

CONSTRUCTING AND LEVERAGING “FLIGHT AND EXPULSION”: EXPELLEE
MEMORY POLITICS AND VICTIMHOOD NARRATIVES IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC
OF GERMANY, 1944-1970

Peter N. Gengler

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Approved by:

Konrad H. Jarausch

Christopher Browning

Chad Bryant

Jay Smith

Klaus Larres

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ABSTRACT

Peter N. Gengler: Constructing and Leveraging “Flight and Expulsion”: Expellee Memory Politics and Victimhood Narratives in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1944-1970 (Under the direction of Konrad H. Jarausch)

This dissertation examines the construction, instrumentalization, and institutionalization of a West German victimhood narrative between 1945 and 1970, namely a homogenized master narrative of the “flight and expulsion” of some ten to twelve million ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe during and immediately after the Second World War. I argue that expellee groups, historians, and politicians cemented a victimhood narrative and idealized past that emphasized German suffering and Soviet barbarity in museums, literature, and the media in order to underpin arguments for social, material, and political claims. In this manner, the expellee organizations fashioned a central concept of “flight and expulsion” and colonized public debates for decades, leaving a lasting impact on how contemporary Germany remembers the war and the integration of millions of refugees. By examining the trajectory of the expulsion narrative, I seek to show the layering of memory, how it was used over time, and the defining impact that this victimhood discourse has had on German public memory and academic interpretation of the phenomenon. My work investigates the origins and evolution of a discourse that continues to inform German historical consciousness, thereby providing fresh insights into the relationship between memory politics, the production and narration of history, and political interest group advocacy.

To my family, on both sides of the Atlantic

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sources. Yet their lives of rupture and loss, shared by millions of Europeans during the 20th century, engendered an understanding for the human and emotional dimensions of these events. While attempting to remain as objective and critical in its assessments, this dissertation—so it is hoped—has tried to remain sensitive to the fact that it deals with loss and suffering. While it is perhaps not the dissertation that they expected, I hope that in a small way that I have articulated what my grandparents and millions of refugees endured, and recorded for posterity their experiences without overlooking the historical processes that unleashed this misery.

While this study is dedicated to my entire family, I want to devote the last and most important lines to the two most important people in my life: My loving wife Jenna, and my precious son Johnathan. Johnny filled his parents with unspeakably deep awe, joy, and pride. Fatherhood suddenly left academic accolades standing in the shadows, and all scholarly achievements pale in comparison to the smirk and giggle of our beautiful son. For his part, Johnathan seems less interested in my dissertation, though he flipped through it a few times before throwing it to the floor. Despite his understandable disinterest in such a somber topic, it remains dedicated to him and the hope that he has a bright and peaceful future. May he always have a home filled with love, where his mother and father encourage and support him, spark his imagination, and stimulate his intellect.

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INTRODUCTION

All my life I have grown up with my grandmother's stories of her traumatic experiences during her family's flight from the Soviet Army during the winter of 1944/45. Born in Braunsberg, East Prussia (today Braniewo, Poland), she along with ten to twelve million Germans either fled the advances of the Red Army during the final months of the Second World War or were expelled from their ancestral homelands after the conflict's resolution. In the immediate postwar years, nearly one in five citizens of West Germany were born in territories beyond Germany's prewar borders, so that many Germans are intimately familiar with the horrific memories of their elders, which constitute a central component of German cultural memory of the Nazi period and World War II.

Yet while I have internalized the oft-repeated memories of my grandmother, my training as a historian and interest in German memory politics made me aware of the instability and malleability of recollections, as well as the selective and often problematic ways in which Germany came to terms with its past. One episode in particular changed my entire perspective on memories of *Flucht und Vertreibung*, or "flight and expulsion," and inspired this dissertation. On Christmas Eve in 2012, with my grandfather in the hospital after having suffered a serious stroke, I tried to draw my distraught grandmother into the family conversation by asking about her childhood memories of the holiday. Quickly she regaled the family with stories of imposing relatives, wintry pine forests, sumptuous feasts, and revered family traditions.

After some time, her recollections inevitably turned to 1944, the last Christmas at home, celebrated amidst a tense atmosphere as questions about the future hung in the air. The mighty Soviet Army stood at the borders of East Prussia preparing a massive operation that would see enemy troops cross the borders of the Third Reich. On January 12, 1945 the Eastern Front erupted in artillery fire, as the Soviet Army launched an attack against the entire German line running through Eastern Europe, driving in little more than two weeks to the Oder River and within 70 km of Berlin. Spelling the final phase of a conflict that had raged since 1939, the unstoppable Soviet offensive also had another consequence: Millions of German civilians plunged into a panicked westward flight.

My grandmother was one of them. Her recollections in 2012 were familiar: Hasty packing, the terrified march across the frozen Vistula Lagoon that represented the last hope for an escape, and the terrifying scenes my then 14 year old grandmother witnessed. Although I noted that her memories followed a stable, unchanged script that recounted this episode of her life, her narrative suddenly had a new component that stunned me. In every version of the story I had heard, my grandmother's aunt decided that the trek was too arduous and so turned home. Reaching her house, she found Russian soldiers had ransacked it and destroyed anything they could not carry with them. She also suffered unspeakable horrors at the hands of the drunken soldiers. Now, in 2012, almost as an aside, my grandmother revealed that it had been German soldiers that had pillaged and looted the family home.

This significant difference in the family narrative, which neither my mother nor my aunt had heard, took nearly seven decades to emerge. My grandmother had not witnessed the events in Braunsberg after its fall and surrender, and only learned of them in a letter her aunt sent the family in 1946 in which she explicitly condemned the German soldiers' behavior, and which my

grandmother now fished out of a box of keepsakes. Yet that portion angrily documenting the excesses of the German military against the civilian population inexplicably vanished from my grandmother's narrative, which contained other disclosures: Recollections of her uncle's POW forced laborers who were well-treated and friendly, until one of them was "sent home" when he threatened his master with a pitchfork; corrupt and incompetent Nazis and heroic Wehrmacht soldiers aiding civilians; memories of passing the Stutthof Concentration Camp, though the prisoners make no appearance; her father delaying flight as the city burned, because as a blacksmith he could make decent money repairing damaged trek wagons of fleeing civilians.

Through my readings and engagement with primary sources, I realized that large parts of this combination of family "blank spots" and tropes mirrored depictions of this history in films, literature, and historical accounts. Indeed, I theorized, my grandmother's memory and personal narrative of her life were significantly molded by them. The political and cultural landscape in postwar Germany profoundly influenced how the phenomenon was discussed, remembered, and represented. Though the Soviet Army committed atrocities against civilians and many Germans knew this firsthand, these experiences fused with lingering National Socialist racial worldviews and the anticommunist politics of the Cold War, thereby encouraging popular depictions of the events of 1944/45 that emphasized Soviet savagery and German anguish while relativizing or obfuscating issues such as German war guilt.

My grandmother had not consciously lied; her memory merely conformed to and reflected how postwar West Germany publicly discussed its recent history. Thus, in order for my grandmother to make sense of her family's plight, it was filtered through a collective memory that held that it *had* to be Russians who inflicted suffering, while most Germans acted honorably

and bravely. The Nazi dictatorship and the acknowledgement of concentration camps and slave labor receded into the background, if not disappearing entirely.

Suddenly, I knew what I wanted to write my dissertation about: I wanted to find out what actors or sources my grandmother was exposed to, and shaped how she and other Germans contemplated “flight and expulsion.” I sought to investigate how master narratives of the events were created and who streamlined them, how these were circulated, what uses they served, and how they were cemented in West German cultural memory. My dissertation, in other words, explores the construction, instrumentalization, and institutionalization of the master narrative of the largest forced migration of peoples in European history between 1944 and 1970 in the Federal Republic of Germany, and its layering over time.

My study will demonstrate that the mental images and historical memories that Germans associated with “flight and expulsion” were significantly shaped by narratives that were a multi-layered *construction* of the expellees themselves and their leaders and associations, as well as historians, politicians, and the media. This construction was based above all on Nazi press reporting and propaganda attesting to Russian atrocities and savagery, which provided some of the most dominant mental images that were expounded upon after 1945.

In the immediate postwar period, journalists covering the expulsions as they unfolded also introduced tropes and interpretations that added a crucial layer to the master narrative. Expellees themselves also contributed to this process. As they fled or faced expulsion, they shared their experiences and reiterated rumors in public and semi-public conversations with one another and non-expellees. Already in the immediate postwar period, therefore, reality and interpretation fused into an inextricable blend of experiences, rumor, fear, yearning, and ideology that reverberate into the 21st century.

Yet another layer was added through a concerted streamlining of the plurality of voices and diversity of experiences reflected in eyewitness testimony, historians, expellee leaders, and members of the media constructed stylized narratives with recurring motifs of German misery and Soviet barbarity, ignoring conflicting accounts. Decontextualized from the history of the Third Reich, expellee associations and their supporters in government, academia, and the media embedded these narratives within historical studies, museums, memorials, and literature.¹ Thus, by the 1950s, the “typical” fates of expellees had cemented themselves within German cultural memory and a central concept of “flight and expulsion” emerged, providing a deep well to draw from to this day.

This dissertation will furthermore argue that expellee associations and their supporters constructed this “sympathy narrative” in order to *instrumentalize* it as the underpinning for social, material, and political claims. The immediate postwar years saw these groups successfully leverage their plight in order to arouse sympathy domestically and abroad to alleviate the consequences of the expulsions through material aid and accelerate integration of their constituents.² Largely apolitical, the earliest descriptions of “flight and expulsion” during the 1940s emphasized refugee suffering and appealed to audiences to intervene in the humanitarian crisis and convince particularly German society to open their doors to the millions of displaced.

¹ Mathias Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Das Großforschungsprojekt ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa,’” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 46 (July 1998): pp. 345-389. See also the contributions in Stephan Scholz, Maren Röger, and Bill Niven, eds., *Die Erinnerung an Flucht und Vertreibung. Ein Handbuch der Medien und Praktiken* (München: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2015).

² The pinnacle of this activism culminated in the “equalization of burdens” law of 1952. See Michael Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

However, by the 1950s, the Cold War provided new rhetorical strategies, and the memory of “flight and expulsion” found new potent uses by incorporating an unmistakable anticommunist tenor that dovetailed with the dominant victimhood framework of the early Federal Republic.³ Thus, expellee organizations by the early 1950s effectively embedded the expulsions into the geopolitical issues of the day, and deployed particularly emotional portrayals of their experiences that emphasized communist barbarity in order to leverage German suffering for the purposes of *Heimatpolitik*, the politics of getting the homeland back.⁴ Particularly the various documentations engaged in an explicit framing of the expulsions that permitted the cultivation of an expellee victimhood narrative.

Lastly, this dissertation investigates the *institutionalization* of “flight and expulsion” in two phases. At the height of their power, expellees successfully enshrined their victimhood narrative in memorials, schools, museums, and literature. During the 1950s, expellees sought and largely successfully colonized public discourse. Starting in the 1960s, however cultural, demographic, and political developments forced them onto the defensive, leaving their narrative anachronistic. Expellee associations therefore attempted to conserve a nostalgic homeland for posterity, as well as attempt to imbed their argument in an emerging human rights discourse.⁵

By examining the trajectory of the expulsion narrative from its initial construction and instrumentalization through its turn toward nostalgia and institutionalization in various cultural

³ Robert Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁴ On the political influence of the organizations in the 1950s, see Matthias Stickler, „*Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch. “ Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004)

⁵ Lora Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights in West Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

forums, I seek to show the layering of memory, how it was used over time, and the defining impact that this “victim discourse” has had on German public memory and academic interpretation of the phenomenon. My cultural history investigates the origins and evolution of a discourse that continues to inform German historical consciousness, thereby providing fresh insights into the relationship between memory politics, the production and narration of history, and political interest group advocacy.

Historiography

My project engages with several distinct historiographies. Although not an *Ereignisgeschichte*, my intervention nevertheless contends with the “history of the events” tangentially. The multivolume *Dokumentation der Vertreibung* (“Documentation of the Expulsions”), published in the 1950s and early 1960s, was not only the first history of “flight and expulsion,” but a foundational text that historians in later decades drew from.⁶ A product of the Cold War, scholars working with this resource invariably work with a constructed narrative, and often refrain from rigorously interrogating the biases and political agendas that shaped the selection of eyewitness reports. The testimonies on which the *Dokumentation* is based therefore remain largely unmined. In order to recreate the plurality of experiences and argue for the postwar culling of conflicting narratives, my dissertation examines these reports and indicts the subsequent production of history that influenced the cultural memory of “flight and expulsion.”

⁶ For a critical examination of the Schieder volumes, see Mathias Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Das Großforschungsprojekt ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa,’” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 46, no. 3 (1998): 345–89.

Secondly, my dissertation engages with the *Verbandsgeschichte* (“organizational history”) of the expellee associations.⁷ Predominantly political histories that ultimately argue for a very brief ascendancy during the 1950s before a rapid decline, these works overlook the relative success of this pressure group in colonizing discussions of “flight and expulsion,” imbedding it within a Cold War context, and circulating their politicized histories not merely domestically but abroad. This raises not only questions about their supposed marginal status, but also places “flight and expulsion” in a transatlantic context, when so often it is relegated to specialized literature on the expulsions. My intervention argues that the “German East” was crucial to the geopolitical calculus of the Federal Republic until the late 1960s, in large part to the successful leveraging of victimhood narratives of the expellee associations, and needs to be more earnestly included in histories of postwar East and West Germany.

Lastly, my dissertation is in conversation with the numerous works examining the collective memory of “flight and expulsion.”⁸ Although historians have laid important groundwork, their scope is generally limited to narrow time periods or focused on specific actors, so that one doesn’t get an adequate sense of the relationship of their case studies and German collective memory. For instance, while Anna Jakubowska covers a long time period from 1957 to 2004, her attention on the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (BDV) restricts the study to an organization

⁷ Matthias Stickler, *“Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch”: Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände : 1949-1972* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004); Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Tobias Weger, *“Volkstumskampf” ohne Ende?: sudetendeutsche Organisationen, 1945-1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008); Michael Schwartz et al., *Funktionäre mit Vergangenheit: das Gründungspräsidium des Bundesverbandes der Vertriebenen und das “Dritte Reich”* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

⁸ For an overview of the historiography, see Maren Röger, “Ereignis- und Erinnerungsgeschichte von ‘Flucht und Vertreibung’: Ein Literaturbericht,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62, no. 1 (2014): 49–64.

with little resonance outside of the expellee community.⁹ Moreover, the examination of the BdV's self-portrayal and depiction in Poland contributes a novel transnational perspective, but doesn't grant meaningful insight into the BdV's impact on public discourse.

Robert Moeller's original treatment of the "selective memory" of the Federal Republic, which emphasized expellee and POW suffering and raised it to a core element of 1950s political identity, proposes many salient points on the mentalities of postwar West Germany.¹⁰ Nevertheless, his research reveals limitations. Specifically, the narrow concentration on a group of historians and sentimental movies, while fascinating, raise the question of whether Moeller overstates their cultural impact. What is needed is a larger empirical base of examples from the German press and literature, particularly the genre of pop literature that reached many millions.

A collective of scholars recently attempted to make inroads into the identification of various media and practices related to "flight and expulsion."¹¹ While uncovering many useful source bases and types, there remain substantial lacunae because some of the contributions gave only a superficial or initial interpretation. Andrew Demshuk's 2012 study makes a crucial intervention by arguing that expellee memory cannot be mistaken for expellee association memory politics, but the questions of the investigation attempt to understand how expellees personally came to terms with the loss of their homeland. The view "from below" therefore

⁹ Anna Jakubowska, *Der Bund der Vertriebenen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Polen 1957-2004; Selbst- und Fremddarstellung eines Vertriebenenverbandes*. (Marburg: Herder-Inst., 2012).

¹⁰ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

¹¹ Stephan Scholz, Maren Röger, and Bill Niven, eds., *Die Erinnerung an Flucht und Vertreibung: Ein Handbuch der Medien und Praktiken* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015).

neglects the activities “from above,” which had a more decisive influence on the West German discourse than individual citizens.¹²

Hans Henning and Eva Hahn provided with their 2010 study a sweeping overview of the expulsion in German memory, covering the period from the end of the Third Reich to the present. The breathtaking scope and many provocative insights cannot make up for an analysis that at times requires more nuance. The authors’ overly critical castigation of West German special pleading assumes a stagnant victimhood discourse, and ignores earlier self-critical rhetoric.¹³ Moreover, the insinuation that East German cultural memory revealed greater and more progressive reflection in comparison to a West German selective reading of the past overlooks that the socialist state also politicized history. Before the West German selective remembering that privileged German suffering and obscured German war guilt, or East German triumphalist narratives of overcoming revanchist forces that relativized expellee misery, discourses in both Germanys possessed remarkable similarities and took both refugee misery and the role of the Third Reich seriously. All this is to say that the political biases of the authors frequently color the interpretations of their sources.

One last relevant work that must be mentioned is the 2007 comparative study of opposing West and East German interpretations of “flight and expulsion” by Christian Lotz. While addressing similar concerns as this dissertation, Lotz concentrates on the construction of histories that supported a revision or legitimization of the Oder-Neiße Line after 1948.¹⁴ The new border

¹² Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹³ Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2010).

¹⁴ Christian Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts: Erinnerungspolitische Kontroversen im geteilten Deutschland um Flucht, Vertreibung und die Ostgebiete, 1948–1972* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2007).

to Poland indeed constituted a primary agenda of memory politics during the 1950s in both German states. But Lotz' focus results in a neglect of the early period. This article reveals an earlier instrumentalization of a discourse to aid integration of millions of expellees and underpin social and political claims.

In general, the period before 1949 receives short shrift in the literature, thereby obscuring fundamental earlier developments that predated foreign policy struggles of the height of the Cold War in the 1950s. The tendency of seeing public discourse as stagnant, or rather focusing on its 1950s iterations, overlooks a surprising evolution. My dissertation represents the first full-length study of how a master narrative of "flight and expulsion" formed, how it influenced public memory, and the purposes it served in the Federal Republic of Germany between 1945 and 1990. In short, I investigate the dynamism, layering, and evolution of a discourse beginning in the Third Reich and stretching into the late Cold War.

Sources

Outlining how a victimhood narrative formed and influenced public memory requires a wide array of sources relevant to a cultural history approach. In order to make the argument of a streamlining of experiences, my dissertation examined the raw collection of testimonies that postwar historians solicited, compiled, and used for their interpretations. Located in the Bundesarchiv-Bayreuth, few historians have taken the time to consult the Ost-Dok holdings, preferring instead the convenience of consulting the *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. While certainly there is nothing in and of itself wrong with relying on these volumes, one must do so carefully and realize one is working with a collection compiled for specific political goals in a Cold War context. The roughly 18,000 accounts from Germans from across the German East

therefore provide a means for assessing just how “representative” the “typical” testimonies in the *Dokumentation* are.

A second set of sources instrumental for this study were party records, and personal papers of politicians bequeathed these archives. These holdings provide a wealth of useful sources, as most parties maintained refugee subcommittees and amassed material ranging from posters to radio scripts, to traditional interparty communication or protocols. The personal papers, moreover, of leading expellees who simultaneously rose in the ranks of their party after 1945 often provided invaluable backchannel communication. In other words, party files are an important tool for measuring responses to the expellees, and how and to what degree these figures exerted influence on public discourse.

Governmental records offered a third crucial source base. Particularly the records of the expellee ministry, held in the Federal Archive of Koblenz, proved a font of helpful documents chronicling the engagement with federal officials with historians, the media, and expellee associations. On the latter, the Sudeten German Archive in Munich, a seldom used yet nevertheless impressively large collection of organization records and personal papers spanning back to the mid-1940s that one cannot ignore when investigating expellee factions, as the papers of most other associations from a similar time period are no longer extant. Lastly, contemporary media coverage as well as novels were vital for tracing public discourse, and how “flight and expulsion” were discussed.

Organization

The first two chapters, covering flight from the Red Army and the expulsions, act as background chapters, yet attempt to create a broad spectrum of voices. If one is to argue that there is a streamlining after 1945, one must identify which voices entered the historical record,

and which ones did not. Moreover, these chapters make a concerted effort to bring in contemporary voices describing the forced migrations, in order to illuminate the formation of narratives and layering of memory that future activists would build upon. This includes Nazi propaganda on Soviet barbarities and the plight of fleeing civilians, German reports and rumors, and Allied reactions as the events were still unfolding. The goal of the introductory chapters is to provide audiences with an understanding of the complex phases and contexts that, as I demonstrate in later chapters, postwar actors conflated into a homogenized, central concept of “flight and expulsion.” As such, I seek to create a panorama of voices and experiences, and unearth the foundations of German historical memory of the war and its consequences.

The third and fourth chapter argue that between 1945 and 1949, discussions of “flight and expulsion” were leveraged as largely apolitical “sympathy narratives” that underpinned demands for material support. Chapter three examines how by 1949, expellees in West Germany forged a “community of fate” in the face of non-expellee apathy and bigotry. Chapter four evaluates the various efforts of expellees to circulate victimhood narratives abroad in order to convince the Anglo-Americans of the importance of helping overcome the refugee crisis through increases in humanitarian aid.

Chapter five discusses how expellees instrumentalized their narrative in arguments for an equalization of burdens law and campaigns to sway the rest of Germany to accept expellees as equal citizens deserving of support. With the short-term goal of integration achieved, expellees turned to their ultimate aim: Revising the postwar order. Chapter six therefore concentrates on the construction of a historical interpretation of “flight and expulsion” that streamlined the memory of the forced migrations into a decontextualized narrative of German victimhood and Soviet barbarity that was in turn leveraged in order to get the lost homeland back. A constellation

of associations, politicians, and the media framed these migrations in a Cold War context and attempted to appeal to domestic and foreign audiences in order to back the geopolitical goal of reuniting Germany within the borders of 1937. While this lobbying ingratiated expellee Cold Warriors with German and American anticommunist lawmakers, their memory politics profoundly shaped how West Germans viewed the forced migrations. Chapter seven investigates what images, tropes, and arguments this lobbying had on media discussions, and argues that when Germans reflect on “flight and expulsion” today, they make use of concepts forged in the 1950s, when expellee associations largely monopolized public discourse.

The last chapter examines the cultural, political, and demographic changes of the 1960s and 1970s that led to the political decline of the expellee organizations. With the recognition of the Oder-Neisse Line by the Brandt government, the relevance of the expellee pressure group faded. This chapter looks at the varying strategies ranging between radicalization and internationalizing flight and expulsion by tying it to human rights and EU discourses in the 1980s. The chapter ultimately assesses how expellees sought to institutionalize and preserve a nostalgic homeland in German historical memory in museums and literature, adding the last layer of a romanticized “out of ashes” narrative to the cultural memory of “flight and expulsion.

CHAPTER 1

“THE RUSSIAN IS COMING!” EXPERIENCES AND MEMORIES OF FLIGHT, 1944-1945

“The misery which is unfolding among the treks dragging themselves from east to west is indescribable,” Joseph Goebbels confided to his diary on January 23, 1945. “One would prefer to avert one’s eyes,” he continued, from the “tragic scenes” unfolding on the icy country roads, where hundreds of mothers could do nothing to keep their children from starving or freezing to death. “This mass exodus in the face of the Soviets will enter as a procession of suffering (*Leidenszug*) into the history of the German people.”¹ Even Adolf Hitler was “touched to the utmost” by the plight of the population caught in the furious maelstrom of the massive Red Army offensive of January 12th, 1945.² Two days later, Goebbels again noted the Führer’s ostensible dismay over the “unending suffering” contained within “deeply moving” reports trickling in.³ What responsibility they bore for this humanitarian disaster unsurprisingly did not arise during the intimate tête-à-têtes. Yet in one way the Reich Propaganda Minister’s entry proved prescient: The flight of millions of panicked civilians during the final months of the Second World War, which initiated a forced migration of 10-12 million Germans over the next several years, would indeed enter German history as one of its most traumatic and calamitous chapters.

¹ Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, vol. 15 (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1993), 190.

² Fröhlich, 15:196.

³ Fröhlich, 15:219.

One of the core challenges of this dissertation is separating reality from myth, distinguishing between actual experiences and postwar legends. At stake is not a meticulous recounting of the actual events, but rather describing who wrote this notorious chapter and populated its pages with “heroes” and “villains,” victims and perpetrators. Because this study investigates the construction and leveraging of a decades-old victimhood narrative, one must first excavate its foundations. The majority of Germans operate with interpretations and images that find their roots in the Third Reich, and were successively built upon by expellees after 1945. The first chapters must therefore reconstruct the actual processes that unfolded between 1944 and 1946, for without a firm grasp of what constitutes “flight” or “expulsion” and analysis of the complex phases of the forced migrations, postwar memory politics become incomprehensible.

Beyond providing necessary background information, however, this chapter will make two main arguments. *First*, it seeks to chronicle civilians fleeing the Soviet advance, yet aspires to challenge the accepted narrative of “flight” that revolves around panicked headlong escapes, treks on icy roads, sinking ships, and bloodthirsty Red Army troops. All these tropes are rooted in a reality, but they stand as “typical” experiences that historians and journalists time and again reified. Largely, this reflects the fact that authors relied on the interpretations of German historians in the 1950s, who established these themes and wove them into an argument for German victimhood and a revision of postwar borders.⁴ The tendency of uncritically utilizing these tropes simultaneously reflects West German cultural memory, and how powerfully discourse shaped scholarship. This dissertation aims to therefore impart a description of the forced migrations that resurrects neglected voices, and complicates the narrative.

⁴ See Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, 3 vols. (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984). The Schieder Commission, and the drawbacks of their scholarship, will be assessed in later chapters.

Such an attempt must take care with studies of the 1950s, and avoid an overreliance on them. The testimonies of the *Dokumentation der Vertreibung* (“Documentation of the Expulsions”) are selections, compiled to support Cold War era arguments. Surprisingly, few historians have taken the time to turn to the archival materials and collection of testimonies upon which the *Dokumentation* based its interpretations. Through a careful use of published accounts and analysis of raw eyewitness testimonies, a more nuanced picture emerges. Furthermore, working against the grain creates a panorama of diverse experiences that calls into question the claims of representativeness of “typical” fates, which in turn makes the postwar streamlining of memories into a homogenized victimhood narrative more comprehensible. In other words: If one wants to deconstruct the cultural memory of “flight and expulsion,” one must begin with reconstructing the diversity of experiences.

Secondly, this chapter argues that the Nazi regime and contemporaries helped lay the foundations of this cultural memory. Fleeing refugees witnessed wartime carnage and recounted their experiences to incredulous audiences, or circulated rumors that spread from mouth to mouth. Yet Nazi press and regime elites emerged as the first authors of an interpretation of “flight and expulsion,” constructing a narrative of fear to coax the population into fighting Bolshevism to the last bullet. By sensationalizing atrocities, the Third Reich stoked terror that explain why millions sought to flee the encroaching enemy to begin with. Yet once disaster engulfed the German East and the regime lacked the inclination or ability to alleviate the suffering of civilians, press reports elided implications of failed humanitarian considerations from the NSDAP, and instead framed the waves of refugees as fleeing an inexorable red wave.

Before the war even ended, in other words, the Nazi regime laid a foundational layer of “flight and expulsion” with powerful resonance, which influenced postwar authors who then

built upon it. One cannot parse the themes and silences without assessing these earliest of iterations that carried into the Federal Republic after 1945. This chapter therefore examines not just what happened, but explains how reality and interpretation fused into an inextricable blend of experiences, rumor, fear, yearning, and ideology that reverberate into the 21st century. In order to untangle this nexus of history and memory, we must go back to the beginning to the events themselves, but also to how they were described and narrated as they unfolded.

Enemy at the Gates: The German East Between Soviet Hammer and Nazi Anvil

Though the reports purportedly astonished and distressed them, the chaotic flight of the population living in the German East should not have completely surprised the Nazi leadership. In fact, what transpired in January of 1945 was but a repetition on a much larger scale of crises in the fall of the previous year. The regime bore a direct responsibility for the disarray in two regards. First, the refusal to learn from the humanitarian crisis unleashed by Soviet offensives in the months before and unwillingness to provide active measures to contend with a foreseeable reprise explained the hectic and disorganized scenes in 1945. Secondly, the unceasing propaganda that circulated news of atrocities and warned of the Soviet menace partially explained why millions of civilians now desperately sought refuge in the Reich. Yet for many civilians in the German East, the events of 1944 also convinced them of the folly of fleeing in 1945. In short: The responses in January 1945, and how events unfolded, can only be understood by examining earlier developments that often remain overlooked or forgotten.

Because memories of “flight and expulsion” habitually begin their story in 1945, it is essential to explain that the calamity had its direct roots in the summer of the previous year. Three years to the day marking the German invasion of the USSR, the Soviet Union launched an

enormous offensive along the entire Eastern Front on June 22, 1944. Though Stalingrad dealt a psychological and military blow that turned the tide against the Third Reich, Bagration represented the greatest military disaster in German history: In less than two months, the Soviet military obliterated three army groups, killing or capturing between 300,000 and 600,000 as it relentlessly drove more than 300 kilometers before halting at the German border in early August.⁵ The operation delivered Nazi Germany a colossal setback, yet the disintegration of the Wehrmacht also carried grave consequences for the population of Central and Eastern Europe.

When the Red Army began its assault in Poland and Belorussia in June 1944, it sparked a massive movement westward of decimated military units and anyone with reason to fear the enemy's retribution. Germans working or living in occupied territories and *Volksdeutsche*, ethnic Germans and Eastern Europeans deemed by the Nazi regime as "racially German" and whose privileged status now could become their undoing, faced particular danger.⁶ Treks of non-Germans, mainly Balts who lived under Soviet rule from 1939 to 1941 and now faced potential

⁵ Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 425; Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten: die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neisse 1944/45* (München: Oldenbourg, 1996), 83–104; and Heinrich Schwendemann, "Strategie Der Selbstvernichtung. Die Wehrmachtsführung Im 'Endkampf' Um Das 'Dritte Reich,'" in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos Und Realität*, ed. Rolf-Dieter Müller and Hans-Erich Volkmann (München: Oldenbourg, 1999).

⁶ Indeed, some *Volksdeutsche* already begun their westward flight as early as 1943, when the long retreat of the Wehrmacht set in. Red Army incursions into Romania and Yugoslavia for instance threatened the Transylvanian Saxons and Yugoslav-Germans; by the autumn, around 250,000 fled or were extracted by German authorities. R.M. Douglas estimates that 160,000 followed the Wehrmacht's retreat from Romania and Yugoslavia, and another 100,000 ethnic Germans fled from Slovenia. *Volksdeutsche* in Hungary were less willing to depart, and only an estimated 50,000—one-tenth of the German population—voluntarily left before 1945. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 63. On the ethnic Germans during the war, see Doris L. Bergen, "The *Volksdeutsche* of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945," in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, ed. Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2003), 101–28.; and R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 39-64.

reprisal for collaboration, opted for a hasty departure and hoped for refuge in the Reich as well.⁷ These were joined, for the first time, by Reich citizens in the Memel Territory and East Prussia in early August, when the Soviet offensive reached the borders of Germany. Conceding that the enemy threatened to overrun the eastern portions of the Reich, at the end of July Hitler ordered a temporary evacuation of non-essential citizens, mainly women and children, along with as much livestock and goods as possible.⁸ Due to the deteriorating military situation, these hastily planned evacuations soon gave way to hurried flight. In early August, NSDAP offices issued directives to flee, yet these came so suddenly that “a great confusion” confounded families.⁹ Largely on foot and together with their forced workers and livestock, the refugees streamed into East Prussia, congregating mainly around Insterburg (Cheryakhovsky) and Labiau (Polessk).

The German East narrowly escaped catastrophe only because the Red Army halted their offensive. Yet despite a botched evacuation, the regime eschewed any desire to draw conclusions from this disaster or develop plans for future crises. The only precaution in case of future enemy incursions remained an ambiguous May 31st, 1944 directive issued by Martin Bormann delineating the authorities of various institutions and which prioritized the removal of

⁷ Andreas Kossert, *Ostpreußen: Geschichte und Mythos* (München: Pantheon Verlag, 2007), 142; see also Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 3.

⁸ This evacuation had all the hallmarks of future similar operations: They were belated, poorly organized, and less interested in the welfare of the population as opposed to securing crucial resources for continuing the war effort.

⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:3. The reporter complains that the livestock suffered from extreme thirst and heat during the two week stay in East Prussia. Yet others had even struggled to get their cattle to safety, having been forced to use trails through boggy terrain because the Wehrmacht had closed the roads for military operations, so that many animals “found a miserable death” on the journey. All in all, through the month of August, 10,000 refugees a day arrived in Insterburg and the surrounding villages, along with nearly 5,000 cattle. Günther Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945* (Bad Nauheim: Podzun-Pallas-Verlag, 1964), 18.

agricultural and industrial goods, as well as slave and prison labor.¹⁰ This provision, however, created a labyrinth of competencies, where ultimately civilian evacuations rested solely in the hands of the NSDAP and the individual *Gauleiter*, or Nazi governors, of the region. No coordination or uniform policy existed at this level, however. By early August, the *Gauleiter* of Wartheland, West Prussia, Silesia, and Pomerania tentatively developed confidential instructions for limited withdrawals within their domains, yet in East Prussia Erich Koch resolutely rejected all proposals as defeatism.¹¹ In fact, in mid-July Koch instituted a prohibition on free travel in East Prussia to “stop wild remigration,” fearing a descent into chaos and bedlam that would hamper military operations and adversely affect morale.¹²

The regime had good reason to consider the population’s mood. For those living in the eastern territories of the Reich, the obvious signs that the conflict stood at their doorstep compounded anxieties. “[T]he entire summer one could...hear the cannon thunder or explosions in the east,” one expellee recalled.¹³ For the first time in the war, East Prussia suffered aerial

¹⁰ This memo was reiterated on July 19, 1944 by Bormann, presumably because the Soviet advance seriously raised the necessity of implementing an evacuation. Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 262-263.

¹¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:12E.. See also Schieder, 1:33; Schieder, 1:46; Schieder, 1:133. Multiple civil servants testify that their attempts to coordinate evacuation plans with higher authorities were blocked by Erich Koch’s office. In any case, extant directives naively called for an evacuation of the population to areas only a few hundred kilometers westward. The rapid January 1945 offensive overran these collection points in a matter of days or weeks.

¹² Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 261. An exception was made for the estimated 825,000 mostly women and children who had been settled in the “air raid shelter of East Prussia,” thus far virtually untouched by Allied air-raids, and whom the regime began extracting in mid-July. See Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:5E.; Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 426. Particularly the 170,000 Berliners now in danger of being caught up in the war needed to be rescued, as their experiences threatened to negatively affect the “mood barometer of the Reich capital.” Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 260.. Koch, however, used his connections with Hitler to oppose Goebbels, reducing the number to 55,000, thereby exemplifying the confusion and intransigence that prevailed among the regime elite. Kershaw, *The End*, 22..

¹³ Quoted in Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 63.

bombardments, and individual planes and small squadrons strafed farmers in their fields or cars on the road.¹⁴ In the summer of 1944, the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) noted flagging morale particularly in the German East, where “a great proportion of the population” grappled with “anxious fears” over the military situation.¹⁵ Regime reports documented “deep depression” nearing “anxiety psychosis,” and “creeping panic.”¹⁶ In East Prussia, one report commented, widespread opinion doubted the ability of the Wehrmacht to keep the front intact.¹⁷

The fear went beyond mere alarm over imminent combat descending upon the region. Anxiety turned to sheer terror because of who stood at the gates: The dreaded Soviet threat. Especially women harbored profound apprehensive: “If the Bolsheviks get in, we might as well all hang ourselves, with our children,” SD operatives overheard from one worried mother.¹⁸ Distress over being caught up in the conflagration mixed with memories of the Tsarist incursion into East Prussia in 1914.¹⁹ These qualms were only amplified by Goebbels’ virulent anti-Bolshevik propaganda intended to raise fighting spirits in the “Total War” effort; since 1943, assurances of German superiority over “sub-humans” gave way to fears of dehumanized, beast-like hordes intent on eradicating Germany.²⁰ Indeed, fears of retribution for a harsh occupation of

¹⁴ Bundesarchiv Bayreuth Ost-Dokumentation (BArch Ost-Dok) 1/19, 211.

¹⁵ Heinz Boberach, ed., *Meldungen aus dem Reich: die geheimen Lageberichte des Sicherheitsdienstes der SS : 1938-1945*, vol. 17 (Herrsching: Pawlak Verlag, 1984), 6698–99.

¹⁶ Quoted in Kershaw, *The End*, 18.

¹⁷ Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 17:6702.

¹⁸ Quoted in Kershaw, *The End*, 18.

¹⁹ The Russian invasion of East Prussia sparked the flight of 350,000 and led to the deaths of about 1,500 civilians and mass plundering, destruction of property, and deportations to Russia. Alastair Noble, *Nazi Rule and the Soviet Offensive in Eastern Germany, 1944-1945: The Darkest Hour* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 20–22.

²⁰ On Nazi anti-Bolshevik propaganda, see Ernest K. Bramsted, *Goebbels and National Socialist Propaganda, 1925-1945* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1965); Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War*

the Soviet Union and German war crimes—well known to the population—were widespread. Visions of war coming home with a vengeance abounded.

Not convinced by slogans that predicted victory, a sizeable proportion of the population yearned for measures that would ensure their safety. Instead, authorities implemented drastic measures that rattled composes further. Starting in July of 1944, the *Gauleiter* mobilized nearly a half million mostly old men and women, forced workers, and POWs for three to four week work details digging a network of trenches and fortifications known as the *Ostwall* (Eastern Wall) in East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, and East Brandenburg.²¹ Instead of inspiring confidence in the face of an approaching menace, the draining and demoralizing labor came across as a “desperate and ultimately pointless effort.”²² The creation of the *Volkssturm* (“People’s Storm”)—a militia comprised of boys as young as 16 and men as old as 65—similarly demoralized the population. While perhaps some believed that herein lay a powerful force to defend hearth and home from the Bolshevik onslaught, SD mood reports discovered deep skepticism: The mobilization of youths and the elderly indicated an exhaustion of Germany’s forces, and signaled that the Reich was “pressed into a hopeless defense.”²³ The coming months

Propaganda, 1939-1945 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974); David Welch, *The Third Reich. Politics and Propaganda* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

²¹ See Kershaw, *The End*, 101–6.

²² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:11E. Billed as an impregnable fortress that would rebuff the Soviet advance, many questioned the military value of the endeavor. Moreover, dragooned laborers resented the grueling work that took them from their homes and harvest, and complained of excesses and abuse by slovenly officials overseeing construction. Cynically, East Prussians referred to the fruitless digging as “*Schipp-schipp-Hurra*” (scoop-scoop-hooray). Kossert, *Ostpreußen*, 143. The Party itself was keenly aware of the criticism regarding the *Ostwall* and lack of conviction that it served realistic military purposes. Kershaw, *The End*, 104.. Indeed, as the Soviet 1945 January offensive would demonstrate, the largely undermanned fortifications presented no threat to the enemy, who seamlessly overran them.

²³ Quoted in Kershaw, *The End*, 106–7. On the skepticism, see also Bernhard Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944: Was in Ostpreussen tatsächlich geschah* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1997), 142. The mayor of Insterburg (Cheryakhovsky) similarly recalled that many doubted *Gauleiter* Koch’s repeated claims that not just the Wehrmacht, but *Volkssturm*

would indeed see the Volkssturm function as mere cannon fodder. Yet as pointless as it seemed from a military standpoint, the radical measure spelled disaster for the German East: With even more men bound to the defense of the Reich, future evacuations would predominantly be the affairs of women, children, and the old. Lacking the skills to lead teams of horses and overburdened with the care of the young or elderly, many women therefore lacked the support that could have mitigated the deprivations of an arduous flight.

Yet among the most unsettling elements of the summer of 1944 were the waves of evacuees, and the news they brought with them. The mayor of Löbau (Lubawa) noted that sounds of the front and reports of “murders, rapes, deportations, and plundering” spread by military units and civilians unsettled inhabitants.²⁴ The regime also registered how reports of evacuees fomented profound anxiety.²⁵ In Alt-Wartenburg (Barczewko), an official recalled how refugees filled the district and spread unrest by recounting their experiences. Soon locals called for evacuations, yet orders prevented departures that would provoke feelings of “defeatism” and cause panic.²⁶ Accounts that “made the true state of the troops and situation apparent” trickled as far as West Prussia, and prompted appeals for concise evacuation plans, which NSDAP offices spurned.²⁷ Prohibited from leaving or preparing for a departure on penalty of treason, onlookers must have wondered whether they too would soon be caught up in the conflagration.

as well, would “firmly claw themselves into the soil of the homeland and no enemy would be able to intrude upon the province.” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:10.

²⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:35.

²⁵ Boberach, *Meldungen aus dem Reich*, 17:6702.

²⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 123.

²⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:32.. The growing desires for withdrawal and staunch prohibition of flight during the summer of 1944 are recurring themes in postwar testimonies of former officials. The recollections of ranking civilian authorities—even accounting for instances of exaggerated self-importance—

Unease within communities that they were on their own in an unraveling situation were widespread. Indeed, the hysterical fear is a familiar element of “flight and expulsion.” Yet the archival record also documents contrary emotions. Dispersed among the rural communities, the summer evacuees were reduced to laborers for the local population and regretted having left their homes in exchange for a life of humiliation. After the Soviet offensive ground to a halt and officials ordered the male population to return to their farms to bring in the harvest, many of their families eagerly accompanied them: The desire to return home outweighed concerns for personal safety.²⁸ Testimonies also reveal that anger and disgruntlement prevailed over relief of having avoided a catastrophe. Farmers of the border region resented the costs of spontaneous evacuation and regretted fleeing: The Wehrmacht seized the majority of livestock, thus dealing a heavy blow to their livelihood. Judging from the archival testimonies, civilians felt immense anger toward the regime and criticized how the evacuations played out and disrupted their lives.²⁹

Certainly, some of this disgruntlement can be explained by the benefit of hindsight and the fact that the halted Soviet advance made evacuations unnecessary. But those who fled or witnessed the August scenes discerned an inadequate and poorly organized response from authorities.³⁰ In particular, the “positively dreadful composure” of fleeing military officials who tore through the region did not engender confidence. In early August, Gauleiter Koch lamented

overwhelmingly corroborate that especially East and West Prussian Nazi officials unequivocally refused to entertain evacuation orders.

²⁸ Schieder, 1:3.

²⁹ Hans Henning and Eva Hahn argue that the course of the evacuations, the complaints in the documentary record, as well as the thefts among the refugees and the capricious appropriation of private property through the Wehrmacht indicate that the evacuations were a humanitarian disaster that call the entire logic of the enterprise into question. Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 268–72.

³⁰ Kershaw, 108. Dokumentation, 9E

to Martin Bormann that daily “complaints over the unheard of manner in which these soldiers are behaving” reached his desk. Audaciously, there were reports of soldiers intruding onto the properties of Reich Germans in order to demand luxury goods or even plunder.³¹

The August evacuations therefore seemed premature and poorly carried out, marked by haste and corruption. The lack of concrete procedures coupled with the blatant desperation and radicalism of the regime raised profound doubts about the ability of authorities to master any future catastrophe. The summer evacuations left a bad taste in the mouths of many, which would have grave repercussions in the coming months: The brush with disaster spread as much anxiety as it did resolve to remain on the family property at all costs. From her family’s farm in Deutsch Thierau (Iwanzowo)—located directly on the Königsberg (Kaliningrad)-Elbing (Elbląg) Autobahn—one young woman “saw the misery of the flight” all summer long, as columns of refugees streamed west and sometimes stopped for shelter. They were a continuous reminder of what loss of property and the risk of a flight into the unknown entailed, and they cautioned their compatriots still fortunate enough to remain at home to avoid making a similar mistake: “Almost all of them said to us: ‘stay where you are; because once you are on the road, everything is over and done.’ At the time we had no idea that the same was in store for us.”³²

“The Russian is Here!” A Foretaste of Calamity

The constellation of inadequate or prohibited planning, anxiety, and disillusionment bore disastrous ramifications on October 5, when the Soviet military launched a formidable offensive

³¹ Their ranks were ostensibly filled with “Eastern peoples (*Ostvölker*), including Russian “broads (*Weiber*)” whom the soldiers openly “pamper and indulge,” completely forgetting that they were now on Reich soil and setting a terrible example. Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 260.

³² BArch Ost-Dok 2/14, 12.

across the borders into the Memel Territory. Reaching the Baltic coast within five days, the attack cut the region and its roughly 100,000 inhabitants from the Reich. Ignoring earlier calls from the military to remove the civilian population, NSDAP officials issued evacuation orders only on October 7, though portions of the population, exhorted by retreating Wehrmacht soldiers, risked punishment by independently fleeing from the approaching enemy.³³

Resentment over the first evacuations or a false sense of security engendered by the averted August disaster nevertheless convinced many to stay put. A sizeable proportion—particularly those who experienced the August evacuations—ignored the belated calls to depart, preferring to “guard their properties from the rabble prowling about.”³⁴ The rural communities exhibited such resolute intransigence that authorities, after initially opposing evacuation, now threatened to treat all who stayed behind as traitors. Despite this, in Wensken (Wentzko Paschil), “many no longer honestly believed [the orders], since the first time we could have stayed.” Only two families out of the nearly 300 villagers decided to leave.³⁵ Because mechanized vehicles are faster than horse-drawn wagons, the speed of the enemy left no time for families to reconsider their choices, and nearly a third of the population—around 30,000—fell into Soviet hands within the first hours of the offensive. Looting, mass rape, and murder were common fates.³⁶

Once communities recognized the seriousness of the situation, hasty flight was the sole yet perilous option. Those who could save themselves across the Memel River before the enemy cut off the route were fortunate; for those whose escape was blocked, salvation lay in reaching

³³ Doku, 3. Dokumentation, 14 E; and Kershaw, 108. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:14E; Schieder, 1:3; Kershaw, *The End*, 108.

³⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:2.

³⁵ Schieder, 1:3.

³⁶ Noble, 130-132. The Memel Territory in the first October days remains a surprising desideratum.

the city of Memel (Klaipeda) or other ports with transport across the Curonian Lagoon to the Curonian Spit before Soviet forces arrived. A desperate race against time developed, yet soldiers and refugees clogged roads under artillery fire. The Wehrmacht variously closed routes or directed civilians onto side roads to free operations for their forces or ease their retreat.³⁷ The rapid enemy advance cut off one avenue of escape after another, so that many treks zig-zagged the countryside looking for a way to safety.³⁸ Fleeing on October 8 after initially stalling, Else Steinwender's trek encountered hundreds of refugees collapsed in exhaustion or resignation among abandoned carts and mounds of household goods that littered the way.³⁹ Finding all avenues of escape cut off by nightfall, Steinwender's family contemplated returning home, yet a burning Memel's ominous red glow on the horizon behind them made this a terrifying proposition. Agonizing over the lack of options, the decision was seemingly made for them:

“All of a sudden it was said: ‘The Russian is here.’ Rigid with fear I watched as German soldiers took cover.... [Our] neighbor fell to her knees and loudly prayed for God's help, we thought we and our children were lost. As if by a miracle it suddenly became quiet, until...fleeing German columns appeared, whom we followed, having discarded all of our unnecessary possessions.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Louis H. ignored evacuation orders until on October 9 he noticed columns of Wehrmacht units driving away from the front past his farm, followed by small arms fire from the adjacent forest. Hastily his family and neighbors fled, but made it only one kilometer before the military police halted civilians for several hours to permit retreating Wehrmacht personnel the right of way. As the last units passed, leaving no line of defense between the treks and the Soviet advance, H. was fortunate enough to immediately follow; those too far back in the traffic jam were overrun. Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 32.

³⁸ One particularly daring example is the report of Inspector K. His trek initially fled away from the city of Memel in the face of Soviet units, only to be cut off by the enemy's advance further south. Portions of the trek returned the way they had come, until German military police stopped them at a bridge that Soviet forces moments before crossed. Realizing he was caught in a cauldron, K. navigated side-roads through artillery fire and throngs of helpless women and children who had given up hope. Essentially following the Russian advance, K. inconceivably managed to skirt through into Memel. Lass, 29.

³⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:4.

⁴⁰ Schieder, 1:4.

Steinwender was fortunate, as most never made it further than a few miles from their homes before the enemy overran the majority of the treks. Steinwender's family reached Mingen (Minija), a small town on the Curonian Lagoon, before German troops detonated the bridge across the Mingen River. Thousands of terror-stricken refugees, huddled on the eastern shore, waited in vain for a place on the single ferry; in desperation many plunged into the water but drowned trying to reach the other shore.⁴¹ All along the coast, a diverse fleet of anything that could float, including fishermen from Nidden (Nida), attempted to ferry as many people across the lagoon to safety before the Red Army arrived.⁴² Frantic refugees, moments before the arrival of enemy troops, reportedly attempted to swim the 15 kilometers, but most failed.⁴³

Else Steinwender and others fleeing into East Prussia undoubtedly shared their experiences with the alarmed population. Hopes that they would avoid a similar fate were dashed only days later. On October 16th, powerful Soviet armored units attempting to drive toward Königsberg (Kaliningrad) punched a 60 kilometer salient into German lines before dogged resistance stopped them by the end of the month. At first many initially failed to notice the danger, as the westerly winds obscured the sounds of combat. "But slowly it trickled in: something is going on at the border! For the first time the names of German villages appeared in the army reports."⁴⁴ In Insterburg (Cheryakhovsky), the "sky in the east was red from fires, the thunder of cannons got louder daily, the streets were clogged with refugees and cars, with

⁴¹ Schieder, 1:4.

⁴² Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 30.

⁴³ Kershaw, *The End*, 110.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Kossert, *Ostpreußen*, 143–44..

livestock and horses.... Children and foals who had lost their mothers wandered the streets.”⁴⁵

The region descended into chaos, as news of encroaching tanks and reports of Soviet atrocities spread like wildfire, yet once again no escape seemed possible.⁴⁶

Wehrmacht commanders anticipated the offensive and arranged a partial evacuation near the border, bypassing the NSDAP.⁴⁷ The majority of East Prussians, however, encountered indifference and callousness from officials. Following directives, Nazi functionaries arranged for the transportation of goods and industry while threatening severe punishment for any signs of defeatism, including fleeing.⁴⁸ Facts on the ground and passionate pleading, however, managed in some instances to convince the NSDAP to change course. For example, in Angerapp (before 1938 Darkehmen, after 1945 Ozyorsk) the growing throng of disconcerted women amassed on the market square confronted NSDAP representatives and moved them to coordinate with district leaders to arrange evacuation. After failing to reach the *Gauleiter*, officials independently initiated departures with trucks and trains they procured.⁴⁹ In Insterburg, where thousands sat “utterly unnerved, helpless and full of worries” on their luggage, the mayor’s pleas for help from Nazi Party offices were initially countered with admonishments to “keep his head.” Only after

⁴⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:10–11.

⁴⁶ Schieder, 1:10.; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 159.

⁴⁷ Noble, *Nazi Rule*, 130. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/5, 89-98.

⁴⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:9–10.. Throughout the region, the Nazi Party issued orders to civil servants to coordinate with factories and firms to prepare for the removal of their wares and machinery in the case of an emergency to assigned evacuation points further west.

⁴⁹ Schieder, 1:5–6. When authorities in Königsberg found out, they intervened and demanded that several individuals be “gunned down (*über den Haufen schießen*)” as punishment. Informed that only women and children were present, the *Gauleiter*’s office demanded that they be mobilized for the defense of the city. Ultimately, the NSDAP relented and approved a limited evacuation.

painting a bleak picture of what an airstrike on the overcrowded train station would mean did the *Gauleiter* dispatch trains that ferried many of the women and children out of the city.⁵⁰

Left largely to fend for themselves and with fighting dangerously close, more often than not local leaders simply ignored NSDAP directives and initiated improvised evacuations for the most vulnerable.⁵¹ Not waiting on permission, ordinary East Prussians frequently packed and prepared for an imminent departure secretly.⁵² Social status and NSDAP affiliation strongly came into play here. Affluent estate owners and notables found few problems negotiating the prohibition on unauthorized withdrawal, managing to save themselves and their valuables days or even weeks before.⁵³ Those who owned automobiles had an advantage, capable of making a speedy getaway with some of their property.⁵⁴ The poor without transport faced a journey on foot, unless they could appeal to the altruism of one of their neighbors or secure precious space on a retreating military transport.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Schieder, 1:10–11. The mayor attempted to prepare evacuation plans in August 1944, but received a sharp dressing down and threats from the district president. One must naturally take into account attempts of self-justification after 1945. Nevertheless, numerous other reports corroborate the intransigence of the Nazi Party regarding timely preparations for the civilian population.

⁵¹ For instance, Albrechtswiesen (Popiollen before 1938, Budry or Popioly after 1945) the mayor arranged for the elderly and sick to be evacuated to Heilsberg (Lizbark Warmiński), though he could not organize the transport of mothers and children. BArch Ost-Dok 1/5, 13.

⁵² BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 594. In the village of Daginten, Soviet planes circling overhead and rumors of enemy paratroopers prompted the mayor to advise his community to clandestinely prepare for departure. Without ever receiving directives, virtually the entire town left during the night before the arrival of the enemy the next day. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 85.

⁵³ In the district of Gumbinnen, for instance, the large estate owners managed to leave long before the arrival of the fighting and the last-minute evacuation order. Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 104. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 123.

⁵⁴ While the rest of the community negotiated the clogged roads in treks, affluent citizens of Frankenhof (before 1936 Didsziddern, 1936-1938 Didschiddern, after 1945 dissolved) packed their cars and drove their families to the Reich. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 121.

⁵⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 33.

Postwar testimonies reflect unbridled anger at Nazi officials and their behavior because of these final hours before headlong departure. Despite often preventing timely departures and expressing confidence that no flight was necessary, the party “fat cats” (*Bonzen*) frequently exhibited unscrupulous and hypocritical self-preservation by absconding with their families and possessions while compatriots anxiously awaited official directives.⁵⁶ In the district of Angerapp, NSDAP notables for example used threats of violence to commandeer trucks that administrators organized for women and children in order to transport luxury foods and alcohol to safety. Moreover, during the hasty preparations of the community, party officials suddenly disappeared, with one high-ranking functionary drinking himself into a stupor at an inn while hysterical refugees milled about the streets.⁵⁷ The privileges of NSDAP membership or connections to the regime were powerful currency: In Gumbinnen (Gusev), one woman called upon her cousin, an officer, who arrived with a military escort and cars to aid the family’s departure.⁵⁸

An “organized” evacuation, it is clear from the primary sources, did not exist. By and large, the regime failed to provide guidance, and it was only the rapid Soviet advance and independent decisions to flee that created a *fait accompli* that broke NSDAP obstinacy. However, when Nazi officials finally issued evacuation directives, they did so at the last possible moment and only intensified the pandemonium. In Gumbinnen, authorities “in their stubbornness

⁵⁶ The local party leader (*Ortsgruppenleiter*) of Sodeiken assured villagers that they were in no danger and warned them not to leave independently, before mysteriously disappearing in the days before the town’s flight. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 596. Similarly, in Puspern (before 1938 Tublauken, after 1945 Lomowo), the *Ortsgruppenleiter* refused to grant the community’s withdrawal, but then absconded during the evening. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 473. Throughout the region, party offices were able to relocate their operations to other cities, which many staffers used as an opportunity to extradite their families and close friends. See BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 208-209; and Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 51..

⁵⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:5.

⁵⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 19.

and delusion” did not allow departures until October 20, even though airstrikes pummeled the city and ground forces reached the outskirts days before. Now under the motto of “everyone for himself,” the district leader finally relented, setting off a stampede to the train station: “Endless droves of refugees gathered with their luggage for the departure... [and] the wagons of the long train were completely packed with people and their possessions.”⁵⁹ In EysseIn (Kubanskoe), after inhabitants spotted enemy tanks approaching the town, authorities suddenly ordered the community to leave within fifteen minutes.⁶⁰ Mostly, however, people were left to their own devices: In the township of Frankenhof, a Nazi official in a nearby village on the verge of being overrun telephoned and advised that the community “do what they think is best.”⁶¹ In many cases civilians received no alerts at all, oblivious to the danger until the Red Army rolled into town.⁶² Even if communities managed to hastily depart, many received no warning of the seriousness of the situation: Treks fleeing westward only realized the danger after retreating Wehrmacht overtook them and shouted that “Bolsheviks were on [their] heels.”⁶³

Not all recalled bedlam and terror. In communities on rail lines, trains managed to transport women and children to western provinces before further evacuation to Pomerania or Saxony without any incidents.⁶⁴ Remarkably, one refugee recalled after the war vividly feeling

⁵⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 208. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 211-216.

⁶⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 111. Miraculously, the 1952 report claims that all of the families of the village managed to escape via Osterode to Saxony without any losses.

⁶¹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 121.

⁶² In Maygunischken (Aksjonowo), Red Army forces overran the town before anyone was able to evacuate. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 93. In Reckeln (Schiguli), only a handful were able to “run away at the last minute” on October 21st, when Soviet forces suddenly appeared in the village. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 483.

⁶³ Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), R55/601, 181.

⁶⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 111; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 208.

that “[t]he ride through the Masurian countryside was nice despite the ardor.”⁶⁵ The excitement filled some refugees, particularly children, with a sense of adventure.⁶⁶ In her diary, a young girl confided on October 20, 1944 that the electric energy made her think of her elders’ stories from WWI: “[A] secret wish emerged within me to once also be able to speak of so many dangers, of such adventures. My wish has come true...I think back on the early morning hours when my brother Horst excitedly stormed into the house with the news: ‘Today is the day.’ I hear once again the loud crying of our neighbors. I once again see the pale face of my mother, I once again relive the exciting hours, the confusing chaos, the clatter and screaming.”⁶⁷

For the majority, however, speedy getaway entailed painful choices and the eschewal of even basic considerations. For one family, this was their second flight since giving up their home in the Memel Territory in August. The travails proved too much for the elderly father, who suddenly passed away; unable to arrange funeral services because the town descended into chaos, the family had no choice but to leave his body in a barn with the hope that German soldiers might bury him.⁶⁸ The departure from the homeland not only took an immense emotional toll, but quickly emerged as a deadly enterprise once combat engulfed the fleeing masses. On October 20, for example, a deadly airstrike on the overcrowded train station interrupted the evacuation of Benkheim (Banie Mazurskie), and the disoriented inhabitants now dispersed on foot as Soviet and Wehrmacht forces engaged in combat in the village.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 594

⁶⁶ Werner Arndt, *Ostpreussen, Westpreussen, Pommern, Schlesien, Sudetenland 1944/1945: die Bild-Dokumentation der Flucht und Vertreibung aus den deutschen Ostgebieten* (Friedberg: Podzun-Pallas-Verl., 1981), 26–27.

⁶⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 2/6, 64.

⁶⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 2/12, 87.

⁶⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/5, 89-98.

Even if one managed to hit the road, the flight immediately descended into disarray. Artillery and enemy planes menaced columns of fleeing civilians, who were exposed to the danger because wagons, livestock, and the slave laborers of the East Prussian farmers clogged the thoroughfares.⁷⁰ Trying to maintain avenues for their operations, the Wehrmacht relegated refugees to the right side of the road while military vehicles in retreat or rushing to the front claimed the left.⁷¹ Nevertheless, military vehicles barreling down narrow country lanes struck slow-moving or distracted civilians and livestock.⁷² Elsewhere, military police closed avenues altogether and halted or redirected frantic columns to side roads.⁷³ Tank columns blocked by traffic jams threatened to drive through any and all hindrances, even at the cost of civilian life.⁷⁴ Compounding the misery of the refugees, officials pressed men directly from the treks into the *Volkssturm* and confiscated horses.⁷⁵ Lacking horses and competent drivers, this effectively ended the flight for many then and there or hindered their flight in January 1945.

Pandemonium sealed the fate of thousands, as treks broke apart in the confusion or were left stranded, eventually overtaken by Soviet forces swiftly penetrating into the East Prussian interior.⁷⁶ Though a few managed to navigate side roads and skirt by the enemy advance, the

⁷⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 140.

⁷¹ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 115.

⁷² BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 584.

⁷³ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 619.

⁷⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:6.

⁷⁵ On the *Volkssturm*, see BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 3, 45, 61, 125, 127, 135, and 147. On the confiscation of horses, see Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 44; Lass, 62.; BArch Ost-Dok 1/1, 51; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 34.

⁷⁶ Of the Tannsee (before 1938 Kasenowsken, after 1945 Jelowoje) community, only two wagons reportedly made it to safety due to the belated evacuation and because the trek was deprived of many of its horses and men. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 619. The Blecken (Judino) trek broke apart into three separate groups after quarrels on which route to take after finding the main avenue closed; only one escaped the enemy. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 65.

archival sources reveal that the advancing Red Army overran the vast majority of treks.⁷⁷

However terrifying the experience of flight may have been up until this point, the first interactions with Soviet soldiers proved incredibly traumatic for exhausted and terrified refugees. Many units, concerned with military objectives, rapidly bypassed refugees without incident. One woman recounted how Soviet soldiers raced by with “mind-boggling” speed, shouting for the civilians to return home as they rushed to engage German forces.⁷⁸ Other Red Army troopers refrained from any abuse, and merely seized valuables such as wristwatches in passing.⁷⁹

Violent excesses were just as common as unremarkable encounters, however. The account of Margot G. reflects the themes of other testimonies. Fleeing with her family and Polish slave workers, the escape ended when enemy soldiers materialized from the mist ahead of them:

“They stopped us with raised rifles and forced us to dismount from our carriages. The lead wagon escaped in the fog—they shot after it. On it were my mother, mother-in-law, and both of my children. The Russians cursed us out. They wanted to exterminate (*ausrotten*) us Germans, and after they had taken the watches of the men, they surrounded my husband, took him several paces with them, and before I could notice what was happening he was killed with a shot through the temple.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ The villagers of Habichtsau (before 1935 Wannagupchen, after 1945 Nowyj Mir) fled at the last possible moment on Oct 19, retreating west for three days parallel to the Soviet advance. Separated by a mere seven kilometers, both parties raced toward Insterburg, with the refugees managing to reach it before the enemy troops closed the approach. BArch Ost-Dok 1 1/19, 239. The trek from Schweizertal (before 1938 Nestonkehmen, after 1945 Woronowo), having received no evacuation order and threatened with enemy encirclement, aimlessly drove between the lines. “Here on the other side of the [forest] the Russian tanks, which were advancing on Schulzenwalde (Dubrava) in parallel, hummed. The German planes dove down and attacked the Russians with cannons and bombs. The Russian planes attacked the trek multiple times with machinegun fire, but no losses were caused among us.” Despite this incredible fortune, treks of neighboring communities behind the Schweizertal group were overrun, though the author reports that no deaths were known to him. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 583.

⁷⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 20.

⁷⁹ For a typical example, see BArch Ost-Dok 2/43a, 196.

⁸⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 49-50. G.’s recollections cannot possibly parse the intentions or motives of the soldiers. It is possible that her husband was simply arbitrarily shot, punished for resisting, or seen as a Nazi functionary because of his Polish slaves. In either case, this specific account is corroborated in BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 34.

Margot Grimm was fortunate that her former slave laborers—now liberated—disguised her in “rags” and identified her as Polish, so that no harm came to her. Red Army soldiers however frequently showed little hesitation to make use of their firearms. Near Gumbinnen, German farmers and French POWs on harvesting duty emerged from heavy fog to find their path blocked by Soviet soldiers; all were reportedly torn from their wagons and summarily executed. Elsewhere in the district, eye-witnesses claimed that Red Army soldiers “blindly fired into the stream of refugees.”⁸¹ Particularly women, elderly and adolescent, faced perilous circumstances when encountering the enemy. Recalling the immediate scenes after their trek was overtaken, one respondent recounted how the soldiers “ravaged terribly”: “Women of every age and girls of school age...were torn down from the vehicles and indiscriminately defiled, men and children were to some extent battered to death.”⁸² Resistance from the victims or intervention from their relatives were met with deadly force.

In addition to eliminating perceived obstacles to their sexual assaults, German uniformed men found little mercy. Whether military or civil servants such as postmen, any symbols of the despised fascist aggressors and remotest suspicion of Nazi Party affiliation—real or imagined—was enough to warrant immediate execution. One farmer from an overrun trek was reportedly bludgeoned to death by a soldier who had discovered a swastika on his hunting license.⁸³ Given that the NSDAP celebrated its most impressive electoral successes in the eastern regions, a

⁸¹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 411.

⁸² BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 214.

⁸³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/7, 29.

significant proportion of the population had real reason to fear retribution at the hands of an enemy that suffered terribly under German occupation.⁸⁴

One must consider the possibility that in some instances, Soviet soldiers perceived civilians as enemy combatants who fell victim to a merciless policy of shooting first and asking questions later. In either case, whether filled with rage for the 20-28 million Soviet dead or uncertainty and fear over encountering masses of people in a combat zone on enemy soil, the fate of civilians caught between two fronts in a war of annihilation frequently ended tragically. When it comes to Soviet behavior, as later chapters will demonstrate, postwar testimonies and literature often contain outlandish exaggerations and ubiquitous assertions of apocalyptic barbarism that spared no one. Parsing the evidence is challenging, as the memories and interpretation of wartime traumata are filtered through a lens influenced by Nazi propaganda and Cold War anticommunism. Emotional and sensational depictions provided the moral and political grist for the memory politics of the expellees within a Cold War context, even as they often stood in stark contrast to the historical record. Nevertheless, even accounting for colorful narrations, overwhelming evidence attests to violence indiscriminately and arbitrarily meted out on a massive scale. Nowhere is the simultaneous blurring of fact and fiction demonstrated more clearly than at the notorious massacre in the East Prussian hamlet of Nemmersdorf.

⁸⁴ Kershaw, *The End*, 98. Cutting across confessional and social lines, the eastern regions of the Reich showed early enthusiastic support for Hitler, particularly in border regions where territorial losses after WWI fueled revanchist sentiments. Moreover, because these territories had been spared many of the wartime deprivations and damages until 1944, regime support remained higher here than in parts of the Reich where Allied bombing produced greater ambivalences.

“Dreadful Rumors” in the East: Fear Narratives of a Collapsing Regime⁸⁵

Reflecting after the war, General Heinz Guderian proclaimed that “what happened in East Prussia was an indication to...the rest of Germany of their fate in the event of a Russian victory.”⁸⁶ On the one hand, Guderian unwittingly reified widely disseminated Nazi propaganda that elevated atrocities into an exhortation to fight to the bitter end or else face extinction. The fear narratives of the Nazi regime spread terror that help explain why millions opted for headlong panicked flight. Guderian’s memoirs evince how wartime images became a foundation that were further expounded upon in the postwar period, transforming Nemmersdorf into a notorious *lieux de memoire* of “flight and expulsion” that profoundly influenced the German public’s cultural memory of the war and the Red Army.⁸⁷ The events are therefore emblematic of the appropriation, distortion, and mobilization of history and memory.

Yet on the other hand, beyond the symbol of Nemmersdorf are the actual events that unfolded there in October 1944, which Guderian not unjustifiably implied as representative of many refugee experiences. In order to comprehend the memory politics of the expellees, it is necessary to critically examine the historical events that so powerfully shaped the course of the flight, and subsequent interpretations established upon them.

As elsewhere in East Prussia, the roughly 600 inhabitants of Nemmersdorf (Mayakovskoye) and surrounding hamlets received no evacuation orders despite the proximity of the enemy. An increasing number of treks from the front, growing din of battle, and enemy planes that started strafing the village in mid-October unsettled the population for days. Anxiety

⁸⁵ Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 15:292.

⁸⁶ Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader* (New York: Da Capo, 1996), 376.

⁸⁷ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 1-36.

grew further once officials ordered inhabitants, including women, to dig defensive positions, all while German artillery stationed in the village pulled out and postal service halted. Many interpreted these developments as signs of imminent combat, and secretly prepared for departure; those with relatives in the Reich suddenly left, while affluent denizens departed despite a prohibition of unauthorized retreat.⁸⁸

On October 20, the district's agricultural leader Fritz Feller was conducting routine business when his car was flagged down by several *Volkssturm* men hiding from Soviet tanks parked 500 meters down the road. Racing to Gumbinnen in order to demand an evacuation, the administrator found that the enemy cut the telephone lines there, prohibiting contact with higher officials. The district president, eschewing responsibility, told Feller to organize an evacuation on his own authority. Frantically driving throughout the neighboring towns, Feller spread word for communities to flee at 6 a.m. the next morning.⁸⁹

In Nemmersdorf, inhabitants made hasty preparations while refugees from further east continued to surge into town. The rapid change of events astonished many: While hastily rushing to purchase provisions, Maria Eschmann came upon her neighbor—a “bear of a man”—bitterly sobbing in the street, lamenting that the villagers “have been betrayed, the Russian is just nine kilometers from Nemmersdorf.”⁹⁰ Toward evening, the situation become so dire that many resolved to leave before the appointed time, and throughout the night treks continuously departed the village as artillery and machinegun fire erupted in close proximity.

⁸⁸ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 109–10.

⁸⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 417. This seems to hold true for the entire region, where starting on the 19th and 20th independent departures began. Only on October 21 did NSDAP offices in Königsberg issue an official order. See BArch Ost-Dok 1/1, 9.

⁹⁰ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 110–11.

Eschmann recalled that the screaming of refugees on the road woke her in the early morning, a few hours before her family was to depart. Shortly thereafter, she discerned three shouts of “Urrah,” the Soviet battle cry preceding an attack. Hurriedly waking her family with the news that the enemy was coming, the Eschmanns rushed to their waiting wagons; only the father-in-law stayed behind, unwilling to abandon his property and preferring to die at home. Most neighbors who had not fled during the night now plunged into a headlong retreat. Families became separated in the pandemonium and erupting combat. The town’s paymaster and fleeing military trucks scooped up pregnant women and the elderly, while Elisabeth Deichmann’s invalid father exhorted his daughters to leave him and escape with bicycles.⁹¹ Escape proved difficult, however, as treks clogged the roads through Nemmersdorf the past two days; masses of refugees congregated on the bridge over the Angerapp River on the eastern side of town.

Because it was the sole crossing point in the area, the bridge was as much a lifeline for fleeing families as a crucial military objective for Soviet forces. The critical race against time was over for many here because “traffic stalled completely and our trek couldn’t move forward further.”⁹² With the enemy nearby, many abandoned their wagons and possessions in order to continue on foot. Marianne S. recalled how suddenly disarray gave way to dismay:

“We were horrified as the first Russians appeared on the slopes over the Angerapp River. At first they seemed to be waiting, but then they stalked closer, and before we knew it they stood before us. In passing they took watches and jewelry from refugees. All of a sudden a Russian tank with the first German captives appeared. Driving any further was unthinkable; the Poles steering our wagons immediately defected to the Russians.”⁹³

⁹¹ Fisch, 112–13. The parents of Elisabeth Deichmann were fortunate to find room on a military horse-drawn carriage.

⁹² BArch Ost-Dok 2/43a, 196.

⁹³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/43a, 196. For S. and her compatriots, the flight ended here. While deciding what to do, Soviet soldiers directed the refugees to return to their homes, only a few kilometers away. Unhindered, the refugees left on foot. Relief that disaster had been averted quickly turned to horror upon arrival in the village, where “horrific scenes

Carefully working their way up the refugee column toward the river, the caution of these advance units suggests that they anticipated resistance at this natural defensive position. The shouting of refugees and soldiers that Maria Eschmann heard likely emanated from the river, and signaled the start of an assault trying to capture the crossing point. Numerous testimonies recalled incredibly thick fog that concealed the area. Opening fire on what they reasonably could assume were Wehrmacht positions, the salvos ripped through the treks on the bridge, sending people clamoring into the adjoining fields. Enemy tanks crashed into the chaos of hysterical refugees and terrorized animals. Whether frantically pursuing military objectives and indifferent to civilian losses or unaware of the situation due to poor visibility, the results were deadly.⁹⁴

Upon entering and sweeping through the town, Soviet forces found numerous inhabitants and refugees who remained or were unable to escape. Contrary to the horror that Nemmersdorf stands for, the first hours seem to have been marked by relative calm. Apart from the town's nurse, whom soldiers arbitrarily beat down and injured with a gunshot, ample evidence reveals that the startled townsfolk initially encountered an equable enemy more concerned with securing the village.⁹⁵ Having sent his family away at the last moment and needing to return home for supplies before following them, Johannes Schewe ran into Red Army soldiers who did not

(*Schreckensbilder*) greeted them. "To both sides of the bridge one could see on the slopes raped women who had been murdered or, covered in blood, were laying in the last spasms."

⁹⁴ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 106. The number of dead are unknown, but nearly all eyewitness accounts recall seeing numerous dead civilians, though, as will become clear, many sources claimed these to be the victims of deliberate executions.

⁹⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 34. The nurse, Margarete Frommholz, survived the encounter and was found after German forces retook the town. After several weeks of convalescence, she was awarded the War Merit Cross with Swords and the Wound Badge in Black by *Gauleiter* Koch for her "heroic holding out at her nursing station." Cited in Fisch, 150.

prevent him from gathering his belongings and leaving Nemmersdorf.⁹⁶ Similarly, Charlotte Müller recounted to Wehrmacht authorities days after the recapture of the town a tense yet ultimately innocuous first encounter as they attempted to flee an overrun Nemmersdorf:

“Suddenly...Russian infantry appeared before us, behind which we also saw Russian tanks. The Soviets...fired several warning shots and stopped us. We and our luggage were searched, and we then received the order to return to our farm. The Soviet soldiers said to us: ‘You Hitler [i.e. are you a Nazi]?’ We said no, after which they let us go. I immediately went into the house and...burned the swastika flag and portrait of the Führer.”⁹⁷

Despite witnessing raped and murdered civilians, Marianne S. attested to Soviet soldiers in nearby Tutteln (Sytschjowo) protecting civilians by gathering them in a bunker during a German artillery bombardment. There she faced questions about her neighbors’ party allegiance and any possible hidden weapon caches and stores of alcohol, yet overall felt that she was “treated politely.” Indeed, despite nearly being raped by a soldier who ultimately could be “talked out of it,” S. “found [her] impression confirmed that they had orders not to harm us.”⁹⁸ A 1949 report

⁹⁶ Schewe’s report in the 1970s failed to mention atrocities he personally witnessed, despite widely known notorious tales of barbaric excesses. His experiences run contrary to many of the oft-cited accounts. Stopped by Soviet troops, Schewe was unable to understand their questions, and he was soon allowed to retrieve his bicycle and some food unhindered. Trying to depart, an officer with excellent German stopped Schewe at the edge of town and asked whether German soldiers were nearby. “I told him that I had seen none and that I was a civilian. Then he said that I should go, and I took my bike and beat it.” Cited in Fisch, 120–21.

⁹⁷ See the reproduced report in Bernhard Fisch, “Nemmersdorf 1944 – Ein Bisher Unbekanntes Zeitnahes Zeugnis. In: Zeitschrift Für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung,” *Zeitschrift Für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 56, no. 1 (2007): 110.. Müller’s family was forced into her farm’s yard, during which the mother was shot in the arm for moving too slowly, and forced to turn over valuables. After serving the soldiers food, they left and no longer bothered the family. During the next several days, the family encountered friendly and polite soldiers as well as hostile troops who threatened them with violence and raped Charlotte Müller on two occasions. Overall, it appears that uncertainty and the possibility of sudden outbursts of brutality marked these interactions.

⁹⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 2/43a, 197. The testimony suggests that the tense questioning focused on intelligence gathering, as she had to explain images of the Wehrmacht Soviet soldiers found in the town, and elucidate German ration cards. S.’s 1963 report, submitted as a response to allegations of atrocities in Nemmersdorf that she wanted to refute, corresponds to her testimony recorded in an October 25th, 1944 military police report. There she claimed that Soviet soldiers gathered civilians in their bunker “to prevent harm coming to them.” Red Army officers questioned civilians as to why they had not been evacuated, and demanded to know what they had been told to expect from Soviet forces. An officer furthermore assured them that no harm would come to them. Even her 1944 description of the

chronicles an even more remarkable encounter between a mother with two children attempting to flee along the Nemmersdorf road on foot. Unable to flag down a German tank that passed without stopping, the family was overtaken by an armored car that halted and took them on. Her relief turned to horror upon realizing that she mounted a Soviet vehicle. To her astonishment, a young officer assured in excellent German that she had no need to despair, indicating on a map where he would bring her. Upon arrival their arrival, he gave her directions to German lines, yet warned her not to take this interaction as a rule of thumb, lest she encounter less hospitable comrades of his.⁹⁹

Despite an abundance of evidence that the Red Army more or less peacefully secured Nemmersdorf, the initial restraint of the soldiers turned to deadly capriciousness over the course of the afternoon, as the only corroborated episode that resulted in half of the 26 massacre victims demonstrates. Surprised by the arrival of enemy forces, Gerda Meczulat's family and some neighbors sought refuge in an air raid shelter. After several hours of silence, Gerda's father ventured home to tend to the livestock and brew coffee. He soon returned, reporting that Nemmersdorf was "filled with Russians" who searched and questioned him, yet let him go unimpeded. This encouraged another member of the group to attempt to retrieve a blanket, but he quickly returned after soldiers plundering the refugees' abandoned luggage turned him away. Because the "road was in a state of utter chaos," the villagers resolved to remain in the bunker. Over the course of the day, the mood suddenly turned:

"[T]he Russians then came into our 'bunker' and spent quite some time among us and rifled through our luggage. A sympathetic looking Russian—he seemed to be the leader of the troop—even played with the small children present. Much later, it was already evening, a higher

averted rape is revealing: After pushing her into a room, the soldier "backed off, probably because he felt like he was being observed." Cited in Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 100–111.

⁹⁹ "You were fortunate to fall into my hands. Take care not to generalize this case, as you will surely suffer. I am an exception." BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 127.

ranking officer appeared who had an extremely intense argument with this soldier before ordering us to exit the bunker. My father, who understood Russian, tried to explain that we as civilians had not done anything and he should let us go. With ‘Pascholl!’ [Move!] we were sent out into the open. My father thought we could go home. But as we emerged, soldiers stood on both sides of the exit with rifles ready. I fell...was yanked up and then felt nothing anymore in the commotion. When I came to, I heard children screaming and rifle shots. Then everything was still.”¹⁰⁰

Gerda Muczulat survived the *coup de grâce*, the lone survivor of the execution that claimed thirteen lives. The motives remain unclear, as are many of the details of what happened in Nemmersdorf and the surrounding areas. The evidence nevertheless suggests that during the course of the day, and before strategically withdrawing and surrendering the area to the Wehrmacht, Soviet soldiers increasingly engaged in violent behavior—possibly fueled by hours of alcohol consumption—that ended in scores of civilian dead through combat and outright murder.

When Wehrmacht units entered Nemmersdorf on October 22, they encountered relieved civilians who “fell into each other’s arms and laughed and cried with joy.”¹⁰¹ They also witnessed scenes “so terrible that some of our recruits run out in panic and vomited.”¹⁰² Numerous witnesses

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 122–23.. Fisch argues that Meczulat’s account remained consistent throughout its numerous iterations over the course of decades, and was corroborated by reports of the Wehrmacht documenting the scene days after the execution. He concludes that Meczulat’s recollections of the bunker have a high degree of veracity and are among the few substantiated reports regarding the Nemmersdorf massacre.

¹⁰¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/43a, 198. The dramatic moment of liberation remained ingrained in the memory of Marianne S. years later. “After several hours it became quiet, yet we did not dare come out [of the bunker]. Suddenly above us a German voice resounded “out,” and I will never forget this feeling as we saw German soldiers before us. We fell into each other’s arms and laughed and cried with joy.”

¹⁰² Günter K. Koschorrek, *Blood Red Snow: The Memoirs of a German Soldier on the Eastern Front* (London, 2002), 293. The Oct. 22nd diary entry describes mutilated corpses, including an old man pierced with a pitchfork and left to hang on a barn door. Interviewed by Bernhard Fisch in 1996, former soldier Harry Thürk somewhat corroborates these statements with his recollection of an old man lying on the ground with a pitchfork piercing his chest. Thürk swore that he also witnessed a woman nailed to a barn door. His unit found two further dead women in their homes, as well as a blood-stained bed, and numerous dead civilians at the bridge. Fisch, *Nemmersdorf*, 132–33.

testified to having seen crucified and dismembered victims.¹⁰³ As will be demonstrated, some horrors that entered into German collective memory, the majority of which first came to light years after 1944, must be attributed to propaganda and postwar embellishments, if not outright myths. Yet contemporary reactions of the soldiers, preserved in diary entries, reveal that Nemmersdorf on October 22nd, 1944 presented a scene that deeply unnerved witnesses.¹⁰⁴

The accounts from Nemmersdorf reached as far as Berlin, where the news catapulted Hitler into a fit of acrimonious rage.¹⁰⁵ Joseph Goebbels registered the “horrible atrocities (*furchtbare Greuelthaten*)” in his diary, immediately interpreting them as evidence of Soviet policy for a conquered Germany.¹⁰⁶ “These atrocities are indeed dreadful,” he added after learning the details, yet also an opportunity. After months of exhortations to resist the Soviet onslaught threatening to

¹⁰³ Karl Potrek, a member of the Königsberg *Volkssturm* deployed near Nemmersdorf, reported in 1953 that upon entering the town he saw four naked women crucified to the sides of a wagon, with another two nailed to a nearby barn door. In all, Potrek testified that he counted 71 women and children and one man “murdered bestially, except for a few who exhibited signs of execution.” A doctor confirmed that “all” women, including girls as young as eight, were raped. Overall, all remaining inhabitants were dead. BArch Ost-Dok 2/21, 716. Testifying on behalf of the defense before the Nuremberg Tribunals in 1948, Dr. Heinrich Amberger swore that his military unit “found the previously circulating rumors of the butchering (*Niedermetzelung*) of German civilians fully confirmed.” Amberger recalled that Soviet tanks had driven through the trek, “rolling flat” carts, animals, and civilians. None of the dead were killed through combat, Amberger reasoned, but were clearly “methodically murdered.” Furthermore, the witness recalled that “[i]n at least one case a man was nailed to a barn door,” though fellow comrades informed him that similar incidents occurred throughout the area. Like Potrek, Amberger reasoned that the entire population had been killed. BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 9-10. A similarly infamous Nemmersdorf legend involves the fate of an elderly man left behind due to an illness that had left him bedridden. Returning days later, the family him replaced with a “completely dismembered (*zerstückelt*), unrecognizable form.” Feller claimed 60 inhabitants of her town had been murdered. BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 35. These witnesses, despite contradicting evidence, remain among the most prominent and cited sources. As later chapters will show, their accounts are colored by Nazi propaganda and in turn had a tremendous influence on postwar collective memory of Nemmersdorf.

¹⁰⁴ See the reactions in Kershaw, *The End*, 113–14.

¹⁰⁵ Hitler’s secretary, Traudl Junge, alleged that the dictator reacted to the news with a characteristically histrionic paroxysm: “They’re not human beings any more, they’re animals from the steppes of Asia, and the war I am waging against them is a war for the dignity of European mankind. We have to be hard and fight with all the means at our disposal.” Traudl Junge, *Until the Final Hour: Hitler’s Last Secretary* (London, 2002), 145.

¹⁰⁶ “The population that remained they harassed, intimidated, raped women and then executed them, plundered, robbed, in short, acted in accordance with the policy that Stalin gave them along the way for their entry into German territory, namely to proceed without discretion.” Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, vol. 14 (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1993), 108.

destroy Europe, the Propaganda Minister had an exemplary cautionary tale. “I will use them as an occasion for a massive press campaign, so that among the German people the last naive contemporaries can be convinced of what the German people can expect if Bolshevism does truly take possession of the Reich.”¹⁰⁷ By taking hold of the narrative, Goebbels ensured that Nemmersdorf would long live on in the popular memory Germany.

The regime’s keen interest in the small East Prussian village manifested itself in the dizzying constellation of actors on the scene in the days after the Wehrmacht’s recapture of Nemmersdorf. Regimental surgeons already examined the bodies of the victims, before troops laid them to rest in the presence of local party representatives. Officials of the Wehrmacht High Command, the military courts, and a special task force of the secret military police arrived three days after the massacre and ordered the exhumation of the victims, who were laid out on a nearby field. With dignitaries looking on, an “international” commission of doctors hailing from various Axis powers examined the bodies; remarkably, the personal physician of Heinrich Himmler, Karl Franz Gebhardt, arrived to assist the investigation into the cause of death. European journalists from allied or German-occupied countries descended to record the scene. German correspondents and Propaganda Ministry officials documented the grisly scene; a press unit photographed slain children and women, their torn down undergarments suggestive of their fate.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Fröhlich, 14:110. Nazi propaganda had for quite some time made the case of what awaited Germany if it did not resist to the last full measure. Nazi press extensively covered the discovery of over 20,000 Polish nationals executed by the Soviet NKVD in Katyn. Yet Goebbels had also increasingly inundated the German people with reports of the Anglo-American dangers, for example. Just a week before Nemmersdorf, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* of October 13 claimed that “American troops have without any reason set fire to and burned down the border town of Wallendorf...in front of the eyes of the inhabitants...so that the entire goods and chattels (*Hab und Gut*) burned down.” Cited in Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 143–44. Nemmersdorf, in other words, occurred at a time when the Propaganda Ministry initiated a more comprehensive “atrocities campaign” to cultivate a fighting spirit in the face of calamitous military setbacks on both the Eastern and Western Fronts.

¹⁰⁸ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 151–54.

“The Raging of the Soviet Beasts—Terrible Crimes in Nemmersdorf—On the Trail of the Murderous Firebrands in the Liberated East Prussian Locales,” the front page of the Nazi Party organ *Völkischer Beobachter* (VB) proclaimed on October 27, 1944, setting off a flurry of coverage throughout the Third Reich.¹⁰⁹ The public learned that the German counteroffensive uncovered “grisly traces of Bolshevik terror,” describing in vivid detail the state of some twenty corpses, all of whom, it was repeatedly emphasized, were methodically killed from close range.¹¹⁰ Worried over implications that authorities left victims in harm’s way, the paper adamantly ensured readers that the NSDAP implemented successful evacuations of most of the population.¹¹¹ On an unfortunate few, “the Soviet beasts slaked their animalistic bloodlust.” Local, regional, and coordinated press echoed the flagship Nazi paper with shocking headlines: “Bolshevik Bloodlust Rages in East Prussian Border Area,” “Bestial Murderous Terror in East Prussia,” and “Beasts Raged in East Prussia” confronted the public with alarmist headlines on October 27th, 1944.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ “Das Wüten der Sowjetischen Bestien,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 27, 1944, 1.

¹¹⁰ The emotionally charged catalogue of heinous crimes included the jarring description of a young woman who was raped and stabbed to death and found holding the hand of her murdered child. The article furthermore described how all women had been raped and subsequently murdered from close range. Several bodies, it was reported, clearly proved that the victims were “forced by the murderous beasts to kneel before they were shot in the nape of the neck.” The repeated allegations of all deaths occurring through execution, as opposed to combat, were ostensibly confirmed by Soviet POWs, who admitted that they had been given “free reign” to plunder, rape, and murder.

¹¹¹ It seemed crucial to communicate the foresight and care of the Party during the evacuations, even if this was not the case. Even Joseph Goebbels noted that on October 25th, 1944 that the evacuations had proven difficult, as they had come too late. The blame, the Nazi notable surmised, lay with *Gauleiter* Koch, who placed too much faith in the Wehrmacht’s abilities to stave off the enemy, so that now all measures that could have been planned were being carried out in a hasty manner. The following day, Goebbels once again bemoaned the flagging morale in East Prussia, which he attributed to the nonexistent evacuation plans which were now poorly executed. Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 14:100; Fröhlich, 14:108.

¹¹² Cited in Kershaw, *The End*, 115.; and “Bestien wüteten in Ostpreussen,” *Braunschweiger Tageszeitung*, October 27, 1944, 1. The papers conformed to guidelines of the German News Agency (*Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro*; DNB), which had been directed by the Press Office of the Propaganda Ministry that “[t]he monstrous Soviet bloodlust must be denounced in the layout and headlines.” The directive advised the Nazi fourth estate that it “is especially desirable that the DNB report brings out the horrific Bolshevik crimes in East Prussia in a big and effective way and comments on them with extreme harshness.” Quoted in Marlis Steinert, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen: Stimmung und Haltung der deutschen Bevölkerung im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf: Econ, 1970), 521–22.

The following day, Kurt-Lothar Tank published a long, gripping narrative of the “unforgettable picture of inhumane horror” he witnessed in Nemmersdorf, now “a village of death, a village of silence.”¹¹³ Tank painted a gratuitously macabre picture of “26 gruesomely disfigured bodies of bludgeoned and shot elderly and children, of defiled and murdered girls” discovered by the shocked soldiers.¹¹⁴ Tank recounted the horrendous rape of “Charlotte W.,” one of the few survivors.¹¹⁵ The morbid descriptions of murdered women and children hammered home the message that all of the victims fell victim to merciless Soviet monsters acting on orders of their communist officers and the “Jew Ehrenburg”—a Soviet propagandist.¹¹⁶ More importantly, the article made clear that this fate awaited all Germans unless they resisted with their entire might. Presciently, Tank claimed that the “frightful days of Nemmersdorf will never be forgotten.”

In the same edition, under the headline “Nailed Alive to the Wall—61 Victims of Bolshevik Murderous Terror,” the international doctors’ commission published their findings of

¹¹³ Kurt-Lothar Tank, “Die Mörder von Nemmersdorf,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 28, 1944, 1.

¹¹⁴ The soldiers “who gazed with frightened faces...upon the bloody field” were, according to the author, seasoned veterans of the Warsaw uprising brutally put down by German forces, which cost the lives of some 150-200,000 Polish civilians. The reporter surmised that “even the hellish scenes from Warsaw, which so bloodily remained vivid in their memories, paled in comparison.”

¹¹⁵ “Charlotte W” is in fact Charlotte Müller, whose testimony to Wehrmacht secret military police, cited above, does not exactly correspond to the much more dramatic interpretation of Tank.

¹¹⁶ Without wanting to engage in morbid voyeurism, an excerpt forcefully illuminates the undoubtedly chilling effect of the article on its public: “Most of them are disfigured, the hands and cheeks, brow and jaws in tatters, neck and chest covered in streams of blood; most of them have been killed with shots to the nape of the neck after unbelievable mistreatment....A 19 year old brunette girl...has evidently been defiled in the most brutal manner and then murdered. To her side lies a six month old infant in blue cotton clothing, the little head bloodily deformed through a pistol shot....In the gulch lay raped and murdered women next to their murdered children. The Bolsheviks even defiled and then murdered a pregnant woman. These are not the isolated acts of a sadistic horde—they are systematic mass murder such as only the Soviets know. They don’t think of demonstrating a deceptive program of sparing German civilians. No, they carry out the orders of the Jew Ehrenburg and the commander of the 33. Bolshevik Army! They arbitrarily kill German people, defile German women wherever they find them. The frightful days of Nemmersdorf will never be forgotten by the German soldier. He has thrown the murderers of German men and women out of Nemmersdorf, and he will drive them back further, for he knows what German civilians can expect if he takes but one step backward. The war has entered its most merciless stage. Here everything ends what one once before could find words for. The bestial bloody deed of Nemmersdorf will cost the Bolsheviks dearly.”

“bestial atrocities of the Soviet hordes” in Nemmersdorf and the surrounding villages.¹¹⁷ It was medically confirmed, the VB heralded, that Soviets had raped nearly all the women murdered virtually all victims with “close range shots.” Though no mention was made of crucifixions in Nemmersdorf—an unlikely oversight for the propaganda machinery intent on emphasizing Soviet brutality—one man in Alt-Wusterwitz (Dubrawa) was found with punctured hands, from which it could be deduced that he had been nailed alive to a wall by his Soviet tormentors.¹¹⁸ Subsequent VB front pages brought further details of eyewitness accounts of how “Bolsheviks for the first time unveiled their brutish (*viehisches*) face on German soil.”¹¹⁹ The November 11th front page of the party paper featured a photograph of murdered children accompanied with a warning that this fate awaited the rest of Germany, if not all energies were brought to the fight against Bolshevism.¹²⁰ By disseminating every last ghastly detail, the Nazi regime hoped to stir indignation far beyond the border regions of East Prussia.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ “Nailed Alive to the Wall—61 Victims of Bolshevik Murderous Terror,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 28, 1944, 1.

¹¹⁸ This remains the sole reference in Nazi publications to any sort of nailing of victims to walls. A Wehrmacht intelligence report chronicling the total number of dead in the region, which quotes a figure of 90 victims, included a claim of five murdered children who had their tongues nailed to a table. BA/MA, RH 2/2685, 168. Overall, allegations of crucifixion are only mentioned in a handful of contemporary accounts, and are nonexistent in the Nazi press.

¹¹⁹ “Eye Witnesses Report From Nemmersdorf: How Moscow’s Executioners Raged,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, November 2, 1944, 1.

¹²⁰ Kershaw, *The End*, 115.

¹²¹ In December 1944, for instance, propaganda units dropped fliers on American lines informing soldiers of the grizzly details of the massacre, warning them that German forces would “fight to the last man” to keep the “murderous hordes...from our homes.” The fliers admonished the Allies that “as long as you, under the guise of being a ‘Crusader for Humanity’ insist on being allied to this Horde of Murderers, we will fight YOU TOO—TO THE LAST DROP OF BLOOD!” Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 185. The intention of driving a wedge between the Western Allies and the USSR by fanning outrage in the court of international opinion and framing Nazi efforts as a defense of the Occident against “Asiatic hordes” failed as it had done with attempts to propagandize Katyn and other Soviet crimes.

Intended audiences nevertheless met the morbid propaganda campaign with mixed feelings. While Nemmersdorf may have engendered a sense of purpose and provided postwar justifications for resistance to the last, the goal of fanning zealous self-sacrifice failed. The regime reluctantly noted that the press agitation backfired and sapped morale, with some circles rejecting the arguments of the regime entirely: Intelligence reports found that Germans detected an irresponsibility on the part of the authorities, who had not evacuated populations in time.¹²² Particularly in areas far removed from the Eastern Front, SD informants registered ambivalence and outright disgust over the heavy-handed enumerations of brutalities. In fact, the shameless exploitation of German dead evoked for some the “atrocities that we have perpetrated on enemy soil, and even in Germany.”¹²³ From the perspective of the regime, the propaganda initiative failed in its desired effects, dampening already flagging morale. Goebbels lamented with exasperation that “[t]he atrocity reports are no longer being bought,” remarking that “[e]specially the news about Nemmersdorf have only convinced a part of the population.”¹²⁴

One should be cautious to conclude from the critical reactions that the ensuing panic following the reporting of Nemmersdorf is nothing but a cherished “myth” uncritically reiterated

¹²² BAB R55/601, Folder 210, “Tätigkeitsbericht” November 7, 1944. The Propaganda Ministry monitored the situation very closely, deploying a system of undercover agents spreading “mouth propaganda” in public spaces to refute the rumors circulating among the population. See BAB R55/601, folder 201, “Mundpropagandaparole Nr. 4,” November 7, 1944.

¹²³ In Stuttgart, SD informants overheard people saying that “every thinking person, seeing these gory victims, will immediately contemplate the atrocities that we have perpetrated on enemy soil, and even in Germany. Have we not slaughtered Jews in their thousands? Don’t soldiers tell over and over again that Jews in Poland had to dig their own graves? And what did we do with the Jews who were in the concentration camp in Alsace? The Jews are also human beings. By acting in this way, we have shown the enemy what they might do to us in the event of their victory.... We can’t accuse the Russians of behaving just as gruesomely towards other peoples as our own people have done against their own Germans.” Why should anyone care, the report went on, “because they have killed a few people in East Prussia. After all, what does human life amount to here in Germany.” Quoted in Steinert, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen*, 522–23.

¹²⁴ Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 14:192–93.

by postwar historians. For despite failing to move the German population to resolute defense, the press campaign spread terror especially among the inhabitants of the regions directly now directly threatened by the Red Army. Memories of 1914 already reverberated in the region: For East Prussians such as Ida K., who as a child fled Tsarist troops in 1915, people “knew what to expect of the Russian troops,” so that news of “horrific butchery” only reinforced expectations of imminent horror.¹²⁵ Moreover, they did not need the litanies of horrors in the *Völkischer Beobachter* to imagine a dark future: Rumors and reports of the atrocities spread mouth to mouth like wildfire, unleashing hysteria among the treks fleeing west.¹²⁶ Stories of “monstrous events...more horrific than any demonic or sadistically perverse fantasy could come up with” were on the lips of many in the German East.¹²⁷ For those facing the inferno, the however distorted imaginings of unbounded barbarism rang true, and were certainly real enough to spark desperate retreats and waves of mass suicides to avoid falling into Soviet hands.

To what degree one can prove or disprove Nemmersdorf is a somewhat fruitless venture, and beside the point.¹²⁸ The point is that “naked horror” gripped many inhabitants of the German East. Justifiably or not, “after ‘Nemmersdorf’ nothing was like it was before,” meaning both the trajectory of the forced migration and the memory of it.¹²⁹ Though inflected with hearsay and luridness, the massacre propelled fears to feverish heights. The October flight also had other,

¹²⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 100. Kleinmann’s fears of Russians prompted her to add a handwritten postscript to her 1948 report to the Stuttgart office of the Protestant humanitarian organization *Evangelisches Hilfswerk*: “We too would have suffered the same fate [of Nemmersdorf] if we would have fallen in the hands of the Russian.”

¹²⁶ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 115.

¹²⁷ Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 57.

¹²⁸ Chapter 8 will attempt an examination of Nemmersdorf in the postwar period.

¹²⁹ Kossert, *Ostpreußen*, 146.

more tangible lessons, however. Throughout the region, “pitiful wagons, from which completely silent little children’s heads curiously peered, were distressing and at the same time endlessly moving. The pots and cans tied to the braces clattered loudly.”¹³⁰ Upon seeing the miserable columns, many must have pondered one fateful question: “Are we next?” The victims streaming through towns, the stories they brought with them, and the headlines in the papers undoubtedly inculcated widespread willingness to risk all for immediate safety, even in the dead of one of the coldest winters in a generation during an enemy offensive more ferocious than the last.

“Every man for himself!” Parsing “Flight”

“There is no mercy—for no one, just as there was no mercy for us,” Marshall Ivan Chernyakhovsky’s order of the day from January 12th, 1945 impressed upon his troops. “It is unnecessary to demand of the soldiers of the Red Army that they show mercy. They burn with hatred and thirst for vengeance. The land of the fascists must be made into a desert like our land, which they laid to waste. The fascists must die, just as our soldiers died.”¹³¹ The Main Political Administration of the Red Army likewise reminded members of the Red Army that they were the sole masters once they set foot on German soil, and that they are “both the judge and the punisher for the torments of his fathers and mothers, for the destroyed cities and villages.” Whomever they encountered were “next of kin of the killers and oppressors.”¹³²

¹³⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:90.

¹³¹ Quoted in Herbert Michaelis and Ernst Schraepler, *Ursachen und Folgen: vom deutschen Zusammenbruch 1918 und 1945 bis zur staatlichen Neuordnung Deutschlands in der Gegenwart ; eine Urkunden- und Dokumentensammlung zur Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 12 (Berlin: Dokumenten-Verlag, 1976), 343.

¹³² Norman M Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 72.

As the Soviet military steeled itself for its mammoth attack, the furious artillery bombardment that preceded it signaled to the inhabitants of East Prussia that something ominous loomed on the horizon. “In the morning around seven o’clock a steady rolling and droning wakes me. The window panes are vibrating....This can only mean the end. Toward midday the rolling is as powerful as a landslide. Air blasts that one holds one’s breath for.... The people...try to console themselves with the belief that this can only be the effects of our new miracle weapon.”¹³³ While Wehrmacht surgeon Hans von Lehdorff anxiously contemplated what the ferocious artillery portended, elsewhere that day, Karl Schippmann’s short letter to his wife noted that “everything is shaking here, me too. What happens now, I do not yet know.”¹³⁴ In Berlin, meanwhile, Goebbels hoped that the “nerve-racking tension” of the latest Soviet offensive would only last a few days.¹³⁵ His adjutant, Wilfred von Oven, observed that most of the Nazi leadership felt “confident,” and that few were “dismayed” by the reports trickling into the capital.¹³⁶

In 1944, the Soviet juggernaut halted at the gates of the Third Reich. January 1945 proved something else entirely: It was the final drive on Berlin to end the war and defeat the fascist foe. With German defenses depleted after the failed December Ardennes Offensive, in less than three weeks the Red Army drove more than 500 kilometers and only stopped once it reached the Oder River, the last natural barrier before the Nazi capital. The coda of the Third Reich’s death throes was staggeringly bloody: In the final phase of the war, 300-400,000 soldiers died each

¹³³ Hans Graf von Lehdorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch: Aufzeichnungen eines Arztes aus den Jahren 1945 - 1947* (München: Biederstein, 1961), 11.

¹³⁴ Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (12.1-20.1.1945)*, vol. 1 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 9.

¹³⁵ Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 15:118.

¹³⁶ Wilfred von Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, vol. 2 (Beunos Aires: Dürer-Verlag, 1949), 208.

month.¹³⁷ Yet Nazi Germany's swift collapse like a "house of cards" proved horrendously deadly and unalterable for the civilian population as well.¹³⁸ Hans von Lehndorff's allusion to a deadly "landslide" rolling from the East seemed a particularly apt metaphor.

Postwar historical retrospections of "flight and expulsion" invariably commence their story on this fateful day: "It began on the 12th of January, 1945," opened a gripping 1949 multi-part series *Ostdeutsches Schicksal* ("East German Fate") chronicling the "collapse" and the "German tragedy."¹³⁹ The following year, the popular illustrated *Der Stern* printed haunting images of destroyed treks and dead horses, reminding readers that "exactly five years ago, as the Russian steamroller inexorably advanced...a fate (*Schicksal*) fulfilled itself, which in its deep tragedy remains unforgettable."¹⁴⁰ Decades on, "flight" remains closely associated with January 1945, where events appear as an inconceivable disaster that erupted without adequate forewarning, akin to a natural catastrophe such as an avalanche or earthquake.¹⁴¹ The events of the preceding summer and fall—apart from Nemmersdorf—feature as a brief footnote, if not overlooked entirely.

Not only does January 1945 eclipse the experiences of refugees in the months before, the popular notion that virtually all inhabitants of the German East wanted to flee but were prevented

¹³⁷ Kershaw, *The End*, 379.

¹³⁸ Heinrich Schwendemann, "Endkampf und Zusammenbruch Im Deutschen Osten," *Freiburger Universitätsblätter* 130, no. 139 (1995): 15.

¹³⁹ Jürgen Thorwaldt, "Es begann an der Weichsel," *Christ und Welt* Nr. 12, March 24, 1949, 4. The series ran until June 7, 1949.

¹⁴⁰"Flucht über das Haff. Bilder, die man nicht vergessen kann," *Der Stern* Nr. 4, January 22, 1950, 7.

¹⁴¹ Even three decades on, texts of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (Federation of Expellees) for a series of commemorations marking the 30th anniversary of the "flight, saving, and expulsion of the East Germans" started historical retrospections in the winter of 1945. Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 001-291-131-1, "Flucht, Rettung und Vertreibung der Ostdeutschen vor 30 Jahren in Zahlen," undated [c. early 1975]. Readers of magazines such as *Spiegel* or *Focus* are similarly left with the impression that the forced migration began in January 1945, where the greatest attention is dedicated to images of treks on wintry East Prussian avenues.

from finding refuge dictates typical “flight” narratives. Many indeed yearned to escape the looming danger. The brush with disaster in the fall, the enemy’s proximity, and months of propaganda and rumors of atrocities did produce a “silent” emigration from the German East in the months preceding January.¹⁴² Prohibitions on travel could be bypassed, particularly if one had relatives in the Reich. Alone 30% of the East Prussian population—nearly 600,000—sought refuge from a Soviet offensive that many foresaw.¹⁴³ A number of prominent postwar historians such as Wolfgang Schieder, Lothar Gall, and Heinrich August Winkler were among those who escaped the deluge of 1945 in this manner.¹⁴⁴ Unsurprisingly, NSDAP elites like Erich Koch also arranged for the safety of their families, and even transported valuables westward.¹⁴⁵

Retrospectives frequently cite compulsory measures that prevented a timely flight once the enemy launched its attack. The regime once again refused to learn from previous evacuations, and continued to stubbornly insist on merely ignoring the military threat.¹⁴⁶ Official authority still lay with the NSDAP, which as in the fall by and large resolutely opposed orderly departures and threatened penalties for anyone who was found packing or preparing wagons. The

¹⁴² It appears that since the beginning of October, isolated train transports from the eastern districts ferried some vulnerable members of the population, predominantly women and children, to Saxony. See BArch Ost-Dok 1/1, 51.

¹⁴³ The evacuees, mainly women and children, for the most part sought refuge in western East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania, Saxony, and Thuringia. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:16E.

¹⁴⁴ Rüdiger Hohls and Konrad H. Jarausch, *Versäumte Fragen: deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus* (Stuttgart; München: Dt. Verl.-Anst., 2000), 281, 300, and 369. In their recollections, the drama and uncertainty of the war were overshadowed by “excitement” and a sense of “adventure.”

¹⁴⁵ See Max Hastings, *Armageddon: The Battle for Germany, 1944-45* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2004), 322–23; Noble, *Nazi Rule*, 320.

¹⁴⁶ Apart from Gauleiter Koch conceding to an evacuation that stretched roughly 30 kilometers behind the front, authorities did not develop extensive preparations for a repeated offensive. Noble, *Nazi Rule*, 131–35. Some engaged local civil servants secretly developed plans such as transportation arrangements and evacuation routes for their communities. The speed of the January offensive, however, proved the inadequacy of virtually all preparations. See for instance Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:11.; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 19.

threat of “black lists” or even death for the “defeatist” act of fleeing was an effective deterrent.¹⁴⁷ Yet another deterrent for leaving was that by departing, families forfeited their ration cards and could not draw provisions on the road, and illegally slaughtering or hoarding foodstuffs to build up a supply were immensely difficult as well as dangerous.¹⁴⁸ Other testimonies point to the physical inability to flee: The military confiscated horses and vehicles throughout the fall, leaving many families incapable of travelling.¹⁴⁹ Some women refused to leave without their husbands and children who, activated in the *Volkssturm*, remained at home.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, families with pregnancies or infants, the elderly, and sick convinced many to stay together.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the extreme wintry conditions, undoubtedly explain the high proportion who vowed to remain behind, preferring to “go to the dogs instead of freezing on country roads.”¹⁵²

All these represented very real concerns that explain why civilians did not take to the road. Yet despite a pervasive eagerness to leave, postwar narratives suggesting a universal yearning to flee ignore the surprisingly high proportion of testimonies that—even recorded after

¹⁴⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 1/7, 109. In Beuthen (Bytom), a “uniformed party comrade” screamed at a women and threatened to have arrested for spreading false rumors of approaching Soviet forces. Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:559.

¹⁴⁸ As one woman explained: “Naturally we had contemplated our departure long before. But no evacuation passes were handed out, and without these we could not have received coals and potatoes in other towns. In any case, anyone speaking openly of imminent danger...was severely punished.” Quoted in Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, 1st ed. (München: C.H.Beck, 2011), 70.

¹⁴⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 24

¹⁵⁰ Gerhard Fittkau, *My Thirty-Third Year: A Priest's Experience in a Russian Work Camp* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1958), 9.

¹⁵¹ Josef Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 117.

¹⁵² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:421., See also Schieder, 1:99.

wartime traumata—express no such desires to begin with. The majority of the ten million in the German East, however, remained for a variety of reasons.

Unsurprisingly, little attention is placed on motivations rooted in regime loyalty: Some earnestly believed promises of miracle weapons and trusted assurances that the Soviets would be held.¹⁵³ For others, the experiences of the 1944 evacuations reinforced the resolve to not undergo a similar travail again. Evacuees arriving in Danzig in October 1944, authorities reported, “levelled the most severe criticisms” against the NSDAP, which in their mind implemented a botched evacuation that endangered or inconvenienced them.¹⁵⁴ Even with the enemy threat, therefore, numerous families “conferred and decided to stay” to safeguard their property.¹⁵⁵ It was “good this way,” one expellee recalled even after the war and the accompanying hardships, as “we...were spared the strain of the evacuation.”¹⁵⁶ The inclination to remain at home proved so strong that throughout December 1944, Insterburg’s mayor waged an unceasing and futile campaign to bar refugees evacuated in the fall from returning. Not even the threat of withholding ration cards helped, and the flustered civil servant needed to “ship off” some people who continued to return multiple times.¹⁵⁷

Moreover, despite widespread fear of the Red Army, many “did not want to believe the news of atrocities...or thought them to be strongly exaggerated.”¹⁵⁸ A pastor in Lauenburg

¹⁵³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:40.

¹⁵⁴ Quoted in Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 143.

¹⁵⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 195.

¹⁵⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 195.

¹⁵⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:11–12.

¹⁵⁸ Schieder, 1:37.

recalled a sense of anxiety, but that pervasive conversations on the street over whether to stay typically ended optimistically: “It won’t get so bad.”¹⁵⁹ Once the Soviet attack approached, one expellee noted in their diary, the population gave up “trying to escape... [and] the majority resolves to remain.” After all, “in 1814 the Russians were generally also human and behaved themselves, even with isolated excesses, as such.”¹⁶⁰ In ethnically mixed regions such as Masuria, Pomerania, and Upper Silesia, Catholics especially decided to stay, strengthened in the belief that their generally better relations with Poles would prevent the most violent excesses.¹⁶¹

Despite widespread stories of Soviet atrocities, a variety of motivations—optimism, the stability of the front throughout the fall, memories of overcrowded evacuation zones, and concerns for property and livestock—convinced many to risk remaining and find refuge in the familiarity of the homeland. Further belying images of a panicked last minute departure yearned for by the entire population, surreal scenes in the testimonies suggest a remarkable sense of normality for many. Refugees from East Prussia in Pomerania encountered “fantastical” sights: Uniformed waiters, set tables, and women dining in fine hats, even as the fighting neared.¹⁶² In Elbing, a student noted in her diary on January 23rd that not even the bombardment could interrupt her reading: “It was simply too cozy in the warm room, Christmas cookies before me, the warm glow of the lamp on the book. I savored!!!”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Schieder, 1:265.

¹⁶⁰ Schieder, 1:99.

¹⁶¹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/143, 8. After 1945, particularly Catholic Germans “opted” for Polish citizenship, thus avoiding expulsion.

¹⁶² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:97.

¹⁶³ Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (21.1-28.1.1945)*, vol. 2 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 313.

Whether assuaged by rosy prognoses or resolved to tough it out, the unimaginable speed of the Red Army left entire communities unmoved or unaware of the danger, even as explosions could be heard and the first refugees appeared.¹⁶⁴ Noblemen took advantage of the “glorious weather” to hunt, though fighting erupted only a few kilometers away.¹⁶⁵ Hans von Lehndorff’s own father, bored with the drudgery of preparing his estate’s trek, took the time to enjoy forests uncommonly teeming with game.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, “relatively peaceful living” continued: In many cities such as Elbing, street cars continued to run and theaters remained open up until the day Soviet forces threatened the city.¹⁶⁷ One moviegoer, after weeks of trying to procure tickets to the sold out film *Opfergang* was disappointed when sirens cut the experience short. On her way home a tank passed her; she only realized that it had been the enemy after her neighbor informed her that elsewhere in the city Soviet armor was driving down the streets and shooting indiscriminately to both sides into houses.¹⁶⁸

As misplaced as the illusions of stability may have been, they complicate postwar tropes of a stubborn NSDAP refusing to allow people clamoring to leave. The sources do support such behavior. For example, the *Gauleiter* of Lower Silesia, Karl Hanke, did not issue evacuation decrees until January 19, a week into the offensive, though hundreds of thousands were already independently on the move.¹⁶⁹ Hanke maintained, however, that the population was in no

¹⁶⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/127.

¹⁶⁵ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:11.

¹⁶⁶ Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 11.

¹⁶⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:50.

¹⁶⁸ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:316.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 77.

danger.¹⁷⁰ Elsewhere in the region, authorities opposed the measure: On January 19, the NSDAP district leader in Cosel (Koźle) informed officials that “everything is to remain as it is,” since the Soviets would not cross the Oder. Anyone who questioned the safety of the city would be shot, he added.¹⁷¹ It was not uncommon that evacuation orders nevertheless followed a mere hours after continuous threats or assurances that all was well.¹⁷²

Archival materials also substantiate familiar tropes of obstinate and cowardly functionaries in the crucial hours of the German East. When news of approaching forces circulated in Elbing, city notables together with party officials requisitioned trucks meant for evacuations, and fled to Danzig with many of their possessions.¹⁷³ In Sensburg (Mrągowo), inhabitants finally could evacuate after days of waiting for permission from NSDAP authorities, who suddenly drove off.¹⁷⁴ Inhabitants throughout the German East noted with fury and disbelief that Nazi representatives had “long fled into the hills,” leaving their compatriots in the lurch.¹⁷⁵ In Frauenburg (Frombork), party elites fled while shouting one last maxim: “Germany must live, even if we must die!!!”¹⁷⁶ When they did not flee, authorities continued to prevent flight, threatening draconian measures for all who disobeyed.¹⁷⁷ Crisis frequently brought out

¹⁷⁰ Andreas R Hofmann, *Die Nachkriegszeit in Schlesien: Gesellschafts- und Bevölkerungspolitik in den polnischen Siedlungsgebieten 1945-1948* (Köln: Böhlau, 2000), 20.

¹⁷¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:411.

¹⁷² Schieder, 1:414; Schieder, 1:431.

¹⁷³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:54–55.

¹⁷⁴ Schieder, 1:91.

¹⁷⁵ Schieder, 1:22; Schieder, 1:229–30.

¹⁷⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 1/7, 109.

¹⁷⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 3.

fanaticism: Throwing himself into the “final struggle,” the NSDAP district leader of Allenstein (Olsztyn) attempted to blow the gas, water, and electrical works, but civil servants dissuaded him by arguing that the measure would only spread even more panic.¹⁷⁸ Nazi figures generally added to the pandemonium: Throughout the German East, deputies roamed the streets mustering boys as young as thirteen or fourteen for the desperate defense. Only rarely, as a report from Leba (Łeba), did refugees recall “party comrades who stepped up with us to the last procession.”¹⁷⁹

As in the previous summer and fall, yet now on a far larger scale, evacuation or disorderly flight only occurred at the last possible moment, when Soviet soldiers were hours away.¹⁸⁰ When directives arrived, or if at all, they emanated from various party, civil, or military offices; often they were contradictory, consistently they were belated, and sometimes they were completely without guidance beyond “every man for himself.”¹⁸¹ Utter chaos ensued “because every [functionary] acted on their own accord or not at all. One village packed and sent women and children away, the neighboring village had no orders or could not trek.”¹⁸² What appears as spontaneous flight in postwar literature was in fact a confusing combination of hasty independent departure and forced evacuation, depending on the local constellation of actors: In some cases the NSDAP overruled pleas for mass departure, in others they left people to their own devices.

¹⁷⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 73. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 80.

¹⁷⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:270. “All social classes were forgotten, not a single outbreak of hatred against the party comrades who had stepped up with us to the last procession (*letzten Gang*), as it were... In these difficult hours all were Germans, unfortunately too late.” The assertion that the flight created a true *Volksgemeinschaft* remains, nevertheless, a minority opinion

¹⁸⁰ Most of the time, for those who had waited for an official order, the permission came much too late; either Soviet forces had off the retreat, or the roads were so congested that no escape was possible. See for instance Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 121.; and BArch Ost-Dok 2/27, 106.

¹⁸¹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 9; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 2-3.

¹⁸² Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 271.

However, German collective memory habitually overlooks that not infrequently, the regime or military decreed compulsory evacuations.¹⁸³ While largely disorderly, the forced removals affected more civilians than independent flight, and sometimes proved successful: The mandated clearance of eastern Lower Silesia meant that 85% of its population—more than 700,000 civilians—could be saved across the Oder River by the time Soviet forces cut off the retreat at Brieg (Brzeg) at the end of January.¹⁸⁴ Yet perhaps more remarkable than the existence of beneficial measures, testimonies reveal widespread antipathy against coercive policies, underlining the forgotten fact that many in the German East refused to leave home and hearth.

For contemporaries, the improvised and belated forced evacuations that sent women and children into sub-zero conditions amounted to, as one refugee recorded in their diary, “probably the greatest crime ever perpetrated on the German people.”¹⁸⁵ Paul Peikert, a priest in Breslau (Wrocław), similarly condemned the measures as “one of the worst acts of madness of National Socialism” in their journal.¹⁸⁶ On January 22, Peikert added an entry on the “Breslau Death March” of 700,000 women and children in minus 20 degrees Celsius: The folly constituted a “crime against the German people, a rush into death,” but one which authorities accepted.¹⁸⁷ Elsewhere, military units forcibly removed inhabitants from their homes and threatened those

¹⁸³ Red Army military reports recognized the combination of force and independent flight. “The majority of the German population of this region... voluntarily evacuated or were forcefully driven by the German administration into the interior of Germany. Present are mainly the old, women, and children.” Cited in Hahn and Hahn, 281.

¹⁸⁴ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 77.

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:595.

¹⁸⁶ Paul Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, ed. Karol Jonca and Alfred Konieczny (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2005), 226.

¹⁸⁷ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:163. On the Breslau evacuation, see Johannes Kaps, *Die Tragödie Schlesiens 1945/46 in Dokumenten, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Erzbistums Breslau*. (München: Verlag “Christ Unterwegs,” 1952).

who refused to leave with execution.¹⁸⁸ “Constantly the military police came, as the village had been ordered to be vacated, and only a few inhabitants remained....Now all were to be forced to leave,” recalled a woman from Sensburg whose family and neighbors decided not to flee.¹⁸⁹ Yet not even threats of violence could convince those too terrified of the trek, stubborn to leave, or optimistic to flee.¹⁹⁰ A good proportion “didn’t want to leave anymore because transportation to the Reich was hopeless,” and so many hid for days so as not to be “captured” by roving Wehrmacht patrols.¹⁹¹ Compulsory evacuation “with all means” and violence, another refugee asserted, was the true source of their misery, as now “sluggishly and under the greatest dangers and challenges,” German officials “exposed [us] to every air attack, every volley from planes.”¹⁹²

All in all, contrary to assertions of nearly everyone wanting to flee, for a variety of reasons a substantial portion of the population never left their homes. Only an estimated 50% of the population—around five million—departed either through force or independently.¹⁹³ Yet

¹⁸⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 9; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 87. See also Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (6.2-12.2.1945)*, vol. 4 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 382.

¹⁸⁹ Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 117.

¹⁹⁰ The rural population, the archival testimonies suggest, were the most reluctant to leave their farms. See BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 24. See also Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 55; Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:37.

¹⁹¹ Cited in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 270.

¹⁹² Hahn and Hahn, 270. The regime hardly acted out of naiveté or stupidity. In mid-January, the Party Chancellery concurred with the Wehrmacht High Command that comprehensive evacuations were pointless and would deliver evacuees into such horrendous conditions, that “it is in the interests of all parties...to accept the risks of leaving behind the population.” A week later, the High Command reiterated that “there is no other option available than to dispense with the evacuation of the refugees.” Cited in Hahn and Hahn, 263–64. Also in late January, government and Wehrmacht officials recognized that the situation had reached the breaking point, and that further evacuations would endanger the 3.5 million already on the move as well as exacerbate the already disastrous situation in the overcrowded evacuation destinations. “Further evacuation of personnel means for the affected exposure to hunger, cold, and danger of overrunning through enemy tanks.” Cited in Hahn and Hahn, 275. Despite these realizations, forced evacuations continued into late February. Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 76.

¹⁹³ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 70.; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:23E.. Parsing what percentage of the five million made it west is difficult. Roughly 1.5 million departed via transport ships and reached ports in Germany and Denmark. The fortunate few who successfully managed to find place on trains generally reached central Germany. Treks from Silesia into Bavaria or the Sudetenland had better chances,

whether eager or reluctant to flee, the population soon realized that they faced an entirely different situation than in the previous fall: Unlike the limited incursion into East Prussia in 1944, in 1945 multiple Soviet prongs penetrated deeply into the western reaches of the German East, creating large cauldrons and swiftly cutting off the line of retreat westward for the majority of the population within a matter of days. The unfathomable speed of the Red Army and instantaneous collapse of Wehrmacht resistance unleashed terror that spread like a contagion, as millions realized that this time the catastrophe would not be averted.

The Trek

“Panic grips the people as the cry goes up: ‘The Russians are close’...Then a man comes by on horseback shouting in a loud voice: ‘Save yourselves, you who can. The Russians will be here in half an hour.’ We’re overcome by a paralyzing fear.”¹⁹⁴ Shattered military units tore through towns, and panicked refugees from further east and their warnings, horrified onlookers.¹⁹⁵ A diary from a woman in Schweidnitz (Świdnica) captured the confusion in Silesia. On February 2, inhabitants noticed that the sound of cannons got closer. “Refugees are no longer coming from that direction....We hear of gruesome rapes and murders of children and old people who could not flee.” A few days later more terrifying news: “The treks passing through speak of

though roughly 1.5 million were overtaken by the enemy. An estimated 1.5-2 million fell in to Soviet hands in East Prussia, West Prussia, and Pomerania. In general, judging from the community questionnaires in Bayreuth, few treks from the German East successfully avoided being overrun. Overall, of the 5 million, less than half managed to avoid the goal of evading the Red Army. Contrary to popular assumptions, “flight” was largely unsuccessful.

¹⁹⁴ Cited in Kershaw, *The End*, 177.

¹⁹⁵ Josef Buhl of Klodebach (Kłodobok) wrote in a 1946 letter that he first was made aware of the dangers by refugees who barely escaped Russian tanks arriving in the village. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:433. Refugees who briefly fell into Soviet hands but then managed to escape spread reports of rapes and murders. See also Schieder, 1:70; Schieder, 1:106; Schieder, 1:426; Fittkau, *My Thirty-Third Year*, 2.

divebomber attacks, dead horses and people.” Then, on February 8, the Red Army captured nearby towns, flight seemed imminent until a counteroffensive brought relief, and horror: “The Russian has been driven back. Frightful things happened to women and children, oh I can’t even put it down on paper.”¹⁹⁶ The German East descended into anarchy in the winter of 1945.

The terrifying chaos rattled even the most devout National Socialists who hoped for a miracle: Upon realizing the disaster that lay at hand, Magdalene Krüger gazed upon her portrait of Hitler “full of hope and confidence. But even he cannot console me today.”¹⁹⁷ Others were reduced to fatalism, “in their despair they screamed: ‘if only the Führer would send a few planes in order to strike all of us dead on the spot!’”¹⁹⁸ In Königsberg, Hans von Lehdorff overheard a woman proclaim: “The Führer won’t let us fall to the Russkis, he would rather gas us.”¹⁹⁹

Though less than one in two East Germans experienced it, the vast majority who attempted an escape did so under confusing circumstances described above. They fled on foot or on horse-drawn cart in columns of compatriots, as the speed of the offensive and insufficient planning left no time for alternatives. Because so many experienced it, and due to the suffering and traumata endured, “the trek” emerged as a symbol synonymous with “flight and expulsion.”²⁰⁰ As one refugee concluded in 1950: “Forever, as long as I shall live, the procession

¹⁹⁶ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 3924/3, “Letzte Kriegstage in Schweidnitz/Schlesien und erste Flucht der rot-Kreuz-Schwester Else Z., 17.1.45-22.2.45 als Tagebuch, dann bis zur Rückkehr im Mai, aus der Erinnerung,” 4-6.

¹⁹⁷ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:280. Others turned to the radio to hear Hitler address them, noting with disappointment that his words were “empty and vague.” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:103.

¹⁹⁸ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:299. Here Kempowski cites Fittkau. In the English translation, the reference to Hitler is omitted and reads: “One woman cried out, ‘Why can’t some planes come over and kill us all right here? That would be a lot easier than being left to the Bolsheviks!’” Fittkau, *My Thirty-Third Year*, 9.

¹⁹⁹ Lehdorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 18.

²⁰⁰ One the trek and its iconic place, see Gerhard Paul, ed., “Der Flüchtlingstrek,” in *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 666–73. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:257.

of suffering (*Elendszug*) of the refugees will remain in my memory, as soon as I hear the word ‘trek,’ it is once again before my eyes.”²⁰¹ Given its centrality in memories of the war, it is necessary to examine the trek and the experiences associated with it.

Most journeys began with disorder and bedlam. With the NSDAP largely absent or discredited, it fell upon civil society to arrange for their own salvation in this hastily and improvised columns. Doyens of the community such as mayors, public servants, noblemen, or priests attempted to establish a sense of order in the hectic final hours before leading their citizens into the unknown.²⁰² They organized groups and attempted to arrange transportation, beseeching those with wagons to keep their loads light to ensure room for the less fortunate.²⁰³ They freed shops to sell wares without ration cards, which many took advantage of to stock up for the journey.²⁰⁴ Farmers now openly butchered and sold or gave away excess food, while members of the family buried precious items in the yard or woods nearby.²⁰⁵ In some cases, people shot their pets and any livestock that they could not take.²⁰⁶ Neighbors said farewells and, “realizing that for many it was... forever, the women began to wail loudly.”²⁰⁷ Recollections of introspection abound: Final walks through the barn and house, gathering soil for a keepsake, or

²⁰¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:257.

²⁰² Their leadership garnered tremendous devotion, and many of the postwar activists and politicians advocating for the expellees had earned the trust of their constituents in 1945.

²⁰³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:42.

²⁰⁴ Schieder, 1:99; Schieder, 1:265. In Neumark (Nowica), the mayor was forced to rescind the order, however, because the population “without discipline and first and foremost tried to procure alcohol.” Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 270.

²⁰⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 124.

²⁰⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:103.

²⁰⁷ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 4:687.

attending a last church service marked the moments before departure. One expellee recalled the scenes: “A deep, solemn devotion descends upon the tortured people, disheartened, despairing calls for help to God that he may turn fate rise to Heaven.”²⁰⁸ These frenzied preparations frequently occurred in mere hours.

If families decided to flee, they soon realized that few options were available. In Sensburg, rumors circulated that transports were on the way and due to arrive within hours; when a single “pathetically tiny” fire truck appeared, dozens of desperate women and their children immediately swamped it.²⁰⁹ In Freystadt (Kisielice), after only a few hours’ notice, inhabitants gathered to begin the march, but the assigned trek leader who knew the route already fled.²¹⁰ In Namslau (Namysłów), farmers who committed to picking up the city’s inhabitants got cold feet and continued without stopping. Luckily, military trucks passing through took most of the women and children.²¹¹ In Elbing, waiting refugees tried flagging down retreating Wehrmacht units in vain. An officer stepped into the road and on his own authority commanded the soldiers to take on the “old, totally exhausted people, the screaming children and whimpering infants.”²¹²

The frenzied moment of departure—iconized in postwar literature and film in a whirlwind of terrified stampeding treks with shouts of “the Russians are here!”—sometimes took on less dramatic forms. In Insterburg, Berlin double-decker busses suddenly arrived to ferry the

²⁰⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:100.

²⁰⁹ Schieder, 1:91.

²¹⁰ Schieder, 1:69.

²¹¹ Schieder, 1:414.

²¹² Schieder, 1:55. For similar scenes, see *Ibid*, 273 and 428.

surprised throngs westward to safety.²¹³ Fleeing refugees near Angersdorf (Prošlic) glimpsed the local count loading his personal plane with luggage.²¹⁴ An airport near Karlsberg (Mierzeja Wiślana) ferried refugees—mostly Nazi Party members or other dignitaries—to Danzig.²¹⁵ Some of the inhabitants of Kamp (Kępa) boarded aeroboats at a nearby seadrome.²¹⁶ In Königsberg, Dore Kleinert left her apartment and planned on walking to Pillau, but decided to board a tram with other refugees. Surreally, all the passengers paid the fare and drove through the burning, “unrecognizable moon and crater landscape” of the Prussian capital to the western suburbs, from where they managed to hitchhike with an army transport.²¹⁷

While the vast majority of fleeing civilians assuredly experienced anguish and fright during a perilous journey, some recall pleasant moments. Even during the dead of winter and in a combat zone, children in particular delighted in the flurry of activity.²¹⁸ One woman recalled how “the children rather enjoyed the wandering life, as they were protected by duvets and the soldiers doted on them.²¹⁹ During rests, they played and went sledding, and “complained a little that the tobogganing fun had to come to an end” when the trek continued.²²⁰ Not just the young

²¹³ Schieder, 1:52.

²¹⁴ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:709.

²¹⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:68.

²¹⁶ Schieder, 1:164.

²¹⁷ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:616.

²¹⁸ “The children find it terrific. Thank God that they don’t notice the earnestness of the hour.” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:22.

²¹⁹ Schieder, 1:92.

²²⁰ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:474. Similarly, Hans-Georg Kochan admits that he “did not think about the seriousness of the situation and found the whole thing somewhat adventurous.” He and other boys explored, as there “was always something interesting to see.” However, the sight of the first corpse—a soldier, whose blood had formed a stalagmite with his head wound and the tank he was laid on—changed his mood decisively. Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:197–98.

were charmed. Some adults, perhaps leaving their province for the first time, were energized by travel on naval ships and astounded by their ornate ballrooms.²²¹ Countess von Sydow fondly remembered travelling through “magnificent forests” and being “enthralled” by the “silence of the deep snow, the grand pine forests, it is almost like a fairy tale.”²²² Documenting the trek from his hometown of Lübchen (Lubów), private photographs of Hanns Tschira captured relatively unburdened, even laughing refugees that make the journey seem rather unspectacular in comparison to the more widely known images of suffering and horror.²²³

Most, however, faced a daunting journey in temperatures dropping below minus twenty degrees Celsius and contending with extreme congestion. Countless testimonies affirm the summary of one refugee’s postwar account:

“[D]ay after day, night after night, endless, ceaseless civilian treks trudge down snowy streets. They are heavily loaded, the horses can barely move.... The wagons creak and groan and—break. Then there are setbacks, traffic jams, confusion. And through all this sorrow the retreating German troops drive, continuously attacked by ever more Russian planes in constant waves. The dead, the wrecked wagons, the horses are shoved into the ditches of the avenues, without pause it is supposed to move on toward the west. Added to this harsh frost, deep snow.”²²⁴

Confiding her despair and self-recriminations for having undertaken the senseless journey to her diary, Else Z. movingly captured what many must of thought:

“On the road the refugee stream envelopes us. Now we are queued up in the great misery of the country lane. Next to us drive tanks. With their treads they make the muck even more abysmal. The tanktraps on the streets are a great obstacle. Every hundred meters the street is again clogged. Cars

²²¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:287.

²²² Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:286.

²²³ Lucia Brauburger and Hanns Tschira, *Abschied von Lübchen: Bilder einer Flucht aus Schlesien* (München: Econ, 2004). See also Maren Röger and Stephan Scholz, “Fotografien,” in *Die Erinnerung an Flucht Und Vertreibung. Ein Handbuch Der Medien Und Praktiken* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2015), 153–67.

²²⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:99.

with wounded overtake us. Horses, people, cows are driven on, it is an unnerving scene. No one is speaking. Mrs. P just sobs and sobs. Before me my daughter walks, I see her little feet go through the muck. My god, why did I even give birth to her! My kids must curse me for doing so. I look for an answer in the dark, starless sky, but I receive none. Halfway there we need to turn off. The road is blocked, so back...”²²⁵

Adding to the congestion, columns of exhausted concentration camp prisoners forcibly evacuated on death marches confronted civilians with the undeniable evidence of the Third Reich’s murderous policies.²²⁶ The weather and road conditions were not the only sources of misery. To an even higher degree than the previous summer and fall, women and children comprised the treks, as roving military police dragooned men and boys from the columns into the *Volksturm*.²²⁷ Depriving families of their males had dire consequences, so that struggling to care for the young and elderly during one of the coldest winter in living memory in a combat zone represented a herculean task.²²⁸ Testimonies often fondly praise the bravery and dedication of Polish and French slave workers, but given that such altruism was coerced, many soon

²²⁵ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 3924/3, “Letzte Kriegstage in Schweidnitz/Schlesien und erste Flucht der rot-Kreuz-Schwester Else Z., 17.1.45-22.2.45 als Tagebuch, dann bis zur Rückkehr im Mai, aus der Erinnerung,” 7.

²²⁶ Later chapters will offer a more thorough analysis of expellee memory of witnessing the evidence of Germany’s racial crimes. For now it should merely be noted that although the military collapse had far deadlier consequences for many of the Third Reich’s racial prisoners, their horror in the final months of the war remains an overlooked memory in postwar narratives of flight and expulsion. The few testimonies that acknowledge the plight of Germany’s victims who were now in full sight during the evacuations exhibit a mix of shock, compassion, hostility, and ambivalence. On the death marches more generally, see Daniel Blatman, *The death marches: the final phase of Nazi genocide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

²²⁷ Party authorities and military units combed treks for able-bodied men and boys, as well as soldiers who were hiding among civilians. Deserters were publicly hanged along roads, often with warning signs around their necks. Those who refused to join the *Volkssturm* were treated as “traitors to the German people” and sentenced to immediate death. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:157; Schieder, 1:285. See also Schwendemann, “Endkampf Und Zusammenbruch Im Deutschen Osten,” 20.; and Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 271.

²²⁸ Nazi authorities came to this realization as well: “The military police in Prenzlau has since several days started to detain the men (civilians) accompanying the treks....This had extremely unpleasant effects, as the treks with the women alone could not be moved further. It also occurred that by taking away a man, his 4, 5, or 6 children remain alone with the trek wagon because the wife has died or subsequently perished on the trek.” Cited in Joachim Rogall, *Die Räumung des “Reichsgaus Wartheland”: vom 16. bis. 26. Januar 1945 im Spiegel amtlicher Berichte* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1993), 133.

abandoned their masters because for them “the war was over.”²²⁹ Without men skilled to navigate the congested roads covered in sheets of ice, as a police report summed up, women and children were “helplessly exposed to the most unheard of difficulties of this hasty flight.”²³⁰

The Wehrmacht’s movements and desperation further added to the chaos.²³¹ As in the fall, the military confiscated horses, wagons, and vehicles in order to make up shortfalls, effectively ending the flight of the affected civilians.²³² To ensure its ability to maneuver, the army re-routed treks and closed bridges and roads.²³³ The congestion and chaos prevented few village treks from remaining together, and the majority broke apart into small, atomized groups of extended family and neighbors.²³⁴ In a region consumed by furious fighting, the columns faced artillery and strafing from enemy planes. Halted by military posts at the Oder River, Karl Siebert recalled the grim scenes as Soviet planes targeted the halted refugees: “The wagons, ensnared into a knot, lay in heaps, smashed into a desolate mass by the planes’ bombs....Horses and people dead...sawed in half by the machine guns of the planes.”²³⁵

²²⁹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:597. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:215.; and Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 270. The lack of motivation to stick with the treks seems hardly surprising, as in many instances Polish workers had to leave their families at home and sought to return as soon as an opportunity presented itself. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:36; Schieder, 1:167; Schieder, 1:213.

²³⁰ Cited in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 279.

²³¹ The comportment of the Wehrmacht in refugee testimonies will be more closely examined in Chapter 8.

²³² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:103. See also Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 44; Lass, 62.; BArch Ost-Dok 1/1, 51; BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 34; and BArch Ost-Dok 2/14, 13.

²³³ In West Prussia, the military closed all bridges across the Vistula to civilians. Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 76. See also Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 72.; Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 118.; and BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 101.

²³⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 88

²³⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:167.

From the outset, refugees faced horrendous conditions, so that many soon wondered whether it “would not been better to stay at home.”²³⁶ The extreme congestion and speed of the enemy meant that the enemy frequently overtook treks, sometimes only a few kilometers from their homes.²³⁷ The terrible weather conditions and unmoving traffic jams convinced many that continuing was senseless.²³⁸ Often blocked by German military indefinitely or with the enemy bearing down from all sides, a majority of treks turned back after only a few days or even hours.²³⁹ Even the Wehrmacht started to advise refugees to abandon their journey and find a place to “wait for the end.”²⁴⁰ Paul Peikert noted that many who had been forcibly evacuated from Breslau returned after only a few days, as in their haste they had not enough food and warm clothing to go on.²⁴¹

For those who continued, the dreadful circumstances produced acts of selfishness that further compounded desperation. When food ran out, the smell of cooking and “smacking of lips,” and refusal to share even a piece of bread, were agonizing.²⁴² Mothers begged for milk for their infants in vain.²⁴³ Refugees seeking shelter were frequently turned away, “[n]owhere could

²³⁶ Schieder, 1:249.

²³⁷ As an example, the trek from Amalienhof (Dworek) turned back after only eight hours, finding enemy tanks blocking their path. BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 11. Similarly, in Badesow (Będziszewo), the civilians made it a mere 12 kilometers before Soviet armor intercepted them. After plundering and even appropriating several wagons, the townspeople were sent back home. BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 13.

²³⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/90, 69. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:160; Schieder, 1:421. Some families, having decided to return home because they could not find shelter and the traffic was too great, were nevertheless forced to continue by German military police, who forced them to continue.

²³⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 99ff. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:91; Schieder, 1:411.

²⁴⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:163.

²⁴¹ Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 35.

²⁴² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:31; Schieder, 1:113. and 113.

²⁴³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:58.

one find refuge or accommodation, one was always sent further on.”²⁴⁴ Refugees encountered closed doors and refusals from compatriots who “did not yet suspect that in the next hours and days, fate had intended the same fortunes of becoming a REFUGEE, to have no homeland and to not know where to lay one’s head at night.”²⁴⁵ Those stranded often remained so, unless they could barter for a ride or authorities intervened and, sometimes at gun point, forced travelers to lend a hand.²⁴⁶ At night, people struggled with rampant theft of horses, wagons, food, and clothing.²⁴⁷ In the cities, civilians and even the military ignored death penalties to engage in plundering.²⁴⁸ Tensions not infrequently ended in brawls between individuals or entire treks.²⁴⁹ Authorities often feared intervening, as threats of violence made no impression on trekkers, who “also were armed and ruthlessly made use of the firearm.”²⁵⁰ Frustration spilled out against the NSDAP, as well. In Kahlberg (Krynica Morska), the *Kreisleiter*’s angry threats of chasing the wounded out of town were shouted down with calls to “beat the brown dogs dead,” and others proclaimed that “[i]f only the Russian were here already, maybe at least our children would not

²⁴⁴ Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 276. Another refugee recalls that “everything was in upheaval, no one waited for the other. It was everyone for themselves,” as people went from door to door of people who had not yet fled and were turned away. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:220–21. Josef Buhl similarly experienced “impudent behavior” from the mayor of Maifritzdorf (Małkolno), who “despite being a party comrade cursed us expellees and homeless people and called us riff-raff.” Chased out of town, a neighboring village offered them shelter, but asked them to leave after a week. Schieder, 1:436.

²⁴⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/127, 181. The report obviously reflects a certain amount of postwar meditation on the experience and meaning of the word “refugee.”

²⁴⁶ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:655.; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:94; Schieder, 1:162; Schieder, 1:173.

²⁴⁷ See, for instance, Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:97; Schieder, 1:105; Schieder, 1:112; Schieder, 1:114; Schieder, 1:118.

²⁴⁸ Kershaw, *The End*, 177. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/90, 68; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:58; Schieder, 1:150; Schieder, 1:203; Schieder, 1:267.

²⁴⁹ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 279. See also Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:596.

²⁵⁰ Cited in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 279.

be hungry anymore.”²⁵¹ Hard-heartedness was the order of the day, and all solidarity dissolved.²⁵² As a woman summed up: “Now I had to make the bitter experience that greatest misery does not generally unite, but instead makes people even more egotistical and hard.”²⁵³

Despite the wartime dangers, memories of misery from cold and hunger stand as the greatest harbingers of suffering and death. “With the enormous cold, the shortage of food, and the week-long standing in open fields, people and animals died. Already after two weeks of flight one saw to both sides of the many hundreds of kilometers...countless cadavers of dead horses and here and there again a fresh gravemound with a simple wooden cross.”²⁵⁴ In their haste, people did not bring sufficient supplies for what turned out to be in some cases weeks of travel.²⁵⁵ “No milk or soup was readied in any of the locales for the children and infants, that is why so many small children and old people died, who were just laid in the ditches of the road because the ground was frozen rock-solid and everyone continued hastily.”²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:95. Even in Berlin the party elite recognized that disastrous situation had in part been the fault of the Nazi Party. On February 13th, Joseph Goebbels confided: “The fiasco of the East Prussia treks is mainly being laid at the feet of the Party, and people are cursing the Party leadership in East Prussia good and proper. I also think that segments of the East Prussian Party did not rise to the challenge.” Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 15:374.

²⁵² A refugee turning to an officer for help in finding transportation was cynically turned away with the advice that “trains are still running, and a hole in the *Haff* is still open as well.” The woman’s shock at this indifference from a fellow German seems to ignore that she herself concluded that most of the refugees were “real criminal times,” as demonstrated by their “crude, husky yelling.” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:93–94.

²⁵³ Schieder, 1:97.

²⁵⁴ Cited in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 275–76.

²⁵⁵ Sometimes treks stopped for great lengths of time. In Karthaus (Kartuzy), refugees halted several weeks because they were barred from moving further. As the Soviets conquered their homes already, few wanted to return home and remained. BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 10. Others became stranded against their own volition: Trek drivers from Beichau (Biechów) felt the cold was too great and the ice too dangerous for the horses, and decided to return. Those who had no vehicles were simply left stranded at the side of the road. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:421.

²⁵⁶ Schieder, 1:172. Even Joseph Goebbels noted the disastrous issue of inadequate provisions in his diary on February 13th: “From East Prussia I receive desperate cries of help for bread and milk.” Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 15:374.

Most infants, some of born in “wagons during snowstorms,” did not survive the journey.²⁵⁷ Karl Wasner of Friedenshütte (Nowy Bytom) recalled “pitiful processions, fleeing families, whimpering children and endless columns” arriving with 19 frozen infants.²⁵⁸ Johannes Theissing, the vicar of Breslau’s cathedral, noted that on one day alone authorities brought 70 frozen babies to the university hospital morgue.²⁵⁹ Pastor Paul Peikert reported the cold claimed so many already on January 31 that search commandos could not recover them all; a witness confided to him that he counted more than 400 victims on a short stretch of the 120 km evacuation route between Breslau and Kanth (Kały Wrocławskie).²⁶⁰ Several months later, Peikert added that the spring thaws revealed the ghastly results of the forced evacuation: Specially created recovery squads uncovered 90,000 remains in Silesia alone.²⁶¹

For a population largely spared by the previous six years of war, being suddenly swept up in hostilities and facing inconceivable horrors took an enormous physical and psychological toll that lasted a lifetime.²⁶² Many suffered from nausea, diarrhea, and headaches, a set of symptoms

²⁵⁷ BArch OstDok 2/127, 180

²⁵⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:406.

²⁵⁹ Joachim Köhler, ed., “‘Peter Michajlowitsch Sidorenko lachte wien ein Pferd.’ Aufzeichnungen des Breslauer Domvikars Johannes Theissing in lebensbedrohlicher Zeit vom 1. Januar bis 9. Mai 1945,” *Archiv für schlesische Kirchengeschichte* 65 (2007): 14. Elsewhere in Breslau, “dead children are brought, frozen, exhausted, infants who died of starvation due to lack of milk.” Horst G. Gleiss, *Breslauer Apokalypse 1945: Dokumentarchronik vom Todeskampf und Untergang einer deutschen Stadt und Festung am Ende der Zweiten Weltkrieges; unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der internationalen Presseforschung, persönlicher Erlebnisberichte von Augenzeugen und eigenen Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, vol. 7 (Wedel (Holstein: Natura et Patria Verl., 1993), 1689.

²⁶⁰ Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 31.

²⁶¹ Peikert, 227. If these numbers are reliable, Peikert’s January 31st conservative estimate of 150-200,000 dead through the travails of the flight for all of the German East are plausible. Sebastian Siebel-Achenbach concludes that 18,000 died on the foot march between Breslau and Kanth. Sebastian Siebel-Achenbach, *Lower Silesia from Nazi Germany to Communist Poland, 1942-49* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 60.

²⁶² BArch Ost-Dok 2/127, 180.

simply coined as *Landstrassenkrankheit* (“country road illness”).²⁶³ Testimonies from farmers consistently bring up the trauma of seeing the distress of their prized livestock and famed Trakehner horses.²⁶⁴ Charlotte Hedrich recalled an East Prussian farmer so distraught upon finding his horses frozen to the ground overnight that he collapsed into sobs and suffered a heart attack.²⁶⁵ The loss of all property similarly shattered spirits. Annemarie Kniep noted in her diary that her mother could not stop crying bitterly after their wagon was destroyed: “First the only son, then the grandson, then the home, now the last portable possessions—lost. For this the parents worked hard their entire life. It is very bitter.”²⁶⁶

Desperation gave way to hopelessness; thousands broke down, resigned to their fates. Refugees succumbed to psychotic breakdowns and “lost their minds,” the stress and ardors left nearly all with headaches, dizziness, and sleeplessness.²⁶⁷ Fluctuating between extreme irritability and sorrow, “many were afflicted with screaming fits.”²⁶⁸ The anguish proved too much that some fell into a stupor, mindlessly wandering country lanes.²⁶⁹ After five days of walking with three children stricken with whooping cough, a young mother documented her despair in a postcard to her relatives: She had been brought to the brink, and could not “take one

²⁶³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:95.. The symptoms, which many refugees exhibited, lasted for up to a year after the ordeal.

²⁶⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 194 and BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 99.

²⁶⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:276.

²⁶⁶ Schieder, 1:110.

²⁶⁷ Schieder, 1:106; Schieder, 1:174. See also Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:383.

²⁶⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:253.

²⁶⁹ As one refugee confided in a January 29th, 1945 letter, she could only wander by counting trees along the avenue and “dragging myself from tree to tree.” Many compatriots, however, sank down in resignation and gave up. Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (29.1-5.2.1945)*, vol. 3 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 56.

more step further”²⁷⁰ In Breslau, Lena Aschner observed two crying children stroking the hands and face of their sick mother. They had travelled for four days and were out of food, and the last overcrowded train departed the main station moments before. “The woman’s blood-drained, blue lips are covered in foam.... Her eyes are closed. The head is leaned against the wall.”²⁷¹ But of course, the loss of family members were the most shattering blows: In Breslau, a group of people wrestled a child from the arms of a distraught woman who, moments before, tore it from another’s pram. Only afterward did the woman realize that the baby was not her own; hers perished during the foot march from Oels (Oleśnica), a terrible fact she only discovered after several hours while trying to change her infant’s diaper.²⁷²

“But Where Do They Want to Go Now?” Escaping the German East

The German East in 1945 was an inferno. Contrary to postwar narratives, few treks reached the interior of the Reich. Moreover, they did not just stream westward. Their movements “crisscrossed” in every conceivable direction to escape Soviet forces closing in “from east and west,” or reach a port or strongpoint still in German hands.²⁷³ The struggle for survival also depended greatly on location. The population residing in the western German East, particularly

²⁷⁰ Haus Schlesien Library, Ber 0050, Letter February 3, 1945.

²⁷¹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:798. The woman had given up, and without Aschner’s arranging a space on a train from another station the next day, her fate would have been uncertain.

²⁷² Kempowski, 1:570.

²⁷³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 33; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 7. A woman who had just given birth along with three female companions spent two weeks walking just ahead of the front until they reached the Vistula, where the bridges were closed. “At the Vistula the forest was full of refugees, and danger was great. It was fearful days, always death or the prospect of falling alive into the hands of the Russians.” The women decided to flee east along the Vistula Spit on a “dreadful journey” with “bullets whizzing past our ears” until they reached Hela, from where they were shipped to Denmark. BArch Ost-Dok 2/14, 12-17. This chaotic back and forth extended onto the sea; a refugee fleeing Stolpmünde eastward toward Kolberg on a steamer recalled encountering ships heading in the opposite direction, signaling that Soviets captured the port. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:263.

west of the Oder River in Silesia, faced more fortunate prospects than their East Prussian compatriots. Not only did they have a few extra days to get ahead of both the Red Army and treks trudging westward, they also had relatively short distances to travel into Bavaria, Saxony, or the Sudetenland.²⁷⁴ The mountains to the south along the German-Czechoslovakian border also provided safe haven for many thousands of Silesians, where they lived in enclaves until the capitulation and arrival of the Red Army in early May.²⁷⁵

Whereas Silesians stood decent chances of avoiding the front, the Soviet advance—with prongs directed toward Danzig (Gdansk), Küstrin (Kostrzyn), and Stettin (Szczecin)—placed a barrier between the Reich and the millions of Prussians and Pomeranians ensnared in a series of ever dwindling enclaves. Here they sat or drove in circles; numerous refugees fled, only to return home multiple times in order to tend to their businesses and farms.²⁷⁶ In short: For those pressed between the enemy and the Baltic, very few escaped via roads unless they resorted to daring attempts of slipping through the enemy's lines.²⁷⁷ The vast majority who managed to reach safety, however, did so via trains and ships.

²⁷⁴ It is estimated that from a total population of 4.7 million in Lower Silesia, 3.2 million fled or were evacuated. Of these, half found safety to the south in the Sudetenland, the other half moved westward into central Germany. See Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 76.

²⁷⁵ A pastor of Rogau (Rogi) who accompanied his community's trek into the *Riesengebirge* near Glatz (Kłodzko) recalled that the refugees lived in their wagons from late January until early May. The local inhabitants did not flee, and made "good business" selling goods to the homeless compatriots. BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 78ff. A farmer also seeking shelter in the rugged terrain testified that the impoverished local population there was elated with the arrival of the refugees, since their wagons proved invaluable for foraging trips to evacuated territories of Lower Silesia. BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 200ff.

²⁷⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 33; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:437. For instance, once the Soviet forces had cut off most westward routes in central Pomerania, civilians were redirected toward Lauenburg (Lębork) and Danzig to the north and east. Another refugee recalled similar scenes: "Our trek breaks apart. In masses the refugees pour out of burning Landsberg. The coupes of the surrounding estates rush across the fields. Soldiers say: "Turn around and drive home. You will not get out of here, you are in a cauldron.' From the opposite direction—from Pr[eussisch] Eylau—the treks approach us." The author returned home, only to attempt to flee once again days later once the front shifted again. Schieder, 1:104.

²⁷⁷ Several tens of thousands, caught between the Soviets and the Baltic Sea, dared an adventurous sally along the coast in columns of civilians and shattered military units, a veritable "migration of nations (*Völkerwanderung*) on

Given the speed of the front, the few that managed to procure seats on trains stood the best chances. However, the limited number of trains could not accommodate the mass of evacuees, who in any case ranked far behind the needs of the military and the shipment of supplies.²⁷⁸ Throngs of hysterical refugees nevertheless stampeded trains that pulled into stations, trampling the young and elderly and separating mothers from their children. In Breslau, Paul Peikert estimated that the heaving mob crushed between 60 and 70 children to death.²⁷⁹

With desperation mounting, people's anger boiled over into bitter rebukes against regime representatives. In Elbing, an officer warned an elderly man that the infant in his arms would die of exposure, the official received a dressing down: "Why don't you ask the people who are guilty of this insanity, the murderers and louts!" Warned that his shouting would cost him his neck, the man charged at the authorities shrieking for them to "go ahead and hang my child with me, you crooks!"²⁸⁰ Only "utmost violence" could keep the frantic crowds at bay, and fights broke out

the beach." Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:232. In a 1946 letter, a Pomeranian mother relayed how she and her child joined a band of women and children scurrying between the fronts, with fighting to the left and right. Everywhere small groups converged on the beach. "It was pitch-black, from the right the guns of our ships fired, and from the left the Russians banged their own rounds, and in between the crashing of the Baltic Sea." Pressed between the sea and dunes filled with Soviet scouts, the refugees slipped out of cauldron. Schieder, 1:222. Other accounts corroborate the harrowing journey of the hundreds who on foot or even in cars travelled along the narrow beach littered with discarded items and the dead or wounded. Schieder, 1:224; Schieder, 1:260.

²⁷⁸ The German High Command established five priority levels for train transport, where transportation of civilians ranked last; in parentheses, the document noted that there "practically were no more refugee trains" already in late January 1945. Cited in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 73.

²⁷⁹ Paul Peikert noted the scenes from the Breslau station in his diary on January 31st, 1945: "Many hours, even an entire day or two, the refugees had to wait at the stations during the greatest winter cold until it was their turn to be loaded onto a refugee train...It also happened that at the train stations expectant mothers prematurely went into labor from the terror and excitement of the flight. In the terrible jostling and burdened with much luggage, mothers often lost their children, whom they sometimes could not find again...It has been reported to me that at the main train station alone around 60-70 children were crushed or trampled to death. Where the trains are taking the enormous number of refugees can to this day not be ascertained, since communication lines are no longer possible." Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 29.

²⁸⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:56.

between civilians and officials.²⁸¹ When authorities such as SA troopers physically assaulted civilians to prevent them from boarding trains without papers, many erupted in fury: “You damn dogs! Our dear Lord will ensure that you croak like dogs!”²⁸² In Königsberg, armed guards fended off distraught crowds enraged by Nazi functionaries allowed to board.²⁸³ Trains “filled to the breaking point” often saw entire compartments crammed with party and military uniforms.²⁸⁴

Instead of ports of safe haven and salvation, therefore, train stations transformed into scenes of bedlam and danger. The overfilled stations proved treacherous traps, and enemy fire wrought havoc.²⁸⁵ The fortunate few who managed to depart faced days-long journeys in the dead of winter, often in open-topped lorries, which took a deadly toll. Women who gave birth reportedly frozen to the floors of wagons; the dead were simply tossed out of the windows.²⁸⁶ An officer, recalling a train halted for days in Elbing, described appalling scenes: “Despite the horrendous cold, thousands of refugees squat in the train station in open (!) transport wagons, mothers with infants in their arms, old men, adolescents, sick, ailing, exhausted, in part already long without warm food, all animated by the faint hope to ride west even under suicidal circumstances.”²⁸⁷ Some refugees attempted to sit on top of the wagons or tried to cling to the sides; they soon froze to death, and fell dead onto the tracks. When the train finally reached the

²⁸¹ Schieder, 1:56–57; Schieder, 1:424–25.

²⁸² Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 3:478.

²⁸³ Kershaw, *The End*, 178.

²⁸⁴ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:449.

²⁸⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 1/5, 89-98.

²⁸⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/14, 12-13.

²⁸⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:56.

next station in Deutsch-Eylau (Ilawa) less than 100 kilometers away, the dead from the compartments were thrown overboard, including twelve children who suffocated to death.²⁸⁸

Even if one survived the conditions, harassing enemy aircraft and gunfire, damaged rail infrastructure, and extreme congestion halted speedy getaways.²⁸⁹ Unless one managed to board a train in the first few days of the enemy's offensive, many trains never made it far because the Red Army cut rail lines to the west. Traffic often stopped, then returned to their points of departure.²⁹⁰ In some instances, Soviet troops blocked the line captured entire trains.²⁹¹ In Allenstein, enemy forces captured the city and station so unexpectedly, that for two hours trains from further east drove into the hands and guns of the Red Army.²⁹² Yet despite the travails, the

²⁸⁸ In Stolp, the local deacon recalled that the sick, dying, and dead from passing trains were unloaded at the station. At nearby Jeseritz (Jezierzyce), he himself buried 30 dead children found by rail workers after a train departed. Schieder, 1:257.

²⁸⁹ The last train from Cammin (Kamień Pomorski) came under fire from Soviet tanks that had blocked the rails, and the previous day another train from Wollin (Wolin) was shelled, claiming many lives. BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 193. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/90, 67; Schieder, 1:229; Schieder, 1:275; Schieder, 1:400. See also Schieder, 1:229; Schieder, 1:275; Schieder, 1:400.

²⁹⁰ Kershaw, *The End*, 178.; Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 70.; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:90. By January 23, trains leaving Königsberg were already returning, as the enemy severed all routes west. Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 18.

²⁹¹ Once trains halted, in a number of cases Soviet troops entered the wagons and plundered and raped the stranded refugees. A young mother of two remained on a stopped train in Pomerania for three days, until Soviet soldiers arrived and first plundered valuables before "the unspeakable suffering of many women began." Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:237. For a similar case, see also Schieder, 1:135..

