

To Our Dead:  
Local Expellee Monuments and the Contestation of German Postwar Memory

by  
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To My Parents

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BdV	Bund der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände (League of Expellees – United Homeland Societies and State Associations)
BHE	Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten (League of Expellees and Disenfranchised)
BvD	Bund vertriebener Deutschen (League of Expelled Germans)
BVFG	Bundesvertriebenengesetz (Federal Expellee Law)
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
COMECON	Council for Mutual Economic Assistance
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Social Union)
EKD	Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (Protestant Church of Germany)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany (from 1949-1990, “West Germany”)
GDR	German Democratic Republic (from 1949-1990, “East Germany”)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
KUD	Kuratorium Unteilbares Deutschland (Curatorium Indivisible Germany)
LAG	Lastenausgleichsgesetz (“Law to Equalize the Burdens”)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers Party)
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands



SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
UDC	United Daughters of the Confederacy
UN	United Nations
VdL	Verband der Landsmannschaften—Association of Homeland Societies
VDK	Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge (People's League for the Care of War Graves)
VOL	Vereinigte Ostdeutsche Landsmannschaften (United East German Homeland Societies)
ZDF	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German Television)
ZvD	Zentralverband vertriebener Deutscher (Central Organization of Expelled Germans)
ZVU	Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler (Central Administration for German Resettlers)

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines how the German expellees have represented and commemorated their experiences of World War II and its aftermath in the form of local monuments. More specifically, it presents a critical, interpretive analysis to investigate the historical narratives articulated by these vitally important, yet overlooked memorials. Erected in every decade following the war, more than one thousand local expellee monuments dot the landscapes of every *Bundesland* in reunited Germany, are located in small numbers throughout the former “German East”, and can be found as far away as the USA and Africa. Drawing its material from the monuments’ individual elements—their forms, inscriptions, iconographies, locations, initiators—this study also explores the commemorative ceremonies held at the monuments, which bring these objects to life.

Fusing historical, art-historical, sociological, and cultural-anthropological approaches, I contend that the monuments make profound statements about their initiators’ understandings of the past and disprove the notion that German wartime suffering has been unmentionable or was not permitted in the postwar era. Moreover, while expellee activists suggest that the local monuments construct innocuous, parallel narratives which augment prevailing Holocaust-centered narratives, this dissertation demonstrates the ways monuments dedicated “to our dead”—that is, to German victims of the expulsion rather than to the victims of the Nazis—obfuscate strict perpetrator/victim binaries and contest official

memories of the war. In fact, I argue that expellee organizations have used the monuments to shape postwar discussions of victimization by constructing one-sided, de-contextualized narratives of German suffering based on the loss of *Heimat* (homeland) and on assertions of collective innocence.

This dissertation is the first all-encompassing exploration of expellee monuments. The multifaceted approach it employs contextualizes and categorizes thematically the methods and motifs chosen to represent the fates of the roughly 12 million Germans forced to resettle at the end of and after WWII and casts new light on this under-analyzed aspect of German postwar memory culture. Thus, the study contributes to larger debates over German wartime suffering and to the enduring discussions over “coming to terms with the past” in twenty-first century Germany.

## **INTRODUCTION**

I can understand the pain over what was lost very well. But it must be pain about what we did to ourselves, not what others did to us.

--Former German Foreign Minister  
Joschka Fischer<sup>1</sup>

The horrors of war, the mothers' tears, the suffering of the expellees are the same for all sides but the causes and the consequences of the war are not the same.

--Former Polish Foreign Minister  
Władysław Bartoszewski<sup>2</sup>

[N]o one takes their memorials more seriously than the Germans.

--James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory*.<sup>3</sup>

## **EXPellee MONUMENTS—BLANK SPOTS IN GERMANY'S MEMORY CULTURE?**

In the late 1990s and the early part of this century, non-Jewish German experiences of the Second World War became a topic of public debate in a way hitherto unseen in the Federal Republic.<sup>4</sup> Unleashing the societal discussions were the works of some leading

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<sup>1</sup> All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

I took this quotation from an interview with Joschka Fischer published as "Was haben wir uns angetan?" in *Die Zeit*, #36, August 28, 2003, p. 6. Fischer's parents were among the Hungarian Germans who fled their homes and settled in what became the Federal Republic of Germany after WWII.

<sup>2</sup> Interview conducted by *Der Spiegel* published as "Ein Paradox der Geschichte," in Stefan Aust and Stephan Burgdorff (eds.) *Die Flucht. Über die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten*. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), pp. 168-169.

<sup>3</sup> James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1993, pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> This development was presciently forecasted by Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich who rightly predicted that the continuing historicization of Auschwitz would unleash a cavalcade of sentiment on

literary and cultural figures who probed postwar German responses to the war, or who explored subjects and framed their findings in ways long considered improper in light of the Holocaust.<sup>5</sup> Much of the discussion centered on if and why the topic “Germans as victims” had been “taboo” and how best to commemorate German wartime suffering without overshadowing Nazi crimes. The efforts of a private foundation called the *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen* (Center Against Expulsions) have doubtlessly been a part of this debate. Since its inception in 2000, the foundation has marshaled a campaign to construct a homonymous, large-scale memorial and documentation center in Berlin dedicated to twentieth-century victims of forced migration in Europe. Operating under the auspices of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (BdV—League of Expellees)—the umbrella organization and chief political lobbying force for all major German expellee groups—the foundation proclaims on its website that “All victims of genocide and expulsion need a place in our hearts and in historical memory.”<sup>6</sup>

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German victimhood. No longer “crowded out” by the enormity of the Holocaust, the authors surmised, German collective memory would become much more self-centered. Markovits and Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1997.

<sup>5</sup> The secondary literature on this resurgence is vast and is growing. Some notable examples include: Robert G. Moeller’s *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 2001, Moeller, “Sinking Ships, the Lost *Heimat* and Broken Taboos: Günter Grass and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany,” *Contemporary European History*. 12, 2; 2003, pp. 147-181, as well as Moeller, “Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a Post-Cold War History of World War II’s Legacies,” *History and Memory* 17, ½, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 147-194. See also Eric Langenbacher, “Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?” *German Politics and Society*. Issue 67 Vol. 21, #2, Summer 2003, pp. 46-68, and Langenbacher, “The Return of Memory—New Discussions about German Suffering in World War II,” *German Politics and Society*. Issue 68, Vol. 21, #3, Fall 2003, pp. 74-88. Other examples include: Bill Niven (ed.) *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Dagmar Wienroder-Skinner (eds.) *Victims and Perpetrators: 1933-1945: (Re)Presenting the Past in Post-Unification Culture*. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006); Helmut Schmitz (ed.) *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007); and Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers its Dead of WWII*. Tr. Haim Waltzman. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> As cited in the “Aufgaben und Ziele” section of the foundation’s website <[www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=35](http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=35)> Accessed January 30, 2010.

Both the foundation and the BdV have sought the German government's official sanction and financial support of the project. Perhaps not surprisingly, the venture did not enjoy much success under the Red-Green government. In a 2002 vote, the Social Democrat-led *Bundestag* approved merely the initiation of a Europe-wide discussion on the emplacement of an international memorial in a location to be determined.<sup>7</sup> However, the BdV has remained adamant that the center be located in Berlin. After a change in government in 2005, the foundation and its advocates had grounds for renewed optimism when the creation of a Center Against Expulsions was made a stipulation of the coalition treaty which formed the new administration. Indeed, the Grand Coalition headed by Chancellor Angela Merkel of the *Christlich-Demokratische Union* (CDU—Christian Democratic Union) passed legislation in late 2008 which opened the door for a state-sponsored center in the German capital and granted the BdV an advisory role as well as a legitimate say in the ultimate form the memorial will take. Nearly two years later, though not yet a *fait accompli*, and in spite of continued squabbling over the personnel composition of the executive committee, the foundation and its sponsors have basically achieved their goal, and plans to create the center are moving forward.

Because the debate over the Center Against Expulsions touches on so many of aspects at the heart of discussions of Germans as victims—such as the proper forms, methods, and locations of such commemorations—the idea of a national monument to the expulsion has been contentious from the start. Not only have the opponents of the proposal feared a self-absorbed, revisionist presentation of the German experience in WWII, they have also not been able to forget the long-standing revanchist policies

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<sup>7</sup> For reasons discussed below, the BdV has had an antagonistic relationship with the Left for decades. In addition to Berlin, less “offensive” cities like Wrocław (Breslau) and Priština were proposed.

espoused by some members of the BdV, which included vociferous opposition to the recognition of the Oder/Neisse border.<sup>8</sup> Seeking to assuage the concerns of their opponents, the BdV and the foundation have stated repeatedly their combined desire to include representations and documentation of all European expulsions of the twentieth century, not just that of the Germans. In fact, the foundation considered an exhibition it organized and held in Berlin in the summer of 2006, which displayed cases of forced migration in Europe starting with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and ending with the dissolution of Yugoslavia, as evidence of how this contentious topic could be presented in a balanced, international context. The exhibits—proclaimed by most reviewers a success—served as a model for the eventual permanent exhibition.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, even a cursory look at the objectives on the Center’s website indicates the preponderance of the German experience.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For an investigation of the expellee lobby’s influence on West German foreign policy, see Pertti Ahonen, After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe, 1945-1990. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Other critics remember the involvement in National Socialism of many of the BdV’s founding members, including its first chairman Hans Krüger, who resigned in 1964 from his cabinet post as expellee minister because of his Nazi past. For more on the organisation’s nefarious connections to National Socialism, see Hans Michael Kloth and Klaus Wiegrefe, “Unbequeme Wahrheiten,” Der Spiegel, 33:2006, p. 46, as well as Erich Später’s examination of the Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft: Kein Frieden mit Tschechien. Die Sudetendeutschen und ihre Landsmannschaft. (Hamburg: KVV Konkret, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Heinrich Wefing, “Die Probe. Was kann das Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen ausstellen?” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, August 8, 2006, p. 31; Klaus-Peter Schwarz, “Anker der Erinnerung. Die Ausstellung ‘Erzwungene Wege’ in Berlin zeigt die europäische Dimension der Vertreibung,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, August 10, 2006, p. 4; and “Erinnerung und Geschichte zusammenführen,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, August 11, 2006, p. 1; Regina Mönch, “Es gibt kein fremdes Land. ‘Erzwungene Wege.’ Die Berliner Ausstellung des Zentrums gegen Vertreibungen vergleicht, ohne aufzurechnen,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, August 11, 2006, p. 33; “Was bleibt ist Heimweh: Die Ausstellung über ‘Flucht und Vertreibung’ im Berliner Kronprinzenpalais,” Süddeutsche Zeitung, August 11, 2006, p. 11; Thomas Schmid, “Die Furcht vor der Wucht der Erinnerung. ‘Erzwungene Wege.’ Die Berliner Ausstellung über die Vertreibungen im 20. Jahrhundert ist sehr vorsichtig. Das schadet ihrer Wirkung,” Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, August 13, 2006, p. 5; Thomas Urban, “Der Henker darf nicht Opfer werden,” Süddeutsche Zeitung, August 16, 2006, p. 11; Piotr Semka, “Der Henker soll jetzt Opfer sein,” Süddeutsche Zeitung, September 14, 2006, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> According to its website, the foundation has four tasks: the first calls for the creation of a museum dedicated to the experience of the German expellees. Deeming this act a “task for the whole of Germany,” the first task foresees a museum/research center with “additional space for sadness, sympathy and forgiveness [...] to be accommodated in a requiem rotunda.” The second task is to “illuminate the changes in Germany as a result of the integration of millions of uprooted compatriots” which “has had its effects on

As could be expected, the BdV's reaction to the legislation passed in 2008 by the Grand Coalition was positive. Nevertheless, in a statement released to the press the day after the German parliament's decision, BdV president Erika Steinbach declared that the government's resolution of this issue "comes late, but not too late." For those who experienced the expulsion firsthand (the so-called "*Erlebnisgeneration*"), the pronouncement continued, the building of the center would provide comfort "that their fate is not forgotten, and instead occupies a firm place in the collective memory of our Vaterland."<sup>11</sup> The statement was in keeping with the argument consistently deployed by the BdV that the commemoration of flight and expulsion had been "a blank spot" in German and European history, and that the expellees have had no place in German memory culture. The proposed Center Against Expulsions would thus fill a significant commemorative lacuna in the Federal Republic's understanding of World War II and its aftermath.

Overlooked in this argumentation, however, are the ubiquitous local monuments already commemorating flight and expulsion. Erected in every decade following the war, more than one thousand monuments dot the landscapes of reunited Germany, are located in small numbers throughout the former "German East," and can even be found as far away as the United States and Africa. The monuments are key components of the expellee organizations' visual and discursive repertoire, and it is clear that with them they

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all areas of life." Task three aims at providing a space "in our hearts and in historical memory" for all the victims of genocide and displacement. Interestingly, in undoubtedly another concession to potential opponents of the Center, the foundation does include a (very brief) mention of European Jews in their lists of representative groups. However, this trite reference ostensibly equates the systematic extermination of the Jews with the forced migration of the Greek Cypriots and other oppressed minorities on the list. The fourth task calls for the bestowal of a prize to individuals or groups who work against human rights violations.

<sup>11</sup> Erika Steinbach, Bund der Vertriebenen. Press Release: "Wir haben viel erreicht," December 5, 2008 <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=802>> Accessed August 26, 2010.



have sought to ensure that their side of history will never be discounted. Taken as a whole, these concrete examples of cultural production constitute an important and substantial part of Germany's memory culture and make unequivocal but overlooked statements about the expellees' understanding of their war experience. These monuments and their contribution to discourses on German suffering in the Second World War are the focus of this dissertation.

## **CENTRAL ARGUMENTS & KEY QUESTION**

It is a common notion that monuments "say" a lot more about the time in which they are established than about the person(s) or event(s) they commemorate. Local expellee monuments are no different. They reflect the political moods, conceptions of history, and general modes of thinking which prevailed at the time of their erection. Put differently, the monuments provide a snapshot of how the recent past was understood at specific moments and narrated on the local level in a variety of locations—in urban/rural areas, in differing geographic locales, in spite of religious cleavages, and despite any conflicting political allegiances. The purpose of my analysis is, therefore, to evince the original commemorative intention of the monuments. To do so, I present synopses of the historical interpretations presented by the monuments (and their initiators) at the time the monuments were unveiled. Though some of these monuments have been amended or even removed (for a number of reasons, not just because of political opposition) in the years since their dedications, the majority still stands and remains unchanged. Whether the monument still exists is not of great consequence here because my analysis does not

aim only at exposing today's memory culture.<sup>12</sup> Instead, I intend to track over time the evolution of how Germans have memorialized the expulsion at the local level. I want to investigate *what* was commemorated in addition to *when* and *how*.

Moreover, with this dissertation, I will provide a “big picture” analysis of local expellee monuments while also getting to the heart of this expansive subject. However, I do not intend to catalogue these crystallization points of German memory.<sup>13</sup> Instead, I seek to categorize expellee monuments thematically. To accomplish this, I conduct a critical, interpretive examination—including evaluations of aesthetics, history, and politics—which fuses together historical, art-historical, sociological, and cultural-anthropological approaches to provide informed interpretations of the monuments. Ultimately, I seek to answer the following question: *What historical narrative(s) do local expellee monuments articulate?*

It is my contention that the monuments, taken as a whole, make profound statements about their initiators' understandings of the past—understandings which in many cases deviate substantially from standard postwar historical narratives that have

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<sup>12</sup> That said, the fact that most of the monuments still stand as designed and many still host commemorative ceremonies (the focus of Chapter Ten) suggest that some people still adhere to the original beliefs expressed by these commemorative objects.

<sup>13</sup> There have been two major efforts to document all the examples of this public art. The first is a catalogue listing a large but incomplete number of the monuments. The list was compiled privately and independently by the amateur historian Kurt Schmidt, who, starting in the mid-1980s, set out to document expellee memorial sites as a hobby. Himself an expellee born in Silesia who then settled in Wuppertal, Schmidt felt compelled to record the monuments' whereabouts because they had come under fire from left-wing parties in various locales, particularly from the Greens, who had called for the removal and destruction of the monuments due to their “untimeliness.” These facts were ascertained through personal correspondence with Mr. Schmidt in the autumn of 2007. Schmidt died the next year. The results of Schmidt's work are housed at the Martin-Opitz-Bibliothek Herne (ed.) Gedenkstätten und Mahnmale der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Beiträge zu einer Bestandnahme. Registerband zur Dokumentation. Arbeitsberichte 4. (Herne: Stiftung Martin-Opitz-Bibliothek, 2004). Based in large part on the Schmidt collection, the second major effort to document expellee monuments has been conducted by the BdV. Starting in the late 1960s, has attempted several times without success to compile a complete list. An accurate total is unknown but the number is believed to be around 1,400-1,500. The BdV solicits information from the public on the locations of hitherto undiscovered monuments. For the documentation project, see <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool/inmemoriam.php3>> Accessed August 26, 2010.

focused on Nazi crimes. This study strives to recover that narrative by elucidating and recapitulating the conceptions of history unveiled by the monuments and by examining the contributions the monuments make to memory culture in Germany. The results of my examination will allow me to make three larger arguments.

First, I will show that local expellee monuments debunk the thesis that German wartime suffering was taboo as a subject of postwar discussion and commemoration, at least in the sense that discussion of the topic was not permitted or nonexistent (Central Argument #1).<sup>14</sup> The monuments prove that the victimization of Germans, particularly of the expellees, has been an ever-present topic on the minds and in the private and public memories of significant numbers of Germans. While this study is not the first that has set out to demystify the notion of postwar commemorative taboos, it is the first major study of expellee monuments that does so.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The suggestion that German suffering in WWII was unmentionable and unacceptable except in the most radical circles is widely shared. Writing about the taboo was, for example, Günter Grass, who lamented in a novella that moderate Germans of a certain generation faced a self-imposed restriction when discussing German experiences of war because of the shame over what their parents had done or overlooked during the Third Reich. See Grass, *Im Krebsgang. Eine Novelle*. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001). W.G. Sebald, in seeking to explain the paucity of literary representations of the destruction of German cities as a result of the Allied air war, wrote that “There was a tacit agreement, equally binding on everyone, that the true state of material and moral ruin in which the country found itself was not to be described. The darkest aspects of the final act of destruction, as experienced by the great majority of the German population, remained under a kind of taboo like a shameful family secret, a secret that perhaps could not even be privately acknowledged.” See Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*. Tr. Anthea Bell. (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 10. Even earlier, director and author Helke Sander purported the existence of a taboo regarding the rape of German women by Allied soldiers. She commented, “The film and the book *BeFreier und Befreite* are about the mass rapes in Germany in the last weeks of World War II and the immediate postwar period. I am often asked how I came up with this topic. I, on the other hand, ask myself why it wasn’t a topic for nearly fifty years.” See Sander, “Erinnern/Vergessen,” in Sander and Johr (eds.) *BeFreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigungen und Kinder*. (Munich: Kunstmann, 1992), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the number of attempts to refute this position involving various modes of cultural representation including literature and film continues to grow. Much of the secondary literature exploring the shifts in memory culture cited above was produced with the aim of dispelling the taboo thesis. See Footnote 5 above. More specific attempts to disprove certain aspects of the thesis also exist. For example, on the purported taboo about the rape of German women, see Atina Grossmann’s convincing rebuttal of Helke Sander’s claim about taboos surrounding rape: Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *October*. Vol. 72, Berlin 1995: War and Rape “Liberators Take Liberties”; Spring 1995, pp. 42-63. In response to W.G. Sebald, Susanne Vees-Gulani contests both the

Second, these local monuments have been part and parcel of a deliberate and sustained effort to shape discussions of victimhood resulting from the Second World War (Central Argument #2). That significant numbers of the memorials were erected within the first decade after the war demonstrates the immediate but also persistent attempts to assert the preeminence of German victimization in the face of Nazi atrocities and official measures of reconciliation and reparation undertaken by the federal government. Hundreds of monuments dedicated since then, including many erected after reunification in the former GDR, show, in fact, how this endeavor has continued, at least on the local level. Though the ongoing debate over the proposed Center Against Expulsions demonstrates that these efforts have endured on the national level as well, the purpose of my study is to go “beyond Berlin” (though there are several expellee monuments in the German capital too) to illuminate historical narratives at the grassroots.<sup>16</sup> This is because I believe the local monuments to be a very public expression of popular memories “from below” (as opposed to official discourse and proper behavior imposed “from above”) and

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lack of literary depictions of the air war and provides psychological reasons for why aerial bombardment was such a difficult topic to tackle: Veas-Gulani, Trauma and Guilt: Literature of Wartime Bombing in Germany. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003). Lastly all the contributors to Niven’s edited volume “test the relative validity,” as Niven puts it, of the taboo thesis. In my estimation, most succeed. Niven, Germans as Victims.

<sup>16</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Paul B. Jaskot (eds.) Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007). The point of the collection of essays contained in this work, according to its editors, was to test whether Berlin’s “fervent engagement with the Nazi experience” is the exception or the rule in postwar Germany. (p. 2) Therefore, the contributions in their edited volume investigate a wide range of local debates over the Nazi past. They write, “By analyzing a wide range of buildings, memorials, and urban spaces that have sparked heated debates over the Nazi past in various towns and cities outside of the German capital, we intend to develop a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic interaction between local and national trends within Germany’s broader culture of memory.” (p. 2) These citations are taken from the editors’ introductory essay, “Urban Space and the Nazi Past in Postwar Germany,” pp. 1-21.

a clear and concrete (figuratively and literally) example of how German-centered postwar narratives have persisted despite the emergence of Holocaust-centered narratives.<sup>17</sup>

Third, local expellee monuments facilitate the construction of de-contextualized German-centered narratives based on (A) the loss of Heimat and the concomitant territorial claims this forfeiture engendered; and (B) exculpatory assertions of victimhood and collective innocence (Central Argument #3). As discussed below, these two “thematic clusters” form the basis for my analysis. However, instead of constructing—as their defenders might contend and as the proponents of the Center Against Expulsions would argue—an innocuous, more inclusive, parallel narrative that merely augments official, Holocaust-centered narratives, my examination of local monuments unveils the building blocks of counter-narratives that set out instead to match and, at times, supersede official narratives. Indeed, expellee monuments reveal historical interpretations that go beyond simple commemoration and instead reflect the concrete and symbolic political objectives of the expellee organizations.

## **SOURCES & METHODOLOGY**

This dissertation is composed of an all-encompassing examination of local expellee monuments. The main sources are the individual expellee monuments themselves. Empirical analysis of their forms, inscriptions, locations, and materials provides a solid basis from which to draw conclusions. Unfortunately, there is some discrepancy as to the

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<sup>17</sup> No less important, this point further illustrates the multi-leveled nature of a nation’s memory culture, an argument which echoes the work of John E. Bodnar, who persuasively uncovers this inherent tension in the American context through examination of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. See John E. Bodnar, Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Bodnar exposed the incongruities that existed in the United States on the “vernacular” and “official” levels of memory. In this specific case, vernacular memory trumped official memory of the Vietnam War, which resulted in Maya Lin’s mournful, individualized memorial, rather than in a traditional war memorial that glorified the nation.

total number of expellee monuments.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, and in order to work from a finite amount, I have limited my analysis in all but a few cases to the collection of expellee monuments contained in a BdV publication from December 2008, which coincided with the early stages of my dissertation writing.<sup>19</sup> The booklet contains 1,365 monuments (Table 1).<sup>20</sup> Kurt Schmidt's catalogue and the BdV's online documentation are helpful starting points when examining expellee monuments, but neither provides analysis of the monuments themselves, or of the specific methodology used to locate and enumerate them. Surprisingly, other examples of scholarship exclusively on this topic are rare and generally limited in scope.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As stated above, the BdV is actively soliciting information as to the whereabouts of expellee monuments unaccounted for as of yet. As a result, the online monument documentation project is updated regularly. Of course, this means that the totals frequently change.

<sup>19</sup> Bund der Vertriebenen –Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände (ed.) Mahn- und Gedenkstätten der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen. (Bedburg: Druckpunkt Offset, 2008). According to the BdV's website, since this booklet was published, new monuments have been recorded bringing the total number to over 1,400. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the more finite number of 1,365 will be used.

<sup>20</sup> Though not always complete or uniform, the booklet provides information on the type of monument, the inscription, the location, and the date of erection. There is some question as to what constitutes a local expellee monument. One answer is that expellee monuments are those the BdV includes in its collections. I provide another definition in chapter one.

<sup>21</sup> For example, Kathrin Panne's sketch of expellee monuments in *Landkreis Celle*, "Erinnerungspolitik—Erinnerungspuren: Zur Funktion symbolischer Erinnerung an Flucht und Vertreibung im öffentlichen Raum. Eine Skizze," in Rainer Schulze, Reinhard Rohde and Rainer Voss (eds.) Zwischen Heimat und Zuhause: Deutsche Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in (West-)Deutschland 1945-2000. (Osnabrück: Senoco, 2001), pp. 201-15. Other examples are the articles by Hans-Werner Retterath, "Geschichtsbilderkampf und zwiespältige Beheimatungsversuche—Vertriebenenendenkmale in Südbaden," Jahrbuch für deutsche und osteuropäische Volkskunde, 47 (2005), pp. 83-121, and "Gedenkstein und Wegweiser. Zur Symbolik von zwei Vertriebenenendenkmälern in Lörrach/Südbaden," Jahrbuch für deutsche und osteuropäische Volkskunde, 48 (2006), 1-33. More recently, Stephan Scholz investigated the use of religious symbols in the monuments in "'Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse'—Religiöse Motive in der bundesdeutschen Gedenkort der Flucht und Vertreibung," Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte, 102 (2008), pp. 287-313. Scholz also produced an article called "'Heute erinnert nicht mehr dran?' Vertriebenenendenkmäler und Denkmalsinitiativen in Oldenburg 1951-2008," Oldenburger Jahrbuch 2009. Band 109 Sonderdruck. (Oldenburg: Isensee Verlag, 2009), pp. 167-199. Publications in English are even more uncommon. See Hans Hesse and Elke Purpus, "Monuments and Commemorative Sites for German Expellees," in Bill Niven and Chloe Praver (eds.) Commemoration in Germany Since 1945. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 48-57, as well as Jeffrey Luppé, "'Den Toten der ostdeutschen Heimat': Local Expellee Monuments and the Construction of Post-war Narratives," in Helmut Schmitz and Annette Seidel-Arpaci (eds.) Discourses of 'German Wartime Suffering'. (Amsterdam: Rodopi, forthcoming).

Table 1 Monuments Erected By Decade, By Land									
	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	No Date/ Unkn own	Total
<i>West Germany</i>									
Baden-Württemberg	2	63	28	23	65	18	9	38	<b>246</b>
Bavaria	16	94	25	26	53	31	13	74	<b>332</b>
Berlin	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	<b>6</b>
Bremen	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Hamburg	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	<b>2</b>
Hessen	11	78	29	12	44	20	6	38	<b>238</b>
Lower Saxony	3	36	13	6	28	17	2	28	<b>133</b>
North Rhine-Westphalia	2	39	26	14	43	16	5	37	<b>182</b>
Rhineland Palatinate	0	8	3	0	7	4	1	12	<b>35</b>
Saarland	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	<b>2</b>
Schleswig-Holstein	0	20	10	3	17	8	0	32	<b>90</b>
<b>Total West Germany</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>1268</b>
<i>Former GDR</i>									
Brandenburg	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	0	<b>7</b>
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	<b>6</b>
Saxony	0	0	0	0	0	7	3	1	<b>11</b>
Saxony-Anhalt	0	0	0	0	0	6	2	1	<b>9</b>
Thuringia	0	0	0	0	0	25	2	0	<b>27</b>
<b>Total Former GDR</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>60</b>
<i>International</i>									
Austria	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	2	<b>5</b>
Former Yugoslavia	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	<b>7</b>
Poland	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	<b>5</b>
Romania	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Czech Republic	0	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	<b>7</b>
Hungary	0	0	0	1	0	7	1	0	<b>9</b>
Namibia	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
South Africa	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
USA	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total International</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>1365</b>

For this reason, I have relied primarily on additional primary materials—such as manuscripts of speeches, dedication ceremony programs, newspaper clippings, and other archival material—collected during two research trips to Germany, in 2007 (North Rhine-Westphalia) and in 2009 (Baden-Württemberg), respectively. During each trip I visited

the headquarters of the BdV, which houses a small monument archive from which I obtained a number of materials. At those times, I also personally visited and photographed 90 expellee monuments. (See Appendix) I use my own images as well as some from the BdV monument archive to illustrate my arguments.<sup>22</sup> Much of the other materials I acquired came from personal collections or from the archives of local BdV affiliates in North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg. As a result, many—though certainly not all—of the examples from which I draw are located in those two Länder.

With help from these materials, I am able to provide informed “readings” of expellee monuments. As a methodological model for my study, I have chosen James E. Young’s landmark study of Holocaust memorials.<sup>23</sup> Young took a multidimensional approach to depict the “biography” of each memorial site emphasizing: 1) “the aesthetic contours;” 2) “the memorials’ place in contemporary artistic discourse;” 3) “the activities that brought the memorial into being;” 4) “the give and take between memorial and viewers;” and 5) “the responses of viewers to their own world in light of the memorialized past.” Differing subject matters, sources, scales, and sheer numbers of monuments prevent a completely parallel study; nevertheless, I have sought to mimic Young’s innovative approach. Young went beyond a mere formal or historical investigation to examine both “the physical and metaphysical qualities of these memorial texts,” as well as their “tactile and temporal dimensions,” to reveal what he calls, “the

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<sup>22</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to the Bund der Vertriebenen for permission to use its photographs in this dissertation.

<sup>23</sup> Young, The Texture of Memory.



texture of memory.”<sup>24</sup> I seek to shed light on the “texture of memory” of expellee monuments.

Young’s analysis of Holocaust memorials is a solid point of departure for my study. However, I aim to transcend his work. His otherwise authoritative survey fails to consider a vital aspect of monuments that makes my analysis distinct and more thorough. That is, he does not examine the commemorative ceremonies which regularly occur at the monuments. In the case of expellee monuments, this includes their unveiling ceremonies and consecrations, but also the annual *Tag der Heimat* and *Volkstrauertag* commemorations which happen there.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in addition to exploring the monuments themselves—with Young’s work as model—I add another dimension to the analysis and place special emphasis on the elements of commemorative practices which take place at the monuments.

Moreover, Young’s approach inadequately addresses the delicate issue of constructing a truly representative sample when dealing with an inaccessibly large number of memorial sites. His solution is too simple. He writes, “Rather than writing a comprehensive survey of these memorials, or attempting merely to cull the ‘good’ monuments from the ‘bad,’ I have focused on a selected handful in ways that will suggest a larger critique of all such memorials.”<sup>26</sup> With over one thousand local expellee monuments to evaluate, I too am unable to offer an exhaustive examination. Nevertheless, a sound and systematic analytical toolkit is crucial. While not perfectly

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>25</sup> These holidays constitute the expellees’ two chief days of commemoration. I provide a thorough analysis of them in Chapter 10.

<sup>26</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. ix.

representative, I have developed a thematic/temporal scheme to cluster together expellee monuments based on their dominant themes.

Indeed, what is most striking and interesting about these disparate monuments is the similarity of the narratives they put forth. In fact, while one does notice some general stylistic variations depending on geography, one does not encounter significant differences in the monuments' themes whether they were erected in Schleswig-Holstein or Bavaria or anywhere else in the Federal Republic. There is, however, a clear temporal divide. This schism marks a key thematic shift that is central for my analysis. For example, prior to the 1970s, when the monuments were parts of campaigns advocating the redrawing of postwar boundaries, the vast majority of monuments displayed texts and images pertaining to the homelands the East Prussians, Pomeranians, Silesians, and Sudeten Germans were forced to vacate after the war. The bulk of the monuments erected since then, however, usually display other motifs in order to address different political, cultural, and commemorative needs. The causes of this shift are vital for the purposes of my study and will be discussed at length below.

Even more importantly, however, the shift forms the basis for two thematic clusters of monuments. Indeed, these clusters comprise the two dominant thematic strands of historical narratives centering on the expulsion at the local level. For this reason, I subdivide local expellee monuments based on the object of their commemoration, i.e. those that commemorate the loss of Heimat and raise territorial claims and those which make exculpatory assertions of victimhood and collective innocence. I label them (A.) "Loss of Heimat and Territorial Claims," and (B.) "Aesthetics of Collective Innocence." This approach allows me to highlight these

hegemonic tendencies and draw conclusions on the basis of the predominant patterns. I then break down each cluster further into several more specific categories. Though I have tried not to cherry-pick only the most extraordinary monuments, those I have chosen in the chapters below are some of the most striking and salient examples. Clearly, they were not selected at random, but instead constitute ideal types. Nevertheless, my interpretive scheme does not capture all local expellee monuments. As will be apparent, some monuments fit into more than one category. Others defy simple categorization. However, it should not be assumed that those not considered here will not be included because they radically contradict these broad categories.

## ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

In a critique of the proposed Center Against Expulsions, the journalist Kurt Nelhiebel wrote that, “No group within the German populace has experienced as much political attention (*Zuwendung*) after WWII as the expellees—not the bombing victims, not the war widows, much less the political victims of the National Socialist dictatorship. Yet the expellees have always felt disadvantaged.”<sup>27</sup> By dint of their large numbers and organization, but also because of the implications of their political and cultural goals, none of the other groups Nelhiebel mentioned has possessed the political sway or garnered media attention like the expellees. Indeed, they have been and still are *primus inter pares* amongst the German victims of WWII. Moreover, local expellee monuments give a good indication of how some Germans at the grassroots have conceived of and memorialized the recent past. As has been the case on the national level with the Center

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<sup>27</sup> Kurt Nelhiebel, “Die Entkoppelung von Krieg und Vertreibung. Zu Manfred Kittels Deutung der jüngeren europäischen Geschichte.” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*. Vol. 1, 58, 2010, p.54.

Against Expulsions, it is clear that the expellees have tried with their local monuments to secure their place on Germany's "postwar memory map."<sup>28</sup> The permission and the financial support of the monuments often (but not always) granted by local governments for the monuments has validated the views espoused by the expellee organizations and has reflected communities' commemorative priorities. More importantly, the monuments demonstrate how historical narratives centering on the experiences of Germans have survived and persisted despite the emergence of other historical narratives based on the Holocaust.

This study looks at how some Germans—particularly the expellees—have commemorated and represented their experiences of WWII in the form of local monuments. Consisting of three parts, its layout is as follows. Part I—"Literature Review and Historical Context" consists of two chapters which situate and contextualize my analysis. In Chapter One, "Monuments and Narrating the Past," I step away momentarily from expellee monuments to present an analysis of relevant secondary literature on monuments in a primarily non-German context to explore broader definitions of these commemorative objects and review how scholars from several fields have theorized monuments' complex functions, in particular, their practical functions, as well as how they operate as mnemonic devices. By discussing current debates on the efficacy of monuments, this chapter addresses some points of contention regarding the place and capabilities of monuments in contemporary society and highlights their position as a

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<sup>28</sup> On this enlightening concept, see Markovits and Reich, *The German Predicament*, pp. 34-42. According to the authors, different variations of four memory clusters—the Weimar cluster, the Nazi cluster, the Bundesrepublik cluster, and the GDR cluster—are pitted against each other in a "memory war" for supremacy of Germany's memory map. They write, "At this moment we can observe only the deconstruction of existing collective memories; we are still far from the establishment of a permanent memory map in which one cluster of memories will enjoy a dominant position." (p.41).

battlefront in memory conflicts. In addition, by briefly mentioning monuments to the Civil War in the American South, I draw a parallel to those erected by the expellees to demonstrate how militarily defeated and politically disenfranchised regimes have employed monuments to construct and transmit historical narratives.

Ultimately, my dissertation is an investigation of the historical narratives local expellee monuments express. At different times and different places, however, these narratives have varied, both in tone and in resonance. As a result, the monuments take different forms, bear altered inscriptions, and were erected at different locations. In Chapter Two, “From Consensus to Contestation: The Place of Flight and Expulsion in Postwar Commemoration,” I present the political and cultural explanations for why expellee monuments took the shapes and employed the rhetoric they have. Put differently, I seek in this chapter to periodize perceptions of the expellees and the expulsion in Germany in light of changing political and cultural contexts. While this approach allows for some commentary on expellee monuments, its main purpose will be to delineate the important societal developments, such as Ostpolitik and the emergence of Holocaust-centered narratives, which have shaped the understandings of the past expellee monuments articulate. That is, I set the stage for further analysis by providing a historical framework into which I embed my more thorough examination of expellee monuments.

Part II—“The Monuments” constitutes the empirical core of my study and contains my interpretive work on local expellee monuments. I divide Part II into two thematic clusters. Cluster A, “Loss of Heimat and Territorial Claims,” looks at monuments that bemoan the forfeiture of German territory as a result of WWII and express the keen desire to reacquire it. Here, the suffering of the expellees was over the

loss of their homeland and not over the brutalities they experienced. Cluster A contains four chapters based on four distinct monument categories, all of which celebrate territory more than people. Chapter Three, “*Großdeutschland* and the Right to the Heimat,” features monuments that maintain the Germanness of the territory the expellees left behind; Chapter Four, “Cold War Conflation,” illuminates the monuments that couch the expellees’ territorial demands in the language of the Cold War; Chapter Five, “Germans as ‘*Kulturträger*’—Accomplishments of German Settlement,” examines the monuments that propound a deep connection to a Heimat created by Germans within the boundaries of other states and extol the perceived cultural contributions that the Germans claim to have bequeathed the world; and Chapter Six, “*Unseren Toten*—Ceremonies and Territorial Claims,” looks at the monuments that link the expellees to their former territory through their burial grounds. All the monuments examined in this chapter are related in that they were erected in the pursuit of “concrete politics”: societal recognition and legal definitions of the expellees, material compensation for their losses, and ultimately, the revision of the postwar territorial status quo.

At around the same time as Willy Brandt’s rise to power as chancellor, a noticeable change in interpretations of the Nazi past occurred in West Germany. In addition, Brandt’s foreign policy made territorial reacquisition virtually impossible. The commemoration of the expulsion persisted, however. As a result of these social and political changes (discussed below), expellee organizations used different motifs to reflect the new realities. In fact, a perceptible shift in emphasis emerged in the forms and inscriptions of local expellee monuments, which is reflected in the monuments of cluster B, “Aesthetics of Collective Innocence.” These monuments employ exculpatory

iconography to address the physical suffering of the expellees and purport their collective innocence. Cluster B contains three chapters based on three distinct monument categories. Chapter Seven, “Christian Symbolism and Collective Innocence,” looks at how expellee organizations have used religious motifs to link the experience of the expellees with that of Christ. Though this was not widespread, the ramifications of such assertions are worthy of closer inspection. Chapter Eight, “*Mutterliebe*—Allegory of the Female Form,” examines the growing numbers of monuments which feature women, particularly mothers, accompanied by small children, as the emblematic figures of flight and expulsion. Chapter Nine, “Subsuming Victims,” explores monuments dedicated to all victims of the war. These monuments lump together all war dead in one overarching victim collective. In almost all cases, however, the expellees are the only victim group mentioned by name. The undifferentiated commemoration occurring on these monuments, like all the rest of cluster B, are indicative of the “symbolic politics” pursued by the expellee organizations in the post-Ostpolitik, post-Holocaust era. No longer about emphasizing the lost Heimat, the expellee organizations erected these monuments in the pursuit of societal acknowledgment of the expellees’ innocent suffering.

Part III—“Commemorative Ceremonies” contains the final chapter, “Local Expellee Monuments as Loci of Remembrance: Tag der Heimat and the Commemorative Ceremonies of the Expellees” (Chapter Ten). Adding another layer to their mnemonic capabilities, expellee monuments have played host for decades to regular commemorative ceremonies: first at their dedications and consecrations, and annually on Volkstrauertag and other days of mourning, as well as on the most important expellee day of commemoration, Tag der Heimat. This chapter provides a brief history of these two

yearly commemorative days and examines key rituals, symbols, and other remembrance practices performed on them. It is during the events on Volkstrauertag and Tag der Heimat that the narratives the monuments unveil are literally put into motion and brought to life.

The study ends with a short conclusion in which I recapitulate my main arguments and summarize my results.



# **PART ONE**

## **LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

### **CHAPTER ONE**

#### **MONUMENTS AND NARRATING THE PAST**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

On June 17, 1980, the Day of German Unity, a tall, thin commemorative stone with the terse inscription DER OSTDEUTSCHEN HEIMAT – DIE VERTRIEBENEN (To the East German Homeland – the Expellees) was unveiled in a park in the Garath district of Düsseldorf (Figures 1 & 2).<sup>1</sup> Flags of the *Landmannschaften* (regional associations) of the former eastern provinces as well as a group of Sudeten Germans in traditional costumes ringed the podium. As the opening remarks of the local BdV-chairman Fritz Arndt made clear to an audience of hundreds—including local public officials and representatives from expellee organizations and other German victim groups (e.g. the Association of Victims of Stalinism)—the sharp edges and fissures of the two-ton quarry stone made of gneiss, chosen instead of a boulder (a more traditional material for German monuments) were to represent “our presently jagged (*zerklüftetes*) fatherland.”<sup>2</sup> Arndt’s

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<sup>1</sup> In the interest of uniformity, I spell out all monument inscriptions in capital letters followed by my translation from the German.

<sup>2</sup> To many expellees, the division of Germany into two states—the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) as part of the postwar settlement—represented but two-thirds of German territory. In fact, some today still speak of Germany’s “*Dreiteilung*” or “triple partitioning,” meaning the two states which emerged and the former territory in the German East, today a part of Poland

later comments, and the address given by the guest of honor, Ingrid von Loebell, deputy chairwoman of the local branch of the CDU, further elucidated the symbolic, memorial purpose the otherwise speechless, lifeless monument was to have.



**Figure 1 Düsseldorf. Photo: J.L.**



**Figure 2 Düsseldorf (close-up). Photo: J.L.**

Though dedicated to the lost homeland of Germany's former eastern provinces, the inconspicuously adorned monument's design had a very specific function from the beginning that went beyond the commemoration of any loss of life, property, or territory. As Arndt stated, the stone's "intentionally dispassionate" inscription revealed the real motivation behind its erection. It was chosen, he elaborated, "to proclaim to the all too easily forgetful public," first, that "there *is* a German East" (my emphasis—note the usage of the present tense); second, that "the Germans were forcibly driven from their homeland in the German East with 2.1 million victims to mourn"; and third that "we will

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and Russia. As a result, expellee celebrations of the "Day of German Unity" not only expressed the desire for reunification of the two German states in the context of the Cold War but also included the missing and "forgotten segment," the once German territory beyond the Oder-Neisse border.

never give up our right to our East German homeland.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Arndt linked the plight of German expellees with the contemporary worldwide refugee problem. “[The German expellees’] right to homeland and self-determination is equally as inalienable as that of other peoples and ethnic groups. There is no statute of limitations!” In addition to demanding compensation for the expellees’ material losses, Arndt appealed to the German federal government and the country’s political parties “not to accept the expulsion of the Germans as a consequence of the lost war, but rather to re-establish [their] rights with peaceful means.”

In the only slightly more diplomatic words of a politician, von Loebell reiterated these sentiments: “The erection of this stone, along with the other cultural activities of the expellee associations, is a small but important contribution to the preservation of our historical consciousness, our identity as German *Volk*, our cohesion, and our desire for unity—lastly, our desire for freedom, which, we are commonly convinced, there will be only when the German *Volk* is given back the right to self-determination.” Speaking more about the present state of affairs in divided Germany than about the immediate postwar era, von Loebell continued. “May this stone be a wake-up call to all the citizens of this city, that we will never resign ourselves to the fact of Germany’s division...”<sup>4</sup>

At first glance, this solitary monument—like all others—was designed simply to mark publicly and permanently certain memories as well as to remind passersby of specific historical events. The site also provided a gathering place for people to grieve and remember. As discussed below, these aspects constitute two of the fundamental roles played by all types of memorials. That is, this brief account provides examples of some

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<sup>3</sup> It is unclear to whom the pronoun “we” refers here.

<sup>4</sup> Again, it is unclear to whom the speaker refers.

essential qualities of monuments. In addition, it sheds light on the possible functions of a monument. For example, it appears that the monument's initiators sought to imbue it with more meaning than what the stone's vague inscription alone conveys.

In addition, the remarks uttered at the monument's dedication ceremony expose a one-sided historical interpretation seemingly at odds with standard postwar narratives in Germany.<sup>5</sup> Investigating formal aspects (e.g. shape, inscription, material, location) and evaluating other available evidence (e.g. archival materials, dedication speeches and other commemorative activities) can indicate how this monument and others are established with quite narrow and seemingly innocuous commemorative qualities but also laced with meaning and intentions that go beyond mere remembrance. Simply put, what appears commemorative in tone is often political in intent.

The commemorative stone in Düsseldorf-Garath illustrates furthermore how a monument can be a place where the past intersects with the present with meaningful implications for the future. In fact, along with reflecting historical memory, this example contains a richer, deeper message, including the achievement of political objectives. Indeed, the monument was created as a clarion call for further action. In other words, this episode embeds this and all local expellee monuments into a larger, ongoing discourse on monuments but also sheds initial light on how the sponsors of monuments employ these commemorative objects to create narratives of the past in locations where interpretations of events or the actions of leaders and other heroes are in dispute. I present an exploration of these issues, a discussion of major debates surrounding them, and make other general remarks about monuments below.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, there is no mention in the monument's terse inscription or in the speakers' comments about the millions of Germany's victims of World War II.

## WHAT MONUMENTS ARE

While this dissertation is the first attempt to assess local expellee monuments in a systematic, interpretive way, the literature on other monuments and their connection to memory—in various geographic, temporal, and formal contexts—is vast. Providing a complete overview of this extensive topic would exceed the limits of this study. Instead, I offer here a review of some major theoretical works on monuments, their function(s), and the motive(s) of those who seek to erect them. Concomitantly, I identify major threads in recent noteworthy scholarship and in older, seminal contributions on monuments in general in order to shed light on key debates within this field, as well as to situate local expellee monuments into a larger discourse on the role these structures play in narrating the past. In what follows, I make an effort to avoid prolonged discussion of specific monuments in order to evince the commonalities all possess. Thus, I cite general works to underscore universal applicability. In some cases, however, references to particular monuments are unavoidable.

### Definitions of “Monuments”

Most works start with the etymological origin of the word “monument,”<sup>6</sup> or its definition, coupled with a discussion of what a monument “is.” As to the former, the term “monument” comes from the Latin root *monere* which means to remind, recall, inform, teach, admonish, or warn. Many definitions exist to address the latter. For example, the first two of the “Nine Points on Monumentality” (1943) compiled by architecture and art historians José Luis Sert, Fernand Léger, and Sigfried Giedion call monuments “human

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<sup>6</sup> According to Helmut Scharf, the source of the German term “Denkmal” was none other than the “Head of the German Reformation,” Martin Luther. Kleine Kunstgeschichte des deutschen Denkmals. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984), p. 8.

landmarks which men have created as symbols for their ideals, for their aims, and for their actions. They are intended to outlive the period which originated them, and constitute a heritage for future generations. As such, they form a link between the past and the future.” Their second point refers to them as “the expression of man’s highest cultural needs.”<sup>7</sup> The art historian Hans-Ernst Mittag provides an oft-cited (at least in the German-language literature) and more succinctly formulated meaning. He defines a monument as, “an independent work of art erected in perpetuity by a certain group of people at a certain location that is supposed to commemorate people and events. The monument as symbol in political-historical conflicts in society is the manifestation of historical consciousness.”<sup>8</sup> Axel Lapp offers an elaborate and perhaps more captivating definition which also links monuments more directly to memory:

Monuments and memorials are formatted abstractions or, to put it differently, materializations of intellectual concepts. They are public facilitators around which a collective memory is created, endeavoring to use their overt themes as a subject for the memory of the future, or, in other words, attempting to create a space in the collective memory of the community to which they are exposed. Once established, they themselves become representations of their public’s collective memory. [...] Monuments are erected to promulgate their subject to the present, to transfuse it into the future and to assure the present that the monument’s durability ensures the longevity of the act of commemoration and, thus, also its perpetual validity.<sup>9</sup>

Radically divergent definitions of the term do not exist. Interestingly, all of these meanings highlight the fundamental temporal yet diachronic connotations monuments

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<sup>7</sup> J. L. Sert, F. Léger, and S. Giedion, “Nine Points on Monumentality,” in Sigfried Giedion. Architecture, You, and Me: The Diary of a Development. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 48. After defining the term, the authors proceed to list reasons for the “decline and misuse of monumentality”—a topic discussed in further detail below.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in Jochen Spielmann, “Stein des Anstoßes oder Schlußstein der Auseinandersetzung?” in Mai, Ekkehard, et al. (eds.) Denkmal, Zeichen, Monument: Skulptur und öffentlicher Raum heute. (Munich: Prestel, 1989), p. 112.

<sup>9</sup> Axel Lapp, “Rodin’s *Bourgeois de Calais*: Commemorating a French Nation Ideal in London,” in William Kidd and Brian Murdoch (eds.) Memory and Memorials: The Commemorative Century. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 15-16.

intrinsically possess. Monuments refer to the past but have implications for both the present and the future.<sup>10</sup>

### **Intentionality of Monuments and Their Traditional Forms**

Writing in 1903, art historian Alois Riegl came up with a similar definition. More significantly though, he identified three classes of monuments based on the original deliberateness of commemoration: “intentional,” “historical,” and those with “age-value.”<sup>11</sup> Although his attention was devoted primarily to the latter two categories (historical and age-value) in the interest of architectural preservation, Riegl made a pertinent point about the former (intentional) also worth mentioning. He wrote, “In the case of the intentional monument, its commemorative value has been determined by the makers, while *we* have defined the value of the unintentional ones.” (original emphasis)<sup>12</sup> Unlike historical monuments then, which require “our modern perception” to make works of art and architecture “monumental,” intentional monuments (like local expellee monuments) are erected with a calculated commemorative purpose.

Though these definitions and classifications indicate how theorists have conceived of monuments over the past century and as such shed some initial light on local expellee monuments, different forms of such memorials have been erected since antiquity. All contemporary monuments are part of a much older tradition. In fact, James Stevens Curl

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<sup>10</sup> On this point, see for example, Andrei S. Markovits, “The Story of the National World War II Memorial on the Mall in Washington, DC: A Major Controversy over America’s Last Uncontroversial War,” (Paper presented at the international conference “Changing Memories of War 1945 + 60,” Mishkenot Sha’ananim, Jerusalem, May 9, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Alois Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin,” *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982[1903]), pp. 21-50. Tr. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo.

<sup>12</sup> Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” p. 23.

traces current trends in European memorials, monuments, and funerary architecture back to the tombs of the ancient Egyptians and Greek war graves. He writes,

Permanent memorials to the dead have been desired by generations of people in Western European culture. The wish to make a structure that will withstand the worst that time and the elements can do has existed since the beginning of history. This wish is connected with a need for a permanent record as well as the need to make some visible symbol to express what society feels it should remember.<sup>13</sup>

Curl attributes the impulse to create monuments to mankind's awareness of its own mortality. "The knowledge that every human being must die has undoubtedly contributed to man's desire to commemorate his existence by building monuments, erecting funerary architecture, and otherwise celebrating death."<sup>14</sup> Thus monuments in most cases—above all, those which commemorate events and people related to armed conflict—serve, according to Curl, as a *memento mori*. As we shall see, literature on monuments and memorials related to the dead—above all to the victims of war, particularly soldiers—comprise a substantial portion of the theoretical works on these commemorative objects in general.

In the same vein, Reinhart Koselleck wrote "commemoration of the dead belongs to human culture; commemorating the fallen, those who died violently, those who died in battle, in a civil war or war, belongs to political culture." He stated, "Monuments with their symbols and inscriptions have become hallowed places, which, when assiduously cultivated, serve their initiators and their descendants as a place where they can find themselves in remembrance of the dead." The urge to create and maintain these places of commemoration, according to Koselleck, has remained constant. Indeed, throughout history, people have felt the need to justify violent death. It should come as no surprise

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<sup>13</sup> James Stevens Curl, A Celebration of Death: An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments, and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition. (London: Constable, 1980), p. 315.

<sup>14</sup> Curl, A Celebration of Death, p. 1.



then that the forms and iconography of political memorials have remained “comparatively stable even into our own century, irrespective of historical circumstances.” More specifically, he ascertained,

Certainly, the styles and parameters of iconographic interpretation change but the triumphant or dying warriors always rise again; the helpful gods, angels, and saints are invoked as well as the many roles women play; crosses are erected, mythically charged animals are symbolized or allegorized; weapons are immortalized; the architectural symbols—from pyramids to obelisks and triumphal arches—reappear again and again; the colonnades, sarcophagi and cenotaphs, chapels or other places of commemoration as well. Expressions of pathos as well as verses from both testaments of the Bible or from classic authors are passed on over generations.<sup>15</sup>

Koselleck is not the only observer who noticed this ongoing tradition. In fact, art historian Alan Borg points out the same formal and iconographic continuities but in an energetic effort to “redeem” war memorials of the twentieth century. Borg firmly believes these monuments have been unfairly maligned aesthetically by critics. “We have no difficulty in seeing Assyrian palace friezes, Greek temples, or Roman triumphal arches as works of art, but many still find it difficult to treat the official art of our own century with an equally open mind.” By situating contemporary war memorials in a historical trajectory reaching back to antiquity, Borg hopes to demonstrate that, “modern memorials deserve as much attention, and certainly derive from man of the same precepts as those of the past.”<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, “If we begin to appreciate war memorials as part of an ancient and continuing artistic tradition, it becomes easier to assess how well they fulfill their primary purpose.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Reinhart Koselleck. “Einleitung,” in Koselleck and Michael Jeismann (eds.) Der politische Totenkult: Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Alan Borg, War Memorials: From Antiquity to the Present. (London: Leo Cooper, 1991), p. xi.

<sup>17</sup> Borg, War Memorials, p. xiii.

## **What Local Expellee Monuments Are**

In defining what expellee monuments are, I do not consider them “war memorials” in the traditional sense described above. Instead, I see them as monuments which commemorate events that happened to the Germans from the East who suffered as a result of flight and expulsion, retributive deportation for forced labor in the Soviet Union, and national division, as well as the loss of life, property, culture, and homeland the previous occurrences implied—as as a result of the war initiated by the Nazi government. These monuments take many forms and employ a wide variety of symbols and inscriptions which I describe greater detail in Part II. Not all expellee monuments possess direct references to the expulsion, however. That is why I call them “expellee monuments” rather than “expulsion monuments.” Thus, in a way, I disconnect them from the war. Nevertheless, I contend these monuments reveal how a significant segment of the German people has understood and narrated a part of the war experience.

In addition, before moving on to what monuments do, a clarification of terms is necessary. Many scholars use the terms “monument” and “memorial” interchangeably. While some might argue that “monuments” are erected to express triumphalism and to extol great men and their achievements, and “memorials” are created to express loss and mourning—following James E. Young’s path-breaking work on Holocaust memorials—I do not believe there is an intrinsic difference between the two concepts. As Young convincingly points out, memorials can be many things, but they need not be a monument. A monument, however, is always a kind of memorial.<sup>18</sup> For the purpose of this study, the concept “memorial” is more inclusive and could potentially denote a host

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<sup>18</sup> For more on this distinction, see Young, *The Texture of Memory*, pp. 3-4. As should be clear, Young’s pioneering work on Holocaust memorials serves as the methodological backbone of this dissertation.

of commemorative objects or other sites, or even a national day of remembrance (e.g. Yom Hashoah in Israel or Memorial Day in the United States, as mentioned by Young) but has no significance in describing a monument's specific tenor. Nevertheless, the focus of this study is on expellee *monuments* and the forms they take, not, however, on the scores of other commemorative sites—for instance, *Heimatstuben* or the innumerable street names—associated with the German East and expulsion, all of which would be considered *memorials*.

Moreover, the monuments under analysis here need not be, and in most cases are not, grandiose in size or message. While I would concur in general with Lars Berggren's observation that, "the heterogeneity of the concept of the monument, its variability with time and place, and its varying application in recent studies," leads to analytical uncertainty and difficulties of creating frameworks for comparison, I do not come to the conclusion he reaches in examining monuments of the nineteenth century: namely, that size and complexity determine whether a commemorative object fits the bill as a monument or constitutes something of lesser value.<sup>19</sup> As Nelson and Olin simply state, "A monument is what art history chooses to celebrate and proclaim a monument."<sup>20</sup> I concur. The Washington Monument on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. and a commemorative plaque hanging on the wall of the *Rathaus* in a North Rhine-Westphalian village clearly do not have much in common in terms of size, form, or the place each occupies in public perception. This notwithstanding, both link the past with the present and future, are intentional, based formally on historical traditions, and finally,

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<sup>19</sup> Lars Berggren. "The 'Monumentomania' of the Nineteenth Century: Causes, Effects, and Problems of Study," in Wessel Reinink and Jeroen Stumpel (eds.) *Memory & Oblivion*. (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 561-66.

<sup>20</sup> Robert S. Nelson and Margaret Rose Olin. "Introduction," in Nelson and Olin. (eds.) *Monuments and Memory, Made and Unmade*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 2.

commemorative and evocative. In other words, both are “tangible markers of memory,” as Cynthia Mills calls the “monuments of the Lost Cause” in the American South.<sup>21</sup>

## **WHAT MONUMENTS *DO***

Rather than positing a new definition of what a monument “is”—a somewhat unrewarding endeavor for my purposes—my project seeks to move beyond the works cited above to expound what monuments “do”; in other words, I am more interested in exploring the “how” and “why” of monuments than the “what.” The commemorative objects under examination here are “monuments” as defined in the previous section. Furthermore, as many scholars have made abundantly clear, monuments say at least as much about the present as they say (or are purported to say) about the past. In addition, according to Riegl’s classification, expellee monuments are incontrovertibly intentional by dint of their initiators’ desire to create with them the capacity to commemorate, garner attention, and trigger affect with publicly displayed memorial objects. As stated repeatedly, however, my project sets out to investigate whether and how local expellee monuments reflect German-centered interpretations of the past and whether they have helped engender and perpetuate them. As Marianne Doezema points out, “Public monuments not only reflect but also contribute to a culture, and in so doing, have the potential to influence thought and experience.” It seems local expellee monuments have done just that. Doezema’s observation nicely encapsulates monuments’ potential and highlights why they can be so controversial. How then do monuments function, both as reflectors and generators of popular conceptions of history?

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<sup>21</sup> Cynthia Mills. “Introduction,” in Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (eds.) Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), p. xv.

