

judicial activity, the diversity of conditions and the range of factors affecting judicial behavior also stand out. The structure of the occupation, the policy of occupiers and collaborators, judicial traditions, personal and collective strategies, and the power of institutions have to be taken into account if the choices judges made are to be understood and, in their turn, subject to moral judgement. Derk Venema and the other contributors deserve considerable praise for bringing out these complexities in a pioneering comparative study.

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German Blood, Slavic Soil: How Nazi Königsberg Became Soviet Kaliningrad

By Nicole Eaton. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023. Pp. xiii + 315. Cloth \$35.95. ISBN: 978-1501767364.

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The victims on the ground most likely do not really care much about the ideological differentiation between one group of oppressors and the next. Those in the “Bloodlands” of East Europe who were impoverished, starved, displaced, or murdered surely did not spend much time wondering whether they were subjects of a race-based or class-based totalitarianism. This is the primary achievement of this fascinating work by Nicole Eaton, which uses an important borderlands location, Königsberg/Kaliningrad, as a laboratory to compare and contrast life under each of the two regimes that battled for supremacy in East-Central Europe. Many of us were educated with the idea that there was an easy binary in defining why the Nazis killed people and why the Soviets displaced and/or murdered people, one for their blood, one for class allegiance. Yet in Eaton’s microhistorical investigation, which details the lives of the people who endured both regimes, such easy binaries quickly fall apart. When politically convenient, local Nazis happily ignored the Polish blood of pro-Reich Masurians, while the working-class status of a postwar German in Kaliningrad meant nothing when a Russian needed his apartment. I have already alluded to the obvious comparator, Timothy Snyder’s *Bloodlands* (2010), with its bold argument that any attempt to rank Soviet occupiers as somehow not as bad as the Nazis becomes deeply problematic when one analyzes the experience of the people of East Europe. Both regimes were terrible and made each other worse in their constant interaction and friction across this space. Eaton’s is a deeply researched, well-written, seminal contribution to the growing body of literature in the wake of *Bloodlands*, one that only deepens the argument.

Beyond the straightforward comparison of the two regimes, the study stands as an excellent example of the increasingly prominent area of border studies by focusing on a city that has long been a meeting point of West (or at least Central) Europe and East Europe. In describing the point of view of both Berlin and Moscow, Eaton writes, Königsberg/Kaliningrad was “a bridge to civilization and a bulwark against the barbarians” (252). The narrative begins with the Prussian history of Königsberg, its crucial position for east-west trade, and its eventual unique place within the Third Reich during the 1930s. As an outpost, cut off from Germany proper by the “Polish Corridor” created at Versailles, East Prussia was largely left alone by Berlin, and its Gauleiter, Erich Koch, was able to rule it as an almost autonomous Nazi fiefdom. Koch’s approach to race in his province is yet another example

of the wildly inconsistent application of racial classification in these borderlands, a field now well-established in work done on present-day western Poland. While hard blood boundaries were strictly enforced around the ultimate enemy of the Nazis, the Jews, things got blurry quickly when it came to Poles. In Posen and Silesia, the systematic racial categorization of the inhabitants, the so-called *Volksliste*, could exclude someone as a Pole until more agricultural labour was required, when the same person could become German with the stroke of a pen. Sure enough, when it came to the Polish Masurians, who made up fully half of the population of southern East Prussia, Koch happily embraced these pro-Reich Slavs as loyal members of his kingdom. At the same time, there was never a large population of Jews in East Prussia, and sure enough, Koch treated them as Hitler desired. The special eastern bulwark status of Königsberg extended into the war years as well, for occupied Ukraine was in fact ruled by Koch from East Prussia. When the war turned against Germany, Eaton describes a world in which Germans themselves became victims of their totalitarian regime, with the total ban on allowing civilians to flee Fortress Königsberg and the resulting astonishing levels of casualties during the siege and terrible aftermath of the fall of the city.

The second half of the book moves into the Soviet story of what would become Kaliningrad. The inescapable theme that Eaton focusses on, from the first rapes of 1944 to the final ethnic cleansing of all Germans by 1950, is the reality that race, or at the very least “ethnicity,” trumped any utopian Soviet ideal of class once the Russians arrived in East Prussia. Eaton is especially careful in analyzing the mass rape, as it really remains incredibly difficult to understand. Sexual terror was not ordered from on high, and there are many documented cases of Russian soldiers raping East European women who were on German soil as forced labour. In an ironic way, class does seem to have played at least some role, in that part of the anger of the soldiers was the result of seeing just how well-off the German people, those who had “raped” their land of food and wealth, in fact were. Eaton then details the early postwar years, in which the Germans of Kaliningrad were provided with no food, were summarily removed from limited housing in order to provide apartments for incoming Russian “settlers,” and ultimately were given no evidence that they would ever be accepted as good, working-class members of the Soviet Union. It appears obvious that it was the strange, “special military district” status of what became the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, administered from Moscow as a colony, that facilitated the terrible treatment of German civilians, for this was not the case in what became the German Democratic Republic – Germans in East Germany were full citizens of their own country (of course, subservient ultimately to Moscow). The neglect of the ethnic German population resulted in mass death from disease and starvation. After a few years of refusing to make such an obvious “race-based” decision, by 1948 Moscow relented to local government desires and allowed for the remaining German population to flee to East Germany.

Nicole Eaton’s structural comparison of the two regimes’ approaches to Königsberg/Kaliningrad reveals incredible similarities: this was always a peripheral space to these empires, largely forgotten, left to local (often thuggish) control, bound by economic constraints to the benefit of the metropolises, but ultimately subservient politically to the whims of those metropolises. One can see in that description how borderland studies has many useful affiliations with the history of colonialism, as Eaton sometimes alludes. This is a powerful study, revealing many of the similarities, as well as contrasts, of life under these totalitarian regimes. It will reward those interested in either empire as well as the endlessly fascinating world of borderland life and history.

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