

Thirdly, there is a question about the uniqueness of Polish posters in the Communist Bloc. M. does not explicitly discuss this point, but she implicitly suggests it, by claiming that there was a “Polish style” in poster design. The exceptionality argument already appeared in the 1950s. From that time on, Poland organized poster exhibitions in other socialist countries, where their specific style was discussed, contributing to their growing reputation. Poland also succeeded in creating “big names” in poster design, such as Tadeusz Trepcowski, who was revered after his death in 1954, which led to the general appreciation of the Polish poster industry. We might add that, in 1968, the founding of a museum specifically devoted to posters in Wilanów contributed to the further association of posters with Poland. Posters created in other Soviet Bloc countries did not have a similar aura. And yet, if we consider posters by György Konecsni in Hungary, or even anonymous Czechoslovakian, Romanian, and Bulgarian posters, the thesis about the exceptionality of the Polish style in poster art is less obvious. Also, the strict division between the 1944–1948 period and the 1948–1953 period seems less obvious. Though it is not exactly the author’s aim, this book points about the transnational history of posters from across the whole Socialist Bloc, and invites to a more critical history of Poland’s poster art as a distinct brand.

Créteil

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No Neighbors’ Lands in Postwar Europe. Vanishing Others. Hrsg. von Anna Wylegała, Sabine Rutar und Małgorzata Łukianow. Palgrave Macmillan. Cham 2023. 422 S., 14 Ill. ISBN 978-3-031-10856-3. (€ 139,–)

In their conclusion to the book under review, Sabine Rutar and Anna Wylegała cite Ernest Renan’s 1882 lecture “What Is a Nation?” Speaking at the Sorbonne, Renan opposed the mainstream primordial-organic definition of a nation, contending instead that a nation is a collective spirit bound together as much by shared *forgetting* as by the forging of shared memories. This constructed, modern definition of national belonging inspired Benedict Anderson to coin his influential term “imagined communities” in 1983. Considering Eastern Bloc territories ravaged by mid-century population policies, Rutar and Wylegała take this selectivity of national identity in a dark direction: social cohesion after 1945 rested upon forgetting how millions of former neighbors had been excluded, plundered, abused, expelled, and subjected to mass murder. Applying Rogers Brubaker’s theory of “ethnicity without groups,” the collection’s articles show how the “event” of forced migration and mass murder solidified ethnic groupness as an experienced reality and forged homogenous nation-states based upon “forgetting” the multiethnic past.¹ National identity relied on absence (whole social castes killed or deported) and abundance (seemingly endless objects appropriated from vanished neighbors). For example, “the locals, long-term residents and new arrivals alike, wanted to forget that any Germans had ever lived in these areas, and their marginalization in memory is part of an ongoing reluctance to acknowledge and remember multiethnic local histories—as doing so would entail the voicing of difficult and multilateral issues bound up with responsibility and with trauma” (p. 410). Cleansed settlement regions became culturally and economically poorer than before, their seeming stability based upon silences and primordial-national mythologies that have outlived the communist regimes that fostered them in pursuit of postwar legitimacy.

Assessing archives, trial records, and interviews, the contributors offer micro-historical fieldwork, whose grassroots insights inform decades of analysis about the era’s population upheavals. Back in 1989, Jan Gross’s watershed article established that postwar communist regimes solidified their authoritarian rule thanks to the destruction of pre-war social

1 ROGERS BRUBAKER: *Ethnicity without Groups*, Cambridge, MA—New York 2004.

structures and property relations.² Massive population upheavals before and after 1945 produced public disorientation and reliance upon regimes that ensured the inheritors of so-called nationally “recovered territories” could keep their misbegotten land and goods.³ Recent studies have explored the interaction between displaced persons and those who replaced them. Sometimes postwar residents were totally new to the land, sometimes they had neighbored those displaced.⁴ Adding seamlessly to these conversations, the articles here examine how “the social void” left after mass violence against vanished neighbors influenced postwar interchange and *longue-durée* memory (p. 7). Even after new occupants sought to expunge traces and heritages in the pursuit of a homogenized material environment and community, evidence of past displacement persisted as—contrary to primordial claims about ancient national history—for most current residents family history in the “recovered lands” seldom predated 1945.

I can only survey selections from the rich contributions in the book’s four parts. The first part, exploring immediate postwar encounters between arriving and expelled populations, commences with Nicole Eaton’s analysis of how Soviet officials and settlers appealed to ethnic primordialism and claims of ancient heritage to justify the marginalization, suffering, and expulsion of the roughly 150,000–200,000 Germans who remained in Königsberg (Kaliningrad). Alongside antifascist rhetoric about rehabilitating Germans, Soviets at first imagined them as productive, “civilized” neighbors (p. 38). By early 1947, however, they blamed supposed German “sabotage” to explain why, without any resources, they had failed to restore the city. Stalin’s myth of Kaliningrad’s Slavic heritage (first proposed to his credulous British and American allies in late 1943) inspired the inventive Russification of towns, rivers, forests, and landmarks alongside mass deportation of Germans. Kaliningrad became like other Eastern Bloc sites, a place where new “national majorities combined postwar antifascism with ethnic nationalism to justify expulsions and assert state legitimacy” (p. 48). Karolina Panz, meanwhile, applies thick description in the resort town of Rabka near Krakow, where Polish priests and local elites incited youth to attack a sanatorium housing over one hundred Jewish orphans, firing grenades and machine guns from a nearby woods where local Jews had been massacred just three years earlier. While silence surrounds local memory of Holocaust victims or Jews who fled the sanatorium in August 1945, a priest who was complicit in inciting the attack is honored today with a plaque on the village church as a victim of communist oppression, while a sign on the sanatorium celebrates Polish partisans. Alienation, meanwhile, features in both Pamela Ballinger’s fieldwork on Istria’s Italian minority under postwar Croatian majority-rule and Machteld Venken’s study of German children who grew up as minorities in postwar Belgian Eupen-Malmedy and Polish Upper Silesia.

