Ther, Philipp: *Die dunkle Seite der Nationalstaaten. »Ethnische Säuberungen« im modernen Europa*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2011. ISBN: 978-3-525-36806-0; 304 Seiten

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Phillip Ther's newest contribution to the burgeoning literature on ethnic cleansing, forced deportation, and population transfer in the Twentieth Century is admirable in a number of ways. *The Dark Side of the National State* is a genuinely comprehensive treatment of one of the most central problems of modern European history: the forcible, often violent removal of people from their homes and communities for no other reason except their supposed ethnic, religious, or national affiliations. Ther starts his treatment of this phenomenon in 1906 with the First Balkan War and ends it in the 1990s with ethnic cleansing in the Caucasus and in former Yugoslavia. The book includes an astonishing number of cases and events in this long and sad history without taking on the numbing quality of an encyclopedia of ethnic cleansing or sacrificing the distinctiveness of each case.

Not only does Ther move effortlessly case by case through the history of population movement, analyzing, grouping and classifying them along the way, he is able to compare the cases in engaging and thoughtful form. The book makes for very good reading. Ther writes with clarity and ease, and the argumentation is attached to well-defined time periods: 1912-1925, from the First Balkan War to Lausanne; 1938-1944, from Munich to Nazi-dominated cases of ethnic cleansing; 1944-1948, from Allied and East European plans for removal to the conclusion of the *„Vertreibung"*; and 1991-1999, from the fall of Yugoslavia to the conflict in the Caucasus and Kosovo. He compares the periods and focuses on the particular character of each. But the book's major contribution is in its synthesis. What, after all, can we understand about ethnic cleansing, after a century of its dominance in international, and especially European politics?

Ther's answer is bolstered by wide-ranging reading in secondary sources, very usefully annotated in the back of the book, and a wealth of knowledge about both specific cases and the broad sweep of modern European history. He even includes serious treatment of „extra-European" cases, which have profound European roots: the partition violence in newly independent India and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians during the 1948 Israeli-Palestinian war. His use of ethnic cleansing as a term is unproblematic and unburdened by excessive definitional meandering. He clearly distinguishes ethnic cleansing from genocide and makes the case that it is essential for good analysis – Bosnia is an important example – to use the terms appropriately. Unlike some scholars, Ther also understands that ethnic cleansing seldom creates conditions for stability. There is relatively little attention in his book to the actual perpetrators of ethnic cleansing or even to its victims, but he does not ignore the horrors of the process itself. He is sharply attuned to the need to examine not just the fate of those expelled, but the populations that are moved in to take their place.

The core argument of Ther's book revolves around the role of politics and the state in creating the conditions for and in carrying out ethnic cleansing. The „European Modern" serves as the cultural and ideological backdrop for the origins of ethnic cleansing in the Balkan Wars, and the precedents for international action in the Treaty of Neuilly (1919), which plays a prominent role in his analysis, and Treaty of Lausanne (1923), which served as the dominant model for later ideas of population transfer. The evolution of the European state system in the first quarter of the century plays a crucial role in setting the norms and forging the agreements and treaties that institutionalize the removal of populations from their home territories. In this sense, both individual states and the international system in which they operate connive to move borders, eliminate minorities, and create homogeneous populations. But even here, Ther's study – like much of the recent historiography – places the weight of responsibility for ethnic cleansing on international actors. In Ther's scheme, nationalist movements, ethnic resentments and hatreds, and spontaneous action play a much lesser role in cases of eth-

nic cleansing than high politics and international agreements. In the European context with which Ther is concerned, British politics and international leadership occupy a particularly important place in the development of ethnic cleansing, whether connected with the end of the Ottoman Empire, the spread of Nazi views of ethnic borders (through Munich), the cleansing of Germans by postwar East Central European governments or, most obviously, the partition violence in Palestine and India, where the unwillingness of the British to take responsibility for the hostilities exacerbated ethnic cleansing.

