



**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** Eric J. Engstrom (Institut für Geschichtswissenschaften, Humboldt Universität)

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## **Ethnocrats and the Ethics of Historiographic Practice**

The philosopher Odo Marquard once provocatively defined history as a “Dauerflucht aus dem Gewissenhaben in das Gewissensein.”[1] Arguably, Marquard’s observation was never truer than in the 1970s and 1980s. Among segments of the historical profession at that time (and not only in Germany), there was no shortage of practitioners who, by exposing the crimes of the National Socialist regime and documenting its murderous work, were inclined to cast themselves as the conscience of the nation. Of course, there can be no doubt that (especially in Germany) there was a pressing need to research those crimes and the events that precipitated them. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, historians turned their critical gaze more easily toward other professions (especially doctors, but also civil servants, lawyers and politicians) than they did toward their own disciplinary ancestors. Research over the past decade—thanks in part to a boomerang effect generated by the searing criticism aimed at East German historians post-1989—has begun to change this. The essays published in this volume represent the efforts of a generation of young scholars to question the past of their own profession; they have found it decidedly wanting.

Georg Iggers has written a foreword for the collection, briefly sketching the historiographic terrain out of which this volume emerged. He, like many others, is right in emphasizing the embarrassing failure of professional historians up until the early 1990s to examine critically the history of their discipline during the Third Reich. This failure is the more glaring for implicating those historians who, in the wake of 1968, defined themselves as standard bearers of a critical historiographic tradition.

Although the editors do not explicitly advertise it as such, this is a collection of studies on the ethics of historiographic practice. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch have set themselves the task of demonstrating that historians and other scholars in the humanities stood “prominently in the foreground” (p. xix) when it came to drafting and implementing Nazi policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide. The emphasis is on fields such *Volksgeschichte*, *Ostforschung*, *Westforschung*, *Heimatsforschung* and *Migrationsforschung*. The editors stress that researchers in these fields hailed from widely varying disciplines, ranging from statistics and geography to linguistics and cartography. Historians, however,

also played a prominent role in these policy-oriented research endeavors. At the time, various generic terms were used to describe these practitioners, such as *Volkstumspolitische Berater*, *Volkstumsspezialisten* or *Ethnopolitiker* (p. 59). Some of the authors in this volume follow Michael Burleigh in describing them as “ethnocrats.”

About half of the contributions have an explicitly biographic focus. One of the great advantages of this approach is that it calls into question the historical ruptures of 1933 and 1945. Almost all of the chapters highlight the biographic permeability of these dates. Furthermore, this approach turns a spotlight on the history of scholars who whitewashed their biographies and massaged their curricula vitae. Indeed, many of the ethnocrats depicted in this book went on to pursue well-respected, lucrative and even highly decorated careers in the Federal Republic. This is one of the more important aspects of the book. It suggests that if historians are in search of lines of continuity within their own profession, it may not be racism, but careerist opportunism that is likely to be the strongest bridge spanning the caesurae of 1933, 1945 and indeed 1989-90. Watching contemporary historians scramble to secure funding from federal or EU-sponsored projects today can be a disturbing reminder of not-so-bygone practices.

Two introductory articles by the editors provide important context for the book as a whole. Ingo Haar’s chapter on “German *Ostforschung* and Anti-Semitism” argues that, in order to understand the role *Ostforschung* played in Nazi Germany, historians must study it not just as an isolated academic discipline, but also in the context of a “dynamic political situation” (p. 1). *Ostforschung* was not simply an innocuous scholarly exercise, but a research agenda inextricably linked with state policy, be it the revision of the Versailles Treaty in the Weimar Republic, the resettlement and extermination policies in the Third Reich or postwar repatriation policies and Western reorientation during the Cold War. Beyond this, however, Haar stresses that *völkisch* historians tended to share the antisemitic visions of the National Socialist regime and its ideology of *Lebensraum*. Focusing mainly on the Nord- und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, he emphasizes the overlapping “racist and conservative nationalist dispositions” (p. 11) within the organization. At the same time, however, he argues that (like the regime itself) ethnocratic scholars became progressively more radical in their policy proposals. In Haar’s account, therefore, an implicit tension exists between political dynamics on the one hand, and the claim that many practitioners of *Volksgeschichte* were inher-

ently antisemitic on the other. More traditional histories would have resolved this tension along a bipolar functionalist/intentionalist spectrum. But Haar avoids deploying this weary model to organize his material, largely eschewing analytic frameworks in favor of descriptive narrative.

