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**Mary Fulbrook**. *A Small Town Near Auschwitz: Ordinary Nazis and the Holocaust.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 464 pp. $34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-960330-5.

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**Bureaucratic Murder in the Shadow of Auschwitz**

The most effective and affective studies of the Holocaust have approached this genocide through integrative approaches using the voices of the victims, perpetrators, and bystanders to give added depth to the high-political and social background to the destruction. In *A Small Town Near Auschwitz*, Mary Fulbrook has produced a study that brings perpetrators into focus, following in the footsteps of such works like Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* (1985) or Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1998). Unlike either of these two examples, however, Fulbrook has a personal connection to a perpetrator, the object of study. She discovered in recent years that a long-time family friend, Udo Klausa, had been a *Landrat* (county administrator or commissioner) within the Nazi-created civilian administrative apparatus in Będzin, Upper Silesia–a mere thirty-seven kilometers from Auschwitz. Klausa, whom she had known since birth, was married to her mother's childhood friend, Alexandra. This friendship was close enough for Alexandra to be named Fulbrook's godmother.

An eminent historian of twentieth-century German history teaching at University College London, Fulbrook has written extensively on the two Germanys after the Second World War and questions of continuity and rupture within these postwar societies. This work is by far the most personal project she has tackled, a fact that she admirably problematizes throughout her discussion, especially in the analysis of her motivations for researching Klausa and the areas in which he worked (pp. 19-23). Because of the close relationship with the Klausa family, Fulbrook was able to access Alexandra's wartime letters and papers in the family's private collection. She anticipates and skillfully fields the questions that inevitably arise throughout her account because of this relationship–did she give Klausa the benefit of the doubt in her analysis or did the proximity of this perpetrator force her to overzealously search for any bit of incriminating evidence for the historical record? Fulbrook, instead of judging, lays out evidence as plainly as possible to allow readers to drawn their own conclusions about the nature of Klausa's culpability in the destruction of the Jews in the region of Będzin. We see, for instance, how his initial indifference to Jewish suffering shifts to an internal crisis of conscience beginning in the spring of 1942, once he learned the extent of the National Socialists' "Final Solution" (pp. 217-226).

Beside the portrait of a perpetrator and the history of the Holocaust in a town passed over by many historians, Fulbrook is also able to offer a gendered perspective of perpetration through the voice of Klausa's wife (and godmother to the author), Alexandra. From her wartime correspondence Alexandra Klausa seems like any typical wife who followed a military husband–she was concerned with the state of his career and with maintaining her domestic sphere. Yet, there is also a coldness and a blindness to the plight of the Jews of Będzin, many of whom were deported from a field visible from the *Landrat*'s residence. Alexandra Klausa, like other women within the German system of occupation, unquestioningly accepted official Nazi justifications even when confronted with incomprehensible violence directed at women and children. Though expressing attitudes no different from other women within the Nazi state system, her callousness to suffering is presented in vivid detail and will serve to enrich scholars' understanding of the intersection between gender and mass violence.[1]

The position of *Landrat* was, as Fulbrook explains, below the level of those policymakers like Adolf Eichmann considered to be the bureaucratic or "desktop" (*schreibtisch*) murderers. The *Landräte* fell under the authority of the *Gauleiter* or provincial leader, many of whom became infamous for their cruelty and brutality.

Though technically a civilian post within the German government, the position of *Landrat* imbued the officeholder with power over local resources and populations. *Landräte* were responsible for the "Germanization" of the region and in part for the systematic expropriation of labor and supplies. This type of authority was only possible because *Landräte* were expected to work closely with National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP) officials, especially in regard to the handling of civilian populations. The *Landräte*, though primarily focused on civilian matters, did oversee local gendarmes. While they were not as cruel as other police forces, these men dutifully carried out Nazi policy.

Born in 1910 in the Silesian borderlands, Klausa was part of a generation of young Germans unwilling to accept the outcome of the First World War who committed themselves to paramilitary training in furtherance of the repeal of the 1919 Versailles provisions. He enrolled as a member of the NSDAP in February 1933 and became a *Sturmabteilung* (SA, the brown-shirted paramilitary "storm division" of the NSDAP) group leader soon after, but it is unclear to what extent this was an act of careerism. Klausa speaks positively about Nazi domestic policies of the early to mid-thirties in his unpublished memoirs, particularly about efforts to curb unemployment, and notes that Hitler's rise to power saved the country from "an escalating civil war" (p. 69). Klausa diligently served his fatherland: he received glowing reviews and commendations for his service throughout the late thirties.