²⁹² Red Army correspondent Lev Kopelev recalled the almost surreal scenes in his memoirs: "Half dead with fear and shame, [the traffic controller] reflexively recited his instructions based on the time table...Beyond the tall narrow windows with the meticulous dark-out curtains made of solid black packing paper the nervously agitated, the tenaciously demanding whistles of the locomotives sounded; wheels squeaked, from the valves billowing steam hissed, brakes screeched. Isolated shots barked, short machine gun salvos. Screams, hurried clapping of feet. Alarmed din of the masses rushing to and fro, amidst suddenly erupting, hysterical, rapidly suppressed crying of women, screams of children, and again clapping, shots, commands, many-voiced cacophony of German voices. The arrivals were herded together, screams, shots, howling, cursing and then anew: whistles of locomotives, hissing of steam." Cited in Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:187.

dedication of the locomotive drivers and rail workers, who ferried tens of thousands of civilians to safety, remains an unappreciated achievement.²⁹³

While trains represented one of the most promising avenues of escape, the brief window of opportunity closed less than a month into the enemy's offensive. With virtually all movement westward blocked by early February, the only hope lay in reaching a port city such as Pillau (Baltiysk), Gdingen (known as Gotenhafen between 1939 and 1945, and since 1945 as Gdynia), Hela (Hel), Swinemünde (Świnoujście) or Danzig, and evacuation via ship. An avalanche of refugees therefore descended upon these locations, and NSDAP offices tried implementing travel bans in order to stem the tide.²⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the roads of Pomerania and East and West Prussia descended into chaos: In its daily report for February 5, Wehrmacht High Command noted that at Swinemünde alone, a traffic jam of 50,000 refugees stretching several kilometers blocked the roads.²⁹⁵ More and more nevertheless continued to flood into these bottlenecks. A witness asked incredulously: "But where did they want to go now? There was no way west, neither south nor east. Helplessly many wagons drove back and forth. On the avenues and country lanes a terrible chaos developed. Two columns next to one another dragged themselves westward, two columns next to one another drove east."²⁹⁶ Refugees fleeing to the port of Kolberg found masses streaming in the opposite direction, as the enemy cut off the road; now thousands turned their

²⁹³ Many locomotive engineers periodically halted to check the lines up ahead, or made several trips back and forth, even through the small arms fire of passing Soviet patrols. See Kempowski, 2:195; Kempowski, 2:186.

²⁹⁴ In Pomerania, *Gauleiter* Franz Schwede-Coburg attempted to turn back refugees from eastern regions, though the military overruled these measures. In Danzig and West Prussia, however, the Party successfully instituted a halt to further evacuations westward in February. Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 76.

²⁹⁵ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 72.

²⁹⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:258.

wagons and fled eastward.²⁹⁷ As the snare tightened, some two million refugees congregated around Wehrmacht defensive positions, such as the “fortress cities” of Danzig and Elbing.²⁹⁸

Further east, hundreds of thousands of refugees in the Heiligenbeil (Mamonovo) Pocket in East Prussia, also faced being trapped. After enemy forces drove north and besieged Elbing on January 26th, the *Frisches Haff*, frozen in an uncommonly cold winter, and then a journey along the *Frische Nehrung* (Vistula Spit) before the enemy fully closed the salient at the Baltic coast represented the only yet perilous path to the ports of Danzig in the west and Pillau in the northeast. Along the lagoon’s coast, in fishing villages and hamlets, refugees amassed for days waiting for the ice, which could not yet support the weight, to thicken. German military police forced travelers to discard items from their wagons to lighten loads and make room for women and children.²⁹⁹ During the agonizing wait, nerves wore thin among the densely packed mass of wagons, whose horse teams began biting one another. Along the avenues leading to the water, rows of dead claimed by shelling or the bitter cold lay unburied.³⁰⁰ More people arrived daily, fleeing the intolerable conditions of nearby cities.³⁰¹ Others chose to risk Soviet occupation and escape these conditions, yet authorities cajoled the masses forward in order to prevent evacuees

²⁹⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 88.

²⁹⁸ Despite continuous evacuations and fleeing, many of German East’s cities increased in size. For example, Schweidnitz (Świdnica) increased from 35,000 to 80,000 and Glatz (Kłodzko) from 20,000 to 50,000. Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 35.

²⁹⁹ Dokumentation, 68.

³⁰⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:108.

³⁰¹ For example, in Braunsberg (Braniewo), a city of 20,000, more than 100,000 refugees faced atrocious conditions. With food low, water and power supply cut, and raging fires from daily bombardments, in early February many concluded that the uncertainty of the road offered better chances, and so flooded north toward the Vistula Lagoon. Schieder, 1:81; Schieder, 1:120.

from streaming back into combat zones and overcrowded cities.³⁰² Pandemonium broke out: Desperate refugees needed to be prevented from crossing until the ice was strong enough, and those who forced their way nonetheless broke through and drowned.³⁰³

Once the military deemed the ice strong enough, one of the most iconic images of “flight and expulsion” transpired over a period of several weeks.³⁰⁴ The aftermath of previous failed attempts, when the ice proved too thin, warned of the dangers of veering from the track: “On both sides of the path wagons that broke through, parts of the canopy and the ears of horses protruded from the water.”³⁰⁵ Day and night the movement continued in a painfully slow procession with frequent pauses, so that traversing the 15 kilometers took several days.³⁰⁶ The weight of the columns, periodic thaws, and tide of the Baltic Sea caused the ice sheet to slowly submerge under knee-deep water that reached up to the axles of the vehicles.³⁰⁷ The vicious conditions took their toll: Halfway across, one mother lost two children to hypothermia, whom she had to simply leave on the ice; her remaining two children perished before she reached the

³⁰² According to one woman: “After eight days of driving we reached Passarge at the Frischen Haff. We were allowed to rest one night, the horses could go no further. From there we could now observe what was playing out on the ice. The sheet of ice was not yet very firm, so that it could not bear the entire load. So the first treks broke through and drowned. One could still see the wagons sticking through the ice. With my own eyes I saw how entire rows of wagons broke through. Once we saw all this, we refused to drive out onto the ice. The order came that the dam would be blasted in an hour and the village would be under water. So we were forced to drive out.” Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 270.

³⁰³ Hahn and Hahn, 271.

³⁰⁴ As will be discussed in later chapters, media images and popular portrayals centered on the experiences of crossing the *Frisches Haff*. See, for instance, the vivid yet largely literary account loosely based on eye-witness reports in Jürgen Thorwald, *Es begann an der Weichsel* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1950).

³⁰⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:109..

³⁰⁶ “Once in a while flares lit up the designated path. Then one saw the endless rows of treks, which silently moved unimaginably slowly forward at great intervals. It seemed to me like a long funeral procession.” Schieder, 1:95.

³⁰⁷ Schieder, 1:73; Schieder, 1:81; Schieder, 1:109.

other side. No one, however, interceded: “Old people sat and lay dying or already frozen on the way.... [T]he people were already completely indifferent after weeks of tribulations.”³⁰⁸

Ignoring orders to keep distance between one another, frantic drivers unnerved by standstills broke ranks in order to pass, incurring curses and inciting brawls.³⁰⁹ Added to this, Soviet planes and artillery attacked the columns and broke the ice, causing wagons to slip beneath the surface.³¹⁰ These chasms only partially refroze, transforming into treacherous traps for following refugees. Gertrud D.’s recollections are representative of the experiences of many:

“The Russian had long before announced that starting on [February 2nd] he would start firing upon the refugees on the ice. We then heard heavy firing of aircraft guns. Here and there people and horses were struck, and the ice cracked apart. [...] Then came a pitch-dark, gruesome night, continuous strafing through aircraft. The bullets and ice pieces crashed on the tin roof of the wagon. Shooting, screaming, and shrieking broke the silence of the night. [...] Only at dawn came the most terrifying sight: corpses upon corpses, people and horses. Often only the drawbars of the wagons protruded from the ice, death had an abundant harvest.”³¹¹

Though confronted with a harrowing crossing, refugees found no alleviation when reaching the *Nehrung*. On a spit no more than a kilometer wide, hundreds of thousands of evacuees and Wehrmacht units converged around Kahlberg. Massive congestion clogged the single road eastward toward Pillau or westward toward Danzig. Days of waiting in snow and

³⁰⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:68.

³⁰⁹ Schieder, 1:94.

³¹⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 100.

³¹¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/14, 13-14. Another account by Countess von Sydow captures the pandemonium: “We decide to bypass all the wagons....The people are beside themselves. May they curse, here it is everyone for themselves, one cannot be considerate. Great cracks are in the ice, the storm keeps gaining strength, as does the fog. Up ahead supposedly everything is falling through, one cannot move forward it is said...The closer we come to the *Nehrung*, the more the vehicles and the greater the screaming. Finally, close to the shore, the noise is virtually deafening. There stand in shambles hundreds of vehicles, partially horses and wagons broken through. People have dismounted and fallen into the water, the children lay in the water and are screaming, people cannot find their wagons or children again. On top of all this pitch-black night, it is truly horrifying.” Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 4:384.

mud without food and water, exposed to the harsh winter, took their toll. As one witness reported: “In addition to the dead horses along the way, many old people already lay spiritlessly [by the roadside].” Mothers with dying children milled about helplessly, their treks having broken apart or abandoned them.³¹² A woman, witnessing “the most horrifying sight” of her flight, discovered a frozen infant in an abandoned pram.³¹³ On a daily basis, new dead were added to the rows of corpses stacked beside houses and along the road.³¹⁴ All this transpired under salvos of Soviet artillery from the mainland and German ships at sea. Across the water “a really red sky, deep red, blood red” from burning cities presented a macabre spectacle.³¹⁵

These travails help explain why numerous testimonies recall the days on the Vistula Lagoon as the most horrendous, leaving deep psychological wounds.³¹⁶ The mayor of Kahlberg noted that “people had become completely dull to the suffering of others and soon even their own, for they did not even have the time to bury their dead.”³¹⁷ Lethargy and indifference prevailed, as one woman whose family’s wagon broke through the ice a few meters before the *Nehrung* bitterly remembered: No one stopped to help, onlookers gathered with hands in their pockets and watched.³¹⁸ The hopelessness and despair left some of the deepest marks on survivors. The calls for help from the injured and abandoned on the *Haff* pierced the night,

³¹² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:96..

³¹³ Schieder, 1:123..

³¹⁴ Schieder, 1:288..

³¹⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/27, 106.

³¹⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 101; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:95..

³¹⁷ Schieder, 1:288..

³¹⁸ Schieder, 1:109..

branding themselves into the memory of exhausted and unnerved refugees.³¹⁹ Another women confided the “hoarse, angry, and at the same time fearfully tortured yells” of the trek drivers continued to haunt her dreams.³²⁰

The estimated 400-500,000 who braved the crossing hoped for a ship in Danzig or Pillau that could ferry them to northern Germany. Yet like train transport, the majority of civilians had little hope of securing passage. Though the German navy, along with the Wehrmacht, remains a celebrated savior of millions of East Germans in collective memory, this popular myth is at odds with the historical reality.³²¹ As with transports via land, supply and the withdrawal of troops took precedence over the safety of the civilian population, who were afforded place on ships only when it did not interfere with military operations. In Pillau, the first vessels to carry refugees to westward destinations did not do so until two weeks into the Soviet offensive.³²²

By this time, however, hundreds of thousands had descended upon the port cities, creating a humanitarian disaster. In his diary, Goebbels lamented that “it is hardly possible to feed [the hundreds of thousands]. For days they have not received any provisions, so that the situation has become entirely bleak.”³²³ The inhabitants of Pillau initially commiserated with the “people [who] arrived here after days of flight, hungry, nearly frozen, hounded and tormented by

³¹⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 123..

³²⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:96.

³²¹ See Andreas Kunz, *Wehrmacht und die Niederlage. Die bewaffnete Macht in der Endphase der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944 bis 1945* (München, 2005), 197. As later chapters will elucidate, similar to their Wehrmacht colleagues, members of the navy such as Admiral Karl Dönitz propagated the myth of the armed forces as a heroic defender of the civilian population, a narrative echoed by popular media and historians in postwar West Germany. See also Fritz Brustat-Naval, *Unternehmen Rettung: letztes Schiff nach Westen*. (Herford: Koehlers Verlagsgesellschaft, 1970).

³²² Kershaw, *The End*, 178.

³²³ Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 15:374.

frantic fear, many nearly insane, others dulled and indifferent from horror and grief, with hardly the barest of necessities, not always with all the family members together, having left the old parents behind, the children frozen along the way and left buried in the snow in the road ditches along the way.”³²⁴ In Gdingen, “women and children [spent days] lying next to one another in large halls, sitting on their bundles, waiting, cursing, and very embittered.”³²⁵ With 35,000 refugees registered by the end of January and that number climbing daily, Pillau also devolved into utter disarray. Finding no room in the crowded public buildings, families camped out in sub-zero temperatures, so that “many of the people...especially children” froze to death.³²⁶ Defying punishments for looting, refugees stormed bakeries and forced their way into homes “like a steamroller that tore down everything that stood in the way.”³²⁷

After days or weeks of tortuous waiting, sheer anarchy erupted with the realization that there wasn't enough transportation. Refugees stormed berthed ships and “any organization dissolved.”³²⁸ Those with travel permits needed to conceal their stroke of luck from frantic mobs in order to avoid an assault or lynching.³²⁹ Children became lost in the confusion, and NSDAP squads combed the crowds for young boys and old men “fit for combat,” leaving bereaved

³²⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:148.

³²⁵ Schieder, 1:255.

³²⁶ Quoted in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 74.

³²⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:148.

³²⁸ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 74.

³²⁹ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 255

mothers and wives alone on the piers.³³⁰ An undated postwar eyewitness report encapsulates what unfolded in the harbors along the Baltic coast:

“At the harbor everyone was pushing towards the ships. There were terrible scenes. Human beings became animals. Women threw their children into the water [against the moored boats]...in order that they not be crushed to death in the crowd. The general confusion was now made even greater when completely disorganized military units streamed into the city and into houses, looted, intermingled with the refugees and also pushed to get themselves onto the ships. In order to get through the cordons to the harbor, soldiers took children from their mothers and claimed that they wanted to bring their families on board! Others put on women’s clothing and thus attempted to get away on the ships.”³³¹

To make matters worse, enemy air and artillery strikes wrought havoc among the dense throngs. In a 1946 letter to a husband relating the circumstances of his wife’s death in Swinemünde, Anna Küsel captures the indecisiveness that could mean life or death: When sirens announced an American air raid on the harbor on March 12, she gave up her prized spot on the *Andros* to seek shelter in a bunker, while her friend remained onboard. The *Andros* took a direct hit, claiming the lives of over 600 refugees.³³²

Given the frantic scenes at the harbors, those lucky to find themselves on a vessel steaming out to sea must have felt a sense of relief.³³³ Yet reports and rumors of sunk ships unnerved passengers.³³⁴ These misgivings were not unfounded: Of the nearly 800 vessels operating in the Baltic Sea in early 1945, around a quarter fell prey to mines, air attacks, and

³³⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:145; Schieder, 1:250.

³³¹ Quoted in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 74.

³³² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:153–54.

³³³ Käte Pawel’s 1952 report recalls the surreal moment of taking in the convoy from the deck as from the lower decks refugees began singing the Bach cantata “Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten” (“Whoever Solely Lets Our Dear God Reign”). Schieder, 1:145.

³³⁴ Schieder, 1:250.

submarines; the sinking of the overfilled *Wilhelm Gustloff* (around 9,000 dead), *Goya* (7,000), and *General Steuben* (3,000) rank among the greatest maritime disasters in history.³³⁵ One of the less than 200 survivors of the *Goya* recounted the “fight for life and death” that unfolded in the lower decks and stairwells after a torpedo ripped through the hull. The ship sank in less than twenty minutes, yet the struggle for survival continued in icy waters, as “[h]orrifying, bone-rattling cries for help pierce the night” before slowly fading.³³⁶ Nevertheless, despite these tragic individual fates, between late January 1945 and the end of the war, the German navy transported around 1.5 million refugees, wounded, and army personnel from the German East.³³⁷ Statistically, therefore, the majority of those who managed to evade the Red Army did so by securing passage in the final months of the war. The majority found no such escape.

Defeat and Retribution

Escaping Eastern Germany—whether by train, ship, or on a trek—was not, as is popularly suggested, the most common experience. Most either remained, cut short their flight, or were overtaken from the enemy. The profound fear that many civilians must have felt can be measured by the staggering number of suicides. Unable to contend with the destruction of their lives or fear of a presumably heartless foe, the historians Hans Henning and Eva Hahn estimate that nearly 15,000 took their own lives in the German East, the Sudetenland, and Southeastern

³³⁵ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 75. For comparison, around 1,500 victims died in the more widely known sinking of the *RMS Titanic*.

³³⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:326.

³³⁷ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 75. 450,000 refugees were evacuated from Pillau alone, though many only as far as Danzig. From the ports of Danzig, Gdingen, and Heligoland, some 900,000 people were transported to northern Germany and Denmark by war’s end.

Europe between the winter and summer of 1945.³³⁸ Indeed, suicide remains one of the most commonly reported incidents in the testimonies. Before the enemy arrived, in Königsberg “everywhere one heard” the talk of cyanide “in a light, casual tone.”³³⁹ Entire families contemplated “leaving this world.”³⁴⁰ In Tiegenhof (Nowy Dwór Gdański), a local farmer who saw off his community’s trek, finished his chores on the farm, and then shot his wife, daughter, grandson, and then himself.³⁴¹ In Dambitzen (Dębice), 62 villagers reportedly committed suicide through drowning, poisoning, and shooting; the local game warden assisted those unable to procure a firearm.³⁴² Mothers resolved to save their daughters from the prospects of rape; in Damerow (Dąbrowa), a woman hanged her six daughters and then herself.³⁴³ Elsewhere, mothers reportedly drowned themselves with their children in wells, rivers, and the sea.³⁴⁴

Civilians had good reason to fear the enemy, as the first interactions with Soviet soldiers could often be violent affairs, as an account near Osterode (Ostróda) documents: Tanks “rammed wagons into the ditches, horse bodies lay dead in the ditches, men, women and children fought for their lives, the wounded screamed for help.”³⁴⁵ Yet just as frequently, the enemy bypassed

³³⁸ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 703. The historians base their estimates on a number of regional studies. The Hahns are critical of expellee victimhood narratives to say the least, so that the figure of 15,000 must be regarded as a conservative estimate.

³³⁹ Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 24–25.

³⁴⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 2/27, 106. Suicide became like a pandemic. For instance, in Lauenburg (Łębork), on the first night of Soviet occupation more than 600 inhabitants reportedly committed suicide. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:266.

³⁴¹ Schieder, 1:294.

³⁴² Schieder, 1:274.

³⁴³ BArch OstDok 1/146, 1.

³⁴⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:82; Schieder, 1:190., 82 and 190.

³⁴⁵ The account continues somewhat melodramatically: “Behind me a young girl says to her father: ‘Father, shoot me!’, ‘Yes, father’ says the about 16 year-old brother, ‘I have nothing more to expect.’ The father gazes upon his

treks without incident, simply taking watches and taunting Germans with jeers of “Hitler kaput.”

³⁴⁶ Almost surprised, some expellees reported that they were left unhindered after brief searches that typically ended with losing valuables, but no further harassment.³⁴⁷ Typically, Red Army troops simply confiscated goods, especially horses and wagons, and told refugees to return home.³⁴⁸ In some instances, they even allowed refugees to continue, going so far as to provide them tips on how to avoid the heaviest fighting.³⁴⁹

Overall, the doubtlessly terrifying first moments were marked by the capricious whims of the conquerors.³⁵⁰ Plundering, executions of men in uniform, and rape appear frequently in testimonies. Entirely unpredictable in their actions, members of the Red Army could be helpful and accommodating one moment, then murderous the next.³⁵¹ In one town the arrival unfolded completely bloodlessly, while just a few kilometers away, executions and rapes were the norm.³⁵² The most consistent theme in eyewitness accounts, however, are theft and rape: Troops

children, tears are running down his face, and he says with a calm voice: ‘Wait just a little while, children.’” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:28.

³⁴⁶ Schieder, 1:28. See also BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 33.

³⁴⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 195; BArch Ost-Dok 1/143, 8; BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 13; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 193.

³⁴⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/143, 8; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 13.

³⁴⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 193.

³⁵⁰ The motivations will be discussed in a later chapter. For more on the Red Army’s behavior, see Catherine Merridale, *Ivan’s War. Life and Death in the Red Army, 1939-1945* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

³⁵¹ As a refugee from Breslau surmised after describing how Red Army soldiers advised him to go into hiding to avoid the rather ill-disciplined irregular forces among their military, “[h]e is sometimes magnanimous and helpful, and then promises things that are contrary to the truth.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 42b. Yet another report claims that crimes were due to the “lack of discipline” of soldiers. BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 14.

³⁵² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:194. In another testimony, a refugee returned from the town he was overrun in where the Soviets were particularly violent, finding his hometown peaceful. “No one was harmed...at least harsh measures from the Russians did not occur. The murders and misdeeds that otherwise happened were carried out by individual criminal elements. These incidents occurred during rapes of women if men intervened or even when women sought protection from men.” Schieder, 1:209.

habitually detained people, locking them in houses or barns for days where they “constantly came with the typical ‘*Uhri—Uhri*’ [watch, watch] and at night with horrible ‘*Frau, komm!*’ [Woman, come].”³⁵³ From there, rearguard troops routinely deported them to do labor in unknown areas further east.³⁵⁴ Even women faced this fate: Within days of overrunning her trek, Soviet soldiers deported Käthe W. along with 600 other women on a 17 day train ride to a work camp in the “Urals (almost Siberia”); almost half died, and most were raped, before returning to Germany in December 1945.³⁵⁵ The historian Thomas Urban estimates that 520,000 German civilians engaged in forced labor, of which 185,000 perished.³⁵⁶

Testimonies also document innocuous, friendly, and even humorous encounters. Soviet troops often immediately distributed rations to hungry civilians, and allowed local life to continue largely unhindered.³⁵⁷ One persistent theme is that children often tamed and even brought joy to Red Army troops, moving them to displays of tenderness and affection.³⁵⁸ Many Soviet soldiers seemed interested in making good impressions: In Breslau, an expellee recalled

³⁵³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:159.

³⁵⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5 and BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 253. The assumption that these men were immediately deported to Siberia seems to be a product of popular imagination. Most were dragooned into work details to perform labor or clean up in the occupied German East.

³⁵⁵ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, “Aus einem Brief (gekürzt) von Frau Käthe W. bei Dittmar,” December 7, 1945.

³⁵⁶ Thomas Urban, *Der Verlust: die Vertreibung der Deutschen und Polen im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: C.H. Beck, 2004), 517.

³⁵⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:159; Schieder, 1:429. In Wohlau (Wołów) for instance, Soviets immediately distributed rations, invited them to a festival, permitted the movie theater to remain open, and allowed the Corpus Christi procession to take place. See also Schieder, 1:159.

³⁵⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:159; Schieder, 1:207; Schieder, 1:211–12; Schieder, 1:491. That even Soviets could find compassion for German children was not always attributed to a sense of humanity, but an act of God: “Suddenly the sun shone, and little Margot was just then illuminated radiantly as the Russian stood before her. The child looked so ever sweet in her fear, so that the Russian fondled her chin, said ‘my darling’ [in English], and holstered his revolver. It was as if the power of God came to our aid.” Schieder, 1:211–12.

with shock how a tank suddenly stopped, the driver emerged, and “amiably waved at me.”³⁵⁹

Many members of the Red Army may have felt themselves as liberators and not mere vanquishers of the fascist foe, sometimes inviting civilians to join in their celebrations: After arriving with raised guns, Soviet troops later that evening invited some young German men to partake in the “usual joyful feasts with lots of schnapps, breads, and shooting.”³⁶⁰ Similarly, after fearfully meeting the enemy for the first time, Heinrich K. was told to lower his arms. The soldiers joined him in his home where they drank schnapps together. Though they departed with his liquor and cigars, they left him with cigarettes and “not a soul” harmed Heinrich.³⁶¹

Several reports suggest inquisitiveness. Expellees recalled troops barging into homes, only to allay their curiosity and seek a conversation with a German before departing peacefully.³⁶² Sometimes these encounters took on surreal forms: Soldiers marched a priest not to his execution as he feared, but to his church where they requested he play the organ; the soldiers parted with thanks and handshakes.³⁶³ In his memoirs, Pastor Fittkau painted a rather jovial scene after encountering the first patrol: Apart from a moment of tension when exchanges of family photos revealed relatives in Wehrmacht uniform, the party departed with “smooches” and assurances that they would return for a longer visit when they had more time after the war.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:707.

³⁶⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:169. See also Schieder, 1:193.

³⁶¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 195.

³⁶² BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 42c.

³⁶³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:491.

³⁶⁴ Fittkau, *My Thirty-Third Year*, 30ff.

The coming days showed Fittkau that he had “great luck with our first meeting with the Ivan.” For many, arrival of Soviet forces unleashed waves of arbitrary violence and destruction. Though Allenstein remained largely undamaged, Red Army forces deliberately torched the city. Viktor Seehofer described ghastly scenes:

“Playing bandoneons, they moved through the alleys and courtyards and shot through windows. One of these units also barged into our building and destroyed the apartments. Crystal, porcelain, household goods, slit-open feather beds, pictures, crucifixes—everything stomped into disorder and smeared with excrement. And then something unbelievable happened: the houses were set ablaze, and those trying to save themselves from a fiery death on the street—mostly women and children—were simply gunned down with machine guns. Snow covered the corpses, and the tanks crushed the little mounds.”³⁶⁵

After the first night, many streets in the German East were littered with broken furniture, smashed windows, and corpses.³⁶⁶ Throughout the German East, the massacre of Nemmersdorf repeated itself. Higher authorities did not endorse such unbridled destruction, but found it difficult to impose order.³⁶⁷ The rampaging, frequently fueled by excessive drinking, often ended in bloodshed. Postwar historians estimated that two to

³⁶⁵ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:296. The scenes of wanton devastation may be common to any war, an outburst from soldiers exposed to extreme brutalization. And in this particular ideological struggle of annihilation, such emotions should not seem remarkable. However, some of the random obliteration, a Soviet officer explained to a perplexed witness during the deliberate burning down of Freystadt, deliberately sought to prevent troops from seeing the signs of luxury. The report also mentions a contradicting statement from another witness “that he cannot account for” that says Soviets announced that the town was burned because they could not find any women to rape. Despite the deliberate destruction and execution of some Wehrmacht soldiers, Soviet forces treated the remaining population decently. BArch Ost-Dok 1/90, 67. Whether motivated by fury or incredulity over the unexplainable wealth they encountered, the senseless destruction on the part of soldiers disgusted some observers such as Lev Kopelev. Lev Kopelev and Anthony Austin, *To Be Preserved Forever* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977).

³⁶⁶ See for example Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:100.

³⁶⁷ Indeed, the senseless destruction of goods that could be shipped to the Soviet Union and disintegration of discipline prompted Marshall Konstantin Rokossovskij to already on January 21st warn that “marauding, senseless destruction and theft” would be punished. Marshall Konjev issued similar orders aimed at curbing plundering and upholding discipline. Even the Wehrmacht acknowledged in February 1945 that intelligence suggested “that strict orders from the upper echelons of the Red Army to treat the civilian population gently are in effect, especially not to touch the property of the inhabitants who have not fled.” These orders did not, however, seemingly have much effect, especially in the first hours of occupation. Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 274.

three percent of the population that remained in the German East were “shot or murdered through other means” during the first weeks of Soviet occupation, translating to 75-100,000 victims.³⁶⁸ Vengeance motivated some killings, and suspected or actual Nazis, soldiers and veterans, or rich landowners faced particular danger.³⁶⁹ Occasionally, Red Army soldiers made clear that they were exacting revenge: In Lehlesken (Leleszki), a Soviet officer announced in good German that he was Jewish and would shoot all German men, after which he executed three victims.³⁷⁰

Much of the killing had no clear underlying cause, however. In the course of pillaging, soldiers simply murdered anyone they came across, as the report of a refugee from Breslau who discovered five of his neighbors randomly shot suggests.³⁷¹ Other acts appear as simple bloodlust: In Schlagenthin (Sławęcín), soldiers fired a flare into a barn filled with 50-60 hiding refugees, then gunned down those trying to escape the blazing building.³⁷² Wehrmacht forces retaking Striegau (Strzegom) discovered a “town littered with corpses of murdered civilians,” and surviving Polish witnesses corroborated a catalogue of horrors.³⁷³ Often the killing was closely associated with sexual violence, as a case from Damerkow (Dąbrówka) illustrates:

³⁶⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:65E. This figure, as later chapters will show, are contested. The historians Hans Henning and Eva Hahn, for instance, place the number of violent deaths at around 15,000. Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 702.

³⁶⁹ For instance, Soviet soldiers executed a farmer and his wife because they discovered an Iron Cross from the First World War in the home. Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 125. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:208; Schieder, 1:479., 208 and 479.

³⁷⁰ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:594.

³⁷¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 11.

³⁷² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:200.

³⁷³ Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 78. A Polish worker testified to the atrocities: “There were reports about murders of old people and of men that made the blood curdle in one’s veins. It was reported that women of all ages were raped, that

“The next day...the Russians stormed into the village. During the course of the day many more refugees from neighboring villages had come, so that we were at least 30 people in one room. The first Russians...demanded watches, rings, and various valuables. [...] Immediately after this, a big Russian came in. He said no word, looked around the room and walked all the way to the back, where all the young girls and women sat. He beckoned my sister just once with his finger. When she did not immediately stand up, he stood right in front of her and held his gun against her chin. Everyone screamed loudly, just my sister sat silently and resolved not to budge. And then all of a sudden the shot rang out. Her head fell to the side, and the blood ran in streams. She was dead immediately, without having made a sound....The Russian glanced at all of us and left the room without saying a word.”³⁷⁴

Far and away, the most persistent theme in the testimonies is witnessing or suffering rape.³⁷⁵ Norman Naimark estimates that as many as two million women experienced rape during the war and occupation.³⁷⁶ Occasionally Soviet soldiers, usually officers, intervened to prevent their men from carrying out their assaults.³⁷⁷ Sometimes the presence of children turned

the breasts of nursing mothers were cut off, that the bellies of pregnant women were cut open and the unborn ripped out of their bodies. There were stories that deep wells were filled with the bodies of living people, that people had their eyes gouged out with bayonets or had their tongues cut out, that Germans were herded in droves into barns or houses and burned alive, that militia men who were captured were driven into captivity with heavy tanks or lorries, and people spoke of many other things that made one shudder.” Cited in Bernadetta Nitschke, *Vertreibung und Aussiedlung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus Polen 1945 bis 1949* (München: Oldenbourg, 2003), 73.

³⁷⁴ Cited in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 70–71.

³⁷⁵ As one reporter surmised, “it can be assumed that [rapes] happened far more than is recorded in the reports, one presumably mostly did not mention them because of their ‘daily’ occurrence. BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 17.

³⁷⁶ Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 132–33. A combination of “hate propaganda, personal experiences of suffering at home, and an allegedly fully demeaning picture of German women in the press, not to mention among the soldiers themselves” fueled the sexual violence perpetrated especially in the first weeks of occupation. Naimark, 108–9. For more on sexual violence during the war, see Elizabeth D Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman: Memories of Germany’s ‘Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity,” *The American Historical Review*, 1996, 354–95; *Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2003).

³⁷⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 42c. Frequently, after the arrival of an officer to administer in the occupation, the frequency of rapes sharply dropped. BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 14.

assailants away.³⁷⁸ Nevertheless, even the old, prepubescent, and pregnant women fell victim to rape and gang rape as well.³⁷⁹ The rapes frequently occurred in the presence of the victim's family, who were made to watch and were killed if they dared intervene.³⁸⁰

Especially nights appear as terrible hours in the recollections: "Continuously Russians entered the room, threatened and cursed, and then moved on. Again and again prayers: 'Dear Redeemer, let us perish.'"³⁸¹ In a small village on the outskirts of Breslau, "[e]very night trucks with troops from the nearby front arrived and they poured into the homes, plundered, mistreated men and women and raped the latter in front of everyone or took them into some dark corner of a room or barn. The city echoed with shrill cries for help."³⁸² The only escape was feigning a grave communicable illness or hiding in barns or woods until the worst of the excesses died down. For those who managed to elude a gruesome fate, the emotional toll remained, as one woman seeking refuge in the forests of her Silesian hometown testified: The "screams of despair of the unfortunate victims still ring in my ears today after such a long time."³⁸³

³⁷⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:207. "The crying and screaming of the children and my old mother always averted their intentions."

³⁷⁹ A refugee from Breslau testified that she was raped despite her age of 60. The 63 year old mother of her sister-in-law was also sexually assaulted numerous times, as was an acquaintance that was more than 70 years old, who subsequently suffered a heart attack from the ordeal. BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 42. The mayor of Woldenberg (Dobiegniew) testified that in his city, a pregnant woman and her daughter were raped side by side repeatedly. Schieder, 1:196. A 1946 letter written by an expellee from Eckersdorf (Florczaki) claims that his neighbor's young daughter was "defiled by an entire tank company, namely from 8 o'clock in the evening until 9 o'clock in the morning." BArch Ost-Dok 2/27, 106.

³⁸⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 88.

³⁸¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:100.

³⁸² BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 251. The report also alleges that "these beasts raped the deceased women." A similar incident corroborates aspects of the testimony, however: "Every night Russians... appeared, shot through the windows and doors, kicked in the locked doors and raped women and girls in front of the children." Schieder, 1:196.

³⁸³ Schieder, 1:332. Hiding also endangered families, as Soviets threatened to kill relatives unless they handed over their hiding female family members. Thus, many "had to fulfill [their] wishes." Schieder, 1:196. See also Henke, "Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien," 122.

The humiliation and torment drove thousands of women as well as men to suicide.³⁸⁴ Others suffered from mental breakdowns. In Königsberg, where a bitter siege and heavy losses stoked Soviet anger that then unleashed itself upon the conquered inhabitants, Hans von Lehndorff recorded that victims were driven mad: “Soon none of the women had any strength to resist. Within a few hours a change occurred within them, their soul died, one heard hysterical laughter that only made the Russians wilder.”³⁸⁵ Even accounting for exaggerations, the suffering of the female population finds corroboration in the testimony of foreign observers. British POWs described how “Red soldiers during the first weeks of their occupation raped every woman and girl between the ages of 12 and 60. That sounds exaggerated, but it is the simple truth.”³⁸⁶ Soviet writers such as Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, a combatant in East Prussia, documented his disgust in the poem *Prussian Nights*:

“Twenty-two Hoeringstrasse. It's not been burned, just looted, rifled. A moaning by the walls, half muffled: the mother's wounded, half alive. The little daughter's on the mattress, dead. How many have been on it? A platoon, a company perhaps? A girl's been turned into a woman, a woman turned into a corpse. . . . The mother begs, ‘Soldier, kill me!’”³⁸⁷

³⁸⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 42.

³⁸⁵ Lehndorff, *Ostpreußisches Tagebuch*, 73. He confided his guilt in his diary: “Can one even write about these things, the most terrible that there is among humans? Is not every word an accusation against myself? Weren’t there enough opportunities to intervene and to seek a decent death? Yes, one is to blame for still living, and therefore one cannot be silent about all this.”

³⁸⁶ Alfred M De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Anglo-Americans and the Expulsion of the Germans : Background, Execution, Consequences* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1977), 67. Another English forced laborer made similar observations: “Flushed with victory—and often with wine found in the cellars of rich Pomeranian land owners—the Reds searched every house for women, cowing them with pistols or tommy guns, and carried them into their tanks or trucks.” De Zayas, 68.

³⁸⁷ Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn and Robert Conquest, *Prussian Nights: A Poem* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977). Lev Kopelev similarly records numerous atrocities, including rapes, in his memoirs. Kopelev and Austin, *To Be Preserved Forever*.

Conclusion

The disintegration of Nazi Germany and victorious onslaught of the Soviet military bore terrible consequences for German civilians, particularly the inhabitants of the German East. The astoundingly bloody coda brought the pitiless war of annihilation and bitter ideological conflict unleashed by Nazi Germany in 1939 violently crashing down on the Third Reich, sweeping up millions of guilty and innocent alike. Because of the unimaginable traumas witnessed or experienced by so many during the Red Army's final assault on the fascist foe, the flight of millions of German civilians remains a firm fixture of German cultural memory of the last months of the war. The intensity of the suffering branded itself into the memories of victims, families, and German society alike. Popular assumptions of a near universal terror-stricken escape before merciless Soviets, treks on wintry roads, or sinking ships filled with refugees therefore remain powerfully entrenched images associated with "flight and expulsion," because they reflected the reality of many.

However, the documentary record also reveals that these were minority experiences, which nevertheless stood out and enflamed imaginations because of their particular horror and the intensity of their dreadfulness. Other common experiences—remaining at home and refusing to flee, or boarding a train to Saxony months before the deluge—remain forgotten. The voices of many millions that testified to death marches of Jews, condemned the Wehrmacht's callousness, or praised the generosity of the enemy have been drowned out by descriptions of universally panicked and innocent civilians, cruel and radical Nazi caricatures, and heartless and barbaric Soviet monsters.

What emerged as "representative," and what became shrouded in silence, are not merely down to the raw number of people who experienced a particular fate. The potency of "typical"

images owe just as much of their resonance to a discourse that framed the events in a particular way and elided other—often equally characteristic—experiences. The key point here is that these selective recollections and silences did not merely emerge out of the postwar discourse and memory politics of the early Federal Republic, but that they originated already during the war as the events unfolded. The reports and rumors spread by refugees, but above all the Third Reich's news reporting and propaganda, provided a foundation for commentators after 1945.

The vignettes from this period anchored themselves into the historical consciousness of West Germans because even those personally far removed from the conflagration caught glimpses of it. Authorities described the despair of refugees, and warned that the influx would affect food distribution and lead to compulsory housing. The regime took great care to remind the *Volksgemeinschaft* (“people’s community”) of their duty toward those “who have suffered the most terrible fate.”³⁸⁸ Editorials in local papers, such as the Swabian *Hohenzollerische Volksbote*, also attempted to arouse sympathy and coax the nation to accept the victims: “The doorbell rings, one opens—a mother and three children and an elderly woman...who had to flee from the German eastern territories. They need to be housed, it must be possible.”³⁸⁹

More crucially, Nazi media constructed a narrative with lasting impact. The propaganda campaign surrounding Nemmersdorf, as we shall see, survived into the postwar period. So did the idea that expellees fled a foe intending to exterminate all of Germany, rather than falling victim to the vagaries of war and a botched evacuation. On May 2, 1945, for instance, Finance Minister Johann Ludwig Graf Schwerin von Krosigk took to the radio to warn of the “stream of

³⁸⁸ Quoted in Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 3:402–3.

³⁸⁹ Cited in Willi Rössler, “Schicksalsjahre der Heimatvertriebenen- Eine Dokumentation über Flucht, Vertreibung und Eingliederung der Heimatvertriebenen, die im Altkreis Sigmaringen eine neue Heimat gefunden haben,” *Zeitschrift für hohenzollerische Geschichte* 47/48 (2012 2011): 328.

desperate, starving people chased by dive bombers fleeing westward from unspeakable terror, from murder and defilement.” They suffered behind an “iron curtain” which obscured from the world the horrific Bolshevist extermination program.³⁹⁰ Prevailing postwar framings of a population universally fleeing the Soviet menace share a remarkable overlap with reporting in the *Deutsche Wochenschau* of March 16, 1945: “The onslaught of the Bolsheviks forced hundreds of thousands...to abandon all goods and land they possessed and bring themselves and the barest necessities to safety. In treks that stretch from morning to night, thousands of wagons and vehicles drag themselves over the ice toward the safety of the Reich.”³⁹¹

Moreover, refugees arriving in the rest of Germany offered authentic descriptions that the scarcely believable and unreliable official press elided, and their accounts of what loomed on the eastern horizon spread like wildfire throughout the Reich. Goebbels noted the circulation of “horrendous rumors,” but dismissed them as “exaggerated tales” spread by histrionic trekkers.³⁹² Yet whether rumor or fact, the suffering of the refugees reached audiences and left impressions even before the war was over. The victims themselves contributed to the communicative memory of “flight and expulsion” in conversations or hurried letters to loved ones, as a January 29, 1945 postcard movingly captures: “Please don’t be frightened, dear mother, but I am not bringing Gabi with me,” a letter of a young mother in a forced evacuation from Silesia began. “I could no longer carry her further after she was dead. I could no longer stand it, and I wrapped her up well and laid her deeply into the snow on the street. There Gabi is not alone, since a couple thousand women with their children were with me along the way, and they lay the dead also in the ditch,

³⁹⁰ Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 391.

³⁹¹ Quoted in Paul, “Der Flüchtlingstrek,” 668.

³⁹² Fröhlich, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, 1993, 15:292.

because there surely no wagons and no cars will drive and inflict more suffering upon them.”³⁹³

Despair and disbelief permeate the traumatic account of the odyssey:

“Gabi was dead all of a sudden. I definitely wrapped her up well in two blankets. But she was only four months old, and children between the ages of two and three died along the way. [...] But the cold drove [us] always onward, except for those who simply remained sitting and maybe froze with their children. I saw many who sat there with their backs against a tree, and sometimes older children stood beside them and cried. A mother’s love certainly is the greatest love. But as great as all love may be, we are after all only frail creatures. [...] I cried ceaselessly out of misery, and a few times I was at the point that I would rather have simply laid down in the snow in order to die. [...] I don’t know what more I should write, dear mother, but everything now is so different from before. [...] Don’t be angry because of Gabi, dear mother, but think of how you would have dragged yourself down the roads and through the snow. Maybe you will understand, and maybe Rudolf will also understand if he should ever make it out of Breslau and we once again reunite.”³⁹⁴

The anguish and self-recrimination speak to the trauma that began in the summer of 1944 and reached its peak in early 1945, yet did not cease with German capitulation. While the necessary defeat of Nazi Germany ended six years of unfathomable suffering for Europeans, the full measure of vengeance that cascaded upon the German East marked a caesura in “flight and expulsion.” The violent arrival of the Red Army not only heralded the start of a new order in the German East, it also marked the beginning of an entirely new phase of the forced migration that would last several years beyond the end of the war on May 8, 1945, and ultimately destroy centuries-old German life and culture in Central and Eastern Europe.

³⁹³ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 3:54–55.

³⁹⁴ Kempowski, 3:55–57.

CHAPTER 2

“THROW THEM OUT”: EXPERIENCES AND MEMORIES OF EXPULSION

On December 15, 1944, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill took to the floor of the House of Commons to elaborate on his vision of a future Europe, and how to safeguard against yet another outbreak of hostilities that could plunge the world into war. “For expulsion is the method which, so far as we have been able to see, will be the most satisfactory and lasting,” the wartime leader explained, and victory over Nazi Germany presented a moment to implement policies so that “[t]here will be no mixture of populations to cause endless trouble as in Alsace-Lorraine.” Churchill concluded with bravado: “A clean sweep will be made. I am not alarmed at the prospect of the disentanglement of population, nor am I alarmed by these large transferences, which are more possible than they were before through modern conditions.”¹ Meeting with junior ministers in February 1945, Churchill noted that “most of the Germans in the territories now taken by the Russians had ‘run away already.’”² To the British head of state, the “disentanglement” of Central Europe seemed a mere formality.

Churchill’s comments touch upon a nexus of issues that this chapter will attempt to disentangle. *First*, in his ruminations before the House of Commons, Churchill addressed long-

¹ Quoted in Joseph B Schechtman, *European Population Transfers, 1939-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 186.

² Quoted in Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 110. It appears that Churchill uncritically echoed assurances from Stalin, who informed Churchill and Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference that virtually the entire German population fled the territories over whose future the Big Three now deliberated.

term ideas on how to cope with perceived nationalities struggles, while at the same time touching upon perceived short-term catalysts of the war still raging in Europe. It is within this tension—between longstanding notions of homogenous nation-states and desires to ostensibly eliminate causes of German aggression—that expulsion emerged. Added to this, the looming Cold War conflict and attempt of reordering Europe into spheres of communist and democratic influence decisively influenced the fates of not just ethnic Germans, but all who lived in the region. This chapter consequently aims to provide an explanation of the forces that led to the final destruction initiated by Nazi aggression of a pluralistic, multi-ethnic Central and Eastern Europe.

Second, Churchill's statements recognized the ongoing flight from the German East, and tied these to plans for an extensive population transfer through expulsion. While related and bleeding into one another, civilians fleeing warzones represented a phenomenon distinct from driving entire communities from their ancestral homelands. Churchill was not alone in his inability to distinguish between the phases of the forced migrations. Expellees themselves and German postwar discourse tended to conflate "flight and expulsion" into a single process, so that to this day the complex stages remain unclear. This chapter therefore attempts to differentiate between the brief "wild expulsions" of the summer of 1945, and "orderly and humane" transfers under Allied supervision that followed. The former, driven by violence and fear, need to be separated from the latter, which represented a far less deadly yet nevertheless intentional policy of ethnic cleansing. The emphasis of this chapter, moreover, will be on the "wild expulsions," as postwar memory predominantly revolves around this stage of the forced migrations.

The cavalier assurances of Churchill that revealed an indifference toward the suffering that forced migration—however implemented—would cause constitute a *third* argument of this chapter. As in the pages preceding it, a careful attempt must be made to take the traumata of

expellees seriously, while avoiding to reify postwar tropes and exaggerations.³ The consistent theme of testimonies speak to the anguish and disbelief as the world seemed to turn upside down, yet also call into question popular narratives forged by postwar actors intent on politicizing German victimhood. Moreover, by drawing out the similarities and differences, this chapter seeks to create a spectrum of experiences, paying particular attention on neglected voices.

Lastly, in order to comprehend West German cultural memory of “flight and expulsion,” the forthcoming pages will continue to examine the layering of memory. Even as they unfolded, commentators and victims described the expulsions and participated in a discourse that created powerful tropes that left lasting impressions upon future actors, who in turn built upon these foundations. It is therefore necessary to analyze how contemporaries interpreted the events, constructed images, and thereby contributed to the master narrative of “flight and expulsion.”

“A Clean Sweep Will Be Made”: The Roots of Expulsion

While the war continued to rage, in February 1945 the leaders of the wartime alliance convened in Yalta to contemplate the postwar period. One major point of discussion revolved around the future of the territories and populations of Central Europe. Already at the 1943 Tehran conference, Joseph Stalin insisted on retaining the portions of eastern Poland guaranteed to the Soviet Union through the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, corresponding roughly to the 1920 Curzon Line.⁴ In 1943, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill issued personal

³ On an example of especially spurious testimonies, see Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Wilhelm Turnwald, eds., *Dokumente zur Austreibung der Sudetendeutschen* (München, 1951); Heinz Nawratil, *Vertreibungs-Verbrechen an Deutschen: Tatbestand, Motive, Bewältigung* (München: Ullstein Verlag, 1982).

⁴ As early as late 1941, the British Foreign Office learned of Soviet territorial demands and goals of a forced deportation of ethnic Germans. A study concluded that seven million refugees would be affected. These conclusions became an orientation point for the War Cabinet, which in July 1942 determined that after the war German minorities would need to be deported from areas “where it is necessary and desirable.” Cited in Klaus-Dietmar

statements principally acceding to Soviet demands; in Yalta, the Anglo-American heads of state formally agreed to an effective halving of the Polish Republic. Affirming the partition of 1939, the Big Three awarded half of Poland, including its historic heartland of the *Kresy*, to the Soviet republics of Ukraine and Belorussia upon the cessation of hostilities.⁵ In order to compensate Poland, in whose defense the United Kingdom entered the war, the leaders tentatively agreed to allocate portions of eastern Germany to the postwar Polish state.

While the westward shift of Poland left open the question of its western borders until a future conference to be held after the defeat of the Third Reich, all parties fundamentally approved a geographic reordering. As for the populations living in those areas, the protocols of the Yalta Conference reveal agreement on this point as well: Expulsion. Stalin assured his partners that forced deportation would prove unproblematic. Turning to Churchill, the Soviet leader explained that “when our troops come in the Germans run away and no Germans are left,” effectively depopulating the region. Churchill nevertheless pondered “the problem of how to handle them in Germany,” remarking that “we have killed six or seven million and probably will kill another million before the end of the war.” Stalin quipped whether it would be one or two million. Churchill seemed unperturbed: “Oh I am not proposing any limitations on them. So there should be room in Germany for some who will need to fill the vacancy.” The British head of government assured his conversation partner that unlike a substantial portion of the English

Henke, “Der Weg nach Potsdam-Die Alliierten und die Vertreibung,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 65–66.

⁵ For a more detailed discussion, see Henke, “Der Weg Nach Potsdam”; Detlef Brandes, *Der Weg zur Vertreibung, 1938-1945: Pläne und Entscheidungen zum “Transfer” der Deutschen aus der Tschechoslowakei und aus Polen* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2001). For a rather polemical account that nevertheless brings in a critical assessment of the Western Allied decisions, see De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*.

public, a violent mass expulsion would not at all shock him.⁶ If there were misgivings at Yalta over what the word “transfer” entailed, the meeting minutes don’t reflect any.

That Stalin proposed mass transfer seems unsurprising. Forced deportation emerged as a preferred method for dealing with ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union after 1941, as well as the Chechen-Ingush and Crimean Tatar populations.⁷ Several factors explain why the leaders of the Western Powers, ostensibly fighting to uphold democratic values, concurred with their Soviet ally. To begin with, population transfers after World War I provided seemingly persuasive precedents for a similar postwar policy. In accordance with the Treaty of Versailles, the defeated German Empire abdicated Danzig, the “Polish Corridor,” parts of Upper Silesia, and Alsace-Lorraine to their neighbors, spurring the movement of nearly two million Germans unwilling to live under French or Polish rule. Hitler himself offered a powerful model for postwar plans: The conquering of *Lebensraum* in the East and accompanying *Generalplan Ost* fell short of the 30 million Slavs slated for “removal” from subjugated lands, yet it resulted in the murder of more than six million Jews and the expulsion of 1.7 million Poles from annexed territories, as well as the resettlement of nearly a million ethnic Germans brought home “into the Reich.”⁸

⁶ See the minutes of Charles E. Bohlen and H. Freeman Matthews in *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers: The Conference at Malta and Yalta, 1945*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1955), 717; *FRUS: Malta and Yalta*, 720. Churchill formulated similar statements to Stalin in October 1944: The British Prime Minister calculated that some seven million German deaths would leave ample of room for those populations driven out of Silesia and East Prussia. “Record of Meeting at the Kremlin, October 9, 1944 (Churchill, Stalin, Molotov, et al.)”, *Cold War International History Project Bulletin (CWIHP Bulletin)* (Winter 2000), 36.

⁷ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 85–107.

⁸ For more on *Generalplan Ost* and German expulsion plans, see Valdis O. Lumans, *Himmler’s Auxiliaries: The Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German National Minorities of Europe, 1933-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Doris L. Bergen, “The Volksdeutsche of Eastern Europe and the Collapse of the Nazi Empire, 1944-1945,” in *The Impact of Nazism: New Perspectives on the Third Reich and Its Legacy*, ed. Alan E. Steinweis and Daniel E. Rogers (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2003), 101–28.; Christopher R Browning, *The Origins of the Final Solution: The Evolution of Nazi Jewish Policy, September 1939-March 1942* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 36ff.

Yet it was the Greek-Turkish population exchange of some 400,000 Turks and 1.3 million Greeks, sanctioned through the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, which predominantly guided the thinking of Churchill and Roosevelt, becoming an “*idée fixe*.”⁹ Even though they generally preferred a moderate course and opposed a universal forced deportation that would mean great burdens on the Allied-occupied areas of Germany, American representatives consistently agreed in principle with population transfers.¹⁰ In the spring of 1943, the American President communicated to British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden that the transfer of East Prussians “in the same manner as the Greeks were removed from Turkey after the last war” seemed a harsh yet necessary measure to ensure future peace.¹¹ Churchill’s above-cited reference to “disentanglement” echoed the “population unmixing” demands of British Foreign Minister Lord Curzon, one of the chief statesmen at Lausanne, who theorized that promoting “the greater homogeneity of the population [would result in] the disappearance of the causes of ancient and deep-rooted conflicts.”¹²

⁹ Henke, “Der Weg Nach Potsdam,” 50.

¹⁰ Advisers within the Department of State recommended that the US endorse a policy of selective deportation of especially incriminated groups and under international supervision. See for instance *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1944. General*. (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1966), 310. The US government, however, seemed unwilling to insist on this position. A January 12, 1945 State Department assessment concluded that it would be infeasible for the United States to oppose universal transfers in the case that the Czech and Polish exile governments, who enjoyed British and Soviet support, insisted upon them. *FRUS: Malta and Yalta*, 189.

¹¹ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1943. The British Commonwealth, Eastern Europe, the Far East* (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1963), 15.

¹² Quoted in Eric D. Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1557. A wide range of literature points out that nationalist sentiments are far from “ancient,” but rather a phenomenon of the late 19th century. See Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991). For more recent studies on the linguistic borderlands of Germany that show how fluid identity was until the early 20th century, see Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Pieter M Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Thinking in terms of ethnically homogenous nation-states, therefore, was not solely the domain of genocidal dictators such as Adolf Hitler or ruthless despots such as Joseph Stalin, but liberally-minded democrats as well. Though the methods and their lethality varied immensely, the calculus that underpinned conceptions of nationhood and self-determination, and remain powerful into the 21st century, did not.¹³ Expulsion was more than a tried method that was once again returned to in 1945; it was widely regarded as a legitimate tool of social engineering that reflected a shared way of thinking about the world and modern statehood. In either case, the Big Three's plans "turned Hitler's Generalplan Ost on its head."¹⁴ Though decidedly less deadly, the "unweaving and homogenization process" brutally initiated by Hitler continued after 1945, and unequivocally fulfills the definition of ethnic cleansing.¹⁵

Besides an innate willingness to accept population transfers, the recent interwar past seemed to make it abundantly clear that only a radical demographic reordering could prevent future conflicts. As the academic Joseph B. Schechtman, widely regarded by contemporaries as a leading expert on minority policy, articulated in 1946, "the purpose of a population transfer is not to remove a high percentage of a minority group from the country of its residence, but to

¹³ Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Benjamin David Lieberman, *Terrible Fate: Ethnic Cleansing in the Making of Modern Europe* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006); Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System"; Philipp Ther, *Die dunkle Seite der Nationalstaaten: Ethnische Säuberungen im modernen Europa* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Michael Schwartz, *Ethnische "Säuberungen" in der Moderne: globale Wechselwirkungen nationalistischer und rassistischer Gewaltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

¹⁴ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 314.

¹⁵ Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: A Genocide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106.

remove a minority problem, to eliminate a threat to the future.”¹⁶ In this reading, population transfer proved an appropriate mechanism for eliminating fifth columnists.

The memory of the asymmetrical nationalities conflicts that substantially contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in 1939 in the first place lingered at the decision tables of 1945.¹⁷ Using the Sudeten German population as a lever to pursue aggressive expansionary policies, Hitler mobilized irredentist sentiments to force territorial concessions from Czechoslovakia in 1938. Similarly, Nazi Germany propagandized alleged persecution of ethnic Germans through the Polish state, sensationalizing and capitalizing in particular on the “Bloody Sunday” massacre in Bromberg (Bydgoszcz) in order to lend their saber-rattling moral weight and justify their invasion.¹⁸ In an August 1944 position paper of the Committee on Post-War Programs, American officials argued that expulsion of ethnic Germans would contribute to inner stability of East European countries, since these recently proved themselves as a “vanguard of National Socialist penetration,” and now faced justified anger from the rest of the population.¹⁹ Given their source of unrest, former US President Herbert Hoover deemed the removal of Germans from the region a “heroic remedy” against future turmoil.²⁰

¹⁶ Schechtman, *European Population Transfers, 1939-1945*, 478. Originally born in Odessa, Schechtman emigrated to the United States in 1941 and between 1944 and 1945 worked as an advisor to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the fore-runner of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), on migration issues.

¹⁷ This view is also shared by Richard Evans, who points to the real danger that German minorities posed for the Polish and Czech states once Hitler came to power and resolved to “bring home into the Reich” these ostensibly beleaguered populations. Richard J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), 95–99.

¹⁸ Gerhard L Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy, 1933-1939: The Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, 2010), 497–504. On the German minority in pre-war Poland, see Winson Chu, *The German Minority in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1944. General.*, 310.

²⁰ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 315.

The Allies not only hoped to eliminate one of the perceived causes of the conflict, but to permanently remove Germany's future ability to wage wars after twice within two decades unveiling themselves as the aggressors. When Roosevelt specifically pointed out to Eden that "the Prussians will be removed in East Prussia," he implied that the dissolution of this state, regarded as a hearth of militarist aggression, would eliminate the catalyst of Teutonic belligerence.²¹ British representatives argued that the "moribund corpse of Prussia" must be "finally killed," lest the "dangerous anachronism" lead to future hostilities.²² An August 1946 British memorandum articulated broadly held sentiments in the Western camp more concisely:

"I need not point out that Prussia has been a menace to European security for the last two hundred years. The survival of the Prussian State, even if only in name, would provide a basis for any irredentist claims which the German people may later seek to put forward, would strengthen German militarist ambitions, and would encourage the revival of an authoritarian, centralized Germany which in the interests of all it is vital to prevent."²³

The apparent need for a removal of "irredentist claims" was reinforced through lobby efforts since the outbreak of the war on behalf of the Polish and Czech governments in exile in London, which conferred with one another on a campaign to convince the Allied leaders of a postwar transfer.²⁴ Czech President Edvard Beneš on numerous occasions received explicit

²¹ Henke, "Der Weg Nach Potsdam," 56.

²² Cited in Christopher M. Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), 675. Clark argues that this simplistic conclusion on the part of the Allies overlooked the tensions between Prussian tradition and Nazism, and that Prussia proved one of the few bastions against the NSDAP in the years before 1933.

²³ Cited in Clark, 675.

²⁴ Detlef Brandes, *Grossbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten 1939-1943: die Regierungen Polens, der Tschechoslowakei und Jugoslawiens im Londoner Exil vom Kriegsausbruch bis zur Konferenz von Teheran* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1988), 230–31. Beneš and Foreign Ministry Secretary of State Hubert Ripka formulated expulsion plans even before the outbreak of war. They publically articulated these views in speeches and talks beginning in May 1941, with explicit references to the Greek-Turkish population transfer. See Henke, "Der Weg Nach Potsdam," 72–73.

Soviet as well as vague American and British approval of his government's demands for a removal of the Sudeten minority.²⁵ These had been citizens of Czechoslovakia, yet the 1938 Sudeten Crisis, enthusiastic support for the fascist movement headed by Konrad Henlein, and Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia convinced Beneš that radical solutions were needed. "Our Germans," the Czech leader reportedly lamented, "have betrayed our state, betrayed our democracy, betrayed us, betrayed humaneness, and betrayed humankind."²⁶ The prevention of Germany from once again leveraging its ethnic populations "for pan-Germanic goals," required a removal of the ethnic minority.²⁷ Moreover, the "unequaled acts of barbarism" perpetrated by the Third Reich, such as the massacre of Lidice, made future coexistence within shared borders impossible.²⁸ The Anglo-American partners recognized, as formulated by American Secretary of

²⁵ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 109. Returning from the Tehran Conference, Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov informed Beneš that the expulsion of millions of East Germans was but a "trifle." Vojtech Mastny, "The Beneš-Stalin-Molotov Conversations in December 1943: New Documents," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 20, no. 3 (1972): 398. By the end of 1943, Beneš signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the USSR, and spoke publically of how the Soviet partners desired a postwar Czechoslovakia that would be "strong, consolidated, and, as much as possible, nationally homogeneous." Cited in Chad Carl Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 208. With Stalin's signaling of mass transfers in the future, Czech communists under Klement Gottwald, previously resistant to universal expulsion, became among the most ardent supporters of the policy.

²⁶ Cited in Nawratil, *Vertreibungs-Verbrechen an Deutschen*, 92.

²⁷ Henke, "Der Weg Nach Potsdam," 72–73. Beneš developed several plans which initially called for the expulsion of politically incriminated Germans—estimated at a third of the circa 3.2 million Sudeten Germans—and resettlement of the remaining population into three districts of postwar Czechoslovakia. British officials, however, pushed for a more radical solution beginning in 1942. Anthony Eden for instance advised that the application of "guilt" as a criteria for deportation would "eventually limit the desired extent of population transfer." Thus, beginning in 1942, Beneš advocated for an expulsion of two thirds of the Sudeten minority, which by the summer of 1945 climbed to a virtual universal deportation. For the lobbying of Beneš in London, see also Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 211–17. Ultimately, a detailed transfer plan presented by the exile government of Czechoslovakia on November 23, 1944 contained nearly all the elements discussed between Beneš and the British and Soviet governments, which the US government also accepted without any principle objections. *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945. General: Political and Economic Matters* (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1967), 1228.

²⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945. General: Political and Economic Matters*, 1228. Particularly after the massacre of Lidice, these arguments seemed to stick with Western observers such as the British liaison to Czechoslovakia Bruce Lockart, who informed the US Secretary of State that "the brutal treatment meted out to the Czechs is arousing wide-spread indignation, and from all parts of the world requests are coming for reprisals." Lockart left no doubt as to who was to blame, claiming that "the chief agents of this bestiality are the Bohemian Germans." Quoted in Philipp Glassheim, "The Mechanics of Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of the

State Edward Stettinius, “the injustice that Czechoslovakia has suffered from Germany and its German minority,” and sought to support efforts for a satisfactory solution, asking merely for Czech authorities to forego unilateral measures and await formal treaties.²⁹

Just as the Czechs, Polish representatives in exile cited their suffering under Nazi rule during their lobbying of the governments of the Allied powers. Poland possessed an arguably greater justification, however: Considered by the Third Reich as subhuman, more than 20% of the prewar population—around six million, including three million Polish Jews—died as a result of war, murder through extermination, hunger, disease, and forced labor. In comparison, less than 400,000 Czechs, or roughly 2.5% of the population perished.³⁰ The issue was more complicated than a mere weighing of suffering and the legitimacy of grievances, however. The German minority in Czechoslovakia resided within the prewar borders of that country, whereas Poland’s wartime expulsion plans depended on territorial demands, which in turn relied on the as of yet unresolved claims of the Soviet Union.³¹

Germans from Czechoslovakia, 1945-1947,” in *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 200–201; Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 213–14.

²⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945. General: Political and Economic Matters*, 1246.

³⁰ Considered by the Third Reich as subhuman, Poles were to over the long run be driven into extinction. Though also accompanied by wanton terror, Nazi plans for the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia sought an integration into the Reich, translating into a milder occupation policy that ultimately claimed less lives. For more on Czechoslovakia under Nazi occupation, see Vojtech Mastny, *Czechs under Nazi Rule, the Failure of National Resistance*. (New York: Columbia University Press, n.d.); Bryant, *Prague in Black*. The May 26th, 1945 assessment of British intelligence officer Colonel Harold Perkins seems rather illustrative as well: “Since my arrival I have been trying to get really to like and admire the Czechs—but I must admit I find the going pretty hard. Resistance throughout the country has been extremely weak, almost negligible. All sorts of wonderful and glorious people are coming to light who claim to have led the various resistance movements. I have spoken to them personally and have had my chaps speak to others, everywhere it is the same. Wonderful heroism, terrific suffering, etc., etc., but when you get down to it—nil, nil, nil. No action of any kind—a good description would be ‘passive collaboration’ with the Bosch, not ‘active’ but ‘passive,’ namely, they collaborated but with bad grace. Czechoslovakia is the least damaged of any country in the whole of Europe. It has suffered the least, the people are well fed and clothed...” Quoted in Karl-Peter Schwartz, “Tage der Vergeltung,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 6, 2005, 6.

³¹ For more, see Sarah Meiklejohn Terry, *Poland’s Place in Europe: General Sikorski and the Origin of the Oder-Neisse Line, 1939-1943* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

As early as February 1940, Polish Foreign Minister August Zaleski included the forced deportation of Germans from prewar Poland and East Prussia, which Poland hoped to acquire in an eventual Allied victory, as a Polish war aim. The ongoing conflict seemed to awaken nationalist ambitions, as a year later Prime Minister Władysław Sikorski demanded that “the German horde, which for centuries had penetrated to the east, should be destroyed and forced to draw back [to the west].”³² Indeed, records of the London-based Polish government reveal 1942 plans for incorporating territory east of the Oder River, yet they called for the eastern Neisse River as a western border; the expulsion of the large and overwhelmingly German population of Lower Silesia between the Western and Eastern Neisse was seen as an impossible sell to the British.³³ Moreover, a dramatic westward expansion would cement German animosity in perpetuity and require dependency on Soviet protection, so that exile government deemed an insistence on the Oder-Neisse Line as the western border of postwar Poland as “foolish.”³⁴

With the realization that the USSR would claim eastern Poland, and that the US and British governments sought to accommodate these demands, the government in exile somewhat reluctantly recognized that a large portion of their postwar state would encompass larger expanses of the German East than expected. Officials therefore developed legal procedures to prepare, such as depriving Germans of their Polish citizenship and expropriating their property. Polish representatives made it clear to the British government that Germans and Poles could not live together within the same borders, and that those who remained after the war would need to

³² Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 123. Polish demands went as far as demanding occupation rights along the Baltic Sea as far as Rostock and the island of Rügen, and participation in the occupation of the Kiel Canal.

³³ Brandes, *Grossbritannien und seine osteuropäischen Alliierten 1939-1943*, 406.

³⁴ Cited in Henke, “Der Weg Nach Potsdam,” 62.

be expelled.³⁵ As with the Czechs, the Anglo-Americans remained “sympathetic” to Polish arguments and had “no objection in principle.”³⁶

While Polish and Czech delegations lobbied the wartime governments, a countervailing voice emerged from the German émigré camp organized around the Social Democrat and labor activist Wenzel Jaksch. In British exile since 1938, the ardent Nazi opponent unequivocally condemned the Third Reich and war crimes in the Protectorate such as Lidice in BBC broadcasts.³⁷ His opposition initially brought him close to the Czech exile camp, where he learned of emerging deportation plans. An appalled Jaksch formed the Democratic Sudeten Committee as a sort of exile government to negotiate with Czech counterparts, and engage in propaganda work.³⁸ Jaksch publically argued against “a mass transfer of minorities” upon Germany’s defeat on moral and logistical grounds.³⁹ Not only was it, Jaksch reasoned, in line with immoral transfers such as the Greco-Turkish and Nazi resettlements, it also tarnished British values and threatened to destroy the foundations of the postwar European community.⁴⁰

³⁵ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 124.

³⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945: The Conference of Berlin, 1945*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1960), 643, 648, 649.

³⁷ For details on Jaksch’s wartime activities, see Martin K Bachstein, *Wenzel Jaksch und die sudetendeutsche Sozialdemokratie* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1974), 175–284.

³⁸ Bachstein, 283. The committee included Eugen de Witte, Willi Wanka, Ernst Paul, and Franz Katz. The ambitious effort of creating a group with the standing to speak for the Sudeten Germans failed.

³⁹ Wenzel Jaksch, *Facts and Propaganda* (London, 1942); Wenzel Jaksch, *Mass Transfer of minorities* (London: International Publishing Co., 1944). In a letter to *The New Statesman and Nation* in January 1944, Jaksch responded to discussions of postwar deportations that could possibly “humanize” Hitler’s transfer methods. Arguing that any such methods would aim at ethnographical lines and therefore never be humane, Jaksch pointed out that the sheer size of the transfers would dwarf the ostensible wave of Jews and anti-fascists that the Allies had been reluctant to let in for logistical reasons. Jaksch concluded that millions of uprooted Europeans would threaten Europe’s stability and make it an Allied problem, and pleaded that justice should be aimed at the guilty, not an unjust “horizontal” treatment of the civilian population. AdsD, NL Jaksch, 32, Jaksch to Editor, January 4, 1944.

⁴⁰ Jaksch repeated many of these arguments in an appeal that he managed to circulate widely in June 1945 through the British leftwing papers *Forward* and *Left News*. See “Peace Through Terror: An Appeal to all Friends of Justice in the Free World by the Parliamentary Delegation of Sudeten Labor,” in *Der Sozialdemokrat*, May 31, 1945, 1087.

Unfortunately for Jaksch, few wanted to hear of mercy for Germans, even antifascist elements. As is apparent in the rhetoric cited above, the brutal conflict engendered extreme antipathy toward Germany. No Western statesman had any compunctions over a harsh treatment of Germany, whose aggression and attempts to secure a racial hegemony in Europe had caused untold suffering. Even an otherwise restrained Franklin D. Roosevelt purportedly said that Germans “deserved” to be expelled.⁴¹ Understandably few tears were shed at conference tables, where participants contemplated the consequences of German savagery. Few seemed alarmed that postwar solutions may contradict the foundational 1941 Atlantic Charter, which assured that territorial adjustments would only be made in accordance with the wishes of those concerned and that the right to self-determination of all peoples would be respected. For members of the anti-Hitler coalition such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, or the Soviet Union, who suffered immeasurably worse under German rule, the thirst for retribution and indifference to German anguish was even greater. As an August 1944 bulletin of the Polish underground summarized in regards to the future policy toward Germans: “Now they will know what collective guilt means.”⁴² Stalin’s June 28, 1945 statements to Czechoslovak Prime Minister Zdenek Fierlinger and Foreign Minister Vlado Klementis reflected similar sentiments: “Throw them out. Now they will learn themselves what it means to rule over someone.”⁴³

See also Matthew James Frank, *Expelling the Germans: British Opinion and Post-1945 Population Transfer in Context* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105.

⁴¹ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 315.

⁴² Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 124.

⁴³ Cited in Naimark, 109. Stalin had made it clear to Polish and Czech representatives, however, that the deportations were not the prerogative of the Red Army, but rather the affair of the East European regimes.

Neither the Soviet Union nor their Western partners therefore shrunk from severe punishment of their sworn enemy. Yet one remaining crucial factor dictated how it came to the largest forced migration in history: Even if Churchill and Roosevelt or his successor Harry S. Truman would have been inclined to stay the Soviet hand, there was precious little that they could do. At the Potsdam Conference in August 1945, Churchill and Truman suddenly voiced concern over the policy of a universal mass expulsion. The Soviet Premier attempted to reassure his partners: “The Germans have already been driven out” of Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴ This was patently false, as only half of the 10-12 million residing in the German East attempted a flight, and of those many to returned home. Yet since Yalta it was clear that any possibilities for deterring Soviet demands, underpinned by millions of military deaths and sacrifices in a bitter war of annihilation, ebbed daily with each kilometer that the Red Army neared Berlin.

Soviet-backed leaders aimed to establish civilian control over the liberated territories received personal instruction from Stalin to “create such conditions for the Germans that they want to escape themselves.”⁴⁵ Thus, militia and police violently drove 700-800,000 Germans from Czechoslovakia and the German East each before the Big Three met at the Potsdam Conference.⁴⁶ Indeed, while victorious allies conferred, at nearby Berlin’s train stations “spectacularly overloaded trains...were disgorging cargoes of the dead, the dying, the diseased,

⁴⁴ Naimark, 111.

⁴⁵ “Gomułka’s memorandum of a conversation with Stalin, third quarter of 1945,” *CWIHP Bulletin* (Winter 2000), 273. Gomułka took Stalin’s directive to heart, as his orders to police and militia detachments dispatched to the Recovered Territories reveal: “As for those Germans who are still there, the kinds of conditions should be created so that they won’t want to remain.” Cited in Naimark, 125.

⁴⁶ Naimark, 111.

and the destitute.”⁴⁷ The expulsions were already underway. As the triumphant wartime leaders haggled, it immediately became apparent that Stalin cunningly orchestrated a *fait accompli* that his partners now had to accept. The decisions reached tentatively in Tehran and formalized in Potsdam would set more than 20 million Europeans—Czech, Polish, Slovak, Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Hungarian, and German—forcibly on the move, separating them from ancestral homelands and changing the ethnic and cultural landscape forever.

The End of Nazi Rule and Inversion of the Social Order in the German East

Wherever the Nazi regime lost its grip on power in the waning days of the war, the social order was suddenly and dramatically upended. The German “master race” saw itself cast to the bottom, and their erstwhile victims now reigned over them with relative impunity. Slave workers, even before Soviet forces arrived, sensed and eagerly anticipated the coming changes in fortune that the closing front heralded. An inhabitant of Oels (Oleśnica) noted angrily in his diary that “the Poles are standing on the street and grinning impudently” at passing Germans.⁴⁸ Renate Schweizer, residing in an improvised refugee camp for evacuated youths in a palace near Streben (Ćiążeń), learned from the Polish maid in broken German that soon the children would clean the rooms for her.⁴⁹ Many slave laborers and subjugated peoples of Eastern Europe fervently awaited liberation, when they could return home, loot goods and provisions, or even settle old scores with cruel German masters.

⁴⁷ R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 89.

⁴⁸ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:796.

⁴⁹ Kempowski, 1:573.

That moment typically arrived as soon as the Red Army appeared. Former slaves proved eager to assist the invaders: “The Poles squatted on the Soviet tanks as guides...and directed them to the most important strategic points of the city.”⁵⁰ More commonly, with their enslavement effectively ended, slaves wagons and horses and headed home.⁵¹ “The suddenly liberated Polish agricultural workers plundered like ravens, loaded us on wagons, took the best horses for themselves, and drove eastward,” a man from an overrun trek recalled.⁵² Frida Lewin, overrun by Soviet forces near the Baltic Coast, initially felt relief that “her Poles” intervened and protected her family from the enemy, but then bitterly noted that they “fled into the hills” with the wagons, leaving them only a few items.⁵³ In Treptow (Trzebiatów), after watching them take stock of “booty” in the house hours before the arrival of the Red Army, a refugee indignantly recalled how the Polish servants “immediately made friends with the Russian soldiers.”⁵⁴

Testimonies attest to the intercession of Poles on behalf of their former masters, saving them from execution or arrest.⁵⁵ Depending on their disposition, however, liberation allowed for an immediate settling of scores. Allegations of German farmers being shot “by [their] own Pole” reveal how six years of exploitation and mistreatment often ended.⁵⁶ Red Army soldiers possessed little compunctions over summarily executing perceived capitalists, particularly when

⁵⁰ Kempowski, 1:707.

⁵¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 200.

⁵² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:190.

⁵³ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:515–16.

⁵⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:29.

⁵⁵ Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 121.

⁵⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:159. The frequent use of “our” or “my” even years after the war also reveals a particular way of how many of the authors thought of the relationship.

they benefited from Nazi Germany's conquests and "hired" forced laborers. Egged on by liberated slaves, the conquerors meted out rough justice liberally. A refugee recalled what happened after her trek was overrun in Pomerania: "There already we see behind the trees the brown uniforms with the disgusting pelt hats creeping forward like cats... 'He Chitler [Hitler] and she Chitler!' ...the denunciations of the Polacks begin, and the accused are immediately arrested."⁵⁷ In the village of Platenheim (Płotówko), several farmers were shot and a woman raped and hanged "at the behest of the Russian POW and the Polish maid, who had a child from the Russian."⁵⁸ Thea Winkler reported that in her village near Elbing (Elbląg), Soviets arrested and interrogated her mother and demanded to know how long her husband had a member of the NSDAP, and where the family concealed a cache of war materiel, including rifles and uniforms. Winkler suspected that "Wanda, the Polish girl, must have told the victors all sorts of stuff, she amused herself to her heart's content with them."⁵⁹

Life in the German East devolved into a lawless "wild west" of plundering and mistreatment.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, for millions of refugees who had fled the Soviet offensive and were now strangers stranded in unfamiliar surroundings, return to even a chaotic homeland seemed a worthwhile risk. Beginning in mid-May 1945, hundreds of thousands crossed the Oder River and travelled down roads that still bore the evidence of what transpired a few months earlier.⁶¹ As one expellee recalled: "Refugees upon refugees on the country lanes....The ditches

⁵⁷ Schieder, 1:337.

⁵⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 203

⁵⁹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:314.

⁶⁰ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, Letter from Mrs. B. to Professor Lang, January 30, 1946.

⁶¹ Klaus-Dietmar Henke estimates that up to a million Germans attempted a return to their homes. Henke, "Der Weg Nach Potsdam," 79.

were filled with spilled oats, with beds, linens, clothing... Valuables in astounding scales lay scattered...and were going to ruin in the wet. Time and again one saw corpses of German soldiers, men, women, and children, which now at least were carried onto the fields and covered. Shudders upon shudders crept up our backs”⁶² Many wandered for weeks with nothing to eat except for what could be plundered from abandoned wagons, and some “remained lying at the road and died.”⁶³ The returning columns faced plundering from partisans, liberated slave workers, and Soviet soldiers, and the confrontations often ended in murder or rape.⁶⁴

Some refugees were luckier: A pastor from Rogau-Rosenau (Rogów Sobócki) and his companions enjoyed an escort of Red Army soldiers who, other than taking valuables, didn’t abuse them and protected them from looters.⁶⁵ A fortunate few, such as a priest who fled to Bohemia, enjoyed a boat ride—“like a nice dream...during the most wonderful sunshine”—to Pirna, Germany, from where trains ferried them unharmed to their home in Silesia.⁶⁶ Throughout May and June, the pandemonium and administrative chaos ensuing from the war endangered displaced persons, yet also afforded relative freedom of movement. The desire to return home drove people on veritable odysseys. Freya von Moltke, a member of the resistance group headed by her husband James, returned to her estate in Silesia and extensively toured the German East. Even Gero von Schulze-Gaevernitz, an émigré and special assistant to Allen Dulles, used his

⁶² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:31. See also Schieder, 1:67.

⁶³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:80.

⁶⁴ Schieder, 1:30–31. Returning via train, which due to the destroyed rail network took weeks, was no less safe. A refugee from Silesia recalled that the train was stopped multiple times to unload the dead, mostly women and children, and to endure plundering by bandits. Schieder, 1:413. Other refugees recounted a sense of decency, however. While Polish bandits plundered most of the luggage of a family attempting to return to Wollin (Wolin), they left one horse because the father was ill and unable to walk. BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 250.

⁶⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 78ff.

⁶⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:459.

diplomatic status to join von Moltke in order to observe the state of things.⁶⁷ Within a few weeks, some communities saw nearly all of their evacuated residents return, though in many cases the homes were destroyed, the livestock slaughtered, and the machinery carted off.⁶⁸ In all, over one million refugees returned to their homes in the weeks after the German capitulation.⁶⁹

The vacuum created by the defeat of the Nazi regime and sudden lawlessness produced dangerous potentials everywhere, yet things looked much different in Czechoslovakia. On the one hand, the majority of Germans never fled, as American forces advancing from the west and the Soviet military closing in from the East convinced many to conclude that “[i]f one were to fall into the hands of the Russians, then better [let it happen] in the homeland.”⁷⁰ Moreover, unlike in the German East where the population faced the fierce onslaught of the Red Army, Czechoslovakia and the Sudetenland remained relatively peaceful until the final days of the war. Many also may have felt that generations of coexistence in communities far more ethnically mixed than in the German East made an eruption of violence unlikely. Yet on the other hand, the

⁶⁷ Freya von Moltke, *Erinnerungen an Kreisau: 1930 - 1945*, 1997, 111ff. Freya von Moltke’s report, and Gero von Schulze-Gaevernitz’s observations, eventually reached as far as Washington DC, being read into the Congressional Record by Senator Homer Capeheart (R, IN) *Congressional Record* 92 (February 5, 1946), 878.

⁶⁸ Klaus Bzdziach and Gesellschaft für Interregionalen Kulturaustausch, *“Wach auf, mein Herz, und denke” zur Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Schlesien und Berlin-Brandenburg von 1740 bis heute = “Przebudź się, serce moje, i pomyśl”* (Dülmen: Laumann, 1995), 416.

⁶⁹ Henke, “Der Weg Nach Potsdam,” 79.

⁷⁰ Cited in Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 228. An evacuation of mostly women and children, encompassing some 30,000 individuals, unfolded throughout the spring. As the Soviet army advanced, some Sudeten Germans and a number of Silesians who had temporarily settled in the region fled particularly the eastern Sudetenland, but the majority of the population, especially in rural communities, refused to give up their homes so close to the end of the war. Multi-ethnic communities also ignored orders from the Nazi Party to evacuate, so that threats of violence and special SS commandos clearing endangered areas had to be employed. Overall, the minority who fled were overwhelmingly overrun by Soviet forces and never reached American lines; the few who did were generally denied entry across US lines. Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 20ff.

high concentration of Germans meant that any outburst would prove particularly calamitous: There was nowhere to run to if neighbor would now turn upon neighbor.

The war remained relatively distant until Silesian treks fleeing the Soviet January offensive poured into the region, bringing with them reports of atrocities and “causing a stir.”⁷¹ Some 100,000 Germans, evacuated from Slovakia by German authorities, also started to arrive in the Protectorate by March 1945.⁷² Most unsettling of all, however, were the last remnants of the German military, among them the forces of the fanatical General Ferdinand Schörner and elements of the *Waffen-SS*, pressed between two fronts into one of the ever-shrinking last remaining enclaves of German control. The exhortations of Karl Hermann Frank, a Sudeten German who climbed to the rank of Secretary of State of the Protectorate, to fight to the bitter end added to the anxious climate. Frank’s radical radio addresses and obsession with partisans, and preparations for the final struggle that included forming two companies comprised of Sudeten Germans, suggested to the Czech population that the final moments of the war would prove bitter. Rumors circulated that the Nazi regime armed German civilians and raised guerilla units to continue the struggle past the war’s conclusion.⁷³ These worries were not just hearsay. Resolved to resist to the last coupled with draconian measures such as mass executions and burning down of villages to quell simmering resistance, the German oppressors stoked terror and fury among those eagerly awaiting liberation.⁷⁴ As the student Hildegard Holzwarth noted in her

⁷¹ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*, vol. 2 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 6. See also BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 54; and Schieder, 2:3.

⁷² Brandes, *Der Weg zur Vertreibung, 1938-1945*, 377.

⁷³ Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 226.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 41.

diary on April 20, a “tremendous tension” developed between Germans and Czechs, and “small disturbances” broke out.⁷⁵ The Protectorate developed into a powder keg.

The tinderbox exploded on May 5, when SS forces violently put down a largely demonstrative rebellion in Prague.⁷⁶ In 1947, a witness related how the sudden shooting caused “[f]urious men, terrified women, and curious children to scatter in confusion” and duck into doorways as a “young SS man fired warning shots left and right” into houses from a racing car.⁷⁷ The underground called Czechs to arms, and the city erupted in street fighting. The collaborationist Russian Liberation Army led by Andrey Vlasov, attempting to jump ship in the waning days of the war, turned on their German compatriots by joining the revolt. Some German troops “handed over their revolvers with smiles to the Czechs, who clapped them on the shoulders and let them go unharmed.”⁷⁸ They were fortunate: Other captives were executed on the spot if they fell into the hands of the rebels. The SS meanwhile mercilessly executed captives and used civilians as human shields, creating a spiral of radical violence.⁷⁹ Czech propaganda and rumors, such as the SS “nailing children to walls,” further fanned the flames of hatred.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Walter Kempowski, *Das Echolot - Abgesang '45: ein kollektives Tagebuch* (München: Knaus, 2005), 22.

⁷⁶ German sources frequently paint the Prague Uprising as a sudden violent outburst from the Czech population, conveniently overlooking the role of the SS in the upheaval.

⁷⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:108.

⁷⁸ Schieder, 2:108.

⁷⁹ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 95; Tomáš Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945: die Stellung der Deutschen in Böhmen, Mähren und Schlesien (ausserhalb der Lager und Gefängnisse)* (Wien: Böhlau, 2003), 91–92.

⁸⁰ Czech Radio reported that the SS was burning down “the century-old symbol of Prague,” the castle, and was “nailing children to walls.” The radio exhorted the people of Prague to “drive the SS from their lairs,” and announced that “all citizens who afford Germans with protection will be held accountable.” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:110.

The revolutionary “May days” in the Czech capital only increased in extremism after German forces withdrew from Prague on May 8 and the Red Army entered a day later, giving free reign to the mobs.⁸¹ “Retaliation was blind,” as people including old women were thrown from their apartment windows and non-Czech speakers beaten to death. Gangs forced entry into hospitals to hunt down victims.⁸² German “volunteers” were dragged from their homes and made to dismantle the barricades erected during the fighting while incensed Czechs harangued, shouted insults, and delivered blows. Many testimonies recalled the joy of the jeering crowds, who drew swastikas on coats, shaved women’s heads, and forced victims to walk barefoot over broken glass.⁸³ Uniformed prisoners incurred the greatest wrath and fell victim to lynching at public squares teeming with celebratory onlookers; in some cases, the captives were doused in petrol and set alight.⁸⁴ A Czech witness confirmed the ghastly scenes:

“We had followed one crowd to a spot in the middle of Wenceslas Square.... There, several Soviet tankists were standing on their tanks and manipulating containers of the gasoline they normally used for fuel.... Today, after almost fifty years, I cannot recall precisely whether it was the Red Army soldiers... or some of our Czech civilians standing beside them, who poured combustible liquid onto two squirming victims in German uniform suspended heads-down from the arch and then set them on fire. Fortunately, we had several rows of people in front of us and could not discern the details of the conflagration, though Milan observed that some degenerates were lighting their cigarettes off the flaming bodies.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ As Mark Mazower has shown, the paroxysms of humiliation and ruthless settling of scores with Germans and collaborators that erupted after liberation broke out all across Europe. Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 235.

⁸² Peter Demetz, *Prague in Danger: The Years of German Occupation, 1939-45: Memories and History, Terror and Resistance, Theater and Jazz, Film and Poetry, Politics and War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 235.

⁸³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:142.

⁸⁴ Wenzel Jaksch, *A Petition to the Signatory Powers of the Potsdam Agreement and to the General Secretary of the United Nations on Behalf of the Non-Nazi Sudeten Population by the Parliamentary Delegation of Sudeten Labour in Great Britain* (London, 1947), 60; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 115.

⁸⁵ Cited in Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 235. Colonel Perkins witnessed similar scenes. Barely escaping a group of Czech fighters hunting for SS who “seemed to bear us a grudge for having deprived them of their spoils,” Perkins

The Prague Revolt spread to other areas of the former Protectorate and Sudetenland, where similar scenes unfolded in hundreds of locations.⁸⁶ The chaos of the collapse left Germans with no recourse and at the whims of their tormentors. Rituals of public humiliation and intimidation were among the most common occurrences that immediately followed the disintegration of German authority. Crowds harangued and forced Germans to clear rubble, sweep streets, fill trenches, and perform degrading tasks like cleaning latrines with their hands; often members of the bourgeoisie such as teachers or civil servants were earmarked for such work.⁸⁷ Czechs also confronted Germans with the crimes of Nazi rule: in Neudeck (Nejdek), Germans were forced to perform the “horrific work” of exhuming concentration camp prisoners, “ostensibly shot by the SS,” with their bare hands. One individual who had failed to show for the assignment was led by partisans through the marketplace with a Hitler portrait around his neck.⁸⁸

As traumatic as these experiences were, justice could easily be far deadlier. Even as the world cheered the defeat of the Third Reich, the killing continued in Czechoslovakia. A combination of revenge-seeking and anxiety in a lawless atmosphere often spilled into murder.⁸⁹ In Pilsen (Plzeň), crowds reportedly stoned the elderly to death and beat infants on the ground and kicked them.⁹⁰ Sometimes the violence seemed driven by sheer bloodlust. A 1947 testimony

and his colleagues were “very glad we did convince them, for later during the morning we saw an SS man caught, strung up by his legs to a lamp post, soaked in petrol and ignited.” Cited in Schwartz, “Tage der Vergeltung,” 6.

⁸⁶ See Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 106–16.

⁸⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 125.

⁸⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:318.

⁸⁹ The deadliest atrocities seemed to occur in areas where the SS or Wehrmacht had orchestrated similar cruelties during the waning days of the war. See Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 237; Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 225.

⁹⁰ Jaksch, *Petition*, 71–72.

of an expellee from Hermsdorf (Hermánkovice) claimed that a Czech clerk “used [a Silesian refugee child] as target practice,” gunning it down in the street.⁹¹ In Dobronin (Dobrenz), the revolutionary guard hacked to death several dozen civilians with picks and shovels.⁹²

Resistance, or fear of it, from Germans elicited deadly consequences. After catching a ride with SS “in a wild flight, trying to escape the clutches of the Russians,” a group of refugees became stranded in Tannwald (Tanvald), where Czech militia subjected the men to interrogations and exactions while forcing the survivors to clear rubble. “The Czechs savored watching the Germans and beating them with sticks,” the expellee recalled, when suddenly a “young man who no longer was willing to put up with such treatment...kicked at one of the louts.” A “swarm of young lads” descended upon him and “literally stomped [him] to death.”⁹³

Jumpy partisans were quick to act on any imagined *Werewolf* activity, collectively punishing German civilians for transgressions. In a town in northern Bohemia, a priest who accompanied the trek from Neumarkt (Środa Śląska) reported that during a ceremony honoring two Czechs and a Soviet soldier killed in fighting, a truck of SS soldiers and refugees fleeing Prague suddenly arrived at the scene, prompting a firefight. The Czech partisans threatened the refugees that they all would be shot if any more of their compatriots died.⁹⁴ In a small village near Karlsbad (Karlovy Vary), Silesian refugees noted that local Hitler Youth hoisted banners with inscriptions such as “Better dead than a slave” and “The way to the Reich goes only over our corpses.” The Red Army and Czech militia exacted a terrible punishment on the town for this

⁹¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/245, 6.

⁹² Hans-Jörg Schmidt, “1945 – Massaker an Deutschen Aufgeklärt,” *Die Welt*, January 26, 2012, <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article13835579/1945-Massaker-an-Deutschen-aufgeklaert.html>.

⁹³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:408.

⁹⁴ Schieder, 1:458.

arrogance, forcing locals out of their homes and orchestrating public executions that all Germans were forced to watch.⁹⁵ In a village near Aussig (Ústí nad Labem), the comrades of a murdered militiaman drove the local German men with shouts of “fifty for one” and “revenge for Lidice” past the body on the way to the execution site. In this case, the wives of the victims managed to beseech a Soviet officer to intervene before the first shots fell.⁹⁶ In Teplitz (Teplice) careless workers caused an explosion in a munitions depot that claimed the lives of two Czechs, prompting the militia to drive the entire local German population to the nearby German border.⁹⁷ Civilians paid a heavy price for calamities eagerly attributed to German machinations.

Though isolated murders remained the norm, the desire for vengeance or punishment of ostensible “resistance” occasionally escalated into mass killings. The most notorious case remains the massacre in Aussig on July 31, 1945.⁹⁸ As in Teplice, an explosion in a munitions depot that claimed the lives of 28 German and Czech workers provided the catalyst for bloodletting.⁹⁹ Rumors of sabotage and roving “Werewolf” militia incited outrage, so that immediately after the detonation Czech militia and soldiers, joined by indignant throngs of civilians and some Soviet troopers, sought retribution.¹⁰⁰ The “Czechs stormed through all the

⁹⁵ Schieder, 1:463.

⁹⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 20. The Red Army investigation found that the dead Czech had not fallen victim to German partisan operatives, but had committed suicide over an unfortunate love affair.

⁹⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 128.

⁹⁸ Just as Nemmersdorf developed into a central fixture of narratives of the experiences in East Prussia, the Sudeten German postwar depictions of their experiences commonly elevated the Aussig massacre as an example of the Czechoslovakian actions against the German minorities and featured it heavily in historical accounts, as will be demonstrated in later chapters.

⁹⁹ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 116.

¹⁰⁰ Multiple German testimonies speak to the fact that survivors felt the explosion was used as a pretext for a pogrom. According to other witnesses, the lynching was orchestrated by outsiders who caused the explosion to begin with. See BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 10 and 18. Wenzel Jaksch claimed that “the population is convinced that it was a frame-up on the model of the Reichstag-fire.” Jaksch, *Petition*, 51. An anticommunist Czech-language

streets, beat the Germans down or shot at them if they ran away,” a Red Cross nurse recorded a year after the massacre.¹⁰¹ At the train station armed mobs fell upon surprised Germans, while at the marketplace victims were drowned in barrels used for firefighting.¹⁰² An Englishwoman witnessed women and children thrown into a burning building alive.¹⁰³ Hundreds of Czechs intercepted workers returning at the end of their shift from across at the bridge across the Elbe River, and immediately bludgeoned and threw Germans—easily identified by their white armbands—into the river. Militiamen fired upon those who resurfaced.¹⁰⁴ The crowd reportedly tossed a mother and infant, still in the pram, into the waters.¹⁰⁵ The number of dead remains undetermined; Sudeten Germans consistently have spoken of several thousand, while recent scholarship has tended to estimate between 100-150 deaths.¹⁰⁶

monthly in London alleged that “communist provocateurs accompanied by people in Russian uniforms” arrived in Aussig prior to the “executions.” Cited in Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:285. These allegations remain without evidence, as does the improbable story of “Werewolves.” Nevertheless, these rumors persisted on both sides into the postwar era and beyond.

¹⁰¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 106.

¹⁰² BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 139 and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:285.

¹⁰³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 127-128.

¹⁰⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 10 and 18.

¹⁰⁵ A worker described the scene: “We could not believe our eyes when we saw how Germans who wanted to cross the bridge were tossed over the railing into the Elbe and shot full of holes from a machine gun...until their bodies sank in the waters. Germans who had come as far as the bridge and who refused to go further were driven by soldiers and partisans with revolvers and pistols at the ready onto the bridge, where the insane tartars received them with howls and threw them into the Elbe as well. These monsters did not even desist with mothers and infants in prams, they suffered the same death!” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 139. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:285; Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 114. Survivors of the massacre in their postwar reports spoke of a range between 600-800 killed. See BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 10, 29, and 106. Wenzel Jaksch assumed a total of 4,000, based on a report filed with the British government by an Englishwoman married to a Sudeten. BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 127-8. The “official” position of Jaksch in his 1947 documentation prepared for the UN and Western governments split the difference at 2,000, though there is no indication on what information this estimate is based. Jaksch, *Petition*, 51.

Elsewhere in Czechoslovakia, similar pogrom-like incidents occurred. In Landskron (Lanškroun), the head of the National Revolutionary Committee, Josef Hrabáček, oversaw a “people’s tribunal” comprised of prominent Czech locals. Holding court in front of the town hall, they tried more than two dozen local Germans and administered death sentences through shooting or hanging, or “lighter” verdicts of beating or dunking in the town fire pool, which also often resulted in death.¹⁰⁷ While awaiting their sentencing, victims endured beatings and humiliations—including licking excrement from Hitler portraits—from partisans and locals, who were allowed to select the next “defendant.” Several were driven to suicide.¹⁰⁸

The harrowing scenes traumatized even those like Else Z., who thought she witnessed the worst horrors during the war and flight until her trek arrived in the Protectorate:

“What now happened was the most gruesome part of our flight. We cannot pass the column [of German POWs] and must slowly drive behind it. On the sides of the roads lay broken down soldiers. They beg us to take addresses. We are being driven on and cannot help these people. We slowly hang back to increase the distance. But it is impossible. Slowly we are enveloped in the column. We see at the sides of the road shot people. Those who no longer can go on or don’t move like the armed Russians and Czechs want to are finished with a shot to the nape of the neck. We drive past them, as they are not yet entirely still. We want to scream or do something, and yet we are entirely silent and frozen. The Czech broads scream at us: ‘Here, take that along for your beloved Führer! German pigs!’ They spit at us, all while plundering the still warm bodies of our soldiers. These women behave like beasts. The boots are pulled off, letters and photos thrown into the street, they are in a frenzy of revenge. Will I forget the sight of a very young blonde man, whose hair hung in the pool of blood while his hands, like a child’s, open and closed in the death struggle? We had to cover our children with a blanket, so that they would not see it. The worst for us was seeing how one threw the executed onto a truck, which then backed up to a gravel pit and dumped them in. A Russian shot from the hip one last salvo into the pit with his machine gun. No identification tags were taken off of the

¹⁰⁷ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 96; Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 110–14.

¹⁰⁸ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Wilhelm Turnwald, *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans*. (Munich: University Press, 1953), 32–33. The sometimes exaggerated reporting found within the documentation of the Sudeten German Working Group are in this case generally corroborated elsewhere. See Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:256.

soldiers, and many will never know where their fathers, husbands, and sons disappeared to, and all of this after the war was over.”¹⁰⁹

Many of these brutalities can be attributed to the emotions and thirst for retribution that exploded into excesses at the long awaited moment of liberation. In the immediate postwar weeks, Central Europe offered undeniably grotesque scenes, yet the violence in Czechoslovakia eclipsed that in Poland. The likeliest underlying cause of this difference is that in the German East, Germans constituted the majority of the population; Poles only gradually occupied the Recovered Territories, as the Polish government referred to them. The largest source of danger before the summer of 1945 emanated from the Soviet military, which over the course of the spring gradually tamed its personnel and instilled discipline that checked wartime passions.

In Czechoslovakia, however, the turbulence of the collapse of Nazi rule unleashed itself upon a German population living in close proximity to the Czech majority. Unlike in Poland, there was no extended period of time for passions to cool before Poles in great numbers confronted German inhabitants. Given the generations of coexistence between ethnic Germans and Czechs, the reckoning was often highly personal, as neighbors suddenly turned upon neighbors.¹¹⁰ The outbursts over the spring and summer of 1945 severed bonds already that

¹⁰⁹ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 3924/3, “Letzte Kriegstage in Schweidnitz/Schlesien und erste Flucht der rot-Kreuz-Schwester Else Z., 17.1.45-22.2.45 als Tagebuch, dann bis zur Rückkehr im Mai, aus der Erinnerung,” 14 and 20.

¹¹⁰ As Heinrich Diez of Aussig testified immediately upon his arrival in Bavaria in December 1946, many Sudeten Germans were shocked and unable to understand their fate. “I have written this report just now...so that the deep emotions after so many horrors have already abated and I can judge over much of it more calmly. I have never felt hatred toward the Czech people, I after all have Czech relatives and lived for 20 years in Prague and had many Czech friends. I could never have thought possible the terrible atrocities of the Czechs such as the ones I myself experienced and witnessed with my own eyes.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 31. Another expellee, whose husband’s family was Moravian nobility, testified that the “population of our community were either bilingual...or overwhelmingly Czechs who...identified as Germans. My surprise therefore was great when starting at the end of April [1945] I heard many inhabitants of the town whispering only in Czech.” Her shock as greater still when after the Prague Revolt the “Czech inhabitants donned...the Czech tricolor and national badges” and began confiscating German property. BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 54. Anti-fascists were equally dismayed when Czech comrades abandoned them. As a June 1945 letter, smuggled out of a labor camp, to Sudeten Social Democrats in London formulated it:

deteriorated under Nazi occupation, and utterly stunned many Germans who lived in multiethnic communities.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, driven by a volatile combination of the “emotions at home, the collapse of institutions, the dialectic of violence at the local level, and the presence of an increasing number of German civilians, SS, retreating Wehrmacht troops, partisans, Czechoslovak troops, and Red Army liberators,” Czechoslovakia erupted in violence.¹¹² This horror did not abate but continued into the summer, as now it was driven by a deliberate process that would ultimately culminate in the destruction of German communities Central Europe.

“The German Question in the Republic Must Be Liquidated”: “Wild Expulsions” in Czechoslovakia

The violence in Czechoslovakia after German capitulation morphed from largely spontaneous acts of vengeance into a directed process that reached its deadliest peak in the summer of 1945. The ostensible participation of the public suggests that these wanton excesses were expressions of the people’s rage, a “paranoid, hysterical fantasy of vengeance” that continues to color memories to this day.¹¹³ Czech authorities likewise happily endorsed the

“We trusted in the words of Churchill and Dr. Beneš on the London radio, illegally worked with Czechs and risked our heads hundreds of times and believed that we would be treated as loyal Czech citizens of the German nation.” Instead, their allies now not only let them “vegetate in dungeons and camps, but also torture in the most barbaric manner.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 123.

¹¹¹ The April 30, 1945 diary entry of Annemarie Hedinger of Brünn, despite considerable obfuscation, dwelled on this issue: “There is agreement within the Czech camp that one must humiliate us and lastly get rid of us. For centuries we lived next to one another, peacefully, even if also critically. The Germans were the carriers of culture and developed the economy and industry and managed it well. Czechs who behaved positively during the development and management received leading positions; their culture [*Volkstum*] was never debated, in fact many of the cultural assets has mixed, blurred, and is today hardly attributable to one group. Even during the years of the Protectorate hatred and arrogance never arose among the Sudeten Germans. That the Germans from the Reich, who never knew the fate of the borderland, could not empathize in this situation and brought more disturbance than good qualities—is this our fault?” Cited in Kempowski, *Das Echolot - Abgesang '45*, 233.

¹¹² Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 229.

¹¹³ Micha Brumlik, *Wer Sturm sät die Vertreibung der Deutschen* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2005), 74. See also Guido Knopp, *Die große Flucht: das Schicksal der Vertriebenen* (München: Ullstein, 2001), 397.

outburst of retribution as emanating from the heart of the masses, though they systematically stoked a climate of extreme hatred and consciously drove the process.

Officials initiated a vociferous anti-German propaganda campaign that emphasized the humiliations and suffering endured under Nazi occupation, and encouraged the population to settle accounts and drive the enemy from the country.¹¹⁴ *Novo Slovo* assured that “[t]he German possesses no soul, and the words that he understands best are—according to Jan Masaryk—the salvos of a machine gun.”¹¹⁵ A brochure—distributed by Beneš’s Czech National Social Party and edited by Prokop Drtina, the future Justice Minister—reminded Czechs that “the devil speaks German” and that “there are no good Germans, there are only bad and worse ones.”¹¹⁶ In May 1945, Drtina unmistakably called on Czechs to “clean out the republic as a whole and completely of Germans,” adding that all had a role to play in the “cleansing of the homeland.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:71–73. The Czech press—regardless of political affiliation—consistently invoked German war crimes, warned of and sensationalized German partisan *Werwolf* activity, and emphasized the inhumanity of the German ethnic group. Directly and indirectly, authors called on Czechs to act accordingly and seek revenge. For instance, the illustrated *Život* concluded a photo series documenting supposed *Werwolf* atrocities: “Not one German on Czech territory! Not one German in Prague! And even if he hides under whatever kind of fig leaf of mixed marriage or loyalty. The people will follow its government...resolutely accepting (all) consequences, and expects from it forceful deeds.” Schieder, 1:73. Throughout June, *Pravo Lidu* ran several articles on Lidice with headlines such as “The entire German people are responsible for Lidice.” Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 115.

¹¹⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:71.

¹¹⁶ Schieder, 1:71. The brochure elevated mistreatment of Germans to a question of honor: “That father who does not raise his children to hate the German culture of lies and inhumanity is not only a bad supporter of the fatherland, but also a terrible father....How can could one raise a child to love such German fellow human beings?” Moreover, mistreatment of Germans was framed as justice: “The entire German people are responsible for Hitler, Himmler, Henlein, and Frank, and the entire people must bear the punishment for the committed crimes. Each of us would have to see it as inhuman, inhumane if the Germans escape their total punishment.”

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Derek Sayer, *The Coasts of Bohemia: A Czech History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 240.

Even members of the clergy spoke of a historic moment to “settle accounts with the Germans, who are evil and to whom the commandment to love they neighbor therefore does not apply.”¹¹⁸

These were not the musings of isolated activists. Key politicians and public figures of the postwar state indulged in similar rhetoric. On May 11, 1945 Klement Gottwald called for the confiscation of properties of “active Nazis” and the revocation of citizenship of Germans and Hungarians who “heavily transgressed against our Republic.”¹¹⁹ Two days later a communist party declaration did not even differentiate between Germans and Nazis, arguing the need to “cleanse the fatherland of the agents of treachery without equal in the history of our people!”¹²⁰ President Beneš made similar appeals as he traveled the country and gave numerous public speeches in which he explicitly stated that “the German question in the Republic must be liquidated” and beseeched the entire Czech people to contribute to this goal.¹²¹ Local violence unsurprising spiked in locales directly following Beneš’s exhortations.

The rhetoric reveals an intention behind the brutal measures, namely—in the words of Beneš—to “de-Germanize everywhere and in all parts of the Republic.”¹²² Czech authorities were not merely settling scores with their erstwhile oppressors or fulfilling wartime aims of eliminating reviled fifth-columnists, however. By creating conditions that made life in Czechoslovakia impossible for the beleaguered minority, they created arguments for the

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Sayer, 239–40.

¹¹⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:70.

¹²⁰ Cited in Fritz Peter Habel, ed., *Dokumente zur Sudetenfrage. Veröffentlichung des Sudetendeutschen Archivs* (München: Langen Müller, 1984), 287.

¹²¹ Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 237 and 239. As Bryant points out, local violence against Germans sharply increased in a number of locales directly following the Czech President’s public exhortations.

¹²² Cited in Bryant, 239.

necessity of expulsion. The inferno raging in Czechoslovakia made Beneš's February 1945 demands of the British government to back deportation, lest he "lose control over his countrymen who, after terrible suffering, will take the law into their own hands," appear prescient.¹²³ Foreign Minister Hubert Ripka also demanded a formal resolution to regulate an ostensibly uncontrollable state of affairs, casting the Aussig massacre as evidence for continued German terrorism that necessitated mass expulsion.¹²⁴

Though a veritable "sabotage panic" gripped Czechoslovakia, they based themselves on "sweeping statements, half-truths and sometimes outright inventions" that in any case made for convenient justifications for anti-German policies.¹²⁵ Moreover, despite initially appearing spontaneous, the violence that gripped the country could best be described as managed chaos. This becomes apparent in the multitude of executions, particularly the massacres and pogroms over the summer, which authorities directed. Typically, as in Aussig in July 1945, military, militia, and non-local elements stood at the head irate mobs.¹²⁶ A Czechoslovakian investigation

¹²³ Brandes, *Der Weg zur Vertreibung, 1938-1945*, 308. Indeed, the American ambassador in Prague warned that a delay on the part of the Allies in resolving the expulsion issue would weaken the authority of Beneš and strengthen more radical forces. Henke, "Der Weg Nach Potsdam," 79.

¹²⁴ In an August 20, 1945 radio address, Ripka declared the Big Three "should understand the feelings of our people who are being consistently attacked by *Werwolf* organizations, and whose property is still being destroyed. E witness large-scale sabotage as was recently the case at Ústí nad Labem. Many of our people still do not feel safe until they know that the Germans will go away." Cited in Louise W. Holborn, *War and Peace Aims of the United Nations. From Casablanca to Tokio Bay: January 1, 1943-September 1, 1945*, vol. 2, 1948, 1048.

¹²⁵ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*; Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 127. Staněk argues that the communist-dominated Ministry of Information had an interest in manufacturing tales of German partisans undermining the state. Staněk, 181. In either case, in the summer of 1945 Czech authorities generated evidence that painted the remaining Germans as a threat to national security and strengthened calls for their universal expulsion, and the press daily expounded on the theme of how the "entire border is now a combat zone, where the hidden enemy launches attacks against the Czech people." Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 115. The British press also ran reports of German sabotage in early August, reinforcing notions of "fifth columnists." Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 177-78.

¹²⁶ A 1945 report of an expellee chronicling the various excesses in and around Aussig (Ústí nad Labem) concluded that most of the actions were carried out by "youths predominantly from Prague, so-called partisans, who possess no knowledge of the people and relationships here." BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 128.

found that militia systematically tortured and murdered roughly 300 Germans in Brünn's (Brno) Kaunitz College in May and June.¹²⁷ On June 18, Czech troops removed 265 refugees, including 120 women and 74 children, from a train near Prerau (Přerov), forced them to dig a mass grave next to the station, and then murdered them with shots to the nape of the neck.¹²⁸ Czech soldiers and police also orchestrated the largest postwar massacre between June 5th and 6th: In groups of 250 at a time, including women and children, elements associated with the regime executed at least 763 local Germans on a pheasant farm near Postelberg (Postoloptry).¹²⁹ These mass murders were not “spontaneous” outpourings of public rage, but orchestrated military initiatives.

By August 1945, an estimated 1.6 million partisans, revolutionary guards, liberated concentration camp inmates, and settlers roamed the Sudetenland carrying out targeted violence, exacting revenge, or seeking their fortunes.¹³⁰ A flurry of decrees sanctioned their actions. A June 19, 1945 announcement concerning the “punishment of Nazi criminals, traitors, and their accomplices as well as the extrajudicial courts” extended *carte blanche* for those seeking vengeance and protected them from legal penalties.¹³¹ Yet another set of ordinances enabled the

¹²⁷ Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 115.

¹²⁸ Dusan Kováč, “Die Evakuierung und Vertreibung der Deutschen aus der Slowakei,” in *Nationale Frage und Vertreibung in der Tschechoslowakei und Ungarn 1938-148: Aktuelle Forschungen*, ed. Richard G. Plaschka et al. (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), 113–14.

¹²⁹ A policeman testified before a 1947 Czech parliamentary inquest that “[t]wo hundred and fifty men were taken one day, another 250 the next, and a layer of earth was thrown in between.” The victims were ordered to dig their own graves. Hans-Ulrich Stoldt, “Revenge on Ethnic Germans: Czech Town Divided over How to Commemorate 1945 Massacre,” Spiegel Online, accessed January 24, 2017, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/revenge-on-ethnic-germans-czech-town-divided-over-how-to-commemorate-1945-massacre-a-646757.html>. The total number of those killed remains unknown, though the 1947 investigation exhumed 763 bodies. Historians contend that this figure is too low, with some estimates as high as 2,000. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 96.

¹³⁰ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 81. In Aussig, a report reveals, the Czechs plundering during May were mostly from the interior of the country. BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 8.

¹³¹ The decree, which was amended on January 24, 1946 and December 18, 1946, in essence sanctioned retribution and the activities of extrajudicial courts ruling over German criminal and political crimes that occurred during the

seizure of property of all “unreliable persons,” initiating wild plundering.¹³² “[E]very Czech wanted a house or a villa,” and they moved swiftly to secure them before others could lay claim.¹³³ When a German woman demanded to see documentation that stated she had to surrender her home, the Czech who claimed the property pointed to his rifle as sufficient authorization.¹³⁴ An August 1945 report smuggled out of the country succinctly described the situation for Sudeten Social Democratic leaders in London: “The Germans without any distinction are robbed of their goods, including all foodstuffs. A Czech arbitrarily comes, picks out the house of a German in the town, and is now the new trustee. In reality he is not only immediate owner, but also master of life and death of the German inhabitants.”¹³⁵

With the blessing of authorities, Czechs could force Germans to work for no, sometimes on their own property. Moreover, a series of local ordinances deprived Germans of radios, bicycles, typewriters, barred them from public transportation, and forced them to wear armbands identifying themselves as *Němci*, or Germans.¹³⁶ “At inns, theaters, [and] shops one can read: ‘Germans are strictly prohibited from entry.’ It reminds one of the Nazi time: ‘Jews undesired

“time of heightened danger for the Republic,” dated between May 21, 1938 and December 31, 1946. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:73–76.

¹³² A May 19th decree from Beneš placed factories and enterprises owned by “state-unreliable persons” (i.e. German and Magyar) under national administration. A little more than month later a second decree provided for the “confiscation and expedited allotment of agricultural property of Germans and Hungarians, as well as traitors and enemies of the Czech and Slovak nation.” These and other similar ordinances did not necessarily create law, but rather opened the door for excesses against enemies of the state during the transitional period, with no clear delineation between military and civil authorities. Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 80.

¹³³ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 106. Often this even went against the wishes of the Czech National Committees, who sought an orderly transfer of property.

¹³⁴ Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 125.

¹³⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 124.

¹³⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 124-5.

[*Juden unerwünscht*].”¹³⁷ In several locales such as Brünn (Brno), relatives were ordered to remove all gravestones with German inscriptions. Quoting an uncited English paper, a German noted that the vindictive measure blatantly attempted to “change the character” of the city and support the fantasy that “Brünn is a purely Czech town.”¹³⁸

Robbed of their rights, Czech police and militia next drove many Sudeten Germans into makeshift detention centers erected in schools, movie theaters, barracks, and stadiums.¹³⁹ They repurposed former Nazi concentration camps as well: In the spring of 1945, some 90,000 Germans found themselves imprisoned in Theresienstadt.¹⁴⁰ Not even children were spared: “On a Wednesday evening it was said ‘all men over the age of ten into the camp.’ One can even see small undernourished lads with a small package under their arms who cannot be older than six years old. One saw the lame and the sick being led on handcarts and wheelbarrows.”¹⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, removing previous owners from their properties streamlined the transfer of possessions into Czech hands: “While the people are in the camps their houses are plundered,

¹³⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 127. These were not isolated reports. “During the course of the next several weeks [of May and June] the at first tentative, then later flood of Czechs into the area immediately erected internment camps for Germans...constant arrests, at first of only male inhabitants, homes with the entire inventory confiscated [...]. All Germans, male and female, are obliged to wear white armbands with an ‘N’ (Němci=German) and greet uniformed Czechs. They are prohibited to use any vehicles (including horse-drawn wagons and bicycles). The bicycles had to be turned in. [...] Moreover Germans are prohibited from going out onto the streets after 9, later even 8 p.m. or to linger in public places.” Cited in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 80–81.

¹³⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 128. The English paper also reported that only with special dispensation could Germans “who are undisputed Czech” change inscriptions to Czech. Certified anti-fascists were also forced to dismantle monuments. “It should be borne in mind that the heirs of the many people buried in Brünn live everywhere in the world, in England for example, and [have] not the physical possibility to cope with the perverse demands of their home-town, even if the news will reach them, which is not very probable.”

¹³⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the camps, see Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 130–57; Tomáš Staněk, *Internierung und Zwangsarbeit: das Lagersystem in den böhmischen Ländern 1945-1948* (München: Oldenbourg, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:60; Staněk, *Internierung und Zwangsarbeit*.

¹⁴¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 125.

clothes, laundry, dishes, and furniture are carried off on carts and cars, the fruits and vegetables in the gardens, the grain in the fields is harvested and taken to the Czech towns, no one can identify the culprits.”¹⁴² Occasionally entire towns were forcibly marched to these facilities.¹⁴³

From the very outset, guards subjected prisoners to terror and brutal mistreatment. In Pilsen, Czech factory workers took their German colleagues into “protective custody” and drove them to the district prison, where a crowd greeted them with “curses, slaps, and other abuses.”¹⁴⁴ Appointing former prisoners of the Nazi regime as guards was common practice.¹⁴⁵ In any case, the overseers purposefully turned Nazi methods of torture and humiliation on their German victims.¹⁴⁶ Numerous reports dwell on insults and insolence endured.¹⁴⁷ Women, who constituted the largest population in the camps, suffered especially terribly. They were routinely decried as “pigs” and “Nazi whores,” and systematically sexually assaulted.¹⁴⁸ Women and girls stripped

¹⁴² BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 125.

¹⁴³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 124. See also Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 80.

¹⁴⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/311, 41. Numerous reports chronicle similar rituals. Prisoners in the internment camp Friedek-Místek (Frýdek-Místek) were “greeted with blows and insults.” Cited in Alois Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen. Sechs Erlebnisberichte,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1995), 136. In Maltheuern (Záluží), prisoners were stripped to search for Waffen-SS tattoos. “When one among us... was discovered, a number of Czechs fell upon him... and worked over the unfortunate with cat o’ nine tails until he gave no sign of life. One of these blonde young lads defended himself with his fists, after which they... spread his legs and in the most bestial way smashed his genitals. The terrible spectacle of the beating of 10 or 12 men lasted until 1400 hours. At 1500 hours followed a march... during which we had to maintain our gaze upon the mound of bloody, disfigured bodies of the beaten. Whoever refused was forced to with rifle butts.” Cited in Harasko, 141.

¹⁴⁵ Jaksch, *Petition*, 69. Wenzel Jaksch’s 1947 report to the UN concluded: “Some of the assistant commanders were former concentration camp inmates who now practiced what they had learned from the Nazis, others were just ordinary criminals, indeed Germans among them who tried to win favor with their new masters by acts of cruelty.”

¹⁴⁶ A Moravian noblewoman, whose castle’s basement had been turned into interrogation cells, asked why the victims were whipped and beaten, to which the Czech militia responded that “the SS had these same methods.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 56.

¹⁴⁷ For a typical example, see BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 26ff. Czech civilians were periodically granted entry into the camps in order to participate in the torture and humiliation of the prisoners, or simply shout insults at them.

¹⁴⁸ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 118–19.

naked and whipped before audiences of jeering soldiers and officers.¹⁴⁹ Female prisoners faced forced prostitution, as camp commanders opened their doors to militia and Soviet soldiers seeking sexual gratification.¹⁵⁰ Suicides, unsurprisingly, were rampant.

But by far, the furiousness of the guards pervades nearly every report.¹⁵¹ Regardless of sex, prisoners endured violent interrogations, beatings—often carried out by prisoners on each other—and sadistic “sport” intended to compound the torment.¹⁵² In Wekelsdorf (Teplice nad Metují) near Braunau (Broumov), Germans were “mistreated in the most horrific manner” in the local prison by drunk revolutionary guardsmen; “pools of blood and shreds of skin” could be seen in the interrogation cells, and the “shrieks of pain of the tortured” kept residents near the building awake at night.¹⁵³ Guards carried out arbitrary executions as well: A survivor recalled how the prisoners in Prague’s notorious Pankrač prison were suddenly awoken and “startled by shots, screams in the hallways, slamming of doors, salvos, and renewed screams.”¹⁵⁴ In

¹⁴⁹ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 146.

¹⁵⁰ Jaksch, *Petition*, 63 and 71; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 119.

¹⁵¹ Not all guards, Sudeten Germans acknowledged, were cut of the same wood. “Some of the Czech gendarmes behaved correctly, others demanded large bribes, others took part in the orgies.” Jaksch, *Petition*, 56. For an eyewitness account with a differentiated assessment of both guards and fellow prisoners, see Margarete Schell, *Ein Tagebuch aus Prag, 1945-46* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 1957).

¹⁵² Prisoners were, as one eye witness account describes, required to participate in daily “exercise” in the yard of the Aussig prison, consisting of throwing oneself to the ground, jumping, and running, accompanied by blows and insults from the guards. BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 9. Other prisoners had to “jump like frogs” for hours and forced to sing the German national anthem. BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 27. Elfriede Steiner’s 1947 testimony corroborates similar experiences: “Often at night we were driven...to the camp yard, then dancing, singing, slapping one another, crawling around on all fours, etc.” Cited in Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 136.

¹⁵³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/245, 1. Similar statements are found in a report on the events in Aussig (Ústí nad Labem), where “often the screams of the tortured” could be heard outside the prison building. A 1947 report from an expellee from Pilsen claims that former Czech prisoners stripped Germans naked and beat them for days, including children and the elderly. The most horrific treatment was reserved for the young: The breasts of teenage girls were burned, while infants were taken by their feet and beaten to death against the wall in front of their mothers. BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 9.

¹⁵⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:133.

Maltheuern (Záluží), the commandant executed a man and his two sons to mark the anniversary of the Lidice massacre.¹⁵⁵ Between beatings and murder, guards enriched themselves from plundered possessions and even gold fillings of their victims.¹⁵⁶

The facilities largely developed into holding pens from where prisoners were distributed to other labor camps or from where local Czechs could “acquire” workers directly. The grueling work in mines, industry, and farms combined with mistreatment, disease, and inadequate nourishment led to a high death rate within the camps.¹⁵⁷ Daily rations during the immediate postwar period consisted of a watery soup and as little as 180 grams (6.3 ounces) of bread, though prisoners could go days without food.¹⁵⁸ In the Hagibor camp, a British observer estimated the daily ration at 750 calories, “which is below the Belsen [concentration camp] level.”¹⁵⁹ Expectedly, children and infants rarely survived.¹⁶⁰ “Veterans” of such conditions

¹⁵⁵ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 143.

¹⁵⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/311, 41.

¹⁵⁷ The bleak secret report smuggled to London summarized the problem succinctly: “The people have no time to prepare clothes...or groceries for a life in camps. Then they are led in droves to some empty factory building, school, or barracks, need to sleep without nourishment on bare floors, and no one can say a peep because immediately there are blows with rubber hoses and rifle butts. . . . All the while, any sanitary measures are prohibited.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 124.

¹⁵⁸ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 136. In Prague’s Strahov Stadium, where some 10,000 people had been interned, rations consisted of soup and 100 grams of days in 36 hour intervals until after some time the Czechs increased provisions. Despite this, one witness estimated that 12-20 people died per day from malnourishment. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:162. Rations outside of the camps were not much higher, and Sudeten Germans alleged that these were explicitly modelled on the “Jewish rations” Nazis imposed in the concentration camps. Jaksch, *Petition*, 45 and 53.

¹⁵⁹ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 152.

¹⁶⁰ One expellee estimated that in a camp near Saaz (Žatec) 15-20 children died daily. Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 146. Another witness reported that in Saaz 40 infants died within the first two days of internment, and that the rates increased over the next few weeks. “Babies died every day, up to 15 a day. From June 25 to 30 not less than 76 children lost their lives. The mothers themselves had to carry or car the little corpses to the cemetery.” Cited in Jaksch, *Petition*, 39. According to a Wehrmacht surgeon interned in the Strahov Stadium in Prague, most of the children did not leave the camp alive. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:162.

delivered perhaps the most damning verdict: “There were also Germans who came here from a concentration camp, who said that it was better there than in the Czech camp.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, for members of the organized working class who opposed fascism, or even German Jews, the wave of retaliation that now swept over them was particularly bitter.¹⁶²

Not all Czechs abandoned their German neighbors, however. The unbridled ferocity appalled many. An anonymous Czech from Komotau (Chomutov) complained to authorities that militia tortured to death over a dozen Germans at the city square, declaring that “[e]ven the brutal Germans did not get rid of their enemies in such a manner, instead concealing their sadism behind the gates of concentration camps.”¹⁶³ Many testimonies recall how Czechs attempted to help by, for instance, hiding friends and neighbors from furious masses scouring cities and towns throughout Czechoslovakia.¹⁶⁴ Local officials attempted to arrest and try Czech vigilantes, though few were convicted.¹⁶⁵ Czechs even disguised themselves with white armbands to approach camps and distribute food secretly.¹⁶⁶ Such acts of kindness were widespread enough to

¹⁶¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 125. Other victims of the Third Reich concurred: “Sudeten socialists who knew the Nazi camps of Buchenwald and Belsen from their own experience stated that conditions...were only comparable to those in the aforementioned [sic] Nazi camps.” Jaksch, *Petition*, 52.

¹⁶² As one socialist bitterly noted: “Although we were persecuted by Hitler and in every way disadvantaged, it is nothing in comparison to the circumstances in which we live now. The entire Sudetenland is a single giant concentration camp, which can easily compare to the Nazi camps.” Despite collaborating with Czechs and his many connections, this activist nevertheless fell victim to “Czech national-fascism...now celebrating orgies.” He pleaded with allies in London to intervene, adding that “[w]e rightly fought against the barbarity of the Nazi concentration camps and sharply condemned these methods. [The camps] should however not justify the Czechs to make the same mistake, indeed maybe even exceed it many times over.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 123ff.

¹⁶³ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 96–97.

¹⁶⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:61–62. See also Henke, “Der Weg Nach Potsdam,” 78.

¹⁶⁵ Frommer, *National Cleansing*, 57–60. In any case, the convictions would have been overturned. On the first anniversary of the war’s end, Czech law absolved all actions between the time of the Munich Agreement and the end of October 1945 that “contributed to the fight for recovery of liberation of Czechs and Slovaks or constituted a just retaliation for the deeds of the occupiers or their accomplices.” Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 84.

¹⁶⁶ Jaksch, *Petition*, 58.

warrant a Ministry of the Interior decree making it a criminal offense to hide or provide food or clothing to Germans, and the press regularly denounced the “increasing number of cases” of “unpatriotic” Czechs providing aid.¹⁶⁷ The majority of Czechs likely fell in between utter hatred and sympathy, and remained silent for fear of being decried as a collaborator, as so many thousands of real and suspected “traitors” were following liberation.¹⁶⁸

Foreign observers equally expressed horror over the “wild expulsions.” Harold Perkins, a British intelligence officer, encountered a “howling mob” of about 100 Czechs driving two women through the streets of Prague who were “just one mass of blood from head to foot” before them. He “itched to join in and tell that crowd exactly what [he] thought of them,” but realized that it would potentially cause an international incident.¹⁶⁹ Writing her sister, Marjorie Quinn explained how the Czechs of Trautenau (Trutnov) “developed plundering and torturing to a fine art,” adding that English POWs “made themselves very unpopular among the Czechs by protecting German women and children as far as they could; they too are horrified at what is happening here.”¹⁷⁰ The formerly pro-Czechoslovak *Manchester Guardian* correspondent F.A. Voigt’s condemnations were even more forceful: The Czechs established “a racial doctrine akin

¹⁶⁷ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 100.

¹⁶⁸ Not all opposition to expulsion was grounded in humanitarian ideals, either. Businesses especially proved resistant to deportation, which would deprive them of cheap and skilled labor, to the point that military officials complained of obstruction. In Tetschen (Děčín) police occupied the railway station to prevent the deportation of Germans across the border. Douglas, 100–103. On Czechs trying to hold on to German laborers, see also Radomír Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans; a Study of Czech-German Relations, 1933-1962*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1964), 129ff.

¹⁶⁹ Cited in Schwartz, “Tage der Vergeltung,” 6.

¹⁷⁰ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 96.

to Hitler's...and methods that are hardly distinguishable from those of Fascism. They have, in fact, become Slav National Socialists."¹⁷¹

Members of the Red Army, too, were shocked by the ferocity. Some Germans in Soviet-occupied Czechoslovakia initially anticipated the "long wished-for arrival" of the Czech military that would end the pillaging, murder, and rape. "Now there would be order, or so we all hoped. But what disappointment, they brought true hell. Often the Russians had to be begged for help against the Czechs, which they did, as long as it wasn't a matter of hunting down women."¹⁷² The ferocity sometimes shocked Soviet soldiers, who intervened to protect German civilians.¹⁷³ Disgusted Red Army troopers reportedly tore off the armbands marking Germans for maltreatment and were occasionally offended by the swastikas painted on the backs of civilians.¹⁷⁴

A confidential report to the Central Committee in Moscow noted that many Germans were terrified of Soviet occupation forces withdrawing: "'If the Red Army leaves, we are finished!' We now see the manifestations of hatred for the Germans. [The Czechs] don't kill them, but torment them like livestock. The Czechs look at them like cattle."¹⁷⁵ Often considered more humane in comparison to Czechs in the testimonies, Soviet forces nevertheless "provided

¹⁷¹ F.A. Voigt, "Orderly and Humane," *Nineteenth Century and After*, November 1945.

¹⁷² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:278.

¹⁷³ In Jägerndorf (Krnov), for instance, Soviet soldiers took food off of Czechs to feed German camp inmates. In Troppau (Opava), where Germans were prohibited from using the sidewalks, a Czech shoved a woman into the street and began beating her. A Red Army soldier on the scene intervened, landing several punches and destroying the Czech's bicycle. Moreover, when Czechs attempted to address the Soviet soldiers as "comrade," the response was often something in the vein of: "You are not a comrade, you did not fight, but Germans are good comrades." Schieder, 2:458.

¹⁷⁴ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 106; Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 117.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 118.

only arbitrary and sometimes chaotic oversight” and often “worked in tandem with Czechoslovak troops, locally appointed police, or Communist partisans.”¹⁷⁶

Unease—whether domestic or foreign—did little to dissuade Czech leaders in London and their Moscow-backed rivals from furiously attempting to create facts on the ground that would then merely necessitate rubber-stamping from the Allies at the forthcoming Potsdam Conference. In the hopes that an already initiated mass movement would secure approval of a process already irreversibly underway, Czech authorities moved to deport as many Germans to Austria and Germany and Magyars to Hungary as possible in the summer months.¹⁷⁷ A Czech administrator who later emigrated Great Britain described the process in Aussig:

“The local national committees were obligated to inform persons of German nationality, members of the Nazi party, of deportation. They worked on the registries late into the night. In the early morning hours military units comprised of revolutionary guard and so-called partisans arrived in the affected communities. [...] The action began. One went into the homes, and in a half hour every family had to be at the meeting place of the community. Jewelry was confiscated, and just be sure the genitals of girls were searched to see whether there weren’t more valuables hidden. After this the ‘transports’ were stuffed into the street car toward Tellnitz [Telnice], and from there they had to go on foot over

¹⁷⁶ Glassheim, “The Mechanics of Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia, 1945-1947,” 203–4. It was not unheard of that Czechs often led Red Army soldiers to Sudeten homes, where they would pillage and rape the female inhabitants. Numerous accounts reveal that the Czechs were the initiators of Soviet excesses, who often reacted to denunciations of Germans motivated out of political or purely private reasons. The Schieder Commission rather aptly summed up the Soviet military in Czechoslovakia: “As unpredictable as Red Army soldiers were in their actions and as unforgotten as the experiences during the Soviet invasion were, already in the first months of the consolidation of the Czechoslovakia Republic and the start of the system of persecution against Sudeten Germans it is clear that often Russian soldiers protected and helped the persecuted. The more pronounced the Czechs appeared as exponents of the politics of revenge against Sudeten Germans, the more positive the attitude of Soviet soldiers is judged and described in the reports. The reports on experiences during the time of the invasion appear milder when compared to the ensuing measures in the ČSR against the Sudeten German population, which culminated in the expulsion, and reflect the disappointed hopes that the Sudeten Germans had placed in the Czechs during the time of their plight at the hands of Soviet troops.” Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 1:32.

¹⁷⁷ As an August 1945 report details, Czech radio reported that the thousands of Germans arriving in the Soviet Zone had left Czechoslovakia “voluntarily.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 125.

the Erz Mountains into Germany. Even 78-81 year-olds were not spared this road to Calvary [*Kalvarienweg*].”¹⁷⁸

The reports of the expellees, sometimes compiled immediately upon their arrival in Germany, more or less corroborate this description. In Langenbruck (Dlouhý Most) authorities informed inhabitants at 2 a.m. on June 17, 1945 of their impending departure:

“Ca. 60% of the population received these terrible news. Permitted were 30 kg of luggage, but neither money nor jewelry. Shouts of terror erupted from the people, since none of the affected had the foggiest notion where they were being shipped. Scores preferred to leave this life through suicide, as is the case with a family in our neighborhood where the husband killed children aged 3 and 4, then his wife, through shooting. Also a neighbor, an 80 year old woman who also was ordered to leave her home that same night preferred to voluntarily depart life by opening her arteries. I still see this woman before me, how she, her whole body shaking, just kept shaking her head, she could not believe it.”¹⁷⁹

Next, inhabitants of Leitmeritz (Litoměřice) described, authorities typically corralled expellees in abandoned barracks or similar structures. “Here we were completely robbed of the last remaining things we had, whoever possessed contraband was beaten, and our money was almost entirely taken. There we spent two nights lying on planks in bug-ridden rooms without food. At night there was shooting, doors were kicked in, girls and women were raped and men beaten bloody.”¹⁸⁰ Partisans next crammed victims into open train cars bound for Teplitz (Teplice), where after four days of waiting on the tracks, they drove everyone on a “death march” at gunpoint across the border to Germany.¹⁸¹ Karl Platz of Saaz (Žatec) reported that

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 81–82.

¹⁷⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:389. Suicides spiked wildly during the “wild expulsions,” and were sometimes well-planned. Families would dress in their finest clothes and collectively commit suicide surrounded by flowers or mementos. See Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 117.

¹⁸⁰ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 139.

¹⁸¹ “The unimaginably strenuous march from Teplitz to Geising was called a death march by us and unfolded under the most dramatic circumstances that are indescribable. Whoever could not go on and remained behind was chased onward with whip and pistol and the exhausted to death people had to dump their last possessions just to get on with their bare lives. Nevertheless many dead or enfeebled remained lying on the way, among them we saw an old dying

“whoever could not endure the marathon and broke down was shot and thrown into the ditch.”¹⁸²

A woman from the town of Freiwaldau (Jeseník), after a weeklong journey on foot and in open train lorries with hardly any food, reported how guards harangued her column with whips and warning shots. At the German tollgate, the militia subjected everyone to “one last search in the most ignoble manner, and then with blows we were driven over the border.” Soviet guards checked papers, but then left the refugees to their own devices.¹⁸³

Posts at the border did not always allow the bedraggled columns into Germany, as was often the case particularly with the American Army. In those instances, the guards returned the expellees to their starting points by the same methods, forced the column onwards until amenable border guards could be found, or simply dumped the victims into no-man’s land, where exposure, hunger, and roaming bandits posed great danger.¹⁸⁴ A number of Czech troops simply shot their charges if American or Soviet soldiers refused entry.¹⁸⁵ The death rate among children was terribly high, and infants rarely survived as mothers all too often could no longer produce breast milk.¹⁸⁶ The ordeal did not end once arriving in Germany, where community

woman collapse, her daughter, who in her despair wanted to kneel beside her, was driven with the whip from her dying mother and driven onward.” Harasko, 140.

¹⁸² Harasko, 145.

¹⁸³ Harasko, 138–39.

¹⁸⁴ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 117. The issue of starving refugees grew to such large proportions that it unsettled the Czech population in the borderland region, who demanded greater security to combat wandering Germans, some of whom burglarized homes and stole food. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 122.

¹⁸⁵ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 120. The exhumation of some of these victims near Buky in 1947 revealed ghastly sights, as a Czech witness reported: “the sight of a baby in swaddling clothes was terrible, its face crushed beyond recognition, obviously by the butt of a rifle.”

¹⁸⁶ Douglas, 101.

governments and occupation officials were unprepared for the waves of refugees, and shuffled them from one place to the next for weeks.¹⁸⁷

The most notorious example of such marches remains the *Todesmarsch* (death march) of Brünn, which quickly became a fixture in Sudeten German collective memory.¹⁸⁸ While expellees often depicted it as a template for the “wild expulsions,” there were some fundamental differences. Allied bombing left the industrial city heavily destroyed, and an acute housing shortage prompted demands for the eviction of Germans from their homes. Communist organizations threatened to strike or take the issue into their own hands.¹⁸⁹ The pressure on officials grew after an incendiary speech by Beneš in Brünn.¹⁹⁰ On May 30, with the consent of the Ministry of Interior, city officials selected 20,000 Germans and marched them toward the Austrian border under guard of the military, partisans, and even Czech workers; a further eight thousand were added to the column from villages along the route.

Margarete Weber and her three children received fifteen minutes notice, and before leaving the Brünn needed to surrender all valuables.¹⁹¹ The arduous journey on foot across much of the country, combined with limited supplies and mistreatment, cost many lives.¹⁹² Weber witnessed “mothers who had to bury their own little children.”¹⁹³ The misery escalated when the

¹⁸⁷ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 138–39.

¹⁸⁸ Jaksch, *Petition*, 75.

¹⁸⁹ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 98.

¹⁹⁰ Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 237.

¹⁹¹ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 137.

¹⁹² Foreign observers gave vivid depictions as well. See Rhona Churchill, ““Out in 10 minutes’ order to Germans,” *Daily Mail*, August 6, 1945.

¹⁹³ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 137.

acting Austrian government refused the refugees entry; instead of being allowed home, the victims vegetated in makeshift camps at the border, where hundreds died of disease and starvation.¹⁹⁴ Sudeten Germans often speak of more than 10,000 victims, a number that is undoubtedly exaggerated.¹⁹⁵ Eagle Glassheim calculated the death toll at around 1,700.¹⁹⁶ These figures obscure the human cost. Weber survived the ten day march, yet lost two of her three children. Less than two years afterward she confided her despair to the historical record: “Is this not a gruesome fate? Now only my bare life can be taken. Death would be a salvation.”¹⁹⁷

The combined efforts of mistreatment and deportation forced some 600-700,000 Germans from their homes before the Potsdam Conference brought a temporary halt to deportations.¹⁹⁸ Sudeten sources often speak of nearly 300,000 Sudeten German deaths during the entire expulsion process, translating into nearly ten percent of the prewar population.¹⁹⁹ These exaggerated figures are a product of the West German government and the expellee organizations’ memory politics, as will be seen.²⁰⁰ The historian Philipp Ther sets the figure at

¹⁹⁴ Staněk, *Verfolgung 1945*, 115–21.

¹⁹⁵ Jaksch, *Petition*, 75.

¹⁹⁶ Eagle Glassheim, “National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945,” *Central European History* 33, no. 04 (2000): 478. This number does not include those who lost their lives on the march itself, but rather in the camps.

¹⁹⁷ Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 137.

¹⁹⁸ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 82. Czech authorities attempted to continue the deportations, however, so that by the end of 1945—in other words before the internationally sanctioned “orderly and humane” transports began—between 800,000 and one million of the 3.2 million Germans residing in Czechoslovakia were forced into the Soviet and Western Occupation Zones. According to Red Army figures in Germany, as of December 12, 1945, 775,000 Sudeten Germans resided in the Soviet Zone alone. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 128.

¹⁹⁹ Nawratil, *Vertreibungs-Verbrechen an Deutschen*, 73.

²⁰⁰ A German-Czech historical commission estimated that 19,000-30,000 victims died as a result of murder, disease, starvation, and suicide. Stanislav Biman and Václav Maidl, *Konfliktgemeinschaft, Katastrophe, Entspannung: Skizze einer Darstellung der deutsch-tschechischen Geschichte seit dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Prag: Außenministerium der Tschechischen Republik, 1996), 69.

30,000 deaths, or a death rate of one percent of the total number of Sudeten Germans expelled, and far lower than other cases of ethnic cleansing. This should not diminish, Ther cautions, that 30,000 nevertheless represents the population of a small city, or that it includes women and children or methods of shooting or even burying alive.²⁰¹

Moreover, whatever the actual figure, the brutality of the “wild expulsions” left the victims in absolute shock and often unable to comprehend what happened, nor imagine a possible future. As one expellee bitterly noted: “Now far from our beloved home we suffer great spiritual anguish, have already lost two beloved family members who died from the mistreatment, ardors, and privations....Destitute we stand before ruin. Our goods and chattels, home and hearth, savings and heirlooms had to be left behind. We are left with no jewelry, no money, and no mementos, and even our wedding rings were taken off of our fingers...we have become absolute beggars.”²⁰²

Unable to contend with their fate, many chose suicide; Red Army officials informed NKVD chief Lavrentiy Beria on June 8, 1945 that “up to 5,000 Germans arrive in Germany from Czechoslovakia [daily], the majority...women, old folks, and children. With their futures ruined and having no hope for anything better, many of them end their lives by suicide, cutting their wrists.” On one day alone, authorities found 71 dead from suicide in one region.²⁰³ Yet a palpable relief that the worst was over with the arrival in Germany persisted as well: “At the border at Eger [Cheb] there stood nice birch trees all along the tracks, and all of a sudden the

²⁰¹ Ther, *Die dunkle Seite der Nationalstaaten*, 184.

²⁰² Quoted in Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 140.

²⁰³ Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 117. According the Naimark, Czech sources accounted for 5,558 suicides as late as 1946.

German armbands fluttered through the air and remained hanging in the branches.”²⁰⁴ While an uncertain future loomed, their immediate suffering had ended. Most of their compatriots remained in the brutal and cruel homeland awaiting their fate.

“Treat Them as They Have Treated Us”: The “Wild Expulsions” in Poland

In June 1945, a young German heading into Germany from Silesia encountered “thousands of refugees” near Görlitz going in the opposite direction. “They did not believe that we had to leave there. They could not understand that there was not going to be a return home,” the young man recalled.²⁰⁵ Similarly, four families from the Pomeranian town of Rützow (Rusowo) attempted a return home like so many hundreds of thousands before them, but after only three kilometers into what was now the Recovered Territories they met acquaintances with a dire warning: “Don’t waste your energy, there is no point, the Germans are being expelled from all communities.”²⁰⁶ By June, Germans travelling to the farms and homes they fled from months before started to meet resistance that went beyond mistreatment or chicanery. What the people seeking a return to a sense of normalcy after wartime chaos could not know was that their futures had already been decided. The “wild expulsions” had begun in Poland.

The “Lublin Committee” that followed on the heels of the Red Army sought to consolidate as much power in Poland before any sort of international agreements could prevent Stalin from shaping the postwar state to his liking. This included initiating the removal of Germans particularly in the areas of the postwar Germany-Poland border so as to strengthen

²⁰⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/240, 57.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Ursula Lange, *East Germany: What Happened to the Silesians in 1945?: A Documentation* (Lewes, Sussex, England: Book Guild, 2000), 80.

²⁰⁶ Cited in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 74.

arguments for the acceptance of the redrawn borders and expulsions at the Potsdam Conference. The May protocols of the Polish Worker's Party capture the sentiment of Polish officials: "If we do not polanize the former German territories, we will no longer have any justifications for taking what they [the Allies] don't want to give us. [...] We need to throw them [the Germans] out, since all nations are founded on national, not multi-national, principles."²⁰⁷

Already as early as mid-April Polish authorities initiated voluntary transports from Danzig to Red Army occupied territories in Germany, which many shell-shocked inhabitants eagerly took advantage of in order to escape the ruined city.²⁰⁸ Alarmed by the continued waves of returnees to the Recovered Territories, moreover, Polish troops attempted to seal crossings across the Oder River starting in May. In Frankfurt an der Oder, troops regularly opened fire on civilians approaching the western shores of the river, be they refugees heading home or fisherman.²⁰⁹ Guards intercepted Germans heading eastward and intimidated them with beatings; one woman recalled one of her tormentors exclaiming that he had "stuck it out in your concentration camps for six years, but you can't stand even one week with us!"²¹⁰ After several days, she and her compatriots were marched to the border and re-expelled into Germany.

Throughout the summer of 1945, Polish authorities also deported entire communities, mostly from Pomerania and East Brandenburg.²¹¹ Typically, in the early morning hours soldiers

²⁰⁷ Quoted in Beer, 77.

²⁰⁸ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 108. Those who volunteered were issued certificates that granted them travel on trains, and requested military and civil authorities to facilitate their travel to Germany.

²⁰⁹ Douglas, 103.

²¹⁰ Douglas, 104.

²¹¹ BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 14. The areas along the anticipated future border, that is the western Recovered Territories, were especially targeted in order to support arguments for the territorial adjustments under discussion at the upcoming Potsdam Conference.

roused towns without prior warning and after fifteen or twenty minutes began marching them at gunpoint westward, allowing only minimal luggage.²¹² Sleeping in the open or in barns, the journey could last weeks. Most did not pack enough food, and so had to scavenge in order to survive. A refugee from Schwiebus (Świebodzin) reported that “[m]any weak and sick people, old folks and children had to be left on the road dead. It was a lamentable procession of utmost misery. We had all lost much weight and many of us looked like skeletons. Heaven only knows how often we were plundered by Poles or Russians and how many times the women were assaulted again and again.”²¹³

A small number of expellees were packed onto trains, which officially were barred from entry into the German occupation zones. Here the conditions were often worse, as people were “squeezed against each other like sardines in a can,” forcing people to stand for the entire journey which could last days or weeks. Without food or water, the death toll soared, and “many, many bodies [were] left lying along the track.”²¹⁴ One woman painted a grim scene:

“After the Poles fell upon us from all sides everywhere and robbed us, we came to a transport train (c. 45 cattle cars for 4,5000 people). In my care there were 116 people. One could neither stand nor sit. We all sat on top of one another. After the Poles had once more robbed us thoroughly, the train started in motion, only after some time to stop again, somewhere out in the open or on the track of some station, constant robbing for 11 days. [...] In our wagon there were 2-3 dead daily. We then came to Frankfurt/Oder from Posen. There we suffered a new shock. On the last station before Frankfurt the polish soldiers violently removed our youngest and last daughter Gerda. All pleading or efforts were in vain. So now everything was over, all hope was lost. Then the people started dying like the flies....Of 4,500 ca. 1,500 perished.”²¹⁵

²¹² Hofmann, *Die Nachkriegszeit in Schlesien*, 192. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:690–703.

²¹³ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 109.

²¹⁴ Quoted in Douglas, 109–10.

²¹⁵ Cited in Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 124.

In total, the Polish military estimated that they deported 1.2 million people, a number that is in all likelihood an exaggeration and contains a significant number of individuals who were deported numerous times after repeated attempted returns to their communities.²¹⁶

Guiding these policies were directions from Moscow-backed Władysław Gomułka, who dispatched party officials, militia, and military units to the borderlands to create prevent repatriation and implement targeted expulsions. If they could not remove the population, however, Gomułka endorsed a policy of creating “the kinds of conditions...so that [the Germans] won’t want to remain” and opt for “voluntary expulsion.”²¹⁷ Directives from commanders encouraged soldiers to “treat them as they treated us.”²¹⁸ On June 24, 1945, General Świerczewski invoked “directives from Moscow” and explicitly cited methods employed in Czechoslovakia and their success in terrorizing the German population. Świerczewski exhorted his troops to “perform one’s tasks in such a harsh and decisive manner that the Germanic vermin do not hide in their houses but rather will flee from us of their own volition and then in their own land will thank God that they were lucky enough to save their heads.”²¹⁹

The policy of making life as difficult as possible for Germans in order to encourage them to leave the Recovered Territories, turned the western portions of the German East into a “wild

²¹⁶ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 321. Norman Naimark estimates that as many as 800,000 Germans were deported from the Recovered Territories before the Potsdam Conference. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 111. David Curp, on the other hand, provides a figure of 350,000. T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep?: The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945-1960* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 53.

²¹⁷ Quoted in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 125.

²¹⁸ Quoted in Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 320.

²¹⁹ Cited in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 215.

west.”²²⁰ Whether roving bandits seeking their fortunes or militiamen orchestrating deliberate abuse, both often resorted to deadly violence.²²¹ One postwar author found it impossible to “speak in public about the kinds of animalistic perversities” she endured, while another confided that it was difficult to talk about her experiences, simply adding that “[i]f one would imagine the worst, then it remains far behind the truth.”²²² The lawlessness even exacerbated a Polish official in Oppeln (Opole): “Terrible arbitrariness is the rule; the people have lost all feeling for right and wrong, no crime arouses any sense of surprise. The militia and in part also the security forces rape and pillage the population, so that people break out in terrible anxiety if they even see a militiaman.”²²³ In Elbing (Elbląg) and other areas, the establishment of a police force by the summer saw a period of calm set in, where particularly gruesome excesses subsided.²²⁴

More typical were humiliations and harassment, which nevertheless spelled out that a departure seemed the best choice. An April 1945 plan to force Germans to wear identifying armbands never materialized, though in many locales authorities passed such measures on their own accord.²²⁵ In some regions, local officials instituted a “compulsory salutation” requiring

²²⁰ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, Letter from Mrs. B. to Professor Lang, January 30, 1946, 2. For more on the “Wild West,” see Beata Halicka and Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh, *Polens Wilder Westen: erzwungene Migration und die kulturelle Aneignung des Oderraums 1945-1948*, 2016; Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 254–83.

²²¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:409. Between Soviet dismantling of factories and workshops and appropriating of machines and livestock, often there was little for Polish marauders to pilfer. Germans then received the brunt of their frustration. BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5.

²²² Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 119.

²²³ Cited in Naimark, 128.

²²⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5.

²²⁵ Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 129. In late November, the Polish government issued a memorandum outlawing the identification of Germans with armbands. Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 75.

Germans to deferentially greet Poles they encountered.²²⁶ Some towns barred Germans from restaurants, movie houses, and taverns; German newspapers and schools were shuttered.²²⁷ To further turn the Recovered Territories Polish and simultaneously encourage Germans to see that they had no future there, Poles removed German inscriptions and destroyed cemeteries. In Bütow (Bytom) for instance, authorities directed the German community to bury their dead in mass graves, as only Poles and Soviet soldiers were now allowed to be interred in the municipality's cemeteries, while in Stolpmünde (Ustka), deceased Germans were relegated to the beach.²²⁸

Militia and police forced Germans to labor on farms, in some cases their own, for little or no money and poor food.²²⁹ The administrator of Waldenburg (Walbrzych) outlined what life for remaining Germans meant: "We will treat the Germans like work animals. They should interest themselves in nothing. They should know only where they should work and their bunks."²³⁰

Aiding in the exploitation of labor were over 200 penal institutions, including reappropriated Nazi concentration camps such as Auschwitz, and several hundred labor camps: Here more than 100,000 Germans of both sexes and all ages worked on local farms, industries, and mines.²³¹

²²⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 8.

²²⁷ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 128–29.

²²⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 189.

²²⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/125, 19; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 89.

²³⁰ Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 128–29.

²³¹ Naimark, 129. Thomas Urban estimates that up to 200,000 Germans were incarcerated in Polish camps between 1945 and 1946. Urban, *Der Verlust*, 129. For more detailed studies of the camps, see Edmund Nowak, *Lager im Oppelner Schlesien im System der Nachkriegslager in Polen (1945-1950): Geschichte und Implikationen* (Opole: Zentrales Kriegsgefangenenmuseum · Lambinowice-Opole, 2003); Witold Stankowski, *Lager für Deutsche in Polen am Beispiel Pommerellen, Westpreußen (1945-1950): Durchsicht und Analyse der polnischen Archivalien = Obozy dla Niemców w Polsce na przykładzie Pomorza Gdańskiego (1945-1950)* (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der Dt. Vertriebenen, 2002).

As in Czechoslovakia, the camps functioned as slave labor holding pens and institutions of vengeance and terror. One camp commander, dancing on a woman beaten to a pulp, claimed that in this manner “we lay the foundation for a new Poland.”²³² At his trial for his mistreatment of German prisoners in 1959, the commandant of the notorious Lamsdorf internment camp (Łambinowice) Czesław Gęborski admitted that his goal was to “exact revenge” on Germans.²³³ Contrary to orders, Gęborski modeled the regulations on Lamsdorf on those of German camps that he himself experienced as a prisoner. The commandant of Potulitz (Potulice), Izydor Cedrowski, similarly survived Auschwitz and lost his family in the Holocaust; Jewish survivors frequently found their way to leading positions of the internment system.²³⁴ The combination of revenge, exposure, hunger, and disease claimed the lives of 30,000-60,000 victims in Poland’s postwar camps.²³⁵ Especially for Silesians, Lamsdorf evolved into a central fixture of expellee collective memory, often acting as a moral counterweight to Auschwitz-Birkenau.²³⁶

²³² Cited in Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 322.

²³³ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 130. For a first-hand account of Lamsdorf, which despite finding validation in subsequent research and Polish court cases should be read with some caution, see Landsmannschaft der Oberschlesier and Heinz Esser, *Die Hölle von Lamsdorf: Dokumentation über ein polnisches Vernichtungslager* (Bonn: Landsmannschaft d. Oberschlesier, Bundesverb., 2000).

²³⁴ Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 322.

²³⁵ Thomas Urban’s calculation of 60,000 seems high based on the figures of individual camps. Urban, *Der Verlust*, 129. Witold Stankowski estimates that between 27,000 and 60,000 perished. Witold Stankowski, *Obozy i inne miejsca odosobnienia dla niemieckiej ludności cywilnej w Polsce w latach 1945-1950* (Bydgoszcz: Wydawn. Akademii Bydgoskiej im. Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2002), 255–56. Reduced to statistics, Zygmunt Woznicka concludes that depending on the camps, between 20-50% of prisoners died. Heinz Esser, a former prisoner, estimates that of the more than 8,000 prisoners in the very brutal Lamsdorf, nearly 6,500—some 80%—perished, though Edmund Nowak advises using caution with these figures. Edmund Nowak, *Schatten von Łambinowice: Versuch einer Rekonstruktion der Geschichte des Arbeitslagers in Łambinowice in den Jahren 1945 - 1946* (Opole: Centralne Muzeum Jeńców Wojennych w Łambinowicach-Opolu, 2005), 133–46.

²³⁶ Nowak, *Schatten von Łambinowice*; Rex Rexheuser, “Das Bild des Nachkriegslagers in Lamsdorf im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Deutschen,” *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung* 50, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 48–72.

As excruciatingly unforgiving as life within the camps was, life outside of it proved equally harsh. Starting in June, Polish settlers—many of them themselves destitute expellees from the *Kresy*—increased the pressure on German inhabitants because a desperate competition for scarce resources such as food erupted in the completely desolate Recovered Territories.²³⁷ Germans, however, faced greater hardships due to punitive decrees. In some towns, Polish authorities refused to hand out ration cards to Germans.²³⁸ Elsewhere, the cards proved utterly useless, as Poles who appropriated shops did not accept them and drove up prices for non-Polish customers.²³⁹ With an extreme shortage or limited access to sustenance, in larger cities such as Breslau prostitution, crime, and hawking emerged as common problems.²⁴⁰ The German communities, often atomized groups of several families comprised of single mothers and elderly relatives, found themselves suddenly thrown out of their homes and forced into dilapidated buildings by the Polish arrivals.²⁴¹

Under these dreadful conditions, the death toll soared, unless resourceful scavengers could find berries, mushrooms, or herbs in the forests.²⁴² A lack of wood and coals, which lasted for many years until 1949, made heating and cooking nearly impossible.²⁴³ Hunger and typhus outbreaks claimed many lives; in West Prussia, 250 people in Lenzen (Łęczce) and 54 in

²³⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5.

²³⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 8.

²³⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/180, 26ff. Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” 129.

²⁴⁰ Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse, *Microcosm: Portrait of a Central European City* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 420.

²⁴¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 42c.

²⁴² BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 89.

²⁴³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 17.

Baumgart (Ogrodniki) died in the immediate postwar months.²⁴⁴ In Breslau, where in July 300-400 Germans died a day due to disease and rations at half to a third the allotted amount, immunization shots were offered free of charge to Poles, while Germans had to pay 100 złoty.²⁴⁵ Few children survived.²⁴⁶ By late summer and early fall, mothers secretly abandoned infants—usually the product of rape by Soviet soldiers during the invasion—unable or unwilling to care for them.²⁴⁷ With dismal survival chances for the young, perhaps it was a relief when authorities took children from their mothers and sent them to orphanages.²⁴⁸ By September 1945, many of the 80,000 Germans remaining in Insterburg (Chernyakhovsk) perished, according to expellees arriving in Germany: “In droves the elderly and children died....And in the countryside in the destroyed areas they more than ever, but this was a tactic of the Russians, the German people should die and rot.”²⁴⁹ There was no deliberate starvation policy, but simply very little food, especially for Germans who stood at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

In short, Poland during the summer of 1945 was a “time of capriciousness, injustice, and insecurity marked by the mutual, conflicting, and even contradictory rule of the Soviet and Polish authorities.”²⁵⁰ The competing claims to authority between Soviet and Poles could both help and torment: Often the beleaguered Germans received “repeated help and sympathy” from

²⁴⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5. The towns had a prewar population of around 1,000 and 500, respectively.

²⁴⁵ Davies and Moorhouse, *Microcosm*, 419–20.

²⁴⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 1/147, 8.

²⁴⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5.

²⁴⁸ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 129.

²⁴⁹ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, “Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes eines Königsbergers vom Februar 1946 (Königsberg verlassen am 23. September 1945),” 2.

²⁵⁰ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 75.

Poles, then other times Soviet soldiers appeared as moderating forces on Polish impulsiveness.²⁵¹ Indeed, even with memories of brutal behavior on the part of the Red Army, many testimonies indicate that Poles were more unrelenting in their persecution.²⁵²

Soviet officials for instance decried the expulsion of productive laborers that disrupted prosperous farms and factories, and frequently overruled Polish militia attempting to herd Germans away from facilities crucial for the occupying force and the reconstruction of the Polish state.²⁵³ To the political section of the Red Army, Polish measures seemed illogical and inhumane: “The German population is starving in many places, in other areas they are under the immediate threat of starvation in the future. Not only does the plundering of the Germans on the part of the Poles not stop, but it gets stronger all the time. There are more and more frequent cases of unprovoked murders of German inhabitants, unfounded arrests, long prison confinements with purposeful humiliation.”²⁵⁴

Altercations between Red Army soldiers and Polish paramilitary elements were frequent, and observant Germans soon concluded that “the Russians and Poles did not get along.”²⁵⁵ The tension afforded Germans breathing space. To be sure, with the first waves of migrants from the Polish interior, Soviet occupation forces often backed the Poles during the selection of houses and farms.²⁵⁶ Red Army commanders also almost immediately appointed Polish mayors,

²⁵¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/180, 30.

²⁵² Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, 146–50. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 11.

²⁵³ Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 127.

²⁵⁴ Cited in Naimark, 127.

²⁵⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:409. On Soviet-Polish enmity, see Gregor Thum, *Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 29–36.

