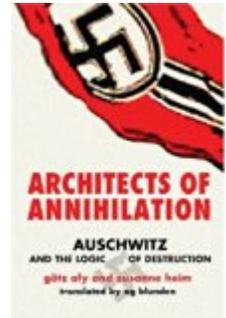
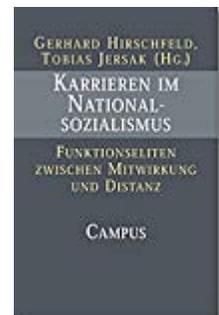


Götz Aly, Susanne Heim. *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction.* London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2002. 378 pp. \$37.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-297-84278-1.



Gerhard Hirschfeld, Tobias Jersak, eds.. *Karrieren im Nationalsozialismus: Funktionseliten zwischen Mitwirkung und Distanz.* Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2004. 345 pp. EUR 24.90, cloth, ISBN 978-3-593-37156-6.



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In the translation of their book, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (1991), historians Götz Aly and Susanne Heim have attempted to show how the mass murder of European Jews during the Holocaust fit into broader population-shaping policies the Nazis had formulated for all of Europe in order to pave the way economically and demographically for Germany's grandiose future. Following a distinctly postmodern assessment of the "rationale" behind the murder of millions of innocent people, Aly and Heim conclude that "the policy of annihilation was the product of rational argument taken to a mercilessly logical conclusion" (p. 290). According to the authors, "racism and modernization were not con-

flicting tendencies but complementary ones" (p. 288). Modernization was to be achieved through the culling of "useless," "unproductive" populations throughout Europe--those that stood in the way of Germany reaching her fullest economic potential as a modern, industrial empire.

Divided into thirteen analytical and carefully researched chapters, *Architects of Annihilation* adds another dimension to the decades-long focus on the history of the perpetrators of the Holocaust. It also contributes a rich perspective to the debate on the process and timing of the decision to murder the Jews of Europe by providing the context and influence of economic considerations in that process. The authors examine the history of policy planners and policy makers in the Third

Reich--those who performed research and who, according to Heim and Aly, helped inform and guide decisions made by top Nazi leadership. These planners viewed Europe as a *tabula rasa* for demographic restructuring and development and, with the Nazi ascent to power, were provided an unprecedented opportunity to remedy the social and economic ills caused by overpopulation, with no moral or ethical barriers to impede their vision. As Aly and Heim have noted, "It was no part of a planner's job to take any thought for the people who lived in these geographical 'spaces' or for their traditional way of life. In fact people as such scarcely featured in most of the proposals for redevelopment" (p. 174). Coupling the population problem with racist ideology rampant at the time, the planners fed the Nazis' goal to dominate Europe and to reshape it in their vision, thus providing impetus for genocide.

At the time of its release in 1991, Aly and Heim's book prompted much scholarly debate. Thus, this more recent English version might have benefited from a recap of that debate, as well as an overview of current scholarship on the topic and the authors' understanding and possible reshaping of their theses in light of a decade of research performed since its release.[1] Their main thesis states that Auschwitz and the wholesale destruction of the European Jews and other populations during the Second World War can be explained as part of a "grand strategy known as "negative population policy" (p. 4). Rather than focusing on the "inexplicable" or "barbaric" dimensions of the murder of millions--oft-repeated concepts that do little to further our understanding of the Holocaust--Aly and Heim focus on how this mass murder fit into the purposefully planned project to curb overpopulation across Europe. In so doing, they refocus the lens away from the likes of Heinrich Himmler, Reinhard Heydrich, and Hermann Göring and instead examine the responsibility of those technocrats--policy planners, trained academics, regional planners, demographers, and civil servants--whose knowledge and

expertise laid the groundwork for the future of a modern, German-dominated Europe.

