Ethnic Cleansing, Communism, and Environmental Devastation in Czechoslovakia's Borderlands, 1945–1989*

Eagle Glassheim
University of British Columbia

> Nature is not a temple but a laboratory, and man is there to work.
> (Bazarov in Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*)[1]

Visitors to north Bohemia from the 1960s to the 1980s reported a landscape of environmental and social devastation: depopulated villages with decaying churches and abandoned houses, vast coal pits where once towns had stood, smog so thick that it stopped traffic and sent pensioners to the hospital. It was a region infamous for the "perks" the government offered its residents: free trips for children to the mountains for clean air and a special financial supplement for residents known locally as the "pohřebné," or burial bonus. North Bohemia had Czechoslovakia's highest mortality rates and ranked at or near the top in alcoholism, crime, and suicide.[2] Travelers could, and did, compare the postwar north Bohemian borderlands negatively with their previous incarnation as part of the German-inhabited Sudetenland. By all environmental, social, and aesthetic measures, north Bohemia declined dramatically after the expulsion of the region's 1.2 million Germans in 1945 and 1946.[3]

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[1] Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons* (New York, 1966), 33.

[2] Tomáš Kostelecký, *Regionální diferenciace sociálních problémů v České Republice* (Prague, 1994).

[3] By north Bohemia I am referring to the territory included in the North Bohemian Region as of the 1960 redistricting: the districts of Česká Lípa, Děčín, Chomutov, Jablonec, Liberec, Litoměřice, Louny, Most, Teplice, and Ústí nad Labem. North Bohemia made up 19 percent of the land area of the former Sudetenland, the region occupied by Nazi Germany from 1938 to 1945. Its population density and industrial output were a much larger portion, however. For 1939 population statistics, see Sudetendeutsches Archiv, *Odsun: Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen* (Munich, 1995), 361. The region had 1.13 million inhabitants, primarily Czech, in 1960. Otakar Tyl and Jaroslav Zahálka, *Severočeský kraj dnes a zítra* (Ústí nad Labem, 1961), 12, 15.

Among Sudeten German expellees and descendents, but also among some Czech observers, it has been common to connect north Bohemia's deterioration with the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans. "As one crosses the border," according to a typical recent account, "one is struck by the stark contrast of the two countries: Germany, clean, bright, and colorful; the Czech Republic gray and dismal; old buildings in ruins and newer ones with the appearance of the tenements of a city such as Chicago or New York. The effects of losing (by that government's choice) over 90% of your population and of communism, as well, are readily apparent."[4] According to this narrative, the once-thriving German communities of the Sudetenland were replaced by Czechs and Slovaks in an inorganic process of resettlement. New settlers, critics argue, lacked solidarity and a connection to the natural and built landscape—what the Germans call *Heimat,* or homeland. Alienation bred a general neglect, as well as social and environmental pathology. The Czech dissident Petr Příhoda has written most eloquently of this decline in a book aptly titled *Lost History.*[5] In general, Příhoda's book formed part of a reevaluation of the expulsions and their legacy among dissident and exiled Czech authors in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These writers concluded that the expulsions produced not only a moral crisis that played into the hands of the Communists but also a long-term loss of economic and cultural potential.[6]

At first glance, the *Heimat*-deficit theory seems an elegant explanation for the decay and despair that plagued northern Bohemia from the 1950s to the 1980s. But it raises a lot of questions, too. How exactly does one determine the existence or the intensity of *Heimat?* Inherently subjective, *Heimat* can be

[4] Letter from Susan Muehlhans Karides in *Heimatbrief* 8, no. 4 (December 1997). Sudeten German *Heimat* organizations in Germany use a similar rhetoric of decline. See, e.g., the website of the Komotau organization, http://www.komotau.de/. Václav Havel, the dissident and first post-Communist president of Czechoslovakia, has shared this view. Reflecting in 1991 on the Czech western border with Germany, he noted, "On one side of the border there are neat, well-kept fields, pathways, and orchards . . . evidence of human care, based on respect for the soil. On the other [Czech] side there are extensive fields with crops lying un-harvested on the ground, stockpiles of chemicals, unused land, land crisscrossed with tire tracks, neglected pathways, no rows of trees or woodlots. Villages are merely the remains of villages, interspersed with something that resembles factory yards." Václav Havel, "Beyond the Shock of Freedom" (1991), in his *Summer Meditations* (New York, 1993), 112.

[5] František Jedermann (Petr Příhoda), *Verlorene Geschichte: Bilder und Texte aus dem heutigen Sudetenland,* trans. Joachim Bruss (Cologne, 1985). The Czech version of this book appeared in 1991 as František Jedermann, *Ztracené dějiny* (Cologne, 1991).

[6] For a summary of this debate, see Bradley Abrams, "Morality, Wisdom, and Revision: The Czech Opposition of the 1970s and the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans," *East European Politics and Societies* 9 (1995): 234–55. Publications from the debate, including some cogent contributions by Příhoda himself, are reproduced in Jan Křen, Bohumil Černý, Václav Kural, Milan Otáhal, eds., *Češi, Němci, Odsun* (Prague, 1990).

as slippery to analyze as other forms of identity.[7] Beyond the difficulties surrounding *Heimat,* is it possible to separate the legacy of the expulsion from that of Stalinist industrial policy in the 1950s, or of Gustáv Husák's post-1968 "normalization" policy, for that matter? And if we are looking for easy explanations, why not blame north Bohemia's problems on coal, which exists there in abundant and impure form, lying tantalizingly close to the surface of the earth? Indeed, are not alienation and anomie widespread manifestations of industrial modernity more broadly? The *Heimat*-deficit argument runs up against a devastating counterfactual: given the history of heavy industrialized regions in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, how can one prove that north Bohemia's fate would have been different without expulsion and resettlement?

Rather than claiming a direct causal link between expulsion and the devastation of north Bohemia, this article argues that ethnic cleansing, Communist social engineering, and late-industrial modernity were related and intertwined phenomena in postwar Czechoslovakia. All three derived from a complex that David Harvey has called "universal or high modernism," an economic, social, and cultural order that flourished in the wake of the Second World War. With roots in the Enlightenment and more proximately in the 1920s and 1930s, high modernism "has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production."[8] Several scholars have recently pointed to the rationalizing tendencies of the modern nation-state to explain cases of ethnic cleansing in Central Europe and elsewhere.[9] Even when inspired and carried out from below, cleansing simplifies the body politic, rendering it more susceptible to state control.[10] Others, including James Scott in the influential book *Seeing Like a State,* have pointed out the predilection of "high modern" states for grandiose utopian schemes seeking to master both man and nature.[11] But in spite of the conceptual affinity of these two literatures, no one has seriously

[7] On problems with the concept of identity, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity,'" *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47.

[8] David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA, [1990] 1997), 9. Harvey drew this quote from the editors of *PRECIS* 6 (1987): 7–24.

[9] See Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), 8–9; and Philipp Ther, "A Century of Forced Migration: The Origins and Consequences of 'Ethnic Cleansing,'" in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944–1948,* ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham, MD, 2001), 44–47.

[10] The state's role in ethnic cleansing is not always clear-cut and varies case by case. In the Czech case, both state and nonstate actors pursued the cleansing of Sudeten Germans. Both levels, however, drew on the ideology of the ethnically pure nation-state.

[11] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT, 1998). On Communist utopianism, see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, 1995).

considered the connections between ethnic, social, and environmental engineering. Northern Bohemia, a worst-case scenario of dystopian modernity, provides excellent terrain for exploring this nexus.

The common denominator of Czechoslovakia's modernist triad of destructive forces was an inclination to reengineer identities—of both people and spaces—according to a materialist philosophy. By materialism, I mean a complex of attitudes that objectify and economize value. My definition includes the Marxist economic theory that underlies socialist thought, but it also encompasses the common understanding of materialism in which worldly possessions are privileged over noneconomic values. Rejecting romantic/pastoral German conceptions of *Heimat,* postwar Czechs sought to create materialist regional identities in north Bohemia that emphasized labor, productivity, and industrial modernity.

Northern Bohemia's human and natural geography made the region particularly susceptible to the postwar materialist revolution. Faced with the unprecedented opportunity of settling an industrialized but rapidly emptying landscape, Communist settlement planners considered the northern borderlands as a frontier laboratory for the emerging socialist order. Confiscation, expulsion, and resettlement began a social transformation that accelerated with the Communist coup of 1948. The Stalinist heavy-industrial push that followed in the 1950s only magnified the experiment, as planners proved willing to sacrifice the health of citizens and the environment for breakneck industrial growth. This article traces the thread of postwar materialist identity from the 1940s through the reform years of the 1960s and into the total environmental breakdown of the 1980s, when north Bohemia, like the Communist regime itself, reached a breaking point.

