Panel 1
Who is a Perpetrator? The Changing Construction and Interpretation over Time

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"The Historiography of Perpetrators"

In the early 1980s, historians could rightly say that 'No adequate study exists about the perpetrators of the Holocaust.'[i] Especially in Germany, *Täterforschung* (perpetrator research) has grown exponentially in the last decade, as the postwar generations finally began researching the questions that they been afraid to ask their parents and grandparents.[ii] From pioneering studies of individuals such as Ulrich Herbert's biography of Werner Best, one of the leaders of the Gestapo and later of occupied France and Denmark, to prosopographical studies of major institutions such as Christopher Browning on the Foreign Office and Michael Wildt on the SD, to photographic records of the *Weltanschauungskrieg* in eastern Europe (*Deutscher Osten* etc) a literature has emerged whose aim, in Peter Longerich's words, is 'Erklärungen für das Jahrhundertverbrechen anzubieten.'[iii] In only a few years, we have reached a situation where instead ignorance and stereotypes have been replaced by such a wealth of detail that it is almost impossible to make any sort of general statements about perpetrators, so varied and heterogeneous do they appear. Thus, whilst explanations can be offered, no consensus prevails.

The debate was kick-started by Christopher Browning's book *Ordinary Men* (1992), and developed in the context of the responses to Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* and the Wehrmacht exhibition after 1995. Browning depicted the activities of Order Police Battalion 101 in Poland, showing how a group of men who were not part of the SS and who came from ordinary backgrounds, developed into mass murderers, as part of the face-to-face killing process in occupied eastern Europe. He did not deny that ideology was important, but showed that the men of Battalion 101 were not committed Nazi fanatics; rather, the men grew into their role for mundane reasons such as peer pressure, group dynamics, excessive alcohol consumption and the brutalising effects of the war. Browning concluded his study by noting that 'Within virtually every social collective, the peer group exerts tremendous pressure on behaviour and sets moral norms.' He then ended with the now famous question: 'If the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?'[iv] Research on the question of

perpetrators has since sought to answer that question, by examining 'circumstances' and, especially, ideological motivation. The literature has been developed on the one hand by social psychologists, notably Harald Welzer, James E. Waller and Steven K. Baum, and other hand by historians, such as Jürgen Matthäus, Gerhard Paul and Konrad Kwiet. The social psychological literature concludes, quite reasonably, that Holocaust perpetrators – and perpetrators of other genocides – are overwhelmingly not sadists, but 'normal' people in unusual situations.[v] This situationist account is probably accepted by most historians too by now.

What the historians add to the explanation is an account of the unusual situations and how they developed, that is to say, they bring the cultural and social factors into play that account for the situations in which perpetrators find themselves (or that they create for themselves). In particular, they have queried the notion of 'normal'; whilst many perpetrators may have been mentally stable, they for the most part lived through World War I and its aftermath and the crises of the Weimar years and, under Nazism, were subjected to or themselves promoted fierce antisemitic propaganda. As Andrej Angrick notes of the men of Einsatzgruppe D, 'Obwohl es eine spekulative – und für den Historiker gewagte – Überlegung ist, kann mit einigem Recht angenommen werden, daß unter einem anderen, einem demokratischen System der Großteil der Täter nie zu Verbrechern geworden wäre.'[vi] The other side of this coin is that, as Norman Naimark reminds us, with reference to German officers and soldiers: 'There were few "ordinary men" among them; or, better, ordinary German soldiers tended to have strong Nazi views, even if they were not Nazis themselves.'[vii] The most striking proof of the perpetrators' 'ordinariness' (though it is perhaps more terrifying than if they were 'mad') is their mental stability after the war; as Konrad Kwiet notes, 'with few exceptions, the murderers were spared the lifelong symptoms of trauma that were and remain the dreadful legacy of the surviving victims.'[viii]

This statement seems perfectly true of men like Best, Six, or Paul Werner Hoppe, the commandant of Stutthof, whom Orth identifies as the typical perpetrator: imbued with radical völkisch ideas and able to act according to objective, rational calculations.[ix] The Camp-SS, the Gestapo and the 'Judenberater' all conform to this model of educated men carrying out mass murder, as do the men on the next rung down the

hierarchy, the SSPF and HSSPF like Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, Friedrich Jeckeln, Friedrich-Wilhelm Krüger, Otto Ohlendorf, Fritz Rauter, and Odilo Globocnik.

