working with Christian theologians to overcome any and all residual negations of Judaism. His outreach was warmly received, both by Catholics and Protestants, and his influence in changing Christian attitudes towards Judaism is already well-known. It is by recognizing the holiness of Judaism that Christians can be strengthened in their own

faith, he argued. Inter-faith dialogue, of course, is no substitute for the hard work of creating a democratic society.

I ultimately return to the sense of disbelief I heard expressed in my childhood, that this was not, after all, a two-sided conflict – tribal, ethnic, political – but acts of atrocity committed all too often by educated, cultivated Germans, steeped in European Christian culture. Yet there can be a danger to my sense of disbelief that these educated, cultivated Germans would have sought the eradication of Jews and Judaism. Friedrich Meinecke, in his post-war book *The German Catastrophe*, argued that Germany did not need a political reckoning, but an 'intensified development of the Germans' inner existence', preferably in spiritual-religious Goethe communities. Yet it is precisely theologians, presumably among the guardians of the inner life, who disseminated so much antisemitic propaganda. Germany can only survive Nazism if its core cultural values, represented by Goethe, were restored – this is precisely the German illusion, writes the distinguished German sociologist Wolf Lepenies in his book, *The Seduction of Culture in Germany*.[40] Lepenies demonstrates that the exaltation of culture over politics was used to support very troubling political positions. The idea of a superior German *Kultur* was used to support German political aggression in 1914 and helped the Nazi Party justify its policies in the Third Reich. We know about the attraction of Nazi Germany to certain intellectuals in the 1930s whose aesthetic fascination was divorced from moral judgment, and the notion of a sacrosanct high culture survived well into the post-war period, including among the Jewish refugees I knew in my childhood.

I would conclude by suggesting that we expand Lepenies' warning about the uses of culture to include religion – not to ban either, but to guard against the separation of both from democratic institutions and political moral judgments. Today's religious fundamentalists, both Jewish and Christian, often imbued with sentiments of *ressentiment*, think they are restoring morality, but by withdrawing from the secular realm and rejecting all forms of religious expression other than their own, or by claiming to speak in the name of alleged transcendent values that ultimately only favour themselves, they become dangers to our democracies. Yes, Lepenies may well be pessimistically correct that it is an illusion that culture – or religion – can substitute for the hard work of

[40] Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton University Press, 2006).

democratic politics. Let us not be seduced by the illusions of yearning, memory or the dangerous error that *Kultur* or religion can function without independent political judgment. As Gershom Scholem wrote of the Lurianic mystics, historiosophy brings reality to moments of catastrophe. For the mystics, it was the divine catastrophe that occurred at the moment of the creation of the universe. For scholars of the Holocaust, historiosophy means bringing to reality unseen or repressed aspects of the murder of the Jews, a murder that continues to evoke in us an overwhelming sense of disbelief.

7

Pastors and Professors: Assessing Complicity and Unfolding Complexity

Robert P. Ericksen

Prologue: four autobiographical moments

Moment #1: in September 1980, I flew from Seattle to London and stayed in remarkably cheap accommodation off the Strand, not far from the decidedly more upscale Charing Cross Hotel. This was a residence reached by a narrow back alley pungent with unwelcome aromas. It cost me £2 a night, a very cheap price even then. The next day I appeared at the London School of Economics for the oral defence of my doctoral dissertation. I remember two things quite clearly. The first is that James Joll, my doctor father, started the proceedings by telling me I had passed. We would simply discuss a few ideas, plus where I should publish. My second distinct memory involves a question posed by my outside examiner from Oxford. Near the end of our conversation, he asked me whether Gerhard Kittel, a very important Professor of Theology at Tübingen University, could possibly have believed all those terrible things he said about Jews and all those wonderful things he said about Hitler. Was it not likely that he had acted under duress and said what needed to be said? Fortunately, James Joll had already indicated that my passing or failing did not hang in the balance. Therefore, I felt no anxiety in saying what I had come to believe: that Gerhard Kittel really did support Adolf Hitler and the Nazi ideology and really did see the Jews as a threat to Germany. His statements and publications from 1933 to 1945, in my view, were far more energetic, frequent and consistently pro-Nazi and anti-Jewish than mere conformity or ducking for cover would have required.

Moment #2: a few days later, I used a Eurail Pass to travel through Germany for ten days, visiting old friends. Each of them asked about the forthcoming American election. I felt no anxiety in telling them what I had come to believe: that Jimmy Carter would win a second term. I was convinced that Ronald Reagan was far too conservative to be accepted by American voters. Those were my two judgments in September 1980. I still think I was right about Gerhard Kittel.

Moment #3: in August 1988, I travelled by car from Berlin to Göttingen, along with two friends and a vice president of the Volkswagen Foundation. The latter spoke with me about Emanuel Hirsch, a famous Professor of Theology at Göttingen University who had quite early on and quite fervently supported Hitler and the Nazi ideology. The Volkswagen Foundation had recently agreed to fund a conference on the 100th anniversary of Hirsch's birth. This official, knowing my book about theologians such as Kittel and Hirsch, assumed I had been invited.[1] In fact, the conference had been organized entirely by and for members of the so-called Hirsch Circle. They were former Göttingen students who had met privately with Hirsch during his last three decades, when he had been banned from teaching by the University. These friends and admirers considered Hirsch the greatest theologian of the twentieth century. They hoped to revive his reputation and they certainly had not invited me, since they understood me to be a critic. This Volkswagen official, however, insisted that they extend me an invitation and pay my expenses, so I returned from Seattle six weeks later. It proved an interesting meeting. I sat around the table with about two dozen friends of Hirsch, plus his son, and was given the chance to explain why I thought his Nazi politics undercut his theology. By coincidence, I was the last person to leave the room on the final day, and I converged at the exit door with Hirsch's son. He wanted to convince me that I had misunderstood things, that his father had never *really* been a Nazi. I pointed to his father's Nazi Party membership and his various pro-Nazi actions and writings. We stood by ourselves for one full hour in that doorway. At the end, we had to agree to disagree.

Moment #4: at 2 am on the morning of this talk, still suffering from jetlag after my flight from Seattle, I recognized something that ties

[1] Robert P. Ericksen, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). This book appeared in German, Dutch and Japanese translations. It was also turned into a documentary film, *Theologians under Hitler*, directed by Steven Martin of Vitalvisuals.com (2005).

together my judgment about Gerhard Kittel in 1980, my conversation with the son of Emanuel Hirsch in 1988 and a book that I published in 2012 (to be discussed below): I tend to believe things that Germans wrote and said between 1933 and 1945, and I tend to disbelieve things these same Germans wrote and said after 1945. A hermeneutic of suspicion, in my view, is appropriate for that post-war era, when so many Germans had so many things to hide. Furthermore, the post-war circumstances of Allied occupation and worldwide condemnation of Nazi crimes made hiding and denial particularly useful, or even necessary. As I said long ago about Gerhard Kittel, I think he believed the awful things he said and wrote about Jews before 1945, and the nice things he said and wrote about Hitler, no matter how objectionable that might seem in our eyes today. The trick is in trying to understand how and why this happened.

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When I began my work on professors of theology in Nazi Germany, I was interested in them as representatives of both church and university. At that time, neither of the words in my title for this talk – neither complicity nor complexity – was thought to be a significant part of the story. Instead, both church and university had enjoyed a positive post-war reputation for their place and role during the Nazi era. German churches had benefited from their claim that they had been victims of the Nazis, not accomplices. Protestants could point to people such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller, pastors who really did suffer from persecution by the Nazi state. They also could focus on the *Kirchenkampf*, an ecclesiastical struggle *within* the church that could subtly be re-imagined as a struggle *against* Nazism. Catholics could point to various quarrels over the implementation of the 1933 Concordat between Germany and the Vatican, as well as the small percentage of Catholic priests placed in concentration camps or even murdered. Many in the post-war Allied camp were predisposed to accept these claims of innocence as well, finding it hard to imagine that Christian values and the crimes of the Nazi state could coexist.

With few exceptions, the early assessment of universities in Nazi Germany experienced similarly benign treatment. Once again, outside observers were prepared to give this segment of the German community the benefit of the doubt. On the one hand, German professors had earned a very high reputation for the thoroughness and quality of their work, so that German universities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were widely considered the best in the world. Furthermore,

Adolf Hitler, with his eighth-grade education and his rather crude and vulgar set of ideas, did not seem like someone who would attract the support of Germany's brightest intellectuals. Max Weinreich already in 1946 saw through this mistaken assumption and wrote *Hitler's Professors*, describing in detail the role of scholars in Germany's crimes against Jews.[2] However, many or most in the Allied camp accepted the idea that smart and well-educated people would not have been *real* Nazis. It made more sense, given the enormity of Nazi crimes and the widespread post-war condemnation of Nazi ideas, to think that professors adopted a stance of 'inner emigration' and uttered their 'Sieg heils' only under duress. For at least a generation after 1945, young scholars in Germany did not risk asking questions of their mentors about what they had done from 1933 to 1945. The mentors, for their part, purged their CVs of any suspicious books and articles they had written during the Third Reich and maintained a disingenuous silence.[3] Since the 1980s and 1990s, historians have vigorously pursued the complex and often compromised role of scholarship in support of the Nazi state, finding evidence of complicity in virtually every discipline.

I entered this field in 1977 with an article about Gerhard Kittel in the *Journal of Contemporary History.* I described this renowned Professor of Theology at Tübingen as someone who gave enthusiastic support to the Nazi ideology, including its anti-Jewish policies.[4] My article began with a quote from Golo Mann. Reviewing Joachim Fest's massive 1973 biography of Hitler, Mann entitled his piece: 'Hitler – For the Last Time?' He argued: 'The longer one devotes oneself to a "hero", with his origins, his motivations, his psychology, the more one is tempted to *understand*, from which, as we know, it is only a step to forgiveness – and then to admiration.'[5] I argued that 'even in dealing with National Socialism,

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[2] Max Weinreich, *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999; first published by YIVO in 1946).

[3] Editions of *Kürschners Deutscher Gelehrten-Kalender* published before and after 1945 are worth perusing. This reference work, which describes virtually all German scholars in terms of their background and publications, clearly allowed individuals after 1945 to purge any articles or books that mentioned National Socialism, Jews, the *Volksgemeinschaft* or other suspiciously politicized topics.

[4] Gerhard Kittel, son of a very important Old Testament scholar, Rudolf Kittel, made a famous name for himself as a New Testament theologian. He remains well-known today as the founding editor of a major reference work, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament.*

[5] Golo Mann, 'Hitler – For the Last Time? On Joachim Fest's New Biography', *Encounter*, 42(6) (1974), 56, emphasis in original.

historians must get close to the lives of individuals, risking the development of empathy and understanding for the hope of clearer insight and analysis'. Noting that even Hitler and Himmler 'were human beings', I added: 'If we cannot empathize with Germans who found them attractive, neither can we fully understand the Nazi phenomenon or recognize its lessons for us.'[6]

I went on to describe Kittel in this article as an important and successful scholar, admired by many, but someone who welcomed the rise of Hitler with great enthusiasm. He joined the Nazi Party in May 1933. The following month, he gave a public speech in Tübingen on 'The Jewish Question', describing Jews as an existential threat to the future of Germany. He proposed stripping Jews of their citizenship and granting them merely 'guest status' – something that the Nazi state actually did two years later in the Nuremberg Laws. This would allow Germany legally to deny Jews any civil rights, including the right to attend a university or work in a significant profession. Kittel acknowledged in his talk that Christians in particular might feel sympathy for Jews treated in such a brutal manner, losing their careers and livelihood through no fault of their own. His goal was to assure these fellow Christians that their consciences should be clean: 'God does not require that we should be sentimental, but that we should see the facts and give them their due.'[7] During the next decade, Kittel became a charter member in Walter Frank's Institute for the History of the New Germany, a Nazi think-tank. He also became the single most prolific contributor to its journal, *Forschungen zur Judenfrage*, a journal intended to give scholarly support to Germany's anti-Jewish policies. His articles described what he believed to be the mongrelization of the Jewish race during the diaspora, along with secret and sinister efforts by Jews to destroy other nations in a drive for world domination.[8] By 1944, after the extent of persecution and mistreatment of Jews had become quite clear, after Jews had almost entirely disappeared from German streets, and after we might expect even Kittel would have developed some sympathy for Jewish suffering, he instead praised Hitler as re-asserting the wisdom of

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[6] Robert P. Ericksen, 'Theologian in the Third Reich: The Case of Gerhard Kittel', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), 595.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 604. This quote comes from Gerhard Kittel, *Die Judenfrage* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1933), p. 9. All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

[8] The best example of Kittel's work in *Forschungen zur Judenfrage* can be found in a volume he co-authored with Eugen Fischer, 'Das antike Weltjudentum. Tatsache, Texte, Bilder', *Forschungen zur Judenfrage*, 7 (1943). Their effort comprises the entire volume 7 of the journal.

pre-Enlightenment, medieval, Christian Europe by isolating Jews and forcing them back into the ghetto. He then labelled Adolf Hitler and the Christian Church 'twin bulwarks' for Western Civilization against the 'Jewish menace'.[9]

In 1985, I published a book, *Theologians under Hitler: Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch*, which described the eager support for Hitler and the Nazi ideology expressed by all three of these theologians. A review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* noted with regret that it had taken four decades for the Nazi enthusiasm of these very prominent theologians to be exposed, and that it had taken an American historian to do it.[10] I also began to focus on Göttingen University, contributing two chapters to *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus* (1987, 1998). In this case I wrote about the Theological Faculty and also the Modern History Seminar at Göttingen.[11] My work is part of a growing tendency to cast the role of both church and university in an increasingly more complex and more negative light. In the balance of my presentation, I will describe these trends and will discuss examples of complexity as well as the issue of complicity, drawing upon my recent book, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany*.[12]

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[9] Ericksen, 'Theologian in the Third Reich', p. 614. See also my treatment of Kittel in *Theologians under Hitler*, pp. 28–78. The 1944 statement about Hitler and the Christian Church forming 'twin bulwarks' against the 'Jewish menace' came in Kittel's lecture 'Das Rassenproblem der Spätantike und das Frühchristentum', delivered on 15 June 1944 at the University of Vienna. I discovered a typescript of the lecture in the Theological Library at Tübingen University. It is also worth noting that, by his own admission, Kittel had learned at least by 1943 of the extermination of Jews in Russia. See Gerhard Kittel, *Meine Verteidigung*, p. 27. This is a manuscript Kittel wrote in his own defence while under French incarceration, dated June 1945. I am indebted to the late Dr Herman Preus of Luther Seminary, St Paul, MN for access to this document. Preus was one of several American colleagues with whom Kittel and his supporters shared information at that time.

[10] Klaus Goebel, 'Theologen die Hitler unterstützten: Über Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus, Emanuel Hirsch', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 127 (5 June 1986), 11.

[11] See Robert P. Ericksen, 'Die Göttinger Theologische Fakultät im Dritten Reich' and 'Kontinuitäten konservativer Geschichtsschreibung am Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Geschichte: Von der Weimarer Zeit über die nationalsozialistische Ära bis in die Bundesrepublik' in Heinrich Becker, Hans-Joachim Dahms and Cornelia Wegeler (eds), *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, 2nd edn (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1998), pp. 75–101 and 427–53.

[12] Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Creating the benign, post-war view of churches and universities: how did it happen?

It is useful to begin this topic about early post-war assessments with a look at Wilhelm Niemöller, brother of the famous Martin. Wilhelm Niemöller, like his brother, was a Lutheran pastor. He had worked with his brother within the Confessing Church during the Nazi period, and both of them enjoyed a positive post-war reputation on the basis of that activity. As the Nazi regime collapsed in 1945, Wilhelm possessed a treasure trove of documents associated with activities of the Confessing Church. He continued to gather documents, establishing at his parish in Bielefeld an archive on the Protestant *Kirchenkampf* ('Church Struggle'), and over the following decades, he published a dozen books of his own, while editing a half-dozen more. For the first generation after 1945, he both inspired the work of other Protestant church historians and made his Bielefeld Archive open to them. Though he was trained as a pastor, he can be considered the most important of those contemporary church historians who first described the Protestant Church within the Nazi period.[13]

Wilhelm Niemöller's training as a pastor stands out as we read his work. Here is his introduction to a book in 1948: 'As I began to write this book, I did not want to walk among the historians . . . I wanted much more to testify that God does miracles even today.'[14] Two decades later, we find that his views had stayed much the same, though he recognized that other church historians were beginning to think differently: 'It almost seems as if one could be satisfied with the rather shortsighted conclusion that church history and "profane" history do not differ from one another.'[15] One outcome of Niemöller's approach is that he only described the Confessing Church, not the *Deutsche Christen*, whom he considered simply heretics. He also dismissed the large group of Protestant church leaders who stood in the middle with these words: 'Even if one wants to recognize the desire for peace among good men, no history comes out. At no time could a clear line be recognized, much

[13] See Robert P. Ericksen, 'Wilhelm Niemöller and the Historiography of the Kirchenkampf' in Hartmut Lehmann and Manfred Gailus (eds), *Nationalprotestantische Mentalitäten. Konturen, Entwicklungen und Umbrüche eines Weltbildes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), pp. 433–51.

[14] Wilhelm Niemöller, *Kampf und Zeugnis der Bekennende Kirche* (Bielefeld: Bechauf, 1948), p. 9.

[15] Wilhelm Niemöller, *Wort und Tat im Kirchenkampf. Beiträge zur neuesten Kirchengeschichte* (Munich: Kaiser, 1969), p. 11.

less a significant act.'[16] By his own admission (at an American conference in 1970), the Confessing Church represented only 20 per cent of Protestants.[17] However, he entitled the 1956 book containing this last quote *The Protestant Church in the Third Reich* and he labelled it a 'Handbook of the Church Struggle'. This handbook leaves 80 per cent of the Protestant Church out of the picture. It also provides anything but a complete view of the stance of that minority group, the Confessing Church.

Wolfgang Gerlach gives us insight into one topic that Wilhelm Niemöller left out of his story of the Confessing Church. He quotes, for example, a Confessing Church hero, Otto Dibelius, writing already in 1928: 'I have always considered myself an antisemite.'[18] This is only one small portion of the evidence Gerlach summons to indicate how pervasively hostility towards Jews permeated Protestant Germany. Another significant gap exists in Wilhelm Niemöller's work as a church historian: he did not mention that he had joined the Nazi Party in 1923. He also did not mention that he and his brother Martin had fought in the right-wing *Freikorps* after the First World War or that both had voted for the Nazi Party in the elections leading up to 1933 and had celebrated Hitler's rise to power. It was only when they quarrelled with the pro-Nazi *Deutsche Christen* over ecclesiastical issues that Martin Niemöller began to do things that attracted Gestapo attention, and it was Gestapo interference in church matters that helped push the feisty Martin towards the creation of the 'radical Niemöller wing' of the Confessing Church. This is an interesting story. It is also a story that emphasizes the strong attraction that Protestant Germans felt for Nazism. Analysis of this part of the story could probe how a few, like Martin Niemöller, became disillusioned with Hitler and why many, even within the Confessing Church, did not. Given Wilhelm Niemöller's own attraction to Hitler, he might have been the perfect person to deal with this story. However, he chose

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[16] Wilhelm Niemöller, *Die Evangelische Kirche im Dritten Reich. Handbuch des Kirchenkampfes* (Bielefeld: Bechauf, 1956), pp. 46–47.

[17] See Wilhelm Niemöller, 'The Niemöller Archives' in Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke (eds), *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), p. 51. This paper was given at the first 'Scholars Conference on German Churches and the Holocaust', hosted by Littell and Locke in 1970.

[18] Quoted in Wolfgang Gerlach, *And the Witnesses were Silent: The Confessing Church and the Persecution of the Jews*, Victoria J. Barnett (ed. and trans.) (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), p. 14.

to bury it.[19] Instead, he wrote the history of the 'German Protestant Church' as if it was only the Confessing Church, and he also ignored the political complexity within the Confessing Church.

Many Germans, not just Wilhelm Niemöller, had a very strong motive in 1945 to distance themselves from – and attempt to rewrite – the Nazi past. Evidence of harsh Nazi policies in violation of long-established values had been available since 1933; however, extremely graphic evidence of Nazi horrors then burst upon Germans and the rest of the world in the immediate aftermath of the war. As Allied troops liberated concentration camps and death camps, they were shocked by what they found. They sometimes then transferred their shock to nearby Germans, forcing them to view bodies stacked up like cordwood or forcing them to help bury the dead. Film footage depicting the horror of the camps was soon being shown to Germans. Then the Nuremberg Trials began to document for the entire world the extent of the German war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In that atmosphere, the international condemnation of Nazi Germany became intense and many or most Germans quickly joined in the condemnation; however, they regularly did so by blaming the atrocities on a tiny group of Nazi criminals at the top. Most added the claim that they personally had never known that *these horrible excesses* were occurring, and those who had participated in the excesses claimed they had only acted against their will, but under orders. The total defeat of Germany and the rubble all around them must have helped create the German willingness to turn on their Nazi past. By the spring of 1945, it was clear that Hitler had completely and utterly failed, even by his own standards. He had preached the Social Darwinist idea that strong nations had every right to conquer, with no moral compunction. Instead

[19] See my discussion of the Niemöller brothers' political stance in Ericksen, 'Wilhelm Niemöller and the Historiography of the Kirchenkampf', pp. 433–37. This article describes Wilhelm Niemöller's angry response in 1969 when the German version of John Conway's *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches* appeared. Conway included a reference to Wilhelm Niemöller's 'active support of the Nazi SA' (p. xxi in the English edition). Niemöller successfully intervened with the publisher to insert a correction in every copy of the book, stating that he had never been a member of the SA. While that might literally be true, it shows a remarkable sensitivity on his part. One can also imagine how lucky he must have felt that Conway had not tied him to his Nazi Party membership. I am indebted to John Conway for this story, and also to Hartmut Lehmann, who discovered the correction still pasted into a copy of the book in the University Library at Göttingen.

of success, however, he led Germany to a shattering, overwhelming defeat.

It is surprising, perhaps, to see that the Allies also proved willing fairly quickly to distort or misunderstand the Nazi past. They did insist upon the Nuremberg Trials, of course, but that emphasis could encompass the impression that only a small group of criminals bore responsibility. The broader process of 'denazification', a difficult and complex procedure, has widely been considered a failure.[20] The Soviets in their Zone of Occupation imposed a denazification that was relatively brief and brutal.[21] After severely punishing some leading Nazis in their sector, they provided an overlay from their own ideology, extolling working-class Germans as the proletarian victims of fascism and nurturing the mythology that all former Nazis not already punished had scampered into the West. Great Britain and the US, by contrast, took denazification more seriously and worked harder and longer at its implementation. Their ideological overlay was the democratic one that Germans should be re-educated. They also thought that participation in the denazification process would prove a suitable school for democracy. However, this approach quickly became impacted by the Cold War, so that making friends with West Germany softened any ideas of a thorough housecleaning. Over a period of about six years, as Britain and the US turned denazification over to the Germans, almost all former Nazis earned a

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[20] See, for example, Lutz Niethammer, *Die Mitläuferfabrik.Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayern* (Berlin: Dietz, 1982). Tom Bower, *The Pledge Betrayed: America and Britain and the Denazification of Postwar Germany* (New York: Doubleday, 1984) provides an example of the Allied criticism that too many Nazis slipped through the net. Rebecca Boehling, *A Question of Priorities: Democratic Reform and Economic Recovery in Postwar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1996) highlights the Allied preference for economic development over democratization. In general, the post-war German complaint was that too many individuals were harassed and punished by denazification when only the top leadership bore real responsibility. I argue in *Complicity in the Holocaust*, pp. 227–28, that the ironic conclusion that the very dishonesty within denazification, the lies told by so many Germans who claimed never to have been *real* Nazis, helped inoculate Germany against any resurgence of Nazi politics. On the one hand, it helped to demonize Nazism – no one would admit association. Also, those individuals who claimed never to have been Nazis could not easily betray that claim by post-war advocacy of Nazi ideas.

[21] See, for example, Timothy R. Vogt, *Denazification in Soviet-Occupied Germany: Brandenburg 1945–48* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). See also Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Category V designation, exonerating them from having been real Nazis in the first place.[22]

The exoneration of most former Nazis set the stage for a quite benign post-war assessment of Nazi Germany, both within and outside of Germany. This assessment differentiated between a few Nazi criminals and the rest of the German public, leading to the common linguistic carelessness of using the words 'Nazi' and 'German' as if they represented two different categories. Peter Fritzsche writes: 'It should be stated clearly that Germans became Nazis because they wanted to become Nazis and because the Nazis spoke so well to their interests and inclinations.'[23] After 1945, it was impossible for anyone to deny that Nazi Germany had veered far outside the norms of acceptable values and acceptable behaviour, but it was still hard to blame this on everyday Germans or 'ordinary men'. The crimes seemed monstrous, so it was easy, even for the Allies, to imagine that they had been committed by monsters. We can add to that an Allied willingness to admire two German institutions – churches and universities.

Christians in the West proved reluctant to imagine that Christians in Germany had been among the criminals. They simply assumed that Christian values and Nazi crimes could not have coexisted. One concrete indicator of this reality is that churches were largely allowed to 'cleanse' themselves during denazification.[24] This resulted in a dramatically lower percentage of pastors entangled in denazification compared to other professions, a ratio of about 1:10, even though many pastors had joined the Nazi Party and otherwise showed support for the Nazi state. Churches also often provided employment for individuals who lost their jobs in more rigorous denazification settings, such as universities.[25] As for historians in the West, they largely accepted and

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[22] See my treatment of these issues in *Complicity in the Holocaust*, Chapter 6, 'Repressing and Reprocessing the Past: Denazification and its Legacy of Dissimulation', and Chapter 7, 'A Closer Look: Denazification at Göttingen University', pp 167–228.

[23] Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 8.

[24] See, for example, Gerhard Besier's study of denazification in the Protestant Church of Hanover, *'Selbstreinigung' unter britischer Besatzungsherrschaft. Die Evangelisch-lutherische Landeskirche Hannovers und ihr Landesbischof Marahrens 1945–1947* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). The focus on 'self-cleansing' in Besier's title points ironically to the small amount of actual 'cleansing' that occurred.

[25] See the story of Eugen Mattiat, for example, in my *Complicity in the Holocaust*, pp. 194–98 and 227.

participated in the writing of a church history that for nearly two generations described the churches as victims and opponents of the Nazi state, not supporters and allies.

Professors and universities suffered a harsher version of denazification than did pastors and churches, especially at first, but their post-war reputation proved similarly far better than it might have been. Academics in the West had long admired and envied the quality of German scholarship. They could hardly imagine that rigorous intellectual standards and a humanistic education could have coexisted with the crudeness and vulgarity of Nazi ideas. For the practical sciences, of course, countries like the US snapped up useful individuals like Werner von Braun and airbrushed his connections to the Nazi past out of existence. But also in philosophy, a figure as exuberant in his praise of Hitler as Martin Heidegger enjoyed a sparkling post-war reputation.[26] A pattern in writing the history of Nazi Germany quickly developed. Careful studies emerged of Hitler, the inner workings of the Nazi Party and the role of the SS. In the midst of this experience of pointing fingers towards the top, professors, major academic disciplines and the universities in which they existed were almost entirely ignored. In those first decades, almost all Germans were denying ever having been Nazis and German churches were treated primarily with praise and admiration. Professors returned to their work and their academic past was hardly treated by historians at all. Within the past generation of historical writing, this pattern has changed quite dramatically.

The arrival of critical scholarship

Pope Pius XII actually came under criticism as early as the 1960s, with Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy* criticizing him for his refusal to speak out against Nazi crimes. About the same time, scholars such as Saul Friedländer and Hans Müller published documents that complicated the story of Catholic innocence and victimhood.[27] John Conway published his study of both Catholics and Protestants in 1968. Though he

[26] For a critique of this tendency, see Emanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933–1935* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[27] See Rolf Hochhuth, *The Deputy* (New York: Grove Press, 1964); Saul Friedlander, *Pius XII and the Third Reich: A Documentation* (New York: Knopf, 1966); and Hans Müller, *Katholische Kirche und Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente 1933–1935* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1963).

called his book *Nazi Persecution of the Churches*, seeming to back up the story of churches as victims, one can find evidence of Christian support for the regime as well.[28] In the late 1970s and 1980s, I first published my research on major Protestant theologians in Germany who enthusiastically praised and supported Hitler and the Nazi ideology. Victoria Barnett began her career as a church historian with a 1992 book on the complexities of the Confessing Church.[29] The work of Susannah Heschel and Doris Bergen has continued to highlight the complicity of Christians in their relationship to the Nazi state. In Bergen's book, *The Twisted Cross*, she describes the extremely pro-Nazi *Deutsche Christen* in ways that highlight their important place within the German Protestant Church.[30] Heschel's *Aryan Jesus* describes the seemingly bizarre but very convenient idea that Jesus was not Jewish – convenient, that is, if you are an antisemite and want to maintain the antisemitic view that no one of Jewish blood at any time or any place could be considered an admired or important figure.[31] Heschel, Bergen and many others have continued to develop a history of Christians in Nazi Germany that cuts deeply against the earlier mythology of victimhood and opposition.[32]

If we turn to universities, historians since the 1980s have begun looking more closely at university-trained professionals and at individual academic fields. Each time, the almost universal outcome has been that these groups and individuals were far more supportive of and enthusiastic towards Hitler and his ideas than we had thought. Doctors, lawyers, sociologists, journalists – each of these groups of professionals gave significant support to the Nazi ideas and the crimes of the Nazi state.[33]

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[28] John Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968).

[29] Victoria J. Barnett, *For the Soul of the People: Protestant Protest against Hitler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[30] Doris Bergen, *Twisted Cross: The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

[31] Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany* (Princeton University Press, 2008).

[32] See, as one small example, Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel (eds), *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), which focuses on the theme of 'betrayal' by Christians and includes chapters by both Bergen and Heschel.

[33] Classic studies include Robert J. Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); and Ingo Müller, *Hitler's Justice: The Courts of the Third Reich*, Deborah Lucas Schneider (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Several group efforts have resulted in books that describe the wide extent of Nazification within the

We know that seven of the 15 participants who met at the Wannsee Conference and planned the murder of Jews had earned their doctorate at a German university. Michael Wildt has shown that leaders in the SS Reich Security Main Office, those who 'designed the institutions of murder themselves, offered ideological justifications for them, and personally supervised the implementation of mass murder on location', had a remarkably high level of education. Of the 221 considered in Wildt's study, more than three-quarters passed their *Abitur*, two-thirds earned a university degree and one-third earned a doctorate.[34] As for historians, it took decades for the Nazi generation to come under scrutiny. However, the *Historikertag* in 1998 finally had young German historians looking at older German historians and finding large amounts of complicity in the Third Reich. The first book to publish papers from this conference put it this way:

> Today we know the actual evidence, which shows that a greater number of historians served National Socialism than we previously thought. It is these sources which prove that the circle was far from made up only of 'secondary school teachers gone wild or outsiders' (Hans Rothfels) or young Party members. The circle stretches further, even to those now considered the 'founding fathers' of historical study in the Federal Republic, and this is the central finding. It was these individuals who helped in various ways, now completely undeniable, to build the 'scientific' foundation for discrimination against Jews and legitimize the *Führer*-state, with its National Socialist demands for a politics of expansion and increase in the soil of the *Volk*.[35]

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humanities in Germany. See, for example, Anson Rabinbach and Wolfgang Bialas (eds), *Nazi Germany and the Humanities* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007); Frank Rutger Hausmann (ed.), *Die Rolle der Geisteswissenschaften im Dritten Reich 1933–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2002); and Jürgen Elvert and Jürgen Nielsen-Sikora (eds), *Kulturwissenschaften und Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008). Hartmut Lehmann and Otto Gerhard Oexle have edited two volumes on *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2004). Finally, see Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

[34] Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), pp. 37–38.

