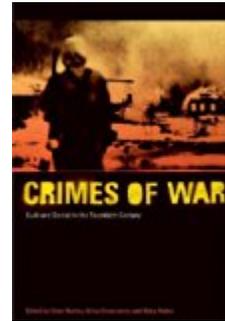


Omer Bartov, Atina Grossmann, Mary Nolan, eds. *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*. New York: The New Press, 2002. xxxiv + 344 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-56584-654-8; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-56584-814-6.

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Published on H-Holocaust (January, 2004)



Researching and Reflecting on Responsibility

In 1995, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research sponsored an exhibit entitled “War of Extermination: Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941-1944” that traveled throughout Germany and Austria for the next four years and was seen by over nine hundred thousand people. Depicting the involvement of German soldiers in war crimes and genocide in the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Serbia, the exhibit relied on the extensive use of photographs, letters from the front and official army reports in order to make the argument that the Holocaust “was an integral part of the war on the Eastern Front” (p. xi). The significance of this argument in light of our understanding of how the Holocaust occurred on the ground, on a daily basis, was so great that the Cooper Union arranged for an American showing of the exhibit set to open in New York in December 1999. However, just in advance of that opening, charges that some of the photographs depicted civilian victims of the Soviet NKVD, not victims of the Wehrmacht, circulated in Germany, and the Hamburg Institute decided to cancel the American tour. Nonetheless, a conference of academics that was to have coincided with the exhibit’s opening in New York went ahead, now focused not only on an examination of the Wehrmacht’s role in genocide, but also on questions of documentation and representation. This volume is the result of that conference and raises a number of significant questions that have increasingly come into debate in the community of Holocaust scholars, amongst those interested in comparative genocide studies, and in the context of a growing number of students and members of the general public interested in both the events of the time and in their sub-

sequent memorialization and representation.

Aryeh Neier begins the volume with a brief history of war and war crimes, emphasizing the importance of the Second World War and German atrocities in putting crimes against humanity on the agenda of the international community. Jan Philipp Reemtsma follows with an eloquent analysis of war and war crimes, particularly in the specific context of the Nazi regime, the Wehrmacht and subsequent memories of the Holocaust in Germany. A member of the Hamburg Institute, he illuminates the context in which the exhibit was planned, explaining that the involvement of the Wehrmacht and other groups in the genocide of Europe’s Jews, although the subject of academic study, was absent from the “collective consciousness” of the Holocaust from the period of the Eichmann trial through the 1990s (p. 12). Reemtsma considers the impact of the Hamburg exhibit on public knowledge of Wehrmacht war crimes to be as forceful as the role that Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* and Victor Klemperer’s diaries had on public awareness of the relationship between the Nazi regime and wartime Germans concerning the Holocaust (p. 13). He then describes the controversy that ended the exhibition’s run, concluding that despite its ultimate closure, the important issues it raised underline the need to understand that “to ask ‘who did the killing’ is only one part of the war-crime question. You also have to ask who was responsible and what kind of responsibility was shared by whom” (p. 15).

Although not explicitly organized into sections, the essays that follow can be seen to represent four thematic approaches to the historical study of war crimes. The first set presents recent evidence about the role of Germans in crimes of the Second World War, primarily but not exclusively focused on those in the Army, which was the historical subject of the exhibition in the first place. The second set of essays pays particular attention to the questions that emerged from the 1999 controversy, namely those concerned with the interpretation of historical evidence. The use of photographic evidence forms a central theme amongst these works. The third group of papers concentrates on the question of memory and representation, while the final section includes three essays on war crimes and memory in the Soviet Union, Japan, and Korea that add a comparative perspective to the volume. Saul Friedlander and Christopher Browning present new evidence on the question of soldiers and the Holocaust from the Ukraine and Serbia respectively. Friedlander uses his case study, and the growth of public awareness about the genocide carried out in the occupied USSR, to dismiss arguments made by Hans Mommsen, among others, that while most Germans knew of the destruction of the Jews, they chose not to deal with this fact and rather “repressed” that knowledge. In contrast, Friedlander suggests that the involvement of Wehrmacht soldiers in such large numbers further underlines the “criminal dimension” of the regime (p. 29). Emphasizing the large numbers of soldiers involved in mass murder and the fact that through letters, photographs and visits home on leave they disseminated knowledge of the Holocaust amongst the public, the resulting response of the German public, characterized as “mostly indifferent,” leads one to conclude that the general population had a “far deeper involvement” with the Nazis than often thought (pp. 26-28). Browning’s Serbian case study makes the distinction between Wehrmacht participation in mass murder and its pursuit of “anti-partisan” warfare which often resulted in civilian deaths, and also measures the attitudes of Wehrmacht commanders, considering their greater freedom to operate in a theater far from Hitler’s desired “Lebensraum” territories (p. 31). Wehrmacht independence led to a reprisal ratio in the anti-partisan war that was extremely high (100:1), but nonetheless was moderated by the ability to investigate individual Serbs and distinguish between those who were partisans of different degrees. Such a distinction was not made at all when it came to Jews and “Gypsies,” with the exception of women and children. For Browning, the first policy led to a spate of war crimes in Serbia while the second meant unmitigated genocide (p. 40).