Claudia Steur, for example, writes in her study of 'Eichmann's emissaries' that 'Zusammenfassend läßt sich feststellen, daß die Arbeitsweise der Judenberater von einer zunehmenden Radikalisierung und Perfektionierung geprägt war.'[x] The emissaries can, according to Steur, be divided into two groups: Those with close links to Eichmann and those without (432). Among the first group were Theodor Dannecker, Dieter Wisliceny, Alois Brunner, Fritz Boßhammer and Franz Abromeit. In second group were Kurt Asche, Wilhelm Zoepf, Heinz Röthke, Anton Burger, Gustav Richter, Hermann Krumey and Otto Hunsche. All were born between 1905 and 1913, lived through World War I as children, and came to maturity in the post-war period. They constitute classic examples of those who had the ground pulled out from underneath their feet by the Weimar crises: 'Fast alle Judenberater entstammten der von der Krise besonders betroffenen Mittelschicht.' (433). Most were businessmen (*Kaufmänner*) who joined the NSDAP between 1930 and 1933. A combination of opportunism and craving for social status seems to have been central to their participation: 'In ihrem Streben nach Macht, Ansehen und sozialem Aufstieg dürfte der Hauptgrund für ihre spätere Beteiligung an der Ermordung der Juden liegen'. Boßhammer, for example, found the measures being taken against the Jews 'grausam und unmenschlich' (434) and was shocked, that he 'im Judenreferat Verwendung finden sollte.' But he still took the job: 'Nur "bei unbedingte Gehorsam" [Urteil Landesgerichts Berlin v.11.4 1972, ZSL, SA 416] bestand die Chance, in die Position eines Regierungsrates aufzusteigen' (434). 'Gegenüber ihren Vorgesetzten', writes Steuer, 'legten diese Männer blinden Glauben und Gehorsam an den Tag und identifiezerten sich vollständig mit Hitlers Staat' (434).

Globocnik, the study of a recent biography, is perhaps the exception, for he allowed his fanaticism to override any notion of dispassionate bureaucratic administration; indeed, it was his demotion from Gauleiter of Vienna (because of corruption) to SS Police Chief in Lublin that gave his violent antisemitic instincts free reign, as he became closely involved in the activities of the Einsatzgruppen in the USSR in 1941 and shortly afterwards emerged as the key figure in the establishment of the Operation Reinhard camps.[xi] The empirical evidence provided by Orth, Herbert,

Steuer and others seems to confirm the intuitive insight of the Auschwitz Sonderkommando man, Zalman Gradowski, that we are dealing with 'cultured demons'.[xii] On the other hand, recent research takes us back to Browning's claim that not all perpetrators were radical ideologues; with reference to the Einsatzgruppen, for example, below the leadership level, and especially once conscription was introduced and local collaborators had to be used to bolster numbers, one sees a rather heterogeneous group.[xiii]

Current research, then, seeks to balance organisational and situational factors against ideological ones. But of course the two overlap, especially when an organisation such as the police was heavily impregnated with ideological training. Still, most historians agree that an emphasis solely on ideology, as if comes from nowhere and has no organisational setting, is inappropriate. Edward Westermann, for example, writing about order police battalions in occupied eastern Europe, writes that 'it is a grave oversight to dismiss the organizational culture of the Uniformed Police in a search for the motive force behind their participation in the conduct of genocide.' This argument – which is a clear criticism of Goldhagen – is based on two findings: the 'militarization' of the police since 1933 and the process of psychologically and physically 'merging' (*Verschmelzung*) the uniformed police with the SS since June 1936, when Himmler assumed control of the unified police. These initiatives, Westermann assures us, 'go far to explain the manner in which individual policemen and the police battalions were shaped into instruments of annihilation.'[xiv] As head of the uniformed police Kurt Daluege stated in September 1938, 'It can only be a question of time before the entire police coalesces with the SS corps into a permanent unit.'[xv] And indeed, 'The police battalions that entered the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 were led by officers and senior enlisted men whose backgrounds and training, as well as the organizational culture within the police, had prepared them for a war of extermination in the East.'[xvi] And they acquitted themselves appropriately, Daluege congratulating Himmler that 'For Adolf Hitler, this corps of the SS and the police represents his struggle for a greater Germany, Europe and the world. Its [the SS and police corps] task is the annihilation of the eternal enemies of all *völkisch* and racially conscious nations.'[xvii] Westermann still arrives at the conclusion that ideology was important, but tries to present it as the outcome not of an essential or innate national belief system, but of deliberately-organised

institutional frameworks to which the men willingly subscribed; he thus seeks to avoid 'focusing on the ideological forest at the expense of losing sight of the individual trees of human causation.'[xviii]

