

From Collaboration to Cooperation: German Historiography of the Holocaust in Hungary

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This article provides an overview of German research on the Holocaust in Hungary. Its first part sketches four larger contexts of the professional study of the Holocaust in Germany to show why, though it was one of the major chapters of the genocide against European Jews, the Holocaust in Hungary has not emerged as a preoccupation among German historians. The second and longer part examines the premises, conclusions, and reception of the three most relevant German-language monographs on the Holocaust in Hungary and immediately adjacent subjects. I argue that the Holocaust in Hungary has only been discovered in German historiography as a result of larger shifts starting in the mid-1980s, and the number of specialists in Germany dedicated to its study and the level of cooperation between scholars in the two countries has remained surprisingly limited. Nonetheless, German historiography has been responsible for path-breaking and widely discussed monographs regarding Hungary, with the publication of Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach's *Das letzte Kapitel* in particular serving as the subject of a transnational quarrel among historians in the early years of this century. I close with the stipulation that, with the further development of all-European perspectives on the Holocaust and growing interest in the last stages of World War II, the Hungarian case might be a more frequent subject of discussion in scholarly contexts that would ensure increased international visibility and attention in the future.

Keywords: Historiography, Hungary, Nazi Germany, the Holocaust, German-Hungarian relations

Introduction

This study offers an overview of German-language research on the Holocaust in Hungary with a focus on historical monographs published in Germany (but not in other countries where German is the most spoken or one of the official languages). Its core section analyzes the methods, conclusions, and reception of three major monographs on relevant subjects.¹ The books in question are,

1 Regina Fritz's more recent monograph *Nach Krieg und Judenmord* on Hungarian history politics related to the Holocaust constitutes another seminal German-language contribution which analyzes its topic in greater detail than any of its Hungarian-language counterparts. See Fritz, *Nach Krieg und Judenmord*. As this paper was originally conceived and written as part of a Yad Vashem project entitled *Trauma and Rehabilitation*,

first and perhaps most importantly, Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's *Das letzte Kapitel: Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/45*. Originally released in 2002, Gerlach and Aly's book has been widely discussed internationally and, especially since its translation in 2005, also in Hungary.² German-language publications on Hungary with clear bearings on our subject also include two perhaps somewhat lesser known but similarly substantial monographs from the late 1980s, namely Margit Szöllösi-Janze's history of the Arrow Cross, entitled *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn. Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung und Herrschaft*,³ and Rolf Fischer's study of Hungarian anti-Semitism until shortly before the genocide against Hungarian Jews, entitled *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939: die Zerstörung der magyarisch-jüdischen Symbiose*.⁴ I chose these works in part because they are arguably the most significant recent scholarly accomplishments in the field, but also because the focus on monographs enables the study of their varying receptions and the occasional interaction between scholars in the two countries.

After offering a brief summary of the key arguments of the major scholarly contributions in question and a discussion of their transnational reception, I embed the German scholarship on the Holocaust in Hungary in its broader contexts. I begin by sketching four such larger contexts to explain why the Holocaust in Hungary did not emerge as a more important subject in German historiography.⁵ These contexts are the emergence and changing priorities of contemporary history writing in postwar (West) Germany; the increasingly

where a separate paper was meant to tackle the case of Austria, Regina Fritz's book, which was written by an Austrian scholar not based in Germany, shall not be discussed below. (I have reviewed the book in Hungarian in *Korall*, 53, 212–15.)

2 Gerlach and Götz, *Das letzte Kapitel*. The book has appeared in Hungarian translation as Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet – a magyar zsidók legyilkolása*, trans. by Gábor Kerényi (Budapest: Noran, 2005). More on its reception below.

3 Szöllösi-Janze, *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung*.

4 Fischer, *Entwicklungsstufen*. The history of anti-Semitism may have received monographic treatment in Hungary in the 1970s, but the focus was on its early manifestations in modern times. See Kubinszky, *Politikai antiszemitizmus Magyarországon*.

5 Tellingly, only one edited volume devoted to the topic has been published in German: Mihok, *Ungarn und der Holocaust*. Based on a conference held at the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung in October 2003, this rather brief volume included, with the exception of Wolfgang Benz's "biographical notes" and editor Brigitte Mihok's reflection on patterns of Hungarian remembrance, only scholars from outside Germany, most of them from Hungary. Beyond this volume, the German-language contributions of Franz Horváth on the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania merit mention. Revealingly, in important German-language volumes such as the pathbreaking *Dimension des Völkermords*, the chapter on Hungary was, exceptionally in the context of the volume, penned by László Varga, an author from the country in question. See Benz,

detailed and nuanced explorations of Nazi mass violence; growing attention to the main settings of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe in recent decades; and the place of Hungary in the regional-comparative study of Central and Eastern Europe.

What this paper cannot offer (though the subject would certainly merit a similarly detailed study) is an exploration of German public remembrance and its evolution over time with a focus on the various roles Hungarian actors have played in shaping it, for instance by contributing to major postwar trial as witnesses or experts or critiquing key German products of self-documentation and self-examination (see, perhaps most notably, Krisztián Ungváry's response to the first major exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht in the mid-1990s). Nor do I intend to sketch the reverse of my current subject here, i.e. the role Hungarian historians have played in Germany and how their research has drawn on and may have influenced German scholarly discussions.

Major Contexts

The early postwar years saw the institutionalization of contemporary history writing (*Zeitgeschichte*) in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁶ The intention to deal with the Nazi past served as a major impetus behind the establishment of a decentralized field, with the Munich-based *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* founded in 1949 emerging as its key institutional setting.⁷ Though (unsurprisingly) more attention has been devoted to the postwar period since the early postwar years, the twelve years of the Third Reich have remained one of the central *foci* of German contemporary history writing in the seven decades since.

The agenda of dealing with the Nazi past has generated a multifaceted process over time. However, despite the central location of Nazi Germany within

Dimension des Völkermords. German historiography's treatment of various Hungarian historical topics has been the subject of a valuable German-language collection by Márta Fata, *Das Ungarnbild*.