I. Expulsion and Resettlement

World War II ended with a wave of popular and often violent retribution in Czechoslovakia. During the so-called Wild Transfer in the summer of 1945, Czech soldiers, partisans, and civilians forced over seven hundred thousand ethnic Germans from their homes. Intentionally evoking the Nazi treatment of Jews during the war, Czechs compelled Germans to wear identifying armbands and herded them into concentration and labor camps, while driving several hundred thousand others across the border into occupied Germany and Austria. As many as thirty thousand Germans died in massacres, forced marches, and disease-filled camps.[12] During this period of brutalization, Czech settlers

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[12] On expulsion violence and the number of deaths, see Czech-German Joint Commission of Historians, *A Conflictual Community, Catastrophe, Detente* (Prague, 1996).

poured into the borderlands seeking to acquire German homes, farms, and businesses.[13] Leading newspapers and government officials urged Czechs to move to the borderlands and take control of confiscated German property.[14] With the promise of easy financial gain, cheap housing, and a new life, hundreds of thousands of Czechs migrated in the months after the end of the war.[15]

As settlers arrived in 1945, they found that Germans still occupied prime housing and leading positions in now confiscated businesses. While some Czech newcomers coexisted with remaining Germans, waiting more or less patiently for their eventual expulsion, others pressed for their immediate removal. It is no coincidence that some of the most violent and deadly outbursts against Germans in the summer of 1945 came in cities with severe housing shortages: Ústí nad Labem (commonly known as "Ústí") and Brno.[16] Local officials often relocated or expelled Germans to ease the mounting pressure for homes.[17] In other cases, Czech administrators of confiscated enterprises requested the evacuation of former German owners, whose moral and sometimes legal claims threatened to undermine the administrators' control of the businesses.[18] Settlers came to the borderlands for largely material reasons, and

[13] For a comprehensive overview of problems and literature relating to Czech resettlement, see Adrian von Arburg, "Osídlování: Die Besiedlung der Grenzgebiete der Boehmischen Laender, 1945–1950" (Diplomarbeit, University of Vienna, 2001).

[14] See, e.g., "Osidlovací akce v našem pohraničí v proudu," *Lidová demokracie,* May 27, 1945, 1, or "Odsun Němců z pohraničí," *Rudé právo,* June 12, 1945, 2. The Provincial National Committee for Bohemia issued a widely reported formal appeal for settlers in June 1945. See text of appeal in "Jde o rychlé osídlení našeho pohraničí," *Lidová demokracie,* June 24, 1945, 2.

[15] Along with five hundred thousand Czechs still living in the borderlands at the end of the war, another 1.2 million moved in by February 1946. Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (ÚV KSČ) pamphlet, "Osnovy referátů, Dobudujeme naše pohraničí" (1948), 13.

[16] See Eagle Glassheim, "National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945," *Central European History* 33, no. 4 (2000): 463–86. On housing shortages, see Zdeněk Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences of Resettling Czechs into Northwestern Bohemia, 1945–1947," in *Redrawing Nations,* ed. Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak (Lanham, MD, 2001), 241–60.

[17] See, e.g., Okresní správní komise (OSK; District Administrative Commission), Ústí to Místní národní výbor (MNV; Local National Committee) Ústí, September 1, 1945. Okresní národní výbor (ONV) Ústí nad Labem, Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, k. 407 ic 5. See also Emilia Hrabovec, "Neue Aspekte zur ersten Phase der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Maehren 1945," in *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn, 1938–1948,* ed. Richard Plaschka, Horst Haselsteiner, Arnold Suppan, and Anna Drabek (Vienna, 1997), 130–32.

[18] See, e.g., letter from the administrator of the Filip Michel & Sons Stocking Factory in Rumburk to OSK Rumburk, April 9, 1946. The OSK issued a notice of expulsion to the Germans in question the next day. ONV Rumburk, Státní okresní archiv Děčín, k 371.

many were driven by material motivations to take part in the wild expulsion frenzy of 1945.

In a series of decrees on German property and resettlement, President Edvard Beneš set up an apparatus for managing the flow of new arrivals. The July 17, 1945, Decree for the Unified Administration of Internal Settlement prepared the way for the creation of a Settlement Office, which came under the purview of the Communist-controlled Ministry of Interior.[19] During 1945, the Settlement Office began setting up shop in the borderlands, though at first it could only haphazardly shape the flow of German expellees and Czech settlers. The office had far more control over resettlement in 1946, when most of the remaining two million Germans left on organized transports and another million Czechs arrived to take over German homes and businesses.[20]

Beyond the gargantuan task of coordinating labor forces, housing stocks, and simultaneous in- and out-migrations, the Settlement Office set out to consolidate community life in what many referred to as a "Wild West" atmosphere in the borderlands. Throughout 1945, thousands of Czechs ventured into the borderlands in search of German loot. These "gold diggers" formed an unstable migrant pool. Some settled temporarily in abandoned (or commandeered) German homes, but many moved from place to place stealing property from expellees or from remaining Germans rendered vulnerable by government indifference. Most of the gold diggers returned to the Czech interior once they had their fill of plunder. In spite of the influx of gold diggers in 1945, the vast majority of settlers came to stay, driven by patriotism, socialist conviction, and above all economic opportunism to help construct a new society in the borderlands. But even settlers without criminal intent tended to move often in 1945, upgrading jobs, apartments, and confiscated businesses as they became available. Labor shortages were endemic in key industries such as mining and glass production. Not only did these industries suffer from the loss of German skilled laborers; they also saw new Czech workers come and go with troubling rapidity.[21]

Along with the chronic mobility of new settlers, borderland communities faced an array of cultural barriers to consolidation. Most profoundly unsettling, during 1945 and 1946 the slowly dwindling population of Germans lived side

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[19] Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences," 243.

[20] Numbers come from Kulturní a propagační oddělení sekretariátu ÚV KSČ, *Dobudujeme naše pohraničí: Osnova a materiál pro veřejné schůze a besedy v pohraničí* (Prague, 1948), 13. By the end of 1947, there were 2.5 million Czechs in the borderlands. Of those, around five hundred thousand were Czechs who had lived out the war there and an estimated three hundred thousand were returnees, i.e., Czechs who had fled the Sudetenland after the Nazi occupation in 1938 but returned after the war ended. Estimates are derived from *Dobudujeme,* 13; and Quido Kastner, *Osídlování českého pohraničí od května 1945* (Prague, 1996), 14.

[21] Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences," 248.

by side with incoming Czechs. In many towns and villages, housing shortages even forced Czech settlers to share accommodations with German families. Further complicating planners' visions of unified and homogeneous borderlands, there were around ninety thousand mixed Czech-German marriages in the country, with most concentrated in the former Sudetenland.[22] In spite of social and legal prohibitions, authorities had a hard time preventing fraternization. Though little has been written on the interaction between Czechs and Germans during this period, their coexistence must have been fraught with tension and uncertainty.[23]

There were also towns where a substantial minority of Germans remained not only until the end of the organized expulsions of 1946 but even into the 1950s and beyond.[24] Some of these Germans had been deemed irreplaceable specialists and exempted from expulsion, while others were married to Czech spouses. In one well-documented example, the village of Mikulov near Teplice was still just under half German in 1950. A sociological study from 1980 found that local Czechs had not established Czech community life there after the war, as German customs (including the yearly cabbage fest) predominated into the 1950s.[25] In addition, scores of towns and villages were settled in part by other ethnic groups or by Czechs from abroad. Around thirty-nine thousand of the settlers were Czech speakers from the now-Ukrainian region of Volynia. In 1946, forty-two thousand Magyars from Slovakia were forced to settle in the Czech borderlands, all but sixteen thousand of whom would go back to Slovakia by 1950. Upward of one hundred thousand settlers were ethnic Slovaks, and around sixteen thousand were Roma (Gypsies) from Slovakia.[26] This fluctuating ethnic diversity was a barrier to consolidation, particularly during the period of heaviest settlement from May 1945 to late 1946.

Even among Czechs, there were serious impediments to cultural unity in

[22] Benjamin Frommer, "Expulsion or Integration: Unmixing Interethnic Marriage in Postwar Czechoslovakia," *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 382. If one adds an estimated 150,000 children of such marriages, the total of 330,000 was a sizable proportion of the population of Czechoslovakia, not to mention that of the borderlands.

[23] There were some areas where Czechs and Germans had a history of coexistence and got along reasonably well during 1945–46. See J. Kadeřábková and J. Pargač, "Problematika současných pohraničních vesnic v severovýchodních čechách," in *Etnické procesy v pohraničí českých zemí po r. 1945,* ed. Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences (Sobotín, 1985), 209–25.

[24] Germans remained for various reasons, with some needed as specialists in industry, others exempted from expulsion for being antifascists, and many united with Czechs in mixed marriages.

