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**The Thick Line at 1945: Czech and German Histories of the Nazi Occupation and the Postwar Expulsion/Transfer**

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**Abstract**

Following the Munich agreement of October 1938 Nazi Germany annexed the predominantly German-inhabited Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Gentile Czechs and Sudeten Germans watched as Nazi officials and their minions registered, segregated, and then deported nearly 100,000 Jews to their death. In 1945, Hitler's troops retreated. Czech mobs set upon Germans, murdering thousands. Over the course of the two years, often used methods that bore a striking resemblance to those employed by the Nazis against the Jews. By the end of 1947 Czechoslovakia had been "cleansed" of its three million Germans.

Two very different, seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of these events continue to divide Czechs and their former German neighbors. Both carefully constructed narratives emphasize a national "trauma," which Frank Hadler calls "the collective experience, memory and reminders of suffering" of the nation that is "formulated and handed down, reflected upon, and criticized" by historians, other scholars, and patriots.

This brief essay examines how historians, political interest groups, governments, and the media have constructed these two competing understandings of the past, paying close attention to the intersection of politics, nationalism, and history-writing. Surprisingly, these narratives began to take form even before the occupation had ended; their basic outlines remain in tact today. The essay also pays attention to historians and others who dissented from their nation's respective narratives. It does not make claims about individual memory, nor does it analyze work by historians based outside Central Europe. Diverging interpretations of the past continue to inform relations between the Czech Republic and Germany, so the question of how to interpret and remember the events of 1939-1947 is crucial for understanding foreign relations in Central

Europe. And yet there are signs that these two narratives are fragmenting, a process that could encourage Central Europeans to rethink what it means to be Czech, German, Sudeten German, and European.