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A Survey of Interpretive Paradigms in Holocaust Studies and a
Comment on the Dimensions of the Holocaust
and
“The Annihilation of Superfluous Eaters”:
Nazi Plans for and Use of Famine in Eastern Europe

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“The Annihilation of Superfluous Eaters”: Nazi Plans for and Uses of Famine in Eastern Europe

by Steven R. Welch

The deliberate use of famine was an integral part of Nazi plans and policies regarding Eastern Europe during World War II. The following essay will examine three key examples: first, the so-called General Plan for the East (*Generalplan Ost*; hereafter GPO); second, the “hunger strategy” carried out by the Germans in the occupied regions of the Soviet Union following the invasion of June 1941, which included the starvation of Soviet POWs and Soviet civilians; and third, the Nazi ghettoization policies from 1940 to 1942 which created famine conditions in which hundreds of thousands of Jews died of hunger and hunger-related diseases.

I. The General Plan for the East

The General Plan for the East, the first draft of which was presented to Heinrich Himmler in July 1941, embodied the Nazi vision for a complete and ruthless demographic revolution in Eastern Europe.¹ The GPO was premised on the belief that the Wehrmacht would quickly and decisively vanquish the Soviet Union and thus bring a vast new territorial empire under Nazi control. Hitler and other leading Nazis conceived of the newly conquered areas as a German “India” over which they would wield absolute power and within whose boundaries they could realize their plans for a sweeping racially-based reorganisation of Eastern

¹On the General Plan for the East (GPO) see Helmut Heiber, “Der Generalplan Ost,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 6 (1958): 281-325; Czesław Madajczyk, ed., *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* (München; New Providence: Saur, 1994); Wolfgang Benz, “Der Generalplan Ost. Zur Germanisierungspolitik des NS-Regimes in den bestetzten Ostgebieten,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 45-57; Rolf-Dieter Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg und die deutsche Siedlungspolitik* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1991); Norbert Müller, *Die faschistische Okkupationspolitik in den zeitweilig besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion (1941-1944)*, ed. Wolfgang Schumann and Ludwig Nestler, vol. 5 of the series *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz. Die Okkupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus (1938-1945)* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1991); Mechtild Rossler and Sabine Schleiermacher, eds., *Der “Generalplan Ost”: Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993). The best brief treatment of the GPO in English is Czesław Madajczyk, “Was Generalplan Ost Synchronous with the Final Solution?” in *The Shoah and the War*, ed. Asher Cohen, Yehoyakim Cochavi, and Yoav Gelber (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 145-159.

Europe and the Soviet Union.² The GPO was to provide the blueprint for this new colonial empire.³ It called for all of Poland, Czechoslovakia and large parts of the Soviet Union to be transformed into gigantic German settlement areas.⁴ This would entail “resettling” or killing between 30 to 50 million of the present inhabitants of those areas: 80-85 per cent of the Polish, 75 per cent of the Belorussian and 65 per cent of the Ukrainian populations would be affected. The GPO implicitly factored into its grisly calculations that many millions of the victims would die as a result of famine and disease brought on by malnutrition and overwork. After the massive liquidation of much of the Slavic population of Eastern Europe the remaining fourteen million people were to be reduced to the status of slave laborers for the ruling Germans who would control all property and monopolize positions of skilled labor. The territory vacated by the millions of deported or liquidated Slavs was to be settled by some 4.5 million Germans drawn from the Reich, from overseas Germans and other Germanic groups (such as Norwegians and Danes) in Europe. The entire process was originally scheduled to be completed within thirty years. Himmler later insisted that the pace be accelerated so that the program of Germanization would be accomplished within no more than twenty years.

The first draft of the GPO included a provision for the forced resettlement of five to six million Jews as part of the Germanization project. By the time a revised version was

²“The Russian space,” Hitler declared in an evening monologue in September 1941, “is our India.” Quoted from Adolf Hitler, *Secret Conversations, 1941-1944* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 28. The image of the East as Germany's India was also entertained by Alfred Rosenberg. In a secret speech he made to the members of his Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories on 18 November 1941, Rosenberg, after mentioning that the Jews were to be pushed beyond the Urals “or brought to destruction in some other way,” continued: “this giant area and this task is as great as any which has confronted the German people in centuries. And here I would like to point to a parallel with India. When a few adventurous Englishmen of the East India Company headed out to conquer India, there were only a few hundred or thousand who fought the few decisive battles in world history.” Quoted in Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Rassenpolitik und Kriegführung. Sicherheitspolizei und Wehrmacht in Polen und in der Sowjetunion 1939-1942* (Passau: Wissenschaftsverlag Richard Rothe, 1991), 132.

³The GPO was not in fact a single grand plan but rather a number of different plans drawn up over the course of two years by groups within the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) and the office of the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of Germanism (RKF). The best short overview of the various versions of the GPO can be found in Werner Röhr, “Forschungsprobleme zur deutschen Okkupationspolitik im Spiegel der Reihe 'Europa unterm Hakenkreuz',” in *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz: Analysen, Quellen, Register*, ed. Werner Röhr (Berlin: Huthig, 1996), 318-43.

⁴Müller, *Hitlers Ostkrieg*, 105.

prepared the following year this provision had disappeared. By then the mass murder of European Jewry in specially designed extermination camps was already well underway. As an official from Alfred Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories noted in April 1942, the Eastern Jews did not need to be included in the revised version of the GPO since they "would already be eliminated before evacuation [to the East]."⁵

Thanks to the defeat of the German army by Soviet forces the provisions of the GPO remained for the most part unfulfilled. Himmler did attempt one large-scale resettlement project in November 1942 in the area of Zamosc in the General Government. Thousands of Polish farmers were forced out of their homes to make room for 27,000 ethnic Germans. From the German perspective the action ended as a dismal failure: throughout the region security worsened, produce deliveries declined and Polish resistance escalated. The deteriorating war situation from 1943 on prevented any further experiments in mass resettlement. After the disastrous defeat at Stalingrad Hitler ordered that further work on the GPO be suspended. Had Hitler's forces been successful in the East, however, there can be no doubt that under the auspices of the GPO tens of millions of Slavs would have been subjected to a program of mass killing in which deliberately imposed famine would have been a major component.

