

## CHAPTER ONE

# “Final Solution,” Holocaust, Shoah, or Genocide? From Separate to Integrated Histories

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How we label things determines in part how we understand them. There is no name for the mass murder of European Jews in the 1940s that is not also simultaneously an interpretation. “Final Solution,” Holocaust, Shoah, Genocide: each of these implies a certain analysis of what happened and why. Thus the changing (and contested) names attached to the mass murder of European Jewry over the past seventy years also suggest shifts over time in how the event has been interpreted. Similarly, these names reflect a series of debates among historians about how best to analyze the destruction of Europe’s Jews. Some of these debates have been more or less resolved, but many persist and seem likely to continue for the foreseeable future. It can thus hardly be the goal of this chapter to resolve these debates or to offer a definitive interpretation of the mass murder. Rather, I want to trace, in broad terms, the trajectory of Holocaust historiography from the first Jewish histories of the Holocaust to today in order to give a sense of where the historiography stands now and how it got here.

### The First Histories

Writing the history of the murder of Europe’s Jews started even before the killing itself stopped. Jews, professional historians and amateurs alike documented their lives under Nazi rule and sought to preserve those documents for posterity. To the extent possible, they also sought to document their deaths.<sup>1</sup> These early efforts were generally either archival or testimonial in nature. Although this means these efforts were focused in the first instance on collecting and preserving historical *sources* for use by later historians, such archival and testimonial endeavors also proffered some initial interpretations of the unfolding tragedy, either implicitly in their choice of what to collect and preserve or explicitly through narrative observation.

The most famous such archival effort was that led by Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) in the Warsaw Ghetto.<sup>2</sup> Ringelblum was himself a trained historian, completing his PhD at Warsaw University in 1927. In 1923, Ringelblum was one of the co-founders of the “Seminar on the History of the Jews in Poland,” which evolved into the Warsaw Commission for the History of the Jews of Poland and affiliated with the Yiddish Scientific Institute in Vilnius (YIVO). Precluded from a university career because he was Jewish, Ringelblum taught high school and wrote articles for Jewish newspapers and magazines. The archive began with personal notes that Ringelblum started to take with the outbreak of war in September 1939, but was officially founded as *Oyneyg Shabes* (Sabbath Delight) on November 22, 1940. Ringelblum assembled a volunteer staff to supplement his own note taking and collecting activities. After the Germans began deporting Warsaw Jews to their deaths in Treblinka, members of *Oyneyg Shabes* buried part of their archive in ten lead crates in August 1942, and a further three milk tins of material were buried near the end of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in February 1943. Much of this material was recovered after the war.

Operating in the tradition of YIVO, *Oyneyg Shabes* was conceptualized from the start as an interdisciplinary research institute intended to document “all aspects of the history of Polish Jewry in the Second World War,” though with a strong focus on the social and cultural history of Polish Jews, a history from the bottom up. This explains the wide net cast by the collectors of *Oyneyg Shabes*, who gathered an astonishing array of materials, ranging from official documents (both German and Jewish) and personal testimonies of Warsaw Jews from all walks of life to material objects from everyday life, underground newspapers and pamphlets, and photos and sketches. The goal of this wide-ranging collection was to gather a sufficiently diverse source base to document the full range of life and death among Warsaw Jews under German rule.

In December 1943, Ringelblum expressed his hopes for the archive: “With a little peace, we may succeed in making sure that not a single fact about Jewish life in this time and place will be kept from the world.”<sup>3</sup> This hope – of recording and documenting Jewish life and death under the Nazis for a future world, one that might perhaps make sense of it all – was shared by other *Oyneyg Shabes* chroniclers. Sometime after September 1942, Gustawa Jarecka, who worked for the Warsaw Judenrat and copied out their documents for the archive, wrote a brief essay titled “The Last State of Resettlement Is Death.” She wrote:

The record must be hurled like a stone under history’s wheel in order to stop it....One can lose all hopes except the one – that the suffering and destruction of this war will make sense when they are looked at from a distant, historical perspective. From sufferings, unparalleled in history, from bloody tears and bloody sweat, a chronicle of days of hell is being composed which will help explain the historical reasons for why people came to think as they did and why regimes arose that [caused such suffering].<sup>4</sup>

In addition to documenting Jewish life, Ringelblum and his collaborators also intended, at least in principle, to analyze those documents and to draft a preliminary history of the Jews under Nazi rule. In mid-1941, *Oyneyg Shabes* began what they called the “Two and a Half Years” project, which was to provide a comprehensive overview of Polish Jewry during the war, covering economics, cultural life, and mutual aid.<sup>5</sup> Ringelblum asked, “Two and a Half Years...which goals? A photograph of life. Not literature but science.”<sup>6</sup> This scientific photograph of Jewish life during wartime was intended not

just as a memorial, but as a foundation for rebuilding after the war. “What kind of social order will reign after the war and what lessons can our two-and-a-half-year experience teach us to prepare for the [postwar] era.”<sup>7</sup> The core idea was that even the most horrific of experiences could offer useful lessons for rebuilding Jewish communities after the end of the war.

That was a rather optimistic, not to say naïve, reading of the situation in late 1941 and early 1942, even if it was still possible to believe that most Polish Jews would somehow survive the war until the major deportations of Warsaw Jews started in July 1942. As the full scope of the murder became clear, it was more difficult to maintain such optimism. Shortly before he was killed in Majdanek in the summer of 1943, Ringelblum’s prewar mentor and *Oyneg Shabes* collaborator, the historian Ignacy (Isaac) Schiper told a fellow inmate that “everything depends on who transmits our testament to future generations, on who writes the history of this period. History is usually written by the victor. What we know about murdered peoples is only what their murderers vaingloriously cared to say about them. Should our murderers be victorious, should *they* write the history of this war, our destruction will be presented as one of the most beautiful pages of world history, and future generations will pay tribute to them as dauntless crusaders.”<sup>8</sup> The job of Jewish historians was to write an alternate history, a history of the murdered, not the murderers. The problem was that even if Jews survived to write such histories, they might not be believed. Schiper continued: “[I]f *we* write the history of this period and tears – and I firmly believe we will – who will believe us? Nobody will *want* to believe us, because our disaster is the disaster of the entire civilized world.... We’ll have the thankless job of proving to a reluctant world that we are Abel, the murdered brother.”<sup>9</sup> Schiper here raised a question that would challenge Jewish historians into the postwar period: who was to be the audience for histories of the murder of the Jews? Was it the Jews themselves, for their collective reconstruction, as was implied in Ringelblum’s vision for the “Two and a Half Years” project? Or should it be the broader, “civilized” (gentile) world, to warn them of their own destructive potential? Was it to be a history by and for the victims? Or about the perpetrators, perhaps with bystanders as the principal audience? Postwar histories intended for different audiences performed emphasized different aspects of the murder of the Jews and offered differing ideas about how to interpret the catastrophe.

### The *Khurbn-Forshung* Tradition

In the event, Schiper proved correct in one thing. Some Jews did survive the war and sought, from the moment of liberation forward, to write the history of their annihilation at the hands of the Nazis. After 1945, Jewish historical commissions were established throughout Europe.<sup>10</sup> Staffed heavily by East European Jews, even in Western Europe, these commissions followed in *Oyneg Shabes*’s footsteps in attempting to collect as much evidence relating to the destruction of European Jews as possible. This included major efforts to interview survivors, to collect and collate their testimony, but also to gather written documentation, Jewish and German. As Laura Jockusch has shown, these commissions grew out of the tradition of *Khurbn-Forshung* (research into destruction) that had developed among East European Jewish communities to document the pogroms of the early twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> Like these early documentary efforts (and *Oyneg Shabes*), the commissions were largely staffed by nonhistorians, though there were important exceptions like Joseph Kermisz of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw (successor to

the Polish Central Jewish Historical Commission [CŻHK]), and Philip Friedman, who at the time was working for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) collecting documentation in Displaced Persons (DP) camps in the American occupation zone in Germany. Others, like the trained Arabist Alfred Wiener from the Jewish Central Information Office in London (eventually, the Wiener Library) or the lawyer and journalist Léon Poliakov, research director for the Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CJDC) in Paris, came to their work with an academic background, even if they lacked formal historical training. But many of the everyday researchers working for the commissions, taking testimonies and collecting documents were autodidacts with little formal training of any sort.

