

### The historiography of the Shoah: an attempt at a bibliographical synthesis

Cattaruzza, Marina

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

Hannah-Arendt-Institut für Totalitarismusforschung e.V. an der TU Dresden

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Cattaruzza, M. (2006). The historiography of the Shoah: an attempt at a bibliographical synthesis. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 3(2), 285-321. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-310621>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Deposit-Lizenz (Keine Weiterverbreitung - keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Gewährt wird ein nicht exklusives, nicht übertragbares, persönliches und beschränktes Recht auf Nutzung dieses Dokuments. Dieses Dokument ist ausschließlich für den persönlichen, nicht-kommerziellen Gebrauch bestimmt. Auf sämtlichen Kopien dieses Dokuments müssen alle Urheberrechtshinweise und sonstigen Hinweise auf gesetzlichen Schutz beibehalten werden. Sie dürfen dieses Dokument nicht in irgendeiner Weise abändern, noch dürfen Sie dieses Dokument für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, aufführen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under Deposit Licence (No Redistribution - no modifications). We grant a non-exclusive, non-transferable, individual and limited right to using this document. This document is solely intended for your personal, non-commercial use. All of the copies of this documents must retain all copyright information and other information regarding legal protection. You are not allowed to alter this document in any way, to copy it for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the document in public, to perform, distribute or otherwise use the document in public.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.

---

# The Historiography of the Shoah – An Attempt at a Bibliographical Synthesis

Marina Cattaruzza

---



Prof. Dr. Marina Cattaruzza, o. Prof. für Neueste allgemeine Geschichte an der Historisch-philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Bern (Anschrift: UNITOBLER, Länggassstr. 49, CH-3009 Bern). Studium der Geschichte und Philosophie an der Universität Triest, Forschungsauf-

enthalte an den Universitäten Wien, Hamburg (als Humboldt-Fellow), am Institut für Europäische Geschichte in Mainz, an der Technischen Hochschule Darmstadt (Habilitation) und am Europäischen Universitätsinstitut in Florenz. Visiting Professor an der LUISS University in Rom.

## Abstract

Der Aufsatz zieht eine Bilanz zur Geschichtsschreibung der Shoah von den Anfängen (zweite Hälfte der 40er Jahre) bis heute. Durch die systematische Analyse der jeweiligen Schwerpunkte und Paradigmen verdeutlicht die Autorin, wie unterschiedlich die Shoah kontextualisiert wurde und welche Fragestellungen jeweils im Vordergrund standen. Seit den 90er Jahren rückte die Frage der „ganz normalen Täter“ in den Mittelpunkt, in den letzten Jahren erweitert um die Facette der Mittäterschaft am Holocaust seitens der nicht-deutschen Kollaborateure.

## I. Uncertain beginnings: from the primacy of foreign policy to a critique of irrationalism and to anti-Semitism as a “tool” for mobilizing the masses

This article aims to describe the most influent paradigms and topics of historical research on the Shoah in the years from 1945 to 2005 and to identify the major lines of development and cross-influence in the scholarly debate surrounding this most central issue in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.\*

Although the history of the destruction of the Jews of Europe cannot be considered separately from the history of National Socialism, the two are not com-

---

\* A different version of this contribution will be published in 2007 in Italian in: Marina Cattaruzza/Marcello Flores/Simon Levi Sullam/Enzo Traverso (ed.), *Riflessioni, luoghi della memoria, risoluzioni*, third vol. of: Cattaruzza/Flores/Levi Sullam/Traverso (ed.), *Storia della Shoah. La crisi dell'Europa, lo sterminio degli ebrei e la memoria del XX secolo*, Torino 2005–2007.

pletely indistinguishable. Of course, today we might well say that the history of the Shoah is one of the main chapters in the history of Nazism, and that the historiography of Nazism is strongly influenced by the historiography of the Shoah. Especially in the post-war years, however, the history of National Socialism was for the most part independent of the history of the Shoah. For example, in Alan Bullock's classic biography of Hitler, first published in 1952,<sup>1</sup> the extermination of the Jews is hardly touched upon at all. In a book of 838 pages, only three are devoted to the Holocaust. Bullock quotes the testimony of Rudolf Höß about the gas chambers at Auschwitz, describes the mass shootings of Jews and Communists by the *Einsatzkommandos*, and emphasizes how the plan of genocide can be directly ascribed to Hitler, who considered the Jews responsible for everything he hated most in the world. However, what interests Bullock above all else is Hitler's foreign policy, and the attempt to build a New Order in Europe based on the racial superiority of the *Herrenvolk* and on their imperial rule over the whole continent: "Such an empire could be won and maintained by force alone: there was no room for cooperation".<sup>2</sup> Bullock's study, as the title reveals, is an application of the classic category of "tyranny" (arbitrary rule) to the historical figure of the Nazi dictator. The eccentric but stimulating study by the British historian A. J. P. Taylor, which reconstructs German history from 1815 to 1944 (the manuscript was completed in September of that year), makes no mention of the Jews, not even in the last chapter, which nonetheless gives an outline of the attack on Poland and the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, considerable attention is paid to a topic subsequently neglected by many historians, namely the relationship between "Germans" and "Slavs". In his subsequent (and equally controversial) book on the origins of the Second World War<sup>4</sup>, Taylor saw Hitler's main objective as being the acquiring of *Lebensraum*, an objective which in his opinion had already been pursued by German politicians (including Bethmann-Hollweg) in power at the time of the outbreak of the First World War. Despite alluding to "*orders of a wickedness without parallel in civilized history*" delivered by the *Führer* and carried out by hundreds of thousands of Germans, and to the massacre of entire populations in the course of the Second World War, Taylor makes no explicit reference to the extermination of the Jews of Europe.<sup>5</sup> This line of investigation, by no coincidence almost exclusively the work of British historians,<sup>6</sup> would seem to lend support to Andreas Hillgruber's theory that during

1 Alan Bullock, *Hitler. A Study in Tyranny*, Oxford 1952.

2 *Op. cit.*, p. 700-703.

3 Cf. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History. A Survey of the Development of Germany since 1815*, London 1945.

4 A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Penguin Books, London 1991 (1961).

5 Cf. *ivi*, p. 23-27.

6 Cf. on the nature of the first series of studies of National Socialism by British historians also Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Cambridge (Mass.)/London 1981, p. 31-34. Dawidowicz correctly points to the strongly pragmatic nature

the Second World War, Nazi Germany was perceived by the western Allies primarily as a militarist, expansionist power, overwhelmingly conditioned by the Prussian nucleus to its history. The other thing that comes across very clearly in these early English studies is the immense pride and relief for having managed to win a war of titanic proportions whose terrible events were still fresh in the memory of soldiers and civilians alike.

Similarly, the reflections of the Marxist philosopher Georg Lukács upon Nazism as being the ultimate outcome of a “destruction of reason”, first published in Budapest in 1952, hardly consider anti-Semitism as a central and fundamental component of the National Socialist worldview, since Lukács’ main concern is to connect the Nazi *Weltanschauung* to the imperialistic expansionism of German capitalism and its plans to conquer an economic space to the East.<sup>7</sup> In 1961, the themes of German irrationalism and cultural pessimism (*Kulturpessimismus*) and their influence on National Socialism were analysed outside the Marxist interpretative framework by the German-Jewish historian Fritz Stern, in *The Politics of Cultural Despair*,<sup>8</sup> a work which investigated the thought of three of the leading figures of the German *völkisch*<sup>9</sup> movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, namely Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn and Moeller van den Bruck. Again, Stern seems to attach no great importance to the virulent anti-Semitism of de Lagarde (the founder of Germanic Christianity) and Langbehn, limiting himself to the casual remark that the same anti-Semitism could already be found in prominent exponents of German nationalism like Moritz Arndt and Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.<sup>10</sup> Although his theoretical starting point is different, Stern, like Lukács, focuses on the conflicting relationship existing between German culture and modernity, the Enlightenment, and the democratic values of the French Revolution.<sup>11</sup> The collection of essays edited by the *International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies* entitled *The Third Reich*, which appeared in 1955 under the auspices of UNESCO,<sup>12</sup> is a perfect example of this first phase of studies on National Socialism. It is significant that the piece

---

of the British historical tradition, tending to shy away from a critical analysis of ideological and cultural factors or questions related to mentality.

- 7 Cf. Georg Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Georg Lukács Werke, vol. 9), Neuwied am Rhein/Berlin-Spandau 1962.
- 8 Published by the University of California Press, Berkeley.
- 9 For the metaphysical nature of the concept of Volk (people), here is the definition provided by George Mosse “‘Volk’ signified the union of a group of people with a transcendental ‘essence’. This ‘essence’ might be called ‘nature’ or ‘cosmos’ or ‘mythos’, but in each instance it was fused to man’s innermost nature, and represented the source of his creativity, his depth of feeling, his individuality, and his unity with other members of the Volk”. From: George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, London 1966 (1964), p. 4.
- 10 Fritz Stern, *Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr: Eine Analyse nationaler Ideologie in Deutschland*, Munich 1986 (1963), p. 332, 348.
- 11 Ivi, p. 318–351.
- 12 Cf. *International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies* (ed.), *The Third Reich*, Richard Clay and Company, Bungay (Suffolk) 1955.

on anti-Semitism, written by Leon Poliakov, appears in the third part of the book, dealing with the techniques the regime used to dominate and subdue, and bears the title *The Weapon of Antisemitism*,<sup>13</sup> indicative in itself of the author's preference for an instrumental interpretation of the phenomenon. At the beginning of his essay, Poliakov, who had been writing a major study on the extermination of the Jews in those years,<sup>14</sup> explains that Hitler considered the singling out of a single enemy as indispensable for obtaining the support of the masses, and that the Jews lent themselves perfectly to the role of embodying absolute evil, representing at the same time a tangible target for popular prejudice. In the context of a discussion about the mass executions carried out in the eastern occupied territories, Poliakov suggests that, in the minds of the Nazi leaders, the crimes committed by the Germans were deliberately designed to strengthen the will to resist of a people who had burnt all their bridges behind them. Committing a crime together is the most effective way of creating a bond between people. "And while the demagogues and agitators," concludes Poliakov, "have always been masters of the art of exploiting the fomentation of an enormous mass of collective hatred, it must be admitted that it was the Nazis who had the macabre inventiveness to try to make full use of this weapon, to apply the method to its very limits".<sup>15</sup> The argument that taking part in atrocities against Jews (and other victims of the "crimes against humanity") gave the perpetrators of these crimes a greater will to resist "until the bitter end" was subsequently subscribed to by other historians, including Peter Longerich in his recent monumental reconstruction of the persecution of the Jews from Hitler's rise to power until the "Final Solution".<sup>16</sup> What is surprising about Poliakov's interpretation, however, is the fact that he sees this element as an *exhaustive* explanation both for Hitler's anti-Semitism and for the extermination of European Jewry in the course of the Second World War. There would be no break in this well-trodden path of investigations into German irrationalism until the publication of George Mosse's book, *The Crisis of German Ideology*.<sup>17</sup> Clearly inspired by the earlier works on *völkisch* thought and German irrationalism, in this pioneering study of German ideology, Mosse does what no previous scholar managed to do, and places ethnic and racial anti-Semitism at the very centre of the argumentative logic underpinning the late nineteenth century *völkisch* idea. The originality of Mosse's work lies in his shift of viewpoint from the high tradition of German antimodernist thought, to that of the *völkisch* movements and the production of ruralist, esoteric and anti-Semitic *Trivalliteratur*. By so doing, he is able to trace the crucial role of anti-Semitism in satisfying the drives for radical change pres-

13 Leon Poliakov, *The Weapon of Anti-Semitism*. In: *The Third Reich*, p. 832-851.

14 Leon Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine: le III Reich et les Juifs*, Paris 1951.

15 Poliakov, *The Weapon*, p. 848 (Anm. 13).

16 Cf. Peter Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung. Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung*, Munich/Zürich 1998, p. 535 f., 586.

17 First published in 1964.

ent at so many levels of German society, and at the same time in keeping the balance of power unaffected in social and economic terms.<sup>18</sup>

In any case, the attention paid in this first phase of studies to the cultural antecedents of National Socialism should induce us to put into perspective certain categorical statements to the effect that the first historians of National Socialism created an image of Hitler and his movement as being fundamentally nihilistic and motivated solely by a lust for power,<sup>19</sup> statements formulated in the wake of Hermann Rauschning's recollections<sup>20</sup> or by the biography by Bullock mentioned earlier. In reality, while the problem of the "cultural origins" of Nazism and its ideological foundations was quite clear to at least some of the authors of these early studies, they failed to take into account the event that in the future would come to represent the unavoidable "core business" of the Nazi phenomenon: the destruction of European Jewry.

