

Mazower, Mark: *Hitler's Empire. Nazi rule in occupied Europe*. London: Penguin Books 2008. ISBN: 978-0-713-99681-4; 726 S.

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Mark Mazower teaches at Columbia University. Known by his books about Europe in the 20th century, he focuses now on „Hitler's Empire“ illuminating the Nazi rule in occupied Europe. Born in 1958 with British background, he explores intellectual and social history. Although he offers no idea how he shaped the book, the reader will enjoy his thoughtful journey into Greater Germany, the new European order and some perspectives.

He touches some questions briefly: what was Adolf Hitler's plan beyond an European empire? How did he envision world power or universal power sharing? If we talk about an empire, a reader might ask, what was his plan B and C, after coming close to realizing A, the German rule on the continent? What was the real and imaginary plan between (A) the European center, (B) the Afro-Asian semi-periphery and (C) the periphery beyond?

For Mazower did a fine job in telling main stories of Europe including the push toward its Eastern part and Asia in the Soviet Union, we shall look for insights (B and C) beyond of Europe. This is the relation between Europe and the Middle East next door. Although a long Nazi rule became not true at those Afro-Asian crossroads, the Nazis devised plans for Northern Africa and Western Asia, especially for Iraq and the French Mandatory of Greater Syria. Not to mention the position of Eurasian Turkey as a benevolent neutral.

Mazower sees Hitler as empire-builder (p. 2): this was surely an image he had of himself; „The Nazis believed it had fallen to them to establish an empire that would elevate them to the status of world power.“ The author asks if Hitler really has envisaged a campaign of world conquest? The historian stresses that in Hitler's thinking Europe came first. Sure, Hitler distinguished between colonial, commercial and territorial politics. While the one came with foreign trade, the latter one fitted him for his „Aryan settlers“ in East Europe.

If we follow Mazower's question about

world conquest or world power sharing, we find that academics close to Hitler's racial approach like Albrecht Wirth claimed: „Western Aryans“ do not look for world power in the old sense of settler colonies. Nor do they do it for a world state with one world culture. Wirth rejected both as impossible, not desirable.

Rather he and his circles favored the concept of world powers dominating regions as the hegemonial forces. This came down as „Weltvorherrschaft“ or the globally dominating powers instead of one conquering world power, „Weltherrschaft“ (see his *Volksstum und Weltmacht in der Geschichte*, Bruckmann: Munich 1901, p. 227-231). Commercial world ambitions (B and C) yes, colonial world conquest no. A commanding sway or controlling influence was their point just like Americans pursued it (p. 3). Thus, scholars like Wirth were critical of old empires. But they propagated new German settler colonies in Eastern Europe gained by war against Soviet Russia or a „blood and soil policy for living space.“

Therewith, Hitler's plans came close to Wirth's. The chancellor pursued regional power sharing with Italy's Benito Mussolini in the Middle East (B) and with Japan in East Asia and South East Asia (C). Briefly he signed Middle Eastern parts even over to Stalin. Take a look at the secret agreement signed by the foreign ministers Joachim von Ribbentrop and Wjatscheslaw M. Molotow the week before Hitler's invasion into Soviet Russia.

Hitler wanted a sharing of world power with Great Britain, perhaps also with the United States until Pearl Harbor. He grew almost to fulfill his biggest hope after the appeasement of Munich. But the Anglo-Saxon democracies under Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt were finally immune against that dictator's „purification of Aryan blood.“ So the war turned against him in 1942. His plans to get in phases to B and C after „Barbarossa“, the fall of Moscow and the access to the Middle East via the Caucasus with oil fields in sight, had to be broken up. But Arab leaders like the former Iraqi Premier Rashid Ali al-Kailani and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amin al-Husaini worked

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just for this event in Berlin. Their and the Nazi's agents were in place, also in Syria, Iraq and Iran.

There was „no single Nazi theory of conquest“ (p. 10). But Hitler spread a vision which included the concept of (A) a „territorial policy only in Europe“ and of regional helpers who must go the same road in pursuit of their own interest in other world regions (B and C). Therefore, if the academic Carl Schmitt came up with the idea to replace the Geneva system with a system of regional power blocs (p. 577), he was in line with Hitler's policy.

Mazower opines (p. 589) that Hitler stayed a believer in racial supremacy of the Anglo-Saxons outside Europe: he did not want to do anything that might hasten Britain's demise as a „dominant race.“ Not at all. If given the chance with Erwin Rommel in North Africa or via the Caucasus, he would have driven them out of the Middle East. It was not about a declaration or the chances to get Muslims to jihad. Hitler tried it. But he put „Barbarossa“ first, and miscalculated. Also he gave diverse assurances to the Arabs. He broadcasted together with Mussolini a joint declaration on support for the Arab independence in 1940.

Ethnic purification, that is driving minorities as solution for regional stability out, did not emerge first in the Balkans. This concept has existed as long as humans have formed their groups and tribal unions. Saying that the end of Europe's Jewish question turned out to be the start of the Middle Eastern one, is wrong (p. 597). Just read the report's summary on the „Jewish question“ as filed by the American consul Selah Merrill of Jerusalem in 1899. The „Jewish question“<sup>1</sup> was not due to the Nazis. They came later up and destroyed basic ideas of the enlightenment, the assimilation in Europe, and aggravated the matter in the Middle East by injecting the racism into religious Jew hatred for a new Islamist ideology.

Arthur Ruppin was an architect of Zionist settlements in Palestine (p. 599). Though he is disputed as father of it. A hundred years earlier were others at work like Jehuda Alkalai of Serbia. This Rabbi edited books which

favor the global Jewish restoration in the land of Zion: the land be purchased for Jewish settlers in Palestine; Hebrew shall be a national tongue. The same was true with Rabbi Zvi Kalischer who asked the Rothschild family in Berlin to restore scattered Jews in the Holy land via some Prussian settlement societies.

Ethnic homogenization is no central European practice spread to Arabs. They found their own way with Jews: tolerating them, driving them out of Arabia or killing their male half and selling the other half into slavery. Arguing that Israel was the motor for this (p. 601), that is Arabs drove Jews out, for Israel's single-minded pursuit of an organized, state-led return, distorts the facts. This was the result of hostilities after three lost wars until 1967. That the Jewish state embraced Sephardim, Jews from the neighboring Middle East, and often supported them, goes without saying.

All in all, Mark Mazower's book about Nazi occupied Europe is a terrific read on this evil empire. It is thought provoking on its semi-periphery and periphery albeit not quite up-to-date on the Nazi affairs in the Middle East.

Wolfgang G. Schwanitz über Mazower, Mark: *Hitler's Empire. Nazi rule in occupied Europe*. London 2008, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 30.10.2009.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.trafoberlin.de/pdf-dateien/2009\\_02\\_03/Michael%20Brenner%20Zionism.pdf](http://www.trafoberlin.de/pdf-dateien/2009_02_03/Michael%20Brenner%20Zionism.pdf)