Vitalija Stravinskienė, *Tarp gimtinės ir tėvynės: Lietuvos SSR gyventojų repatriacija į Lenkiją (1944–1947, 1955–1959 m.)*, Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2011, 510 p. ISBN 978-9955-847-46-5

At the end of the Second World War massive population movements took place across East-Central Europe from Belarus to Wrocław, Ukraine to Pomorze, and from the Baltic states westward. In this process millions of Germans, Poles, Jews, Ukrainians and others were uprooted from their ancestral homes and came to reside in new regions, many of which had themselves been emptied of their pre-war populations by genocide or state policy. The German case (whether from the Baltic States, other parts of the USSR, Poland or Czechoslovakia) has been quite extensively researched in dozens of studies. The Polish-Ukrainian case forms an important part of Timothy Snyder's *Reconstruction of Nations* (2003). A number of Polish works examine the causes, process and outcomes of the population transfers from Soviet Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania. In Lithuania, however, much less research has been done on this topic. Two historians in particular have published valuable work on the 'population exchange' (which ended up almost entirely one way, from the LSSR to Poland) of the postwar period: Nastazija Kairiūkšytė and Vitalija Stravinskienė. The present book represents a major contribution to our understanding of these events, and as such is illuminating of a little-known period of Lithuanian history.

The historiography of the postwar population exchanges (which started, of course, in 1944 before the war was yet over) has generally been written as a tragedy: violence, political repression, the uprooting of helpless individuals by cruel forces of history. The German tradition adopts this outlook in the very different works of, say, Andreas Hillgruber and Philip Ther (these authors' names are chosen almost at random). In Polish, a similar tone reigns, with a hefty dose of blame levelled at Ukrainians, Lithuanians, and in particular the Soviet state for causing these tragic events. Here one may mention the (valuable and scholarly) works of S. Ciesielski, A. Srebrakowski, J. Czerniakiewicz, P. Eberhardt and E. Paczoska, among others. In particular in Poland, the loss of Vilnius and L'viv tends to be portrayed as a historical tragedy, even by authors who are very far from harbouring revanchist sentiments.

Stravinskienė's fundamental approach is quite different. She avoids, indeed, dwelling much on the moral side of the population shift, though it appears that her basic position would be that (a) the 'unmixing of ethnicities' was probably necessary at this point to avoid future ethnic clashes,

(b) in Lithuania the transfers were carried out without unnecessary cruelty, though with some inevitable human suffering, and (c) these are historical events which need to be examined as such, and not as painful episodes in a person's – or a nation's – life. Even for someone who does not entirely agree with this approach, Stravinskienė's sober and scholarly work is compelling. The strengths of her study are many: its clear location in the historiography of ethnic cleansing, its incorporation of the quite extensive Polish historiography (while not sharing many of its premises), its profound and careful use of archival sources, and its inclusion of both episodes, the first at the immediate end of the war and the second after Stalin's death. This study will long remain, I think, the central work on the population transfer from the Lithuanian SSR to the People's Republic of Poland; one hopes that it will soon appear in Polish translation.

The idea of population transfer (*'repatriacija'* to use a very loaded term) to achieve greater ethnic homogeneity had been practiced as an official policy of European governments at least since the Greek-Turkish population exchange of the early 1920s. Precedents to this can be found in Russian policy 'encouraging' Muslims in the Caucasus and, by proxy, in the Balkans to migrate across the border into the Ottoman Empire. Thus the idea of 'unmixing ethnicities' had a long, if checkered, past already before the Yalta agreement.

By 1944 all three leaders of the allied powers – Stalin, Churchill, Roosevelt – agreed in principle that population transfer would mitigate inter-ethnic frictions and thereby help avoid war in the future. But who, in the Lithuanian-Polish case, made up the target group? Stravinskienė devotes the first main section (of three) to this question, giving us a capsule history of Poles in this area (*Wileńszczyzna* for Poles, *Rytų ir Pietryčių Lietuva* for Lithuanians). This chapter acquaints the reader with the region, relations between Poles and Lithuanians, and the demographic dynamics of the Polish community here after the initial (1944–1947) population transfer. The other two sections look at the two 'repatriation' periods, 1944–1947 and 1955–1959. As one would expect, the section on the crucial immediate postwar transfer is by far the longest, making up nearly half of the book. The book ends with almost 150 pages of documents in Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian, including the original text of the transfer agreement of 22 September 1944, a Polish *instrukcja* from the same year that attempted to transform the provisions of this agreement into bureaucratic reality, and statistics on numbers of persons receiving permission to emigrate in the second period.

