

Preface

This is a book about the role of history in European societies. It has two main intellectual and scholarly sources. One is many years' theoretical and empirical, "didactic" co-operative work among several of the authors to try to understand history not only as scholarly interpretations of phenomena and processes of the past, but also as a dimension or an instrument for individuals and collectives to cope with their contemporary lives and problems. The other source is a partly overlapping scholarly co-operation on problems of contemporary European society such as boundary and ethno-territorial conflicts, carried out since the 1970s at the Department of History, Lund University, under the guidance of Professor Sven Tägil.

The present book is the first concerted result of the research project *The Holocaust and the European Historical Culture*, financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. The project includes scholars from three Swedish universities: Lund, Stockholm and Uppsala. The aim of the project, initiated in 2001, is to study the interpretations and representations of the Holocaust made in various European societies and states since the Nazi genocide of European Jewry took place during the World War II years. However, the main focus is on the last quarter-century and even the last full decade, when the Holocaust has attained a prominent position in a Europe wrestling with identities, orientations and values. This temporal bias is certainly evident from the chapters of the book. There is also a certain geographical bias in the sense that countries in East and Central Europe dominate among the geographical areas of the studies. In the central chapters of the book, the problem how the Holocaust is interpreted and represented in Germany and Israel is addressed.

It is urgent to underline from the very start that the book should be regarded as work in progress. The authors have set themselves the task of formulating open-ended but scholarly fruitful questions, to elaborate a useful theoretical and conceptual framework and to identify

relevant empirical cases, rather than providing the readers with complete answers, ready-made theories and full empirical accounts. Despite the fact that the project is in an unfinished state, we have considered it worth while to publishing our findings, partly to facilitate a scholarly debate on historical culture that can reach outside the project fellowship, partly because we find our approaches to history in general, and to the Holocaust in particular, instructive for the scholarly communities within a broad range of disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. Furthermore, we sincerely hope that the book, focusing on issues that are ranked high on the European and Western cultural, political and social agenda of the new millennium, will find many interested readers among the general public.

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Klas-Göran Karlsson & Ulf Zander

KLAS-GÖRAN KARLSSON

The Holocaust as a Problem of Historical Culture

Theoretical and Analytical Challenges

Our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

The Holocaust is the same; it cannot change. But the world in which we live, whether we welcome or do not welcome the development that is before us, changes the meaning of the Holocaust as time passes before our eyes.

Raul Hilberg

History of Effect

Historians have traditionally dealt with history by means of explaining it. In fact, explanation has often been looked upon as history's *raison d'être* in the rank of scholarly disciplines. However, when explaining history, historians have normally deemed causes more important than effects. While taking great pains in separating motives from structural causes, keeping "igniting sparks" apart from more profound causal factors and in general distinguishing the vital prime movers leading to historical change from conditions considered less important, the fate of the historical event after its occurrence has often been put at a disadvantage. The history of effects has been insufficiently elaborated upon among historians, who often have

confined themselves to discerning a victorious, factual line of development standing out in prospective chronological succession from the complex causal setting of historical change. More often than not, the fact that we, i.e., present-day individuals and society, constitute the provisional terminal point of this prospective line of historical development, is not given due attention.

As a matter of fact there are, analytically speaking, two kinds of history of effects. The other is retrospective, which means that it more or less explicitly starts from the subjective questions, problems and perceptions of the same present-day individual and society. It is a perspective that relates closely to what philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer called *Wirkungsgeschichte*, history of effect, with its hermeneutic insistence that aspects such as tradition, language and horizon must be included in the idea of history, and furthermore that history is lived prospectively but experienced retrospectively. In itself, the hermeneutic perspective is opposed to the objectivistic idea that the historian is capable of positioning himself or herself outside the historical process, not being one of its "effects", which for a long time has been one of the main aspects of the historians' professional identity. It is, however, the contention of the authors of this book that the two perspectives must be combined if the historian wants to explain and understand the double role played by history as on the one hand an inexorable line of development of which we are a part, on the other hand a man-made cultural construct.

With a somewhat pretentious wording, it can be argued that history scholarship over the last two decades has turned from the *Erklärung* towards the *Verstehen* tradition. With the terminology just used, it means that history as a cultural construct has attracted an increased attention, sometimes with a certain disregard to the objectivistic approach. In discourse analysis, what is cause and what is effect is often regarded as questions uncalled for. Obviously, inspiration from Michel Foucault can easily inhibit historians from using any explanatory devices whatsoever:

The human being no longer has any history: or rather, since he speaks, works, and lives, he finds himself interwoven in his own being with histories that are neither subordinate to him nor homogeneous with him.¹