## **Practical Functions: Physical Spaces, Identity Formation, Justifying & Glorifying**

Before tackling this complex question, a brief look at some other crucial but more practical functions of monuments in the twentieth century and beyond is in order. In his examination of private and public expressions of mourning following WWI, Jay Winter shows how war memorials became part of the “languages of mourning.” He states,

[Monuments to the “Great War”] were built as places to mourn. And be seen to mourn. Their ritual significance has often been obscured by their political symbolism which, now that the moment of mourning has long passed, is all that we can see. At the time, communal commemorative art provided first and foremost a framework for and legitimation of individual and family grief.<sup>22</sup>

In short, monuments provided, in this particular case, the physical space necessary to mourn publicly the massive loss of life and physical destruction suffered by family after family and community after community in Europe during the First World War. Obviously, due to their very nature as tangible commemorative objects, all monuments create this physical space. But Winter continues, “War memorials marked the spot where communities were reunited, where the dead were symbolically brought home, and where the separations of war, both temporary and eternal, were expressed, ritualized, and in time, accepted.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, monuments create a physical space for commemoration which in turn facilitates unified mourning.

For at least a short time, these “sites of mourning” possessed the “aura of unity, universality, and timelessness” that comes with the erection of monuments.<sup>24</sup> Yet according to Winter, this is short-lived. He writes,

Their initial charge was related to the needs of a huge population of bereaved people. Their grief was expressed in many ways, but in time, for the majority, the wounds began

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<sup>22</sup> Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 93.

<sup>23</sup> Winter, Sites of Memory, p. 98.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa Maya Knauer and Daniel J. Walkowitz, “Introduction,” in Walkowitz and Knauer (eds.) Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 5.

to close, and life went on. When that happened, after years or decades, then the objects invested with meaning related to loss of life in wartime become something else. Other meanings derived from other needs or events may be attached to them, or no meaning at all.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, although the physical sites of commemoration provided by the monuments we build are supposed to be permanent, the meanings we ascribe to them are often ephemeral and as such clearly subject to change.

In addition to providing the physical space to mourn in public, monuments also bestow opportunities for identification. In an essay published in 1979,<sup>26</sup> Koselleck wrote how war memorials help identify and classify: “First the deceased, the ones killed, and the ones killed in action are identified in a particular respect: as heroes, victims, martyrs, victors, kin, possibly also as the defeated; in addition, as custodians or possessors of honor, faith, glory, loyalty, duty; and finally, as guardians and protectors of the fatherland, of humanity, of justice, of freedom, of the proletariat, or of a particular form of government.”<sup>27</sup> Monuments categorize those they seek to commemorate. They create groups and collectives and assign *ex post facto* the goals and virtues for which the dead fought and gave their lives, whether or not they were aware of it at the time. As Koselleck noted, “...the sense that the deceased may have rested from their dying eludes our experience.”<sup>28</sup>

Not only is this classification germane to the “objects” of a monument’s remembrance but also to those who do the commemorating. Koselleck continued,

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<sup>25</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*, p. 98.

<sup>26</sup> Reinhart Koselleck. “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden,” in Odo Marquard and Karlheinz Stierle (eds.) *Identität: Poetik und Hermeneutik*. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1979), pp. 255-276. The citations here are taken from the English-language version of this essay (“War Memorials: Identity Formations of the Survivors” translated by Todd Samuel Presner) which appeared in Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Koselleck, “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden,” p. 287.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Secondly, the surviving observers are themselves put in a position where they are offered an identity: an offer to which they should or must react. The maxim “*Mortui viventes obligant*” (“The living are obliged to the dead”) is variously applicable depending on the classifications given above. Their cause is also ours. The war memorial does not only commemorate the dead; it also compensates for lost lives, so as to render survival meaningful.<sup>29</sup>

Though Koselleck was writing about traditional war memorials—i.e., monuments dedicated to armed combatants who fell in actual conflict—his observation holds true in other contexts as well, in particular, in the case of local monuments dedicated to *civilian* deaths (and loss of homeland) as a result of the flight and expulsion of Germans after WWII. Furthermore, and here he echoed Winter and many other observers, Koselleck noted the fleeting nature of these categorizations. “Yet over the course of time, and this is what history teaches, the intended identity similarly eludes the control of those who established the memorial. More than anything else, memorials erected permanently testify to transitoriness.”<sup>30</sup>

For George L. Mosse, however, monuments function in a different way.<sup>31</sup> Focusing on the numerous war memorials constructed throughout Western Europe after WWI, he writes how monuments were key contributors in the “cult of the fallen” which served to propagate the “Myth of the War Experience,” which, as the author describes, “was designed to mask war and to legitimize the war experience; it was meant to displace the reality of war.”<sup>32</sup> Fallen soldiers became martyrs who died for their nations, and their gravesites became “shrine[s] of nation worship.”<sup>33</sup> As martyrs, the horrific mechanized deaths of the fallen gunned down or gassed in blood-filled trenches were to be

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>31</sup> George L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars. (New York: Oxford University Press), 1990.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

overlooked. Instead, the dead soldiers were to be honored and emulated for making the ultimate sacrifice.<sup>34</sup> Although some WWI monuments were decidedly anti-war or pacifist,<sup>35</sup> the vast majority—particularly in Germany—were not. Certainly, many cultural objects were utilized in spreading this “cult” but monuments played a central role because of the prominent places they occupied. Mosse states,

But the fallen as symbols would have had much less impact if it were not for the public spaces and memorials which bore witness to their deeds and their heritage. The purpose which the fallen were made to serve was given true meaning when their resting places became shrines of national worship and when monuments erected in their honor became the focus of the public’s attention. The fallen were transformed into symbols which people could see and touch and which made their cult come alive.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the monuments were constructed to bolster the citizen’s attachment to the nation by justifying and even glorifying death in its name. More importantly, these monuments functioned in a visible way to make waging war and falling as a soldier more palatable and indeed honorable. Whether local expellee monuments function in a similar way—either to justify somehow the efforts of Germany’s fallen soldiers of WWII or to elevate the expellee dead in order to offset the millions killed by the Nazis—is debatable and will be investigated in later chapters.

### **Monuments as Mnemonic Devices**

More central to my argument than these “practical” functions of monuments—yet more difficult to pinpoint perhaps—is their function as mnemonic devices. Certainly, one

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> The well-known figures at the German war cemetery in Vladslo, Belgium entitled “*Trauerndes Ehepaar*” (“The Grieving Parents”), created by the celebrated artist Käthe Kollwitz, whose son Peter was killed in the fighting, immediately come to mind. In general, all of Ernst Barlach’s work was proclaimed “modernist” and “offensively un-German” by rightists and other conservatives, but it was above all his memorial sculptures in Güstrow and Magdeburg, which emphasized grief and loss due to death in war rather than the glorification of death in service of the fatherland, that drew the ire of National Socialists. For an English-language account of Barlach’s battles with the Nazis, see Peter Paret, *An Artist Against the Third Reich: Ernst Barlach, 1933-1938*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Mosse. *Fallen Soldiers*, p. 80.



could argue that providing a site of commemoration, figuring prominently in the formation of identity, or justifying and glorifying death in war are all inextricably interwoven with memory. The following sections, however, address more specifically the function monuments play in catalyzing and reifying memory, and more importantly, how monuments become building blocks in the construction of historical narratives.

It seems everything about monuments—from their form, motif, and inscription to their building material and location—is chosen by their initiators and designers to evoke certain memories and convey particular messages. Monuments are where historical narratives are rendered visible. But what to some appears quite simple—monuments reflect society’s memories—is actually rather complex and has political and cultural ramifications of great consequence, particularly where memories are contested. For Kristin Ann Hass, a monument’s connection to memory is straightforward. “The work of any memorial is to construct the meaning of an event from fragments of experience and memory. A memorial gives shape to and consolidates public memory: it makes history.”<sup>37</sup> Likewise, Kirk Savage claims, “Monuments serv[e] to anchor collective remembering, a process dispersed, ever changing, and ultimately intangible, in highly condensed, fixed and tangible sites. Monuments embod[y] and legitimat[e] the very notion of common memory, and by extension, the notion of the people who possessed and rallied around such a memory.”<sup>38</sup> In short, memories can be articulated in the form of a monument because they coalesce there.

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<sup>37</sup> Kristin Ann Hass. Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Kirk Savage, “The Politics of Memory: Black Emancipation and the Civil Rights Monument,” in John Gillis (ed.) Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 130-131.

At the same time, people have always used commemorative architecture and monuments to conjure up the images that facilitate recollection. “The ancients knew very well, as we also know, that we are able to remember only a very low percentage of what we hear, whereas if we *see* something, we can remember it better. [...] [T]o remember we must bear images in mind, and these images must be organized with *order* and *regularity* and the human product in which order and regularity appear best is architecture.”<sup>39</sup> (original emphasis) The question may arise, however, whether monuments themselves generate historical narratives, and the memories of which they are comprised, or whether they simply reflect them. Nelson and Olin answer this quite succinctly and, for the purposes of this study, satisfactorily, “Memory and monument are to each other as process and product, although not necessarily as cause and effect, for circularity often obtains.”<sup>40</sup> Monuments neither simply generate memories nor simply reflect them but do both in a kind of mnemonic cycle.

But, as Young points out, monuments should not be considered expressions of “*collective* memory.”<sup>41</sup> Instead, he advocates examining them as representatives of society’s “*collected* memory” (my emphasis). According to Young, monuments collate the dissimilar and separate memories held by members of society and provide a common meaning. “By maintaining a sense of collected memories, we remain aware of their disparate sources, of every individual’s relation to a lived life, and of the ways our

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<sup>39</sup> Umberto Eco, “Architecture and Memory,” in *Via*. Vol.8, 1986, p. 90.

<sup>40</sup> Nelson and Olin, “Introduction,” p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> A large and ever-growing body of literature tackles the topic of collective memory. Most treatments of the subject commence with a discussion of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs’ landmark text *On Collective Memory*. Edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) first published posthumously in French in 1952. In it, Halbwachs posits that collective memory is socially constructed. He elucidates the importance of the social group as context for recollecting and recreating the past. An individual’s memory does not belong to oneself, Halbwachs notes, it belongs to everyone in his/her particular social group. His exploration of the frameworks and structures of collective memory includes analyses of those provided by the family, religious society, and by social class.

traditions and cultural forms continuously assign common meaning to disparate memories.”<sup>42</sup> Much like the circularity of memory, we project meanings onto monuments and extract from them at the same time.

The memories encapsulated by a monument need not be limited to those of the events or people commemorated therein. Writing about a colossal monument erected by Saddam Hussein to commemorate Iraq’s triumph over Iran in the first Persian Gulf War,<sup>43</sup> Samir al-Khalil (Kanan Makiya) links monuments directly to a host of memories. He writes,

Monuments are more than aesthetic objects. In their deepest essence they are about memories, memories that constitute the very marrow of a city’s identity, bestowing personality and character upon a city just as they do upon an individual. The form, shape, size, and way of making a monument, the story of how it came to be there, the trials and tribulations of those who made it the manner of its placement in its city, all of these contribute to crystallizing the workings of memory. For these purposes it does not matter whether these memories are good or bad. But it does matter how they relate to their city, and which monuments survive to represent them. It is here that the question of responsibility—individual or collective—arises.<sup>44</sup>

As this case indicates, the memories “crystallized” by the monument can include and have much to do with the deliberations, planning, and other events involved with its erection. Clearly, the monuments emplaced by despots face a less arduous path than those erected in a pluralistic, democratic, and thus, more contentious memorial landscape. Nonetheless, this example showcases the importance of a particular monument’s initiator and of the discussions surrounding its origin for understanding its meaning.

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<sup>42</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>43</sup> Baghdad’s well-known, gigantic “Victory Arch” features two outstretched forearms and hands modeled after Saddam Hussein’s own, enlarged forty times. They each hold intersecting swords which arc over the wide boulevard where Hussein’s army held its victory parades. 2,500 Iranian soldiers’ metal helmets are contained in netting at the base of each side. For a brief history of the arch in the post-Saddam era, see Kirk Semple, “Iraq Confronts Hussein Legacy Cast in Bronze.” *New York Times*. April 8, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Samir al-Khalil [Kanan Makiya], *The Monument: Art, Vulgarly, and Responsibility in Iraq*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

Most assuredly, the meanings of the memories conveyed can and will change over time. Though their constructions of the past are usually selective, as will be discussed below, their messages often evolve over time in spite of the certitude they display and the nuances they seemingly disallow. As William Hubbard writes, “What monuments have traditionally done is embody an idea important to those who erected them. (...) But a monument endures beyond its time, holds that idea before us, in our time, and asks us to contemplate that idea—turn it over in our heads, stand next to our own experiences and ask if it still applies.”<sup>45</sup> In sum, monuments provoke and encourage reconsideration of how we view the past. But is it the monuments themselves that change or the historical narratives encapsulated there? More importantly, do these changes lead to clearer recollection and “better” commemoration or do they lead merely to more forgetfulness?

## THE EFFICACY OF MONUMENTS

Though it may seem *prima facie* counterintuitive, commemorative objects like monuments—intentionally constructed explicitly to evoke society’s memories—are also intimately associated with forgetting. In fact, forgetting is at the heart of many of the key debates over monuments. First of all, monuments must contend with diminishing public interest that comes as a result of the inevitable passage of time. As Robert Musil, in his short, frequently cited essay “*Denkmale*” piquantly observed, “[M]onuments are conspicuously inconspicuous. There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen—indeed to attract attention. But at the same time they are impregnated with something that repels attention, causing the glance to roll right

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<sup>45</sup> William Hubbard, “A Meaning for Monuments,” *Public Interest* 74, Winter (1984), p. 28.

off, like water droplets off an oilcloth, without even pausing for a moment.”<sup>46</sup> Over time, goes this argument, monuments as physical objects can become part of the landscape and hence unnoticeable, thus vitiating their commemorative capabilities. Due to the passage of time, monuments—and even more dramatically, the people and events they were created to commemorate—become “inconspicuous” and are forgotten.

Secondly, it is impossible to remember everything. In fact, remembering perforce begets forgetting. As David Lowenthal writes, “For memory to have meaning we must forget most of what we have seen.”<sup>47</sup> He continues: “Memories must continually be discarded and conflated; only forgetting enables us to classify and bring chaos into order.”<sup>48</sup> Without question, inscriptions can only convey one original message, which usually comprises a synthesis of many disparate, individual experiences and attitudes. Because monuments are constructed to prompt affect and reflection as well as to trigger particular memories, they almost always discriminate against opposing views or are left intentionally nebulous to put forth one overarching historical narrative. For this reason, some contend commemorating with monuments engenders forgetting as well. Selectivity breeds exclusion; that which is excluded is probably forgotten. Of what use then are monuments?

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<sup>46</sup> “[D]as auffallendste an Denkmälern ist nämlich, daß man sie nicht bemerkt. Es gibt nichts auf der Welt, was so unsichtbar wäre wie Denkmäler. Sie werden doch aufgestellt, um gesehen zu werden, aber gleichzeitig sind durch etwas gegen Aufmerksamkeit imprägniert, und diese rinnt wie Wassertropfen – auf Ölbezug – artig an ihnen ab, ohne auch nur einen Augenblick stehen zu bleiben.” In Robert Musil, Nachlass zu Lebzeiten. (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1962), p. 59-60. This pithy quotation is cited virtually everywhere in the literature on monuments. The English citation is taken from: Musil, Posthumous Papers of a Living Author. Tr. Peter Wortman. (Hygiene, Colorado: Eridanos Press, 1987), p. 61.

<sup>47</sup> David Lowenthal, The Past is a Foreign Country. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 204.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

## Monuments and Forgetting

Corresponding to the two positions mentioned above, two opposing approaches comprise the debate about the overall efficacy of monuments, in the modern world, in terms of memory or the lack thereof. The first group believes that monuments are either the result or the cause of forgetting. The second group—discussed in detail in the next section, and representing the scholarship to which I adhere—foregrounds monuments as a battlefield in national and local conflicts over remembering.

While some critics find fault with the monuments themselves,<sup>49</sup> other critics address more directly the connection society makes between monuments and memory. Pertaining not only to monuments, Pierre Nora's concept of "*lieux de mémoire*" is the best example of this position.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, according to Nora, "technologized" society's myriad "sites of memory," "originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory, that we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize

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<sup>49</sup> For instance, Lewis Mumford pronounced the "death of the monument" and viewed the immutability of monuments as a characteristic of relics from a bygone era, incompatible with modern society. See Mumford, *The Culture of Cities*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1938), p. 435. Decades later, others sought to build on Mumford's ideas. H.W. Janson, for example, notes the "tide of oblivion and indifference that has engulfed the public monument." Also pronouncing monuments "dead," he ascribes this to the lack of societal consensus in singling out noted personalities, such as great kings and other great rulers, or ideas, such as the nation, worthy of commemoration. This suggests, of course, that fewer monuments were constructed in the twentieth century and beyond than in what Janson calls "the Age of the Public Monument *par excellence*," i.e. the nineteenth century. See Janson, *The Rise and Fall of the Public Monument*. (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1976). Helmut Wohl also notes the "problem of erecting plausible contemporary monuments," but dates the rise of this predicament back to the American and French Revolutions and the post-Napoleonic era. Equally damaging for monuments has been the rise of mechanical reproduction. Wohl argues, "One reason for the problems of erecting believable contemporary monuments [...] is that photography, film, and television, through their capacity to represent the momentary and to repeat it at will, have transposed the forms in which memory or commemoration are recorded from the palpable physicality of real objects to the virtual reality of the mechanical reproduction, or of the cinema or television screen, and have thereby rendered memory commonplace, banal, and forgettable. Memory's ubiquity waters down the commemorative effects of monuments. This is, however, merely one part of the equation. More troublesome still, Wohl claims, is that modern monuments no longer are able to "transmute the everyday, to raise it to a level beyond habit, routine, and the backdrop of our consciousness." See Wohl, "Memory, Oblivion, and the 'Invisibility' of Monuments," in Reinink and Stumpel (eds.) *Memory and Oblivion*, pp. 925-928.

<sup>50</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory, Spring (1989), pp. 7-24.

celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills because such no longer occur naturally.”<sup>51</sup> Real memory is no longer preserved and passed on and cannot evolve as it did in primitive societies because of how modern society organizes the past—the “acceleration of history.”<sup>52</sup> Moreover, because of the antagonistic relationship between “real memory” and “history”—merely a *partial* rendering of what is no longer, as Nora describes it in this often (mis)quoted but seminal essay, the subject of a much larger project<sup>53</sup>—we must create sites to institutionalize and select what we deem worthy of remembrance. Rather than a natural process then, what we remember is a calculated, artificial creation. What today constitutes “memory” is not really memory at all. We create monuments and other *lieux de mémoire* to do the memory legwork for us, and we keep them deliberately ambiguous so that they “only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications”<sup>54</sup>—hardly a ringing endorsement for the erection of more monuments.

In a similar vein, Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler, co-editors of The Art of Forgetting, look at the link between objects and memory to expose how cultural objects (especially memorials and monuments) contribute to society’s process of forgetting.<sup>55</sup> This is, of course, contrary to most peoples’ expectations. Forty reiterates this view in the book’s introduction, “It has generally been taken for granted that memories, formed in

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 8. According to Nora, monuments are perfectly compatible with, and a hallmark of, modern society. Indeed, they are one of its defining characteristics, at least in relation to memory. Because nearly everything in modern society is deemed commemoration-worthy, the number of *lieux de mémoire* has increased exponentially. “In just a few years, then, the materialization of memory has been tremendously dilated, multiplied, decentralized, democratized.” (p. 14)

<sup>53</sup> Nora’s project spawned a German imitation, the three-volume Deutsche Erinnerungsorte. (Munich: Beck, 2001), edited by Etienne François and Hagen Schulze.

<sup>54</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” p. 19.

<sup>55</sup> Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler (eds.) The Art of Forgetting. (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects, which can come to stand for memories and, by virtue of their durability, either prolong or preserve them indefinitely beyond their purely mental existence.”<sup>56</sup> He then argues that this is not the case and that this is due to monuments’ and memorials’ selectivity. In fact, he maintains, “But it is surely an inevitable feature of memorials—and this is true not only of war memorials, but of all commemorative artifacts—that they permit only certain things to be remembered, and by exclusion cause others to be forgotten.”<sup>57</sup> Even Young—author of some of the most innovative, incisive and widely cited recent work on memorials—has noted monuments’ capabilities “to efface as much history from memory as they inscribe in it.”<sup>58</sup>

In delineating his argument, Forty mentions the creation of what Young calls “counter-monuments” to the Holocaust<sup>59</sup> as proof that “commemorative artifacts” lead to forgetting. This coincides with a significant shift in the purposes of monuments, according to Young, “from the heroic, self-aggrandizing figurative icons of the late nineteenth century celebrating national ideals and triumphs to the antiheroic, often ironic, and self-effacing conceptual installations that mark the national ambivalence and

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<sup>56</sup> Forty, “Introduction,” in Forty and Küchler (eds.) The Art of Forgetting, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> James E. Young, “Memory and Monument,” in Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.) Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 105. In spite of this observation, Young’s confidence in the efficacy of memorials and monuments and the role they play in establishing and demonstrating the contours of a nation’s memory is obvious.

<sup>59</sup> Young defines the term as “memorial spaces conceived to challenge the very premise of the monument.” See James E. Young, “Against Redemption: The Art of Countermemory in Germany Today,” in Peter Homans (ed.) Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century’s End. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 129. For even more on the idea of counter-monuments, see once again James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” Critical Inquiry 18.2 Winter (1992); pp. 267-96.



uncertainty of late twentieth-century postmodernism.”<sup>60</sup> At the forefront of this movement are a handful of young German sculptors and artists—about whom Young has written extensively—who renounce conventional monumental forms to commemorate the Shoah.<sup>61</sup> He recounts how these artists,

[C]ontemptuously reject the traditional forms and reasons for public memorial art, those spaces that either console viewers or redeem such tragic events, or indulge in a facile kind of *Wiedergutmachung* or purport to mend the memory of a murdered people. Instead of searing memory into public consciousness, they fear, conventional memorials seal memory off from awareness altogether. For these artists such an evasion would be the ultimate abuse of art, whose primary function, to their mind, is to jar viewers from complacency and to challenge and denaturalize the viewers’ assumptions.<sup>62</sup>

This tendency is problematic particularly in the case of Holocaust commemoration. Indeed, it could be argued that Young’s perspicacious observations apply exclusively thereto. He goes on, “To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. In effect, the initial impulse to memorialize events like the Holocaust may actually spring from an opposite and equal desire to forget them.”<sup>63</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld supplies a response to this assertion. He states, “While such claims serve as a useful caveat against naively viewing monuments as healthy signs of active memory, the absurdity of the converse—that the absence of monuments reflects a strong engagement with memory—suggests it should not be overemphasized.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> James E. Young, “Memory, Countermemory and the End of the Monument,” in Young (ed.) At Memory’s Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>61</sup> Some of Young’s examples include Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz’s disappearing “Monument against Fascism” in Hamburg, Horst Hoheisel’s proposed “Blow Up the Brandenburger Tor” in Berlin, and Shimon Attie’s installment in Berlin called “The Writing on the Wall.”

<sup>62</sup> Young, “The Counter-Monument,” p. 272.

<sup>63</sup> Young, “The Counter-Monument,” p. 273.

<sup>64</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, Munich and Memory: Architecture, Monuments, and the Legacy of the Third Reich. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 108.

While this prospect is especially acute in the case of Holocaust memorials, which beseech their viewers not only to remember but also never to forget, there is a glaring discrepancy between these positions. On the one hand, Forty argues that monuments lead to forgetting because what gets commemorated comes at the expense of all other aspects of the past. A monument's selectivity and exclusiveness limit all other interpretations. With nothing to mark the other overlooked aspects of history, they are forgotten. In other words, that which is *excluded* is forgotten. Young, on the other hand, contends that the person or the event commemorated by the monument itself will be forgotten because the public leaves all remembering up to the monument. Unburdened with remembering thanks to the ever-faithful commemorative capabilities of the monument, the public can go about its daily life. The "uncommemorated" aspects of the past, however, are not taken into consideration. That which is *included* is forgotten.

Taken to the extreme, according to these views, nothing commemorated with a monument—neither that which is excluded nor included—is remembered at all. To be sure, there is certainly more to recall than what monuments memorialize. Without question, history encompasses more than what is inscribed for perpetuity on the face of bronze or stone. And similarly, while Young's stance may be accurate in the case of public remembrance with monuments erected by the "perpetrators" (rather than by the victims themselves) and their descendants, it seems unlikely when the monument is emplaced by partisan advocates seeking to garner attention and propagandize particular historical narratives.

Young's and Forty's views, however, endow monuments with an all or nothing commemorative quality that is inherently problematic. It belies the fact that opposing sets

of monuments are often used as “social agents”<sup>65</sup> in contested memorial landscapes—like those under examination here—to “compete” against other narratives by propagating opposing ones. After all, sometimes out of solemn remembrance and sometimes out of bitter resentment, and for a multitude of other reasons, monuments continue to be constructed. As Rosenfeld continues in his response to Young, “Rather, monuments are erected with varying intentions towards preserving memory, at times with solid conviction, at times with ambivalence or reluctance.”<sup>66</sup>

### **Monuments as a Battlefield in Memory Debates**

If one reads only the work by most of the aforementioned authors, one gets the impression that the status of monuments is nothing but precarious and that they are no longer of much use. Maligned by critics, inconspicuous or invisible, monuments have been deemed the discriminatory producers of forgetting incompatible with modern times. One would expect to have seen “the end of the monument” long ago. Yet, they remain. In fact, Andreas Huyssen has cogently dispelled the supposition that the passage of time or the profusion of “*lieux de mémoire*” in the information age—as the preceding authors surmised—has led to the weakening of the memorial clout of monuments. Instead, he notes the possibility of the opposite. First, however, he acknowledges, “[T]he museum, the monument, and the memorial have [...] been declared dead many times during the history of modernism.”<sup>67</sup> But Huyssen then remarks that the monument is “experiencing a revival of sorts” and “benefiting from the intensity of our memorial culture.” He

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<sup>65</sup> Nelson and Olin, “Introduction,” p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory*, p. 108.

<sup>67</sup> Andreas Huyssen, “Monument and Memory in a Postmodern Age,” in James E. Young (ed.) *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History*. Exhibition Catalogue for the Jewish Museum. (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1994), p. 9 & p. 12.

attributes this to the very qualities which previously drew criticism, the “material quality of the object.” “The permanence of the monument [...], formerly criticized as deadening reification, takes on a different role in a culture dominated by the fleeting image on the screen and the immateriality of communications.”<sup>68</sup> According to this view, the permanence of a monument and its ability to “set” memory, once considered by some its downfall, is now its most redeeming quality. With this, Huyssen has endeavored to rehabilitate modern public monuments, albeit with a caveat. “This said, the success of any monument will still have to be measured by the extent to which it connects with the multiple discourses of memory provided to us by the very electronic media to which the monument, as solid matter, provides an alternative.”<sup>69</sup>

Whether they meet Huyssen’s high standard or not, monuments—newly proposed or long since erected—are recurrently the source of cacophonous contemporary debate.<sup>70</sup> That the erection of new monuments and the messages of old ones remain controversial is a testament to their staying power and the symbolic position they occupy within society. Fraught with apparent shortcomings and inherent tensions, but with the potential for concretizing memory by making it visible and palpable and by putting historical narratives on display in a world of flickering images, monuments remain a vital means of representing the past and a highly contested front in memory battles at all levels, especially when the objective is constructing narratives which call into question standard understandings of the past.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 11 & p. 12.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> The most recent controversy is over the statue of Martin Luther King Jr. slated for erection on the National Mall in Washington D.C. The statue’s design has come under fire in many circles for a slew of reasons including its purported “Socialist Realist” style, its depiction of a too “confrontational” King, the origin of its material, as well as the provenance of the sculptor selected to execute it. For a brief summary of the debate, see Shaila Dewan, “Larger than Life, More to Fight Over,” New York Times, May 18, 2008.

Rather than fighting these battles on one prominent, national front, they are often carried out locally. Particularly relevant for the purposes of this study, John E. Bodnar shows how clashes arise when discrepancies exist on the two levels of memorial culture, the official and the vernacular.<sup>71</sup> Where the two intersect, he argues, is where public memory emerges. Using memorials in the United States as examples, Bodnar declares, “Official culture relies on “dogmatic formalism” and the restatement of reality in ideal rather than complex or ambiguous terms. It desires to present the past on an abstract basis of timelessness and sacredness. [...] Normally, official culture promotes a nationalistic, patriotic culture of the whole that mediates an assortment of vernacular interests.” This he juxtaposes with vernacular culture, which

[R]epresents an array of specialized interests that are grounded in parts of the whole. [...] Defenders of such cultures are numerous and intent on protecting values and restating views of reality derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities rather than the ‘imagined communities’ of a large nation. [...] But, normally, vernacular expressions convey what social reality feels like rather than what it should be like. Its very existence threatens the dogmatic and timeless nature of official expressions.<sup>72</sup>

While Bodnar’s juxtaposition corresponds nicely to the two levels on which memory culture operates in the German post-WWII context, it is interesting and necessary to point out that expressions of vernacular memory in the form of expellee monuments are much more nationalistic and uphold the “timelessness and sacredness” of German territorial claims in the lost homeland.<sup>73</sup> Nonetheless, Bodnar’s contribution to understanding the bifurcation of memorial culture is of paramount importance for this project.

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<sup>71</sup> See Bodnar, Remaking America, as well as his contribution “Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland” in Gillis (ed.) Commemorations, pp. 74-89.

<sup>72</sup> Bodnar, “Public Memory in an American City,” p. 75.

<sup>73</sup> Bodnar borrows his terms “official” and “vernacular” from Susan G. Davis’s work, Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988). Although the terms do not align perfectly in the context of expellee monuments, I will use “national” or “official” and “local” to describe the two levels of expellee memorial culture.

## CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES WITH MONUMENTS

On all levels, memory battles involving monuments rage on. In his far-reaching study, Sanford Levinson also documents a number of cases of such disputes.<sup>74</sup> Above all, it is the power to organize public space and the ability to “promote privileged narratives” that enflames passion over monuments.<sup>75</sup> As another indication of their contemporary power and meaning in society—thus again challenging the positions held by the monument naysayers cited in the previous section—he cites the urge so commonly held by a liberated populace, for example, those in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism, to tear down the discredited political symbols of regimes overthrown and de-legitimized.<sup>76</sup>

But it is still the construction (not the deconstruction) of “public art” that carries the most weight. Focusing on the commemoration of the American Civil War, Levinson defines the concept “public art” as “the art chosen self-consciously by public institutions to symbolize the public order and to inculcate in its viewers appropriate attitudes toward that order.”<sup>77</sup> Through this public art, various groups compete for the hegemony of their interpretation of the past—an especially salient point for local expellee monuments. Protagonists view gaining the upper hand in memory clashes as a must, particularly when

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<sup>74</sup> Sanford Levinson, Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>76</sup> For a collection of essays with examples drawn from French and German history on this topic, see Winfried Speitkamp (ed.) Denkmalsturz. Zur Konfliktgeschichte politischer Symbolik. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997). See also Katherine Verdery, The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> Levinson, Written in Stone, p. 28.

interpretations of the past vary, which is almost always the case. As Levinson writes, by virtue of their erection the message of a monument is treated “as an authoritative enunciation of the meaning of the commemorated event.”<sup>78</sup> Displaying the object in a place of prominence confers the message contained therein with even more authority.

Permission to erect a monument in public space is thus tantamount to receiving official imprimatur for the memories the initiator seeks to convey there. But there is more. Art historian Kirk Savage—also writing about U.S. Civil War memorialization—claims the erection of monuments is not only about official approval but also about societal legitimization. “Public monuments do not arise as if by natural law to celebrate the deserving; they are built by people with sufficient power to marshal (or impose) public consent for their erection. In this respect, [...] the public monument represents a kind of collective recognition—in short, legitimacy—for the memory deposited there.”<sup>79</sup> As Savage’s sinister examples illustrate, the implications of this acknowledgement can be profound, especially in terms of race relations and civil rights.<sup>80</sup>

The acrimonious debates surrounding the Civil War monuments to which both Levinson and Savage refer are related to the monuments dedicated to the “Lost Cause.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> Kirk Savage, “The Politics of Memory,” pp. 135-136.

<sup>80</sup> In brief, Savage writes, “The commemoration of the Civil War in physical memorials is ultimately a story of systematic cultural repression, carried out in the guise of reconciliation and harmony.” Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>81</sup> Space constraints preclude a full elaboration of this concept. Cynthia Mills, however, very succinctly explains the “Lost Cause” as, “the name given to a whole body of writings, speeches, performances, prints, and other visual images that presented a certain version of Confederate history—as told from a southern white perspective. This sentimental narrative said the war was fought to defend states’ rights and to protect a chivalrous antebellum way of life from northern aggression. It pictured an Old South in which genteel white men protected their beautiful and virtuous women and children, fighting with dignity and pride. While Lost Cause advocates did not seek to reinstate slavery, they often argued that it had been a benevolent institution in which southern whites gave guidance and nurture to a simple, dusky people who needed Christian help and were loyal to their masters. They emotionally contended that slavery was not the main reason for the war. According to this retelling, southern men suffered no shame in military defeat, because the war was lost only because of the industrial might and overwhelming numbers of the North, not

These monuments to the Confederacy present a captivating analogous case study for examining how monuments have been utilized in politically-charged, highly emotional campaigns orchestrated at the grassroots level by fervent partisans with the desire to “set the record straight.” Like local expellee monuments, not only were these monuments constructed to commemorate the past, but, more significantly, they were erected to provide a very conspicuous *counter*-narrative to the standard postwar depiction of the past “imposed” upon the defeated.<sup>82</sup> Motivation for this multi-decade, postwar effort, according to Stephen Davis, was threefold:

For Confederate veterans, continued idealization helped minimize defeat, the moral implications of which (in a society associating success with righteousness and godly purpose) imposed a considerable psychological burden. At the same time, for the thousands of families that had lost men in the war, the commemoration would attempt to make meaningful their loss. Finally, publicizing the virtues of the Confederate soldier countered American derogations, which some Southerners feared would dictate the many historical accounts of the war yet to be written.<sup>83</sup>

To be sure, monuments were but one of many instruments in spreading the Lost Cause ideology. Nevertheless, they were one of the most visible and prominent. Moreover, it should be noted that the parallel I seek to highlight is not the historical content of what actually is commemorated but rather the effort to subvert official memory culture via the erection of a network of local monuments.

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because of mistakes, lack of bravery, or a false cause. Above all, the Lost Cause sought a restoration of respect.” See Mills, “Introduction,” pp. xvii-xviii. For a contemporary account of the cult of the Lost Cause, see Tony Horwitz’s entertaining Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> A similar argument could be made using the narrative of World War II put forth in some Japanese museums, memorials, and shrines, which diminishes Japan’s culpability and justifies the nation’s actions at that time. For accounts of the debates in a comparative context see Ian Buruma The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1994). For brief accounts of specific Japanese commemorative sites, see John Nelson, “Social Memory as Ritual Practice: Commemorating Spirits of the Military Dead at Yasukuni Shinto Shrine,” The Journal of Asian Studies Vol. 62, No. 2 (May 2003), pp. 443-467; and Daniel Seltz, “Remembering the War and the Atomic Bomb: New Museums, New Approaches,” in Walkowitz and Knauer (eds.) Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space, pp. 127-145.

<sup>83</sup> Stephen Davis, “Empty Eyes, Marble Hand: The Confederate Monument and the South,” Journal of Popular Culture, 16, 3 (Winter 1982), p. 2.



In this particular case, in opposition to what we would today view as the standard, northern interpretation of the Civil War, no longer were the hostilities carried out by seditious, dishonorable southern whites to maintain the ignominious institution of slavery—the lifeblood of the southern economy—the monuments portrayed an interpretation of history that instead emphasized the worthiness of the southern cause and the nobility of the South’s sacrifices. The war, so the argument goes, and as represented by southern Civil War memorials, was fought simply to preserve states’ rights. Slavery, if mentioned at all (it usually was not), was presented in altruistic terms as if the southern whites had civilized and Christianized the slaves.<sup>84</sup>

In most cases, southern whites were not depicted as individuals but as ideal types. In the statues erected throughout the South, the soldiers of the Confederate army were presented as dignified, virtuous, and valorous.<sup>85</sup> Women, when commemorated at all, were also idealized. “[T]he form chosen is also that of the anonymous white southern woman assuming nurturing roles, whether as guardian of culture and family or as nurse and source of strength for southern men.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the monuments romanticized the now lost cultural heritage of the halcyon antebellum South destroyed by the victorious North as a result of the war and the tumultuous period of Reconstruction that followed. Southerners felt they were the victims of a slanderous misinformation campaign emanating from the overly moralizing North and sought to counter it. Above

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<sup>84</sup> Savage describes what he claims to be the first and only monument that commemorates “faithful slaves” erected in Fort Mill, South Carolina over forty years after the end of the Civil War.

<sup>85</sup> David Currey, “The Virtuous Soldier: Constructing a Usable Confederate Past in Franklin, Tennessee,” in Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson (eds.) *Monuments to the Lost Cause*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>86</sup> H. E. Gulley, “Women and the Lost Cause: Preserving a Confederate Identity in the American Deep South,” *Journal of Historical Geography*. 19, 2 (1993), p. 137.

all, proponents of the “Lost Cause” ideology sought vindication of their way of life and what they had fought for.<sup>87</sup>

Initially, memorials were constructed by veterans groups simply to commemorate the war dead in cemeteries where they were unlikely to meet disapproval from the occupying northern authorities. Decades after the war, brazen citizens groups, led by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC), spearheaded a more demonstrative and strident commemorative effort that soon went beyond mere rituals of mourning to propagate the cult of the Lost Cause. By then, the monuments sprang up in areas which ensured greater accessibility and higher visibility for larger numbers of the citizenry, e.g. on battlefields, near courthouses, and on public squares. This was not an isolated phenomenon, however, but could be seen throughout all the former Confederate states. What appeared to be an entire memorial network arose, indicative of a united, regional campaign. Savage observes, “The rise of a more or less uniform vernacular monument at the local level indicates that towns wanted to participate in a shared and standardized program of memory; while each town fixed and deposited a permanent record of its own involvement in the war, the commemorative grammar imposed such a strong linkage between memorials that they constituted a kind of coordinated front.”<sup>88</sup> This is exactly the point. The coordination and the essentially standardized historical interpretation contained in the monuments effectively implied that everyone shared in the views espoused there.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Indeed, the large-scale monument to Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, on Monument Avenue in Richmond, Virginia, contains the openly revisionist inscription “DEO VINDICE” (“God Be Our Vindicator”). The story of this monument and a bevy of other Confederate memorials are told in the contributions contained in Mills and Simpson (eds.) Monuments to the Lost Cause.

<sup>88</sup> Savage, “The Politics of Memory,” p. 131.

<sup>89</sup> Gulley, “Women and the Lost Cause,” p. 134.

The point of this case study is not to draw parallels based simply on the historical events depicted in Civil War monuments and those in local expellee monuments. Rather, my aim is to illustrate how monuments have been used in loosely or tightly organized campaigns to cast history in a light that differs from standard narratives. In these specific cases, the narratives generated by and reflected in the monuments certainly challenge and even undermine the respective authoritative historical interpretations.

Again, there is more to this story. In fact, the circumstantial coincidences in the methods employed to counteract the standard narratives are striking. First of all, in both cases the initiators of monuments clearly share the belief that without their side of the story, narratives of the past would not only be incomplete but also inaccurate. Hence, the strong desire to present their versions of what happened. The verisimilitude of their assertions or the legitimacy of their grievances is, of course, irrelevant. Nevertheless, the monuments are imbued with the desire to set the record straight, as it were. Secondly, in both cases, the causality of the events depicted is ignored, obfuscated, or altered. Losses are decried (e.g. of the previous way of life) but not the loss of war. Also, the majority of monuments do not commemorate individuals in either case. Instead, the monuments utilize vague ideal types and indeterminate idealized concepts to symbolize and commemorate all.

Thirdly, consistent patterns exist in each memorial group's basic messages, despite the fact that a veritable cornucopia of monuments had been erected at different times and different places. This is of course indicative of coordinated networks of partisans who wished to convey a united message. This leads to the fourth striking similarity, namely,

the respective roles played by partisan groups in sponsoring, financing, and crusading for recognition of their causes.

## **LOCAL EXPELLEE MONUMENTS AND NARRATING THE PAST**

There can be little question whether the local expellee memorials under examination in this study, like the one in Düsseldorf-Garath described at the opening of this chapter, can and should be considered “monuments.” Though they are not necessarily grandiose in size or prominence, they fit the bill, both in terms of *raison d’être* and in structural terms, according to almost every definition put forth by the scholars cited above. Like all monuments, they have been erected to commemorate people and events. Constructed of stone, metal, and wood, these monuments follow the traditions of the *memento mori* built throughout the history of western civilization and have been designed with posterity in mind. That is, the actual objects are expected to outlive their initiators, leave a permanent mark on the landscape, provide a space for grieving and commemoration, and transmit their commemorative message to future generations.

Moreover, that which is memorialized—captured in the form, inscription, etc. of the object—connects events of the past to the present and to the future. No less important, the monuments are not the remnants of what once was, i.e. they are not ruins of structures made historically significant by the passage of time, but were emplaced in specific locations with precise commemorative purposes. Similarly, the forms, motifs and materials were not selected by chance, but were chosen deliberately. Every aspect of the

monuments was intentional, and was utilized to evoke certain mnemonic and ideological responses. In this sense, local expellee monuments—like all monuments—are memory conduits which contribute to shaping the contours of historical understanding.

But these monuments seem to go beyond mere commemoration and solemn mourning. More importantly—as pointed out by Koselleck—monuments categorize and assess normatively the people and events they commemorate. In this particular case, the monuments lament the extraordinary loss of life, property, and Heimat as a result of the Second World War. In order to make this loss meaningful, those who suffered it (i.e. those commemorated by the monuments)—regardless of the cause—are designated as “victims.” Concomitantly, as Koselleck also noted, monuments also make an offer of identity for the survivors. Here, “*Mortui viventes obligant*” (“The living are obliged to the dead”), has permitted the survivors, through their affiliation with those memorialized, to identify themselves as victims as well, and has spurred them to agitate for the causes the expellee organizations hold dear.<sup>90</sup> Expellee monuments thus appear to have created an entire collective of victims: both those who perished and those who survived. For many in Germany, but especially for those in neighboring countries who suffered at the hands of the Nazis, this is a seemingly paradoxical but extremely profound declaration.

The expellee monument in Düsseldorf-Garath, still standing nearly thirty years after its official unveiling, typifies these points. Though the monument is slowly

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<sup>90</sup> This brings up an important point, also addressed by Koselleck. Whether or not one chooses to accept the identity provided and how one responds to a monument in general is left up to the individual observer. Furthermore, the specific memories the commemorative objects conjure up, and whether passersby even take notice of the monument, are, of course, nearly impossible to ascertain. In this sense, a monument is a medium that relays to the entire public what some segments of the population already hold to be true. Though it may be very difficult to disentangle entirely, one could certainly argue that monuments reflect and galvanize the memories of those who share the sentiments expressed there (and choose to identify with the group created) and generate awareness for those of a different opinion and exhort them to feel the same way.

becoming overgrown by the trees and shrubs that surround it, it remains highly visible, and is prominently placed along a path in a tranquil public park. Its exact message, however, remains as vague today as in the past. Indeed, its ostensibly inoffensive inscription allows more leeway for interpretation now than then. One would think the additional meanings imbued in the monument from the start, as enumerated in the addresses given by the political representatives at the dedication ceremony, would no longer resonate. After all, Germany has reunited and all legal questions regarding the borders and territorial claims vis-à-vis the nation's former eastern provinces have been irreversibly settled. No additional information, however, has been added to deconstruct or re-contextualize the original meaning or reformulate its message for the future. The monument does, however, show signs of remaining contentious.<sup>91</sup>

What then is this monument commemorating today? Is it the loss of Heimat alone, or the loss of life and possessions as a result of the expulsion? Does the large stone call for restitution of property or border revisions? What does this monument really say? Without stating what the monument *should* say, we can only examine what it *does*, or rather, *does not* say. In this case, the monument is selective. Only German suffering and loss is commemorated here. Germany's victims are not included. As such, it presents a one-sided interpretation of the past and remains part of the widespread network of memorials that express similar sentiments. These monuments were expressions of German-centered postwar narratives, which, as Chapter Two demonstrates, were once predominant but fell out of favor in the 1970s and 1980s before reemerging at the end of the century.

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<sup>91</sup> At some point, someone vandalized the monument. It is difficult to say, however, whether the vandal's motivation was political or wanton destructiveness. My photo (taken in July 2007) shows that someone had cleaned and repaired the monument.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**FROM CONSENSUS TO CONTESTATION:**  
**THE PLACE OF FLIGHT AND EXPULSION IN POSTWAR**  
**COMMEMORATION**

**INTRODUCTION**

My goal with this dissertation is to investigate and expose the historical narratives local expellee monuments articulate. At different times and different places, however, these narratives have varied, both in tone and resonance. Nevertheless, discourses on German victimhood, particularly the suffering of the expellees, have persisted throughout the postwar era. Indeed, the topic “flight and expulsion” has been a constitutive part of national and local narratives, on the political agenda at all levels, and publicly commemorated in every decade after the war. In many ways, it could be argued that the expellees were *primus inter pares* amongst the victims of WWII in Germany. Flight and expulsion has been represented in various forms, including monuments, and was an omnipresent topic—from (West) Berlin to Bad Oeynhausen, and most cities, towns, and villages in-between—throughout the postwar era. Though the numbers have varied widely by decade, the erection of local expellee monuments has continued unabated throughout the postwar era and into the present time. What follows is an exploration of the political and social factors that explain these disparities.

Rather than jumping in with an in-depth analysis of the monuments, I seek in this chapter to periodize perceptions of the expellees and the commemoration of flight and



expulsion in Germany in the postwar era. I begin my analysis this way because of the keen importance of temporality and scope of contestation in determining the themes and forms expellee monuments have taken. Thus, the periodization that follows serves two purposes. First, it demonstrates that German wartime suffering was never “taboo” as a topic of discussion in the sense the concept has been used recently in debates over Germany’s past; that is, that assertions and discussions of German victimhood were disallowed or nonexistent (Central Argument #1). Second, it provides essential background material for interpreting local expellee monuments. While this approach allows for only brief commentary on the monuments, the main purpose is to outline the important political and societal battles that have shaped perceptions of what happened to the Germans from the East. That is, I seek to provide an historical framework into which a more thorough examination of expellee monuments will be embedded and to set the stage for further investigation in Part II.

### **AFTER THE EXPULSION: INITIAL COMMEMORATIVE EFFORTS OF THE 1940s**

Like so many other things involving the expellees, the exact numbers of bedraggled, dispossessed forced migrants from the German East—as well as the precise number of deaths resulting from violent confrontation, infectious diseases, malnourishment, exposure, etc. during the expulsion—are politicized and controversial. As for the former, estimates range from a total of eight million to more than double that. As for the latter, the informed guesses range from several hundred thousand to approximately four million. Robert G. Moeller and Pertti Ahonen presume that roughly twelve million Germans survived the expulsion with two-thirds of them settling in West

Germany, slightly over sixteen percent of the Federal Republic's total population.<sup>1</sup> In the GDR, around four million newly arrived expellees comprised just under a quarter of the total population. That the numbers are enormous is, however, beyond dispute. Moreover, the long-term logistical effort to accommodate this massive influx was unparalleled in German history. In fact, many consider the expellees' successful integration to be among the greatest achievements of both postwar German states.<sup>2</sup>

Two factors played a significant role as to where the expellees ended up after the war. First, there were the points of origins of these now homeless Germans—be it East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, Bohemia and Moravia, or further stretches of eastern and southeastern Europe, e.g. the Siebenbürgen region of Romania or the Batschka region in Hungary and Yugoslavia (today, Serbia). Second, there was the timing of the forced departure—some new arrivals had either been evacuated by order of the Nazi authorities or had fled on their own accord before the war's end. Others had been driven out by vengeful, anti-German local partisans during the “wild expulsions” in the summer of 1945. Still others were forced to relocate as a result of border settlements and the population transfer decreed by the Allies at Potsdam.<sup>3</sup> What is clear is that no two experiences of flight and expulsion were the same and a multitude of factors were involved in determining how later events unfolded. This will be especially important when we look at how these experiences have been represented in monuments.

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<sup>1</sup> See Moeller, *War Stories*, p. 3 and Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> Recent scholars have undertaken studies to show, in fact, that despite official rhetoric, the integration of the expellees was far from harmonious and despite superficial and momentary successes created social and cultural problems that have lasted into the present. See Ulrich Völklein, “*Mitleid war von niemand zu erwarten.*” *Das Schicksal der deutschen Vertriebenen*. (Munich: Droemer, 2005) and Andreas Kossert, *Kalte Heimat. Die Geschichte der deutschen Vertriebenen nach 1945*. (Munich: Siedler, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Georg Müller and Heinz Simon, “Aufnahme und Unterbringung,” in Eugen Lemberg and Friedrich Edding (eds.) *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland: Ihre Eingliederung und Ihr Einfluss auf Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Politik und Geistesleben*. Vol. 1 (Kiel: Ferdinand Hirt, 1959), p. 303ff. Most of the following historical recounting is based on this text.

The first order of business for the Allies was halting the massive two-directional flow of refugees within the zones of occupation: heading westward, hundreds of thousands of Germans from the East sought to leave the Soviet Zone for the American and British Zones; at the same time, similar numbers of refugees moved eastward in an attempt to reach their homes but were held up by Polish militias at the Oder/Neisse line and not allowed to return.<sup>4</sup> Müller and Simon point out that it was here that “those who fled” (*die Geflohenen*) became “expellees.”<sup>5</sup> As the former term makes clear, many viewed their refugee status and homelessness as provisional and expected to return home in the near future. Some expellees held this belief for decades and did not relinquish it until forty-five years after the war when the newly reunited Federal Republic officially recognized the integrity of its eastern border with Poland.

An estimated 2.5 million citizens from Germany’s eastern provinces were already in western Germany prior to the Potsdam conference. With the country’s major and even its smaller cities in ruins, the German refugees had been directed before the cessation of hostilities to rural areas where they were accommodated in factories, schools, guesthouses, and military barracks. Those fortunate enough to have relatives in the West stayed with them. After the Potsdam Accord, however, large transports of East Prussians, Silesians, and other Germans compelled to leave their homes were received first at *Durchgangslager* (transit camps),<sup>6</sup> where they were registered by local authorities, given

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<sup>4</sup> These authors remind their readers that the refugees from the German East were amongst millions of others (hundreds of thousands of released Wehrmacht soldiers, evacuees from bombed out German cities, as well as former prisoners of war held in German territory, millions of foreign forced laborers, and other displaced persons [DPs]) passing through the zones of occupation at this time.

<sup>5</sup> Müller and Simon, “Aufnahme und Unterbringung,” p. 306.

<sup>6</sup> The most famous *Durchgangslager* was Friedland in Lower Saxony, which, due to its location near the line of demarcation with the Soviet Zone received hundreds of thousands of expellees, evacuees, returning German soldiers and POWs, concentration camp survivors, and other displaced persons. Wilfried F.

medical examinations (including delousing), and temporarily housed before the allocation of more permanent housing. Those unable to find permanent homes often remained in the camps for several years. In 1950, Lower Saxony provided shelter for more than one hundred thousand expellees and others in over 1,200 camps. Five years later, more than one hundred fifty thousand expellees still inhabited camps throughout the Federal Republic.<sup>7</sup>

### **Local Reactions to the Expellees**

Though many *Einheimische* (locals) accommodated their homeless compatriots from the East, offering them food and shelter, others were less generous in sharing their already scarce resources. Due to the acute housing shortage, and despite vociferous protests, occupation authorities and local officials frequently requisitioned extra rooms which were then apportioned to expellees. In such cases, as Müller and Simon write, which were not rare, expellees had to be accompanied by armed escorts to access their new homes.<sup>8</sup> As could be expected, this massive influx—in some rural areas the number of newcomers soon surpassed that of the local population—sparked intense competition for housing, employment, and food, and upset the traditional religious composition of many areas (e.g. communities historically comprised of Catholic majorities soon were inundated with Protestants and vice versa). Kossert cites a public-opinion poll from 1949, the results of which concluded, “The expellees make excessive demands, are arrogant, backwards, indifferent, and unreliable; they are another *Volk* with different ways of life

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Schoeller calls Friedland the “waiting room of the uprooted.” See Schoeller, Deutschland vor Ort. Geschichten, Mythen, Erinnerungen. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Müller and Simon, “Aufnahme und Unterbringung,” p. 324 & p. 417.

<sup>8</sup> Müller and Simon, “Aufnahme und Unterbringung,” p. 320.

and thinking, and frequently of another religious confession; they are envious of the locals and are, therefore, unsatisfied.”<sup>9</sup>

Compounding the problems of this abrupt demographic and social shift was the discriminatory—and borderline racist—stereotypes held by the *Einheimischen* against their countrymen from the East. Locals referred to the expellees as “*Flüchtlingsschweine*” (refugee swine), “*Polacken*,” “*Rucksackdeutsche*” (backpack Germans), and “*40-kg-Zigeuner*” (40 kg gypsies, a reference to the amount of belongings, in kilograms, they were allowed to take with them when forced to leave their homes in the East). Though such prejudices had been long held in Germany, Kossert attributes this particular view to the widespread internalization of Nazi propaganda regarding the innate inferiority of Germany’s eastern neighbors,<sup>10</sup> and points out that “degrees of rejection [existed] according to the origin of the expellees.” As examples, he notes the general acceptance of the Pomeranians in the Lüneburg Heath while the Silesians and East Prussians faced greater difficulties. Germans from regions farther east were most likely to be confronted with rejection.<sup>11</sup> In sum, the attitudes held by many locals toward their new neighbors are reflected in this mock prayer circulating in Württemberg in 1946/1947:

God in heaven, see our despair  
We farmers have no lard and no bread  
Refugees are eating like pigs  
and steal our last bed.  
We starve and suffer great torment,  
God, send the rabble home.  
Send them back to Czechoslovakia,  
God, free us from these good-for-nothings.  
They have no faith and no good name,  
The three-times cursed, in eternity, amen.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 71.

<sup>11</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> In the original German, the prayer reads as follows:  
Herrgott im Himmel, sieh unsere Not,

In many cases, expellees faced discrimination, were homeless, impoverished, and hungry. As a result, it is not surprising that many expellees felt compelled not only to verify their “Germanness” but also to prove their social status, as well as the material and cultural wealth they once held in their lost homelands. One means of expressing these sentiments was the local expellee monuments soon to spring up throughout West Germany.

### **Official Responses of the Allies and the Emergence of Expellee Organizations**

The distrust of so many locals vis-à-vis the expellees was matched by the suspicions of the Allies, who from the start explicitly forbade the formation of expellee organizations. Viewing the expellees as particularly susceptible to extremism, either in the form of renewed National Socialism or Communism, the occupying powers instituted what was called the *Koalitionsverbot* for fear that this large constituency might become radicalized. In addition, the Allies were keen to maintain the status quo of the postwar settlement. In other words, they proscribed the *Koalitionsverbot* to prevent the formation of political movements based on territorial revisionism. The solution to the expellee problem, in the eyes of the Allies, was not a return to their homes beyond the Oder-Neisse line but rapid integration and assimilation into western society.<sup>13</sup>

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wir Bauern haben kein Fett und kein Brot,  
Flüchtlinge fressen sich dick und fett  
und stehlen unser letztes Bett.  
Wir verhungern und leiden große Pein,  
Herrgott, schick das Gesindel heim.  
Schick sie zurück in die Tschechoslowakei,  
Herrgott, mach uns von dem Gesindel frei  
Sie haben keinen Glauben und keinen Namen,  
die dreimal Verfluchten, in Ewigkeit Amen.  
Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 78.

<sup>13</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 25.

Nevertheless, the expellees formed collectives based on familial ties and church communities which remained under the Allies' radar.<sup>14</sup> Aid organizations emanating from the religious groups were the first major expellee associations but they drew unwanted attention from the Allies and were promptly shut down when members dabbled in political activities. Stickler claims the expellees sought from the start to circumvent the Koalitionsverbot by founding substitute organizations and by renaming and re-establishing banned groups to cozen Allied observers.<sup>15</sup> For example, Boehm writes of a large regional grouping of expellees from Silesia in North Rhine-Westphalia who evaded British authorities by using the cover "*Wir Usinger*" ("We Usinger," an old nickname for Silesians).<sup>16</sup> In time, the British and American occupation authorities<sup>17</sup> lifted their prohibition<sup>18</sup> and the humanitarian associations that had managed to avoid Allied censure and other local groups that had sprung up were given free rein to coalesce on a larger scale on higher levels. Making up for lost time, grassroots expellee organizations began

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<sup>14</sup> Max Hildebert Boehm, "Gruppenbildung und Organisationswesen," in Lemberg and Edding (eds.) Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland. Vol. 1, pp. 523-530.

<sup>15</sup> Matthias Stickler, "Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch." Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972. (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2004), p. 34.

<sup>16</sup> Boehm, "Gruppenbildung und Organisationswesen," p. 556.

<sup>17</sup> The French Zone was the home until later in the decade to a much smaller population of expellees (under 50,000). The occupying authorities there did not allow for the large-scale transfer of expellees into its zone until 1948. In all, the French Zone became home to approximately 200,000 Germans from the East whereas the British and American Zones accommodated several million each. See Müller and Simon, "Aufnahme und Unterbringung," p. 309 and p. 393ff. and Ahonen, After the Expulsion, p.25n.

<sup>18</sup> According to Ahonen, the prohibition was repealed due to the breakdown in relations between the Western Powers and the Soviet Union. Soviet non-compliance with the Potsdam Accords provoked the Americans to call into question the permanence of the Oder/Neisse border. Instead of forbidding the possibility of border revisions as American acceptance of the territorial status quo implied, they now held open the possibility, a stance that proved popular with the expellees. Ahonen writes, "In changing their public position on the Oder/Neisse line, American policymakers were primarily motivated by two tactical objectives: winning over German loyalties on the one hand and embarrassing the new enemy, the Soviet Union, on the other." Thus prohibiting groups who advocated official U.S. policy (even though the probability that the Americans would move to change things was slim at best) proved hypocritical and politically inexpedient. The ban was lifted in 1947 in the American Zone and in 1948 in the British Zone (where the prohibition had never been as strict anyway). Nevertheless, the proscription of overtly political organizations (as opposed to cultural and economic associations) remained in effect until the late 1940s. See Ahonen, After the Expulsion, p. 26-28.

to organize on a national level as well. By 1950, all the major individual Landsmannschaften had formed.<sup>19</sup> The desire for political and social structures within the multifarious expellee community is truly remarkable. In addition to these large groups, smaller occupational committees and unions formed, among them the Society of Former Sudeten German Movie Theater Owners and Federal Association of Expellee Doctors and Dentists.<sup>20</sup>

Another important development was the establishment of a separate *Bundesministerium für die Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen* (Federal Ministry for Expellee Affairs) after the first national election in the newly established Federal Republic in 1949.<sup>21</sup> The ministry oversaw the preparation of legislation and the

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<sup>19</sup> The Landsmannschaften were associations based on the regional origins of the expellees. Boehm's text offers a fascinating summary of each of these important expellee groups' formative years. See ("Gruppenbildung und Organisationswesen," pp. 535-579). According to Boehm, though the homeland societies originally set out to meet the psychological needs of their isolated and alienated members scattered about occupied Germany, the core of their mission became – above all – political. More than just a cure for homesickness and the cultivation of local traditions from the former homeland, members of the Landsmannschaften saw themselves politically responsible for the lost Heimat and its fate in the future (p. 595).