²⁵⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 1/143, 8.

sometimes from among former slave laborers liberated in the area, upon pushing out Wehrmacht forces.²⁵⁷ By the summer, Soviet officials nevertheless preferred dealing with Germans, and appointed a German administration to act alongside Polish ones.²⁵⁸

Recognizing that the Soviets promised greater protection, Germans could easily avoid Polish excesses as long as they could prove themselves useful to the Red Army, which heavily relied on them for food and labor. Occasionally, Soviets engaged Germans for bizarre reasons: Two women from Königsberg needed to report to the Sambian Peninsula, where their sole yet crucial task was to care for a llama that escaped the Königsberg Zoo during the war's fighting and was found wandering the countryside by stupefied yet concerned Red Army soldiers.²⁵⁹

In either case, the relationships Germans forged with their Soviet "employers" often proved crucial during the expulsions; in Breslau, Red Army troopers intervened to stop the eviction of their "friends" from their apartments and resorted to gun play to drive off the Polish soldiers.²⁶⁰ German servility infuriated occupation authorities. As one official complained: "It's not the German women who are raped by Soviet soldiers but, on the contrary, Soviet soldiers who come under attack from prostituted German women."²⁶¹ The cavalier and cynical assessment ignored the dire straits German women found themselves in, yet touched upon a reality: The German population was pressed between a rock and a hard place.

²⁵⁷ BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 88 and 203. Both reports from rural Pomerania indicated that in these case, the Polish mayor "behaved himself very well vis a vis the German population," and that the situation was "bearable."

²⁵⁸ Thum, *Uprooted*, 38.

²⁵⁹ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, "Über Königsberg berichten die Herren H...sowie der Studienrat Z. wie folgt," undated [c. 1946-1947], 2. The authors also reported that the Soviet soldiers "show much interest for the exotic animals that are no longer in the Zoo. The hippopotamus enjoys much awe and special care," having become a sort of mascot that soldiers rewarded with vodka.

²⁶⁰ Thum, *Uprooted*, 36-43.

²⁶¹ Quoted in Davies and Moorhouse, *Microcosm*, 419.

Even with this occasional protection, more than a few East Germans held little hope for a better future. Many therefore opted to leave “voluntarily.”²⁶² Leaving behind the hunger, arbitrary arrests, and forced labor, a woman from Königsberg resolved to leave for Germany in August of 1945. “Farewell with Königsberg wasn’t difficult for us, because Königsberg is a dead city and because we had experienced much too much hardship there,” she wrote to acquaintances in January 1946. “We were happy once the wheels of our flight rolled, but as we drove through our once so beautiful, rich East Prussia, now completely devoid of people and entirely barren, we all cried.”²⁶³

“Horror in Europe”: The “Orderly and Humane”

The eventual destination for the majority of Germans evicted from the Recovered Territories was Berlin, where refugees swamped the destroyed city.²⁶⁴ 17,000 expellees streamed into the German capital a day; the Berlin Office of Social Welfare recorded 537,000 refugees passing through in July, with a further 494,000 in August.²⁶⁵ Expecting expulsions to follow only after formal treaties, the influx caught authorities completely unprepared. Berlin’s improvised transit camps could only provide lodging for at most a few days and a daily ration of 100 grams of bread and watery soup. Given the “large amount of contamination” caused by refugees “defecating in the open,” a dysentery epidemic followed by a breakout of typhoid seemed hardly

²⁶² BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 6.

²⁶³ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, Letter from Mrs. B. to Professor Lang, January 30, 1946, 3.

²⁶⁴ British authorities noted that in just ten days in July, the district of Wedding saw a total increase in population of 14,000. That same month, some 5,000 refugees a week settled in Charlottenburg, while 4,000 passed through Reinickendorf. 1,200 Germans forcibly removed from Czechoslovakia and the Recovered Territories arrived each day at the Lehrter train station. Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 125–26.

²⁶⁵ Frank, 125–26.

surprising.²⁶⁶ British observers noted thousands of aged and sick, and children separated from their families wandering the streets.²⁶⁷

To avoid becoming drowned in the desperate throngs, Marshal Zhukov closed the city to non-Berliners in late July, but this had no discernable effect and placed the burden on other cities: By August, 50,000 refugees tripled the population of Zittau, while 100,000 swamped Görlitz. Soviet officials closed sections of the German border to transports from Czechoslovakia and the Recovered Territories, where 45,000 crossed each day.²⁶⁸ Cities along the Oder and Neiße Rivers now flooded with thousands of refugees, exposed to the elements, extreme hunger, and roving Soviet and Polish bands.²⁶⁹ In Görlitz, people caught in this no-man's land spent weeks "sleeping in parks in vast numbers with their tattered possessions, searching for their relatives among the countless notices fastened onto trees."²⁷⁰

Not by coincidence, this humanitarian disaster coincided with the arrival of the wartime leaders at the Cecilienhof Palace in Potsdam, where they sought to hammer out details of how to contend with defeated Germany. Hundreds of journalists accompanying them descended on Berlin to cover the proceedings. Deprived of details of the conference, bored journalists found the destroyed capital a font of stories and human interest pieces, ranging from the ruins of Hitler's chancellery and bunker to frivolous street scenes of triumphant Red Army troopers,

²⁶⁶ Quoted in Cited in Frank, 127.

²⁶⁷ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 119.

²⁶⁸ Włodzimierz Borodziej, Hans Lemberg, and Claudia Kraft, "*Unsere Heimat ist uns ein fremdes Land geworden...*": *die Deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945-1950 : Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven*, vol. 1 (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2000), 163–64.

²⁶⁹ Hofmann, *Die Nachkriegszeit in Schlesien*, 192–93; Herbert Hupka, *Letzte Tage in Schlesien: Tagebücher, Erinnerungen und Dokumente der Vertreibung* (München: Langen Müller, 1981), 346–51; Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 216.

²⁷⁰ Franz Scholz, *Wächter, wie tief die Nacht?: Görlitzer Tagebuch 1945/46* (Eltvile: Walter, 1986), 45.

jovial GIs, and gregarious *Fräuleins*.²⁷¹ The destroyed city and raucous nightlife featured heavily in Anglophone press, yet one of the most striking figures in Berlin's postwar landscape—the refugee—found little space in the bylines.²⁷² It was not until a week after the conclusion of the conference that the crisis found serious coverage.²⁷³ Prior to August, reporting overwhelmingly sympathized with the expelling governments and uncritically accepted population transfers.²⁷⁴ For instance, *Daily Express* correspondent Peter Smollett filed a report on July 20, 1945 after accompanying a group of 500 Germans on their expulsion to Saxony, in which he clearly

²⁷¹ See for instance Henry Brandon, *Special Relationships: A Foreign Correspondent's Memoirs From Roosevelt to Reagan*. (London: Macmillan, 1988); Wilfred Byford Jones, *Berlin Twilight ... With 29 Illustrations. [On Life under the Allied Occupation]*. (Hutchinson & Co.: London, 1947); George Bilainkin, *Second Diary of a Diplomatic Correspondent* (London: S. Low, Marston, 1947). The press corps and the opportunities for news stories that Berlin offered were compellingly captured in Joseph Kanon, *The Good German: A Novel* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2001).

²⁷² The *New York Times* ran one story reporting that the director of the Red Cross, Arthur L. Mayer, saw the “maintenance of our soldiers’ morale in the face of the destruction and human desolation that surrounds them” as the greatest challenge facing the organization. “Describing the ‘incredible horror’ he witnessed in Germany, Mr. Mayer declared that the ‘greatest horror is not bloodshed, but the people along the roads, the displaced persons, the refugees with their few belongings piled in a wheelbarrow. I don’t care how much you hate the Germans,’ he said, ‘when you see a little flaxen-haired girl holding a doll to her breast, or a blind woman stumbling along, it does something to your heart.’” “Horror in Europe Saddens Our GI’s,” *New York Times*, July 19, 1945, 2.

²⁷³ Not until September 7, 1945 was military censorship of outgoing news lifted, which partially explains the lack of reporting on the refugee crisis in July, as it could be seen as damaging to Anglo-Soviet relations. However, a certain self-imposed censorship on the part of correspondents or their editors likely explains the lack of coverage. Labour MP Dick Crossman’s September report on a trip to Germany alleged that the expellee issue was “played down” because “conscientious journalists had been wary of prioritizing German suffering and criticizing the Soviets.” Richard Crossman, “Why Germany Matters,” *New Statesman and Nation*, September 22, 1945. Similarly, the essayist Stephen Spender recounted a conversation with a journalist “who complained [...] that he had many excellent stories which his paper refused to publish, about the desperate conditions in Berlin.” Stephen Spender, *European Witness* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1946), 144.

²⁷⁴ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 108. Correspondents were extremely reliant on local authorities, who provided information and access. One of the few critical voices that raised concerns about the expulsions was, unsurprisingly, a Sudeten German. The social democrat Wenzel Jaksch, living in London exile, used his connections to *New Statesman* and *The Times* to condemn the Czech policies, as will be examined in chapter 4. Left-leaning publications such as the *Manchester Guardian* and *Observer* furthermore took a critical editorial line against Czech policy during the course of June 1945.

endorsed the Prague government's policies as "revenge for Lidice," and failed to note mistreatment of Germans.²⁷⁵

Smollett's piece, however, unnerved one reader in particular. Perusing the *Daily Express* between sessions at the Potsdam Conference, Winston Churchill penned a note to Foreign Minister Anthony Eden that he was "much disturbed" by what he read, wondering whether the issue should be raised at the conference. He recognized that "[o]f course there must be an exodus, but it should be conducted with due regard to the repercussions in other countries." He further requested a report on the total numbers of refugees and to what zones they were being deported, and under what conditions the transfers took place.²⁷⁶

Two days later, Churchill raised the issue in the plenary session. President Truman, worried by the sheer number of displaced persons, wondered where they would go. Stalin retorted that the "Poles do not ask us. They are doing what they like, just as the Czechs are."²⁷⁷ Churchill suddenly expressed "grave moral scruples regarding great movements and transfers of populations," adding that some should return to their homes. The Soviet leader exclaimed that "the Poles would hang them if they returned." When Churchill proposed that at the very least Beneš should be consulted before finalizing the Sudeten issue, Stalin demurred flippantly: "But is this not serving mustard after supper? The Germans have already been driven out."²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Peter Smollett, "Revenge for Lidice is Mass Expulsion," *Daily Express*, July 20, 1945. Despite the sympathetic reporting, the Czech government protested the article.

²⁷⁶ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 117. A memorandum prepared for Churchill that same day concluded that there were "no official reports" of expulsions taking place, and that Beneš would not provide such information before the conclusion of the conference. Moreover, Eden dismissed the Germans referenced in Smollett's article as in all likelihood "notorious Henleinists."

²⁷⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945: The Conference of Berlin, 1945*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1960), 262; *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945: The Conference of Berlin, 1945*, 2:389.

²⁷⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States Diplomatic Papers, 1945: The Conference of Berlin, 1945*, 1960.

Leaving aside the fact that it took Churchill chancing upon a newspaper to realize that expulsions were already underway, the sudden concern revolved less around the welfare of Germans, but rather over who should take responsibility for the care of millions of penniless refugees that very well could destabilize the occupation zones. Wrangling between the Anglo-Americans and the Soviet delegations erupted immediately after Churchill's protest of "wild expulsions," an independent action on the part of the Polish and Czech governments sanctioned by Stalin. Eventually, the parties reached a compromise for a temporary halt to the deportations until December 1945, after which point an "equitable" distribution of expellees over the occupation zones under supervision of the Control Council would unfold. Moreover, Article 13 to the Potsdam Agreement called for transfers conducted in an "orderly and humane manner."²⁷⁹

As has been shown, broad agreement existed among the Big Three that preventing future conflict could only be achieved through population transfers. Joseph Stalin's strategy of initiating these prior to a final formal agreement set in motion a process that Churchill and Truman felt they could not reverse. If they could not prevent them, the British representative on the sub-committee that discussed the transfer plans confided, then the Western Allies should "ensure that they were carried out in as orderly a manner as possible in a way which did not throw an intolerable burden on the occupying authorities in Germany."²⁸⁰ It was not until the full dimensions of the mass movement of peoples, and the threat that the humanitarian crisis could undo the fragile peace that had been so bitterly won in Europe, that the Anglo-American leaders committed to a policy that seemed a *fait accompli* anyways. The "orderly and humane" transfer

²⁷⁹ Great Britain and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Documents on British Policy Overseas / 1945. Series 1, Vol. 1* (London: Her Majesty's stationery office, 1984), 1275.

²⁸⁰ Cited in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 120.

may therefore have been a response to the shocking ferocity of the “wild expulsions” and an earnest attempt to alleviate the suffering of deportees, but also an attempt to exert a modicum of leverage over a situation that they had little control.

Moreover, the “orderly and humane” clause represented a concession from the Soviets that included the guarantee of free and fair elections in Poland. Realizing that Stalin’s greater ambitions, Churchill and Truman tested the Soviet leader on Poland by acceding to expulsions. Despite the death toll decreasing considerably once the Allies intervened, the notion of an “orderly and humane” transfer was a fiction that nevertheless allowed the Western leaders to disavow responsibility for the excesses, which were laid at the feet of the East European states and the Soviet Union. The expellees become objects of the victorious powers, so that Winston Churchill’s ruminations on the “tragedy of great proportions” on the floor of the British House of Commons on August 16, 1945 ring rather disingenuously.²⁸¹ Just a few months later, the “mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed of” had become a weapon in the emerging Cold War.²⁸²

In either case, though Stalin and his allies in Warsaw and Prague effectively achieved a recognition of the *fait accompli* they orchestrated all summer long, the Soviet Premier nevertheless only “grudgingly accepted” the deal.²⁸³ Undeterred by the limitations, Stalin stated that “he did not expect any considerable results” from the provisos, which he declared “a mere

²⁸¹ Henke, “Der Weg Nach Potsdam,” 82.

²⁸² John Olsen, “The Sinews of Peace,” The Churchill Centre, accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/120-the-sinews-of-peace>.

²⁸³ Piers Dixon, Corinna Dixon Hamilton, and Lord Butler, *Double Diploma: The Life of Sir Pierson Dixon : Don and Diplomat* (London [etc.: Hutchinson, 1968), 173.

shot in the dark.”²⁸⁴ Indeed, the officially banned “wild expulsions” continued in Czechoslovakia as well as in Poland by means of “voluntary emigration.”²⁸⁵ Some of these operations even enjoyed the support of the German Communist Party (KPD) in the Soviet zone, who coordinated transports with Soviet officials.²⁸⁶ Soldiers continued to evict Germans but, fearing backlash, did not accompany them to the border; in many instances the unsupervised deported “dispersed again into the countryside.”²⁸⁷

The deportations that continued after the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference were on full display for journalists at Berlin’s train stations into the fall. Some pundits remained unmoved: “It is the turn of the Germans now,” the *Daily Express* gleefully noted. “The great conquering race that transported millions of slaves from all over Europe [...] is now being transported itself,” the correspondent continued, lauding the expellers for “a thorough job.”²⁸⁸ When in September 1945 the National Peace Council issued a call for Britons to accept reduced rations to feed refugees, a letter to the *Daily Herald* demanded that Germans be starved just as the “men, women and children of Greece and Russia” hungered under Nazi occupation.²⁸⁹ Goronwy Rees, an officer attached to the Allied Military Government, wrote in the *Spectator* that it was “inevitable that millions of Germans must die in the coming winter” and “find no

²⁸⁴ Great Britain and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Documents on British Policy Overseas / 1945. Series 1, Vol. 1, Series 1, Vol. 1*, 1086.

²⁸⁵ British diplomats in Silesia noted that economic pressures were increasing on Germans in order to force a “voluntary” departure. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 124.

²⁸⁶ Douglas, 124.

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Douglas, 124.

²⁸⁸ W. Troughton, “Despair Hordes Swamp Berlin,” *Daily Express*, August 10, 1945.

²⁸⁹ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 287.

resting place but the grave,” as averting the disaster would require a stupendous act of philanthropy that would offend the Soviet Union and the unity of the victorious powers.²⁹⁰

Such bluster seemed to be confined to a minority. Reuters correspondent Henry Buckley warned of a “gigantic refugee problem,” which many papers echoed.²⁹¹ Robert Cooper of *The Times* lambasted continued deportations against the accords hammered out at Potsdam, adding that the transfers had “gone too far for the introduction of the word ‘humane’ to have much effect.”²⁹² According to the *Times*, 60 women and children evicted from Danzig spent days in a cattle car without food or water; 20 on the transport perished.²⁹³ Charles Bray of the *Daily Herald* reported on the “cattle truck mortuary” that each night transported the dead from Berlin’s Stettiner Station, and described heinous scenes of Polish DPs entering trains to pillage and rape in the open. It was irrelevant whether the Nazis conducted similar policies, Bray argued, “these excesses, wreaked only on the women and children of Germany, on families of the modest means of shopkeepers or small farmers, cannot be allowed to continue.”²⁹⁴

The *News Chronicle*’s Norman Clark also recounted terrible scenes at Stettiner Station, where he discovered four corpses, with several more refugees too far gone “just being allowed to

²⁹⁰ Goronwy Rees, “Problems of Germany,” *Spectator*, November 2, 1945.

²⁹¹ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 132.

²⁹² Robert Cooper, “Mass Transfers of Germans,” *The Times*, August 8, 1945.

²⁹³ *The Times*, September 10, 1945.

²⁹⁴ Charles Bray, “Retribution,” *Daily Herald*, August 24, 1945. The full quote reads: “Today I have seen thousands of German civilians—old men and women and children of all ages—reduced to the depths of misery and suffering that the Nazis inflicted on others during their beastly reign [...] I did not like it. It gave me no satisfaction, although for years I have hoped that the Germans would reap from the seeds they had sown. I saw at the Stettiner Station miserable remnants of humanity, with death already shining out of their eyes—with that awful, wide-eyed stare. Four were dead already, another five or six were lying alongside them, given up as hopeless by the doctor, and just being allowed to die. The rest sat or lay about, whimpering, crying or just waiting, hanging on to the slenderest hope that something, somehow, sometime would be done for them. They are past helping themselves.”

die.” Clark witnessed an emaciated woman attempting to feed her “two whimpering babies” from her “milkless breasts—a pitiful effort that only left her crying at her failure.” The scenes, Clark declared, “gave me no satisfaction, although for years I have hoped that the Germans would reap from the seeds they had sown.”²⁹⁵ A British relief worker noted that it was little wonder that journalists “describe the scenes on the railway station as being Belsen all over again,” adding that he had “never seen a hard-boiled pressman so near to tears.”²⁹⁶ *Daily Mail* reporter George Bilainkin, despite his confessed disdain for Germans that permitted him from even shaking hands with them, confided to his diary that the “picture of elderly women, and young girls, with children almost dying on [the] railway stations of Berlin after long journeys from their former homes, provides [a] test of political convictions. Humanitarian, not soft-hearted, considerations rise unwillingly to the surface.”²⁹⁷

The scenes left seasoned combat veterans and witnesses to the horrors of Nazi concentration camps equally aghast. The British officer Richard Brett-Smith regarded the “more dead than alive” refugees as among the most moving experiences of his time in Berlin.²⁹⁸ For the future Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, Gerald Gardiner, the arrival of “voluntary” expellees evoked memories of his service in an ambulance unit that worked with concentration camp survivors: “The removal of the dead in carts from the railway stations was a grim reminder of what I saw in the early days in Belsen.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁵ Norman Clark, “25,000 Seek Food Every Day,” *News Chronicle*, August 24, 1945.

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 134.

²⁹⁷ Bilainkin, *Second Diary of a Diplomatic Correspondent*, 181.

²⁹⁸ Richard Brett-Smith, *Berlin '45: The Grey City*, 1967, 174.

²⁹⁹ Gerald Gardiner, “Migration of Death,” *Spectator*, October 26, 1945.

A battle-hardened Major Stephen Terrell, outraged by “entire populations dying by the thousands on the roads from starvation, dysentery and exhaustion,” sent a thirty page report to the press and government ministries via Charles Bray. A trip to a Berlin hospital, Terrell decried, “is an experience which would make the sights in the Concentration Camps appear normal.”³⁰⁰

Adrian Kanaar, a British medic at the liberation of the Belsen Concentration Camp, was so enraged upon seeing an expellee train with 75 dead from overcrowding that he risked court martial by leaking his observations and testimonies of refugees to the press, declaring that he had not “spent six years in the army to see tyranny established which is as bad as the Nazis.”³⁰¹

Robert Murphy, the State Department’s senior representative in Germany and participant at the Potsdam Conference, also documented similar quandaries in a memo alleging that the Allies incurred guilt for the same crimes that Nazis committed and that had “provided part of the moral basis on which we waged the war and which gave strength to our cause.”³⁰²

It was apparent that neither demands for an “orderly and humane” transfer nor a halt to deportations until December 1945 changed the facts on the ground in the expelling states. In fact, the continued flooding of the occupation zones with emaciated refugees was a brutally effective argument for forcing the Allies to come up with a system for “organized” expulsions. In late fall

³⁰⁰ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 117.

³⁰¹ Cited in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 270.

³⁰² Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 118–19. “In viewing the distress and despair of these wretches, in smelling the odor of their filthy condition, the mind reverts instantly to Dachau and Buchenwald. Here is retribution on a large scale, but practiced not on the *Parteibonzen* [party bigwigs], but on women and children, the poor, the infirm. The vast majority are women and children. Our psychology adjusts itself somehow to the idea that suffering is part of the soldier’s contract . . . That psychology loses some of its elasticity, however, in viewing the stupid tragedy now befalling thousands of innocent children, and women and old people. . . . The mind reverts to other recent mass deportations which horrified the world and brought upon the Nazis the odium which they so deserved. Those mass deportations engineered by the Nazis provided part of the moral basis on which we waged the war and which gave strength to our cause. Now the situation is reversed. We find ourselves in the invidious position of being partners in this German enterprise and as partners inevitably sharing the responsibility.”

of 1945, the Czech and Polish governments presented a scheme for the deportation of the remaining 6.65 million ethnic Germans in their states by summer 1946, which the Allied Control Council approved on November 20, 1945. Nevertheless, the “ACC agreement” made few provisions for overseeing deportations, and merely outlined their timing and the proportional distribution of the expellees over the German occupation zones.³⁰³

The task of coming up with basic uniform welfare standards and mechanisms for the transports was entrusted to the Combined Repatriation Executive (CRX), which also oversaw the transport of a further two million Allied Displaced persons.³⁰⁴ The dimensions of the proposed operation proved astounding: A *New York Times* editorial noted that the number of Germans to be moved in seven months was “roughly equal to the total number of immigrants arriving in the United States during the last forty years.”³⁰⁵ The Polish government faced an even greater, nearly Herculean task: besides deporting millions of Germans, had to simultaneously repatriate Poles from east of the River Bug. As the historians Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse put it, the operation “required administrative expertise of the sort attributed to Adolf Eichmann, and logistical planning on a scale at least twice as large as anything attempted during the Holocaust.”³⁰⁶ The “organized expulsions” were a tall order.

³⁰³ The agreement held that Germans from Czechoslovakia and Hungary would go to the US zone, while expellees from the Recovered Territories would be distributed across the British and Soviet zones.

³⁰⁴ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 160–65. The British, Soviet, and American occupation authorities insisted on differing demands that nevertheless ensured a modicum of relief to the refugees. Among other provisos, they called for adequate rations, limited passengers in each wagon, medical oversight, the preservation of families, sufficient luggage and currency to start a new life, and Allied oversight of the deportation process.

³⁰⁵ *New York Times*, December 16, 1945.

³⁰⁶ Davies and Moorhouse, *Microcosm*, 437.

The disorganization had disastrous consequences. When the first “organized” transports from Czechoslovakia arrived in Bavaria on December 13, 1945, US Army observers were appalled that the “stripped conditions” had not prevented their journey in temperatures of minus nine degrees centigrade. Three days later, Red Cross workers opened the doors on 94 dead passengers, including 22 children.³⁰⁷ A Polish Red Cross train from Breslau, meant to showcase the care of elderly and sick deportees, similarly ended in disaster: the passengers, including a number of Alzheimer’s patients who “did not realize even during the journey what was going on with them” arrived in Germany with five dead and another two that died thereafter due to the paltry 150 gram per day ration.³⁰⁸ Though the death rates gradually declined in part to Allied pressure, the expellees bore signs of physical trauma and, as a reporter of the *Manchester Guardian* confirmed after speaking with a British medical officer, “most of the women had been violated, among them a girl of 10 and another of 16.”³⁰⁹ Many of the transports were subjected to plundering at the border, even with Allied demands for greater security.³¹⁰

Though the Germans who had not fled the Red Army and stuck it out under Polish and Czech rule had seen the handwriting on the wall, the deportations came as a shock to many; in the Recovered Territories, where Polish settlement was moderate, Germans continued to constitute the majority and remained on their farms until more than a year after the war.³¹¹ In fact, until mid-1946, Poles did not make out the majority of the population in the Recovered

³⁰⁷ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 165. The debacle prompted American officials to halt the deportations, imposing greater restrictions and oversight on Czech authorities.

³⁰⁸ Douglas, 168.

³⁰⁹ *Manchester Guardian*, March 10, 1946.

³¹⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 2/125, 19.

³¹¹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 3 and BArch Ost-Dok 2/125, 19.

Territories and lived side by side with Germans until then.³¹² In Breslau, less than 35,000 Poles were registered in December 1945, compared to more than 150,000 Germans.³¹³ The streetcar operators of the Silesian capital continued to be German until 1946, as were the letter carriers due to their familiarity with the urban landscape.³¹⁴ Skilled workers were not just prized for their expertise and indispensability, which explains why they were often deported last; they developed genuine relationships with Poles. For more than two years, Poles and Germans sometimes lived in the same house. As a Polish refugee from the *Kresy* recognized “that both sides were somehow joined by the same miserable fate. We had been driven from our native soil by the [Ukrainian] bands, and they were paying for a war that had been started by a devil . . . Despite the language barrier, our relations developed in a friendly fashion.”³¹⁵

These fragile arrangements ended by late 1946, when the majority of the deportations were completed.³¹⁶ In total, more than five million Germans from Eastern Europe had been transferred to occupied Germany. All that remained of a German present east of the Oder River were 400,000 Germans who had opted for Polish citizenship. These so-called “amphibians,” residing particularly in multiethnic border regions such as Masuria or Upper Silesia, possessed adequate linguistic abilities that they could pass as Polish.³¹⁷ In some areas of Poland, the deportations created entirely unpopulated areas that remained devoid of people for years.³¹⁸ This

³¹² Thum, *Uprooted*, 66.

³¹³ Davies and Moorhouse, *Microcosm*, 419.

³¹⁴ Thum, *Uprooted*, 81.

³¹⁵ Cited in Davies and Moorhouse, *Microcosm*, 432.

³¹⁶ Sporadic transports continued into the late 1940s.

³¹⁷ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 79.

³¹⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 5.

was likely far from the minds of the millions disembarking throughout Germany. Despite arriving in an unknown land that they were now to call home, many breathed a sigh of relief that years of uncertainty, arbitrary violence, and deprivation were at an end. As one refugee put it: “We could once again become humans.”³¹⁹

Conclusion

“As their train bumps on towards the Reich, the Sudetens will perhaps recall the happy days when the Jewish shop-windows went flying into smithereens and the fires in the trade-union buildings were starting up, and the folk, the ordinary folk, were running about looking for somebody to take a smack at, and shouting, ‘We want to be home in the Reich!’ Soon they will get their wish.”³²⁰ A British journalist’s cynical observation of an expellee transport touches upon a poignant truth: Hitler’s genocidal attempts to transform Central Europe into a racially homogenous empire boomeranged fiercely. The Silesian poet Gerhart Hauptmann recorded in his diary on September 30, 1939: “After waking up, the terror of the war pressed in my chest: Poland! How much hate has been released there. We destroyed Poland, delivered up half of it to the Russians, calling forth all the spirits of revenge on us for a century. Why is it that this pitiless nationalism has been aroused everywhere and in everything.”³²¹ Six years later, the Nobel Prize winner lay on his deathbed and uttered his last words: “Am I still in my house?” A handful of Silesian earth was placed in the coffin in which he was expelled in the summer of 1946.³²²

³¹⁹ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, vol. 2 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 784.

³²⁰ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 167.

³²¹ Cited in Naimark, *Fires of Hatred*, 125.

³²² Ekkehard Kuhn, *Schlesien: Brücke in Europa* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997), 56–57.

By the time Hauptmann passed away, the “orderly and humane” expulsions were in full swing, and had already depopulated vast areas of their German population. This capped a process that began in the final days of the war, when the Nazi collapse opened the door for vengeance and retribution against guilty and innocent Germans. Whereas in most of Europe these passions died down, they took on dreadful dimensions in Poland and especially Czechoslovakia. The score-settling transitioned into “wild expulsions,” a process of extreme violence, abuse, and deportations directed by Polish and Czech leaders. Violence seemed an end to itself, but also aimed to set as many on the move in order to create facts that the American and British needed to accept: There were no more Germans in the German East, and in any case they faced a bleak future, so that agreeing to massive transfers and border changes seemed the best course.

The process in Czechoslovakia differed little from that in Poland, though in the former a greater degree of orchestrated violence between May and July can be discerned. Unlike in Poland, most Germans never fled their homes and lived among the Czech population, and so faced greater exposure to roving militia. Apart from rampaging Soviets, many East Prussians or Silesians did not see Polish settlers for weeks, and even then they remained in the majority. Secondly, in the German East the Red Army furiously smashed the defenders; in Czechoslovakia, the German occupiers ruthlessly put down opposition in the eleventh hour of their reign, fighting on in some areas as late as May 11th.³²³ Czechs continued to suffer at Nazi hands under the longest occupation in Europe while the rest of the continent celebrated the defeat of the Third Reich. This created what Chad Bryant described as a “dialectic of violence” that potently exploded in the first weeks of the postwar period.³²⁴

³²³ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 95.

³²⁴ Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 229.

Another reason that the “wild expulsions” took on such a deadly form in Czechoslovakia was that here violence was politically useful: Government and state agencies in a negative competition attempted to politically capitalize on the situation. All major political camps forged a consensus on the ethnic composition of the postwar nation: While Stalin blessed the expulsion plans of Beneš, the communist representative in Czechoslovakia, Klement Gottwald, similarly grasped the removal of all Germans as an opportunity to establish his party’s legitimacy after having previously declared that the German proletariat was innocent of the crimes of fascism.³²⁵ The communists possessed powerful cards, for in addition to controlling key ministries—including the Ministry of National Defense, headed by the pro-Soviet Ludvík Svoboda, a key ally of Gottwald’s—they also dominated the national committees and therefore exerted enormous influence over local politics and therefore the treatment of the German minority.³²⁶ With elections looming in 1946, no one wanted to lose footing in the “social revolution” of Czechoslovakia by looking “soft” on the key postwar challenge: The German question. The political contest, culminating in the 1948 communist coup, over the future of the Czech state had a profound impact on the fate of its German and Hungarian minority as well.

In either case, the “wild expulsions” constitute a distinct phase separate from the “orderly and humane” stage, which did see a general improvement in conditions and decline in the death toll. Nevertheless, Germans at the time and even to this day continue to ignore the stages of the expulsions, as the press office of the CDU marking the five year anniversary of the war indicate:

“It must always once again be stated that the expulsion of many millions of people from their ancestral homelands cannot be sanctioned by any agreements or paragraphs, and instead will for eternity remain a crime

³²⁵ Bryant, 215.

³²⁶ For more, see Bradley F Abrams, *The Struggle for the Soul of the Nation: Czech Culture and the Rise of Communism* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004); Frommer, *National Cleansing*.

against humanity. The expelling states did not even hold to the measly mandate that the Potsdam Agreement meant to protect the expellees. In the areas east of the Oder and Neisse, in Czechoslovakia and in the Southeast, at least 2.5 million Germans perished. They in part succumbed to the ordeals of flight and acts of violence of the revolution, they found death through hunger, disease, and inhumane exploitation through forced labor, but in large part they were victims of camps and the expulsion itself. From exceedingly numerous transports the expelled needed to immediately be brought into hospitals, many however reached their ordained destination...as corpses. [...] They were crammed into camps and transports, even though they could no longer hold out such ordeals. The expulsion would be a crime against humanity even if it had been undertaken with Salon cars. The gravity of the crime however was pushed into the unquantifiable when the expelling states in countless cases didn't...adhere to the even primitive protective regulations of the Potsdam Agreement. This makes the commitment to conduct the expulsion 'in an orderly and humane manner' continually seem as a bitter mockery of all humanity."³²⁷

The commentary reveals how frequently postwar Germans conflated images and narratives of the “wild” and “orderly and humane” expulsions, and fused them into a central concept of “flight and expulsion.” For this reason, the Potsdam Agreement’s provision appears as a cynicism sanctioning the excesses of the spring and summer of 1945, when in fact they emerged as an explicit response and safeguard against a repeat of such travesties.

One understandable reason that the “wild expulsions” came to disproportionately represent the entire forced migration after 1945 and dominates the narrative is because of the intensity of the violence; murder, rape, and abject misery tend to stand out more strongly in memory. Yet the testimonies also reveal utter dismay and an inability to contend with the world suddenly turning upside down, where loss of property and homeland often stand out as even more incomprehensible than death. Indeed, although the narrative is about the short-range wild expulsions, the historical significance lays in the “orderly and humane transfers,” which had

³²⁷ Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 07-001-3437, “In ordnungsgemässer und humaner Weise”, *DuD* Nr. 52, April 11, 1950 [unpag.]

long-range and eternal demographic and cultural consequences: The multi-ethnic and cultural landscape of Central Europe had changed forever between 1938 and 1948. War, genocide, and lastly the forced migrations of some 20 million Europeans destroyed a vibrant, pluralistic world.

One last conclusion pertinent to the argument of this dissertation must be made: Another reason that the “wild expulsions” stand out, or why boxcars emerged as representative symbols or Aussig emerged as a central fixture of expellee memory, is because as the events unfolded, contemporaries contributed to the narrative. As has been seen, Western journalists and observers circulated accounts and descriptions which, as we will see, ended up in the hands of expellee leaders. Yet Germans themselves were talking. Whether smuggling out reports from camps in Czechoslovakia that then were further distributed or published, exchanging accounts in the streets or refugee camps of Germany, or writing letters to share and fill in information, the victims added another layer to the narrative of “flight and expulsion,” blending fact with rumor into an inextricable blend. As we will see, these memories proved immensely valuable to the expellee associations, who would instrumentalize them for political arguments.

CHAPTER 3

“THE POLACKS ARE COMING!”: ARRIVAL AND THE FORGING OF A “COMMUNITY OF FATE”

In January 1945, the sight of the first trek wagons arriving on her East Elbian estate in January 1945 moved Armgard von Schmidtseck to compassion: “Silent figures and little bodies sit on them, and as we take the children down they cry out bitterly from exhaustion and cold...warmth, inner and outer, and the feeling of momentary security is what these people need first of all. And for the inner warmth a friendly word and the feeling that they have been received gladly and with utmost understanding for their plight suffices for these people, who have the hardest behind them that a person can experience.”¹

Unfortunately, most refugees found a “cold homeland” in Germany.² In June 1946, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) organ *Neues Deutschland* reprinted an open letter of a refugee by the name of Anna Scharmacher, in which she attempted to describe the last “one and half years flooded with tears” for readers. “Every single word is a tale of misery,” she explained, but of course “millions have it this way.” Speaking for those millions, the author expressed dismay and frustration that expellees found no understanding from the rest of the population. Scharmacher ended with a demand: “What have we done that we alone must bear the misfortune

¹ Günther Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945* (Bad Nauheim: Podzun-Pallas-Verlag, 1964), 65.

² Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (München: Siedler, 2008).

of the entire German people?” Even if expellees were to be “personally addressed, their plight understood,” it would do much to bring a “sigh of relief” to the victims.³

With the Third Reich’s defeat, the figure of the German refugee appeared on German streets, a familiar and ubiquitous presence for years after the war in all of Germany’s zones of occupation. Yet before they emerged as “Germany’s Nr. 1 Question,” they were a victim group—if slightly larger and more desperate—among many.⁴ What’s more, they faced indifference, revulsion, even antipathy from Germans and Allied occupiers alike. Overcoming this apathy proved one of the first and crucial challenges for activists fighting for the integration of 10-12 million displaced Germans in the postwar period.

Before there was even a German bureaucracy to contemplate financial support and legal privileges, however, there was the moment of arrival and struggle for survival. The official responses, and expellees and state agencies paved the way for material aid and mastering the refugee crisis, will be left for a later. This chapter strictly examines the first chaotic postwar years, when millions of disoriented and impoverished refugees traumatized by war and forced migration, arrived in Germany. Often a lacuna due the fragmentary source base, this brief period between expulsion and integration nevertheless is crucial for understanding how the expellees themselves coped with their suffering by speaking with one another, recounting their experiences to their new neighbors, and asserted themselves and claimed an identity. In short: the forthcoming pages analyze how “flight and expulsion” were narrated and perceived

³ “Ein Notruf von Millionen. Wir appellieren an die Solidarität des ganzen Volkes,” *Neues Deutschland* Nr. 52, June 25, 1946, 2.

⁴ “Deutschlands Frage Nr. 1,” *Das Parlament*, March 12, 1952, 1.

In order to analyze how refugees emerged as highly visible *Heimatvertriebene* (“homeland expellees”) who then could make social and material demands, this chapter addresses three interlocked issues. *First*, it looks at how refugees contended with their arrival in Germany, and how they grappled with their experiences. Whether attempting to process their own traumas, figure out where family and friends ended up, or commiserate and find solace with others in shared suffering, “flight and expulsion” featured as a pervasive element of the postwar landscape and conversation. This chapter therefore attempts to provide window into this semi-public world of coping with war and loss from the perspective of the victims, who simultaneously helped shape and circulate a coalescing narrative of their ordeal.

Second, this chapter examines the media of the occupation zones, who much like the expellees also sought to find an explanation for the war and its consequences, even as these unfolded. Influenced by the sights of treks and arriving trains filled with disheveled, dazed refugees, journalists and supervising occupation officials sought to provide an interpretation of “flight and expulsion.” They thereby set the parameters of public discourse, and also contributed to the layering of memory on the forced migrations.

Lastly, one must assess the responses of the German people to the refugee crisis. While many expressed sympathy and compassion, the overriding sentiment toward the expellees was a mixture of fear and resentment. By briefly surveying the resistant dispositions that expellees faced, one can measure how effectively—or rather ineffectively—the narratives from refugees and the media made inroads into the population. The hardheartedness also is crucial for understanding how expellees formed into a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, a “community of fate.” Moreover, it permits insight into how gradually a “sympathy narrative” emerged that sought to

turn expellee suffering into an argument for accepting the displaced millions as compatriots entitled to material aid and social recognition.

“My Life Has No Purpose Anymore”: Coping With “Flight and Expulsion”

Arriving in Germany, many felt utter relief after months or years of hardship: “Once we held in our hands the first ration cards and ate the first buttered bread and saw the well-dressed people, we thought we were dreaming. The whole thing was like a movie...I physically broke down,” one woman confided to an acquaintance.⁵ The rapid processing through transit camps to German communities or refugee camps, however, were among the first disorienting experiences of millions of expellees, many of whom survived harrowing ordeals only in the recent past and still raw. The novelist Peter Härtling captured the unnerving experience in a 1967 article: “At the start there was the passage through the camps, places whose names one had never heard of that now spread fear: Wasseralfingen or Pasing, stopping points for those infested with scabies, the delousing had by now become a ritual, even the typhus shot into the breast.”⁶

Once discharged, German officials decided where to permanently settle refugees, though occupiers insisted that communities not be established together in order to spur assimilation.⁷

Understandably, after years of hardship suffered together, the disbanding of tightly knit

⁵ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, Letter from Mrs. B. to Professor Lang, January 30, 1946, 2-3.

⁶ Peter Härtling, “Die Flüchtlinge,” *Der Monat* 220, 1967, 20. For more on expellee memory of the camps, see Albrecht Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland; 1945 - 1990* (München: Beck, 1996), 56–65.

⁷ A 1947 transport consisting of 2,000 persons was, for example, distributed in the Western Zone over 158 communities. Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, 1st ed. (München: C.H.Beck, 2011), 104. That East Prussians largely ended up in northern, Silesians in central, and ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia in southern Germany can be attributed to the Allied desire for a fast transfer and therefore reliance on the shortest distances between the point of origin and Germany, and not, as has been popularly alleged, a policy of retaining cultural cohesion.

emotional communities came as a huge psychological blow to expellees who now faced the unknown alone. Many first spent some time in refugee camps, erected in abandoned barracks, schools, air raid shelters, and even concentration camps such as Dachau. Temporary emergency camps sprouted like mushrooms at the edge of towns throughout Germany, and soon developed into permanent fixtures.⁸ In the Soviet Zone, the ZVU oversaw more than 600 camps holding nearly a half million people.⁹ The postwar landscape of Germany in popular memory consists of devastated urban centers and “rubble women,” though the Quonset huts and barracks dominated the scene just as well. Reinhard Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten* (“The Unfulfilled”) states it rather plainly: “For where the refugees are, there also always are The Camps [sic]...” In 1940s Germany, the refugee was everywhere.

The struggle for survival—searching for food, shelter or jobs—naturally took priority for the refugees. But of equal importance was trying to piece together fractured lives by finding families dispersed through the chaos of the forced migrations. A casual glance at the postwar photographic record reveals the ubiquity of refugees and near perpetual reminder of the “catastrophe” that befell Germany. Men stood with placards in public places with names of loved ones and last known location, and countless notices scribbled onto scraps of paper could be found fastened onto trees, bulletin boards, or lampposts.¹⁰ In Munich, daily hundreds of refugees

⁸ In Bavaria alone, in October 1946 1,375 camps held 146,000 refugees. The number of inhabitants dropped to 64,000 a year later, but climbed back to 100,000 by the end of 1949 due to an influx of refugees fleeing the GDR, among whom a large percentage were expellees. Franz J. Bauer, “Aufnahme und Eingliederung der Flüchtlinge und Vertriebenen. Das Beispiel Bayern 1945-1950,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 209. As late as 1955 nearly 2,000 such facilities continued to hold a quarter of a million inhabitants in the Federal Republic of Germany. Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 67.

⁹ R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 309.

¹⁰ Franz Scholz, *Wächter, wie tief die Nacht?: Görlitzer Tagebuch 1945/46* (Eltville: Walter, 1986), 45.

descended upon the tracing service, as a Sudeten German recalled: “Very soon after its opening, long lines of 300 to 500 meters formed. In a ruin...they therefore had to open a waiting room, where people could fill out search forms. On some days up to 300 families could be reunited.”¹¹

One could not easily escape the reminders of broken lives. On the radio and in cinemas, newsreels and recordings of children searching for their parents confronted the public with the humanitarian crisis, while outside in public spaces posters called attention to the *Suchkinder* (“searching children”), infants and children separated from their mothers during the flight or orphaned and needing the assistance of distant relatives. The German Red Cross issued newsletters describing the “extent of children’s suffering” during the war and “the whirlpool of the fleeing misery.” They also provided reminders of how flight occurred: “It is clear...that many thousands of infants, children, and youths died from the deprivation of flight during winter alone, even when they were in the company of their parents. Every participant of the trek movements...has seen with his own eyes the associated dying of children.” The Red Cross explained that thousands of youths continued to wander the countryside or lived in camps alone, and that the “haggard and teary faces of women...who continually try in some way to find assurances over the fate of their children” represented the greatest priority in postwar Germany.¹²

The painful reminders undoubtedly left deep impressions on adults, but mortified some children, as one expellee recalled years later:

“[C]onstant messages of people searching for the missing came over the radio. They spoke of refugee children who were searching for their parents: name, height, eye color, etc. That was terrible for us all back then, the idea of searching for parents and siblings. In any case this thing

¹¹ Erich Maier and Sudetendeutscher Rat, *40 Jahre Sudetendeutscher Rechtskampf: die Arbeit des Sudetendeutschen Rates seit 1947* (München: Sudetend. Rat, 1987), 28.

¹² Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 001-377-09/9, “Suchaktion nach verlorenen Kindern,” *Deutsche Hilfe. Mitteilungsblatt der deutschen Hilfsgemeinschaft* Nr. 2, December 20, 1945, 7-8. The Red Cross published the newsletter.

must have preoccupied me a lot, as my best friend and I, we constantly imagined how awful it would be if we ourselves would have to flee. If we were to flee, in no case must we lose one another and so forth. But if that should happen nonetheless, then we would have to notify the Red Cross without fail, so that we could find one another. Back then I dreamt very often that I had to leave our home, our beautiful house, that I was in flight and had lost my parents.”¹³

Occasionally joyful turns of event reached the public, yet nevertheless giving pause for contemplating “flight and expulsion.” For instance, the film studio DEFA’s series “The Eye-Witness” aired emotional reunions of separated families: “The months of the wild flight of millions emerge from these ‘human documents’ before us. Much silently born, heavy suffering, reignited by the shimmer of hope, speak to us and grip our hearts.”¹⁴ Displaced and lost children and grieving mothers together with the recent sight of treks in the last weeks of the war ranked as the earliest visual associations with expellees.

As they waited in queues or gathered around notices beseeching information on lost friends and family, the refugees undoubtedly talked with one another over their miseries and shared sorrows. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Anne O’Hare McCormick, foreign news correspondent for the New York Times, found in her travels through Germany that the arrivals from the German East were “eager to talk, crowding around visitors to relate their experiences.”¹⁵ Non-expellees assuredly picked up snippets of conversations in these semi-public

¹³ Quoted in Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 92.

¹⁴ “Kinder suchen ihre Eltern. Schicksale im Strom der Zeit. Ein Griff in das Archiv des ‘Augenzeugen,’” *Berliner Zeitung*, March 12, 1947, 3.

¹⁵ Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Problem of Places for the Refugees,” *The New York Times*, November 13, 1946, 24.

settings. In pubs, for instance, expellees gathered to sing songs and reminisced about the homeland, and shared experiences of the flight or the expulsions.¹⁶

Contemporary journalists similarly noted that in public places such as train cars, the dialects of the German East—“like a foreign language”—and exchanging of personal biographies and travails were unmistakable: A “horrifying report” of a Silesian woman, the journalist noted, “that one can hardly believe that it didn’t destroy her life,” another woman showing family photos and the “blooming garden of the lost homeland.” The chatter produced a cacophony of miseries:

“Where are you from?”—“Oh, we were not far from there”—“When did you scedaddle?”—“Did you see anything [of the war]?”—“We already left in March”—“We had to leave my mother, she couldn’t walk quickly enough. Haven’t heard from her”—“Where are you going?”—“To bring the child to my sister in Wasserburg. We don’t have anything to eat, one already died”—“Yes, he looks bad, the boy.”—“Hasn’t eaten since yesterday, but he will make it”—“How did you come over?”—“Yesterday night, illegally over the border. I dragged the boy, my sister the bags, we sprinted for an hour through the darkness”—“Do you think you will all be able to stay?”—“No, we don’t want to. I am driving back tomorrow, my sister a little later, she needs to rest.”—“Does your sister in Wasserburg know you are coming?”—“No.”—“And if she has no use for you?”—“Oh, she will take us. It’s just her husband...”¹⁷

Children of expellees are also a good measure for the pervasiveness of “flight and expulsion” in family conversation. “Yes, my mother—and my grandmother as well—constantly talked about their homeland, about the beauty of their homeland. And they often spoke about the flight,” one expellee explained.¹⁸ Even when they did not speak explicitly about what happened and traumas remained uncommunicated, the expulsions left telltale marks that allowed one to fill

¹⁶ Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 57.

¹⁷ Ilse K. Bembé, “Im D-Zug. Sommer 1946, nachts,” *Die Gegenwart*, September 24, 1946, 31-33.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 92.

in the blank. Returning from the war and a POW camp, the future famous author Günter Grass recalled in his autobiography how irrevocably his parents' experiences in Danzig changed them:

“We embraced, compulsively, over and over. Wordlessly, or with meaningless phrases. Too much, more than could be put into words, had happened in the course of a time that had no beginning and could have no end. Some things came up later, others were too horrible for words. The repeated violence done to my mother had muted her. She was old now and ailing. Little of her liveliness and wicked tongue remained. And was that shell of a man my father? He who set such great store by dignity and self-possession.”¹⁹

Grass himself experienced the war, and knew enough to surmise what ordeal his mother and father went through. Yet even children born after 1945 document in their writings the unceasing ubiquity of stories of the past at dinner tables or gatherings. In the East German novel *Wir Flüchtlingskinder*, Ursula Höntsch-Harendt has her protagonist confide to her diary in December 1945 that her parents “no longer laugh and only speak of home and that it is unjust that only the Silesians have to pay for the war, because after all we are not responsible for this alone.”²⁰ The author Petra Reski, asking her mother why they had no heirlooms or antiques like her friend's family, recalled the matriarch's incredulity before responding with “the phrase that I already knew so well: But we lost everything on the flight... The flight, the flight, always the flight. The history of the flight always came up when two adults came together. It began with WHEN THE RUSSIAN CAME and ended with tears.”²¹ Hans-Ulrich Treichel documents the confusion over the endless discussions of the war and meaningless reference points:

“During his childhood, time and again friends, neighbors, acquaintances or even relatives of his parents from the East appeared who spoke a curious German, wore old-fashioned clothes, and spoke of things of which he had no idea. The East, and all that was associated with it,

¹⁹ Günter Grass, *Peeling the Onion* (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 2007), 240.

²⁰ Ursula Höntsch-Harendt, *Wir Flüchtlingskinder: Roman* (Halle: Mittelde. Verl., 1989), 152.

²¹ Petra Reski, *Ein Land so weit. Ostpreussische Erinnerungen* (München: List, 2000), 148.

remained for him as a child and youth completely incomprehensible, he could never unravel the topographical and historical jumble the adults presented to him when conversations turned to Silesia, East Prussia and Pomerania, to Breslau, Königsberg and Lodz, to Masuria and the Giant Mountains, to evacuations and resettlements, flight and expulsions before, during and after the First World War as well as before, during and after the Second World War.”²²

The ethnologist Hermann Bausinger noted the phenomenon of “new citizen narratives” while researching Swabian folklore in the early 1950s.²³ Experiences during flight and expulsion were an unmistakable part of village talk, and expressions of hatred and desires for vengeance were the dominant themes Bausinger recorded. The ethnologist Alfred Karasek visited refugee camps in Bavaria and drew similar conclusions, documenting narratives that resembled modern sagas and contained themes of miraculous rescues, just punishment for tormentors, supernatural spirits protecting lost property, and prophecies of imminent return.²⁴ As the illustrated magazine *Quick* explained in 1951, the ghosts of the brutally murdered, including through crucifixion, tormented the Poles living on “robbed land”:

“Again and again Polish village mayors—so a reliable person in the Soviet Zone who often travels to Poland on business reports—are beseeched by simple farmers: they no longer want to remain on the German farms allotted to them. They want to flee before the ghosts of the wicked deed. Above fields they see floating crosses of birch, German soldiers who disappear into thin air when one approaches them...the horror has gripped the invaders! They cannot enjoy in their theft!”²⁵

²² Hans-Ulrich Treichel, *Menschenflug* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2015), 51.

²³ Hermann Bausinger, “Lebendiges Erzählen. Volkskundliche Gegenwartsuntersuchungen im schwäbischen Dorf” (PhD Thesis, Tübingen, 1952), 71.

²⁴ Heinke Kalinke, “Gerüchte, Prophezeiungen und Wunder. Zur Konjunktur sagenhafter Erzählungen in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit,” in *Zur Ikonographie des Heimwehs - Erinnerungskultur von Heimatvertriebenen*, by Elisabeth Fendl (Freiburg i. Br.: Johannes-Künzig-Inst. für Ostdt. Volkskunde, 2002), 159–74.

²⁵ “Nicht durch einen Krieg,” *Quick* Nr. 39, 1951, 1305ff.

Refugee narratives depended on the “horror of remembering,” so that these conversations therefore consisted of meticulous descriptions of brutalities.²⁶ In letters, friends and neighbors exchanged descriptions of the fighting and occupation or travails of the flight, filling in missing information on the last days in the homeland and “how...you survived the flight.”²⁷ The effect of this discourse was that within a few years after 1945, the conversations about the war became so familiar that, as one refugee woman from Braunsberg/Braniewo put it, “to report the details of the path of suffering (*Leidensweg*)...would go too far, and is unfortunately known all too well by the millions of [this] fate.”²⁸ Despite trying to connect the dots and comprehend the fate of their community, the recycling and passing on of reports blurred the lines between personal experience and group memory. Expellees in the district of Gumbinnen, for instance, the postwar reports of people wanting to “corroborate” details of the Nemmersdorf massacre, but who had not been personally present, seemed to trace back to one family that after 1945 spread the news through letters, though they themselves also were not present during the massacre.²⁹ Reality and interpretation soon fused into an inextricable blend by the 1950s. A confounded Theodor Schieder, head of a commission documenting flight and expulsion, concluded: “Nowhere does legend grow more uncontrollably than exactly here and the horrific becomes ever more horrific when it is told from one to the other.”³⁰

²⁶ Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 190.

²⁷ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, Alice W. to her family, July 15-20, 1946, 3. See also Ibid, Letter from Mrs. B. to Professor Lang, January 30, 1946, 2; and Ibid, “Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes eines Königsbergers vom Februar 1946 (Königsberg verlassen am 23. September 1945),” 2. See also BArch, Ost-Dok 1/19, 104 and BArch, Ost-Dok 2/5, 11. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:305.

²⁸ BArch, Ost-Dok 2/5, 121.

²⁹ BArch, Ost-Dok 2/13, 34.

³⁰ Theodor Schieder, “Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten als wissenschaftliches Problem,” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, no. 8 (1960): 9.

Conversations between expellees also revolved around exchanges of advice, or where to get food and how to navigate bureaucratic hurdles. However, with the Potsdam Agreement's ambiguity of the lost territories remaining under "Polish administration" until a final peace conference, widespread hopes for a return abounded. In some areas of Bavaria, observers warned, refugees relying on rumors of an imminent return to the homeland no longer stocked firewood for the winter.³¹ An aid worker in Germany warned the Sudeten German leadership in London that "confusion about whether they will be going home soon" was widespread among refugees. Most alarmingly, agitators distributing fliers in refugee camps proclaiming that the "war is not yet over" and prophesying an imminent "cleansing" of the homeland and return of the expellees stirred unrest.³² Equally as confusing were supposedly Czech pamphlets distributed in German refugee camps encouraging expellees from the "Czech Corner" around Glatz (Kłodzko), which Czechoslovakia aimed to annex from Poland, to return.

"Your homeland is at the moment Polish territory. Terror and horror are at home there. At night the shots and the cries of the drunken militia and soldiers echo through the streets and villages. But this won't last long anymore! In a few weeks or even days your homeland will again be liberated. The district of Glatz is coming to Czechoslovakia. Czech soldiers will protect your possessions and chattels from Polish capriciousness until it will be delivered into your hands. Almost all... will return to their homeland. Active National Socialists are the exception. [...] We know that in the area of Glatz that not many were for Hitler, and we want to help those. They shall build a new life in their beautiful homeland. That's why have courage and patience! England and America stand on our side. They hate the injustice that the Poles inflicted upon

³¹ Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), NL Jaksch, J32, SPD Kreisgruppe Marktoberdorf to Jaksch, December 6, 1947.

³² AdsD, NL Jaksch, J32, Hermann Grimm to Wenzel Jaksch, November 2, 1947. The flier read: "One day, Poland and the CSR will share the same fate as the Hitler accomplices. The war is not over yet. The day when your homeland will be cleansed is already set. When the time comes we will act, yet the moment has not yet come and we cannot speak of it openly. Ensure that the news is spread, this is your task. Your representatives are with us and have their instructions. Your men and sons, who are imprisoned, do not want to fight us. Do not have fear. The motto is: The Sudeten Germans will be granted autonomy, the Czechs who came to the Sudetenland in 1945 must leave, return of your property and restitution, quick repatriation through America and your homeland will become American territory. Germans, remain disciplined and true to your homeland."

you just as much as us. They know just as us: Glatz is neither Polish, nor Czech, Glatz is German!”³³

Most postwar communication involved reconstituting ties to family and community, however. Refugees attempted to recreate virtual communities and identify who survived and ended up where. More ambitious souls took it upon themselves to compile reports of the events during and after the war and conducted a sort of primitive census.³⁴ After receiving her first mail “from the Reich” after three months, Alice W. was elated to hear from her family and eagerly shared of her life in East Prussia, where she remained. The content did not revolve around the war or devastation, but news of acquaintances and where people ended up, and encouragement for those in Germany to take up contact with family friends still in East Prussia. For Alice, the “big question” was where her brother and father were. “When will we see each other again? Are we just building castles in the sky?” The author praised the strength that family gave her in the difficult times she faced now:

“My dear parents, how I love you. Everything that you told me in nice serious hours has now come true and is of manifold worth. When we celebrated holidays all together, how father always emphasized this. And anyways, that we children had to do everything on the farm at least once, how good. Only now does one know what being a mother means. And those like ours no longer exist. Not a day goes by where you aren’t an example. And especially one word of yours has become wonderful truth: what one gives...selflessly, comes make manifold.”³⁵

³³ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2069, “Abschrift, Tschecholsowakisches Rotes Kreuz in der brit. Zone, Hamburg, May 20, 1946. An alle deutschen Flüchtlinge aus der Grafschaft Glatz, Übersetzung in die deutsche Sprache!” The curious pamphlet went on to clarify that Glatz would come under Czechoslovakian administration, and that after two years Germans could decide whether to stay or leave for Germany again. The appeal closed with the blatant underlying attentions: It sought the help of Germans to reconstruct the area, and “help support our efforts that your land is freed from Poles” with monetary contributions. In other words: It sought to harness German expellees from Czechoslovakia for the effort of annexing territories granted to Poland.

³⁴ See for example BArch, Ost-Dok 1/19, 94 and BArch, Ost-Dok 1/146, 189.

³⁵ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, Alice W. to her family, July 15-20, 1946, 2-3

Given the immense interest for news and need for solace, and despite the coalition ban, immediately after the expulsions remnants of communities attempted to reunite. Lacking the political tenor of the massive demonstrations of the 1950s, these smaller, more intimate gatherings were scenes of “joyful greetings” where the lost homeland could be revived for an afternoon.³⁶ In 1947, for instance, 1,000 former residents of Reppen/Rzepin met at Berlin’s zoological garden, where questions and tales of the last days of the community “had no end.”³⁷ Through these meetings and updating of contacts, newsletters of current news, greetings to one another, as well as stories of individual wartime experiences circulated throughout Germany.³⁸ Even in the Soviet zone, where such meetings were regarded with deep suspicion because of ostensible “revanchist” content, expellees risked arrest to exchange news, advice, personal histories, and talk about the homeland and how it looks today.³⁹

Above all, whenever refugees communicated with one another, the East Prussian sociologist Elisabeth Pfeil noted in a 1948 survey of the expellees, discussions turned to worries about the state of the homeland: “are our homes dilapidated, are the paths we forged turning wild? Are our fields and gardens overgrown with weeds? Are forests filling the meadows?”⁴⁰

³⁶ “Heimatbrief an die Heimatfreunde von Reppen und der umliegenden Dörfer,” 1, Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep 901 Nr. 419.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸ See, for instance, the newsletters in Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep 901 Nr. 419.

³⁹ See the informant reports in Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep 901 Nr. 419. The memos swing widely between impressions of non-political chit-chat and a “coffee party” atmosphere to condemnations of fascist rallies. Nevertheless, into the 1950s and even 60s, these meetings continued to be organized by word of mouth in the GDR. For more on homeland meetings in the GDR, see Heike Amos, *Die Vertriebenenpolitik der SED 1949 bis 1990.*, Schriftenreihe der Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte; Sondernummer (München: Oldenbourg, 2009), 32–41; Christian Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts: Erinnerungspolitische Kontroversen im geteilten Deutschland um Flucht, Vertreibung und die Ostgebiete (1948-1972)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2007), 103–9.

⁴⁰ Elisabeth Pfeil, *Der Flüchtling: Gestalt einer Zeitenwende* (Hamburg: Hugo, 1948), 74–75.

Curios about “how it is back home” led to flurries of letters between family, friends, and acquaintances, some of whom remained in the homeland or had just recently been expelled.⁴¹ As one woman who remained in the Sambian Peninsula wrote in a December 28, 1949 letter, it felt good to talk with a friend about her suffering before taking her on an imaginary walk to show what was still standing and what had been destroyed.⁴² Often, the news was not good: A German in Königsberg informed a friend in Germany in February 1946 that her house burned down.⁴³ In a November 1946 letter to Germany, an East Prussian categorically emphasized that there was no more homeland, and for those in Germany to give up hope for a return: “Everywhere graves. The villages looked sad and barren, ruins everywhere, furniture, doors, and windows torn out and destroyed. The wind howled through the open houses and buildings. A rotten, musty air, decaying livestock, swarms of rats and mice, overgrown fields with wild flora, countless swarms of mosquitos and flies.”⁴⁴

While many accounts condemned the “glaring injustice” that befell them and demanded “a return to our beloved homeland and hope that the human rights we were robbed of will be returned,” other voices—equally as typical in the historical record, and perhaps of greater interest to ordinary expellees—did not cement themselves in the “master narrative” of flight and expulsion.⁴⁵ The East Prussian Bishop Maximilian Kaller’s September 1945 appeal to his

⁴¹ See for example the letters in Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872. See also BArch, Ost-Dok 1/19, 131 and BArch, Ost-Dok 2/27, 108.

⁴² BArch, Ost-Dok 1/30, 81.

⁴³ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, “Auszugsweise Abschrift eines Briefes eines Königsbergers vom Februar 1946 (Königsberg verlassen am 23. September 1945),” 2.

⁴⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/27, 108.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Harasko, “Die Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen,” 139.

congregation ranks as an emblematic voice of warning against delusions of a return. After having led elements of his flock across the frozen Vistula Lagoon during their flight from East Prussia, Kaller returned to the homeland during the summer of 1945. He felt compelled to share the dismal conditions that he discovered with those waiting on a return:

“Out of deep conviction I therefore state that I do not find it right to return to East Prussia... *Our homeland is lost to us*. This is hard. But we cannot ignore hard facts. The sorrow for the lost homeland must be consoled and comforted; it is the will of God.” Kaller encouraged his community to “search for a new homeland, to find, to build... From the indestructible bond with Christ you will draw trust in God and courage to start anew, as once your forefathers did after the 30 Years’ War, the wars with Sweden, after the Napoleonic Wars that destroyed your homeland.”⁴⁶

Such future oriented messages did not fit into the narrative that expellee leaders wished to propagate, as will be shown. Indeed, as Andrew Demshuk has argued, these exercises of imagining the homeland as it existed—desolate, destroyed, and emptied of its community—led to the creeping realization for most expellees that through the irreversible changes, the homeland no longer existed.⁴⁷ Instead, the “revanchist” undertones of injustice and demands for the atonement of suffered indignities provided the grist for the memory politics of the expellee organizations during the 1950s. At the time, the active communication didn’t go unnoticed by occupation authorities, who also detected harmful irredentist sentiments. As an OMGUS psychological study from February 1947 complained, the “refugee will send chain letters to all his friends as long as he can delude himself with the idea that there is a chance for return.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Cited in Franz Lorenz, *Schicksal Vertreibung - Aufbruch aus dem Glauben. Dokumente und Selbstzeugnisse von religiösen, geistigen und kulturellen Ringen mit dem Vertriebenenschicksal* (Köln: Wienand, 1980), 34.

⁴⁷ Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴⁸ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 315.

What the OMGUS report and Theodor Schieder's dismissive remarks failed to take note of, and what becomes evident in the letters, is that these were not expressions of a political claim, but a coping mechanism for contending with immense traumata and finding consolation. Unsurprisingly, these efforts of coming to terms with one's personal travails could lead to resignation and despair, as the letter of a woman deported to Germany after many months in a labor camp in the Urals reveals:

“And now I sit here in the countryside, without love, without money, without home, without homeland, and I do not know what will become of me, since I don't know where my family and relatives are. My only possessions are what I have on, I don't receive any support, no pension. Our entire fortune is gone. You know best, what kind of days we experienced and now through the Nazi war we have become beggars. My tears, my despair, my silent helpless sorrows are accusations against what I endured in Russia. Realistically I tell myself, that my Ruth and my husband no longer are alive because the ardors were too great, but emotionally I hope to see them again. I give myself a year for a reunion with my loved ones, this separation I could yet endure and then—then my life has no purpose anymore.”⁴⁹

The documentary record also reveals an immense catharsis that came with articulating the traumas one endured, however. The comfort in talking becomes evident in a short piece in the high-brow newspaper *Die Gegenwart*, where a journalist simply recounted snippets of conversations overheard on a night train one summer night in 1946. Filing in and out, Sudeten Germans, Prussians, and Silesians variously exchanged experiences, inquired about each other's fates, and offered words of sympathy and encouragement: “You will make it.”⁵⁰ When expellees

⁴⁹ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1872, “Aus einem Brief (gekürzt) von Frau Käthe W. bei Dittmar,” December 7, 1945, 1-2.

⁵⁰ Ilse K. Bembé, “Im D-Zug. Sommer 1946, nachts,” *Die Gegenwart*, September 24, 1946, 31-33.

came together and talked, however, they not only sought comfort, they simultaneously circulated narratives that became more and more stylized with each rendition.

“Through Hitler’s Fault”: Explaining “Flight and Expulsion” in Occupied Germany

Even as the forced migrations of ethnic Germans still unfolded, a cacophony of voices—Nazi propaganda, refugee reports, and press commentary—turned “flight and expulsion” into an inextricable combination of experiences, rumor, fear, yearning, and ideology. It was against this backdrop of memories and word-of-mouth reporting that some Germans attempted to make sense of the consequences of the Third Reich and its defeat, and communicate those interpretations to their compatriots. Contrary to assumptions of West German amnesia and resistance to contemplate the years 1933-1945, not all Germans shied from confronting their compatriots with the past. In Cologne, the future mayor Ernst Schwingel commissioned a series of placards in the summer of 1945 to educate the population on the sources of their grievances. The “jostling, shoving, cursing, pounding” on “overfilled old streetcars” were the “inheritance left by the Nazi pest.”⁵¹ To those suffering waiting in queues at hydrants, posters reminded that this was the result of voting for Hitler; standing in lines and long waits for food were the abundance of Hitler’s garden; and “nothing would have happened” to the symbol of the city, the Cologne

⁵¹ “*Drängeln, Stossen, Schimpfen, Schlagen, überfüllte alte Wagen ist was uns die Nazipest als ihr Erbe hinterlässt.*”

Cathedral, if Hitler had not ruled.⁵² But concerning the refugees, a Schwering placard offered a biting epitaph: “Through the streets just as beggars we crawl, thanks to the Nazi Reich.”⁵³

The Sudeten German politician Richard Reitzner, returning from British exile in 1946, likewise pointed to the past in in order to make sense of the expulsions and simultaneously offer a plea to vote for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD):

“A harsh fate has befallen us Sudeten Germans. At the end of the sacrilegious politics of Hitler and Henlein stands the loss of our dear, beloved homeland. We Social Democrats have tirelessly called for humanity and justice in a world poisoned by the total war. That our voice has not reached the centers of international decision making really was not our fault. It was above all the crimes that the Hitler system committed against humanity. Once before we appealed to your political intelligence in September 1938. [...] Wenzel Jaksch at that time called to you: ‘Compatriots! Sudeten Germans! Consider in this fateful hour: the youthful fanatics that call for violence have no inkling what great horror and destruction the word ‘world war’ entails. They have experienced no drumfire, they do not know how poison gas corrodes the lungs, they have not yet seen peaceful villages and cities ignite into flames. The misery of homeless refugees, the dying of innocent children, the pain of the wives and mothers who mourn the torn bodies of their loved ones is foreign to them!’ [...] Learn from the past! [...] We clearly see the massive rescue effort that we Social Democrats face, we want to through positive work in the service of the expellees and new citizens make an earnest contribution to the rebuilding of Bavaria, Germany, and Europe and to a dearly won yet nevertheless prosperous future of the German people!”⁵⁴

German politicians and journalists struggled to engage with the interconnectivity of dictatorship, war, and the defeat’s consequences. However, in the first two postwar years, the

⁵² “Müsst ihr am Hydrant euch quälen, Denkt das kommt vom HITLER-wählen”; “Schlange stehn und langes Warten Früchte sind aus HITLERS Garten”; “Dem Kölner Dom wär nichts passiert, hätt' Adolf Hitler nicht regiert.” Other similar posters: “Trümmer hat der Krieg gebracht, den die Nazis angefacht”; “Hier wird wieder Recht gesprochen, wo die Nazi es gebrochen”; “St. Martin wie die Welt es kannte, eh' Hitlers Krieg es niederbrannte”; “Alle Kirchen sind vernichtet, das hat Hitler angerichtet.” All texts “museenkoeln.de | Bild der Woche: ‘Drängeln, Stossen, Schimpfen, Schlagen...,’” accessed March 4, 2018, https://www.museenkoeln.de/portal/bild-der-woche.aspx?bdw=1998_47.

⁵³ “Durch die Straßen Bettlern gleich, ziehn wir Dank dem NAZI-Reich”. For a reproduction of the refugee placard, see Gabriele Brodmann, *Die Bewältigung der deutschen Vergangenheit aus deutscher und ausländischer Sicht*. (München: Grin Verlag, 2005), 8.

⁵⁴ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2074, “Aufruf an die Neubürger,” c. fall 1946.

Nazi past—and not “selective remembering” of German suffering—loomed large over the public discourse over the refugee crisis.⁵⁵ As officials attempted to prepare their population for the upcoming challenges, explanations for why they were there to begin with were sorely needed. The early journalism in occupied Germany proved a crucial medium for describing, explaining, and coming to terms with the Nazi past and its consequences, including the expulsions. Not only did journalists emerge as important actors in making sense of the columns of refugees and emergency camps that became ubiquitous features in the postwar landscape, they also played a vital role in translating the scenes into political messages of the occupation forces who wanted to make plain that the postwar burdens were Germany’s responsibility. If Germans could understand that it had been Nazi aggression which produced the catastrophe, perhaps they would be more willing to accept consequences and the victors’ imperatives of denazification, demilitarization, decartelization, and democratization.⁵⁶ Concerning the waves of refugees, one step in getting Germans to roll up their sleeves in rebuilding efforts seemed to illuminate the link between the waves of unwanted strangers and the bygone criminal Nazi regime.

The Allies hoped to achieve this through a rigorous ban on all militaristic and nationalist organizations, which strongly proscribed expellee activities. This left the official Allied-licensed German media as the sole shaper of public discourse. The occupiers vigilantly controlled opinion forming institutions in order to project messages that aligned with their occupation goals of denazification and establishing democracy or socialism, meaning that German self-pity or recriminations against the victors were a nonstarter. This likely explains why descriptions of

⁵⁵ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

what had occurred during “flight and expulsion” remained vague and only sporadically appeared in American and British Zone headlines prior to the foundation of the FRG and greater press independence. Surprisingly, in the Soviet Zone (SBZ) such discussions featured relatively frequently and in rather open language in the early postwar years. Despite the danger of alluding to the role of the Red Army in Germany suffering, German refugees allowed for an emotional and forceful indictment of the criminality of Nazism and need for socialist correctives. Both Western and Soviet presses initially acknowledged a catastrophe and horrendous suffering.

Condemnations of fascism should hardly come as a surprise when one peruses the occupation press in the Soviet Zone. Prior to 1949, however, readers in the West German zones also could not escape references to the past when opening their newspapers. Until the late 1940s, for instance, the Liberal-conservative Freiburg-based *Die Gegenwart* and *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Mainz consistently ran features focusing on Nazi atrocities, war crimes trials, and investigative reports of the dictatorship. The two papers represented the postwar journalistic elite in the Western Zones, and their often critical tone sought to promote the type of introspection that the Anglo-American press officers welcomed.⁵⁷ The expellees, despite their prominence in postwar society, appeared infrequently in reporting. When Western Zone papers addressed them, they typically identified their root cause: The Third Reich and the lost war. The most striking case, and among the first overt references to the expulsions, appeared on the front page of *Die Zeit*, a center-left periodical founded in February 1946 in Hamburg under British license. A week after

⁵⁷ Both papers consisted of sophisticated reporting on international and domestic politics and allocated much space to literary contributions and short stories from literary notables. A number of collaborators of *Die Gegenwart*, which appeared until at least 1956, had previously worked at the liberal *Frankfurter Allgemeine* shuttered by the Nazi regime in 1943. The *Allgemeine Zeitung*, reformed in 1945 by Erich Dombrowski and former *Frankfurter Allgemeine* journalists, continues to appear in Mainz. Some of its collaborators and staff of *Die Gegenwart* together with Dombrowski formed the centrist *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in 1949. The two papers, in other words, boasted many of the postwar journalistic elite that had opposed the Nazi regime and who shaped public discourse in the early FRG.

firing up its presses, the front page featured an illustration of bedraggled figures accompanied by the allegorical apparitions of hunger, misery, and sickness returning “home into the Reich.”⁵⁸

By invoking the Nazi rallying cry to bring all ethnic Germans into the borders of a unified state, the editors suggested that Nazi hubris had produced the disaster, which ironically had in its own disastrous way fulfilled Hitler’s vision of an ethnically homogenous nation. The accompanying caption acknowledged the expulsions as a “new milestone in the path of suffering of the German people...unequaled in history,” yet went on to castigate not just National Socialism for producing the unprecedented humanitarian disaster. “When from the dismal procession of human misery the dull and yet all-shattering denouncement against the war and its destruction rises to the heavens, we must remain silent. We have become less than beggars. Our guilt makes us voiceless.”

While for some an unspecified guilt explained German self-pity, the Berlin’s *Der Tagesspiegel*, a periodical with similar political tendencies as *Die Zeit* published under American license since September 1945, offered a different take. Appearing in June 1946, “Through Hitler’s Fault” declared expellees as the “poorest of the affected,” yet attributed their suffering to the “insanity” of the deceased dictator.⁵⁹ Readers were left to ponder for themselves what aspects of National Socialism were “insane,” but by blaming Hitler, “ordinary” Germans could count themselves among the war’s victims and avoid contemplating responsibility for the outbreak and consequences of the war. Others were more specific: Pointing out that the “movement of peoples” had first been unleashed by “Hitler, the modern Genghis Khan,” a lengthy *Die Gegenwart* article detailed the murderous population politics of the Third Reich that had now

⁵⁸ “Heim ins Reich,” *Die Zeit*, February 28, 1946, 1.

⁵⁹ “Durch Hitlers Schuld,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, June 9, 1946, 3.

“rebounded terribly.” It was all the result of “the lost war unleashed by National Socialism.”⁶⁰ Moreover, to prevent the formation of even yet another dangerous “fifth column,” Germany itself needed to contend with the “fate...it has created for itself or even conjured.”⁶¹

The Third Reich also lingered in an article from April 1947 in the *Niedersächsische Rundschau*, a weekly paper of the CDU in Lower Saxony: “The current unprecedented debasement [*erniedrigung*] of Germany is the consequence of political errors made in 1933. Something like this cannot happen again.”⁶² The article’s indictment, however subtle, of National Socialism culminated in an appeal to expellees and non-expellees to support the only party that fought for the rights of refugees and all Germans by transforming expellee suffering into an argument for Christian-democratic values:

“The refugees have experienced themselves [*am eigenen Leib*] with utmost severity and cruelty to what consequences politics with a purely materialistic worldview leads. Their eyes must have been opened to the fact that the German catastrophe had its root causes in spiritual decay, in deviation from Christendom. They today daily experience egoism and harshness and lack of understanding in their inconceivable need. They must interpret such dispositions as a consequence of purely materialistic thought. This realization can only lead expellees to the conclusion that they politically turn to only those powers that want to build a new, a different Germany”⁶³

While not specifically commenting on the long-term roots of the expulsions, a report on the condition of expellees arriving from Poland in Marienthal in *Der Spiegel*, a social democratic oriented weekly magazine founded by British press officers in Lower Saxony in 1947, provided

⁶⁰ R.H., “Der fünfte Stand?”, *Die Gegenwart*, November 30, 1946, 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 12.

⁶² “Flüchtlinge-Ostvertriebene! Euer Schicksal liegt in eurer eigenen Hand!”, *Niedersächsische Rundschau: Wochenschrift der Christlich-Demokratischen Union*, April 12, 1947, 1.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 3.

among the first nationally circulated images and detailed descriptions of the people “from the East.”⁶⁴ The photo of an emaciated man clinging to his papers when “everything else had been taken from him” dominated the cover of the magazine’s fourth addition in January 1947.⁶⁵ The accompanying article, “The 65th Death: A Cold Experiment,” detailed the horrible humanitarian conditions on the deportation transports.⁶⁶

British papers and military reports corroborate the details.⁶⁷ Apart from a somewhat cynical headline, the balanced tone refrained from criticizing occupation authorities who oversaw the process, and in fact pointed out that they vowed that they no longer would accept unheated transports. Instead, the Polish government appeared as the culprit in this debacle. One must assume that British press officers, who sat on the board of *Spiegel* until the magazine’s fifth edition, had a hand in the piece’s language as well for its entire *raison d’être*. Coinciding with considerable press coverage in the United Kingdom as well as Germany of the poor conditions of the transfers, British authorities had grown weary of the financial and administrative burdens of “Operation Swallow,” the organized deportations from Poland to the British Zone. The *Marienthal* incident provided an opportune justification to file formal protests with Polish

⁶⁴ A total of four British officers, including Harry Bohrer, a Czech national who had fled to the United Kingdom in 1939, explicitly designed the periodical to emulate British news magazines. Initially founded in Hanover as *Diese Woche*, the British sat on the editorial board until the fifth edition, after which it was reformed as *Der Spiegel* in Hamburg under British license. See “Betr.: Harry Bohrer,” *Der Spiegel*, October 7, 1985, 3.

⁶⁵ Cover, *Der Spiegel*, January 25, 1947. So compelling was the image that a 1981 picture book of “flight and expulsion,” brought out by the publisher Podzun which specialized in popular histories focusing on the expulsions and the German military in WWII, reprinted it. Stripped of its context, the caption continued to explain that the man had been left with nothing but his papers, but that he was one of the lucky few to have “escaped the hell” of the Czech and Polish “concentration camps.” Werner Arndt, *Ostpreussen, Westpreussen, Pommern, Schlesien, Sudetenland 1944/1945: die Bild-Dokumentation der Flucht und Vertreibung aus den deutschen Ostgebieten* (Friedberg: Podzun-Pallas-Verl., 1981), 194.

⁶⁶ “Die 65. Tote. Ein Kälte-Experiment,” *Der Spiegel*, January 25, 1947, 5.

⁶⁷ See Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 195–97.

representatives. While the expulsions continued until 1947, British indignation saw a reduction in the scale of transports and improved conditions.⁶⁸ Through *Spiegel*, occupation authorities registered their qualms over egregious inhumane violations while placing the entire responsibility for the outcome of Allied policies squarely on expelling states behind an increasingly hardening Iron Curtain.

Perusing the periodicals of the Western Zones in the immediate postwar years, one finds that the moralizing and somewhat self-critical tone of these articles is an anomaly, however. The forced migrations hardly featured as a topic of discussion, with only occasional fictionalized short stories or reports in 1945 and 1946 that referenced specific travails of the German East.⁶⁹ On the one-year anniversary of German capitulation, *Die Gegenwart* printed a series titled “Chronicle of the Collapse,” with one edition dedicated to the “tragedy of the East” and the Wehrmacht’s “heroic” defense of a region doomed to “descend into an inferno of fire and horror.”⁷⁰ Silence, as opposed to exhaustive coverage, as the general rule and reminders of German aggression when the subject arose must doubtlessly be attributed to American and British supervision. In any case, the discourse of 1945 and 1946 reflects Allied aims of directing

⁶⁸ For more on British policy and the organized expulsions, see Douglas, 197–222. Above all, the negative press coverage must be understood as an attempt of the military government to distance itself from the expulsions. Similar efforts had been made by none other than Winston Churchill himself, when already on August 16, 1945 the former wartime leader shed crocodile tears over the “tragedy of great proportions on a prodigious scale” unfolding in Europe in the House of Commons. British Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 16 August 1945/vol. 413/cc83-4. In his famous Fulton, Missouri speech in March of 1946, Churchill went further and blamed the “enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed of” on the USSR and the “Russian-dominated Polish Government.” Olsen, “The Sinews of Peace.”

⁶⁹ Karl Zimmermann, “Der gestohlene Koffer,” *Die Gegenwart*, February 24, 1946, 24–30; “Flucht über das Frische Haff,” *Die Gegenwart*, March 24, 1946, 27–28; Horst Lange, “Wie damals in Bethlehem,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 25, 1948. See also Maren Röger, “Presse, allgemeine,” in *Die Erinnerung an Flucht und Vertreibung: ein Handbuch der Medien und Praktiken*, ed. Stephan Scholz, Maren Röger, and Bill Niven (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015), 358–71.

⁷⁰ “Die Tragödie des Ostens,” *Die Gegenwart*, May 24, 1946, 15.

Germans toward an understanding of the expulsions rooted in National Socialism and, increasingly as the Cold War confrontation emerged, communist brutality.

Soviet occupation authorities shared the goals of their Anglo-American counterparts, so that one would expect to see a similar desire to brush German victimhood under the carpet, particularly since the Red Army featured prominently in such discussions. The conscious effort to refer to expellees as *Umsiedler* (resettlers) or *Neubürger* (new citizens), as increasingly was the case in the late 1940s, derived from Soviet directives and relativized allusions to violence or injustice implied in the terms “refugee” or “expellee.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, even communist organs did not shy away from discussions of “flight and expulsion” or deny the cruelty of the experiences. Far from it, as a commentator put it bluntly: “Resettlers, refugees, expellees—we may call them what we want, they are victims of the Hitler war.”⁷² German victimhood needed to be contextualized while serving as an object antifascist lesson.

For instance, Wolfgang Parth of the *Berliner Zeitung*, produced in the Soviet sector of Berlin since May 1945, acknowledged the general terrible misery wrought by utter defeat, but couched it as the same agony that the nation had inflicted upon its neighbors.⁷³ Referencing the German expellees specifically, Parth argued that they needed to serve as a reminder that displaced persons had existed since 1933: “Racial hatred” and political oppression drove thousands abroad, reaching their apex in Nazi resettlement of ethnic Germans and millions of slave laborers brought to the Reich. These were the true source of German misfortune, Parth

⁷¹ From the protocol of the first ZfdU meeting, the chairman Joseph Schlaffer explained the terminology “resettler” as deriving from the “express wishes of the Soviet mil[itary] adm[inistration].” “In the term ‘resettler’, Schlaffer explained, “the harsh expression should be avoided, namely that we are ministering to mere refugees and homeland returnees, instead we want to settle here the people that come from the East.” Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 215.

⁷² “Mit Herz und Kopf,” *Neues Deutschland*, June 6, 1946, 2.

⁷³ Wolfgang Parth, “Flüchtlinge,” *Berliner Zeitung*, July 29, 1945, 3.

explained, for the millions who, though free of individual guilt, needed to now “pay for the politics of predation of the war criminals.” A few months later, *Berliner Zeitung* again contextualized the German migrations in the fascist “reordering of Europe” that produced “everywhere extermination, expulsion, or deportations” and “millions of people driven from home and hearth onto the country lanes, wandering into the unknown.” Before one should contemplate the German forced migration, one needed to ponder how Hitler “like Attila...uprooted millions of people through his criminal racial and population policies, and under the slogan of ‘reordering Europe’ he created chaos.”⁷⁴ Soviet Zone papers pursued a unified line of framing the expulsions as “the last act of the movement of peoples that began with 300,000 German Jews...encompassed 20 million people.”⁷⁵

Communist presses naturally omitted references to Red Army violence perpetrated against Germans during the forced migrations. Because of their widespread knowledge, this outright absence would have undermined the narrative, so that writers shifted the blame for undeniable civilian suffering onto the Wehrmacht and Nazi party. Jumping on instances where German authorities implemented forced evacuations, *Berliner Zeitung* explained that millions were chased “mostly against their will” from their homes, where “many died in the road ditches!”⁷⁶ The expulsions were, as the title of the story alleged, the “last act of a migration of peoples criminally initiated by Hitler.” For Parth, expellee plight also represented a “last act of this great tragedy, which has cost all peoples rivers of blood and seas of tears.”⁷⁷ This “tragedy,”

⁷⁴ “Die Wanderung der Millionen: Der letzte Akt der von Hitler verbrecherisch eingeleiteten Völkerwanderung,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 25, 1945.

⁷⁵ “Mit Herz und Kopf.”

⁷⁶ “Die Wanderung der Millionen.”

⁷⁷ Parth, “Flüchtlinge.”

Soviet Zone papers emphasized, started with fascist aggression, and the “entire German people now reaps the terrible harvest of a twelve year long politics of insanity.”⁷⁸ Fascism’s consequences needed to be atoned for, as Michael Tschesnow put it succinctly in *Neues Deutschland*: “Like a boomerang the German people are struck by what they expected of other peoples through its support of the Hitlerian politics of predation [*Hitlerische Raubpolitik*].”⁷⁹ In contending with this reality, Germans should not indulge in a “fruitless bemoaning of ‘fate,’ but instead constantly think of the guilty with a holy hatred” and recall what the “blood-soaked Nazi clique” wrought upon Germany.⁸⁰

In the first two years after 1945, SBZ attempts at explaining the calamity that had befallen Germany corresponded to some Western Zone efforts that also saw a relationship, however vaguely articulated, between the “guilt” of the Third Reich and the disastrous outcomes of its defeat. The communist press more forcefully acknowledged expellee suffering than their Western counterparts, because their relatable misfortune powerfully underlined the criminality of fascism and served as one of the most compelling arguments for a “New Germany.” Moreover, the SED’s unpopularity and the greater effort needed to transmit the desired values required for this rebuilding meant that the link between fascism and German victimhood and acceptance of the consequences of German hubris needed to be more explicit. While communist elites endorsed a recognition of a self-made disaster and, by implication, an acceptance of reality, few in the Western Zones spoke so plainly. While the press lamented Germany’s misery and reproached

⁷⁸ “Helft den Umsiedlern,” *Berliner Zeitung*, December 29, 1945.

⁷⁹ “Mit Herz und Kopf.”

⁸⁰ Parth, “Flüchtlinge.”

Nazi bigwigs, the vague formulations of guilt did little to persuade readers confronted with the abject deprivations described in previous chapters.

As numerous surveys of the occupiers demonstrated, explanations of how it came to the dire postwar situation did not make their desired point. A July 1946 American survey found that only 45 percent of residents in Munich, Frankfurt, and Stuttgart agreed with the proposition that National Socialism ultimately caused refugee plight; in communities under 10,000, only one in three concurred.⁸¹ Similar refusals to see the interconnectedness between German suffering and the war that it launched prevailed in the SBZ, as a 1947 anonymous letter of an Upper Silesian to the SED Directorate of Greater Berlin reveals. Condemning the SED's lack of a position to the territorial question, the author explained that twelve million people had been robbed of their "entire goods and chattels" and were driven "completely naked to the Reich" while Poles plundered and robbed them along the way. In Germany they have been "exposed to hunger, misery, and the cold," and the little help that is offered is not enough. The letter culminated in a rejection of the type of reporting circulating in the SBZ:

"One has accused Nazism of monstrosities; these monstrosities however were committed during the war. But already three years have passed since the end of the war and the monstrosities are being committed with the greatest enthusiasm by the humane peoples of Poland and Russia during peace. Is it not terrible to throw people out of their homes and even plunder their belongings?"⁸²

⁸¹ Grosser, "Wir brauchten sie nicht zu nehmen, sind aber froh gewesen, dass sie hier gewesen sind". Die Aufnahme der Heimatvertriebenen und SBZ-Flüchtlinge in Mannheim 1945-1960," in *Flüchtlingsfrage, das Zeitproblem: amerikanische Besatzungspolitik, deutsche Verwaltung und die Flüchtlinge in Württemberg-Baden, 1945-1949*, by Christiane Grosser, Thomas Grosser, and Rita Müller (Mannheim: Institut für Landeskunde und Regionalforschung der Universität Mannheim, 1993), 107–8.

⁸² Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 901 Nr. 419, Anonymous letter of an Upper Silesian to the Landesvorstand von Groß-Berlin SED, October 28, 1947.

These views were far from a minority opinion. Expellees understandably felt their own suffering more intensely than that of others. The administrator of Guben summarized the contradictory sentiments among refugees at public gatherings in October 1948: “Why did the Russian not tolerate us as refugees in Poland, why did he not keep us? We so long for our homeland. We of course know that we lost the war and want to atone for everything [*wieder gutmachen*], but the Russia should just let us back into the East... We would embrace and kiss the Russian if he were to give us the homeland on which we depend so much back... Must we resettlers pay for the war alone?”⁸³ Fearing the persistence of organizations cultivating a self-understanding of victimhood at odds with its antifascist narrative, the SED planted agitators in an attempt to steer conversations into more suitable waters. As the 1948 guidelines for these informants explained, the expellees “simply don’t want to know anything about the factories of death in Treblinka, Auschwitz and Maidanek,” and needed to be reminded that Poles would “never again allow a ‘master race’ to rule in their lands with unheard of capriciousness.”⁸⁴

The first postwar years saw a concerted effort to impart political messages and move expellees and the rest of the population to accept the expulsions as a result of National Socialism and a war of annihilation waged by Nazi Germany. Yet broad unwillingness to accept the war’s consequences as a purely German problem, as will be argued, abounded. For now it must be reemphasized that while expellees contended with their traumas and circulated their stories, the media of occupied Germany helped construct a narrative of “flight and expulsion” that added to this layer of memory.

⁸³ Quoted in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 221. Such informal gatherings, organized by community notables from the homeland, in the SBZ and in Berlin’s western zones were quite common and closely monitored by the SED and its network of informants. See reports in Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 901 Nr. 419.

⁸⁴ Cited in Kossert, 216–17.

“Dear God, send this rabble home”: German Responses to the Expulsions

The sudden emergence of traumatized and destitute throngs, competing for jobs and resources in close-knit communities and challenging the local cultural, political, and confessional harmony created enormous tensions that threatened the fragile peace and undermined postwar reconstruction. The whole enterprise was, according to a German refugee commissioner in 1946, a “great experiment.”⁸⁵ The historian Mathias Beer goes further in the assessment, calling the “absorption of many thousands of expellees...a daring involuntary effort with incalculable risk and unforeseeable outcome.”⁸⁶ The herculean task that German bureaucrats faced during the refugee crisis became clearer after the 1950 census: The Western Zones had taken in some eight million expellees, while 3.2 million landed in the Soviet Zone.⁸⁷ In other words, in the immediate postwar period, East Germans constituted more than 24% of the population in the Soviet Zone and 16% in the Western Zones.⁸⁸

While food shortages weighed heavily, housing posed the most significant predicament. More than a quarter of all dwellings in Germany were completely or heavily damaged; urban centers were the most affected, with many cities over 50% destroyed. Rural communities had to

⁸⁵ Andrea Kühne, *Entstehung, Aufbau und Funktion der Flüchtlingsverwaltung in Württemberg-Hohenzollern 1945-1952: Flüchtlingspolitik im Spannungsfeld deutscher und französischer Interessen* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1999), 244.

⁸⁶ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 102.

⁸⁷ Hans Neuhoﬀ and Kulturstiftung der Deutschen Vertriebenen, *Die deutschen Vertriebenen in Zahlen* (Bonn: Osmipress, 1977), 19; Michael Schwartz, *Vertriebene und “Umsiedlerpolitik”: Integrationskonflikte in den deutschen Nachkriegs-Gesellschaften und die Assimilationsstrategien in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1961* (München: Oldenbourg, 2004), 54.

⁸⁸ Broken down by state in the Soviet Zone: Brandenburg (24.8%), Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (43.3%), Sachsen (17.2%), Sachsen-Anhalt (24.4%), Thüringen (23%). In the Western Zones: Schleswig-Holstein (27.2%), Hamburg (11.3%), Niedersachsen (24.3%), Bremen (13.9%), Nordrhein-Westfalen (14.5%), Hessen (17%), Rheinland-Pfalz (8.1%), Baden-Württemberg (15.5%), Bayern (17.3%), Saarland (1.7%), West Berlin (6.9%).

bear the vast majority of the influx, with more than 85% of expellees sent there.⁸⁹ The local population was soon overwhelmed. In the village of Beckedorf near Celle, a 1947 protocol reveals that more than 400 refugees had been settled in the community of 480.⁹⁰ The Catholic bastion of Vechta in Lower Saxony saw its prewar population of more than 50,000 swell to over 75,000 after the arrival of Protestant East Prussian and Silesian expellees in 1946, topping out at just under 80,000 by 1950.⁹¹ On average, every third person in the Western occupation zones was a refugee or expellee.⁹²

Though this was an issue throughout Germany, studies suggest that expellees in larger cities faced fewer resentments from the local population as they sought to carve out a place in the new homeland.⁹³ Though the dire housing and food shortages created an intense competition for resources in German cities between 1945 and 1948, the refugees represented a smaller proportion of the population and were less visible. In addition to being generally more cosmopolitan and less sensitive to “outsiders” than their bucolic compatriots, city dwellers were better informed of wartime events such as the expulsions, as an American survey concluded in July 1946, and

⁸⁹ Franz J. Bauer’s case study of Bavaria speaks of an “over-filling of rural areas,” which placed the “main burden” on farmers. Bauer, “Aufnahme und Eingliederung der Flüchtlinge und Vertriebenen. Das Beispiel Bayern 1945-1950,” 208. See also Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 308.

⁹⁰ Rainer Schulze, *Unruhige Zeiten: Erlebnisberichte aus dem Landkreis Celle 1945-1949* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1991), 281.

⁹¹ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 58.

⁹² Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 100.

⁹³ Alexander von Plato, “Fremde Heimat : zur Integration von Flüchtlingen und Einheimischen in die neue Zeit,” in *Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten”: auf der Suche nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in nachfaschistischen Ländern*, by Lutz Niethammer and Alexander von Plato (Berlin; Bonn: Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., 1985), 172–219; Grosser, “Wir brauchten sie nicht zu nehmen, sind aber froh gewesen, dass sie hier gewesen sind’. Die Aufnahme der Heimatvertriebenen und SBZ-Flüchtlinge in Mannheim 1945-1960”; Evelyn Glensk, *Die Aufnahme und Eingliederung der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge in Hamburg 1945-1953* (Hamburg: Verlag Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1994); Bernhard Parisius, in *Zeitzeugen im Interview: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene im Raum Osnabrück nach 1945*, by Klaus J Bade and Bernhard Parisius (Osnabrück: Rasch, 1998), 13–91.

willing to accept their consequences.⁹⁴ Moreover, urban residents had faced greater deprivations during the war, enabling an identification with refugees and a mutual understanding based on common experiences of suffering.⁹⁵

Things looked vastly different in the countryside, where the majority of expellees sought a new home. A Franconian paper in 1948 acknowledged the “fruitful relationship” that had developed between expellees and the indigenous population remained an illusion in the small communities and villages, where “meanness and intolerance is still often making the hard existence of the expellees more difficult.”⁹⁶ A 1950 investigation conducted by the sociologist Elisabeth Pfeil for the state of Bavaria corroborated these observations, finding that the social tensions were greatest in communities with less than 2,000 inhabitants.⁹⁷ Regional studies have supported the conclusion that the integration in rural communities was fraught with greater conflict.⁹⁸ Being generally more conservative and closed off from the war and its consequences,

⁹⁴ Grosser, “‘Wir brauchten sie nicht zu nehmen, sind aber froh gewesen, dass sie hier gewesen sind’. Die Aufnahme der Heimatvertriebenen und SBZ-Flüchtlinge in Mannheim 1945-1960,” 107–8. The survey found that 45% of the residents of Munich, Frankfurt, and Stuttgart agreed that National Socialism ultimately caused the refugee plight, suggesting a German responsibility, while only 34% of Germans in communities with populations fewer than 10,000 held the same view.

⁹⁵ Alexander von Plato’s investigation of the Ruhr region found that nearly 70% of all native residents had lost or been separated from a family member during the war, just under half had lost their homes or suffered terrible damages due to Allied bombing, and extreme food shortages were widespread for years after the conflict. Plato, “Fremde Heimat : zur Integration von Flüchtlingen und Einheimischen in die neue Zeit,” 203–4.

⁹⁶ *Fränkische Landeszeitung*, September 21, 1948, quoted in Ian Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 64.

⁹⁷ Elisabeth Pfeil, *Fünf Jahre später die Eingliederung der Heimatvertriebenen in Bayern bis 1950* (Frankfurt am Main: W. Metzner, 1951), 101.

⁹⁸ Franz J. Bauer, *Flüchtlinge und Flüchtlingspolitik in Bayern 1945-1950* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982); Paul Erker, *Vom Heimatvertriebenen zum Neubürger: Sozialgeschichte der Flüchtlinge in einer agrarischen Region Mittelfrankens, 1945-1955* (Stuttgart: in Komm. bei Steiner-Verlag Wiesbaden, 1988); Doris von der Brelie-Lewien, “Flüchtlinge in einer ländlichen Region - Aspekte des Strukturwandels zwischen ‘Dritten Reich’ und Nachkriegszeit,” in *Niedersachsen nach 1945: Gesellschaftliche Umbrüche, Reorganisationsprozesse, sozialer und ökonomischer Strukturwandel*, by Doris von der Brelie-Lewien, Helga Grebing, and Angelika Hohenstein (Hannover: Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1995), 110–51.

the expellees faced a much more insular world. Village elites exerted a decisive influence on whether and how expellees would be taken in and provided prospects of local rural communities.⁹⁹ When the refugees emerged from their transports in the undamaged countryside, where the destruction of the war had been an abstract concept until the final months or weeks of the war, they typically faced scorn and hatred. “The people who have lost the most,” Philip Raup of the Food and Agriculture Branch in the American zone commented in October 1946, “have come into very close contact with the farmers who have lost the least.”¹⁰⁰

The often hysterical tenor that accompanied the refugee crisis remains largely forgotten, overshadowed by a West German “success story” of integration. Expellees and particularly their children often frame family histories as a tale of self-made achievement, where years of suffering during and after the war were overcome in a difficult “fresh start” with hard work and an industriousness that garnered social recognition and economic prosperity.¹⁰¹ In turn, politicians and the media lionized expellees as an essential element of the Federal Republic’s triumphs; indeed, in these “out of ashes” narratives, they are “the symbol of the success of the Federal Republic” and an integral foundational myth.¹⁰² In the introduction to the 2011 temporary exhibit *Angekommen* (Arrived) guide, the president of the Federation of Expellees Erika Steinbach concluded that the integration “has largely succeeded and become a part of the postwar success

⁹⁹ Rita Müller, “Von den Schwierigkeiten einer Bergstrassengemeinde im Umgang mit den Heimatvertriebenen. Dossenheim 1945-1950,” in *Flüchtlingsfrage, das Zeitproblem: amerikanische Besatzungspolitik, deutsche Verwaltung und die Flüchtlinge in Württemberg-Baden, 1945-1949*, by Christiane Grosser, Thomas Grosser, and Rita Müller (Mannheim: Institut für Landeskunde und Regionalforschung der Universität Mannheim, 1993), 197–223.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Bauer, *Flüchtlinge und Flüchtlingspolitik in Bayern 1945-1950*, 444.

¹⁰¹ Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 38 and 69.

¹⁰² Susanne Greiter, *Flucht und Vertreibung im Familiengedächtnis: Geschichte und Narrativ* (München: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2014), 300. See also Moeller, *War Stories*, 174.

story of our country.”¹⁰³ Personal memories of animosities and feuds during the process of integration today are often recalled as humorous misunderstandings, while national narratives ignore the “cold homeland” that greeted the displaced East Germans.¹⁰⁴ These romanticized notions obscure very profound hostilities that expellees encountered and needed to confront in order to truly “arrive”; before they were foundations of democracy, the expellees were the dynamite that threatened it.

The first hurdle to be overcome was the widespread refusal on the part of Germans to comply with the Allied directives to accept the expellees. Although the ACC issued a decree that sanctioned the appropriation of rooms and property as well as compulsory rental agreements for refugees, the enforcement depended on local authorities and police who often were unwilling to back the newcomers against the interests of the community.¹⁰⁵ In Hessen, a police chief for seven weeks simply ignored a court order mandating that police permit refugees who had been locked from their sublet back into the home, until state agencies suspended him and intervened.¹⁰⁶ Even when authorities managed to forcefully find accommodations, it set up an awkward and acrimonious dynamic, as Gertrud K. recalled: “The family screamed and shook because they had to give up the small room to us. These people still had everything and did not know what it means to lose the homeland.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Katharina Klotz and Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, *Angekommen die Integration der Vertriebenen in Deutschland* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Universitätsdruckerei und Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011), 11.

¹⁰⁴ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 135–36. Albrecht Lehmann reached similar conclusions in his interviews with expellees and their children, noting that in very small communities past slights and disagreements remained topical, though this can be attributed to the social dynamics of rural communities. Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 48.

¹⁰⁵ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 104.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Reitzner, *Vom Ostwind verweht...: Das Schicksal von Millionen* (München, 1948), 20–21.

¹⁰⁷ Kempowski-Biographienarchiv 1921, “Flucht und Vertreibung von Gertrud K.,” undated. True to the positive “out of ashes” narrative, K. recalled that because local inhabitants of the small southern German town had not

Bypassing provisions proved relatively easy, particularly in the Soviet Zone, where by 1948 only 4% of available dwellings in Brandenburg had been inspected to ascertain their suitability for refugee housing.¹⁰⁸ Open defiance of the law required the Allies to conduct snap inspections, which in some cases led to arrests, but a British officer concluded that “at the best they get the minimum prescribed by law and at the worst they have to accept accommodation which is scarcely fit for cattle.”¹⁰⁹ To enforce their directives, occupation troops occasionally moved refugees into confiscated housing at gunpoint.¹¹⁰ On at least two occasions, US military courts sentenced obstinate resisters along with their families to several weeks of life in a refugee camp with nothing but a few kilos of luggage, consciously reproducing the expellee experience.¹¹¹

Even when refugees managed to find room in a house or barn, their unwelcome presence, foreign mannerisms, and unfamiliar customs caused consternation. The strange smells of their cooking unleashed what contemporaries called a “war of cooling spoons,” and homeowners often made life as miserable as possible by denying access to kitchens or bathrooms and stipulating specific times when their “guests” could enter or leave the property.¹¹² Other observers spoke of an “acute war between old and new citizens,” noting “clear outlines of

experienced the war, she often felt prejudice and animosity, “but it always went upwards.” After a detailed description of her expulsion, the postwar period lists merely biographical highlights and career achievements.

¹⁰⁸ Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany*, 204.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 313.

¹¹⁰ See Marion Frantziach-Immenkeppel, “Die Vertriebenen: Hemmnisse, Antriebskräfte und Wege ihrer Integration in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” (Reimer, 1987), 119; Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 313.

¹¹¹ Bernhard Piegsa, “‘Zigeuner’, ‘Neubürger’, ‘Entwicklungshelfer’ - Schlaglichter auf Ankunft und Aufnahme der Heimatvertriebenen in Bayern 1945 bis 1950 am Beispiel der Oberpfalz,” *Jahrbücher für fränkische Landesforschung* 60 (2000): 776.

¹¹² Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 110.

a...class struggle.”¹¹³ Though the countryside had been spared the worst of the wartime destruction, expellees and non-expellees competed for the same limited resources, and locals resented sharing even the most trivial of items. A refugee recounted how even her request for straw in order to make pillows was rejected by an irate farmer, as then “everyone will come.”¹¹⁴ Another woman recalled years later how after her mother had gathered stinging nettles and saltbush for food, villagers complained bitterly that “now they eat all the food for our geese! We have nothing for our little ducks and geese.”¹¹⁵

The key to survival for expellees lay in securing a paying position, which meant an extreme competition for the more limited work opportunities in the countryside. One of the few options available was agricultural labor, where the sudden liberation of farmers’ slave workers that they had enjoyed during the Third Reich produced huge demands.¹¹⁶ In February 1946, Alois Schlögl, co-founder of the Christian Social Union and dominant force in Bavarian politics, complained in an open letter of labor shortages and indolent refugees: “These conditions are scandalous. It must be the task of the Bavarian council of ministers to finally and quickly intervene with radical measures. Whoever wants to live and eat in Bavaria needs to work here as well. No lady is too fine and lovely so that she should be above farm work.”¹¹⁷

German authorities were willing to help meet agricultural demands. In the spring of 1946, the Helmstedt labor office resorted to separating able-bodied men from their families, sending

¹¹³ Beer, 110.

¹¹⁴ Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 49.

¹¹⁵ Silke Satjukow and Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, *Kinder von Flucht und Vertreibung* (Erfurt: Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung Thüringen, 2010), 138.

¹¹⁶ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 112.

¹¹⁷ Cited in Bauer, *Flüchtlinge und Flüchtlingspolitik in Bayern 1945-1950*, 349.

the women, children, and elderly onward for distribution to the various communities. In Bavaria, local authorities intercepted trains from the Sudetenland if they had higher proportions of young adults, rejecting and sending on trains with the elderly and sick to other states, who protested being stuck with “unproductive” elements.¹¹⁸ Once they arrived at their final destinations, farmers “selected” the best laborers to take in, leaving the rest behind at the square or train station for the authorities to deal with.¹¹⁹ Social workers from Marburg complained to regional officials of veritable slave or cattle markets, and that at the arrival of expellees “the people act like beasts, one absolutely must intervene with police.”¹²⁰

Despite being a welcome source of cheap labor, anger erupted when expellees didn’t play along or show sufficient “gratitude.” At the mercy of domineering “hosts” and forced to work long hours for minimal pay, expellees quite often felt that they were indentured servants, whose presence was barely tolerated. Their reduction to agricultural workers and hired help represented a real social degradation for erstwhile independent farmers, skilled laborers, and expellees from urban areas alike. Moreover, the exploitation combined with seething resentment and demeaning treatment produced endless humiliating incidents that often left deep marks: Years later, a woman living for a time on a farm continued to angrily recall a particularly mortifying incident, in which she had to serve guests during a wedding feast at the house and periodically endure the matriarch opening and inspecting her mouth to see if she had eaten any of the food.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 312.

¹¹⁹ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 48.

¹²⁰ Cited in Kossert, 57.

¹²¹ Margot Litten, “Vertriebene - Ablehnung und Verachtung für Landsleute aus dem Osten,” Deutschlandfunk Kultur, accessed May 1, 2017, http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/vertriebene-ablehnung-und-verachtung-fuer-landsleute-aus.976.de.html?dram:article_id=363983.

Expellees engendered sheer contempt among many, who saw in them an existential threat to, as one 1947 report put it, “the homeland-rooted character of our community” and the “ancient tribal values” of “hospitality and moral uprightness.”¹²² An inhabitant of Celle in 1947 claimed that “every farm is completely undermined by the ferment of refugees, this foreign element actually undermines every enterprise. They are hostile to family and to work, and...permanently shatter the uniform character of our villages and farms.”¹²³ Another complaint from Baden-Württemberg protested that “the homeland expellees can’t forever pester us. [...] We aren’t at fault that they had to leave their homeland. They may always talk about how we all lost the war; but one can’t just so simply want to share everything. [...] The homeland expellees must leave here and will. If necessary, then one must use force. One wants to take the land away from us little people so that the homeland expellees get farms.”¹²⁴ A Lower Saxon farmwoman’s 1948 letter was more succinct: “The refugees are difficult to stomach.”¹²⁵

These tensions were partially related to perceived differences in lifestyles between the local community and its new citizens. The outsiders engendered an existential threat to, as one 1947 report put it, “the homeland-rooted character of our community” and the “ancient tribal values” of “hospitality and moral uprightness.”¹²⁶ For the isolated and tight-knit communities, the sudden introduction of large groups of people with a different cultural, social, or religious background provided real and imagined gulfs between the indigenous people and newcomers. In

¹²² Cited in Schulze, *Unruhige Zeiten*, 303.

¹²³ Cited in Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 59.

¹²⁴ Cited in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 109.

¹²⁵ Schulze, *Unruhige Zeiten*, 167.

¹²⁶ Cited in Schulze, 303.

the Soviet Zone, refugees faced particular animosity in areas with a high proportion of Sorbs, a Slavic minority, who in some instances reportedly pelted arrivals with stones.¹²⁷ A tremendous point of contention were differences in social background. In Celle, a clergyman complained that the refugees from mostly urban areas brought “big city assumptions to the countryside as well as an unwillingness to help.”¹²⁸ In rural Franconia, Paul Erker’s study found that Silesians faced similar rejections of their “urban attitudes and lifestyle [that] seemed to represent a foreign way of life which destroyed the homogenous character of the village.”¹²⁹

Denominational differences played a considerable role in the antagonism between the two populations as well, though researchers remain divided on how central these truly were.¹³⁰ Numerous examples, however, suggest that at the very least, religion and different religious practices within the same confession could become a pretense for discrimination and misunderstandings. In the pietistic communities of Württemberg, the vivacious and very urban catholic Sudeten Germans caused indignation by introducing movie theaters, dance venues, and sport clubs to village life.¹³¹ The cultural shocks also worked in reverse: Devout expellees from

¹²⁷ Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 289.

¹²⁸ Rainer Schulze, “Growing Discontent: Relations between Native and Refugee Populations in a Rural District in Western Germany after the Second World War,” *German History* 7, no. 3 (1989): 341.

¹²⁹ Erker, *Vom Heimatvertriebenen zum Neubürger*, 35.

¹³⁰ Alexander von Plato for instance argues that religion played only a minor role in the Ruhr. Plato, “Fremde Heimat : zur Integration von Flüchtlingen und Einheimischen in die neue Zeit.” Eugen Lemberg’s 1950 study of Hesse drew the opposite conclusions, maintaining that religious differences were the main source of antagonisms. Eugen Lemberg, *Die entstehung eines neuen Volkes aus Binnendeutschen und Ostvertriebenen; Untersuchungen zum Strukturwandel von Land und Leuten unter dem Einfluss des Vertriebenen-Zustromes*. (Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1950).

¹³¹ Thomas Grosser, *Die Integration der Heimatvertriebenen in Württemberg-Baden (1945-1961)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 404. After calls for the curtailment of the dancing in Buchen in 1950, an expellee responded in an open letter titled “Refugees are at fault for everything”: “You are absolutely certain that only East expellees are at fault for all the dances, because before the expellees came there hardly was any dancing here. But these terrible East expellees, they live here in clover [*wie Gott in Frankreich*], they have an ‘opulent’ income and such ‘nice’ homes,

Hungary openly demonstrated as late as the mid-1950s against the Shrove Tuesday celebrations of the Swabian-Alemannic region, which they decried as “unchristian” blasphemy.¹³²

Indeed, as societal leaders, prominent clergy were in a position to promote greater efforts of lending a hand. Yet ambivalence emerged even in institutions intimately involved in the care of the expellees like no other organization in the immediate postwar era. A December 1946 pastoral letter of Archbishop Michael Faulhaber to the diocese of Munich painted evocative images for Bavarian Catholics: “In long columns, accompanied on both sides of the avenues by the apocalyptic riders of famine and death, the millions of refugees...have migrated into Bavaria.” Faulhaber preached that “those who have are obligated before God and their conscience to help those who have not within the limits of the possible and reasonable.” The message was undercut, however, with the reminder to refugees that they could not violate the Ten Commandments that delineated the sanctity of property and sin of covetousness, and the importance of Bavarian “age-old and holy tradition” such as families reserving places in church. The expellees were to find their appropriate places on the “benches for refugees.”¹³³

Faulhaber not only implied a second class citizenship, but explicitly doubted whether the refugees had a future: Only pending peace treaties which could “open the return of the homesick expellees to their homeland” or emigration, as “was possible...for the Jews,” offered feasible solutions. When a delegation of refugees approached Faulhaber in mid-1945 to request the bishop’s assistance, he demurred and directed them to the Bavarian Red Cross; the Protestant

they feel so well here that they apparently need to dance and jump the entire day. But here...you have utterly fooled yourself.” Quoted in Grosser, 406.

¹³² Hermann Bausinger, Markus Braun, and Herbert Schwedt, *Neue Siedlungen: volkskundlich-soziologische Untersuchungen des Ludwig Uhland-Instituts, Tübingen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1959), 81.

¹³³ Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 399.

State Bishop Hans Meiser likewise declined support.¹³⁴ The churches were, in effect, highly ambivalent. The Council of the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) insisted to the Allied Control Council and United Nations that “[expellees] will never find their way out of misery” and would “rip the rest of the German population deeper into perpetual hunger crisis” if the forced migrations were not reversed or the agricultural breadbasket of the German East returned.¹³⁵ Despite the famous Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt of the EKD in October 1945, clerical notables generally refrained from informing the public in detail of the causes of their suffering or addressing German war crimes, and instead lamented the effects of war on Germany.¹³⁶ For many in a position to intervene, there was no future for expellees in Germany and, therefore, a reluctance to pave the way for their integration.

From a 21st century perspective, these tensions seem quaint and rather mundane, and speak to how much the postwar displacement of millions of Germans diminished such cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. Yet in 1940s Germany, these were still powerful sources of identity and the influx of large groups of people with “foreign” habits was seen as a humanitarian as well as existential crisis that seemed irresolvable. Refugees needed to leave, locals argued, if they and their way of life were to survive. Long after 1945 in Lower Saxony, locals continued to

¹³⁴ Tobias Weger, *“Volkstumskampf” ohne Ende?: sudetendeutsche Organisationen, 1945-1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008), 82.

¹³⁵ Quoted in Jürgen Weber, *Auf dem Wege zur Republik 1945-1947*. (München: Bayerische Landeszentrale, 1994), 113.

¹³⁶ Robert Żurek, *Zwischen Nationalismus und Versöhnung: die Kirchen und die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen 1945-1956* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005).

allege that “the three great maladies [after the war] were the wild boars, the potato weevils, and the refugees.”¹³⁷ Poems from the 1940s capture local resentments:

“Dear God in heaven, see our suffering,
we farmers have no lard and no bread.
Refugees gorge until they are fat and plump
and steal our last bed.
We starve and suffer great harm,
dear God, send this rabble home.
Send them back to Czechoslovakia,
dear God, free us from this swarm.
They have no faith and no name,
these threefold accursed, forever and ever Amen.”¹³⁸

Germans attributed all manner of ills to the new inhabitants. The historian Rainer Schulze notes that “rumors circulated that most newcomers were prone to stealing and other dishonest activities, that the people from the East were dirty and slovenly; some also felt the newcomers had no ‘culture.’”¹³⁹ A city council woman in Passau, who freely admitted that “at the sight of that rabble, one’s stomach churns,” objected to the building of facilities at the refugee camp, pondering “why people who have never seen a bathtub need a bathroom!”¹⁴⁰ Others alleged that the East Germans were “cowardly” because they had fled and let themselves be driven from their homelands; “vagrants” who “gypsied around” and were “rootless”; “asocial” who were “lazy and work-shy”; or “dirty” and “infested” with flees and lice.¹⁴¹ Expellees were blamed for the

¹³⁷ Cited in Andreas Eynck and Emslandmuseum (Lingen), *Alte Heimat - neue Heimat: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene im Raum Lingen nach 1945* (Lingen (Ems): Emslandmuseum, 1997), 495.

¹³⁸ Cited in Mathias Beer, “Flüchtlinge-Ausgewisene-Neubürger-Heimatvertriebene. Flüchtlingspolitik und Flüchtlingsintegration in Deutschland nach 1945, begriffsgeschichtlich betrachtet,” in *Migration und Integration: Aufnahme und Eingliederung im historischen Wandel*, by Martin Kintzinger, Mathias Beer, and Marita Krauss (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1997), 164.

¹³⁹ Cited in Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 134.

¹⁴¹ Kossert, 49.

increase in venereal disease and children born out of wedlock, the result of rapes endured during the forced migration. In Bavaria, the rise in divorces was blamed on refugees, though other factors such as husbands killed during the war or missing in action explain the anomaly.¹⁴²

Some of the allegations entered the realm of the patently absurd. In Mecklenburg, locals believed that expellees used their knowledge of Slavic languages to masquerade as Soviet soldiers and engage in plundering.¹⁴³ In southern Germany, meanwhile, a community drove a woman from the farm she had been assigned to after being accused of being a witch after locals and livestock inexplicably became ill.¹⁴⁴ The *Rhein-Neckar Zeitung* newspaper endorsed these malicious recriminations: “The refugee is fundamentally dirty. They are generally primitive, they are even in principle dishonest. That they are lazy goes without saying, and they would rather swindle an honest native than to take on work from him. Having said all that, they are the most quarrelsome people that arrives in our lanes and alleyways. And they know no thanks for what is being done for them. This is what one hears in ninety of a hundred conversations about refugees.”¹⁴⁵ Profound animosity, paired with a sense that locals’ sacrifices and generosity went unappreciated, dominated the general feeling in Germany’s countryside.¹⁴⁶

Much of the disdain was rooted in profound ignorance, as Sudeten Germans discovered when their surprised neighbors asked how they could speak German so well if they come from

¹⁴² Kossert, 52–53.

¹⁴³ Georg R. Schroubek, *Wallfahrt und Heimatverlust; ein Beitrag zur religiösen Volkskunde der Gegenwart* (Marburg: N.G. Elwert, 1968), 121.

¹⁴⁴ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 109.

¹⁴⁵ “Kommentar,” *Rhein-Neckar Zeitung* [Nord-Baden Edition], April 13, 1949, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Schulze, “Growing Discontent,” 338–39; Brelie-Lewien, “Flüchtlinge in einer ländlichen Region - Aspekte des Strukturwandels zwischen ‘Dritten Reich’ und Nachkriegszeit,” 122; Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany*, 65.

Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁷ For others, the appearance of refugees seemed to be the first time that they were made aware of the consequences of the war: After arriving in the Swabian village of Aalen, a woman recalled a perplexed civil servant asking her why she had not simply stayed at home instead of coming there.¹⁴⁸ For those who had spent the war in the isolation of the countryside, the stories of flight and expulsion elicited disbelief among many who understandably could not imagine such suffering. Without an understanding of what had happened “in the East,” few could see the disheveled columns arriving at the local train station as victims of war.

The refugee crisis also permitted the reframing of recent history and deflection of war guilt for those unwilling to contemplate the legacy of Nazism or attempting to distance themselves from the immediate past. A British Military Government’s 1947 survey on the integration of refugees found that the indigenous population frequently justified their disdain for the newcomers because many were “Nazis and militarists.”¹⁴⁹ Natives deflected responsibility and guilt for Nazism by frequently painting expellees as the source of National Socialism and the lost war.¹⁵⁰ The October 1945 report of a district administrator in Rosenheim on the mood of the local population capture condemnations leveled against the expellees: “Bavaria wants absolutely nothing more to do with Prussia...for Prussia signifies to us fascism and militarism.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Uta Müller-Handl, “Die Gedanken laufen oft zurück ...”: *Flüchtlingsfrauen erinnern sich an ihr Leben in Böhmen und Mähren und an den Neuanfang in Hessen nach 1945* (Wiesbaden: Historische Kommission für Nassau, 1993), 149.

¹⁴⁸ Rössler, “Schicksalsjahre,” 333.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany*, 81–82.

¹⁵⁰ See Marita Krauss, “Das ‘Wir’ und das ‘Ihr’: Ausgrenzung, Abgrenzung, Identitätsstiftung bei Einheimischen und Flüchtlingen nach 1945,” in *Vertriebene in Deutschland: interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspektiven*, by Dierk Hoffmann, Marita Krauss, and Michael Schwartz (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2000), 28–39.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany*, 82.

However, when the expellees demonstrated an impeccable opposition against the Nazi regime as was the case with registered antifascists, suspicions of and disgust for their relationship to communism and preferential treatment particularly in the Soviet zone sparked resentment and envy.¹⁵²

The conflicted confrontation with the refugees as representatives of the collapsed Third Reich in either case produced self-serving justifications to refuse aid and demands for preferential treatment from occupation authorities in the face of the threat the newcomers represented. This becomes especially clear when expellees threatened the tranquility of communities navigating the denazification directives of the occupation authorities, thereby sparking a “veritable victimhood competition.”¹⁵³ The indigenous population feared that involvement in the Nazi regime could cost them their livelihood and employment, and argued that they were disadvantaged in comparison to expellees, who could hide in anonymity and connive their way into replacing them.¹⁵⁴ Allegations that the East Germans were the true Nazis abounded; a Bavarian civil servant lamented in June 1946 that he had “never seen as many giving the Hitler salute as in the Sudetenland” and pleaded that all refugees should be assumed

¹⁵² See Michael Grottendieck, “Zwischen Integration und Abstoßung. Probleme der Eingliederung von Vertriebenen im münsterländischen Greven sowie von ‘antifaschistischen Umsiedlern’ im mecklenburgischen Ludwigslust im Vergleich,” in *Geglückte Integration?: Spezifika und Vergleichbarkeiten der Vertriebenen-Eingliederung in der SBZ/DDR*, by Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz (München: Oldenbourg, 1999), 247–71.

¹⁵³ Klaus J. Bade, *Homo migrans: Wanderungen aus und nach Deutschland: Erfahrungen und Fragen* (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 1994), 264.

¹⁵⁴ These fears were not completely unfounded. In some states such as Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein, around 40% of teachers in 1950 were expellees or bombed-out Germans who had replaced instructors dismissed because of their support for the Nazi regime. Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany*, 73. In the Soviet zone, the SED’s reluctance and inability to apply a rigorous denazification investigation against expellees applying for public sector jobs created a seething resentment among the indigenous population who felt themselves disadvantaged at the expense of newcomers often regarded as unrepentant Nazis. Gerald Christopeit, “Die Herkunft und Verteilung der Evakuierten, Flüchtlinge und Vertriebenen in der Provinz Mark Brandenburg und ihr Verhältnis zu der einheimischen Bevölkerung,” in *Sie hatten alles verloren: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands*, by Manfred Wille, Johannes Hoffmann, and Wolfgang Meinicke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verl., 1993), 100.

guilty until proven innocent.¹⁵⁵ Expellees for their part framed themselves as the greater victims of the war and in need of leniency, as in many cases they lacked necessary documentation to pass the denazification process.¹⁵⁶ The clearance of a tribunal represented the first step toward employment, and expellees complained that local courts dragged their feet to protect local business interests and lamented that the mass migration deprived them of networks of witnesses who could testify on their behalf.¹⁵⁷

The reframing of the Nazi past and shifting of blame often revealed deep-seated regional stereotypes and, ironically, fascist rhetoric. Jakob Fischbacher, co-founder of the nativist Bavarian Party, made national headlines with a tirade in May 1947 against Prussians, whom he held accountable for “seducing” Bavarians to Nazism. To eliminate “un-Bavarian tendencies” that would plunge Bavaria into disaster, Fischbacher called for their deportation to Siberia.¹⁵⁸ His comments reveal how the mass migrations amplified longstanding regional animosities toward “Prussians,” who had long carried the blame for German militarism and the subjugation of

¹⁵⁵ Lutz Niethammer, *Entnazifizierung in Bayern: Säuberung und Rehabilitierung unter amerikanischer Besatzung* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1972), 387.

¹⁵⁶ It should be noted that for those with a Nazi past and potential criminal activities, the expulsions created conditions of anonymity that benefitted complicit refugees.

¹⁵⁷ Erker, *Vom Heimatvertriebenen zum Neubürger*, 55. There is an element of truth in these fears. In some states such as Lower Saxony and Schleswig-Holstein, around 40% of teachers in 1950 were expellees or bombed-out Germans who had replaced dismissed instructors. Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany*, 73.

¹⁵⁸ “‘Preuß’n sind mir unsympatisch.’ Dr. Fischbachers Rechtfertigung vor dem Bayrischen Bauernverband,” *Berliner Zeitung*, May 9, 1947, 2. The full quote as cited by *Der Spiegel*: “When a farmer’s son marries a north German blonde, that in my eyes is blood disgrace [*Blutschande*]. The Prussians, this filth, and the refugees need to be thrown out, and the farmers need to actively help. The best thing would be if one would send the Prussians to Siberia.” “Preußen-Attacke: Die Sünde des Blut,” *Der Spiegel* 16, April 19, 1947, 4-5.

regional identities.¹⁵⁹ Even Konrad Adenauer in May 1946 feared an implantation of “the Prussian spirit in our Rhenish youth.”¹⁶⁰

Fischbacher’s racially charged diatribe, however, also demonstrates extant bigotries toward peoples “in the East.” Refugees were referred to as *Wasserpölen* (“watered-down Poles”), “Russians,” *Rucksackdeutsche* (“backpack Germans”), “forty-kilo gypsies,” and “Pimoks,” a Westphalian slur used to describe Polish laborers during the 19th century.¹⁶¹ Longstanding disgust toward “the East” combined with more recent Nazi racism were quickly directing themselves toward the expellees. Even Joseph Goebbels was stunned by East Germans during a chance encounter with a trek in March 1945, remarking that “what is streaming into the Reich under the label of German is not exactly exhilarating. I think that in the West more Germanic peoples [i.e. Allied troops] are intruding by force than Germanic peoples are coming into the Reich peacefully.”¹⁶² The Nazi propaganda chief was not alone in his skepticism: National Socialist rhetoric permeated a protest letter of rural notables in the late 1940s which argued that the “purity of the blood is very questionable” and threatened the “authentic character of our people [*Volkstum*] through mixture with foreign and dissimilar [*artfremd*] character.”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ Schwartz, *Vertriebene und “Umsiedlerpolitik,”* 20–21.

¹⁶⁰ Rudolf Morsey and Hans-Peter Schwartz, eds., *Briefe 1945-1947*, Adenauer Rhöndorfer Ausgabe (Berlin: Siedler, 1983), 255.

¹⁶¹ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 77 and 314.

¹⁶² Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, vol. 15 (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1993), 450.

¹⁶³ Rainer Schulze, “Zuwanderung und Modernisierung-Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene im ländlichen Raum,” in *Neue Heimat im Westen: Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge, Aussiedler*, by Klaus J. Bade (Münster: Westfälischer Heimatbund, 1990), 83.

Ostensible inferiorities could just as easily be forgiven, however, when the presence of DPs and foreign slave workers unified expellee and non-expellee in their animosity.¹⁶⁴

The curious mixture of radicalism, racial hatred, and shifting of blame for National Socialism and the war onto East Germans implied that they were not only a threat to postwar German social harmony, but outsiders undeserving of sympathy and aid. Nowhere was this paradoxical combination more pronounced than in Schleswig-Holstein, where a nativist movement mobilized fears of Prussian subversion and a National Socialist reemergence to forge alliances with the Danish minority and force a secession from Germany to Denmark. Writing to a Danish-language paper in 1947, a farmer warned that “one should not believe that the Prussian spirit is dead with the end of the Nazi regime and dissolution of Prussia. No, it lives in all those people who came to us from the East and under whose foreign rule we have to live.”¹⁶⁵ In a state where the Nazi Party celebrated some of its first electoral breakthroughs, nativist elements ironically now attempted to distance themselves from the Third Reich by accusing the East Germans of fascist sympathies. “The refugees saved their savings books but lost their party memberships” a popular refrain jested.¹⁶⁶ The journalist Tage Mortensen produced a brochure in

¹⁶⁴ As the Minister for Expellees Hans Lukaschek explained in a presentation on February 13, 1950, the “preferential” international status of DPs created a source of political friction for German refugees. Moreover, Czech refugees fleeing Czechoslovakia angered Sudeten Germans, who “for understandable reasons” had a deep resentment due to their mistreatment during the expulsions. See ACDP, 07-001-3435, “Die Deutschen Heimatvertriebenen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und ihre Bedeutung für Europe,” 4. In Bavaria it even came to physical altercations between Sudeten Germans and Czech refugees. According to the Sudeten SPD politician Almar Reitzner, 90% of the Czechs were “diehard nationalists who to this day celebrate their hatred of Germans with the communists.” Interned in a camp with Sudeten Germans and demonstrating “arrogant” behavior, several Czechs “ended being beaten up.” Reitzner added that allegedly several of the victims continued to wear the uniforms of the Czech militia and decorations for their actions during the expulsions. See Letter of Almar Reitzner to Wenzel Jaksch, April 10, 1948, AdsD, Nachlass Jaksch, J2. For more on expellee and non-expellee animosity toward foreign refugees, see Adam R Seipp, *Strangers in the Wild Place: Refugees, Americans, and a German Town, 1945-1952*, 2013.

¹⁶⁵ Cited in Renate Wertz, *Die Vertriebenen in Schleswig-Holstein* (Kiel: Schmidt u. Klaunig, 1988), 305.

¹⁶⁶ Wertz, 305.

which he spelled out the dangers of “Hitler’s guests,” whose “Slavic-Germanic blood mixture” had formed “the foundation of all of the German politics of conquest from Frederick the Great to Hitler.”¹⁶⁷ At stake, he alleged, was the preservation of the democracy now trying to take root.

The rejections of fascist ideology were undermined, however, by the racism that drenched the suspicions and disapprovals of some inhabitants of Schleswig-Holstein. Already in October 1945, a letter to Field Marshal Montgomery urged him to ensure that natives retained positions of power, explaining that “this stream of foreigners...threatens to extinguish [*auslöschen*] our ancestral Nordic character and represents the centuries-old danger that our people may become Prussian.” In an accompanying addendum, the authors claimed the refugees would “suffocate or even biologically pollute [*überfremden*]” and “racially extinguish” the native population.¹⁶⁸ Even Tage Mortensen’s defense of democracy included an examination of the racial peculiarities of the Prussians, a “mulatto race” and people of “mixed-blood” (*Mischlinge*) whose women had broad cheekbones and “powerful and stubby fingers like the Polish girls who in recent times [i.e. the Third Reich] worked on the southern islands of Denmark during the beet harvest.”¹⁶⁹ Caricatures in Danish-language papers depicted the refugees as rats, and locals assured British observers that these “foreign people” possessed the “worst human characteristics” and “lived a parasitic life.”¹⁷⁰ “Throw that shit into the North

¹⁶⁷ Cited in Manfred Jessen-Klingenberg, “In allem widerstrebt und dieses Volk.“ Rassistische und fremdenfeindliche Urteile über die Heimatvertriebenen und Flüchtlinge in Schleswig-Holstein 1945–46,” in *Regionalgeschichte heute: das Flüchtlingsproblem in Schleswig-Holstein nach 1945*, ed. Karl Heinrich Pohl (Bielefeld: Verl. für Regionalgeschichte, 1997), 89.

¹⁶⁸ Jessen-Klingenberg, 85.

¹⁶⁹ Cited in Jessen-Klingenberg, 91.

¹⁷⁰ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 72–73.

Sea,” radicals demanded.¹⁷¹ With such rhetoric, several populist nativist parties achieved moderate electoral successes into the 1950s in elections in Kiel, Lübeck, and Flensburg, where they even won a majority.

The hateful language often culminated in threats of violence. In March 1947 a placard in the Bavarian town of Egming demanded: “Out with the refugees from our village! Give them the whip instead of accommodation—this Sudeten rabble! Long live our Bavarian land!”¹⁷² Into the 1960s, Rhineland carnival songs professed that the population “would laugh ourselves silly if they were gone again” on a transport, or jested that expellees would be “knocked dead” if the East Germans wouldn’t disappear on their own.¹⁷³ A popular “prayer” at the time decried the “wretched rubbish from the East” that “live on our dime” and concluded that if the natives want to have their lives back, “then the others must drift toward heaven.”¹⁷⁴ Traces of the Third Reich’s barbarism reared their ugly head as well: a notable wine merchant received a 1,000 DM fine from the Wiesbaden criminal court after refusing an invoice from an expellee freight carrier, declaring “you refugees all belong in Auschwitz in the box [i.e. gas chamber].”¹⁷⁵

It is unsurprising that the combination of extreme hatred and violent rhetoric spilled over into actual physical confrontations that ended with injuries and occasionally death.¹⁷⁶ In an interview decades later, an expellee recalled that “he had the feeling as a child that one was all of

¹⁷¹ Wertz, *Die Vertriebenen in Schleswig-Holstein*, 93.

¹⁷² Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 62.

¹⁷³ Cited in Kossert, 77–78.

¹⁷⁴ Cited in Kossert, 78.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in Hans Jandl, *Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebene im Rheingau-Taunus-Kreis: Flucht und Vertreibung, Aufnahme und Unterbringung, Prozeß der Eingliederung* (Bad Schwalbach: Bund der Vertriebenen, 1991), 196.

¹⁷⁶ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 79.

a sudden not someone anymore, but instead ostracized cattle...Constantly youths would come who would say, if you don't give us that, then we will beat you dead and nothing will happen to us." Another woman who settled in the same Bavarian village remembered on her first day trying to play with a local boy who exclaimed "now the dirty Polaks are coming," firing at her with a slingshot."¹⁷⁷ It was not unheard of that fights broke out particularly when authorities attempted to forcefully move refugees into confiscated homes, as was the case involving a seemingly notorious pair of "hard-hearted perpetually unwed crones" in a village near the Swabian city of Sigmaringen. On October 31, 1947, the local paper informed readers, the women "stubbornly refused for hours to cede three of four completely vacant rooms to a refugee family." The authorities present were "bombarded with the foulest of insults and it even came to fisticuffs, during which the town's mayor received an injury to his forearm and a police official had his tie, uniform buttons, and insignia torn off." Inconceivably, "Luise St. behaved the most 'dignified,' as even after having already been arrested and locked into a room, she leaped out of the window in order to continue to participate in the contumacy."¹⁷⁸

Events often took a much more serious turn when outraged locals and desperate refugees faced off. In Sigmaringen, the local paper painted a bleak and tense situation in the city center at the height of the crisis in December 1947:

"Evening upon evening and night upon night the overcrowded trains bring travelers from all directions. Many transients mill about the train station. The possibilities for an overnight accommodation are limited and on top of that the station mission is no longer distributing blankets, since many have already been stolen. Therefore the entire burden falls to the sisters of the *Fidelishaus*. But they receive no thanks for their selfless sacrifice. Just recently 30 wool blankets were taken, along with light bulbs, watches, linens, and coats. Yet the most terrible thing is that

¹⁷⁷ Litten, "Vertriebene - Ablehnung und Verachtung für Landsleute aus dem Osten."

¹⁷⁸ "Ohne Herz und Gefühl," *Schwäbische Zeitung*, October 31, 1947.

robust hoarders have managed to address the sisters as “scallywags” when there is no more room to spend the night. Others talk of ‘burning down the shack.’”¹⁷⁹

While the report indicted refugees for thievery and intimidation, all too often natives resorted to violence. Klaus Seiler recalls how he and his father were caught stealing potatoes. “Over the din of the tractor: my father yells, the farmer screams and waves the arms about; curses, expletives, the men tear at the sacks. Then my father raises the pick, it’s raised, it quivers in the air—the farmer directly under it; real close. We hold our breath. What happens, when it comes crashing down? An eternity passes. My father lets the pick sink. We are numb. Our handcart is empty.”¹⁸⁰ Such altercations could end tragically: in the Bavarian town of Degendorf, a farmer beat a refugee child he had caught stealing pears from his orchard to death.¹⁸¹

On November 6, 1946, the front page of the *Freie Presse*, a regional newspaper for the state of Lippe, reported that the “scenes of misery are becoming increasingly more dreadful,” producing “a terrible crop for the future.” The editors asked what many readers must have thought: “Is this how the world should recover?”¹⁸² A refugee poem that emerged in Lower Saxony during the 1940s captures an equal amount of uncertainty and anxiety when expellees contemplated the future: “Dear God, let us soon return home/ because in Oldenburg we can no longer stand it/ Where the farmers are more stubborn than tanks/ there is no homeland for

¹⁷⁹ Cited in Rössler, “Schicksalsjahre,” 350.

¹⁸⁰ Klaus Seiler, *Barackenkind: vier Jahre Flüchtlingslager : 1947 - 1951* (Berlin: Zeitgut-Verl., 2004), 45. For a similar recollection of a refugee woman being chased away with a whip, see Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 49.

¹⁸¹ Reitzner, *Vom Ostwind verweht...*, 20. The incident, as well as the farmer’s sentence of fifteen months, sparked much consternation in the expellee community.

¹⁸² Cited in Anke Hufschmidt, “... und dann blieben wir doch”: *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Lippe 1945-1953* (Detmold: Inst. für Lippische Landeskunde, 1994), 12.

Silesian children.”¹⁸³ With no way back and the new homeland cold and foreign, expellees themselves needed to fight for recognition.

“We Forever Belong Together”: Expellees and the Birth of the “Community of Fate”

Arriving in many cases with nothing but the clothes on their backs, the first priority for many refugees was to impress upon the indigenous Germans that they were not paupers looking for handouts. The sudden decline in social standing was difficult to bear, and expellees often felt a veritable compulsion to explain their previous lives and sense of loss to native Germans, as the poem in a 1949 letter to the Sudeten German labor leader Wenzel Jaksch expresses: “Understand me, I want to say to the other/ You still have a country over which you can bother/ I however must carry the most terrible sorrow/ For my homeland is in the hands of the robber.”¹⁸⁴ “Hardly a refugee enters a stranger’s house without noting that he himself also once had his own house,” the sociologist Elisabeth Pfeil noted in her 1948 study.¹⁸⁵

The urge to cast off the suspicion of vagrants often led to miscommunication, however. A young refugee from Budweis recalled the indignation her mother felt after the farmer with whom they were housed offered leftovers to the family instead of feeding it the pigs. This kind gesture rubbed the erstwhile wealthy bourgeois woman, who listed the jewelry and possessions she once, the wrong way. “They lastly probably did not believe her. She after all had no evidence, not even

¹⁸³ Kurt Dröge, “Von der Notunterkunft zum Eigenheim. Zur Wohnform als Faktor der kulturellen Integration,” in *Zuhause war anderswo: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Oldenburg*, by Lioba Meyer and Sabine Brendel (Oldenburg: Isensee, 1997), 187.

¹⁸⁴ AdsD, Nachlass Jaksch, J31, Letter of unknown sender to Wenzel Jaksch, February 28, 1948.

¹⁸⁵ Pfeil, *Der Flüchtling*, 136.

a photo.”¹⁸⁶ A Sudeten German years later said that often one heard from neighbors: “Yes, yes, where you were everyone probably had big houses.”¹⁸⁷ Locals soon began to joke that refugees came from the land of *Wir-hatten* (“we-had”), a disbelief that turned to envy once material aid started to flow in the 1950s; if all the information of lost properties on the compensation forms were true, it was remarked, then Germany must have reached to the Urals before the war.¹⁸⁸

Sometimes expellees managed to address larger audiences of native Germans and evoke sympathy and understanding, however. Intent on organizing a Christmas celebration “like we had back home,” a Sudeten woman in a small town in Hessen managed to attract curious neighbors and regale them with traditional songs and stories. The event featured expellee children explaining their traditions, interrupted with a staged interjection from an older child: “You still have it well. You still have your mother...But I have no one, I am from the Sudetenland.”¹⁸⁹ The play was such a success that in subsequent years it was performed in neighboring villages. Locals were exposed to and moved by flight and expulsion narratives in other contexts as well. In the small Hessian town of Todenhausen, a couple who owned a local inn not only took in refugees, but expressed a keen interest in their experiences. Once a month they organized a “homeland evening” for local expellees and natives. “The natives sang their

¹⁸⁶ Alena Wagnerová, *1945 waren sie Kinder Flucht und Vertreibung im Leben einer Generation* (Köln: Kiwi Bibliothek, 2016), 56.

¹⁸⁷ Müller-Handl, *Die Gedanken laufen oft zurück ...*, 85.

¹⁸⁸ Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 39.

¹⁸⁹ Müller-Handl, *Die Gedanken laufen oft zurück ...*, 96–97. The mayor of the village, the woman claims, was moved to tears and the next day brought his daughter to her house for a repeat performance.

songs, the East Prussians the ‘Land of Dark Forests,’ the Silesians the ‘Great Mountain Song,’ and because all were unified in the wish to have a good time, one got along well together.”¹⁹⁰

These “organic” attempts of approaching their neighbors and asserting themselves undoubtedly evoked sympathy and eased the social integration into communities. In the face of antipathy and prejudice, refugees insisted upon being seen as equal members of the German community. In January 1948, the refugee Franz Renelt pleaded the case of the expellees before the city council and citizens of the Swabian community of Nürtingen, where refugees constituted half of the population:

“We are definitely not refugees. Against all moral rights we were chased out of our homes and driven from our homeland, robbed of all possessions, brought here unwillingly and without being asked, and certainly not voluntarily. We also are not at fault for the war, as we so often hear. Because the movement that conjured the greatest misfortune in German history reached maturity here and was brought to us. We certainly are not inferior people from the East. [...] I beg you to consider that we alone did not lose the war, and we cannot believe that we alone must pay for it with our possessions and property, we expect a just equalization of the burdens. We therefore plead for your understanding for the situation and support. I appeal to your sense of justice and...[request] your help in improving the difficult situation of the new citizens so heavily afflicted by fate.”¹⁹¹

By asserting themselves, expellees also claimed an identity within an emotional community. Camps in particular offered an incubator for this community, as here expellees could cope with the loss of their homeland and rely on the support of one another instead of the unfamiliar and hostile outside world.¹⁹² So unifying were the bonds of shared suffering in a hostile and strange place that in some cases expellees refused to leave their support network and

¹⁹⁰ Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 57.

¹⁹¹ Kossert, 85–86.

¹⁹² M McLaren, “‘Out of the Huts Emerged a Settled People’: Community-Building in West German Refugee Camps,” *German History* 28, no. 1 (2010): 21–43.

police force was required to resettle them.¹⁹³ The scenes once “for the first time people who had still maintained their erstwhile village communities even in the Bavarian refugee camps were separated from one another” were bitter and glaring to even observers of the local press.¹⁹⁴ But there was something more than emotional support at stake. Summarizing the first reunion of the citizens of Reppen, the author articulated the “unspoken thought” all had on their minds: “We who are loyal to the homeland, who had to give up and leave the homeland, we forever belong together, we are a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* born in a time of profound experience.”¹⁹⁵

This *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* gradually coalesced into a vehicle for political and social demands, as we shall see in later chapters. For now, it must be noted that a communal identity organically emerged in response to hostility and apathy expellees faced. A 1948 hunger strike of 72,000 refugees in Dachau and nearby refugee camps demanding increased food rations and monthly stipends revealed the contours of this emerging social force.¹⁹⁶ Led by the Sudeten German Egon Hermann, the American journalist Ernest Leister recounted the fiery rhetoric: “A burning-eyed man of fifty was exhorting them with the controlled rage of a practiced orator. ‘Let them remember,’ he shouted in a German which had the thick accent of the Sudetenland, ‘that we are German too, that German blood runs fiercely in our veins. Let them not dare any longer to treat us as aliens in an alien land. When the might of the Fatherland was marching in triumph, we

¹⁹³ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 311.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Rössler, “Schicksalsjahre,” 337.

¹⁹⁵ Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep 901 Nr. 419. “Heimatbrief an die Heimatfreunde von Reppen und der umliegenden Dörfer,” 2.

¹⁹⁶ Brenda Melendy, “Expellees on Strike: Competing Victimization Discourses and the Dachau Refugee Camp Protest Movement, 1948-1949,” *German Studies Review* 28, no. 1 (2005): 107–26.

marched along. Let them care for us now in defeat.”¹⁹⁷ Hermann’s appeals to the Bavarian government and German people variously spoke of refugees in Dachau suffering from conditions “worse than in a concentration camp,” as reduced to the status of wartime “*Ostarbeiter*,” and victims of intentional destruction who preferred “the quicker and painless path of extermination in the form of gassings or other known means of liquidation.”¹⁹⁸

Leister’s dismay over the demagoguery, and German politicians’ fears of a Bolshevik uprising paving the way for communism in Bizonia, overlooked Hermann’s appeal to expellee identity.¹⁹⁹ Herrmann’s hijacking of a narrative of Jewish suffering for German refugees revealed a potent development. By appropriating mental images associated with the victims of the Third Reich and Germany’s war of annihilation, Herrmann shrewdly maneuvered the expellees into the postwar category of “victims of fascism” through an association with the persecuted of the Nazi regime. It also revealed the articulation of an identity, of expellees as *the* “victims of war.”

This is how many expellees indeed saw themselves. They had not waged the war, yet had paid for it dearly. They were not mere refugees, but *Heimatvertriebene*.²⁰⁰ They were victims,

¹⁹⁷ Ernest Leister, “Germany’s Stepchildren,” in *Germany, 1945-1949 a Sourcebook*, by Manfred Malzahn (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 143–45.

¹⁹⁸ Melendy, “Expellees on Strike,” 120. Herrmann habitually denounced Bavarian officials as Nazis and declared the Bavarian state secretary for expellees and East Prussian, Wolfgang Jaenicke, the “state secretary of extermination.”

¹⁹⁹ See “Fluechtlings-Sorgen in Bayern,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, Sept 30, 1948, 4; “Kommunistische Drahtzieher am Werk,” *DUD*, September 13, 1948, 1-2; “KPD-Funktionäre in Flüchtlingslagern,” *DUD*, September 30, 1948, 1; Flier “Zur Aufklärung! An alle Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebene! An alle Bayern,” undated, in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2086.

²⁰⁰ Expellees themselves cultivated this terminology. In a letter to the editor of the expellee paper *Sudetenland-Heimatland*, Herbert Schmidt of the Sudeten German Association related how the head of the organization preferred the term “Potsdam Displaced Persons” or “Potsdam homeland expellees”; the use of “new citizens” or “refugees” should “not appear in the future [*haben nichts zu suchen*]. If one needed to use an alternative term, Schmidt advised, the paper should refer to “expellees” [*Ausgewiesene*] or “homeland expellees” [*Heimatvertriebene*]. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), NL Albert Karl Simon 1, Herbert Schmidt to Mosig, February 2, 1949.

but a special kind of victim: Those most harshly afflicted by fate. To win social recognition and make claims for material aid, expulsion narratives needed to be communicated to non-expellees. As an August 1947 letter surmised: “What all is in that word *Ostflüchthling*. Often without any understanding or sympathy, or even with disdain in tone, this word is spoken. What new strength it gives when one finds a person who attempts to understand all of our fortunes and to help....Then our lot will no longer be so heavy and this word ‘*Ostflüchthling*’ will lose much of its harshness.”²⁰¹ These contours provided a useful point of departure for the expellee organizations to politicize and instrumentalize “flight and expulsion.”

Conclusion

In 1948, the East Prussian expellee and sociologist Elisabeth Pfeil attempted a first academic assessment of the social impact of the ubiquitous “figure of a turning point in history,” the refugee, simultaneously issuing a plea for sympathy and aid: “Here are the millions of homeless...a million-fold yearning, many thousand-fold embitterment. Doesn’t it lay like a cloud of pain over Germany at night? Doesn’t anyone hear the lament?”²⁰² While the world seemingly refused to listen, expellees indeed were lamenting their past, as well as fearing for their future, with one another and their new neighbors.

In attempting to cope with their biographical ruptures, expellees circulated narratives of “flight and expulsion.” The press as well sought to provide explanations for the disaster that befell Germany. Through constant telling and re-telling, both of these levels of discourse were contributing to a stylized narrative and adding another layer of memory that focused on

²⁰¹ BArch, Ost-Dok 2/127, 182.

²⁰² Pfeil, *Der Flüchtling*, 71–72.

commonalities of loss and suffering, and began to streamline the immense plurality of experiences during the forced migrations.

Furthermore, with each other, the recounting fostered a sense of emotional community and forged a *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*. As a woman writing from the Kaliningrad Oblast in February 1947 reminded her friends: “Even if now as slave and maidservant, you are among Germans...when all are together, then everything can be born easily. Then one laments his plight and one consoles one another, but alone like this life is tough, especially in these times.”²⁰³ Directed toward their hard-hearted neighbors, it was an assertion of their identity as victim and implicit demand for recognition which in the short term helped expellees find a niche and ease their transition into the community. In the long term, leveraging their suffering as an argument for an obligation for aid and tolerance would prove the means for integration. In other words: The crucial immediate postwar years laid a foundation upon which expellee associations could build in order to obtain legal and economic guarantees.

²⁰³ BArch, Ost-Dok 1/19, 103-4.

CHAPTER 4

“OR IS THERE A DOUBLE STANDARD?” LEVERAGING EXPELLEE VICTIMHOOD ABROAD

“Let us accept that these things happened with the acquiescence of the democratic Western Allies and continue to happen, and that they are clad in idioms such as ‘securing of peace’ and ‘defense of democracy.’” Speaking in 1947 on a summer day in Munich, the Silesian continued his denouncement of the expulsions, pointing out that they were “committed by nations who officially—and in contrast to the ‘barbaric’ Germans—are counted among the ‘lovers of peace and justice,’ the ‘democratic’ and ‘culturally high-standing,’ the ‘protectors of human rights’ and the ‘carriers of the ideals of freedom.’” The speaker ended his rebuke with an appeal, beseeching the governments of the United States and Great Britain to “not create a new hearth of sickness that one day both peoples must regret deeply.”¹ These bitter recriminations were not uttered by a Nazi or embittered nationalist, but by the venerable Social Democrat Paul Löbe, former Vice President of the Weimar National Assembly, Reichstag President, and head of the German chapter of the Paneuropean Union. During the interwar years, the parliamentarian worked to try and reverse German territorial losses to Poland. In the summer of 1945, he personally experienced the effects of geographic reordering: Together with hundreds of others, Löbe boarded a cattle car in Glatz (Kłodzko).

¹ Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Seliger Archiv VII, 1938, “Auszug aus einem Überblick, herausgegeben vom Pressereferat im Staatssekretariat für das Flüchtlingswesen,” July 1, 1947, 1.

The values cynically identified by Löbe nevertheless presented inroads for expellee activists, who sought to capitalize on these principles and cultivate sympathy abroad. A number of advocates already in the summer of 1945 recognized that their best chances lay with American and British audiences, whose compassion they then could channel for their agendas of halting or reversing the still ongoing forced migrations, and getting the Anglo-American world to provide material support. Expellee leaders quickly grasped that improving the lot of their constituents or revising the postwar order required Western support.

Examining expellee lobby efforts abroad is necessary for several reasons. *First*, in order to sway foreign audiences, the expellee advocates developed rhetorical strategies that underpinned the appeals and demands leveraged against Western governments. These arguments rested upon illuminating expellee suffering, yet two distinct strands emerged, which will be treated in two case studies focused on Sudeten German activists in the social democratic and conservative camps. An “antifascist expellee narrative” developed by Wenzel Jaksch sought to mobilize wartime rhetoric and appealing to mainly British audiences that the expulsions were not only morally wrong, but affected innocent antifascist Germans. A second “nationalist expellee narrative,” however, attempted to engage in whataboutism and denounce Allied crimes, and was closely associated with elements that would fuse into the Sudeten German *Landsmannschaft*, or homeland association. These two differing narratives predated the later, more well-known anticommunist revanchist discourse of “winning back the homeland,” yet must be examined because they laid important foundations for later activists to expound upon.

While immensely difficult to reconstruct due to a fragmentary source base, these early campaigns aiming to change Allied policy remain underappreciated in the historiography.² With

² Aspects have been covered fleetingly in Matthias Stickler, “*Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*”: *Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände : 1949-1972* (Düsseldorf:

an uncommonly extensive source base, focusing on the Sudeten Germans makes eminent sense. Moreover, it is unsurprising that the Sudeten Germans stand at the center of this analysis, as they spearheaded lobbying efforts. Their experience as a prewar minority pressure group struggling for political rights made them keenly aware of the power of the court of international opinion, and provided a strategic playbook that they turned to in 1945. Furthermore, figures such as Wenzel Jaksch cultivated extensive networks while in exile that other expellees did not possess. Moreover, as the second-largest bloc of expellees generally and the largest in the American Zone, so that an examination of Sudeten special pleading captures not only the most significant, but also influential early postwar efforts to internationalize “flight and expulsion.”

Second, identifying the Western Allies as the key audience to win over was not merely sound because as occupiers they held considerable power over the treatment and policy governing the fates of expellees. As will be shown, there existed tremendous trepidation over the expulsions in the United States and Great Britain among politicians, journalists, key public figures, and even the public. This surprising level of outrage and concern remains largely overlooked. However, the mounting pressure and indignation—supplied with German arguments and literature—managed to make a “breach in the wall of silence,” as expellees crowed.³ Though ultimately failing to end or reverse the expulsions or winning back the homeland, expellee victimhood helped convince the Anglo-American governments to adopt more generous policies,

Droste, 2004); Tobias Weger, *“Volkstumskampf” ohne Ende?: sudetendeutsche Organisationen, 1945-1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008). One of the immense challenges for an examination of 1940s expellee lobbying efforts is the meagre source base. Involving individuals or small networks that spanned continents, the documentary record is frequently fragmented and inadequately preserved in personal papers. Moreover, the lobbying in this time period predated the *Landsmannschaften*, who were barred through the coalition ban, and West German organizations that came into existence only with the founding of the Federal Republic of Germany, so that materials prior to 1949 are a rarity.

³ Georg Kurth, “In der Sicht des Auslandes,” in *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland*, by Eugen Lemberg and Friedrich Edding, vol. 3 (Kiel: F. Hirt, 1959), 511–77.

which translated into crucial material aid in the lean years before 1948, but also set the stage for Marshall Aid and the reconstruction of Europe. In other words: Expellee lobbying is an important yet neglected factor in explaining how and why West Germany was absorbed into the Western community of values.

Lastly, and most crucially, in their international lobbying, Jaksch and his colleagues emerged as the first collectors of testimonies and constructors of expellee memory. Their initial activities streamlined the expellee narrative into a politically useful chronicle, parts of which influenced the discourse in Germany: Their efforts created a feedback loop, in which Americans and British supporters adopted their arguments, which were then translated back into German and entered collective memory. We must therefore examine the narratives constructed and circulated abroad because they are an overlooked layer in the master narrative of “flight and expulsion.” The cultural memory of the forced migrations is largely attributed to German domestic actors and the *Landsmannschaften*. However, these organizations built on the efforts analyzed in the forthcoming pages.

“A New, and Greater, Lidice”: Wenzel Jaksch and the “Antifascist Expellee Narrative”, 1944-1949

The first source of expellee lobbying emanated from the Social Democrat and labor activist Wenzel Jaksch.⁴ As has been explained in earlier chapters, Jaksch’s exile since 1938 in London brought him into contact with Beneš and the Czechoslovakian government in exile, as well as the Labour Party. The involvement in the anti-Hitler coalition conferred onto Jaksch a certain esteem, yet also exposed him to emerging deportation plans circulating within the exile and émigré community. In response, Jaksch formed the Democratic Sudeten Committee as a sort of exile government working to thwart Czechoslovakian expulsion plans.⁵

As we have seen, the Committee and Jaksch publically argued against “a mass transfer of minorities” following Nazi Germany’s defeat on moral grounds.⁶ Jaksch’s appeals even found reprinting in leftist papers such as *Forward* and *Left News*, thanks in large part to his stature in the Sudeten German labor movement and credentials as an avowed antifascist.⁷ Realizing in the summer of 1945 that appeals to prevent a universal expulsion failed, Jaksch committed himself to limiting the scale of the deportations and assisting as many expellees as possible. “We are very well informed about the monstrously sad situation in the Sudeten territories, and it is

⁴ For details on Jaksch’s wartime activities, see Martin K. Bachstein, *Wenzel Jaksch und die sudetendeutsche Sozialdemokratie* (München: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1974), 175–284.

⁵ Bachstein, 283. The committee included Eugen de Witte, Willi Wanka, Ernst Paul, and Franz Katz. The ambitious effort of creating a group with the standing to speak for the Sudeten Germans failed.

⁶ Wenzel Jaksch, *Facts and Propaganda* (London, 1942); Wenzel Jaksch, *Mass Transfer of minorities* (London: International Publishing Co., 1944). Jaksch also contributed letters and op-eds pleading against universal deportations in *The New Statesman and Nation* as early as January 1944. AdsD, NL Jaksch, 32, Jaksch to Editor, January 4, 1944.

