

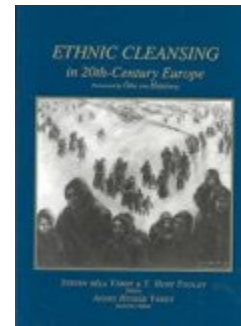
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Steven Bela Vardy, T. Hunt Tooley, eds. *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Boulder: Columbia University Press, 2003. xiv + 861 pp. \$68.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-995-7.

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## German and Hungarian Suffering after World War II, with the Ex-Yugoslavia as Background

The title of *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, edited by Steven Bela Vardy and T. Hunt Tooley, leads one to assume that the book attempts to describe and explain the entire phenomenon of ethnic cleansing in Europe in the twentieth century. This is not quite the case, and the focus is very clearly on the former Habsburg lands of Central Europe and the Balkans, and particularly on the persecution of ethnic German and Hungarian minorities. Other cases are included (including some chapters which include non-European events), but the focus is pronounced.

This collection is the product of a conference on ethnic cleansing in twentieth-century Europe held at Duquesne University in November, 2000. The conference included some sixty scholars, survivors, members of NGOs and former government figures. The presence of a foreword by Otto von Habsburg in the book, and the participation of and financial support from ethnic German and Hungarian organizations in the United States in the conference should be noted. The conference took place against a background of the then recent break-up of Yugoslavia (including the NATO bombing of Serbs in Kosovo, which happened just before the conference). Less immediate events that influenced the conference (and thus the book) include the collapse of the Soviet Union and its client states in Eastern Europe, the German *Historikerstreit*, and the unification of the two Germanies. It should also be considered both in the context of renewed ethnically based politics in the Balkans and Eastern and Central Europe, and in the context of a new

German interest in speaking of German suffering during and after the Second World War.

The book itself is massive: its over 870 pages include forty-four essays (three by Alfred de Zayas alone), a foreword by Otto von Habsburg, two addresses by prominent guests at the Duquesne conference, an introduction by the editors, and a host of figures, tables, and maps in the individual essays. Forty-five people made written contributions to the book. Most contributors were academics, though among these there were more senior graduate students or assistant professors than senior scholars. Unusual for a book growing out of an academic conference, a small number of the contributions were by survivors of ethnic cleansing. Sadly, the book contains no concluding chapter or index. The contributions are divided into subsections on the rise of twentieth-century ethnic cleansing, the ethnic cleansing of Germans during and after World War II, the after-effects of ethnic cleansing in the wake of World War II, survival and memory of the expulsions, and the broader implications of ethnic cleansing in the last third of the twentieth century. Finally, a documentary appendix includes eleven documents ranging from the Lausanne Treaty on Greek-Turkish Population Exchange of 1923 to excerpts from the Dayton Peace Accords of 1996.

The purpose of both conference and book was to provide analysis of ethnic cleansing over the course of the entire twentieth century in Europe, and in particular, to bring to light some of the more obscure and little-known

instances of it. "Ethnic cleansing" is specifically distinguished by the editors from the related "genocide," and the editors' working definition of it reads: "the mass removal of a targeted population from a given territory, including forced population exchanges of peoples from their original homelands as well as other means." Thus, though mass murder and other crimes are included, the emphasis here is on the removal of people from a given territory (p. 3). Most contributors stuck to this working definition or used similar definitions drawn from recent international law, yet the book is still conceptually diverse, and many contributors tended to conflate ethnic cleansing with genocide, or with milder forms of ethnic or religious persecution. It is a shame that the editors did not attempt to draw a theoretical or conceptual balance at the end of the book, and the analytical weight of the project suffers as a result.