[35] Winfried Schultze, Gerd Helm and Thomas Ott, 'Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus: Beobachtung und Überlegungen zu einer Debatte' in

Theodor Schieder, a major historian in post-war Germany, was one of those individuals discussed at the *Historikertag*. After the successful invasion of Poland in 1939, he wrote a report on how this military success could create *Lebensraum* for Germans. He advocated the removal of hundreds of thousands of Poles and the 'de-Judaization of the rest of Poland' so that a 'healthy' German population could take their place.[36] Werner Conze, another major historian in post-war Germany, also came under discussion. He had larded his enthusiastic discussion of German opportunities in the conquest of Eastern Europe with a variety of antisemitic slurs.[37]

Assessing the concept of complicity

Specific research on individuals such as Schieder and Conze is important. Knowing how historians helped create the *Generalplan Ost* teaches us something significant about the planning and implementation of Nazi brutalities on the Eastern Front, especially including the wide breadth of participation. My focus, however, is on a broader and more subtle question. Is it appropriate to accuse pastors and professors generally of complicity in the crimes of the Nazi state? Were churches and universities primarily supporters of Hitler and the Nazi hierarchy rather than victims of a regime that had grabbed hold of totalitarian power? Does that make them complicit in Nazi crimes?

I argue for broad complicity based upon three main factors. First, as I said in my oral PhD exam in 1980, I view widespread and enthusiastic praise for the rise of Hitler as genuine rather than coerced. Second, I take the lack of significant resistance within churches or universities as evidence of overall support. Third, I focus on the public face of churches and universities and try to imagine the message that lay people, university students and the general public would have received. I believe most Germans would have felt encouraged by their pastors and professors to support and participate in the Nazi state. If we wonder at the willingness

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Winfried Schultze and Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999), pp. 16–17.

[36] See Götz Aly, 'Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder, Die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung', in Schultze and Oexle (eds), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, p. 163.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 173. On this topic, see also Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (eds), *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1920–1945* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

of ordinary German men and women to kill Jews for Hitler or commit other atrocities, it seems to me that the permission granted by churches and universities played a significant role.

Looking first at church reactions to the rise of Hitler, the enthusiasm seems unequivocal. Paul Althaus, the most prominent Luther scholar of his day, called the turning point of 1933 'a gift and miracle of God'.[38] Protestant sermons and Protestant newspapers were filled with unblushing praise of Hitler.[39] Those in the hyper-pro-Nazi *Deutsche Christen* movement were tempted to see Hitler as a new 'saviour', even in a religious sense; however, almost all Protestants judged him at least to have 'saved' Germany from Weimar democracy and a decadent culture. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was an exception. He never was attracted to Nazism. In my view, that is at least partly because the Bonhoeffer family never went to church and therefore did not catch the virus that drew so many Protestant Germans towards Hitler.[40]

The Catholic response to Hitler involved more suspicion at first, including several slightly ambiguous warnings in 1930 and 1931 against Catholics joining the Nazi Party.[41] However, the Catholic Centre Party handed Hitler his Enabling Act in March 1933, giving his first grab for dictatorship its decisive votes.[42] At the same time, Catholic bishops withdrew their warnings against membership in the Nazi Party, with the result that Catholics soon joined up as readily as Protestants. The Vatican gave Hitler his first success in international diplomacy by signing a Concordat in the summer of 1933. Cardinal Faulhaber visited Rome at that time and reported that Pope Pius XI 'publicly praised . . . Adolf Hitler'. Another observer noted that the Papal Nuncio in Berlin, Cesare Orsenigo, 'was frankly jubilant' about Hitler's rise to

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[38] Paul Althaus, *Die deutsche Stunde der Kirche*, 3rd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 1934), p. 5.

[39] See Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, Chapter 2, 'Churches and the Rise of Hitler'.

[40] See Robert P. Ericksen, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer in History: Does Our Bonhoeffer Still Offend?' in Clifford J. Green and Guy C. Carter (eds), *Interpreting Bonhoeffer: Historical Perspectives, Emerging Issues* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), p. 130.

[41] See my *Complicity in the Holocaust*, pp. 50–51. Note that Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 2010) describes a very supportive Catholic role in the first years of the Nazi Party, as it developed in Munich.

[42] See Rudolf Morsey, 'Die deutsche Zentrumspartei' in E. Mattias and R. Morsey (eds), *Das Ende der Parteien 1933* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1960), pp. 281–453.

power.[43] Both churches seem to have fit comfortably within that large majority of Germans who soon saw Hitler as wonderful.

A similar story can be told of universities. In April 1933, with a new law for 'cleansing' the civil service in place, Hitler began purging universities of Jews and leftists. James Franck, a Nobel-prize-winning Jewish physicist at Göttingen, resigned in protest, hoping to stir up opposition among his faculty colleagues. His public letter appeared in the local press on a Friday. Forty-two of his colleagues, about 20 per cent of the teaching faculty, managed to sign a petition over the weekend – but not in support. Rather, they denounced him as a traitor to Germany.[44] In May 1933, book burnings were held at universities all across Germany. Professors and students together gave speeches and threw books onto the pyre, celebrating the Nazi policy to remove all leftist and Jewish books. University hiring policies quickly added politics into the mix, so that some professors received appointments without the proper credentials, without *Habilitation* or even a doctorate, so long as their commitment to Nazism was sufficient. The curriculum also began to privilege Nazi ideas, including the new idea of 'racial science', all of this occurring within a system that had boasted intellectual rigour, substantial self-government and a vigorous notion of academic freedom prior to 1933.[45]

My second measure of complicity involves the lack of resistance. Almost no resistance can be found within the German universities, despite purges, book burnings and corrupted hiring practices. Martin Heidegger praised the Nazi state while he handed his former Jewish students almost no sliver of humane response or support. Later, during denazification, many professors bragged about an instance or two of not crossing the street to avoid a former colleague or an instance of saying hello to a former student. These are very weak boasts. As for actual resistance, we find almost none. The brief and ineffectual appearance of White Rose anti-Nazi flyers in Munich in 1942 and 1943 remains

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[43] See Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, pp. 56–60. The quoted remarks are found in Guenter Lewy, *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 30–31 and 27.

[44] See Ulf Rosenow, 'Die Göttinger Physik unter dem Nationalsozialismus' in Becker, Dahms and Wegeler (eds), *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 555–58.

[45] See my discussion of this in *Complicity in the Holocaust*, especially Chapter 5, 'The Intellectual Arm: Universities through 1945'.

the highest-profile resistance to be found within the German university system. Almost nothing else can be found.[46]

As for the churches, it was long thought that extensive resistance marked their stance. Resistance by the brave and victimhood for the rest became the standard story in both the Protestant and Catholic Churches. Closer attention to details within the past three decades has significantly compromised that story. Almost no serious scholar, for example, now claims that the Protestant 'Church Struggle' was a struggle *against* the Nazi state.[47] The Barmen Declaration itself, the foundation for the Confessing Church, warns its readers: 'Be not deceived by loose talk, as if we meant to oppose the unity of the German nation!'[48] The word 'Jew' is never mentioned in the Barmen Declaration, nor is there any critique of other Nazi policies. This 'struggle' was theological and ecclesiastical, an attack upon the alleged heresy of the *Deutsche Christen*. It was hoped and assumed by the authors of Barmen that this document could be signed without question by good Nazis.

Much Catholic evidence of 'resistance' shows a similar ambiguity. For Palm Sunday in 1937, Pope Pius XI smuggled a statement into Germany that was read from every pulpit. When we read *Mit brennender Sorge* today, we see that the 'burning concern' was largely about a series of complaints over the Nazi implementation of the Concordat of 1933. It did warn that an extreme emphasis on race and state could become a form of idolatry, but the statement was not primarily political. It was not a critique of Nazi persecution of Jews, for example, or other violations of human rights.[49] We know that Bishop Clemens von Galen gave three dramatic sermons in the summer of 1941. He protested against Nazi mistreatment of the church and also, in one of the three sermons, against euthanasia. This was brave and good, but it was not an attack on the Nazi state and most especially not a defence of Jews.[50]

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[46] See Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, pp. 163–66.

[47] See Robert P. Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, 'The Churches and the Holocaust' in Dan Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 296–318.

[48] The full text of the Barmen Declaration can be found in Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 237–47.

[49] See '"With Burning Concern", 14 March 1937', a portion of *Mit brennender Sorge* printed in Peter Matheson (ed.), *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 1981), pp. 67–71.

[50] See Beth A. Griech-Polelle, *Bishop von Galen: German Catholicism and National Socialism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 72–95.

Kevin Spicer's book *Hitler's Priests* shows us a handful of Catholic clergy who eagerly supported rather than resisted Nazi policies. One of these priests, Richard Kleine, received tribute in his 1974 obituary as 'a good and well-respected human being and priest', who had held firm against 'the growing terror of anti-Christian and anti-Church forces in the National Socialist regime'. Spicer, by contrast, describes him – much more accurately – as 'a zealous adherent of National Socialism and a devoted follower of Adolf Hitler'.[51] Kleine's goal was to strengthen the German Catholic connection to the Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, most especially by raising Catholic awareness of Jews as the common enemy. He worked with the Protestant Walter Grundmann in his 'Dejudaization Institute' described by Susannah Heschel in *The Aryan Jesus*. In the process of his energetic campaign to link Catholics and Nazis, Kleine drew support from prominent Catholic scholars such as Joseph Lortz and Karl Adam. Even Bishop von Galen showed a willingness to give his endorsement to their work.[52] As we consider the realities of Catholic resistance, it is worth noting that by 1974, even Richard Kleine, this enthusiastic Nazi priest, could receive the standard acclaim for having resisted 'the growing terror of anti-Christian and anti-Church forces in the National Socialist regime'. Post-war claims like this were very common, but hardly reliable as actual assessments.

Many Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, later testified in denazification proceedings that they had resisted Nazism. This often took the form of claiming to have defended (or at least befriended) Jews. A close reading of such claims often reveals the 'Jews' actually to have been Christians. Both Protestants and Catholics were most likely to stand up for a 'Jew' if that person happened to be Jewish by Nazi racial standards, but otherwise a friend and fellow parishioner. The 'defence' of that Jew might have been as minimal as a handshake or a hello. We also find some Christians who claimed to have defended 'Jewishness', while meaning the Jews of the Old Testament. That view quite often coexisted with a cultural critique of contemporary Jews, those who had failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah. This was the stance of Gerhard Kittel, for example, and one that he defended even during his post-war trial.[53] As the Nazi antisemitic onslaught continued over the years, Christian

[51] Kevin Spicer, *Hitler's Priests: Catholic Clergy and National Socialism* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), p. 154.
[52] *Ibid*., pp. 181–94.
[53] Kittel, *Meine Verteidigung*, pp. 5–18.

defence of even these limited categories of Jews or Jewishness tended to diminish.[54]

Of course, there were Christians who really did oppose the Nazi state and really did oppose the persecution of Jews. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed for his opposition to Hitler, as were some Catholic priests. Martin Niemöller was imprisoned for his refusal to be muzzled by state order, as were other pastors and priests. Some Christians in Germany risked their personal safety by hiding Jews or by assisting in the creation of forged ID. However, these stories of the very few should not drown out stories of the very many. Such a distortion was common in the post-war period and it remains a temptation for some today. However, it misrepresents the role and reputation of churches in Nazi Germany.

What about my third measure of complicity? What was the public face of churches and universities in Nazi Germany? I believe that any German lay person or university graduate during that period would have assumed that churches and universities were on Hitler's side. They would have witnessed university enthusiasm for book burnings and noticed the modified, pro-Nazi focus of public lectures and university curricula. They would have heard many sermons in praise of the rebirth of Germany under Hitler or read church newspapers lavishing praise on the regime. Both Catholic and Protestant bishops sent telegrams of congratulation to Hitler on his birthday. When Germany invaded Poland, an act later judged to be a war crime, Protestant leaders sent this message to their faithful:

> Since yesterday our German people have been called on to fight for the land of their fathers, so that German blood may be reunified with German blood. The German Evangelical Church stands in true fellowship with the fate of the German people. The church has added to the weapons of steel her own invincible weapons from the Word of God . . . So we unite in this hour with our people in intercession for our *Führer* and Reich, for all the armed forces, and for all who do their duty for the fatherland.[55]

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[54] See Gerhard Lindemann, *'Typisch jüdisch': Die Stellung der Ev.-luth. Landeskirche Hannovers zu Antijudaismus, Judenfeindschaft und Antisemitismus 1919–1949* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1998).

[55] As quoted in Conway, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches 1933–1945*, p. 234. See also Matheson (ed.), *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, p. 84.

Catholic bishops voiced a similar message:

> In this decisive hour we encourage and admonish our Catholic soldiers, in obedience to the *Führer*, to do their duty and to be ready to sacrifice their whole existence. We appeal to the faithful to join in ardent prayer that God's providence may lead this war to blessed success for Fatherland and people.[56]

After success in Poland, both Protestant and Catholic churches rang their bells for an entire week in celebration.

All Germans could have noticed some points of tension between church and state in Hitler's time, just as there had been struggles between church and state since the Investiture Crisis and other medieval conflicts. However, most Protestant pastors worked hard to show their unwavering loyalty throughout the Third Reich. In 1942, when Pius XII refused to condemn Hitler, refusing to criticize him by name or to call upon German Catholics to question his policies, he knew something about German Catholic loyalties.[57] A genuine fear that many would choose Hitler over their Pope was hardly the least of his reasons for staying silent.

Complexity and the question of coercion

I believe that 'complicity' is the right term to describe the relationship of churches and universities, pastors and professors, to the crimes of the Nazi state. However, considerable complexity remains. Consider, for example, our various accounts about those who saved Jews. Many demanded and received considerable payment for their good deeds, which could either cause us to question their altruism or be considered appropriate reward for their level of risk. Some who saved Jews one day turned in others the next. Another sort of complex story can be found in the case of Gottfried Ewald, head of a psychiatric hospital at Göttingen University. He readily supported forced sterilization of the 'unfit', a stance that now would be condemned by many. Later, however, he refused to sit on assessment boards for euthanasia, due to his

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[56] As quoted in Conway (ed.), *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, p. 234.

[57] See Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's 'Final Solution'* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1981) for a discussion of the tremendous amount of information about the murder of Jews that became available to the Vatican and others during 1942.

disapproval of that policy. In terms of his own patients, however, he knowingly filled out and signed forms that sent one-third – a total of 238 – to their death. In the post-war period, he preserved his career and reputation by claiming to have saved 136 lives, energetically using all of the exceptions granted by Nazi regulation. Among the 12 Jews in his hospital, of course, Ewald made no search for exceptions and none was saved. If Ewald was really a hero, as he claimed after the war, it was a rather odd form of heroism.[58]

We see another complex story if we look at a 1936 event in the history of the Confessing Church. In June of that year, a small group within the Confessing Church composed and sent a letter to Hitler, taking a stance that meets many of our expectations for appropriate moral critique. It complained about Gestapo arrests without charge, about extra-legal concentration camps and about antisemitic propaganda that encouraged Germans to hate Jews. But there are problems. First of all, the authors of this letter represented only the radical Niemöller wing of the Confessing Church. Second, it was a secret message sent directly to Hitler (who simply ignored it). Then, when a copy was smuggled to Switzerland and published, Protestant bishops condemned it. Finally, even the Niemöller group disowned the letter, producing in its place a watered-down version that made no mention of the Gestapo, concentration camps or antisemitism. There is also a problematic aftermath to this story. Dr Friedrich Weissler, a member of the Confessing Church, was arrested as the one most likely to have smuggled the letter to the Swiss. As a Christian of Jewish descent, he made a convenient and vulnerable target. One week after his arrival in Sachsenhausen, he was beaten to death.[59]

Weissler's violent death points towards the potentially harsh repercussions that have regularly been used to explain the lack of open resistance or protest in Nazi Germany. Weissler really did suffer and die due to his participation in the criticism of Nazi ideas and behaviour. However, other forms of protest took place in Nazi Germany without punishment. Bishop von Galen did not suffer for his attack on euthanasia. The

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[58] See Ulrich Beurhausen, Hans-Joachim Dahms, Thomas Koch, Almuth Massing and Konrad Obermann, 'Die Medizinische Fakultät im Dritten Reich', in Becker, Dahms and Wegeler (eds), *Die Universität Göttingen unter dem Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 205–27.

[59] See Conway (ed.), *The Third Reich and the Christian Churches*, p. 164. I am also indebted to Manfred Gailus for the further insight he has shared with me on Weissler.

famous Rosenstrasse protests took place in Berlin, resulting in the release of Jewish husbands rather than the punishment of their non-Jewish wives.[60] Earlier, in the autumn of 1934, the Protestant Bishops Theophil Wurm and Hans Meiser in Württemberg and Bavaria were removed from office and placed under house arrest by the 'German Christian' Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller. Masses of people rose up in protest, including many of the most important Nazis in the region. Hitler soon intervened to reinstate Wurm and Meiser, with no punishment of those who had marched in the streets.[61]

We can add further complexity to this question of alleged coercion under the Nazi state. Christopher R. Browning has shown us that the 'ordinary men' in Reserve Police Battalion 101 were allowed not to participate in the murder of Jews, if they chose, with no punishment to follow.[62] Ernst Klee's ironically titled book *'The Good Old Days'* devotes a section to Heinrich Himmler's order that anyone not willing to shoot Jews should not be required to do so.[63] Robert Gellately has produced two books arguing that the Nazi police state was not imposed by a huge and vigilant Gestapo, but by a German public that willingly enforced Nazi ideals and expectations through their willingness to 'out' any non-conformists among them.[64]

These realities go against popular opinion. A student of mine once announced in class that Germans were coerced into killing Jews – otherwise they would have been killed themselves. I asked him for the source of his information. He told me that his high school history teacher had visited Germany. An elderly man sitting on a bench next to him confessed that he had been one of those who murdered Jews. However, the elderly German explained, he had had no choice. His friend had refused to do the job and was killed by a pistol shot to the head.

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[60] See, for example, Nathan Stoltzfus, *Resistance of the Heart: Intermarriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

[61] See Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust*, pp. 100–06.

[62] Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

[63] See 'Forced to Obey Orders – The Myth' in Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess (eds), *'The Good Old Days': The Holocaust as Seen by its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky & Konecky, 1991), pp. 75–86.

[64] See Robert Gellately's two books, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) and *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

What could anyone do? This anecdote passed on by my student is a distilled version of the most convenient argument any German after 1945 could use, both to comfort himself and to present to the world. One serious problem with the 'I would have been shot' defence, however, is that no such example has ever been found. It would have been the most useful defence at any post-war trial, but no defence lawyer managed to uncover a single instance. There is one exception. Jews and other victims of the Nazis were sometimes made to kill or punish their fellow victims. They could be shot for failing to comply. But that is hardly the same story.

And yet there is a complexity to coercion in which being threatened with a shot to the head is merely one end of the spectrum. It is very important to know that Germans were not faced with being shot for non-compliance in the implementation of genocide. However, did the Germans that I am labelling 'complicit' act under some other form of duress? I have learned to be sceptical of Germans who claim to have been opponents of Nazism, no matter what the documentary record might indicate. I have read far too many disingenuous denazification files and have seen far too many transparent attempts to manipulate and misrepresent the story. And yet we must assume that some percentage of the post-war stories is true. Some Germans must have joined the Nazi Party only in order to keep an inoffensive job – as a teacher, for example – or to make enough money to feed a family. There are surely some instances in which my 'hermeneutic of suspicion' is overdrawn. The tricky part, of course, is knowing when to be suspicious and when not. It is probably impossible for any of us fully to know our own motives, much less to look inside the heart and soul of another. Remove this by two or three generations and the problems multiply.

However, certain examples from the Nazi period help clarify the issues. Prominent professors such as Gerhard Kittel, Paul Althaus and Emanuel Hirsch need not have modified their entire research and publication agenda to remain able to feed their families. And yet they praised Hitler to the skies and they both accepted and advocated the Nazi position on Jews in their work. This makes me think they really did believe in the Nazi state. Elisabeth Schmitz gives us an alternative example. She was a member of the Confessing Church, living in Berlin. She had a PhD in history, but experienced the restricted career of a woman at that time, ending up teaching in a school for girls. Because of her own close connection to Christians of Jewish descent, she recognized very clearly the impact of the new Civil Service Law of 1933 and the Nuremberg Racial Laws of 1935. She composed a remarkable documentation of

these injustices, sent it to leaders of the Confessing Church and tried in vain to get Confessing Church leaders to make this an issue for the church. In 1938, she resigned her teaching position and gave up her career because she was unwilling to teach the Nazi viewpoint to her students and exhibit enthusiasm for the Nazi state, as she was now required to do.[65] That seems to me like very genuine opposition to the politics and values of the Nazi state.

The Confessing Church not only did not protest against Nazism, but the leadership of the Confessing Church refused to attach themselves to people like Elisabeth Schmitz. A majority in the Confessing Church considered the radicalism of the Niemöller wing unattractive. Bonhoeffer was fully aware that almost all in the Confessing Church disapproved of his stance and especially his resistance behaviour. Even in 1952, the Protestant Bishop Hans Meiser of Bavaria refused to attend a Bonhoeffer memorial at Flossenburg, where Bonhoeffer had been executed. To him, Bonhoeffer was merely a traitor.

In the end, I am not sure I would have done better. But I do think that pastors and professors inhaled the tainted air of Nazi Germany and that most of them stayed loyal to that regime. I do think they gave the regime their blessing and that this ostentatious support was part of the package that allowed ordinary Germans to do horrible things. For that reason, my sense of their complicity overrides my sense of the complexity. I believe what they said and wrote before 1945. I question the arguments of innocence since.

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[65] See Manfred Gailus, *Mir aber zerriss es das Herz. Der stille Widerstand der Elisabeth Schmitz* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2010).

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Protestants, Catholics, Mennonites and Jews: Identities and Institutions in Holocaust Studies

Doris L. Bergen

The title of this chapter almost sounds like the beginning of a joke: 'A Protestant, a Catholic, a Mennonite and a Jew walk into a bar.' But then what? There is no punchline. Or if there is one, I do not know what it is. Freud would have something to say about the discomfort behind my impulse to start a discussion of 'personal trajectory, professional interpretations' with a joke. And, indeed, over the past 25 years, I have devoted considerable energy and time to the effort to convince people – above all, my students – that who you are (in the sense politely captured in Canada by the term 'your background') need not dictate what you think.

This has often been an uphill battle. In the early 1990s, at one of the first academic conferences where I presented my research on the German Christian Movement (*Glaubensbewegung 'Deutsche Christen'*), an eminent historian of Nazi Germany introduced me as 'a Mennonite farm girl from Saskatchewan'. Saskatchewan, where I was born, is one of Canada's three Prairie provinces. In graduate school, I had discovered that in some circles, including in the academic satires of the British writer David Lodge, 'Saskatchewan' represented intellectual barrenness and failure, a kind of anti-nirvana for scholars. At the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where I did my PhD, one distinguished professor was known to chide graduate students: 'If you keep on like that, you'll end up at the University of Saskatchewan.' (He seems to have dropped that line after I entered the programme, something I

appreciated as an alumna of that institution, although I found Lodge's books very funny.)

But the historian who presented me as being from Saskatchewan was not joking, or at least was not only making a joke. What I felt he was doing made me even more uncomfortable: all three of those attributes – 'Mennonite', 'farm girl' and 'from Saskatchewan' – seemed to be presented as evidence that I was sincere, earnest, an outsider and therefore capable of original or at least objective insights. They were also meant to signal unmistakably that I am not Jewish. To that scholar, who I am – or who he perceived me to be – was inseparable from my scholarship and his assessment of it. To me, however, that equation seemed essentializing and constricting. It also seemed to insult the integrity of scholars who, in Saul Friedländer's words, tried to show in their work that 'no distinction was warranted among historians of various backgrounds in their professional approach to the Third Reich, that *all* historians dealing with this theme had to be aware of their unavoidably subjective approach, and that all could muster enough self-critical insight to restrain this subjectivity'.[1]

For the meeting in Cape Town, each of us was asked to reflect on the relationship between our personal trajectory and professional interpretations. In what follows I have tried to do so, keeping Friedländer's challenge in mind, by analysing two of my ongoing research projects: one about the 'Volksdeutschen' (ethnic Germans) and definitions of Germanness in Nazi Europe, and the other about German military chaplains in the Second World War. Although these topics seem rather disparate, they are linked by several traits. Both approach the Holocaust from the side rather than head on. Both draw on an eclectic array of sources and both address the question of how an apparently normal society – with the 'ordinary people' and institutions that constitute it – was transformed into a genocidal enterprise. A fourth set of similarities links these projects, too; I chose them because the topics animate me. Although I continue to hold that who I am does not dictate what I think, I recognize that it does affect what I think about. Moreover, in retrospect it seems clear that my background, together with the contexts in which I have lived and worked, have taught me to pay particular attention to the ambiguity of identities and the power of institutions in analysing how the Holocaust occurred.

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[1] Saul Friedländer, 'Prologue' in Jonathan Petropoulos, Lynn Rapaport and John K. Roth (eds), *Lessons & Legacies IX* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010), p. 3, emphasis in original.

Identities: the *Volksdeutschen* in Nazi Germany

Perhaps 'identities' is a misnomer. I share with many scholars a distaste for the over-used and slippery concept of 'identity' as a category of analysis. The term, as Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper have pointed out, is both too soft and too hard.[2] Here I am using identity instead as something closer to 'categorization', that is, to refer the processes of how the *Volksdeutschen* or ethnic Germans, in Nazi ideology and practice the opposite of the Jews, were defined. The process, as I figured out already in the early 1990s, was at once tenuous and dynamic; the category of *Volksdeutschen* was not delineated by language, religion, appearance or foodways; it was constituted through violence and exacerbated by violence.[3] This insight in turn has a series of implications for understanding how gentiles killed Jews during the Holocaust.

As a category of privilege, the notion of 'Volksdeutschen' created a space of impunity for certain people. That impunity was recognized in acute ways by those on the receiving end of violence and theft, including its main targets: Jews. In a 1997 interview in California, the Holocaust survivor Abraham Szmiga, born in 1938 in Płock in central Poland, described how Nazi triumphs empowered the local *Volksdeutschen*:

> I forgot to mention it before, all those German colonies that were around Płock . . . When the German just walk, come into Płock, those German bastards they went right away with those bands, with the *Hakenkreuz*, with the swastika. All of a sudden they were all Nazis. They knew everybody. They knew the Jews, who is rich, who is poor, you know . . . And they gave the Jews the worst time of their life. The *Volksdeutschen* they called that. They were beating up people, they're stealing everything from everybody, and they knew exactly where everybody lives . . . Personally I see it, saw them in the street with the, you knew it right away who they are. Because they were not in uniform. You see, all those occupation with SS, they were all in uniform. But those, they were civilians with those band with the swastika. So, all of them, they were like that. And the young ones, too. You know,

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[2] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society*, 29 (2000), 1–47.

[3] Doris L. Bergen, 'The Nazi Concept of "Volksdeutsche" and the Exacerbation of Anti-semitism in Eastern Europe, 1939–1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29(4) (1994), 569–82.

> they, right away, like, they have the Hitlerjugend they called it. So, the young Hitler groups. They were, right away they joined. They were marching in the street and singing, you know. And those were the worst.[4]

Contemporary documents reveal other dimensions of the licence that Nazi German conquest gave the *Volksdeutschen* vis-à-vis the Jews. In 1939, a Czech-German Protestant pastor in Bohemia in the Protectorate wrote to the local rabbi. Give us your synagogue building, he demanded. It was only going to be seized by the Germans. At least this way it would remain 'a house of God'.[5] To him and others like him, the Jews were, if not already dead, in effect already gone. By their logic, it was clear that the Jews had no future, so why should they, the *Volksdeutschen*, not be the beneficiaries?

Acts of categorization and delegation produced a contagious, brutalizing effect, a chain reaction generated, whether intentionally or not, by German practices of divide and rule. In an interview with me, a man I will call R.S. from Wadowice in western Poland described how he served in a forced labour squad made up of teenaged Jewish boys. Starting in late 1939, transports of *Volksdeutschen* from Eastern Europe arrived in the region. R.S. remembers them as looking like farmers, speaking an unusual German and coming from Bessarabia or Bukovina. He knows now that the Germans were trying to populate the area with ethnic German people. Concurrently, the Germans would use Jews to help remove Poles from their homes. 'Imagine what this does to the atmosphere', R.S. said, 'when Poles see Jews throwing out their furniture and what have you. This was done in many areas. Jewish workers in these forced labour squads helped Germans evict Poles. They were transporting these Poles into the General Government. To this day those Poles might say those Jews were helping the Germans.' In that region, R.S. recounts, the Poles were very devout Catholics: 'Every Polish home had images of Jesus, Mary, and so on.' He will never forget how in one house,

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[4] Abraham Szmiga, Interview 30107, *Visual History Archive* (hereinafter VHA), USC Shoah Foundation (1997), accessed 4 July 2012, McMaster University, Hamilton. Thanks to Jordan Stone for research assistance and for preparing the transcripts quoted here.

[5] Magda Veselská, '"Sie müssen sich als Jude dessen bewusst sein, welche Opfer zu tragen sind…": Handlungsspielräume der jüdischen Kultusgemeinden im Protektorat bis zum Ende der großen Deportationen' in Andrea Löw, Doris L. Bergen and Anna Hájková (eds), *Alltag im Holocaust. Jüdisches Leben im Großdeutschen Reich 1941–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013), pp. 151–66.

an SS man pointed to a crucifix and said: '"Runter mit dem Juden" – take down the Jew. He sent in a Jew to do it in front of the Poles.'[6]

Reified by violence, the Nazi concept of 'Volksdeutsch' had few consistent, observable features. The ambiguity surrounding this category in turn opened up cracks for the assertion of agency, including Jewish agency. *Einsatzgruppen* reports from 1941–42 reveal the difficulties that supposed racial experts from Germany had in determining who was who. Under the chaotic conditions of genocide, the blurred outlines of ethnic Germanness could sometimes serve as camouflage. A report from Minsk indicated that an interpreter for the German field command had been discovered to be a Jewish woman passing as a German-speaking Pole. In Nowo-Podolsk, Catholic, Lutheran and Mennonite *Volksdeutschen* lived in the midst of Ukrainian and Jewish settlements. SD operatives reported capturing Ukrainian communist partisans who had tattooed huge crosses on their chests and claimed to be devout Christians. Elsewhere, two Jews were found passing as *Volksdeutschen*: one of them worked as an interpreter for the Germans and the other was a member of the *Selbstschutz*.[7]

Jewish sources reveal still further twists. By 1942, Abraham Szmiga's parents and the other members of his family had been killed, and he was wandering from town to town trying to find work and shelter. He was 13 years old. By then, he explained, the ethnic German enclaves outside Płock were considered 'judenrein' – purged of Jews. As a result, he was able to pose as a Christian vagrant because the *Volksdeutschen* believed they had removed or killed all Jews in the area. 'I was doing pretty good', Szmiga recalls, 'I was getting food. I could sleep sometimes in a stable. They were more, uh, because they didn't know at all that I'm Jewish. They couldn't, in a hundred years they couldn't believe that a Jew can be in this area. Because they took care of everybody.'[8] Szmiga passed as a gentile until 1945, living with a Pole and working for him as a farmhand. After the Soviets liberated the area, Szmiga told the farmer he was Jewish. 'He couldn't believe it. He said, "How could you fool me? I never could imagine that you are Jewish. You were doing a good job. I was happy. I couldn't, you have no problems with the language".'[9] The

[6] Author's interview with R.S., conducted in Toronto, 12 May 2010; transcript in possession of the author and R.S. Name not used by request.
[7] See details in various 'Tätigkeits- u. Lageberichte der Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in der UdSSR', copies in Yad Vashem Archives, O.53, file 3.
[8] Szmiga, 30107, VHA.
[9] *Ibid*.

murderousness of the *Volksdeutschen* combined with the Polish man's antisemitic assumptions made it impossible for him to see a live person, whom he liked and with whom he could communicate, as a Jew.

