

Hugo Service. *Germans to Poles: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing after the Second World War.* New Studies in European History Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. ix + 378 pp. \$39.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-107-59548-4.



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The flight and expulsion (*Flucht und Vertreibung*) of German citizens and ethnic Germans from former German eastern territories at the end of World War II has been the subject of numerous studies, most of them undertaken by German scholars. The subsequent processes and strategies of de-Germanization and nationalization of the former German eastern territories by the new, Communist-controlled Polish regime, on the other hand, still present scholarship with a research desideratum. With his study *Germans to Poles*, Hugo Service provides a deep insight into and understanding of these complex processes and offers a step toward studying this area of postwar European history.

One important goal of the new Communist-controlled Polish regime after World War II was the re-Polonization of the former German eastern territories. This re-nationalization was to be achieved by erasing the German heritage of these territories via changing street names, dismantling monuments, removing German-language inscriptions, and implementing a restrictive language

policy to suppress the use of the German language. Another dimension of these re-nationalization processes was the resettlement of large numbers of Poles from other regions into the newly gained territories, simultaneous to the expulsion of the German population living in these areas. To analyze these processes and strategies of nationalization of the former German eastern territories by the new Polish regime, the author employs a comparative analysis of two localities: the Jelenia Góra/Hirschberg district in Lower Silesia and the Opole/Oppehn district in Upper Silesia. By comparing the nationalization processes in these two localities, he shows two very different processes of “ethno-national transformations in the immediate aftermath of the war” (p. 11).

The focus of Service’s investigation lies between the years 1945 and 1950 and is embedded into a broad context: Service begins his study with a close examination of the policies of occupation, expulsion, and mass killing in Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in eastern Europe during World War II, followed by an analysis of the population

movements during the last months of the war and the immediate postwar period of the summer of 1945. These movements were caused by the evacuation processes of the Nazi authorities as well as the flight movements of the German population during the Red Army's advance. They were further increased by the disorganized and organized expulsions of people by the new Polish authorities, accompanied by an influx of Polish settlers from other parts of the country into Poland's new territories in the West (chapters 1-3). By including the population policies of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union into his analysis, Service convincingly shows that the policies of nationalization of the former German eastern territories by the new Polish regime after the end of World War II must be seen within a broader context of territorial and population policies during the war and the accompanying migration flows, expulsions, and flight movements in the region.

These first chapters, furthermore, provide a helpful overview of the recent history of the complicated population structure in this area and provide the foundation for a deeper understanding of the preconditions of the two nationalization processes within the two localities. The majority of Opole's/Oppeln's population had been bilingual in German and a west Slavic dialect closely related to Polish before 1945, as was typical in southern East Prussia and western Upper Silesia. They were allowed to remain in the Opole district after 1945, while Polish authorities directed their campaigns of ethnic screening and pressured assimilation in these areas in the immediate postwar period. Jelenia Góra/Hirschberg, on the other hand, was inhabited by a homogeneously German-speaking population before 1945. This region experienced far fewer losses of the prewar population through mass flight than most other areas of Poland's new territories. As a consequence, at least as many Germans remained in Jelenia Góra/Hirschberg as before the war, of which the vast majority was

uprooted through active expulsion by Polish authorities once the war was over.

Service describes this expulsion and uprooting of the Germans from the Jelenia Góra district as a three-step process, starting with the disorganized expulsion in the summer of 1945, leading to the coordinated expulsion in 1946, and, finally, ending with the expulsion of the remaining skilled workers in 1947. Without heavy war damages, the Jelenia Góra district was an attractive destination for Poles, mostly from central Poland and the Polish prewar eastern territories, which had been annexed by the Soviet Union. Polish authorities supported this development through advertisement and propaganda, in a few cases also through organized transportation of people directly into the district.

One of the achievements of Service's analysis of the Jelenia Góra district is that he traces the changing attitudes of the new Communist-controlled Polish authorities toward the Germans. By doing so, he argues that the expulsion of Germans by the new Polish authorities not only was driven by revenge but also needs to be seen within the policy to establish an ethnically homogenous state within the supposedly *righteous Polish borders*—a notion the new Polish Communist authorities adapted from the prewar Polish National Democrats. According to Service, this argument is supported by the fact that there were also German Jews among the expellees.

Initially, Germans in the Jelenia Góra district were permitted to stay. Poles arriving from other parts of the country were instructed to live side by side with the Germans, mostly on their farms in the district's rural areas. Service demonstrates that Poles' motivations to come to Jelenia Góra were as divergent as their social and cultural backgrounds. Some, mostly arriving from the former Polish eastern territories, were looking for a new life, having abandoned or lost their old properties; others looted abandoned farms and houses and returned back home afterward. The Polish-

German cohabitation, however, contributed to a massive transfer of properties in which the property of the remaining Germans was transferred to the new Polish inhabitants. This process partially must be seen as a consequence of individual claims of German property by Poles, but also as a consequence of an active expropriation policy of Germans realized by Polish authorities—a campaign that was to serve the homogenization of Poland's new territories but also the Communist revolutionary socioeconomic transformation of the country. The ongoing massive influx of Poles into the Jelenia Góra district instigated the first attempts to uproot Germans through disorganized expulsions during the summer of 1945. A shortage of skilled workers soon changed this policy. Due to this shortage, Polish authorities were forced to continue employing Germans for everyday tasks within the local administration. However, the remaining skilled workers were finally expelled in 1947.

