

Aspekten des Diskurses der Untergrundpresse interessiert ist, sollte die Buchveröffentlichung nutzen. Wer sich dagegen vor allem für bestimmte politische Gruppierungen interessiert, dem dürfte am besten mit der Internetpublikation gedient sein.

Anmerkungen:

- 1 Vgl. neben J. T. Gross, *Nachbarn. Der Mord an den Juden von Jedwabne*, München 2001, vor allem ders., *Upiorna dekada. Trzy eseje o stereotypach na temat Żydów, Polaków, Niemców i komunistów 1939–1948*, Kraków 1998; ders.: *A Tangled Web. Confronting Stereotypes Concerning Relations between Poles, Germans, Jews, and Communists*, in: I. Deák/J. T. Gross/T. Judt (Hrsg.), *The Politics of Retribution in Europe. World War II and its Aftermath*, Princeton 2000, S. 74–129.
- 2 K.-P. Friedrich, *Der nationalsozialistische Judenmord in polnischen Augen. Einstellungen in der polnischen Presse 1942–1946/47*, Köln 2003, 730 S. (<http://kups.uni-koeln.de/volltexte/2003/952/>, letzter Zugriff 7. August 2008).

Dan Diner: Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse. Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2007, 128 S.

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This is an important book. It could change how people think about memory and World War II. It could even affect the world – but even if it does neither, it is a kind of a dazzling argument just by itself.

Since the book is dense, I'm afraid that very few people will read it if they are not persuaded beforehand that it will be well worth their time. As indeed it is.

Many books have been written on the question of whether globalization is good or bad. Diner's book starts out with this issue of moral evaluation but takes it in a new direction. It does not linger on the question of whether universalization is morally superior to particular memories of the Holocaust – as so many other books in this genre do – but rather contextualizes and historicizes it by considering different contexts within and outside Europe.

The interested reader will find four very tightly composed essays, each one approaching a different set of memories. Taken together however the book works like a composition of counterclockwise (or "reverse" memories (which also explains the German title of the book "Gegenläufige Erinnerungen"). The stakes are high for Diner. Nothing less than historical judgment is at risk when we look at the recent politics of memory. This loss of historical judgment was caused by the separation of two intertwined historical events: World War II and the destruction of European Jewry. This in turn – according to Diner – leads to a loss of temporality, a loss of historical time, and hence a loss of judgment. We are left with nothing except an undifferentiated moralizing discourse about victims, which again results in thinking without differentiation. Thus, Diner's aim is to differentiate and this is exactly what these four essays attempt to do. They cannot be read separately; they need to be read together since the full argument only emerges from their sum total. In the first essay "The Epistemics of the Holo-

caust”, Diner takes the term “epistemics” seriously. Epistemics refers to the scientific study of knowledge, and in the opening chapter Diner sets out to study knowledge about the Holocaust. He returns to a concept which he developed in earlier writings, “Zivilisationsbruch” – a “rupture in civilization”, a term which encompasses the breakdown of ontological security and which coheres with Hannah Arendt’s position as developed in her “Origins of Totalitarianism”. Zivilisationsbruch can be characterized as a breakdown in a rational understanding of the world, a breakdown in the basic belief that life is more important than death, a reversal of values where survival was accidental and destruction became the rule. This rupture of civilization does not stop with the perpetrators. They are part of this breakdown as well and their survival is suspended together with their victims’. From here, Diner analyzes two possible modes of approach one angle looks at the historical and the particular and inquires why it happened to the Jews. The second approach is universal: it asks how it could have happened at all. Diner returns repeatedly to Arendt’s thoughts on the Holocaust and how she understood early on that the destruction of the Jews was a break with the past and called for a new mode of thinking.

Diner explains that comparisons (including analogies and metaphors) are not merely neutral devices but also ideological vehicles whose meanings can be transformed. Thus a universal framework situating memories of the Holocaust on the same level as for instance remembrance of German expellees, the victims of allied bombings or the victims of colonial atrocities has multiple meanings that are determined within the

parameters of different needs and situations. However, every de-contextualization involves also a re-contextualization. Thus, there are two parallel – and somewhat incompatible – conceptions of victim consciousness, one universal and one particular. The particular highlights the crimes of the aggressor; the universal downplays them through the very idea that we are all victims. Both imply a conversion experience because the exposure to trauma requires a redemptive departure from the original traumatic experience. The particular form of victim consciousness depends on its distinction between perpetrator and victim. Under the particular system, there can be no victim without a perpetrator – and conversely, to call someone a victim is to instantly accuse someone else of being a perpetrator. These are the points Diner develops in the essays that follow.