## II. The beginning of historical reflection in Germany

In the immediate post-war years, when we consider the specifically historical reflection which took place in Germany about the previous twelve years, we find confirmation of a fundamental insensitivity towards the unspeakable tragedy that had just occurred. Friedrich Meinecke's spiritual testament *Die deutsche Katastrophe*,<sup>21</sup> written in 1945 in a Germany in ruins and stripped of its statehood, contained only a brief reference to the gas chambers, in the chapter about the relationship between Hitler's movement and Christianity. The elderly historian remarked that for Hitler and his followers, loving their neighbour stopped at their own people, and even then, only those who offered unconditional support to Nazism, adding that with regard to the hated Jews the usual ethical limits did not apply, and neither did principles based on human rights or regard for human dignity. "In the gas chambers of the concentration camps", Meinecke concluded, "the last trace of Christian morality and humanity died".<sup>22</sup> Such observations on

18 Cf. on these issues Saul Friedländer, *Mosse's Influence on the Historiography of the Holocaust*. In: Stanley G. Payne/David J. Sorkin/John S. Tortorice (ed.), *What History Tells*. George L. Mosse and the Culture of Modern Europe, Madison (Wisconsin) 2004, p. 134–147.

19 Cf. with regard to this historiographical verdict – to my mind too schematic – Andreas Hillgruber's essay, *Die "Endlösung" und das deutsche Ostimperium als Kernstück des rassenideologischen Programms des Nationalsozialismus*. In: *VfZ*, 20 (1972), p. 133–153, and in particular 133 f.

20 Hermann Rauschning, *Gespräche mit Hitler*, New York/Zürich 1940; Id., *Die Revolution des Nihilismus*, New York/Zürich 1938.

21 Cf. Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, Zürich/Wiesbaden 1946.

22 Ivi, p. 125. Cf. on *Die deutsche Katastrophe* the critical comments by Lucy Dawidowicz in: Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, p. 58 f.

the anti-universalistic nature of the Nazi conception of the world are not incorrect as such, but they show that for Meinecke too, the extermination of the Jews was anything but central to an understanding of the phenomenon that was Nazism. To him, it was just one of the symptoms of the profound crisis of values which had overwhelmed the Europe of the French Revolution, a Europe in which the masses had become the protagonists of political action, and it was a crisis which in Germany had taken on a character all of its own, due to the militarist imprinting of the Second Empire, the fast pace of modernization, the predominance of technology, the trauma of defeat in the First World War, and the presence of a man like Adolf Hitler. As Bernd Faulenbach pointed out some years ago, in the first decade after the war, historiographic debate in Germany had more to do with national identity than with “a clear critical elaboration of the experience of dictatorship”.<sup>23</sup> This approach was the predominant one also in the thinking on German history reflected in international historiography, which was much more concerned with tracing the lines of continuity between Germany’s past and the Third Reich than with analysing the various aspects of the National Socialist phenomenon. The only significant difference in the two historiographical approaches was that the non-German historians emphasized the specifically Germanic elements, while the German historians tended to give more importance to the bigger picture of crisis in Europe.<sup>24</sup>

In any case, the need to deal with the “German catastrophe” certainly gave very strong impetus to the study of contemporary history in the Federal Republic of Germany. As early as 1949, the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* was founded in Munich, while the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* began life in 1953. While conceding that the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* had made an extremely important contribution to historical knowledge about National Socialism, Lucy Dawidowicz was unhappy about the dry, impersonal tone of its publications. “In part, the overload of factual detail induces tedium”,<sup>25</sup> was the American historian’s comment. These criticisms were taken up and expanded upon in Nicolas Berg’s weighty doctoral thesis, which accuses the historians who were working at the *Institut* in Munich of insensitiveness to the experience of the victims and inability to integrate the suffering of witnesses who survived the atrocities into their work.<sup>26</sup> In this regard, however, two important considerations need to be made:

23 Cf. Bernd Faulenbach, *La storiografia tedesca dopo la dittatura di Hitler*. In: Gustavo Corni (ed.), *I muri della storia. Storici e storiografia dalle dittature alle democrazie 1945-1990*, Trieste 1996, p. 55-78, here 64 f.

24 A classic example of how National Socialism is placed in the context of a general European crisis is Gerhard Ritter’s, *Europa und die deutsche Frage. Betrachtungen über die geschichtliche Eigenart des deutschen Staatsdenkens*, München 1948.

25 Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, p. 62.

26 Cf. Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker*, especially p. 274-277, 319 f. In his heated attacks on the historians of the Munich Institut, Berg fails to adequately contextualize the methodological attitude they adopted in the light of the German historiographical tradition. Of course, their inability to place the Holocaust at the centre of their research activity represented a serious cognitive limitation in the 1950s,

a) German historiography, for so long dominant internationally,<sup>27</sup> had defined itself in terms of the Rankian paradigm of historical objectivity, which required the historian's attitude to be as impersonal as possible.<sup>28</sup> The catastrophe of the Second World War did not automatically lead to this paradigm being called into question.<sup>29</sup> b) Outside Germany, too, the personal accounts of the victims were for several decades a neglected theme in historical narration.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is rather disconcerting to note that in the bulky volume which appeared in 1999 to celebrate the *Institut's* fiftieth anniversary, not a single chapter deals with its part in the historical reconstruction of the genocide of the Jews.<sup>31</sup>

### III. The destruction of the Jews of Europe

The initial work on the Shoah was done by a few "outsiders", such as the above-mentioned Leon Poliakov, the British scholar Gerald Reitlinger, and some years later, the American Raul Hilberg. Despite the excellent sources available,<sup>32</sup> his-

---

but as we have pointed out, it was a limitation which German historians had in common with their colleagues in other countries.

- 27 On the respect accorded to the Rankian method as a paradigm of "scientific history" well into the twentieth century cf. George G. Iggers, *The Image of Ranke in American and German Historical Thought*. In: *History and Theory*, 2 (1962), p. 17–40.
- 28 Cf. Winfried Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, München 1989, p. 201 f. The paradigm of historical objectivity was not radically called into question at the international level until 1974, with the publication of Hayden White's revolutionary study, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Baltimore/London 1974.
- 29 On the methodological continuity of German historical thought after 1945 cf. Schulze, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*; Ernst Schulin (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg (1945–1965)*, Munich 1989. Cf. also Bernd Faulenbach, *La storiografia tedesca dopo la dittatura di Hitler*. In: Corni (ed.), *I muri della storia*, p. 55–78.
- 30 An exception in this respect is the reconstruction of the experiences of victims carried out by the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem. Cf. for example the indexes of the volumes of "Yad Vashem Studies" for the period 1957–1967: *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance. Indexes to Vols. I–VI*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1969. Since 1988, the memory of Holocaust victims has been the subject of numerous articles published in the journal "History and Memory", published by the Eva and Marc Besen Institute for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of Tel Aviv.
- 31 Horst Möller/Udo Wengst (ed.), *50 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Eine Bilanz*, München 1999.
- 32 The Nuremberg trials of the major Nazi war criminals presented a unique opportunity for historical reflection upon Nazism immediately after its defeat. For the presentation of the evidence at the trials, more than one hundred thousand official documents were collected which had been systematically seized and catalogued by the Allies during their advance through Germany and in the early days of their occupation. Nuremberg has been called "the biggest research centre for history and the political sciences" (cf. Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung*



torians did not yet deal with the subject “Auschwitz” and even less with its ethical and metahistorical implications as a central element of contemporary consciousness.<sup>33</sup> In 1953, Gerald Reitlinger published the first broad study on the extermination of the Jews, entitled *The Final Solution: the Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939–1945*, based primarily on the documentation produced at Nuremberg and on the proceedings of subsequent trials,<sup>34</sup> supplemented by memoirs and the testimonies of survivors. The work was published in Great Britain by an obscure publishing house and only a few hundred copies were sold.<sup>35</sup> The same fate befell Leon Poliakov’s work, *Nazism and the Extermination of the Jews*, translated from French into English thanks to the generosity of a Jewish businessman.<sup>36</sup> Neither of the books gained any mention in the most important specialist journals of the time. In the 1950s, when Raul Hilberg, the author of what is still the standard work of reference on the extermination of European Jewry, told his professor Franz Neumann that he had decided to write his doctoral thesis on the Nazi murderers, Neumann’s reaction was “It’s your funeral”.<sup>37</sup> With hindsight, Hilberg made the following comment about Neumann’s reaction: “He knew that at this moment I was separating myself from the mainstream of academic research to tread in territory that had been avoided by the academic world and the public alike”.<sup>38</sup> For Hilberg, it would be a life’s work. As a doctoral student, he examined tens of thousands of documents deposited by the Allies at the *Federal Record Center* in Alexandria (Virginia). The part with the shelves containing the documents of the German authorities, of the different branches of the Nazi party and the various military corps was eight kilometres long. It was the first time anyone had dared to take on such a task. The dissertation was accepted in 1955, but only published in 1961 by a small American publisher. It was not translated into German until 1985.<sup>39</sup>

Still today, *The Destruction of the Jews of Europe* remains the most complete and well-documented work on the subject, and represents a classic text of refer-

---

mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute, München 2001, p. 46); Raul Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, München 1985 (1961), vol. II., p. 1300–1308; Id., *Sources of Holocaust Research*, Chicago 2001.

- 33 Cf. on this complex subject the important study by Enzo Traverso, *L’Histoire déchirée: essai sur Auschwitz et les intellectuels*, Paris 1997; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 103–123; Dan Diner (ed.), *Denken nach Auschwitz*, Frankfurt a. M. 1988.
- 34 On the role of juridical sources in historical research into National Socialism cf. Marina Cattaruzza, *La ricerca storica sul nazionalsocialismo e le fonti giudiziarie*. In: *Storia della Storiografia*, 41 (2002), p. 101–115.
- 35 Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution – The Attempt to Exterminate the Jews of Europe 1939–1945*, London 1953; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 103.
- 36 Poliakov, *Bréviaire de la haine*; Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, p. 103.
- 37 Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory. The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, Chicago 1996, p. 66.
- 38 Ivi.
- 39 Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, p. 69–90, 161–175.

ence in research on the Holocaust.<sup>40</sup> The reconstruction is based on Hilberg's by now famous model, according to which the persecution and extermination of the Jews was carried out in four phases: definition, confiscation, concentration, and extermination. The extermination took the form either of mass shootings by the mobile units or of mass deportations to the extermination camps scattered throughout occupied Europe. While emigration was still a possible alternative during the first three phases, once the persecution took the form of genocide, every escape route was closed.

*The Destruction of the Jews of Europe* is an impressive achievement, and provides a detailed description of the process by which the measures of persecution became progressively more radical. For the first time, a historian dealt with the theme of the complex network of complicity and connivance involving thousands of people which was needed to put into motion the apparatus of total destruction and keep it working efficiently for years. The extermination was a bureaucratic procedure bound to succeed because every available expert contributed, providing ideas and know-how. "This all-encompassing readiness, which had to be deep-rooted, carried certain implications for the question of what Germany was all about",<sup>41</sup> was Hilberg's comment. This was how he described the impact of his work on international public opinion: "Topics may be suppressed or catapulted to public attention, but always for reasons that reflect the problems and needs of a society. [...] For Germany the time did not come until the 1980s, when the perpetrators were either dead or in old-ages homes, and when for the first time their sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters, could openly ask questions about the activities of their elders during the Nazi era. [...] In both Germany and France decades passed before my work was translated, but then the reception exceeded my expectations".<sup>42</sup>

#### IV. Eichmann in Jerusalem and the Auschwitz trials

In the early Sixties, two sensational trials focused attention once again on the crimes of the Nazis, and led to a significant shift in emphasis, both in public opinion<sup>43</sup> and in the historiography on the subject.

In 1960, Adolf Eichmann, previously a high-ranking SS-officer, was captured in Argentina by the Israeli Secret Service and flown to Jerusalem for trial. Eichmann, who had been in charge of the deportation of Jews to the death

40 Alongside Hilberg's work, we should also include today, among the general works on the Holocaust, at least Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung*.

