

Brandes, Detlef: „*Umvolkung, Umsiedlung, rassische Bestandsaufnahme*“. NS-„*Volkstumspolitik*“ in den böhmischen Ländern. München: Oldenbourg Verlag 2012. ISBN: 978-3-486-71242-1; 309 S.

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How to translate „Umvolkung,“ a term imposed in June 1941 by the Nazis in their Sude-tengau as an official euphemism for Germanisation (p. 82)? Perhaps the title of Detlef Brandes’s new book could be best rendered into English as „National Mutation, Resettlement, Racial Survey: National Socialist ‘Population Policy’ in the Bohemian Lands“. The University Professor in Düsseldorf for the History and Culture of the Germans in Eastern Europe, Brandes made his first major contribution to the historiography concerning German-Czech relations during the Nazi era with his two-volume study, published in 1969 and 1975, of the „Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia“ – the puppet polity that Nazis devised in 1939 for the overwhelmingly Czech-speaking core of the Bohemian lands. Subsequent works included a study of the Polish, Czechoslovak, and Yugoslav exile governments in London between 1939 and 1943 (1988), a history of plans and decisions concerning the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland after the Second World War (2nd, expanded edition, 2005), and an account of German politics in the „Sudeten“ rim of the Bohemian lands in that fateful year, 1938 (2008).<sup>1</sup> Recently retired, Brandes has now returned to his original topic, but shifted focus. His new book covers not only the Protectorate but the Reichsgau Sudetenland, as well as smaller parts of the Bohemian lands assigned by the Third Reich to other „Gau“ when it carved up the western part of Czechoslovakia, today’s Czech Republic. It rests on archival material from the Protectorate ministries and from the offices of Nazi overlords in Prague which were not available to Brandes before the collapse of Communism in 1989, and which he maintains have been little used by other historians even since then. And it centers on so-called racial policy, on Nazi attempts to Germanize the Bohemian

lands – including many of the Czechs who lived there.

Despite its title and topic, the book skirts Nazi policy against Bohemian Jews. It discusses the Holocaust only inasmuch as Brandes’s new sources, centered on non-Jews, bring to light new information. Thus several pages are devoted to the dislocation of „Aryans“ from Theresienstadt / Terezín in 1942 in order to create the ghetto where many Bohemian Jews either perished or were loaded onto trains to the death camps in occupied Poland. The Roma, another object of Nazi racial policy, are the focus of a single paragraph. Despite a promise at the outset to compare the Nazi occupation of Czech-speaking areas with the strikingly different Polish case next door, the book makes only a few marginal remarks on the matter in the concluding summary. And readers receive little help from the author in integrating his empirical findings with the insights of several generations of scholars into Nazi dynamics and structures. Detailed discussion of turf battles between *Reichsprotector* Constantin von Neurath and his *Staatssekretär* Karl Hermann Frank, for example, as well as among them, *Gauleiter*, SS leaders, Nazi Party offices, government ministries, and other players unfolds in something approaching an interpretive vacuum. More meaning could have been squeezed from the particulars had Brandes drawn on such historians as Martin Broszat and Ian Kershaw, who have made a compelling case for understanding the Nazi state as a set of fiefdoms feuding ever more desperately with one another as they „worked

<sup>1</sup> Detlev Brandes, *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat. Teil I. Besatzungspolitik, Kollaboration und Widerstand im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren bis Heydrichs Tod (1939–1942)*, München 1969; ders., *Die Tschechen unter deutschem Protektorat. Teil II. Besatzungspolitik, Kollaboration und Widerstand im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren von Heydrichs Tod bis zum Prager Aufstand (1942–1945)*, München 1975; ders., *Großbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten 1939–1943. Die Regierungen Polens, der Tschechoslowakei und Jugoslawiens im Londoner Exil vom Kriegsausbruch bis zur Konferenz von Teheran*, München 1988; ders., *Der Weg zur Vertreibung 1938–1945. Pläne und Entscheidungen zum „Transfer“ der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei und aus Polen*, München 2001 (2. überarb. u. erw. Aufl. 2005); ders., *Die Sudetendeutschen im Krisenjahr 1938*, München 2008.