<sup>20</sup> As a result of the Allied proscription of a singular movement, however, the road to a unified, nationwide expellee organization was much more complicated. As an umbrella organization for the twenty homeland societies, the *Vereinigte Ostdeutsche Landsmannschaften* (VOL—United East German Homeland Societies) was organized in 1949 (and rechristened *Verband der Landsmannschaften*—VdL, Association of Homeland Societies in 1953). Not desiring to speak for the expellees as a whole, the VOL/VdL instead actively sought the retention of the power and influence of the individual *Landsmannschaften*. On the selfsame day in 1949, a competing organization came about in an effort to represent all expellees regardless of origin: the *Zentralverband vertriebener Deutscher* (ZvD—Central Organization of Expelled Germans)—renamed the *Bund vertriebener Deutschen* (BvD—League of Expelled Germans) in 1954. Although the goals of the rival groups were supposed to differ—the VOL/VdL's explicit aim was the reunification of Germany and, concomitantly, the reacquisition of Germany's lost eastern territories; the ZvD/BvD addressed economic and sociopolitical concerns—the division proved to be less than fruitful as the overlapping objectives led to internecine squabbling and inefficiency. (See Stickler, "Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch," pp. 41ff.) Nevertheless, these associations—which would merge in 1957 to form the so-called "*Avantgarde des deutschen Volkes*" (Avantgarde of the German people—Ibid., p. 99), the *Bund der Vertriebenen* – *Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände* (BdV—League of Expellees – United Homeland Societies and State Associations)—were instrumental in articulating the interests, both political and cultural, of the expellees on all levels and were responsible for initiating a large number of local monuments throughout the postwar period.

<sup>21</sup> The name was changed to the *Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte* (Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War-Damaged) in the early 1950s. The "Refugees" referred to in the ministry's title were those Germans who fled the Soviet Zone and the German Democratic Republic. According to some estimates, roughly one third of those who fled the GDR for West Germany were



coordination of policies pertaining to the expellees. More specifically, it organized measures to provide a legal definition of expellees, coordinated expellees' ongoing economic and social integration, resolved the expellees' resettlement issues within the Federal Republic, and provided support for those fleeing the GDR.<sup>22</sup> Even though the responsibilities of the ministry could have been addressed more efficiently perhaps by other ministries and agencies of the new government, it was viewed as politically expedient to set up a distinct cabinet-level institution.

It should be pointed out, however, that setting up the ministry was not a Right or Left issue. Indeed, all three of the largest parties (the CDU, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* [SPD—Social Democratic Party of Germany], and the *Freie Demokratische Partei* [FDP—Free Democratic Party]) had campaigned on this issue

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expellees despite the fact that the expellees accounted for just under one quarter of the entire population. Cited in Philipp Ther, "The Integration of Expellees in Germany and Poland after World War II: A Historical Reassessment," in *Slavic Review*, 55, 4 (Winter 1996), p. 800.

<sup>22</sup> One of the ministry's notable achievements was publishing several hundred firsthand accounts of the expulsion in the colossal, multivolume Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. The project provided vivid depictions of German suffering with scant mention of the suffering they inflicted on others. See Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, (ed.) Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa. Vol. 1: Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neiße. 3 Parts. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984 [1954 (pts. 1&2), 1960 (pt. 3)]). Vol. 2: Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Ungarn. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984 [1956]). Vol. 3: Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Rumänien. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984 [1957]). Vol. 4: Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei. 2 Parts. (Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag, 1984 [1957]). Vol. 5: Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984 [1961]). I. Beiheft. Käthe von Normann, Ein Tagebuch aus Pommern, 1945-1946. (Groß-Denkte/Wolfenbüttel: Grenzland-Druckerei, 1955). 2. Beiheft. Margarete Schell, Ein Tagebuch aus Prag, 1945-1946. (Kassel: Herbert M. Nuhr, 1957). 3. Beiheft. Hans Graf von Lehndorff, Ein Bericht aus Ost- und Westpreussen, 1945-1947. (Düsseldorf: Oskar-Leiner-Druck, 1960).

The overt aim of the series was twofold. First, the personal testimonies and government documents contained in the volumes and supplementary texts ("*Beihefte*") were to serve as official documentation of what happened to Germans in their former homelands. Second, they were to be used as evidence in negotiations to settle border issues at an expected international peace conference. To be fair, the Dokumentation does indeed contain some material contextualizing the expulsion and shedding light on the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, as Mathias Beer contends, the sponsors of the project had political goals that went beyond balanced analysis: in terms of domestic policy, to support the integration of expellees in their new homes; and, in terms of foreign policy, to relativize German guilt. See Beer, "Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte: Das Großforschungsprojekt 'Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa,'" in Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 46, 3, Juli 1998, pp. 345-390; see also Moeller, War Stories, pp. 51-87.

prior to the 1949 election.<sup>23</sup> Clearly, all the parties sought to curry the favor of this formidable voting bloc and crucial constituency. Despite the pre-election consensus, an independent expellee ministry was not a foregone conclusion and was not a top priority of the new Adenauer government. In fact, Mathias Beer notes that Adenauer hoped that the ministry would draw the potential dissatisfaction of the expellee organizations away from his administration and deflect it toward the Ministry for Expellee Affairs instead.<sup>24</sup> Quite possibly, however, the ministry's most important function was its role as what Beer calls, "the institutional expression of symbolic politics," which "underscored for the expellees the high significance attributed by the federal government to their concerns."<sup>25</sup> Such symbolic concessions vis-à-vis the expellees encouraged their continued activism and further cemented, for the time being, the place of the expellees, their organizations, and their interests within the Federal Republic's public sphere.

Based on these historical developments, it is safe to assume that this period (the late 1940s) would see the fewest number of new expellee monuments. Besides the shorter duration of this period, this assumption is premised on two major factors. The first is the expellees' precarious financial situation. For most expellees, due to the lack of a permanent place of residence<sup>26</sup> and the inability to procure gainful employment<sup>27</sup> the

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<sup>23</sup> Moeller claims the ministry is another indication of Germans' "selective memory" of their recent past. As he points out, there was no equivalent "Ministry for Survivors of Nazi Persecution." Moeller, War Stories, p. 85. In this important book, Moeller responds to the notion that Germans were unable to mourn the recent past, and more broadly, to the belief that Germans avoided any recollection of Nazi rule during the 1940s and 1950s. Moeller asserts that German remembrance then focused exclusively on German suffering in an exaggerated amount. As he writes, "remembering selectively was not the same as forgetting." (p. 16)

<sup>24</sup> Mathias Beer. "Symbolische Politik? Entstehung, Aufgaben und Funktion des Bundesministeriums für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte" in Jochen Oltmer (ed.) Migration steuern und verwalten. Deutschland vom späten 19. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart. (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2003), p. 311.

<sup>25</sup> Beer, "Symbolische Politik?" p. 322.

<sup>26</sup> Transports of expellees continued to stream into the western zones and the Federal Republic until the end of the decade. For those dwelling in temporary camps, the resettlement programs to alleviate the problems of high concentration of expellees in the *Aufnahmeland* (receiving states, i.e. Schleswig-Holstein, Lower

situation in immediate postwar era—even compared to that of their “ordinary” German neighbors—was a period of extraordinary flux. In this state of instability, the resources to fund commemoration of the expulsion in most cases were nonexistent. Secondly, although they gained political clout after the end of the *Koalitionsverbot*, the expellee organizations at this time were comparatively weak. Under these circumstances, it seems likely that establishing themselves into West German society socially, economically, and politically was more of a concern for expellees than constructing monuments. In the small number of expellee monuments that did appear, however, one might expect to see open assertions of “Germanness” due to the prejudices held against expellees by local populations. To be sure, the Allies were paying attention to all kinds of German memorials,<sup>28</sup> so the probability that the tone of expellee monuments would be overtly revanchist, nationalistic, or even particularly political, was slim.

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Saxony, and Bavaria) did not begin in earnest until 1949 and continued into the 1950s. For more on the *Umsiedlung* (resettlement) of the expellees within West Germany, see Müller and Simon, “Aufnahme und Unterbringung,” pp. 391-410. The authors of this text (published in 1959) point out that although the resettlement efforts were generally judged a success, questions remained whether the further dispersal and distribution of the expellees to areas based merely on current labor shortages would be a long-term solution.

<sup>27</sup> In 1949, expellees constituted more than one-third of all the unemployed in the Federal Republic even though they constituted just over sixteen percent of the total population. See Ian Connor, “Die Integration der Flüchtlinge und Vertriebenen in den Arbeitsprozeß nach 1945.” *Jahrbuch für ostdeutsche Volkskunde*, 32 (1989), p. 190. Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 94.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to banning the political organization of expellees via the *Koalitionsverbot*, the Allied Control Council promulgated Directive No. 30 on May 13, 1946, the first paragraph of which declared illegal, “the planning, designing, erection, installation, posting or other display of any monument, memorial, poster, statue, edifice, street or highway name, marker, emblem, tablet, or insignia which tends to preserve and keep alive the German military tradition, to revive militarism or to commemorate the Nazi Party, or which is of such a nature as to glorify incidents of war, and the functioning of military museums and exhibitions, and the erection, installation or posting or other display on a building or other structure of any of the same...” Enactments and Approved Papers of the Control Council and Coordinating Committee. Available online, Library of Congress Homepage: <[www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military\\_Law/Enactments/03LAW28.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/Enactments/03LAW28.pdf)> Accessed December 18, 2008. This is not to suggest that the expellees at any time employed Nazi insignias to commemorate and decry their losses. Nonetheless, it is not likely that the Allies would have tolerated openly revisionist monuments during this period (which arguably would appear later).

## THE NARRATIVE ESTABLISHED: PUBLIC COMMEMORATION IN THE 1950s

On the five-year anniversary of the Potsdam Agreement, thousands of expellees packed the courtyard of the Neues Schloss in Stuttgart<sup>29</sup> to protest the Allies' partitioning of German territory after WWII and to hear the proclamation of the *Charta der deutschen Heimatvertriebenen* (Charter of the German Expellees).<sup>30</sup> The Charter—signed by all the leaders of the major expellee organizations of the time—was read before members of the federal government, the churches, and other expellee dignitaries.

For the writers of this seminal declaration (often cited in the inscriptions of expellee monuments), the Charter was to serve as the “Basic Law” (*Grundgesetz*) for the expellees and elucidated what they considered their “duties and rights”—such as the renunciation “of revenge and retaliation...in memory of the infinite suffering brought upon mankind particularly during the past decade,” and avowals to “support with all our strength every endeavor directed towards the establishment of a united Europe in which the nations may live in freedom from fear and coercion,” as well as to “contribute, by hard and untiring work, to the reconstruction of Germany and Europe.” The Charter also contains passages which provide key insights into the way the expellees understood their experiences of flight and forced migration at the end of and after WWII during the 1950s. For example, it states:

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<sup>29</sup> A memorial plaque was emplaced here in 2002 to commemorate this historic event.

<sup>30</sup> The (non-gender-neutral) translation of the Charter I use here comes from the English version provided on the BdV's website. The original document in German, as well as translated versions (English, Polish, Romanian, Russian, and Czech), are also available there: <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/charta-dt.php3>> Accessed January 12, 2009.

We have lost our homeland. The homeless are strangers on the face of the earth. God himself placed men in their native land. To separate a man forcibly from his native land means to kill him in his mind.<sup>31</sup>

We have suffered and experienced this fate. We therefore feel called upon to demand that the right to our native land be recognized and realized as one of the basic rights of man, granted to him by God.

[...]

The nations of the world should become sensitive of their co-responsibility for the fate of the expellees who have suffered most from the hardships of our times.

[...]

The nations must realize that the fate of the German expellees, just as that of all refugees, is a world problem the solution of which calls for the highest moral responsibility and for a commitment to tremendous effort.

Obviously, the text is problematic for several reasons. As Samuel Salzborn points out, the Bund der Vertriebenen has always emphasized the expellees' magnanimity (*menschliche Größe*) in denouncing violent retribution as a response to what befell them. Primarily interested in the Charter's implications for German foreign policy, Salzborn also criticizes the way the declaration "relativizes Germany's war guilt" and objects to its "double function": The first being the attempt by the expellees to portray themselves as victims of the Nazis and to protest the Potsdam Agreement; and the second being the demand for an expellee "say" in matters regarding the political power constellations in Europe.<sup>32</sup> Equally critical of the declaration—particularly of the self-pitying total dissolution of cause and effect and of the self-centered assertion that the expellees "suffered most from the hardships of our times"—I view the Charter as a time capsule which summarizes not only the general attitudes held by the expellees but also the sentiments expressed by the monuments in the 1950s, arguably the most important era of

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<sup>31</sup> This key passage (Original German: "Den Menschen mit Zwang von seiner Heimat trennen, bedeutet, ihn im Geiste töten") is the inspiration for the inscription on the monument in Hagen, North Rhine-Westphalia. The monument is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

<sup>32</sup> See Samuel Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat: Geschichte, Gegenwart und Zukunft der Vertriebenenverbände*. (Berlin: Elefant Press, 2000), pp. 56-57, as well as his *Heimatrecht und Volkstumskampf. Außenpolitische Konzepte der Vertriebenenverbände und ihre praktische Umsetzung*. (Hanover: Offizin, 2001), pp. 21-25. For other notable critiques of the Charter, see Micha Brumlik, *Wer Sturm sät. Die Vertreibung der Deutschen*. (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2005), and Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld, oder von der Last Deutscher zu sein*. (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2000).

all. Again, this decade was marked by a number of key political and societal developments, the most important of which will be sketched out below, which helped shape local expellee monuments and the historical narratives they articulated during this period.

### **Politicizing German Suffering**

In terms of politics, the expellee organizations spent the early years of the 1950s campaigning for compensation for their property losses in the East. In the years immediately following the war, when such discussions commenced, some expellees had been reluctant to enter into such debates over restitution (called the *Lastenausgleich* or “equalization of burdens”—in essence, a legislative act that would provide expellees and others reimbursements for material losses during the war) because they considered a financial settlement of this nature tantamount to a rejection of the possibility of a return home.<sup>33</sup> Still yearning for the acknowledgement of their material wealth and a return to their former social status in the East, however, many expellees came to view themselves as entitled to compensation—though not in the form of welfare or charity—that provided the sought-after societal recognition and distributed the burdens of the war amongst the entire West German populace.

At first, the expellee organizations were unsure how best to articulate their political interests. At issue was whether the expellees should join the already established political parties (in particular, the CDU, the SPD, or the FDP) or originate their own.<sup>34</sup> To be sure,

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<sup>33</sup> Michael L. Hughes, Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat: West Germany and the Reconstruction of Social Justice. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1999, p. 79.

<sup>34</sup> Enjoying short-lived success in the 1950s, the *Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten* (BHE) was founded by Waldemar Kraft in Schleswig-Holstein in 1950. In the state parliament election there in

none of the major parties at this point advocated (publicly, at least) giving up the formerly German eastern provinces. In another key area considered vital by the expellees, the need for some form of compensation for material losses in the eastern territories, the major parties did not differ.<sup>35</sup> Foreign policy would eventually settle the issue for them. By the 1970s, most expellees, especially those reluctant to recognize the Oder/Neisse border, would be firmly ensconced in the corner of the Christian Democrats and *Christlich-Soziale Union* (CSU—Christian Social Union). In the 1950s, however, expellee votes were much more up for grabs and all the parties sought to garner the support of this large voting bloc.

What ensued in the initial years of the new decade amounted to an expanded competition of victimhood between the expellees and their organizations and the other “war-damaged” German peoples.<sup>36</sup> Through some legislative acts discussed below, the expellees became *primus inter pares* amongst German victims of WWII. To make their case, the expellee organizations painted their members and supporters as passive victims of injustice. This required, of course, overlooking any involvement in National Socialism.

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1950, the party earned nearly a quarter of the votes and helped form the ruling coalition. In 1953, after renaming itself the *Gesamtdeutscher Block/Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten* (GB/BHE) to make a stronger appeal to non-expellees, the party surpassed the 5% hurdle in the federal elections and entered the Bundestag. Though the party experienced moderate success at the state level, it fell short of the 5% hurdle in the 1957 federal elections and was for all intents and purposes dissolved in 1961 when it merged with the *Deutsche Partei* to form the *Gesamtdeutsche Partei*. For more on the BHE, see Franz Neumann, Der Block der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten, 1950-1960: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte und Struktur einer politischen Interessenpartei. (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Though all the parties agreed on the need for what Ahonen calls “the principle of redistributive justice” (After the Expulsion, p. 54), they differed widely in their approaches to implementing this policy. For more on the political wrangling between the parties, see Hughes, Shouldering the Burdens of Defeat, pp. 129-150.

<sup>36</sup> It is imperative to recall that Germans possessed a limited view of who could make such claims. Hughes notes, “Significantly, postwar West Germans did not accept every claim to victim status or compensation. They were disinclined to accept Jews and political persecutees as victims and they refused recognition and recompense to various other groups who suffered because of Nazi persecution or war, for example, Sinti and Roma, homosexuals, and so-called asocials. In each case, West Germans did not see these people as fellow members of a mutually obligated moral community.” *Ibid.*, p. 99.

As Hughes notes, “Any suggestion that individual war-damaged shared responsibility for their losses undermined their demands for recompense—as victims or legal claimants.”<sup>37</sup>

In the end, though some complain to this day about the shortcomings of the resulting legislative efforts at restitution, due to their organization, dogged determination, and the political sway they held, the expellees were more successful than other groups in securing restitution and garnering attention to their plight. Hughes writes,

Organized expellees were more numerous and, having generally lost everything, more committed to a *Lastenausgleich* than were their bomb-damaged counterparts. They were convinced that they had suffered more than the bomb-damaged and were entitled to privileged treatment. [...] Fearing potential expellee radicalism, the government and the political parties tended to privilege the expellees over the bomb-damaged.<sup>38</sup>

The *Lastenausgleichsgesetz* (LAG—Law to Equalize the Burdens) was promulgated on August 14, 1952.<sup>39</sup>

The next year, another crucial law was passed which had a significant impact on the status of expellees within West German society during this period (and beyond) and played an important role in promoting (indirectly) the erection of local monuments. The Bundestag passed the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* (BVFG—Federal Expellee Law) in May 1953.<sup>40</sup> The law’s Paragraph 96 (the so-called *Kulturparagraph*, referred to by Manfred

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that in the preamble of the LAG, it is stated that the law has been passed with “the emphatic proviso that obtaining and accepting the benefits of the law does not mean a renunciation of the assertion of restitution claims on the assets left behind by the expellees.” As cited in the appendix to Eugen Lemberg and Friedrich Edding (eds.) *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland: Ihre Eingliederung und Ihr Einfluss auf Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Politik und Geistesleben*. Vol. III. (Kiel: Ferdinand Hirt, 1959), p. 665. In other words, the legislation was crafted in such a way as to keep the door open for a return home and claims for compensation vis-à-vis Germany’s eastern neighbors.

<sup>40</sup> The law’s formal title is the *Gesetz über die Angelegenheiten der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge* (Expellee and Refugee Affairs Law). Its main purpose was to define legally the status of “expellee” and differentiate juristically between those Germans forced to leave their homes in Eastern Europe and the “refugees” who fled the Soviet Zone of occupation (and later, the GDR) in order to regulate the rights and benefits for which they were eligible. (For more on this aspect, see Salzborn, *Grenzenlose Heimat*, p. 63.) Less concretely, the legislature provides insights into the way the federal government viewed this important political constituency. That the law defined them as “expellees” and not “re-settlers,” “migrants,” or any other designation corroborated the view that Germans from the East had suffered more than others and



Kittel as “fundamental to the memory culture of the German East”)<sup>41</sup> also explicitly stated the federal and respective state governments’ role in advancing the culture of the German East. It states:

Corresponding to the responsibilities given them by the Grundgesetz (Basic Law), the federal government and the states are to maintain awareness of the cultural assets (*Kulturgut*) from the areas of expulsion vis-à-vis the expellees, the entire German Volk, as well as internationally; to ensure and evaluate archives, museums and libraries as well as to secure and promote institutions of artistic creation and education. They are also to promote science and research in order to fulfill the tasks resulting from the expulsion and the integration of expellees and to support the further development of cultural achievements of the expellees.<sup>42</sup>

Likely inspired by the Kulturparagraph, the German Associations of Cities (*Deutscher Städtetag*) and the German Association of Counties (*Deutscher Landkreistag*) called for guidelines for the formal establishment of *Patenschaften* (patronages)<sup>43</sup> of eastern German localities by cities and counties in the West to boost consciousness and knowledge of expellee cultures and nurture their local traditions. The concept of the Patenschaft entailed much more than a typical partnership between equal sister cities.

Writing about this arrangement between cities of North Rhine-Westphalia and the eastern

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deserved some legal recognition. Interestingly, the law officially allowed the extension of those perquisites to the non-expellee spouses of the truly expelled as well as to expellees’ progeny. According to West German law then, the children and grandchildren of expellees—conferred this special status regardless of their birthplace—were thus entitled to the same rights as those adversely affected by the expulsion.

<sup>41</sup> Manfred Kittel, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen? Der historische deutsche Osten in der Erinnerungskultur der Bundesrepublik (1961-1982)*. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), p. 81. Though the title contains a question mark, there is little question Kittel’s expellee-friendly text clearly argues—though in my opinion not entirely persuasively—that commemoration of the expulsion was marginalized and successfully halted over the course of the two decades of his analysis.

<sup>42</sup> Cited in Ibid., pp. 81-82. As a result of Paragraph 96, Kittel reports, military barracks and rest areas along the Autobahn were named after cities of the German East, and a series of stamps was produced depicting formerly German landmarks beyond the Oder/Neisse (pp. 87-89). More significantly, the West German federal and state governments financially supported expellee cultural centers, regional museums, and scores of local *Heimattuben* throughout the Federal Republic. The Heimattuben are particularly noteworthy. Even smaller than the museums dedicated to the commemoration of local cultures and traditions (i.e. *Heimatismuseum*), a Heimattube, in connection to the expellees, contained extant cultural artifacts, photographs, artwork, traditional costumes, books, flags, coats-of-arms, etc. commemorating and celebrating the local cultures of municipalities and regions in the former eastern provinces. For more on Heimat museums and the important role they have played in German history, see Alon Confino, *The Nation as Local Metaphor: Württemberg, Imperial Germany, and National Memory, 1871-1918*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 134-157.

<sup>43</sup> *Patenschaft* means literally “sponsorship” as of a child by godparents.

provinces, Alfons Perlick noted that through a Patenschaft, an East German city was still “spiritually in existence.” Because the German cities of the East were themselves unable, due to the political situation at the moment, to maintain their traditions and culture, West German cities were to assume that responsibility for them.<sup>44</sup>

The first Patenschaft was set up in 1950—three years before the aforementioned official guidelines were established—and linked the city of Goslar in Lower Saxony to the Silesian city of Brieg, then and now in Poland. The total number of such arrangements reached approximately 350 by the end of the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Patenschaften were typically established between cities or counties of similar size or with historical, cultural, geographical, and economic ties. They also came about when large numbers of expellees from a particular locale in the eastern provinces congregated in a specific area in the West. Not just cities and counties adopted eastern counterparts, however. For example, Baden-Württemberg took over sponsorship of all Danube Swabians (*Donauschwabern*) in 1954. The renowned West German soccer club Schalke 04 (Gelsenkirchen, North Rhine-Westphalia) adopted the Allenstein (East Prussia—today Olsztyn, Poland) Sports Club (*Allensteiner Sportverein*).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> The responsibilities of the West German cities were to sponsor gatherings of expellees from certain cities and counties, which would demonstrate to the whole world, according to Perlick, that the adopted cities and counties now in Polish territory remained “unequivocally German.” In addition, these special relationships between cities were to foster the integration of expellees by creating opportunities for exchange between locals and their new neighbors from the East. For more on this arrangement, see Alfons Perlick, “Die west-ostdeutsche Patenschaftsbewegung in Nordrhein-Westfalen,” in Perlick (ed.) *Das west-ostdeutsche Patenschaftswerk in Nordrhein-Westfalen*. (Düsseldorf: Wegweiserverlag, 1961), pp. 9-18.

<sup>45</sup> Kittel, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen?* p. 99. As in the case of local expellee monuments, a precise total is uncertain. Kittel cites an Expellee Ministry report from 1969 which addresses this issue. The lack of a central organizing body, overlaps, unannounced changes, abrogation of the relationship due to lack of funds or waning interest—all were all to blame for this missing total.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98. The city of Gelsenkirchen had adopted the city of Allenstein as well.

## **The Inception of the Cold War and the Commemoration of the Expulsion**

Less than a month after the promulgation of the Federal Expellee Law, Soviet tanks violently suppressed a workers' uprising in East Berlin and throughout the GDR. That day, June 17, 1953 was momentous for all (West) Germans, including the expellees, as Edgar Wolfrum persuasively argues, because (West German) interpretations of events surrounding that day rehabilitated the notion of the "nation" as such, and made it possible "to speak of [the German nation] without speaking of National Socialism."<sup>47</sup> What is more, in addition to what Wolfrum identifies as the main interpretations of the unrest, i.e. as an expression of anti-authoritarianism against the SED-state, or as a reestablishment of national dignity, the open rebellion was viewed as an attestation of Germans' indomitable will to reunify.<sup>48</sup>

With most still clinging to the hope of revisiting the border question (and, concomitantly of course, returning to their homes in the East), June 17, 1953 and its subsequent political interpretations were understood by the expellee organizations and

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<sup>47</sup> Edgar Wolfrum, Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung, 1948–1990. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the readings of this historic event, see *Ibid.*, p. 76ff. In agreement in principle over these larger interpretations, the major political parties differed as to the event's implications for German-German policy, and foreign policy in general. For the CDU the uprising served as confirmation of Konrad Adenauer's policy of western integration. National unity, according to the chancellor, would only come about if Germany was free, democratic, and firmly entrenched in Western European and American security, economic, and political structures. Furthermore, the events of June 17, 1953 further discredited the SED regime and bolstered Adenauer's claim of the Federal Republic as the sole representative of the German nation. For the SPD, the unrest was first and foremost a workers' rebellion that demonstrated the Left's long-standing claim as the true representative of the nation's best interests. Even more importantly, for the Social Democrats, the events were a revolution both against the totalitarianism in the East as well as against Adenauer's "restorative" government and the virtual impossibility of reunification promoted by Adenauer's western integration. (*Ibid.*, p. 89 & p. 92). Nevertheless, both major political parties viewed the events of June 17, 1953 as worthy of official recognition and commemoration. And remarkably, all the major parties were in agreement (except for the Communists [KPD]) with declaring the date a national holiday. Henceforth, June 17<sup>th</sup> was celebrated as the Tag der deutschen Einheit (Day of German Unity). For more on the parliamentary discussions on June 17<sup>th</sup> as West Germany's national holiday, see Margarete Myers Feinstein, State Symbols: The Quest for Legitimacy in the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, 1949-1953. (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001).

their members as a vociferous call—not unlike their own—for the end of Germany’s division. Undoubtedly, this and other key moments of the embryonic Cold War kept questions of the finality of Germany’s borders in the public eye even though reunification in any circumstances was becoming less realistic politically by the day. For the expellees, of course, reunification meant not only the end of the division between the two German states, but also the reacquisition of their lost Heimat and the reestablishment of Germany in its 1937 borders, i.e. before the *Anschluss* of Austria and the annexation of the Sudetenland.

Nevertheless, June 17, 1953 refocused attention, albeit briefly, on the issue of overcoming German division in a new and more immediate way particularly germane for the expellees. In general during the early Cold War, the expellees could couch their rhetoric about the right to homeland and the desire for a return home in the rhetoric of German reunification usually reserved for the two German states. In fact, some local expellee groups, with the assistance of other organizations opposed to division, erected monuments to reflect this Cold War conflation; these markers referred not only to the expulsion and the lost cities and regions of the East but also to the lost cities and regions of the GDR.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the Cold War cemented for many West Germans, not least of which the expellees, steadfast anti-Communist attitudes. As Wolfrum points out, expellee organizations pounced on the opportunity presented by June 17, 1953 to inveigh against the brutality of the Soviets and their cronies in the rest of the Eastern bloc, who had not only crushed the uprising in the GDR but also murdered, raped, violently expropriated, and ruthlessly expelled the Germans who had lived in some cases for centuries in their

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<sup>49</sup> What I call “Cold War Conflation” as a motif of local expellee monuments is discussed in detail in chapter 4. Many local expellee monuments—not all of which display this motif—were dedicated on subsequent commemorations of the Tag der deutschen Einheit, June 17th throughout the postwar decades.

new territory.<sup>50</sup> Reflecting this attitude, the Communists bore the sole responsibility for the expulsion, according to many members of the expellee organizations, and not the Western Allies (who obviously had also signed off on the borders and population transfers established by the Potsdam Accord).<sup>51</sup>

A final major event in this decade occurred in 1957 when the two major expellee umbrella organizations, the *Verband der Landsmannschaften* (VdL—Association of Homeland Societies), merged with its rival, the *Bund vertriebener Deutschen* (BvD—League of Expelled Germans) on October 22, 1957 to form the largest, most powerful, vocal, and visible advocacy group for the interests of the expellees on the national, state, and local levels, the *Bund der Vertriebenen - Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände* (BdV—League of Expellees – United Homeland Societies and Homeland Associations).<sup>52</sup> The BdV has played a crucial role in initiating local expellee monuments up to the present time.

In the 1950s, the expellees were at the height of their political and social influence. With the improvement of their socioeconomic status, the expellees' sheer numbers dictated that the major political parties would take their concerns seriously. The increase in power of the expellee organizations also helped their cause. Furthermore, political developments domestically and internationally seemed to be going in the expellees' favor, which kept the prospect of returning home realistic for many of them. Moreover, most West Germans shared the basic tenets of the expellees' understanding of history and

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<sup>50</sup> Wolfrum, *Gechichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 151.

<sup>51</sup> Christian Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts. Erinnerungspolitische Kontroversen im geteilten Deutschland um Flucht, Vertreibung und die Ostgebiete (1948-1972)*. (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), p. 101.

<sup>52</sup> For a much more detailed account of the internal machinations, debates, and negotiations between the two key protagonists and their representatives during the “long road” to a united expellee organization, see Stickler, *“Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch.”* pp. 33-97.

their fate: namely, that the eastern provinces were rightfully German and that the expulsion had been an unprecedented tragedy and a singularly unjust action. The monuments of the 1950s were thus erected in an environment where talk of German suffering was not exceptional and was indeed the norm.<sup>53</sup> For these reasons, one can presume that this decade witnessed the largest number of dedications of local expellee monuments for most *Länder* of the Federal Republic. Moreover, one might expect in general to see more expellee monuments in the public domain, and that they would become less mournful and more unabashedly political in tone with the goals of garnering recognition for their losses and agitating for a revision of the border to enable a return home.<sup>54</sup>

### **WANING EXPELLEE INFLUENCE AND SHIFTING MEMORY PARADIGMS: COMMEMORATING THE EXPULSION IN THE 1960s & 1970s**

Though most look at the 1960s—with its highly publicized trials of Nazi perpetrators, the rise of the student movement, and the election of the social-liberal coalition headed by Willy Brandt of the SPD—as the key period in which the shift away from the German-centered narrative happened, changes were already afoot in the

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Moeller, *War Stories*.

<sup>54</sup> This intention is not unprecedented in the history of German monuments. In fact, expellee monuments mirror German colonial monuments after the First World War. Though Joachim Zeller's examination of colonial monuments encompasses their entire lifespan, it is above all the monuments erected after Germany's defeat in WWI and the loss of colonies as a condition of the Versailles Treaty which is most fruitful for drawing parallels. No longer dedicated to the fallen German soldiers of the colonial wars, post-1918 colonial monuments were used to agitate for and articulate revisionist territorial demands. Zeller shows how partisan activists—just like the initiators of expellee monuments—defiantly emplaced colonial monuments to maintain awareness of what had once been Germany territory and garner support for the reacquisition of their homelands. Joachim Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler und Geschichtsbewusstsein. Eine Untersuchung der kolonialdeutschen Erinnerungskultur*. (Frankfurt: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2000). Zeller divides his analysis into three phases (1884-1914, 1918-1945, and post-1945) to elucidate their messages and the various ways they were used over time.

previous decade.<sup>55</sup> By the latter half of the 1950s, the decade in which public memorialization of the expulsion reached its peak, the first signs of the expellees' waning influence had in fact appeared. Within a few years, a significant shift in emphasis would be perceptible and large numbers of West Germans, particularly the young people, started to question the preponderance of the German experiences of WWII—above all, those of the expellees—in the Federal Republic's historical narratives. By the 1970s, the key events shaping the commemoration of flight and expulsion with monuments would in fact be going against the expellees. As a result, expellee organizations and their interpretation of the past began to be pushed to the periphery as foreign policy matters and remembrance of the Holocaust took precedence. Nevertheless, and this is pivotal, their messages remained the same and in some cases became more radical.

With both German states fully integrated militarily into the two-block system by the middle of the decade, Christian Lotz marks the inception of the paradigm shift in 1956. In time, as a result of everything from de-Stalinization to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, German reunification was effectively removed from the list of most pressing issues for the superpowers.<sup>56</sup> In other words, the likelihood of ending the division between East and West Germany—let alone of the hoped-for final peace treaty planned at Potsdam in 1945 which would restore Germany's territorial integrity entirely and enable the expellees to return home—was growing slimmer.

Closer to home, Lotz identifies four developments that would have more direct relevance for the continued preeminence of the expellee organizations' interpretation of

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<sup>55</sup> It is important to note that the paradigm shift described here was a drawn out process taking place over years, not a clean break that occurred overnight. Despite the move away from a German-centered narrative, it would be years before one could speak of a narrative centering on the Holocaust. In any case, discussions over the recent past in Germany remained contentious throughout this entire period.

<sup>56</sup> Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts*, pp. 127-128.

the past and maintenance of their somewhat privileged societal position as the most important victims of WWII. First, the “economic miracle” had alleviated the most pressing material needs of the expellees and had furthered their integration into West German society to an extent unforeseeable in the first years after the war. With the economic situation improving for most expellees, fewer of them saw a return home as the only possibility of reestablishing their prior existence. Second, the plausibility of expellees’ hopes and demands was questioned. Every day away from the old Heimat meant further consolidation of Polish (or Czechoslovak or Soviet) control over the formerly German territory. Years after the end of the war, the chance that this state of affairs would simply revert to old times became less realistic. Third, as touched on above, the likelihood of an easy resolution of the border issue in the confrontational international political climate of the period was also minimal. In time, the German federal government saw the expellees and their territorial demands as an albatross around its neck that limited its diplomatic options. Moreover, the expellees grew to be seen by the rest of the population as a hindrance to détente between East and West. Finally, the revelations of criminal atrocities at the high profile trials of Nazi perpetrators in the early 1960s weakened the morally-based arguments of the expellees about the unprecedented brutality they had faced and bolstered the case of those who maintained the expulsion was directly connected to Nazi war of aggression.<sup>57</sup> Though all of these continued throughout the period and are important, the last two are crucial for the purposes of this study and will be elucidated here.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-208, especially 201-202.



### **“*Verzicht ist Verrat*”: Foreign Policy Considerations in the Cold War**

As the decisive European front in the Cold War, West German foreign policy considerations played a substantial role in diminishing support for the expellee organizations’ accounts of the past. For over a decade, the Adenauer government envisioned the achievement of state sovereignty through western integration while simultaneously not recognizing the GDR and pursuing the reunification of Germany in its 1937 borders.<sup>58</sup> The first part of the strategy was a success as West Germany regained (nearly) full autonomy through the Paris Treaties of 1954/1955. When the Berlin Wall emerged over night on August 13, 1961, however, the efficacy of the second part of the plan was challenged. Prominent West German commentators, according to Ahonen, viewed the erection of the Wall as a “decisive break” which “sounded the death knell for previous reunification concepts and necessitated a painful re-examination of the Federal Republic’s policies.”<sup>59</sup> The expellee organizations, on the other hand, viewed the crisis in Berlin much as they had viewed the uprising on June 17, 1953. As Ahonen continues, “In their opinion, the latest Berlin crisis had merely confirmed the correctness of Bonn’s hard-line anti-Communist stances of the 1950s by once again spotlighting the relentless, probing aggression characteristic of ‘Soviet-Russian imperialism.’”<sup>60</sup>

Instead of siding with the expellees’ version of the latest Cold War crisis, as had been the case in 1953, the general populace seemed to side more with those who called for a rethinking of West German foreign policy. Starting around this time the events of

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<sup>58</sup> For an excellent summary of Adenauer’s policies regarding foreign policy and reunification, see Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*. (New York: Random House, 1993), pp. 48-53.

<sup>59</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 165. For more on the media’s role in the changes to West Germany’s Ostpolitik and memory culture in the 1960s, see Kittel, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen?* pp. 31-57.

<sup>60</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 167.

Cold War were becoming a double-edged sword for the expellees. On one hand, they once again refocused the world's attention on communist brutality against Germans and on the human cost of division. On the other hand, the emblematic events of the recent past were June 17, 1953 and the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, not the loss of Heimat. Simply put, the political realities of the Cold War precluded a border revision. Even worse for the expellees, for more and more West Germans, the focus was on the partition of Germany into the two extant states, not on the former German territory beyond the Oder/Neisse. Thus "Germany" in the minds of many became the Federal Republic and the GDR as the real possibility of reunification diminished.<sup>61</sup>

Most top government officials in the early 1960s were also increasingly dissatisfied with the hard-line stance advocated by the expellee organizations, which the officials began to view as an impediment to larger foreign policy goals. The Western Allies also exhorted the West German government to soften its obdurate position toward the GDR and to accept the border status quo in the interest of worldwide détente.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the fear of alienating the expellee voting bloc in upcoming elections prevented the major parties from significant foreign policy modifications. Ahonen writes, "In the midst of an unprecedentedly intense bidding war for the hearts and minds of the expellee electorate, none of the major players wanted to be the first to begin demolishing the revisionist illusions which they had all nurtured for years and thereby risk forfeiting millions of

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<sup>61</sup> For a more concrete example of this phenomenon, see Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts*, pp. 212-213.

<sup>62</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 181.

expellee votes.”<sup>63</sup> Caught in this tug-of-war, the parties’ propagandistic outreach efforts to the expellees reached their zenith in the first half of the decade.<sup>64</sup>

In spite of the political parties’ continued championing of the expellees’ cause, calls from outside the government for a new approach vis-à-vis the East persisted. One of the most notable examples was a memorandum (*Denkschrift*) published by the *Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands* (EKD—Protestant Church of Germany) in 1965 called, “The Situation of the Expellees and the Relations of the German People to their Eastern Neighbors.”<sup>65</sup> This fascinating document sheds light on the paradigmatic shift underway within most of West German society concerning the expulsion and its historical context. Although the text contains many passages supportive and sympathetic to the expellees, the memorandum was at its core an appeal to all West Germans, above all, to the expellees, for a new approach in dealing with their neighbors to the East. In the name of reconciliation between Germany and Poland in particular, and in the interest of peace, the document also called for the acknowledgement of German guilt for the expulsion as a result of initiating the Second World War. Furthermore, the memorandum stated that Germans must make responsibility for their self-inflicted wounds and the acknowledgment of guilt in the deaths of millions of non-Germans key components of German foreign policy vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc. In sum, the text suggested that real peace and stability could only be achieved with a new beginning in the relationship of the Germans with their eastern neighbors—in other words, when the expellees recognized the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 171. For more details on the political parties’ deliberate manipulation of the expellee electorate, particularly on the part of the CDU/CSU and the SPD, see Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch,” pp. 212-279.

<sup>65</sup> “Die Lage der Vertriebenen und das Verhältnis des deutschen Volkes zu seinen östlichen Nachbarn – Eine evangelische Denkschrift“ Mit einem Vorwort von Präses D. Kurt Scharf, 1965: <<http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/45952.html>> Accessed November 29, 2008.

Oder/Neisse border and gave up their territorial demands. Predictably, the memorandum of this Lutheran organization active in both Germanys drew intense criticism from the expellee organizations, who sought in vain to counter the symbolic mood swing the document represented.<sup>66</sup>

The new government fused together in December 1966 between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, the Grand Coalition, was forced to accommodate these views while still pursuing its main goal, German reunification.<sup>67</sup> While most credit is usually given to the next government for the decisive changes in West German foreign policy towards the East, Ahonen labels the Grand Coalition the “turning point” in the role played by the expellee lobby in determining West German foreign policy vis-à-vis Eastern Europe.<sup>68</sup> Though ultimately a failure due in part to events influenced by the superpowers and thus out of the government’s control—but also due to the ruling parties’ unwillingness to resist the pressure of the expellee organizations—the Kiesinger government’s Ostpolitik laid the groundwork for the dramatic foreign policy achievements of its immediate successor.<sup>69</sup>

After a hotly contested campaign and a victory by the slimmest of margins, a social-liberal coalition between the Social Democrats and Free Democrats, headed by Willy Brandt of the SPD was formed in October 1969.<sup>70</sup> The parties’ shared objectives in eastern policy—namely, *Wandel durch Annäherung* (change through rapprochement)—

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<sup>66</sup> For more on the negative reactions of the BdV and other expellee organization to the *Denkschrift*, see Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts*, pp. 212-213 and Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch,” pp. 112-116.

<sup>67</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 209.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., pp. 203-242. Ahonen undergoes a thorough exploration of the influence of the expellee organizations on the eastern policy of the Grand Coalition.

<sup>69</sup> As Timothy Garton Ash points out, “A great deal of the “new” Ostpolitik was thus already in place, as a set of premises and intentions, in 1967. (It was at this point, indeed, that it was christened “new”). See Ash, *In Europe’s Name*, p. 55.

<sup>70</sup> The CDU/CSU had actually won the largest number of votes but was unable to find coalition partners who would have kept the party in power.

provided the basis for this somewhat unlikely union.<sup>71</sup> Key components of this policy were recognition not only of the GDR but also of Poland's western border on Oder/Neisse—a change of course made public by Brandt at the SPD's Nuremberg convention in March 1968, where it was above all the Young Socialists (*Jungsozialisten*, or “Jusos”) who had been calling for this break.<sup>72</sup> Not surprisingly, this proposed move was a source of great consternation for the expellee organizations.

Even before the diplomatic events reflecting this changed philosophical approach made the division of Germany and the sundering of its eastern territories a *fait accompli*, the Brandt government laid bare the new place of the expellees and their interests in the eyes of the social-liberal coalition. Foreshadowing the final transformation to come, in a “symbolically significant move, the new government summarily closed down the Expellee Ministry, and transferred the relevant tasks to the Ministry of Interior, thus signaling that it viewed the expellee problem as a matter of domestic policy alone.”<sup>73</sup> For some time, critics had viewed the Ministry as not only “superfluous” due to the expellees’ ongoing economic integration, but also considered its continuing institutional support of the expellee organizations a roadblock to international détente, particularly between West Germany and its eastern neighbors.<sup>74</sup>

To an increasing number of West Germans, the importunacy of the expellee organizations in their insistence on their *Recht auf Heimat* (Right to Heimat or homeland) was inimical to peace and stability in Europe. Many inside and outside the two German

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<sup>71</sup> Ash, *In Europe's Name*, p. 69.

<sup>72</sup> For more on this strategic shift, including excerpts from Willy Brandt's address delivered at the party congress as well as the expellee reaction to it, see Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch,” pp. 260-263.

<sup>73</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p. 243. Recall the “institutional expression of symbolic politics” embodied, according to Matthias Beer and cited above, by the Ministry for Expellee Affairs.

<sup>74</sup> Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts*, p. 226.

states found the expellees' unceasing territorial claims anachronistic in a progressive era in which the SPD-FDP government's aims at détente and rapprochement had grown in popularity and in which most had come to terms with the border status quo. As a result, the expellees' dogged demands for a border revision were seen as one more hindrance to improved relations with the Eastern bloc instead of a pre-condition, as they had always seen them. Willy Brandt's foreign policy directly reflected this.

The precise details of the series of treaties between the Federal Republic and its eastern neighbors—namely, the Soviet Union, Poland, the GDR, and Czechoslovakia—have been documented elsewhere.<sup>75</sup> Suffice it to say what started with the Moscow Treaty in August 1970 and ended with the Prague Treaty of 1973, resulted in a sea change in West German foreign policy: Bonn now recognized the other German state and confirmed the “inviolability” of the existing borders in Europe, i.e. it acknowledged the Oder/Neisse as Poland's western border and thus renounced expellee territorial claims on their former homeland.<sup>76</sup> Put another way, the Brandt-government's eastern treaties (*Ostverträge*) rendered the Heimat-political goals to which the expellee organizations had clung for almost a quarter century completely unrealistic. There would be no return home for the expellees.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Frank Fischer's “Im deutschen Interesse:” Die Ostpolitik der SPD von 1969-1981. (Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 2001), particularly pp. 29-57, provides a fine summary of Brandt's new Ostpolitik. For a more extensive presentation of the diplomatic history of the eastern treaties, see Ash, In Europe's Name, especially pp. 48-215.

<sup>76</sup> The wording of the Warsaw Treaty (1970) stated that *West* Germany, not *united* Germany, recognized the permanence of the Oder/Neisse border. The treaty stipulated that in the event—unlikely at the time, of course—that the GDR and the Federal Republic would reunite, a new border agreement would have to be reached. Needless to say, the expellee organizations were adamantly opposed to the signing of these treaties and campaigned vigorously against their ratification.

<sup>77</sup> Ancillary repercussions of the new Ostpolitik were the Nobel Peace Prize for Willy Brandt in 1971 as well as a more decisive victory for the SPD at the polls the next year. In addition, the chief expellee organization, the BdV, which had conceived of itself hitherto as nonpartisan, became firmly entrenched in the camp of the Union parties (CDU/CSU).

## **“Taboos” Imposed & the Protracted Emergence of Holocaust-Centered Narratives**

It is unlikely that the sweeping changes in Bonn’s foreign policy of the early 1970s—at least the aspects germane to the expellees—would have occurred without the equally sweeping changes amongst wide swaths of the West German population’s understanding of the past. Concomitant to the shift in attitudes in the Federal Republic about the former German territory in Eastern Europe over the course of the 1960s was an astonishing shift in attitudes about German culpability for World War II, and, above all, for the atrocities against millions committed in Germany’s name during the Third Reich.<sup>78</sup> This transformation will be briefly discussed here.

Just as the shift in West German public opinion regarding the Oder/Neisse was not immediate or wholesale, attitudes on German guilt did not change overnight. Prior to the 1960s, in fact, discussions of responsibility had facilitated the widespread popularity of the narratives of the past focusing on German victimhood, including those put forward by the expellees. The Nuremberg Trials in the fall of 1945 and the successor trials from 1946 to 1949, as well as the Allies’ broader efforts to denazify German society did little to implicate the rest of the populace in the crimes of the Nazis.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, one could argue they had done the opposite. Writing about the Nuremberg Trials, Jeffrey Herf notes,

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<sup>78</sup> The two were inextricably linked in Willy Brandt’s historical visit to the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in December 1970, at which time he dropped to his knees in a symbolic gesture of contrition. On this vital connection and its ramifications, Markovits and Gorski write, “Along with Willy Brandt’s justly famous kneeling at the memorial to the Jewish victims of the Warsaw ghetto revolt, and his rapprochement with Germany’s eastern sufferers through his Ostpolitik, the New Left’s massive criticism of German national socialism and the Bonn republic’s quiescence about it helped—perhaps indirectly, though no less decisively—to create an atmosphere of contrition, if not repentance, about the German past.” Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), p. 22. For more on the “*Kniefall*” itself, see Brandt’s memoir *Erinnerungen*. (Berlin: Propyläen Taschenbuch, 1989), pp. 186-197 and Wolffsohn Brechenmacher’s full-length monograph *Denkmalsturz? Brandts Kniefall*. (Munich: Olzog, 2005).

<sup>79</sup> A full examination of denazification and the “rehabilitation” of former Nazis into West German society would exceed the parameters of this study. A good starting point, however, is Norbert Frei’s *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit*. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996).

“Nuremberg [...] represented rejection of the collective guilt of the entire German people and the reaffirmation of the principle of individual political and moral responsibility.”<sup>80</sup> Much the same way, the denazification of the rest of the German population as a whole, an enormous bureaucratic undertaking, produced similar results. Alf Lüdtke maintains that the entire project “tended to stimulate the notion that the masses were not responsible, allowing the *Mitläufer* to perceive themselves as much closer to the victims than to the perpetrators.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, rejection of collective guilt opened up a space rapidly filled by German-centered memory.<sup>82</sup> Overall, as Moeller argues, the move away from any suggestion of German culpability to German victimization had the purpose of “ma[king] it possible to talk about the end of the Third Reich without assessing responsibility for its origins, to tell an abbreviated story of National Socialism in which all Germans were ultimately victims of a war that Hitler started but everyone lost.”<sup>83</sup>

Most attribute the beginning of the more widespread readiness to reassess remembrance of the German past to a series of high profile criminal trials starting with the *Einsatzgruppe* trial held in Ulm in 1958 at which the mass killing of Jews in Poland and the Soviet Union was comprehensively presented in public for the first time.<sup>84</sup> Based on the desire for justice born out of the trial, the *Zentrale Stelle der*

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<sup>80</sup> Jeffrey Herf, Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 208.

<sup>81</sup> Alf Lüdtke, “Coming to Terms with the Past: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany,” The Journal of Modern History. 65, 3, September 1993, p. 549.

<sup>82</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of collective guilt as a topic, see Karl Jaspers, The Question of German Guilt. Tr. E.B. Ashton (New York: The Dial Press, 1947). Jaspers distinguishes between four kinds of guilt: criminal, political, moral, and metaphysical. Using this typology, he ascertains that one can be guilty even if s/he did not personally commit a crime.

<sup>83</sup> Robert G. Moeller, “War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany,” The American Historical Review. Vol. 101, No. 4 (Oct. 1996), p. 1013.

<sup>84</sup> Detlef Siegfried, “Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlußstrich. Der Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten 1958 bis 1969,” in Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried and Karl Christian Lammer (eds.) Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften. (Hamburg: Christians, 2000), p. 79. Much of the following synopsis of this key period is taken from this text.



*Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung von NS-Verbrechen* (Central Office of the State Justice Ministries for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes) in Ludwigsburg was established to promote the prosecution of Nazi criminals and expose the details of their murderous campaigns. Even more prominent was the trial of Adolf Eichmann held in Jerusalem in 1961.<sup>85</sup> Two years later in Frankfurt, a case against camp personnel at Auschwitz brought even more attention to the industrialized evils committed by Germans during the Third Reich. Not only was this trial extraordinary because the accused were “regular people” and not Nazi elites, but also because, as Detlef Siegfried points out, “From the start, the trial was not seen as purely a penal, legalistic matter at which merely individual guilt was to be investigated, but rather as a constitutive part of an historic project of enlightenment at which the entire complexity of National Socialist extermination policies was exposed.”<sup>86</sup> By the middle of the decade, trials had been held for personnel of all the major extermination camps.<sup>87</sup>

Though Siegfried rightly downplays the role of the student movement—the so-called “68ers”—as the societal impetus behind the new self-critical approach to the past

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<sup>85</sup>For more on this trial and Eichmann’s role in the machinery of genocide, see Hannah Arendt’s seminal classic, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1994 [1963]).

<sup>86</sup> Siegfried, “Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlußstrich,” p. 94.

<sup>87</sup> In revealing to the world the full extent of Nazi crimes, the trials played an important didactic role that altered the opinions of many on the fundamental nature of the Third Reich and challenged West German attitudes on culpability in general. Though a distinction must be made between the attitudes of the political class and other elites and the rest of the population, the trials inevitably led to more confrontation with and contemplation about the role played by ordinary Germans in the annihilation of European Jews. Through them, Siegfried writes, “Eichmann [became] a symbol of the nondescript *Schreibtischtäter*, the bloodthirsty potentiality of bureaucracy; Auschwitz [was an] anthropological symbol for that what human beings can do.” (Siegfried, “Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlußstrich,” p. 96) This is not to say that the West German government had hitherto completely ignored its responsibility for the victims of National Socialism. While not always popular, official steps had also been taken by the Adenauer government to make amends for the crimes committed in Germany’s name, such as Bonn’s support of the state of Israel, and *Wiedergutmachung* (restitution) for Jewish survivors initiated by the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952. (See Herf, *Divided Memory*, especially pp. 267-333). For much of the public, however, the trials began to shift perceptions about German suffering during and after the war, including that of the expellees, by shining the spotlight more brightly on the victims of Nazi crimes rather than on German victims.

in West Germany, its role was undeniable, he argues, in “radicalizing the already intensive discourse which had occupied West German society for over ten years.” The radicalization of discourse in this context entailed, above all, indignation over the double standards and hypocrisy with which older West Germans dealt with their past and their dubious efforts “to come to terms” with it.<sup>88</sup> Though it would go too far to claim the 68ers were protesting for the centrality of the Holocaust in historical narratives, the antiauthoritarianism and antifascism of many members of this age cohort was fueled in part by dissatisfaction with their parents’ generation’s response to Germany’s recent history and its eagerness to forget and willingness to suppress what actually happened during the Nazi epoch. “[The 68ers] charged that the failure of their parents’ generation to resist National Socialism was tantamount to complicity.”<sup>89</sup>

This view of the Nazi past also affected the expellees by diminishing the palatability of their claims of victimization. As Schneider states, “The student revolutionaries of 1968 simply banished from their version of history all stories about Germans that did not fit in with the picture of the ‘generation of perpetrators.’”<sup>90</sup> The expulsion came to be viewed as the result of Nazi Germany’s war of aggression and the intertwined extermination of the Jews rather than as an act long wished for and planned by the Poles and Czechs.<sup>91</sup> As this generation assumed positions of authority over time, its stance that “what Germany had lost [e.g. the eastern territories] was the price Germans had to pay for the crimes of the National Socialist regime” became the norm.

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<sup>88</sup> Siegfried, “Zwischen Aufarbeitung und Schlußstrich,” p. 104.

<sup>89</sup> Moeller, “Germans as Victims?” p. 170.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Schneider, “In Their Side of World War II, the Germans Also Suffered,” New York Times, Jan.18, 2003.

<sup>91</sup> For more on this long-held argument of the expellees, see Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, “Mythos ‘Vertreibung,’” in Heidi Hein-Kircher and H.H. Hahn (eds.) Politische Mythen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in Mittel- und Osteuropa. (Marburg: Verlag Herder Institut, 2006), pp. 167-188.

Furthermore, as Moeller notes, those who, “claim[ed] victim status [were] immediately suspect because [such claims] implied the denial of responsibility for German crimes.”<sup>92</sup> From now on, as Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider observe, one could not speak publicly of German victimization, “without a direct causal reference to German crimes coming before the expulsions.”<sup>93</sup>

When people talk about “taboos” imposed on discussions of German victimhood, it is these developments to which they refer. The trend continued throughout the 1970s as the expellee organizations, and their historical interpretation, grew more and more isolated. Kittel catalogs a number of examples from the 1970s—everything from the weather map on the news program of *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (ZDF—Second German Television), which until 1976 included formerly German cities in the eastern territories, to the appellations used by sports announcers for the opponents of German soccer clubs—when now passé references to the former German territory were eliminated.<sup>94</sup> In terms of social acceptance, it certainly did not help that the right-wing extremist *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD—National Democratic Party of Germany) had adopted the expellees’ position on the Oder/Neisse as a plank in its political platform. Even though the NPD had long since reached its peak as a mainstream political force by the early 1970s, and never made a significant impact at the federal level, in the minds of many, their presumed association with right-wing radicalism further tainted the expellees.<sup>95</sup> In the face of these tremendous changes—

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<sup>92</sup> Moeller, “Germans as Victims?” p. 170 & p. 171.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, “Memories of Universal Victimhood: The Case of Ethnic German Expellees,” *German Politics and Society*. Issue 75, Vol. 23, No. 2, Summer 2005, p. 20.

<sup>94</sup> Kittel, *Vertreibung der Vertriebenen?* p. 147ff.

<sup>95</sup> Stickler analysis of the relationship between the expellees and the NPD is inconclusive as to the profundity of the connection. To wit, he notes the electoral successes of the NPD at the state level particularly in the Länder with larger numbers of expellees but also remarks on the BdV’s efforts to keep

considered by most as “progress”—and with some unyielding expellees still raising territorial claims and focusing purely on their own suffering, it is no coincidence that the sobriquets “revanchists” and “*Ewiggestrige*” gained currency at this time.<sup>96</sup>

It would be an exaggeration to say that the astounding changes of the late 1960s and early 1970s regarding views of the past led to the increased assumption of guilt or responsibility on a widespread, personal level. More accurate would be to say that Brandt’s foreign policy and the broader awareness of the Nazi genocide led for many West Germans to a new readiness to engage with the past. I would argue that the events of this period mark one of the central “crises” in the Federal Republic which have occurred repeatedly throughout the postwar era in the “constant seesaw,” identified by Saul Friedlander, “between learning and forgetting, between becoming briefly aware of the past and turning one’s back on it.” It is my contention that the slow paradigm shift that was taking place during this period was the pivotal upswing of this “near automatic process,” at least for the expellees.<sup>97</sup>

The extermination of the Jews became a linchpin in interpretations of recent German history after the airing of the American mini-series Holocaust in January 1979. The television program was seen by millions of Germans and precipitated intense public debate.<sup>98</sup> Even though the program was panned by critics, this watershed event is

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the party at a distance, citing a study that shows that the expellees did not vote over proportionately for it despite the NPD’s stance on the border issue. See Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch,” pp. 336-346.

<sup>96</sup> Kossert, Kalte Heimat, p. 191 (caption).

<sup>97</sup> Saul Friedlander, Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 8.