⁷ “Peace Through Terror: An Appeal to all Friends of Justice in the Free World by the Parliamentary Delegation of Sudeten Labor,” in *Der Sozialdemokrat*, May 31, 1945, 1087. See also Matthew James Frank, *Expelling the Germans: British Opinion and Post-1945 Population Transfer in Context* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105.

extremely difficult to shake the terrible impressions that we take from these reports,” Jaksch confided to an émigré friend, adding “our politics now is about getting help for our friends and relatives suffering heavily, and whenever we encounter English personalities, our motto is the known Goethe words [from Faust]: ‘Enough horror has been disseminated, let rescue be inaugurated.’”⁸

Jaksch’s rescue efforts mobilized wartime conceptual frameworks of “fascism” and “antifascism” in order to plead that Sudeten German antifascists who stood by the Czechs and suffered under the yolk of Nazism should be spared from a policy of collective punishment. To make his case, Jaksch immediately in the summer of 1945 gathered reports from his contacts in Germany and Czechoslovakia.⁹ The first compilation of these materials was a memorandum titled *Mass Transfer Becomes Slave Trading*, in which Jaksch called for a “total revision” of the expulsions to prevent the ruin not just of the Sudetenland, but Europe.¹⁰ The exiled Sudeten German ironically called for a speeding up of the deportations to save innocent victims from “Democratic Belsens” and the plight of “outright slave labour [sic].” Jaksch condemned the naiveté of foreign observers who let Czech observers pull the wool over their eyes:

“Almost every foreign guest is being shepherded to the ruins of Lidice, that landmark of Nazi barbarism, while in the Sudetenland thousands of new Lidices are being created at the same time. Anyone who has the least chance of planting an article in a foreign paper, of course praising the expulsion policy, can have a cheap stay in the finest hotels of Prague,

⁸ AdSd, NL Jaksch, J32, Jaksch to Kaiser, June 6, 1946.

⁹ Presumably, Jaksch turned to former friends and contacts that he knew from before 1938, and who took up contact with him after the war. As a letter from 1950 attests, Jaksch requested materials and books, as he “here and there [was] in a position to make a picture of our past to influential people.” AdSd, NL Jaksch, J32, Jaksch to Katz, December 20, 1950.

¹⁰ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 235–36.

plenty of food off the ration, pleasure trips into the countryside, and many glasses of the famous Pilsner beer.”¹¹

How Jaksch utilized the information trickling to him in London can be discerned from a draft titled “Cain, Where is Your Brother,” an undated memo from 1945 or 1946 located in his personal papers. Written in an impassioned tenor and lacking the sophisticated argumentation of later appeals, the article exhibits one remarkable curiosity: The names of cities in the examples of Czech atrocities committed against the wives of social democrats persecuted by Hitler are listed as “x,” “y,” and “z.” The emotionally worded incidents nevertheless read generic enough, so that the impression arises that Jaksch drafted a form letter with “fill in the blanks” to which he could add names later.¹² This strongly suggests that the narrative that Jaksch started constructing from abroad constituted a blend of testimony, rumor, and fictionalized incidents.

In any case, Jaksch resolved to make his case to the general public and confront them with the chilling accounts. His initial effort consisted of a series of brochures compiled of his source material and published as a supplement to the July and October 1945 editions of *Der Sozialdemokrat*, a publication of the Sudeten German Social Democratic Party in London.¹³ Dedicated to “all true friends of the Czech people,” the *Deportation Drama in Czecho-Slovakia* informed readers that “the Czech people need your help to save them from the degradation of Nazi methods,” framing the persecution of Sudeten Germans as a sort of civil war among Czechoslovakian and German antifascists. Appearing as the deportations unfolded, Jaksch cited

¹¹ Quoted in Frank, 236.

¹² “Kain, wo ist dein Bruder?” in AdsD, NL Jaksch, J5. Testimonials referenced by Jaksch in later publications often concealed the identity of the authors to protect them and their families from retaliation, yet this is the sole instance where the locale is kept anonymous.

¹³ Wenzel Jaksch, *Evidence on the Reign of Racialism in Czecho-Slovakia*. (London: Sudeten German Social Democratic Party, 1945); Wenzel Jaksch, *Deportation Drama in Czecho-Slovakia* (London: Sudeten German Social Democratic Party, 1945).

non-German observers' estimates of 800,000 deportees, of which at least twenty percent purportedly died.¹⁴

While Jaksch did not shrink from castigating the British and American governments for their role in the expulsions, he traced Western agreement to the deportations to lies and distortions of a duplicitous Beneš and his coterie. Quoting critical British observers, the publication also included testimonials of Western observers confirming “the case of a dying people.”¹⁵ These were juxtaposed with damning quotes of Czech elites and eyewitness accounts ranging from an “anti-Fascist woman-refugee” to an “old social democrat” describing scenes of appropriation, starvation, beatings, and murder.¹⁶ What was happening in Czechoslovakia, Jaksch argued, was a violation of Western laws, of democratic principles, and a betrayal of Sudeten democrats who had been abandoned in 1938.

Within the reports, British readers encountered images and rhetoric that must have been all too familiar: Czech “concentration camps” that, according to Sudeten victims of Hitler, were worse than in the Third Reich; ruthless Czech “storm troopers”; “ghettos” so miserable that even German-speaking Jewish Holocaust survivors were appalled; and gruesome massacres such as Aussig—which allegedly claimed the lives of as many as 4,000 Germans—that were “a new, and greater, Lidice.”¹⁷

The indictments against Potsdam came from a bona fide “hero” of Sudeten democracy, readers were assured in closing remarks by the social democratic Sudeten German Richard

¹⁴ Jaksch, *Deportation Drama in Czecho-Slovakia*, 2. The pamphlet went on to allege that the number was likely closer to 300,000, an alleged death rate of just under 40%.

¹⁵ Jaksch, 19.

¹⁶ Jaksch, 2–3.

¹⁷ Jaksch, 4–9.

Reitzner.¹⁸ Jaksch indeed possessed impressive antifascist credentials, and the effort to differentiate between Nazis and Sudeten German socialists continued efforts during the war to convince the British public of the existence of “other Germans.”¹⁹ Yet by conflating genuine opponents of Hitler and Henlein with the fate of all Sudeten Germans, Jaksch made an emotionally powerful case in a language that British readers could understand. Moreover, by selecting expulsion reports that faintly resembled Nazi atrocities, and editorializing them with a language typically reserved for German war crimes, the narrative suggested that fascist barbarity did not end with Germany’s defeat, and the hard-won victory of democracy was tarnished by the barbarism of the expulsions.

The theme of twice-betrayed antifascists was even stronger in *The Tragedy of the Socialists of the Sudetenland*.²⁰ Asking readers to file protests against the expulsion of “socialists from their homes” with their parties and unions and soliciting donations for their aid, the Relief Committee for Sudeten Socialists sought to tell the “story of a great wrong,” namely the “sentence of death for countless men, women, and children” who have started a “long weary trek into the unknown.”²¹ Deprived of their possessions and denied refuge, “many are dying of hunger and exposure.” After a brief history of peaceful German settlement which turned

¹⁸ Jaksch, 25. Reitzner, who accompanied Jaksch into exile in London, used the closing page of the brochure to combat Czech allegations of Jaksch being a Henlein supporter. Pointing out that “not a single Czech or Slovak quisling has yet been tried,” and that instead “Slav Racialists are hunting for ‘Fascists’ everywhere... in the internment camps for women, children and babies, among the heroes of the pre-exiled spokesmen of Sudeten Democracy.” Reitzner cited that according to the *Manchester Guardian*, Jaksch’s name appeared on a Gestapo list of some 2,500 people to be immediately arrested upon a successful German invasion of Great Britain. Moreover, Reitzner highlighted the numerous ways in which Jaksch opposed fascism before 1938 at home and then abroad.

¹⁹ Treuegemeinschaft Sudetendeutscher Sozialdemokraten, *Forgotten Heroes: The Victims of Nazi Terrorism in the Sudetenland* (London, 1943). The publication provided detailed lists of Nazi atrocities against Sudeten German socialists, social democrats, and Jews and included biographies and the fates of the victims.

²⁰ *The Tragedy of the Socialists of Sudetenland*. (London: Relief Committee for Sudeten Socialists, 1947).

²¹ *The Tragedy of the Socialists of Sudetenland*, 2.

“wilderness into prosperous towns and villages,” the brochure pointed out that many Sudeten Germans only turned to fascism after the Czech state and the Great Depression turned them into paupers in the interwar period. Readers were assured, however, that the majority of expellees were “comrades who fought many a battle with us against the international capitalist class.”²² With an image of Nazis herding Sudeten socialists into concentration camps, the pamphlet reminded that “Sudeten workers” had been betrayed three times in a decade: At Munich the Western democracies abandoned them, the Czech government handed many over to the Gestapo after relinquishing the Sudetenland, and lastly the victors surrendered them to a cruel fate at Potsdam.²³ The brochure ended with a rousing exhortation to “forge a bond of fraternal solidarity with our comrades in Europe, and help to bring to reality that resounding slogan of Karl Marx: ‘WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE.’”²⁴

These argumentative strategies—establishing the innocence and victimhood of the Sudeten Germans by emphasizing their antifascism, framing the expulsions in a long line of betrayals of the German minority, casting the forced transfers as illegitimate violations of law and principle, and appropriating words of condemnation from Western figures—set the tone of subsequent publications and utterances of exiled Sudeten Germans in London attempting to issue “appeals to the conscience of the world” into the late 1940s.²⁵ Jaksch’s “antifascist expellee

²² *The Tragedy of the Socialists of Sudetenland.*, 6.

²³ *The Tragedy of the Socialists of Sudetenland.*, 5.

²⁴ *The Tragedy of the Socialists of Sudetenland.*, 8. A 1946 flier titled “The Story of a Great Wrong,” itself a reprint from an article in *The New Leader*, seems to have served as the template for *The Tragedy of the Socialists of the Sudetenland*. Informing readers that “they starved in Buchenwald: Now they starve in ‘liberation,’” the pamphlet included the same image of arrested socialist Sudetens and even the same turns of phrases. Readers were asked to “agitate politically” and demand the end to the deportation of all Sudeten Germans, thereby conflating antifascists with the rest of the population. “The Story of a Great Wrong,” in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2056.

²⁵ They are apparent, for example, in a series of public speeches intended as “appeals to the conscience of the world” in the spring of 1949 by Jaksch and his associate Eugene de Witte, another Sudeten German who spent the war in exile in London. Wenzel Jaksch and Eugen de Witte, *Der Kampf gegen die Austreibung Appell an das Gewissen der*

narrative” intended to distance Sudeten Germans from fascism, and therefore must be understood as a counter-narrative competing with Czech efforts to emphasize their suffering before the court of world public opinion. This narrative circulated as far as Canada, where emigrants and friends of Jaksch who founded the émigré community of Tupper Creek after their 1938 flight reprinted Sudeten German literature in an effort to convince the Canadian government to raise their immigration quotas.²⁶

In addition to publications and speeches, Jaksch organized charity drives to help his compatriots in Germany. These initiatives also doubled as initiatives to arouse sympathy among Britons. A Sudeten Christmas fair in December 1945 in Hampstead organized for the benefit of “people indiscriminately expelled from Czechoslovakia” and featuring Sudeten German handicrafts and foods promised visitors an opportunity to “solve your gift problems” while simultaneously helping to raise funds to “relieve suffering of women and children expelled from their homes.”²⁷ A number of organizations connected to Jaksch’s circle, including the Relief Committee for Sudeten Socialists, the Parliamentary Delegation of Sudeten Labour, and the Anglo-Sudeten Club, engaged in PR and fundraising efforts in Great Britain during the 1940s as well.²⁸ The Rescue and Relief Committee for Socialist Refugees and Expellees, established in

Welt. 2. Reden ... (Stuttgart: Volkswille, 1948). See also “The Expellee Problem: Czechs and Sudeten Germans after the Expulsions,” in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2056.

²⁶ Jaksch’s friend, the almost inconceivably named “Willy” Wanka, reiterated Jaksch’s talking points in the 1946 pamphlet “Twice Victims of Munich: The Tragedy of the Democratic Sudeten Germans.” The same tropes of a romanticized history followed by betrayals in the recent past were deployed after descriptions of “terror in the Sudetenland.” Wanka assured readers that the “account of conditions...has been gleaned from reliable sources...whom I know personally and in whose veracity I have every confidence.” “Twice Victims of Munich: The Tragedy of the Democratic Sudeten Germans,” in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2057. Another contact in Chile, Karl O. Paetel, issued similar literature. “Der Todesmarsch der Zehn Millionen,” in *Deutsche Blätter* 29, January 1946, 4-11, in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2056.

²⁷ “Come to the Christmas Fair”, Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Seliger-Archiv VII, 2057.

²⁸ The Anglo-Sudeten Club, for instance, was founded by Jaksch associate Rudolf Storch in 1948. Emulating the tradition of British clubs, the association developed cultural and economic initiatives for the benefit of Sudeten

Munich by Almar Reitzner to minister to the “antifascist transports,” also engaged in propaganda work to move American and British authorities to aid social democratic Sudeten Germans.²⁹ A variety of similar social democratic organizations were constituted in Frankfurt am Main, Wiesbaden, Stuttgart, and Weimar, the latter being disbanded after the formation of the SED.³⁰

The efforts of the Sudeten Germans in London culminated in an official appeal to the signatory powers of the Potsdam Agreement and the General Secretary of the United Nations on “behalf of the non-Nazi Sudeten population.”³¹ Jaksch sought materials that revealed “what crimes were perpetrated against us,” and used contacts in Germany to solicit a “crushing quantity” of evidence in the form of “authentic depictions” documenting “atrocities perpetrated against innocent people since the invasion of the Czechs into our homeland.”³² Adolf Tutsch distributed leaflets among Sudeten German expellees exhorting them to provide evidence of a prescribed series of crimes.³³ Above all, Tutsch entreated, “the indictment against the Czechs

refugees and sought to establish contacts to other organizations in order to promote the Sudeten German case. Tobias Weger, *“Volkstumskampf” ohne Ende?: sudetendeutsche Organisationen, 1945-1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008), 214, 445. A similar club was founded by Sudeten German social democrats living in Sweden since 1938 in Malmö, Sweden in January 1951.

²⁹ A 1947 flyer sent to “organizations and persons known to us” in the United States and Great Britain, attempted to raise awareness of the harsh conditions for Sudeten and Silesian social democrats. The authors reminded readers that these expellees had been the victims of “unfortunate international decisions several times,” and had engaged in a “heroic struggle at the side of Czech democracy against the Nazi-Heinlein movement.” Many were victims of fascist concentration camps or had served since their exile in the Allied forces. “Help us save these old champions of freedom and democracy,” the pamphlet closed. “Hilfskomitee für ausgewiesene Sozialdemokraten,” in AdSD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2060.

³⁰ Weger, *“Volkstumskampf” ohne Ende*, 209. Weger emphasizes that this network of social democratic Sudeten German organizations, all with loose ties to its nominal leader Jaksch, formed the basis for future SPD expellee organizations after the lifting of the coalition ban in 1948.

³¹ Wenzel Jaksch, *A Petition to the Signatory Powers of the Potsdam Agreement and to the General Secretary of the United Nations on Behalf of the Non-Nazi Sudeten Population by the Parliamentary Delegation of Sudeten Labour in Great Britain* (London, 1947).

³² Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), NL Wenzel Jaksch 725, “Sudetendeutsche, folgender Aufruf,” undated [c. January 1947].

³³ The desired reports should document crimes concerning “[a]ll persons who had to suffer bodily mistreatment, deportations in an inhumane manner, who were tormented to death in coal mines and through slave work in

must be scathing.” The operation was heralded as a “first little step in winning back our unforgettable homeland,” a duty in which “no one can stand by, all must help, as it is for the most important thing: ‘For our homeland.’”

The directives indicate the agenda of Jaksch as well as the desired tone of the reports, so that the end product is hardly surprising. Expanding on his October 1945 pamphlet, Jaksch presented to world leaders a history of a peaceful Sudetenland starting in the medieval period before chronicling the thwarted self-determination in 1919 and the annexation of 1938, depicted as yet another betrayal. As pawns of history, the historic suffering of the Sudetenland culminated in its destruction in 1945. The petition proposed the founding of a neutral investigative committee under the patronage of the UN, and called for the protection of rights of Sudeten Germans in their homeland. It also insisted upon allowing representatives of the Sudeten Germans to attend the 1947 foreign ministers conference in London, and demanded the UN and victors force Czechoslovakia to pay reparations for damages estimated at four billion US dollars.

To substantiate its case, the brochure ended with several pages of testimonies from various cities. Alleging that the excesses were official Czechoslovak policy and the result of the Potsdam Agreement that sanctioned them, the litany of atrocities failed to differentiate between the various phases of events in Czechoslovakia. Violent brutalities in the spring of 1945, the wild expulsions of the summer and fall, and the orderly transfers were conflated into a single concept of “expulsion.” Moreover, the testimonials, often unattributed to ostensibly protect identities, ranged from rather matter of fact first person accounts to salacious and dramatically narrated

internment and work camps, the disappearance without a trace of people, etc.” Reports were also requested that could speak of “the inhumane edicts that made us into beggars, that chased us into the unknown, many only with what they had on their own body. Of the downfall of blooming regions, of the economy, of agriculture, industry and trades resulting from the inability of the Czech administrators, as well as of the many conflagrations and wanton destruction of realities through which irreplaceable values of the people’s economy went under, which will bring with them disastrous consequences for all of Europe.”

third person reports from second or third sources. Though Jaksch's initiative failed, the petition was an early attempt of gathering and selecting of testimonies that were in turn arranged into a particular narrative for the purpose of raising sympathy among audiences that could intervene in the refugee crisis.

Besides these ambitious appeals, Jaksch attempted to make his case through the British press. As a trained journalist, he understood the efficacy of the press and its role in shaping public opinion. His high standing in certain British circles opened the door at papers critical of the expulsions such as *New Statesman and Nation*, *The Times*, and *The New Leader*, who granted Jaksch and his allies space to air their grievances in the summer and fall of 1945.³⁴ Left-leaning papers such as *Forward*, *Manchester Guardian*, and *The Observer* echoed the arguments and sharply criticized the forced transfers, appealing to the Labour Party to avoid the punishment of German workers through excesses that closely resembled Nazi methods.³⁵

As a social democrat and avowed antifascist, Jaksch placed great hope in internationalism and the assistance of foreign socialists. He and his network built relationships to a myriad of socialist institutions that, so it was hoped, would aid their Sudeten German brethren.³⁶ Writing to a friend in 1946, Jaksch expressed faith that “the good reputation of our movement still offers a bridge to the well-meaning of other peoples,” adding that “often we have discussions with our

³⁴ See for example “In this 12th Hour: Help Us Now! An Appeal by a Sudeten Socialist,” *The New Leader*, January 19, 1946, 3. Jaksch reiterated the familiar tropes of a “double enslavement” in 1919 and 1938. After longing for an end to the war and rejoicing at the sight of American troops, the Sudeten Germans were yet again betrayed when Czech authorities turned the country into “one vast concentration camp.” Jaksch included excerpts of letters from “socialist comrades,” including a report alleging that in the camps “you can find the same yellow faces as in Belsen or Buchenwald.”

³⁵ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 105.

³⁶ While admitting the limited success abroad, a letter to Jaksch listed some of the organizations that had been approached: Fabian International Bureau, United Nations Association, Federal Union, International Socialist Conference. A wide range of left-leaning journals had also demonstrated friendly dispositions: *Daily Herald*, *Spectator*, *New Statesman and Nation*, *National News Letter*, and *Socialist Leader*.

Labour friends who, despite the impressions of the total war and despite the great estrangement between the peoples have maintained a feeling heat and a solidary socialist ethos.”³⁷ Jaksch nevertheless overestimated his standing.

As the food crisis in Germany subsided and conditions on transports and in camps improved due to international pressure, one Labour ally after another abandoned Jaksch, who lamented that they had been “deceived by the clever Prague propaganda.”³⁸ In 1949, the Committee of the International Socialist Conference (COMISCO), the forerunner of the Socialist International headed by Labour politician Walter Morgan, declined a request from Jaksch’s associates for Sudeten German representation on grounds that it violated the organization’s statutes.³⁹ Their case would not be part of the agenda of organized international socialism.

Other concerns may also explain the organization’s refusal. The exile Julius Braunthal alerted COMISCO of the “völkisch” activities of social democratic Sudeten Germans with ties to the London faction in Austria. Writing to Erich Ollenhauer in 1950, Braunthal expressed concern over the “alliance of our comrades with half-Nazis and full-Nazis.”⁴⁰ Jaksch’s energetic lobbying engendered disdain in many circles and raised suspicion of irredentism.⁴¹ Similar concerns led to rejections of Jaksch’s requests for emigration to Bizonia from Allied military governments, who

³⁷ AdsD, NL Jaksch, J3, Jaksch to Schmiedl, April 24, 1946.

³⁸ Quoted in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 235–36.

³⁹ COMISCO provided only one membership per country, and Czechoslovakia already had delegates represented. The West German SPD refused to intercede, arguing that the Sudeten Germans could find a new home among social democratic parties in West Germany or Austria. Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 214–15.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Weger, 214–15.

⁴¹ In August 1947, the journalist Edwin Hartrich classified Jaksch as a “skilled propagandist” engaged in a “Sudeten pawn game,” who promised his compatriots an imminent return to their homeland. The Czechoslovakian Foreign Minister Vladimír Clementis voiced similar concerns in December 1947, denouncing Jaksch as the “leading spirit of...revisionist goals.” Weger, 212–13.

feared that his politics could radicalize the SPD that, reportedly, considered Jaksch for the position of party spokesperson.⁴² An American intelligence report in the spring of 1947 disapproved of Jaksch-affiliated organizations in Germany, many of which cultivated ties across zones and established offices in cities near the Czechoslovakian border. The operation, the memorandum stated, had as its goal the “reconstitution of the Sudetenland” and caused unrest among expellees with a leafleting campaign.⁴³ Suspicions were further amplified by intelligence reports of Jaksch’s contact with the “left wing” Nazi Otto Strasser, in Canadian exile since his flight from Germany in the wake of the “Knight of the Long Knives” putsch in 1934. Supposedly, the two forged plans for a German nationalist political movement.⁴⁴

Ultimately, advisors to Clay concluded that Jaksch had taken up contact with irredentist groups, but had convincingly distanced himself from their claims. Assessing that his integration into the SPD would have a positive influence on the assimilation of the expellees in Germany, Jaksch received permission in 1949 to permanently settle in Wiesbaden, where he continued his campaign for the Sudeten Germans and quickly became an influential figure in the SPD and a driving force behind the party’s expellee politics.⁴⁵

⁴² Richard Reitzner, who returned to Germany in 1945 and ascended to the position of undersecretary of Bavaria’s refugee administration, aided Jaksch’s efforts. Hans-Werner Martin, “... *nicht spurlos aus der Geschichte verschwinden*”: *Wenzel Jaksch und die Integration der sudetendeutschen Sozialdemokraten in die SPD nach dem II. Weltkrieg (1945-1949)* (Frankfurt am Main [u.a.: Lang, 1996), 249–92.

⁴³ Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 210. Ignaz Kasperl, who stood in direct contact to Jaksch and was classified as the representative of “right-wing groups in exile,” had already been ordered to cease his activities after his pamphlets had caused disturbances among expellees. Possibly a pamphlet, signed in Jaksch’s name and forwarded to him by an associate in Bavaria, caused OMGUS consternation. In all likelihood a forgery, the fliers were distributed in refugee camps, stirring confusion especially among the old and adding to the rumors and cluelessness of what to do. AdsD, NL Jaksch, J32, Grimm to Jaksch, November 2, 1947. See Chapter 3, footnote 32 for a text of the flyer.

⁴⁴ Weger, 213.

⁴⁵ Edmund Jauernig, *Sozialdemokratie und Revanchismus; zur Geschichte und Politik Wenzel Jakschs und der Seliger-Gemeinde*. (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1968), 195.

Wenzel Jaksch, who in the postwar period enjoyed a “similar image to that of Wilson between 1918 and 1920” among Sudeten Germans, presents a peculiar case.⁴⁶ Among the first to collect testimonies and arrange them into narratives, Jaksch became one of the earliest architects of the West German narrative of “flight and expulsion.” His antifascist brand of memory politics failed to avert the forced migration of Sudeten Germans, but Jaksch managed to achieve some small victories. He himself credited public backlash and the activism of British contacts that pressured Czech and Polish authorities to improve conditions in labor camps and on transports, thereby “saving countless lives,” to his lobbying.⁴⁷ One can also attribute the “antifa transports,” which allowed hundreds of antifascists to leave Czechoslovakia and Poland with the majority of their property, to the pleading of Sudeten social democrats to spare genuine opponents of Nazism. Moreover, as one of the expellee’s first advocates, Jaksch publicized their suffering and laid a foundation that future lobbying efforts could build upon.

In a November 1948 letter, Jaksch professed that he would be willing to work with every party, with the exception of those weighed down by “blood guilt.” He owed that much to “comrades” who had suffered in Nazi concentration camps. Many with “pure motives” defected to Henlein’s camp, and it was this great “folly” of the Sudeten Germans that engendered mistrust and “aided the expulsion plans.” Jaksch ended the missive self-critically: “We cannot grapple with the injustice perpetrated against our people if we don’t simultaneously break with that völkisch romanticism that threw the Sudeten Germans onto the anvil of a gruesome fate.”⁴⁸

Writing to his close confidant Eugene de Witte a year later, Jaksch remained resolute and

⁴⁶ Fritz Peter Habel, “Die sudetendeutsche Volksgruppe nach 1945 in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Mitteldeutschland und der ČSSR, Ein statistischer und organisatorischer Überblick,” *Literatur-Spiegel*, 1979, 44.

⁴⁷ Wenzel Jaksch, *Europe’s Road to Potsdam*. (New York: Praeger, 1963), 432.

⁴⁸ AdsD, NL Jaksch, J3, Jaksch to Suchy, November 17, 1948.

contemplated initiating a “broad Sudeten German debate” in order to isolate the “incorrigibles [*Unverbesserliche*]” attempting to claim the mantle of Sudeten German expellee leadership. A “national unification” with them made no sense, since if tomorrow all expellees would return home, “the whole theater would start anew.”⁴⁹

By the time Jaksch settled in West Germany, the expulsions had largely concluded. Irrespective of political background, the Sudeten Germans were now bound by a common fate. The conclusion of the forced migrations and collective treatment made Jaksch’s “antifascist expellee narrative” superfluous, and toward 1950 it disappeared. His arguments turned progressively polemical and anticommunist, and his advocacy adjusted to the Sudeten German Association’s “homeland politics” aimed at recovering the Sudetenland. The contacts to dubious figures like Strasser reveal Jaksch’s desperate habit of turning to seemingly any sort of figure professing support and propensity for pursuing false friends. The introspective letters and vows of staying true to his social democratic roots belie Jaksch’s rightward shift around 1950, born out of bitterness over the expulsions. His unrelenting pursuit of the homeland would align him with compatriots with the same goal, many of whom came from the complete opposite end of the political spectrum. These also engaged in lobby efforts of their own in Germany, as we will see.

“History Will Exact a Terrible Retribution”: Anglo-American Responses, 1945-1947

As has been shown in the previous chapter, the press critically covered the expulsions already in the summer of 1945.⁵⁰ The British papers *New Statesmen*, *The Times*, *Forward*,

⁴⁹ AdsD, NL Jaksch, J32, Jaksch to de Witte, November 21, 1949.

⁵⁰ Perhaps the best known case in Great Britain was the reporting of Rhona Churchill, who accompanied and vividly described the forced march of the German population of Brno to the border. “‘Out in 10 minutes’ order to Germans,” *The Daily Mail*, August 6, 1945. See also Kurth, “In der Sicht des Auslandes,” 531.

Guardian, and *The Observer* regularly condemned the brutality of the forced migrations.⁵¹ As the excesses subsided into 1946, the anxieties over whether the forced migration and potential destabilizing of Central Europe seemed prudent continued. The editorial board of *The Observer* expressed horror that 1945 Germany evoked the “dark depictions of life in Bavaria, Bohemia, in the Rhineland, or in the Palatinate” during the Thirty Years War.⁵² American reporting generally echoed British reactions to the transfers occurring “often under conditions which recall those created by the Nazis.”⁵³ The celebrated Dorothy Thompson and the Pulitzer Prize winner Anne O’Hare McCormick were early critics of the expulsions, with McCormick deeming their scale and conditions “without precedent in history.” “No one seeing its horrors first-hand can doubt that it is a crime against humanity for which history will exact a terrible retribution.”⁵⁴

The concerned observations of journalists created backlash at home. Churches were the quickest to voice their condemnation of German suffering. In Great Britain, a number of denominations joined in an opposition to British policy in homilies and public statements, including a rally in Albert Hall in November 1945.⁵⁵ George Bell, the Bishop of Chichester, spoke in the House of Lords and rebuked the government for agreeing to deportations of people on “racial grounds,” a contradiction of the values for which the Allies fought.⁵⁶ The Archbishops

⁵¹ See Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 105. Formerly outspoken anti-Nazi correspondent Frederick Voigt of the *Manchester Guardian* and German émigré Sebastian Haffner ranked as among the most prominent critics. R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 293.

⁵² Cited in Isaac Deutscher, *Reportagen aus Nachkriegsdeutschland* (Hamburg: Junius, 1980), 42.

⁵³ “Boundaries and People,” *New York Times*, December 16, 1945, 8.

⁵⁴ Anne O’Hare McCormick, “Wiesbaden Plans Portentous Exhibition,” *New York Times*, October 23, 1946, 25.

⁵⁵ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 153–63.

⁵⁶ Kurth, “In der Sicht des Auslandes,” 530.

of Canterbury and York similarly deemed the expulsions “a violation of the principles of humanity that the Allies are pledged to uphold” during the fall of 1945, and petitioned Prime Minister Clement Attlee to increase aid to the refugees and suspend the transfers.⁵⁷ Attlee acknowledged that the suffering was “a very terrible thing,” but “only one of the facts” facing Europe: The British government had done all it could, and ultimately the Germans themselves were responsible for their fate. “You cannot ravage a Continent like this,” Attlee explained, “without paying the penalty, and that is what is happening now in Europe.”⁵⁸

A number of American Catholic bishops voiced deep concern over the treatment of expellees during the expulsions as well, stating that “[w]e boast of our democracy, but in this transplantation of peoples we have perhaps unwillingly allowed ourselves to be influenced by...heartless totalitarian political philosophy.”⁵⁹ Other clergymen, such as Bishop Muench in March 1947, reproached their congregations: “What did you do to protest against the devilish measures of the forced deportation of people from their ancient homeland, which were carried out under such miserable and distressing conditions and have no precedence in history?”⁶⁰ *The Christian Century*, the flagship publication of American Protestantism, raised the question of whether “we are murderers” of “elderly, especially women, nursing mothers, children.” The editors reminded readers that the United States “more than any nation” bore responsibility for the

⁵⁷ Church of England and Synod of York, *The York Journal of Convocation: Containing the Acts and Debates of the Convocation of the Province of York*. (York, 1945), 54. The delegates pledged their support of government energies “to relieve the sufferings of Europe,” an effort that “a great mass of Christian and educated opinion” stood behind. Quoted in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 158.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 158.

⁵⁹ Cited in Committee Against Mass Expulsion, *The Land of the Dead: Study of the Deportations from Eastern Germany* (New York: Committee against mass expulsion, 1947), 31.

⁶⁰ Quoted in Kurth, “In der Sicht des Auslandes,” 516.

“millions robbed, defiled, thrown from their homes, driven into slavery, starved, induced to suicide, murdered.”⁶¹ Msgr. Edward Swanstrom’s *Pilgrims of the Night* included similar strongly worded condemnations in the name of leaders of the American Catholic church.⁶²

That men of the cloth would invoke moral obligations seems hardly surprising. They were joined by intellectuals and notables calling upon their governments to do more to alleviate their misery. In Great Britain, the renowned philosopher Bertrand Russell decried Allied policy in the *Times* in the fall of 1946. Concerned with the welfare of expellees, Russell pointedly reproached the victors’ hypocrisy of leveling charges against Nazi war criminals, when similar deadly deportations were carried out in their names.⁶³ In *The New Leader*, Russell went to great lengths to explain what the territorial losses of Germany’s agricultural territories meant for the country’s food shortage, relaying reports from people witnessing scenes of “Belsen over again” and conditions that “make the sights of the concentration camps seem normal.” If millions would die, as was expected, it was the British public that bore the responsibility, Russell warned.⁶⁴ Writing in *The Observer*, George Orwell acknowledged that the expulsions may not have been preventable, but that they should nevertheless be protested and condemned for creating a “monstrous peace.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Quoted in Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 364.

⁶² Edward Ernest Swanstrom, *Pilgrims of the Night: A Study of Expelled Peoples* (N.Y.: Sheed and Ward, 1950).

⁶³ *The Times*, October 23, 1946.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *Congressional Record* 92 (February 5, 1946), 879. The fact that US congressmen quoted Russell indicates how quickly and widely the reports on Europe were spreading after 1945.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Charles M. Barber, “The Isolationist as Interventionist: Senator William Langer on the Subject of Ethnic Cleansing, March 29, 1946,” in *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, ed. Steven Béla Várdy and T. Hunt Tooley, 2003, 399.

More prominent were the activities of the publisher Victor Gollancz and his “Save Europe Now” initiative.⁶⁶ Intending to raise sympathy for defeated Germany and argue for a benevolent occupation with earnest material support, Gollancz partially addressed the expulsions by rejecting notions of “collective responsibility” leveled at Germany, as such allegations could cut both ways since the forced transfers.⁶⁷ His *Our Threatened Values* and *In Darkest Germany*, which contained several dozen photographs of conditions on the ground that the author himself witnessed on a visit in 1946, clearly affirmed and denounced German atrocities, yet questioned the practicality of keeping an entire defeated nation living in abject misery.⁶⁸ Gollancz energetically organized donation drives for German refugees and organized a series of public demonstrations, managing to fill Albert Hall in November 1946 with protestors.⁶⁹

In the United States, a wide variety of figures similarly appealed to the public and lawmakers with reasoned and sober arguments. The philosopher Sidney Hook penned a

⁶⁶ For more on Gollancz and “Save Europe Now” in regard to German refugees, see Matthew Frank, “The New Morality-Victor Gollancz, ‘Save Europe Now’ and the German Refugee Crisis, 1945-46,” *Twentieth Century British History* 17, no. 2 (2006): 230–56; Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 140–53.

⁶⁷ Gollancz vehemently criticized other activists’ allegations that the West had devolved into absolute hypocrisy and applied Nazi methods. He acknowledged that the expulsions and harsh occupation policies were “more in the spirit of the Hitler we fought than in that of the western liberalism for which we fought him,” but “to suggest that all distinction has vanished, and that we have been utterly corrupted by the thing we have been fighting—this would be to exaggerate, and grossly.” Gollancz clarified: “We have alienated great territories of the enemy: Hitler would have annexed all of Europe, and eventually the whole world. We non-fraternised [sic] with the Germans: Hitler murdered six million Jews. We are starving the people in our charge, not deliberately but because to feed them as we ought would be to lower our standards: Hitler would have starved, and did starve, anyone it might suit him to starve, with complete deliberation and even, God forgive him, as a matter of preference. These are vast differences, and we must cling to the thought of them if we are to retain our self-respect.” Victor Gollancz, *Our Threatened Values* (Hinsdale, Illinois: Henry Regnery Company, 1948), 215.

⁶⁸ Victor Gollancz, *In Darkest Germany* (London, 1947); Gollancz, *Our Threatened Values*. As the historians Hans Henning and Eva Hahn have astutely observed, Gollancz’s admirable activism did not shirk from criticism of Germany’s past. He was celebrated as an “ingeniously undogmatic ethicist,” as the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* heralded on September 9, 1960. Awarded with the *Bundesverdienstkreuz* in 1953 and the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1960, as well as having several schools and streets named after him, Gollancz’s more critical assessments of German society went largely unmentioned in German publications, and an entire translation of his works did not appear in Germany. Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 382.

⁶⁹ *Daily Herald*, November 27, 1945.

provocative piece in *The New Leader* alleging that “Hitler’s spirit still lives” through Czech atrocities and the perpetration of “hundreds of other Lidices.”⁷⁰ However, the most concerted effort of progressive intellectuals to steer American policy toward a more concerted effort of alleviating expellee pains was the Committee Against Mass Expulsions (CAME), formed in late 1946 in New York. This collective of activists from across the political spectrum included the philosopher and reformer John Dewey, the pacifist and socialist politician Norman Thomas, Sidney Hook, as well as celebrated journalists such as Dorothy Thompson, *The Christian Century* editor Paul Hutschinson, William Henry Chamberlin, and Varian Fry, the famed journalist who helped thousands of Jews and opponents of the Third Reich flee Europe.⁷¹ The initiative was closely associated with the American Civil Liberties Union, several of whose board members joined CAME, including the founder of the ACLU Roger, Nash Baldwin.

Members individually published articles and appeals condemning the forced deportations of ethnic Germans and demanding restitution for the injustices suffered. As a group, however, CAME released a series of pamphlets with titles such as *Tragedy of a People*, *The Land of the Dead*, and *Men Without Rights*.⁷² The flurry of activity in 1947 coincided with the upcoming

⁷⁰ “Hitler’s Spirit Still Lives. Czechoslovaks Perpetrate Atrocities Against Sudeten Germans,” in *The New Leader*, October 6, 1945, in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2056. Hook alleged that the Czech militia had “adopted down to its finest nuance the Hitlerian technique of persecution and mass expulsion” of innocent victims, including socialists and Jews, in an attempt to make Czechoslovakia “rassenrein.” Hook explained that authorities had imposed the same “catalogue of Nazi atrocities” and revived anti-Jewish laws. “The Czech government did not have even the shameless pretext the Nazis gave for the destruction of Lidice which wrung the heart of decent people everywhere,” Hook argued, and called on Americans to make Beneš “feel the weight of American indignation.” The article also reprinted a Czech poster alleging that “The whole German nation is responsible for Lidice” as well as a list of regulations aimed against Germans.

⁷¹ The signatories to CAME included: Roger N. Baldwin, Alfred Bingham, William Henry Chamberlin, George S. Counts, John Dewey, Christopher Emmet, Varian Fry, D. C. Gauss, A. G. Hays, J. H. Holmes, Paul Hutchinson, Rev. John La Farge, S. J., Louis P. Lochner, Eustace Seligman, George N. Shuster, Norman Thomas, Dorothy Thompson, Oswald Garrison Villard, and Robert J. Watt.

⁷² *Tragedy of a People*, which preceded the formation of CAME but was authored by many of the eventual founding members and in association with the American Friends of Democratic Sudetens, focused on the case of the Sudeten Germans. John Dewey, *Tragedy of a People: Racialism in Czecho-Slovakia* (New York, N.Y.: American Friends of Democratic Sudetens, 1946). *The Land of the Dead*, which took its name from a November 1946 report on the

foreign ministers conferences, which CAME hoped to influence by providing materials to delegates.⁷³ Including eye-witness reports of journalists based in Europe and expellees themselves, these brochures emphasized the criminality of population transfers and argued for a revision of the Potsdam Agreement that not only represented an injustice, but an accord that the Soviet Union and East European states had violated by failing to uphold their commitment to an “orderly and humane” expulsion. Barring a return of territories to Germany, CAME argued that economic restitution was necessary, as expellees of German ethnicity were still barred from many forms of international and Allied aid and their return to the lost homeland seemed admittedly unlikely or in the distant future. The Committee’s proposals were forwarded to American and British politicians, universities, and over 1,500 journalists.⁷⁴

The arguments of CAME did not go without objection.⁷⁵ Yet the combined pressure of journalists, intellectuals, and members of the public moved politicians in Great Britain and the United States to at least take a position. Statements decrying the expulsions as “repugnant and unacceptable,” as Potsdam Conference participant General W. Bedell Smith declared in the

conditions in Silesia from Robert Jungk of the Swiss paper *Weltwoche*, concentrated on the expulsions from the territories east of the Oder and Neisse Rivers. Committee Against Mass Expulsion, *The Land of the Dead*. The last pamphlet, *Men Without Rights*, examined the fate of German minorities in Yugoslavia, Romania, and German territories ceded to Poland after 1919. Christopher Emmet and Roger Baldwin, *Men without the Rights of Man: A Report on the Expulsion and Extermination of the German Speaking Minority Groups in the Balkans and Prewar Poland* (New York: Committee Against Mass Expulsions, 1947).

⁷³ Kurth, “In der Sicht des Auslandes,” 517; Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 385.

⁷⁴ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 294.

⁷⁵ The Society for the Prevention of World War III, which was staunchly anti-German and for a harsh occupation and included Eleanor Roosevelt and William Shirer as members, vehemently opposed CAME. Steven Casey, “The Campaign to Sell a Harsh Peace for Germany to the American Public, 1944-1948,” *History* 90, no. 297 (2005): 62–92. A number of Slavic-American groups also protested CAME’s arguments. The American Friends of Czechoslovakia, whose honorable chair was Edward Beneš himself and included the president of Columbia University, Nicholas Murray Butler, and James T. Shotwell, the president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 295.

spring of 1946, partially attempted to distance signatories from the unappealing consequences of their decisions at negotiation tables.⁷⁶ On October 26, 1945, British Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin urged the House of Commons to imagine if 60% of the United Kingdom were “suddenly turned out of their homes and drifting somewhere else,” and shared the “pathetic sight” he had seen while in Berlin: “[T]he stream of perambulators and small vehicles...and the people were nearly all women and children, with very few men at all. One could not help saying, ‘My God, this is the price of stupidity and war.’ It was the most awful sight one could see.” Bevin concluded that the problem was “almost beyond human capacity to solve quickly, and all I can say is that we will do our best.”⁷⁷ The government’s efforts had not alleviated the conditions in the British Zone a year later, prompting renewed handwringing on the part of the Foreign Secretary, who swore that he only with the “greatest reluctance” acceded to the expulsions in the hope of “free and unfettered elections” in Poland.⁷⁸

Some criticisms of government response was blatant opportunism on the part of political oppositions. In the United States in August 1945, Herbert Brownell, Jr., chairman of the Republican National Committee, accused the Truman administration of “sowing of seeds of rancor” in Europe without consulting Congress, adding that “[s]ome day, when the time is ripe, the people of this country will hold the Administration [sic] to strict accountability.”⁷⁹ Similarly

⁷⁶ Quoted in Committee Against Mass Expulsion, *The Land of the Dead*, 30–31.

⁷⁷ Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 26 October 1945/vol 414/cc2382.

⁷⁸ Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 22 October 1946/vol 427/cc1517-1518. Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 25 July 1946/vol 426/cc282-335. Earlier that year, Bevin similarly combined pathos and mitigation: “I make this solemn confession. I was a party to the Atlantic Charter...and one of my first experiences, almost before the ink was dry, was to find myself in that Cabinet where I had to accede to a new Polish frontier which I have never yet been able to reconcile with the Atlantic Charter, but which the very necessities of war at that time compelled me to accede to.” Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 25 July 1946/vol 426/cc282-335.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Committee Against Mass Expulsion, *The Land of the Dead*, 31.

in Great Britain, Winston Churchill impressively combined crocodile tears and criticism of a policy that he shaped, yet now foisted upon others: Assuring the House of Commons in August 1945 that he was “particularly concerned” by the accounts reaching London that suggested a “tragedy of great proportions on a prodigious scale,” the former Prime Minister criticized his rival Anthony Eden by demanding “any statement...which would relieve or at least inform us upon this very anxious and grievous matter.”⁸⁰

As the disastrous scale of the expulsions became clearer a few months later, Labour parliamentarian Michael Foot decried the “wanton and deliberate creation of a new sore in Europe.”⁸¹ “Speaking for myself, and as a Socialist, I will never accept the doctrine that their German nationality absolves them and excludes them from the bounds of human compassion,” Foot explained, before reading the testimony of an East Prussian grandmother’s arduous trek to Berlin with her grandchildren whose mother had perished on the road. Now without a homeland or “future aim in life,” Foot warned his colleagues:

“For women and children, creatures such as these, there is for their protection an older law than any promulgated at Potsdam: ‘But whoso shall offend against one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.’ If these infamies are to be allowed to continue there will be a shortage of millstones to set beside the other shortages of Europe.”

⁸⁰ Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 16 August 1945/vol. 413/cc83-4. In his speech in Fulton, Missouri in March of 1946, Churchill similarly opted to distance himself from “enormous and wrongful inroads upon Germany, and mass expulsions of millions of Germans on a scale grievous and undreamed-of,” blaming instead the overreach on the part of the Soviet Union and the “Russian-dominated Polish Government.” John Olsen, “The Sinews of Peace,” The Churchill Centre, accessed February 15, 2017, <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/120-the-sinews-of-peace>.

⁸¹ Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 26 October 1945/vol. 414/cc2362-2365. Foot’s comments were made in a larger discussion of the conditions in Europe and preceded the presentation of UNRRA reports by Miss Rathbone of the Combined English Universities regarding the expulsions, in which Russia had “acted wantonly and viciously.” After a detailed description of the expulsions in Czechoslovakia, a country she “reluctantly” wanted to criticize, Rathbone ended with an appeal for greater British energy in alleviating the suffering of refugees and moral courage to send a message to the world that “freedom, prosperity and peace cannot possibly result from a policy of freezing or starving our former enemies to death.” Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 26 October 1945/vol. 414/cc2413-2417.

Foot assured the assembly that his criticisms of inadequate reconstruction plans, allegedly designed solely to “prevent starvation and disorder,” were intended as calls to action. Moreover, Foot invoked Great Britain’s “duty to show that this country of ours is the foremost champion of tolerance and decency” with an obligation to “act, conquerors and conquered, in the name of humanity.”⁸² Few British politicians, however, seemed genuinely motivated by such appeals. For many conservatives, the expellees confirmed the Soviet Union’s innate barbarity, yet the British Left was hesitant to criticize the wartime alliance and the Kremlin in the immediate postwar period.⁸³ With the exception of Labour MP Dick Stokes, who waged a virtual one-man campaign from the floor of the House of Commons and in newspaper articles informing readers of the situation in Czechoslovakia, government officials accepted the expulsions and did little to articulate policy to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Germany.⁸⁴ The brief flurry of condemnation subsided as the worst concerns over refugees “dying in the streets in very large numbers” largely failed to materialize in the spring of 1946.⁸⁵

Similar concern could be heard in the American Congress. Already in December 1945, senators read stirring appeals of charities operating in Europe pleading for an increase of American food supply into the Congressional Record.⁸⁶ A few months later, Senator Homer

⁸² Parliamentary Archives, HC Deb 26 October 1945/vol. 414/cc2366.

⁸³ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 221. The “spiritual agony” that the developments in Eastern Europe unleashed among the Labour Party arguably contributed to the transformation of the party’s foreign policy in the late 1940s. See Jonathan Schneer, *Labour’s Conscience: The Labour Left, 1945-51* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 30–42.

⁸⁴ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 235–41. Stokes had a record of pointing out inhumane treatment of Germans, having condemned the firebombing of Dresden in February of 1945 in the House of Commons, which in part forced a reappraisal of British bombing policy in the final months of the war.

⁸⁵ “British See Danger of German Hunger,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1946, 26.

⁸⁶ *Congressional Record* 91 (December 14, 1945), 12059ff. Senator Claude Pepper (D, Florida), for instance, introduced a joint letter of the World Council of Churches, World Jewish Congress, Caritas, the Red Cross, and Save the Children reporting on the hundreds of thousands of children facing starvation. Regarding expellees, Father

Capehart (R, Indiana) issued a scathing denouncement of what he saw as a deliberate policy to “draw and quarter a nation now reduced to abject misery.”⁸⁷ He criticized the military government’s handling of the refugee crisis and argued that the “starvation rations” of 1,550 calories in the US zone were an overt attempt to destroy the German people. After distributing photos of emaciated children depicted in a Victor Gollancz pamphlet, Capehart read from letters of witnesses chronicling sorrowful vignettes of the refugee experience that American policy had caused.⁸⁸ The indignant senator alleged a betrayal of American principles, an opinion ostensibly shared by many: Selecting letters published by the American Friends’ Service Committee in five leading papers pleading for a change in policy, Capehart quoted American soldiers and Jews who lost family in the Holocaust, yet didn’t want Germany turned into a “vast extermination camp.”⁸⁹

The remarkable overlap between the German and Anglo-American discourses is not a mere coincidence. In large part, they had common roots. Western critics provided useful condemnation for Germans, allowing expellees to turn the words of journalists, clergymen, or statesmen such as Churchill back onto Western governments and demonstrate that the whole world recognized and accepted German arguments. Jaksch for instance quoted extensively from the American and British critics quoted above, appropriating the writings of Gollancz and twisting them out of context to make the “the case of a dying people.”⁹⁰

Stegerwald of Caritas informed Senator Pepper that “all children” under the age of two had died, and that in areas of the Soviet Zone of Occupation the infant mortality rate was 100 percent.

⁸⁷ *Congressional Record* 92 (February 5, 1946), 876. This pointed allegation was not the most extreme phrasing by Capehart, who in the course of his speech worked himself into a frenzy, declaring the victors “a pack of hyenas struggling over the bloody entrails of a corpse, and inspired by a sadistic and fanatical hatred” of Germans.

⁸⁸ *Congressional Record* 92 (February 5, 1946), 878.

⁸⁹ *Congressional Record* 92 (February 5, 1946), 879.

⁹⁰ Jaksch, *Deportation Drama in Czecho-Slovakia*, 19.

Something more was at play, however. The reason that Americans and Britons sounded remarkably similar to expellee advocates is because, in many cases, they explicitly relied on their arguments, formulations, and evidence. Jaksch explicitly intended his memos and compilations of testimonies to act as reference material for his foreign contacts. Publications such as *The Guardian* and *The Observer* sounded so similar to Jaksch because they in all likelihood relied on his interpretations and sources. Many British journalists, as the historian Mathew Frank points out, never saw the expulsions in person but relied on second- or third-hand reports exclusively of Sudeten German origin and.⁹¹ The Czech media certainly credited adverse British reporting to the influence of Germans in London, particularly Jaksch and his circle.⁹² Jaksch himself attributed editorials penned by British hand to his engagement and connections to British politicians and journalists.⁹³

Indeed, the Bishop of Chichester George Bell for example felt a particular affinity with the Sudeten German exile, who supplied Bell with materials and provided assistance to his preparations for his speeches before the House of Lords condemning the expulsions and calling for a motion on the subject.⁹⁴ Jaksch's politics naturally endeared him to the Labour Party, where he cultivated an especially close relationship with Michael Foot and Richard Stokes. Czechoslovakian critics accused Jaksch and Foot, a former editor of the *Evening Standard*, as the

⁹¹ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 189. The *New Statesmen and Nation* admitted as much in H. N. Brailsford, "Plight of the Sudetens," *New Nation and Statesman*, October 20, 1945.

⁹² In October 1945, an editorial in *Svobodné noviny* rhetorically asked: "What does the average reader in Britain know of the fact that the foreign political editor of the 'most English of journals,' as the *Manchester Guardian* is frequently called, is a journalist of German origin [F.A. Voigt]? [...] How is the average Englishman to ascertain that most of the foreign political articles in the *Observer* are written by a journalist of German-Polish origin [Sebastian Haffner]? How can he verify the fact that the *Tribune* is supplied with reports from people in the entourage of Wenzel Jaksch?" Quoted in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 293.

⁹³ AdsD, NL Ernst Paul, 1438, Jaksch to Paul, August 10, 1945.

⁹⁴ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 220.

source for Prague-critical reports in the Labour-affiliated *Daily Herald*.⁹⁵ Stokes, as has been noted, made frequent interventions in the House of Commons opposing the expulsions and for years lent his support to the Sudeten German cause, even writing forewords to their literature.⁹⁶

Stokes' appeals, relying on reports supplied by Jaksch, were so passionate that the *Central European Observer* challenged the MP to travel to the Sudetenland to observe the deportations "instead of relying on distorted news from an informant who obviously belongs to the clique which is seeking to intrigue against the Czechoslovak State from abroad."⁹⁷ Stokes accepted, travelling to Prague in September 1946 after having been briefed and provided a list of "reliable" contacts by Jaksch personally.⁹⁸ His impressions, appearing in numerous English papers, were reprinted by the German exiles for mass distribution to Anglo-American audiences.⁹⁹ Even though Stokes eventually conceded that the forced migrations were unavoidable and over time improved, Jaksch praised him as a friend to the Sudeten German

⁹⁵ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 291.

⁹⁶ Stokes for instance wrote the foreword to Almar Reitzner's report on his 1948 trip to Czechoslovakia. Calling for the world to end expellee suffering, Stokes endorsed Reitzner's dramatic and often specious accounts for German readers as "a true portrayal of the terrible suffering that millions of innocent people who were exposed to during a Czech racial orgy that can only be compared to the horrors that Hitler had inflicted upon Jews and Catholics in Poland." See forward in Almar Reitzner, *Ich flog nach Prag. Ein Tatsachenbericht über die Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit in der Tschechoslowakei* (München: Hessen Verlag, 1948).

⁹⁷ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 235; and "Mr. Stokes Should Go to Prague," *Central European Observer*, November 30, 1945.

⁹⁸ Richard Reitzner also provided words of advice: "When you arrive at the residence of the European Mephisto, Prague, you must bear in mind that the Czech authorities are well aware that we have been in touch with you. You might even have to encounter Czech agents, perhaps of Sudeten origin, who will try to make Mephisto Beneš look like an angel." Cited in Frank, 236–37.

⁹⁹ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2057, Pamphlet "The Expulsions from the Sudetenland and Conditions in Political Detention Camps in Czechoslovakia. Report on Ten-Day Tour by Mr. R.R. Stokes, Member of Parliament for Ipswich," October 1946. The pamphlet failed to mention that Stokes' assessments after his personal observations did not substantially contradict British reports on the expulsions after 1946, when the "orderly and humane" transports began, which generally held that the conditions improved. Stokes differentiated between the conditions in the camps, which were deplorable, and those on the transports, which during this phase were generally humane.

cause and one of the “courageous fighters for a humanist Europe” whose advocacy to improve the conditions of deportations saved countless lives.¹⁰⁰

The remarkable overlap in testimonies and argumentation must also raise the suspicion that Jaksch acted as a source for some of the materials to CAME, or rather its short-lived predecessor American Friends of Democratic Sudetens, who published a report on Czechoslovakia and the expulsions in June 1946.¹⁰¹ Particularly CAME’s republishing of a June 1945 poster announcing discriminatory ordinances against Germans suggests contact to Jaksch: Cited by the Americans as a typical manifestation of the racism driving the expulsions, Jaksch and others also consistently invoked the ordinance as representative for the situation in the Sudetenland. It appears in much of Jaksch’s literature and was cited for decades in other works, including in Jaksch associate Richard Reitzner’s adventurous 1948 report on his trip to Czechoslovakia, where he claims to have seen the poster.¹⁰² The historian Johann Wolfgang Brügel claimed to have personally taken down the ordinance and then passed it on to Jaksch, yet noted that the decree had hung only a few hours before officials removed it.¹⁰³ Whatever its provenience, the poster entered into Sudeten German cultural memory.

¹⁰⁰ Jaksch, *Europe’s Road to Potsdam.*, 398; Jaksch, 101.

¹⁰¹ Dewey, *Tragedy of a People: Racialism in Czecho-Slovakia.*

¹⁰² Reitzner, *Ich flog nach Prag.*

¹⁰³ Why the ordinance was removed remains unclear. Brügel however stated in a 1980s interview that “[i]t really only hung for one afternoon, but naturally it terribly frightened the people, the common people.” Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 363–64.

“We Solemnly Relinquish Vengeance and Retaliation!” Expellee Victimhood Narratives in Occupied Germany

Developing parallel to Jaksch’s efforts in London, activists in occupied Germany also attempted to make their case before world opinion. This constellation of actors faced greater challenges than their colleagues in exile, however. First, the Allied coalition ban of nationalist organizations, and wide dispersal because of the chaos of the expulsions, significantly complicated and delayed the formation of cohesive congregations. This deprived expellees not only of institutional structures but also of prominent figureheads, so that the limited organization that developed under the watchful eye of the occupation authorities unfolded generally at the local level and under the “protecting and camouflaging bells” of the churches¹⁰⁴ Secondly, as the occupied and conquered, expellees in Germany possessed very little standing. Moreover, unlike social democratic exiles, several doyens of the expellee community had personal histories of complicity with the Nazi regime that dissuaded them from attracting attention before the Allied authorities backed off from denazification efforts in the late 1940s.¹⁰⁵ This was particularly true of the rightwing faction of the future Sudeten German *Landsmannschaft*, many of whom opted for Henlein and the Third Reich. Lastly, given the chaotic conditions, expellees and the organizations dealing with the crisis spent most of their energy contending with day to day concerns, something that expellees in Great Britain did not have to grapple with.

¹⁰⁴ Georg Boehm, “Gruppenbildung und Organisationswesen,” in *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland*, ed. Eugen Lemberg and Friedrich Edding, vol. 1 (Kiel: F. Hirt, 1959), 553. A 1958 West German government report noted that during the time of the coalition ban, the churches “made possible the association of the homeless masses” and “secured the ground for the future organizational developments.” Cited in Samuel Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat: Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Vertriebenenverbände* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 2000), 54.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Schwartz et al., *Funktionäre mit Vergangenheit: das Gründungspräsidium des Bundesverbandes der Vertriebenen und das “Dritte Reich”* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

Because the churches operated with relative freedom in the first postwar years, it is unsurprising that from their ranks emerged the first voices pleading with the Allies to intervene in the refugee crisis. One of the earliest prominent voices was that of the Rhinelander and Protestant pastor, Heinrich Grüber. The humanitarian engaged in resistance during the Third Reich, which led to a lengthy incarceration in Nazi concentration camps. After the war, his activism continued: He co-founded the Union of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime in 1947, and ministered to concentration camp survivors. His efforts encouraged the Soviet authorities to appoint Grüber as the head of welfare services in Berlin. Through his work to provide aid to the victims of war, Grüber witnessed on a daily basis the horrific dimensions of the refugee crisis, and recognized the need for Allied help. Grüber used his credentials as a humanitarian and Nazi opponent to take up contact with foreign clergy, particularly George Bell, whom he knew from before the war. Despite his experiences with Nazi terror, what he was witnessing in Germany was “worse than anything that I have experienced before,” Grüber assured Bell.¹⁰⁶ In addition to Jaksch, therefore, Grüber acted as a source of evidence for the British bishop, who incorporated Grüber’s reports into his public appeals in Great Britain and the House of Lords.

Grüber was a sober, results-oriented humanitarian interested in alleviating the anguish of his fellow man. A slightly different tone could be discerned from the church leadership. In a “pulpit promulgation of the West German bishops” in the fall of 1946, the clerical elite expressed its inability to “no longer...remain silent over the terrible lot of more than 10 million East Germans.” The address lamented the “terrible brutality and disrespect of all humaneness” of the expulsions,

¹⁰⁶ “I did bear [sic] the tortures of the concentration camps but what happens before our eyes, that is beyond everything ever happened in form or extent. I am thinking of those taking their lives out of despair. Thousands of corpses are driven into the water by [the] Elbe and Oder. Thousands of corpses are hanging in the woods and in the neighborhood of Berlin, no one cuts them off [sic], thousands and tens of thousands are dying in the country roads by [sic] hunger and exhaustion.” Quoted in Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 157.

before alleging that the world was remaining silent in the face of this “terrible tragedy, as if an iron curtain had descended before this part of Europe.”¹⁰⁷ Not only did the international community accepted these crimes without a word, they were responsible and seeking vengeance: Acknowledging “terrible crimes” committed by Germans in passing, the bishops demanded to know “*since when it is acceptable to take vengeance on innocents and atone for crimes with crimes?*”¹⁰⁸ The declaration upbraided the victors:

“One should unrelentingly bring to justice the true culprits. But who wants to be responsible for the mass deaths of children, mothers, old people? Who wants to take upon themselves the *despair of many thousands*, who in their horrendous misery end their lives? *We beg and we plead* that the world may break its silence; those who have the power may prevent that might is right, and that *once again the seed of hatred is sown*, which can only bear a calamity within it.”¹⁰⁹

The Catholic bishops understood the expulsions as “victor’s justice” which needed to be tempered. They presented their arguments to Lucius D. Clay in the summer of 1945 with the request to have their appeal forwarded to President Truman.¹¹⁰ Clay politely declined, pointing out that German minorities destabilized interwar governments and contributed to the outbreak of the war, and that while the victors knew that many innocent people had been affected by the transfers to prevent future similar conflicts, it was impossible to ascertain individual guilt.¹¹¹

The pulpit promulgation led nowhere, yet is crucial for understanding the prevailing sentiment that underpinned German and expellee interpretations of the forced migrations. The

¹⁰⁷ Reproduced in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 396.

¹⁰⁸ Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 397. Emphasis in original.

¹¹⁰ A petition with similar arguments was submitted to the Allied Control Council by Cardinal Frings of Cologne. See Franz Lorenz, *Schicksal Vertreibung - Aufbruch aus dem Glauben. Dokumente und Selbstzeugnisse von religiösen, geistigen und kulturellen Ringen mit dem Vertriebenenschicksal* (Köln: Wienand, 1980), 130.

¹¹¹ Fritz Peter Habel, *Dokumente zur Sudetenfrage: unerledigte Geschichte* (München: Langen Müller, 2003), 689.

historians Eva and Hans Henning Hahn argue that the framing of the expulsions as vengeance from Allied governments obsessed with hatred and retribution conforms to narratives of Third Reich propaganda, and that many of the postwar statements reveal lingering Nazi rhetorical and thinking patterns that had a profound effect on German cultural memory.¹¹² Indeed, there were direct links and continuities. Finance Minister Johann Ludwig Graf Schwerin von Krosigk's May 2, 1945 radio lament that German suffering unfolded behind an "iron curtain" which concealed expellee misery from an indifferent and callous world carried into the postwar period.¹¹³

In his closing statements on October 1, 1946 before the Nuremberg Tribunal, Hans Frank recognized German guilt that "a thousand years could not take from us because of the behavior of Hitler in this war."¹¹⁴ A few moments later, he came to speak of other "colossal mass crimes of the most appalling kind," namely "those carried out and still being carried out by Russians, Poles and Czechs against Germans above all in East Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania and in the Sudetenland." The condemned man alleged that "already today they have completely paid for every possible guilt of our people," before asking the court who might "one day judge these crimes against the German people?" Frank had doubtlessly digested some of the evidence presented by the German defense team, which entered into the record reports of Soviet atrocities such as Nemmersdorf that included mass rape, the murder of infants, and nailing of women to barn doors.¹¹⁵ Intending to discredit the Soviet judges and relativize Nazi war crimes, the defendants' legal counsel and Frank became

¹¹² Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 397.

¹¹³ Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, 391.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat*, 41.

¹¹⁵ Bundesarchiv (Barch) Ost-Dok 2/13, 9 and 32. See also the excerpts of leaflets dropped by Nazi propaganda units on the Western Front in late 1944 detailing Soviet barbarities, discussed in chapter one.

among the first Germans in postwar Germany to publically leverage “flight and expulsion” narratives against the Allied victors.

The combination of self-pity, ambiguous acknowledgment of German responsibility, and denouncement in the utterances of indicted war criminals and Catholic bishops, in other words, traced a general rhetorical strategy that expellees in Germany would replicate in their appeals to foreign audiences, and which would dictate the direction of “flight and expulsion” for decades to come. Unlike the network of Sudeten German socialists organized around Jaksch, the second type of lobbying directed against the Western Allies developing in occupied Germany constituted a loose coalition of actors. Many did not know one another personally or take up contact with one another, and they espoused diverse political ideologies, though generally they were nationalist and conservative. What united them, however, was a shared interpretation of the expulsions, and how to present arguments to the American and British occupiers.

Despite these issues and a fragmented source base from the period before the formation of expellee organizations in 1948, a discernable argumentative strategy developed in Germany that distinguished itself from the lobbying of Wenzel Jaksch. Here again the Sudeten Germans, mostly from the conservative or nationalist camps, spearheaded efforts, as their history as an ethnic minority helped them to instinctively recognize the power of presenting grievances to higher powers. As Reich citizens, Silesians and Prussians had no experiences beyond the Wilhelmine Empire or Third Reich, so that developing an engaged lobbying effort to present their plight to foreigners constituted a foreign concept that took years to grasp. Nevertheless, whereas Jaksch attempted to bring the Sudeten Germans into the antifascist fold and make a case for the unjust punishment of opponents of Hitler, the “sympathy narratives” directed against the Allies from groups in Germany oscillated between arousing pity for German victims and indicting the victors.

One of the first and most prominent expellee critics was the Bavarian Catholic priest Emmanuel Reichenberger. His career took him to Bohemia, where his vocal opposition to Henlein's Sudetendeutschen Partei (SdP) forced the cleric to flee to Great Britain after the German occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1939. There he joined Wenzel Jaksch, with whom he co-founded the Democratic Sudeten Committee. Reichenberger's London activities primarily focused on negotiating with the Canadian government to accept a limited number of Sudeten Germans into the country, before he himself settled in South Dakota and eventually Chicago.¹¹⁶ There he became an early and vocal critic of the expulsions, which he deemed "the greatest persecution of Christians of all time," especially among German-American circles, giving public speeches and writing numerous essays in German-language newspapers such as Chicago-based *Nord-Amerika*.¹¹⁷

These articles formed the basis for the 1948 book *Ostdeutsche Passion*, one of the first German publications on the forced migrations.¹¹⁸ With an eye-catching cover featuring an illustration of a column of emaciated and bowed figures marching under an enormous westward-pointing cross in the sky, the book familiarized readers with the history of the German East, the background to the forced transfers, and included eyewitness accounts and quotes from foreign observers. What sources Reichenberger consulted to tell the story of the 18 million expelled and five million dead remained unclear, and the often salacious testimonials were uncorroborated and legitimized with assurances that the author "knew many [of the victims] personally."¹¹⁹ A

¹¹⁶ Bachstein, *Wenzel Jaksch und die sudetendeutsche Sozialdemokratie*, 182.

¹¹⁷ Weger, "*Volkstumskampf*" *ohne Ende*, 141; Kurth, "In der Sicht des Auslandes," 527.

¹¹⁸ Emmanuel J. Reichenberger, *Ostdeutsche Passion* (München: Europa-Buchhandlung, 1948). The book covered events in the Recovered Territories, but the predominant focus remained on Reichenberger's adoptive homeland of the Sudetenland.

¹¹⁹ Reichenberger, 216.

hyperbolic and emotional language permeated the entire book: “The Bloodlust in Friesetal,” “The Hell of Hodolany,” “Children Under the Gallows,” “The Mass Graves of Brünn,” “Sadists Rage in Raase,” “Bullets to the Nape at the Open Grave,” “In the Torture Chambers of Mährisch-Rothwasser,” “The Jägerndorfer Kindermord,” “German Girls Trampled to Death,” “Raped, Starved, Bludgeoned,” “The Beast Unchained,” and “Polish Terror in Upper Silesia” were but a few of the reports Reichenberger included.¹²⁰

The work appealed to the UN and Western governments to right these injustices, a precondition for a lasting peace in Europe. At the heart of the book however was a vociferous rejection of German collective guilt and a condemnation of atrocities committed against Germans. In the opening pages, Reichenberger contemplated who bore the “guilt for the catastrophe,” and alleged that the role of the Germans “could not so easily be answered.”¹²¹ Holding Hitler responsible, he explained how National Socialism could not be “restricted to the German people.” Leveraging his objectivity as a Nazi opponent and exile, Reichenberger argued that the Sudeten Germans had been forced through economic hardship and the misery of minority status under Czech rule into the fascist camp; most, the author attested, rejected annexation in any case and had no desire to return “home into the Reich.”¹²² Like Jaksch, Reichenberger bemoaned the betrayal of the many democrats who fought valiantly for democracy, yet ultimately suffered in vain because the wheels of history had ordained the Sudetenland for catastrophe. The second part of the goal was an indictment of the true guilty parties, particularly the “Pharisees-like disposition of the

¹²⁰ Reichenberger, 5–6.

¹²¹ Reichenberger, 15. In the closing pages he reprinted a letter sent to the radio station “Voice of America,” which more or less summarizes Reichenberger’s position: “I do not deny the portion of the guilt that our people must bear, but it would not reflect the truth if one would like to speak of a sole guilt. Someday after all history will issue a different verdict of this time than is the case today.” Reichenberger, 266.

¹²² Reichenberger, *Ostdeutsche Passion*, 18.

Czech people that stands as a counterpart to the barbarism of Hitler.”¹²³ These “nauseating” and “grotesque” crimes were not individual acts, but thousand-fold crimes that had no source in National Socialism. Their tradition, Reichenberger explained, were the tradition of the Husites who already in the 15th century had “locked German women and children in churches and let them die through an excruciating fiery death!”¹²⁴ While the Sudeten Germans had proven their humanity for centuries, the Czechs and their Soviet backers, whose “behavior in comparison to German soldiers must not be iterated,” were motivated by age-old passions. Though Reichenberger denied the concept of collective guilt, he did not afford Slavs the same privileges.

Barred from entering Germany for many years, Catholic Sudeten Germans managed arrange a Germany tour for Reichenberger in the summer of 1949 billed as an “appeal to the conscience of the world.”¹²⁵ Speaking before tens of thousands at fourteen mass rallies, Reichenberger compared the expulsions explicitly to the Holocaust and levelled charges against the expellers of perpetrating an intentional genocide.¹²⁶ Addressing the occupation authorities, Reichenberger pleaded for a comprehensive treatment of the refugee problem that constituted an “Atomic bomb” in the heart of Germany and “the fateful question for Western Civilization.”¹²⁷ These themes were reiterated in the book *Europa in Trümmern* that emerged a year after his

¹²³ Reichenberger, 266.

¹²⁴ Reichenberger, 11.

¹²⁵ Emanuel J. Reichenberger, *Appell an das Weltgewissen: Ansprache bei den Großkundgebungen in verschiedenen deutschen Städten* (München: Veritas-Verl., 1949).

¹²⁶ Reichenberger, 8.

¹²⁷ Reichenberger, 7–27.

journey, in which he relativized Germany's role in World War II and accused the Allies of having engaged in a "crusade" against the German people and especially the expellees.¹²⁸

Reichenberger, the proclaimed "Father of the Homeland Expellees," is an important yet often overlooked figure, as he was among the first of the expellee leaders to iterate expellee history and present it to audiences domestically and abroad.¹²⁹ His works and statements therefore are a foundation of the collective memory of the expellees as well as West Germans, and reflect the historical worldview of the Sudeten Germans. More importantly, his efforts of attempting the Western governments to reverse the expulsions augmented similar tactics pursued by particularly conservative expellees in Germany after their political organization in 1948.

In February 1950, a coalition of expellee organizations drafted an open letter to the "representative of the great American people," the US High Commissioner John McCloy, invoking the authority of "higher principles of right and justice" in order to decry Western silence over the crime of some five million deaths "of mostly innocent women and children."¹³⁰ Speaking on behalf of the "millions of downtrodden," the letter raised an "eternal accusation before God's judgment" that the Allies were guilty of and indicted the Western double standards and a false application of justice that seemed to be granted to the peoples of the world "including the uncivilized tribes of inner Africa," but not to Germans.¹³¹ Appealing to McCloy and the

¹²⁸ Emanuel J. Reichenberger, *Europa in Trümmern. Das Ergebnis des Kreuzzuges der Alliierten*. (Graz: L. Stocker, 1950).

¹²⁹ Weger, "Volkstumskampf" ohne Ende, 175.

¹³⁰ Open Letter of the Landsmannschaften der Vertriebenen für das Land Hessen to American High Commissioner Mac Cloy [sic], February 3, 1950, in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), Sprecherregistratur Lodgman v. Auen 262, 1. Specifically: the letter provided a corrective interpretation of the deportations: "This expulsion is not a consequence of natural catastrophes or blind violence, or distant barbaric times, but instead of open and secret agreements of the Allied governments!"

¹³¹ Specifically, the letter demanded to know why Germans had been sentenced to death for forced deportations, while "16 million innocent and helpless people have been robbed of their homeland, their lives, and their property." Moreover, the authors questioned the rationality of "forcing on the one hand the culprits [*Unrechttuer*] of the

“conscience of the American people and entire humanity,” the letter demanded justice for “inhumane and barbaric fate” that had befallen “16 million innocent people,” closing with an assurance that God would “slowly but surely punish this injustice.” A second public address to McCloy denouncing American hypocrisy followed two weeks later, penned a Sudeten German “who happened to have the luck not to have been burned alive by murderous Czech bands or who was slaughtered after days of painful torture, and who had the misfortune of being driven into a defeated, destroyed, and unlivable Germany.”¹³² Silesian associations engaged in similar tactics of underlining American responsibility for expellee suffering during the spring of 1950.¹³³

The strategy of token acknowledgment of vaguely worded German guilt combined with indictments and condemnations of Western hypocrisy culminated most famously in the “Charta of the Homeland Expellees.” In August 1950, thirty representatives of every major expellee association signed and publically proclaimed the “Charta” in which they “relinquished vengeance and retaliation” that the “unending suffering that especially the last decade has wrought on humanity.”¹³⁴ Besides imploring the world to “recognize that the fate of the expellees is as with all refugees a world problem whose solution requires the highest moral

German people to compensate victims of Nazi injustice, while the compensation for the injustice done to 16 million expellees, who were helplessly given over to misery, is denied.” Ibid, 1.

¹³² Open letter to US-Kommissar McCloy from Josef Schwarz, published in *Ost-West-Kurier*, February 18, 1950, in BayHStA, SdA, Sprecherregistratur Lodgman v. Auen 262. The author ended his letter by pointing out that American support for victims of Nazi racism seemed like hypocrisy: “Were we not also expelled for racial reasons because we belonged to a people? Have not millions of our brothers and sisters been slaughtered in the most devilish way, that the murderous methods of the Gestapo pale in comparison?”

¹³³ “An die hohen Kommissare. Denkschrift der Landsmannschaft Schlesien,” *Breslauer Nachrichten*, May 5, 1950, 5.

¹³⁴ “Charta Der Heimatvertriebenen | Bund Der Vertriebenen e.V.,” accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.bdv-bayern.de/de/Wir-ueber-uns/Charta>. The declaration in front of the ruins of the Stuttgart was attended by between 70 and 150,000 expellees. Numerous celebrations took place as well; in Bad Cannstadt, representatives of the High Commission and the French government joined some 1,000 attendees. Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” ohne Ende, 470–71.

accountability and commitment,” the signatories also fashioned a victimhood formula with tremendous political import. Just as the expellees had generously forgiven, the “peoples of the world should feel the joint responsibility for the fate of the expellees as those most affected by the misery of these times” and meet their insistence for the correction of historic wrongs. The demand that now the victors needed to engage with questions of guilt and collective responsibility dovetailed with the “selective remembering” and “dominant victimhood mental state” of the early Federal Republic, where the “Charta” was celebrated as an important postwar document of contrition and reconciliation.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the ostensibly clear-minded indictments combined with the influence of the expellees as a pressure group politically very quickly convinced the Federal Republic to endorse and insist upon the borders of 1937 as the first criteria of discussion in future unification negotiations, thus paving the way for the politicization of “flight and expulsion,” as will be shown.¹³⁶

“Make the Germans Do It!”: Responding to the Refugee Crisis in Germany

The crucial context for expellee lobbying and the critical responses was the refugee crisis ignited by the war and expulsions. These created seemingly insurmountable challenges for

¹³⁵ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Peter Reichel, “Nach dem Verbrechen: nationale Erinnerungen an Weltkrieg und Judenmord,” in *Holocaust: der nationalsozialistische Völkermord und die Motive seiner Erinnerung*, ed. Burkhard Asmuss, 2002, 215–37. The “Charta” remains a celebrated “foundational document” in Germany, though it is now more critically discussed. See for instance the parliamentary debates to the 60 year anniversary in “Debatte über ‘Charta der Heimatvertriebenen,’” Deutscher Bundestag, accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2011/33306237_kw06_sp_vertriebene/204550.

¹³⁶ There was a broad political consensus within the FRG until the mid-1960s on this point, one which was lent greater foreign policy implications after the GDR recognized the Oder-Neiße Line as its border with Poland and renounced all territorial demands on Czechoslovakia in 1950, moreover acknowledging the legality and finality of the expulsions. These developments forced the FRG to officially insist on the borders of 1937 as the still extant borders. The Sudetenland’s status as a territory annexed in 1938 by the Third Reich presented a political headache that German lawmakers ameliorated by insisting on Sudeten rights to a homeland and right of self-determination, announcing “patronage” of the Sudeten expellees in 1950.

occupation authorities and German administrators alike. In Berlin, nearly fifty reception centers attempted to provide accommodations for the thousands of refugees arriving daily; between July 1945 and June 1946, the US sector of Berlin alone processed close to a million refugees.¹³⁷ Even without the influx of millions of refugees, the humanitarian situation going into the winter of 1945/46 looked so grim that a British officer attached to the Allied Military Government concluded that it was “inevitable that millions of Germans must die in the coming winter.”¹³⁸

Indeed, Germans died in large numbers in 1945. The daily death toll in Berlin soared to several hundred in August 1945, and only five percent of infants born in the summer months survived.¹³⁹ Food shortages were the biggest immediate threat. Soviet officials admitted to their allied counterparts that only the populations of Berlin and Dresden were receiving official rations, with all others, including expellees, left to fend for themselves.¹⁴⁰ The consequences were predictable: In Frankfurt an der Oder, one of the chief crossing points for refugees from the Recovered Territories, German authorities documented more than twelve thousand deaths through starvation between May and December 1945.¹⁴¹ While the Western Allies noted modest improvements by the fall, authorities feared a repeat of the coldest winter in recent history for the

¹³⁷ “Monthly Report”, June 3, 1947, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 36 4/18-3/1, 4. Beyond a few nights rest and a single daily meal consisting of 200 grams of bread and 750 milliliters of soup, British and American facilities were intended as mere stopover points. Indeed, British authorities resolved to offer “the minimum facilities short of inducing disease” and in October withheld ration cards to new arrivals in order to induce them to keep moving. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 303.

¹³⁸ Goronwy Rees, “Problems of Germany,” *Spectator*, November 2, 1945.

¹³⁹ Michael Balfour, *Four-Power Control in Germany and Austria 1945-1946* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), 76.

¹⁴⁰ Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 198.

¹⁴¹ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 306. So dire was the food situation along the border that reports from Görlitz in the summer of 1945 spoke of a “constant flood of people from dawn until dusk heading for the surrounding villages, sometimes more than 30 kilometers away, in order to obtain potatoes.” Cited in Notker Schrammek, *Alltag und Selbstbild von Flüchtlingen und Vertriebenen in Sachsen 1945 - 1952* (Frankfurt am Main [u.a.: Lang, 2004), 151.

year 1945/46 would undo progress and end in catastrophe. With Germany already struggling and swamped with refugees, the start of the “orderly and humane” transfers in December 1945 saw a further four million mouths added to the equation. As it stood, some experts glumly predicted that daily rations would need to be reduced to 400 calories per day.¹⁴²

Lack of cooperation between the victors, as well as inadequate planning, compounded the situation. The British and Americans surprisingly did not confer with one another on expellee matters until January 1947, while the Soviets likewise guarded their independence.¹⁴³ Despite the dangerous humanitarian situation, however, the Allies refused to offer more than basic help, and all parties pursued a policy of complete “decreed assimilation.”¹⁴⁴ One crucial step toward this goal was the banning of expellee coalitions by all military governments, fearing that these would act as an incubator for nationalist resentment.¹⁴⁵ International and intergovernmental agencies likewise refused aid; the International Refugee Organization, explicitly founded in April 1946 to

¹⁴² Frank, *Expelling the Germans*, 196.

¹⁴³ In fact, overwhelmed by the sheer numbers which already by summer of 1945 exceeded two million, Soviet authorities engaged in chicanery to relieve the pressure at expense of the Anglo-Americans: In Saxony, officials loaded several thousand refugees onto rafts and let them drift down the Elbe River into the British zone, while elsewhere misleading directives attempted to set millions westward. In November 1945, a radio broadcast in the Soviet Zone ordered all Germans who had ever resided in the Western Zone to vacate Brandenburg, sending thousands of “homeless, starved old people, children, and Wehrmacht cripples” toward the British zone. According to the *Manchester Guardian*, “along the 70-mile stretch of road between Weimar and...Friedland at least half a million people are estimated to be lying in the highways, paths and in ditches.” *Manchester Guardian*, November 5, 1945. A similar August directive in Saxony mandated all expellees to leave the state within 48 hours. Anglo-American officials protested and Soviet authorities rescinded the orders, citing a translation error, though Western commentators alleged that the initiatives were attempts of influencing ongoing ACC agreement negotiations. *The Economist*, November 10, 1945. In all likelihood, these ruses were an attempt for overburdened local Red Army commanders to relieve pressure.

¹⁴⁴ Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, 1st ed. (München: C.H.Beck, 2011), 103. Touting the Soviet line, Paul Merker called for an “assimilation of the resettlers in their new homeland and the conjoining (*verwachsen*) with the indigenous population.” Paul Merker, *Die nächsten Schritte zur Lösung des Umsiedlerproblems* (Berlin: Dietz, 1947), 7.

¹⁴⁵ In June 1946, General Lucius Clay ordered the coalition ban of expellees, as otherwise “each large group of migrants would have been justified in forming political parties. Nothing could have been more injurious to their cause—or to democracy.” Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 315–16.

contend with the largest number of people on the move since the Thirty Year's War, forbade assistance to "persons of German ethnic origin" and enshrined this policy in its constitution, even though expellees constituted the largest group by far. The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency similarly did not acknowledge expellees as part of its mandate, and the International Committee of the Red Cross ended all relief initiatives for civilians after 1946.¹⁴⁶

Few American or British occupation officials expressed satisfaction at the sight of emaciated refugees arriving from the German East. Nevertheless, the expulsions, though distasteful, were a reality and ultimately the Germans' own doing. As the American High Commissioner Lucius Clay concluded, "if there had been no German aggression...the [refugee] problem would not exist."¹⁴⁷ This assessment reflected Allied policy, which deemed the refugee issue an exclusively German problem that would be solved alongside a general reconstruction of Germany. While provisions were in place to assist non-German displaced persons, no single policy concerning the expellees emerged.¹⁴⁸ The prevailing sentiment, as a member of the American occupation put it succinctly, was clear: "Make the Germans do it."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Douglas, 296.

¹⁴⁷ Lucius D. Clay, *Decisions in Germany* (London: William Heinemann, 1950), 100.

¹⁴⁸ American policy differentiated between Displaced Persons, who were entitled to American aid and support of relief organizations, and refugees of German ethnicity, who were the responsibility of German organizations. These were, nevertheless, often supplied with American and British foodstuffs. Generally, American occupation authorities and Congress adhered to the differentiation, partially in order to minimize the sheer number of dependents in Europe. For an extensive review and debate of DP policy, as well as congressional opposition to it, see *Congressional Record* 93 (March 25, 1947). For empirical examinations of DP policy in practice, see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany*, 2009; Adam R Seipp, *Strangers in the Wild Place: Refugees, Americans, and a German Town, 1945-1952*, 2013.

¹⁴⁹ Cited in Sylvia Schraut, *Flüchtlingsaufnahme in Württemberg-Baden 1945-1949: Amerikanische Besatzungsziele und demokratischer Wiederaufbau im Konflikt* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1995), 45.

Overcoming the crisis would prove difficult for the occupied, however, as German authorities had limited autonomy.¹⁵⁰ As a government official in Württemberg-Hohenzollern remarked in 1946, the Allies in essence foisted upon German offices a “burden that we in our great plight are additionally saddled with.”¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, trains carrying deportees continued to arrive in beleaguered communes. The critical humanitarian situation, which seemed to have no end in sight, is the crucial backdrop for understanding both Western critical responses and expellee advocacy discussed above. The task at hand for German voices was to move the Allies to intervene immediately to prevent an unimaginable catastrophe in the heart of a destroyed continent, and which would disproportionately affect the homeless and destitute expellees.

The hopelessness and desperation formed a central argument of reports fluttering across the Atlantic. For instance, Congressman Capeheart’s emotional condemnation of his government’s inaction in the face of horrendous calamity, cited above, relied heavily on the reports of an “outstanding economist” warning of 15 million Germans on the move, four million deported to the Soviet Union, and a further three million dead through murder and starvation. Capeheart additionally read from letters of German “friends” who described scenes in Germany of “millions of homeless, tattered, hungry, sick, helpless, hopeless human beings fleeing westward” because of American decisions at Yalta and Potsdam.¹⁵² At least one of these sources

¹⁵⁰ The Western Allies generally preferred indirect control over German institutions, issuing orders and taking on a supervisory role; tasks were foisted onto local German district or municipal governments, who after 1946 received their directives from state governments carrying out Allied policy. The Soviet counterparts favored a more streamlined approach, acting through the German Communist Party (KPD) and after 1946 the Socialist Unity Party (SED). Because the Soviet Zone carried the brunt of the expellee influx, already in September 1945 the military government there founded the first expellee-specific agency, the “Central Administration for German Resettlers” (ZVU).

¹⁵¹ Andrea Kühne, *Entstehung, Aufbau und Funktion der Flüchtlingsverwaltung in Württemberg-Hohenzollern 1945-1952: Flüchtlingspolitik im Spannungsfeld deutscher und französischer Interessen* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1999), 244.

¹⁵² *Congressional Record* 92 (February 5, 1946), 878.

in all likelihood was Gero von Schulze-Gaevernitz, the special assistant to Allen Dulles, who together with Freya von Moltke braved a journey to the Recovered Territories in order to gather facts for the American government.¹⁵³ Senator William Langer (R, ND), who also recounted and vociferously condemned the disastrous conditions in Europe, similarly cited German sources in his descriptions of “mass migration under conditions of indescribable and wanton cruelty unknown to civilized nations.”¹⁵⁴ Langer introduced eyewitness accounts of Freya von Moltke, as well as articles of Frederick Voigt on conditions in Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Danzig, and the Sudetenland, and materials from CAME.

In any case, the discomfort of American lawmakers and castigations of the press over potential mass starvation in Europe were enough for Harry S. Truman to dispatch Herbert Hoover to Europe in 1947 in order to get an overview of the chaotic conditions and formulate proposals for their alleviation. Finding the state of Germany disastrous, the former US President emotionally appealed to the American public’s patriotism:

“Those who believe in vengeance and the punishment of the great mass of Germans, not concerned in the Nazi conspiracy, can now have no misgivings, for all of them, in food, warmth, and shelter, have been sunk to the lowest level known in a hundred years of western history. If western civilization is to survive in Europe, it must survive in Germany. After all, our flag flies over these people. That flag means something more than military power.”¹⁵⁵

Hoover’s findings, which anticipated the Marshall Plan, urged Truman and Congress to increase aid and foodstuffs, develop economic initiatives until German export industries could

¹⁵³ Freya von Moltke, *Erinnerungen an Kreisau: 1930 - 1945*, 1997, 111ff..

¹⁵⁴ *Congressional Record* 92 (March 29, 1946), 2806.

¹⁵⁵ *Congressional Record* 95 (April 5, 1949), 3896.

sustain the country, and consider emigration as a safety valve.¹⁵⁶ Though a veritable drop in the bucket before Marshall funds began to flow in 1948, American government funding of Government and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA) combined with private American initiatives operating in Germany with OMGUS blessing, such as the Cooperative for American Remittance to Everywhere (CARE) and the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany (CRALOG), meant a very real difference between life and death for DPs as well as expellees, especially in the lean years between 1945 and 1947.¹⁵⁷

Expellee lobbying therefore substantially contributed toward alleviating the dire conditions in Germany. Yet as the previous chapter has shown, even with the thwarting of immediate existential concerns, the Allied demand for complete assimilation of Germans from the East in their new communities remained an illusory and unrealistic expectation. Allied officials underestimated the capacity and willingness for the defeated nation to absorb the sudden influx of millions competing for limited resources. Occupation officials in both zones registered the simmering social tensions, which posed a serious issue for longterm recovery. In the Soviet Zone in 1946 for instance, some 45,000 complaints from expellees over their mistreatment at the hands of their new neighbors landed on the desk of the Brandenburg government alone.¹⁵⁸ An American officer concluded that “in Bavaria or perhaps the whole of Germany there is no

¹⁵⁶ Hans W. Schoenberg, *Germans from the East: A Study of Their Migration, Resettlement, and Subsequent Group History Since 1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 47. See also Lucius D. Clay, “Chapter in Humane Relations,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 21, 1954; and Herbert Hoover, *No Reconstruction without Food: A Remedy for near Starvation in Germany* (New York: Common Cause Inc., 1948).

¹⁵⁷ The policy of excluding expellees from legal entitlements remained intact and enshrined in legislation such as the 1948 Displaced Persons Act. Refugees continued to be excluded from aid through the IRO as well.

¹⁵⁸ Alexander von Plato and Wolfgang Meinicke, *Alte Heimat, neue Zeit: Flüchtlinge, Umgesiedelte, Vertriebene in der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone und in der DDR* (Berlin: Verlags-Anstalt Union, 1991), 48.

difference between a Nazi and Antinazi [sic], Black or Red, Catholic or Protestant. The only difference is between natives and refugees.”¹⁵⁹

Statistics backed these general impressions. In March 1946, a confidential American survey found that only seven percent of expellees were dissatisfied with the treatment at the hands of non-expellees, yet by September 1947 that number had grown to 64%. In the spring of 1946, 60% of expellees believed that they would get along with the native population, with only 25% expressing doubt; those numbers had completely reversed a year later. Meanwhile, investigators discovered that the number of native Germans who predicted that expellees would not get along with them had grown from 25% to nearly 66%, and only 59% regarded their new neighbors as German citizens. 85% of refugees expressed a desire to go home in September 1947, compared to 79% less than a year before, and 91% of native Germans “expected” the East Germans to one day return. Less than half of the indigenous population, the survey found,

¹⁵⁹ Cited in Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (München: Siedler, 2008), 70–71.

thought that Germany should support the expellees.¹⁶⁰ Surveys in the Soviet zone in April 1947 likewise registered an increasingly deteriorating situation since December 1946.¹⁶¹

The reports indicated the immense concern and interest with which the occupation authorities monitored the refugee crisis. They also captured a startling trend that alarmed the victors: “Dissatisfaction [was] mounting” in Germany.¹⁶² At the heart of this disorder lay the *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, by 1948 a substantial power bloc demanding political rights and economic assistance. After three years of legal limbo, expellees now resorted to explicit threats of dire consequences lest non-expellees continue to marginalize expellees. The popular revival preacher Johannes Leppich, known as the “machine gun of God” and himself an expellee from Upper Silesia, regularly warned West Germans that “a revolution will come from the bunkers and barracks if no help is extended.”¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ “German Reactions to Expellees and DPs,” 1-8, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 36 4/9-1/45. Only 41% of expellees considered Germany responsible for their care, with 26% demanding the Allies take responsibility compared to 11% of native Germans calling for the same. The only point of agreement seemed to be on the return of the expellees to their homeland and whether the expulsions were justified: 98% of expellees and 93% of non-expellees felt the expulsions were justified, though the latter figure had risen from 72% in March of 1946. Other investigations supported the findings of this detailed report. Yet another American investigation in Baden-Württemberg in November 1946 found that around half of the indigenous population considered expellees fellow citizens, and 40% of expellees complained that the indigenous population “considered them as human beings of inferior value, as foreigners or as beggars.” Surprisingly, the survey found that 40% of expellee respondents disavowed German citizenship. Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 314. Surprisingly, the survey found that 40% of expellee respondents disavowed German citizenship. In 1948, American fact finders concluded that 90% of expellees want to return home. Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 110. A Bizonia study from this period found that 60% of native Germans felt the relationship to expellees was poor, whereas 96% of refugees felt the same, specifically citing egotism, heartlessness, greed, unfriendliness, and insufficient understanding of their experiences. Rainer Schulze, “Zuwanderung und Modernisierung-Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene im ländlichen Raum,” in *Neue Heimat im Westen: Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge, Aussiedler*, by Klaus J. Bade (Münster: Westfälischer Heimatbund, 1990), 92.

¹⁶¹ Philipp Ther, *Deutsche und polnische Vertriebene: Gesellschaft und Vertriebenenpolitik in der SBZ/DDR und in Polen 1945-1956* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 287.

¹⁶² “German Reactions to Expellees and DPs,” 1-8, Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep 36 4/9-1/45, 1.

¹⁶³ Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 64.

Leppich's warnings seemed to hold weight. In October 1948, in defiance of the coalition ban, 35,000 expellees took part in demonstrations, and between 1948 and 1949 issued more than 500 protest resolutions to the Bavarian government.¹⁶⁴ At election rallies in Baden-Württemberg and Nordrhein-Westfalen, expellees assaulted speakers or clashed with police when they attempted to arrest refugees attempting to hold speeches against the state government.¹⁶⁵ A number of "trek associations" formed, with as many as 32,000 families pledging to travel in wagons across Germany as during the winter of their flight unless the West German government accelerated planned resettlement of refugees from overpopulated states.¹⁶⁶ Among the most alarming incidents in early postwar Germany, however, was the 1948 hunger strike led by Egon Hermann, already discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁶⁷ American journalists saw the potential for a dangerous "fuehrer of Germany's expellees and, through them, perhaps of all Germany."¹⁶⁸ German politicians meanwhile suspected Hermann of being a Bolshevik agent fomenting unrest among East Germans and paving the way for communism in Bizonia.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 60.

¹⁶⁵ Ian Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 179.

¹⁶⁶ Connor, 179–80.

¹⁶⁷ Brenda Melendy, "Expellees on Strike: Competing Victimization Discourses and the Dachau Refugee Camp Protest Movement, 1948-1949," *German Studies Review* 28, no. 1 (2005): 107–26.

¹⁶⁸ Ernest Leister, "Germany's Stepchildren," in *Germany, 1945-1949 a Sourcebook*, by Manfred Malzahn (London; New York: Routledge, 1991), 143–45.

¹⁶⁹ See "Flüchtlings-Sorgen in Bayern," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, Sept 30, 1948, 4; "Kommunistische Drahtzieher am Werk," *DUD*, September 13, 1948, 1-2; "KPD-Funktionäre in Flüchtlingslagern," *DUD*, September 30, 1948, 1; Flier "Zur Aufklärung! An alle Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebene! An alle Bayern," undated, in *AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII*, 2086. Herrmann was suspected of having crossed the border from the Soviet zone illegally as a KPD agent. While Hermann denied ties to the KPD, he stood as a candidate for this party during the 1949 Bundestag elections.

The military governments remained steadfast in their efforts “to get the Germans to accept persons coming from the East as their own people, and not to regard them as foreigners foisted upon them,” as a British occupation official explained. The Germans were not cooperating, however.¹⁷⁰ On February 4, 1947, the American High Commissioner Lucius Clay beseeched German politicians to make greater strides in providing a future for the new citizens suffering in their midst:

“These Germans after all belong to you. The future harmonious coexistence of your citizens depends on the manner in which you absorb them. If it continues as it does, then you will create a minority that in coming years will perpetuate hatred and enmity. You should know the problems that were caused by minority groups in the past.”¹⁷¹

Three years later, Clay’s memoirs again criticized ambivalence toward the “continuing major threat in Germany and in central [sic] Europe.”¹⁷² Unremitting German foot-dragging prompted General Charles Gross to forego tact: Complaining to American journalists that German politicians were failing to implement policies for overcoming the refugee crisis, Gross assured his audience that “there is not a single people in the entire world that is so unwilling to take on a responsibility as the Germans.”¹⁷³

Gross downplayed the challenges that Germany faced five years after the end of the war. His comments also ignored the curtailed sovereignty which tied German hands; the victors ran the show but ostensibly refused to accept responsibility or provide assistance, and resented the notion of doing so. The contradiction was implied in a 1950 report of the American High

¹⁷⁰ Cited in Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 309.

¹⁷¹ Bundesarchiv (Koblenz), *Akten zur Vorgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: 1945-1949*, ed. Walter Vogel and Wolfram Werner, vol. 2 (München: Oldenbourg, 1989), 186.

¹⁷² Clay, *Decisions in Germany*, 313.

¹⁷³ Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 65.

Commissioner, which reiterated that the issue remained “primarily a German problem and... responsibility” while acknowledging that the military “must devote much of their time to joint efforts with other occupying powers and German authorities on the refugee problem.”¹⁷⁴

The “Make the Germans Do It” approach failed to engender German recognition that expellees were equal citizens and acceptance that their presence was permanent.¹⁷⁵ Reluctantly, the occupation authorities conceded that mere pressure on German officials alone would not solve the issue, but rather required financial assistance to alleviate the catastrophic perpetual destitution and lack of life chances that would derail the Western democratization project while still in its infancy. A February 1947 OMGUS psychological study of refugees made a strong case that continuous alienation would scupper any chance for producing reliable citizens invested in the future of Germany:

“As he looks about himself, it appears to him that he alone lost most in the war since the native Germans, who were not expelled, retained their homes, land and cattle. The expellee will have to own things in his new country before he can be expected to take an interest in it, or develop a sense of ‘belonging’.”¹⁷⁶

British military governor Brian Robertson, writing to Anthony Eden in February 1949, echoed these sentiments. Between castigating the “latent impulses of the German character to persecute the underdog” as one cause for the misery of the expellees, Robertson denounced how German society had turned them into “a class apart bearing a stigma which only the passage of time combined with a marked improvement in their physical condition can hope to efface.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Jack Raymond, “West Scores Bonn on Refugee Issue,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 1950, 8.

¹⁷⁵ Cited in Schraut, *Flüchtlingsaufnahme in Württemberg-Baden 1945-1949*, 45.

¹⁷⁶ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 315.

¹⁷⁷ Cited in Schulze, “Zuwanderung und Modernisierung-Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene im ländlichen Raum,” 93.

It was at this crucial juncture of 1947/48 that American lawmakers once again took up the issue of the expellees. Among the most fervent advocates were those of German extraction or representing districts with a high proportion of German-Americans alarmed over the fate of their compatriots and, in some cases, distant relatives in the Old Country. Senator Langer, whose father was born in Moravia, explained to his congressional colleagues that the afflicted Germans were a “subject dear to [his] heart, and...dear to the hearts of the people of [his] State [sic].”¹⁷⁸ Organizations such as the Steuben Society, Federation of American Citizens of German Descent in the USA, German-American National Congress, American Friends of Democratic Sudetens, American Friends of the Sudetenland, and the Rescue and Relief Committee for Socialist Refugees and Expellees in Southern Germany pressured officials and pleaded for increased aid and a revision of American policy that gave preferential treatment to non-German refugees.¹⁷⁹ In the immediate postwar period, these groups also organized invaluable charitable contributions and published eyewitness reports in the dozens of German-language newspapers in the United States.¹⁸⁰ As forthcoming chapters will elucidate, many of these organizations stood in close

¹⁷⁸ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14658.

¹⁷⁹ In 1949, it was Langer who twice introduced appeals from German-American organizations beseeching the American government to assist their compatriots. In July of 1949, Langer submitted a resolution of the American Aid Societies for the Needy and Displaced Persons of Central and Southeastern Europe requesting an amendment of the 1948 Displaced Persons Act to allow at least 54,000 “kinfolk...excluded from the care of the IRO because of their German ethnic origin” to be allowed entry into the US. The resolution argued that these Germans had been expelled due to their “religious beliefs, cultural traditions, or national origin,” and that was “inconsistent with the great and noble traditions of these United States,” who owed it to the association’s “relatives and friends” to right this wrong. *Congressional Record* 95 (July 29, 1949), 10395-10396. A telegram from Theodore Hoffmann, the chairman of the Steuben Society, similarly attacked American policy. Langer read the message of “one of the greatest patriotic organizations in the United States” into the record on October of 1949, in which Hoffmann objected to the “viciously discriminatory” DP policy designed to “purposefully...stop German immigration completely.” The German-American community, Hoffmann added, “bitterly resented” this exclusion and demanded that expellees be included in immigration quotas of displaced persons, as Germany could not handle the influx that now threatened Central European peace and which American decisions at Potsdam had caused. *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14658.

¹⁸⁰ The New York based *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung und Herold* and *Sudeten-Bulletin; Abendpost, Deutsch-Amerikanische Bürgerpost*, and *Nord-Amerika* in Chicago; the *Rochester Abendpost; Philadelphia Gazette-*

contact with expellees and acted as their “representative in the USA” and evaluator of the American “cultural landscape.”¹⁸¹

The colorful isolationist Langer, however, remained the most consistent champion of expellees and critic of the Potsdam Agreement.¹⁸² By 1949, when Langer’s repeated warnings of impending disaster seemed all too prescient, the Senate contemplated how to accelerate European recovery. Again Langer intervened, disparaging the Marshall Plan’s inadequate funding to Germany before quickly turning to a critique of deliberate “mass starvation of 20,000,000 Germans under the American flag” and censure of occupation authorities preventing UNRRA, the Red Cross, and churches from assisting Germans in the first postwar months.¹⁸³ Langer assured the Senate that the expulsions were “the greatest crime against humanity in all of history.”¹⁸⁴ According to the senator, 15 million had been expelled, of which five million

Democrat; as well as several smaller papers of the Tribune Publishing Company in Omaha. Kurth, “In der Sicht des Auslandes,” 527.

¹⁸¹ BayHstA, SdA- Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 74, von Auen to Totzauer, Oct 24, 1952. Totzauer distributed testimonies to journalists and congressmen, organized fundraisers with American churches and other charitable organizations, and planted articles in the American and German-speaking press that echoed SL positions. However, von Auen also requested information that could provide strategies for countering the allegedly Jewish-dominated institutions that controlled American public opinion and engaged in anti-German propaganda.

¹⁸² Already in 1946, Langer had given a speech that was later published registering the concerns for the humanitarian conditions in Germany. William Langer, *The Famine in Germany: Speech of William Langer of North Dakota in the Senate of the United States, March 29, 1946* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946).

¹⁸³ *Congressional Record* 95 (April 5, 1949), 3895. Langer alleged that this was a blatant implementation of the draconian Morgenthau Plan, and that the continued industrial disarmament, stagnant growth, and capricious denazification procedures “repeating the Gestapo techniques” were callous as well as unproductive. Langer extensively quoted congressional colleagues, occupation officials, and observers to drive home the point that, as Senator Robert A. Taft (R, Ohio) had stated in September 1946, “[n]ot only has our policy in Germany been wrong; it has been wrong; it has been futile and impossible. We have pursued contradictory policies which have only created contempt as well as hatred for America.” Langer invoked the assessment of Hanson Baldwin, a military analyst, from March 1947: “German is divided and broken, slowly starving, a cancerous growth in the heart of western Europe... There festers in her ruins the poison of fascism, the virus of communism; either totalitarianism flourishes in decadence and destruction. *Congressional Record* 95 (April 5, 1949), 3896.

¹⁸⁴ *Congressional Record* 95 (April 5, 1949), 3898.

perished, part of a series of “criminal betrayals of American principle...and extension of human slavery of the white race.” Langer expounded upon what was transpiring in Europe:

“Nowhere in recorded history, has such a grim chapter of brutality been written than in the account of what has already taken place in Eastern Europe. Already, from fifteen to twenty million people have been uprooted bodily from their ancestral homes of a thousand years and thrown into the torment of a living hell, to perish, or to be driven like cattle across the wastes of eastern [sic] Europe. Women and children, the old and the helpless, the innocent and the guilty alike have been subjected to cruelties which have never been surpassed, even by the Nazis themselves. Yet, we are now committed to a continuation of these inhuman policies in the future, although the conscience of the American people cries out against such bestial practices.”¹⁸⁵

Langer asserted that at the Nuremburg Tribunals, Nazi functionaries had faced charges for these very policies, before closing his speech by once again citing financial analysts’ concerns for the future of postwar Europe and demands for a re-orientation of policies toward “German-speaking people” and a constructive solution to the “German problem.”¹⁸⁶

In the fall of 1949, Langer once again took to the floor of the Senate with demands for an expansion of emigration for expellees. The senator set the tone for the speech that would last the better part of the afternoon from the very onset:

“It is the plight of millions of helpless people who for generations lived peacefully in certain eastern European countries, but who, by one single stroke of the pen, found themselves expelled from their homes and driven from their soil for no other reason, Mr. President, than that they spoke German. Never, in the course of inhuman events, has any group of people been so ruthlessly treated as the so-called expellees who augment their daily prayers with a supplication that somewhere on earth a place can be found where their sole crime, the stigma of being able to speak only German and of being of German ethnic origin, will be pardoned, so that they may once again raise their faces skyward and breathe an air not

¹⁸⁵ *Congressional Record* 95 (April 5, 1949), 3898.

¹⁸⁶ *Congressional Record* 95 (April 5, 1949), 3898-3899.

polluted by bigotry, abuse, and the stench of rotting bodies of their miserable friends and wretched relatives.”¹⁸⁷

The presentation sought to emphasize the victimhood and abandonment of expellees and secure an increase in immigration quotas from which Germans were excluded. Already in the previous year, Langer had spearheaded efforts to include an amendment to the 1948 Displaced Persons Act granting eligibility for 12,000 ethnic Germans to emigrate annually. Calling for this figure to be expanded to at least 52,000, the speech included lengthy digressions on the history of migration, definitions of the term “ethnicity,” and periodic interruptions from colleagues.

At the heart of the lecture was a racially charged juxtaposition between DPs and expellees. Engaging in blatant victimhood competition, Langer offered anecdotes of unruly Slavic DPs documented in numerous complaints to his office, and reports from Europe that revealed how the Third Reich’s erstwhile victims formed “the hard core of Europe’s teeming humanity.” They were “far from angelic,” with many being criminals and communists or Nazi collaborators.¹⁸⁸ Langer questioned laws benefiting hundreds of thousands of “aliens, whose sole

¹⁸⁷ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14658-14659

¹⁸⁸ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14664. Langer introduced as evidence the previous comments of Senator Ed Gossett (R, TX) concerning DP’s and the security risks they presented, and his opposition to directives to increase quotas for “presumably” political refugees of Jewish heritage from the Soviet Union. Without wanting to “belabor [the] point,” Gossett asserted that there was no antisemitism in Russia, where the “Yiddish-speaking Russian Jew... is the backbone of the Communist Party,” and that “90 percent of the Communists in this country—that may be a slight exaggeration, but I think it is close to it—have some Russian connection. Many of them are these Russian Jews we have mentioned.” Defending his opposition, Gossett added that “many of these people are not Hebrews. They are no more related to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob than you and I... They go back to the first century; they are Mongolians. The Orthodox Hebrew cannot speak Yiddish. These are the Kazars. A lot of those folks have Communist histories. When we cut out 100,000 of them, we have not discriminated against the Jewish people, we have just exercised prudent caution, and we have been fair in that they have voluntarily displaced themselves.” *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14673.

melodramatic claim to eligibility...would be that they, not unlike many millions of others, have a burning desire to come to the United States.”¹⁸⁹

The DP “pressure groups and the Potsdam schemers” brought these elements to American shores while deliberately barring expellees from escaping from Europe, the senator argued.¹⁹⁰ Langer assured listeners that he hardly dismissed the Third Reich’s crimes, yet reminded colleagues that they had pledged to prevent their repetition.¹⁹¹ Yet “scarcely a finger has been lifted for the relief of the expellees,” Langer lamented, “and we sit quietly in this Chamber while those very expellees are slowly being exterminated like rats, and welcome into our midst shipload after shipload of displaced persons, many of whom have greatly abused our hospitality.”¹⁹² While the DPs themselves and their victimhood were questionable, expellees were of better “stock” and possessed a “more desirable character.”¹⁹³ Indeed, their mental caliber and moral codes are as admirable as their distant relatives in my State and many of the other sovereign States of the Union,” Langer assured.¹⁹⁴ As skilled farmers and laborers, they would benefit the American economy. Their victimhood, moreover, was beyond doubt.

¹⁸⁹ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14664.

¹⁹⁰ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14663.

¹⁹¹ “We were struck with horror at the atrocities the Nazis committed. Our spines were chilled when we read of the gas chambers, and when...we were shown stomach-churning photographs of the heaps of innocent dead we vowed that we would pledge ourselves and dedicate our future efforts to prevent a repetition of such outrages of humanity.”

¹⁹¹ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14665.

¹⁹² *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14665-14666.

¹⁹³ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14665. Charles M. Barber maintains that Langer refused to distinguish between victims of the Holocaust and the expulsions, and that he was genuinely motivated by humanitarian principles. Barber, “The Isolationist as Interventionist.” While much of Langer’s engagement was on behalf of a multitude of various oppressed groups during his tenure as senator, on this particular occasion Langer unmistakably distinguished between victims, and his advocacy for ethnic Germans on the one hand relied on a dismissal of DPs on the other.

¹⁹⁴ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14659.

Langer passionately pleaded that it had been a catastrophic mistake to appease the USSR in 1945, “thereby licensing their hordes to legally crack a cat-o’-nine-tails brutally over the heads of some 12,500,000 innocent people.”¹⁹⁵ The crimes were ostensibly without historic precedent: “Never in peacetime has so large a congregation of humanity been caused to float aimlessly on the sea of broken dreams, deprived of a pilot, and robbed even of their compass. Pushed, kicked, beaten, and cowed, with only the remnants of clothes to warm them, their aching feet protected by cardboard, newspapers, or tattered rags, these outcasts eke out an existence as scavengers in the woods or in the back alleys of cities and villages because their only crime was being of German ethnic origin.”¹⁹⁶ Langer spoke alternately of three and five million dead, but all had been “virtually condemned to death.”¹⁹⁷ Repeated descriptions of “despicable atrocities...[that] baffle the human conception of decency” punctuated Langer’s presentation. He described how farmers who love their soil were “simply thrown out, ruthlessly and unceremoniously” from their homes, and then packed onto trains from which crews tossed still living babies out of windows into the snow.¹⁹⁸ Now they were “drifting from place to place, haunting from pillar to post” while the world sat by watching “this remnant of a once-proud people...slowly ebbing away.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14659.

¹⁹⁶ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14659-14660

¹⁹⁷ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14665.

¹⁹⁸ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14665. The descriptions of trains and the tossing of the dead and dying cropped up repeatedly during the afternoon.

¹⁹⁹ *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14664-14665.

Conclusions

Expellee representatives have often lamented that the world remained silent in the face of their suffering. This is a patent falsehood: Sympathy and condemnation were consistent themes in newspaper columns and political debates in the United States and Great Britain. Remarkably, even the interpretations, imagery, and specific examples bore a striking resemblance to how expellees discussed and characterized their fate. Langer's long denunciations of history's most "fiendish plot" were mawkish overtures to be sure, but exceptional only in their hyperbole.²⁰⁰ Why this is the case is down to the surprising international lobby efforts of the expellees, which allow a number of crucial conclusions.

First, though frequently overlooked or treated as an exoticism, expellee arguments are an important factor in explaining the postwar stabilization and recovery of Germany. The successful influence of American and British discourse on the crisis in Central Europe, and not simply the seriousness of the calamity itself, led to increased aid and foodstuffs and the easing of restrictions that made a real difference in the lives of expellees in the dire period before 1947. Reports of continued and even growing social tensions in the American and British occupation zones from 1947 onwards, as well as limited German progress toward a longterm solution to the expellee question, forced a fundamental rethinking in American policy in Germany. Emerging Cold War demarcations of course played a central role; but expellee suffering, and the successful campaign to raise international awareness of the need for greater intervention, played a part in

²⁰⁰ Langer's dramatic characterizations of the expulsions punctuated the speech: "Never has a more fiendish plot been perpetrated under the guise of political expediency, than the Potsdam agreement, signed by the head of the United States, the Prime Minister of England, and Uncle Joe Stalin"; "Voltaire, Tolstoy, Victor Hugo, and other literary giants by comparison wrote in high school terms when we view the tragedy of the expellees"; "[T]he despicable atrocities committed...baffle the human conception of decency"; "The uprooting of the people with German names and with German blood in their veins...may well be called the greatest peacetime crime in history"; "Again...never have I heard of a more revolting crime committed against so large a group of industrious people in peacetime." *Congressional Record* 95 (October 15, 1949), 14659-14665.

paving the way for the Marshall Plan and legislation that would finally integrate expellees, as the next chapter will demonstrate.

Second, the remarkable similarity between American and expellee discourses reveals how successfully German conversation partners impressed their narrative on foreign audiences. British and American perceptions rested upon materials and arguments provided by expellees. In turn, German seized upon foreign conclusions and reintroduced them domestically to underline Anglo-American second-guessing of the expulsions, establish political legitimacy at home, and assuage expellees that their suffering struck a chord.²⁰¹

This transatlantic feedback loop also had immense influence on German discourse and the collective memory of “flight and expulsion.” For instance, expellees within the CDU published and circulated a translation of CAME’s *Land of the Dead*, transforming Western criticism of the expulsions into a plea for a reversal of the transfers and return of ceded territory.²⁰² The afterword noted “with satisfaction” the growing criticism abroad and praised the pamphlet’s “open language” in naming the main culprit: “Russia and its vassal states.”²⁰³ While the pamphlet suggested that the CDU recognized the earnestness of the refugee crisis and somehow had influence abroad, and therefore deserved the expellee vote, the publication also presented a whitewashed history that attempted to avoid offending reader sensibilities: While the

²⁰¹ For example, Winifred Utley, better known as Freda Utley, was British-American onetime communist turned anticommunist. Working for *Reader’s Digest* in Germany, Utley’s observations there and criticism of Allied occupation policy culminated in a book that held the forced migrations and use of German POWs as slave labor in France and the USSR as war crimes. She also took issue with Allied justice, castigating in particular the legal proceedings at the Nuremberg Trial. Freda Utley, *The High Cost of Vengeance*. (Chicago: Regnery, 1949). The controversial book was immediately translated into German. Freda Utley, *Kostspielige Rache* (Hamburg: Noelke, 1950).

²⁰² Komitee gegen Massenvertreibung, *Das Land der Toten: Studie der Deportationen aus dem Osten Deutschlands*. (Hannover: Zonenausschuß der CDU der britischen Zone, 1948).

²⁰³ Komitee gegen Massenvertreibung, 31.

edition meant for internal party use entailed a verbatim translation of the original English, the public version omitted CAME's section on the "monstrous balance of the Nazi crimes" that partially explained the origins of Allied policy. The injustice of "flight and expulsion" had no relationship to the twelve years of Nazi rule, and instead appeared as an irrational crime resulting from Western mistakes and East European brutality against Germans.

Lastly, the efforts of expellees to immediately after 1945 gather testimonies and arrange them into a narrative created a streamlining of experiences and memories, which added another layer to "flight and expulsion." Over time, Wenzel Jaksch's "antifascist expellee narrative" lost out to the accusatory victimhood narrative propagated by expellees in Germany, many of whom ascended to leadership positions within their parties and expellee associations. While in the 1940s it lacked the overt political tenor and demands of getting the homeland back, this longterm successful framing of the expulsions not only provided a crucial bedrock for the "homeland politics" of the 1950s, it created a transatlantic network that expellees hoped to utilize in order to achieve a revision of the postwar order, as will be shown.

All in all, the international memory politics not only profoundly shaped how the consequences of the Second World War were overcome, but also remembered. It also explains an overlooked aspect of how "flight and expulsion" narratives circulated and anchored themselves in the cultural memory of West Germany.

CHAPTER 5

SHARING THE BURDENS OF DEFEAT: EXPELLEE SYMPATHY NARRATIVES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR INTEGRATION

On February 1, 1945, the *Deutsches Nachrichtenbüro* (German News Agency) issued warnings to the German people that a mass of refugees fleeing the Bolshevik hordes would soon be arriving in the streets of the Reich. It was everyone's "duty to in every manner help these fellow Germans who have lost their homes and workplaces under the most difficult circumstances" and who "suffered the most terrible fate." The statement closed with a promise of a forthcoming law that would provide for a "just distribution of the burdens" across the entire German people for the damages incurred by the refugee crisis.¹ The regime, busy with its existential struggle, never passed such a resolution, leaving it as one of the first main tasks for the postwar German authorities; not until 1952 did the Federal Republic implement a type of scheme articulated in the press release in the form of the *Lastenausgleichsgesetz* (LAG), or "equalization of burdens law."

If it had been easy to bear sacrifices during dizzying victories, the disaster of total defeat strained the supposed bonds of solidarity of the "people's community."² Just as many within

¹ Cited in alter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (29.1-5.2.1945)*, vol. 3 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 402–3. The bulletin, anticipating complaints over food shortages, went on to explain that the East Germans had "grown not only their own food, but provided surpluses for the Reich" during the war.

² Historians have questioned whether the "people's community" existed more in Nazi propaganda than in reality. Ian Kershaw has argued that the *Volksgemeinschaft* was nothing more than a "vague" concept constructed by Nazi propaganda, which utterly failed to overcome social and economic differences in German society. Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 172. Michael Wildt and Frank Bajohr generally concur, but take the ambitions of the regime more seriously and point to the fact

society looked upon expellees with profound ambivalence, leading German politicians adopted a “wait and see” attitude. Responding to a letter that expressed fear of a subversion of local culture through the refugees on May 26, 1946, the future chancellor Konrad Adenauer was of two minds: “On the one hand we must be good to them, yet on the other they...cannot transplant the Prussian spirit into our Rhenish youth. We must attempt to assimilate them and have them adopt our spiritual mindset. An accumulation of eastern refugees in leading positions of course cannot occur.”³

Unlike his colleague from Cologne, Konrad Adenauer’s political rival Kurt Schumacher, the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), possessed a connection to the German East. Born in Kulm/Chełmno, the West Prussian nevertheless also initially demonstrated uncertainty at the prospect of millions of expellees flooding into Germany in October 1945: “The flood of refugees from the East...eclipses all of the previously imaginable. The hunger winter will drive even more masses from the East into our territory. Today already we see conditions develop that remind one of the concentration camps.”⁴ In this and other public statements, Schumacher lamented the “indolence and coldness of many a heart,” yet the leading Social Democrat did little to foster sympathy. Instead, the refugees appeared as a hostile flood of outsiders, excluded from the German national community and obligations of aid.

that many Germans bought into the promise of a “people’s community,” which mobilized national awareness and partially contributed to political and social stability. Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009). Götz Aly argues that the Nazi regime achieved very real gains in equality and social upward mobility, and that it was the destruction of the Jews that provided the integrating function for the constituting of a unified “people’s community.” Götz Aly, *Hitlers Volksstaat Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 2006).

³ Hans Peter Mensing, ed., *Adenauer. Briefe 1945-1947* (Berlin: Siedler, 1983), 255.

⁴ Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 416.

Yet within a few years, both Schumacher and Adenauer would sing different tunes. Expellee victimhood by the founding of the Federal Republic was without question, as was their membership within the nation. Indeed, the “community of fate” for all major parties constituted a vital component of postwar political identity: A shared sense of collective victimhood that cut across every party line, save for the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), dominated the public discourse of the early Federal Republic in the late 1940s and 1950s. While disagreements arose about the details of how to master the crisis, the importance of alleviating expellee suffering and goal of integrating the millions of displaced were national goals that virtually every West German politician subscribed to solving “Germany’s Nr. 1 Question.”⁵

This chapter examines this dramatic turnaround, and investigates how expellees went from marginalized figures struggling against societal ambivalence to war victims *par excellence* deserving of assistance and special rights. Of interest here is not an evaluation of the expellee associations, or the relationship of the West German parties to them and their concerns.⁶ Neither will it attempt an exhaustive history of the LAG, which has already been investigated elsewhere.⁷ Instead, the forthcoming pages will assess how expellees and their supporters fostered a largely apolitical “sympathy narrative” of “flight and expulsion” in order to illuminate the fate of

⁵ “Deutschlands Frage Nr. 1,” *Das Parlament*, March 12, 1952, 1.

⁶ See Hans W. Schoenberg, *Germans from the East: A Study of Their Migration, Resettlement, and Subsequent Group History Since 1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); Manfred Max Wambach, *Verbändestaat und Parteienoligopol; Macht und Ohnmacht der Vertriebenenverbände*. (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1971); Matthias Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch”: *Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände : 1949-1972* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004); Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Weger, “Volkstumskampf” ohne Ende; Matthias Müller, *Die SPD und die Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1977: Eintracht, Entfremdung, Zwietracht* (Berlin: Lit, 2012).

⁷ Michael L Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Paul Erker, *Rechnung für Hitlers Krieg: Aspekte und Probleme des Lastenausgleichs* (Heidelberg: Verl. Regionalkultur, 2004).

refugees and underpin social and material claims. Instead of examining the political history of how the path to integration was forged, in other words, it will examine how the case for including the expellees into the national community was made and how, in the process, they emerged as a symbol of German suffering and central element of West German political identity. In short: The *Heimatvertriebene* (“homeland expellees”) and *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* (“community of fate”) needed to be constructed and sold to the West German people between 1945 and 1952.

“Do You Know What it Means to Lose the Homeland?” Early Refugee Activities and the Foundations of a Sympathy Narrative in the Western Zones, 1945-1947

The year 1947 was a crucial turning point. Two years after the end of the war, the challenges of arrival and survival turned toward the longterm question of integration. Simultaneously, social unrest reached a dangerous boiling point, leaving the prospects for a peaceful and prosperous Germany in doubt. As has already been examined, expellees on their own claimed an identity and asserted themselves against their neighbors. From the beginning, however, they were supported by a handful of non-expellees who attempted to make the argument that the new arrivals were equal citizens deserving of sympathy of aid.

The bureaucrats tasked with aiding refugees often attempted to shame resistant elements among the population by openly pointing out how their unsympathetic dispositions stood in stark contrast to the previously vaunted *Volksgemeinschaft* of the Third Reich. Fritz Ulrich, the social democratic Interior Minister of Württemberg-Baden in the American Zone, in April 1946 decried that the worst “inhumane” acts could be seen exactly among those “who could not scream ‘Heil

Hitler' loudly enough in the Third Reich."⁸ The district administrator of the *Rheingau*, Peter Paul Nahm, also took his constituents to task, pointing out in editorials throughout the region's newspapers that they would likely be more willing to take in refugees if they were laborers: "When in recent times [during the Third Reich] the labor offices dispersed foreign workers, none of the farmers could get enough of them on his farm...Now no foreign workers are coming, but *German people*, just like us."⁹ In the Soviet Zone, Michael Tschesnow, the vice president of the Central Administration for German Resettlers (ZfdU) impugned the "people's community," remarking that it lasted as long as it was at the expense of others, but now when there were true "brothers in need," precisely those fail who couldn't run their mouths enough." In 90 percent of the cases in which the ZfdU investigated mistreatment of refugees, Tschesnow fumed, the guilty parties were "Nazis in disguise or their cronies."¹⁰

Making plain to all that the expellees were here to stay no matter what rumors or fantasy might say was the first step for German administrators and officials on the business end of the refugee problem, namely. Fliers and posters appeared throughout Germany warning in simple terms that refugees were inbound and that the local population had no choice but to accept the imposition. Placards of the Relief Aid of the Province of Sachsen (*Hilfswerk der Provinz Sachsen*) called upon the inhabitants of Naumburg to "help the resettlers!" to donate clothing and other goods in "freely," adding that representatives would come house to house to explain the situation and take in collections before the arrival of the next refugee transports arriving on

⁸ Quoted in Thomas Grosser, *Die Integration der Heimatvertriebenen in Württemberg-Baden (1945-1961)* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 328.

⁹ Quoted in Hans Jandl, *Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebene im Rheingau-Taunus-Kreis: Flucht und Vertreibung, Aufnahme und Unterbringung, Prozeß der Eingliederung* (Bad Schwalbach: Bund der Vertriebenen, 1991), 135.

¹⁰ "Mit Herz und Kopf," *Neues Deutschland*, June 6, 1946, 2.

January 20, 1946.¹¹ A 1947 poster in Chemnitz depicting shadowy figures of a man and woman carrying an infant pulling a handcart above the skyline of the city warned of the impending arrival of 6,000 resettlers and demanded that the population “give them a new homeland!”¹² Often local leaders took the population to task: In Baden-Württemberg, for instance, the Lutheran Bishop Theophil Wurm pleaded his congregation to “take in the people robbed of their existence not as bothersome foreigners, but as compatriots, as people who are close to us.”¹³

Similar messages could be discerned on the airwaves. In early 1946 the Bremen district administrator and SPD politician Louis Biester issued an appeal to community leaders to provide for a just distribution of housing and integrate the refugees “as much as possible” into the labor market. “The refugees are staying here,” Biester informed listeners, “they will be our [community] members and citizens, they may not be regarded as beggars who came to us. It is our duty to ensure that they enjoy a sense of belonging [*Heimatsgefühl*] and homeland rights [*Heimatsberechtigung*] here. They must be born as if they have been here with us for years, because we know they will likely never return.”¹⁴ The stern, matter of fact language corresponded to the brusque manner in which occupation governments shunted off the refugees onto the communities and reflected the dire situation that the responsible administrators faced.

Pleas in the socialist zone of occupied Germany likewise took on an urgent tone. In December of 1945, Berlin’s Soviet-appointed mayor Arthur Werner launched a series of direct

¹¹ See flier in Haus der Geschichte, Bonn.

¹² See poster in Haus der Geschichte, Bonn.

¹³ Cited in Grosser, *Die Integration der Heimatvertriebenen in Württemberg-Baden (1945-1961)*, 329.

¹⁴ Track Nr. 1, “Aufruf an die Bevölkerung. Ansprache von Landrat Biester,” Radio Bremen, 1946, in: *Flucht und Vertreibung im Rundfunk. Tondokumente aus den Jahren 1945 bis 1960*, Alina Laura Tiewes and Hans-Ulrich Wagner (Hamburg: Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2017).

appeals in the Soviet-licensed Berlin press to demand patience from the city's population and solicit donations in order to create a worthy Christmas for the refugees trying to find "peace and refuge from their ardors." "You must help them! We appeal to you! Even if your plight is great as well, it is not great enough to make out even a portion of the suffering that these people are exposed to." Werner promised that "the day will come when we all will have what we need," and that the humanitarian efforts now "can no longer be destroyed through war or bombing raids."¹⁵ The Central Administration for Public Health in the Soviet Zone similarly issued calls for goods, blankets, and volunteers to help at train stations where refugees arrived. "The entire German people now reaps the terrible crop of twelve years of politics of insanity," yet the "Hitler clique" had disproportionately harmed the expellees: "Those who are affected the most are the resettlers, who have lost home and hearth and who now face an uncertain and dark future" after long journeys in the cold. "The terrible plight of the present can only be overcome through the force of a true and active [*tatbereiten*] democracy."¹⁶

The messages left little doubt as to the inevitability of the situation and directed listeners that they had no choice but to comply. These rather purely informational notifications soon gave way to appeals to guilty consciences. Into the late 1940s, placards and pamphlets in the two Germanys, often utilizing gendered metaphors for innocence and vulnerability such as a refugee mother and child, pleaded with Germans to provide "help for all." The remarkable similarities cut across zonal borders and ideological divides: A placard from the Soviet Zone featured two hands reaching for a family of five, including a woman with an infant in her arms, and their

¹⁵ "Helft den Flüchtlingen!" *Berliner Zeitung* Nr. 176, December 7, 1945, 2. See also "Weihnachtshilfe für die Flüchtlingslager. Ein Aufruf des Oberbürgermeisters," *Neue Zeit*, December 7, 1945, 4.

¹⁶ "Helft den Umsiedlern!" *Berliner Zeitung* Nr. 194, December 29, 1945, 2.

pitiful cart with the entreaty to “accept them into your midst” and “help the resettlers.”¹⁷ In the Western Zones, a flier with a sketch of a family pulling their possessions past an indifferent couple, the husband in Wehrmacht uniform with hands thrust into pockets, called upon viewers to “Pitch in!” and reminded Germans that “It concerns all of you!”¹⁸

One common strategy were PR campaigns which attempted to familiarize the expellee and non-expellee population with one another. When starting in 1947 French authorities gradually opened their zone to refugees, the Württemberg-Hohenzollern refugee commissioner Theodor Eschenburg’s “integration bulletins” went a step further in preparing the population: “The expellees come from a foreign land, their customs and their mentality are different from our own, their clothing their way of cooking is different, many of their work methods vary from our own. Their dialect is different from ours. Some will find it difficult to communicate with them in the early days. What seems foreign to you is not in and of itself malicious and worthy of condemnation, perhaps only after weeks and months you will be able to render a judgment over your new cohabitants and neighbors.”¹⁹ Eschenburg at the same time took care to explain local customs to the expellees and remind them that integration required mutual effort and patience.²⁰

¹⁷ See examples in Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat: die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945* (München: Siedler, 2008), 65.

¹⁸ CD Jacket in: *Flucht und Vertreibung im Rundfunk*, Tiews and Wagner.

¹⁹ Cited in Andrea Kühne, *Entstehung, Aufbau und Funktion der Flüchtlingsverwaltung in Württemberg-Hohenzollern 1945-1952: Flüchtlingspolitik im Spannungsfeld deutscher und französischer Interessen* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1999), 240.

²⁰ “The people here in this land have maintained their customs through centuries of change. They are honest, close-mouthed, and thrifty and they measure the new arrivals according to these traits. They are tireless in their work, especially the women with their housekeeping, and expect the same of others. They are scrupulously tidy and very sparing in their own consumption, they think that it must be this way with others. In principle they are modest, but very sensitive to criticism and strangers who are know-it-alls. Their words are earthy, but hidden behind them are much love and helpfulness.” Quoted in Kühne, 245.

Throughout Germany, state activists attempted to leverage the plight of fellow Germans into arguments for greater understanding. Commissioned by the district administrator of Lippstadt to deal with arriving refugee transports, the writer Theo Breider sought to address his Westphalian compatriots directly in late 1945. Writing poems in the dialect of the region, Breider encouraged his compatriots to “mak’t uap” (open up) their doors and demonstrate greater charity to the “people of our blood who have lost homes,” reminding readers that “they are German people, those are our farmers, the men were our soldiers.”²¹

Peter Paul Nahm, the district administrator of the *Rheingau*, argued in similar tones. Nahm from the onset adopted an uncompromising and consequential tone in his directives to the mayors of the region when refugee transports started to arrive in February 1946, warning that “the arriving shall not be treated as temporary lodgers or foreign elements, they are comrades of the community who are to have their own room and opportunities for cooking.”²² Nahm emphasized that “there is no option to refuse reception” as elsewhere in Germany, where communities ignored instructions or implemented them with the greatest reluctance and delay. The rigid commands did little to assuage the population, however, and reports of altercations and chicanery led Nahm to engage in a vociferous press campaign in order to issue “grave words in serious times” in the region’s papers. Despite his clear guidelines to the community governments, Nahm chided, numerous incidents continued to anger and disappoint him:

“As the experiences have shown us, the refugees have in many communities been received poorly and dishonorably. The most unmentionable scenes have transpired. In some places the poor people sat for hours on their possessions in front of the doors of farm houses waiting for lodging. No one wanted to be the first to take these people

²¹ Friedrich-Carl Schultze-Rhonhof and Gesellschaft für Ostdeutsche Kulturarbeit, *Neuanfang in Münster Eingliederung von Flüchtlingen und Vertriebenen in Münster von 1945 bis heute* (Münster: Ges. für Ostdt. Kulturarbeit Münster e.V., 1997), 55.

²² Cited in Jandl, *Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebene im Rheingau-Taunus-Kreis*, 131.

into his home. [...] Above all, everyone was allowed to keep their homeland. Do you know what it means, to lose the homeland? Could you even imagine how you would feel if you were forced to leave your homeland with 100 kg of luggage or to work as a laborer on the farm where you once were the farmer? As the experiences have shown, this sympathy is missing everywhere. I expect of my mayors that they go before all in their community as a shining example and in every matter are the first. The inhabitants of the communities should look upon the mayor, who was elected by them in free elections after twelve years of dictatorship, with pride. [...] Everyone must be aware that the refugee, who must live pent-up in the most crowded space, will become impatient, and that through this insalubrities will develop in every home. In various communities my delegates had to intervene.²³

The media played a crucial role in facilitating integration. Some papers also let refugees speak directly: In June 1947, *Die Gegenwart* reprinted a letter of an East Prussian which, according to the paper, reflected the majority of expellee letters to the editorial board. “Should not more often the gruesome tragedy of the Prussian fate be recognized in all of Germany and move the people of Southern Germany to not disparage the Prussian people...but instead elicit sympathy for the cruelty of the Control Council’s decision? No democracy can grow and prosper on earth which holds seeds of hatred.”²⁴ Occasionally, papers covered in detail complaints of expellees and printed their demands and recriminations.²⁵

West German journalists attempted to raise understanding by giving the refugees a human face. Reporting introduced audiences not only to who the outsiders were and where they came from, but also their worries. Ilse K. Bembé for instance recounted the conversations one could overhear on a night train in 1946, reproducing the dialects of Sudeten Germans, Prussians,

²³ Cited in Jandl, 135.

²⁴ “Schwierige Verständigung. Briefe an die Herausgeber,” *Die Gegenwart*, June 3, 1947, 24.

²⁵ “Bittere Anklagen der Flüchtlinge,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 28, 1949, 1.

and Silesians who shared stories of suffering, words of advice, and encouragement.²⁶ Another lengthy report humanized the inhabitants of the refugee camp in Ülzen in June 1948, providing biographies and descriptions of the travails of barracks life and searching for firm footing. Readers learned of an East Prussian woman who had but a pile of straw for a bed; it was her third time in the camp, she explained, as she had been snatched up by police while wandering the countryside looking for work. While tending to her swollen feet, she recounted her trek from East Prussia to the Sudetenland and her odyssey through the SBZ.

The reporter noted with horror how the entire camp smelled of sweat, unaired clothes, and foul food, and that the camp staff—themselves refugees—eyed everyone with a “gaze more critical than some criminal detectives.” Nonetheless, they had filed a report to the government decrying the camp as a “crime against humanity.” The author described children who “played” scrounging for food, “packing bags...and departure and quarrel,” as well as “border crossing” and “jail.” Their clothes were tattered, and some had no shoes for years, many of the children could not read and had no access to school. The article closed with the tale of a young mother of two, whose fortune had turned to despair: Her husband had found work, but had suddenly died of TB, so that she was back in the camp. “Three and a half years ago the flight began. Three and half years ago she ended up in the mill, in the great mill of the barracks, the camps, where people are ground...But the war ended three years ago.”²⁷

Radio in particular developed into a powerful medium and did much to shape public perceptions of the refugee problem and the challenges that faced the expellees. Naturally, interviews with refugee politicians, as well as discussions over issues concerning the expellees,

²⁶ Ilse K. Bembé, “Im D-Zug. Sommer 1946, nachts,” *Die Gegenwart*, September 24, 1946, 31-33.

²⁷ “Station im Strom der Menschen. Bilder aus dem Flüchtlingslager Ülzen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 25, 1948, 2

featured prominently. But perhaps more gripping and powerful were reports from refugee camps and interviews with refugees in which they described their experiences. In 1946, for example, *Radio Bremen* visited a herring packing plant where many refugees worked. Against the backdrop of the machinery and women singing, a young woman whose medical studies had been cut short by the expulsions professed that “she didn’t really belong there.” She needed money to support her family, and so “it has to be this way,” she sighed, adding that many of the other workers had similar stories. The reporter intervened: “The ‘what’ one does is after all not so important as the ‘how’ one does it. For we all live in...misery and must accept it and must bear it if possible, isn’t that so?”²⁸ Demonstrations of bitterness and confidence could be heard on West German airwaves throughout the late 1940s, often framed by reporters as stories with happy ends that highlighted the diligence and hope of the new citizens now starting a new, prosperous existence.

Other programming sought to bring together expellees and non-expellees, such as *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*’s series “Old and New Homeland.” Content ranged from political discussions over the equalization of burdens law to interviews, but perhaps the most popular feature were cultural pieces that entailed anecdotes, stories, and humor from the German East’s various regions. Often in dialect, the program intended to appeal to expellees and acoustically recreate a virtual homeland for an hour. But often the content explicitly addressed non-expellees as well. In “One Hour of Silesian Heaven,” the actors revealed the breadth of dialects of Upper and Lower Silesia, and expressed what the word “Silesia” means to the expellees: “For many this word means nothing more than the name of a region that lies somewhere in the East. Well, there

²⁸ Track Nr. 2, “Flüchtlinge beim Herringsreinigen in Wesermünde” Radio Bremen, 1946, in: *Flucht und Vertreibung im Rundfunk. Tondokumente aus den Jahren 1945 bis 1960*, Alina Laura Tiews and Hans-Ulrich Wagner (Hamburg: Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2017).

may be only a few. But for thousands, yes millions of Germans, ‘Silesia’ encompasses the most holy that lives in a person’s heart: The love for homeland. For a land in which they took their first steps. And where they for the first time...saw their mother lovingly smile at them.” They had not lost their humor, however, and wanted to explain to listeners what their culture consisted. The narrator agreed, adding that the program intended to help non-expellees get to know their new compatriots. “The more one knows of one another, the more one can understand.”²⁹

Similarly, *Bayerischer Rundfunk*’s “For the old and new citizens” attempted to foster mutual understanding. A June 1951 radio play dramatized disagreements between expellees and non-expellees over who had suffered the most during and after the war. In a mish-mash of Bavarian, Silesian, and East Prussian dialects, the heated argument ended in mutual understanding and recognition that all had suffered, but that the expellees needed sympathy in order to call Bavaria home.³⁰ Messages of reconciliation and respect were common features on German radio shows in the early postwar years, and the humanizing of the mass of expellees constituted an important milestone in the process of confirming their status as victims with claims to material and social support.

That expellees found help from the radio stations can partially be attributed to the influence of individual staffers who pushed for greater attention on the refugee crisis. Wilhelm Matzel, the head of the news division of NWDR and the station’s expert for refugee matters, hailed from Silesia, as did Radio Stuttgart’s Albrecht Baehr. There were, in other words, activists who in any case had an interest in the concerns of the expellees. But expellee leaders also

²⁹ Track Nr. 21, “Eine Stunde Schlesisches Himmelreich” Radio Stuttgart, June 4, 1948, in: *Flucht und Vertreibung im Rundfunk. Tondokumente aus den Jahren 1945 bis 1960*, Alina Laura Tiewes and Hans-Ulrich Wagner (Hamburg: Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2017).

³⁰ BArch Koblenz 150-3340, Script of program of Bayerischer Rundfunk’s “Für die alten und neuen Landsleute,” June 20, 1951.

attempted to influence programming. In December 1949, for instance, Radio Frankfurt and expellees entered into talks to expand programming and allocate more airtime to issues related to the forced migrations. “Their numbers in Hessen are so great, their concerns so pressing and their will for cooperation is positive,” *Neue Heimat* explained, that “they can make demands for greater consideration.” The goal was not “political propaganda” or “irredentism,” but providing a “forum for the German ‘problem Nr. 1’ in a sober manner and simultaneously making an important contribution to the understanding of the entire German culture. One cannot deny that hereby radio would also contribute to the further rapprochement between natives and homeland expellees in a most positive manner.”³¹

Expellee leaders in the parties as well felt in 1947 and 1948 that they were entitled to greater influence in German media, and bemoaned the in their opinion general lack of coverage. In a 1948 confidential memo from the conference of the refugee subcommittees of the CDU and CSU in Braunschweig, representatives discussed the need for greater coverage and fostering of awareness among the population. They demanded their parties endorse their recommendation for refugee editors with authority to independently revise and edit all news and programming and who would “in every publication be granted space to present the seriousness of the problem” and “counteract statements which call into question the justified demands of the expellees.” Institutions that did not accept these demands, the attendees proclaimed, should be blacklisted as “papers that are not close to us and our efforts.”³²

³¹ Clipping “Radio Frankfurt und die Heimatvertriebenen,” *Neue Heimat*, December 3, 1949, in ACDP 007-001-3437.

³² ACDP 001-377-01/3, Confidential “Vermerk über die in Braunschweig zur ersten Reichstagung versammelten Delegierten der Landesflüchtlingsausschuss der CDU und CSU,” 1948.

These radical demands went unheeded. But generally, after 1947 and 1948, refugees in the parties used their greater influence to shape a new, more earnest course of accelerating integration. Fostering greater understanding for expellees that would justify legislative considerations were one of the top agendas. An initiative of “refugee sponsorship” developed within the SPD in Baden-Württemberg, where every household received a form in which residents could indicate the number of expellees they wanted to sponsor. Materials for newspapers, and ads for calls for clothes and household goods “to help during the most difficult period of need” and to “create a comrade-like equalization” were the second part of the campaign. Moreover, the refugee subcommittee of the SPD drafted a brochure titled *Du und Dein Neubürger* (“You and Your New Citizen”) containing explanations of the refugee problems and reports from experts such as doctors on the “psychiatric dimension” of the expulsions. The pamphlet also included expellee testimonies of their wartime and postwar experiences. The purpose of the publication, the subcommittee explained, was to “interest both the new citizens and the native population in one another and bring them together. The concerns of both parties must be shown. Help from the native population is in their own interest. New citizens: Good will to integrate.”³³

On the eve of the founding of the Federal Republic, and with broad rejection toward refugees and the expellees themselves descending into apathy and anger, reporting in the Western Zones increasingly spoke of the refugee problem as a problem to be solved. Newspaper articles criticized the lack of progress frequently indicted the hard-headedness of the population and its refusal to show greater understanding.³⁴ An August 1948 *Allgemeine Zeitung* editorial is

³³ AdsD Seliger Archiv VII, 1949, Undated draft [c. 1947 or 1948] regarding “refugee sponsorship.”

³⁴ “Die Menschenmühle. Ein Strom von Schicksalen, gesehen hinter einem Tisch,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 24, 1948, 2; “Station im Strom der Menschen. Bilder aus dem Flüchtlingslager Ülzen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 25,

representative of much of the critical reporting: Expressing frustration with continued antipathy, the paper demanded that “whoever has two garments, give one to whom has none” in order to make good on the Christian-social ethos.³⁵ Local papers such as the *Schwäbische Zeitung* often reproached the population more directly, calling upon readers to demonstrate greater compassion in their encounters with expellees:

“For months one speaks of the refugees in our land, of the children, the elderly, and men who had to leave their homeland. Now they stand before our door and expect our help. With the dismal remnants of their possessions they wandered for years, from camp to camp, from city to city, always with the hope to find a permanent place and to build a new life, be it ever so humble. We cannot refuse the shielding roof, sufficient sustenance to the refugees who seek shelter with us. [...] For two years they lived in the confinement of the camps until now the transport train brought them to the new homeland after a long journey. They are tired and jaded, poor and helpless. Take them in just as you would expect a reception if you yourself were in their situation. To meet them cheerfully, to help them in their plight is our duty as people and Christians. Who here wants to remain without pity, to close their heart and barricade their house door in the face of this suffering? If we ourselves remove the pain and barbs of this misery through support, then it will be able to be borne by all.”³⁶

In April 1947, the *Niedersächsische Rundschau* castigated the ignorance of readers and their refusal to acknowledge the expellees as fellow citizens. The impetus for the piece seemed to be a response to the question that many Germans seemed to ask of whether it was even possible to lift the refugees from their “hopelessness and despair.” The author chided the reader: “Who even knows how it is with these raped, tortured and broken people? What does the public know about the violence that ravaged the German people of the East!” The article confronted the

1948, 2; “Sie Warten,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 30, 1949, 1; Julius Stocky, “Die Flucht vor den Flüchtlingen,” *Welt von Morgen* Nr. 3 (1949), 6-7, newspaper clipping in ACDP 07-001-3434; “Die Schande. Einheimische und Flüchtlinge,” *Die Gegenwart*, March 15, 1951, 7.

³⁵ Rudolf Krämer-Badoni, “Kann man den Vertriebenen helfen?,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 4, 1948, 2.

³⁶ “Flüchtlingsnot pocht an unsere Tür,” *Schwäbische Zeitung*, January 1, 1947, 1.

ignorant with an uncommonly explicit description of what had transpired with the expellees: “Violence of every form, existential and miserable, horrific and horrendous have for two years broken and smashed these homeless people.” “Has the German East lost the war alone?”, the author asked, reminding the audience that the expellees’ “possessions and chattels had paid the down payment for reparations that should be carried by the entire German people.”³⁷ The author leveraged expellee suffering into justification for policy measures, calling for a refugee law in the British Zone and an equalization of burdens.

It is not a coincidence that the greater urgency in public discourse and greater effort to foster sympathy coincided exactly with the shift in the public mood over the future of Germany. And the implied subtext, and indeed often explicit exhortation, of these appeals was an argument for the massive fiscal sacrifices West German society needed to make in order to contend with a war fought and lost by the entire nation, but the consequences of which the expellees disproportionately bore. The West German discourse on “flight and expulsion” took on distinct forms by 1949. As the expellees increasingly emerged as the war’s greatest victims, they found a place in the collective memory of the Federal Republic where talk of “Hitler’s fault” or “errors of 1933” slowly receded. It was this imbedding of expellee experiences with the prevailing collective memory of the war which emphasized German suffering that help explain why expellees so rapidly emerged as the most recognized victim group, and ultimately managed to secure their political rights.

³⁷ “Flüchtlinge-Ostvertriebene! Euer Schicksal liegt in eurer eigenen Hand!”, *Niedersächsische Rundschau: Wochenschrift der Christlich-Demokratischen Union*, April 12, 1947, 1.

Allied “Atrocities” and German “Misdeeds”: The Interweaving of German Victimhood and “Flight and Expulsion”

On March 15, 1950, the CDU’s news service reported a “second wave” of 80,000 German refugees arriving in West Germany from the Eastern Bloc, an ostensible “tactical” move of the communist regimes to destabilize the Federal Republic. “For Bolshevism the fate of hundreds of thousands...plays no role. He sacrifices them without scruples in order to achieve its goals. The West on the other hand wants to respect the laws of humanity.” As a “pauperized people,” however, West Germany lacked agency to withstand the “culmination of a tragedy decided in Yalta and Potsdam”: Waves of refugees and unwanted “ballast” of foreign DPs stirring trouble. “The current situation of our continent is the result of countless errors of European and similarly minded peoples, to which the German people has contributed its share,” the release explained, but the “commonly conjured dangers can only be solved through the greatest common action.”³⁸

The remarkable statement stands out in its self-pity and obfuscation of the historic processes that explained forced migration and the presence of “undesirable” foreign refugees. Bound by a Cold War framework, 1933-1945 were now “errors” to which Germans had “contributed,” and the “migration of peoples [*Völkerwanderung*]”—invoking the barbarian invasions of the ancient world—which resulted from the war were a “commonly conjured danger” and ostensible joint responsibility of Western Europe and the United States. The press release, while certainly aiming to make a political point against the ideological nemesis behind the Iron Curtain, is nevertheless emblematic of a particular West German discourse over the past that emerged around 1948. The shadow of the Third Reich, persistently present in reporting

³⁸ “Der zweite Stoss,” *DUD*, March 15, 1950, 2-3.

during the occupation period, slowly disappeared, and with it the rhetorical framework that required at least a nominal engagement with history and the processes that explained the present.

The discourse on “flight and expulsion” in the Federal Republic took on new dimensions in a matter of a few years, where by the founding of the country the expellees went from marginalized figures struggling against societal ambivalence to war victims *par excellence* deserving of assistance and special rights. The arguments that expellees brought, namely that they were not mere “refugees” and therefore consciously rejected that designation, hit home: Their preferred self-understanding as “homeland expellees” (*Heimatvertriebene*) or “war expellees” (*Kriegsvertriebene*) prevailed, and the more emotionally loaded label that suggested victimhood at the hands of a foe displaced the more general term.³⁹ Coinciding with greater press freedoms, the looming Cold War and diverging political tendencies in the two Germanys also played a significant role: The disappearance of the homeland behind an Iron Curtain that seemed to harden with each crisis and socialist “flight and expulsion” narratives demanded and invited the leveraging of a West German victimhood narrative for social and political claims. Out of practical and ideological reasons, the expellees needed a new homeland and greater attention.

The more prominent stature of the refugees after 1947 in part reflects the successes of the expellees, who freed from coalition bans emerged as a political pressure group aiming to colonize public discourse and provide an interpretation of the defeat and the expulsions which obfuscated questions of German responsibility, stripped away the context of the Third Reich, and elided the possible self-inflicted nature of postwar burdens. Expellees, in other words, were the recognized victims of an unexpected catastrophe that had sent millions onto an *Opfergang*, or path of suffering, which now encompassed a divided Germany and all of Europe. Just as in the

³⁹ ACDP, 001-377-09/9, Letter of Kather to Brandes, December 10, 1945.

SBZ/GDR, West German observers recognized the forced migrations as a necessary challenge to master, yet in the minds of many the causes of this heavy burden did not lie with Germans themselves but their ostensible tormentors.

The indisputability of German victimhood also dovetailed with a “dominant victimhood mental state” of the early FRG.⁴⁰ Oscillating between self-pity and condemnation of abstract metaphysical notions such as “fate,” the hypocrisy of the Western Allies, or savagery of the communist expelling regimes, the “selective remembering” helped constitute a West German “community of memory” which privileged German traumas over the suffering that the nation had inflicted on others just a few years before.⁴¹ While this may have allowed the Federal Republic to acknowledge the war and aspects of the nation’s recent history, it also offered a distancing to the National Socialist past and rejection of collective guilt. Such a reading, obviously, ignored questions of responsibility for the war and explanations for the “catastrophe,” even as it allowed for a rejection of the explanations of the East German rival and sped up a reorientation of the FRG toward the Western community of values embroiled in the Cold War.

One way in which expellees established themselves as war victims deserving of the nation’s support directly corresponded to the fact that discourse in 1947/48 increasingly amplified the emergent trend of humanizing the refugees. Expellees went from being an abstract mass to a people whose terrible fates received prominent attention. A January 1947 report on the condition of expellees arriving from Poland in Marienthal in *Der Spiegel* provided among the

⁴⁰ Peter Reichel, “Nach dem Verbrechen: nationale Erinnerungen an Weltkrieg und Judenmord,” in *Holocaust: der nationalsozialistische Völkermord und die Motive seiner Erinnerung*, ed. Burkhard Asmuss, 2002, 215–37.

⁴¹ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 12.

first nationally circulated images and detailed descriptions of expellees arriving in Germany.⁴² The image of an emaciated man clutching his identification papers, “everything else had been taken from him.”⁴³ The accompanying article detailed the horrible conditions on the deportation transports: Of the 1,500 mostly elderly, women, and children, 65 had perished from extreme hunger or cold. The last victim, a 77-year-old woman, died upon arrival “at the exact moment as the photographer took the shot,” the caption of a skeletal figure explained. Two of the passengers who were doctors struggled without medication for fourteen days against frostbite, dysentery, three pregnancies, and two miscarriages, one of which resulted in the mother becoming frozen to the unheated cattle-car floor in her own blood.⁴⁴ For many readers, it may have been the first exposure to what the fate of expellees actually looked like.

While the assertion of German victimhood remained veiled in *Spiegel*, the theme emerged forcefully from 1948 onwards. On February 18, 1948, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* ran a short piece on the “Treck [sic] of the 14 Million,” the “migration of peoples...without equal in history.” Chronicling the scope and scale, the “sober numbers reveal a tragedy of devastating proportions” which had cast the afflicted, and with it Germany, into an “existential struggle.”⁴⁵ Even an obligatory reference to the Third Reich, which the *Allgemeine Zeitung* had extensively

⁴² A total of four British officers, including Harry Bohrer, a Czech national who had fled to the United Kingdom in 1939, explicitly designed the periodical to emulate British news magazines. Initially founded in Hanover as *Diese Woche*, the British sat on the editorial board until the fifth edition, after which it was reformed as *Der Spiegel* in Hamburg under British license. See “Betr.: Harry Bohrer,” *Der Spiegel*, October 7, 1985, 3.

⁴³ Cover, *Der Spiegel*, January 25, 1947. So compelling was the image that a 1981 picture book of “flight and expulsion,” brought out by the publisher Podsun which specialized in popular histories focusing on the expulsions and the German military in WWII, reprinted it. Stripped of its context, the caption continued to explain that the man had been left with nothing but his papers, but that he was one of the lucky few to have “escaped the hell” of the Czech and Polish “concentration camps.” Arndt, *Ostpreussen, Westpreussen, Pommern, Schlesien, Sudetenland 1944/1945*, 194.

⁴⁴ “Die 65. Tote. Ein Kälte-Experiment,” *Der Spiegel*, January 25, 1947, 5.

⁴⁵ “Der Treck der 14 Millionen,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 18, 1948, 18.

covered in the early postwar years, remained unmentioned, so that the expulsions appeared as an incomprehensible disaster orchestrated by the victors, but especially by Eastern European communists who bore the lion's share of culpability for violent excesses.

Erik Mauthner of the *Westdeutsche Zeitung* was even more pointed in his article "The East German Tragedy," based on an interview with Pastor Gerhard Goebel, the director of the *Hauptausschuss der Ostvertriebenen für die britische Zone* ("Steering Committee of the Eastern Expellees for the British Zone"). Mauthner's visit with the nationalist cleric focused on Goebel's efforts to raise awareness of the expellee's experiences, which seemingly were on par with more recent atrocities. The author referenced the indictments brought at Nuremberg against Nazi war criminals, which included the "methodical and planned measures to integrate [occupied] territories politically, culturally, socially, and economically into the German Reich" and efforts to "make their earlier national character disappear" through "forced deportation of non-German inhabitants." Mauthner pointed out that the same exact thing had happened after the war, and castigated American hypocrisy of engaging in a policy for which "Nazi leaders were...indicted and hanged." The expellees "suffered the hatred and vengeance of the Eastern victors for all of Germany," and would spearhead the "crusade for the winning back of the homeland, fought with the weapon of the flaming words and in accordance with divine judgement."⁴⁶

Goebel's extremism was not without West German critics, and the pastor numerous times raised the ire of the CDU, SPD, and Allied authorities.⁴⁷ His *Hauptausschuss* was nevertheless not without some influence. The first Federal Minister of Expellees Hans Lukaschek served as the association's vice president. Goebel moreover translated and widely distributed CAME's

⁴⁶ Erik Mauthner, "Die ostdeutsche Tragödie," *Westdeutsche Zeitung*, March 3, 1949.

⁴⁷ "Geistlicher Rat teuer," *Der Spiegel*, March 12, 1949, 9-11.

Land of the Dead in an effort to turn American indictments against the victors. Throughout 1948, the *Hauptausschuss* gathered thousands of eyewitness reports and other materials and compiled them into one of the first collection of testimonies on the forced migrations in *Die Ostdeutsche Tragödie* (“The East German Tragedy”).⁴⁸ As Goebel explained in an informational brochure, his educational efforts directly sought to counter notions of a German collective guilt with documented German suffering: “We owe it to ourselves and our people to present the occurrences in the East to the world, first because the belief throughout the world is that only the German people through a debasement through National Socialism was capable of crimes against humanity, and secondly because Europe will never find peace if the atrocities that happened in the East are not compensated through a return of East Germans to their home areas. We don’t want to antagonize hatred, but we must testify to the truth.”⁴⁹

Yet another expellee cleric argued in similar tones. The aforementioned Bavarian cleric Emmanuel Reichenberger, for example, published the hyperbolic and emotionally charged 1948 *Ostdeutsche Passion* (“East German Passion”), which vociferously rejected German collective guilt and condemned the atrocities committed against Germans by East Europeans and their Soviet backers. These were “a counterpart to the barbarism of Hitler” and the culmination of age-old passionate hatred of Germans, Reichenberger explained.⁵⁰ Barred from entering Germany for many years by American and British authorities for fear that the firebrand would ignite popular unrest among German refugees, pressure from Catholic expellees managed to secure

⁴⁸ Hauptausschuss der Ostvertriebenen and Ostarchiv, *Die ostdeutsche Tragödie: eine Frage an das Weltgewissen* (Lippstadt i.W.: Das Ostarchiv, 1948).

⁴⁹ ACDP 001-377-09/3, Informational brochure from the chairman of the *Hauptausschusses der Ostvertriebenen in der britischen Zone*, 1948, 3.

⁵⁰ Emmanuel J. Reichenberger, *Ostdeutsche Passion* (München: Europa-Buchhandlung, 1948), 266.

Reichenberger authorization to tour the Western Zones in the summer of 1949. Speaking before tens of thousands at fourteen mass rallies, the cleric equated Germany's suffering to the Holocaust and accused the expellers of an intentional genocide.⁵¹ A year after his journey, Reichenberger's *Europa in Trümmern* relativized Germany's role in World War II and accused the Allies of having engaged in a "crusade" against the German people and especially the expellees.⁵²

The direct juxtaposition of German guilt with German suffering permeated West German reporting in the late 1940s. A typical representation of the "flight and expulsion" framing of the late 1940s can be seen in the pieces of *Christ und Welt*, a conservative paper founded in Stuttgart in June 1948 by Eugen Gerstenmaier and other representatives of the Protestant Church. Employing a coterie of members of the propaganda department of the Third Reich's Foreign Office, the regular condemnations of denazification procedures and war crimes trials repeatedly faced *Christ und Welt* with the threat of prohibition by the licensing American authorities, who regarded the publication as an "under cover Nazi-paper" disseminating "nationalism and militarism."⁵³ Particularly the writings of "Erbo," the pseudonym of Heinz Bongart, ruffled occupation official feathers. As a founding member of *Christ und Welt*, Bongart's journalistic career began as a propagandist in the navy, in whose service he covered the evacuation of refugees from the German East in the spring of 1945.⁵⁴ His observations appeared in print only

⁵¹ Emanuel J. Reichenberger, *Appell an das Weltgewissen: Ansprache bei den Großkundgebungen in verschiedenen deutschen Städten* (München: Veritas-Verl., 1949), 8.