II. The "Hunger Strategy" of 1941-42

In spring 1941 the Reich Food Ministry and the Armed Forces High Command (OKW) developed what Rolf-Dieter Müller has termed a "hunger strategy" devised to deprive millions of Soviet citizens of food in order to provide surpluses which would feed the German army in Russia as well as allow foodstuffs to be sent back to the Reich from the occupied territories in the East.⁶ This hunger strategy, as Müller has convincingly demonstrated, was not an unintended or unavoidable outcome of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union but was deliberately planned in

⁵"Stellungnahme und Gedanken zum Generalplan Ost des Reichsführers SS" dated 27 April 1942 (Nuremberg document NG-2325) in Heiber, "Generalplan Ost," 300.

⁶Rolf-Dieter Müller, "Das Scheitern der wirtschaftlichen 'Blitzkriegstrategie'" in *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 4, 989-1022.

advance and must be regarded as a “consciously implemented policy of extermination.”⁷

Plans for the economic exploitation of the occupied territories had been considered in some detail by German civilian and military experts in advance of the invasion. A statement of goals for the upcoming campaign from early May 1941 succinctly noted: “1. The war can only be continued if all armed forces are fed by Russia in the third year of war. 2. There is no doubt that as a result many millions of people will be starved to death if we take out of the country the things necessary for us.”⁸ A much more detailed document prepared by the ‘Economic Staff East, Agricultural Group’ on 23 May 1941, painted an even grimmer picture of the mass starvation and deindustrialization planned for some Soviet regions. The planners commented dispassionately that “the population of these areas, in particular the urban population, will have to face most serious distress from famine.”⁹ The document went on to state with brutal frankness that the policy being enunciated would result in mass death for the population of the occupied regions:

It follows from all that has been said that the German administration in these territories may well attempt to mitigate the consequences of the famine which undoubtedly will take place, and to accelerate the return to primitive agricultural conditions. An attempt might be made to intensify cultivation in these areas by expanding the acreage under potatoes or other important food crops giving a high yield. However, these measures will not avert famine. Many tens of millions of people in this area will become redundant and will either die or have to emigrate to Siberia. *Any attempt to save the population there from death by starvation by importing surpluses from the black soil zone would be at the expense of supplies to Europe. It would reduce Germany's and*

⁷Ibid., 994.

⁸Excerpt from the minutes of a meeting of State Secretaries held 2 May 1941; Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), vol. 5, doc. no. 2718-PS, 378.

⁹“Economic Policy Directives for Economic Organization, East, Agricultural Group” dated 23 May 1941 in Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), vol. 7, doc. no. EC-126, 298.

*Europe's power to resist the blockade. This must be clearly and absolutely understood.*¹⁰

Within the context of the racial ideology of Nazism, which posited the supremacy of the Aryan master race over the inferior Slavs and Jews, the murder of “many tens of millions of people” by means of deliberate starvation was accepted as perfectly legitimate and indeed desirable. The utter disregard of humane values by the German planners provides very striking evidence of what Hans Mommsen has referred to as the “deformation of public and private morality” during the Third Reich.¹¹ The hunger strategy which the economic experts in the Wehrmacht and the state ministries formulated was a clear violation of international law which required that occupying forces insure an adequate food supply for the indigenous population. The economic planners cynically choose to ignore their obligations under international law and endorsed a policy guaranteed to condemn millions to starvation. In comments made on the eve of the invasion of the Soviet Union, Alfred Rosenberg explicitly rejected the notion that Germany had any obligation toward the peoples it was about to subjugate; German interests alone were paramount: “the job of feeding the German people stands, this year, without a doubt, at the top of the list of Germany’s claims on the East...We see absolutely no reason for any obligation on our part to feed also the Russian people with the products of that surplus-territory. We know that this is a harsh necessity, bare of any feelings.”¹²

Rosenberg was articulating a view which was shared by all members of the top Nazi leadership. Three weeks into Operation Barbarossa Hermann Goering spelled out German priorities when it came to the distribution of food supplies: “It is clear that a graduated scale of food allocations is needed. First in line are the *combat* troops, then the remainder of the troops in *enemy territory*, and then those *troops stationed at home*. The rates are adjusted accordingly. The supply of the *German* non-military population follows and only then comes the *population of the occupied territories*.”¹³ He went on to note, “In the occupied

¹⁰Ibid., 300. Emphasis in original.

¹¹Hans Mommsen, “The Realization of the Unthinkable: The ‘Final Solution of the Jewish Question’ in the Third Reich,” in *From Weimar to Auschwitz: Essays on German History* (Princeton, New Jersey: Polity Press, 1991), 253.

¹²Extract from a speech by Albert Rosenberg, 20 June 1941, in Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), vol. 3, doc. no. 1058-PS, 716.

¹³Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington D.C.: U.S.

territories on principle only those people are to be supplied with an adequate amount of food who work for us. Even if one *wanted* to feed all the other inhabitants, one *could not* do it in the newly-occupied Eastern areas. It is, therefore, wrong to funnel off food supplies for this purpose, if it is done at the expense of the army and necessitates increased supplies from home.”¹⁴ The economic welfare and indeed the survival of the subject populations was to be callously and criminally disregarded; all that mattered was what benefit Germany could derive from the occupied territories.