According to Jockusch, the various commissions across Europe all shared one central challenge, how to use mainly “memory” sources – testimonies in particular – to write “objective” history. This raised the problem of how to deal with emotion in history. In addressing this difficulty, different commissions came down on opposite sides of various divides. The first was whether to adopt a more traditional, “national” historical approach that dealt primarily with the destruction of specific, national Jewish communities, or, given the continental scale of the Nazi genocide of the Jews, whether it made more sense to engage in transnational research, seeking documents and interviewing witnesses from across Europe. The French CJDC and Polish CŻHK opted for a national approach, whereas the historical commissions operating in the DP camps tended to embrace a more transnational approach. In part, this was simply a question of resources. In the DP camps, researchers had ready access to survivors from across Europe, whereas in France or Poland, “national” resources and local witnesses were more readily to hand. At the same time, implicit in these different approaches is a methodological division within Jewish historiography more broadly – whether Jewish history is best told within the national frame of the various countries where Jews settled and lived, or whether the diasporic nature of Jewish life means that Jewish history inherently transcended national borders and has to be understood in transnational terms.

The commissions also differed on the core question raised by Schiper: whether to write primarily for a Jewish or gentile audience, with the national historians tending to prioritize a broad audience reaching out to non-Jews, whereas those working in a more transnational (and diasporic) vein prioritized the Jewish audience. An approach that highlighted the specific experience of various national Jewish populations, say French or Polish, could readily link those experiences to the broader national experience of occupation and collaboration, an especially strong theme for the French commission. A story that emphasized the shared experience of deportation and murder regardless of national context more firmly situated this history in a distinctively Jewish idiom.

Finally, there was the question of whether the focus should be on perpetrator (German and collaborator) sources, which guided the CJDC, or on Jewish sources, which was how the CŻHK approached its research. Was the story about the process of *killing* Jews and the decisions and policies that led to this? Or was it about Jews *dying* and their efforts to survive? Related to this were divergent assessments of the reliability of survivor testimony. Was it overly emotional and subjective? Or did it provide privileged, perhaps unique, access to dimensions of historical experience that were rarely written down at the time and, almost by definition, did not appear in sources created by perpetrators? Divergent answers to these questions characterized the emergence of a genuine historiography of the mass murder of the Jews in the first decades after the war, down, say, to the trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. To an extent, this can be framed as a divergence

between a historiography of what was coming to be called the Holocaust as a dimension of *Jewish* history and a historiography of what the Nazis themselves termed the “Final Solution” as an aspect of *German* history.

### The History of the Holocaust as Jewish History

The story of the Holocaust as primarily a Jewish event was largely the preserve of Jewish historians in these years, whereas both Jews and non-Jews wrote the history of the “Final Solution” as perpetrator history. Several important Jewish historians of the Holocaust, working in Europe, the United States, and Israel focused on the internal history of Jewish communities confronting destruction. Among these Philip Friedman was perhaps the most important. In a 1957 essay, Friedman, whom Salo Baron called “the father of Jewish Holocaust literature,” decried what he saw as an overemphasis in the existing historiography on “the subject of anti-Jewish hostility and its effects.”<sup>12</sup> Instead, what Friedman called for was a “history of the Jewish people during the period of Nazi rule in which the central role is to be played by the Jewish people, not only as tragic victims but as bearers of a communal existence with all the manifold and numerous aspects involved. Our approach must be definitely ‘Judeo-centric’ as opposed to ‘Nazi-centric.’”<sup>13</sup> Friedman, a trained historian who had received his PhD from the University of Vienna in 1925, survived the war in hiding in Lwów and began working for the Polish Jewish Historical Commission after liberation. After testifying at the Nuremberg trials, he remained in Germany where he worked for the Joint Distribution Committee gathering testimony and documentations in the DP camps of the US zone, eventually moving to New York where he worked as a lecturer at Columbia. As early as 1945, Friedman could declare in an “Outline of Program for Holocaust Research” that “the main topics of research on the Holocaust...relate to the sufferings of the Jewish population and the struggle for life.”<sup>14</sup>

Unsurprisingly, then, most of Friedman’s postwar scholarship focused precisely on the Jewish struggle for survival. His first postwar book, in 1954, was a history of the Warsaw Ghetto and his second, in 1957, was a history of Christian rescue of Jews.<sup>15</sup> In an important essay, intended to form the basis of an eventual but unfinished book on Jewish communal life in Nazi occupied Europe, Friedman identified a number of key trends in the trajectory of Jewish communal organization, all conditioned by the pressure applied by the Germans. These included a substantial increase (initially) in formal membership in Jewish communities, since the Nazis concentrated Jews and forced even converts to join, together with “immensely enhanced communal control and authority.”<sup>16</sup> The forced concentration of Jews produced “a strong centripetal trend,” as diverse elements in the Jewish community were forced together in ghettos, whether Zionist, socialist, secular, or Orthodox. Together, these newly concentrated Jewish communities were forced to focus on “primordial” issues of survival, rather than political or religious disputes. “Finally and tragically, instead of regeneration and reorganization, disintegration and extermination.”<sup>17</sup>

This does not mean, however, that Friedman lost sight of the diversity of Jewish experience and attitudes or that he thought conflict disappeared in the ghettos. He did think, however, that the nature of intra-Jewish differences and conflicts changed under the harsh circumstances of German rule. The “ghetto community was not a direct continuation of the prewar Jewish society, with its class differences and interrelations. Under the tremendous pressure of the Nazi persecutions, a social revolution took place, which

swiftly and radically shattered the whole prewar order.”<sup>18</sup> Yet because of the constant evolution of Nazi policy and the steady march to destruction, it was impossible to establish a “new social order of any permanence.”<sup>19</sup> In this context, prewar class and political differences became largely irrelevant. Differences in worker skill or ruthless willingness to survive at any cost created new hierarchies.

In the jungle, money and scholarship do not count for much – only strong teeth and nails – and the ghetto created by the Nazis was a jungle, in which group was pitted against group in a struggle for survival against impossible odds, a struggle carefully orchestrated by the Nazis to undermine communal solidarity and foster the growth of a corrupt, manipulable underworld.<sup>20</sup>

Within Friedman’s “Judeo-centric” historiography, two key debates emerged in the course of the 1960s and 1970s, both prompted by the publication of the first edition of Raul Hilberg’s seminal *The Destruction of the European Jews* in 1961 and Hannah Arendt’s controversial *Eichmann in Jerusalem* in 1963.<sup>21</sup> The first concerned the broad question of Jewish resistance (or alleged lack thereof) to the Holocaust. The second focused on the subsidiary issue of the role played by the so-called Jewish Councils (*Judenräte*), which helped administer the ghettos established by the Nazis prior to launching the full-scale extermination operations.

Hilberg’s *Destruction of the European Jews* was not the first full-scale history of the Holocaust in toto (that distinction goes to Gerald Reitlinger), but it soon proved to be the book that launched a thousand debates.<sup>22</sup> Hilberg’s prodigious research and his sharp argumentation were a fecund source for other scholars but also prompted sometimes bitter criticism – nowhere more so than regarding the question of Jewish resistance. Hilberg was not subtle. “The reaction pattern of the Jews is characterized by an almost complete lack of resistance,” he declared.<sup>23</sup> The problem, according to Hilberg, was that the Jews had “unlearned the art of resistance” in their long history of exile in the diaspora. “In exile the Jews had always been in a minority; they had always been in danger but they had learned that they could avert danger and survive destruction by placating and appeasing enemies... Armed resistance in the face of overwhelming force could end only in disaster. Thus, over a period of centuries the Jews had learned that in order to survive they had to refrain from resistance.”<sup>24</sup>

The failure to offer meaningful resistance meant that Jews turned to other strategies for survival. To a very modest extent (according to Hilberg), they sought to flee, but more fundamentally, the Jews turned to measures of alleviation and compliance. Alleviation covered petitions, bribery, self-help, and relief efforts, “in short, all those activities which are designed to avert danger, or, in the event that force has already been used, to diminish its effects.”<sup>25</sup> Then, “there was a second way in which the Jews tried to avert disaster: by judicious compliance with orders, and sometimes by anticipatory compliance with orders not yet issued.”<sup>26</sup> These strategies had been adaptive in earlier periods, slowing violence against Jews and always enabling some (often sizable) portion of the community to survive and rebuild. The problem was that the Nazis were not like earlier persecutors of the Jews. “When the Nazis took over in 1933, the old Jewish reaction pattern set in again, but this time the results were catastrophic. The German bureaucracy was not slowed by Jewish pleading; it was not stopped by Jewish indispensability.... The Jewish community, unable to switch to resistance, increased its co-operation with the tempo of the German measures, thus hastening its own destruction.”<sup>27</sup>

It should come as no surprise that this portrait of Jewish passivity and cooperation in their own destruction provoked outrage, especially among survivors. The criticisms were both empirical – claims that Hilberg got his facts wrong – and moral – assertions that his arguments were an insult to the dead. Nathan Eck, a survivor and journalist living in Israel, exemplifies this response. “The Jewish section of this book [Hilberg’s] is a slander on the Jews. The author’s guilt lies not so much in his harsh criticism of the conduct of the Jewish masses during a period of calamity, nor even in the satire and disdain in which he finds it necessary to indulge....His fault lies in the fact that he permitted himself as an historian so easily and casually to be venomous, without trying to verify his sources and his facts; to treat this grave issue as a nonessential subordinate to his main topic.”<sup>28</sup> On Eck’s reading, Hilberg was merely acting out his “feelings of disappointment and frustration, resentment and anger, perhaps even pain.”<sup>29</sup> He might well be nothing more than a self-hating Jew.