Ther has written the kind of „critical and explanatory history" that he calls for in his book (p. 253). With that said, the book is not without its weaknesses, most of which derive, in my view, from Ther's proclivity to over-argue and make declamatory statements about the history (and politics) of ethnic cleansing. In an unhelpful way, the *„Bund der Vertriebenen"* appears explicitly and implicitly in Ther's narrative as a historiographical opponent. For example, Ther's excellent exploration of the historiography is marred by a near obsession with commentators who think there was a taboo on the writing of history about the Vertreibung from the mid-1960s until the late 1980s. Of course, taboo is too strong a word. But there certainly was a distinct unwillingness to discuss the Vertreibung among academics in that period and almost no serious historical scholarship to turn to. His mention of the 1985 collection edited by Wolfgang Benz (note the late date) is the exception that proves the rule. That Ther ridicules those who want to raise this question by saying that they suggest there was no freedom of press in the Bundesrepublik (p. 277) or that the Bundesrepublik was a dictatorship (p. 288) begs the serious historiographical issue. He indicates this himself when he implies at one point that the historiographical silence was related to „the societal change" following the 1960s (p. 277).

Ther has provided a plethora of evidence in numerous cases to demonstrate the centrality of the international system to ethnic cleansing. But to state, as he does, that „the victorious powers of the Second World War wanted to establish at any price homogeneous nation states in the northern part of Eastern Europe" cannot be reasonably demonstrated (p. 264). At one point, he seems to concede that Stalin was a thoroughgoing realist and „ambivalent" about ethnic cleansing (p. 171). The Americans cannot, I think, be considered unambiguous proponents of ethnic cleansing during the war. The Allies certainly opened the door for the Poles and Czechs to do what they wanted – and that is, drive out the Germans. After Potsdam, they sought to regularize the process. The Allies also unquestionably brought about a disastrous predicament for millions of Germans (and Poles in the East) by redrawing the borders of the country at Teheran and Yalta. The British developed plans for the „transfer" of the German population that acknowledged its dangerous character. But it strikes me as imbalanced to place so little emphasis on the plans and actions of the respective nation states.

The same issue reappears throughout the book, though it is most pronounced in the case of the Vertreibung. One further and related example will have to do. As best I know, the Polish government planned, organized, and carried out Operation Vistula, the ethnic cleansing cum counterinsurgency operation against UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and the Ukrainians in southeastern Poland in 1947. Yet Ther wants to place the responsibility for it on the Soviets and writes only about NKVD (People's Ministry of Internal Affairs) supervision and Soviet interests (p. 188). In both cases, the Vertreibung and Operation Vistula, Ther pretty much deprives the Polish authorities of any agency. He does the same, in my view, with Benes and his successful lobbying for expulsion in London and his single-minded actions to rid Czechoslovakia of the Germans.

Ther focuses on the political machinations of the European system and of the nation state as the primary determinants of ethnic cleansing. But this does not mean, as he insists, that emotions – anger, resentment, hatred, revenge, avarice, and others – do not play any role at all. It is certainly the case that diplomats and international actors act in the name of what Ther calls „population technical utopias." But it is hard to understand why this undermines in any way the observation that

„hate, revenge, or other emotions“ explain, at least in some part, the attack against targeted populations in episodes of ethnic cleansing (p. 79). He asserts there was *no* „revenge of the victims“ in the process of ethnic cleansing in Poland and Czechoslovakia (p. 49). This makes no sense in face of the demonstrable and justifiable emotional content of the Poles' and Czechs' attitudes at the individual, local, and governmental levels towards the Germans. Another explanation he uses is that hate and emotions cannot be used to explain ethnic cleansing because „there has always been hate in human history.“(p. 262) Of course; but there also have always been great powers, shifts in borders, and attempts to drive people from their home territories. He certainly understands that hatred was in the air in 1945, when he writes that the Germans were „barely less hated by their Western enemies than in the east.“(p. 186) It is, of course, extremely difficult to measure or analyze hatred, revenge, and other emotional motives for ethnic cleansing, but to say that they do not belong in *any* analysis of the Vertreibung (or to assert that hatred for the Germans in the west was roughly the same as in the east!), does not, in my view, reflect reality.