Categorization of *Volksdeutschen* was a collective process that involved networks, communities and most notably families. Implication in what it involved – theft, violence, brutalization – spread through those same channels. In 1942, a *Volksdeutscher* from Hungary crossed into German-occupied Polish territory, where he worked in a prison. His duties included guarding and sometimes shooting captured Jews. In the 1970s, the Stasi, the German Democratic Republic's state security service, subjected him to intensive interrogation regarding his role in the war. One of the most concrete accusations, which was used to expose his lies in denying he had been involved in the mass killing of prisoners, was based on evidence that he had taken underwear from the piles of clothing left behind in the killing process and sent it home for his children.[10] Through this gift, the man's wife became not only a beneficiary of his destruction of Jewish lives but also a witness. After the war, family connections stretched into chains of rationalization and sometimes denial. Anna Sudermann, an ethnic German teacher from a Mennonite community in southern Ukraine, was typical in continuing to propagate a narrative about Jewish NKVD (Soviet secret police) agents who tortured Christians and therefore had somehow deserved their wartime treatment, or at least could have expected it.[11]

In the Nazi context, categorization, as we learn from considering the *Volksdeutschen*, was not literally about dehumanization, that is, about some people deeming others to be non-human. Certainly, the man who took the underwear recognized its original owners as human children – of approximately the same size as his own offspring. Nor was Nazi categorization really about something that might simply be called 'race', a sort of radical otherness. Rather, it was a process of appropriation, a kind of inversion, by which perpetrators rendered themselves and their

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[10] 'Vernehmungsprotokoll Peter Zauner', Erfurt, 4 September 1973, files from the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, copies in Yad Vashem Archives, TR. 10/3650.

[11] See Gerhard Rempel, 'Mennonites and the Holocaust: From Collaboration to Perpetration', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 84(4) (2010), 507–49. Anna Sudermann features prominently in Rempel's discussion. One notable feature is her combination of asserting that Jews were NKVD and other kinds of communist villains with an open admission of Mennonite guilt in the Holocaust.

victims interchangeable. For the killers and those close to them, this changing of places brought moral as well as material benefits.

One incident can serve to illustrate the process. In September 1941, the Reich Security Main Office sent the following message to the *Einsatzgruppen* A, B, C and D:

> Re: Material for Antibolshevik Propaganda
>
> For purposes of propaganda we require you to send immediately some bloodstained clothing from murdered people with a brief description of the circumstances. If these are not available, select instead suitably damaged pieces of clothing from those who have been shot.[12]

The terse formulation signals that 'murdered people' means Germans and their accomplices killed in the Soviet campaign; 'those who have been shot' refers to the targets of *Einsatzgruppen* massacres. People in the first group might be difficult to find, the author of the memo understood, but there were more than enough of the latter. It is hard to imagine a clearer perversion of empathy: killers using the clothing of their dead victims to conjure the image that it was they themselves who had been victimized.

My interest in the *Volksdeutschen* in the Holocaust dates back many years now, but are my interpretations somehow linked to my own biography? I certainly did not approach the topic with that in mind. Of course, it is possible that years as the only non-Dutch Reformed pupil in a small-town, parochial school taught me to look beneath the surface of public identities; maybe my Mennonite roots and ambivalence about them drew me towards sites of ambiguity. Still, many people without this heritage have written extensively and excellently about the *Volksdeutschen*: I think about Martin Dean, Alexa Stiller, Gerhard Wolf, Eric Steinhardt, Mirna Zakić, Wendy Lower and others,[13] none of whom to my knowledge is a Mennonite from Saskatchewan.

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[12] Funkspruch, Berlin Nr. 5811, 4 September 1941, 'An die Einsatzgruppen A, B, C, D', from Reichssicherheitshauptamt IV A 1D, signed Vogt, SS-Sturmbannführer, in Yad Vashem, O.53/5.

[13] Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–44* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2000); Alexa Stiller, 'Germanisierung und Gewalt: Nationalsozialistische Politik in den annektierten Gebieten, 1939–1945', dissertation, University of Bern (in progress); Gerhard Wolf, *Ideologie und Herrschaftsrationalität. Nationalsozialistische Germanisierungspolitik in Polen* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2012); Eric Steinhardt, 'Policing the Boundaries of "Germandom" in the East: SS Ethnic

Nevertheless, there are personal factors that I did not recognize or acknowledge when I started this project. Both of my parents were born in Ukraine in the 1920s in German-speaking communities. They left Europe as children before the war, but through our relatives, I have had access to people who witnessed and in some cases participated in the Holocaust, and it is possible that because of our family connection, they told me things they might not have told a complete stranger.[14] For instance, in the mid-1990s, I interviewed a group of Mennonite *Volksdeutschen* from Ukraine, whom I met through my mother's cousin. All six of them had been sent to Siberia after the war. They described to me an incident on the train that involved a man condemned by a Soviet tribunal to a life sentence of hard labour for his participation in the wartime massacres of Jews. Unable to bear the prospect of the Gulag with no hope of ever getting out, the man prepared to jump from the moving train to his death. But then, I was told, a miracle occurred. Jesus appeared to the man and told him not to jump. He would be saved. And, indeed, soon afterwards he was released and reunited with his family.[15] My interviewees, three elderly married couples, told me this story with great animation and obvious pleasure, no doubt assuming that I shared their views.

Also significant for my research on the *Volksdeutschen* is the factor of timing. In the 1990s, as I began to work on the subject, the collapse of communism made archives available in Poland, Russia and Ukraine – and also in what had been East Germany. Those materials have been vital for me. A stint as an instructor at the University in Tuzla in the summer of 1996 also proved formative. Less than a year after the Dayton Accords formally ended hostilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, I found myself living in a flat in a large building, the exterior of which was riddled with bullet holes. Someone had clearly stood outside with a machine gun, blasting away, oblivious or at least unconcerned with

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German Policy and Odessa's "Volksdeutschen" 1941–1944', *Central European History* 43(1) (2010) 85–116; Mirna Zakic, 'The Price of Belonging to the Volk: Volksdeutsche, Land Redistribution and Aryanization in the Serbian Banat, 1941–4', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 49(2) (2014), 320–40; Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[14] See the discussion in Doris L. Bergen, 'Mourning, Mass Death, and the Gray Zone: The Ethnic Germans of Eastern Europe and the Second World War' in Peter Homans (ed.), *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), pp. 171–93.

[15] Recounted in *ibid.*

whether those hit were Bosnians, Croats, Serbs or some combination. Passing by the scarred walls several times a day and thinking about how 'ethnicity' was defined – indeed, created – through violence in the wars associated with the breakdown of Yugoslavia drew my attention to comparable aspects of the situation around the *Volksdeutschen* half a century earlier. Likewise, the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, attributed by some early, ill-informed Western observers to 'ancient tribal hatreds' between Hutus and Tutsis, turned out on examination to be much more complex. The terrible dynamics that unfolded there provided another horrific lesson in how extreme violence hardens lines that once were blurred.

Other developments in the 1990s shaped my work, too. I benefited directly from the enormous growth of public interest in the Holocaust and the institutionalization of Holocaust Studies, including the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993. In my research and teaching, I participated in efforts to integrate into research on the *Shoah* work on gender and sexuality that proved transformative in so many other fields. In hindsight I can see that ideas and insights that seemed so original to me at the time were in fact connected to wider trends that involved whole cohorts of scholars all over the world.

Institutions: the *Wehrmacht* chaplains

For many years now, I have been thinking about Christian chaplains in the Nazi German military. The topic first came to me when I was undertaking research for my dissertation on the German Christian movement. In the central Protestant Church Archive in Berlin, I stumbled across a letter to Reich Bishop Ludwig Müller from a Lutheran pastor in Luseland, Saskatchewan. That pastor, a German expatriate living in a dreary prairie town (where, coincidentally, my father grew up), expressed his enthusiasm for Hitler and his excitement about German rearmament. He also offered his services to the new *Wehrmacht* as a chaplain. At the time, I was more interested in individual reactions to National Socialism than I was in institutions, and although Konrad Jarausch,[16] one of my mentors, encouraged me to think about pastors as professionals, I did not pursue that line of inquiry. Only later did I gain the insight that the military chaplaincy as an institution was a

[16] See his important book about his father, a theologian and non-commissioned officer in the Wehrmacht: Konrad H. Jarausch (ed.), *Reluctant Accomplice: A Wehrmacht Soldier's Letters from the Eastern Front* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

significant force of legitimation for Nazi German atrocities during the Second World War.[17]

Thinking about the *Wehrmacht* chaplains has helped me comprehend a number of features of Nazi genocide. First, a focus on the chaplaincy as an institution sheds light on how Nazi atrocities, in particular the assault on Jews and Judaism, developed over time and linked back to old traditions of antisemitism and anti-Judaism. Derek Hastings describes the important role that First World War Roman Catholic chaplains played in the early Nazi movement in Munich in the 1920s.[18] Rearmament in 1935 was a triumph for the churches, and the two Military Bishops named, the Protestant Franz Dohrmann and the Catholic Franz-Justus Rarkowski, proudly took their places at the head of the reconstituted chaplaincy. Certainly, neither of them nor, judging from the record, anyone else associated with Christian institutions objected that German Jewish men were officially excluded from military service. Nor was there anything beyond a few murmurs when Nazi activists scratched out the names of Jewish soldiers on memorial plaques listing those fallen in 1914–18. Many such memorials were located in churches.

Decisions and compromises in the pre-war years bound the chaplaincy ever closer to the National Socialist regime and established patterns that proved decisive in wartime. Both Dohrmann and Rarkowski weathered the purge of early 1938 that saw their patrons, the German Minister of War Werner von Blomberg and Army Commander-in-Chief Werner von Fritsch, lose their jobs.[19] Now the Military Bishops owed their positions and prestige solely to their Nazi bosses, who expected active loyalty in return. Like the business leaders whom Peter Hayes has analysed so astutely,[20] the top chaplains delivered the goods.

Over the course of the war, military chaplains were located in the thick of the action, including mass killings all over Europe. They were

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[17] Doris L. Bergen, 'German Military Chaplains in World War II and the Dilemmas of Legitimacy', in Doris L. Bergen (ed.), *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), pp. 165–86.

[18] Derek Hastings, *Catholicism and the Roots of Nazism: Religious Identity and National Socialism* (Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. pp. 109, 125 and 136–37.

[19] See Gerhard L. Weinberg, 'The German Generals and the Outbreak of War, 1938–1939' in *Germany, Hitler, and World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 129–45.

[20] Peter Hayes, 'From Aryanization to Auschwitz: German Corporate Complicity in the Holocaust', Oregon State University, May 2013, www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQwDm5iQaCw (date accessed 17 March 2015).

present in the Blitzkrieg against Poland in 1939 and in France in 1940, where German soldiers and officers massacred several thousand black soldiers they had captured.[21] Chaplains operated in the midst of reprisal killings in Yugoslavia and Greece; they were on the scene during the mass shootings of Jews in 1941 in Kovno, Dünaberg, L'vov and Kiev. *Wehrmacht* chaplains observed anti-partisan slaughters in Belarus and Italy; they witnessed the death marches of the last year of the war.[22] In years of research I have found only one record of an attempt by chaplains to stop killings of civilians, and that is the well-known incident at Belaya Tserkov, Ukraine, in August 1941.[23] There two chaplains, a Protestant and a Catholic, rallied some fellow chaplains to try to stop the killing of some 90 Jewish children who were locked in a school, their parents already murdered by Germans and local accomplices. They failed to save the children and continued to serve as chaplains through the end of the war.

As a group, the *Wehrmacht* chaplains learned to keep their heads down and do their work. The chaplaincy proved adept at institutional self-regulation, as evidenced by the complex process of selecting its members. I have examined approximately 250 files of clergy who were proposed as military chaplains. At least two-thirds of them were rejected on the principle that there should be no troublemakers in the ranks. Avoiding trouble meant keeping quiet about German crimes, an assignment that intersected with every aspect of a chaplain's job, from comforting the sick to burying the dead. As one supervisory chaplain suggested in his 1942 guidelines for conducting funerals, 'moral assessment of the dead is always dangerous'.[24]

Military chaplains were important sources of legitimacy in yet another way: they provided a counter-narrative to their brutalized surroundings. It was not atrocity in which German soldiers were involved, they

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[21] Raffael Scheck, *Hitler's African Victims: The German Army Massacres of Black French Soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[22] Daniel Blatman, *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide*, Chaya Galai (trans.) (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

[23] This incident has been discussed by many historians. See Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002).

[24] 'Vierteljahres (Seelsorge) – Bericht des ev. Divisions-Pfarrers der 7. Pz.-Division für die Zeit vom 22.6. bis 30.9.1941', p. 3, NARA (U.S. National Archives Records Administration) College Park, Captured German Records (Record Group 242), T-315 (Records of German Field Commands, Divisions), Microfilm Roll 424/ frame 269.

preached; it was duty. Germans were not killers but victims; not guilty sinners but, like Christ, innocents who sacrificed their blood for others. A Catholic chaplain's notes from 1941 juxtaposed his horror at the massacres of Jews in L'vov with excitement about how many soldiers attended his worship services.[25] An *Einsatzgruppen* report from late 1941 described the killing of tens of thousands of Jews in the Baltic region and mentioned military chaplains holding services for the local *Volksdeutschen*.[26] In August 1943, an official report submitted by a Protestant chaplain with the 1st Mountain Division in Greece recounted how German soldiers killed 317 civilians: 'It was a heavy inner burden on the consciences of many to have to kill women and children in the actions against partisans.'[27]

As individuals and as part of an institution, the *Wehrmacht* chaplains were on the defensive. Studying them has alerted me to a dynamic I call compensatory complicity, a form of cooperation intended to overcome suspicions of disloyalty by bending over backwards to prove one's worth to a hostile authority. Frequently, *Wehrmacht* chaplains complained that they were disrespected by soldiers and officers, who mocked Christianity as Jewish, womanly and weak. Countless restrictions poked at their ability to do their jobs by limiting who they could bury, with whom they could communicate, even whether they could be awarded Iron Crosses. Like church leaders everywhere, perhaps, German military chaplains craved relevance, and every criticism they received or perceived increased their efforts to prove themselves.

At least some elements of the German public acknowledged the efficacy of the chaplains' efforts. Bereaved family members wrote to the chaplains begging to know whether their husbands, sons, fathers and brothers had 'died at peace with God'. At least some of those wrenching requests seem to be coded inquiries into whether the man concerned had become a murderer. After all, information about German atrocities in the East was readily available back home; soldiers had regular

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[25] Alphons Satzger, 132 Inf. Div. in Kempowski Archiv, #3101, Akademie der Kuenste, Berlin, Archive. On chaplain Satzger's impressions of 'Lemberg', see the entry from 4 July 1941. I am very grateful to Peter Fritzsche for drawing this source to my attention.

[26] 'Tätigkeits- u. Lagebericht Nr. 5 der Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD in der UdSSR', reporting period 15–30 September 1941; copy in Yad Vashem archives, O.53, file 3. See especially pp. 14–15 of the report (file pp. 27–28) and the five-page appendix (file pp. 39–44).

[27] Quoted in Mark Mazower, 'Military Violence and National Socialist Values: The *Wehrmacht* in Greece 1941–1944', *Past & Present*, 134 (1992), 129–58.

periods of leave and many sent photographs of killing sites to friends and relatives. Like complicity, the quest for legitimacy was a family affair. In every case where the response is recorded, chaplains assured the family that, indeed, the soldier in question died at peace with God and man. In processes of legitimation, institutions play a powerful, reinforcing role. Institutionalization collected, organized and ultimately replaced individual intent. In fact, the institution of the chaplaincy also absorbed individual disagreement so that even chaplains who were tormented by the mass killing they euphemistically referred to as the 'special nature of this war' ended up providing – indeed, embodying – a Christian endorsement of the German war of annihilation.

Is this interpretation of the *Wehrmacht* chaplaincy and its significance a product of my personal trajectory? An easy answer would be to claim that my pacifist Mennonite heritage inspired a critique of German military chaplains. But that response would misrepresent my relationship to Mennonitism. It would also cover over the thousands of Mennonites from southern Ukraine alone who served in German uniform (*Wehrmacht* and also SS) during the war and participated actively in the Holocaust. Gerhard Rempel has carried out remarkable research on this neglected part of Mennonite history, which includes not only onlookers and beneficiaries of the destruction of Jews but also mass murderers. For instance, Heinrich Wiens, a Mennonite from southern Ukraine, headed an *Einsatzkommando* that killed more than 6,000 Jews in a single *Aktion*.[28] And in any case, as with the *Volksdeutschen*, I can point to many scholars from very different backgrounds who have done important work on German military chaplains: Manfred Messerschmidt, Hans-Jürgen Brandt and Lauren Faulkner Rossi come first to mind.[29]

Easier to trace than background forces is the influence of institutions of which I have been part. At the University of Vermont, in my first academic position, I saw how institutional support for study of the Holocaust, a legacy of Raul Hilberg's long career there, translated directly

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[28] Rempel, 'Mennonites and the Holocaust'.

[29] Manfred Messerschmidt, 'Aspekte der Militärseelsorgepolitik in nationalsozialistischer Zeit' and 'Zur Militärseelsorgepolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg', *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen*, 3 (1968), 63–105 and 5 (1969), 37–85; Hans-Jürgen Brandt (ed.), *Priester in Uniform: Seelsorger, Ordensleute und Theologen als Soldaten im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Augsburg: Pattloch, 1994); Lauren N. Faulkner, 'Against Bolshevism: Georg Werthmann and the Role of Ideology in the Catholic Military Chaplaincy, 1939–1945', *Contemporary European History*, 19(1) (2010), 1–16.

into active encouragement of my own increasing focus on the subject. In Vermont, I also met Rabbi Max Wall, who had served as a chaplain with the US Army in occupied Germany. His experiences demonstrated how the institution of the chaplaincy could magnify an individual's efforts to do the right thing, too.[30] At the University of Notre Dame, I gained a new appreciation of the continued impact of Christianity on public discourse. In that hierarchical setting, I learned a great deal about how institutional forces discipline and reward individuals.

In my current position at the University of Toronto, I am part of an enormous institution where my time is stretched to the limit and beyond. The experience of always being busy has raised my awareness of another challenge that confronted the *Wehrmacht* chaplains. They were spread so thin and were so overtaxed that they had no time to think, to contemplate what they were doing or to ponder what processes they were part of. In my assessment, their circumstances played a significant role in shaping the chaplains' actions. As Hannah Arendt reminds us, thinking is the essence of ethical behaviour, indeed of humanity, just as thoughtlessness is a source of evil.[31]

Timing is important for this project, too. Carol Rittner first drew to my attention the remarkable discussion of military chaplains in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report.[32] The parallels to chaplains in Nazi Germany are uncanny, and reading the South African material helped me develop my interpretation of the *Wehrmacht* chaplains' legitimizing role. When I first started thinking about military chaplains in the 1980s, the topic seemed obscure and of only limited interest. But with the events of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many people suddenly found the intersections of religion and war to be of urgent importance. I have found myself invited to speak to military chaplains, to officers and cadets at West Point – in short, I have experienced a small degree of relevance myself. There is something gratifying about the feeling, but at the same time I cannot forget a comment I once heard from a woman with decades of experience in university affairs. Academics are easily bought, she observed; all they really want is to be invited to nice dinners where they sit next to

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[30] Max B. Wall, '"We Will Be": Experiences of an American Jewish Chaplain in the Second World War' in Bergen (ed.), *The Sword of the Lord*, Chapter 9.

[31] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963).

[32] *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (Cape Town: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1999).

powerful people. Friedländer's call for 'self-critical insight' seems worth repeating here.

At public appearances, Raul Hilberg was invariably asked: 'How did the Holocaust happen?' His answer was always the same: 'Step by step.' Thinking about the *Volksdeutschen* and the *Wehrmacht* chaplains prompts me to add another word to that response: 'together'. These steps were not taken by individuals alone, but by people who were members of families and professional groups. The concepts of chronology and networks are central to what I understand about the Holocaust. The category of *Volksdeutschen* hardened some bonds and shattered others; military chaplains provided a Christian narrative to soothe the consciences of German soldiers, their families and themselves. Both processes of categorization and that legitimating narrative facilitated a kind of moral inversion that turned perpetrators, accomplices and beneficiaries of destruction into victims, at least in their own perceptions. Thinking about the theme of our conference and this volume – personal trajectories, professional interpretations – serves as a reminder of how porous the field of Holocaust Studies is, how vulnerable to instrumentalization and sensationalization, but also how open to new impulses. This complex and multi-layered subject needs all of us and many others, too, because, to quote Hilberg again: 'There is still so much that we do not know.'[33]

[33] 'Is There a New Anti-semitism? A Conversation with Raul Hilberg', *Logos* 6(1–2) (2007), available at: http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_6.1-2/hilberg.htm (date accessed 17 March 2015).

9
My Wrestling with the Holocaust

Karl A. Schleunes

My 'wrestling with the Holocaust' has taken me through more than 20 years of teaching a course on the subject and many more as a scholar attempting to understand how it could have happened. At its root, I have come to realize that this wrestling also has a deeply personal dimension. I have wrestled with the Holocaust as a teacher, a scholar and a human being – and have come to realize that the lines separating these dimensions are by no means clear. In each of these capacities, I have for the past five decades confronted a variety of issues, problems and situations.

I came to the Holocaust through the back door, by way of German history. When I was a graduate student in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the term 'Holocaust' had not yet become the standard label for the tragedy then referred to by what the Nazis themselves called it: 'the final solution to the Jewish problem', or simply the 'Final Solution'. When *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* was published in 1970, the word 'Holocaust' appeared nowhere in it.[1] And to my surprise, the book's title did not convey the subject matter to potential readers as clearly as I had assumed. What could be clearer than 'the twisted road to Auschwitz?', or so I thought. Let me explain: I lived in Chicago at the time the book was published, and when the publisher informed me that copies had been delivered to bookstores, I hurried downtown to one the city's largest bookstores, Krochs & Brentanos, to – well – admire it, I guess. I did not need to buy it after all. In any event, I proceeded to the store's history section, but there even a careful perusal of its shelves

[1] Karl Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy towards German Jews, 1933–1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970).

produced no such book. I was disappointed, but since my wife and I were scheduled to leave for Europe shortly, I thought I'd at least buy a guidebook for Germany. So I drifted over to the store's travel section to peruse its shelves – and there it was: *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz* nestled alongside a huge collection of travel guides. Even 'Auschwitz', to say nothing of 'Holocaust', had not yet entered the everyday public vocabulary.

What I did not know at the time either was that I had become a Holocaust historian. Nor did I know that I was soon to become a 'functionalist'. Functionalism was a term I connected with sociologists – people like Talcott Parsons. I did eventually learn that the coiner of the term (so Tim Mason told me) was the German historian and political scientist Karl Dietrich Bracher. Bracher clearly did not mean it as a compliment, presumably because he believed it let Hitler off the hook for much of the horror that the Nazis had perpetrated. So I was told by critics who shared his view. In light of their criticism, I read through the book again, checking for mentions of Hitler's involvement. I found him often enough to convince myself that on that point at least, the critics were wrong.

When I say I came to the Holocaust through the backdoor of German history, I must add that I went through that door with some hesitation, at least when it came to developing an undergraduate level course on the Holocaust. This was in the late 1980s. You may recall some of the debates during the 1970s and 1980s about the appropriateness of a course on the Holocaust, especially for college undergraduates. Some feared that such a course would almost certainly trivialize the suffering of the Holocaust's victims. Opponents conjured up the spectre of the bedraggled college sophomore suffering from a hangover, oversleeping and then griping about 'being late for the Holocaust'. Or, perhaps worse, of students complaining about how boring this class turned out to be. Or of their deciding that the subject matter was not important enough for them to attend class – not on such a beautiful spring morning. I took such concerns at least semi-seriously. Then, too, there was Elie Wiesel's admonition that the only appropriate response to the Holocaust is silence. Standing in silent awe of the horrors of the Holocaust seemed quite appropriate to me – and in many ways still does. But I had failed to understand the level upon which his admonition was meant, as well as the many levels upon which it was not meant, for Wiesel certainly has been anything but silent about the Holocaust. It was not until the fall of 1988 that I finally set aside such misgivings and began planning a semester-long course on the Holocaust, one to be directed at upper-level

undergraduates and to which I gave the title 'The Holocaust: History and Meaning'.

Why the term 'Meaning' in the course title? Probably because I knew that the subject matter of the Holocaust raised questions that 'normal' history does not. I do not mean to suggest that the Holocaust constitutes a conceptually new and separate category of history. My intention is much more modest. I have no conceptually clear definition for what I mean by 'normal history'. I use the term loosely merely to emphasize the point that the Holocaust evokes responses that 'normal' (or, if you prefer, 'other') history', however loosely conceived, does not; it touches upon sensitivities that 'normal' history does not; it inspires denial that 'normal' history does not. It engages the energies of a range of academic disciplines far beyond those usually devoted to 'normal' history. At a recent conference of Holocaust scholars in the US, there were, by my count, 11 different scholarly disciplines represented – history being only one of them. In short, the Holocaust raises a host of questions, most of which cut to what can rightly be called the 'ontological bone'. There are theological questions: 'Where is God?', Elie Wiesel asks in his autobiographical novel *Night*.[2] There are psychological questions: 'Where was man?', Stanley Milgram asks in his Nuremberg experiments. There are sociological questions: 'What were the social bases for Nazi policies?', Seymour Martin Lipset asks in his book on *Political Man*.[3] There are moral questions: what is the nature of evil? Can it be 'banal', as Hannah Arendt suggests in reference to Eichmann?[4] These are all questions that cannot be ignored, but seldom arise in other historical settings. The answers often given, however, are by no means always clear and in many instances are inadequate. Saul Friedländer's formulation that the Holocaust was 'a monstrous manifestation of human potential' is as depressing as it is true.

Then there is the related question of our limited capacity to represent the horror of the Holocaust. Can the horror even be represented? Could it be beyond the limits of representation? Again, Saul Friedländer is among those who deliver a warning to those struggling to represent (say, teach) the Holocaust. To quote him again: 'we are dealing', he says, 'with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representational

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[2] Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Stella Rodway (trans.) (New York: Hill & Wang, 1960).
[3] Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960).
[4] Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

capacities, an "event at the limits"'. Are we to conclude that perhaps we are simply unable to represent the Holocaust? But Friedländer goes on to argue that we must represent it because 'the perpetrators invested considerable effort not only in camouflage, but in effacement of all traces of their deed, [thereby making] the obligation to bear witness and record this past seem even more compelling'.[5] Then, too, the problem is not merely whether we can represent the Holocaust, but, if we try, how do we represent it? If we attempt to do so, it is against the backdrop of his warning that it is imperative for the record of suffering not to be distorted or cheapened by banalities, be it in our scholarly discourse or our pedagogical expositions.

Given the gravity of the questions raised by the Holocaust, the search for adequate representations often reaches into poetic, religious realms. Take George Steiner, who speaks of the Holocaust as representing 'a second fall of man', suggesting that Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden to be an insufficient explanation for the evil of Auschwitz. 'The world of Auschwitz', he posits, 'lies outside of speech as it lies outside of man.'[6] And in that 'outside sense', it seems to confound our comprehension as well as our speech. As Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter responded in 1943 to Jan Karski of the Polish underground after hearing his report on what he had witnessed in the Warsaw Ghetto and the Belzec death camp: 'I don't believe you', Frankfurter said – 'I do not mean you are lying. I simply said I cannot believe you.'[7] The difficulty of finding fitting metaphors, poetic or otherwise, forces one to reconsider the words of the guard at Auschwitz, who, when asked by inmate Primo Levi about the 'why' of Auschwitz, said simply 'hier gibt es kein warum' ('here there is no why'.) 'Only those who were killed', Levi finally concluded, 'could really understand the Holocaust.' How could this be translated into the understanding of undergraduates?

There is a danger in all of this as well – that of mythologizing or mystifying the Holocaust and thereby unwittingly defining it to be out of reach of both representation and explanation. If this were so, there would be no point in going on. Nor would there be much point in teaching a course on it. 'Is there really a Nazi mystery?', French

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[5] Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation; Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 2–3.

[6] George Steiner, *In Bluebeard's Castle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 54–55.

[7] Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 14.

political philosopher Raymond Aron has asked. Such a mystery 'only survives', Aron claims, 'as a function of the way the question is asked. If that question is divided into its component elements', he suggests, 'the answers make the Hitler adventure as understandable as any other episode in history'.[8] In light of Aron's claim, one is reminded of the eighteenth-century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's theory of knowledge as it related to the human capacity for understanding history. For Vico, knowledge of human history was more solidly grounded than was knowledge of physical nature. Vico was contradicting Descartes' claim that human knowledge of physical nature was superior, i.e., more certain and measureable than knowledge of human activities. Vico reasoned that because God had created nature only God could know it. '[Human] history on the other hand', he wrote, 'or the world of nations, was made by man; therefore man could come to know it, and it [i.e., his knowledge of history would have] a reality superior to that of mathematics.'[9] No two scholars of the Holocaust have benefited more from proceeding in accordance with Vico's proposition than have Yehuda Bauer and Raul Hilberg. As Bauer points out, dependence upon mythologization, or what he calls 'metaphysical transcendence', would be self-defeating. It would render 'British history between the two world wars as inaccessible as it would the history of the Holocaust'.[10] Hilberg, as we know, often focused on smaller questions (railroad schedules, for example) and came up with some very big answers.

To be sure, the big questions about the Holocaust do not just disappear because we resist mythologizing them. They are still there and they still take us to what one might call the ontological bone. We cannot know the answer to Elie Wiesel's question about 'where was God?', but we can know the answers to questions about many of those who believed themselves to be people of God. Where were they? To find that out, one need point only to the work of three scholars – Susannah Heschel, Doris Bergin and Robert Ericksen. Their work has been extremely instructive on this question. Ericksen's recent book on churches and universities in the Third Reich makes this abundantly clear.[11] The answers that

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[8] Raymond Aron, 'Is There a Nazi Mystery?', *Encounter* (June 1980), 34.
[9] Giambattista Vico, *The New Science of Biambattista Vico*, revised translation of the 3rd edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 96.
[10] Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 18.
[11] Robert P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

he – along with Susannah and Doris – provides lie on a continuum ranging from disquieting to disgusting. In my own religious upbringing, some 60 and more years ago in small-town rural Wisconsin, where almost everyone was of German extraction, echoes of the German Protestant tradition permeated the air, sometimes faintly, sometimes, as I now recall, not so faintly. There is much of that tradition – I'm speaking of the Wisconsin version – I still cherish, and that may be the reason why I find the possible answers to the question of 'where were they?' so disquieting.

