

German Historians versus Goldhagen

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Few debates among professional historians have provoked as much agitation as has the controversy touched off by Daniel Goldhagen's book¹ immediately after its publication early in 1996. The debate between historians got off to an early start in the United States, where intense media coverage and, in particular, the symposium held in early April at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., brought the story to public attention. The symposium participants were treated to appearances by several of the world's most eminent Holocaust scholars, including Konrad Kwiet of Australia, Christopher Browning and Richard Breitman of the United States, Hans Heinrich Wilhelm of Germany, and Yehuda Bauer of Israel. Although this article does not deal with the debate in the United States, the summary prefacing the report on the symposium and circulated on the Internet a few days after its conclusion, remains pertinent to our topic: "The symposium ... shed much light on the gap between academic history and popular history and the passions with which the Holocaust is inevitably debated. The audience on the whole supported Goldhagen and reacted sharply to his critics."²

The controversy in Germany, which began even before the German translation of the book was released in September 1996³ developed into a highly-charged dispute. The opening salvo was fired by the prestigious Hamburg-based weekly *Die Zeit*, which boasts a circulation of nearly 500,000. The editor of the political-literature section set the tone for the discussion by asserting that "great historical debates are always conceived in provocation." Such was the case with Fritz Fischer's book, which aroused the ire of conservative historians in the early 1960s by contending that German

¹ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996) (Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*).

² Report by Maria Mitchell and Peter Caldwell, list H-GERMAN (Dan Rogers, editor), April 11, 1996 (international discussion group in the Internet).

³ *Hitlers willige Vollstrecker. Ganz gewöhnliche Deutsche und der Holocaust*, Aus dem Englischen von Klaus Kochmann (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1996).

statesmen and military commanders were responsible for the outbreak of World War I.⁴ Another comparable event was the "historians' controversy" inspired by the letter to the editor of Ernst Nolte and the ensuing reply by Jürgen Habermas:⁵

"Now, ten years later, the signal has been given for the second, even more acrimonious, historians' debate...Despite all the arguments advanced [against Goldhagen's theses] this is an important book that merits discussion...Once the ceremonies marking the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war were over, many in our country seemed assured that at long last we had managed to leave behind th[is] painful subject and, free of the burden, we could now give ourselves up to new "normalcy." But a brilliant scholar from Harvard has now come forth to tell us that a long time will pass before we could disengage ourselves from the most harrowing chapter of our history."⁶

Authors of the initial, irate reactions in the German press scoffed at the claim about the importance of the book and the need for its public discussion. At least in one respect, however, at the time of this writing, there emerges considerable resemblance between the "historians' controversy" then and the current furor over Goldhagen's book: both debates took place in the public mass media, in daily and weekly newspapers with mass circulation, as well as— even more than ten years ago— on radio and TV, rather than on the pages of scholarly historical periodicals. However, today, the journalists' and columnists' share of the limelight is considerably greater than it was in 1986-87.

⁴ Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht. Die Kriegszielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschlands 1914/18* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1961).

⁵ See: "*Historikerstreit*." Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung (München: Piper, 1987); Richard J. Evans, In *Hitler's Shadow , West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

⁶ Volker Ullrich, "Hitlers willige Mordgesellen," *Die Zeit*, April 12, 1996; reprinted in Julius H. Schoeps, ed., *Ein Volk von Mördern? Dokumentation zur Goldhagen — Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust* (Hamburg: Hoffman & Campe, 1996) (Schoeps). Some of the articles were apparently edited by their authors prior to their publication in the collection compiled by Schoeps. The passages quoted here are from the edited version, Schoeps, pp. 55ff

In fact, the initial press reports were outspokenly dismissive; employing at times quite "un-diplomatic" language, to put it mildly. The coeditor of the respected conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, for example, minced no words when he wrote that "there is nothing new in all this," and expressed astonishment at "the chutzpah" (die chuzpe, in the original) with which Goldhagen chose to ignore "the abundance of findings [available] in the humanities scholarship."⁷ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, the "competitor from the left" of the *Zeitung*, was even more frank: "Only very seldom does the question of what is truly new [in Goldhagen's book — A.B.] appear in the debates held in the U.S., because more often than not the discussion goes on between Jewish non-historians, in other words journalists and columnists, and themselves."⁸

Soon it became clear, however, that the attempts to silence the debate on Goldhagen's book at the early stage through such peremptory arguments had failed. Since the appearance of the initially dismissive articles, the German press has been flooded with responses penned by historians, political scientists, and ordinary readers. Goldhagen's visit to Germany in early September 1996 turned into an immensely successful promotion tour for his book, which, at the time of this writing, has sold well over 100,000 copies. For a full week the German mass media gave full coverage of his appearances before audiences of thousands in various cities throughout the country. His debates with key figures of German historical scholarship were broadcast on television, with most commentators agreeing that the visit had become a "triumphal parade." After his departure the media continued to dwell on what meanwhile had been dubbed the "Goldhagen phenomenon." Heated debates no longer involved the book's contents and arguments but began to focus instead on the significance of the German public's reaction to its various layers and to the author himself. This subject, however, important as it may be, transcends the confines of this article, as the main concern here is the views of German historians as they were expressed during the debate in their country.

⁷ Frank Schirrmacher, "Hitlers Code," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 15, 1996, in Schoeps, p. 105.

⁸ *Frankfurter Rundschau*, April 12, 1996.

Summary Dismissal

At first, German historians, too, tended to brush aside Goldhagen's book as the unfledged, pretentious product of a young Ph.D. student, who hardly merited the title and certainly not the distinction awarded to him by his alma mater. Eberhard Jäckel, one of the most distinguished scholars of Nazi ideology and the Nazi regime, penned a single small article entitled "Simply a Bad Book," and, at the time of this writing, has not returned to the fray. Jäckel dismissed the book outright, primarily because of the overblown conclusion portraying all Germans as inveterate Antisemitic "eliminationists":

"It is always the Germans that are being talked about...if not all of them then at least the vast majority. It was they who wanted it to happen and therefore ended up with mass murder...Goldhagen repeatedly insists that the Germans and their Antisemitism, both before and during the Nazi period, must be "studied anthropologically." In so doing he lays bare the cornerstone of his approach. The term anthropology may mean different things. [Among others] it is also part of the biological science investigating inherited, not acquired, traits of human beings. There from sprouted the race theory which, in turn, spawned the racist Antisemitism. Goldhagen treads perilously close to this biological collectivism."⁹

Having identified the principal flaw in the reviewed author's approach, Jäckel proceeded to take Goldhagen to task for the self-assertive and imperious attitude shown in his book toward historians and other scholars who preceded him, his disregard and selective use of their work, and his practice of "harvesting from [scholarly] literature (mainly the outdated) that which suits his purposes." Although this article is not meant as yet another review of Goldhagen's book or his defense against his critics (whose views are discussed below), Jäckel's two principal objections deserve broader treatment since they appear frequently in review articles— although often more bluntly phrased. Our discussion shall be informed by a close reading of Goldhagen's book, both the original and the German translation.