In the Opole/Oppeln district, on the other hand, the majority of the prewar population was allowed to stay while verification processes were imposed in order to verify inhabitants' Polish identity. Service conducts an analysis of the organization and procedures of such verification processes. Interestingly, verification and ethnic screening undertaken by Polish authorities were based on the so-called *Deutsche Volksliste*, the system introduced by Nazi German authorities after September 1939 to classify ethnic belonging. The Communist-led Polish government believed that a sizable proportion of the German citizens living in this area was not of German origin but were *indigenous Poles*, the so-called *autochtoni*. Service argues convincingly that behavioral criteria, such as Polish-languages skills, a Catholic denomination, membership in and/or loyalty to a Polish association before 1939, or even personal involvement in the Upper Silesian Uprisings in the aftermath of World War I, were as important in proving a Polish identity as supposedly *objective* criteria. In the course of this classification, only 3 per-

cent of the prewar population was verified as not Polish. Polish authorities appear to have been eager to testify in favor of the population's Polish identity and sometimes to have been indulgent enough to rehabilitate former members of the Nazi Party. A positive verification as Polish, however, did not automatically lead to permanent Polish citizenship. To become a Polish citizen, verified ethnic Poles also had to submit a signed declaration of loyalty to the Polish state.

In addition to his thorough analysis, Service also dedicates a whole chapter to the situation of Polish Jews after Poland's liberation, which adds to the book's comprehensive approach. Of the probably less than one hundred thousand Polish Jews who had survived the Nazi German occupation without leaving the prewar Polish territory, a significant percentage found themselves in the territories ceded to the Soviet Socialist Republics of Ukraine, Belorussia, and Lithuania. As a consequence of the liberation of the Groß-Rosen concentration camp and its sub-camps by the Red Army, a Polish Jewish community of about seven thousand people decided to remain in Lower Silesia during the last months of the war. The new Polish government also facilitated the return of Polish Jews who found themselves outside the country's new postwar borders. Together with the non-Jewish repatriates, they were transported back into Poland's new territories in the West as part of the Polish-Soviet population exchanges. The new Communist-led Polish regime, as Service demonstrates, oscillated between helping Polish Jews to find a new livelihood in the new western territories by directly transporting them there and denying them concrete help in other instances. Unlike their handling of non-Jewish repatriates from the Soviet Union, the Polish government's State Repatriation Office and local state administrative authorities did not take care of Polish Jewish repatriates arriving in Poland's new territories after 1945. Instead, the government placed full responsibility into the hands of the Central Committee for Jews in Poland. The existence of

these two different systems, as Service demonstrates convincingly, can be regarded as one possible reason why there was only little social and cultural interaction between Jewish and non-Jewish settlers of the newly gained western territories.

After the Kielce Pogrom on July 4, 1946, the Communist-led government tried to restore order by sentencing nine perpetrators to death. However, the government was also aware that by acting too resolutely against anti-Semitic sentiments within the Polish population, it might alienate the vast Polish population from the regime and thus diminish its support. In the end, the new Polish regime regarded Polish Jews as a national minority and their mass exodus following the Kielce Pogrom received more support than the emigration of non-Jewish Poles since the Jewish emigration, thereby contributing to the ethno-national homogeneity of the new Polish state. After the change of attitude toward Zionism prompted by Joseph Stalin's opposition to the new state of Israel, which had been founded in May 1948, Polish authorities started to suppress Polish Jewish institutions. Service classifies the mass exodus of Polish Jews from the late 1940s onward as "not forced, but neither [was it] entirely voluntary" (p. 233). In addition, Service's analysis clearly shows that the Communist-led Polish regime's attitude toward Polish Jews was never unambiguously benevolent. And although Polish Jews might not have been forcibly expelled, as was the case with the German population, their exodus and the growing suppression of their political and cultural institutions after 1948 indicate that their perception as a national minority did not coincide with the consolidated Communist regime and its ideas of an ethnically homogenous Polish state.

Based on a rich variety of sources, Service's study is clearly written and well structured. Especially the sources from the Polish archives provide new insight into the procedures of verification and ethnic screening in Upper Silesia. One of

the great achievements of Service's book is the placing of nationalization processes into a broader context by not only analyzing the prehistory of events of territorial and population policies during World War II but also providing an outlook to its aftermath. Particularly his analysis of the situation of Polish Jews and verified indigenous Poles (chapter 8 and 9) add to the richness of the book's details.

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