[25] Tomáš Grulich, "Etnografický výzkum novoosídlenecké problematiky v horské části Krušných hor," *Český lid* 68, no. 4 (1981): 204–13.

[26] See Kastner, *Osídlování,* 15; and Arburg, "Osídlování," 138–46.

the early postwar years. Czechs differed widely in their sense of what it meant to be Czech, and what it meant to be a Czech "frontiersman" *(hraničář)* in particular. Both the regional press and official publications warned of conflicts between "old settlers" and "new settlers"—that is, between Czechs who had lived in the borderlands before 1945 and those who arrived afterward.[27] Since the 1880s, Czech national unions in German-dominated parts of Bohemia had fought to establish Czech schools and property ownership. Originally a minority protection organization, the North Bohemian National Union reemerged from Nazi-induced hibernation in 1945 and pressed for a leading role in establishing Czech administration in the borderlands. Thus, in many towns, old settlers created and dominated postwar local governments. In towns with a significant Czech population already, national committees were elected immediately by the local Czech population. Where Czech populations were small, the Ministry of Interior appointed outsiders to staff so-called administrative commissions; these then became national committees as soon as the number of settlers was deemed sufficient for democratic elections. In the beginning, these local organs had a substantial role in determining the fate of German property, thus institutionalizing an old/new settler struggle for control over local government and the distribution of the spoils of the expulsion. Citing undesirable tensions between old and new settlers, the Provincial National Committee of Bohemia rejected requests of old settlers to found their own interest groups.[28] Members of the national unions bitterly complained in 1946 and 1947 about their marginalization at the hands of Communist administrators.[29]

Beyond the old/new divide, there was also noticeable tension between early new arrivals, who became "national administrators" of the best housing and best enterprises in the summer of 1945, and later settlers who had to make do with the leftovers. The latter often accused the national administrators of incompetence and corruption, while the administrators lobbied hard for legal confirmation of their property rights.[30] In addition, new Czech settlers came from a variety of regional and social backgrounds. New arrivals found that

[27] See, e.g., K. Innemann, "Pro jednotu všech Čechů v pohraničí," *Sever,* February 5, 1946, 1; and the frequent references to unity in *Osidlování,* the official journal of the Settlement Office. Christiane Brenner analyzes the old/new divisions in "Viděl jsem pohraničí . . . Das Grenzland in der tschechischen Publizistik und Literatur nach 1945," in *Regionen und Regionalismus in den boehmischen Laendern in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* ed. Robert Luft (Munich, forthcoming).

[28] Zemský národní výbor (ZNV; Provincial National Committee) Praha to Karel Fridrich, rejecting application to form Spolek Sdružení hraničářů starousedlíků v Podmoklech a okolí, September 25, 1946. ONV Děčín, Státní okresní archiv Děčín, k 173.

[29] See various articles in *Náš hraničář, Ústřední orgán národní jednoty severočeské,* 1946–47.

[30] See Arburg, "Osídlování," 80–83, 91–96.

they differed on everything from degrees of piety to dates and styles of community celebrations to skill levels and work habits.[31] While these differences did not necessarily produce conflicts, they did deprive locals of natural raw material for regional identity building and solidarity in the immediate postwar years.

Settlers did, however, have at least one thing in common: what I call the "terms of settlement"—the conventions governing colonization, allocation of property, and community organization in the borderlands. These regulations and new bureaucracies functioned as structural determinants of behavior and identity. Crucially, Czech officials were concerned above all with maintaining the economic production of the borderlands, establishing terms of settlement that emphasized rapid colonization, individual ownership of small businesses and housing, and state ownership of larger industry. So even if settlers began with few common points of reference, the terms of settlement bound them all in a community of rules governing economic and material interests.

In 1945, however, there was still little sense of unity among the disparate border populations. Though most settlers would have been aware of the oft-rehearsed collective memories that gave shape to a wider Czech national identification, the new arrivals lacked a historical connection to the land, regional customs and architecture, and each other. Beyond the diverse local and regional cultures they brought with them, the frontiersmen and women found themselves surrounded by reminders of their German predecessors. Concentrated in a ring stretching from the industrial northern borderlands of Bohemia and Moravia through the spa towns of the west and the backward, rural estate economy of the south, Germans had had both deeply rooted local cultures and a strong, if relatively young, collective "Sudeten German" identity. Germans left markers of these identities all across urban and rural landscapes of the Czechoslovak borderlands. Graveyards, glassworks, half-timbered houses, and the great arcades of Karlsbad and Marienbad stood as emblems of German culture. Often expelled on a moment's notice, Germans also left behind houses, books, and the accoutrements of everyday life. Arriving Czechs quickly replaced German signs with Czech ones, but the manifold markers of German regional and local identity could not be erased so quickly.

II. Constructing a Regional Identity

Resettlement officials and settlers alike did their best to appropriate or obliterate the German cultural heritage of the borderlands while establishing a

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[31] On celebrations, see "Posvícení v pohraničí," *Osidlování* 3, no. 12 (October 25, 1948): 328. On skills and work habits, see Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences," 248.

Slavic/Czech historical narrative in its stead.[32] Nationally, President Beneš and Communist leaders declared that the Czechs were "undoing" the legacy of the 1620 Battle of White Mountain, which they blamed for the Germanization of historically Czech lands.[33] According to the prevailing Czech narrative in 1945, the Habsburgs had replaced the defeated Czech aristocracy in 1620 with a German one, preparing the way for a "denationalization" of Czech soil, particularly in what came to be known as the Sudetenland. As Beneš declared in a typical 1945 speech in Tábor, "We must de-Germanize our republic . . . names, regions, towns, customs—everything that can possibly be de-Germanized must go."[34]

The assertion of a Czech history in the borderlands thus became an important goal of the Settlement Office. The office's journal is filled with articles featuring historic Slavic settlement in the Sudeten areas, monuments and ruins left by Czech rulers, and famous Czechs born or raised in the region. One such article highlighting the venerable German border city of Tetschen (Děčín) crows of "the return of our graceful landscape—the ancient seat of the Slavic tribe of Děčans—to Czech hands."[35] This campaign to establish a Czech historical narrative for the borderlands culminated in a splashy 1947 exhibition in the center of Prague called "The Czech Borderlands." Its organizers intended, as they put it, "to show the public how our borderlands were, from the arrival of our ancestors to the Sudeten basin, always Czech." In spite of "the large and systematic pressure of the German element into that basin, the great Germanizing efforts were only short-lived and were never lasting and firmly anchored." The article announcing the exhibition concluded triumphantly that "the victory of the Allies in World War II allowed [us] . . . to renew the original Czech character of our borderlands."[36] As the contemporary historian Albert Pražák wrote, "In the borderlands we are renewing every Czech trace and memory, so that our people here feel at home historically."[37]

The 1947 Prague exhibition was only one part of a greater effort to build new regional identities in the borderlands. Not only were the borderlands integrated into a seamless Czech historical narrative to negate the memory of centuries of German inhabitation; the Settlement Office also sought to build

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[32] On the construction of a Czech historical narrative in postwar Czechoslovakia, see Nancy Wingfield, "The Politics of Memory: Constructing National Identity in the Czech Lands, 1945 to 1948," *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 246–67.

[33] See Glassheim, "National Mythologies."

[34] Speech reproduced in "Republiku musíme odgermanisovat," *Lidová demokracie,* June 17, 1946, 1–2.

[35] See, e.g., *Osidlování* 2, nos. 4–5 (July 10, 1947): 104.

[36] *Osidlování* 2, nos. 10–11 (October 10, 1947): 210.

[37] Pražák text reproduced in Svatopluk Technik, *Výstava Budujeme osvobozené kraje v Liberci roku 1946* (Liberec, 2001), 50.

"a new regional patriotism, [so] people feel at home in the resettled territory."[38] Regional solidarity was important for several reasons. First, a widespread sense of belonging would help consolidate conditions in the chaotic labor and housing markets of the borderlands and consequently would help stabilize the region's economy. People who "feel at home," officials hoped, would work harder and not move. Second, officials wanted to head off international attempts to reverse the expulsions by showing Czech success in resettlement. As one observer put it, "Our foreign guests and domestic tourists should gain the best impression in the north Bohemian borderlands," a sense that "our borderlands are in reliable and industrious hands."[39] Third, Communist planners knew that new identifications would inevitably form in the borderlands; through quick action and extensive organization, they sought to control the content of those identities.

