

Zitierhinweis

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Michael Fleming: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnicity in Poland, 1944-50. (Bases/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies, Bd. 58.) Routledge. London – New York 2010. XVII, 199 S. ISBN 978-0-415-47651-5. (109,99 €.)

Drawing on recent studies such as Padraic Kenney's *Rebuilding Poland*¹ and Jan Gross's *Fear*², Michael Fleming offers the latest proof that communist rule in Poland relied heavily upon preexisting xenophobic tropes and nationality policies as a way to consolidate power in a postwar environment of exacerbated ethnic hatred. Inherently unpopular in Poland and imposed by Soviet occupiers, the communist system in Poland attained control only by sponsoring the most extreme nationalist goal: an ethnically cleansed, homogenous Polish nation-state established primarily at German expense on western, often industrialized spaces.

By highlighting the communist-nationalist symbiosis that characterized the immediate postwar regime, F.s work takes on the deeply influential nationalist mythologies which the communists and their academic, often nationalist adherents upheld through most of the Cold War (and even recently). While recognizing that Soviet and Polish communist terror coerced Poles to support the new regime, F. demonstrates that the communist party attained "sufficient consent" from the people to maintain its power "through the manipulation of nationality policy, national myths and tropes, and the linking of land reform to the new national and territorial configuration" (p. 1). It was a process which F. traces back to 1935, when, to appear relevant in public opinion, the interwar communists started to adopt xenophobic slogans persecuting national minorities. The communists' utilitarian shift from tolerance to nationalism only increased amid the ethnic cleansing and border shifts at the end of World War II, when "through the drive to national homogeneity, and nationality policy more generally, the communists were able to secure sufficient acquiescence from Polish society to enable them to move forward with their social, political and economic programmes" (p. 2).

After establishing this contextual basis, the heart of F.s book is the third chapter, which convincingly demonstrates that the communist party obtained popular support by directing social anger against the most helpless and despised targets: national minorities. In an end-note, he adds a useful assessment of how the state then used the creation of "non-people" in Polish territory to persecute its political opponents on the grounds that they were un-Polish (p. 75, note 74) – a development that could have received more treatment. The fourth chapter outlines how the repressive structures of the early communist and Stalinist states were directed against national minorities, notably Jews, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Germans, and "autochthonous" populations. Here the author summarizes specific violent actions against the various groups. The fifth chapter ties in the role of the Polish Catholic Church, which before the onset of state persecution in 1947 gave substantial support to the nationalist (and communist) line from the party. This was due in large part to its acquisition of formerly German church properties and its alienation from the Vatican, which had opposed the postwar border revisions and ethnic cleansing of indigenous populations, notably Germans (p. 101). Thus in the crucial, immediate postwar period, though the church sought to "outflank" the communists through appeals to the Right, "the result was merely to align itself with the PPR nationality policy and to foster an illiberality in the political culture of which the PPR was the chief beneficiary" (p. 108). Perhaps most original is F.s inclusion in chapter six of two forgotten incidents in postwar Polish nationalities policy: the attempt to bring "home" proletarians of Polish descent who had settled in Germany's Westphalian industrial area before the war and the integration of Greek refugees from the

¹ PADRAIC KENNEY: *Rebuilding Poland. Workers and Communists, 1945-1950*, Ithaca u.a. 1997.

² JAN T. GROSS: *Fear. Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz. An Essay in Historical Interpretation*, Princeton 2006

Greek civil war in the depopulated border town of Zgorzelec, both of which the author contends demonstrate that Polish nationalism had softened from a policy of exclusion into one of assimilation. Nonetheless, that minorities such as largely assimilated Polish Jews continued to face exclusion and attacks over the coming decades should give caution to over-emphasizing the notion that Polish exclusionary nationalism lessened, not least because assimilationist and exclusionary nationalism tend to coexist and anticipate each other (if one assimilates, one may not be excluded, and vice-versa). More convincingly, the two incidents reveal that the early communist state at times moved beyond purely nationalist objectives when prompted by practical considerations (a worker shortage and the need to support communist-bloc causes)– a hardly surprising trend that increased in the Stalinist period.

The biggest shortcoming of F.s work is its assertion that it is doing something particularly new. While alluding to the work of Krystyna Kersten³ and relying heavily on Kenney and Gross, the author fails to sufficiently acknowledge the fact that his core argument – the communist appeal to nationalist slogans to attain real popular support – has already been made convincingly in this previous scholarship. Among others, T. David Curp⁴ has also shown that prewar border regions, such as in the Great Poland area around Poznań, proved especially susceptible to the nationalist tendencies explicit in the communist regime; legacies of hatred against Germans and postwar ethnic cleansing in adjacent German territories prompted Poles in the region to actively partner with the new regime to build the new state. Such regional distinctions are missing. It is also surprising that the leading rightwing nationalist movement which the communists co-opted – the highly popular, anti-German interwar *Endecja* platform – is hardly mentioned in the book, along with the many *Endecja* scholars whose outlook was transferred to the new regime. This too would have furthered the author's position that the communists were tapping into nationalist xenophobia by identifying that xenophobia's longer history.

Finally, it is peculiar that F. weakens his own argument by questioning Jan Gross's recent findings about continuities in postwar Polish antisemitism. Asserting that many Poles helped Jews and that other minorities (such as Germans) were also attacked, he accuses Gross of detaching Polish antisemitism from its historical context (61, 143). The fact that some Poles sheltered Germans in ethnically "cleansed" places like Lower Silesia does not prove that the regime failed to gain support from the majority through xenophobic attacks (and so it builds F.s argument). Furthermore, state support for prevalent attacks against multiple minorities fails to overturn arguments about the specific post-Holocaust Polish "fear" of Jews; rather, it demonstrates that the state was falling back on multiple xenophobic mythologies (most of which had prewar and wartime roots) to rally popular support in the aftermath of Polish suffering during World War II, regardless of whether targeted groups could be collectively condemned as "perpetrators" (especially Germans) or, as Gross argues, symptoms of Polish guilt. Though rooted in differing strands of nationalist paranoia, the plundering and violence could often look much the same, and it tended to receive comparable state support.