Michael Fahlbusch’s account of ethnopolitical experts in the Reichssicherheitshauptamt is more rigorously structured than Haar’s chapter. Fahlbusch sketches the highly organized and convoluted network of ethnocrats and research institutions put in place to serve the aims of the SS. Describing the Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften as a “brain trust” (p. 31), he outlines the extensive financial and administrative resources that the regime devoted to ethnic German research societies. He also uses a cohort structure to analyze three distinct groups of elite functionaries within the Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften. On the whole, he makes a strong case for *Volkstumsforschung* being big, heavily state-sponsored science. He then rounds out his account with a case study of one influential ethnocrat, Wilfried Krallert, a geographer and historian who headed the Kuratorium für Volks- und Landesforschung and participated in ethnic cleansing operations in the Balkans. Fahlbusch’s contribution is especially important for surveying the larger administrative apparatus in which the events described in the ensuing chapters transpired.

Several of those chapters are especially noteworthy. Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel D. Sinner assess the work of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp, two ethnopolitical advisors on the Ukraine. Drawing on personal diaries and official reports, the authors paint a vivid picture of the mundane, but murderous enthusiasm of these “liberators” of German ex-patriots in the Ukraine. Furthermore, in a section entitled “From Genocide to Genealogy,” they demonstrate how the legacy of Leibbrandt and Stumpp lived on in postwar repatriation policies and in the genealogical interests of Russian-German heritage societies.

Michael Wedekind’s chapter “The Sword of Science” investigates the role of German scholars in National Socialist annexation policies in Slovenia and northern Italy. With the more or less explicit annexation of the provinces bordering Yugoslavia and Italy in 1941, the Third Reich expanded into regions renowned for intractable ethnic conflict. The ensuing deportation, resettlement and germanization policies were undertaken with the aid of various institutions within the Sösdostdeutsche and Alpenländische Forschungsgemeinschaften, especially

the Institut für Kärntner Landesforschung. These actions marshaled a mix of geopolitical, economic, historical and ethnic arguments in pursuing strategies of ethnic segmentation and antagonism. Arguably, no other part of the Third Reich was so fraught with overlapping political, linguistic and ethnic tensions. Wedekind's article does an excellent job in driving home just how enormously complex these patchwork regions were—and simultaneously how hopelessly utopian Nazi attempts to sanitize them were.

Hans Derk's chapter on German *Westforschung* comes as a sober corrective to the emphasis on Eastern Europe in most of the early chapters. He draws on the case of Franz Petri, a historian and National Socialist whose research concerned the language boundary dividing medieval Germanic and Frankish peoples. After the invasion of Belgium in 1940, Petri became a so-called *Kulturpapst* in Brussels, responsible for many of the Nazis' cultural and ethnic policies. Translated into policy terms, Petri's *Westforschung* was designed to "abolish the 'Western orientation' of the Flemish and Walloon people; to 'germanize' science and its institutions.... [and] to transform into practice the demands formulated in his *Habilitationsschrift* concerning the *Sprachgrenze* such as, for instance, support for the ethnic Germans in Arel and Luxembourg" (pp. 186-187). In the person of Franz Petri, personal interests, the ideals of *Westforschung* and Nazi ideology coalesced into one.

Karl-Heinz Roth's contribution on Hans Rothfels aims to sidestep recent disputes that zero in on Rothfels's work in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Roth takes a wider biographic perspective, analyzing three periods in Rothfels's life. First, he considers the radicalization of Rothfels's politics in the early 1930s. On the one hand, he disputes the basis of Eckart Kehr's claim that Rothfels had fascist leanings, but on the other hand he confirms Rothfels's status as a spokesman for a group of young neo-conservatives inspired by the works of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, Carl Schmitt and Oswald Spengler. Second, Roth recounts the stages of Rothfels's marginalization within German academia and his ultimately futile attempts to secure the patronage of Nazi officials. Finally, Roth assesses the impact of Rothfels's experiences in England and the United States on postwar German historiography, arguing that emigration deradicalized Rothfels's thinking, even while the Cold War proved conducive to his neo-conservative views.

