

GERMAN SCHOLARS AND ETHNIC CLEANSING

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1919–1945

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Edited by

Ingo Haar

and

Michael Fahlbusch

Foreword by

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FOREWORD



Georg G. Iggers

It is striking how little has been done in West Germany to examine the role of the historians in the Nazi period and their participation in the genocide, much less so and much later than in some other academic disciplines. The leading historians in the post-1945 period emphasized that the bulk of German historians continued to be honest scholars and remained aloof from the regime. Werner Conze, one of the most important historians and mentors of the post-1945 generation of West German historians, still commented in 1983 that “a serious confrontation [*Auseinandersetzung*] with Nazi historiography was not necessary because the few Nazi historians had either died or lost their positions,”¹ overlooking his own important role in the planning of ethnic cleansing in the East and the elimination of the Jews. Two historians of an older generation who played eminent roles in the West German historical profession after 1945, namely, Gerhard Ritter, who was arrested after the 20 July 1944 attempt against Hitler, and Hans Rothfels, who was removed from his professorship under the Nazis because of his Jewish parentage and forced to emigrate and thus could lay claim to having been victims of the Nazi regime, assured the German public that with very few exceptions historians during the Nazi period had maintained their scholarly integrity.² This overlooked that their own ultranationalist and antidemocratic views coincided with a great deal of the Nazi outlook. Both had been outspoken opponents of the Weimar Republic, wanted an authoritarian state, and endorsed German foreign policy aims after 1933. Ritter a conservative, who did not accept many aspects of Nazi ideology, nevertheless supported the war against the Soviet Union to safeguard European Christian culture, and volunteered in 1944 to lecture to the troops in France, where he told them that the French should take Prussia as a model and learn to “starve and obey” (*großhungern und gehorchen*)³ if France was to regain its

Notes for this section begin on page xvii.

nationhood. Although he was already aware of the early phases of the Holocaust, a memorandum, forwarded under his signature in January 1943 to the anti-Hitler opposition group around Carl Goerdeler, argued that Jews must not be permitted to regain the rights of German citizenship that they had acquired in the course of the nineteenth century.⁴ Rothfels, despite his Jewish origin, was close to Nazi positions of ethnic expansion in the East and left Germany only very reluctantly after his applications for honorary Aryan status were turned down despite Joachim von Ribbentrop's support. All this points at areas of consensus between a broad spectrum of established historians and National Socialism.

Yet just as there was the image of the clean Wehrmacht innocent of war crimes, there was also the picture of an academic discipline that kept apart from the Nazi Party and pursued "objective" scholarship. Still relatively recently a dissertation written at the University of Frankfurt argued that there was an inseparable gulf between the conservatism of the broad majority of German historians and Nazi ideology, and that as a rule the historians remained faithful to their scholarly ethos.⁵ Even researchers who were aware of the support given to the Nazis by historians who played an important role in the West German historical profession after 1945 had not realized the extent to which many historians were directly involved in Nazi plans for ethnic cleansing and genocide.⁶

The great contribution of this volume is that for the first time it makes available to an English reading public the results of the extensive scholarship of the last decade and a half on the role that German scholars played in the programs of ethnic cleansing. A good deal of new material became available with the opening of East German archives after 1989, but already much had been readily accessible in West German archives and simply ignored. It is also striking how little East German scholarship utilized the sources on this topic contained in its archives. A first important work on the role that scholarship played in the planning of ethnic cleansing was published in English, Michael Burleigh's *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich*.⁷ A first careful analysis of the politics of German historians appeared in 1992 in Karen Schönwälder's *Historiker und Politik. Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus*.⁸ Yet the most pioneering work in this direction was Götz Aly and Susanne Heim's *Vordenker der Vernichtung* in 1992, published in English in 2002 as *Architects of Destruction: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction*.⁹ Drawing on documentation that had been largely neglected, Aly and Heim reject interpretations that identify Nazi leaders as primarily responsible for the Holocaust and show to what extent demographers, geographers, economists, civil servants, and academics were involved in the planning. The 1990s increasingly saw studies that dealt with the role of the historians. In 1992 Karl-Heinz Roth and Angelika Ebbinghaus discovered a previously secret document in which Theodor Schieder, shortly after the fall of Poland in 1939, had prepared and edited a protocol that called for the

deportation of hundreds of thousands of Poles and the “dejewification” (*Endjudung*) of Poland.¹⁰ Writings by Werner Conze between 1936 and 1944 went in a similar direction.¹¹

An important contribution of Ingo Haar’s dissertation *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*,¹² published in 2000, and also of the present collection of essays edited by him and Michael Fahlbusch, is that they do not concentrate on individual historians, although they deal with them, but examine the institutional basis of the scholarship serving Nazi policies of ethnic cleansing and the genocide of the Jews. They establish a clear continuity between this scholarship before the Nazi rise to power, during the Nazi period, and after 1945. The origins of the *Ostforschung* (research on the East) of the Nazi period are to be found when a movement of young neo-conservative intellectuals, historians, sociologists, and ethnographers outside academe began in the 1920s to create a *Volksgeschichte*¹³ as an alternative and as a challenge to the established academic historiography with which, in fact, these young historians shared many political attitudes. For both, a prime task of the historian was the revision of the borders created by the Versailles Treaty. Both were passionately opposed to the parliamentary democracy of the Weimar Republic, which they sought to replace with authoritarian government, and strove to restore Germany’s position as a major power, and both for the most part were outspoken anti-Semites. Yet there were fundamental differences. The historiography that had dominated the German universities since the last third of the nineteenth century saw the state as the key institution in history, specifically the German national state as it had been forged by Bismarck, with its semi-autocratic aspects distinguishing it from Western European democracies. They proclaimed an ethos of objective, impartial scholarship, although in fact their scholarship was highly ideological, nationalistic and socially conservative.¹⁴ Clinging to a classical historical outlook (*Historismus*), they rejected any approaches that replaced the focus on leading individuals and political events, and vigorously rejected the turn to social history in the historiographies of Western countries as nonidealistic and collectivistic, even Marxist.

But on three important points the new *Volksgeschichte* differed emphatically from the established historiography that it considered outdated. For it, the center of history was the *Volk*, conceived not as a people in a democratic sense but as an ethnic community in biologicistic, racial terms. In the place of the struggle between states for hegemony, the young neo-conservatives now saw an embittered conflict between ethnic communities and posited the cultural and racial superiority of the Germans over all other ethnic groups in Eastern, and for that matter also in Western, Europe. They now radicalized the political assumptions of the academic historians for whom Germany was a political unit whose natural borders were those of 1914, possibly with the addition of post-1918 Austria, and sought an expansion of German borders far to the East to include all territories where

German minorities lived as well as others that at one time or other had had German populations. Eastern Europe, they argued, was overpopulated, and room would have to be found to settle Germans by removing non-Germanic populations. Instead of a Germany ruled by conservative elites, the young neoconservative historians wanted one based on the broad masses governed by charismatic leaders. Thus, there very soon arose an affinity to the National Socialist movement, and after 1933, and in some cases already before, many joined the Nazi Party.