6 *Zeitgeschichte* was famously defined by Hans Rothfels, a major agent of the institutionalization of the field, as "the epoch of contemporaries and its scholarly study." On Rothfels, see Eckel, *Hans Rothfels*. The officially anti-fascist communist state of East Germany may have heavily invested in acts of symbolic politics related to the Nazi past, including at major Nazi concentration camps within its territory such as Buchenwald, but it had not developed an internationally noted tradition of research into the history of the Holocaust and will therefore not be treated separately here.

7 The Institute, originally launched as the *Deutsches Institut für Geschichte der nationalsozialistischen Zeit* (German Institute for the History of the National Socialist Time) in 1949, was renamed *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute of Contemporary History) in 1952. For a monograph focused on the activities of the institute in a critical manner, see Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker*.

historiographical discussions of the contemporary era in the Federal Republic, the attention devoted to Nazi mass crimes has shown significant variation over time, with more recent decades seeing a massive increase. As Ian Kershaw insightfully remarked, long into the postwar period, West German historians seemed more interested in accounting for 1933 than attempting to explain 1941–42. In other words, they tended to devote much more attention to the origins of the Nazi dictatorship than to the origins or crimes of the Holocaust.⁸ As Frank Bajohr has put it, in the first decades after the war, German scholars preferred merely to interpret rather than actually research the history of the latter.⁹ Important scholarly accomplishments from earlier decades notwithstanding, the emergence of the Holocaust as a seminal subject in German historiography can be considered a relatively recent phenomenon which began no earlier than the mid-1980s.

Due to the presence of significant numbers of Jewish “displaced persons” in Germany after liberation, documenting and interpreting the Holocaust (*avant la lettre*) on German soil actually started practically immediately at the end of World War II.¹⁰ This exceptional situation in the immediate aftermath of the war was soon over though, and it is fair to state that no major early Holocaust historian with longer-term international impact was active in the two Germanies of the early postwar period.¹¹ Despite its devoted and professional focus on Nazi Germany, when it came to research on the Holocaust, the discipline of history in Germany thus lagged significantly behind the study of history in other countries, including the writings of a number of prolific “survivor historians” in Poland, France, Hungary, the United States, or the newly established State of Israel.¹²

Triggered by a new generational constellation and partly also by the Eichmann trial and especially the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963–65,¹³ both of which had

8 Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship*.

9 Bajohr, “Elvont rendszerviták.”

10 On this, see Jockusch, *Collect and Record!*

11 Joseph Wulf, a Jewish immigrant from Poland, constituted a significant but only partial exception. As Klaus Kempter has shown in his detailed biography, Wulf could at times be rather visible and successful in the German public sphere, but he nevertheless remained on the margins of the German historical profession. Kempter, *Joseph Wulf*. On “Survivor Historians and the Holocaust” (with my contribution on Jenő Lévai), see the special issue (no. 1–2, 2015) of *Holocaust Studies. A Journal of Culture and History* edited by Boaz Cohen and Tom Lawson.

12 It is rather telling that within Germany, jurists had for decades been more actively engaged with the subject. On this, see Pohl, “A holokauszt, mint német és kelet-európai történelmi probléma.”

13 See Pendas, *The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial*, and Yablonka, *The State of Israel vs. Adolf Eichmann*.

significant though understudied connections to the new understandings of the implementation of the Holocaust in Hungary and the experiences of survivors, the 1960s and 1970s brought about a first wave of substantial scholarly works on Nazi mass violence.¹⁴ Even so, German historians continued to devote—in retrospect, surprisingly—little attention to the genocidal aspects of Nazi rule, and key aspects of the Holocaust continued to be practically ignored.¹⁵ The breakthrough of Holocaust historiography did not take place until the 1980s and especially the 1990s.¹⁶ In his recent overview of the development of what he has called a difficult field, Ulrich Herbert identified the years between 1985 and 2000 as the period of most intense engagement with this darkest chapter of German history.¹⁷

Perpetrator research has remained one of the special strengths of local historiography. Inspired partly by the groundbreaking works of scholars from outside Germany such as Christopher Browning,¹⁸ the 1990s saw a whole host of refined and detailed research projects into concrete aspects of the implementation of the Holocaust and elaborate debates regarding its major and more “ordinary” perpetrators.¹⁹ These research endeavors led to a substantial transformation of the image of Holocaust perpetrators from within German society and across the continent, not to mention an expansion of their numbers. No longer was this group reduced, in the scholarship, to a small minority of fanatical Nazis. The category of Holocaust perpetrator now came to be applied to hundreds of thousands. The process has also resulted in a reconceptualization of the context of and motivations behind the perpetrators’ deeds.

In this period (between 1985 and 2000), several new subfields of professional Holocaust historiography also emerged. Perhaps most importantly, in contrast to the previous decades, German scholars started to devote themselves to

14 As a major example, see Broszat et al., *Anatomie des SS-Staates*. The late 1970s also saw the release of a major monograph on the treatment of Soviet POWs: Streit, *Keine Kameraden*.

15 Rather characteristically, a major exception from the 1970s studying the Reinhardt murder facilities was based on documentation from German trials. See Ruckerl, *Nationalsozialistische*. A first major German-language monograph on the Reinhardt death camps was published no earlier than 2013. See Berger, *Experten der Vernichtung*.

16 The airing of the American series *Holocaust* on German television in 1979 brought the term Holocaust into widespread use in West Germany. The shock waves it sent indirectly also generated much new interest among researchers. For a transatlantic study on such matters, see Eder, *Holocaust Angst*.