⁵² Emanuel J. Reichenberger, *Europa in Trümmern. Das Ergebnis des Kreuzzuges der Alliierten*. (Graz: L. Stocker, 1950).

⁵³ David Oels, "'Dieses Buch ist kein Roman': Jürgen Thorwalds 'Die grosse Flucht' zwischen Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerungspolitik," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 6, no. 3 (2009): 384.

⁵⁴ David Oels, "Vertreibung: Schicksal, Schuld und Gräueltaten," *Zeit Online*, accessed January 26, 2018, <http://www.zeit.de/2010/30/Geschichte-Thorwalds-Flucht>.

in 1948 in *Christ und Welt* and focused predominantly on the sinking of passenger ships through a combination of news reporting and literary flourish.⁵⁵

To escape the vigilant gaze of American occupiers, Bongart adopted the pseudonym Jürgen Thorwald for his “East German Fate,” a series appearing in *Christ und Welt* from March until June 1949.⁵⁶ Gripping illustrations of treks, sinking ships, and destroyed cities graced the paper’s cover, while Thorwald vividly blended news reports, testimonies, and fictionalized accounts into a narrative of helpless civilians caught between a heroic Wehrmacht beholden to the ideological obtuseness of Nazi fat cats and a savage Soviet juggernaut. The chronicle of evidently struck a chord: Sales of *Christ und Welt*, which already enjoyed among the highest readerships in West Germany, tripled in the first three weeks of the series’ debut.⁵⁷ Responding to the acclaim, the editors solicited submissions from readers documenting their experiences in order to expand the series into a two-volume book, which appeared in 1950.⁵⁸

The blend of pop history, creatively narrated reports, and propaganda techniques expounded upon the themes articulated in *Christ und Welt* and combined the acknowledgment of German war guilt with mitigating circumstances. The ghastly details presumably attempted to balance the scales of guilt by proposing that Germany had suffered at the very least as much as its victims. The removal of the most outlandish claims from subsequent editions decades later speaks to their unsubstantiated nature, but the “symbolic aggregation” purporting to represent

⁵⁵ See Erbo, “Die Katastrophe der Flüchtlingsschiffe 1945,” *Christ und Welt*, November 12, 1948, 1; and Erbo, “Der Untergang der ‘Wilhelm Gustloff,’” *Christ und Welt*, November 19, 1948, 4.

⁵⁶ Jürgen Thorwald, “Ostdeutsches Schicksal,” *Christ und Welt*, March 24, 1949, 1.

⁵⁷ Oels, “Dieses Buch ist kein Roman,” 384.

⁵⁸ Jürgen Thorwald, *Es begann an der Weichsel* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1950); Jürgen Thorwald, *Das Ende der Elbe* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1950).

“typical” expellee experiences shaped the narrative of “flight and expulsion” dramatically and remain reference guides for expellees activists today precisely because of their emotional power.⁵⁹ The influence of Thorwald should not be underestimated, as up to 1980 his bestsellers sold more than fourteen million copies, making them among West Germany’s most successful pop histories.⁶⁰ Gerstenmaier recalled seeing a copy at Adenauer’s bedside, and that the chancellor had confided that “he had learned much” only after having turned to it.⁶¹ Thorwald’s writings are therefore not only representative of the discourse on the expulsions within the FRG by 1950, they profoundly influenced how broad segments of the public perceived them and contributed to the constitution of a West German political identity as victims of the war, in which the expellees were a particular and prominent “community of fate.”

The leadership of this group of victims enshrined their self-understanding before the world in August 1950 in the declaration of the “Charta of the Homeland Expellees,” in which thirty representatives of every major expellee association publically “relinquished vengeance and retaliation.”⁶² Politicians heralded the ethos of the “Charta,” which continues to be celebrated as crucial expression of German contrition and desire for reconciliation.⁶³ Such a reading overlooks the political potency of the declaration: Just as the signatories generously forgave their oppressors, the responsible parties needed to acknowledge “the joint responsibility for the fate of the expellees

⁵⁹ Oels, “Dieses Buch ist kein Roman,” 390.

⁶⁰ Oels, 375.

⁶¹ Oels, “Vertreibung.”

⁶² “Charta Der Heimatvertriebenen | Bund Der Vertriebenen e.V.,” accessed May 30, 2017, <http://www.bdv-bayern.de/de/Wir-ueber-uns/Charta>.

⁶³ Though it is now more critically discussed for, the “Charta” remains particularly among conservatives an important foundational text of the FRG. See for instance the parliamentary debates to the 60 year anniversary in “Debatte über ‘Charta der Heimatvertriebenen,’” Deutscher Bundestag, accessed May 30, 2017, http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2011/33306237_kw06_sp_vertriebene/204550.

as those most affected by the misery of these times.”⁶⁴ The insistence that German suffering must be acknowledged and that now the victors should grapple with questions of collective guilt and accountability reflected the “selective remembering” of the early Federal Republic, but also the worldview of the expellee leadership, which sought to mint their suffering into political capital.

The decontextualized victimhood narrative which coalesced by 1949/50 made possible the identification of those who suffered, but culprits and responsible parties as well. Allied easing of press restrictions and coalition bans only augmented these efforts. Whataboutery and direct criticism of the Allies’ responsibility for the expulsions and obligation to intervene therefore featured prominently in the West German media toward the end of the 1940s. Yet bitter recriminations and sudden amnesia over the recent past were not the monopoly of misanthropes or bitter nationalists. These interpretations of German history also came to the fore in comments and declarations of public officials of all political stripes, who internalized and fanned the rhetorical flourishes. The core messages of expellee leaders had entered and dominated West German discourse.

The West Germans Respond: Catalysts for Change

By 1949, when the Federal Republic of Germany came into existence, a number of pressures forced the West German government to spring into action on the refugees. Two external factors in particular loomed large. On the one hand, measures passed in the SBZ and a seemingly more rapid integration of the refugees there put immense strain on West German politicians, who in 1949 continued to wrangle over legislative solutions. With the growing divergence of the two systems, the democratic Germany needed to respond to its ideological

⁶⁴ “Charta Der Heimatvertriebenen | Bund Der Vertriebenen e.V.”

rival, which set the benchmark in integration measures. Yet on the other hand, growing American impatience constituted another impetus for greater action.

West Germans nevertheless remained adamant that they could not solve the problem alone. The Sudeten German Association continued to bombard the military governments with literature, resolutions, and demands for meetings to discuss Allied support of refugee claims to financial restitution and a return to the homeland.⁶⁵ Official envoys of the government proved equally tenacious. In at least six tours of the US between 1949 and 1959, expellee ministry undersecretary Walter Middelman met policymakers, public figures, academics, and journalists and gave dozens of presentations on the peril of the refugee crisis and need for American involvement.⁶⁶ Middelman's lobbying convinced Congressman Francis E. Walter (D, PA) to conduct a fact-finding mission in Germany in the fall of 1949, followed by Christian Sonne of the Economic Cooperation Administration, which administered Marshall Plan funds, in 1951. Both investigations resulted from the urging of Middelman, who provided the delegations with testimonials and materials reflecting West German and expellee positions.⁶⁷

German officials continued to hope that Western governments would foot the bill for the expellees integration, and possibly push for a revision of the peace treaty that included a return of the lost territories, a not entirely unrealistic expectation given American responses. German lobbying initiated at least two American congressional inquiries led by Congressman Francis E.

⁶⁵ See materials in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 262.

⁶⁶ See files in BArch B 150-590 and BArch B 150-591 vol.1.

⁶⁷ BArch B150 591, "Denkschrift Be: Zweck und Erfolg der Auslandsreisen des Abeitungsleiters II (Middelman), November 7, 1952.

Walter and the Economic Cooperation Administration member Christian Sonne.⁶⁸ Sonne's report to Konrad Adenauer underlined that addressing the expellee matter remained a German concern, and urged the Chancellor to finally implement an ambitious public spending program that would quadruple federal expenditures yet work to provide jobs and housing for refugees.⁶⁹

West German parties crowed that American delegations had been "deeply shattered to have to realize that the mass of expellees were no 'Nazis,'" and took their interest as signs of a "breach in the wall of silence."⁷⁰ Both the CDU and SPD interpreted foreign concern as a recognition that they had been "duped at Potsdam" and browbeat by Stalin, and that they understood their responsibility for helping "save the productive qualities of these millions of rootless people through the financing of a West German reconstruction program."⁷¹ Was there "growing insight," as the CDU's organ rhetorically asked in December 1949, among the American public?⁷² With American lawmakers voicing reservations over European recovery and increases in US foreign aid, it seemed as if German special pleading had worked.⁷³ Government and Relief in Occupied Areas (GARIOA), the Cooperative for American Remittance to Everywhere (CARE), and the Council of Relief Agencies Licensed for Operation in Germany

⁶⁸ See BArch B 150, 591, Middelman to Hans Lukaschek, Feb 2, 1952; BArch B150 591, "Denkschrift be: Zweck und Erfolg der Auslandsreisen des Abeitungsleiters II (Middelman), Nov 7, 1952.

⁶⁹ Hans Christian Sonne, *The Integration of Refugees into German Life: A Report of the ECA Technical Assistance Commission on the Integration of Refugees in the German Republic : Submitted to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, March 21, 1951.* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1951).

⁷⁰ "Eine Bresche in die Mauer des Schweigens," *Deutschland Union Dienst (A)*, May 4, 1950, 1-2.

⁷¹ "Tatsachen und Recht," *Deutschland Union Dienst*, September 7, 1949, 1-2; and Wenzel Jaksch, "Amerika und die Vertriebenen," *Sozialdemokratischer Pressedienst*, September 2, 1949, 5-7, here 7.

⁷² "Beginnende Einsicht?," *DUD (A)*, December 22, 1949, 6.

⁷³ See William Langer, *The Famine in Germany: Speech of William Langer of North Dakota in the Senate of the United States, March 29, 1946* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946).

(CRALOG) satisfied Germans that Americans were seeing the “German problem” as their responsibility. German politicians nevertheless overlooked that Walter recognized the need for a greater financial commitment, but rejected the “fallacy of the theory of American coresponsibility [sic] for the uprooting of German expellees and refugees.”⁷⁴ Sonne’s conclusions, submitted to Chancellor Adenauer, also unmistakably reiterated that the issue remained a challenge of the Federal Republic, and urged the implementation of an ambitious public spending program quadrupling federal expenditures.⁷⁵

American resentment over the slow progress of integrating the refugees increased. As previously shown, occupation authorities and Anglo-American journalists registered growing social tensions and a deteriorating relationship between Germans and the newcomers. Throughout occupied Germany, bureaucrats and community leaders exuded a “concealed, and often even open, hostile disposition toward the refugees,” as an American report to the Council of States (*Länderrat*) alleged in early 1946.⁷⁶ The exasperated memo lambasted the multitude of public proclamations and assurances of a “brotherly acceptance” and promises of “standing helpfully at their side” as they “founded a new home and hearth,” when the facts on the ground reflected a different reality.

More alarmingly, other evidence pointed to disgruntled refugees becoming incubators for fascist resentments in the young republic. The American military government warned in 1949 that

⁷⁴ United States et al., *Expellees and Refugees of German Ethnic Origin. Report of a Special Subcommittee of the Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives, Pursuant to H. Res. 238, a Resolution to Authorize the Committee on the Judiciary to Undertake a Study of Immigration and Nationality Problems.* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1950), 6.

⁷⁵ Hans Christian Sonne, *The Integration of Refugees into German Life: A Report of the ECA Technical Assistance Commission on the Integration of Refugees in the German Republic: Submitted to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, March 21, 1951* (Washington: National Planning Association, 1951).

⁷⁶ Thomas Grosser and Sylvia Schraut, eds., *Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebene in Württemberg-Baden nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg: Dokumente und Materialien zu ihrer Aufnahme und Eingliederung.*, vol. 1 (Mannheim: Institut für Landeskunde und Regionalforschung der Universität, 1998), 88.

the expellees constituted “the most overtly nationalistic faction” in Germany.⁷⁷ The 1948 hunger strikes and growth of revisionist rightwing parties such as the *Sozialistische Reichspartei* (SRP) raised fears that the project of democracy building had hit a wall. By 1950, authorities grew weary of West German dillydallying, and unnamed officials accused Bonn of deliberately stalling integration with the hopes that “the surplus population...would bolster the argument for German ‘living space’” and return of the territories.⁷⁸

The Americans ordered the German agencies to implement a number of measures which they hoped would jumpstart economic recovery and in particular raise the living standards of refugees. American prodding managed to push the newly formed Bundestag to pass the “Immediate Aid Law” in August 1949, allocating the pittance of 100 to 200 marks per household. Occupation authorities also greenlighted the formation of a central refugee ministry, which opened its doors in 1949 and concerned itself with predominantly representing the socio-economic interests of refugees and other Germans who had sustained damages during the war. Because of its rather limited mandate, however, the agency’s greatest value lay in its symbolic importance which signaled integration measures.⁷⁹ Financially, Allied intervention was a mixed bag. While portions of Marshall money went directly to refugee assistance, American decreed 1948 currency reform counteracted gains because it disproportionately hurt those whose assets consisted predominantly of cash. This therefore wiped out the savings of the majority of expellees, and amounted to a “last straw” for those who had suffered “an already years-long period of vegetating

⁷⁷ Cited in R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 315.

⁷⁸ Jack Raymond, “West Scores Bonn on Refugee Issue,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 1950, 8.

⁷⁹ Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, 1st ed. (München: C.H.Beck, 2011), 117–18.

while trapped in a daily guerilla war for a humanly decent dwelling, for an even so modest job, and for one's daily bread," as one expellee decried.⁸⁰ The expellees for their part argued for a conversion of 1:1 as opposed to the mandated 10:1, but went empty-handed.⁸¹

The occupation authorities and Economic Council recognized that the economic situation of the war damaged had become dangerously untenable and required a response. The expellees in particular faced grim prospects: By the end of 1949, over 35 percent were unemployed in West Germany; in Schleswig-Holstein, the figure was at nearly 60%.⁸² Despite improving economic performance overall, policies specifically geared toward the expellees remained in the planning stages. Over much of 1948, the Economic Council on pressure from the Allies drafted the "First Equalization of Burdens Law," which earmarked a billion Marks raised through capital levies of two percent for the immediate needs of war-damaged. Instead of directing expellees, the war damaged, and victims of political oppression during the Third Reich to the welfare offices, the bill foresaw a meager 70 Marks per month for those unable to work due to age or disability, with additional supplements for dependents. This made the "Support Aid" more generous than general welfare, but it still only amounted to a drop in the bucket.

More debilitating was that this first equalization of burdens remained tied up with Allied occupation authorities, who spent eight months weighing and amending the German proposal before them. The US secretary of the army Kenneth Royall had concerns over the bill's name and the seemingly radical interventionist economic measures. Under pressure from Lucius Clay and the State Department, Royall relented but insisted the law be renamed "Immediate Aid Law,"

⁸⁰ Quoted in Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat*, 69–70.

⁸¹ Hughes, 74.

⁸² Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 94.

which was finally promulgated in August 1949. West German lawmakers were perplexed by American concerns after having heard so much about the need for German ownership of the refugee crisis. And indeed, American delay slowed German progress on formulating a second, more comprehensive equalization of burdens scheme, as the advisory commission suspended their work to gauge Allied intentions.⁸³ The delay only increased pressure now for the first Bundestag to act. If German politicians could point to their limited sovereignty as the reason for missing legislation for the expellees before 1949, those explanations no longer rang quite as true after the founding of the FRG. From the perspective of the expellee organizations, who now formed into pressure groups, Adenauer government's responses remained largely meaningless symbolic measures, and the equalization of burdens law continued to remain mired in political wrangling.

A third source of pressure came from mounting exasperation documented in the West German press. Descriptions of conditions in the camps, frustrating bureaucratic hurdles, and the hopelessness among "streams" of refugees typically concluded with exasperation that no firm policies had been brought to the table.⁸⁴ Pundits spoke of the "German stare" in camps, meaning the look refugees took on when dared to demand clear answers to clear questions but went wanting.⁸⁵ Fears of the *homo barackensis*, a disillusioned nihilist created by the state of limbo, abounded.⁸⁶ Waves of wandering refugees, their ranks swelled by those fleeing the GDR, raised

⁸³ Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat*, 80–82.

⁸⁴ For typical examples, see "Die Menschenmühle. Ein Strom von Schicksalen, gesehen hinter einem Tisch," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 24, 1948, 2; "Station im Strom der Menschen. Bilder aus dem Flüchtlingslager Ülzen," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 25, 1948, 2; "Sie Warten," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 30, 1949, 1.

⁸⁵ "Flüchtlings-Sorgen in Bayern," *Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 30, 1948, 4.

⁸⁶ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 309.

the “highest alarm level” and fears of rootless vagabonds.⁸⁷ Reports on youths, orphaned and banding together, and their criminality and liberal sexual mores raised anxiety over a new amoral generation produced by the forced migrations.⁸⁸ The inability to lay out measures constituted an egregious “flight before the refugees,” a 1949 editorial by Julius Stocky complained, just as the refugee problem was at a crucial “turning point.”⁸⁹ In letters and newspaper articles, expellees demanded their rights as equal citizens.⁹⁰ It was in a word “shameful,” *Die Gegenwart* declared, that the refugee problem still remained unresolved in 1951, reducing all talk of solidarity to “derision and mere talk.”⁹¹ The German parties seemed to be oblivious to Germany’s “number one task,” the *Allgemeine Zeitung* complained in September 1949.⁹²

A second strand of reporting voiced concern over disturbances and demonstrations of expellees throughout 1948 and 1949, already discussed. The press voiced concern that the “social atomic bomb” lobbed by Stalin at Potsdam could now explode and bring down the young democracy.⁹³ Diagnoses of the “political dynamite” that could derail the political rebuilding of Germany abounded.⁹⁴ Terrorized pundits warned of the reemergence of fascism, but equally rang warning bells over an imminent communist revolution. Expellee demands for the implementation

⁸⁷ “Höchste Alarmstufe,” *Sozialdemokratischer Pressedienst*, November 8, 1949, 1-2.

⁸⁸ “Mädchen ohne Heimat,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 18, 1948, 2.

⁸⁹ Julius Stocky, “Die Flucht vor den Flüchtlingen,” *Welt von Morgen* Nr. 3 (1949), 6-7, newspaper clipping in ACDP 07-001-3434.

⁹⁰ Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat*, 145.

⁹¹ “Die Schande. Einheimische und Flüchtlinge,” *Die Gegenwart*, March 15, 1951, 7. See also “Die Flüchtlings-Schande,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 1, 1949, 1.

⁹² “Aufgabe Nummer Eins,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 13, 1949, 1.

⁹³ Moeller, *War Stories*, 108.

⁹⁴ “‘Völkerwanderung’ in Deutschland,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, April 15, 1950, 1-2.

of seemingly successful agricultural reforms in the GDR in order to put languishing farmers on secure footing terrified conservative political parties, who nonetheless effectively blocked such initiatives from reaching state legislatures.⁹⁵

Just as alarming were “agitation,” “inflammatory speeches,” and “downright terror” in camps needed to be attributed undoubtedly to the “great number of functionaries with a schooling in tactics with origins in Moscow.”⁹⁶ The CDU press service decried the Dachau hunger strike led by Egon Hermann, pointing out that his recent expulsion and Russian wife suggested some sort of affinity for communism. The upheaval clearly was the work of a “communist manipulator” sharing a “spiritual connection with the methods that are the daily course of business in the Soviet Zone.”⁹⁷ A few days later *DUD* dispensed with innuendo, and labeled the strike a “planned communist action” led by “KPD functionaries” implementing “pronounced terror measures” dictated by Moscow.⁹⁸ Suspicions were amplified by the East German press, which gleefully noted the disturbances as a vindication that West German refugee policies were a farce and encouraged expellees to continue agitating for their rights.⁹⁹

Charges of complicity with Bolshevism offended the protestors, who took it as evidence of the regular defamation and hostility they had to endure from non-expellees.¹⁰⁰ It also ignored the assurances of expellee leaders that the expellees through their experiences in and after the

⁹⁵ Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 201.

⁹⁶ “Flüchtlings-Sorgen in Bayern,” *Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 30, 1948, 4.

⁹⁷ “Kommunistische Drahtzieher am Werk,” *DUD (A)*, September 13, 1948, 1-2.

⁹⁸ “KPD-Funktionäre in Flüchtlingslagern,” *DUD (C)*, September 30, 1948, 1.

⁹⁹ “Westdeutsches Flüchtlingsgesetz eine Farce,” *Neues Deutschland* Nr. 241, October 14, 1949, 5.

¹⁰⁰ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, Flier “Zur Aufklärung! An alle Flüchtlinge und Heimatvertriebenen! An alle Bayern!”, Kontrollausschuss des Reg.-Dulag Dachau, undated [c. late 1948].

war wholly rejected this ideology; the Silesian Walter Rinke for instance hyperbolically spoke of the expellees as the “penicillin against communism” that benefited all of German society, and whose force was more powerful than any atomic bomb.¹⁰¹ Even the CDU’s own press service praised their “immunity against communism,” taking issue with comments from “certain parties” suggesting that the “expellees could lose their immunity against communism.”¹⁰²

Expellees leaders understood how to cash in on these concerns, leveraging anxiety in order to push for more action. Linus Kather, for instance, informed the CDU that “disgust for the horrors committed in the East” likely prevented a radicalization to the left, but wondered if continued inaction could change this.¹⁰³ The Federal Minister of Expellees Hans Lukaschek similarly conceded that lived experience made it unlikely that expellees would join communist movements, but no one could tell where Germany was headed: Nihilism and material concerns were fertile ground for the “handiwork” of spies and agitators who could promote radicalism and push Germany into the arms of the Kremlin.¹⁰⁴ The specter of communism could be invoked at the local level, too. For example, an expellee attempting to receive permits to start building “refugee communities” in Westphalia complained to the district president of bureaucratic foot-dragging: “We expellees are indeed immune to communism, but when we are treated and

¹⁰¹ “Die Schlesier in Detmold,” *Die Welt*, May 15, 1951, unpaginated clipping in ACDP 07-001-3438.

¹⁰² “Immunität gegen den Kommunismus,” *DUD*, February 14, 1950, 4-5. “The homeland expellees are and will remain immune to communism, because between them and Bolshevism stands the expulsion from the homeland, robbed property, lost careers, countless and indescribable mistreatments and first and foremost more than 2.5 million murdered and hundreds of thousands of defiled women... There is no common ground between the homeland expellees and Bolshevism precisely because the expellees in countless cases experienced on their own persons [*am eigenen Leibe*] what Bolshevik slavery means for each individual person.” Ibid, 5.

¹⁰³ ACDP 001-377-01/2, “Bericht über die Tätigkeit des Zonenflüchtlingsausschuss seit seiner Errichtung und über die nächsten Aufgaben,” October 20, 1946.

¹⁰⁴ “Die deutschen Heimatvertriebenen in der Bundesrepublik und ihre Beduetung für Europa. Ein vortrag von Bundesminister Dr. Hans Lukaschek, gehalten in Genf am 13. Februar 1950 vor den ‘Nouvelles Equipes Internationales,’” 18, in ACDP 07-001-3435.

disenfranchised in this way, we will probably one day intentionally grasp the last straw. [...] In the expanses of Siberia the district planner can then contemplate...whether it was a good idea to thwart the buildup of an existence of an eager expellee through mean-spirited measures.”¹⁰⁵

Whether real or cunningly feigned to lend their arguments greater import, such threats and prophecies certainly sent shockwaves through German society.

Rising militancy and general mobilizing reveals a fourth source of pressure on the German government to finally pass an “equalization of burdens law”: The expellees themselves were banding together and flexing their muscles. 1947/48 seemed a breaking point between expellees and non-expellees. Added to this was the disastrous monetary reform and inadequate welfare schemes that indicated that the refugees would over the long term remain a marginalized and impoverished group. In response to their persisting degradation, some expellees banded together into “trek associations” between 1950 and 1952. As many as 32,000 families pledged to reproduce their wartime flight and travel in wagons across Germany from areas with a high percentage of refugees and therefore poor prospects to less overfilled areas in Bizonia. The move intended to pressure the West German government to follow through and accelerate the planned resettlement of refugees from overpopulated states.¹⁰⁶ In a radio interview, Kurt Dahn, one of the movement’s leaders, lamented the treatment of refugees and attempted to exert political pressure as well as raise sympathy: “You see, we and our children must urgently get out of this misery, before we completely deteriorate here!”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, 114.

¹⁰⁶ Ian Connor, *Refugees and Expellees in Post-War Germany* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 179–80.

¹⁰⁷ Alina Laura Tiews, “1945: Flüchtlinge in Norddeutschland,” NDR, December 5, 2016, [/der_ndr/unternehmen/geschichte/1945-Fluechtlinge-in-Norddeutschland-,fluchtnorddeutschland100.html](https://www.ndr.de/der_ndr/unternehmen/geschichte/1945-Fluechtlinge-in-Norddeutschland-,fluchtnorddeutschland100.html).

Ironically, expellee ambition to fight back received an immense leg up from the Allies, who over the course of 1948 lifted the coalition ban. While this seemed counterintuitive given fears over radicalization, the measure partially intended to accelerate integration by permitting expellees to make their own case. Moreover, the Allies were responding to the communist coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948. In the opening phase of the Cold War, the prospect of anticommunist refugee associations that would contribute to the stabilization of a West Germany as a frontline state in the ideological struggle seemed a sound strategic move.¹⁰⁸ This opened the door then to refugees to form their independent organizations and even parties, severely pressuring the major parties to take seriously a revolt among their potential base.

Yet a second formation that emerged after the lifting of the coalition ban, and in direct response to refugee rage over limited progress, was the political party *Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten* (Union of Homeland Expellees and Those Deprived of Rights, BHE) in 1950. Founded by the former NSDAP members Waldemar Kraft and Theodor Oberländer in Schleswig-Holstein in 1950, the BHE generally espoused nationalist and conservative if not outright rightwing views. Historians nevertheless have struggled to define the party's ideological tenets. While its ranks certainly disproportionately featured former Nazis, revanchists, and anticommunists, a balanced assessment is complicated by the fact that over its eleven year existence the BHE proved flexible enough to form coalitions with every major party. In Lower Saxony, for instance, the SPD formed a coalition with the BHE that excluded the CDU from the government and allowed Kurt Schumacher to dream of implementing socialist

¹⁰⁸ K. Erik Franzen, "Sudetendeutsche Tage als Gedenkstätten!?! Die Erinnerung an NS-Diktatur und Krieg in politischen Reden von Vertretern der Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft 1950-1995," in *Diktatur-Krieg-Vertreibung: Erinnerungskulturen in Tschechien, der Slowakei und Deutschland seit 1945*, by Jíří Pěšek, Roman Holec, and Christoph Cornelissen (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 200.

reforms.¹⁰⁹ The BHE's opposition to neoliberal policies of the Adenauer government and favoring of state intervention saw some overlap with the SPD, which in any case saw the equalization of burdens as part of a larger campaign to gather disadvantaged Germans into one camp that would provide the critical mass for more radical socialist measures. For its part, the BHE's willingness to work with any and all and enter into marriages of convenience reflected its commitment to advance its cause of representing predominantly expellees and other war victims, such as victims of Allied air raids and civil servants affected by denazification.

It was precisely this focus on this core constituency that saw already in its first year of existence win more than 23 percent of the vote in Schleswig-Holstein, emerging as the second-strongest party behind the SPD. In a state with the highest proportion of expellees, the other German parties needed to take this electoral breakthrough as a warning signal that expellee anger had culminated in the worst possible scenario: There now was a "refugee party." For this reason, the CDU, FDP, and SPD in various states willingly joined with the BHE in order to coopt this demographic. While its results in Bundestag elections ultimately never surpassed the six percent mark and made clear by 1957 that the BHE's appeal had waned due to a successful integration, in 1950 the party upended and threw into chaos the political calculations of the major parties.

One manifestation of increased concern can be seen when one evaluates the makeup of the first Bundestag in 1949: Of a total of 421 delegates, around 60 had an expellee background. This translated to 15 percent, roughly on par with the percentage of expellees within the Federal Republic, and suggests a greater interest of the major parties in incorporating the expellees.¹¹⁰ Party committees such as the SPD provided lengthy memos on talking points to all their

¹⁰⁹ Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat*, 139.

¹¹⁰ Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, 63.

candidates regarding the expellee issue, as well as advising greater attention on social policies during campaign speeches or public talks.¹¹¹ Across the board, German politicians seemingly discovered the crisis and need for urgent action: Konrad Adenauer declared it a “political question of the first order,” while Kurt Schumacher spoke of a “central question” facing the nation and the FDP invoked the “moral duty for the entire nation.”¹¹²

Between GDR competition, Allied frustrations, critical press reporting, growing radicalization, and now expellee political factions on the rise, the CDU and SPD were finally forced to embrace an “equalization of burdens” law and reconsider its treatment of the refugee issue. At the same time, however, the parties increasingly exhibited traces of the expellee victimhood narrative, indicating how deeply the narrative penetrated even political discourse.

The “Community of Fate” and the First Bundestag: Expellee Suffering as a National Concern

In a pamphlet partially intended to convince expellees to vote for the SPD, in 1948 Richard Reitzner admitted that the “brutal persecution of opponents of Hitler, Jewish pogroms, and the human slaughterhouses in Poland” required all Germans to reject Nazism if their cries of help should be expected to be heard by the world.¹¹³ Nevertheless, the majority of expellees were “truly innocent, but also misled fellow travelers or exploited idealists” whom, according to the brief description of how it came to the expulsions, the West hypocritically abandoned.¹¹⁴ The main source of the “screams of tortured people in the horror reports that let one’s blood curdle,”

¹¹¹ AdsD Seliger Archiv VII, 2087, “SPD-Landesausschuss NRW, Referenten-Material,” March 28, 1950.

¹¹² Cited in Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, 67.

¹¹³ Richard Reitzner, *Vom Ostwind verweht...: Das Schicksal von Millionen* (München, 1948), 30.

¹¹⁴ Reitzner, 29.

however, was the “panslavic expulsion politics.”¹¹⁵ The events of 1945 placed a “tombstone on the many sacrificial efforts of generations” to create harmony in the region, which finally exploded in a “one-sided civil war...against women, children, and the elderly.”¹¹⁶ Reitzner’s party demonstrated a similar propensity for brazen self-pity: In 1950, the SPD’s news service publically asked the High Commissioners whether human rights applied to refugees, and accused the US of “closing their eyes” to the German “slavery problem” although that nation had foot a bloody civil war to end human bondage.¹¹⁷

Konrad Adenauer, the consummate politician, equally did not shy from dramatic formulations when the subject of German victimhood came up. In a speech on March 3, 1949 before the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Bern, Adenauer ranked the “German biological problem,” namely the 7.3 million expellees who exacerbated housing and food shortages, as one of the most pressing dangers facing Germany and Europe. Six million Germans had “disappeared from the face of the earth” during the expulsions through “misdeeds...worthy of standing next to those misdeeds committed by German National Socialists.”¹¹⁸ His speech caused a minor kerfuffle in the Western press, but the following month behind closed doors, Adenauer expounded upon his thoughts in Bern before the CDU’s refugee subcommittee:

“And today the rest of the speech...Of course I should have said that because of the Potsdam Agreement and according to American estimates 13.7 million Germans were driven out in the most frightful way from

¹¹⁵ Reitzner, 4–5.

¹¹⁶ Reitzner, 8.

¹¹⁷ Wenzel Jaksch, “Gelten die Menschenrechte auch für Flüchtlinge? Eine Frage an die Hohen Kommissare,” *Sozialdemokratischer Pressedienst*, March 11, 1950, 2a. Not to be outdone, the CDU—as was shown in the last chapter—published a translation of *Land of the Dead*, albeit with mentions of German war crimes redacted. Komitee gegen Massenvertreibung, *Das Land der Toten: Studie der Deportationen aus dem Osten Deutschlands*. (Hannover: Zonenausschuß der CDU der britischen Zone, 1948).

¹¹⁸ “Rede Vor Der Interparlamentarischen Union in Bern, 23. März 1949,” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, accessed February 13, 2018, <https://www.konrad-adenauer.de/dokumente/reden/1949-03-23-rede-bern>.

their homeland, in which for hundreds of years their ancestors lived. I should have stated that, according to American findings, of these 13.7 million expellees six million vanished without a trace from the earth. Dead, deteriorated, displaced, taken into forced labor. I should furthermore have explained that these atrocities that occurred...can stand equally next to the National Socialist misdeeds. [...] I was pleased for once to publicly speak about this in neutral Switzerland, where one knows nothing about these things. The killing of so many people, the expulsion...and the taking away of almost half of Germany, these are the main reasons for the suffering and plight in Europe. If this is nationalistic, well then I have to run the risk of being nationalist.”¹¹⁹

Much of Adenauer’s maudlin handwringing can be attributed to grandstanding and deliberate pandering to his audience. In his memoirs, the expellee leader Linus Kather dismissed Adenauer as “no friend of the German East and the East Germans.”¹²⁰ Certainly, some of this emanates from Adenauer’s reputation as a fiercely proud Rhinelander with little love for Prussia, which in some Rhenish minds began immediately east of the city’s outskirts beyond the Rhine River. But whether genuinely felt or not, it reflected the rhetoric of politicians from the left as well as the right of the political spectrum. And, it was par for the course for the Bundestag, where German victimhood featured prominently in the first years of the Federal Republic.

Due to the manifold challenges of reconstructing life for millions affected by the war facing the young Federal Republic, German victims unsurprisingly appeared frequently in the pronouncements of the first Bundestag. Not just expellees, but victims of Allied bombing, war cripples, and POWs still languishing in Soviet prison camps understandably were on the agenda and minds of elected officials.¹²¹ But the emotional manner in which they were invoked

¹¹⁹ ACDP 07-001-3436, “Protokoll der Tagung der CDU Flüchtlingsausschüsse der britischen Zone in Königswinter, 1./2. April, 1949”, 12-13.

¹²⁰ Linus Kather, *Die entscheidenden Jahre* (Wien: Olzog, 1964), 294. Kather’s disappointment over the, in his view, inadequate financial restitutions to the expellees and his subsequent sidelining within the party due to his combative personality and idiosyncrasies, color this rather damning assessment.

¹²¹ For more on the other victim groups, see Moeller, *War Stories*.

contributed to the fortifying of belief in an extraordinary German victimhood. Margarete Hütter (FDP), for instance, proclaimed Wehrmacht POWs “along with the victims of the concentration camps [as] the most tragic figures of the Third Reich’s politics.”¹²² Maria Probst (CDU) concurred and spoke for “all parties” when she expressed the “debt of gratitude of the German people” to the prisoners of war and deportees, who “sacrificed for the entire people.”¹²³

The victims themselves appeared in the Bundestag chamber as a visible reminder of the millions waiting on the legislature to alleviate their plight. In its seventh session, for instance, a POW approached KPD chairman Max Reimann during his address to the chamber, producing a tumult: The CDU vacated the room while conservative legislators harangued communist delegates to observe the man’s tattered shoes and clothing, while Reimann decried a blatantly prearranged scene attempting to impugn the KPD’s reputation.¹²⁴ Bundestag President Erich Köhler (CDU) struggled to calm the chamber, clearing the loges and admonishing parties that they were forbidden from bringing unofficial guests.¹²⁵

But apart from their cursory appearance in the Bundestag, the expellees themselves sat in the seats and frequently took to the podium to speak about their own experiences, often employing emotional and contentious formulations. Fritz Richter of the German Conservative Party-German Right Party (DKP-DRP) bewailed the fact that “our East German homeland is in

¹²² German Bundestag 1/271, June 12, 1953, 13430.

¹²³ Ibid, 13431.

¹²⁴ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 66. The stenographer documented that the man was dressed as a POW returning from the Soviet Union. Reimann’s speech, the official KPD response to Konrad Adenauer’s government declaration, attacked the fascist past of many legislators and at various points sought to address the unresolved legacy of the Third Reich. Interrupted by jeers and shouts numerous times, the POW’s sudden appearance seemed to confront the KPD with the Soviet Union’s continued incarceration of German veterans. The KPD, for its part, leveled allegations of a concerted ploy, noting that the man had been sitting in the chamber for several sessions.

¹²⁵ Ibid, 67.

the hands of murderous bands of a Bierut or a Gottwald or a Zapotocki.”¹²⁶ In the same session, the Pomeranian Hans-Joachim von Merkatz (DP) recalled that in the East “things happened that were so terrible beyond any measure,” prompting Friedrich Rische of the KPD to ask whether he meant Auschwitz. Von Merkatz continued undeterred on the subject of “torture that is burned deep upon the soul of our people, unforgettable as a burden of sheer insurmountable despair”: “Rootless and without peace are all those subjected to the horrific injustice of the evisceration of our fatherland...Our land is eviscerated, desolated are our souls, deserted and burned out all that which honest toil was created there for Germany over centuries.” Rische interjected once more, encouraging von Merkatz to “talk about why everything ended up like that.” The speaker declined to discuss the question with adherents of the KPD.¹²⁷

Tensions between expellee speakers and the communist faction unsurprisingly boiled over at times. When speakers of the KPD voiced criticism over harsh language and insufficient historical awareness of how Germany’s defeat came about, the Silesian Günter Goetzendorff (WAV) explained that if one is “offended by the talk of Czechoslovakian Soldetska...then I want to ask him if he has ever heard of the Prague death march” to cheers from the middle and right of the chamber.¹²⁸ Goetzendorff continued his denouncement:

“I want to recall the words of the honorable Federal President [Theodor Heuss], when he said: ‘Homeland is not just the potato field, homeland is the land of all Germans.’ Perhaps we previously also did not recognize these values; today we however know, it is not just earthly possessions, it is not just the boxes and crates that we left at home, it is all that which once made life rich and precious. It is the streets and places. When we think back on these things, on the streets of misery in the Sudetenland, in East Prussia, in Silesia: Behind us the horror, above us death, then this way, trek upon trek, person upon person—and many a soul collapsed and

¹²⁶ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 83.

¹²⁷ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 113.

¹²⁸ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 126.

found a forgotten grave—then this path is a row of black crosses that were never erected. May the previous speaker perhaps think of these things, when he finds the term ‘Czech Soldatska’ too harshly chosen.”¹²⁹

But apart from these contentious moments, expellee representatives took to the floor to speak for their constituents and leverage their suffering into calls for recognizing the community of fate as fellow Germans. It was time to create equality and alleviate concerns that they were second-class citizens. After all, the Silesian Paul Krause (Z) argued, “those robbed of their homeland” were fellow citizens owed a debt by Germany: “We homeless of the German East are also good Germans, as our brothers and sisters in the rest of Germany. We only changed our postal codes, and not even through our own volition. The treatment we received here in the West in our bitter experiences God only knows did not always correspond to the principles of Christian charity, nor to the foundations of socialist activism.”¹³⁰

Numerous speakers argued, as did Günter Goetzendorff, that the expulsions were not merely “a deep misfortune, a crime against the expellees, it was furthermore a crime against the entire German people and the whole civilized world.” “The burdens of the war that Germany has incurred must be carried together,” Goetzendorff explained, and the expulsions were “nothing more than a consequence of the war.” The victims “paid” for the nation’s defeat with their “possessions and chattels, with homeland and their existence,” and were therefore owed aid.¹³¹

The parliamentarian elaborated on the national community’s obligations:

“From this it arises that the homeland expellees are the trustees of the West German indigenous population, and these therefore in part their debtors. No one has the right to remove oneself from this community of fate. An entire nation lost the war, and I believe an entire nation must also pay for it. [...] It pains us when you describe us as a plague. Let us

¹²⁹ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 126-127.

¹³⁰ German Bundestag, 1/12, October 20, 1949, 296.

¹³¹ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 126.

instead say: The expellee question itself, the lost war and the suffering from the war, are a plague for the German people in the first place. [...] No man who lives knows whether he will conclude his life in peace. It could be that once again the clouds form over the German fatherland, and it could be that those whose hearts have hardened as if they are stone will one day tread the same streets of misery that we also went with the last bundle of our belongings.”¹³²

German suffering could serve a higher moral and national purpose. For the Sudeten German Walter Zawadil (FDP), the expellees were “living witnesses of the crime of the brutal expulsion of millions of innocent Germans which is unprecedented in human history and violates international law,” but this made them “the champions of a new peaceful philosophy of humanity, in whose name never again people will be disenfranchised and expelled because of their ideology, their language, their nationality or their faith.”¹³³ Joachim von Merkatz on the other hand held that the expellees formed the heart of “a national community, seasoned through fate, [and] forged in the fires of a monstrous reality” which encapsulated the “right to life, our right to freedom and equality.” Struggling with the “malice and brutality,” West Germany could show how “in the hour of its deepest humiliation” it nevertheless prevailed to “defeat the powers of darkness.” The forced migrations, the parliamentarian argued, were the catalyst that would energize the Federal Republic in its struggle against communism:

“Herein lies the dignity of the conquered, this quiet nobility and industriousness that is more powerful than all weapons. We live in a terrible century in which the incursion of barbarity, armed with the greatest technical means and guided by ice-cold heartlessness and narcotized conscience, unfolded. Let us erect embankments before the satanic that has set out to destroy everything that life makes worth living. This is the German task, task of a land in which the abyss has been laid bare, whose reality eclipses the visions of Dante-esque fantasies.”¹³⁴

¹³² German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 127-128.

¹³³ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 112.

¹³⁴ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 113.

The suffering of the expellees was invoked in arguments for the German people to recognize their new neighbors as part of a “universe of obligation,” forged in a jointly waged and lost war.¹³⁵ Concretely, this meant finally addressing their plight through legislative measures. Expellee representatives continuously voiced the dangers of ignoring of the desperate living conditions of the expellees any longer. The first Minister of Expellees, Refugees, and War Damaged Hans Lukaschek, for instance, on several occasions informed the parliament of the activities of his office and the challenges it faced. The native of Breslau used the occasion to relate his own experiences and arrival in the Western Zone with only 23 postal packages and without a single piece of furniture, since “my economic foundations had been taken from me” by the Soviets.¹³⁶ Lukaschek embraced opportunities to “as a beggar personally...share in the fate of all of my homeland expellees.”¹³⁷ The need for legislative action was dire, the Minister warned, reminding the parliament that while all Germans suffered during the war, the expellees lost their homeland and were victims of an “economic general and total execution.”¹³⁸

Other expellee representatives invoked the suffering of their constituents to urge their colleagues to adopt the equalization of burdens law still under advisement of the parties. Richard

¹³⁵ Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide National Response and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 4.

¹³⁶ German Bundestag, 1/52, March 27, 1950, 1887. Lukaschek had not experienced the expulsions, but in fact had been liberated by Soviet forces from Moabit prison, where he had been incarcerated in the wake of the failed assassination attempt on Hitler on July 20, 1944.

¹³⁷ German Bundestag, 1/136, April 19, 1951, 5365. Lukaschek also sparred with hecklers in the Bundestag. In April 1951, Lukaschek took to the podium and began his report by expressing his pride in being regarded as a “beggar.” Walter Fisch of the KPD derided the speaker, commenting that “as a beggar you won quite a bit on your so-called flight.” Lukaschek retorted: “Indeed! I can tell you exactly how much. When the Russian freed me from prison, I had a toothbrush. When I left Weimar, my entire move consisted of 23 cardboard boxes. Please try to replicate what I did!” The ruling parties applauded the comments, and Lukaschek reminded Fisch that “six years ago today I stood before the People’s Court. Go the path that I went, even the path that I today—as a proud beggar—go.” *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ German Bundestag, 1/250, February 25, 1953, 11971.

Reitzner pointed to the crucial “political moment,” and chided the Bundestag that its duty was to “lift the millions...from their current despair” lest the “rootless people...become a deadly danger, yes I would say the millstone around the necks of the young German democracy.”¹³⁹ The Sudeten German Walter Zawadil (FDP) also spoke of the expellees as the “cardinal problem” of the Federal Republic, and that if the expellees continued to remain the carriers West Germany’s misery, then “great dangers arise through which all efforts of initiating a healing of Germany...could be destroyed.”¹⁴⁰ Zawadil warned of the spiritual isolation of the expellees created through the difficulties of integration and lack of understanding and support: “The result of this is a pronounced tendency of looking backwards, the constant raising of the question of when finally a return to the homeland can be undertaken. The miring in perpetual remembrance of the past...leads to embitterment and indifference, the memories of the inhumane horrors during the expulsions to a spiritual freezing in thoughts of revenge and vengeance...We find the efforts of some refugee representatives who, caught up in a psychosis bred in deprivation and the camps attempt to radicalizes the masses of the suffering, harmful and completely devious.”¹⁴¹ Social and economic measures were the only way to create productive fellow citizens.

The critical social and political tensions, as well as perhaps the earnest words of their expellee colleagues, convinced non-expellee politicians to offer ringing calls for actions. Herbert Kriedemann (SPD) pondered whether inaction would not be forcing them to become supporters of collectivism” that would seriously undermine the defenses “of those who are prepared to

¹³⁹ German Bundestag, 1/12, October 20, 1949, 288.

¹⁴⁰ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 111.

¹⁴¹ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 111.

defend that which we understand as western culture and existential and life-worthy assets.”¹⁴²

Alfred Loritz (WAV) likewise did not foresee fortuitous outcomes if expellees continued to live in “shabby wooden barracks” or even “under the open sky.”¹⁴³ Eugen Gerstenmaier (CDU) expressed concern over the lethargy not just among refugees, but legislators tasked with formulating a “comprehensive treatment” of the expellee issue. While he lamented that the division of Germany prohibited “significant reparations,” the interjection from the KPD that “over there they long have had a social equalization of burdens” reminded the Bundestag that their ideological rival was leading the way on tackling the refugee crisis.¹⁴⁴

Indeed, even the KPD had partially internalized the victimhood rhetoric and voiced its sympathies for the expellees, who simultaneously permitted a criticism of the bourgeois parties stymieing socialist reform. Willi Agatz confronted the Bundestag and asked “what the millions of elderly, the sick in need of treatment, our war damaged should say” when their elected officials did nothing. It had been “continuously...pointed out in what great misery they live,” but it was all talk, Agatz criticized, adding that it was the “duty of every German to ensure that the refugees are aided and that the government takes on this problem.” A parliamentarian took issue with the speaker’s inadequate condemnation of the expulsions: “Indeed, the refugees must be helped, but also the crime committed against them must be denounced!”¹⁴⁵ The KPD’s

¹⁴² German Bundestag, 1/48, March 17, 1950, 1665.

¹⁴³ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 68.

¹⁴⁴ German Bundestag, 1/48, March 17, 1950, 1655.

¹⁴⁵ German Bundestag, 1/9, September 28, 1949, 169. Similarly, Oskar Müller of the KPD indicted the slow political response. Potsdam and Yalta had created a series of problems, Müller pointed out, which were only responded to with “ad hoc measures.” The parliamentarian stated that while some had spoken “of perhaps in 10 or 20 years...we can be thankful to the refugees because they provided valuable assistance in reconstruction. Well, since 1945 until today very much has been said about the actually existing misery of the refugees. If these words had been followed with action, then I believe a whole range of questions that are addressed in the various petitions here could already have been solved.” German Bundestag, 1/12, October 20, 1949, 293.

unwillingness to engage with the expulsion's nature in the same emotional tenor as their parliamentary rivals did not prevent them from echoing elements of the victimhood discourse: Paul Harig's criticism of the government's inadequate response in formulating an equalization of burdens law while the "poorest of the poor among our people...who saved and suffered want for generations in order to acquire something that they then lost through the war and its consequences" partially recognized the uniqueness of the "community of fate."¹⁴⁶

The suffering of the expellees was, in other words, accepted by all in principle, even if the causes of their hardship remained a point of contention. Most parliamentarians moreover agreed that the time had come to act decisively on the equalization of burdens law. All it took, Bernhard Reismann (Z) pleaded with the Bundestag, was a little contemplation of what the afflicted had gone through:

"One must first, if one has not oneself been afflicted, put oneself into the position of the people who at the end of the war stood before the rubble of their estates...that had been built through generations of hard work and thrift; in the situation of the person who needed to leave their homeland and with a little package of rags and torn clothes arrived in foreign lands, in which not the minimal preparations had been made for them; one must put oneself into the situation of people who lost everything, even personal mementos, and who have again gained a foothold only under tremendous difficulties."¹⁴⁷

By 1949 a particular West German discourse emerged which increasingly privileged German suffering during the war that simultaneously obfuscated the role of the Third Reich. The flights into self-pitying and stubborn defiance to account for the past emerged in the late 1940s and permeated the culture of the early Federal Republic. Yet even the young democracy's political elite were not free of the "selective remembering" gripping West German society,

¹⁴⁶ German Bundestag, 1/96, October 27, 1950, 3525.

¹⁴⁷ German Bundestag 1/53, March 28, 1950, 1958.

creating a political culture rooted in a sense of aggrievement over suffered injustices and eagerness to sweep the recent past under the carpet.

Already in his first government declaration on September 20, 1949, Adenauer took to the podium on the floor of the Bundestag to offer his interpretation of how it had come to the precarious peace. After chronicling the myriad challenges facing the nation, he turned to the expellees, whose “lot...is especially difficult.” Their “future fate cannot alone be solved by Germany,” Adenauer explained to shouts of approval from parliamentarians. The problem “lies close to the heart for us in Germany and is an existential question [*Lebensfrage*] for our entire people.” “We cannot under any circumstances accept the one-sided amputation carried out by Soviet Russia and Poland,” Adenauer announced to “enthusiastic applause” from the parties seated to the right, middle, and left side of the chamber. The chancellor’s vow that his government “will never cease to pursue our claims in an orderly judicial manner” was met with jubilation, with parliamentarian Fritz Richter shouting that the chancellor should not forget the Sudetenland.¹⁴⁸ Adenauer was not finished, assuring the nation that he struggled to “speak with the necessary passionless restraint...when I think of the fate of the expellees, who have perished in the millions.” Shouts of “five million” from the chamber’s center briefly interrupted the address. Without dwelling on Nazi barbarism, Adenauer quoted Western criticisms of the violent methods applied during the expulsions and promised that the federal government would publish “judicial and eyewitness materials” in order to underpin demands for a “respect of the law that we are owed.” Once more, the chamber erupted in shouts of approval.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ German Bundestag Nr. 01/5, September 20, 1949, 28.

¹⁴⁹ German Bundestag Nr. 01/5, September 20, 1949, 29.

The chancellor, along with most parliamentarians of the first Bundestag, did not deny German war crimes. Yet packaging them in a passive voice that obscured the identities of perpetrators and victims alike—“nameless victims, faceless criminals,” as the historian Robert Moeller phrased it—muddied historical understandings of the causality of a disastrous war that cost millions of lives: A dictatorial regime with broad pillars of popular support.¹⁵⁰ Adenauer spoke of West Germany’s “serious and holy obligation” to *Wiedergutmachung* (“making good again”), as “through misuse of the name of the German people the misdeeds were committed,” even if it “demands sacrifices, perhaps heavy sacrifices, of us who do not personally feel guilt.” Acknowledging that Europe’s Jews “needed to endure the most gruesome persecution,” Adenauer took care to point out that “by far” most Germans were not National Socialists, and that many Nazis disagreed with the “horrors that were committed.”¹⁵¹ In fact, “we all only were made aware of this full horrific scope afterwards,” the leader of West Germany explained.

With so many caveats, one may have been forgiven for pondering whether the Federal Republic even owed the victims of Nazi Germany anything at all. Indeed, Adenauer warned of limits to reparations due to the “necessary caring for the countless war victims and the aid for the refugees and expellees.”¹⁵² Not all agreed with the chancellor’s assessment, citing German suffering as one predominant reason why no reparations could be offered at all. Von Merkatz, a vociferous proponent of a general amnesty for Nazi crimes, acknowledged German atrocities, but

¹⁵⁰ Moeller, *War Stories*, 22.

¹⁵¹ German Bundestag Nr. 01/252, March 4, 1953, 12092.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 12093.

restitution would “unfortunately cause renewed injustice” since it would come at the expense of the expellees who continued to await financial support.¹⁵³

As the Bundestag contemplated compensation for the victims of the Third Reich, West German lawmakers simultaneously discussed the victimhood of Germans. Indeed, the crimes “worthy of standing next to those misdeeds committed by German National Socialists” were set side by side one another.¹⁵⁴ Lawmakers borrowed from images of Nazi war crimes anchored in the postwar consciousness and appropriated them to describe German suffering, thereby crafting an understanding where all wartime fates as equally deplorable. For instance, Hans-Christoph Seebohm, the Minister of Transportation, directly brought Germans and Jews into a shared fate with his observation that “the methods that were used by the National Socialist leaders against the Jews and that we most vehemently condemn are on a par with the methods that were used against the German expellees.”¹⁵⁵ Justice Minister Thomas Dehler in an address to Jewish jurists in December 1951 reminded that everything that had been perpetrated against Jews had also been suffered by Germans, so that both groups could demand and expect compensation.¹⁵⁶

Caught between acknowledging a genocidal dictatorship while attempting to elide the broad pillars of support upon which it rested, West German politicians across parties ended up contributing to a confusing historical panorama in which suddenly all groups were equal victims. This glaringly came to the fore on March 18, 1953 in a Bundestag debate on the reparations treaty with Israel. Eugen Gerstenmaier (CDU) supported the measure, and lectured colleagues on

¹⁵³ German Bundestag Nr. 01/254, March 18, 1953, 12279.

¹⁵⁴ “Rede Vor Der Interparlamentarischen Union in Bern, 23. März 1949.”

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 32.

¹⁵⁶ Constantin Goschler, *Wiedergutmachung: Westdeutschland und die Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus 1945-1954* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1992), 203.

the “most frightful things” that had occurred during the Third Reich.¹⁵⁷ The “outbreak of insanity” culminated in the “sending of citizens of Jewish race into ghettos and from there into exile or into the gas ovens.”¹⁵⁸ The speaker however denied allegations of collective guilt; “hundreds of thousands of horrified in Germany...attempted to struggle with help” and “risked their necks,” becoming the “blood witnesses of humanity.” Moreover, the Germans at the end of the war were now the “witnesses” who saw what the Nazis had done: “Germany, all of Germany, was transformed into one giant ghetto. More insurmountable than the walls of an oriental ghetto were the walls of hatred, contempt, and renunciation for us Germans, which already before the war were drawn around us and which after the war continued to hold us captive.”¹⁵⁹

Richard Reitzner had also taken to the floor that day, not in order to “cultivate sympathy,” but instead remind the chamber of the fate of “20 million” Germans that still waited on financial assistance. “The expellee fate is the fate of a group that was held accountable because of their ethnicity [*Volkszugehörigkeit*] and the lost Hitler war,” Reitzner argued.¹⁶⁰ On a day in which compensation for persecution based on race or ethnicity was on the parliamentary agenda, the comments of the Sudeten German may very well have reminded listeners that Germans had faced comparable fates, and that those persecuted during the Third Reich were a

¹⁵⁷ German Bundestag Nr. 01/254, March 18, 1953, 12275.

¹⁵⁸ “The outbreak of insanity will always remain one of the most incomprehensible developments of contemporary history, to which an estimated six million German, French, Belgian, Polish, Russian, Hungarian, Danish, and other European citizens fell victim to. With systematic methods and an almost perfect technique they, from infant to the elderly, were shot, gassed, exterminated for no other reason than that they supposedly or actually were people ‘of different blood,’ people of the Jewish race. The order was given, German, ‘Greater Germany,’ indeed to make Europe ‘free of Jews.’ Whoever did not escape succumbed to the executioner. He who gave the order and those who carried it out were heinous murderers. But they had power in Germany and they spoke in its name, in any case at the expense of Germany.” Ibid, 12276.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 12276.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 12236.

victim group among many that together had experienced the same hardships equally in an “insane” or merciless war perpetrated by a small clique of criminals.

One may forgive German lawmakers their rhetorical flourishes and attribute the problematic perspective and insufficient nuances to inadequate historical awareness. Moreover, the vocabulary used to describe wartime atrocities and which featured pervasively in the press offered gripping language to draw from. It is relatively easy to castigate “white spots” with the benefit of entire libraries dedicated to the history of the Second World War, so that undeniably tone-deaf comparisons nevertheless may seem understandable. Additionally, the very human reaction to feel one’s own suffering more intensely than that of others may explain the hyperbolic flourishes of German politicians.

Less excusable were rather deliberate attempts to balance German war crimes with German suffering. Many West German politicians maintained the moral right to not only mourn the deceased, but insist that the nation had an equal number of dead to bemoan as other victim groups. Adenauer’s claim of six million Germans having “disappeared from the face of the earth” suspiciously equaled the number of Shoah victims.¹⁶¹ A few months later, the chancellor’s invocation of “millions” lacked a tangible total; members of the Bundestag offered an unsolicited correction of “five million.”¹⁶² In a 1951 Bundestag session, the parliamentarian and Sudeten German expellee Konrad Wittmann (WAV) reminded his colleagues that “the carriers of the burdens were we 18 million [expelled] people...of whom 6 million disappeared.”¹⁶³ The

¹⁶¹ “Rede Vor Der Interparlamentarischen Union in Bern, 23. März 1949.”

¹⁶² German Bundestag Nr. 01/5, September 20, 1949, 29.

¹⁶³ German Bundestag Nr. 1/115, January 31, 1951, 4374. No one knew, Wittmann lectured, where and how the victims had been murdered, but he reminded the Bundestag that “we [expellees] know, and we beg the world again and again to listen to us” so the rest of the expellees could be saved.

unaffiliated rightwing parliamentarian Adolf von Thadden in March 1953 contributed to the numbers game by lowering the figure of Nazi Germany's victims: While acknowledging that the Holocaust could not "be whitewashed or atoned for by any person," von Thadden maintained that "German offices" had killed one million Jews of the 5.6 million living in Europe. Carlo Schmid of the SPD interjected that the speaker had forgotten "a couple million."¹⁶⁴ Clearly, final tallies remained in doubt, yet in any case the talk of unattributed and wildly fluctuating "millions" of expellee dead seemingly tipped the moral scales and ostensibly balanced out Nazi war crimes.

Whatever the number of dead, apart from representatives of the KPD, Bundestag members were quite willing to endorse the expulsions as a cataclysmic event, and indeed the greatest tragedy of the war. For Richard Reitzner, the expellees embodied the "currents of our time," yet while he "did not want to overdramatize and blow things out of proportion," he nevertheless held that "no catastrophe has been so profound as the catastrophe of the year 1945," a fact that had "not yet penetrated the consciousness" of all Germans or Europeans.¹⁶⁵ The Sudeten German Ernst Kuntscher (CDU) noted that the world had in fact recognized the "fate and bitter injustice" perpetrated against Germany, but hoped that the "cries of help are not in vain" and would admonish the world to recognize its egregious error.¹⁶⁶

More brazen were attempts to leverage German victimhood as an indictment against the hypocrisy of the victors. Hans-Joachim von Merkatz ruminated that the disaster was deliberate: Germany had been turned into "a conquered land under foreign rule...placed outside of the law,

¹⁶⁴ German Bundestag Nr. 01/254, March 18, 1953, 12280.

¹⁶⁵ German Bundestag, 1/136, April 19, 1951, 5348.

¹⁶⁶ German Bundestag, 1/12, October 20, 1949, 286.

declared as outlawed and surrendered to capriciousness” by “unforgiving individuals amongst our opponents.”¹⁶⁷ From there it was a short jump to instrumentalizing German suffering as a riposte to wartime crimes for which Germans were still being unnecessarily held accountable. During his pontifications, Konrad Wittmann argued that an equalization of burdens law would have been unnecessary if the victors had “implemented their democratic promises” or avoided deeming the expulsions a purely German problem. These issues, Wittmann declared to audible approval from the right side of the chamber, were only a German problem “insofar that they were made on the backs of Germans.” The speaker voiced his fatigue with reminders that the “German misfortune” had started before Potsdam or Yalta, or “even earlier...under the Nazis.” “Why constantly does one say: Hitler is at fault for everything! [...] With this philosophy of history, in which we place it on others, we will in the end wind up at Cain’s murder of his brother.”¹⁶⁸ Franz Richter was even more explicit in pressing the issue of using German suffering to offset condemnations of German crimes:

“In the last few years one did not shy away from presenting the German people with large outstanding debts for the offenses that isolated individuals...committed, as they can occur with any nation. But only individuals! For I maintain that one never could or should find the entire people guilty for the offenses of individuals. While one is already speaking of crimes against humanity, then I think...we could present an offsetting bill, which for all I care begins in Hamburg, Cologne, Mannheim, Munich, Stuttgart, Hannover and ends in Dresden, and which would not be altogether inconsequential. When one speaks at all of crimes against humanity, then...one must highlight last of all the greatest crime that has ever been perpetrated against humanity, namely the bestial expulsion of millions of Germans from the ancient German Eastern territories.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 112.

¹⁶⁸ German Bundestag Nr. 1/115, January 31, 1951, 4374.

¹⁶⁹ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 82. Elsewhere in the speech Richter again returned to the subject of leveraging German suffering against German war crimes: “Certainly one has already spoken much of the brutal expulsions through which the East Germans were expelled from their homeland. While one side, and not always in

The former Nazi's recriminations were met with applause from the centrist and conservative parties, indicating that many elected lawmakers were comfortable with demanding that the world needed to acknowledge what it had done or allowed to transpire to Germany.¹⁷⁰ As Chancellor Adenauer lamented in the Bundestag in October 1950, "any apology for these procedures remains outstanding."¹⁷¹ The German people were owed statements of contrition, particularly from the USSR and Poland, for whom there would be no "danger involved" if they admitted to wrongdoing. "I have just pointed out that the perhaps understandable emotions of agitation and vengeance in the first few years [after the war] can no longer persist and be allowed to govern. No, ladies and gentlemen, here we are dealing with measures of cold cruelty...which imposed suffering, pain, and desolation" upon millions of Germans."¹⁷² Hans-Joachim von Merkatz similarly lamented that "we continue to wait on any real sign of willingness to make amends for the...injustices perpetrated against the expellees." Their suffering was moreover due to "the same totalitarian degeneration of state power" as National Socialism; since Nazism was

an unassailable fashion, brings proceedings against Germans, a similar international court investigating those responsible for the brutalities against East Germans remains outstanding." Ibid, 83.

¹⁷⁰ Fritz Richter, born Fritz Rösler (1912-1987), was a functionary in the Nazi Party in Saxony and propaganda ministry staffer before 1945. With falsified records, Rösler managed to enter the German Bundestag with support of the Sudeten Germans in 1949. After the fusion of the DKP-DRP with the National Democratic Party (NDP) into the German Reich Party (DRP) in 1950, Rösler rose to the head of the party before resigning his post for contacts to the rightwing radical Socialist Reich Party of Germany (SRP), which he joined and represented in the Bundestag before his arrest for falsification of records during a plenary session in 1952. Rösler garnered contacts to numerous European fascist organizations. See Sven Felix Kellerhoff, "Untergetauchte Nazis: Als Ein NS-Funktionär Bundestagsabgeordneter Wurde," *Die Welt*, February 20, 2012, <https://www.welt.de/kultur/history/article13871943/Als-ein-NS-Funktionaer-Bundestagsabgeordneter-wurde.html>.

¹⁷¹ German Bundestag, 1/94, October 26, 1950, 3495.

¹⁷² German Bundestag, 1/94, October 26, 1950, 3495.

the same as communism, von Merkatz implied, why should only West Germans be held accountable?¹⁷³ Günter Goetzendorff made similar overtures:

“It would be futile to want to educate the homeland expellees or the Germans in democracy when this democracy allows the violation of the most primitive human rights. Every people, the English, the Americans, are proud of loving their nation. Well then: We Germans as well demand to love our fatherland, in fact every part of it. Justice cannot be determined merely as the means of a nation. Justice is indivisible, as should be the communal suffering of all people. One cannot shrug the shoulders and look away simply because it concerns German suffering. We have recognized with shame that it was possible to bring thousands of people to their deaths in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. But I do not know whether it is more humane when the politicians of the victorious powers place themselves above divine and earthly law with the stroke of a pen, when they drive out people from their ancestral homeland, to along the way murder and rape them or let them die slowly but surely in an overfilled West Germany.”¹⁷⁴

Goetzendorff’s diatribe culminated in a declaration to the world: “Yalta and Potsdam were crimes against humanity!” Demanding that the Federal Government recognize the anniversary of the Potsdam Conference as a national day of mourning, Goetzendorff declared that Germans “demand of the world that it be ashamed for the expulsion, just as we were ashamed of the deeds of those who did evil things in the name of the German people. We however also call upon the world to make atone, as much as one can atone for the unheard of violence and horrors that we carried out in the name of supposed humanity.”¹⁷⁵

As some of the comments suggest, West German lawmakers held that not only had the “other side” exhibited the same brutality as the Nazis, their continued refusal to recognize this paled in comparison to Germany’s model atonement. Adenauer’s cryptic reference to justifiable “emotions” caused by unspecified crimes was a demand for an atonement that Germany already

¹⁷³ German Bundestag Nr. 01/254, March 18, 1953, 12279.

¹⁷⁴ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 128.

¹⁷⁵ German Bundestag, 01/07, September 22, 1949, 129.

had continually demonstrated.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, while the question of German traumas remained an unaddressed injustice, West German reparations had “drawn a line” under Germany’s “darkest chapter,” as Walther Hasemann pointed out. “The German people even while rejecting collective guilt...are called upon and are willing to make amends for suffered injustice and suffered damages,” but less than a decade after the war, that chapter was now closed.¹⁷⁷ West German magnanimity seemingly provided closure on what Germany had done, even as it continued to wait on similar generous gestures from the victors for what Germany had endured.

Not all so readily accepted sweeping the shadow of the Third Reich under the carpet. Responding to Adenauer’s first government address, Kurt Schumacher criticized the chancellor’s insufficient attention on the German resistance in the war and victims of fascism, and called for more explicit acknowledgment of the “horrible tragedy of the Jews in the Third Reich” and the shameful “extermination of six million Jews by Hitler’s barbarism.”¹⁷⁸ Perusing the protocols of the parliamentary debates, the SPD generally showed a greater willingness to discuss the Third Reich’s legacy than their conservative colleagues. Unsurprisingly, the KPD most energetically confronted the parliamentarians with the nation’s past, often to the chagrin of the parties who argued that “we communists didn’t even have the right to represent certain groups of people,” as the KPD delegate Heinz Renner complained. “I want to explain why we and only we have the right to fight for these groups of people. It was us communists who led the fight against...the war provoked by Hitler, with the result that more than half of the functionaries paid with their lives in this fight against the war,” Renner reminded the chamber. “We have the right to represent this

¹⁷⁶ German Bundestag, 1/94, October 26, 1950, 3495.

¹⁷⁷ German Bundestag Nr. 01/254, March 18, 1953, 12278.

¹⁷⁸ German Bundestag Nr. 01/6, September 21, 1949, 36.

group of people, because in the past and today we alone were the force which led the struggle against the source of the misery, against the war. That is why we here speak, why we speak as elected representatives of those whom you misguided and deceived.”¹⁷⁹

For many members of the Bundestag, the suffering the nation continued to struggle with was not induced by fascism. Rather, it had been the enemy, and particularly the communist victors, who had brought on the calamity. The important political lessons were not be found in a closer examination of the past, nor in careful soul-searching: They were embodied in the millions who had lost homes, who continued to wait on husbands and sons to return home from captivity, but above all in the expellee. The forced migrations and their brutality were so painful, their affects so widespread and readily apparent on the street, their details so widely discussed in daily conversation, in the press, or in the parliament, that they seemed an apt metaphor to describe the fate of Germany generally. Once again, no other than Chancellor Adenauer sums up the predominant thinking within West Germany: On October 26, 1950, the chancellor reminded the Bundestag and nation of the “measures of cold cruelty” that Germany had endured and continued to suffer. “I do not know,” Adenauer continued to shouts of approval, “if ever in history a verdict of misery and misfortune has been felled against millions of people with such chilling heartlessness.” For a government in the midst of finalizing a reparations treaty with Israel, the West German chancellor and his audience may have known the answer.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ German Bundestag, 1/58, April 26, 1950, 2156. Renner’s speech, interrupted several times by objections, sent the Bundestag into a frenzy after the speaker attacked his colleagues: “Many of you cheered as long as the church bells in Germany heralded Hitler’s victory. [...] Many of you supported Hitler and his war because you demanded, just like Hitler, the petrol in Baku and the grain in the Ukraine. Don’t delude us! Your ‘antifascist struggle’—the colleague Mr. Adenauer is not here—consisted of slipping with gritted teeth pensions that the fascist state paid you into the pocket.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ German Bundestag, 1/94, October 26, 1950, 3495-3496. Adenauer went on: “I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that the entire German people on this and that side of the Iron Curtain is unified in the condemnation of this cruelty.”

Conclusions

In May 1951, the Federal Government promulgated a law securing special benefits to civil servants who had lost their positions through the defeat of the Third Reich. Among the so-called “131er” beneficiaries were a high number of expellees, as well as former NSDAP members. In August 1952, the equalization of burdens law followed, opening a flow of payments over which reached their highpoint in the 1960s and had by 2001 allocated over 145 billion DMs; by 1970, 71 percent of the 7.1 million applications were accepted.¹⁸¹ The law did not fundamentally alter West German social structures, which disappointed leftist factions. Moreover, the emphasis on a social equalization, as opposed to the individual favored by the FDP, left some expellee elites and refugees with substantial wealth before the expulsions disappointed that not enough had been done.

Yet while the financial aid did not constitute a full compensation for a lost business or estate, and certainly could not offset the psychological pain of losing a homeland, the law paved the way for millions of refugees who after seven years could now financially manage to start a new life. In May 1953, moreover, the Bundestag passed a final central piece of legislation, the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (“Federal Expellee Law”), which legally defined “expellees” and spelled out the government’s obligations to support their continued social integration and promote their culture through financing of expellee organizations. The law represented an immense victory for expellees, as not only did it guarantee that expulsion status could be inherited and thus preserve the size and influence of the refugees over the next decade, it provided a moral and fiscal support line which buoyed the surging expellee organizations over the 1950s, not coincidentally the apex of their power.

¹⁸¹ Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 118–19.

These measures were a response to the mounting pressures on the Federal Republic. Indeed, during contemplation of the laws, expellee associations mobilized demonstrations and protests throughout West Germany, and expellee politicians threatened to withhold their support for military spending which would come at the cost of the war damaged.¹⁸² But perhaps most remarkable of all is the utter lack of partisanship in principle to these legal measures: Apart from squabbling over details or scale, every major party except for the KPD supported some sort of equalization of burdens.¹⁸³

One may interpret the consensus that emerges in the Bundestag protocols as responsible lawmakers recognizing the practical need for measures. But of equal, and perhaps greater, importance was the degree to which the victimhood narrative of the expellees had been internalized by lawmakers and the public alike. The massive media coverage and discursive framework guaranteed that the “community of fate” dominated the thoughts and minds of West Germans, who not only mustered sympathy for the expellees but saw them as an allegory for German suffering, and thus a central component of German collective memory of the war. The shift in the discourse after 1947/48 had a large hand in fulfilling the material demands of the expellees.

Nevertheless, more than changing discourses and laws transformed the *Heimatvertriebene* from a marginalized figure into a one of the pillars of West German political culture. The escalation of Cold War tensions played an immense role in the trajectory of the “community of fate,” whose influential leaders managed to imbed themselves within the political fabric of the Federal Republic. The short-term goal of financial support achieved, the main

¹⁸² Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat*, 169.

¹⁸³ For details, see Hughes, *Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat*.

objective of revising the postwar order now beckoned.¹⁸⁴ With the hardening of the Iron Curtain, the expellee lobby sought to recommend itself as the vanguard of an ideological struggle to get the homeland back. If expellee victimhood narratives lent themselves to underpinning material and social demands, they were equally as potent when instrumentalized for the “homeland politics” during the Cold War era.

¹⁸⁴ Walter Rinke, the speaker of the Silesian Homeland Association, in 1949 pointed out that material aid and integration constituted merely a “short-term” goal, the primary objective remaining a “return to the old homeland.” Quoted in Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, 39.

CHAPTER 6

CONSTRUCTING A POLITICALLY USEFUL PAST: EXPELLEE VICTIMHOOD IN THE COLD WAR

On July 5, 1953, Walter von Keudell, spokesperson of the *Landsmannschaft* Berlin-Mark Brandenburg, addressed compatriots at their federation's summit in Braunschweig. The worker's uprising in the GDR the month before, Keudell began, focused world attention on Germany and raised hopes for an imminent reunification. The upheaval revealed German "democratic values" which expellees, themselves victims of communism, shared.¹ The world should not fear the growing power of their associations, Keudell pleaded, but recognize that they rejected "every form of radicalism." Germans could counter allegations of a "supposed danger of the Neo-Nazi plague" with "an unparalleled operation in history": The "[f]rightful experience of the treks," the "bestial evacuation prohibitions during which the party functionaries mostly reached safety," in addition to "the deliberate misleading of the population and [their] planned sacrifice...before the vengeance from the East." All this, Keudell explained, "inevitably resulted in expellees and refugees only being able to recall Nazism with humiliation and contempt."²

The former National Socialist's history lesson, in which expellees were victims of the Third Reich, not only legitimated an end to "Nazi snooper." It underpinned the demands of a

¹ Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 07-001-114, Speech of v. Keudell at the Bundestreffen der Landsmannschaft Berlin-Mark-Brandenburg in Braunschweig, July 5, 1953, 2.

² Ibid, 6.

people “abundant in suffering and blessings, in sacrifices and promises, in duties, confidence and hope, and blessed with the awareness that we do not act as the representatives of a dying era, but as champions of a better and more noble Germany, spiritually bound with all the downtrodden peoples of Eastern Europe who gaze upon our efforts...and yearn with us to secure freedom through the tireless peaceful struggle for our homeland, for a free Europe and free world.”³ The implication that common suffering under fascism and Bolshevism forged the peoples of Europe into a community struggling for freedom provided a means for engaging with Germany’s recent past while simultaneously breaking with it. The demand for a “return of the homeland” and the particularism of German victimhood transformed into a call for an international struggle for reunification and Western democracy against the communist foe across the Iron Curtain. The expellees, their leaders asserted, were the vanguard of this contestation.

Keudell’s remarks and historical interpretation were not out of the ordinary for the 1950s. The speaker of the Sudeten German *Landsmannschaft* Rudolf Lodgman von Auen expressed similar thoughts before 150,000 attendees gathered at Munich’s Theresienwiese for the main address of the “Sudeten German Day” on June 6, 1954:

“Nine years now have passed since fate fell upon us, ejecting us into a Germany that was at its knees. The end of our people and its history seemed to have come. [...] It took until the 20th century for humanity to become presented with a politics in which genocide is one of its means. It is not intrinsically new, but before then it was always regarded as a crime and not a recognized legal means of politics, only through the agreements of Yalta, Tehran, and Potsdam did it become such a means.”⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Quoted in K. Erik Franzen, “Sudetendeutsche Tage als Gedenkstätten!? Die Erinnerung an NS-Diktatur und Krieg in politischen Reden von Vertretern der Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft 1950-1995,” in *Diktatur-Krieg-Vertreibung: Erinnerungskulturen in Tschechien, der Slowakei und Deutschland seit 1945*, by Jíří Pěšek, Roman Holec, and Christoph Cornelissen (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 211.

For Lodgman von Auen, 1945 likewise represented a caesura, one where the suffering of non-Germans ranked behind the fate of Germans, who were victims of a genocide orchestrated by the Allies and needing restitution.⁵ 1945 meant defeat and humiliation, and the start of a phase of personal suffering and national indignation through division and displacement. Only one path forward could overcome this catastrophe and assuage the pain of a “heavily tried, dejected, [and] destroyed” Germany: A return of the lost territories, guarantee of a right to homeland, and reunification of Germany. “When we speak of Germany,” von Auen declared, “we do not think only of this land beneath the spring heavens, of its cities, industry, its people, but also of its history, of the grandeur of its past and the suffering commensurate with this grandeur. May this Germany once again become a land of hope and faith, a land which we all can love ‘above all in the world.’”⁶ Though the Sudetenland only belonged to Germany for seven years between 1938 and 1945, the audience could legitimately dream of that kind of future.⁷ The day before, State President Hans Ehard (CSU) proclaimed Bavaria’s aegis over the “great community of the Sudeten German people.” Bavaria shared their “burning desire for the preservation of peace and

⁵ Indeed, May 8 for many Germans did not connote liberation. Instead, it was an ambivalent date that led to “political irritations and diplomatic disgruntlement” in the early Federal Republic. Peter Reichel, *Politik mit Erinnerung Gedächtnisorte mit Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1999), 233.

⁶ Cited in Franzen, “Sudetendeutsche Tage als Gedenkstätten!? Die Erinnerung an NS-Diktatur und Krieg in politischen Reden von Vertretern der Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft 1950-1995,” 212.

⁷ The Sudeten German claims conflicted with reunification demands of the Federal Republic, which called for a reconstitution of Germany within the borders of 1937. The Potsdam Agreement nominally continued to uphold the existence of the German Reich, with the lost territories under Polish and Soviet administration until a final peace settlement. This therefore excluded the Sudetenland, which had never been part of the German Empire until its annexation through Nazi Germany in 1938. Nevertheless, Sudeten German demands fluctuated between calls for a return of expellees to Czechoslovakia and autonomy guaranteed through international protections, and more commonly the application of self-determination and joining with the Federal Republic.

the solution of all world problems, as well as their return to their ancestral homeland.”⁸ The suffering of expellees concerned Bavarians and Germans, and their cause—reversing the forced migrations—was in the vital interest of the entire nation.

The declarations reveal yet another layer in the discourse over “flight and expulsion.” The sentiments reflect the victimhood discourse that emerged in the Federal Republic after 1948, as the previous chapter demonstrated. “Sympathy narratives” further conjoined with the Federal Republic’s amnesia over the past and demands for reparations. Yet 1950s political identities focused on victimhood are but a point of departure for the next stage in the instrumentalization of expellee memory: The “Right to the Homeland.” Growing into a powerful pressure group, the expellee associations developed a historical narrative of their experiences which supported their “homeland politics.” They moreover effectively imposed these interpretations upon the West German government, making the struggle to win back the German East an all-German concern.

This chapter investigates three interconnected issues. *First*, it asks how the discourse on “flight and expulsion” changed in the 1950s. With social integration initiated by 1952, the narrative shifted from arousing sympathy to arguing for a return of the homeland and revision of the postwar order. The expulsions now appeared as not just a mere injustice and historic error, but as having irrevocably taken something from Germany. The painful “amputation,” as Adenauer called it, of lands rich in resources and central to German culture, moreover prevented reunification.⁹ The struggle for the *Heimat* was a problem for all of Germany, and the Western world. Argumentative strategies therefore increasingly emphasized the need for a return of the

⁸ Quoted in Franzen, “Sudetendeutsche Tage als Gedenkstätten!/? Die Erinnerung an NS-Diktatur und Krieg in politischen Reden von Vertretern der Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft 1950-1995,” 211.

⁹ German Bundestag Nr. 01/5, September 20, 1949, 28.

German East in order to guarantee European stability, as the blow that Germany suffered could not be endured economically over the long term and threatened peace.

A central element of this layer of “flight and expulsion” memory was the continued cultivation of blank spots in the prehistory of the German East and which produced the ostensible powder keg of postwar European order. The context of National Socialism in the destruction of ethnic and cultural landscapes of Europe frequently received only superficial treatment, if at all. Because they brought claims to domestic and international audiences, sanitized or reframed histories needed to eliminate a causation rooted in the German role in the conflagration that consumed the continent. Many yearned to think of National Socialism as a “catastrophe,” an aberration and incomprehensible “traffic accident.”¹⁰ It had little bearing on postwar developments, and undermined claims of German victimhood. Narratives therefore routinely romanticized the German East’s history and celebrated the achievements of Teutonic industry and culture since the Middle Ages. Communist aggression and economic mismanagement destroyed this vibrant region. Walter von Keudell preferred to interpret expellee suffering as caused by Hitler’s megalomania, which left Germans as passive victims on equal standing with victims of Nazism. Alternately, Lodgman von Auen’s comments reflect a tendency of relativizing Nazi war crimes in attempts to balance the scales of moral guilt with atrocities committed by outside aggressors. The homeland, in short, emerged as an idealized utopia set aflame in 1944/45, where 1933-1945 held little explanatory value for its destruction.

This chapter *secondly* examines why the narrative of “flight and expulsion” took on new forms. Postwar recovery opened doors for expellees. The equalization of burdens and federal

¹⁰ Friedrich Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe*. (Wiesbaden: Eberhard Brockhaus, 1946); Fritz Fischer, *Hitler war kein Betriebsunfall: Aufsätze* (München: Beck, 1998).

expellee laws legally and socially acknowledged the new citizens as part of the national community, thereby fulfilling a “short-term” goal, as the Silesian leader Walter Rinke extolled. With secure footing and immediate concerns of prosperity addressed, the primary agenda of a “return to the old homeland” now loomed.¹¹ Despite the stark contradiction between carving out a new home and demanding a return to the old, the narrative’s evolution in the 1950s in large part stems from the campaign waged by expellee organizations and representatives to fight for a “right to the homeland,” which in their minds continued to be a real and physical place.

Their “homeland politics,” and a further reason that the narrative changed and took hold in the FRG, stems from political context. The demands of expellees fell upon fertile ground in the Bundestag and in government offices, as apart from the KPD every West German party called for a reunification of Germany within the borders of 1937. Constitutionally enshrined in Article 23 of the Basic Law, the FRG committed itself to obtaining the lost territories and acknowledging revisionist demands. This provided inroads for expellee organizations, who received ample moral and financial support from the federal government, to bill themselves as the national *avant garde* of the struggle for a *Gesamtdeutschland*, or “Greater Germany.”¹²

Above all, the escalation of the Cold War explains the dramatic changes in “flight and expulsion” discourse in the 1950s. The ideological contestation created a rhetorical framework that profoundly influenced the discourse, imbuing it with a pronounced anticommunism and interpretation of the past through the lens of 1950s mentalities. The clash between democracy and communism also validated the struggle for the *Heimat* as a logical geopolitical concern, and

¹¹ Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 39.

¹² Matthias Stickler, *“Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch”: Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände : 1949-1972* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004), 99.

stoked the aspirations of the expellees. With a series of peace conferences, the American Liberation Policy professing a rollback of communism from Eastern Europe, and popular uprisings in the Soviet Bloc in 1953 and 1956, expellees had good reason to initially believe in a postwar revision despite the hardening of the Iron Curtain. With each crisis, the fight for a homeland that lay beyond the Oder-Neisse Line elevated the particularist “homeland politics” of the expellees into a feasible Cold War objective.

Thirdly, this chapter examines who constructed and propagated 1950s expellee narratives. Expellee organizations, now able to operate freely and with the support of the West German government, and independent think-tanks of self-billed experts on the territories beyond the Iron Curtain worked in tandem with German offices. The relationship between these autonomous entities and the federal government was further strengthened by the fact that many expellee elites also served in state offices and in the parties, and worked to steer the political apparatus of the FRG toward an *Ostpolitik* aimed at regaining the lost territories. In the 1950s, the expellee organizations evolved into a unique lobby, one imbedded within the political structures of the Federal Republic.

Of central focus here, however, will be the figures who attempted to mobilize history for political gains, and thereby created a viable narrative for expellee “homeland politics.” From the onset, West Germans believed that the key to winning back the German East lay in swaying Western Allies to recognize the expellee claims. Explaining what happened and establishing the injustice of the expulsions, therefore, constituted a central component of this strategy. The key to success for education campaigns lay in an interwar method of harnessing scholarship for political

purposes: The “white book.”¹³ Under the mantle of impartiality, a network of actors worked to harness history for revisionist claims.

This chapter therefore seeks to illustrate the next phase in the trajectory of “flight and expulsion,” where the memories of suffering collided with memory politics and a conscious production and narration of history on the part of an influential interest group. For a brief time in the 1950s and early 1960s, when expellee organizations reached the zenith of their power, the forced migrations and the presence of the German East were an inexorable theme of West German politics and culture. As such, the “homeland politics” laid a powerful layer in the cultural memory of “flight and expulsion” that continues to linger today.

“Bought Expertise”: *Ostforscher* in the Early Federal Republic¹⁴

Already Konrad Adenauer’s first government declaration raised the idea of a federally commissioned documentation of the forced migrations. Pledging his administration to the publication of “judicial and eyewitness materials,” the West German chancellor intimated that evidence of German suffering could engender “respect of the law that we are owed” and underpin revisionist claims. This project at least officially counted as a prime undertaking of the young republic.¹⁵ In essence, the arguments leveled against the Western powers were to receive the weight of atrocities perpetrated against Germans under the umbrella of scholarly objectivity.

¹³ See Johannes Lepsius, Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Friedrich Thimme, eds., *Die große Politik der europäischen Kabinette 1871 - 1914: Sammlung der diplomatischen Akten des Auswärtigen Amtes, Im Auftrag des Auswärtigen Amtes*, 14 vols. (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1922); Max Montgelas and Walther Schücking, eds., *Die deutschen Dokumente zum Kriegsausbruch 1914* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft für Politik und Geschichte, 1927).

¹⁴ Manfred Max Wambach, *Verbändestaat und Parteienoligopol; Macht und Ohnmacht der Vertriebenenverbände*. (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1971), 93.

¹⁵ German Bundestag Nr. 01/5, September 20, 1949, 29.

Efforts of documenting the expulsions were already underway as the chancellor basked in enthusiastic applause of the Bundestag. One strand evolved in Göttingen in early 1946, when Herbert von Dirksen commissioned *Ostforscher* (“researcher on the East”) Hans Mortensen to draft a study of the economic importance of Silesia to Germany as an argument for territorial adjustments in forthcoming peace talks.¹⁶ As a former ambassador to the USSR, Japan, and Great Britain, Dirksen cultivated numerous contacts, including American diplomat Robert D. Murphy and William Strang, a British political advisor in the British Zone.¹⁷ Dirksen beseeched them to send the study to the ACC for review.¹⁸ Their interest encouraged Dirksen to form the “Working Group for Eastern Questions” in Bad Nenndorf, comprised of former Foreign Ministry officials and *Ostforscher*, to continue collecting materials on Silesia. Concurrently to Dirksen’s efforts, a collective of scholars predominantly from Königsberg University, among them the historian Theodor Schieder, formed the “Working Group for East Prussian Questions” in Göttingen.¹⁹

By November 1946, these elements fused into the *Göttinger Arbeitskreis* (“Göttingen Working Group”, GA). Founded by Herbert Kraus, Wolf von Wrangel, Wilhelm Kutscher, and

¹⁶ See Manfred Overesch, *Gesamtdeutsche Illusion und westdeutsche Realität: von den Vorbereitungen für einen deutschen Friedensvertrag zur Gründung des Auswärtigen Amtes der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1946-1949-51* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1978), 26–34. As a Silesian himself and former director of the East Division of the Foreign Ministry, Dirksen had a vested interest in the subject. Moreover, his advocacy for radical revisionist politics against Poland during the interwar period meant that he was a veteran of fighting for lost territories.

¹⁷ On Dirksen and his career spanning from the *Kaiserzeit* into the Third Reich, see his memoir Herbert von Dirksen, *Moscow, Tokyo, London*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1952).

¹⁸ Mathias Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Das Großforschungsprojekt ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa,’” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 46, no. 3 (1998): 354. It is unclear whether Murphy or Strang complied.

¹⁹ Their work was supported by the Minister President of Lower Saxony Hinrich Kopf, who himself had fled on a trek from Upper Silesia, and the Minister Presidents of the US Occupation Zone. See Walter Vogel and Weisz, eds., *Akten zur Vorgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1945-1949. Bd. 2, Bd. 2, vol. 1* (München: Oldenbourg, 1979), 799.

Joachim von Braun, the GA provided displaced scholars as well as former Third Reich “Eastern experts” a new home in postwar West Germany.²⁰ Its advisory board included Theodor Schieder, Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, Theodor Oberländer, and Herbert von Dirksen.²¹ Just as many scholars offered their expertise in service of the Nazi regime, again academics eagerly sought to engage in politicized scholarship.²² The GA from the onset published scholarship that would speak for a recovery of the lost territories at the 1947 Foreign Ministers Conference in Moscow and subsequent meetings. By 1948, several memoranda emerged which, one contemporary noted, countered the “unjustified Slavic claims on our homeland...with objective evidence.”²³

Though collectives of scholars and self-purported experts on Eastern Europe abounded in postwar Germany, the GA developed into one of the largest and most highly regarded institutes dedicated to raising awareness of the “German Question,” the expulsions, and the German East. Though nominally independent, like many of its rivals such as the Herder Institute, it received funding from the government.²⁴ By the mid-1950s, the GA operated as a “think tank” advising

²⁰ Christoph Kleßmann, “Osteuropaforschung und Lebensraumpolitik im Dritten Reich,” in *Wissenschaft im Dritten Reich*, ed. Peter Lundgreen, 1985, 350–83; Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

²¹ See files in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv (BayHStA), Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 731.

²² Proposals included transforming the network of academics into a political office that should prepare materials and a delegation for an expected peace conference failed. The political members to be called upon included Paul Löbe, Konrad Adenauer, Herbert von Dirksen, Wolfgang Jaenicke, and Kurt Schumacher. The initiative failed because Schumacher, who was the offered chairmanship, had concerns over the intentions and makeup of the group. Overesch, *Gesamtdeutsche Illusion und westdeutsche Realität*, 33.

²³ Quoted in Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld,” 356.

²⁴ BArch B150-1152, Freiherr von Braun to Hans Lukaschek, March 30, 1949. Von Braun requested funding from Lukaschek, pointing out that the financial committee of the State Council earmarked 18 million DMs for academic research projects. Von Braun lamented that translation and publication in English cost money, but was a necessary investment in order to counter Polish “propaganda” and ahistorical claims.

policy makers and government ministries on subjects relating to expellees.²⁵ Its “predominant” objective was to augment the foreign policy of the Federal Republic.²⁶ Financing from various government ministries allowed a rapid succession of publications arguing for a revision of the Potsdam Agreement, which in turn provided officials and expellee associations with reference materials. The GA also operated a press service that translated and disseminated newspapers from the Eastern Bloc and provided interpretations of developments and advice on how to respond to them.²⁷ In short: Though it cultivated appearances of objectivity and nonpartisan expertise, the GA coordinated closely with federal agencies and expellee homeland associations.

The GA mainly, however, produced literature arguing for a return of the German East as an economic necessity. Occasionally, its members published articles in the expellee press.²⁸ By

²⁵ By 1953, for instance, the Ministry for All-German Questions engaged the GA to examine all school books in West Germany in order to judge how they discussed the German East, as well as produce a series of brochures educating teachers on how to incorporate these matters into curriculum. The BMVt also approached the GA to turn their publications into materials for grade schools, a measure the expellee ministry brought before the Federal Council’s Committee for Refugee Questions. BArch B150-2360, BfgF to BMVt, December 10, 1953.

²⁶ BArch B150-1152, Freiherr von Braun to Hans Lukaschek, March 30, 1949.

²⁷ The GA operated several separate press services abroad as well. For Latin America, it distributed “Tatsachen-Realidades,” billed as the news “from Germany, the homeland of the expellees.” Into the late 1950s, the GA supplied Anglo-American academics and government offices with the “Expellee Press Service,” advertised as “news items and comments on the problems of the uprooted millions and their home countries behind the Iron Curtain.” See files in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 731.

²⁸ Much of this public outreach fell upon Bolko von Richthofen, a German archeologist distantly related to the famous WWI fighter ace Manfred von Richthofen, also known as the “Red Baron.” As part of the legal defense counsel at the Nuremberg Trials, the former NSDAP member and SS *Ahnenerbe* staffer, Richthofen as early as 1949 took to castigating Poland relativizing German war crimes. Reprinting testimonies of witnesses of the Bromberg Massacre entered into the record at Nuremberg in *Breslauer Nachrichten*, Richthofen claimed that “all those seeking justice...must regard...these entire sad facts as much as the guilt of Germans during the war and the even greater Polish guilt from the time after the German collapse.” The piece, intended as a discussion of “objective truth” that would serve as a basis for reconciliation, suggested that supposed Polish atrocities in 1939 explained why they occurred again in 1945. See Bolko von Richthofen, “Der Todesmarsch der Deutschen nach Lowitsch,” *Breslauer Nachrichten*, November 10, 1949, 3-5. A few months later, Richthofen was even more explicit: Decrying the “historical misrepresentations” beyond the Iron Curtain, the author denied allegations of German crimes as “propaganda” and dismissed Polish experiences under German occupation as “so-called perpetual path of suffering of the Polish people.” Richthofen, “Geschichtsklitterung jenseits des ‘Eisernen Vorhangs’”, *Breslauer Nachrichten*, January 20, 1950. *Breslauer Nachrichten*, which transitioned into *Der Schlesier* in 1948, was an independent

1949, the GA's activism convinced the *Deutsches Büro für Friedensfragen* ("German Office for Questions of Peace"), the predecessor of the Foreign Ministry, that a "small private circle" would most effectively advance West German arguments on the German East, "one of the most important tasks for the future in the first place." The GA, von Braun argued, could utilize personal connections to "foreign opinion-forming" figures, operating "in the same way that it does in Anglo-Saxon countries through committees, loose associations of interested parties." This arrangement, the GA contended, would benefit the young Federal Republic immensely. Domestically, the GA would also "influence" West Germans. The GA's involvement, moreover, would lend "scholarly qualifications" to what in essence were PR campaigns.²⁹

To that end, in 1950 the GA proposed a "collection of documents of humanity," a counterpart to a "documents of inhumanity" in the planning stages at the Expellee Ministry. In an appeal in newspapers soliciting testimonies of exceptional displays of humanitarianism in the time of "hatred and vindictiveness, of greed and horror," the GA explained that the publication would "break through the wall of silence, which still prevents the true recognition of the meaning, of the severity and the scope, of the mass expulsions."³⁰ Reports of POWs who "worked faithfully and often in amicable cooperation" with Germans, "accompanied" them on

nationalist-conservative paper that acted as the organ of the Silesian Association until the 1980s, when the expellee organization cut ties to the controversial publication.

²⁹ BArch B150-1152, von Braun to von Schönebeck, June 28, 1949, 1-2. Von Braun proposed an audacious funding scheme obligating every city and district to contribute 50 DM a year to the GA. The GA received government funds even if this plan did not come to fruition, and underlines expellee beliefs that the struggle for the German East included all West Germany.

³⁰ The occasion, the appeal explained, was the five year anniversary of when "the great treks of the East Germans trudged westward in ice and snow, while those who remained behind needed to endure unimaginable suffering. The homeland expellees think back on this terrible plight and the death of so many dear kin, friends and neighbors, who froze on the streets on the flight or in far off imprisonment, who hungered or were bludgeoned." Meanwhile, the victors planned expulsions of the survivors from their homeland "in which their ancestors for many centuries lived in peaceful cohabitation [and] worked faithfully with their [East European] neighbors." BArch B150-1152, Aufruf des Göttinger Arbeitskreis betreffend "Sammlung von Dokumenten der Menschlichkeit," February 16, 1950, 1.

their “death march,” shielded them from excesses, or instances where “members of those peoples who carried out the expulsions” acted decently sought to provide a counterweight to the “voices of hatred” and “triumph of vengeance...expressed in the dictates of the Potsdam Agreement.”³¹

Purporting to dispel “hatred amongst nations” and initiate “true understanding and a real reconciliation,” the appeal revealed political intentions. First, despite honoring individual acts of magnanimity, the “unceasing misery caused by the accords of Yalta and Potsdam must illuminate the background.”³² Coinciding with the five year anniversary of the expulsions, the publication sought to emphasize the “great misfortune that was brought upon Central Europe and the entire world.”³³ Secondly, the compendium signaled—whether contrite or feigned—an ethos of reconciliation that simultaneously could deflect suspicions and allegations of purposeful revisionist politics. Like the Charta of the Homeland Expellees, expressions of mutual understanding softened the blow of recriminations. As a BMVt official commented about the “Documentation of Humanity,” it was “necessary to also bring positive comments” so as not to undermine documentation of crimes perpetrated against Germans, since litanies of atrocities would make the German case seem a “tendentious” and obviously propagandistic effort.³⁴

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, documenting especially East European benevolence aimed to “counter every proposition of a collective guilt of any people.” “Especially the homeland expellees” ostensibly rejected temptations to lump all Czechs and Poles into a

³¹ Ibid, 2. The appeal, perhaps unwittingly, revealed two standards for measuring humanity: While French and English POW decency was praised, reports on East Europeans needed to “really demonstrate behavior of pure humanitarianism and not for some sort of reward or hope for advantage.”

³² Ibid, 1.

³³ Ibid, 3.

³⁴ BArch B150-5630, Memo re: Diary of Frau Margarete Schell, July 10, 1958, 2.

single category of perpetrators, even “while leading figures of all political persuasions of those nations constantly seek to raise the impression that their people in their entirety desired and demanded the horrors of the mass expulsions.”³⁵ The distinction between the Czechoslovakian and Polish people and their government undermined the thesis of collective guilt typically levelled against Germans. The implication seemed clear: If bereaved Germans could differentiate and reject desires of holding entire nations responsible, how then could the victors make all of Germany accountable for Nazism? And if this proved irrational, how then could twelve million expellees be made to suffer the expulsions? The Potsdam Conference punished an entire defeated nation, and claimed the entire German East as unjust restitution for the misdeeds of a minority.

The final publication of the “Documents of Humanity” reflected the general tendencies of the appeal. Introduced by Albert Schweitzer, the collection of reports interpreted the war and the expulsions as a “terrible misfortune [*Unglück*].”³⁶ The elimination of German agency and role in this calamity left witnesses as hapless victims exposed to waves of endless violence, surrendered to a “fate” ordained by higher powers. Equally as problematic as this framing was the inclusion of remarks such as “Polish horde” and disparaging comments over “Polish economy [*Polenwirtschaft*],” a derogatory reference to the apparently self-evident inability of Poles to manage the German East competently.³⁷ Yet the greatest deficiency was the entire underpinning logic: The contrasting of mostly innocent Germans, who bore no responsibility for historical

³⁵ BArch B150-1152, Aufruf des Göttinger Arbeitskreis betreffend “Sammlung von Dokumenten der Menschlichkeit,” February 16, 1950, 2. In other words, communist elites and not German victims thought in terms of collective guilt and approval.

³⁶ Karl O Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente der Menschlichkeit aus der Zeit der Massenausreibungen* (Kitzingen-Main: Holzner, 1950), 8.

³⁷ Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, 121; Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, 149.

processes, with savage Slavic perpetrators who collectively committed a historic crime save for a minority of exceptional individuals.

Furthermore, the reports presented slave workers and POWs as loyal “employees” grateful for German tutelage and the civilizing effects of their gracious overlords.³⁸ Why Germans “possessed” laborers went unexplained. The behavior toward their “masters” in the hour of their greatest plight, however, did. Slavic workers tended toward unbelievable and unforgivable treachery, so that demonstrations of decency and selflessness seemed exceptional and uncommon for the typical Pole or Russian. Compassion and forgiveness from Jewish commissars in the Red Army, or gentle and kind treatment from Soviet soldiers, equally baffled expellees.³⁹ Their refusal to descend into barbarism, authors suggested, signaled that they were not real communists and extraordinary Slavs, who arose as pillars of humanity from the horde of “sub-humans” created by Nazi propaganda, reinforced by wartime experiences, and widely popularized through postwar retelling in the anticommunist West Germany of the 1950s.⁴⁰

The French, Belgian, and English revealed no moral failings, and dutifully served and inspired their German compatriots with bravery and humanitarian gestures.⁴¹ As one author was told by another expellee upon admiring the devotion of “her” POWs: “Thank God that you have

³⁸ One testimony for instance: “I offer this...as evidence of the fact that the Pole...maintains genuine devotion and loyalty to his just and considerate provider. [...] However, the Pole easily lapses into chauvinism and barbarism if incited by a criminally infernal propaganda. I think fondly of my Polish people.” Quoted in Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente*, 131.

³⁹ Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, 149, 160, and 239.

⁴⁰ Albrecht Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland; 1945 - 1990* (München: Beck, 1996), 197–98. One document, titled “Humane Gestures in a Hellish Scene,” describes exactly this scenario: A Jewish commissar appears suddenly to “free us from a horde.” Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente*, 160.

⁴¹ See the useful comments in Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 195–96.

these Frenchmen, they will go through fire for you. How they have a good heart!”⁴² The testimonies insinuated an inborn humanity, forged in common values of Western culture, and a friendship cultivated through “humane” treatment of the POWs during the war. Between the lines, Albrecht Lehmann detects an “unmistakable message that they in no way wanted to stand with Russians, Poles, and Czechs in the camp of the victors, but instead already before the end of the war and the crumbling of the Allied alliance switched fronts and formed the new coalition of the West against the East.”⁴³ Now Germans and French were “comrades,” as one report explained, where the POWs demonstrated a dogged determination to keep their German charges and themselves from falling into the hands of encroaching communists.⁴⁴

Whether the testimonies reflected events accurately is beside the point. The echoes of National Socialist racial thinking as well as Cold War dichotomies framed reports substantially. The premise dictating their selection was political, and an overt effort to provide an interpretation of the past that furthered expellee homeland politics. These interpretations and images moreover circulated widely. In 1955, for instance, the GA commissioned a radio episode “Documents of Humanity—In the Days of the Mass Expulsions” that included readings of reports.⁴⁵ The conscious attempt to influence West German historical awareness continued into the 1960s, as the GA endorsed and supported expellee association’s efforts to bring out their own publications that ostensibly more accurately reflected their historical experiences and

⁴² Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente*, 95.

⁴³ Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, 196.

⁴⁴ Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente*, 74.

⁴⁵ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 200, “Ost- und Mitteldeutsche Heimatsendungen,” 1955.

understanding than more “scholarly” treatments.⁴⁶ With an eye to receptions abroad, the GA moreover strove to professionalize and coordinate expellee association attempts of bringing their case before larger audiences and engage in more effective public relations work.

Sudeten German Memory Politics in the Early FRG: A Case Study

Homeland organizations eagerly worked with the GA, a recognized think tank with a favorable reputation.⁴⁷ But the *Landsmannschaften* also developed their own campaigns. Working in cooperation with but not entirely within the system guaranteed a measure of leverage for this special interest group. Though it utilized various mechanisms to further their homeland politics—for instance through party and state institutions—expellee associations also recognized the need to base their claims on scholarship and recent history.⁴⁸ During the 1950s, therefore, numerous homeland associations brought out their own collections in the tradition of interwar “white books.”⁴⁹ The Sudeten Germans proved the most adept in disseminating their arguments

⁴⁶ Karl O. Kurth, *Sudetenland. Ein Hand- und Nachschlagebuch über alle Siedlungsgebiete der Sudetendeutschen in Böhmen und Mähren/Schlesien*, ed. Göttinger Arbeitskreis (Kitzingen-Main: Holzner, 1954). RE: LAMSDORF

⁴⁷ The Sudeten German Association (SL), for instance, regularly sent press releases to the GA, which circulated them. In November 1953, the SL used the upcoming 1954 Berlin Conference, where “once again Germany’s fate will be decided,” to iterate its interpretation of history: “Once before Germany’s fate was decided on German soil by foreign powers. It was in Potsdam. Eight years ago. Then Morgenthau’s spirit still reigned. The accords reflected the wishes of the Kremlin. They meant genocide, death, the expulsions of Germans who were deprived of rights, who were hounded from their centuries-old homeland. Without guilt they stood there, a disenfranchised heap of a people.” Similarly, a January 1955 piece reminded audiences that they arrived in a Germany “ravaged by war, robbed completely of its sovereignty and plundered by the victors,” but expellees nevertheless persevered and built new homes “in the ruins of the Third Reich.” Expellees deserved credit for this, but accolades were but a start: The ultimate goal was the struggle for the homeland, “for the sake of the German people and the Fatherland.” See “Lasst die Weihnachtsglocken der Heimat, dem Recht, dem Frieden läuten,” November 26, 1953; and “Zum Jahreswechsel,” January 1955, in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 1.

⁴⁸ On expellees and the political parties, see Wambach, *Verbändestaar und Parteienoligopol; Macht und Ohnmacht der Vertriebenenverbände.*; Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*; Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*; Matthias Müller, *Die SPD und die Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1977: Eintracht, Entfremdung, Zwietracht* (Berlin: Lit, 2012).

⁴⁹ Hans Jürgen von Wilckens and Landmannschaft Westpreussen, *Die Grosse Not Danzig-Westpreussen 1945: Zusammengestellt Im Auftrage Der Landmannschaft Westpreussen* (Sastedt: Niederdeutscher Verlag Ulrich und Ziss, 1957); Hans Hartl, *Das Schicksal des Deutschtums in Rumänien (1938-1945-1953)* (Würzburg: Holzner,

via networks domestically and abroad, possibly because they instinctively recognized their precarious legal position and the connection between the construction of a useful past and their political agendas. Already in July 1947, a coalition spanning the political spectrum formed the “Working Group for Ensuring Sudeten German Interests [*Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung sudetendeutscher Interessen*]” (AG).⁵⁰ At a time when authorities carefully monitored refugee associations, the Sudeten leadership installed an office that it understood as a “foreign ministry of the Sudeten Germans,” with support of the Bavarian state.⁵¹

Its primary interest concerned foreign policy. It aimed to gather materials for future peace talks, and sought to represent “a pan-German perspective...in all political, economic, and cultural questions” related to expellee matters and the Sudetenland.⁵² The SL voiced similar goals in its 1950 Declaration of Detmold, which affirmed that “foreign education” was the best foreign policy; the documentation of the suffering of the Sudeten Germans was the most important element of any campaign.⁵³ With these aspirations, the self-appointed leaders of the Sudeten German vowed to “never again allow that we...will be bystanders of decisions made

1958). Hans Hartl was a staff member of the Schieder Commission tasked with gathering materials for the Yugoslavia volume. In 1949, Heinz Esser published a brochure on the “concentration camp” of Lamsdorf, possibly with support of the GA. This was turned into a documentation by the Upper Silesian Association in 1969. See Heinz Esser and Landsmannschaft der Oberschlesier, *Die Hölle von Lamsdorf: Dokumentation über ein polnisches Vernichtungslager* (Dülmen: Laumann-Verlagsgesellschaft, 1969).

⁵⁰ Walter Becher proposed the working group, which Richard Reitzner then realized through the Bavarian refugee ministry. Its founding board were Richard Reitzner (SPD), Hans Schütz (CSU), Franz Ziegler (CSU), and the *völkisch* activists and publishers Walter Becher and Emil Franzel. See Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” ohne Ende, 87.

⁵¹ “Das ‘Auswärtige Amt’ der Sudetendeutschen Volksgruppe,” *Egerer Zeitung* 6/4, 1955, 31. See also Wambach, *Verbindestaats und Parteienoligopol; Macht und Ohnmacht der Vertriebenenverbände.*, 121.

⁵² BayHSta NL Becher 107, “Aufzeichnung Bechers,” July 16, 1947. In other words, the Sudeten Germans needed to imbed their agenda within larger foreign policy goals, and work toward creating an understanding and context for West Germans to accept these positions.

⁵³ Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, 48.

against us behind our backs.”⁵⁴ Much of their activities for the next decades must be understood with these objectives in mind, as well as the worldview steeped in a profound sense of timeless victimization of the Sudetenland stretching back into the 19th century.

The AG immediately started work on fulfilling its goals. Before the 1947 London Foreign Minister Conference, Emil Franzel drafted a memo in the name of the AG detailing the “political and legal situation of the Sudeten Germans.” Addressed to US Secretary of State George C. Marshall, Franzel passed the memorandum to Robert D. Murphy, an advisor to the American military government.⁵⁵ In 1949 as well, the AG organized numerous demonstrations attended by several thousands, in which they read appeals to the US Senate and the UN and demanded a just settlement to the expulsions.⁵⁶ Lastly, the AG gathered protocols and eyewitness testimonies from various institutions that ultimately culminated in the Sudeten German Archive in 1955.⁵⁷

These sources allowed for a breadth of publications, though two in particular stand out in the importance attributed to them by the AG. The flagship publication irrefutably detailing the suffering of Sudeten Germans were the *Dokumente zur Austreibung der Sudetendeutschen*

⁵⁴ Walter Becher captured the guiding ethos of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft*: “It shall never again be allowed that at international conferences we Sudeten Germans will be bystanders of decisions made against us behind our backs and it which only those circles...participate who pursue the criminal, undemocratic goals in the tradition of Beneš and are interested in the elimination of our ethnic group [*Volkgruppe*] as a factor of European harmony.” Walter Becher, “Im Dienste der Volksgruppe, Über die Aufgaben der Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung sudetendeutscher Interessen,” *Der Sudetendeutsche*, January 20, 1951, quoted in Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 88.

⁵⁵ There is no clear evidence on whether Marshall read the materials; he did, however, point to the tentativeness of the Potsdam Agreement and even raised the issue of a revision of postwar borders in the course of the conference.

⁵⁶ Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 92–93.

⁵⁷ As Tobias Weger notes, the logic behind the archive was less the conservation of materials, but rather the “historical-political documentation of self-produced sources.” More of a documentation center than an archive, it strove to provide “academic” underpinning of fundamentally political claims of the SL. Weger, 279. The Sudeten German archive, as Weger correctly finds, validates Aleida Assmann’s observation of archives as legitimizing instruments of the “control of memory.” Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: C.H. Beck, 1999), 343f.

(Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans), the so-called “White Book of Expulsion.”⁵⁸ The project received clandestine support from notables: Hugo Prinz von Thurn und Taxis, who knew Lodgman von Auen personally, solicited donations to finance the “white book” from a number of dignitaries, including Justice Minister Thomas Dehler.⁵⁹ As for the content, the Sudeten leadership entrusted AG member Heinrich Zinke with the editing process. Zinke already by late 1945 amassed more than 700 protocols himself, a “bloodcurdling panorama of crimes, horrors, plight and despair,” as *Spiegel* reported in a profile of the “historian of horror.”⁶⁰

The work did not progress smoothly, as Zinke and the AG shared contrary visions of what the “white book” should entail. Zinke wanted a “handbook of historical worth” and legal basis for future criminal proceedings against expellers, while the AG imagined a reference guide capable of augmenting the homeland politics of the SL.⁶¹ In a 1950 conference, the AG demanded that the “white book” be shorter yet beyond reproach, meaning that charges of collective Soviet and Czechoslovakian guilt needed to remain muted so as to not “raise the slightest inkling” of attempts to engage in “atrocious propaganda.” Despite this, von Auen felt that

⁵⁸ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Turnwald, *Dokumente zur Austreibung*. The partially federally supported documentation predated Schieder’s efforts and made use of the same materials of the federal project, publishing even more sensational reports that the historians had deemed salacious and unverifiable, and therefore open to accusations of propaganda.

⁵⁹ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Prinz von Thurn und Taxis to von Auen, December 3, 1949. Von Thurn und Taxis requested SL “propaganda materials” that he sought to funnel into “proper channels that can help our cause” both domestically and abroad.

⁶⁰ “Damit sie weinen können,” *Der Spiegel*, January 19, 1950, 9. See also files in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456. Walter Becher since 1945 gathered reports while working with the *Sudetendeutschen Hilfsstelle*. Maier and Sudetendeutscher Rat, *40 Jahre Sudetendeutscher Rechtskampf*, 43. These together with Wenzel Jaksch’s statements gathered for his UN petition, as well as materials sent on by Schieder Commission staffer and AG member Wilhelm Turnwald, the Sudeten Germans collected some 1,000 testimonies by 1950.

⁶¹ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Zinke’s memo on the *Dokumentation*, August 6, 1950. In an interview with *Spiegel*, for instance, Zinke commented that “there may one day after all be a Czech Nuremberg.” “Damit sie weinen können,” 9.

the brutality needed to be clearer and more accessible. Wenzel Jaksch reminded attendees of the intended foreign audience, and emphasized the greater need for refuting assumptions of a “humane transfer” and proving that excesses were centrally directed by Beneš and Stalin. Jaksch furthermore raised the idea of noting that Nazis also persecuted Sudeten Germans, while Czechs “did not do all that badly” in the Third Reich, where they enjoyed equal citizenship. After art historian Wilhelm Turnwald warned that many testimonies lacked verification, the AG concluded that another call for materials needed to be issued in order to produce a “documentation of truth” that would not “raise hatred or serve cheap propaganda.”⁶²

In the summer of 1950, the AG sacked Zinke for lack of progress and unwillingness to work with the leadership, replacing him with Turnwald.⁶³ In October 1951, the AG officially presented the 369 testimonies to the public, though *Spiegel* printed excerpts the previous year.⁶⁴ In a foreword written by Hans Schütz, von Auen, and Richard Reitzner, the editors declared that the reports documented a “genocide” and violation of “the most crucial laws of morality and ethics, of ethnic and natural rights.” This injustice legitimized claims to “the ancestral homeland of nearly a thousand years,” reparations, and punishment of the guilty.⁶⁵ Turnwald’s introduction reiterated these themes and decried the “mass crimes” and “genocide.”⁶⁶ The politically charged

⁶² BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Protocol der AG, Kommissionssitzung, April 15, 1950. Zinke drafted his own memo that reveals some insight into some of the issues plaguing the “white book.” Zinke for instance lamented that no one read the manuscript: Von Auen had perused about a third but preferred a “journalistic tone,” while Hans Schütz admitted to reading a few pages before concluding that the “maudlin” tone made the work “unusable.” BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Zinke’s memo on the *Dokumentation*, August 6, 1950.

⁶³ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Becher to Zinke, August 10, 1950. In other words, Zinke did not bend to the will of the AG, and needed to be replaced.

⁶⁴ “Damit sie weinen können.” Selected reports gathered by Zinke were included in newsletters sent by Sudeten leaders to constituents. BahHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 1, Rundschreiben Nr. 1, September 17, 1948.

⁶⁵ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Turnwald, *Dokumente zur Austreibung*, V.

⁶⁶ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Turnwald, VII.

statements eschewed any form of Sudeten German involvement or complicity in the course of events of the immediate past. Indeed, Turnwald framed the testimonies within the context of a reading of history which amounted to a summary of the AG's *völkisch*-tinged perceptions, already enshrined in its 1950 historical overview of Bohemia and Moravia.⁶⁷

The work amounted to a “politically motivated indictment against Potsdam” intended to instrumentalize the expulsions.⁶⁸ The Allies allegedly destroyed a culturally rich community, thereby irrationally terminating the “historical mission of the Germans” in a region marked by the “power play between the ‘civilized’ and the ‘barbaric’ world.”⁶⁹ Notions of cultural or racial superiority were widely shared across expellee factions. That such thoughts echoed the worldview of *völkisch* nationalists and Nazi racial ideology seemed to go unnoticed by German authors. In the context of the Cold War, however, visions of historic German dominance, which formed a bulwark against Asiatic barbarism, resonated powerfully. Indeed, just as since the Middle Ages Germans defended Western Civilization against the threats from the Orient, expellees maintained that they deserved a leading role in the struggle against Bolshevism.

To drive home the cataclysmic error that Anglo-Americans committed in Potsdam, the AG offered its interpretation of history that emphasized Slavic aggression and expellee innocence. Not only were the expulsions the “[t]riumph of the Slavic-nationalist movement,”

⁶⁷ Helmut Preidel, ed., *Die Deutschen in Böhmen und Mähren: ein historischer Überblick* (Gräfelfing bei München: E. Gans, 1950).

⁶⁸ Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 328.

⁶⁹ Preidel, *Die Deutschen in Böhmen und Mähren*, 8. The historian Wilhelm Weizsäcker put it similarly in 1949: The Sudeten Germans engaged in a “historical program” of transporting “Western culture” to the East, “in order to promulgate the lessons of the cross in desolate areas and to tame the crude manners of still half-pagan tribes through hard work.” Wilhelm Weizsäcker, “Die geschichtliche Sendung des Sudetendeutschums,” *Sudetendeutsche Blätter für Kunst und Wissenschaft*, vol. 1 nr. 1 (1949), 5; and *Ibid.*, vol. 1 nr. 3 (1949), 10. The Sudeten Germans were not alone in their belief that Germans first brought Christianity and culture to the East through peaceful missionary, as these themes were common among all expellee associations.

they “equaled German National Socialism.”⁷⁰ Germans suffered from Slavic antagonism for centuries, but the true plight of the Sudetenland began in 1918 with the thwarted right to self-determination promised by Woodrow Wilson. The Sudeten Germans were objects, not subjects of history, betrayed in 1918, 1938, and in 1945. Turnwald continued these themes in the “white book,” reframing support of Sudeten Germans for Hitler as misguided enthusiasm over being freed from Czechoslovakian mistreatment and hope for the “overcoming of all perceived problems in economic and political areas” which Hitler ostensibly accomplished in Germany.⁷¹ That the affinity could be explained by the overlap of National Socialist ideology with the ethno-nationalism of broad segments of the Sudeten German population went unmentioned, as did the role of the Sudetenland in the expansionary foreign policy of Nazi Germany.

The offsetting of German war crimes with the expulsions and relativizing of National Socialism and Sudeten German responsibility for events before 1945 did not significantly differ from similar attempts of authors loosely associated with the Sudeten German elite. The AG instead painted a grim picture of brutalities cast as aggression going back centuries. Hussitism as an age-old proto-nationalism which tormented the peaceful German carriers of culture, now fused with communist decrees, fulfilled the ancient Slavic objective of driving into the heart of Europe. Emotionally charged language filled the “white book”: Reports of stoning, women pulled apart by horses, human torches to honor Beneš, in addition to countless instances of humiliation and degrading chicanery, constituted the “typical” Sudeten German experiences that made the case for astonishing suffering. Though many of the reports emanated from second-hand

⁷⁰ Preidel, 7.

⁷¹ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Turnwald, *Dokumente zur Austreibung*, XII.

or third-hand sources, Turnwald nevertheless declared them “beyond reproach.”⁷² In either case, the “white book” unmistakably reflected the historical understanding of the Sudeten leadership, leveraging expellee suffering under the mantle of “objectivity.” In reality, the selective interpretation of recent history was a blatant “self-stylization of the in-group into victims and refraining from any individual responsibility for the historical processes before 1918 or 1945.”⁷³

While the “white book” outlined the historical understanding of the Sudeten German leadership and presented their suffering that supported their demands, the *Sudetendeutsche Atlas* established the geographic claims and boundaries of the Sudetenland.⁷⁴ Partially financed by the Foreign Ministry, the atlas’ scenic countryside images and cityscapes presented an idealized Sudetenland. As a brochure advertising the publication announced, the “scholarly...work provides future conferences an atlas of the geographic-historical realities of the Sudetenland.”⁷⁵ The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* heralded its contribution to the “detoxification of...national antagonism.”⁷⁶ The captions in German, French, and English indeed signaled desires to guide international audiences through the AG’s Sudetenland, but declining Czech text hardly suggested a reconciliatory discussion over these linguistic borderlands in the heart of Europe.

The inclusion of Czech would have implicitly weakened claims of centuries of German influence in the region. Its absence therefore reflected not “geographic-historical realities,” but political ambitions and nationalist imaginations of the AG. That the atlas entailed a continuation

⁷² “Sudetendeutsche schildern Austreibung aus der CSR,” *Die Welt*, October 24, 1951, 8.

⁷³ Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 89.

⁷⁴ Emil Meynen and Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung sudetendeutscher Interessen, eds., *Sudetendeutscher Atlas* (München: Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung sudetendeutscher Interessen, 1954).

⁷⁵ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Brochure for Sudetendeutscher Atlas, circa 1954/55.

⁷⁶ Press clipping from March 6, 1954, in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456.

of interwar and National Socialist *Volkstumskampf* (“ethnic struggle”) becomes clear when one considers the editors. Initially, the AG entrusted the *völkisch* geographer Gustav Fochler-Hauke with the project until his 1948 departure to Argentina in order to evade denazification procedures.⁷⁷ The AG next turned to the geographer Emil Meynen, a scholar also implicated in the academic legitimization of ethnic and nationalist claims.⁷⁸ He was assisted by Ernst Schwarz, a professor of German language and literature at Prague University who fled Czechoslovakia in 1945 with ethno-cartographic maps that would serve as the basis for much of the atlas’ proposed linguistic boundaries.⁷⁹ The tendentious extent of German linguistic areas did not reflect realities, and dismissed the fluidity of identity and national belonging that prevailed in the region into the early 20th century.⁸⁰ In other words, the *Sudetendeutsche Atlas* amounted to outright ethno-nationalist geography, a symbolic Sudeten German occupation of large swaths of Bohemia and Moravia tenuously masked by a “scholarly” veneer endorsed by “experts.”

For hardliners, the already generous demarcations of Meynen did not go far enough. SL member Rudolf Staffen proposed that for the second edition, territories with more than fifty

⁷⁷ Fochler-Hauke studied under Karl Haushofer, an early theoretician of “Lebensraum.” Just who exactly the AG turned to and what philosophy they admired emerges in Fochler-Hauke’s 1937 thoughts on the “Sudeten German *Volksboden* [ethnic land]”: “The struggle for the further advancement and pushing back of the linguistic border...has since the time of the emigration of the Germanic tribes from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia and subsequent Slavic infiltration and opposing German medieval re-conquest...never come to a standstill. Nowhere in the world has the struggle for national ownership been bitterer than in Bohemia, and nowhere is the fight for the claim on the one hand and further advancement of power on the other been more doggedly carried out than in the Sudeten lands.” Quoted in Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 96.

⁷⁸ Between 1937 and 1944, Meynen co-edited an *Ostforschung* publication, and during the war directed the *Publikationsstelle Ost* (Eastern Publication Office) in Berlin, an institution within the Ministry for Eastern Territories and disseminator of Nazi racial studies. For more see Michael Fahlbusch et al., *Handbuch der völkischen Wissenschaften: Akteure, Netzwerke, Forschungsprogramme* (Munich: Saur, 2008), 422–28.

⁷⁹ Schwarz spent the interwar and Nazi period attempting to prove German supremacy in the Bohemian lands by documenting substantial reaches of German culture in Czechoslovakia. Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 98.

⁸⁰ Pieter M Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

percent German language simply appear as German outright, as in “Western democracies 51% is a majority.” Moreover, maps documenting pan-Slavism, and how this menace had become a reality, would provide evidence of historic Slavic aggression. While he acknowledged the benefit of “exact” measurements that prevented Czechoslovakian criticisms, Staffen pointed out that the appearance of a more contiguous Sudetenland appear and removal of unsightly linguistic islands would mitigate against foreigners feeling that it would not be worth “fighting” these areas and increase the “propagandistic effectiveness” of the publication.⁸¹ Similarly, Reinhard Pozorny—an editor of *Sudetendeutsche Zeitung* and staffer at *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, as well as the SL’s reviewer of publications covering the Sudeten question—advised against the inclusion of Czech language islands. “Since the language borders...can never be drawn 100% accurately,” Pozorny counseled, “I would recommend for purely propagandistic purposes that certain changes be made in the future” to reflect a more favorable picture for the SL.⁸² While Sudeten leaders grappled with the multiethnic composition of the former Hapsburg domains that they themselves so often praised, maximizing the extant of Sudeten culture opportunely supported postwar claims of a return of territories that ostensibly belonged to the Germanic realm since time immemorial.

Between a “Documents of Inhumanity” and Contemporary History: Federal Efforts of Constructing “Flight and Expulsion”

While independent entities began their efforts of documenting the expulsions, refugee offices in the American Zone likewise saw the need for a systematic securing of testimonies. In

⁸¹ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 456, Staffen to Walter Becher, June 24, 1954. Walter Becher welcomed Staffen’s ideas, but expected that Meynen would rejected “any political-propagandistic tendencies” because they would undermine the “value” of the atlas. “One can be of differing opinions about this,” Becher added. Ibid, Becher to Staffen, June 28, 1954.

⁸² BayHStA, Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 80, Pozorny to Becher, August 17, 1955.

1947, gathering of materials with emphasis on atrocities and violent excesses perpetrated against Germans began in earnest. The intention, as guidelines for the endeavor explained, was a record of the “actual contexts and occurrences” which would “create irreproachable material for a future German government.”⁸³ Acknowledging its political ramifications, an August 1949 resolution of the Minister-Presidents of Bizonia entrusted the project and all materials to the *Friedensbüro*, explicitly founded to coordinate efforts for eventual peace talks.⁸⁴ The anticipated product, which received a mention in Adenauer’s first government declaration, became a crucial agenda of the young Federal Republic: A “White Book” that would arm a German delegation with irrefutable proof of the injustice and economic irrationality of the forced migrations and territorial truncation of Germany.

Beginning in late 1949, appeals for testimonies circulated throughout Germany in press, radio, and letters. In the refugee camp in Friedland, a small staff instituted an office interviewing arrivals from the SBZ with an expulsion background.⁸⁵ The *Büro* commissioned Wilhelm Turnwald to gather materials to the Sudetenland, while Prof. Fritz Valjavec focused on German minorities from southeastern Europe. The *Büro* turned to the circle of scholars in the north as well, engaging Hans von Spaeth-Meyken, a collaborator of Dirksen’s, to gather evidence relating to the territories east of the Oder and Neisse Rivers. The federal efforts therefore constituted a fusion of elements of the various strands discussed above.

⁸³ Cited in Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld,” 357–58. This strategy paralleled interwar stratagems of providing evidence to strengthen the defeated Reich’s position at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and mitigate against a harsh peace.

⁸⁴ Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BArch) B150-4187 vol. 1, Note on file re: “Refugee Documentation,” November 21, 1949.

⁸⁵ Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld,” 360.

The researchers never developed a uniform methodology for documenting testimonies. The case of Spaeth-Meyken exemplifies the process. In addition to identifying source bases of private persons or church organizations, starting in late 1949 Spaeth-Meyken appealed for assistance to homeland associations, who put him in touch with selected witnesses. Spaeth-Meyken solicited their cooperation in order to “prove to world public opinion the crimes committed against us.” His directed questions encouraged answers with only limited value for ascertaining context or an objective overview of historical processes: The chronological focus began with the Soviet incursion, with special attention on “especially great atrocities” and experiences after capitulation in “work, concentration or extermination camps.”⁸⁶ The questionnaire moreover invited respondents to contemplate whether witnessed crimes “were merely excesses of undisciplined enemy soldiers” or evidence of a “deliberate program for the extermination of Germandom.”⁸⁷

Spaeth-Meyken not only directed respondents to answers that would support a documentation of Soviet barbarity, the solicitations left little doubt as to the political intentions. The political stakes became clear with exhortations that the *Büro*'s involvement should remain unmentioned in public statements or in letters going to the SBZ.⁸⁸ Spaeth-Meyken furthermore cajoled respondents with emotional assurances that their experiences were of “decisive value in the struggle...for our homeland,” reminding that “it depends on all of us if eternal silence...will

⁸⁶ BArch B150-4187 vol. 1, undated form letter (c. late 1949 or early 1950) from Hans von Spaeth Meyken (Attachment No. 8). For a similar appeal, see *Ibid*, “Aufruf zur Sammlung von Erlebnisberichten,” undated (c. late 1949 or early 1950) (Attachment No. 3)

⁸⁷ BArch Bayreuth, Finding aid “Ost-Dokumentation 1” (Fragenbogenberichte zur Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa), 8.

⁸⁸ References in the expellee press and in the responses in the archive in Bayreuth refer to various calls, such as the “Aktion Ostpreussen,” which seemed to be the cover for the collection of materials.

reign over our expulsion, over the plight and death of our kin, or if the world will one day revise the injustice of Potsdam and Yalta.”⁸⁹ By invoking expellees’ “personal duty to the homeland,” the mawkish overtures complicated the securing of sober testimonies that would form the basis of an ostensibly objective study of the war and its consequences.⁹⁰

With the founding of the Federal Republic, the production of the “White Book” now fell to the Ministry for Expellees (BMVt). This office intended to turn the roughly 1,000 collected testimonies into a “documentation of the crimes against humanity” in order to “educate the world about the terrible fate of these people.”⁹¹ Foreign audiences needed particular education, as BMVt officials feared that communist regimes had gained an advantage in propagating historical interpretations that emphasized brutal German occupation policies and genocidal extermination. Mitigation of German guilt aimed to counteract the “opponents’ propaganda that has created the false impression that with the National Socialist invasion a large number of ‘Nazis’ arrived in the later liberated European lands,” where they “ostensibly raped the population, robbed, terrorized, and butchered the population as long as Hitler was in power.”⁹² A counter-narrative needed to

⁸⁹ BArch B150-4187 vol. 1, Undated form letter (c. late 1949 or early 1950) from Hans von Spaeth Meyken (Attachment No. 8). For insight into the worldview of another staffer, see the extensive letter from Dr. Hoppenrath in which he addresses his fears of the effectiveness of “mendacious” Polish propaganda, which ostensibly during WWI laid the groundwork for territorial gains at the expense of Germany. Hoppenrath felt it important to emphasize the investment and infrastructure improvements made by Germany in the East between 1939 and 1945, and voiced concerns over “unpleasant and bad stupidity” on the part of Germans in WWII that may present a “dangerous weapon in the hands of the political opponent.” BArch N1709-3, Hoppenrath to Diestelkamp, October 29, 1953.

⁹⁰ Indeed, upon taking over the project, Schieder dismissed roughly 65% of von Spaeth-Meyken’s materials as “not useable.” BArch N17903-3, von Keudell to Spaeth-Meyken, February 16, 1954.

⁹¹ BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, “Bericht über den augenblicklichen Stand und die Weiterführung der Arbeiten,” October 7, 1950, 2.

⁹² BArch B150 4171 vol. 1, Memo of von Wilpert re: Dokumentationen der Unmenschlichkeit, April 20, 1951, 2. The “propaganda” of the Eastern Bloc furthermore ostensibly emphasized that the “freed people justifiably rose up against their tormentors,” and that it was “unfortunate but understandable” that they didn’t “wear velvet gloves and the odd brutality transpired.”

make clear that the ancestors of expellees “possessed the right to the homeland...at a time when America was not even discovered yet, that they were not robbers and plunderers but carriers of culture, who for hundreds of years lived together with other peoples and...contributed substantially to the well-being” of the inhabitants of the region. Such a corrective would make “the inhumanity [perpetrated against Germans] appear all the more crassly.”⁹³

A number of issues complicated progress. Many reports, particularly gathered by Sudeten German groups, lacked “necessary objectivity” even for researchers eager to collect descriptions of atrocities.⁹⁴ The “propagandistic exaggeration or tendentious depiction” clearly undermined the value of the final product.⁹⁵ Source gaps to certain regions persisted as well, as the “hell of Soviet excesses and Polish sadistic torture” fragmented communities. Moreover, the struggle for survival left inadequate time for expellees to record a thorough report, and many did not provide precise details or shunned contemplating a painful past: The “experiences [were] so gruesome” that they defied description, and women remained silent in “justified shame.”⁹⁶ At other times, the BMVt dismissed testimonies altogether: In July 1951, an expellee wishing to have her recollections preserved for posterity received a rejection which pointed to the abundance of

⁹³ The BMVt noted that the focus should not just begin with the arrival of Soviet forces, but earlier. Several testimonies “continuously point to the events of 1939 (Blood Sunday in Bromberg, death march to Lowitsch, etc.) as the start of all crimes against humanity.” In other words, Polish aggression toward Germans needed to be emphasized, while the context of the Nazi occupation of Poland mitigated. The *Büro* engaged Otto Heike, a member of the Weichsel/Wartheland expellee association and editor of its organ *Stimmen aus den Osten*, to compile materials to acts of Polish brutalities before 1944/45. BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, “Bericht über den augenblicklichen Stand und die Weiterführung der Arbeiten,” October 7, 1950, 16.

⁹⁴ Many of these reports were however used by the AG in its “White Book.”

⁹⁵ BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, “Bericht über den augenblicklichen Stand und die Weiterführung der Arbeiten,” October 7, 1950, 9-10. The author of the report specifically mentioned the “White Book of 1939,” whose clearly propagandistic intentions left the project a failure. The BMVt did not desire a “litany of many...crimes and atrocities” that would disgust the reader, but instead “gripping” material that reflected the “historical truth.”

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 12-13.

materials and explained that “the fate and the experiences of the eastern expellees are after all the same, even if each individual may think their own experience as especially indicative.”⁹⁷

Administrative decisions raised a second set of problems. Ottomar Schreiber, the undersecretary of the BMVt and nominal director of the project, ardently insisted upon a speedy publication by summer of 1951. Yet another challenge emanated from difficulties of finding a suitable editor capable of towing the designated political course. BMVt officials emphasized the need for an uncompromised background in order to thwart allegations particularly from the Eastern Bloc of the “White Book” being nothing more than propaganda.⁹⁸ Several editorial and publication options fell through. Lack of financing, however, proved the greatest hurdle, and by the spring of 1951 staff members feared that the “White Book” faced termination.⁹⁹

Hearing of the project’s impending discontinuation from Spaeth-Meyken, former Stettin State Archive director Adolf Diestelkamp lobbied the federal government for continued support. In an extensive memorandum, he outlined the current state of research and potential.¹⁰⁰ The

⁹⁷ BArch 150-4171 vol. 2, Bruno Maurach to Marianne Weber, July 27, 1951.

⁹⁸ The historian Walter Recke initially seemed an ideal candidate given his ostensible standing as a “designated expert on the East.” In a letter soliciting Recke’s engagement on a project intending to “counter the notion of Nazis pouring into Eastern Europe,” BMVt officials warned of the potential that the documentation could face allegations of a “fallback into Nazi propaganda” if collaborators were not objective and with a “clean past.” The BMVt seemed confident of Recke’s credentials, yet desired to know if in all candor Recke considered himself “politically untainted [*unbelastet*]” and capable of withstanding public scrutiny. In the end, Recke’s NSDAP membership and scholarship during the Third Reich proved a liability. BArch B150-4171 vol 2, von Wilpert to Recke, April 20, 1951, 2.

⁹⁹ Several researchers started to jump ship with materials they had gathered. Von Witzendorff-Rehdiger, a collaborator who provided reports from Silesia, shipped materials to personal contacts in the United States who approached Senators Walter Langer and Guy Gabrielson, the Republican National Committee chairman. The Americans expressed interest in the material and its publication in the US. BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, “Bericht über den augenblicklichen Stand und die Weiterführung der Arbeiten,” October 7, 1950, 26. Turnwald also used portions of his testimonies for the Sudeten German “White Book.”

¹⁰⁰ BArch N 1539, “Denkschrift zur ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung aus den Ostgebieten,’” May 22, 1951. Diestelkamp noted the political potency of scholarship of the Reich Archive in the interwar period. Noting the “hard and unequivocal lessons of the peace negotiations” in 1919, he argued that only a rigorous scholarly publication could avoid the “German failure and omissions that...had a substantial share in the [1919] territorial losses.”

venture represented a “national-political duty with far-reaching significance” upon which “the future fate of these German territories may one day significantly depend.” Particularly in the United States, testimonies could play “a decisive factor in our struggle for the winning back of the German East.”¹⁰¹ The memo explicitly revealed foreign policy concerns, but also tensions between German suffering and the Nazi Past: Diestelkamp lauded federal financing of research on National Socialism, but claimed that “events in the East” should receive priority.¹⁰² Moreover, the Polish government understood the power of propagating a historical narrative in line with Warsaw’s politics and which underpinned its legitimacy.¹⁰³ The memo warned of the urgent necessity of a West German response grounded on evidence, and more comprehensive than a collection of testimonies speaking to atrocities envisioned by the BMVt.¹⁰⁴

As the “national duty” did not just concern expellees, representatives of the BMVt, the Foreign Ministry (AA), the Ministry of the Interior (BMI), and the Ministry for All-German Affairs (BMfgF) convened on July 13, 1951 in order to discuss the memo’s content.¹⁰⁵ The AA called for continuation, as a “great possibility [exists] that such a documentation will one day be of acute foreign policy interest.” Pointing to limited funds, the BMVt demurred and pleaded for a

¹⁰¹ BArch N 1539, “Denkschrift zur ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung aus den Ostgebieten,’” May 22, 1951, 4-5.

¹⁰² Diestelkamp presumably referred to the “Institute for Research on the National Socialist Period,” renamed into the Institute for Contemporary History (*Institut für Zeitgeschichte*) in Munich.

¹⁰³ This likely refers to the *Documenta occupationis Teutonicae*, a multivolume documentation put out by the Institut Zachodni (Western Institute) in Posen between 1945 and 1949, which outlined historic German aggression and supported Poland’s legitimate claims to the “Recovered Territories.”

¹⁰⁴ Indeed, in October 1950, Spaeth-Meyken reported that Diestelkamp’s contacts at the American Library of Congress warned of a “flood” of Eastern Bloc publications intended to influence American policymakers. BArch B150 4188, “Bericht über den augenblicklichen Stand und die Weiterführung der Arbeiten,” October 7, 1950, 26.

¹⁰⁵ BArch B150-4171, vol. 2, “Aufzeichnung über die Besprechung über die Fortführung der Dokumentation im Bundesministerium für Vertriebene am 13.7.51,” July 16, 1951. The Ministry of All-German affairs, whom Diestelkamp initially approached with the memorandum, arranged the meeting.

simple “documentation of inhumanity,” a compilation of atrocity reports that “should serve to educate foreign audiences about this pivotal chapter of the history of the German refugee problem.”¹⁰⁶ The BMfgF offered to appropriate funds from its budget, as the project “must by all means continue in order to secure materials for a defense against the documents already collected by the opposition, which are incriminating for us Germans.”¹⁰⁷

The offer of cobbling together funding from various ministries with a stake in a *Dokumentation* as proposed by Diestelkamp extended a lifeline to the project. The expanded scope, however, required new personnel. Schreiber and Diestelkamp turned to the conservative historian Hans Rothfels, who fortuitously returned to West Germany in 1951 after having fled in 1939. Rothfels welcomed the overtures, but recommended former University of Königsberg colleague Theodor Schieder to head the commission. His engagement with the *Göttinger Arbeitskreis* and the *Deutsches Büro für Friedensfragen* made him an ideal candidate. Moreover, his research during the interwar period on the repercussions of WWI on East Prussia provided useful methodological templates for the *Dokumentation*.¹⁰⁸

Despite “mixed feelings,” Schieder felt obligated to take the reins to prevent the publication of a “thriller” that would lead to “problematic effects.”¹⁰⁹ He insisted on qualified staffers capable of producing a study that could withstand critical scrutiny. Schieder argued for an account of the expulsions that included their sources and phases, and adhered to rigorous

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 4. The BMVt also received letters from expellee leaders and organizations pushing for a continuation. See the letters of Axel de Vries, the federal chairman of the VOL, to the BMVt in BArch B150-4171 vol. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Schieder directed the *Landesstelle Ostpreussen für Nachkriegsgeschichte*, an institute engaging in documenting the consequences of the war on the province. The revisionist historical enterprise was closely associated with the *Zentrallstelle für Nachkriegsgeschichte* in Berlin, led by the *Ostforscher* Albert Brackmann.

¹⁰⁹ BArch N1188-5, Theodor Schieder to Hans Rothfels, September 26, 1951.

academic standards.¹¹⁰ This stood at odds with the explicit propagandistic ambitions in the BMVt, which still desired a “documents of inhumanity.” Schieder acknowledged the “political usefulness” of influencing public opinion abroad, and that an official “white book” of the “most consequential incident in European history” could demonstrate that the expulsions had not occurred under “humane and orderly conditions.”¹¹¹ He emphasized that success depended on going beyond a litany of atrocities, and instead emphasize the centuries of German settlement in these territories and “Bolshevik origin of the expulsion program.” Only authoritative scholarship could moreover “from the outset eliminate all suspicions of propagandistic intentions.”¹¹²

Though it did not conform entirely to the expectations of the BMVt, the proposal contained enough common ground that Schreiber acceded turning the “documentation of inhumanity” into a “documentation of the expulsions.”¹¹³ The BMVt also approved suggested candidates who would join Schieder and Rothfels. Noted legal scholar Rudolf Laun and historian Peter Rassow joined the commission. Diestelkamp joined as well, and was replaced after his unexpected death by Werner Conze in 1956. Several young researchers assisted the doyens: Martin Broszat and Hans-Ulrich Wehler would go on to deeply influence the field of modern German history in their own right.

¹¹⁰ BArch B106-27733, Memo from October 1, 1951. See also BArch B150-4171 vol. 1, “Gutachten über eine Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den Ostgebieten für das Bundesministerium für die Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen,” October 1, 1951.

¹¹¹ BArch B106 27733, 130.

¹¹² BArch B106 27733, 131.

¹¹³ Already at the first meeting on October 15, 1951, Schreiber’s comments on the intentions of the documentation corresponded to a high degree with the proposals and even language of Schieder’s memorandum. See BArch B106-27733, Protocol of Meeting, October 15, 1951. For his part, Schieder expressed relief in a letter to Rothfels that he could disabuse the BMVt of its initial demands and “adjust the matter so that the entire process of the expulsion, and not for example just the ‘inhumanities’ by themselves.” BArch N1188-5, Schieder to Rothfels, November 17, 1951.

Promised full independence, the commission immediately convened and resolved to secure and carefully evaluate testimonies based on their scholarly merits, and not political considerations.¹¹⁴ Rothfels emphasized that sources should not be misappropriated for propagandistic purposes.¹¹⁵ The researchers quickly recognized that despite thousands of testimonies, there remained large gaps. Yet the bigger issue regarded the methodological blunders of the initial gathering of reports, which had been narrowly compiled with a focus on a documentation of atrocities. Schieder was appalled to learn that the BMVt remunerated staffers collecting testimonies based on the frequency of excesses such as murder or rape in reports.¹¹⁶ The project required additional gathering of testimonies, which by 1953 included around 20,000 responses to questionnaires, and 11,000 narrative-driven “reports of experience.”¹¹⁷

The researchers developed a methodology by which materials were evaluated for their authenticity, believability, and suitability.¹¹⁸ Schieder insisted upon eliminating uncorroborated testimonies or those which contained “obvious exaggeration,” “unfounded speculation,” “polemical” statements, or expressions of “resentment.”¹¹⁹ Moreover, instead of presenting a

¹¹⁴ BArch B106-27733, Protocol of Meeting, October 15, 1951.

¹¹⁵ Schreiber communicated to Rothfels that only “unimpeachable” materials should be used, and that their future use would “depend on the entire political development.” BArch B150-4171 vol. 1, undated memo [circa summer 1951].

¹¹⁶ BArch N1188-92, Protocol of Staff Meeting, June 16, 1952.

¹¹⁷ Between November 1951 and April 1952, Spaeth-Meyken reported that the commission evaluated 3,000 testimonies. Impressively, of the more than 12,000 communities of the German East, some 11,000 had been contacted by the commission in 13,130 inquiries, and that within three weeks of sending out the request over 6,000 responses had come in. BArch B150-4188, vol. 2, Spaeth-Meyken to BMVt, March 24, 1952. By January of 1953, the research staff evaluated more than 14,000 documents. See BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, “Arbeitsbericht” of Spaeth-Meyken, January 12, 1953, 5.

¹¹⁸ Martin Broszat, at the behest of Rothfels, delineated the “methods for a critical editing of documents” used in the project in Martin Broszat, “Massendokumentation als Methode zeitgeschichtlicher Forschung,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 2, no. 2 (1954): 202–13.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 61.

collection of individual fates, the commission sought to offer typical experiences representative of aspects of wartime experiences.¹²⁰ The historians desired a record that fulfilled political objectives and would “emphatically make the world public aware of things that until now have been for the most part hushed up.” As Schieder explained, at stake was the assessment of “one of the most momentous events in all of European history and one of the great catastrophes in the development of the German people.”¹²¹ But the commission also earnestly considered their professional obligations, and insisted to BMVt officials that they would investigate the “entire fate of the East German population in the end stage of the war in all of its various phases,” including developments beforehand.¹²² In short, this brought Schieder and his colleagues into “conflict between politics and contemporary history,” as Mathias Beer aptly assesses.¹²³

Some staffers on the project who predated Schieder’s arrival, such as Spaeth-Meyken, continued to live up to the political expectations of the BMVt and assured officials that the documents “prove that the extermination of Germanism in the territories east of the Oder-Neisse was planned and methodically carried out.”¹²⁴ Schieder however asserted himself by 1952 against tendencies to deliver a mere catalogue of horrors, ensuring selections that conformed to

¹²⁰ For more on Schieder’s thoughts on this, see Theodor Schieder, “Zum gegenwärtigen Verhältnis von Geschichte und Soziologie,” in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 3 (1952), S. 27-32; and Schieder, “Der Typus in der Geschichtswissenschaft,” in *Studium Generale* 5 (1952), S. 228-234.

¹²¹ BArch B150-4171 vol. 1, “Gutachten über eine Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den Ostgebieten für das Bundesministerium für die Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen,” October 1, 1951.

¹²² See BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, Memo from May 6, 1952; and BArch B106-27733, Memo from February 23, 1953. This corresponded to the expectations of at least Hans Lukaschek, the Ministry for Expellees, who pushed for greater attention on the events before 1945, including the course of the war, the Wehrmacht’s occupation in Eastern Europe, living conditions in the territories and mood of the population. See BArch B150-4188 vol. 2, “Arbeitsbericht” of Spaeth-Meyken, January 12, 1953.

¹²³ Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld.”

¹²⁴ BArch B150-4188, vol. 2, Spaeth-Meyken to BMVt, March 24, 1952.

standards of historical objectivity, at least as the commission understood it. The team proposed two volumes each for the Recovered Territories, Southeastern Europe, and the Sudetenland, with several more accessible testimonies as special publications for a broad audience.¹²⁵

By August 1953, the commission submitted a draft of the first two volumes to the Foreign Ministry, which foresaw no political issues with the content.¹²⁶ Armed with 400 editions, Hans Lukaschek travelled to the 1953 West German Association of Historians, where the expellee minister distributed copies free of charge.¹²⁷ A press release on the initiative explained that the *Dokumentation* represented a corrective to “constant foreign publications...with a tendentious anti-German content,” and sought to “secure the facts...and bring them to the world’s attention.”¹²⁸ Internally, some staffers were blunter: The work acted as a counterweight to Nazi crimes, as especially “[t]he Poles have understood how to influence world opinion through comprehensive, tendentious, and dishonest literature and propaganda since 1945.”¹²⁹

In September 1953, the BMVt officially released the *Dokumentation* on the territories beyond the Oder-Neiße Rivers. Schieder’s introduction invited readers to understand the content as the “final act of a war, in which written and unwritten laws...were violated a thousand fold, and the annihilation of entire peoples was not merely proclaimed as a goal, but indeed carried

¹²⁵ The most famous of these was Hans von Lehndorff’s “East Prussian Diary.” Two further supplements dealt with Pomerania and the Sudetenland. See Schell, *Ein Tagebuch aus Prag, 1945-46*; Käthe von Normann, *Ein Tagebuch aus Pommern, 1945-46: Aufzeichnungen* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, 1955); Hans Lehndorff, *Ein Bericht aus Ost- und Westpreussen, 1945-47*. (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 1960).

¹²⁶ BArch B150-4171, vol. 1, Letter of Foreign Ministry to the Federal Ministry for Expellees, August 22, 1953.

¹²⁷ BArch B150-4172, “Besprechung der wissenschaftlichen Kommission mit Minister Lukaschek,” September 11, 1952.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld,” 373.

¹²⁹ BArch B150-4187 vol. 2, “Mahnung. Eine Denkschrift zum gegenwärtigen Stand der ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa,’ 1955, 13.

out.”¹³⁰ Guided by “incorruptible love for the truth and not by the desire for denunciations or justification,” Schieder expressed confidence that the volume avoided a “presentation of isolated facts pulled from their context or a mere collection of...excesses and atrocities,” but instead a nuanced overview of the forced migrations that represented the diverse fates of expellees.¹³¹ If one policy influenced the work, the introduction assured, then it was the obligation to the “Charta of the Homeland Expellees” and its “explicit renunciation of vengeance and retribution”: The testimonies did not intend to cultivate hatred or incite feelings of self-pity, as the historians were “all too aware of the German share in the destinies of the last decades.”

A press release announcing the publication explained that the “especially representative” testimonies contained valuable information for all seeking to understand political developments since 1945. “A devastating series of images roll past our mind’s eye, violence that remains unatoned for because those who could have prevented them left their subordinates a free hand or even ordered the excesses, the plundering and the rapes.” When “letting the unfathomable scale of atrocities and barbarism sink in,” the reader could not forget one key thing, however: “That the Charta of the East German homeland associations solemnly declared the relinquishment of vengeance and retribution.”¹³² If audiences recognized this ethos even after learning the reality of “flight and expulsion,” then the *Dokumentation* will have contributed to the prevention of future forced migrations, the unification of all Europeans, and a return of expellees to their homeland. Or as the introduction pleaded: Not an “overlooking,” but a “responsible confrontation with the

¹³⁰ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), I.

¹³¹ Schieder, 1:IV.

¹³² BArch B106-27734, Press release re: *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, circa September 1953, 3.

most recent past” could foster “new moral strength” that ensured the reconciliation of Europeans, thereby assuring that “the unspeakable suffering of our generation is not entirely in vain.”¹³³

The humanist appeals and invocation of the Charta cannot obscure the volumes’ strategic purpose, namely the documentation of German victimhood that permitted a balancing of moral scales and underpinned revisionist claims. In a press conference the following spring the intentions seemed clearer: The West German government had no intention to “wake new feelings of revenge,” but rather desired to “present the proof that in this war, unfortunately on both sides the same measure of injustice was done.”¹³⁴

Good Germans, Bad Russians: Framing “Flight and Expulsion” for Foreign Audiences

The contention that “both sides” perpetrated injustices signaled the underlying objectives: Tipping moral scales. Informing foreign audiences that outside forces bore the blame lay at the heart of the *Dokumentation*, and permeate the testimonies that the commission selected. The Schieder Commission strategically constructed a victimhood narrative populated with victims and perpetrators in order to underpin claims of egregious suffering and demands for postwar restitution and winning back the German East. This framing unsurprisingly entailed a particular reading of the past with selective silences and memories.

First, the *Dokumentation* attempted to maximalize German losses by proffering an estimated 2.2 million dead in the territories east of the Oder and Neisse Rivers alone.¹³⁵ This

¹³³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:VI–VII.

¹³⁴ BArch B15-4171 vol. 1, “Aktenvermerk für die Pressekonferenz betreffend Dokumentation,” March 2, 1954.

¹³⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:158E. After comparing the pre-1939 populations with postwar statistics, the Schieder Commission estimated that alone nearly 2.2 million people perished in the territories Oder-Neiße territories. Schieder, 1:158E. These figures included natural deaths between 1939 and 1945, but also military personnel killed during the war. Problematically, the figures based on census data also counted regime victims, including German Jews who emigrated or perished in the Holocaust, among the number of German dead.

stood in contrast to expellee responses: Remarkably, when perusing responses in the archival materials, nearly half explicitly denied seeing or knowing of violent excesses perpetrated in their community.¹³⁶ Even a conservative acceptance estimates in the testimonies falls well short of purported millions of deaths. The Schieder Commission worried that endorsing a “too low” figure could lead to “politically undesirable conclusions...abroad,” yet rejected BMVt preference for the specious 3.1 million deaths calculated by historian Gotthold Rhode.¹³⁷

The West German government ultimately endorsed the commission’s estimation of some two million deaths for decades. Yet it continued to pressure scholars to increase their estimates: In 1954, the Federal Statistical Office encouraged Friedrich Burgdörfer—engaged by the BMVt to compile statistical information for the Schieder Commission—to add 100,000 to his estimate of 250,000 deaths in the Sudetenland, thereby bringing them closer to Rhode’s calculation of 450,000. The office furthermore warned the BMVt to prevent the publication of “confusing” material in a government publication.¹³⁸ The effort to move Burgdörfer to tout the political line failed, and the Schieder Commission stuck to his more conservative yet nevertheless inflated

Subtracting Wehrmacht KIA, the Schieder Commission concluded that 1.6 million perished from “flight and expulsion” specifically.

¹³⁶ See for instance BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 15; BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 122; BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 189; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 191.

¹³⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 89 and BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 94

¹³⁷ Ingo Haar, “Die deutschen ‘Vertreibungsverluste’—Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung,’” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch* 35 (2007): 261. See Gotthold Rhode, “Die Deutschen Im Osten Nach 1945,” *Zeitschrift Für Ostforschung* 2, no. 3 (1953): 387.

¹³⁸ BArch N1188, 3071, “Statistisches Bundesamt, Zwischenbericht über die Arbeiten zur zahlenmäßigen Feststellung der Verluste der Zivilbevölkerung durch Flucht und Vertreibung aus dem deutschen Reichsgebiet östlich der Oder-Neiße und aus den übrigen deutschen Siedlungsgebieten Ost- und Südosteuropas,” June 15, 1954.

figure of 225,600 deaths.¹³⁹ Only in 1958 did the Statistical Office reduce its estimates to 1.39 million dead in the Oder-Neisse territories, and 225,000 for Czechoslovakia.¹⁴⁰

Even these figures are too high, and their continued use ignores detailed investigations such as the one conducted by the Munich Tracing Service in 1964, which found 473,013 deaths through murder or deprivation by consulting “homeland registries.”¹⁴¹ In either case, historians together with government offices engaged in a concerted effort to push the number of expellee victims as high as possible in order to presumably lend greater moral gravity to West German political claims.¹⁴² The radical revisionist Sudeten German historian Heinz Nawratil made this cynical calculus explicit: “When one adds all the... figures and the expulsion victims, then one finds that in 1945 and afterward 6 to 10 million innocent people perished. The postwar losses therefore eclipse even the victims of German dictatorship and war between 1933 and 1945.”¹⁴³

Beyond engaging in a numbers game, the *Dokumentation* secondly sought to present the expulsions as an unjust historic error. Reports reminded that the territories had been German for centuries and not, as ill-informed audiences might assume, conquered through Nazi aggression.

¹³⁹ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 135E.

¹⁴⁰ Statistisches Bundesamt, *Die deutschen Vertreibungsverluste: Bevölkerungsbilanzen für die deutschen Vertreibungsgebiete 1939/50* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1958), 37; Statistisches Bundesamt, 355. This means that there existed a 210,000 person deficit between the Statistical Office and the Schieder Commission. Internally, the BMVt fretted as late as 1964 whether the discrepancy could undermine the validity of federal studies provide fodder for “mean-spirited critics” to cast them as unreliable and tendentious. BArch B106-27734, BMVt internal memorandum, (Referat I5 to Referat II2), April 21, 1964.

¹⁴¹ *Gesamterhebung zur Klärung des Schicksals der deutschen Bevölkerung in den Vertreibungsgebieten*. (München: Zentralstelle des Kirchlichen Suchdienstes in München, 1965).

¹⁴² For more, see Rüdiger Overmanns, “Personelle Verluste der deutschen Bevölkerung durch Flucht und Vertreibung,” *Dzieje najnowsze* 26, no. 2 (1994): 51–65; Haar, “Die deutschen ‘Vertreibungsverluste’—Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung.’”

¹⁴³ Heinz Nawratil, *Vertreibungs-Verbrechen an Deutschen: Tatbestand, Motive, Bewältigung* (München: Ullstein Verlag, 1982), 76.

They were the ancestral homelands of millions, where “families had been born, lived, and died, which [they] had loved, on which [they] had worked, and which [they] had defended against enemies,” as one West Prussian nobleman explained.¹⁴⁴ The population transfers marked the destruction of a “multinational community unlike any other in the world,” an expellee from Yugoslavia lamented.¹⁴⁵ Despite the 1938 annexation of the Sudetenland and 1939 occupation of Czechoslovakia, another testimony mourned the disappearance of a unique region only in 1945: A “land with a rich nature, an old culture, and a modern civilization...blessed with children, a peasantry, a working class, a middle class, intellectuals, a vibrant, vital nation in a bountiful homeland.” Since the dictates of Potsdam, Sudeten Germans were “a people no more, it is a chaotic mass of refugees, expellees, homeless, beggars” cast into a “distant uncertain fate.”¹⁴⁶ A report from Troppau (Opava) similarly grieved the dissolution of “unwritten solidarity among the unpolitical people of both nations...who had lived together here for years.”¹⁴⁷

Scholarship on the linguistic borderlands of Central Europe emphasizes the region’s multicultural composition, arguing that national identities and ethnic tensions arose only in the late 19th century.¹⁴⁸ By alluding to a romanticized and harmonious past stretching to the Middle Ages and simultaneously papering over political developments in 1933 and 1938/39, the editors

¹⁴⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:155.