Though the Communist-dominated resettlement apparatus was the most self-conscious about building new regional identities, there was general agreement among officials and settlers alike that the new order should contrast starkly with pre-1945 Sudeten German conceptions of identity. The dominant Sudeten German *Heimat* narratives of the interwar period had been romantic and vaguely antimodern, merging easily with National Socialist blood and soil rhetoric in the 1930s. In spite of north Bohemia's advanced industrial economy, the Sudeten German Nazi Hans Krebs wrote in 1937, the region's identity derived from its village architecture, rural customs, and landscape. Larger cities like Aussig (Ústí) and Brüx (Most) were atypical, as workers there lived "in deep enmity and antagonism toward the surrounding world," cut off from the land and thus from their *Heimat.* In many other industrial towns, though, workers owned houses and gardens, ensuring "a deep love for the *Heimat*" that was rooted in the soil.[40]

Though postwar Czechs did embrace north Bohemia's handsome hills and river valleys, they advanced a decisively antiromantic regional identity stressing cities, labor, and industry. The animating spirit of this new order was to be found in workers and machines, not soil and mountains. Recent scholarship stresses the contested nature of national identity, the tendency of different groups and interests to advance their own specific goals in the name of the nation.[41] Literature on Czech nationalism is no exception, pointing out how

[38] "Ze zahájení výstavy 'České pohraničí,'" *Osidlování* 2, no. 12 (October 25, 1947): 253.

[39] Karel Tuček, "Přírodní bohatství severočeského pohraničí a jeho využití," in *Masarykova akademie práce, Odborných spisů # 54* (Prague, 1947), 22.

[40] See Hans Krebs and Emil Lehmann, *Sudeten-deutsche Landeskunde* (Kiel, [1937] 1992), 122–33. Quotes come from 126 and 133. Krebs was a leading Nazi and was executed in 1947 for his collaboration in the Sudetenland from 1938 to 1945.

[41] For a sample of writings on the "contested nation," see Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York, 1996).

agrarians, socialists, conservatives, clericalists, fascists, and others sought to sway official and popular understandings of Czech nationhood in the interwar period.[42] In the 1920s and 1930s, an agrarian vision tinged with romanticism proved particularly influential, placing the essence of Czech national identity in the fertile mythic ground of the Bohemian countryside. But a countervailing modernist view pointed to the early industrialization and urbanization of Bohemia and strong Czech progressive and socialist traditions. The Czech experience of occupation and war (in that order) largely discredited agrarianism, and Czechs emerged from the war in 1945 widely embracing socialism and associated nation views.[43] Contrasting sharply with prewar Sudeten German (and Czech) romantic nationalism, socialist productivism proved a particularly potent ideology in the northern borderlands.

Productivity and industrial modernity featured prominently in a grand 1946 resettlement exhibition in Liberec (Reichenberg), an industrial center and former "capital" of the German Sudetenland. The Liberec exhibition emphasized not only renewed Czech domination of the borderlands but also the task of construction and reconstruction of the region's industrial livelihood. The exhibition's title, "We Are Building Liberated Regions" (Budujeme osvobozené kraje), indicated the importance placed on both liberation (the defeat and expulsion of the Germans) and construction (the replacement of German labor and industry with those of Czechs). Conceived and organized by the newly Czechified Liberec Chamber of Commerce, BOK (as the exhibition was affectionately known) aimed to highlight and strengthen regional identity by showcasing the region's Czechness and economic productivity. As František Zejdl, the chamber's president put it, BOK would both illustrate and inspire Czech labors, becoming "a real monument of Czech willpower both here and in the whole borderland . . . a new basis for active work in the spirit of new regionalism, which aims to create new values, both regional and national."[44]

Spread out over four pavilions of the renovated former German trade-fair grounds of Liberec, BOK sought to demonstrate Czech success at taking the reins of German industry and administration. While the "material basis of

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[42] Examples of this literature include Cynthia Paces, "'The Czech Nation Must Be Catholic!' An Alternative Version of Czech Nationalism during the First Republic," *Nationalities Papers* 27, no. 3 (1999): 407–28; Nancy Meriwether Wingfield, "Conflicting Constructions of Memory: Attacks on Statues of Joseph II in the Bohemian Lands after the Great War," *Austrian History Yearbook* 28 (1997): 147–71; and Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

[43] Bradley Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Czech Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (New York, 2004).

[44] František Zejdl, "Význam výstavy BOK," in *Katalog výstavy, BOK* (Liberec, August 1946), 38.

life—factories, homes, fields and forests, natural wealth" remained the same, the "main actor of cultural and social life" had changed. As the Germans departed, so too did the "German spirit," including German "culture, social and community order and administration, ways and methods of management and labor." Czechs were now imprinting their own culture of labor and industry on the economic infrastructure inherited from the Germans. As the exhibition guide concluded, "Above all else, we are exhibiting labor."[45] Visited by hundreds of thousands of Czechs, the BOK exhibition both illustrated and promoted an emerging production-oriented identity in the resettled borderlands.[46] "Life and our general efforts in the borderlands." the guidebook declared, "are directed above all at the economic viewpoint."[47]

The Liberec exposition stressed a particular brand of industrial modernity, emphasizing technologically sophisticated production processes and state and regional planning. The exhibits themselves were self-consciously modern and innovative, employing recent advances in sound and lighting effects.[48] Displays of enterprises and state organs highlighted "specialization . . . the bridge to rationalization and the lowering of the costs of production." Exhibition planners favored firms demonstrating "concentration of industry," which promoted the use of "the most modern production equipment and the more complete utilization of raw materials."[49] In a similar spirit, BOK offered several areas devoted to planning and planners, including the so-called Hall of Planning in the main pavilion and several planning offices and organizations in the "We're Building" and "The State Leads Us" pavilions.[50]

Organized from below by the local business and professional elite of Liberec, BOK demonstrated the popular basis for the Settlement Office's efforts to infuse borderland regionalism with socialist, modern, and production-oriented content. The official campaign drew partly on the prewar industrial profile of north Bohemia, highlighting hard work and traditions of Czech labor activism in cities such as Most and Liberec, where Czech minorities had been part of the industrial workforce since the late 1800s.[51] But in contrast to the exploitative and chaotic capitalism of the Sudeten Germans, the new industrial order was to be an organized socialist one, privileging labor and planning

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[45] Emil Weiland and Stanislav Šolta in *Katalog výstavy, BOK,* 45–47.

[46] In a recent interview, one of the organizers estimated the attendance at half a million. Svatopluk Technik interview, Liberec, April 8, 2003.

[47] Miloslav Bureš in *Katalog výstavy, BOK,* 53.

[48] Technik, *Výstava,* 35.

[49] Budujeme osvobozené kraje, Náměty pro výstavu Budujeme osvobozené kraje, odbor průmysl a živnosti, May 28, 1946. Obchodní a živnostenská komora v Liberci (OŽK), Státní okresní archiv Liberec, k 1290.

[50] Technik, *Výstava,* 18–19.

[51] See also Brenner, "Das Grenzland."

above all else. Propaganda praised the dedicated efforts of borderlanders in factories and coal mines and on farms. At the same time, it emphasized the broader work involved in populating and reconstructing the borderlands. Speeches and articles repeatedly referred to the "great settlement task," which in Czech *(Velké osidlovací dílo)* suggests work and workmanship, evoking images of factories and the shop floor. "We're constructing *[budujeme]* a liberated land," Miroslav Kreysa, the Communist director of the Settlement Office, declared at the opening of the Liberec exhibition. He added that the "best exposition of our constructive *[budovatelský]* efforts is the whole Czech borderland itself."[52]

Kreysa carefully chose his reference to the borderland as an exposition, reflecting a Communist intention to make the region both a model and a laboratory for the building of socialism. In the first issue of the Settlement Office's public journal, Kreysa wrote of the "creative work" going on in the borderlands, announcing that Czechs had the opportunity to build on their frontier a society that was "closer to the ideals of social justice [and] in the spirit of a people's democracy than that of the interior" of the country.[53] The expulsion of the Germans also meant the eradication of an entrenched bourgeoisie. The capitalists were gone, but their capital remained, offering an unprecedented opportunity to implement advanced socialism without class struggle. The Communist head of the Settlement Committee in the National Assembly saw this utopian potential as vital to the development of Czech socialism: "The borderlands . . . [must] become a model territory for the other regions of the state, a guide to the path by which the working people will find a better tomorrow."[54]

Among the first acts of the Settlement Office was the opening of the great spas of Mariánské Lázně (Marienbad), Teplice (Teplitz), and Karlovy Vary (Karlsbad) to workers.[55] Spa life changed dramatically, with the once-animated elite social scene yielding to a populist and utilitarian focus on the health of laborers. Beyond such symbolic moves, Communist officials oversaw a massive centrally planned culling and relocating of borderland businesses and industries starting in late 1945, an undertaking Zdeněk Radvanovský calls "an important step toward establishing a state-controlled, or planned, economy."[56]

[52] M. Kreysa, "Celé české pohraničí je nejlepší výstavou našeho budovatelského úsilí," *Osidlování* 1, nos. 5–6 (August 10, 1946): 99.

[53] M. Kreysa, "Osidlovací politika lidově demokratického státu," *Osidlování* 1, no. 1 (May 17, 1946): 1.

