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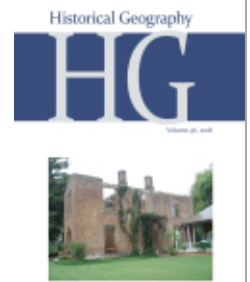
Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich
ed. by Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca (review)

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Hitler's Geographies: The Spatialities of the Third Reich. Paolo Giaccaria and Claudio Minca, eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. vi+378, black & white illustrations, maps, notes, index. \$55.00, hardcover, ISBN 978-0-226-27442-3.

Recently, there was a public conversation with Sonia Warshawski, a Holocaust survivor of three concentration camps and a death march. In the one-hour talk in Kansas City, Missouri, she repeatedly lamented, "You can't really imagine." Indeed, few can fathom the genocidal abyss opened by Nazism, nor do many know the key role that academic geography played in preparing the ground for the new German empire that was to extend into Russia.

Giaccaria and Minca have assembled a wide range of essays to provide an overview of recent research in English-language geography and related disciplines on the spatialities of Hitlerism. Grand spatial plans and everyday spatial practices are discussed from different theoretical perspectives in geography, history, and Holocaust studies. After a two-chapter introduction covering geographical perspectives and historiography on Nazism and the Holocaust, the book is divided into two parts: (I) Third Reich Geographies and (II) Geographies of the Third Reich.

Part I covers the racialized *Lebensraum* policies embedded in academic geography, starting in the 1870s with German colonialism in Africa and ending with Nazi-approved urban and regional planning for Central and Eastern Europe. Guiding the geographers serving Hitler's regime were the rationales of colonial exploitation developed in the late nineteenth century by Ferdinand von Richthofen and other geographers and the arguments of Albrecht Penck for German ethnic and cultural spaces beyond Germany's post-Versailles borders. Penck's concept of *kulturboden* (German soil) was used after the 1939 invasion of Poland to rationalize the annexation of the western province of Warthegau to Germany. It did not matter that few Germans inhabited Warthegau; for centuries they had supposedly created the landscape and its worthwhile material culture. It is important to point out, however, that many academic geographers did not abjectly serve Nazism. Mark Bassin in his essay argues that in the Ratzelian tradition, Karl Haushofer, Richard Henning, and other geopoliticians based their theories on materialist, nomothetic science emphasizing the environment and economic activity as the basis of Germanness, not Himmler's prime criterion of

rassischen Zugehörigkeit (racial membership). National Socialism did not rise from German geography, but rather evolved from the mid-nineteenth-century *völkisch* (“folkish”) movement that glorified the German people and their innate spiritual values. That movement embraced late nineteenth-century racial theories and their mutually exclusive, hierarchical categories based on genetic traits and cultural differences. Rejecting the environmental determinism that dominated German geographic thought into the 1930s, the Nazis espoused a cultural determinism that the German people reshaped the landscape to reflect their nation and race. The Heck brothers even attempted to back-breed aurochs to help create a distinctly Teutonic ecosystem in the newly conquered eastern territories, reversing supposed Slavic mismanagement of the land.

Geographers will be especially interested in the two essays dealing with central place theory (CPT), its use in planning the spatial reorganization of Germany and the resettlement of the conquered eastern territories, and the different relationships Walter Christaller and August Lösch had with Nazism. Christaller’s dissertation on CPT, first published in 1933, generated enough interest that the Study Group on Central Places (*Arbeitskreis Zentrale Orte*) was formed in 1937 and recognized CPT as a model for the spatial reorganization of German cities and industry. In 1940 Christaller began contributing to Konrad Meyer’s Planning and Soil Office and Meyer’s Institute for Agriculture and Agricultural Politics. These two units jointly devised the *Generalplan Ost* (General Plan for the East), which laid out how the East, starting with Poland, was to be settled and administered. Despite his responsibility for replanning settlement in Warthegau (where hundreds of thousands of Jews and Slavs were deported to make room for incoming ethnic Germans), Christaller was not a defendant in the Nuremberg trials. After the war, Christaller joined the Communist Party and remained active in geography, even receiving the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Association of American Geographers in 1964. In contrast, Lösch refused to make a loyalty oath to Hitler and his 1940 book *Die räumliche Ordnung der Wirtschaft* (translated in the 1954 English-language edition as *The Economics of Location*), perhaps because of its novel, complex ideas, was overlooked by the Nazis. Lösch died from scarlet fever in 1945, before the war ended.

The shorter Part II focuses on the Holocaust's spatialities, witnessing, and contemporary memorials. In their lead essay, the editors explain that in the Nazi geographical imagination, cities were to be preserved for Germans and the intervening woodlands were to be for the Other. As the war progressed, however, city-woodland boundaries blurred as in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where the camp was fenced off from the city. The ghettos, where Jews were to be gathered for deportation, were supposed to be located in the poorest section of each city with a large Jewish population, but, as Tim Cole relates, often were apartment buildings in which Jews and non-Jews lived, as in Budapest.

Several authors in Part II make painfully clear that citizens in the conquered countries not infrequently joined in the persecution and murder of the Jews. In France the Vichy government was in charge of rounding up Jews to be relocated to three adjacent apartment buildings in the Paris suburb of Drancy, from where they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Likely in response to anti-Semitism in the United Kingdom, the British Foreign Office created a constricted space and time for the dissemination of news about Nazi atrocities. As Katherine Fleming writes, "one of the great challenges of the commemoration of the Holocaust is to find ways to make it universal enough that in theory it is part of everyone's past" (360). As time passes our collective memory of this horror dims, but remember we must that the responsibility for the Holocaust is not limited to Hitler and to Himmler's SS and Waffen-SS that ran the death camps.

This volume is not easy reading for the nonspecialist. It covers details of German geographic thought and practice not well known nowadays and contains many non-English-language terms, some of which are not translated. This edited book is well organized; however, some chapters are original and engaging while others are based on previously published ideas. Most of the essays would have benefited from more maps and other illustrations as geography is quintessentially visual. Despite these limitations, the book is recommended to anyone wanting to understand how the geography of Nazism disserved humanity and daring to imagine the many spaces of the Holocaust.

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