The same sense of complexity – and hence greater adherence to human behaviour – informs recent discussions of 'desk killers' versus 'active murderers'. The dominant image of the desk killer, prevalent from the 1960s until the 1990s, cohered largely with the functionalist notion of 'industrial genocide' and a certain reluctance to confront the brutality of the events. We now know that the division is not justified, for the men most often identified as 'desk killers' – Eichmann and his staff – were actively involved in implementing murderous policies on the ground throughout occupied Europe.[xix] Similarly, according to the RSHA's policy of rotation, two-thirds of Gestapo leaders – with their middle-class upbringings, humanist schooling (almost half of them with doctorates in law) and narrow avoidance of military service in 1914-18, were 'als Führer von Einsatzgruppen und –kommandos sowie als Leiter von Stapo- und Sipo-Dienststellen in den besetzten Gebieten aktiv in die Massenmorde an der jüdischen Bevölkerung involviert.'[xx] Clearly, it is wrong to focus only on bureaucratic efficiency or on radical racist passions, when Nazism in action combined them so successfully. George Browder sums up the state of the historiography neatly by writing that '"Committed ideologue" versus "banal bureaucrat" may even be a false dichotomy; they are at best two extremes on a multidimensional spectrum of perpetrators.'[xxi]

This research, whilst placing greater stress than Browning on ideology, appears to confirm a neo-functionalist perspective for two reasons. First, it places considerable emphasis on decisions made at the periphery rather than in Berlin. Second, it suggests that policy developed zig-zag fashion rather than following a pre-ordained blueprint. However, these points are counterbalanced by the fact that many of these studies strongly reassert the primacy of ideology, in that these heterogeneous 'ordinary men' (as well as the smaller number of less ordinary, committed careerist Nazis) were operating in a framework suffused with antisemitism as a result of which their actions did not need to be directed in order to achieve the desired result, for it was already clear to them who their targets were. Whether they were committed ideologues or criminal '*Exzeßtäter*', their generational, social, religious, educational

and ideological heterogeneity did not get in the way of the production of a homogeneous victim group: 'Die Shoah erweist sich letztendlich als arbeitsteilige Kollektivtat in europäischer Dimension, zu der die verschiedensten Tätergruppen ihren unverzichtbaren Beitrag leisteten.'[xxii] Irrespective of the fact that the men of the Einsatzgruppen came from diverse backgrounds, 'Dessenungeachtet entfaltete die Einsatzgruppe eine erschreckend "homogene", mörderische Wirkung, ohne daß im Winter 1941/42 ein Ende sowohl ihrer Eroberungslust als auch ihrer Eroberungsmöglichkeiten in geopolitischer bzw. militärischer Hinsicht auch nur irgendwie absehbar erschien.'[xxiii]

Perhaps this combination of 'neo-functionalism' and the 'return of ideology' is most fruitfully seen in detailed examinations of the development of the killing process as it occurred on the ground in occupied eastern Europe. Two terms, in particular, seem to sum up well the state of research: Wendy Lower's 'anticipatory obedience' and Jürgen Matthäus's 'controlled escalation'. Between them they capture the sense of the radicalisation of policy brought about in the context of the 'war of annihilation', on the one hand, and the interplay between Berlin and the 'wild east', on the other.

In her case study of the *Generalbezirk Zhytomyr*, Lower builds on the work of the authors of the 'regional studies' of the last decade or so (largely based on newly-available archives in eastern Europe), to show that in seeking to stress the importance of the periphery rather than the Berlin centre to the murder process, one should be careful not to go too far. Her work notes that the studies of Gerlach, Sandkühler, Musial and Pohl tends to downplay the significance of Hitler, Himmler and Heydrich, who appear as shadowy background figures in these narratives. Actual policy tends to be driven, in these works, by antisemitic and anti-Soviet violence emanating from the Wehrmacht and the occupation authorities more than by central directive. By contrast, Lower shows that, at least in the Zhytomyr region, an acceleration of violence followed visits to the area by Hitler, Himmler and Jeckeln in the first months of the occupation. She writes that there were actually several reasons for the escalation of anti-Jewish massacres: 'the direct involvement of Reich leaders who pressured their subordinates to kill more Jews, the accumulation and expansion of available killing forces in the region, and the collaboration of local commanders from the Wehrmacht and SS-Police, who proved to be efficient killers.'[xxiv] Lower then demonstrates this interrelationship between centre and periphery, using examples such as the construction of Hitler's 'Werewolf' bunker just north of Vinnytsia and the close involvement of Hitler's personal SS escort, the Reich

Security Service (RSD) under SS-Gruppenführer Hans Rattenhuber, in massacres of Jews in Vinnytsia, and Himmler's speech to senior SS and police leaders at his Hegewald compound in September 1942: 'Go to your men in the isolated gendarme stations, visit the poor wretches who are sitting around outside in small groups and whom no one bothers about. … Take care of things on the spot. … Do not cling to your desk, instead make decisions in the field!'[xxv] Her conclusion, which even the term 'anticipatory obedience' understates to some extent, is that 'while German leaders at the periphery often acted independently, the highest Nazi leaders – whether physically present or indirectly involved – shaped events at the local level to a far greater extent than most authors of regional studies would accept.'[xxvi] Peter Longerich's recent biography of Himmler offers much detailed information that confirms Lower's argument. After reviewing Himmler's activities in the occupied areas of the USSR after June 1941 Longerich concludes that Himmler's breathtaking travel schedule in the first months after the invasion of the Soviet Union shows that he did everything possible to turn the mass execution of Soviet Jews into a comprehensive genocide, and that the transition to the systematic murder of the Jewish civilian population in the areas where his killing units were operating was brought about on his decisive initiative.[xxvii]

