



## BOOK REVIEWS

*Jewish Histories of the Holocaust: New Transnational Approaches.* Edited by Norman J. W. Goda. *Making Sense of History: Studies in Historical Cultures Series 19.* New York–Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014. 305 pp.

*Jewish Histories of the Holocaust* is an eclectic—in the best sense of the word—collection of highly detailed case studies of what is known as the “Jewish Holocaust,” the effort to portray and analyze the Holocaust from a Jewish perspective. The volume opens with two theoretical explorations of the framework of Holocaust research. Dan Michman’s chapter explores the notion of the “unprecedentedness” of the Shoah from a decidedly Jewish-centered perspective, by integrating Jewish perspectives into a longer history of Jewish life in Europe. The fact that the Jews occupied a special place in Nazi ideology, argues Michman, sets the Shoah apart from other genocides. This calls for the use of a language that emphasizes the boundaries between this mass murder and the many others that took place in Europe during the twentieth century. An overly rigorous application of paradigms such as genocide, borderlands, and regions risks crushing the unique details of which the past is made up. As Michman argues, there was something “essentially different” about the Jewish fate in wartime Europe, and without close attention to this fact and its consequences for Holocaust research, we will never arrive at a genuine grasp of the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust.

Perhaps the one potential meeting point between Michman’s framework and that of Timothy Snyder is that both scholars emphasize the centrality of the “victim” by placing him or her in a wider social context and history. Yet where Michman argues for a Jewish-centered perspective on the larger history of the Holocaust, Snyder instead focuses on regional history as a means of understanding and analyzing the broader wartime experience. One cannot, argues Snyder, ignore the millions of other “bodies” that fell victim in the same regions during those same years. Only by developing a micro-historical approach that transcends the national, one that does not shy away from comparisons of the genocide of Jews and the large-scale massacres of people of various ethnicities and nationalities, can the immense scope of World War II be grasped.

Part II tackles the controversial subject of Jewish leadership—the Judenräte—in the wartime ghettos. Gordon J. Horwitz concentrates on Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski and his role in our understanding of the Łódź ghetto. His essay is a foray into the use of the concept of disbelief as a tool with which to forge historical knowledge about the motivations and actions of Jewish leaders, especially the role of disbelief in the realm of people’s private thoughts and feelings. It couples a biographical analysis with the ultimate fate of the ghettos, which, needless to say, was not in the hands of the Jewish leadership. Despite this, disbelief as an analytical tool forces historians to return to the timeliness of events as they unfolded, and, also, to withhold judgement. Indeed, as Sara Bender shows in her contribution about the ghettos of Kielce and Bialystok, in the study of the personalities of Jewish leaders and their strategies of every-day survival, what seems important in assessing their legacies is their ability to negotiate with the local structures of power. In other words, the ability to change German intentions with regard to the location of the ghetto or the ways in which ransoms were paid, for instance, influenced not so much the outcome of the Nazi policies (although this too was most certainly a goal of Jewish leaders), but rather temporarily improved day-to-day conditions inside the ghettos. Are we then to base our assessments of the role of wartime Jewish leadership on the fates of their communities? As these case studies show, this is a rather futile direction of inquiry, because despite (for instance) marked differences in leadership between Hermann Levy in Kielce and Efraim Barash in Bialystok, the fate of the two communities was ultimately guided not by their choices, but by Nazi politics in Berlin and on the ground.

All four essays in Part III present a convincing case for the use of specific types of witness and testimony sources. Alexandra Barbarini pleads for increased specificity in our use of Jewish-centered source material on the Holocaust in regards to time, context, production, and voice. She concentrates on the wartime diary as a source distinct from postwar memoirs and other documents. Diaries, she says, reveal contemporaneous horizons and expectations that are by default restricted by the framework of the events as they unfold. As such, they contain interpretations and feelings that existed before the notion of the Holocaust became solidified in the postwar years; in other words, they reveal the thoughts that transpired in the hearts, minds, and worlds of Jewish individuals, who were writing in an effort to convey what happened to them in real time.

Omer Bartov’s contribution demonstrates one of the ways in which historians can get away from the idea and study of the Holocaust as a dehumanized,

industrial killing enterprise perpetrated by the Germans. Instead, Bartov focuses on human interactions of wartime violence by analyzing the violence from a localized perspective, sculpted into the biography of a town, Buczacz, now in western Ukraine, and the story of the Holocaust as it unfolded there at a local level. Rejecting the category of bystander altogether, Bartov argues that historians should instead consider the various levels of engagement between people and populations and the violent events they experienced. Building on this notion of active, personal engagement between individual actors and acts of violence, Bartov writes history as seen through the eyes of its protagonists, a cacophony of irreconcilable voices that speak to posterity in countless forms of documentation scattered in archives in Europe, Israel, and the United States.

Sara R. Horowitz's chapter deals with deferred memory narratives and their relation to gender identity in the telling of one particularly horrific event: infanticide, or the killing of babies and children by their parents. Horowitz brings to light the various aspects of the "unspeakable" nature of these crimes—so horrible that these memories fall outside the boundaries of straightforward narratives—as they are revealed in oral sources. In many cases, it took decades for these experiences to make their way into the spoken language of survivors, and herein lies the particular value of these testimonies: they have the potential not only to reveal the horrors encountered, but also the changing gendered nature of maternal and paternal responses to infanticide. In some cases, parents exhibited a reversal of traditional roles with regards to the care (feminine) and murder (masculine) of infants, showing the disruptive potential of these events in the lives of those who lived through it, as well as the importance of gender categories for a fuller understanding of infanticide.

Finally, Daniel Blatman zooms in on a particularly daunting period of the Holocaust, namely, the death marches that took place from January 1945 to the end of the war. Blatman, who dedicated a monograph to the subject, *The Death Marches: The Final Phase of Nazi Genocide* (2011), argues that this relatively short period stands out in the recollections of survivors for several reasons. Most importantly, the death march experience broke with the routine and boredom of the camps and the strategies of survival and group dynamics that prisoners had developed. The change from a confined space to an open space, in which cruelty was unleashed in unknown patterns, came as a shock. As such, the marches stand out as a particularly barbaric experience in the recollections of survivors. By focusing on the commonalities in survivor testimonies and memoirs, Blatman documents the death march experience as a separate event defined by its own set

of responses. As a cluster, these four essays show the analytical sophistication and depth of new approaches to the Jewish Holocaust.

Part IV offers new insights into the existence and practice of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust. Samuel Kassov presents a long *durée* reading of Emanuel Ringelblum, creator of the Warsaw ghetto archive. By peeling off the layers of the many roles Ringelblum played in the decades leading up to the Holocaust—historian, activist, private Jew—Kassov shows how his personal visions of history, historical memory and social welfare merged with the larger project of conserving Jewish life in wartime Poland for posterity. Faced with the ongoing destruction of Jewish culture and Jewish lives, Ringelblum and his small group of insiders created the archive as an attempt to write their own history. In Kassov's formulation, they did so to ensure that future generations would write about the catastrophe based not on Nazi documents, but on Jewish sources.

In his contribution, Bob Moore also concentrates on pre-existing structures and connections, in this case between Jews and non-Jews, in his analysis of Jewish self-help during the Holocaust. He argues that contacts on the communal, organizational, religious and underground levels sometimes assisted Jews in their efforts to resist deportation or starvation. By focusing on case studies from France and Belgium, Moore highlights contacts between refugees from Nazi Germany and societal structures in the west, thus presenting another way of overcoming the East-West divide in studies of the Holocaust. Renée Poznanski analyzes the broad phenomenon of Jewish communism by reading it in a specifically national context, namely, wartime and postwar France. She tackles the question of the role of Jewish communists by positioning it on the intersection of three broader subjects: the history of resistance, the history of wartime communism, and Jewish history. This approach widens the scope of possible interpretations of Jewish resistance in wartime France, while admitting that the contradictions and complexities remain unresolved.

