The First Domino. International Decision Making during the Hungarian Crisis of 1956
Johanna C. Granville. Foreword by Raymond L. Garthoff
Texas A&M University Press, College Station, 2004 (Eastern European Studies, Nr. 26), 323 pages
ISBN 1-58544-298-4

The First Domino deals with an event which, in the words of a contemporary, truly ‘shook the Kremlin’, or more precisely, with the decision-making process surrounding the Hungarian revolution of 1956. Interestingly, the book’s title avoids the word ‘revolution’, either because the conservative American public dislikes the word, or because Ms Granville writes not only about the revolution/uprising itself but also about its suppression and aftermath, events that could be wrapped up in the vaguer word, crisis. The views and decisions of the principal partners in this political conflict are discussed in six well-documented chapters, with the seventh providing conclusions applying to the events – Robert Jarvis’s theory on decision-making.

Granville starts her book with a historical narrative chapter tracing the ‘roots of the uprising’ – the political history of Hungary from the summer of 1953 to the autumn of 1956. She is right in pointing out that the appointment of the reformist Communist agricultural expert, Imre Nagy as Prime Minister in 1953, followed by his resignation and expulsion from the Hungarian Workers’ Party in 1955, made things very difficult for Mátyás Rákosi, the Hungarian Party Secretary, the following year. It was on 25 February 1956 that Nikita Khrushchev delivered his famous speech on ‘Stalin’s crimes’ which (as Granville points out) ‘[of all countries] had perhaps the strongest impact in Hungary’ (pp. 16–17). It emboldened the Hungarian anti-Stalinist Party members, mostly journalists and writers, to take a stand against Rákosi, demanding first his serious self-criticism and then his resignation. Their attack on the man responsible, amongst other things, for the trial and execution of the ‘Titoist’ László Rajk in 1949, could not be ignored; the ‘spirit of the 20th Congress’ dictated a change of leadership in Hungary at a time when the Soviets were trying to mend fences with Yugoslavia.

In other words, had the Soviet leadership’s perceptions of their ‘players’ in Hungary been correct, had they clearly understood the relative political strength of the cunning but dogmatic Rákosi, and ‘naive’ but very popular Imre Nagy, the
1956 uprising could have been avoided. In Poland, anti-Soviet feelings were considerably stronger than in Hungary, yet Władysław Gomulka managed to steer a middle course between national interests and ‘internationalist’ (read: pro-Soviet) loyalty. Of course, he and the Polish Communists had the advantage of the experience of the Poznan riots that tilted the decisive centre within the party towards the reformists. As Johanna Granville points out, even the Soviet leaders believed it was a mistake to have deprived Imre Nagy of his Party membership, Mikoyan said so in his speech to the July 1956 Plenum of the Hungarian Party. Yet the decisive mistake was made after Rákosi’s forced resignation in July 1956, when the Soviets opted for ex-NKVD agent Ernő Gerő to replace the former dictator. In spite of his mistrust of home-grown Communists, Rákosi recommended János Kádár as his successor, probably hoping to be able to manipulate him behind the scenes. This was not accepted by the Russians at the time and Khrushchev later blamed himself (and Mikoyan) for the wrong choice. In this they were not helped by Andropov, the then Soviet Ambassador to Hungary, whose reports ignored popular resentment with the old Stalinist leadership, including with Gerő.

Chapter 2 deals with the role of Yugoslavia and Poland in the unfolding political crisis in Hungary. Tito’s ‘third-path model’ clearly attracted many Hungarian Communists, disillusioned with policies prior to Stalin’s death, but their perception of Yugoslavia was certainly idealized. The revisionism of the Hungarians went considerably further than that of most Yugoslav intellectuals and there may have been some truth in the accusation of the mysterious ‘Hungarian envoy Kurimszki’ who compared the Hungarian writers Tibor Déry and Tibor Tardos with Tito’s former friend, Milovan Djilas, sacked from Yugoslav government service in 1954. As for Tito, he could support ‘national communists’ in any country of Eastern Europe, but stopped short at condoning a multiparty system, which would have destroyed the Communist monopoly of power. As for the Poles, in October 1956 very few Hungarians knew what sort of a politician Władysław Gomulka was and how far he would go in satisfying popular desire for a reform of the system. The Poles were lucky in losing their Party leader Bolesław Bierut (who died in Moscow in March 1956) and choosing the centrist Ochab as his successor, for Ochab then could relatively smoothly transfer power to Gomulka some months later, without endangering the hegemony of the Communist Party. Gomulka, however, remained a ‘dark horse’ both for Khruschev and his comrades and the young Hungarians who pinned hopes of radical reforms on him in the autumn of 1956.