The second is called “Kontinentale Verschiebungen”. “Verschiebung” in German can mean both displacement and postponement and Diner implies both the temporal and the spatial. He talks about temporal icons such as May 8th, 1945, the date of German capitulation in Reims, the city where French kings were traditionally crowned. For Germans, this date began as a capitulation and within 40 years turned into an icon of liberation. For Germans, May 8th, 1945 now symbolizes the start of Germany’s alliance with the West. The date stands for liberal values like freedom and democracy, pluralism and parliamentary democracy. It may be a good date for the West, but it is not the only one. From May 8th, Diner moves to May 9th, 1945. One day later, another capitulation site, this time in Berlin-Karlshorst, this time capitulation to the Western allies, but

also capitulation to the Soviets. This icon marks the end of the war as perceived from Moscow, and not from Washington, Paris or London. For many nations of Eastern Europe this was not a date of liberation, but the beginning of Soviet oppression. Diner highlights the meaning of this date for the Baltic peoples, the Poles, the Czechs and others. Memories of Stalinism and memories of the Holocaust and German oppression need to be viewed side by side, as strange but necessary bedfellows. In his next essay, "Kontinentale Verwerfungen" ("Continental Fault Lines"), Diner not only uses a geological metaphor, but moves outside the European context. He returns to May 8th, 1945. However, the location is different: Setif in Algeria. The same day Germany surrendered in World War II, a parade organized by the local Algerian population to celebrate German capitulation turned out to be not only a French victory parade, but a demonstration for Algerian independence. The French who had vital reasons to protect their colonies after World War II responded by bloody attacks on the local Algerians. Here, May 9th, 1945 was the beginning of the colonial struggle against the French and the West. Decolonization and the end of World War II start exactly on the same date. Diner weaves his arguments together, writes about the Algerian struggle, Camus, Pontecorvo's brilliant documentary movie (1966), the Battle of Algiers to better define the meaning of the anti-colonialist struggle. He shows how former French resistance fighters, who were tortured by the Nazis, themselves became torturers, and how this fact contributed to the blurring of the Holocaust and colonial atrocities. On the other hand, Diner demonstrates

that torture is not equal to extermination. The purpose of torture is the breaking of your enemy's political will. As paradoxical as it sounds, torture demands the recognition of the other's human-ness. From here, Diner returns to historical judgment and his insistence on the need to differentiate. Genocidal colonial wars and the Holocaust are not the same. Diner again emphasizes the singularity of the Holocaust. The Holocaust was about extermination no reason can justify and is situated therefore beyond the scope war, conflict or animosity. It was death without meaning. Diner then shifts to India and Japan and shows how World War II created new alliances. German Nazis were celebrated as liberators by local peoples. They became the enemy of the enemy. He shows how Jews in these lands became hostages of impossible situations and how especially Jews in Muslim countries became hostages of processes of decolonization.

The last essay "Verstellte Wahrnehmungen" (again, the German word "verstellt" has several meanings. It can mean "displaced" and also "disguised") is not even five pages long but contains the whole crux of the book. It condenses his recently published book in English "Lost in the Sacred: Why the Muslim World stood still". He returns to the beginning and the concept of "civilizational rupture", but this time shows how this concept of the breakdown of ontological security is connected to Western processes of secularization. In brief, to doubt the achievements of the Enlightenment, one needs the Enlightenment as a horizon. Diner inquires whether such a process can oblige other civilizations, which do not have this type of tradition, such as the Muslim civilization. If your reality is im-

bued with the question of the presence of God, a worldview with rational man at its center may be meaningless for you. Such a worldview cannot accept the Holocaust as civilizational rupture, which accounts for its relativization or even negation. It is indeed a displaced perception. Diner ends his book on a pessimistic note in a return to Europe. In his view, processes of pluralization will displace the historical judg-

ment of the Holocaust as well. Diner sees this as the end of Europe as the historical continent. Historical judgment will be replaced by universalization and relativism. Pre-modernity and post-modernity will join forces to undermine our historical understanding of the past. Diner's book is a heroic effort to prevent this demise. Whether this effort is doomed to fail, only time will tell.