[54] Bedřich Steiner, "Pohraničí ve dvouletém plánu Gottwaldovy vlády," *Osidlování,* 1, nos. 5–6 (August 10, 1946): 98.

[55] Kreysa, "Osidlovací politika lidově demokratického státu," 2. See also numerous articles on the Teplice spa in the north Bohemian newspaper *Sever* in 1945.

[56] Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences," 248.

Through a combination of propaganda and social engineering, the Settlement Office and the Communist Party sought to create a socialist society in the borderlands and, correspondingly, to build regional identities stressing rationalization, labor, industry, and the new socialist man.

Accordingly, coal and coal miners became icons of north Bohemia's postwar regional identity. Almost immediately following the end of the war, Czech officials turned their attention to the massive coal complexes stretching from Ústí to Chomutov, described later as "the industrial core of the region."[57] Seeking to restore output to prewar levels, the government's biggest concern was a labor shortage in the mines.[58] To remedy the situation, officials tried a variety of measures, including a delay of the expulsion of German miners, the freeing up of new housing (by the relocation of German families), and a publicity campaign to induce Czechs to settle in coal towns like Most and Chomutov.[59] Propaganda emphasized the vital role of coal mining in the Czech economy. Coal was "the blood pouring into the arteries" of the country's industry, according to the Communist daily *Rudé právo* in September 1945.[60] Like the coal, the metaphors kept flowing in the press and official publications: "(Our) industrial heart beats there below, in the layers of coal," for example, or a rhyming slogan on the banners of miners visiting the capital city, "Prague, don't forget when you fire up the heat, from the sweat of our miners, we're building a new state."[61] Even the ideologically diverse Liberec BOK organizers shared in the celebration of coal, devoting a special exhibition booth to the great "underground . . . wealth that provides our economic corpus with its lifeblood."[62]

The manufacture and appropriation of regional identity in the north Bohemian borderlands crucially buttressed Communist efforts to dominate public life in the region in the years following the Second World War.[63] Indeed, northern Bohemia was a bastion of Communist support both before and after the elimination of democracy in 1948. In free elections in May 1946, the Communist Party won from 50 percent to 60 percent of the votes in north

[57] *Katalog výstavy '10 let budování Ústeckého kraje'* (Ústí, 1955), unpaginated.

[58] On the labor shortage in mines, see Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences," 247.

[59] See, e.g., OSK Ústí to Mjr. Šimůnek (Posádkové velitelství): "Ustanovení vládního zmocněnce za účelem zvýšení těžby uhlí, August 23, 1945. ONV Ústí nad Labem, Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, k. 407 ic 5.

[60] Vlastimil Školaudy, "Hovoří Mostecko," *Rudé právo,* September 30, 1945, 3.

[61] Vlastimil Školaudy, "Odvěký sen českých horníků se splnil," *Rudé právo,* July 3, 1945, 5.

[62] František Zejdl, "Liberecká výstava nástupem do dvouletého plánu," *Stráž severu,* insert: "Budujeme osvobozené kraje," August 4, 1946, 1.

[63] On struggles to control north Bohemia, see Volker Zimmermann, "Die Wahlen muessen schon vorher entschieden werden!" *Bohemia* 43 (2002): 1–32.

Bohemia, as compared to 40 percent in the Czech Lands as a whole.[64] There were several reasons for the strong Communist showing in the borderlands, not least of which was the party's control over the redistribution of German property. Ironically, Communists became the chief defenders of settlers' property rights (i.e., of their claim to legal title of confiscated German homes and businesses). Communists also used the Settlement Office to press their natural organizational advantages in the borderlands, offering disoriented settlers the solidarity of unions, political clubs, and agricultural societies. It helped too that the Communists won the reputation as the most determined adversaries of everything German, as well as the party closest to the Soviet guarantors of the post-German order. But beyond patronage and geopolitical considerations, one can also assume that voters supported the general thrust of Communist policy for the region, above all the promotion of a rationalized, modern, labor-friendly industrial and agricultural identity.[65]

By the 1950s, of course, heavy industry would be central to the entire state's Communist identity. The status and privileges of miners and other "heroes of labor" grew proportionately, with, for example, the creation of worker recreation centers in the mountains and spas of the former Sudetenland.[66] Though very much in sync with the broader Communist obsession with heavy industry, northern Bohemia stood out in its overwhelmingly industrial profile. Forty-eight percent of its population worked in industrial concerns in 1960, as opposed to 35 percent in the country as a whole.[67] Regional publications from the 1950s through the 1970s indicated (at least from the official point of view) tremendous pride in north Bohemia's contribution to economic growth in Czechoslovakia, praising the region's "continuous growth of production and the constructive enthusiasm of its workers."[68] Celebratory photographic pub-

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[64] In the two north Bohemian electoral districts, Ústí nad Labem and Liberec, the Communists received 56.5 percent and 48.3 percent, respectively. "Přes 40% hlasovalo pro komunisty," *Rudé právo,* May 28, 1946, 1. See also Jiří Sláma and Karel Kaplan, eds., *Die Parlamentswahlen in der Tschechoslowakei, 1935–1946–1948* (Munich, 1986), 116–18.

[65] In general, the social structure of settlers was favorable to Communist organizing efforts. Settlers tended to come from humble backgrounds ("socially weak," as some Czech historians perhaps unfairly label them) and were thus open to a party that seemed to champion their interests.

[66] As one curious English-language publication pointed out, these workers' getaways started as early as 1945: "The Revolutionary Trade Union Movement . . . [in 1945] turned private hotels and sanatoriums (expropriated from quislings, big capitalists and fascist occupiers) into health centres and arranged holidays for the first four thousand working people. In the following year 46,000 workers spent holidays at these centres . . . [by] 1974 some 361,000." O. Vidláková, ed., *Landscape and Man in Socialist Czechoslovakia* (Prague, 1977), 38.

[67] Tyl and Zahálka, *Severočeský kraj dnes a zítra,* 20.

[68] Ibid., 78.

lications highlighted productive processes and industrial modernity in the region, including dramatic photos of the Most coal mines and their massive earthmoving machinery, natural landscapes punctuated by the chimneys of power plants, and men and women working assiduously in clean and efficient (looking) factories.[69]

Wading through the propaganda and the heavy-industrial fetishism of the 1950s, one can lose sight of the pre-Stalinist origins of north Bohemia's production-oriented identity. From 1945 to 1948, resettlement officials and settlers alike forged a new identity for the region that was materialist in all senses of the word. Settlers themselves came to the borderlands for largely material reasons, as the process of settlement was closely tied to the expropriation and expulsion of the area's 3 million Germans. Both the central and regional governments saw the task of resettlement in primarily material terms: above all, they sought to restore and soon to increase the economic output of a region long famed for its industry. The government's production-oriented material identity resonated with a population accustomed to terms of settlement that emphasized and rewarded productivity. By giving title of small enterprises to effective national administrators and allocating some of the best housing to workers in key industries, settlement officials strengthened new regional identities that highlighted production and economic growth. Thus materialist ideologies, policies, and popular attitudes converged in a powerful mix that would shape the development of the borderlands for decades to come.

III. The Environment, Resettlement, and Communism

In January 1982, a choking acidic cloud settled over the north Bohemian brown-coal region from Ústí nad Labem to Chomutov.[70] Children coughed, the elderly wheezed (and died), and traffic often came to a halt in the blinding smog.[71] Sulfur dioxide levels exceeded the capacity of measuring devices, indicating concentrations several times higher than those considered dangerous

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[69] See in particular *Budujeme pohraničí* (Prague, 1950) and *Katalog výstavy.*

[70] Internal Communist documents labeled the situation an "extraordinarily unfavorable dispersion and emission situation." See Zápis z jednání komise pro tvorbu a ochranu životního prostředí, Ústí nad Labem, January 28, 1982. OSN Ústí nad Labem, Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, k 138 ic 514. Meteorologists often refer to these particular conditions as an inversion, a situation where air temperatures at higher altitudes exceed those at lower altitudes, thereby trapping air pollution close to the earth. Inversions happened often in the north Bohemian brown-coal basin from Ústí to Chomutov.

[71] During the inversion, mortality among those over sixty increased to four times the normal rate for heart attacks and bronchial pneumonia. Ibid.

to health.[72] While locals later joked that at least no one got colds during the Great Inversion (the deadly air was said to discourage bacteria and viruses), the cumulative effects of pollution in north Bohemia were devastating for the health of residents, forests, and rivers.[73] Indeed, life expectancy for the north Bohemian brown-coal region averaged three to five years lower than in non-polluted areas of Czechoslovakia in the 1980s.[74] Though the crisis came to a head in the eighties, Communist officials and visitors alike registered serious environmental problems as early as the 1950s, as the Stalinist emphasis on energy-hungry heavy industry led to a rapid increase in brown-coal mining and the construction of new power plants near the coalfields around Most, Chomutov, Teplice, and Ústí.