One interpretation is that we are not able to provide the explanations or even generate the meanings in historical discourse, since we always and already find ourselves enclosed within a discourse. We will never grasp the idea of history, neither as professional historians nor as individuals, only the pale reflections left behind. Foucault's dictum can however also be used for an opposite, hermeneutic purpose, i.e., to stress the historicity of the human being and his/her capacity to reflect upon the possibilities of getting admission to the past offered thereby. In such a case, a genealogical perspective does not necessarily mean that a culture is epistemologically closed in itself, but, quite the reverse, open to the interpretation and representation of an understanding posterity. As a matter of fact, since Foucault strongly underlines that the human predicament to a great extent is linguistic, cultural and social, his statement can also be used to stress the historicity of society. In such a cultural interpretation, the human "interwovenness" in history does not only mean that man is influenced by historical circumstances, but also that he influences his life and society by means of history; or rather of the past cultivated into meanings, memories, memorials, monuments, museums, myths and several other aspects of a historical culture. In this way, history has been transformed from a row of blind causes that have made us what we are, to a source of cultural or symbolic power that we can exert in order to further various interests and needs. In other words, man not only thinks about history, but also with history. No wonder that the *fin de siècle* scholarly society abounds in newly published books about a new kind of political history. Its primary focus is not on the history of politics, but on the politics of history or memory.

An important part of the human predicament is that man has a historical consciousness, thus more or less constantly and consciously interpreting, representing and using history for various aims and purposes. Historical consciousness is a mental process that connects contemporary human beings to what they apprehend as "their" past and "their" future, but also to various larger histories or "imagined communities" which are of longer duration than an individual life and therefore are considered existentially or ideologically precious. Informing the present and implanting hopes for and fears about the future, history as consciousness performs the same function as the

mirror of Snow White's stepmother, telling you who you are in relation to other generations and to the world. Consequently, the operation of historical consciousness is intimately related to the development of different facets of identity.

To be sure, internal theoretical "turns" within the scholarly community have promoted these new professional ideas, but there is obviously also an external dimension of this change of fundamentals among historians. As an effect of several radical European developments, including the facts that economic and social uncertainties have made us all doubtful about modernist ideas of continuous growth and progression, that globalisation, Europeanisation, regionalisation and multiculturalism have called traditional, national and other identities into question, and that the disappearance of the Cold War has ended a period of seemingly eternal bipolarity and precarious stability, history has gained ground as a dimension offering existential orientation, moral encouragement and political-ideological guidance. For professional historians, it has become evident that the forms, contents and meanings of the past, the historical culture, are not fixed into ready-made scholarly constructions. The past can be represented to us from a multiplicity of perspectives and sources. The new competition has probably enhanced the historians' awareness of history as a cultural phenomenon that can have an influence on man and society a long time after the end of the factual history in question.

In this book, the concepts mentioned above – which will be further elaborated later in this introductory chapter – will be used to carry out an investigation of how several European societies and states have handled important aspects of their history since the end of World War II. The purpose is to write a cultural history of effects, i.e., to analyse what Gadamer described as "situations" in which societies and states in retrospect have become conscious of, interpreted, represented and made use of historical events as part of a tradition or a historical culture. One important knowledge offered by hermeneutics is that historical constructs are permanently in the making, offering building stones for variable national and other identities. Yet, history-cultural change is not spontaneous, because, in Gadamer's words, "the process of construal is itself already governed by an expectation of meaning that follows from the context

of what has gone before”.² A study of historical culture must therefore have a considerable extension in time, at the same time as it has to be keenly open to a broad range of external, structural influences that obviously also can affect the continuity and change of historical culture.

Another important piece of knowledge that can be extracted from the hermeneutic current of ideas concerns the source materials, “texts”, for studying historical cultures. Another principal figure of modern hermeneutical thinking, Paul Ricœur, defines a text very broadly as “any discourse fixed by writing”.³ Traditionally, historians are considered the main interpreters of history and the main producers of the artefacts of historical culture. But if the scholarly task is to study how societies and states have confronted and are confronting their history, and if Ricœur is right in arguing that a textual discourse comprises a “mimetic” bond between the act of writing/reading and real action, scholarly historiography is hardly the only relevant source for the study of history’s role in society. In this book, rituals, school history textbooks, films, exhibits and other products of a popular culture or a public use of history will be considered at least as important for the development of historical culture as traditional scholarly monographs and theoretical-intellectual debates.

The Cultural Significance of the Holocaust

The focus of this study is not on the meanings and forms of any history. The aim is to assess the position of the Holocaust within the European historical culture, or alternatively, national historical cultures in Europe, during a protracted period of time from the first post-war years to the present. Among the questions necessary to pose are the following: how have various European states and societies reacted to the Nazi destruction of European Jewry from the first official international response, the Nuremberg trials of 1945–1946, to the frequent and multifaceted national and European reactions at the dawn of the new millennium? What kind of historical consciousness has developed over the past half-century with respect to the Holocaust? In what ways has the Holocaust been used – maybe even abused – to satisfy various needs and further various objectives in various

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