Hitler of course was in full agreement with a policy of maximum exploitation and minimum concern for the population of the occupied territories: “Our guiding principle must be that these people have but one justification for existence—to be of use to us economically. We must concentrate on extracting from these territories everything that it is possible to extract.”¹⁵ It can come as no surprise that the hunger strategy could count on Hitler’s complete support. On 8 July 1941 General Franz Halder, Chief of the Army General Staff, noted that the Führer had indicated that it was his “firm decision to level Moscow and Leningrad, and make them uninhabitable, so as to relieve us of the necessity of having to feed the populations through the winter.”¹⁶ All the evidence amply justifies Theo J. Schulte’s judgement that “the economic and military leadership of the Third Reich...advocated a radical policy of exploitation that did not merely allow for but, rather, was based on the need for the extermination of millions of people.”¹⁷

The hunger strategy had a devastating impact on the Soviet population in the occupied regions. One of the most remarkable and brutally frank assessments of the consequences of the strategy was provided in a report from the Armaments Inspector for the Ukraine, Major General Hans Leykauf, dated 2 December 1941. Leykauf’s report is noteworthy for its matter-of-fact acknowledgment of the scale and scope of mass killing being carried out by German forces in the East:

When we shoot the Jews to death, allow the POWs to die, expose considerable portions of the urban population to starvation and in the upcoming year

Government Printing Office, 1946), vol. 7, doc. no. EC-3, 245. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴Ibid., 245-6. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵Hitler, *Secret Conversations*, 343.

¹⁶Entry for 8 July 1941. Franz Halder, *The Halder War Diary, 1939-1942* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 458.

¹⁷Theo J. Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 89.

also lose a part of the rural population to hunger, the question remains to be answered: *who is actually supposed to produce economic values?*¹⁸

Leykauf's attention, of course, was focused not on the lethal human consequences of the hunger strategy and the other atrocities committed against the Soviet population but solely on the effects such a strategy might have on the productivity of the occupied regions. As he made clear, his own views were based not on humane "sentiment" but on "sober economic calculations."¹⁹ These calculations undoubtedly informed his suggestions for a continuation of the hunger strategy:

Scooping off the agricultural surplus in the Ukraine for the purpose of feeding the Reich is therefore only feasible if traffic in the interior of the Ukraine is diminished to a minimum. The attempt will be made to achieve this

1. by annihilation of superfluous eaters (Jews, population of the Ukrainian big cities, which like Kiev do not receive any supplies at all);
2. by extreme reduction of the rations allocated to the Ukrainians in the remaining cities;
3. by decrease of the food of the farming population.²⁰

As military reports from 1942 indicate, the German insistence on the "annihilation of superfluous eaters" helped to foster famine conditions which afflicted large numbers of the Soviet population.²¹ A rear army group reported in May 1942: "the population is afflicted by hunger and is therefore under pressure to wander around the countryside to barter for foodstuffs. The fact that the German Wehrmacht has done nothing to guarantee the nourishment of the civilian population

¹⁸Leykauf to General Thomas 2 December 1941, in Office of United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), vol. 5, doc. no. 3257-PS, 996. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹See for example the report of the 198th Infantry Division, dated 16 March 1942, in Norbert Müller, *Die faschistische Okkupationspolitik in den zeitweilig besetzten Gebieten der Sowjetunion (1941-1944)*, ed. Wolfgang Schumann and Ludwig Nestler, *Europa unterm Hakenkreuz. Die Okkupationspolitik des deutschen Faschismus (1938-1945)* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1991), 266-7.

has influenced opinion and made the population distrustful towards the victorious German forces.”²²

The 3.3 million Soviet prisoners of war who fell into the hands of the Wehrmacht during 1941 were even more disastrously affected than civilians by the deliberate hunger strategy of the Germans. Christian Streit has estimated that approximately two million of these Soviet POWs died or were executed.²³ Streit’s pioneering research into the treatment of Soviet POWs by the German forces demonstrated that in the run-up to the invasion of the Soviet Union the German military leadership made virtually no preparations for dealing with the massive number of prisoners of war expected to come under German control during Operation Barbarossa. “In full knowledge of the consequences, the provision of food for the prisoners was totally subordinated to the goal of exploiting the food resources of the East in order to raise the rations of the German population.”²⁴ Predictably, the results were catastrophic. Major General Wagner, the army’s Quartermaster General in charge of the POWs, declared at a conference on 13 November 1941, “Those non-working prisoners of war in the prison camps are to starve. Working prisoners of war can in individual cases be fed from army provisions. But unfortunately this cannot be ordered on a general basis, given the overall food situation.”²⁵ This policy guaranteed that the death toll among the prisoners would be extraordinarily high. Major General Leykauf, in his notorious December 1941 report on the fate of “superfluous eaters” cited above, commented directly on the plight of the Soviet POWs: “Billeting, food, clothing and health of the prisoners of war is bad, mortality very high. The loss of tens of thousands even hundreds of thousands during this winter is to be expected.”²⁶ Only in the aftermath of the failure of Operation Barbarossa and in the knowledge that a lengthy conflict with the Soviet Union would require the utilization of all possible productive forces did the German military authorities alter their hunger policy toward

²²Activity report of Korück 582 dated 21 May 1942 quoted from Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia*, 104.

²³Christian Streit, “The German Army and the Policies of Genocide,” in *The Policies of Genocide. Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 12.

²⁴Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden. Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen 1941-1945*, 2 ed. (Bonn: Dietz, 1991), 13-14.

²⁵Excerpt from the notes of the Head of the General Staff of the 18th Army, 13 November 1941, quoted from Gerd R. Ueberschär and Wolfram Wette, eds., *“Unternehmen Barbarossa” Der deutsche Überfall auf die Sowjetunion 1941. Berichte, Analysen, Dokumente* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1984), 362.

²⁶Leykauf to General Thomas 2 December 1941, in *Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression*, vol. 5, doc. no. 3257-PS, 997.

the Soviet POWs with the intention of preserving and exploiting their labor power.

