

Book Reviews

Personal Names, Hitler, and the Holocaust. A Socio-Onomastic Study of Genocide and Nazi Germany. By I. M. Nick. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books. 2019. Pp. xxvi + 469. US \$140.00 (HB). ISBN 978-1-4985-2597-8.

Dr. I. M. Nick enjoys a well-deserved reputation for her meticulous scholarship and her ability to engage in interdisciplinary research. Her impeccable credentials are precisely what this massive and very significant project required. She holds a Ph.D. in English linguistics from the University of Freiburg, and an MA in German linguistics (University of Washington, Seattle), a BA in Germanic languages and literature (University of Maryland), a BSc in clinical and social psychology (University of Maryland), an MSc in forensic and investigative psychology (University of Liverpool), all with university and departmental honors. Finally, she was awarded the prestigious German post-doctoral degree of “Habilitation” for her research in English linguistics (University of Cologne), which represents the highest level of scholarly achievement in Germany.

In her “Preface” (2019: ix-xix), Dr. Nick discusses her visit with her mother to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on its opening day (April 22, 1993) and their profoundly personal reactions to its historical significance. It is located on 100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW in Washington, DC. Its street address pays homage to the Swedish architect, businessman, diplomat, and humanitarian who saved thousands of Jews in Nazi-occupied Hungary. He disappeared on January 17, 1945 and was reported to have died on July 17, 1947 in the Lubyanka prison in Moscow.

Dr. Nick states that the purpose of this book is “an exploration of names and naming immediately before, during and after the Holocaust” (xiii). Early in her research on names, Nazis, and the Holocaust, she decided not to approach her task from a statistical analytical perspective. Dr. Nick points out that this decision derived from “my profound respect and concern for the millions of people who had their identities and names stolen and replaced with serial digits during the Holocaust. It is also out of profound respect and concern for the people today whose lives have been, are, or will be threatened by a different genocide” (xiii). As a result, Dr. Nick sought to tell the stories of the people behind the names. As she observes, “the namestories shared here are embedded within a historical examination of naming laws, policies, and practices that were significant for the preparation and execution of the atrocities perpetrated during the Holocaust. In addition, this work examines the ways in which similar naming practices have been used in several contemporary genocides” (xiv).

In her Acknowledgments section (xxi), Dr. Nick points out that:

This work is dedicated to all those people whose names have yet to be recovered, whose stories have yet to be told. This work is gratitude to all those incredible people who so generously and graciously shared the story of their lives and names with me. It has been my profound honor to share these namestories here. And this work is for all of those who will come after us; may you have the strength to live your lives in honor, with kindness, forbearance, and truth. May you always find the courage to protect and cherish those around you as they protect and cherish you. May your own namestory be one filled with tolerance, bravery, honesty, and grace.

In the first chapter (“Names, Naming, National Security, and Personal Liberty in the United States,” 1–36), Dr. Nick enumerates the invasive techniques employed by the US to keep tabs on its citizens and others within its territorial borders. Nevertheless, a person’s name remains one of the most common forms of bureaucratic identification. The 9/11 attack in the US prompted federal legislators to create laws that would permit law enforcement agencies to maintain precise and accurate records of US citizens and visitors. Nevertheless, problems exist with official name lists as Dr. Nick points out. Furthermore, names provide significant information about an individual. The point of Dr. Nick’s discussion of US governmental collection of name data seeks to introduce the reader to the science of name study (onomastics) and one particular manifestation of its practice, the study of personal names (anthroponomy). In this way, she uses information the reader knows to delve into her discussion of the Third Reich’s use of personal names as a method to identify and target its intended victims. This chapter and the remaining eight chapters feature detailed substantive and reference notes. This chapter contains 97 such notes, which testify to Dr. Nick’s encyclopedic knowledge of the topic of onomastics and all of the related documents to provide a credible and far-reaching account of the significance of names during this dismal historical period that must never be forgotten. The actual range of end-of-chapter notes is 25 (chapter 8) to 192 (chapter 6).