Like the academic establishment, the advocates of *Volksgeschichte* emphasized the role of scholarship. For them, however, its aim was not to establish the results of objective inquiry but to serve as a means for ethnic struggle, as a “*kämpfende Wissenschaft*” or a fighting science. This science was to establish the ethnic compositions of areas and communities in the East, their historical development, the conditions of life, family patterns, occupations, structures of authority, and cultural patterns. This history rested heavily on demographic, geographic, and economic studies based on statistics, thus asserting its character as an empirical science, superficially similar to the innovative *histoire totale* that the *Annales* circle was pursuing in France, but with a totally different aim. At its core was a Social Darwinian pseudo-science of race, the purpose of which was to identify German and non-German populations and to classify the latter for separation and ultimate removal. An idea that became prominent in the 1930s, as propagated by Theodor Oberländer and Werner Conze, was that the East was overpopulated and that it was necessary to remove “surplus populations” of Slavs and Jews to make room for German settlement.

As has been noted, to begin with the practitioners of *Volksgeschichte* were largely outside academic institutions. Their major, but by no means exclusive, focus was *Ostforschung*, research about Germans in Eastern Europe. True both the government of the Weimar Republic, guided by Gustav Stresemann’s policy of achieving revisions of the Versailles Treaty by peaceful negotiations, and the Social Democratic-led Prussian government distanced themselves from the extremism of the neoconservative *Ostforschung*. But the position of the government toward this ultraradical movement of ethnic scholars was marked by contradictions. Officials from the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Interior welcomed studies that would throw light on the assimilation of German minorities in Poland, the Baltic states, and Czechoslovakia after 1918, and on their emigration from these countries, in such a way as to strengthen its arguments for border revisions. Governmental money thus began to support the research of the *Volk* historians. The Leipziger Stiftung für deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung (Leipzig Foundation for Research for Ethnicity and Land Cultivation), founded in 1926, funded the scholarship of specialists from the government as well as advocates of a radical ethnic approach. The extreme ethnicist direction of the foundation was soon brought under control, and it was dissolved in 1931. But the integration

of extreme ethnicists into the academic institutions had begun. At the University of Königsberg, with Hans Rothfels and the sociologist Gunter Ipsen as mentors and Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze as their students, proponents of *Volksgeschichte* received a firm academic basis. After the Nazi accession to power in 1933, the institutionalization of racial ethnic research took off. Between 1931 and 1934 the *Volksdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaften* (ethnic German research societies), a scientific network with up to a thousand members in at least six regional branches, were founded as an umbrella organization to finance and coordinate this research on a national scale. The most important was the Nord- und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (North and East German Research Society) in Berlin. Increasingly, representatives of this racial historiography and of related social sciences entered the universities, mostly younger scholars eager to pursue career opportunities. Now large-scale projects were funded with public money and increasingly controlled by the Nazi Party. The Nazis made use of the racist scholarship, which lent its services gladly.

The essays in this book trace the path of this scholarship from its early attempts to legitimize German claims to the East through scholarship which claiming to be scientific to the role this scholarship played increasingly after 1933 and particularly after the conquest of Poland in 1939 and the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941—in the Nazi program of ethnic cleansing and the annihilation of European Jews. Two of the main themes of these essays are the institutionalization of *Ostforschung* after 1933 and the specific tasks it carried out in the expulsion of Poles and others and the genocide of Jews and Roma. Ingo Haar outlines the main themes of the volume, the role that demographic and historical studies played in defining ethnic groups and in laying the foundations for segregation and ultimately expulsion or annihilation. By collecting demographic data on the composition of Eastern European areas, the *Ostforscher* participated directly or indirectly in the segregation of ethnic groups in the Eastern areas and in the deportation and genocide of the Jews. Haar examines the role of a number of historians, such as Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, and Hermann Aubin, who in a scholarly capacity contributed to the Nazi program. The know-how developed in the North and East German Research Foundation found direct application after 1941 in Nazi practices. Michael Fahlbusch describes the highly organized network in which *Ostforschung* and *Volkstumforschung* were carried out in collaboration with the SS. He thus refutes postwar accounts that maintain that *Landes-* (regional) and *Volksforschung* had been conducted in a serious, scientifically innovative way and had not been subject to Nazi infiltration and control. A multiplicity of research programs that were created after 1933 were closely coordinated during the war and after 1943 fully subordinated to the SS. An increasing number of scholars were integrated into the programs, in many cases in newly created university positions. The

North and East German Research Society, with its staff of 150 by far the largest of the research groups, active in the course of the 1930s, controlled more than 400 research projects. But there were also other large research foundations, such as the West German Research Society and the Southeast German Research Society, headed by Otto Brunner, who too was to play a major role after the war, first in Vienna and then at the University of Hamburg, and whose research group participated directly in ethnic removals in the Balkans.

The chapters that follow deal with research groups as they related to the transfer of populations with the aim of germanization and genocide in various areas surrounding Germany. Again, demographic and historical studies defined members of ethnic groups in order to carry out the program for replacing of non-German populations far beyond the borders of Germany with German settlers. In their chapter on the ethnographic research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, Eric J. Schmalz and Samuel D. Sinner make an important point, citing Michael Burleigh on *Ostforschung*: “Deportations, resettlements, repatriations, and mass murder were not sudden visitations from on high ... but the result of the exact, modern, ‘scientific’ encompassing of persons with card indexes, card-sorting machines, charts, graphs, maps and diagrams.”¹⁵ For most of World War II, Leibbrandt functioned as a high official in the political department of Alfred Rosenberg’s Ministry for the Occupied Territories. By late 1941 he was making top-level policy decisions concerning the liquidation of Eastern European Jews, and in January 1942 he attended the Wannsee Conference, which planned the implementation of the “Final Solution.” Stumpp prepared extensive studies of villages intended for ethnic exterminations in Ukraine. Alexander Pinwinkler’s chapter deals with Erich Keyser’s activities in basing *Ostforschung* on a history based on the study of population along ethnic lines in specific spatial areas. As early as the 1920s he considered the history of population to be an appropriate instrument for restoring Germany’s lost position as a superpower. Keyser’s history, as Pinwinkler shows, rested on the invention of pure myths that envisioned a Germanic population that dated back basically unchanged to very early times. From the beginning *Volk* and *Raum* were irrevocably connected with each other. One of the basic principles of his work is the supposed social and racial opposition of Germans and Jews since the Middle Ages. The chapter by Christof Morrissey highlights the Institut für Heimatforschung (Institute for Local Research), which started as a modest center for the study of German culture in Slovakia but was soon integrated into the vast network that prepared the research groundwork for German expansion and ethnic cleansing. Michael Wedekind addresses the research intended to prepare the way for Germany’s ethnic cleansing and annexation of areas in Slovenia and Northern Italy in the predominantly Italian regions of the Trentino. In his examination of Nazi occupation policy in Northern Italy,

Wedekind points at the leading role played by experts from the Southern branch of the scientific network, the Alpine Research Society. The Carinthian and Innsbruck institutes for regional research (*Landeskunde*) worked especially closely with the SS.