Hilberg’s allegations led to a wave of research on Jewish responses to the Holocaust, much of it emphasizing both the variety of Jewish reactions and the extent of active Jewish resistance and efforts to escape.<sup>30</sup> With additional research, a much more complicated picture of Jewish responses to the Holocaust emerged. Scholars pointed to what Ernst Simon called “spiritual resistance” and to other forms of nonviolent opposition to the Nazis, as well as to incidents of armed resistance beyond the Warsaw ghetto uprising.<sup>31</sup>

For instance, Isaiah Trunk, a Polish Jew who survived the war in the Soviet Union and worked in his later years as head archivist for YIVO in New York, agreed with Hilberg that “traditional methods of self-defense were entirely inadequate in the radically changed situation” of Nazi rule.<sup>32</sup> However, he further noted that, “in time, with the intensification of the systematic persecution, the Jews developed other, more fitting clandestine tools of moral, economic, cultural, and political self-defense against the Nazis.”<sup>33</sup> These included economic measures such as smuggling and illegal trade with Christians, bribing corrupt Nazi officials, and various forms of collective self-help. Jews also offered other forms of nonviolent resistance designed to preserve Jewish identity and communal life. Many religious Jews, for instance, went to great lengths to try to fulfill Jewish ritual requirements despite Nazi prohibitions, although rabbis also relaxed religious rules (like dietary restrictions) for the sake of saving Jewish lives. Secular Jews and religious Jews alike sought to preserve Jewish culture, creating schools; running underground newspapers; writing new songs, poems, and plays, all of which “strengthened the ghetto Jew in his sense of self-esteem and dignity. These efforts bore the clear stamp of spiritual and intellectual resistance.”<sup>34</sup> For Trunk, even the supposedly docile way in which Jews went to their death could be interpreted, not as passivity or surrender, but as a way of retaining self-respect. Jews died, refusing to “show the murderers any panic or hysteria that might have given additional pleasure to the sadists among them. The victims preferred dying with dignity and with scorn toward their killers.”<sup>35</sup>

Hilberg, of course, denied that these sorts of activities constituted resistance in any meaningful sense. Indeed, one of the major differences between Hilberg and his critics was his insistence that only armed insurrection really counted as resistance. Yehuda Bauer among others rejected this definition as both excessively narrow and a misconstrual of the situation in which Jews found themselves. “Armed resistance during the Holocaust was possible only under conditions that most Jews did not enjoy. You either have arms or you do not; for the most part, the Jews did not.”<sup>36</sup> Bauer therefore suggested a broader definition of Jewish resistance as “any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to

the known or surmised laws, actions or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters.”<sup>37</sup> Spiritual resistance, economic and political efforts at survival, fleeing and hiding all counted as much as taking up arms.

Of course, there was Jewish armed resistance, more of it than Hilberg assumed. Yet this too has to be understood in its proper context. Bauer argued that *armed* resistance emerged in the ghettos and death camps, to the extent it did, only once it became apparent that the Nazis intended to kill all Jews. In other words, most forms of Jewish resistance, including those most common before 1942, were intended to preserve Jewish lives, identity, and culture for the reconstruction of a postwar Jewish community. Once it became clear that there was unlikely to be much of a postwar Jewish community in the areas under Nazi control, armed resistance emerged as a more rational option. “Ghetto rebellions never took place when a hope of survival could be entertained – only when the realization finally struck that all Jews were going to be killed any way. All other armed rebellions during World War II were predicated on the assumption that there was some chance of success. In the ghettos, no such success could be contemplated.”<sup>38</sup> Because the Jews were so desperately outnumbered, outgunned, and isolated from any possible military assistance, armed resistance was in most cases suicidal. It therefore made sense only once the sole other option was to allow oneself to be murdered.

Given the impossibility of actually stopping the Nazi murder program, the goal of armed resistance was, like that of earlier forms of cultural and religious resistance, the preservation of Jewish dignity and self-respect, now in a gesture of final defiance in the face of inevitable extinction. Much the same could be said of armed resistance in the death camps, such as when the Jewish *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz set fire to one of the crematoria in October 1944 or the mass escape from Sobibór in October 1943, where all but 58 of the escapees were eventually captured and killed.<sup>39</sup> The story was somewhat different for Jewish partisans operating in the countryside behind German lines, where there was at least some chance of military success and personal survival.<sup>40</sup> But for most Jews, any possible course of action was bound to end in death. Resistance was literally futile, save as a moral gesture.

In this context, a related debate developed in the historiography concerning the role played by Jewish Councils, committees of Jewish self-administration created and supervised by the Nazis. The councils were in charge of most of the day-to-day administration of the ghettos, everything from allocating rations and housing to assigning work-details to policing criminal activity and the black market. Even more troubling was the fact that once the Nazis began deporting Jews from the ghettos to the death camps, the councils were responsible for drawing up the lists of those to be deported, that is, killed.

Hilberg was quite critical of the councils, noting that they “conveyed German demands to the Jewish population and placed Jewish resources into German hands, thereby increasing the leverage of the perpetrator in significant ways.”<sup>41</sup> The Holocaust was a priority for the Germans, but in the context of a continental war, one they tried to carry out with minimal resources. Leveraging Jewish cooperation thus became a crucial aspect of the destruction. Contrary to the misreading by some of his critics, Hilberg was not unsympathetic toward the dilemmas facing the councils, calling them “genuine” leaders “who strove to protect the Jewish community from the most severe exactions and impositions and who tried to normalize Jewish life under the most adverse conditions.”<sup>42</sup> The problem was that the game was rigged against them in every possible way. The system was created by Germans and designed to serve German goals from exploitation

to extermination. Every aspect of the system, including the Jewish Councils, ultimately facilitated German goals. “In short, the Jewish councils were assisting the Germans with their good qualities as well as their bad, and the very best accomplishments of a Jewish bureaucracy were ultimately appropriated by the Germans for the all-consuming destruction process.”<sup>43</sup> The situation of the Jewish councils was in the most literal sense tragic, where even their virtues facilitated murder.

Hannah Arendt was less sympathetic than Hilberg, on whose work she relied. On her reading, the councils’ cooperation with the Nazis blurred the lines between victims and perpetrators. She argued that they “enjoyed their new power” and had cooperated with the Nazis to a far greater extent than necessary.<sup>44</sup> “Wherever Jews lived,” she wrote, “there were recognized Jewish leaders, and this leadership, almost without exception, cooperated in one way or another, for one reason or another, with the Nazis. The whole truth was that if the Jewish people had really been unorganized and leaderless, there would have been chaos and plenty of misery but the total number of victims would hardly have been between four and a half and six million people.”<sup>45</sup> Jewish leadership as embodied in the councils was symptomatic of the “moral collapse the Nazis caused in respectable European society,” a moral collapse that greatly influenced Eichmann, whom Arendt saw as simply going along with the new norms created by the Nazis, destructive and murderous as they were. Eichmann and the Jewish Councils were in this sense both part of the same phenomenon on Arendt’s reading.

It is hardly surprising that this conflation of perpetrator and victim was immensely controversial, and Arendt faced criticism even more heated than that directed at Hilberg.<sup>46</sup> Aside from emotional and often quite personal attacks, her interpretation of the Jewish Councils themselves was subjected to both empirical and moral critique.<sup>47</sup> Much of the force of Arendt’s interpretation depended on her dual assertion that Jewish cooperation with the Nazis was more or less universal and more or less voluntary. In an important article in *Yad Vashem Studies*, Aharon Weiss called both contentions into question. Weiss pointed to strong elements of personnel continuity among prewar Jewish leaders and the leadership of the Jewish Councils in western Poland (the area administered by the Germans from September 1939), though this was less true for eastern Poland, where Nazi rule came only with the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. In western Poland, the Nazis did allow the Jews to select their own leaders, subject to German approval, and in this sense, the members of the councils could be said to have served “voluntarily.” However, many who served on the councils had been leaders of prewar Jewish institutions, and in that sense, merely continued to serve. Moreover, the Jewish people themselves “exerted moral pressure on those who refused to assume office.”<sup>48</sup> So, it was as much “Jewish internal considerations” that led people to serve as it was any misguided desire to work with the Nazis.

