

## **Dagmar Kusa**

### **Redrawing Nations**

Every society has some dark periods in its history, some tragic events that go largely unmentioned for many years afterward. But unless the society eventually comes to terms with these sore points, they lurk in the shadows, haunting future generations. A few countries have designed reconciliatory mechanisms for dealing with traumatic episodes in their past, as South Africa did with its Truth and Reconciliation Committee, but more often they attempt to gloss over those episodes and to delete them from textbooks and popular memory. Not until the past has been candidly addressed and a national "soul-searching" has taken place is it likely that scholars will be able to explore earlier misdeeds with the thoroughness they deserve.

One such traumatic historical event in the history of Central and Eastern Europe is surely the ethnic cleansing that followed the Second World War. The massive transfers of populations happened with the blessing of the Western allied powers and with vigorous Soviet backing. With remarkable speed, Poland and Czechoslovakia transferred over ten million ethnic Germans from the "formerly German territories" in Poland and from the Sudetenland in Bohemia to the German occupation zones, and the Czechoslovak government shipped more than eighty thousand Hungarians from southern Slovakia into Hungary in exchange for tens of thousands of Slovaks who supposedly were "returning" to replace the ousted Hungarians. The small number of Germans and somewhat larger number of Hungarians who were left in Czechoslovakia were denied their citizenship rights for three years, a period that was dubbed by the survivors as the "homeless years." In Central and Eastern Europe the topic of forced migration was taboo in academic research throughout the Communist period. Only a handful of relevant publications appeared in the region, and these were mostly written without access to archival materials locked away in East-bloc archives.

After the downfall of East European Communism in 1989 one might have expected that the population transfers would be a widely discussed topic in the region, but that has not been the case. Most people were reluctant even to bring up the subject, and new scholarship on the forced migration was produced mostly by researchers from abroad. Within the region the population transfers were still an open wound, too sensitive to touch. Besides, there was the more immediate past that needed to be dealt with. The publications that appeared in the region were mostly case studies or partial summaries of events that took place in a particular country, patched together from declassified archival materials and from oral accounts that helped illuminate the effects of the forced migration on local communities. What was lacking, though, was a comprehensive comparative study that would put the population transfers into a historical and political perspective.

Such a study has now finally appeared with the book *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*, published as the first volume in the Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series. It is a valuable compilation of essays on the forceful policies of ethnic homogenization in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and western Ukraine. The authors draw extensively on documents that have emerged from the former East-bloc archives as well as from Western archives. The book begins with a superb introduction by Mark Kramer explaining the international situation that led to the transfers, the logistics of forced migration, and the uneasy legacy of these events for current international relations. Kramer also provides a valuable summary of the book's scope and achievements, including the special attention given to the way the Soviet Union and indigenous Communist parties in the region used the ethnic cleansing to consolidate Communist rule. In the next chapter Philipp Ther discusses the theory behind

the ethnic cleansing and offers a thorough historical background of the circumstances that were conducive to such harsh treatment of minorities. Subsequent chapters cover the forced transfers of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia and the policies adopted to assimilate those who remained: de-Germanization; re-Polonization of Upper Silesia; and resettlement of domestic populations in the territories vacated by the Germans, a phenomenon highlighted with particular vividness in the case study of northwestern Bohemia. The forcible "exchange" of populations between Poland and Ukraine in 1944-1947 is covered in great detail as well, illustrating the way ethnic cleansing backfired in some instances and produced greater ethnic tension. The overall picture is completed by essays examining the personal and social difficulties facing the expellees in their integration into German society. Although studies of this last topic were produced in West Germany during the Cold War, it has received very little attention outside Germany.

There are a few things that *Redrawing Nations* does not include. Most striking, although the "voluntary exchange" of populations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary that uprooted more than 150,000 Slovaks and Hungarians against their will is mentioned by both Kramer and Ther, it is not treated in separate chapters. The exchange was followed by two waves of further resettlement of Hungarians from Slovakia to the Czech lands, a policy that was justified by the Communist regime as "voluntary aid for agriculture." Other removals of populations took place, albeit on a smaller scale—for example the forced "co-optation" of some 20,000 of the Ukrainians living in Slovakia to move to Soviet Ukraine surely deserves a spot in the tragic history of the region. These cases are egregiously underresearched. Only a few publications on the forced transfers of Hungarians from Slovakia, making use of archival research, have appeared since the fall of Communism. (They are cited by Kramer in his introduction.) Until those studies came out, only one lengthy account, published in 1978 by an ethnic Hungarian writer, Kalman Janics, was available. It was put out in a Slovak translation in the mid-1990s, but with a print run of only five hundred. Some oral histories of the surviving Slovak and Hungarian expellees who returned to their previous homes a few years after the transfers have been collected, but not in a systematic way. Even less is available on the other cases of forced population movements in Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. This gap in *Redrawing Nations* is therefore understandable, and one can only hope that further research will fill in the gaps in our understanding of these largely unknown events. Despite this omission, *Redrawing Nations* is an essential publication for any scholar interested in the events of the mid- to late 1940s, including the settlements reached by the great powers and the advent of Communism in Central Europe. The book is a thorough survey of the problematique of ethnic cleansing, and it offers a multitude of case studies on the politics of specific regions. Thus it is of great value to scholars from various disciplines, including historians, political scientists, and anthropologists.

The book is especially valuable because it includes contributions by Central and East European authors as well as leading Western experts. Unfortunately, only rarely do we find authors from Central and Eastern Europe joining with Western scholars to produce large comparative studies. The research that is being done by individual scholars in Central Europe is often kept from wider circulation by too narrow a focus, by linguistic barriers, or by a lack of cooperation with other Central European researchers writing about essentially the same topics in their own countries. Luckily it seems that an up- and-coming generation of researchers in Central and Eastern Europe will be able to fill in this gap by taking part in such crucial projects as *Redrawing Nations*.