In north Bohemia, coal was the driving force of the economy, and mining concerns had tremendous power. As central planners continually increased norms for power and coal production in the 1950s through the 1970s, the sprawling surface mines of the north Bohemian basin expanded voraciously, swallowing 116 villages and parts of several larger cities by 1980.[75] Infamously, the entire historic city center of Most was obliterated from the late 1960s through the mid-1970s in order to expose 88.7 million tons of coal. Planners calculated a "profit" of 2.6 billion Czechoslovak crowns from the enterprise, after subtracting the expense of building standardized housing projects for up to fifty thousand people in "New" Most.[76]

Planners envisioned the new city of Most as a model of socialist modernity. Deriding Most's old town as a decaying relic of the past, officials lauded New Most's spacious and efficient panel-style high-rises. Adding to the contrast, the majority of Old Most's inhabitants—close to three thousand by 1970—were Roma, the bulk of whom had been settled there by Communist officials

[72] Ibid. On a similar inversion in September 1980, when leaves fell prematurely from area trees, see Miroslav Vaněk, *Nedalo se tady dýchat: Ekologie v českých zemích v letech 1968 až 1989* (Prague, 1996), 57.

[73] Joke on the health benefits of SO_2 from Vladimir Kaiser, director of the City Archive of Ústí nad Labem, personal communication, February 2003. On the long-standing myth of the salutary antiseptic value of coal smoke, see Barbara Freese, *Coal: A Human History* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 39 and 152.

[74] See František Kotěšovec et al., "Long-Term Trends in Mortality," in Radim Šrám, ed., *Teplice Program, Impact of Air Pollution on Human Health* (Prague, 2001), 252. The authors note that it is difficult to separate environmental causes of mortality from lifestyle causes (such as smoking, etc.). I would suggest that environmental causes also influence lifestyle choices (general ugliness can contribute to depression, alcoholism, smoking, etc.). Life expectancy was two to three years lower in north Bohemia than the countrywide average. See also Vaněk, *Nedalo,* 61.

[75] Vaněk, *Nedalo,* 54.

[76] Olga Hniková, "Po nás potopa?" *Mladá fronta,* June 23, 1968, 4.

in the 1950s.[77] In spite of the Communists' best assimilationist intentions, north Bohemia's Roma had remained poor and isolated, intensely disliked by their Czech neighbors. The so-called Gypsy problem had long vexed Communist administrators, who had a mandate to stamp out racial and social inequality. Local officials saw the destruction of Old Most as an unprecedented opportunity to improve the lot of the Roma. Because "living environment determines lifestyle," as one study put it, relocating impoverished Roma to modern and spacious new apartments would yield "a change in the value system of the Gypsies."[78] For Communist planners, the Roma evoked an old order of segregation, class oppression, and bad hygiene. In one stroke, they could "liquidate once and for all the Gypsy problem" while also liquidating Old Most.[79]

Like many cities in north Bohemia, however, New Most was woefully undersupplied with culture, greenery, and services. As its builders envisioned, it was a city dedicated to production of coal, power, and chemicals—and little else. Visitors to Most and north Bohemia after the mid-1960s described the region as a moonscape, a battlefield, a wasteland.[80] Even now, fifteen years after Communism itself has gone the way of Old Most, a drive from Ústí to Chomutov takes one through a surreal panoply of ecological and social destruction: half-eaten mountains, vast pits inhabited by massive earth-devouring machines, agglomerations of belching smokestacks, row upon row of decaying prefabricated apartment buildings.

At first glance, one is inclined to group environmental disaster among the many failures of Communism and move on. Indeed, Václav Havel has suggested that environmental devastation was a corollary to the wreckage of civil society under Communism.[81] But why assume that a dictatorship cannot protect the environment, or that a free society naturally would? Indeed, democratic countries have had their share of environmental crises and still, in the age of environmentalism, are torn between industrial/productivist and environmental/conservationist interests.[82] Visitors to parts of Pennsylvania and West Virginia

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[77] Útvar hlavního architekta, *Cikáni ve starém Mostě* (ONV Most, 1975), 27a. Copy located in Státní okresní archiv (SOkA), Most.

[78] Ibid., 95, 97.

[79] Ibid., 184.

[80] Among others, see Jedermann, *Verlorene Geschichte,* 95–104. Seeking a suitably devastated landscape, filmmakers shot the movie version of *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1979) in areas around Most.

[81] On political passivity, see the essays in Václav Havel, *Living in Truth* (Boston, 1990). Havel makes passing references to the environmental legacy of the Communists in speeches reproduced in *The Art of the Impossible: Politics as Morality in Practice,* trans. Paul Wilson (New York, 1997).

[82] For a comparison of the environmental policies of Communist East Germany and

in the 1970s would perhaps have found the north Bohemian landscape familiar.[83]

A smattering of German and Czech observers have suggested a link between the environmental crisis in north Bohemia and the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans after World War II.[84] The Czech dissident Petr Příhoda describes a land of unrooted, demoralized settlers who were unable to replace the deeply established German culture of their predecessors. Příhoda associates the "eco- and social pathology" of the borderlands with an identity crisis, a lack of community. With little connection to the land or to each other, the borderlanders were isolated and alienated, easily exploited by a system that privileged the productive process above all else.[85] Příhoda is right that the relentless materialism of the regime devastated north Bohemia. But, in fact, many— perhaps most—in the region were not alienated from the land or from each other. New identifications took form in the borderlands during and after the resettlement years, and these very identities contributed to the domination of the materialist thinking and interests that fed the downward environmental spiral in north Bohemia.

Little documentation exists on the connection of regional identity and the environment in north Bohemia, though one sociological study from 1971 tried to correlate attitudes toward pollution with degrees of local patriotism and satisfaction with everyday life. At least in the town of Neštěmice (an industrial suburb of 3,200 people near Ústí), locals avowed a sense of belonging and general satisfaction with life, while at the same time expressing dissatisfaction with air and water quality in the region. Though 77.5 percent were newcomers to the town after 1945, the overwhelming majority (72 percent) said they felt at home there in 1971, and only 10.5 percent expressed a desire to leave. Poll respondents viewed the local factory (a significant polluter) positively, primarily for its contribution to the town's economic well-being. Moreover, 68 percent of the population counted as "workers," thus strengthening identification with local and regional industry. The study concluded that a certain

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capitalist West Germany, see Raymond Dominick, "Capitalism, Communism, and Environmental Protection: Lessons from the German Experience," *Environmental History* 3, no. 3 (July 1998): 311–32. Dominick concludes that politics, rather than economic system, determined environmental policy. While pollution in West Germany rivaled that of the East into the 1960s, the West improved dramatically thereafter. Western public outcry about the environment in the 1960s and 1970s led to pollution controls, while the East squelched most environmental criticism.

[83] Freese, *Coal,* 111–23, 180.

[84] Radvanovský, "The Social and Economic Consequences"; and Jedermann, *Verlorene Geschichte.*

[85] Jedermann, *Verlorene Geschichte,* 90.

"lack of a critical view" toward environmental problems stemmed from a close identification with the town and its factory.[86]

Unlike Neštěmice, the Most region had more tenuous local identifications; there thousands of already recent settlers were uprooted again by the expanding coalfields during the 1960s through 1980s. As the prefabricated blocks of New Most multiplied, the displaced poured into the city, swelling its population by 22 percent from 1970 to 1990.[87] In addition, since 1945, Most had seen tens of thousands of residents come and go, as young and unmoored settlers moved in and out of the mines and chemical complexes. As a result of all this movement, the geographer Petr Pavlínek suggests, "many people in the Most region developed what one resident of the region called a *mechanistic mentality* toward nature, allowing them to ignore the devastation of the environment in which they lived."[88] Nor did it help that the majority of inhabitants of the region worked in the very industries that ate the land, fouled the air, and poisoned rivers and lakes. In spite of differences in degrees of local loyalty, then, the evidence from Neštěmice and Most confirms that a productionist/ materially oriented regional identity was well developed in much of north Bohemia and that this identification was just as likely to hinder as to raise environmental consciousness.

It appears, in fact, that during the relatively open 1960s, most "dissent" about the environment in north Bohemia came from local and regional Communist officials, not from the population. Some officials complained, in fact, of the local population's "indifference" to their surroundings.[89] Regional and central Communist authorities, in contrast, had been well aware since the early 1960s of the environmental crisis and its effects on human and ecological

[86] Československá sociologická společnost při ČSAV Praha, Výzkumný tým v Ústí nad Labem, "Vliv některých faktorů životního prostředí na identifikaci občanů s městem Neštěmice," 1971. ONV Ústí nad Labem, Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, k 262 ic 1025. In another, more recent study of the highly polluted city of Teplice, Alena Nedomová found that close to 80 percent of residents felt at home there, at least in 1991. Nedomová concludes, "The generation of current inhabitants of the originally resettled towns feels completely at home there now, and view any doubt as to their position as permanent residents as an attack on their identity." Alena Nedomová, "V blízkosti hranic: Identifikace obyvatel dosídlených po 2. světové válce do českého pohraničí a jejich potomků s místem současného bydliště na příkladu Českého Krumlova a Teplic," *Sociologický časopis* 31, no. 4 (1995): 507, 515.