Viorel Achim's essay, "Romanian-German Collaboration in Ethnopolitics: The Case of Sabin Manuilă," goes in a somewhat different direction from the other essays in the volume, which all deal with Nazi-directed studies aiming at the displacement of non-German minorities in Eastern, Southeastern, and Western Europe to make room for German settlement and the physical elimination of Jews and Gypsies. Manuilă, whose main area of expertise was ethnic demography, had specifically Romanian goals in mind. Achim stresses that he was no Fascist and was perceived before and after the war as a democrat. Nevertheless, his demographic studies were intended to achieve an ethnic homogenization that would cleanse Romania of non-Romanian ethnic groups, which would be removed to the surrounding countries—to Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Hungary—with borders redrawn along ethnic lines. Germans and Turks would be repatriated and Jews and Romany deported to Ukraine, which actually happened, and where most perished. Manuilă was a close adviser to Antonescu on population questions. He conducted a study of the number of Jews in Romania on the basis of the 1930 census, which he used generally for his ethnic studies, and concluded that the Jewish population was close to 750,000, not the up to 2.5 million that far right circles claimed. At the same time he argued that the Romanian Jews constituted a threat to Romania, not because of their numbers, but because of their economic power, constituting a qualitative rather than a quantitative problem. He maintained close contact during the war with German demographic statisticians, particularly Wilfried Krallert, the director of the Publications Office (Publikationsstelle) Vienna, which focused on Romania and Hungary. Like most of his German colleagues, he did not experience any post-war consequences of his wartime activities; in fact, he became a leading member of the National Peasant Party, on which, according to Achim, Romanians pinned their hopes for a democratic future.

The chapters by Wolfgang Freund and Hans Derks turn to *Westforschung*, which worked to legitimize the removal of French populations in large areas of Walloon Belgium and Northeastern France that at one time supposedly were inhabited by Germanic Franks. Freund deals with Fritz Braun, who from 1936 to 1945 directed an institute for Saarland and Palatine local studies following racist lines. Soon he expanded his activities into occupied France and participated in the newly founded Institute for Research on Region and *Volk* in Metz while almost one hundred thousand French-speaking people and all Jews were expelled from Lorraine. Braun was then also involved in the settlement and extermination program in Poland. The Nazi regermanization policy was supported scientifically by kinship group information furnished by his institute and used

for the selection of population. Hans Derks focuses primarily on Franz Petri, who in close cooperation with the military occupation in Belgium conducted racial population studies for the reorganization and germanization of populations in Belgium and Northeastern France. *Westforschung* was started at the University of Bonn directly after World War I. Petri worked closely with Hermann Aubin and Peter Steinbach, who after 1939 became important in the population studies and the ethnic relocation planning in the East. The essay by Eric Kurlander deals with Otto Scheel, of an older generation, from Schleswig Holstein, who even before World War I had supported ultranationalist, often *völkisch* policies. Although he had originally combined liberal reforms with racist exclusion, including virulent anti-Semitism, he placed himself fully into the service of the Nazis after 1933. Frank-Rutger Hausmann follows the establishment of cultural institutes in the countries occupied by, or like Bulgaria or Hungary, dominated by Nazi Germany to propagate the Nazi “scientific” doctrines as well as in a small number of neutral countries. Finally there is the essay by the Polish scholar Jan M. Piskorski, who surveys German *Ostforschung* as it emerged in the 1920s aiming to provide “scientific” proof of Germany’s right to a major part of Polish territory, and the Polish response of a *Westforschung* (*myśl zachodnia*), admittedly less widespread and with less governmental support, which sought to establish historic claims to territories up to the Elbe River once inhabited by Slavs who were forcefully germanized. Karl Heinz Roth’s chapter presents a biographical, political sketch of the same Hans Rothfels we have already discussed, who played an important role in the emergence of a school of ethnic, expansive historiography and who, after he had been designated as a Jew and forced into emigration while, returned to Germany to play an important role in the reconstitution of the historical profession in post-World War II Germany.

But the story does not end here. Whereas in East Germany there occurred a virtually complete exchange of elites, there was virtually none in Western Germany after 1945. The historical profession was no exception. Thus, almost all of the historians and other scholars involved in the Nazi planning and carrying out of programs of ethnic cleansing and extermination were restored to important positions in the western half of Germany soon after the end of World War II. The essays in this volume document the continuity. Theodor Schieder and Werner Conze became the two most important mentors in training a new generation of West German historians between the mid 1950s and the mid 1970s. They did in fact move away from their *völkisch* positions, especially Conze, who now advocated a history that focused on the social structures of a modern industrial society. A new generation of historians, among them Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Wolfgang Mommsen, and Hans Mommsen, who received their university education in the Federal Republic as students of Schieder and Conze, and in Hans Mommsen’s case also of Rothfels, applied the

concepts of modern social history to a critical examination of the German past. Winfried Schulze, in a study published in 1989 on German historiography after 1945, saw the new social history as an outgrowth of a denazified *Volksgeschichte*, a history that abandoned the dependence on race but in contrast to the old historicism preserved a broadly social perspective. But this overlooked that the new critical historians were emphatically democratic in their perspective, indebted to historians from a different tradition who while not Marxists, borrowed from Karl Marx an emphasis on social inequality and social conflict and were mindful of the close relation between economic and political power relationships as seen by Max Weber, and who had been influenced by the democratically oriented historians of the Weimar Republic such as Eckart Kehr and the exiled Hans Rosenberg, and by the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. Yet the ethnic demographic perspective on which both *Ostforschung* and *Westforschung* rested was by no means dead. Now Hans Rothfels, Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze, and Theodor Oberländer, in a major compilation sponsored by the West German government, documented the expulsion of the Germans from the East¹⁶ without adequately dealing with the context of German genocidal practices that had led to it. Almost all the other scholars dealt with in this volume again took up population and *Heimat* studies and founded or refounded institutes dedicated to these studies. Petri at Bonn and Fritz Braun in Kaiserslautern took up *Westforschung* again, though they would no longer speak of the revision of borders. On the other hand, the Herder Institute in Marburg, founded in the 1950s with Erich Keyser, as director, followed the older tradition of *Ostforschung* and was committed to revising the post-1945 borders of Germany.

