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Heinz Schütte. *Zwischen den Fronten: Deutsche und österreichische Überläufer zum Viet Minh.* Berlin: Logos Verlag Berlin, 2006. 371 pp. EUR 39.90, paper, ISBN 978-3-8325-1312-2.

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In *Zwischen den Fronten*, Heinz Schütte tells the fascinating story of three men--Austrian Ernst Frey and Germans Rudy Schröder and Erwin Borchers--who defected from the French Foreign Legion to fight with the Viet Minh under the names Nguyen Dan, Le Duc Nhan and Chien Si in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The biographies of the three men set them apart from the more than one thousand other deserters from the Foreign Legion during the First Indochina War (1946-54). While the typical deserter after 1945 was a German who had fought most recently for Adolf Hitler and deserted out of fatigue, Schütte's protagonists were political exiles who had joined the Legion in 1940 in hopes of fighting against Germany and defected to the Viet Minh out of sincere dedication to the anticolonial cause. In retracing the route of three men from exile to the Foreign Legion to the Viet Minh and back to postwar Europe, Schütte provides a novel perspective on both the predicaments of direct European participation in anticolonial struggle and the international repercussions of the Second World War.

While Frey, Schröder and Borchers all hoped to fight Nazis in the Foreign Legion, none set out to help the Vietnamese win their independence. All three were German-speaking communists (two from Germany, one from Austria) who fled persecution in what they called "Hitler-Deutschland" in the 1930s to take refuge in France. Their proximate reasons for joining the Foreign Legion differed: Schröder hoped it would mean clemency for his interned wife and young son; Borchers had been rejected from the regular French Army because his (French) mother had married a German; and Frey was homeless and destitute. Their tactical alliance with the French in order to fight the Nazis turned on them when France came under German control and occupation in 1940. Having been shipped from Paris to North Africa, the three would-be antifascists now discovered themselves fighting on the side of their worst enemy.

To their good fortune, the Foreign Legion transferred all three to Indochina. Frey hoped that British forces would intercept the transport and he would have a chance to defect and take up

the anti-Nazi fight alongside the English. After reaching Indochina without incident, the group founded an anti-Legion cell within their troop, adding an anarchist from Berlin and an athletic former member of the International Brigades from Austria. These five formed a cross-country team as a ruse, talking tactics on their training runs and attempting contact with potential recruits at track meets. Eventually, they made contact with a leader of the French Resistance in Indochina, who in turn connected them to representatives of the Viet Minh. After the defeat of the French, the imprisonment of the three as POWs, and the fall of the Japanese, the Viet Minh pulled the cell members from prison and welcomed them as allies. Viet Minh leaders commissioned them with writing propaganda to encourage defections from the Foreign Legion, and gave Frey, who had received officer's training in North Africa, control over troops. They gave Schröder the task of creating a counter-Foreign Legion of European defectors, naming it the "Tell Regiment" after medieval Swiss anti-imperialist and legendary marksman William Tell.

The details of the three defectors' stories are dense and startling. Schütte embraces the drama of their lives, weaving his own story into theirs by beginning the book with a lengthy account of the coincidences and chance encounters that led him to the project. The introduction sets the tone of the book, which is largely biographical and intent on reassembling the lives of its three subjects, a task made considerably easier by the thick memoirs that two of them left when they died. Beyond a limited number of interviews with former Vietnamese leaders and some use of the East German state archives, little corroborating documentary evidence survives, a fact that amplifies the literary quality of the narrative. In their memoirs, Schröder and Frey used literary (and frequently religious) tropes of sacrifice and redemption, and often return to the transition from the ecstasy of collective action to the suffering of the individual body. Schütte reinforces that literary tone and structure, titling consecutive chapters "The Time of Expectation," "The Time of Disillusionment," and (after a German idiomatic expression) "The Moor Has Performed his Duty: Return to the Unknown Old World." Schütte's choice of style, though usually effective, occasionally tips over into the affected. When he ruminates on writing and the status of the "border-crosser" in the introduction, he only narrowly avoids turning the three defectors into metaphors, an impulse inconsistent with the care with which he has reconstructed their lives.