⁹ Eberhard Jäckel, "Einfach ein schlechtes Buch," *Die Zeit*, May 17, 1996, in Schoeps, pp. 187-192.

Accusations of arrogance and condescension are not baseless. Beginning with the "Introduction" and throughout the book's chapters, the reader cannot but be struck by the brash, even impudent, formulations which do, in fact, lighten the critics' labors. The spectacle of a young Ph.D. student taking prominent historians to task for having missed the point is hardly a trivial matter, particularly if we bear in mind that the historians in question have devoted many years of their lives to the study of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime and have attained a level of undisputed accomplishment in this field. In fact, Goldhagen goes so far as to proclaim his book a necessary revision of all previous scholarship: "Explaining why the Holocaust occurred requires a radical revision of what has until now been written. This book is that revision."¹⁰

Passages like these are, in fact, grist for the mill of the author's critics. They, in turn, reproach him for drawing on secondary literature, especially in his Ph.D. dissertation, instead, as befitting a historian, of bringing to light new documentary evidence and other primary sources. Other critics, however, admit that this critique is unfair. Jäckel himself, history professor at the University of Stuttgart, reveals that Goldhagen invested a great deal of time and effort in combing the archives in the neighboring town of Ludwigsburg for the files of trials that had taken place in the Federal Republic of Germany. Jäckel met with him frequently, guiding and encouraging the young scholar. Those familiar with the book cannot but admit that its author drew extensively on postwar interrogation protocols and trial proceedings in order to assemble most of his documentation on atrocities and killings perpetrated by German police squads in occupied areas, in labor camps, and during the death marches close to the end of the war. Some critics do, in fact, concede that these chapters break new ground in the research literature and bring to light hitherto unknown information. But, as we shall try to show below, the critics remain divided over the significance of detailed accounts of atrocities and their contribution to our understanding of historical events.

Arguably, the person who can best appreciate the value of this kind of primary source work is Wolfgang Scheffler, one of the first German historians

¹⁰ Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, p. 9

to publish articles and a teacher's guide with a collection of documents on the Holocaust, with a circulation of tens of thousands of copies. For over thirty years, Scheffler gave testimony as an expert witness at trials of Nazi criminals in Germany and other countries. In a blistering review of Goldhagen's book, he describes himself as:

“one who has spent almost his entire working life studying files of German prosecuting agencies in order to uncover the violent crimes of National-Socialists, and [a person] who has long since been aware of the fact that often a huge chasm yawns between the knowledge generated by these documents and the status of published research findings.”¹¹

Scheffler concedes that Goldhagen has studied the files, but castigates him for refusing to try

"to accommodate his thought to the conditions of the period [under study] and understand them... Instead he follows his prejudices and therefore does not understand a thing...He mines the files, employing the principle that 'the main thing is that it fits my central arguments.'”

Other arguments by Scheffler amount to a summary dismissal of the book, although he promises to confront Goldhagen's findings in scholarly literature. The outspoken and disparaging tone of Scheffler's argument indicates a lingering sense of insult. This probably also accounts for the complete silence, at least at the time of this article, on the part of some of the most prominent historians of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, such as Hermann Graml and Wolfgang Benz.

The Historiographical Generation Gap

Most German historians studying Nazism and the Holocaust, however, went beyond a one-time, peremptory dismissal of the book. Even those who wrote matter-of-fact reviews, sometimes favorable in parts, also take issue with the presumptuous manner in which Goldhagen presents his findings and conclusions. These reviewers nonetheless find them worthy of serious consideration. To this end the editor of *Die Zeit* did, in fact, avail himself of his

¹¹ Wolfgang Scheffler, "Ein Rückschritt in der Holocaustforschung," *Der Tagesspiegel*, Berlin, September 3, 1996. The quotation in the following paragraph is from this source.

declared mission; namely, to provoke extensive and thorough debate on the central question posed by Goldhagen: What prompted tens of thousands of "completely ordinary Germans" to commit ghastly atrocities with cruelty, even murderous lust, while millions of others became aware of the atrocities while maintaining a silence that signified consent?

Most participants in the debate admit, at least in part, that German scholars on the whole suppressed this question until the early 1980s, and even afterward failed to address it with due seriousness. In fact, during the two decades after the war, no historical Holocaust research worthy of its name had been carried out in Germany. Veteran German historians, including some Jewish scholars who returned from exile, chose either to preoccupy themselves with manifestations of resistance during the Nazi era that had recently ended or to engage in bland apologetics about the "German catastrophe." Only when the younger generation of historians, most of them born in the 1930s, began filling academic posts vacated by their older colleagues, did studies dealing with the persecution of German Jews and the Holocaust of European Jewry begin coming out. From then on their research and findings have become a permanent and important fixture on the landscape of the international historiography of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust.

Until recently, however, the dominant, though by no means exclusive, distinguishing characteristic of German scholarship has been its focus on describing the institutions and patterns of bureaucratic administration of the Third Reich.¹² A partial explanation for this trend can be found in the fact that most German historians who addressed these issues during this period advocated the approach of the influential school of "social history" centered at the University of Bielefeld. The so-called "functionalist" or "structuralist" approach to the question of the "Final Solution" fits in well with the general perspective of this school, even though it is not necessarily derived from it.

¹² Notable examples of this approach are Martin Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers: Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung* (München: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 1969), and Hans Mommsen, *Beamtenum im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1966).

The influence of the "social history" approach is clearly felt in the first studies about the persecution and destruction of German Jews dating from this period, particularly in the preoccupation with the legal system and anti-Jewish decrees and the struggles surrounding these legal measures within the regime's ruling circles and the Nazi party.¹³ Later, this body of historical work was supplemented by prolific "remembrance literature," which dealt with Jews as objects and victims of persecution, particularly on a local and regional level. The number of publications belonging to this genre of historical writing has reached several thousand and continues to grow.

One should not underestimate the good intentions of locally based individual researchers and "research groups" who were prompted to erect textual memorials and recreate the final years of Jewish communities that had lived and perished in their cities and towns. At the same time, however, only a handful of these commemorative publications measure up to the standards of historical scholarship.

