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Book Reviews: Popular Books Section



...A MUST READ FOR ALL ...Naomi paints a grim but very real picture of the pathetic conditions of Jews during the Holocaust. The prisoners were kept in pathetic, unsanitary and overcrowded conditions facilitating the spread of typhus... They were then killed under the garb of preventing further infection to other inmates. The horrendous acts of Nazis thus got passed of as acts of great benevolence, even as international agencies like the Red Cross kept watching helplessly...

Murderous Medicine - Nazi Doctors, Human Experimentation, and Typhus *by* Naomi Baumslag, Foreword by E.D. Pellegrino. Hard Bound, 6" x 9.5".
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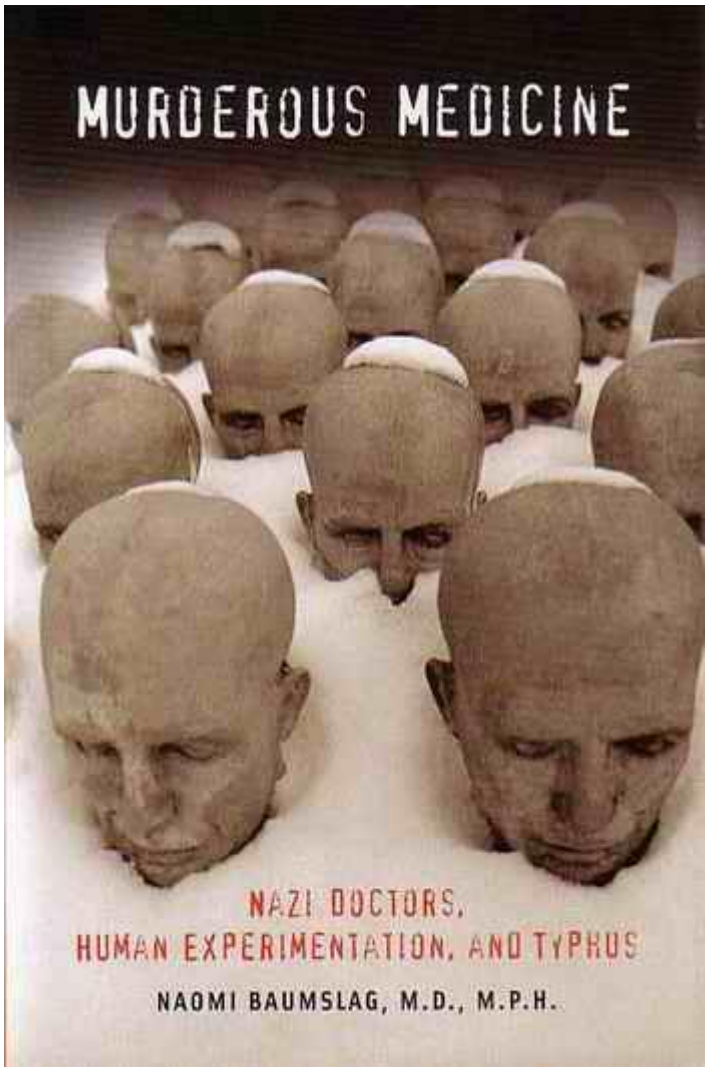

Naomi Baumslag



Dr. Naomi Baumslag is a Clinical Professor of Pediatrics at Georgetown University Medical School, as well as the President of the Womens International Public Health Network. She is a recognised expert in public health, has been advisor to many international agencies, and is a member of several human rights committes. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa, she obtained her MD at the Witwatersrand University Medical School Johannesburg and an MPH at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, Baltimore. Dr Baumslag worked in clinics in South African townships and in the USA for underserved populations.

Dr. Baumslag is especially concerned about the atrocities committed by the Nazis upon the Jews during the Holocaust. This is because most of her family was murdered by the Nazis during this period. The seeds of this book were sown in 1996, when she was given an opportunity to present a paper at YIVO conference on medical resistance in the Holocaust. She chose to speak on typhus, because the unfortunate victims were being deceived under the garb of delousing them.

They were told that they were going to the deloused and bathed, while in reality they were being sent to the gas chambers.

Baumslag remembers her uncle Baruch Baunslag passionately, who was a community doctor in Pasvalys in 1941 and who was committed to saving lives even in that antiSemitic village. Once he saved the lives of a child and mother by conducting a Caesarian section under very primitive conditions - after a Lithuanian doctor had refused to help.

Baumslag dedicates her book to her uncle Baruch and her late son Barry who was named after him.

If there exists one example of deification or apotheosis of evil, it is during the height of Nazism. It was during this period that killing of people was justified as an act of benevolence to the Nazis! An act to cleanse not only the Germans of an inferior race (Jews), but even the Jews themselves of diseases that were spreading among them. Thus by killing Jews carrying contagious diseases (typhus), the Nazis were actually helping the Jews!

Not only Jews, but a host of other groups such as Roma (gypsies), Slavs, homosexuals, the mentally disabled and several others who were considered unworthy of life were killed.

A number of books have been written on the horrors of the Holocaust. This book too concentrates on it, but it specifically concentrates on one specific aspect which has been overlooked by other investigators - the role of typhus during the Holocaust, and how the disease was systematically used by the Nazis to deify their horrendous acts.

Jews were killed not only by gas chambers but also by injections of intracardiac phenol and evipan injections (evipan is a sleep-inducing, anesthetizing barbiturate which kills in high doses).

