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Niels Beckenbach. *Wege zur Bürgergesellschaft: Gewalt und Zivilisation in Deutschland Mitte des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2005. 310 S. EUR 34.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-428-11977-6.

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The Many Faces of *Gewalt* in Twentieth-Century Germany

Niels Beckenbach's volume offers eight eyewitness accounts of Germany's brutal twentieth century from, among others, a public intellectual, a senior police officer, and a terrorist's daughter. His criteria for choosing these particular witnesses remain unclear, but *Gewalt*, with all its multiple meanings and ambiguity, is the nominal connecting thread among the contributions. The original meaning of *Gewalt* was power in the sense of the legitimate authority of the monarch and later of the state. That meaning is cited, in passing ("Alle (Staats)Gewalt geht vom Volke aus!"), in both Beckenbach's introduction and in the memoir by Hermann Kreutzer (SPD), whom both the Third Reich and the DDR persecuted. Beckenbach also uses the term to refer to the separation of powers in a constitutional state. Elsewhere in the book, though, including in the title, *Gewalt* is used in its more common contemporary meaning of compulsion, (physical) force, or, indeed, violence, with a strong connotation of illegitimacy.

Beckenbach's own contributions (an "Editorial," an introduction, a history of the origins of the Red Army Faction, and a chronicle of twentieth-century Germany) seek to illuminate *Gewalt* in twentieth-century Gemany. Following Hans-Ulrich Wehler, he sees the period 1914-45 as a second Thirty Years' War, an extended period of violence, both international and domestic, that plagued Germany. He sees the foundations of that violence partly in reactions against modernity and its representatives, such as Jews, intellectuals, and capitalists. He also roots it not in an alliance of big industry and the fascist Right but in "disturbances to identity, a collective deficit in self-worth, as well as in latent perceptions of the Enemy" (p. 30). The Nazi *Ungeist* resulted primarily from " 'festering' resentments" (p. 30) and a potential for hate. His discussion of postwar reactions to Nazi rule emphasizes psychological terms such as repression, projection, and self-exculpation. His analysis of *Gewalt* and of twentieth-century German history is firmly anti-materialist, identifying the key causal forces as an inability to come to terms with rationalism and psychological reactions to stress-inducing realities.

Beckenbach suggests a Whig interpretation of recent German history, as a triumph of "a republican culture with guaranteed citizen rights, institutionalized separa-

tion of powers, and a critical public" (p. 17). He sees *Gewalt* and the potential for *Gewalt* as characteristic of the postwar period in both East and West Germany. Only the anti-authoritarian movements of the 1960s and 1970s in West Germany and the Revolution of 1989 in East Germany overcame the lingering potential for *Gewalt* and introduced a stable, peaceful future.

Ralph Giordano emphasizes how *Gewalt* dehumanizes both perpetrator and victim. Trapped in Berlin, the partly-Jewish Giordano only survived World War II by going into hiding, with a neighbor's assistance, in February 1945. He resolved that he would not let the Gestapo take his mother alive. When it looked as though the Gestapo had discovered their hiding place, he released the safety on his pistol and aimed at his mother's head. Fortunately it was not the Gestapo, but he felt dehumanized at almost having shot his own mother. He and his brother agreed that if they survived the war they would shoot four people who had persecuted them. In the event, they could not bring themselves to shoot anyone. Giordano believed that he needed to be re-humanized after his experience of Nazism and its *Gewalt*. That included embracing the humane principle that one does not exercise *Gewalt* against the defenseless, even a mortal enemy.

Freya Klier focuses on the non-physical *Gewalt* a dictatorship can impose. Her father, having struck an off-duty policeman who had injured her mother, was imprisoned in the GDR for a year for attacking state power. The regime sent the three-year-old Freya and her slightly older brother to a Stasi children's home, allowing them to see their mother only on weekends. She describes the home's brutal regimen, as preschoolers were marched everywhere, subjected to twice-daily role calls, and ordered to stand daily facing the wall while thinking about what they would do to make good their parent's crimes against the people. Her "brainwashing" was so complete that she even began to imagine that God looked like Joseph Stalin. She mentions that the home's staff resorted to corporal punishment, but for her *Gewalt* was primarily the psychological abuse inherent in authoritarian browbeating of defenseless children. She goes on to discuss her brother's repeated clashes with state power, culminating in his incarceration in a mental institution and eventual suicide.