<sup>98</sup> For a contemporaneous look at the reception of Holocaust in West German society and the lasting changes its airing unleashed, see New German Critique Special Issue 1 Germans and Jews. No. 19, Winter 1980, especially the essays by Jeffrey Herf (“The Holocaust Reception in West Germany: Right Center and Left,” pp. 30-52), Andrei S. Markovits and Rebecca S. Hayden (“Holocaust Before and After the Event: Reactions in West Germany and Austria,” pp. 53-80), and Siegfried Zielinski (History as Entertainment and Provocation: The TV Series Holocaust,” pp. 81-96). Another essential resource is the anthology co-edited

“frequently cited as a high point in West Germans’ confrontation with the individual face of mass extermination.”<sup>99</sup> According to Siobhan Kattago, the massive response to the film was sparked by the “emotional appeal instead of abstract appeal common in traditional monuments and museums.”<sup>100</sup> Most importantly, the film introduced on a large scale the word “Holocaust” to the German vernacular.<sup>101</sup> By now the emergence of other postwar narratives had undermined the salience of German suffering and the loss of the German East and discredited those who harped on it. Holocaust-centered memory, though not unchallenged, was now hegemonic on the national level. Whether the same can be said about historical narratives on the local level was debatable.

Virtually all the events on the national level during the 1960s and 1970s went against the expellee organizations and their interpretation of the recent German past. It would seem likely that the slowly changing postwar narrative precipitated by Ostpolitik and the increased societal awareness of Nazi atrocities which led to this marginalization would have a profound effect on the local expellee monuments erected during this period. Presumably, one would observe a precipitous decline in the construction of new monuments, those proposed would face rising opposition, and those already standing would draw more scrutiny, particularly from young people and left-wing critics. At question too is whether and how long it would take for the political and social changes described above to trickle down through society and be reflected in the monuments.

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by Anson Rabinbach and Jack Zipes entitled Germans and Jews Since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), especially the Markovits and Hayden essay “Holocaust Before and After the Event: Reactions in West Germany and Austria,” pp. 234-257.

<sup>99</sup> Moeller, “War Stories,” p. 1035.

<sup>100</sup> Siobhan Kattago, Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>101</sup> Atina Grossmann states that prior to the mini-series most references were to the *Endlösung* (“Final Solution”). See Grossmann, “The ‘Goldhagen Effect’: Memory, Repetition, and Responsibility in the New Germany,” in Geoff Eley (ed.) The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the German Past. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 96n.

These historical developments also suggest that whether or not the expellee monuments' tone and message would change after the time of campaigning for tangible political goals had concluded, the resonance thereof certainly would.

### **SEEKING "NORMALIZATION," REUNIFICATION, AND THE RETURN OF GERMAN SUFFERING: COMMEMORATING THE EXPULSION SINCE 1982**

The political *Wende* of 1982 which engendered the CDU/CSU's resumption of power—with Helmut Kohl as chancellor and the FDP as coalition partner—sparked renewed optimism for expellee activists that changes of policy vis-à-vis the East might be imminent. Any glimmers of hope the expellee organizations might have harbored were snuffed out after it became clear that there would be no radical breaks in foreign policy and no reversals on the border issue. This is not to say the Kohl government did not play the border revision card or make token gestures of solidarity to the expellee organizations throughout the 1980s. For example, Kohl appointed the last chief of the Expellee Ministry, Heinrich Windelen, to his first cabinet in 1982 as Minister for Inner-German Relations and himself addressed expellee congresses—the first time the highest-ranking member of the West German government had done so since Ludwig Erhard some twenty years prior.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> A minor scandal arose at the end of 1984 over the participation of Helmut Kohl at an annual *Deutschlandtreffen* of the Silesian *Landsmannschaft* to be held the next summer. Kohl accepted the *Landsmannschaft*'s invitation to speak before the assembly's theme became public. When it was announced the motto would be "*40 Jahre Vertreibung – Schlesien bleibt unser*" (40 Years Expulsion – Silesia Remains Ours) Kohl's silence on the matter drew international attention. Under pressure from the Kohl government, the Silesian *Landsmannschaft* ultimately selected a slightly more politically correct title ("*40 Jahre Vertreibung – Schlesien bleibt unsere Zukunft im Europa freier Völker*"—40 Years Expulsion – Silesia Remains Our Future in a Europe of Free Peoples) and Kohl attended and spoke as planned. For interesting insight into Kohl's management of the scandal, see Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Deutschlandpolitik in Helmut Kohls Kanzlerschaft: Regierungsstil und Entscheidungen 1982-1989*. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1998), especially pp. 243-264.

None of these developments led to either a resurgence of the expellee organizations or to any real effort to re-address the territorial status quo, despite the CDU/CSU's protests against the recognition of the Oder/Neisse while in the opposition in the 1970s.<sup>103</sup> Instead, the federal government's overtures to the expellees were part of what Timothy Garton Ash calls a "neo-Adenauerian domestic political strategy,"<sup>104</sup> which, as historically had been the case, proved effective in shoring up the still crucial expellee vote and garnering the support of right of center voters of all stripes, including extremists and nationalists. Overall, however, the expellee organizations' political and cultural influence continued to erode in the 1980s—a development best illustrated in their ineffectual efforts to impede official recognition of Poland's western border after German reunification in 1990.<sup>105</sup> (Reunification will be discussed in greater detail below).

The contradictory nature of the new government's relationship with the expellee organizations mirrored the paradoxical nature of the major public debates—some involving Kohl himself, as well as his administration—over memory and the past in West Germany leading up to reunification. But just as the *Wende* of 1982 did not precipitate a transformation in eastern policy, the switch to a conservative administration did not precipitate a departure from the Holocaust-centered memory prevalent since the 1970s either. It should be remarked that the most significant cultural and political events of the first part of this period were only tangentially related to German suffering. Indeed, commemoration of the expulsion itself factored minimally in these national memory

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<sup>103</sup> Ahonen writes "Kohl and the other responsible top-level leaders of the CDU/CSU knew perfectly well that territorial changes in Germany's favor in Eastern Europe were neither possible nor desirable..." (After the Expulsion, p. 257. Pages 256-260 provide more on the CDU/CSU's delicate balancing act during the 1980s).

<sup>104</sup> Ash, In Europe's Name, p. 229.

<sup>105</sup> Stickler, "Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch." p. 435.

contests. The victimization *of Germans* in WWII, moreover, was not directly weighed against victimization perpetrated *by Germans*, at least not how it had been in the past. To be sure, the primacy of the Holocaust as centerpiece of postwar history and national identity would be challenged. But instead of countering this fact with rehashed, one-sided arguments of the 1950s and early 1960s, disputes ensued over how best to incorporate normatively the important changes in memory culture of the 1970s into present-day culture in West Germany.

### **“Normalization” and the Holocaust Moments of the 1980s**

The mid-1980s were replete with a series of significant public events and incidents—what Grossmann calls “Holocaust moments”<sup>106</sup>—which spawned highly publicized debates in academic circles, the public sphere, and beyond, over the meaning of the Third Reich and Judeocide in contemporary (West) Germany. Although it would far exceed the parameters of this study to explore these acrimonious incidents in-depth—all of which have been subject to book-length analyses—it is definitely worthwhile to list and comment on some of the major impetuses for the contentious discussions that followed. For instance, the topics of collective guilt and *Wehrmacht* complicity in Nazi atrocities was reintroduced via the controversial visit of Ronald Reagan and Chancellor Kohl to the military cemetery at Bitburg in 1985. In addition to being the final resting place for Germany’s “regular” fallen soldiers, the cemetery was discovered also to contain the graves of a several dozen members of the *Waffen-SS*.<sup>107</sup> Kohl hoped to use the meeting at Bitburg, held in conjunction with the ceremonies celebrating the forty-year

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<sup>106</sup> Grossmann, “The Goldhagen Effect,” p. 89.

<sup>107</sup> For a collection of superb essays on this controversy, see Hartmann, (ed.) Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective.



anniversary of the end of WWII, to rehabilitate his country in light of its dark past. Through this act of reconciliation between erstwhile enemies—supported by all the parties of the Bundestag except the Greens—West Germany’s “ordinariness” in the present was to be emphasized and acknowledged by making its disreputable past less relevant. As Kattago notes, the event was to “symbolize the normalcy of the Federal Republic and its firm participation in the Western fight against communism. Bitburg would more importantly symbolize the end of German guilt and a German national identity unencumbered and unburdened by the Nazi past.”<sup>108</sup> Thus, Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich state, the incident at Bitburg represented, “the first concerted effort to revive a dormant and partially illegitimate collective memory.”<sup>109</sup>

This attempt to tweak the national narrative was overshadowed days later by German President Richard von Weizsäcker’s noted address before the German parliament on May 8, 1985. During this moving and nuanced speech, Weizsäcker touched on an array of topics concerning the meaning of the end of the war for the Federal Republic, including the experience of flight and expulsion. Forty years hence, Germany’s surrender did not mean defeat and catastrophe, according to the federal president, but should be considered the country’s liberation. He made note, however, that for many—and here he was obviously referring to the expellees—the end of the war meant the beginning of suffering and loss. However, he adroitly added in a clear reflection on the changes that had taken place since the 1950s that the actual cause of that misery could not be decoupled from the start of the Hitler dictatorship. Furthermore, Weizsäcker made reference to the special hardships the expellees had faced—including in many cases the

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<sup>108</sup> Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory*, p. 49.

<sup>109</sup> Markovits and Reich, *The German Predicament*, p. 35.

lack of empathy on the part of the locals vis-à-vis the newcomers—but also implored the expellees to relinquish their claims in the interest of common understanding. What is more, in an unusual reversal, the officially neutral chief of state (though a Christian Democrat) proclaimed a long list of victim groups to be commemorated. This list commenced with Germany's victims and concluded with German victims, and—presaging the next major debate over public memory in the Federal Republic—accentuated the uniqueness of the Holocaust.<sup>110</sup>

Needless to say, this rhetorical *tour de force* was extraordinary for many reasons—not least of which was the last point. Acknowledging German suffering while undercutting the expellee organizations' one-sided historical interpretation of what had befallen them, Weizsäcker established a causal link between the Nazis' seizure of power and the expulsion of the Germans—a first for a Christian Democrat at the national level. The speech counteracted moreover the tendency to “normalize” the past embodied by Chancellor Kohl and the debacle at Bitburg. Mary Nolan writes, “In its political and moral range, its willingness to accept historical responsibility in combination with authentic personal memories and emotions, its refusal to engage in over-simplifications and its clear-sighted confrontation with current political realities, this speech was a remarkable performance.”<sup>111</sup> Even more sensational though, was Weizsäcker's public, by-proxy assumption of Germany's enduring responsibility for the crimes committed in its name during the Third Reich. Helmut Dubiel observes the “heretical quality” of this

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<sup>110</sup>Richard von Weizsäcker. “Ansprache von Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker anlässlich der Gedenkstunde zu 40 Jahren Kriegsende im Plenarsaal des Deutschen Bundestages.” 08.05.1985 in Bonn <[www.bundespraesident.de](http://www.bundespraesident.de)> Accessed March 19, 2009. See also, Ulrich Gill and Winfried Steffani (eds.) Eine Rede und ihre Wirkung. Die Rede des Bundespräsidenten Richard von Weizsäcker vom 8. Mai 1985 anlässlich des 40. Jahrestages der Beendigung des Zweiten Weltkrieges: Betroffene nehmen Stellung. (Berlin: R. Röll, 1986).

<sup>111</sup> Mary Nolan, German National Identity after the Holocaust. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 99.

particular declaration and claims the main arguments of the speech are an assault on the “interpretive framework utilized by the conservative elites of the republic to keep their guilt at bay for forty years.”<sup>112</sup> Above all, the speech articulated the changes in historical understandings since the late 1960s, further undergirding the centrality of the Holocaust for understanding the recent German past.<sup>113</sup> That Weizsäcker—a Christian Democrat, but also the son of a prominent Nazi diplomat indicted at the Nuremberg trials, and himself of the “generation of perpetrators” not blessed with the *Gnade der späten Geburt* (mercy of a late birth) à la Helmut Kohl—gave the address only added to its authenticity and profundity.

Despite its significance, to say that Weizsäcker’s address forged a consensus in matters surrounding the German past and its proper place in the present and future would be erroneous. In fact, not long after the speech, the infamous *Historikerstreit* (historians’ dispute) broke out with battle lines drawn along ideological lines, with conservative revisionists pitted against left-wing opponents.<sup>114</sup> Characteristic of the major public discussions of recent history in West Germany in the 1980s, the *Historikerstreit* was highly political (though as Wulf Kansteiner points out, politicians for the most part were

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<sup>112</sup> Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte: Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages*. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1999), p. 211.

<sup>113</sup> Wulf Kansteiner, *In Pursuit of German Memory. History, Television, and Politics after Auschwitz*. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), p. 257.

<sup>114</sup> Much has been published on the *Historikerstreit*. Challenging the notion that the Nazi genocide was a *sui generis* and inexplicable occurrence unequalled in modern history, conservative historians, most notably, Ernst Nolte, Andreas Hillgruber, and Michael Stürmer, tried to draw parallels between the Holocaust and other deliberate mass killings of entire groups of peoples in an effort to normalize the German past. They were accused by the liberal side (with Jürgen Habermas and Micha Brumlik at the forefront) of seeking to relativize Nazi crimes and exculpate all Germans from collective guilt over WWII in order to revitalize a traditional German national identity based on a healthy, uninhibited relationship with the past—an idea that for many on the Left was anathema. For more on the debate, see Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), which offers an incisive overview and analysis of the debates. Peter Baldwin’s edited volume is also an essential compendium of outstanding essays by world-class scholars on the themes and broader implications of the *Historikerstreit*. Peter Baldwin (ed.) *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians’ Debate*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

not directly involved) and focused on the meaning of the past in the present. Specifically at issue were questions of the singularity and comparability of the Holocaust.<sup>115</sup>

The discussions of the Nazi past at this time were more about its proper place in the present and future historical consciousness of West Germans. Moishe Postone saw in the attempts to “normalize” the past “a conscious conservative campaign [...] to reverse many political-cultural developments that had occurred in the Federal Republic after 1968-1969 [...] by establishing a greater degree of continuity with elements of the German past that had been discredited.” This “normalization” of Germany’s past was intended to make it more usable in the present. But Postone saw something more sinister at play: “It appears perfectly straightforward—an attempt by the Right to regain cultural and political hegemony by affirming continuity with the past. Nevertheless, aspects of that conservative campaign suggest that, behind its apparently straightforward character, a level of historical repression continued to operate.”<sup>116</sup>

To be sure, some historians and conservative politicians had challenged the primacy of the Holocaust in West German memory culture. But they failed to dislodge it. To reintroduce Friedlander’s seesaw metaphor, the memory squabbles in the 1980s swung decidedly in the opposite direction of the late 1960s and 1970s, but they did not represent a *full* downswing in the direction of forgetting or ignoring the Nazi past.

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<sup>115</sup> Though the right-wing protagonists in the debate did not endeavor to equate the Holocaust to the victimization of Germans, the expulsion did come up in Hillgruber’s contributions to the debate. See Andreas Hillgruber, Zweierlei Untergang. Die Zerschlagung des deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums. (Berlin: Corso bei Siedler, 1986). Hillgruber delineates Polish and Soviet plans to dismantle and overtake Germany’s eastern provinces *before* the Nazi invasion. He then links the fate of European Jews to the plight of the expellees and claims the crimes of the Nazis were matched by those of the Soviets. Hillgruber was criticized for too closely identifying with the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* whose valor in efforts to protect Germans in the East from the onslaught of the Red Army the author explicitly praised.

<sup>116</sup> Moishe Postone, “Germany’s Future and Its Unmastered Past” in Michael G. Huelshoff, Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich (eds.) From Bundesrepublik to Deutschland: German Politics after Unification. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), p. 295.

Indeed, the efforts to draw a line under the past—a so called (*Schlußstrich*)—were forcefully rebuffed. Lars Rensmann has written about the paradoxical outcome of drawing a line under the past. In what he calls the “*Dialektik der Schlußstrich-Ideologie*” (dialectic of finalization ideology) Rensmann notices that repeated calls for a *Schlußstrich* often do the opposite of their intent. Instead of ending discussions, they engender even more and refocus public attention on the issues at hand in new ways. Debates over the past become more about the present than about what happened during the Third Reich, thus amplifying the meaning of this history rather than silencing it.<sup>117</sup> It seems the uproars thus solidified Auschwitz even further as a central tenet of German identity and as a key to understanding German history.

While they certainly downplayed the importance of the Holocaust, right-wing ripostes to the changes of the 1960s/1970s did not reintroduce German suffering to public consciousness in a big way. Interestingly, neither the expulsion of the Germans as a historical chain of events nor the expellees as political actors figured prominently in the major debates of the 1980s. Expulsion was for the most part an afterthought. German victimhood in WWII was not in competition with the suffering inflicted by Germans, nor was it reasserted in an effort to equate, and thereby diminish, the potency of the Holocaust as the centerpiece of official memory in Germany.<sup>118</sup> As their absence from these debates suggests, the 1980s were a period of weakness for the expellee organizations.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Lars Rensmann, “Baustein der Erinnerungspolitik,” in Micha Brumlik, Hajo Funke and Rensmann (eds.) *Umkämpftes Vergessen: Walser-Debatte, Holocaust-Mahnmal und neuere deutsche Geschichtspolitik*. (Berlin: Verlag Das Arabische Buch, 2000), pp. 135-167.

<sup>118</sup> Though one might argue the legislation passed in 1985 which made Holocaust denial a punishable offense, and also contained a provision making denial of the expulsion illegal, did just that.

<sup>119</sup> Dietrich Strothmann’s short piece touching on the scandal over Chancellor Kohl’s participation at the congress of the Silesian *Landsmannschaft* sheds some light on the activities of the expellee organizations in

Their inability to influence political decision-making was highlighted during the run-up to German reunification in 1990. Whether through Chancellor Kohl's deft political maneuvering to shore up the right-wing electorate in upcoming elections or his risky mismanagement qua brinksmanship potentially jeopardizing the reunification entirely,<sup>120</sup> the possibility of revising Poland's western border had been broached even before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The expellee organizations, whose chief objective, according to Ahonen, remained the "chimera of territorial revisionism,"<sup>121</sup> pounced. Kohl's avoidance of the issue and the wishy-washy proclamations he repeatedly uttered on it throughout the fall of 1989 and into 1990,<sup>122</sup> rejuvenated the expellees (albeit fleetingly), befuddled allies on the continent and overseas, and stoked Polish fears that Germany might once again be tempted to implement aggressive policies toward its eastern neighbor.<sup>123</sup> Instead of helping to shape the policies ultimately carried out, however, the expellees and their hope of a final decision in their favor on the border issue were once again viewed as a roadblock to national unity. Two bilateral pacts—the German-Polish border treaty from November 14, 1990, and a treaty the following year based on mutual respect and amicable relations—officially and irrevocably settled the

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the 1980s. See Dietrich Strothmann, "'Schlesien bleibt unser.' Vertriebenenpolitiker und das Rad der Geschichte," in Wolfgang Benz (ed.) Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen. (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), pp. 209-218, but a more thorough overview of their activities and role in the debates over memory in the 1980s would be a welcome addition to the literature on expellee organizations.

<sup>120</sup> Ahonen and Ash both lean toward the former.

<sup>121</sup> Ahonen, After the Expulsion, p. 261.

<sup>122</sup> As is well known, Kohl's 10-point program of late November 1989, which enumerated steps leading to unification, did not mention the border question at all.

<sup>123</sup> Markovits and Reich write that as a result of Kohl's evasiveness and hesitance to take a clear stand on the border issue, the Polish Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, requested Soviet troops remain in Poland "to protect against a potentially expansionist Germany." See Markovits and Reich, The German Predicament, p. 112.

border issue.<sup>124</sup> Instead of concrete politics, all that was left for the expellee organizations were symbolic politics.

### **“*Umsiedler*” and the Commemoration of the Expulsion in the German Democratic Republic (GDR)**

To this point, this chapter has only looked at West German memory culture and the commemoration of the expulsion with monuments in the Federal Republic. There is a simple reason for this: by the mid-1950s the topic was no longer a part of public discourse in the GDR, and no local expellee monuments were erected in East Germany until after German reunification in 1990.

By 1949, over 4.3 million “*Umsiedler*” (re-settlers, *not* expellees<sup>125</sup>) had been registered in the Soviet Zone (and later the GDR) comprising nearly a quarter of the total population.<sup>126</sup> For fear of upsetting diplomatic relations with their new benefactors, however, the East German political authorities quickly ended the privileging of the expellees and effectively denied them victim status. The authorities’ motivation for this was clear. They believed that making their socialist brethren—and the Soviet Union, in particular—guilty for the expulsion of the Germans from the East would be politically

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<sup>124</sup> The third and final episode of the 2001 documentary miniseries *Die Vertriebenen: Hitlers letzte Opfer* (Dir. Sebastian Dehnhardt) depicts the outrage felt by many expellees over the finality of the Oder/Neiße border. The film shows Helmut Kohl’s speech before a large audience at an expellee gathering. When Kohl announced there would be no new border negotiations his statement was greeted by a cacophony of boos and derisive whistles. Some angry audience members rose and disgustedly vacated the large hall in which Kohl’s address occurred.

<sup>125</sup> Kossert deemed this moniker a “language manipulation decreed by the Soviets” (*Kalte Heimat*, p. 215). Ther explains the term “*Umsiedler*” was selected because, “With this word [authorities in the Soviet Zone] wanted, for one thing, to demonstrate to indigenous Germans and to expellees, who were at this time usually labeled “refugees,” that their flight was over and their acceptance in the locality final, and to underpin the choice of words used in the Potsdam agreement, according to which it was not a question of cruel expulsion contrary to international law, but of a legal and planned resettlement.” See Philipp Ther, “Expellee Policy in the Soviet-Occupied Zone and the GDR,” in David Rock and Stefan Wolff (eds.) *Coming Home to Germany? The Integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*. (Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), p. 60.

<sup>126</sup> In Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, expellees comprised over 40% of the total population. Cited in Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 196.

harmful for the newly established GDR.<sup>127</sup> After all, Germany's socialist liberators could hardly have been responsible for German suffering.<sup>128</sup> In other words, the political situation in the GDR was much less propitious from the start for public commemoration of the expulsion.

Even more than in West Germany, however, the political authorities viewed the expellees with skepticism and greatly feared their potential to destabilize the fragile new social structure. Their rapid integration into the new system was thus a paramount goal for the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (KPD—Communist Party of Germany, KPD), and after 1946, for the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, (SED—Socialist Unity Party of Germany, SED). All policies regarding the expellees were crafted to meet this objective and demonstrate the SED's superior capability (compared to the West's) to integrate the expellees. For example, the aid provided to newly arrived expellees in the Soviet Zone was more generous than in the western zones. In fact, Philipp Ther notes, East German authorities carried out the economic and social integration of the expellees more efficiently than their counterparts in the Federal Republic. They redistributed land, closed refugee camps, and arranged new accommodations, economic and social integration more quickly than was occurring in West Germany.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, during the period of de-Nazification, the socialist

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<sup>127</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 215.

<sup>128</sup> Clearly, Cold War considerations played a central role in these decisions. Just as the Federal Republic downplayed the western Allies' role in the air war in favor of the expulsion in the interest of "Westbindung," the GDR played up the "imperialistic" actions of the "Anglo-American air gangsters" who laid waste to Dresden in the firebombing of February 1945. The bombing was commemorated regularly with anti-American, anti-imperialist speeches decrying the deliberate efforts of the Americans and British air fleets to hinder anti-fascist rebirth in Germany. See Olaf B. Rader, "Dresden," in Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (eds.) *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*. Vol. III. (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2001).



leadership considered an expellee's future value as a contributor to the new society more decisive than his or her Nazi past.<sup>130</sup>

Another key aspect of integrating expellees in the Soviet zone and the early GDR was the very early recognition of Poland's western border.<sup>131</sup> Since 1946 or 1947, the Soviet Union had recognized the permanence of the then officially provisional border. The Görlitz Treaty of July 6, 1950, a prerequisite to the accession of East Germany into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), ended all territorial ambiguity vis-à-vis the GDR's eastern neighbors by acknowledging the Oder/Neisse as Poland's western border. According to Kossert, the pact had a two-pronged purpose. First, it normalized relations with Poland and Czechoslovakia, which simultaneously improved the SED's economic maneuverability. Second, the treaty furthered the integration of the expellees by eliminating with one fell swoop the hope for a border revision.<sup>132</sup> Simply put, for the expellees residing in the GDR, the treaty meant there would be no "return home" and the "right to Heimat" would not be instrumentalized to mobilize voters. To be sure, this decision was not made without dissent. Even within the party leadership, some officials, including at first Wilhelm Pieck, the first president of the GDR,<sup>133</sup> questioned the decision to recognize what became known as the "*Friedensgrenze*" (peace border). In time, those who expressed their misgivings about the

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<sup>130</sup> Damian van Melis, "Angabe nicht möglich – Integration statt Entnazifizierung der Flüchtlinge in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern," in Dierk Hoffmann and Michael Schwartz (eds.) *Geglückte Integration? Spezifika und Vergleichbarkeiten der Vertriebenen-Eingliederung in der SBZ/DDR*. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), p. 165.

<sup>134</sup> Ther, "Expellee Policy in the Soviet-Occupied Zone and the GDR," pp. 56-76.

<sup>131</sup> The most thorough examination of this topic comes from Andreas Malycha, "'Wir haben erkannt, dass die Oder-Neiße-Grenze die Friedensgrenze ist': Die SED und die neue Ostgrenze 1945 bis 1951," *Deutschland Archiv* 33, 2000; pp. 193-207.

<sup>132</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 219.

<sup>133</sup> Pieck was born in the city Guben, through which the Neisse River directly flowed. The border between the GDR and Poland literally split the original city in two. After the Oder/Neisse line became the border, the city center, renamed Gubin, became a Polish city. The western suburbs became the German city Guben.

border were expelled from the SED. Early recognition allowed the SED to cast opposition to the territorial status quo—particularly by the West German government and the expellee organizations—as reckless warmongering. According to East German propaganda, only those opposed to peace and stability would dare resist the “peace border.”<sup>134</sup>

As a result, street and place names with connections to Germany’s eastern provinces were changed and songs from the East were no longer permitted on East German radio. Moreover, the SED criminalized revisionist claims on the land beyond the Oder-Neisse and came to view the activities of expellee groups in the GDR as sedition. Although expellee organizations had emerged in the Soviet zone even earlier than in the western zones, the SED disbanded the largest and most important, the *Zentralverwaltung für deutsche Umsiedler* (ZVU—Central Administration for German Resettlers) in July 1948, and disallowed all Landsmannschaften akin to those in the West. The oppression of expellees was particularly harsh. Kossert writes of two “resettlers” who were sentenced to over ten years imprisonment in the former concentration camp Sachsenhausen for unlawful assembly because they had regularly met with fellow expellees from their home region.<sup>135</sup> By 1949, the SED had decreed that the term “resettler” was no longer to be used. Just months later, the party leadership declared the “naturalization” of the expellees complete.<sup>136</sup> By the middle of the 1950s, the East German media no longer mentioned the expellees as such.<sup>137</sup> Simply put, the expulsion did not play a part in the postwar narrative

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<sup>134</sup> Manfred Wille, “SED und ‘Umsiedler’ – Vertriebenenpolitik der Einheitspartei im ersten Nachkriegsjahrzehnt,” in Hoffmann and Schwartz (eds.) *Geglückte Integration?* p. 103.

<sup>135</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 217.

<sup>136</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Vertreibung und Vergangenheitspolitik: Ein Versuch über geteilte deutsche Nachkriegsidentitäten,” in *Deutschland Archiv*, 30 (1997), p. 195.

<sup>137</sup> Wille, “SED und ‘Umsiedler,’” p. 104.

told by the GDR, which from the start had centered exclusively on antifascism.<sup>138</sup> Needless to say, the SED did not permit the construction of local expellee monuments in East Germany during its reign—not until after the fall of the Berlin Wall did they appear.

### **Post-Reunification Memory Squabbles**

While reunification irrefragably answered questions about Germany's borders, it raised new questions about how the collective memory of the past of this "economic giant but political dwarf" would shape its future policies, particularly vis-à-vis its neighbors.<sup>139</sup> For nearly two decades, reunited Germany has for the most part pursued international cooperation and diplomacy in both its economic and foreign affairs. Indeed, concerns over the answer to the burning question, the new "German Question," of the early days—*quo vadis* the new powerhouse in Central Europe?—have proven largely unfounded.

Closer to home, on the other hand, the massive transformation brought about during Europe's *annus mirabilis* did little to squelch issues over the correct place of the Nazi past in Germany's present. In fact, the post-reunification years witnessed another round of highly publicized Holocaust moments which enflamed public passions and initiated embittered intellectual exchanges over efforts to reshape the contours of

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<sup>138</sup> Antifascism not only justified the socialist regimes of post-WWII Central and Eastern Europe, it also liberated citizens of the GDR from engagement with Germany's National Socialist past. As Kattago puts it, antifascism "provided a collective exculpation of East Germans." Since according to state doctrine, she goes on, "socialists were by nature antifascist," they "bore no responsibility for the Nazi past." As such, Kattago observes, "The East German official representation of the Nazi past universalized National Socialism into fascism and did not attempt to confront the social, political, and moral consequences of National Socialism in the GDR." For more on the East German postwar narrative, see Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory*, pp. 81-116 and Herf, *Divided Memory*, particularly pp. 162-200. Though antifascism dominated the GDR's approach to the Nazi past, East German memory culture was less monolithic than some might presume. Kattago's work explores the shifts and turns—not unlike those in the Federal Republic—taken in the GDR's self-understanding and its approach to the past, as does Harald Schmid's compelling study of the East German memorialization of "Reichskristallnacht" (November 9, 1938). See Schmid, *Antifaschismus und Judenverfolgung. Die 'Reichskristallnacht' als politischer Gedenktag in der DDR*. (Dresden: V&R Unipress, 2004).

<sup>139</sup> The authoritative work on the implications of Germany's collective memory on its foreign policy is Markovits and Reich, *The German Predicament*.

Germany's memory landscape. A few highlights: In the political realm, and of some consequence for the expellees, Helmut Kohl pushed through the reconfiguration of the *Neue Wache* as the Central Memorial to the Victims of War and Tyranny in 1993.<sup>140</sup> Critics contested everything from the lack of parliamentary imprimatur for the project to the size of the pietà that the chancellor personally selected to serve as the memorial's centerpiece. In particular, however, detractors opposed the "implied equality of victims" suggested by the memorial's nonspecific title.<sup>141</sup> Thus all the dead of WWII are marked as victims—whether German, Jew, Pole, homosexual, soldier, or civilian. The critics saw in this equalization an expression of Kohl's desire "to create single category of victims as an expression of national unity," and, as in the controversy over Bitburg, his wish to forge a sense of normalization.<sup>142</sup>

In 1994, the motion picture *Schindler's List*, based on a real-life industrialist's efforts to save Jews during the Holocaust, was a smashing success seen by some 5.7 million German spectators. The film painted a different, albeit not entirely untainted picture, of individual resistance during the Third Reich.<sup>143</sup> In *Gedenkjahr* 1995, the fifty-year anniversary of the end of WWII—a Holocaust moment in and of itself<sup>144</sup>—a highly

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<sup>140</sup> Located on Berlin's main thoroughfare Unter den Linden, the Neue Wache has a long history as a showplace of German memory culture. Originally designed as an actual guardhouse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the structure was used as a memorial to the dead of WWI after 1918, remained basically unchanged during the Third Reich, and was reconstituted and rededicated as the Memorial to the Victims of Fascism and Militarism in 1960 by the SED government of East Germany.

<sup>141</sup> Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 220.

<sup>142</sup> See Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin*, p. 219. Ladd writes that as a concession to his opponents on this issue, Kohl had commemorative plaques put up which specifically list victim groups including both German victims, including the expellees, and victims of the Nazis. It also incorporates those killed "because they resisted totalitarian dictatorship after 1945."

<sup>143</sup> See Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*. (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 91-92.

<sup>144</sup> See Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text: Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse*. (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998). For this text, Naumann poured over the reportings of 436 newspapers in Germany to evaluate the diversity of approaches to six thematic clusters in the "Year of

controversial and correspondingly well-attended exhibition staged throughout Germany and Austria by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research entitled “*Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944*” (“War of Annihilation. The Crimes of the Wehrmacht, 1941-1944”) attracted thousands of visitors. The purpose of the exhibit was to demonstrate the complicity of the Wehrmacht in atrocities on the eastern front and thereby debunk long-held myths upheld in Federal Republic in which the valor of German soldiers in the Second World War had always remained unblemished.<sup>145</sup>

A year later, even before the German edition appeared in bookshops, Daniel Goldhagen’s study Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust set off yet another heated debate about anti-Semitism in German society as well as individual culpability and collective guilt during National Socialism. Although some historians discounted Goldhagen’s research methods or disagreed with his central arguments, the book was a huge bestseller and enjoyed an unusually large media presence.<sup>146</sup> In October 1998, noted author Martin Walser instigated another Holocaust moment when he was awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade (*Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels*). During an incendiary public address at the famed *Paulskirche* in Frankfurt, Walser blasted the memory culture of united Germany,

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Commemoration 1995”: 1. Allied aerial bombardment of German cities; 2. Flight and expulsion; 3. Liberation of concentration camps; 4. Conduct of the *Wehrmacht*; 5. Meaning of the end of the war in localities; and 6. End of the war on May 8, 1945.

<sup>145</sup> Running until 1999, the contentious exhibit was cancelled when it was discovered that a small portion of the captions of the photographs were not accurate. A revised, second exhibition, “*Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944*” (The Crimes of the Wehrmacht. Dimensions of the War of Annihilation, 1941-1944) was unveiled to the public in 2001.

<sup>146</sup> See Daniel Goldhagen, Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust (New York: Knopf, 1996). For a broader, more detailed discussion of the reactions to Goldhagen’s book see Julius Schoeps (ed.) Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust. (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe Verlag, 1996). Of particular interest in this book is the contribution by Andrei S. Markovits (“Störfall im Endlager der Geschichte,” pp. 228-240), who forcefully defends the merits of Goldhagen’s scholarship and convincingly counters the biased and otherwise faulty argumentation of many of the book’s critics. Geoff Eley’s edited volume also contains important essays on the topic. See Eley (ed.) The Goldhagen Effect.

particularly its still Holocaust-centered form as constructed by the Left. He decried the metonymic usage of Auschwitz as a “moral cudgel” and called the future Holocaust memorial in Berlin—the debate over which also constituted a drawn-out Holocaust moment—a “football field-sized nightmare.” Walser claimed to be expressing what everyone already thought but no one dared to say and basically blamed Jews for the animus they face. His subtext was that Jews bring anti-Semitism upon themselves through their criticism of Germans. Above all, Walser renounced what he called, the “instrumentalization of our disgrace for present ends.”<sup>147</sup>

While the names and topics in the debates over memory had changed after 1990, the overarching themes remained the same. Like the debates of the 1980s, the post-reunification memory conflicts focused on normalization, national identity, presumed individual and purported collective guilt, as well as efforts to counteract such assertions, possibilities of resistance, and probing the overall meaning of the Nazi past in the present. Once again, what Rensmann calls the dialectic of finalization came to the fore: efforts to draw a line under the past and thereby conclude discussions of it “once and for all” in order to “move on” were sure to do the opposite and instead initiate round after round of new discussions. Indeed, while the repeated attempts to quell the fixation with the past, such as Walser’s, might be disconcerting, the inevitable backlash that followed could be interpreted as a testament to the staying power of the Holocaust-centered narrative that was characteristic of the 1990s. Moreover, it should be added that, as in the 1980s,

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<sup>147</sup> Direct quotations are cited from Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, pp. 175-193 and from Brumlik, Funke and Rensmann (eds.) *Umkämpftes Vergessen*. The latter is also an outstanding exploration of the debate which ensued as a result of the speech. According to one of its authors, Lars Rensmann, Walser’s words were not what ignited the controversy. His speech was considered by most observers as “food for thought” (“*Denkanstoß*”—p. 30). It was not until Ignatz Bubis, then President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, in his response called the speech “intellectual arson” that the controversy commenced.

German wartime suffering, and the expulsion in particular, were not the primary topics in these highly publicized discussions of the Nazi past. This was still to come.

### **The Return of German-Centered Memory?**

Two weeks prior to Martin Walser's inflammatory speech, national elections drew the curtain on the Kohl era and ushered in a new, SPD-led government, the "Red-Green coalition." Just months later, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's government approved German participation in NATO air strikes against Serbia without a UN Security Council resolution. The erstwhile dictum of the pacifist Left "*nie wieder Krieg*" (Never again war)—considered by many the most important lesson of WWII—no longer seemed to apply, at least not as formerly conceived. Recent conflicts in the Balkans, especially the mass murder in Srebrenica, had given rise to new thinking amongst many on the Left encapsulated by the slogan: "*nie wieder Auschwitz*" (Never again Auschwitz). As construed by the Red-Green coalition, the dictum now meant that the use of German military force as *ultima ratio* was on the table in some cases, such as the human rights abuses in Kosovo. Such decisions were sure to unleash discussions over the place of the Nazi past in the "Berlin Republic." What lessons were to be drawn when dealing with current circumstances?

Much of the transformation that followed can be attributed to a "conversion" of the Left. "Before Kosovo," as Levy and Sznajder put it, "only German Conservatives wanted to universalize the Holocaust. Leftists were dedicated to its uniqueness—any assault on that uniqueness, including any form of comparison, was perceived as a diminishment of German war guilt and collective responsibility for the Holocaust."<sup>148</sup> This was decidedly

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<sup>148</sup> Levy and Sznajder, "Memories of Universal Victimhood," p. 8.

no longer the case. Instead of requiring reticence, as the Left began to see it, the Nazi past now compelled Germans to stand up to genocide.<sup>149</sup> Langenbacher suggests that the *volte-face* “represent[s] the Left coming to terms with the memory of German suffering, just as conservatives came to terms with the memory of German crimes in the 1980s and early 1990s.”<sup>150</sup> Even more importantly, Levy and Sznajder argue this move blurred distinctions between conservative and leftist interpretations of the past. Moreover, the authors contend that the metamorphosis “[lent] legitimacy to mourn German victims” and “reopened the national floodgates” that once marginalized discourse on German suffering.<sup>151</sup> This drastic shift had a far-reaching impact on all of German society, most especially on Germany’s memory landscape, as it unleashed a wave of representations of German victimhood in all forms in the mainstream media by leading literary and cultural figures on a scale not seen for over three decades.

Nevertheless, it is unclear exactly how much of the switch back to German-centered narratives we can attribute to the change of government and its policies.<sup>152</sup> Of course, other exogenous and endogenous factors were involved which accompanied the conversion of the Left. Heidemarie Uhl mentions four:<sup>153</sup> 1) Scenes of forced migration in Kosovo conjured up images of expelled Germans’ own experiences during and after

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<sup>149</sup> For more on this incredible transformation within the Left, particularly by the Greens, the coalition’s junior partner, see Markovits and Reich, *The German Predicament*, especially, pp. 137-149. The changes had been underway since the UN engagement in Bosnia earlier in the decade but did not fully come to fruition until the Red-Green coalition came to power.

<sup>150</sup> Langenbacher, “Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?” p. 62.

<sup>151</sup> Levy and Sznajder, “Memories of Universal Victimhood,” p. 8.

<sup>152</sup> As laid out above, solely attributing the change to the change in government overlooks the efforts of Chancellor Kohl and other conservatives over the past decade and a half to normalize the German past.

<sup>153</sup> Heidemarie Uhl, “Deutsche Schuld, deutsches Leid – Eine österreichische Perspektive auf neue Tendenzen der deutschen Erinnerungskultur,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte*, 33, 2005, p. 169. Besides exploring the reemergence German victimhood in political and cultural discourse there, Uhl makes a larger point about the memory cultures in Germany vis-à-vis Austria. She finds that no equivalent “return to memory” has occurred in Austria even though expulsion has remained a valent topic in some political circles there. Furthermore, she argues that Austrian case proves the return of memory in Germany was not automatic or inevitable.



WWII. 2) The impending enlargement of the European Union would soon eliminate barriers and reopen discussions of restitution between Germany and its eastern neighbors as a condition of accession. 3). The efforts to pass on a positive picture of the past between generations.<sup>154</sup> 4) The search for a new national myth linking East and West Germans in the common bond of victimhood, such as Kohl wanted to achieve with his rededication of the Neue Wache. I would argue that pinpointing the actual cause of this cultural phenomenon is complex. What is clear, however, is that the final period under examination here has witnessed an explosion of examples—different quantitatively and qualitatively—of cultural representations of German victimhood.

Seemingly legitimated by all sides, the number of fictional and non-fictional accounts dealing with German suffering reached unparalleled heights. One of the most celebrated examples was a book by Günter Grass, winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize for Literature. The expulsion and the sinking of a German ship overflowing with civilian refugees from the eastern provinces near the end of WWII served as a key backdrop in his bestselling novella, Im Krebsgang.<sup>155</sup> In what was obviously a pointed self-criticism, Grass lamented the fact that moderate Germans of a certain generation faced a self-imposed restriction when discussing German experiences of war because of the shame over what their parents had done or overlooked during the Third Reich. Around the same time, writing from very different normative perspectives about the Allied aerial bombardments, W.G. Sebald and Jörg Friedrich were said to have finally spoken out

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<sup>154</sup> On this point, Uhl cites the fascinating study conducted by Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschnuggnall and published in “Opa war kein Nazi”: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis. (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002). The authors’ research reveals how “family memory” is passed on and how the past is filtered intergenerationally. Especially intriguing is their finding that, “The more comprehensive the knowledge of war crimes, persecution and annihilation, the stronger the obligations of family loyalties to promote the development of stories which reconcile the crimes of the Nazis or the Germans and the moral integrity of the parents or grandparents” (p. 53).

<sup>155</sup> Grass, Im Krebsgang. Eine Novelle.

about the enormous loss of architectural wonders and cultural goods through the massive destruction of German cities.<sup>156</sup> The news magazine Der Spiegel ran a series on the expulsion and cover stories about the Allies' air war against Germany. Two big-budget, multi-part documentaries on the expulsion aired on Germany's state-owned television networks.<sup>157</sup>

In addition, a new literary genre appeared. Having less to do with the first-hand experience of victimization and more to do with the psychological repercussions on second and third generations, a number of authors born after the war published works dealing with the "postmemory"<sup>158</sup> of German wartime suffering. Some of the notable authors of this new genre who have thematized the legacy of the expulsion include Hans-Ulrich Treichel,<sup>159</sup> Reinhard Jirgl,<sup>160</sup> and Tanja Dückers.<sup>161</sup> Their works feature personal

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<sup>156</sup> W.G. Sebald's Luftkrieg und Literatur: Mit einem Essay zu Alfred Andersch. (Munich: C. Hanser, 1999) appeared in English as On the Natural History of Destruction and Jörg Friedrich, Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945. (Munich: Propyläen Verlag, 2002). In this highly controversial and equally popular book, Friedrich, by dint of his word choice in describing various aspects of the bombings, equates the German victims of the aerial bombardments with the victims of Nazi extermination camps. For an overview of the international debate that ensued, see Lothar Kettenacker (ed.) Ein Volk von Opfern? Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-45. (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2003).

<sup>157</sup> The films were Guido Knopp's Die Große Flucht. (Dirs. Christian Deick and Anja Greulich); 2001 and Die Vertriebenen: Hitlers letzte Opfer; (Dir. Sebastian Dehnhardt); 2001. Although both films were more inclusive in terms of perspectives offered than earlier documentary accounts of the expulsion, they still "cleanly separate the Volk from Hitler and the Nazis," as Gerd Wiegel puts it. See Wiegel, "Familiengeschichte vor dem Fernseher: Erinnernte NS-Geschichte in den Dokumentationen Guido Knopps," in Michael Klundt (ed.) Heldenmythos und Opfertaumel: Der Zweite Weltkrieg und seine Folgen im deutschen Geschichtsdiskurs. (Cologne: PapyRossa Verlag, 2004), pp. 82-102. Indeed, both films attempt to draw parallels between the Jewish and German experience of WWII and in some cases intimate that Germans had it worse. They do this, for example, by highlighting the fact that Germans received worse rations than the Jews had under the Nazis in the internment and work camps located in Czechoslovakia immediately after WWII.

<sup>158</sup> For more on "postmemory," see Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>159</sup> See Ulrich's semi-autobiographical trilogy consisting of: Der Verlorene. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998), Menschenflug. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), and Anatolin. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2008).

<sup>160</sup> Reinhard Jirgl, Die Unvollendeten. (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2003).

<sup>161</sup> Tanja Dückers, Himmelskörper. (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005).

crises, intergenerational conflicts, and family dramas based on the uprootedness caused by the forced migration.<sup>162</sup>

Clearly, the public wanted to read and see depictions of Germans as victims of WWII. Despite this renewed interest, however, the topic has remained controversial. At issue for many was usually not *whether* but *why* the topic had supposedly been taboo, as well as who had imposed this purported moratorium. In addition, critics have feared that overly emphasizing German experiences of WWII could potentially overshadow Nazi victims' fates and that recognition of German victims—for example, of the expellees with the Center Against Expulsions in Berlin<sup>163</sup>—might in a way exculpate German perpetrators. Moeller, for example, has expressed these sentiments. He believes acknowledgement of this type could lead to equalization—a development that would continue down the slippery slope toward effacing and forgetting. He notes that accounts of German suffering have often contained an “implicit ‘too,’ [...] and from ‘too’ it has sometimes been a short step to ‘like’ and the equation of German and Jewish suffering.”<sup>164</sup>

Of all the challenges faced by Holocaust-centered memory since the 1980s, the re-emphasis of German wartime suffering has probably been the greatest. Though things have seemed different, Friedlander's “constant seesaw between learning and forgetting” has not teetered decisively to one side. In fact, marking the culmination of changes in society underway since the late 1950s, the continued importance of the Holocaust was cemented (literally) as a centerpiece of official postwar historical understandings

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<sup>162</sup> For a broader view of the new literature on this topic, see the essays contained in Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (eds.) Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic. (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009).

<sup>163</sup> For more on this particular debate, see the Introduction.

<sup>164</sup> Moeller, “Germans as Victims?” p. 172.

precisely at this time in the form of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe dedicated in Berlin in 2005.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite all the recent controversy, the widespread discussion of German wartime suffering in the late 1990s and 2000s was not new, and has, in fact, never been taboo. As I have shown here, for more than two decades following WWII, discourses on the victimization of the Germans—particularly the expellees—were quite common, if not predominant, at both the national and local levels. Indeed, because of the importance of the expellees as a voting bloc and the strength of the expellees as a lobby group, the West German government paid an inordinate amount of attention to the expellees' political, economic, and cultural concerns. Domestically, the first Adenauer government created a separate ministry and passed two major pieces of legislation in the first four years after the founding of the Federal Republic to serve expellee needs. In terms of foreign policy, all the major political parties at this time (at least officially) supported a revision of the postwar territorial status quo. Bonn crafted and pursued policies to right the political wrongs of the war's aftermath and the Potsdam Agreement.

While the improving economic situation alleviated many of the expellees' immediate social problems, and the power of the expellee organizations gradually decreased, it was not until Willy Brandt's SPD-led coalition took power in the late 1960s that this kind of catering to the expellees ended. The political change coincided with a profound social change. By the end of the 1970s, many West Germans, if not most, viewed Nazi crimes, especially the Holocaust, as the key events of WWII, and as the

essential characteristics of the Third Reich. Although it certainly did not happen overnight, and was not uncontested, historical narratives based on this understanding of the past became standard at the national level.

Without question, these political and social changes have shaped how German experiences of WWII—particularly, the expulsion—have been remembered and represented. While the purpose of this chapter was in part to address my dissertation’s first central argument, namely, that the commemoration of German wartime suffering has never been taboo, it has also been to periodize perceptions of the expellees and the expulsion in light of changing political and cultural contexts. Thus I have sought to delineate the most important societal developments which have shaped understandings of the Nazi past and establish a historical framework into which I will embed my interpretations of local expellee monuments in Part II. It is to the monuments—which so clearly reflect these important political and social changes—that I now turn.

## **PART TWO THE MONUMENTS**

### **ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW**

This segment contains my interpretive work on local expellee monuments and addresses this dissertation's second and third central arguments. Here, I explore how the monuments have functioned and seek to answer the following questions: what historical interpretations have they expressed? What elements do they employ to represent the past? Finally, whose memories do they articulate and to what end? As stated in the Introduction, it is my contention that expellee monuments have operated as elements of a sustained effort to shape discussions of victimization as a result of WWII (Central Argument #2). With these monuments the expellee organizations have sought to ensure that their interpretations of WWII and its aftermath find an enduring place in public memory, at least on the local level. However, instead of constructing, as their defenders would argue, an innocuous, more inclusive, parallel narrative that augments other postwar narratives, close readings of the local monuments reveal the building blocks of a counter-narrative that foregrounds German wartime suffering and contests the centrality of the Nazi war of aggression and the Holocaust in representing the past.

More specifically, I contend that local expellee monuments facilitate the construction of de-contextualized, ahistorical, German-centered narratives (Central Argument #3). In fact, it appears in many cases as if the initiators erected the monuments

not simply to commemorate the dead but also to obfuscate causal links between the war started by the Nazis and the forced migration of Germans. To demonstrate this, I have constructed an interpretive framework for analyzing expellee monuments that organizes them by theme. In fact, virtually all expellee monuments can be grouped into two overarching but closely related thematic clusters. I open both with a section called “Context & Background,” which highlights and contextualizes each cluster’s dominant theme. In order to conduct a more detailed analysis, however, I sub-divide the broad clusters into more precise categories, which form the basis of individual chapters.

What immediately follows is an elucidation of cluster A, which I call “Loss of Heimat and Territorial Claims.” Here, I look at monuments that commemorate the expellees’ loss of Heimat and the concomitant territorial claims that forfeiture engendered. The vast majority of these monuments were erected before the expellees’ full assimilation into West German society and prior to Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik in the early 1970s. Thus, they were part of campaigns orchestrated by the expellee organizations in the pursuit of what I call “concrete politics”—that is, the tangible benefits the expellees desired in the first quarter century after WWII (above all, territorial reacquisition, but also compensation for material losses and accelerated economic, social, and political integration). This cluster is comprised of four individual chapters: Chapter Three—“Großdeutschland and the Right to the Heimat;” Chapter Four—“Cold War Conflation;” Chapter Five—“Germans as Kulturträger: The Accomplishments of Settlement;” and Chapter Six—“Unseren Toten in der Heimat—Cemeteries & Territorial Claims.” It is these monuments, which assert the “Germanness” of the lands the expellees left behind, that I now examine.

## **A. LOSS OF HEIMAT AND TERRITORIAL CLAIMS**

Why does one love the Heimat? Because the  
bread tastes better there, the sky is higher,  
the air is zestier, voices ring out louder, and  
the ground is more easily trod.

--Bertolt Brecht<sup>1</sup>

Leaving the Heimat is the greatest burden  
faced by gods and men. Agnes Miegel

--Inscription of monument at the *Heimathaus*  
in Warendorf, NRW

### **CONTEXT & BACKGROUND: THE INVOCATION OF HEIMAT**

On November 18, 1956—Volkstrauertag<sup>2</sup>—a monument to the expulsion was dedicated in Lippstadt, North Rhine-Westphalia (Figure 3). The monument, standing on a central plot in a local cemetery provided by the city government, features a sandstone sculpture of three expellees—a “*Flüchtlingsfamilie*”—clutching one another in obvious fear with their eyes turned toward heaven, and a separate commemorative block bearing the inscription NIE VERGESSEN 1945 (Never forget 1945) and the cross of the Teutonic Knights over an outline of Germany’s eastern territories in 1937. Atop the block, a bronze basin was to shelter an eternal flame.<sup>3</sup> During the unveiling ceremony’s main address, a local expellee functionary delivered a pledge of allegiance to the German East, the land to which “the greatest injustice in the history of the world” had occurred.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Gordon Lueckel and Johannes Thiele (eds.) Deutschland, das Buch. Erleben, was es bedeutet. (Munich: Thiele Verlag, 2009), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> I detail this day of commemorative day’s history in Part Three.

<sup>3</sup> The flame had been doused when I visited the monument in July 2007.



According to this functionary, freedom and the right to homeland were the highest goods in all of humanity. Though they renounced retaliation for the injustices they suffered, the speaker maintained, the expellees would never renounce their right to their Heimat. Love of the homeland (*Heimatliebe*) and homesickness (*Heimweh*) were amongst the deepest and primordial roots of human feeling.<sup>4</sup> To consecrate the monument further, a capsule filled with sacred *Heimaterde* (soil from somewhere in the eastern territories) was buried at the memorial site.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3 Lippstadt. Photo: J.L.**

<sup>4</sup> The direct quotation and subsequent paraphrasings are taken from “Ein Mahnmal mit heiliger Heimaterde,” *Der Patriot*, November 20, 1952.

<sup>5</sup> Two contributions in Elisabeth Fendl (ed.) *Das Gedächtnis der Orte. Sinnstiftung und Erinnerung*, (Freiburg: Johannes-Künzig-Institut für ostdeutsche Volkskunde, 2006) describe the powerful symbolic role played by Heimaterde in the post-expulsion commemorative and funerary culture of the expellees. Traditionally, according to Ulrike Zischka, who was writing about the private practice of sprinkling the sacred soil on personal graves, a packet of Heimaterde taken along while traveling ensured a return home and provided the opportunity of being buried in the traveler’s home soil if s/he died while away. See Zischka, “Fremde Heimat Friedhof,” p. 39. Fendl describes the political meaning ascribed to Heimaterde, particularly by the expellee organizations, after the expulsion. So precious and valuable did it become that it was often given as a wedding and Christmas gift. She writes the soil often originated from farmers’ fields in the eastern territories or, when possible, from graves of relatives from the local cemetery left behind. In such instances, Fendl writes, the soil was doubly sanctified. See Fendl, “Beerdigung und Totengedenken in der ‘neuen Heimat,’” pp. 96-100.

The statue in Lippstadt is not the only expellee monument consecrated by Heimaterde, nor is it the only one erected to attest and commemorate the seemingly preternatural connection to their homelands many expellees felt and the anguish inflicted upon these Germans as a result of the expulsion. Scores of expellee monuments memorialize, venerate, celebrate, and swear loyalty to the former German East. Indeed, monuments have invoked the concept of Heimat throughout the postwar period, but especially in the first decade after the end of WWII, when border revision seemed possible.

The expellees were not the first Germans to idealize and extol the virtues of the Heimat.<sup>6</sup> As is well known, what Alon Confino calls the “Heimat idea” has circulated widely since Germany first unified in 1871. Confino maintains that particularistic Germans concocted the notion to forge a common bond as a response to the unprecedented social, political, and economic upheaval brought about after national unification. “The invention of the local and national Heimat ideas was a symbolic response to the post-1871 temporal and spatial demands of the Homeland. The Heimat idea provided a symbolic national common denominator among different regions, their inhabitants and territories.”<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the Heimat idea allowed for a new national identity that did not require the shedding of local and regional affiliations. One could

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<sup>6</sup> A large number of scholars have endeavored to theorize, define, and probe the concept of “Heimat” in various cultural and historical contexts. Some of the most innovative and important interventions of recent years include: Celia Applegate, A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Confino, The Nation as a Local Metaphor, and his Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Peter Blickle, Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland. (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002); and Johannes von Moltke, No Place Like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Confino, The Nation as Local Metaphor, p. 126.

uphold one's deep connection to Württemberg, to use Confino's example, and still consider oneself German.

Few would argue that the interconnectedness between the local, regional, and national provided by the "Heimat idea" forms an essential part of German identity. But why has this concept been so crucial for the expellees' understanding of the recent past? And why is it invoked on so many expellee monuments? I contend it has to do with the implicit Germanness ascribed to the concept. If we accept Confino's observation that "Germans like to think of the Heimat idea as unfathomable, mysterious, and, above all, *peculiarly German*" (my emphasis), then the loss of Heimat would have been especially traumatic because it implies the involuntary shedding of a key source of identity.<sup>8</sup> As one sees with their monuments, for the expellees, the loss of Heimat—regardless of the cause—was on par with death. Obviously, the expellees who erected the monuments were the survivors of the expulsion yet they considered themselves as much the victims as those who had perished. Moreover, this "human dimension" of Heimat was part of a common vernacular. The nationwide prevalence of the concept made the significance of losing the Heimat easily understandable for all Germans. It could be invoked to garner sympathy and make the expellees worthy of recognition and restitution.

Recall as well that upon arrival in the West, many Germans from the East were viewed with skepticism or discriminated against by the local populations. In the eyes of many locals, the expellees' origins in the far reaches of the Reich and beyond marked them as insufficiently German. Potentially Slavic ("Polacken"), and deemed, at any rate, inferior because of their strange customs and dialects (and their privation), Silesians, East Prussians, Bessarabian Germans, and other groups were perceived by the *Einheimischen*

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

as competitors and intruders. The invocation of this “peculiarly German” concept therefore amounted in the early days to an assertion of Germanness. Laying claim to a Heimat conveyed to locals that despite having different, distant birthplaces, the expellees were Germans too.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to its human dimension, the invocation of Heimat has also contained a political dimension. Thus, by invoking the Heimat, expellees were asserting not only the Germanness of the *people* from the eastern territories but also the Germanness of the *lands* they left behind. If the people were German, the land must be too; especially if the Germans had created a flourishing Heimat out of what was once a desolate, uncivilized, barren landscape. Because the land had been made into a Heimat, it was by rights German. Much of the territory beyond the Oder/Neisse claimed by the expellees had in fact been inhabited by Germans for centuries. The graves of Germans still lying in the cemeteries of the eastern territories made the expellees’ territorial claims—centering on the German Reich in its 1937 borders—all the more unassailable. For these reasons, the “Right to the Heimat” (*Recht auf die Heimat*) became central in narrating the past and formulating the postwar territorial claims of the expellees. Though ultimately fruitless, invoking the Heimat thus bolstered the territorial claims of the expellee organizations.

I turn once again to the Charter of the Expellees from 1950, which offers key insights into the self-perceptions of the expellee organizations and their understanding of their fate, particularly with regards to the loss of the eastern provinces. In one of the text’s key passages, the composers of this document wrote,

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<sup>9</sup> Based on this sort of thinking, groups like the Siebenbürger Saxons and the Danube Swabians (*Donauschwaben*), neither of whom ever inhabited German territory and yet were coerced to leave their respective homelands because of their ethnic heritage, could conceive of themselves, by tapping into the concept of Heimat, as equally German.