The process of 'repatriation' was extremely complicated, involving questions of property, political allegiance, national identity, administrative practices, and logistics of moving tens of thousands of individuals and their property over significant distances. All of this took place in 1944–1947 on the background of chaotic conditions where documentation was not

always available (or had been destroyed), family members were often not in one place, and no one could be entirely sure what tomorrow would bring. And, as Stravinskienė shows, from the very start, the 1944 treaty (*sutartis/uklad*) was open to different interpretations, in particular regarding just who was allowed to be repatriated. The agreement stated that Poles and Jews who had been Polish citizens on 17 September 1939 could apply for repatriation. The two parallel administrations – Lithuanian and Polish – interpreted this seemingly clear statement in quite different ways, the Lithuanian more narrowly (in particular aiming to avoid the emigration of ethnic Lithuanians) and the Poles more broadly (essentially looking the other way even when individuals could not prove Polish ethnicity or Polish citizenship in September 1939). Further complications involved exactly how much and what kind of property could be taken along. Finally, what was to be done when individuals signed up for repatriation but then failed to show up for their assigned *ešalonas*? Should they be allowed a place on a later train, or should they be regarded as having forfeited their chance to leave the Lithuanian SSR?

Stravinskienė shows in detail just how the bureaucracies were put in place, decisions on these various questions were reached, and how the various complications were dealt with. To start with, however, she considers the basic issue of how individuals decided whether to stay or to leave. In 1944 and even into 1945, after all, the Polish underground remained active in the region. Its position was initially very opposed to the population transfer, and only gradually, forced along by brutal reality and the realisation that Vilnius and its surroundings would in fact not fall to Poland, acquiesced. Similar attitudes were present among the Polish Catholic clergy. Stravinskienė also provides a fascinating look into how the Soviet ‘security services’ viewed the process of repatriation.

Once the decision was made to leave, one entered a confusing bureaucratic process to get the necessary papers, stamps, and permissions. Stravinskienė well documents this complicated process of registration, getting assigned to an *ešalonas*, obtaining permission (or not ...) to take along property of various kinds, figuring out when the *ešalonas* would leave (there were, predictably, delays), and what happened when registered individuals (or members of their families) failed to show up for the assigned train. Besides individuals, there was the issue of exporting cultural goods, like books and art works. Some of these belonged to individuals, and others to institutions like the library of Vilnius University (Uniwersytet Stefana Batorego in the interwar period). No other work gives such a clear idea of these complicated issues, decisions, and outcomes.

Compared to the rather chaotic – but given the circumstances, quite successful – 1944–1947 ‘repatriation’, the population transfer of a decade later was much more orderly and considerably smaller in scale. Now, ten years after the war, both sides could fall back on well-established bureaucra-

cies and practices (one should not forget that both the Lithuanian SSR and the Polish Republic in 1944–1947 had at best makeshift administrations). In essence, this second repatriation allowed individuals who ‘should have’ or ‘could have’ left right after the war a second chance to leave. Nearly 50,000 individuals left the LSSR; strikingly, over one third of these were children (up to age 16, pp. 270–271). This time the provisions for taking personal property were considerably less generous than in the first ‘repatriation’, possibly because the Soviet side no longer felt the need to ‘entice’ local Poles to sign up for departure. On the whole, this repatriation went forward more successfully and with less chaos than the first.

This is an excellent book, well-researched, interesting, and scholarly. One does not, however, have to accept all of its conclusions. To my mind, Stravinskienė tries a bit too hard to shift blame for the repatriation decisions on Moscow, when the Lithuanian communists (and not just the Muscovite viceroy, Mikhail Suslov) were by all evidence we have quite happy to be rid of the pesky Polish element (especially in Vilnius). In fact, the quite different processes of ‘repatriation’ of Poles from the Belarusian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian SSRs are one argument against stressing decisions made in Moscow too strongly. Still, one should not end on a negative note, in particular on such a controversial topic. Vitalija Stravinskienė’s book is a very serious contribution to our understanding of the Lithuanian-Polish population transfers of the post-war period; no other work in any language provides a more comprehensive account of these events. One hopes that the book will be published in translation to increase its impact on foreign historians.

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