Other essays bring new evidence to light concerning the responsibility of various individuals for war crimes and the manner in which society confronted those crimes. Gudrun Schwarz’s essay on the role of women particularizes Claudia Koonz’s thesis that “most” German women “collaborated” with the regime in some way. Schwarz focuses on women serving in the East, whether in resettlement organizations targeting ethnic Germans or as translators, secretaries and medical personnel for the Army and the SS. Building an argument that women who witnessed murder, profited from murder and plunder, or participated in the atrocities of the Eastern front were equally as guilty as the men serving on the Eastern Front, Schwarz also seeks to destroy the myth of the innocent, homebound woman who merely survived under Nazism. She concludes that women were essential to the “smooth functioning” of the Nazi system in Eastern Europe and at home (p. 137).

The strongest essay in the collection is that of Omer Bartov, which operates as a transition piece between the historiographical question of Wehrmacht involvement and the methodological question of interpretation and representation raised by the photographs used in the Hamburg Institute’s exhibit. Bartov, a member of the committee which examined the exhibit’s evidence following the cancellation of its American tour, defends the exhibit by reiterating the committee’s conclusion that while some evidence had been mislabeled, there was absolutely no attempt to falsify claims and that the overwhelming quantity of evidence gathered strongly supported the conclusion that the Wehrmacht participated in war crimes “partly in a leading and partly in a supporting capacity” (p. 42). The strength of the piece, however, comes in his analysis of the debate that hounded the exhibit. Bartov effectively dismisses the assessments of historians like Horst Moller, who attacked the exhibit for portraying a Wehrmacht role in genocide when, as Moller sees it, the majority of soldiers were only engaged in partisan warfare. Bartov nonetheless acknowledges that it was the nature of photographic evidence that allowed the criticism to stick. The real issue, therefore, was not the use of photographs, but rather “the limitations of historians unused to integrating such material into their work” (p. 58). Encouraging use of such evidence, which is voluminous when it comes to war and genocide in the East, Bartov calls on researchers to refine their critical analysis of such sources and to integrate them with oral testimony, memoirs and official documentation (p. 58).

Bernd Boll takes up Bartov’s challenge in a subsequent essay. Boll directly analyzes the most controversial

photographs from the exhibit, those from Zloczow in East Galicia. This was a town where the NKVD was active before the Nazi takeover. It was also the location of genocidal war crimes committed on July 3-4, 1941, as Ukrainian militia, the SS, and troops of the Wehrmacht murdered local Jews in one of many pogroms that killed somewhere between twelve and twenty-four thousand Jews across western Ukraine in June and July (pp. 73, 77). The physical location of the Zloczow massacre, an old citadel, had also been the site, prior to July, of a series of NKVD murders, and this fact was used to discredit some of the photographs in the Hamburg exhibit, with critics claiming the photographs used were of NKVD and not Nazi atrocities. In analyzing the actual photographs, Boll acknowledges that some errors took place in the labeling and that some of the exhibit photographs really portrayed victims killed by the NKVD, and that victims of both the NKVD and the Nazis were shown in photographs that emerged from Zloczow in the summer of 1941 (p. 92). Rather than simply accept these errors, however, critics used the existence of inaccuracies in order to question the exhibit's general argument that Wehrmacht involvement in the Holocaust was extensive (p. 92). Boll decisively rejects this line of argument. He demonstrates that the vast majority of Zloczow photographs shown were accurately represented as those of Jews killed by the Nazis in the two-day pogrom (p. 92). More significantly, he traces the origins of the idea that Jewish victims of the Nazis were actually non-Jewish victims of the NKVD back to Nazi propaganda produced in 1941. The SS manipulated the presentation of the photographs almost immediately after the murders of local Jews took place. It was the Nazi regime and local commanders who claimed that this visual evidence of the killing of Jews actually showed the murder of Ukrainians by Jewish citizens who favored Soviet rule. Such propaganda was designed to encourage the Wehrmacht to murder by connecting the Jewish population with Communist aggression (p. 81). Boll concludes that criticism of the exhibit, with its particular focus on the potential NKVD link, emerged in Germany not because of any form of Holocaust denial or pro-Nazi sentiment, but rather as an example of current revisionism centered on the Army's role in the Holocaust. Part of this revisionism seeks to end criticism of the army as an institution, but the greater message, for Boll, is the increasing desire to portray regular Germans such as the soldiers of the Wehrmacht not as perpetrators but as victims themselves, thus excluding war crimes committed on orders from above as crimes, moving away from the Nazi past to construct a new national identity in light of reunification (p. 97-98). In addition to Bartov's concern