Rolf-Dieter Müller has delivered an appropriate overall verdict on the hunger strategy adopted by the Nazi regime in 1941-42:

The victims of this plan were not unavoidable casualties of war but martyrs of a deliberate policy on the part of the occupational authorities, who set about implementing the first phase of their plan to colonize and germanize the lands of the Soviet Union. It was the beginning of a premeditated genocide on a colossal scale. The population was divided into racial categories, with 'undesirable' elements or 'superfluous mouths' being left to starve or simply murdered.²⁷

III. Famine in the Jewish Ghettos 1940-42

The final example of Nazi use of famine is provided by the ghettoization policies adopted in the period 1940-42. As Christopher Browning has pointed out, ghettoization policy emerged from the initiatives of local authorities and within the context of debates between two groups of officials whom he labels as "productionists" (those who favored allowing Jews to work in order to feed themselves) and "attritionists" (those who endorsed a harsh policy of allowing Jews to starve to death as a means of extracting all the assets which the ghettoized Jews allegedly were hoarding).²⁸ In late 1940 and early 1941 the attritionists held the upper hand among the German authorities in Warsaw and as a result they succeeded in deliberately imposing a starvation policy on the ghetto there with disastrous consequences for the Jewish inhabitants. As the commissar of the Warsaw ghetto, Heinz Auerswald, noted, "A quantum leap in deaths for May of this year [1941] showed that the food shortage had already grown into a famine."²⁹

In spring 1941—at the same time that the hunger strategy toward the Soviet Union was being formulated—German

²⁷Rolf-Dieter Müller, "The Occupation," in *Hitler's War in the East, 1941-1945: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997), 284.

²⁸Christopher Browning, "Nazi Ghettoization Policy in Poland: 1939-1941," *Central European History* 19 (1986): 343-68.

²⁹Auerswald report of 26 September 1941, quoted from Browning, "Nazi Ghettoization Policy," 360.

authorities in the General Government adopted a fundamental change in German policy toward the Jews in the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos, endorsing the position of the "productionists" who insisted that the ghetto inhabitants were not to be allowed to starve to death but should be provided with enough food to transform the ghetto into a productive entity.³⁰ This change in German policy slowed down but did not halt the hunger and attrition in the ghettos. "In 1941 and 1942," Israel Gutman has written, "112,463 persons died in the two ghettos [Lodz and Warsaw] of starvation and disease, which means that 20 percent of the population perished in the space of two years."³¹ Despite the temporary ascendancy of the productionists, starvation still remained one of the chief weapons in the Nazis' anti-Jewish armoury. In August 1942, Hans Frank, Governor-General of Poland, declared: "Clearly we are sentencing 1.2 million Jews [i.e., the Jewish population of the General Government] to death by starvation; and if they do not die from hunger, we will have to adopt other anti-Jewish measures."³²

At the same time in 1941 that local German authorities were debating how to deal with the Jews confined to ghettos, Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the Reich Main Security Office, was busy formulating more far-reaching and deadly plans concerning European Jewry, plans which also incorporated famine as a deliberate tool of extermination. Götz Aly has argued that in March 1941 Heydrich developed a plan which called for Jews to be deported first to the eastern periphery of the General Government and then, following the anticipated quick military victory over the Soviet Union, to the swamp areas of the Pripyat region.³³ Those Jews who survived these ordeals would then be deported further into Siberia. In Aly's words, "the [Jewish] deportees would die a 'natural' death, in part starving and freezing to death in ghettos and camps, in part working themselves to death under a barbaric police regimen."³⁴ Famine thus played an integral part in the initial plans which eventually culminated in the 'Final Solution'.

³⁰Ibid., 353-4.

³¹Israel Gutman, *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co, 1990), vol. 2, 581.

³²Ibid.

³³Götz Aly, *"Endlösung" Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1995), 273

³⁴Ibid., 278.

IV. Conclusion

The three examples which have been briefly outlined above provide clear evidence that famine was a central component of Nazi plans for occupied Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Although the ambitious and lethal demographic reorganization envisaged in the General Plan for the East never advanced far beyond the initial planning stages, the actual hunger strategy implemented in conjunction with Operation Barbarossa, as well as the inhumane conditions created in the ghettos of Eastern Europe, had catastrophic consequences for the Slavic and Jewish populations of the region. Raul Hilberg has estimated that over half a million Polish Jews died in the ghettos.³⁵ Approximately 7.5 million non-Jewish Ukrainian, White Russian and Polish civilians died as result of German occupation.³⁶ In addition, some 3.3 million Soviet POWs perished through hunger, disease or shooting at the hands of the Germans on the Eastern front over the course of the war.³⁷ These horrific figures underscore the magnitude of the death and suffering produced by the calculated starvation strategies applied by the Nazi regime. Along with numerous other methods of death and destruction, the deliberate use of famine must be rated as one of the favored Nazi means of exterminating the regime's racial and ideological enemies.

³⁵Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 vols. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985), vol. 3, 1212.

³⁶Figures on non-Jewish deaths cited from Gunnar Heinsohn, *Warum Auschwitz? Hitler's Plan und die Ratlosigkeit der Nachwelt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995), 56.

³⁷Streit, *Keine Kameraden*, 10.

A Survey of Interpretive Paradigms in Holocaust Studies and a Comment on the Dimensions of the Holocaust

Steven R. Welch

In a book published in 1995, historian and sociologist Gunnar Heinsohn surveys forty-two different theoretical approaches to explaining the Holocaust—and, of course, he adds a new one of his own for good measure.¹ Heinsohn's extensive catalog of proposed explanations of the Holocaust highlights the reigning lack of consensus in the field of Holocaust studies. Within the brief compass of this paper it is impossible to discuss even a small portion of the extensive literature dealing with the Holocaust; instead I will simply attempt to map in broad terms some of the more significant features of the vast historiographical terrain of Holocaust studies, providing brief sketches of the five major interpretive paradigms which currently shape the field, while making specific reference to a few representative works. At the end I also offer a short description of the most authoritative recent investigation into the scope of the Holocaust.²

The intense scholarly interest which has been devoted to the Holocaust has resulted in a very rich historiography which utilises a number of highly useful—but also highly contentious—concepts (structure, agency, ideology and modernity, among others) and integrates them into a variety of provocative interpretive strategies. The following survey may

¹Gunnar Heinsohn, *Warum Auschwitz? Hitler's Plan und die Ratlosigkeit der Nachwelt* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1995).