We have lost our homeland. The homeless are strangers on the face of the earth. God himself placed men in their native land. *To separate man forcibly from his native land means to kill him in his mind.*

We have suffered and experienced this fate. *We therefore feel called upon to demand that the right to our native land be recognized and realized as one of the basic rights of man, granted to him by God.* (my emphasis)<sup>10</sup>

According to this central document, which is cited routinely to this day by expellees in any number of areas, including in the inscriptions of monuments, in public addresses, and in other examples of expellee literature, just to name a few places, the uprooting of the Germans from their Heimat was an unparalleled act of barbarity that led to immense suffering worthy of special acknowledgement and recompense. The recognition the expellees yearned for had two dimensions: first, recognition vis-à-vis their compatriots in West Germany. That is, the expellees believed their fate warranted restitution and the West German federal government complied, resulting in individual financial support provided by the *Lastenausgleichsgesetz* (LAG) and the cultural funding and special status conferred by the Federal Expellee Law. The second dimension targeted an international audience and dealt with the fundamental Recht auf die Heimat and the right to return home.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the expellee organizations argued that aside from any violent acts the processes surrounding the expulsion might have engendered—and they were, of course, legion—the removal of the Germans from their homelands was itself not only a breach of international law but also a violation of a God-given right that caused long-lasting suffering and permanent despair, even for those expellees who survived the ordeal and

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<sup>10</sup> This version is taken from the official English translation available on the BdV website <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/charta-en.php3>> Accessed October 13, 2009. The original German reads, “Wir haben unsere Heimat verloren. Heimatlose sind Fremdlinge auf dieser Erde. Gott hat die Menschen in ihre Heimat hineingestellt. Den Menschen mit Zwang von seiner Heimat trennen, bedeutet, ihn im Geiste töten.

Wir haben dieses Schicksal erlitten und erlebt. Daher fühlen wir uns berufen zu verlangen, daß das Recht auf die Heimat als eines der von Gott geschenkten Grundrechte der Menschheit anerkannt und verwirklicht wird.”

<sup>11</sup> See Heinrich Rogge, “Vertreibung und Eingliederung im Spiegel des Rechts,” in Lemberg and Edding (eds.) *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland*. Vol. 1, p. 234.

were able to reestablish themselves in West German society. With their spirits crushed, the anguish that resulted from the expulsion, according to the Charter of the Expellees, was equally if not more severe for those who survived than for those who actually perished.

My point in revisiting the expellees' *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law)—as they called it—is to illuminate the vital role played by Heimat and the loss thereof in the self-understanding of many expellees and their organizations. As the text makes clear, for most of the first decades following the end of the war, the emphasis was much more on the suffering inflicted on the expellees because of the forfeiture of their eastern territories, not on the violent acts associated with the expulsion. The Charter itself only mentions the expulsion when referencing the people expelled, the “*Heimatvertriebenen*.” Aside from in this self-defining moniker, the term “Heimat,” on the other hand, appears four times in the brief text. Of course, the belief at that time was that a peaceful final resolution of the border issue was imminent and that a return home was possible if not even likely.<sup>12</sup> Apparent to all, however, was the injustice of the forced migration. Whereas in the early days (the 1940s), the invocation of Heimat proved fruitful in demonstrating the Germanness of the expellees, later it was invoked to underline the Germanness of the territory they left behind. Therefore, the loss of Heimat—not the violence of the expulsion—justified the expellees’ territorial claims and they formulated their demands

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<sup>12</sup> It is worth emphasizing that many expellees did not view a border revision as chimerical at this time. The expellees endeavored to gather support and lobby for their cause. In fact, many expellees considered those who advocated official recognition of the border to be either a communist or a traitor to his country (*Landesverräter*). See Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts*, p. 125.

accordingly. The steadfast insistence on the “right to the Heimat”<sup>13</sup> has served as one of the major causes for the expellee organizations since the Charter.<sup>14</sup>

As all the monuments in the following four chapters will show, the expellees sought to demonstrate with them that the Heimat was more than just a mystical, mythical, idyllic place. The invocation of Heimat—and the commemorative practices at the unveiling ceremony of the monument in Lippstadt—were carried out to demonstrate the unquestionable Germanness of the eastern provinces. The Heimat was real and the expellees wanted theirs back.

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<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of the definite article in “*die* Heimat” (“*the* homeland” or “*the* Heimat”) suggests this right was not an abstract principle or a high-minded, universally applicable ideal. It contained very specific connotations. The right to the Heimat that the expellee organizations were fighting for was not the right to any old homeland. It was the right to the land and the homes they hastily fled under duress before the end of WWII or were forced to leave under a variety of circumstances thereafter.

<sup>14</sup> According to Ahonen, the right to the Heimat, in tandem with the right to self-determination, became over time “the most important and most widely used concept through which the expellee lobby sought to promote its revisionist interests.” See Ahonen, “German Expellee Organizations: Between Revisionism and Reconciliation” in *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*. 45, 2005, p. 354.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **GROßDEUTSCHLAND AND**

### **THE RIGHT TO THE HEIMAT**<sup>1</sup>

#### **INTRODUCTION**

That the territory east of the Oder/Neisse was once the Heimat of millions of expellees marked the land as indelibly German. The accentuation of the suffering caused by the loss of Heimat is, however, but one facet of the territorial claims (in this case, moral and cultural) raised by the monuments in this chapter. The other is the closely related belief repeatedly espoused that, despite the Potsdam Agreement, a Germany existed that was larger than the existing borders and that the expellees had a divine right to the parts of it they once occupied. That is, beyond the moral and cultural claim to the Heimat, the expellees staked additional legal and political claims which were based primarily on the two key agreements made by the Allies, the London Protocol of 1944 and the Potsdam Agreement.<sup>2</sup> As Matthias Stickler points out, however, the

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<sup>1</sup> The term “Großdeutschland” has taken several historically specific meanings over the past two centuries. I use it here not as a reference to nineteenth century efforts to unify all German lands, including the German-speaking areas of the Habsburg Empire, into one state. Nor am I referring to the extreme version based on the concepts of “*Heim ins Reich*” or “*Lebensraum*” undertaken by the Nazis. Instead, I refer simply to the beliefs shared by many expellee and the leaders of their organizations in the existence of an imaginary Germany that was larger than the two postwar German states or later the reunited Federal Republic. A bumper sticker available at expellee events captures this sentiment perfectly. It reads “*Deutschland ist größer als die Bundesrepublik*” (Germany is larger than the Federal Republic). It is this sentiment that I seek to capture with this admittedly problematic term.

<sup>2</sup> As for the former, the expellees based their juridical claims on the decisions reached by an Allied advisory council which settled on December 31, 1937—that is, before Nazi Germany’s *Anschluss* of Austria in March 1938 and its annexation of the Sudetenland later that year—as the starting point for discussions of the establishment of occupation zones upon the conclusion of the war. Germany in its 1937 borders included the eastern territories of East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia but did not comprise the Sudetenland, which at that time belonged to the still sovereign state Czechoslovakia; parts of West Prussia and Danzig, which, respectively, constituted sections of the Polish Corridor and which existed as a “Free



recommendations made by the council in London did not in any way guarantee the territorial integrity of Germany in the 1937 borders.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the expellees were fixated on Germany in its 1937 boundaries, and reacquisition of this territory, at minimum, became the goal.<sup>4</sup> As for the latter, in spite of the rancor provoked by the Potsdam Agreement, which provided the legal sanction of the expulsion and the sundering of the eastern territories, its precepts, which included a final peace agreement to settle the border issue permanently, were often cited by the expellees as further grounds for the provisional character of the territorial status quo.

Based on these ideas, according to the expellee organizations, the territorial integrity of Germany in its 1937 borders remained intact. Leaving the territory of West Germany and the GDR aside, the belief in this “Großdeutschland,” as I define it, expressed the conviction that the lands of the German East are, were, and always would be German, despite the decisions made by foreign powers and in spite of any other temporary political setbacks. With indefatigable patience, unflagging loyalty, and clever campaigning, many hoped the expellees would win back their homelands. Though this belief waned over time due to the integration of the expellees into West German society on one hand and the increasingly obvious political realities engendered by détente and the new Ostpolitik on the other, a number of expellees did not abandon this hope for decades.

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City” after the Versailles Treaty and until 1939; or, of course, the areas of German settlement along the Danube and points further southeastward. This historical inconvenience led to efforts led in particular by the large and powerful Sudeten German lobby to alter the starting point for making claims to a later date when the Sudetenland was a part of the internationally recognized German state.

<sup>3</sup> For more a more thorough discussion of the debates over the 1937 borders, see Stickler, “Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch,” pp. 397-401.

<sup>4</sup> Some passages of the Basic Law buttressed the point of view of the expellee organizations. For example, as Stickler points out, the validity of the 1937 borders was further attested by its inclusion in Article 116 of the Grundgesetz, which dealt with the basis of German citizenship. See Ibid., p. 398.

## THE MONUMENTS

The beliefs in the singular agony caused by the loss of Heimat and in a Germany beyond current borders were articulated in a large number of local expellee monuments, which conveyed the widespread umbrage taken by the expellee organizations and their members with the Potsdam Agreement. Most arresting and germane, however, is that the monuments go beyond merely lamenting the loss of lives and instead boldly establish permanent links to the former German East.<sup>5</sup> With them the expellees did not set out to mourn the dead of the expulsion but instead to bemoan the territorial status quo and to avow the reality-defying continuity of a Großdeutschland greater in size than the divided postwar remnants. This aspect constitutes the defining characteristic of the monuments in this chapter. The monuments celebrate and perpetuate a Heimat in the German East that no longer existed. They were created therefore to remind the local population that the lands beyond the Oder/Neisse—parts of which were labeled “under Polish administration” on the West German maps of Central Europe of the time—still belonged to Germany, and were designed to garner support for their reacquisition. In contrast to the symbolic politics of victimization which seemed to be the focus of expellee organizations after West Germany’s recognition of Poland’s western border in 1970, these monuments were articulating the concrete politics of border revision. That is, they expressed real territorial claims openly and directly.

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<sup>5</sup> On this point, Eva Hahn and Hans Henning Hahn write, “The personal memories of suffering experienced [by the expellees] and the loss of Heimat were mixed from the start with the construed context of the collective loss of the ‘German East;’ thus the individual victims of ‘flight and expulsion’ became instruments of revisionist politics. The *Heimatvertriebenen* as supporters of the successful expellee politicians became part of a quasi memory construction (*Gedächtniskonstruktion*) had as its object not the suffering experienced by the expellees but the ‘German East.’” Hahn and Hahn, “Flucht und Vertreibung,” in François and Schulze (eds.) *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, p. 341.

In addition to memorializing the land rather than the people, the monuments in this chapter share other immediately recognizable attributes. First, some communicate what Maruška Svašek has written about a poem composed by a Sudeten German expellee called “Lost Heimat”: namely, “the idea that forced migration is a disturbance of a God-created order in which peoples’ identities are inextricably bound up with their natural place of birth and residence.”<sup>6</sup> The regular invocation of the Heimat idea meant the territory referenced was without question German. Second, others exhibit revisionist iconography and motifs, such as displaying maps of the lost provinces or Germany in its 1937 borders, or marking the anniversaries of the founding of the centuries-old, formerly German towns and communities of the eastern territories. Third, they employ nationalistic motifs and/or traditional Germanic forms such as the coats-of-arms of the eastern regions or the “erratic boulders” (*Findlinge*) commonly found in northern German areas, respectively.<sup>7</sup> Because the *Reichsdeutschen* (East Prussians, Pomeranians,

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<sup>6</sup> Maruška Svašek, “Narratives of ‘Home’ and ‘Homeland:’ The Symbolic Construction and Appropriation of the Sudeten German *Heimat*,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 9: 2002, p. 495.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Fuhrmeister has written extensively on the importance of material in the German context—and the ideological connotations various materials possess—for interpreting monuments. Analyzing several examples from Weimar-era and Nazi Germany, he links the usage of synthetic, modern material cement with the left wing, and “ur-German,” natural, erratic boulders with the conservative, nationalistic side of the political spectrum. See Fuhrmeister, *Beton. Klinker. Granit: Material Macht Politik. Eine Materialikonographie*. (Berlin: Verlag Bauwesen, 2001). More specifically on “erratic boulders,” see his “Findlinge als Denkmäler: Zur politischen Bedeutung erratischer Steine,” *Museumsdorf Hösseringen Landwirtschaftsmuseum Lüneburger Heide* Materialien zum Museumbesuch. 32, 2000, as well as his “The Advantages of Abstract Art: Monoliths and Erratic Boulders as Monuments and (Public) Sculptures,” in Charlotte Benton (ed.) *Figuration/Abstraction: Strategies for Public Sculpture in Europe 1945-1968*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 107-26. In his full-length study, Fuhrmeister acknowledges the ideological dimension, particularly for the *Findlinge*, became less pronounced after 1945. Nevertheless, it appears that the initiators of some local expellee monuments sought to tap into long-held Germanic traditions by erecting, for example, groups of several boulders in formations reminiscent of ancient burial sites or “*Ehrenhaine*” (Heroes Groves) such as at the Ehrenhain der Vertriebenen (Expellee Heroes Grove) in Rendsburg, Schleswig-Holstein. A different kind of example is the expellee monument in front of a local city hall in Dorsten, North Rhine-Westphalia which features an unpolished, free-standing boulder and a plaque with the inscription: FEST WIE URGESTEIN SOLL DIE DEUTSCHE TREUE SEIN. DEN AUS DER STADT RYBNIK, OBERSCHLESIEIEN STAMMENDEN BEWOHNERN, DIE IN DER BUNDESREPUBLIK LEBEN VON IHRER PATENSTADT DORSTEN GEWIDMET. 7.9.1958 (German loyalty shall be firm/staunch like prehistoric stone. Dedicated to the residents of the Federal Republic from

Silesians—i.e. expellees from territory recognized as belonging to the German Reich before the Nazi annexations and expansions) settled primarily in these same northern regions after the expulsion, these monuments are found predominantly in the north of West Germany as well, the fourth commonality. Fifth, these monuments occupy some of the most prominent and visible locations of any expellee monuments.<sup>8</sup> Sixth, many monuments of this category commemorate the establishment of the special link between West German cities with their adopted brethren from the East in the form of Patenschaften. Finally, most (though surprisingly not all) of the most arresting, i.e. openly revisionist, monuments were erected in the 1950s and early 1960s; that is, prior to détente and before the Federal Republic’s formal recognition of the Oder/Neisse border. Obviously, the temporal dimension is crucial here. Expellee monuments allow us, however, to observe and trace the sometimes subtle shifts over time in the expellees’ formulations of territorial claims, which will also be explored briefly. For this reason, I divide the chapter into pre-Ostpolitik and post-Ostpolitik monuments.

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Rybnik, Upper Silesia by their adoptive city, Dorsten. 7.9. 1958). These are but a few of several such examples. Writing over a decade before Fuhrmeister, Meinhold Lurz saw the continued use of such old materials differently. In his massive study of German war memorials, Lurz called erratic boulders in post-WWII German monuments “relics of nationalism” (p. 32) that, when used by the expellee organizations, embodied their “persistent [territorial] claims” (“*hartnäckige Ansprüche*,” p. 187). Lurz writes, “With erratic boulders for the German Heimat in the East, [...] thoughts of defiance and resistance are at the forefront.” (p. 206-207). See Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland*. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik. (Heidelberg: Esprint, 1987). Echoing Lurz, because of the ongoing pertinence of these traditions, it would be irresponsible to overlook the factor of material and formation when examining the monuments. For that reason, the material of each monument is listed when relevant and available. However, it cannot be ruled out that cost and ready availability—particularly in the north, where such erratic boulders are more abundant—played bigger roles than Germanic traditions for the initiators of the monuments.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, the 1950s and early 1960s witnessed the move away from the less visible cemeteries to more prominent or easily accessible locations, particularly the high crosses. Retterath writes the 1950s was the “time of the “crosses of the German East” (see Retterath, “Geschichtsbilderkampf...” p. 108), for example, the oversized cross emplaced over Bad Harzburg, Lower Saxony high in the Harz Mountains, overlooking the border to the GDR.

## **Großdeutschland: Pre-Ostpolitik Territorial Claims**

One of the most extraordinary examples of the monuments of this type is the two-meter-tall stone slab standing in the small, mostly Protestant Westphalian city, Lengerich (Figure 4). Erected in September 1956, the monument possesses a number of noteworthy aspects. On the front side of the monument hang five coats-of-arms from four of the eastern provinces (East and West Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania, the Sudetenland) plus the city seal of Berlin. Obviously, the addition of the Sudeten German plaque indicates the belief in an even larger Großdeutschland than is typically the case (i.e. larger than Germany in its 1937 borders) but it is most likely explained by the financial involvement of the area's Sudeten German Landsmannschaft which contributed to the monument's design and construction. The stone itself was paid for by donations of the other local Landsmannschaften as well as by assistance from the state and local governments. Sitting atop the tapered block was a stone bowl for the burning of small "admonitory fires" (*Mahnfeuer*), a tradition hearkening back to the national movements in the early nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Wolfrum writes that the use of fire as a symbol of freedom was a widely used practice in the post-1945 German context. He describes torchlight processions that functioned as protests against the division of Germany and the sundering of the eastern territories. See Wolfrum, Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, pp. 165-167.



**Figure 4 Lengerich. Photo: BdV Archive**

The monument contains no direct reference to the human suffering brought about by the expulsion. Instead the focus is on expressing grievances with the borders as imposed by the Allies with the “dubious” Potsdam Agreement. Indeed, most notable and instantly striking about the monument is its inscription: EWIG DEUTSCHER OSTEN (Eternal German East). Not only does such a statement look retrospectively at the past, it also fervently asserts an everlasting territorial claim that extends into the future. The German East memorialized here still existed regardless of the current political situation. The forthrightness of the monument’s inscription was matched by the openness of the speakers at the dedication ceremony. According to contemporary newspaper reports,<sup>10</sup> virtually all who spoke during the festivities commented on the specific role the monument was to play. The opening speaker said the monument was to announce to all,

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<sup>10</sup> My paraphrases of the speeches were taken from contemporary articles appearing in the regional newspapers Westfälische Nachrichten and Westfälische Rundschau as well as the local daily Tecklenburger Landbote.

both on that day and in perpetuity, that twelve million Germans from the East had been unlawfully forced out of their Heimat and that with the unscrupulous dismemberment of their territory a grave injustice had been perpetrated against all Germans. The monument was not put up to commemorate the dead but to inspire and inflame the living. Another speaker stated this explicitly. He declared the monument was not constructed to memorialize the past or to honor the victims but to remind passersby of the injustice of the postwar border settlement. In addition to the financial support, the participation at the events by local elected representatives, including the mayor of Lengerich and other local administrators, along with the fact that custodial care of the monument was ceremoniously handed over to the city government, signaled the widespread approval of the monument's message. The large attendance (in the press reports the number of spectators varies significantly from roughly 1,000 to 5,000 in a city which today has a population of approximately 22,000) and the prominent location at the intersection of two major streets ensured that the monument was highly visible and that many of the city's inhabitants were well aware of its existence.<sup>11</sup>

The monument in Lengerich is typical in that it employs the historic coats-of-arms (*Wappen*) of the eastern provinces and of their *Landsmannschaften* to affirm further the Germanness of the territory. On monument after monument throughout the Federal Republic, the traditional *Wappen* have been showcased to express the continuity of these historical regions.<sup>12</sup> The monument was also not alone in pledging undying loyalty to the

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<sup>11</sup> The monument was moved from the crossing of Tecklenburgerstraße and Schulstraße to the parking lot on Bodelschwinghstraße near the sports stadium.

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, the red and black insignia of the Sudetenland, which features on the left side an eagle (an expression of the area's connection to the German Confederation of which it was a part until 1806) and on the right side a cross (the sign of the German Order of Knights who colonized Eastern Europe centuries before) was also often incorporated into the designs of the monuments even though it had no historic basis

German East.<sup>13</sup> Arguably, it was matched by a commemorative plaque erected across from a church in Giessen, Hessen, also in 1956. The plaque was emblazoned with the Silesian coat-of-arms, listed distances to various Silesian cities, and bore the inscription: SCHLESIEN IST DEUTSCH. SCHLESIEN WAR DEUTSCH. SCHLESIEN BLEIBT DEUTSCH. (Silesia is German. Silesia was German. Silesia remains German). Other milder vows of loyalty to the former homeland in the form of monuments also were constructed, such as the commemorative crosses in Kammerbach and Kesselbach, Hessen with the inscriptions, HEIMAT WIR BLEIBEN DIR TREU (Heimat, we remain loyal to you) and DER HEIMAT DIE TREUE (Loyalty to the homeland). Erected throughout the entire postwar period, a large number of monuments memorializing the “unforgotten Heimat” (*Unvergessene Heimat*) also decry more the forfeiture of territory than the loss of lives. Though not comparable with the monument in Lengerich in terms of fervor and virulence, I would argue these monuments raise restrained territorial claims nonetheless and signal an enduring disinclination to accept the territorial status quo.

The participation of local government officials at the dedication ceremony in Lengerich—and of state and even national officials at unveilings elsewhere in the 1950s—was nothing unusual as the expellees were at the height of their political and social influence. Compared to the 1940s, when they were unable to organize legally, the membership rosters of the expellee organizations swelled to their highest numbers in the

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and had only been in use after the expulsion. See Peter Fliegl (ed.) *Kleine Wappenkunde*. (Karlsruhe: Haus der Heimat e.V. BdV-Kreisverband Karlsruhe, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> The monument in Lengerich is not the only one to feature the bold statement EWIG DEUTSCHER OSTEN. The medieval defense tower (*Wehrturm*) in Osnabrück, Lower Saxony was transformed in 1954 into the *Mahnmal des Deutschen Ostens* (Monument of the German East) and featured the same inscription. Though the tower still stands, the script was removed.



first half of the decade.<sup>14</sup> With their socioeconomic status improving, the expellees' sheer numbers dictated that the major parties took seriously their political concerns at all levels. They had no choice. None of the major parties openly supported recognition of the current borders. What is more, though certainly not everyone agreed with their "oftentimes aggressive rhetoric," Lotz notes that most West Germans shared the basic tenets of the expellees' understanding of history and their fate; namely, that the eastern provinces were rightfully German and that the expulsion had been an unprecedented tragedy and a singularly unjust action.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, Leo Kreuz cites poll results from throughout the decade in which solid majorities in the Federal Republic (two-thirds or more) rejected the imposition of the Oder/Neisse border.<sup>16</sup> Majorities of all West Germans, not just of the expellees, favored a border revision.

It is probably no coincidence that this decade also witnessed the largest number of dedications of local expellee monuments in most *Länder* of the Federal Republic, in addition to their move from local cemeteries to more conspicuous places in the public domain. In fact, nearly one-third of all expellee monuments were erected in the 1950s.<sup>17</sup> It is clear that many of them were erected with the intention of openly agitating for revising postwar borders, such as the monument dedicated initially in 1955 and expanded in 1980 in Schelklingen, Baden-Württemberg (Figure 5). The monument consists of a

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<sup>14</sup> According to statistics cited by Stickler ("Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch," p. 147), at the beginning of 1956 there were 2,152,785 members of the two largest expellee umbrella organizations, the ZvD/BVD and the VdL, which constituted almost 24% of the entire expellee population of West Germany and West Berlin.

<sup>15</sup> Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts*, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> Not until 1969 did a majority of West Germans favor recognizing the border status quo. Prior results show strong (though declining) opposition to the German-Polish border established by the Potsdam Accord: 1951 (80%), 1956 (73%), 1959 (67%) and 1964 (59%). See Leo Kreuz, *Das Kuratorium Unteilbares Deutschland: Aufbau, Programmatik, Wirkung*, (Opladen: Leske Verlag + Budrich GmbH, 1980). Here, p. 53. Kreuz cites surveys initially published in Gebhard Schweigler, *Nationalbewußtsein in der BRD und DDR*, (Düsseldorf: n.p., 1973).

<sup>17</sup> Hans Hesse and Elke Purpus, "Monuments and Commemorative Sites for German Expellees," p. 52.

commemorative cross atop a stone plinth and is flanked on each side by three similarly shaped though smaller hewn stone blocks, each of which bears the name or names of eastern provinces, including those in Southeast Europe never a part of the German Reich either in 1871 or in 1937. From left to right, the stones read 1.) OSTPREUSSEN DANZIG WESTPREUSSEN 2.) POMMERN OSTBRANDENBURG POSEN 3.) SCHLESISIEN 4.) SUDETENLAND 5.) BANATER-SCHWABEN DONAUSCHWABEN 6.) BUCHENLAND SIEBENBÜRGEN. The inclusion of the Southeast European regions is an indication of the composition of expellees in the area, which included far more Volksdeutsche than in northern regions. Again, it is the blunt main inscription that makes this monument notable. It reads: WIR FORDERN UNSERE HEIMAT (We demand our homeland).<sup>18</sup> Built into a hill by a bike path outside this small city near Ulm, the monument still stands.

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<sup>18</sup> According to information compiled by Heinrich Eich and Hans Vastag, the original monument has been expanded or renovated more than once. The site now contains benches for contemplation, stones with the names of the eastern regions, including those in Southeast Europe never a part of the German Reich, as well as another stone with the inscription: "Memorial (*Mahnmal*) for the German Victims of WWII. Wanderers pause and consider: 11,570,000 Germans were expelled from their homeland. 2,200,000 lost their lives as a result, among them thousands of Germans from Russia. 1,700,000 found a new homeland in Baden-Württemberg. They helped in the reconstruction of this state. The dead admonish us to preserve peace, to stand up for justice and freedom, and to complete the unification of our fatherland." Cited in Eich and Vastag, Dem Vergessen entrissen. Gedenkstätten und Mahnmale der Vertriebenen, Flüchtlinge und Aussiedler in Baden-Württemberg. (Stuttgart: Bund der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften, Landesverband Baden-Württemberg, 2002).



Figure 5 Schelklingen. Photo: J.L.

In addition to the directness of the inscription, I find the invocation of *Heimat* in Schelklingen particularly intriguing. Certainly, the reference to the *Heimat* here makes the monument more inclusive. The reader will recall that insisting solely on the return of the eastern territories from 1937 excluded the territorial demands articulated by Sudeten Germans and all the other Southeast European Germans. By demanding the *Heimat* instead of *unser Territorium*, *unsere Region*, *unser Land*, etc. the monument vindicates the expellees' cultural, emotional, and spiritual connection to these areas; this elevates the expellees' attachment to their homelands and renders it more than a purely material or commercial attachment. It went well beyond that.

Other monuments of this type also mobilize this kind of pathos. They suggest that the uprooting of the Germans from their *Heimat* was an unparalleled act of barbarity that led to immense suffering worthy of special acknowledgement and recompense. One of the best examples that shows what the loss of *Heimat* meant to the expellees consists of three commemorative stones erected by the city government in a park in Hagen, North Rhine-Westphalia (Figure 6). The monument bolsters territorial claims by referencing, on

the stone at left, the referendum of 1920 with which the inhabitants of *Kreis Lyck* (County Lyck) voted overwhelmingly to remain a part of Prussia instead of becoming part of Poland. It bears the city seal of Lyck and the inscription 1920 FÜR DEUTSCHLAND UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT (1920 For Germany Unforgotten Heimat). The stone on the right reads 1955 LYCK OSTPREUSSEN PATENSTADT HAGEN and commemorates Hagen's adoption of the city Lyck (known today as Elk, Poland) in a Patenschaft in 1955.<sup>19</sup> The three-stone monument was designed to resemble a monument at the train station in Lyck.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 6 Hagen. Photo: J.L.

In a speech at the unveiling ceremony in August 1963, Hagen's *Oberbürgermeister* expressed his hope that the city could someday erect a fourth stone memorializing the

<sup>19</sup> Numerous monuments were erected throughout West Germany to commemorate the anniversaries of the establishment of other Patenschaften as well. Recall that a Patenschaft provided for the financial and political support of an eastern city's or county's cultural traditions. Much like the monuments of this category which purport the existence of Germany in its 1937 borders, the special relationship sealed by a Patenschaft was conceived to demonstrate the continuing spiritual existence of the eastern cities and counties regardless of the political situation on the national level, which is why I include them in this chapter as well.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief history of the monument, see Beate Hobein and Dietmar Osses (eds.), "Bis in die fernste, fernste Zeit." Hagen und seine Denkmäler. Hagener Stadtgeschichten Bd. 6. (Hagen: Lesezeichen Verlag Dierk Hobein, 1996).

expellees' return to their homeland.<sup>21</sup> The inscription on the monument's center stone is, however, the most illuminating of the three. It reads, DEN DEUTSCHEN MIT ZWANG VON SEINER HEIMAT TRENNEN HEISST IHN IM GEISTE ZU TÖTEN (To separate the German forcibly from his native land means to kill him in spirit). The text is easily recognizable as being based on a passage from the Charter of the Expellees.<sup>22</sup> But what does it really say? First, it seems to say that even if the expellees managed to elude the dangers associated with the war and forced migration, the loss of their Heimat rendered them dead in spirit. Secondly, it conveys the message that because the survivors of the expulsion had lost their beloved homelands, they had suffered as much as any other victims of the Second World War and its aftermath, including those who actually were killed. The sentiments expressed here echo the statement made by the East Prussian writer Agnes Miegel, and seen on two monuments in North Rhine-Westphalia (Ahlen and Warendorf): VON DER HEIMAT GEHEN IST DIE SCHWERSTE LAST, DIE GÖTTER UND MENSCHEN BEUGT (To leave the *Heimat* is the greatest burden faced by gods and men).

### **Großdeutschland: Post-Ostpolitik Territorial Claims**

The monument in Hagen was erected several years after the earlier, more vociferous and revisionistic examples from the 1950s. For reasons discussed in Chapter Two, over the course of the 1960s, the incendiary and intractable rhetoric of the expellee organizations began to fall on deaf ears. In fact, many West Germans, particularly young people, met the expellee organizations with an *a priori* skepticism and accused the

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<sup>21</sup> Hobein and Osses (eds.), "Bis in die fernste, fernste Zeit," p. 220.

<sup>22</sup> The initiators of the monument in Hagen nationalized the passage by replacing the first words "*Den Menschen*" with "*Den Deutschen*," i.e. the text was changed from "the person" to "the German."

organizations of balancing out their dead with Germany's victims and of not accepting German responsibility for their fate. As a result, the expellees and their interests were marginalized. While one might suspect that the political and social developments on the national level would have led perforce to major alterations in the monuments' tenor, it took a long time for the effects of this tectonic shift to trickle down to the local level. To be sure, a gradual change in thematic emphasis began to occur around this time. Of the new local monuments emplaced, more and more articulated the symbolic politics of recognition and collective innocence (discussed in cluster B) instead of expressing the tangible political objectives of territorial claims based on the loss of Heimat. The change from concrete to symbolic politics was not wholesale, however and the expellee organizations' claims to their homelands did not abate. Reflecting this, small numbers of monuments commemorating the eastern territory more than the dead of the expulsion were erected after the Warsaw Treaty of 1970.

A monument unveiled in Plüderhausen, Baden-Württemberg in 1980 offers a case in point. (Figure 7) The double-beamed stone cross stands in a courtyard next to a Catholic church in this small city near Stuttgart. Abutting the courtyard is a wall on which hang plaques with the seals of all levels of the government, as well as the coats-of-arms of the eastern provinces and the text: DIE HEIMAT BLEIBT UNVERGESSEN (The Heimat remains unforgotten).<sup>23</sup> Initiated by both the Plüderhausen Catholic church community and the local branch of the BdV, the monument consists of a stone cross with two horizontal beams, each of which bears an inscription: on the upper beam, (VERTREIBUNG AUS DEM OSTEN 1945—Expulsion from the East 1945); on the

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<sup>23</sup> The monument's initiators utilized unusual capitalization for the inscription on the wall. To emphasize the lost homeland, it reads: die HEIMAT bleibt unvergessen.

lower beam, (RECHT AUF HEIMAT—Right to Heimat). Newspaper reports emphasized the reiterations of the concept “Recht auf Heimat” in each of the speeches given at the dedication ceremony.<sup>24</sup> Denying people this “irreproachable legal concept according to international law” by forcibly expelling them from their homelands—the keynote speaker proclaimed that day—constituted an injustice (*Unrecht*). Perhaps anticipating critics, the speaker also claimed the applicability of the right to Heimat for everyone, not just the expellees.<sup>25</sup> However, the very specific context provided by the monument’s other attributes (inscriptions, plaques, etc.) is difficult to overlook. The “Recht auf Heimat” the monument extols was clearly meant to apply to the expellees from the former German East.



**Figure 7 Plüderhausen. Photo: J.L.**

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<sup>24</sup> “Stätte der Erinnerung und Zeichen der Versöhnung, Symbol für Recht auf Heimat,” *Schorndorfer Nachrichten*, July 8, 1980.

<sup>25</sup> The direct quotation is taken from a manuscript of the address given to me by the speaker, Karl Walter Ziegler.

Elsewhere, monuments in various forms were erected which memorialized the eastern territories in the traditional ways. The monuments still prominently display the coats-of-arms of the eastern provinces and of their *Landsmannschaften*, and references to the territory beyond the Oder/Neisse, and to the Germanness thereof, still abounded. For example, in what looks to be a unified effort, in 1989, the *Wappen* of various eastern provinces (East Prussia, West Prussia, Danzig, Pomerania, Silesia, Upper Silesia, and the Sudetenland, to be precise) were hung in the foyers of city halls in several cities in North Rhine-Westphalia.<sup>26</sup> The phrasings on some monuments of this category indicate at minimum the tacit acknowledgment of the permanence of the newly confirmed borders. In 1975, the BdV erected a monument in Fulda, Hessen at the *Platz der Heimat* which reads WIR GEDENKEN DER VERLORENEN HEIMAT BdV 1975 (We commemorate the lost Heimat BdV 1975). With the territory “lost,” monument initiators elsewhere used concepts such as “loyalty” (*die Treue*) and “forgetting” and “not forgotten” (“*vergessen*”/“*unvergessen*”) to qualify the Heimat and implore spectators to maintain their affinity toward and deep bond with their homeland despite the fact that there would be no return home. Monuments dedicated to the UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT (Unforgotten Heimat), or some similar variation, were erected throughout West Germany after 1970. Virtually all of them include the *Wappen* of the eastern provinces, however, and thereby espouse the continuing existence of these political entities in the face of political realities to the contrary.

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<sup>26</sup> The seals hang near the entrances of the *Rathäuser* in Altenbeken, Bad Lippspringe, Borchten, Büren, Delbrück, Hövelhof, Lichtenau, Paderborn, Salzkotten, and Wünnenberg. Though I have uncovered no specific information suggesting the striking similarities amount to more than a coincidence, the visual evidence (the coats-of-arms are identical) and the fact that all appeared in 1989 makes it look as if the erection of these monuments was part of an orchestrated campaign.



The monument dedicated on June 17, 1988 in Neuss, North Rhine-Westphalia stands as one example (Figure 8).<sup>27</sup> This *Mahnmal für den deutschen Osten* (Monument for the German East) was erected on the city's *Platz der deutschen Einheit* (German Unity Square) almost two decades after the ratification of the Warsaw Treaty. Nevertheless, it still conveys the expellee organizations' disinclination to accept the territorial status quo. The monument is comprised of a red-brown granite column and a fountain, the basin of which is adorned with the coats-of-arms of Silesia, Pomerania, Sudetenland, West Prussia, and the insignia of the East Prussian Landsmannschaft, a moose antler.<sup>28</sup> The inscription is again key: VERGEßT EUREN DEUTSCHEN OSTEN NICHT (Do not forget your German East). The text indicates that the expellee organizations had been fighting an uphill battle since the 1970s to garner the public's sympathy for their plight. Clearly, the inscription addresses the threat that the German East might indeed be forgotten and beseeches passersby not to succumb to this seemingly inevitable temptation given the passage of time and the dominance of other postwar narratives. Simultaneously, however, I find the monument mounts a muted, threefold protest against the fruits of Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik. First, the employment of the coats-of-arms suggests these historical territories still exist. The other two pertain to the

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<sup>27</sup> The city Neuss was described to me as a very "*vertriebenenfreundliche Stadt*" (expellee-friendly city). The involvement of the city and local businesses in the erection of the monument corroborates this assertion, as stated on a commemorative plate behind the actual monument: ERRICHTET VON NEUSSER BÜRGERN UND UNTERNEHMEN, DEN OSTDEUTSCHEN LANDSMANNSCHAFTEN NEUSS, DER JUBILÄUMSSTIFTUNG DER STADTSPARKASSE NEUSS SOWIE DER STADT NEUSS. 17. JUNI 1988. (Erected by citizens and businesses of Neuss, the East German Landsmannschaften Neuss, the anniversary foundation of the local city bank, as well as the City Neuss. 17. June 1988). The monument stands in front of a local business. In this case and in all these cases, the involvement in any capacity of local government and even local merchants indicates at least some approval of the historical interpretations offered by the expellees. The sometimes radical views propagated by the monuments therefore were not limited to the hardliners of the expellee organizations. In 2002, the BdV, again with the help of local businesses, added a Glockenspiel to the square which chimes the *Heimatlieder* of the eastern provinces twice daily.

<sup>28</sup> Water trickles down a groove in the stone into the basin. The two sides of which represent the two halves of Germany, which at the time of the dedication, was of course still divided.

expulsion. Immediately conspicuous is the designation of the territory commemorated as the German East. Regardless of the new national boundaries, the territory was still German. Finally, the possessive pronoun (*Euren*) expresses ongoing ownership. While visiting the monument in 2007, I was told the possessive plural “you” was selected instead of “our” (*unseren*) to convey that the eastern provinces belonged to *all* Germans, not just to the expellees, and therefore the forfeiture of the German East meant a great loss—especially culturally—for everyone.



**Figure 8 Neuss. Photo: J.L.**

## CONCLUSION

The expellee monuments of this chapter purport the continuation of a Germany—a “Großdeutschland”—that no longer existed. The eastern territories were still German and the expulsion amounted to a singularly unjust action that separated the expellees from their beloved Heimat. At the same time, the monuments demonstrate the importance of

temporality, international developments, and changes in the national political mood for interpreting these commemorative objects. Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and, specifically, West Germany's recognition of the Oder/Neisse border—which the expellee organizations, of course, vehemently opposed—had a lasting impact on the monuments' forms and themes. Although one might expect to see an increase in stridency or a shriller tone in the territorial claims after Ostpolitik, this was generally not the case. More striking is the decrease of monuments displaying the Großdeutschland motif—the result of a far more significant shift in commemorative emphasis that will be explained thoroughly in cluster B. For the time being, however, in a few cases, which I have highlighted here, the expellee organizations still used local monuments after Ostpolitik to pursue concrete politics and raise territorial claims. In this regard, the monuments highlight the differences between overblown political rhetoric at the national level and public commemoration at the local level. These few post-Ostpolitik cases show that for some expellees, the attachment to the Heimat would never diminish.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **COLD WAR CONFLATION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Some expellees still refer to the Germany's division after WWII as a *Dreiteilung* (triple partitioning) rather than a *Zweiteilung* (division) to emphasize the fact that German territory constituted an area much larger than the two postwar states. The division of rump Germany into the Federal Republic and the GDR and subsequent efforts to protest and agitate against the postwar political constellation offered different avenues for the expellee organizations to articulate their interests. Instead of claims based specifically on the loss of Heimat, the ideological conflict between the superpowers and their allies enabled expellee organizations to broaden their appeals for support in reacquiring their lost homelands by making border revision a part of the larger struggle of the West against Communism and Soviet expansion. The territorial demands of the expellees were thus conflated with calls for the reunification of East and West Germany and were couched in the language of the Cold War.<sup>1</sup> The local expellee monuments in this chapter reflect this.

Campaigning for the reacquisition and reunification of formerly German territory by conflating the expulsion with the division of Germany made territorial claims more palatable by tapping into widely shared negative attitudes about the Soviet Union. It also kept the eastern provinces in the public eye during an era when Germans increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> The appellation "East Germany" is also problematic for many expellees for whom the GDR remains "Mitteldeutschland" (Central Germany).

viewed the Federal Republic and the GDR as the sole remnants of the former German Reich. Of course, this strategy had major implications for attributions of guilt and responsibility as well. Indeed, by extension, I would suggest the conflation was part of an effort—undertaken not only by expellee organizations—to put some rhetorical distance between the plight of the expellees and the war that had been started by the Nazis and underwritten by millions of Germans, including the expellees, for years. Blame for the suffering of the expellees therefore was pinned on the Soviets, their communist underlings, and other partisans of Eastern Europe and not on the Nazis and those who supported them (or on the western Allies, for that matter).

## **THE MONUMENTS**

This type of conflation can be seen in a small but important set of local expellee monuments. Though the commemorative implications are complex and far-reaching, the monuments themselves are more straightforward. The defining characteristic of the monuments in this chapter is a reference to the eastern territory as well as to the division between West and East Germany. More specifically, these monuments link symbols and other iconography seen in Chapter Three (“Großdeutschland and the Right to the Heimat”) to the division between the two German states. For example, monuments with Germany presented in its 1937 borders also display (with extra emphasis) the inner-German border. These monuments treat East German cities like Dresden, Eisenach, and Magdeburg as “lost” just like the cities of the truly lost eastern provinces, e.g. Danzig and Königsberg. Much the same, they include the traditional coats-of-arms of the Länder of “*Mitteldeutschland*” (e.g. Saxony and Mecklenburg) with those from the eastern

provinces. References to Berlin are also prevalent. In addition, the monuments employ the language used to call for reunification between the Federal Republic and the undemocratic GDR (e.g. “*Wiedervereinigung*” [reunification], “*Selbstbestimmung*” [self-determination], “*Freiheit*” [freedom], and “*Einheit*” [unity]) to formulate the expellees’ territorial demands.

Thirty-seven monuments of this type were erected throughout the Länder of West Germany.<sup>2</sup> Such monuments were located in smaller numbers throughout the Federal Republic (though not in Hamburg, Bremen, or Saarland), which indicates the popularity of the messages conveyed was widespread and not geographically bound. More than half of all of these, however, were in the northern Länder—Schleswig-Holstein led the way with nine, followed by Lower Saxony (eight), and North Rhine-Westphalia (seven). Particularly striking about all of them is the location. Most were erected in easily noticeable areas: large public squares, major intersections, near train stations, by municipal buildings, including in and by city halls. This high visibility belies the assertion that local expellee monuments served merely as ersatz grave sites for solemn

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<sup>2</sup> Though the escalation of the Cold War in the 1950s coincided with what Retterath calls the “time of the ‘crosses of the German East’” (Retterath, “Geschichtsbilderkampf...” p. 108)—that is, when large religious symbols commemorating the expulsion were strategically emplaced near the inner-German border—in the interest of clarity, I do not necessarily include them in this category. One of them—the oversized cross erected in Bad Harzburg, Lower Saxony, high in the Harz Mountains—is especially worth mentioning. Visible at the time across the border in the GDR, the monument was dedicated in June 1950 before a crowd of 20,000—including prominent government officials such as Expellee Minister Hans Lukaschek and the Lord Mayor of West Berlin, Ernst Reuter. The monument, restored after a major storm in 2002, is enormous. Including the base, the original structure reached approximately 26 meters high. The cross—illuminated at night by floodlights—was to be a monument of peace and a symbol of loyalty to the Heimat. Affixed to its base were wooden panels engraved with the coats-of-arms of the lost German provinces beyond the Oder/Neisse and an urn containing soil from the Heimat immured in the base. (See Hans Kuhne, *Das Kreuz auf den Uhlenklippen bei Bad Harzburg*. (Bad Harzburg: Bund der Vertriebenen Ortsverband Bad Harzburg, n.d.) Though obviously an expellee monument, the geographical location—facing eastward—was selected to underscore its effect and gather further attention. Erected before the uprising in East Germany on June 17, 1953, the expulsion is presented here and elsewhere, according to Scholz, as a “manifestation of the communist system in Eastern Europe and the GDR.” Tapping into anti-communist sentiments of the time, the expellees began presenting themselves not only as the victims of Bolshevism but also as the Christian West’s bulwark against the atheist east. For more on this religious element, see Scholz, “Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse,” p. 303.

remembrance and quiet reflection and instead were erected to mobilize the public, draw attention to concrete political objectives, and shape historical understandings. Furthermore, many of the monuments of this category were erected on the Day of German Unity, June 17, which memorialized the much-celebrated, though ultimately unsuccessful, rebellion in the GDR on that day in 1953.<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, commemorations of the revolt, and the desire for unification it was said to have expressed, were appropriated and combined by expellee organizations with their hope for unification of all former German territory.

Some examples of this expulsion/division conflation include the signpost in Blexen, Lower Saxony (erected in 1957), notable not only for its easily visible location near the ferry landing in this city on the North Sea, but also for its listing of distances to cities in the German East (Breslau, Danzig, Königsberg, and Stettin) and its large outline of the city of Berlin's symbol, the bear. In Tornesch, Schleswig-Holstein, a commemorative wall (*Gedenkmauer*) was constructed near the town's city hall in 1959 with an outline of Germany's 1937 border on the Baltic Sea (including the territory of Pomerania and East Prussia, at that time in the GDR and Poland, respectively) and the inscription: ES GIBT NUR EIN DEUTSCHLAND (There is only one Germany).<sup>4</sup> Another monument from 1959, unveiled June 17<sup>th</sup> of that year, was emplaced at the market square in Schöningen, Lower Saxony. It bears the seal of Berlin as well as the historic coats-of-arms of Germany's eastern and central (i.e. GDR) provinces and the

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<sup>3</sup> For an outstanding rendering of the instrumentalization of the uprising of July 17, 1953 as the source of West German national pride and identity, see Wolfrum, Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

<sup>4</sup> The inscription was changed in 1997 to IN GEDENKEN AN UNSERE UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT (In commemoration of our unforgotten Heimat). The border outline remains. I thank Hans Hesse for providing this information.

assertion: BERLIN SOLL IMMER HAUPTSTADT BLEIBEN 17.6.1959 (Berlin shall always remain the capital) as well as: VERGESST DEN DEUTSCHEN OSTEN NICHT! (Do not forget the German East!)

One of the most illuminating examples, however, is a cube-shaped monument erected (not coincidentally) at Berliner Platz in Böblingen, Baden-Württemberg (Figure 9). The square is located at the corner of Berliner Straße and Steinbeisstraße. The next two streets on either side are named for cities in the former German East: Königsbergerstraße and Breslauerstraße. Two blocks further, Berliner Straße becomes Stettinerstraße, a street named for another city of the lost provinces. Danzigerstraße is also nearby. The site was provided by the city government, and the monument was erected in the late 1950s.<sup>5</sup> Large plates adorned the four visible sides of the cube—all of which displayed either inscriptions or iconography typical of this category.

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<sup>5</sup> Even after e-mail correspondence with the director of the Agency for Culture in Böblingen, Peter Conzelmann, I was unable to ascertain the exact date of the monument's unveiling.





Figure 9 Böblingen. Photo: BdV Archive

Featuring the coats-of-arms of Königsberg, Berlin, and Breslau, the first plate made no distinction between the cities beyond the Oder/Neisse and the former capital of the German Reich, divided Berlin. The second plate featured the inscription WIR WOLLEN SEIN EIN EINIG VOLK VON BRÜDERN (We want to be a united Volk of brothers) taken from the “Rütli oath” recorded in Friedrich Schiller’s 1804 play Wilhelm Tell.<sup>6</sup> According to Edgar Wolfrum, such invocations of the “German spirit” (*deutscher Geist*) and other national symbols from the era of Germany’s Wars of Liberation were

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<sup>6</sup> The full stanza reads:  
 Wir wollen sein ein einzig Volk von Brüdern,  
 in keiner Not uns trennen und Gefahr.  
 Wir wollen frei sein, wie die Väter waren,  
 eher den Tod, als in der Knechtschaft leben.  
 Wir wollen trauen auf den höchsten Gott  
 und uns nicht fürchten vor der Macht der Menschen.  
Wilhelm Tell, Act 2, Scene 2

part and parcel of 1950s efforts to revive the cult of the German nation-state during the first decades of division.<sup>7</sup> The hope was that hearkening back to another time of German disunity and occupation would once again inspire national cohesion. The circumstances of the division were different, however.

Nevertheless, the ultimate goals of the monument's initiators were similar and were succinctly articulated on the third plate's inscription: FREIHEIT RECHT EINHEIT (Freedom Justice Unity). But to whom were these lofty ideals typical of the Cold War to apply? To the Germans of the GDR, caught behind the iron curtain? To the expellees in the Federal Republic? The fourth plate provided the answer and was, in fact, the most telling. It displayed an outline of Germany in its 1937 borders. This fact alone does not make this plate noteworthy. What did, however, was the inclusion of the demarcated German-German border, i.e. the heavily fortified boundary from the Baltic Sea to Bavaria between East and West Germany. Strikingly, East Germany's border with Poland—the Oder/Neisse—was omitted. Those who initiated the monument wished to express that the inner-German boundary marked off areas no longer belonging to Germany. It was as if the GDR did not exist. In other words, everything lying to the east of democratic West Germany, and everyone hailing from those areas, was treated the same—as the victims of expulsion, Soviet occupation, and German division. Therefore, the freedom, justice, and unity mentioned here applied not only to the Germans residing in the GDR but to those from beyond the Oder/Neisse as well. Moreover, the peaceful resolution of the converse of these ideals could only be engendered by the reunification of *all* parts of Germany—not only between the Federal Republic and the GDR, but the former German East as well.

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<sup>7</sup> Wolfrum, Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, pp. 164-177.

It bears repeating that the municipal government of Böblingen provided the location for this monument. It was not situated in the back corner of a tranquil cemetery but stood conspicuously at the intersection of major city streets. This monument was created to be seen. In addition, the cube was not typical because it was not initiated by the BdV or another expellee organization. Instead, it was sponsored by the *Kuratorium Unteilbares Deutschland* (KUD—Curatorium Indivisible Germany), a non-partisan, national organization founded in 1954 with the explicit purpose of fostering a grassroots campaign to bring about German reunification by mobilizing the public and influencing politicians.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the obvious allusions to the former German East on the cube's sides allowed for the appropriation of the monument for BdV purposes even after the reunification in 1990 and especially after the KUD disbanded in 1992.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, it should be added that my usage of the past tense to describe the monument is deliberate. The monument was removed with the approval of the BdV in 2006 due to the danger posed by the long-term effects of exposure to the elements. The cube was falling apart.<sup>10</sup>

Differing in form but not in content, a number of signposts (“*Wegweiser*”) erected throughout the 1950s and 1960s provide other examples of local monuments that employ this thematic intermixing. While expellee groups initiated other such signposts with references only to cities in the former German East, what set these monuments apart were

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<sup>8</sup> It is very possible that the KUD and the BdV collaborated in initiating this monument. Kreuz writes that the two organizations often experienced differences of opinion over ultimate objectives at the national level (i.e. the BdV wished to see greater emphasis on the lost eastern territories in the KUD's rhetoric) but points out that the two shared common interests and were often able to find common ground at the local level. See Kreuz, *Das Kuratorium Unteilbares Deutschland*, p. 127. The Böblingen monument's strong emphasis on the German East makes cooperation of some sort seem likely.

<sup>9</sup> The monument is included in a useful compendium of memorial sites regarding the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR edited by Anne Kaminsky called *Orte des Erinnerns: Gedenkzeichen, Gedenkstätten und Museen zur Diktatur in SBZ und DDR*. (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Böblingen will not be without an expellee monument for long, however. The city has once again provided a location for a replacement which was to be unveiled in 2009. This time in a less conspicuous area, the city's *Waldfriedhof* (forest cemetery). I thank Peter Conzelmann from the city's Agency for Culture for this information.

their references to cities both in the eastern provinces as well as to cities in the GDR or to Berlin. For many, all the formerly German cities behind the iron curtain were administered against the will of the German people by foreign occupiers and thus were similarly unreachable. Furthermore, and in spite of the varying distances, the cities were equally far away. To wit, the *Wegweiser* in Springe, Lower Saxony, listed the distances of that small city near Hannover to the former East Prussian city Tilsit (today, Sovetsk, Russia), Danzig, the former Pomeranian city Stettin (today, Szczecin, Poland), Berlin, Breslau, and Dresden.<sup>11</sup> Though formally designated a reunification monument (*Mahnmal der Wiedervereinigung*), the wooden post's references to former German cities in the East made clear that reunification would be incomplete without the eastern territories. Designed by a local expelled German from Silesia, the signpost in Springe was unveiled at a fork in two major streets in the city center on the expellees' day of commemoration, Tag der Heimat, in September, not the national holiday, June 17<sup>th</sup>, in 1959.<sup>12</sup> Akin to a number of other monuments throughout the Federal Republic sharing this form—for example, in Lörrach, Baden-Württemberg; Kitzingen, Bavaria; Wolfhagen, Hessen—this signpost directed its viewers' attention to the cities of the East and to Berlin or the GDR and reminded them that postwar division split German territory in three, not in two.

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<sup>11</sup> Dresden is an interesting selection for a representative city of the GDR due to its historical significance in discussions of German wartime suffering, especially in the GDR, because of the massive destruction caused by Allied (i.e. British and American) bombing of the city in February 1945. For more on the GDR leadership's instrumentalization of the bombing of Dresden during the Cold War, see Bill Niven, "The GDR and the Memory of the Bombing of Dresden," in Niven (ed.) *Germans as Victims*, pp. 109-129.

<sup>12</sup> What is also remarkable about the signpost is that it was set at an angle and propped up by a cast-iron outline of a human figure. The monument was to be reset to vertical once division was overcome, including the reacquisition of the eastern provinces. After the unanticipated events of 1990, however, the signpost remained as it was originally designed in part because the reunification did not include the lost territories and for fear it might be misunderstood as raising a lasting territorial claim. In need of restoration, the monument was removed in 2005. I thank Andreas Lilge from the City Archive of Springe, who provided me with this information.

Though more a sign wall than a signpost, the expellee monument in Porta Westfalica, North Rhine-Westphalia also displays this conflation by listing the respective distances to Königsberg and Berlin (Figures 10 & 11). Like the majority of monuments in this category, this one was dedicated in 1965, i.e. between the uprising in the GDR in June 1953 and Willy Brandt's New Ostpolitik of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In addition to the city names, city seals and the distances, however, the large brick segment more overtly mentions the expulsion. A bronze plaque containing the inscription ZUM GEDENKEN DER TOTEN DURCH KRIEG, GEWALTHERRSCHAFT, FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG (In commemoration of the dead of war, due to tyranny, flight and expulsion) seems to thematize all the dead of WWII, including the victims of the Nazis. In this context though, the inclusion of the dead due to tyranny might refer to the victims of Stalinism instead—amongst whom many expellees counted themselves, but who also certainly included the citizens of the GDR.



**Figure 10 Porta Westfalica. Photo: J.L.**



**Figure 11 Porta Westfalica (close-up). Photo: J.L.**

One of the most explicit examples of this category, however, is another wall in Westphalia, this time in Gescher (Figure 12). Here, a bronze relief with a map of Germany in its 1937 borders and the seals of East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia hangs on a one meter by two meter brick wall. The monument—conceived and dedicated by the local branch of the BdV and approved and financed by the city government by a majority vote a mere three years before the fall of the Berlin Wall (1986)—is conspicuously situated in the city center next to another expellee monument emplaced over three

decades before.<sup>13</sup> Two features of the monument point to the conflation of the expulsion with the Cold War that followed. First, along with the map and seals on the bronze plate, both the Oder/Neisse border and the inner-German border are demarcated. That Germany—according to the expellees in Gescher—underwent an illegitimate “triple partitioning” after WWII is evident. This also implies the recognition of the GDR, absent in other depictions. These facts alone are not uncommon, except that there is greater emphasis on the boundary between the two German states than on the GDR-Polish border (i.e., the border is raised and thus more distinct than the Oder/Neisse border which is engraved and sunken). Like the others of this category, this monument shows that overcoming the division of Germany, and true reunification, could only occur when the former German territory in what was then Poland and the Soviet Union was also reincorporated.



Figure 12 Gescher. Photo: BdV Archive

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<sup>13</sup> The commemorative stone from 1955 expresses the dissatisfaction with the territorial status quo typical of the period. It features a metal plate affixed to its side with the inscription DENKT AN DEN DEUTSCHEN OSTEN (Think about the German East).

A second feature, however, makes an even more potent statement in terms of historical narratives. Indeed it reflects the general shift in the objectives of the expellees away from the open territorial claims of the first decades of the Cold War, to the strong accent on victimhood which occurred after Ostpolitik and the emergence of Holocaust-centered narratives. The monument bears the generic inscription DEN OPFERN VON VERTREIBUNG UND TEILUNG (To the victims of expulsion and division). This vague phrasal pairing raises a number of questions, the answers to which provide insight into how many West Germans connected the expulsion of Germans with the division of Germany. The first question refers to the persons commemorated by the monument. It is unclear to whom the designation “victims of expulsion and division” refers. Are those victims one and the same—meaning all Germans equally, i.e. West Germans, citizens of the GDR, the expellees—who suffered (some more than others) due to the occupation and partitioning of their Fatherland? Or, alternatively, are the groups distinct? If the groups are distinct, secondly, what do the victims have in common? The Federal Expellee Law of 1953 legally defined the expellees, but who were the “victims of division”? Would-be escapees shot down at the Berlin Wall? Other refugees from the GDR killed attempting to flee westward at the inner-German border? The Germans forced to live behind the iron curtain? All Germans? What do they share with the expellees other than their ethnic heritage? Third, and most significantly, assuming the groups were indeed separate, why was the expulsion disconnected from the Second World War and attached to postwar events?

Unfortunately, the monument does not provide clear answers. On the other hand, the Cold War conflation conveyed by the inscription was not formulated alone to assert



some kind of territorial claim or to express the will to reunify, as traditionally had been the case. Instead, a new exculpatory dimension was added to the narrative. The victims of expulsion and division are combined here, I contend, to form a new cohort of victims. The monument commemorates those Germans affected by *postwar* events, that is, those who suffered at the hands of the Allies *after* WWII, not as a direct result thereof. The expulsion and division are disconnected from the Nazi war of aggression and this monument makes it appear as though Germans bore no responsibility for the fate that befell them.

## CONCLUSION

To demonstrate this conflation a final time, I draw briefly on a monument not included on BdV lists. In December 1960, the “Memorial to German Unity” was dedicated at the prominent *Servatiiplatz* near the main train station in Münster, North Rhine-Westphalia (Figure 13).<sup>14</sup> Designed by the sculptor Anni Buschkötter, the monument features two large, trapezoidal concrete blocks linked together by bulky iron chains that symbolize “the will of unity and ... expression of the fact that the German people could not be divided.”<sup>15</sup> The monument is easily interpreted as a representation of the unbreakable bond between the two German states. In no way could one construe this as an expellee monument. Indeed, it was initiated and sponsored by the local office of the

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<sup>14</sup> For more on this monument, see Godehard Janzing, “National Division as a Formal Problem in West German Public Sculpture: Memorials to German Unity in Münster and Berlin” in Benton (ed.) *Figuration/Abstraction*, pp. 127-146, as well as Maren Ullrich, *Geteilte Ansichten: Erinnerungslandschaft Deutsch-Deutsche Grenze*. (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2006), pp. 38ff.

In addition to this unification monument, Münster had a commemorative plaque with the text of the Charter of the German Expellees hung near the entry of the city hall in 1975. Addressing the lack of a prominent expellee monument in the city, a commemorative stone was placed at an area of *Servatiiplatz* adjacent to the unification monument in 2003.