For those of us who are not Jewish, there is serious reason for wrestling with the Christian tradition or, more specifically, with the doctrinal teachings of the Christian Church, especially its characterization of the Jews. The crux of the problem, quite obviously, lies in the Church's teachings attached to the crucifixion of Jesus, the most inflammatory of which are found in the familiar account in Matthew 27:22–25, wherein a crowd composed of Jews shouts out the call for Jesus to be crucified. When the Roman governor Pontius Pilate protests that he saw no fault in Jesus and handed him over to the crowd, Matthew quotes the crowd as shouting in unison the fateful words: 'His blood be upon us and our children.' Therewith was born what became the fateful myth of Jews as Christ-killers, calling down upon themselves divine punishment in the form of an eternal curse. Biblical scholars tell us that Matthew's account of these events was not written for another 40 or more years after the event. However, the notion that Jews bore a collective responsibility for this act of deicide was by no means unique to Matthew. As early as the year 50 of the Common Era, the Apostle Paul, in his first letter to Christians in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 2:24), spoke of 'the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and oppose all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles'. It may be, as some scholars propose, that Paul was not referring to all Jews, but only to those in the crowd witnessing the crucifixion, or simply to Judeans, or even that the offending phrase was a later interpellation with which Paul had nothing to do. Yet this debate over authorship, writes Amy-Jill Levine in her recent book on *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of a Jewish Jesus*,[12] in no way 'alters the role these verses came to play in forming Christian attitudes toward Jews'. The notion that Jews bore the guilt for killing Jesus embedded itself deeply in Christian doctrine

[12] Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 93–94.

during the four centuries after the crucifixion, mainly by way of the theological treatises of nearly every one of the early Church Fathers. There is no need in this setting to rehearse the calumnies directed against the Jews in the *Adversus Judaeos* writings of the early Christian centuries. In the sixteenth century, the German reformer Martin Luther expanded on this tradition in his disgraceful tract *On the Jews and their Lies*.[13] Suffice it to say that to this day, the Church continues to wrestle with the bitter consequences of this tradition. The same must be said of students in courses on the Holocaust. This wrestling is rarely easy, especially for those living in the part of the US in which I live and where I taught for 40 years – the American South, sometimes referred to as the buckle on the country's 'Bible Belt'. The course I taught, 'The Holocaust: History and Meaning', sought to answer four basic questions: why the Jews? Why the Germans? Why Hitler? Why the Holocaust? It was the first of these questions – why the Jews? – that generated the most difficulties for those of my students imbued in traditional Christianity.

Any attempt to answer the question of 'why the Jews?' cannot avoid beginning with an examination of the long history of anti-Jewish teachings in European/Christian culture. Not without reason is the product of these teachings often called our culture's 'longest hatred', one that has extended over two millennia and bore its acid fruit in the death camps of Eastern Europe. In recognition of this hatred and its origins, there has emerged in recent years a general consensus among scholars of the Holocaust, to quote the Catholic theologian Rosemary Ruether, that 'the anti-Jewish myth is neither a superficial nor secondary element in Christian thought' and that 'the foundations of anti-Judaic thought were laid in the New Testament'.[14] Or to cite the slightly more cautious observation of the Methodist theologian, the late Franklin Littell, that there is a 'red thread' leading from the teachings of Church Fathers of the early centuries of the Common Era to the Auschwitz of the 1940s.[15] Adding to that is Ruether's devastating, and radical, contention that: 'Possibly anti-Judaism is too deeply embedded in the foundations of

[13] Martin Luther, 'On the Jews and their Lies' (1543), Martin H. Bertram (trans.), in *Luther's Works, The Christian in Society*, vol. 47 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 121–306.

[14] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974), p. 226.

[15] Franklin H. Littell, *The Crucifixion of the Jews* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986). See Chapter II on 'Christian Antisemitism'.

Christianity to be rooted out entirely without destroying the whole structure.'[16]

Ruether's assertion is one that generations of students in my course on the Holocaust have been forced to wrestle with. For some, especially the more sensitive, it has been a painful and disconcerting experience. For many, it was a direct challenge to the underpinnings of their most fundamental beliefs. Not just occasionally would a student walk out of the class – sometimes in protest, always in turmoil. For some few (those who could – and would – blithely decide 'I think I'll skip the Holocaust today'), there was no problem. To the handful of atheists, of course, there was no problem either. This was pretty much what they had expected from Christianity – or religion in general. However, I'm gratified to be able to say that an overwhelming number of the most discomfited students did work their way through this difficult confrontation to emerge with a more discerning, if chastened understanding of their religious background. This meant they could sympathize with someone like Benjamin Disraeli who, long before the Holocaust, is quoted as saying that: 'The Jews are a nervous people. Nineteen centuries of Christian love have taken their toll.'[17]

Of considerably less concern to students was the intentionalist–functionalist controversy among scholars over how decisions in the Third Reich, particularly those leading to the Holocaust, were made. To me, of course, the issue was of great concern. In the baldest of its formulations, the issue was whether the Holocaust was the product of an unfolding masterplan, a blueprint of sorts, outlining the stages of Jewish persecutions culminating in the death camps in 1941, or whether the escalating persecutions were driven forward by the jockeying of bitterly opposing factions within the Nazi firmament, each competing to capture control over certain policy areas – and each striving to please the Führer?

Among intentionalists, there was disagreement about how early the masterplan regarding the treatment of the Jews had been devised. Perhaps Hitler had already revealed such a plan in 1925 in the pages of *Mein Kampf*. Or perhaps he had it stored in a filing cabinet, to be opened as circumstances allowed for a new stage of persecution. Many scholars thought this to be the case – as does much of the general public, as anyone who has occasion to speak on this topic in general forums

[16] Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*, p. 226.
[17] Benjamin Disraeli. See any book of quotations.

well knows. Certainly, many of the students who came to my class thought so, perhaps because they had read William Shirer's highly-readable bestseller *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, a book most likely to be found on their parent's bookshelves. In short, the intentionalists understood the escalating persecutions to be in accordance with the unfolding of an ideologically crafted masterplan, the last stage of which was the wartime 'final solution to the Jewish problem'. There were disagreements within the intentionalist camp, but these were mostly about how far back the Nazi intention to murder the Jews might be traced. Some few suggested it went back to 1919 and was already signalled in September of that year in Hitler's letter to a German soldier, Adolf Gemlich, who had inquired about the position of the Nazi Party (then known as the German Workers' Party) on the Jewish question. Others went even further back. Historian Gerald Fleming pointed to 1908, when the teenage Adolf Hitler supposedly joined an antisemitic league in pre-war Vienna. From there, Fleming asserted, it was possible to speak of a *schnurgerader Weg* (an absolutely straight path) leading from Hitler's 1908 decision to his order over 30 years later to destroy the Jews.[18] Others suggested that Hitler knew what he wanted to do to the Jews by 1929, or 1933, or 1935 or 1938, and had simply been waiting to be in a position powerful enough to carry out his murderous intentions.

Reinforcing the intentionalist position was the totalitarian model, a scholarly construct devised in the early 1950s by historians, political scientists and other academicians to explain what were then the widely perceived similarities between the Nazi and Soviet dictatorships. The totalitarian model focused upon the decisive role of a single, all-powerful – and, by implication, hard-working – dictator. This was a dictator who, after having destroyed all other parties, exercised absolute control over his own party as well as over the instruments of persuasion and force in his society, all with the aim of imposing upon it the tenets of his all-embracing ideology – in Hitler's case, this was National Socialism and in Stalin's, it was communism. At the very least, the totalitarian model required a hard-working dictator, one whose administrative skills served to hold his system together – perhaps on the model of Frederick the Great, the eighteenth-century Prussian king who was known to work

[18] Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 24.

late into the night and get up early in the morning, all the while preparing orders for his underlings. From the outside at least, both Hitler and Stalin seemed to fit neatly into this framework.

On the other hand, the so-called 'functionalists' of the 1970s and 1980s (sometimes also dubbed structuralists) called into question the central tenet of the totalitarian model, at least as far as it concerned Hitler. A shift in understanding the nature of Hitler and his dictatorship came in the late 1960s in the portrait drawn of him in a memoir by his architect friend, Albert Speer. Speer, one of the few to know Hitler intimately, described him as anything but hard-working. Brutal yes, but hard-working no. Here was a Hitler who, at least before the war, was given to days, and even weeks, of indolence and lethargy – followed by bursts of activity – and who then lapsed back into languor. And he vigorously resisted getting up early. Moreover, his interests were narrow. He was prone to neglect areas he found uninteresting. He did, however, pay detailed attention to matters relating to foreign policy, rearmament and the rebuilding of German cities, the last of these being the basis for most of Speer's contacts with Hitler prior to the war in 1939. Other policy areas were often left up for grabs. These included, to a significant degree, matters relating to racial policies, matters which were open to fiercely contesting factions within the party, each competing to elevate its position in Hitler's eyes. It was in this fashion that second-tier leaders in the Nazi hierarchy, the likes of Goering, Himmler, Heydrich, Ribbentrop and Goebbels, competed for Hitler's favour in a process Ian Kershaw has called 'working toward the Führer'.[19]

It was these rivalries that generated the dynamism within the Third Reich that propelled and shaped the escalation of Nazi policies, particularly its persecution of the Jews. Hans Mommsen has called this process one of 'cumulative radicalization'.[20] Hitler's virulent antisemitism in this process was, of course, vital, but less in the sense of initiating policy than in inspiring its initiation. Chaotic as this system was, it functioned because of Hitler's charismatic powers, which guaranteed that no one

[19] Speer's portrait of Hitler was largely an echo of how Hitler's secretaries and others who worked in his direct service had characterized his erratic work habits to Allied interrogators immediately after the war. Many of their accounts were published in the late 1940s in what was sometimes sarcastically called the 'I was Hitler's Mustache' genre. Their portrait of Hitler, however, was largely ignored, no doubt victim to the totalitarian model into which such a Hitler would not fit.
[20] Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th edn (London: Arnold, 2000), p. 264.

of his satraps, however brutal, would challenge his leadership position. These same powers made it possible for Hitler to intervene directly – and decisively – at any time he deemed one of these factional conflicts to be threatening to the system, or his position in it. Such an intervention could be brutal. No one experienced this more clearly than did Ernst Roehm and other SA leaders in the 30 June 1934 massacre known as the 'Night of Long Knives'. Hitler's powers over his underlings were, in Dietrich Orlow's felicitous phrase, 'permanently potential', much like a cat always ready to pounce. The system was as complicated as it was awkward. An American correspondent on the scene in Berlin at the time, Howard K. Smith, described the Nazi system as a 'strange complicated mechanism' with all sorts of 'ill-shaped accretions that have been added illogically to it'. 'It looks roughly', he concluded, 'like a Rube Goldberg invention, inspired by a nightmare.'[21]

The intentionalist–functionalist debate produced considerable controversy and sometimes more heat than light. It was largely eclipsed in the late 1980s by the eruption in Germany of a conflict known as the *Historikerstreit*, a dispute among historians over how the Holocaust was to be fitted into the larger narrative of the nation's history. This was a question quite removed from the issues separating intentionalists and functionalists. By the time that the heat of *Historikerstreit* had abated in the early 1990s, the intentionalist–functionalist controversy had given way to an accommodation of sorts, one rooted in the unavoidable and, in retrospect, obvious recognition that intention and function were more complementary than contradictory. The signal that the controversy was over came when I read (in a book review I recall) that Christopher R. Browning was a 'moderate functionalist'. This judgment was recently ratified when it occurred to me that I might check Google to see what Wikipedia had to say about the 'functionalist versus intentionalist' question. The author (or authors) of the Wikipedia article identified five positions that scholars have taken on this question: extreme intentionalist, moderate intentionalist, extreme functionalist, moderate functionalist and, finally, synthesizer. Moderate intentionalists are given only three sentences. They read – I quote: 'Moderate functionalists such as Karl Schleunes and Christopher Browning believe that the rivalry within the unstable Nazi power structure provided the major force behind the Holocaust. Moderate functionalists believe

[21] Howard K. Smith, *Last Train from Berlin* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1942), p. 168.

the Nazis aimed to expel all of the Jews of Europe, but only after the failure of these schemes did they resort to genocide.' This is sometime referred to, according to Wikipedia, as '"the crooked path" to genocide'. Synthesizers get a little more space. On the list as 'synthesizers' are Arno Mayer, Yehuda Bauer, Ian Kershaw and Michael Marrus. They are the ones credited with having 'developed a synthesis of the functionalist and intentionalist schools, by suggesting that the Holocaust was a result of pressures that came from above and below and that Hitler lacked a master plan, but was the decisive force behind the Holocaust'.[22]

Perhaps the chief legacy of the intentionalist–functionalist controversy was its having raised questions about the interplay between structures and agency. Structures do not make decisions; people make decisions. To be sure, structures will shape and limit the range of possible decisions and, likewise, privilege certain of them above others. Within those structures, people will decide whether to resist or collaborate; stand by or participate; rescue or murder. Exploring the complexity of the interplay between structure and agency as it applies to decision making in the Third Reich remains the challenge to historians.

The *Historikerstreit*, too, was rooted in issues that teachers and scholars of the Holocaust needed to wrestle with. My students, however, could not easily relate to this dispute. The issues simply did not resonate with them. Why should they care about how Germans fit the Holocaust into their larger history? I wrestled with how to get them to pay attention and, in particular, to focus on how the Holocaust indeed fits into German history. There has been a wide range of answers to that question. Back in 1941, William M. McGovern, Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University and (according to that university's alumni magazine) the prototype for the movie character Indiana Jones, presented his thesis in the title of his book, *From Luther to Hitler*.[23] In it he traced how German political thought, beginning with Luther, led directly to Hitler. William Shirer in *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* did much the same, arguing that Hitler and the Third Reich were the logical culmination of an unedifying German history.[24] During the *Historikerstreit*, the *Sonderweg* historians claimed something rather similar, although in an infinitely more sophisticated fashion. German

[22] See 'Functionalism versus intentionalism', Wikipedia, http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Functionalism_versus_intentionalism (date accessed 19 March 2015).
[23] William M. McGovern, *From Luther to Hitler* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1942).
[24] William. L. Shirer, *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990).

history had taken a 'special path' that led to National Socialism, unlike the path taken by the liberal democracies such as France, Great Britain or the US.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who maintained that Nazism and Holocaust were aberrations in German history, phenomena without roots in the country's past. Thus, the Holocaust is left to stand outside of German history, an un-German phenomenon, likened perhaps to an industrial accident. I am reminded of a cartoon that appeared in the early 1960s in the German student magazine *Konkret*. It showed a German grandfather bouncing his grandson on his knee and answering the question the boy had obviously asked. The caption read: 'Well, it was this way', the grandfather explains. 'In 1933 these brown creatures suddenly dropped from the heavens and for the next twelve years raised havoc all over Germany, and then – in 1945 – just as suddenly, they disappeared.'

Many of the issues I have reflected upon are ones that arose during the early stages of Holocaust historiography. Some of them, like the intentionalist–functionalist controversy, have been resolved, or at least superseded. The *Historikerstreit*, too, has subsided. Other interpretations remain. The difficulties of representation are still with us and are not likely to go away. The 'why' questions are obviously the most troublesome. Whether the Church will finally shed itself of the burden of antisemitism remains to be seen. These are questions that have shaped my life, both as a scholar and as a teacher. They will continue to shape our understanding and knowledge about the Holocaust in the decades to come.

10

‘Lessons’ of the Holocaust and the Ceaseless, Discordant Search for Meaning

Michael R. Marrus

How should those of us involved in Holocaust Scholarship respond to the invocation of ‘the lessons of the Holocaust’? We constantly hear about these lessons in public exhortations, commemorative speeches and educational programmes. Reference to them comes from public officials, dignitaries, clergymen, commentators and representatives of any number of good causes. We learn about them from presidents and heads of state, politicians and administrators, generals and university presidents, teachers and reviewers, human rights advocates and even fundraisers. They appear in textbooks, mission statements, annual reports, policy papers and, occasionally, political campaigns.

By lessons, I am referring to admonitions that are drawn from contemplations of the Holocaust; they are usually expressed as timeless directions that are deduced both from its history and from comparisons with state-directed massacres in other situations. Such lessons are not quite the same as ‘lessons’ understood as a portion of Scripture or some other body of material to be studied. The lessons of the Holocaust, in the sense used here, flow from the destruction of European Jews during the Second World War and are presumably the product of research into these matters by historians and others who have thought deeply about the subject. I would even go further and say that to proclaim a course of action as deriving from a lesson of the Holocaust is an effort to confer on it a special authority that comes from a shattering event in human history. In consequence, the lessons of which I speak are not only widely broadcast, they are also accorded a special importance because of the seriousness which our society confers upon this terrible past.

Although students of the Holocaust might be inclined to ignore these admonitions as not our line of work, the public at large will likely not let us off so easily. After all, Holocaust scholars are understood to be, in some sense, the custodians of public knowledge about our subject. We are supposed to spend our professional time trying to advance our society's understanding of what happened during the Holocaust, and thereby promote as authoritative and reliable comprehension of it as we can manage. Moreover, it is usually assumed that we are doing something useful with our time. And so it makes sense that if society credits the idea of lessons, Holocaust scholars will be seen to have an obligation to take some responsibility for them. I think people believe we have an important role to play in both the articulation and dissemination of lessons, and some may even feel that this is our core professional responsibility.

However, I doubt that many of those of us who research and teach in this field feel similarly. In professional discourse, I have found that Holocaust scholars do not speak much if at all about lessons. More often than not, I suspect, specialists think of them as a lesser order of understanding of what scholars actually do. After all, the lessons as commonly articulated in the public space are rarely buttressed by scholarship. The lessons not only carry no footnotes, they are seldom supported by convincing arguments or evidence. Codified in formulae, they quite often have only the most tenuous relationship with the work that scholars do. In addition, they eschew nuance, a much-prized scholarly proclivity. Sometimes, they cause the scholars to wince. Often, they contradict each other. To state the obvious: there are lessons proclaimed by the right and others proclaimed on the left; some lessons are particularistic and some are universalistic. And so on.

Moreover, the idea of fixed, clearly defined lessons from any historical experience does not sit well with the scholars' understanding of the advance of historical knowledge. As every researcher knows, we do our work by asking questions, inquiries that set the agenda for our scholarship. Further, we insist on going where the evidence and force of argument carries us. In this process we regularly challenge received wisdom and advance knowledge by enlarging, refining, revising or improving upon previous understandings. Indeed, we pride ourselves on doing so and see this process as making a significant contribution to the field, not the reverse. And we are certain that this is going to continue into the future. As generations pass, people come to the past with new interests, new layers of experience and new unfamiliarity, prompting new questions. Inevitably, the answers cannot help but

challenge previously articulated lessons, based as these necessarily are on imperfect, previous interpretations. All of this, it seems to me, cannot but render purported lessons of the Holocaust ephemeral, and not the timeless injunctions they are sometimes purported to be.

There is a further reason why we should ponder the insubstantial character of lessons, and that has to do with the self-understanding of Holocaust scholars. For while we scholars resist claims that lessons are the sort of thing that we do, questions about alternative purposes of our enquiries persist. Most Holocaust scholars, I believe, like to believe that what we do contributes to human understanding and perhaps even, if indirectly, helps prevent similar catastrophes in the future. But how? What kind of knowledge comes from studying the Holocaust past? What follows is a personal (and highly abbreviated) examination of what is wrong with answering such questions with lessons, and what better answers there might be.

* * *

My starting point in this inquiry is history. Conceptually, I suggest, if there are lessons of history, there should be lessons of the Holocaust. And if there are lessons of the Holocaust, there should be lessons of history. For whatever else it is, the Holocaust is part of history, and even though this is an obvious fact, I think we cannot simply take it for granted. People did not always think of the Holocaust as part of history, or at least as a part worth studying, as I suspect everyone of my age and education knows very well. When I specialized in history at university in the 1960s, the Holocaust was non-existent as a matter of professional scholarship and research. There were no courses on the subject, few scholarly monographs and, most importantly, no disposition to think about the persecution and murder of European Jewry in the way one thought of, say, the French Revolution or the First World War. Thanks to the work of Hasia Diner and others, we can now correct a sense that the Holocaust was completely absent from the post-war era.[1] But while it was discussed in some Jewish circles, it was emphatically not a part of the general discourse on modern history and had practically no place in academia. That took time.

Historians have traced a growing Holocaust consciousness in the popular culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Highlights in this process were the Eichmann Trial in 1962, the interest in group identities in the 1960s

[1] Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York University Press, 2009).

and 1970s, and the impact of film, television and literature. Academic study accompanied this process. In my book *The Holocaust in History*, first published in 1987, I argued that the Holocaust entered the course of historical understanding over the preceding two decades, at least in Western countries.[2] For those of us who are contributors to this volume, I would venture, the emergence of a whole field of Holocaust Studies has been one of the most important developments of our personal careers – experienced in different ways, to be sure, but in every case as a major change.

The contrast between the present state of scholarship and that which existed when I was a student could not be more stark. As I think virtually every scholar of the subject would now agree, the Holocaust is now a well-established academic field and has entered the scholarly culture of our time. Present-day Holocaust research is international and outstanding in quality, quantity and scholarly sophistication. We have long passed the point, I believe, when specialists can keep fully abreast of all of professional literature on the topic. There are now well-stocked libraries on the Holocaust, distinguished institutes, journals, monographs, encyclopedias, archival collections, films, conferences, symposia, fellowships, university chairs, programmes, Internet resources, the involvement of disciplines other than history, interdisciplinary work and scholarly debates. And there are graduate students. While it is easy to lose sight of the importance of this transformation over the professional lifetime of many of us, I want to stress how impressive this development has been and how it augurs well for what many people are rightly concerned about: namely, that the destruction of European Jewry, a decisive event in the history of the modern era, should be properly remembered and studied in the future.

Of course, scholarship does not guarantee responsible understanding – and I fully recognize that there are those, most recently Alvin Rosenfeld in his book *The End of the Holocaust*, who argue pessimistically that there has been 'a diminution of its meaning and a denigration of its memory' in recent times.[3] Rosenfeld is concerned with what he sees as an epidemic of trivialization and vulgarization, together with an antipathy to Jewish concerns over the importance of the event and even anti-Jewish hostility. My own view is quite different. While trivialization and vulgarization exist, I believe that these are part of the price to be paid for the extraordinary popularization and dissemination of Holocaust

[2] Michael R. Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (Hanover: Key Porter Books, 1987).
[3] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *The End of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), p. 12.

consciousness in recent times. Ignorance, of course, is another matter. The achievements I have mentioned do not mean that people will know essential facts about the Holocaust, nor will they necessarily be able to situate it in the context of other great wrongs in recent centuries. However, more often than not, these deficiencies exist elsewhere as well. A distressingly large number of people are unlikely to know much if anything about, say, the Reformation, the Renaissance, Benito Mussolini, Josef Stalin or Chairman Mao. The decline of historical consciousness in our time is a real problem, and one that I certainly cannot deal with here. What I do want to return to, however, is history more broadly understood and, indeed, the lessons of history.

Perhaps the most commonly articulated piece of wisdom on historical lessons is the dictum of the Spanish American popular philosopher George Santayana, who wrote in the first decade of the twentieth century in his multi-volume *Life of Reason* that 'those who cannot remember the past are doomed to repeat it'. Often proclaimed from public platforms and usually intended more as an injunction to heed whatever 'lessons of history' the speaker has in mind, Santayana's observation turns out to be problematic in many respects, not the least of which being that it refers to memory, not history. Much commented upon by historians of late, memory is generally accepted by students of the subject to be, as one of its foremost experts, Pierre Nora, puts it, 'in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived'.[4] Is this what we want to guide policy makers faced with difficult choices? Few historians would insist on this, even as they commend the study of history to their students.

But why? My contention is that this has little if anything to do with 'lessons'. Among historians, particularly those with the most authority in their fields, the lessons of history now seem awkwardly out of fashion. Few of the acknowledged masters of Clio's craft, it seems to me, would be willing to lend their authority to what lay people so confidently assert, following Santayana, we should all be paying heed to. Moreover, at least in my reading, there are at least as many mistakes made when decision makers believe that things are going to repeat themselves as when they think they are facing new challenges and new situations. Some 30 years

[4] Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*', *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 8.

ago, the famous British military historian Sir Michael Howard presented his Inaugural Lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford on the lessons of history. Howard's main point was to challenge the popular notion that history was 'useful' in a practical sense and that its lessons could be practically formulated. Professional historians such as his colleagues at Oxford, he was at pains to note, had the most grave reservations about this idea:

> The layman looks for wise teachers who will use their knowledge of the past to explain the present and guide him as to the future. What does he find? Workmen, busily engaged in tearing up what he had always regarded as a perfectly decent highway; doing their best to discourage him from proceeding along it at all; and warning him, if he does, that the surface is temporary, that they cannot guarantee its reliability, that they have no idea when it will be completed, and that he proceeds at his own risk.[5]

'History', Howard told his audience, 'whatever its value in educating the judgment, teaches no "lessons", and the professional historians will be as skeptical of those who claim that it does as professional doctors are of their colleagues who peddle patent medicines guaranteeing instant cures. The past is infinitely various, an inexhaustible storehouse of events from which we can profess anything or its contrary.'[6]

I expect that this contention will need no elaboration or argument from my fellow historians or others who undertake academic work on the subject. No academic whom I know expects his or her students to make a case for particular lessons of history on examinations. And it has been a long time since I have heard any professional historian argue that we should apply such lessons to contemporary affairs. Even as we hear from time to time from lay people about the lessons of history, and much more so about lessons of the Holocaust, authority figures in the discipline are likely to be highly sceptical about them – and this, I should add, at the very time that history-writing has become increasingly sophisticated, and Holocaust history in particular has really come into its own as a highly professional, even exemplary inquiry.

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[5] Michael Howard, *The Lessons of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 12.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

By now, some readers may be uncomfortable with where I am going. If so, I must warn them, it gets worse. For I want to suggest that Holocaust lessons are *particularly* problematic. This is a serious contention, I realize, all the more so because Holocaust lessons have such a ubiquitous presence. On that last point, I should note that if one enters 'lessons of the Holocaust' on Google, one will find over eight *million* hits – in 0.18 seconds. Looking closely at a tiny sample of these, I find that these lessons extend all the way from familiar topics, such as the observation of Santayana, to a whole host of themes, such as 'man's inhumanity to man', 'one person can make a difference', 'the dangers of conformity' and 'Jewish women can hold the family together', going all the way to 'bullying in the schoolyard'. I can assure readers who do not have the patience for this kind of inquiry that lessons of the Holocaust come to Google from all over the map, from Jews and non-Jews, from the left to the right, from many disciplines and levels of inquiry. Some more examples: 'it starts with words but it ends with the Holocaust', 'the Holocaust teaches the illusions of utopian humanitarianism', 'Jews can only count on themselves' and the related 'Jews must have a state of their own'. Other lessons come from the opposite political camp: 'we must all be alert to violations of anyone's human rights' and its first cousin, 'we must be alert to all violations of human rights', or one that I particularly like, by I.F. Stone, 'if you treat people like things it can end up in the gas chambers'. And then, not long ago, in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, the journalist and historian Tom Segev wrote that the 'main lesson' of the Holocaust was that 'everyone in uniform [must] refuse patently illegal orders'.[7] Against this, another Israeli newspaper proclaims that the Holocaust instructs those who live amongst wolves to beware lest they be eaten.

Then there is a special category of rhetorically bracing semi-lessons that, at least to my ears, sound more like slogans, albeit sometimes noble admonitions, rather than carefully deduced conclusions that derive only from the Holocaust. The most famous, of course, is 'Never again!', but others come up frequently on the Web. Some of these seem to have more comparative significance. For example, 'the Holocaust is unique in its genocidal singularity' and also 'there are some things too terrible to be believed, but not too terrible to have happened'. Then too there is the open-ended quotation from Hillel, 'If not now, when' – presumably

[7] Tom Segev, 'Demjanjuk Case Illustrates Powerlessness of Law in Bringing Nazis to Justice', *Haaretz*, 18 March 2012.

a call to action, although it is not clear, and often not explained, just *what* is to be done. Another lesson, applied broadly to murderous situations but particularly to the Holocaust, is that 'if someone threatens to murder you, you should take that very seriously', which is clearly true in some cases, but is hardly a weighty conclusion or one with universal application. There is also 'we are each the guardians of each other's destiny' or the contention that 'Jews are the canaries in the coal mine' – certainly not exclusively derived from the Holocaust, although often so, and probably unhelpful in difficult situations. And there are others – many, many others.

Some lessons, while more precise, come with distinct political coloring. One of the most egregious of these, wrongly attributed in intent to Abba Eban, refers to 'Auschwitz borders', taken from a speech he gave to the United Nations General Assembly in 1975. From the perspective of the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Eban wanted to convey his country's apprehension about returning to the time before the outbreak of the preceding conflict. As a battle cry of the Israeli right, this became a prediction of genocide on the order of the Nazis' most destructive death camp if Israel were ever to return to the so-called 'green line', the 1948 armistice line.[8] And there are academically honed lessons – one of which comes from the Polish-born social scientist of Jewish background, Zygmunt Bauman, warning of the grotesque outcomes of modernization. I should also stress that these 'lessons' need not be understood as speaking necessarily to Jews. In 1983, at a time of heightened Cold War tensions, American columnist George Will saw the then controversial United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as conveying a warning against American isolationism in a dangerous world.

These examples suggest, as historian Margaret MacMillan observes in her book *Dangerous Games*, that 'the past can be used for almost anything you want to do in the present'.[9] MacMillan cautions against the misuse of history and warns that if we turn to it 'for understanding, support, and help', we should do so very cautiously. In practice, all kinds of people dip into the Holocaust for direction – well-meaning, for the most part, although perhaps not always; learned in some cases and opportunistic in others – to define all kinds of propositions as 'lessons', many

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[8] Robert Mackey and Elizabeth A. Harris, 'Israeli Settlers Reject the "Auschwitz Borders of 1967"', *New York Times*, 19 May 2011.

[9] Margaret MacMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Modern Library, 2009), p. xi.

of them quite different, some of which are actually in opposition to others, and all of them questionable in this context, in my opinion. 'If the study of history does nothing more than to teach us humility, skepticism, and awareness of ourselves, then it has done something useful', she concludes. 'We must continue to examine our own assumptions and those of others and ask, where's the evidence? Or, is there another explanation? We should be very wary of grand claims in history's name or those who claim to have uncovered the truth once and for all. In the end, my only advice is to use it, enjoy it, but always handle history with care.'[10]

By contrast with those who are quick to suggest lessons or other fundamental truths that emerge from the Holocaust, Primo Levi, one of the greatest writers to have survived its horrors, was distinctly modest in requests made of him to provide lessons. In an interview published in 1983, he expressed his frustration with what he constantly faced when he visited schools to speak with children:

> one of the questions that gets repeated and repeated is the question of why it happened, why there are wars, why the camps were built, why the Jews were exterminated, and it is a question to which I have no answer. No one does. Why there are wars, why was the First World War and the Second World War . . . [these questions that torment] me because I have no answer.[11]

Levi, of course, spoke only for himself. But having done a fair amount of public speaking and visiting of schools myself on the subject, I have plenty of sympathy for his frustration and weariness. And admiration too, for Levi was forthright in saying that he just did not know – something for which I particularly admire him for doing. Too many, I believe, simply cannot resist the temptation to evoke the Holocaust to make some point or another on which their opinion is probably no better grounded than anyone else's.

Notably, Levi refused to cloak himself in the authority of being a survivor and insisted that he only spoke for himself – and rightly so. Nothing is more obvious than that survivors differ among themselves on such matters, including the most essential elements of Holocaust-related testimony. Speaking of his time in Auschwitz, Levi once said

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[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 169–70.

[11] Primo Levi, *The Voice of Memory. Interviews 1961–87*, Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon (eds), Robert Gordon (trans.) (New York: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 231–32.

that the camp was his university; another survivor and a great writer, Jean Améry, once said that he learned nothing at all from his experience. For Eli Wiesel, Auschwitz was a word apart, another planet; for Eli Pfefferkorn, at Majdanek, the camp was a representation of the wider world, only at a terrible extreme.