²The word 'Holocaust' is itself a problematic and contested term, but I will not enter into the debate about its appropriateness. On the origins of the term see Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman, "Why Do We Call the Holocaust 'The Holocaust'? An Inquiry into the Psychology of Labels," *Modern Judaism* (May 1989): 197-211. There is also a debate about what the term does or should refer to; does it designate only the destruction of European Jewry, or should it encompass other victims of Nazi mass murder such as the Gypsies, the mentally disabled, Russian POWs, and civilians from Poland, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia? Ward Churchill has argued that all of these groups should be included as victims of the Holocaust, insisting that "the true human costs of nazi genocide came to twenty-six million or more, six million of whom were Jews, a million or more of whom were Gypsies, and the rest mostly Slavs. Only with these facts clearly in mind can we say we have apprehended the full scope of the Holocaust." *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas, 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1997), 49. For the purposes of this paper I will use the term Holocaust to refer *only* to the mass murder of European Jews.

therefore be of value to those engaged in the study of other cases of genocide or mass killing. To a certain extent, as Colin Tatz has suggested, the various approaches developed in Holocaust studies may be able to serve as 'templates' which can be applied to the investigation of similar issues in other cases of genocide.

There are five key interpretive paradigms which are currently the major competitors in the effort to arrive at an explanation of the Holocaust.³

1.) Intentionalist

Intentionalist explanations identify antisemitism as the core element of Hitler's world view and argue that the persecution and mass murder of European Jewry was primarily a result of Hitler's express intention to destroy Jewry. The Holocaust was the outcome of long-term, deliberate planning; in some versions the plan is traced back as early as 1919. The importance of ideology rather than structure is stressed, and the Holocaust is located primarily within the contexts of German and Jewish history and within the larger history of antisemitism (rather than in the context of modernity, or along a continuum of genocidal events in human history). Intentionalists also tend to argue for the uniqueness of the Holocaust, insisting that it was such an extreme form of genocide that it must be separated from other examples. The term Holocaust is thus to be reserved specifically for the murder of European Jewry. Lucy Dawidowicz, Gerald Fleming, Yehuda Bauer, and Eberhard Jäckel stand as the chief representatives of the intentionalist position.⁴

The most controversial addition to the intentionalist interpretation was the recent book by Daniel J. Goldhagen, which argued that antisemitism was "the central causal agent of the Holocaust" and that "Hitler, having made the crucial decisions

³For a similar list of conceptual approaches to the Holocaust see Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13 (1999): 28-61. I have drawn upon this list but altered and expanded it. Rosenfeld's article also provides references to a large range of books and articles relevant to various debates in genocide and Holocaust studies.

⁴Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (New York: F. Watts, 1982); Gerald Fleming, *Hitler and the Final Solution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews, 1933-1945*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Seth Press; Distributed by Free Press, 1986); Eberhard Jäckel and Jürgen Rohwer, eds., *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg. Entschlußbildung und Verwirklichung* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1985).

himself, was the prime mover of the persecution that culminated in genocide".⁵ While Goldhagen's book sparked intense debate, it has not succeeded in achieving its express aim of leading to a "radical revision" of explanations of the Holocaust, and it does not appear to have exercised much influence on subsequent studies of the Holocaust.⁶

Steven Katz has undertaken the most ambitious attempt to distinguish the Holocaust from other incidences of mass murder, arguing that the Holocaust is the *only* true case of genocide ever to have taken place.⁷ Katz, Goldhagen, and Deborah Lipstadt stress above all the fact that Hitler aimed at *total* annihilation of an entire people, an aim which they insist sets the Holocaust apart from all other examples of mass killing.⁸

⁵Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1996), 9 and 134. Goldhagen's book ignited a storm of controversy; most historians of Germany and the Holocaust rejected his monocausal explanation as too one-sided and reductionist. See Julius H. Schoeps, ed., *Ein Volk von Mördern?: die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1996) and Robert R. Shandley, ed., *Unwilling Germans?: the Goldhagen Debate* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998). Two of the most recent articles dealing with the Goldhagen book and the controversy it stimulated are: Yisrael Gutman, "Goldhagen—His Critics and His Contribution," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 329-364 and Avraham Barkai, "German Historians Confront Goldhagen," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 295-328.

⁶See Nikolaus Wachsmann, "After Goldhagen. Recent Work on the Genesis of Nazi Genocide," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34 (1999): 477-87, esp. 479.

⁷Steven T. Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁸Goldhagen, *Executioners*, 412: "Not just its spatial reach but the comprehensiveness of the Germans' extermination of the Jews is also distinctive. Every last Jew, every Jewish child, had to die"; Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: the growing assault on truth and memory* (New York and Toronto: Free Press, 1993). John Connelly has most recently reiterated this position: "The absolute dominance of ideological considerations—whether or not Nazi leaders knew from the beginning precisely where they would lead—accounts for the total and uncompromising nature of the final solution of the Jewish question. There was but one attempt to destroy the whole of a people, there was but one Holocaust." Quoted from Connelly, "Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice," *Central European History* 32 (1999), 33.