<sup>15</sup> This quotation comes from a speech given at the dedication ceremony cited in Janzing, “National Division as a Formal Problem in West German Public Sculpture,” p. 135.

KUD, not by an expellee organization. In fact, local expellee groups were critical of the monument's design from the start because it "formulated the 'German question' as no more than an inner-German problem, between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic."<sup>16</sup> The objection was not short-lived. Nearly thirty years after the monument was unveiled, on the Day of German Unity, October 3, 1990, unknown protestors chained a third block—representing the former German East—to the original structure to express their enduring disapproval of the exclusion of the eastern provinces in the original monument and in discussions of the impending German reunification. In other words, the expellees in Münster were protesting the *lack* of conflation of their interests with the efforts to overcome the Cold War.



**Figure 13 Münster. Photo: J.L.**

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 135.

## **ADDENDUM—AFTER THE COLD WAR: LOCAL EXPELLEE MONUMENTS IN THE GDR**

The end of the Cold War for Germany meant that this motif was no longer employed in the erection of post-reunification expellee monuments. Like the monument in Münster, to which a cast-iron sign with the years “1945-1990” was added, other monuments of this type were dismantled or otherwise amended to reflect the drastic changes to the political situation.<sup>17</sup> After reaching a second highpoint in the 1980s, in fact, the numbers of monuments erected in West Germany in general dropped precipitously after the fall of the Berlin Wall. No memorials to the expulsion were erected in the territory of the GDR until after 1990.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, newly formed expellee organizations quickly began erecting expellee monuments in the new Länder.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The debate that ensued in the 1990s over an expellee monument in Bad Arolsen, Hessen provides one example. Here, the KUD dedicated a monument on June 17, 1960, which displayed a map of Germany in its 1937 borders with emphasis on the inner-German boundary and, to represent Berlin, a small depiction of the Brandenburg Gate. The inscription read, DEUTSCHLAND UNTEILBAR (Germany indivisible). City representatives from the Green Party protested against the monument already in February 1990 and later that year formally proposed a measure to dismantle it, which did not receive a majority and was not passed. As a compromise, a plaque was added which states, SEIT DEM 03.OKTOBER 1990 UMFASST DAS VEREINTE DEUTSCHLAND DIE GEBIETE DER BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND DER DEUTSCHEN DEMOKRATISCHEN REPUBLIK UND GANZ BERLIN. DAS VEREINTE DEUTSCHLAND ERHEBT KEINERLEI GEBIETSANSPRÜCHE GEGEN ANDERE STAATEN UND WIRD SOLCHE AUCH IN ZUKUNFT NICHT GELTEND MACHEN. DIE BESTÄTIGUNG DER GRENZEN DES VEREINTEN DEUTSCHLANDS IST EIN WESENTLICHER BESTANDTEIL DER FRIEDENSORDNUNG IN EUROPA. (Since October 3, 1990, united Germany comprised the territories of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic and all of Berlin. United Germany does not raise any territorial claims vis-à-vis other states and will not in the future. The confirmation of the borders of united Germany is a considerable component of peace and order in Europe.) The monument was removed after repeatedly being defaced. After a failed attempt by local members of the CDU to restore the monument at city expense in 1993, the privately organized *Kyffhäuserbund Waldeck* provided funds for its renovation and re-dedication, which took place later that year. For more on this debate, see Kaminsky (ed.) *Orte des Erinnerns*, p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> Since 1990, expellee memorials have been erected in a number of East and Central European states. According to the registry of the Bund der Vertriebenen, however, only a single memorial was erected in the Eastern Bloc during the time of the Cold War, in Hungary in 1979.

<sup>19</sup> No longer fearful of Stasi infiltration or state prosecution, small groups and committees of expellees began forming and meeting in the open in the GDR in March 1990. Just over a month after the reunification later that year on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, a state-level organization of the BdV was founded in Thuringia, one of the first in East Germany. It is probably no coincidence that the earliest documented monument in the former GDR was also erected there, in Gotha, in August 1992—less than two years after reunification.

Although they bear no particular thematic resemblance to the monuments of this chapter, I will briefly examine these monuments here.

While the overall numbers of expellee monuments in the new *Länder* are not high (Thuringia has the most, twenty-seven—more than double that of any other eastern state), the monuments present a valuable counterpoint to those in the West. In fact, I contend they allow for a worthwhile comparison and for the condensed observation of how a certain understanding of Germany's recent past was developed beyond the ideological shadow of the Cold War. One thing is certain—the monuments in the former GDR speak emphatically about the strong will still shared by many expellees to memorialize the expulsion publicly decades after the event. Echoing the patterns of the West, the desire for recognition of their plight and the urge to commemorate it in the form of enduring memorials appears not to have been a fleeting trend or merely an epiphenomenon of the Cold War. The monuments in the former GDR were constructed nearly half a century after the event. Several were erected, in fact, on the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. While they do not conflate the themes of the Cold War, the historical understanding on display there was not a Cold War relic, but rather represented attitudes held since the end of WWII.

The most notable aspect about the monuments—most of which were erected on the major days of commemoration: Tag der Heimat or Volkstrauertag—however, is their reiteration of the sentiments expressed for decades by those of the West. For example, a simple commemorative stone was erected on a street in Delitzsch, Saxony with the

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Research on the activities of the expellee organizations in the former GDR is lacking. The information presented on them here is from Bernhard Fisch, "Wir brauchen einen langen Atem." Die deutschen Vertriebenen, 1990-1999. Eine Innenansicht. (Jena: Verlag Neue Literatur, 2001). Fisch's text, a very personal, polemical account of his disappointing experiences as an expellee in one of the new *Länder* (Thuringia), offers some insight into this topic but does not stand up to scholarly rigor.

inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN AN DIE VERTREIBUNG UND DAS UNRECHT AN DEN DEUTSCHEN NACH DEM 2. WELTKRIEG (In commemoration of the expulsion and the injustice against Germans after WWII). Whether the monument in Delitzsch, the commemorative stone with deposits containing Heimaterde in Apolda, Thuringia, or the monument dedicated to UNSEREN TOTEN (Our dead) in Tabarz, Thuringia, the monuments in the former GDR resemble their older counterparts in the West. They rarely refer specifically to other victims nor do they provide much historical context.

The same applies to a sandstone column located at the main cemetery in the city of Erfurt, which features a mother and the common motif of a caravan of refugees fleeing from their homes.<sup>20</sup> The column bears the inscription VERTREIBUNG IST UNRECHT. DIE HEIMAT BLEIBT UNVERGESSEN. (Expulsion is an injustice. The Heimat remains unforgotten) and is surrounded by small stands bearing the coats-of-arms of the eastern provinces. The use of Heimat-political symbolism is actually quite rare in monuments in the former GDR. The general lack of nationalist symbols on other monuments reflects the shift from concrete politics (territorial claims) to symbolic politics (exculpation and espousal of victimhood) witnessed in the West.

To be sure, the initiators in the eastern states have had to overcome obstacles not regularly seen in the West in order to emplace their monuments. For example, though it is difficult to measure the extent to which the SED's antifascist rhetoric was truly accepted and reproduced throughout the larger East German society, and would be equally tough to chart the long-term influence of pro-Soviet and anti-Federal Republic propaganda on the populace, it seems safe to say that societal approval of the organized expellees'

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<sup>20</sup> As will be explored more thoroughly in chapter eight, the figure of the mother—an iconic figure of the expulsion—is used to assert claims of collective innocence.

understanding of their fate was less widespread than in the West in previous decades. Expellee monuments in the former GDR were erected in an environment where just years before talk of the expulsion had been expunged from public discourse and criminalized. The nascent expellee organizations were decades behind their western counterparts in terms of organization and social status and were forming at a time of growing unemployment and great financial insecurity due to the transformation of the moribund East German economy. Nevertheless, the desire to dedicate monuments to the victims of the expulsion has been strong. And, as had been the case with so many monuments in the West, the messages conveyed seem to be de-contextualized and to neglect all causality.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **GERMANS AS KULTURTRÄGER:**

### **ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF SETTLEMENT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Wolfgang Wippermann has shown that the theory of Germans as bearers of culture (*Kulturträgertheorie*) was a significant component of the ideology of the German *Drang nach Osten* (Drive to the East) which, depending on the proponent, was either an anti-Slavic position justifying the reacquisition of formerly Germanic territory from the Poles and other Slavs from the Middle Ages to the Third Reich, *or* which facilitated the integration of Slavic peoples and enhanced in their eyes the legitimacy of their hold on formerly German territory (including after the expulsion).<sup>1</sup> The focus here, of course, is on the German side of the argument. Especially vis-à-vis the Poles, the theory was brought to bear historically to legitimate Teutonic possession of lands and dominance over Slavic populations. In essence, this view implied that “foreign” control of Polish territory was justified because of the cultural, political, and technological superiority of the Germans.<sup>2</sup> The emphasis on German cultural and political supremacy more than implies the inferiority of others in the same fields.

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<sup>1</sup> See Wippermann, Der “deutsche Drang nach Osten:” Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> Wippermann notes five technological, economic, and social innovations introduced by German in the time of the settlement of the east which provided the basis for these assertions: in particular, the iron plow, the city in the legal sense, agricultural and village layouts, lawful standing of peasants, and, in general, German industriousness. Wippermann, Der “deutsche Drang nach Osten,” pp. 101-102.

The theory applied in other geographic contexts as well, particularly southeastern Europe. The cultural accomplishments of the Germans who settled there and the territorial claims they supposedly legitimized are nicely summarized in a contribution in a festschrift compiled for the consecration of an expellee monument in Geislingen, Baden-Württemberg in 1950.<sup>3</sup> First of all, the author of the piece refers to the German settlers as “pioneers” who were to be credited with converting the areas of the Carpathians, Bessarabia, and the Black Sea regions—until the arrival of the Germans, inhabited only by “nomads”—into the flourishing breadbasket of Europe. An important aspect to note is the belief that the land was hitherto unexploited, and that earlier inhabitants—if the area was not completely unpopulated—were primitive and had no permanent connection to the land. While the founding of cities, towns, and villages and the creation of farms were certainly worth mentioning, Reimesch notes, those architectural achievements and the other “material assets” amassed over generations are,

but a part of their accomplishments, certainly the most visible, but probably not the most important, because in addition to these agricultural and commercial deeds stand those of the mind (*des Geistes*) which first and foremost led to the return of the nomadic Southeast—since Roman times overrun by Asiatic mentality (*Geisteshaltung*) and won back after the Turkish Wars (*Türkenkriege*)—to the Christian West. That was mostly German work.

Never did the original German settlers and their descendants (who today are members of various *Landmannschaften*), as the author points out, attempt to force their way of life on their non-German neighbors but instead, he maintains they “endeavored to be good

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<sup>3</sup> Fritz Heinz Reimesch, “Die europäische Leistung der Deutschen im Südosten Europas,” in Landesverband der vertriebenen Deutschen in Württemberg, Kreisverband Göppingen (ed.) *Festschrift zur Ostlandkreuz-Weihe am 1. und 2. Juli 1950, Geislingen an der Steige, Württemberg*. (Geislingen, n.p., n.d.), pp. 37-41. At the time, Reimesch served as chairman of the Association of Siebenbürger Saxons in Germany. The Siebenbürgen region lies in present-day Romania.



role models and honest instructors.” No other *Volk*, Reimesch implies, could have done the same.<sup>4</sup>

## THE MONUMENTS

The monuments I examine in this chapter express this conviction. That is, they correspond to the theory’s traditional pattern by commemorating a people who, by virtue of their resourcefulness, their exemplary hard work, and their overall stalwartness—i.e. because of the innate characteristics associated with their ethnicity and their cultural heritage—were able to carve out a flourishing Heimat from a desolate, unfruitful, and generally backward region. Forming the basis for a different kind of territorial claim, these monuments say that by virtue of the Germans’ cultural contributions, the land—though governed by others—had become unquestionably German.

Significantly, the vast majority of the monuments I discuss in this chapter were not erected by the expellees from the northeastern stretches of what was the German Reich (today in Poland and Russia—for reasons explored below), but by the expellees from Southeastern Europe, especially the Danube Swabians, but also in some cases by Sudeten Germans—that is, by expellee groups from regions that were never a part of any Germany.<sup>5</sup> But why did these expellee groups in particular (and not others) employ elements of this historical motif? How does one commemorate the loss of lives, land, and property incurred by ethnic Germans who lived in other sovereign states and were not

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the national self-perceptions of the Germans from Southeastern Europe—particularly prior to WWII—see the trenchant essays in Krista O’Donnell, Renate Bridenthal and Nancy Reagin (eds.) The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

citizens of the German Reich? What are the elements of the bearers of culture theory seen in expellee monuments, and how do they connect to the larger narrative?

The geographical settings of these monuments point toward an interesting aspect of expellee culture in the Federal Republic: in general, the Germans from the East initially came to reside in areas of West Germany which corresponded geographically to their regions of origin. That is, the expellees from northern regions (e.g. Pomerania or East Prussia) generally ended up in the northern Länder of the Federal Republic (e.g. Schleswig-Holstein or Lower Saxony) while many from central areas of the East (e.g. Silesians) settled in the middle of West Germany (e.g. North Rhine-Westphalia or Hessen). Accordingly, the vast majority of these monuments are geographically bound, as the bulk of expellees from the Southeast found new homes in the south, particularly Baden-Württemberg.<sup>6</sup> Baden-Württemberg “adopted” all Danube Swabians in 1954. Over ten percent of all local expellee monuments there (26 of 246) fit in this category. Though not seen in all parts of Germany, these monuments are more than just a marginal phenomenon. Smaller numbers are located in the neighboring southern Länder Bavaria and Rhineland-Palatinate as well.

A good point of departure for analyzing this chapter’s monuments is Ulm—the city from which many of the Germans who eventually settled in southeastern Europe embarked on their journey down the Danube. For this reason, the city adopted the Landsmannschaft of Danube Swabians. The two main expellee monuments in this city of approximately 120,000 are situated on the historic city wall along a well-travelled,

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<sup>6</sup> According to census data, of the approximately 655,000 expellees from Southeast Europe living in the Federal Republic in 1970, 268,000 lived in Baden-Württemberg. Bavaria was home to the second highest number with 144,000. Cited in Markus Leuschner, *Heimat und Schicksal. Eine kurze Chronologie*. (Bonn: BdV, 2008).

bicycle path that follows the Southeast European Germans' "*Schicksalsstrom*" (river of fate) from its source, through neighboring Bavaria, and into Austria, traveling all the way to Vienna. The first of the two, the *Ahnenauswandererdenkmal* (Ancestral Emigrant Monument), was dedicated on the occasion of the third *Tag der Donauschwaben* (Day of Danube Swabians), August 8, 1958 (Figure 14). Coincidentally, the festivities took place the very month the sentences for the defendants in the highly publicized Ulm *Einsatzgruppen* trial were pronounced (the larger implications of which were discussed in Chapter Two).



**Figure 14** Ahnenauswandererdenkmal in Ulm. Photo: J.L.

The size of the dedication ceremony and the number of the high-ranking political figures who participated that day reveal the commemorative significance of this memorial. According to published reports, approximately 40,000 people attended the *Tag der Donauschwaben* festivities that weekend, one of the key events of which was the

unveiling of the new monument. Contingents of Danube Swabians from overseas, including the United States, made the long journey to Ulm to participate. Underscoring the fact that this was no small-scale, insignificant event, the city's Lord Mayor, Theodor Pfizer, spoke at several of the events, including the dedication ceremony, and state-level cabinet members were also in attendance. Moreover, telegrams and well-wishes were sent by several prominent national and regional government officials, including Eugen Gerstenmeier (President of the Bundestag), Ludwig Erhard (Federal Economics Minister and later Federal Chancellor) and Gebhard Müller (Minister President of Baden-Württemberg).

Originally bearing a single inscription, VON ULM AUS ZOGEN DEUTSCHE SIEDLER IM 18. JAHRHUNDERT AUF DER DONAU NACH DEM SÜDOSTEN EUROPAS. IHRE NACHFAHREN, VOM SCHICKSAL NACH DEM ZWEITEN WELTKRIEG VERTRIEBEN, KEHRTEN IN DAS LAND IHRER VÄTER ZURÜCK (From Ulm, German settlers traveled on the Danube to Southeast Europa in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their descendants, expelled by fate, returned to the land of their fathers), the four-meter-high, white stele designed by Erich Koch, features a smaller bronze statue of a man, woman, and young child in a boat with an oversized cross for a mast which symbolizes the arduous river journey to their new Heimat. Beyond the brief clause ("expelled by fate"), the actual forced migration of the Danube Swabians is not the primary commemorative focus of this monument.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the expulsion usually plays a secondary role for monuments in this category. Instead, these memorials celebrate origins, and honor both Ulm as the specific site of departure for many of the intrepid

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<sup>7</sup> The word "*Schicksal*" (fate) suggests—as usual in expellee monuments—that Germans fell victim to events out of their control and that they had no hand in what befell them.

original German settlers, and also the region as the source of this migration. In other words, the inscription and the intent make clear the origins not only of the settlers (clearly labeled “Germans”) but also demonstrates the “Germanness” of those who returned after WWII to what became the Federal Republic (“the land of their fathers”—Vaterland) despite their prior citizenship in countries outside of the Reich. The monument thus links the expellees’ “new Heimat” to the “old Heimat” (referred to elsewhere as the “*Urheimat*”).

To further commemorate this historic site on the Danube, the city government rechristened the area the “*Donauschwabenufer*” (Banks of the Danube Swabians) in 1962. After a renovation in 1974, an additional inscription was added: EINIGE TAUSEND ÜBERLEBENDE RÜCKKEHRER WANDERTEN AUS NOT UND VERZWEIFLUNG IN ANDERE EUROPÄISCHE LÄNDER UND NACH ÜBERSEE AUS. SO ZERSTREUTEN SICH DIE DONAUSCHWABEN ÜBER DIE GANZE WELT UND WURDEN ÜBERALL GEACHTETE BÜRGER. AUCH IHRER SEI IN EHREN GEDACHT (Several thousand surviving returnees emigrated to other European countries and overseas due to hardship and desperation and became respected citizens. They are also to be honorably commemorated).

As memorialized by the *Ahnenauswandererdenkmal*, the colonizers who departed Ulm for southeastern Europe were part of the civilizing mission discussed above which brought German customs to underdeveloped and uncivilized areas. Through their hard work, flourishing outposts of western culture were established; these became a bulwark against incursions from the East: from Turks (Ottomans), Mongols, Slavs, etc. Little is mentioned here, however, of the new Heimat the settlers created. To honor these

communities, another monument was created just a short distance away. (Figure 15) Fastened onto the ancient city wall, this collection of nineteen plaques dedicated both to collectives of southeastern European German settlers (Danube Swabians and Banat Germans in particular—the two largest plates) and individual settlements in the region has steadily grown in number since the initial unveiling in 1986. The plaques also contain the usual visual clues which corroborate the theory of Germans as bearers of culture.



Figure 15 Commemorative plaques, Donauschwabenufer in Ulm. Photo: J.L.

The first of the bigger plates was part of the original configuration and features the vague inscription which frames it: DONAUSCHWABEN: DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT, DES KRIEGES UND DER VERTREIBUNG (Danube Swabians: To the dead of the Heimat, of war, and of the expulsion—Figure 16). In a smaller font, the names of cities of the region (Ulm, Vienna, Buda and Pest, and a handful of new settlements downriver) mark points along the Danube. In addition, in slightly larger lettering, the plaque exhibits the terms AUSWANDERUNG (Emigration—referring to the departure from Ulm for points southeastward along the Danube), ANSIEDLUNG (Settlement—referring to the

arrival in and establishment of the “new Heimat” in SE Europe), and RÜCKKEHR (Return—referring to the expulsion and the arrival back in Baden-Württemberg) and is festooned with symbolic artistic renderings of the aforementioned events and activities emblematic for this category. For example, in reference to the emigration, the plaque shows an “*Ulmer Schachtel*”—the elongated, shallow, wooden barges traditionally used to carry goods down the Danube but which were also the main modes of transporting the Danube Swabians on the precarious journey to their new homes. By their nature, the boats enhance the territorial claims of those who sailed on them. Because they were unable to sail against the river’s current, they were dismantled upon arrival and either sold as lumber or used to create temporary homes for recent arrivals. In other words, those who left for Southeast Europe did not plan to return home. What is more, the use of this symbol once again celebrates the local origin of many of these Germans by linking them historically to Ulm and the region—important for the integration of the expelled Danube Swabians back into the “Urheimat” after WWII. The 18<sup>th</sup> century image of the Ulm Cathedral wrapped by the city wall at left serves the same purpose.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> At 534 feet (161m), the cathedral today boasts the highest church steeple in the world. Pictures from the 18<sup>th</sup> century show a more diminutive steeple, as depicted on the plaque.





Figure 16 Donauschwaben commemorative plate in Ulm (close-up). Photo: J.L.

The images portraying the settlement on the plaque more directly bear the hallmarks of the bearers of culture theory. Representing the creation from scratch of a new Heimat, recently arriving figures with few belongings and walking sticks are shown joining their countrymen already hard at work together constructing new homes. The nearly completed structure in the foreground stands in a row of houses revealing the cooperative industriousness and ingenuity of the settlers in adapting German architectural styles in a planned and systematic manner. The new homes were to be the first permanent reminders of the German imprint on the region, which to that point had supposedly been occupied by nomads with no lasting connection to the land. Below this image one sees two rows of gravestones in the shape of small crosses. I elucidate the function of cemeteries in legitimizing territorial claims in the following chapter. In this context, however, the crosses also depict another cultural contribution, namely the expansion by



German settlers of Christendom into the area as well as the piety of the deceased. The image of gravestones indicates, moreover, the passing of generations and attests to the longevity of the settlement. As we will see, many monuments in this category include dates of settlement and expulsion or other references to the passage of time expressing the prolonged existence and enduring influence of German settlement.<sup>9</sup>

Organized geographically with the right side representing the East, the image on the plaque's left side refers to the return of the Danube Swabians to western Germany as a result of the expulsion. Defoliated trees in the background reveal the devastation wrought by war and the end of the land's bounty. The bare trees no longer produce fruit. A caravan of horse-drawn covered wagons heading west was selected to depict the fate of the descendants of the original settlers. To the left is a man carrying an indistinguishable person piggyback. To the right, a mother leaves the Heimat on foot cradling a young child. Dispossessed, what the Danube Swabians had achieved culturally and economically over generations had come to an abrupt end.

Unveiled ten years after the initial emplacement, I view the other large plate—dedicated specifically to the *Banater Schwaben* (Germans of the Banat—the upper inscription)—as a complement (Figure 17). The inscription on the plaque's underside reads: EINE HALBE MILLION DEUTSCHE FANDEN IM BANAT FAST 300 JAHRE LANG HEIMAT (A half million Germans found a Heimat in Banat for almost 300 years). As usual, the text contains more than meets the eye. Just as the concept of Heimat is invoked to demonstrate the Germanness of a particular region, explicitly stating the longevity of German settlement is a method of attesting a temporal connection to the

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<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the simple cross as gravestone—a common design in the cemeteries of fallen soldiers—might also be used here to demonstrate the common burden of all Germans in sacrificing their young men in the service of the military for the defense of the *Heimat*.

land. Like the plaque to its left, the plate is organized chronologically and geographically. An Ulmer Schachtel and the words 18 JH ULM (Ulm 18<sup>th</sup> century) on the left side with an arrow pointing to the right indicate the direction of the initial migration.



**Figure 17 Banater Schwaben commemorative plate in Ulm (close-up). Photo: J.L.**

Emphasizing their contributions in cultivating a once barren landscape, the plaque includes depictions of a settler behind a horse-drawn plow tilling the soil and an overfilled cornucopia. The Banat Germans had, after all, turned the region into a breadbasket of Europe. In addition, the symbol of iron mining commemorates the wealth created by the industrialization of the area. Here as well, one sees further examples of superior German architecture: more modest dwellings as well as the Cathedral Church of Timișoara. Strikingly, but not surprisingly, the German names for the cities of this multiethnic, polyglot area along the Danube are used instead of their contemporary appellation (including “Temeschburg” instead of “Timișoara”) even though the plaque

was added in 1996. Other inhabitants of the area, e.g. the Romanians, Hungarians, Serbs, Croats, and Jews remain unmentioned. Indeed, because of the regular shifting of political borders at the hands of neighboring great powers throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the region's natural boundaries are emphasized on the plaque (the rivers Marosch, Theiss, and the Danube comprise respectively the northern, western, and southern flanks; the Carpathian Mountains, also displayed, constitute the eastern edge) thus suggesting the insignificance of such political developments. Quite clearly, according to the initiators of the plaque—the Landsmannschaft of Banat Danube Swabians—because of the duration of the settlement and the cultural contributions their ancestors made there, this area was made German and still is claimed to be German regardless of the nation-state currently in control. Their coat-of-arms is found in the upper left corner. Because the ethnic Germans of the Banat were not formally expelled and actually remained in Romania in large numbers until the 1980s and 1990s, the expulsion is not depicted.<sup>10</sup> With an arrow pointed westward, a lone figure carrying a rucksack symbolizes their return to the land of their predecessors.

In-depth analysis of each of the rest of the seventeen smaller plaques, which commemorate individual settlements in the region, would exceed the boundaries of this chapter. Suffice it to say, the other plaques exhibit similar imagery and reiterate the themes articulated by the larger plates.<sup>11</sup> For example, renderings of important civic and

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<sup>10</sup> The winner of the 2009 Nobel Prize for Literature, Herta Müller, was one of the Banat Germans who “returned” to the Federal Republic at this time. In a BdV press release issued upon the announcement of her award, Erika Steinbach wrote, “At the same time, it is a great day for German literature. With this Nobel Prize, the value of the cultural legacy of the Germans from the East becomes clear. We must maintain this legacy and continue to promote it.” See “Herta Müller, Gratulation zum Nobelpreis für Literatur,” BdV Pressemitteilung, October 9, 2009. <[www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php?id=912](http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php?id=912)> Accessed September 9, 2010

<sup>11</sup> The most recent additions were the plaques for the communities in Bulkes as well as Jabuka and Glogon in 2005.

architectural achievements (e.g. city seals, churches and cathedrals, or other significant man-made landmarks) and symbols of the rewards reaped thanks to agricultural resourcefulness highlight German cultural and economic contributions in establishing a new Heimat. Demonstrating the longevity of the German settlement, all feature the years the cities and towns were founded. Some provide further description, for instance, the plaques for Novo Selo/Neudorf an der Donau (ERSTE DEUTSCHE ANSIEDLUNG IN DER BATSKHA—First German settlement in Batschka<sup>12</sup>) and Torschau (ERSTE DEUTSCHE PROTESTANTISCHE GEMEINDE IN DER BATSKHA—First German Protestant community in Batschka). The towns were founded in 1734 and 1784, respectively. Accentuating the suddenness and unexpectedness of their ending, the year of the communities' extirpation (either 1944 or 1945) is also included. What precipitated the end of these vibrant communities, however, is not. It appears as if they simply ceased to exist. The expulsion is sparingly mentioned on just a few. Likewise, and particularly worth noting, are the plaques dedicated to the communities in Gakovo (Batschka) and Rudolfsgnad (Banat). Both share the typical features described above but also display the text: 1944-1948 INTERNIERUNGSLAGER TODESSTÄTTE TAUSENDER DONAUSCHWABEN (1944-1948 Internment camp, Place of death for thousands of Danube Swabians). No further context was deemed necessary.

The significance of all these observations would be diminished if this phenomenon was not so unambiguous and pervasive. An equally striking example of this category is the monument to the German community in Billed (Banat—today Biled in Romania)

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<sup>12</sup> Today, the Batschka region comprises territory straddling the Hungarian-Serbian border.

located at the main city cemetery in Karlsruhe, Baden-Württemberg (Figure 18).<sup>13</sup> Unveiled on Pentecost Sunday and consecrated a few weeks later in 1987, the cross-shaped monument made of Greek marble was placed in a section of the cemetery provided free of charge by the city government. The monument bears telling inscriptions on each side. The text on the right is more germane here: BILLED WURDE 1765 UNTER KAISERIN MARIA THERESIA VON DEUTSCHEN KOLONISTEN GEGRÜNDET. NACH SCHWEREM ANFANG WUCHS UND ENTWICKELTE SICH DIE GEMEINDE ZU EINEM BLÜHENDEN SCHWABENDORF. UNTER VÖLKISCHEM UND POLITISCHEM DRUCK KEHRTEN DIE DEUTSCHEN NACH 200 JAHREN IN IHR MUTTERLAND ZURÜCK (Billed was founded by German colonists under Empress Maria Theresia in 1765. After a difficult beginning the community grew and developed into a blooming Swabian village. Due to nationalist and political pressure, the Germans returned to their Motherland after 200 years).<sup>14</sup> Further consecrating the site, soil from both cemeteries, from the war memorial, and from a field in Billed was buried in a container at the foot of the monument. Inlaid stones taken from the village's church and from its main landmark, the *Kalvarienberg*, provide the monument's foundation.

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<sup>13</sup> The unusually tranquil and scenic park cemetery in the city housing Germany's highest court has another monument dedicated to all expellees as well as a memorial to the victims of Allied air raids on the city, which includes the graves of those killed.

<sup>14</sup> On the left is an engraved image of the war memorial erected after WWI in Billed and the text: WIR GEDENKEN IN EHRFURCHT, DANKBARKEIT UND LIEBE UNSERER TOTEN, DER GEFALLENEN DER BEIDEN WELTKRIEGE, DER OPFER DER FLUCHT, DER RUßLANDDEPORTATION, DER BARAGANVERSCHLEPPUNG, ALLER UNSERER TOTEN IN DER HEIMAT UND DER VERSTORBENEN LANDSLEUTE IN ALLER WELT (We commemorate in awe, gratitude, and love our dead, the fallen of both world wars, the victims of flight, of deportation to Russia, the deportation to Baragan, all our dead in the Heimat and our deceased countrymen in all the world).



**Figure 18 Billed Monument, Karlsruhe. Photo: J.L.**

Even more illuminating, however, is the monument's main feature, the relief prominently built into the cross on its front side (Figure 19). This work of art displays all the characteristics discussed above and presents a pictorial narrative of what Peter Krier, a Banat German functionary in his introduction of the monument at the dedication ceremony, called the community's "*Werden-Sein-Vergehen*" ("Becoming – Existing – Elapsing").<sup>15</sup> Leaving little to the imagination in his comments that day, Krier described in detail what each of the six images signifies. What follows is a brief recapitulation of Krier's most salient points. First of all, the two figures in the upper-left image, a father and son, are to be recognized as Germans, according to Krier, by their clothing. With few possessions, the two look resolutely upon the desolate land which they intend to turn into a new, free, and blessed (*segensreiche*) Heimat for themselves and their descendants. The

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<sup>15</sup> The full text of the speech was published in a festschrift produced on the occasion of the monument's dedication in 1987. I thank Werner Gilde of the *Billeder Heimatgemeinschaft* for providing me with this text.

second image, labeled by the speaker the central figure of the relief, depicts a man plowing the soil in this “desolate, swampy, and uncultivated” land. Krier stated, “With the plow our ancestors created a blossoming cultural landscape—a breadbasket, a blessed land—in Southeast Europe on the eastern border of the German Reich.” The church in the field of wheat, the third image, stands as the symbol of the community’s time of prosperity. Eight generations of Germans in Billed were baptized and married in the church, according to Krier. In the bottom left, the fourth image, the Calvary (*Kalvarienberg*)—Billed’s most notable landmark—reminds all who see it that the cross belongs to the life and history of all people. Billed had its own cross to bear and each of the smaller crosses represents a time of hardship in the village’s life. Addressing the Second World War and its ramifications for the community more directly, the barbed wire fence in the fifth image symbolizes the bondage and disenfranchisement that followed for the prisoners of war, for those deported for forced labor to the Soviet Union and forcibly transferred by Communist authorities to the Bărăgan Steppe in central Romania in the early 1950s. The woman gazing over the fence stands for the mothers and women waiting for their loved ones to return home and for those waiting for their freedom. The last image, according to Krier, represents the evacuation from their homeland. The female figure looks upon the graves the Germans regrettably had to leave behind, while the male figure looks at the setting sun in the West, where his family would once again have to create a new Heimat.



**Figure 19 Billed Monument (close-up). Photo: J.L.**

One could examine a number of other similar monuments in Baden-Württemberg (e.g. Bad Schönborn-Langenbrücken, Beuren, Görwihl, Herrischried, Reutlingen, Stuttgart, or Winnenden, to name just a few) or Bavaria (e.g. Munich) or Rhineland-Palatinate (e.g. Frankenthal or Landau) and come to similar conclusions. In fact, the monuments in this category display perhaps the least amount of variation of all. Like the others, the Billed Monument provides another example of the visual documentation of the cultural contributions made by Germans during the extended period of their settlement in this southeast European region. It records an understanding of history in which Germans transformed a barren landscape into bounteous fields of plenty and transferred German customs to the far reaches of Europe, becoming models of stability and achievement for their neighbors. These colonizers created a *Heimat*, an island of exceedingly prosperous German territory in an inhospitable climate, in lands outside of the German Reich. This is essentially what these monuments commemorate.



## CONCLUSION

Why did these expellee groups choose the Germans as bearers of culture motifs to represent and commemorate their experience of the expulsion and the loss of their homeland? Why are monuments of this type so prevalent amongst the southeastern European Germans and not amongst the expellees from other regions, especially Poland, where the political ideology associated with this theory has traditionally been applied? The answers to these questions speak to other commonalities amongst these monuments. For instance, with the notable exception of the *Ahnenauswandererdenkmal* in Ulm (1958), these monuments were not erected during the peak period of local expellee monument construction in the early 1950s, i.e. at the time, as we have seen, when political agitation for a border revision (regardless of its plausibility) was at its peak. Not only were local branches of the expellee organizations actively campaigning for it but it was also a topic of regular discussion amongst all major political parties at the national level. The reestablishment of a German state in its 1937 borders at this time was improbable. Nevertheless, it was not viewed as impossible. For Germans from areas that had never been a part of the unified Reich, particularly for the Danube Swabians, however, a beneficial alteration of the territorial status quo was out of the question.<sup>16</sup> Thus these monuments are devoid of the unconcealed territorial demands seen on expellee monuments elsewhere described earlier in cluster A.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> On this point, see Eugen Lemberg, "Der Wandel des politischen Denkens," in Lemberg and F. Edding (eds.) *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland*. Vol. III, p. 440f.

<sup>17</sup> This is not to say that southeastern Europeans are not included in monuments that make territorial demands. For example, with the inscription WIR FORDERN UNSERE HEIMAT (We demand our Heimat), the monument in Schelklingen, Baden-Württemberg (erected in 1955) includes the names of the eastern provinces of the German Reich as well as the regions in the Southeast.

For many expellees, as the sentiments captured by these monuments indicate, there was little question that the former eastern provinces had always been, and would always remain, a part of Germany. The same cannot be said about the formerly German communities in southeastern Europe. Therefore, as an alternative to the unmistakable, overt territorial claims made by Silesians and East Prussians, for example, the monuments of this category contain a more understated territorial connectedness. Furthermore, the monuments that display the Germans as bearers of culture motifs are always dedicated to specific groups or communities and not to all expellees.

Similarly, the justification for their connection to this territory is not the injustice of the expulsion per se (as it is elsewhere) but rather the creation of a Heimat. In fact, the expulsion is not the centerpiece of these narratives of the past but is instead a single event—one of several key events—in the historical trajectory of these communities. Equally important are the initial arrival of the German settlers, the establishment of the communities, and the periods thereafter when these cities and towns thrived. Nevertheless, the forced migration of the Germans terminated the once flourishing municipalities and marked the abrupt end of German cultural contributions to the area. In pictorial form, this is represented by the long caravans westward. In textual form, it is oftentimes marked with an inscription of the year 1944 or 1945. The commemorative thrust of the monuments is therefore equally on German toil and the settlers' resultant successes recognizable in the renderings of local landmarks and agricultural themes. In other words, the justification of the Southeast European Germans' strong identification with this territory is not the expulsion alone but rather the longevity of the settlement and the distinctly German cultural and economic achievements they made there.

The monuments of this category then seem to be part of a preemptive effort to affirm the Germanness not only of these areas along the Danube—the Heimat created by these German settlers—but also in terms of the nationality of those who resettled in what became the Federal Republic immediately following the war and in the decades hence. Thus, the monuments link the ancestors of the Danube Swabians and others with the “Urheimat” while concomitantly connecting them and their descendants both to the Heimat they created within the frontiers of other states, and to the *new* Heimat in what became the Federal Republic. Why? To put these “volksdeutsche” expellees on an equal footing with other “reichsdeutsche” expellees whose homelands had unquestionably been within the boundaries of the German Reich. Of course, this points toward unpleasant divisions not only amongst Germans themselves, but also amongst the various expellee groups as well.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For a host of compelling examples, see Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, Völklein, “Mitleid war von niemand zu erwarten,” and Albrecht Lehmann, Im fremden ungewollt zuhaus. Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland, 1945-1990. (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1991). Indeed, while conducting research for this dissertation in Baden-Württemberg in 2009, some expellees were unable to contain their dissatisfaction over the internecine squabbling in pursuit of their common goals. In particular, the lack of élan on the part of Southeast European Germans and Germans from Russia in mobilizing their numerically stronger Landsmannschaften has been the source of much consternation on the part of the other groups.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**UNSEREN TOTEN IN DER HEIMAT:**  
**CEMETERIES AND TERRITORIAL CLAIMS**

**INTRODUCTION**

In a text dealing mostly with the commemoration of individual deaths of Sudeten Germans in the new Heimat, Elisabeth Fendl has written that, for the expellees, not having access to the graves of deceased ancestors and relatives (*das “Kein-Grab-Haben”*) in the lost eastern territories was a “frequently described, traumatic experience in the first years after the expulsion.”<sup>1</sup> In the years immediately after the war, the virtual impossibility of lighting candles, placing flowers, and otherwise mourning dead family members at the locations of their burials exacerbated the expellees’ feelings of uprootedness and loss. That this inability to visit the cemeteries of the homeland caused great anguish for some expellees is incontestable, as was the distress over the inability to visit the graves of the hastily interred loved ones who perished due to violence or otherwise succumbed on the oftentimes grueling and dangerous treks westward during and after WWII.

This commemorative deficiency, it seems, explains the panoply of local expellee monuments—the focus of the present chapter—dedicated to “*unseren Toten in der*

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<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Fendl, “Beerdigung und Totengedenken in der ‘neuen Heimat,’” p. 82.

*Heimat*” (our dead in the Heimat). According to Fendl, and seconded by others,<sup>2</sup> these monuments addressed the need for a public place to mourn by functioning as “*Ersatzorte der Trauer*” (substitute mourning sites). Like Fendl, Hans-Werner Retterath notes the “private-religious nature” of some, especially early, expellee monuments and, echoing Koselleck, stresses their role in creating spaces for the expellees to mourn their dead.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, this seems to be the best rationalization for all these multifaceted monuments. In my estimation, however, much more is at play. In fact, I contend that in addition to memorializing the dead left behind, the commemorative links they establish between the expellees in the new Heimat (i.e. the Federal Republic) and the inaccessible cemeteries of the old Heimat (i.e. the former German East) served other, more political, purposes both domestically and internationally. They too were raising territorial claims.

I base my argument in part on Katherine Verdery’s study about “dead-body politics” and the “symbolic capital” possessed by human remains in the former socialist bloc.<sup>4</sup> While Verdery’s analysis encompasses many facets of the “political lives of dead bodies,” including the burials and reburials of famous and infamous as well as nameless Eastern European ancestors in the post-socialist context, it is what she observes about graves and territory in the Balkans that is especially salient for my work. In particular, burials and reburials in the successor states of Yugoslavia have “sacralize[d] and nationalize[d] spaces as ‘ours.’”<sup>5</sup> Burying the dead in a certain area is an expression of possession that sets up an almost unassailable, spiritual bond between the land and the

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler* Vol. 6 Bundesrepublik, Retterath, “Geschichtsbilderkampf...” and Panne, “Erinnerungspolitik – Erinnerungsspuren,” and Scholz, ““Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse,”” p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> Retterath, “Geschichtsbilderkampf...” p. 208.

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

various ethnic groups that live (and die) there. The implications for territorial claims are obvious. Verdery quotes a Serbian opposition leader during the reign of Slobodan Milošević, Vuk Drašković, who flatly stated, “Serbia is wherever there are Serbian graves.”<sup>6</sup>

For many expellees, it seems the gravestones of their ancestors and relatives also served as border posts or boundary markers, and offered additional proof that the land vacated in the East was German. Indeed, though the historical circumstances are not the same, much like the gravesites in the Balkans—which helped define and determine the boundaries of Serbian (or Croatian, or Bosnian) territory—the monuments dedicated to the dead left behind in the no longer accessible Heimat raise veiled territorial claims by connecting the expellees to the sacred soil of their cemeteries. In other words, much like the Serbian politician cited above said, these monuments seem to indicate that where German graves lie was, is, and always will be German territory. To demonstrate the real political nature of these monuments of this type, I have chosen seemingly innocuous and mournful monuments which I analyze below.

## **THE MONUMENTS**

The distinguishing characteristic of the monuments in this category is a reference to the dead in the Heimat. While the general appearances of the monuments of this category have remained fundamentally the same throughout the entire postwar era, the political objectives they have enunciated have changed over time. For example, the first documented local expellee monuments, from the 1940s, are of this type. The archetypal local expellee monuments of the years immediately after WWII were the crosses which

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<sup>6</sup> Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 98.

stood in graveyards of a small towns in Bavaria or Hessen (approximately two-thirds of the roughly three dozen monuments from the 1940s are located in these two Länder) with the dedication “To the Dead of the Homeland” (DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT).<sup>7</sup> They were conspicuously austere (and presumably inexpensive), and, with but a few exceptions, employed a cross (or, in areas predominated by Catholic expellees, a crucifix). They were doleful in tone and expressed grief—all of which lends credence to Fendl’s argument that expellee monuments were substitute mourning sites.

However, two trademark aspects of the monuments in this category during this initial period—both of which were geared in part toward a domestic audience, i.e. vis-à-vis the local, non-expellee population—point toward a political polyvalence present in these monuments from the start. First is the ambiguity of the terse inscriptions. It is unclear specifically to whom the monuments are dedicated. Assuming Fendl is correct, the “Dead of the Homeland” are the ancestors and relatives of the expellees who lie in now inaccessible cemeteries behind the iron curtain, as well as those who died during flight and expulsion. Interpreted broadly, however, they might also be the deceased expellees buried after the expulsion not in the former eastern territories but in their new Heimat in the West, or the fallen soldiers from the eastern provinces.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The lack of deviation from this inscription paradigm in the early stage is striking. To wit: DEN TOTEN DER OSTDEUTSCHEN HEIMAT (To the Dead of the East German Homeland—Kamen, North Rhine-Westphalia—discussed in greater detail below), DEN TOTEN DIE WIR IN DER HEIMAT LIEßEN (To the Dead We left behind in the Homeland—Hanau, Hessen), WIR GEDENKEN DER LIEBEN ANGEHÖRIGEN, DIE IN UNSERER ALTEN HEIMAT RUHEN (We Commemorate our Dear Family Members, who rest in our Former Homeland—Lahntal-Göttingen, Hessen), DIE TOTEN UND DIE AHNEN DER ALTEN HEIMAT MAHNEN UNS ZUR TREUE! (The Dead and the Ancestors of the Old Homeland Exhort us to Loyalty!—Trostberg, Bavaria). With little variance, virtually all of the inscriptions on the monuments of the 1940s touch on this theme.

<sup>8</sup> The vagueness of the inscriptions raises other questions. For instance, how did these people die? In combat? In air raids? Due to exposure, disease, or violence during the expulsion? Of natural causes after arriving in the West? Also, the inscriptions are one-sided. Do they apply to the non-Aryan population of the East as well? All this remains unclear, though it seems very unlikely that the inscriptions would apply to anyone besides non-Jewish German expellees. As will be examined in cluster B, monument initiators’

The second aspect is the emphasis on the concept *Heimat*, which, as argued throughout cluster A, functioned at this particular time as a vigorous riposte to the discrimination and skepticism on the part of the local West German population vis-à-vis the expellees. In fact, virtually all monuments in this category, not only those erected in the 1940s, refer not only to the dead but also to the homeland itself. Indeed, the inscriptions usually do not read UNSEREN TOTEN (To Our Dead) but rather UNSEREN TOTEN IN DER HEIMAT (To Our Dead in the Heimat). As always, the invocation of the concept of *Heimat* is crucial. With it in these early cases, the expellees were asserting their own Germanness in the face of local prejudice. This sentiment is nicely captured in the inscription of a monument in Bückeberg, Lower Saxony: AUS DER IRDISCHEN HEIMAT VERTRIEBEN ABER NICHT HEIMATLOS 1946-1947 (Expelled from the earthly Heimat, but not without a Heimat 1946-1947). Though the expellees were indeed homeless, they were equally German. Thus, the invocations of *Heimat* on the very early monuments of this type were intended to “nationalize” the expellees.<sup>9</sup>

However, the erection of this type of monument continued beyond the early years of discrimination even after the integration. Reflecting this, initiators of other monuments of this type often added modifiers to the inscriptions (such as “East German” (*ostdeutsch*), or another adjective (e.g., “*unvergessen*” [unforgotten] or “*geraubt*” [stolen])<sup>10</sup> to make known to all who saw it that the monuments referred to the dead from

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willful distortion or omission of such facts conveys a sense of collective innocence and distances German victims from the atrocities committed by the Nazis.

<sup>9</sup> Later monuments also invoked *Heimat*, of course, but no longer to attest the Germanness of the newcomers themselves, as was the case here, but to assert the Germanness of the areas the expellees left behind.

<sup>10</sup> Along with the dozens of monuments dedicated at this time “to the dead of the *East German* homeland” (my emphasis) was, for example, the small commemorative cross erected in Schotten, Hessen, with the



indisputably German territory. It is the intrinsic territorial claims that this chapter's monuments have always possessed that sets them apart and makes them decisive for my analysis. As we have seen, all the monuments I examine in this cluster also dispute the permanence of the newly established borders. But they do it in a much more unabashed, demonstrative way. Here the monuments' political polyvalence is more subtle. These monuments establish links between the expellees in West Germany and the unreachable cemeteries—as well as the dead who rest there—in the former German East. The monuments commemorate the *land* as much as the *people*. Above all, it is this viewpoint that distinguishes my work from Fendl and the others.

Probably the most straightforward example of the territorial claims raised with these monuments is a monument in Tuttlingen, Baden-Württemberg (Figure 20). A local expellee organization approached the city government in 1953 about erecting a memorial to the deceased family members of the area's expellees. In addition to the local government's financial assistance, the expellees were successful in procuring the necessary funding through donations from local businesses and other individual donors. Dedicated in November 1956, the organization emplaced a bronze bowl atop a large block made of red sandstone under a statue of Christ in the city's old cemetery.<sup>11</sup> During the unveiling ceremony, participants laid wreaths at the foot of the monument while a flame burned in the bowl. More than simply memorializing the dead, however, the

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inscription, VERGEßT DIE TOTEN UNSERER GERAUBTEN HEIMAT NICHT! (Do not forget the dead of our stolen homeland!), from 1951.

<sup>11</sup> The city cemetery is also home to an *Ehrenfeld* (field of honor) for the victims of the Nazi euthanasia campaigns from the area which was erected in 1947. Four stone tablets list the nearly 600 dead under the inscription, FERN DER HEIMAT STARBEN SIE DURCH EINEN GEWALTSAMEN TOD (Away from their homelands they died a violent death). Two other plates commemorate the local victims of concentration camps who were cremated in the city crematorium, 87 of whom were interred here. An obelisk with the inscription (in German and Latin): DEN UNGLÜCKLICHEN, DIE FERN DER HEIMAT STARBEN. (To the unfortunate ones who died away from their homeland) MISERIS PROCUL PATRIA DEFUNCTIS. MORS EORUM SIT FINIS LABORUM, along with the number of dead from the area.

monument also established an unbreakable bond between the expellees and their monument in the West and the cemeteries in the lost provinces in the East. Its most compelling attribute, the inscription, states this clearly. It reads: WO UNSERE TOTEN RUHN LIEGT UNSERE HEIMAT. WO WIR UNSERE TOTEN EHREN LIEGT UNSERE WÜRDE. UNSEREN IN DER HEIMAT VERSTORBENEN UND DEN OPFERN DER VERTREIBUNG ZUM GEDÄCHTNIS. DIE HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN. (Where our dead rest lies our Heimat. Where we honor our dead lies our dignity. To our dead in the homeland and in commemoration of the victims of the expulsion. The Expellees). The additional texts on the monument's side panels complete the territorial linkage. Both sides read respectively: UNSERE HEIMATGEBIETE (Our Heimat regions) followed by a list of the former German provinces: Included on the left are Memelland, East Prussia, West Prussia, Danzig, Pomerania, and Brandenburg. On the right are Silesia, Wartheland, Sudetenland, Danube Swabia, and Siebenbürgen. What was intended to commemorate individuals became but another means of lamenting the forfeiture of territory. The Heimat and loss thereof was equally if not more worth mentioning by name than the deceased ancestors and relatives the monument's initiators intended to venerate.



Figure 20 Tuttlingen. Photo: BdV Archive

In other cases, the connection to territory was less overt. The monument in the small city Kamen, North Rhine-Westphalia, provides an example of a monument establishing the link with the dead in the East in a more indirect fashion (Figure 21). In the form of a high cross (*Hochkreuz*), the monument is uncommon on two accounts; first, it was one of the (percentagewise) few erected in the 1940s. Secondly, its main inscription on the horizontal beam DEN TOTEN DER OSTDEUTSCHEN HEIMAT (To the dead of the East German Homeland) contains a modifier—“*Ostdeutsch*”—more characteristic of subsequent years. The cross also contains other unconcealed references to the territory of the East—stone plates with the names and coats-of-arms of East German provinces are situated like gravestones at the base of the cross—which also constitute an unmistakable territorial claim. The plates read (at left): Silesia, Pomerania, and Sudetenland, Brandenburg. At right: East Prussia, West Prussia, Danzig, and Posen. On the other hand, like virtually all others in this category, an expellee organization initiated the cross. It also stands on a plot in a cemetery provided free of charge by the city government.



Figure 21 Kamen. Photo: BdV Archive

From the start, the monument was to be part of a protest against the postwar territorial status quo. In fact, it was dedicated on August 7, 1949, almost four years to the day after the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference.<sup>12</sup> The date also fell on what was called the *Tag des deutschen Ostens* (Day of the German East)—a precursor to the Tag der Heimat which originated with the proclamation of the Charter of the Expellees in Stuttgart the next year.<sup>13</sup> Obviously, the date chosen for the unveiling was no coincidence. According to an internal report held in a BdV archive, organizers had planned a “Demonstration for the Right to Heimat” for several months to be held that summer weekend. The erection of the monument became a part of these plans, which quickly evolved from an intimate local gathering to a full-blown, state-level event.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Potsdam Conference concluded on August 2, 1945.

<sup>13</sup> I explain the origins of this key day of expellee commemoration in Chapter Ten.

<sup>14</sup> The events stretched over the entire weekend and included organizational meetings, Catholic and Protestant church services, marches, the monument’s dedication ceremony, and a *Volksfest*. According to

Corroborating my argument that the monument was intended to commemorate territory at least as much as the dead left behind, furthermore, the cover of the program for the weekend's events featured the monument's inscription plus a different shaped cross casting a shadow over the territory severed from the German Reich.

I do not question that the expellees in Kamen sought to memorialize their deceased relatives with their cross—one of the first local expellee monuments in all of North Rhine-Westphalia. The unpublished report states clearly that, “here, the expellees will have the possibility to commemorate their dead.” But combined as it was with these other tendentious political acts, the monument conveyed a passionate dissatisfaction with the territorial status quo. Though commemorative in tone, the cross in Kamen was clearly political in intent. Therefore, reducing this monument's commemorative capabilities—or that of the other monuments of this category—to a substitute site of mourning à la Fendl et al., ignores these monuments' polyvalence and omits the crucial political dimension of the dead bodies to which they refer.

Another monument in North Rhine-Westphalia—Wermelskirchen—dedicated the next year also bespeaks this politicization of mourning (Figure 22). Central in this discussion, of course, is the fact that this was not part of a clandestine effort to influence surreptitiously the Federal Republic's foreign policy makers or manipulate public opinion. Like the others in this category, the historical interpretation and the political goals the monument in Wermelskirchen articulates were unguarded and public. The openness with which the monument itself states the one-sided narrative is as forthcoming as the speakers at its unveiling. That said, it is not the monument's formal attributes that

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the unpublished report, police estimated that 25,000 expellees took part. The organizers requested from the *Bundesbahn* that extra trains be put into service to transport the people to Kamen. Permission was granted. For those unable to attend in person, the monument's unveiling was also broadcasted on the radio.

make it extraordinary. It consists of a large wooden cross atop a stone plinth. One of few monuments of this category not situated in a cemetery—the city government provided the location at no cost to the monuments’ expellee initiators—the *Kreuz des deutschen Ostens* (Cross of the German East) stands conspicuously at a fork in a major road not far from the entrance to a soccer stadium.

Once again, the monument’s most striking and revelatory features are the inscriptions. Warranting inclusion in this category, the main inscription, at the cross’s base, reads DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT (To the dead of the Heimat) and hints at the territorial connotations of the monument. More forcefully expressing the expellees’ bond with their homeland, in the middle of the stone plinth, a shield hangs with the smaller text FERN DOCH TREU (Though distant, loyal) over the cross of the German Order of Knights (*Deutscher Ritterorden*). The cross itself also bears an inscription. On its horizontal beam, the dates “1945” (left of center) and “1950” (center) were engraved with space left bare (right of center). The absence stood symbolically for the year the expellees would return to their homeland.<sup>15</sup> The first year was the year of flight and expulsion, Nazi Germany’s capitulation, and, most importantly, the Potsdam Accord. The next year listed on the cross marked the year of the unveiling ceremony, which was deliberately scheduled as a protest to coincide with the five-year anniversary of the Potsdam Conference. The actual dedication occurred on July 30, 1950.

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<sup>15</sup> Much of the information that follows was gleaned from contemporary articles in the local edition of the *Bergische Morgenpost* which the local branch of the BdV compiled and reproduced in the brochure *Bund der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften Ortsverband Wermelskirchen. Tag der Heimat 1990. 40 Jahre Mahmal “Kreuz des deutschen Ostens.”* (n.p., n.d.). The newspapers summarize and recount the speeches and the activities that took place at the unveiling ceremony.



Figure 22 Wermelskirchen. Photo: BdV Archive

Participants' speeches at the dedication ceremony were equally revealing about the monument's manifold true intentions. The main speaker, an expellee organization functionary, acknowledged first and foremost that the monument was to honor the memory of the dead left behind, whose graves can no longer be decorated and the millions of expellee victims who perished or were murdered.<sup>16</sup> His comments abruptly transcended this one-sided, de-historicized commemorative dimension, however, and became political. He reminded the audience that it was the Potsdam Agreement that had torn the German Reich asunder and set the expulsion in motion. According to the speaker, however, the monument was also a call to action for all Germans, expellees and the *Einheimischen*, to raise their voice to get back the land that had been taken from them. If the suffering of the expellees—who were expelled from their homelands because of their ethnicity (*Volkszugehörigkeit*) alone—was to make sense, the speaker noted, it

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<sup>16</sup> The speaker made no mention of the non-Germans who suffered because of the genocidal policies of the Nazis.

was only to make sure that future generations were spared from similar catastrophes. Thus the monument had two functions. The commemoration of the dead of the lost Heimat was the first. The second was indicating the task of the “Christian West” in preventing another expulsion. Though not a call to arms, the lesson taught by recent German history, according to the speaker, was to avert at all costs another expulsion.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

I do not deny the strong will these monuments express to mourn the dead, or question the expellees’ powerful attachment to the cemeteries of their lost Heimat. Fendl describes how ancestors’ gravesites in the East are usually one of the first stops on the *Heimweh* (homesickness) tours taken by many expellees and their descendants to the former eastern provinces. She notes that for many expellees, the feelings of intimacy, comfort, and belonging associated with Heimat to a large extent has been confined and reduced to the cemetery of their old hometown.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, interpreting the scores of these monuments merely as bridges connecting the expellees with their deceased relatives overlooks the broader political implications the monuments convey. Like so many issues

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<sup>17</sup> The words of two local spiritual leaders—one Catholic, one Protestant, both expellees followed these remarks. The president of the county government was next. He proclaimed that the monument was not a memorial of revitalized nationalism but instead was intended to proclaim that the right to homeland was a fundamental human right that may not be denied any person or *Volk*. Lastly, the final representative of the expellees to speak cited Ernst Moritz Arndt in his address and declared that Germans were not from various tribes but were one unit, and must together bear the cross.

<sup>18</sup> See Fendl, “Beerdigung und Totengedenken in der ‘neuen Heimat,’” p. 115. Svašek also writes about the enduring link between the expellees—in this case, Sudeten Germans—and their old cemeteries. She writes, “The war memorials and the graveyards linked the Sudeten Germans to their deceased kin, their dead relatives whom they had been forced to leave behind at the time of the expulsion. Not surprisingly, revisiting the graveyards evoked strong emotions, not only because the expellees experienced this as a symbolic reunion with their beloved kin, but also because the graveyards were often in a terrible state. Especially in the area that had been part of the Cold War defense zone, whole graveyards had disappeared along with the villages. In other areas, many Sudeten German graves had been destroyed by the new settlers. In Brand, for example, most Sudeten German gravestones had been thrown over the graveyard wall into the bushes, or had been used as building material.” See Svašek, “Narratives of ‘Home’ and ‘Homeland,’” p. 512.



involving the expulsion and the expellees, mourning and memorializing the dead was politicized from the start. I contend the dead were instrumentalized here to achieve the expellee organizations' chief political objective during the era of concrete politics, the reacquisition of lost territory. Just as dead bodies in the Balkans helped determine national boundaries in the post-socialist era, the expellees used their dead to raise their own territorial claims on moral and cultural grounds. The fact that the expellees' progenitors, in many cases, for generations, had been laid to rest in Silesia, the Sudetenland, and in other regions throughout Central and Eastern Europe, was proof enough that this territory still belonged to them. Much like border posts or other territorial markers, German names on headstones in the East marked the land as German. Monuments dedicated to "Our dead in the East German Heimat" were thus used to bolster territorial claims.

