# Sarah A. Cramsey. *Uprooting the Diaspora: Jewish Belonging and the "Ethnic Revolution" in Poland and Czechoslovakia, 1936–1946.*

## The Modern Jewish Experience. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2023. ix, 410pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Photographs. $95.00, hard bound. $49.00, paper.

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That Palestine, imagined as the only Jewish homeland by some, became the destination for Jews from east central Europe after the Holocaust, is for certain observers as factual as it is "self-evident." The Holocaust and its aftereffects, after all, confirmed what became the dominant Zionist narrative after World War II: life in the diaspora was unsustainable, dangerous, and undesirable. Only a Jewish polity in Palestine embodied the true connection between ethnicity and territory, people and land. No so fast, argues Sarah A. Cramsey, in her engaging and deeply researched book, *Uprooting the Diaspora*. The consensus to negate the diaspora experience was neither "automatic" nor "self-evident." Rather, it was a process that required profound changes in people's thinking about Jews' rootedness in Europe as well as in international norms regarding minority rights and populations transfers as state building tools. Indeed, it was a process that took "deliberate work" (3). What was fast, however, was the speed with which a consensus to uproot minorities emerged. These transformations in thinking, what Cramsey dubs the "ethnic revolution," happened in the span of ten years and, at times, even within months. By 1944, and for some much earlier, there was a consensus among Jewish and non-Jewish policymakers and activists that "empirical Zionism," the transfer of the region's Jews to Palestine and the creation of an ethnic Jewish polity there was the "solution" to the problem of minorities in Europe. In time, they came to believe that it was where most survivors wanted to go. This stance emerged out of a much broader conversation that laid the ground for the deliberate, if "organized and humane," uprooting of millions of people after the war.

In *Uprooting the Diaspora*, Cramsey traces this emerging consensus to uproot and relocate Jews to Palestine through the interplay between Jewish activities, working and writing within the framework of national and transnational Jewish organizations, and statesmen in the Czechoslovak Government-in-Exile and its Polish counterpart, as well as bureaucrats in the emerging international framework of the United Nations. Her sources—newspaper articles, conversations, memoirs, letters, memoranda (and their annotations), policy proposals, and decisions—place the book's analysis firmly within the corridors, offices, and hotel rooms of a dozen or so exiled political leaders, diplomats, humanitarian reporters and workers, and Polish Jewish scholars, writers, and activists. The first three chapters examine the interwar consensus within this latter group in which Jews' rootedness in east central Europe, really in the diaspora, was self-evident. In 1936, when the book begins, the leading activists in the World Jewish Congress (WJC) agreed that emigration to Palestine had only one purpose: to remove Jewish "surplus population" and thus strengthen Jewish economic and social life in the diaspora. During the war, the affirmation of diaspora gave way to a focus on Palestine as a destination for survivors, especially Polish ones, and the rejection or "negation" of Jewish life in the diaspora. Effectively, Cramsey argues, the WJC

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adopted "empirical Zionism," the "ingathering of the exiles" in Palestine. Cramsey places this change within the context of a much broader "ethnic revolution." This was the diplomatic and political stance emerging from Czechoslovak and Polish exiled leaderships, that a stable postwar order in east central Europe required an "ethnic unmixing of populations." Minority rights had been shelved and ascribed ethnicity would determine where individuals could legitimately live after the war. Cramsey shows just how quick and consequential the consensus on "population transfer" as a legitimate state building tool was. It was mainly driven by Czechoslovak statesman Edvard Beneš's desire to remove ethnic Germans entirely from the postwar Czechoslovak state. This consensus had deep ramifications. It resulted in the planned "uprooting" of millions of ethnic Germans as well as what remained of the region's Jewish population.

While the first three chapters trace "the intellectual and diplomatic foundation for the unmixing of populations," those developments, "do not foretell what happened" (151). The last two chapters trace what happened as knowledge and comprehension about the Jewish catastrophe emerged among the book's protagonists and how it shaped their work to change the policies of refugee and displaced persons organizations. By 1946, instead of repatriation of Jews, these organizations facilitated the uprooting and transfer of Jewish survivors away from their former homelands. If it is hard for the reader to at times follow the minutiae of meetings, wording of memos, and the painstaking plotting of conversations, Cramsey's work convincingly reveals the depth and breadth of the intellectual revolution that was necessary to create the map of ethnically homogenous nation states that revolutionized postwar east central Europe.

## Oleksandr Melnyk. *World War II as an Identity Project: Historicism, Legitimacy Contests, and the (Re-)Construction of Political Communities in Ukraine, 1939–1946.*

### Ukrainian Voices. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2023. 432 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Photographs. €49.90, paper.

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Oleksandr Melnyk's monograph, *World War II as an Identity Project*, broadly explores the "relationship between history, legitimacy, and violence" in the destruction and creation of political communities in Ukraine during and after the Second World War (25). Published as part of ibidem-Verlag's "Ukrainian Voices" series, books like this one have never been more timely given Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine. Indeed, as the preface notes, Melnyk was living in a Russian-occupied village in southern Ukraine at the time of the book's completion, showing there is presently little safety from the horrors he surveys in the book.

By title alone, the monograph's goals are ambitious. Melnyk is interested in how various actors, in light of the brutal Nazi occupation of Ukraine and its accompanying layers of violence, sought to delimit the parameters of knowledge and discourse about the war, define new civic and political identities in a post-war Soviet Ukraine, and shape

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