2.) *Functionalist or Structuralist*

The functionalist or structuralist paradigm focuses on the structure and institutions of the Third Reich and explains the Holocaust as the outcome of an unplanned process of 'cumulative radicalisation'.⁹ There was no straight path from Hitler's anti-Semitic intentions to Auschwitz but rather a 'twisted road' characterised by haphazard development, improvisation and *ad hoc* decisions by various groups within a chaotic polycratic system of rule. The Final Solution arose in a piecemeal fashion, emerging through responses by local Nazi officials to the immediate context created by the war. The importance of ideology and antisemitism is strongly downplayed in functionalist explanations. Martin Broszat, Hans Mommsen and Uwe Adam are the most prominent advocates of a functionalist interpretation of the Holocaust.¹⁰

Broszat argues that there was not single Hitlerian decision for the 'Final Solution' but rather that it arose "bit by bit," as a result of the initiatives of local Nazi officials. The liquidation of the Jews, he asserts, "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 Nazis had manoeuvred themselves."¹¹ In opposition to the intentionalists, Mommsen has argued that "the 'thought'—that is, Hitler's fanatical proclamations of racial antisemitism—could not suffice in itself to unleash the systematic extermination of the Jews."¹² He characterises the Holocaust as the outcome of a process of radicalisation, encouraged by the disorganised, polycratic nature of the Nazi regime, which

⁹Hans Mommsen, "Cumulative Radicalisation and Progressive Self-Destruction as Structural Determinants of the Nazi Dictatorship," in *Stalinism and Nazism: dictatorships in comparison*, ed. Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75-87.

¹⁰Martin 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 (London: Macmillan, 1985), 390-429; Hans Mommsen, "The Realization of the Unthinkable: The 'Final Solution of the Jewish Question' in the Third Reich," in *The Policies of Genocide. Jews and Soviet Prisoners of War in Nazi Germany*, ed. Gerhard Hirschfeld (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 93-144; idem, "Anti-Jewish Politics and the Implementation of the Holocaust," in *The Challenge of the Third Reich*, ed. Hedley Bull (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 117-140; and Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1972).

¹¹Broszat, "Hitler and the Genesis of the 'Final Solution'," 93.

¹²Hans Mommsen, "Hitler's Position in the Nazi System," in *From Weimar to Auschwitz: Essays on German history* (Princeton, New Jersey: Polity Press, 1991), 181.

developed its own internal dynamic. Nazi officials, eager to demonstrate their loyalty and indispensability to the *Führer*—as well as to expand their own power and influence—drove the process forward in a series of unplanned and largely uncoordinated stages. Only in retrospect, Mommsen insists, do these stages of escalation take on the appearance of a coherent plan.

3) *Pathology of Modernity*

During the 1980s a number of historians began invoking the concept of modernity as the key to explaining the horrors of the Holocaust. From a conservative standpoint, Rainer Zitelmann argued against the Holocaust's uniqueness and asserted that it was not the outcome of German peculiarity or deep-seated antisemitism but rather the result of the totalitarian potential of modernisation.¹³

Zygmunt Baumann's enormously influential book *Modernity and the Holocaust* presented the mass murder of European Jewry as a product, not a failure, of modern society.¹⁴ He stressed the cold, mechanical nature of the industrial slaughter engineered by distant and inhumane bureaucrats intent on using destruction as a way of solving pressing social problems. "The Holocaust," Baumann asserted, "was not an irrational outflow of the not-yet-fully-eradicated residues of pre-modern barbarity."¹⁵ Rather it was "a paradigm of modern bureaucratic rationality," the story of whose organization "could be made into a textbook of scientific management."¹⁶

A leftist variant of the modernisation approach was provided by Götz Aly and Susanne Heim in their series of path-breaking works dealing with the operations of mid-level Nazi bureaucrats in Poland. Aly and Heim sought to explain the Holocaust as a product of a rational process of capitalist exploitation of the conquered territories.¹⁷ The emphasis was on

¹³Michael Prinz and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991); Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse, and Rainer Zitelmann, eds., *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit: Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1990).

¹⁴Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Polity Press, 1989).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 149 and 150.

¹⁷Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, "The Economics of the Final Solution: A Case Study from the General Government," *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 5

the plans of petty functionaries in the occupied East who planned the Final Solution in the context of economically driven population plans. Aly and Heim discount “irrational” Nazi racist ideology as a causal factor and insist that the Holocaust was a product of the modern capitalist system.¹⁸ Aly has subsequently published a detailed study of Nazi policy between 1939-41 arguing that the mass murders must be placed in the broader context of Nazi population plans for the East, especially the resettlement schemes for ethnic Germans.¹⁹

In a stimulating 1993 essay, Detlef Peukert argued that “what was new about the ‘Final Solution’ in world-historical terms was the fact that it resulted from a fatal racist dynamism present within the human and social sciences.”²⁰ On this reading the Holocaust was a high-tech procedure for eradicating those considered to be without value; the Jews were the most victimised, but they not alone. Peukert’s interpretation shifts the emphasis away from antisemitism toward a broader concept of racism and its intersection with science (or perverted science or pseudo-science).

All the approaches associated with the modernity paradigm de-emphasise the Jewish character of the Holocaust and the centrality of antisemitism and instead focus on the Holocaust as a

(1988): 3-48; Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1991); and Götz Aly, “The Planning Intelligentsia and the ‘Final Solution’,” in *Confronting the Nazi Past. New Debates on Modern German History*, ed. Michael Burleigh (London: Collins & Brown, 1996), 140-153.

¹⁸The Aly/Heim thesis of the political economy of the Holocaust has been severely criticised. See Dan Diner, “Rationalization and Method: Critique of a New Approach in Understanding the ‘Final Solution’,” in *Yad Vashem Studies XXIV*, ed. Aharon Weiss (Jerusalem: Daf Noy Press, 1995), 71-108; Ulrich Herbert, “Racism and Rational Calculation: The Role of ‘Utilitarian’ Strategies of Legitimation in the National Socialist ‘Weltanschauung’,” in *Yad Vashem Studies*, ed. Aharon Weiss (Jerusalem: Daf Noy Press, 1995), 131-146; and for the most scathing and dismissive critique Michael Burleigh, “A Political Economy of the Final Solution? Reflections on Modernity, Historians and the Holocaust,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 30 (1996): 29-41.

