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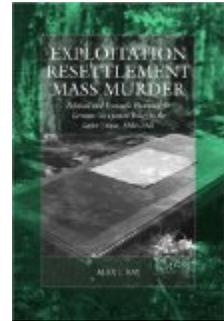
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Alex J. Kay. *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder: Political and Economic Planning for German Occupation Policy in the Soviet Union, 1940-1941*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2006. 242 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-186-8.

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Beside the Twisted Road

In his study *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder*, Alex J. Kay aptly characterizes Nazi Germany's occupation of parts of the Soviet Union as "organized chaos." Immediately noting the "administrative chaos, interagency competition and wide-ranging policy disputes" of the Third Reich, much of Kay's detailed analysis, which draws on an impressive amount of primary source material, leads to the conclusion that "German occupation policy in the Soviet Union was built from the beginning on shaky foundations due to a fundamental disagreement regarding the practical approach to policy implementation" (pp. 1, 208). However, Kay also demonstrates that "collaboration and cooperation between the economic and political planners were more systematic, sustained and extensive than has hitherto been thought" (p. 206). This encapsulates one of the major valuable insights offered by this work, adding to a field that has attracted increasing attention in recent years. As Kay points out, several scholarly publications have already engaged with the initially overlooked issue of Nazi planning for the occupation; however, the present volume provides the first substantial comparative analysis of the undertakings of political and economic planners, highlighting the conformity and conflicts between them.

Of course, the unexpected turns that Germany's war in "the East" took, and the resultant failure of Adolf Hitler's *Blitzkrieg*, ensured that the Nazis' plans to establish a civil political administration were only realized temporarily and in a relatively small area. Nonethe-

less, Kay demonstrates that the political and economic planning for the envisioned comprehensive occupation of the Soviet Union is of crucial importance, revealing much about how the Nazi regime functioned. In succinct, chronologically and thematically structured chapters, Kay maps out the strategic and ideological motives for the invasion; key institutions and individual players involved (such as the previously marginalized figure of Alfred Rosenberg); and the wider population policy dependent on the ideological aims of the SS, particularly in relation to the ideas of *Neuordnung* and *Hungerpolitik*. Kay makes a compelling case for the disorganization and deficiencies of the institutions involved being the result not of any lack of detailed planning, but (combined with the fact that major military activity never ceased) of a lack of coordination and efficient implementation of the policies set out: "In this sense, perhaps the roots of the anarchy witnessed in German occupation policy can be found in the planning phase" (p. 2).

The importance of economic motives for the invasion can be seen in the Nazi leadership's anxiety over a potential repeat of Germany's downfall in World War I, namely, in terms of the military catastrophe of a war on two fronts and the dire lack of resources on German soil sparked by a war of attrition. As Kay points out: "Memories of the First World War, more specifically what the Nazis saw as the decisive effect of the British naval blockade on the supply of food to the German home front and consequently on the population's morale, strength of re-

sistance and belief in ultimate victory, were particularly influential in shaping the mentality, and subsequently in formulating the policies, of the Nazi leadership in this matter” (p. 40). Kay states early in his book that along with “the racial-ideological motivations which doubtless existed, there were also military and economic considerations which played a major role in the decision to invade,” and even goes so far as to claim in his conclusion that “economic gain was the key motivation for waging war against the Soviet Union in mid-1941” (pp. 26, 200).

While strategic considerations such as this certainly played an important role, one gets the sense at several points throughout Kay’s study, including in the above quotations, that the crucial influence of ideology is somewhat underplayed. Kay touches on the fact that strategic and ideological factors were intrinsically connected in such concepts as *Lebensraum*, noting that “ideological motives combined with strategic and economic motivations” (p. 51). However, the argument that the importance of “living space” to Hitler’s thinking, which is evidenced in many of his public pronouncements over a number of years, was sharply preceded by “agricultural-economic and wider strategic arguments” for invading the Soviet Union and only gained serious weight in the final months of 1940, is a point of contention that unfortunately elicits limited discussion (p. 27). Jürgen Förster has shown the intertwined nature of Hitler’s ideological and strategic goals to be highly complex: “In the summer of 1940 Hitler linked the realization of his twenty-year-old living-space programme—which united expansion towards the east, annihilation of Bolshevism, and extermination of Jewry—with the strategic necessity of securing the German sphere of power against the growing challenge of the Anglo-American naval powers.”[1] This strong intersection between ideology and strategy sometimes seems to elude Kay’s discussion of economic and political planning. This is not a major criticism of Kay’s thesis, only a point that perhaps deserves further elaboration.

Kay also makes a useful contribution to existing discussions of the *Hungerpolitik*, or “starvation strategy,” which involved the planned forced removal of vast amounts of food, particularly grain, from the Soviet population, who would subsequently starve, in the so-called deficit territories. In short, “the notion of winning over the Soviet population would find no place in Nazi Germany’s *Hungerpolitik*” (p. 57). The other major concept Kay explores *Neuordnung*, entails the German occupiers’ political and demographic restructuring of the Soviet Union. In a three-tiered process that mirrored Nazi

Germany’s earlier invasion of Poland, which Christopher Browning has summed up as “ethnic cleansing,” Kay reveals with precision that the population policy comprised the murder of “undesirables,” the expulsion of large numbers of Soviet civilians further eastward, and the resettlement of people of an “Aryan” persuasion into the occupied territories (p. 96).[2] It is evident that any course of action that was to be undertaken by the Nazi occupiers grew increasingly genocidal in nature over time, both in theory and practice.