41 Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, p. 124.

42 Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory*, p. 123 f.

43 On the impact of Eichmann's trial on international public opinion cf. David Cesarani (ed.), *After Eichmann. Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961*, Abington 2005.

camps and had coordinated the Wannsee Conference, was condemned to death by the Israeli court and executed.<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly, the court proceedings against Eichmann, which were publicized by the mass media all over the world, were instrumental in introducing for the first time, also to the public at large, the idea of the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust compared to the Nazis’ other crimes (and not only to their crimes). The most significant response to the “Eichmann case” is most certainly Hannah Arendt’s pamphlet *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, which started life when Arendt was asked to cover the trial for the American magazine *New Yorker* and eventually appeared in book form in 1963. In it, a universal meaning is conferred to the “banality of evil”-formula, and the German-American philosopher becomes the first thinker to pose a problem summed up decades later with the phrase “ordinary men”, namely: how did it come about that a nondescript individual like Adolf Eichmann could commit such heinous crimes?

Hannah Arendt took up at a philosophical level the same problem Raul Hilberg dealt with using a historical, empirical approach: the genocide of the Jews was carried out by thousands of petty bureaucrats, and planned and carried out just like a bureaucratic procedure. Many of the perpetrators felt no particular hatred for the victims and did not belong to the category of fanatical anti-Semites (although this claim has been challenged in subsequent historiography, especially with regard to Eichmann<sup>45</sup>).

With *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Hannah Arendt was the first to reflect, at a metahistorical level, on the universal nature of the Holocaust. The extermination of the Jews, as she sees it, is a crime against humanity committed on the body of the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism may explain the choice of the victims, but not the nature of the crime. Genocide is a crime against the plurality of human beings, and therefore against human existence itself. Therefore the destruction of European Jewry represents “an attack upon human diversity as such, that is, upon a characteristic of the “human status” without which the very words “mankind” or “humanity” would be devoid of meaning”.<sup>46</sup> An International Court of Justice would therefore have been more suitable to judge Eichmann than the court in Jerusalem.<sup>47</sup> The conclusion she reaches is in line with her earlier thinking on totalitarianism: in fact, it is a quality of totalitarianism to oppose any and

44 Cf. Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, London 1963.

45 For Eichmann’s virulent antisemitism and his membership of völkisch circles cf. now David Cesarani, *Eichmann: his life and crimes*, London 2004. According to Cesarani, Hannah Arendt adapted the figure of Eichmann to fit her own idea of the individual when inserted into a totalitarian reality. Cf. Cesarani, Introduction. In: Id., *After Eichmann*, p. 6. For a critical analysis of the sources in the “Eichmann Case” cf. Christian Gerlach, *The Eichmann Interrogations in Holocaust Historiography*. In: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 15 (2001), p. 428–452.

46 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York 1994, p. 269.

47 Ivi, p. 260–284.

every manifestation of individuality and specificity in human nature which might pose a threat to the need for total domination.

The trial of Eichmann had important repercussions for the prosecution of Nazi criminals in the Federal Republic of Germany, which in the meantime had become an independent state. Soon after Eichmann's capture, the assistant of Rudolph Höss at Auschwitz, Robert Mulka, was arrested by the West German authorities, and other war criminals who were personally involved in making the apparatus of destruction function and were responsible for the deaths of thousands of people, were apprehended and sentenced by a German court.<sup>48</sup> The trial was held in Frankfurt from December 1963 to August 1965.<sup>49</sup> Leaving aside the question of whether the sentences passed down were adequate (most of the accused were merely found guilty of being accomplices to murder), these trials sparked off a debate in West German society about "the most recent past" ("*jüngste Vergangenheit*").<sup>50</sup> The newspapers published reports on the court hearings every day, and so the general public was brought face to face with the monstrous reality of what had happened only twenty years earlier. There were consequences for historiography too. The Auschwitz trials<sup>51</sup> required detailed reports that would throw light on questions such as the persecution of the Jews, the structure of the SS, the concentration camps, and the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* in the Soviet Union. These reports were prepared carefully and objectively for the courts by professional historians, who in the Seventies and Eighties were to become some of the major experts on the history of National Socialism: Hans Buchheim, Helmut Krausnick, Hans-Adolf Jacobsen and Martin Broszat. In two volumes, the reports came to represent a basic text for understanding the structure and internal mechanisms of National Socialist power<sup>52</sup> and provide the essential basis for the interpretative standoff between "intentionalists" and "structuralists" or "functionalists", soon to develop in the sphere of German historiography.

48 Cf. Irmtrud Wojak, *Die Verschmelzung von Geschichte und Kriminologie. Historische Gutachten im ersten Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess*. In: Norbert Frei/Dirk Van Laak/Michael Stolleis (ed.), *Geschichte vor Gericht. Historiker, Richter und die Suche nach Gerechtigkeit*, Munich 2000, p. 29–45.

49 Cf. Hermann Langbein, *Der Auschwitz-Prozess. Eine Dokumentation*, Frankfurt a. M. 1995 (1965), 2 volumes.

50 On the inadequacy of the usual legal categories in cases such as genocide, an inadequacy which emerged clearly in the Auschwitz trials, see now Devin O. Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial, 1963–1965. Genocide, History and the Limits of the Law*, Cambridge et al. 2006.

51 Cf. in addition to the documentation produced by Hermann Langbein also Bernd Naumann, *Auschwitz. Bericht über die Strafsache gegen Mulka u. a. vor dem Schwurgericht Frankfurt*, Frankfurt a. M. 1965.

52 Hans Buchheim/Martin Broszat/Hans-Adolf Jacobsen/Helmut Krausnick, *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, Munich 1967, 2 volumes. The reconstruction of the "final solution" was entrusted to Helmut Krausnick.

## V. The discovery of ideology

Between the Sixties and Seventies, there was a kind of “Copernican revolution” as regards studies on National Socialism, and this had immediate implications for the interpretation of the Shoah. The end of the Seventies saw the appearance of the first great summary of the history of National Socialism, written by Karl Dietrich Bracher: *Die deutsche Diktatur*.<sup>53</sup> This work, almost 600 pages long, is a reconstruction of the Nazi phenomenon from its origins to the military defeat in 1945. Taking the concept of “totalitarianism” as his starting-point, Bracher argues that National Socialism is not a manifestation of “fascism” but is more comparable, if anything, to the Soviet regime under Stalin, given the wish to annihilate the “absolute enemy” (the Jew) identified on the basis of pseudoscientific arguments according to which the race struggle (like the class struggle in the Soviet Union) would provide history with an exclusive attribution of meaning. Bracher is also one of the first scholars of Nazism who postulated a central role for Hitler as the charismatic *Führer* in the unspeakable crimes committed by the Germans during the Third Reich, and interpreted the extermination of the Jews as the implementation of certain objectives formulated within the framework of a hateful ideology but one which nonetheless had its own internal coherence.<sup>54</sup>

An additional and fundamental investigation into the central role of Hitler in the extermination of the Jews was completed by Eberhard Jäckel in 1969.<sup>55</sup> Until then, the studies of cultural and intellectual history had been focused on the possible antecedents of Nazism in German culture (“irrationalism”). Eberhard Jäckel was the first scholar who specifically examined Adolf Hitler’s worldview as presented in his writings and speeches. In Jäckel’s view, Hitler’s vision of reality, though it may have been twisted, was quite coherent. In this vision, eliminationist anti-Semitism and the need for “*Lebensraum*” were central and to be considered equally important, because they were the ideological mainstays from which Hitler developed the objectives of destroying the Jews and advancing in Eastern Europe as far as the Ural. Jäckel also stresses the elements of social Darwinism in Hitler’s thought, his vision of history as an “eternal struggle” and his idea of the supremacy of the “community of people” (*Volksgemeinschaft*) over the State. Eberhard Jäckel sees his own studies as a contribution to a vision of National Socialism centred around the figure of the *Führer* who, once he had gained absolute power over the German people, devoted himself to realizing the aims whose ideological foundations had already been laid in 1925, when *Mein Kampf* was written.

53 Karl Dietrich Bracher, *Die deutsche Diktatur. Entstehung, Struktur, Folgen des Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne 1993 (1969).

54 Bracher, *Die deutsche Diktatur*, p. 456–468.

55 Cf. Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitlers Weltanschauung*, Stuttgart 1969.

In 1972, the “intentionalist” interpretation of the Holocaust gained some ground in the shape of an important study by Andreas Hillgruber,<sup>56</sup> which provided the first convincing reconstruction of the connection in Hitler’s mind between eliminating the Jews of Europe and securing *Lebensraum* in the east. Emphasizing once again the central importance of Hitler’s vision of the world as the principal factor shaping political action, Hillgruber traces the intimate and “necessary” connections which unite the twin objectives and render them the cornerstones of a terrifying conception of reality. According to Hillgruber, Hitler’s view of the war against the Soviet Union had the following aims:

1. The elimination of the “Judeo-Bolshevik” leadership, including its alleged biological roots, namely the millions of Jews of central and eastern Europe;
2. The acquisition of colonial space for German settlers in what Hitler considered to be the best territories in Russia, or in those areas Hitler deemed important from a political or strategic point of view;
3. The decimation of the Slav peoples and their subjugation to Germany divided into four “states”, the “Reich Commissariats” Ostland, Ukraine, Moskovia and Caucasus under the control of German “viceroys”. Here, Hitler was referring to his personal ideal of colonial dominion, represented by the role of Britain in India. The main aim of German rule would be to cancel out in the masses any memory of Russian statehood and to reduce them by these means to a state of blind obedience to their new “masters”;
4. In the end, the autarchy of a “great space” would be achieved in the continental Europe under German dominion which would be able to beat the blockade, and for whom the conquered eastern territories would represent a theoretically inexhaustible supply of food and raw materials. This seemed to be the absolute pre-condition for the “German Reich of the Germanic nation” to be able to turn the tide of war against the Anglo-Saxon powers and win any “world war” in the future. The intention that all the armed forces should be fed by Russia, which would mean that “many millions of people will be starved to death”, was already contemplated in a directive from the Economic Staff East no later than 2 May 1941.<sup>57</sup>

Hillgruber’s short but brilliant article contained some strikingly new elements with regard to several historiographical issues: for the first time it placed the extermination of the Jews in the overall context of Hitler’s aims to create a continental Reich dominated by the “superior race” (the Germanic one). In fact, since in Hitler’s mind the Jew represented pure racial negativity, and as such, a permanent element of decomposition of the structures of the state, German domination in the eastern territories could only be guaranteed if the Jewish ele-

56 Andreas Hillgruber, Die “Endlösung“ und das deutsche Ostimperium als Kernstück des rassenideologischen Programms des Nationalsozialismus. In: VfZ, 20 (1972), p. 133-153.

57 Ivi, p. 140.

ment was annihilated. The genocide of the Jews was therefore the necessary premise for ensuring Germany's position as a "world power". Secondly, Hillgruber argues convincingly that in the sphere of Hitler's aberrant ideas on race, any distinction between domestic policy and foreign policy disappeared. Thirdly, the genocide of the Jews was identified as a more radical manifestation of racially-motivated extermination plan on an apocalyptic scale, which involved the murder of millions of people belonging to the so-called "inferior races".

## VI. "Intentionalists" and "structuralists"

The renewed attention paid by historians to the theme of Hitler's *Weltanschauung* was the prelude to a extremely important historiographical debate about the internal dynamics of the extermination policy, the role that Hitler played in it, and the decision-making mechanisms within the Nazi regime. The debate centred on the nature of the Nazi state, which was interpreted either as a relatively monolithic structure, subordinate to the will of the charismatic leader (by the "intentionalists") or as a polycratic one, characterized by an overlapping and mixing-up of authority and responsibilities of a whole series of state bodies, party representatives or SS-leadership (by the "structuralists"). Also in this latter case, however, Hitler was still the supreme source of legitimacy and integration of the system. Oddly enough, the debate began with an article by Martin Broszat in the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* in 1977,<sup>58</sup> in which Broszat expressed his agreement with certain theories of David Irving, yet to become the emblem of historiographical negationism. Irving's theories were already slightly bizarre then, however, since he not only argued that Hitler had not given the order to exterminate the Jews but also that, until 1943, he was unaware it was taking place.<sup>59</sup> Broszat's response to Irving was that Hitler was indeed to be seen as the main inspiration behind the genocide, but that the extermination of the Jews of Europe, carried out principally between the second half of 1941 and the end of 1942, was not the realization of a plan pursued systematically and conceived much earlier,<sup>60</sup> but the result of various obstacles in the bloody and brutal operations of deportation of the Jews to the "east" and of their being herded together into ghettos. The Russian campaign would be the key factor, since when the invasion of Russia stalled, the setbacks after the initial rapid advance made it impossible to complete the deportation operations. The decisional process which led to the extermination of the Jewish people who had fallen into the hands of

58 Martin Broszat, Hitler und die Genesis der "Endlösung". Aus Anlass der Thesen von David Irving. In: VfZ, 25 (1977), p. 735-775.