Steven Bowman's contribution, finally, is a highly sophisticated account of the entwinement of Jewish and Greek traditions through an analysis of collective suicide in Hellenic Jewish history. Starting from the desire to understand the uprising of the Greek Jewish *Sonderkommando* in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, Bowman traces the roots of the tradition of collective suicide from Flavius Josephus's account of Masada in 73 C.E., to the *Sepher Yosippon*, a tenth-century treatment of the event, and the Greek tradition of noble death as a way to achieve freedom. Bowman's analysis of this long history actually sharpens, not

dilutes, our understanding of the particularities of the 1944 uprising, which in itself remains an understudied moment in Holocaust research.

Part V, lastly, addresses the aftermath of the Holocaust in memory, politics, and aesthetics. All three essays underline the fact that not one, but a multitude of “aftermaths” exist. Tuvia Friling’s chapter on the contested memory of Auschwitz *Kapo* Eliezer Gruenbaum is a good example of how irreconcilable narratives about Communism, Zionism, Orthodoxy and family can converge in the biography of a single person but remain not only in discord with one another, but also disconnected. Arieh Kovachi’s contribution about the negotiations between Jewish and non-Jewish pressure groups and the American and British administrations during and after the war highlights the ways in which Holocaust research can bridge the gap between East and West, as well as between Jewish and non-Jewish narratives of war and these groups’ interests, motivations, and agendas. Like Moore’s chapter on self-help, this topic lends itself well to integrative approaches that place a distinctly Jewish experience in connection with other, simultaneously unfolding narratives. The last chapter, which is by Michael Meng, offers a similarly integrative approach to the role of emotions and space in the transmittance of memory of Jewish life in Central Europe, whether direct memory, in the case of survivors, or indirect memory, in the case of second or third generation American or Israeli Jews. Meng uses a slightly more experimental approach, analyzing travelogues and literary and artistic reflections that confront Central Europe and its history from afar, and he thereby creates a montage of emotive spaces dealing with the responses of Jews to the vanished landscapes of prewar Jewish Europe.

Together, these fifteen chapters present some of the cutting-edge research currently being developed in the field. Apart from breaking new ground in the selection of subject matter (infanticide, collective suicide, Jewish self-help) or approach (the study of motivations, engaged violence, or combined histories), each essay presents an opening for further debate and research. As a whole, the volume brings together a diverse pool of Jewish histories of the Holocaust—some connected, some severed—that speak to the plethora of transnational experiences that together make up the Jewish Holocaust. It is my hope that these insights will be applied to other regions and contexts that could not be addressed in this volume, such as literary studies of the Holocaust or the experiences of Jewries in Hungary and Southeastern Europe.

Ilse Josepha Lazaroms

A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination From Persecution to Genocide. By Alon Confino. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. 284 pp.

The Nazis burned thousands of copies of the Hebrew Bible on November 9 and 10, 1938, in hundreds of communities across the Reich. Why? The substantial contribution of Alon Confino to the scholarship on the Holocaust rests on this key question, which previous historiography has ignored. According to the interpretation presented in *A World Without Jews*, this “intentional act” was “part of a larger story Germans told themselves during the Third Reich about who they were, where they came from, how they had arrived there, and where they were headed” (p.5). In order for this new national story to be built, the Jews had to be erased from the existing world.

As Confino explains, by burning the Bible, the Nazis aimed to create a new German and anti-Jewish identity, an aim which in turn reveals that an exclusively racial explanation of their beliefs would be reductionist. Germans’ choice of this “imaginary enemy” ought rather to be explained with reference to emotions and imagination, the book argues. In other words, Alon Confino seeks to provide an account of “what the Nazis *thought* was happening,” rather than what actually happened (p.6), and in doing so, he continues the cultural historical work he started in his previous book, *Foundational Pasts*.<sup>1</sup>

Despite his book’s main focus on the Nazi imagination, Confino also offers a detailed summary of the historical events that took place from January 30, 1933, when Hitler was named chancellor, to Germany’s defeat in the Second World War in May 1945, making his book accessible even to those without specialist knowledge of the Holocaust. However, Confino’s approach to the existing historiography is questionable, in particular his quick, ungenerous dismissal of Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (p.18).<sup>2</sup> While he takes into account Saul Friedländer’s idea of a Nazi “redemptive anti-Semitism” (p.20), he neglects Arno Mayer’s understanding of Nazi anti-Semitism as a “crusade” inseparable from a broader world view, which included an anti-Enlightenment stance expressed in the form of anti-Marxism as well as racial colonialism—the

---

1 Alon Confino, *Foundational Pasts: the Holocaust as a Historical Understanding* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

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

quest for *Lebensraum*.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, while critiquing the focus on racism, Confino seems to reduce the Nazi imagination to its anti-Semitic dimension.

Confino's investigation into the Nazi creation of an anti-Jewish imagination centers on public rituals and was carried out through extensive research of a variety of sources: "diaries, letters, eyewitness testimonies, speeches, posters, images, films, travelogues, newspaper accounts, and records of government, military, Nazi Party, and religious organizations" as well as "photographs from the period" (p.16). Discussing these public actions allows him to "follow the way Germans imagined a world without Jews," the "leading metaphor that drives" his story (p.9).

The book is divided into three parts, the first of which (chapters one through three) analyzes the period 1933–1938 and the relationship between Jews and modernity. In the eyes of the Nazis and other Germans, "'the Jew' represented different and often contradictory things" (p.30), but these ideas had a "common denominator": "the Jews were the creators of an evil modernity that soiled present-day Germany" (p.31). The first chapter of the book shows how, in opposition to this "Jewish modernity," the Nazis promoted their own modernity, embedded in "a racial society of pure Aryans based on the idea of a strong leader and a nation poised for European hegemony, an alternative ideology to liberalism in the West and communism in the East" (pp.31-32). The purpose of book burning was to underline the meaning of this new German identity. It was, on the one hand, an act of "national redemption" (p.52) and, on the other, "an act of irreverence, and the total erasure of the opponents" (p.53).

The second chapter analyzes how the Nazi notion of race became a metaphor for the origins of the new national identity. The obsession with origins was rooted in the idea of *Heimat*, or homeland, which by 1933 "was perceived as an essence of Germanness" and was then appropriated by the Nazis (p.67). Ultimately, Confino argues that the Nazi plan to conquer and restructure Europe was not "based on hard, scientific evidence, but on moral beliefs" (p.69). His study maintains that for the Nazis, "storytelling was more important than science": they built such an effective fictional story about the Jews that they did not require hard facts to substantiate it. They were not interested in proving that they had found the truth, but rather in using racial science "as a modern seal of approval to predetermined anti-Jewish views" (p.71). The Nazi new world was

---

3 Arno Mayer, *Why Did the Heavens not Darken? The 'Final Solution' in History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

to be built on the ruins of an old authority, represented by the Jews, who had to be publicly humiliated. Such public acts of humiliation aroused emotions that ranged from raw hatred, mockery, fear, and envy to shame and deep unease. In Confino's words, "Germans acted publicly against the Jews to strengthen the self and build an emotional community that defied this inner sense of transgression" (p.80). The brutal violence against the Jews happened on the local level and freed the Germans' imagination, making it possible for them "to envision, however vaguely, new social possibilities, new ways of life, linking an imagined world without Jews with everyday occurrences on the ground" (p.81). The point of these acts of public violence was "not to make everybody agree" but to involve everybody (p.85). The alleged viciousness of the Jews became a "truth that demanded no evidence" (p.86).

