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Bernadetta Nitschke. *Vertreibung und Aussiedlung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus Polen 1945-1949.* München: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2003. 392 S. EUR 34.80 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-486-56687-1.

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The Expulsion of Germans from Poland, Revisited

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Recent debates over the foundation of a Center Against Expulsion, in Berlin, demonstrate the enduring sensitivity of the jagged scars left by World War II in Central Europe. German Social Democrats and Polish publicists together denounced the idea, which advanced by Erika Steinbach of the League of German Expellees. Instead of a monument to German suffering in the former capital of the Nazi Reich, critics have suggested a museum memorializing all the victims of forced migration in Europe. The site of this European memorial would fittingly be Polish Wroclaw, once German Breslau and the current home of tens of thousands of Poles expelled from Lviv/Lwow/Lemberg after its annexation into Soviet Ukraine in 1945.[1] Regardless of one's position in the debate, all agree that fifteen million ethnic Germans suffered terribly during flight and expulsion from Poland and Czechoslovakia from 1944 to 1947. Originally published in Polish in 1999, Bernadetta Nitschke's recently translated survey of the expulsions from Poland is a welcome contribution to the discussion, providing an even-handed account that draws on both Polish and German sources.

On the whole, Nitschke's account will be familiar to those acquainted with the post-war expulsions. She devotes the first chapter to the genesis and planning of the transfer, including the Greco-Turkish precedent of 1923-24, the Nazi wartime population movements, and the Allied agreement to move Polish borders westward at the expense of occupied Germany. The second chapter recounts the harrowing flight of six million Germans as the Soviet Red Army advanced from the East in 1944 and 1945. During this mad rush from the approaching Front, 450,000 Germans fled East Prussia over the perilous ice of the *Frische Haff*; hundreds of thousands more set out by boat from Danzig and other port cities. Though estimates of the dead range widely, as many as a million Germans perished during flight and expulsion from Poland in 1944-45.

Chapter Two also sketches the conditions facing the five million Germans remaining in reconstituted Poland in 1945. Though the degree of mistreatment varied widely, Germans were often humiliated, forced to wear special armbands, denied access to public transportation, and sent off to camps and forced labor. Directives ordering a stop to the abuse occasionally arrived from Warsaw, but they were rarely enforced. Typhus, tuberculosis, and venereal diseases were rampant in the undernourished German communities.

The third chapter describes the problem of Germanized Poles, many of whom were known as "autochthons." Upwards of a million residents of Masuria and Upper Silesia were of Slavic descent, but did not identify strongly with Polish nationality. Many spoke German or Germanized dialects of Polish, and large numbers had signed the German *Volksliste* (national registers) during the war. Wanting to retain as many Poles as possible, the government put autochthons through "verification" to determine which were redeemable for Poland. Autochthons not only disliked the subjective and often arbitrary verification process, but they also faced discrimination even once verified. Polish settlers coveted autochthon property, and they resented and distrusted the verified autochthons. Many autochthons fled to occupied Germany in despair at their treatment, though the situation in Germany was little better. As one Silesian wrote, "In Poland, I'm a German. In Germany, a Pole. Perhaps they should create a state for us on the moon. There we might finally

feel at home" (p. 165).

In the long fourth chapter, Nitschke turns to the expulsions, which came in three waves. During a period of "wild expulsions" from May to July 1945, the Polish military drove up to 400,000 Germans across Poland's new western border. Though apparently inspired by a similar expulsion frenzy in Czechoslovakia, Poles were neither as brutal nor as thorough as their Czech counterparts. Nitschke does not venture a comparison, but the contrast is remarkable. The Poles, after all, suffered a much harsher and deadlier German occupation than the Czechs.

The second wave of expulsions came after the Potsdam conference, but before the "organized transfer" of remaining Germans began in early 1946. From August to December, 1945, Poles expelled close to 600,000 more Germans in poorly organized transports. Thousands starved and froze to death in slow and ill-equipped trains. The final phase involved the transfer of 2.25 million Germans in a process coordinated with British and Soviet authorities in occupied Germany in 1946 and 1947. Many still died on route, but conditions were far better than those in 1945.

In a welcome departure from standard East Central European accounts of the expulsions, Nitschke briefly follows the German expellees across the border into occupied Germany. Drawing on German archival sources, she describes overcrowded refugee camps in the British Zone, where typhus outbreaks continued to kill expellees once they had crossed over from Poland. On the other hand, there is much that Nitschke leaves out. We get little sense of the interconnected policies of German expulsion and Polish resettlement. We also hear little about the Polish Communist Party, which used expulsion and resettlement to further its political goals.

Nitschke is particularly interested in establishing the numbers of expellees, and her conclusions (drawing from a wealth of regional studies) confirm the estimates of leading German scholars.[2] Of around 12.4 million Germans within the lands of post-war Poland in 1944, six million fled or were evacuated, 3.6 million were expelled, one million were verified as Poles, 300,000 remained in Poland as a German minority, and up to 1.1 million died (p. 280). In its focus on the "balance sheet" of German losses, Nitschke's account is a conventional one. Even so, coming from the Polish side of the discussion on the expulsions, it is an important contribution towards finding a common German-Polish narrative of the war and its aftermath.

Notes:

[1]. *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, Ukraine Report.* 26 August 2003, Volume 5, Number 31. `http://www.rferl.org/pbureport/2003/08/31-260803.html.`

[2]. See Theodor Schieder, ed. *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse.* Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa 1. Bonn: Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees and War Victims, 1954.

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