¹⁴⁵ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus Jugoslawien*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 262.

¹⁴⁶ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*, vol. 2 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 465–66.

¹⁴⁷ Schieder, 2:46.

¹⁴⁸ Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848-1948* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*; Caitlin E Murdock, *Changing Places: Society, Culture, and Territory in the Saxon-Bohemian Borderlands : 1870-1946* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

underscored injustices perpetrated against Germans after 1945.¹⁴⁹ Culprits other than Germans bore responsibility for the destruction of the German East. Reports expressed disbelief over how “British and Americans, Christian people who lived according to the law, would tolerate the complete evacuation of Germans from entire provinces where those Germans had lived for centuries.” The outcome shook their “faith in the Anglo-American sense of justice.”¹⁵⁰ Another testimony voiced the hope that “this country was always German, thus the British and Americans are not suddenly going to allow it to become Polish.” Refugees felt confident that when “Asia has washed over us, the west will save us....With this knowledge and confidence, we quite consciously constructed the last wall of humanity in the east.”¹⁵¹ The Allies betrayed these convictions, and watched as the bulwark against Asian barbarism descended into flames.

Allegations of Allied short-sightedness reflected a common theme of “flight and expulsion” of the 1950s. Yet for all of Western imprudence, there existed a greater cause of German misfortune: Bolshevism, as opposed to the preceding twelve years of dictatorship and war of annihilation, explained the panorama of horrific testimonies that bore witness to the demise of Central European culture. For the editors, the key events that explained how millions unjustifiably lost their homeland started in 1944/45, with the arrival of Soviet forces. The driving impetus of the *Dokumentation*, namely providing evidence that would “prove to world public opinion the crimes committed against us,” created the main criteria for the selection of

¹⁴⁹ When the period of 1918 and 1945 came up, then usually in grievances of thwarted self-determination in 1918/1919 that featured prominently in expellee discourses, as well as the abuse of German ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe in the interwar period. The impact of Nazism and the war, however, received short shrift.

¹⁵⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:317.

¹⁵¹ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, vol. 2 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 362.

testimonials.¹⁵² Objectively documenting the “deliberate program for the extermination of Germandom” constituted a central pillar upon which the “white book” built its case.¹⁵³

Unsurprisingly, Soviet savagery emerged as the most persistent theme of the collection.

Establishing intentions mattered for the historians commissioned by the FRG. Horrific mass rape or murder purported to demonstrate an agenda of, as one testimony purported, “exterminating us Germans.”¹⁵⁴ The driving brutality of this process—evinced in reports describing notorious incidents such as the Nemmersdorf massacre or the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*—was Bolshevism and Slavic aggression. Spurred on by propaganda such as the writings of Ilya Ehrenburg exhorting to murder and rape, the wave of excesses revealed the Kremlin’s sinister plan to culturally and physically annihilate German influence in Eastern and Central Europe. The means, as the introduction to the *Dokumentation* authoritatively clarified, were “the expression of a manner of behavior and mentality which for European sensibilities is inconceivable and repulsive” and reflected “particular boundlessness and savagery.”¹⁵⁵

The savagery of the invasion and occupation of the USSR that did not justify but would have helped clarify Red Army behavior did not factor into the “driving forces and tendencies...that could offer an explanation of the often unthinkable atrocities and inhumane actions.”¹⁵⁶ Fleeting references to vengeance went unparsed, so that desires for retribution were

¹⁵² BArch B150-4187 vol. 1, undated form letter (c. late 1949 or early 1950) from Hans von Spaeth Meyken (Attachment No. 8).

¹⁵³ BArch Bayreuth, Finding aid “Ost-Dokumentation 1” (Fragenbogenberichte zur Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa), 8.

¹⁵⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 49-50.

¹⁵⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:61E.

¹⁵⁶ Schieder, 1:60E.

unclear. Instead, “flight and expulsion” were rooted in communist and Slavic barbarism, where events between 1933 and 1945 were hardly worth mentioning.¹⁵⁷ Such a framing naturally required a counterpart to the enemy’s cruelty, and explains why the *Dokumentation* contributed to the erection of the second pillar of the narrative of “flight and expulsion”: Innocent Germans unjustly enveloped by the storm that swept through the German East.

While Soviet soldiers and Polish and Czech militia ranked as the most prominent tormentors of expellees in the *Dokumentation*, the editors needed to deal with the National Socialist past, opting to distinguish between “good” and “bad” Germans. Nazi officials consistently appeared in the testimonies as corrupt and crazed tyrants, caricatures clinging to final victory and brutally suppressing “defeatism.”¹⁵⁸ Few genuine Nazis appear in the *Dokumentation* apart from those who harangue the beleaguered population. Yet in the eastern regions of the Reich, the NSDAP celebrated impressive electoral successes before 1933.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, accounts reveal faint clues that many a past now threatened to become the author’s undoing. A civil servant recounted how he “feverishly” destroyed incriminating papers and “anything that could remind one of the party” as Soviet forces besieged the town.¹⁶⁰ Burying or

¹⁵⁷ To be fair, the Schieder Commission acknowledged that Soviet excesses declined toward the end of the war: “The Soviet proclamations that exhorted the Red Army to acts of retribution were therefore stopped around mid-March 1945, and instead daily orders and fliers were distributed that called for discipline. [...] [T]he frequency and intensity of the excesses and acts of violence were, as far as the reports allow a judgment, somewhat less; especially blatant individual incidents are not attest to as often. But only with the period of the cessation of hostilities did a really noticeable alleviation for the German civilian population set in.” Schieder, 1:69E.

¹⁵⁸ For a typical example, see Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:680.. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:489.

¹⁵⁹ Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler’s Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012), 98.

¹⁶⁰ Josef Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 121.

burning uniforms seemed common.¹⁶¹ Apart from implying that witnesses knew enough of the nature of the Nazi dictatorship to fear retribution, the historians did not utilize such frank accounts, preferring to leave the issue of regime support unparsed and imbedded within litanies of seemingly inexplicable Soviet brutalities.

Careful framings and omissions manifest themselves when German misery explicitly collides with Nazi crimes. While the collapse of the Third Reich tore many of its citizens into abject hardship, its dissolution also meant that the horrendous suffering of Germany's victims continued unabated. Resolute to continue and finish the extermination of Europe's last remaining Jews, the SS evacuated its concentration camps and drove emaciated prisoners westward in thousands of death marches, frequently right through German cities and villages in plain sight.¹⁶² Sharing the very same roads as refugees, the columns would have been a common sight and irrefutably confronted the populace with the murderous reality of National Socialism.

There are expellee accounts which describe ghastly scenes that unfolded throughout the German East. "Everything heads westward," a report from Kanth (Kąty Wrocławskie) explains, and "among the column of evacuees the SS drive great numbers of prisoners, among them a tremendous amount of Jews." The brutality unfolded in plain sight: "The people were totally exhausted, fell to the ground, and were then yanked up by the SS, beaten, and forced onward. These endless columns of people on the flight moved a whole three weeks through Kanth."¹⁶³ A Red Cross nurse in Schweidnitz (Świdnica), shocked by the "cluster of ghosts" that confirmed

¹⁶¹ Henke, "Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien," 121.

¹⁶² Daniel Blatman, *The death marches: the final phase of Nazi genocide* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁶³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 194. Despite witnessing a death march, the author curiously conflates the end stage of the Holocaust with the fate of German civilians by referring to their violent forced evacuation as a "flight."

“rumors of Jews, foreigners, and political ‘criminals’ in horrendous camps,” described prisoners “dropping like flies” in front of her house in her diary: “All of it is madness, these people, these refugees, accompanied with the howl of sirens”¹⁶⁴ Others discovered grisly remnants of the death marches: Near Pillau, a child investigating the “large, dark ‘objects’ in the moonshine as far as one could see” was horrified to find “dead people, frozen stiff.” “On the left side of the jackets they have a badge: Stars. The first dead of my life, for a long time. Back on the wagon my questions only receive the answer: those are the Jews.”¹⁶⁵

Such open and emotional responses to the Holocaust are rarely found in the *Dokumentation*.¹⁶⁶ Accounts in which expellee suffering and the Nazi regime intersect typically remain ambivalent, and the nature of who is suffering and why appears murky. On numerous occasions, reports upend the hierarchy of victimhood, casting Germany’s victims as threats or sources of distress. An officer encountering evacuated prisoners recalled that the survivors requested rations and transport along with German refugees. After overcoming a “psychological resistance,” he prioritized the prisoner evacuation, as otherwise Germans would face “an extremely unreliable element.”¹⁶⁷ Yet another testimony transformed Germany’s victims into sinister figures, even in the hour of intense suffering: Stumbling upon thousands of Soviet POWs, an East Prussian woman noted the “ragged and pitiful, many Mongolian types” reduced

¹⁶⁴ Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (21.1-28.1.1945)*, vol. 2 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 169. The author noted that one family attempted to toss bread from their window, which led to their arrest. This made onlookers disperse out of fear.

¹⁶⁵ Stephan Hebel, ed., *Alltag in Trümmern. Zeitzeugen berichten über das Kriegsende 1945* (Berlin, 2005), 172. Curiously, despite fleeing through a war zone, the testimony makes clear that the murdered Jews were the first deceased that the author would see.

¹⁶⁶ For a rare exception, see Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:489.

¹⁶⁷ Schieder, 1:322. In other words, the forced evacuation of prisoners is framed as a flight, in which the victims beseech German authorities to evacuate them westward.

to eating raw morsels cut from horse cadavers. Nevertheless, the SS guard admonished her to “take cover,” as “one does not know what could happen in the next few minutes. The forest road is narrow and lonely, and if the prisoners now fall upon the treks, no one can help.”¹⁶⁸

When not terrified of the survivors of Nazi annihilationist policies, authors demonstrate an unwillingness to recognize them as victims, instead voicing irritation over the haughtiness of “grinning” and jubilant POWs expecting eminent liberation.¹⁶⁹ Refugees bitterly recall the indignities of having to tolerate “Poles standing on the street and grinning insolently” or in a refugee camp suffering “dressing-downs from the foreign, mostly Polish kitchen personnel!”¹⁷⁰ In addition to being subjected to perceived arrogance, respondents resented prisoner evacuees who kept forlorn refugees out in the cold: Herding them into confiscated barns, the SS forbade refugees from approaching the shelters, relegating them to the frigid outdoors.¹⁷¹ In another account, it is unclear at whom the author directs his bitterness: The police who closed the road, or the Soviet POWs driven westward while Germans sat in the cold, surrendered to the approaching Red Army.¹⁷²

Other testimonies suggested that erstwhile victims now emerged as tormentors. A woman from Transylvania discerned Jews among the Hungarians and communists exercising a “regime...of terror” after German surrender.¹⁷³ Elsewhere, Jews commanded camps holding

¹⁶⁸ Schieder, 1:96.

¹⁶⁹ Schieder, 1:96; Schieder, 1:143. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/192a, 71.

¹⁷⁰ Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (12.1-20.1.1945)*, vol. 1 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 796.; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 85.

¹⁷¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:112.

¹⁷² Schieder, 1:178.

¹⁷³ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus Rumänien*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 350.

German civilians or, as in Budapest, allegedly orchestrated the anti-German press campaign.¹⁷⁴ Liberated prisoners from Theresienstadt “overran the towns” and stole alcohol, after which they perpetrated “the usual excesses, and women were seized.”¹⁷⁵ When slave workers saw that their liberation was at hand, their sudden betrayal of their former masters—through plundering, denunciations, or any sort of cooperation and sign of affinity “of these Polacks” with the Red Army—astounded and infuriated authors.¹⁷⁶ The settling of scores, such as when a farmer was shot “by his own Pole,” seemed utterly random and unfathomable, though such acts very well had their root in the nature of the relationship between 1939 and 1945.¹⁷⁷ According to the testimonies, Germans now suddenly fell victim to inexplicable rage, made only all the more incomprehensible due to the missing context of the Holocaust and Nazi occupation policy.

The psychological reactions to the sudden cataclysmic disintegration of Nazi rule and role reversals are perhaps understandable. Moreover, civilians caught in the maelstrom of a disintegrating Eastern Front could not fully parse the causal events and privileging of evacuations of the regime’s prisoners. Postwar historians, on the other hand, eschewed their responsibilities for making sense of the material, and ultimately preferred accounts that left the Third Reich’s genocidal policies appearing incomprehensible. That the prioritization of evacuations of prisoners reflected a defined policy remains unmentioned: A directive of May 31, 1944 instructed the army and police to ensure the evacuation of industrial goods, foreign

¹⁷⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:182; Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus Ungarn*, vol. 2 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 91.

¹⁷⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:681.. See also Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Ungarn)*, 2:83.

¹⁷⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:337. See also Schieder, 1:185; Schieder, 1:190; Schieder, 1:200; Schieder, 1:230; Schieder, 1:271; Schieder, 1:459. See also BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 200.

¹⁷⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:159.

“workers,” and prisoners before German civilians.¹⁷⁸ German refugees observing death marches and glumly standing by as these figures rolled onward witnessed a deliberate effort to continue the destruction of the Third Reich’s racial victims, even at the expense of German civilians. In the last days of the war, numerous fates intersected, and the disintegration of the German East simultaneously spelled the coda to the Holocaust and fanatical effort to create a racial utopia.

The ambivalent treatment of the relationship between Nazism and the expulsions fulfilled three strategic aims intended to amplify the political potency of the *Dokumentation*. First, while digressions into genocide and the extermination policies may have gone beyond the project’s scope, the remarkable absence of the war of annihilation eliminated a factor that explained the rage and excesses perpetrated against Germans, and reason for the forced migrations as a whole. The utter lack of context made Red Army or liberated prisoner behavior incomprehensible. The barbarity of the past twelve years that now boomeranged in full force instead appeared as an inscrutable orgy of “hatred,” where those emotions received no explanation or commentaries from editors. Moreover, prominent attention on the murderous zealotry of the Third Reich would have undermined claims of unprecedented suffering of Germans, and thereby compromised a publication seeking to enshrine a particular victimhood narrative. Instead, the historians subordinated the anguish of Germany’s victims to that of the expellees and erected curious framings that left German victimization unquestioned and German culpability ignored.

¹⁷⁸ Helmuth Greiner et al., *Kriegstagebuch des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht (Wehrmachtführungsstab): 1945*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Bernhard & Graefe, 1961), 1565–67. How this prioritization manifested itself in practice can be gleaned from some of the refugee testimonies. While the population in Namslau (Namysłów), Silesia were assured by the Party that no need existed for an evacuation, Soviet POWs from a nearby camp had already been marched westward days before the January 19th directive to flee. Near Wirsitz (Wyrzysk) in West Prussia, treks found the road closed to civilians because 4,000 Soviet POWs were passing through. Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:178; Schieder, 1:415.

Secondly, numerous selections suggested that expellee agony equaled that of the regime's victims and that all suffered alike. The wave of violence and collective punishment through forced migration was irrational and heavy-handed. But since the expellees' "only offense is that they have a German name and German is their mother tongue," and that they were "born Germans," the expulsions seemingly had the same sinister and maniacal criminal logic as Nazi persecution of entire groups due to their "blood."¹⁷⁹ A Sudeten German's made the equivalency explicit: "What a bad comedy all this is: nothing is original, a copy of the Hitler regime, again and again we have to hear: 'Just as you have treated the Jews.'"¹⁸⁰

German and Jewish fates, suggested several testimonies, did not differ and in fact had much in common. In one of the only references to Auschwitz, a Silesian recalls the "pitiful procession...of fleeing farmers, English, French, and Russian prisoners, and Jews accompanied by SS soldiers. The Jews had come from Auschwitz and crept with frozen feet wrapped in rags." Curiously, after reporting that "[w]hoever broke down was shot and left lying there," the author asserts confidently: "But all were driven by the same thought: onwards to the West and don't fall into the hands of the Russians."¹⁸¹ That survivors of genocide, days away from liberation, preferred to flee with their tormentors amounts to an absurd interpretation that nevertheless underscores the ostensible boundless horror of the Red Army. In the *Dokumentation*, the marauding Soviet military equally tortures Germans and Jews desperate to escape, forging them into a community equally afflicted by the vagaries of war and the barbarism of totalitarian

¹⁷⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Ungarn)*, 2:175; Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Jugoslavien)*, 1:226.

¹⁸⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:439.

¹⁸¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:406. A report concerning slave laborers, ostensibly just as eager as the Germans to flee from the Red Army, echoes this sentiment: "They too had only one wish, not to fall into the hands of the Russians." Schieder, 1:292. Schieder, 1:84.

regimes. When Hans Graf von Lehndorff commented that Germans were “experiencing nothing unusual, nothing different from what millions of people have experienced in the past years,” the tacit recognition of the enormity of the Third Reich’s crimes nevertheless compares the fates of Germany and the victims of Nazi genocidal policies.¹⁸² Such comparisons emphasized Bolshevik savagery and simultaneously acted as an implied proposition to include innocent Germans in the community of recognized victims after 1945.

Invoking the Holocaust moreover provided useful language to describe the enormity of what expellees endured and a powerful analogy. Robert Moeller identifies “unmistakable parallels in the descriptions of German experience at the hands of Communists and Jewish experience at the hands of Germans” which remained implicit in many postwar “war stories.” At the risk of reading too much into reports and asking “whose hell [they] described,” numerous descriptions nevertheless remain striking: Germans digging their own graves, camps ruled by facetious maxims, wearing of armbands, “Jewish” starvation rations, “death marches,” selections between men and women, mounds of naked corpses, and the harvesting of gold teeth evoked familiar memories.¹⁸³ There was “no difference between the Germans and German Jews,” as a Breslau native explained, at the hands of the savage victors.¹⁸⁴

Despite superficial similarities and conscious efforts of Polish or Czech militias to replicate Nazi terror methods, reporting of atrocities perpetrated by Germany offered categories for measuring and articulating German trauma after 1945. In that sense, testimonies reflected a postwar discourse shaped by Allied occupation policy. The vociferous campaigns of Western

¹⁸² Lehndorff, *Ein Bericht aus Ost- und Westpreussen, 1945-47.*, 66.

¹⁸³ Moeller, *War Stories*, 79–80.

¹⁸⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 2:333.

and Soviet officials to confront Germans with their misdeeds may not have succeeded in making the case for collective guilt, but they circulated images and articulated a language to describe the experiences of an ostensible nation of innocent victims. As such, postwar references to expellee “death marches” very well may be understood as an unconscious attempt to describe what had happened in familiar terms, even if it appropriated imagery associated with Nazi atrocities. Similarly, avowals that life in the German East “could not have been worse [than] a concentration camp” sought to make German suffering comprehensible.¹⁸⁵ This additionally made it possible to emphasize Germany’s suffering before international audiences.

Thirdly, the selections allowed Germans to distance themselves from war crimes and National Socialism. Reports assured readers that they “intensely hated the Nazi regime from the very beginning.”¹⁸⁶ Another author, caught in an interrogation led by “[his] Pole whom [he] had employed many years,” needed to explain his NSDAP membership: He only joined in 1937 because “things had gone so well” and that he didn’t know war would happen. In any case, he treated all of his “workers” well, which got him off the hook.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, the magnanimous treatment of slaves proved an essential way of communicating decency and innocence. A Pomeranian master butcher who treated “[his] foreign workers in a humane fashion,” and “like anyone who thought and behaved decently” rejected “widespread reports...of the Russian acts of terror” as propaganda, believed he had nothing to fear. He was “bitterly disappointed.”¹⁸⁸ Another woman also was “always tolerant of Poles—no one hated us.” In fact, her husband

¹⁸⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Tschechoslowakei)*, 1984, 2:216.

¹⁸⁶ Schieder, 2:386. See also Lehdorff, *Ein Bericht aus Ost- und Westpreussen, 1945-47.*, 73.

¹⁸⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:199–200.

¹⁸⁸ Schieder, 1:233.

purportedly toiled as a sharecropper for a known Polish partisan, whose family they treated well while he was in hiding. Despite this, the mistreatment after the war from those “who in all those years had worked for us” forced the woman to flee in order to be “saved from the Pollacks.”¹⁸⁹ Casting the exploitative relationship as a benign employer-employee relationship was made easier with comments such as those of an East Prussian estate manager, who assured readers that Poles “had nearly the same rights as a German worker.”¹⁹⁰

Testimonies similarly carefully framed atrocities in order to eschew German culpability. In a report from Hungary, a refugee recalled the “endless columns of Jews” as “quite well dressed, with raincoats and rucksacks.” Those who could not go on were not shot, but helpfully lifted onto carts by a soldier who declared that “he was no murderer.”¹⁹¹ The memory of the humane gesture and implication that death marches did not seem so terrible aside, the account certainly described an atypical scene. A 1952 report from the Sambian Peninsula, written as a diary, similarly distinguished between “good” and “bad” Germans: “A few days before a larger transport of Jews found its end here,” the reader learns, after which “many of the hundreds...died from exhaustion, hunger, and maltreatment and remained unburied in the snow drifts.” The survivors were “driven...into the sea or shot by [foreign] guards.” Locals could not “prevent this insane act, which the population justifiably saw as an inhumane atrocity.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Schieder, 1:340–41. Generally, Poles frequently appeared as loyal and gracious subordinates, as a Pomeranian farm leader recalled: “As during five years of war, the comportment of the district was exemplary.” The preparations for flight were “optimally” supported by “our 6-7,000 prisoners and Eastern workers,” and “nowhere...did any sort of problems emerge from these people” until the arrival of the Soviets. Schieder, 1:292. See also Schieder, 1:84.

¹⁹⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 2:185.

¹⁹¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Ungarn)*, 2:15.

¹⁹² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:136.

The massacre of Palmnicken (Yantarny) in fact elicited a range of responses from civilians, some of whom risked their lives to aid survivors.¹⁹³ Despite acknowledging a ghastly crime, the report exposed readers to an expellee condemning Nazi crimes as “insanity” while setting up clear roles: German guards “had higher orders,” innocent bystanders expressed dismay, and “foreign guards” ultimately pulled the triggers. Many of the authors clearly internalized and repeated justifications for wartime behavior consistently heard in the early Federal Republic. Once again, however, one cannot overlook that historians strategically employed evidence that supported the political intentions of the *Dokumentation*. In this case and others, the testimonies offer a useful mitigation of German collective guilt and evidence of the decency of “ordinary Germans,” a key objective of the project.

When testimonies did not blur the lines of responsibility for war crimes, others expressed a willingness to atone for what “other” Germans had done. Forced by Polish militia to exhume Jewish victims for reburial, a woman in Lower Silesia was left “smelling like a corpse” and crying tears “that you couldn’t wash away.” The only way forward, the author professed, was to “stop crying, be brave, and thus assist in atoning for the crimes that were committed among our people.”¹⁹⁴ Helpfully, in some testimonies, survivors of the Holocaust performed acts of kindness and offered absolution and forgiveness to expellees. They did not demand “an eye for an eye,” and instead reminded that “we all have one God” and a shared humanity.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ SS guards drove mostly Jewish prisoners from various Stutthof satellite camps, murdering some 2,000 victims along the way before halting in the East Prussian township of Palmnicken (Yantarny). Presumably fearful of being overtaken by Soviet forces, the guards murdered the remaining 3,000 directly on the shores of the Baltic Sea. Andreas Kossert, “‘Endlösung on the ‘Amber Shore’: The Massacre in January 1945 on the Baltic Seashore—A Repressed Chapter of East Prussian History,” *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 49, no. 1 (2004): 3–21; Kershaw, *The End*, 184–86.

¹⁹⁴ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 2:439–40.

¹⁹⁵ Normann, *Ein Tagebuch aus Pommern, 1945-46*, 33.

When confrontation with unspeakable horrors did not elicit introspection, readers received declarations of ignorance. An expellee recalled an American officer—a “tall...blonde with blue eyes”—who offered condolences upon learning that the author’s son died in the war. A second officer, however, berated and “tortured” him with insults of “*Hitlerschwein* [Hitler swine]” and reminders that his son would still be alive had it not been for the father’s support of National Socialism. When the conversation turned to concentration camps, the officer flew into a rage when the German pleaded ignorance, stating that he only heard of Dachau. “In America, every child knows about it, and you pig, you claim not to know about Buchenwald?” Without indicating how he knew, the author easily determined “[h]e was a Jew.”¹⁹⁶

The encounter, portrayed as an unfair and bellicose browbeating, allowed victims of the forced migrations to disavow knowledge of Nazi crimes. When a witness to a massacre of Germans “asked the Russian why they had done this,” the explanation that “German soldiers had also shot dead women and children” stunned the author: “I responded that I did not believe this, as a soldier I would not have been able to carry it out.”¹⁹⁷ The confrontation and conversation, held in the immediate aftermath of a bloodbath, once again contrasted the Wehrmacht with the Red Army.¹⁹⁸ Disavowal of Nazi atrocities can also be seen in a 1951 report from Posen, one of

¹⁹⁶ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 2:83. Obviously, the author knew enough to register the connection between concentration camps and Jews, so that his dubious conclusion in any case undermines the avowals of complete ignorance.

¹⁹⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:200. Indeed, many Soviet soldiers explained that they exacted retribution for what Nazi Germany had perpetrated in the Soviet Union. As a woman recalled: “[A]ll who spoke a little German told of how their wives and sisters were treated much worse by German soldiers, that even some had been doused in gasoline and burned, locked in their homes and burned, shot, etc.” The dimensions of the war of annihilation that could help explain events in the German East, however, remained uncommented by editors, and such statements were left to readers to interpret. Schieder, 1:266.

¹⁹⁸ See the comments of Emmanuel Reichenberger, which spoke for many Germans. Chronicling the barbarity of the Soviet Union and Czech militia, Reichenberger fleetingly acknowledged supposed German crimes. However, Soviet “behavior in comparison to German soldiers must not be iterated.” Reichenberger, *Ostdeutsche Passion*, 11.

the longest in the volume. Incarcerated in a camp, an expellee petitioned the commandant to attend *Majdanek*, a Soviet documentary on the liberation of the extermination camp that included grisly details and interviews with survivors and guards. Asked by the commandant what she thought, the author dismissed the film as “propaganda,” suffering a stern and forceful rebuke.

In this case, the editors helpfully intervened to provide the reader with necessary context. Defending the author’s and all of Germany’s ignorance, the editors explained that the reaction “can be understood as a response to the enormity of the horrors with which she had just been presented, which were unknown to the German people under the National Socialist regime until the end of the war.”¹⁹⁹ Responses of disbelief indeed may not have been uncommon.²⁰⁰ Yet reading between the lines of testimonies, knowledge of crimes perpetrated by Germans was widespread, so that the exoneration of the historians seemed generous.²⁰¹

The lament of a police officer upon finding his murdered cousin seemed to capture the overall subtext of the *Dokumentation*: “Why does God allow that life and fortune of people is dependent on coincidence, on the delusions of a madman like Hitler, on the beast within men, on the lust for power of others?”²⁰² Despite burning his incriminating documents, the cousin could not escape the retribution of incensed Red Army soldiers, and the bereaved author had no answer

¹⁹⁹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 2:572..

²⁰⁰ For instance, a January 6, 1950 letter from a German who remained in Fraunberg (Frombork) lamented to her former neighbors in the FRG that “[w]e here are poor victims”: “A man from Warsaw told us that on orders of Hitler 6.5 million Jews were cooked into soap! He also knew the places and camps, but did not want to believe that I did not know anything about it. We after all are not responsible for such things.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 19.

²⁰¹ For the widespread knowledge of atrocities and war crimes, see Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008). See also the impressions recorded by the Austrian-American intelligence officer Saul Padover in Saul Kussiel Padover, *Experiment in Germany: The Story of an American Intelligence Officer* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1984). See also Walter Kempowski, *Haben Sie davon gewusst? Deutsche Antworten* (Hamburg: Knaus, 1979).

²⁰² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:399.

for the catastrophe that had befallen him and Germany. Yet the editors eagerly rendered a verdict for the twelve million expellees, and with them the nation: “Without a doubt innocent.”²⁰³

Leveraging Expellee Suffering: German Victimhood on the International Stage

Taken as a whole, the efforts of the think-tanks, expellee organizations, and federal ministries produced a historical record that reflected and shaped the mindsets of broad segments of West German society. The expellees moreover politically cemented their standing as an influential pressure group into the early 1950s, so that the Federal Republic could not overlook their demands for a foreign policy aimed at negotiating a return of the homeland and revision of the Potsdam Agreement. Through financial and moral support, in the nation’s constitution, and in virtually every party platform, West Germany unmistakably insisted upon the borders of 1937 in future unification negotiations.²⁰⁴ These positions were consistently impressed upon American and British audiences, from whom West Germany expected sympathy and alleviation.

The hardening geopolitical fronts forced a change in thinking among American officials that opened doors to German delegates. Increasingly, they referred to displaced Germans as “political refugees” and victims of the “Godless dictatorship” of communism.²⁰⁵ Western

²⁰³ Schieder, 1:112E.

²⁰⁴ There was broad political consensus within the FRG until the mid-1960s on this point, one which was lent greater foreign policy implications after the GDR recognized the Oder-Neiße Line as its border with Poland and renounced all territorial demands on Czechoslovakia in 1950. These developments forced the FRG to officially insist on the borders of 1937 as the still extant borders. The Sudetenland’s status as a territory annexed in 1938 by the Third Reich presented a political headache that German lawmakers ameliorated by insisting on Sudeten rights to a homeland and right of self-determination in a free unified Europe. Nevertheless, the FRG pronounced “custody” of the Sudeten expellees on July 14, 1950.

²⁰⁵ As the head of the US Displaced Persons Commission stated to German immigrants upon their arrival in the US in October 1951: “Those dates that many of you have told me about—the day your family was ordered to get out of your home, and your homeland—the day an arrest was made—the day that a long term in a prison camp began—the day that you realized that you were no longer free, but the oppressed victims of a Godless dictatorship. These are the

governments eagerly placed the blame for European turmoil at the feet of Moscow, so that German victimhood narratives, despite their transparent political subtext, found receptive audiences.²⁰⁶ German conversation partners recognized the new opportunities that European crises created.²⁰⁷ While they continued to speak of injustices and violations of democratic principles, expellee activists gradually backed away from strongly worded allegations of Western machinations, instead emphasizing Soviet duplicity in negotiations on the postwar European order that had misled their British and American comrades.²⁰⁸ As Walter Becher reflected: “The awareness that one commanded a moral balance sheet [*Schuldkonto*] with the expellers and their backers that was now also recognized by the United States assured me that I represented a just cause and could openly address our claims.”²⁰⁹

Recognizing the realities and opportunities of the Cold War, expellee indictments against the British and Americans partners therefore predictably tapered off.²¹⁰ Already in February 1949, West German expellee leaders such as Wenzel Jaksch advised colleagues to back down

dates that this day will erase.” Quoted in R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 299.

²⁰⁶ The “Walter Report,” while absolving the American government for the expulsions, cited the *fait accompli* orchestrated by Moscow and placed blame for excesses at the feet of the communist East European regimes.

²⁰⁷ While noting growing interest in expellee concerns with growing Cold War tensions—a situation the SL should take “advantage” of in its lobbying—Wuschek also reported that the SL did not enjoy “favorable” references in American communications to the State Department. BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 262, Anton Wuschek to Lodgman von Auen, March 9, 1953.

²⁰⁸ Already in February 1949, Wenzel Jaksch complained that pamphlets should emphasize salacious claims and tone down criticism Lucius Clay and other American occupation authorities, as the expellees would need to work with them. AdsD, NL Jaksch, J31, Jaksch to friends (form letter), February 13, 1949. Federal government officials also increasingly chided the expellees to moderate their criticisms of Western governments and their role in the expulsions. Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 162.

²⁰⁹ Walter Becher, *Zeitzeuge: ein Lebensbericht* (München: Langen Müller, 1990), 260.

²¹⁰ In February 1949, Wenzel Jaksch complained that pamphlets should minimize criticism of American authorities, as he would need to work with them. Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), NL Jaksch, J31, Form letter Feb 13, 1949.

from aggressive criticisms of American authorities, as these were crucial partners in the struggle to roll back communism and once again secure the lost homeland.²¹¹ Federal officials echoed these words of advice, admonishing expellee spokesmen that their condemnations eroded foreign and domestic faith in West German commitment to the Western integration.²¹² Expellees continued to speak of violations of democratic principles, yet backed away from pointed allegations of Western machinations and instead emphasized Soviet and communist treachery. Anglo-American culpability increasingly appeared as naiveté in the face of “Stalin and his henchmen,” as a flier published by the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) formulated it in May 1952.²¹³ As the anticommunist tenor increased with each crisis of the early Cold War, “flight and expulsion” provided a powerful morality tale on the stakes of the ideological conflict and menace of Bolshevism now threatening the very heart of Europe. Expellee experiences were the proof, and their voices the authoritative reminder of the existential struggle at hand.

In short, the various documentations of expellee suffering served as one of the primary pieces of evidence for expellee political claims within a new political context. To lend arguments emotional significance and simultaneously imbed them within the Cold War, expellees sought to leverage the politically useful history contained within the “white books,” many of which were translated into multiple languages by the 1950s. In 1953, for instance, the AG published an English translation of its “White Book,” in which readers learned that the “perilous state of the world” resulted largely from the expulsions and communist aggression.²¹⁴ Only an alleviation of

²¹¹ AdsD, Personal Papers of Wenzel Jaksch, J31, Form letter from Jaksch to friends, February 13, 1949.

²¹² Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 162.

²¹³ ACDP 07-001-3439, Union in Deutschland Flier, May 1952.

²¹⁴ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Turnwald, *Documents on the Expulsion of the Sudeten Germans.*, IV.

German hardship through a return of the homeland and combatting of Bolshevik barbarism, as revealed in the reports, could ensure the stability of Europe. Billed as a history lesson on the “consequences of radical nationalism,” the background of National Socialism remained absent. The introduction to the English translation of the *Dokumentation* communicated similar messages, explaining that the testimonies documented a viciousness “Asiatic in origin” and “inconceivable and abhorrent for the European mind.”²¹⁵ The “Documents of Humanity,” meanwhile, preached the message of German desires for reconciliation and forgiveness.²¹⁶

In other words, West Germans presented a framing which argued that the sources of German wartime and postwar anguish needed to be found in questions related to the Cold War, where anticommunism held more explanatory value than fascism. This Europeanization of the expulsions and imbedding in the Cold War and the greater “German Question” transformed German travails into political capital for “homeland politics.”²¹⁷ Moreover, narratives of German suffering at the hands of Soviets and Eastern Europeans provided concrete illustrations of the danger of Bolshevism, and reconfigured expellee experiences into a warning bell to the West of the stakes in the ideological struggle: Western Civilization. The confrontation between Christian

²¹⁵ Theodor Schieder and Adolf Diestelkamp, *The Expulsion of the German Population from the Territories East of the Oder-Neisse-Linie* (Bonn: Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims, 1958), 49.

²¹⁶ Göttinger Arbeitskreis and Karl Kurth, eds., *Documents of Humanity during the Mass Expulsions*. (New York: Harper, 1954).

²¹⁷ Among the most vociferous conflations of expulsion and Cold War politics were statements of the nationalist-conservative *Deutsche Partei* headed by Hans-Joachim Merkatz, Hans-Christoph Seebohm, and Heinrich Hellwege. The former two politicians were themselves expellees, and their experiences profoundly shaped their rabid anticommunism. While himself not an expellee, Hellwege also tied liberation of Eastern Europe from communism to a recovery of the lost territories and German rearmament, citing that the German youth had already in the Second World War “fought together with other European divisions in the belief that the defense of their homeland would simultaneously save Europe and its culture from Asiatic Bolshevism.” Heinrich Hellwege, *Deutsche Verantwortung: der konservative Weg in die Zukunft ; eine Rede und die Grundsätze der Deutschen Partei* (Bremerhaven: Nordwestdt. Verl. Ditzen, 1952), 7.

civilization and the Asiatic East was an existential struggle, expellees argued, but Europe had lost its important historical bulwark against this threat through the expulsions.

The FRG's various federal agencies with mandates that touched upon foreign policy directly and indirectly funded and disseminated literature intended to exert influence on world public opinion.²¹⁸ The Foreign Ministry distributed the *Dokumentation* particularly aggressively: German politicians, journalists, and universities received German copies, while German delegations presented similar foreign figures, international organizations, church leaders, and public intellectuals throughout the world with translations. From Vienna to Addis Ababa, from La Paz to New Delhi, the FRG sent thousands of editions to every conceivable address. Public libraries, universities, and even remote community colleges received the volumes as well; to this day, the spines of these bequests sit on most university library bookshelves.²¹⁹

Expellee associations also attempted to distribute their literature widely. The Sudeten German "White Book," for instance, acted as a "Sudeten German calling card," thrust into the hand of any notable that representatives of the Sudeten Germans encountered.²²⁰ Presented to German parliamentarians, journalists, and occupation officials, the "White Book" was already in its fourth edition a year after its publication.²²¹ In January 1951, the SL presented the United

²¹⁸ Some works did raise flags. For instance, the Foreign Office agreed to distribute Johannes Kaps's "Martyrium und Heldentum ostdeutscher Frauen" to its missions, who then individually could decide whether to distribute it to local universities, organizations, or personalities. There were reservations for a broader dissemination, as the work contained "almost exclusively atrocity reports," Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes (PA-AA), B 12, 288, "Vermerk," September 30, 1955, 1. Johannes Kaps, *Martyrium und Heldentum ostdeutscher Frauen: ein Ausschnitt aus der schlesischen Passion, 1945/46* (München: Niedermayer & Miesgang, 1954).

²¹⁹ See materials in PA-AA, B 12, 291B; and BArch B 12, 291B.

²²⁰ Weger, "Volkstumskampf" ohne Ende, 95. Through their contacts in the United States, the Sudeten Germans launched a "White Book campaign" in 1954. BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 440, Lodgman von Auen to Kurt Glaser, March 25, 1954.

²²¹ Weger, 95.

Nations with a copy.²²² Walter Becher meanwhile distributed the English translation to select American politicians and known anticommunists.²²³ In his autobiography, Becher claimed that especially among American politicians of the Republican Party the study had been “met with open ears” and opened doors.²²⁴ Even Pandit Nehru, who in the course of his attempts to internationalize the Indian freedom movement in the 1920s and 30s had visited the Sudetenland, received a copy from Richard Reitzner, in the hopes that the Indian Prime Minister would see similarities between the fate of the Sudeten Germans and the Indian people.²²⁵

Expellees also sought to distribute films and documentaries that would impress their political messages and historical interpretations upon foreign audiences. In October 1953, Wenzel Jaksch proposed a series of films “in service of European-American rapprochement.” “The current East-West conflict will not be won through force of arms alone,” Jaksch reasoned, noting that “[i]n the Cold War of ideologies, it depends on the force of historical consciousness as well.” Jaksch felt it imperative to overcome the “disunity of Europe” through a “common European historical awareness engendered.” To foster “spiritual assertiveness” in the face of Bolshevism, the films needed to focus on the role of Hellenism and Roman law, Christianity that “tamed” the disintegrating Roman Imperium, and the “birth of a European consciousness through the defense of eastern invasions and through the crusades.” The Whiggish history,

²²² Kurth, *Sudetenland. Ein Hand- und Nachschlagebuch über alle Siedlungsgebiete der Sudetendeutschen in Böhmen und Mähren/Schlesien*, 266. Ironically, it was a *New York Times* review of the “White Book” that inspired the Sudeten leadership to this action. “Genocide Laid to Czechs,” *New York Times*, October 24, 1951, 4. Sending the article to Richard Reitzner and Hans Schütz, Becher noted the “oppositional paper has framed the argument for us that should dictate the course,” namely targeting the UN. He recommended sending along a copy to their “confidant,” the West German General Consul in Paris, who could distribute it at an upcoming UN meeting in Paris. BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 195, Becher to Reitzner and Schütz, October 29, 1951.

²²³ Maier and Sudetendeutscher Rat, *40 Jahre Sudetendeutscher Rechtskampf*, 56.

²²⁴ Becher, *Zeitzeuge*, 508.

²²⁵ “Ein Weissbuch für Pandit Nehru,” *Die Brücke*, November 28, 1953, 15a.

Jaksch warned could not be a “propaganda enterprise of the Cold War.”²²⁶ The films, envisioned as teaching materials in classrooms on both sides of the Atlantic, never came to fruition, yet reveal the historical understand and worldview of the Sudeten German leadership.

To what degree expellees influenced the FRG’s foreign policy remains questionable.²²⁷ Matthias Stickler ultimately evaluates their activism as a resounding failure, since they constantly clashed with experts in the Foreign Ministry over frequent undiplomatic statements. The ultimate goal of establishing an outpost of the *Verband der Landsmannschaften* (VdL) in Washington D.C. never materialized due to intense rivalries between homeland associations, personal feuds, and latent resistance from the German Embassy in the United States, which worried that pompous and brusque comportment would undermine German diplomacy.²²⁸ Generally, Foreign Office State Secretary Walter Hallstein assured von Auen governmental support for expellee PR work abroad, even contemplating an “eastern propaganda radio station” conforming to their positions. Moreover, he nominally welcomed more engagement of “Eastern experts” from expellee circles, and endorsed efforts of the homeland associations to cultivate contacts to East European anticommunist exiles.²²⁹ But these gestures never allowed for the

²²⁶ AdsD NL Jaksch, J20, “Vorschlag für ein Programm historischer Filme im Dienste der europäisch-amerikanischen Annäherung,” October 25, 1953.

²²⁷ For a more detailed discussion of expellees and West German foreign policy, see Samuel Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat: Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Vertriebenenverbände* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 2000); Samuel Salzborn, *Heimatrecht und Volkstumskampf: aussenpolitische Konzepte der Vertriebenenverbände und ihre praktische Umsetzung* (Hannover: Offizin, 2001); Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*; Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*.

²²⁸ Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 349. On the rivalries, see materials in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 195.

²²⁹ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 440, “Gedächtnisschrift über meine Unterredung mit Staatssekretär Dr. Hallstein,” March 8, 1955. In a July 1954 letter, Hallstein assured von Auen that it would not influence or block Sudeten German negotiations with “Czechs prepared for reconciliation,” and wished the SL the best of luck. BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 247, Hallstein to von Auen, July 7, 1954.

hijacking of state offices by expellee organizations, despite great ideological conformity between them and government representatives.

Unable to colonize official institutions, expellee representatives nevertheless entered into the service of the government or worked with it indirectly. Though the Foreign Ministry successfully opposed domination of its Eastern European section by expellees, the pressure of homeland associations secured a position for Wilhelm Turnwald, the editor of the “White Book,” as a liaison officer and Eastern Bloc expert between the German Embassy and the State Department in 1955.²³⁰ From there he cultivated contacts to William Jackson, the special assistant to President Eisenhower, and his memos on Central European developments circulated as high as the desk of Allen Dulles, the longtime CIA Director, architect of the American Liberation Policy, and driving force behind US foreign policy in the postwar period.²³¹

Several lobbyists championed by expellee organizations also received tentative support. For instance, the Foreign Ministry argued in May 1953 that Richard Sallet, a former press secretary at the German Embassy in the US during the 1930s, should receive funding for his trip to attend the 25th Harvard reunion.²³² Indeed, Sallet used his friendship to Paul Nitze, a high-

²³⁰ AdsD, NL Jaksch, J2, Letter from Hans Krüger, Wenzel Jaksch, and Georg Manteuffel-Szoegé to Heinrich von Brentano, June 30, 1961. The 1961 appeal for a promotion for the disgruntled Turnwald praised his “excellent work” in establishing a relationship between him and the State Department’s Eastern Europe Section, as well as fostering connections to organizations “influential on public opinion,” such as universities and the Council on Foreign Relations.

²³¹ FOIA General CIA Records/CREST, CIA-RDP80B01676R004300050001-1.

²³² BArch B150-591 vol.1, Memorandum re: “Vorsprache von Herrn Dr. Richard Sallet, ZvD,” May 13, 1953. Sallet lived for 17 years in the United States, the memo noted, and graduated from Harvard in 1928. From his studies and time at the embassy until 1941, he cultivated contacts and garnered experience in “speaking with US circles and influencing public opinion.” The Foreign Ministry acknowledged that it could set a dangerous precedent and open the door to further requests from expellee associations, and that the funding could ultimately simply bankroll a private engagement. Linus Kather also pleaded with the Expellee Ministry that Sallet’s acquaintances in financial circles could positively impact American aid to Germany. The ministry ultimately allocated funds for the trip. BArch B150-591 vol.1, Kather to Anton Storch, April 29, 1953.

ranking State Department official and friend from his studies at Harvard, to set up meetings with Allen Dulles and American lawmakers, and coordinated with FRG officials during his travels.²³³ The hope that the trip would translate into Sallet's appointment as the fixed expellee representative in Washington D.C., however, never materialized due homeland association infighting.²³⁴ However, the government continued to support lobbying activities: In 1954 the Foreign Ministry committed to financing three to four trips lasting between six and eight weeks for VdL representatives.²³⁵ Federal funds also financed expellee contacts such as Hans Froehlich, an Upper Silesian Holocaust survivor and attorney who monitored Czech activities in the US for the Sudeten Germans. The Foreign Ministry funneled \$24,000 a year to Froehlich through the VdL in order to conceal the involvement of official offices.²³⁶

In addition to generous monetary assistance, the West German government expended considerable energy in helping expellees shape and propagate a specific interpretation of the outcome of World War II, as well as undermining competing narratives. In August 1956, Walter Hallstein convened a meeting between various ministries to consult on how to counter the theses

²³³ BArch B150-591 vol.1, Confidential Memo from German Embassy to Foreign Office, June 30, 1953. The German Embassy remained doubtful of Sallet's credentials, and feared that his activities during the Third Reich would be "thrown in his face." Despite expressing their support, officials seemed more interested in keeping tabs on Sallet and gleaning intelligence from him.

²³⁴ Initially, Sallet was considered as the preferred choice of several homeland associations to head up the potential "embassy" of the expellees in Washington D.C after an acrimonious feud over suitable candidates. While the Sudeten Germans preferred someone from their ranks, the East and West Prussians opposed these efforts. Ultimately, the SL proposed Richard Sallet, whom the East Prussian Association and Foreign Ministry supported. Otto von Habsburg also thought highly of Sallet, and offered him his professional contacts in the US. Ultimately, the head of the VdL, Manteuffel-Szoegge, blocked the measure, citing his youth, Habsburg allegiances, and that he was only nominally German (*Volkliste II*). Given the intense personal rivalry between Lodgman von Auen and Manteuffel-Szoegge, the VdL's stonewalling likely amounted to an attack on the SL. See correspondence in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 440.

²³⁵ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 440, Wuschek to von Auen, January 7, 1954. Through the initiative, the VdL managed to send representatives of the Silesian, East Prussian, and West Prussian associations.

²³⁶ BayHstA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 440, Hilf to von Auen, Apr 2, 1953.

put forth in the English historian Elizabeth Wiskemann's book, *Germany's Eastern Neighbors*, which struck at the heart of expellee homeland politics and the West German legal position on the German East. Wiskemann decried the "strong taste of nationalism" in expellee utterances, rejected their claims as dangerous revisionism, and argued that Germany's historic aggression validated the expulsions.²³⁷ The protocols, classified as "secret," document the concerted effort of the government to coordinate with a wide network of German scholars and newspapers to respond to critics, while keeping the government's influence in the background.²³⁸

Whatever qualms officials may have had over the comportment and domineering attitude of homeland associations, expellees and officials were in fundamental agreement over how "flight and expulsion" should be discussed with foreign audiences. As the protocols of a February 1955 meeting between representatives of various ministries, the VdL and the Federation of Expelled Germans (BvD) discussing public speeches demonstrate, the attendees agreed that the expulsions and division of Germany "emanated virtually only in the East, from the Soviet sphere."²³⁹ It was a question of optics, but not a fundamental difference of opinion on how West Germans needed to approach Western conversation partners.

The federal and expellee lobbying reveals a curious dynamic of West German foreign policy in the mid-1950s. It in part relied on the expellee associations, who enjoyed greater latitude in their indictments and exploitation of German suffering than official representatives of

²³⁷ Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Germany's Eastern Neighbours; Problems Relating to the Oder-Neisse Line and the Czech Frontier Regions*. (London, Oxford University Press, 1956), 190.

²³⁸ PA-AA, B 130, 3883A, "Aufzeichnung Besprechung im Auswärtigen Amt am 27. August 1956 über das Buch von E. Wiskemann, "Germany's Eastern Neighbors."

²³⁹ PA-AA B 12, 286, "Memo re: Discussions of the 'Dämmerchoppenkreises'", February 14, 1955. The representatives of the government urged the expellees to focus on the legal claims, emphasize the "Charta of the Homeland Expellees," and avoid still observable anti-Western criticisms.

the FRG. They therefore functioned in some regards as an “ancillary foreign policy” of West Germany.²⁴⁰ As Lodgman von Auen described in a 1952 memo, Sudeten German initiatives abroad offered a “division of labor between the Federal Republic and the expellees,” who could act as “helpers in areas of foreign policy in which [the government] at the moment cannot or does not wish to become active, but nevertheless under no circumstances should neglect.”²⁴¹ Elsewhere, von Auen argued that the homeland associations could educate uninformed foreigners and push back against East European propaganda in a more uninhibited manner than West German offices, who remained constrained by the niceties of diplomacy.²⁴²

Expellees therefore acted as unofficial communicators of positions that touched upon diplomatically delicate subjects. By not openly backing them, the government granted broad freedoms to these actors, who made surprising inroads into the American political elite. On numerous trips to the US between the early 1950s and late 1960s, the Sudeten German expellee politicians Walter Becher and Albert Karl Simon related the position of the SL in conversations with representatives of the State Department, politicians, and public intellectuals.²⁴³ The future director of the Sudeten German archive and SL “embassy” in Bonn, Anton Wuschek, used a

²⁴⁰ Wambach, *Verbändestaat und Parteienoligopol; Macht und Ohnmacht der Vertriebenenverbände.*, 90.

²⁴¹ Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 349.

²⁴² BayHstA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 247, Memo “Verbandes der Landsmannschaften an die Regierung der Bundesrepublik zur Unterstützung einer aktiven Ostpolitik,” undated (circa 1952/53). Von Auen emphasized that the goal of expellees was to make the return of the territories the goal of the entire German people and its government, and issued a series of unrealistic demands. Among other things, von Auen demanded that an expellee become the undersecretary of the Foreign Ministry, an expansion of the Eastern desk of the ministry staffed by expellees or workers who “understand the needs of the homeland associations and people” and knew the “real-political circumstances” of the Eastern Bloc. He also recommended a “propaganda office” in New York and Washington D.C., and eventually London, Paris, Madrid, Rome, Vienna, and several locations in South America should be considered.

²⁴³ Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” *ohne Ende*, 525.

1951 scholarship to the University of Ohio to forge contacts with American Congressmen, members of anticommunist Eastern European exile groups, and State Department officials.²⁴⁴

Through these ties, Sudeten Germans successfully disseminated and received American recognition of their interpretation of the Second World War. On August 1, 1953, Representative Usher Burdick (R, ND) read a letter of Walter Becher introducing the “White Book,” with an overview of the forced migrations and excerpts of testimonies, into the extended remarks of the Congressional Record.²⁴⁵ The following year, Burdick again introduced a letter of Becher’s making the “Sudeten German Case,” a distillation of the Sudeten leadership’s interpretation of history from the Middle Ages to the present.²⁴⁶ Burdick on three separate occasions read materials and correspondence from his Sudeten German contacts in Germany into the record in 1957 alone.²⁴⁷ In extended remarks in July 1959, Representative Albert H. Bosch (R, NY) read speeches from the Sudeten German Day held in Vienna in May of that year, in which the congressman reiterated German cultural achievements in Bohemia and contemplated the tragedy that had befallen them in 1945.²⁴⁸ Representative Brazilia Carroll Reece (R, TN) was so convinced by arguments provided by the expellees that he unleashed minor international

²⁴⁴ See correspondence in Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, SdA-Sprecherregistratur Lodgman v. Auen 205.

²⁴⁵ Usher L. Burdick, Walter Becher, and Association for the Protection of Sudeten German Interests, *Sudeten German Expellees* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1953). Becher’s letter, along with other reports, formed part of an official condemnation by the US Congress of communist excesses committed during the expulsions.

²⁴⁶ Usher L. Burdick, Walter Becher, and Association for the Protection of Sudeten German Interests, *The Sudeten German Case* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954).

²⁴⁷ Bernd Stöver, *Die Befreiung vom Kommunismus: amerikanische Liberation Policy im Kalten Krieg 1947-1991* (Köln: Böhlau, 2002), 711.

²⁴⁸ *105th Congressional Record-Appendix* (July 21, 1959), A6313-14.

controversy with statements that the citizens of Danzig had always been German.²⁴⁹ Reece also organized his own advisory committee on the expulsions, and drafted reports in support of the expellee's claims.²⁵⁰

German wartime suffering and evidence of communist atrocities served as powerful evidence for American Cold Warriors, who saw in the reports a confirmation of the menace of the Soviet Union that vindicated American moral superiority in the ideological struggle against communism. The numerous letters from Becher—in which he pontificated over European history, the nature of the forced migrations, and the SL's visions of a Central Europe free from communist tyranny—provided useful talking points for American hawks. Lawmakers quoted and relied on Becher's arguments debates over the Cold War foreign policy of the United States.²⁵¹ On May 14, 1955, for example, Congressman T.P. Sheehan (R, IL) relied on Becher's letter marking the tenth anniversary of the expulsions to make extensive remarks on the "true face of communism" and its enslavement of captive nations behind the Iron Curtain.²⁵²

The inquests of McCarthy ally and chairman of the House Select Committee on Communist Aggression, Senator Charles Kersten, also benefited from expellee memories of their experiences. Together with Brazilia Carroll Reece, Kersten travelled to Munich in 1954 to interview victims of the forced migrations as part of a fact-finding tour on Soviet wartime violence. Chaperoned by Glaser, the delegation met with witnesses recommended by the SL and

²⁴⁹ Jędrzej Giertych, *Poland and Germany: A Reply to Congressman B. Carrol Reece of Tennessee*. (London, 1958).

²⁵⁰ Stöver, *Die Befreiung vom Kommunismus*, 712. With help of the Göttinger Arbeitskreis, Reece published a German translation of a speech he gave in May 1957 in the House of Representatives. See Carroll Reece, *Das recht auf Deutschlands Osten* (Leer: Der Göttinger Arbeitskreis, 1957).

²⁵¹ A keyword search of "Walter Becher" in the US Government Publishing Office database yields 81 references.

²⁵² A.P. Sheehan, "The Communist State Security System," *Congressional Record* 104 (May 14, 1958), 8768.

who comprised its political elite, some of whom like Wenzel Jaksch had not themselves experienced the expulsions. The West German government consented to the initiative but feared East European protests, and therefore urged that the interviews take place in the American consulate in order to disguise official involvement.²⁵³ Kersten found the evidence immensely helpful in documenting the nature of Bolshevik terror and helping form a basis for his foreign policy views, adding that the expulsions in his estimation constituted a “political catastrophe” that only a liberation of Czechoslovakia from communist tyranny and a reconstruction of the German homeland could overcome. Von Auen noted with satisfaction that “our efforts to present the Sudeten German story along these lines has in a measure been successful.”²⁵⁴ Kersten’s observations in Munich provided the foundation for a report presented to Congress in August 1954, which elaborated on the experiences of the suppressed behind the Iron Curtain and warned of co-existence with the Soviet Union.²⁵⁵

Wenzel Jaksch for his part travelled to the US on several occasions, meeting with academics, labor representatives, and anticommunist associations, and even gave an invited talks

²⁵³ See files in PA-AA B 11, 546. In a letter to von Auen in which he railed against communist sympathies in the German media and their unfair coverage of the expellees, the Nuremberg trials, and proceedings against SS war criminals involved in the Malmedy massacre, Brada expressed his satisfaction that Kersten’s visit had gone completely uncovered by news agencies. Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, SdA, Sprecherregistratur Lodgman v. Auen, 184, Brada to v. Auen, September 24, 1954, 10.

²⁵⁴ Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, SdA, Sprecherregistratur Lodgman v. Auen, 270, v. Auen to Charles J. Kersten, August 4, 1954, 1-2. Lodgman von Auen thanked Kersten for his candid remarks and expressed satisfaction that the testimonies were deemed invaluable, adding that “perhaps you will find that the forced deportation of millions, with the accompanying political, economic and social chaos and misery...a phase of communist aggression of such magnitude that a further more specialized investigation of this problem is necessary.”

²⁵⁵ Charles Joseph Kersten, *Report of the Select Committee to Investigate Communist Aggression against Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, East Germany, Russia and the Non-Russian Nations of the U.S.S.R. Second Interim Report of the Select Committee on Communist Aggression, House of Representatives Eighty-Third Congress Second Session under Authority of H. Res. 346 and H. Res. 438. August 9, 1954* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1954).

at the Yale Political Science Department.²⁵⁶ The thrust of his arguments came to the fore at a speech before an assembly at Southern Illinois University on May 8, 1960, where Jaksch used the anniversary of V-E Day to contemplate how European history had come off the rails so tragically.²⁵⁷ Without dwelling on details on what American troops may have encountered in Germany, the speaker assured the audience that the liberators surprisingly “discovered that Germans had not been poisoned by Nazism,” and doubtlessly learned that “Stalinism is no different from Hitler’s methods, that totalitarianism is the enemy.” In a sweeping historical overview of German struggles for freedom going back to the 30 Years War, Jaksch concluded that Germany ultimately fell victim to unfortunate geography, which did not allow liberty to emerge until American and British forces transplanted it.

Above all, the speaker spoke at length on the “15 million expelled from their homes” and death of two million that underpinned the right to a homeland. The “terrible losses on many battlefields, 500,000 German civilians [who] perished in burning cities, [and] 800,000...dragged off by the Russians...somewhere in Siberia or in the Arctic region” needed to be atoned for. A peaceful Europe depended on a unified Germany, Jaksch added, whose “moral convalescence” since 1945 should allay fears of German belligerence.²⁵⁸ Two years later, Jaksch organized a high profile European-American conference in Chicago through the Foundation for Foreign Affairs.²⁵⁹ The “moral convalescence” seemed complete: In addition to covering topics related to

²⁵⁶ AdsD, NL Jaksch, J3, “Itinerary for the America Trip of Wenzel Jaksch, 1960 (April 18-May 19).

²⁵⁷ AdsD NL Jaksch, J20, “Germany and America as Partners in Freedom,” address by Wenzel Jaksch at a faculty-student assembly of Southern Illinois University, May 8, 1960. Kurt Glaser, who served on the faculty of Southern Illinois University, presumably arranged Jaksch’s presentation.

²⁵⁸ AdsD NL Jaksch, J20, “Germany and America as Partners in Freedom,” 9.

²⁵⁹ The conference was attended by expellee notables, German “East researchers” such as Eugen Lemberg, and more than 80 American scholars, as well as the arch-conservative political writer Christopher T. Emmet, who gave a presentation on the “drama of the mass expulsion of over 15 million Germans.” Covered by *Readers Digest*,

the expulsions, Jaksch crowed that it had fulfilled the purpose of counteracting “communist propaganda” that continually aimed at “keeping the memory of the crimes of Hitler fresh.”²⁶⁰

Conclusions

West German activism in the United States constituted what today we would regard as “soft power.” The fledgling democracy possessed good reason to present itself as a rehabilitated nation, reliable partner, and devotee of liberty. Yearly publications such as *Germany Reports* or *Germany Today* attempted to familiarize the transatlantic partner with their crucial ally in Central Europe.²⁶¹ Promotional materials beckoning tourists, academic exchanges to foster mutual understanding, and hosting of cultural foundations remain an important dimension of the Berlin Republic’s foreign policy today. Yet into the 1960s, the official materials of West Germany emphasized the continued existence of a Germany within the borders of 1937, and described the “flight and expulsion” endured by millions of its citizens which continued to represent a substantial financial and political burden on the Federal Republic.

Newsweek, and *Life*, the conference, Jaksch conceded, was a challenge in deciding when to deploy language of German self-criticism and self-determination. Wenzel Jaksch, “Möglichkeiten und Gefahren in USA. Ein Nachwort zur Chicago-Konferenz,” *Ost-West-Kurier*, April 3, 1962, in AdsD, NL Jaksch, J6.

²⁶⁰ The Ministry for All-German Affairs judged the success more moderately: By the 1960s, “German refugee issues are not only uninteresting, they are repugnant. They disturb the political stability and mark the Germans as a nation of perpetually agitated and discontented. German expellee problems must therefore be treated with special care in the USA and in France.” Quoted in Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 354–55. Jaksch himself perhaps validated the ministry’s misgivings when he opined that the conference served the important purpose of counteracting communist propaganda. “Most of the doyens of our cultural life—professors and notable radio personalities included—have not yet understood that the distancing from the National Socialist past does not free them of the responsibility to acknowledge legitimate interests of their own people against foreign totalitarianism. This is the situation: far into the ranks of our allies the propagandists of the Eastern Bloc are at work keeping the memory of the crimes of Hitler fresh and denouncing the Federal Republic as the successor state of the Third Reich.” Wenzel Jaksch, “Möglichkeiten und Gefahren in USA. Ein Nachwort zur Chicago-Konferenz,” *Ost-West-Kurier*, April 3, 1962, in AdsD, NL Jaksch, J6.

²⁶¹ See for instance Federal Republic of Germany, *Germany Reports* (Bonn: Press and information Office of the German Federal Government, 1953); Hans Joachim von Merkatz and Wolfgang Metzner, eds., *Germany Today: Facts and Figures* (Frankfurt am Main: Alfred Metzner Verlag, 1954).

A politically viable history, German officials and expellees believed, offered a potent legitimization of their positions and key to achieving reunification and at least a partial return of the lost territories. For this reason, they resuscitated interwar strategies of attempting to harness scholarship for political purposes, and invested substantial energies into the *Dokumentation* and *Weissbuch*. The background and intentions call into question claims of an “incorruptible love for the truth” and eschewal of recriminations in narratives of “flight and expulsion.” From the outset, the West German government attempted to “denounce one’s own suffering and those responsible for it and capitalize politically upon it.”²⁶²

The surprising transatlantic dimensions of “flight and expulsion” widen the perspective on the history and cultural memory of “flight and expulsion,” revealing an evolution of the communicative memory of the deportations and argumentative strategies of the expellees. These underwent a rapid development in the first fifteen years after 1945, exposing a dynamism of how German suffering was articulated and leveraged, and allowing several conclusions.

First, the founding of the FRG, and with it the entry of the expellee associations into politics, and context of the Cold War saw the instrumentalization of German suffering shift from alleviating humanitarian concerns to the long-term agenda of winning back the homeland. This inflected narratives with the “right to homeland” tenor, and saw the crystallization of a revanchist narrative that remained stagnant for decades. Yet another consequence of this evolution in the discourse was that overt denouncement of Western governments for their role in

²⁶² Mathias Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Hintergründe – Entstehung – Ergebnis – Wirkung,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 50 (1999): 113. These agendas tempted scholars to focus on the Schieder Commission’s deficiencies and dismiss achievements. For this tendency, see Moeller, *War Stories*; Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*. For a journalistic criticism, see Otto Köhler, “Zweierlei Erinnerung - Die Deutschen machten sich ihre Vertreibung selber,” *Der Freitag*, May 6, 2005, <https://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/die-deutschen-machten-sich-ihre-vertreibung-selber>. Such an evaluation nevertheless ignores the volumes’ significance and achievements. See the very nuanced analysis in Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld.”

the expulsions gradually disappeared. Instead, anticommunism emerged as a dominant theme, more than in the immediate postwar years.²⁶³ The twin pillars of innocent Germans and barbaric Soviets that constitute typical “flight and expulsion” narratives, moreover, emerged during the 1950s, and was lent credence by scholarly objectivity harnessed by the German government and expellee organizations.

Second, the agenda of dispelling “false impressions,” as a BMVt official explained, that all Germans “ostensibly raped the population, robbed, terrorized, and butchered” in Central and Eastern Europe attempted to obfuscate German war crimes, and offset these with German victimhood.²⁶⁴ This framing pushed back against the “constant reporting in the newspapers of the unbelievable charges that are raised against us,” as one testimony bemoaned. The author may have spoken for the curators of expellee memory that it was “high time that our case was brought to the public, just like that of the German concentration camps.”²⁶⁵ The *Dokumentation*’s selective portrayal unsurprisingly sought to “denounce suffered victimization and those responsible for it, and thereby gain political capital” among international audiences.²⁶⁶ The litany

²⁶³ As Matthias Stickler aptly summarizes: “Anticommunism indeed played an important, maybe even the decisive role in the ideological integration of the expellees, especially its right wing, into the Western-democratic community of values....The animus against the Western Allies was redirected against the Soviet Union, upon which completely ahistorically the entire blame for the loss of the homeland was placed. This simultaneously permanently prevented the reemergence of anti-Western resentments of the old German Right, in fact ‘Europe,’ understood as Europe of the Fatherlands in the Gaullist sense, was rebuilt as the new hope for the future, and democracy as a bulwark against Bolshevism was made attractive.” Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 361.

²⁶⁴ BArch B150 4171 vol. 1, Memo of von Wilpert re: Dokumentationen der Unmenschlichkeit, April 20, 1951, 2.

²⁶⁵ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 81.

²⁶⁶ Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Hintergründe – Entstehung – Ergebnis – Wirkung,” 113.

of horrors contained within its pages served as the “moral coin for settling accounts” and demanding justice.²⁶⁷

This was not a mere underlining of the innocence of not just the victims of “flight and expulsion,” however. Their experiences represented the entire nation, which suffered unduly through no fault of its own. If Germans were innocent, the testimonies implicitly asked, then how could they continue to face the wrath of the victors? With no relationship to National Socialism, German traumas and continued plight constituted a grave and historic injustice, bolstering claims to a recognition of victimhood and, therefore, restitution. The distancing to the Nazi past in the testimonies cleaved it from the history of forced migration, which continues to this day.

Lastly, while the homeland failed to come back, attempting to construct a narrative that would appeal to foreign and particularly American audiences proved an integrative exercise. Expellees recording their testimonies undoubtedly experienced a sense of closure, entrusting their memories to the stewardship of the government and thereby receiving recognition of their victimhood. Furthermore, framing Germany as a victim of communist aggression, and the strong anticommunist undertones of the documentations, show how immensely integrative the Cold War was for the integration of the Federal Republic into the Western Alliance.

The ideological contest reconfigured National Socialist racism and anti-Bolshevism, and redirected it in a new struggle against the continued nemesis of the Soviet Union. Narratives of victimhood and suffering therefore enjoyed great political resonance, as dissolution of the victors’ alliance created a bridge for certain Nazi ideologies to seamlessly carry over past 1945 and thereby provided a path to the West. By seeking a partnership with the United States, the FRG successfully shed an “occupied mentality” that made cooperation with the US attractive,

²⁶⁷ Moeller, *War Stories*, 79.

especially for nationalist-conservatives turned into Cold Warriors seeking to revise the postwar order, however misplaced these hopes were. The continued antipathy and struggle against the Soviet Union and reinterpretation of National Socialist principles, in other words, helped the Federal Republic become an important postwar ally and constructor of an anticommunist Europe. The expellees and their memory politics are a significant part of this story.

CHAPTER 7

AT THE NEXUS OF HISTORY, MEMORY, AND MYTH: THE MASTER NARRATIVE TAKES HOLD

In the fall of 1953, the Federal Ministry of Expellees (BMVt) presented the first volumes of the authoritative account of the chaos that enveloped the German East in 1944 and afterward. Based on 382 “especially representative” reports, the press release announcing the publication warned that a “devastating series of images roll past our mind’s eye.” Besides inviting readers to relive the events through the eyes of the expellees, the release simultaneously summarized the master narrative of “flight and expulsion”:

“We learn, in the words of those who went through it, the fate of fleeing East Prussians. We...see the long columns of the fleeing on the ice of the Vistula Lagoon, we follow the lonely road...that now becomes a terrible street of death. Then the firestorm of the encroaching front envelopes West Prussia and Pomerania, until finally Soviet breakthroughs...make a westward escape impossible and tens of thousands attempt...escape the closing trap via the sea. Devastated, we read the testimonies of the sinking of the ‘Wilhelm Gustloff’ and the ‘Goja,’ we learn from those who suffered overrunning Soviet tanks and needed to return in order to do slave work with completely inadequate nourishment. [...] We learn of the various Polish and Russian methods of treatment in territories surrendered to their mercy and ruthlessness, and understand why so many could no longer stand the abuses and ended their lives. [...] In unceasing waves the Germans...were deported to the West, on the way robbed of their last possessions, plundered, vilified, raped.”¹

¹ Bundesarchiv-Bayreuth (BArch) B106-27734, Press release re: *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, circa September 1953, 2-3.

Two years later, the ten year anniversary of the end of the Second World War provided a moment to look back on the bitter days of the catastrophic defeat, as well as the progress made toward recovery. Months before, newspapers started to mark the occasion of the demise of the German East.² Neutral outlets such as *Die Welt* refrained from emotional outbursts, printing maps of trek paths and simple statistics of the “11.9 million Germans... [who] descended into the whirlpool of flight and expulsion.”³ Local presses tended to focus on individual expellee groups, and granted space to voices from the community. The *Gießener Anzeiger*, for instance, printed an account of an expellee who lost his parents, two siblings, and a grandmother through “deliberate murder” decreed by “Stalin’s orders,” despite the fact that his family “verifiably...suffered terribly under the Nazi regime.”⁴ The expellee press similarly used the anniversary to reflect on the war, largely using personal testimonies to “relive” the horrors of “flight and expulsion”: Treks, evacuation by sea, and desperation in “fortress cities.”⁵

What emerges from the flood of retrospections and “typical” experiences? Ten years after the events, a streamlined master narrative with highly stylized tropes and turns of phrase already

² For an overview, see Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, ed., *10 Jahre nach der Vertreibung: Äusserungen des In- und Auslandes und eine Zeittafel* (Bonn, 1956). It is noteworthy that by 1955, the start of “flight and expulsion” was associated with January 1945 and the Soviet offensive; the preceding mass movements which started in the summer of 1944 ranked as a mere footnote.

³ “Vor zehn Jahren,” *Die Welt*, February 1, 1955, newspaper clipping in Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 07-001-3440. The report noted that only half of the population successfully fled, and erroneously noted that 1.6 million—nearly 16% of the German East’s population—perished during the forced migrations.

⁴ The testimony was a reprint of a telegram of Gerhard Bahr to Nikolai Bulganin and Nikita Khrushchev, whose assurances to Adenauer during the chancellor’s 1955 Moscow visit that the Red Army had behaved correctly during the war “required [him] out of obligation to historical truth to pass along the...facts.” The missive was reproduced under the headline of “merely an example of many...” in Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, *10 Jahre nach der Vertreibung*, 96.

⁵ See the analysis of the expellee press’ treatment of “flight and expulsion” in Hans-Jürgen Gaida, *Die offiziellen Organe der ostdeutschen Landsmannschaften: ein Beitrag zur Publizistik der Heimatvertriebenen in Deutschland*. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1973), 218ff.

dominated public discourse of “flight and expulsion.” When expellees in the CDU contemplated the “harsh winter” a decade before and yearned to remind the nation “precisely of those days,” their recounting undoubtedly evoked familiar images for West Germans: The days “when cities and villages descended into the flames of war, when massive swarms of people were driven from home and hearth, crammed into camps, and expelled from the homeland in endless columns of misery”; the “millions...of dead through hunger, exhaustion, disease, or unjustified violence”; as well as obligatory pleading to cast aside thoughts of vengeance were a common component of West German victimhood and fixture of the postwar republic’s collective memory.⁶

Because these formulations and stereotypical images continue to echo in the Federal Republic today, they require analysis, as well as an assessment of what experiences did not survive the streamlining process and disappeared to the margins of postwar collective memory. The *Dokumentation* and its counterparts produced by expellee organizations offer a useful point of departure for this task. As the previous chapter argued, these publications specifically emerged as materials for West German foreign policy and revisionist claims, and as such provided an interpretation and framing of Germany’s immediate past. Expellee activists and the Federal Republic sought to impress a politicized history upon foreigners, and establish a revisionist historiography that served West German political agendas.

Yet the works also addressed domestic audiences. While attempts of casting the expulsions in a politicized framework certainly intended to speak to German readers and shaped historiography, the “big picture” likely mattered little to the average West German. Of particular concern in this chapter are specific tropes and themes associated with “flight and expulsion”

⁶ ACDP 07-001-3440, “Das große Leid...10 Jahre Austreibung,” *Stimmen der Heimat. Organ des Landesverbandes Oder-Neiße der CDU/CSU*, January 2, 1955.

which dominated public discourse. The way the expulsions appeared in the media or in conversations profoundly impacted how expellees recounted their past, as well as how West Germans came to think about the war and German victimhood. In other words, historians and authors constructed a narrative from interpretations and “representative” voices that left indelible traces in the historical consciousness of the Federal Republic in the form of ideas or images.

In addition to the question of *what* images emerged in the 1950s, one must ask *how* and *why* they imbedded themselves in German collective memory. Historians have already noted the *Dokumentation*’s contribution to the forging of a “useable past.”⁷ The provocative and illuminating queries tell us much about how Germans viewed their history and constructed a victimhood narrative, but do not adequately explain their broader resonance and impact. The documentations did not spontaneously by osmosis enter into German consciousness. Strictly speaking, the tomes indirectly influenced public discourse, and must be brought into relation to other, more popular media portrayals of “flight and expulsion” that had greater bearing, yet continue to remain overlooked and represent a lacuna in the scholarship.⁸

If one wishes to comprehend how Germans communicated their traumata after 1945, one must begin with an interrogation of which memories remained buried in the archive and those that entered the historical record to create a history with emotional and political potency. The horrors suffered needed explanation and meaning, and postwar curators of memory provided the interpretations. By examining the gulf between memories in the archive and postwar iterations

⁷ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

⁸ An attempt to provide a broad overview has been made in Stephan Scholz, Maren Röger, and Bill Niven, eds., *Die Erinnerung an Flucht und Vertreibung: ein Handbuch der Medien und Praktiken* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2015).

and assessing how these framings entered literature, print media, radio and movies, one can trace how the “flight and expulsion” narrative formed and imbedded itself in public discourse.

The *Dokumentation* provides a useful point of departure for considering how certain narratives formed and took hold. Firstly, it ranks as a bellwether of the collective memory and mentalities of 1950s West Germany. The “blank spots,” problematic language, and self-understanding are an important factor in explaining how West Germans perceived the war and its outcomes, and why German victimhood narratives reverberated so powerfully. Secondly, the academic treatment of the forced migrations interacted with and combined with other media portrayals. This combination of scholarship and pulp media fused with and influenced expellee memories, creating a confusing panorama of recollections where the boundaries between history and myth, fact and fiction blurred and often became indiscernible. Yet it was precisely this inscrutable mass of voices that considerably influenced the historical consciousness of postwar West German society and constituted a master narrative of “flight and expulsion” that crystalized by the mid-1950s. What notions cemented themselves depended on the dense layering of genuine experiences, memory politics, and Cold War culture that continue to echo in the historical consciousness and cultural memory of the Federal Republic to this day.

***Sinnwelten* of 1950s West Germany: Marking the Boundaries of Public Discourse**

Understanding how expellee narratives made inroads requires an examination of West German society and its attitudes. The “moving tragedies” of expellee experiences struck a chord with broad segments of society, so that hopes that “atrocities and barbarism sink in” could expect success.⁹ The streamlining and cementing of “flight and expulsion” narratives succeeded because

⁹ BArch B106-27734, Press release re: *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, circa September 1953, 2-3.

of receptive audiences. Wartime suffering constituted a common denominator in postwar West Germany. Expellees, nearly twenty percent of the population of the Federal Republic, witnessed unimaginable traumata. The accounts of their suffering however must not have struck Germans as incomprehensible, as terrifying air raids, the fear of combat, tension of enemy occupation, and chaos of the collapse of a murderous regime affected the majority of the population.¹⁰

Even those with limited lived experience could relate, as the war dominated conversations on the street, the pub, or the dinner table. Germans knew of the conflagration in the German East through reporting, rumor, or interaction with refugees, as has been shown. Scholars noted pervasive “new citizen narratives,” that revolved around the war and the expulsions.¹¹ Reality and interpretation soon fused into an inextricable blend of experiences, rumor, fear, yearning, and ideology. A confounded Theodor Schieder concluded: “Nowhere does legend grow more uncontrollably than exactly here, and the horrific becomes ever more horrific when it is told from one to the other.”¹² In short, widespread discussion of expellee suffering in the private and public sphere provided familiar images that a majority of Germans could identify with emotionally in one way or another.

¹⁰ Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944-1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

¹¹ Hermann Bausinger, “Lebendiges Erzählen. Volkskundliche Gegenwartsuntersuchungen im schwäbischen Dorf” (PhD Thesis, Tübingen, 1952), 71. Frequent talk of divine retribution, processes steered by God or demonic forces, and a “terrible misfortune” shared not only a desire for understanding the bitter defeat, often as driven not by German failures but higher powers and “fate.” For the first decade after 1945, these narratives frequently resembled modern fairy tales, with themes of miraculous rescues, divine punishment for tormentors, supernatural spirits protecting the homeland and graves of the deceased, and prophesies of imminent return. See Heinke Kalinke, “Gerüchte, Prophezeiungen und Wunder. Zur Konjunktur sagenhafter Erzählungen in der unmittelbaren Nachkriegszeit,” in *Zur Ikonographie des Heimwehs - Erinnerungskultur von Heimatvertriebenen*, by Elisabeth Fendl (Freiburg i. Br.: Johannes-Künzig-Inst. für Ostdt. Volkskunde, 2002), 159–74.

¹² Theodor Schieder, “Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten als wissenschaftliches Problem,” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, no. 8 (1960): 9.

Secondly, “flight and expulsion” narratives easily cemented themselves into postwar collective memory because they conformed to mentalities and validated worldviews prominent in the 1950s. Particularly avowals of innocence and ignorance over aspects of the Third Reich reflected the “selective remembering” and “dominant victimhood mental state” of the early Federal Republic.¹³ In “war stories” of the 1950s, there were few Nazis apart from archetypes who tormented apolitical compatriots; “Nazis” were everywhere and nowhere, appearing as alien figures in comparison to “ordinary” Germans.¹⁴

Certainly, testimonies of suffering rarely suggested individual guilt, and instead often expressed innocence that absolved the “good” Germany, the primary victims of the war who had no need to ponder culpability or the chain of events that produced their suffering. After a costly conflict and perceived victor’s justice, the nation had nothing to answer for. As one expellee bemoaned: “We are the poor victims,” yet the world “did not want to believe that we did not know anything about it.” In any case, innocent Germans “are not responsible for such things.”¹⁵ Indeed, for some expellees, non-Germans were victims of a different sort. As a memo presented to the mayor of Munich argued in April 1947, the “national characteristic of the Czechs has always been thieving,” and there were “only very few genuine political victims.”¹⁶ Accounts of

¹³ Moeller, *War Stories*; Peter Reichel, “Nach dem Verbrechen: nationale Erinnerungen an Weltkrieg und Judenmord,” in *Holocaust: der nationalsozialistische Völkermord und die Motive seiner Erinnerung*, ed. Burkhard Asmuss, 2002, 215–37.

¹⁴ See for instance Harald Welzer and Sabine Moller, “*Opa war kein Nazi*” *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002).

¹⁵ BArch BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 19. In a January 6, 1950 letter from a German who remained in Frauenberg (Frombork), the author lamented to former neighbors in the FRG that “[w]e here are poor victims”: “A man from Warsaw told us that on orders of Hitler 6.5 million Jews were cooked into soap! He also knew the places and camps, but did not want to believe that I did not know anything about it. We after all are not responsible for such things.”

¹⁶ “The national characteristic of the Czechs has always been thieving. During the bombardment of German cities, they plundered homes and robbed corpses. The Czech victims of fascism often are constituted from such and similar crimes. There were only very few genuine political victims, but many war profiteers.” Quoted in Tobias Weger,

unspeakable misery and propensity for self-pity resonated because many West Germans experienced hardships during the war, and postwar special pleading insisted upon a leading position in the pantheon of war victims.

Furthermore, the humiliation of losing territory, as after the First World War, inculcated widespread indignation and dismay. Notions of a historic civilizing mission in Eastern Europe, as expellee literature frequently argued, corresponded to widely held convictions of German superiority and ascendancy now arbitrarily destroyed with strokes of Allied pens.¹⁷ Teutonic, Saxon, and Marcomanni settlers brought industry and culture to the East, and Slav achievements could only be explained by the influence of the vastly more sophisticated Germans. As a letter to the editor in an expellee paper argued in 1953, “our Slavic neighbors absorbed much German blood and thereby German characteristics and abilities.” Particularly in the “exalted, stalwart, and leading strata of the Czech people, the German impact is especially pronounced.”¹⁸ An ethno-nationalist reading of the past, and implicit demand for a restoration of German hegemony in the East, reflected the thinking of not just expellees, but many West Germans as well: In a 1946 letter, Konrad Adenauer mused that “the task of western Germany must be to one day win back the East through peaceful means and to colonize it,” as in centuries before.¹⁹

What appeared as self-evident fact in the FRG of the 1950s revealed beliefs of an innate German superiority and ingrained disdain for Slavs stretching back into the 19th century and

“*Volkstumskampf*” ohne Ende?: *sudetendeutsche Organisationen, 1945-1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008), 329.

¹⁷ For an expression of the type of sentiments, see Harald von Koenigswald, *Was wir Mitbrachten; Eine Rückschau über Kräfte und Leistungen der Heimatvertriebenen und Flüchtlinge 1945-1955*. (Troisdorf: Der Wegweiser, 1955).

¹⁸ “Vom Wesen des tschechischen Volkes,” *Hoam!* Volume 7, Nr. 9 (1953), 10.

¹⁹ Hans Peter Mensing, ed., *Adenauer. Briefe 1945-1947* (Berlin: Siedler, 1983), 263.

radically amplified by National Socialism. The prevalence of lingering beliefs in a “master race” become apparent in expellee testimonies, frequently written in a language that betrayed the racism and bigotries of the authors. For instance, as has previously been argued, expellees almost universally referred to “their” slave workers.²⁰ The absent-minded phrasing made clear the grim reality of National Socialist rule in Europe, even as the nature of the relationship remained unnoticed and uncommented. Derogatory remarks of “Polish broads” and “Pollacks” only underlined the racially-tinged testimonies.²¹

On the subject of Jews, reports demonstrated decidedly more careful phrasing, though elements of antisemitism and racial stereotypes linger. Nazi propaganda images of Jews as vermin responsible for infestations echo in reports from Stutthof. With the concentration camp emptied of prisoners, authorities turned the barracks over to refugees. Testimonies did not note the significance of the largest camp in East Prussia, nor comment on the former inhabitants, who in any case left a “very unclean camp” and “indescribably filthy” barracks for refugees.²² Silence over the camp’s nature is as remarkable as the incredulity over its sanitary conditions. Jewish greed similarly reverberates in the record. “[W]ho knows where they came from,” a Sudeten German pondered, but the sudden appearance of liberated Jews purportedly explained the exploitative black market that quickly arose.²³ A report from Breslau clarified that crime

²⁰ BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 11. Doku 159, 199, 200,

²¹ Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße*, vol. 1 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 337. See also BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 189: “My God already, how did it look in that city [Bütow]! Everywhere on the street one saw Polish broads wearing colorful headscarves. The city’s character had completely changed. One felt as if one were in a Congress Polish, degenerate country town a la Czernowice! One would not think it possible. Almost solely Polish rabble.”

²² Josef Henke, “Exodus aus Ostpreußen und Schlesien,” in *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 119; and Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:97.

²³ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 77.

syndicates were led by ringleaders who were “all Jews,” while in Pressburg “Jewish owners were all once again in their businesses” and responsible for exorbitantly high prices.²⁴ The specter of Judeo-Bolshevism also echoes: Authors explicitly emphasized that many Soviets, particularly commissars, were “Jews” without any indication of how they knew.²⁵ A blasphemous female officer haughtily pacing through a church during Sunday mass with a lit cigarette could only have been a “Communist Jewess” in the estimation of a refugee from Posen.²⁶

Soviet soldiers who defiled churches and Christian images or exhibited their atheism by turning Bibles into cigarette papers confirmed expectations of the godless profanity of Bolsheviks.²⁷ Despite a supposed disdain for Christianity, when church services continued and Soviet troops attended, expellees assumed they were acting as spies as opposed to satisfying their curiosity or spiritual needs.²⁸ The Red Army not only perverted wholesome Christian customs, it also corrupted gender roles with their inclusion of women in the military, further underlining the depravity of communism: Numerous references to *Flintenweiber* (battle-axes)—at once terrifying and “comical”—reveal the disdain for the seemingly unnatural Soviet social order.²⁹ Women in uniform particularly spread horror as “true beasts in the shape of humans.”³⁰

²⁴ Quoted in Moeller, 77.

²⁵ Schieder, 1:196, 212.

²⁶ Schieder, 1:372–74.

²⁷ Moeller, *War Stories*, 68. Surprisingly, despite their alleged godlessness, numerous “miraculous” accounts of how Red Army soldiers were turned away by crucifixes seem to suggest that not all Soviet soldiers disregarded Christian images.

²⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:491.

²⁹ Moeller, *War Stories*, 68; Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:28.

³⁰ Moeller, *War Stories*, 68.

Sometimes authors were unsure whether to attribute wanton destruction to the communist system, or some underlying biological trait. For one expellee, the “disregard, indeed, disdain, for human life” and “disregard for every form of personal property” were “characteristic of the mentality of the Russians.”³¹ Soviet soldiers appear easily confused and child-like in their demeanor.³² Others overcame their fear to laugh over the “cultured soldiers” perplexed by simple items such as bedpans.³³ When Red Army officers could not speak German or translators struggled for words, it was regarded as a sign of immense ineptitude. Alternately, when expectations of facing dimwitted dolts were shattered by troops speaking excellent German, witnesses expressed profound incredulity.³⁴ Just as how individual soldiers typically proved unimpressive, the Red Army as a whole validated low opinions and made the defeat all the more shocking: The mighty Wehrmacht had inexplicably been defeated by “this rabble in rags with crooked insignias on deteriorated vehicles, rattling and stinking...So these were the victors!”³⁵

Soviet soldiers generally confirmed Nazi images of primitive sub-humans. To Hans von Lehndorff, the Soviet onslaught resembled a “flood of rats that exceeded all of the Egyptian plagues.”³⁶ Numerous reports express horror over the realization that the Soviet military was

³¹ Moeller, 68.

³² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:340.

³³ Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (29.1-5.2.1945)*, vol. 3 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 472.

³⁴ BArch BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 127.

³⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:408.

³⁶ Moeller, *War Stories*, 64.

filled with “Jews”³⁷ and “Mongols.”³⁸ While “Asiatic” troops were not over-represented in the Red Army or in the violent excesses of the last months of the war, they ostensibly overran the German East.³⁹ The recruits from Central Asia stoked particular horror, as “their faces did not move, only the eyes were alive” and they generally looked “unbelievably wild.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere one encounters descriptions of an inscrutable mass, “stupid faces, one just like the next, all uniform people.”⁴¹ Others reported “the devilish Mongoloid grimaces”⁴² or the “primitive faces [and] rounded skulls” with “hideous faces.”⁴³ Still other expellees described Soviets as “dirty cave creatures.”⁴⁴ Even when they did not live up to their terrible reputation, witnesses found the explanation in questions of race: When they had “a face like a German man,” one refugee assured, one could expect better treatment.⁴⁵ With such widespread prejudice and dread, memories ran wild: With “Asians” who “rode camels [and] wore high, spiked, white fur hats and

³⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:196; Schieder, 1:212.

³⁸ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:181; Schieder, 1:201; Schieder, 1:206; Schieder, 1:212; Schieder, 1:266; Schieder, 1:277; Schieder, 1:444.

³⁹ Manfred Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten: die Rote Armee und die Besetzung Deutschlands östlich von Oder und Neisse 1944/45* (München: Oldenbourg, 1996), 150.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 66.

⁴¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:397.

⁴² Schieder, 1:338.

⁴³ Schieder, 1:28.

⁴⁴ Schieder, 1:394.

⁴⁵ Schieder, 1:338. How the various above sentiments could combine into a single assessment is revealed in the testimony from Silesia: “Russians upon Russians, large, handsome [and] strong, sympathetic looking, small and bow-legged, Kalmyk and Kyrgyz with slant-eyes, women as soldiers, battle-axes with poisonous eyes and hatred one could feel in the air.” BArch Ost-Dok 2/174, 252.

white fur coats,” it was easy to attribute all manner of unbridled savagery to the horrifyingly exotic riders who sexually assaulted “even...children, animals, and old people.”⁴⁶

The racialized language of the Third Reich therefore permeated many “flight and expulsion” accounts of the 1950s. One could exert tremendous energy in chronicling the problematic language in expellee testimonies. A mere handful of years after the collapse of the Third Reich, it should not surprise that Nazi racial thinking remained strongly entrenched. Understanding the reports, along with their deficiencies, as a useful indicator of West German mentalities provides greater explanatory power, however, as it reveals why the awkward phrasings and glaring blind spots did not strike historians, witnesses, or the public as odd. The mixture of Nazi ideology, wartime experiences, rumors, and imaginations meant that narratives of brutalities found receptive audiences: They spoke in a language that all understood and affirmed postwar worldviews, such as for example widespread contemptuous attitudes toward East Europeans and the Soviet Union. The content of expellee testimonies were not out of place, and seamlessly dovetailed with postwar collective memory of dictatorship, the war, and defeat.

In addition to shared wartime experiences and worldviews, “flight and expulsion” narratives successfully popularized particular images because they were a pervasive fixture of the media landscape and daily life. Accounts of civilian suffering, Mongolian hordes, or heroic struggles of soldiers attempting to thwart the deluge of misery dominated West German media in the 1950s and 1960s. Through radio, newspapers, movies, and pop literature, the public could hardly escape exposure to expellee experiences and references to the German East. The expulsions were a permanent fixture of West German memories of the war that consumed their lives only a few years before, and continued to cast their shadow on postwar lives.

⁴⁶ Moeller, *War Stories*, 66.

“The Russian is Coming!” War and Forced Migration in the Media Landscape

How did the documentations resonate among the West German public, and how did “flight and expulsion” reach domestic audiences and shape how West German society viewed and remembered the war? In and of themselves, the studies had limited impact: Few readers streamed to bookstores to acquire copies of the dreary tomes with drab binding. The dry collection and exorbitant cost of 20 DM undoubtedly proved unappealing.⁴⁷ Intended as materials for expellee and West German foreign policy, the voluminous *Dokumentation* never intended to reach a popular audience, and sales were predictably dismal.⁴⁸

The content reached the public audiences through indirect avenues, however. One way in which the dense documentations filtered into the mainstream is through generally enthusiastic reviews.⁴⁹ Contemplating the Sudeten German “white book,” *Die Welt* explained that the unimpeachable reports did not intend to “tear open old wounds or allege collective [Czechoslovakian] guilt,” before summarizing testimonies chronicling mass executions, stonings, human torches to honor Beneš, and gruesome torture.⁵⁰ The *Salzburger Nachrichten* placed news of the “white book’s” publication on the front page, and also lifted passages of some of the most ghastly atrocities.⁵¹ The press lauded the *Dokumentation* as well, recounting

⁴⁷ BArch B106-27734, Press release re: *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, circa September 1953, 1.

⁴⁸ Mathias Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Hintergründe – Entstehung – Ergebnis – Wirkung,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 50 (1999): 116.

⁴⁹ Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Wilhelm Turnwald, eds., *Dokumente zur Austreibung der Sudetendeutschen* (München, 1951).

⁵⁰ “Sudetendeutsche schildern Austreibung aus der CSR,” *Die Welt*, October 24, 1951, 8.

⁵¹ “Symbol der europäischen Krise. Eine mitteleuropäische Tragödie in Dokumenten,” *Salzburger Nachrichten*, October 31, 1951, 1-2. See also “Der Bluttausch der Tschechen 1945. Weitere Dokumente aus der deutschen Passion in Böhmen und Mähren,” *Landshuter Zeitung*, November 9, 1951, 4. The paper reprinted entire reports, focused particularly on acts of humiliation such as insults, shaving of heads, and being forced to clean toilets.

particularly striking passages.⁵² Expellee leaders expressed general approval: Herbert Hupka, a SPD parliamentarian active in the Silesian Association, praised that expellees could relate to the reports, which ultimately demonstrated that Soviet behavior was “foreign to Europeans and rooted in Asiatic traditions and communist propaganda encouraging soldiers to seek revenge.”⁵³

The reviews not only placed a stamp of approval on expellee experiences and applauded their authenticity, they simultaneously articulated an abridged narrative of “flight and expulsion.” On an August 24, 1954 broadcast of “The Book of the Day” on *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk*, reviewers described the reports on an event “exceptional in world history”:

“What was done to millions of innocent people has absolutely no parallels in all of history. Tortured, abused and raped, exposed to hunger, robbed of everything, finally rounded up like livestock and literally penned up in cattle cars, here the inhabitants of entire provinces were driven from the land of their parents and grandparents, expelled from the graves of their kin, expelled from territories that in large part were entirely German for almost a millennium.”⁵⁴

No “seeker of truth” reading these “documents of inhumanity” could avoid being filled with “deep pity,” and concluding that “if great new injustices could make up for previous injustices, then the sinful debt [*Schuldkonto*] of Hitler’s Germany will have been paid in full.”⁵⁵

⁵² See newspaper clippings in BArch B150-5641, especially “Chronik des Grauens,” *Rheinischer Merkur* (c. 1954); “Dokumente des Grauens,” *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, September 2, 1954; and “Katastrophen der Deutschen-Vertreibung aus dem Osten in Dokumenten,” *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 6, 1954.

⁵³ BArch B150-5642, Transcript of “Der gemeinsame Weg,” *Hessischer Rundfunk*, August 24, 1958, 1-4. In the rather nuanced review, Hupka agreed with the desire of editors to attempt to understand the expulsions in connection with “Hitler’s politics,” as only this made the “hatred” understandable. Hupka lamented the lack of specific examples of German war crimes within the volumes, and criticized that the *Dokumentation* did not render adequate context. Hupka also wished that the historians would have edited “unfortunate formulations” such as “Polish broads [*Polakenweib*]” and “Mongol grimaces” [*Mongolenfratzen*]” that showed understandable anger, but seemed unnecessary provocations that could have been avoided.

⁵⁴ BArch B150-3349, Gustav Württemberg, “Buch des Tages,” *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk*, August 24, 1954, 6.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* The reviewer acknowledged that the expulsions were a consequence of “Hitler’s politics,” but warned that one could not see them as a compensation: Hitler’s crimes remained crimes, and the forced migrations—even if viewed as reprisals, remained crimes.

A July 16, 1958 broadcast on *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* went into more detail, reading a “representative” testimony from the “catalogue of the demonic nature” while noting that “whether it was in East Prussia or Wartheland, in Silesia or in the Sudetenland: more or less the terrors took on the same contours everywhere.”⁵⁶ With descriptions of Nazi functionaries extolling the “certainty of victory,” drunken Soviet soldiers that “spread fear and horror everywhere,” and rapes and plundering, the excerpts “contained elements that are found continuously in the rest of the statements in various...forms.”⁵⁷ Listeners heard a condensed narrative of “flight and expulsion,” complete with the obligatory invocation of the “Charta of the Homeland Expellees” and reminder that contemplation of German victimhood should promote reconciliation and dispel notions of vengeance or hatred.⁵⁸

A second way in which the documentations entered the mainstream is when writers utilized testimonies to recount specific scenes—for instance the situation in the Heiligenbeil pocket or the infamous flight across the frozen Vistula Lagoon—that frequently coincided with anniversaries of the start of the forced migrations.⁵⁹ On the 1958 *Volkstrauertag*, the “National Day of Mourning,” *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* read passages of the *Dokumentation* related to the sinking of the *Goya*. As many Germans remained unaware of the “horrors” and basked in the

⁵⁶ BArch B150-5642, Transcript of Albrecht Bähr, “Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Mitteleuropa—Besprechung einer Buchreihe,” *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, July 16, 1958, 6. See also reviews of *10 Jahre nach der Vertreibung*, the second volume of the *Dokumentation*, and *Ein Tagebuch aus Pommern 1945/46* in BArch B150-3350, Johannes Weidenheim (Author) and Albrecht Bähr (Editor), “Bücherspiegel,” *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, May 8, 1957.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁵⁸ The reviewers offered a rather nuanced interpretation, noting that the “vengeance and defilement that played out...on this scale is probably unparalleled in recent European history, and is only eclipsed by the persecution of the Jews under Adolf Hitler. An overpowering and fanatical enemy drunk with victory yearned to take revenge for the plans of his extermination and for the slogan of the ‘Slavic subhuman.’” *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁹ See “Von Heiligenbeil an eine einzige Wüste,” *Bayern-Kurier*, August 21, 1954; and “Die Flucht über das Frische Haff,” *Rheinfelder Anzeiger*, February 14, 1955, both clippings in BArch B150-5641.

glow of the “Economic Miracle,” the expellee intendant Albrecht Bähr felt it “especially wise on this day to remember a particularly harrowing episode from the German Passion: the fates of those large ships, filled to the brim with people.”⁶⁰ Naturally, the expellee presses continuously returned to descriptions of expellee experiences.⁶¹ A myriad of amateur documentations cherry-picked particularly gripping reports, often altering them to make them more literary and “realistic.”⁶² Similarly, Günter Karweina’s *Der Grosse Trek* (“The Big Trek”) combined the styles of documentation with fictionalized testimonies—for instance adding dialogue, internal thought processes, and more dramatic language—and thereby popularized the Schieder Commission’s reports on some of the more iconic scenes that unfolded in the German East, such as Nemmersdorf, treks crossing the Vistula Lagoon, sinking ships, and fortress cities.⁶³ The works naturally also served as handy reference materials for TV documentaries.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ BArch B150-3350, Johannes Weidenheim (Author) and Albrecht Bähr (Editor), “Ostdeutscher Heimatkalender,” *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, November 16, 1958.

⁶¹ For a thorough analysis, see Gaida, *Die offiziellen Organe der ostdeutschen Landsmannschaften*.

⁶² For just a few, see Hans Jürgen von Wilckens and Landmannschaft Westpreussen, *Die Grosse Not Danzig-Westpreussen 1945: Zusammengestellt Im Auftrage Der Landmannschaft Westpreussen* (Sastedt: Niederdeutscher Verlag Ulrich und Ziss, 1957); Hans Hartl, *Das Schicksal des Deutschtums in Rumänien (1938-1945-1953)* (Würzburg: Holzner, 1958); Günther Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945* (Bad Nauheim: Podzun-Pallas-Verlag, 1964); Rudolf Grenz, *Stadt und Kreis Gumbinnen: eine ostpreussische Dokumentation* (Marburg, Lahn: Kreisgemeinschaft Gumbinnen in der Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen, 1971); Günter Böddeker, *Die Flüchtlinge: die Vertreibung der Deutschen im Osten* (München: F. Herbig, 1980); Werner Arndt, *Ostpreussen, Westpreussen, Pommern, Schlesien, Sudetenland 1944/1945: die Bild-Dokumentation der Flucht und Vertreibung aus den deutschen Ostgebieten* (Friedberg: Podzun-Pallas-Verl., 1981); Heinz Nawratil, *Vertreibungs-Verbrechen an Deutschen: Tatbestand, Motive, Bewältigung* (München: Ullstein Verlag, 1982); Herta Schöning and Hans-Georg Tautorat, *Die ostpreussische Tragödie 1944/45: Dokumentation des Schicksals einer deutschen Provinz und ihrer Bevölkerung* (Leer: Gerhard Rautenberg, 1985).

⁶³ Günter Karweina, *Der Grosse Treck. Dokumentarbericht Über Die Flucht Und Austreibung von 14 Millionen Deutschen*. (Stuttgart: Eduard Wancura Verlag, 1958). Theodor Schieder felt immense displeasure over the liberal use of the *Dokumentation*, and in particular registered his commission’s “alienation” that their material had been picked up by Karweina for the use of publishing a “thriller.” BArch B150-5630, Memo of Schlicker re: meeting minutes of December 6, 1958. Karweina served as the ghost writer for Holocaust denier David Irving’s 1963 *Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht*.

⁶⁴ BArch B150-3339, Dr. von zur Mühlen (BMVt) to Hoedke (Norddeutscher Rundfunk) re: “Fernsehserie ‘Deutschland nach dem Kriege’”, September 20, 1967.

A third way that the *Dokumentation* influenced public discourse was through supplemental publications of particularly evocative and gripping reports specifically intended to bring the academic work to broader audiences.⁶⁵ Hans von Lehndorff's accounts enjoyed unexpected success: Instantly a bestseller, within six months it sold over 100,000 copies.⁶⁶ Between December 7, 1961 and January 13, 1962, the popular tabloid *Bild* printed excerpts complete with idyllic prewar images of the German East.⁶⁷ Readers read the account of a "sufferer among the suffering," whose diary "reads as if a report from another world. Appalling, harrowing—and also fascinating, because it is our fate that he describes."⁶⁸ *Die Zeit* also enthusiastically discussed the book, adding that it "ranks as the most harrowing that one can read."⁶⁹ For twenty weeks, it topped *Spiegel's* bestseller list thanks to the "literary finesse" of the author and the public's demand for such chronicles.⁷⁰ By 2015, Lehndorff's diaries appeared in their 32nd edition, cementing its place as the most well-read "flight and expulsion" account.⁷¹

⁶⁵ Margarete Schell, *Ein Tagebuch aus Prag, 1945-46* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 1957); Käthe von Normann, *Ein Tagebuch aus Pommern, 1945-46: Aufzeichnungen* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, 1955); Hans Lehndorff, *Ein Bericht aus Ost- und Westpreussen, 1945-47*. (Bonn: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 1960).

⁶⁶ Mathias Beer, "Sachbücher, Populäre," in *Die Erinnerung an Flucht Und Vertreibung. Ein Handbuch Der Medien Und Praktiken* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2015), 378.

⁶⁷ See "Ostpreußisches Tagebuch," *Bild* Nr. 285, December 7, 1961, 6, and subsequent editions until "Ostpreußisches Tagebuch," *Bild* Nr. 11, January 13, 1962, 8.

⁶⁸ "Ostpreußisches Tagebuch," *Bild* Nr. 282, December 4, 1. Not all welcomed the diary's serialization in a tabloid: The expellee paper *Deutscher Ostdienst* condemned the "lust for sensationalist" and "moneymaking," declaring that "one should not play fast and loose with the bitter plight of flight and expulsion." "Vertreibungsschicksal als Illustrierten-Schnulze?," *dod*, January 29, 1962, clipping in BArch B150-5644.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Beer, "Sachbücher, Populäre," 378. See also "Ein Mann, der in Ostpreußen blieb," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 17, 1961, clipping in BArch B150-5644.

⁷⁰ "Kyrie statt Heil," *Der Spiegel* 35, August 29, 1962, 28ff. The article included excerpts of Lehndorff's descriptions of the battle for Königsberg.

⁷¹ Beer, "Sachbücher, Populäre," 378. As a complete aside, in 2016 a Kaliningrad paper published excerpts of the diary in Russian. Friedrich Schmidt, "Kaliningrads ungeklärtes Erbe," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 31, 2016, 6.

The West German government's efforts to create a massive record of the expulsions therefore generated a deep well to draw from. The "painstaking objectivity...banishes from the start any doubt of the absolute historical accuracy," providing unimpeachable evidence of expellee suffering; when relying on the testimonies of profound suffering, few could dare to call the depictions into question.⁷² Indeed, as one reviewer of the *Dokumentation* surmised, the meticulous scholarship sanctioned the "irrefutable proof of the accuracy of those descriptions" found in more well-read popular literature, but which may have lacked academic credentials.⁷³ This plight moreover beseeched Germans whether they "really want to forget...far and away the most horrifying event of the last war?"⁷⁴ Judging from the prevalence of "flight and expulsion" in the media landscape, the answer was an emphatic and resounding "no."

In addition to Lehndorff's diaries, numerous autobiographical or semi-autobiographical books dealt with the forced migrations or used the expulsions as a backdrop.⁷⁵ Already at the time, commentators noted the "conspicuous abundance" of expulsion novels.⁷⁶ Several achieved notable sales successes, particularly Günter Grass' "Danzig trilogy."⁷⁷ Focused primarily on the suffering during and immediately after the war and romanticizing the German East, prominent

⁷² "Dokumente des Grauens," *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, September 2, 1954, clipping in BArch B150-5641.

⁷³ "Katastrophen der Deutschen-Vertreibung aus dem Osten in Dokumenten," *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 6, 1954, clipping in BArch B150-5641.

⁷⁴ "Dokumente," *Deutsche Zeitung und Wirtschafts-Zeitung*, March 24, 1954, clipping in BArch B150-5641.

⁷⁵ Numerous studies examine "flight and expulsion" and themes of contending with the loss of the homeland. For a thorough analysis, see the standard work Louis Ferdinand Helbig, *Der ungeheure Verlust: Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschsprachigen Belletristik der Nachkriegszeit* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1996).

⁷⁶ Georg Gehrmann, "Versuche der literarischen Bewältigung," in *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland*, ed. Eugen Lemberg and Friedrich Edding, vol. 3 (Kiel: F. Hirt, 1959), 276.

⁷⁷ Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (München: dtv, 2009); Günter Grass, *Katz und Maus* (München: dtv, 2014); Günter Grass, *Hundejahre* (München: dtv, 1993).

themes included the emotional pains of leaving the homeland, treks, Soviet excesses and sexual violence, and deprivation through hunger or cold.⁷⁸ Generally, most expulsion novels of the 1950s and early 1960s reflected West German reluctance to contemplate guilt or responsibility for the war.⁷⁹ Other works discussed the war in abstract, often religious terms, and cast expelled fates as divine judgement.⁸⁰

Accessibility and entertainment value promised large readerships, and in the 1950s no medium proved more popular than illustrated magazines. By the end of the decade, *Hör zu!* claimed a readership of 3.5 million, while *Quick* and *Stern* sold over a million copies each.⁸¹ The focus on consumers meant that stories corresponded to the worldview and “zeitgeist” of readers.⁸² Lackluster responses brought a swift end to series, and favorable responses not only

⁷⁸ Hans Deichmann, *Ich sah Königsberg sterben: Tagebuch eines Arztes in Königsberg 1945 bis 1948* (Beltheim: Bublies, 1999); Hugo Hartung, *Der Himmel war unten* (Gera: Wilhelm Gottlieb Korn, 1951); Kurt Skorczyk, *Geschlagen, geschändet, vertrieben* (Leer: Rautenbert & Möckel, 1952); Ruth Storm, *Das vorletzte Gericht* (Würzburg: Bergstadtverl. Korn, 1989); Heinz Werner Hübner, *Das Floss der Vertriebenen* (München: List, 1954); Hans-Ulrich Horster, *Suchkind 312: die Geschichte einer unerfüllten Liebe* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann-Lesering, 1959); Hans Hellmut Kirst, *Gott schläft in Masuren* (München: Heyne, 1981); Jens Rehn, *Feuer im Schnee* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1956).

⁷⁹ See the analysis in Helbig, *Der ungeheure Verlust*, 33–43. Notable exceptions must be named. *Leviathan* (1949), *Wintergewitter*, *Das verschüttete Antlitz* (1957), and Grass’s works attempted to contemplate German war guilt and discussed the victimization of Germany’s victims. Arno Schmidt, *Leviathan* (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp Verl, 1970); Kurt Ihlenfeld, *Wintergewitter* (Wien: Europaverlag, 1979); Gertrud Fussenegger, *Das verschüttete Antlitz* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verl., 2007); Grass, *Die Blechtrommel*.

⁸⁰ Ernst Wiechert, *Missa sine nomine* (Bergisch Gladbach: Bastei-Lübbe, 1977); Ihlenfeld, *Wintergewitter*; Hanna Stephan, *Engel, Menschen und Dämonen*. (Gütersloh: Rufer-Verlag, 1956); Werner Klose, *Jenseits der Schleuse* (Tübingen: Heliopolis Verl., 1953).

⁸¹ Jan Albroscheit, “Die Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den ehemaligen Ostgebieten in der deutschen Belletristik, Illustrierten und der Geschichtswissenschaft der 1950er Jahre” (Universität Hamburg, 2006), 6. Considering that illustrated magazines were often handed on to friends or acquaintances, or displayed in public spaces such as waiting rooms, one must assume a much higher readership. Michael Schornsteimer calculates that each magazine was read by ten people, amounting to a readership of over 19 million for *Quick* and *Stern* by the end of the 1950s, or a third of the Federal Republic. Michael Schornsteimer, *Bombenstimmung und Katzenjammer: Die Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Quick und Stern in den 50er Jahren* (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1989), 14.

⁸² Marianne Jabs-Kriegsmann, *Zerrspiegel: der deutsche Illustriertenroman, 1950-1977* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981), 13.

measured success, they dictated content.⁸³ The medium ranked as a “consciousness seismograph” of West German society.⁸⁴ Moreover, unlike traditional news reporting, pop culture possessed the ability to “create a special tenor or...cement an existing attitude into a reality.”⁸⁵ One genre dominated above all: The 1950s were the decade of the *Dokumentation*, but also the heyday of the *Tatsachenbericht*, the “report based on facts” that recounted “how it was” during the war based loosely on testimonies and infused with emotional drama.⁸⁶

As the dissertation of Michael Schornsteimer compellingly argues, the tone of the stories was one of “terrific atmosphere and caterwauling [*Bombenstimmung und Katzenjammer*],” oscillating between adventure stories and handwringing over victimization during the war, captivity, or the postwar period.⁸⁷ Far from a discernable effort to elide the Third Reich, readers obsessed over the immediate past and yearned to come to terms with it. While few necessarily desired a return of the National Socialism, the content and letters from the public “spoke with vim, verve, and enthusiasm of the bygone, adventurous time” that for many “was the most important time in their lives, and certainly not (only) in the negative sense.”⁸⁸ The language and thinking reflected the lingering ideology, racism, and antidemocratic tendencies of the

⁸³ The *Illustrierte Revue* asked its readers for instance whether they wanted to read the report of Heinz Linge, Hitler’s valet, which *Stern* declined to publish. Schornsteimer, *Bombenstimmung und Katzenjammer*, 16.

⁸⁴ Schornsteimer, 331.

⁸⁵ Walter Hollstein, *Der deutsche Illustriertenroman der Gegenwart: Produktionsweise, Inhalte, Ideologie* (München: Francke, 1973), 10.

⁸⁶ Additionally, the serialized novels, or *Fortsetzungsromane*, frequently used the Second World War, the Nazi dictatorship, or the postwar period as the background to the plot. See for instance Vicki Baum, “Hier stand ein Hotel,” *Quick* 3 Nr. 3, 1950 and subsequent volumes, and Herbert Kranz, “Die Irrfahrten des Dr. Sebastian,” *Quick* Nr. 12, 1951.

⁸⁷ Schornsteimer, *Bombenstimmung und Katzenjammer*.

⁸⁸ Schornsteimer, 331–32.

defunct dictatorship. Predictably, if discussed at all, war crimes were blamed on a small circle of perpetrators, and the selective amnesia of the FRG framed the dialogue.

Because editors attempted to conform to expectations of readers, stories unsurprisingly painted the majority of the population as “good” Germans who knew nothing of the regime’s criminal dimensions, or only did their duty and attempted to muddle through. Replete with photographs, reporting fell into several broad categories. One of the most common were war stories that lionized apolitical soldiers, and recounted their daring and brave exploits in desperate circumstances.⁸⁹ This left most of Germany as victims, a theme reiterated in the numerous reports of POWs and their bitter struggles behind Soviet barbed wire.⁹⁰ Included in the category of victims were defendants of Allied war crimes trials, and their supposed persecution featured prominently.⁹¹ The ostensible litigiousness of the victors, who unjustifiably oppressed Germany and clung to punitive notions of collective guilt, prompted many illustrated magazines to criticize occupation policy and level charges of ostensible plans to destroy and humiliate the destroyed

⁸⁹ Gebhard Kraft, “Was war bei El Alamein,” *Quick* Nr. 8, 1950, 242; “Stalingrad: Zwölf Jahre nach der Schlacht von Stalingrad,” *Stern* Nr. 5, January 30, 1955; or Eberhard Seeliger, “Auf der Rollbahn des Krieges,” *Stern* Nr. 45, 1957. Occasionally profiles lauding military heroes, which would appear rather problematic from today’s perspective, also ran. See for instance the profile of SS-officer Otto Skorzeny “Der gefährlichste Mann der Welt,” *Quick* Nr. 14, 1950 and subsequent editions. Occasionally, more critical stories, such as the report of a member of the *Flakhelfer-Generation*, grappled with the relationship of the individual with the regime, but tended toward casting regime support as misguided zeal and a betrayal of youthful enthusiasm, which was then punished with a disastrous and humiliating defeat ushered in by an exploitative, manipulative, and insane Nazi Party. See for example Klaus Stephan, “So wahr mir Gott helfe!,” *Quick* Nr. 5, 1958. The series ran until March 8, 1958. See Stephan, “So wahr mir Gott helfe!,” *Quick* Nr. 10, 1958. For a more detailed analysis, see Schornstheimer, 251–330.

⁹⁰ See for instance “Willi S., der Heimkehrer,” *Quick* Nr. 1, 1950; “Gefangener in Siberien,” *Quick* Nr. 7, 1950; “DER VORHANG darf nicht fallen—Noch 250.000 Kriegsgefangene in Russland,” *Stern* Nr. 6, 1950; and “Ich weiß wieder was war...,” *Quick* Nr. 34, 1951.

⁹¹ See “Freiheit für Kesselring,” *Quick* Nr. 30, 1950; “Mein Gewissen ist mein Anwalt! Der Fall Falkenhausen,” *Quick* Nr. 40, 1950; “Im Landsberger Todeshaus,” *Quick* Nr. 10, 1951; “Nicht Gnade, sondern Recht—Wofür büßen die Generalfeldmarschälle Kesselring und Manstein?,” *Stern* Nr. 31, 1951; and “Die letzten drei von Spandau,” *Quick* Nr. 10, 1958. Former regime elites even on occasion received a forum in order to “render an account” of their service and construct a sympathetic image of ostensibly apolitical patriots swept up in Hitler’s megalomania and Allied litigiousness. See the series “Ich lege Rechnung,” the printed excerpts of Karl Dönitz’s memoir, which started in *Quick* Nr. 19, 1958.

nation.⁹² All of these *Tatsachenberichte* appeared under the rubric of “historical truth,” and offered readers a political lesson that reinforced 1950s victimhood mentalities.

Given the tenor of the magazines, it is somewhat surprising that “flight and expulsion” emerged only marginally, second to the more intensely discussed returning POWs or “victims” of postwar Allied justice.⁹³ Protagonists in serialized novels hailed from the German East, but incidents during the war or the forced migrations were only vaguely alluded to.⁹⁴ Expellees also themselves contributed to the voices speaking to broken lives in postwar West Germany.

Through letters, such as to *Hör Zu!*’s “Questions for Ms. Irene,” they described their lives as destitute refugees.⁹⁵ Occasionally, they provided explicit descriptions of what occurred. In 1950 for example, a woman recounted her rape and the marital problems that ensued after her husband accused her of having “betrayed their love” and surrendering too easily.⁹⁶ With these

⁹² Particularly Jürgen Thorwald wrote a series of reports that focused on how the “victors did not want peace, but instead the punishment of Germany and the economic destruction according to the Morgenthau-Plan.” See Thorwald, “Hinter den Kulissen der Nachkriegszeit,” *Quick* Nr. 51, 1951; Thorwald, “Hinter den Kulissen der Nachkriegszeit,” *Quick* Nr. 52, 1951; Thorwald, “Wie Deutschland der Vernichtung entging,” *Quick* Nr. 3, 1952; Thorwald, “Der unbequeme Christ,” *Quick* Nr. 4, 1952; Thorwald, “Der unbequeme Christ,” *Quick* Nr. 5, 1952; Thorwald, “In der Mühle der Kollektiv-Schuld,” *Quick* Nr. 6, 1952; Thorwald, “Hühnerfutter,” *Quick* Nr. 11, 1952.

⁹³ This is also the conclusion of Jan Albroscheit, who analyzed publications of the 1950s. See Albroscheit, “Die Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen aus den ehemaligen Ostgebieten in der deutschen Belletristik, Illustrierten und der Geschichtswissenschaft der 1950er Jahre”; Jan Albroscheit, “‘Die Zeiten der Mongolenzüge kehrten wieder!’ ‘Flucht und Vertreibung’ in den Illustrierten ‘Hör Zu!’, ‘Quick’ und ‘Stern’ der 50er Jahre,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte Westpreußens* 20/21 (2006): 351–73. Albroscheit argues that the expulsions were “not absorbed by broad segments of society” based on their limited discussion in the magazines of the 1950s. Albroscheit, 372.

⁹⁴ Albroscheit, “‘Die Zeiten der Mongolenzüge kehrten wieder!’ ‘Flucht und Vertreibung’ in den Illustrierten ‘Hör Zu!’, ‘Quick’ und ‘Stern’ der 50er Jahre,” 371.

⁹⁵ For example “Wir müssen wohl Zaungäste des Lebens bleiben!”, *Hör zu!* Nr. 46, 20; and “Ich finde keinen Anschluß mehr,” *Hör zu!* Nr. 31, 13. The letters attest to hardship into the late 1950s, as an expellee testified: “We are both in our early 40s and have five kids. Since the war took from us our homeland and destroyed our existence we have been unable to succeed at a new start. [...] Into this misery our daughter was born. It is very healthy and happy. But I am at the end of my strength. Therefore we would decide to have our little one be adopted.” “Uns geht es so schlecht, dass wir unser Kind abgeben müssen!”, *Hör zu!* Nr. 37, 45.

⁹⁶ “Ich habe meine Liebe nicht verraten!”, *Hör zu!* Nr. 22, 13. “It was during the Russian invasion in May 1945. Most of the women of the town in which I lived fell prey to the soldiers. I was also among the victims. My situation was especially terrible, because my husband—released from the field hospital as a heavily wounded—was with us. I knew from the neighboring town that all the men who attempted to protect their women were put down. We had to

submissions, expellees joined a community of victims, such as POWs and widows, who continued to suffer hardships and familial strife more than a decade after 1945.⁹⁷

Readers also encountered expellees in coverage of their homeland gatherings, such as the 1951 Silesian meeting in Munich.⁹⁸ Photos of beaming visitors among the 200,000 attendees revealed jovial scenes, but editorial comments reminded audiences of the injustice of the expulsions and the “thousand-year legal claim” of Germany, and forbade a forgetting of the German East.⁹⁹ Reports from journalists who travelled to Poland or Czechoslovakia also drove home the point of a terrible loss for Germany.¹⁰⁰ At certain moments, the authors were able to recall what occurred after 1945, such as when on their stop in Aussig they reported that the lampposts from which “two thousand Germans hung” still stood.¹⁰¹ Overall, the past only

suffer the worst that a woman can. But we accepted it and survived. That which happened to us after all did not concern us. The husbands of other women took it as a terrible fate for their women and attempted to prop them up. My husband however says that he cannot forget it. I supposedly submitted too easily and therefore betrayed him. I supposedly betrayed our love. What do you say?”

⁹⁷ See “Mein Mann ist völlig gefühllos...”, *Hör zu!* Nr. 7, 1950, 13; “Mein Mann ist völlig verstört”, *Hör zu!* Nr. 10, 16; “Ich muß meinem Herzen Luft machen,” *Hör zu!* Nr. 15, 13; and “Mein ehemaliger Verlobter ist wieder da und fordert mich zurück!,” *Hör zu!* Nr. 15, 1955, 31;

⁹⁸ “Nicht durch einen Krieg,” *Quick* Nr. 39, 1951, 1305ff.

⁹⁹ Readers were reminded of the fact that “[n]o authority in the world can ignore the ‘thousand-year legal claim’ of fifteen million expellees to their homeland in the East.” A photo of an expellee who saved a handful of “homeland earth” meanwhile served as the “most valuable reminder” of what had been lost during the “invasion of the Russians” and the Poles who followed and behaved “even more terribly.” A photo of a couple gave pause to remember that there was “joy and bliss—but even more tears: Everyone lost the homeland, but many also beloved kin.” Another attendee explained: “We had nothing anymore. They [the Poles] fell upon us like wolves.” “Nicht durch einen Krieg,” *Quick* Nr. 39, 1951 1305ff.

¹⁰⁰ See the travel diary of the Canadian journalist Charles Wassermann, in Wassermann, “Unter polnischer Verwaltung,” *Stern* Nr. 14, 1958, 22ff. and subsequent editions. See also Günther Dahl, “Damals gab es hier nur Haß,” *Stern* Nr. 35, 1955, 8ff and Dahl, “Heimaterde unter fremden Stiefeln,” *Stern* Nr. 36, 12ff.

¹⁰¹ Dahl interviewed Czech police officers, who showed him a site of the crime. “‘Here,’ says the oldest of the three policemen earnestly. ‘It was here. Two thousand Germans hanged from the lampposts. It was grotesque. No one can probably forget it. But could we not stop, all of us stop, hating one another?’” Dahl, “Heimaterde unter fremden Stiefeln,” *Stern* Nr. 36, 42. No other reports spoke of victims hung from lampposts during the Aussig massacre.

vaguely came to the fore.¹⁰² The emphasis remained on dilapidated conditions and poor stewardship of the erstwhile blooming German landscapes.¹⁰³ Xenophobic language moreover generally portrayed current inhabitants as backward, unclean, and indolent.¹⁰⁴ Other reports painted them as childishly superstitious, driven from their properties by ghosts of the murdered inhabitants: “Horror has gripped the trespassers! They cannot enjoy their booty!”¹⁰⁵

The political messages articulated in *Quick* and *Stern* conformed to the homeland politics of the expellee organizations, and helped contribute to a cementing of the expellees as German victims of the war, anchoring them and the lost territories in the collective memory of West Germany. Judging by reader responses, these messages at least partially hit home with audiences.¹⁰⁶ “No report has impressed me as much as your article on my hometown of Eger,” a reader raved. “I believe that these photos jolt not only homeland expellees, but all those who

¹⁰² As Wassermann noted, he “would like to say farewell to the war, but its horrendous face glares at us continuously on this journey through East Prussia. Wherever we arrive: The core of most of the cities is mostly destroyed—and reconstruction efforts have not yet begun.” Wassermann, “Unter polnischer Verwaltung,” *Stern* Nr. 17, 1958, 17.

¹⁰³ An exception is a brief observation that Wassermann does not elaborate on: “It is also true that the retreating German military contributed much to the current conditions in the German territories under Polish administration and turned cities...into ‘fortresses,’ which certainly could have been spared.” Wassermann, “Unter polnischer Verwaltung,” *Stern* Nr. 23, 1958, 54. A critical letter to *Quick* noted the inadequate treatment of the destruction and the impression that the Red Army was responsible for the majority of it. She also complained that Wassermann greatly exaggerated conditions and ignored Polish reconstruction. Letters to the Editor, *Stern* Nr. 21, 1958, 30.

¹⁰⁴ Wassermann quotes a German woman who remained in Poland: “But you know, one thing we Germans will never accept: We are accustomed to order, and with the Poles that does not exist—at least not that which we understand as order. And the drunks! [...] This is the worst: No order, no discipline!” Wassermann, “Unter polnischer Verwaltung,” *Stern* Nr. 18, 1958, 40. Dahl’s report from Eger described a city center that the expellers reduced into a “desert.” “Only the memories enliven the dark holes that once were windows and doors. What the grenades left unscathed, gypsies plundered.” Dahl, “Damals gab es hier nur Haß,” *Stern* Nr. 35, 1955, 9.

¹⁰⁵ “Der Fluch der bösen Tat,” *Quick* Nr. 39, 1306.

¹⁰⁶ Many readers reacted positively, particularly representatives of the expellee associations. See letters to the editor in *Stern* Nr. 19, 1958, 74 and *Stern* Nr. 21, 1958, 30.

were spared the bitter lot of the expulsion. From these images the senselessness of the expulsion becomes clear.”¹⁰⁷ A travel diary from East Prussia elicited similar responses:

“This report opens readers’ eyes. [...] Kolberg: once famous and beloved Baltic spa—now only a haunted ruin. Treptow: the most dirty and impoverished city, more wasteland than fertile fields. In other words, in the heart of Europe there are German lands which the ‘current administrator’ is incapable of managing and preserving. What the war did not destroy decays and turns into steppe.”¹⁰⁸

The understandable rage many expellees might feel when seeing the images of their homeland could, one reader explained, “perhaps indeed once again tear open already scarred wounds among many older people, since there will be no return.” But this was “negligible in the face of the monstrosities that this travel diary unsparingly uncovered. The entire world needs to know what one perpetrated through the expulsion of countless German carriers of culture. I wish that one would write hundreds of these reports.”¹⁰⁹

The magazines certainly helped illuminate expellee plight. Already in 1950, *Stern* published “photographs that one cannot forget” of treks, destroyed wagons, and dead horses on the frozen Vistula Lagoon, “where hounded people attempted to save that which blind capriciousness smashed.”¹¹⁰ The magazine provided a narrative of “flight and expulsion” that

¹⁰⁷ Damals gab es hier nur Haß,” *Stern* Nr. 37, 1955, 21.

¹⁰⁸ Letters to the editor, *Stern* Nr. 18, 1958, 59.

¹⁰⁹ Letters to the editor, *Stern* Nr. 28, 1958, 51. The author responded to a critical letter of another reader questioning the entire premise of the piece: “The title of the travel report should not be ‘under Polish administration,’ but instead ‘in the lost German eastern territories.’ [...] For us expellees the report is not a surprise; [...] What does one achieve with this? While reading this report, the older generation of expellees will be most painfully reminded of their lost homeland and existence, and will once again contemplate a possible return. In other words, already scarred wounds are torn open once more, even though there will no longer be a return.” Letters to the editor, *Stern* Nr. 25, 1958, 48.

¹¹⁰ “Flucht über das Haff,” *Stern* Nr. 4, 1950, 7. “Exactly five years ago, as the Russian bulldozer inexorably rolled onward...a fate unfolded which in its deep tragedy will remain unforgettable....Hundreds of thousands have been crowded together into the narrowest of space. They feverishly wait for the moment for when the only flight path to the west becomes navigable....The cold gets worse. Again and again the strength of the ice is measured, until finally, first for those on foot and then for the heavy treks, the path is opened. Now the stream of refugees, which in unending columns pours over the...lagoon, does not end. On the open, snow-covered surface the bombs and machine guns of the enemy planes find easy targets. The pandemonium that they unleash is indescribable. Animals

typically focused on the “conspicuous treks of hounded refugees” which “know only one goal: to the West, to the West!”¹¹¹ Those who could not flee with treks joined “hundreds of thousands surging into the Baltic ports seeking their salvation from a horrific fate.”¹¹² Accompanying text described the perilous crossing dramatically, yet more or less accurately captured the experiences of survivors, which nevertheless did not represent the representative refugee experience.

A 1959 *Stern* serialized story, which combined factual and fictional components, expounded upon these themes.¹¹³ Revolving around a love triangle that culminates in the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, the plot used the German East’s “murder, destruction and defilement” as a backdrop. By recounting how a brutal enemy mercilessly swept up German civilians and the Wehrmacht, the piece defined the roles of victim and perpetrator.¹¹⁴ It was a time of “horrific atrocities,” a “return of the Mongolian invasions.”¹¹⁵ The Red Army’s demonic nature stood out even more dramatically with the description of the fall of Königsberg, which in 1945 continued to be “clean” and “esteemed”: “They did not come like a clap of thunder like elsewhere, they came sneaking like the black death; Königsberg died for 13 weeks. It started with bombs; grenades followed bombs—it ended with the occupation of the Russians.”¹¹⁶ This narrative was

and humans hurry out of the way, break through thinner ice and drown. For a long time corpses and ruins line the icy street of suffering, until the spring takes mercy and the heaving water drags the victims into the depths.”

¹¹¹ “Die letzten 23 Tage,” *Quick* Nr. 19, 1958, 5.

¹¹² “Die letzten 23 Tage,” *Quick* Nr. 19, 1958, 8.

¹¹³ “Das nackte Leben,” *Stern* Nr. 10, March 7, 1959. The series ran until April 25, 1959, or *Stern* Nr. 17, 1959.

¹¹⁴ “Das nackte Leben,” *Stern* Nr. 15, 44.

¹¹⁵ “Das nackte Leben,” *Stern* Nr. 10, 27. Concretely, *Stern* pointed to an incident in East Prussia that stood for what refugees faced: “In Nemmersdorf women were nailed to barn doors alive, all women and girls were defiled countless times, men and the elderly were martyred to death, forty French POWs bludgeoned.”

¹¹⁶ “Das nackte Leben,” *Stern* Nr. 15, 44.

buttressed by moving and evocative illustrations and photographs of mostly women and children, and concerned soldiers attempting to alleviate their plight.

The role reversal of victim and perpetrator, and glossing over the sources of how the war came to the German East, was as misleading as positing that the disaster was unforeseen and arbitrary. The suggestion of a universal panicked flight from a brutal enemy was also a distortion, as this ignored millions who chose to remain at home. The gripping tropes that magazines suggested as “typical” flight experiences did not speak for the majority of expellees. However, more importantly, these stories contributed to a master narrative of flight in which treks, the crossing of the brittle frozen Vistula Lagoon, and sinking ships emerged as iconic symbols of universal experiences, and offered images that seared themselves into the cultural memory of West Germany.¹¹⁷ Perhaps the first exposure to “flight and expulsion” for many West Germans, the *Tatsachenberichte* reached millions, and left indelible impressions.

One person in particular found the 1959 *Stern* piece compelling: The West German director Frank Wisbar. Following his 1958 epic on the catastrophic fate of the 6th Army in Stalingrad, Wisbar continued to tackle tragic subjects from the lost war.¹¹⁸ He credited the inspiration for his next project on the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* to the 1959 *Stern* article, and adopted major elements of the plot, such as the love triangle.¹¹⁹ *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (“Darkness Fell on Gotenhafen”) insisted upon stark realism, and seamlessly blended National Socialist *Wochenschau* footage with the film’s scenes. *Spiegel* credited the “technical brilliance”

¹¹⁷ On the iconic stature of the trek, see Paul, “Der Flüchtlingstrek.”

¹¹⁸ Frank Wisbar, *Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben* (Deutsche Film Hansa, 1958).

¹¹⁹ Michael J Ennis, *The M.S. Wilhelm Gustloff in German Memory Culture: A Case Study on Competing Discourses* (Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, 2014), 23.

of the final production, and praised the “astounding vitality” of the actors.¹²⁰ Like other films by Wisbar, who spent the war in exile, it addressed German victimhood and used it to reinforce anti-war messages. However, the director made clear that his work, “dedicated to the German women,” was intended as an “anti-Bolshevik film.”¹²¹ In either case, the style of docudrama presented the public with unforgettable scenes of suffering.¹²²

Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen represented an anomaly when it came to “flight in expulsion” in the other growing popular medium: Film and television. Expellees here were, like in other mediums, ubiquitous. But while the sappy *Heimatfilme* often featured characters with an expulsion background, plots revolved around issues of integration and mutual understanding, as previous chapters examined.¹²³ Scenes from the war seldom confronted audiences, who in any case preferred to escape the past and the hardships of postwar recovery with lighthearted entertainment. The 1955 adaptation of *Suchkind 312*, for instance, abstractly alluded to the chaos of the treks that separated the protagonist from her mother. Critics panned the “overcooked” and “sloppy” tone, but praised that the still relevant problem of “homeless children lost on the flight, carried off by strangers, left waiting for father and mother in hygienic but hapless institutional homes, without names or birthdates.” Another reviewer noted that it told the story of nearly 100,000 children whom the Red Cross reunited since 1945, and as such delivered a “timely protest on behalf of all children who were left over as victims of the last war.”¹²⁴

¹²⁰ “*Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (Deutschland),” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 11, March 9, 1960, 70.

¹²¹ “*Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (Deutschland),” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 11, March 9, 1960, 70.

¹²² After sinking the ship on a West German sound stage in 1960, Frank Wisbar returned to the tragedy in his 1967 TV film, *Flucht über die Ostsee*.

¹²³ For a more detailed analysis of the *Heimatfilme*, see Moeller, *War Stories*, 123–70.

¹²⁴ Quoted in Moeller, 146–47.

The war as such, and the accompanying experiences of refugees, seldom made an appearance in film or radio. There were notable exceptions, however. The 1951 anticommunist film *Kreuzweg der Freiheit* (“Crossroads of Freedom”), for example, heavily focused on the “German Passion” and the “right to homeland.” Utilizing scenes of the treks gleaned from Nazi propaganda unit shots, the film pursued a documentary style and reenacted scenes not captured by cameras, including the rape of a woman by Red Army soldiers in front of her children. In 1955, a radio episode titled “Documents of Humanity—In the Days of the Mass Expulsions” included readings of reports from the *Göttinger Arbeitskreis*’ publication.¹²⁵

Lastly, it must be noted that the media of 1950s did not merely reflect West German mentalities, they also contributed to a streamlining of expellee memories. The historical context, diverse phases, and myriad experiences were reduced to a handful of “representative” scenes, such as the trek, ship evacuations, or bloody massacres. An eye toward sensationalism and marketability may have innocently driven this process. But, as two case studies demonstrate, certain actors consciously engaged in memory politics in order to render an interpretation of “flight and expulsion.” In the process, they established prominent mental images that profoundly shaped the master narrative of the forced migrations and how Germans continue to think of them.

Architects of West German Collective Memory

A veritable flood of fictional or semi-fictional accounts of “flight and expulsion” confronted West Germans with an accounting of the war and German victimhood into the 1960s. The degree to which they shaped memory of the recent past naturally varied, but some authors proved more influential than others. The amateur historian Heinz Schön, for instance, left lasting

¹²⁵ BayHStA, Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 200, “Ost- und Mitteldeutsche Heimatsendungen,” 1955. Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente*.

and powerful impressions of one of the most notorious chapters of “flight and expulsion”: The sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. As a member of the German merchant marine during the war, Schön survived the largest maritime disaster in human history and dedicated the rest of his life to documenting the event. Already in 1949, Schön issued a three part account of the disaster for *Heim und Welt*.¹²⁶ After receiving more than 1,500 letters to the editor, including from survivors and other witnesses, the paper tasked Schön with expanding the chronicle and incorporating new material into a twelve part series that appeared in 1951.¹²⁷

Schön’s interwove his personal experiences onboard the ship with the memories of others that spoke for the nearly 10,000 victims. The narrative predominantly revolved around the central protagonists Hermann Freymüller, who booked passage for his wife, daughter and infant son on the ship but never saw them again, and the titillating “Gustloff foundling,” an unidentified newborn found in a life raft by Werner Frick, who adopted the youngest survivor of the sinking. The rescued child captivated imaginations, as it seemingly spoke of the fate of many young separated from their families in posters and broadcasts in the postwar period. Freymüller himself became convinced that Schön described his lost son Frank-Michael, and waged a custody battle against the German Democratic Republic.¹²⁸ As a West German public clamored for the

¹²⁶ Heinz Schön, “Die Wilhelm Gustloff Katastrophe. Wie sie wirklich war,” *Heim und Welt* 7, February 20, 1949. The second and third parts appeared on February 27 and March 6.

¹²⁷ Heinz Schön, “Tot—und doch am Leben—Das Schicksal des Gustloff-Findlings,” *Heim und Welt* 42, 1951, 1. The series ran each week until the 53rd number of *Heim und Welt*.

¹²⁸ On the controversy, see Peter Sandmeyer, “‘Wilhelm Gustloff’: ‘Seid still, wir müssen alle sterben,’” *Stern*, February 25, 2008, <https://www.stern.de/politik/geschichte/-wilhelm-gustloff---seid-still--wir-muessen-alle-sterben--3083234.html>. The Fricks refused to relinquish their adopted son and forbade blood testing, and the East German government opted to allow Peter to decide for himself whether he wanted to pursue the investigation after his 21st birthday. Freymüller passed away in 1964, a year before Peter’s 21st birthday. Unaware of the controversy for many years, Peter Frick published his memoirs under a pseudonym. See Peter Weise, *Hürdenlauf: Erinnerungen eines Findlings* (Rostock: Büro + Service Rostock, 2006).

reunification of a bereaved father with his son caught behind the Iron Curtain, the struggle embodied the division and suffering of the German nation.

Schön emerged as the Gustloff's foremost chronicler, writing popular accounts that combined personal memories with the recollections of others into a literary narrative that appealed to a broad audience.¹²⁹ The Schieder Commission's footnotes reveal that they relied on Schön's sleuthing for their research, for instance.¹³⁰ For his 1960 film *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen*, director Frank Wisbar consulted and hired Schön as a technical advisor. Scenes from Schön's writing—such as the heroics of the radio operator who risked his life to send an SOS signal as the ship sank—featured as gripping plot points of the film. Schön's stature as one of the founders of cultural memory on “flight and expulsion” cannot be underestimated. Yet more than the author himself, the tragedy he helped illuminate animated West German imaginations. For instance, several of the *Dokumentation*'s testimonies invoked the sinking in their reports. Largely recorded in the early 1950s, the maritime disaster shaped expellee memories, which incorporated the sinking into their personal narratives without firsthand knowledge.¹³¹ Rumors of the Gustloff's fate may indeed have spread like wildfire already during the wartime evacuations, but the testimonies suggest that postwar reports left deep impressions

¹²⁹ Heinz Schön, *Der Untergang der “Wilhelm Gustloff”* (Göttingen: Karina-Goltze-Verl., 1952); Heinz Schön, *Die “Gustloff”-Katastrophe: Bericht eines Überlebenden über die größte Schiffskatastrophe im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1984); Heinz Schön, *Rettung über die Ostsee: die Flucht aus den Ostseehäfen 1944/45* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1985); Heinz Schön, *SOS Wilhelm Gustloff: die grösste Schiffskatastrophe der Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 1998); Heinz Schön, *Die letzte Fahrt der “Gustloff” Tatsachenbericht eines Überlebenden* (Stuttgart: Motorbuch, 2008). Schön also has lent his pen to general works on “flight and expulsion.” See Heinz Schön, *Tragödie Ostpreußen 1944-1945 ; als die Rote Armee das Land besetzte* (Kiel: Arndt, 1999); Heinz Schön, *Königsberger Schicksalstage: der Untergang der Hauptstadt Ostpreussens ; 1944-48* (Kiel: Arndt, 2002); Heinz Schön, *Flucht aus Ostpreußen 1945 die Menschenjagd der Roten Armee* (Kiel: Arndt, 2001); Heinz Schön, *Ostpreussen 1944,45 im Bild: Endkampf - Flucht - Vertreibung* (Kiel: Arndt, 2007).

¹³⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:48E.

¹³¹ Schieder, 1:71, 146, 147, 250, 282, 306, 307, 323–24.

on expellees that retroactively colored the memory of their own suffering. By the time the witnesses recorded their experiences, the *Gustloff* already served as shorthand to convey the dangers and suffering of fleeing civilians.

The writer Heinz Bongartz, better known as Jürgen Thorwald, also profoundly influenced how West Germans would come to recall the war. Bongartz's journalistic career began as a propagandist for the German military. In the spring of 1945, the navy charged him with drafting laudatory pieces of the evacuation of refugees from the German East.¹³² His observations did not appear in print until after the war in the conservative *Christ und Welt*. As a founding editor, Bongartz together with Eugen Gerstenmaier and other representatives of the Protestant Church formed the publication in June 1948 around a coterie of former employees of the propaganda department of the Third Reich's Foreign Office. Habitual condemnations of denazification procedures and war crimes trials repeatedly drew the ire of American authorities, who threatened revoking the publishing license of what it considered an "under cover Nazi-paper" espousing "nationalism and militarism."¹³³

Particularly several pieces of Bongartz, who adopted the pseudonym of "Erbo," ruffled the feathers of occupation officials.¹³⁴ With considerable literary flourish, Bongartz sought to chronicle the "gruesome dance of death" that included treks, Soviet tanks rolling over fleeing refugees, and overloaded ships sinking in icy seas that "still remains shrouded in silence."¹³⁵ The author fleetingly acknowledged "partially legitimate, but often artificially stimulated hatred"

¹³² Oels, "Vertreibung"; Ennis, *The M.S. Wilhelm Gustloff in German Memory Culture*, 171.

¹³³ Oels, "Dieses Buch ist kein Roman," 384.

¹³⁴ Erbo, "Die Katastrophe der Flüchtlingsschiffe 1945," *Christ und Welt*, November 12, 1948, 1; and Erbo, "Der Untergang der 'Wilhelm Gustloff,'" *Christ und Welt*, November 19, 1948, 4.

¹³⁵ Erbo, "Die Katastrophe der Flüchtlingsschiffe 1945," *Christ und Welt*, November 12, 1948, 4.

against Germany, but quickly moved to casting light on “the tragedy...that was far more terrible and destructive than the indisputable suffering of Soviet millions.”¹³⁶ Lamenting the “odium of political intentions” demonstrated by the victors who judged Germany “ex post facto,” Bongartz argued that no German should feel confident to pontificate over “justice, guilt, and sins.”¹³⁷ A careful and truthful examination of expellee misery was necessary, however, in order to avoid a “new wave of propaganda that may appropriate these events as a political instrument.”¹³⁸

Bongartz’s rhetorical strategy—briefly acknowledging German guilt before transitioning to descriptions of ostensibly greater suffering that offset it—remained carefully worded to survive the vigilant gaze of the American occupiers. It nevertheless revealed an agenda that Bongartz would return to more forcefully. Already a few months later, under the nom de plume Jürgen Thorwald to evade occupation oversight, Bongartz authored a weekly running series for *Christ und Welt* titled “East German Fate” that expanded on his earlier articles.¹³⁹ From March until June 1949, dramatic illustrations and photos of treks, sinking ships, and destroyed cities graced the paper’s cover. Vividly blending news reports, testimonies, and fictionalized accounts into a narrative of helpless civilians caught between a heroic Wehrmacht beholden to the ideological obtuseness of Nazi fat cats and a savage Soviet juggernaut, Thorwald’s account struck a chord: Sales of *Christ und Welt*, already boasting among the highest readerships in West Germany, tripled in the first three weeks of the series’ debut from 17,000 to 68,000.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Erbo, “Der Untergang der ‘Wilhelm Gustloff,’” *Christ und Welt*, November 19, 1948, 4.

¹³⁹ Jürgen Thorwald, “Ostdeutsches Schicksal,” *Christ und Welt*, March 24, 1949, 1.

¹⁴⁰ Oels, “Dieses Buch ist kein Roman,” 384.

The unexpected acclaim prompted the paper's editors to solicit submissions of experiences. These flooded in, and together with thousands of testimonies gathered by Gerstenmaier's *Evangelisches Hilfswerk* and Thorwald's access to 55,000 Nazi news reports and former generals, produced a massive source base.¹⁴¹ The materials provided an ideal collection for Thorwald's next project of turning the series into a two-volume book, which appeared in 1950 and instantly became a financial success.¹⁴² The content expounded upon the themes articulated in *Christ und Welt*. Given his military background, Thorwald's writing focused on the Wehrmacht, whose soldiers often appeared as rational and sober actors compelled to fulfill their oaths of duty despite the megalomania and insanity of Hitler and the Nazi regime. Yet in addition to the stoicism and heroic suffering of the military, another major theme is the misery of the civilian population. David Oels underlines that much of Thorwald's writing purports to rely on evidence, yet the archival materials reveal outright fabrications. For instance, the account of an East Prussian woman who fled across the Vistula Lagoon on a trek, which Thorwald later identified as the symbolic core of his book, provides a glaring case of the author's methods.¹⁴³ The closest corresponding report in Thorwald's materials that could have served as the basis

¹⁴¹ Thorwald relied on over 2,000 documents, including "books, brochures, newspapers and fliers, letters, diaries, notarized testimonies." Moreover, "exhaustive reports from memory of leading personalities at the time" and interviews with retired regime elites and generals rounded out Thorwald's source base. Jürgen Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1965), 587.

¹⁴² Jürgen Thorwald, *Es begann an der Weichsel* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1950); Jürgen Thorwald, *Das Ende der Elbe* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1950).

¹⁴³ Thorwald, *Es begann an der Weichsel*, 143–47. Thorwald invoked the centrality of this protagonist in a 1971 interview. See "Jürgen Thorwald, Dichtung und viel Wahrheit. Über die Schwierigkeit, Sachbücher zu schreiben," *Deutsche Zeitung/Christ und Welt*, November 5, 1971.

made no mention of rapes or Red Army tanks flattening a trek.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the materials reveal substantial deviations, including stylistic editing that is then reproduced as verbatim quotes.¹⁴⁵

Oels not only identifies inconsistencies, he astutely observes Thorwald's fusion of fact, "emotionally-subjective" reports, and fiction: "Front developments and tactical considerations stand next to dreams and character studies, documentation finds itself beside blatant literary construction."¹⁴⁶ Thorwald's background as a propagandist likely served him well, providing a template for compelling writing that effectively blended testimonies, wartime reports, and interviews—all inflected with gripping literary style—into one of the first histories of the final days of the war accessible and palatable for the West German public. There is an element of artistic license, yet more than book sales influenced how Thorwald chronicled the war.

Thorwald's writing reflected the worldview of a former Nazi propagandist, and member of a reconstituted circle of fellow travelers at *Christ und Welt* engaged in a campaign of interpreting the recent past. They had a vested interest in establishing guilt and innocence. The blatant partisanship certainly was not lost on foreign readers, who found Thorwald's arguments unconvincing and unseemly.¹⁴⁷ In West Germany, where the dominant discourse focused on German victimhood, rehabilitating "ordinary" Germans and the Wehrmacht, ending "Nazi

¹⁴⁴ In the 1965 edition, Thorwald acknowledged that he changed the name of the protagonist, who he "solely selected as a symbol to portray the verifiable suffering recounted in original reports and which hundreds of thousands of East German women had to endure." Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 298.

¹⁴⁵ Oels, "Dieses Buch ist kein Roman," 386.

¹⁴⁶ Oels, 378.

¹⁴⁷ Léon Poliakov, writing in the Jewish journal *Commentary*, noted: "All through his book Mr. Thorwald attempts to convince his readers that the sufferings endured by the German population as a result of Russian barbarism during the last phase of the war remain without parallel in history; most of us will have little difficulty thinking of a parallel—and in more than a parallel—that Mr. Thorwald apparently wishes us to forget." Ernest S. Pisko similarly in *Christian Science Monitor* "wonders about the author's moral stand when one reads such a resentfully ironic statement as: 'Later generations may judge the evens even no worse than the destruction or expulsion of the jews [sic] from Germany.'" Both quotations in Oels, 374.

snooper,” and denouncing denazification excesses and perceived litigious and unjust trials, Thorwald delivered a magisterial historical account.¹⁴⁸ German reviewers praised the criticism of the generals’ misguided and disastrous acquiescence to Hitler and the “damning denouncement...of brown *Gauleiter*.” More importantly, Thorwald delivered the “harsh indictment against the Poles and the Red Army,” whose crimes let the “unspeakable atrocities of the Hitler people” pale in comparison.¹⁴⁹ The messages obviously struck a chord.

Reviewers praised that Thorwald delivered a “shattering picture, whose effect no one can withdraw from.”¹⁵⁰ It was precisely the popular style that made the work so accessible and effective. As *Spiegel* noted, Thorwald mastered “historic novels, only that his novels’ heroes overwhelmingly still live today, and every reader experienced this epoch depicted in the novels.”¹⁵¹ The blurred lines between truthfulness and “authentic” fiction did not bother critics. It also did not trouble Thorwald: The author explained that “this book is no novel, but instead a report of historical events, even in the few passages that utilize the literary form. It is historical truth, insofar that such truth can be ascertained by a single person seeking it.”¹⁵² Thorwald seemingly powerfully captured the experiences and feeling of an entire nation.

The postwar author ranks as a central shaper of German collective memory of the war. The “authentic” *Tatsachenberichte* (“reports based on facts”) counted as among the first published descriptions of “flight and expulsion” that many West Germans encountered. In the

¹⁴⁸ Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (München: Beck, 2012).

¹⁴⁹ Rudolf Pechel, “Es began an der Weichsel,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 76, Volume 1, Nr. 2, 1950, 117.

¹⁵⁰ Rudolf Pechel, “Es began an der Weichsel,” *Deutsche Rundschau* 76, Volume 1, Nr. 2, 1950, 117.

¹⁵¹ “Wlassow. Kapitel verspielt,” *Der Spiegel* 52, December 24, 1952, 27.

¹⁵² Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 587.

process, he constructed a narrative with themes that profoundly influenced public discourse over “flight and expulsion”: Notions of a small minority of Germans as criminals, let alone Nazis; a miniscule circle of delusional figures propping up an insane and increasingly erratic Hitler as the craven regime crumbled and dragged the real Germany into the flames; the Wehrmacht as valiant yet hapless heroes struggling to uphold their duties to their compatriots. But above all, the collapse of the regime and its desperate radicalism turned the majority of Germans into innocent victims, their misery unimaginably compounded by the brutality of a cruel enemy.

Despite assurances that he did not intend to write “about the guilt of the others or about one’s own innocence,” Thorwald in fact delivered what for many West Germans was a convincing and powerful accounting of historical truth, and of guilt and innocence.¹⁵³ The editors of the *Dokumentation* recognized Thorwald as an authoritative source, citing him numerous times and thereby validating his accounts.¹⁵⁴ The gripping volumes moreover enjoyed immense success, and the content reached a large audience: Before 1980, they sold more than fourteen million copies, making them among West Germany’s most successful pop histories.¹⁵⁵ Gerstenmaier recalled seeing a copy at Adenauer’s bedside, and that the chancellor confided that “he had learned much” only after having turned to it.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Thorwald, 589. “It should not be a book about the guilt of the others or about one’s own innocence. It was not written to glorify generals or to categorically damn party members or the other way around; it was not written to prove our own innocence and to denounce the guilt of the others for our own exoneration; it also was not written in order to engender new hatred, but was written to find the truth on all sides, insofar this is even possible today and for an imperfect person. For in the truth alone lie the lessons that this book can impart—above all to the Germans, perhaps also to other peoples.”

¹⁵⁴ As a reviewer of the *Dokumentation* noted, the collection of testimonies provided “irrefutable proof of the accuracy of those descriptions,” meaning the popular works of the 1950s. “Katastrophen der Deutschen-Vertreibung aus dem Osten in Dokumenten,” *Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 6, 1954, clipping in BArch B150-5641.

¹⁵⁵ Oels, “Dieses Buch ist kein Roman,” 375.

¹⁵⁶ Oels, “Vertreibung.”

Thorwald's juxtaposition of German guilt and suffering contributed immensely to the constitution of a West German political identity as victims of the war, in which the expellees were a particular and prominent "community of fate." His writings are representative of the discourse on the expulsions within the FRG by 1950. Yet they also profoundly influenced how the forced migrations were discussed: His style proved highly popular, and pulp authors and German tabloids attempted to emulate Thorwald's methods. Above all, Thorwald unquestionably shaped how broad segments of the public perceived "flight and expulsion." The "symbolic aggregation" purporting to represent "typical" expellee experiences shaped the narrative of "flight and expulsion," and articulated a narrative that dominated discourse into the 1960s. Lastly, as we shall see, Thorwald's images appeared frequently elsewhere, and proved the source of many a memory of the expulsions.

The Red Flood and the Heroic Wehrmacht: Two Pillars of "Flight and Expulsion"

As has already been argued, authors like Thorwald or the Schieder Commission engaged in a streamlining of experiences at odds with the historical record. The comparison between narratives and sources cast a different light on two of the main actors who populated "flight and expulsion" scenes in West Germany. In popular histories, newspaper articles, and other media of the 1950s and 1960s, an apolitical and heroic Wehrmacht sacrificing itself to buy precious time for fleeing civilians and opposing a seemingly heartless and barbaric Red Army constituted the most consistent themes. The myth of the Wehrmacht as savior of refugees and salacious claims about Soviet savagery remain powerfully entrenched, yet archival testimonies question this powerful element of German memory of the war.

Soviet cruelty permeated nearly every iteration of "flight and expulsion." As has been explained, racialized notions of "Mongolian" hordes underlined assumptions of unspeakable

horror that unfolded wherever the Red Army arrived. “An Asiatic storm of violence cast Silesia into apocalyptic darkness in 1945,” Johannes Kaps explained.¹⁵⁷ Readers of *Stern* learned of when “the times of the Mongolian invasions returned.”¹⁵⁸ Imagery of a “red flood” or “red bulldozer” impressed the unprecedented ferocity and scale of suffering upon audiences.¹⁵⁹ Narratives emphasized cruelty and bloodlust, and even when highlighting acts of humanitarianism, the magnanimity seemed a drop in the bucket that validated the rule of Slavic barbarism.¹⁶⁰ Postwar literature suggested unparalleled atrocities that a majority of expellees experienced, yet testimonies and a critical reading require a more nuanced understanding of Red Army and German civilian interactions that stand at odds with popular assumptions.

The behavior of Soviet soldiers has found analysis elsewhere already. Of concern here is the framing of Red Army actions and their behavior. To begin with, sources reveal an enemy capable of extreme violence, but not intent on perpetrating a genocide or deliberate murder campaign, as postwar commentators frequently asserted.¹⁶¹ Furthermore, expellee narratives typically stripped away context that did not justify, but certainly could explain the enemy’s behavior. This can be illustrated by one concrete example of the report of a police officer. By his own admission, he and his cousin spent the moments before the Red Army’s arrival destroying

¹⁵⁷ See dustcover of Johannes Kaps, *Martyrium und Heldentum ostdeutscher Frauen: ein Ausschnitt aus der schlesischen Passion, 1945/46* (München: Niedermayer & Miesgang, 1954).

¹⁵⁸ “Das nackte Leben,” *Stern* 10, March 7, 1959, 27.

¹⁵⁹ H. Birkstedt, “Die Besetzung Hindenburgs vor 10 Jahren,” *Unser Oberschlesien* 3, February 5, 1955; H.G. Warman, “Deutschland ist auch hinter Oder/Neiße,” *Pommersche Zeitung* 3, February 5, 1955, quoted in Gaida, *Die offiziellen Organe der ostdeutschen Landsmannschaften*, 219. See also Flucht über das Haf,” *Stern* Nr. 4, 1950, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Kurth and Göttinger Arbeitskreis, *Dokumente*.

¹⁶¹ See Christel Panzig and Klaus-Alexander Panzig, “‘Die Russen kommen!’ Deutsche Erinnerungen an Begegnungen mit ‘Russen’ bei Kriegsende 1945 in Dörfern und Kleinstädten Mitteldeutschlands und Mecklenburg-Vorpommerns,” in *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland: Briefe von der Front (1945) und historische Analysen*, ed. Elke Scherstjanoi (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2004), 340–68.

incriminating documents. Moreover, the policeman's basement contained supplies for an entire *Volksturm* company. Enemy soldiers also discovered photo albums that revealed that four sons were in the military, with one being in the SS. During the course of ransacking the house, the "carrying-on was so comical, that I could not help laughing" at the troopers, who flew into a rage. Lastly, the policeman intervened in an execution and claimed to have grabbed the gun. The policeman survived all these infractions, but "for some reason" soldiers ultimately shot his cousin. "That night I quarreled with the dear Lord. How could, why did something like this have to happen?" Accounting for self-aggrandizement, and the tragedy of his cousin's death notwithstanding, the testimony made the case of Red Army soldiers as indiscriminate murderers, yet a careful reading could also support a more nuanced picture: Even when encountering a belligerent Nazi with weapons and sense of superiority, it did not warrant the use of the gun.¹⁶²

Presented as a case of inexplicable cruelty to readers, the particular account revealed the tendency of postwar narrations to elide motivations—particularly when they broached the subject of Nazism—of the murderers and portray scenes of irrational bloodlust. The catalysts for violence, however, were numerous. As Norman Naimark found, the Red Army frequently encountered a defeated yet nevertheless conceited foe, and the perceived arrogance and airs of superiority infuriated and goaded the victors into degrading and humiliating the "master race" that viciously ravaged the Soviet Union.¹⁶³ In letters home, they contemplated avenging lost

¹⁶² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:394–99. The testimony seemed plausible enough despite the Schieder Commission's insistence on weeding out unbelievable reports. Portions nevertheless read as bluster: "In later incidents as well I found that the Russians immediately came around if you did not take them seriously. As soon as one aimed the gun at me, I tore open my smock and stood before them with spread legs. Then they shook their heads and let me go. Their facial expression seemed to say: this guy is not normal." Schieder, 1:396.