Through this extensive persecution, the Germans could see the Jews "everywhere" and could imagine them as "already gone": in the third chapter, Confino analyzes the Jews' omnipresence and anticipated erasure. Burning books excised the Jews from national culture. But the Nazis also demolished synagogues because they "evoked a sense of tradition and history, and by demolishing them, the Nazis insisted that the connection between German and Jewish pasts had to be severed in order to free up German national history" (p.109).

It becomes clear, therefore, what the Nazis wanted to achieve by burning the Bible: to destroy the tradition that the Jews symbolized. Confino devotes the second part of his book (chapters four and five) to the origins of the "moral past" represented by the Jews and the period 1938–41. The fourth chapter shows how Nazism was "about building a racial civilization by extinguishing the authority of the Jews over a moral, ancient past embedded in the Bible" (p.120). Paradoxically, the Nazis destroyed the Bible because it was important to them: "in Kristallnacht the Nazis created at the same time a German national and Christian community that was independent of Jewish roots" (p.121).

After discussing anti-Jewish laws and a number of "phantasmagoric ideas about how to extinguish Jews from German life" (p.144), chapter five reaches the critical date of Monday, January 30, 1939, when "Germany's most important interpreter of the Jewish Question," Hitler, finally made public his proposal for "bringing the Jewish problem to its solution" (p.151). Hitler knew that this was the right moment to talk publicly about the "annihilation" of the Jews to the German audience: by this time, Confino argues, "'annihilation' had already become a shared social practice and part of the cultural imagination" (p.152), and Hitler was therefore describing to his audience "an existing reality." When

the “flood,” the war, came, it was made clear, through the immediate genocidal policies against Polish Jews, that there would be no place for the Jews in the Nazi empire, where they “had no right to live as human beings” (p.168). Paradoxically, the same “sense of time—that is, of history and memory—permeated the perception of both Jews and Germans”: the Jewish people were “a thing of the past, of memory and commemoration,” and the Nazis had appropriated their role of bearers of morality and replaced their narrative of historical origins with a new Nazi civilization (p.176).

The last part of the book (chapter six and the epilogue), “The Jew as the Origins of History,” starts with the Final Solution in 1941 and ends with Germany’s defeat in 1945. The Final Solution was certainly a “radical rupture,” but “not as radical as is commonly portrayed” (p.190): in Confino’s view, “the radical element of the Final Solution was not the basic decision to create a world without Jews but the decision to create it immediately” (p.191). In the sixth chapter, Confino “turned to listen to Nazis, other Germans, Jews, and Europeans,” all of whom supposedly “imagined the extermination of the Jews as an act of creation, in the sense of genesis, in which the Jewish world would be destroyed to make space for the Nazi one” (p.192). The genesis of a new Nazi time relied on the destruction of Jewish time. The ultimate annihilation of the Jews happened in “a place with no time, past, and history”: the extermination camps (p.204).

Confino’s study ends with a surprising and rather controversial analogy between the Jews and the Nazis: “Jews and Nazis shared a belief in the power of Jewish history and memory” (p.207). They both supposedly believed in the power of books and stories, with the crucial difference that whereas “the Nazis wanted to destroy the Jewish Bible, history, and memory,” the “Jews clung to them” (p.237). The conclusion Confino reaches runs contrary to much received wisdom: “The Nazis perpetrated the Holocaust in the name of culture,” and not against it, and the Germans burned the Bible “not in spite of being a nation of high culture,” but precisely because they were such a nation. The “new morality of the master race,” the Aryan one, relied on the annihilation of the Jews, because they represented the “old morality witnessed in the Book of Books” (p.242).

This book is an original cultural history of Nazism, with a clear focus on the origins of the Holocaust—an approach for which Confino has indeed argued before. Such a cultural history brings new insights to the understanding of the Nazis’ motivations and their incredibly effective identity-creation process, which went much further than their racial ideology and the general brutality of

the Second World War. However, the book's excessive focus on the Germans' emotions and imagination as the only key to understanding the Holocaust makes this approach unilateral and monocausal. The "Germans" themselves appear to be a vague presence in Confino's rendition of the events, because he presents us with only the Jewish point of view and provides only Jewish voices and reactions. What about the German audience that (according to his account) was so influenced by the burning of the Bible? One wonders whether there is a way of directly documenting that wider audience's opinion.

Benedetta Carnaghi

Perben és haragban világháborús önmagunkkal. Tanulmányok. [In Trial and in Anger with Our Roles in World War II: A Collection of Essays]. By Judit Pihurik. Pécs–Budapest: Kronosz Kiadó–Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, 2015. 252 pp.

In her scholarly work, Judit Pihurik has dealt primarily with the history of Hungary in World War II. In her earliest writings, she presented the events of the war and, more specifically, the Eastern Front from a distinctive, subjective perspective by drawing on the diaries and memoirs of Hungarian soldiers. Her book *Naplók és memoárok a Don-kanyarból 1942–1943* [Diaries and Memoirs from the Don River Bend, 1942–1943], which was published in 2007, met with a warm reception among historians. She has continued to focus on historical memory and the fates of Hungarian soldiers, but she has expanded the scope of her study both chronologically and thematically and has also turned to new types of sources. These include, perhaps first and foremost, the documents found in the Historical Archive of the State Security Services, where she has pursued thorough research which ultimately enabled her to present in her writings the soldiers' fates after the war and the history of the so-called "Délvidék," or "Southern Land" (a term that refers essentially to the territories ceded by Hungary to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes after World War I), between 1941 and 1944 (a period during which a significant part of these territories had been re-annexed by Hungary).

*Perben és haragban világháborús önmagunkkal* contains eight essays which have been published before. (It is worth noting that the University of Pécs granted Pihurik a habilitation based on this collection.) As she observes in the preface to the book, "each of the eight articles deals with the period of World War II or the consequences of the war, and each article examines the individual options for action. They are also linked in terms of the research method that has been applied." Pihurik is indeed mainly interested in the conduct and the options of ordinary people who, at the whim of history, found themselves garbed in soldiers' uniforms in a time of war.

Four of the articles deal with the history of the Southern Land after 1941. In the article entitled "Hungarians and Serbs in the Southern Land, 1941–1944," Pihurik draws not only on archival sources that, for the most part, have been familiar to historians, but also relies heavily on the memoirs and recollections of officers who took part in the re-annexation of the territory. The memoir

of Milenko Palić, a Serbian who at one time had served in a forced labor unit and later became an instructor at the University of Novi Sad, deserves special mention because of the uniqueness of the perspective. Pihurik has already had his recollections published.<sup>1</sup>

The next article, which bears the apt title “Pathography as Historical Source,” concerns the 1942–1943 trial of lieutenant general Ferenc Bayor, who served as the military governor of Novi Sad following the occupation (or re-annexation) of the Southern Land. Bayor, who had been relieved of duty from the armed forces in 1938, was reinstated at the time of the re-annexation of northern Transylvania in accordance with the Second Vienna Award and again the following year, during the armed conflicts that took place in the Southern Land. He became infamous principally because of the “war reparations” that he imposed on the Jewish inhabitants of Novi Sad, the deportations of Slavs who had settled in the region, and in general because of the atrocities committed against Serbs. Pihurik, however, does not make these issues the focus of her inquiry, but instead examines Bayor’s personality and the motives he had for committing these acts. She raises the surprising question as to how Bayor could have acquired such an important role, despite his negligible intellectual abilities and why he, a man who earlier had been deemed unsuitable to serve as a regular soldier, was reinstated and appointed military governor of Novi Sad. Drawing on the surviving documents of the civil trial (it was a civil trial because Bayor resigned from his military position), Pihurik offers a detailed presentation of the proceedings, including an examination of why he was accused of theft, forgery of official documents, embezzlement, misappropriation, and abuse of authority and why he was sentenced to two years in prison for six counts of embezzlement and one count of forgery of official documents. Bayor’s story, however, does not come to an end here. After the war, he was turned over to the authorities in Yugoslavia, where he was sentenced to death for the acts he had committed as governor of the city and executed. At the end of her essay, Pihurik concludes that the case of Bayor clearly illustrates the consequences one had to face if he were given a position that exceeded his abilities, and she states that an individual’s abilities strongly influence the way he uses or abuses his power. At the same time, Pihurik adds, his case also demonstrates that serious efforts were taken in Hungary even during the war to hold officers responsible for abuses of

---

1 Milenko Palić, *Visszaemlékezés a világháború éveire (1941–1945)* [Milenko Palić: Recollections of the World War (1941–1945)], *Dél-alföldi évszázadok* 19 (Szeged: Csongrád Megyei Levéltár, 2003). Published by Judit Pihurik.

authority. Regrettably, she provides only one brief footnote that refers to other such cases.

