

*Ausgrenzung, Vertreibung, Völkermord: Genozid im. 20. Jahrhundert*, by Wolfgang Benz (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006; pp. 190. Eur 10).

In this collection of conference papers and public addresses, the long-time director of the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung at the Technical University in Berlin, Wolfgang Benz, presents his reflections on discrimination, ethnic cleansing and genocide. These ten chapters are not the results of primary research but, in the main, syntheses of recent research, so specialists in the various fields he traverses will not find anything new. Given Benz's high public profile in Germany, the value of the book is its function as a barometer of progressive opinion in the German political and intellectual classes about the status of the Holocaust in relation to other genocides.

What the book's chapters about German colonial genocides and the denial of the Armenian and Roma and Sinti genocides reveal is that the Holocaust no longer functions to exclude consideration of other cases. Still, that many voices—among them the American political scientist Guenter Lewy—persist

in refusing to consider these instances as genocide is evident in Benz's balanced rebuttal of their often sectarian objections. Ever attentive to injustice, he points out that the Sinti and Roma were also subject to persecution after the Second World War; their wartime maladies did not receive the attention or sympathy accorded to the Jewish experience. In this way the book is characterised by a welcome ecumenism and generosity of spirit.

No one will be surprised that the Holocaust remains paramount for Benz. That he uses the genocide concept at all is the breakthrough, but it allows for the separation as well as association of cases, such as allowing him to distinguish the Holocaust from the ethnic cleansing (*Vertreibung*) of Germans in central and eastern Europe between 1944 and 1948, a phenomenon he usefully contextualises as the unintended culmination of Nazi demographic policies during the war. The difference between the two cases would seem obvious to historians, but Benz is aiming his pen at revanchist voices on the centre-right of German politics who want to equate them. Similarly, he rejects the proposition that the German colonial genocides in Africa can be seen as an immediate precursor of the Holocaust, while also recognising that the continuity of the racist colonial mentality in the 1920s and 1930s 'paved the way' for the acceptance of Nazi extermination policies in the population.

For all its openness to new scholarship, however, the book is also very old-fashioned. Benz sees it as a contribution to what he calls 'comparative genocide studies', but simultaneously stresses the particularity of each case. Is that a coherent position? Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term, called genocide a 'generic concept' in order to stress what cases of group destruction share rather than what separate them. He took the differences for granted and wanted to draw connections between seemingly disparate events across time and space. It is fitting, then, that Benz admits that he makes no pretence to 'theoretical or systematic explanation' of genocidal ideology, demographic politics, deportations and massacres. Proving that Ranke's spirit lives on in Berlin, his intention is to describe 'how it really was', using the narrative form (p. 10). The advantage of this approach is the attention he brings to the lived experience of those who were persecuted. His political agenda, as it has been for decades, is to evoke identification with, and sympathy for, the victims of Germans—and now of others. To that extent, the book is another contribution to public education, a role to which German intellectuals feel a special calling. There is a strategy here. Benz thinks that memories of mass crimes are an important component of a society's 'democratic potential', and in this he is surely right.

There are limitations with the narrative mode, however. In his final, short chapter that sums up the twentieth century as an epoch of genocides, the reader is left none the wiser about *why* it all occurred this way. It is a pity that Benz does not refer to Mark Levene's landmark two-volume *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State* (2005), which advances a case about the rise of the modern states and international system as the driving force of genocides as well as of environmental catastrophe. Whatever one makes of the thesis, it provides a framework with which one can begin to account for events. With Benz's narrative approach, we are left, in effect, to throw up our hands in despair at the senselessness and inhumanity of it all.

Because there is no systematic, global or transnational approach in this book, Benz does not consider the partitions, civil wars and ethnic cleansings during the decolonisation in the Middle East and the Indian sub-continent that

brought death and misery to many millions. Like so many other books in genocide studies, he jumps from Europe in the 1940s to the genocides of the 1990s. Given his position and inclinations, it is not to be expected that he would investigate the proposition that ethnic cleansing took place against Palestinian Arabs in 1948. His sympathies are firmly on the side of the Jews who fled Europe. The difficulty in persisting with his morality-tale mode of presentation strains with his ready, if unconscious, adoption of the perspective of these refugees. Thus, he refers to 'Erez Israel' instead of Mandate Palestine when he writes about the 1940s, at one point referring to 'the coast of Israel' in 1940!

Benz's blend of history and moralism has served a valuable purpose over the decades and, to his credit, he is willing to extend recognition to more victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide than the German public sphere has been able to contemplate. But the limitations of moralised story-telling are equally on display here. The narrative stops when analysis collides with the simple tale of good and evil he wishes to communicate.

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