59 Cf. David Irving, Hitler's War, London 1977.

60 For a paradigmatic example of intentionalistic interpretation, cf. Lucy S. Dawidowicz, The War Against the Jews 1933-1945, New York 1975. See also Hillgruber, "Endlösung" und Ostimperium.

the National Socialists developed in a kind of interaction between the centre and the periphery, and did not come about solely as a result of the orders given by Hitler, Himmler and Heydrich. The Holocaust was the end result of a series of “improvisations”<sup>61</sup> and not the monstrous coming to fruition of a plan drawn up long before and carried out by means of a secret, but unequivocal order.<sup>62</sup>

Broszat’s theories were taken up again with a slightly different emphasis, especially by Hans Mommsen, who had already caused quite a scandal in a 1981 essay by saying, in line with Albert Speer, that Hitler had been a weak dictator, whose function was basically limited to lending symbolic unity to the entire system, and who left the actual decision-making to others.<sup>63</sup> According to Mommsen, as for Broszat, the Holocaust developed a dynamic of its own after the mass executions along the eastern front and the failure of the deportation plans to the east. Mommsen, too, denies the existence of an order relating to the destruction of the Jews.

The debate came to a climax at the big international conference held in Stuttgart in 1984, in which German, American and Israeli historians came together to discuss the theme “The Killing of the Jews in the Second World War”.<sup>64</sup> This was a significant conference for several reasons. To start with, it was one of the first occasions that historians representing the various traditions of Holocaust studies in the United States, Germany and Israel came together to debate and compare their different scientific approaches. Secondly, the conference focused attention on the problem of the internal periodization of the extermination process and on the precise dating of an order or decision to completely eliminate the Jewish population of Europe. The different positions were summarized by Saul Friedländer,<sup>65</sup> who, for his part, came down firmly on the side of the “intentionalist” interpretation. Basing himself principally on a study by Gerald Fleming<sup>66</sup> (which today seems to have been forgotten), but also on statements by Hitler reported in conversations with politician and diplomats<sup>67</sup> and on indirect allusions to the orders of the *Führer* found in documents produced in various legal proceedings, Friedländer argues that the perpetrators of the “final solution” were acting on Hitler’s authority and expressed desire, and that they used this to legitimize their crimes.<sup>68</sup> The Stuttgart conference marked

61 Broszat, *Hitler und die Genesis der “Endlösung”*, p. 757.

62 *Ivi*, p. 754–759.

63 Cf. Hans Mommsen, *Hitlers Stellung im nationalsozialistischen Herrschaftssystem*. In: Gerhard Hirschfeld/Lothar Kettenacker (ed.), *Der “Führerstaat”: Mythos und Realität. Studien zur Struktur und Politik des Dritten Reichs*, Stuttgart 1981, p. 43–72.

64 Cf. Eberhard Jäckel/Jürgen Rohwer (ed.), *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Entschlussbildung und Verwirklichung*, Stuttgart 1985.

65 Saul Friedländer, *Vom Antisemitismus zur Ausrottung*. In: Jäckel/Rohwer (ed.), *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, p. 18–60.

66 Gerald L. Fleming, *Hitler und die Endlösung*, Munich 1982.

67 Cf. on this subject Andreas Hillgruber, *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler*, Frankfurt a. M. 1970, 2 volumes.

68 Friedländer, *Vom Antisemitismus zur Ausrottung*, especially p. 44–47.



the beginning of a heated historiographical debate which continued throughout the Nineties and which only recently shows signs of being settled, after achieving important results at the level of historical reconstruction. According to Christopher Browning, for example, the invasion of the Soviet Union was a crucial turning-point in the implementation of the “final solution”, not because it made it possible to realize a plan that Hitler had conceived of decades before, but because in the “flush of victory” during the summer of 1941, all the necessary conditions seemed to be in place to make the Germanic *Lebensraum* free of Jews (*judenrein*). The various attempts to enact this policy between 1939 and 1941, including considering the deportation of the European Jews to Madagascar, were merely faltering experiments, conducted in absence of a global vision of the situation.<sup>69</sup> It was the brilliant military victories of the Reich which functioned as the element which legitimized the pursuit of certain ends and means without precedent in human history.<sup>70</sup> In a previous article, Browning had already placed the maturation of the idea of the “final solution” between the summer and autumn of 1941: in the July of that year at the latest, Heydrich, Himmler and Göring were informed of Hitler’s wish to eliminate the Jews of western Europe as well. A few months later work began on the construction of the gas chambers at Chelmno and Belzec.<sup>71</sup> In this context, it seems only fair to mention the late German historian Uwe Dietrich Adam, who as early as 1972 proposed the theory that the decision to exterminate the Jews had been taken by Hitler at the end of 1941, when hopes of a “territorial” solution, namely deporting all the Jews to the “East” beyond the Urals<sup>72</sup> had been dashed by the failure of the “*Blitzkrieg*” against the Soviet Union. Adam’s theories, contained in a weighty volume on the persecution of the Jews in the Third Reich, have since been confirmed by numerous scholars, such as Philippe Burrin<sup>73</sup> and Christian Gerlach.<sup>74</sup> According to Adam, the main impulse for the implementation of the “final solution” came

69 Cf. Christopher Browning, *Nazi Resettlement Policy and the Search for a Solution to the Jewish Question, 1939–1941*. In: Id., *The Path to Genocide. Essays on Launching the Final Solution*, Cambridge 1992, p. 3–27.

70 Ivi, p. 27.

71 Christopher Browning, *The Decision Concerning the Final Solution*. In: Id., *Fateful Months. Essays on the Emergence of the Final Solution*, New York/London 1985, p. 8–38, in particular 36–38.

72 Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf 1972, p. 303–315.

73 Cf. Philippe Burrin, *Hitler et les Juifs. Genèse d’un génocide*, Paris 1989. While agreeing with Adam’s dates, Burrin principally attributes Hitler with the decision to carry out the extermination. Burrin’s work also contains an excellent reconstruction of the various “territorial” solutions (Madagascar, Lublin, and so on) attempted until the last few months of 1941.

74 Cf. Christian Gerlach, *The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews, and Hitler’s Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews*. In: *The Journal of Modern History*, 70 (1998), p. 759–812. Unlike Gerlach, Uwe Dietrich Adam does not take into consideration the phenomena of radicalization in the occupied territories or behind the eastern front. According to Adam, the process of cumulative radicalization took place at the top of the National Socialist state in Germany.

from the wish to expel the Jews from all those territories under German control. The state of war also created favourable conditions for deporting the Jews of Germany, after they had been deprived of their citizenship.

To put it succinctly, it could be said that over the last two decades, the debate between “intentionalists” and “structuralists” served the purpose of providing historical research with a framework within which to formulate those questions which must be answered by any historian working on themes connected to the Shoah. The opening of the archives in the countries of Eastern Europe, together with new historiographical questions and a fresh approach, both to the juridical sources and memoirs, have shifted the old quarrel between “intentionalists” and “structuralists” onto new ground.<sup>75</sup> Studies like Dieter Pohl’s on Eastern Galicia (part of the General Government during the Second World War)<sup>76</sup> or Christian Gerlach’s on White Russia<sup>77</sup> have helped to reveal the interaction between the organs of the German state in Berlin and the officials responsible for administering the occupied territories. The room for manoeuvre available to the peripheral bodies was considerable: it would thus seem that the mass killings of Jews carried out by the *Einsatzgruppen* and various police units immediately after the invasion of Russia did not correspond to any clear-cut command to perform these actions; that they had simply been instructed to keep the territory behind the lines free of partisan and Bolshevik activity. The “extensive” interpretation of their task originated in a commonly-held belief that the “Jews” were in themselves a threat to the security of the German occupation forces.<sup>78</sup> In fact, in my opinion, the historiography (and especially the writing of the military historians), has tended to over-exaggerate the importance of the so-called *Kommissar-Befehl*, namely the notorious order to shoot all the Red Army political commissars (most of whom were thought to be Jewish) given to the *Wehrmacht* before Russia was invaded. This order was deemed to be the source of the barbaric treatment meted out to the Jewish population, not just by the *Einsatzkommandos*, but also by the soldiers and officers of the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>79</sup> Even though it went against all the norms and codes of civilized warfare, the order still need not have implied the savage butchery of Jewish civilians behind the front lines. On

75 An excellent overview of the state of studies at the end of the Nineties can be found in Ulrich Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1998.

76 Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941–1944. Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens*, Munich 1996; Id., *Von der “Judenpolitik“ zum Judenmord. Der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements 1939–1944*, Frankfurt a. M. 1993.

77 Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland 1941–1944*, Hamburg 1998.

78 Ulrich Herbert, *Vernichtungspolitik. Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des “Holocausts“*. In: Id., *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik*, p. 48 f., 58–60.

79 Cf. for an authoritative example Jürgen Förster, *Das Unternehmen “Barbarossa” als Eroberungs- und Vernichtungskrieg*. In: *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* (ed.), *Der Angriff gegen die Sowjetunion (Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg, vol. IV)*, Stuttgart 1983, p. 413–450, especially 435–440.

October 12, 1941, in the Eastern Galician town of Stanislaw, approximately 20 000 Jews were killed in a single day because it had been decided to concentrate the Jewish population of the area into a ghetto not big enough to contain them all. The “action” was organized by an officer of the border police on the orders of the SS and the Security Service. The appalling massacre, in which children were murdered in their mothers’ arms, was carried out by German police assisted by Ukrainian auxiliaries, under the eyes of the *Wehrmacht* and other “curious onlookers”. Shortage of supplies, logistical problems, the risk of epidemics or other similar inconveniences were used as a pretext for the ruthless killing of thousands of people.<sup>80</sup> However, significant changes in the genocide policy, such as the decision to exterminate Jewish women and children too, or deport to the death-camps the highly qualified Jews who worked in the ghettos, were accompanied by orders from Himmler, issued in the name of the *Führer*. In Eastern Galicia, for example, which was annexed to the “General Government”, the change came in June 1942, when Hans Frank was replaced in all matters concerning the police and the Jews by Himmler’s emissary, Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger. This high-ranking SS-officer ordered that the entire Jewish population be deported to the gas chambers of Belzec, and they were transported in cattle trucks in such horrifying conditions that even the local Nazi propaganda office protested.<sup>81</sup> Working from new documentary evidence (including Himmler’s diary) discovered in the Moscow archives, Christian Gerlach has dated Hitler’s decision in favour of the “final solution” as coinciding with America’s entry into the war.<sup>82</sup> Until then, the deportations of “Reich Jews” to the East had proceeded fairly slowly, and German Jews had not been killed systematically, although there had been massacres in White Russia, Galicia and in the Baltic (Riga) on the initiative of the *Einsatzkommandos*.<sup>83</sup> However, the “civil” authorities of the General Commissariats had expressed their opposition, a response that had been woefully lacking when hundreds of thousands of eastern Jews had been massacred, including women and children after August 1941. In the opinion of Gerlach and other historians (including Philippe Burrin), America’s joining the war was crucial to Hitler’s decision. On 12 December 1941, the *Führer* summoned the Nazi party leaders to a meeting, and according to a note by Goebbels, declared that now that the war had become a world war, the destruction of the Jews was the necessary consequence. Here, Hitler was obviously alluding to his famous speech before the Reichstag on 30 January 1939, in which he had “prophesied” the end of the Jews in Europe, “should united Jewry again succeed

80 Ivi, p. 54 f. The massacres which took place in Galicia have been carefully reconstructed in Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien* and Thomas Sandkühler, “Endlösung” in Galizien. *Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz 1941 bis 1944*, Bonn 1996.

81 Thomas Sandkühler, *Judenpolitik und Judenmord im Distrikt Galizien, 1941–1942*. In: Herbert, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik*, p. 122–147, here 144 f.

