GENERAL EDITOR'S FOREWORD

History without historiography is a contradiction in terms. The study of the past cannot be separated from a linked study of its practitioners and intermediaries. No historian writes in isolation from the work of his or her predecessors nor can the commentator – however clinically objective or professional – stand aloof from the insistent pressures, priorities and demands of the ever-changing present. In truth there are no self-contained academic ‘ivory towers.’ Historians’ writings are an extension of who they are and where they are placed. Though historians address the past as their subject they always do so in ways that are shaped – consciously or unconsciously as the case may be – by the society, cultural ethos, politics, and systems of their own day and they communicate their findings in ways which are specifically intelligible and relevant to a reading public consisting initially of their own contemporaries. For these reasons the study of history is concerned most fundamentally not with dead facts and sterile, permanent verdicts but with highly charged dialogues, disagreements, controversies, and shifting centres of interest among its presenters, with the changing methodologies and discourse of the subject over time, and with audience reception. *Issues in Historiography* is a series designed to explore such matters by means of case studies of key moments in world history and the interpretations, reinterpretations, debates and disagreements they have engendered.

Tom Lawson’s subject is one of the most recent topics in this series – still one, indeed, for some, within painful living memory – so its historiography is necessarily shorter in its time-span. But, as the book’s title announces, it is emphatically plural in nature. This book rejects the possibility of packaging the Holocaust’s complexities within a single over-arching framework. Lawson deals with depictions of perpetrators, victims and bystanders, Jew and non-Jew, German and non-German. He charts the opening up of archives; the reunification of Germany, understandably, made a vital difference in this respect. He has a clearly foregrounded agenda, and reflects helpfully on relationships between text and context and between past and present. Though broadly thematic in its treatment the book keeps chronology constantly in view and

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examines the shifting preoccupations of the debates, the development of different perspectives (gender, for instance), and the kinds of metanarratives – intentionalist and functionalist – which have emerged and been challenged. Key terms like ‘Holocaust’ and ‘Final Solution’ are carefully unpacked and shown to have changing resonances and meanings. The coverage is extremely broad and a very large number of historical writings and other texts come under scrutiny. Writers as different as Raphael Lemkin, Hannah Arendt, David Irving, and Saul Friedlander are discussed and situated in their times. Dialectical relationships between text and context come into prominence; crude determinism is avoided.

This is a subject which, unsurprisingly in view of its moral and emotional impact, has claimed the attention of the public at large and not simply that of the historians’ professional community. Survivor testimonies discussed here, some of them unleashed by the trial of Adolf Eichman in 1961, helped fuel it. It is entirely fitting, therefore, that some attention is given in this book to contributions to debates on the Holocaust which originated outside academia. Hochhuth’s discomfiting play ‘The Deputy’ (1963) receives an extended treatment. So do the deliberately stage-managed text of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947) and Benjamin Wilkomirski’s *Fragments* (1996), an influential forgery. Major films like *Schindler’s List* (1993) and the nine-hour epic documentary *Shoah* (1985) which have had a huge impact are considered. More recent films like *The Pianist* (2002) and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2008) are further indicators of an unflagging interest in this subject. Television programmes on the Holocaust, both drama and documentary, have abounded.

Lawson’s forcefully argued book makes compelling, and sometimes deeply moving, reading. Students will find it a helpful and reliable guide to one of the most controversial subjects of modern times and will surely pause as a result of reading it before subscribing to glib verdicts and generalisations.

R.C. Richardson
December 2009