Dividing their book into three thematic parts, Aly and Heim focus first on the *Entjudung* (the systematic removal of Jews) from German society, describing how discrimination combined with economic restructuring influenced planning, even in annexed Austria and the Sudetenland in 1938. The book's second thematic grouping deals with occupied Poland, which was used by the German government and its planners as a testing ground for the complete restructuring and transformation of the economy and demographics. In occupied Poland, for the first time according to Aly and Heim, the "Jewish problem" became a "population policy problem," one that "could not be 'solved' with the hitherto customary instruments of terror, expropriation and enforced emigration" (p. 7). Aly and Heim delineate how the "constructive desire of the German planners," whose strategies to "build a better future" dovetailed with the SS, "was the very thing that led ultimately to genocide" (p. 7). In the last third of the book, Aly and Heim show how conflicts between economic refiguring, solving the overpopulation problem in southeastern Europe, and the policy of starving millions of Soviet citizens prefigured the decision to murder the Jews. Heim and Aly try to show that according to this starkly rationalistic plan, rather than depleting economic resources, the murder of millions of people would pave the way for economic success by maximizing productivity. Jews, who were overrepresented in the commercial and industrial economic sectors, represented a barrier to industrial development in Poland, according to this rationale.

In addition to its provocative thesis, one of the most remarkable aspects of the book--which links it thematically to the collection of essays edited by Gerhard Hirschfeld and Tobias Jersak--is the uncovering of information about specific, relatively unknown experts in the fields of demographic and economic planning upon whose work

the German government allegedly based its decisions. These biographical encounters are particularly fascinating for the dedication they show on the part of many intellectuals and thinkers who harnessed the opportunity to plan and build a great German future. See, for example, their discussion of the economist Helmut Meinhold, who worked at the Institute for German Development Work in Cracow, where he examined and evaluated possibilities for "regional economic restructuring" for the government and where he achieved unprecedented opportunity to concretize plans (p. 121-22). These young intellectual experts--Aly and Heim note that they were largely in their mid- to late twenties--had the chance to reach secure academic employment and see their visions realized. Their careers skyrocketed and they had the backing and opportunity to formulate a new Europe, a remarkable boost to relatively short careers. Furthermore, the idea that the initiatives for mass murder originated in plans formulated by civil servants and policy researchers also reinforces research that shows that Nazi policy was often radicalized by initiatives originating from below. [2]

But how does the particular, and as many argue fundamentally unique, plan to murder all the Jews of Europe fit into the authors' thesis? Why were the Jews specifically slated for destruction? Aly and Heim's view is less particularistic, and certainly functionalist. According to Heim and Aly, the Nazis viewed Europe's Jews as one of many "surplus populations" that hindered the economic modernization of Europe and thus needed to be removed from society. As such, Aly and Heim give less weight to the influence of racist ideology, or antisemitism for that matter, in the structure of their argument: "the policy of mass murder was not primarily motivated by racist or terrorist ideology, but was an instrument designed to speed up the industrialization and agrarian rationalization of the Government General as an 'emerging country'" (p. 184). This rationalization was the foundation for the murder of

the Jews, according to the authors. But was it ideological racism or utilitarian economic needs that determined the decision to annihilate the Jews of Europe? And furthermore, how much influence did the policy planners examined in detail by Aly and Heim actually have on the decision-making process, as opposed to other "experts" who worked for the regime? Although Aly and Heim have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the climate in which decisions were made and have certainly shown how economic policy helped shape that climate, their argument that utilitarian needs were the main impetus for the murder of the Jews is not entirely convincing. For instance, the thesis does not take into consideration many of the other factors and influences, for example, of racial antisemitic ideology and racial science on the formation of anti-Jewish policy. Isabel Heinemann, in her essay in Hirschfeld and Jersak's book, "Ambivalente Sozialingenieure? Die Rasseexperten der SS" and her book *Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut* (2003), in which she examines the SS Race and Settlement Office, shows that racial experts played a key role in determining occupation and Germanization policy in Poland. Her thesis emphasizes the racial ideology of the Nazis as the determining factor for the decision to annihilate the Jews of Europe, rather than economic and demographic concerns. She has emphasized that far from being ambivalent functionaries or non-intellectual, irrational ideologues, the "racial experts of the SS were quite consistent racists, who were confident in the accuracy of their mission formed within their world view" (p. 83).