It is striking, as the essays in the volume point out, that from 1945 until the early 1990s there was complete silence about the criminal activities of the scholars involved in the planning for ethnic cleansing. Their colleagues honored them as committed scholars who had not misused their research to aid the Nazi cause. Theodor Oberländer served in Konrad Adenauer's cabinet as Minister for Expellees. Karl Stumpp was a close adviser to Adenauer on Russian affairs. Several of these scholars were awarded the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* (Federal Cross of Honor) for their scholarly and patriotic contributions to Germany. Still more surprising is that their students, who were committed to a democratic Germany, declined to question their mentors on their past. It took a new generation of scholars to raise these questions on the basis of new materials, some of which had been available before but not utilized. As Nicolas Berg points out in an extensive study published in 2003 on how historians in the Federal Republic dealt with the Holocaust, there was a conscious attempt to shield scholars who had been deeply involved in the Nazi regime.¹⁷ The Holocaust was seen as a horrendous crime carried out from the top by the party but not involving the broad masses of scholars who remained dedicated to

honest scholarship. The reaction of the students of Conze and Schieder, when confronted with the evidence, was to defend them. As Hans-Ulrich Wehler argued, notwithstanding their involvement in the Third Reich, his mentors were able to learn after 1945 and to make significant, innovative contributions to historical science.¹⁸ Wehler suggested that if we cannot forgive Schieder and Conze for their involvement with the Nazis, then neither can we forgive Edward P. Thompson for his membership in the British Communist Party,¹⁹ forgetting that Thompson was not an accomplice to ethnic cleansing and genocide and left the Communist Party in protest of the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian uprising.

Nevertheless, the involvement of German scholarship in the Third Reich has finally become a burning issue to which the German Historians' Congress (Historikertag) devoted a special session in 1998. In 1997, the American historian Charles Maier had admonished his German colleagues at the first conference in Berlin of the Center for Comparative Social History to critically confront their mentors. If they were unwilling to do so, he warned, the task would be left to non-historians. We no longer need to fear today that historians will shy away from critical examination of the past of their discipline and from the broader problem of the ways in which historians and social scientists have permitted themselves to become instruments of those in power. Yet because this question of an alliance between professional scholarship or science and those who control society and the state is not restricted to Nazi Germany but recurs in other modern societies as well, it should be a subject of serious study. The controversy about the complicity of German historians under National Socialism is by no means over. Passionate debates rage even today between those like Heinrich August Winkler, who wish to exonerate their mentors, and those like Ingo Haar and the contributors to this volume, who through a careful analysis of the sources engage in a critical examination of how historians and other social and humanistic scientists actually functioned under the Nazi dictatorship. Most frequently this debate has been reflected in the efforts of Heinrich August Winkler, a student and defender of Hans Rothfels, to discredit Ingo Haar's research on the role that the German historical profession played in the Nazi regime, and in Haar's defense of this research.²⁰

Notes

1. Cited in Götz Aly, "Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder Die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung," in *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Winfried Schulze and Otto Gerhard Oexle (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 178.
2. See Gerhard Ritter, "Der deutsche Professor im Dritten Reich," *Die Gegenwart* 1, no. 1 (24 December 1945): 23–26, and Ritter, "Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 1 (1950): 81–86, 129–137; Hans Rothfels, "Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft in den 30er Jahren," in *Deutsches Geistesleben und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Andreas Flitner (Tübingen, 1965), 90–107. Rothfels here suggests that professional historians were generally uninvolved in Nazi historiography, which had the support of only a handful of "rabid secondary teachers [*wildgewordene Studienräte*] and outsiders." See also Rothfels, *The German Opposition Against Hitler* (Chicago, 1948).
3. Werner Berthold, "... großhungen und gehorchen" ... *Zur Entwicklung und politischer Funktion des westdeutschen Imperialismus untersucht am Beispiel von Gerhard Ritter und Friedrich Meinecke* (Berlin, 1960).
4. Klaus Schwabe, ed., *Gerhard Ritter, ein politischer Historiker in seinen Briefen* (Boppert am Rhein, 1984); see "Denkschriften des 'Freiburger Kreises,'" ed. Rheinhard Herd, Anhang 5 "Vorschläge für eine Lösung der Judenfrage in Deutschland," 769–774.
5. Ursula Wolf, *Litteris et Patriae. Das Janusgesicht der Historie* (Stuttgart, 1996).
6. Even I was not aware of this, when I mentioned in my study of the German historical professions the active support that historians, whom I named, had given to the Nazi Party, but did not realize the extent to which they had contributed through their scholarship to the planning of the relocation of non-German populations and the destruction of the Jews. See Iggers, *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Kritik der traditionellen Geschichtsauffassung von Herder bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 1971), 318–328.
7. Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastward: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1988).
8. Karen Schönwälder, *Historiker und Politik. Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992).
9. Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1992), in English, *Architects of Destruction: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction* (Princeton, 2002).
10. Angelika Ebbinghaus and Karl Heinz Roth, "Vorläufer des 'Generalplans Ost.' Eine Dokumentation über Theodor Schieders Polendenkschrift vom 7. Oktober 1939," 1999. *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 7 (1992): 62–94; see also Aly, "Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze," 163.
11. See Aly, "Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze," 181, notes 34–40.
12. Ingo Haar, *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus. Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der "Volkstumskampf" im Osten* (Göttingen, 2000).
13. Willi Oberkrome, *Volksgeschichte. Methodologische Innovation und völkische Ideologie* (Göttingen, 1993).
14. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, 1968), does not contain the section on the Nazi historians cited above in note 6.
15. Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 10.
16. *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 7 vols., published by the Federal Expellee Ministry (Bundesvertriebenenministerium), of which Theodor Oberländer was minister. Chief editor was Theodor Schieder in "association" (*Verbindung*) with Hans Rothfels, Peter Rassow, and Rudolf Laun, and beginning with vol. 3 also Werner Conze (Berlin, 1953–1960).
17. Nicolas Berg, *Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2003).

18. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, "Nationalsozialismus und Historiker," in Schulze and Oexle, *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, 306–339, and Wehler, "Historiker sollten auch politisch zu den Positionen stehen, die sie in der Wissenschaft vertreten," in *Ver-säumte Fragen. Deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad Jarausch (Stuttgart and Munich, 2000), 240–266.
19. Wehler on Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 January 1999.
20. See Heinrich August Winkler, "Hans Rothfels—ein Lobredner Hitlers? Quellenkritische Bemerkungen zu Ingo Haars Buch 'Historiker im Nationalsozialismus,'" *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49 (2001): 643–652; Ingo Haar, "Quellenkritik oder Kritik der Quellen," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50 (2002): 497–506; Winkler, "Geschichtswissenschaft oder Geschichtsklitterung. Ingo Haar und Hans Rothfels. Eine Erwiderung," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50 (2002): 636–652.

PREFACE



In the twentieth century, border conflicts, ethnic cleansings, and genocidal policies altered the landscape of Europe. Examining Nazi population policies in occupied Europe, this volume attempts to shed light on the crimes of that century by considering them not only as barbaric acts, but also as a component of modernity.

Standing prominently in the foreground, alongside statesmen and confirmed murderers, are humanities scholars. In fact, science and politics constituted mutual resources for each other. Humanities scholars not only sanctioned state actions, but also contributed fundamentally to the process of placing border and population conflicts onto the political agenda. They constructed minority groups by using ethnic-racial classifications, supplied statistics and cards in order to delimit the groups, and employed their expertise in order to segregate whole peoples—going so far as to support genocide.