Monika Richarz, the German historian and an authority on the history of German Jews, addressed the problems besetting this particular genre:

"Efforts by local researchers and the institutions which support them do not guarantee full and complete uncovering of all the aspects of the National-Socialist past of their localities. On the contrary: the political tendency of the authors to transpose the issue from the history of criminal perpetrators to that of the victims is quite manifest. They chronicle in detail the sequence of persecution of local Jews and go to great lengths to rescue from oblivion the names of all the deportees to death [camps]. Names of local perpetrators, however, are not mentioned. There were crimes but no one committed them—criminal acts without criminals...Shedding light on the victims makes it

¹³ See the pioneering study by Adam, which is still frequently quoted, *Uwe Dietrich Adam, Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1972).

possible to cast a shadow over the criminals. In this fashion Jewish history is turned into a fig leaf.¹⁴

Only recently can one discern a certain shift of orientation in the writings of younger German historians, most of them born in the 1950s. In the area of local history, too, studies have come out which ask questions about the deeds of the oppressors and those who benefited from the persecution and dispossession of local Jews. Apparently the generation of grandchildren is less inhibited than that of their parents, and they feel less restrained from scrutinizing the deeds of the German population as a whole during the Nazi reign. Evidence of this change of heart is apparent in the debate on Goldhagen's book, not only in the pages of scholarly journals but in the public domain as well.

The Hub of the Debate: Antisemitism and the Holocaust

Initially, historians of the younger generation, too, tended to belittle the scholarly significance of the book, believing that it could be brushed aside with relative ease. Nonetheless, even early on some of them sensed the magnitude of the moral and scientific challenges it posed. Due to the confines of this paper, we cannot possibly encompass all the voices in the debate that ensued in the German press for more than four months prior to the publication of the German translation; only the better known names will be discussed.

Norbert Frei, born in 1955, and recently appointed professor of history at the University of Bochum, spoke disparagingly of the "sonorous theses" that Goldhagen needed in order "to find an audience in the over-competitive media market of the Nineties" and of the sales' pitch of his American publisher, which clamorously extolled "Goldhagen's provocation." At the same time, however, Frei places in sharp focus the key issue of the controversy:

"Daniel Goldhagen's comprehensive account is basically framed by a single idea which he pursues with great vigor, sometimes by means of an alarmingly

¹⁴ Monika Richarz, "Luftaufnahme--oder die Schwierigkeiten der Heimatforscher mit der jüdischen Geschichte," *Babylon, Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart*, 8/1991, p. 30.

hermetic argumentation: all studies of Nazi Jewish policies are faulted with striking disregard for the powerful impact of an Antisemitic world-view." ¹⁵

Having taken Goldhagen to task for what he believes is "the argument on the separate German path (Sonderweg) brought to the extreme," Frei proceeds to take stock of the importance of the chapters describing the murder spree of police squads and the horrors of labor camps and death marches. In so doing he ties the fear of denunciation that enveloped Jews hiding in Germany and those who assisted them "to that 'genocidal mentality' (*Mentalität des Genozids*) rightly described by Goldhagen as widely spread in Germany— certainly more widespread than claimed by the historiography that tried to suppress the level of identification with Hitler and the Nazi regime." ¹⁶

Frei was among the first who responded to the initiative of *Die Zeit's* editor, and his brief article steered the discussion mainly to the political-public track. Other historians, writing in *Die Zeit* and other newspapers, devoted much more space to rebuttals of arguments put forward by Goldhagen in the first chapters of his book. These chapters were designed to substantiate the thesis on "eliminationist Antisemitism" and trace its historical development since the nineteenth century, not only as a continuation of the traditional Christian-Jew hatred, but as a German development *sui generis*.

Criticism of the first section of the book is by no means a difficult task: these "pre-historical" chapters are evidently, also in the opinion of this author, the weakest of the lot, and the critics are right in pointing out that they are based primarily on dated, secondary research literature on the history of Antisemitism. Goldhagen's demurrals notwithstanding, the analogy drawn by his critics to the view "from Martin Luther to Hitler," so popular in the 1930s and 1940s, is not without foundation. Goldhagen's protestation against these allegations, in which he claims that he does not argue in favor of a German Antisemitic "national character" but deals instead with the "mentality" of the Germans and its evolution in the period in question, remains unconvincing. After all, how does the existence of such a "mentality," capable of remaining dormant for decades only to burst forth unbridled as soon as the Antisemitic,

¹⁵ Norbert Frei, "Ein Volk von 'Endlösern'?. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 13/14, 1996, in Schoeps, pp. 93-98.

¹⁶ Ibid.

racist regime removes the conventional moral barriers, fit in with the blanket "certificate of purity" granted by Goldhagen to democratic Germans "cleansed of Nazism" in our day?

Evidently, Goldhagen had need for these theoretical-historical chapters to demonstrate the existence of a singular German Antisemitism. He designates it "eliminationist Antisemitism," but fails, as his critics are correct in pointing out, to subject it to the test of comparison with Antisemitism in other countries, even though he is aware of its existence elsewhere. The logic of his inquiry demands this sleight of hand, since it aims at explaining the savagery of "ordinary Germans" in committing acts of mass murder.

There is no need, in fact, to embark on a long historical voyage into the past in order to substantiate the book's central thesis whereby "Hitler's willing executioners," those tens, or hundreds of thousands of "ordinary Germans" who perpetrated atrocities "in the field" were driven by Antisemitism. The debate over this key issue often ignores the difference between the concepts and research methods used by Goldhagen as a sociologist and political scientist, on the one hand, and those employed as tools of the trade by the historians who debate him, on the other hand. The latter charge him with failing to corroborate his thesis and of shifting the burden of proof to those who contest it. This argument, however, overlooks the difference between historians' research methods and those employed by sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists. By Goldhagen's methodological standards, the massive documentary material generated by the trials of war criminals constitutes a "random representative sample" of the entire population of "ordinary Germans." This allows him to construct a general "cognitive model" and conclude that all, or a "vast majority" of "ordinary Germans" succumbed to Antisemitic views and emotions. This extrapolation, in turn, enables him to argue that they would have behaved similarly to the actual perpetrators had they been given the assignment of mass murder. Arguably, the definition of the sample as "representative" remains controversial, but, from his intrinsic methodological standpoint, Goldhagen can legitimately claim that no further proof is needed. Those who reject this claim

are, in his view, duty-bound to come up with another "sample" and a different "model."