17 Herbert, “Holocaust-Forschung in Deutschland,” 31–81.

18 Browning, *Ordinary Men*.

19 Innovative works on perpetrators include Herbert, *Best. Biographische Studien* and Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten*.

the study of the perspectives of the persecuted as well.²⁰ Such a boom in Holocaust research in the late twentieth century notwithstanding, the fact that for a long time the massive growth of German scholarship did not lead to the establishment of major centers or independent chairs devoted to Holocaust Studies remained rather conspicuous in international comparison.²¹ While there have been attempts to develop such centers in recent years, German historians of the Holocaust continue to be active at diverse institutions, and the established historians of contemporary times, unlike in North America, for example, have rarely been exclusively or even primarily devoted to the study of this subject.²²

In the meantime, the end of the Cold War and the fall of communist regimes not only resulted in the unexpected and sudden unification of the two Germanies but also brought crucial changes in the basic circumstances of the study of the Holocaust. The postwar decades, when, from a West German point of view, the central locations of the Holocaust had practically all been “behind the Iron Curtain,” were now over. Crucially for historians, the new accessibility of the major theaters of World War II and the Holocaust meant that local archival materials were now much more easily available. The dramatic political changes would thus lead to a new temporal and geographical focus in the study of Nazi Germany too: a profound interest in the second six years of the regime and the appearance of numerous publications which offer nuanced local contextualization of its major crimes.²³ Such attempts at local contextualization have often (and with direct bearing on our subject) also highlighted the pronounced roles played by non-German perpetrators.²⁴

20 See, for example, Löw, *Juden im Getto*, and Meyer, *Tödliche Gratwanderung*.

21 German historical studies of the Holocaust tend to be intimately connected to and are typically embedded in the study of Nazi Germany and World War II, even though several recent institutional changes, notably the creation of a department for Holocaust Studies at the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich and the establishment of the first chair for Holocaust Studies in Frankfurt a.M., have pointed toward the emergence of a largely independent field. This, however, has not made Germany entirely comparable to the United States or Israel, where rather large and separate institutions and programs in Holocaust Studies have emerged, and have done so significantly earlier.

22 Such institutions include university departments, research centers, and memorial sites (*Gedenkstätte*). I ought to add that this decentralization does not mean that the level of institutionalization would be unsatisfactory. See Gerlach, “A tömeges erőszak nemcsak politikatörténet.”

23 See the discussion of this trend in Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust*.

24 To mention only some of the most important publications: Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*; Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei*; Dieckmann, *Deutsche Besatzungspolitik*; Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*. In more recent years, the case of Romania has been the subject of several important works: Heinen, *Rumänien, der Holocaust*; Geissbühler, *Blutiger Juli*; Glass, *Deutschland und die Verfolgung*. Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's *Das letzte Kapitel* can be usefully placed alongside these works.

Despite this notable “eastward” shift to the actual settings of the implementation of the genocide, much of the German historiography has not only continued to insist on the allegedly “unique” features of the Nazi period, but has remained primarily interested in the history of the German state and society during those twelve years.²⁵ In other words, the increasing internationalization of Holocaust research and the Europeanization of the subject of research notwithstanding—processes to which German scholars have actively contributed—comparative and transnational approaches to the Nazi period have been rather slow to develop.²⁶

In this context, new specialized studies on the involvement of East European states and actors offered a significant corrective to the practically exclusive focus on German Nazis familiar from previous decades. As Dieter Pohl put it, the new “common sense” among scholars is that East European states pursued radical programs of ethnic homogenization during World War II, and these programs included an “anti-Semitic consensus” which, however, aimed at realizing somewhat different goals than Nazi Germany: whereas a politics of extermination was being implemented by the latter, the policies of the former typically aimed for expropriation, exploitation, and expulsion under Europe-wide circumstances largely but not exclusively created by Germany.²⁷ As Pohl has added, in practice, there was substantial overlap between the two agendas though, which eventually meant that the East European states and societies became actively involved in perpetrating genocide.

In more recent years, the very term “collaboration” has also been contested, partly because of its clear moral undertones but also because it implies a rather strict hierarchy among actors. The more neutral-sounding concept of cooperation, which also allows for more impactful forms of local initiative, has repeatedly been suggested as a potentially more adequate alternative. The discussion among German historians regarding the relative merit of the two terms is ongoing. Its outcome is likely to have important consequences for the ways in which the deeds of East European actors will be conceptualized in the future, and the history of the Holocaust in Hungary could potentially provide intriguing evidence

25 For a major recent effort to compare beyond the totalitarian model, see Geyer and Fitzpatrick, *Beyond Totalitarianism*.

26 Such a transnational turn has been proposed in Patel, “In Search of a Second Historicization.” Comparative fascism studies have also been pursued outside Germany more than within. This was partly due to the rather prevalent thesis on the uniqueness and incomparability of the National Socialist regime and its crimes. On comparative studies, see Iordachi, *Comparative Fascist Studies*.

27 See Pohl, “A holokauszt mint német és kelet-európai történelmi probléma.”

for discussions and debates concerning this question.²⁸ However, Hungary's trajectory and transnational connections admittedly continue to occupy rather peripheral places in German historiography of the Holocaust; as a matter of fact, German historians continue to draw on Hungarian-language primary sources and scholarship originating in Hungary only in rather exceptional cases.

To move to the fourth major context of German historiography on the Holocaust in Hungary, German historians often prefer to place Hungary into a broader regional perspective. In this perspective, Hungary, like Romania, Slovakia, and Croatia, figures as a state in the Nazi sphere of influence with notable levels of independent agency.²⁹ A key interpretative thrust concerning these countries has aimed to explore the connections between their foreign policy considerations and their "Jewish policy" during World War II.³⁰ The gist of the argument here could be briefly summarized as follows: their trust in a German victory after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union made these countries cooperate avidly with the Axis, partly in order to curry favor with the imperial giant at one another's expense. Their trust also made them swiftly radicalize their anti-Jewish drive in 1941–42 to the point of active involvement in genocide. However, the change in the tide of the war in 1942–43 turned them into much more cautious or even unwilling satellites.