There was also a difference in the possible military solution of the conflict that arose in Warsaw and Budapest respectively. Khrushchev knew that military intervention in Poland would have had incalculable consequences: as he admitted later, when in October 1956 he began to analyse the problem in detail and calculate
which Polish regiments would obey the pro-Soviet defence minister, Rokos-
sowski, the ‘situation began to look somewhat bleak’ (p. 53). The alternative was
an attack on Warsaw by Soviet troops, which would have met with stiff Polish
resistance. In other words, Gomulka’s election to lead the Polish Communist Party
created a kind of fait accompli, which could have been overturned only by huge
expense and loss of credibility to the Soviet Union. The situation was different
in Hungary, where at dawn on 24 October, Soviet troops arrived in Budapest with
orders to refrain from shooting, using firepower only if attacked. Apparently, the
Soviet leadership thought a show of force would deter any armed resistance. What
they did not count on was the spontaneous formation of armed groups, recruited
from young workers, students and some soldiers, which sprang up overnight and
fought back with inferior weapons but much ingenuity. In her overview, Granville
stresses the importance of the massacre in Lajos Kossuth Square on 25 October,
which was the work of a secret policy unit hiding on rooftops and Soviet tanks
positioned around the square, with the intervention of the latter being decisive.
After this incident, the Hungarians’ perception of the Soviets turned completely
hostile. In fact, it was at this point that the uprising was transformed into a proper
revolution and a fight for Hungarian independence; no armed group would accept
the amnesty offered repeatedly by the government, for the simple reason that they
did not believe its promises. So in a sense, Imre Nagy, in limited control from
the dawn of 24 October, had no option but to order a ceasefire, which he did four
days later, on 28 October 1956. The Hungarian army in the meantime, with the
exception of a few isolated units, was confined to its barracks and remained neutral
in the conflict.

Research in Soviet archives supplied the backbone of The First Domino, and
some of its findings make interesting reading. First of all, the myth of a monolithic
Soviet system and with it Politburo decision making is seriously damaged, the
so-called Malin Notes reveal not only hesitation but considerable shifts at the top.
One day Marshal Zhukov was still ‘flexible’, considering the withdrawal of all
Soviet troops from Hungary, the next day he is amongst the hawks urging
intervention. Khrushchev himself at first hoped that Imre Nagy’s first
‘revolutionary’ government would be able defuse the crisis, but then he gave in
to the interventionist call for a second invasion. Anastas Mikoyan seems to be the
only Soviet leader who voted against the military solution, at one point even
threatening suicide. The question arises then, what made the Soviets change their
mind about Hungary almost the same day when they issued a placatory statement
about ‘different roads to Socialism’ (31 October 1956)?

Clearly, this was not Cardinal Mindszenty’s ill-timed speech just before the
second Soviet attack, or the Hungarian declaration of neutrality. Khruschev’s
mind was made up by 1 November, and the only thing he needed, apart from the
mobilization of further divisions, was Marshal Tito’s approval. (A visit to Brioni
took care of that; it turned out that Tito did not need much persuasion, for he was also scared of the direction Hungarian events were taking.) The crucial factors then which prodded the Soviet Politburo to launch the second military intervention could be listed as (a) Soviet perception of the disintegration of the Hungarian Workers Party and the helplessness of Imre Nagy facing popular demands; (b) pressure from other Communist parties (China, which supported the Polish changes, now turned against Nagy’s reforms; Communist countries neighbouring on Hungary urged intervention); (c) a conviction that as the Western powers were engaged with the Suez affair and with the American presidential elections taking place there would not be a serious Western reaction; and (d) belief in the ability of János Kádár and his team to consolidate power quickly in Hungary. It was this last presumption that proved quite costly, not only because the promised economic improvements did not automatically mollify the Hungarian population, but also because the Budapest workers would not agree to normalization as long as Soviet troops remained in the country. Strike actions of a political nature, in fact, continued until January 1957, when the government passed a decree introducing the death sentence for strike organizers. This, coming from a body calling itself ‘the government of workers and peasants’, was the most counter-revolutionary measure in the entire history of post-war Hungary.