It is perhaps time, as I venture into this conflicted territory, to clarify my problem with the lessons of the Holocaust. My quarrel with lessons is not necessarily with the legitimacy of any one of them, including those mentioned here; some of them may be quite wise in some circumstances, many of them are valuable as admonitions and the people who advance them are often well-meaning, even exemplary. It is rather that these formulae do not depend upon the Holocaust for their veracity, nor are they necessarily true in every respect, nor should they need or depend upon the Holocaust as a source of authority, nor are they necessarily a guide to modern-day challenges and nor do they necessarily follow from facts about the Holocaust that have been established by Holocaust historians. And nor do they derive from what I think should be the first responsibility of Holocaust historians, which is to be as faithful as we can to the events and circumstances of the Holocaust themselves, and to seek as deep and sophisticated and independent-minded understanding of these events as we can manage.

* * *

This brings me to what I have found to be a more satisfactory answer to the questions that I think all Holocaust scholars ask themselves at one time or another, namely the question about how our work might serve the public good. My response to this is not lessons, but rather a probing of the value study of history itself – and it entails some rumination on my own past as a historian.

Let us acknowledge that Holocaust history is not like, say, the history of early modern agriculture. People tell me that what I do is *important* – although I admit to feeling embarrassed to hear them say that. Holocaust history is alive in many people's memories and those of their families, even though there are fewer and fewer with direct experiences of its events. The human scars are evident – missing generations, psychological impacts that have been transmitted to post-war collectivities, new generations and new individuals. There are mental landscapes where the desolation is still quite evident. History, moreover, provides no unified, consolatory view. As those acquainted with this history are aware, there are many opinions about it and an abundance of authorities. Survivors have special preoccupations, although these are less easily

collapsed into a single prescription than is customarily assumed. Civic leaders may speak with one voice on commemorative and other occasions, but there are plenty of dissenters, and not all of them agree with each other. Some use Holocaust history for fundraising or political purposes, while others are revolted by the prospect. Some Jewish leaders promote lessons of the Holocaust as a way of energizing Jewish identity, but others warn that it is unhealthy to define oneself as a perpetual victim, particularly when this defies current reality. Non-Jews are all over the map as well. Some have had enough. Some want to dig deeper. Other ethnic or national communities have special preoccupations and are concerned with how lessons of the Holocaust might reflect upon their own group. There are also different clusters of lessons on the left and on the right. Media offerings vary considerably, from the thoughtful and carefully articulated to the meretricious and clumsily worded.

I have wrestled with at least some of these issues for a long time. I remember, in the mid-1960s, debating with fellow graduate students at Berkeley about the larger context, namely the historian's craft. What was the historian's vocation? Opinions varied, but in my circle, in that heady Vietnam and civil rights era, most of us saw our task as social and political change. Politics lurked just beneath the surface of everything, we believed. (The title of my doctoral thesis and first book was *The Politics of Assimilation*.) We were to hold a mirror up to society to show the seamy underside and then to help set things right. There was plenty of presumption on our part. Our histories were sharply critical and seldom celebratory. Lessons made sense in that environment and, young though we were, we did not shrink from pronouncing them.

I remember to this day the response to that view, which I now believe to have been the wiser course, and which was articulated by one of my instructors at the University of Toronto, universally respected as a master at his craft, even if not admired by us for his politics at the time. This was A.P. Thornton as he was professionally known, a great historian of the British Empire. A red-faced Scotsman who had been educated at the University of Glasgow and Trinity College, Oxford, 'Archie', as I later knew him, was a veteran of the D-Day landings in France and had taught at Aberdeen and University College of the West Indies before coming to Toronto in the 1960s. To his Canadian students, he was the very embodiment of Empire. Later Chairman of the Department in Toronto, I could imagine Archie answering the telephone, as did his counterpart in the film version of Kingsley Amis' comic academic novel, *Lucky Jim*, intoning: 'History speaking.' 'The historian's job', Thornton insisted from his lectern – and I can remember his Scottish accent still, after more than

60 years – 'is *to get it right*!' 'Getting it right' was a sober and perhaps uninspiring injunction to youthful idealists because it suggested the diversion (as we saw it) of extraordinary energy into detail and tests of accuracy. It meant the greatest care in research, wide-ranging reading, seeing documents in their original form, learning foreign languages and studying the idioms of particular contexts. More often than not, it meant visits to dreary, ill-appointed archives (which we loved), sifting through papers for hours on end. Then, as now, research required plenty of *Sitzfleisch*. This was a programme sure to bring high-flying pronouncements down to earth, or discourage some from even getting off the ground. But it was the best advice we ever had.

'Getting it right' is what professional historians try to do and have a special obligation to do, in my view. According to convention, everyone else may stray from this priority according to the dictates of occasion, conscience, public commitments and fundamental beliefs. With Holocaust history, Jews and non-Jews, teachers and politicians, clergymen and artists may all feel that they have professional reasons to treat the subject differently. I do not disparage such different approaches – far from it; at various moments, in other roles I perform, let us say on commemorative occasions, I may well engage with the wartime murder of European Jews otherwise than as a professional historian. Some, however, have to make sure that the Holocaust upon which people act and ruminate is faithful to the historical truth of the events themselves, or at least as faithful as we can possibly make it. Some have to be counted on for narrative accuracy, for explanatory generalizations that fit but not exceed the evidence, and for a balanced view. Those are the historians' tasks, making him or her the custodian, in a sense, of the public memory of the event itself. Historians provide the answers to many of the questions that I have noted here.

Just putting it this way, I know, makes some people uneasy, and quite often when I elaborate, they feel even worse. No one takes kindly to assertions of external authority in matters of the heart, and when memory has become sacralized, as has sometimes been the case with the murder of European Jewry, it can clash sharply with history as historians understand it. That is why academic lectures on Holocaust themes sometimes finish in stormy question and answer periods, with lecturers rushing for the door at the end of the evening. 'Let me tell you, it was not *quite* the way you have told us', questioners might say. Or 'professor, that was a very nice lecture, but you *forgot* something'. What then follows is another version of the subject at hand. 'Getting it right' sometimes involves questioning the recollections of Holocaust survivors

(although almost invariably there are other survivors who remember things differently), disputing received wisdom, pitting book learning against or at least alongside cherished or traumatic memories (although all of these may be contested by others in the audience). To younger colleagues contemplating this challenge, I can only say *bon courage*!

There are significant compensations, however. I contend that the history of the Holocaust poses historical problems at least as challenging, and often more challenging, than any other field I can imagine. 'Getting it right' is extremely demanding; in order to do so, investigators have available to them a vast documentation about perpetrators, victims and bystanders – an availability that has significantly increased with the opening to researchers of archives in the former Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated countries. Those who do this work proceed by asking questions and in the case of the Holocaust, these involve the murder of millions of people. Some of these questions may fall outside the historian's province, for the answers may require a deeper understanding than we are capable of about humanity itself and its capacities for good and evil. But there are also myriad, garden-variety questions, asked and answered all the time by Holocaust historians, but in their case involving matters of sometimes extraordinary moral import: how were decisions about atrocities reached? How were they carried out? Who decided? Who acted? Who led? Who followed? Who helped? Who watched? Who knew? When? How? How did one place differ from another? Such questions, and many others, do not differ appreciably from those asked in other areas of inquiry – except in that both the evidence and the answers involve issues of the gravest atrocities, murder and other horrors, on a practically unimaginable scale.

'Getting it right' involves posing such questions and addressing them with the best tools that the historical culture of our society provides. It entails putting ourselves in the shoes of others, often through the most vigorous efforts of the imagination, disciplined by the deepest and widest inquiry into the most varied of human circumstances. It also requires great efforts at objectivity, perhaps the most important methodological challenge for the student of the Holocaust. Among the least appreciated and often contested attributes of the researcher these days, objectivity is nevertheless what we insist upon in many other aspects of life. There are many appropriate ways to respond to murder, but if we are speaking about an investigating officer, a coroner or a judge, for example, we feel that their task requires them to keep an open mind about the evidence they assess and a capacity to weigh it fairly and dispassionately. When it comes to the serious illness of someone close to us,

we can respond appropriately as friend, parent, spouse or whatever, but we have quite different expectations when it comes to the surgeon conducting an operation. Indeed, with surgery, as with the practice of law or many other professional activities, we usually feel that too intimate a relationship would interfere with the sound discharge of professional responsibilities. Simply put, we feel that practitioners such as these carry out their responsibilities best when they act as professionals.

No one expects, or desires, Holocaust specialists to perform like machines. But there is a world of difference between an inquiry as a sacred duty, keeping faith with those who were murdered – intimately involved with mourning, commemoration, denunciation or a warning for future generations—and the quite different task of analysis, trying to deepen understanding in terms that are recognized by the general culture of our day. This task of analysis is the objective I am talking about here, an effort to integrate the history of the Holocaust into the general stream of historical consciousness, to apply to it the modes of analysis, the scholarly discourse and the kinds of analyses used for other great issues of the day.

More than anything else, 'getting it right' involves digesting this literature and asserting the place of the Holocaust in the wider history of our time. Disagreeing with Alvin Rosenfeld in his recent book *The End of the Holocaust*, I do not accept that the Holocaust is shrinking from responsible historical memory and that those of us concerned with its place in history should lament its becoming 'a volatile area of contending images, interpretations, historical claims and counter claims'. I believe that he is right about the contentions – a matter about which we hear a great deal on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Academic Committee, which he chairs. But I believe that such disputation is evidence of the vigour of historical and other writing on the subject and its broad acceptance – one price of which is a degree of trivialization and vulgarization that seems to accompany any dominant historical understanding, especially one that involves unprecedented human wrongdoing. But quite unlike the time of my youth, no one contemplating what has happened to mankind in the twentieth century can now avoid the Nazis' assault on European Jewry. Historians of the Third Reich now must all come to terms with it. Those who study the Second World War must do the same. Similarly, researchers from many different disciplinary backgrounds cannot avoid the issue. Moralists and political theorists, sociologists and psychologists, religious thinkers and humanitarians must, at one point or another, consider the Holocaust. As Tony Judt once put it, 'by the end of the twentieth century the centrality

of the Holocaust in Western European identity and memory seemed secure'.[12] I would say the same for much of the rest of the industrialized world as well.

Most importantly, the effort to eliminate an entire people, set as a major objective by a highly developed industrial society and carried out on a European-wide scale, is now widely seen to be unprecedented, not only for a European civilization but also for humanity itself. The Holocaust is, as someone once put it, 'the moral signifier of our age'. In the past, peoples have constantly been cruel to one another, have tormented others in various ways and have fantasized horribly about what might happen to their enemies. But there were always limits – imposed by technology, humane sensibilities, religious scruples, geography or military capacity. During the Second World War, mankind crossed a terrible threshold. Nazi Germany operated without historical limits, until crushed by military force.

As a result, we have a different sense of human capacities than we did before. Some, particularly Jews who suffered at the hands of the Nazis but who miraculously survived, draw the bleakest conclusions of all. 'Every day anew I lose my trust in the world', wrote Jean Améry, not long before his suicide. Others think that a warning is all one can deduce. Primo Levi's message was: 'It can happen, therefore it can happen again.'[13] Levi too ended his life, in all likelihood, but while he lived, he argued that reflecting on the Holocaust might help prevent another catastrophe. Whatever one's view, the Holocaust has become a major reference point for our time, constantly kept in view for one's judgment about the state of the world – as once was the case, say, for the French Revolution or the First World War.

In addition to studying perpetrators, 'getting it right' involves looking at victims, even while refusing to see them as endowed, by their victimization, with a special aura of heroism, righteousness or other admirable qualities. When the Israeli research and commemorative institute Yad Vashem was founded in 1953, it was denoted in English as the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority. At the centre of attention, according to the law establishing the institution, was a distinctly Israeli appreciation of the victims' experience – 'the sublime, persistent struggle of the masses of the House of Israel, on the threshold of destruction, for

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[12] Tony Judt, 'From the House of the Dead: On Modern European Memory', *New York Review of Books*, 6 October 2005.

[13] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Raymond D. Rosenthal (trans.) (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 199.

their human dignity and Jewish culture'.[14] The accent was on combativeness, rebellion and unwillingness to submit. The principal outcome was national regeneration through resistance and armed struggle. However, no sooner had Yad Vashem been established than a different Israeli voice was heard. In 1954, the Hebrew poet Natan Alterman, who has been called 'the uncrowned poet laureate' of his Israeli generation and who lived in Palestine during the war, wrote a famous poem celebrating Jewish *opponents* of the insurgents – those who claimed that 'resistance will destroy us all'. A dissident voice at the time, Alterman took care to appreciate as the real heroes those Jews who were caught in the middle – heads of the Jewish Councils or *Judenräte*, confused and harassed community leaders, those responsible elders who 'negotiated and complied' rather than the relatively small number of young people who managed to take up arms.[15] Following Alterman's intervention, an intense debate began, which has renewed itself with new discoveries and new historical writing, and it has continued ever since – most recently in a new book by my younger Israeli colleague, Dan Michman, *The Emergence of Jewish Ghettos during the Holocaust*. In this way, Holocaust history renews itself. The result, I believe, has been a greater historical understanding, enriched by research and the confrontation of different points of view.

Finally, 'getting it right' involves finding the right language, expressing oneself in the right idiom – speaking with a voice, in short, appropriate both for the most terrible events and also for the present generation, including young people. Holocaust history is like all history in this respect; it must constantly be rewritten if it is not to vanish from public perceptions or lose the significance we want ascribed to it. Here again, Holocaust history poses special challenges. In his *Reflections of Nazism*, published 30 years ago, Saul Friedländer dwelt upon the difficulties that historians and others face in finding the right words to discuss the massacre of European Jewry. Friedländer worried about what he felt was an unhealthy fascination with Nazism, something that was evident particularly in films and literature. This is part of the problem of how we communicate things that are deeply disturbing, but also strange to us and difficult to grasp emotionally – and it is of course a problem that is with us still, as Alvin Rosenfeld has noted in his recent work. Historians neutralize horror, Friedländer seems to say, and he was concerned

[14] Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance (Yad Vashem) Law 5713-1953, www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/pdf/YV_law.pdf (date accessed 19 March 2015).
[15] Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Haim Watzman (trans.) (New York: Henry Holt, 1993), p. 292.

with expression that 'normalizes, smoothes and neutralizes our vision of the past'. Does scholarly discourse anaesthetize in this way? Friedländer knew that there is no easy answer: 'There should be no misunderstanding about what I am trying to say: The historian cannot work in any other way, and historical studies have to be pursued along the accepted lines. The events described are what is unusual, not the historians' work. We have reached the limit of our means of expression.'[16]

There is no alternative, I conclude, but to keep at it. Students of the Holocaust are called upon to provide various kinds of explanation, and their preoccupation is not only the intractable material material they work with, but also with a public that is constantly coming forward with new layers of experience, new interests and new unfamiliarity. Diaries and memoirs of survivors reflect a widely shared obsession of those who went through the Holocaust: 'How will what happened to us be understood?' 'Could a postwar world possibly grasp what we went through?' Imagine how those victims might understand the generation that now looks back on their agonies. The gap grows wider and with it so does the challenge to historians and everyone else.

To all of those concerned to see knowledge about the Holocaust extended so that such things might be prevented in the future, I think we have something that is more durable than lessons, which in any event were bound to evolve and change with the passage of time. The Holocaust has become history and has entered into the historical canon, with all of its strengths and weaknesses. This means disputation and disagreement, but also research, new questions and new ways of looking at old problems. It means writers and researchers around the world and with many different backgrounds, applying themselves to the task of understanding, which is predicated upon the requirement to 'get it right'. This is the way, in our culture, that historical understanding is preserved and advanced. It seems plain now that after the shock of the post-war era, the Holocaust has become history. That is certainly the best guarantee we have that it will be remembered. As to the future, the preserve of lessons, no one knows whether a deeper understanding such as the one I am promoting here can enable societies to avoid the catastrophes of the past. All I can suggest is that we are better equipped to do so than if we abandoned such an effort. Studying the Holocaust deepens appreciation of human reality, and that, in a general sense, makes us more mature, wiser, more 'experienced' observers of the human scene.

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[16] Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, Thomas Weyr (trans.) (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1984), p. 92.

11
Apartheid and the *Herrenvolk* Idea

David Welsh

> Most rational and social justifications of unequal privilege are clearly after-thoughts. They are created by the disproportion of power which exists in a given social system. The justifications are usually dictated by men of power to hide the nakedness of their greed, and by the inclination of society itself to veil the brutal facts of human life from itself. – Reinhold Niebuhr

I was born in Cape Town and have lived here all my life, apart from two years at Oxford. My first degrees were obtained at the University of Cape Town (UCT), where I was fortunate enough to be taught by inspiring teachers, notably H.J. Simons, Monica Wilson and A.C. Jordan. My undergraduate years fell squarely within the apartheid era, and since the focus of my studies was largely concerned with governments and politics, together with African languages, my political awareness and, indeed, my involvement in politics increased. It was impossible for anyone with a sensitivity to the injustice of apartheid to remain detached from such involvement.

Apart from participation in regular student and faculty protests against the imposition of apartheid on the universities, I joined the Liberal Party in 1958 and remained a member until its dissolution in 1968 – a consequence of legislation that banned racially mixed parties. Though never big – it never won an election in an ordinary (exclusively white) constituency – the Liberal Party's membership included some remarkable people, like Alan Paton, Peter Brown, Leo Marquard, Jordan Ngubane, Eddie Daniels and Margaret Ballinger. Many younger academics were also members. The Party faced not only government repression, in the form of 'banning' orders under the Suppression of Communism Act, but also pervasive surveillance by

the Security Police, which included spies in lectures, tapping of telephones and general harassment. I spent a brief period in detention in 1960 during the State of Emergency imposed after the Sharpeville shootings.

I returned to Cape Town in 1963 and took up a post in what was called Comparative African Government and Law, headed by H.J. 'Jack' Simons, a dedicated Marxist-Leninist, certainly the most brilliant communist in South Africa and, consequently, a prime target for the Security Police. A banning order in 1964 ended his teaching career at UCT, but in exile he continued to be actively involved in the African National Congress (ANC).

Marxism-Leninism never held any attraction for me. I was – and remain – much concerned about structural inequality. R.H. Tawney's *Equality* made a big impression on me. I remained, however, a liberal, though with a strong social-democratic slant. In the South African context, Marxist analyses of the origins of racism and nationalism grew apace in the 1970s and 1980s, and challenged traditional interpretations of South African history. For many of the (neo-)Marxist scholars, racial discrimination was a toxic consequence of the peculiar trajectory of capitalist development, while they (wrongly) tended to ascribe to liberal scholars the view that racism was an 'irrational', extraneous force.

The controversy heated up, forcing us liberals onto the defensive. I participated in the debates – and devoted my Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Southern African Studies in 1983 to a critique of Marxist views. The thrust of my argument was that racism could not be reduced simply to an offshoot of capitalism. I continue to hold the view that capitalism is the worst economic system – except for all the others (a variant of Winston Churchill's comment on democracy).

In 1974, I stood as parliamentary candidate for the liberal Progressive Party. My opponent was the then leader of the Opposition, Sir de Villiers Graaff. I had no hope of winning, but did better than expected. My parliamentary ambitions, however, were never strong and I recognised that I would have been an ineffective (and frustrated) MP.

My scholarly interests remained strong. Having long fretted about how a democratic system could work in a divided society, I embarked on a study entitled *South Africa's Options* in collaboration with F. van Zyl Slabbert, a friend and a rising political star. The book had little impact, though some have credited it with implanting the seed of 'negotiation politics'. However, our proposal for a semi-consociational system of government fell on deaf ears, neither the National Party nor the ANC

being remotely attracted, one wishing to retain power and the other demanding total power.

Much of my work in recent times has concerned Afrikaner nationalism. I have considerable empathy for the Afrikaners' cultural struggle, but no sympathy whatever for apartheid. I have also attempted to show that racial discrimination cannot be blamed solely on Afrikaners: English-speaking whites were hardly less culpable. On the other hand, the notion that Afrikaner nationalism derived its ideas from Nazi Germany is simply incorrect and crude. Indeed, white South Africans could learn little from Nazi Germany about racism and racial discrimination. From roughly the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the contours of racial stratification had been laid down and the presumption of racial inequality had taken firm root among whites. All subsequent incorporations of people who were not white – mainly Africans and Indians – occurred against this background. In effect, they were slotted into a pre-existing racial hierarchy. In the case of the San, hunter-gatherer groups, it is no exaggeration to say that attempts to exterminate them as vermin were genocidal.[1]

It was by no means only Afrikaners who held racist views. Cecil Rhodes, for example, justified imperialism in the following terms: 'Africa awaits us still, and it is our duty to seize every opportunity of acquiring more territory and we should keep this one idea steadily before our eyes that more territory simply means more of the Anglo-Saxon race, more of the best, the most human, the most honourable race the world possesses.'[2] Many Victorian imperialists shared this view, though few expressed it so blatantly. Further examples of the racism of English-speaking colonists in southern Africa abound and need not be recounted here. Their attitudes towards Africans and Indians in Natal offer plentiful evidence.

In his magisterial prose, de Kiewiet wrote:

> To the ordinary European voter after the Great War the inborn inferiority of the native [African] remained a truth beyond serious contention. Inequality and inferiority were natural defects beyond the reach of enlightenment. In the countryside this truth had the full authority of the Bible behind it; in the towns it was supported by

[1] Mohamed Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2010).

[2] Quoted in Apollon Davidson, *Cecil Rhodes and His Time* (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2003), p. 9.

> popular scientific beliefs. A belief in an innate and invincible white superiority in turn justified the determination to preserve in South Africa the dominance of the white race . . . White political dominance and white racial purity became not selfish ends, but trusts to which unfaithfulness would be punished by degeneracy.[3]

Since Milton Shain's contribution to this volume deals with anti-semitism in South Africa, I shall say little about it. It is relevant to point out that there are differences between anti-black racism and anti-semitism. Jews have historically been stigmatized as 'clever', 'crafty' or 'cunning' – which is the obverse of saying that education, wisdom and astuteness are culturally highly regarded in the Jewish tradition. These qualities, together with their tradition of hard work and entrepreneurship, can be traced to the historical experience of Jewry in the diaspora, when they were regarded as outcasts, denied access to many occupations, as well as being forced into close communal solidarity in the interests of self-protection and the preservation of their beliefs and customs.[4]

If antisemitism is a perverse (or perverted) form of envy, racism that targets Africans is outright rejection: they are the barbarians, destined to be the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' for white masters. They were, so the myth continues, biologically inferior, incapable of attaining more than a veneer of civilization. Racism, in other words, was a rationalization of domination. It justified *baasskap* (literally meaning 'master-ship'), which is roughly similar in implication to *Herrenvolk*.

The term *Herrenvolk* was seldom used in white political discourse, and then usually as a criticism of racial policy by anti-National Party politicians. During a parliamentary debate in January 1948 – a few months before the Nationalists' electoral victory – Paul Sauer, a leading Cape Nationalist who became a minister in the Nationalist cabinet, was expounding the policy of apartheid and reacted to a minister who had accused him of *Herrenvolk* ideas:

> He is perfectly right . . . I consider that the European position in South Africa vis-à-vis that of the Native was that of a *Herrenvolk* . . . We are the superior race in South Africa. We have 2,000 years of civilisation

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[3] C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic* (Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 226.

[4] Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish Conspiracy and Protocols for the Elders of Zion* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967), p. 255.

> behind us. We have the Western civilisation and the Western way of life. Does not that in itself constitute us the *Herrenvolk* in South Africa as long as we can, and as long as we are justified in remaining it . . . ? If you are weakening the position of the *Herrenvolk* in South Africa then you are doing something to bring the semi-civilised race in South Africa on an equal footing with the European.[5]

A further consideration was that *swart gevaar* (black peril) electioneering was a powerful tool for winning votes, as Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog's National Party (NP) discovered in the 1929 election. A critical ingredient in the toxic mix was the severity of the poor white problem: the Carnegie Commission revealed in 1932 that 300,000 (or 17 per cent of the white population) were poor whites, most of whom were Afrikaners. It caused scarcely a ripple in white politics when an official commission documented in 1932 even greater poverty among Africans. The combined effect of the Great Depression and the worst drought in living memory was to force thousands, both white and African, out of the rural areas and into the towns.

The torrent of discriminatory legislation that poured forth from Parliament after 1910 laid the foundations of the apartheid system that was implemented from 1948 onwards. The 1930s was a crucial decade for Afrikaner nationalism. First, a rising generation of younger Afrikaners was pressing for more radical politics, notably for the attainment of a republic, and, second, many had become impatient with Hertzog's reluctance to push for a republic and his increasingly autocratic style of leadership. In spite of his credentials as a founder of Afrikaner nationalism, he remained committed to the idea of cooperation between Afrikaners and the English. Blacks (Africans, Indians and Coloured people), however, formed no part of his concept of the South African 'nation'. No significant Afrikaner leader, including General J.C. Smuts, differed from this view. It was also shared by most English-speakers. White liberals were a small, powerless minority.

By 1933, desperate economic conditions forced Hertzog to reconsider his previous refusal to enter a coalition with his historic rival, Jan Smuts, leader of the South African Party. The NP was divided on the issue and acquiesced in Hertzog's decision, recognizing, no doubt, that a refusal to do so might cause the NP to lose the election due in 1934. But Hertzog's next step, fusion of the two parties to form the United Party

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[5] Phyllis Lewsen (ed.), *Voices of Protest: From Segregation to Apartheid 1938–1948* (Craighall: Ad. Donker, 1988), p. 283.

(UP), was too much for the radicals, who hived off to form the 'Purified' NP, headed by D.F. Malan. The dreaded split (*skeuring*) in the ranks of nationalists had occurred. Hertzog's UP enjoyed the return of moderate prosperity over the next five years and won a resounding victory at the polls in the 1938 election.

Superficially, it seemed as if the narrow form of nationalism had been comprehensively, perhaps even permanently, defeated. But powerful currents were flowing that would eventually, though not without difficulty, strengthen the Nationalist cause: the rise to maturity of a younger, more militant generation of Afrikaners, the *Afrikaner Broederbond*'s role in activating the mobilization of Afrikaner organizations, and the small but steady emergence of graduates from the Afrikaans-medium universities that were strongholds of nationalism. Complementing the latter was the return of graduates from study abroad, notably from Germany.[6]

The events of 1933–34 had a further consequence: the 'Purified' NP, now in conflict with its erstwhile members who had followed Hertzog, had free rein to sharpen its core beliefs. Partly this was out of conviction and partly it was a strategy to steal an ideological march on Hertzog's UP by demanding a republic outside the British Commonwealth and the radical elaboration of segregation. The divergence of views in the UP provided the NP with many opportunities to exploit these divisions.

There is little evidence to suggest that these developments were attributable to Hitler's rise to power in 1933. However, the growth of antisemitism and increased hostility to the immigration of Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany clearly reflected what was a worldwide tendency that was expressed in its most horrible form in the Third Reich.

At the core of Afrikaner nationalist beliefs, before and after 1933–34, was the view that it had been God's will that Afrikaners should form themselves into a *volk* and carry the beacon light of Christianity into Africa. This was the essence of the Afrikaner civil religion: God's guiding hand determined the fate of his creations and punished those who strayed from the path of pious obedience. The three Afrikaans churches, of which the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* was by far the biggest, had traditionally provided crucial support to Afrikaner communities, especially after the devastation caused by the Anglo-Boer War. They would remain a powerful source of solidarity and influence deep into the twentieth century.

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[6] W.M. Macmillan, *Africa Emergent* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, revised and expanded edn, 1947), p. 324.

The idea of a *volk* was central to the beliefs of Afrikaner nationalism. The word *volk*, literally translated as 'people', carried further connotations when applied to Afrikaners and their institutions. It signified a group defined by language, religion and, of course, colour, who lived in a particular territory.

The original settlement of whites at the Cape in 1652 was heterogeneous in its composition. Barely 50 per cent were actually Dutch, followed closely by Germans. Later generations of Afrikaners, as they were subsequently named, took pride in their achievement of remaining white – unlike colonists in Brazil. 'Racial purity' was an historical claim. A demand that it be protected grew in fervour as twentieth-century Afrikaner nationalism developed. The genealogist H.F. Heese, however, demonstrated that the claim of Afrikaner racial purity was a myth, since some seven per cent of Afrikaner families had an ancestor (usually female) who was not white. Heese records that when his book *Groep Sonder Grense* appeared in 1985, it caused a political uproar among ultra-right-wing groups, although the ruling NP remained unmoved. This was despite a plethora of earlier legislation to prohibit racially mixed marriages and sexual relations across the colour line. These laws, he noted, owed more to comparable legislation in the American South than to the Nuremberg Laws of Nazi Germany which they resembled.[7] In 1950, the Population Registration Act sought in principle to classify every citizen on a racial basis, an individual's classification being recorded on his or her identity document. For the many people of mixed racial origins, notably in the Western Cape, this was a cruel law, sometimes enforced by crude tests of 'racial' identity, and occasionally dividing families into 'white' and 'non-white' branches.

The celebration in October 1938 of the centenary of the Great Trek captured the imagination of hundreds of thousands of Afrikaners across the country. Ostensibly it was intended to be a non-political event, but it turned into a massive demonstration of Afrikaner sentiment, from which non-Nationalist Afrikaners, including supporters of Fusion, and English-speakers were largely excluded. It was out of this event that a highly significant organization, the *Ossewa-Brandwag*, was to be established. At its peak, its membership numbered 250,000, although others, like D.F. Malan, put the figure at 400,000. Whatever the correct figure, it was the largest organizational mobilization in Afrikaner history.

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[7] H.F. Heese, *Groep Sonder Grense: Die rol en status van die gemengde bevolking aan die Kaap – 1652–1795*, 3rd edn (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2013), p. 8.

The outbreak of war in September 1939 and the South African Parliament's decision, by 80 votes to 67, on 4 September to ally with Britain in the fight against Nazi Germany, was a milestone in white politics. First, it destroyed Fusion; second, it catapulted Smuts into the prime ministership after the Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan, had controversially refused Hertzog's request to dissolve Parliament and hold fresh elections; and, third, it polarized the white population to an extent not seen since the times of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902). In his parliamentary speech during the war debate, Hertzog had proposed a qualified neutrality in terms of which South Africa would remain neutral, while honouring the Simonstown Agreement to allow the Royal Navy use of the harbour and its facilities. Smuts pointed out that this would be an inherently unworkable arrangement.

By 1939, Hertzog had become disenchanted with parliamentary government and had even embraced fascist ideas. In his speech proposing neutrality, he insisted that South Africa would not be plunged into any war unless its interests were threatened. Was Hitler out for world domination? There was 'not the slightest proof of this'. It was all the fault of the punitive conditions imposed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles: 'I had been through the same mill [a reference to the Treaty of Vereeniging that ended the Anglo-Boer War in 1902] . . . I know what it is to be driven by humiliation and belittlement and insult . . . With what justification can one ask me and South Africa to take part in a war because Hitler and the German nation will no longer suffer this humiliation?'[8]

Malan went even further in expressing his wholehearted support for Hertzog's motion: the allegation that Hitler sought world domination was 'a propaganda argument'. Germany's actions were 'an effort to get together in one country and under one Government what through race and language belongs together and wants to be united'. This, he continued, was what Afrikaners were doing and 'such a desire is natural and justified'.[9]

Nowhere in this and subsequent debates on the war is there any reference to the essentially criminal nature of the Nazi regime, with its concentration camps, Gestapo and persecution of Jews. Even the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty of 1939 hardly caused the vehemently anti-communist nationalists to miss a beat in their opposition to the war.