In my view, of Pihurik's essays on the Southern Land, her article "Vagy ők, vagy mi" ("Either them or us"), which deals with the massacre that took place in the village of Csúrog (today Ćurug in Serbia) in 1942, offers the widest scope of new perspectives. This is in part because Pihurik draws on a source which historians have not yet studied. She compiled the documents found in the Archive of the State Security Services on the investigation into the events and the trial, which were drawn up between 1967 and 1973 and come to some 4,000 pages. Pihurik's article also affords new insights because the events which took place in Csúrog, which were part of a larger raid in the Southern Land, have so far remained in obscurity. At the moment there is no monograph on the raid in Novi Sad either, which is otherwise the most thoroughly researched and most widely known of the massacres committed by Hungarian authorities in the Southern Land in early 1942. The massacres in Csúrog took place in the wake of a confrontation that cost the lives of seven Hungarian soldiers and gendarmes. As a justification for their actions, the authorities claimed that there was a plan underfoot for a partisan uprising, though (as Pihurik observes) no historical evidence has been found in support of this claim. For days, the Serbian inhabitants of the village were brought in and questioned. In the end, the authorities, citing an escape attempt by one of the prisoners as their pretext, committed a massacre that claimed some 900 lives (estimates vary, as I note below). This made the events in Csúrog the bloodiest of the series of mass murders that took place in the Southern Land in early 1942. According to Hungarian statistics, 873 Serbs were killed (according to Serbian statistics 893), along with 13 Israelites and one Hungarian. The victims included women, children, and the elderly, who were beaten to death or shot. Thus between January 4 and January 8, 1942, the Serbian population of the village was literally decimated.<sup>2</sup> The article reconstructs the events of the massacre on the basis of the confessions of 33 people, some of whom had been soldiers or village officials at the time and others who were simply inhabitants of the settlement, i.e. for the most part ordinary people who had participated in the massacre. Pihurik's research clearly shows that captain János Károlyfalvy and lieutenant of the gendarmerie László Stépán, the leaders of the armed force that conducted the raid, were given no instructions concerning

2 According to Hungarian sources, the raids that took place in the Southern Land in January 1942 claimed 3,309 victims, and according to other statistics, 3,340 victims. According to these sources, there were 879 victims in the city of Novi Sad.

whom they should regard as a potential partisan. In the end, this was determined by the representatives of the local authorities, primarily the village clerk Gyula Varga and the members of the National Guard, which consisted of recruits from the local Hungarian community. Pihurik cites Varga's instructions to the units that conducted the raids: "Either them or us." Thus every Serbian and, indeed, every Jewish person became a suspect. Pihurik also emphasizes that in the command in which he ordered the raid, the chief of the general staff Ferenc Szombathelyi did not order the authorities to take action against the civilian population. She demonstrates persuasively that a sense of hysteria had come to prevail in the village, in which the leaders of the community and in particular the village clerk and the National Guard came to play important roles. Furthermore, the soldiers and members of the gendarmerie who had been brought to the area had little knowledge of the area and could not speak Serbian. Thus they were unable to assess the reliability of the misleading information provided by the village clerk, information that was instrumental in the creation of a sense of panic among the local Hungarian population. This detail made it significantly easier for the local authorities to instigate the brutal violence that were committed indiscriminately against the Serbian population.

The characters in Pihurik's narrative, however, are not villains but rather ordinary people serving in the armed forces who found themselves, quite unexpectedly, in a situation in which their scope for action was dramatically limited. They implemented measures that looked justifiable, even innocent, as the world of military action, which is based on following orders, demands. Thus they became participants in the murder of several thousand innocent Serbs and Jews. At the close of the article, Pihurik notes that the series of brutalities in Csúrog did not come to an end in 1945. After the war, the Serbs of the area did not forget what had befallen the Serb-speaking inhabitants of Csúrog, and with the change in the power relations they addressed their demand directly to Tito to have all the Hungarians of the village deported, a demand that met with the approval of his government. The number of Hungarians who had collaborated with the authorities in committing the raids and the massacre could not have been more than 50. The new partisan rulers dealt harshly with the Hungarians of Csúrog and the so-called Southern Land in general. As Pihurik observes, thousands of innocent Hungarians were deprived of their lands and belongings and deported or executed.

Pihurik's expertise as a historian, including her balanced manner of narrating historical traumas and her impressive knowledge of the sources, are perhaps

most apparent in this essay. While on the one hand she gives voice, as it were, to her sources, on the other hand she remains clearly aware that, given the nature of these sources, they shed light on the past only from the perspective of the perpetrators, while offering no insights into the perspectives of the victims and survivors. Her article is an admirable example of how to present the traumas that befell the Hungarians and the Serbs of the region so as to allow them to become part of national memories that are forward looking.

The next article in the collection also deals with the Southern Land. Drawing on Hungarian and Serbian archival sources, Pihurik presents the history of the Russian white emigration that took place between 1941 and 1944, which involved somewhere between 4,000 and 10,000 people (depending on the source), as well as the Hungarian and German plans concerning these emigrants. Pihurik offers a detailed analysis of why the various attempts to enlist Russians into armed units under German leadership failed despite the fact that permission was granted to undertake these recruitment efforts. She is no doubt conversant with the relatively slight Hungarian secondary literature on the subject, but she regrettably does not draw on the wealth of sources on the white Russian emigration in Serbian, Russian, and German.

The next three articles present the fates of Hungarian prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, a topic of considerable interest today and often the subject of lively debates. Pihurik draws on the recollections of the soldiers, who were of various ranks and educational backgrounds and who as civilians came from various social strata. She also takes into consideration the circumstances of the formation of the survivors' memories. The liveliness of the debates today concerning the fates of Soviet prisoners of war is due to several factors. One of these is the simple fact that until the fall of socialism in Hungary one was not permitted to speak openly about the subject and the Soviet sources were not accessible. The question was only dealt with in the context of the larger narrative of Hungary's "criminal war" against the Soviet Union or, more recently, through the prism of the unjust occupation of Hungary by the Soviet Union. It was addressed not as a serious issue meriting patient study by historians, but rather as a question of seeing justice done in the name of national memory.

In the article entitled "Hadifoglyok írták" ("Written by Prisoners of War"), for instance, Pihurik challenges the claims and methods of those who, in their efforts to analyze the question of prisoners of war, separate the issue from its context, from the war itself. She notes quite emphatically that she examines

the question “in a broader context, as part of the theme of the war.” In her view, the war was the fundamental turning point in the lives of the soldiers and their lives as prisoners of war only began after their involvement in the war. As she observes, however, this fact comes up only rarely in the recollections of the prisoners of war, though she does not endeavor to find any explanation as to why this is the case. Thus her point of departure is not the moment at which a soldier was taken prisoner, but rather Hungary’s declaration of war against the Soviet Union. It is worth noting that in this article Pihurik draws on quite different sources, many of which have been forgotten, including not only the actual recollections of prisoners of war, but also the so-called anti-fascist farewell albums of prisoners who left the camps to return home, which were politically manipulated by the Soviet authorities.