Soviet documents bear out the very difficult position in which Kádár found himself after ‘his friendly abduction’ by Ferenc Münnich, a trusted old Soviet agent not too compromised during the Rákosi regime. The Moscow protocols show that he tried to explain Hungarian perceptions to the Soviets and at first even had reservations about the military intervention (which was under way, in any case). He was then persuaded to play the role of a quisling, a reputation which in later years he tried to mitigate by creating a more rationally run economy and a relaxed political control, a sort of ‘goulash-communism’. But there was one issue compounding his betrayal of the Hungarian people in November 1956, the abduction, trial and execution of Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister of the revolution. Research in Soviet and Hungarian archives now shows that it was precisely Kádár who (no doubt with Soviet encouragement) insisted on putting on trial the ‘traitor’ Imre Nagy, and who was also the one who condoned the execution of Nagy and his co-defendants (Gimes and Szilágyi) as well as Pál Maléter in June 1958. All four were Communists, albeit of a ‘national’ persuasion. In the opinion of Hungarian historian György Litván, documented in a book for some reason omitted from Granville’s bibliography (Alajos Dornbach, The Secret Trial of Imre Nagy, Praeger, Westport, Conn., 1994), the decision to try Imre Nagy and his comrades was taken as early as March 1957, during Kádár’s first official visit to Moscow (Dornbach, p. 171) and implemented in the Military Court in Foutca in February 1958.

Why did Kádár act in this manner? He probably feared his legitimacy as long
as Nagy refused to resign as lawful Prime Minister of Hungary. This was something that Nagy refused to do while in the Yugoslav Embassy prior to his abduction by the NKVD and also later in Romanian captivity. (Nagy and his comrades, most of them fellow-Communists, were taken to Snagov in Romania and kept under arrest until the trial.) As for treason, he argued that he had not betrayed the interests of the Hungarian people or Hungarian socialism. From a Soviet point of view, of course, he was both a weak politician and, objectively speaking, a traitor to Soviet imperial interests. The timing and manner of his execution by hanging in June 1958 confirm that the Soviets regarded him as a mere pawn in the internal Communist power struggle with the Yugoslav Communist Party.

Granville devotes more than one chapter to Yugoslav policies vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and Hungary in 1956–58. While most of her findings are well documented, it is not clear whether she had access to all Yugoslav archival material from this period. While Veljko Micunovic’s *Moscow Diary* revealed much about Yugoslav attitudes, I think some papers in the archives of the former Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs might have shed more light on certain episodes in the stormy Yugoslav–Soviet relationship of these years. Tito, as pointed out before, feared the ‘overspill’ of the Hungarian uprising into Yugoslavia, not so much because of the attitude of the Hungarian ethnic minority in the Vojvodina, but because of the possible attraction of a genuine multi-Party system in the Socialist framework. We are talking here about a democratic ‘Third Way’, where the only factor limiting the programmes and activities of different parties would have been a Socialist constitution unchangeable without a two-third parliamentary majority. Socialism without the ‘leading role’ of the Communist party was unimaginable to him. On the other hand Imre Nagy’s abduction and treatment by the Kádár regime was unacceptable for Tito, as Ms Granville correctly suggests, mainly because the execution even of a ‘compromised’ Communist leader who had enjoyed Yugoslav asylum for a while would have destroyed his credibility.

This is why it would have been crucial to know exactly what went on during the Kádár–Tito meeting at the Hungarian–Yugoslav border on 27/28 March 1958. Here, a footnote (p. 93) claims that, in spite of a Hungarian book published on the subject, ‘the Hungarian minutes [of the meeting] have apparently not been located’. A pity, because soon afterwards Nikita Khrushchev visited Hungary and successfully blackmailed János Kádár into telling everything that had transpired at his fateful meeting with Tito. In her footnote, Granville refers to Tibor Méray who ‘hypothesizes that Tito tried to persuade Kádár to pursue a policy more independent of the USSR’ and ‘this angered Khrushchev’. I am afraid, Méray was right, his hypothesis was sound. During his visit in Hungary in early April, Khrushchev made a strange statement, which was reported in all Western
newspapers, including the *New York Times*. I quote: ‘Khrushchev urges toughness and self-discipline, speech Szatálnéváros; criticizes Hungarian party; in speech reported by Hungarian news agency he warns workers not to depend on USSR intervention in event of another revolt, April 6’ (*NYU Index for Published News, Vol. 46*, under ‘Hungary’). Khrushchev’s statement was, however, withdrawn two days later at Tatabánya; according to the *New York Times*, the Soviet leader ‘reverses stand on aid to fight revolts [and] holds Western newsmen misinterpreted earlier remarks’.