82 Cf. Gerlach, *The Wannsee Conference*.

83 Ivi, p. 766 f.

in provoking a world war".<sup>84</sup> Actually, one can speak here of a self fulfilled prophecy, as it was Germany which declared war on the USA. These events were the prelude to the Wannsee Conference where, according to Gerlach, it was decided to exterminate both the German Jews and the Jews of Western Europe. With an impressive command of his sources and the relevant literature, Gerlach puts forward the theory that peripheral attempts at extermination and the systematic killing of Soviet Jews were coordinated and made more radical at the Wannsee Conference, culminating in the "final solution". The destruction of the European Jews was therefore performed in two phases, and the mass killings by the *Einsatzkommandos* behind the front lines to the East still did not necessarily mean the extermination of the entire Jewish population. Hitler's speech on 12 December marked the beginning of an even deadlier phase in the genocide, because it was the basis for the following decisions: a) the killing of all the Jews deported to the General Gouvernement or to the eastern territories; b) intensification of the experiments for carrying out mass execution using gas; c) the deportation and murder of all German Jews. Going beyond the intentionalist/structuralist dichotomy, Gerlach argues that the peripheral German representatives settled in the eastern territories had already carried out massacres of deported Jews on their own initiative, but these monstrous actions could not have developed into a systematic plan of genocide without "a leadership decision by Hitler".<sup>85</sup>

The work of Götz Aly, on the other hand, represents a reworking of the "structuralist" interpretation with interesting, though debatable results. After a controversial debut with the book *Forerunners of Extermination*,<sup>86</sup> which over-emphasized the significance of the "economic" element as the cause of the genocide, Aly then reconstructed the decision-making process behind the extermination of Polish Jewry, relating it to the various impediments and delays which occurred in the program to repopulate the ex-Polish territories annexed to the

84 Ivi, p. 784–787.

85 Ivi, p. 812.

86 Götz Aly/Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung*, Hamburg 1991. In this book, Aly puts forward the theory (highly debatable, to say the least) that the destruction of the Jews in Poland and other parts of eastern and south-eastern Europe was motivated principally by a decision to rationalize the retail trade, which was excessively fragmented (!). Cf. also Götz Aly, *The Planning Intelligentsia and the "Final Solution"*. In: Omer Bartov, *The Holocaust. Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, London/New York 2000, p. 92–105. Aly's latest work *Hitlers Volksstaat* is just as simplistic and based on a similarly monocausal interpretation. Starting from the correct assumption that during the Second World War, the Third Reich's economy was based on looting and plundering, Aly asserts that German society's approval of Nazism derived from the opportunity to take advantage of the goods stolen from all over occupied Europe and confiscated in the main from the Jews. Cf. Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus*, Frankfurt a. M. 2005.

“Reich” with ethnic Germans.<sup>87</sup> In his view, the decision to exterminate the Jews in Poland had its origin – in a context of “progressive radicalization” and dehumanization of the victims – principally in an attempt to regain control of the plans for expulsion and resettlement, which had proved more difficult to carry out on the spot than originally expected. Although this explanation may appear too one-sidedly structuralist, Aly did have the good sense to place side by side, in a reciprocal relationship, the practice of genocide and the resettlement and population policies promoted by Heinrich Himmler’s “Reich Commissariat for the Strengthening of German Folkdom”. The “General Plan for the East”<sup>88</sup> itself was an example of an apocalyptic vision for the ethnic re-stratification of Europe.<sup>89</sup> The latest studies have helped to reassess the idea that the Holocaust was an aseptic, mechanical process churning out death.<sup>90</sup> In reality, millions of Jews (half of all the victims according to Omer Bartov) were killed in mass executions after having dug their own graves, amid scenes of indescribable panic and horror, with the living covered by the corpses of their companions and the executioners literally dripping in their victims blood and brains. Even after the transports to the death camps of Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor had begun, the killing of the Jews in Poland continued to be conducted in parallel with the mass shootings, carried out when the “capacity” of the gas chambers brought pauses in the deportations.<sup>91</sup> That point of view successfully challenges the classic interpretation of the Holocaust as the epitome of modernity, or at least emphasises the combined horror of “modern” methods of killing vast numbers of people alongside “traditional” acts of barbarity carried out on an unprecedented scale.

---

87 Götz Aly, “Endlösung”. Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden, Frankfurt a. M. 1995.

88 Cf. Mechtild Rössler/Sabine Schleiermacher (ed.), Der “Generalplan Ost”. Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik, Berlin 1993.

89 Cf. on this subject Isabel Heinemann’s insightful study: Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut. Das Rassen- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas, Göttingen 2003.

90 For a classic work on the subject: Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, Ithaca 1989.

91 Cf. among others Dieter Pohl, Die Ermordung der Juden im Generalgouvernement. In: Herbert, Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik, p. 98–121, here 106 f. Indeed, the “case studies” Goldhagen presents in Hitler’s Willing Executioners, related to the killing of over one million Jews by “traditional” means can only lead one to similar conclusions.

## VII. The “other” victims

Alongside the lines of research discussed above, from the Eighties onwards, historians began to show more interest in the implications of the Nazis’ conceptions of race and the idea of the “community of Volk” (*Volksgemeinschaft*).<sup>92</sup> In a pioneering work, Wolfgang Wippermann and Michael Burleigh<sup>93</sup> analysed the mechanisms of exclusion and integration proper to the *Volksgemeinschaft* and in doing so, managed to lay bare an overall design of racial selection and annihilation of those elements considered “inferior” which was aimed at radically changing the racial make-up and “hereditary mass” (*Erbmasse*) of German society. The extermination of the Jews was at the centre of a complex program aimed at “purifying” the Arian-Nordic race. This program ranged from compulsory sterilization, to killing the mentally ill and the “asocial” elements, and in general all those deemed to belong to an inferior race. “All of these people” observe Burleigh and Wippermann correctly, “were persecuted for the same reasons, although the degree of persecution was bound up with how threatening the regime perceived them to be.” The final aim was the creation “of an ideal future world, without ‘lesser races’, without the sick, and without those who they decreed had no place in the ‘national community’”. The Third Reich was intended to be a racial rather than a class society”. For this very reason, the two authors conclude, categories such as modernization, or generic theories like totalitarianism or fascism are insufficient for an understanding of the special nature of a regime without historical precedents or other terms of comparison.<sup>94</sup> The core aim of Nazi regime was to implement a radical “biocratic” renewal of German society.

Studies such as this, which focused attention on the SS as the force responsible for the “permanent purifying” of the “social body”,<sup>95</sup> were accompanied in the same years by insightful studies into compulsory sterilisation<sup>96</sup> and the victims of the “Euthanasia Action”;<sup>97</sup> the persecution of the “asocials”,<sup>98</sup> the homo-

92 Cf. Detlev Peukert’s successful book, *Volksgenossen und Gemeinschaftsfremde*, Köln 1982.

93 Michael Burleigh/Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State. Germany 1933-1945*, Cambridge et al. 1991.

94 Ivi, p. 304–307.

95 Cfr. Norbert Frei, *Der Führerstaat. Nationalsozialistische Herrschaft 1933-1945*, Munich 1987, p. 120–129.

96 Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus. Studien zu Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik*, Opladen 1985.

97 Ernst Klee, “Euthanasie” im NS-Staat. *Die Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens*, Frankfurt a.M. 1983; Hans-Walter Schmuhl, *Rassenhygiene, Nationalsozialismus, Euthanasie. Von der Verhütung zur Vernichtung “lebensunwerten Lebens”, 1890–1945*, Göttingen 1987; Henry Friedlander, *Der Weg zum NS-Genozid: von der Euthanasie zur Endlösung*, Berlin 1997.

98 Wolfgang Ayass, “Asoziale” im Nationalsozialismus, Stuttgart 1995; Id., “Gemeinschaftsfremde”. *Quellen zur Verfolgung von “Asozialen” 1933–1945*, Koblenz 1998.

sexuals,<sup>99</sup> and the Jehovah's Witnesses;<sup>100</sup> the extermination of the gypsies<sup>101</sup> and the Soviet prisoners-of-war; and the unremitting and deadly exploitation of slave workers.<sup>102</sup> Of around 5 200 000 Red Army prisoners-of-war, 3 300 000 died in the first few months following Operation Barbarossa, shortly after being taken prisoner. In 1978<sup>103</sup> Christian Streit documented how, until the end of 1942, when it was realized that using prisoners of war captured in the east might be used as slave labour, Russian prisoners were deliberately left to die from hunger, cold and epidemics.<sup>104</sup> It was one of the most abhorrent crimes committed by National Socialist Germany, extermination on an apocalyptic scale for which the *Wehrmacht* must be held directly responsible.

Thanks to this line of research, it has been possible to insert the Holocaust into the context of a "biocratic" plan of social engineering, which aimed to change the face of European society by using mass killings to get rid of all those considered unsuitable to be part of the "new order". In this re-appropriation by historiography of the "forgotten" victims, an important role was played by counter-cultures appearing in the wake of the students' movement, intent on giving dignity and visibility to groups which had suffered persecution under Nazism and still found themselves discriminated against and excluded in post-war German society.<sup>105</sup>

According to Henry Friedlander, the fact that German mentally ill people as well as the gypsies were to suffer the same fate as the Jews, and all be exterminated, should induce historians to look again at the "Holocaust" category, and include the other groups of victims who were destined to be wiped out. The American historian, author of an admirable study into the "Euthanasia Action", interprets the experiences the Nazis acquired while gassing the mentally ill as a

99 Rainer Hoffschildt, *Die Verfolgung der Homosexuellen in der NS-Zeit. Zahlen und Schicksale aus Norddeutschland*, Berlin 1999; Burkhard Jellonek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz. Die Verfolgung der Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich*, Paderborn 1990.

100 Because they were conscientious objectors, Jehovah's Witnesses were the religious group that suffered the greatest losses in relation to their numbers. Cf. Detlef Garbe, *Zwischen Widerstand und Martyrium: die Zeugen Jehovas im "Dritten Reich"*, Munich 1994.

101 Michael Zimmermann, *Verfolgt, vertrieben, vernichtet. Die nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik gegen Sinti und Roma*, Essen 1989; Id., *Rassenutopie und Genozid. Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage"*, Hamburg 1996.

102 Cf. Ulrich Herbert, *Fremdarbeiter. Politik und Praxis des "Ausländer-Einsatzes" in der Kriegswirtschaft des Dritten Reiches*, Berlin (West)/Bonn 1985.

103 Cf. Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, Stuttgart 1978, especially p. 128–190.

104 Cf. besides Streit, *Keine Kameraden* also Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941–45*.

105 Cf. for example the opening comments in: Jellonek, *Homosexuelle*, p. 11–13. More than any other historian, George Mosse brought out the contradictory nature of the respectable, petit-bourgeois National Socialist ideal. On this aspect of George Mosse cf. now Karel Plessini, *The Nazi as the "Ideal Bourgeois" Respectability and Nazism in the Work of George L. Mosse*. In: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 5 (2004), p. 226–242.

necessary lead-up to the genocide of the Jews.<sup>106</sup> This theory is supported by the personal continuity existing between the people involved in eliminating the mentally ill and the organizers of *Operation Reinhard* (the killing of approximately three million Polish Jews in the death camps of Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka).

### VIII. The “Historikerstreit” (Historians’ Debate)

In 1986, a historiographical and politico-cultural debate which arose in the Federal Republic of Germany concerning the placement of the destruction of Europe’s Jews in national history and memory caused a great furor outside West Germany too, and sparked off a series of heated discussions, not just in the specialist journals but also in the international press. The controversy spread far beyond the strictly historical sphere to touch the very foundations of post-war German identity, and spark off debate on the role that would be played by “guilt” in the identity of the generations born after the Second World War.

The controversy began almost by chance with a short article by Ernst Nolte entitled *The past that will not pass* (*Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will*), appearing on 6 June, 1986 in the moderate German daily, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*<sup>107</sup>. In 1963, Nolte had published a long and complex work called *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche*,<sup>108</sup> in which he tried, primarily at the level of cultural history and of the image that the various fascist movements created of themselves (including National Socialism), to construct a history and general theory of fascism. His technical efforts met with the interest and respect of the historians’ “guild”, despite the fact that the cryptic nature of the concept of “transcendence” which he employed limited the usefulness of the work for subsequent research carried out on the same theme. *The past that will not pass* summarized and in part over-simplified the results of a new study that Nolte would publish a few months later with the title: *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus*,<sup>109</sup> devoted to what Nolte himself defined as the “causal connection” between the atrocities committed by the Bolsheviks and the Nazis’ “over-reaction”. In his opinion, the extermination of

106 Cf. Henry Friedlander, *Step by Step. The Expansion of Murder, 1939–1941*. In: Omer Bartov (ed.), *The Holocaust. Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, London/New York, p. 63–76; Henry Friedlander, *Der Weg zum NS-Genozid. Von der Euthanasie zur Endlösung*, Berlin 1997 (1995).