The following chapter (“The National Socialist Policy of Onomastic Apartheid,” 37–77) observes that a forename and a surname were popular among the aristocracy in the twelfth century. Legislation relating to a two-name system came into being in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe. The Jewish population of central Europe, for example, primarily used only forenames. However, in July 1787, Austrian Jews were required to take on a surname. These last names were determined by the government and they were often derisive and deprecatory. Over time, new legislation restricted the right of a Jew to possess a Christian name. These laws set the scene for the Third Reich’s complete control over the personal names of its Jewish population. Dr. Nick reproduces the second version of LAFFN-2 (= Law for the Alteration of Family and First Names-2) on August 17, 1938, which contained the requirement that all Jewish residents had to have the names *Sara(h)* or *Israel* added to their names (67). One of the main architects of this dictum was Hans Josef Maria Globke (1898–1973). Ironically, Globke had a powerful position in post-WWII government as Chief-of-Staff of the Federal Chancellery (1953–1963) and was one of the closest aides to Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967). This chapter provides incontrovertible evidence that the Nazis used personal names to identify Jewish citizens as a key element of their genocidal program of *Endlösung* (‘final solution’) to eradicate the Jewish population. Dr. Nick provides several specific examples to personalize how this program functioned.

The third chapter (“National Socialist Practices for Naming the Power Elite,” 79–133) recounts Heinrich Himmler’s (1900–1945) two-pronged approach to the expansion of the fertility rate of Aryans and the elimination of “undesirables.” The first involved the “systematic identification, relocation, concentration, and ultimate extermination of all those deemed unworthy of life” (84). The second eugenic component was the establishment of a master race to re-populate and rule the newly won German territories or *Lebensraum* (84). As Dr. Nick explains, the *Lebensborn* (‘spring of life’) program provided gynecological and obstetric, and pediatric clinics, and the first was in Hochland in August 1936. Unfortunately, those children born with “defects” were routinely transferred to medical facilities where they were murdered, and the mothers were not only permanently banned from the *Lebensborn* but, under Heinrich Himmler’s orders, many were also sterilized. Participants in these programs were expected to name their offspring after Germanic virtues and heroes. Thus, male children “should be given German names connected with heroic battle, courage, bravery, victory, and ferocity; and female children receive German names related to chastity, honor, feminine pride, and dignity”

(97). In this chapter, and in all subsequent chapters, Dr. Nick provides documentary evidence (letters from National Socialist leaders, laws) and a personal namestory based on an interview with an adult *Lebensborn* child. Dr. Nick's approach to writing an engrossing narrative is outstanding. The reader has the sensation of being an eye-witness to one of the worst epochs in human history.

Chapter 4 ("The Hunt for Sara(h) and Israel," 135–168) explains the function of the National Socialist onomastic laws that required that Jewish residents who lived in the Third Reich to use either the name "Sara(h)" or "Israel" as a nominal identifier for a Jewish person. These two names had to be used in everyday transactions. Furthermore, they were included in all public records, even public telephone books. Failure to use these two forenames (codes for a Jewish person) was regularly policed by the government and fines were levied against offenders and some were imprisoned. Public access to this information (telephone books) allowed Aryans to identify, taunt, demean, and otherwise harass Jewish citizens (137). Throughout this chapter, Dr. Nick provides case after case of individuals punished for disobeying the Third Reich's terroristic onomastic laws. Her forensic approach to the detailed archival records left from the Nazi régime attests to the extraordinary assiduity that she employed in researching this remarkable volume. Because Dr. Nick personalizes the constant indignity and shame, not to mention fines and incarceration imposed on the Jewish population by government officials under the Third Reich's onomastic law (LAFN-2), the reader quickly understands how name laws permeated German society and facilitated the Holocaust.