Academically certified specialists were and are a sought-after resource in politics. This volume presents the most recent research results regarding how the knowledge of experts in the pre-1945 era came to be applied to the resettlement and genocidal policies of the National Socialists, how this knowledge was organized, and which consequences followed its application. From this perspective, National Socialism is to be understood not only as a return to barbarism, but simultaneously as the most radical orientation of the European idea of the national state.

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— *Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch*

FstR	Research Office of the Russian Germans (Forschungsstelle des Russlanddeutschtums)
Gestapo	Secret State Police (Geheime Staatspolizei)
GRHS	Germans from Russia Heritage Society
GStAPK	Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz
HMP	Historisches Museum der Pfalz, Speyer
ICS	Central Institute of Statistics (Romania)
IHF	Institute for Local Historical Studies (Institut für Heimatforschung)
KE	Carpathian German Teachers Corps (Karpatendeutsche Erzieherchaft)
NAGN	Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden
NL	Nachlaß (unpublished works left by an author)
NOFG	North East Ethnic German Research Society
NS	National Socialism
NSDAP	National Socialist German Workers' Party
NSDStB	National Socialist German Students League (Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund)
OEEG	East European Research Society
PA	Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes
PCM	Preşedinţia Consiliului de Miniştri
P-Stelle	Publication Office (Publikationsstelle)
RFSS	Reichsführer SS
RKF	Reich Commissioner for Strengthening Germandom (Reichskommissar für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums)
RMI	Reich Ministry of Interior (Reichsministerium des Innern)
RMO	Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (Reichsministerium für die besetzten Ostgebiete)
RMVP	Reichs Ministry for Propaganda
RSHA	SS Reich Security Main Office (Reichssicherheitshauptamt)
SD	Security Service (Sicherheitsdienst)
SHB	Schleswig-Holsteiner Bund
SOFG	Southeast German Research Society (Südostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft)
VDA	League for Germans Abroad (Volksbund für das Deutschtum im Ausland)
VDR	Association of Germans from Russia (Verband der Deutschen aus Rußland)
VoMi	SS Ethnic German Liaison Agency (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle)
WFG	West German Research Society (Westdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft)

ABBREVIATIONS



AA	German Foreign Ministry (Auswärtiges Amt)
AFG	Alpine Research Society (Alpenländische Forschungsgemeinschaft)
AHSGR	American Historical Society of Germans from Russia
ANIC	Arhiva Națională Istorică Centrală
AWLV	Working group of West German Research on Region and People (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für westdeutsche Landes- und Volksforschung)
BArch	Bundesarchiv
BayHStA	Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Munich
BayKM	Bavarian Ministry for Cultural Affairs
BDC	Berlin Document Center
BDO	League of the German East (Bund Deutscher Osten)
DAF	German Labor Front (Deutsche Arbeitsfront)
DAI	German Foreign Institute (Deutsches Ausland-Institut)
DDP	Democrats (Deutsche Demokratische Partei)
DeVlag	Deutsch-Flämische Arbeitsgemeinschaft
DFG	German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft)
DNVP	German National People's Party (Deutsch Nationale Volkspartei)
DP	Deutsche Partei
DPO	Deutsche Post aus dem Osten
DSB	Deutscher Schutzbund
DVG	German People's Community (Deutsche Volksgemeinschaft)
DVL	German National List (Deutsche Volksliste)
DWI	German Cultural Institutes (Deutsche Wissenschaftliche Institute)
E.K.I	Iron Cross First Class
EWZ	Central Immigration Office Lodz (Einwandererzentrale Litzmannstadt)

Chapter 1

GERMAN *OSTFORSCHUNG*
AND ANTI-SEMITISM



Ingo Haar

The subject of *Ostforschung*, German academic research on Eastern Europe in the Weimar Republic and Third Reich, would seem to have been exhausted in the historiography. Yet a closer glance brings to light a certain conceptual insecurity. On the one hand, historians have described the discipline as a “success story” that developed and applied innovative methodologies.¹ On the other hand, *Ostforschung* has come to stand for a politically compromised research agenda that disqualified itself through active participation in the National Socialist program to “germanize” East-Central Europe.² In order to better understand the role *Ostforschung* played in National Socialist policies, historians must transcend the conceptual boundaries of considering the subject simply as an isolated academic discipline or from a political-institutional standpoint alone. Rather, they should understand *Ostforschung* as a scholarly discipline that operated in the context of a dynamic political situation—a situation that *Ostforscher* consciously intended their discipline to help shape. One concrete aspect of *Ostforschung* on which to orient a study on the interplay between politics and scholarship is anti-Semitism.

When intellectual historians analyze the development of a “school of thought,” they need to investigate complex connections between the creation of paradigms and changed patterns of thought, on the one hand, and the development of academic research agendas and their grounding in institutions, on the other.³ Professionalized academic disciplines based in and connected to universities are products of a long historical development. Despite their reputation as breeding grounds for new scientific approaches, universities rarely promote truly innovative research. In the Weimar Republic, new research agendas could only compete with more

traditional university-based programs through the support of research foundations outside the universities.

Historians should therefore concentrate not only on *Ostforschung's* development as an academic discipline, but above all on its origins during the Weimar Republic as a research agenda geared toward political consulting. The rise of *Ostforschung* was inseparably tied to the establishment of *völkisch* concepts, which defined the *Volk* as a “community of blood,” within Weimar’s secret anti-Versailles revisionist circles. Yet it was not until the National Socialist takeover that *Ostforschung* became established as an academic discipline rooted in universities. Under these auspices, German *Ostforscher's* anti-Semitism and their role in National Socialist crimes need to be reexamined.

The German *Volks- und Kulturboden* and the Leipzig Foundation, 1922–1931

After Versailles, many former citizens of the German Reich found themselves living in the new states of East-Central Europe. Right-wing parties in Weimar Germany wanted to instrumentalize former Reich citizens’ dissatisfaction with their new minority status to further their own revisionist aims. According to these revisionists, Germans had a “special mission” to resist absorption into the “successor states,” regardless of whether those states relied on subtle or more brutal integration methods. As part of the Weimar Republic’s clandestine revisionist policies, German minorities received political, economic, and cultural support. The continued presence of unassimilated German minorities in the states of East-Central Europe seemed the best guarantee for an eventual revision of Versailles and restoration of German hegemonic power in the region.⁴ In order to evaluate the integration policies of “enemy states” and prepare possible countermeasures, the “functionary elite” of *Deutschtumspolitik* (German minority policy), situated just below the ministerial level in the Foreign and Interior Ministries, began supporting a new research agenda focused on ethnic group issues in the East in 1924. In support of their minorities policy, the *Stiftung für deutsche Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung* (Foundation for Research on German Ethnicity and Land Cultivation) was established in Leipzig in October 1926. Minority policy experts in the Reich ministries consulted with selected social scientists and scholars from the humanities in an effort to understand how social communities function in ethnically diverse regions and how ethnic differences could be manipulated to stabilize or destabilize international borders.⁵