The article entitled “Katonadolog 1945–1962” (“Be a Man, 1945–1962”) focuses on the fate of the military officers of the Horthy era after the war. As Pihurik notes at the conclusion of the article, she is unable to give a clear-cut answer to the question she raises in her subtitle, namely whether the military officers of the Horthy regime were scapegoats or enemies. On the one hand, they were a bit of both, but on the other, as her historical analysis of the fates of 255 former officers or reservists after the war makes clear, the careers of these individuals in fact took many different directions in the Kádár era. Many of them were indeed psychologically broken, but many had opportunities to pursue their original professions as civilians, even “under the unflagging gaze of the political police.” On the basis of an assessment made by the political police in 1962, of the careers of 255 former officers and reservists, Pihurik determined that 36 percent of them had found jobs that corresponded to their level of education, 37.6 percent had jobs involving physical labor, 4.6 percent were in administrative positions for which they were technically overqualified, and the others were either pensioners or dependents.

The next article in the collection, “A ‘horthysta katonatiszt’ mint potenciális kém a Rákosi-korszakban” (“The ‘Horthyist Military Officer’ as a Potential Spy in the Rákosi Era”), presents one example of the fate of a former military officer of the Horthy regime and uses his case as a means of analyzing the mechanism of the 1950s to create scapegoats. In her examination of the 1952–53 trial of flight lieutenant Ferenc Skriba, Pihurik shows how, in the course of the investigations and the trial, the goal was not to prove that the accused had actually acted as a spy. Rather, from the outset, the authorities forejudged that given his past as a military officer of the Horthy regime he could not possibly be innocent.

The last article deals with the history of 1956, though it also touches on the period of World War II. Exceptionally, it focuses not on the soldiers involved in the conflict, but the civilians. The story is paradoxical from the outset, since it is about a meeting that took place in a wine cellar in a small city in Transdanubia and allegedly subverted the people's democracy. The characters in the narrative were members of a close circle of friends in Szekszárd, consisting of people of varying professions, such as a doctor, a lawyer, a civil servant, a teacher, an employee, and an architect, both among the observers and among the observed. As in her other inquiries, here too Pihurik devotes considerable attention to critical analysis of the various kinds of documents of internal affairs on which she draws (agents' reports, transcriptions of interrogations, pre-sentence reports, operational plans, documents pertaining to investigations, etc.), and she clearly indicates both the potentials and the limitations of these diverse sources.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the collection is Pihurik's thorough knowledge of the sources and her ability and willingness to consider their uses and limits, as well as her capacity to provide narratives of traumatic events that are unbiased by political motivations. *Perben és haragban világháborús önmagunkkal* strives to explore, learn about, and confront the past, and Pihurik does not content herself with simple black-and-white answers.

Enikő A. Sajti

Political Justice in Budapest after World War II. By Ildikó Barna and Andrea Pető. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2015. 135 pp.

Ildikó Barna's and Andrea Pető's *Political Justice in Budapest after World War II* is a groundbreaking work for two reasons: first, the authors shift the focus of historical research from the wartime elite to the general Hungarian population and, second, they adopt an applied quantitative methodology. Furthermore, instead of limiting themselves to the political leaders of the Horthy and Szálasi regimes and other prominent war criminals, they expand the scope of their inquiry to the everyday defendants of the so-called People's Courts and bring not only the accused but also the witnesses to the fore. This is a significant step, since the thousands of ordinary Hungarians who were brought before the tribunals to testify were also very much part of the country's wartime history in general and the denazifying processes in particular.

It is worth underlining that, given the immense quantities of available archival materials, the research team understandably was not able to look through them in their entirety, only 500 cases out of approximately 22,000 (p.33). This explains why the authors themselves dub their findings *estimations* rather than exact results (pp.42–43). Moreover, as Pető and Barna note on page 35, due to the diverse nature of the files, the quantitative research method could not be fully applied to the study of these documents. Another limitation of their book is territorial: although people's courts functioned in several Hungarian towns and cities in the immediate post-war years, the authors decided to focus on the best documented and probably most important tribunal of the retribution process, the Budapest People's Court. In addition to the people's court, which are in the focus of *Political Justice in Budapest after World War II*, postwar retribution in Hungary had at least two other pillars. First, shortly after the Nazi Germans left Budapest, thousands of civilians fell victim to Soviet soldiers hunting for people who could be used as forced laborers, including ordinary Hungarian citizens who happened to be ethnic Germans. Second, so-called justificatory committees (*igazolóbizottságok*) were set up by major employers, professional organizations, trade unions, etc. Their task consisted of finding war criminals among their own colleagues. These committees even had the right to propose the internment of those who had not committed actual crimes during the war, but for other, non-specified reasons were considered "a threat to the rebuilding of the country along

democratic lines.”<sup>1</sup> And interestingly, it was the political police who made decisions regarding proposed internment on the basis of the 138.000/1945 B.M. decree. The rulings of the justificatory committees could be appealed, however, and the appeal court was the National Council of the People’s Court (*Népbíróóságok Országos Tanácsa*), the top echelon of the denazification system.

In my view, one of the most important results of Pető’s and Barna’s inquiry is found in the general description of the files, in which the authors classify the groups of the Budapest People’s Court’s cases (pp.45–47). According to their results, the vast majority of the files deal with wartime crimes. Thus, in their assessment it would be misleading to define the People’s Court as nothing more than a tool in the Communist Party’s quest for absolute power. On the contrary, 43 percent of the cases were related to wartime crimes committed against “Jews,” a proportion that is significantly larger than the second largest group of files (26 percent), for which the main accusation was being or having been a member of the Arrow Cross Party or another armed far-right organization. The third group (12 percent) consists of the cases that were related to crimes committed against “non-Jews” during World War II. If one sums up the first three groups, they comprise a little more than four-fifth of all of the files (81 percent), and—as is worth reiterating—they involve exclusively acts committed during World War II. The flipside of the coin is that no less than 19 percent of the files deal with post-war cases, which was a unique feature of the Hungarian retribution system: while the obligation of bringing war criminals to trial followed from the armistice agreement with the Allies, the established tribunals could also pass judgment on individuals who had broken the law after the end of World War II. Out of the remaining 19 percent, no more than 12 percent were ideologically led trials with the clear purpose of silencing political opponents of the Communists. By drawing attention to this relatively low number, the authors persuasively undermine the popular claim that the people’s courts primarily served the struggle of the Communists leaders against their political competitors (p.46). Finally, the last 7 percent of trials were initiated because of allegations of post-war (mostly verbal) anti-Semitism.

In practice, the members of the research team processed each and every court file by filling out a questionnaire. All data was transformed into numbers, for instance, the number 1 indicated that the defendant was male and the number

1 Tibor Zinner, “Háborús bűnösök perci. Internálások, kitelepítések és igazolóeljárások 1945–1949.” [Trials of War Criminals: Internments, Resettlements and Justificatory Processes, 1945–1949]. *Történelmi Szemle* 28, no. 1 (1985): 119–20.

2 indicated that she was female (pp.37–40). 18 percent of the defendants turned out to be female, an unusually high proportion in a society in which, until then, almost all prisoners were men and women were hardly present in public life (p.51 and pp.86–87). According to analysis of the collected questionnaires, the average age of the defendants in the Budapest People’s Court was 38. The researchers also examined issues that have not yet been studied. For instance, they analyzed the proportion of women among the People’s Judges (pp.93–95).