This interpretation is, by and large, applicable to both Romania and Slovakia. However, the special timing of the main phase of the Holocaust in Hungary in 1944–45, i.e. after the main phases of the Europe-wide genocide and the clear reversal of fortunes on the Eastern Front, means that such links are rather tenuous in the case of Hungary. Hungarian actors had on several occasions committed mass murder against Jews in Hungary or in Soviet territory before 1944, and they had initiated deportations from Hungary shortly after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in 1941,³¹ but the main phase of the Holocaust in Hungary (the deportation of approximately 437,000 persons from Hungary, the very large majority of them to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the course of less than

28 For an elaboration of this point, see my article, "The Radicalization of Hungarian anti-Semitism."

29 This statement applies to Slovakia and Croatia as well, two countries that have often been conceived as mere "puppet states." See especially Tönsmeier, *Das Dritte Reich und die Slowakei*, and Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*.

30 See, perhaps most characteristically, the recent monograph by Case, *Between States* which is admittedly not a German work of scholarship but reflects transnational approaches.

31 See chapter two of Kádár et al., *The Holocaust in Hungary* in particular.

two months) coincided with the beginning of what turned out to be the last year of the war in Europe.³²

1944–45 amounts to a highly specific phase of World War II and of Nazi German history too. As compared to the impressive efforts historians made to account for the origins of the Nazi *Endlösung* decades ago,³³ these last waves of Nazi violence have begun to be studied in comparable detail only recently.³⁴ The further radicalization of the Nazi regime in the last stages of the war could indeed be usefully studied in combination with the most similar case of Hungary, not to mention the need to uncover in more detail the decisively important interactions among the representatives of the two countries and the members of the two societies in the same period.

To summarize, contemporary history writing emerged early in postwar West Germany, and this growing field has produced substantial and increasingly nuanced explorations of Nazi mass violence. However, only in recent decades has there been a closer focus on the actual settings of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, though without the Holocaust in Hungary emerging as an important preoccupation for German historians.

Key Contributions

Having sketched four major contexts of the German study of the Holocaust in Hungary, let us now turn to the most significant achievements of German historiography regarding this subject. Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's *Das letzte Kapitel* is in my assessment the towering achievement in this regard. In his most recent volume, Tim Cole, a leading British authority on the Holocaust in Hungary went so far as to place *Das letzte Kapitel* next to Randolph Braham's seminal *The Politics of Genocide*,³⁵ calling the book one of the two comprehensive,

32 By this time, Auschwitz-Birkenau had emerged not only as the main center of the Nazi concentration camp system but also as the main annihilation camp and central stage of the Holocaust. Now see Wachsmann, *KL. A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*.

33 See, among many other works, Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution*. See also Gerlach, "The Wannsee Conference."

34 See Kershaw, *The End. Hitler's Germany*. On the concentration camps in the last year of the war and thus with special relevance to the scholarly study of the Holocaust of Hungarian Jewry, now see Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno*. On the death marches (which were closely connected to the deportations from Hungary), see Blatman, *The Death Marches*.

35 See Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*.

internationally available histories.³⁶ At the same time, Cole contrasted these two major works in several respects, pointing out that whereas Braham drew “in the main on national level Hungarian state archives,” the German authors drew “primarily on German documents.”³⁷ Perhaps more importantly, Cole asserted that the two overviews crucially diverge in their understandings of why the Holocaust was carried out in Hungary: “In what approaches the playing out of the so-called intentionalist vs. functionalist debate that dominated Holocaust Studies in the 1970s and 1980s in miniature, these authors differ over whether a Nazi master plan for deportations was implemented in Hungary, or greater importance should be assigned to the local dynamic in the radicalization of measures.”³⁸

Das letzte Kapitel not only constitutes the sole monographic study on the subject in German, it can also be considered innovative in several respects. Gerlach and Aly’s book devotes substantial attention to the prehistory, motivating factors, and background of the Holocaust in Hungary. Following a theoretically- and methodologically-oriented introductory chapter, the book analyzes Hungarian–German relations in the interwar years, the socioeconomic situation of Hungarian Jews, and the anti-Semitism of the Horthy era. The coverage of these themes is in turn followed by a discussion of the key reasons behind and an analysis of the concrete manner of implementation of the German occupation; the composition and functioning of the occupying apparatus; state-organized economic expropriation and redistribution; and the decision-making process and policies of annihilation. Last but not least, the book covers the persecution of Hungarian Jews after the major wave of their mass deportation in May, June, and July 1944 as well as their main survival strategies, including their sufferings as slave laborers.

Das letzte Kapitel was authored by two well-recognized German scholars who have published several other important works on Nazi rule, the Holocaust, and extreme forms of violence.³⁹ Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach were first recognized for their studies on the planners of annihilation and the connections between the German war economy and genocide, respectively, which were

36 The years later saw the release of Kádár et al., *The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide*.

37 Cole, “Prologue.”

38 Ibid., 3.

39 See Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies*; Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*; Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord*; Aly and Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*; Aly, “Endlösung”; Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat*; Aly, *Die Belasteten*; Aly, *Europa gegen die Juden*. Alongside Aly’s coauthored book on the case of Hungary, another three of Götz Aly’s books have also been translated into Hungarian.

published in the late 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁰ In recent decades, Aly has arguably come to shape the German debates on Nazi mass violence and its origins perhaps more than any other author.

In her review, Heidemarie Petersen highlighted that their joint monograph from 2002 might be viewed as Aly's and Gerlach's attempt at combining their previous explanatory models.⁴¹ Their monograph indeed approached Hungary as a case study to explore political, socioeconomic, and military historical connections, and it provided the first such complex study of a much neglected major chapter of the Holocaust. As it was written by two prominent scholars with established reputations, *Das letzte Kapitel* was arguably bound to be rather widely received in Germany and to shape the reigning conceptions of the Hungarian chapter of the Holocaust. Several scholars with important contributions of their own to the historiography, such as Frank Golczewski, Thomas Sandkühler, Tatjana Tönsmeier, and Michael Wildt, have indeed offered summaries, contextualizations, and assessments of the book on the pages of scholarly journals and in major daily newspapers.