In terms of the persecution of Soviet Jews, which is admittedly far from the central focus of this book, Kay’s interpretation of Nazi planning and the events that transpired is clearly situated along a functionalist or structuralist reading of the evolution of the Holocaust. His analysis of the (in some cases belated) economic and political preparations for the German occupation of “the East,” even those that were not implemented, have a significant place in the historiographical debate. The functionalist perspective adhered to by Kay views the radicalization of anti-Jewish measures more as a response to circumstances, encapsulated by the common metaphor of a “twisted road” leading to Auschwitz. Functionalist historians portray the Third Reich as “a maze of competing power groups, rival bureaucracies, forceful personalities, and diametrically opposed interests engaged in ceaseless clashes with each other,” and characterize Hitler as a “brooding and sometimes distant leader.”[3] Curiously, the role of the Führer rarely assumes such a guise in Kay’s narrative, which shows that there were “concrete plans, concepts and intentions on the part of Adolf Hitler” (p. 2).

In opposition to the functionalist perspective, intentionalists argue that the extermination of Soviet and European Jewry was the result of long-term planning and that Hitler was a prime instigator of Nazi policy toward the Jews.[4] In his chapter on “Population Policy,” Kay gives only very cursory attention to the intentionalist perspective, which has vast implications for his overall argument. After surveying the various nuances within the functionalist interpretations of the “decision” to murder all Soviet Jews, Kay writes: “Indeed, it could well be the case that the Nazi Leadership had the *intention* already prior to the invasion to wipe out Soviet Jewry in its entirety, but did not issue an explicit order to this effect due to its own uncertainty as to how feasible this would prove to be in practice” (p. 108, Kay’s emphasis). While I do not intend to advocate an intentionalist position here, this issue arguably warrants more detailed reflection. Recent scholarship on the evolution of the Holo-

caust has moved away from depicting the intentionalist and functionalist arguments as polarized opposites, generally incorporating elements of both perspectives.

Much research in the past several years, particularly in relation to the active role of the Wehrmacht, has stressed that Nazi leaders and military officers conceived the war as one that would be characterized by unprecedented brutality, while qualifying the functionalist emphasis on the persecution of the Jews being solely a response to circumstances.[5] The crucial role of ideology has been exposed in discussions of events even prior to mid-1941, namely in the occupation of Poland.[6] While Kay rightly points out that “the invasion of the Soviet Union was no purely ideological impulse on the part of Hitler,” his view that “a more calculated agenda with agricultural-economic considerations” rested “at its core” could have been strengthened by a more in-depth engagement with the ideological facets of the invasion (p. 6). For example, Kay’s assertion that “pursuing the ‘starvation policy’ [of *Hungerpolitik*] was in the interests of the Wehrmacht” due to their own imminent need for resources perhaps overlooks the possibility that such an arguably genocidal project might have inspired a greater measure of ideological agreement within the army as well (p. 132).

Kay provides a compelling exploration of Nazi Germany’s political and economic planning for the occupation of the Soviet Union in the year leading up to and several months following the invasion. This study is clearly structured and well presented, and Kay takes care to note any limitations he faces due to the inevitable gaps in the documentary record. Appealing to a diverse audience with interests ranging from broad wartime strategic policy to the specifics of Nazi Germany’s genocidal project, *Exploitation, Resettlement, Mass Murder* provides many valuable insights into what transpired along and beside the “twisted road” to Auschwitz.

Notes

[1]. Jürgen Förster, “Hitler’s Decision in Favour of War,” in *The Attack on the Soviet Union*, vol. 4, *Germany and the Second World War* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 27. For more on the overlapping nature of ideology and strategy in Nazi doctrine and German foreign policy, see P. M. H. Bell, *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Longman, 1986), 77-85.

[2]. Christopher R. Browning, *Nazi Policy, Jewish Workers, German Killers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2-5. For more on the German policies of mass resettlement in Poland, see Götz Aly, “‘Jewish Resettlement’: Reflections on the Political Prehistory of the Holocaust,” in *National Socialist Extermination Policies: Contemporary German Perspectives and Controversies*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 53-82.

[3]. Michael R. Marrus. *The Holocaust in History* (London: Penguin, 1987), 40.

[4]. For an influential example of the intentionalist perspective, see Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The War against the Jews, 1933-45* (1975; repr., London: Penguin, 1990).

[5]. The conception of the war as having a specifically ideological nature is examined in Geoffrey Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006). Also Richard Bessel, *Nazism and War* (New York: Modern Library, 2004), 23-29.

[6]. See, for example, Jochen Böehler, *Auftakt zum Vernichtungskrieg: Die Wehrmacht in Polen 1939* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2006); Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Bogdan Musial, eds., *Genesis des Genozids: Polen 1939-1941* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004); and Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

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