Aly and Heim's book also focuses largely on Poland, without considering large areas of the rest of Europe in their thesis. Did demographic planning change as the territory conquered increased or as the tide of war changed? As Yehuda Bauer has aptly inquired, "If the problem of German resettlement in the eastern marches of the Reich was the motive for the murder of the Jews, why did the Germans deport to their death the

Jews of Corfu and Rhodes, or those from Narvik in Norway and Bayonne in France? Why did they want to murder the Jews who had found refuge in Shanghai?"[3] Their work falls short on this point. However, despite these criticisms, this text is a worthy, well-researched, and important contribution to the historiography of the Third Reich and should be read as an examination within a series of evolving works by Aly on the materialistic rationale behind forming plans for and supporting, or doing nothing to stop, the murder of the Jews. The authors do, however, foreshadow later work (by Aly and other scholars, such as Frank Bajohr, whose essay on "Aryanization" in the work below centers on this topic) by noting that "[The] collective profiting of one group at the expense of another was a cornerstone of the annihilation policy" (p. 292).

The second work under review, *Karrieren in Nationalsozialismus: Funktionseiliten zwischen Mitwirkung und Distanz* is a more recent contribution and elaboration on the theme of "functional elites" and their role in shaping and implementing the Final Solution. Like Aly and Heim's book, this compilation of well-written essays focuses on the perpetrators of the Holocaust and adds nuance to our understanding of the historical actors involved in the murder of the Jews. More specifically, the essays focus on people from the three segments of society which generally formed so-called "networks of persecution" of Europe's Jews: administration (civil service), occupation administrations, and military officers. This thematic arrangement includes vibrant discussions of politicians, party members, business managers, economists, financial civil servants, and social engineers ("race experts") who, according to the contributing authors, fulfilled a "bureaucratic and institutional division of labor" in the persecution of the Jews (p. 10).

This broad, varied focus on different levels of bureaucratic service is brought together under the main theme of "ambivalence" and analyzes

the culpability of these actors through their understanding of their roles in the criminal processes of the Third Reich.[4] In the formulation of this volume, ambivalence was offered as a conceptual starting point for authors to view particular figures--such as SS officer Kurt Gerstein, "Aryanization" benefactors and administrators, financial civil servants, and scientists. What was given as a conceptual model to the authors is likewise offered as a tool to the reader to consider and debate the role and responsibility of various perpetrators. This concept has permitted the authors--who have reached a broad consensus on the complexity of motivation to participate in the criminal acts of the Third Reich--to analyze how the societal segmentation of the murder of the Jews contributed to individually felt distance or ambiguity towards the crimes perpetrated by the Nazi regime during the Third Reich. How and why did these elites become increasingly supportive of the murderous machinations of the Nazi regime? As many of the articles show, sometimes they had doubts about their actions and tried to achieve some kind of distance from the tenets, actions, and crimes they perceived as emanating from the center. At other times, they were enthusiastic, opportunistic participants.

By focusing on this stimulating and relevant topic, this compilation of short, well-focused essays often raises more questions than it answers. The volume prompts contemplation on the darkest of human behavior. Although the study of ambivalence in the context of the *Funktionseiliten* of the Third Reich is not entirely new, the book ambitiously covers a number of different topical areas that help us understand ambivalence as an important and complex phenomenon of the era. Furthermore, like Aly and Heim, the collection, as a whole, elaborates on the theme of "rationality" in the context of the Holocaust and the planners and administrators who carried out in their own conceptual frameworks various aspects of the Final Solution, as opposed to the sheer barbarism inherent in the murder of millions. The compila-