Part two assesses lasting damage from wartime trauma. Using trial records, Nadege Ragaru examines property restitution questions among Bulgarian collaborators (especially those who stole from Jews) and Marta Havryshko produces evidence of wartime sexual victimization of Jewish women in Ukraine, often by former neighbors. Volha

2 JAN GROSS: *Social Consequences of War: Preliminaries to the Study of Imposition of Communist Regimes in East Central Europe*, in: *East European Politics and Societies* 3 (1989), 2, pp. 198–214.

3 For three collections exploring these upheavals, see: PHILIPP THER, ANA SILJAK (eds.): *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948*, Lanham 2001; PERTTI AHONEN, GUSTAVO CORNI et al.: *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and its Aftermath*, Oxford et al. 2008; JESSICA REINISCH, ELIZABETH WHITE (eds.): *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Postwar Europe, 1944–9*, New York 2011.

4 See for instance: BARBARA TÖRNQUIST-PLEWA (ed.): *Whose Memory? Which Future? Remembering Ethnic Cleansing and Lost Cultural Diversity in Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe*, New York 2016.

Bartash, meanwhile, traces how Roma in the western Soviet borderlands sought to reconstruct nomadic communal life. And Wylegała applies hundreds of interviews and rare textual sources to compare how, in both Poland and Ukraine, partitioned Galicia suffered a dearth of tailors, traders, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, and landlords in towns that seldom recovered their prewar size, much less prosperity.

As implied by its cynically ironic name “The Unbearable Lightness of Things,” the third part explores the fate of goods and property left by vanished neighbors. While Rutar analyzes a 2010 Slovenian film on lasting discomfort surrounding Italian material heritage in Piran (Pirano), Emanuela Grama examines how over 200,000 Romanian Germans rejected state offers of restitution if they joined collective farms, enticed instead to abandon their material heritage and escape to West Germany. Giving voice to former Jewish and non-Jewish neighbors, Borbála Klacsmann reassembles fragmentary records to show how Hungary’s communist government won public support by maintaining the status-quo with respect to stolen Jewish property. Every level of society and administration in her microhistorical analysis took part in and benefitted from confiscated Jewish goods, leaving impoverished survivors to try (typically in vain) to get it back based on “local factors, namely the benevolence of non-Jewish neighbors, civil servants, and committee members” (p. 249). German property around Kočevje (Gottschee) in Slovenia, Mitja Ferenc reveals, physically vanished. Like depopulated rural places in the Sudetenland, the expulsion of Germans was never followed by substantial in-migration of Slavic successors; rather, the region was used for interring political prisoners, military training, and pastureland. Churches were demolished, cemeteries leveled, and most of the region gave way to dense forests bereft of traces that could testify to six centuries of ethnic German heritage.

Finally, the fourth part features contemporary absences, whether in Irina Rebrova’s examination of monuments around Rostov (which seldom mention Holocaust victims), or Johana Wyss’s exposition of “collective amnesia” among Czechs in Opava, where recent willingness to commemorate a vanished synagogue paralleled blockage of a monument to the town’s former German majority. Those who benefit today from the land and goods they inherited did not perpetrate this expulsion, but their unwillingness to recognize past injustice makes them participants in “memory loss and collective amnesia” that invites susceptibility to rightwing nationalist agendas (p. 379). As inheritors of once-multiethnic landscapes, Małgorzata Łukianow concludes, Polish and Ukrainian residents of former Galicia have the power to decide what is remembered and what is forgotten. In practice, that seldom means recognizing national crimes that were committed in the name of their “group” (p. 403).

This volume brings multilingual research to English-language specialist researchers, as well as upper-level university courses on nationalism, forced migration, or memory history. Inevitable regional and disciplinary gaps (partially filled by footnotes and bibliographies) include contemporaneous global cases in India/Pakistan or Israel/Palestine, where scholars have identified similar trends of selective forgetting to produce homogenized history. As the last witnesses to mid-century ethnic violence pass away, one can only hope that the micro-historical stories here help mitigate against repeating such traumas in the name of primordial-nationalist mythologies. Unfortunately, ongoing population upheavals in areas like Ukraine and the Caucasus make the context provided by this book’s cases especially urgent. Around the world, the inherently violent “unmixing” of peoples destroys culture and lives based on the enduring, faulty dogma that homogenized nation-states yield political and social stability.

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