Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Political Geography

Long-term effects of ethnic cleansing in the former Polish-German borderlands

CrossMark

R. Urbatsch [1]

Iowa State University, 503 Ross Hall, Ames, IA 50011-1204, United States

ABSTRACT

In compulsory population transfers and expulsions such as those wrought by partition, costs may accrue not only to the banished, but also to the places left behind. In particular, forcibly removing portions of the population rends social networks and discards location-specific skills and knowledge; these costs may be even worse if the expellees are replaced by refugees from elsewhere. The case of the interwar German-Poland borderlands, now Polish territory, shows that even six-plus decades after a population expulsion, ethnically cleansed and resettled places are appreciably different, with higher crime rates, lower civic engagement (measured by voter turnout), and less efficient public services (as measured by educational statistics). Although post-conflict population transfers might increase local social cohesion in some dimensions, this does not guarantee improved economic and sociological outcomes. Expelling local populations can, instead, cause highly persistent damage.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

The twentieth century saw many people expelled from their land and homes because of membership in a social identity group, often though not always ethnic. Indeed, in the first half of the century, such expulsions were an accepted part of international law and treaty-making, whether in explicit "population exchanges" or as immediate though implicit consequences of "partition." As such events repeatedly turned into human rights catastrophes, however, and displaced groups' claims were more loudly heard, forced population movements were rejected, decried as "ethnic cleansing" and, potentially, a war crime (Preece, 1998). The mainstream international community is now, for normative reasons, more reluctant to accept such policies.

Expulsions' empirical repercussions have attracted less attention than have their normative implications. Scholars *have* investigated the psychological and material aftereffects of becoming a refugee (e.g., Fazel, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Hadley, Zodhiates, & Sellen, 2007), but fewer analyses consider the consequences of ethnic cleansing for the places left behind. What does being ethnically cleansed do to a place and to any society that assumes the evacuated property? Does the location's new ethnic homogeneity produce the positive consequences desired by the cleansers and seen by social scientists in places that never had much identity-group fractionalization? Or does the rending of the local societal fabric, sacrificing the pool of deep local knowledge, damage the social and political landscape for the long run, even beyond the immediate suffering of expellees? These questions attain particular importance given the continued experience, despite international condemnation, of forced expulsion, and the perennial appeal of partition as a means for resolving seemingly implacable conflict (Fearon, 2004; Kaufmann, 1998; Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl, 2009; Tir, 2005).

This paper explores the question of what happens to the places left behind in forced migrations. It focuses on the case of what is now western Poland, but which before World War II was part of Germany. As part of the postwar settlement and transfer of territory, much of the ethnically German population was compulsorily expelled, often violently, and replaced with a more Polish-identifying population, themselves in part displaced from territory transferred to the Soviet Union. Identifying the effects of these expulsions, like those of other forced migrations, is difficult. The formerly German areas tended to be nearer to coasts and to relatively well-off areas of Western Europe, for example, which shapes local outcomes and masks the specific effects of the population expulsion.

To surmount this difficulty of isolating ethnic-cleansing effects,

this paper employs a quasi-experimental research design examining the subset of Poland that directly adjoined the interwar border on either side. That is, it compares places—some forcibly depopulated after the war and some not—that are geographically proximate, lying right next to areas that received very different treatment after the war. Such places have comparable access to markets and infrastructure networks and are exposed to similar spatial influences, reducing the effect of potentially confounding factors. Focusing on these areas reveals that ethnically cleansed areas perform distinctively today on many important social indicators. Local areas where the population was expelled wholesale in the 1940s—those along the German side of the interwar border—exhibit quantifiably higher unemployment, more crime, lower electoral turnout, and less efficient school systems in the 2010s than do their counterparts along the Polish side of that former border. These divergences hold up both in simple comparisons of means and in models controlling for other characteristics of the regions. This battery of generally adverse outcomes suggests that places that undergo forced population transfers still suffer damage from that history decades later, a result with important implications when considering the costs and benefits of partition or other would-be population engineering.