The program of *Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung*⁶ took advantage of established statistical and cartographical research strategies. In addition, participating scholars constructed arguments around a racial concept of the *Volk* as a “community of blood” to provide an ideological basis for

border revision policies. The newly invented term *Volks- und Kulturboden* implied that an ethnic group establishes itself in a fixed zone of settlement whose peripheries dissolve into ethnically mixed zones. German *Volksboden* (the soil in which an ethnic group is anchored) in areas bordering Poland and Czechoslovakia was to be protected by “internal colonization” measures, specifically by erecting a “settlement wall” of German peasants there. The *Volks- und Kulturboden* agenda integrated racialist models for a “reordering” informed by population policy; the purportedly homogenous German *Volkskörper* (ethnic body) was to be stabilized or at least reestablished in areas where formerly German-speaking populations were considered to have already been assimilated. German *Kulturboden* referred exclusively to areas inhabited not by German but usually by Slavic ethnic majorities and whose German inhabitants had historically played an important cultural and economic role.⁷

The political ambiguity of such a doctrine is evident. Weimar foreign minister and chancellor Gustav Stresemann built his revisionist policy on a peaceful balance between the European states. He demonstrated his support for the liberal post-World War I European order by engineering Germany’s entry into the League of Nations.⁸ The intellectual strategists of so-called ethnopolitics, on the other hand, spoke in favor of eventually gaining a new hegemony for the German Reich in *Mittleuropa*, and their pursuit of this goal included efforts to instrumentalize minorities policy in the near term. Max Hildebert Boehm, for example, proposed reservations for the German minorities in Eastern and Central Europe in order to prevent their integration into the new states. Through an “irredenta,” Boehm argued, the German minorities had to destabilize the existing political order so that the German Reich could intervene. Boehm called for the establishment of a “Greater German Empire.”⁹

In debates among the Leipzig scholars, a division across that ran straight across the various political camps became evident. One group was reconciled to the existence of the new states and wanted to pursue a legally based minority policy with the help of the League of Nations. Another group looked for chances to intervene politically in order to destabilize Germany’s neighbors. Whereas the foundation’s manager, geographer Wilhelm Volz, supported the view that Germany’s “natural space” corresponded with the German and Austrian borders of 1914,¹⁰ geographers Albrecht Penck and Friedrich Metz resurrected Germany’s expansionist objectives of World War I.¹¹ For this reason they came into serious conflict with the Prussian Ministry of Interior, which had no interest in allowing an adventurous minorities policy to cause diplomatic tensions.¹²

Albrecht Penck, along with Karl Christian von Loesch, Karl Haushofer, and Max Hildebert Boehm, put no stock in diplomatic conflict resolution. Loesch assumed that both the Weimar constitution and the peaceful European order that Stresemann sought through Germany’s entry into the League of Nations blocked Germany’s ascent to a hegemonic position

in Europe. As a proponent of the idea of the “Greater German Empire” he demanded the “reannexation” of Austria and was concerned about the ethnically “endangered areas in the North and East on both sides of the border.” The creation of a continental European customs union between Austria and Germany had to be completed before a “reordering of European issues” could take place. The termination of the Versailles system should constitute a new order of nationalities in Europe under the predominance of Germany. Loesch hoped to solve the problems of “overpopulation,” of the “ethnic hodgepodge” and the “primitive-brutal conceptions of the state” in the Eastern and Southeastern European states. He regarded the German minorities living in those regions as “raw material” that needed Reich support in its efforts to maintain its “Germandom.”¹³

The view that occupation of foreign territories required not only colonial economic exploitation and enforcement of an internal legal order but also population policy measures was a new feature of the program developed by Penck, Loesch, Haushofer, and Boehm. They foresaw the need to exercise control down to the lowest level, including neighborhoods in villages and towns, achieved through a policy of *völkischer* border security, the precondition for which would be ethnically homogenous communities with stable social orders.¹⁴ Before this new settlement policy could be implemented, *Ostforscher* would explore ethnic conditions on both sides of the German border. All cultural and social sciences sharing the doctrine of the *Volkstumskampf* (struggle for ethnic heritage) would contribute to this “sociography” of Germandom. The German minorities living in Central Europe would be counted with statistical methods and their settlement areas would be recorded in comprehensive mapping projects and encyclopedias.¹⁵

The invention of *Volkstum* as a research agenda intended to support the ethnic segregation of Europe was completed by the end of the 1920s. By contrast, the process of establishing university-based disciplines of *völkischer Wissenschaft* (*völkisch* scholarship) and new institutions of political consulting got underway only during the mid 1930s. Before 1933, *völkisch* research programs lacked academic legitimacy. In 1929, Prussia’s Social Democratic Interior minister Carl Severing subjected the work of the Leipzig Foundation to greater parliamentary control because the foundation had been increasingly infiltrated with extremist right-wingers. The historian Walter Goetz, a Reichstag member, democrat, and declared League of Nations supporter,¹⁶ became supervisor of the Leipzig Foundation.¹⁷ The institutionalization of *Ostforschung* could not prevail against the will of these *Vernunftrepublikaner* (republicans of reason). Friedrich Meinecke and Hermann Oncken, as well as Wilhelm Volz, committed themselves to liberalism and to the borders of 1914. These “statists” loyal to Weimar managed to block *völkisch* aspirations in the leading Prussian historical institutions until the early 1930s.¹⁸

Although the mostly young geographers, sociologists, and historians who participated in *Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung* failed to become part

of established historical or geographical publications and research councils before 1933, they received support from the Prussian Notgemeinschaft der Deutschen Wissenschaft (Emergency Community of German Science), the predecessor of the German Research Society founded in 1934 by the Reich Ministry of Interior. This official backing ensured a relatively safe position from which to wait out the removal of republican hindrances to *völkisch* scholarship that followed the Nazis' "seizure of power." In fact, a majority of academic consultants who started their careers after 1933 came directly from the Leipzig Foundation or had at least received funding through the foundation. Werner Essen, who as Karl Haushofer's student had compiled the first statistics on the ethnic makeup of the Baltic states,¹⁹ became a specialist in the Reich Ministry of Interior's department of *Grenzziehung und Volkstum* (borders and ethnicity) in 1934. Essen worked his way up to become special assistant to State Secretary Wilhelm Stuckart, until promoted in 1941 to head the division for "settlement and race policy" in the Generalkommissariat Ostland (Office of the General Commissioner for the Eastern Territories).²⁰

