

## **THE THICK LINE AT 1945:**

### **Czech and German Histories of the Nazi War Occupation and the Postwar Expulsion/Transfer**

Chad Bryant  
University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill



The National Council for Eurasian and East European Research  
910 17<sup>th</sup> Street, N.W.  
Suite 300  
Washington, D.C. 20006

**TITLE VIII PROGRAM**

### **Project Information\***

<b>Principal Investigator:</b>	<b>Chad Bryant</b>
<b>Council Contract Number:</b>	<b>819-01f</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>February 13, 2006</b>

### **Copyright Information**

Scholars retain the copyright on works they submit to NCEEER. However, NCEEER possesses the right to duplicate and disseminate such products, in written and electronic form, as follows: (a) for its internal use; (b) to the U.S. Government for its internal use or for dissemination to officials of foreign governments; and (c) for dissemination in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act or other law or policy of the U.S. government that grants the public access to documents held by the U.S. government.

Additionally, NCEEER has a royalty-free license to distribute and disseminate papers submitted under the terms of its agreements to the general public, in furtherance of academic research, scholarship, and the advancement of general knowledge, on a non-profit basis. All papers distributed or disseminated shall bear notice of copyright. Neither NCEEER, nor the U.S. Government, nor any recipient of a Contract product may use it for commercial sale.

---

\* The work leading to this report was supported in part by contract or grant funds provided by the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, funds which were made available by the U.S. Department of State under Title VIII (The Soviet-East European Research and Training Act of 1983, as amended). The analysis and interpretations contained herein are those of the author.

## **Executive Summary**

Following the Munich agreement of October 1938 Nazi Germany annexed the predominantly German-inhabited Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Gentile Czechs and Sudeten Germans watched as Nazi officials and their minions registered, segregated, and then deported nearly 100,000 Jews to their death. In 1945, Hitler's troops retreated. Czech mobs set upon Germans, murdering thousands. Over the course of the two years, often used methods that bore a striking resemblance to those employed by the Nazis against the Jews. By the end of 1947 Czechoslovakia had been "cleansed" of its three million Germans.

Two very different, seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of these events continue to divide Czechs and their former German neighbors. Both carefully constructed narratives emphasize a national "trauma," which Frank Hadler calls "the collective experience, memory and reminders of suffering" of the nation that is "formulated and handed down, reflected upon, and criticized" by historians, other scholars, and patriots.

This brief essay examines how historians, political interest groups, governments, and the media have constructed these two competing understandings of the past, paying close attention to the intersection of politics, nationalism, and history-writing. Surprisingly, these narratives began to take form even before the occupation had ended; their basic outlines remain in tact today. The essay also pays attention to historians and others who dissented from their nation's respective narratives. It does not make claims about individual memory, nor does it analyze work by historians based outside Central Europe. Diverging interpretations of the past continue to inform relations between the Czech Republic and Germany, so the question of how to interpret and remember the events of 1939-1947 is crucial for understanding foreign relations in Central Europe. And yet there are signs that these two narratives are fragmenting, a process that could encourage Central Europeans to rethink what it means to be Czech, German, Sudeten German, and European.

## **Introduction**

Following the Munich agreement of October 1938 Nazi Germany annexed the predominantly German-inhabited Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Six months later, Hitler's troops moved on the rest of western Czechoslovakia. Slovakia became semi-independent, and Nazi officials in Prague established the so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, completing the dismemberment of Eastern Europe's last functioning democracy. For six long years Czechs endured daily insults to their national identity and individual dignity. They also lived in fear. In 1942 Nazi police murdered the entire male population of two Czech villages, Lidice and Ležaky, as revenge for the assassination of a top Nazi leader. Thousands of Czechs and Germans—resistance fighters, politicians, wisecracks, labor organizers, committed Communists, religious leaders, and even “innocents” wrongfully accused of anti-Nazi behavior—disappeared quietly in the night. Most people, however, quietly went about their lives.

Gentile Czechs and Sudeten Germans watched as Nazi officials and their minions registered, segregated, and then deported nearly 100,000 Jews to their death. Officials in Prague concocted plans—never realized—to expel half the Czech population to the “East” and to make the other half “German”; rumors of these plans filtered down to the population. In 1945, Hitler's troops retreated. Czech mobs set upon Germans, murdering thousands. Over the course of the two years, officials for the newly established Czechoslovak government marked ethnic Germans, rounded them up, confiscated their property, and forced them into trains headed for Germany—often using methods that bore a striking resemblance to those employed by the Nazis against the Jews.