Targeting different audiences at different times and employing vague inscriptions, the monuments of this category are among the most complicated and multi-dimensional of all expellee monuments. Nevertheless, they allow for a few generalizations. First, the majority of them are located in cemeteries. Second, though they are not geographically bound—indeed they were erected throughout the Federal Republic—they do appear to be somewhat temporally bound. Perhaps it is not a coincidence then that the initiators of these local monuments erected the bulk of them during the 1940s and 1950s, i.e. when hopes burned most brightly for a permanent peace agreement that would allow a return home. Third, and perhaps most interestingly, specific references to the cause of death or to the expulsion itself on the monuments in this chapter are rare. Of course, that most of these monuments were erected before Ostpolitik and do not directly mention the

expulsion supports my argument that the groups that erected them intended to do more than just commemorate. Instead, the monuments contained an inherent political dimension. Although supreme suffering was obviously implied when the expulsion experience was represented here, what was most noticeably accentuated is the loss of Heimat.

## **CONCLUSION--LOSS OF HEIMAT & TERRITORIAL CLAIMS**

All local expellee monuments provide insight into postwar historical understandings in Germany. As the examples from these four chapters demonstrate, prior to Ostpolitik, the monuments' central theme was the loss of Heimat. With some exceptions, the expellee organizations and their supporters erected most of these monuments in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. As these earlier monuments indicate, the monuments' commemorative thrust was not as much the oftentimes violent act of flight and expulsion as the actual forfeiture of territory. Indeed, some of these monuments make it appear as though the expellees' loss of Heimat was a fate worse than death. The monuments served therefore to illuminate publicly the profundity of this loss, which many expellees believed made them worthy of special legal recognition. Furthermore, and even more significantly, the monuments disputed the postwar borders and in many cases claimed the continued existence of a Germany in its prewar boundaries. Thus, the monuments of cluster A were part of the campaigns agitating for the reacquisition of the expellees' homelands. Simply put, the expellees' fate served as the basis for the pursuit of concrete politics. To this end, the expellees repeatedly invoked Heimat on their monuments.

However, making reference to "Heimat" has served different purposes at different times. In the first years after the Potsdam Agreement, the expellees attested their own Germanness by referring to it. Later invocations of the concept affirmed the Germanness of the lands they left behind. Clearly, maintaining awareness of this fact was of critical importance for the expellee organizations and a major impetus for the erection of new monuments. Constructed to do much more than console, these monuments were designed

to inspire and rouse. They were erected to jar Germans from their complacency and galvanize efforts at the local level to push for a border revision. Elsewhere, monuments were unveiled which couched the expellee organizations' territorial claims in the language of the Cold War to increase the palatability of their desire for a border revision and at the same time shift responsibility for the expulsion and German division to the Soviets and their Communist allies.

Although the reacquisition of the German territory in Southeastern Europe was even less likely than the reacquisition of East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia (if not completely impossible), monuments were erected avowing the Germanness of the lands along the Danube settled by Germans by dint of their cultural achievements there. The fact that Danube Swabians, Banat Germans et al. had carved out a Heimat in inhospitable areas made the lands German even though they were governed by others. The fact that these Southeast European Germans—whose immediate postwar experiences were entirely different than those of other expellees—are counted amongst the victims of the expulsion—make these monuments all the more problematic. Lastly, the cemeteries filled with “Our dead in the East German Heimat” also facilitated subtle territorial claims because where German graves lie must be German territory.

Besides their invocations of Heimat, what binds these diverse monuments is that while often commemorative in tone, they were political in intent. Indeed, they commemorate as much the territory as the people who were killed, and bemoan a loss of German influence in and over Eastern Europe. What did their continuing pledges of loyalty really mean? Why this fixation with Heimat? First of all, making reference to it was particularly effective because it was part of a language spoken and understood by all

Germans. As Alon Confino points out, “In postwar West Germany, the lost Heimats of the East served as a powerful idiom of national victimhood and suffering.”<sup>1</sup> But the usage of this idiom was not limited to the expellees. In fact, Confino argues that West Germans in general were using the Heimat idea to “distance Germany from the Third Reich” and “represent Germans as twice victims: of the Hitler regime and of the Allies, especially the Russians and other East Europeans.”<sup>2</sup> Having suffered the loss of Heimat, the expellees had been just as victimized as any victim of the Nazis.

The implications of this stance for larger discussions of guilt and responsibility are crucial. As cluster A’s monuments show, the expellees did not treat the loss of the eastern territories as the consequence of the Nazis’ genocidal war. In a concerted effort to muddle a strict victim/perpetrator binary, the monuments blur any such causality. Instead, throughout the entire postwar period, the monuments purport the indisputable Germanness of the eastern territories. As we have seen, even the tacit recognition of the new borders did not mean the expellee organizations renounced what they believed to be their fundamental right to the homeland. The insistence to this day on the “right to homeland” is the case in point for what Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich saw as the disconnection of causality between the war and the expulsion. Writing about the “illusory” territorial demands of the expellee organizations, they noted, “Instead, Germany tried to compel the victors, on the basis of the victors’ own moral and political standards, to deal with the consequences of Nazi crimes as if the whole thing had been a relatively inconsequential military conflict.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance*, p. 85

<sup>2</sup> Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance*, p. 83 & p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> In their seminal collective psychological analysis of postwar (West) Germany, Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich held the prolonged hopes of territorial restitution not as “revanchist” but as

The expellee monuments demonstrate the unwillingness of a significant portion of the West German populace to recognize and accept German responsibility for the loss of the eastern territories. Acceptance of the territorial status quo would have signaled acknowledgement that the border adjustments and population transfer sanctioned by the Potsdam Agreement were justified results of the world war Germany initiated. Defying social trends concerning perceptions of the Nazi past starting in the late 1960s, none of the monuments here intimate even the slightest link between the expulsion and Nazi crimes. Moreover, the focus on the loss of Heimat appears to be a one-sided strategy of distancing and disconnecting that omits all non-German victims of WWII. As portrayed on the monuments memorializing the loss of Heimat, the expellees were the only ones who had suffered.

By the late 1970s, conceptions of the Nazi past in West Germany had changed entirely. Along with West Germany's recognition of Poland's western border, new Holocaust-centered historical narratives emerged. In response to these changes, monuments erected in the pursuit of concrete politics, as in the past, became scarce.<sup>4</sup>

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"illusory," for it reflected in their estimation the incapability of most Germans to recognize the "logical consequences of the war." See Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior. Tr. Beverley R. Placzek. (New York: Grove Press, 1975), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Overall, the expellee organizations erected fewer monuments, those they proposed faced rising opposition, and those already standing drew more scrutiny. Not surprisingly, much of this resistance came from young people and left-wing critics. Retterath writes, for example, of a notable two-year debate in the mid-1960s in Tübingen over a planned wooden signpost with distances to cities in the German East. Students in the university town threatened to chop down the post should the plan come to fruition. The proposal was dropped. It is difficult to ascertain whether the students were upset most by the connection to the lost territories or that the sculptor selected to create the monument was a high-ranking member of an extreme right-wing party (NPD). For more on this debate, see Retterath, "Gedenkstein und Wegweiser," p. 31 (66n). In most cases, however, the loudest political opposition came from the Social Democrats. Kittel suggests that as far as the commemoration of the expulsion and the eastern provinces went, municipal SPD officials attempted to implement at the local level what the social-liberal coalition had done via Ostpolitik at the national level. (See Kittel, Vertreibung der Vertriebenen? pp. 136-146). For instance, he lists a number of conflicts that arose in municipalities throughout the 1970s over the long-established Patenschaften between cities and towns in the Federal Republic and the formerly German cities beyond the Oder/Neisse they adopted. In the interest of reconciliation and improved bilateral relations between West Germany and its Polish neighbors, local SPD politicians sought to establish new partnerships between

Instead, the expellee organizations constructed different kinds of monuments in the pursuit of new political and commemorative goals. Associated with what I call “symbolic politics,” I examine these more recent monuments in the following chapters.

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equal West German and now Polish cities rather than Patenschaften. The financial support for commemorative activities guaranteed by the Patenschaften—including money for *Heimastuben* and presumably for the upkeep and erection of new monuments—dried up; authorities removed other monuments or moved them to less conspicuous areas; and officials renamed streets and buildings. For example, Kittel mentions two signposts in Berlin (on the corner of Mehringdamm and Yorckstrasse in Kreuzburg in 1972 and a second on the corner of Gneisenausstrasse also in Kreuzburg in 1976), that were removed on two respective initiatives of the SPD. Debates along party lines also ensued over inscriptions and locations of new monuments. A squabble between local politicians over the location of a proposed expellee monument in Euskirchen, North Rhine-Westphalia in 1976 also illustrates this point. The debate pitted SPD officials, who disputed the need of a new monument and who were against the ambiguous inscription and the prominent position in the central city cemetery the monument was to occupy, against their CDU (and in this case, FDP) counterparts. Because the Christian Democrats had a majority of the votes, the city council approved the proposal. Though it would be inaccurate to say the situation was the same everywhere, it is apparent that the widespread support of *all* political parties, had for the most part, and in most areas, ended.

## **B. AESTHETICS OF COLLECTIVE INNOCENCE**

There is no guilt or innocence of an entire people. Guilt, like innocence, is not collective, but personal.

--Richard von Weizsäcker, speech  
before the German Bundestag, May  
8, 1985<sup>5</sup>

### **CONTEXT & BACKGROUND: EXPULSION AND EXCULPATION**

In an address given at the dedication ceremony of an expellee monument in Karlsruhe on Volkstrauertag in 2000,<sup>6</sup> the chairman of the local BdV affiliate offered insights into many Germans' historical understandings concerning the place of the expulsion—and of the wartime suffering of German people in general—in the memory culture of the Federal Republic. The speaker talked at length about the victimization of the expellees and other Germans during and after WWII, and went on to mention the over eleven million Germans who perished due to the war, amongst whom he counted:

3,250,000 German soldiers as a direct result of combat; 1,000,000 women, children, and elderly people as a result of the bombing terror conducted in violation of international law (*völkerrechtswidriger Bombenterror*); 3,242,000 German soldiers held as Allied POWs; [...] 3,000,000 women, children, and elderly people during the expulsion from the Heimat after 1945; 500,000 murdered during the invasion of the Soviets in East and Middle Germany (*Ost- und Mitteleuropa*); 60,000 murdered during the invasion of Austria.

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<sup>5</sup> Rede von Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker bei der Gedenkveranstaltung im Plenarsaal des Deutschen Bundestages zum 40. Jahrestag des Endes des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Europa <[http://www.bundespraesident.de/Reden-und-Interviews/Reden-Richard-von-Weizsaecker-12166.629421/Rede-von-Bundespraesident-Rich.htm?global.back=/Reden-und-Interviews/-%2c12166%2c0/Reden-Richard-von-Weizsaecker.htm%3flink%3dbpr\\_liste](http://www.bundespraesident.de/Reden-und-Interviews/Reden-Richard-von-Weizsaecker-12166.629421/Rede-von-Bundespraesident-Rich.htm?global.back=/Reden-und-Interviews/-%2c12166%2c0/Reden-Richard-von-Weizsaecker.htm%3flink%3dbpr_liste)> Accessed February 13, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Erected in 1976, the original monument, a 4.4 meter-high wooden cross dedicated to DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT (The Dead of the Heimat) had to be removed due to damage sustained from prolonged exposure to the elements.



Also on this laundry list of German victims were the “thousands of women, children, and elderly who died in the death camps of Tito’s partisans,” and the “thousands of civilians who did not return home from forced labor in the Soviet Union.”

Moments later, the speaker added, “At this point, we do not want to judge; rather, we speak of the suffering of a hard fate and of victims without individual guilt.” (*Opfern ohne individuelle Schuld*). He went on to decry the way [German] officials are unable, “to get away from their habit of dedicating countless hours of remembrance and memorials to some [clearly meaning Germany’s victims] and passing over others [German victims] either by silence or distortion of the truth.” Before moving on to commentary over the purpose of the newly dedicated monument, the BdV functionary took one more jab at German memory culture, particularly as practiced by younger elites: “When it is about innocent victims and human suffering, the officials in politics and the media play the part of judges who, through their distribution of remembrance and grieving, have restored earthly justice. The thought that they act equally unchristian and inhumane, that they as an up-and-coming generation are simply overbearing, doesn’t enter their minds.”<sup>7</sup>

Equally as disquieting as the speech’s many inaccuracies and omissions (the inflated numbers, the exclusion of Germany’s victims, the inclusion of Austrians in the listing of German war victims) and the last criticism, was the speaker’s proclamation of innocence (twice) not only for *all* the victims of flight and expulsion, but also for *all* German war dead. Though the monument’s inscription only addresses the expellees,<sup>8</sup> the

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<sup>7</sup> All these quotations were taken from the speech as cited in Bund der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften – Kreisverband Karlsruhe (ed.) Mahnmal-Weihung und Totengedenkfeier am 19.11.2000, Hauptfriedhof Karlsruhe. (Karlsruhe: n.p., n.d.)

<sup>8</sup> The monument consists of a stone cross flanked by two large stones which bear the main inscriptions (left side) DEN MILLIONEN DEUTSCHEN, DIE DURCH GEWALTSAME VERTREIBUNG, FLUCHT, INTERNIERUNG UND VERSCHLEPPUNG IHR LEBEN VERLOREN, ZUM EHRENDEN GEDENKEN. (In honoring commemoration of the millions of Germans who lost their lives due to violent

presumably guiltless women, children, and elderly forced to leave their homes in the German East specifically addressed in the speech are lumped together with their compatriots killed by Allied aerial raids in the cities, who were in turn thrown in together with fallen soldiers. Not only were the victims of flight and expulsion collectively innocent but they were not distinguished from all other German war victims—whom the speaker also pronounced innocent. All the German war dead are subsumed into a single category. With this speech, the BdV functionary exculpates by extension all Germans (and, in a *völkisch*-racial manner, all Austrians). What begins with assertions of the collective innocence of some (usually women, children, and elderly) is quickly expanded to include more and more Germans, including soldiers.

The monuments of cluster B purport the collective innocence of the expellees. I contend they were erected in the expellee organizations' pursuit of "symbolic politics"—that is, the desire for the acknowledgement of expellee suffering, and the wish to be counted amongst the guiltless victims of WWII. To achieve this recognition, the monuments portray the expellees as the collectively innocent victims of events outside of their control and focus much more on the physical hardships and deaths connected with the expulsion than on the loss of the Heimat. Moreover, the monuments explicitly and implicitly bestow those they memorialize with the title "victim." Such monuments are the focus of the following three chapters.

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expulsion, flight, internment and forced deportation) and (right side) IHRE HEIMAT WAR DANZIG, OSTPREUSSEN, POMMERN, SCHLESSEN, WESTPREUSSEN, IN DER TSCHOSLOWAKEI UND IN DEN DEUTSCHEN SIEDLUNGSGEBIETEN IN ESTLAND, LITAUEN, JUGOSLAWIEN, POLEN, RUMÄNIEN, RUSSLAND, UND UNGARN. (Their homeland was Danzig, East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia, West Prussia, in Czechoslovakia, and in the German settlement areas in Estonia, Lithuania, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Russia and Hungary).

Expellee organizations erected most of these monuments in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. While the drastic thematic switch these more recent monuments indicate certainly has much to do with Ostpolitik and the West German government's renunciation of long-held territorial claims in the early 1970s, I believe it has even more to do with the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives I described in Chapter Two. The sweeping political and social changes of the 1960s and 1970s altered discussions of guilt and victimization in West Germany and effectively marginalized the experiences of the expellees—and all other German victims—in official accounts of the past. Thus the expellee organizations emplaced the monuments discussed here to counter national narratives focusing on the crimes of the Nazis and provide a putatively more complete history of WWII and its aftermath that sets the record straight. The historical counter-narrative these monuments articulate centers on German suffering and seeks acknowledgement of the expellees' plight and societal recognition of their victimization. Therefore, the monuments here address normative questions brought up in the speech in Karlsruhe with which I opened cluster B, and are part of the debates over who the victims of WWII actually were and whether remembrance of the war should dwell on Germany's victims or on German victims.

This cluster is organized like the previous one but because the themes discussed are generally more complicated and less literal, I begin each chapter with longer introductions which situate my work and provide more thorough background information. Cluster B is comprised of three individual chapters, all of which examine monuments that claim the collective innocence of the expellees: Chapter Seven—"Christian Symbolism & Collective Innocence" investigates monuments that link

expellee suffering to Christ's suffering. These monuments—which appeared primarily in the 1950s—are the earliest examples of this type. Chapter Eight—“*Mutterliebe*: The Allegory of the Female Form” looks at the usage of women, especially mothers with small children, as the signal figures of the expulsion. These monuments, I contend, extend the presumed innocence of defenseless women and children to male expellees. The monuments of the first two chapters elevate the expellees' experiences above those of all others. In Chapter Nine—“Subsuming Victims,” I look at monuments that stress expellee suffering in a different way. Particularly in the new Länder, monuments highlight the suffering of the Germans from the East not by portraying it as unique but by stressing its similarity to the suffering of others—specifically, to that of other (non-German) victims of the war and violence, who, few would argue, were guiltlessly persecuted and slain. By saying that expellees suffered in kind, these monuments purport that the expellees were equally inculpable for their fate.

All of these monuments employ the aesthetics of innocence to dissolve causal links between WWII and the expulsion and thus preclude the possibility that individuals from the German East might have been complicit in Nazi atrocities or that the Germans in general were in any way liable for what befell the expellees. It is to a more specific analysis of these monuments that I now turn.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM & COLLECTIVE INNOCENCE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Meinhold Lurz, author of a six-volume study of war memorials (which includes a very brief analysis of expellee monuments) found that around ninety percent of the 35,000-40,000 war memorials of various sorts erected in (West) Germany after the Second World War exhibit some type of Christian motif.<sup>1</sup> As examples of this symbolism, Lurz lists (among other things) the cross, crowns of thorns, the Man of Sorrows (*Schmerzensmann*), pietà, and the resurrection of Christ—all designed and erected, though not always by religious communities, to commemorate various aspects and victims groups associated with the war. He attributes this not to a sincere return to Christian belief and general devoutness on the part of the West Germans, but to the “lack of a new state ideology in the still young republic” with which to make sense of the death and destruction—military and civilian—of the recent past. West Germans had to find new ways to understand and justify the reasons for dying in a lost war. No longer would death on the battlefield serve to glorify the nation. “The new Christianity of the 1950s,” according to Lurz, “served as an alternative to nationalism.”<sup>2</sup> After the nation and the Vaterland had been discredited by the xenophobic hyper-nationalism of National

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<sup>1</sup> See Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik, p. 217. This figure is also cited in Sabine Behrenbeck, “Heldenkult oder Friedensmahnung? Kriegerdenkmale nach beiden Weltkriegen,” in Gottfried Niedhart and Dieter Riesenberger (eds.) Lernen aus dem Krieg? Deutsche Nachkriegszeiten 1918 und 1945. (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck), pp. 344-361.

<sup>2</sup> See Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik, p. 141.

Socialism, West Germans used Christianity as the lens through which they could view their past.

As I showed in cluster A, the borderline nationalist and Germanic motifs seen on local expellee monuments demonstrate that such attitudes were not completely absent in the postwar era, as Lurz purports.<sup>3</sup> It does, however, seem apparent that the “re-Christianization” of West German society, “became the most important interconfessional response to war, fascism, and defeat,” as Frank Biess states in his study of the cultural and political implications of the POW phenomenon in post-WWII Germany.<sup>4</sup> Biess writes that “[re-Christianization] propagated a return to Christian principles as the most promising concept for overcoming National Socialism as well as for safeguarding postwar society against the Communist East.” Correspondingly, representations of the recent past displaying Christian symbolism proliferated, including the thousands of war memorials identified by Lurz. In fact, as Biess puts it, “Christian motifs and tropes provided essential components for West German commemorations of the Second World War, even in seemingly secular settings.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, high percentages of local expellee monuments (though lower than Lurz’s figure of approximately 90% of all war memorials) also display religious forms and iconography.<sup>6</sup> The cross is in fact the most common form chosen to commemorate the expulsion and the loss of Heimat. So prevalent did re-Christianization as a strategy of memorialization become, that the

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the scores of monuments with the coats-of-arms of the eastern territories, the dozens with Germany in its 1937 borders, and the many monuments in the form of erratic boulders.

<sup>4</sup> See Frank Biess, Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> For example, over half of the monuments in Hessen (121 out of 236) consist solely of or incorporate a simple cross.

wartime experiences of even non-Christian groups were commemorated with these familiar symbols.<sup>7</sup>

The central question here is, of course, why? What did the Christian tradition have to offer West Germans—and the expellees in particular—after WWII for understanding their recent past? What historical interpretations did the employment of Christian symbolism facilitate? As a response, I turn back to Lurz,<sup>8</sup> who argues that the return to religiosity provided relatives and friends of the dead of WWII above all with solace. Believers in Christ could be redeemed; and though those commemorated—i.e. the war dead—were gone forever, they were in a better place and could enjoy everlasting life. Moreover, further comfort was provided by the Christian belief that, upon their own deaths, the surviving family members would reunite with their deceased loved ones. Therefore, Lurz writes, the many crosses and other references to Christ's resurrection offered consolation by symbolizing the salvation of mankind.<sup>9</sup>

While it appears at first glance that the monuments exhibit these religious symbols merely to provide comfort, other elements make it seem as if more is at play. In fact, Lurz is critical of the war memorials that express such sentiments. At the heart of his analysis is the assertion that West German society did not draw the proper lessons from the war experience, and that post-WWII monuments in the Federal Republic were not sufficiently

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<sup>7</sup> This enlightening point was made by Harold Marcuse, Frank Schimmelfennig, and Jochen Spielmann, who note the existence of a *Verfolgtenkmal* (Monument to the Persecuted) in Kassel dedicated to DEN VERNICHTETEN 1933-1945 (The Annihilated 1933-1945) which as its centerpiece features a large crown of thorns. The choice of this motif seems problematic because while many of those persecuted by the Nazis were indeed Christians, millions of others were not. See Harold Marcuse, Frank Schimmelfennig, and Jochen Spielmann. *Steine des Anstoßes. Nationalsozialismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg in Denkmälern 1945-1985*. (Hamburg: Hein & Co, 1985), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Though his study encompasses war memorials dedicated to civilians, it bears repeating that the real focus of Lurz's work is on war memorials dedicated to fallen German soldiers. Nevertheless, his analysis applies to other groups as well.

<sup>9</sup> Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland*. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik, p. 216 & p. 219.

anti-war. The war memorials' heavy focus on Christian redemption distracts the relatives, comrades and members of veterans' organizations, as well other contemporaries—Lurz argues—from the real circumstances surrounding the deaths of the fallen. Cause and effect are omitted, or overlooked. The fact that the dead soldiers had served in a war of aggression that had spread death and destruction throughout Europe and the world, moreover, was not included in the monuments.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the suffering of the fallen and the anguish of their relatives and surviving comrades, which according to Lurz appeared frequently on the war memorials,<sup>11</sup> is coupled with that of Jesus Christ on the cross. Put differently, the sacrifices of dead German soldiers were like those of Christ. The fate of the fallen was identified with that of Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup>

The authors of a thematically similar but less exhaustive study are equally skeptical about the use of Christian forms and iconography on post-WWII monuments in West Germany. They find that virtually all such symbols “refer almost exclusively to the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ.” This in itself is not as problematic as drawing parallels with the suffering and death of Christ and his sinless nature. They state, “Concomitantly, the actual circumstances of death can be transported away from the political realm through the latently implied identification of the dead with Christ to the mystical-sacral realm. The hindrance to political reflection caused thereby can conceal the ideological intentions of the monument’s initiators.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, without examining the origins of their suffering, the monuments’ sponsors used Christian symbolism to connect the wartime experiences of various victim groups to the death of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Marcuse, Schimmelfennig and Spielmann, Steine des Anstoßes, p. 23.



Jesus Christ on the cross. Their affliction and sacrifices are similar to his. As I show in what follows, the initiators of local expellee monuments employed Christian symbols and iconography to propose precisely this analogy.

I am not the first to note the occurrence of Christian symbolism in the monuments of the expellees.<sup>14</sup> In 2008, Stephan Scholz published an article in a Swiss journal in which he sketched out the changes in how expellee organizations have used Christian symbolism on monuments to narrate their experiences of flight and expulsion through the decades.<sup>15</sup> While Scholz's contribution is indeed helpful, it both over- and underemphasizes certain points about expellee monuments in general and those displaying Christian motifs in particular. For example, his stress on the use of monuments with Christian motifs to make oblique territorial claims underplays the scores of monuments that make quite literal and forceful claims. Some of his readings of monuments are also overly Catholic. In addition, in the cross Scholz sees sacrifice (*Opfer*) as the central meaning whereas I see in this familiar motif seen in all cemeteries of Christendom a polyvalent symbol, the meaning of which encompasses mourning, but also hope, Christian love, forgiveness, salvation, and so on. The cross alone is not always automatically the political symbol as Scholz makes it seem. Nevertheless, my disagreements with Scholz are in most cases quite minor. Indeed, though his article has broader aims, it makes a valuable larger point similar to the one Lurz made about the repeated invocation of the Christian tradition on expellee monuments—he claims it was

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<sup>14</sup> Tobias Weger briefly described the popular use of religious, particularly Catholic, motifs in a variety of cultural objects—including monuments—in his article: "Die katholische Rhetorik bei den vertriebenen Sudetendeutschen in der Nachkriegszeit," *Bohemia*. 45, 2, 2004, pp. 454-468.

<sup>15</sup> Stephan Scholz, "'Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse.'"

used to cast the expulsion experience and the suffering it engendered as one akin to that of Jesus Christ's crucifixion.

Even more important is Scholz's argument about the implications of these claims in terms of shaping historical narratives and understanding the past. The monuments displaying Christian symbolism have much to say about how the expellees—and all Germans—viewed their own suffering vis-à-vis the suffering of other victims. He writes, “In light of the latent competition of victims of World War II, the goal of the victimhood rhetoric and symbolism is obviously to grant a prominent place for the German expellees and for the Germans as a whole in the hierarchy of victims.”<sup>16</sup> The monuments do more than show the expellees as victims, however. As Scholz goes on, through their suffering, parallel to that of Christ, the victimhood of the expellees serves as expiation for the sins of the Nazis. He writes, “Through the victimization of the expellees [...] the atonement of German guilt and a restoration of German innocence have taken place.”<sup>17</sup> The fate suffered by the expellees was punishment for the misdeeds of others. Just as sinless Jesus suffered and died to save the world and release all believers from their sins, the supposed innocent suffering of the expellees did the same for their countrymen. In other words, the fact the expellees suffered too absolved Germans of their guilt. It is this critical point of Scholz's article that I would like to refine and examine in greater detail.

## THE MONUMENTS

Of greatest interest to me are the monuments with religious motifs that add to the discourse on German victimization in and after the Second World War. Therefore, not all

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 306.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

monuments displaying Christian symbolism will be discussed here. A simple cross dedicated “To our dead” clearly displays a religious motif, as do the crosses inscribed with the phrase HERR GELEITE UNS HEIM ([Lord, guide us home] e.g. in Bremerhaven and Söllingen, Baden-Württemberg, among other places). None of these, however, directly references the suffering of Christ or other biblical occurrences to contextualize and represent the expulsion.<sup>18</sup> Other expressions of piety—either on the part of the monuments’ initiators, or of those commemorated—are also not included. Instead, the monuments under examination combine commemorations of the expulsion with religious symbols and biblical references. These monuments employ the cross and other unmistakable Christian elements, such as crowns of thorns, to ascribe a religious meaning to the expulsion. Put differently, I am looking at expellee monuments, as Lurz puts it, where, “From the passion of Christ becomes the passion of the German people in WWII.”<sup>19</sup> In a nutshell, with these monuments, representatives of expellee organizations who initiated them were trying to make clear that the suffering inflicted on the expellees was the worst kind of all.<sup>20</sup> Such assertions would, of course, have profound implications for discussions of German guilt, innocence, atonement, and absolution.

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<sup>18</sup> I also do not include references to the lost churches of the Heimat nor examples of the widespread practice in the Federal Republic of re-assembling and re-hanging bells from the churches and cathedrals in the eastern provinces. For a brief exploration of this topic in a very specific context, see Marion Josephin Wetzel, Die Integration von Flüchtlingen in evangelischen Kirchengemeinden. Das Beispiel Schleswig-Holstein nach 1945. Kieler Studien zur Volkskunde und Kulturgeschichte, Band 7. (Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2009), pp. 216ff.

<sup>19</sup> Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik, p. 172.

<sup>20</sup> These views were, of course, already captured in two key passages from the Charter of the German Expellees from 1950. The first encapsulates expellee suffering vis-à-vis other Germans. Recall the document’s demand for the “Just and reasonable distribution of the burdens of the last war among the entire German people and an honest application of this principle.” The implication here, of course, is that the expellees had fared worse as a result of the war than their compatriots. In the minds of many expellees, because of their losses, they had borne the ultimate burden and made the ultimate sacrifice. Transcending the national context, the second passage dealing with the singularity of the expellees’ suffering also pertains to questions of guilt and responsibility. It declares, “The nations of the world should become sensitive of their co-responsibility for the fate of the expellees who have suffered most from the hardships

There are specific examples of this narrative analogization. In addition to the large numbers of expellee monuments which take the form of crosses offering consolation to relatives or explicitly and implicitly raising territorial claims, a smaller number of monuments link the expulsion of Germans from the eastern territories to biblical happenings, especially the suffering of Jesus Christ. Unlike in other cases, however, in which just a cross is featured there seems to be no regional patterns in the locations of these monuments.<sup>21</sup> That is, they are located throughout West Germany. (For obvious reasons, monuments exhibiting religious forms and iconography of any type are rare in the former GDR). The temporal distribution of the monuments of this type in West Germany indicates the seeds of this narrative were planted early on and were part of the re-Christianizing, redemptive memories of the war Biess describes. Thus, while I concur with Scholz in his assessment that the emphasis on expellee victimhood has grown over time (as opposed to the political efficacy of territorial claims, which has dissipated) I would also argue that that elements of this narrative were present from the beginning—despite the ongoing primacy of the reacquisition of the Heimat as chief goal of the expellee organizations—and continued intermittently throughout the postwar era.

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of our times.” The expellees’ Christ-like experience has been elevated vis-à-vis all other victim groups. *They* suffered most of all. Correspondingly, the monuments in this category are devoid of references to other (non-Aryan German) victims. The only victimization of consequence was that of the expellees. Their suffering of biblical proportions was all that mattered.

<sup>21</sup> There are, however, regional patterns in the forms of the crosses. For example, in areas with large numbers of Catholics, particularly in southern Germany, crucifixes are prevalent, whereas in areas with large numbers of Protestants, i.e. northern Germany, unadorned crosses are more common.



**Figure 23 Marbach. Photo: J.L.**

My first example occupies a central place in the main cemetery in Friedrich Schiller's birthplace, Marbach, Baden-Württemberg (Figures 23 & 24). The monument, initiated by a group of local expellees and erected in 1952,<sup>22</sup> consists of a tall wooden cross with a two-fold commemorative thrust that encompasses both the territorial dimension discussed in previous chapters as well as the physical hardships of flight and expulsion and the implied innocence of those who shared this experience. First, the monument is typical of the pre-Ostpolitik era in that it directly references the border issue. Displayed prominently near the base is a hand-carved shield bearing the coats-of-arms of nine eastern provinces. Clearly, few of the expellee organizations' commemorative efforts of the 1950s could be divorced from the concrete politics of agitating for a border adjustment.

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<sup>22</sup> The monument was erected the same year the federal state Baden-Württemberg came into existence upon the merger of the states Württemberg-Baden, Baden, and Württemberg-Hohenzollern.

Nevertheless, the cross employs additional Christian symbolism to draw parallels between Christ's suffering and that of the expellees. The second commemorative thrust therefore foreshadows the shift in emphasis away from territory to assertions of collective innocence. The cross exhibits two other elements more commonly associated with the symbolic politics of the post-Ostpolitik era, which shed light on the monument's hybridity. First, to make clear the monument's point of reference, the cross beam bears the inscription: "1945." It appears that the monument's initiators were confident that the historical understanding they sought to convey with the cross would not be misunderstood. There are no other explanatory inscriptions. Though the various phases of flight and expulsion actually happened over several years, starting in 1944, and lasted until the end of the decade, this year is singled out as the period of greatest suffering.<sup>23</sup> This reference to a date rather than to the dead left behind (e.g. UNSEREN TOTEN DER HEIMAT), or to the Heimat, limits the field of possible referents to the originary acts of expulsion themselves.

The monument's second and more important element indicates how the initiators wanted to portray the expellees. The intersection of the two beams is ringed by a large metal crown of thorns—one of the most important Christian symbols—which, for Lurz, “unifies all the suffering due to the war and its consequences.”<sup>24</sup> More effectively than the cross alone, the crown of thorns links the victimization of the expellees to that of

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<sup>23</sup> The significance of this year for commemorating the expulsion is obvious: Setting the large-scale flight of Germans in motion, the Red Army's winter offensive launched in January; as the year progressed and the eastern front further collapsed, more and more Germans were evacuated by Nazi authorities; May brought the formal cessation of hostilities as well as the concomitant ‘*wilde Vertreibungen*’ of Germans by local revenge-seeking partisans, and August saw the Potsdam Agreement and the official settlement of Germany's postwar borders and the subsequent forced population transfer.

<sup>24</sup> Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland*. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik, p. 218. Lurz writes that the crown of thorns was one of the more common embellishments on the war memorials of the Federal Republic. He writes it was used to connote the wartime suffering of other German civilian groups such as at the monument for victims of the Allied firebombing of Hamburg at Ohlsdorfer Cemetery.

Christ.<sup>25</sup> Whereas the cross alone stands for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and for Christianity as a whole, the crown of thorns stands for Christ's physical torment and eventual torturous death. Scholz writes that the crown of thorns has been used on expellee monuments as an embellishment of the cross to more compellingly convey the "Passion" of the expellees.<sup>26</sup>



**Figure 24 Marbach (close-up). Photo: J.L.**

As portrayed here, however, the expellees' experiences were Christ-like: like him, they had been humiliated, tortured, and killed. While I do not call into question that many expellees truly suffered during the expulsion, I do find problematic the fact that monuments of this type make it look like all expellees suffered the same fate, or that their suffering occurred for the same (or similar) reasons, and under the same (or similar) circumstances, as Christ's did. Of course, those who erected this monument, and the millions of others who came to reside in what became the Federal Republic, were the survivors of the westward treks and the forced migration. They had not suffered the worst

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<sup>25</sup> In three of the four Gospels of the New Testament, Matthew (27:29), Mark (15:17) and John (19:2) write of the crown of thorns placed on Jesus Christ's head by Roman soldiers to mock him as "King of the Jews" before his crucifixion.

<sup>26</sup> Scholz, "Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse," p. 304.

fate when compared to the Germans' many victims. Even more problematic, however, is the additional meaning with which such monuments are encoded. Taken a step further, by linking the expulsion to Christ's suffering, the monument tells an exculpatory narrative of the past. According to teachings in the New Testament, Christ was persecuted unjustly and suffered innocently. He was tortured and died undeservedly, so when the expellees connect their experiences to this fate, the expellees are portrayed in a similar light. The linkage represented by the cross, the shield of Wappen, the inscription "1945," and the crown of thorns at the monument in Marbach amounts, therefore, to an assertion of collective innocence. The biblical metaphor was thus employed to absolve the expellees of the guilt of the war and Nazi crimes.<sup>27</sup>

Another example from the 1950s makes a more direct visual link between flight and expulsion and the crucifixion of Christ to assert the collective innocence of the expellees. As a symbolic expression of the "insoluble bonds between Pomerania and Schleswig-Holstein," the *Pommernkapelle* (Pomerania Chapel) was added to a wing of the *St.-Nikolai-Kirche* in Kiel, which due to extensive war damage had been under reconstruction throughout the decade (Figure 25). The Pomerania Chapel was created to stand vicariously for the many lost churches of Pomerania, which were "erected there as

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<sup>27</sup> A number of expellee monuments from the pre-Ostpolitik era display the crown of thorns. In fact, use of the motif was surprisingly widespread in the 1950s when monuments were erected in Gütersloh, NRW (1951), Immenhausen, Hessen (1955), Höhr-Grenzhausen, Rhineland-Palatinate (1956), Essingen, Baden-Württemberg (1959), all displaying this telltale symbol of suffering and expiation. Crowns of thorns were seen on later monuments as well, for instance, in Villingen, Baden-Württemberg, where the artist Willi Dorn created a memorial site in 1967 comprised of a metal sculpture of a crown of thorns atop three granite blocks which surround a small fountain. Located in a green space in the city, the monument represents the three parts of Germany—the Federal Republic, the GDR, and the eastern territories—all of which were held together by the sculpture of the crown. Carved into the base of the monument is the text UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT (Unforgotten Heimat) along with the names of several eastern provinces. According to the BdV's online catalogue of monuments, the crown of thorns stands for the expellees' *Leidensweg* (path of suffering, ordeal). The three constitutive parts of Germany were therefore held together by a symbol of expellee suffering. A crown of thorns also adorns the monument in Landshut, Bavaria, which was dedicated in 1986.



meaningful attestations of German architecture.”<sup>28</sup> The connection to the Heimat which the chapel’s initiators were attempting to convey is obvious. The chapel’s floor features a large mosaic map of the Pomeranian region with the seals of cities in the eastern territories. The Landsmannschaft of Pomeranians contributed the largest individual donation for the chapel and paid for the new addition’s centerpiece: two large stained-glass windows dedicated in two separate ceremonies in 1957 and 1958, and designed by Lotte Usadel, a local artist born in Stettin, Pomerania’s capital city (today Szczecin, Poland). The first depicts the *Jakobikirche* in Stettin and its large organ, which, like the *St.-Nikolai-Kirche* in Kiel, had been destroyed by Allied bombs in WWII.

Like the monument in Marbach, however, the Pomerania Chapel goes beyond upholding a connection to the old Heimat. The second and more important window symbolically connects the suffering of the expulsion to Christ’s crucifixion, and once again asserts the collective innocence of the expellees. Consecrated by a clergyman at its unveiling, the window features a large depiction of Christ on the cross, surrounded by renderings of flight and expulsion: a man holding the hand of a small child while consoling a visibly distraught woman; an old man with a cane arduously shouldering his few remaining belongings in a bundle accompanied by a woman in black and a child; three figures struggling to move a heavy-laden cart; a long caravan of downtrodden mothers bearing their infants and other small children; horse-drawn carriages; and other assorted broken and battered people carrying meager possessions. Suffering from prolonged exposure to the elements, all the figures are warmly dressed in long cloaks, and wear hats and scarves. Interestingly, both genders are represented on the window,

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Herbert Thode, “Der Bugenhagenteppich in der Kieler St. Nikolaikirche,” Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Kieler Stadtgeschichte. 3/4, July/October 1966, p. 234 & p. 235.

though the advanced age of some men is made apparent by the use of canes.<sup>29</sup> A younger man at the lower left uses a shovel to dig a grave for one of the victims of the perilous journey. In addition, just as Christ's crucifiers are absent, the Polish partisans and Soviet authorities who forced the Germans out of their homes are not depicted. The symbolic link, it seems, required no explicit articulation.



Figure 23 Pommernkapelle, Kiel. Photo: BdV Archive

Such depictions of the expulsion have grown in familiarity throughout the postwar decades and have become central images in the visual vocabulary used to narrate the expulsion. The more harrowing incidents of the flight—replete with scenes in winter predominated by women, children, and old men using primitive modes of transportation (horse-drawn carts and carriages)—were chosen to represent the experience of the expulsion. Here, however, the window also juxtaposes these images with a depiction of

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<sup>29</sup> The meaning of the employment of gender for asserting the collective innocence of the expellees in depicting the expulsion is discussed in the next chapter.

Christ's crucifixion to draw parallels between their plight and his. Once again, the expulsion has been linked—visually—to Christ's suffering.<sup>30</sup>

Not every local monument uses Christ's suffering as its biblical referent to convey the victimization and guiltlessness of the expellees. For example, erected much later in the small Bavarian town Bubenreuth, a monument mounted on the wall of the *Pfarrkirche Maria Heimsuchung* (Parish Church of Mary's Visitation), uses the Holy Family's escape to Egypt (referenced with three small pyramids on the right side) to protect baby Jesus and his parents from King Herod's order calling for the murder of the first-born sons of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-15) to represent the expulsion (Figure 26).<sup>31</sup> The event is commonly referred to as the "Slaughter of the Innocents." The South Tyrolean sculptor Paul Gartner created the large bronze disk, which was consecrated at an ecumenical ceremony on Volkstrauertag in 2003. Anonymous local survivors of the expulsion paid for it. The connection to biblical occurrences was deliberate. According to an article by Heinz Reiss in the *Erlanger Nachrichten* from November 18, 2003, the monument's circular form represents "*die Unendlichkeit*" (infinity). The tree and the dwellings on the left side stand for the homes the expellees were forced to relinquish. Joseph's outstretched arm points toward the expellees' uncertain future.

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<sup>30</sup> Another example of this visual link is the painting which was hung in at the Glashütte Süßmuth in Immenhausen, Hessen in 1955, which features a depiction of the expulsion of the Germans from Penzig, Silesia in 1947 and their arrival in western Germany overlooked by a rendering of Christ's death on the cross.

<sup>31</sup> The community considers the monument one of its most important landmarks. It is listed as one of Bubenreuth's *Sehenswürdigkeiten* (places of interest) on the town's official website: <<http://www.bubenreuth.de/index-Dateien/Sehenswuerdigkeiten.htm>> Accessed August 10, 2010.



**Figure 26 Bubenreuth. Photo: BdV Archive**

What is arresting about this monument is not only that it once again exhibits Christian imagery to represent the expulsion, but also that it does so much later than those described above. However, at the same time as it illustrates a continuity of Biblical narrative strategies, the monument reveals a dramatic long-term shift in the societal acceptance of historical narratives. First, unlike the earlier monuments employing Christian symbolism, this monument dispenses with overt references to lost territory. It features no coats-of-arms or other claims to the old Heimat. The focus of the monument is the commemoration of the expellees' suffering, not agitation for the reacquisition of territory.

Second and more importantly, the shift is also the result of a larger movement away from German-centered narratives and toward the centrality of the Holocaust in narrating Germany's recent past. Though the monuments' initiators chose a biblical analogy to convey a message similar to those of its related predecessors, the intrinsic assertion of the expellees' collective innocence in this monument is more restrained than

in similar monuments of the 1950s. Though the monument memorializes a hazardous, life-threatening flight to an unknown destination—Joseph, Mary, and Baby Jesus were fleeing for their lives—the expellees’ fate is not shown as the worst imaginable. Put differently, in light of the revelations in the 1960s about Nazi crimes, the suggestion that the expellees had suffered worst of all WWII victims—conveyed by linking the expulsion to Christ’s death on the cross—was no longer convincing. Though the monument’s focus was still solely on the expellees’ victimization, such assertions had become too egregious to be acceptable. As a result, less contentious methods had to be sought to express the injustice of the expulsion and the collective innocence of the expellees.

## **CONCLUSION**

As Scholz has observed, the use of Christian symbolism on local expellee monuments has served many purposes. Building on Scholz’s observations, I have detailed an important subset of monuments that uses biblical metaphors to assert the expellees’ collective innocence. This category of monuments, though small in number, contributes greatly to our ability to understand the effects of larger societal developments on postwar historical understandings. In sum, they reveal how German victimization and innocence was expressed prior to the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives. These monuments were part of the articulation of an early narrative of German victimization. This demonstrates that alongside the expellee organizations’ political efforts to agitate for a change in the postwar territorial status quo, the discourse on German victimization had become entrenched well prior to the key political and societal developments of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Scholz speculates that the use of Christian symbolism to express the expellees' collective innocence dissipated over time due to the secularization of West German society.<sup>32</sup> Experiencing their heyday in the 1950s, the numbers of monuments of this type did indeed drop significantly in the following decades. While Scholz's argument may in part be the case, his explanation is not entirely persuasive. To be sure, religious iconography still appeared on local expellee monuments in subsequent decades. However, as a means of proposing the collective innocence of the expellees—particularly, of suggesting they suffered on par with Christ—the motif lost virtually all currency. Rather than resulting from a societal move away from public religiosity, however, I would argue that the decreased employment of this commemorative strategy had more to do with the increase in public awareness of the crimes the Nazis committed, in particular, the Holocaust. With this knowledge, the assertion that Germans had suffered Christ-like and most of all as a result of WWII was no longer plausible and in fact became socially and politically unpalatable. For this reason, only a few individual cases liken the expulsion to the suffering of Christ following Ostpolitik and the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives. The expellee organizations had to find other means to feature the guiltlessness of the expellees. I discuss two such tactics in the following two chapters.

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<sup>32</sup> Scholz, "Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse," p. 307.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **MUTTERLIEBE:**

### **THE ALLEGORY OF THE FEMALE FORM**<sup>1</sup>

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Because of the ignominious shadow cast by National Socialism, representing German experiences of WWII has been an inordinately complex and problematic undertaking. Examining one strategy for addressing this thorny issue, Elizabeth Heinemann has described how the female war experience helped fill the representational vacuum that emerged after 1945.<sup>2</sup> As a result of women's demographic predominance and the atypically visible role played by women in the immediate aftermath of the war (i.e. the so-called *Frauenüberschuss*)<sup>3</sup>, coupled with male dishonor and disgrace over having served in the military of the criminal Nazi regime, she argues, the “stereotypical female experience” was universalized as the basis for a new national identity for all Germans, regardless of gender. Specifically, she identifies the memories of three

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter's title consists of two parts. The first comes from the title of a sculpture (*Mutterliebe*—“motherly love”) located outside the half-timbered Haus der Landsmannschaften—a museum dedicated to preserving the culture of Germans from the eastern territories—in Pforzheim, Baden-Württemberg. Dedicated in 1994, the sculpture consists of a woman lovingly and protectively cradling three infants. The base bears the inscription DEN MILLIONEN OPFERN VON FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG NACH DEM II. WELTKRIEG. BESONDERS DEN MÜTTERN UND DEN KINDERN ZUM GEDENKEN (To the millions of victims of flight and expulsion after WWII, especially in commemoration of the mothers and children). The monument's base features two other inscriptions which refer, respectively, to the monument's initiator and designer (Herwig Schubert) and to the artist who carried out the sculpture (Gerhard Bruhn-Dzielcielski), both of whom were born in the eastern provinces. The origin of the second part is discussed below.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Heinemann, “The Hour of the Women: Memories of Germany's ‘Crisis Years’ and German National Identity,” *American Historical Review*, 101, (April 1996), pp. 354-395. Heinemann's focus is on the years 1942-1948 but it seems her analysis is apt for subsequent years as well.

<sup>3</sup> Heinemann writes that in October 1946 women outnumbered men in the occupied zones of the former German Reich by 7 million. (“The Hour of the Women,” p. 374).

“moments” which served key roles in forging the new identity: female victimization brought about by Allied bombings, fleeing the advancing Red Army, and rape; the massive rebuilding efforts by the *Trümmerfrauen* (rubble women); and sexual upheaval during the Allied occupation. Germans appropriated these moments to help themselves understand and come to grips with the recent past. What started as personal experiences of *some* women became, in many cases, the popular memories of the war for both genders. In time, some of those popular memories became the official memories of the war.<sup>4</sup>

Why were female memories chosen? Heinemann declares that the emphasis on women’s wartime experiences in general was especially useful because they offered “images that could be generalized and that provided vital alternatives to representations of militaristic and genocidal Germans. They also prompted a discourse about decline in the realm of sexual morality and the loss of national sovereignty that helped to deflect attention away from troubling moral questions about the Nazi past.”<sup>5</sup> This kind of approach had a major impact on the way Germans viewed their recent past. By embracing these female memories, men could shed their own, more troublesome, memories and distance themselves from the past. What this meant in practice was, as Heinemann explains, “The disproportionately female civilian experience and the almost exclusively female rape experience...seem to have been especially well-suited for allowing Germans to consider their nation as a whole an innocent victim of war.”<sup>6</sup> Few would contest that German women had suffered on the home front, so by adopting female

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 367.



experiences as their own, German men, could view themselves and their Vaterland as victims too.

Heinemann discusses large-scale appropriations of female experiences for the entire nation, i.e., about one of many strategies that shaped how Germans could view the past and from which *all Germans* could benefit. But the same process transpired on a smaller scale as well. For example, the female experience of forced migration—in particular, women’s perilous flights westward in the face of the invading Soviets—has become one of the signature experiences of the expulsion and depictions of these flights have become a central motif in representing it. Moreover, these female experiences have been chosen as representational of the expulsion experience for *all expellees*, women and men.

Before commencing my analysis of these monuments, however, it is worth mentioning that the use of female forms as symbols of grief and mourning has long held a place in the history of the visual arts, particularly in commemorative art. David Robinson, for example, presents a collection of photographs with idealized women as “bearers of sorrow,” grieving for men.<sup>7</sup> In addition, and more significant for this study, female forms have also long been used allegorically. In fact, the latter half of this section’s title is taken from the subtitle of a monograph by Marina Warner.<sup>8</sup> In it, Warner shows how generic female figures have often been employed allegorically in public art to embody high-minded ideals such as liberty, justice, or virtue. In a different study on a similar topic,

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<sup>7</sup> See David Robinson, *Saving Graces: Images of Women in European Cemeteries*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). Robinson notices four general types of funerary sculpture featuring female forms: 1. Women so overwhelmed in sorrow that they drape themselves over the graves or at the feet of the deceased. 2. Upward-reaching women attempting in vain to reach a loved one who has ascended into Heaven. 3. Inconsolable and immovable women holding themselves. 4. Women resigned to their fate and accepting of death.

<sup>8</sup> Marina Warner, *Monuments & Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Silke Wenk writes that “Signs of femininity have served again and again historically to bring into view and to “personify” that which cannot be represented or portrayed (*Nichtdarstellbares*).”<sup>9</sup> Combining the two, mourning and allegory, monuments to the First World War in Germany (and elsewhere) featuring women provide an illustrative case in point. Lurz notes the widespread use of the female form in war memorials after WWI, especially to distinguish between the brutality of the warfront and the tranquility of the Heimat.<sup>10</sup>

With few exceptions, however, the women featured on local expellee monuments do not fit the historic mould of mourning mothers and grieving wives. I would argue, however, that they do in fact perform allegorical functions. Small numbers of monuments portray lone women and their children as the personifications of German forced migration. The women and children embody the personal trauma associated with leaving the Heimat. So what is the problem with that? After all, women had in all likelihood constituted the majority of the adult civilian population at the time of the expulsion.<sup>11</sup> Left to fend for themselves, it was the women of the German East who in largest number had fled westward as the Red Army advanced toward Berlin. In addition, it was also the women of the eastern provinces who had fallen victim in greatest number to the

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<sup>9</sup> Silke Wenk, Versteinerte Weiblichkeit: Allegorien in der Skulptur der Moderne. (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1996). Wenk sets out to track how ultimate meanings of the allegories featuring female forms have changed over time. She is also the author of a shorter study which examines the allegories of female form in the monuments of Berlin. See Wenk, “Warum ist die (Kriegs-) Kunst weiblich? Frauenbilder in der Plastik auf öffentlichen Plätzen in Berlin,” Kunst + Unterricht, Heft 101, April 1986, pp. 7-14.

<sup>10</sup> Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik p. 177. Gerhard Armanski has also written about the use of female forms, particularly the usurpation of the traditional Christian pietà, in German war memorials. See Armanski, “...und wenn wir sterben müssen:” Die politische Ästhetik von Kriegerdenkmälern. (Hamburg: VSA-Verlag, 1988).

<sup>11</sup> This seems a safe assumption though I am unaware of a reliable demographic breakdown on the victims of expulsion based on gender or age. Due to the mass mobilization for the Nazi war effort, virtually all males—except for the very young, the elderly and infirm—had been called away from home.

“unrestrained explosion of sexual violence” unleashed by revenge-seeking Soviet soldiers so powerfully described by Norman M. Naimark’s study.<sup>12</sup>

In this regard, Heinemann is correct in pointing out that “women dominated the refugee experience.”<sup>13</sup> Yet gender played no role when it came to defining expellees in a legalistic sense. Not all expellees were women, nor had all expellees fled the eastern territories, nor did all make the dangerous trek across the frozen waters of the Baltic Sea or along the snow-covered roads of East Prussia. Regardless of their personal circumstances, and regardless of their gender or age, all Germans from the former eastern territories were recognized by federal law as expellees. As Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn point out,

Thanks to the Federal Expellee Law of 1953, *everyone who came “from the East”* could label him/herself as an expellee, regardless of how s/he left his homeland: whether the person was forced by Nazi authorities or fled by May 1945, whether expelled or forced to resettle between 1945-1947, or whether the person left the Heimat voluntarily between 1950-1990 and lives as a so-called ‘Spätaussiedler’ in West Germany. The collective appellation “expellee” in no way designates people connected by the same or similar experiences.<sup>14</sup> (my emphasis)

This meant, of course, that despite the fact that women probably had borne the brunt of the direct violence and suffering brought about by expulsion, they were not the only ones to claim the expellee status and the presumption of victimhood that it conferred. Millions of men—who spent the end of the war in the field or in prisoner of war camps—claimed it, as well. What is more, the women’s dominance of the expulsion experience did not

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<sup>12</sup> Norman M. Naimark, The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 79-80. For more on the large-scale rape of German women and girls at the end of the Second World War, see Helke Sander and Barbara Johr (eds.) BeFreier und Befreite. See also the special issue of October 72, Berlin 1945: War and Rape “Liberators Take Liberties;” Spring 1995, especially Atina Grossmann’s contribution, “A Question of Silence.”

<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Heinemann, “Gender, Sexuality, and Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past,” Central European History. 38, 1 (2005), pp. 41-74.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, “Mythos ‘Vertreibung,’” p. 171.

extend to postwar expellee politics. Men dominated the scene in the major expellee organizations. In fact, not a single woman was amongst the thirty signers of the Charter of the German Expellees.<sup>15</sup> This notwithstanding, women and children have been deemed suitable as symbolic representatives of the expulsion, including in monuments. However, the monuments have not been designed with only the commemoration of a specific gender or age group in mind. Instead, they have been erected to memorialize all expellees.<sup>16</sup>

## THE MONUMENTS

The defining characteristic of the monuments in this chapter is the employment of a female form to represent the expulsion. Expellee organizations have erected roughly twenty statues and sculptures of women, or where women are the most prominent figures (above all as mothers, e.g. carrying and leading small children).<sup>17</sup> There is no clear geographical pattern: the monuments stand in Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg, Thuringia (Erfurt), in Germany, and in Austria (Unterretzbach bei Reitz, Lower Austria), and Lithuania (Klaipeda, the formerly predominantly German city, Memel). Though Scholz notes an

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<sup>15</sup> The group of men who signed the Charter was made up of representatives and chairmen of the leading expellee organizations of the time including individual Landsmannschaften. Hahn and Hahn state unequivocally, “the myth of the expelled, suffering woman was construed predominantly by men at a time when one needed to use a microscope to find women amongst the leaders of the expellee organizations and their authors.” See *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>16</sup> Wenk made a similar observation about the monuments in Berlin displaying the female form. Virtually none of the monuments that employ renderings of women, she claims, are actually dedicated to them.

<sup>17</sup> Scholz noticed the same development in an article that focuses primarily on religious motifs in expellee monuments entitled, “Opferdunst vernebelt die Verhältnisse.”

increase in the numbers since the 1980s,<sup>18</sup> which is certainly noticeable, a handful of monuments displaying the female form have been in existence starting in the early 1950s. It seems that just as there were veiled and unveiled territorial claims in some monuments erected post-Ostpolitik, there were efforts to address symbolic politics in this manner before Ostpolitik and the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives. This reflects the early efforts—identified by Heinemann et al.—by West Germans to appropriate the female experience in order to create a new national identity. While a more recent phenomenon in general, female figures with children have been used for some time.

Addressing the question of how these monuments operated requires closer analysis of some individual examples. To identify changes over time, if there have been any, I have chosen to look at some of the earliest examples—from Troisdorf and Bielefeld, both in North-Rhine Westphalia—and compare these with some more recent monuments from the last two decades.

### **Early Examples**

In Troisdorf, a city located between Cologne and Bonn, expellee organizations dedicated a sculpture of a woman and child in 1953 (Figure 27). The monument stands at the main entrance to the city's *Waldfriedhof* (forest cemetery) and rests on a plinth made of bricks. BdV literature tells us that the sculpture, called *Flüchtlingsfrau mit Kind* (female refugee and child), was created by Edmund Wessling, an artist from a nearby town. The piece features the figures' heads as well as the arm of the female figure—presumably the child's mother—wrapped around the adolescent. Whether the arm is there

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 307. Again, Scholz's emphasis is on the religious elements of expellee monuments. Indeed, he attributes the higher numbers not to the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives but to the loss of meaning of the cross as a symbol of sacrifice and victimization in a secularized West German society.

to protect or comfort is unclear. Wearing a hood or a head wrap, the woman appears exhausted and forlorn. She is grimacing and is visibly distressed. No man is present. Where is the father of the child? Did he fall in war? Is he in a prisoner of war camp? These questions remain unanswered. The monument does not commemorate anyone in particular. The woman and child are anonymous. The figures stand for other things.



**Figure 27 Troisdorf. Photo: BdV Archive**

Though the cause of her anguish is uncertain, the monument's inscription gives us clues. It reads: GEDENKET DES JAHRES 1945 (Commemorate the year 1945). The date is probably in reference to the expulsion but could just as easily be interpreted as commemorating the defeat of Nazi Germany. However, other elements shed more light on the monument's specific topic. Surrounding the monument is a knee-high semicircular wall which features three coats-of-arms of eastern provinces as well as three plaques inscribed with the phrase DEN TOTEN DER FERNEN HEIMAT (To the dead of the distant homeland). The monument was designed to commemorate the expulsion and

agitate for a border revision. As reported in the press, the speeches by expellee functionaries and local religious and political leaders at the unveiling ceremony focused on the solution of the “*Vertriebenenfrage*” (expellee question), which could be solved by reestablishing German territory in the borders of 1937, by improving relations between the local population and the expellees in the area, and by improved organization on the part of the expellees. But the depicted anguish of women and children (or of anyone else) was not the object of commemoration per se. More than that, the monument symbolized the loss of German territory and the efforts necessary to get it back, as was typical at that time.

The sculpture in Bielefeld functioned similarly (Figures 28 & 29). Even more conspicuous than the figures in Troisdorf, the monument still stands at the end of a one-kilometer-long street with homes constructed in the late 1940s and early 1950s to meet housing needs for the influx of expellees in the city. The building cooperative responsible for the new residential area (*Baugenossenschaft “Freie Scholle”*) commissioned a well-known local artist, Karlheinz Rhode-Jüchtern, to create the monument, which was dedicated in 1953. The monument itself has two parts. The first is a stone sculpture of a female figure with a young child and a somewhat older male figure.<sup>19</sup> The mother looks unfazed, almost proud, as she looks into the distance with one hand holding the hand of the child and the other resting on the third figure’s shoulder. Unlike the figure of the mother in Troisdorf, however, she does not look mournful, distraught, or defeated. She is determinedly leading the others into the future. All three are in a small boat. The mother

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<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to ascertain whether the older male is the female figure’s son or husband. Contemporary descriptions refer to the figure as both the son and the husband. At any rate, the woman is without question the dominant figure.

and small child are looking forward as the older figure looks back, holding the boat's rudder.<sup>20</sup>



Figure 28 Bielefeld. Photo: J.L.