The geographer Emil Meynen, who as Albrecht Penck's intimate in the Leipzig Foundation edited the *Handwörterbuch für das Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum* (Encyclopedia of Border Area and Foreign Germandom), later coordinated the activities of the Volksdeutscher Forschungsgemeinschaften (Ethnic German Research Societies). As a leading member of Georg Leibbrandt's staff, Meynen set up the Publikationsstelle Ost (Publication Office East) in the political department of Alfred Rosenberg's Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (RMO). In that capacity, he served as liaison between ethnic researchers and the settlement and race policy experts of the SS agency Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle (Ethnic German Liaison Agency, charged as of 1938 with politically coordinating all ethnic German minorities in Europe) and in the Foreign Ministry.²¹ Leibbrandt, who between 1928 and 1930 had visited the United States and Soviet Union to study German emigrants through the procurement of the Leipzig foundation, took over the NSDAP's "Foreign Policy Office" in 1933. Following his appointment to head the main political section of the RMO in 1941,²² Leibbrandt represented Rosenberg at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.²³

"Fighting Scholarship" and the Genesis of *Ostforschung* within the North East Ethnic German Research Society

After the National Socialists assumed political power in 1933, the researchers of the Leipzig Foundation found themselves in a stronger position vis-à-vis the reigning historicist school. Their agenda, based on catch-phrases such as *Volkstum*, *Lebensraum* (living space), *Volk ohne Raum* (people without space), and *Volksboden*, got its first serious chance to establish itself.²⁴ The political radicalism of Hans Rothfels and his students in Königsberg seriously rattled

the strong position of Friedrich Meinecke and Hermann Oncken in the historical profession. In 1932, one year before the National Socialist "seizure of power," Rothfels staged his first confrontation with Meinecke. Rothfels ostentatiously declined to participate in a meeting of the Historical Commission for the Reichsarchiv (the Reich's central archive) on 8 March 1932. Rothfels opposed the projects of Veit Valentin and Martin Hobohm, who sought to chronicle the emergence of the Weimar Republic. Rothfels denounced Valentin as an unqualified historian and rejected his project, a compilation of sources from the republic's early years, warning that "academic tasks that are extremely urgent today might take second place." Therefore, according to Rothfels, it would be "almost impossible" to "tackle those problems (German minorities in foreign countries, recent history of colonization in the east, etc.) relevant to today's foreign policy in terms of the defensive intellectual struggle (of the German minorities against other ethnic groups) and which have or might have a role to play in promoting national unity."²⁵ Rothfels complained that "all opportunities are blocked" for the "best-educated academic youth," by which he meant his own students.²⁶ Rothfels saw National Socialism first and foremost as a chance to institutionalize the new *Volks-geschichte* (ethnic history) on a broad basis within specially conceived research facilities.

Rothfels' students took advantage of Max Hildebert Boehm's concept of a "self-sufficient people" to appropriate new tasks for the historical profession in the National Socialist regime's Eastern policy. Boehm's catalogue of criteria that characterized the "self-sufficiency" of a people, meaning their ethnic homogeneity, was open to racist social planning techniques. These would help identify both *Volks-genossen* (ethnic comrades) and *Volks-fremde*, those "alien" to the German ethnic body.²⁷ Young historians organized in the Verein für das Deutschtum im Ausland (League for Germans Abroad or VDA) Königsberg working group demanded a radical change of policy. They proposed steps to stop the migration of the rural population from eastern Germany to the industrialized regions of the West. Economic migration should be diverted to areas inhabited by *Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum* (ethnic Germans in border areas and foreign countries).²⁸ This political model for "reordering" the "front from Bucharest to Reval" dovetailed with the expansionist and racist programs of Leipzig Foundation geographers who supported National Socialism.²⁹

Völkisch-minded historians' affinity for National Socialism was evident, even though their views diverged on the matter of anti-Semitism. In a radio address on the occasion of the Nazi takeover, Rothfels stated somewhat didactically that history should not be interpreted as the result of a "race-based original disposition."³⁰ Like his student Theodor Schieder, Rothfels promoted a voluntaristic conception of race.³¹ Under this model, racialist categorizations depended on the preparedness of non-German ethnic groups in Eastern Europe to submit to the rule of a German "Third Reich." The Königsberg historians dreamt of a confederation of peoples

under German direction. They promised protection for the Baltic ethnic groups if these chose German domination over Soviet rule.³² Notwithstanding this subtle but important distinction in their respective interpretations of race and its meaning to society, the Königsberg historians were eager to participate in the new regime after 1933.

The price the Königsberg historians had to pay for their establishment as experts in National Socialist settlement and population policy was high. Hans Rothfels was forced to give up his position in Königsberg because of his Jewish descent, despite the interventions of Hermann Rauschning, the National Socialist president of the Danzig Senate, and of Theodor Oberländer, who directed the Bund Deutscher Osten (League of the German East or BDO), as well as the NSDAP's East Prussian intelligence service, which was concerned with questions of Germandom in border areas and foreign territories.³³ Although as a World War I veteran Rothfels could have continued his official duties up to a point, he was unable to keep his position in the political consulting institution that succeeded the Leipzig Foundation. Internally, the NSDAP leadership justified Rothfels' removal with a reference to the future function of the Königsberg historians. They were to assume a central role in National Socialist settlement and population policy. Rothfels' membership in the new political consulting institutions had to be suspended if the anti-Semitic attitude required of his students was not to be permanently tested. For their part, the *Ostforscher* considered Rothfels's forced resignation a severe blow to the discipline.³⁴

Ethnographic historians tried to effect a change of paradigms by replacing the "concept of the state according to the *kleindeutsche* school (which favored a Prussian-led Germany that excluded Austria) with the idea of the *Volk* as an organic racial community."³⁵ Albert Brackmann played a leading role in promoting this paradigm shift. Brackmann, the general director of Prussia's state archives and member of various historical commissions, wanted to found a new research organization for the study of the *Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum*. In late 1933, he succeeded in forming an alliance with VDA chief Karl Haushofer, Theodor Oberländer, the leader of the BDO in Eastern Prussia, and the NSDAP's central party administration. This alliance facilitated the integration of the young Königsberg historians into the Prussian historical establishment. Political and personnel intrigues formed the basis for dissolving the Reich Historical Commission and the gradual *Gleichschaltung* of the ethnography of Eastern Europe, especially in Breslau and Berlin.³⁶

Anti-Semitism and the Construction of *Volkstum* in the North East Ethnic German Research Society

The establishment of *Volkstum* as a factor in settlement policy planning did not lead directly to National Socialist "reordering" of the East. *Ostforschung*

experts were by no means ardent National Socialists. Otto Hoetzsch, who was denounced in 1935 as being too accommodating of Poland and the Soviet Union, had been a member of the rival German National People's Party (DNVP, a conservative nationalist party in the Weimar Republic).³⁷ Schieder had been affiliated with the National Conservative Union, a right-wing splinter group of the DNVP.³⁸ Hans Rothfels had not been a member of any party, but did enjoy good contacts in the East Prussian "camarilla." All had exploited their connections to the highest ranks of the Prussian government long before 1933. Albert Brackmann had been a member of the German Democratic Party (DDP).³⁹ As a member of various historical commissions and general director of the Prussian state archives, Brackmann enjoyed access to the strongholds of state power as well as the financial resources of the Prussian administration. As head of the Nord- und Ostdeutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (North East Ethnic German Research Society or NOFG), founded in 1933, and as special adviser to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation or DFG, the successor to the Notgemeinschaft), Brackmann had decisive influence over the distribution of 1,200,000 Reichsmarks that the DFG earmarked exclusively for organizing the newly created research fields of *Volksforschung* (ethnopolitical research on peoples). In comparison, all other fields of historical research received only 150,000 Reichsmarks from the DFG.⁴⁰