If there are any shortcomings of the book, they lie in the fact that in certain areas it is too brief on context and leaves some of its data unexplained. For instance, the key section on the accused individuals informs the reader that a substantial proportion of the people who committed their wartime crimes against non-Jews had had completed some form of higher education (p.56) and, in general, “defendants were typically better educated than the average for the general population” (p.55). However, in the case of people who were brought before the courts because of their memberships in right-wing organizations, Pető and Barna find that most of them had had significantly less schooling than the general population (p.55). The authors do not, however, offer any explanation concerning the consequences of these different educational backgrounds for those who had to stand trial for war crimes at the people’s courts. As Tibor Zinner has shown, following the end of the war, politicians and higher officials instructed the judges and tribunals to assume that the accused workers and peasants had been bewildered by the elite of the Horthy regime during the war.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the idea that leaders had misled the uneducated masses, the new political elite wanted to pass more lenient judgments for their potential voters.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, as the statistics presented by Pető and Barna reveal, the better educated were indeed more likely to face accusations than the less educated. On the other hand (and the statistical analysis presented by the authors does not touch on this), the Budapest People’s Court regularly considered a defendant’s low level of education an extenuating circumstance,<sup>4</sup> while a higher level of

---

2 Zinner, “Háborús bűnösök,” 121.

3 On this notion see also József Horváth, “Ezer kis-nyilas” [One-thousand Petty Arrow Cross Fighters], *Szabad Szó*, 18 July, 1945, quoted by Éva Ständeisky, “Erkölcsök 1945-ben” [Morals in 1945], *Mozgó Világ* 32, no. 2 (2006). On the political motivations for this leniency see Péter György, *Apám helyett* [Instead of my Father] (Budapest: Magvető, 2011), 30–31, and 23–24.

4 See for example: Budapest City Archives, BFL XXV.1.a - 1481/1945, A Budapesti Népbíróság büntetőügyei [Criminal Cases of the Budapest People’s Court], the case of Mrs. Gyula Reményi or BFL XXV.1.a - 947/1945, the case of Mrs. János Csibor.

education was clearly regarded as an aggravating circumstance.<sup>5</sup> As this example shows, the results of Pető and Barna's quantitative research at times prove somewhat too narrow and do not provide adequate explanations. Of course, this does not reduce the value of their findings. Furthermore, this feature of the inquiry may indicate that it is intended primarily for a readership already familiar with the wartime and immediate post-war history of Hungary.

Researchers will no doubt cite the data made available in this book with unusual frequency, yet because in some sections the reader finds primarily numbers and inventories of the characteristics of the average victims, defendants, and witnesses, some of the research questions that are raised seem more ambitious than the actual inquiry that follows.<sup>6</sup> The quantitative results can reveal, for instance, the features of an average witness, and the available data provide a general overview of the social background, gender, and education of a person likely to be brought before the People's Court as a defendant. However, drawing the picture of the average accused or the average witness hardly explains the deeper logics of the retribution process. To understand these logics properly, we would need to assess the opportunities of those involved and their different choices of agency, and we would also need to be familiar with the changing political circumstances and the changing motivations of people.

It is worth noting, in praise of the authors, that the chapter on gender aspects of the People's Court activity is excellent, and it clearly reveals how much can be learned from the statistical data in terms of agencies. It is an important result that those found guilty of post-war verbal anti-Semitism were mostly young women whose prime social responsibility was widely considered to be providing meals for their families. This may explain in part why they were more frequently involved in anti-Jewish incidents targeting alleged black marketers. Another excellent section of the book deals with the Jewish victims and witnesses at the tribunals. What may be seen as slightly problematic here is the definition of *Jew* (pp.45–46). The authors first note that “during the Holocaust the authorities determined who was and was not Jewish,” and then add to this that “the people's tribunals also followed this logic” (p.46). I certainly agree with the first statement, but not necessarily with the latter claim, especially since in 1948 the Hungarian authorities decided to stop registering the religious

---

5 A good example of this can be found in BFL XXV.1.a - 779/1945, the case of Mrs. János Burger and Anasztid Stekker.

6 See for example the questions raised on page 45 or in the last paragraph on page 97 and its continuation at the top of page 98.

affiliation of citizens. The expression often used by the people's courts, the so-called "persecuted person," was a broader and vaguer category. Historians need to be more careful when using the word *Jew* in a post-war context, especially when talking about a Jewish community that was as highly assimilated as the one in Budapest. For me, it is crucial that most of these individuals of Jewish origin regarded themselves primarily as Hungarian, even after the horrible trauma of the Shoah, which is why researchers should use terms that at least represent their hyphenated (Jewish-Hungarian) identities.<sup>7</sup> At the end of their book, Pető and Barna try to relate their quantitative findings to changes in what they call a "Jewish identity." The existence of such a relationship, however, is not always clear. They contend that since an unusually high number of cases ended in acquittal (43 percent), these court procedures could not serve as a tool in processing the trauma of the Holocaust. This is why, according to the authors, Hungarian Jewish identity became a hidden identity and the memory of the Shoah became the most important element of this identity. However, we have to remind ourselves that the authors only dealt with cases from the archive of the Budapest People's Court. There were many other retribution forums. Furthermore, the authors do not provide us with any characterization of pre-war or wartime Jewish identity, which is essential if they wish to write about the modification of a Jewish identity. In other words, what was the original version of the Jewish identity that was then allegedly changed by the reluctance of the People's Court to imprison war criminals? This seems all the more important, as many of the people who were considered Jews in this book hardly identified themselves as Jews or nurtured any kind of Jewish identity, even in the pre-war era. Finally, only one paragraph of the book (on page 104) deals with the sentences in cases related to wartime crimes committed against "Jews," which is why the reader might ultimately feel that the large amount of quantitative data presented in the book has not been persuasively connected to the conclusion that this all ended up changing Hungarian Jewish identity.

The authors' rich description of the witnesses merits mention. Accordingly, for example, a significant number of them were born in the Hungarian capital, a much higher number than their average proportion in the society, especially if

---

7 On this see for example: Tim Cole, "Constructing the 'Jew', Writing the Holocaust: Hungary 1920–1945," *Patterns of Prejudice* 33, no. 3 (1999): 19–27. The so-called Gerő–Romsics debate among Hungarian historians also touched upon on this question. See more on this also in Maté Rigó, "A Hungarian version of the Historikerstreit? A summary of the Romsics–Gerő debate among Hungarian historians (2012)," accessed July 27, 2015, <http://www.imre-kertesz-kolleg.uni-jena.de/index.php?id=415&l=1percent27>.

we consider where war crimes tended to be committed against Jewish victims during World War II (pp.67–68). At the same time, the authors explain that the percentage of defendants judged by the Budapest People’s Court who had been born in villages was high: 53 percent if speaking about crimes against so-called Jews and no less than 70 percent if we are speaking of cases related to membership in the Arrow Cross or other armed far-right organizations. Should we then conclude that during the war the bourgeois Budapest was assaulted by “war criminals” arriving from the provinces? A careful interpretation of the data shows that the picture was indeed far more complex. Yet it seems fair to say that the Budapest People’s Court frequently passed judgment on someone who had not been born in Budapest on the basis of the testimony given by witnesses and victims who had been born in the capital city.