[8] *House of Assembly Debates*, vol. 36, 1939, cols. 20–23.
[9] *Ibid*., cols. 46–49.

Some in the NP, notably Eric Louw (a future cabinet minister) and Dr A. van Nierop, as well as the extra-parliamentary Greyshirts, led by L.T. Weichardt, maintained a vociferous antisemitism throughout the war. In 1937, the Transvaal NP altered its constitution to debar Jews from membership. Malan personally was not antisemitic, regarding the Jews as the Biblical 'chosen people'. However, he did nothing to curb the wild utterances of some of his followers, recognizing, no doubt, that antisemitism was electorally popular. 'British-Jewish' capitalism was regarded as Afrikanerdom's arch-enemy.

While vigorous opposition to the war continued, a new theme emerged from Nationalist speeches in 1940–41, namely, that a German victory was inevitable. In a motion calling for peace in August 1940, Hertzog claimed that Britain had been 'paralysed' by Germany: the war was already 'completely lost', Germany having superiority on land, air and no need to be subordinate to Britain at sea, and 'as regards prestige, influence, and authority and even popularity, it is no longer England or France but Germany to which the nations of Europe look and to whom they attach their hopes for the future'.[10] Other leading figures in the NP spoke in a similar vein; J.G. Strijdom, leader of the NP in the Transvaal and a future prime minister, even said of the Dunkirk evacuation that the British 'ran away'.[11]

For many Nationalists, the belief that Germany was overwhelming Britain was confirmed by the nightly broadcasts from Radio Zeesen, usually delivered by Erik Holm, a South African who extolled the virtues of National Socialism, including its toxic antisemitism. Thousands listened to the broadcasts. Some Nationalists even claimed that Zeesen's offerings were more objective than the pro-war broadcasts from the BBC and the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

The prospect of a British defeat turned Nationalist thoughts to what would happen to South Africa in the event of a German victory. Many took at face value Zeesen's assurances that the Reich would respect South Africa's independence – provided that an anti-British government was in power. Malan said:

> If Germany wins this war, then we are in this position . . . that the war aims of Germany and our desire to have a republic of South Africa clash with each other, unless we make it clear to Germany that the

[10] *Ibid.*, vol.40, 1940, cols. 82–87.
[11] *Ibid.*, col. 369.

> people of South Africa repudiate the Prime Minister [Smuts] and his declaration of war and his continuance of the war.[12]

Not much reliance could be placed upon Zeesen's assurances, given the Nazis' ambition to regain the colonies Germany had lost after the First World War. South-West Africa (now Namibia) was the jewel in the colonial crown, with the biggest German population (over 9,000) of all the German colonies. There was also evidence of extensive Nazi activity, as well as a widespread hostility to Afrikaners who had moved into the territory since it had come under South Africa's control as a League of Nations Mandate.

Smuts was under no illusions about Germany's hegemonic intentions. He had been impressed by the warnings of Baron Otto von Strahl, a German diplomat based in South Africa who had been dismissed for refusing to join the Nazi Party. He remained in South Africa and produced some illuminating reports on Nazi activities.[13] As at the outbreak of war in August 1914, he was convinced of South-West Africa's strategic importance. In April 1939, intelligence reports had indicated that pro-Nazi elements in the territory would attempt a coup. Smuts forestalled this by sending in a force of 300 police. He did this in his capacity as Minister of Justice without consulting the Cabinet, some of whom held pro-Nazi views.[14] After September 1939, many of the Nazi activists in the territory were interned in South Africa.

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There was general acceptance by all white parties and organizations that the main issue in South Africa was the conflict between white and black, and all were in agreement that segregation, enforced with greater or lesser degrees of rigour, was the appropriate policy. White politics was divided not only on the issue of participation in the war, but also about whether South Africa should become a republic. Afrikaners were politically divided, not only between the minority (so-called Bloedsappe) who supported Smuts, and those who were nationalists in the broad sense. The latter were bitterly divided among themselves so that by the end of 1940, Afrikanerdom was in disarray.[15] The attempted re-unification

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[12] *Ibid.*, col. 273.
[13] Jeremy Lawrence, *Harry Lawrence* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1940), p. 114.
[14] J.C. Smuts, *Jan Christiaan Smuts: By His Son* (Cape Town: Cassell, 1952), p. 372.
[15] The classic overview is M. Roberts and A.E.G. Trollip, *The South African Opposition 1939–1945* (London: Longmans, Green, 1947); see also Christoph

of Hertzog and Malan had failed. Nationalist radicals had never trusted him for joining with Smuts in 1934, the *Broederbond* had declared him an enemy since his attack on it in 1936 and, now, in 1941, he refused to budge from his long-held conviction of equality between Afrikaners and the English. He and some of his trusted lieutenants broke away and resigned from Parliament. Most of his Afrikaner followers (*smelters*) aligned themselves with Malan and his NP, while the Hertzogites, led by N.C. Havenga, formed the Afrikaner Party.

From 1941 onwards, Afrikaner organizations fought one another for the leadership of Afrikaner nationalism. The conflict between the NP and the *Ossewa-Brandwag* (OB), now a semi-militaristic organization, raged for several years from late 1941 for the next three years and more. The issue was that the OB had been established as a cultural organization that was committed to the attainment of a republic, but, in violation of an agreement with the NP, it had steadily encroached on politics, which the Nationalists regarded as their exclusive preserve.

Complicating the issue were the distinct national socialist convictions of many OB leaders, notably J.F.J. van Rensburg, who took over as Commandant-General in January 1941. Van Rensburg was a trained lawyer and a senior official in the Department of Justice until he became Administrator (the senior provincial official) of the Orange Free State. He was a well-read man, possibly one of very few Afrikaner leaders to have read the racist works of de Gobineau, Houston Stewart Chamberlain and Alfred Rosenberg.[16] Given the enormous impression that Hitler made on him when they met in Berlin in 1936, it is certain that he had also read *Mein Kampf*. Hitler 'is ein Heiliger' ('is a saint'), he told two American diplomats in 1944.[17] He also considered Mussolini a great man who had saved Italy from communism.

Enfolded within the OB was an elite corps, the *Stormjaers* (SJs), hard men, many of whom had been discharged from the Defence Force for security reasons. Nominally, the SJs were independent, but van Rensburg described them as 'the activist yeast'. They were responsible for a good

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Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel: Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the Ossewabrandwag* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2008); Patrick Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991).

[16] J.F.J. van Rensburg: *Their Paths Crossed Mine* (Johannesburg: CNA, 1956), p. 83.

[17] George Cloete Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?* (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1976), p. 157.

deal of sabotage and other subversive activities during the war, even to the extent of planning a coup to take over the state's authority should the opportunity present itself.[18] That could happen only in the event of a German victory and the meltdown of the South African state.

The OB was in constant communication with Germany via the German consulate in Lourenco Marques (now Maputo) in the neutral Portuguese colony of Mozambique. U-boats were active in southern African waters and Allied shipping suffered severe losses and thousands of deaths. Much of this was attributed to information about shipping movements supplied by OB members.[19] Several assassinations and assaults were also carried out against alleged traitors and opponents of the OB.[20]

In June 1942, 52 SJs were charged with treason. The Crown's case was that the accused were part of a secret army whose aim was to overthrow the government. Unlawful military drills were held, factories were established for making munitions, contacts were made with secret agents of the enemy, and sabotage of telegraph wires and rail tracks was carried out. However, the case collapsed: a key witness disappeared and was found only much later 'in a deplorable state of mental and physical health . . . a broken man'.[21] It was clear that he was terrified of the revenge that would be meted out to him.

By no means all or even most of the OB members favoured the use of violence. Most of the SJs were Transvalers; the OB in the Cape set its face firmly against violence, and no division of the SJs existed in the province. Nor were the vast majority of OB members supporters of National Socialism, despite the proclivities of many in the leadership. M.E. Rothmann (who wrote as MER), who became an active *kommandant* in the OB, declared: 'I have nothing to do with Nazis or Nazi doctrine. The OB, which is a pure Afrikaner struggle, also has nothing to do with that.'[22] It is very likely that much of the rank-and-file, which included a cross-section of the Afrikaner community, shared this view.

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[18] P.F. van der Schyff, 'Verset teen "Empire-oorlog"' in P.F. van der Schyff (ed.), *Die Ossewabrandwag: Vuurtjie in Droë Gras* (Potchefstroom: History Department, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1991), p. 228.
[19] E.G. Malherbe, *Never a Dull Moment* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1981), pp. 213–14.
[20] Van der Schyff, 'Verset teen "Empire-oorlog"', pp. 232–33.
[21] Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?*, p. 113.
[22] J.C. Steyn, *Die 100 Jaar van MER* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2004), p. 383 (translation).

The Nazi invasion of Holland and Belgium, which many regarded as *stamlande* (countries of origin), caused dismay and, no doubt, contributed to a decline in such enthusiasm as existed for, at any rate, the Nazi version of National Socialism. But even the brutality of the Nazi occupation did little to dampen the hopes of Germany victory over Britain. Malan, who had obtained his doctorate in Holland, was upset but considered the invasion a military necessity – suggesting the modern euphemism of collateral damage.

Brief reference must be made to two other proto-Nazi organizations: the Greyshirts, founded by and based around L.T. Weichardt; and the New Order (NO), led by Oswald Pirow, the former Minister of Defence in Hertzog's Cabinet. Both Weichardt and Pirow were of German descent. The Greyshirts, although numbering only some 2,000 members, were influential immediately before the outbreak of the war, but faded completely after Weichardt's internment. They were notable for their thorough-going antisemitism and their hostility or indifference to Calvinism, which imposed limits on their ability to win support among Afrikaners. Second, their political programme proposed that citizenship be limited to whites of Aryan origin, including English-speakers. Afrikaners were to be the core of a *bloed-en-bodemsbepaalde volksgemeenskap* (literally a blood-and-territorially-based *volk* community).[23] (So far as I am aware, this was the only organization that mentioned Aryans in their propaganda; if it was intended to refer to a specific blond and blue-eyed physical type, however, only a few whites could meet the specification.)

The Greyshirts' emphasis on 'race-purity' and its insistence that 'racial' division was a principle of nature did not in any fundamental way distinguish it from other white political organizations – or from the views of most English-speakers who were as strongly opposed to miscegenation as any Afrikaner nationalist.

Pirow, a devoted disciple of Hertzog, remained in the NP even after the failure of re-unification. During Hertzog's prime ministership, he had kept his national socialist convictions to himself. But being of German parentage and married to a German wife, Germany was his spiritual home. In September 1940, even while he was an NP MP, he established the New Order and attracted to its ranks 16 NP MPs, nearly all of whom were old Hertzogites. He created space for the NO inside the NP's offices

[23] F.J. van Heerden, 'Nasionale Socialisme as Faktor in die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek'. Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of the Orange Free State, 1972, pp. 72–75.

from which he conducted its affairs. For Malan, it was an anomalous situation that could not be tolerated indefinitely. He was concerned by the number of NP MPs who were impressed by Pirow and by the support he received from some Afrikaans newspapers, including *Die Vaderland*, which remained a supporter of Hertzog. Moreover, the NO's explicitly Nazi-like views[24] embarrassed the NP, which, notwithstanding its anti-war position, was certainly not pro-Nazi in its ideological orientation. Of equal concern to Malan was the growing evidence that the NO and the OB were drawing closer together. It was clear to Malan that the OB, far from being a cooperative ally on the cultural front, was striving to become the dominant force in Afrikaner nationalism.

The NP had, nonetheless, to endure the taunt of being labelled 'Malanazis' by the governing party and its supporting press. In June 1941, a crisis conference of the NP rejected the NO, and Pirow was despatched to the political wilderness. Like the OB, the NO's approach rested on the assumption of a Germany victory. Pirow, challenged by Ben Schoeman, a former *smelter* and a future cabinet minister, to say what he would do if Germany lost, he replied with a smile, 'I will go to my farm' – which is, metaphorically, what he did.[25] He returned to the bar and practised as an advocate. He was initially a prosecutor in the Treason Trial that began in 1956.

The OB was a much tougher nut to crack. Apart from its size (Malan believed it to be 400,000-strong), its activism, including drilling, militaristic uniforms, marching and physical exercise, stood in sharp contrast to the dour proceedings of the NP, which offered little by way of activism and excitement. In some measure, the OB had managed to channel the enthusiasm generated by the Ox-Wagon Trek of 1938, held to commemorate the Great Trek of 1838 (the diaspora of Afrikaners to the interior) to its own purposes. For thousands, the effect was both inspiring and cathartic. Initially, Malan had welcomed the emergence of the OB, regarding it as a valuable instrument for the mobilization of Afrikaners on the cultural front that would also benefit the NP. The Cradock agreement between Malan and OB leaders was signed in October 1940 in terms of which a supposedly clear demarcation between 'party-political' (the NP's sphere) and 'non-political' activity (the OB's sphere). It was apparent that

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[24] O. Pirow, *Nuwe Order vir Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: Christelike Republikeinse Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionaal-Sosialistiese Studiekring, 1940).

[25] Ben Schoeman, *My Lewe in die Politiek* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1978), p. 92 (translation).

Malan was becoming uneasy at OB encroachment on the party-political sphere.

There were inherent problems with the Cradock agreement: first, the agreement was in fact not all that clear; second, given the extent to which political and cultural (notably language) issues were inextricably tied together in Afrikaner nationalism's history, how could an effective division of labour be enforced? However, the major problem derived from the replacement of Colonel J.C.C. Laas as the (ineffective) Commandant-General of the OB by van Rensburg, an ambitious and able person who, it was claimed, harboured pretensions of becoming South Africa's *Fuehrer*. According to Scholtz:

> From his utterances it was perfectly clear that he wanted to transform the OB into what was the National Socialist Party in Germany, the Fascist Party in Italy and the Falangist Party in Spain. Accordingly this meant that the OB should be recognised as the only political organisation in South Africa. Van Rensburg saw himself as the equivalent in South Africa of Hitler in Germany, Mussolini in Italy and Franco in Spain. This meant that he should be accorded the powers of a dictator; he did not want to be the leader of a democratic party.[26]

In many speeches, van Rensburg denounced democracy – according to him, it was already dead and should be buried. He abhorred parties and considered them to be divisive and, in South Africa's case, preventing the solidarity of the *volk*. In February 1942, he said:

> It has now become clear that the OB will still rule the country. The organisations to whom the OB looked for leadership in political matters are in the process of decline and it looks as if the OB will have to take over the task.[27]

Speeches of this tenor and the steady removal of NP members in senior positions in the OB (notably C.R. Swart, NP leader in the Orange Free State) meant the end of any cooperation between the NP and the OB. Van Rensburg, who had not been party to the Cradock agreement, ignored its provisions. The fight for control of Afrikaner nationalism

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[26] G.D. Scholtz, *Die Ontwikkeling van die Politieke Denke van die Afrikaner*, vol. 8, 1939–1948 (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1984), p. 15 (translation).
[27] *Ibid.*, p.153 (translation).

was on. It would be bitter. In a speech in April 1941, B.J. Vorster, a general in the OB of the Eastern Cape (and Prime Minister from 1966 to 1978), observed sadly that 'the Afrikaner never stamps as hard as when he has his foot on the throat of a fellow-Afrikaner'.[28] It was a comment reminiscent of Simmel's finding that the closer the contending forces are to each other, the more bitter the conflict.

For Malan and the NP, it was an unfortunate irony that at a time when the omens for *hereniging* had seemed particularly auspicious, the old Afrikaner curse of *verdeeldheid* (dividedness) had recurred. The Ox-Wagon Trek of 1938, followed by the resignation of Hertzog after the war vote in September 1939, had seemed to open the way for *hereniging*: apart from the significant minority of Afrikaners (perhaps 30 per cent) who supported Smuts, there appeared to be no inherent reason why Afrikaner nationalists could not unite and form a combination that could win a general election (which is exactly what happened in 1948). But *hereniging* with Hertzog failed and some of his erstwhile followers formed the Afrikaner Party, and then small neo-Nazi groups like the Greyshirts and the NO came – and went. The OB, however, was a formidable rival, capable of generating popular emotion in ways that the NP could hardly match.

There were important ideological differences between the NP and the OB. The NP rejected national socialism and the idea of a one-party state led by a dictator. It remained committed to the racially exclusive democracy (*herrenvolk* democracy, as it has been termed), while acknowledging that the kind that had been practised in South Africa, modelled on the British system, had failed: it put the fate of the *volk* in 'coincidental and passing circumstances'.[29] J.G. Strijdom, leader of the Transvaal NP and a rising star (he would become Prime Minister in 1954), used more robust language, declaring that it was British-Jewish and capitalist democracy which was responsible for the misery in the country and that it had to be eliminated root-and-branch. It was a 'false and degenerate democracy that enabled Hoggenheimer [the mythical Jewish capitalist] and his exploitation to reign supreme to eliminate all dividing lines between white and non-whites'.[30] Strijdom's close associate and another rising

[28] H.O. Terblanche, *John Vorster: OB-Generaal en Afrikanervegter* (Roodepoort: CUM-Boeke, 1983), pp. 130–31 (translation).
[29] D.F. Malan, *Afrikaner Volkseenheid en My Ervarings op die Pad Daarheen* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1959), p. 216 (translation).
[30] J.L. Basson, *JG Strijdom: Sy Politieke Loopbaan van 1929 tot 1948* (Pretoria: Wonderboom Publishers, 1980), p. 366 (translation).

star, H.F. Verwoerd (then editor of *Die Transvaler* and a future prime minister), shared similar views, believing that the Afrikaners' republican ideal and their democratic beliefs were identical twins.[31]

The obverse of this disenchantment with the existing (*herrenvolk*) democracy and the repudiation of national socialism was the proposal to return to the *volksregering* (*volks* government) of the nineteenth-century Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. The *Uniale* (Union) Congress of the NP, held in June 1941, expressed its preference for the Boer form of democracy, saying that it was indigenous, fully representative of the *volk* and contained the necessary restrictions on organized *geldmag* (money-power) and the press, as well as providing stability. Moreover, it protected the right of protest without which – in other words, under a compulsory fascist one-party system – there would be no Afrikaner people today.[32]

Both republics had party-less systems, although factions existed, and elections for the presidency and the *Volksraads* (Parliaments) were contested. However, they functioned in what were agrarian societies (at least until the Transvaal was plunged into crisis by the discovery of gold). Could they really be transformed into systems capable of regulating conflict and governing effectively in a modernizing society? A number of doubts on this score were expressed, and it is possible that the proposals were made more as a symbolic gesture of historical legitimation of republican independence than a feasible ambition. By the end of the war and in the run-up to the 1948 election, the proposals were quietly forgotten.

The *Uniale* Congress laid down emphatically that the NP was the only organization that represented 'nasionaal-gesinde' ('national-minded') Afrikanerdom on the party-political front, and urged all Afrikaners to discourage deviations and group-formation inside or outside the NP. It also endowed Malan with the title of *volksleier* (leader of the *volk*) and granted him extraordinary powers, subject to responsibility to the Congress. This was less the consequence of Nazi influence than a move to claim leadership in the struggle with the OB, whose leader had ambitions to become the leader of Afrikanerdom. Malan was no aspirant führer, but insisted that in times of crisis, a leader who led from behind was no leader, but, rather, was a danger. However: 'I believe in real

[31] G.D. Scholtz, *Dr. Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd – 1901–1966* (Johannesburg: Perskor), vol. 1, p. 106.
[32] Roberts and Trollip, *The South African Opposition 1939–1945*, pp. 84–85.

leadership but leadership-in-council, that is leadership in living contact with one's people.'[33]

In a lengthy speech at the Congress, Malan sought to put ideological space between the NP and National Socialism. Citing the resolutions of an earlier meeting of the NP's Federal Council, he denied that the NP wanted to pass a negative judgement on National Socialism as a system for Germany. He accepted that it had achieved remarkable things for the German people, binding them together to pull them out of the depths of humiliation to which the Treaty of Versailles had condemned them. He also acknowledged that they could learn from National Socialism. Its anti-capitalism need not be strange to Afrikanerdom because it, too, had always been anti-money-power and anti-exploitation.

Yet, Malan continued, to accept dictatorship, which was the core of National Socialism, violated Afrikaners' traditions and their fundamental religious convictions:

> We should not forget that our entire history's direction has always been away from dictatorship over body and soul and away from a compulsory unitary system which had no place for our nationhood [*nasieskap*], for our freedom of conscience and for our ingrained human rights . . . By giving up our right of protest we are making a deadly weapon – for whose hands?[34]

Apart from the legitimacy that the NP derived from its long struggle as the standard-bearer of Afrikaner nationalism – compared with the 'Johnnie-come-lately' record of the OB – it had other formidable weapons at its disposal: a powerful press that supported it in the conflict with the OB, refusing to accept advertisements from the OB and declining to print news about its activities. Moreover, all three of the Afrikaans churches, apart from a few dissident clergy, came out strongly against national socialism, deeming it to be inconsistent with Calvinist principles. The intervention of the churches was decisive: no matter how much the OB and the NO sought to insist that their programmes took account of the Christian-National character of Afrikanerdom, the churches believed that the *gesagstaat* (authoritarian state) would not tolerate their independence.

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[33] Malan, *Afrikaner Volkseenheid*, pp. 192–93 (translation).
[34] S.W. Pienaar (ed.), *Glo In U Volk: Dr DF Malan as Redenaar 1908–1954* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1964), p. 42 (translation).

The violence of the SJs was another issue that alienated many Afrikaners, including OB members in the Cape. Its Cape leader, J.A. Smith, refused to allow an SJ movement in the Cape, and Vorster expressed opposition to the use of violence, although he claimed to understand that people resorted to it because the government's wartime regulations (including internment) put so much pressure on them. He acknowledged not having much faith in the ballot box, but quoted, with evident agreement, van Rensburg's comment: 'We are striving for a republic. And as far as we are concerned, it does not matter how the republic comes – ballot box or blunderbuss [*stembus of blunderbus*] – as long as it comes.' As late as mid-1944, even when it was clear that Germany was losing the war and the OB's numbers had shrunk considerably, van Rensburg remained bullish, asserting his belief in 'real National Socialism achieved by revolutionary means – and when I say revolution I actually mean armed rebellion'.[35] This was delusional.

It was not surprising that the Smuts government armed itself with emergency powers. After all, South Africa was at war and, unlike the other dominions, it was confronted with a large and potentially dangerous fifth column, as well as evidence that Nazi agents were active in South Africa. It was estimated that security against domestic anti-war groups forced the government to keep two battalions of troops at home. It was not unreasonable to require that firearms owned by members of the public be impounded for the duration of the war, but this step led to protests from Afrikaner nationalists who insisted that 'die Boer en sy roer' ('the Boer and his rifle') were inseparable. Notwithstanding prohibitions, extensive caches of arms and ammunition were discovered by the authorities during 1941 and it was believed that plans had been laid to topple Smuts.[36] It was also clear that the OB had extensively infiltrated the police, a number of whom were suspended and interned.

Internment of individuals suspected of subversive proclivities became a major political issue. The irony is that the NP and the OB protested vehemently against the principle of detention without trial (though a mechanism for an Appeal Advisory Commissioner was created), but no less a person than Vorster (who was interned for over 14 months in 1942–43) as the Minister of Justice introduced detention without trial, with no right of appeal, as a principle of the ordinary law in 1962. In the apartheid era, torture of detainees was frequent and over 70 died. None

[35] Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?*, pp. 167–68.
[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 92, 98.

of the 6,636 wartime internees (including 833 South African nationals, of whom only 158 were nationals by birth) was tortured, and none died, other than possibly of natural causes.[37] Only three individuals were sentenced to death: Robey Leibbrandt, who was landed off the west coast by a German yacht on a mission to carry out sabotage and the assassination of Smuts;[38] and Julian Visser and H.S. van Blerk, who had placed a bomb at the Benoni post office that exploded and inadvertently killed a passer-by. In all three cases, the death sentences were commuted, and all three, together with others jailed for political offences, were released shortly after the NP took office in 1948. (This should be contrasted with the 131 individuals executed for politically motivated offences during the apartheid era.)

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It should be noted that throughout the war, Malan behaved with constitutional propriety:

> I was against our participation in the war, but what was decided, for good or bad, by parliamentary decision I abided by, and any action of a military nature that opposed this I regarded as treason.[39]

He made an interesting prediction in 1942:

> The road to the republic by way of the ballot box is ultimately certain – whatever the result of the war may be. After every war – and this has always been the experience – come setbacks just as surely as night is followed by day. National and republican-minded South Africa will just as certainly derive the advantage from this exactly as it was the case after the previous World War [a reference to the NP–Labour Party Pact's victory in the 1924 election].[40]

The prediction turned out to be correct. Despite the tide turning slowly in favour of the Allies and the decline in strength of the OB and other splinter groups, the going remained hard for the NP. It sustained a thumping defeat in the 'khaki' election of July 1943. On the eve of the election, the UP and its far smaller allies held 86 seats and the NP and

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[37] Lawrence, *Harry Lawrence*, p. 173.
[38] Visser, *OB: Traitors or Patriots?*, pp. 201–06.
[39] Malan, *Afrikaner Volkseenheid*, p. 220 (translation).
[40] Pienaar (ed.), *Glo In U Volk*, p. 45 (translation).

its (dubious) allies 65. After the election, a substantially different picture emerged: the UP and its allies now held 105 seats and, in addition, the three Natives Representatives could be relied upon to support the government on most issues, certainly those relating to the conduct of the war.

Analysis of the votes cast tells a slightly different story: although the UP and its allies had significantly increased their parliamentary majority while the NP's number of seats declined to 43, the number of votes cast for the UP had declined slightly from 447,535 in 1938 to 431,171 in 1943. The NP's number of votes rose from 24, 582 in 1938 to 316,320 in 1943 – an appreciable increase. Stultz estimates that only one out of every four Afrikaners who had voted for the UP in 1938 voted for the UP in 1943.[41] Moreover, one can only guess at the number of OB supporters who boycotted the election, but it surely amounted to several thousand. Malan could derive some comfort from the rise in the number of NP voters and from the heavy defeat of the Afrikaner Party. He could claim, legitimately, that the election had at least cleared the decks, leaving the NP as the sole representative of republican Afrikaners in politics.

Prior to the election, Malan had flatly rejected an offer from van Rensburg for the support of the OB provided that the parties nominated 'mutually acceptable Volk candidates'. Havenga accepted the offer with alacrity on behalf of the AP, while Pirow's NO was busy withdrawing from the election. Malan subsequently rejected a request from Havenga for the NP to stand aside in the eight seats then held by the AP. As Stultz correctly observes, 'thousands of Afrikaners abstained from voting in 1943 as a deliberate political act'.[42] Many, no doubt, had taken to heart van Rensburg's repeated claims that Parliament and its ritual elections served no purpose. On the other hand, it is equally apparent that thousands disregarded his views and voted. Malan, predictably, claimed that this was the case.[43]

In his memoirs van Rensburg quoted, with evident agreement, an article in the *Cape Times* of 21 October 1954, which argued that Malan had refused the OB's offer of cooperation because, had it been accepted, Smuts would have had an excuse to act against the NP. According to van

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[41] Newell M. Stultz, *The Nationalists in Opposition: 1934–1948* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1974), pp. 83–91.
[42] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[43] Van Heerden, 'Nasionale Socialisme as Faktor in die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek', p. 312.

Rensburg, this demonstrated that the OB was 'in word and deed, far too heavily under fire from the enemy to be a safe ally'.[44]

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By way of a conclusion, I consider briefly the fates of the OB and the NP, and thereafter assess the impact of National Socialist ideas on Afrikaner nationalism. After 1943, and especially after the election, the OB declined both numerically and in terms of its capacity to create mayhem. By 1945, it was a mere shell of its earlier self. Many of its supporters supported or joined the Afrikaner Party, led by N.C. Havenga, who had been Hertzog's close associate. Malan and Havenga brokered an electoral pact prior to the 1948 election, much to the dismay of leading NP figures, notably J.G. Strijdom, the leader of the Transvaal NP. It was apparent, though, that the Afrikaner Party had only a limited following, winning nine seats in the elections thanks only to the generous allocation of winnable seats by the NP. It was absorbed into the NP not long thereafter, and Havenga, despite Malan's backing, never had a ghost of a chance of succeeding him as NP leader. That position fell to J.G. Strijdom.

The OB lingered on until its dissolution in 1954. Van Rensburg was, to some extent, accepted back into the nationalist fold, being given a post in the administration of the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Act provided for the radical separation of white and black (in fact mostly Coloured and Indian people) for residential and business purposes. It was one of apartheid's cruellest laws and van Rensburg could not stomach it. He acknowledged, ruefully, to a lawyer that his job was one that 'only a fascist could do'.[45]

As has been indicated, the NP benefited indirectly from the massive mobilization of Afrikaners achieved by the OB. After a narrow victory in 1948, it went from strength to strength in subsequent elections, remaining in power until 1994. Very few prominent Afrikaner nationalist leaders and intellectuals, other than those in the OB, had identified with Nazism. While many admired Nazi Germany's economic achievements and wanted a German victory for anti-British reasons, none wanted an authoritarian system ruled by a dictator. This reflected the old adage: 'My enemy's enemy is my friend.' Those who did support Nazism included Nico Diederichs, an academic who was prominent in

[44] Van Rensburg, *Their Paths Crossed Mine*, p. 207.
[45] Personal information conveyed by the lawyer concerned.

the *Afrikaner Broederbond*, and P.J. Meyer, also a *Broederbonder*, who later became head of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. Otto du Plessis, editor of the bi-weekly *Die Oosterlig* (based in Port Elizabeth), was outspoken in his Nazi sympathies until he was restrained by the owners, *Nasionale Pers*, who demanded that he heed the anti-Nazi and anti-OB policy of the company.[46] (After the war, the Netherlands refused to accept du Plessis as the South African ambassador.)

A surprising (in view of his later opinions) sympathiser with National Socialism was N.P. van Wyk Louw, who would become the leading Afrikaans poet and dramatist. In 1936, he expressed himself as 'cautiously sympathetic' to Nazism. He never identified wholeheartedly with the ideology and his sympathies waned rapidly after 1939 when the evidence of Hitler's brutal attitude to small states was clear.[47] In spite of his rejection of Nazism, Louw nevertheless opposed participation in the war.

As the tide of war turned decisively against Germany after 1943 and the OB's fortunes waned, support for fascism also declined. Some, like Oswald Pirow of the NO, preferred what might be termed fascism-lite of the Portuguese variety.[48] This had also been Hertzog's preference. The brutality of the Nazi regime had become even more apparent and the claim that allegations were propaganda no longer held water. Even one of the most committed Nazis, van Rensburg of the OB, expressed his horror after the war at the Holocaust as 'indefensible' and 'a blot on Christian humanity'.[49] Even loud-mouthed antisemites like Eric Louw, who became a cabinet minister in 1948, toned down their abusive rhetoric, declaring it to have been a political tactic.

English-speaking whites appeared to be immune to fascist ideology, even if the vast majority supported white racial control and were hardly much less imbued with racist sentiments than their Afrikaner counterparts. Fewer were now calling Britain 'home', but loyalty to Britain remained strong, as did a vicarious pride in Britain's wartime leadership. The powerful English-language press gave unstinting support to Smuts and the South African war effort.

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[46] C.F.J. Muller, *Sonop in die Suide: Geboorte en Groei van die Nasionale Pers 1915–1948* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1990), p. 613.
[47] J.C. Steyn, *Van Wyk Louw: 'n Lewensverhaal* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 162, 266, 277.
[48] Oswald Pirow, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, n.d.), p. 259.
[49] Van Rensburg, *Their Paths Crossed Mine*, p. 109.