107 Cf. Ernst Nolte, *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte*. In: “Historikerstreit”. *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, Munich/Zürich 1987, p. 39–47.

108 Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche. Action française – Italienischer Faschismus – Nationalsozialismus*, Munich 1963.

109 Ernst Nolte, *Der europäische Bürgerkrieg 1917–1945. Nationalsozialismus und Bolschewismus*, Frankfurt a. M./Berlin (West) 1987.



the Jews of Europe was caused by a blind fear of Soviet Bolshevism on the part of Hitler and the Nazi leadership, and by Judaism being identified with Bolshevism. In fact, the key passage in *The past that will not pass* read: "In any case, it must be legitimate and even inevitable to ask ourselves the following question: Did the Nazis, beginning with Hitler, perhaps commit an act of 'Asiatic ferocity' simply because they considered themselves and other people of their kind in turn the real or potential victims of an act of 'Asiatic ferocity'? Wasn't the Gulag Archipelago more original than Auschwitz? Is it not true to say that the Bolsheviks' 'class murder' was the logical and factual antecedent to the 'race murder' committed by the Nazis? Were not the most secret actions of Hitler also more understandable on the basis of the fact that he had *not forgotten* the 'rat-trap'?<sup>110</sup> Were not the origins of Auschwitz to be found precisely in a past that did not want to go away?"<sup>111</sup>

Nolte owed most of the indignant and offended reactions to his article to the ambiguity of his own formulations, the confusion between rhetorical questions (which were actually statements) and open-ended questions, and his continuous shifting of his ground. In the general confusion about his own interpretation of the Holocaust, which the Berlin historian probably did a lot to create, he was accused of trying to "justify" the Holocaust.<sup>112</sup>

The "Historians' Debate" was then supplemented by another debate which had begun under other auspices, namely the publication of Martin Broszat and Elke Fröhlich's great work on "Bavaria at the time of the National Socialists".<sup>113</sup> Martin Broszat, then director of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* in Munich, had subsequently published a series of considerations regarding the "historicization of National Socialism" in the journal *Mercur*, based on the experiences deriving from the research project on Bavaria.<sup>114</sup> Saul Friedländer responded to Broszat's appeal, repeating the concept of the exceptional nature of Nazism as a theme for historical research and the impossibility to deal with the subject using the usual tools of historiography, including the most innovative ones, such as the then very fashionable "history of daily life" approach. The stimulating exchange of viewpoints between the two historians was published in 1988 in the *Vierteljahrshefte*

110 According to Nolte's rarefied interpretation, which referred to a quotation from Hitler in 1943, it was a form of torture practised by the Chinese Ceka. While they were being interrogated, prisoners were threatened with having their faces gnawed at by rats, which had been purposely driven half-mad with starvation, and then hung in cages very close to the faces of the unfortunate victims. Cf. Nolte, *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will*, p. 44.

111 Ivi, p. 45.

112 Cf. in particular the various contributions to the controversy by Jürgen Habermas in: "Historikerstreit".

113 Martin Broszat/Elke Fröhlich, *Alltag und Widerstand. Bayern im Nationalsozialismus*, Munich/Zürich 1987.

114 Cf. Martin Broszat, *Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus*. In: Hermann Graml/Klaus-Dietmar Henke (ed.), *Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte*, Munich 1986, p. 159-173.

für *Zeitgeschichte*.<sup>115</sup> Broszat and Friedländer were tackling a dilemma central to the story of Nazism (and also, inevitably, of the Shoah): to what extent does the Shoah call into question the tried and tested paradigms of history and where exactly do we place what Friedländer had occasion to call the “limits of representation”?<sup>116</sup> For Broszat, socialized in the cultural tradition of the *Historismus*, the crux of the problem is the challenging of an uncritical understanding, based on empathy and identification with the historical actors of the time. In Broszat’s opinion, what is needed instead of identification is the “historical judgement” (*historische Einsicht*). Unlike Friedländer, Broszat was interested in salvaging certain fundamental aspects of the *Historismus*, such as the open nature of the historical process, and therefore from his point of view, analysing the behaviour of Hitler’s contemporaries, did not mean that “Auschwitz” need necessarily always be placed at the centre of the analysis. From his own research experiences in Bavaria, in fact, Broszat retrieved a dimension of “normality” for those elements of the population who were not among the victims of Nazism. It was therefore important to take into consideration approaches to National Socialism which did not necessarily centre upon the extermination of the Jews or other categories of victims killed in the course of the Second World War.<sup>117</sup> Friedländer, on the other hand, was expressing his fear that such an approach might lead to a “normalization” of the memory of Nazism, because in their memories, people tend naturally to give privilege everything that is normal, understandable, comparable and bearable.<sup>118</sup> In fact, with regard to research into Nazism, the two historians were really dealing with two different kinds of problem: it is clear, as Saul Friedländer said, that Nazism (and to an even greater extent the Shoah) could not be treated like any other topic of research. The atrocities committed in the course of the Second World War are often unimaginable and can only be described as accurately as possible.<sup>119</sup> At the same time, however, as Broszat pointed out, during the twelve years of Nazi rule, German society lived out its own daily “normality” in spheres which – perhaps deceptively – seemed to maintain a certain continuity with previous reality and did not appear significantly affected by the regime’s obsessive desire for change.<sup>120</sup> Appearing around the same time as this stimulating exchange of letters, and connected to the same problems, are Dan Diner’s acute comments about Auschwitz representing the “fracture of civilization” and about the inexplicability of a crime without precedents and com-

115 Martin Broszat/Saul Friedländer, Um die “Historisierung” des Nationalsozialismus. Ein Briefwechsel. In: VfZ, 36 (1988), p. 339–372.

116 Cf. Saul Friedländer (ed.), *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Cambridge (Mass.) 1992.

117 Broszat, Friedländer, Um die “Historisierung” des Nationalsozialismus, p. 340 f., 352 f.

118 Ivi, p. 372.

119 Ivi, p. 370 f.

120 Ivi, p. 362 f. Cfr. also Broszat, Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus, p. 162–173.

pletely lacking in any rational motivation, a crime actually perpetrated against reason (*Gegenrationale*).<sup>121</sup>

### IX. "Ordinary men"

The season of studies on the "executioners" began with publications like the one by Helmut Krausnick and Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm on the soldiers in the "ideological war", namely the crimes of the *Einsatzgruppen* on the eastern front.<sup>122</sup> In *The Eastern Front, 1941–45, German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare*<sup>123</sup> Omer Bartov shifts attention onto the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht*, meticulously reconstructing the psychological reactions of the soldiers on the eastern front to the fact of finding themselves isolated in enemy territory. Group solidarity rapidly became the only value to which these men felt committed. The willingness to commit atrocious crimes against extraneous elements can be explained by this isolation and by the fact that their group of fellow soldiers was the only thing that gave them protection and a sense of identity. To transgress the rules of internal solidarity would have meant finding themselves in a state of total isolation, perceived as unbearable.

This line of investigation came to a temporary conclusion with Christopher Browning's book *Ordinary Men*, one of the most original and groundbreaking works to appear in the field of Holocaust studies in the Nineties.<sup>124</sup> Browning opts for a micro-historical approach, scrutinizing the behaviour, one by one, of a battalion of middle-aged German reservists in Poland who were given the job of slaughtering the entire Jewish civilian population in the district of Lublin. Men who could certainly not be described as fanatical Nazis rapidly degenerated into merciless killers, guilty of massacres in which at least 38 000 people died, most of them women and children, while 45 000 more were sent to the death-camp at Treblinka. Working from the verbatim records of the trial proceedings stored in the *Zentralstelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen* in Ludwigsburg (where all the documentation concerning the trials against Nazi war-criminals in the Federal Republic of Germany can be found), Browning painstakingly reconstructs the process by which a group of police reservists turned into butchers of helpless women and children. From a critical reappraisal and interpretation of the trial proceedings, a chilling picture emerges of the daily horror which became just

121 Dan Diner, Zwischen Aporie und Apologie. Über Grenzen der Historisierbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus. In: Id. (ed.), Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit, Frankfurt a. M. 1987, p. 62–73.

122 Helmut Krausnick/Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, Die Truppe der Weltanschauungskrieges. Die Einsatzgruppen der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD 1938–1942, Stuttgart 1981.

123 Published by Palgrave in collaboration with St. Antony's College, Oxford 1985.

124 Christopher R. Browning, Ordinary men. German police and the "final solution" in Poland, New York 1992.

normal routine for the men of Battalion 101. Browning comes to the unsettling conclusion that their principle motives for committing such unspeakable crimes were neither fanaticism nor any particular Nazi leanings, but feelings such as *esprit de corps*, comradeship, detachment from their victims, peer pressure and the fear of appearing as “cowards”.<sup>125</sup> “for the German occupiers stationed in the conquered lands of eastern Europe,” remarks Browning, “literally tens of thousands of men from all walks of life – the mass murder policies of the regime were not aberrational or exceptional events that scarcely ruffled the surface of everyday life. As the story of Reserve Police Battalion 101 demonstrates, mass murder and routine had become one. Normality itself had become exceedingly abnormal”.<sup>126</sup> In some ways Browning’s approach can be seen as the antithesis of that of historians like Eberhard Jäckel or other exponents of the “intentionalist” school, who tend to emphasize the “uniqueness” aspects of National Socialism: they stress the features that make Nazism “unique” and not just “singular”, while Browning delves into the unsettling – and in themselves partial – aspects of “normality”, aspects which might well recur in other extreme situations.

This line of enquiry into the practice of genocide as a reality of daily life was then continued, though with a slightly different approach, by Omer Bartov, Daniel Goldhagen and Christian Gerlach,<sup>127</sup> to mention some of the most important names. The “ordinary men” issue is taken up once again in a perspective of radical intentionalism by Daniel Goldhagen, who claims in his book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* that the whole of the German population was convinced of the necessity to eliminate the European Jews and that the genocidal behaviour of the “ordinary men” (Goldhagen calls them “ordinary Germans”) can therefore be explained by this “eliminationist” conviction. Goldhagen’s book met with widespread approval among the general reading public, actually becoming a bestseller, while the response of most professional historians was extremely negative. Certainly, Goldhagen’s “monocausal” interpretation answers the general public’s need for simple explanations for complex phenomena. At the same time, it must be said that the empirical research upon which most of the book is based, often carried out on first-hand accounts, provides sickening examples of group behaviour involving the torturing of Jews (often quite gratuitous), episodes inexplicable if not on the grounds of a deep hatred of Jews which took delight in torture and mass murder even when this had not been ordered from above (Goldhagen provides the classic example of this with the notorious “death

125 On Browning’s work cf. Marina Cattaruzza, Il ruolo degli ‘uomini comuni’ nello sterminio degli Ebrei europei. In: Storia della Storiografia, 30 (1996), p. 141–150.

