

Culture



Francis HENRY, *Neighbours and Victims: A Small Town in Nazi Germany Remembered*. South Hadley: Bergin and Garvey, 1984. 201 pages. \$12.95 (paper), \$27.95 (cloth)

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L'ours polaire contenues dans des sources de natures diverses et de valeur inégale : récits d'explorateurs, de chasseurs et de missionnaires, monographies ethnologiques, matériaux historiques, études de zoologie, etc. Toutes ces sources étaient écrites et à part quelques entretiens avec divers Inuit de passage à Paris, il n'y avait pas eu d'enquête chez les Inuit, quoique l'inventaire devait préparer la voie à une véritable enquête ethnozoologique. C'est ce mémoire qui est ici publié avec seulement quelques retouches mineures, même si Randa est bien conscient des limites d'un travail s'appuyant essentiellement sur des sources écrites et même si l'auteur n'a pu intégrer à sa publication bon nombre de données ethnozoologiques qu'il a finalement pu recueillir, en 1985, à Igloodik.

L'ouvrage est divisé en deux grandes parties : la première étudie l'ours polaire et son mode de vie (origine et évolution, écologie et biologie des ours), alors que la seconde décrit la nature des rapports des habitants de l'Arctique avec l'ours (l'ours objet de convoitise, l'ours grand médiateur, diverses manières de raconter l'ours). L'ampleur et la minutie de l'inventaire effectué sont remarquables. Randa semble avoir consulté les sources scientifiques les plus importantes en russe, en anglais et en français, en plus d'une variété considérable d'autres ouvrages, comme la Sainte Bible et Aristote (en rapport avec l'histoire de l'ours). Pour chacun des thèmes abordés, il a le souci constant d'exposer fidèlement les points de vue des auteurs consultés et d'effectuer des synthèses. Comme les « savants » européens et américains divergent parfois d'opinion, pareilles synthèses requièrent beaucoup de doigté et même de l'humour. Donnons un exemple : devant des thèses contradictoires sur la vélocité de l'ours polaire, Randa affirme (p. 77) qu'il lui paraît impensable pour un humain de se mesurer à la course avec l'ours polaire, mais il suggère quand même à tout savant « sceptique et avide de vérité » de vérifier son affirmation en traversant l'enclos des ours polaires au Zoo de Vincennes (!).

L'ouvrage contient et rend accessibles beaucoup d'informations qui pourraient être utiles à de nombreux scientifiques intéressés aux rapports entre l'homme et la nature, qu'ils soient biologistes, zoologistes, écologistes ou ethnologues. Les écologistes apprendront sans doute beaucoup de faits nouveaux et intéressants dans le chapitre III, qui brosse un tableau fort complet de l'écologie et de la biologie de l'ours. Ils ne trouveront cependant pas là, pas plus qu'ailleurs dans l'ouvrage, des informations sur certains sujets comme l'évolution numérique de l'espèce, les niveaux de récolte par les autochtones et les allochtones, la réglementation de la chasse par les autorités gouvernementales et les conflits que cette

réglementation a pu provoquer chez les Inuit. Les anthropologues nordistes, quant à eux, apprécieront particulièrement les chapitres IV et V, qui traitent des aspects matériels des rapports entre l'ours polaire et les Inuit, et des représentations et pratiques rituelles relatives à l'ours. Ces deux chapitres constituent des synthèses sans égal d'une abondante documentation anthropologique et montrent à quel point il existe un parallélisme entre les modes de vie des ours et des Inuit.

Ce livre m'en rappelle un autre écrit par Robert Gessain sur un autre grand mammifère de l'Arctique, le boeuf musqué (Paris, Éditions Robert Laffont, 1981). Ce livre de Gessain avait des objectifs analogues à ceux poursuivis par Randa, mais, fait à souligner, ce dernier réussit beaucoup mieux, par son inventaire systématique de la documentation, à développer un véritable traité sur l'ours polaire et ses rapports avec les Inuit, peut-être à cause d'une abondance plus grande de sources. Et dire que Randa ne nous a pas encore livré les résultats de ses recherches passées et futures sur le terrain, chez les Inuit, ou la dimension véritablement ethnozoologique de son sujet ! Il y a là une suite logique des travaux de Randa que nous attendons avec impatience et qui viendra compléter—et sans doute compliquer—une synthèse déjà fort instructive.