Another German historian who dwelled on "the methodological challenge...that Goldhagen's book poses before the science of history" is Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, born in 1952, professor of history at the University of Bielefeld. Having disputed Jäckel's peremptory dismissal of the book as "a relapse into the research situation of the fifties, the most primitive of stereotypes," she condemns professional historians for refusing to try to deal earnestly with what she considers Goldhagen's innovative methods:

"The author seeks to explain the Holocaust by uncovering the cognitive and mental make-up (Struktur) of the murderers. What kept them going? What permitted them to commit mass murder? Why and how was it possible to do away with the prohibition of murder in Christian ethics?...The anthropological perspective employed by the author to explore the subject of his study is informed by the explanatory logic of the history of mentality which until now has not been often put to use in the research on Antisemitism and National-Socialism. Undoubtedly, the world-view and motivations of Nazi functionaries have been scrutinized, but the cognitive and mental make-up of "ordinary Germans" employed by the extermination machinery has not been systematically studied...From this point of view the underlying cause that forms the core of Goldhagen's discussion is a novel way of posing the question and his arguments force [us] to deal with the insufficiently explored dimension of the explanation of actual murder of Jews and its acceptance."¹⁷

Despite Gilcher-Holtey's assertion that "the author does not look for a new explanation of the political process that culminated in the destruction of the Jews and the industrialization of mass murder, and is not interested in making a new contribution to the argument between 'intentionalists' and 'structuralists'," it is a fact that leading adherents of the "functionalist" school in Germany felt themselves under attack and formed the spearhead of the campaign against Goldhagen and his book. The most prominent among them is the veteran historian Hans Mommsen of the University of Bochum, a highly

¹⁷Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, "Die Mentalität der Täter," *Die Zeit*, June 7, 1996, in Schoeps, pp. 210-213.

accomplished scholar who has published numerous studies dealing with the rise of the Nazi regime and how it functioned. Mommsen is regarded as a pillar of German Holocaust scholarship.

Of course, opposition on the part of "functionalists" is not a coincidence. In the debate on the "genesis of the Final Solution" Mommsen and his colleagues developed the theory of "cumulative radicalism" to account for the sequence of the persecution of the Jews. It was the internal, self-propelled dynamics of "cumulative radicalism" that led to the mass murder without any advance planning or explicit orders from on high. According to this explanation, what drove the process forward was the technocratic striving for efficiency on the part of state and Nazi-party machines, which competed among themselves for the favors and appreciation of their bosses, foremost Hitler, for their contribution to the solution of "the Jewish question." The victories and conquests of the first years of the war brought ever larger numbers of Jews under Nazi rule, thus creating the conditions that facilitated mass murder. In this explanatory scheme, very little importance, if any, was attached to ideological fanaticism, particularly the Antisemitism of hard-working and determined bureaucrats.

Three months after the debate was launched by *Die Zeit*, Mommsen responded in a long article,¹⁸ a declaration of principles of sorts, in which he attached much greater importance to the Antisemitic ideology than he did in his writings in the 1970s and 1980s. Taking note of the tremendous impact made by Goldhagen's book, "first of all in the United States but also in other Western countries," Mommsen drew the following conclusion:

"We realize that the recurring moral impact of the German murder of Jews does not slacken even after many decades. Regardless of our judgment of the book, which in many respects lags behind the latest advances in research, it nonetheless forces us to confront anew the question of how in a civilized country like ours destruction of millions of people, in particular Jews, was made possible without any serious attempts to halt the crime. Farsighted persons could anticipate that widespread discrimination of the Jewish

¹⁸ Hans Mommsen, "Schuld der Gleichgültigen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 20, 1996.

population would ultimately lead to extermination by appraising the unbridled Antisemitic incitement propaganda of the regime, and the cynicism and hatred that accompanied dispossession and social ouster taking place in full view of the public...Threat of extermination had long since been staple of the lexicon of racist Antisemitism...After 1933 the Nazi regime removed the legal barriers against the threat of violence and actually began carrying it out against Jewish citizens...who, as Hannah Arendt established long ago, were turned by the unrestrained Antisemitic propaganda into outcasts (*vogelfrei*) in the full meaning of the term.

Interestingly, Mommsen draws on Hannah Arendt once again in a later interview in which he declares himself "committed to the complex interpretative matrix of Hannah Arendt's thesis on the banality of evil which, it seems, remains beyond the grasp of the general public, whereas Goldhagen's reduction [of it to] pure Antisemitism presents a relatively trouble-free solution."¹⁹

The renewed popularity of Hannah Arendt in Germany transcends the confines of this paper, and perhaps merits separate analysis. We may only hazard a guess that the political context of a "reunited" Germany, in which "victims of the violent regimes" of Nazism and of "the German Democratic Republic" (GDR) are commemorated in the same breath, did play a part here, just as the political context of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s lent credence to Arendt's theory of "totalitarianism," which became quite popular. In any event, Arendt's controversial account of Eichmann's trial certainly fits the mold of the "functionalist" thesis, which lays the blame for mass murder at the door of middle-level bureaucrats about whom we cannot even be certain that they "obeyed orders." One of the left-wing commentators on the Goldhagen controversy was frank when addressing this point:

¹⁹ Idem, "Im Räderwerk," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 7, 1996. Needless to say, Mommsen is referring to Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963). See the German translation with an extensive, if somewhat critical, preface by Mommsen: *H. Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem. Ein Bericht von der Banalität des Bösen, Mit einem einleitenden Essay von Hans Mommsen* (München: Piper, 1986).

"In 1964 Hannah Arendt supplied the required explanation [in the form] of her theory of "banality of evil"...The responsibility for Nazi terror did not lie with the abject character and morals of the Germans, but with their having been enlisted in the totalitarian bureaucratic apparatus. Stereotypes of the "desk criminal" who signs with equanimity orders of murder and deportation, and of a "book-keeper mentality" of underlings ensconced in their routines— these stereotypes made a career as explanatory models and in this fashion the evil-doer and the ugly German disappeared...This explains the lasting popularity of Arendt's thesis in Germany; elsewhere hardly anyone took this banality nonsense seriously because evil is never banal."²⁰

In another article Mommsen acknowledges Goldhagen's achievement in that he "assiduously dwelt on [the fact that] implementation of the Holocaust was the work of a very large group of people and that the secret was not sufficiently well-kept." At the same time, however, Mommsen insists that a "majority of the population either did not know about the crimes or could not surmise its full scope."²¹

"Therefore Goldhagen's attempt to draw conclusions from the large number of perpetrators of the Holocaust [and extrapolate] them to the entire nation, accusing it of informed consent; is of little help from the methodological point of view...It is more logical to analyze the intermediate stratum, in other words, the mentality of "desk criminals" molded by bureaucratic perfectionism...The real stimulus for the Holocaust originated with the fanatical anti-Semites who constituted a minority of 20 percent at the most even within the party. It was they who found prominent advocates in [the persons of] Hitler, Himmler, and, generally, Nazi satraps...The minority of racist, fanatical anti-Semites...had always refueled the "cumulative radicalization" that characterized the regime. The method of differential analysis employed by recent Holocaust research posits Antisemitism as a necessary but by no means sufficient condition for implementing "the final solution."...The institutional structure of compartmentalization, designed to achieve permanent rivalry...set a course

²⁰ Mathias Bröckers, "Das Böse ist niemals banal," *Tageszeitung*, September 10, 1996.