The book has also been widely received and debated in Hungary. Upon its release in Hungarian translation in 2005,⁴² it was reviewed in various scholarly forums, including non-historical venues such as the journal on social policy *Esély* (Opportunity) and *Közgazdasági Szemle* (Review of Economics), as well as Hungarian mainstream dailies and weeklies, such as *Népszabadság* and *Élet és Irodalom*. Gerlach and Aly's approach, furthermore, could be usefully compared to those used by some of the most promising young Hungarian historians of the Holocaust of the time (who now belong to the middle generation), such as Gábor Kádár, Zoltán Vági, and Krisztián Ungváry.⁴³

Tellingly, social policy expert Dorottya Szikra reviewed Kádár and Vági's book on the economic annihilation of Hungarian Jews alongside the Hungarian translation of *Das letzte Kapitel* (the two were published at almost exactly the same time), lauding them as milestones in the secondary literature which mark the start of a new epoch in the study of "social policy."⁴⁴ As Szikra maintained, such innovative works explore the links between questions of foreign and domestic

40 See, in particular, Aly and Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*, Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*.

41 Petersen, "Rezension von: Christian Gerlach / Götz Aly: Das letzte Kapitel."

42 Gerlach and Aly, *Az utolsó fejezet*.

43 By the latter, see especially Ungváry, *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege*, which significantly draws on Götz Aly's pathbreaking explorations.

44 Szikra, "Új ablak a magyar szociális ellátások történetére," 110; Kádár and Vági, *Hullarablás*.

policy as well as sociological and political economic factors, on the one hand, and racial policy and persecution, on the other, to reveal the dark side of modern social policy.⁴⁵ At the same time, Szikra contrasted the works of the two author duos by highlighting that Gerlach and Aly remained focused on states and their international relations, whereas Kádár and Vági also devoted attention to the actual mechanisms of expropriation and violence on the local-societal level.⁴⁶

This important difference was arguably the key factor behind the criticism leveled against *Das letzte Kapitel* by Gábor Kádár and Zoltán Vági in their review, entitled “‘Racionális’ népirtás Magyarországon” (“Rational” Genocide in Hungary).⁴⁷ Kádár and Vági praised *Das letzte Kapitel* for its presentation of the Holocaust as a complex series of events and for its elaboration of a multicausal explanatory scheme. They categorized the book as a post-functionalist synthesis, which asserted the primacy of pragmatic considerations but integrated elements of both the functionalist and the intentionalist schools of interpretation. Kádár and Vági by and large agreed with Aly and Gerlach that the plan and the implementation of the Holocaust in Hungary were generated, above all, by unsolved problems related to the economy and financing of the Third Reich and a looming crisis in supplying German society. At the same time, a key aim of their review was to offer a critical assessment of Gerlach and Aly’s conception of German and Hungarian intentions and their depiction of the steps taken by the two sides to acquire the wealth of Hungarian Jews. Drawing on their own research, Kádár and Vági concluded that the persuasive power of the book was weakened by significant interpretative mistakes. In other words, they maintained that the approach was persuasive, but the authors’ specific interpretations were less convincing.

Kádár and Vági claimed that there was a tremendous gap between plans and their actual implementation, and they contended that by failing to address or explain this gap, Gerlach and Aly had not succeeded at grasping the practical mechanisms of expropriation.⁴⁸ As specific agencies, such as ministries and local administrations, were ultimately responsible for the exact manner of implementation, cases of embezzlement and theft proliferated,

45 More specifically, Szikra recommended the study of the two sides of social redistribution (the “contributors” and the “recipients”), with particular attention to “racial” distinctions.

46 Ibid., 113.

47 Kádár and Vági, “‘Racionális’ népirtás Magyarországon.”

48 As they explained, the Hungarian government may have declared principles of redistribution, but it proved unable to develop comprehensive legal framework in 1944.

enabling significant segments of Hungarian society to profit from robbing the persecuted without the Hungarian government managing to inject the decisive part of so-called “Jewish wealth” into the “Hungarian” economy or channel it into the state budget.⁴⁹ Moreover, Kádár and Vági challenged Aly and Gerlach’s contention that the occupying German forces had remained largely uninvolved in this dimension of the genocidal process: instead of a neat division of labor as postulated by them, the Germans’ actions to acquire “Jewish wealth” in Hungary led to numerous conflicts and raised serious tensions between them and their local partners, according to Kádár and Vági.

Beyond such criticisms of a more empirical bent, Kádár and Vági also complained that Gerlach and Aly had interpreted the events through somewhat narrowly defined concepts of rationality and irrationality. As the reviewers pointed out, “Christian Hungarians” may have aimed to make economic gains, but the mass deportations in fact significantly damaged the Hungarian economy and disrupted public supply. As these aspects were neglected in their book, the German authors did not realize or address the fact that the deportation of hundreds of thousands caused a decline in production and had a deleterious effect also on the economic situation of “non-Jews” in Hungary.

Beyond Kádár and Vági’s review of the German original of *Das letzte Kapitel* in *Bukész*, the leading Hungarian-language journal devoted to scholarly reviews, Gerlach and Aly’s key theses were also scrutinized by László Karsai, one of the doyens of Hungarian Holocaust historiography.⁵⁰ If “‘Racionális’ népirtás Magyarországon” was penned by scholars explicitly sympathetic to Gerlach and Aly’s post-functionalist agenda even if they also questioned the more specific interpretations in their book, Karsai proved much more critically disposed: he essentially argued that Gerlach and Aly’s ambition of reinterpreting the Holocaust in Hungary failed to yield convincing results.⁵¹ In his “A holokauszt utolsó fejezete” (The last chapter of the Holocaust), Karsai explained that the two key novelties of the book were, first, its arguments that the Sztójay government played the role of initiator and actively shaped the implementation of the Holocaust and, second, that the stolen wealth of Hungarian Jews significantly

49 In other words, they claimed that the state-led campaign of robbing the dead had been executed much more efficiently than that of redistributing wealth.