By the end of 1947 Czechoslovakia had been “cleansed” of its three million Germans. This understanding of the events of 1938/9 to 1947—itsself produced by selecting certain facts

and weaving them into a narrative with judgments, meaning, and a peculiar understanding of the past—is hardly straight-forward and far from universally accepted. Indeed, two very different, seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of these events continue to divide Czechs and their former German neighbors. Both carefully constructed narratives emphasize a national “trauma,” which Frank Hadler calls “the collective experience, memory and reminders of suffering” of the nation that is “formulated and handed down, reflected upon, and criticized” by historians, other scholars, and patriots. The two traumas, besides uniting their respective ethnic groups and giving meaning to that group’s past, are pregnant with moral judgments and attempts at self-absolution. One emphasizes the occupation years to argue for the collective guilt of the rival group, thereby justifying postwar events. The other ignores the occupation years, emphasizing collective suffering among compatriots after 1945. The two traumas have been surgically removed from their historical contexts. Historians and others only rarely explore causal relationships strewn across the magical 1945 dividing line.

This brief essay examines how historians, political interest groups, governments, and the media have constructed these two competing understandings of the past, paying close attention to the intersection of politics, nationalism, and history-writing. Surprisingly, these narratives began to take form even before the occupation had ended; their basic outlines remain in tact today. The essay also pays attention to historians and others who dissented from their nation’s respective narratives. It does not make claims about individual memory, nor does it analyze work by historians based outside Central Europe. Diverging interpretations of the past continue to inform relations between the Czech Republic and Germany, so the question of how to interpret and remember the events of 1939-1947 is crucial for understanding foreign relations in Central Europe. And yet there are signs that these two narratives are fragmenting, a process that could

encourage Central Europeans to rethink what it means to be Czech, German, Sudeten German, and European.

Writing after the war, self-described Sudeten Germans made two traumas central to their collective narrative. The first trauma followed the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy, which as Friedrich Prinz writes, represented for Bohemian Germans a “decisive psychological caesura” with their past identity. “Fathers and mothers, villages and towns had become aimless. They had ceased to be Austrians and now wanted to become a Volk; if only their leaders would not fail!” Dr. Alfred Grimm, the co-founder of Czechoslovakia’s largest Sudeten German Catholic youth group, remembered in 1936. Intellectuals and other leaders answered the call, delimiting the group, naming it, and endowing it with a story that still resonates. (“Sudeten German” became the accepted term for Germans living within the borders of Czechoslovakia only after World War I.) Several themes in the group’s collective narrative, firmly established by writers in the interwar period, still run like a bright thread through the story: the Germans as “bearers of culture” to Bohemia and “outposts” on the edge of Germandom; a long, bitter struggle with the Czechs over economic, political, and cultural supremacy in Bohemia; and deep, organic connections to their local and timeless homeland, or Heimat. Histories emphasized perceived injustices suffered under Czech rule—perceived injustices that Konrad Henlein’s Sudeten German party, Munich, and annexation to Nazi Germany promised to correct.

The Vertreibung, which translates roughly as “expulsion,” became the second defining trauma of the Sudeten German narrative, even as millions of refugees continued to spill into the borders of occupied Germany from 1945 to 1947. Diaries, memoirs, and testimonials detailed for posterity the rapes, beatings, humiliations, forced marches, camps, and deportations that characterized the expulsion experience. In addition to helping individuals come to terms with

these horrible events, tales of collective trauma had many practical uses. The Committee for Refugee Affairs of the Regional Authority [Ausschuß für Flüchtlingswesen beim Landerrat] in Stuttgart, for example, hoped that such clear violations of human rights would improve Germany's position vis-à-vis the Allies. Other leaders hoped that tales of expulsion from Poland would force Allied leaders to question the legitimacy of the Oder-Niese line.

In 1950, one in every five West German inhabitants, or about eight million people, had arrived after World War II or had fled the Soviet-controlled zone. Memories of the expulsions, which flattened differences and emphasized common, collective suffering among Sudeten Germans, aided the integration of millions into larger German society. Sudeten German experiences fitted neatly into a larger narrative of German suffering that included losses on the front, POW camps, bombings, and dislocation. When West German authorities established a fund to support people for material losses suffered during the war—a fund that eventually paid out 140 billion Deutschmarks from 1949 to 1995—expellees gained a financial incentive to document their experiences.

