



Manfred Kittel. *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen? Der historische deutsche Osten in der Erinnerungskultur der Bundesrepublik (1961-1982).* Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2007. 220 pp. EUR 39.80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-486-58087-7.



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Published on H-German (December, 2008)

Commissioned by Susan R. Boettcher

Take Only Memories

Manfred Kittel wastes no time answering the title question of his contribution to the *Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*. Far more than question whether or not the German presence in eastern Europe has been expelled from public history and memory in the FRG, Kittel interrogates the extent to which West German political parties and media actively promoted this second expulsion. Kittel uses party and governmental records, as well as published material from major German media outlets and the Deutsche Ostdienst (DOD), to argue that any potential public interest in preserving the culture of eastern European Germans fell victim to the primacy of foreign policy concerns in the 1960s and 1970s.

After briefly outlining the parameters of his study in chapter 1, Kittel breaks down the key decades of the expellees' expulsion from public memory chronologically, beginning in chapter 2 with a discussion of how the second Berlin crisis reshaped public dialogue about Eastern Europe. While acknowledging that the West lauded the expellees' successful integration, Kittel argues that jour-

nalists, scholars, and politicians alike also overtly linked eastern European Germans with the *Großdeutsche* foreign policy that epitomized the worst excesses of the National Socialist regime. Chapter 3 blames West German press, radio, and television for overemphasizing such arguments by insinuating that eastern European Germans were particularly supportive of National Socialist ideologies, and depicting the 1945-46 expulsions as understandable—if regrettably violent—punishment for Nazi occupation policies in eastern Europe.

The next three chapters explore the vital consequences of such public associations between eastern German culture and National Socialism. Thus, chapter 4 argues that such widespread stereotyping undermined efforts—led by the Bund deutscher Vertriebenen (BdV)—to prosecute expulsion-related crimes, while chapter 5 documents how all three major political parties (CDU, FDP, and SPD) increasingly distanced themselves from expellee advocacy during the 1960s. Chapter 6 shows how the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* further decreased historical awareness of a German presence in eastern Eu-

rope; Kittel suggests that the law decentralized cultural preservation efforts and stripped international cultural exchanges of potentially controversial political content.

Having shown cultural consciousness and public memory as under assault from all sides, Kittel's summation of *Ostpolitik* as a critical moment in the expellees' expulsion from history comes as no surprise. Nonetheless, chapter 7 offers a most nuanced explanation of the multiple factors and actors shaping West Germany's silencing of expellee history. Demonstrating his great facility with a wide variety of print sources, Kittel recreates an era in which superpower interests dominated German federal policy, media outlets, and party discourse, and against which BdV protests were futile. Kittel does acknowledge a vibrant debate about cultural preservation in Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia, but does not explore this discourse in detail, leaving it perhaps for future research on the nature of historical memory on the local level.

Chapters 8-10 argue that the *Ostpolitik* initiative paved the way for a multifaceted, if not necessarily coordinated, collective suppression of expellee memory and culture in the 1970s. For example, just as the federal printing office delayed reprinting its 1958 report on the expulsions, the Bundeswehr removed eastern German melodies from its songbook, and the Bundesbahn dropped German place names from train schedules. Although Kittel notes exceptions to this trend in Bavaria and North Rhine-Westphalia, his argument is clear: local, regional, and national policymakers together cleansed public references to a German presence in Eastern Europe prior to the National Socialist period. Academics and journalists did nothing to counter these actions, Kittel argues, instead accepting—and sometimes even legitimizing—the “ghettoization” of East European German culture.[1]

Summarizing his analysis in chapter 11, Kittel asserts that the gradual repression of expellee culture went well beyond a pragmatic acceptance of Cold War era for-

eign policy interests. Having ceded territorial claims, the Federal Republic went on to deny the expellees' cultural heritage and collective identity, effectively purging Germanic influences from academic and public histories of eastern Europe and thus sanitizing, rather than learning from, the past.

Overall, Kittel is quite convincing, particularly in chapter 7, where, as noted above, he intertwines regional and national discourses. At times, however, the very solidity of his argument can be somewhat disconcerting. West German media, educational authorities, and public opinion appear to be little more than passive objects of a federal government compelled to accommodate its Cold War protectors. In short, the primacy of foreign policy seems absolute and essentially unchallenged, not only at the level of national politics, but even within public discourse. Were there no attempts to characterize the expellees as one of numerous landless populations in post-war Europe? Were there no exceptions to the anti-BdV editorials printed in the national press? Can the statements of the Deutsche Ostdienst be accepted as even-handed evaluations of public opinion?

A clearer rationale for source selection, and perhaps a more thorough explanation of interpretative methodology might well justify an argument that seems a bit overstated at times. That said, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen?* is one of a small, but very welcome body of works that push beyond the economic fate of the expellees to consider more hidden, significant questions of cultural and historical identity. Kittel's book certainly demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the expellees' postwar struggle for identity and cultural recognition.

Note

[1]. Rex RexhÄuser, “Das Bild des Nachkriegslagers in Lamsdorf im kollektiven GedÄchtnis der Deutschen,” *Zeitschrift fÄr Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 50 (2001): 71, quoted by Kittel, 167.

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Citation: Kimberly Redding. Review of Kittel, Manfred, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen? Der historische deutsche Osten in der Erinnerungskultur der Bundesrepublik (1961-1982)*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. December, 2008.

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