What happened between 6th and 8th April? Clearly, Kádár panicked and told Khrushchev everything he knew about Tito’s plans to form an ‘independent block’ within the Communist camp, comprising the Poles, Hungarians, Yugoslavs and possibly Italy. (Tito at the time did not yet know that Togliatti had already agreed to Imre Nagy’s execution, asking only for a postponement, because of the Italian elections in May 1958.) This was János Kádár’s third betrayal, the only one that haunted him until his death; he feared that with Nagy’s rehabilitation and preparations for his reburial in 1989, he would be held to account for his predecessor’s judicial murder.

In *The First Domino* a fairly long chapter is devoted to the role of the United States in the Hungarian crisis. Here, Johanna Granville gives an overview of US policies from the 1950s to 1957. She states that the Soviet perception of US intentions towards the Soviet satellite empire was based on facts little known by the Western public, such as American plans to establish an anti-Soviet ‘emigré army’, the ‘Volunteer Freedom Corps’. The role of Radio Free Europe in October–November 1956 is also discussed in some detail, Granville concluding that some of the broadcasts during the revolutionary days in fact misled Hungarian listeners, especially when they raised the probability of Western military aid or swift UN intervention. RFE broadcasts also contributed to the Soviet leadership’s ‘Manichean mindset’ about Hungary, believing that ‘if they let Hungary leave the Warsaw Pact, it would automatically join NATO’. As for the Hungarians, their problem was that they could not separate US rhetoric and propaganda (the ‘liberation’ policy) from real intentions and realistic possibilities. John Foster Dulles was successful in raising expectations and failed rather badly in providing diplomatic solutions at the time of crisis.

American generosity towards Hungarian refugees in 1957 was the outcome (partly the corrective) to previous passivity and lack of diplomatic pressure on the Soviets during the days of the Hungarian revolution. True, US politicians were preoccupied with the presidential elections and also defusing the Suez crisis, something that the Soviets had not expected to happen so quickly. However, Granville does not ask one relevant question: why did the United States not intervene in the case of Imre Nagy when the CIA already knew that a secret trial was taking place in Budapest? Had the Americans threatened the Kádár
government with breaking off diplomatic relations if the death sentence was carried out on Nagy, matters would have turned out differently. But apparently nobody in the State Department wanted to ‘upset the apple-cart’ for the sake of even a ‘good’ Communist sent to the gallows.

Johanna Granville’s concluding chapter makes a convincing case for the role of ‘misperceptions’ in both Soviet and American thinking. Some of these misperceptions survive to this day. Some American political scientists with strong ties with the Bush administration believe that a Soviet intervention was ‘inevitable’ in Hungary in 1956. The Soviets changed their minds on how to deal with Hungary several times during the last week of October 1956, first minimizing and then maximizing potential dangers for their empire. Maybe, ‘had the United States issued a convincing military, perhaps even a nuclear, threat at the critical moment of hesitation in the Soviet Presidium, the Soviet decision makers might have been deterred from intervening [a second time]’(p. 214). That would have been a highly risky strategy. John F. Kennedy did, however, take up the Soviet challenge six years later and succeeded in forcing the Soviets to make strategic concessions. Of course, the historical situation was different and Cuba is much closer to Florida than Hungary. One could also argue that Kennedy in 1962 had a much stronger hand to challenge a well-armed Soviet Union bent on ‘burying capitalism’, partly because of the guilt-feeling that the United States had avoided confrontation with Khrushchev in 1956; the Hungarian tragedy could have served a purpose in that respect as well. As for the 1956 revolution itself, it remains the single event by which the world now remembers 20th-century Hungary.

