

BOOK REVIEW

Never Again: Germans and Genocide after the Holocaust

By Andrew I. Port. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2023. Pp. 416. Hardcover \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0674275225.

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In his 1927 poem, Yitzhak Lamdan proclaimed “Never again,” a slogan that has become synonymous with the Holocaust and genocide awareness. And yet, even post-1945 genocide continues to happen. In *Never Again: Germans and Genocide after the Holocaust*, Andrew I. Port outlines the role that Germany plays as a major Western power in reacting to crimes against humanity, from Cambodia to Bosnia and Rwanda. *Never Again* investigates “how memories and perceptions of the Third Reich and the Final Solution shaped attitudes and influenced behavior in response to reports of genocide in *other* countries” (12). Port’s focus on Germany’s obsession with working through the National Socialist past is not just an investigation of memory politics during the immediate post-war period. Rather, these types of memory constellations influence the present, and “how we conceive or talk about the past influences the actual behavior of individuals and society in the present” (20). At its core, *Never Again* focuses “on the extent to which the lessons supposedly learned after 1945 guided concrete action” (24) and outlines whether Germans were moved by their own memories of the World War II past to act on their convictions.

Never Again seeks to answer the questions of Germany’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through prominent voices, including politicians, journalists, and public intellectuals. Germany’s past remains a specter that haunts the present and influences, often in surprising ways, contemporary politics, and human rights advocacy. The focus in Cambodia, Bosnia, and Rwanda and the rationale for choosing these distinct cases depends on their “high level of global attention” (28). However, it becomes evident that the lessons learned from these case histories can be applied to dozens of other instances of conflicts since World War II. In the epilogue, Port addresses Ukraine, highlighting the at times proactive policies, while also emphasizing the failure of Western democracies to concretely act during modern atrocities. *Never Again* is thus an investigation of which cases were linked most strongly to German responses, in the shape of measurable military or humanitarian aid.

The analysis of Cambodia is most exhaustive, with an investigation of decades of public policy and engagement. We learn that, in the case of Cambodia, there was initial inaction, and that television broadcasts played a vital role in swaying political reports and acknowledging that mass murder took place. Further, active parallels and comparisons to Auschwitz and Hitler played a vital role in rousing support and raising advocacy. *Der Spiegel* and other prominent and popular news sources became critical means of swaying public perception. Despite journalistic evidence, Germany’s response to Cambodia became an ideological Cold War between both the East and the West. Strikingly, West Germany was initially skeptical and reluctant to acknowledge the veracity of the genocide and slow to represent it accurately in the public sphere, though East Germany was no more accurate in their initial

reporting. It becomes evident that over time there were demands on both sides of the Wall to act in Cambodia and the desire to memorialize the genocide only intensified after Germany's reunification and in the wake of the Bosnian genocide.

The Bosnian genocide was the worst genocide in Europe since the Holocaust. What was the world doing and what actions did we take to prevent this atrocity? *Never Again* reminds us that more than any other Western country, Germany took in the most Bosnian and Croatian refugees. In contrast to Cambodia, there was far less skepticism about the veracity of the crimes committed (164), though military action was not a favorable approach, and instead, humanitarian aid in the amount of 10 billion DM in 1992 alone became a primary way of intervening (226). The emphasis on the impact of photojournalism in rousing international outrage becomes increasingly apparent. As Port notes, it became more difficult to argue against footage of suffering, and "we didn't know" mantras became less plausible because everyone could watch the atrocities unfold (175).

The chapter on Rwanda feels rushed and the mention of colonialism, racism, and economic factors is not fully fleshed out. Colonialism introduced racial division in Rwanda, allowing Western powers to profit from Rwandan natural resources. In short, there was no economic interest to intervene in Rwanda and this directly translated to Western inaction. In Germany, visas were actively denied to Rwandans seeking refuge, in contrast to white, European refugees (261). Nonetheless, Germany intervened in some capacity, sending almost 3.5 billion DM in humanitarian aid (269), but this form of intervention was not nearly enough in the wake of over 800,000 deaths in the Rwandan genocide and the death toll rising into the millions because of the first and second Congo Wars.

Though *Never Again* promises to include the voices of novelists and filmmakers, it does so hastily and without deeper investigation, glossing over the influential impact of such representations, from the airing of the Eichmann trial in 1961, the NBC Holocaust miniseries in 1978 and the colossal impact of *Schindler's List* and artists like Art Spiegelman. Much of the focus of *Never Again* remains solely on political and journalistic intervention, and while these certainly remain critical voices, they are by no means the only influential markers on genocide intervention and awareness. A more multidirectional approach to understanding Germany's response to contemporary human rights crisis would encompass popular representations about the World War II past and how they influenced contemporary genocide responses, from Turkish-German writers and directors, like Şinasi Dikman and Fatih Akin, to Balkan-German novelists and human rights advocates, like Saša Stanišić and Marica Bodrožić. It is equally as important to consider these representations because historical memory arises out of a larger constellation—a sort of montage in which diverse elements are brought together through the act of representation—which provides a much-needed element of diversification and circulation of the atrocity depiction. Germany's past collides and engages with contemporary historical traumas through representation and creates a transferential space between the past and the present, making it possible to transmit memory and call to action.