²¹ Hans Mommsen, "Die dünne Patina der Zivilisation," *Die Zeit*, August 30, 1996.

which inevitably terminated in the extermination of the Jews. For this reason the bureaucratic administrative factor was of at least equal significance as the mounting hatred of Jews within Nazi leadership.²²

Attentive readers cannot but notice quite a few differences, at least in emphasis, in these formulations by Mommsen, as compared to his articles published in the early 1980s, where one would look in vain for arguments such as "Antisemitism was a necessary but not sufficient condition" for the destruction of the Jew.²³ The functionalist thesis downplayed the importance of the ideological factor, including Antisemitism. However, recent studies by young historians, mostly German, have uncovered evidence of widespread acquiescence among Germans, which grew in scope, paralleling the economic and political achievements of the regime. Popular support also involved ideological identification, reinforced by a sophisticated system of indoctrination whose reach extended even to the very young.

As already noted, the historians of the "generation of grandchildren" have shown greater boldness in asking basic questions. Their research brought to light evidence of popular acceptance of persecution and deportation of Jews, and documented the benefits derived by "ordinary Germans" from the institutionalized plunder known as "Aryanization." The part played by the German army in extermination, both on the command level and operationally, has also been established by recent research. It is not surprising then, that Goldhagen's book provoked little emotional or substantive resistance among these historians.

A good illustration of this intergenerational difference of approach is exemplified in the debate between Mommsen and Frei in a joint newspaper interview.²⁴ Mommsen rejects the charges against "...the functionalists of allegedly having forgotten the part played by Antisemitism. Of course, this self-evident issue was not always referred to in

²² Ibid

²³ See Avraham Barkai, "Regierungsmechanismen im Dritten Reich und die 'Genesis der Endlösung'," *Jahrbuch des Instituts für deutsche Geschichte*, XIV, Tel Aviv (1985), pp. 371-384, especially p. 379f. Idem, "The Führer State: Myth and Reality," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry II* (1986), pp. 291-298.

²⁴ "Wenn die Dinge so einfach lägen..." *Berliner Zeitung*, July 24, 1996.

detail as a preliminary condition, but now a mistaken impression has gained hold that Antisemitism did not receive historical treatment.”

Frei concedes that "the Holocaust research of the last two decades should have paid a little more attention to the aspect of Antisemitism," though he rejects Goldhagen's simplistic explanation whereby "Jews were murdered because Antisemitic Germans wanted to murder them."

More significant differences between the two interlocutors emerge with respect to the issue of detailed descriptions of atrocities. Mommsen refers to Goldhagen's efforts in this area as”

“...voyeurism. In contrast to us, Mr. Goldhagen does not flinch from dwelling at length on acts of sadism as they occurred, in order to work up psychological resistance to Nazi crimes. We, however, learned that this effect provokes everything— except rational political and moral confrontation with history. For this reason historians have so far refrained from this voyeurism...If everything is described as Goldhagen does, it may evoke a counter-reaction of habituation to violence in politics.”²⁵

Frei responded as follows:

“It can also be argued that we, the historians, missed something here...Don't you think that the question of how to describe the crimes is, among others, a problem of generations?...In the early sixties [the historians] deliberately opted for the model of the level-headed approach of the legal system. I do believe that this approach also amounted to an attempt by scholars to protect themselves from horrible things. For researchers in those days, [persons] who had experienced National-Socialism as young people, this self-protection was important. More important than it is for historians born in the 1960s.”²⁶

In the same interview, Hans Mommsen brushed aside Frei's postulation that scholars provide "as direct an account as possible of gruesome details" and,

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

in a later interview in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, he expressly spoke against those who claim that the time has come

“...to open the Pandora’s box...because the history of the Second World War— not only from the German point of view— inspires so much horror that normal people will turn away from it. One can go on expanding [the list of] acts of savagery that Goldhagen describes...also in other contexts...in which others than Jews were murdered...even though these savage and ghastly acts, which no one doubts, did not constitute the singular feature of these crimes...In National-Socialism we are dealing with a new form of mass murder and violence against people who lived and thought differently, a form in which the factors of spontaneous emotions were not as useful as the bureaucratic efficiency and perfectionism in execution. After all, the key perpetrators, such as Heydrich, Eichmann or Himmler, did not personally aim the rifles and they are not the type of criminals that the German public, following Goldhagen, appears to have preferred to preoccupy itself with.”²⁷

During a public debate with Goldhagen in the Jewish Community Center in Berlin on September 6, 1996, Jürgen Kocka also took Goldhagen to task for having shifted the focus to "primitive executions by police squads and camp guards, and during death marches," while downplaying the industrialized murder in extermination camps, "where they worked differently." Although it is true that Goldhagen did not address this topic in his book, it is also clear why Kocka's argument aroused the ire of the audience: after all, neither was the "industrialized murder" that the "functionalists" bring up as evidence to buttress their views perpetrated by impeccable "desk murderers" wearing kid gloves. This murder, too, was actually committed by a mass of Germans, assisted by local collaborators, acting with savagery at all stages, beginning with the rounding up of the Jews, assembling the deportees and packing them into transport freight cars, and culminating with the selections on the "ramp" in Auschwitz or driving them through the "green tunnel" of Treblinka.

In Kocka's view, the attraction of the book lies in the veracity of the descriptions of "the realities of daily existence of the murderers...and their acts." The German historian considers this preoccupation characteristic of,

²⁷ In the interview of September 7, 1996 (see note 19 above).

though not necessarily flattering to, "the younger generation of scholars whose depictions of atrocities approximate the aesthetics of mass media."²⁸

Scholars who, in recent years, have specialized in case-studies of various aspects of the Holocaust system took a less critical view of Goldhagen, even though they, too, take exception to some of his overblown premises. Walter Manoschek, born in 1957, lecturer at the University of Vienna, studies mainly the roles of the Austrians and the regular army in the destruction of Jews. Recalling the exhibition "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944," staged in Hamburg in 1995, he maintains that "as research gets more detailed the overall picture grows more frightening." Even more troublesome, according to Manoschek, is the fact that, as a group, the perpetrators can be said to represent a microcosm of German society, a cross section of the "German Volksgemeinschaft." As for the special part played by the Austrians, Manoschek has this to say:

"Goldhagen's mono-causal thesis on the will to extermination intrinsic to the inhabitants of Greater Germany falls short of accounting for the destruction of the Jews...Nonetheless this thesis cannot but shock us, the Austrians. For, in reality, the Antisemitic program of the Nazis before March 1938 [annexation of Austria — A.B.] did not differ from the proposals that Social-Christians had been advancing in Austria since time immemorial...The pogroms of the "Anschluss" days were "native work" which did not need instructions from German Nazi institutions. Even in early 1945, local gendarmes, together with members of the Hitlerjugend and Volkssturm men, openly murdered in the streets tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews deported to the Mauthausen concentration camp. It appears that only in this generation is it possible to deal comprehensively with the involvement of the Volksgemeinschaft in the racist extermination policy.^{29]}²⁹

Similarly, we should consider the views of Ulrich Herbert, born in 1951, professor of history at the University of Freiburg. Herbert acquired a reputation

²⁸ Volker Ullrich, "Goldhagen und die Deutschen," *Die Zeit*, September 13, 1996 (summary report on Goldhagen's lecture tour in Germany).