50 Karsai, “A holokauszt utolsó fejezete.”

51 Rather characteristically for Karsai’s “rejectionist” take on the book, a section of his elaborate critique was entitled “A List of Mistakes.” The pages that followed were meant to demonstrate Karsai’s profound knowledge of key primary sources, sources he claimed Gerlach and Aly often misread.

contributed to financing the war economy and stabilizing the quality of life for the rest of the population.

Karsai agreed with Gerlach and Aly that the Germans may not have arrived with a detailed plan of deportation in March 1944, but he emphasized that it must have seemed unnecessary to them to prepare such an elaborate blueprint in writing. In other words, the lack of evidence regarding detailed German planning did not imply that the Germans had not been preparing to murder as many Hungarian Jews as they possibly could. Karsai thereby contested the claim that ideological factors had played only secondary roles in the genocide, and he made considerable efforts to demonstrate that a comprehensive plan of deportation was formulated early on during the German occupation. In his assessment, the fact that the Germans and Hungarians responsible for deporting Hungarian Jews created six zones of deportation before the end of April 1944 contradicts Gerlach and Aly's conception of the three main stages of interactive decision making.⁵² Moreover, like Kádár and Vági, Karsai emphasized that registering, storing, and "redistributing" so-called "Jewish wealth" in an orderly manner proved beyond the capacity of Hungarian authorities, and that *Das letzte Kapitel* failed to survey Holocaust-related costs incurred by the authorities to arrive at a more precise balance sheet.⁵³

Karsai concluded that the explanation according to which the Hungarian authorities practically forced the deportation of the large majority of Hungarian Jews on the Nazi Germans amounted to no more than "baseless speculation" and "a harsh accusation." In short, the primarily intentionalist interpretation that Karsai reiterated went hand in hand with his suggestion of the clear primacy of German responsibility, whereas Kádár and Vági's greater appreciation for the (post-)functionalist position also implied more ready acceptance of the Hungarian side's grave culpability.

It is worth comparing these critical Hungarian-language assessments with the reception of *Das letzte Kapitel* in German. Frank Golczewski, German and Eastern Europe expert and professor at the University of Hamburg, thought the book offered a radical reinterpretation that presented the Hungarian Shoah as

52 It is worth noting that Kádár and Vági have released a volume on the stages of Hungarian-German interactive decision making in the spring of 1944 since. See Kádár and Vági, *A végső döntés*.

53 His line of reasoning was that the deported masses were simply too large, the time period too short, and the property left behind too enticing for thieves on the lower levels of power hierarchies, so the Hungarian state could not succeed in acquiring and putting to new use the otherwise notable wealth that the Holocaust might have generated.

an act “largely justified and implemented” by Hungarians save for the actual acts of murder.⁵⁴ Intriguingly, Golczewski asked whether access to further sources in Hungarian would have made Gerlach and Aly reconsider some of their conclusions, claiming that this was “difficult to judge,” but then adding that “this might not be the case to a large extent.”⁵⁵ Thomas Sandkühler, a noted expert on the Holocaust in East Galicia and, as of 2009, professor for *Geschichtsdidaktik* at Humboldt University in Berlin, similarly explained that Gerlach and Aly’s book revealed a division of labor between Hungarians and Germans which was used due to partly overlapping and partly divergent motives when short-term German calculations met longer-term Hungarian plans.⁵⁶ Sandkühler also thought that one of the main findings of the book was how eagerly Hungarians participated in the genocide, and he expressed no reservations or qualifications concerning this conclusion. His only notable criticism concerned Gerlach and Aly’s strong emphasis on “reformist social policy.” Sandkühler thought that, in this respect, the authors effectively reproduced contemporary Nazi propaganda slogans.

Unlike his aforementioned colleagues, Jürgen Zarusky, a researcher at the Institute of Contemporary History, formulated more encompassing criticisms of *Das letzte Kapitel*. Zarusky shared the view that anti-Semitic obsessions alone could not account for the Holocaust and questions regarding the economic rationality of the genocide deserved to be raised.⁵⁷ However, he took serious issue with Gerlach and Aly, claiming that the connections on which their book was meant to focus were not properly illuminated: they did not really manage to explain the relationships between various causes and impacts, Zarusky asserted, nor did they explain which motives were of decisive importance for different actors. Zarusky’s review ultimately argued that “economic rationalizations” played a limited role in Nazi policy making towards the end of the war, and there could be talk neither of the primacy of production logics over anti-Semitic considerations nor of the efficient use of the labor force.

What all the aforementioned German reviews have in common is that none of their authors could claim research expertise regarding the history of the Holocaust in Hungary.⁵⁸ The criticisms they offered thus tended to be milder

54 Golczewski, “Das letzte Kapitel.”

55 Ibid.

56 Sandkühler, “Arbeitsteiliger Massenmord.”

57 Zarusky, “Lag dem nationalsozialistischen Judenmord.”

58 The only scholar with expertise in Hungarian history to have reviewed the book in German is Árpád von Klimó. However, Klimó is not a Holocaust researcher either. See von Klimó, “Der ungarische Judenmord.”

and diverged from the detailed empirical rebuttals made by Kádár and Vági or Karsai by focusing more on questions of theory and overall interpretation. At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the general assessments of Aly and Gerlach's approach and explanations ranged from positive to negative in both countries.