In the end, F.s book should be welcomed as another corrective to the longstanding presumption that Poles were passive victims of communism. Backing up what might be called a growing scholarly consensus, F. proves that many strata of Polish society which later resisted the regime – workers, nationalists, and the Catholic church – actively promoted the new state in the name of nationalism and ethnic cleansing in the early postwar era. While the text may be more appropriate for experts rather than beginners (as it presumes much

³ KRYSZYNA KERSTEN: *The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland 1943-1948*, Berkeley u.a. 1991.

⁴ T. DAVID CURP: *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960*, Rochester/NY 2006.

preceding contextual knowledge), the bibliography could be used as an introduction to selected English and Polish-language literature on nationalism, communism, and population displacement in Poland.

Birmingham/AL

Andrew Demshuk

Katja Hartleb: Flucht und Vertreibung. Ein Tabu-Thema in der DDR-Literatur? Tecum-Verl. Marburg 2011. 138 Seiten. ISBN 978-3-8288-2490-4. (€ 24,50.)

Hat man noch im Ohr, wie Deutschlands prominentester Kritiker Marcel Reich-Ranicki ein „schrreckliches Buch“ in den Orkus zu verbannen pflegte, das nicht nach seinem Geschmack war? Um Geschmacksurteile darf es nicht gehen, wenn ein wissenschaftlicher Text zu beurteilen ist. Falls es sich dabei um eine Graduiierungsarbeit handelt, sollte die Rezensentin davon ausgehen können, dass der sachkundige Gutachter darüber befunden hat, ob die eingereichte Arbeit inhaltlich und formal den üblichen Kriterien entsprochen hat – nämlich (angeleitet von einem fachkundigen Betreuer) einen wissenschaftlichen Beitrag zu leisten, der sowohl bezüglich des Erkenntniszugewinns als auch der Formalien den Normen für wissenschaftliche Arbeiten entspricht. Mit solcher (auch im Interesse der Reputation unseres Faches wünschenswerten) Sorgfalt scheint es nicht nur die Verfasserin nicht genau genommen zu haben. So lautet meine Empfehlung an die potenziellen Leser: Sparen Sie Zeit und Geld, indem sie die Originale anstelle von Paraphrasen lesen! Ein solches Urteil erscheint unangemessen hart. Ich will es begründen:

Seit Helbig's verdienstvoller Schrift von 1988¹ sind zu dem Thema „Flucht und Vertreibung“ so viele Konferenzen veranstaltet, Bücher veröffentlicht worden, dass es schon eine Herausforderung darstellt, den Forschungsstand zu diesem Gegenstand zu überblicken (dabei beziehe ich ausdrücklich Publikationen aus den Vertreibungsländern ein). Diese Tatsache nicht zu reflektieren, erscheint mir vor allem anderen problematisch. Das Thema verlangt eine ebensolche Informiertheit über einschlägige politikwissenschaftliche und historische Publikationen zu diesem Gebiet. Konzidiert man, dass kaum jemand alle diese Publikationen kennen oder lesen kann, so erwartet man doch, dass eine repräsentative Auswahl getroffen und begründet wird. Der Anspruch, einen Abriss zu Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte der SBZ- bzw. DDR-Literatur auf rund zwanzig Seiten zu geben, kann nur zur Ansammlung von Allgemeinplätzen führen, die nicht eigener Überlegung entspringen, sondern kanonisierte Fachtexte paraphrasieren. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Mechanismen des Erinnerns bringt weitere Wissenschaftsdisziplinen ins Spiel – ob das sinnvoll ist, sollte sich dann an den exemplarischen Interpretationen zeigen. Ich meine: Der Nutzen ist marginal und dem Aufwand nicht angemessen.

Mit einiger Ungeduld kommt der Leser schließlich auf S. 63 dort an, worauf ihn der Titel des Bandes neugierig gemacht hat: bei den fiktionalen Texten. Für die Untersuchung ausgewählt wurden *Der Hirt* von Erik Neutsch, *Herr Müller, diesseits und jenseits der Oder* von Günter de Bruyn, *Vorgeschichte oder Schöne Gegend Probststein* von Helga Schütz und *Wir sind keine Kinder mehr* (der zweite Band von Ursula Höntschs unvollendeter Flüchtlingstrilogie). Man kann diese (wie jede) Textauswahl akzeptieren oder kritisieren – sie wird immerhin im abschließenden Vergleich zu begründen versucht. Zu allen Texten liegen bereits zahlreiche Interpretationen vor – auch solche unter dem Aspekt „Darstellung von Flucht und Vertreibung“. Sich mit diesen Interpretationen auseinanderzusetzen wäre wünschenswert gewesen – und sinnvoller jedenfalls als die ermüdenden Paraphrasen auf den ersten 60 Seiten. Der Diskurs findet leider nicht statt. Stattdessen wird die *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie* von Matías Martínez und Michael Scheffel als Raster

¹ LOUIS FERDINAND HELBIG: *Der ungeheure Verlust. Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschsprachigen Belletristik der Nachkriegszeit*, Wiesbaden 1988 (Studien der Forschungsstelle Ostmitteleuropa an der Universität Dortmund, 3).