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German historiography and the Holocaust

Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung
Nicolas Berg
Wallstein, Göttingen, 2003 (768 pages)
€46, ISBN 3 89244 610 5

It goes without saying that in no country has the discussion of the Holocaust been more fascinating than in Germany. The metamorphosis of a nation, where Hitler and Nazism were possible, into a solid reliable Western democracy within half a century, remains a remarkable fact. In a way this is as remarkable as the Holocaust. It rebuts the theory of some unchanging national character, even if there are some mental and cultural peculiarities and norms, which can survive the
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deepest breach. To explain this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this article, but besides the influence of the Cold War, Marshall Aid and an amazing economic boom, we may wonder if the democratic tradition has indeed been so absent or unimportant in German history as the theory of the ‘Sonderweg’ (the particular development) after the impact of Nazism proclaims. At present the question is of some relevance again with respect to Iraq. Post-war Germany has triumphantly been cited by the Bush-administration as a model of successful democratization thanks to American re-education and interference-policy. Without liberal-democratic forerunners, even if they had been the losers in the past, however, this would have been a miracle.

Be this as it may, German collective memory was soiled by the Hitler catastrophe. History couldn’t function any longer without pain and remorse as the basis of national identity and remembrance. Whereas ordinary people could try to turn their back on the nasty past, forget or repress their own reminiscences, historians had to come to terms with it and to redefine that identity. They couldn’t condemn national traditions at random however without condemning part of their own norms and their own past. The accusation of a collective guilt naturally awakened protest, especially among the older generation deeply rooted in the pre-Hitler past; for instance, the authoritative historian Gerhard Ritter who was not at all a supporter of the regime. But in explaining the success of National Socialism they got into trouble. Ritter’s theory, that National Socialism was really an un-German phenomenon and an anomaly in German history did not satisfy many of his colleagues. They could not and did not, deny the enormity of the Nazi-crimes but felt that anyhow they had to present the inside view and experience of a totalitarian dictatorship against the outside view. After all, there was personal continuity with respect to academic chairs (except for some notorious Nazi professors). So it was the generation of the Weimar-republic and the Third Reich who had to start the necessary revision. Looking back in 2004, we should realize that it would have been amazing if that phase of a revision had progressed without repression of compromising facts and disputable criteria of selection.

Therefore it was with the next generation, who gradually took over the lead in the later 1960s and 1970s, that revisionism and self-criticism became really fundamental. From now on, German historiography began to approach Western historiography in the scope of its research and its questions and norms. It was the generation who had democratic norms in their bones, men like Bracher, Wehler, the Mommsen brothers, Kocka and Schulze. The ‘Historikerstreit’, the quarrel between historians on the uniqueness-theory in 1986, had been an enlightening demonstration of the clash between some elder conservatives like Nolte or Hillgruber and this new generation. Nolte provoked a sharp reaction because of the masked apologetic tendency of his thesis that the Nazi-genocide had been sort
of a reaction to Bolshevism and Stalinist mass murder. This could have had a damaging effect on the democratic identity of the Federal Republic, and its acceptance of the historical responsibility for the Nazi-crimes. Therefore, the debate was not a pure academic question but touched on fundamental political values.

Meanwhile, however, the younger generation of historians accused the present academic establishment of accepting too much the apologetic version of their fathers and their teachers with respect to their personal attitude during the Third Reich. That father-generation, authoritative professors in the 50s and 60s, such as Schieder, Conze or Erdmann, had been much more involved in Nazi-thought than they admitted later. Recent research has paid much attention to the peripheral domains of the Third Reich, to seemingly non-political scientific institutions and projects and it is obvious that there existed much more affinity with Nazi-ideas and more voluntary cooperation in some of these institutions, research-programmes and academic circles, than had been known previously.