¹⁶³ Norman M Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 114–15.

family members and compatriots.¹⁶⁴ Fliers such as the one distributed before the January 12, 1945 offensive, which recalled the “corpses of all the innocent from the mass graves” that now marched with them toward Berlin, heightened emotions. The “boots and shoes of those men, women, and children shot or gassed in Maidanek” inspired soldiers for the last assault on the fascist foe.¹⁶⁵ The thought of the enemy’s crimes, which many soldiers witnessed or close family members fell victim to, undoubtedly lingered on many a mind as they entered into Germany.

Expellees themselves sometimes fleetingly mentioned receiving explanations from their tormentors. Soviet troops cited their Jewish heritage or other horrors perpetrated by Germans against their families as the reason for their retribution.¹⁶⁶ Asked for the reason why he opened fire on fleeing refugees, a Soviet officer explained that “German soldiers also shot dead [Soviet] women and children.”¹⁶⁷ Atina Grossman found that “[a]gain and again in German recollections of what Russian occupiers told them, the vengeful memory summoned was not a parallel violation by a German raping a Russian woman, but of a horror on a different order: it was the

¹⁶⁴ Elke Scherstjanoi, ed., *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland: Briefe von der Front (1945) und historische Analysen* (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2004).

¹⁶⁵ Quoted Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (12.1-20.1.1945)*, vol. 1 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 8.

¹⁶⁶ Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (21.1-28.1.1945)*, vol. 2 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 594.

¹⁶⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:200. Indeed, many Soviet soldiers explained that they exacted retribution for what Nazi Germany had perpetrated in the Soviet Union. As a woman recalled: “[A]ll who spoke a little German told of how their wives and sisters were treated much worse by German soldiers, that even some had been doused in gasoline and burned, locked in their homes and burned, shot, etc.” The dimensions of the war of annihilation that could help explain events in the German East, however, remained unmentioned by editors, and such statements were left to readers to interpret. Schieder, 1:266.

image of a German soldier swinging a baby, torn from its mother's arms, against a wall—the mother screams, the baby's brains splatter against the wall, the soldier laughs.”¹⁶⁸

Rationales—whether motivated by vengeance, hatred, greed, combat fatigue, or human error—never matter to the dead. They are of incisive importance for interpreting events, however. Explanations of the 1950s remained influenced by Nazi commentators, for whom the enemy's intentions seemed obvious: The violence stemmed from “the desire to annihilate which has resulted from the years of hate propaganda against the Germans,” as Wehrmacht intelligence argued in early 1945.¹⁶⁹ The regime cajoled the public into rabid resistance by attributing enemy crimes as the work of vile propagandists such as “the Jew Ehrenburg.”¹⁷⁰ The press attributed the waves of refugees that presaged the looming catastrophe to the “onslaught of the Bolsheviks.”¹⁷¹ Minister of Finance Ludwig Graf Schwerin von Krosigk took to the radio on May 2, 1945 to discuss the “stream of desperate, starving people chased by dive bombers fleeing westward from unspeakable terror, from murder and defilement” and condemn the “iron curtain” that obscured the Bolshevik crimes from the world.¹⁷² By blaming the regime's death throes on communist forces, the Nazi leadership absolved itself from responsibility for suffering civilians while cultivating a narrative of fear that would hopefully inspire all to fight to the last bullet.

¹⁶⁸ Atina Grossman, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *October* 72 (1995): 51.

¹⁶⁹ Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 78.

¹⁷⁰ Kurt-Lothar Tank, “Das Grauen von Nemmersdorf,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 28th, 1944, 1

¹⁷¹ See the *Deutsche Wochenschau* report from March 16, 1945, reproduced in Paul, “Der Flüchtlingstrek,” 668.

¹⁷² Quoted in Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 391.

Notions that the inferno in the German East was but the natural outcome of communist sub-humans plotting to annihilate Germany therefore resonated profoundly after 1945, and formed a basis for subsequent memories of Soviet and Slavic violence. For postwar commentators attempting to interpret the enemy's intentions, wartime narratives provided a helpful framing. Whether consciously or unwittingly, they adopted tropes proffered by Nazi propaganda, and framed the violence as evidence of communist directives that drove the brutality, as the previous chapter argued. The combination of supposed historic Slavic aggression and primitiveness—expressed in “destructive Magyar nationalism,” Czechoslovakian Hussitism, or “pan-Slavic-imperialism”—with Bolshevism explained German victimhood.¹⁷³ These explanations reflected and further reinforced assessments of individual witnesses of violence ostensibly aimed at “exterminating us Germans.”¹⁷⁴ But unexpected benevolent gestures, briefly touched upon above, call into question the simplified and widely believed narrative of bloodthirsty Bolsheviks created by Nazi propaganda and reified in postwar accounts.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the discernable shock when the enemy did not live up to the terrifying images reflects understandable immense fears, as well as the effectiveness of Goebbels's propaganda.¹⁷⁶ These

¹⁷³ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 71.; Emmanuel J Reichenberger, *Ostdeutsche Passion* (München: Europa-Buchhandlung, 1948), 11; and Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Seliger-Archiv VIII, 2224, “Grundsätze einer sudetendeutschen Europapolitik” (undated [early 1950s]), 1.

¹⁷⁴ BArch BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 49-50.

¹⁷⁵ Even Nazi authorities questioned such images. In February 1945, the Wehrmacht reported that “strict orders from the highest command of the Red Army are in effect, calling for a gentle treatment of the civilian population, and particularly not to touch the property of inhabitants who have fled.” Similarly, the SS concluded that the “bestial behavior of individual groups of Red Army troops [...] cannot be traced to orders of superior agencies.” Quoted in Zeidler, *Kriegsende im Osten*, 153.

¹⁷⁶ Soviet military authorities found that in many areas they found few civilians, as most inhabitants went into hiding, had fled, or were evacuated by authorities. “With a successful implementation of the evacuation as the goal, the fascist propaganda sharpened its agitation. It terrifies the population with horrors that have apparently been carried out by the Red Army.” Quoted in Scherstjanoi, *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland*, 56. The assessment cannot of course be taken at face value, but it suggests the widespread dissemination of propaganda images that terrified the population. Another report from March similarly alludes to irrational fear: “The remaining German population has enormous fear of the Red Army. The inhabitants... of Silesia are convinced that ‘the Russians, if not

images, entrenched in German minds, colored memories of the enemy and carried into the postwar period, as testimonies reveal with their descriptions and racialized language.

The Red Army and callous Nazi ideologues habitually contrasted sharply with those ostensibly easing civilian suffering: The Wehrmacht. Frequently, the literature depicted the army valiantly struggling to save the population from a cruel fate.¹⁷⁷ Based solely on the fact that the navy ferried 1.5 million refugees to safety, or that thousands of desperate civilians managed to catch rides with retreating army units, the notion of the Wehrmacht's final months as an elaborate rescue operation seem compelling. No standing policy, however, prioritized civilians. In early March, the Nazi Party issued five priority levels for train transport, where transportation of civilians ranked last; in parentheses, the document noted that there "practically were no more refugee trains."¹⁷⁸ That same month, Hitler decreed that the evacuation of civilians should come second to military priorities.¹⁷⁹ The 1.5-2 million evacuees who found salvation on trains or ships were fortunate beneficiaries only after military personnel and material loaded up.

West German collective memory seemingly overlooked the reality that no official order counselled the Wehrmacht to sacrifice itself for the wellbeing of the population, and instead elevated its final stand into a heroic act. Numerous testimonies testify that the military did intervene to help, praising dutiful officers who for instance stopped fleeing trucks and ordered

today then tomorrow, will carry out the butchering of the population,' they hide in basements, they don't go in the open. If they encounter Soviet soldiers and officers, many (including children and the elderly) thrust their arms into the air, as if begging to be spared." Quoted in Jochen Laufer and Georgij P Kynin, *Die UdSSR und die deutsche Frage 1941 - 1949: Dokumente aus russischen Archiven*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2004), 550.

¹⁷⁷ "Das nackte Leben," *Stern* 10, March 7, 1959, 22.

¹⁷⁸ Quoted in Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, 1st ed. (München: C.H.Beck, 2011), 73.

¹⁷⁹ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 265.

them to take on women and children.¹⁸⁰ As one refugee attested, the Wehrmacht “did their utmost to help refugees.”¹⁸¹ The collapsing front provided enough examples of individual Wehrmacht members casting a protective hand over beleaguered civilians, so that postwar celebrations of unparalleled selflessness ring true.

But altruism and bravery appear rather exceptional when examining archival sources even superficially. Since much of the population refused to leave, the regime with assistance of the military often implemented coercive evacuation measures. Furthermore, the disintegration of military order in the face of the enemy’s irresistible onslaught enveloped noncombatants as well: Capriciousness, indifference, outright violence against civilians, and actions that prevented or complicated flight are among the most consistent themes in the mountain of sources.

Condemnations and recollections of party and military officials as tormentors of expellees permeate the thousands of testimonies collected by the Schieder Commission. The historians did little, however, to refute popular notions that the military acted as a savior of refugees, fighting steadfastly to the last in order to buy the fleeing population precious time.

Unsurprisingly, a shattering military fighting to the death frequently failed to live up to such images, and the conduct of soldiers often stoked resentment. Witnesses complained of military personnel occupying houses, evicting families, and destroying property.¹⁸² Already during the Soviet summer offensive of 1944, the Nazi Party received daily “complaints over the unheard of manner in which these soldiers are behaving,” which included theft and destruction of

¹⁸⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:55.. See also Schieder, 1:273 and 428..

¹⁸¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:124.

¹⁸² BArch Ost-Dok 1/1a, 124 and BArch Ost-Dok 1/7, 57.

private property throughout the eastern borderlands the province.¹⁸³ An East Prussian judge protested the poor comportment of soldiers during the October counteroffensive that freed parts of the region from Soviet occupation, stating that most returning refugees found their shops plundered and wardrobes kicked in. The enemy appropriated very little, he noted, and instead the Wehrmacht “acted like vandals,” adding that “conspicuous quantities of luxury goods [were] sent to relatives via mail.”¹⁸⁴ Not all appropriation was for personal gain, yet it rankled civilians and had serious consequences nonetheless. In the fall of 1944, the military increasingly confiscated horses, wagons, and vehicles to compensate for enormous losses incurred between June and October, which meant that thousands could not flee in early 1945.¹⁸⁵ Farmers watched furiously as their livestock ended up in field kitchens, with no compensation.¹⁸⁶

That the Wehrmacht proved equally as capable of exhibiting the debauchery and corruption typically reserved for descriptions of Nazi Party apparatchiks found little attention after 1945. The same can be said of the increasing displays of fatalism which alarmed and disgusted civilians. With the frontlines now running through German soil, civilians got a close look at the demoralization of the common soldiery, expressed in open drunkenness and defeatist comments.¹⁸⁷ With discipline shattering, the Wehrmacht frequently presented itself as a defeated force rather than a bulwark. One East Prussian recalled her shock when soldiers “making

¹⁸³ Cited in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 260.

¹⁸⁴ Bernhard Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944: Was in Ostpreussen tatsächlich geschah* (Berlin: Edition Ost, 1997), 139–40. Security Police reported to Wehrmacht General Hoßbach that refugees returning to their homes found their property damaged and stolen. One man “discovered that German soldiers had stolen his radio and a portion of his clothes and otherwise had ransacked and soiled the home.” Another woman complained that German soldiers had no consideration, and damaged her home and furniture. Fisch, 139.

¹⁸⁵ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 34. See also Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:805.

¹⁸⁶ BArch Ost-Dok 2/5, 98.

¹⁸⁷ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984., 58 and 91; and Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:598.

themselves at home” in her house declared the war to be over.¹⁸⁸ Others were dismayed by panicked soldiers forcing their way into homes to “hole up behind luggage, between chair and table legs,” and hide from roaming military police searching for deserters.¹⁸⁹ In Pillau, where tens of thousands hoped to escape on ships, soldiers bypassed blockades by tearing children from their mothers to pass them off as their own, while others donned women’s clothing.¹⁹⁰ The sight of shattered, fleeing units forced expellees to realize that they misplaced their hopes in their military, an anguished insight continuously coming to the fore in testimonies.¹⁹¹

In addition to these psychological blows, numerous accounts testified to the brutality of authorities. Heavy-handed measures to force civilians to depart against their will “destroyed the last link between the Party and the population.”¹⁹² Soldiers forcibly threw civilians from homes or threatened with executions if they remained.¹⁹³ Refugees complained of “military police [who] constantly came” and harangued inhabitants.¹⁹⁴ Seeing flight as “hopeless,” some took to hiding from patrols to avoid being “captured” and evicted.¹⁹⁵ Contemporaries condemned sending women and children into subzero conditions and combat zones as “one of the worst acts

¹⁸⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 86.

¹⁸⁹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa* 2, 2004, 401.

¹⁹⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:150.

¹⁹¹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:509.

¹⁹² Quoted in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 68.

¹⁹³ BArch Ost-Dok 1/87, 9; and BArch Ost-Dok 1/146, 87. See also Walter Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa. Ein Kollektives Tagebuch (6.2-12.2.1945)*, vol. 4 (München: btb Verlag, 2004), 382.

¹⁹⁴ Josef Henke, “Exodus Aus Ostpreußen Und Schlesien,” in *Die Vertreibung Der Deutschen Aus Dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 117.

¹⁹⁵ Cited in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 270.

of madness of National Socialism”¹⁹⁶ Efforts of the regime to use propaganda of Red Army atrocities to encourage departures did not convince all, who instead dismissed the “horror stories” as exaggerations.¹⁹⁷ As pervasive as fear of Soviet soldiers may have been, many viewed compulsory evacuation “with all means” as a pointlessly cruel policy that exposed civilians to “the greatest dangers and challenges” and subjected them “to every air attack, every volley from planes.”¹⁹⁸ It was, as one Breslau priest noted in his diary, a “crime against the German people, a rush into death,” but one which authorities accepted.¹⁹⁹ The author went even further: The forced evacuation amounted to “one of the worst acts of madness of National Socialism.”²⁰⁰

“Instead of the warrior helping the refugee, the refugee had to help the warrior save his life,” a refugee summarized.²⁰¹ Logically, a fighting force must maintain its operational capabilities, and no military could be expected to curtail its movements. But this had serious ramifications for millions of civilians caught in the maelstrom. Moreover, it became apparent that some movement was not bound by dictates of combat, but the catastrophic collapse of the Wehrmacht. Civilians observed cars filled with officers and their baggage race past.²⁰² Soldiers

¹⁹⁶ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:595. See also Paul Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, ed. Karol Jonca and Alfred Konieczny (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2005).

¹⁹⁷ Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 28.

¹⁹⁸ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 270.

¹⁹⁹ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:163. On the Breslau evacuation, see Kaps, *Die Tragödie Schlesiens 1945/46 in Dokumenten, unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Erzbistums Breslau*. Despite these realizations, the forced evacuations continued into late February. Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 76.

²⁰⁰ Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 226.

²⁰¹ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 272.

²⁰² Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 4:382.; and Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 1:571.

cursed and threatened their countrymen who hindered their retreat.²⁰³ One soldier recalled encountering a trek stuck in the snow: “‘Soldiers, help us!’ they beg of us. But it is pointless, and we continue. The floodgates have opened, and everyone now fights for their own survival.”²⁰⁴

Even the regime noted the “hardly pleasant reports of refugees over the dishonorable comportment of members of the Wehrmacht.”²⁰⁵ A trek leader arriving in Landsberg decried how the only representatives of the state he had seen were ones who “fled past us at full speed...and ruthlessly shoved our trek wagons to the side. For hours sometimes we had to stand on the street, so that the armed forces could tear out quicker. They did not care what happens to women and children. The scene at the end looked thus, that the police formed the vanguard, the Wehrmacht the middle guard, and the trek with women and children the rearguard.”²⁰⁶ With such ignominious displays, it hardly surprises that refugees recalled the trek as “probably the most horrific crime ever perpetrated upon the German people.”²⁰⁷

Self-preservation explains the callousness of some retreating units, yet ideological zeal proved just as harmful. In March, Hitler directed the military to destroy anything of value that could not be saved from the enemy.²⁰⁸ The demolition of bridges could serve strategic purposes, yet doomed refugees on the other side of the river. The destructive will compounded civilian suffering in other ways as well. In Braunsberg, where many thousands resolved to remain, the

²⁰³ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:23.

²⁰⁴ Cited in Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 73.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Joachim Rogall, *Die Räumung des “Reichsgaus Wartheland”*: vom 16. bis. 26. Januar 1945 im *Spiegel amtlicher Berichte* (Sigmaringen: J. Thorbecke, 1993), 144.

²⁰⁶ Rogall, 116.

²⁰⁷ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:595.

²⁰⁸ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 265.

Wehrmacht's targeted detonation and burning of churches and other public buildings, including the water and gas works, left the city a desolate moonscape that made postwar life difficult.²⁰⁹ In the interest of preventing supplies from "falling into enemy hands," a commander in East Prussia ordered his men to run over a herd of cattle with their tanks and machinegun.²¹⁰ Elsewhere, authorities destroyed mounds of food, preventing Red Army soldiers as well as Germans from profiting.²¹¹ Given the wave of mass starvation after occupation, such wanton destruction proved especially disastrous for those who remained in the German East. The scorched earth policies carried out by the Wehrmacht did not benefit the population in the slightest.

Perhaps nowhere does the gulf between myth and reality become more evident than in testimonies describing the so-called "fortress cities," where Hitler demanded that "every square meter...be defended vehemently."²¹² Breslau, the most notorious, withstood the onslaught of the Soviets for nearly three months, capitulating on May 6, 1945. The defense of these cities was led by fanatical National Socialists who ignored the suffering and petitions of the beleaguered civilians; in Elbing, women and children marched on the commandant's headquarters to demand he heed Soviet calls for surrender for the sake of the civilian population, repeatedly announced via loudspeakers.²¹³ Civilians did not just suffer through combat, however. Soldiers plundered warehouses, seizing alcohol that fueled bouts of drinking.²¹⁴ Witnesses recall troops and even

²⁰⁹ BArch OstDok 1/7, 41. After 1945, the destruction was often attributed to the savagery of the Soviet Union.

²¹⁰ Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 53.

²¹¹ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:399.

²¹² Schieder, 1:283.

²¹³ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:659.

²¹⁴ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 4:379.

officers plundering homes.²¹⁵ In Breslau, pastor Peikert's diaries testify to the city's fury over the fanaticism and corruption of not just the party, but military as well. Soldiers forcibly evicted civilians at gunpoint, plundered, methodically burnt down entire streets to create defensive positions, and dismantled graveyards to build barricades. "These soldiers no longer have the faintest feeling of responsibility for their own people, instead they are their greatest enemies and oppressors," Peikert recorded, noting that nearly every person he spoke with longed for surrender and desired the arrival of Soviet forces that would end their misery.²¹⁶

Considering the ferocity of the Soviet onslaught, the radicalism of a collapsing genocidal regime, and disintegration of the Wehrmacht that was losing 300-400,000 men a month in the final stages of the war, the recollections of the witnesses unsurprisingly reflect the Third Reich's death throes, aspects of which moreover would be found in any military facing cataclysmic defeat.²¹⁷ The fact that not just "the Nazis" fanatically clung to notions of a miraculous final victory and zealously struggled at all costs to prolong the war nevertheless remains hidden between the lines, or is reduced to fleeting remarks, in postwar accounts. That many expellees did not view Soviet barbarism as the sole or predominant source of their misery, or that coerced flight sealed the fate of thousands, also remains muted and absent from popular memory.

Despite the avalanche of evidence to the contrary, why do the indifference of the military and its ideological fervor fail to register in collective memory? Why does the Wehrmacht as savior continue to enjoy currency? Jürgen Thorwald emerged as a decisive purveyor of these notions, as his books habitually exonerated the military: Depictions of rational and incorruptible

²¹⁵ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984., 150, 203, and 267.

²¹⁶ Peikert, *Festung Breslau in den Berichten eines Pfarrers*, 93.

²¹⁷ Kershaw, *The End*, 379.

soldiers and a lionization of their sacrificial duty permeated Thorwald's works.²¹⁸ Not only did he differentiate between the sober military and the fanatical and delusional regime leadership through an evocative literary style, Thorwald based his writing on extensive interviews with generals who had a strong interest in presenting themselves in a heroic light. Heinz Schön also played a role: Recruited by the *Forschungsstelle Ostsee* (Baltic Sea Research Center) in 1963, the author helped propagate positive narratives of the navy as a savior of refugees on behalf of the institute's staff, many of whom directly participated in Operation Hannibal.²¹⁹

Indeed, military luminaries themselves successfully construed their roles as heroes, and manicured their image in the early Federal Republic. Hans Dieter Berenbrok, a former officer in the navy, adopted a pseudonym to recount the perspective of veterans and contribute to the glorification of the navy and its role in rescuing refugees.²²⁰ Berenbrok painted a picture of the German military resisting Nazi calls for a battle to the last man, dedicated instead to the defense of civilians in spite of certain defeat. "Operation Hannibal" thus transformed into a deliberate—and largely successful—valiant effort that constituted the "greatest rescue action in history."²²¹

²¹⁸ As emerges in an imagined conversation between Guderian and General Heinrici, Guderian "as a soldier, as a German, but above all as an East German" was aware of the "task that stood before his eyes before all other tasks, namely: An assertion on the Eastern Front with all means, in order to prevent that more land and even more people fall into the hands of the Russians." Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 308. For a deeper analysis of Thorwald's descriptions of the military and its leadership, see Oels, "Dieses Buch ist kein Roman."

²¹⁹ Ennis, *The M.S. Wilhelm Gustloff in German Memory Culture*, 25. The *Forschungsstelle* was headed by Konrad Engelhardt, a retired admiral who oversaw Operation Hannibal. The Ministry for All-German Affairs commissioned the *Forschungsstelle* to draft a report on the success of the evacuations, thereby inviting self-serving accounts from actors who themselves participated and now found assistance from Schön.

²²⁰ Cajus Bekker, *Kampf und Untergang der Kriegsmarine* (Hannover: Sponholtz Verlag, 1953); Cajus Bekker, *Flucht über's Meer: Ostsee--deutsches Schicksal 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1959).

²²¹ Bekker, *Flucht über's Meer*, 262. The book is permeated with such explicit explanations. For instance: "What greater motivation had there ever been for a soldier to offer resistance to the last, than the certain knowledge that he now defended his own homeland, his own women and children?" Bekker, 9. Elsewhere: "Theoretical contemplations could not give the soldier...the strength to still now stand firm. On the contrary: Every day, every hour that this war neared its end must have been a blessing for all. And yet not for all. Not for the hundreds of thousands of women and children and other refugees crammed into the bridgeheads of Danzig and Gotenhafen. Who only had one hope: to escape before it all ended. The soldiers knew this. They saw it every day. That alone gave

Wehrmacht generals also eagerly justified their service.²²² Between 1951 and 1961, four separate self-serving accounts appeared from commanders who served in the German East.²²³ Friedrich Hoßbach assured audiences that first and foremost in his mind was the “moral obligation” toward civilians, and that the “deliberations for the conduct of the struggle” prioritized their fate.²²⁴ His January 1945 memos complaining of treks blocking roads and observation that “the civilian population has to remain behind... That sounds cruel, but unfortunately it cannot be helped” went unmentioned.²²⁵ Similarly, Otto Lasch, commandant of the fortress city Königsberg, attested that he realized immediately that “all efforts to save this wonderful land and its inhabitants would be in vain if a miracle didn’t happen.”²²⁶ He could not prevent the “horrific fate” that befell East Prussia and its capital, despite personal trips to the frontlines to oversee the transport of civilians to the port city of Pillau.²²⁷ Lasch even suggested that he was a sort of hero, vigorously asserting that he alone reached the decision to capitulate on

them the strength. Not strategic deliberations. And especially not Hitler’s order. Instead the only legitimate meaning for a soldier: to protect his own compatriots, whose life and limb were threatened.” Bekker, 200.

²²² See Friedrich Gerstenberger, “Strategische Erinnerungen. Die Memoiren deutscher Offiziere,” in *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944*, ed. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995), 620–33.

²²³ Otto Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg: Kampf und Untergang von Ostpreussens Hauptstadt*. (München: Gräfe und Unzer, 1958); Hans von Ahlfen and Hermann Niehoff, *So kämpfte Breslau; Verteidigung und Untergang von Schlesiens Hauptstadt* (München: Gräfe und Unzer, 1959); Hans von Ahlfen, *Der Kampf um Schlesien; ein authentischer Dokumentarbericht* (München: Gräfe und Unzer, 1961); Friedrich Hossbach, *Die Schlacht um Ostpreussen: aus den Kämpfen der deutschen 4. Armee um Ostpreussen in der Zeit vom 19.7. 1944-30.1. 1945* (Überlingen/Bodensee: O. Dikreiter, 1951).

²²⁴ Hossbach, *Die Schlacht um Ostpreussen*, 43.

²²⁵ Cited in Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 73.

²²⁶ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 1958, 8.

²²⁷ Kempowski, *Fuga Furiosa*, 2004, 2:659.

April 9th in the face of vehement protests of “prominent people of the party.”²²⁸ Overall, Lasch wanted to counter allegations of a “panicked flight” of units under his command and illustrate that “even in a hopeless situation there were still men who true to their sense of duty were prepared up to the last engagement.”²²⁹ The combination of regret over the catastrophe and solemn pride in the prowess of his fighting force—and that the two might be interconnected—went unnoticed, as did the fact that waiting on a miracle cost some 50,000 lives.

Perhaps the most successful propagator of notions of holding actions to save civilians was Hitler’s successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz. With Hitler dead and the war lost, the Führer’s successor exhorted his forces on April 30, 1945 to continue fighting to “save German blood in the East” from “Russian despotism.”²³⁰ The “blood and soil” connotations that revealed his National Socialist worldview disappeared the following day, when Dönitz justified the continuation of the war to “save hundreds of thousands... from enslavement and extermination.”²³¹ In his war diary, Dönitz acknowledged that “Russian behavior toward the civilian population... is measured and reserved,” so that his public appeals concealed ideological motivations to continue the desperate struggle.²³² After capitulation on May 9, 1945, Dönitz sang hymns of praise: “What the German Wehrmacht in fighting and the German people in suffering

²²⁸ Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg*, 1958, 11. To be fair, Lasch’s surrender resulted in the arrest of his family.

²²⁹ Lasch, 10.

²³⁰ Quoted in Walter Lüdde-Neurath, *Regierung Dönitz; Die Letzten Tage Des Dritten Reiches*. (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1964), 129.

²³¹ Quoted in Lüdde-Neurath, 133.

²³² Quoted in Percy Ernst Schramm, *Die Niederlage 1945: Aus Dem Kriegstagebuch Des Oberkommandos Der Wehrmacht* (München: Deutscher taschenbuch Verlag, 1962), 437.

achieved in these six years is unprecedented in history and in the world. It is an unparalleled act of heroism. We soldiers stand without stains on our honor.”²³³

Dönitz echoed these themes in postwar efforts of portraying the delayed capitulation as a humanitarian gesture and spinning fables of personally ordering evacuations of millions of civilians via the sea. Far from battling to the last out of ideological convictions, Dönitz “surmised the saving of the East German population as the first duty that the German soldier could yet fulfill. If we soldiers already were pained that we could not save the homeland of the East Germans, we could under no circumstances leave them in the lurch. It was therefore...necessary that the soldier...continue to fight in order to save the German population of the East”²³⁴ His ruminations enjoyed broad appeal: In 1958, the illustrated newspaper *Quick* serialized excerpts of his autobiography under the title “I render an account.”²³⁵ For the remainder of his life, Dönitz engaged in mythmaking endeavors: “The German people fearfully fled westward from the encroaching Russian army in order to find safety there, and the German soldier, who no longer wanted to struggle against the West, continued to fight in the East in the belief that he thereby could still save the lives of women and children.”²³⁶

Indeed, popular magazines of the 1950s particularly uncritically accepted avowals of faithful, duty-bound soldiers defending their fatherland in the face of the Soviet horde, as we

²³³ Gerhard Förster and Richard Lakowski, *1945: das Jahr der endgültigen Niederlage der faschistischen Wehrmacht: Dokumente* (Berlin: Militärverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1975), 364.

²³⁴ Karl Dönitz, *Zehn Jahre und zwanzig Tage* (Bonn: Athenäum, 1958), 205.

²³⁵ “Ich lege Rechnung,” *Quick* Nr. 19, 1958, and subsequent editions. *Quick* not only offered a mouthpiece for Dönitz, it actively helped prop up his image as an apolitical soldier. On the “lord of the U-boats,” the editorial staff crowed that “he always was only a soldier. Only in the war did he end up in the wheelwork of politics, which led him to the highest German office—and the docket of Nuremberg.” “Der Herr der U-Boote,” *Quick* Nr. 20, 1958, 60.

²³⁶ Karl Dönitz, *Mein wechselvolles Leben* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1975), 401.

have seen. “Sad and embittered,” *Stern* readers learned, the soldiers witnessed the suffering of refugees; “they too become refugees and attempt, pursued by the enemy, to save themselves.”²³⁷ Brave officers—often with a love story connection to a refugee—selflessly threw themselves into the breach, charging with machine gun in hand against Soviet soldiers about to rape refugees.²³⁸ Expulsion novels also featured stalwart officers as protagonists working “continuously under the propagandistic bluster of criminal Gauleiter” in the face of hopeless odds to buy fleeing civilians precious time.²³⁹ Even national newspapers featured reports, usually coinciding with anniversaries of the last months of the German East, decried the “insanity” of the final struggle, as seen in *Christ und Welt*’s May 1949 “Did Breslau Have to Die.” The blame for the destruction nevertheless remained at the feet of the Soviet beleaguers and Nazi Party.²⁴⁰

Remarkably, expellee papers echoed these themes and even exceeded themselves in praise of the military, despite a readership consisting overwhelmingly of eyewitnesses whose experiences fundamentally challenged the neat black-and-white dichotomies drawn in the Federal Republic. On the five year anniversary of the flight, *Wir Ostpreußen* informed readers of how “General Hoßbach wanted to fight free the way westward for the East Prussian population...and how Hitler and Koch foiled these intentions.”²⁴¹ Basing the article on Thorwald’s descriptions of the general’s inner dialogues, the article alleged that Hoßbach contemplated ignoring higher orders prohibiting a breakout attempt, and interpreted his

²³⁷ “Flucht über das Haf,” *Stern* Nr. 4, 1950, 7.

²³⁸ Hans Wehrle, “Das nackte Leben,” *Der Stern*, March 14, 1959, 31.

²³⁹ Karweina, *Der Grosse Treck. Dokumentarbericht Über Die Flucht Und Austreibung von 14 Millionen Deutschen.*, 89; Karweina, 97.

²⁴⁰ “Mußte Breslau sterben?,” *Christ und Welt*, May 12, 1949, 4 ff.

²⁴¹ “Ausbruch aus Ostpreußen...”, *Wir Ostpreußen*, January 20, 1950, 35.

acquiescence as a tragic deference to “obedience” to his oath.²⁴² While sitting in his plane to Berlin, the editors speculated, Hoßbach was “followed by the shadows and voices of those who would have cheered his determination” to carry out a great rescue operation.²⁴³ All of this, the paper added in bold words, was prevented by Hitler and Koch. Instead of condemning Hoßbach’s moral failings, the hapless general should “go down in history.”²⁴⁴

The Silesian press issued similar plaudits. In July 1949, *Breslauer Nachrichten* printed a lengthy report on the defense of Breslau which was not intended to “affix wreaths of glory or raise questions of guilt.”²⁴⁵ Despite professed objectivity, the report attributed much of the city’s destruction to the general, faceless havoc of war, failing to mention that the Wehrmacht carried out much of the wholesale demolition of entire districts to create defensive positions. Moreover, while lamenting the futility of the hold-out, the paper surmised that the ultimate intention was a breakout attempt in which 200,000 civilians could escape. Why this never materialized, or why the fortress did not surrender until two days before Germany’s capitulation, were due to fears of radical elements within the party that would obstruct these efforts. Less than a year later, the paper ran yet another feature on Breslau’s “last days” reiterating these themes, casting repeated Soviet calls for surrender as “lovely promises” that left the inhabitants unmoved.²⁴⁶

Nowhere were the contradictions between handwringing over irrational fighting and justifications for bitter defense starkest than in the nationalist *Der Schlesier*, which in its ten year

²⁴² Ibid, 38

²⁴³ Ibid, 37.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 35. It appears that *Wir Ostpreußen* borrowed liberally from Thorwald, who lionized the general in *Es begann an der Weichsel*.

²⁴⁵ Max Roßbach, “Breslaus Verteidigung,” *Breslauer Nachrichten*, July 15, 1949, 5.

²⁴⁶ “Aus Breslaus letzten Tagen,” *Breslauer Nachrichten*, February 5, 1950, 5.

anniversary of the “Silesian Passion” vocalized a solemn pride in the Wehrmacht.²⁴⁷ The fight for Breslau was simultaneously “senseless” and “pointless,” as well as “heroic.” The population, however, did not lose hope, even as they cowered in basements while the defenders fought “in bitter street battles.” Any blame lay at the feet of the Gauleier Hanke, who absconded at the last moment from an airfield he forced civilians to build after demolishing entire city blocks, as well as the cruel enemy. The Wehrmacht frequently appeared in the paper’s pages as a force which “lastly did not believe in the ‘Final Victory,’ but to the last man knew that German earth was being defended and with complete sacrifice for German women and children, as if they were their own, applied himself in order to protect them from the Red flood.”²⁴⁸

Later that month, the paper published an account of how “ragtag bands of troops accomplished the miracle of contesting the fortress up to the day of the general capitulation of Germany in the face of a far superior enemy.”²⁴⁹ The author reprinted a supposed speech of the first commandant, General von Ahlfen—portrayed as a calm, objective father-like figure—in which he insisted that the priority was “the protection of women and children for as long as we can still carry a weapon.” “That the siege is short and tolerable for all” was the general’s innermost wish, the reader was assured. Later that year, an article titled “Defended Against Fivefold Advantage” once again reminded readers of the “heroic fight for the fortress of Breslau.”²⁵⁰ Occasion for the piece was the release of the last commandant, Hermann Niehoff, from Soviet captivity, who after ten years informed Silesians that he surrendered in order to

²⁴⁷ “Schlesische Passion vor zehn Jahren,” *Der Schlesier*, Nr. 5 (February), 5.

²⁴⁸ “115 Tage Angriff und Abwehr,” *Der Schlesier*, Nr. 12 (March), 7.

²⁴⁹ “Vor 10 Jahren: Breslau von Russen eingekreist,” *Der Schlesier*, Nr. 7 (February), 4.

²⁵⁰ “Gegen fünfache Übermacht verteidigt,” *Der Schlesier*, Nr. 42 (October), 7.

prevent further “useless bloodshed”; that this decision, by his own admission, came only “at the moment that Adolf Hitler was dead, the Eastern Front had collapsed, and the continuation of a successful fight was hopeless” went without criticism. Indeed, “no objections about the fighting leadership” could be raised: “May all stand politically to the events of the last months of the war as he wishes: the greatness of the humane service of the soldiers of the German Empire and the tragedy that lies in all the occurrences will for all times remain recorded in the annals of history.”

Why have the annals of history been so kind to the Wehrmacht’s role in the flight of the East German population? For decades, the exculpating accounts of the generals and media images from authors such as Schön or Thorwald cemented the view of an ennobled Wehrmacht in the West German collective memory of the war. Added to this were filmic treatments such as *Hunde, wollt ihr ewig leben*, *Des Teufels General*, *Der Arzt von Stalingrad*, or *Die Brücke*, which reiterated themes of the common soldiery fighting for Germany and not National Socialism and provided powerful images of a true German military man fighting against overwhelming odds while attempting to outwit crazed Nazi zealots. Partially this reflected the spirit of the 1950s, yet the distancing from National Socialist ideology and questions of responsibility also aided in the formation of democratic institutions and Western integration. It is no surprise that portrayals which rehabilitated the regular army and notions of a heroic stands for Western values coincided with West German rearmament and joining of NATO in 1955.²⁵¹ Cold War battle lines made narratives of heroics in the face of the Soviet flood fit within the postwar societal consensus. Moreover, because 17 million men served in the military, it should hardly

²⁵¹ As has been noted elsewhere, the echoes of Nazi propaganda that in the last years of the war increasingly framed the struggle against Bolshevism as a defense of the West reveal the lingering influences of National Socialist ideology, but also the integrative function of the Cold War for West Germany. Berenbrok’s writings, for instance, not only contributed to the image of a “clean Wehrmacht,” they rehabilitated the military at a time that the Adenauer government drummed up support for rearmament and attempted to boost enlistment; as such, his works were distributed free of charge to youth programs. Ennis, *The M.S. Wilhelm Gustloff in German Memory Culture*, 82.

surprise that such notions resonated broadly. Casting the German military's final struggle as a humanitarian mission offset the shadow of participation in a genocidal war, and offered a palliative that gave the conflict and suffering the semblance of meaning. The human need for venerated heroes is only amplified in "flight and expulsion" accounts of miraculous escapes from death or danger, where villains and champions give the narrative coherence and significance.²⁵²

The hospitable incubator of 1950s West German culture and society may explain a natural emergence of notions of Soviet barbarism and Wehrmacht valor. But how can one account for the voices buried in the archive that did not make it into the narrative and which would have questioned these framings? Voices that undermined these assumptions did not fit into this framework, and faded into obscurity: They served no purpose politically, and detracted from a West German victimhood discourse. Partially, this happened organically. The efforts of Wehrmacht generals and regime elites to rehabilitate themselves reveals that memory politics also must be taken into account. The same can be said of expellee authors, who—sometimes against the views of many of their constituents who lived through the conflagration—not only endorsed the Manichean portrayals of cruel Soviets, fanatical Nazis, and victimized Germans: They actively worked to construct and disseminate them.

Memory, History, and Myth: Nemmersdorf, Aussig, and Ilja Ehrenburg

While it remains difficult to parse what aspects of the "flight and expulsion" narrative emerged organically because they reflected psychological truths, and which arose due to willful distortion, three case studies grant insight into how the layering of memory and construction of history looked in practice. In order to excavate the powerful narrative of merciless Soviet

²⁵² On the tendency of "victimhood" and "heroisation" tropes in family memory through the generations, see Welzer and Moller, "*Opa war kein Nazi*" *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*.

soldiers, one must examine the lingering memory of Nazi propaganda in postwar West Germany that echoed in the testimonies largely recorded in the early 1950s. As mentioned above, estimates of the number of dead in expellee reports yielded surprisingly mixed results. Authors' estimates curiously tended to skyrocket depending on notoriety: In communities surrounding Nemmersdorf, where Soviet troops ostensibly massacred 26 Germans and 50 French POWs in October of 1944, numerous respondents specifically cited Nazi press reports as the source of their knowledge and typically alleged scores of deaths.²⁵³ Headlines such as “The Blood Bath of Nemmersdorf,” one respondent recounted and underlined for emphasis, continued to reverberate in expellee memory.²⁵⁴ Despite frequently admitting that they had not witnessed atrocities themselves, the knowledge of brutal excesses and self-evidence of Soviet barbarism translated into authoritative testimonies on what had transpired in East Prussia.

The toxic mixture of racism, terrifying imaginations enflamed by propaganda, recollections profoundly shaped by wartime trauma, and postwar discourse unsurprisingly formed into a dizzying mosaic of memories after 1945. Nowhere does this become more evident, and the postwar streamlining and construction of expellee narratives more tangible, than with Nemmersdorf. Already detailed in the first chapter, the focus here is not what happened *in* the East Prussian hamlet, but what happened *with* the massacre. The first stage of myth-making began with Joseph Goebbels, who used the grisly discovery for a “massive press campaign” warning of the consequences should Bolshevism prevail in the war.²⁵⁵ On October 27, the Nazi

²⁵³ One respondent estimated that of the 600 inhabitants of Nemmersdorf, at least 40% had been murdered. Though she was not there, the author assured that her brother could attest to the “atrocities” and at least 60 victims. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 411. In neighboring Schweizertal, a respondent claimed to know of more than one hundred who were shot in Nemmersdorf. BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 584.

²⁵⁴ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 191.

²⁵⁵ Elke Fröhlich, ed., *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, vol. 15 (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 1993), 110.

Party organ *Völkischer Beobachter* shocked readers with news of “The Raging of the Soviet Beasts,” while regional headlines warned of “Bolshevik Bloodlust” and “Bestial Murderous Terror.”²⁵⁶ Press reports of “people nailed to walls alive,” grounded on a single corpse found in a nearby village with wounds to the hands, counted as among the most heinous discoveries made by the soldiers retaking the town.²⁵⁷

The expectedly lurid Nazi press did not mention grotesque postwar claims of Soviet soldiers crucifying six naked women to barn doors. Witnesses reported conflicting sights as well. The diary of General Werner Kreipe, who arrived hours after Nemmersdorf’s recapture, noted women and children nailed to barn doors and ordered photographs to document the horror. None have ever been found.²⁵⁸ Colonel-General Georg-Hans Reinhardt, also present afterward, wrote to his wife that “Bolsheviks had ravaged like wild beasts, including murder of children, not to mention acts of violence against women and girls, whom they had also murdered.”²⁵⁹ The journal of a soldier who participated in the recapture of the hamlet recorded an old man pierced with a pitchfork and left hanging on a barn door, and sights “so terrible that some of our recruits run out in panic and vomit.”²⁶⁰ A Wehrmacht intelligence report with interviews of witnesses confirm the grim discovery of 26 corpses with shots to the head, but made no mention of any crucifixions

²⁵⁶ “Das Wüten der Sowjetischen Bestien,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 27th, 1944, 1; and Kershaw, *The End*, 115. See also Kurt-Lothar Tank, “Das Grauen von Nemmersdorf,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 28th, 1944, 1. With salacious descriptions of rapes and murdered infants, Tanks warned readers that these atrocities were part of a program of annihilation based on orders of the reviled “Jew Ehrenburg.”

²⁵⁷ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 50–51.

²⁵⁸ Kershaw, *The End*, 113.

²⁵⁹ Kershaw, 114.

²⁶⁰ Günter Koschorrek, *Blood Red Snow: The Memoirs of a German Soldier on the Eastern Front* (London: Greenhill Books, 2002), 293.

or similar mutilations.²⁶¹ The entries, witnessed within 48 hours of Soviet withdrawal and predating the corrupting influence of Nazi press reports, substantiate a grisly scene.

But how did the horrors grow ever more salacious and why did the number of dead continue to soar after 1945, until the events in East Prussia transformed into a myth which inflamed imaginations and anchored itself in German cultural memory? The first postwar mention of Nemmersdorf came during the Nuremberg Trials, when defense attorneys introduced materials to turn the tables on the accusers. The testimony of a soldier confirmed witnessing executed civilians, and at least one crucifixion of a man.²⁶² Testimony from General Dethlefsen, which largely outlined the Wehrmacht's exemplary behavior in the Soviet Union, in passing mentioned the "martyrdom" of multiple civilians through nailing to barn doors.²⁶³ By his own admission, he gleaned this information from reports and did not observe them himself.

It was Dethlefsen's account that likely produced the first public reference to the massacre in the 1949 Thorwald series, as the general served as a source for a number of the author's portrayals.²⁶⁴ Thorwald's subsequent 1950 bestseller recounted the "terrible devastation" in Nemmersdorf, where "women were nailed alive to barn doors" and all "women and girls were defiled countless times, men and elderly were tortured to death, 40 French prisoners of war bludgeoned."²⁶⁵ A year later, an article in *Quick* included an illustration of a terrified man

²⁶¹ Kershaw, *The End*, 113.

²⁶² BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 9. The soldier admitted that combat prevented him from "making further observations," but that "afterward I heard from comrades who discovered countless similar cases, and in fact not just in Nemmersdorf itself, but also in the neighboring...communities."

²⁶³ BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 32.

²⁶⁴ Jürgen Thorwald, "Ostdeutsches Schicksal," *Christ und Welt*, March 24, 1949, 1.

²⁶⁵ Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 18. Elsewhere, Thorwald describes how Red Army troops castrated and crucified victims. Thorwald, 63.

running from a figure crucified to a barn door which, though it did not mention Nemmersdorf, indicated “terrible deeds” that occurred in the German East and introduced the crucifixion motif in a widely read magazine.²⁶⁶

The Nuremburg testimonies were sent on to the Schieder Commission, and ended up in its source base. Added to them were postwar reports of inhabitants of the region recorded in the 1950s, which however could not confirm crucifixions. Many could not even cite violence that they themselves witnessed. Instead, they advised the historians to consult Nazi press reports.²⁶⁷ Clearly, the majority learned of the events and gleaned the necessary information to authoritatively speak of atrocities from third parties. Solely one testimony provided meaningful details, including that slain Soviet soldiers “all completely had Asiatic facial features”; the author did not see them himself, as he arrived days later.²⁶⁸ A 1963 memo presented the most convincing impressions of the massacre: An inhabitant who was on the scene and asked by authorities to help identify the deceased denied allegations of crucifixions, noting that “there was talk of this,” but that victims had perished through gunshots.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ “Der Fluch der bösen Tat,” *Quick* Nr. 39, 1306. The fleeing man was a Pole, and the article described how Polish residents encountered ghosts and spirits of murdered Germans that made it “unable for them to enjoy their booty!”

²⁶⁷ A sample of responses: “The case of ‘Nemmersdorf’...known from the daily press.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 586. “The known atrocities.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 49. “My witnesses [corroborating Nemmersdorf] have died. A report about this was in all the papers.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 69. “Serious crimes did not occur in the community, but in Nemmersdorf mass shootings took place on 20 October. Witnesses were probably present.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 89. “In our community as far as I know there were not many shootings. Terrible crimes...were committed in Nemmersdorf. I cannot name witnesses.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 94. “In our Kirchdorf many people were shot. Nemmersdorf is the name of the place.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 140. “Not known in community. In the district the notorious atrocities around Nemmersdorf.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 189. “I don’t know in my community, but in the community of Nemmersdorf...there much blood flowed.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 191. “According to testimony the crimes in Nemmersdorf are known to me. I can’t name eyewitnesses.” BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 66.

²⁶⁸ BArch Ost-Dok 1/19, 421.

²⁶⁹ BArch Ost-Dok 2/43a, 195. The testimony arrived too late to be included in the initial publication of the *Dokumentation*.

The impressions of local inhabitants seemingly provided little useful information for the historians, who utilized the 1953 account of the *Volkssturm* trooper Karl Potrek, who counted 72 corpses and six women crucified women.²⁷⁰ Both accounts suggest a conflation of witnessed or overheard scenes with Nazi propaganda. Another report referencing 62 deaths very well might stem from Nazi news reports of 61 total murdered civilians in the region.²⁷¹ The same might also hold true for Potrek, whose emergence as an eyewitness nine years after the massacre shows contours of witnessed and confirmed scenes and Nazi propaganda. One must also take into account the collective memory of East Prussia: Tales of real and exaggerated atrocities perpetrated by Tsarist forces during the First World War were imbedded deeply within the memory of the region, and some of the most salacious brutalities centered particularly on Nemmersdorf's district of Gumbinnen.²⁷² The "introduction of Asiatic barbarism onto German soil" in 1914/15 received prominent attention from the German press.²⁷³ Claims of heinous crucifixions emerged as well.

No villagers corroborated crucifixions; some witnesses alluded to mutilations, but Wehrmacht reports did not confirm the worst excesses; Nazi newspapers, which had no reason to cover up heinous details in its effort to shock readers into rabid resistance, made one fleeting suggestion of a single crucifixion in a nearby town; postwar testimonies and bestsellers, written in the midst of reporting of the atrocities, established crucifixions to barn doors and specifically

²⁷⁰ Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:8.

²⁷¹ "Lebend an die Wand genagelt—Bisher 61 Opfer des bolschewistischen Mordterrors," *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 28th, 1944, 1.

²⁷² Alexander Watson, "'Unheard-of Brutality': Russian Atrocities against Civilians in East Prussia, 1914–1915," *The Journal of Modern History* 86, no. 4 (2014): 780–825.

²⁷³ "Russische Greuel," *Frankfurter Zeitung und Handelsblatt* [Evening Edition], September 12, 1914, 1.

named Nemmersdorf; and by 1953 a historical commission, ostensibly utilizing a methodology that weeded out embellished and unsubstantiated reports, accepted the most dubious account as accurate and representative of expellee experiences.²⁷⁴ From there, the massacre took on a life of its own. In a running series in *Stern* in 1959, readers learned of Nemmersdorf and “the times when the Mongolian invasions returned.”²⁷⁵ Between 1964 and 1993, at least ten publications helped cement the notorious atrocity in the public’s mind; eight relied on Potrek’s testimony.²⁷⁶

The constructors of “flight and expulsion” narratives engaged in outright fabrications as well. In a 1949 letter responding to the call for testimonies in *Christ und Welt* following Thorwald’s popular “East German Fate” series, Fritz Leimbach wanted to clarify what happened in Nemmersdorf.²⁷⁷ Explaining that Soviet troops announced that civilians should not flee and no harm would come to them—a detail nowhere else corroborated—Leimbach claimed that “those who believed this announcement can no longer testify,” as they were “all murdered in the most

²⁷⁴ A note in the file earmarked the report, advising that “despite certain exaggerated and lofty sections,” the remarks over Nemmersdorf were “useful” for publication. BArch BArch Ost-Dok 2/21, 713.

²⁷⁵ “Das nackte Leben,” *Stern* 10, March 7, 1959, 27. The paper included an uncited verbatim reiteration of Thorwald’s description of Nemmersdorf. Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 18. Into the 2000s, newspapers or popular histories returned to the subject of Nemmersdorf on anniversaries or retrospective pieces on “flight and expulsion,” frequently uncritically repeating the postwar version of events. See Guido Knopp, *Die große Flucht: das Schicksal der Vertriebenen* (München: Ullstein, 2001), 37–49. See also “Die Katastrophe,” *Der Stahlhelm* 5, May 1955, in BArch B150-5641; “Wie viele Deutsche kaput?,” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 27, July 2, 1979, 77ff; “Nichts vergessen, nichts verzeihen,” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 16, April 14, 1980, 46ff; and “Vater, erschieß mich!,” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 13, March 25, 2002, 40ff; and Ralf Georg Reuth, “Nehmt Die Frauen Als Beute,” *Die Welt*, February 19, 2005, <https://www.welt.de/print-wams/article123849/Nehmt-die-Frauen-als-Beute.html>.

²⁷⁶ Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 171. Among the most prominent works that include the Nemmersdorf massacre are: Karweina, *Der Grosse Treck. Dokumentarbericht Über Die Flucht Und Austreibung von 14 Millionen Deutschen.*; Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*; Grenz, *Stadt und Kreis Gumbinnen*; Alfred M De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Anglo-Americans and the Expulsion of the Germans : Background, Execution, Consequences* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1977); Böddeker, *Die Flüchtlinge*; Arndt, *Ostpreussen, Westpreussen, Pommern, Schlesien, Sudetenland 1944/1945*; Nawratil, *Vertreibungs-Verbrechen an Deutschen*; Schöning and Tautorat, *Die ostpreussische Tragödie 1944/45*.

²⁷⁷ BArch BArch Ost-Dok 2/13, 126-127. Leimbach, a soldier at the time, recalled that fliers were distributed and read to troops chronicling the massacre, and that the German people learned of the atrocities through radio and print media.

gruesome manner” by a “devil in wild bloodlust.”²⁷⁸ However, Leimbach described an encounter between a mother with two children attempting to flee Nemmersdorf and Soviet soldiers that ranked as a remarkable “humane gesture”: Unable to flag down a retreating German tank, the family was overtaken by an armored car that took them on. Relief turned to dismay as the woman realized that she entered a Soviet vehicle. A young officer told her “in good German” that she need not despair, indicating on a map where he would bring her. Upon arrival at the location, he gave her directions to the German lines with a warning: “You were fortunate to fall into my hands. Take care not to generalize this case, as you will suffer. I am an exception.”²⁷⁹

Leimbach’s letter to “help [*Christ und Welt*] in its effort to portray for the German people and the world the path of suffering of a nation” did not make it into Thorwald’s subsequent publications. It also apparently offered little value to the Schieder Commission, to whom the account was forwarded and into whose collection it was ultimately filed. Günther Lass found the report useful for his 1964 documentation, however, and faithfully recounted Leimbach’s horrific scenes and promises of humane German soldiers, albeit with a liberal literary inflection. The “glimmer of...humanity in this sea of blood, vengeance, and lust to murder” also found reiteration, though Lass suppressed the Soviet officer’s German language abilities. The alteration to the parting words, however, were more significant: “You were lucky, but beware, because behind us follow Stalin students!”²⁸⁰ Rudolf Grenz also quoted this version in his documentation

²⁷⁸ The mutilations and devastation angered the soldiers, and vindicated the “historical mission of the German people of a bulwark of the Western world against the scourge of humanity from the East.” Leimbach claims that at the time he felt convinced that it was “irresponsible to show mercy to a Russian soldier, as one would only give a criminal the opportunity to show his bloody thanks to a German.” Nevertheless, Leimbach asserted that he and his comrades showed mercy to two wounded Soviet soldiers they found days later. Ibid, 127

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 127.

²⁸⁰ Lass, *Die Flucht, Ostpreußen 1944-1945*, 49–50.

published by the East Prussian Association.²⁸¹ The obscure reference to “Stalin students”—presumably rabid communists fully capable of the perpetrated horrors—and reliance in both cases on the most salacious yet also questionable testimony of Karl Potrek, seem a rather clear attempt of framing expellee memories in the most dramatic and gripping light.

The accounts in popular history books meant for broad audiences complimented the visual images that helped the massacre to resonate still further. The infamous photographs of dead children and women with skirts suggestively raised featured prominently as a terrible example of Soviet retribution, even though the images resulted from Nazi documentation: Collecting the victims and carrying them together into an open field, authorities staged a horrific still life that remains a jarring and notorious scene.²⁸² It therefore was part in the tradition of Nazi atrocity propaganda aimed at stoking furious indignation, as when the regime published images of the “Bromberg Bloody Sunday” massacre of ethnic Germans at the hands of Polish brigands to justify the German attack on Poland. The 1939 campaign failed to remain part of German cultural memory because of their obvious propagandistic instrumentalization, yet were specifically invoked by Harry Nerad, the press secretary of the Sudeten German association, as a specific example of the “power of the image” which expellees should keep in mind.²⁸³

Indeed, many of the iconic photographs of “flight and expulsion” exude powerful emotional qualities, although they occasionally are inaccurate. Images of slain civilians variously are attributed to massacres in Nemmersdorf or Metgethen, a Königsberg suburb. In many

²⁸¹ Grenz, *Stadt und Kreis Gumbinnen*, 819. Grenz also reproduces Nazi press reports, about 20% of his source base, by citing them merely as a “German newspaper.” Grenz, 816. A number of other falsifications, among them citing witnesses who by their own admission were not present, remain hidden from the reader unfamiliar with the sources. See also Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 169–71.

²⁸² Fisch, *Nemmersdorf, Oktober 1944*, 135.

²⁸³ Harry Nerad, “Die Sprache des Bildes,” *Sudetenland—Heimatland* Vol. 3, Nr. 1 (1950), 38.

instances, snapshots do not depict German refugees at all but liberated DPs or *Volksdeutsche* “returning home into the Reich,” photographed by Allied journalists or Nazi newsreels respectively.²⁸⁴ In most cases, these misrepresentations occurred through sloppy verification of sources and the editorial desire for compelling artwork. In other instances, the falsifications were more egregious: Images of slain civilians, laying in each other’s arms against the wall that they were executed against, in expellee and pop literature represented Sudeten German victims²⁸⁵; in reality, the image depicted Czechs murdered by the SS during the Prague Uprising.²⁸⁶

If Nemmersdorf stands as a quintessential image of the “flight,” the horrific scenes in Prague often emerge in images of “expulsion.” Yet of even greater notoriety is the massacre of Aussig, a notorious symbol of Sudeten German suffering just as Nemmersdorf is for expellees from the German East. The massacre has already been examined in previous chapters. Of note here is how accounts of Sudeten German leaders cemented themselves in public discourse, and shaped postwar narratives. Of important influence was the 1948 account of Almar Reitzner, one of the first descriptions of the event.²⁸⁷ Commissioned by Wenzel Jaksch to depart for Czechoslovakia in order to “unveil the propaganda lies of the Czech rulers and educate the civilized world of this tragedy,” Reitzner by his own admission undertook the mission to gather evidence for political uses.²⁸⁸ Claiming to have witnessed the atrocity by happenstance from a

²⁸⁴ Stephan Scholz, “‘Ein neuer Blick auf das Drama im Osten’? Fotografien in der medialen Erinnerung an Flucht und Vertreibung,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 11, no. 1 (2014): 120–33. See also “Falsche Opfer,” *Der Spiegel* 42, October 13, 2014, 44–45.

²⁸⁵ Knopp, *Die große Flucht*, 395.

²⁸⁶ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 85–86.

²⁸⁷ Almar Reitzner, *Ich flog nach Prag. Ein Tatsachenbericht über die Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit in der Tschechoslowakei* (München: Hessen Verlag, 1948).

²⁸⁸ Almar Reitzner, *Das Paradies lässt auf sich warten: Erinnerungen eines Sozialdemokraten* (München: Langen, 1984), 65.

plane flying overhead, Reitzner recounted experiences from second and third hand sources and framed them as the conclusions of a meticulous investigation.

Reitzner's foundational narrative is important in two regards. First, while he acknowledged official estimates of around 120 dead, his arbitrary estimate of between two and four thousand set a standard that continued to find frequent citation. Two years later, the Sudeten German "white book" seemingly split the difference, and certified 800-1,000 victims. The Schieder Commission offered an unattributed estimate of 1,000-2,700, while the Sudeten German amateur historian Emil Franzel proposed the round figure of 2,500.²⁸⁹ The dizzying and confusing figures vary wildly. The exact figure indeed remains unknown, though scholarly consensus ranges between 100 and 150.²⁹⁰

Secondly, however, Reitzner presented the massacre as a spontaneous outbreak of mob hysteria driven by a hatred of Germans and desires for revenge. Sources at the time already called this into question: The local population only marginally participated and expressed horror over the excesses, which were perpetrated by military and secret service units.²⁹¹ Anticomunist exiles in London also spoke of a disgraceful act: "Lidice was a living memorial of the unholy 'furor teutonicus,' and Aussig rather than anything else rehabilitated the German Nazi murderers. The number of victims here was almost quadrupled. Will these crimes not enter history as the

²⁸⁹ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 69.

²⁹⁰ R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane. The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 114.

²⁹¹ See the nuanced study Otfried Pustejovsky, *Die Konferenz von Potsdam und das Massaker von Aussig am 31. Juli 1945: Untersuchung und Dokumentation* (München: Herbig, 2001). Indeed, two English witnesses reported that the "majority of the Czechoslovakian population were deeply ashamed over the riot the next day." Quoted in Alfred M. de Zayas, *Die Nemesis von Potsdam: die Anglo-Amerikaner und die Vertreibung der Deutschen* (München: Herbig, 2005), 161.

‘furor Czechoslovaka plebs?’²⁹² Perhaps more importantly than being able to point to Czechoslovakian condemnation, Reitzner translated and published the denunciation to support his thesis of Aussig as a pogrom carried out by a hysterical mob.²⁹³ Such notions were perpetuated by postwar authors: Jürgen Thorwald explained the source of the ghastly scenes he described as a “Slavic temperament” and a “people’s rage” that manifested itself numerous times before in European history.²⁹⁴

Such violence ostensibly distinguished itself from German crimes, or at least offset them in the minds of many postwar authors. Comparisons between Aussig and Lidice, for instance, were therefore important and frequent after 1945.²⁹⁵ An extreme manifestation of this tendency is the 1950 *Das andere Lidice* (“The other Lidice”) by Erich Kern, who offered “a tally comprehensible for all”: Against the “inflated estimates of 184 shot men, 135 women incarcerated in concentration camps, and children deported to asylums” in Lidice stood three million “disenfranchised, [...] debased more than any animal, robbed, plundered, mistreated into

²⁹² Quoted in Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 76.

²⁹³ Reitzner, *Ich flog nach Prag*, 33–35. The article also found reproduction in subsequent German literature. Theodor Schieder, ed., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*, vol. 2 (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 282–86. On the 60 year anniversary, expellee literature reprinted the article as well. See Adolf Wolf and Walter Stratmann, “Aussig: Furor Czechoslovaka plebs,” *Deutscher Ostdienst* 47/7 (2005), 13f.

²⁹⁴ Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 538.

²⁹⁵ Wenzel Jaksch, for instance, often framed expulsion violence as “a parallel to Lidice.” Wenzel Jaksch, *A Petition to the Signatory Powers of the Potsdam Agreement and to the General Secretary of the United Nations on Behalf of the Non-Nazi Sudeten Population by the Parliamentary Delegation of Sudeten Labour in Great Britain* (London, 1947), 41. As late as 1963, Jaksch lamented the “dozens of Sudeten German Lidices” and explicitly compared the Nazi massacre to Aussig. See AdsD, NL Jaksch, J2, Jaksch to Kurt Mattick, October 8, 1963. The American philosopher Sidney Hook, in an opinion piece in the *New Leader* decrying the expulsions, likewise compared the two massacres: “The Czech government did not have even the shameless pretext the Nazis gave for the destruction of Lidice, which wrung the heart of decent people everywhere. They avenged Lidice by perpetrating hundreds of other Lidices.” Sidney Hook, “Hitler’s Spirit Still Lives.” Czechoslovaks Perpetrate Atrocities Against Sudeten Germans,” *The New Leader* Vol. 28 Nr. 40, October 6, 1945, newspaper clipping in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2056.

insanity and finally murdered in the hundreds of thousands.”²⁹⁶ Whether to relativize German war guilt or to capitalize on Lidice’s notoriety as a recognized horrific war crime, the equating of Sudeten German suffering with that of Czechoslovakians under Nazi occupation provided the former with useful language that nevertheless obscured the relationship between the two fates.

Nevertheless, it is precisely this narrative that dominated postwar discussions of the expulsions.²⁹⁷ Reitzner’s descriptions of the “hell of Aussig,” in which the number of victims ballooned and unsubstantiated dramatic “factual accounts” painted apocalyptic scenes, left a lasting impression on postwar accounts.²⁹⁸ Herbert Schober’s *Jenseits der Grenze*, billed as the first “novel of an expellee,” for instance culminated in the massacre of Aussig after litany of “horror scenes of the expulsions” told with “striking power.”²⁹⁹ Schober’s account of the “bestial mass murder in the streets of the city” affirmed Reitzner’s impressions, and in any case reflected the fates of many and the “spiritual martyrdom of a people.”³⁰⁰

Even a few dozen victims entails a tragedy, and there can be no doubt that a terrible atrocity unfolded on the bridge over the Elbe at Ústí nad Labem. Yet research and sources do not

²⁹⁶ Erich Kern, *Das andere Lidice: die Tragödie der Sudetendeutschen* (Wels: Welsenmühle, 1950), 110. Erich Kern was the pseudonym of Erich Kernmayr, a former SS officer, revisionist pop historian, and editor of the rightwing nationalist *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung*. He also wrote for the *National-Zeitung* in Essen in the 1930s, where Jürgen Thorwald also worked. Oels, “Dieses Buch ist kein Roman,” 376.

²⁹⁷ In a travel diary published in *Stern* in 1955, Günther Dahl visited Aussig and exposed readers to Reitzner’s general argument: “Here is the marketplace that in the summer of 1945 became the stage for the terrible ‘bloody Sunday.’ About 2,000 Germans fell victim to the raging mob. They hung in pairs from lampposts.” Günther Dahl “Heimaterde unter fremden Stiefeln, *Stern* Nr. 36, 13. No reports spoke of victims hanged from lampposts in Aussig, and the author likely conflates this with reports from Prague in May 1945.

²⁹⁸ Reitzner, *Ich flog nach Prag*, 12.

²⁹⁹ Undated review of *Jenseits der Grenze* published in the winter of 1949 in “Die Stimme der Vertriebenen,” clipping in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 176. Herbert Schober, *Jenseits Der Grenze* (Salzburg: Hellbrunn, 1949).

³⁰⁰ As the review noted, the only difference to a *Tatsachenbericht* was its subjective voice: “It is more than a report, story, novel: it is the chronicle of the spiritual martyrdom of a people.”

support claims of Aussig as an expression of collective popular rage. The framings of the early postwar period introduced powerful images, and constructors of expellee narratives presented Aussig as the representative experience of Germans in Czechoslovakia. Along with the “Brünn death march,” Aussig ranks as a quintessential “flight and expulsion” experience. While violence erupted throughout Czechoslovakia in the immediate postwar months, they were far from a universal experience. Moreover, the proposition that one of the most heinous excesses stands as a “typical” event of the forced migrations fails to differentiate between the phase of the “wild expulsions” and the “orderly and humane” transfer. Indeed, the tendency of invoking Aussig as a metaphor of the entire expulsion process, and conflation of its distinct phases, left many West Germans with a distorted understanding of the forced migrations; the most dramatic and radical, yet brief and hardly universal, experiences came to represent the fate of millions.

Just as certain places and events of “flight and expulsion” still reverberate, a number of “villains” particularly responsible for German suffering remain powerfully entrenched fixtures in expellee narratives. The dizzying array of voices and convoluted blend of distorted reports and political agendas that contributed to notorious boogymen clearly emerges with Soviet propagandist Ilja Ehrenburg, routinely cited as the prime agitator responsible for Red Army crimes perpetrated against Germany. Ehrenburg’s infamy was so great that in September 1959, after Nikita Khrushchev announced he would travel to the United States with the author, the decision aroused much consternation among members of the West German public who regarded the former writer as a war criminal. The announcement rekindled memories of Ehrenburg’s wartime propaganda. An intrigued Fritz Leimbach contacted the Institute for Contemporary

History (IfZ) for a copy of the supposed flier exhorting Red Army soldiers to murder and rape German civilians, quoted in General Otto Lasch's memoirs.³⁰¹

To what fliers were Leimbach and his correspondents referring? In the literature, two pieces regularly find mention. The first, typically titled *Ubej!* ("Kill"), called upon the Red Army to kill all Germans in their path. The second flier ostensibly encouraged Soviet soldiers to "break with violence the racial arrogance of the German women!"³⁰² For postwar authors, the exhortations provided prominent evidence of the Kremlin's extermination plans.³⁰³ The "Red Army was systematically incited by the propaganda of Ehrenburg...[which] stoked the lust of the soldiers with its propaganda of hatred."³⁰⁴ Others cited it as the main causes of the worst of the excesses: "With the exhortations it became clear that Nemmersdorf...conformed to a premeditated guideline."³⁰⁵ Still others felt Ehrenburg tipped the moral scales in the other direction: "An appeal that in its atrociousness lets all the violations of international law that the National Socialist regime committed...pale in comparison."³⁰⁶

³⁰¹ Letter reproduced in Bernhard Fisch, "Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45," *Geschichte-Erziehung-Politik* 8, no. 1 (1997): 26. Leimbach referred to the flier's mention in the memoirs of the last commandant of Königsberg, General Otto Lasch. German troops ostensibly found copy's of Ehrenburg's exhortations in the pockets of slain Red Army troops. See Otto Lasch, *So fiel Königsberg: Kampf und Untergang von Ostpreussens Hauptstadt*. (Stuttgart: Motorbuch-Verlag, 1976), 138.

³⁰² "Kill! Kill! There is nothing that is innocent with the Germans, not the living nor the unborn! Follow the commands of comrade Stalin and smash forever the fascist animal in its lair. Break with violence the racial arrogance of the German women! Take her as justified booty!" Quoted in Fisch, "Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45," 23.

³⁰³ Herbert Hupka, in a radio review of the *Dokumentation*, alluded to propaganda that "urged Russians to take revenge." BArch B150-562, Transcript of "Der gemeinsame Weg," *Hessischer Rundfunk*, August 24, 1958.

³⁰⁴ Alfred Maurice de De Zayas, *Die Anglo-Amerikaner und die Vertreibung der Deutschen: Vorgeschichte, Verlauf, Folgen* (Frankfurt/M.: Ullstein, 1978), 84. Heinz Nawratil, *Vertreibungsverbrechen an Deutschen: Tatbestand, Motive, Bewältigung* (Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1987), 101.

³⁰⁵ Schöning and Tautorat, *Die ostpreussische Tragödie 1944/45*, 36.

³⁰⁶ Quoted in "Tötet, tötet, tötet," *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 72. The quotation is attributed to pop historian Walter Görnitz. See Walter Görnitz, *Der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1952).

These verdicts rely on problematic sources. Jürgen Thorwald was perhaps the first to mention the fliers in a fictionalized account of a Soviet captain exhorting his troops with Ehrenburg's words to destroy a town, burn children alive, rape the women, and castrate and crucify the men.³⁰⁷ Elsewhere, Thorwald authoritatively claimed that Ehrenburg "openly and hatefully promised Red Army soldiers German women as booty."³⁰⁸ In 1952, reporter Walter Görlitz used similar formulations, yet was the first to add the phrases "violently break the racial arrogance" and "take them as justified booty."³⁰⁹ The previously mentioned 1958 memoirs of Lasch reprinted Görlitz's version, as did the autobiography of Hitler's successor, Admiral Karl Dönitz, which came out in the same year.³¹⁰ Subsequent publications decades later continued to reprint this iteration as a verbatim quotation of the infamous flier.³¹¹ As *Spiegel* noted in 1962, the International Biographical Archive—the "Munzinger Archive"—adopted Görlitz's text; as many newspapers rely on the resource, it guaranteed that this version found wide circulation.³¹²

The incendiary piece that became such object of contempt has never been found. In his 1959 inquiry, the IfZ directed Leimbach to Lasch, who in turn put him into contact with Kurt Dieckert, a collaborator on Lasch's work and archive director of the Ministry for All-German

³⁰⁷ "Kill, you Red Army troops, kill! For there is nothing that is innocent with the fascists, not the living nor the unborn. Kill!" Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 60.

³⁰⁸ Thorwald, 95. Thorwald claimed that the quotation was based on testimonies of refugees who presented the author with fliers, and statements of Wehrmacht soldiers who escaped Soviet captivity. Thorwald, 296.

³⁰⁹ Quoted in "Tötet, tötet, tötet," *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 74.

³¹⁰ Dönitz, *Zehn Jahre und zwanzig Tage*.. Into its ninth edition (1985), readers still are not offered a citation or indication of where the text emanates from.

³¹¹ Fisch, "Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45," 24.

³¹² "Tötet, tötet, tötet," *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 72. See for example "Das nackte Leben," *Stern* 10, March 7, 1959, 26.

Affairs.³¹³ Dieckert did not possess a physical copy, but referred Leimbach to the reproduction in Thorwald's *Es began an der Weichsel*, adding that it may not have been a flier at all but a radio broadcast.³¹⁴ Thorwald's materials, bequeathed to the IfZ, do not contain the propaganda flier. In response to an inquiry from *Spiegel* in 1962, archivist Hildegard von Kotze explained that the institute "turned to all relevant institutions domestically and abroad...but to this day could not ascertain the provenience of the quotation."³¹⁵ Görlitz likewise could not provide answers as to his source.³¹⁶ The BMVt could not provide evidence.³¹⁷ Subsequent research in German and Russian archives also could not turn up the infamous source.³¹⁸ Various attributed to fliers found on slain enemy soldiers or intercepted radio broadcasts, only one thing remains doubtless: Thorwald provided the first quotation of a nonexistent flier, which Görlitz amended further, and since then numerous publications continued to quote this more acidic version.

³¹³ Dieckert was the editor of various military documentations. See for instance Kurt Dieckert and Horst Grossmann, *Der Kampf um Ostpreussen: Der umfassende Dokumentarbericht über das Kriegsgeschehen in Ostpreussen* (Beltheim-Schnellbach: Lindenbaum-Verl., 2010).

³¹⁴ Letter reproduced in Fisch, "Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45," 26.

³¹⁵ "Tötet, tötet, tötet," *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 74.

³¹⁶ Initially, the author informed *Der Spiegel* that the quote came from Thorwald. After reporters pointed out that the Thorwald text was much shorter and substantially different, Görlitz raised the possibility of having read it in a Red Army brochure of a Soviet deserter. The *Deutsche Soldatenzeitung* confirmed that the Ehrenburg text was printed in Russian and circulated in émigré circles, but Görlitz insisted on having read it in German. He lastly informed *Der Spiegel* that he may have read the appeal in a newspaper.

³¹⁷ In January 1964, Hans Edgar Jahn's research assistant referenced the *Dokumentation*'s passages attesting to captured Ehrenburg documents and "unpublished material" in the possession of the historians. His request for copies of these sources for his forthcoming publication could went unanswered. BArch B106-27734, Grünthal to Schlicker, January 1, 1964. Later that month, again correspondents contacted the BMVt attempting to clarify details on the *Dokumentation*'s references to Soviet propaganda posters; the government officials once again provided no indication of what these materials were, or where they could be located. BArch B106-27734Müller to Schlicker, January 29, 1964.

³¹⁸ Fisch, "Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45," 22.

Ehrenburg in fact penned the other contentious essay, *Ubej!*, but its first full reproduction and translation from Russian into English did not appear until 1977. Subsequent German publications habitually cut the first half.³¹⁹ Readers not versed in Russian were therefore not exposed to descriptions of German crimes perpetrated in the Soviet Union. Crucially as well, postwar authors neglected to reveal the flier's publication date. Written in 1942, when the Soviet Union faced an existential struggle against a foe who systematically starved millions of their compatriots and that year initiated the Holocaust, qualms over Ehrenburg's harsh dehumanizing language seem contrived. It moreover seems farfetched that a 1942 appeal could have provoked such fury in the Soviet soldiery already hardened by a war of annihilation and firsthand knowledge of German crimes three years later.

Besides removing the context and eliding the reasons for Ehrenburg's outrage, the demands to "kill the Germans" could hardly have applied at the time to civilians in East Prussia. Meant were the only Germans Soviet soldiers could strike dead, namely those invaders in Wehrmacht and SS uniforms. It is unclear how specifically this exhortation differed from the task of British or American forces, who similarly struggled with all means against a regime orchestrating murder on an unequalled scale.³²⁰ The consistent ignoring, whether willful or innocent, of the context of *Ubej!*—namely the date of its creation and the sources of Soviet

³¹⁹ Nawratil, *Vertreibungsverbrechen an Deutschen*, 99; De Zayas, *Die Anglo-Amerikaner und die Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 85.

³²⁰ In an interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1962, Ehrenburg addressed the harsh tone of his writings and exhortations to kill the invaders: "When the Nazi army invaded our land, our soldiers thought that the German workers and farmers had been coerced, that only the generals were against us, that one only needed to wait for the arrival of the soldiers in order to then immediately find mutual understanding. If at that moment we would not have been able to explain that the majority of Germans supported Hitler, we would have been unable to exhort our army to meaningful military resistance." "Tötet, tötet, tötet," *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 75.

indignation and fury—left the propaganda piece a useful document that underlined German victimhood, and thereby helped ensure Ehrenburg’s place in German cultural memory.

There can be no question that Ehrenburg authored emotionally charged appeals to steel the Red Army’s fighting spirit.³²¹ Yet what maxims did he pass on to comrades standing at Germany’s doorsteps as triumphant conquerors three years later? In *Krasnaja Zvezda* in November 1944, the propagandist reminded that the “Red Army does not go to Germany in order to rape women.”³²² In a subsequent piece in February 1945, Ehrenburg chided readers who imagined that vengeance for “the fascist two-legged animals who...publically raped our women requires us in turn to do the same to them. That has never happened and can never happen. Our fighters will never let something like this happen.” Wishful thinking cannot change the fact that members of the Red Army perpetrated crimes on a large scale. Once historicized, however, the essay hardly supports the image of Ehrenburg as a demagogue instigating brutalities in occupied Germany. Instead, Ehrenburg called for “order among the troops,” warning those who “violate military discipline are committing grave crimes against the homeland.”³²³ Ehrenburg in fact registered dismay over rapes and other excesses he witnessed in the drive toward Berlin.³²⁴

For his part, Ehrenburg vehemently denied the allegations and “was prepared to fall to my knees...even before the remains of Hitler” in order to swear that he did not compose the

³²¹ For a more detailed examination, see Carola Tischler, “Die Vereinfachungen des Genossen Ehrenburg. Eine Endkriegs- und eine Nachkriegskontroverse,” in *Rotarmisten schreiben aus Deutschland: Briefe von der Front (1945) und historische Analysen*, ed. Elke Scherstjanoi (München: K.G. Saur Verlag, 2004), 326–39.

³²² Quoted in Fisch, “Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45,” 22.

³²³ Fisch, 22.

³²⁴ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 32.

racially charged exhortations.³²⁵ For decades, Ehrenburg challenged critics to produce evidence, and lamented that the “legend completely invented by a Hitler general survived...all these years.”³²⁶ Ehrenburg attested that he “knew already during the war that Dr. Goebbels had the outright devilish idea to fabricate such an appeal and to sign it with my name.”³²⁷ By 1965, and in response Ehrenburg’s public disavowals, Thorwald’s editions conceded that Nazi fabrications were not unthinkable, but continued to vow that he had himself seen the flier.³²⁸

The former Nazi propagandist was not alone: Many former Wehrmacht members swore to have read Ehrenburg’s comments during the war or having heard them from Soviet loudspeakers. A staff officer of Army Group Center wrote to the Federal Archive in 1960 that he “remembered precisely that...we received various fliers written by Ilja Ehrenburg. There is no doubt that in them there was talk of ‘flaxen-haired women as booty.’”³²⁹ Klaus von Bismarck—a relative of the Iron Chancellor, speaker of the Pomeranian Homeland Association, director of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk, and president of the Goethe Institute—recalled that the text was distributed among his troops in Danzig.³³⁰ The unlikelihood of Soviet broadcasts in German appealing to Soviet soldiers aside, if the recollections of German translations circulated on the Eastern Front are accurate, they imply at the very least a distillation of Red Army materials by Third Reich offices. In 1994, Bismarck revealed that he had come to believe that what he thought

³²⁵ “Tötet, tötet, tötet,” *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 72.

³²⁶ Il’ja G Èrenburg, *Menschen, Jahre, Leben: Memoiren*. (Berlin: Verl. Volk u. Welt, 1982), 33.

³²⁷ “Tötet, tötet, tötet,” *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 73.

³²⁸ Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, 296.

³²⁹ “Tötet, tötet, tötet,” *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 74.

³³⁰ Fisch, “Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45,” 32.

as authentic Soviet propaganda materials for decades were in his estimation Nazi fabrications. It had been the Soviet dissident and war veteran Lev Kopelev who convinced him: Puzzled by the numerous appearances of Ehrenburg in West German “volumes and newspapers,” Kopelev found that the “primitive construction” in “very bad Russian” did not correspond to Ehrenburg’s style, and suggested an “attempt of the Goebbels-cadre to...strengthen the spirit of resistance.”³³¹

No evidence points to an outright fabrication of Ehrenburg’s inflammatory writings by the propaganda machinery of the Third Reich. This in either case is secondary to the greater point: The conviction of having heard or read the murderous declarations point to a cementation of Ehrenburg in the narrative of “flight and expulsion.” As Bismarck confided, even during the war he “knew quite a lot of Ilya Ehrenburg.”³³² A frequent subject of their scorn, the Nazi press transformed the Jewish propagandist into a terrifying boogeyman. The National Socialist press immediately declared “the Jew Ehrenburg” as the instigator of the Nemmersdorf massacre.³³³ Hitler himself denounced the “Stalinist house Jew” in an address to the Wehrmacht in 1945.³³⁴ Unsurprisingly, postwar West Germans therefore contended with a caricature of Ehrenburg

³³¹ Fisch, 23. “I first saw and read this so-called ‘Ehrenburg flier’ in West Germany after 1980, explicit reproductions were in collected volumes and newspapers. I have often responded...to questions about this flier. It is a rather primitive compilation of several quotations from Ehrenburg’s features from various years and several phrases (exhortations to murder, to rape—‘break the racial arrogance...’) that Ehrenburg could not have written, neither morally nor simply grammatically; they are written in very poor Russian, and raise the impression that they are a translation from another language (German, Polish, Lithuanian). None of my acquaintances and comrades can recall such a flier. It seems to be known only among German troops, and likely was an attempt of the Goebbels-cadre to in this manner strengthen the spirit of resistance of the Wehrmacht.” See also Kopelev’s comments in Lew Kopelev, “Verlorene Kriege, gewonnene Einsichten. Rückblick vom Ende eines Zeitalters. Ein Gespräch,” in *Deutschland und die russische Revolution: 1917-1924*, by Gerd Koenen and Lew Kopelev (München: Fink, 1998), 39.

³³² Fisch, “Ubej! Töte! Zur Rolle von Ilja Ehrenburgs Flugblättern 1944-45,” 32.

³³³ Kurt-Lothar Tank, “Das Grauen von Nemmersdorf,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, October 28th, 1944, 1

³³⁴ “Der Tagesbefehl des Führers an die Deutsche Wehrmacht: 1945—Jahr einer geschichtlichen Wende,” *Völkischer Beobachter*, January 2, 1945, 1.

largely fabricated by Nazi propaganda. Whether consciously or unwittingly, authors echoed wartime contempt when they referred to Ehrenburg as a ruthless “agitator,” the “Soviet Julius Streicher,” and specter possessing an “ingenious talent for stoking hatred of Germans.”³³⁵

How ingrained the Soviet author was in German psyches can be seen by periodic public outrage whenever the prominent Soviet author came into contact with the Western world. An invitation of Ehrenburg by Hans Mandl, vice mayor of Vienna, to an East-West cultural function sparked a minor controversy in Austria in 1960. The Austrian People’s Party, the Education Ministry, and the Foreign Ministry registered their dismay, while rightwing presses denounced Mandl and Ehrenburg and published the Görlitz quotation. Expellees and newspapers in Germany joined the fray, with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* commenting that the “appeal to the final struggle...remains unforgotten in Germany.” Mandl consulted numerous institutes and archives, and noted that the allegations remained based on unclear evidence.³³⁶

Two years later, when Kindler Publishers announced a forthcoming translated first volume of Ehrenburg’s memoirs, public furor moved Kindler to delay their efforts and contact a variety of authorities to clarify the existence of Ehrenburg’s notorious flier; unable to verify its existence, the publisher forged ahead with its venture.³³⁷ Protestors picketed book stores, while other vendors refused to carry it at all. Numerous papers registered their outrage and republished the inflammatory appeal. *Die Zeit* pondered whether “we can allow ourselves” a publication of

³³⁵ De Zayas, *Die Anglo-Amerikaner und die Vertreibung der Deutschen*, 86; Alfred M De Zayas, *Anmerkungen zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1993), 60; Nawratil, *Vertreibungsverbrechen an Deutschen*, 99.

³³⁶ “Unerwünschter Gast,” *Der Spiegel* 16, April 13, 1960, 60.

³³⁷ For a detailed overview of the controversy, see “Tötet, tötet, tötet,” *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962. Kindler contacted the Federal Ministry of Defense, the Federal Press Office, the Institute for Research on the USSR, RIAS, Osteuropa-Institute, and Harvard University, among other offices. When a rival publisher moved to bring the Ehrenburg memoirs to market, Kindler opted for publication.

Ehrenburg's autobiography, while the radical nationalist *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung* accused Kindler of delivering a "slap to the face of the German people" and condemned Ehrenburg as a "blood-drenched monster in the form of a human."³³⁸ The *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung* went so far as to publish a "Documentation on the greatest agitator of murder in world history: Ilja Ehrenburg." With passages of authentic texts—edited and without context—and facsimiles, the running series also included the controversial appeal. When asked by *Der Spiegel* why it did not include a facsimile of this particular flier, the newspaper explained that limited space and a desire not to bore the reader led the editors to decline an original reproduction, which the paper nevertheless had in its possession; pressed for details, the *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung* lamented that the flier had disappeared and could not be found located.³³⁹

The deliberate or unwitting fabrication and distortion starting in the Third Reich and continuing into the postwar period cemented Ehrenburg as one of the main culprits and bloodthirsty firebrands in "flight and expulsion" narratives. There he joined villains such as the demonic Joseph Stalin, conniving Edvard Beneš, callous Winston Churchill, and thousands of Red Army "Mongols" and Czech "soldetska" who stood as the symbol of a politics ostensibly aimed at the absolute destruction of Germany. References to the Soviet propagandist and his role in German suffering were seemingly obligatory and reflexive, and as permanent of a fixture of a stylized narration of the forced migrations as the treks and crossing of the frozen Vistula Lagoon, the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* or *Goya*, the fortress cities of Breslau and Königsberg, the

³³⁸ Quoted in Tischler, "Die Vereinfachungen des Genossen Erenburg. Eine Endkriegs- und eine Nachkriegskontroverse," 326.

³³⁹ "Tötet, tötet, tötet," *Der Spiegel* 36, September 5, 1962, 76.

massacres of Aussig and Nemmersdorf, and “death marches” from Brünn, and other notorious *lieux de memoire* in the mind of the nation.³⁴⁰

Conclusions

It is not a question of whether Soviet forces perpetrated extreme violence in Nemmersdorf or countless other locations in the German East, or whether Czech or Polish militia meted out rough justice in cruel and often deadly ways once liberation upended the social order in Central Europe. One cannot dismiss German suffering out of hand because of inconsistencies or problematic language used to describe intense personal anguish. It is naturally difficult to parse what aspects of expellee memories are accurate recollections or distorted reflections colored by Nazi and postwar discourse. Doubtlessly in many cases, the contradictions and rhetorical flourishes were innocent attempts of arranging intense traumas into a narrative that felt authentic and reflected psychological truths: Memories can, after all, remain inaccurate on various points of detail, but endure as absolutely true expressions of emotional states that offer insight into mentalities and why events are remembered in a certain way. They are psychologically true, even when demonstrably at odds with reality.

At issue are postwar memory politics, and how those pains were recalled, collected, interpreted, and disseminated. Purporting to reveal “a true representation of the reality of what happened,” as Schieder Commission member Martin Broszat explained, the curators of West German memory of the expulsions nevertheless constructed a politicized narrative.³⁴¹ These

³⁴⁰ Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 1-36. On the Aussig massacre in Sudeten German memory, see Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 65–77.

³⁴¹ Martin Broszat, “Massendokumentation als Methode zeitgeschichtlicher Forschung,” *Vierteljahrshäfte für Zeitgeschichte* 2, no. 2 (1954): 204.

authorities stamped their scholarly seal of approval on the real, fictitious, and altered expellee testimonies that emerged from the mass of voices. Their authentic voices in turn validated the narrative. As the editors of the *Dokumentation* declared: “We can leave it to the victims...who tell of their own experiences.”³⁴² No further elaboration was needed, any doubt unnecessary and unseemly. This rubric of “fact” provided a powerful political tool for leveraging victimhood.

While this layering over time and altering of testimonies to inflect them with greater dramatic affect and more powerful meanings may have served the homeland politics of the expellee associations and the West German government, they also had one significant side affect. Whether for dramatic license, financial gain, or political agendas, postwar actors successfully colonized discussions of “flight and expulsion” and framed expellee experiences in such a way that they profoundly left a mark on West German memory of the war for decades. Assumptions of criminal and brutal Soviet soldiers, as demonstrated in Nemmersdorf or bloodthirsty hysterical Czech mobs in Aussig, may have diminished over time, but seven decades on the 1950s narratives continue to reverberate. Large portions of German cultural memory remain grounded in politically charged constructed narratives forged during the Third Reich and the Cold War.

Impressions gleaned from books, newspapers, or films echo in memories through the generations, blending family experiences and legends with media images into an inseparable whole.³⁴³ The impact of the postwar discourse can also be measured in the archival files of the BMVt. In a failed bid to commission an “expellee movie,” the ministry solicited scripts which

³⁴² Schieder, *Die Vertreibung (Oder-Neiße)*, 1984, 1:60E.

³⁴³ Welzer and Moller, “*Opa war kein Nazi*” *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*. On a similar study for expellees, see Susanne Greiter, *Flucht und Vertreibung im Familiengedächtnis: Geschichte und Narrativ* (München: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2014).

show many of the tropes examined in this chapter.³⁴⁴ When asked to conjure the ideal narrative of “flight and expulsion,” authors understandably drew from what they knew, which inevitably led them to blend personal traumas, overheard stories, or films and articles they consumed.

The prevalence and saliency remained relatively shortlived, however. As the next chapter will examine, growing awareness of Nazi crimes and sweeping cultural changes eroded the pillars of support of German victimhood, and which constituted a crucial political identity of West Germany in the 1950s. While typically associated with the generational revolt of the late 1960s, already in the late 1950s the “selective remembering” paradigm started to fracture in the face of the need to recognize the Third Reich and the victims of German persecution. The receding resonance of “flight and expulsion” narratives can be measured by the historical perspective of Schieder and his staff, which evolved substantially over the course of their work.

Dissatisfied by the poor reception abroad, the scholars came to the realization that deficiencies mired their work, and required a deeper examination of historical context in order to make the forced migrations comprehensible.³⁴⁵ National Socialism and its attempts to racially reorder Central and Eastern Europe through extermination, expulsions of “racial inferiors,” and the resettling of ethnic Germans needed to enter into any analysis of the war. In 1953, however, Schieder compromised and opted to leave out “hot potatoes,” such as the role of the outbreak of

³⁴⁴ See the scripts in BArch B150-6989 volumes 1 and 2; BArch B150-6990 volumes 1 and 2; and BArch B150-6991 volumes 1 and 2.

³⁴⁵ A review in *The American Historical Review* commented that although the Schieder Commission intended to avoid a “collection of atrocity stories and outrages...in practice it has evidently been found difficult to avoid doing this.” Paul R. Sweet, review of *Review of Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ostmitteleuropa*, by Theodore Schieder, *The American Historical Review* 59, no. 4 (1954): 928. Discussions in *The Fortnightly* and *Times Literary Supplement* lambasted political intentions, with one commentator dismissing the project as propaganda laying the foundation for World War III. The shortened English edition—which Schieder never entirely authorized—received even harsher responses due to inadequate historical perspective: The historians insufficiently addressed the Third Reich’s crimes, which served as a justification for the forced transfers. Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Hintergründe – Entstehung – Ergebnis – Wirkung,” 112–13.

war in September 1939, hoping for “necessary consideration for a future volume that will place the expulsion process in a larger historical context.”³⁴⁶ When the commission tackled the next volumes, the “hot potatoes” proved glaring and inescapable. The source base proved problematic, as quite a number of testimonies for the Hungary volume emerged as forgeries.³⁴⁷ Similar concerns arose with the material for Yugoslavia, which contained contradictions, inaccuracies, and falsifications that “in many places raise the suspicion that...through deliberate influencing or subsequent corrections, testimonies were lent the appearance of accuracy and authenticity.”³⁴⁸ The sloppiness and dishonesty forced the commission to start over.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ BArch N1188-3, Schieder to Gotthold Rhode, March 6, 1953. Schieder proposed that upon completion of the *Dokumentation*, the commission should publish a comprehensive volume that would historicize the expulsions into a larger historical context which included the emergence of the nationalities struggle in the 19th century, the population transfers of the early 20th century, and National Socialism in particular. See BArch B106-27733, Protocol of meeting, February 28, 1953. This proposal predated similar framings by decades. See Eric D. Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5 (2008): 1313–43.

³⁴⁷ Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Hintergründe – Entstehung – Ergebnis – Wirkung,” 108.

³⁴⁸ BArch N1709-3, “Zum jugoslawischen Dokumentenmaterial,” undated [circa 1955]. The memo noted that many of the testimonies had been fundamentally altered and edited by the transcript writers engaged by the *Süd-Ost-Europa-Institut* (Southeast European Institute). This meant that the “intended elimination of bias and discrepancies sometimes occurred in only a superficial way.” Numerous reports contained “stereotypical” comments corroborating death rates and acts of violence, such as “I learned of this through a grave digger.” Moreover, the figures of deaths in camps in multiple testimonies had a high degree of consistency as opposed to earlier reports, suggesting that the “consistency was achieved during the editing.” Most alarmingly, when the originals of protocols were available, numerous instances of editing through “additions or omissions” created statements that were “sharpened and pointed.”

³⁴⁹ The numerous inconsistencies led the commission to ask respondents to verify their testimonies and rewrite them. In many cases, however, the addresses of supposed authors were false and emerged as fictitious. Moreover, the commission discovered that Prof. Valjavec, who led the research team gathering materials for the Yugoslavia volume, and his assistant pocketed portions of honorariums meant for witnesses. They frequently demanded protocols and interviews, and rejected personally written testimonies, as the latter received no compensation. Lastly, the investigation found that Valjavec and other staffers violated copyright laws, using reports intended for the *Dokumentation* for a separate publication they attempted to publish through the *Göttinger Arbeitskreis*. See BArch B150-5630, Memo “Erfahrungen mit Prof. Vajavec bei der Zusammenarbeit für die Dokumentation der Vertreibung,” March 27, 1957. The BMVt declined to bring legal charges, as it feared the unnecessary attention that could undermine the value of the entire *Dokumentation*. See BArch B150-5642, Oberländer to Georg Graf Henckel, August 14, 1958.

The problematic testimonies the commission waded through for a decade exasperated Schieder.³⁵⁰ Of greater concern was that volumes on these countries and the Sudetenland required greater attention on the prehistory of the expulsions, extending to the First World War, the emergence of new nation-states, and the treatment of minorities to make postwar policies understandable.³⁵¹ Nazism could no longer remain overlooked, and Schieder lamented to the BMVt that “obvious difficulties” would arise in the “collaboration of parties who differ over their aims—political on the one hand, scholarly on the other.”³⁵² In 1955, he again urged a concluding volume.³⁵³ The BMVt approved a draft, yet left the question of publication open, as officials dreaded a sweeping treatment of forced migration in the 20th century that undermined claims to the unprecedented nature of the expulsions. Attention on Nazi policies furthermore provided potential justifications for Allied policy, weakening the FRG’s position at future peace negotiations. Schieder, in short, undercut the political objectives of a historical examination of the “flight and expulsion.”³⁵⁴ The proposal therefore continued to remain academic.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁰ The issues forced Schieder to acknowledge the crucial obstacle for contemporary historians incorporating eyewitnesses into their work: “Nowhere does legend grow more uncontrollably than exactly here, and the horrific becomes ever more horrific when it is told from one to the other.” Schieder, “Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten als wissenschaftliches Problem,” 9.

³⁵¹ See BArch B150-4171, vol. 2, Protocol of meeting, January 17, 1955. One can see the commission’s greater attention to the historical context when comparing the first two volumes with later publications. While the former featured minimal commenting on the testimonies, the subsequent volumes contained longer introductions that focused greater attention on the prehistory and historical context for the forced migrations.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ See BArch N1228-114, Memo on “Plan des sogenannten Ergebnisbandes,” July 22, 1955. Conze supported Schieder’s proposals for a sweeping examination, though he feared the scope and ambition would make the project difficult to complete. BArch N1188-4, Conze to Schieder, July 30, 1955.

³⁵⁴ See BArch B150-4173, Protocol of meeting, March 7, 1958. In a meeting a few months later, Rothfels acknowledged that the scope would “raise political difficulties and one would need to discuss embarrassing occurrences.” Nevertheless, it seemed impossible to continue the *Dokumentation* without a rigorous examination of the preceding three decades and the Third Reich. BArch N1228-112, Protocol of meeting, December 6, 1958.

³⁵⁵ Schieder attempted to receive a guarantee the rights to a separate publication detached from the BMVt under the independent authority of the commission, but the government dismissed this compromise as well. For more see

Undeterred, into the late 1950s Schieder pleaded his case, pointing out that since the project's start, increased attention on the Third Reich and mountains of documents from the Nuremberg Trials made the absence of the Nazi dictatorship untenable. In 1961, Schieder argued for the political necessity of "seeking to understand the [expulsions] from purely historical causes and in some way as a reaction to the NS-politics." "The attempt of a clarification of the backgrounds and interrelationships that ultimately led to the expulsions," he contended, "are without doubt necessary as well as useful for the interests of the politics of the Federal Republic, which after all supports the elucidation of the NS-politics."³⁵⁶

Government officials continued to stonewall.³⁵⁷ BMVt State Secretary Peter Paul Nahm rejected the proposal because it trivialized the expulsions and left a one-sided impression of German aggression, admonishing that it spelled the "political suicide" of his ministry.³⁵⁸ Rothfels intervened, assuring that the commission noticed the importance of "National Socialist ethnic and resettlement and expulsion policies," which now emerged as a "conditio sine qua non," only through the course of its work. They did not intend to fabricate justifications for the forced migrations, but warned that ignoring the crucial historical context would leave a glaring partisan impression.³⁵⁹ The doyen of the West German historical guild also failed to move government officials: The concluding volume remained a draft and never appeared in print.

Mathias Beer, "Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte. Das Großforschungsprojekt 'Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa,'" *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 46, no. 3 (1998): 380–81.

³⁵⁶ BArch B150-5630, protocol of meeting, July 29, 1961.

³⁵⁷ In 1963, Schieder attempted a final compromise of reducing the more than 1,000 page manuscript, but maintaining a focus on the National Socialist period. BArch N1213-77, Circular Nr. 171, March 18, 1963.

³⁵⁸ BArch N1188-219, Memo re: discussion from August 1, 1963.

³⁵⁹ BArch N1213-3, Rothfels to Nahm, December 11, 1963.

The thwarted concluding volume illustrates a much larger point beyond the intellectual eminence and evolution of Theodor Schieder. Just as the *Dokumentation*'s beginnings reveal continuities between the interwar period and the Third Reich with the early Federal Republic, ruptures and evolutions also emerged after 1945. For the older and conservative historians who entered the academy when it more closely aligned with the prerogatives of the state, and who waged a struggle against Versailles through scholarship, the close collaboration with the government in the fight to overturn Potsdam did not initially pose professional or moral problems. Yet the researchers increasingly challenged the traditional compliance of scholarship with politics during the course of their work. The next generation of historians, led by the young staff members Martin Broszat and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, went on to break with this orthodoxy entirely through a critical social history that examined the issues and themes raised by Schieder in a far different Federal Republic of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁶⁰

The changing perspectives of the commission members, through research findings and generational conflict, more importantly reflected a rapidly changing West German social context: They presaged coming tensions between German victimhood and the Nazi past which were there from the start, but by the 1960s loomed unavoidably. Within a project that sought to document expellee suffering and underpin political claims based upon them, German victimhood and the Nazi past emerged as indivisible. Schieder's insights may have come prematurely and ultimately failed in the face of governmental opposition, but the handwriting was on the wall: It was getting harder to instrumentalize "flight and expulsion."

³⁶⁰ To what degree the young researchers' interpretations influenced Schieder remains uncertain. Nevertheless, he himself pointed out that the views of his younger colleagues diverged substantially from his generation's. BArch N1188-219, Memo dated August 1, 1963.

CHAPTER 8

“INTO THE LAST VILLAGE”: INSTITUTIONALIZING “FLIGHT AND EXPULSION”

In June 1950, a crowd of 20,000 ascended the 550 meter high cliffs just east of the Lower Saxon city of Bad Harzburg, where they were greeted by a “giant beer tent...blazing flames, pylons, waving banners and galloping crusader knights on high horses.”¹ To accommodate the throng of visitors, special trains of German Rail ferried attendees from across West Germany to the remote enclave. “A mass assembly just as the Germans have always liked them,” British High Commissioner Sir Brian Robertson sardonically reported to London.² The occasion was the inauguration of an *Ostlandkreuz*, a “Cross of the German East,” “for all Germans on this side and that side of the zonal border” that ran just below the twenty meter tall wooden crucifix. Visible from the GDR during the day, the organizers of the *Zentralverband der vertriebenen Deutschen* (Central Association of Expelled Germans) theorized that the neon lights mounted to the structure could be seen for a hundred kilometers beyond the Iron Curtain, “as if a glowing cross floats somewhere high up in the heavens,” the expellee press exalted.³

The thousands of crosses, tablets, and plaques that sprang like mushrooms from the ground throughout the Federal Republic in the 1950s and into the 1960s addressed the anguish of

¹ “Gesamtdeutsche Fragen. Deutsches Kreuz in Holz,” *Der Spiegel* 3, January 17, 1951, 8.

² Quoted in Stephan Scholz, *Vertriebenenendenkmäler: Topographie einer deutschen Erinnerungslandschaft* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2015), 192.

³ “Heute ein Kreuz an der Grenze...”, *Ostpreußenblatt*, May 5, 1950, 1.

millions, and attempted to memorialize the German East by recognizing the experiences of refugees violently separated from their homeland. Yet other agendas blatantly accompanied somber remembering. The markers attempted to anchor the lost territories, expellee claims, and political messages within the psyche of the nation. They must be understood as the physical manifestations of the literature discussed in the previous chapter, and an outgrowth of the homeland political agendas of expellee associations already examined. In order to demonstrate their political power and cement the saliency of their demands, expellee leaders used mass gatherings, memorials, museums, and classroom curricula to reinforce their activism. This chapter therefore analyzes how expellee leaders attempted to institutionalize their narrative of “flight and expulsion” in the political and cultural life of West Germany, in the hopes of preserving the German East in the mind of the nation until the day would come that a German flag would fly over the lost lands in a reunited Germany once again.

This chapter also examines, however, the diminishing relevance of the expellees, why their cultural activity largely failed to have its desired effect, how expellees responded, and—most crucially—how this impacted “flight and expulsion” narratives. From the late 1950s onward, the homeland associations faced converging challenges that saw their influence wane, and with it the saliency of their narrative. Firstly, social-liberal coalition victories in state and federal elections ushered in new governments that while not fundamentally opposed to expellees certainly brought political reforms at odds with their associations’ goals. Specifically, Chancellor Willy Brandt’s normalization of relations with the Eastern Bloc, in which the recognition of the postwar order and the Oder-Neisse Border played a key role, ended West Germany’s pro-homeland politics course. The *Neue Ostpolitik* (“new Eastern policy”) in effect accepted the loss of the German East, and delivered a crushing political blow to expellee political organizations.

Secondly, the expellee associations' anachronism became more palpable with a diminishing interest among their own base. A more or less successful integration and secured economic footing eroded interest in a return to the old homeland. This meant that there existed a fundamental chasm between the desires of "ordinary" expellees and agendas of their self-appointed leadership. While both shared a love for the homeland, most expellees accepted that this world was gone. To them, the *Heimat* transformed into a virtual homeland, while for hardline advocates it remained a physical place to return to.⁴ Complicating the growing ambivalence were dramatic demographic changes: The *Erlebnisgeneration*, the generation that experienced the forced migrations, steadily declined. Their children, too young to remember the old homeland or born after the events, had little to no relationship to these incomprehensible territories. They could scarcely identify with the emotional appeals and victimhood narratives that agitated their elders. As such, the associations saw a decline of their clientele and influence.

Lastly, the social and generational upheaval associated with the "68er" generation made the saliency of "flight and expulsion" narratives less tenable. Increased awareness of National Socialist crimes made extensive handwringing over German suffering a problematic proposition. Gradually, acknowledgment of German guilt and recognition of victims of Nazi persecution emerged as the central tenet of public commemoration and political identity. The upending of the hierarchy of victimhood eroded the pillars of support for the *Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, or "community of fate," and displaced expellees and their narrative from the center of public discourse. Moreover, this cultural transformation left expellee rhetoric, tactics, and demands appearing hopelessly out of touch and nationalistic. The expellees and their resentments were ill-

⁴ See Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

suited for this new era, and West German politicians and the media frequently voiced their discomfort over alarming continuities between their political groupings and the Nazi past.

The winds of change erupted just as expellees reached the height of their power and cultural significance, and demanded new strategies to maintain the gains made over the course of the 1950s. One reaction of the associations was to dig in their heels and become a source of what Minister for All-German affairs Jakob Kaiser commended as *heilsame Unruhe* (“beneficial unrest”).⁵ Expellee leaders weaponized their claims of standing in the vanguard of those patriotic Germans struggling for reunification of the divided German nation. This included the expanded cultivation of an identity as a bulwark against insidious currents counteracting these goals, in particular communism. Indeed, a critical West German society that dared to question the positions of the expellee leadership could only mean a treacherous and successful communist infiltration which undermined “healthy” German dispositions.

Expellee associations therefore went on the attack against supposed traitors and *Verzichtler* (“relinquishers”) in the public sphere, attempting to discredit and silence their opponents. Criticism of their political style in turn only encouraged even more radical responses, so that the 1960s and 1970s saw in many respects a self-reinforcing cycle of radicalization. When faced with the prospect of losing in culture war, expellees frequently employed the strategy of waging holding actions and insisting upon legal technicalities that kept the German East legally on the agenda, when in reality West German politics and society had moved on.

⁵ Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BArch) B106-27372, vol 1, Sitzungsbericht der Schlesischen Landesversammlung, 8. Und 9. Plenarsitzung, 25/26 November, 1967, BA 106.

Aspects of this turn toward desperation and resentment had already been documented extensively elsewhere, and largely lay beyond the scope of this dissertation.⁶

Of greater relevance is the inadequately assessed impact of this politics from a position of weakness on narratives of “flight and expulsion” and their instrumentalization. One tendency was to double down on victimhood claims, attempting to continue to force them into a public discourse ostensibly overly focused on “other” victims and German guilt. This translated into an implied and often explicit *Aufrechnung*, or “offsetting,” of German fates with other victim groups. While some if this simply meant that the narrative of the 1950s remained stagnant in the face of shifting cultural trends, and thereby appeared anachronistic or revanchist, the emergence of the Holocaust as a central subject of public memory created a rival narrative that some expellee leaders felt compelled to oppose in a struggle of victimhood competition. When faced with a public indifferent or unmoved by expellee narratives, association leaders invoked a “taboo” which ostensibly shrouded German suffering, yet another layer on the master narrative of “flight and expulsion” that has lasted into the 21st century. Conveniently explaining to themselves and their constituents why they failed to win back the German East, the proposition of a blanket of silence over the fate of expellees created the notion of a second victimhood: First they were expelled from their homelands, then from the cultural memory of the nation.

A second and more sophisticated tendency of expellee leaders was to reframe “flight and expulsion” in an internationalized language, imbedding the forced migration of Germans within

⁶ Manfred Max Wambach, *Verbändestaats und Parteienoligopol; Macht und Ohnmacht der Vertriebenenverbände*. (Stuttgart: F. Enke, 1971); Samuel Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat: Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Vertriebenenverbände* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 2000); Pertti Ahonen, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Matthias Stickler, “*Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*”: *Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände : 1949-1972* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004).

comparable international phenomena such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the partition of India. Whether coinciding commemorations of the expulsions with UN “Human Rights

Day” celebrations or increasing PR work and circulation of expellee literature such as the *Dokumentation* during the 1965 “International Year of Human Rights,” expellee advocates latched onto the affirmative and neutral notions of universal human rights. The emerging regime of human rights provided a new language that obscured German particularism and steered expellee arguments onto neutral ground.

While at the height of their influence the expellee associations sought to interject their messages into every conceivable arena, from the 1970s onward a shift toward melancholy and nostalgia developed in public discourse. One discerns an attempt to preserve an idealized homeland, a romanticized virtual *Heimat* that ceased to exist in 1945, but continues to live on in museums and literature. While perhaps never openly admitting it, this form of institutionalization implicitly recognized the ultimate demise of the German East and attempted to salvage it from disappearing entirely in the footnotes of history. The *Ostlandkreuz* at Bad Harzburg and hundreds of other locations throughout Germany still stand on windswept hills, an easily overlooked and inscrutable curiosity for most hikers. Yet they also symbolize the ascendancy and decline, indeed the entire narrative’s trajectory of “flight and expulsion.”

Early Efforts: Memory Politics from a Position of Strength

The forced migrations constituted a major component of West German discourse in the 1950s, arising as a common theme in books and magazines, the silver screen, and conversation. However, expellee associations also aspired to enshrine their vision of the German East and their political claims in the minds of West Germans by energetically engaging in other forms of cultural work. Supported through funding guaranteed through ¶196 of the “Federal Expellee

Law,” expellees enjoyed ardent institutional and moral support from governmental agencies in their effort to “conjoin homeland expellees and the native population in understanding for their mutual cultural worth and common German fate.”⁷ The cultural work acted as more than just a preservation of traditions of the German East, however, and in fact functioned as a counterpart to expellee declarations or speeches, a sort of physical manifestation of the memory politics analyzed previously. It was in the 1950s, from a position of strength, that the expellee leadership aspired to institutionalize their conception of “flight and expulsion” within the very fabric of the Federal Republic, and thereby bolster their political and cultural influence well into the future.

One primary way in which expellees hoped to cement their historical interpretations and political messages was through school books and *Ostkundeunterricht*, or “education about the East.” The incorporation of their messages into West German curricula encompassed a central demand of expellees from the 1950s onward. Combining history and cultural studies, as well as engagement with communism, expellees and scholars argued for incorporation of the German East into every subject in order to avoid “the danger that the entire problem of the ‘German East’ would appear as an inorganic or unwelcome appendage of an essentially more or less closed worldview.”⁸ Guidelines of the 1956 *Kultusministerkonferenz* (KMK), the assembly of ministers of education, established the mandatory incorporation of the curriculum at all schools, so that into the 1960s a majority of students in the Federal Republic learned of the forced migrations,

⁷ Mathias Beer, “Bundesvertriebenengesetz (BVFG),” in *Lexikon der Vertreibungen: Deportation, Zwangsaussiedlung und ethnische Säuberung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Detlef Brandes, Holm Sundhausen, and Stefan Troebst (Wien: Böhlau, 2010), 97–100.

⁸ Eugen Lemberg, “Deutscher Osten im Unterricht,” *Pädagogische Provinz*, Nr. 8 (1954), 334–336, here 334. See also BArch B150-2360, Eugen Lemberg, “Thesen zu dem Thema: Der deutsche Osten im Geschichtsunterricht.”

their consequences, and the need for a return of the lost territories and were exposed to a uniform and federally sanctioned interpretation that conformed to expellee expectations.⁹

Remarkably, the parliament as well as a report issued by the Ministry of Education emphasized a responsibility of curricula to expose National Socialist war crimes, and criticized a privileging of a German-centered narrative.¹⁰ The KMK's recommendations, however, placed an emphasis on the latter, arguing for "education on the East" to fixate on German history in the region. As the historian Eugen Lemberg, explained schools needed to propagate a "pan-German historical view in which the fate and development of Germans living outside of the Bismarck Reich are treated equally and on the same footing, and the history of the German people is seen as a whole. This is only possible if the German nation-state created in the 19th century does not appear as the intention and goal of Germany history, and the supranational function of the old Reich of the German people becomes visible."¹¹

The KMK's endorsement reflected the lobbying efforts of expellee associations, who since the late 1940s pressured state governments to adopt an *Ostkundeunterricht* in line with

⁹ Britta Weichers, *Der deutsche Osten in der Schule: Institutionalisierung und Konzeption der Ostkunde in der Bundesrepublik in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 2014), 229.. The ideas conform to earlier proposals. Christine Teusch, Kultusminister of North Rhine-Westphalia, informed State President and school teachers that the division of Germany required the type of instruction that raised awareness of the "togetherness" of all Germans. This duty bound especially schools to propagate a "all-German and European perspective," and include in all lessons the German East. This included decorating classrooms with pictures of landscapes and cityscapes of the German East, and notable personalities. BArch B150-2360, Christine Teusch to Regierungspräsidenten and educators of the state, May 24, 1954.

¹⁰ Weichers, 320.

¹¹ BArch B150-2360, Eugen Lemberg, "Thesen zu dem Thema: Der deutsche Osten im Geschichtsunterricht," 2. To be fair, Lemberg's memo, which more or less served as the basis of the KMK recommendation, advocated that the "handling of the German East must overcome the ongoing apologetic attitude prevalent since the last phase of the nationalities struggle, which erects an insular catalogue of German achievements in the East and views the remaining peoples as national opponents and from through the lens of the dangerous thesis of a West-East cultural dividing point." Ibid, 3.

their perspectives.¹² Indeed, representatives of *Ostkunde* participated in the writing of the KMK's report. These educators, who predominantly came from the German East and were active in expellee associations, even designed curricula and drafted materials and syllabi for teachers.¹³ How this content was incorporated into schools depended on the individual German state. In Lower Saxony, for example, "East German Weeks" into the 1960s made the German East a central focus of classroom discussions and incorporated lectures, songs and dance, slideshows, and films.¹⁴ North Rhine-Westphalia implemented similar measures, and even included the learning of East German folk dances and field trips to the German-German border.¹⁵

Above all, lessons exposed students to a history that glorified German settlement of the region, an "enormous achievement before which all adventure tales and mystery stories pale in comparison," as one teaching manual explained.¹⁶ In this reading, the peaceful settlers brought culture and industry to fallow Slavic lands, thereby exporting civilization and conquering the

¹² Wolfgang Protzner, "'Kommunismus' als Gegenstand Bayerischer Schul- und Bildungsbemühungen seit 1945." (1968), 44ff.. The *Ostdeutsche Kulturrat* (East German Cultural Council) similarly recommended an incorporation of the German East in all school subjects and the use of materials that would inculcate a "feeling of duty to a greater Germany (*Gesamtdeutschland*)." This was not intended to foster nationalism or imperial ambitions, but instead raise the political awareness of students as well as their knowledge of Eastern Europe. BArch B150-2360, "Recommendations to the Kultusminister of the States of the Federal Republic over the Treatment of the German East and the Problems Emanating from the Expulsions in Upbringing and Education," undated [circa May 1954].

¹³ Eugen Lemberg, for instance, has been described as the "spiritual father" of *Ostkunde*. "Ostkundliche Rundschau: Zehn Jahre Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft für deutsche Ostkunde im Unterricht," Nr. 9, vol. 4 (1963), 92-93, here 92. Other prominent educators included the Sudeten Germans Ernst Lehmann, Theo Keil, and Ernst Zintl. The majority of leading activists were active in Nazi organizations during the Third Reich and supporters of the Third Reich's politics in the occupied territories of Eastern Europe. As the lessons touched on highly political topics, the Ministry for All-German Affairs also engaged the *Göttinger Arbeitskreis* to evaluate school books and compile literature for teachers, material that West German education ministries adopted "more and more." BArch B150-2360, Bundesminister for All-German Affairs to BMVt, December 10, 1953.

¹⁴ Weichers, *Der deutsche Osten in der Schule Institutionalisierung und Konzeption der Ostkunde in der Bundesrepublik in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren*, 318.

¹⁵ Rolf Meinhardt, "*Deutsche Ostkunde*": *ein Beitrag zur Pädagogik des Kalten Krieges, 1945-1968* (Oldenburg: MI Verlag, 1978), 326ff.

¹⁶ Jochen Hoffbauer, "Ein Wort zuvor...", in *Nach Ostland wolen wir reiten...Die Besiedlung des deutschen Ostens* (Die Brücke. Lesebogen zur Behandlung des deutschen Ostens im Unterricht), February 1953, 2.

territories for the Occident. Moreover, this migration served the purpose of creating a bulwark against Asiatic disorder and savagery. The lessons made the implication clear: Germans won the right to these areas, and the German East constituted ancient Germanic and European lands.¹⁷ The current Slavic inhabitants could not make any sort of similar legitimate historic claims. As one textbook explained: “The German East...was never and nowhere one thing—Polish. [...] The land is German, because German achievement created it. The accomplishments extend to all areas of human endeavor: Economic, scientific and the arts of all sorts.”¹⁸

“Flight and expulsion” constituted a central element of this historical education. Frequently written in an emotionalized language, lessons habitually elided the context of the Third Reich and Second World War, thereby obscuring possible motives of the forced migrations or their genesis. Furthermore, the interpretations streamlined the complexity of the expulsions, reducing them into a seemingly single phenomenon without distinct phases. Students therefore encountered an undifferentiated victimhood narrative that contrasted German suffering with East European brutality, and simultaneously enshrined expellees as the greatest victims of the war in West German education.¹⁹ Generally as well, however, portrayals of expellee integration praised a “success story” as a general and crucial part of the West German “economic miracle.”

Moreover, the descriptions of “events that unfolded during the invasion...by Soviet troops” and which “without doubt represent the deepest indignity ever experienced by the East

¹⁷ See for instance Heinrich Wolfrum, “Die Entstehung des deutschen Ostens, sein wesen und seine Bedeutung,” in Ernst Lehmann, ed., *Der deutsche osten im Unterricht*, 2nd edition (Weilburg, 1956), 19-30.

¹⁸ Gerhard Pohl, “Deutsches Land im Osten,” in Karl Pagel, *Deutsche Heimat im Osten* (Berlin 1951), 9-16, here 16.

¹⁹ As an example, per an evaluation of Robert Maier, the treatment of the expulsions exceeded discussions of the Holocaust twelve-fold. Robert Maier, “Der Stellenwert des Themas ‘Zwangsmigrationen’ in deutschen Schulbuchdarstellungen,” in *Das Thema Vertreibung und die deutsch-polnischen Beziehungen in Forschung, Unterricht und Politik*, ed. Thomas Strobel (Hannover: Hahn, 2008), 167.

German population,” as one textbook formulated it, cemented particular tropes in the cultural memory of the FRG:

Mass *rape* of women and children, arbitrary *murder* of civilians, *theft*, *plundering*, *arson* and *mistreatment* from the Russians and also Poles transpired with such uniformity in *all* East German (and Sudetenland) areas during the arrival of the Red Army, that in remembrance of this one cannot avoid a description of the flight and expulsion process. [...] [Germans] were imprisoned in ‘internment camps’ (e.g. Potulice) built by Poles and harassed terribly there. Because of the insufficient nourishment, inhumanity, gruesome treatment and unhygienic conditions thousands died.”²⁰

Besides providing a streamlined narrative, the textbook’s description contains two peculiarities. First, it fails to differentiate between events during the war and postwar expulsions, taking the Red Army’s invasion as the “typical” and representative expulsion experience. Secondly, the suggestion that Poles built the internment camps, when in reality they often simply repurposed Nazi concentration and POW camps, conveniently papers over German war crimes that may not have excused postwar excesses, but certainly could have helped explain and contextualize them. In either case, it was important to communicate, Eugen Lemberg argued, that this process encompassed an “extermination” of Germans.²¹ When aspects of Nazi dictatorship such as the Holocaust seemed impossible to ignore, students received an interpretation that equated the genocide of European Jews with the expulsions: That which “Germans inflicted upon the Jews...now befell them” at the hands of East Europeans.²² In other words, expellees managed to imbed their victimhood narrative of cataclysmic and inexplicable disaster in a setting

²⁰ Manfred Vollack and Georg Schmelzle, *Ostdeutschland: und ehemalige deutsche Siedlungsgebiete in Ost- und Südosteuropa.*, 3rd ed. (Stade: Selbstverlag der Schülerzeitung WIR, 1960), 62.

²¹ Eugen Lemberg, “Die deutsche Ostsiedlungsbewegung im Streit der beteiligten Völker,” in Eugen Lemberg, *Ostkunde: Grundsätzliches und Kritisches zu einer deutschen Bildungsaufgabe* (Hannover-Linden: Jaeger, 1964), 11.

²² Eugen Lemberg, *Geschichte des Nationalismus in Europa* (Stuttgart: Curt E. Schwab Verlag, 1950), 11.

that reached millions of West Germans, culling from it contesting voices and other dimensions that could have somehow undermined the political intentions of the *Landsmannschaften*.

Beyond schools, expellees and their advocates in the federal government attempted to educate the public on the German East. The conspicuous radio programming and homeland gatherings, already analyzed previously, aimed to not simply address expellees, but all Germans. The same can be said of the numerous illustrated *Heimatbücher*, or “homeland books,” which presented a virtual tour of the German East and combined idyllic prewar images with romanticized descriptions of the *Heimat*. These were typically juxtaposed with pictures of the current dilapidated state, anticommunist condemnations of “Polish economy [*Polenwirtschaft*],” and snide asides over East European incompetence which destroyed a vibrant and blooming region.²³ In fact, the texts habitually exhibited thinly-veiled prejudices that attributed the continued desolation to some inborn Slavic primitiveness or lethargy.

The shocking level of destruction in the images certainly raised questions over the socialist planned economy and its shortages that paled in comparison with the speedy reconstruction of West German cities. Yet they also revealed the ferocity of the war and zealotry with which the Third Reich fought to the bitter end, a fact *Heimatbücher* rarely touched upon. For example, images of the remnants of Braunsberg’s destroyed cathedral spire, “stretching aloft like an admonishing finger” over the ruined city, failed to note that it was not the Red Army but retreating SS units that detonated the house of worship.²⁴ Haunting photos of Danzig still largely in ruins similarly neglected to explain to readers that the fanatical defense of

²³ For a typical example, see Karl Hermann Böhmer and Klaus-Eberhard Murawski, *Deutschland jenseits der Oder-Neisse-Linie* (Essen: Tellus-Verlag, 1967).

²⁴ *Bunte Illustrierte, Jenseits von Oder und Neisse*. (Offenburg: Burda-Verlag, 1965), 135.

the fortress city produced this destruction. “On the not yet reconstructed spaces...children frolic between the wall remnants. Yet under these ruins lie still thousands of dead who lost their lives during the conquest of the city by the Red Army, the capricious arson of roving plunderers, and during the expulsion of the German population.”²⁵ If the prewar images reminded of past glories and a carefree time, postwar images of obliteration minimized the German role in this outcome, and generally placed the blame on an enemy that engaged in wanton arbitrary destruction in a war that incomprehensively descended upon this paradise without warning.

Similarly, thousands of slideshows of the homeland before the war and the current state treated audiences to pleasant memories, as well as horrifying realizations. The texts accompanying the images also imparted a historical lesson adhering to the viewpoint of expellee elites. The achievements of Germans in the region since the Middle Ages remained a constant theme. Even photos of exceptionally “beautiful and impressive” Krakow, a Polish city before 1939, “clearly [showed] the German influence on its history.”²⁶ Like in school books, however, the Third Reich remained largely abstract and hardly a relevant context for “flight and expulsion.”²⁷ Instead, German suffering stood at the center of this story, and the organizers of the viewings clamored for images of the “events of the last days of the war and especially the treks.”²⁸ Often used in conjunction with the reading of expellee testimonies, presentations

²⁵ Bunte Illustrierte, 163.

²⁶ BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, Text to Slideshow “Schlesien Heute—Ein Besuch in Oberschlesien/Schlesien,” 1956, 15. The city’s picturesque state, the text suggested, had less to do with the minimal wartime destruction, and seemed rooted in its Teutonic character.

²⁷ Even when slideshows surprisingly included images of Auschwitz, as a 1958 series did, the “bitter memories” and “countless innocent victims” were attributed to Germans as well as “later Polish rule.” BArch B150-3374 vol. 1, Text for Slideshow Nr. 35, 90 color images “Eine Reise nach Polen und die polnisch besetzten deutschen Ostgebiete,” 1958, 10.

²⁸ BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, Vorsitz BvD Ortsgemeinschaft Assinghausen H. Christ to BMVt, November 10, 1961.

desired gripping images to augment the emotional scenes.²⁹ At some presentations, survivors of the “great trek to the West” and the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* related their experiences along with images.³⁰

The photos of an immaculate homeland undoubtedly sparked fond recollections among expellees. However, scenes of contemporary conditions must also have incited dismay and fury. While a 1958 Expellee Ministry slideshow carefully warned that audience perceptions of Poles were “in many cases still influenced by the partially outdated war memories,” viewers encountered a narrative of Poland as a “land of contradictions” that may have done very little to dispel negative stereotypes. Any modern infrastructure, the text accompanying the images explained, could be credited to centuries of German influence and industry, though current inhabitants proved poor stewards. “Surprisingly good roads” needed to be credited to German engineering. The abundance of crosses, meanwhile, testified to the piety of Poles, though they were mostly “primitive” constructions.³¹ Other slideshows struck a similar tone.³²

Indeed, the major message of the presentations was that the *Heimat* had changed beyond recognition. As a 1956 script prepared by the Expellee Ministry formulated it, the German East

²⁹ BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, Otto Müller to BMVt, March 14, 1965. See also Ibid, Alois Brauner to BMVt, May 12, 1965. Surprisingly, the BMVt did not have many images available, and a sole official put together a “very impressive” collection of a handful of images to satisfy demands. BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, Elisabeth Preuschoff to Ada Mages, Landeskulturstelle of BvD, Landesverband Hessen, April 6, 1965. See also Ibid, Preuschoff to Brauner, May 25, 1965, and Ibid, Preuschoff to Müller, March 31, 1965.

³⁰ BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, BdV, Ortsvereinigung Oker, Veranstaltungs-Ablauf am 20. Mai in der Aula der Mittelschule, undated [circa 1965].

³¹ BArch B150-3374 vol. 1, Text for Slideshow Nr. 35, 90 color images “Eine Reise nach Polen und die polnisch besetzten deutschen Ostgebiete,” 1958.

³² For example, yet another widely shown presentation of 60 color slides of East Prussia confronted audiences with images of a village pond left to turn into a swamp and Junker estates in disrepair and transformed into inefficient collective farms. BArch B150-3374 vol. 1, Text for Slideshow “Deutscher Osten 1958. Teil II: Ostpreussen,” 1958. German newspapers struck a similar tone up until the 1950s. See the clippings of diverse expellee and West German daily papers in Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 07-001-3382.

was “mainly destroyed,” the “cities and villages are grey and deteriorated.”³³ Throughout the region, former German houses could be seen falling apart, and Poles even dared to “deliberately” tear down churches not destroyed in the war.³⁴ In Leobschütz, charming images from 1922—“how it looked like back then, when 99% voted for Germany [during the plebiscite]”—contrasted sharply with how it looked today. “Of everything shown in the previous pictures, nothing exists: Neither the people—old or young—live in Leobschütz, nor does a single stone stand on another.”³⁵ Not even remaining Germans, who ostensibly solely accounted for modest of reconstruction efforts, could change the “desolate scenes.”³⁶ That grim landscapes testified to the ferocity of the final phase of the war—Leobschütz, for instance, was surrounded and fanatically held by SS units and nearly 50% destroyed in fierce fighting—rarely entered into explanations. Instead, blame for widespread remnants of a bitter war waged barely a decade previously fell upon Polish lethargy and communist incompetence.

The slideshows therefore attempted to argue that the images proved that a disinterested people inhabited German lands unlawfully. “The majority of the villages show that strangers live in them who have not yet taken hold of it or don’t even want to,” narrators recited as projectors cast images of towns and cities in disrepair. “In most villages practically nothing has been done to rebuild since the war.”³⁷ Another text explained that “the people living there live as strangers

³³ BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, Text to Slideshow “Schlesien Heute—Ein Besuch in Oberschlesien/Schlesien,” 1956, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 2. An image of a Silesian village with repaired houses, straight fences, and clean streets proved an exception, thanks to the few Germans who remained. “Here still live people who regard the land as their own.” *Ibid*, 9.

³⁷ BArch B150-3374 vol. 1, Text for Slideshow “Deutscher Osten 1958. Teil II: Ostpreussen,” 1958, 7.

in the area.”³⁸ The terrible conditions were “typical,” audiences learned, because “the Pole...no longer wants to live in isolated houses due to the insecurity” presented by roving brigands and ostensible pending German return.³⁹ They supposedly also desired an equitable solution for Germany, so that Poles “can go home to Wilna and Lemberg,” they too wanted to “go back to their Heimat” annexed by the Soviet Union after 1945.⁴⁰

The slideshow as a vehicle of communicating expellee association messages should not be underestimated. Particularly in an age before televisions featured in most West German homes, the presentations functioned as a popular medium. Expellee groups organized showings aggressively. From January to June of 1950, the East Prussian Association organized around 120 screenings throughout West Germany.⁴¹ Audiences regularly included non-expellees. For example, an expellee representative in Heidelberg reported that the majority of visitors to a slideshow showing in May 1960 were “natives.”⁴² The chairman of the Silesian Association chapter of Scheinfeld, Bavaria celebrated that more than 800 students of local schools visited a presentation of “the unforgotten German East,” which left a “deep impression” and audiences praised as “excellent.”⁴³ Even the President of West Germany, Heinrich Lübke, visited such

³⁸ BArch B150-3374 vol. 2, Text to Slideshow “Schlesien Heute—Ein Besuch in Oberschlesien/Schlesien,” 1956, 2.

³⁹ Ibid, 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 7.

⁴¹ BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, Memorandum of the Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen Veranstaltungsdienst, “Aufgaben, Tätigkeitsdienst und Ziele,” August 1950.

⁴² BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, Hans Ratke to BMVt, May 17, 1960.

⁴³ BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, Chairman of the Silesian Association District Group Scheinfeld/Mfr. to Osbild, November 5, 1954.

events, and expressed his enthusiastic praise for the cityscapes and landscapes as a choir sang “Von der Memel bis zur Elbe” (“From the Memel to the Elbe”).⁴⁴

Establishing a link between non-expellees and the German East in fact comprised a central, and perhaps the most important, intention of institutionalization efforts. Indeed, the vast majority of homeland association cultural work unfolded through the myriad *Patenschaften*, a sister city initiative in which cities in the FRG “adopted” a community beyond the Iron Curtain. In this arrangement, West Germans committed themselves to the “cultural care” of expellees and their traditions.⁴⁵ Practically, this ensured the incorporation of the German East into schools, libraries, and cultural life of municipalities, as well as obliged the sponsor to found museums, promote expellee artists, name streets or plazas after the lost territories, and act as hosts for homeland gatherings already discussed in previous chapters.⁴⁶

Starting off as informal agreements, the *Patenschaften* system expanded dramatically: By 1962 there were over 350 communities of the German East with a partner city in the Federal Republic, so that—expellee leaders claimed—only a few cities and counties remained available.⁴⁷ Remarkably, as well, while the *Deutsche Städtetag* (“Association of German Cities and Towns”) consulted the VdL on the 1952 guidelines to municipalities regarding *Patenschaften*, by the mid-1950s the expellee associations enjoyed sole control and veto

⁴⁴ BAArch B150-3376 vol. 1, Singkreis der Bundesministerien Bonn to Dr. Schlicker, January 18, 1965.

⁴⁵ For more, see Alfons Perlick, *Das west-ostdeutsche Patenschaftswerk in Nordrhein-Westfalen: Geschichte, Berichte und kulturelle Aufgaben*. (Troisdorf/Rhld: Wegweiserverl., 1961); Ute Reichert-Flögel, *Ostdeutsche Patenschaften heute* (Bonn: Bundesministerium des Innern, 1989); *In der Obhut Bayerns: Sudeten- und ostdeutsche Patenschaften im Freistaat Bayern*. (München: Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Arbeit und Sozialordnung, 1989).

⁴⁶ As an example, Cologne’s sponsorship of Breslau explains why the Silesian gatherings often chose that city as the site for its festivals.

⁴⁷ Mathias Beer, “Patenschaften,” in *Die Erinnerung an Flucht Und Vertreibung. Ein Handbuch Der Medien Und Praktiken* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2015), 337.

privileges. In other words, the treatment of the expellees stood under the supervision of the VdL, who insisted on the demand of remaining the exclusive representative on expellee matters.

Memorials were an instrumental dimension of the campaign to institutionalize “flight and expulsion” as well. Dozens of crosses similar to the Bad Harzburg *Ostlandkreuz* appeared throughout the Federal Republic in the 1950s. The year before Bad Harzburg, local expellee groups raised a taller *Ostlandkreuz* on a bluff above Geislingen, “exhorting the entire civilized world to honor the dictates of humanity and atone for the bitter injustice perpetrated upon millions of peaceful and hardworking people.” A poem captured the memorial’s meaning:

“How long was the path, since from these lands/we streamed eastward
into dark forests/and clearing fires cast the sky red; Soon villages and
proven cities grew/the colorful diversity of German life/until Asia
wrested the German East with bitter shackles; With bold fortresses and
sublime cathedrals; came German law, and German culture prevailed/as
an eternal goal and sure omen; Soon foreign-tongued serfs were freed/but
no one matched us in the footrace/We believed foolishly in their loyalty;
And so after almost a thousand years/many thousands perished neither
sick nor old/only the crosses testify that they were ours; In German earth
their remains rest/but violence also drove us from the homeland/where
people keep silent now only the stones speak; So heralds here, even
when we have long faded/the looming stature of the Eastern Cross/that
we were forced to cede our home and hearth; May you be a memorial for
all who still come:/never shall the love to the homeland cool!/But only a
return home can truly soothe us/When German forests bloom anew in the
Eastern lands.”⁴⁸

Often located on the edges of towns, the symbols relentlessly reminding viewers of the German East became focal points for commemorations. On holidays such as Pentecost, the “Day of the Homeland,” or the “National Day of Mourning,” expellees, sometimes clad in traditional garb and carrying signs, gathered in town centers. Joined by community notables and onlookers, the processions then snaked through the streets toward the memorials, where services honored

⁴⁸ Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Seliger Archiv VII, 2087, “Festschrift zur Ostlandkreuz-Weihe am 1. und 2. Juli 1950, Geislingen an der Steige/Württemberg,” Landesverband der vertriebenen Deutschen in Württemberg, Kreisverband Göppingen”, 5.

the dead, attendees mourned the lost homeland, and local association representatives gave speeches expressing the continuing righteous demands of the gathered for a right to self-determination in a reunified Germany and free Europe.

Expellee associations aspired to not only claim hilltops on the edges of towns, but dominate central municipal spaces. Whereas inscriptions on the discreet crosses in cemeteries or on bluffs put the remembrance of the victims at the forefront, the markers in front of courthouses, schools, train stations or in marketplaces and parks—sites promising to reach the largest possible audience—typically emphasized the lost territories and “right to homeland.” In churches such as St. Mary’s in Lübeck, stained glass windows featured coats of arms of territories in the East.⁴⁹ In the Nikolai Church in Kiel, since 1957 the “Pomeranian Chapel” and stained glass of a crucified Christ towering above fleeing refugees and trek wagons memorialized the forced migrations.⁵⁰ On the exhibition hall roofs of the West Berlin trade grounds, the flags of the former Prussian provinces hung from 1951 until 1969.⁵¹ Another favorite venue for expellee memorials were towers of city walls and fortresses—such as in Osnabrück, Goslar, and Nuremburg—in order to impart messages of truculence and steadfastness in the struggle for the lost homeland.⁵² Streets and plazas named for cities and other geographical fixtures of the German East similarly served to keep memory of the ostensibly only

⁴⁹ The emblems included states in the GDR, as well as Pomerania, West Prussia, East Prussia, East Brandenburg, and Lower and Upper Silesia. Territories beyond the borders of 1937 were featured as well: Posen, Siebenbürgen, the Sudetenland, Danzig, and Baltic states also appeared, as well as the city names of Posen, Kattowitz, Riga, and Tilsit. In all, the window commemorated significant areas of “Germandom” beyond strict legal definition of the German Reich as promulgated in the West German Basic Law.

⁵⁰ Scholz, *Vertriebenendenkmäler*, 288.

⁵¹ “Furcht vor Sturm,” *Der Spiegel* 51, December 15, 1969, 78.

⁵² For more on this and the explicit connection between the martial structures and political messages, see Scholz, *Vertriebenendenkmäler*, 209–12.

temporarily locked away German lands behind the Iron Curtain. Markers went up throughout the FRG indicating the distance to far away lost German cities: In Aachen, where Federal Highway 1 began and once ran via Berlin to Königsberg, signs informed drivers that the East Prussian capital was 1,170 kilometers away and that “Germany is indivisible.”⁵³

While the vast majority of the memorials remained discreet and at the local level, the biggest feathers in the cap that homeland organizations could hope for was an expression of West Germany’s commitment to its lost territories on a larger, more national stage. Here, too, they achieved astonishing successes. At the “German Corner” in Koblenz, where the Mosel and Rhine Rivers meet, emblems of all German states, including those “violently wrested” from the nation, surrounded a solitary German flag on a pedestal.⁵⁴ From 1953 to 1990 they reminded of Germany’s division and desire for a reunification within the borders of 1937.⁵⁵ The “Memorial of the Homeland Expellees” at the Reichskanzlerplatz (present-day Theodor-Heuss-Platz) in divided Berlin represented yet another coup, as its location at the epicenter of Cold War

⁵³ BArch B106-27372, vol. 1, “Landmannschaft Schlesien: Rundbrief der Bundesgeschäftsstelle,” Nr. 5, March 10, 1963, 7.

⁵⁴ The State President of Rhineland-Palatinate, Peter Altmeier, declined Sudeten requests to have their crest included, stating that while he did not oppose it in principle, the Sudetenland’s exclusion from the 1937 borders required further review of potential legal implications. BayHStA, Sudetendeutsches Archiv (SdA), SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 385, Altmeier to Hans-Christoph Seebohm, June 3, 1953. Lodgman von Auen wrote Altmeier pleading for the inclusion of the Sudetenland, as the loss of the homeland “affected Germans inside as well as outside of the Reich, and created a feeling of solidarity that cannot be contained by former political borders.” Eliminating lines of demarcation would help “enable a growing sense of the common German community of fate.” Ibid, von Auen to Altmeier, undated. In private, von Auen seemed less enthusiastic of including every territory, confiding to the head of the VdL Alfred Gille that “one cannot expect that now for example Russian Germans, Bessarabia Germans, Dobruja Germans, the ‘Banatian Swabians,’ all who did not exist at all before 1945, can be understood under German ‘territories.’ After all, one can then with justification include Alsace-Lorraine, and one could get the idea to include the former German colonies.” Ibid, von Auen to Gille, June 21, 1953. Von Auen similarly shared his exasperation with Seebohm that radical demands cannot “possibly extend the former German Reich to the Volga, to the Black Sea and to Swakopmund.” Ibid, von Auen to Seebohm, June 21, 1953.

⁵⁵ Once the site of a statue of Kaiser Wilhelm I commemorating the unification of Germany in 1871, the memorial sustained heavy damage in fighting in 1945. The monument to German division gave way in 1990 to the first German emperor once again, marking the reunification of the Federal Republic.

confrontation underlined the reunification demands of the. Inaugurated during the 1955 “Day of the Homeland” on September 10, which on the occasion of the ten year anniversary simultaneously was billed as the “Day of the Germans,” the plain block bearing the inscription “Freedom, Justice, Peace” emerged as the most prominent memorial, featured on expellee organization letterheads and other literature. Its flame was even used to light other memorials in West Germany with a similar design, such as an East Prussian monument in Bochum in 1951 and a replica of the Berlin version in Hannover in 1961.⁵⁶

Remarkably, this activism went beyond dominating prominent space in the FRG’s urban landscape by attempting to colonize its soundscape through quasi audible memorials. Throughout West Germany, church bells of the German East—“themselves expellees,” as the Silesian leader and SPD politician Herbert Hupka explained to listeners of *Bayerischer Rundfunk* in a 1956 Christmas program of Silesian poems and songs—brought the sounds of the lost homeland to the Federal Republic, thereby creating a tonal connection between West Germany and its truncated lands beyond Cold War borders.⁵⁷

In total, more than 1,500 expellee memorials to “flight and expulsion” and the German East dot the Federal Republic, the vast majority having gone up in the 1950s and 1960s at the initiation of expellee organizations and their local chapters.⁵⁸ Added to this were some 600 *Heimatstuben*, or “homeland rooms,” typically housed within town halls or a municipality’s

⁵⁶ Scholz, *Vertriebenenendenkmäler*, 342. and *Heimabend* 90, August 1961, 1, newspaper clipping in BArch B106-27372. Its fires died out in 1990.

⁵⁷ Track Nr. 17, Herbert Hupka, “Transeamus,” Bayerischer Rundfunk, December 16, 1956, in: *Flucht und Vertreibung im Rundfunk. Tondokumente aus den Jahren 1945 bis 1960*, Alina Laura Tiewes and Hans-Ulrich Wagner (Hamburg: Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2017).

⁵⁸ The majority are documented in Heinrich Kucharczyk, Walter Stratmann, and Bund der Vertriebenen-Vereinigte Landsmannschaften, *Mahn- und Gedenkstätten der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen* (Bonn: Bund der Vertriebenen-Vereinigte Landsmannschaften, 2008).

museum of local history and culture, or even in the foyer of a school.⁵⁹ While they frequently involved the input of “ordinary” expellees who contributed materials and shared memories as they walked through the space, the exhibitions overwhelmingly functioned as presentation sites of conceptions of local expellee associations, who normally founded and designed the museums.

Typically, the forced migrations featured abstractly: A handcart, suitcase, or Polish expulsion decree or items carried to West Germany stood as representative of the war and its immediate aftermath. Visitors could project their expectations onto the objects. Yet it was the old homeland which stood in central focus in virtually all *Heimatstuben*. Traditional costumes, figurines, woodcuts, and photos preserved an undestroyed, idyllic prewar homeland. Symbols of industriousness, such as looms or porcelain manufactured in the German East, related past contributions to German culture and their role in the booming postwar West German economy. The spaces captured a romanticized and pristine homeland, a paradise and place of yearning. The period between 1933 and 1945 found no place in these exhibits. The *Heimatstube* therefore not only presented a sanitized narrative of glorious roots, tragic loss, and postwar integration success, it preserved a mythic homeland which, so it was implied, needed to be returned to its former inhabitants and the nation. In short: They were sites for communal nostalgic contemplation and melancholic remembering of what was lost, not places for considering historical contexts.

Beyond the rather simple *Heimatstuben* dotting the landscape, several travelling exhibits managed to expose large audiences to the messages of the expellee organizations. The most well-known emerged from a 1950 proposal of the Christian Democratic Party (CDU) faction within

⁵⁹ Weichers, *Der deutsche Osten in der Schule Institutionalisierung und Konzeption der Ostkunde in der Bundesrepublik in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren*, 193.

Berlin's city deputies' assembly. Supported by the Ministry of All-German Affairs, *Deutsche Heimat im Osten* ("German Homeland in the East") opened its doors in Berlin, Düsseldorf, Munich, and Landau. Its popularity led to an expansion to Stuttgart and Hanover in 1951, before it retired as the permanent collection of the "House of the East German Homeland" in the "German House" in West Berlin. By all accounts, *Deutsche Heimat im Osten* enjoyed large numbers of visitors: Special rates and extended hours of operation of the German Rail helped boost attendance, as did conferences of not just expellee groups but teacher's associations and trade or women's groups held on the grounds.⁶⁰

The sites' design signaled ambitions to commemorate a lost part of the nation and the victims of the forced migrations: Flags of all the provinces of the German East adorned the entrance, while bells in a specially built clock tower tolled hourly in "remembrance of the victims of the expellees, who gave their lives in the old homeland or far away from it."⁶¹ Yet while commemoration of suffering certainly factored into the intentions of *Deutsche Heimat im Osten*, from the start planners explicitly aimed for more than a simple "exposition of memories of the homeland expellees."⁶² The culture and history of the German East were of central concern, as was communist aggression in a special section chronicling the "Bolshevization of the Soviet occupation zones." Films, expellee publications, and a bookstore selling the "important literature" regarding "flight and expulsion" augmented the museum's content.

⁶⁰ See AdsD, Seliger Archiv VIII, 2235, Circular of Interior Ministry of Württemberg-Baden re: Exhibit "Deutsche Heimat im Osten."

⁶¹ Ibid, 3.

⁶² Ibid, 1. The circular cited Minister for All-German Affairs Jakob Kaiser's introduction to the exhibit catalogue to expound upon the intentions: "Germany today is a decisive factor for the save and reinforcement of European freedom. If this is the case, then the understanding needs to grow that the right to self-determination of peoples needs to be applied to all of Germany. [...] Europe can only then be pacified when a Germany is reconstituted as an equal within the borders that conform to its right to self-determination."

In short, the well-visited exhibit, which for decades ranked as the most coordinated and prominent example of “flight and expulsion” in the West German museum landscape, transmitted the homeland politics of the expellee associations and their federal patrons. Visitors were confronted with messages and a narrative that “documented the moral, political, and historical rights of the German people to their areas of settlement.”⁶³ The focus should be on the German East before 1939, a nostalgic overview that offered “perhaps the last chance to see the old Heimat one last time how it was” before communism destroyed it, as a 1961 memo of the Ministry of the Interior (BMI) argued in a bid to turn the exhibit into a documentary. Audiences needed to have their “memory freshened,” and especially youths should come away with a notion of the “Fatherland.” The BMI reasoned that like the exhibit, the film could “show losses that can’t simply be written off, but instead should remain painfully tangible as an example of lost German greatness” without sentimentality, political overtones, or aggression.⁶⁴

⁶³ While initially limited to the legal claims of the borders of 1937, complaints from the Sudeten German Association saw an expansion of the Stuttgart exhibit to include the “importance of Germanism” in the Sudetenland and Southeastern Europe. At a Sudeten gathering in Ansbach in May 1951, Hans-Christoph Seebohm criticized the exhibit and the Ministry for All-German Affairs for excluding the Sudetenland, which he alleged occurred because American and British authorities refused to allow the exhibition to go forward if it contained material on territories beyond the 1937 borders. ACDP 07-001-3438, newspaper clipping “Pfingstfest der Vertriebenen,” *Die Welt*, May 15, 1951. The exclusion prompted the Sudeten Association to consider designing its own travelling exhibit titled “We Sudeten Germans,” which would emphasize the cultural achievements of the Sudeten Germans over the last 1,000 years, the Sudetenland’s central importance for Western Civilization, expulsion crimes, and the exemplary integration of Sudeten expellees and key role in West German economic prosperity. BayHStA, SdA, NL Albert Karl Simon 1, Memo re: “Ausbau einer sudetendeutschen Wanderausstellung,” undated [summer 1950].

⁶⁴ BArch B106-27696, Brochure “Deutsche Heimat im Osten,” written by Gerhart Pohl. It is unclear whether the project went forward, though Munich-based Insel-Film Company devised a script and initiated production. The Expellee Ministry expressed concerns with the text and the political overtones of the movie, yet BMI officials dismissed these reservations as unfounded; the content was not political in their estimation, particularly since the attention was on the pre-war German East. Ibid, Pagel to Rothen, August 29, 1961. In either case, of relevance here is that it grants insights into the intentions of *Deutsche Heimat im Osten*, which served as the inspiration for the effort to turn the exhibit into a documentary.

“Into the last village”: Cementing “Flight and Expulsion” in the Mind of the Nation⁶⁵

Ultimately, the idea of “lost German greatness” lay at the heart of every effort to eternalize the German East in West German culture. The calculations that drove 1950s institutionalization efforts appear rather obvious at even a casual glance. The hallmarks of expellee argumentation have already been extensively examined elsewhere. Since memorials in and of themselves do not communicate narratives, but rather augment historical interpretations of their patrons, a brief analysis of the intentions of expellee elites and the political messages imbedded within their memorials is necessary.

Whatever its form, all cultural work aimed first and foremost to tell the story of the injustice arbitrarily perpetrated in 1945, and which needed to be atoned for. The days used for commemoration ceremonies, for instance, signified far deeper meanings and underlined the unprecedented and historic suffering of expellees. Upper Silesians marked their ceremonies on March 20th, the anniversary of the 1921 plebiscites that saw portions of the region ceded to Poland in the interwar period. Invoking the “disgrace” of Versailles thereby framed the expulsions as a continuation of cruel victors’ justice perpetrated against Germany, and legitimized the tradition of revisionist struggle.

The Sudeten Germans chose March 4th, the day in 1919 that Czechoslovakian military units violently broke up a demonstration of ethnic Germans demanding that German-majority territories be allowed to join Austria. The “March Dead” and “Blood Witnesses” of thwarted self-determination evoked the idea that the Sudeten Germans were perpetual victims, and that the draconian peace after 1918 paved the way for a similar travesty after 1945. The “Day of the

⁶⁵ BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, “Veranstaltungsdienst der Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen an Geschäftsführer aller Landsmannschaften,” September 6, 1950, 2.

Homeland,” set traditionally on the first Sunday in August, meanwhile sought to organize gatherings as close to the August 2nd anniversary of the Potsdam Agreement, thereby becoming a “lively protest against Potsdam,” in the words of Minister for All-German Affairs Jakob Kaiser.⁶⁶ The celebrations, in other words, revolved around a mythic past and injustice contextualized in the interwar period.⁶⁷

The memorials around which expellees gathered on those days sought to embody the victimhood narrative in physical form. The frequent use of Christian imagery, for instance, transformed expellee claims into a “divine right,” a sacred demand for a revision of unholy postwar treaties.⁶⁸ Expellee leaders expounded upon the meaning of the markers to dispel any confusion. “When the hour has come,” representatives of the VdL vowed at the 1952 inauguration of an eight meter tall wooden cross wrapped in barbed wire in Berlin-Kreuzberg’s Viktoriapark, expellees would carry the hallowed sign “from Berlin to the land of the homeland expellees.”⁶⁹ The symbol of Christ’s death and resurrection seemed an apt allegory for the expulsions, which Expellee Minister Hans Lukaschek deemed “the historical Good Friday of our people.”⁷⁰ He also invoked militaristic imagery associated with the cross: “In this sign we will be

⁶⁶ Quoted in Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 480.

⁶⁷ See *Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung* Nr. 665/50, July 11, 1950, clipping in ACDP 07-001-3438. The press release reported that on the 30-year anniversary of the plebiscites in West and East Prussia, expellee leaders handed Minister Kaiser a declaration of thousands who “renewed their oath of loyalty as they did on July 11, 1920. “They suffered the terrible fate of an irresponsible war. But this act of violence cannot become the foundation for a true peace; instead, it must be as it was in 1930, the self-determination right of the expellees.” The “dead in the graves, of our parents and grandparents, they all were German, they made the fields arable. Our ancestors already centuries ago built churches and chapels, villages and cities, in which every stone testifies to Germanism. Just as the plebiscites affirmed it, so again too one day these lands will and must return.”

⁶⁸ “Weihe des Ostlandkreuzes,” *Der Südmährer*, June 1950, 229.

⁶⁹ “Der Kreuzberg bekam ein neues Kreuz,” *Die Neue Zeitung*, August 10, 1952.

⁷⁰ “Kirche und Heimat,” *Christ unterwegs* 4 (1950), Nr. 12, 14.

victorious!”⁷¹ The reference to Emperor Constantin’s miraculous vision of a cross in the sky and ensuing victory on the field of battle referenced a myth of Western Civilization, and nurtured hopes for a similar astounding turn of fortunes for expellees.⁷²

Other activists revealed an even more elaborate historical subtext in the symbols. For instance, the *Ostlandkreuz* in Geislingen presented an ideal setting to reflect upon the narrative of suffering embedded within the nearby monument, as Adolf Hasenöhrl attempted at a conference of the SPD’s “Expellee Working Group” in Geislingen in July 1951:

“Six years ago, endless treks of starving, beaten, harried, defiled people robbed of their homeland... arrived in German lands with their last strength. They were the survivors of that inhumane landslide that washed over large areas of Europe after the war, who with their diligence in the East...delivered a considerable contribution to European culture and civilization. Those who were the authors of this madness unleashed the devilish instincts of robbery and murder in a premeditated and intentional way; they wanted to physically and morally break millions of German-speaking people.”⁷³

Hasenöhrl failed to recognize National Socialism or German atrocities in the rendition of the “tragic fate” and a “political mistake” represented by the cross on the hill. Expellee monuments neglected to contextualize “flight and expulsion” in the Second World War or the Third Reich. At yet another SPD expellee gathering in Geislingen a few years later, Bavarian State President Wilhelm Hoegner conjured the deep past that underpinned the “right to

⁷¹ “Heute ein Kreuz an der Grenze...”, *Ostpreußenblatt*, May 5, 1950, 1.

⁷² In a more skeptical editorial of the purposes of these memorials, the SPD-oriented *Neuer Vorwärts* nevertheless also connected the *Ostlandkreuz* to the cross of Golgotha. The editors hoped that the crosses would symbolize the refusal of politics grounded in violence and “false nationalism.” In their mind, they were a sign dedicated to the expellees, expressing “all the thoughts, sufferings, pains, all longings and all the misery commensurate to their fate and their existence.” “Kreuz der Illusion,” *Neuer Vorwärts*, June 30, 1950, newspaper clipping in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VII, 2087.

⁷³ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VIII, 2224, “Arbeitstagung der Vertriebenengruppe in der SPD in Geislingen,” July 21, 1951, 1. Remarkably, Hasenöhrl spoke of the Sudeten German experience. His description remains so general, and is infused with so many familiar turns of phrase and rhetorical flourishes, that it not only could apply to any number of groups from the German East, it reveals the internalization of a master narrative of “flight and expulsion” already by 1951.

homeland” represented in the *Ostlandkreuz*. The righteousness of expellee demands rested upon the fact that Germans “did not conquer the land that they lived in militarily, but through the diligence of their craftsmen, citizens, and farmers” who “cleared primeval forests, opened mine shafts, and founded cities.” Germans did not expel Slavs, but rather achieved “dominance” by bringing culture to a barren and primitive *tabula rasa*. This history moreover obligated the government to make the return of the territories its “primary task” in order to make up for “one of the greatest marks of shame of the 20th century.”⁷⁴ Similarly, at the 1951 inauguration of a memorial in the battlement tower of Schloss Burg near Solingen, audiences learned of the “Teutonic Order and homelands of Germandom” that needed to be returned to Germany.⁷⁵

Above all, viewers were expected to decipher one crucial reminder: The theft of the homeland and the struggle for its return. The memorials expressed a hope—indeed a prophesy—that “we will one day return home under the sign of the cross up there on the hill,” as a paper explained in the coverage of the Bad Harzburg inauguration.⁷⁶ The monuments heralded that the government would “never relinquish [the German East]...for as long as there are German people. If today it is a cross at the border, tomorrow it will be a cross in the heart of Germany, as a reminder of the injustice perpetrated against us, and that the injustice transformed into justice.”⁷⁷

The notion that the memorials addressed all Germans is a second message of every expellee memorial, museum, or homeland gathering. The cultural activities of the homeland associations sought to create a link between West Germany and the lost territories, and keep that

⁷⁴ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VIII, 2224, “Ansprache des bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten Dr. Wilhelm Hoegner auf der Auslandskonferenz der Seliger-Gemeinde am 1. Juli 1955, Geislingen.”

⁷⁵ Quoted in Scholz, *Vertriebenen Denkmäler*, 210.

⁷⁶ “Heute ein Kreuz an der Grenze...”, *Ostpreußenblatt*, May 5, 1950, 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

relationship at the forefront of every mind. When on August 3, 1953 the “German Youth of the East” (DJO) presented the mayor of Bonn a bowl of earth acquired from the Sudetenland, a clear message accompanied the gesture: “With this...earth we bring a piece of our homeland and a piece of our hearts” into the custody of West Germany. Minister of the Interior Robert Lehr acknowledged the gift as a reminder that “this land belongs to us.”⁷⁸ The suffering of the expellees in their midst, and the stolen cultural heritage of the German East, exhorted every citizen to subscribe to demands for a return of the nation’s territories. An eternal flame of the “Memorial of the Homeland Expellees,” lit by uniformed members of the “Silesian Youth,” would burn until Germany would once again be reunited within its borders of 1937, thereby emphasizing the all-German dimensions of expellee homeland politics.⁷⁹ At the inauguration, Willy Brandt, President of the Berlin Parliament and future chancellor who ironically would recognize the Oder-Neiße border, articulated what audiences should see when they gazed upon the block and its flames: Germany’s right to self-determination, a “right to the homeland,” and a “reunified Reich in freedom.”⁸⁰ Berlin’s Mayor, Otto Suhr, likewise read in the monument a call for Germans to join in the “crusade for the unity of Germany.”⁸¹

Against whom that crusade would be waged seemed obvious. Expellee institutionalization efforts therefore thirdly revealed the profound anticommunism of “flight and expulsion” narratives. The location of the Bad Harzburg cross at the border, a “trench that

⁷⁸ “Sudetendeutsche trugen ihre Heimaterde nach Bonn,” *Generalanzeiger für Bonn*, August 3, 1953, newspaper clipping in BArch B106-27373 vol. 2.

⁷⁹ See *Heimabend* 90, August 1961, 1, newspaper clipping in BArch B106-27372. Its fires died out in 1990.

⁸⁰ For a copy of the speech, see Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, ed., *10 Jahre nach der Vertreibung: Äusserungen des In- und Auslandes und eine Zeittafel* (Bonn, 1956), 120–22.

