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## BUCHBESPRECHUNGEN

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**Michael Geyer / Sheila Fitzpatrick  
(Hrsg.): Beyond Totalitarianism. Stalinism and Nazism Compared, New  
York: Cambridge University Press  
2009, 536 S.**

Rezensiert von  
Claus Bech Hanen, Florenz

Beyond Totalitarianism is a landmark in the comparative study of Nazism and Stalinism. Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick have successfully brought together experts on both German and Soviet history in an endeavour to unshackle the limitations of previous work on totalitarianism by widening the analytical perspective and firmly placing the comparison within the context of history. The essays are jointly authored by one expert from each field respectively and ordered thematically. As a result each essay constitutes a thorough comparative treatment of one or more aspects of the two regimes. In turn the essays are organized by four overriding themes, outlining the areas of comparability: Governance, violence, socialization and entanglements. In an inspiring introduction, Michael Geyer leads the reader on a tour-de-force

through the complex history of the comparative study of Nazism and Stalinism. Analytically perspicuous and exceptionally well-written, Geyer lays bare the pitfalls and strengths of the totalitarian debate in order to display the overall intention of the volume "to work toward a comprehensive assessment of the two regimes and their comparability." (p. 18)

The volume is best read with this clarification in mind. As such, the authors are not following one main explanatory or analytical framework. Rather they test the ground for comparison of different aspects, revealing differences and similarities between the two regimes. As a consequence, the comparative studies all historicize the regimes, offering possible explanations for their specific governing practices. Broader terms such as ideology and inclusion/exclusion are the recurrent themes against which the regimes are compared.

Under the rubric of 'governance', Hans Mommsen and Yoram Gorlizki focus on high-politics and the evolution of the state. The essay provides a good overview of the evolutionary process that resulted in the accumulation of power by Hitler and Stalin, although it does not reach beyond the state of the art. Turning away from the configuration of the state apparatus, Annette Timm and David Hoffmann scrutinize different reproductive policies in a

highly readable essay. Embedding reproduction strategies within the larger European context of social engineering, Timm and Hoffmann show the crucial impact ideology had on practices aimed at creating the desired social body. Inclusion and exclusion become clear markers of the difference here: In the policy area of reproduction, the racial ideals of Nazi Germany resulted in eugenics and euthanasia with regard to undesirable groups of the population, while the Soviet Union was characterised much more by inclusion at large. The determination of the different regimes to include and exclude, become particularly clear when their practices to fulfil these goal are analysed. The authors of the essays on violence do well in delineating the murderous potential inherent in both regimes. While Christian Gerlach and Nicholas Werth compare the treatment of three victim groups in each society, Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel view the murdering campaigns against the background of a modern vision of homogeneity. Gerlach and Werth concentrate their essay on three victim groups ('asocials'/socially harmful elements', Ethnicity-based Resettlements, and prisoners of war), despite their emphasis in both introduction and conclusion on the need to focus on perpetrators to gain a more nuanced picture of the states they define as "extremely violent" (p. 137). As a consequence, the characterisations of Soviet violence as "developmental" and internally directed, and Nazi violence as expansionary and "imperialist" are surely comprehensible, but only partly deepen our understanding in regard to the basic similarity of the regimes' violent nature. Baberowski and Doering-Manteuffel choose a differ-

ent approach and focus on similarities, which they detect in the regimes' efforts to overcome heterogeneity. The authors hold that both Nazi and Soviet ideology were characterised by purification fantasies, which sought to eradicate multiethnicity in order to realise "a permanent order of social, national, and racial homogeneity." (p. 181). Following this argument, mass terror must be understood in relation to the multiethnic nature of both empires – the Soviet Union inheriting its nature from the Tsarist state, Nazi Germany becoming one through expansionist war. One of the most puzzling questions of history of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union is how the leadership managed to create a popular foundation for their rule. The essays on socialization focus on the regimes' identification strategies. The authors make clear the consequence of identification, namely that it was largely based upon exclusion. Christoph Browning and Lewis Siegelbaum scrutinise the schemata for ascribing identities and the practices with which identities were imposed onto the social body. In the Soviet Union, 'enemies' changed over time depending on the central leadership. In some cases this even led to the reintegration of formerly stigmatized populations such as the kulaks, for example, when the enemy categories shifted largely to nationality. By contrast, the rigid racial ascription of the Nazis resulted in an exponential rise of exclusion with the annexation of non-German territories during the WWII. Identification did, however, not only take place through negative ascription and the contributions of Sheila Fitzpatrick / Alf Lüdtke and Peter Fritzche/Jochen Hellbeck examine offers of identification de-

veloped by the regimes. Fitzpatrick and Lüdtke dismiss Hannah Arendt's emphasis on the atomisation of totalitarian society, and find that despite policy efforts to destroy old bonds of identification, ties within families, for example, were sustained, if not strengthened (p. 299). Furthermore, new bonds were generated, partly through the production of new social regimes (workplace, youth-groups) and partly in resistance to the suppression of old ones (religion). In regard to the question of new social bonds, ideological underpinnings become vital and Fritzsche and Hellbeck delineate the origins of the 'New Man', on the basis of which visions of future societies were depicted. The New Man, they argue, did, however, take on a different shape in the two regimes: "The adherents of Nazi racial suprematism mobilised in lieu of history, while the Stalinist citizen believed himself to be the embodiment of historical progression." (p. 339)