More fundamentally, Weiss found substantial evidence of noncompliance and noncooperation among chairmen of Jewish Councils in the early period, prior to the start of mass extermination. In the early period, seventy-seven percent of council chairmen refused to cooperate with the Germans to one degree or another, and only fourteen percent cooperated without fail. In the extermination period, only thirty-three percent offered any meaningful resistance, and sixty percent cooperated fully. The reason for this is simple: “responsible leaders were replaced, often with German support, by people less attuned to the interests of their community.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, when the Germans merely wanted to exploit the Jews, they were willing to tolerate Jewish leaders who were less than fully compliant, but when they moved to killing Jews, they replaced noncompliant

leaders with docile ones to facilitate the extermination. Arendt's blanket condemnation of the Jewish Councils and even Hilberg's "tragic" reading of them as aiding the Germans even when not intending to oversimplifies a more complicated story, in which it matters a great deal whether we are talking about the period of concentration and oppression or the period of extermination.

This view of the Jewish Councils – that they were diverse in their responses, that these responses changed when the Nazis shifted from oppression and exploitation to mass murder, and that whatever cooperation the councils had offered resulted heavily from the degree of coercion they faced from the Nazi authorities – is reinforced by Isaiah Trunk's National Book Award-winning *Judenrat*.<sup>50</sup> Trunk noted that the behavior of council members was "not uniform" but that "two principal – and contradictory – attitudes emerged."<sup>51</sup> Some council members went along to get along, hoping to thereby save lives, not least their own. Others tried to minimize their cooperation, and refused to aid the deportations at all, even when it meant their own death. Trunk argued that the councils "reached the morally dangerous borderline of collaboration," but that only some members crossed that line, while others preserved "high moral standards."<sup>52</sup> In other words, no blanket condemnation of the Jewish councils can do justice to the full complexity of their actual behavior, which spanned an enormous range from eager cooperation to outright resistance, and which moreover changed substantially over time in the face of enormous German pressure and coercion.

### The History of the "Final Solution" as Perpetrator History

Historians who saw the destruction of the Jews as mainly a facet of Jewish history focused heavily on the question of Jewish responses to persecution and extermination. Historians who were interested in the murder of the Jews as a dimension of German history, on the other hand, concentrated on questions of causation and motivation. What caused the "Final Solution," as the Nazis termed it? What motivated the killers, both those at the top of the hierarchy and, perhaps more troubling, those on the ground who did the actual killing? As Raul Hilberg put it in the preface to his seminal work, "this is not a book about the Jews. It is a book about the people who destroyed the Jews."<sup>53</sup> (It is all the more ironic then that Hilberg's book set off a furious controversy about the behavior of the victims, as we have seen). As with the Jewish history of the Holocaust, the German history of the "Final Solution" spawned a number of intense and at times polemical debates of which the most important by far was the so-called intentionalism/functionalism debate, which in many ways dominated the historiography of the 1970s and 1980s.

The intentionalism/functionalism debate concerned the causes of the "Final Solution." Participants concentrated their attention on the origins and development of German anti-Jewish policy. The intentionalist position in the debate is quite straightforward. As Lucy Dawidowicz put it: "The Final Solution had its origins in Hitler's mind."<sup>54</sup> Dawidowicz's, although hardly the only intentionalist account of the "Final Solution," is certainly the most forceful and eloquent. Hitler, she notes, claimed in *Mein Kampf*, to have realized in the shock following Germany's loss of World War I that there could be no compromise or agreement with the Jews, only the "hard either-or."<sup>55</sup> This uncompromising position, she argued, amounted to an early determination to destroy the Jews, one Hitler never surrendered. His only significant modification was when he came to see the Jews as not just a domestic, but an international threat as well, thereby expanding the scope of his antisemitism.

On Dawidowicz's reading, once Hitler came to see the Jews as a global threat, the destruction of the Jews became ineluctably linked to the need for a pan-European war of imperial expansion. Once this idea developed, Hitler never changed his mind. "He had long-range plans to realize his ideological goals, and the destruction of the Jews was at their center....The implementation of his plans was contingent on the opportunism of the moment or the expediency of delay."<sup>56</sup> In other words, any apparent shifts in policy or any seeming uncertainty among Nazi elites was really just a reflection of Hitler's tactical calculations of how best to achieve his unwavering long-term goal of physically murdering all the Jews of Europe.<sup>57</sup>

The logic of the intentionalist position is a straightforward syllogism. Hitler was a rabid antisemite with a long history of violent rhetoric about "removing," "liquidating," and "destroying" the Jews. Hitler became the supreme dictator of the Third Reich. The Third Reich murdered millions of Jews. Therefore, the genocide of the Jews carried out by Germans under Hitler's leadership was the direct result of his long-standing desire to see them murdered.

The functionalist position, on the other hand, is more complex and varied. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that the functionalists all more or less disagreed with the intentionalists on three key points. First, for the functionalists, or structuralists as they are also called, the origins of the "Final Solution" are to be sought not in the mind of Adolf Hitler but in the governing structures of the Third Reich. Second, while intentionalists interpret the evolution and increasing destructiveness of Nazi anti-Jewish policy between 1933 and 1942 as evidence of Hitler's tactical opportunism, functionalists see this as evidence of a process of "cumulative radicalization" driven by bureaucratic competition and pressure from below.<sup>58</sup> Finally, functionalists contend that the decision to murder the Jews of Europe – if indeed there ever was a specific, discrete, and unitary decision for genocide – came quite late, sometime between the invasion of the Soviet Union in the early summer of 1941 and the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.<sup>59</sup>

No functionalist ever denied that Hitler was a rabid antisemite or that he frequently expressed a desire to rid Germany and the world of Jews. They do deny, however, that Hitler's personal beliefs alone "caused" the Holocaust and that the development of Nazi anti-Jewish policy, from discrimination to extermination, was the straightforward realization of a long-standing plan on Hitler's part. Rather, they contend the dynamics of governance in the Third Reich itself drove a developmental process of increasing radicalization. According to Karl Schleunes, anti-Jewish policy developed by "trial and error," with little evidence of long-range planning or coherent development.<sup>60</sup>

The process was largely driven by the competitive dynamics of the Nazi hierarchy, which Martin Broszat termed a "polycracy," a rule by many, comprised of "individual office holders, each seeking to recommend himself to Hitler through a particular ability to get things done."<sup>61</sup> Many of the specific measures against Jews were, according to another leading functionalist, Hans Mommsen, "conceived by the rival satraps around Hitler, who were unscrupulously determined to outdo one another in implementing national socialist policies, and thus to please the Führer. Only in retrospect have these measures acquired the appearance of being part of a systematic and cynical escalation of persecution."<sup>62</sup>

In the context of this uncoordinated policy making process, each step tended to create unanticipated problems that called for additional "solutions," each of which tended to become more radical than the ones that preceded it. This is what Broszat means when he writes: "It thus seems that the liquidation of the Jews began not solely as the result of an

ostensible will for extermination but also as a ‘way out’ of a blind alley into which the National Socialists had maneuvered themselves.”<sup>63</sup> Deportations to the Ghettos, for instance, created overcrowding and increased the risk of pandemics, which led to the first killings of German Jews in Poland. The “Final Solution” itself was the product of a series of such more or less local, more or less improvised solutions, rather than the culmination of a long-term plan by Hitler.

Recent years have seen an “emerging consensus” on the origins of the “Final Solution” that seeks to bridge the gap between the intentionalists and functionalists. Christopher Browning’s magnum opus, *The Origins of the Final Solution*, can be taken as representative.<sup>64</sup> Browning has concluded “from September 1939 to October 1941 he [Hitler] was an active and continuing participant in the decision-making process. Indeed, not a single change in Nazi Jewish policy occurred without his intervention and approval,” though on Browning’s reading, Hitler’s directives could “take the form of relatively vague and inexplicit statements, exhortations, and prophecies,” which were then given more concrete form by other leading Nazis, Himmler in particular.<sup>65</sup> In other words, Hitler was an active participant in the decision to exterminate Europe’s Jews, but he did so in a context of evolving policy and absent a concrete, long-term plan dating back to the 1920s. This approach acknowledges a process of cumulative radicalization and an ad hoc search for various “solutions” to the “Jewish question” before settling definitively on physical liquidation as the “Final Solution” in the summer/fall of 1941, while also insisting that Hitler remained a key actor in this process, even if not the only one. Hitler provided both the crucial ideological framework within which subordinates “working toward the Führer” operated to realize the long-term goal of ridding Germany, Europe, and perhaps eventually the world of Jews.<sup>66</sup> Hitler not only established the long-term goals of Jewish policy (which even earlier functionalists had acknowledged), he intervened more directly at crucial moments to help drive forward the radicalization process, as Browning emphasizes.