²⁹ Walter Manoschek, "Der Judenmord als Gemeinschaftsunternehmen," *Profil*, 18, April 29, 1996, in Schoeps, pp. 155-159. The *Volkssturm* were units of older soldiers, past conscription age, who were drafted during the last months of the war and served in Germany.

for his studies of the exploitation of workers from occupied countries by the German war economy, and, recently, for his biography of one of the "desk murderers," which indicts their conventional portrayals as technocrats bereft of any ideological motivation.³⁰ Although he agrees with most of Goldhagen's critics with respect to numerous mistakes and exaggerations plaguing his book, Herbert nonetheless adds:

"All the same, the fervor and unanimity of the critics inspire a certain unease... Despite all the author's overstatements and analytical imprecision, the book did play a part in that at long last a public debate is held on the question that has been all but forgotten in the last decades despite the fact that it forms the core of the unbelievable events, reaching to the heart of German self-understanding: the question of the scope and prevalence of Jew-hatred in the German population and the importance of Antisemitism in initiating and perpetrating the murder of millions."

Having outlined his views on the link between widespread anti-Semitism and the Holocaust of European Jewry, Herbert draws the following conclusion:

Let us not be mistaken: murder of the Jewish people was certainly not carried out by "all the Germans" and did not feed on "eliminationist Antisemitism" allegedly deeply embedded in German culture for hundreds of years. A considerable proportion of the German population, however, held extreme views, of varying intensity, against the Jews...The number of Germans who were active accomplices in murders may have not reached millions, but we must presume it did encompass tens of thousands...These linkages will preoccupy us Germans for a long time to come, past all the emotionally-charged debates on current topics."³¹

³⁰ Ulrich Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996).

³¹ Idem, "Die richtige Frage," *Die Zeit*, June 14, 1996. The quoted passage is from the expanded version in Schoeps, pp. 214-224.

By and large, the responses by younger historians follow the pattern of matter-of-fact criticisms of some central theses presented by Goldhagen, and a rejection of the preemptive dismissal of his book by other critics, while stressing the importance of the questions he asks both for the specialist and, above all, for the German public. This type of response, however, was by no means confined to the younger people. One of the most eminent representatives of the older generation of historians, Hans Ulrich-Wehler, aged sixty-six and the founder and uncontested leader of the Bielefeld school, responded in a similar vein. Noting the German press's criticism of "the enthusiastic applause of American journalists and polemicists," Wehler advises his compatriots to take note of the beam in their own eyes.³²

The echo reverberating in the thicket of the German press is definitely not a cause for satisfaction. With irritating speed and spectacular self-assurance, which often helps to conceal ignorance on matters of substance, a consensual defensive reaction (Abwehrkonsens) [against the book] has set in. Again and again we are being told that the book doesn't offer any new empirical findings;...and, since interpretation is "a pure folly, of course"... [we] can calm down and move on to other matters on the current agenda. While the first part of this description remains spectacularly incomplete, misleading, even not true, the second one merits detailed discussion... The public impact [of the book] is there for all to see and it acts as a prickle goading [us] to face anew the most painful questions which are far from being thought through. All the justified counter-arguments notwithstanding, [we] should have given it our blessing as a welcome outcome, rather than spontaneously erecting barriers against any substantive debate. In this country we also should have acted with greater tolerance and accorded respect to the manifestly moral outrage of the author.

Wehler then proceeds to enumerate "six reasons...to take seriously parts of Goldhagen's empirical analysis and several of the questions he asks." He draws attention to the fact that, among thousands of dissertations in departments of history at German universities, conspicuously absent are

³² Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Wie ein Stachel im Fleisch," *Die Zeit*, May 14, 1996. The quoted passage is from the expanded version in Schoeps, pp. 193-209.

monographic studies of acts committed "in the field" by policemen during mass murders, of atrocities in labor camps and during death marches at the end of the war.

"In the antechambers of the infernal kingdom of gas chambers and liquidation operations there stretched an endless landscape of daily savagery against women, children, the elderly and the defenseless...Is not Goldhagen justified in insisting that this savagery, that emerged suddenly as a mass phenomenon [and lasted] years among sons of a formerly civilized people, still stands in need of explanation?... Instead of taking under scrutiny the "banality of evil" of the typical bureaucrats of "the final solution," such as Eichmann and his ilk, [Goldhagen set out] to present a more visual picture of hundreds of thousands of individual murderers...Can such an intention be casually brushed aside? Both methodologically and empirically this is a Herculean task, but definitely a legitimate one all the same.

The same goes for the question which has been continuously debated since the 1930s, namely, how deeply was Antisemitism rooted in the mentality of millions of Germans, and did it facilitate and make possible the transition...to the general final solution...Not one from among the enviably omniscients makes it easier for himself by dismissing the entire book out of hand, from the heights of adequate expert knowledge, but possibly also in the service of latent defense mechanisms designed to finally distance ourselves from the horrors of our past."

Having said this, however, Wehler launches a devastating attack against the theoretical underpinnings of Goldhagen's book, particularly those concerning the singularly German "eliminationist Antisemitism," the absence of comparative analysis with Antisemitism among other nations, his failure to address the political factors behind the Nazi rise to power, and, finally, the "certificate of purity" granted by Goldhagen to the postwar German Federal Republic and its residents.

The Political — Public Debate

As the sample of responses quoted above indicates, the initial tendency of several journalists and a number of reputable historians to sweep Goldhagen's book under the rug immediately upon its publication in English ran aground. To those who still harbored doubts, the political-public nature of the debate became clear in early September 1996 at the latest, during Goldhagen's tour of the country close on the heels of the publication of the German translation. To the surprise of many, it emerged that preoccupation with the questions raised by the author was hardly confined to "American columnists, most of them Jewish," and that sensitivity to these questions existed in their country, too—a sensitivity that could not be attributed to "anti-German political resentment."

The thick and expensive volume of the German translation of the book sold nearly 100,000 copies in the first week, and the printing presses could not cope with the demand for new editions. Four public panel discussions were held before packed houses; the last discussion took place in the Munich symphony hall to a sold-out crowd of 2,500, with a large number of would-be listeners left outside.