towards the *Führer*". A related criticism is that although Brandes cites outstanding recent works about the Protectorate and about the Sudetengau, including those by Chad Bryant (2007), by Volker Zimmermann (1999), and by Ralph Gebel (1999), he engages little with their interpretations, and does not make clear what his volume adds to theirs.<sup>2</sup>

„Repeopling, Resettlement, Racial Survey“ does offer a thorough synopsis of what heretofore little used archives contain regarding Nazi attempts at Germanizing Bohemian territory and Czechs. Chapter 1, which follows a very brief introduction, provides an overview of Nazi policy against Czechs, culled from Brandes’s earlier publications. Chapter 2 concerns fields and methods of Nazi population policy in the Bohemian lands: the bolstering of Germans native to the Bohemian lands (*Volksdeutsche*); the suppression of Czech schooling and of the Czech language; the Germanization of administration and of the economy; land policy; the resettling of thousands of *Volksdeutsche* from the South Tyrol, from Bessarabia, and from elsewhere; and efforts at building German „land bridges“. The third and final chapter, about racial policy, begins with a discussion of tensions over how candidates for Germanization should be selected: on the basis of „objective“ racial markers or of self-nomination, „confession“ (*Bekennnis*). Subsequent sections outline attempts at Germanizing Czechs by removing them to the „old Reich,“ and various pseudo-scientific „racial surveys“ to which perhaps 5% of the Czech population was subjected during the war. The failure of Germanization comes through clearly, as does the vicious absurdity of how Nazis planned solutions to their „Czech question.“

Brandes’s concluding claim, that „the goal of German policy was the Germanization of the space and of a part of the people“ (p. 235), seems at best to be made out of context. Yes, this was indeed the goal of Nazi racial policy. Various Nazi plans specified that most Czechs were to be Germanized, while the rest were to be shipped to the East or subjected to „special handling“. But time and again, racial policy was subordinated to other policies, as Brandes himself shows. Even ferocious Nazis such as K.H. Frank and Reinhard

Heydrich postponed or scaled back initiatives against Czechdom, giving priority instead to squeezing the maximum out of Czechs and their highly industrialized economy for the war effort. To cite John Connelly’s stimulating article from 1999, „Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice“, „There was but one attempt to destroy the whole of a people, there was but one Holocaust“.<sup>3</sup>

Brandes no doubt would agree with Connelly. But this study, by allowing a particular set of sources to channel its inquiry, misses connections between the Czech case and others. Understanding suffers as a result. Brandes’s compartmentalizations, above all of the Bohemian Holocaust from Nazi policy toward Czechs, call to mind passages from Jan Gross’s 1979 book, „Polish Society under German Occupation,“ including this one on p. 184: „It is sad that in a work about Polish society during the war one can devote just a few lines to the story of three million Polish citizens, the Jews, who were effectively isolated and confined, wretched beyond description, in the area of the ghettos. The ghettos and the holocaust, although both happened on Polish soil, are a distinct subject because the pace of life and death of the Jews followed its own very special rhythm.“<sup>4</sup> In later works, Gross reversed course. His „Neighbors“ (2001) stands as a passionate and brilliant „challenge to standard historiography of the Second World War, which posits that there are two separate wartime histories – one pertaining to the Jews and the other to all the other citizens of a given European country subjected to Nazi rule“.<sup>5</sup> Would that Brandes

<sup>2</sup> Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black. Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism*, Cambridge, Mass. 2007; Volker Zimmermann, *Die Sudetendeutschen im NS-Staat. Politik und Stimmung der Bevölkerung im Reichsgau Sudetenland (1938–1945)*, Essen 1999 (= Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Kultur und Geschichte der Deutschen im östlichen Europa 16. Zugleich: Veröffentlichungen der Deutsch-Tschechischen und Deutsch-Slowakischen Historikerkommission 9); Ralph Gebel, „Heim ins Reich!“ Konrad Henlein und der Reichsgau Sudetenland 1938–1945, München 1999 (2. Auflage 2000).

<sup>3</sup> John Connelly, *Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice*, in: *Central European History* 32 (1999), pp. 1–33, here p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Jan Gross, *Polish Society under German Occupation. Generalgouvernement, 1939–1944*, Princeton 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish*

had been as bold.

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Community in Jedwabne, Poland, Princeton 2001, pp. 7–8.