It would be a misconception to conclude that all Afrikaners opposed participation in the war. As many as 30 per cent of Afrikaners did not support either the NP or the OB, and of the whites who volunteered for active service in the South African Defence Force, approximately half were Afrikaners. Moreover, some of the most prominent generals in the army, like Dan Pienaar and Frank Theron, had Afrikaner backgrounds.

The defeat of the Axis powers and revelations of Nazi barbarism, notably the Holocaust, led to a worldwide revulsion against racism. The war had also loosened the foundations of colonial rule, which had previously cushioned South Africa against criticism of its racial policies. In the post-war era, South Africa stood alone, with the exception of the American South, as the only state based upon institutionalized racial discrimination. Coming into power in 1948, the NP turned its back on these developments and began to implement an even more rigorous form of racial discrimination: apartheid.

The word 'apartheid' came into use in the 1940s. The NP claimed that it was rooted in the segregationist policies of the past, which now required radical elaboration and extension if South Africa were to be made safe for whites. D.F. Malan, who became Prime Minister in 1948, said, in launching the NP's election manifesto:

> [Apartheid] envisages the maintenance and protection of the white population of our country as a pure white race, the maintenance and protection of indigenous racial groups as separate communities of people, with possibilities of developing in their own areas . . . and the cultivation of national pride, self-respect and mutual esteem among the different races of the country.[50]

The reality of apartheid was vastly different from this seemingly rosy picture: it involved the ruthless enforcement of racial separation and domination by whites in virtually all spheres of life.[51] But separation could not apply to the workplace since the economy was dependent on black labour. Tradition and legislation, reinforced in the 1950s, ensured that the colour bar protected whites against black competition.

Anti-communism, a prominent feature of NP propaganda after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, assumed major proportions as the Cold War developed. The renaissance of the ANC during and after

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[50] W.A. Kleynhans (ed.), *SA General Election Manifestos: 1910–1981* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1987), p. 135.

[51] David Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), passim.

the war could be targeted as communist-inspired, supposedly justifying strong-arm action against alleged communists or those assisting the communist cause.

Malan was succeeded as Prime Minister by two more ruthless politicians: J.G. Strijdom and H.F. Verwoerd, both of whom had been firmly anti-Nazi even though they were equally firmly opposed to South Africa's entry into the war. (Strijdom habitually used the term *baasskap* to define racial policy.) Verwoerd, who became Prime Minister in 1958, had been instrumental in the imposition of tighter, more authoritarian controls over Africans, sought in 1959 to re-orient policy away from white rule (or *baasskap*, as Strijdom had termed it) to 'separate development'. Verwoerd was frank in acknowledging that while he wished that the old order could have been retained, the times demanded a new approach, in which South Africa could align itself with the decolonization process that was underway in Africa. Thus emerged the so-called (though not officially) Bantustans, putatively independent states based on the scattered, fragmented African reserves designated by earlier legislation.

It is unnecessary for my purpose to describe the details of the new approach and its calamitous failure. The NP, in brief, could not escape from the hard demographic fact that whites were a small minority that was growing smaller in percentage terms as the black population increased. Nor could black political resistance be eradicated or opposition to apartheid ignored.

The changed basis of legitimation, while resulting in no real change in the structure of society, at least saw the Nationalists eschewing racially abusive language: the word 'kaffer' (equivalent in its offensiveness to 'nigger') was avoided by politicians. Assertions of racial inferiority were now taboo, although there were suggestions that Africans were 'different', with the implication that cultures were 'engraved on their souls', as Verwoerd remarked in proposing a (pseudo-)traditional form of government for Bantustan Africans.[52]

Verwoerd rejected the racist view that white superiority derived from inherent biological or genetic factors. But, as Hermann Giliomee points out, 'his thinking could be considered racial because he believed that biological descent, along with culture, were immutable attributes of social identity'.[53]

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[52] A.N. Pelzer (ed.), *Verwoerd Speaks: Speeches 1948–1966* (Johannesburg: APB Publishers, 1966), p. 273.

[53] Hermann Giliomee, *The Last Afrikaner Leaders: A Supreme Test of Power* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012), p. 26.

The avoidance of explicitly racist assertions of black inferiority evidently made little impression on most whites. In a survey conducted in 1966–67, Heribert Adam found that in a sample of 350 white parliamentarians, officials and entrepreneurs, 77 per cent agreed with the statement that Africans were 'not inferior but different by nature', while 85 per cent agreed that Africans possessed hereditary character predispositions. Adam commented:

> Continuing adherence to the traditional stereotypes of racial distinctions has to be understood not merely as a relic of an unenlightened past, a kind of scientific lag, but also as the only lasting and individually satisfying justification of separation in a situation where 'cultural parallelism' has to be imposed by the ruling group for the security of its privileges.[54]

In his book *The Rise of the South African Reich* (published in 1969),[55] Brian Bunting, a stalwart communist, claims that Nazi ideology had a significant influence on apartheid. Several chapters are headed by epigraphs that are quotations from *Mein Kampf*. Two quotations are relevant:

> The innermost Nationalist cadrés . . . drank deep at the fountains of Nazism and found the Nuremberg laws confirmation and rationalization of the racist doctrines which they had traditionally espoused in South Africa. (pp. 119–20)

> South Africa is not yet Nazi Germany, with its concentration camps and gas ovens. But the attitude of mind which produced such inhumanities in Nazi Germany is there, and it needs only the whiff of a crisis for White South Africa to throw aside its remaining civilized pretentions and grasp in a frenzy of panic at any weapon for preserving its privileges. (p. 521)

On both issues, Bunting is wide of the mark. As has been indicated, white South Africans could learn little from outsiders about racial discrimination. Parallels with the Nuremberg Laws there may have been, but parallels do not entail cause and effect. In fact, if white South Africa

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[54] Heribert Adam, 'The South African Power Elite' in Heribert Adam (ed.), *South Africa: Sociological Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 80–82.
[55] Brian Bunting, *The Rise of the South African Reich* (London: Penguin, 1969) pp. 119–20, 521.

derived any 'confirmation and rationalization' of its racial laws, it was mainly from the southern states of the US.[56]

There is little evidence to suggest that German traditions of nationalist thought had much impact on Afrikaner nationalism. In some respects it was *sui generis*, resembling typical anti-colonial nationalisms, including that of Ireland. But this analogy is of limited explanatory value.

In a more recent book, Allister Sparks, a former editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* and doyen of contemporary columnists, advances a more circumspect comparison between apartheid and national socialism:

> the influence of Nazi Germany on the minds of those who fashioned apartheid was very great, especially among key members of the Broederbond secret society, the inner body of Afrikanerdom's new political intelligentsia where the actual ideological groundwork was laid. This is not to say that the two are the same thing. To equate apartheid with Nazism is an overstatement that invites incredulity: its evil is in a different category from the calculated genocide of the death camps. But they are of the same genre. Apartheid and National Socialism both came from the same witches' cauldron of national grievance and economic depression.[57]

While it is correct that many Nationalist intellectuals were members of the *Broederbond*, it is an exaggeration to attribute the formulation of apartheid to it per se. The Nazis destroyed Weimar democracy and instituted a totalitarian system led by a dictator: this was never on the cards in South Africa, where the Nationalists were able to use the parliamentary system of the racial oligarchy to gain and retain power. In the run-up to the crucial 1948 election, the dominant faction in the NP was the Cape Afrikaner establishment, comprised of politicians (notably Malan himself), a powerful press based around the influential *Die Burger*, a growing business sector and the churches. None of these was amenable to National Socialism or its less abhorrent fascist variants. Nor were the strongmen of the Transvaal, Strijdom and H.F. Verwoerd.

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[56] For an excellent critique of efforts to compare South Africa with Nazi Germany, see Heribert Adam, *Modernizing Racial Domination: The Dynamics of South African Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp. 38–39, 42–51.

[57] Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (London: Heinemann, 1990), pp. 162–63.

Apartheid was a cruel system, doomed from its very inception to prove unworkable. It certainly was authoritarian, but it was never totalitarian. The essence of totalitarianism is the obliteration of the distinction between state and society, and, although the state's bureaucratic and coercive machinery were firmly under the control of the Nationalist government, it was never possible to impose the kind of *Gleichschaltung* seen in the Third Reich. That South Africa was an authoritarian state is undoubted, but the state's grip on civil society did not throttle it completely and pockets of relative, though circumscribed, openness remained. A critical press and (some) universities continued to exist in spite of censorship and limitations on academic freedom.

Moreover, the NP itself, unlike its Nazi counterpart, remained internally democratic, and its parliamentary caucus debated issues surprisingly frankly. The three Dutch Reformed churches, all strongly influenced by the Dutch philosopher/theologian Abraham Kuyper, cleaved to his dictum of 'sovereignty of spheres', which politicians should not violate.

None of these considerations should be regarded as arguments in mitigation of apartheid. Cruel though it was, it could not imprison people in indoctrinated minds. Eventually, the rigid doctrines of apartheid buckled, largely under the weight of black numbers, and a pragmatism that increasingly eroded the system.

12

Echoes of Nazi Antisemitism in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s

Milton Shain

My earliest political recollections date back to the arrival of Harold Macmillan in South Africa in 1960. During recess at our elementary school, I rushed with a classmate to the nearby Union Buildings to catch a glimpse of the British Prime Minister. One sensed that dramatic things were in the offing and indeed they were: a few days later, Macmillan delivered his famous 'Wind of Change' speech to South African parliamentarians. African emancipation from colonial rule appeared imminent. Yet in the immediate years after Macmillan's visit, it was high school sport rather than politics that captured my attention. Of course, one knew that apartheid South Africa was fundamentally evil – and one was reminded of this from time to time by liberal teachers – but, for the most part, one's privileged white life carried on uninterrupted. As a university student, however, I began to explore and examine the inequities and injustices based on race and legislation. Were these driven by class interests or simple racism? By the time I entered university, an exciting revisionist historiography was beginning to valorize the former, but, whether class or race, one could not avoid confronting racial prejudice and its odious consequences for so many South Africans. It was some time before I engaged seriously with an even older prejudice, that of antisemitism. My engagement with this subject did not emerge from knowledge of European antisemitism in general or the Holocaust in particular. Nor did it come from the home. Even my father's wartime experiences fighting for the Allies in Italy (where he lost his brother) did not impact in any significant way. However, in retrospect, subtle messages within the home about the Jewish predicament were imbibed and one had a sense – even subliminal – that hostility towards Jews

was an ever-present possibility. Indeed, from time to time, it was more overt as the apartheid state 'securocrats' identified Jews as communists or liberals, both terms of opprobrium under the apartheid regime. Yet on a personal level, I never faced slights or hostility; at worst, one observed impersonations of the strangely accented immigrant Jew coupled with 'Shylock-like' allusions. Alongside the harsh focus on Africans, Coloureds and Indians, this was of little consequence.

In my early twenties, however, I began to think more deeply about the politics of anti-Jewish prejudice and embarked on a study of Jewry in the old Cape Colony. What really struck me was the depth of anti-alienism (merged with classic antisemitism) that had emanated from both Afrikaans- and English-speakers in that period. I explored this phenomenon in an MA dissertation which *inter alia* revised understandings of the Cape Immigration Restriction Act of 1902, which was hitherto seen as targeting Asians only.[1] Having uncovered a rich vein of popular anti-Jewish prejudice, even hatred, in *fin de siècle* South Africa, I began a doctoral dissertation which examined constructions of the Jew in South Africa prior to the Quota Act of 1930, which effectively put a halt to the influx of Eastern European Jews. This study uncovered widely shared anti-Jewish stereotypes that dated back to the late nineteenth century, rooted in specifically South African conditions and intimately bound up with the local stresses and upheavals that resulted from the 'mineral revolution' and labour instability in the early 1920s: Jews were characterized as fortune-seekers, cosmopolitan financiers, rural traders, urban hucksters, wartime shirkers and radical unionists. From the mid-1920s, nativist and eugenicist concerns with race, miscegenation and the 'Nordic' character of South African 'stock' amplified obsessions with the Jew.[2] These obsessions, together with the threat of Jewish economic competition and (to a lesser extent) fears of radical subversion, underpinned the Quota Act of 1930 that effectively precluded the influx of Eastern European Jews, the seedbed of South African Jewry. Every nation had the right to 'maintain its own particular type of civilization', D.F. Malan, Minister of the Interior, told an approving Parliament in defence of the Act.[3] Tellingly, English-speakers supported the legislation, as did

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[1] Milton Shain, *Jewry and Cape Society: The Origins and Activities of the Jewish Board of Deputies for the Cape Colony* (Cape Town: Historical Publications Society, 1983).
[2] For the emergence of scientific racism, see Saul Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995).
[3] *Hansard*, 10 February 1930.

the press in general. 'Jews were the wrong type of immigrant', comments Sally Peberdy, an historian of South African immigration, 'because, although white, they were of the wrong race'.[4] Most importantly, my study challenged a conventional wisdom that saw the 'Jewish Question' of the 1930s and 1940s in South Africa as essentially a European import.[5]

Having stressed continuity rather than a break with the earlier decades, it became apparent that the anti-Jewish agenda was being driven by the Radical Right and was informed by European fascism and Nazism. This was vividly brought home only nine months after Hitler had been appointed Chancellor. At a raucous meeting held in late October 1933 at the Koffiehuis – a well-known Cape Town meeting place for politicians, students and writers – Louis Theodore Weichardt, a 39-year-old rabble rouser who had spent his teenage and young adult years in Germany, launched the 'South African Christian National Socialist Movement', later popularly known as the Greyshirts.[6] Blaming the Jews for all evils, Weichardt accused Jews of dominating the economy and spreading lies about Germany through the Jewish-owned press. Even worse, having won the First World War, they were now spoiling for another. He would put the Jew in his place, Weichardt shouted to rapturous applause. Jews, he warned, were stirring up hatred and were determined 'to crucify Christianity'. Obviously concerned about the appellation 'Socialist' in his organization's name, Weichardt denied allegations that his movement was 'camouflaged Bolshevism'. 'There are two classes of capitalists', he claimed, 'the man who works in the interest of the nation, and the other who obtains his wealth by means of international exploitation.' All fired up and far from satiated, the audience posed enthusiastic questions from the floor at the conclusion of his address. It was a most appreciative audience and at its conclusion gave the Nazi salute.[7]

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[4] Sally Peberdy, *Selecting Immigrants: National Identity and South Africa's Immigration Policies 1910–2008* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2009).

[5] See Milton Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa* (Charlottesville and Johannesburg: University Press of Virginia and Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

[6] An iconic Cape Town venue, Die Koffiehuis was situated next to the Groote Kerk, a short walk from Parliament. See Vivian Bickford-Smith, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden, *Cape Town in the Twentieth Century: An Illustrated Social History* (Cape Town: David Phillips Publishers, 1999), p. 77.

[7] For the full report, see the *Cape Times*, 27 October, 1933. See also Patrick J. Furlong, *Between Crown and Swastika: The Impact of the Radical Right on the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement in the Fascist Era* (Johannesburg: Wesleyan

Well-attended meetings at which Jews were the chief target continued apace in the immediate wake of Weichardt's address. Some ended in violence when opponents, among them young Jews, turned up to disrupt events.[8] At one meeting in Vrededorp, a working-class Johannesburg suburb, organized by the South African National Democratic Movement or Blackshirts, Manie Wessels and Chris Havemann denounced Jews as 'unwanted foreigners who were contaminating the South African people'. They were underpaying the non-Jews who sweated for them and had formed a worldwide conspiracy to gain control of the wealth of the world and direct it to pernicious ends.[9] Another speaker referred to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, calling it 'a conspiracy aimed at the overthrow of Western civilization'. Jews, he continued, 'had caused the Great War and the downfall of the great German Empire. The only way to deal with them, the audience was told, was to follow the example of Hitler and suppress them.'[10]

A short while later, Weichardt addressed a meeting in Port Elizabeth presided over by the Mayor. Ostensibly a protest against undesirable immigrants in general, Weichardt's focus was on the Jew. Spelling out the constitution and programme of the Greyshirts which specifically targetted Jews, he told the crowd that aliens who had entered the country from 1918 onwards would have to relinquish their South African nationality since they had not adhered to it.[11] The occasion turned nasty, with hecklers and 'Greyshirtists' engaging in bloody brawls, while others in the crowd sang 'Rule Britannia' in response to those giving Nazi

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University Press and Witwatersrand University Press, 1991); F.J. van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme as faktor in die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek, 1933–1948', DPhil dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, 1972; and Izak Hattingh, 'Nasionaal-Sosialismus en die Gryshemp-beweging in Suid-Africa', DPhil dissertation, University of the Orange Free State, 1989.

[8] See South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Executive Committee Minutes, 26 February 1934. Archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg. See also *Cape Times*, 16 February 1934.

[9] *Rand Daily Mail*, 1 February 1934.

[10] See *Zionist Record*, 2 February 1934. In a communication six weeks earlier to Morris Alexander, I.M. Goodman complained that the *Protocols* were being circulated in 'Port Elizabeth and elsewhere'. See I.M. Goodman to Morris Alexander, 20 December 1933. Alexander Papers BC 160, List 111 3c. Manuscripts and Archives Division, University of Cape Town.

[11] The movement's 'Programme' had 17 clauses, of which Clause Nine made it quite clear that Jews who had arrived after 1918 were 'unassimilable' aliens:
'No 9: Definite Immigration Laws to exclude all Alien Races who are unable by reason of their character to be assimilated by the white races of South Africa.

salutes.[12] 'Pandemonium reigned', reported the *Eastern Province Herald*, with blood flowing freely.[13]

By early 1934, the Radical Right, employing the symbols and rhetoric of German fascists, had attracted substantial attention across the country. Much space was devoted in the general press to the turn of events in both South West Africa and South Africa, and it was widely known that Nazi agents were spreading propaganda in the former German colony, now mandated to South Africa.[14] These activities were monitored by the South African government, which was obviously cognizant of the local pro-Nazi agitation.

In May 1934, Weichardt transformed his movement into the South African National Party (SANP) which included the Greyshirts – the 'Body Guard' of the party, specifically created 'to combat the pernicious influence of the Jewish race' and also to maintain order and protect the leader. The name change was a deliberate move by Weichardt to play a new role in the wake of the 1933 coalition agreement between Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog's National Party and Jan Smuts' South African Party that followed the dissolution of the National and Labour Party 'Pact Government' that had been in power since 1924.[15]

From the outset, Weichardt fashioned the SANP's racist, antisemitic and fascist philosophy, a *Weltanschauung* demonstratively drawn from European sources but grafted onto South African conditions. Patently

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(a) South African Nationality shall not be granted to any such Aliens who entered South Africa after 1st November 1918.
(b) Should South African Nationality already have been granted to any such Aliens, same to be declared null and void.'

Clause 17 spelled out the great enemies of the country: 'National welfare in the first place, and consider international Socialism, Communism, and International Capitalism as enemies of the State. As an independent member of the Commonwealth of Nations, we will do our share in promoting world peace along economic and political lines. HAIL SOUTH AFRICA.' *Die Waarheid/The Truth*, 23 February 1934. See also van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', pp. 56–82.

[12] See the *Zionist Record*, 2 February 1934.

[13] *Eastern Province Herald*, 30 January 1934.

[14] See the *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 January 1934 and the *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 4 August 1933.

[15] According to van Heerden, the birth of the Oranjehemde (Orange Shirts), a National Party shirt movement, was also a factor. See van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', pp. 46–47. It was also claimed that the movement was changed into a party in order to prevent meetings being banned by the government under the laws of Riotous Assembly. See Hattingh, 'Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 63.

inspired by Hitler's successful tactics in Germany, including Brownshirt thuggery and the 'Heil' greeting, and aided and abetted by anti-Jewish literature from South West Africa as well as Nazi support from abroad, the SANP did its best to set the national agenda.[16]

We know little about Weichardt's early life, but we do have three articles about his youth and early adult years, each obviously tendentious: his memoir published in the *Fascist Quarterly* in October 1936; 'A Short Biography of a Great Leader', published in his Party's bilingual weekly, *Die Waarheid/The Truth*; and a pamphlet, 'Die Man en die Plan vir die Volk' ('The Man and the Plan for the People').[17] Merging the accounts and using interviews conducted with Weichardt by F.J. van Heerden in 1972 and Izak Hattingh in 1983, a picture emerges of an aggrieved, disillusioned and Jew-obsessed man.[18]

Born on 23 May 1894 in Paarl (a small village near Cape Town), Weichardt moved to Pretoria – in what was then the South African Republic – as an infant with his older brother Carl and widowed mother Johanna. In 1906, his mother married a German schoolmaster and at the age of 12, after attending the German School in Pretoria, Weichardt was sent to the German-medium Neu Hanover Primary School in New Hanover, a village in the Natal Midlands (now KwaZulu-Natal) established in 1858 by German cotton planter families. One year later, the

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[16] As early as 1929, Major Heinrich Weigel had established a Nazi Party in the former German colony and from 1933 worked with the Nazi *Auslandsorganisation*. One of its objectives was to enrol *Reichsdeutsche* (German citizens) and *Volkdeutsche* (former German citizens and ethnic Germans) into the Nazi Party, and both groups were targets of a concerted and successful propaganda campaign. See Israel Gutman, Editor in Chief, *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan), pp. 122–23 and 'Union of South Africa: Report of South West Africa Commission 1936' U.G. 26-1936. Amidst growing calls to clamp down on Nazi activities, the South African government began to monitor closely developments in the former German colony. On 3 August 1933, an Ordinance was passed in South-West Africa enabling the Administration to control the situation. See also I. Goldblatt, *History of South West Africa, from the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* (Cape Town: Juta & Company Ltd, 1971), 231. Evidence certainly suggests that Weichardt was connected to the South-West African agitators.

[17] L.T. Weichardt, 'National Socialism in South Africa', *Fascist Quarterly*, 2(4) (October 1936), 557–70; Frikkie du Toit, 'A Short Biography of a Great Leader', *Die Waarheid/The Truth*, 3 January 1936; and Isak le Grange, 'Die Man en die Plan vir die Volk'. See also Steven Uran, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Fascism in South Africa: 1933–1945', MA dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1975.

[18] The interviews were incorporated in van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme' and Hattingh, 'Nasionaal-Sosialismus'.

family moved to Germany.[19] In 1914, Weichardt joined the German war effort and returned to South Africa in 1923. 'From then till 1933', he recounts, 'I struggled, within the ranks of one of the then existing political parties, to propagate the principles of National Socialism, and found myself checkmated at every turn by powerful financial interests, predominantly Jewish.' He was dissatisfied 'with the chicanery and corruption of South African politics' in which he was unable to find a place to conduct honest business due to the dominance of foreign or alien elements. Weichardt claimed that Jews – whom he referred to as the 'masters of gold' – had orchestrated South Africa's decision to abandon the Gold Standard that had benefitted only the rich. His disillusionment with the state of politics reached a climax 'when the majority of the Nationalist leaders abandoned the principles for which they had hitherto professed to stand and entered into an unholy, Jew-inspired alliance with the followers of General Smuts'.[20]

Following the collapse of the 'Pact Government' in 1933, many disillusioned South Africans were struggling to cope in the wake of the economic depression and political uncertainty. Huge income disparities existed between English-speakers and Afrikaners, with the latter poorly represented in white-collar occupations and the professions. There was a sense of malaise and inaction within the administration and the Hertzog–Smuts coalition appeared to provide little hope for the disaffected. Weichardt hoped to move into the political vacuum, but the real spur to action and his break from the National Party was the coalition between the National Party and the South African Party. This he found unacceptable and, believing that 'the struggle was

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[19] Under 'Child's Parent or Guardian', his school record at Neu Hanover Primary School notes Mrs J. Weichardt. Her address is given as 'Pretoria' and it was noted that Louis had come from the German School in Pretoria. He was at Neu Hanover Primary School for one year only. I wish to thank Erich Vorwerk for assisting me in obtaining the school registration record. Both van Heerden ('Nasionaal-Sosialisme', p. 36) and Hattingh ('Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 42) write that Weichardt attended an English-medium school in Natal. Hattingh also says Weichardt attended an English-medium school in Natal ('Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 42). In his affidavit supplied for the court case (*Louis Theodor Weichardt v. Argus Printing and Publishing Company* (1943) Provincial Archives of Western Cape), Weichardt explicitly indicates that he departed for Germany in 1906. According to Hattingh, the family only moved to Germany in 1912. Where was Weichardt at school from 1906 to 1912? Was this the so-called English school referred to in a propaganda pamphlet, 'Die Plan en die Man vir die Volk', by Isak le Grange? See also Uran, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Fascism in South Africa', pp. 169–70.

[20] See Weichardt, 'National Socialism in South Africa'.

futile under the prevailing party system', he abandoned the National Party.[21]

With headquarters in Cape Town, the SANP established regional sectors and divisions throughout the country. Its reach was helped by speedier rail communications, improved literacy and the spread of newspapers. Yet it would appear that despite many meetings in the small country towns, the membership of the uniformed Greyshirts never exceeded 2,000.[22] Accurate figures, however, are difficult to obtain. According to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the SANP as a whole – that is not only the uniformed Greyshirts – had in excess of 4,000 members in Port Elizabeth and environs alone, and claimed a membership of between 3,000 and 4,000 in Natal.[23]

SANP propaganda was tailored to incorporate both disillusioned English- and Afrikaans-speakers, with Weichardt himself more comfortable speaking English.[24] Betraying an affinity with Nazi racial categories, he defined the Dutch and English as branches of 'the same great Aryan race' capable of complete assimilation. According to him, anyone trying to keep the Dutch and English apart was simply playing 'the Jews' game', maintaining that the 'Jewish motto' had always been 'Divide and Rule'. Indeed, some articles in the SANP mouthpiece, *Die Waarheid/The Truth*, were published in English while others appeared in Afrikaans, demonstrating a determination to woo English-speakers and not simply build on the anger of aggrieved, impoverished and alienated 'poor white' Afrikaners.[25]

Indicative of this strategy was the fact that the publication's undisclosed one-time editor was the Scottish-born and educated Kerr Wylie

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[21] He was also irritated by Malan's tepid handling of the Quota Act of 1930 and the alleged boycott campaign led by Jews against Germany. See van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', p. 38.

[22] Van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', p. 44; and David M. Scher, 'Louis T. Weichardt and the South African Greyshirt Movement', *Kleio*, 18(1) (1986), 58. From the start, Weichardt was supported by English-speaking and Afrikaner businessmen. See Hattingh, 'Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 48.

[23] See 'The Anti-Jewish Movements in South Africa. The Need for Action', South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, July 1936. Weichardt told Hattingh ('Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 62) that membership by the end of 1933 was 3,000.

[24] His English, according to van Heerden, betrayed a German accent (personal communication).

[25] Weichardt believed that Afrikaners saw the movement as a means of dealing with the 'poor white' problem, while the English-speakers supported him in order to challenge the traditional English business establishment. See van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', p. 45; and Hattingh, 'Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 100.

who held the W.P. Schreiner Chair of Roman Law and Jurisprudence at the University of Cape Town.[26] Under his guidance (and later that of others), *Die Waarheid/The Truth* published fascist articles from abroad as part of a general assault on local and international Jewry. Its tone, tailored to South African conditions, was crude and defamatory, and bore all the hallmarks of the movement's Nazi mentors.

A rash of anti-Jewish Greyshirt meetings spread across the country. In Dalton, a village near Pietermaritzburg, the Natal Greyshirt leader, 36-year-old English-speaking horticulturalist, Ray Rudman, told a largely farming audience of about 300 (approximately 40 per cent of whom were German) how Jews had their 'poison fangs' in South Africa. Quoting extracts from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, he described Jews as 'snakes' who wished to enslave 'the goyim'. 'One by one, this accursed race of non-believers has laid countries low. They are one hundred per cent immoral and corrupt', he told the audience.

Obsessed with conspiratorial ideas, Rudman claimed that Jews had crept into the 'highest positions in the land' and that 'their breath taints and degrades every profession'. They preached free love, incited the 'Natives' and instigated war:

> While we are squabbling, Comrades, Ikey is rubbing his dirty greasy hands, and we are paying the price in blood and tears . . . Every Jew is a skunk. There is not a good Jew. They are all evil and filthy. Every mother must warn her sons of the fate which is his by the hands of Zion and send her husband and sons out to fight this evil. I urge you, Comrades, forget your animosity, and British, Boer and German, come out together as one man and fight Judaism until we have strangled the snake and it lies dead at our feet. This is a religious fight. The fight for Christianity.

Rudman went on to praise Hitler and the Nazis, maintaining that the Greyshirts alone could save South Africa.[27]

Three months earlier, during a meeting in Aberdeen in the Eastern Cape, the Eastern Province leader of the Greyshirts, 28-year-old

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[26] Wylie held degrees from Edinburgh and London and took up a position at the University of Cape Town at the age of 40 in 1924. See *Cape Times*, 22 June 1948. Wylie's efforts as editor were carried out secretly, presumably because of his position at the University of Cape Town. See Weichardt to J.H.H. de Waal, 24 October 1934. Weichardt Collection: PV 29 File 1, ARCA, Bloemfontein.

[27] A full report of speech was sent by the *Natal Witness* to the Board of Deputies, 17 June 1934. See South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Executive Committee

Johannes von Strauss von Moltke – the son of an English-speaking father of German origin – had dramatically claimed to have uncovered a sensational plot. Standing in the middle of Aberdeen's Market Square, he told a gathering of several hundred that he had in his possession a document secretly taken from the Western Road Synagogue in Port Elizabeth by a member of the Greyshirt movement that spelled out in meticulous detail a Jewish plot to control the world. In his exposé, von Moltke spoke of Jews dividing and exploiting Christians and ensuring their bondage to Jews within four generations. He warned the gathering about the corruption of 'the organised money powers' and the danger of Christians coming under the sway of the 'International Jew'.[28]

Von Moltke's dramatic speech that purported to throw 'light on the persecution of the gentiles by Organised Jewry throughout the world' was given front-page exposure in *Die Rapport*, owned by David Hermanus Olivier.[29] A rather simple farmer turned newspaper proprietor, Olivier had been introduced to von Moltke by Harry Victor Inch, the Port Elizabeth Greyshirt leader. Harboring clear sympathies towards the movement,[30] Olivier offered von Moltke the opportunity to insert news of the Greyshirts in his newspaper.[31]

Von Moltke repeated the accusation he made at Aberdeen at another Greyshirt meeting in Port Elizabeth attended by an audience of approximately 500. Before quoting from the ostensibly stolen document, von Moltke warned the audience that what they were about to hear would make their blood curdle. The audience appeared dumbstruck. 'A few seconds of intense silence prevailed throughout the Hall', noted *Die Rapport*. Von Moltke then asked the audience to 'abstain from violence

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Minutes, 27 June 1934. Rudman had been a member of the SA Horse IX Regiment and the SA Motor Cycle Corps during the First World War. R.K. Rudman Collection, PV 160, ARCA, Bloemfontein.

[28] *Die Rapport*, 6 April 1934.

[29] See *ibid*. The speech was subsequently published in English in *Die Rapport*, 13 April 1934 based on von Moltke's Port Elizabeth speech (see below).

[30] *Die Rapport* published a range of viciously anti-Jewish articles, focusing on Jewish conspiracies. Much of the material emanated from abroad. For example, articles from *The Fascist: The Official Organ of Imperial Fascist League of England* were appropriated.