[87] The population of greater Most increased from 58,800 in 1970 to 70,700 in 1990. Petr Pavlínek and John Pickles, *Environmental Transitions: Transformation and Ecological Defence in Central and Eastern Europe* (New York, 2000), 310.

[88] Ibid., 113.

[89] The quote comes from Jan Gabriel, Ústí nad Labem's chief architect, in an interview in "Už gesto obrany," *Dialog* 3 (1966): 4.

health. The party was also alert to potential economic and political conse-
quences, as a small but steady stream of inhabitants left the region for cleaner
and more congenial places.[90] As early as 1960, north Bohemian national com-
mittees identified a range of environmental problems, from emissions of ash
and toxins to noise pollution and general ugliness.[91] The north Bohemian Re-
gional Presidium of the Communist Party directed this effort, invoking the
Czechoslovak constitution of 1960 and an initiative from above to build "a
socialist environment."[92]

In Ústí, the administrative center of north Bohemia and one of the region's
most polluted cities, officials reported occasional improvements by local chem-
ical and electric works, but they also expressed frustration at the lack of pro-
gress. Above all, they complained of their inability to enforce existing envi-
ronmental regulations. The Ústí District National Committee, for example,
regularly levied fines on local polluters, but the amounts (from a few thousand
to several hundred thousand crowns) were trifling compared to the cost of
technology upgrades to reduce emissions.[93] A 1966 committee report lamented
that "legal regulations from 1960 . . . do not give organs the means they need"
to effectively pursue environmental violations.[94] The failure to deal with the
environmental crisis thus stemmed from a systematic devaluation of the im-
portance of clean air and water, which was reflected in the setting of low and
ineffective fines, the defiance or indifference of industrial enterprises, and the
lack of support from central organs.

While a short-term focus on industrial output was endemic to Communist
regimes in Eastern Europe, the catastrophic state of the environment in north
Bohemia was an extreme case, the worst in Europe by some accounts.[95] As
many functionaries pointed out, such severe environmental damage was ex-

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[90] Vaněk, *Nedalo,* 57–61. Frustrated by its inability to stop the departures, in 1982
the central government instituted a two-thousand-crown yearly bonus for those who
remained in the brown-coal basin from Ústí to Chomutov. Locals half-jokingly referred
to this as the burial subsidy (*pohřebné*).

[91] See letter from ONV Ústí to members of environmental review committee, n.d.
(1960), as well as Plánovací komise ONV v Ústí nad Labem politicko-organizační
opatření . . . ke zlepšení přírodního a pracovního prostředí v ústeckém okrese, Decem-
ber 9, 1960. ONV Ústí nad Labem, Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, k 138 ic 515.

[92] "Za socialistické životní prostředí v Severočeském kraji" (speech of Communist
Party secretary Oldřich Voleník and environmental program of Krajský výbor Sever-
očeské KSČ, November 1960). ONV Ústí nad Labem, Archiv města Ústí nad Labem,
k 138 ic 515.

[93] Of the many such reports, see "Souhrnná zpráva koordinační komise o stavu ži-
votního prostředí v okrese Ústí n. L," February 18, 1966, 17–18. ONV Ústí nad Labem,
Archiv města Ústí nad Labem, k 138 ic 515.

[94] Ibid., 17.

[95] See Pavlínek and Pickles, *Environmental Transitions,* 44–48.

pensive. The foul air and water poisoned crops, water supplies, and people. One could put a price tag on some of these effects, and in fact I have found several staggering regional estimates of the costs for agriculture and health care.[96] In one example reported by Miroslav Vaněk, north Bohemian officials calculated economic damages from coal mining and power production of 8 billion crowns per year in the 1970s.[97] So while Communist economic priorities had something to do with the failure to stop pollution in north Bohemia, they could just as easily have been invoked (as they were by some regional officials) to press for environmental protections. At the center, however, ingrained perceptions of north Bohemian industrial identity dominated, obscuring the increasing economic irrationality of industrial and environmental planning in the region.

I would argue that the failure of environmental policy in north Bohemia had two main causes. First, coal and industrial interests from the region were a tremendously powerful lobby, and they were able to block serious reforms by stonewalling and putting pressure on central officials. This was true both during the liberal 1960s and later, under Gustav Husak's increasingly authoritarian "normalization" regime of the 1970s and 1980s. With the Prague Spring approaching and internal criticism of environmental policy picking up in 1967, miners and mine management successfully opposed proposals to decrease coal output in favor of cleaner burning Soviet natural gas.[98] They had two convincing arguments: that north Bohemia's identity and livelihood were rooted in its industry and that one must please the coal miners and other industrial workers (the region's heroes of labor) at all costs. These arguments resonated again in the 1970s, as the central government was particularly sensitive to worker morale after the crushing of the Prague Spring reform movement in 1968. As Miroslav Vaněk reports, Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal's motto on the matter was, no matter what, "we can't anger the miners."[99] Both the postwar industrial identity of the region and the inflated status of miners had taken hold during the resettlement period, when central officials and regional leaders had emphasized material concerns as a remedy for labor shortages and a perceived lack of regional solidarity. The Stalinist regime of the 1950s

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[96] The Czech journal *Demografie* reported, e.g., 15 million crowns a year of damage to agriculture alone in the Teplice district in the early 1960s. Excerpt in Rudolf Urban, "Erhoehte Sterblichkeit im Bezirk Teplitz durch Industrieabgase," *Wissenschaftlicher Dienst für Ost-Mitteleuropa* 15 (1965): 415. Local estimates of damage to forests included 7.2 million crowns in the Most region in 1960. See *Literární noviny* excerpt in Rudolf Urban, "Das Schicksal der Stadt Brüx," *Wissenschaftlicher Dienst für Ost-Mitteleuropa* 16 (1966): 332.

[97] Vaněk, *Nedalo,* 50.

[98] Pavlínek and Pickles, *Environmental Transitions,* 105.

[99] Vaněk, *Nedalo,* 52.

pushed this regional identity even further, but its roots date to the years immediately following the Second World War.

The second and related reason for the failure of efforts to reverse the environmental decline was that central officials never stopped thinking of north Bohemia as a laboratory. Planners sought to extract as much energy and production from the region as they could, at minimum cost. In effect, it was an experiment that tested residents' ability to maintain industrial production while enduring a constant assault on health and sanity. Some north Bohemian officials complained that the center treated the region like a "periphery," and they could well have said "colony."[100] During the liberal period from the mid-1960s to 1968, local criticism of government policy toward the borderlands burst into the open. In May 1968, for example, national committees from the Šluknov region wrote an open letter to the government demanding an end to neglect and an infusion of development aid. Citizens "have lost faith in central organs and have been speaking of discrimination against our region," officials wrote. "Ever since 1945 there has been persistent discrimination against the border regions." The letter went on to demand support for housing, culture, schools, and health care, all of which had suffered for years.[101] In a rare mea culpa, the administration in Prague accepted Šluknov's critique of central investment policy, noting that "the government considered [the region's] demands as largely justified."[102]

Šluknov was one of many areas in northern Bohemia that were being sucked of life by an extractive industrial policy. As far as central planners were concerned, the environment was an afterthought, at best. In 1966 Vladimír Karfík described the introduction of yet more new power plants into the Most region as "a biological experiment of hitherto unknown proportions."[103] As Vaněk chillingly writes, "The north Bohemian region became a laboratory in which the governing power not only undertook its experiments on nature but also tested the ability of the local population to survive" in such conditions.[104] The social and economic experiments in north Bohemia began in 1945, forged ahead during the heavy-industrial push of the 1950s, and culminated in the late Cold War drive for yet more coal, more power, and more production in

[100] "Periphery" comes from Škornička, a member of the north Bohemian regional committee of the KSČ. Quoted in ibid., 49.

[101] Otevřený dopis městských a místních národních výborů Šluknovského výběžku centrálním orgánům Československé socialistické republiky, May 18, 1968. Městský národní výbor (MěNV) Rumburk, Státní okresní archiv Děčín, k 36 ic 115.

[102] Novotný, Sekretariát Podpredsedu vlády JUDr. Gustáva Husáka to MěNV Rumburk, June 25, 1968. MěNV Rumburk, Státní okresní archiv Děčín, k 36 ic 115.

[103] Quoted in Rudolf Urban, "Das Schicksal der Stadt Brüx," *Wissenschaftlicher Dienst für Ost-Mitteleuropa* 16 (1966): 331.

