

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Ingo Haar, Michael Fahlbusch, eds. *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1920-1945*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005. xxii + 298 pp. \$80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57181-435-7; \$25.00 (paper), ISBN 978-1-84545-048-9.

Reviewed by Margarete Myers Feinstein (Center for Jewish Studies, University of California at Los Angeles)

Published on H-Genocide (September, 2007)



Ordinary Social Scientists: Scholarship in the Service of the Nazi State and the Federal Republic of Germany

When the Nazis won 33.1 percent of the vote in November 1932, it was not a forgone conclusion that Adolf Hitler would become chancellor of the Weimar Republic. For that to happen, traditional conservatives, such as Franz von Papen, had to persuade President Hindenburg to accept a coalition government of conservatives and Nazis. These conservatives believed they could control the radicalism of the Nazi movement while using it to achieve their aims. Although these German conservatives did not necessarily subscribe to the Nazi racist doctrine, they did share an interest in dismantling the Versailles Peace Treaty, restoring German power, and regaining territories in the east. Their social and economic anti-Semitism and disdain for Slavs prevented them from either noticing or caring about the evil in Nazi doctrine. Some conservative leaders continued to be fellow travelers, as the Nazis consolidated their rule, while others disavowed the monster they had helped to birth. It is not surprising, therefore, that conservative historians, geographers, sociologists, and other social scientists followed a similar path, developing theories that helped to legitimate claims made by conservative Weimar politicians as well as Nazis both for territorial expansion and German domination of Slavs.

Although historians have readily examined the roles of physicians and natural scientists in the Holocaust and Nazi eugenics policies, they have been less quick to explore the complicity of social scientists. The editors of this volume have accused the postwar German histo-

rians' establishment (e.g., Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Juergen Kocka, and Wilfried Schulze) of deliberately avoiding these topics in order to protect the reputations of their intellectual mentors and colleagues (e.g., Hans Rothfels, Theodor Schieder, and Werner Conze). In this collection of often provocative essays, the editors introduce an English-reading public to recent scholarship on the role of social scientists in Nazi racial policy. Through biographies of individual academics and institutional histories, this volume documents the ways in which intellectuals both legitimized and provided tactical support for population transfers, territorial annexations, and cultural looting. The fact that many of those scholars acted as advisers to the Weimar Republic, the Nazis, and later to the Federal Republic of Germany, raises questions of continuity, responsibility, and politicized research agendas.

Building on Michael Burleigh's work, Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch explore how scholars involved in the German interdisciplinary study of Eastern Europe, *Ostforschung*, prepared the way for ethnic cleansing in the East. Haar shows that scholars in various Ostforschung think tanks provided scientific legitimization for Nazi ideas concerning population transfers and used their research data to compile *Volksliste* (lists of people categorized by race). Michael Fahlbusch's essay explores how the Nazi Security Service (*Sicherheitsdienst*) used experts for advice on territorial claims, segregation of ethnicities, and intelligence service. Both of these authors point out that the scholars in question continued to have successful

careers in postwar Germany.

The question of continuity between the Third Reich and its successor state in the west gets fuller treatment in three biographies. In their studies of Erich Keyser, Otto Scheel, and Hans Rothfels respectively, Alexander Pinwinkler, Eric Kurlander, and Karl Heinz Roth attempt to demonstrate their subjects' continuity of thought from the Weimar Republic through the Third Reich to the Federal Republic of Germany. These essays are noteworthy chronicles of scholarly adaptation to changing political circumstances and suggest the difficulties societies face in rooting out ideas that aided and abetted genocide. In a further study, Eric Schmaltz and Samuel Sinner show how ethnographic data collected in the Nazi-occupied Ukraine provided vital information for Nazi extermination and resettlement policies. Depoliticized after the defeat of Nazi Germany, the data appeared harmless, and "amnesia" set in over the wartime activities of the SS ethnographers, as they became darlings of genealogical societies.

Scholars also assisted the Nazis' efforts to win support from ethnic Germans abroad. Wolfgang Freund's work neatly establishes how the Nazis exploited research on German emigration and ethnic Germans interested in family history, using their networks to indoctrinate the ethnic Germans abroad and to compile *Volkliste*. Christof Morrissey ably examines the particularism of ethnic Germans in Slovakia that the Nazis sought to overcome through new approaches to the region's history. Frank-Rutger Hausmann writes about scholars who promoted German culture abroad through the German Cultural Institutes. While he argues for their complicity in supporting the Nazi state, their "crimes" are qualitatively different from those who, for example, compiled the *Volkliste*.

One of this book's strengths is the inclusion of studies beyond German-Polish (ethnic Germans) questions. For those interested in Nazi policies toward ethnic Germans and in the interplay of Nazi ideology and pragmatism, the

piece by Michael Wedekind offers much information on regermanization and resettlement in Slovakia and northern Italy. The essays by Viorel Achim and Jan Piskorski remind us that Romanian and Polish scholars were also willing to put their expertise at the service of their countries' territorial ambitions and ethnic relations policies. Hans Derks's fascinating article explores the lesser known *Westforschung* (study of Western Europe) to illuminate the wartime German occupation of Belgium and the postwar Western orientation of the Adenauer government. Looking back to the empire of Charlemagne to justify Nazi dominance of Western Europe and its battle with the Slavic east, the scholars of *Westforschung* also provided the Adenauer government with a conservative foundation for its western alliance and struggle against the communist enemy in the east. In their zeal to demonstrate the links between the scholars and genocide, Derks and some of the other authors exaggerate the level of complicity. Stealing books and firing Jewish professors were not the same as ordering deportation or murder. At the same time, they were part of the Nazi system that devalued people of "lesser races" and facilitated the social isolation, persecution, and murder of the victims. These essays demonstrate that seemingly ordinary scholarly activities, when put in the service of the Nazi state, contributed to genocide, deportations, and resettlement.

This collection of essays will be of interest to scholars of the Third Reich, particularly of its racial policies. Historians of the postwar period will find interesting tidbits and controversies concerning the origins and character of the Federal Republic of Germany. Those interested in other genocides may be able to find points of comparison as well as inspiration for research questions. Although the authors often allude to the controversial nature of their undertakings, it may be difficult for non-specialists to appreciate this fully. Some essays contain a daunting alphabet soup of German acronyms. It is also a shame that Berghahn Books or the authors did not proofread a few of the essays more carefully, since content was occasionally compromised. Overall, though, this volume is a valuable addition to the field.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-genocide>

Citation: Margarete Myers Feinstein. Review of Haar, Ingo; Fahlbusch, Michael, eds., *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1920-1945*. H-Genocide, H-Net Reviews. September, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13580>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.