The intentionalism/functionality debate concentrated in the first instance on the formulation of policy and only secondarily on its implementation. Because the intentionalists were mainly interested in Hitler, and the functionalists mainly in governing structures, neither paid much attention to the actual killers. Neither Hitler’s will nor the competitive dynamics of bureaucratic office holders can explain why many thousands of Germans (and their European collaborators) were willing to brutally murder millions of Jewish men, women, and children. The debate over perpetrator motives at the ground level was to some extent present in the West German Nazi trials of the 1950s and 1960s, but it did not really reach public prominence until the 1990s.<sup>67</sup>

In 1992, Christopher Browning published his groundbreaking *Ordinary Men* and four years later Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* appeared.<sup>68</sup> Rarely in the history of scholarship have two books so closely overlapped in their topic and sources, and even more rarely have they reached such diametrically opposed conclusions. Both books took the West German judicial interrogations of the surviving members of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 from the 1960s as their primary documentary source. Reserve Battalion 101 was responsible for over a dozen mass executions of Jews in occupied Poland in 1942 and 1943. Both Browning and Goldhagen saw these records as providing unique insight into the mindset of ordinary killers in the “Final Solution” because the members of Battalion 101 were middle-aged reservists, not SS activists. They were the most ordinary of ordinary Germans. Yet they had overwhelmingly participated actively in the brutal shooting of many thousands of Jews. Equally important,

their commanding officer had explicitly given the men the opportunity to opt out of the killing, a chance very few took advantage of. Their participation could thus be seen as fully voluntary. The question for both Browning and Goldhagen was why?

This is where the similarities between the two books end. Goldhagen, a trained political scientist rather than historian, offers an explicitly monocausal explanation. “My explanation,” Goldhagen writes, “is that the perpetrators, ‘ordinary Germans,’ were animated by antisemitism, by a particular *type* of antisemitism that led them to conclude that the Jews *ought to die*....Simply put, the perpetrators, having consulted their own convictions and morality and having judged the mass annihilation of the Jews to be right, did not *want* to say ‘no.’”<sup>69</sup> To be fair, Goldhagen does note that it was only “*under propitious circumstances*” that Germans moved from hating to killing Jews, but these circumstances consisted in the main of removing obstacles to murder, not in generating murderous dynamics of their own.<sup>70</sup> As he put it in a reply to his critics, “Many horrific and complex outcomes have simple causes.”<sup>71</sup>

Goldhagen makes two central claims about the role of antisemitism in the “Final Solution.” First, he insists that it had long served as the defining “cognitive model” for Germans.<sup>72</sup> Tracing antisemitism briefly from antiquity to the Third Reich, stressing its prominence in nineteenth-century Germany, Goldhagen asserts that its “remarkable malleability” and tendency to change over time is merely “evidence of its constancy.”<sup>73</sup> Thus, any apparent decline in antisemitism was merely proof of its malleable persistence. Goldhagen further concludes that the “Jewish Problem” as it existed in Germany “more or less promised an axiomatic belief in the need to ‘eliminate’ Jewishness from Germany as the ‘problem’s’ only ‘solution.’”<sup>74</sup> This, Goldhagen dubs “eliminationist antisemitism.” And this, crucially, is what Goldhagen sees as the “cause” of the “Final Solution,” both at the level of policy formulation at the top, and policy implementation – including mass murder – at the bottom. “The great success of the German eliminationist program of the 1930s and 1940s was, therefore, owing in the main to the preexisting, demonological, racially based, eliminationist antisemitism of the German people, which Hitler essentially unleashed, even if he also continually inflamed it.”<sup>75</sup> For Goldhagen, the decision by members of Battalion 101 to participate in mass killing “indicated that they wanted to be genocidal executioners.”<sup>76</sup> (Note that Goldhagen here conflates a willingness to do something with a desire to do so, a point to which I return later). In effect, then, Goldhagen doubles down on the intentionalist strain of interpretation. Not only did the “Final Solution” happen because Hitler wanted it to; it also took place because virtually all Germans *also* wanted it to happen. It is, according to Goldhagen, an “incontestable truth” that “an enormous number of ordinary, representative Germans became – and most of the rest of their fellow Germans were fit to be – Hitler’s willing executioners.”<sup>77</sup>

Yet the “truth” of Goldhagen’s argument was, in fact, hotly contested. While agreeing with Goldhagen that many Holocaust killers were “ordinary” Germans (and not self-selected SS zealots) and that they were “willing” executioners who did not have to be coerced into participation, Browning disagrees with Goldhagen on virtually every other point. Specifically, he disputed Goldhagen’s two core arguments. Antisemitism was not, on Browning’s reading, an invariant aspect of German culture stretching back for centuries. And, more fundamentally, he disputed that antisemitism, eliminationist or otherwise, was either a necessary or sufficient explanation for most of the ordinary men who willingly killed Jews in the Holocaust.

In his broader work on the origins of the “Final Solution,” Browning was clear that antisemitism was an indispensable inducement to policy formulation, without feeling the

need to dwell on its *longue-durée* history, but in his view, antisemitism played at best a subordinate role in motivating many, probably most, of the killers on the ground, certainly those in Battalion 101. Browning does not deny – how could he? – that antisemitism was ubiquitous in Nazi Germany and that many of the men of Battalion 101 were likely themselves antisemitic to one degree or another. But, he insists, racial animosity does not lead automatically to racial murder. “Influenced and conditioned in a general way, imbued in particular with a sense of their superiority and racial kinship as well as Jewish inferiority and otherness, many of them undoubtedly were; explicitly prepared for the task of killing Jews they most certainly were not.”<sup>78</sup> Rather, Browning offers a complex, multilayered account of the various factors that pushed ordinary Germans to murder. In particular, he stresses several findings from social psychology, the work of Stanley Milgram especially. Browning argues that a general tendency to obey authority and, even more important, an inclination to conform to group expectations explains why so few men in Battalion 101 were able to resist the order to murder. “To break ranks and step out, to adopt overtly nonconformist behavior, was simply beyond most men. It was easier for them to shoot.”<sup>79</sup> When combined with “mutually intensifying effects of war and racism,” these psychological factors offer a reasonable explanation for the actions of many of the ordinary killers.

If the intentionalism/functionality debate ultimately resulted in a new synthesis, the Goldhagen debate has in the long term been rather more lopsided. While it is clear that Goldhagen helped set off what one historian has termed “the voluntarist turn” in the historiography of the Third Reich and a renewed interest in Nazi ideology, it is hard to see that his specific interpretations have had any long-lasting influence on the historiography.<sup>80</sup> The specifics of Browning’s account certainly remain open to debate. Many historians, like Saul Friedländer, argue that ideology played a greater role in motivating ground-level perpetrators, without embracing Goldhagen’s all-encompassing account and acknowledging the significance of situational factors. Thus, it seems clear that Browning’s plea for a “complex” multicausal account continues to shape ongoing research.<sup>81</sup>

The debates of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s thus seem to have more or less come to an end. New interpretive approaches have emerged in their wake.

### The History of the Shoah as Integrated History

Probably the most important single recent work on the extermination of the Jews as a whole is Saul Friedländer’s magisterial, two-volume *Nazi Germany and the Jews*.<sup>82</sup> Richard Evans has called this the new “standard historical work on Nazi Germany’s mass murder of Europe’s Jews.”<sup>83</sup> At the level of interpretation, Friedländer offers nuanced positions on virtually all of the key debates in the historiography of the Holocaust: a soft intentionalism to compliment the soft functionalism of Browning, an emphasis on both ideology and situational factors in motivating the ordinary killers, and a layered portrait of Jewish responses to the killing. Friedländer’s major innovation, however, is methodological. *Nazi Germany and the Jews* is an attempt at what Friedländer calls “integrated history,” bringing together the history of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders into a comprehensive whole. “The ‘history of the Holocaust’ cannot be limited only to a recounting of German policies, decisions, and measures that led to this most systematic and sustained of genocides; it must include the reactions (and at times the initiatives) of the surrounding world and the attitudes of the victims, for the fundamental reason

that the events we call the Holocaust represent a totality defined by this very convergence of distinct elements.”<sup>84</sup>

In effect, Friedländer seeks to bridge the divide between the German history of the “Final Solution” and the Jewish history of the Holocaust. In this regard, it is significant that he titles Part III of volume 2 of *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, which deals with the peak killing period, “Shoah.” This is, in a way, a return to the *Khurbn-Forschung* of the first postwar years, since *Shoah* means catastrophe in Hebrew, as *Khurbn* does in Yiddish. But Friedländer’s method and use of sources is far more complex and sophisticated. Largely eschewing postwar memoirs, he makes extensive use of diaries and letters to reconstruct not only the contemporary experiences but also the mental worlds of the victims and perpetrators. In this regard, his integrated history is as much mosaic as synthesis. It is comprehensive, continental in scope, and simultaneously sweeping and detailed.