More recently, Lower's viewpoint has received corroboration – and nuance – from a study by Jürgen Matthäus of the first stages of Operation Barbarossa. Matthäus's starting point is the opposite side of the coin from Lower's: he welcomes the regional studies since he thinks that most scholars have devoted too much time on the centre; but he agrees that more work is needed on the interplay between centre and periphery in order to understand the nature of the violence that was unleashed in the early stages of the war in the Soviet Union. Looking at the town of Garsden (Gargždai) in Lithuania, Matthäus shows how the local SS/SD leaders, Hans-Joachim Böhme and Werner Hersmann, spoke with Himmler and Heydrich (both of whom had been in the region). According to Böhme, the SS leaders 'received information from me on the measures initiated by the Stapostelle Tilsit and sanctioned them completely.' Whilst most of the Lithuanian Jews were killed by Einsatzkommando 3, a sub-unit of Einsatzgruppe A, under Karl Jäger, Böhme's men had murdered 3,302 Jews by 18 July 1941. Matthäus's conclusion is that 'The beginnings of the Holocaust in Lithuania suggest that the push for these extreme "measures" came from officers

in the field who at the time offered various justifications for their actions; references to specific orders are notably absent.'[xxviii] Matthäus, then, places slightly more emphasis than Lower on the initiatives of the local leaders, but still notes the importance for them of having these actions legitimised by the centre and agrees with Lower that the presence of senior SS and police chiefs escalated the murder process and/or 'established this type of killing as standard operating procedure.'[xxix] Matthäus and Lower further agree on the vital role played by local collaborators, on the role of ideological indoctrination – 'Himmler's indoctrination program and his men's eagerness to accept the leadership's legitimization of anti-Jewish violence mutually reinforced each other'[xxx] – and the importance of orders from the centre in radicalising action on the ground. Matthäus cites Gestapo chief Heinrich Müller, from a speech of September 1941, to this effect: that, 'in the absence of written orders, they had to "get used to reading between the lines and acting accordingly."'[xxxi] Like Lower's 'anticipatory obedience', Matthäus's 'controlled escalation' is based on the claim that the Holocaust emerged neither from a top-down, order-driven approach, nor from grassroots initiatives alone that were then retrospectively endorsed by the leadership; rather, escalation was driven 'by the eagerness of subordinate officers to adopt new, more radical measures',[xxxii] a process that involved consensual negotiation between centre and periphery.

Consensus about mass murder was created through interaction between centre and periphery, but it is vital, *pace* Lower and Matthäus, not to underestimate the importance of the Nazi leadership as the driving force. Regional studies have brought much new evidence to light about how the occupation operated at a day-to-day level and how pressures and ideological competition escalated the murder process. But ultimately they reinforce a more traditional view that sees direction being given from the centre.

These studies confirm what Ian Kershaw argued some time ago was the case with the onset of the Holocaust in the Wartheland.[xxxiii] They show how consensual decision-making was arrived at through a combination of top-down orders from the centre and initiative at the periphery, through improvisation and experiment arriving at what subordinates thought was required of them. In other words, they illustrate what Kershaw means by 'working towards the Führer', creating in the process a

'community of violence' in which the perpetrators, from whatever social background and ideological position, ended up at the same place: very few failed to fulfil the gruesome task they were set.[xxxiv] Thus, whilst, as Donald Bloxham notes, historians may have exaggerated the extent to which division – even duplication – of labour in the Third Reich meant conflict amongst the 'polycracy' of competing agencies, it would be equally false to 'go to the opposite extreme and label the genocidal state as just another manifestation of the "network society."'[xxxv] Particularly when representatives of the Nazi leadership were present, the dynamic of genocide got a radicalising boost; and in their absence, the various agents involved, in the context of the institutional frameworks of their various affiliations, acted to realise the 'Führer's will': ideological indoctrination, at the level of the Order Police and Wehrmacht as well as the SS/SD, was more significant than historians have realised, and 'High- and mid-ranking organizational men came together in a form of consensus politics that allowed subordinates to lead even as they followed.'[xxxvi]