From the 1950s until today tales of expulsion also distinguished Sudeten Germans and other expellees from their new German neighbors, preserving the Sudeten German identity. Heimatbücher, a genre of local history popular during the interwar period, served as constant reminders of lost homelands. Tales of expulsion also solidified the group's political power, especially in Bavaria. Memories of the expulsion gave moral legitimacy and political weight to organizations like the Bund der Vertriebenen [Association of Expellees], the Sudetendeutscher Landmannschaft, and the Sudetendeutscher Rat. Other expellee interest groups gathered behind common political beliefs; still more associations, like the Gemeinschaft Iglauer Sprachinsel, brought together former inhabitants of a particular region.

Historians, too, played their role in fixing the expulsions in Sudeten German, and German, memories. In 1951, the largest, and most politically potent, project of documenting the expulsions for posterity and politics began under the direction of historian Theodor Schieder. Funded by the newly established Ministry for Expellee Affairs in West Germany, the so-called “Ostdokumentation” project, using methods borrowed from social science fields such as sociology, gathered roughly eleven thousand testimonials from expellees who once inhabited Eastern Europe, including about 2,000 testimonials from Bohemia and Moravia. The result was five volumes and three Beihefte, the last of which was published in 1962. As Matthias Beer writes, political goals, voiced most vociferously by the members of the Ministry of Expellee Affairs, informed the project from the beginning.

The volumes, also published in English, combined scholarly analysis with gruesome first-person testimonies of the expulsions, thereby hoping to provoke sympathy abroad, especially among American leaders. Domestically, the volumes served to further underpin anti-Communism as a uniting ideology in West Germany and to integrate the expellees into society. It also sought to interpret and understand the events of 1945 to 1947 so that, as the authors wrote, “the unspeakable suffering of our generation will not remain entirely senseless.” As during the Weimar and Nazi era, historians wrote in the service of the nation and the state. Schieder, in fact, had come of age as a specialist in Eastern European Studies [Ostforschung] and had contributed knowledge used in the SS’s own population engineering during the war.

To condemn the project as a purely political, national endeavor would, however, be unfair. Schieder proposed extending the documentation project to include German life in Eastern Europe before the expulsions. Later, he envisioned a final volume that would place the expulsions within the context of other population movements and expulsions that plagued the



nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including those perpetrated by the Nazi regime. The projects' scholars could realize neither of these scholarly visions, however, thanks to intransigence from the Ministry for Expellee Affairs and intense press campaigns by expellee interest groups, which were also involved in the project. (For the two volumes on the Czechoslovak regions, the Sudeten German Archive in Munich carried out the task of collecting the testimonials. The Sudetendeutscher Rat also provided documentation.) Later historians, however, would take up Schieder's questions, laying the groundwork for a histories that placed the expulsions within the flow of history, exploring causal relationships criss-crossing the years from 1939 to 1947 and comparing varying cases of "ethnic cleansing" in modern Europe.

The project also laid the groundwork for what Beer calls a "modern, social-historical orientated contemporary history" that broke with the "national-political goals" of history-writing past. One of the project's young historians, Martin Broszat, later published path-breaking works on the Holocaust and the mechanics of Nazi rule. Another young member of the project, Hans Ulrich Wehler, established the highly influential Bielefeld school of social history. Instead of seeing Nazi rule as an aberration in Germany history, Wehler placed the regime within the long sweep of European and German history, arguing that Hitler's Germany was the product of a special path [Sonderweg] to modernity set out in the nineteenth century. Instead of building a nation, they and others of their generation launched a project of critiquing the whole nationalist project.

Beginning in the 1960s historians like Broszat and Wehler turned away from Eastern Europe, the Germans who inhabited it, Nazi rule in the East, and the expulsions. Eastern European specialists, decidedly anti-Communist and bound up with German national interests before and during World War II, reorientated for a post-expulsion, Cold War context. They, too,

ignored the occupation years in Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, the task of making sense of the expulsions fell to interest groups and a handful of research institutions “whose interpretations,” Rainer Ohliger writes, “ranged from serious historiography to those meant to justify a hagiography.” Scholarship, in other words, continued to mix with national interests and politics.

The Collegium Carolinum, founded in 1956 and supported by the Bavarian government, embodied this intertwining. As the concluding statement to the institution’s 1959 “discussion about the tasks of the CC” explained, the institution was to approach the study of Bohemian and its peoples with “a foundation in scholarship,” yet it was to keep in mind the “parts of the German nation [Volksteile] now in exile” and continue in the tradition of German institutions of learning such as the former Prague-German Charles University. The historical profession remains indebted to the work of many talented historians of Bohemia who worked at the Collegium Carolinum and elsewhere during the Cold War years. After the Prague Spring, the Collegium provided space and funding for many political exiles from Czechoslovakia to continue their work. The end of communism, as discussed below, inspired the Collegium to reorientate once again, much to the benefit of scholars from the Czech Republic and honest scholarship. Still, the shadow cast by Sudeten German interests has not entirely disappeared. The Collegium and its library still share building space with the Sudetendeutsche Landmannschaft, the Sudetendeutscher Rat, and other interest groups. In 1999 one of its own, Eva Hahn, published an article harshly accusing the Collegium of institutional isolation and of perpetuating German interests at the expense of scholarly ones. She was dismissed within months.