The next chapter ("Denazification in Name Only?," 189–212) addresses the Allied nations post-World War-II control of Germany and Austria after the German unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945. The aftermath of WWII in the European theater required the elimination of discriminatory Nazi administrative and legal practices and procedures. Early on (September 20, 1945), "German and Austrian officials were ordered to remove the compulsory onomastic markers from all governmental records; and to report back to the responsible Allied officials that this order had been carried out" (169). This early administrative act by the Allies signified the impact of the Nazi onomastic laws (LAFN-1 and LAFN-2) and their intention to identify the Jewish population, and, ultimately, eradicate it. Dr. Nick points out that during this process of denazification of names, the infamous *Lebensborn* system (discussed in chapter 3) came to light because some of the children in these camps were kidnapped by the Germans and had their names changed. As Dr. Nick notes, in 1915 the governments of France, Great Britain and Russia signed a joint condemnatory statement concerning the Armenian genocide (185). Three decades later, France, Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, and the United States signed an agreement on August 8, 1945 to prosecute and punish those guilty of three categories of crimes: (1) crimes against peace, (2) war crimes, and (3) crimes against humanity (185). The Nuremberg trials began in November of 1945. In order to avoid prosecution many members of the Nazi party (estimated at between 10,000 and 100,000) used assumed names after WWII (195). Dr. Nick comments that in 1949, a mere four years after the Holocaust, the West German government offered a very controversial amnesty to residents living under an alias (195–196). A mere 250 former Nazis presented themselves to the government under the proclamation of amnesty. It should be noted at this juncture that a total of twelve defendants at the Nuremberg trial were sentenced to death by hanging. Only ten received that punishment because Hermann Göring committed suicide before his sentence could be carried out, while Martin Bormann, convicted in absentia, died in May 1945 trying to escape from Berlin.

In chapter 6 ("Names and Aliases of Male War Criminals," 213–280), Dr. Nick discusses the ways in which Nazi men changed their names and assumed aliases in order to escape detection and punishment after the Allied victory. There were three strategies: (1) Alias completely different than National Socialist criminals' birth name (217–218); (2)

cryptic pseudonyms routinely used by T4 (codes for killing centers and “disinfection files”) employees in Nazi killing centers during the war (224); (3) forename altered, last name retained (238); and (4) forename retained, last name altered (247). In one of many grisly stories designed to illustrate how fiendish ex-Nazis altered their names to avoid detection, she discusses specific atrocities designed by military action units (*Einsatzgruppe*) to exterminate undesirable groups in Eastern Europe (Communists, partisans, the physically and mentally disabled, Roma and Sinti, and Jews, 240). This entire chapter is replete with sickening tales of ex-Nazis who managed to escape prosecution with the help of such aliases.

It should be noted that there are nine unpaginated pages between chapter 6, which ends on page 280, and chapter 7, which begins on page 291. The first three pages (281–283) include photos of the Hohehorst *Lebensborn* (‘spring of life’) facility (see chapter 3 for a detailed account of this program), while the remaining six pages feature family photos of Abraham Chercevsky and his daughter Eve Line (284, 285, 330–339), Etja (= Evie Ruth) including her paternal family and her European relatives (286, 326–328), Henri (Shoah survivor) and his parents (287, 347–348), Fanny/Joan (= Joan Frances Salter, 288, 348–366), and Muguette (= Marie Bella) and her family (289, 341–346). Dr. Nick received permission to use all photos from Holocaust survivors in this pictorial section.

Chapter 7 (“Names and Aliases of Female Nazi War Criminals,” 291–324) addresses the name changes employed by female Nazi war felons. As Dr. Nick states (291):

The administrators of the Holocaust did not act on their own, however. Every step of the way, they were assisted by an army of complicit administrative assistants. All across the Reich, thousands upon thousands of typists, stenographers, archivists, receptionists, translators, bookkeepers, interpreters, file managers, telephonists (etc.) all played their part in the Final Solution. Many of those executive assistants were women. Women, therefore, not only had first-hand knowledge of the atrocities. Their labor was also integral to first perpetrating and then concealing these crimes. In addition to these administrators of death, there were also many thousands of women who directly participated in the atrocities in a wide range of professional environments. In hospital wards and research laboratories, psychiatric clinics and open fields, factory floors and extermination camps, women voluntarily pulled the triggers, inserted the injections, cracked the whips, held the scalpels, wielded the cudgels, ordered the dogs, administered the poisons, dissected the bodies, and built their careers as dealers of death.

As Dr. Nick observes, the name changes for female Nazis were different from those that male Nazis employed. These included: (1) Concentration camp matrons and their legal name changes (294), and (2) secret names used by concentration camp prisoners for female guards (314). Once again, Dr. Nick recounts the gruesome cruelty and barbarity of female Nazis just as she did in the previous chapter on male perpetrators. In fact, many prisoners in the camps gave specific nicknames to their guards, e.g., Marthe Luise Hildegard Lächert was called *Krwawa Brygida* (“Bloody Bridgit”) in Polish and *Blütige Brigitte* (“Bloody Bridgit”) in German (314).