Beginning with his first panel appearance in Hamburg, Goldhagen met with a warm welcome and profuse expressions of assent—none of which made the task of the historians debating him any easier. The numerous newspapers that covered the debates, both the public ones and the discussion panels broadcast by TV networks, were equally sympathetic. The subtitles of the article in *Die Zeit*, summing up Goldhagen's visit, dispelled any lingering doubts: "The tour (Die Tournee) has turned into triumphal procession!"; "The historians criticize...the public greets the book as a liberating factor."³³

To the surprise of the moderator and the audience, the participants in the Hamburg panel exchanged compliments and apologies, with Goldhagen casting a spell over the audience with his relaxed style of reply. Here and there he admitted that "perhaps I should have written it differently," but refused to yield on the fundamentals of his approach. In contrast, the panel

³³ See note 25 above. Unless otherwise indicated, the passages quoted below are from the same source

discussion held the next day in the hall of the Jewish Community Center in Berlin turned into a vociferous confrontation with Hans Mommsen, backed, as mentioned above, by Jürgen Kocka. Mommsen vehemently objected to the generalizations and methodological shortcomings besetting Goldhagen's book. His colleague, however, the historian Wolfgang Wippermann, commended the author for having "contributed to the well-being of the political culture of our country" by bringing to a halt the trend toward historicization and relativization of the Holocaust and restoring the cardinal question to the center of the research agenda: Why could the Holocaust happen only in Germany and not in another country? The reporter who covered the venue commented on the stormy ovation with which the audience responded to this statement, saying:

"It has become clear this evening that as attacks by historians against Goldhagen mount, the audience's support for him grows. By assiduously insisting on personal responsibility of the perpetrators he strikes a more responsive emotional chord in the audience than do Mommsen and Kocka in their search for structures and complex political conditions."

Sympathy toward Goldhagen was clearly in evidence also in more restricted venues such as discussions with students and scholars, as well as on the eve of his public appearance in Frankfurt. The *Die Zeit* reporter attributed this, in some part, to Goldhagen's personal "telegenic radiance," but primarily to the fact that,

"At long last someone speaks out here on what until now has been a kind of taboo: that the distinction between "Nazi criminals" and "normal Germans" is wrong, and that the willingness to murder millions of Jews was to be found within German society...The fact that someone says this simple truth has a liberating effect on many Germans. The fears that Goldhagen's research is liable to rekindle anti Semitic emotions [this much was hinted also by Hans Mommsen — A.B.] have turned out to be groundless."

The article dwells briefly on Goldhagen's evening appearance in Munich; like elsewhere, the audience was solidly behind him, whereas "historians on the dais treated him with great respect, lovingly offering him suggestions for corrections, expressing only cautious criticism." The article sums up the whole visit as follows: "Not only was Goldhagen surprised and impressed by so much friendly attention and shows of sympathy...The unusual resonance [of his visit] proves that even after the reunification and celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war, confronting the Holocaust did not disappear from the political agenda."

No German newspaper— from large, respected dailies down to marginal weeklies and small local papers— failed to report on Goldhagen's appearances. By and large, accounts of the discussions and reactions of the audience accord with the *Die Zeit* coverage. Surprisingly, commentaries accompanying the reports display only minor variations. "What has happened?" asked the journalist Charlotte Wiedemann in an article summing up the tour:³⁴

Oddly, fifty-one years after the war a thirty-seven year old American arrives in Germany and asks: "Did the perpetrators think what they were doing was right?" He keeps asking in Hamburg, Berlin and Frankfurt, and every time a total silence sets in for a moment in the room...German professors, their hair grown white during decades of distinguished Holocaust research, argue that this is too simple a question: the persons who raises it exaggerates the importance of Antisemitism as the driving force...he lags behind recent research advances [offering] "multi-casual explanations," overlooks the methods employed by the regime, the group pressure, the "cumulative radicalization." But after all this the small question still hangs in the air...

It is possible that the so-called Goldhagen debate is also a historians' controversy. But above all it is a discussion involving morality and responsibility... At this point it is quite clear who exactly has committed himself to the acrimonious public argument against Goldhagen: the first line consists

³⁴ Charlotte Wiedemann, "Im Land der Täter," *Die Woche* nr. 38, September 13, 1996.

neither of people of the right or the new right, nor the professional end-line-drawers, but, first of all, the historians from the social-liberal, even leftist camp, who thirty years ago attacked the lie of the lives of their parents.

Speaking in Hamburg the historian and publicist, Goetz Aly, provided a concise description of the vacuum thus created: "I told my parents: You knew! Now, my sixteen-year-old daughter comes back from school and asks: Did grandpa take part in this? The 'no' answer is too simple." Here Aly makes a surprising statement: "We must thank Goldhagen for bringing it up to the surface."

The previous historians' controversy had to do with historicization, with the vague situating of the Holocaust, with drawing the line. The elated exclamation of the Berlin historian Wolfgang Wipperman "Nolte did not win because Goldhagen came!" can be taken as an overstatement, but if only a little remains of the unease caused by the American [historian], the line will not be drawn for a long time...It appears that the only distinction that would have been denied to Goldhagen in Germany would be his Ph.D."

The "Goldhagen Phenomenon"

I have quoted at length from two newspaper stories dealing with Goldhagen's tour in Germany because they offer us a reliable account of public reactions—so different from those of his scholarly colleagues—to his appearances and his book. To the best of this author's knowledge, the quoted passages are representative, in essence, of the coverage in most of the German mass media. After Goldhagen's return to America, both the experts and press in Germany continued to preoccupy themselves with the author and his book. Both center on the fact that despite the consensus regarding the scientifically problematic nature of the book (even those who acknowledged the significance of some of its findings admit this much), it met with such a broad public acceptance.

In late September 1996, the annual German Historians' Congress took place in Munich; like previous such venues, this one, too, was widely attended, with the program offering a smorgasbord of topics. The presiding committee rejected the proposal to hold a discussion on Goldhagen's book;

one participant responded with a prank by entering Goldhagen's name on a secret ballot slip as candidate for the post of chairman of the Historians' Association. Moreover, a high proportion of the participants "voted with their feet" by crossing the street to the hall where two publishing houses assembled a discussion panel that the presiding committee refused to hold. On this occasion the provocation was delivered by Professor Moshe Zimmerman:

"He [Zimmerman — A.B.] sees himself facing "a united front of angry scholars"... even the general audience considers him an "outsider" [English word in the original — A.B.] only because of his claim that the theses of Goldhagen are being suppressed in Germany. The "experts" have failed. Having set up in Germany a "taboo zone" around Antisemitism, and having lived in the "historians' ghetto"...the "experts" turned out to be a disappointment. To this Zimmerman added a threat, saying he would duly report to his students on the historians' conference: in the course of discussion in Munich on "Wars in Modern Times" no one as much as dropped a word about the Second World War...You've been caught! Historical scholarship in Germany liberates itself from the concern over its past!"³⁵

This account of the Munich discussion, together with commentary by its author, are of great interest. The confrontation between Zimmerman and his German colleagues, he felt, involved a collision of resentments "the depth of which could hardly be fathomed," and neither was the debate between German historians free of it:

"In Munich too some Historians decry [the fact that] Goldhagen's theses are staged for the [benefit of] the media, that behind him stands the American identity crisis and "racism" against Germans. Others can only suspect Antisemitism in everyone who simply thinks that these theses are too simplistic and counter-productive. In this fashion the entire debate turns into a row among the Germans over the treatment of their past, well beyond Goldhagen's book...This is a catastrophe, says Wolfgang Benz, Director of the

³⁵ Gunter Hofmann, "Die Welt ist, wie sie ist," *Die Zeit*, September 27, 1996 (all the passages quoted below are from this article).