Thanks in large part to interest groups and specialists in Bohemian history, the traumas of 1918/1919 and the expulsion continued to dominate Sudeten German historical narratives through the end of the Cold War. Just as before, the Nazi occupation and war were rarely

mentioned, meaning that the expulsions remained outside of history. There still exists only one monograph on the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, a two-volume dissertation published by Detlef Brandes in 1969 and 1975. From 1960, the year of its founding, until 1980 the Collegium Carolinum's flagship journal, Bohemia, published only five articles directly addressing the years 1939 to 1945 in the Bohemian lands. Publications by the Sudetendeutscher Rat and other interest groups, too, almost never mentioned the occupation years in their stories, leaping over the six years of history from the Munich agreement to the expulsions.

When the occupation years were mentioned, common themes emerge: the supposed dominance of "Reich Germans" over the administration, Sudeten German casualties during the war, various forms of "resistance," and events surrounding the Social Democratic leadership that fled to London—still more instances of Sudeten German suffering and victimization. The racism and anti-democratic elements of Henlein's movement, the Gestapo informants, the high number of Sudeten Germans who willingly joined the Nazi party after 1938, prominent Sudeten Germans among the SS, the massacre of Czechs at Lidice and Ležaky in 1942, and the destruction of the Jews are left out. Few self-described Sudeten German writers and scholars of Bohemian history confronted difficult questions of responsibility for the events of 1939 to 1945. Few took part in the "working through the past" [Vergangenheitsbewältigung] that, since the 1960s, has dominated mainstream German history writing on the Nazi era.

For many Czechs, the "German trauma" that accompanied six long years of occupation is paramount. Instead of collective suffering, the narrative emphasizes collective German guilt. After the war, the *odsun*, which translates roughly as "coerced transfer," was seen not only as just retribution but necessary for domestic peace in the newly reconstituted Czechoslovakia and undertaken with the blessing of the Great Powers. Historians and other patriots placed the

transfer within the flow of Bohemian history, seeing it as the natural climax to centuries of struggle between two homogenous nations. Yet the transfer itself remained unstudied and little discussed; only its justifications—along with isolated acts of Czech heroism during the occupation—received attention.

The dominant Czech narrative of the occupation years began to take shape before the war had ended. Propaganda produced by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile based in London repeated a number of themes: the injustice of the Munich agreement, Czech resistance to Nazi rule, and the occupiers' barbarism, as witnessed in Lidice and Ležaky massacres. After Lidice, President-in-exile Edvard Beneš and his government forged another theme: German guilt. In the early years of the occupation, resistance fighters were almost in alone in calling for the expulsion of each and every German from any postwar Czechoslovakia. After Lidice, collective guilt, retribution, and a Czech nationalism radicalized by six long years of occupation came together in Beneš's mind and in official Czechoslovak policy. "The German nation has committed offenses unlike any other [nation] in the world," Beneš told his countrymen in an address broadcast on the BBC in 1944. "The German nation therefore deserves punishment and the German nation and state will receive punishment. And with it all of those who helped [the German nation]." "I know that there are decent Germans," one of his cabinet members, Prokop Drtina, told his listeners after the Lidice massacres, "but it is not within the power of humans to separate out Nazism from the German nation." In December, 1943 Beneš traveled to Moscow and obtained from Stalin vague support for the Czechoslovak government's evolving expulsion plans. Czechoslovak Communists based in Moscow took the cue. For the next few years, no party's anti-German stance was more radical than the Communists'.

Thus, the most horrific aspects of the occupation years served the cause of establishing collective German guilt and the necessity of the transfer. While the government registered, segregated, and then deported Czechoslovakia's Germans, mythmakers, often with the help of graphic images, fixed the massacres at Lidice and other forms of German/Nazi terror into popular memory. Other publications reminded Czechs of the petty insults they had to endure, the German/Nazi attacks on Czech culture, economic exploitation, Gestapo arrests and torture, and the fact that in 1938 the vast majority of Sudeten Germans had voted for Henlein's party, and by extension everything that followed. The transfer also helped to make sense of the occupation years and the transfer. Long before the occupation, Czech patriots portrayed the long history of the region as a continuous struggle between two homogenous nations. Now professional scholars, publicists, and politicians reworked old themes and introduced a conclusion to the story. The transfer promised to redress crimes that stretched back to the Habsburg defeat of supposedly Czech nobles at White Mountain in 1620, which, in Czech historical memory, initiated three hundred years of German dominance and Czech cultural darkness. The transfer promised to prevent another Munich and protect European geopolitical stability. With the transfer, one pamphlet written for a Western audience claimed, "The Czech nation desires to ensure the future of its race by clearing all alien elements from its soil and converting its State into an ethnically homogenous and uniform one."