Within the narrow limits of the topic itself, the individual chapters cover a wide range of cases and approaches. One or two actually begin their analyses well before the beginning of the twentieth century (Peter Dreisziger, N. F. Mentzel). Several consider acts of ethnic cleansing committed by the Ottoman Empire or Turkish Republic (Mentzel, Cathie Carmichael), including the classic cases of the Armenians (Alfred de Zayas) and the Anatolian Greeks (Ben Lieberman, Eleni Eleftheriou). Some essays are very legal in focus (de Zayas 3, John Cerone) or look at the practical question of how best to intervene in future cases to limit suffering (Gabriel S. Pellathy). One contribution actually considers parallels with the North American experience (Dreisziger), and is among the most innovative and interesting contributions to the book. Several (again among the most useful) paint the evolution of ethnic cleansing with a broad chronological brush (Hunt Tooley, Stefan Wolff, Victor Roudometof), and another looks at the reaction of U.S. Senator William Langer to the expulsion of ethnic Germans after the Second World War (Charles M. Barber), and places his reaction in the context of larger trends in United States domestic politics. The book certainly brings to light a number of little-known and under-researched cases of ethnic cleansing, and to this extent, it deserves praise. The persecution of ethnic Hungarians, but also the extent of the persecution of ethnic Germans at the end of the Second World War, is not yet widely acknowledged today, nor are even more obscure cases, such as Ukrainian attacks against ethnic Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (Alexander V. Prusin), or the ethnic cleansing of the Crimean Tartars (Brain Glyn Williams).

Yet despite this diversity, the book exhibits three very distinct emphases. One is naturally a focus on the Balkans, both because the Balkans have been a main locus of instances of ethnic cleansing in Europe, and because of the impact of the break-up of the former Yugoslavia, which was very fresh in the minds of all participants, and which brought the term "ethnic cleansing" into public discourse. As a result, four contributions deal with the historical background of late twentieth-century events in the former Yugoslavia (Mentzel, Carmichael, John R. Schindler, Andrew Ludanyi), and eight deal with the post-1989 collapse of Yugoslavia either exclusively (Michael V. Hayden, Klejda Mulaj, Robert H. Whealey, Cerone) or as a central focus in a larger analysis (Otto von Habsburg, Géza Jeszenszky, Janos Mazsu, de Zayas 3). Few of these papers are particularly illuminating, with the exception of the contribution of Stefan Wolff, who gives a balanced and broad historical look at the practice and consequences of ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century. The chapter by Cerone and the third one by de Zayas are very legalistic, but provide useful and informational summaries of international law regarding ethnic cleansing. On the other hand, the piece by Robert H. Whealey downplays the severity of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, accuses the U.S. media of being anti-Serb, and is both confused and strangely obsessed with the role of "Zionists" in discourse on the former Yugoslavia. Janos Mazsu's look at the evolution of the term "ethnic cleansing" is interesting, but ultimately frustrating, since it seems to equate Soviet and Nazi acts of barbarity, and treats the Holocaust as if the Nazi genocide against the Jews were motivated by class and not race.

A second focus of the book is on ethnic Hungarians and their treatment by the Soviets, Yugoslavs (Serbs), Rumanians and Slovaks, and historically, across the entire Carpathian basin (Tamas Stark, Bela Vardy, Edward Chaszar, Rubert Barta, Ludanyi, Mazsu and Jeszenszky). These contributions all have the advantage of presenting information relatively little known to the average Western European or North American reader, and of putting ethnic cleansing in a larger context than is usual in most recent works, but are often rather thin in substance and documentation (Vardy, Barta). To be fair, the persecution of ethnic Hungarians by the Soviets and in the post-war Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe is still an under-researched subject, and primary sources are often still difficult to obtain. Better and more conclusive work will certainly follow.

Finally, the most obvious focus of all is on the persecution and ethnic cleansing of ethnic Germans after