The penultimate chapter (“Namesakes of Shoah Survivors,” 325–368) is a truly moving account of Shoah survivors based on personal interviews by Dr. Nick. They include accounts of Etja, Shlomit, Eve Line, Michel, Muguette, Henri, and Joan/Fanny. Photos of some of these survivors can be found on the unpaginated pages between chapters 6 and 7 (284–289). On the one hand, these namestories evoke a sense of why were such unthinkable crimes against humanity perpetrated by a nation against its own people? On the other hand, these personal accounts commemorate the indomitable spirit of these survivors, their bravery, and their ability to withstand the ghastly horrors of the Holocaust. Each namestory is unique and inspirational.

In her final chapter (“Naming, Names and Recovering Identities,” 369–421), Dr. Nick ponders the ongoing struggle to identify the victims of the Holocaust as well as the perpetrators of the systematic slaughter of an entire group of people. The task of identification of Holocaust victims is a demanding one. In order to illustrate the process for identification of Holocaust victims, Dr. Nick produces a “fictitious” set of records of biographical data from Holocaust documents: (1) Transportation record, (2) Hospital record, and (3) death record (391) as a way of answering this vexing question. The effort to preserve the names and the memories of Holocaust victims comes not only from the surviving members of those families but also from some of the children and grandchildren of the Nazi criminals who engaged in the heinous transgressions against humanity. In particular, Dr. Nick conducted in-depth interviews with relatives of Heinrich Himmler (1900–1945), Hans Frank (1900–1946), and Amon Göth (1908–1946), the concentration camp commander featured in Stephen Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*.

In the front matter contains useful items: (1) German WWII Military Ranks and US Equivalents (xxiii–xxiv) and a list of abbreviations and acronyms (xxv–xxvi) used in the text. The References (423–449), the Subject Index (451–464), and the Name Index (465–469) are comprehensive and exhaustive. The reader will find it easy to locate specific material.

Dr. Nick provides the reader with a gripping account of the Third Reich’s use of names as a tool to identify and eradicate its Jewish population as well as others considered “undesirable” in its own territories and those it conquered during World War II. That régime’s compulsive record keeping allowed Dr. Nick to unravel the various ways in which names were used both during the existence of that government and also after the war by Nazis who sought to escape punishment. Dr. Nick weaves political and social history of that era through a compelling chronicle that makes this book hard to put down. Moreover, her interviews with Holocaust survivors provide a very personal account of that era. An oft-cited quotation by the Spanish philosopher George Santayana (1883–1952) states that “those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it.” The Third Reich’s program of genocide ended seventy-five years ago, and its survivors are now relatively few, and for this reason, we must remember Santayana’s maxim if we are to prevent future cases of such atrocities. As I write this review, I cannot help but note that the political situation that created the circumstances for the Holocaust is again on the rise. We must remain ever vigilant lest it happen again.

The Latin proverb “*nomen est omen*,” which means “the name is a sign,” is appropriate here. On the one hand, it means that a name is a semiotic designation that provides meaning to those who encounter it. In this sense, the Third Reich used onomastics laws as a legal way to identify the Jewish segment of its population for nefarious and malevolent purposes. On the other hand, at the end of WWII, Nazis changed their names to escape criminal prosecution. In this sense, the deliberate deceptive act of a name change signifies that the person wanted to avoid well-deserved punishment.

In closing, reviews, even lengthy reviews, cannot capture the nuanced complexity of Dr. Nick’s far-reaching and all-encompassing forensic research on the role of onomastics in the National Socialist genocidal plan to eradicate the Jewish populations within its own borders and those of the nations it conquered. This book is a must read for everyone who seeks to be informed about the horrors during the Third Reich. It is also a reminder that it must never happen again. This is a lesson worth remembering. In closing, I would note that I wrote a brief blurb for the outside back cover of this volume.

University of Louisville, USA

FRANK NUESSEL