The narrative was not uniformly accepted, of course. Under postwar, democratic Czechoslovakia, voices of dissent could still be heard. Journalists, social scientists worried about the numeric strength of the nation, concerned citizens, and family members protested the transfer of Germans married to Czechs. Retribution trials reminded Czechs that not only Germans bore responsibility for the horrors of the occupation. At the Second Congress of Czechoslovak

historians in 1947 at least one participant raised the issue of Czech atrocities committed against Germans immediately after liberation. Historians debated the extent and nature of German influence on Czech culture and history. A generation of historians determined to write history in the service of “life,” the present, and the Czechoslovak state dominated the meeting, but echoes of the 1930s Gollist school, who emphasized positivism and a more objective, scientific approach to history writing, could still be heard.

All that changed after the Communist coup of 1948. “Stalinism broke upon Eastern Europe in full force,” John Connelly writes, “and state harassment poured down on universities, in a continuous hail of decrees, pronouncements, and public threats, all eroding freedoms of teaching and research. Students and professors received instructions for every minute of the day: what books to read and write, which classes to attend and teach, and ‘invitations’ to after-school ‘production discussions’ or rallies that lasted deep into the night.” The Communist Party, “with its separate idioms, values, and regulated hierarchies,” dominated the university. Hundreds of professors were purged, replaced by unqualified party loyalists. Like the rest of society, university life “became subject to centralization, planning, and collective methods of work,” Antonín Kostlán observes.

History writing, especially writing on the politically sensitive years 1938-1948, became uniform as well. The template was largely the work of Zdeněk Nejedlý, a respected Communist historian who served as the Minister of Education from 1945 to 1946 and again from 1948 to 1953. Along with the demagogic Minister of Information Václav Kopecký, Nejedlý’s history wove socialism into the long *durée* view of Czech history, incorporating heroes such as Jan Hus and his loyal warrior Jan Žižka into a master narrative that portrayed the Czechs as innately democratic, egalitarians, and courageous. Like the great nineteenth century history and “father of

the nation” František Palacký, Nejedlý wove Czech-German interaction and rivalry into the very fabric of Czech history. Certain periods such as the counter-reformation and the enlightenment disappeared from the narrative and hence became taboo for historians, as did certain important persona like Tomáš Masaryk. Work on politically potent topics such as the Nazi occupation emphasized the activities of Communist partisans, the heroic role of the Soviet Union, and the 1945 uprisings. Everything else, including the transfer and the Holocaust, remained taboo, and few historians trod this forbidden ground. Until Stalin’s death historians served the ideological goal of linking Nazism with the West Germany and the West. Only after 1956 do historians appear to have returned to establishing collective German guilt for the occupation-era atrocities. The subject of official Czech anti-German propaganda during the years 1948 to 1961, and its success in legitimizing Communist rule, awaits a serious scholarly study. But there is little doubt that historians and propagandists successfully maintained the illusion of “battling” the Germans, and by extension the West, even after few Germans remained in Czechoslovakia. History, indeed, was written in the service of the new state and its ideology.

More serious and thoughtful scholarship on the occupation years began to emerge in the 1960s with the gradual liberalization of the academy. Thanks to innovative journals such as Historie a vojenství and Odboj a revoluce, the historical profession, like cultural life in Czechoslovakia, experienced a brief flowering. Some historians dared to challenge the Marxist paradigm. In 1966 Josef Macek, head of the Historical Institute of the Academy of Sciences, urged the historical profession to experiment with new methods and to address ignored topics. For the first time since 1948, historians gave serious attention to previously forbidden topics such as the non-Communist resistance and Beneš’s Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London. Outside of Prague, local historians provided textured depictions of life under Nazi rule

that went beyond formulaic accounts of resistance, industrial sabotage, and liberation. Soon after the Soviet invasion, however, the new regime expelled one out of every three professional historians from their posts, replaced every single director within the Czech section of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences by 1970, and assigned secret police watchdogs to anyone “thrown out” who did not flee abroad. Other scholars, like Macek, could still conduct research but were expelled from the Party, demoted and, for the most part, silenced. A new, but softer, era of ideological control over the profession had begun.