[31] *Die Rapport* subsequently had 'Offisiele Orgaan van die South African Christian National Socialist Beweging' on its masthead and Olivier was appointed Greyshirt leader in Aberdeen. See Olivier's invitation to Johannes von Strauss von Moltke, 17 February 1934 and Olivier to J. von Moltke, 26 February 1934. 'Greyshirt Case': A1 Correspondence. BC 1105: Manuscripts and Archives Division, University of Cape Town. Von Moltke was happy to write articles for the newspaper at no cost.

of whatever form', but he did appeal to the 'Nordic peoples' in the city to form a self-defence organization to deal with 'such occult, alien organizations as are harbored in the Jewish synagogues... If the Jews dispute the truth of the contents of this document let them prepare a charge of theft against any person; then the Judiciary of this land will be able to decide what occult movement belongs to Jewry'.[32] The message was clear: the 'Jewish state' within the South African 'Christian state' was 'affiliated to other hostile Jewish states in other Christian states throughout the world'.[33]

The matter ended in a court defamation action brought by the Reverend Levy of Port Elizabeth against von Moltke, Inch and Olivier. At the trial, the inspiration behind the document became obvious. Purportedly written by a learned Jew and deriving its authenticity from Hebrew lettering at the top,[34] the document was supposed to be a copy of lectures discussing Jewish attitudes towards Christianity and issues pertaining to antisemitism and the Greyshirts. It claimed that from the time of Luther, Jews had manipulated the Christian Church and were planning to destroy the Roman Catholic Church, establish world communism and a dictatorship of the proletariat, as well as crippling the Greyshirts and handing over South Africa to the black population.

After nearly two weeks of proceedings, the court declared the document to be false and the defendants to have conspired to promote the interests of the Greyshirt movement. The court found their evidence to be riddled with fabrications and contradictions and the story surrounding it was labelled pure invention.[35] Yet despite its findings, the *Protocols* continued to be quoted and published. In fact, the trial actually stimulated the acceleration of 'Shirtist' activities. Among those encouraged by the *Protocols* was J.H.H. de Waal Jr., organizing secretary of the Greyshirts before he formed a splinter group, the *Christenvolk-Beskermingsbond* (Gentile Protection League), early in 1935. The central aim of his breakaway movement was once again the removal of Jews from their supposed control over South Africa. Launched in Cape Town

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[32] Quoted on the cover of Mark Lazarus, *The Challenge* (Port Elizabeth: Mercantile Press, 1935). *The Challenge* is a narrative of the proceedings of the Greyshirt trial. Mark Lazarus, a Port Elizabeth local Labour Party politician, was involved in the case.

[33] The speech was published in *Die Rapport*, 13 April 1934.

[34] It later turned out that the lettering actually spelled out 'Kosher lepesach' ('fit for Pesach') copied from the *South African Jewish Chronicle*.

[35] *Zionist Record*, 24 August 1934.

(also at the Koffiehuis), de Waal told his audience that they were gathered there with the aim of fighting 'the Jewish menace in South Africa'. This would be done by limiting Jewish rights such as revoking the citizenship of Jews who had obtained Union citizenship after 1918 and precluding Jews from employment in government offices.[36]

De Waal now became a serious player on the Radical Right and by June 1935, he claimed his movement had a membership of over 5,000. While such figures are not substantiated, de Waal certainly gained notoriety with a 61-page booklet, *My Ontwaking* (*My Awakening*), in which he explained the evolution of his insights into the Jewish question and how he had become alerted to this menace. One chapter, lifted directly from the *Protocols*, crudely demonstrated the existence of an international web of antisemitic literature in which Jews were described as exploiters, the disciples of Satan, ritual murderers, Bolsheviks and an international octopus bent on dominating the world. One of de Waal's cartoons, 'Rituele Moord' ('Ritual Murder'), was taken directly from the 'Blood Libel' number of the Nazi broadsheet *Der Stürmer*, as indeed were other pictures. Age-old canards about the Talmud were also included. All was grafted on to de Waal's warped beliefs about Jews in South Africa, including their corruption of Christian women and alleged manipulation of insurance agencies with fraudulently based business fires. A 'Verborge Hand' (Hidden Hand) guided all affairs, with Jews infiltrating all the country's institutions, often changing their names to dominate the professions.[37]

In addition to Weichardt's SANP and de Waal's *Christenvolk-Beskermingsbond*, other Radical Right movements inspired by Nazism joined the anti-Jewish bandwagon. By the mid-1930s, a number of groups – including offshoots of the Greyshirts – were operating:

- Johannes von Strauss von Moltke's South African Fascists, with its official mouthpiece, *Die Swastika*.
- Manie Wessels' South African National Democratic Movement.
- Chris Havemann's Blackshirt organization, known as *Die Volksbeweging*, an offshoot of the South African National Democratic Movement.

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[36] See 'A Memorandum on the Anti-Jewish Movements in South Africa', Alexander Papers, BC160: List IV, 24, Manuscripts and Archives Division, University of Cape Town; and Hattingh, 'Nasionaal-Sosialismus', p. 113–14.
[37] Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr de Waal, *My Ontwaking* (Cape Town, n.d.)

- The People's Movement, also known as the South African Gentile Organisation, operated under H.S. Terblanche. Its newspaper, *Terre-Blanche*, was emblazoned with two swastikas on the masthead.
- A National Workers' Union (*Bond van Nasionale Werkers*), known as Brownshirts. Members employed Nazi salutes and its expressed goal was to rid the Union of exploiters – 'those living on the sweat and blood of South Africans'.
- The 'Oranjehemde' (Orangeshirts), founded by Frans Erasmus, a junior Nationalist Member of Parliament, which targeted the ills of capitalism in general rather than focusing on the Jewish threat.[38]

It would seem that the divisions among these groups centred more on personality than policies. The leaders were marginalized individuals who were often in financial trouble. Filled with bluster and intoxicated with their own rhetoric and message, they did their best to bring their ideas to the centre of South African politics. Meetings became increasingly ugly and violent, with the 'party system' under assault and Nazism exalted. Membership figures are impossible to ascertain, but meetings – and there were dozens and dozens – were well attended and propaganda leaflets widely distributed.[39]

It was, however, Weichardt's SANP that gained most prominence and did its best to set the political agenda. Most importantly, Weichardt threatened to capture votes from D.F. Malan's 'Purified' National Party, founded as a breakaway from Hertzog in 1934 after the latter had merged with the South African Party to form the United South African Party, better known as the United Party. Even though the Greyshirt leader did poorly when he contested the Port Elizabeth North by-election in January 1936,[40] pressure on the 'Jewish Question' remained and was fuelled by the influx of Jewish refugees from Germany who were exempt from the Quota Act of 1930.

Although Jews made up less than five per cent of the white South African population, their alleged dominance in business and commerce was of escalating concern. Certainly, Malan and his 'Purified' National Party quickly climbed on the bandwagon and by late 1936 were at

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[38] See 'A Memorandum on the Anti-Jewish Movements in South Africa', Alexander Papers, BC160: List IV, 24 and South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Executive Minutes, 7 October 1934.

[39] South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Executive Committee Minutes, 26 April 1936.

[40] Weichardt attracted a paltry 498 votes out of a total of 5,868.

the forefront of anti-immigration protests. These reached a crescendo with the impending arrival of the *Stuttgart*, a ship with over 537 Jewish refugees from Germany that had been specially chartered to beat the financial strictures on immigrants that had been introduced by the United Party government.[41]

Significantly, the anti-Jewish immigration cudgels were now taken up by young Afrikaner academics, especially at the University of Stellenbsoch. Driven by a *völkisch* agenda and deeply concerned about the economic plight of the Afrikaner, these intellectuals – in particular Professors Hendrik Verwoerd, Christian Gustav Waldemar Schumann, Johannes Basson and Theophilus Ebenhaezer (Eben) Dönges – added a dose of gravitas to the anti-immigrant hullabaloo and in fact led the charge against the *Stuttgart*, adding academic ballast to the cries of the hoi polloi.[42]

On the eve of the *Stuttgart*'s arrival, the Greyshirts held a 3,000-strong protest meeting at Cape Town's Koffiehuis. Crowds spilled into the adjacent Church Square and at 10.20 pm, a rumour that the *Stuttgart* was due to dock at 1 am provoked hundreds in the audience to march to the docks. Within half an hour, about 400 Greyshirt supporters had gathered at the quayside; however, their plans came to naught as the ship did not dock, but instead dropped anchor outside the entrance to Table Bay. By the time the liner with flying swastikas eventually docked at 6 am the next morning, the crowd had largely dispersed, leaving only a small group of protesters on the quayside shouting antisemitic slogans and giving the Nazi salute.[43]

In January 1937, the United Party government, under relentless pressure from the National Party and the Radical Right (and facing an Immigration Bill from Malan), passed an Aliens Act to replace the Quota Act. The new legislation effectively blocked the influx of German-Jewish refugees, using notions of 'assimilability' as a qualification for entry.[44] But even this failed to satisfy the Radical Right. Malan now ominously

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[41] See Edna Bradlow, 'Immigration into the Union 1910–1948: Policies and Attitudes', PhD dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1978, Chapter XII, passim; and Lotta M. Stone, 'Seeking Asylum: German Jewish Refugees in South Africa, 1933–1948', PhD dissertation, Clark University, 2010, Chapter 3, passim.

[42] See Joanne L. Duffy, *The Politics of Ethnic Nationalism: Afrikaner Unity, the National Party, and the Radical Right in Stellenbosch, 1934–1948* (New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 84ff. Duffy also names A.C. Cilliers, C.G.S. de Villiers and J.A. Wiid.

[43] See the *Cape Times*, 27 October 1936.

[44] See Bradlow, 'Immigration into the Union 1910–1948', pp. 275ff.

called for a 'Nordic front' to win back for the English- and Afrikaans-speakers the ground they had lost to the Jews. Here Malan was of course relating to European notions of Nordicism and their complicated connections with Aryanism and European fascism, especially Nazism. Within this worldview, Jews – in contrast to the Nordic peoples – were a people apart and an ever-present threat.[45]

In an April 1937 speech in Stellenbosch, Malan delivered a blistering attack on the Jews, linking them to a range of evils, including communism and liberalism, and blaming them for bringing about the 'Fusion' of the National Party and the South African Party. More than that, he claimed that Jews were antagonistic to all nationalist movements and indeed sponsored miscegenation.[46] A week later, the Administrator of the Orange Free State and President of the *Afrikaanse Nasionale Studentebond* (Afrikaans National Student Movement (ANS)), J.F.J. 'Hans' van Rensburg, took the opportunity during an address to the ANS to praise Hitler and Nazism. Van Rensburg had visited Germany at the time of the Olympic Games and was greatly impressed by the pageantry accompanying a Nazi Congress at Nuremberg. He declared his pride at having met Hitler and other leading Nazis (including Alfred Rosenberg) and accepted willingly an invitation from the Nazi Party to become the Africa representative of the 'Anti-Comintern'.[47]

Clearly seduced by the Führer and impressed with what he had seen in Germany, van Rensburg told the students that National Socialism was 'the only salvation for South Africa' and the only answer 'to the subversive doctrines of Marx the Communist, a man who never did a stroke of hard work in his life'. Hitler, he said, was 'the Saviour of the Fatherland against the danger of International Communism'. Filled with *völkisch* allusions, van Rensburg referred to the 'spirit' of nationalism and its 'muscular' body. National Socialism, he told the students, meant submission of the individual to the nation (*volk*). According to him, the synthesis of Nationalism and Socialism was the 'perfect fusion': 'There is something bigger than each of us, and also bigger than the Afrikaners together as a group – and that is the Afrikaner Nation (*Afrikanervolk*).'

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[45] For Nordicism, see Christopher M. Hutton, *Race and the Third Reich: Linguistics, Racial Anthroplogy and Genetics in the Dialectic of Volk* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), Chapter 7.

[46] *Cape Argus*, 12 April 1937.

[47] See Hans van Rensburg, *Their Paths Crossed Mine: Memoirs of the Commandant-General of the Ossewa-Brandwag* (Pretoria: Central News Agency, 1956), pp. 102ff; and Uran, 'Afrikaner Nationalism and Fascism in South Africa', pp. 306–31.

In discussing the 'poor white' crisis, van Rensburg pointed out that 'the South African nation is becoming every year more and more a nation of sweated labourers in town, instead of a nation of independent farmers as it used to be… My tour in Germany showed me clearly that unless some form of National-Socialism be adopted in South Africa, we cannot hope to keep pace with the progress of the world'.[48]

With this burgeoning *völkisch* Afrikaner nationalism, it is not surprising that the 'Jewish Question' became an issue in the 1938 General Election. National Party propaganda – driven by its mouthpiece *Die Transvaler*, edited by Verwoerd – was underpinned by an insistence on the threat of Jewish domination and the need to put a complete stop to Jewish immigration. Political meetings became violent, with anti-fascists clashing with the Radical Right.[49] At the hustings, appeals were made to outlaw name changing and to limit the occupations of Jews. Indeed, both the Transvaal and Natal Provincial branches of the National Party had already precluded Jewish membership.[50] Although the 1938 General Election saw the defeat of the National Party, there were indications that its membership was expanding. More disturbing was the blame attributed to Jews at the highest levels for the Nationalist defeat.[51]

In early 1939, a paramilitary authoritarian movement, the *Ossewa-Brandwag* (OB) was founded. Born out of the *Eeufees* – the centenary celebrations of the 1838 Great Trek, a central pillar and pivotal event in the maturing of Afrikaner nationalism[52] – the OB attacked 'British-Jewish-Masonic' imperialism and capitalism, 'British Jewish' democracy, 'Jewish money-power' and 'Jewish disloyalty'. In the same year, Manie Maritz – a hero among Afrikaners for his role in the Anglo-Boer War and the 1914 Boer Rebellion – published his autobiography, *My Lewe en Strewe* (*My Life and Struggle*).[53] Like de Waal's *My Ontwaking*, the

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[48] *Die Waarheid/The Truth*, 14 May 1937.

[49] See, for example, Rebecca Hodes, 'Free Fight on the Grand Parade: Jewish Resistance to the Greyshirts in 1930s South Africa', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 46(3) (2013), 194–203.

[50] Charles Bloomberg and Saul Dubow (ed.), *Christian-Nationalism and the Rise of the Afrikaner Broederbond in South Africa, 1918–48* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 149.

[51] See, for example, *Die Transvaler*, 20 and 21 May 1938.

[52] See D. Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid, and the Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), Chapter 9, *passim*.

[53] Of course, the very title of the book suggests that it was modelled on Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

book illustrated the international reach of antisemitic literature and the impact of Nazi ideas in South Africa. It contained 27 pages of portions of the *Protocols* translated into Afrikaans.[54]

The impact of the Radical Right on mainstream Afrikaner politics was again evident in a private Bill introduced early in 1939 by the National Party's Eric Louw, a former ambassador to Europe and Washington DC and now the National Party's most vocal and scurrilous opponent of the Jews. The objectives of his Aliens (Amendment) and Immigration Bill were wide-ranging and constituted an undeniable assault on the Jewish community:

(a) To prevent people of Jewish parentage being given permits to reside permanently in the Union.
(b) To cancel the permits of aliens found to be without visible means of subsistence or to have engaged in communistic or other subversive activities.
(c) To compel aliens to obtain registration cards to be shown on demand to the police.
(d) To forbid aliens to change their names.
(e) To compel business firms to reveal fully the names of their owners, partners and directors.
(f) To compel employers of aliens to obtain permits for this purpose from the Minister of the Interior.

In addition, Louw's Bill contained a clause that 'no applicant for permission to enter the Union who is of Jewish parentage shall be deemed to be readily "assimilable"'. This clause also referred to British-born individuals. With regard to the business restrictions of aliens, the Bill provided for the Governor-General to designate by proclamation businesses that aliens could not own or be employed by, as well as specifying the number of aliens who might own or be employed in any business. Louw planned to make these provisions retrospective to include immigrants who had entered South Africa after 1930 who would then have to reapply for permission to reside in South Africa. Moreover, any alien who had entered South Africa after 1 January 1933 would not be permitted to remain in the service of any employer in the Union without a written permit from the Minister of the Interior.[55]

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[54] Manie Maritz, *My Lewe en Strewe* (Pretoria: Gepubliseer en Uitgegee deur Generaal Manie Maritz, 1939).
[55] *Government Gazette*, 1939.

A flurry of hostile comment followed the publication of the Bill in the *Government Gazette*. 'Let us hope that wiser counsels may prevail and that Dr Malan will induce his exuberant lieutenant to withdraw a Bill which might almost have been drafted by Herr Streicher himself', noted *The Star*.[56] 'Eric Louw beats the Fascist Drum', was the response of *The Independent*,[57] while the *Cape Argus* referred to the Bill as 'Contemptible'.[58] It was 'an example of naked Jew-hatred', concluded a government-supporting newspaper, *Die Suiderstem*.[59] 'Has there yet been a closer approximation in this country to the barbaric, reactionary doctrines of the Nuremberg legislation?', asked the *South African Jewish Chronicle*. 'Is there a clearer indication that Mr Louw's ultimate intention is to adopt the whole paraphernalia of German and Italian racialism?'[60]

Antisemitism was given further impetus following the South African Parliament's controversial decision in September 1939 to support the Commonwealth war effort against Germany. By contrast, the OB orchestrated a powerful anti-war sentiment that was shared by Hertzog and some of his followers who had left the United Party to reunite with the 'Purified' National Party at the outset of war.[61] OB energy was directed against 'a capitalist-imperialist conspiracy' orchestrated by 'elements alien to the volk' – an obvious reference to Jews – who were excluded from membership. As its leader Colonel C.J. Laas explained, 'they are unable to subscribe to the principles of the OB, the kernel of which is the preservation of the traditions and language of the Boer nation'.[62] Indeed, it was envisaged that ultimately the Jews would be stripped of their civil rights.[63]

By mid-1940, the OB had 45,000 members in the Orange Free State alone, most of them farmers. A special effort had also been made to incorporate those less well-off in small towns and to encourage them to join the rural commandos. Rapid advances were also made in the Western Transvaal and in the far north, where the OB could attract about

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[56] *The Star*, 10 January 1939.
[57] *The Independent*, 18 January 1939.
[58] *Cape Argus*, 9 January 1939.
[59] *Die Suiderstem*, 12 January 1939.
[60] *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 13 January 1939.
[61] The 'Purified' National Party had been established under D.F. Malan in the wake of the Hertzog–Smuts merger in 1934.
[62] *Die Transvaler*, 26 February 1940. Cited in Alexander Hepple, *Political Leaders of the Twentieth Century: Verwoerd* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1967), p. 88.
[63] Christoph Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel*, *Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the Ossewabrandwag* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2009), p. 320.

15,000 people to meetings. But the movement's greatest growth was in the larger centres, especially on the Witwatersrand, where white miners were encouraged to replace class with national struggle. The OB also made inroads in the south, with one critic estimating that 50 per cent of the Afrikaners in the Western Cape had joined within the first year of the OB's existence. Even Natal, with its dominant English-speaking population, had 12,000 members at that time, concentrated mainly around Vryheid and Utrecht. By the second half of 1940, it is estimated that the OB had 75000 mostly male members, including a number of academics,[64] and an elite paramilitary unit, the *Stormjaers* (storm troops).[65] Like all fascist movements, it provided a sense of belonging, a chance to transcend the material, and an opportunity to deal with the anomie of failure.[66] The OB followed in the tradition of European fascist movements. It was not an imitation, maintained van Rensburg: 'It is a movement which has assumed different names in various countries. In Italy it is called fascism, in Germany, National Socialism, in Spain, Falangism, and in South Africa, the Ossewabrandwag.'[67]

The OB's objectives – patently inspired by European National Socialism – were underpinned by Christian-National *Volkseenheid* (People's unity), an anti-war stance and support for republicanism,[68] all 'girded by anti-capitalist and anti-Semitic rhetoric'.[69] In essence, the OB was against individualism, which it characterized as a product of 'British-Jewish capitalism' that had taken hold of the Afrikaner. The 'money-power' had to be weakened, parasites made unwelcome and the natural resources of the country used to the benefit of all.[70] More

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[64] For membership and growth, see Christoph Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel. Radical Afrikaner Nationalism and the History of the Ossewabrandwag* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2008), pp. 346–51.

[65] It is difficult to date the formation of the Stormjaers exactly. See Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel*, p. 353.

[66] See M. Roberts and A.E.G. Trollip, *The South African Opposition, 1939–1945. An Essay in Contemporary History* (London and Cape Town: Longmans, 1947), p. 74.

[67] *Rand Daily Mail*, 16 March, 1942. Cited in George Cloete Visser, *OB. Traitors or Patriots?* (Cape Town: Macmillan South Africa), p. 17.

[68] Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel*, p. 331. See also van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', p. 129.

[69] See Marx, *Oxwagon Sentinel*, p. 337.

[70] See van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', pp. 130–33. A draft Republican constitution published by the Transvaal OB in April 1940 spoke of settling the 'Jewish question' as well as the 'poor white' and 'coloured' questions without delay. A precondition for citizenship in the envisaged republic would be 'pure white

menacing than simple numbers was the talk of a Boer armed uprising against the Smuts government.

In October 1940, van Rensburg became leader of the OB. His aim was to unite the Afrikaner people who had been divided by 'British-Jewish' parliamentarianism.[71] The terminology of 'blood purity', 'bonds of blood' and 'blood and soil' peppered his rhetoric.[72] This racist discourse was clearly spelled out in an OB document that identified five racial groups in South Africa: whites (both English and Afrikaans speakers), Jews, Africans, Coloured and Indians. Citizenship would be restricted to whites, who would act as state builders, and as far as Jews were concerned, the document described them as unassimilable 'non-Europeans' or 'Semites' who constituted an alien minority race that would fall under the control of the white group. This was based on notions of blood, with Jews understood to be a pre-Asiatic race not sharing the blood of the English or Afrikaner.[73]

These notions were also evident in a number of major National Party publications during the war years. Insurgent Afrikaner *völkisch* nationalism afforded no place to the Jew. This was certainly the case for Oswald Pirow's *Nuwe Orde* (New Order), a 'talk shop' within the National Party founded in late 1940. Like the OB, it focused on race and communism and was opposed to liberal 'British-Jewish' democracy. The grandson of German immigrants, Pirow had left South Africa for Germany at the age of 14 and had completed a doctoral degree in Germany. Highly regarded, he was appointed Minister of Justice in the 'Pact Government' in 1929 and thereafter served in the United Party government as Minister of Defence before joining Malan soon after the war began.

When he was a member of the United Party, Pirow had been extremely dilatory on the subject of rearmament and had even been accused of softening the country up for invasion. On a visit to the 1936 Olympic Games in Germany, he had expressed ferocious opposition to communism and assured Germans that South Africans did not look upon

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descent and service to the Afrikaans ethnic calling and incorporation into organic ethnic life would be a first requirement'. *Die Volkstem*, 5 October 1940. Cited in Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom*, p. 215.

[71] Van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', p. 125.

[72] See Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience, 1910–1967* (Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 130.

[73] *Uniale Omsendbrief 1/41*. OB Archives: GR 1/1/1: Rassevraagstuk: Algemene Uitgangspunt. Undated document. Cited in André van Deventer, 'Afrikaner Nationalist Politics and Anti-communism, 1937 to 1945', MA dissertation, University of Stellenbosch, 1991, p. 277.

the Nazi regime as a future enemy.[74] Two years later, in Europe, he rubbed shoulders with Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and Salazar, and a year after that – more precisely, three months after Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia – his daughter told London's *Daily Express* that 'the family felt more German than South African'.[75]

Acting as a National Socialist pressure group within Malan's 'Purified' National Party, Pirow's pamphlet, 'Nuwe Orde vir Suid-Afrika' ('New Order in South Africa'), fundamentally challenged inclusivity and presented plans for a 'South African national socialism'.[76] Published in December 1940 and reprinted seven times, Pirow built on J.H.O. du Plessis' *Die Nuwe Suid-Afrika – Die Rewolusie van die Twintigste Eeu* (*The Revolution of the Twenty-First Century*), which unashamedly supported totalitarianism and attacked liberal individualism and 'unnational' elements while extolling the corporate state.[77] The state, stressed Pirow, should be founded on a Christian basis, which meant 'that anti-Christian and even definitely un-Christian elements' would 'have no say'. It had to be 'national in the sense that all anti-national or unnationally disposed persons who do not unconditionally and exclusively and in good faith throw in their lot with their Fatherland are foreigners and must be treated as such'. Actual power, continued Pirow, would repose with the 'established section' of the population, 'with the exclusion of everything anti-nation, unnational and unassimilable'.[78]

Such proposals obviously excluded Jews from full participation in the envisaged body-politic. Even its educational documents for incoming cadres stated that the Jewish attitude to life was that of Shylock, 'a figure completely out of touch with the conceptions of right and wrong . . . completely legalistic and commercial' – an attitude 'absolutely incompatible with conceptions of the New Nazi State'.[79] British democracy and Jewish capitalism were accused of enabling exploitation and facilitating the power of money. Democracy was considered a sham. Instead, a guild system would operate in an organic polity deeply informed by Nazism and modelled substantially on fascist Italy.[80]

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[74] Yet he did make plans to protect key facilities in the Union and to ensure sufficient powers to police in the event of an emergency.
[75] Bill Nasson, *South Africa at War, 1939–1945* (Pretoria: Jacana, 2012), p. 38.
[76] See Oswald Pirow, *Nuwe Orde vir Suid-Afrika* (Pretoria: Christelike Republikeinse Suid-Afrikaanse Nasionaal-Sosialistiese Studiekring, 1941).
[77] Van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', pp. 57–61.
[78] See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, p. 131.
[79] Nuwe Order correspondence course, Lecture No. 14. Cited in *ibid*., p. 131.
[80] See van Heerden, 'Nasionaal-Sosialisme', pp. 163–88.

The turning of the tide of war against Hitler gradually eroded the warm reception accorded to Nazi and fascist ideas. By 1942, mainstream National Party leaders, including Malan, Verwoerd and Johannes Strijdom, were rejecting National Socialism as an alien import and endorsing parliamentary democracy. The OB on the other hand continued its unqualified support for Nazism.

The horrors of Buchenwald revealed to the world by the American Third Army in 1945 elicited no sympathy from the Nationalists and the Radical Right. Indeed, the OB, rather than reflecting upon the havoc wrought by Hitler, honoured those South African men interned for subversive activities during the war. 'Cold and callous' were the words used by the *Zionist Record* to describe the attitude of the Nationalist press with regard to the uncovering of Nazi atrocities.[81] Acknowledgement of the atrocities would, of course, have discredited Germany and made the Allied cause acceptable. *Die Burger*, aligned to Malan's National Party, effectively ignored the revelations,[82] while the *OB* (the newspaper of the OB) treated them as propaganda, going so far as to accuse *Die Burger* of failing to comment on what it believed were demonstrable lies.[83] It accused Jews of pursuing a propaganda campaign of hate against the German people, even denying that the pictures of Dachau were of people, claiming that they were instead the effect of a Russian disease characterized by 'moonie faces and incredible stench'.[84]

The trial of Nazi criminals at Nuremberg shortly after the war was also belittled in the Nationalist press, which deemed Britain and Russia as guilty of aggression and oppression as Germany. Shortly after the trial began, *Die Vaderland* referred to the 'Nuremberg Affair' as 'the ugliest caricature which has yet been made in the history of civilization of the principle of the administration of justice; the so-called trial was an act of revenge of the Allies and one of the most disturbing characteristics of the new world which the war has given us'.[85] Such sentiment persisted in the wake of the judgment at Nuremberg, with *Die Kerkbode*, the official organ of the Dutch Reformed Church, arguing that the trial had set a dangerous precedent. While acknowledging that Germany's crimes were horrific, it accused the Allies of having also

[81] *Zionist Record*, 4 May 1945.
[82] Sharon Friedman, 'Jews, Germans and Afrikaners: Nationalist Press Reactions to the Final Solution', BA Hons dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1982, p. 31.
[83] *OB*, 2 May 1945. See also *OB*, 11 July 1945.
[84] *OB*, 11 June 1945.
[85] *Die Vaderland*, 24 November 1945.

dirtied their hands with, for example, the horrific consequences of the atomic bomb.[86] *Die Nuwe Orde*, Pirow's mouthpiece, was more blatant. Under the headline 'In Memory of the Martyrs of Nuremberg', it placed a full page of the names of the convicted Nazis surrounded by a black border.[87]

The rise of the Radical Right and the escalation of antisemitism was a product of specific circumstances: Hitler's ascent to power; domestic political instability; Nazi infiltration into mandated South West Africa; the growth of African and Afrikaner trade unionism; the influx of German-Jewish refugees; Jewish upward mobility; contested definitions of (white) South African identity; a divisive 'European' war; and, most importantly, the growth of *völkisch* Afrikaner Christian-Nationalism, built upon the social misery of Afrikaners and steered by ethnic entrepreneurs. Long-standing ties with Germany and an historic hostility to Britain facilitated the transference of antisemitism from the the sphere of ideas into the party-political realm – what the historian Todd Endelman has referred to as the transformation of 'private' into 'public' antisemitism.[88] Certainly, prior to the launch of Weichardt's 'South African Gentile National Socialist Movement', anti-Jewish ideas had been articulated essentially at the level of iconography and stereotypes. From the late nineteenth century, the Jew had been characterized as devious and subversive; a symbol of modernity in an age of upheaval. For the unskilled and dislocated Afrikaners in the city, the Jew was identified as the *éminence grise* behind their misfortunes. Hoggenheimer, a grotesque antisemitic cartoon caricature personifying mining capital, strode colossus-like over an inhospitable urban landscape.[89] These tropes had now become a part of public discourse and politics, no doubt

[86] *Die Kerkbode*, 16 October 1946.

[87] Cited in the *Zionist Record*, 14 November 1947. See the October issue of *Die Nuwe Orde*.

[88] In this view, private antisemitism refers 'to the expressions of contempt and discrimination outside the realm of public political life', while public antisemitism refers to the 'eruption of anti-Semitism in political life – the injection of anti-Semitism into matters of policy and the manipulation of anti-Semitism for partisan political ends'. See Todd M. Endelman, 'Comparative Perspectives on Modern Anti-semitism in the West' in David Berger (ed.), *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1986), p. 104.

[89] In the 1920s, a League of Gentiles had been established with crude anti-Jewish proposal, but it failed to get off the ground. See Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*, pp. 120–25.

stoked by the Hitler 'revolution' and aided, at least to some extent, by propaganda from Germany.

With the outbreak of the Second World War and the initial successes of the Nazi military machine, the prospect of fascist politics, including antisemitism, rising to dominance among Afrikaners was real. Much hinged on the relationship between the National Party and the OB. In the end, Malan, always uncomfortable with non-parliamentary politics, terminated his flirtation with fascism. The change of war fortunes for the Allies ensured that the Radical Right would not grow. But at least some of the authoritarian lessons of the European Right were not lost on the National Party, which came to power in 1948 and immediately set about introducing its apartheid programme firmly built upon a colonial heritage and decades of segregation.

Reflecting on the 'Jewish Question' in the 1930s and 1940s, it is apparent that hostility towards Jews was not an aberration of South African thought or a moment of irrational deviation; rather, it was premised on the maturation of widely shared anti-Jewish stereotypes. Indeed, the Quota Act of 1930 would not have received popular support without these stereotypes.[90] But anger went much deeper, with calls to curtail opportunities for Jews. Injected into the bloodstream of South Africa's body-politic, major political parties increasingly took cognizance of mounting anti-Jewish feeling. Even an upturn in the economy from the mid-1930s failed to dampen a populist discourse in which the Jew was characterized as unassimilable, exploitative and subversive, and a challenge to a country grappling with its own sense of identity. For the first time, South Africans confronted a 'Jewish Question' in the broadest sense. Although deeply and indelibly linked to earlier ideas and stereotypes about the Jew, the transformation of 'private' into 'public' antisemitism was not simply a deepening of ideas. It was a product of specific factors; a set of contingencies – not least the rise of Nazism – that ultimately propelled South Africa's 'Jewish Question' in the decade before and during the Second World War.

[90] See Shain, *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*.

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