⁸¹ Quoted in Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, 123–24.

foreign forces tore through our German fatherland,” was no coincidence.⁸² It faced East toward the homeland, but also against Bolshevik terror responsible for Germany’s misery. Sometimes, acts of commemoration culminated in torchlight processions to make the Cold War stakes clear: The 1955 inauguration of the “Memorial of the Homeland Expellees” culminated in a torchlight procession, the torches lit by the eternal flame, through West Berlin and skirting the border with the GDR. The Berlin flame also lit torches in a relay lighting ceremony along the German-German border in 1959.⁸³ During the 1956 homeland gathering of 300,000 “exhorting souls who will never find peace” in Nuremberg, several thousand uniformed youths marched through the city before setting a “sea of fire” along the Bavarian-Czechoslovakian border.⁸⁴

Dramatic demonstrations surrounding memorials intended to draw attention of onlookers to Cold War divisions, reminding the “entire cultivated world” and “all who once stood against us” of the German lands that remained under the yoke of “violent, brutal tyranny.”⁸⁵ The handful of dirt of the German East received by Lehr not only exhorted Germans to recall the territories beyond the Iron Curtain, but represented the hope that the “day of liberation is closer than some today would like to think.”⁸⁶ The monuments also articulated the aspiration of expellee associations to be the national *avant garde* of the struggle for a *Gesamtdeutschland*, or “Greater

⁸² “Heute ein Kreuz an der Grenze...”, *Ostpreußenblatt*, May 5, 1950, 1.

⁸³ Scholz, *Vertriebenen Denkmäler*, 342.

⁸⁴ “Die Pfingsttage in Westdeutschland waren von Demonstrationen geprägt,” translated newspaper clipping of *Aftenposten*, in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VIII, 2284.

⁸⁵ BArch B106-27373 vol. 2, Newspaper clipping “Sudetendeutsche trugen ihre Heimaterde nach Bonn,” *Generalanzeiger für Bonn*, August 3, 1953.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Germany,” and the vanguard against an ideology that inflicted upon them the suffering that now made them tested and true defenders of Europe against the threat posed by communism.⁸⁷

Expellee memorials therefore communicated an extensive and complex message, “all those things...that we expellees have to say,” as the *Ostpreußenblatt* remarked in its coverage of the Bad Harzburg cross. For that reason, the paper hoped that every community would receive a similar reminder. In reporting on its activities, the East Prussian Association vowed to spread its activism “into the last village” in West Germany.⁸⁸ In other words, expellees and their federal backers consciously intended to sear the German East into the consciousness of the nation. This conspicuous insertion of the expulsions into the fabric of West German life through memorials, rallies, school books, or weather maps aimed to achieve several goals.

First, expellee leaders sought to politicize every aspect of “flight and expulsion.” From the perspective of expellee leaders, there could be no innocent or apolitical invocation of the lost homeland. Even the most ordinary picture book of costumes of the *Riesengebirge* (Krkonoše), Expellee Minister Theodor Oberländer assured, not only contributed to the crucial “preservation of East German traditions.” These efforts as a matter of fact constituted “one of the most important tasks of the expellees,” namely providing evidence that “Silesia is German land since centuries,” so that this “memory work” needed to have “widespread effect.”⁸⁹ Expellees ascribed

⁸⁷ Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 99.

⁸⁸ BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, “Veranstaltungsdienst der Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen an Geschäftsführer aller Landsmannschaften,” September 6, 1950, 2.

⁸⁹ BArch B106-27372 vol. 1, Draft of introduction for the “Erinnerungsbuch der Reisegebirgstrachtengruppe,” March 24, 1959, 1. Oberländer’s undersecretary, Peter Paul Nahm, laid out justifications for federal support of expellee culture, thereby revealing their political motivations: The German people shared an obligation to not only assuage the “egregious emotional-spiritual” pain of expellees, but would benefit from their “insights and attitudes” on the “dangers of communist undermining” that they experienced. Moreover, expellees needed to share their “biological vitality as well as cultural abilities and know-how” and “transplant” their values. This was a “chance to find a point of departure, after the fateful events that followed the compression of the German people, for a great culturally-renewing synthesis that will not only be of significance for us, but for the relaxation [of tensions] in

great political significance to their cultural activity, which amounted to government-supported memory politics aimed at augmenting and eternalizing revisionist claims, and linking memories of “flight and expulsion” with the political demands of the expellee organizations.

Secondly, by erecting crosses on hilltops, gathering bowls of earth, orchestrating demonstrative marches, or shaping school curricula, expellee leaders yearned to keep the link between West Germany and the German East alive in perpetuity. This reflected the “pan-German” aspirations of the associations, as previous chapters have already analyzed. Memorials in public places or attractive homeland books tried to institutionalize awareness that German unification could only occur through a revision of Potsdam and a return of the territories wrested from the Reich, and which represented a disastrous and irrevocable loss for Germany and Europe. While consumed predominantly by expellees yearning to keep memories alive or seeking to slake their curiosity over how it looked “back home,” the melancholic homeland books and slideshows hoped to reach and convince non-expellees of the beauty and cultural and historic importance of the lost territories as well.

Endorsements for *Die schlesische Bilderbibel* (“The Silesian Illustrated Bible”), for example, made overall intentions clear.⁹⁰ “One should give it to the inhabitants of West Germany,” *Breslauer Nachrichten* demanded, to show them “see, this was the German East!” As many people as possible needed to know “that this pure, occidental spirit was extinguished by the ‘Age of Humanity.’”⁹¹ The *Kultusminister* of Bavaria, Alois Hundhammer, praised that the

Europe.” BArch B150-3340 vol. 1, Radio with Dr. Nahm re: Paragraph 96 of Bundesvertriebenengesetz, undated (c. early 1958), 4-5.

⁹⁰ Alfons Teuber, *Die schlesische Bilderbibel* (München: Verlag Kirchliche Hilfsstelle, 1949). See also the English translation, Alfons Teuber, *Silesia in Pictures: A Record of Remembrance* (Munich: Christ unterwegs, 1956).

⁹¹ BArch B150-3340, “Einige Urteile über ‘Die schlesische Bilderbibel,’ gestaltet von Alfons Teuber,” 1-2 [circa 1950].

Heimatbuch captured the “beauty of the Silesian land so strikingly, that once again and painfully its loss is made plain for everyone.”⁹² Images of picturesque cities, tree-lined country lanes, and crystal-clear lakes were not a escape into memory, but a documentation of “what we all have lost,” non-expellees realized according to organizers of a 1960 slideshow in Heidelberg.⁹³

The Federation of Expellees (BdV) also attempted to spread its political messages beyond its clientele by organizing “book campaigns” coinciding with days of commemoration. “Every expellee is called upon to give at least one book or record about the *Heimat* or...an East German author on the ‘Day of the Homeland’ (9/11)” particularly to non-expellees, youths, and foreigners, the BdV appealed in 1960. Not only would this stimulate sales of authors of the German East, but help “raise awareness” of the lost territories and related political issues.⁹⁴ Overall, an East Prussian Association’s characterization of its mission sums up the ultimate goal of what the fostering of expellee culture attempted to do: The objective was an “East German cultural-propagandistic penetration of the West German as well as homeland expellee population, and especially the youth, in order to serve as a basis for life and ideological bulwark of the Western world against Asia.”⁹⁵

The explicit reference to reaching out to Germany’s youth constituted the third objective of the institutionalization of “flight and expulsion.” Recognizing a coming generational shift,

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, Hans Ratke to BMVt, May 17, 1960.

⁹⁴ BArch B150-4331 vol. 2, Circular Letter Nr. 114 of the Kulturreferat of the BdV to Member Organizations, June 14, 1960. Academic works were discouraged; book suggestions constituted novels, light reading, and pop histories of the forced migrations. Expellees were also encouraged to urge their local books stores to support East German literature and ensure a healthy stock of reading materials.

⁹⁵ BArch B150-3375 vol. 2, Memorandum of the Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen Veranstaltungsdienst, “Aufgaben, Tätigkeitsdienst und Ziele,” August 1950, 3.

proponents argued that the “entire cultural and spiritual powers of the expellees” were of paramount importance for “educational purposes” of adolescents organized in the homeland associations’ youth groups.⁹⁶ The Federal Expellee Law ingeniously conferred the legal status of “expellee” to the second generation, thereby hoping to mitigate a sudden disappearance of this clientele. But beyond an inflation of numbers, the “all-German” ambitions also necessitated winning over non-expellees. Schools posed a crucial battleground. Here *Ostkundeunterricht* needed to be elevated into a “matter of conscience,” and deliver a particular historical interpretation of “flight and expulsion”⁹⁷ The courting of youths attempted to tie a properly educated cadre of activists to the organizations.⁹⁸ As a 1965 request for slides depicting the actual expulsions revealed, the older generation yearned to keep the “path of suffering of the parents” vivid for the children, and thus win them for the political cause.⁹⁹ In addition to keeping the memories of misery intense for the next generation, the associations armed their youth groups with materials to help them provide proper “answers” to questions of incredulous non-expellees perplexed by their uniforms, activities, and political demands.¹⁰⁰

Virtually all cultural work therefore tried to preserve the image of the homeland, as envisioned by the leadership, for those who never themselves lived there or experienced the

⁹⁶ BArch B150-3340, Adolf Kunzmann and P. Paulus Sladek of Ackermann Gemeinde to von Scholtz, June 22, 1950.

⁹⁷ Ernst Lehmann, “Der deutsche Osten im Geschichtsbild,” *Deutsche Ostkunde* Nr. 2, vol. 2 (1956), 1-5, here 1.

⁹⁸ Linus Kather sold the idea of federal support for a “German Youth of the East” to Konrad Adenauer, who pledged financial support of an association of 120-150,000 youths as a counterweight against the “ferment” of the socialist Free German Youth (FDJ). ACDP 001-377-18/5, Kather to Bundesminister Lehr, April 16, 1951. Lodgman von Auen meanwhile envisioned the Sudeten youth as a potential bastion against communism as well, requesting federal monies for a “pre-military education” of expellee adolescents. BayHstA, SdA, Sprecherregistratur Lodgman v. Auen, 247, “Neue Möglichkeiten einer deutschen Politik in Mitteleuropa,” January 21, 1957.

⁹⁹ BArch B150-3376 vol. 1, Alois Brauner to BMVt, May 12, 1965.

¹⁰⁰ Heinz Heindenrich, “Die Schlesische Jugend antwortet,” undated [c. 1960] in BArch B106-27372, vol. 1.

trauma of the forced migrations, so that they could continue the struggle. The endorsements of *Die schlesische Bilderbibel* again fittingly capture these efforts. *Breslauer Nachrichten* commanded that readers “give this volume into the hands of every Silesian child—see, this was your Heimat!” The St. Hedwigs-Werk, an expellee branch of the Central Committee of German Catholics, surmised that the “300 pictures should bring their glow into the misery of the barracks,” but that they had a specific “mission”: “Give this book to your children, so that they never forget the *Heimat*.” Representatives of the Silesian association for Waldorf (since 1945, Borek) similarly demanded that “our children must also read it with such devotion, as if they were reading a prayer book,” adding that it belonged in every school.¹⁰¹

Expellee leaders invested their hopes in the future, as the expected return of the homeland depended on maintaining a base with emotional ties to the lost lands and willingness to struggle for their return and, finally, re-settle them. As the inauguration of Schloss Burg’s memorial made clear, the young “should keep themselves prepared for the great tasks of resettlement,” and continually remind their West German peers “so that one day there will be enough people who will once again be prepared to continue the German task in the territories wrested away.”¹⁰² In other words, the memorials aimed in large part to inculcate dedication to something completely foreign, to bequeath the homeland politics of the elders to their offspring.

Fourthly, the cultural politics during the ascendancy of expellee power attempted to lend this pressure group continued potency and the appearance of a force to be reckoned with. As a former Silesian mayor explained to those who doubted the power of the organized mass of expellees to achieve their goals, they “should get to know our big *Heimat* meetings

¹⁰¹ BArch B150-3340, “Einige Urteile über ‘Die schlesische Bilderbibel,’ gestaltet von Alfons Teuber,” 1-2.

¹⁰² Quoted in Scholz, *Vertriebenen Denkmäler*, 210.

sometime.”¹⁰³ The omnipresence of the German East in West German politics and society, expellee leaders genuinely believed or convinced themselves, signaled to the world that they could not simply be ignored. As long as the masses continued to undertake veritable pilgrimages to remote memorials or homeland gatherings in far off cities, the argument could be made that the throngs categorically endorsed the messages of the leadership.

The power of the associations depended largely on a continuous emotional agitation. The 1950 recommendations of Hermann Hönig, an advisor to the Sudeten German *Landsmannschaft* and specialist in “awareness education,” captures the ulterior motives of public speakers and, by extension, the symbols they stood before: They were to keep discussions of the expulsions and their backgrounds simple, and utilize “emotional images” to provoke listeners and mobilize them for an “emotional politics.”¹⁰⁴ Even the most banal cultural work needed to support the homeland politics of the expellee associations. Although partially billed as a means to comfort expellee anguish, and despite vows of not wanting to “tear open old wounds,” all expressions of “flight and expulsion” ultimately sought to cultivate resentments and indignation. Whether reiterating wartime experiences or exposing audiences to slideshows of an infuriatingly dilapidated homeland, the associations intended to ignite passions that could be harnessed politically.

Cultural work such as radio programming, as the Silesian director of *Südwestdeutscher Rundfunk* explained at a 1950 conference, needed to engage with more than a “heartache

¹⁰³ Quoted in Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 2.

¹⁰⁴ AdsD, Seliger Archiv VIII, 224, “Excerpt from a presentation of Hermann Hönig, held on October 1, 1950 in Stuttgart.” As a trained journalist and chief editor of the Sudetendeutsche Partei’s organ *Rundschau* and correspondent of the Belgrade-based *Donauzeitung* between 1935-1945, Hönig had extensive experience in propaganda. After 1945, the Witiko activist worked for the expellee paper *Ost-West-Kurier*, *Christ und Welt*, and *Vertriebenen-Anzeiger*. Tobias Weger, “*Volkstumskampf*” ohne Ende?: *sudetendeutsche Organisationen, 1945-1955* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2008), 601.

question,” but encompass political issues.¹⁰⁵ For this reason, and despite incessant handwringing that more needed to be done to highlight their concerns, expellee leaders harbored a profound aversion toward “sentimental” efforts that promoted integration and “contradicted our...goals,” as a Sudeten German Association (SL) staffer complained to the organization’s speaker, Rudolf Lodgman von Auen.¹⁰⁶ Specifically, this meant a rejection of cultural work that placed too great an emphasis on integration that could erode desires for a return to the homeland. Expellee Ministry Undersecretary Peter Paul Nahm argued that “[a]ll fostering of culture, all the homeland gatherings and every *Patenschaft*...would have lost their purpose if assimilation, and moreover the deliberate relinquishment of homeland thinking, would be pursued and encouraged.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, the sort of cultural work expellees desired represented a double-edged sword, if it brought with it the danger of neglecting to politicize audiences.

Expellee associations therefore vigorously pushed content that stressed political aims that mere “chumminess and relying on the joys of costumes and festivals” could not accomplish.¹⁰⁸ A “cultural program from idealists is not enough,” a Sudeten German Association memo complained, the key needed to be political programming such as radio dramas “of our expulsion,

¹⁰⁵ BArch B150-3333, “Referat und Aussprache bei der Rundfunktagung am 10.6.50 in Bremen über zweckdeinlichere Behandlung des Vertriebenenproblems im Rundfunk,” 5.

¹⁰⁶ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 199, Hans Rückel to von Auen, August 3, 1951. By “goals,” Rückel meant the realization of a return of Sudeten Germans to the homeland and, preferably, its incorporation into a reunified Germany.

¹⁰⁷ BArch B150-3333, Text to “Eingliederung-Einschmelzung,” *Hessischer Rundfunk*, November 9, 1953. Nahm contemplated the inherent contradiction in this thinking: “The question is do we mean what we say about our right to homeland. If we mean it, then the question that must motivate us is how we ready the German people for the material sacrifice that must be brought in order to make the right to the homeland that all cultured people recognize a reality.” Nahm acknowledged that “integration on the one hand and longing for the Heimat on the other leads to conflict in individuals,” but integration needed to ultimately prepare for the “great moral goal of a peaceful return.”

¹⁰⁸ See BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 435, “VK-Veranstaltungsdienst zum Tag der Heimat am 14. September 1958”; Brochure of VdL “Empfehlungen für den Tag der Heimat 1958”; and “Arbeitsbrief Nr. 1, July 15, 1959 (Sonderheft der VdL Informationen Nr. 27a).

about the days of May 1945 etc.” One could not be “considerate” of sensibilities, as expellees needed to mobilize “before we lose momentum.”¹⁰⁹ The deputy chairman of the Silesia Association, Waldemar Rumbaur, similarly bemoaned “missed opportunities”: At gatherings and commemorations, the “big speeches...are nice and make an impression, but they are soon forgotten.” What was needed was “a new style and tactics,” as expellee groups yearned to be “a fighting organization [*Kampforganisation*] with political vehemence.”¹¹⁰ Flights into the “virtual *Heimat*,” to use Andrew Demshuk’s term, or finding solace in cherished traditions were fruitless exercises if such sentimentality lacked a political purpose.

Fifth, the activism of the expellee organizations revealed their ambition of being the sole arbiter of how “flight and expulsion” should be discussed. “It is really time that we actively intervene and thereby prevent programs that run which do not contribute to illuminating our fate from our standpoint,” an expellee activist illustratively wrote the Expellee Ministry.¹¹¹ The domination of school curricula, rigid control of *Patenschaften*, and moves to found their own university underlined the ambition of the expellee leadership to function as the only entity that could represent expellees. The “cultural assets of the expellees from the East can only then serve as a source of power if it is transmitted from its own homeland atmosphere,” an expellee

¹⁰⁹ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 199, Rudolf Friedrich, Memorandum re: Rundfunk, undated (c. 1951). After elevating the expulsions to “our contribution for the defense of the West,” and which legitimized that “our needs be met to represent our position,” Friedrich explicitly acknowledged the emotional power and mobilizing force behind the cultural work of the expellees while castigating those voices who ostensibly denied the expellees with “idealistic” programs geared toward integration: “Who doesn’t want to play along? Do they want to drive us to radicalism at all costs? Someday our patience will be over, and then the masses will no longer be appeased with platitudes.”

¹¹⁰ BArch B106-27372 vol.1, “Sitzungsbericht of the Schlesische Landesversammlung, 8. und 9. Plenarsitzung, 25/26 November 1967 in Mainz,” 19. That expellees themselves cared little for their leaders’ speeches, as will be argued in the last pages of this dissertation, did not seem to enter into Rumbaur’s thoughts.

¹¹¹ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 199, Rudolf Friedrich, Memorandum re: Rundfunk, undated (c. 1951).

advocate pleaded with the *Bayerischer Rundfunk* in 1950. Only those from there or who have proven “inner solidarity with the spiritual realm of the German East” should have the right to speak to the matter.¹¹² For this reason, they meticulously monitored and attempted to police publications and the media, seeking to bend them to their absolute will.

The associations frequently flew into fits of fury even during the 1950s, when broad consensus over the injustice of the expulsions meant that politicians and the media demonstrated sympathy and a willingness to help. For instance, writing to the publisher of a *Göttinger Arbeitskreis* (GA) guide on the Sudetenland, von Auen criticized the release of the work so close to the SL’s own *Atlas*, thereby allegedly robbing it of resonance. Von Auen castigated many “deficiencies,” and demanded the publisher run all publications by “experts” within the SL, or rely exclusively on their materials.¹¹³ Perhaps motivated to boost sales of its own literature, the SL also asserted the authority of its “correct” publication which depicted more extensive reaches of ethnic German influence in Czechoslovakia, and conformed to its expectations. However, control lay at the heart of the matter, as well as the belief that only expellees themselves, or rather their elite, could be entrusted with the writing of their own history.

Occasionally the zealousness with which expellees decried an undermining of their authority took on absurd forms. Incensed listeners frequently filed complaints with the BMVt and broadcasting stations, taking issue with errors or exaggerated and “laughable” dialects of actors in radio dramas.¹¹⁴ On several occasions, the Minister of Expellees saw it fit to intervene,

¹¹² BArch B150-3340 vol. 1, Alfons Teuber to Dr. Clemens Münster, July 11, 1950.

¹¹³ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 80, von Auen to Holzner-Verlag, June 8, 1956.

¹¹⁴ BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, von Wilpert to Hans Laleike, May 8, 1950. The BMVt took the protests seriously enough to initiate an investigation, urging the East Prussian Association to nominate a list of speakers who could provide genuine “native [*heimatlich*]” dialogue. See BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, von Wilpert to Krüger, May 8, 1950.

sitting with broadcasting officials and expellee leaders to listen to selections of programs and assess their authenticity.¹¹⁵ A case in point is a 1951 protest over a “Call of the Homeland” broadcast of the *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk* (NWDR). Marking the 30 year anniversary of the Upper Silesian plebiscite, the program opened and ended with expellees singing and conversing. Pastor Johannes Smaczny, an editor of the prominent expellee paper *Heimat und Glaube* with close ties to Expellee Minister Lukaschek and Linus Kather, took particular offense with the use of *Wasserpölnisch* (“water Polish”), a dialect of the region heavily marked by Slavic influences. Smaczny’s grievances were not so much aesthetic, but instead exposed expellee fears that any shortcoming, however trivial, spelled a grave threat to their enterprise and authority. As an Upper Silesian and participant in the plebiscite, Smaczny alleged that every “upstanding Upper Silesian” would be dismayed by the portrayal of the “German character” of the region, which instead sounded like it lay “beyond the Urals.” The actors and all people associated with the travesty, Smaczny alleged, were “alien” and not from there, who furthermore profoundly endangered the “task of raising education” and endorsing expellee politics.¹¹⁶

The controversy forced the BMVt to immediately initiate an investigation.¹¹⁷ The program editor, Wilhelm Matzel, demanded to be involved in the process. Himself an Upper Silesian, Matzel pointed out that he consulted with compatriots, including Expellee Minister Lukaschek, and that they even added to the script. Other expellees wrote to praise the program

¹¹⁵ BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, Hilpert to Laleike, May 24, 1950. The representative of *Norddeutscher Rundfunk* expressed proved less enthusiastic, noting that all dialects are sometimes exaggerated on radio. He added that as an East Prussian himself and employee of *Königsberger Rundfunk* from 1931 to 1945, he found no issue with the programming and judged the complaints to be “overly sensitive,” though from his time in Königsberger he knew to “expect this from [East Prussian] compatriots.”

¹¹⁶ BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, Smaczny to NWDR, March 28, 1951.

¹¹⁷ BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, Rothen to Lukaschek, April 2, 1951.

and request a repeat broadcast. In general, Matzel pointed to the region's diversity of dialects "that differ from High German," and that he did not intend to insult or contribute to a "negative judgment" of Upper Silesians.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, Matzel personally brought the recording to the BMVt. With the minister in attendance, sixty officials crammed into the ministry's conference room to listen to the recording. Upper Silesian employees attested to the dialogue's authenticity, explaining that in parts of the region people did indeed speak in this manner. A handful of critics backed Smaczny: It was "superfluous to let these fellows with their Upper Silesian jargon be heard, since it raises the impression that Upper Silesians...did not speak a real German in their homeland." The matter in the end was dropped with the explanation that "about 98% of the program's Upper Silesian [actors]...sufficiently proved that they mastered High German."¹¹⁹

The comical incident reveals how the diverse goals of institutionalization efforts worked in tandem. The expulsions in a sense represented a process that condensed a culturally and linguistically diverse group into homogenous blocs, and exposed leaders to the realization that the region they claimed to speak for in fact contained significant diversity.¹²⁰ Broad designations such as "Silesia" and "East Prussia" papered over variances typical to linguistic borderlands.¹²¹ This therefore created a tension for association leaders, who regarded themselves as arbiters of what constituted "true" culture and who was a "real" member of the group they claimed authority over. The incident moreover encapsulates their reluctance to rely on "outsiders," even

¹¹⁸ BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, "Stellungnahme des NWDR be: 'Der Ruf der Heimat' anlässlich der 30. Wiederkehr der Volksabstimmung in Oberschlesien," March 30, 1951.

¹¹⁹ BArch B150-3348 vol. 1, Memo from Rothen, July 27, 1951.

¹²⁰ In other words, this particular incident confronted Upper Silesian critics with the fact that this region was rather diverse. Situated along a linguistic borderland between Poland and Czechoslovakia, dialects between the urban centers and the rural countryside varied wildly.

¹²¹ See for example King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans*; Judson, *Guardians of the Nation*.

those offering support for keeping the German East a firm fixture in West German public discourse. Additionally, the overreactions of individuals with a particular memory of the homeland exposed how any deviation from the leadership's vision in their eyes amounted to an attack on the group itself, and more crucially, their legitimacy. Lastly, suggestions that the German East was not "German" enough threatened to inculcate ambivalence among West Germans, and undermine the struggle for the return of historic German territory.

Associations insisted upon a monopoly of control on one point in particular: The depiction of their suffering. When portrayals did not conform to their interpretations, their leadership demonstrated an extremely thin skin. One must only think of the responses to the *Dokumentation*, already discussed in previously. When the historians and their government patrons denied ethnic Germans from Hungary controlling rights over the project, they decried the publication as "unscholarly, tendentious, and full of primitive falsehoods" that altogether "turned out after the fancy of the expellers."¹²² The Sudeten Germans also lamented that they had "absolutely no influence over the final design," not even "insight into the manuscript."¹²³ Georg Baron von Manteuffel-Szoege, President of the Union of Homeland Associations (*Verband der Landsmannschaften*, VdL), also questioned the integrity and objectivity of the commission because it refused to grant expellees greater control over the chronicling of their own fate.¹²⁴ Any search for "historical truth," they pleaded, needed to include the associations.¹²⁵

¹²² BArch N1228-111, Circular Letter Nr. 93, May 23, 1957. At the heart of the dispute was the role of the context of National Socialism, which the German-Hungarians feared would relativize their suffering.

¹²³ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 662, Lodgman to Simon, February 3, 1956.

¹²⁴ BArch N1188-55, Oberländer to von Manteuffel-Szoege, August 5, 1958.

¹²⁵ BArch B150-5642, Zillich to VdL, July 9, 1958.

The expellee elite bemoaned the “authoritarian inadequacies” of the historians not merely because they dismissed the “power of judgment” of the victims over their own history. They also feared the “historical representations” the historians may render.¹²⁶ As has been argued, into the 1950s the Schieder Commission increasingly attempted to contextualize the forced migrations in the history of National Socialism and the war. Schieder himself surmised that the “entire spectacle after all is nothing more than the attempt to exclude the [German] ethnic groups from the general judgment over NS politics that we so-called *Binnendeutsche* [“interior Germans,” i.e. Reich Germans] after all face without argument.”¹²⁷ Yet something more fundamental beyond asserting dominance in the face of perceived interlopers was at play: When it came to depicting expellee misery, “outsiders” failed to paint a gruesome enough picture.

The expellee leadership consistently preferred dramatic and salacious reports, and resented depictions that eschewed emotional language or documented less sensational, yet nevertheless grim, expellee experiences. When their accounts drew criticism, they bristled and resorted to browbeating naysayers. For example, after Waldemar Lenz of *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* issued a glowing review of the Sudeten “White Book” and read several gripping passages, the station’s supervisory board chastised Lenz’s “political abstruseness” and “nationalist” comments. The Sudeten German Association jumped to his defense, decrying the critics’ “haranguing.” “How can facts be politically abstruse or nationalistic,” Rudolf Lodgman von Auen demanded to know, complaining how “for days and years on end only misdeeds of Germans are discussed, yet crimes committed against Germans are covered with the blanket of Christian charity.” Lenz deserved thanks from “every German and European-thinking person,

¹²⁶ BArch B150-5642, Zillich to VdL, July 9, 1958.

¹²⁷ BArch N1188-41, Schieder to Booms, July 21, 1957.

who must be moved how after the terrible atrocities, the Sudeten Germans are so willing to rebuild Europe.”¹²⁸

Already when the first volume of the *Dokumentation* appeared in 1953, some expellee leaders lamented that the historians had not been thorough enough, as “many incidents are not adequately addressed or...not even mentioned.”¹²⁹ These concerns escalated with the publication of the diary of Margarete Schell. Her account proved not horrific enough, and her assessment of the expellers lacked the proper vitriol and presented an entirely too nuanced interpretation at odds with “flight and expulsion” narratives pushed by the homeland associations. As reviews in the expellee press made clear, expellee elites felt that Schell raised the impression that expellee accounts of suffering were “all lies, since now a...published diary proves that it wasn’t so bad.”¹³⁰ The Sudeten German Association (SL) also objected, deeming the testimony as not “characteristic of the suffering of the Sudeten Germans.”¹³¹ They arrived at this conclusion after “very thorough engagement,” which consisted of counting positive and negative remarks regarding Soviets, Czechs, and Germans. The results proved “catastrophic,” the SL concluded,

¹²⁸ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 200, von Auen to Rundfunkrat of *Süddeutscher Rundfunk*, May 20, 1952.

¹²⁹ BArch B150-4171 vol. 2, Guillaume to Adenauer, November 11, 1953.

¹³⁰ “Tagebuch einer Bevorzugten,” *Vertriebenen-Anzeiger*, July 5, 1958, unpaginated newspaper clipping in BArch B150-5644. Specifically, the authors lamented that Schell disproportionately mentioned encounters with helpful Czechs and Soviets. Moreover, descriptions of callous and crude Germans further incensed critics. For the *Vertriebenen-Anzeiger*, it was utterly “incomprehensible how the expellee ministry decided to publish such a ‘diary’ in a volume...on the inhumane expulsion of...Germans from their ancestral homelands.” The report worked “much better as a propaganda piece of Prague communists, aimed at discriminating against the expellees.” The damage the Schieder Commission had done, particularly abroad, could not be fathomed.

¹³¹ BArch B150-5630, Memo of Schlicker re: “Stellungnahme des Vorstandes der SL zum Tagebuch Margarete Schell, October 10, 1958. The SL acceded that the diary did accurately describe life in Czechoslovakian “concentration camps,” however.

and completely “devalued” the government’s treatment of Sudeten German suffering.¹³²

Expellee dissatisfaction with treatments of the forced migration that did not adhere to their standards remained a consistent theme: When the Silesian Association sought to publish a series of paperbacks that promised greater resonance than the dry academic tome produced by Schieder, Herbert Hupka felt it necessary to “select the best” reports, as the somber scholarly treatment inadequately informed audiences of the “terrible crime against humanity” perpetrated against Germany.¹³³

All of this is to say that the primary goal of expellee institutionalization efforts was an overt attempt to monopolize all public discourse on “flight and expulsion,” and make the expellee elite’s interpretation binding upon the nation. Whether commissioning hundreds of memorials, orchestrating massive rallies, or shaping school curricula, on this front the homeland organizations proved immensely successful during the 1950s. They complained bitterly over rare slights and negative reporting, taking it as a conspiracy against them that continued the ignominy endured since 1945. But calls for a “purge [*Säuberung*]” of the “sordid, rootless and wavering elements” in the media eroding “national unity” were a radical minority grievance in the first postwar decade.¹³⁴ The consensus over “flight and expulsion” prevailed, and the majority of West German politicians supported efforts of supporting expellee concerns. There were some

¹³² BArch B150-5630, Memo re: “Tagebuch der Frau Margarete Schell—Beurteilung der Sudetendeutschen Landsmannschaft,” July 10, 1958, 2. The government representatives pondered in particular whether the “article from a Hungarian Jew” in the *Soldaten-Zeitung* could be traced to the SL. Already in previous meetings with Schieder, BMVt workers intimated that Olga Barényi for a time worked for the SL organ *Sudetendeutsche Zeitung*. BArch B150-5630, Memo re: “Dokumentation der Vertreibung, Ein Tagebuch aus Prag von Frau Margarete Schell,” June 30, 1958. The editor of the *Vertriebenen-Anzeiger*, the Sudeten German journalist and Witiko-Bund member Alfred Hönig, also was closely associated with the SL.

¹³³ BArch B106-27733, Hupka to Bundesminister Krüger, December 9, 1963.

¹³⁴ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 199, VdL Geschäftsführung to Sprecher der Landsmannschaften, September 2, 1954, 2.

limits: Expellees for instance never received a much-wanted central national memorial, and sometimes endured tongue-lashings and admonishments when their homeland gatherings threatened to interfere with West German foreign policy.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the federal government consistently supported the expellees: In 1955, it issued a special postage stamp featuring fleeing figures marking the ten year anniversary of “flight and expulsion.”¹³⁶ The flags and emblems of the German East also adorned the parliamentary building in Bonn, and hung in the eastern wing of the Reichstag until 1990.

The West German media similarly demonstrated an eagerness to meet the expectations of the expellees in the 1950s. Broadcasting directors unanimously expressed sympathy, and even acceded to subjecting their stations to “coordination measures” issued by the BMVt and expellee associations.¹³⁷ Even when expellee organizations continued to press for total control and veto rights over editorial and broadcast boards, the BMVt resisted these steps and noted the “earnest measures” to accommodate expellees: In May 1951, German radio stations recorded up to 4,000 meters of magnetophon reel of expellee broadcasts per day for “critical evaluation” by the BMVt and expellee representatives.¹³⁸ Overall, broadcasting officials consistently exhibited an

¹³⁵ For example, government officials chided expellees to moderate their criticisms of Western governments and their role in the expulsions, particularly as the FRG attempted to enter into NATO and the Western Alliance. Officials also expressed reservations over the 1955 “Day of the Homeland” and postponed it by several months so as not to set a false tone during the Bonn-Paris Conventions and Adenauer’s August visit to Moscow, and President Heuss withdrew his initial acceptance of attending the inauguration. Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*, 162–63.

¹³⁶ Elisabeth Fendl, *Zur Ikonographie des Heimwehs - Erinnerungskultur von Heimatvertriebenen: Referate der Tagung des Johannes-Künzig-Instituts für Ostdeutsche Volkskunde 4. bis 6. Juli 2001* (Freiburg i. Br.: Johannes-Künzig-Inst. für Ostdt. Volkskunde, 2002), 48–53.

¹³⁷ See for example BArch B150-3333, “Referat und Aussprache bei der Rundfunktagung am 10.6.50 in Bremen über zweckdeinlichere Behandlung des Vertriebenenproblems im Rundfunk.”

¹³⁸ BArch B150-3343, Memo of BMVt to BMfgF, October 13, 1951. The Ministry for All-German Affairs concurred that the stations were meeting expectations, and did not require a special expellee referee. Ibid, BMfgF to BMVt, April 17, 1951.

accommodating if not differential demeanor during the 1950s, demonstrating an eagerness to apologize when expellees expressed displeasure and willingness to please this bloc.¹³⁹

Indeed, most expellee leaders themselves expressed satisfaction, underlining how from their perspective they successfully permeated public discourse in the first decade after 1945. Representatives of the *Zentralverband vertriebener Deutscher* (“Central Federation for Expelled Germans,” ZvD), for example, tolerated reporting “even if in the details some things were not accurate,” praising the interest and honest attempt of the German media to “keep the pan-German homeland awareness alive.”¹⁴⁰ The expellee press also admitted that despite “individual laments,” and accepting that one “can’t get enough programming concerning the homeland,” no one could “honestly doubt that the good will has been there.”¹⁴¹ Herbert Hupka, a Silesian Association leader engaged at the *Bayerischer Rundfunk*, also felt that “a lot has been done” to meet expellee organizations expectations, so that it was “inappropriate of individual squealers to make irresponsible demands.” Writing to the BMVt, Hupka advised that it would “take the wind out of their sails” if it could be shown what all had been accomplished.¹⁴²

In sum, in the early to mid-1950s, expellees had much reason to bask in the glory of their ascendancy. Yet things would soon quickly change. Just as it had presaged changes in how intellectuals viewed German history, the Schieder Commission and its skirmishes with the expellee organizations anticipated political and cultural currents that rapidly pulled the rug out

¹³⁹ See for example BArch B150-3342, Geerdes to Oberländer, August 21, 1958. In this particular case, Expellee Minister Theodor Oberländer wrote to Walter Geerdes, the director of *Freies Berlin*, on behalf of expellee leaders to register concern with ostensible cuts to programming concerning the expulsions. Geerdes immediately promised an expansion of reporting.

¹⁴⁰ BArch B150-3343, Pressreferat of ZvD to Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk, April 24, 1961.

¹⁴¹ BArch B150-3340 vol. 1, Transcription of “Der Rundfunk und die Flüchtlinge,” *Die Brücke*, March 31, 1951.

¹⁴² BArch B150-3340 vol. 1, Hupka to Lukaschek, June 5, 1951.

from under “flight and expulsion.” Hans Rothfels assessed the “increased radicalization” of expellees in their interactions with the scholars as a sign that they struggled for their very “existence.”¹⁴³ A more rattled Theodor Schieder condemned their departure from the ethos enshrined in their “Charta of the Homeland Expellees,” predicting that the impracticable demand of seeking continuous “approval” from their political leaders could only lead to “unrest and strife.”¹⁴⁴ The renowned historian felt dejected and “entirely fed up”: “I sometimes begin to despair because of the downright grotesque...lack of consideration. I am solely consoled by the fact that all these things are directed by a minority, which nevertheless apparently knows with which means one can exercise spiritual terror.”¹⁴⁵ The comments from Rothfels and Schieder would prove prescient. The uproar and accompanying press reactions foretold a seismic shift on the place of “flight and expulsion” in West German public memory.

“Beneficial Unrest?” The Decline of “Flight and Expulsion”¹⁴⁶

In hindsight, astute observers could have traced the signs of an imminent decline of expellee influence already in the mid-1950s. Nevertheless, toward the end of the decade this deterioration took on an astonishing pace. With growing distance from 1945, and basking in the glow of the “economic miracle,” interest in endless dwelling on the war waned. Renewed

¹⁴³ BArch B150-5630, Memo of Schlicker re: “Kurzprotokoll der Sitzung vom 6. Dezember 1958 in Köln”

¹⁴⁴ BArch B150-5642, Schieder to Kleberg, May 13, 1958. Though he saw the project through to its conclusion in 1961, Schieder’s experiences with the expellee associations left him disillusioned and dejected. In a 1955 letter to Hans Rothfels, Theodor Schieder privately summed up his disillusionment: “Seldom in my life has something brought me so much worry, trouble and aggravation as this, and for this one receives no thanks from anyone.” BArch N1213-158, Schieder to Rothfels, December 22, 1955.

¹⁴⁵ BArch N1188-5, Schieder to Rothfels, July 10, 1958.

¹⁴⁶ BArch B106-27372, vol 1, Sitzungsbericht der Schlesischen Landesversammlung, 8. Und 9. Plenarsitzung, 25/26 November, 1967, BA 106.

prosperity in the form of a humble home or modest vacations gradually supplanted living in the past. Was not longing for a bygone time and place beyond an Iron Curtain, which Cold War crises made all the more absolute, an absurd fantasy? Was not acceptance of reality, and reconciliation with Poland and Czechoslovakia, more realistic and desirable? What was the alternative beyond war, which after such horrendous suffering just years before now meant certain annihilation in the atomic age? Largely unspoken opinions too unpopular to utter openly before the 1960s, journalists, politicians, pundits, and average Germans pondered these questions more and more.

A variety of developments contributed to this dramatic turn of events that undercut the expellee associations and the ascendancy of “flight and expulsion.” First, for non-expellees with no emotional bonds to the German East, already extant ambivalence—or “scarcely believable indifference of most people toward the fate of these 12 million disenfranchised”—turned into incredulity.¹⁴⁷ Understandable confusion over eternal protestations of events long ago was not just palpable among those who never experienced the forced migrations, however. Substantial waning of interest for an actual return to the homeland among “ordinary” expellees also compounded the declining influence of expellee leadership. The equalization of burdens funds and strengthening economy allowed for the reestablishment of homes and livelihoods that provided security. Grasping their second chance of a new existence, real lives in Wuppertal or Cologne displaced yearning for Waldenburg or Colberg; memories of an old, bygone life supplanted longing for a theoretical return in the indefinite future.

¹⁴⁷ BArch B150-3348 vol. 2, Werner Beck, “Zum Abschluss der ostdeutschen Heimatwoche in Hamburg,” *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk*, May 22, 1950.

Expellees recognized, even if they were hesitant to articulate it openly, that there was nothing waiting for them. The passage of time, the menacing Iron Curtain, but more importantly the realization that the homeland had irreversibly changed, left notions of a return seem improbable. Most were quite aware of the current state of their erstwhile hometowns and properties. Indeed, as Andrew Demshuk convincingly argues, this knowledge provided the final break with the homeland, and convinced most expellees to find closure. Regular reports of how the homeland fared under communist mismanagement—including the slideshows and *Heimatbücher* analyzed above—intended to stoke fury and indignation for continued political pressure to revise the Potsdam Agreement. Yet they ironically had the opposite effect, and confirmed nagging suspicions that the German East transformed unalterably beyond recognition, and was gone forever.

The publisher Joseph Caspar Witsch openly noted these issues in a March 8, 1957 broadcast of *Stammtisch*. The “majority of refugees—let’s express it carefully—are not doing poorly,” which did not mean that their homeland no longer existed, but that “it is no longer there anymore, because it really is no homeland anymore. If they returned—they would bring along expectations, but the expectations would not materialize in situ because it has almost become a different country.”¹⁴⁸ Though it remained a contentious proposition in the 1950s, West German commentators and increasingly expellees themselves agreed: Few desired to give up whatever modest prosperity they acquired in their new communities in exchange for an unrecognizable homeland comprised of devastated communities and dilapidated infrastructure. Indeed, polls

¹⁴⁸ ACDP 001-377-12/2, “Der Stammtisch,” Westdeutscher Rundfunk, March 8, 1957, 7-8.

revealed a progressive decline of expellees willing to return in the unlikely scenario that the flag of a reunified Germany would once again fly above the German East.¹⁴⁹

This meant that expellee associations claimed a mandate for a demographic that mostly cared little for their visions. Their constituents had little in common with the self-appointed leadership, a “small group of...so-called professional refugees [*Berufsflüchtlinge*], who in fact live off of this function,” Witsch scathingly remarked.¹⁵⁰ Ordinary expellees simply did not care for the debates over borders or political developments. In 1952, editors of a popular magazine astutely noted that the expellee “wants to know how it looks in his community, on his street. The man that looks homewards closes his eyes. The louder the fight around him becomes, the more firmly he clings to the eternal, unchanging, always friendly image of the *Heimat*: to memory!”¹⁵¹ Curiosity and pining for a pristine world left behind drew large audiences to the slideshow evenings, homeland gatherings, and bookstores to purchase the latest *Heimatbuch*, but should not be interpreted as an explicit endorsement of the associations’ politics. This does not mean that they did not harbor a sense of injustice or forgave the torment suffered at the hands of expellers, or that they did not demand social recognition as victims. But to accept the notion of “the” expellees with shared desires is to overlook a profound ambivalence among the rank and file, and accept a construct of their leaders who continued to insist upon the right to speak for millions.

The massive attendances at yearly homeland gatherings into the late 1960s are an ideal case for assessing the gulf between association authority and hubris. Orchestrated by the associations as a dramatic show of force to West German and foreign publics, they provided a

¹⁴⁹ ACDP 001-377-11/3, Kather to Präsidialmitglieder, August 3, 1957.

¹⁵⁰ ACDP 001-377-12/2, “Der Stammtisch,” Westdeutscher Rundfunk, March 8, 1957, 5.

¹⁵¹ Quoted in Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 9.

measure of ostensible saliency of demands for a “right to the homeland.” The bombastic proclamations of speakers asserting eternal claims garnered approving nods and applause from an audience in complete agreement that they suffered a terrible and unprecedented injustice that left them the greatest victims of the war. Yet it is doubtful that the majority of expellees embraced the activism of their leadership as a pressing personal concern.

Attending the festivals offered an opportunity to see old friends and relatives, to speak one’s dialect and eat traditional food, and relive memories in a reconstituted “virtual Heimat” among countrymen for an afternoon. Already in 1950, journalists noted that the agendas of participants differed from that of their leaders: The former came to visit with loved ones and sing *Heimatlieder*, or “songs from the homeland,” while the latter sought to impress the West German public with “irrefutable evidence” that the German East belonged at the start of any political discussion.¹⁵² While attendees tended to demonstrate closed ranks to outsiders, in reality they frequently only partially agreed with the political utterances.¹⁵³ While the associations invested great meaning in the throngs, and projected their aspirations onto them, most participants attended to find a “surrogate *Heimat* spaces” and join a “collective therapy session.”¹⁵⁴ In short: Most expellees showed little interest in the political agenda of their leadership beyond a shared

¹⁵² BArch B150-3348 vol. 2, Werner Beck, “Zum Abschluss der ostdeutschen Heimatwoche in Hamburg,” *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk*, May 22, 1950.

¹⁵³ Svašek Maruška, “Gewähltes Trauma. Die Dynamik der erinnerten und (wieder-)erfahrenen Emotion,” in *Zur Ikonographie des Heimwehs - Erinnerungskultur von Heimatvertriebenen: Referate der Tagung des Johannes-Künzig-Instituts für Ostdeutsche Volkskunde 4. bis 6. Juli 2001*, ed. Elisabeth Fendl (Freiburg i. Br.: Johannes-Künzig-Inst. für Ostdt. Volkskunde, 2002), 72. See also the assessments of SED informants at Berlin homeland gatherings in the late 1940s, in Landesarchiv-Berlin, C Rep. 901 Nr. 419. While many decried nationalist rhetoric, a recurring theme in the reports is the rather apolitical discussions of ordinary participants.

¹⁵⁴ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 161–62. For a detailed analysis of the homeland gatherings, see Demshuk, 161–84.

sense of victimhood that could be enflamed at the main address of a homeland gathering before venturing over to a beer tent and finally returning home and daily life.

Insufficient exuberance and participation in associational functions were increasingly magnified by demographic trends that spelled out an inescapable dying out of Germans from the East. The generation that experienced the forced migrations steadily shrunk, and though the 1953 Federal Expellee Law extended expellee status to children born after 1945, the proactive measure to boost membership over the long term could not prevent a dramatic dwindling of persons who earnestly regarded themselves as expellees and may have identified with the cause of the associations.¹⁵⁵

The second generation, raised in West Germany in a more prosperous era than their elders, successfully integrated. Their homeland was Landshut or Ingolstadt, not the mysterious Liegnitz or Insterburg their parents spoke of. Many felt little affinity with places, customs, and a cause curiously rooted in the past. However exposed to family stories, the offspring possessed few reference points on which expellee associations could build. As the novelist Hans-Ulrich Treichel explained, the war generation “spoke a curious German, wore old-fashioned clothes, and spoke of things of which he had no idea.” For those too young to remember or, like Treichel, born after 1945, the East remained “completely incomprehensible, he could never unravel the topographical and historical jumble the adults presented to him when conversations turned to Silesia, East Prussia and Pomerania, to Breslau, Königsberg and Lodz, to Masuria and the *Riesengebirge*, to evacuations and resettlements, flight and expulsions.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ ACDP 001-291-035/2, Memo of BdV to all members of the board, “Argumentation in Public,” February 10, 1981. Herbert Czaja, the president of the BdV, internally admitted that sinking interest, the successful integration, and general acceptance of *Neue Ostpolitik* produced a decline in membership numbers. Above all, aging represented a major challenge.

¹⁵⁶ Hans Ulrich Treichel, *Menschenflug: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2015), 51.

Political developments abroad and domestically are the second main catalyst for the decline of “flight and expulsion.” Recurrent hopes for peace talks, in which the fate of Germany’s 1937 borders could be finalized, and fluidity of the early phase of the Cold War gave way to realizations that postwar demarcations proved more immutable than imagined. The Hungarian Uprising in 1956 decisively demonstrated Soviet intentions to hang onto its sphere of influence with force, while also revealed Western reluctance of rolling back communism. Any change in status quo without conflict and nuclear Armageddon seemed unthinkable. Moreover, the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961 symbolically heralded the unmistakable fact that the Eastern Bloc, and with it the German East, remained unreachably locked behind the Iron Curtain for the foreseeable future.

West Germany’s allies therefore surprised only the most oblivious of optimists when they openly recognized reality. Before 600 journalists in March 1959 in Bonn, Charles de Gaulle exhorted the Federal Republic to “no longer call into question the current borders in West, East, North, or South.” In the fall of 1960, officials of the Kennedy administration reportedly informed the First Secretary of the Polish People’s Republic, Władysław Gomułka, that the United States echoed de Gaulle’s calls for a recognition of the postwar borders. Indeed, West German officials registered with “concern” a variety of American lawmakers joining the chorus calling for a *de jure* acceptance of the Oder-Neisse Line. To the alarm of expellee leaders, the Foreign Ministry discovered that of 75 atlases published abroad in the late 1950s, only a Swiss edition indicated the provisional character of the German East under Polish and Soviet administration.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ See “Das grosse Tabu,” *Der Spiegel* 35, November 22, 1961 54-71, here 55. See also “Ohne ostdeutsche Ortsnamen. Blick in ausländische Atlanten,” *Weser Kurier*, March 15, 1957, newspaper clipping in ACDP 07-001-3382; and “Britten sehen Oder-Neisse-Linie als Ostgrenze,” Ppp Press report from June 11, 1957, in ACDP 07-001-3382. According to the report, the London *Financial Times* published a map of Germany in which the Oder-Neisse-Line was designated as the border between Poland and the GDR. “With this the respected London financial

Simultaneously, West German politicians began to cautiously question the feasibility of a reunification of Germany within the borders of 1937. Realpolitik and pragmatism, harbored secretively, more and more entered into political debates. “I personally see this question [of German territorial claims] in connection with reunification,” Foreign Minister Heinrich Brentano intimated to reporters in London on May 3, 1956, “and see it as entirely possible that the German people will one day face the question of whether they are prepared to relinquish the territories in order to thereby free 17 million Germans from the Soviet Zone, or whether they—merely to uphold some problematic claim to the eastern territories—will not be prepared to abandon them.”¹⁵⁸ The comments stoked indignation among expellees and conservative politicians, forcing von Brentano to clarify that the official position of the FRG remained a return of the German East.¹⁵⁹ The misstep nonetheless revealed a growing camp of realists who believed that a “relinquishing” of the German East, rather than return, lay in the future.¹⁶⁰

The most prominent “relinquisher” (*Verzichtler*), as expellees denounced figures who called for accepting the status quo, was the gravedigger of their hopes: Chancellor Willy Brandt. Once staunch supporters of expellee claims and subscribers to the “all-German” consensus, the SPD and Willy Brandt changed tack over the course of the 1960s.¹⁶¹ When the social-liberal

newspaper continues the British tendency, so often already condemned in Germany, of incorporating at least cartographically the German territories...into the Polish state without consideration for the legal situation.”

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in Klaus Rehbein, “Die westdeutsche Oder/Neiße-Debatte: Hintergründe, Prozeß und das Ende des Bonner Tabus” (Lit-Verl., 2006), 88.

¹⁵⁹ See “Billigung der Regierungserklärung im Bundestag. Politische Aussprache—Eine Erklärung des Bundesministers des Auswärtigen Amt,” *Bulletin* Nr. 120, July 1956, 1198, clipping in ACDP 07-001-3382.

¹⁶⁰ For more on the debate around the Oder-Neisse Line, see Rehbein, “Die westdeutsche Oder/Neiße-Debatte.”

¹⁶¹ See Matthias Müller, *Die SPD und die Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1977: Eintracht, Entfremdung, Zwietracht* (Berlin: Lit, 2012). Into the 1960s, Willy Brandt regularly attended expellee gatherings and events. As late as 1963, Brandt declared that “Breslau, Oppeln, Gleiwitz, Hirschberg, Glogau, Grünberg: These are not just names, they are living memories rooted in the souls of generations and which unceasingly pulsate within our consciousness.” ACDP 001-291-108/2, Wiltschko to Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung, September 9, 1973. Moreover, perhaps for political reasons,

coalition swept into power in 1969, it marked a sudden and dramatic shift in West German foreign policy. Recognizing realities and accepting that the only sensible German reunification was with the GDR, the new government pursued a *Neue Ostpolitik* (“new Eastern policy”) seeking rapprochement with West Germany’s eastern neighbors. The *Ostverträge* (“Eastern treaties”) signed between the FRG and Moscow, Warsaw, and Prague between 1970 and 1973 pledged the states to nonviolence and normalization of relations. The inviolability of the Oder-Neisse Border, and refusal to insist upon territorial changes, constituted a crucial component of these accords.

The consequences of Brandt’s politics for expellee interests has already been analyzed elsewhere.¹⁶² Needless to say, 1970 marked a caesura that spelled out that now expellees played only a marginal role in the political life of the Federal Republic. The consensus over the German East disappeared, robbing expellees of social support. Of relevance here is how this gradual decline influenced “flight and expulsion” discourse. For despite the vanishing of pillars of support, culturally expellees remained an active and vocal faction thanks to continued financial backing enshrined in the “Federal Expellee Law.” The greater issue was that their considerable loss of political influence precipitated a rapid decline in cultural relevance. Their shrinking size and anachronism left West Germans perplexed by the expellee associations. But a third crucial

Brandt nevertheless took care to maintain strong contacts to expellees within the party. In December 1964, he reached out to Wenzel Jaksch to encourage him after a series of “bothersome” newspaper articles on the Sudeten German and his dispute with German broadcasting stations. “I have made clear that you as the president of the BdV are our most important partner, and that there is no question of ‘letting you fall.’” Brandt did not want to “throw stones” but offer the SPD’s support, so that it will then be “easier to stand by you in this important work.” Moreover, Brandt invited Jaksch to participate in meetings of the party executive, and thereby offer an opportunity to “evinced our bonds with a man we not only feel bound to as an old social democrat, but from whom we also know that he today must master one of the most difficult national-political tasks.” AdsD, NL Jaksch, J1, Brandt to Jaksch, December 1, 1964.

¹⁶² Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*; Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heisst Gesamtdeutsch*.

challenge emerged during the 1960s that placed a decisive nail in the coffin of the ascendancy of the expellee victimhood narrative: West Germans found it increasingly difficult to uncritically regard this group as the greatest victims of the war.

For all of its foreign policy implications that thwarted homeland political ambitions, *Neue Ostpolitik* also produced an emblematic image that reflected these sweeping cultural changes in West Germany. Visiting the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising before signing the Warsaw Treaty on December 7, 1970, Chancellor Willy Brandt suddenly and apparently spontaneously fell to his knees after laying a wreath in honor of Nazi Germany's victims. The penitent chancellor's unexpected act of contrition acknowledged German guilt and begged forgiveness on behalf of the nation. Brandt's gesture elicited surprise and praise internationally, but sharply divided the German public. Expellee leaders in particular saw it as an exaggerated act before a Polish audience who had just as much to apologize for. The responses reflected generational divides: Aghast critics tended to be older, and subscribed to a political identity formed in the immediate postwar period and rooted in German suffering. Brandt's genuflection powerfully signaled an evolving West German memory culture, and that the nation stood at the cusp of a new era in which acknowledgment of Nazi crimes and admission of guilt comprised an essential element of what it meant to be German. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or "mastering the past," ascended as the guiding ethos of the Federal Republic, thereby displacing "selective remembering" and cultivation of victimhood.¹⁶³

The confrontation with the Nazi past represented a seismic shift in West German public memory. Whereas in 1959 Willy Brandt could still declare that "not only injustice was

¹⁶³ Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

perpetrated in our name, but the German people itself suffered injustice,” a public moral equation of Germany’s suffering with the misery of its victims proved problematic by 1970.¹⁶⁴ The shocking revelations during the 1961 Adolf Eichmann and 1963 Auschwitz Trials initiated and helped accelerate this paradigm shift, as now ignored or marginalized specters of the nation’s past bubbled to the surface in force. In 1965, parliamentary debates over whether to extend the statute of limitations for unprosecuted crimes committed between 1933 and 1945 similarly engaged the West German public with painful discussions over its past and missed opportunities to provide justice to the victims of Nazi persecution.¹⁶⁵ The social revolt instigated by the “68ers,” which in Germany included frequently painful interrogations of the histories of elders and public figures, exposed dimensions of National Socialism hitherto papered over in silence.

Memories of the war, particularly family stories of military service, fire bombings, or flight and expulsion, did not disappear. Despite a general willingness to acknowledge guilt as a whole, apologetic framings that minimized moral failings of fathers and mothers failed to vanish entirely. Research suggests that stories of trauma and exculpating justifications precariously coexisted with awareness of dictatorial crimes, and continue to create a paradoxical disconnect between individual memories and public discourse to this day.¹⁶⁶ Ironically, a more self-critical

¹⁶⁴ Wenzel Jaksch, “Selbstbestimmung und Wegbestimmung,” *Die Brücke*, September 19, 1959, copy of newspaper clipping in AdsD, NL Jaksch, J5. Brandt uttered these words at a “Day of the Homeland” gathering in Berlin.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland: die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (München: C.H. Beck, 2001), 182–98. For a prominent contemporary engagement with the subject, see the articles in *Der Spiegel* Nr. 11, March 8, 1965. The cover featured a provocative photo of smiling German troops in the process of executing civilian victims.

¹⁶⁶ See Harald Welzer and Sabine Moller, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2002). Investigating multiple generations of single families, Welzer and Moller argued that the vast majority of participants—whether the war generation, their children, or grandchildren—made use of “victimhood” and “heroisation” tropes to frame their family experiences. The generation that lived in the Third Reich typically appears as victims of social circumstances, war, captivity, and military occupation and simultaneously as “heroes.” The authors support their theory by citing a 2002 study of the Emnid-Institut in Bielefeld, which concluded that Germans between the ages of 14 and 29 had the propensity to turn their elders into regime opponents or even resistance fighters. 14% claimed their parents had lent active resistance,

history from the 1960s created increasingly introspective West Germans, yet this cut two ways: The growing “realization that National Socialism was a criminal system that claimed millions of victims required successive generations to construct a past in which their relatives appear in roles that have nothing to do with crimes.”¹⁶⁷ While public memory progressively focused on the Holocaust and German guilt, these elements emanated from external sources such as history books, television programs, memorials, and museums. Germans also received historical education from the deeply personal narratives of their elders.¹⁶⁸

Of central importance to this study is West German cultural memory, and the point to be made is that from the 1960s onward, public discourse and political identity revolved around what Germans had *done*, not what they endured. The growing realization of the scope of criminality and complicity made extensive handwringing over even indisputable German misery an unappealing exercise, and undermined the prominence of “flight and expulsion.” From the onset, “flight and expulsion” narratives always needed to contend with the legacy of Nazism. The cultural shifts emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, dramatically upended the hierarchy of victimhood. Expellees could no longer count on receptive audiences beyond the immediate circle of their constituents.

and only 4% believed them to have been convinced National Socialists. Only 3% of respondents believed their grandparents had been directly involved in any criminal acts. Within German families, in other words, the Nazi dictatorship is largely understood as a system of coercion and terror leaving no room for individual agency, even if individuals as a whole are willing view German society’s behavior during the Third Reich more critically. See Walzer and Moller, *Opa war kein Nazi*, 247.

¹⁶⁷ Welzer and Moller, *Opa war kein Nazi*, 207.

¹⁶⁸ The power of these family stories cannot be understated. More than seventeen million men served in the Wehrmacht, ten to twelve million fled or experienced forced migration, untold millions lived through aerial bombardments. In other words, nearly every family experienced the war on some level, and virtually all Germans had access to sanitized recollections and catalogues of suffering.

What's more, the worldviews of expellee elites seemed out of place after this gradual cultural shift toward a more introspective Federal Republic. Isolated journalists early on registered their concerns with the "mess of dangerous contradictions, unmistakable tensions, disastrous misinterpretations, and overt perplexity" on display at homeland functions and expellee demonstrations.¹⁶⁹ A minority of critics even categorically condemned the fiery rhetoric and nationalist resentments uttered by expellee leaders with dubious pasts in the Third Reich, and expressed fear over the enthusiastic applause such statements elicited and that portended a dangerous political extremism.¹⁷⁰ Pundits warned even in 1950 that alarming continuities with Nazi tactics, style, and language would ultimately harm the otherwise legitimate cause of the expellees and sow chaos among West Germany's fledgling democracy in the process.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ BArch B150-3348 vol. 2, "Kommentar von Werner Bäcker, 'Zum Abschluss der ostdeutschen Heimatwoche in Hamburg,'" *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk*, May 22, 1950.

¹⁷⁰ See "Misstönender Applaus," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, July 3, 1951, clipping in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 345. While noting how expellees held understandable resentments, the reporter expressed shock over the rhetoric he heard at a VOL congress and choice of speakers who made careers in the Third Reich. Particularly Heinrich Zillich, the head of the Association of Transylvanian Saxons in Germany, whipped the crowd into a frenzy with radical statements. "No wonder that every East German heart beats faster when this man praises the Germans as the salt of the European East and dismisses the Slavs as a 'deadly foe of the Occident,' indeed as innate barbarians—irrespective of a Copernicus or an ancient people such as the Russians whom we know from the works of Tolstoy or Dostoevsky," the reporter commented. The most embarrassing moments were the "applause for Zillich's offhand remark that the partitions of Poland 'did not harm the interests of peace'; as he characterized the Germans (through their sacrifices and suffering) as the 'only cleansed of the dark earth'; and especially as he declared: 'Do not let yourselves be driven into...feelings of guilt that foreigners want to saddle you with!'" After a long history lesson that "bypassed the epoch of Hitler in an elegant arc," Minister Lehr echoed calls for a protection of Western Civilization and notions of Germans as a bulwark against "culture-destroying Slavendom." Equally alarmingly, Ministers Kaiser, Lukaschek, and Seebohm were in attendance, as was Vice Chancellor Blücher. Theodor Heuss and Ernst Reuter also sent greetings.

¹⁷¹ See E. Franzel, "Streitbarer 'Volksgruppenführer.' Schuhplatter nach dem Egerländer Marsch," *Die Welt am Sonntag (Ausgabe Nord)* Nr. 25, June 18, 1950, 2. The author warned of growing *Völkisch* tendencies, especially among "dangerous elements" of the Sudeten Germans. "Here scholarly advisement, plans and exchanges of ideas, there demonstrations with hearty slogans, with many drums and with the... 'Egerländer March' with which Geobels began his propaganda programs...played during the official receptions of *Gauleiter* Konrad Henlein." The Sudeten German Association also demonstrated troubling tactics. It resorted to "totalitarianism" to oust dissenting voices from its ranks, and at the speeches of Lodgman von Auen "raiding parties" made their way through the audience to "sing, scream, applaud, or strike down." When foreigners questioned von Auen on this radicalism, the author claimed that the leader of the Sudeten Germans "saw things in a different light: When the German rearmament comes it will be uninteresting what foreigners think of us." The "Lodgmannschaft," the article surmised, represented a radicalization toward the right that would harm the expellees and ultimately lead to their decline in politics.

Yet what appeared as acceptable in the early Federal Republic now emerged as incongruous with the progressive values of 1960s West Germany. As noted above, the weariness with unceasing longing for a lost world now incorporated a mounting concern with the specter of Nazism that the expellees seemingly embraced. Rather favorable write-ups of homeland gatherings and sympathetic press reporting gave way to observations of radicalism, nationalist resentment, and revanchist agitation.¹⁷² While in fact little actually changed with content of *Sonntagsreden* (“Sunday speeches”)—polemical speeches marked by hyperbole and bombast—the rhetoric elicited shock and criticism from the press.¹⁷³ The entire program of the expellees seemed dubious to an increasingly professionalized and critical West German media.

One strand of reporting chided the associations and their usefulness. Particularly Werner Friedmann of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* condemned the “grand illusions” for German reunification and a return of the territories.¹⁷⁴ These were “political pipe dreams,” the purveyors of which abused those who have suffered enough, simply to spur unrealistic hopes for a conquest that could only lead to yet another war.¹⁷⁵ The “Sunday speakers,” Friedmann alleged elsewhere, “abused the sentiments [of expellees] and keep hopes alive.” While the federal government certainly could not officially give up on the territories, legal claims and technicalities contained little “hopes for tomorrow.” In any case, Friedmann asserted that the question of “whether it

¹⁷² For a representative sampling of the favorable coverage, see the extensive coverage in *Die Welt*, May 15, 1951, newspaper clipping in ACDP 07-001-3438; and “Nicht durch einen Krieg,” *Quick* Nr. 39, 1305ff.

¹⁷³ Particularly Hans-Christoph Seebohm, a Silesian who so strongly identified with the Sudeten German cause that he arose as a prominent spokesmen for their association, ranked as a notorious firebrand. See “Wenn Seebohm redet,” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 12, March 21, 1956, 13. Already in the 1950s, the longtime Minister of Transport raised the ire of German politicians, the press, and foreign governments for provocative statements.

¹⁷⁴ Werner Friedmann, “Die grossen Illusionen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, May 8/9, 1954, cited in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 184, Georg Brada to von Auen, September 25, 1954.

¹⁷⁵ Friedmann, “Politische Wunschträume,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 6, 1953, cited in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 184, Georg Brada to von Auen, September 25, 1954.

would be worth it for the still living to go home to Tilsit” should be posed to the “widows and orphans and various victims of the last war.”¹⁷⁶ The belief that the homeland associations outlived their purpose, and only kept the pain of their constituents alive for their impractical political goals, increasingly dictated the tone of coverage in the late 1950s and onward.¹⁷⁷

A second hallmark of 1960s reporting was that it took issue with the historical interpretations of the associations and criticized their selective reading of the past and silences over National Socialist crimes. Reporters openly questioned bold claims based on romanticized and completely ahistorical myths.¹⁷⁸ Programming which focused on the history of Eastern Europe, and in particular the experiences of inhabitants under German occupation, increased at the height of *Ostpolitik*, thereby placing the expulsions into a larger context.¹⁷⁹ Reporting also tended to interrogate the relationship between Nazi population policies such as *Generalplan Ost* and the forced migrations of Germans after the war.¹⁸⁰ Journalists questioned the backgrounds of expellee educators and their school curricula, finding an alarming amount of Nazi ideology.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Friedmann, “Missbrauchte Gefühle,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 14/15, 1954, cited in BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 184, Georg Brada to von Auen, September 25, 1954.

¹⁷⁷ See also the critical tone in Cyrill von Radzibor, “Dokumentation: Die Vertriebenen-Verbände,” *Themen der Zeit*, May 16, 1975, script in ACDP 001-291-127/2; and Martensen, “Zukunft der Vertriebenen-Verbände,” *Themen der Zeit*, May 16, 1975, script in ACDP 001-291-127/2.

¹⁷⁸ In the spring of 1956, for instance, the Sudeten German Association launched attacks on a journalist who questioned their demands: The “so-called Sudetenland is and remains not a German but a Czechoslovakian territory to which we cannot make any claims. Whoever in spite of this wants to continue to steal foreign territory betrays Germany’s reunification, and incites to war.” “Die Pfingsttage in Westdeutschland waren von Demonstrationen geprägt,” translated newspaper clipping of *Aftenposten*, in AdsD, Seliger Archiv VIII, 2284

¹⁷⁹ See AdsD, NL Jaksch, J1, Intendant *Westdeuscherrundfunk* to Ernst Paul, May 6, 1965; and ACDP 001-291-127/2, Hupka to Intendanten des 2. Deutschen Fernsehens Professor Hozamer, October 6, 1972.

¹⁸⁰ “Nach dem Kriege—Krieg gegen Wehrlose,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 9, 1965, clipping in BArch B150-5118 vol. 2.

¹⁸¹ Kai Hermann, “‘Nach Ostland woll’n wir reiten.’ Seltsame Empfehlungen für den Ostkunde-Unterricht,” *Die Zeit*, April 9, 1965.

The painful experiences of expellees were not questioned, but the West German media recognized that it needed to be placed in the history of the Third Reich and Second World War, and that German misery certainly did not eclipse that of the victims of Nazi barbarism. As one reporter explained, the “misery of the people who after the war needed to leave their homeland is constantly evoked without duly mentioning what preceded this suffering, namely the violent rule in the territories annexed by Germany.”¹⁸²

A third theme of media reports on the expellee associations revolved around disquieting continuities between their agendas and appearances and the Third Reich. In 1961, for instance, the journalist Jürgen Neven-du Mont—a perpetual nemesis of the associations—questioned the use of uniforms in expellee youth groups, noting uncanny similarities to the Hitler Youth. The issue was not so much with what the groups advocated, but rather “what purpose it serves.”¹⁸³ The disconcerting sight of marching uniformed Germans did not seem to concern expellee leaders, who denied that such practices had become infamous since 1933.¹⁸⁴ Neither did the uncomfortable fact that the scenes in Berlin at the previously mentioned 1955 inauguration of the

¹⁸² Peter Pragal, “Protest-Kampagne gegen einen ‘Ätherguss.’ Eine Analyse der Vertriebenenorganisationen brachte dem Bayerischen Rundfunk eine Strafanzeige ein,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 2, 1968, clipping in ACDP 001-377-28/5.

¹⁸³ The TV program “Wem nützt das eigentlich?” (“What purpose does it serve”) aired on June 2, 1961. Defending himself against attacks from the BdV, Neven-du Mont denied linking a continuity in ideologies between expellees and the Hitler Youth, but that the disquieting similarities in the uniforms—“the symbols and the dangerous game of emblems”—required a clearing up of misunderstandings. The journalist added that the press positively reviewed the program, and agreed that the “exaggerated wearing of uniforms hurts the cause of the associations and expellees.” Lastly, Neven-du Mont expressed sympathy for the BdV’s concern over the discomfiting images, but added that “I am not responsible for these similarities. If it had not already been noticed and caused public confusion, the whole piece would have been unnecessary.” AdsD, NL Jaksch, J1, Neven-du Mont to President and Vice President of BdV, August 9, 1961.

¹⁸⁴ In the case of Neven-du Mont, expellee leaders bemoaned that the nefarious journalist acted in bad faith and misled them. They curiously asserted that not a single youth group of the twenty associations had a uniform, and that in any case the historic use of such attire predated 1933. The BdV also took issue with Neven-du Mont, who “in all seriousness claimed that torchlight processions have become infamous since 1933.” AdsD, NL Jaksch, J1, BdV to Director Eberhard Beckmann, August 1961.

memorial at the Reichskanzlerplatz, which just ten years before bore the name “Adolf-Hitler-Platz,” recalled the torchlight procession through the capital on the night that the Führer attained power in 1933.¹⁸⁵ To observers more sensitive to recent confrontations with the German past, the gestures seemed naively tone-deaf at best, and unnecessary nationalist provocations at worst. Others noted that the “cultural program [of the homeland associations]...shows that one searches for the actual homeland in the 1930s.” All this suggested a “blood and earth” ideology anchored in National Socialist thought.¹⁸⁶

Not just problematic symbolism gave pause for thought: Sometimes, “revanchist expellees and neo-Nazis” disrupted public events such as a presentation on Poland in Dortmund on October 1963, distributing copies of Nazi-era papers with “baiting tirades against Poles” and even calling in a bomb scare to cancel the event.¹⁸⁷ While such radical incidents had no connections to the homeland associations, the political history of many of their leaders suddenly proved highly dubious. Many of the first generation of expellee elites held an NSDAP membership, or enjoyed careers in the Third Reich.¹⁸⁸ BMVt Minister Theodor Oberländer’s membership in the SS and his scholarship that helped provide academic justifications for Nazi

¹⁸⁵ Scholz, *Vertriebenen Denkmäler*, 342.

¹⁸⁶ ACDP 001-291-108/2, Stefan Wiltshko to Redation *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*, September 9, 1973.

¹⁸⁷ “Provokatorische anti-polnische Demonstration in Dortmund,” *Ost-Informationen*, October 29, 1963, clipping in BArch B150-5118 vol. 2. It must be noted that the Expellee Ministry condemned the incident, but noted that the event should have included the voices of expellees. As it stood, it was “unfortunate” that the “opponents of the afflicted [i.e. Poland and media] were handed talking points through the distribution of radical propaganda.” Nevertheless, “radicals and unruly groups are no allies of our cause,” the BMVt official concluded. Krüger to Reichelt, October 31, 1963. The Ministry for All-German Questions also voiced displeasure over the unrest, but noted that blame lay with a “discussion leader who was unable to maintain rigid authority” and who made numerous comments that deviated from the homeland association positions. The ministry weighed pressuring the city of Dortmund to bring in “good” speakers with a “clear and resolute political line,” but that this seemed unlikely given Dortmund’s “extreme political views.” Ibid, von Dellingshausen to Krüger, January 8, 1964, 1-2.

¹⁸⁸ Michael Schwartz et al., *Funktionäre mit Vergangenheit: das Gründungspräsidium des Bundesverbandes der Vertriebenen und das “Dritte Reich”* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

ethnic cleansing were also no secret, but his past had only become an issue in 1960: A targeted propaganda campaign orchestrated by the GDR and SPD efforts to investigate the embattled minister to resign.¹⁸⁹ Journalists meanwhile decried the “dangerous aggression” in Rudolf Lodgman von Auen’s rhetoric, which reminded of the “short-circuit of 1938.” With his radicalism, he “stood in the shadow of Hitler” and pushed politics that could only be solved through war and the “devil’s cycle of violence and revenge.”¹⁹⁰ While von Auen never joined the NSDAP, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and other periodicals uncovered troubling “brown colors” in the pasts of ranking members of the SL and the extremist Witiko-Bund faction.¹⁹¹

The expellee elite naturally took issue with this litigious “snooping” in the past.¹⁹² And while they continuously responded with indignation and even brought lawsuits for slander, internally the leadership resented prying eyes because there indeed were skeletons in the closet that in a changed Federal Republic proved embarrassing. When a well-meaning activist attempted to compile a “Who’s-Who” of SL notables, association members panicked: Writing to

¹⁸⁹ Ausschuss für Deutsche Einheit, ed., *Die Wahrheit über Oberländer: Braunbuch über die verbrecherische faschistische Vergangenheit des Bonner Ministers* (Berlin, 1960). While the sentence *in absentia* of Oberländer to lifelong imprisonment for participation in war crimes rested on fabricated evidence, the campaign to unveil and discredit the former Nazi Party member ultimately led to his resignation, and contributed to increased focus on the dubious pasts of West German public figures.

¹⁹⁰ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 80, Bittermann to von Auen, December 16, 1958. Von Auen unsurprisingly took issue that he was seen as standing in Hitler’s shadow merely for “denouncing the crimes against the Sudeten.” Regarding Bittermann’s understanding of 1938, von Auen clarified that it was no “short-circuit” or aggression that many Sudeten Germans embraced Hitler, but that it was regarded as “amends for the criminal betrayal perpetrated against the Sudeten Germans in 1918/19.” The leader of the SL closed by noting that if the article had been written under the “1945 occupation license” by a journalist trying to hide a Nazi past with a progressive attitude, he would not be surprised; he did not know if Bittermann belonged to that circle, “but in any case you are spiritually related.” *Ibid*, von Auen to Bittermann, December 22, 1958.

¹⁹¹ Dieter Großherr, “Braune Farben im Flüchtlingsblätterwald,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 18/19, 1959, 5; and “Die Berufsflüchtlinge hüten ihr Geheimnis,” *Plus* 1, Nr. 59, November 20, 1959, 26-28; and an overview of a controversy surrounding Christian Wallenreiter’s investigation of the Witiko-Bund, in “Strafanzeige gegen Wallenreiter,” *Die Welt*, January 13, 1968, 3.

¹⁹² See newspaper clipping of *Sudetendeutsche Zeitung* Nr. 17, April 25, 1959, 5.

von Auen, a SL adviser warned that there “certainly could be people that would be seriously harmed by the publication,” and that “all political and national enemies would receive a work into their hands that they could thoroughly exploit.”¹⁹³ Some expellee activists such as the nationalist Witiko-Bund were keenly aware of their Nazi baggage, to the point that they went to great efforts to coordinate their stories and construct a history of 1933/38-1945 that belittled their roles.¹⁹⁴ The radicalism and continued fascist ideologies proved so strong even twenty years on, that some activists grew weary and resigned: Franz Höller, a longtime member of the Witiko-Bund, complained in March 1963 to Walter Brand that he “simply has no more desire to stand upright for the idiocies of a few. Who can guarantee me that once again a moron does not stand at the grave of a Witiko member with the Hitler greeting. And the directorate remains silent.” Fearing that the organization was pushing him out, Höller preferred resignation and insults to “swimming in the stream with the die-hards [*Ewiggestrige*].¹⁹⁵

Ultimately, the expellee leadership contained quite a few individuals with a troubling history. This was not just a peculiarity of their associations, however: Many institutions of the Federal Republic faced similar problems.¹⁹⁶ The expellees were not disproportionately more Nazi than the rest of society. Apart from Linus Kather, who in his old age and desire for political relevancy briefly sought out the NPD, no significant collaboration between expellee associations

¹⁹³ BayHStA, SdA-Sprecherregistratur v. Auen 726, Schubert to von Auen, March 20, 1956. The SL cautioned its members to refuse participation and ignore the questionnaires.

¹⁹⁴ See the *Materialien zur sudetendeutschen Zeitgeschichte*, a series of compiled protocols of meetings edited by the Sudetendeutsches Archiv. The materials clearly show a concerted effort to expunge embarrassing or incriminating episodes from the pasts of Sudeten German leaders.

¹⁹⁵ BayHStA, SdA, Nachlass Walter Brand 35, Franz Höller to Walter Brand, March 3, 1963.

¹⁹⁶ Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

and radical rightwing groups developed. Viewing themselves as proponents of a “positive national feeling” that could withstand “Soviet imperialism,” their undoubtedly nationalist tendencies did not equate to a support of National Socialism.¹⁹⁷ The BdV as well regarded itself as the “representative a disciplined, well-understood patriotism” and contributor to “democratic order and a health national feeling.”¹⁹⁸ Responding to criticisms of a pamphlet on the expulsions, a Silesian youth magazine took issue with the reproaches: “Does one doubt that it was like this? Does one not find it appropriate to continuously keep in front of the eyes of the youth the time of Germany’s deepest humility, so as to do in any nationalist idiocy and...contribute to an awakening of real national feeling among our youth?” The Silesian youth sought to ensure that all “learn that LOYALTY, HOMELAND, HONOR, [AND] FATHERLAND are terms that must take root in the heart of every German.”¹⁹⁹

Such rhetoric undoubtedly reveals that the bulk of politically active expellees subscribed to nationalist and culturally conservative values. It also should be noted that it implied that they claimed a monopoly over what it meant to be a “good” German; seeing critics as communist agents and enemies within the ranks hardly suggest a progressive mindsets. Allegations of National Socialist mindsets, however, were gross simplifications, as were denunciations of expellees being nothing more than the “foremost lay brothers of Hitler” possessing a “blatant appetite for vengeance” or using a “collection of quotes from the dictionary of brutes.”²⁰⁰ The

¹⁹⁷ Wenzel Jaksch, “Selbstbestimmung und Wegbestimmung,” *Die Brücke*, September 19, 1959, 2, copy of newspaper clipping in AdsD, NL Jaksch, J5

¹⁹⁸ BArch B106-27361, Vorschau auf die Verbandsarbeit im Jahre 1967, March 1966, 1-2.

¹⁹⁹ *Heimabend* 90, August 1961, 12, newspaper clipping in BArch B106-27372.

²⁰⁰ ACDP 001-291-127/2, Pressemitteilung des BMVt, May 30, 1969.

times changed, the expellee leadership did not: They were “frozen” in the worldview and language of the 1950s. How they would respond would add new layers to “flight and expulsion.”

Conclusion

Starting in the 1950s and gradually accelerating, a variety of political and cultural currents converged which categorically pushed the expellees to the margins of West German politics and society. There simply was no more sympathy for the tactics and demands of a vocal minority. Public figures who dared to go against the associations did not cave to threats of lawsuits or denunciations of engaging in “treason.” Unlike a decade or so before, the media refused to cater to the demands of the expellees, insisting that they could impossibly engage in “common politics” and bend to expellee association demands, as this would violate their professional obligations of impartiality and duty to cover political and cultural currents.²⁰¹

Disinterest in schools among pupils and educators in incorporating the stale recommendations of expellees into lesson plans found backing from left-leaning state governments, so that the German East gradually disappeared from curricula as well.²⁰² In March of 1970, television stations declined to show the German territories on its weather maps. With declining interest due to successful integration, the *Patenschaften* lost significance, as cities forged partnerships with cities in Western European countries.²⁰³ In Berlin, the flags of the German East were unfurled

²⁰¹ AdsD, NL Jaksch, J1, Intendant *Westdeuscherrundfunk* to Ernst Paul, May 6, 1965. See also BArch B150-3345a, Press Release from Radio Bremen, October 14, 1965.

²⁰² Meinhardt, *Deutsche Ostkunde*, 221ff.

²⁰³ Beer, “Patenschaften,” 341.

and taken down from the exposition halls; when expellees protested, organizers cited the fear of storms that could damage the flags.²⁰⁴

In other words, the expellees were losing the struggle over interpreting “flight and expulsion” in the 1960s and 1970s, which would have enormous consequences on its master narrative. No longer able to control or dictate programming in order to propagate their political messages, the expellee organizations lamented what they perceived to be a categorical muzzling and persecution by the “homeless Left...who sit on secure thrones in the radio and TV stations” and who viewed the expellees as “the greatest potential resistance to any alignment with the Ulbricht-system.”²⁰⁵ Public discourse, and particularly the media, were an “impregnable bastion” and “occupation force...probably for all eternity,” Walter Becher lamented in 1968.²⁰⁶ The struggle for “freedom” in the face of ostensible indifference and antipathy produced two strategies of trying to combat the growing irrelevance of the expellee associations, each with their own impulse on “flight and expulsion.”

First, the desperation of feeling overtaken by a competing victimhood discourse centered on the Holocaust fueled a radicalized argumentation and deployment of expulsion narratives that entered into the realm of *Aufrechnung* (“equating”) of the number of German dead against that of other victims, particularly Poles and Jews. Some expellee functionaries disavowed

²⁰⁴ “Furcht vor Sturm,” *Der Spiegel* 51, December 15, 1969, 78.

²⁰⁵ BArch B106-27372 vol.1, “Sitzungsbericht of the Schlesische Landesversammlung, 8. und 9. Plenarsitzung, 25/26 November 1967 in Mainz,” 25.

²⁰⁶ ACDP 001-377-28/5, Becher to Kather, February 29, 1968.

victimhood competition, arguing that Germany's crimes must be acknowledged but that German losses also deserved recognition.²⁰⁷

Nevertheless, the bombastic and tone-deaf proclamations of the 1960s partially intended to respond to and compete with more self-critical interpretations of the recent past that implicitly called into question the expellee victimhood narrative. Demanding on the 30th anniversary of the expulsions that the federal government present to the public a historical study that would document the crimes committed against Germans, Heinrich Windelen (CDU) used the floor of the parliament to thrust German victimhood back into the public discourse.²⁰⁸ Other leaders went so far as to decry discussions of Germany's victims as communist propaganda.²⁰⁹ In either case, the prominence of the Holocaust inspired the expellees to double-down on already discernable tendencies of refashioning their suffering as similar or equal to that of Germany's victims, consciously linking the two fates.²¹⁰ One prominent outcome of these efforts is that the German

²⁰⁷ Herbert Czaja, for instance, was a consistent proponent of openly recognizing Germany's crimes, German victims of violence, as well as aid offered by Eastern Europeans during the flight and expulsion. See ACDP 001-291-131, Vol. 1, press notice of the BdV, March 11, 1975.

²⁰⁸ Hearings of the German Bundestag, 7th Legislative Period, 118th Session, September 25, 1974. Interior Minister Gerhard Baum (FDP) pointed to the already existing *Dokumentation*, but added that discussions of German victimhood were not in the political interest of Germany, as they threatened to open old wounds and undermine the course of reconciliation that the Brandt government had steered. Indeed, the political climate had shifted so dramatically that as early as 1965, the Federal Press Office voiced concerns that the Schieder Kommission's works could raise international objections that the FRG was trying to relativize German war crimes. BArch B145-9873, Memo of Graf Schweinitz, Feb 3, 1965.

²⁰⁹ BdV President Jaksch, decrying that German youth groups were exposed to "one-sided" propaganda during their trips to Czechoslovakia, felt that Prague "exhume[d] the lamentable victims of Lidice and Theresienstadt in order to erase the memory of the victims of communist inhumanity." AdsD, NL Jaksch, J2, Jaksch to Kurt Mattick, Oct 8, 1963.

²¹⁰ This is most clearly demonstrated in the assertions of the chairman of the Sudeten German *Landsmannschaft* Horst Rudolf Übelacker, who argued that the reparation strategies of the "Jewish 'Holocaust victims' [must] be an example for the victims and survivors of the Sudeten German 'Holocaust.'" Übelacker, "Witikobund: Wiedergutmachung für alle—auch für Sudetendeutsche!", *Sudetenpost* Nr. 24, December 17, 1998, 8. Andreas Kelletat speaks of a "Holocausticization of *Flucht und Vertreibung*." See Kelletat, "Von der Täter- zur Opfernation? Die Rückkehr des Themas 'Flucht und Vertreibung' in den deutschen Vergangenheitsdiskurs bei Grass und anderen," www.bohemistik.de/kelletat.html, retrieved October 15, 2015.

death toll, according to many expellee sources more than two million, remains artificially high in order to presumably allow for a more favorable standing in the hierarchy of victims.²¹¹

While the 1960s saw memory politics unwilling to depart from the discourse of the 1950s and even a radicalization, on the other hand an “internationalization” of *Flucht und Vertreibung* developed as well. Whether coinciding commemorations of the expulsions with UN “Human Rights Day” celebrations or increasing PR work and circulation of *Dokumentationen* during the 1965 “International Year of Human Rights,” the Ministry for Expellees and BdV in particular used the affirmative and neutral notions of universal human rights as a means of interjecting the German case into international discussions. The rise of a new regime of human rights prompted the expellee organizations to adopt the rhetoric as a means of dispelling suspicions of particularism.²¹² Arguing based on international conventions established through the Nuremberg Trials or the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights freed expellees from the strictures of contentious histories. Moreover, by increasingly bringing the German experience into relationship with other widely recognized instances of unjust forced migration, such as the Palestinian case, the expellees promised to gain recognition from international institutions and governments who, presumably, would support German territorial demands or restitution claims at a future peace conference.²¹³

²¹¹ For an analysis of why these numbers are inaccurate and politicized, see Ingo Haar, “Die deutschen ‘Vertreibungsverluste’—Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der ‘Dokumentation der Vertreibung,’” in *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch* 35 (2007): 251-272.

²¹² Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); and Lora Wildenthal, *The Language of Human Rights in West Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

²¹³ The Ministry for Expellees regularly sent delegates to international rights conferences and distributed literature to attendees.

Although various legal experts had examined the German case and provided arguments for a *Recht auf Heimat* or “right to homeland” since the 1950s, in the 1970s non-German scholars took note of expellee proposals that their fate represented a violation of human rights to self-determination.²¹⁴ The 1990s Balkan conflicts further brought the issue of forced population transfers into renewed focus of international human rights advocates.²¹⁵ How much these efforts have influenced international standards is demonstrated by the fact that José Ayala Lasso, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, has visited and spoken at several expellee commemoration events. Though they have not led to a concrete return of the *Heimat*, the international acknowledgements have at the very least granted the expellees a modicum of social recognition of their plight, as well as allowed them to cite these sources in their argumentation for their demands.²¹⁶

The decline of “flight and expulsion” added new facets to its narrative, which will be reexamined in the conclusion of this dissertation. First, the more critical West German discourse substantially influenced popular memory of the forced migrations and the German East, displacing it to the point that it today only vaguely lingers. German youths have little comprehension or knowledge of this chapter of history. Additionally, the widespread assumption

²¹⁴ See Alfred De Zayas, “International Law and Mass Population Transfers,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 16 (1975): 207–258; Felix Ermacora, *International Human Rights: Documents and Introductory Notes* (Vienna: Law Books in Europe, 1993); and Dieter Blumenwitz, *Internationale Schutzmechanismen zur Durchsetzung von Minderheiten- und Volksgruppenrechten* (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1997).

²¹⁵ Alfred De Zayas, “The Right to One’s Homeland, Ethnic Cleansing and the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia,” *Criminal Law Forum* (1995): 257–314; Alfred de Zayas, an American lawyer and high-ranking UN official specializing in international law, has for decades compared the experience of Germans to modern postwar forced migrations. His often polemical research on the expulsions, however, have not gone without criticism. Alfred de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006). De Zayas has enjoyed a good relationship with expellee leaders and the BdV, and ranks as one of their greatest Anglo-American supporters.

²¹⁶ See for instance the BdV’s digital guidebook to the temporary exhibit, “Angekommen.” www.ausstellungangekommen.de/index.php?id=46, accessed September 28, 2015.

that expellees are revanchists and Nazis left an indelible mark on how Germans see expellees. Evoking feelings of suspicion and apprehension, few associate positive qualities with the associations. While certainly the frozen rhetoric of the 1950s, which for the most part did not fade until the 2000s if at all, did little to assuage these prejudices, the over-simplification has its roots in the critical reporting of the 1960s and 1970s and displacement of “flight and expulsion” from the center of West German public discourse.

Secondly, even in a position of weakness the expellee leadership still managed to influence cultural memory, in part because of their virtually complete colonization of discussions over the forced migrations in the 1950s. In their struggle for relevance, they also managed to add new layers to “flight and expulsion.” In their siege mentality and losing battle to steer the conversation onto their terrain, they developed the notion of a “taboo” that they frequently deployed in public debates both to explain their own ineffectiveness to themselves and their constituency. The world would not listen because of missteps or faults of the leadership, but because expellees were the whipping boy of history and an indifferent domestic and international audience.²¹⁷ Moreover, the proposition of an overt silencing of their voices propped up their sense of martyrdom and victimhood, providing invaluable cultural capital in some circles.²¹⁸ Furthermore, the attempts of internationalizing “flight and expulsion” laid important groundwork for discussions of forced migration globally in the 21st century.

The institutionalization efforts of the expellee associations ultimately failed to achieve their goals, though this does not mean that they remained without impact. The flurry of activity

²¹⁷ See Hans-Jürgen Gaida, *Die offiziellen Organe der ostdeutschen Landsmannschaften: ein Beitrag zur Publizistik der Heimatvertriebenen in Deutschland*. (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1973), 254.

²¹⁸ Martin Sabrow and Norbert Frei, *Die Geburt des Zeitzeugen nach 1945* (Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: Wallstein Verlag GmbH, 2012).

at the height of their power meant that certain tropes and images imbedded themselves firmly into the consciousness of West Germans. There can be no denying, however, that the ascendancy of the *Landsmannschaften* was brief. Despite declarations to the contrary, after 1970 the self-appointed leadership spoke for and to a small minority, and indulged in wishful thinking that their continued fight for the return of the German East would bear fruit. Their argumentations stagnated: For all of its dynamism in earlier periods, the expellees institutionalized a narrative rooted in the anticommunism of the Federal Republic and unwilling to adapt. When West Germany changed, the monuments, school books, and marches reflected a cause out of step with the rest of society unable to decipher or relate to the political messages.

For the majority of the victims of the forced migrations not too punch-drunk from the promises of their leadership, memories was all that remained. The only meaningful pieces of the institutionalization campaigns for them was the “virtual Heimat” of the mind or which could be constituted between kin. The homeland books, the museums, the fleeting moments at festivals, or nostalgic novels of childhoods in East Prussia were a remnant of a lost world that could briefly be revisited in a daydream or an afternoon of celebration with family and friends. Melancholy and wistful whiling away in an idyllic *Heimat* increasingly marked memories of the German East. They held on to these recollections dearly because they were comforting, and because it “is the only paradise we can’t be expelled from.”²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Quoted in Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 14.

EPILOGUE

During my research of this dissertation, I took an afternoon off from the archives to visit the *Haus der Geschichte* (“House of History”), the massive museum of the history of the Federal Republic located in the former capital of Bonn.¹ When it opened its doors in 1994, one of the first things that confronted visitors was a video depicting treks crossing the frozen Vistula Lagoon and navigating icy roads as they fled the encroaching Red Army. The implication seemed that “postwar German history begins not with Auschwitz or even with Adenauer, but with the expulsion of Germans.”² Be that as it may, expellees featured prominently in the narrative of a CDU-governed Federal Republic. Today, one first must walk past images and videos of the collapse of the Third Reich and the Holocaust before one encounters newsreels of children searching for parents, a handcart, or reconstructed barracks telling the story of “flight and expulsion.”

The rearrangement makes greater chronological sense than the 1994 exhibit, but also symbolizes contemporary German cultural memory of “flight and expulsion”: It is no longer a central pillar of political identity and prominent subject of discourse, nor is it a taboo that is shrouded in silence. It does, however, rank behind the Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust in German historical memory, and often holds little meaning for a generation raised without the

¹ Peter Reichel, *Politik mit Erinnerung Gedächtnisorte mit Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verl., 1999), 249–52.

² Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 194.

German East as a dominant topic of conversation. Standing before a map of the German East, a teenager asked his perplexed mother what all those territories were. The fact that they both had trouble finding Hessen may say more about their geographic knowledge than their historical awareness, but it doesn't change the fact that the Königsberg and Breslau, East Prussia and Silesia are obscure, faint memories that few outside of a rapidly dwindling proportion of the population can relate to.

Much of this hinges upon the crucial year of 1970, which marks the end of this dissertation's chronology. The recognition of the borders effectively ended the dreams of returning to the homeland and hamstrung the relevance and influence of the expellee associations. Ending the study in 1970 also makes sense not only because it marked a period of decline, but because the expellee associations' rhetoric and worldview remained largely stagnant and did not fundamentally change, even as the political and cultural climate transformed dramatically.³ The last chapter of this dissertation examined the emergence of a discourse focused on German guilt, which reached its apex in the 1980s, as the prime catalyst for the marginalization of expellee memory. Yet it is worthwhile to briefly examine trends afterward in order to complete the trajectory of this constant fixture of collective memory from the Third Reich, through the Cold War and into the Berlin Republic. After all, memories of the forced migration continue to resonate, albeit in ambivalent forms. Yet expellees no longer control the debate over the expulsions, as developments beyond their control dictated this master narrative of "flight and expulsion," and its place in German public memory.

³ One must only glance through the writings of the controversial former president of the Federation of Expellees (BdV), Erika Steinbach, to see that romanticized histories stretching from the Middle Ages to the injustices of 1945, through to a remarkable recovery and willingness to integrate still hold sway in the expellee milieu. Erika Steinbach, *Die Macht der Erinnerung* (München: Universitas, 2011).

Not that they didn't try to counteract this decline. Since Willy Brandt's "betrayal," as we have seen, expellee associations aspired to reverse the political course, or at the very least maintain their moral and legal claims in the hope for a sudden reversal of fortune. After all, *Neue Ostpolitik* did not culminate in a peace treaty, therefore allowing unrealistic yet nevertheless technically legitimate convictions to survive that the German East was not yet lost forever. Many expellee elites believed that the 1982 election of Helmut Kohl and more conservative government portended better prospects for their concerns. Kohl's greater sensitivity to the expellees, who comprised an important part of his base, gave expellee associations reason to hope that a renaissance was at hand. It was during the 1970s and 1980s that the CDU/CSU built its reputation as the party of the expellees, predominantly because it publically opposed the foreign policy of Willy Brandt. With "their" man now at the helm, the Christian Democratic chancellor reignited dreams of a Germany reunited within its 1937 borders.

The expellee associations' narrative of "flight and expulsion" received another chance with Kohl's vocal desire for a more affirmative German history, particularly for those who enjoyed the "mercy of a late birth" that exculpated them from guilt for Nazism.⁴ This dovetailed with calls from conservative historians concerned that an overly self-critical discourse reduced the nation's past to Hitler and twelve years of Nazi dictatorship.⁵ The *Historikerstreit* ("historians' debate"), a fiery intellectual dispute over how to interpret and recall the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, may have unfolded in the ivory towers of academia, but nevertheless reflected West German society's ambivalence over this history. It was a past that refused to pass,

⁴ The remark, uttered in Jerusalem in January 1984 before the Knesset, sparked indignation among those who interpreted it as an exoneration of Kohl's generation.

⁵ Charles S Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

the conservative historian Ernst Nolte bemoaned. Nolte's ally in the debate, Andreas Hillgruber, suggested a moral equivalency between the victors' treatment of the defeated Reich and Germany's genocidal policies. In a series of essays on "two sorts of demise," Hillgruber interpreted the expulsions and Holocaust as two catastrophes, two disasters caused by political extremism different only in degree.⁶

The point is that there remained a significant proportion of the public that did not subscribe to the changes in West German memorial culture and historical memory that emerged in the last decades, and who now vocalized their disenchantment. Since the revolt of the "68ers" and era of social-liberal politics, conservatives lamented that the pendulum swung too dramatically to the left: There was inadequate space for German victims, too much belaboring of German guilt and crimes. Desires for a "normal" history complemented West Germany's assertiveness and confidence on the international stage as well: With a booming economy and respectable "Made in West Germany" brand, successful soccer team, and key role in NATO policy and Pershing II deployment, did Germans not deserve to escape Hitler's shadow after four decades? Indeed, Kohl exerted the FRG's soft power to influence perceptions of the Holocaust abroad, for fear that negative depictions could harm West Germany's image and reputation.⁷ The promised correcting course in public memory was music to the ears of the expellee associations, who eagerly awaited to once again take center stage in the nation's history.

⁶ Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* (Berlin: W.J. Siedler, 1986). What interested Hillgruber the most is clear in the uneven treatment of the two "demises," as the historian provided greater detail on the expulsions. As Charles Maier noted: "If indeed these two experiences are two sorts of destruction, one is presented, so to speak, in technicolor, the other in black, gray, and white." Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 23.

⁷ Jacob S Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory since the 1970s*, 2016.

A series of political gaffes from Kohl, however, dispelled hopes for a return to an era of public memory more favorable to expellees. The first blunder occurred in the spring of 1985 during a visit from President Ronald Reagan to West Germany. Marking the 40th anniversary of the end of the war, Kohl and Reagan started a day of commemoration at the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, ending with a ceremony at a military cemetery in nearby Bitburg. The West German chancellor called for the remembrance of “infinite suffering that the war and totalitarianism inflicted upon nations,” while the American head of state opined that the German graves held “victims of Nazism also.” “They were victims,” Reagan added, “just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps.”⁸ The chancellor’s hapless attempts of bringing German victims prominently back into memories of the war may have struck a chord with those who saw May 8 as a painful reminder of national humiliation, cataclysmic defeat, and the start of unspeakable injustice and suffering. Yet the equating of German and Jewish suffering, before the graves that contained SS personnel no less, sparked outrage in the United States and West Germany, even as it reflected the historical understanding of some expellees and conservative West Germans who failed to see the fundamental difference between these two fates.

The Bitburg fiasco unfolded parallel to yet another controversy that spring. Although he regularly attended homeland gatherings in order to signal that the expellees were not excluded from West German society and politics, Kohl suddenly withdrew his planned participation at the June 1985 Silesian *Heimattreffen* in Hanover.⁹ The impetus was that year’s motto: “40 Years of Expulsion—Silesia Remains Ours.” Nationalist rhetoric in Silesian papers and the unwillingness

⁸ Quoted in Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 256; Hartman, 240.

⁹ “Unsere Schlesier,” *Die Zeit*, January 4, 1985, <https://www.zeit.de/1985/02/unsere-schlesier>.

of expellee leaders to moderate their tone demonstrated an “irresponsible, damaging and fatuous” attitude, a spokesman for Kohl lamented. The chancellor could only be persuaded to speak before the anticipated 100,000 attendees after the adoption of a new slogan, “Silesia Remains our Future in a Europe of Free Peoples.”¹⁰ Despite assurances from the Silesian Association that they would tone down their rhetoric, participants at the gathering raised banners with the original slogan at the moment that Chancellor Kohl took to the podium.

The controversy surrounding the Hanover homeland gathering reiterated the already noted downward trend of expellee association standing. The debate refocused attention on the associations, who *Der Spiegel* noted continued to “wallow up until now, mostly unnoticed by the public, in pan-German dreams.”¹¹ By 1985, 76% of West Germans—including a slim majority of expellees—had accepted the Oder-Neisse border. Most rejected the 1985 motto of the Silesians, and felt that it harmed the reputation of West Germany; 65% agreed with Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher’s assessment that a “handful of expellee functionaries are playing fast and loose with the peace-politics of the Federal Republic.”¹² As had already become clear decades earlier, the purpose and politics of the expellee leadership seemed hopelessly anachronistic and out of step with the views of most of the rest of the population.

¹⁰ “Breslauer Nachrichten,” *Der Spiegel* 5, January 28, 1985, 21-22. Despite this, leading Silesian expellee leaders adamantly explained that the new motto did not negate the original slogan, and that Silesia remained German territory.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² “Schindluder mit der Friedenspolitik,” *Der Spiegel* 6, February 4, 1985, 93-94. Interestingly, 60% agreed that Kohl should participate in the gathering. Of those who rejected the original slogan, only 52% agreed outright that it was categorically inappropriate; 15% felt it accurate, while 33% agreed that it was “correct, but unclear.” 84% felt that the children of expellees could not be regarded as expellees themselves, and a majority agreed that the opinions of the associations differed from the ordinary rank and file. All of this suggested a rejection of the logic of the associations and their politics, and a dramatic shift on accepting the expulsions: In 1951, for instance, only 8% accepted the borders.

Kohl's imbroglios at Bitburg and Hanover underlined that the shifts in West German public memory, which placed a recognition of the Nazi past and Germany's victims at the center, could not be reversed or ignored. Yet while Kohl reaped backlash, President Richard von Weizsäcker's May 8, 1985 speech in the German Bundestag offered a competing narrative that received acclaim: "[T]he 8th of May was a day of liberation. It liberated all of us from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National-Socialist regime." While he explicitly acknowledged expellee suffering and praised their willingness to peacefully integrate, Weizsäcker chided the public to not regard the "end of the war as the cause of flight, expulsion and deprivation of freedom," reminding them that one could not "separate 8 May 1945 from 30 January 1933." Above all, the president cautioned against an equation of suffering: "Can we really place ourselves in the position of...the victims of the Warsaw ghetto or of the Lidice massacre?"¹³ The nuanced speech did not deny German misery, but contextualized it in a genocidal war unleashed by Germany. While the cruelty of the conflict affected millions of innocent Europeans, Weizsäcker carefully distinguished between the fate of the gas chamber and trek, and noted the fundamental differences and root causes of those horrors as well as Germany's duty to acknowledge its responsibility in that history.

Richard von Weizsäcker interpretation of contemporary history reflected an attitude toward the past within the Federal Republic that grew in resonance in 1970, and would prove dominant by the 1980s. "Flight and expulsion" did not disappear entirely from public discourse, but the expellee associations could no longer command the discourse. In 1981, the three-part documentary *Flucht und Vertreibung* attempted to "show how it was," in the words of the producers, and address a subject that was "as good as taboo" and mired in misunderstanding due

¹³ Hartman, *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, 263ff.

to “our lack of historical consciousness”.¹⁴ Expellee leaders bemoaned “shortcomings,” but generally praised the “first large-scale attempt” to shed light on this “hitherto neglected topic.”¹⁵ In 1984, the voluminous *Dokumentation der Vertreibung* appeared in inexpensive paperback form. The historian Gotthold Rhode praised the compendium as a necessary “voice of those...whose time of suffering only really began once the weapons were silenced,” and which the nation needed to hear as it approached the 40th anniversary of the war’s end.¹⁶ Lastly, a 1987 miniseries based on Arno Surminski’s *Jokennen* dramatized “flight and expulsion,” emulating the style of the 1979 American program *The Holocaust* that had confronted shocked German audiences with the genocide and individual faces of that horror.¹⁷

This period also saw a number of celebrated novels and semi-biographical works that engaged with the German East, yet in a manner different from the expellee associations. For instance, Siegfried Lenz’s 1978 bestseller *Heimatmuseum* (“The Heritage”) shot a broadside against the monopoly over the homeland that radical expellee factions claimed: The protagonist, fearing that association functionaries were attempting to take control of his museum and take advantage of it for their nefarious political purposes, burns the shrine to his beloved Warmia to

¹⁴ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 182. The series consisted of three parts. Part one, “Inferno in the East,” focused on the prehistory going back to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and culminated in the “treks of misery.” Part two, “The Disenfranchised,” concentrated on the Treaty of Versailles and the “fate of those Germans who did not flee or could not flee: Internment, such as for example in the notorious Lambsdorf [sic] camp, deportation for forced labor, wild exploitation.” The last part, “Between Foreign Land and Homeland,” looked at the “‘orderly’ expulsion” and integration of the expellees. Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP) 001-168-018/2, Press release of CHRONOS-FILM, February 2, 1981.

¹⁵ ACDP 001-168-018/2, Form letter of Stingl, March 1981.

¹⁶ Gotthold Rhode, “Das Leid der Vertreibung. Zum Neudruck einer Dokumentation,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 14, 1985, 27.

¹⁷ Arno Surminski, *Jokennen: oder Wie lange fährt man von Ostpreußen nach Deutschland?* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1976).

the ground.¹⁸ Lenz's writings movingly preserved the world of his childhood, and forged an unideological concept of *Heimat* that allowed for an engagement with the German East without navigating the precarious memory politics of the homeland associations.

He was not alone: Günter Grass, Horst Bienek, and Marion Dönhoff similarly conserved a nostalgic homeland and critically engaged with the Nazi past without indulging in angry calls for restitution or amends.¹⁹ Grass, Lenz, and Dönhoff also supported Willy Brandt's politics, even if it came at the expense of their beloved homeland. These authors, despite clear affection for their roots and a tinge of melancholy, rejected the radicalism of the expellee organizations, thereby engaging in a "very different kind of memorializing of the German east...outside the official organizations."²⁰ Their coming to terms with their own pasts and moving farewell of the *Heimat* reflected the turn toward introspection that West Germany underwent as a whole, acting as a counter-narrative to the "flight and expulsion" constructed by the expellee associations.

Despite several prominent iterations of "flight and expulsion" and a more sympathetic political administration, the 1980s did not see a resurgence of the expellee associations or their interpretations. Not only did the expellees' special status evaporate, it failed its ultimate purpose of underpinning an argument for a return of the homeland: However sympathetic Kohl may have been to the expellee organizations, the Christian Democratic chancellor continued Brandt's

¹⁸ Siegfried Lenz, *Heimatmuseum* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1978).

¹⁹ Günter Grass, *Die Blechtrommel* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1959); Günter Grass, *Katz und Maus* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1961); Günter Grass, *Hundejahre* (Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand, 1963); Horst Bienek, *Die Erste Polka* (München: Hanser, 1975); Horst Bienek, *Septemberlicht* (München: Hanser, 1977); Horst Bienek, *Zeit ohne Glocken* (München: Hanser, 1979); Horst Bienek, *Erde und Feuer* (München: Hanser Verlag, 1982); Marion Dönhoff, *Namen, die keiner mehr nennt: Ostpreußen - Menschen u. Geschichte.* (München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl., 1989).

²⁰ David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 314.

course of *Neue Ostpolitik*. In a demonstrative move during a visit to Poland in November 1989 just days after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Chancellor Kohl and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki signed a joint declaration embedding the future relationship of the two nations in the context of European integration. The dominant tone of the talks was one of reconciliation and finding common ground in a post-communist Europe. An image of the heads of state embracing powerfully signaled the desire for mutual understanding, as did their attendance of a bilingual mass on the property of the Kreisau estate of the von Moltke family, located in Lower Silesia.²¹ The talks thereby not only revealed the desired shape of the future of the continent, the summit and its venue suggested that the FRG departed from its homeland politics policy.

The scenes of cooperation understandably alarmed expellee leaders and adherents unwilling to write off their legal and moral claims. Some expellees believed that a prosperous West Germany could “buy back” the land, as an elderly expellee explained in 1988: “Silesia will one day be opened as a developing nation, when it is depopulated. When it is some day run down economically, as one today already sees. Many don’t know how to continue and try to flee. It will get to the point that...Germans and others can once again go back—a new colonization.”²² Others clung to the “option of the land once again belonging to you,” as a daughter asked her father. “You don’t want to ever give up the land,” she asked, even “if your children...don’t daydream about this option?” Admitting that a “restauration will never come into question,

²¹ Marcin Zaborowski, *Germany, Poland and Europe : Conflict, Cooperation and Europeanization* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 93. The last inhabitant, Helmuth James Graf von Moltke, was executed by the Nazi regime in January of 1945 for treason. The reconciliation talks between Kohl and Mazowiecki resolved to restore the property as an international youth center. Financed by the “Foundation for German-Polish Cooperation,” the center opened in 1998. The site today hosts as a meeting and reconciliation center, but also supports the building of memorials to the common cultural heritage and history of the two nations, as well as supporting projects that foster dialogue and the renovation and preservation of historic sites throughout Poland.

²² Quoted in Albrecht Lehmann, “Flüchtlingserinnerungen Im Erzählen Zwischen Den Generationen,” *BIOS-Zeitschrift Für Biographieforschung Und Oral History* 2, no. 2 (1989): 204.

nothing good will come of it,” the father nevertheless held out hope that “Poland will one day get a Marshall Plan, it could very well be that they then need the cooperation of the German neighbors. The Germans could absolutely play a role in the case of European cooperation.”²³

Yet by the end of the 1980s, only a handful of radicals continued to lay a claim to the physical German East. “Where are Pomerania and East Prussia,” a group of West German students travelling through the region asked in 1981. “Now we are here, and we know where they lay: they lay where our *Volk* is missing land.” Without personal or familial connections to the territories, and inspired by guidebooks that romanticized the German East’s past, the youths entertained alarming fantasies: “*We ourselves* are the ones affected, because this is *our* property. One of *us* could live here....*We ourselves* were expelled from here.”²⁴ Progressives were ready to attribute such revanchist sentiments to all those who dreamed of the German East, yet in reality they were a minority opinion. While expellee organizations continued to expound upon a “right to a homeland,” most understood the slogan as a symbolic demand for recognition of suffering.

In short, the expulsions remained a memory of the war among many others. No amount of lip service from conservatives could stake out a continued privileged position in the cultural memory of West Germany: Nazi dictatorship and barbarism and the Holocaust—as we have seen—eclipsed the forced migrations in media discourse, public commemoration, and education. German victimhood no longer provided the political influence that it did in previous decades. The historical perspectives of West Germans who came of age in this era differed significantly from their elders. In fact, it transformed into a toxic legacy for many progressives disenchanted

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Quoted in Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945-1970*, Reprint edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

by the associations' blatant nationalism and anachronistic rhetoric. The journalist Petra Reski (b. 1958)—daughter of Silesian and East Prussian expellees—recalled how she viewed the homeland organizations during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Correcting her grandmother's use of Danzig instead of Gdąnsk, the young Reski made a solemn vow:

“This was part of my battle against the revanchists: I regarded everyone who said Danzig as a clandestine *Heim-ins-Reich* German, everyone who forgot to include the word ‘former’ in front of East Prussia was an incorrigible *Deuthscland-Deutschland-über-alles* German for me. After all, they had started the war, and so it seemed only just that they had to leave their homes.”²⁵

Similarly, Silke Kleemann (b. 1976), also the granddaughter of Silesians, found the expellee milieu “always foreign, even suspect.” The “alienating snippets of conversation” she overheard left a horrifying impression: “Revisionism, no thank you.” That history “unequivocally belonged in the past, a bad past...connected with Germany as the guilty party for the war. Nothing that one could be proud of; nothing that I wanted to identify with.”²⁶

When the sudden collapse of communism presented the opportunity for German reunification of some form, the Kohl government also did not insist upon revisionism and Germany's borders of 1937. Instead, dropping maximalist claims for a reunion with 17 million citizens of the GDR seemed the more favorable course. The “Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany” paved the way for overcoming decades of division, yet a key provision entailed an acceptance of the post-1945 borders and rescinding of territorial claims beyond the Oder-Neisse River. The “2+4 Agreement” categorically ended the political rationale of the

²⁵ Petra Reski, *Ein Land so weit. Ostpreussische Erinnerungen* (München: List, 2000), 23–24.

²⁶ Silke Kleemann, “Flucht: Heimat ist, was fehlt,” *Die Zeit*, November 15, 2017, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2017-11/flucht-trauma-fluechtlingskrise-schlesien-heimat-breslau-10nach8?fbclid=IwAR3NAvfx30xtVel39_q325lqI10z-15xX_FH_X85zIWY_51MA2rV2YfCViY.

associations, who up until 1990 could cling to legal technicalities to maintain their claims to the German East.

On October 3, 1990—the day the two Germanys officially joined—*Die Welt* noted that while Bonn celebrated, a solitary desk lamp shone on the desk of parliamentarian and president of the Federation of Expellees, Herbert Czaja, in an otherwise darkened parliamentary office building. “No, I am not celebrating,” Czaja explained. “I share the contemplative joys over the achieved progress, but I cannot manage wild elation. Today is a not only a day of joy, but also sorrow and farewell.”²⁷ While many West and East Germans euphorically celebrated the end of bitter division, Czaja worked late into the night to calm fears and anger expressed in the mountain of letters piling up on his desk. Filled with “strong contradictions, with indignation,” the mail also contained “incredibly moving letters, words of grief and deep resignation.”

Whereas Czaja decried the “dangerous” tendency of shrouding the German East in a “taboo,” most of his constituents, as we have seen, already anticipated what came to pass in 1990 decades earlier. The political course had little bearing on the “virtual Heimat” that expellees with a living memory of the lost homeland resided in. Their notion of “homeland” did not fixate on a physical place, but like most expellees arose in communion with their brethren, the familiarity of traditions, and freedom to commemorate and mourn.

The Return of the Suppressed?

The first key factor that impacted the discourse manifested itself in the fall of communism and the rapid German reunification itself. Western and German leftist observers

²⁷ “Bei den Vertriebenen blieben die Lichter aus,” *Die Welt*, October 4, 1990, clipping in ACDP CDU Pressearchiv 10-9. Czaja felt it particularly bitter that numerous politicians within the CDU now “suddenly celebrate German unity, when in the previous year they still vehemently backed the maintaining of status quo.”

expressed initial skepticism and even fear of a united Germany that may once again tread the path of dangerous nationalism.²⁸ A spate of xenophobic attacks and debates over asylum policy fanned fears that Nazi specters were returning in force. As a whole however, the peaceful joining of West and East Germany and emergence of the Federal Republic as a staunch proponent of European cooperation proved alarmists incorrect.

The challenge that reunification posed to post-1990 German identity was not so straightforward. Triumphalist rhetoric and domineering West German attitudes left East Germans feeling that reunification was not so much a joining as an annexation, famously creating a “wall in the head” that generates a perpetual *Ossi* versus *Wessi* conflict to this day. Yet an equal issue was that reunification “offered a return to and an escape from history,” where the “debate about the legitimacy and form of unity was saturated with references to the past.”²⁹ Many conservatives breathed a sigh of relief that the overcoming of the painful decades-long division could produce a “normal” European nation-state, with a “normal” and more positive history that did not center on National Socialism. In this reading, 1990 represented an overcoming of the burdens of war, and seemingly drew a line under the consequences of the Nazi dictatorship. The reunified nation required and deserved a new historical narrative.

How the Federal Republic envisioned its story could be seen in the *Haus der Geschichte*. Expellees featured prominently in memories of wartime suffering, but also in the narrative of the Federal Republic, which according to the *Haus der Geschichte* resembled a long and arduous tale of overcoming adversity and transforming into a normal, prosperous democracy. Indeed, this

²⁸ On reunification and responses to it, see Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

²⁹ Jarausch, 182.

reading shaped the narrative of “flight and expulsion,” as the expellees exemplified the success story of the Federal Republic: Overcoming insurmountable misery and through hard work and willingness to forge a new future, the millions of displaced evolved into a celebrated symbol of postwar German history.³⁰

Secondly, a series of political developments after 1990 significantly impacted “flight and expulsion.” Whereas the collapse of communism unfolded bloodlessly in most of Europe, the breakup of Yugoslavia unleashed a series of conflicts which plagued the Balkans for most of the 1990s. Reports of massacres such as Srebrenica and newsreel footage of refugees fleeing or standing behind barbed wire outraged the world and evoked memories of the Second World War. Scholars coined a new term, “ethnic cleansing,” to describe the orchestrated violence intended to drive populations from their ancestral homes. The provocative scholar Götz Aly noted the problematic legacy of population transfers exhibited in 1918, 1923, and 1945.³¹ The Balkans were the latest instance of the ostensible rational calculations intended to solve “minority problems,” but which in fact revealed the horrific and frequently deadly implications of ethnically homogenous nation-states pursued not just by National Socialists, but liberal democracies as well. While expellee literature noted similarities between their fate and other instances of population transfer, academics now readily accepted placing forced migration into the larger context of nationalism and state-building efforts.³² This historicizing of ethnic

³⁰ See for instance the glowing praise in the introductions of the 2011 exhibit book, Katharina Klotz and Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, *Angekommen die Integration der Vertriebenen in Deutschland* (Potsdam: Brandenburgische Universitätsdruckerei und Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011).

³¹ Götz Aly, “Dafür Wird Die Welt Büßen. ‘Ethnische Säuberungen’, Ein Europäischer Irrweg,” in *Rasse Und Klasse. Nachforschungen Zum Deutschen Wesen*, by Götz Aly (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003), 28–41. The article initially appeared in May 1995 in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

³² Norman M. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); Philipp Ther, *Die dunkle Seite der*

cleansing and expulsion promised to eliminate German particularism, and created a larger space to soberly contemplate “flight and expulsion.”

While human rights abuses in Europe’s backyard opened a new perspective on forced migration, the expansion of the European Union also engendered a rethinking of the expulsions. The fall of the Soviet Union returned the Eastern Bloc to the mental geography of Western Europeans and suddenly created the prospect that the contested territories could return to the EU. On one level, a growing number of Germans got to know their Eastern neighbors and rediscovered cities and landscapes locked away behind the Iron Curtain. The re-centering of Germany on the continent rekindled for some Germans an appreciation for territories intimately tied to a common Central European history. Here, collaborative research between German and Polish or Czech scholars helped pave the way for the political project of seeking a reconciliatory shared history.³³

Expellees played a role in this process. They had long billed themselves as the “bridge builders” to Eastern Europe.³⁴ The President of the Federation of the Expellees (BdV), Erika Steinbach, resurrected notions of expellee “intercultural competence” that would play a vital role: Their “eight hundred year old cultural experiences of living beside and with their Slavic, Magyar, Baltic or Romanian neighbors” provided a supposed the framework for the future of

Nationalstaaten: Ethnische Säuberungen im modernen Europa (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011); Michael Schwartz, *Ethnische “Säuberungen” in der Moderne: globale Wechselwirkungen nationalistischer und rassistischer Gewaltpolitik im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013).

³³ See for example Włodzimierz Borodziej and Hans Lemberg, eds, “*Unsere Heimat ist uns ein fremdes Land geworden...*” *Die deutschen östlich von Oder und Neiße 1945-1950: Dokumente aus polnischen Archiven*, 4 volumes (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2004); and Rafał Eysymontt, Thomas Urban, and Dorothea Nitsche, *Breslau: im Luftbild der Zwischenkriegszeit : aus den Sammlungen des Herder-Instituts Marburg* (Marburg; Wrocław: Herder-Institut ; Wydawnictwo Via Nova, 2008).

³⁴ ACDP 07-001-3440, Bulletin Nr. 133, “Ein ungeteiltes Schlesien in einem freien Deutschland!” (21 July 1954), p 1203-4.

European cooperation.³⁵ However fanciful, expellee associations since 1970 and increasingly after 1990 provided the lion's share of financial contributions to restore landmarks in their old homelands, and in the process cultivated contacts to the local population.³⁶ European integration entailed political and economic cooperation, but also mutual understanding. West German politicians therefore praised expellees as the means for which to build relationships with the Federal Republic's eastern neighbors, and insisted upon a wrestling of the past that would uncover shared histories: Not just violence and barbarism, but the rediscovery of centuries of cultural exchange, constituted a major aspect of "EU thinking."

The Balkan conflict and European Union expansion permitted a Europeanization of "flight and expulsion" that the expellee associations attempted to sell since the 1960s. This internationalizing discourse steered "flight and expulsion" onto more neutral ground, allowing for a contemplation of expellee suffering but at the same time significantly blunting revanchist sentiments. Taken together with the desire for a new historical narrative since 1990, these currents permitted a third major influence on the narrative of "flight and expulsion," which in turn reinforced the impact of the first two trends: A series of "memory booms" that "rediscovered" the forced migrations.

Part of the interest can be attributed to a general phenomenon, not limited to Germany, of recognizing the eyewitness and victim as an important actor with immense social capital.³⁷ Yet

³⁵ Klotz and Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, *Angekommen die Integration der Vertriebenen in Deutschland*, 10–11. Steinbach also somewhat curiously noted that the expellees' "frequent multilingualism" made Germany into a diverse nation that found no parallels in "any other Western industrialized state." Ibid.

³⁶ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 275.

³⁷ See Martin Sabrow, "Heroismus und Viktimismus. Überlegungen zum deutschen Opferdiskurs in historischer Perspektive," *Potsdamer Bulletin für Zeithistorische Studien* 43/44 (2008): 7–20. See also Martin Sabrow, "'Erinnerung' und 'Aufarbeitung' – zwei Leitbegriffe deutscher Geschichtskultur in der Gegenwart," *psychozial* 31, no. 114 (2008): 89–97.

the specific context of 1990s Germany—the affirming moment of reunification and apparent mastering of the past and approaching 50th anniversary of the end of the war—invited Germans to openly address their traumas, supposedly for the first time. Interviews, articles, and exhortations to guard “against forgetting” saturated the German press.³⁸ The nation discovered a “desire for remembering” what ordinary Germans experienced during the war.³⁹ Unlike previous waves of recalling in 1955 or even 1965, however, the voices and faces of Germany’s victims were not forgotten or marginalized. Addressing the *Bundestag* in the first session of a reunified Germany in October 1990, Helmut Kohl warned that Germans should not “suppress the dark chapters” of history or “forget, push aside or trivialize...crimes perpetrated by German hands.”⁴⁰

Unlike the 1950s, therefore, public memory did not privilege German suffering over that of others. Nevertheless, Kohl suggested an inclusion of Germans in the pantheon of victims of the war and totalitarianism. When the chancellor opened the first session of a unified *Bundestag*, he called for a moment of silence to honor the victims of Nazism before calling for the same measure for victims of communism.⁴¹ The solemn moment revealed a widespread view: There seemed ample room to include innocent Germans in the struggle to never forget.

³⁸ “8. Mai 945—Gegen das Vergessen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, April 27, 1995, 3.

³⁹ “Kriegsende: Lust am Erinnern,” *Der Spiegel* 17, April 24, 1995, 18-21. The article gave a short overview of the selective memory of the Federal Republic, and evaluated the sudden memory boom and fascination of both old and young Germans to engage with the past. See also Kinzer, “Confronting the Past, Germans Now Don’t Flinch,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1995, 6.

⁴⁰ German Bundestag, 11/228, October 4, 1990, 18020. Kohl was unequivocal: “Ladies and gentlemen, when we acknowledge all parts of our German history, then we also do not want to suppress its dark chapters. One may never forget, push aside or trivialize those crimes perpetrated by German hand in this century, which caused suffering of people and nations. In carrying this burden of history together we demonstrate ourselves also worthy of the shared liberty. We owe it to the victims to keep the memory of the darkest chapter of our history alive. We owe it above all to the victims of the Holocaust, the unprecedented genocide of the European Jews.” Ibid.

⁴¹ James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 25.

A clear expression of this can be seen in the “Central Memorial of the Federal Republic for the Victims of War and Dictatorship,” located in the guardhouse on Berlin’s Unter den Linden and opened in 1993.⁴² The rather simple space and moving Käthe Kollwitz sculpture of a grieving mother holding her dead son sought to honor all civilian dead. Yet some critics questioned whether the central expression of German memory should “insist on mourning collective fates,” and include German victims alongside victims of Nazi terror.⁴³ The memorial’s inscription lists the “innocent who lost their lives as a result of war in their homeland, in captivity and through expulsion” above the “millions of Jews” or those murdered for their “origin, homosexuality, sickness or infirmity.” By proposing that the majority of those who lived through the conflict were equal victims of Nazism, the official central memorial of the Federal Republic allocated a prominent space within the cultural memory of the reunited nation.

Desires to expound upon what Germans endured found reflection on the silver screen as well. The 1992 *BeFreier und Befreite* (“Liberators Take Liberties”) dramatically addressed the experience of rape at the hands of Soviet soldiers in the final weeks of the war. “Germans as victims of Russians—no sane person could claim that up until now. We generally saw that as a taboo,” a review in *Der Tagesspiegel* claimed.⁴⁴ The 1993 film *Stalingrad*, despite showing the suffering of Soviet soldiers and civilians, presented the desperate soldiers as apolitical victims of the insanity of war persecuted by the brutal winter, the unstoppable enemy, and crazed Nazi

⁴² On the memorial and the site’s past as focal point of commemoration in various regimes, see Daniela Büchten and Anja Frey, eds., *Im Irrgarten deutscher Geschichte: die Neue Wache 1818 bis 1993* (Berlin: Movimento Druck, 1993).

⁴³ Stephen Kinzer, “The War Memorial: To Embrace the Guilty, Too?,” *New York Times*, November 15, 1993, 4. On the controversy, see Reichel, *Politik mit Erinnerung Gedächtnisorte mit Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, 231–46.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Moeller, *War Stories*, 194.

officers. Critics noted that the film “shows the Germans just as they most like to see themselves: as victims.”⁴⁵ The drama of the 6th Army’s destructions likely found broad appeal: A 1995 poll commissioned by *Der Spiegel* found that only 46% of respondents, and 26% of those over 65, recognized that the Wehrmacht participated in war crimes.

The 1995 travelling “Wehrmacht Exhibition” similarly divided the public, unleashing a controversy with the argument that the German military actively participated in the Nazi war of annihilation. Large sections of the public preferred to recall their own military service or the sacrifices of their elders as a misguided effort that in the last days of the war turned into a heroic sacrifice to save civilians from the encroaching Red Army.⁴⁶ Whether German civilians or soldiers, a prevailing sentiment held them both as hapless victims of the war’s incomprehensible ferocity.

The proposal of a universal victimhood of war and dictatorship—however more elegant than iterations in previous decades—reflected a prevalent framework for remembering the war in the Federal Republic with a long history. Conflicting feelings over whether May 8 was a day of liberation or defeat remained prevalent, as memories of personal suffering opposed awareness of perpetrated crimes.⁴⁷ The victim/perpetrator paradox created immense tension, so that a paradigm of “victims of war” neatly solved the conundrum of contending with undeniable

⁴⁵ Andreas Kilb, “Von ‘Holocaust’ bis ‘Schindlers Liste’: Hollywood bewältigt die deutsche Vergangenheit. Und wir?: Warten, bis Spielberg kommt,” *Die Zeit*, January 21, 1994, <https://www.zeit.de/1994/04/warten-bis-spielberg-kommt>.

⁴⁶ On the depiction of the Wehrmacht in the press during the 50th anniversary of the war’s end, see Klaus Naumann, “Die Mutter, Das Pferd Und Die Juden: Flucht Und Vertreibung Als Themen Deutscher Erinnerungspolitik,” *Mittelweg* 36 5, no. 4 (1996): 79–80.

⁴⁷ According to a 1995 opinion poll commissioned by *Der Spiegel*, around 80% of respondents tended to view May 8 as a day of liberation from Nazi terror, suggesting that public education and discourse focused on the terror of the Third Reich reached the vast majority of the public. On individual details such as specific knowledge of dates, the role of the Wehrmacht, “accomplishments” of Hitler, or the nature of the expulsions, however, the figures showed a generational divide and ambivalence. “Die Jungen denken anders,” *Der Spiegel* 19, May 8, 1995, 76–77.

misery that nevertheless emanated from German aggression. Indeed, *Frankfurter Allgemeine*'s warning that "every single fate deserved respect" invited readers to view the experiences of bombing, mass rape, and expulsion as comparable to incarceration in concentration camps, life under German occupation, or genocide.⁴⁸ The obligatory retrospectives on 1945 in local presses indulged such tendencies in particular.⁴⁹ *Schwäbische Zeitung* explained in January 1995 that a death march from Auschwitz and "fleeing from the onrushing Soviet soldiers" were "interchangeable fates": "The young Jewish girl and East Prussian farmer did not saddle any personal guilt upon themselves, their suffering was similarly pointless." A few days later, *Münchener Merkur* declared that expellees should not be "second-class" victims, and demanded the same "right to mourn" extended to Holocaust victims.⁵⁰

These were not the ruminations of isolated editorial boards. In a series of *Die Zeit* titled "1945 and Today," for instance, the SPD politician and expellee Peter Glotz, condemned the "sickness of nationalism" that produced so much suffering. Yet the "destruction of the Jewish people, planned by Hitler, was not the only genocide," Glotz explained. The "expulsions that are carried out against the will of the population and without the possibility that [they] may be resettled all together in one place" also needed to be regarded as "genocidal."⁵¹ The issue

⁴⁸ "Jedem einzelnen Schicksal schulden wir Achtung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 6, 1995. Contemporaries noted this complicated paradox. See for instance Ralph Giordano, "Auch die Unfähigkeit zu trauern ist unteilbar," *Die Tageszeitung*, April 18, 1995, 10.

⁴⁹ For a specific analysis of "flight and expulsion" in the press during 1995, see Naumann, "Die Mutter, Das Pferd Und Die Juden: Flucht Und Vertreibung Als Themen Deutscher Erinnerungspolitik."

⁵⁰ Quoted in Naumann, 75.

⁵¹ Peter Glotz, "Die Krankheit Nationalismus," *Die Zeit*, March 24, 1995, 16. In the same series, the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel penned the contribution on the genocide of European Jews which followed the expulsions segment several weeks later. Wiesel argued that the Holocaust remained a "unique crime," and castigated attempts of "watering down" its meaning. In particular, the term "genocide"—meaning the "intention to exterminate an entire people"—required special care: "We must be careful with words. Language is very important, we must use it with care." Elie Wiesel, "Ein Volk auslöschen," *Die Zeit*, April 21, 1995, 16.

contained an extensive account of “The Fight for East Prussia.”⁵² The 1995 *Der Spiegel* poll indicated that such sentiments would strike a chord: When asked whether the “expulsions were “just as great a crime against humanity as the Holocaust,” 36 percent of respondents categorically agreed.⁵³

The memory boom surrounding the 50th anniversary of 1945 was soon followed by yet another flurry of remembering “flight and expulsion” in the early 2000s. Much of the interest stemmed from the Nobel Laureate Günter Grass, whose lifetime engagement with his childhood home of Danzig culminated in the 2002 novella *Im Krebsgang* (“Crabwalk”). Dealing with the suppressed wartime traumas of flight and the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* within three generations of a family, Grass sought to tell the story of something that “no one wanted to hear about it, not here in the West and definitely not in the East.”⁵⁴ On a superficial level, the critics who praised the work as a long awaited breaking of a “taboo” on the expulsions missed a far more nuanced point Grass attempted to make. Speaking through the protagonist, Grass indicted the hijacking of “flight and expulsion” by nationalists and the dangers of West Germany’s reluctance to have contemplated German suffering:

“[His generation] should have found words for the hardships endured by the Germans fleeing East Prussia. ...Never...should his generation have kept silent about such misery, merely because its own sense of guilt was so overwhelming, merely because for years the need to accept responsibility and show remorse took precedence, with the result that they abandoned the topic to the right wing. This failure...was staggering.”⁵⁵

⁵² Heinz Werner Hübner, “Noch siebzig Tage bis Pillau,” *Die Zeit*, March 24, 1995, 6-8.

⁵³ “Die Jungen denken anders,” *Der Spiegel* 19, May 8, 1995, 77. Only 27% explicitly answered with no; 35% felt that “one cannot compare” the fates. A slight generational split showed that 40% of Germans over 65 felt that the expulsions and Holocaust were equal crimes against humanity.

⁵⁴ Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang* (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2002), 31.

⁵⁵ Grass, 99.

Im Krebsgang sparked a flurry of interest in “flight and explosion.” Perhaps heeding the calls for Grass to process German suffering after having neglected the subject since the 1960s, a series of novels dealing with the forced migrations and family traumas appeared in rapid succession.⁵⁶ Following a ZDF documentary titled “The Great Flight,” the pop historian Guido Knopp published an accompanying book.⁵⁷ Newspapers such as *Der Spiegel* published running series on the subject.⁵⁸ Witnesses and survivors appeared on television and in print to narrate their experiences.⁵⁹ Not just expellees dominated the discourse: Victims of rape at the hands of the Red Army or Allied firebombing fascinated the public.⁶⁰ Films such as *Der Untergang* (“The Downfall,” 2004), *Dresden* (2006), and *Die Flucht* (“March of Millions,” 2007) drew large audiences as well.

What marked these treatments was the genuine attempt to discuss the expulsions and German suffering without shrouding German crimes in silence. Despite broad acknowledgment of the Nazi dictatorship and condemnation of its crimes, many Germans continue to struggle

⁵⁶ Jörg Bernig, *Niemandszeit* (Stuttgart: Dt. Verl.-Anst., 2002); Reinhard Jirgl, *Die Unvollendeten* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003); Tanja Dücker, *Himmelskörper* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2003); Olaf Müller, *Schlesisches Wetter* (Berlin: Berliner Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003); Michael Zeller, *Die Reise nach Samosch* (Cadolzburg: Ars Vivendi, 2003).

⁵⁷ Guido Knopp, *Die große Flucht: das Schicksal der Vertriebenen* (München: Ullstein, 2001).

⁵⁸ See for instance *Der Spiegel* issue 13, 2002 to *Der Spiegel* 16, 2002. One can trace a veritable explosion of “flight and expulsion” since 2000: A search for the term in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* yields nearly 500 articles in the last twenty years, compared with less than 250 between 1949 and 1999.

⁵⁹ For instance, alone four autobiographies of survivors of the *Gustloff* emerged after *Crabwalk*. Peter Weise, *Hürdenlauf: Erinnerungen eines Findlings* (Rostock: Büro + Service Rostock, 2006); Armin Fuhrer, *Die Todesfahrt der “Gustloff”*: Porträts von Überlebenden der grössten Schiffskatastrophe aller Zeiten (München: Olzog, 2007); Renate Matuschka and Peggy Poles, “*All unsere Lieben sind verloren*”: *der Untergang der “Wilhelm Gustloff” - zwei Überlebende erzählen* (München: Knaur Taschenbuch Verlag, 2008); Lieselotte Kamper, *Edith: das Schicksal einer Überlebenden der Wilhelm Gustloff* (Oldenburg: Schardt, 2009).

⁶⁰ Anonyma, *Eine Frau in Berlin: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen vom 20. April bis 22. Juni 1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 2008); Ralf Georg Reuth, “Nehmt Die Frauen Als Beute,” *Die Welt*, February 19, 2005, <https://www.welt.de/print-wams/article123849/Nehmt-die-Frauen-als-Beute.html>; Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940 - 1945* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2002).

squaring personal misery and memories of war with this realization, as was elaborated upon in the last chapter.⁶¹ Even with occasional inelegant formulations cited above, the discourse of the last decades generally is not an explicit and cynical attempt of *Aufrechnung* engaged in by some expellee functionaries, however. Rather, it reflects the profound ambivalences in German collective memory and struggle to resolve the cleavages of the past.⁶²

The tension between Germans as victims and awareness of them as perpetrators sometimes seems unsolvable, as education on the Nazi dictatorship successfully raised awareness of German crimes while personal and family memories of wartime traumas remain powerfully imbedded within psyches. The result is that German cultural memory in the 21st century is often schizophrenic, torn between wanting to indict and mourn the nation. The price of inclusion into the Berlin Republic's self-critical memory was the shedding its revanchist tenor. Neither narratives have been harmed by this development. As the historian Rainer Schulze observed, “[r]emembering the victims of the consequences of National Socialism does not exclude remembering the victims of National Socialism.”⁶³

What Remains? Following the Thread

On June 11, 2013, Chancellor Angela Merkel proclaimed that a long forgotten chapter of “great suffering and tremendous injustice” would be acknowledged when the *Stiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung* (“Foundation for Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation”) opens its doors in

⁶¹ See also Harald Welzer and Sabine Moller, “*Opa war kein Nazi*” *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer-Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002).

⁶² See Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 258–345.

⁶³ Rainer Schulze, “The Politics of Memory: Flight and Expulsion of the German Populations after the Second World War and German Collective Memory,” *National Identities* 8, no. 4 (2006): 378.

Berlin in 2016, thereby “filling a vacancy in our country’s museum and memory landscape.”⁶⁴ Merkel’s comments overlooked that the expulsions were, as this dissertation has argued, never excluded from Germany’s memory landscape. The *Stiftung*’s very existence demonstrates that expellee organizations still had some influence in the 21st century. The reactions to it, moreover, reveal that “flight and expulsion” continues to remain a painful memory for the rapidly declining group of those who experienced them, as well as a lightning rod for criticism primarily because critics take issue with the homeland associations’ politics.

With backing from prominent citizens and politicians from across the political spectrum, in 1999 the BdV proposed a *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen* (“Center Against Expulsions”) to document the history of forced migrations in international perspective. Despite a broad framework, the *Zentrum* nonetheless represented the culmination of decades of expellee advocacy to secure a prominent presentation site for their narrative of “flight and expulsion.” Based on a series of exhibits on German history in Eastern Europe, the forced migrations, and integration, it was clear that the content of the museum foresaw an enshrinement of this interest group’s understanding and collective memory of the expulsions.⁶⁵ Supporters celebrated an overdue commemoration of the forced migration, while critics decried the privileging of German victims and the insufficient focus on the Second World War and Nazi war crimes that caused the

⁶⁴ “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel bei Baubeginn eines Dokumentationszentrums der Stiftung Flucht, Vertreibung, Versöhnung im Deutschlandhaus,” Federal Republic of Germany, accessed September 23, 2013, <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2013/06/2013-06-11-rede-merkel-stiftung-vertreibung.html>. The opening of 2016 has been pushed back to 2019.

⁶⁵ See the exhibit books Katharina Klotz and Zentrum Gegen Vertreibungen, *Erzwungene Wege: Flucht und Vertreibung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts*; [Ausstellung im Kronprinzenpalais, Berlin ; 11. August - 29. Oktober 2006] (Wiesbaden: Zentrum gegen Vertreibung, 2006); Katharina Klotz and Zentrum Gegen Vertreibungen, *Die Gerufenen: deutsches Leben in Mittel- und Osteuropa*; Ausstellung im Kronprinzenpalais, Berlin 16. Juli bis 30. August 2009 (Wiesbaden: Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, 2009); Klotz and Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, *Angekommen die Integration der Vertriebenen in Deutschland*. For a more detailed analysis of the background of the museum and the exhibits, see Tim Völkerling, *Flucht und Vertreibung im Museum: zwei aktuelle Ausstellungen und ihre geschichtskulturellen Hintergründe im Vergleich* (Berlin: Lit, 2008).

border and population shifts in Central Europe.⁶⁶ Because of the backlash and concerns over the incorporation of expellee arguments, the Federal Republic rejected the BdV's proposal in 2008, transforming the project instead into a federal foundation.

The *Zentrum/Stiftung* affair demonstrated that the expellee associations no longer could control the terms of the discourse like they did in the 1950s. This dissertation has traced the evolution of a narrative, from its ascendancy to its decline. Yet even though they seem politically powerless and their preferred victimhood narrative proves problematic, their impact on German cultural memory remains strong: Many of the tropes, themes, and images established by Nazi propaganda, incorporated and expanded upon in the 1950s, and diverse layering since then continue to shape how Germans recall and discuss "flight and expulsion." Like a red thread, they wind themselves through collective and cultural memory, from 1944 to today.

When contemplating the literature since the memory boom of 2002, the prevailing framing of the start of the mass exodus seems to conform to the interpretations of panicked flight before the "onslaught of the Bolsheviks" that forced millions to abandon all "goods and land [*Hab und Gut*]." The mental images of "treks that stretch from morning to night, thousands of wagons and vehicles [that] drag themselves over the ice toward the safety of the Reich" emerged in Nazi press reports, and firmly imbedded themselves as the "typical" experience of all expellees.⁶⁷ This reflected a real experience, but Germans reading *Der Spiegel* in 2002 likely failed to learn that less than half of the 10-12 million opted to flee to begin with.⁶⁸ Whether in the

⁶⁶ On the debate, see the contributions in Jürgen Danyel and Philipp Ther, eds., "Flucht Und Vertreibung in Europäischer Perspektive," *Zeitschrift Für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51, no. 1 (2003): 1–104.

⁶⁷ *Deutsche Wochenschau* of March 16, 1945, quoted in Gerhard Paul, ed., "Der Flüchtlingstrek," in *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 668.

⁶⁸ "Die Abrechnung: Schrecklicher Exodus," *Spiegel-Special* 2/2005, 222-225.

Haus der Geschichte or watching *Die Grosse Flucht*, the trek wagon symbolizes a supposed universal experience, and as exemplified by the film *Jokehnen*, it is cast with familiar characters: Dependable mayors, disillusioned noblewomen, “good” Jews, affable and loyal slave laborers, craven and corrupt Nazis haranguing the population, and incomprehensibly ruthless Soviets.⁶⁹

Nazi suggestions that Soviet barbarism drove the flight, and that this westward retreat represented safety, were also a propagandistic simplification that the Schieder Commission largely reified, and German media and authors adopted again and again under the rubric of “bloody vengeance,” as the popular historian Guido Knopp framed it.⁷⁰ The Nemmersdorf massacre in particular remained the symbol of Soviet predaciousness which explained the source of the chaos.⁷¹ What Germans consume today remains on occasion largely indistinguishable from the literature of seven decades ago. In assessing the final months of the war, Knopp resurrects Ilja Ehrenburg as the firebrand goading savage Red Army soldiers:

“The vengeance was terrible. Incited by the murderous slogans of Ilja Ehrenburg, the Soviets now carried out bloody retribution on the German civilian population. [...] They were no perpetrators upon whom the victors unleashed their rage—they were the defenseless. Above all women, children, the elderly. The civilian population would have been spared much if it would have been evacuated in a timely manner.”⁷²

⁶⁹ Moeller, *War Stories*, 182.

⁷⁰ Knopp, *Die große Flucht*, 10.

⁷¹ Knopp, 37–49. See also “Die Katastrophe,” *Der Stahlhelm* 5, May 1955, in BArch B150-5641; “Wie viele Deutsche kaput?,” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 27, July 2, 1979, 77ff; “Nichts vergessen, nichts verzeihen,” *Der Spiegel* Nr. 16, April 14, 1980, 46ff; and “Vater, erschieß mich!”, *Der Spiegel* Nr. 13, March 25, 2002, 40ff; and Reuth, “Nehmt Die Frauen Als Beute.”

⁷² Knopp, *Die große Flucht*, 10.

Seemingly unaware that several decades earlier their journalists had powerfully indicted the image of Ehrenburg, *Der Spiegel* ironically also invoked Ehrenburg in its 2002 tableau of savage Soviet soldiers, innocent Germans, and fleeing treks:

“Those who now attempted to flee before [the Red Army] were indeed the wrong victims....But the army now was rarely merciful, many Red Army soldiers rather thought like...Ilja Ehrenburg, who exhorted: ‘Kill the Germans.’ When finally in early May the Soviet troops halted at the Elbe, they left nightmarish scenes in their wake—squashed treks, scorched earth, mistreated corpses.”⁷³

Despite identifying Nazi crimes as the source of the catastrophe and criticizing postwar revisionist tendencies of narrowly focusing on German suffering and ignoring the National Socialist past, the authors nevertheless made use of familiar and clichéd tropes with a long history. Unsurprisingly, politicians succumbed to the media images and passed them along to audiences, as Bavarian Christa Stewens did during a commemoration ceremony on May 8, 2002:

“In the territories invaded by the Red Army the inhabitants fleeing in endless treks suffered horrific torture. Countless numbers were ground beneath Russian tank treads, sank in the hail of bombs in the frozen Vistula Lagoon or were indiscriminately cut down. The conquerors followed the exhortation of Ilja Ehrenburg to murder and rape as if intoxicated. Never ending mass rap count as the unspeakable horrors in this last act of destiny.”⁷⁴

Perilous evacuations over the sea, and especially the *Wilhelm Gustloff* disaster, also remained a near constant fixture in West German discourse for decades.⁷⁵ After sinking the ship on a West German sound stage in the 1960 hit *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen*, director Frank Wisbar returned to the tragedy in his 1967 *Flucht über die Ostsee*. Wisbar’s works left profound

⁷³ “Die Abrechnung: Schrecklicher Exodus,” *Spiegel-Special* 2/2005, 224.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern: Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2010), 292.

⁷⁵ See William John Niven, *Die Wilhelm Gustloff: Geschichte und Erinnerung eines Untergangs* (Halle (Saale): Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 2011); Michael J Ennis, *The M.S. Wilhelm Gustloff in German Memory Culture: A Case Study on Competing Discourses* (Cincinnati, Ohio: University of Cincinnati, 2014).

influences on the 2008 *Die Gustloff*, which also included the “Gustloff foundling” as a central plot point. Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* likewise incorporated the orphan as a central plot point of his story of the maritime tragedy. Between 1960 and 2010, over eighty films, documentaries, news reports, or other broadcasts referenced the maritime disaster a total of more than two hundred times.⁷⁶ With so many continuous references, it should hardly come as a surprise that expellees often vow that they nearly ended up on the doomed ship. The brush with fate, similar to tropes of the “last plane out of Stalingrad” among Stalingrad veterans—as seen in the 1993 *Stalingrad* epic—is an iconic image produced by West German discourse, even as it conveys the psychological truths of wartime suffering.

Yet another perpetual theme carried from the 1950s today is the notion of the Wehrmacht as savior, already analyzed in previous chapters. Contrary to the sources that painted a far more complicated picture, authoritative public figures endorsed the self-serving portrayals of the military and postwar media narratives. The historian Andreas Hillgruber, for instance, argued that the Wehrmacht “offered a protective shield for a centuries-old German area of settlement.”⁷⁷ Moreover, one “must identify with the...desperate and sacrificial efforts of the German army in the East, which attempted to preserve the population of the German East from the orgy of revenge of the Red Army...and sought to keep open the avenue of flight.”⁷⁸ Celebrated pop historian Guido Knopp’s suggestions of honorable acts of benevolence on the part of the apolitical and selfless German soldier are virtually indistinguishable from Jürgen Thorwald’s

⁷⁶ Ennis, *The M.S. Wilhelm Gustloff in German Memory Culture*, 98.

⁷⁷ Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, 64.

⁷⁸ Hillgruber, 24.

renditions half a century earlier.⁷⁹ Politicians also shared these assessments: Speaking at the inauguration of an expellee memorial in 1984, Franz Josef Strauss reminded audiences of the “heroism, the bravery of the helping and saving branches of the navy, merchant navy, and army.”⁸⁰ The May 8, 2002 speech by Stewens echoed this praise: “The defenders in the East are owed a permanent commemoration...for them it was not about extending the war. Their service was for the tortured civilian population. Time and again we encounter the testimonies of the surviving fighters, who by their own avowals would have felt miserable had they left defenseless women, children, and elderly, for whom they were the last hope, in the lurch.”⁸¹

Regarding the expulsions, some of the same rhetoric and tendencies constructed in the immediate postwar period emerge in writings today. Just as their predecessors, authors have trouble distinguishing between the “wild” and “organized” expulsions. Decades ago this tendency revealed a strategy of framing a complex process with the most violent and shortest phase in order to provide political arguments against the population transfers. The propensity toward invoking the Aussig massacre as a metaphor of the entire expulsion process bequeathed to successive generations a distorted interpretation of the forced migrations.⁸² Even in 2002, the most dramatic and radical, yet brief and hardly universal, experiences came to represent the fate of millions. To the bestselling pop historian Guido Knopp, “the hatred that the former occupiers

⁷⁹ Knopp, *Die große Flucht*.

⁸⁰ Archiv der sozialen Demokratie (AdsD), Seliger VII, 1937, “Bayerns Verbundenheit mit den Heimatvertriebenen,” 2.

⁸¹ Quoted in Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*, 292.

⁸² Almar Reitzner, *Ich flog nach Prag. Ein Tatsachenbericht über die Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit in der Tschechoslowakei* (München: Hessen Verlag, 1948); Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Wahrung Sudetendeutscher Interessen and Wilhelm Turnwald, eds., *Dokumente zur Austreibung der Sudetendeutschen* (München, 1951).

endured" manifested itself in Aussig, when "this hysteria escalated."⁸³ Not even Micha Brumlik, the former director of the Fritz Bauer Institute for the Study and Documentation of the History of the Holocaust, proved immune from relying on the stereotypical narrative founded by expellee activists: 2,700 people fell victim to the "Czech population" animated by a "paranoid, hysterical fantasy of vengeance."⁸⁴

Thorwald's unsubstantiated grotesque image of a family nailed to a raft floating down the Elbe, already analyzed in previous chapters, did not remain a typical expulsion experience for just the author.⁸⁵ Its impact lingered for decades, as expellee activists turned to Thorwald precisely because of the emotional power of his scenes: Despite disappearing from publications after 1995, the account remained for Erika Steinbach an example to illustrate "particularly for young people" the need for a "Centre Against Expulsions."⁸⁶

The point here is not to, as some historians have opted to do, uncover "myths" and relativize expellee suffering by unveiling the manifold silences and problematic framings of this German victimhood narrative.⁸⁷ Undoubtedly, various simplifications or exaggerations, if not outright falsehoods, continue to resonate today. Of greater significance, however, is the remarkable stability of "typical" memories associated with the forced migrations, which speak to

⁸³ Knopp, *Die große Flucht*, 397.

⁸⁴ Micha Brumlik, *Wer Sturm sät die Vertreibung der Deutschen* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2005), 74.

⁸⁵ Jürgen Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht* (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1965), 572–73. Seifert's testimony cannot be found in Thorwald's sources in the IfZ, and have never been corroborated elsewhere. The dubious report disappeared from subsequent editions starting in 1995. David Oels, "'Dieses Buch ist kein Roman': Jürgen Thorwalds 'Die grosse Flucht' zwischen Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerungspolitik," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 6, no. 3 (2009): 390.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Oels, "Dieses Buch ist kein Roman," 390. Seifert no longer appeared in Thorwald's editions after 1995, suggesting the dubiousness of the account.

⁸⁷ Hahn and Hahn, *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern*.

the power of earlier media images and reports that anchored themselves in West German cultural and historical memory.

Their continued hold can be explained by the fact that they are a *construction*, the foundation of which was laid by Nazi propaganda reports in 1944 and 1945, and which expellee testimonies added to in the immediate postwar period. Expellee activists, historians, and the postwar press added to this layer in the 1950s by streamlining the narrative, including purging it of the context of the Third Reich and focusing the interpretation on the brief and most violent episodes. With slight regional variances that emphasized certain aspects, “typical” fates and images emerged from the cacophony of voices. This produced a seemingly inscrutable labyrinth of experience and memory that successively built upon one another, until a homogenized central concept of “flight and expulsion” crystalized.

Their lasting resonance can also be explained by their widespread *instrumentalization*. Nazi propaganda leveraged a “narrative of fear” that, combined with witnessed wartime devastation, left lasting impressions. Postwar activists in turn developed a “sympathy narrative” that provided the foundations for integration, yet also familiarized Germans with their new neighbors. The anticommunism of the early Federal Republic and Cold War provided an incubator for the mobilization of expellee suffering aimed at winning back the homeland. Though this ultimately failed, for the first decade and a half after 1945 the expellees leveraged their misery and used it to as an argument that underpinned their political and social power.

During this ascendancy, the expellee associations took careful care to *institutionalize* their narrative in museums, schools, memorials, and virtually all aspects of West German public life, another key factor in explaining the longevity of “flight and expulsion.” Political and cultural trends saw the associations rapidly decline and appear anachronistic. Nonetheless, their

successful monopoly and colonization of the public discourse on the German East guaranteed that the potency of their interpretations would last into the 21st century, despite a profound ambivalence toward expellee politics and German victimhood. Yet since 1970, their gradual displacement from the center of German public memory means that “flight and expulsion” no longer carry the political baggage that they once did. They have become “history,” a chapter of the nation’s past that sometimes presents a challenge to contend with. But they are no longer a trauma that interest groups can manipulate for political purposes, as their number rapidly dwindles and because the German East no longer holds a political meaning.

The reality that those with a living memory of the German East will soon disappear offers both an opportunity and a misfortune. On the one hand, the increased temporal and emotional distance may offer a new prospective for engagement between Germans and their neighbors. Just a few years ago, the German past of Breslau was largely absent from plaques and city history; today, the excellent city museum highlights the plurality of the Silesian capital’s past. Without the emotional baggage of wartime traumas, Europeans can more easily contemplate their interconnected past and rediscover a multi-ethnic heritage unburdened by the dichotomies of the Second World War and Cold War.

Yet on the other hand, without a concerted effort to cultivate such discoveries, the danger emerges that something will irrevocably will be lost when the eyewitness generation pass way. The homeland museums, already nostalgic shrines to a bygone world documented in folk costumes, curios filled with crystal and porcelain, or woodcuts and scale models of churches and landmarks long destroyed, are eerily empty, save for occasional elderly couples coming into conversation with one another over a particular item that triggers a common memory of childhood. The obligatory handcart or suitcase may spark associations with familiar images that

have circulated in popular media since 1945 and have anchored themselves in the cultural memory. For the most part, however, the collection documents an unfamiliar world of people and places whose names one does not know. Melancholy has replaced nostalgia. In Königswinter, where the *Haus Schlesien* (“Silesian House”) conserves the history of the region in a renovated manor house, the inner courtyard with its coats of arms of Silesian cities and trees stands empty, and the kitchen staff serving traditional Silesian food stand idly by. Who comes here anymore, one can’t help but wonder, and who will care?

In 2005, the historian Michael Schwartz asked if “expellees can be victims.”⁸⁸ By extension, one could query whether Germans generally may contemplate their suffering. The answer is, of course, yes. The terror of war, the pain of leaving one’s homeland forever and disintegration of entire communities are ruptures that many struggled to cope with their entire lives. It is only natural that personal traumas need to be contended with, and that these would rank higher than the victimhood of unknown others. More nuance and care must be given when societies remember: When commemorating victims or providing an interpretation of these events, distinctions need to be made between expulsion and the Holocaust. This study examined, and often indicted, the memory politics, not individual suffering or the right to mourn.

If contextualized in the Second World War, and not—as expellees often attempted to do—deployed in an effort to secure the highest rung on a hierarchy of victimhood for political gains, Germans have every right to grieve and mourn. It has taken a long time—and it continues to remain a challenge—for Germans to come to a place where they are capable of honoring their losses without ignoring the victims of Nazism, or commemorating the victims of National

⁸⁸ Michael Schwartz, “Dürfen Vertriebene Opfer sein? Zeitgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu einem Problem deutscher und europäischer Identität,” *Deutschland Archiv* 38, no. 3 (2005): 494–505.

Socialism without castigating attempts to process their own traumas. Though not equal horrors, German misery and the suffering that they inflicted upon others are intimately linked with one another and a part of Germany's history, and need to be historicized. Given the profound ambivalence of German cultural memory and lingering media memories that indicate the pervasiveness of exaggerated tropes, it is unlikely that this will fully succeed.

In over seven decades, expellees often complicated and delayed a coming to terms with the past by remaining a near perpetual fixture of public memory narrowly focused on German suffering. The inability, indeed unwillingness, to contend with the consequences of the Nazi dictatorship should rightly be criticized. But German cultural memory has come a long way, and even shaped how expellees view their experience. In the summer of 2007, before my grandparents would become too old, the family embarked on a journey to their homes in Silesia and East Prussia. Among the many excursions to farms of uncles and aunts and sharing of memories sparked by the explorations, one moment stands out: My grandmother staring at the Vistula Lagoon, glittering in the summer sun, at the exact spot that she stepped onto the ice more than sixty years before as a young girl. "We deserved to lose it," she surprisingly uttered after contemplative silence. "This is what we got for Hitler and starting the war," my grandfather echoed. Never before, or since, had I heard my grandparents so explicitly link their personal suffering with the Third Reich. Even in their old age, the more self-critical examination of the German past filtered through. Once again, my grandmother unwittingly revealed how collective and private memory interacted.

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