I wish to suggest, by citing these examples, that *Political Justice in Budapest after World War II* should be mandatory reading for historians dealing with the Holocaust in Hungary and scholars of transitional justice. Pető and Barna’s findings reveal numerous fascinating and until now unknown aspects of the functioning of the court, for instance the fact that it was the *Nemzeti Parasztpárt* (National Peasant Party) that delegated the most women to the Budapest tribunal. Moreover, thanks to the authors’ thorough analyses, we now have a clear idea of the background of those summoned to the courtroom of a specific People’s Court, which is indeed a huge step towards understanding the Hungarian retribution process and the individuals who were involved in it.

Istvan Pal Adam, PhD

*Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung.* Edited by Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw. Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer Verlag, 2015. 342 pp.

*Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung* is the result of an international workshop held in April 2014 in Tutzing, Germany. One of the first publications of the recently established *Zentrum für Holocaust-Studien am Institut für Zeitgeschichte München*, this ambitious volume offers an assessment of the state of Holocaust research after the boom of the last quarter of a century. Individual articles provide overviews of key approaches in Holocaust historiography, assess the new opportunities and challenges brought by the deepening internationalization and specialization of the field, repeatedly address the moot question of appropriate contextualization, and raise some potentially central questions of future research. Written mostly by leading German experts, the volume can also be seen—though this is not explicitly part of its agenda—as an attempt to situate several specifically German contributions to the field in their transnational contexts, and thereby reflect on the roles specific national research traditions continue to play in Holocaust scholarship.

Two of the four sections of the volume are devoted to the question of continuities and various attempts at contextualization, including war and occupation, whereas the other two analyze perpetrator research and newer studies on the perspectives and strategies of Jews under Nazi rule. The introduction “Tendenzen und Probleme der neueren Holocaust-Forschung: Eine Einführung,” by Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw, key representatives of the new research center in Munich, highlights the massive transformation Holocaust scholarship has undergone in recent decades. Bajohr and Löw discuss the increased attention researchers currently pay to the multiple roles played by individuals during World War II and the consequently more nuanced social historical contextualization of genocide. Their introduction also addresses the altered image of both the perpetrators, who can no longer be viewed as a marginal criminal gang pathologically different from the rest of society, and their crime, the Holocaust, which is now repeatedly depicted as the sum of a multiplicity of massacres and murderous acts rather than the result of the operation of a few major extermination camps. Last but not least, while emphasizing the intimate connections between the Holocaust and other national socialist crimes, the editors emphasize the pan-European scope of the Holocaust and the ways

in which anti-Jewish radicalization was often produced by interactions between the Nazi center and peripheries.

Ulrich Herbert's elaborate overview of the history and perspectives of Holocaust research in Germany ("Holocaust-Forschung in Deutschland: Geschichte und Perspektiven einer schwierigen Disziplin") comes after the introductory text by Bajohr and Löw. In addition to providing a narrative of the history of what he calls a problematic field of study, Herbert's contribution, like that of Bajohr and Löw, addresses the inadequacies of the image of a cold, industrial, almost clinically executed mass murder. Rejecting easily comprehensible concepts and theories as insufficient, in their stead Herbert suggests a stronger focus on the concrete, everyday facets of the Holocaust—which in their sheer mass may admittedly be unbearably horrific and utterly unmanageable. The author's chronological overview, first and foremost, reminds his readers how "hesitantly and very late" historical Holocaust research started in Germany (41). Herbert notes that German historians lagged decades behind German jurists in amassing detailed information and offering nuanced interpretations. As he observes, only in the 1990s did historical research start to outweigh interpretative polemics. Moreover, he maintains that the massive increase in German historical research was partly a reaction to an almost ceaseless public debate in the country, which took place approximately between 1985 and 2000 and by the end of which "everything was thought possible, even probable, and the *onus probandi* was now squarely on the shoulder of the doubters" (p.60).<sup>1</sup>

As Herbert's "Holocaust-Forschung in Deutschland" highlights, in the last half of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s researchers focused on political, institutional, scholarly, and situational dynamics. They addressed the behavior, motives, worldview, and biographies of perpetrators, as well as the degrees and extent of participation, knowledge, support, or indifference of ordinary Germans. At the same time, there was a marked shift in the focus of research towards Eastern Europe, which placed the Holocaust in the middle of an "inferno of violence" and thus also made it appear somewhat less like a radical rupture in civilization. Another momentous change Herbert sketches is how, in addition to devoting significant attention to material aspects, German researchers finally began to study the perspectives of victims too. Moreover, he argues that the public polemic had visibly declined by the turn of the millennium and the Holocaust would thereby emerge as a preoccupation primarily of historians.

---

1 All translations from German are my own – FL.

As the article observes, this happened at a time when the emergence of new transnational perspectives on the subject and the increasingly international composition of the researchers themselves meant that German research trends were losing many of their distinguishing features.

In his overview of perpetrator research, entitled “Täterforschung: Ertrag, Probleme und Perspektiven eines Forschungsansatzes,” Frank Bajohr asserts that the microanalytical focus on perpetrators and their networks fundamentally changed our understanding of how the Holocaust was implemented (p.170). At the same time, Bajohr reflects on the unclear perspectives of *Täterforschung* now that the task of separating perpetrators from Nazi German society at large no longer appears easy and providing a satisfactory definition of who qualifies as a perpetrator has therefore emerged as a serious problem in its own right. After all, as Bajohr notes, violence was an element in community building in Nazi society, which implies a substantial amount of overlap between a history of perpetrators and a social history of violence. Bajohr also emphasizes, in his valuation of *Täterforschung*, that explorations of the personal motivations of perpetrators have not yielded many valuable insights. Biographical specificities, such as previous experiences of violence, do not seem to provide a sound basis on which to draw conclusions concerning these exceptional radicalization either, even if the political meanings perpetrators assigned to their former experiences of violence—whether endured, witnessed or committed—seem indeed to have played crucial roles. Whereas in recent years situational and social psychological explanations of perpetrators have admittedly grown in importance, in the assessment of Bajohr, they by and large fail to provide adequate historical contextualizations. Bajohr’s critical overview of current approaches finishes with a plea not to pursue *Täterforschung* in isolation, but to develop new approaches that combine insights into perpetrators with structural and institutional analyses (p.181).

Mark Roseman’s subsequent reflections (“Lebensfälle: Biographische Annäherungen an NS-Täter”) relate to several of the concerns raised by Bajohr. Roseman asks whether individual biographies are relevant in a society of perpetrators, and he critically examines the notion that the radicalization of Nazi policy could be explained with reference to personal attitudes. He ultimately appears rather skeptical towards biographical studies, claiming that such projects promise to discover merely “some of the mechanisms within the Nazi party and regime that enabled and motivated action” (p.202). Roseman reminds his readers that moral constraints necessarily hinder an empathic

approach to Nazi perpetrators and thus their biographers ultimately, and perhaps entirely unavoidably, tend to fail in their attempts to grasp their motives and their psychological strategies of self-justification. Moreover, Roseman argues that a marked focus on the options perpetrators had point, admittedly rather paradoxically, to the need to search for structural preconditions. Noting that perpetrators were often characterized by a bewildering mixture of radicalism and flexibility, the study maintains, quite simply, that ambitious young men at the beginnings of their careers in 1933 were prone to becoming perpetrators, largely irrespective of their individual intellectual profiles.

In “Der Holocaust und die anderen NS-Verbrechen: Wechselwirkungen und Zusammenhänge,” which represents a thorough attempt at contextualization, Dieter Pohl agrees that anti-Semitism may well have constituted the central element of the Nazi worldview, but it escalated in the context of a new form of continental imperialism. Sharing the perception that “the other half” of National Socialist violence has remained relatively understudied in comparison with the Holocaust, Pohl complains that connections and interplays between various major Nazi crimes (above all those committed against Jews, prisoners of war, and political enemies) have often been neglected. Emphasizing furthermore that the Nazi policy of extermination was closely connected to economic and labor policies, Pohl ultimately pleads for an integrative study of Nazi violence.