In interpretive terms, Friedländer’s soft intentionalism places decisive significance on Hitler and his ideological phantasms: “I have emphasized Hitler’s personal role and the function of his ideology in the genesis and implementation of the Nazi regime’s anti-Jewish measures... In all its major decisions the regime depended on Hitler.”<sup>85</sup> This is not far removed from Browning’s claim that Hitler’s vision, implemented by Himmler, was crucial in the radicalization of anti-Jewish measures to the point of extermination, though the emphasis is somewhat different. Importantly, Friedländer is quite clear that “Hitler’s murderous rage and his scanning of the political horizon for the most extreme options do not suggest the existence of any plans for total extermination in the years prior to the German invasion of the Soviet Union.”<sup>86</sup> This is intentionalism, but of a much subtler sort than the first generation of intentionalists.

Hitler’s ideas about Jews constituted what Friedländer terms “redemptive anti-Semitism,” by which he means “Hitler perceived his mission as a kind of crusade to redeem the world by eliminating the Jews. The Nazi leader saw ‘the Jew’ as the principle of evil in western history and society. Without a victorious redeeming struggle, the Jew would ultimately dominate the world.”<sup>87</sup> Hitler’s sense that the Jew posed both a superhuman threat and subhuman contagion positioned the Jew as an “endlessly changing and endlessly mimetic force [that] had launched a constantly shifting offensive against humanity.”<sup>88</sup>

This portrait of Hitler’s redemptive antisemitism has obvious similarities to Goldhagen’s notion of eliminationist antisemitism, yet there are two crucial differences. First, Friedländer offers a much more nuanced history of German and European antisemitism, in which Hitler’s view represent an outlier rather than a concrete expression of a long-standing tradition. Friedländer traces its origins in particular to “that meeting point of German Christianity, neoromanticism, the mystical cult of sacred Aryan blood, and ultraconservative nationalism: the Bayreuth circle.”<sup>89</sup> Hitler adopted and adapted these Wagnerian tropes, which were quite distinctive from other strands of antisemitism. Friedländer’s second difference from Goldhagen concerns the extent to which he thinks “Germans” shared Hitler’s own obsessions. While he is clear that antisemitism was widespread in Germany by the time Hitler came to power, and spread further under the impact of Nazi propaganda and education, he is skeptical that most Germans (as opposed to the core of the Nazi elite) shared the specifics of Hitler’s ideological views. The behavior of the “ordinary German soldiers, policemen, or civilians toward the Jews they encountered, mistreated, and murdered was not necessarily the result of a deeply ingrained and historically unique German anti-Jewish passion....”<sup>90</sup> Rather, they were

animated by the “mobilizing function” of the Jew in Nazi propaganda and, in particular, the “charismatic” bond forged with Hitler and his interconnected “salvation creeds” of which redemptive antisemitism was but one aspect (racial community and anti-Bolshevism being the other two). At the same time, he is insistent that “key figures in the agencies involved [in the extermination]...were motivated by anti-Jewish fanaticism.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, for Friedländer, Hitler, his closest associates, and some key actors in the German bureaucracy shared a redemptive antisemitic ideology, while the broader collective of perpetrators were bound to that ideology by multiple commitments, of which antisemitism was only one component.

In terms of the Jewish side of his story, Friedländer tells a deeply sympathetic and human story that highlights individual voices and experiences and largely avoids moralizing judgments. He sees two “contrary trends” in the Jewish response to Nazi persecution and extermination, a growing passivity as the violence increased, on the one hand, and increased solidarity among “politically homogenous groups” that rose “in some places in desperate armed revolts.”<sup>92</sup> Friedländer is finely attuned to the sense of tragedy in all this. Not only were these revolts futile, in some cases Jewish resistance could be counter-productive. He speculates that an arson attack in May 1941 by members of the “Herbert Baum group” of communist and Jewish resistance activists in Berlin and the assassination of Reinhard Heydrich by the Czech commandos working with the British that same month may have hastened Hitler’s decision to deport German Jews, as he came to perceive them as an increasing internal security threat, not unlike that of the strikes of 1917, which he of course blamed on Jews. For Friedländer, the Jewish experience in the Shoah is tragic in the fullest sense. They had no good options and whatever they did, most stood little chance of survival.

### The History of Nazi Genocide as World History

If Friedländer’s resolution to the debates of the 1960s–1990s was to deepen the history of the Shoah, to bring together perpetrator and victim history, a younger generation of scholars has recently sought to sidestep those debates by *broadening* the history of the murder of the Jews as “genocide.” The term genocide was initially coined by the Polish-Jewish jurist, Raphael Lemkin, to describe the then unfolding extermination of European Jewry.<sup>93</sup> Yet unlike the other terms coined to describe the extermination of the Jews – *Khurbn*, Holocaust, “Final Solution,” Shoah – genocide was from the first intended as a more universal term that could be applied to a wide variety of cases where there was an attempt to “destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such.”<sup>94</sup> From the start, the emergent field of genocide studies was therefore necessarily comparative, looking at multiple cases to try to define and describe a global phenomenon.<sup>95</sup> The recent scholarship analyzing the Holocaust under the rubric of genocide is different. It argues that the extermination of the Jews was one instance in a longer history violent population politics, less a separate case to be compared than a moment in a long-term story to be analyzed.

What is shared by the key scholars in this field is the sense that the multiple genocides that took place in what Timothy Snyder termed the “bloodlands” of East-Central Europe were all in some way interconnected.<sup>96</sup> The Holocaust, they contend cannot be understood in isolation. Rather, they insist that we must “try to imagine the genocides of modernity [including the Holocaust] as part of a single process rather than merely in comparative (and competitive) terms.”<sup>97</sup> It is imperative, they contend, to both understand

the geographical specificity of the European killing fields of the twentieth century *and* their connection to broader transnational processes of modernization and/or geopolitical reconfiguration. Here, the work of Mark Levene and Donald Bloxham can be taken as representative.

Levene has offered perhaps the most systematic, certainly the most extensive, attempt to make an argument about the embeddedness of genocide, including the Holocaust, in the specific historical trajectory of the past two hundred or so years. According to him, it is in the emergence of an international system of nation states near the end of the eighteenth century that we must seek “the origins of something which we specifically call genocide....” According to Levene, genocide “is intrinsically bound up with that emerging system [of nation states] and is indeed an intrinsic and crucial part of it....Genocide is thus not only a by-product of particular national trajectories as they attempt state building in order to operate within, circumvent, or possibly confront that system, but a guide to and indeed a cypher for its own dysfunctional nature.”<sup>98</sup>

Levene’s overall analysis is complex, based on interrelated arguments about the “West’s striving for people-homogeneity,”<sup>99</sup> “the process of modernization ...in the context of a broader international reality,”<sup>100</sup> and the “imperial anxieties” besetting both expanding (British and French) and declining (Romanoff and Ottoman) empires.<sup>101</sup> Yet it is ultimately the “crisis” of the early twentieth century that Levene hopes to explain. He points out that this period in particular was marked by a dramatic series of genocides and near-genocides taking place mainly in what he calls “the European Rimlands” in Eastern and South Eastern Europe. These stretch from the Armenian Genocide in 1915 to the Holocaust and its aftermath in the 1940s. He asks, “Why is there an approximate coincidence between the Holocaust....and so many *other* genocidal events?”<sup>102</sup>

His answer is that there was an “intersection” between “the anti-Semitic drive, restated empire, *and* the nation state.”<sup>103</sup> At the start of this period, the conflict between advancing and collapsing empires (which is how he interprets World War I) “loosened” much of Eastern Europe “from its traditional political anchor,” and as a consequence the peoples living there (“more particularly allegedly ‘suspect’ peoples”) were “especially vulnerable” to political and military power struggles.<sup>104</sup> In this context, the Rimlands between west and east needed to be reordered. Two options presented themselves: reincorporation in some new imperial configuration, either Soviet or Nazi German, or a new incorporation into a western-sponsored system of nation-states. This created a geopolitical context of extreme, ideological war. At the same time, minorities in general, and Jews in particular, were a “problem” for both projects. For the empires, they posed a potential security threat (due to presumed irredentism) and fifth column, for the nation states, they were heterogeneous elements that belied claims to national unity. This explains why minorities were targeted by many different regimes, while Jews came to be viewed as suspicious by most East/South European states. This explains why the Nazis’ national allies, like the Romanians and Hungarians, were willing (and sometimes happy) to cooperate in the extirpation of the Jews, even without embracing Nazi ideology more generally. The violent population expulsions in the wake of World War I set the precedent for murderous homogenization projects, but it was ultimately the contest between Germany and the other European great powers that generated a second wave of genocidal violence culminating in the Holocaust. Because, for Hitler “the Jewish factor *was also* the geopolitical factor,” the genocide of the Jews was ineluctably linked to the military conflict with both west and east. His theory: “‘Defeat Russia: win the global war against the Jews [who controlled the United States and Britain].’”<sup>105</sup> The World War II arose from

the disorder precipitated by the first and created a perfect storm that swept up Jews and other ‘suspect peoples’ in paroxysm of murderous violence.