The research alliance headed by Albert Brackmann promoted the establishment of *Volksgeschichte* (ethnic history) as a discipline at eastern German universities. In addition, the NOFG became the institutional link between ethnographic research and state policymaking. Temporarily, more than 150 experts in ethnographic and cultural studies, as well as archivists from thirteen scholarly institutions, joined the research alliance.⁴¹ National Socialist settlement and population policy started with ethnic segregation in border regions between Germany and Poland, which was also reflected in ethnographic historians' research agenda in the form of dissertations, conferences, and publications. From the start, anti-Semitic influences figured prominently in this research agenda. On 7 December 1933 Hitler proclaimed in the Reich Chancellery to the assembled leaders of the VDA and BDO, who exercised political control over the new research societies, that he would stand up for the "freedom of *Volkstum*," by which he meant not only Germans but also other major nationalities. After 1945, *Ostforscher* who continued their careers in the Federal Republic used this proclamation as "proof" that Hitler had concealed his anti-Semitic intentions from them.⁴²

In June 1934 Albert Brackmann received his first political instructions straight from the center of secret revisionist policy, the Deutsche Stiftung (German Foundation). This foundation was responsible for the secret financial and political support of German minorities in all contested border areas. The head of the Deutsche Stiftung personally referred Brackmann to

a paper by Jan Skala, who had closely connected the segregation of Europe on the basis of population policy to the "Jewish question."⁴³ Skala's paper made clear that Hitler's December 1933 reference to "freedom of *Volks-tum*" was a euphemism. What Hitler really had in mind was the forced expropriation and deportation of Europe's Jews. This "freedom," Skala argued, should be achieved through a policy of "dissimilation," which aimed to regain the particularities of a specific ethnic group that had been assimilated into a majority population. Evidently, Jews themselves would be made to pay for their expulsion from the German *Volkskörper* (ethnic body). In that way, "damage" to the German "ethnic body" supposedly caused by the emancipation of Jews in the late nineteenth century could be repaired.⁴⁴ Skala's paper confirmed the general political direction of the Reich Ministry Interior, which supported the deportation of Jews and other groups from the Reich as early as April 1934. German scholars of population presented this doctrine at the International Congress for Population Policy in Berlin in 1935 in order to justify National Socialist policy toward Jews.⁴⁵ This political anti-Semitism in settlement and population policy was sanctioned by the establishment of Sippenämter (offices for racial and genealogical heritage) and Sippenbücher (registers of genealogical heritage) in the Reich's border regions,⁴⁶ which Brackmann's archivists had been informed about.⁴⁷

The members of the NOFG were initially rather reserved in their public statements about the "Jewish question." Their research commission was geared primarily toward other political tasks. It was no coincidence that the publications of German ethnic historians focused either on the role of colonists in settling the contested border regions in West Prussia, Posen, and Upper Silesia or on the German population's participation in constructing the Polish state.⁴⁸ Polemical remarks or scholarly papers that questioned the sovereignty of the Polish state or were anti-Semitic were still considered inappropriate. From 1934, the NOFG regulated the language of its publications in coordination with the Ministry of Interior.⁴⁹ Scholars were to avoid any statements that questioned the German-Polish Friendship Treaty of 1934 or gave the League of Nations cause to assail German settlement and race policy.⁵⁰ To back up this order, the Ministry of Interior secretly decreed in August 1936 that every doctoral thesis dealing with issues of *Volkstum* and the *Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtum* must be presented to the ministry for approval. Controversial papers were to be classified "secret" and kept unavailable to the interested public. Violations would lead to the revocation of academic titles.⁵¹ Anyone wanting access to classified publications had to negotiate a complicated bureaucratic process at the NOFG. This invisible machinery of censorship relied upon a complicit academic community. It was no coincidence that the Königsberg historians who dominated the NOFG came from the same radical right-wing circles as the responsible functionaries in the Ministry of Interior.⁵² Those who were part of this inner circle shared common values and

knowingly accepted the violation of civic rights and even crimes against humanity as the price they had to pay to achieve their goals. Accepting this rationale became a prerequisite for building a career in the leading circles of German *Ostforschung*. The *Ostforscher* compensated for their external reticence through considerably greater eloquence in the arena of secret political consulting.

In March 1935, the leading lights of *Ostforschung*, including Theodor Oberländer, Werner Markert, Peter-Heinz Seraphim, Erich Maschke, and Werner Essen, exchanged ideas at the BDO Ostschulungslager (training camp for the East). They hoped to achieve “harmony between theory and practice” in their work in the border regions. A “base” (*Etappe*) that included 58 professors, lecturers, and research assistants met a “front” of political functionaries: seven training specialists of the NSDAP, the Hitler Youth, and the Königsberg academic community, in addition to three heads of the Reichsarbeitsdienst (compulsory labor service), two civil servants, and two elementary school teachers. Oberländer, the training camp’s patron, introduced the 72 participants during the first “full day of the camp” to the tasks of the *Grenzkampf* (border struggle). He accused the Polish state of “denationalizing” the German minority through repressive policies. He contrasted the Polish policy with the favorable German policy toward the Poles, which he claimed was not aimed at “germanizing” the Polish minority. Oberländer interpreted the Polish-German Friendship Treaty solely as a “political commitment by the state to non-violence.” He supported the “border battle” against the Polish minority in the Reich, and demanded that social relationships between Germans and Polish immigrants be prohibited.⁵³

Oberländer added another hypothesis to his assumption that the “pressure of overpopulation” would affect German border zones if the Germans failed in their “border battle” against the Poles. He implied that the Polish state was incapable of agrarian and sociopolitical reforms because Poland was not a racially homogenous nation-state. Oberländer described the social and economic situation in Polish cities as hopeless because the urban population there was nothing more than “transplanted rubes.” Since unskilled rural laborers were no substitute for a specialized urban workforce, an efficient industry could not emerge. In Oberländer’s hypothesis, the Jewish population had assumed a special role in the social order of Poland’s cities.⁵⁴ Seraphim, who headed the Polish section in the Institute for Eastern European Economy in Königsberg,⁵⁵ considered the “Jews in Eastern Europe” a kind of “intermediate layer” in the social order, who made up the middle class following the emigration or assimilation of the region’s Germans.⁵⁶

Whether or not Seraphim’s assertions that the Jews exploited native Poles and avoided investing in the Polish economy constituted a model for domination that anticipated National Socialist settlement and population policy remains an open issue.⁵⁷ In any case, it was not controversial