During post-1968 “normalization” scholarship once again became subject to a command system run by Party hacks, bureaucrats, and loyalist historians. Once again, topics such as the Holocaust and the transfer became taboo. “We do not accept everything from history,” Jaroslav Purš, director of the Academy of Czechoslovak and World History declared. “We do not drink water from impure sources, but carefully filter and purify it, so we also do not draw from the past everything we know about it.” Ideological conformity was far from total, however. The “Right to History” became a rallying cry among the emerging dissident movement of the 1970s. Václav Havel, the movement’s most prominent and elegant voice, explained why:

“In our country one has the impression that for some time there has been no history.... We begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really doesn’t matter overwhelms us....Everything merges into a single gray image of one and the same cycle and we say ‘There is really nothing happening.’”

Dissident historians and non-historians alike contributed essays to underground journals such as Historické studie (Historical Studies), which published twenty-six volumes from 1978 to 1989. Admirable works of history also emerged from “niches” and “gray zones” that survived outside of the most prominent institutes and university departments in Prague. Far away in Opava, researchers at the Silesian Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences embraced



social historical methods, producing a number of impressive studies about economic development in the Silesia during the occupation. From his position in the Comenský Pedagogical Museum in Prague, Tomáš Pasák completed his bibliography of occupation-era media and quietly conducted research on Czech collaboration—work that only saw the light of day after 1989. Among historians of the grey zone, document collections became a popular method of publishing provocative materials. Historians of the gray zone tended toward a positivistic approach last heard from in 1948; dissidents—who rarely had access to archives—attempted to be provocative. (Some of the liveliest debates among the dissidents surrounded a number of essays questioning the morality of the transfer.)

After the fall of Communist rule, much changed and much stayed the same in Czechoslovakia, and then, beginning in 1993, the Czech Republic. A handful of prominent historians returned from exile. Many of the most notorious “normalizers” quietly retired, while many historians from the “gray zone” remained. Research centers like the Institute for Contemporary History set as their goal the study of events long suppressed or misinterpreted under Communism. Historians throughout the Czechlands, and especially historians of the occupation years, rushed to “make up for lost time” and to fill “empty spaces” left blank by decades of Communist rule. New examinations of resistance movements complemented groundbreaking studies on collaboration. Previously ignored topics such as culture, university life, and the fate of Czechoslovakia’s Jews and so-called Gypsies became the subject of recent studies. More general works on the Protectorate greatly enhanced our understanding of high politics and the structures of state rule. Local studies again detailed the functioning of Nazi rule at the regional level while providing glimpses at life under occupation.

Yet, as historian Jan Gebhart wrote in 2002, “the most keenly felt lack [in Czech historiography] ... is due the absence of an overall treatment of the years of war and occupation, which has not been forthcoming even with the radical change in the regime, the removal of ideological pressures, and the opening up of archival sources.” More to the point, Czech-language histories of the Protectorate and the Sudetengau have tended to emphasize the gathering of information over analysis. Few studies have looked beyond Bohemia to place the occupied Czech lands within the context of Nazi-occupied Europe; few, too, have engaged arguments, concepts, and theories outside of their immediate field, largely ignoring the well developed German-language literature on Nazism and even influential Czech-language studies of nationalism. Empiricism, or what Czech historians refer to as the “factographical” [faktografický] approach, remained paramount. In his review of Pasák’s monumental work on Czech fascism and collaboration, Bedřich Lowenstein expressed a common criticism:

This comprehensive discussion on Czech fascism was written mostly under Communist rule and could not be published until after the changes of the régime. It unfortunately fails to meet many of the demands of the contemporary critical history writing. The author, the late Tomáš Pasák, has not surpassed the simple approach of providing a chronicle of events, ignored the discussions on fascism which went on elsewhere in the world, and has not asked the basic questions. In terms of interpretation, this study does not provide anything new.

Finally, the transfer has until recently only received scant scholarly attention, the impressive work of Tomáš Staněk constituting an important exception. Although several historians explored how Nazi rule laid the groundwork for the establishment of Communist rule in Czechoslovakia, no one examined in detail the causal relationships between the occupation years and the transfer. Politicians often cannot resist repeating old parables. In 2002 conservative German and Austrian demanded that the Czech Republic repeal the so-called Beneš decrees, under which so-called organized transfer took place, in return for membership in the European

Union. The Chamber of Deputies in Prague responded by passing, unanimously, a resolution crafted by all political parties that reaffirmed the Beneš decrees. Unlike in Poland, there has been comparatively little debate in the Czech Republic about the meaning and morality of the transfer.