126 Browning, *Ordinary men*, p. XIX.

127 Cf., by way of example, Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weissrussland*, Hamburg 2000; Id., *Durchschnittstäter*, Berlin 2000; Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, London 1996; Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis and War in the Third Reich*, New York/Oxford 1991.

marches”, hitherto neglected by scholarship).<sup>128</sup> In his landmark essay about Jewish life in Germany during the Third Reich, Saul Friedländer, on the other hand, develops the category of “lifesaving antisemitism”, which was an attitude of widespread, though not explicit acceptance of the extermination of the Jews among very broad sections of German society. In this attitude, there were elements of traditional, religion-based antisemitism in combination with new pseudoscientific racist beliefs, which saw the Jew as a kind of dangerous “germ” infecting the body of the “Volk community” so as to weaken it and bring about its extinction. The panic and fear of “degeneration” was thus bound up with a desire to be healed rooted in religion, producing a deadly combination of unprecedented destructive power. This mixture of traditional stereotypes and newly acquired notions of “racial science” together with the experience of the First World War and the attempts at revolution in the post-war period helps to explain the low threshold of inhibition displayed by the “ordinary men” when they were committing their crimes.<sup>129</sup> For Friedländer too, however, the absolute conviction that they were doing what Hitler wanted must have had a potent legitimating effect in unleashing such ruthless behaviour, totally devoid of any moral qualms.<sup>130</sup> In his brilliant biography of Hitler, which he wrote keeping constantly in mind the relationship between the German people and their *Führer*, Ian Kershaw concludes that Hitler was “the chief inspiration” of a genocide without parallel in history. An extreme form of personal power attributed to a beer hall demagogue who had taken upon himself the task of saving and regenerating his country proved to be the decisive factor in the terrible chain of events which took place in those twelve fatal years.<sup>131</sup>

One of a series of controversies which shook German public opinion had to do with the direct involvement of the *Wehrmacht* in the atrocities against civilians and in the extermination of the Jews. The debate ensued when, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, a photographic exhibition was organized by the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Hamburg devoted to the “*crimes of the Wehrmacht*”.<sup>132</sup> In this case, the ones who were in the dock were metaphorically those millions of Germans who had taken part in the Second World War and who, until then, had considered themselves as be-

128 On the “controversy” cf. Julius H. Schoeps (ed.), *Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust*, Hamburg 1997.

129 Saul Friedländer, *Das Dritte Reich und die Juden. Die Jahre der Verfolgung 1933–1939*, Munich 1998, vol. I (1997), p. 87–128; Id., *The Extermination of the European Jews in Historiography*. In: Bartov (ed.), *The Holocaust*, p. 79–91. Friedländer is one of the few historians who greeted Daniel Goldhagen’s theories with interest, though with some understandable reservations.

130 Friedländer, *Extermination of the European Jews*, p. 86.

131 Ian Kershaw, *Hitler. 1936–45: Nemesis*, New York/London 2000, p. 839–841.

132 Cf. the extremely informative catalogue of the exhibition: *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* (ed.), *Vernichtungskrieg, Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, Hamburg 1996.

longing to a “clean” institution, largely untouched by the crimes committed by members of the SS and the SD, and the Nazi party or its offshoots. The exhibition was temporarily closed in November 1999, after some inaccuracies were noticed in the labelling of the photographs, and a committee of experts was appointed to express its opinion on the scientific accuracy of the initiative. Although the committee confirmed that the documentation on show was authentic, the exhibition was not re-opened to the public. In its place, another exhibition was put on in Berlin, which opened in November 2001, in which the accusations against the *Wehrmacht* were formulated more cautiously.<sup>133</sup> There are other studies which confirm the involvement of the *Wehrmacht* in the atrocities. In Serbia, it was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, General Franz Böhme, who organized the killing on the spot of thousands of Jews in the ghettos, apparently in order to combat partisan guerrilla warfare. Again in Serbia, the first experiments were conducted with killing Jews by gassing with exhaust fumes, even before the Wannsee Conference. Subsequently, between March and May 1942, Jewish women and children died after being piled into vans whose exhaust pipes had been channelled into the back, gassed by exhaust fumes during nightmare “journeys” across Belgrade. It took about fifteen kilometres to kill the “load”.<sup>134</sup>

In any case, the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* is just one of the many examples of a fact which may be traumatic, but is by now incontrovertible in its documentary evidence: the unprecedented crimes committed in the Second World War were not the work of a few hundred fanatical SS men belonging to the notorious *Einsatzkommandos*, but of hundreds of thousands of German soldiers, policemen and reservists, not to mention auxiliaries from other countries. This evidence puts the whole question of guilt on another level: as Karl Jaspers<sup>135</sup> has theorized, it is not a matter of metaphysical or “collective” guilt, but of real crimes (often confirmed by eyewitnesses) actually committed by an extraordinary number of men (and a certain number of women<sup>136</sup>).

Careful studies over the last decade, often conducted at the regional or micro-historical level, offer new perspectives to the questions posed by the historiography of the past: the interpretative patterns can only be multi-causal and aimed at weighing up all the various factors involved in the decision-making process (an-

133 On the whole issue cf. Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust. Disputed Histories*, Ithaca/London 2003, p. XI-XIII. Omer Bartov was a member of the committee of experts appointed to judge the scientific accuracy of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*.

134 Cf. Walter Manoschek, *Die Vernichtung der Juden in Serbien*. In: Herbert, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik*, p. 209–234, here 220–230. Cf. also Christopher Browning, *Wehrmacht Reprisal Policy and the Murder of the Male Jews in Serbia*. In: Id., *Fateful Months*, p. 39–56; Id., *The Semlin Gas Van and the Final Solution in Serbia*. In: *ivi*, p. 68–87.

135 Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Frage*, Zürich 1946.

136 Cf. Gudrun Ingeborg Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite: Ehefrauen in der “SS-Sippengemeinschaft”*, Hamburg 1997.

ti-Semitism, descent into barbarism subsequent to war, interaction between centre and periphery, becoming inured to massacres of civilian and/or helpless populations, the vested interests of the various groups involved, and so on) according to their relative importance in bringing about what the executioners described as “the final solution of the Jewish problem”.

## X. The “other” executioners

The opening of the archives in Central and Eastern Europe, the new political climate in the ex Warsaw Pact countries, the expansion of the European Union and the coming together of previously separate parts of Europe has given new urgency to the historical problem of responsibilities in the implementation of the Holocaust – other than Germans. In the countries of western Europe, after an initial phase of denial, research into collaborationism and local responsibilities in the deportation of Jews has made significant advances in countries such as France, Italy, Holland and Belgium. Still today, however, far less progress has been made in this direction in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in what Omer Bartov has rightly called “the place” of the genocide.<sup>137</sup> A pioneering achievement on this subject is the book edited by Wolfgang Benz, *Dimension des Völkermords. Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus (The Dimension of the Genocide. the Number of Jewish Victims of National Socialism)*.<sup>138</sup> With this work, published in 1991, Wolfgang Benz<sup>139</sup> proposed to quantify the number of Jewish victims in the course of the Second World War country by country. Although the quality of the essays is uneven and although all the authors rightly tend to emphasize, in the first place, the responsibility of the Germans for the planning and execution of the extermination, some disconcerting inconsistencies emerge, as concerns the behaviour of the politicians in charge and of the populations in the occupied or allied countries: for instance, one of the countries with the highest number of deported Jews was Holland,<sup>140</sup> where the occupation was relatively bland. Generally speaking, most of the satellite

137 A useful bibliography can be found in Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistischer Judenmord als Problem von osteuropäischer Geschichte und Osteuropa-Geschichtsschreibung*. In: *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 40 (1992), p. 96–119.

138 Munich 1991. The book appeared in the series by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte: *Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte*. But cf. also Yisrael Gutman/Gideon Greif (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period*. Proceedings of the fifth Yad Vashem International Historical Conference, Jerusalem, March 1983, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1988. Numerous essays about the treatment of the Holocaust in Soviet and East European historiography demonstrate just how strong the taboos were which surrounded the topic, at times accompanied by openly denialist positions.

139 Wolfgang Benz is head of the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung in Berlin.

140 Out of approximately 160 000 Jews, 102 000 were deported. Cf. Gerhard Hirschfeld, *Niederlande*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 137–165.

countries handed over their foreign Jews to the SS with a certain alacrity, although they must have known the fate that awaited them. The Jews who were actually citizens of the country concerned, enjoyed a greater degree of protection, although a high number of them ended up being sent to the death camps too. This happened in Vichy France<sup>141</sup> and in Admiral Horthy's Hungary,<sup>142</sup> while in Bulgaria, around 11 300 foreign Jews who were living in areas occupied in the course of the Second World War were handed over to the Germans.<sup>143</sup> In Italy, the deportation of Jews to the death camps did not begin until after the armistice on 8. September 1943, and in those areas occupied by the Germans: the communities in Rome and Trieste were particularly hard-hit.<sup>144</sup> A special case is represented by those countries in which the presence of German troops gave rise to a series of bloody anti-Jewish pogroms by the local population or local groups of irregular militia, or in which the massacres were carried out with the help of auxiliary formations, assigned to the worst aspects of mass executions. These forms of collective behaviour were to be found in the Rumanian province of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, previously occupied by the Soviet Union. The Jews here were victims of pogroms, or were forced to walk eastward towards the Transnistria region on "death marches", or herded into concentration camps where hundreds died daily. In the pogroms alone, 55 000 Jews lost their lives. More fortunate were the Jews resident in the "old territories" of Rumania, mostly subjected "only" to discriminatory legislation and confiscations, to being herded into certain parts of a city and recruited into special battalions.<sup>145</sup> In Lithuania, Estonia,<sup>146</sup> Eastern Poland,<sup>147</sup> Ukraine and White Russia, the arrival of the

141 Cf. Juliane Wetzel, *Frankreich und Belgien*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 105–135. The deportation of French Jews began in November 1942, when Vichy France was occupied by the Germans. Ivi, p. 120.

142 Lázló Varga, *Ungarn*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 331–352. Cf. also *Ungarn* in: Israel Gutman/Eberhard Jäckel/Peter Longerich/Julius H. Schoeps (ed.), *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden*, Berlin 1990–1993, Vol. III, p. 1462–1468. Before the Germans occupied Hungary, 17 000 foreign Jews were handed over to the SS by the Hungarian authorities. It is estimated that a further 42 000 Hungarian Jews died after they were recruited into "work battalions" destined for slave labour. Ivi, p. 1464 f.

143 Hans-Joachim Hoppe, *Bulgarien*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 275–310, especially 289–310.

144 Cf. Liliana Picciotto Fargion, *Italien*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 199–227.

145 Krista Zach, *Rumänien*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 381–409, especially 397–402.

146 Lettland. In: *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, vol. II, p. 854–857.

147 On the "nexus" between the soviet occupation of Eastern Poland and the pogroms against the Jews which occurred after the marching in of the Wehrmacht s. the pioneering work of Bogdan Musial, "Konterrevolutionäre Elemente sind zu erschießen". Die Brutalisierung des deutsch-sowjetischen Krieges im Sommer 1941, Berlin/München 2000. Musial's work offers an important empirical documentation of the fatal identification between "Jews" and "Bolsheviks" in the territories of Eastern Europe occupied by Germany in the Second World War.



*Wehrmacht* was accompanied by pogroms involving thousands of victims. Here too, local nationalists provided the personnel for the auxiliary forces responsible for slaughtering thousands of Jewish civilians.<sup>148</sup> An extreme example of this is provided by the Ustaša state in Croatia, where the number of Jews killed in pogroms, in the extermination camp of Jasenovac and in other death camps was greater than the number of Jews deported from Croatia and killed at Auschwitz. The Croatian authorities actually paid the SS 30 German marks for every Jew deported to the death camps.<sup>149</sup> In referring to the Holocaust in Croatia, the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* published by Yad Vashem stated, that the Jews of Croatia were killed for the most part by Croatian citizens, whereas the Germans barely cooperated in the massacres,<sup>150</sup> thus describing the reversal of the roles usually found in the “division of labour” enacted in the practice of genocide. Polish public opinion, on the other hand, was deeply affected by the publication of Jan Gross’ book on the pogrom carried out by their “neighbors”<sup>151</sup> on the entire Jewish population of a Polish town when the German troops arrived there on 23. July 1941. The little town of Jedwabne was to be part of the Soviet Union following the signing of the pact between Hitler and Stalin, and it was immediately occupied by the Germans at the time of the invasion of the Soviet Union. The presence of the *Wehrmacht* activated a murderous dynamic, in the course of which 1 600 Jews were rounded up and killed in the most barbaric way. The majority of them were driven into a barn and burnt alive. The children, too were thrown onto the burning coals by using pitchforks.<sup>152</sup> The memory of the massacre had stayed alive at the private level, whereas officially the crime had been attributed to the Germans.<sup>153</sup> It should not surprise us that denial has set in among numerous sections of Polish public opinion, or that Jan Gross has been fiercely attacked by certain newspapers.<sup>154</sup> In any case, the book has helped to start a debate on the responsibilities in the Holocaust of a people, who only felt it was a “victim” and who in effect, had seen its ruling class decimated by both the Germans and the Russians, allies in the dismemberment of the country.

148 Gert Robel, Sowjetunion. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 499–560, especially 503–526. Cf. also *Hilfspolizei, ukrainische*. In: *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, vol. II, p. 607 f.; *Trawniki*. In: *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, vol. III, p. 1425–1427.