As Regina Fritz recently remarked, the history of fascism and that of the Arrow Cross movement, party, and regime in particular have long remained rather poorly researched within Hungarian historiography, despite or perhaps because of all the political discourses surrounding them.⁵⁹ It may be true that around the time of Fritz's writing in 2013, two new Hungarian-language monographs were just about to be published that arguably substantially improved the situation.⁶⁰ Until then, however, Margit Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn. Historischer Kontext, Entwicklung und Herrschaft* (The Arrow Cross movement in Hungary. Historical context, development and rule) could be considered the only major work of history on the Arrow Cross in any language, other than Éva Teleki's somewhat dated work from the 1970s.⁶¹ Based on the author's dissertation from 1986 and awarded the prize of the German Society for Southeast European Studies (*Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft*) in 1987, Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* was eventually published in 1989.

More specifically, Szöllösi-Janze's book offers an original exploration of German, British, and American archival materials as well as documents drawn up or used by key Arrow Cross functionaries, while also drawing on the secondary literature in German and Hungarian. The book devotes some eighty pages to describing the socioeconomic and political scene of interwar Hungary to illuminate the broader context of the emergence of the Arrow Cross. Szöllösi-Janze subsequently provides more focused analyses of the sudden rise, social support, changing fortunes, and major failures of the Arrow Cross movement between 1935 and 1945.⁶²

59 Fritz, "Zwischen Dokumentieren," 30. As a significant exception, Regina Fritz could refer to Zoltán András Kovács's study of the Interior Ministry of the Szálasi government. Kovács, *A Szálasi-kormány belügyminisztériuma*. Important Hungarian scholarship on fascism from earlier decades include works by Miklós Lackó and Mária Ormos. See Lackó, *Nyilasok, nemzetiszocialisták*, Ormos, *Nácizmus – fasizmus*. The prolific Ormos also published biographies of Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler.

60 Paksa, *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták*, Paksy, *Nyilas mozgalom Magyarországon*. There are now also two Hungarian-language biographies of Ferenc Szálasi, one by Paksa and one by Karsai.

61 For Teleki's earlier work in Hungarian, see Teleki, *Nyilas uralom Magyarországon*.

62 The years 1935 to 1944 receive slightly more attention than the months of Arrow Cross rule in late 1944 and early 1945 (180 as opposed to 150 pages).

As Thomas Schlemmer and Hans Woller argue in their overview of the evolution of fascist studies, Szöllösi-Janze's book might be viewed as part of a third wave of research into fascism when researchers began to explore indigenous movements outside the "core Axis states" of Italy and Germany in greater depth.⁶³ However, as Schlemmer and Woller highlight, such important additions to the study of fascism could count on significantly less public interest in West Germany than those that were originally published during the great wave of the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁴ At the same time, the German reception of Szöllösi-Janze's work was generally positive, as illustrated by Hungarologist Holger Fischer's review, which praised *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* as an impressively documented and logically structured work "entirely worthy" of the prize it had been awarded.⁶⁵ Gyula Borbándi, one of the leading personalities of the Hungarian émigré intellectual scene in Germany, also praised the work as "the most detailed" and "best documented" one on its topic which thus filled a significant gap in the scholarly literature.⁶⁶ Borbándi's review highlighted two original aspects of Szöllösi-Janze's approach in particular, namely its detailed analysis of the social bases of the Arrow Cross and its descriptive-analytical tone, i.e. an absence of evaluative statements (with which Borbándi did not take issue).⁶⁷

Szöllösi-Janze had a familiar connection to her subject which could potentially have made the international reception of the monograph's neutral approach and tone more polemically charged (even if this family relationship was not explicitly highlighted in the scholarly discussions). Nicholas Nagy-Talavera, a leading expert on Central and Eastern European fascism at the time, for instance, found Margit Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* to be an "impressive study."⁶⁸ At the same time, Nagy-Talavera not only pointed to the special and rather unfortunate timing of Szöllösi-Janze's research during the last phase of

63 See Schlemmer and Woller, "Politischer Deutungskampf," 11. *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* could thus be seen as the Hungarian counterpart to Armin Heinen's *Die Legion "Erzengel Michael" in Rumänien. Soziale Bewegung und politische Organisation. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des internationalen Faschismus*, a near contemporaneous German-language monograph on the Iron Guard. See Heinen, *Die Legion*.

64 See Schlemmer and Woller, "Politischer Deutungskampf," 11.

65 Fischer, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze."

66 Borbándi, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze."

67 More specifically, Borbándi was unsatisfied with the categorization of certain Hungarian political forces, maintaining that Szöllösi-Janze's characterization of Gömbös' attempt as "fascism from above" was unconvincing. Indeed, this label struck him as a contradiction in terms.

68 Nagy-Talavera, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze," 456–57.

the Cold War and communist rule, i.e. shortly before much sensitive archival material would have become available. As a witness to the events depicted in the book, he was also convinced that, no matter how commendable Szöllösi-Janze's detachment may have seemed from a professional point of view, she had thereby unduly neglected crucial aspects of the period.

Leading British Habsburg historian R. J. W. Evans thought that, beyond providing a reliable but not terribly innovative description of the advances of fascist organizations and of the supporters and breakthrough of the Arrow Cross in the Hungary in the 1930s, Szöllösi-Janze managed to break new ground in two areas in particular: by providing a balanced appraisal of the Arrow Cross worldview and by examining the party's attempts to implement its policy ideas.⁶⁹ However, like Nagy-Talavera, R. J. W. Evans found Szöllösi-Janze's dispassionate approach insufficient to convey a real sense of key personalities and a convincing account of the horrible drama they unleashed. It might be worth noting that, rather differently from the recognized country and regional experts Nagy-Talavera and Evans, German-British historian Francis L. Carsten praised Szöllösi-Janze's book for providing a mass of original detail and a thorough description of Arrow Cross rule in 1944–45, and his only major criticism related to what he saw as Szöllösi-Janze's insufficient explanation of the temporary decline of the Arrow Cross during the years of World War II, when Germany still appeared victorious.⁷⁰

Rolf Fischer's *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939*, the third major German-language monograph on Hungary with a bearing on the history of the Holocaust, was published in 1988 and could thus be seen as part of the same broader wave of interest in the persecution and extermination of European Jewry observable after the mid-1980s.⁷¹ Like Szöllösi-Janze's history of the Arrow Cross, Rolf Fischer's book received some international attention. Soon after its release, *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* was reviewed by both István Deák and Hillel Kieval, two eminent authorities

69 Evans, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze," 260–61.

70 See Carsten, "Margit Szöllösi-Janze," 363–64. It might be worth adding that, despite such reservations from abroad regarding her award-winning dissertation and unlike Christian Gerlach (who has been appointed to a tenured position at the University of Bern in Switzerland) and Götz Aly (who has established himself as an extraordinarily successful independent historian in Germany), Margit Szöllösi-Janze, who has subsequently specialized in the history of science, became a professor first in Salzburg and then also in Germany, in Cologne and more recently in Munich. Her dissertation on the Arrow Cross may not have been a decisive reason behind these appointments, but it clearly has not constituted a hindrance either.