¹⁹Götz Aly, *“Endlösung” Völkerverschiebung und der Mord an den europäischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1995). Translated into English as *‘Final Solution’: Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (London and New York: Arnold and Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁰Detlev J.K. Peukert, “The Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’ from the Spirit of Science,” in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1993), 234-252, here 236.

pathological outcome of the crisis-ridden process of modernisation. There is a tendency to regard the potential for mass murder as latent within modern societies and thus to dissociate the Holocaust from the specific context of German history (i.e. there is no need to invoke the notion of a *Sonderweg* or peculiar German historical path).

4) Moderate Functionalism

The debate between the proponents of intentionalism and functionalism sparked a great deal of fruitful research in the 1970s and 1980s. One of the outcomes of these efforts was the realisation that neither of the two positions could adequately account for all the evidence. Moderate functionalism represents an attempt to synthesise the strengths and redress the shortcomings of the two competing views. Christopher Browning, who coined the term, and Saul Friedländer are two of the chief representatives of moderate functionalism.

According to Browning, Hitler did not decide on the Final Solution as the culmination of any long-held or premeditated plan. But he did make a series of key decisions in 1941 which led to the mass murder of European Jews. There was no preordained plan; rather the Holocaust ensued as a result of responses to circumstances created by the war. Despite the absence of a written order from Hitler, the evidence clearly shows that he was an active and continuing participant in the decision-making process. No major change in Nazi Jewish policy took place without his knowledge and approval. The gradual radicalisation of Jewish policy between 1939 and 1941 seems to be linked to the series of military victories won by Hitler's armies. According to Browning, it was in his moments of euphoria that Hitler apparently radicalised his policies and made the drastic decisions that led to the annihilation of the Jews.²¹

²¹Christopher R. Browning, "The Decision Concerning the Final Solution," in *Unanswered Questions. Nazi Germany and the Genocide of the Jews*, ed. François Furet (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 96-118; idem, "Beyond 'Intentionalism' and 'Functionalism': The Decision for the Final Solution Reconsidered," in *The Path to Genocide. Essays on Launching the Final Solution*, ed. Christopher R. Browning (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 86-124; and idem, "A Product of Euphoria in Victory," in *The Holocaust. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, ed. Donald L. Niewyk (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 267. Browning's contention that Hitler made his decision at a time of euphoria over the expected victory in the East has recently been challenged by Christian Gerlach who argues that Hitler's decision to exterminate European Jewry was made on 12 December 1941; see

The first volume of Saul Friedländer's history of Nazi policy toward the Jews deals only with events up to 1939 and thus does not directly engage in the debate concerning the origins of the Holocaust, but in the following passage he outlines a moderate functionalist approach: "The crimes committed by the Nazi regime were neither a mere outcome of some haphazard, involuntary, imperceptible, and chaotic onrush of unrelated events nor a predetermined enactment of a demonic script; they were the result of converging factors, of the interaction between intentions and contingencies, between discernible causes and chance. General ideological objectives and tactical policy decisions enhanced one another and always remained open to more radical moves as circumstances changed."²²

The moderate functionalist approach informs several of the most significant new works on the Holocaust produced by a group of young German scholars. Dieter Pohl, Thomas Sandkühler, Christoph Dieckmann and Christian Gerlach have undertaken detailed regional studies of the killing fields of Eastern Europe, and they generally conclude that much of the early mass murder resulted from the initiatives of local Nazi officials, often in response to logistical difficulties and food shortages.²³ These studies reconstruct a complex process of interaction and feedback between Berlin and an ever-more radicalised periphery struggling to cope with increasingly difficult wartime conditions (of their own making, it must be stressed). While antisemitism is not seen as the primary driving force behind the killings (as in Goldhagen's interpretation), its

his article "The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of the German Jews, and Hitler's Decision in Principle to Exterminate All European Jews," *The Journal of Modern History* 70 (1998): 759-812; see especially 780-93.

²²Saul Friedlander, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 5.

²³Dieter Pohl, *Von der "Judenpolitik" zum Judenmord: der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements, 1939-1944* (Frankfurt am Main; New York: P. Lang, 1993); Dieter Pohl, "Hans Krüger and the Murder of the Jews in the Stanislawow Region (Galicia)," *Yad Vashem Studies* 26 (1998): 239-64; Thomas Sandkühler, *"Endlösung" in Galizien: der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz, 1941-1944* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); Gerlach, "The Wannsee Conference, the Fate of the German Jews"; and Ulrich Herbert, ed., *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1998), English translation under the title *National-Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000).

role as a conditioning factor which informed the decisions of Nazi administrators is acknowledged.

Dieter Pohl's new book, which was inspired in part by the work of Christopher Browning and which, like the earlier works by Aly and Heim, draws upon newly accessible archive material in Eastern Europe, explores in detail the origins and course of the Holocaust in the areas of East Galicia under Nazi control.²⁴ Pohl concludes that while "the decisive impulse for the murder of the Jews naturally came from Berlin" much of the killing in East Galicia, especially between October 1941 and April 1942, was in fact initiated and organised by local officials. He explicitly takes issue with interpretations like Baumann's which invoke the concept of modernity as the key to understanding the mass murders in Eastern Europe. Pohl stresses the "complete de-bureaucratisation" of much of the mass killing, describing the actual killing process as a brutal form of "human hunting" (*Menschenjagd*) characterised by "improvisation and chaos," a far cry from the process of scientific, detached killing suggested by the proponents of the modernity model.²⁵

5) *Genocide*

The fifth and final paradigm is that of genocide. A number of scholars, such as Leo Kuper, Israel W. Charny, Frank Chalk and Mark Levene, have sought to contextualise the Holocaust by comparing it with other incidents of genocide. The Holocaust's uniqueness is challenged, and it is generally argued that it was not qualitatively different from other examples of mass killing in human history.²⁶ Regarding the Holocaust as a sub-category of a broader 'generic' type of genocide deflates the importance antisemitism and encourages explanatory schemes which favour more universal factors. One of the great difficulties of applying the genocide approach has been the lack of consensus on the definition of the term genocide itself.