[104] Vaněk, *Nedalo,* 65.

the 1980s. That the experiment was failing was evident to many north Bohemians by the 1960s. By 1989 it was evident to all but a dwindling cadre of socialist coal barons and defiant Stalinists.

IV. Conclusions

On a sunny day in Ústí nad Labem, the smog acts as a distorting prism, layering waves of dulled color and light over the hills of the Elbe (Labe) Valley. Looking out and back over the last half century, one can see the shadows and distorted light of modernity itself dispersed over this once-beautiful landscape. Here the transformative power of the state, the surging search for national and social solidarity, and the culmination of materialist thought and deed came together in a dystopian brew, ultimately poisoning the land and the people who lived on it. Not only a laboratory of socialism, it was also a laboratory of late industrial modernity.

Disaggregating these darker possibilities of late modernity, we see an unrelenting exertion of state power over land and people, the engineering of society and environment to serve the needs of the state and economic growth.[105] The massive transformation of north Bohemia's ethnic makeup began during the Nazi occupation and culminated with the expulsion and resettlement wave of 1945–47. The so-called organized transfer of 1946 and accompanying resettlement involved a wide-ranging, bureaucratized apparatus of deportation, confiscation, and redistribution. At the same time, Czech officials, mostly Communists, planned in minute detail the social and industrial reorganization of north Bohemia, liquidating many enterprises, relocating others, and setting labor and production quotas for nationalized large industries, including mining, energy, and chemical concerns.[106] As early as 1945, planners envisioned north Bohemia as a proving ground of socialist modernity. The transition to Communist five-year plans and Stalinist heavy industrialism was relatively smooth in north Bohemia after 1948, as the region was already thoroughly planned and controlled.

The idea of a frontier ripe for utopian experimentation was by no means

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[105] On the darker aspects of late modernity, see Scott, *Seeing Like a State.* For a productive application of Scott's work to a Communist case, see Amir Weiner, "Nature, Nurture, and Memory in a Socialist Utopia: Delineating the Soviet Socio-Ethnic Body in the Age of Socialism," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 4 (October 1999): 1114–55; and Amir Weiner, ed., *Landscaping the Human Garden: Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework* (Stanford, CA, 2003).

[106] State control and planning of north Bohemia's larger industries began during the war, with Nazi organs managing industry for war production. Even so, planning and control reached a crescendo with the postwar resettlement and subsequent Stalinization of the region.

unique to Czech Communists. In the 1930s, the Soviets had built what they considered an examplary socialist city at Magnitogorsk, in the isolated Eurasian borderlands.[107] Like the Bohemian borderlands, Magnitogorsk was settled with people from across the Soviet Union and aimed to create a "new socialist man" that would be a prototype for the entire country. Postwar Stalinist regimes in East Central Europe followed the Soviet lead, building from scratch the heavy-industrial cities of Nowa Huta in Poland, Sztálinváros in Hungary, and Eisenhüttenstadt in East Germany.[108] Czechoslovakia and Poland, however, could boast an even broader canvas for social and industrial experimentation after the war. Not only did they have their socialist cities, but they also possessed industrialized borderlands emptied of their former inhabitants.[109] James Scott has pointed out that war and revolution in the twentieth century have given unprecedented opportunities for high-modern states to extend their control over vulnerable societies.[110] To this list of disorienting phenomena, we should add ethnic cleansing, which dislocated as many as 30 million people in the wake of World War II.[111]

As we have seen in northern Bohemia, cleansing prepared the ground for the creation of new regional identities, both national and social, that took shape in a profoundly materialist/productivist moment. This materialist orientation began with the expropriation of German property and the connection of settlement with acquisition, often leading to the suspension of moral values when material gain was concerned. Hundreds of thousands of Germans were moved to concentration camps or expelled by officials seeking to free up housing and other assets for Czech newcomers. Settlers arrived with very little. They came in pursuit of property and status, gained property and status, and generally were grateful to the Communist Party for making it all possible. Though there were some efforts to promote "cultural work" in the resettled borderlands, most official time and resources went toward issues of production: increasing labor and housing supplies and restoring industrial output to prewar levels.

The new identities promoted and adopted in resettled north Bohemia were not only national (Czech) but also heavily tinted by a socialist-inspired late-modern industrialism. There is evidence that not only Communist planners of

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[107] Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain.*

[108] On Nowa Huta, see Katherine Lebow, "Nowa Huta, 1949–1957: Stalinism and the Transformation of Everyday Life in Poland's 'First Socialist City'" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2002); on Eisenhüttenstadt as a model town, see Timothy Dowling, "Stalinstadt/Eisenhüttenstadt: A Model for (Socialist) Life in the German Democratic Republic, 1950–1968" (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1999).

[109] On the settlement of Poland's western borderlands, see Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists, 1945–1950* (Ithaca, NY, 1997).

[110] Scott, *Seeing Like a State,* 97.

[111] Ther, "Century," 44.

the Resettlement Office but also settlers themselves considered smokestacks, "heroes of labor," and coalfields to be essential icons of north Bohemian identity. Though the region had long been a center of industry, this was a sharp break with the predominantly romantic Sudeten German version of *Heimat,* rooted more in the natural, religious, and architectural landscape. Rather than a *Heimat* deficit, then, north Bohemia suffered from a misguided and destructive vision of regional identity.

In the borderlands, Petr Příhoda concludes, "People and things were subjugated to the demands of the production process."[112] Though one could say the same about the whole Communist order, materialism ruled in north Bohemia like nowhere else. The new north Bohemia was an experiment in national, social, industrial, and environmental engineering. It became a worst-case scenario—short of mass murder and nuclear annihilation—of what Communism, indeed modernity itself, could produce.[113] In diagnosing and analyzing this failed experiment, we need to recognize that it began in 1945, with ethnic cleansing and resettlement. But contextualizing the north Bohemian disaster most broadly, we should see it as a product not just of Communism or resettlement alone but also of a wider late-modern drive for economic growth regardless of the human and environmental cost. As Václav Havel has written, the "automatism" and materialism rampant under Communism, the sacrifice of "spiritual and moral integrity" for material security, was not just an indictment of Communism but also a "warning to the West . . . [of] its own latent tendencies."[114]

While locals may have shared in the productivist identity fostered by Communist ideologists, many regional officials and citizens took issue with the extreme ends to which the regime pushed it. In November 1989, residents of Teplice, drowning in coal dust and sulfur dioxide, took to the streets shouting "Give us oxygen, we want clean air!" Beaten severely by police, the Teplice protesters anticipated the Velvet Revolution in Prague by a week.[115] Trumpeted as a model of socialist progress, north Bohemia became instead a vanguard in the failure of Communism, an emblem of dystopian modernity.

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[112] Jedermann, *Verlorene Geschichte,* 90.

[113] Chernobyl was another such disaster meriting the title of worst-case scenario.

[114] I should note that Havel was referring to consumerism in this quote, but this also applies more broadly to mentalities privileging economic growth over nonmaterial values. Václav Havel, "The Power of the Powerless," in his *Living in Truth* (Boston, 1990), 54.

[115] The Teplice demonstrations began on November 11, 1989. The crowd of mostly young people numbered between six hundred and eight hundred on November 11 and one thousand on the next day. Miroslav Vaněk, "Předehra k 17. Listopadu 1989: Ekologické demonstrace v Teplicích," *Historické studie k sedmdesátinám Milana Otáhala* (Prague, 1998): 226.

Since the downfall of Communism just days after the Teplice protest in 1989, some residents of north Bohemia have tried to redefine the region's relationship with the natural and human landscape. Seeking a post-Communist, postindustrial vision of home, local Czechs have revived traditions of natural and historic preservation. Groups like Amici Decini (Friends of Děčín) have raised money for architectural restoration, published local guidebooks, and worked to connect the region's hiking trails to international "greenways."[116] In spite of the industrial landscapes in which they live, these groups have turned away from materialist ideologies of belonging. Local activists see their initiatives as part of a European value system embracing regionalism, environmental protection, and humanely regulated capitalism. Indeed, northern Bohemia is now part of the Euro-Region Elbe/Labe that spans the Czech-German border, and the Czech Republic joined the European Union in 2004. In many respects, then, new identities are starting to take hold in the Bohemian borderlands, highlighting visions of home that embrace the possibility of a green modernity.[117]

[116] See, e.g., Hana Slavíčková, *Děčínská zastavení, historický průvodce městem* (Děčín, 1997). Slavíčková is one of several historians, archivists, museum curators, and others in north Bohemia trying to establish a post-Communist identity for localities in the region.

[117] Here I am partly paraphrasing the title of William Rollins's book, *A Greener Vision of Home: Cultural Politics and Environmental Reform in the German Heimatschutz Movement, 1904–1918* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1997).