Klausa, the son of a *Landrat* himself, had always coveted this position so as to follow in his father's footsteps; this family background may have been the ultimate impetus for the appointment in Będzin in 1940. Archival records indicate that the position had already been filled, but Klausa's father's connections forced the change in personnel. These backhanded dealings indicate that Klausa's role was therefore always politicized. There is also no doubt that his work as *Landrat* was crucial to the localized administration of the Holocaust (p. 78). Yet his memoirs emphasize how there was an "absence" of Jews in the district apart from the three towns where they had already been resettled. Here again Klausa was attempting to present a sanitized view of his work in Będzin and to reaffirm both the anodyne and mundane nature of his bureaucratic output during the war.

From his own accounting, it seems that Klausa was only fully aware of the totality of Nazi policy in 1942 as the deportations to death camps ramped up. But as was the case with others in similar positions, he felt that it was best not to question state, party, or military policy.[2] We see, however, that he was wracked by internal "unease" once he became aware of the totality of the "Final Solution." Fulbrook's work provides a nuanced picture of banal evil, showing how individuals clearly uncomfortable with genocidal action still worked "towards the Führer."[3] Fulbrook also explains that as a practicing Catholic, Klausa had moral concerns about his actions and those of the state he represented. Though as she adeptly states, "[f]or Udo Klausa, [this] commitment to the Catholic faith caused some difficulty, although not sufficient to affect his relations with his Nazi superiors in any way" (p. 68). Klausa himself was never brought to trial after the war, a decision owing in part to a lack of documentary evidence against him and the lack of political will in postwar West Germany to try individuals who were not fanatical murders (guilt was reserved only for those Nazis who had gone above their station and ordered killings, not those only following orders).[4]

The city of Będzin itself provides an interesting case for understanding the implementation of National Socialist occupation policies. Though incorporated into the so-called Greater German Reich, the town had a much larger Polish and Jewish population than more western reaches of Silesia where the population was primarily German. The town's Jewish population fell under the control of a regional "Community of Elders," as the Sosnowiec-based *Judenrat* for the area was known. This council was led by the megalomaniacal Mojżesz (Moniek) Merin, a man comfortable wielding the Jewish auxiliary police force under his command in order to consolidate power, ensure the safety of his loved ones, and curry the favor of Nazi overlords.[5] There are many parallels between these policies and those of the Jewish council in Łódź under the control of Khayim Mordkhe Rumkowski, though the case of Będzin allows scholars to see how Nazi policy differed in smaller ghettos within industrialized Silesia.

Scholars will certainly be able to benefit greatly from Fulbrook's micro-history of a region typically neglected in the study of the Second World War, though there are minor issues that will jump out to readers with specialized knowledge. The title itself, *A Small Town Near Auschwitz*, may leave some Holocaust scholars uneasy. Despite the short distance between Będzin and the death factory of Auschwitz, the title does a disservice to the city, essentially relegating it to a waypoint for Jews on their way to the crematoria. Additionally, Fulbrook spends much of her discussion of prewar Jewish life in Będzin on the issue of Polish antisemitism. While this hatred certainly existed, it obscures the variegated nature of Jewish society and culture in the interwar years. Even

more problematic, this presentation draws a connection, though not implied, between Polish antisemitism and Nazi antisemitism–two different forms of virulent hatred for the same population. These points aside, Fulbrook's study is a key example of the integrative histories of the Holocaust and the Second World War that provide depth and nuance to the understanding of perpetration, victimization, and nonparticipation in one of the central crimes of the twentieth century.

Notes

[1]. On the question of female support for the Nazi state, see Dagmar Herzog, ed., *Sexuality and German Fascism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

[2]. On the mindset of perpetrators and the blind acceptance of orders, see Browning, *Ordinary Men*; Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Höss* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000); and Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York, NY: Aaron Asher Books, 1992).

[3]. Ian Kershaw, "'Working Towards the Führer': Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship," *Contemporary European History* 2, no. 2 (1993): 103-118.

[4]. For an excellent account of postwar justice in the Federal Republic of Germany (or the lack thereof), see Rebecca Wittmann, *Beyond Justice: The Auschwitz Trial* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[5]. Isaiah Trunk, *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe under Nazi Occupation* (New York: MacMillan, 1972), in particular, 422-428.

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