The impact of these empirical studies is clear in the synthetic works. Scholars who have previously taken an intentionalist standpoint now modify their interpretations so as not to suggest that there is a simple (or, from an explanatory standpoint, simplistic) link between idea and act. They insist on the importance of ideology, especially antisemitism, but note that the implementation of Nazi ideology provided an overall framework within which policy could still be made on a reactive or ad hoc basis, depending on circumstances. Saul Friedländer provides the most thorough version of this approach, in his *The Years of Extermination* (2007). His explanatory framework of 'redemptive antisemitism' is put forward as the motor of Nazi policy, indeed of the Third Reich as a regime, but the development of *Judenpolitik* was nevertheless bound by broader geopolitical events and was, in his reading, by no means a straightforward implementation of a pre-conceived plan. As for the decision-making process, for all the detailed studies that preceded his, the nearest thing a date that Friedländer is willing to offer is his assertion that 'The decision was taken sometime during the last three months of 1941.' The same is true in Peter Longerich's study, *Holocaust* (2009), in which circumstances are seen to radicalise an antisemitism that was always present, and which, in its inner logic, contained the seeds of genocide within itself from the start – on the level of the unconscious, or fantasy – and which developed as the regime faced new challenges, such as the

Euthanasia problem and the changing fortunes of the war. As we have seen, the clearest example of this radicalisation is the territorial solution, which, in Longerich's view, was genocidal from the outset, but which, in its failure, pointed the way to articulations of outright murder. Longerich also notes that with the changing circumstances of the war after 1942, and the efforts of the Jewish victims of Nazism to influence the perpetrators (through hiding, escape, or negotiation), one runs up against the limits of a pure *Täterforschung* that focuses only on the killers and their actions.[xxxvii] These two works represent, for the time being (and probably for some time to come) the pinnacle of the traditional historiography of the Holocaust.[xxxviii]

A good summary of what is meant by 'modified intentionalism' can be found in Doris Bergen's *War and Genocide* (2003), where she writes that Hitler 'could be flexible, pragmatic, and responsive to the situation "on the ground", but he took the initiative and provided much of the drive and the will that proved crucial in setting Germany on the path to war and genocide.'[xxxix] But a particularly striking example of an intentionalist position struggling to incorporate neo-functionalist scholarship is to be found in Dan Diner's history of the twentieth century, *Cataclysms* (2008). Diner's short narrative of how the Holocaust developed is a useful précis of the amalgamation of intentionalism with neo-functionalism. 'While the thrust of National Socialism's ideologically driven Jewish policy was towards annihilation,' he writes, 'this does not mean it was programmatically steered from the start.' Rather, the 'juncture between motive and circumstance points the way to the Holocaust.' Although it is 'doubtful whether a clear, administratively effective decision, traceable to specific officials, rests behind the killing process's sequential intensification', it is important for Diner to establish that this was no negligent or accidental slide into genocide: 'Even when what is at stake is a series of distinct but interrelated deeds rather than an elaborate plan driven by a declared will to act, intense deliberation and ideological motivation can be manifestly present.' Especially eye-catching is his use of the terms 'sequential intensification' and 'gliding escalation' to describe the unfolding of the genocidal decision-making process. Here Diner signifies his debt to Mommsen's 'cumulative radicalisation', whilst not wishing to identify himself with Mommsen's ultra-functionalist position. Yet he ends surprisingly close to Mommsen when he asserts that antisemitic ideology did not need to be pervasive but, as with all ideologies, operated by 'osmosis'. Thus, it was not necessary for all actors to be

imbued with all-embracing antisemitism. 'Instead, it suffices simply to appeal to the ideology in moments of doubt or inner conflict.' The ideological conviction remains in the background, and is brought to the fore at key points.[xl] Here we see functionalism insofar as Diner permits a narrative that embraces inconsistency, confusion and contingency, but intentionalism in that 'Despite the Nazi regime's institutional chaos, there was in fact little doubt about who was to be persecuted and finally subjected to "special treatment."' The perpetrators did not even need to hold a strong ideological conviction. 'What mattered far more', he concludes, 'was that they acted *as if* they were so motivated.'[xli] Irrespective of the extent to which perpetrators subscribed to antisemitic propaganda, it is clear, in Mark Roseman's words, that 'the "intention", to follow the language of the older debate, was dispersed far more widely than historians once thought. … we should treat antisemitism not as an abstract dogma, but effectively as a lens that influenced the way other factors were perceived and evaluated.'[xlii]

Roseman's claim has clearly influenced the way historians are now thinking about perpetrators. As Michael Wildt suggests, irrespective of other motives, antisemitism seems to have served as the glue that held everything together:

> Die in den vergangenen Jahren zunehmend diskutierte Frage, wie aus "normalen" Männern Täter wurden, erweist sich bei näherer Betrachtung als eine Frage nach Beteiligung, nach womöglich sehr unterschiedlichen Teilnahmen und Verhaltensweisen des Mitmachens. Die jeweiligen Motive mochten durchaus unterschiedlich gewesen sein: Habgier, Neid, Missgunst mögen die Handelnden ebenso befeuert haben wie explizite Judenfeindschaft. Und selbst unter den antijüdischen Beweggründen mag es variierende Motive und Absichten gegeben haben. … Gleich welche Intention zur Tat drängte, stets richtete sich die Gewalt gegen Juden. … Die antisemitische Praxis gestattete sogar, alle Gefühle und Ressentiments, die ansonsten sozial sanktioniert waren, ungehemmt auszuleben.[xliii]

And the authors of a recent study of the German public and the Holocaust confirm the importance of an antisemitic consensus:

Der antijüdische Konsens war mit einem allgemeinen Mordkonsens nicht identisch. Wie die neuere Täterforschung überzeugend herausgearbeitet hat, war auch das Gros der mittlerweile auf 200,000 geschätzten Täter des Holocaust keineswegs von einem inneren, persönlichen Mordwillen motiviert. … Ohne einen impliziten antijüdischen Konsens wäre nicht erklärbar, warum die große Merhheit der Täter entsprechende Feindbilder so widerspruchlos akzeptierte.'[xliv]

Thus, even some notable contributors to the regional studies literature, such as Pohl, are coming to the conclusion that, whilst there is no simple link between ideology and action, the pervasive antisemitism that characterised the Third Reich did provide a framework that allowed heterogeneous perpetrators and motives to come together.

What are the limits to such studies? Their achievement, which is to be based on substantial empirical research, also explains their shortcomings. Such studies tend to confirm the fears of critics, especially literary critics, who worry that the 'rational' exegesis that defines historical study, somehow serves to hide the horror of what is being explained and which motivated such scholarship in the first place. In seeking 'explanations for the crime of the century', in Longerich's words, we should not restrict ourselves to what is empirically measurable, such as institutional affiliation or speeches, vital though these factors are. In particular, what an emphasis on networks, structures and even ideology and propaganda can overlook, with its focus on individual and collective biographies, is the question of whether perpetrators enjoyed their tasks. This is of course a very sensitive and difficult topic to address, and one can understand why the 'Auschwitz syndrome' was so successful the moment one raises it. Yet a glance at the photographic record suggests immediately that perpetrators saw themselves not simply as bearers of a 'world-historical mission' which they had to undertake, however distasteful they may have found it. Rather, one does not have to delve very far to see smiling and laughing perpetrators. This is to argue neither that the perpetrators were sadists nor that German men of this period were somehow hard-wired to commit violence – the social psychological literature utterly scotches such notions. But we do have to consider, perhaps through an anthropologically-inflected cultural history approach, the suggestion that what Prusin calls a 'community of violence' was more than just contingent. Suffice it here to say that the extraordinary transgression of 'normal' mores that we see in the Holocaust cannot be satisfactorily explained by the interaction of structures and institutions. This

statement should not be seen as an attempt to impart some kind of demonic grandeur to the events – as Arendt worried would be the case if she spoke of radical evil in this context – for one of the achievements of the functionalist literature has been to show how 'ordinary men' can become genocidal killers. There is something chilling about the view that genocide emerges out of social structures and actors that are recognisably 'normal'. Even so, this way of conceptualising the murders can tend to overlook the fact that placing the tools of the state at the disposal of mass murder – what Hilberg termed the 'machinery of destruction' – is actually rather uncommon, historically speaking. Indeed, and in an attempt to link this paper with what will follow, one might consider whether one of the most likely ways of finding historically meaningful links between the perpetrators of the Holocaust and of other genocides is precisely this category of enjoyment, what LaCapra calls *jouissance*.

Alon Confino notes that the massive accumulation of data that characterizes recent Holocaust historiography runs the risk of smothering the horror, the sense of strangeness about the Holocaust that brought forth such interest amongst historians in the first place. The more complete the explanation, he also notes, the greater the danger of domestication, of losing that sense of strangeness.[xlv] Nevertheless, a striking sentence at the start of Peter Fritzsche's latest book seems to act as a challenge to those who study perpetrators: 'The violence of the Nazis was so excessive and their feeling of liberation from conventional morality so complete that any attempt at explanation falters. But a context of macabre premonitions of German death makes the mindset of perpetrators more comprehensible.'[xlvi] Fritzsche's approach seems to offer a way of trying to understand the perpetrators historically whilst also heeding Confino's warning. For Confino believes that explanations that focus on German culture and sensibilities – and this is what Fritzsche seems to be proposing – can, if done sensitively, to some extent avoid the problem of smothering feeling in factual material. But for now I leave that as a thought, a way of suggesting how research might move on from the remarkable achievements of *Täterforschung* since Friedlander decried the absence of such work just over twenty years ago.