In her article “Besatzung als europäische Erfahrungs- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte: Der Holocaust im Kontext des Zweiten Weltkrieges,” Tatjana Tönsmeier advocates a social historical study of occupational experiences during World War II, which would help researchers develop an integrated history of the Holocaust in a pan-European perspective. Tönsmeier suggests that occupations ought to be understood as forms of social interaction between occupiers and occupied with special dynamics of their own. She pleads for thick descriptions of the complex, often ambivalent, and highly situation-dependent ways in which some 200 million people living in occupied territories dealt with the norms, rules, and institutions of the Nazi occupiers. She maintains that an encompassing project of this kind would conceptualize Jewish populations as part of local societies without recourse to morally loaded terms like collaboration and bystander.

“Holocaust und Besatzungsgeschichte,” Doris L. Bergen’s reflections on Tönsmeier’s intriguing proposal, recognizes opportunities inherent in treating the Holocaust as part of a history of occupation, but it also points to several potential pitfalls and unsolved dilemmas of this kind of an approach (p.300).

Bergen raises several crucial concerns, such as the fact that the Holocaust was also implemented in non-occupied and non-German occupied territories, the potential neglect of military history in a research project focused narrowly on civilians, or the simple fact that relevant participants may have experienced the social processes of what Tönsmeier calls occupation as annexation or even as liberation. She highlights the benefits of focusing on the role that interests and identities (whether ethnic, religious, political, or clan-based) played amidst all the corruption and violence in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe in particular, while also pleading for methodological pluralism.

Ingo Loose's "Massenraubmord? Materielle Aspekte des Holocaust" covers a much debated topic by focusing on four issues in particular: the annihilation of the economic foundations for the existence of German Jewry and its consequences in the 1930s, the subsequent economic annihilation of European Jews during the war and the Holocaust, material components of collaboration, and, last but not least, the relationship between economy and rationality in Nazi policies. Loose argues that while there was a strong though certainly not necessary empirical connection between the economic annihilation of Jews and their subsequent murder, the actual value of stolen Jewish property across Europe should not be overestimated. The author points out that by 1938 the largest segment of property, that of German Jews had largely been confiscated, and the value of Jewish forced labor to the German war economy was probably greater than what was expropriated from Jews across Europe during the war (p.151). At the same time, Loose explains that even if the perception among anti-Semites of the wealth of Jews was a notable factor in the radicalization of the persecution, the Holocaust was not a consequence of economic motivations. His article thus maintains that the contested German concept of *Massenraubmord* (literally: mass robbery murder) has limited value. After all, as Loose notes, Polish Jews were still alive when their properties and belongings were confiscated, but by the time these things had been sold and the profits from their sale were being put to use, the vast majority of these people had already been murdered (p.155).

Turning to the victims, Beate Meyer's study on Jews in the Third Reich and Western Europe ("Nicht nur Objekte staatlichen Handelns: Juden im Deutsche Reich und Westeuropa") reminds her readers that while Jewish reactions, options, and choices were all strongly influenced by Nazi policy, societal attitudes and behavior, they were nonetheless highly diverse. Meyer focuses, more particularly, on how, by the late 1930s and early 1940s, the strategy of cooperation pursued by Jewish representatives with the aim of moderating the impact of persecution

and enabling further emigration came into obvious conflict with the strategies of ordinary members of their communities, who tried to escape the impact of Nazi policies as best they could. In her “Handlungsspielräume und Reaktionen der jüdischen Bevölkerung in Ostmitteleuropa,” Andrea Löw uses the example of ghettos in Eastern Europe, primarily in Poland, to discuss newer themes and research perspectives on Jewish behavior. Pleading for social historical analyses and a focus on everyday life in particular, Löw underlines, much as Meyer does, the broad diversity of Jewish behavior within Nazi ghettos, which included impressive cultural activities alongside various forms of resistance, but which also generated notable conflicts within these forcefully created communities. In his essay “Handeln und Erfahren: Bewältigungsstrategien im Kontext der jüdischen Geschichte,” Dan Michman explains that Jewish strategies in the face of Nazi persecution cannot be sufficiently understood when conceived of as immediate reactions. Arguing that the broad diversity of Jewish behavior under Nazi rule observable across the continent may be better grasped with reference to previous Jewish experiences and organizational forms, he suggests taking a longer-term view of them.

In “Neue Quellen, neue Fragen? Eine Zwischenbilanz des Editionsprojekts ‘Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden,’” in which she offers an overview of the largest ongoing German project on the Holocaust, Susanne Heim specifies what the *Editionsprojekt “Judenverfolgung 1933–1945”* has already yielded. Heim begins by emphasizing that, repeated claims to the contrary notwithstanding, the Holocaust has not been thoroughly researched in its pan-European dimensions yet and the *Editionsprojekt* aims to bring historians back from their avid focus on questions of memory and remembrance to more ‘directly historical’ explorations. More concretely, Heim explains that the project has made advances in three specific ways: it has amassed new materials on Jewish perspectives, it has gathered source materials on the rather under-researched cases of Southeastern Europe and Hungary, and, more generally, it has nurtured broad international comparisons (p.337).

In his essay entitled “Holocaust als angewandter Antisemitismus? Potenzial und Grenzen eines Erklärungsfaktors,” Jürgen Matthäus probes the seemingly self-evident but actually rather questionable explanatory value of anti-Semitism. Matthäus offers the intriguing assessment that “the newest research shows that anti-Semitism as an abstract explanatory concept is of limited use. At the same time, we are only at the beginning in terms of probing the actual relevance of anti-Semitism to the Holocaust.” (p.118) Explaining that structures of prejudice

have to be contextualized in a nuanced manner in order to grasp how they actually functioned in the context of unleashed violence, Matthäus ultimately pleads for empirical analyses of the relationship between images of an alleged enemy and practices of persecution. Last but not least, in her “Sonderweg, Kolonialismus, Genozide: Der Holocaust in Spannungsfeld von Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten der deutschen Geschichte,” Sybille Steinbacher examines the strengths and weaknesses of placing emphasis on the continuities of German history. She pleads for an approach that would incorporate longer-term historical connections, such as the one to colonialism, while placing the novel racist radicalism of the National Socialist regime at the center of attention and focusing on the utopian dimension of its rule (p.95).

In sum, *Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung* not only offers numerous fascinating insights into current trends of Holocaust historiography but also provides overall assessments of several of its major areas. However, as a whole, the volume proves more convincing as an analysis of such trends and a critique of some of their shortcomings than as a set of proposals for new avenues of research. Instead of pointing to still uncharted territories, numerous contributors plead instead for more integrated perspectives, whether in the study of Nazi violence in the case of Pohl, the study of occupations in the case of Tönsmeier, or the plea for structurally and institutionally grounded research on perpetrators in the case of Bajohr. This in turn suggests that, as a consequence of recent decades of intense research, specialized knowledge on individual aspects of the Holocaust has reached a certain depth that now calls for new synthetic visions. Works by the likes of David Cesarani, Christian Gerlach, and Timothy Snyder, which promise to articulate precisely such visions, are in fact already near completion. *Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung* also makes clear that the internationalization of scholarship on the Holocaust may have proceeded at an impressive rate, but it has not yet brought a reasonable balance to our knowledge of various European regions. Ultimately, in this agenda-setting volume of the *Zentrum für Holocaust-Studien am Institut für Zeitgeschichte München*, Nazi Germany and the occupied Eastern European theaters of war appear as the central objects of Holocaust historiography. Thus detailed explorations of the varied interactions between Germany and other, non-occupied states, which represent another subject of great relevance to histories of the Holocaust, also remain to be conducted as part of future studies.