Ehrhart Neubert, a theologian, focuses more on *Gewaltlosigkeit*, non-violence, than on *Gewalt*. Although he does discuss the conflicts between state power and the Lutheran church in East Germany over the decades, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s practice of non-violence inspired him. He discusses the East German Lutheran church's commitment to non-violence and emphasizes the importance of non-violence for the development not only of the church's interactions with the state but also of the Revolution of 1989.

Beckenbach interviewed Bettina RÃ¶hl, daughter of terrorist Ulrike Meinhof. Meinhof planned to send her young twin daughters to be brought up in an orphanage in a Palestinian refugee camp. Instead, after their "liberation" (RÃ¶hl's word, p. 228) from Red Army Faction control, they were educated at a predominantly upper-class school in Hamburg. RÃ¶hl never uses the term *Gewalt* to describe her mother's plans for her, but she clearly sees it as brutal and irresponsible treatment of defenseless children. Her almost vehement insistence that her childhood was happy and normal leaves the impression that it was not–that she has struggled to come to terms with her parents' treatment of her and with the "68ers" who glorify her mother. She also found and arranged the 2001 publication of photographs of then-Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, as a young radical, beating a helpless policeman during a 1973 demonstration. That publication sparked a discussion of the legitimacy of *Gewalt* in pursuit of political ends, although she does not explore that discussion here. She then goes on to characterize as *Gewalt* the harassment and persecution she experienced from "68ers" as a consequence of her simply doing her journalistic job.

Beckenbach's closing essay seeks to elucidate the origins of the Red Army Faction. He recognizes the fairly widespread sense on the Left that the Federal Republic of Germany constituted a closed system that effectively blocked paths to change, including the near-monopolies of the Axel Springer press and the Grand Coalition. He also cites the availability in every book store of glorifications of various rhetorics of revolution. He does suggest a connection between the *Wortgewalt* of the student movement and the *Tatgewalt* of the budding terrorist movement, beginning with department-store arsons. However, he believes that only "psychosocial dispositions" (p. 248) can explain the terrorists' abandonment of discourse and enlightenment for armed *Gewalt*. He asserts a fundamental continuity among Nazism, East German Communism, and the Red Army Faction, with the latter an anachronistic return of the " 'restless German' " (p. 260).

While the authors of these texts are united in deploring the physical violence that was so much a part of twentieth-century German history, they are also sensitive to other forms of *Gewalt*. Although Giordano escaped direct physical violence, he felt "de-humanized"

by the fear of violence that dominated his life under the Nazis. Klier's life was pervaded by her apparently successful and her brother's unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with the psychological violence they suffered at the hands of the East German regime. Neubert's commitment to non-violence seems, to a significant degree, a reaction against the *Gewalt* that the East German regime exercised against believing Christians and other dissidents. The political commitments of RÃ¶hl's parents and their supporters seem to have done violence to her childhood.

Beckenbach mentions the "gray zones in legitimating *Gewalt*" (p. 236), but he does not pursue this important topic. Central to both a civil society and a democratic republic, whose triumph he celebrates, are questions of political citizenship, not only of those allowed to participate in political life but the terms of that participation. He alludes to the concerns that led 1960s West German demonstrators to move from marching and speaking to more active forms of protest, such as to throwing eggs, tomatoes, and (in some cases) stones, or holding sit-ins, to make their voices heard in a conservative social environment. He also notes the terrorists' assertion that their resort to physical violence was necessary because they lived in a fascistic society that only revolution could overthrow and replace. However, he chooses not to explore the vibrant debates that developed over these issues in 1960s and 1970s West Germany, crucial milestones on the path to civil society.

Individual contributions to this text offer insight into the complex and powerful role of *Gewalt* in twentieth-century Germany. They are deeply personal and often vividly evocative. They do not, however, offer a coherent view of "Gewalt und Zivilisation in Deutschland," and the book raises more questions than it answers.

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