A remarkable specimen of this critical reaction by the Young Turks is this voluminous study by Nicolas Berg. In a profound analysis he takes the German historians and the historiography of the Holocaust to task. This topic is the very touchstone of German historical consciousness and its readiness to come to terms (as far as this is possible for human beings) with the darkest page of their past. Berg’s main accusation is that German historians did not integrate and consider the perspective of the victims, the Jewish historiography. One target of his attack is the München-Institut für Zeitgeschichte; it was due to the extensive documentation and publications of that Institute that we got a realistic and thorough inside-view of how the system of terror functioned. The philosophy behind this achievement, the norm of strict pragmatism and objectivity, had been an understandable reaction to the first emotional wave of bewilderment and of struggle with the guilt-problem. The tormented introspection was then succeeded by a longing for a more sober and clinical approach, which corresponded somehow to the climate of disillusion and pragmatism of the so-called ‘sceptical generation’ (Schelsky), the younger war-generation in other countries as well. In the 1950s, even in Jewish historiography, there was the tendency to replace the attitude of mourning and bewilderment by an unemotional scientific analysis, for instance in the work of Poliakov and Adler. But Berg reproaches the leading team of the Institute, Krausnick, Buchheim and Broszat, for this very pretension of scientific objectivity and their depreciation of Jewish contributions as being the subjective perspective of the victims. Their own perspective, Berg contends, was not at all clinically neutral but in fact influenced by the German experience from within; specifically, the admirable research and voluminous work of Wulff, a survivor of Auschwitz, deserves rehabilitation. Berg’s analysis is sharp and not without moral indignation. But his remark, that the pretension of the Institute to present only an
objective study of the strategy of destruction implies an unintentional apologetic tendency, is convincing. Concentration on the functioning of a totalitarian system automatically diminishes the personal responsibility of the executioners. However, this was partly the consequence of the structure of the research-project as such. For in an analysis of the machinery of terror, its executioners not its victims are the main source. That is not an excuse for scientific arrogance with respect to the perspective of the victims. The author presents some examples of this arrogance (even sometimes with anti-Semitic undertones) where one can sympathize with his indignation. But nevertheless the question should also be asked if one psychologically could expect a thorough revisionism from the very generation that was bred and misled in its most sensitive age by Nazi-indoctrination, had fought in the war and had now to feel – and indeed felt – responsible for what had happened. The Institute has made an honest attempt to reveal thoroughly and meticulously a terrible reality. It has thereby increased our insight and created the indispensable foundation for solid documented history. Let us try to distinguish between objective shortcomings and the subjective merits of its representatives.

Berg rejects the functionalist theory with respect to the Holocaust, a theory specially represented by Hans Mommsen, perhaps at present the most authoritative Third Reich-expert. Mommsen in the ‘Historikerstreit’ was a violent opponent of Nolte’s conservative-apologetic theory and has stressed in many publications the chaotic structure, the ‘polycracy’ of the system, and the accidental character of the policy. It puts in perspective also the personal role of Hitler – in his often-cited words actually ‘a weak dictator’. The Jewish historians, Bauer and Friedlander clashed with Mommsen, they were concerned that by making ‘the Führer’ himself a prisoner of his system, even his guilt was belittled. Berg here touches a fundamental point of the whole discussion, the moral consequences of a depersonalization of history by the impact of modern structuralism. Whereas the school of the ‘intentionalists’, by stressing Hitler as the dominating factor and author of the Holocaust, could furnish a scapegoat for the German people, the ‘structuralists’ could have an apologetic function as well, thanks to minimizing the personal element in history.

The observation, that in Western public opinion the Second World War had become a footnote to the Holocaust, seems especially true for a young German generation of historians, and is proof of the metamorphosis of German society. Nothing fits better into this frame than the book of Berg. His extensive and penetrating analysis is an impressive account of half a century of German historiography of the Holocaust, and, because of that dark past, the intense and fascinating struggle with identity and traditional values. But it is also precisely for this reason that his moral verdict seems not always justified and a bit dogmatic, from the hindsight perspective of a generation that already has internalized
democratic norms in a free, open society. He projects too easily back to the self-evident norms of the information-and communication-society of today. He therefore underestimates the problems of a generation, which was educated in a climate of frustrated nationalism and of intense Nazi-indoctrination and who had to accept after 1945 that nearly all they had believed in, had been wrong and a lie. They had not prevented unspeakable crimes and now were held responsible and had to feel responsible. We actually have no other examples of a comparable necessity of collective revisionism. Secondly we must keep in mind the general change in Western climate of opinion and historiography in which, until the 1960s, the Holocaust had been no more than a footnote to the war. The neglect of the Jewish perspective for a long time was not a German speciality, as one might think by reading Berg. It was a country where, apart from fallen soldiers, nearly all the big cities had been devastated, and the footprints of the war still were very visible. Perhaps the fact that the moral and political responsibility of Germany now meant a taboo on a normal national cult of mourning and an order to keep one’s mouth shut, also blocked the readiness of that war-generation to accept the Holocaust and its victims as an exceptional chapter. In this respect Germans did not differ so much from the others. When Berg criticises the post-war generation for accepting too much the apology of their fathers, he forgets two things: first the natural bonds between fathers and sons, which imply a certain degree of personal understanding and a psychological hesitation of the son openly to condemn the father, certainly regarding the traditional prestige of the master in Germany at that time, and, secondly, it was the accomplishment of that very generation nevertheless to bridge the scientific distance with Western historiography, also with respect to the Holocaust.

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