²⁴Dieter Pohl, *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien 1941-1944: Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1996).

²⁵Ibid., 399-410; quotations from 402 and 405.

²⁶Israel W. Charny, ed., *Genocide: a critical bibliographic review*, 3 vols. (London: Mansell, 1988-94); Mark Levene, "Is the Holocaust Simply Another Example of Genocide?," *Patterns of Prejudice* 28 (1994): 3-26; Henry R. Huttenbach, "Locating the Holocaust on the Genocide Spectrum: Towards a Methodology of Definition and Categorization," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 3 (1988): 289-303.

Omer Bartov's recent essay "Defining Enemies, Making Victims," although its focus is primarily on the Holocaust, fits within the genocide paradigm and promotes a comparative approach aimed at identifying both similarities and differences among various episodes of genocide.²⁷ Bartov argues that "mass murder is driven in part by the construction of the victims as elusive enemies of the perpetrators"; this is a common element linking the Holocaust with other cases of genocide.²⁸ "Victims are produced by enemies, and enemies eventually make for more victims."²⁹ He suggests that future historical work direct its attention to uncovering and understanding this underlying process of defining enemies and making victims.

The Dimensions of the Holocaust

In August 1944 Adolf Eichmann confided to an SS officer that approximately four million Jews had been murdered in the extermination camps and an additional two million had died in other ways, primarily as victims of the *Einsatzgruppen* (Nuremberg document PS 2738). Eichmann's initial estimate of six million victims remains, 55 years later, the figure most widely accepted and quoted in both scholarly and popular accounts of the Holocaust.

²⁷Omer Bartov, "Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews, and the Holocaust," *American Historical Review* 103 (1998): 771-816. Bartov's most recent book, *Mirrors of Destruction*, also focuses attention on the Holocaust, which he regards as "a crucial event for Western civilization" which "can never be relegated to a secondary place." But, as the subtitle of his book indicates, he still endorses the view that genocide is an essential interpretive category and explicitly notes that his concentration on the Holocaust "should in no way be seen as an attempt to diminish the importance of other genocides." Omer Bartov, *Mirrors of Destruction: War, Genocide, and Modern Identity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

²⁸Bartov, "Reply," *American Historical Review*, vol. 103 (1998), 1191. In the original article he formulated his position in the following terms: "The ubiquity of perpetrators and victims, and the frequent confusion between them, is at the core of the destructive energy characteristic of modern genocide, taking place as it does within an imaginary universe that encompasses every single individual in a cycle of devastation and murder. And, since a neutral position is no longer available, both individuals and collectives will naturally tend to present themselves as victims. Thus the unique features of the Nazi genocidal enterprise illustrate an important characteristic of state-organised industrial killing, whereby the fabrication of elusive enemies makes everyone into a potential killer." Bartov, "Defining Enemies," 786.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 811.

Since 1945, there have been numerous attempts to quantify the precise dimensions of the Holocaust. These efforts were sometimes hampered by faulty figures which emerged in the context of postwar investigations and trials. One of the most striking cases is that of Auschwitz. The figures originally supplied for the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex ranged from 3 to 4 million, including some 2.5 million Jewish victims. In light of subsequent research the figures have been revised downwards to a total of 1.1 to 1.5 million victims, 960,000 to 1 million of them Jewish.³⁰

In one of the first scholarly attempts to quantify the overall scope of the Holocaust, Gerald Reitlinger in 1953 gave a minimum figure of 4,194,200 and a maximum of 4,581,200 Jewish victims.³¹ Raul Hilberg in his standard work estimated the total at 5.1 million.³² In an Appendix to the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* the number of Jewish victims is placed at 5,860,000.³³

The most thorough and authoritative examination of the scope of the Holocaust, however, is contained in the 1991 study published by the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, *Dimension des Völkermords*.³⁴ In his introduction to the volume Wolfgang Benz enumerates the many difficulties which historians face in trying to estimate the number of Jewish victims murdered by the Nazis and also provides an overview of the quite considerable source material which is available to historians (reports of the *Einsatzgruppen*, the so-called Korherr report March 1943, testimony and documentation produced in war crimes trials). The book contains seventeen area studies covering Germany, Austria, Luxemburg, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Italy, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Poland and the Soviet Union. Two basic methods are employed by the specialist authors of each area study: 1) direct calculation, adding up the number of

³⁰See Franciszek Piper, "Estimating the Number of Deportees to and Victims of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Camp," *Yad Vashem Studies* 21 (1991): 49-103.

³¹Gerald Reitlinger, *The Final Solution: the attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*, 2 ed. (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1968).

³²Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, 3 vols. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985).

³³Israel Gutman and Robert Rozett, "Estimated Jewish Losses in the Holocaust," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan Pub. Co, 1990), 1797-1802.

³⁴Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Dimension des Völkermords: die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 33, *Quellen und Darstellungen zur Zeitgeschichte* (München: Oldenbourg, 1991).

victims of concentration camps, extermination centres, mobile killing squads and other mass killing actions (such as T 4; 14 f 13) listed in documents; 2) the indirect method of statistical comparison, comparing population figures from prewar and postwar statistics. The second method has distinct limitations due to the incomplete or deficient nature of much of the statistical material from southeastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In the case of the Soviet Union, for example, the population figures are not sufficiently organised according to ethnic or religious categories. The numerous and frequent shifts in borders also complicate demographic estimates. In arriving at their calculations the authors draw upon a wide range of sources: deportation lists, transport reports, arrival lists, death camp lists, reports of the *Einsatzgruppen*, statistical surveys, trial testimony, newspaper reports and archival documentation.

The study arrives at a minimum figure of 5.29 million and a maximum of just over six million. These figures may now need to be revised (probably upward) on the basis of material from the archives of the former Soviet Union. Benz's book, however, should be considered as the most thorough and reliable study now available.