Schütte's analysis is sharpest when he works with the points that arise organically from the material. The central question with which the defectors wrestle is the dynamic between internationalism and nationalism. The radical disidentification of all three men with their own nations had attracted them to the Vietnamese cause from which, as Schütte writes, "they expected the universal values" abandoned by their own countries (p. 320). Frey, who was Jewish by birth but nonpracticing, wrote starkly of the experience of estrangement from his own country: "as I saw my compatriots enter Nazi camps en masse in March 1938 and the way my wisp of a mother was seized by SA men to clean the sidewalks with a toothbrush, my connection to Austria vanished with a single blow. After 1945 [and the defection to the Viet Minh] I had found a new fatherland" (p. 282). Schröder, a protégé of Raymond Aron and frequent contributor to the journal of the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research during his exile years in Paris, dreamt of a new form of community even before arriving in Indochina, writing to his wife in 1940 about his aspirations for "a universal-human, non-state existence" (p. 261).

Yet the defectors' enthusiasm for the revolutionary community blinded them to the fact that the role they were intended to play in anticolonial struggle was, in part, to campaign for their own obsolescence. The goal of the revolutionary forces was to enable a previously dominated nation to

begin making its own history, not to have Europeans continue making it for them. In believing they had accomplished a leap into pure internationalism, the defectors misapprehended the nature of belonging in postcolonial Vietnam, where the Vietnamese revolutionaries saw leadership positions as best occupied by Vietnamese. Though useful to the Viet Minh for a while, the European defectors became redundant after 1950, when the victorious Chinese Communist Party offered a ready source of foreign advisers. A long-standing suspicion of European defectors and their motivations led the Vietnamese to demote those who had been given responsibilities, like Schröder and Frey, and to begin the process of deporting the rest. By 1951, with only a few exceptions (one of whom was Borchers, who stayed in the country with his Vietnamese wife and family until 1966), the European defectors had returned to Europe.

The demotion came as a blow to these three, even though their zeal had not extended to learning anything beyond rudimentary Vietnamese, in Frey's case, or any at all, in Schröder's. When the Viet Minh removed them from meaningful positions in 1950, Frey and Schröder experienced existential crises. After a religious epiphany, Frey attempted a pilgrimage through the jungle in a feverish state, intent on convincing General Vo Nguyen Giap of the existence of God. For Schröder, the crisis was philosophical; his wife had sent him a copy of Jean-Paul Sartre's recently published ***Being and Nothingness*** (1943), which greatly affected him as he read it in underfed isolation and plagued by chronic illness.

Skeptical of what he saw as the beginnings of restrictive groupthink in the Viet Minh leadership, Schröder had concluded by 1951 that the path to collaboration between western and Vietnamese political actors remained barred for material reasons. Months before his voluntary departure from Vietnam in 1951, he asked how Europeans would overcome their "necessary overcompensation" and Vietnamese their "inferiority complex," considering "20 million Vietnamese could not be subjected to psychoanalysis" (p. 259). He answered: "Allow three consecutive generations to eat until they are full" (p. 259).

Schütte mentions Martiniquan psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon only in passing, but the relevance of his work to Schütte's subject would have borne more consideration. In seeing a material basis for the seemingly unbridgeable gap between Europeans and Vietnamese, Schröder produced a kind of basic-needs version of Fanon: instead of the moment of violence, the experience of satiety becomes the route out of the psychological distortions of colonialism. The defectors' experiences of humiliation and their desire for psychological release in post-independence Vietnam present a model of liberation that refracts Fanon's insights at an oblique angle. Pariahs in their own country, the defectors briefly found their "new ***Heimat***" in an insurgent Vietnam, only to be expelled again. At the end of ***The Wretched of the Earth*** (1961), Fanon calls for the creation of a "new man," an expression usually read as an asymptotic and possibly messianic goal. In Schütte's book, however, the lives of the three defectors suggest provocatively that perhaps the new man, or rather, the new human, is created occasionally for brief periods of time in moments of political euphoria, and then is snuffed out again. Schütte's monograph makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing study of the oscillations between internationalist and nationalist forms of political imagination in action.

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