Spurný, Matěj: Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945-1960) [They are not like us: Czech society and minorities in the borderlands (1945-1960)].

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Matěj Spurný is one of a handful of bold, young historian-activists who have reconsidered the history and legacy of the expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans after World War II. Spurný's latest book, "Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí", is an impressive work of engaged academic history that carefully considers the treatment of minorities in Czechoslovakia both before and after the establishment of a Communist dictatorship in 1948. Spurný uses the Czechoslovak margins (borderlands, minorities) to press for a reconsideration of both the nature and the periodization of the Communist dictatorship. His well-documented conclusions are often surprising: popular pressure for "cleansing" of Germans and other "unreliable elements" was a driving force both before and after the Communist seizure of power in 1948; for many minorities, the Stalinist dictatorship could be more emancipatory than repressive; far from "totalitarian," the Czechoslovak state of the 1950s was highly differentiated, both within different ministries and at different levels (local, regional, and central). In other words, we should rethink the common perception that Czechoslovakia's Stalinist dictatorship was monolithic, imposed from abroad, maintained entirely by repression, and lacking popular legitimacy.

The book begins with a concise overview of post-war expulsions and resettlement, with an emphasis on the discourses and social practices that accompanied this massive movement of populations from 1945 to 1947. Though painstakingly planned by the state, the reengineering of populations was far from smooth. With the state focusing on "national, strategic, and economic interests," it neglected key elements of community building: a sense of home/belonging, a relationship to landscape and local history, and a related local patriotism (47-48). As a result, the resettled borderlands were rife with petty crime, dilapidated homes, and itinerant inhabitants. Newly arrived "Gypsies" (Roma) from Slovakia and other minorities became scapegoats for these broader symptoms of un-rootedness in the resettled borderlands.

The next chapter shows how the widely popular "cleansing" of Germans came quickly to encompass other minorities and "unreliable persons" in the borderlands from 1945 to 1947. The urge to cleanse, Spurný writes, is the "other side of the coin of revolutionary optimism, a fundamental element of an engineer's approach to society" (p. 103). Spurný emphasizes that both social engineering and cleansing originated in the immediate post-war period, an era commonly thought to be a democratic prelude to the Communist dictatorship. Though Communists were adept at mobilizing the "material and symbolic capital" of cleansing and resettlement (p. 40), the height of cleansing rhetoric and actions came over a year before the establishment of their dictatorship. In fact, Spurný argues, the Communist Party wound down cleansing rhetoric and official discrimination against minorities in the late 1940s, after the Party had consolidated its control of the state.

Three case studies comprise the second half of the book: the small German minority remaining in Czechoslovakia after 1947; Gypsy (Roma) migrants from Slovakia; and Czech re-emigrants from the Volhynian region of Soviet Ukraine. All three

groups were concentrated in the borderlands and were looked upon with suspicion (as "unreliable") by many officials and local inhabitants from 1945 through 1960. After the Communist Party seized full control of the state in 1948, the central government gradually tried to integrate these minorities into socialist Czechoslovakia, inspired by the emancipatory (and internationalist) ideology of revolutionary communism, a need for labor, and a desire to widen the regime's base of support. Concessions to Germans and Roma proved unpopular with many local officials and residents of the borderlands, who used both legal and extra-legal means of isolating and even removing unwanted minorities. As Spurný writes, sometimes

> […] the public demand for different forms of cleansing and forced regulation of life in minority communities was so strong that the power elites of the socialist dictatorship had to satisfy it, even at the cost of renouncing the emancipation project that they liked to think they were implementing. (p. 347)

A notable example was the pressure "from below" to change course on Gypsy policy in the mid-1950s, from social amelioration (by providing education and housing) to close regulation and policing. Indeed, local communist officials had long defied central directives on the treatment of the Roma, preferring repression to the "patience" urged by the Ministry of Interior (p. 266).

Spurný uses these cases to urge a reconsideration of the Communist dictatorship during the Stalinist 1950s. First, he argues, there were substantial continuities of cleansing rhetoric and discrimination against minorities from 1945 to the late 1950s. Even though the Communist elite turned away from discrimination against ethnic minorities by the late 1940s, both discourses and practices of cleansing persisted on the local and regional level throughout the 1950s. Second, the Communist regime underwent a substantial change of orientation in the second half of the 1950s, a period Spurný provocatively refers to as the "first normalization" (p. 343). This was above all a shift from revolutionary idealism (emancipation and the new socialist man) to a conservative dictatorship devoted to keeping order. Spurný's evidence on Gypsy policy suggests that the "energy and dynamism" of repressive policies came from below and proved a "successful legitimating strategy" for the Communist Party (p. 340) both in the immediate post-war period and in the second half of the 1950s. As Spurný points out, many of the leading Communist reformers of the 1960s had been revolutionary idealists in the early Stalinist era, only to be disillusioned by the more conservative dictatorship that followed.

This is a self-consciously anti-parochial book, using closely researched case studies to widen and deepen historiography of Czech Stalinism and "modern dictatorships" more generally. There are at least two elements crucial to Spurný's efforts to "come to terms" with both the expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans and the experience of Communist dictatorship. First he situates each in a broad geographical and conceptual context. Ethnic and social cleansing were characteristic of a wide range of states in the mid-twentieth century, both dictatorships and democracies. Czechoslovakia was both a democracy and a dictatorship, twice over, during the height of the cleansing wave from the 1930s to the 1950s, making it an excellent laboratory for comparing and connecting cleansing under different kinds of regime. Spurný is exceptionally thorough and convincing in locating both continuities and discontinu-

ities in the treatment of minorities after the establishment of a Communist dictatorship in 1948. Second, Spurný suggests that Czechs (and others) need to study and acknowledge popular complicity in both ethnic cleansing and modern dictatorships. In "Nejsou jako my", Spurný convincingly connects the two:

> The purification of society, which brought about different forms of repression and terror, was, first of all, an expression of the society's will, and not only a method used by those in power to intimidate their subjects. In forming [this] Czechoslovak society, the Communist Party mostly drew energy and dynamism from the bottom, and using this dynamism was a successful legitimization strategy throughout the 1940s and 1950s. (p. 348)

In other words, "coming to terms" with the past also means taking both collective and personal responsibility for that past (and its legacies in the present). With this engaging, yet deeply researched book, Spurný helps to lay a scholarly foundation for an ongoing revision of the history and memory of the Czechs' jagged twentieth century.

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