Donald Bloxham makes a similar argument. As the very title of his book, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* makes clear, he conceptualizes the Holocaust as of a piece with other incidents of mass killing aimed at entire communities. Like Levene, he situates the Holocaust in the “shatterzone” of empires located at the intersection of the Russian, Ottoman, and German empires that were destroyed by World War I and the site of efforts, by the Germans and Soviets, to reconstitute that space in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>106</sup> As such, World War II and the Holocaust were really the third “Eastern Crisis,” following on the heels of the first in 1875–78 and second in 1912–22.<sup>107</sup> Like Levene, Bloxham points to the intersection of empire and nation-state, arguing that “Hitler’s geopolitical aims were in fact a hybrid of the imperial-colonial designs of a great power and the irredentist expansionism of the young European nation-state, both of which had been retarded by Germany’s defeat in 1918.”<sup>108</sup> And as in those earlier crises, the various solutions trotted out for the question of minorities and geopolitical reconfiguration tended to be remarkably violent, with the Holocaust as simply the most extreme instance.

Like the earlier functionalists, Bloxham interprets the Holocaust as the result of an evolutionary process but, distinctively, he asserts, “the evolution of the policy *never* stopped,” meaning there never was a “final, final solution,” but a continual development up to the very end of the regime.<sup>109</sup> And unlike the functionalist position, Bloxham notes that, at least with respect to Jewish populations outside areas of direct German control, that evolution was not uniformly radicalizing and escalating. This implies that for all that he recognizes the significance of Nazi ideology (indeed, mirroring Goldhagen, he even terms it “eliminationist”), it manifested as mass extermination only due to a confluence of geopolitical and military circumstances, most manifestly the failure (and ultimately impossibility) of various “territorial solutions” to the “Jewish question.”

What is perhaps most distinctive about Bloxham’s analysis is his emphasis on the conjunction of religious and ethnic identities in the long-term genocidal violence of twentieth-century Europe, starting with the anti-Christian atrocities (“Balkan horrors”) of the 1870s, continuing through the ethnic cleansing of Muslims from Europe with the retreat and collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the anti-Christian genocides of Armenians and Syrian Christians during World War I, and culminating in the “Final Solution.” After World War I “largely divested” Europe of “one of its two most important and long-standing ethno-religious ‘others,’” the question became what to do with the second, the Jews.<sup>110</sup> Like the Muslims, Jews were to be removed, but unlike the Muslims, ethnic cleansing proved impossible, so genocide became the default solution. “The Third Reich was a product of the continent as well as the most destructive shaper of it. Nazi racial policy was geared not just to Hitler’s peculiar obsession with the Jews, but to a host of other biopolitical and geopolitical concerns that would have been entirely recognizable to millions of nationalist in and beyond Germany.”<sup>111</sup>

Unlike Friedländer’s integrated history, the transnational turn of genocide scholars has proved quite controversial.<sup>112</sup> Their path out of the debates of the 1970s and 1980s has led them into the thicket of another debate, one that had seemed largely abandoned as sterile and irresolvable: Holocaust uniqueness.<sup>113</sup> In light of the criticism leveled at his and similar analyses, Bloxham’s assertion that “as far as historical scholarship is concerned, the uniqueness ‘debate’ has lost of most of its steam” seems more like wishful thinking than an accurate assessment of the state of play.<sup>114</sup> Doris Bergen, for instance, accused Bloxham of “decentering the Holocaust,” and neglecting the

extent to which Holocaust scholarship had already contextualized the “Final Solution” in the kind of East European history Bloxham called for, whereas Omer Bartov alleged that Bloxham seemed to “fear that the voices of Jewish victims will drown out all other victims.”<sup>115</sup> Both Bergen and Bartov were deeply critical of Bloxham for focusing on the perpetrators to the exclusion of the victims, contrasting Bloxham unfavorably with Friedländer.

Yet more overtly than the intentionalism/functionalism debate, what was at stake in the renewed uniqueness debate was politics more than historical interpretation. Bergen suggests Bloxham failed to heed Friedländer’s injunction that scholarship ought to aspire “to transcend or at least sidestep identity politics.”<sup>116</sup> Bartov is more explicit. On his reading, critics of Holocaust uniqueness, like Bloxham, but also Dirk Moses and Mark Mazower (Bartov does not discuss Levene) are making “almost purely political” arguments aimed at delegitimizing the state of Israel by likening it to settler colonialism, which they see as “intrinsically genocidal.”<sup>117</sup> Bloxham rejected the allegation, but did respond that his analysis was in part “moral-cum-political,” aimed to a great extent at “prediction and prevention.”<sup>118</sup> Because this debate was thus deeply bound up with contemporary political controversies focusing especially on Israel and Middle East politics, there is little chance that it can be resolved in strictly *historiographic* terms. What one makes of the turn to genocide in the historiography of the Holocaust will depend in part on where one stands on contemporary political questions.

## Conclusion

We have seen that the historiography of the destruction of the European Jews has evolved, in part through an empirical and analytical deepening, but also through a series of sometimes bitter and polemical, sometimes sophisticated and nuanced, debates over questions of interpretation and method as well as contemporary politics. This seems unlikely to change going forward. Although Friedländer’s integrated approach has found near universal praise, it has not proved to be the only model for writing the history of the Holocaust. The debates over Jewish responses, the root causes of the “Final Solution,” and perpetrator motivation may have been more or less resolved, but the question of uniqueness remains contentious, as does the question of the contemporary implications of studying the destruction of Europe’s Jews. And as new research unfolds, it is likely to remain so as questions of Nazi empire, transnational trends in genocidal violence, and the ongoing challenges of Middle East politics ensure no simple resolution. In the end, the study of the genocide of the Jews remains deeply relevant to the contemporary world. This means it is likely to remain contentious as well.

## Notes

- 1 See for instance the remarkable testimonies buried by members of the Jewish *Sonderkommando* who worked the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Ber Mark, *The Scrolls of Auschwitz* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1985).
- 2 Ruta Sakowska, “Emanuel Ringelblum (1900–1944) und das Untergrundarchiv des Warschauer Ghettos,” in *Oneg Schabbat: Das Untergrundarchiv des Warschauer Ghettos/Ringelblum-Archiv* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny and Frankfurt: Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 9–14.
- 3 Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emanuel Ringelblum*, ed. and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958), xxi.