Change and continuity also characterized developments on the other side of the former iron curtain. With the end of Communism German historians of Nazi rule and the Holocaust rushed to Poland and lands eastwards, and for good reason. More than half of the Jews murdered by the Nazis lived the lands of pre-1939 Poland. The most notorious death camps, such as Auschwitz, were located in the Nazis' "East." Drawing from newly available archival material, these mostly German-speaking historians have unearthed a remarkable amount of empirical material to recast our understanding of Nazi rule in the East. While some authors have focused on experiences among the subject populations, most examined the role that military, party, SS and other Nazi officials in Europe's peripheries had in the creation of Jewish policy in Berlin, the murder of the Jews in the "East," and atrocities committed against local populations. Alongside detailed studies of various perpetrators, historians are now beginning to examine Nazi attitudes toward the Slavs as well as the planners, racial experts, and academics who studied, sorted, and in some cases moved whole populations. The sum of this literature, along with works on Nazi economic theories and policies, has transformed how historians think about the development and implementation of Nazi plans to kill every Jew in Europe. They have suggested causal linkages among Nazi expulsion and resettlement plans for ethnic Germans, Poles, and Jews. The new studies have greatly contributed to a new, continent-wide understanding of Nazi rule in Europe.

Another related outpouring of studies have compared and linked the post-World War expulsions from Eastern Europe to other instances of "population engineering" and forced

resettlement in Europe's history. Nazi plans for population engineering and the post war expulsions are placed within the flow of a modernizing Europe, a process that continued in Yugoslavia in the 1990s. Phillipp Ther, for example, has written groundbreaking work showing how "the specific interaction of the growth of modern states with the development of the idea of the 'nation' created the preconditions for the cleansing of minorities." "Central and homogenizing" state policies, he concludes, then worked to make nations while transforming "nationalism from an abstract ideology into a social reality." The wars in Yugoslavia no doubt served as an impetus for such studies, whose authors suggested that "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans was not the product of "ancient hatreds" but the culmination of modern, European forces. The studies owed a great intellectual debt to Ernest Gellner, Zygmunt Baumann and James Scott, who analyzed the many ways that states have made nations through assimilation and violence. In other ways, the literature picked up where Scheider and the Ost-Dokumentation project ended.

Both outpourings of new research have forced historians of Germany and "East European studies" to rethink their approaches to the study of German minorities, the flight and expulsion of Germans from the East, and German imperial "reaches" into the region. For the first time, historians have suggested causal relationships between the war/occupation and the postwar expulsions. At the same time, the social historical paradigm has undergone withering challenges from a number of competing methodological approaches—the history of experience and everyday life, consumption, gender studies, the "cultural turn," and others. Many historians openly question the possibility of having one German narrative; many narratives seem more realistic, and palatable. Other historians, such as Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer, argue for a master narrative that emphasizes ruptures, not continuities, "shifting the narrative frame from a

history of Germany to the histories of Germans as people.” Similarly, the discourse of German guilt for the evils of World War II, so carefully constructed beginning in the 1960s, has been challenged anew, thanks in no small part to the historians’ rediscovery of Eastern European German minorities and the postwar expulsions. The atmosphere became especially charged in 2002 following the intra-Central European debate over the Beneš decrees. That same year Günter Grass published his novel Crabwalk, in which the left-leaning novelist used the Soviet sinking of a German ship overloaded with 10,000 fleeing Germans to ruminate the on issues of German guilt and innocence, Germans as perpetrators and Germans as victims. Then controversy erupted over a project initiated by the Association of Expellees.

Like the Sudetendeutsche Landmannschaft, the Association of Expellees remains determined to emphasize collective suffering and collective victimization and to ignore crimes committed under Nazi occupation. Their membership is still strong—50,000 people attended the Landmannschaft’s “Sudeten German days” celebration in Augsburg this year— and the organizations still throw their political weight around. In June 2000 the Association officially proposed that a Center against Expulsions be built in Berlin with government support. The Center, as conceived by a foundation created by the Association, was meant to be research center and a monument to the expellees’ suffering, an interpretation that relies on a cheap comparison of similarity with other instances of forced migration and resettlement in world history. As usual, the expulsions are stripped from their historical context; links with the occupation era are deliberately ignored. The Center, Association President and Christian Democratic Union (CDU) Bundestag member Erika Steinbach declared, deserved to be near Berlin’s Holocaust memorial so that the themes of Jewish and German suffering “will augment each other.”