tion humanizes the perpetrators, complicating our ideas about culpability and human capacity to perform evil deeds. Setting the stage for a discussion of these kinds of ideas, Ulrich Herbert has noted in his essay at the beginning of the book, "Wer waren die Nationalsozialisten? Typologien des politischen Verhaltens im NS-Staat": "Indem man erkennt, dass das NS-Regime und seine Verbrechen nicht von einer anderen Gesellschaft und anderen Menschen betrieben wurden als von den uns wohlvertrauten, wird man die Entdeckung der Ambivalenz für einigermaßen selbstverständlich halten" (p. 38). The Nazi era was human-created, and therefore understanding the complex connections between individuals and their roles within the regime helps us achieve greater understanding of how the Third Reich functioned and how and why people participated in that functioning. The study of ambiguity or ambivalence with regard to the criminal nature of their work is not meant to excuse this participation, however. Rather, this kind of focus can bring the perpetrators of the Third Reich uncomfortably close to us when we discover that the acting elites were not monsters, but at times inconsistent, wavering, and ultimately human.

Karrieren features individual and group biographies that permit easy comparison and analysis within each thematic grouping. The editors have chosen key examples of administrative experts who are largely unknown in the historiography. For example, within the occupation administration section of the volume, essays by Geraldien von Frijtag, which centers on Hans Georg Calmeyer and his ambivalence with regard to deciding racial categories of Jews in the Netherlands, and by Peter Romijn on K.J. Fredericks and the professional ambitions within occupied territories in the West, are enlightening counterpoints to essays such as "Die vermeintliche Ambivalenz des Bösen: Der SS-Offizier Kurt Gerstein" by Tobias Jersak. In contrast to Aly and Heim's argument in *Architects*, Isabel Heinemann emphasizes that the nature of the German occupation of Europe was

founded on the work of the so-called race experts, who were convinced of the soundness and "rationality" of their reasoning. Marc Baruch focuses on the collaboration of the French civil service, and how their participation contributed to the efficiency of anti-Jewish actions there. To cite a few other examples from this rich collection, Thomas Sandkühler, in his essay on Berthold Beitz, uncovers the ambiguous, "situational" motives behind rescue, which sometimes emanated from a desire for personal gain. Christian Hartmann, in his biography of Franz Halder, remarks on the political and moral compromises made by members of the military. The essays show that ambiguity or doubts with regard to one's place within various sectors of society under the Third Reich did not often lead to resistance.

The collection does, however, have some gaps. It might have been enriched, for example, with a focus on women perpetrators and women in functional careers during the Third Reich.[5] And while the focus on western European occupation regimes and the gray zones within which officers and civil administrators conducted their business is interesting, the volume might have also benefited from central and eastern European examples of collaboration and its various levels of ambiguity.

Still, this volume is a useful collection of varied focuses on a central theme running through both books: How was the murder of millions of people technically and administratively possible? Who carried it out, and who was slated to benefit? And lastly, why was this vision, whether conceived by demographers and economists or other technocrats, permitted to be possible?

Notes

[1]. See, for example, the recent translation of Götz Aly, *Hitler's Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State* (New York: Metropolitan, 2007) in which he focuses on the support of the Nazis by the German population and the immense benefits (economic, social, and so

on) from that support. See also Aly, *"Final Solution": Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (London: Oxford University Press, 1999) and Susanne Heim's work on the Kaiser Wilhelm Society, *Research for Autarky: The Contribution of Scientists to Nazi Rule in Germany* (Berlin: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 2001).

[2]. See, for example, Ian Kershaw's biographies of Hitler.

[3]. Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

[4]. My thanks to Dr. Evelyn Zegenhagen, with whom in-depth and lively discussions about this book helped shape this review.

[5]. See, for example, the essays of Beate Meyer and Dagmar Reese in Kirsten Heinsohn, Barbara Vogel, and Ulrike Weckel, eds., *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1997).

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