Other articles treat a variety of topics. Alexander Pinwinkler examines the *völkisch* historian Erich Keyser

and his concept of *Bevölkerungsgeschichte*. Keyser imagined a racial and biological "essence" that united Germans across the ages and that justified their irredentist aspirations. Christof Morrissey presents a case study of the Institut für Heimatforschung in Slovakia in order to demonstrate how the Nazi regime incorporated regional scholarship in its efforts to reorder Central and Eastern Europe. Viorel Achim provides a fascinating account of the Romanian statistician Sabin Manuila, who (as director of the Central Institute of Statistics in Bucharest) supplied demographic and ethnic data not only to German scholars and officials, but also to the governments of Ion Antonescu, Great Britain and the United States. Achim demonstrates how serving up statistics to such varied political masters was anything but an exercise in mindless bureaucratic number crunching. Wolfgang Freud examines the migration research of Fritz Braun, who from 1936 to 1945 was instrumental in Nazi expulsion and resettlement policies in Lorraine and Poland, and who after 1945 was honored on both sides of the Atlantic for his research on German emigration. Frank-Rutger Hausmann's chapter on the network of Deutsche wissenschaftliche Institute (DWIs) explores the activities of these interdisciplinary research institutions, designed as conduits of academic exchange between Germany and the cultural elite of occupied countries. Unfortunately, Hausmann does not adequately embed these institutions in the long tradition of German *auswärtige Kulturpolitik*, but he does remind us that, in spite of such big-science initiatives, "only about half of all DWIs really functioned" (p. 224). And of those, most were fully active for only a brief period from 1940 to 1942. Finally, Jan Piskorski juxtaposes German *Ostforschung* with Polish *mysl zachodnia*, adding a useful comparative perspective and a potential corrective to the discussions in Germany, which have not generally highlighted the work of non-German ethnocrats.

The book is not without its faults. For example, there is a price to be paid for stressing the "political dynamics" of ethnocratic work. And that is that the professional and disciplinary dynamics tend to get pushed into the background. With the exception of Karl Heinz Roth's chapter, most of the other contributions sacrifice internal disciplinary dynamics to larger political narratives. Admittedly, given the interdisciplinary nature of *Ost-* and *Westforschung*, treating these multiple internal dynamics would have made it much more difficult to produce a coherent collection of essays. But still, it is worth noting that a price has been paid for the coherence that this volume delivers.

In their brief introduction, Haar and Fahlbusch express their gratitude to American colleagues for helping to publish a volume that has been “up to now noticeably lacking in Germany” (p. xix). While it may be the case that American audiences will be more receptive to their claims and while they have certainly encountered stiff resistance from some historians in Germany, the implicit suggestion that such a volume has not or could not be published in Germany is misplaced and disingenuous. Their work (and that of several other authors in this collection) has been widely discussed and published in Germany.[2] Some critics have attacked them for stylizing themselves as *enfants terrible* in order to advance their own careers.

The editors also fail to lay out explicit hypotheses or sketch an analytic framework that would help to focus further research. In their preface, they have missed an opportunity to make a broader argument, not only about the role of the humanities in ethnic cleansing, but also about the ethics of historiographic practice. A crucially important theme that is often missing in the articles concerns the specific methodologies that ethnocrats deployed: cataloging systems, statistical techniques, cartographic procedures, documentation strategies and, more generally, the scientific methods of ethnic and racial profiling. Some articles touch briefly on these topics. But the collection would have been much stronger had more contributors addressed these mechanics of scholarly labor in

the human sciences.

In spite of these criticisms, this is a compelling collection of essays, well conceived, and judiciously assembled. The editors should be commended for publishing a set of articles that—unlike many essay collections—is thematically coherent and well balanced. Likewise, their move away from studying scholarly work as cerebral labor to focus instead on research agendas in their political contexts is important and laudable. Bringing these articles to English-language audiences provides an opportunity to expand our understanding of the role of scientific experts and political consultants in Nazi Germany and is a poignant reminder to contemporary historians about the ethics of their own historiographic practices.

#### Notes

[1]. Odo Marquard, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981), p. 57.

[2]. To mention but a few examples: Peter SchÄttler, ed., *Geschichtsschreibung als Legitimationsswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999); Winfried Schultze and Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds., *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1999). H-Soz-u-Kult organized a review symposium on *VersÄumte Fragen* in 2000, on *Westforschung* in 2003, as well as a forum on Hans Rothfels, likewise in 2003.

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