149 Holm Sundhaussen, *Jugoslawien*. In: Benz (ed.), *Dimension des Völkermords*, p. 311–330, especially 321–326.

150 Cf. *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, vol. II, p. 827.

151 Jan T. Gross’ book has the chilling title *Neighbors*. Cf. Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors*. *The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, Princeton 2001.

152 I refer here to the German version: Jan T. Gross, *Nachbarn*. *Der Mord an den Juden von Jedwabne*, Munich 2001, p. 15–27.

153 Ivi, p. 119 f.

154 For a broad documentation of the controversy over “Jedwabne” in Poland s. Anthony Polonsky/Johanna B. Michlic, *The Neighbors Respond*. *The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland*, Princeton/Oxford 2004.

## XI. A glance at the present day

The thorough investigations into how the centre interacted with the periphery and the responsibilities assumed and initiatives taken by the various bodies involved in giving rise to the “final solution” came to a fitting climax with Christopher Browning’s book *The Origins of the Final Solution*<sup>155</sup> published in 2003.<sup>156</sup> Against an increasingly horrifying backdrop, which in the end becomes routine for hundreds of thousands of men, Browning slots into place the various components of what would become the extermination machine. Reproposing his own dating of the decision to carry out the “final solution” as July 1941, Browning connects up the extermination operations behind the front lines with preparation of the machinery of mass extermination, tracing how it was first tried out on Soviet prisoners and then finally “put into action”. Browning’s work is the first of a series of volumes on the Holocaust to be published by the Institute of Yad Vashem in collaboration with Nebraska University Press. It aims to reconstruct the reality of the deportation and extermination of the Jews country by country. It is no mere coincidence that this aim should be realized a good fifteen years after the breaking-up of the Soviet bloc: in fact, the opening of the archives of Eastern Europe has made it possible to pose the problem of the “place” in which the Holocaust occurred, and where most of the victims came from, in much more concrete terms. Ninety per cent of all the Jews killed were resident in Eastern Europe<sup>157</sup> and almost all died on either Polish or Soviet territory. Alongside this need to pay more attention to the “place” of the Holocaust, the most recent historical research, Omer Bartov in particular, has stressed the need for historical reconstruction to pay more attention to the interaction between the victim and the executioner: “The victim too can ultimately be understood only through the relationship with the perpetrator. This is an insight we owe to some of the most remarkable memoirs of survivors, but one that is sorely lacking in German scholarship on the Nazi period”,<sup>158</sup> the American remarks critically and with a clear lack of empathy for the older generation of German historians.<sup>159</sup> Notwithstanding, this suggestion opens undoubtedly a very promising perspective to reconstruct with a greater degree of concreteness the story of the destruction of European Jews which, although it was the greatest crime of the modern age, was executed using methods in which a deviant form of “nor-

155 Cf. Christopher R. Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942*, Lincoln 2004.

156 The German version preceded the American one.

157 Cf. Pohl, *Nationalsozialistischer Judenmord als Problem von osteuropäischer Geschichte*, p. 96–119, and especially 100.

158 Omer Bartov, *German Soldiers and the Holocaust. Historiography, Research and Implications*. In: Id., *The Holocaust. Origins, Implementation, Aftermath*, London/New York 2000, p. 162–184, here 178.

159 On this point see my observations in this article on p. 6 f.

mality” and “daily routine” can be recognised.<sup>160</sup> The tremendous efforts made by researchers to investigate the different elements involved in the decisional process that led to the genocide of the Jewish population of Europe, their connections with each other, the gradual disappearance of any hesitation or reluctance on the part of hundreds of thousands of perpetrators to commit the most appalling crimes, the speed with which they got used to massacring defenceless beings, re-proposes to us today, at a superior level of knowledge and awareness, the problem, that what happened then could happen again in different forms. In fact, most of the executioners were responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent human beings without having taken part in planning the “final solution” and often without even being aware of this aim. In any case, the pogroms and massacres of Jewish populations which accompanied the arrival of the *Wehrmacht* in the Baltic States, Belorussia and the Ukraine, occurred several months before the Nazi leadership had decided on the total destruction of a group of human beings guilty of having at least three Jewish grandparents, and condemned to death for the simple reason of having been born<sup>161</sup>. While that may be the decision upon which the “uniqueness” of the Holocaust is based conceptually, it was also undoubtedly made possible by all those “willing” executioners who were quite prepared to cooperate in the genocide without asking themselves too many questions about its ultimate aims. The behaviour of these individuals can surely be compared to that of other executioners, seemingly just as willing to be involved in extermination procedures, though in contexts different from that of the Shoah (Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Ruanda and so on). According to the Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer, who claims that the Shoah could happen again, this possibility would present itself if the following three factors came to co-exist: a) widespread antipathy at the social level towards a minority; b) the coming to power of a political elite which proposes the elimination of this minority; and c) identification of a part of the intellectual classes with this political elite and with the regime it has established.<sup>162</sup>

This seems to me to be the present state of affairs in historical research on the Shoah, and it will be apparent that it contains a wealth of different approaches and queries, depending on whether one is analysing the actions of individuals such as Hitler, Himmler or Heydrich, or investigating the decision-making processes at work in the rudimentary command structures in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union, or considering the motives and behaviour of the auxiliaries of Ukrainian or Lithuanian or any other nationality. Recently, the Shoah has been seen as the most extreme example of that series of ethnic cleansing and

---

160 The most important writings about the “daily life” of the perpetrators of the Holocaust are those by Christopher Browning.

161 Cf. Yehuda Bauer, Comparison with other Genocides. In: Id., Rethinking the Holocaust, New Haven/London 2001, p. 39–67, here 48.

162 Cf. Yehuda Bauer, Is the Holocaust Explicable? In: Id., Rethinking the Holocaust, p. 14–38, here 37.

genocides which have stained the twentieth century,<sup>163</sup> thus reposing the question of placing the destruction of the European Jews in the broader context of the modern history of Europe.

## Conclusions

At the end of this brief reconstruction of historiography of Shoah, I wish to try to come to some conclusions about how investigations into this issue have developed in the last sixty years. Some of the questions dealt with by the first generation of historians proved seminal for further research and the lines of continuity are clearly recognizable in the way different generations of scholars have approached the Shoah. Of course, questions were modified as a consequence of new historical evidence and the growing amount of research. The opening of new fields of inquiry (such as the “history of everyday life”) and the way in which historiography intended itself also helped to renew this field of historical studies. Notwithstanding this, many crucial questions destined to occupy historians for decades were already formulated – at least rudimentarily – in the Fifties and Sixties. One example is the dilemma of the “genesis” of National Socialism (and therefore of the Shoah), already dealt with in the late Forties by historians like Friedrich Meinecke and Gerhard Ritter on the one hand, and later by philosophers like Georgy Lukács and emigre historians like Fritz Stern and George Mosse as intellectual history, on the other. Still in the Nineties, the problem of the prevalence of the “German” over the “universal” roots in the crime of the destruction of the European Jews was reformulated with the focus on the perpetrators by Christopher Browning in his *Ordinary Men*<sup>164</sup> and by Daniel Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. In addition, the attention to the cultural roots of the “German catastrophe” and from the Sixties onwards also to German anti-Semitism<sup>165</sup> stimulated research into Hitler's *Weltanschauung* too, thus

163 Cf. among the most interesting studies Norman Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge (Mass.) 2001; Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge 2005.

164 For the “universalistic” view see for example the following passage in Browning: “The policemen in the battalion who carried out the massacres and deportations, like the much smaller number who refused or evaded, were human beings. I must recognize that in the same situation, I could have been either a killer or an evader – both were human – if I want to understand and explain the behaviour of both as best I can”. From: Browning, *Ordinary Men*, p. XX.

165 Cf. for a recent historiographical treatment of this topic Jeffrey Herf, *Le origini culturali e politiche del nazismo: un bilancio storiografico*. In: Marina Cattaruzza/Marcello Flores/Simon Levi Sullam/Enzo Traverso (ed.), *Storia della Shoah. La crisi dell'Europa, lo sterminio degli ebrei e la memoria del XX secolo, I vol.: La crisi dell'Europa: le origini e il contesto*, Torino 2005, p. 369–399.

renewing the studies on the figure of the *Führer* and questioning the early nihilistic interpretation furnished by Rauschnig and Bullock.<sup>166</sup>

Raul Hilberg's monograph on the *Destruction of European Jews* was an outflow from the studies on the Nazi state by Ernst Fränkel and Franz Neumann, and helped to widen the definition of "guilt", implicating not only the Nazi elite prosecuted in Nuremberg, but also the minor bureaucrats who kept the machine of annihilation going. Similar questions were raised by Hannah Arendt in her "Banality of Evil". It may be fair to say that it was Hannah Arendt who first described the category of "ordinary men" destined to become a central concept in Holocaust research in the Eighties and in the Nineties and applied by her – perhaps erroneously – to Adolf Eichmann.

In the framework of "Intentionalism", fundamental research was done into Hitler's aims, on the one hand, and on the other into the decisional process which led to the *Endlösung*. The whole discussion on the dating of Hitler's decision may be put down to the Intentionalism line of research. The structuralist paradigm, with its emphasis on the autonomous role of peripheral bodies and authorities promoted research into the perpetrators in the different sections of German state and German society (the police, the armed forces, the SS, scientists, doctors and so on).

The emphasis on the "other victims" threw light on the whole ideological dimension of the national socialist biocratic program, whereas the "historicization" debate between Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer helped to clarify the question regarding the aspects of National Socialism which were "comparable" with other violence-based regimes and those which were not. Finally, new research into the non-German perpetrators and into the Shoah seen in the general perspective of mass violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century seeks to get beyond the dichotomy between the Shoah and other genocides without questioning the extreme nature of the *Endlösung* even when compared with other projects of annihilation of whole groups of population. In his "Hayes Robinson Lecture" in 2001, Saul Friedländer stressed that the different groups of perpetrators showed different patterns of behaviour and he suggested concentrating on single, extreme details of behaviour or on single, abhorrent, revealing verbal statements, thus developing a sort of "anthropology of mass murder", which would of course be applicable to other genocides.<sup>167</sup> The "uniqueness" of Shoah is in fact based on the simultaneous occurrence of genocidal elements (and first of all of a genocidal will) in an unprecedented radical form. However, the *single* murder elements are recognizable in other cases of genocide as well.

To conclude, it seems likely that the new lines of research begun in recent years will focus on better placing the phenomenon of the destruction of the

166 Alan Bullock did modify this interpretation slightly, attributing more weight to Hitler's anti-Semitism in the second edition of his book, published in 1964.

167 Saul Friedländer, *Massacri e società tedesca nel Terzo Reich: interpretazioni e dilemmi*. In: Cattaruzza/Flores/Levi Sullam/Traverso (ed.), *Storia della Shoah*, vol. II: *La distruzione degli ebrei*, p. 15–33, here 28–29.

European Jews within the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was the huge amount of research carried out specifically on the Shoah in the last decades, which makes this aim seem more attainable now and enables us to carry out verifiable comparisons of the various forms of violence resulting in genocide promoted by state and political authorities, or initiated by groups of individuals (for example, improvised corps of volunteers or even mere civilians) and often favoured by war.<sup>168</sup> It seems reasonable to say that a major task for historians in the near future will be the reconstructing of the manifold contributions which the historiography of Shoah made to a broader conceptualization and scholarly awareness of the modern phenomenon of mass-murder, whether arising from racial, ethnical, political, social or religious causes. In my opinion, it is well worth investigating how the scholarly examination of the different aspects of the “fracture of civilization”<sup>169</sup> occurring in Europe between 1939 and 1945 has sharpened our awareness of similar manifestations of human evil in modern times, and also provided us with the analytical categories for a better understanding of politically motivated and initiated mass-crimes. The present article intends to be a modest contribution to this aim.

---

168 For a typological overview on different kinds of violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century s. Mark Mazower, *Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century*. In: *The American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), p. 1158–1178. Mazower states, however, that the strong focus on the Holocaust in contemporary research on violence may lead to a misperception of the different manifestations of this phenomenon, because of the emblematic character of the history of the destruction of the European Jews.

169 Dan Diner, “Zivilisationsbruch”: la frattura di civiltà come epistemologia della Shoah. In: Cattaruzza/Flores/Levi Sullam/Traverso (ed.), *La crisi dell’Europa: le origini e il contesto*, p. 17–43.