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# Alain Blum, Marta Craveri, Valérie Nivelon, éd., Déportés en URSS

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## REFERENCES

Alain BLUM, Marta CRAVERI, Valérie NIVELON, éd(s.), **Déportés en URSS. Récits d'Européens au goulag**. Paris : Éditions Autrement (Mémoires/Histoire,161), 2012, 311 p. + CD

- 1 Publications based on oral history interviews with survivors of Soviet repression display some emerging conventions. Four appear in this volume: maps to show the victims' multiple displacements, victims' photographs, passages taken directly from the victims' testimony, and collaboration among the interviewers/editors and between interviewer and interviewee. The resulting history is dynamic and intimate. Blum, Craveri and Nivelon have brought the survivors' unmediated stories to readers by including an audio CD with excerpts from a few interviews. Each excerpt is in the survivor's voice and language, preceded by a French translation. The title of this CD, "Les voix du goulag," is also becoming something of a convention in published survivors' testimonies.<sup>1</sup> Our reference to voices signals our commitment to the urgent task of recording the victims' versions of their lived experiences before they die. We also honor their words and emotions as crucial evidence in the full account of world historical events otherwise defined by grand, national and international, political, military, and diplomatic narratives based on archival documentary evidence.
- 2 The eighteen interviews included here are a small sample of the 160 interviews 13 researchers conducted in 2008-2010 across Europe and into Kazakhstan and Siberia with persons who survived forced deportation out of European zones of Soviet occupation and resettlement on Soviet territory from 1939 to the early 1950s. The entire sound archive of these interviews is available at <http://museum.gulagmemories.eu>. The sound archive constituted the primary project. This book-CD, as Nivelon calls it (p. 17), is an

extension of that project. Students and scholars interested in the lives of roughly one million Europeans deportated at the point of Soviet guns may thus explore 160 recorded interviews in addition to the thirteen chapters here.

- 3 The authors of those chapters are members of the research team who conducted the interviews, and then subjected them to their interpretation and analysis. By contrast with other anthologies of oral history interviews, this volume is thus frankly interpretative, rather than implicitly so as are selected collections of interview transcriptions. Much of each chapter's text is the author's recounting of the survivor's narrative, with direct quotes included from the interviews. The alteration between author's exposition and interviewee's words reminds the reader that an oral history interview is "an exchange between two subjects: literally a mutual sighting," and therefore an "intersubjective encounter" between historian and subject.<sup>2</sup> A chronology outlines the steps in Soviet repression and subsequent efforts to redress the state's crimes through rehabilitation. Maps showing the incidence of deportation from points of departure and at resettlement destinations convey this history in a visual manner. While the text is based on oral history interviews with survivors, the instructive voices in the text are those of the interviewers rather than the interviewees. By contrast, on the CD, one does not hear the interviewer's voice, except for a rare sympathetic chuckle in response to something the interviewee has said.
- 4 The guiding principle for the author of each chapter was to identify the intimate thread that he or she detected in the fabric of the survivor's life story as he or she told it. Most chapter titles are signposts to the chosen thread, for example: "Faire sa place en silence" written by Isabelle Ohayon and "La faim, un combat incessant" by Mirel Banica. The survivors' names do not appear in the Table of Contents; they appear only within the chapter texts themselves. The subtitle of the volume "Récits d'Européens au goulag" thus properly refers to the CD, but not to the text.
- 5 The researchers-authors-editors are particularly attentive to language as evidence of the physical and emotional displacements the deportees experienced. Valérie Nivelon describes the CD, with its eighteen voices speaking nine different languages, as a veritable Tower of Babel. That linguistic diversity reminds listeners of the broad range of Soviet occupation and forced deportations. Equally important for the oral historian are the moments in interviews when survivors shift among as many as four languages: their native language, the languages of the military and administrative personnel upon whom their fate depended: German and Russian; and the language of their adopted countries for those who escaped the Soviet Union, but did not return to their homelands. Psychologists and oral historians have noted that survivors often slip from the past tense to the present tense when recalling traumatic episodes. In the interviews here on CD and in text, that pattern intensifies with the simultaneous shift from past to present tense and from native or adopted language to the language used by their oppressors or fellow victims of Soviet repression.
- 6 The interviewees' accounts of their experience as deportees, inmates of Soviet labor camps or special settlements, and survivors following amnesty are consistent with such other sources as Katherine Jolluck's study of Polish women deportees, Lynne Viola's study of special settlements, and memoirs by Esther Hautzig and Efrosinia Kersnovskaia. From the arrival of men in uniform to deliver deportees to cattle cars for stinking transport into Soviet territory, through the victims' hunger, typhus, and forced company with corpses, these accounts reinforce what we know about the Soviet state's dehumanizing

policies. While describing her labor as a child in the taiga, the interviewee in the CD's Track 10 says, "See this little bone here in my hand? It should be here, but it's over here. Our hands were simply stretched out. It's displaced because we had to carry such heavy things." Listening, one recalls Engels' indictment of British capitalists in "The Condition of the Working Class in England" for labor regimes that deformed and maimed their working hands. The matter-of-fact, parenthetical way this survivor of Soviet maiming of European child deportees describes the legacy of her forced labor underscores how ordinary such experiences were, and thus, how all the more horrifying this particular manifestation of Soviet internationalism was.

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## NOTES

1. Jehanne M. Gheith and Katherine R. Jolluck, eds., *Gulag Voices: Oral Histories of Soviet Incarceration and Exile* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Anne Applebaum, ed., *Gulag Voices: An Anthology* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2011).
2. Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991), 61, as quoted in Mary Jo Maynes, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Barbara Laslett, *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History* (Ithaca - London: Cornell University Press, 2008), 120. Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett also use the phrase "intersubjective encounter," especially in Chapter 4, 98-125.