Conclusion

It is now clearer than ever that the implementation of the Holocaust required negotiation between centre and periphery concerning the articulation and execution of orders. But even clearer is the fact that the negotiation involved took place in the context of clear orders delivered by Hitler and passed on primarily by Himmler. For all the achievements of the regional and local studies, we must ultimately come back to Berlin and to a very small group of German leaders in order to understand the decision-making process. As recent research shows, the Third Reich's leaders in Berlin were not alone responsible for the Holocaust, and one can no longer entertain the notion that the murder of the Jews followed a pre-conceived, detailed plan that was passed on through a clear chain of command. The perpetrators on the ground were not automatons who simply followed instructions from Berlin; they were much worse – active agents who drove the murder process forward at every stage. Yet without the leadership, the process is equally lacking in perspective. The regime's leaders' belief – increasingly widely shared as the war went on – that Germany's very existence was threatened by the machinations of the 'international Jew' drove the radicalisation process, as is clear in their responses to their underlings and their responses to the changing circumstances of the war. Hitler's words are the key, as for example, this speech addressed to high officers of the Wehrmacht on 26 May 1944 :

> By removing the Jew, I abolished the possibility of building up a revolutionary core or nucleus in Germany. Of course one might say to me, 'Yes, but couldn't you have solved this more simply – or not simply, since all other means would have been more complicated – but more humanely?' Gentlemen, fellow officers, we are engaged in a life-and-death struggle. If our opponents triumphed in this struggle, then the German people would be extirpated.[xlvii]

Examining the decision-making process is not enough. Perpetrator research has added new dimensions to our understanding of the Holocaust as it developed on the ground in occupied eastern Europe. Future research needs to build on these insights, both by bringing in cultural history, and by encouraging comparisons with perpetrators of other genocides.

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i Henry Friedlander, 'The Perpetrators' in *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust*, eds. Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes (Los Angeles: Simon Wiesenthal Center, 1983), p. 155.

ii See Gerhard Paul, 'Von Psychopathen, Technokraten des Terrors und "ganz gewöhnlichen" Deutschen: Die Täter der Shoah im Spiegel der Forschung' in *Die Täter der Shoah: Fanatische Nationalsozialisten oder ganz normale Deutsche?*, ed. Paul (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), pp. 13-90.

iii Peter Longerich, 'Tendenzen und Perspektiven der Täterforschung', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 14-15 (2 April 2007), p. 7. I will examine studies of Nazi institutions and agencies in more detail in chapter 3.

iv Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993 [1992]), p. 189.

v Harald Welzer, *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2005); James Waller, *Becoming Evil: How Ordinary People Commit Genocide and Mass Killing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Steven K. Baum, *The Psychology of Genocide: Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Rescuers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Paul A. Roth, 'Hearts of Darkness: "Perpetrator History" and Why There Is No Why', *History of the Human Sciences*, 17, 2-3 (2004), pp. 211-51 for a particularly strong defence of the situationist account.

vi Andrej Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord: Die Einsatzgruppe D in der südlichen Sowjetunion 1941-1943* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003), p. 387.

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viii Konrad Kwiet, 'Perpetrators and the Final Solution' in *The Memory of the Holocaust in the 21st Century: The Challenge for Education*, ed. Stephanie McMahon-Kaye (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2001), p. 80.

ix On Hoppe, see Karin Orth, *Die Konzentrationslager-SS: Sozialstrukturelle Analysen und biographische Studien* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004), pp. 217-21.

x Claudia Steur, 'Eichmanns Emissäre: Die "Judenberater" in Hitlers Europa' in *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg: "Heimatfront" und besetztes Europa*, eds. Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2000), p. 431. Further page references in parentheses.

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xiii Klaus-Michael Mallmann, 'Menschenjagd und Massenmord: Das neue Instrument der Einsatzgruppen und – kommandos 1938-1945' in *Die Gestapo im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, eds. Mallmann and Paul, p. 304.

xiv Edward B. Westermann, 'Shaping the Police Soldier as an Instrument for Annihilation' in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, eds. Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), pp. 129-50, here 131.

xv Cited in Westermann, 'Shaping the Police Soldier', p. 137.

