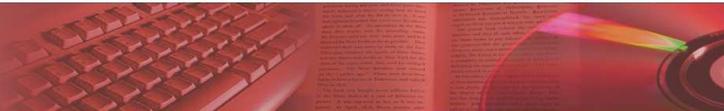


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Omer Bartov. *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories.* Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003. xxi + 248 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3824-0; \$21.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8014-8681-4.

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Few historians would disagree with Omer Bartov's assertion that war and genocide have been intimately connected in the twentieth century (p. xvi). Yet the military history of World War II and the story of the Holocaust come into direct contact with one another all too infrequently. As Bartov points out in chapter 2 of this book, even the authoritative, multi-volume publication, *Germany and the Second World War*, scarcely mentions the Holocaust. Bartov's main aim in *Germany's War and the Holocaust* has been to show why German historians should resist the separation of these two narratives.

Hitler's war in the East was a racial war. It was designed, in the short term, to fuel the German war machine at the expense of starving to death the occupied peoples. In the long run, the Nazis intended to construct a new German empire and German "living space" in vast tracts of land from which millions of the population would be made to "disappear" by forced deportation and mass murder. Some historians have also argued that the euphoria of victory in the first phase of the war against Russia encouraged Nazi leaders to begin the mass murder of European Jews. In their eyes this was, after all, an ideological and racial war to destroy "Jewish Bolshevism." Other historians insist that the transition to genocide was the product of frustration with the failure of *Blitzkrieg* to achieve its goals in Russia. If Germany could not immediately defeat the Soviets, the Germans could at least finish the war against the Jews in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Bartov concludes that "while there is no consensus on the nature of the tie between the decision on mass murder and the course of the *Blitzkrieg* in Russia, there is almost complete unanimity on the connection [...] between *Blitzkrieg* and the implementation of genocide" (p. 51).

How would Germans deal with the memory of this war of racial annihilation after 1945? Bartov thinks that until quite recently they did not. Instead, post-war Germans fixated upon two competing images of Hitler's war; the initial euphoria, when the magical formula of *Blitzkrieg* delivered stunning, cheap German victories in quick succession, and then the final death agonies of the Third Reich, when, hard-bitten, cynical, but loyal German soldiers fought bravely yet hopelessly against the overwhelming force of the Allies' superior material resources. This second image has allowed Germans to view themselves as victims while ignoring the fate of the real victims: the "Jews and all the other Soviet citizens belonging to "biological " and political categories deemed unworthy of life by the authorities of the Third Reich" (p. 6).

Identifying with the victims has not been a strength even of those historians in Germany who have dedicated their careers to researching the history of the Holocaust. They have tended to approach this history armed with an analytical framework—functionalism—which downplays the importance of ideology and of moral choice. Functionalists acknowledge the suffering of the victims and the importance of anti-semitism. But they argue that neither the analysis of the perpetrators' ideology nor of the victims' experience provide ways of understanding why the Holocaust happened. Functionalists focus instead upon structural factors in the Nazi "polycratic state" which produced a "cumulative radicalization" whose end point was genocide.

In chapter 3, Bartov discusses the attempts of a younger German historian, Goetz Aly, to put flesh-and-blood perpetrators back into this picture by examining

their motivations and mentalities. Aly's work situates the Holocaust within a larger framework of Nazi population policies, in particular, the "General Plan for the East." An army of experts and professionals—demographers, economists, even historians—drew up detailed plans for the demographic restructuring of Poland and occupied Eastern Europe which would make these areas economically more efficient, hence, more valuable to the German colonizers. This program required the forced deportation and mass murder of millions of Slavs and Jews. The problem for Bartov is that racism plays no important role in Aly's discussion of Nazi "ethnic policies." Yet, if anti-semitism is relegated to the margins of the analysis, it is difficult to understand what made Nazi planners believe it was vitally necessary to annihilate the Jews. Bartov also finds anti-semitism strangely absent from Wolfgang Sofsky's path-breaking study of the concentration camp system, *The Order of Terror*. Sofsky paints a horrifying picture of the concentration camps as sites for the construction and exercise of "absolute power." Yet the Final Solution did not simply grow out of the concentration camp system that the Nazis had established before the outbreak of the war. In his study, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen certainly brings anti-semitism back into the discussion of the motivations of the German perpetrators. But Bartov challenges Goldhagen's monocausal insistence on the power of "eliminationist anti-semitism" as well as his conscious decision not to focus upon the extermination camps.

Bartov's final chapter opens with a lyrical discussion of the historical moment we inhabit. Soon, the deaths of the last surviving witnesses of the Holocaust will leave us "all alone, staring into the darkness of the past without anything to guide us but the written and photographic traces left by those who had been there" (p. 193). This prospect emphasizes the value of Victor Klemperer's secret diary, which was published in Germany in 1995 and quickly translated into English. Klemperer was a German-Jewish professor whose marriage to a non-Jewish German woman saved him from the death

camp. He steadfastly refused to accept the identity of a non-German that the regime and increasing numbers of his neighbors wanted to force upon him. When his diaries were published in Germany, reviewers applauded Klemperer's dogged attachment to his Germanness and found appealing his insistence that the Nazis were somehow not really Germans. Bartov suggests that the diaries should lead Germans to a somewhat different conclusion: "This is what Klemperer comes to tell Germany today: that the Jews were Germans, perhaps the best Germans, maybe even the last Germans, for they were the ones who were not Nazis" (p. 215).

What Bartov has to say in this volume will not be particularly new or surprising to specialists in this field. All of the chapters in this book are significantly revised or expanded versions of essays that have already appeared in print. I doubt, however, that specialists are the intended audience. This is the kind of book that I would gladly recommend to graduate students or to colleagues who want to be brought up to date on the most important issues and controversies in this already massive and still expanding field of research. Bartov's arguments are always interesting, sometimes brilliant. His writing is elegant. He never forgets the moral implications of the scholarly arguments he dissects with such clarity and verve. Finally, he reminds us that German national identity has been deeply influenced by the ways that Germans have remembered the Holocaust and Hitler's War since 1945. Certainly, he could have said more about East Germany, which dealt, at least officially, quite differently with the Nazi past. But this is just one gap in a remarkably stimulating book.

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