Expulsion, forced migration, and mass refugee flows

Purging a population of undesired groups through forced expulsion is an ancient practice, but on the rise since the end of the Cold War, from Bosnia to Sudan to Kurdistan (Bell-Fialkoff, 1996; Bulutgil, 2015; Olsson & Siba, 2013; Stefanovic, Loizides, & Parsons, 2014; Tinsley, 2014). This raises questions both moral and empirical. Ethnic cleansing clearly harms those chased away from their homes, who suffer the loss of property, the anguish of separation and, often, the trauma of betrayal by neighbors (Weine et al., 1995). Accordingly, many studies have examined refugees' psychological and economic state after they have resettled or been restored to their original homes (e.g., Summerfield, 2003; Yule, 2000). Other analyses have illuminated the effect of displaced people on the camps and places where they end up after being evicted (e.g., Alix-Garcia & Saah, 2010; Chambers, 1986; Salehyan & Gleditsch, 2006). Nevertheless, relatively few studies have empirically investigated the aftermath of forced migrations: analyses have tended to focus more on those migrations' origins (e.g., Wood, 1994; Schmeidl, 1997; Davenport, Moore, & Poe, 2003; Adhikari, 2013; Zhukov, 2015; see Morawska, 2000; Stefanovic et al., 2014 for exceptions). Consequences get short shrift even in an essay (Jenne, 2011) titled "The Causes and Consequences of Ethnic Cleansing," coming up largely as *anticipated* consequences that perpetrators foresee when deciding how to treat ethnic rivals—and so cause those perpetrators to resort to population expulsions—rather than the actual consequences that do arise in the wake of incidents.

This narrow focus leaves serious gaps in scholars' and policymakers' understanding of population transfers. Victims and their post-transfer hosts are unlikely to be the only people affected when a group is expelled from its home territory. The perpetrators are probably affected, too, whether by intended or unintended effects of their actions. Furthermore, the people left behind in the depopulated location—or those who migrate in to fill the abandoned property and infrastructure—also matter. These groups, after all, are typically important to the decision-makers who formulate the plan to permanently eject people from their homes.

One force limiting attention to ethnic cleansing's consequences is the difficulty in clearly identifying what those consequences are. Episodes of forced population transfer typically, but not always (Adhikari, 2012; Randell, 2016; Thomas, 2002; Doevenspeek 2011),

occur amidst broader war and conflict, which have their own negative effects (Besley & Reynal-Querol, 2014; Ghobarah, Huth, & Russett, 2003; Hoddie & Smith, 2009). Disentangling these from any aftereffects of population transfer *per se* can be complex, especially in the usual absence of data with the fine spatial grain to observe the local outcomes implicated in many ethnic conflicts and population transfers (Cunningham & Weidmann, 2010).

It is nonetheless possible to deduce several likely theoretical consequences of suddenly removing large portions of population from a geographical location. No one study could possibly explore all the potential consequences, but past literature points to several possible dimensions in which population transfers might be expected to have an effect. Studies of natural disasters, which often drive people from their homes, strongly bolster the idea that forced migration tends to destroy social capital: social networks are generally disrupted by mass population movements, especially when the movements are ill-planned and involuntary (Działek, Biernacki, & Bokwa, 2013; Messias, Barrington, & Lacy, 2012). With social capital's protean effects on other political and societal outcomes, this likely has several implications, especially since it is most often explicitly embedded in regional linkages (Laursen, Masciarelli, & Prencipe, 2012).

One of social capital's most widely noted consequences concerns economic development: dense networks of trusting relationships enhance economic productivity through multiple channels (Torsvik, 2000), including making it likelier that those who want to work will be able to find jobs (Freitag & Kirchner, 2011). By shredding these connections, expelling the local population likely harms the economy. Ethnic cleansing, moreover, has direct economic costs. It sacrifices location-specific skills and local trading links; if newcomers are brought in to replace those ousted, financial costs of resettlement also likely fall on locals (Hirschon, 2003, pp. 16—17). This suggests testable hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Ethnically cleansed areas will later have higher unemployment rates than will otherwise similar areas that experience less ethnic cleansing.

Hypothesis 2: Ethnically cleansed areas will later have lower per-capita income than will otherwise similar areas that experience less ethnic cleansing.

The breaking of social ties typically influences sociological as well as economic outcomes. It impedes the formation of collective organizations, as the lack of trust and commitment makes it more difficult to coordinate or act as a cohesive group (McCulloch et al., 2012). This is especially true when those organizations are designed to provide broader public goods, which require motivation to help not just associates but also the broader community (Apinunmahakul & Devlin, 2008; Sonderskov, 2011). In fact, broad networks of social connections even contribute to the maintenance of the smaller, interpersonal association within the family, altering the propensity for family breakdown (Afifi, Davis, Denes, & Merrill, 2013; Ramseyer, 2014). Such weaker micro- and macro-level social connections often associate with higher rates of crime, as people feel less social impulse to engage in prosocial behavior—and as would-be criminals gain confidence that potential victims lack the protective shield of strong social networks and institutions (Sampson and Groves 1989; Stamatel, 2009, p. 1343; Akcomak and ter Weel 2012; Takagi, Ikeda, & Kawachi, 2012). Stated more formally, this produces two sociological hypotheses to test:

Hypothesis 3: Ethnically cleansed areas will later have a lower density of voluntary associations than will otherwise similar areas that experience less ethnic cleansing.