the Second World War. The introduction specifically states that Germans have been the greatest victims of ethnic cleansing during the twentieth century in Europe (p. 6) (with the Hungarians second). At least twenty of the contributions—nearly half—are concerned with ethnic German suffering after the Second World War. Not only is an entire subsection (part 2) devoted to the topic, but several of the essays in other sections are as well, as is an entire section where all six essays concern ethnic Germans, four of which (Karl Hausner, Hermine Hausner, Martha Kent, and Erich A. Helfert) are personal stories of ethnic German survivors of ethnic cleansing. These are among the most poignant and heart-wrenching contributions in the entire book, but their academic or analytical value is strictly limited. The topic has been nearly taboo in historical writing since the Second World War, but has recently seen a resurgence of interest in the West and particularly in modern, post-unification Germany, as many taboos against discussing German suffering in the Second World War have begun to be challenged. The contributions on ethnic Germans are mixed in quality. On the one hand, the chapter by de Zayas makes wild accusations and excoriates the Allies and particularly Czech President Eduard Benes, while those by Scott Brunstetter, Janos Angi and Nicolae Harsanyi are superficial. On the other hand, the contribution by Christopher Kopper on the Czech case, though based largely on secondary sources, is at least balanced and shows that there was an evolution of Czech government thinking. The two chapters on Poland by Richard Blanke and Tomasz Kamusella are both very good: Blanke looks at the special case of German-speaking ethnic Poles, whereas Kamusella uses mainly Polish sources to look at Upper Silesia. Two other essays on Poland, by Elizabeth Morrow Clark and Gregor Thum, exploit the recent interest in history and memory to look at the memory of the now absent German presence in, respectively, Gdansk and Wroclaw.

For all the breadth of case studies, a vital missing element prevents this book from actually being a study of twentieth-century ethnic cleansing in Europe, and turns it into a much narrower, parochial affair: there is not a single paper on the ethnic cleansing of any ethnic or religious group by Germans or Germany, and there is no specific analysis, even comparative, of the Holocaust. This lends an often surreal air to the book: Jews and the Holocaust are mentioned more than twenty times in individual essays, and the ethnic cleansing carried out by the Germans (including, but not limited to the Holocaust) is clearly the largest and most important instance of ethnic cleansing in Europe, but not a single essay is devoted to

it. This was a deliberate choice, and in the introduction, the editors explain their rationale: first, they specifically considered the Holocaust as an instance of genocide, and thus something much larger than the more limited topic of ethnic cleansing. They also felt that the Holocaust is adequately addressed in modern scholarship, while ethnic cleansing, particularly in some of the more obscure cases they were at pains to include, is not. Finally, they felt that, had the Holocaust been specifically included, it would have dominated the attention of all concerned so completely that everything else would have been overshadowed. The editors do acknowledge quite strongly that there is hardly a more significant event in the history of the twentieth century than the Holocaust, and again, many of the contributions make specific mention of it. And yet: the elephant remains in the room, largely unacknowledged, but obviously on the minds of everyone present. The choice of the editors to specifically exclude the Holocaust may be debated, but one thing is certain: it significantly limits the reach and the power of the analyses presented in this collection. Surely, in such a large work, there might have been room for one or two analytical contributions on the Holocaust. The value of the book and the conference upon which it is based would only have been strengthened.

Most essays in this book stress the suffering of the victims. This approach is certainly justified, and it is clear that many of the essays in this collection intend to give a voice to victims ignored until now. Yet this strategy makes it more difficult to understand the larger context of events, and thus, the reasons for the events themselves. For example, this volume is very good at describing the suffering of German minorities in individual (national) cases, but does not ask why so many Eastern and Central European countries expelled and persecuted their German minorities after the Second World War. Only very slight mention is made of the collaboration of these German minorities with the Third Reich in war crimes and other exactions against the non-German populations, and no analysis of them is made. The reader is left with a string of often heart-rending stories of suffering and injustice, but little or no analysis of why such injustice might have occurred, except to evoke communist thugs, venal neighbors or the evil ethnic nationalism of President Benes. But the problem runs even deeper. Many of the contributions are implicit or even explicit pleas for the acknowledgment of the suffering of the ethnic group with which the author identifies, and the book skates very close at times to a frankly revisionist exercise in comparative ethnic suffering. This impression is only

accentuated by the fact that a majority of contributions are based mainly on secondary sources, and many are superficial. The quality of contributions varies greatly.

At the end of this book, the reader is left with a much larger knowledge of instances of ethnic cleansing in twentieth-century Europe, and with an enlarged, though inconclusive, conceptual understanding of the phenomenon. The omission of the Holocaust, the special pleading of many contributions, and the revisionist tendencies of some, also leaves a faint and unpleasant odor of sulphur, which is unfortunate and perhaps unintended by the editors, but difficult to dispel. The long-term use-

fulness of the book is thus brought into question, and it may too easily be pigeonholed as just another exercise in comparative suffering, instead of the comprehensive and conceptually rigorous study its editors intended.

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