I certainly agree that „politically driven processes“ were primarily responsible for the war and the ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. But to say that „ancient hatreds“ were not involved *at all* and that there was not even „ethnic conflict,“ which was clearly both exploited and promoted by ethnic entrepreneurs like Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman, seems extreme and untenable (p. 244).

Related to the Soviet experience, Ther suggests that „cases of ethnic cleansing unregulated by treaty can take on a genocidal character.“(p. 273) But he totally rejects suggestions that the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide began as cases of ethnic cleansing and ended in genocide. He even uses the derogatory (and untranslatable) notion of *„verharmlosend“* for the attempt to understand the Holocaust in this context (p. 161). The historiography of the Holocaust is too deep, complex, and dynamic for me to pronounce unequivocally on this subject. But it does seem to me that Ther overdoes the „intentionalist“ scheme and is too dismissive of the argument. Hitler's genocidal fantasies aside, the Third Reich organized its initial anti-Semitic campaign around plans and policies to isolate the Jews, deprive them of their rights and property, and expel them from Germany and Europe. These actions were based on an extreme racialist version of the homogenization drive that Ther identifies with ethnic cleansing. That there was no place for them to go actually supports his case for the importance of the international community, which begged off of confronting or dealing with the increasing Nazi pressure on the Jews. The Madagascar plan can only be seen in the context of a cleansing operation, though Nazi officials would have been only too glad to see Jews die there. I share the views of those who talk about „the cumulative radicalization“ of Nazi extermination policies, accelerating during the occupation of Poland and exploding in stages after Barbarossa. But even in 1939-1940, when the Nazis were focused on eliminating the Polish elite and placing Jews in ghettos, ideas about expulsion still coursed through the leadership of the Third Reich.

The Armenian genocide is also not so easily separated from the processes of ethnic cleansing. After the disastrous Balkan Wars, the Ottoman government considered ways to remove the Christians, some specific local populations exempted, from Anatolia. This included the Armenians, the Greeks, and the Assyrians, whose fate certainly should be analyzed together, even if the fate of the Greeks was that of ethnic cleansing, while the Armenians and Assyrians became victims of genocide. Ther rejects thinking about the Greek situation together with the Armenian, because, one assumes, he is unwilling to consider ethnic cleansing and genocide as related processes (p. 78-79). Ther rightly emphasizes that before the First World War, the Ottoman government negotiated with the Greeks about a voluntary population exchange. However, immediately after the outbreak of the war, many communities of Aegean Greeks received even worse treatment than the Armenians by being deported in substantial numbers to the center of Anatolia. The historiography is more complicated than Ther indicates and the issues are not easily resolved.

Still, there is plenty of evidence that after the outbreak of the war, the Ottoman handling of the Armenians started as ethnic cleansing and morphed into genocide. The Van uprising (April-May 1915) and the Allied offensive in Gallipoli (April 1915-January 1916) led to the kind of cumulative radicalization in the Ottoman case that made genocide more likely. Ther supports his view that the Armenian case should be considered genocide and not ethnic cleansing instead of a process starting with ethnic cleansing and ending with genocide by the argument that the Armenians were deported in various directions inside Anatolia instead of to the Russian Armenian territories to the east (p. 82). But the Ottoman leadership would hardly deport the Armenians to the territory of their major wartime enemy, whose Armenian battalions were already a source of resentment and anger among the Young Turks.

To conclude: Ther's book is worthy of respect and attention. It will provoke many useful arguments and discussions. The declaratory tone of some of his assertions can sometimes be off-putting. But this does not mean that students, scholars, and an educated readership as a whole will not profit greatly from reading his study. One can hope it will be translated into English for the Anglo-American audience, as well as become part of the growing and ever more sophisticated arguments in Germany, in particular, about the Vertreibung and ethnic cleansing in Twentieth Century Europe.

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