When legislators took up the issue of the Center's construction in Berlin, controversy erupted in Germany. Several questions swirled in the air. Are these events moral equivalents? Will the Jewish Holocaust lose its central place within the moral narrative of German history? Are ethnic Germans less or more guilty than Germans who lived in Germany? Did ethnic Germans have human rights? Is Europe, as Thomas Sundhausen provocatively asked, not more a more peaceful place because of the expulsions? Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer warned against a "perpetrator-victim reversal" in German self perception. They expressed the same fears to the Süddeutsche Zeitung, adding that the Center could damage relations with Germany's neighbors. Czech and Polish publicists attacked the proposal; a declaration signed by 116 Central European scholars published in Lidové noviny and Gazeta Wyborcza warned that the Center would discourage "critical, pluralistic, and enlightened discourse" while providing a state-sanctioned reinterpretation of the past." Voices of compromise suggested that the Center be in Poland, the Czech Republic, the point where the three countries meet, and Sarajevo. Others have suggested that only a "European" research center, not a museum, be constructed. The issue has not disappeared. In August 2005 Angela Merkel, who will almost certainly be Germany's next chancellor, declared her support for the Center, provoking an angry response from Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski.

The Czech and Sudeten German narratives have proven remarkably resilient; the traumas remain central to each group's collective imagination; causal relationships between the occupation years and the expulsions remain unexplored. If causal links were drawn, simplistic tales of guilt and suffering would quickly collapse. Hence, the traumas remain separated, removed from the flow of history. And yet the ground has never been more fertile for the study of the years 1939-1947 in Central and East-Central Europe. Since 1990 the Czech and German

governments have signed several documents expressing mutual regret and asking forgiveness of each other for the events of 1939 to 1947. Individuals and localities have made small gestures toward reconciliation. Within academia collaboration across borders has rarely, if ever, been more active. The Czech-German and Slovak-German Historians' Commissions, offspring of a larger Czechoslovak-German Commission established in 1990, have to this day held seventeen international conferences, published more than a dozen edited volumes, and supported numerous workshops, seminars, and grants for young scholars. Consisting of many of the region's most well-respected historians, the Commission's stated goal has been to study "the common history of the nations of both lands." If the Commission's latest volume of collected essays, penned predominately by younger scholars, is any indication, a "common history" is far from imaginable. This, however, is one of the volume's greatest strengths. The authors, pursuing their own research questions and relying on scholarship beyond their respective national contexts, speak not at Germans or Czechs, but as historians.

Meanwhile, respective "empty spaces" are slowly being filled. Two excellent works on everyday life and politics in the Nazi Sudetengau have appeared. From 1989 to 2003 Bohemia has published twelve articles dealing with the years 1939-1945 in the Bohemian lands. New studies of the expulsion/transfer eschew overt moralizing to provide new perspectives, for example, on how the expulsions transformed local economies and populations in postwar Czechoslovakia. A bibliography published on the Collegium Carolinum's website lists 110 Czech-language books and articles and 65 dissertations and masters' theses on the "Vertriebung und Ausseidlung" [expulsion and evacuation/resettlement] that have appeared since 1989. A bright line still separates most works on the expulsion/transfer from the occupation years, but that border is finally being crossed. Recent works in both languages have examined the

development of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile's expulsion plans, the radicalizing effect that the domestic resistance had on those plans, and how the collapse of the Nazi regime created the necessary conditions for the "wild transfer" of 1945.

In her contribution to a discussion forum hosted by the Collegium in 1994, Christiane Brenner argued that lines of continuity reaching back to the nineteenth century, when historians consciously worked to construct closed and all-encompassing national visions of the past, should be severed. "The renunciation of this mission is, in my view, is not a loss," argued Brenner, who has been editor of Bohemia since 1999. "Rather, [this renunciation] means that candor and autonomy will benefit." Taking aim at the Czech-German Historical Commission, political scientist Bohumil Doležal has recently argued that honest, critical history can also be national history. Beware, he writes, of any "common history" that consists of mutual exculpations in which "Czech understand that the transfer meant a whole array of sufferings for the transferred. The transferred understand in return that Czechs could not have done otherwise." This "deformity," he concludes, is not in the national interest: "only a just and correct grasp of the lapses and offences of the past will guard against their repetition in the future." Will historians delve further into the study of causal links between the occupation years and the expulsion/transfer, or will these symbolically potent national traumas continue to be isolated from each other? To what extent will politics and national imagination will continue to contour scholarship? Will historians continue to write to and for the nation? No clear answers are emerging, yet there is no doubt that the field has changed a great deal in the last few years. It is certain, too, that historians will continue to shape how Central Europeans understand their past, and that their activities should concern anyone interested in the region's present.