



**Andrew Demshuk.** *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945–1970.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 324 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-107-02073-3.

**Reviewed by** Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius (University of Tennessee)

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## Treasured Landscapes of Loss

This very interesting history of Silesian expellees in the Federal Republic of Germany from 1945 to 1970 traces twenty-five years of refugees' constant longing, and charts the changing emotional states that also evolved in that period. The expellees' history is wrenching, as seven centuries of German presence in parts of Central and Eastern Europe was overturned as a consequence of the war unleashed by the Nazis in the name of a new order in Europe. After the war, the fate of the Federal Republic in part would turn to the question of the political commitments of the expellees. A fifth of the population of the Federal Republic came from these lost territories. The special richness of Andrew Demshuk's text comes from its focus on the individual experiences and emotions of some three million ordinary Germans expelled from Silesia. The broad variety of sources that the author draws on is admirable: personal interviews by the author and correspondence with expellees about their experience, travel accounts, slide shows, memoirs, advertisements, political speeches, physical monuments, and visual sources.

The book's central argument is that "two images of *Heimat* were developing simultaneously, drawing ever further apart" (p. 3). Demshuk asserts that exiles "transfigured *Heimat* into an idealized realm that they could possess whenever they closed their eyes to console themselves amid growing awareness that the physical *Heimat* east of the Oder and Neisse rivers was diverging away, becoming a foreign space they could never possess again" (p. 3). This argument challenges stereotypes of expellees as politically radical, permanently aggrieved, inflexible, and monolithically unreconciled. Demshuk effectively presents many suggestive cases of idealization of the lost home territory, juxtaposed with a despairing realization that the present state of the lands was becoming unrecognizable. Intriguingly, at one point the author says that cemeteries in the former German East could easily take

up another chapter of analysis; one hopes that he will pursue this fascinating track in a future article.

Given the nuances of emotion on which the argument turns, precise nomenclature takes on great importance. Throughout the book, the author repeatedly uses the term "healing" to describe the evolving state of mind of Silesian expellees. Yet this forces the reader to wonder if such loss could ever be really properly healed. A different image that Demshuk also invokes, which seems far more fitting, is the phrase "scarring over," as this denotes a trace of hurt, something that does not fade entirely. Similarly, at one point Demshuk writes of what he calls a "desire for expulsion" on the part of some German Silesians (p. 96). With this deliberate paradox, he is referring to the sentiments of Silesians who remained in their home area as it was transformed under Polish rule and who later came to feel their situation intolerable, wishing for safety in the Federal Republic. In this case, the paradoxical wording of desiring one's own expulsion seems exaggerated and not apt, in an otherwise careful text.

The 1970 Treaty of Warsaw concludes Demshuk's narrative. He argues that the renunciation of earlier borders expressed by Willy Brandt's government was, contrary to many portrayals, in fact met with relative calm by a mass of expellees who already had accepted that they would never repossess the territories of their memory. Demshuk closes this history with a view to the present. He argues that the current amnesia within Germany itself about its East carries perils for the future, as ignorance of the past can pave the way for future "misreading of history" (p. 269).

This monograph is clearly written, vigorously argued, and ambitious in its revisions of accepted wisdom. It is a notable contribution to the literature on modern Germany.

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