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xvii Daluege, 'Zum 10. Jahrestage der nationalsozialistischen Revolution, SS und Polizei im großdeutschen Freiheitskämpfe' 30 January 1943, cited in Westermann, 'Shaping the Police Soldier', p. 145.

xviii Edward B. Westermann, '"Ordinary Men" or "Ideological Soldiers"? Police Battalion 310 in Russia, 1942', *German Studies Review*, 21, 1 (1998), p. 42; see also Jürgen Matthäus, 'What about the "Ordinary Men"? The German Order Police and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Union', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 10, 2 (1996), pp. 134-50; Konrad Kwiet, 'From the Diary of a Killing Unit' in *Why Germany? National Socialist Anti-Semitism and the European Context*, ed. John Milfull (Oxford: Berg, 1993), pp. 75-90 for similar attempts to balance ideology and situational factors.

xix Yaacov Lozowick, *Hitler's Bureaucrats: The Nazi Security Police and the Banality of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2002); Hans Safrian, *Die Eichmann-Männer* (Vienna: Europaverlag, 1993).

xx Paul, 'Von Psychopathen', p. 45, citing works by Paul, Michael Stolle, Jürgen Schuhladen-Krämer, and Michael Wildt. See also Steuer, 'Eichmanns Emissäre' for similar comments on the '*Judenberater*', especially Dannecker and Brunner, who combined bureaucracy and ideological commitment with particular brutality; and Kurt Pätzold and Erika Schwarz, *"Auschwitz war für mich nur ein Bahnhof". Franz Novak: der Transportoffizier Adolf Eichmanns* (Berlin: Metropol, 1994).

xxi George C. Browder, 'Perpetrator Character and Motivation: An Emerging Consensus?', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 17, 3 (2003), p. 495.

xxii Paul, 'Von Psychopathen', p. 62.

xxiii Angrick, *Besatzungspolitik und Massenmord*, p. 450.

xxiv Wendy Lower, '"Anticipatory Obedience" and the Nazi Implementation of the Holocaust in the Ukraine: A Case Study of Central and Peripheral Forces in the Generalbezirk Zhytomyr, 1941-1944', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 16, 1 (2002), pp. 4-5.

xxv Lower, '"Anticipatory Obedience"', p. 13.

xxvi Lower, '"Anticipatory Obedience"', p. 13.

xxvii Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: Biographie* (Munich: Siedler, 2008), esp. pp. 543-58. Longerich writes (p. 557): 'Betrachtet man Himmlers wahrhaft atemberaubende Reisetätigkeit in diesen Wochen und Monaten, so wird deutlich, dass er nach seiner Zurücksetzung in der Besatzungspolitik von Ende Juli bis Ende September/Anfang Oktober alles nur Mögliche unternommen hatte, um die Massenexekutionen von Juden in der Sowjetunion, mit denen seine Mordeinheiten unter "sicherheitspolitischen" Vorwänden schon begonnen hatten, zu einem flächendeckenden Genozid zu erweitern: Die entscheidende Initiative, zum systematischen Mord an der jüdischen Zivilbevölkerung überzugehen, war in allen Einsatzgebieten seiner Einheiten jeweils von ihm selbst ausgegangen.'

xxviii Jürgen Matthäus, 'Controlled Escalation: Himmler's Men in the Summer of 1941 and the Holocaust in the Occupied Soviet Territories', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21, 2 (2007), p. 223.

xxix Matthäus, 'Controlled Escalation', p. 224.

xxx Matthäus, 'Controlled Escalation', p. 229.

xxxi Matthäus, 'Controlled Escalation', p. 234.

xxxii Matthäus, 'Controlled Escalation', p. 233.

xxxiii Ian Kershaw, 'Improvised Genocide? The Emergence of the "Final Solution" in the "Warthegau"', Transactions of the *Royal Historical Society*, 6th Series (1992), pp. 51-78.

xxxiv Alexander V. Prusin, 'A Community of Violence: The SiPo/SD and Its Role in the Nazi Terror System in Generalbezirk Kiew', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 21, 1 (2007), pp. 1-30.

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xxxvii Longerich, 'Tendenzen und Perspektiven der Täterforschung', p. 7.

xxxviii Alon Confino, 'Narrative Form and Historical Sensation: On Saul Friedländer's *The Years of Extermination*', *History and Theory* (forthcoming); Paul Betts and Christian Wiese, eds., *Saul Friedländer's* The Years of Extermination (New York: Continuum, forthcoming).

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xli Diner, *Cataclysms*, p. 180. On the status of the 'as if' in determining perpetrators' actions, see Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Evil and Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 87-89.

xlii Mark Roseman, 'Ideas, Contexts, and the Pursuit of Genocide, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute London*, 25, 1 (2003), pp. 65, 83.

xliii Michael Wildt, 'Gewalt als Partizipation', pp. 236-7, 238.

xliv Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Massenmord und schlechtes Gewissen: Die deutsche Bevölkerung, die NS-Führung und der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008), p. 10.

xlv Confino, 'Narrative Form'.

xlvi Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 4-5.

xlvii Cited in Longerich, *The Unwritten Order*, pp. 122-23. On the perpetrators' sense of their own victimisation see Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*; Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination*; Michael Geyer, 'Endkampf 1918 and 1945: German Nationalism, Annihilation, and Self-Destruction' in *No Man's Land of Violence: Extreme Wars in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Alf Lüdtke and Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), pp. 35-67; Moses, 'Empire, Colony, Genocide'.