Vasilijus Safronovas, *Migrants and Refugees on the Curonian Spit: Resettlement in the Mid-20th Century*, Vilnius: Vilnius Academy of Art Press, 2019. 155 p. ISBN 978-609-447-318-0

Vasilijus Safronovas' *Migrants and Refugees on the Curonian Spit: Resettlement in the Mid-20th Century* is a microhistory of population movement on the Lithuanian side of the Curonian Spit, a sand dune that separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. The author presents his study as a contribution to migration research, which is a relatively new topic of interest in Lithuanian historiography. The literature devoted to the forced migrations of the 20th century tends to represent them as a traumatic event in the history of the Lithuanian nation, not part of the global landscape of migration. The author's attempt to explore new territory is therefore very welcome.

In order to portray migration as a continuous, rather than disruptive, feature of life on the Curonian Spit, the author makes excursions as far back as the 13th century, when the Teutonic Order took over the area inhabited by Old Prussians (p. 18). Chapter 1 is a sweeping overview of the interplay of settlement and mobility from the 13th century to the First World War. There are occasional references to extremely interesting themes that remain underexplored, most particularly the interrelated mobility of sand and people (pp. 25–26). Whole villages were buried under the sand and people forced to move to other stretches of the Spit until both, the sand and the people, achieved some stability in the mid-19th century as a result of advances in engineering science. The reader is shown glimpses of what the addition of environmental history would have added to the story, but the author moves on.

Safronovas tells the reader that, although important for the argument about the pervasiveness of migration, Chapter 1 should be seen as an introduction to the main part of the book (p. 11), which focuses on population displacement during the Second World War (Chapter 2) and population settlement in the post-Second World War era (Chapter 3). Thus, while attempting to extend the scope of Lithuanian historiography, the book remains centred on the Second World War and its aftermath, with everything else serving as part of the frame. The author

justifies cutting the study off in 1961 by saying that the settlement of the northern section of the Curonian Spit after the establishment of the Neringa municipality in 1961 was 'determined by completely different factors' (p. 11). But it is precisely these 'completely different factors' that some readers, dissatisfied by the blank spots in Soviet historiography, might be especially curious to learn more about.

The study is delimited not only temporally, but also spatially, as it focuses on the Lithuanian (northern) part of the Spit. Analytical borders coincide with the political ones. Safronovas mentions the militarisation of the Spit during the 'great' wars (Chapter 1 and Chapter 2), the presence of Soviet border guards (Chapter 2), and the soft and hard borders that have historically separated the north from the south (Introduction, Chapter 1 and Chapter 2), but he does not link the microhistory of the northern part of the Curonian Spit to the history of the changing political regimes and the role of regulating mobility in making or breaking them. It would have been extremely interesting to link the particular story of displacement and settlement on the Curonian Spit with post-Second World War population exchanges and the Soviet treatment of German-speaking populations. But Safronovas remains reluctant to leave his part of the dune.

As a demographic microhistory, the book is very thorough. Safronovas follows the lives of prewar residents in great detail, building creatively and productively on the work of Kurt Forstreuter, Friedrich Mager and Arūnė Liucija Arbušauskaitė. He updates statistics on the number of displaced and returned individuals and families. He rightfully insists that there is no single story, but rather a succession of overall trends, including the near-total evacuation of the Spit during the Second World War (95% according to a postwar Soviet census, p. 63), the fact that many of the Second World War evacuees did not reach their destinations, that families were separated, that post-Second World War migration consisted of people striving to return to their prewar property (early postwar years) or to reunite with their families in West Germany in the late 1950s, when the Soviet Union allowed emigration for this population group (p. 95).

Chapter 3 contains the most novel and fascinating data. There is indeed very little written on how migration was organised and experienced in the post-Second World War Soviet Union (with the exception of studies of deportations and a few on population exchanges). The chapter discusses two waves of settlement, the first one beginning in 1945, and the second in 1951. The first wave entailed the resettlement of people from the lake districts in Lithuania (as fishing was the only

economic activity on the Spit), and toward the end of the period, the arrival of migrants from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, among other places. Migration during the first wave of post-Second World War settlement was both planned and chaotic, unlike the carefully organised second wave, which became associated with forestry in addition to fishing. Given the near-total depopulation of the Spit during the Second World War (as a result of the forced evacuation in 1944), it is not surprising that the postwar residents greatly outnumbered the prewar ones, although Lithuanians remained the majority (p. 134).

The extraordinary volatility of the postwar period came to an end in the late 1950s. Safronovas suggests that the new economic logics of the late Soviet period came into conflict with the strict control of the movement of people on the Spit associated with the militarised regime of the postwar years. In 1957, the Soviet Border Guard lost the ability to prevent the arrival of tourists. In later years, the emergence of Soviet environmentalism and the introduction of fishing quotas interfered with the livelihoods of the locals, who had few other opportunities to make a living than their neighbours across the lagoon (p. 88). Overall, the microhistory leaves no doubt that the motivations of the residents had to do with family, home and survival, rather than ideological or political sentiments.

Finally, the book is not only a pleasure to read but a pleasure to hold. It is very well designed. Footnotes are placed next to the main text, and the narrative is accompanied by wonderful photographs. It has large margins for note-taking, and it almost fits in the pocket. Highly recommended!

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