as to how historians should use photographic and other evidence, Boll suggests that we should also be concerned that some evidence might be more susceptible to various "selective readings" than others. In doing so, he offers an introduction to the question of representation and memory that forms the third theme of the book. Frank Biess also contributes to this theme with a significant essay on the subject of the Kameradenschinder trials in postwar West Germany, trials of individuals held in Soviet POW camps who abused their fellow inmates when given positions of authority by the Red Army. By emphasizing the fact that many such trials were held, in contrast to the small number of West German trials of Nazi war criminals, and by underlining the uniqueness and peculiarity of such cases, Biess argues that they can be seen to represent the "displaced, selective and indirect" manner in which West Germany grappled with the transition from Nazism. For Biess, these trials serve as a valuable source for analyzing that transition. He argues that the nature of the evidence considered in these cases can provide historians with lessons about how the West German judiciary interpreted questions closely associated with the Nazi regime and its crimes, such as the question of individual responsibility for war crimes and the role of denunciation in war crimes accusations that emerged after warfare ended (pp. 140, 143, 146). Moreover, in describing the events of the Eastern war in West German courtrooms, these trials did bring details about the Wehrmacht's actions into the public record, although Biess concludes that prosecutors and judges "failed to capitalize" on this aspect of the evidence presented (p. 150). In summary, Biess argues that the ability to bring this evidence into the public realm, and the inability to exploit it for its fuller truths, represented both the successes and the limitations of the new West German democracy in its transition from Nazism (p. 160).

More directly focused on the question of representation, Marianne Hirsch confronts the issue of artists using perpetrator images in post-Holocaust art. Emphasizing the role gender plays in the photographs, she concludes that their use actually "mythologizes" the images and "obscures" their sources (p. 103). Within this context, Hirsch offers some interesting ideas about photographic evidence of the Holocaust, stressing that in its freezing of a particular moment, it becomes "a sign of excess, connecting the perpetrator's gaze to the perpetrator's deed" (p. 106). Robert Moeller's focus is quite different but is similarly grounded in a detailed study of representations, this time of cinematic portrayals of the Battle of Stalingrad. The image of German soldiers as vic-

tims in this particular instance, Moeller argues, pervades films from the 1950s through the 1990s, and thus contributed to the birth and perpetuation of the myth of the “clean” Wehrmacht that the Hamburg Exhibit sought to counteract (pp. 170-171).

The final essays offer a comparative perspective. Given the subtitle of the book, one is a bit disappointed that the comparative element is given only three spots in a collection of thirteen essays. One of the strengths of the essays in the collection is their focus on the Hamburg exhibit as a starting point for reflections on the many topics associated with war crimes, and here these comparative pieces seems a bit out of place since they do not begin with such explicit references. However, individually these essays are as strong as any in the collection. Amir Weiner looks at the Soviet anti-Semitic campaign of the late 1940s and early 1950s, John W. Dower examines the multiplicity of ways in which the Japanese have confronted their wartime past, and Marilyn B. Young writes about the lengthy coming to terms with American war crimes in the massacre at No Gun Ri in July 1950, emphasizing the idea that when it comes to war crimes, the

“narrative form which concedes some things in the service of a larger denial” is still with us today (p. 254). In this context, an acknowledgment of civilian deaths does not equate with an acceptance of responsibility for war crimes; “atrocities arise unbidden,” as she later puts it (p. 258).

Are we overrun with images and narratives of war crimes? Has this diminished the significance we once attached to the questions asked by Reemtsma that highlighted the importance of responsibility in the study of war crimes? For this reviewer, the essays included in *Crimes of War* demonstrate the importance of refocusing on that question again and again. Whether in the use of new materials, in the analysis of how evidence is interpreted and/or misused, or in the examination of how memory is created, transformed and reorganized when it comes to war crimes, for these authors the question of responsibility remains vital to their work. One of the lessons of the Hamburg exhibit, then, is certainly to get the evidence right. But equally important, if not more important, is to ask the right questions as well.

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Citation: David A. Messenger. Review of Bartov, Omer; Grossmann, Atina; Nolan, Mary, eds., *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*. H-Holocaust, H-Net Reviews. January, 2004.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8824>

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