Center for the Study of Antisemitism in Berlin. He did not air his views on the book, but certainly considers it demagogical...And the East-Germans? Not one of their historians stepped forward to present serious arguments in the debate on Goldhagen. Did they turn mute because of the declared anti-fascism ritual?...A minority of [Western] historians took part in the discussion, some offended, some sad, some impotent...The embittered Hans Mommsen said that after this discussion "it is easier for him to understand" why the Germans chose Hitler. These days they give evidence of their guilt feelings and flee inward, to irrationality. His generation learned that there was no meaningful history (*sinnbezogene Geschichte*). The young who applaud Goldhagen are still in need of this experience.

Is it possible that so much rage and frustration stem not only from injured self-esteem?...Hans Mommsen says somewhere that he admires the younger people for their capability for the "toughness" that is needed to write about crimes with direct realism. This sounds as if Goldhagen inadvertently discovered something real: that what the social and structural history model of explaining the Holocaust did, after all, all the good reasons notwithstanding, was to offer a small and permissible escape. Hans Mommsen: even today we must not open the "Pandora box." "Should we prohibit the young to read our books?" he asks irritably. Reinhard Rürup replies that "of course" the box needs to be opened, hard as it is...Everybody listens intently to a history teacher, saying that an explanation of the Holocaust through structural history prompts her students to ask what can an individual person do anyway if the power of structures is so overwhelming...

After fifty years [people] again try to understand the perennial question... "Why the Germans?" It can be argued that this is the true German question. This is not a "Failure" of the experts, as Moshe Zimmerman's indictment would have it. More to the point, it can be seen as a minor tragedy. But they do not deserve to be put in the docket as if they have always endeavored to lift the blame.

The article extensively quoted above does, in the view of this author, accurately reflect the mood among fairly broad circles of German historians and publicists and their readers. Similar musings can be found in numerous

texts dealing with the "Goldhagen phenomenon." The author of an article thus entitled³⁶ goes even further, despite the fact that he, too, keeps in mind "serious flaws" in the book and in its methodological approach:

"Still people were fighting over entrance tickets and responded with stormy applause, fifty-one years after Hitler. And why? Because scholarly discourse does not cope with the sense of horror...The shocking narrative of police battalions and death marches touched an exposed nerve; repression was replaced by emotional participation...It is comforting to see that the Germans of today did not react with rejection and mounting defenses.

One can even take little pride in this reaction. The young generation which was brought up on sterile linguistic formulas such as "on behalf of the Germans" or "Hitler and his murderers" left the cocoon and identified itself with the author and the victims...While grandparents keep silent and parents can only point out their being born late, the children want to rediscover the old crime...

Only when the horror is given name and face does it touch one's soul, a feat that thousands of footnotes cannot accomplish. The glass bell has shattered again and people do not recoil from the shards. Scientific research seems to have "tamed" the horror, but Goldhagen broke the door again. It is to his credit that he succeeded. The fact the "ordinary Germans" of today are prepared to follow in his footsteps speaks in their favor. "

Did Goldhagen's book really open a new "historians' controversy" in Germany? The argument saying that "there is not enough scientific fuel [in the book]" is countered by Wehler, who maintains that neither was the "controversy" of 1986/7 a "purely scholarly debate, but, above all, a political discussion involving principles grounded in partially historical arguments." True, the previous "historians' controversy" raged in the press and fizzled out, so it appears, after the decisive victory of the historians who came out against Nolte and his supporters. Whether or not the victors expressed the opinion of

³⁶ Josef Joffe, "Das Goldhagen-Phänomen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 11, 1996.

a majority of "ordinary Germans" remains unclear. There was no follow-up to speak of on the controversy in the "respectable" scholarly literature. Numerous articles and books by Nolte, which came out later, placed him in the eyes of many beyond the pale, an outcast on the right-wing fringes close to those who deny the Holocaust. The specter of that "controversy" nonetheless continues to haunt scholars and their disquisitions.

Did Goldhagen really "vanquish" Nolte? Will his book continue to be discussed in historical scholarly treatises armed with footnotes? Will it prove impossible, at least from now onward, to write treatises and propound theories on the Holocaust in which Antisemitism plays a minor or even negligible role among the profusion of other complex factors? Only the future will tell.

Epilogue

At the time this article was going to press, we learned that the prestigious journal *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* awarded its "Democracy Prize" to Daniel Goldhagen. The prize is awarded sporadically, only when a truly deserving laureate is found. In justifying their choice, members of the jury said that the prize was given to Goldhagen because, *inter alia*, "through his in-depth description, pervaded by moral strength, he significantly stimulated public consciousness in the [German] Federal Republic...and sharpened the sensitivity to the background and limits of German 'normalization.' "

The laudatory remarks were made by the well-known philosopher Jurgen Habermas. The full text of his speech, an incisive essay in its own right, which certainly deserves separate attention, was published by *Die Zeit*.³⁷ The following excerpt encapsulates Habermas' reasons for giving the prize to Goldhagen:

"[Awarders of the prize] cannot and do not wish to involve themselves in scholarly disputes. [Similarly to other countries], in Germany, too, important historians have attained substantial recognition, many of them did so by investing considerable effort throughout their academic careers in researching

³⁷ Jürgen Habermas, "Geschichte ist ein Teil von uns. Warum ein 'DemokratiPreis' für Daniel J. Goldhagen? Eine Laudatio," *Die Zeit* nr. 12, March 14, 1997.

and explaining the Nazi period and the tangled pre-history of the Holocaust to the public...The question is not who from among the historians deserves the attention of the reading public at large, but rather how should one evaluate the extraordinary attention of interested citizens actually lavished on Daniel Goldhagen's book. The emblematic significance of giving the prize is an acknowledgment that the public response provoked by the book and its author in the Federal Republic was deserved and should be welcomed...

...Such a wide response to this kind of a book could only be expected. It is enough if one understands the coincidence of two things: Goldhagen's analytical case-studies and the expectations of the public which is interested in casting light on this criminal chapter of its history. Goldhagen's studies fit exactly the mold of the questions that have polarized our private and public discussions for the last fifty-years..."

Translated by Jerzy Michalowicz

Source: *Yad-Vashem Studies*, Vol. 26, Jerusalem, 1998, pp. 295-328.