In many ways, World War II constituted the inevitable collision of the two regimes, which defined themselves against one another. In the section on 'entanglements', two essays analyse the role mutual encounters played in relation to practice and self-definition. Mark Edele and Michael Geyer attempt to grasp the 'barbarisation' of the Eastern Front through the framework of 'states of exception'. According to the authors, this exceptional condition under which the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union led their war, is best characterised by unrestraint. 'Barbarisation' was therefore not least a consequence of a learning process that lay at the heart of the Nazi-Soviet war. Cruelty was learned and adapted. Bringing the state of exception even further, however, was the fundamen-

tal circumstance that National Socialism never contemplated peace with its perceived enemies on the Eastern Front – it was an all-out onslaught, a life-and-death struggle, led by the alternative of extermination or self-destruction. (p. 395) Mutual perception, however, was not solely a consequence of WWII, but had deep roots in German-Russian history. It is this entangled history that Karl Schlögel and Kathrina Clark set out to untangle in their essay on mutual image-making of the respective 'Other'. With the intensification of an inimical relationship, formerly diverse pictures of one another were highly influenced by context and ideology, based upon racial ideology of Soviet inferiority in Nazi Germany and a universalistic notion of historical progress in Stalin's Soviet Union (p. 440). Interestingly both portray themselves as the defenders of European civilisation: Nazi Germany against Soviet Bolshevism, the Soviet Union against Nazi barbarism.

Beyond doubt the volume is an important addition to research on the comparison of Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union. The authors do not adhere to one consistent analytical framework, but instead offer different perspectives from which comparative work can be done, hence preparing the way for future research. The intensified 'historisation' of the regimes provides a deeper understanding of totalitarianism and we are left with a nuanced picture of two regimes that over time evolved in relations to one another, displaying both similarities and dissimilarities in regard to policies, goals and practices. The essays cover a broad variety of topics that offer insights into the multifaceted reality of the regimes and indeed

do overcome the traditional totalitarian model.

Lastly, Cambridge University Press must be complimented for including both a bibliography and an index, which detail the abundance of materials used by the authors. One can only wish the edition a large readership.

**William Beinart / Lotte Hughes: *Environment and Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007, 395 S.**

Rezensiert von  
John R. McNeill, Washington D.C.

Beinart and Hughes have written the first general survey of the environmental history of the British Empire. The book is a companion to the five recently published volumes in the Oxford History of the British Empire, which, despite their formidable bulk, have almost nothing to say about soils, forests, irrigation, disease, wildlife conservation or any other environmental theme. The book stands as a useful addition to the Oxford series, and as an implicit, gentle rebuke to it.

Beinart and Hughes are both Africanists, and the book shows it. Beinart is well-known as the author of several works, not all environmental histories, on South Africa. Hughes, less well-known as yet, has written on the Maasai under colonial rule. The parts of the book that deal with Southern and East Africa generally show a greater contextual awareness and rely

more on sources from the time periods under consideration than do the other parts, which generally rely heavily on the most recent and prominent scholarship. This is an observation not a criticism; every broad survey is written this way.

The authors clearly state that their aim is not to cover the whole environmental history of the British Empire, but instead to explore certain themes within that subject. In their words, the book is a "synthesis, exploring commodity frontiers, environmental change, diseases, conservation ideas, urban environments, visual images of nature, and political ecology over the long run." (vii). They present stories of environmental change, of nature conservation, and of the politics of access to resources in several parts of the British Empire. Some of the smaller corners come in for little treatment, and some of the important ones are deliberately left out (such as Ireland) or mentioned only in passing (Nigeria). By and large, India, South Africa, East Africa, Australia and Canada provide the bulk of the examples and cases.

The authors must rely on published sources for a book of this scope. By and large they have seized the low-hanging fruit. The literature on the Canadian fur trade, for example, easily accessible and of high quality, serves as the basis for a crisp summary of that episode. Some newer work, done after this book was drafted, shows some additional interesting aspects, such as the reliance of Canadian First Nations on beaver ponds as insurance against drought. The depletion of the beaver meant greater vulnerability to periodic drought on the prairies. The chapters on India focus on forestry and irrigation, the best developed subjects in Indian environmental his-