- 4 Cited in Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum, the Warsaw Ghetto, and the Oyneg Shabes Archive* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 7.
- 5 Kassow, 225–83.
- 6 Kassow, 226.
- 7 Question guidelines for “Two and a Half Years” interviews in Artur Eisenbach, “Visnshaftlkhe forshungen in Varshever getto,” cited in Kassow, 234.
- 8 Alexander Donat, *The Holocaust Kingdom: A Memoir* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 211.
- 9 Donat, 211.
- 10 We now have an excellent overview of these commissions. See Laura Jockusch, *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 11 See Laura Jockusch and Elisabeth Gallas in this volume.
- 12 Philip Friedman, *Roads to Extinction: Essays on the Holocaust*, ed. by Ada June Friedman (New York: Jewish Publication Society of America and Conference on Jewish Social Studies, 1980), 561. Salo Wittmayer Baron, “Introduction” in Friedman, 1.
- 13 Friedman.
- 14 Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 571.
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- 18 Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 150.
- 19 Friedman, *Roads to Extinction*, 150
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- 25 Hilberg, *Destruction*, 14.
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- 27 Hilberg, *Destruction*, 17.
- 28 Nathan Eck, “Historical Research or Slander?,” in Michael Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust: Historical Articles on the Destruction of European Jews*. 6. *The Victims of the Holocaust*, vol. 1 (Westport: Meckler, 2011), 161. Originally published in *Yad Vashem Studies* 6 (1967): 385–430.
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- 32 Isaiah Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution: Collective and Individual Behavior in Extremis* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979), 10.
- 33 Trunk, *Jewish Responses*, 10.
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- 37 Bauer, 27.
- 38 Bauer, 29.
- 39 On the Auschwitz *Sonderkommando*, see Gideon Greif, *We Wept without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). On Sobibór, see Jules Schelvis, *Sobibor: A History of a Nazi Death Camp* (New York: Berg, 2007).
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- 45 Arendt, 125.
- 46 See, for example, the book-length rebuttal penned by Jacob Robinson, *And the crooked shall be made straight: The Eichmann Trial, the Jewish Catastrophe and Hannah Arendt’s Narrative* (New York: Macmillan, 1965).
- 47 For the broader debate spawned by *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, see Anson Rabinbach, “Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy,” *October* 108 (Spring 2004): 97–111 and Michael Ezra, “The Eichmann Polemics: Hannah Arendt and Her Critics,” *Democratija* 9 (Summer 2007): 141–65.
- 48 Aharon Weiss, “Jewish Leadership in Occupied Poland – Postures and Attitudes,” *Yad Vashem Studies* 12 (1977): 335–65. Cited in Marrus, pt. 6, vol. 1, 460.
- 49 Marrus, *The Nazi Holocaust*, 469.
- 50 Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972).
- 51 Trunk, *Judenrat*, 436–37.
- 52 Trunk, *Judenrat*, 570, 443.
- 53 Hilberg, 2005 edition, xv.
- 54 Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews, 1933–1945*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1986 [1975]), 150.
- 55 Cited in Dawidowicz, 150.
- 56 Dawidowicz, 158.
- 57 Other intentionalists make similar arguments. See, for example, Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Klaus Hildebrand, *Das Dritte Reich* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009 [1979]); or Eberhard Jäckel, *Hitler’s Weltanschauung* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1981).
- 58 The phrase is Hans Mommsen’s. See Mommsen, “The Realization of the Unthinkable: ‘The Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ in the Third Reich,” in Mommsen, *From Weimar to Auschwitz*, trans. Philip O’Connor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 224–53.
- 59 This is an area where there is substantial disagreement among historians who can be more or less characterized as functionalists, with one group favoring a somewhat earlier decisions predicated on the Nazis’ euphoric sense in the summer 1941 that they were going to win the war against the Soviet Union and another group that dates the ultimate decision to shift to physical extermination to the fall of 1941 or even early winter 1942 as a result of a pessimistic realization that the war was not going well and that the Germans were looking at a long, bloody war of attrition. For the former position, see, for example, Christopher Browning, *The Path to Genocide: Essays on the Launching of the Final Solution*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For the latter position, see among others Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The Final Solution in History* (New York: Pantheon, 1988)

- or Christian Gerlach, "The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of German Jews, and Hitler's Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews," *The Journal of Modern History* 70 (December 1998): 759–812.
- 60 Karl A. Schleunes, *The Twisted Road to Auschwitz: Nazi Policy toward German Jews, 1933–1939* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970), 258.
- 61 Martin Broszat, *The Hitler State: The Foundation and Development of the Internal Structure of the Third Reich*, trans. John W. Hiden (London: Routledge, 1981 [1969]), xi.
- 62 Mommsen, "Realization of the Unthinkable," 233.
- 63 Martin Broszat, "Hitler and the Genesis of the 'Final Solution': An Assessment of David Irving's Theses," in *Aspects of the Third Reich*, ed. H.W. Koch (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 405.
- 64 Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (London: Arnold, 2000), 130.
- 65 Christopher R. Browning with Jürgen Matthäus, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939–March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2004), 425. A related argument, likewise emphasizing Himmler's role in translating Hitler's fantastical proclamations into concrete policy, can be found in Richard Breitman, *The Architect of Genocide: Himmler and the Final Solution* (New York: Knopf, 1991), though Breitman argues that the SS at least had aimed at the murder of Jews as far back as 1938, well before Hitler came around to the idea in early 1941.
- 66 The phrase, "working toward the Führer" was used by the Prussian civil servant, Werner Willikens, and has been taken up by Ian Kershaw to describe the way Hitler framed the goals that guided the radicalization process. See Ian Kershaw, "'Working Toward the Führer': Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," *Central European History* 2 (1993): 103–18.
- 67 On the trials, see generally, Devin Pendas, "Seeking Justice, Finding Law: Nazi Trials in Postwar Europe," *Journal of Modern History* 81 (2009): 347–68 and Kim Christian Priemel, "Consigning Justice to History: Transitional Justice Trials after the Second World War," *Historical Journal* 56 (2013): 553–81. For an earlier, criminological attempt at a typology, see Herbert Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft: Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Gewaltkriminalität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982 [1967]).
- 68 Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, with a new afterward (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998 [1992]) and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).
- 69 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 14.
- 70 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 446.
- 71 Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, "The Failure of Critics," in Robert R. Shandley ed., *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 136. Originally in *Die Zeit*, August 2, 1996.
- 72 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 45.
- 73 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 45.
- 74 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 81.
- 75 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 442.
- 76 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 279
- 77 Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, 454.
- 78 Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 184.
- 79 Browning, *Ordinary Men*, 184.
- 80 Neil Gregor, "Nazism – A Political Religion? Rethinking the Voluntarist Turn," in Gregor, ed., *Nazism, War and Genocide: Essays in Honour of Jeremy Noakes* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2005).

- 81 See, for example, Gerhard Paul, ed., *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002).
- 82 Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, *The Years of Persecution, 1933–1939* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997) and vol. 2, *The Years of Extermination, 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007).
- 83 Richard J. Evans, “Whose Orders?,” *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, June 24, 2007, accessed October 20, 2019, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/24/books/review/Evans-t.html>.
- 84 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2, xv.
- 85 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, 3.
- 86 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, 4.
- 87 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2, xviii.
- 88 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, 100.
- 89 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 1, 87.
- 90 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2, xx.
- 91 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2, 479.
- 92 Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. 2, 479.
- 93 Raphael Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1944).
- 94 *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (adopted by the General Assembly, December 9, 1948), accessed October 20, 2019, <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%2078/volume-78-i-1021-english.pdf>.
- 95 See, for example, Israel Charny, *How Can We Commit the Unthinkable? Genocide, the Human Cancer* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1982) or Leo Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). More recently, see Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003) or Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
- 96 Snyder’s book does not use the term genocide. While it has been by far the most popular book in the genre, it is also the least analytical, mostly describing the recurring horrors that took place between Stalin and Hitler, without actually offering much of an explanation as to why this happened. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
- 97 A. Dirk Moses, “Conceptual Blockages and Definitional Dilemmas in the ‘Racial Century’: Genocides of Indigenous Peoples and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 36 (2002): 28.
- 98 Mark Levene, “Why Is the Twentieth Century the Century of Genocide?,” *Journal of World History* 11 (2000): 308. For his broader project, see his two different but related two-volume studies: Mark Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, vol. 1, *The Meaning of Genocide* and vol. 2, *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2005); and Mark Levene, *The Crisis of Genocide*, vol. 1, *Devastation: The European Rimlands 1912–1938* and vol. 2, *Annihilation: The European Rimlands, 1939–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 99 Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, vol. 2, 3.
- 100 Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation State*, vol. 1, 176.
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- 102 Levene, *Crisis of Genocide*, vol. 1, xiv.
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- 107 Bloxham, *Final Solution*, 3.
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- 111 Bloxham, *Final Solution*, 130.
- 112 For a trenchant overview of the debate, see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past Is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 105–11.
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- 114 Bloxham, *Final Solution*, 319.
- 115 Doris Bergen, “Challenging Uniqueness: Decentering and Recentering the Holocaust” and Omer Bartov, “Locating the Holocaust” in “Review Forum on Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide*,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 13 (2011): 129, 121.
- 116 Bergen, “Challenging Uniqueness,” 142.
- 117 Omer Bartov, “Genocide and the Holocaust: What Are We Arguing About?,” in Uffa Jensen et al. eds., *Gewalt und Gesellschaft: Klassiker modernen Denkens neu gelesen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011), 382, 392.
- 118 Donald Bloxham, “Response – Discussing Genocide: Two Moralities and Some Obstacles,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 13 (2011): 138.

### *Recommended Reading*

- Bankier, David, and Dan Michman, eds. *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009.
- Kershaw, Ian. *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. London: Arnold, 2000.
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