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Until recently, anthropologists like their other social scientific colleagues, rarely confronted the occurrence of genocide in their work. The issues surrounding the Nazi war against the Jews were generally avoided, either because the Holocaust occurred in an area outside the usual purview of anthropologists or because the subject was painful for Western anthropologists of both Jewish and non-Jewish origin [see A. Shiloh, 1983 : *Anthropology: A Case-Study in Holocaust Blindness, Fields of Offerings* (ed. by V.D. Sanua), New York : Herzl Press, pp. 165-172]. *Neighbors and Victims* can thus be seen as marking a new turn in anthropological studies dealing with genocide.

Frances Henry rightly points out that her book deals with events which led up to the Nazi extermination of Jews in Europe, but that it is not a study of the Holocaust per se. She does, however, follow the Jews who remained in the small Rhenish town of "Sonderburg" right up to the time that they were put on trains heading for the concentration camps in the East. Henry in this work is dealing with memory as noted in the title, the memory of German Gentiles still living in "Sonderburg" (a pseudonym) and of German Jewish refugees who left close to half a century ago.

This study has taken Frances Henry into a new territory of anthropology, in which the anthropologist is a participant, as well as an observer. Here the Canadian anthropologist who has done research in the Caribbean must confront her own roots as a German Jewish refugee going back to the village in which her family had lived. I am myself of the same background as Francis Henry, being a few years younger and having arrived in the United States at about the same time. I am using this perspective in the review. One of the charms of this book is the way in which the author conveys her active role in the study.

Henry begins her book by recalling her own experiences in Germany and during the early days in the United States after immigration. She has some early childhood recollections of Sonderburg, where her paternal grandparents lived, the realization of her Jewishness when faced with insults by Gentile youngsters, and the desire to forget Germany while growing up in New York City during the Second World War. She tells of her return to Sonderburg and how the idea of this study came to her.

In her book she portrays the relations between Jews and Gentiles in Sonderburg both before the Third Reich and during the Nazi period. A degree of typicality is claimed for Sonderburg as a small town in Germany, a claim which has some merit, but which is difficult to document. She then proceeds to show that Jews and Gentiles participated in a single community; they shared a common language and culture and they worked within the same economic and political framework. There were, however, differences. Even though they were not segregated, there were elements of a Jewish subculture which persisted in southern Germany, including use of Yiddish phrases and observance of Jewish festivals. While the Jews of Sonderburg were far from orthodox, some separate practices were retained, even though Francis Henry deals with them cursorily, such as eating *matzot* on Passover or giving children money on Hanukkah. Inter-marriage was discouraged but did occur. It did not result in the severance of ties.

Despite all of this, she demonstrates that after the Nazis came to power, they were able to isolate the Jews fairly easily. Many emigrated, especially the young. By 1942, only a few elderly Jews were left to be deported to the east. While Nazis were a minority in Sonderburg, they were able to persuade and intimidate their fellow-citizens so that the latter shunned their Jewish neighbors. The Jews in turn reacted with pain and hurt. Only a few Gentiles were sufficiently courageous to help the Jews, especially the elderly who were often unable to go out. Henry points out that such individuals existed in the community to the end.

Henry writes in her introduction that she wishes to undermine the "myth of complicity". This is the belief which in its crudest form states that all German Gentiles were Nazis guilty of genocide. It asserts that those who did not actively assist Jews were as guilty of genocide as the killers. At a visceral level, as she very effectively demonstrates, this belief was shared by a great many Jewish refugees as well as others. Large numbers of refugees of my and her parents' age reacted against German Gentiles with great bitterness. While memories of the pre-Hitler period might be pleasant, the rejection of the Jews by Germany cut deeply, although they remained bearers of German culture. These expressions of pain come out in the book.

In fact, her effort to undermine the belief in German complicity is futile, although she does find mitigating circumstances for the majority of Sonderburgers. The reason is that with varying degrees of appropriateness, all those who were adults during this period, including Jewish leaders in America, Mandatory Palestine and Europe have been indicted for their roles in the Holocaust. If this is so, how can German Gentiles who were in any position to give aid and succor to the Jews escape from the charge?

In general, *Neighbors and Victims* is quite good as a description and analysis of Jewish-Gentile relations in interwar Sonderburg and in dealing with the memories of the Gentile and Jewish natives of that small German town. While Henry has done her homework in setting Sonderburg against the background of Germany as a whole, the analysis seems to fade into generalities when she attempts to apply theories of ethnicity. Still, Francis Henry has demonstrated that ethnography can be successfully applied to uncovering one's own past and coping with the analysis of one of this century's greatest tragedies. Her work deepens our understanding of the differing perceptions of the Holocaust and the Second World War by Gentile Germans and their former Jewish neighbors.