71 Herbert, "Holocaust-Forschung."

on Habsburg and post-Habsburg Jewish history in the United States.⁷² The contemporaneous international reception of this book in fact seemed less critical than that of *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn*, though its reviewers did not appear convinced of the true originality of Fischer's approach or findings.

István Deák thought Fischer's key thesis concerned the abrupt end of a Hungarian-Jewish symbiosis in 1918–19, which inaugurated a process of officially supported dissimilation and supposedly culminated in the Holocaust of Hungarian Jews. Deák called Rolf Fischer's book a "well-documented study," but he also had several critical remarks. He thought Fischer did not quite give an adequate impression of the phenomenal rise of Hungarian Jewry under the Dual Monarchy, and he noted that some of the crucial roots of a Hungarian revolt against capitalism, liberalism, and modernity lay in the period before 1914.⁷³ Moreover, Deák saw Fischer's work as unduly one-sided in some of its critical insights: he thought Fischer overemphasized the anti-Semitic thrust of right-wing counter-revolutionary violence in 1919 without illuminating the larger context. Deák also questioned what he saw as Fischer's construction of a straight path leading from Horthy-era anti-Semitism starting in 1919 to the deportation and murder of Hungarian Jewry's large majority in 1941–45.⁷⁴

Hillel Kieval also argued that the narrative of *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* revolved around the decisive turn when Hungary pivoted away from being an inclusive country, in which a "liberal national consensus" reigned, to one that committed itself to a "Christian-nationalist" course and threatened to exclude its Jews, irrespective of their levels of assimilation.⁷⁵ As Kieval is primarily an expert on Jewish history in the Czech lands, it should perhaps come as no surprise that he commented on specifically Hungarian matters somewhat less elaborately than Deák. Nonetheless, he went on to offer more frontal criticisms of Fischer's book, complaining about its lack of originality, even predictability, and rather narrow source base. Again in contrast to Deák, Kieval assessed the overall interpretation of the book as laudably balanced: he thought Fischer focused on the internal dynamics of Hungarian anti-Semitism while also emphasizing what he called "partial pressure" from

72 Deák, "Rolf Fischer," 712–13.

73 Ibid., 712.

74 Ibid., 713.

75 Kieval, "Rolf Fischer," 1236–37.

Nazi Germany and the impetus deriving from the Nazi *Anschluss* of Austria and the Munich accords of 1938.⁷⁶

Even so, the main impression one gains from the reception of Fischer's *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* is that, unlike the two monographs discussed above, this solid work of scholarship fell short of exerting a significant impact on wider discussions of its topic. Whereas the historiography of the Holocaust in Hungary and the Arrow Cross movement would be significantly poorer without *Das letzte Kapitel* and *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* (their debatable aspects notwithstanding), the interpretations of the history of Hungarian anti-Semitism are likely to have proceeded along rather similar lines without its most important German-language exploration to date.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our assessment of the contribution of German historiography to the study of the Holocaust in Hungary has to be rather mixed. On the one hand, for partly understandable reasons, this major chapter of the Europe-wide genocide has not emerged as an independent preoccupation among German historians. The Holocaust in Hungary and adjacent topics, such as the history of Hungarian anti-Semitism or the Arrow Cross, have only really been “discovered” in German historiography as a consequence of a larger temporal and geographical shift of focus which began around the mid-1980s. However, even today, there are no experts employed at German universities or research institutions whose primary research focus concerns the Holocaust in Hungary. Moreover, there has been only limited direct cooperation among researchers of the Holocaust in Germany and Hungary, and cross-fertilization among their scholarly works has also remained surprisingly modest.

On the other hand, for a historiography that lacks specialists and seems interested in the Holocaust in Hungary only as part of larger debates on the genesis of the Holocaust and questions of collaboration and cooperation in its implementation, German historiography has produced two path-breaking and rather widely received monographs. Margit Szöllösi-Janze's *Die Pfeilkreuzlerbewegung in Ungarn* from 1989 can be considered one of the major works on the history of the Arrow Cross in any language. Christian Gerlach and Götz Aly's towering *Das letzte Kapitel* from 2002 has exerted an even greater

76 Ibid., 1237.

impact both internationally and within Hungary. Even if some of its specific arguments have been contested by leading local historians of the Holocaust, Gerlach and Aly's book, published at the beginning of the twenty-first century, succeeded for the first time in making the case of Hungary a reference point in broader discussions on the Holocaust among German scholars.

Based on ongoing attempts to Europeanize the historiography of the Holocaust as well as current discussions regarding the latest phases of the war in 1944–45,⁷⁷ one might reasonably expect growing interest in the Holocaust in Hungary. If so, a puzzling paradox of postwar German approaches to the Holocaust could finally be overcome: even though postwar German discussions have recurrently used the name Auschwitz as a metonym for the German-led destruction of European Jewry, German scholarship has not yet devoted earnest attention to the single largest group of victims of this most infamous camp complex, Jews from Hungary.

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77 See, for instance, Kershaw, *The End*; Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno*; Blatman, *The Death Marches*.

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