Pharmaceutical industry watched the proceedings quietly. It had an ulterior motive in tacitly condoning and even encouraging the barbarous Nazi experiments. The industry derived huge benefits by selling their drugs, vaccines and other pharmaceutical products with which Nazi doctors experimented upon the prisoners. Hoechst Company got its experimental hormones tested virtually for pennies and with no restraints. Human experimentation was rife with a complete absence of consent.

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Baumslag structures her book nicely in six roughly equal parts, each part concentrating on one particular aspect of Nazi medicine that touches her. In chapter 1 entitled "Typhus: War, lice and disinfection", Baumslag concentrates on the history of typhus, how Dr. Howard Taylor Ricketts described the organism that caused typhus, which was subsequently named *Rickettsia prowazekii*, in memory of his contribution and that of Dr. Prowazek. Dr. Baumslag describes very vividly how both investigators ultimately succumb to typhus!

Other chapters describe very vividly how Nazi doctors use the typhus alibi to kill thousands of innocent Jews in concentration camps. The very conditions existing in concentration camps - cold, cramped, congested, unhygienic, full of starvation - were responsible for the perpetuation of typhus. But ironically this very situation was used by the Nazis to kill Jews; ostensibly they were killing Jews not because they hated them, but because they wanted to help the rest of them by killing those who were infected. Baumslag also describes very vividly how international agencies

like the Red Cross kept a cold and studied silence from a distance without as much as raising a word of protest!

Murderous medicine is about German doctors in WWII abusing public health for Reich public policy and violating all established ethical principles. This is a book that will move you emotionally. And yet it is not just an emotional drama. The book is packed with well-researched historical information which will be useful to academicians in the field of philosophy, history, ethics and medical sciences. A highly useful book. Fully recommended for one and all.

Excerpts from the book:

This is such a moving book, that - after a lot of deliberations - the editors decided to run a few excerpts from the book and a few photographs, so readers get some idea what this book contains. Here are some excerpts from pages 62-64, which depict graphically how Nazis cheated and deceived Jews into going into gas chambers in the name of their own good!

SCENES SET FOR DECEPTION-BATHING AS A FAÇADE FOR MURDER (pages 62-64)

Figure 2.13: A. Disinfection of prisoners at Mauthausen concentration camp was totally inadequate and served only to increase the spread of lice. Fotoarchiv der KZ-Gedenkstaette Mauthausen, Stephan Matyus. (Click to enlarge)



In order for the mass killing of Jews to run as smoothly as possible, the Nazis took great trouble to conceal their murderous activities. They had special gassing vans in Mauthausen and used medical blocks in Sachsenhausen as an execution chamber. By 1942 three extermination centers were operating - one in Belzec, which killed 15,000 per day, another in Sobibor with the capability of killing 20,000 per day, and in Treblinka which could gas 25,000 persons per day. Kurt Gerstein, a German chemical engineer in charge of the SS technical disinfection with highly toxic gasses, testified that the system was organized to cause the minimum resis¬tance and to utilize as few staff members as possible.

Figure 2.14: Nazi officials looked through this peephole in the gas cham¬ber door while families were murdered in the Mauthausen concentration camp gas chamber. In Auschwitz the gas chamber peephole had a metal grid. (Click to enlarge)



When prisoners arrived, they were instructed to take off all their clothes and leave valuables at the "valuables ticket office." Prisoners' hair was cut off in the barber's barrack, and they were then marched under the gun to the gas chambers (Figure 2.13, above right). They stood stark naked and were told by an SS officer that no harm would come to them. "You just have to breathe very deeply, that strengthens the lungs, inhaling is a means of preventing contagious dis¬ease. It's a good disinfection". They were packed into the gas chambers, and the doors were shut. Exhaust fumes from a diesel en¬gine filled the room. SS doctors and professors like Wilhelm Pfannenstiel, a medical doctor and professor of hygiene at the University of Marburg/ Lahn, and others watched through specially constructed peepholes on the door of the gas chamber (Figure 2.14, left). Metal grids covered the peepholes so that the people inside could not try to break it to get air. After the prisoners died, dentists were sent in to hammer out the gold teeth bridges and crowns while others inspected anuses and genitalia for hidden wealth. Whatever valuables were found were sold.

Poison gas (HCN) was used in Auschwitz, and to a lesser extent in Sachsenhausen, Natzweiler, and Stutthof. In Treblinka they used carbon monoxide (CO). Each camp had its own procedures, but all had variations on this deceptive theme-gas chambers disguised as shower rooms (Figure 2.15 - not

reproduced here). The Nazis exploited expectations of routine delousing, and doctors were actively involved in all aspects of the façade. Prisoners were forced to erect the buildings and create changing rooms with hooks, towels, and soap and fake washrooms with false showerheads and no drains. Gardens were planted to enhance the illusion of a bath¬house. Prisoners were promised food and clean clothes after delousing, but they were instead robbed and murdered. In Buchenwald, the corpses were taken to the crematorium, the ashes used for fertilizer.

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Other reviews of this book:

1. Journal of American Medical Association 2006; 295: 1068-1069

2. New England Journal of Medicine, Volume 354:1655 [April 13, 2006, Number 15]

3. Journal of Clinical Investigation 115:3305 (2005)

4. SciTech Book News, Sept, 2005

5. Deutches Arzteblatt, May 2006

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Murderous Medicine - Nazi Doctors, Human Experimentation, and Typhus by Naomi Baumslag

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