Behind the sculpture, the monument's second part hangs on a wall of the last apartment building on the street. In large letters, one sees the text: VOR UNS NEUER STRAND IN UNS HEIMATLAND (Before us, new shores, in us, our homeland) as well as the vibrantly colored coats-of-arms of Bielefeld and several eastern provinces, including Upper Silesia, Danzig, and the Sudetenland (None of which was a part of the German Reich in 1937). While the monument certainly acknowledges the past in the old Heimat, it seems to be more a celebration of the "new shores," new opportunities, and the

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<sup>20</sup> Not the expressions on the faces but the characteristics of the faces spawned a brief but heated controversy after the monument was unveiled. It seems that a member of the local branch of the expellee party BHE did not think Rhode-Jüchtern's figures looked German enough. He criticized the figures' "östliche Physiognomien" (eastern physiognomies), which for him amounted to "defamation of the expellees." Bernd J. Wagner, of the Bielefeld city archive kindly informed me about the debate. For a brief account of the hullabaloo, see Wagner's "50 Jahre Berufsverband Bildender Künstlerinnen und Künstler in Ostwestfalen-Lippe," in Peter Flachmann, (ed.) Kunst ist kein Luxus, sie gehört zum Leben. Bielefeld: Westfalen-Verlag, 2005, p. 23.



new future in West Germany. The reference to territory, therefore, has more to do with integration into West German society than with border revision. After all, it is unlikely that the building cooperative which commissioned the sculpture would be in favor of the expellees returning en masse to the old Heimat.



**Figure 29 Bielefeld (close-up). Photo: J.L.**

More importantly, however, as in Troisdorf, the monument is not dedicated to the suffering of women and/or children (or anyone else, for that matter). In neither case are the actual victims named nor is there a direct reference to the expulsion. However, the polyvalent trope of the mother had already been established and needed no further explanation. Moreover, in both cases, the female form was employed to pursue concrete politics. As we have seen, the economic, social, and political integration of the expellees was a central objective of their organized efforts throughout the first decade after the war.

Though the monuments have different emphases, the familiar trope of female and children survivors, along with the coats-of-arms, tell the story.

### **More Recent Examples**

I open with these brief looks at older examples not to recapitulate the themes discussed in the previous cluster, but rather to contrast the usage of the female form that was to come. Before the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives, the suffering of the expellees, as personified on local monuments by mothers and children, was used as a means to an end. That is, the expellee experience was used to further the concrete political objectives of the expellee organizations: border revision and right to homeland, compensation, and integration. After Ostpolitik and the rise of Holocaust-centered narratives, however, the expellee experience became an end in itself. The era of concrete politics had come to an end, and the symbolic politics of victimization and exculpatory assertions of collective innocence became more prevalent. Reflecting these changes, the expellee organizations used the female form differently, as more recent examples demonstrate.

Privately initiated and donated, a bronze statue of a female figure and three young children was erected in Oberursel, Hessen, in 1981 (Figure 30).<sup>21</sup> The sponsors commissioned a sculpture by the noted local artist Georg Hieronymi. Originally slated to stand at the corner of Troppauerstrasse and Schlesierstrasse, two of the city's main arteries, the monument was placed instead outside the entrance to the city's main cemetery. Featured on the sculpture are the figures of a visibly downtrodden, hunched

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<sup>21</sup> The sponsors of the monument, Anton and Gisela Ritschny, were both expellees born in Troppau in Moravian Silesia (today, Opava in the Czech Republic). Anton Ritschny was the founder of the Hessen-Glasswerke.

over woman with her children (two older children and an infant) trudging during winter and carrying their meager possessions in small bundles. The sculpture is most likely based on well-known visual depictions of one of the most harrowing experiences of the expulsion, the westward treks of Germans fleeing the Red Army's winter offensive of January 1945. As usual, the father is not present. His whereabouts, like the group's final destination, can only be speculated upon. Why they were forced to flee, however, is inscribed at the sculpture's base: 1945/1946 FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG AUS DER HEIMAT IM OSTEN (1945/1946 Flight and expulsion from the Heimat in the East). They were the blameless German victims of expulsion at the end of WWII.



**Figure 30 Oberursel. Photo: BdV Archive**

According to an article in a local newspaper, the monument's sponsors commissioned the sculpture both to mark their upcoming fiftieth anniversary and to express their gratitude to their 43,000 fellow Oberursel residents, who had received the expellees as they streamed into the area after the war. The sculptor, Hieronymi, was

quoted as saying, “[The sculpture] should also make clear that the women and mothers almost always had to bear the burden of the flight or expulsion without help from men because males were at war.” While the inscription clarifies exactly to which historical events the monument refers, it was also meant to refer to all the women and children of the world facing a similar fate.<sup>22</sup> Though the piece had been privately initiated, the local chapter of the BdV organized the unveiling ceremony.<sup>23</sup>

Compared to the earlier, previously mentioned examples, the monument is relatively apolitical. It features no coats-of-arms from the eastern provinces. Aside from the word “Heimat” in the inscription, no other reference is made to territory or the other tangible political goals so energetically pursued by the expellee organizations in the decades after the war. Instead, the monument in Oberursel employs the female form to portray expellees as hapless victims of events out of their control. Abandoned by men who had to fight, women and children were left to their own devices. By commemorating the expulsion at large, however, not just that of female and adolescent Germans, the victimization extends to all expellees. The sculpture paints *all* expellees—regardless of gender—as victims. As the inscription makes clear, moreover, this particular suffering did not commence until 1945. It was apparently not connected to the war. In other words, flight and expulsion are portrayed as events with no antecedents and effectuated by nothing in particular.

The historic specifics of this sculpture’s privately financed origin are important as well because they might help explain why fewer monuments of this type have been erected. In general, privately initiated local expellee monuments are rare. As mentioned,

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<sup>22</sup> “Denkmal stellt das Leid der Mütter auf der Flucht dar,” Taunus-Zeitung. August 29, 1980.

<sup>23</sup> “Denkmal wird enthüllt,” Taunus-Zeitung. October 17, 1981.

affluent local residents with expellee backgrounds commissioned the monument. In this and other cases, monument sponsors hired recognized local artists rather than gravestone engravers to execute the sculptures. It can be safely assumed that the costs of such undertakings were high when compared to the prices of more modest and simple monuments. Because most other monuments were proposed by perennially cash-strapped local branches of expellee organizations, the high cost and time consuming efforts to produce these types of works would probably present a hindrance difficult to overcome.

The same is true of the monument in Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt (Figure 31). In the mid-1980s, a call to regional artists was made by the local branch of the BdV for submissions in a competition to complete a new monument. The winning design was submitted by Ingrid Seddig, an expellee from Pomerania.<sup>24</sup> It features six figures on a stone pedestal: four adult women on foot with no possessions during a westward trek—recognizable as females by their long, windblown hair and their attire—two of whom are carrying infants on their backs. Striding determinedly against a strong wind, the group plods forward gathered tightly together. With the exception of one of the small children, all face the same direction. Each face is marked by peculiarly arched eyebrows, but the figures bear blank expressions. The monument was unveiled to the public on Tag der Heimat 1986.

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<sup>24</sup> Seddig was born in 1926 in Kreis Stolp in Pomerania, where she lived until 1947. Seddig died in 2008.



**Figure 31 Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt. Photo: J.L.**

The monument is significant for two reasons. First, once again, in a move typical of the more recent examples from this chapter, women and children were chosen to represent all expellees. Seddig's bronze sculpture is called the *Denkmal für die Opfer der Vertreibung* (Monument for the Victims of the Expulsion). The gender of those victims remains unspecified although the gender of the adult expellees on the monument is clear. Moreover, the sculpture's base is ringed by metal plates with the full text of the Charter of the German Expellees (more about this in a moment) as well as a text, which, in part, reads: 14 MILLIONEN DEUTSCHE WURDEN INFOLGE DES ZWEITEN WELTKRIEGES AUS IHRER HEIMAT IM OSTEN VERTRIEBEN. 2 MILLIONEN FANDEN DABEI DEN TOD. VERGESST DIESES SCHICKSAL NICHT. (Fourteen million Germans were expelled from their homelands in the East as a result of WWII.

Two million met thereby their deaths. Do not forget this fate.)<sup>25</sup> The text makes it even more apparent that the female experience of flight and expulsion was to stand as typical for all expellees. Perhaps even more significant than the monument's form is, secondly, its location. The monument's setting indicates that the usage of the female form is not a phenomenon limited to small, unimportant towns on the periphery. Unofficially, the sculpture is the central expellee monument in Stuttgart—the capital and largest city of Baden-Württemberg—and stands in the city's most populous district. Moreover, the sculpture is situated just a stone's throw away from a stop on the city's public transportation line, in a small park near the historic *Kursaal* Bad Cannstatt, where the “founding fathers” of the expellee organizations met in 1950 to formulate the Charter of the German Expellees, which was proclaimed publicly in Stuttgart's city center the next day.

Almost a decade later, another monument with the maternal form was unveiled in the small Westphalian city, Ahlen (Figure 32). Sculpted by local artist Alfons Reiberg, a bronze statue of a lone woman with children stands atop a platform in a small square with a parking lot amidst an expellee housing development built at the edge of town in 1956.<sup>26</sup> The monument is unique because, in addition to the sculpture, this *Mahnmal gegen Vertreibung und Willkür* (Monument against Expulsion and Despotism) features brass

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<sup>25</sup> The rest of the text reads: DAHER ERRICHTETE DIESE GEDENKSTÄTTE DER BUND DER VERTRIEBENEN – VEREINIGTE LANDSMANNSCHAFTEN IN STUTTGART MIT HILFE DES LANDES BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG UND DER LANDESHAUPTSTADT STUTTGART. (Therefore, the BdV-Stuttgart erected this monument with the support of the state Baden-Württemberg and the city of Stuttgart). The costs of the monument were divided equally amongst the three parties. While the involvement of the state and city government in funding the erection of the monument might serve as evidence of widespread approval of the monument, a short piece and photograph in an expellee publication shows that not everyone concurred. The photograph shows the monument sprayed with graffiti: “Die deutschen Täter sind keine Opfer!” (The German perpetrators aren't victims!). See “Vertriebenen-Denkmal in S-Bad Cannstatt geschändet,” *BdV-Nachrichten. Mitteilungsblatt des Bundes der Vertriebenen. Landesverband Baden-Württemberg*. Issue 4, December 2000, p. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Local citizens made the donations that paid for the sculpture. The local branch of the BdV initiated it.

plates with the coats of arms of eight eastern provinces (Danzig, Silesia, Sudetenland, Brandenburg, East Prussia, West Prussia, Upper Silesia, and Pomerania) affixed to the plinth. Rarely does one see references to territory on the later monuments of this type. In addition, a metal plate fastened to an inlaid concrete block with the text VON DER HEIMAT GEHEN IST DIE SCHWERSTE LAST DIE GÖTTER UND MENSCHEN BEUGT. AGNES MIEGEL 1960 (literal translation: Leaving the Heimat is the most difficult burden that bends gods and people. Agnes Miegel 1960) was emplaced approximately two meters in front of the statue.<sup>27</sup>

The figure of the mother appears resolute. Though gaunt, she stands tall, and is not hunched over, but remains stationary. Unlike the other examples in this category, she is not still fleeing. Rather than on a frightful westward trek, she looks like she has arrived in the new Heimat. Nevertheless, her expression is sober as she looks into the distance. Her sleeve is rolled up. With one hand she carries her meager remaining possessions in a small bundle. The other hand holds her infant close to her chest in a bag slung across her torso. As usual, no man is present. Instead, she is accompanied by the infant and another child. The older child walks on her own. She peers to the side with her arm comfortingly placed around her mother. Befitting a young child, her expression is less serious than that of her mother. She carries her last remaining possession from the old Heimat, a doll.

The monument was dedicated on April 19, 1995—just weeks before the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII. As I will show, the timing of the unveiling ceremony makes the sculpture, and what it stands for, noteworthy, as does the participation that day

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<sup>27</sup> Agnes Miegel (1879-1964) was an author and journalist born in Königsberg, East Prussia. Prominent in expellee circles, Miegel has been a controversial figure in the postwar era due to her ties to National Socialism during the years of the Third Reich.



of Heinrich Windelen. Mentioned in Chapter Two, Windelen was the last head of the federal government's Expellee Ministry and the chief of its successor, the Ministry for German-German Relations, after the formation of the CDU-led government in 1982. Born in Silesia in 1921, the former cabinet member was also an expellee who resided near Ahlen at the time of the monument's erection.



**Figure 32 Ahlen. Photo: J.L.**

In a remarkable address, Windelen clarified the monument's real intention.<sup>28</sup> It was a response to the past two and a half decades' tendency toward marginalization of the expellees. The monument would serve the purpose of setting the record straight. It would correct postwar interpretations centering not enough on German experiences, i.e. on those

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<sup>28</sup> The speech was reprinted verbatim in Heinrich Windelen, "Möge diese Mahnung von allen verstanden werden," in Münsterland, Jahrbuch des Kreises Warendorf. 2, (Warendorf: Kreisheimatverein Beckum-Warendorf, 1996), pp. 7-11.

narratives focusing on the Holocaust. Windelen mentioned the debates raging at that time, which concerned how Germans should commemorate the fifty-year anniversary of the end of the war. He then pointed out that the topic remained most controversial for those not yet born in 1945. He then stated that May 8<sup>th</sup> must remain open to many interpretations. Although the speaker very briefly acknowledged the suffering of non-Germans (without mentioning them by name), the focus was clearly on non-Jewish German suffering.

For many Germans, particularly the expellees, Windelen contended, the end of the war meant the beginning of suffering. And thus for the sake of historical truth, Germans must also commemorate those who fell victim during the expulsion. Windelen declared, “That there were also crimes committed against millions of innocent Germans also belongs to this truth. This we do not say to offset or balance out. But when one side denies all guilt, then it is difficult to dignify equitably the suffering of others beyond your own.”<sup>29</sup> Though the expellees were not any more responsible for Auschwitz and Hitler’s other misdeeds than other Germans had been, they were the ones who had to make the largest sin offering (*Sühneopfer*) vicariously for all Germans. The monument is important, according to the former cabinet minister, because it helps keep alive remembrance of the horrors of expulsion lest they be repeated. Addressing the public opinion makers for whom commemoration of WWII remained so controversial,

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<sup>29</sup> In the original German, this passage reads, “Doch zu dieser Wahrheit gehört, dass es eben auch Verbrechen an Millionen unschuldigen Deutschen gegeben hat. Das sagen wir nicht, um aufzurechnen. Wenn aber eine Seite jede Schuld leugnet, dann fällt es schwer, über dem eigenen Leid auch das Leid der anderen gerecht zu würdigen“ (Ibid., p. 8).

Windelen said, “Whoever seeks to suppress this memory makes him-/herself complicit.”<sup>30</sup>

Windelen closed his remarks by commending those involved with the completion of the monument, and with the hope that the monument would exhort everyone to peace, freedom, and reconciliation. But throughout the speech, he clearly said more. In fact, his comments do much to recapitulate the efforts of the expellee organizations typical of the symbolic politics of victimization seen since the 1970s. Windelen argued that the commemoration of German suffering had been pushed aside by too much commemoration of other victims. As a result, Germans had forgotten the fate of the expellees. The monument featuring indisputably innocent women and children in Ahlen was created to remedy this. Though Windelen’s speech was ephemeral, the monument was a lasting act of symbolic politics to right this wrong and prevent the forgetting of the expulsion.

## CONCLUSION

As these monuments show, mothers with children have become iconic figures for the entire experience of flight and expulsion.<sup>31</sup> Dedicated to all expellees, the monuments universalize the victimization of some (mothers with children) for all. My goal here has been to examine why female figures became a preferred form and to explore the broader

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<sup>30</sup> In the original German, this passage reads, “Wer diese Erinnerung verdrängen will, macht sich mitschuldig.” (Ibid., p. 10).

<sup>31</sup> This is seen in other representations as well, e.g. in movies, where women have been featured as the lead protagonists in filmic portrayals of flight and expulsion. An early example is the film *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* (Dir. Frank Wisbar, 1959), starring Sonja Ziemann. A more recent example is the TV-docudrama *Die Flucht* (Dir. Kai Wessel, 2007), with Maria Fürtwangler in the lead role. In his examination of newspaper articles commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII, Klaus Naumann found that photos of women and children fleeing the eastern territories comprised one of the three principal motifs in reporting on experiences of flight and expulsion. See Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text*, p. 72ff.

implications for the historical understandings this chapter's monuments bring to bear. The answer to why Germans have chosen women (and children) to depict these experiences is probably obvious, and has already been addressed in part by Heinemann and many others, including Confino and Atina Grossmann.<sup>32</sup> In general, the victimization of German women allowed German men to see their nation and themselves as victims. While this is certainly a disconcerting distortion of historical truth, there is more. Defenseless women and children—embodying the sacrifices and resilience of the home front, far from the battlefield—are presumed a priori to be “innocent.”

This chapter's monuments are thus among the postwar renderings that depict women—who apparently had no connection to the Nazi state apparatus or its genocidal war machine despite the fact that many females had been members of the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (NSDAP—National Socialist Workers' Party), served as military auxiliaries and concentration camp guards, and had in general approved of the Nazi regime<sup>33</sup>—as the guiltless victims of brutally violent, retributive

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<sup>32</sup> For example, Confino writes, “When war reached women and the Heimat, as happened in the years of total war and defeat, the result was violation, rape, and changing of what was viewed as the natural order. The violation of German women stood for the violation of Heimat and nation.” Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance*, p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> Such discussions hearken back to the so-called *Historikerinnenstreit*—centering predominantly on the writings of Claudia Koonz and Gisela Bock—which debated women's involvement with and approval of National Socialism. For a nuanced response to this academic dustup, see Adalheid von Saldern, “Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State,” in David F. Crew (ed.) *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*. (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 141-165. How does one, however, evaluate the level of women's involvement in and acceptance of National Socialism? Just how innocent were they? This is difficult to measure. As Moeller has stated, “It is difficult to chart the boundaries between acquiescence, accommodation, acceptance, and support; there is no accurate gauge of women's attitudes toward Nazi ideology and policies that elevated the status of those women, judged fit according to the regime's racist criteria, for whom children and housework constituted the most important employment.” See Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 15. Without question, women helped carry out National Socialist policies, particularly in the eastern territories. Elizabeth Harvey has written an impressive study about women as the “missionaries of Germanness” in the lands of Central and Eastern Europe occupied by the Nazis. As Harvey points out, some of these women's accounts of the end of the war were included in *Dokumentation der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. See Harvey, *Women and the Nazi East: Agents and Witnesses of Germanization*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). There

acts. Having no connection to National Socialism, the war, or the Holocaust, women (especially mothers) and children are therefore morally “pure” and untainted by the past. Particularly in the case of the expulsion, Hahn and Hahn as well as Scholz have written that the presumption of female innocence has validated and bolstered expellees’ assertions of their own collective victimhood. While correct, this overlooks another key aspect: namely, the presumption’s exculpatory potential. Men appropriate women’s and children’s experiences, and what Warner calls the “plural significations of women’s bodies” facilitates the creation of an exculpatory narrative for all expellees.<sup>34</sup> In other words, I contend that the employment of women and children on local monuments amounts to an assertion of *collective innocence* for all expellees.

The historical understanding behind the contention follows a straightforward, if ethically tenuous logic: Since most adult males were either on the front, POWs or dead, the majority of those Germans forced to leave their homes near the end of and after WWII were women and children. Hence, most expellees were women and children. Women and children, since they were not involved with the war, were “innocent.” The men from the eastern provinces—legally defined as expellees too after the war—could therefore declare themselves guiltless as well. As a result, all expellees were considered the same—the innocent victims of events beyond their control. Reasoning of this kind has always been indispensable in the self-perceptions of the expellee organizations and equally crucial in their political pursuits, both concrete and symbolic. Contrary assertions would undermine the righteousness of expellees’ claims, which have always been

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is also new research which indicates that many more German women than once believed were complicitous in committing Nazi atrocities. See Isabel Kershner, “Women’s Role in Holocaust May Exceed Old Notions,” *New York Times*, July 17, 2010.

<sup>34</sup> Warner, *Monuments & Maidens*, p. xix.

premised on their presumed lack of involvement with National Socialism and the singularity of expellee suffering.

Conceding the latter point, the monuments I examine in the next chapter attest the strength and pervasiveness of Holocaust-centered narratives. Instead of purporting the uniqueness of expellee victimization to assert their own collective innocence, the monuments state that the expellees suffered like others and thus subsume all victims of WWII into a universal collective.

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **SUBSUMING VICTIMS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Two main inscriptions offer clarification and context at the Neue Wache, the Federal Republic's *Zentrale Gedenkstätte für die Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft* (Central Commemorative Site for the Victims of War and Dictatorship) on Berlin's Unter den Linden. Located at the foot of the monument's centerpiece, an enlarged version of Käthe Kollwitz's *pietà*, the first states succinctly: DEN OPFERN VON KRIEG UND GEWALTHERRSCHAFT (To the victims of war and dictatorship). The second and more detailed text is inscribed on a tablet hanging on the wall near the monument's entrance and presents an ambiguous who's who of victims, both German and non-German.<sup>1</sup> It reads:

We commemorate the peoples who suffered because of the war. We commemorate the citizens who were persecuted and lost their lives. We commemorate the fallen of the world wars. We commemorate the innocents who lost their lives in the Heimat during the war and as a result of the war, those held in captivity, and those who perished during the expulsion.

We commemorate the millions of murdered Jews. We commemorate the murdered Sinti and Roma. We commemorate all those who were killed because of their ancestry, their homosexuality, or because of illness and debility. We commemorate all those murdered who were denied the right to life.

We commemorate the people who had to die because of their religious or political convictions. We commemorate all those who were victims of dictatorship and innocently lost their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> The third text gives an historical account of the Neue Wache.

We commemorate the women and men who sacrificed their lives in resistance to dictatorship. We honor all those who accepted death rather than compromise their conscience.

We commemorate all the women and men who were persecuted and murdered because they resisted totalitarian dictatorship after 1945.

As briefly addressed in Chapter Two, Helmut Kohl's forays into memory politics as well as his top-down efforts to "normalize" Germany's past and thereby forge a more positive national identity—including through the renovation and re-conceptualization of the Neue Wache—were contentious for several reasons.<sup>2</sup> I do not mention this central monument and its long inscriptions to open this chapter, however, in order to revisit these larger controversies. Instead, I do so because these texts capture the essence of, and exemplify on a grander scale, the sentiments expressed by my final category of local expellee monuments. That is, the texts at the Neue Wache make for an interesting analogue because they subsume those who suffered during and after World War II into a universal collective of victims. Rather than commemorating victims of a war in which some were active agents and some passive recipients, these monuments collapse categories like "German" and "Jew" or "Pole," or "civilian" and "soldier," or "perpetrator" and "victim," to remember all who suffered without addressing how or why. As Sabine Behrenbeck observes, this type of historical interpretation treats all the nameless, faceless war dead as the victims of "an accident, like a tragic fate, or a natural disaster."<sup>3</sup> Narratives positing the universality of victimhood in the post-WWII German context have profound implications for discussions of guilt and responsibility.

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<sup>2</sup> The controversy is nicely summed up in Peter Reichel's *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*. (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), pp. 231-246. See also Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin* and Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*.

<sup>3</sup> Sabine Behrenbeck. "Heldenkult oder Friedensmahnung?" p. 361.



In a related fashion, Constantin Goshler hypothesizes the existence of two competing, ideal-typical models of victimhood discourse in the decades following the founding of the Federal Republic.<sup>4</sup> He labels the first—which distinguishes between Nazi Germany’s victims and German victims, including the expellees—the “particularistic model.” Most prevalent from the 1970s until the late 1990s, this model differentiates between victims groups and creates hierarchies them. It was during the time of the particularistic model that the centrality of the Final Solution for depicting the recent past in (West) Germany came to the fore. Goshler calls the second and, for my purposes, more significant model of victimhood discourse “integrationist.” About it, Goshler writes, “the integrationist model of victimhood constructs [...] an overarching category of victims based above all on the existential, fundamental experience of being a victim and thus annuls (*nivelliert*) the contextual differences of the various victim groups.” His description of the latter model continues: “This model found and finds itself especially in connection with attempts to assert the parity of German victims of the war vis-à-vis the German and non-German victims of National Socialist dictatorship and, in extreme cases, amounts to a form of offsetting (*Aufrechnung*) of victims.”<sup>5</sup> While the two models have always been in existence, Goshler claims that each has dominated at different times.<sup>6</sup> Of the two, the monuments in this chapter correspond to Goshler’s integrationist model.

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<sup>4</sup> Constantin Goshler, “‘Versöhnung’ und ‘Viktimisierung.’ Die Vertriebenen und der deutsche Opferdiskurs,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 10, 2005, pp. 873-884.

<sup>5</sup> Goshler, “‘Versöhnung’ und ‘Viktimisierung,’” p. 874.

<sup>6</sup> While compelling and useful for describing the monuments in this category, Goshler’s argument is not without its conceptual holes. He theorizes that the integrationist model of victimhood discourse thrived most especially in the 1950s and 1960s as well today. I would certainly concur that postwar narratives today incorporate both the victimization of both German victims and Nazi Germany’s victims and is as such “integrationist.” I would argue, however, that the loudest voices in the first two decades after the war were not integrationist and were indeed particularistic—with German victims at the pinnacle. It seems the change from the 1950s/1960s to the 1970s/1980s was not a shift from the integrationist model to the

On the one hand, subsuming various victims groups into all-embracing historical narratives has the potential to offer more inclusive and more accurate accounts of the past that allow for a full range of individual and group experiences. Victims groups are no longer hierarchized and are memorialized alongside one another. In contrast to the German-centered historical interpretations circulating in the first decades after the war, those that integrate the memories and histories of all the victims of the war would be considered an improvement because everyone's story could be told. In fact, nuanced subsumption in current discussions of the Nazi past demonstrate the poignancy and pervasiveness of historical narratives based on knowledge and recognition of National Socialist crimes, especially the Holocaust. On the other hand, subsuming all victims as a commemorative strategy is not without its faults, as Goschler's description of the integrationist model points out. A key aspect of the integrationist model is that despite the inclusion of other victims, German suffering remains at the forefront. What becomes even more problematic, however, is when the victimization of Germans, particularly of the expellees, is equated with that of other victims.

## **THE MONUMENTS**

The preceding two chapters show how local monuments have elevated the expulsion experience to highlight the putatively guiltless suffering of the expellees. As we saw in Chapter Seven, religious symbolism on expellee monuments in the 1950s and 1960s equated expellees' victimization with Christ's innocent suffering. In more recent times, monuments have employed gender to allegorize the innocent suffering of all

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particularistic but instead a shift in particularity away from the preeminence of German suffering to the preeminence of Jewish suffering. Local expellee monuments function as a solid case in point.

expellees. Whereas the motifs employed in the prior categories were selected to elevate the expulsion experience by conveying the singularity of expellee suffering, the monuments here heighten it by doing the opposite. Their assertions are tempered. That is, by negating previous assertions of expellee exceptionalism, they equate the suffering of the expellees with the suffering of Nazi Germany's victims. Subsuming German victims—more specifically, the expellees—into this undifferentiated collective of wartime victims is tantamount therefore to proclaiming that the expellees suffered in kind with victims of Germans' military and political measures. These local monuments are therefore an expression of the perceived common bonds of suffering shared by the expellees and other victims of the war and violence. They acknowledge the suffering of others, but see that of the expellees as commensurate.

Moreover, like the monuments in Chapters Seven and Eight, those examined here make cautious and implicit—but unmistakable—exculpatory claims. First of all, through the inscriptions, the monuments classify the expellees simply as victims and testify to the expellee organizations' strong desire to be recognized accordingly. Though variations of the texts exist, they usually contain the phrase "...to the victims of the expulsion" (...DEN OPFERN DER VERTREIBUNG). In formulating the inscriptions of their monuments, the expellee organizations declare themselves victims. As we have seen, claiming victimhood is virtually the same as claiming innocence.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, few question the guiltlessness of the victims of Nazi persecution. By lumping themselves in

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<sup>7</sup> Goschler writes, "The label of victim is decisive. Associated with this designation is a principal presumption of innocence regardless of whether or not Sudeten Germans were involved in the destruction of Czechoslovakia, or other Germans were involved in the National Socialist regime. To all appearances, the contemporary victimhood discourse allows them the wished for acceptance amongst the group of "desired" victims as it has developed in the western world in the last two decades." (Goschler, "'Versöhnung' und 'Viktimisierung,'" p. 883).

with the other innocent victims of war and violence, however, the expellees convey their desire to be viewed similarly. As reflected on the monuments, therefore, expellees identify themselves with other innocent victims.

Though a few examples of such inclusively-themed monuments hailing from pre-unification decades exist (two of which will be discussed in greater detail below), the subsumption of victims on local expellee monuments is a recent phenomenon. The majority of the more than forty examples of this type that I have identified were in fact erected after 1990.<sup>8</sup> Only rarely do the monuments contain textual (as part of an inscription) or symbolic references to the former eastern territories. With them, the monuments' initiators have sought acknowledgement of expellee victimization. Thus, they have been part of the expellee organizations' pursuit of symbolic politics. As such, it seems that the increase in the numbers of these monuments has to do with the emergence and solidification of the Holocaust as the constitutive part of most mainstream postwar historical narratives. The defining characteristic for this category is therefore a reference to the victims of the expulsion in addition to (oftentimes vague) references to other victims. The monuments represent the past in a way that asserts all were equal victims of the war.

In terms of location, virtually all of these monuments stand in cemeteries. This alone does not make the monuments unique. As we have seen, many other kinds of

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<sup>8</sup> This fact raises the question as to Helmut Kohl's impact on what Henning Süssner called the "renationalization of public discourse." (Süssner, "Still Yearning for the Lost Heimat? Ethnic German Expellees and the Politics of Belonging," German Politics and Society, Issue 72, Vol. 22, 2 (Summer 2004), p. 15.) Put differently, did Kohl's very public efforts to normalize the German past and the challenges to the centrality of the Holocaust in postwar narratives at the federal level in the 1980s and early 1990s—culminating in the subsumptive inscriptions at the Neue Wache—trickle down to the local level? Many expellee monuments suggest the flow was heading in the opposite direction. That is, it could be argued that Kohl's actions and the national debates over the past were echoes of widely held sentiments already expressed at the grassroots.

expellee monuments are located in or near graveyards. In this context, however, the location of the monuments augments their other subsumptive properties. Lurz and Ulrike Haß have both commented on this additional aspect of post-WWII monuments, though in different contexts. On war memorials Lurz writes, “The central problem with the erection of a monument in a cemetery consists in annulling (*Nivellierung*) the difference that exists between a death due to war and a normal civilian death. Death due to war is not the same as the necessary death of an average person and instead came prematurely, needlessly and occurred at the hand of another.”<sup>9</sup>

Writing about memorials to Nazi victims in cemeteries, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, Haß addresses more directly the ramifications of universalizing victimhood for guilt and absolution. “The selection of the cemetery as the place of commemoration makes it possible to blur differences between the dead who merely perished and the dead who were murdered, between those of the persecuted who survived and the still-living perpetrators [...] and as such reduce what happened to the existential universal.”<sup>10</sup> The circumstances surrounding the deaths commemorated by the monuments described by Lurz and Haß—and by expellee monuments—were extraordinary. However, when they stand in cemeteries, these monuments make the deaths remembered seem quotidian. As both authors make clear, treating all the dead of WWII the same by memorializing them with monuments emplaced in cemeteries bestows a certain normality to the deaths and, more importantly, obfuscates causation.

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<sup>9</sup> Lurz, *Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik*, p. 294. Lurz sees in the Federal Republic’s monuments evidence that the anti-war lessons that West Germans should have learned after WWII did not take hold. Emplacing monuments dedicated to fallen soldiers in cemeteries does not underscore the uselessness of war and ergo does not emphasize the lessons of anti-militarism that he espouses.

<sup>10</sup> Ulrike Haß. “Mahnmaltexte 1945 bis 1988. Annäherung an eine schwierige Textsorte,” in Wolfgang Benz and Barbara Distel (eds.) *Erinnern oder Verweigern*. (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), p. 139.

## Subsuming Victims in West Germany

One of the best examples of the monuments of this type is not located in a cemetery. The monument—comprising a *Gedenkhalle* (memorial hall) and a large statue, both of which subsume victims—is situated next to the Castle Oberhausen in the North Rhine-Westphalian city of the same name (Figures 33 & 34).<sup>11</sup> Both elements of the monument were dedicated on September 2, 1962 at a ceremony presided over by the city's mayor, Luise Albertz (SPD), and attended by numerous former inmates of Nazi concentration camps. This commemorative site is especially significant. Considered the first memorial to the victims of National Socialism in West Germany financed solely by a municipal government, the monument's intended commemorative reach extended not only to victims of National Socialism but to the expellees as well.

Erected near the front of the memorial hall, the large (~4m) statue *Die Trauernde* ("The [Female] Mourner") was created with the intention of offering as many groups as possible a place to commemorate their dead.<sup>12</sup> For decades, *Die Trauernde* has served as the location for Oberhausen's official commemorative ceremonies, for example on Volkstrauertag. The artist Willy Meller<sup>13</sup> created the sculpture featuring a sleek statue in the form of a lone, visibly bereaving woman enshrouded in a cloaked hood with her arms crossed and her head bowed. More important than the form, however, is the dedication. The figure looks in the direction of an inlaid plate at the foot of the statue, which bears

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<sup>11</sup> Oberhausen's city council unanimously made the decision to construct the monument in 1960.

<sup>12</sup> Much of the following discussion is based on a brief article by Günter Born called "Die Gedenkhalle Schloß Oberhausen," published in the online journal *Lotta—Antifaschistische Zeitung aus NRW*. <[http://projekte.free.de/lotta/pdf/29/schloss\\_oberhausen.pdf](http://projekte.free.de/lotta/pdf/29/schloss_oberhausen.pdf)> Accessed August 10, 2010.

<sup>13</sup> The fact that Meller was not only a member of the NSDAP but also a highly decorated artist during the Third Reich (he obtained a professorship from Hitler) was the cause of recent controversy. On Volkstrauertag in 2008, a member of the city's Green Party faction sent an open letter to Oberhausen's mayor protesting the use of the statue as the insignia on the city's invitations for the ceremonies taking place at the statue and proposing the use of the memorial hall as a replacement site for future ceremonies. The Greens had suggested the addition of a plaque detailing Meller's inglorious personal history.

the ambiguous inscription ZUM GEDENKEN AN DIE OPFER DER KRIEGE, DER UNFREIHEIT, DER VERTREIBUNG (In commemoration of the victims of the wars, lack of freedom, the expulsion). According to Günter Born, the text applied to the dead of both world wars, including those who had been persecuted by the Nazis, the victims of *Unfreiheit* (which he leaves undefined), and the victims of expulsion. The lack of specificity in these monuments' inscriptions is a common feature. Who is actually invoked when the victims of the war (or wars) are commemorated?



**Figure 33** *Die Trauernde* in Oberhausen. Photo: J.L.

The original configuration of the Gedenkhalle also subsumed victims.<sup>14</sup> Although, as Born points out, it originally contained a permanent exhibition with informational texts and displays focusing on National Socialism and its victims, the exhibit also included a large photomontage which, in addition to an image of a liberated concentration camp, also displayed photos of Dresden after the firebombing and of Germans fleeing the

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to note that expellee organizations initiated neither the statue nor the memorial hall. The BdV includes just the statue *Die Trauernde* on its list of expellee monuments. The city overhauled the exhibitions in the memorial hall in 1988.

eastern provinces. It is clear that the city council conceived of this site as the city's main memorial complex for all victim groups. In terms of inclusiveness, the elements of the monument in Oberhausen were doubtlessly progressive for their time. But while the emphasis remained on victims of the Germans, German victims were not ignored. In fact, the hall housed the exhibition space commemorating Oberhausen's adoption of the Upper Silesian city, Königshütte (today, Chorzów, Poland) in a Patenschaft established in 1955.<sup>15</sup> Despite the differing circumstances of their deaths, however, the exhibit treated all victims equally. It made room for all victims, German and others.



Figure 34 *Die Trauernde* (inscription). Photo: J.L.

The two elements of the monument in Oberhausen show how inclusion in an all-embracing memory complex subsumes victims. The expellee monument erected in Heilbronn in 1985 does the same thing (Figure 35). Here, the monument itself is not subsumptive—the main inscription makes clear that the piece is dedicated to the German victims of the expulsion and to other victims of forced migration throughout the world—but the large stone's location in the heart of the city at the *Hafenmarktturm* links the

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<sup>15</sup> Perlick, "Die west-ostdeutsche Patenschaftsbewegung in Nordrhein-Westfalen," pp. 116-117.



suffering of the expellees with that of others who were killed as a result of the war.<sup>16</sup> Though the city's main cemetery had been home to a different expellee monument since the 1960s, the local chapter of the BdV commissioned a new monument, designed by Rainer Bergmann, to complete the city's main commemorative site for the victims of the world wars. The BdV unveiled the monument in May 1985, as part of a ceremony marking the fortieth anniversary of the end of WWII.



Figure 35 Heilbronn. Photo: J.L.

The Hafenmarktturm features memorials dedicated to the fallen and missing soldiers from various divisions and regiments of the Reichswehr and Wehrmacht, as well as a monument commemorating Heilbronn's reconstruction after the city's devastating

<sup>16</sup> The main inscription reads: DEN 14,000,000 DEUTSCHEN HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN UND DEN FLÜCHTLINGEN UND VERTRIEBENEN IN ALLER WELT (To the 14 Million German Expellees and the Refugees and Expellees of the world). Interestingly, while referencing the former German East, the monument does so by listing the names of the people who lived there rather than to the territory itself. For example, it lists the *Sudetendeutsche* (Sudeten Germans) rather than the Sudetenland.

bombardment in December 1944 (dubbed the *Denkmal für den Wiederaufbau*).<sup>17</sup> The site is decidedly German-centered. In fact, non-German victims and other victims of the Nazis are not mentioned. The inclusion of the expellee monument at this site makes it look like all Germans were victims of WWII.

Erected ten years later, another example of subsuming victims in West Germany is the expellee monument in Minden-Todtenhausen, North Rhine-Westphalia (Figure 36). Like most monuments of this type, the stone, initiated by the BdV, stands in a cemetery near other war memorials and gravestones. A plate affixed to the top of the stone bears the inscription: 1945-1995 – 50 JAHRE FRIEDEN. NIE WIEDER KRIEG, FLUCHT, VERTREIBUNG UND VERSCHLEPPUNG. NIE WIEDER OPFER VON GEWALT. (1945-1995 – 50 years of peace. Never again war, flight, expulsion, and deportation. Never again victims of violence) as well as an engraved adaptation of a well-known image of a westward trek once featured on a postage stamp.<sup>18</sup> As we have seen, a monument's location in a cemetery enhances its subsumptive properties. While the monument strikes a decidedly anti-war tone and (at least indirectly) references other victims ("Never again victims of violence"), the main thrust of the inscription applies only to the Germans from the eastern territories who fled, were expelled, or were deported to the Soviet Union as slave laborers after the war. Though other victims are mentioned, the text and the image of the trek foreground German suffering and make clear to whom the monument is actually dedicated.

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<sup>17</sup> The monument's inscription lists "the thousands of dead Heilbronnians demanded by the First and Second World Wars." The monument itself is dedicated to the "women and men who survived the terrors of the war and National Socialism who in spite of the hopelessness of the postwar situation had the courage and the power to clear the rubble and helped rebuild the city."

<sup>18</sup> The *Deutsche Bundespost* (German Postal Service) produced and circulated the stamp in the Federal Republic in 1955 to commemorate the expulsion.



Figure 36 Minden-Todtenhausen. Photo: J.L.

### Subsuming Victims in the Former GDR

The monuments in Oberhausen, Heilbronn, and Minden are but a few examples of this type in West Germany. There is a clear geographic dimension to these monuments. Immediately apparent when looking at the distribution of these monuments is that their numbers are skewed higher toward the new Länder. In fact, roughly three-quarters of them have been erected in the former GDR.<sup>19</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, no expellee monuments were erected there during the reign of the SED. As if to make up for lost time, dozens of new monuments were unveiled in eastern Germany after 1990. In fact, these comprise a significant percentage of all post-unification expellee monuments. Interestingly, most of these monuments were erected on Volkstrauertag and not on Tag der Heimat, the expellee organizations' traditional day of commemoration. It is probable that these monuments' location in the former GDR plays a part in their formal attributes as well. On the whole, they are less ornate than earlier monuments in the West. Most are

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<sup>19</sup> While a good portion of the new monuments in the former GDR bear the inclusive motifs and inscriptions which subsume the victims of the war, many bear the familiar one-sided, German-centered tropes common in West Germany.

plain, comparatively less expensive commemorative stones bearing simple inscriptions. This is likely a reflection of post-unification economic and political realities in the new Länder; less established expellee organizations with fewer members, fewer financial resources, and fewer sympathizers within the community as well as within local and regional governments. I surmise that the more modest monuments in the new Länder are thus the result of limited resources.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these structural disadvantages, the newly established expellee organizations in the former GDR still felt the need decades after the fact to commemorate publicly the collective fate of the expellees. Immediately striking is the fact that the monuments, in particular, the inscriptions, exhibit so little variation.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, just two examples will be described. The monument in Jena, Thuringia, for example, was erected at no cost to the BdV in 1998 (Figure 37).<sup>22</sup> The austere, though quite large, commemorative stone stands in a cemetery and bears the inscription: DEN OPFERN VON KRIEG, FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG ZUM GEDENKEN (In commemoration of the victims of war, flight, and expulsion). Local government officials, including the city's lord mayor, took part in the dedication ceremony. Similarly, in the city of Torgau, Saxony—perhaps best-known as the city on the Elbe where US Army troops met the

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<sup>20</sup> It is likely that the initiators of these monuments in the former GDR faced other limitations as well; for example, in their choices of motifs and inscriptions which had to be rendered more inclusive to make them less likely to arouse suspicions of revanchism and revisionism and thereby render them less contentious and more likely to be politically implementable in the changed post-1990 political environment.

<sup>21</sup> To wit, along with the monument in Jena, discussed here, eleven other monuments in Thuringia subsume the victims of the war. Some examples of their inscriptions include, in Bleicherode: GEDENKT DER OPFER VON GEWALT, FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG (Commemorate the victims of violence, flight and expulsion); in Flemmingen: along with a Bible verse, ZUM GEDENKEN DER OPFER VON KRIEG, GEWALT UND VERTREIBUNG (In commemoration of the victims of war, violence, and expulsion); in Rositz, DEN OPFERN DES ZWEITEN WELTKRIEGS, DER GEWALTHERRSCHAFT UND DER VERTREIBUNG (To the victims of the Second World War, dictatorship, and the expulsion). Though different formulations exist there is little variation in the sentiments expressed.

<sup>22</sup> The commemorative stone as well as a plant basin (*Pflanzschale*) were donated by the masonry firm which carried out the engraving. The Jena city government provided the location in the cemetery for free.

Soviet Red Army in April 1945—a white marble stele bearing the coats-of-arms of eastern provinces and the inscription IN EHRENDEM GEDENKEN ALLER OPFER VON KRIEG, FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG. ERINNERUNG, MAHNUNG, VERSÖHNUNG, FRIEDEN. GESTIFTET VOM BUND DER VERTRIEBENEN (In honoring commemoration of all victims of war, flight and expulsion. Memory, admonition, reconciliation, peace. Donated by the BdV) was unveiled next to the river at a ceremony presided over by Angelika Pfeiffer, at the time a member of the Bundestag (CDU), on Volkstrauertag 1995. (Figure 38)



Figure 37 Jena. Photo: BdV Archive



Figure 38 Torgau. Photo: BdV Archive

## CONCLUSION

On the monuments in both Jena and Torgau, and on so many other newly constructed expellee monuments elsewhere in the former GDR, it seems society had deemed it no longer acceptable to focus exclusively on German suffering. Instead, catch-

all inscriptions memorialize *all* victims of the war. Thus, the monuments remember victims of the expulsion alongside all other victims (of the war, of violence, of dictatorship, of terror, etc.).<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, however, there is no clear indication of who the other victims are.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, though the monuments make vague references to other victims, the victimization of the Germans forced from their homelands in the eastern provinces remains at the forefront. Within the newly created, all-encompassing rubric “victim,” the expellees stand apart. Indeed, the only victims specifically distinguished are expellees. In fact, the only differentiation between victims occurs when the monuments list the victims of flight and expulsion as a group apart—a collective of people who apparently do not consider themselves victims of the war. According to the monuments, the expulsion was not connected to it. It was separate, and a result of other historical events. Because they experienced a similar fate, all are memorialized equally—except the expellees, whose suffering garners special attention.

Writing about a variety of postwar monuments in the Federal Republic, Frank Schimmelfennig decries the lack of clarity in explaining the historical events the monuments were to memorialize. He reserves his harshest criticism, however, for the ambiguous inscriptions seen also on these expellee monuments (and other types dedicated, for instance, to “the victims of violence”). He labels these inscriptions the “apex of indeterminacy” and points out the “alibi-function” such inscriptions activate.<sup>25</sup> According to Brian Ladd, of all the many objections raised against Helmut Kohl’s

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<sup>23</sup> In the specific context of the former GDR, of course, the victims of dictatorship or of terror might refer to the victims of the Soviet occupation authorities or of the GDR’s own communist regime.

<sup>24</sup> It is, of course, also possible that my analysis is too generous to the initiators of these monuments. It could be that the “victims of the war and violence” to whom the monuments are dedicated are not the victims of the Nazis at all and instead encompass only German military and civilian casualties.

<sup>25</sup> Schimmelfennig, “Die Denkmalinschrift,” in Marcuse, Schimmelfennig, and Spielmann (eds.) *Steine des Anstoßes*, p. 24.

redesigned Neue Wache in the early 1990s, the voices against the “implied equality of victims” reverberated most loudly.<sup>26</sup> I would argue, this was for good reason. If everyone was a guiltless victim, then no one (or only a few, i.e. Hitler and the upper echelon of the National Socialist regime) was a perpetrator. Subsuming victims thus transforms the expellees—and all Germans—into passive recipients of actions and events out of their control. Agency is removed and the suffering of different groups is equated.<sup>27</sup> Since they (the expellees) suffered like others did, they could also be innocent like others.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ladd, The Ghosts of Berlin, p. 220.

<sup>27</sup> This line of thinking and the disconnection of the causal link between the Second World War and the expulsion are explored in Hans Henning Hahn and Eva Hahn, “Mythos ‘Vertreibung,’” pp. 167-188.

<sup>28</sup> Such historical interpretations are in keeping with long-held assertions of collective innocence, which Aleida Assmann avers, have functioned as a mechanism of exculpation (*Entlastungsmechanismus*) to elude (real or imagined) claims of collective guilt. Assmann argues that the “victim syndrome” was one of three such mechanisms coursing about in the first decades of the Federal Republic. The other two were silence (*Schweigen*) and anti-communism, both of which helped postwar Germans deflect attributions of guilt and avoid painful memories of the recent war. While Assmann claims all three have lost efficacy over time, these monuments seem to disprove that. See Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945. (Stuttgart: DVA, 1999), p. 140ff.



## **CONCLUSION—AESTHETICS OF COLLECTIVE INNOCENCE**

Though less forceful than in the blunt remarks at the dedication ceremony in Karlsruhe which open cluster B, the monuments here make profound statements about how the expellee organizations have perceived the expulsion experience and illuminate their views concerning guilt, responsibility, and causality. The monuments disconnect the expulsion from WWII and show the expellees as the collectively innocent victims of circumstances beyond their control. For many expellees, this stance confirmed the absolute injustice of their fate and has been a key component of their postwar self-understandings. Indeed, from the beginning, the belief in the collective innocence of the expellees has been a constant for the expellee organizations and has been crucial in formulating their political demands. But rather than as part of a proactive effort in the pursuit of concrete politics (though those topics have never been far from the surface), the expellee organizations constructed these monuments in the pursuit of symbolic politics: the desire for societal recognition as victims on par with other victim groups, in particular, those persecuted by the Nazis.

I believe the expellee organizations have erected these monuments as a response to recent social developments with regard to how Germans have come to understand the Nazi era. Above all, the designs and motifs of B's monuments reflect the rise in importance of the Holocaust for narrating Germany's past. Indeed, most of the monuments here are from recent decades. The earliest examples (Chapter Seven) represent expellee suffering as being akin to Christ's innocent suffering and portray the expulsion as the German people's expiation for the sins of others. In this regard, the monuments correspond to the belief that Hitler and the National Socialist leadership



alone had been responsible for the war and for all the death and destruction—military and civilian—it brought about. Not only was their suffering Christ-like, in other cases, monuments have instrumentalized gender to re-link all expellees to the peaceful, halcyon days in hearth and home and further distance the expellees from the National Socialist regime and its murderous war efforts (Chapter Eight). That blameless women and children suffered demonstrates the wanton brutality and senselessness of the expulsion. Most recently, monuments subsume the victims of the expulsion amongst all war victims—a move which obfuscates the differing causes of death and says that all were equal victims (Chapter Nine). Though the monuments make gestures to other victims, they once again thrust German wartime suffering to the fore and mute attributions of guilt and responsibility

Though there can be little doubt that many expellees suffered at the end of WWII, the monuments in all three chapters go beyond simple commemoration to make universal attributions of innocence. Moreover, these monuments unveil historical interpretations that dissolve causal links and preclude the possibility that certain expellees might have been complicit in Nazi atrocities or were in any way liable for what befell them. No real discussion of guilt graces the monuments; nor do the monuments provide worthy provocation for further discussion; nor do they mention responsibility, a fact which—in light of the changes in official narratives at the national level—is surprising. Despite the sluggish progress made in incorporating non-German casualties in official postwar narratives in Germany, it appears that the initiators of these monuments have sought to go beyond simply commemorating the expellees' losses and have desired instead to contest non-German-centered narratives. Thus, cluster B's monuments have been local-level

participants in larger discussion over the guilt and innocence, not only of the expellees but also of the German people as a whole.

As inaccurate and misleading as it is to conclude that all Germans after WWII were collectively guilty for Nazi crimes, it is likewise erroneous to propound that such a large segment of the German populace—the expellees made up roughly 16% of West Germany’s population—was collectively innocent. To be sure, I do not claim that all expellees, regardless of gender or age, “deserved,” or should have expected, any adverse fate—regardless of their involvement with National Socialism. Nor do I pass judgment on the millions of individual Germans expelled from their homes. In my opinion, such conclusions are irrelevant; the purported “guilt” or “innocence” of expellees has no real bearing on an analysis concerned with their representations of these things. The forms and methods the expellee organizations have chosen to represent the expulsion experience are more interesting and pertinent for my analysis. Nonetheless, when the “untainted” are selected to represent an entire community—millions of people—that had at least some members involved in National Socialism, troubles arise. In a war in which all but a very few were innocent, no one was guilty. When all were victims, no one was a perpetrator.

Cluster B ends my direct interpretive work on expellee monuments. In Part Three, I look at the commemorative ceremonies which occur there and provide further insight into the narratives the monuments articulate.

## **PART THREE**

### **COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONIES**

#### **CHAPTER TEN**

#### **LOCAL EXPELLEE MONUMENTS AS LOCI OF REMEMBRANCE:**

#### **TAG DER HEIMAT AND COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONIES OF**

#### **THE EXPELLEES**

A Volk that honors its dead honors itself and overcomes the prejudices of callousness and barbarity hurled against us by the whole world.

--Paul Löbe, President of the Reichstag, at the inaugural celebration of Volkstrauertag, 1922.<sup>1</sup>

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout this dissertation I have referred occasionally to the commemorative ceremonies of the expellee organizations to contextualize the narratives articulated by their monuments. For example, in Chapter Six I brought into relief the monument in Kamen, NRW. Consisting of a simple cross with the inscription “To the dead of the East German Heimat,” the monument assumes an amplified meaning when the commemorative ceremonies surrounding its erection—which were part of demonstrations protesting the postwar territorial status quo—are put into view. Nevertheless, the focus in Part II remained on the monuments themselves. In this chapter, I reverse my aim. Adding

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, e.V. (ed.) 40 Jahre Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge. (Neuwied: Raiffeisendruckerei, 1959), p. 28.

another layer to their mnemonic capabilities, these monuments have played host for decades to regular commemorative ceremonies: first at their dedications and consecrations, and annually on Volkstrauertag and other days of mourning, as well as on the most important expellee day of commemoration, Tag der Heimat. In this chapter, I examine the public rituals and remembrance practices of the expellees that take place at their local monuments.

Gershoni and Jankowski consider commemorative ceremonies “one of the primary means of representation of collective memories.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it seems a thorough study of monuments and the historical narratives they generate and reflect would be incomplete without a discussion of the commemorative ceremonies that happen there. The ceremonies give an indication of a monument’s “life” in the years after its initial emplacement.<sup>3</sup> At these times, the often veiled messages of monuments are revealed in both word and deed. The ceremonies are an important part of an all-encompassing investigation because they echo and reinforce the historical interpretations the monuments’ inscriptions and forms already express. In other words, the ceremonies enliven and embellish the narratives the monuments tersely articulate. Not all of the 1,400+ local monuments play host to organized commemorative ceremonies. In the numerous cases in which they do, however, they provide the central location for the “performance” of memories of the expulsion. The ceremonies with the monuments as backdrops are where memories and historical narratives are brought to life. Most importantly, the commemorative ceremonies put those narratives on display *in public*.

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<sup>2</sup> Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, Commemorating the Nation: Collective Memory, Public Commemoration, and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Egypt. (Chicago: Middle East Documentation Center, 2004), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> They also offer a gentle riposte to Musil’s claim of monuments’ “conspicuous inconspicuousness.” See Chapter Two.

Thus, the object of my analysis here is not the expellee monuments per se but rather the festivities that occur there, which, I contend, like the monuments, shed light on the oftentimes one-sided and de-contextualized historical interpretations the expellee organizations propound. That is, instead of using the ceremonies to clarify the monuments' sometimes vague or ambiguous meanings, I seek here to analyze the key role played by the monuments as loci of public remembrance. I do this, first, by highlighting the three main ways monuments facilitate and promote commemorative ceremonies, and second, by exploring how the ceremonies performed there further unveil historical narratives. I then offer a review of the expellees' primary days of commemoration and the main rituals that happen during them.

## **FACILITATING COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONIES**

Monuments play a central role in facilitating commemorative ceremonies. At the most basic level, monuments' inscriptions and forms offer a one-sided take on the events of the past and give direction as to what or who is to be commemorated. As Part II has shown, the historical narrative made local expellee monuments reveal is one centered on German wartime suffering, particularly that of the expellees. This simple aspect constitutes the first way in which monuments facilitate commemorative ceremonies: they instruct. The second and third ways are equally straightforward, and are related to what I referred to in Chapter One as the practical functions of monuments.

Of these latter two ways, the first is that all monuments fashion a physical space for people to congregate in public. While this is true of all monuments, it is especially significant for those commemorating the expulsion: an object of commemoration which,

due to the diffuse nature of the events associated with the forced migration of Germans after WWII, has no centralized or representative site.<sup>4</sup> The monuments have therefore extricated the expulsion from the far reaches of the former German Reich and other areas of German settlement—from those locations where most of the events the expulsion comprised actually occurred—and transplanted it to the Federal Republic. Thus, the monuments “localize” the expulsion by anchoring it in communities far from where the commemorated events occurred. Much the same, local monuments have offered members of the Landsmannschaften and their sympathizers an *authentischer Ort* (authentic site)—otherwise lacking—to mourn their dead and celebrate the Heimat.<sup>5</sup> To be sure, the authentic sites are not “authentic” in the sense that the events commemorated actually occurred there, as might be the case with a commemorative plaque on a battlefield or some other kind of historical marker. For the expellees, however, the monuments become the next best thing.

As also noted in Chapter One, the physical space created by monuments enables the formation of collectives. In particular, it was Koselleck who demonstrated the ways in which monuments classify and identify both those commemorated as well as those doing the commemorating.<sup>6</sup> In this case, the monuments designate all expellees—those who perished as a result of the expulsion and those who survived it—as the aggrieved. Moreover, not only do the monuments foster communities of East Prussians, Sudeten

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<sup>4</sup> A growing number of expellee monuments have been erected by the expellee organizations—with the approval of local authorities—in the “old Heimat,” for example in Poland, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Romania, and Hungary. The expellee organizations have erected the lion’s share of monuments located outside of the Federal Republic in these countries.

<sup>5</sup> In all but a few cases, for example, the monuments commemorating the fate of the expellees who passed through the transit camps at Friedland (Lower Saxony) and Moschendorf (in Hof a.d. Saale, Bavaria), or at expellee cemeteries, such as in Freiberg, Saxony, local expellee monuments are located far from the places and events they were designed to memorialize.

<sup>6</sup> Koselleck. “Kriegerdenkmale als Identitätsstiftungen der Überlebenden.”

Germans, Pomeranians, Danube Swabians, etc., they also help create communities of victims. The surviving expellees, who gather at the monuments to mourn, celebrate, and protest, identify with the victims of the expulsion (designated thusly by the monuments) and ostensibly declare themselves victims as well. The offer of a potential identity the monuments make and that Koselleck described, it seems, is made most conspicuously during the commemorative ceremonies. In fact, the creation of a site via the emplacement of a monument is vital for developing what is arguably the most significant social impact of commemorative ceremonies: namely, the coalescence of these collectives.

As Koselleck noticed, the physical space for remembrance that monuments provide affords visitors the opportunity to identify with the dead, and thereby promotes the formation of these groups; the united memorialization that happens there during commemorative ceremonies actually cements this identification and group building. According to Insa Eschebach, one of the goals of public commemoration is the “constitution of a ‘we,’ a society, which is produced on the one hand through speeches and on the other hand, for example, through collective songs or moments of silence.”<sup>7</sup> In other words, the monuments provide the sites for likeminded people to congregate; the ceremonies Eschebach has written about solidify their bond. It is these groups who return to the monuments year after year to remember their dead, reminisce about the old homeland, and celebrate their interpretation of history.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Insa Eschebach. Öffentliches Gedenken. Deutsche Erinnerungskulturen seit der Weimarer Republik. (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Writing about “primitive” societies (in particular, about ancient Egypt), Jan Assmann has also written on this topic. He claims, “Every group that wants to consolidate itself as such endeavors to create and secure sites that not only offer stages of their forms of interaction, but also serve as symbols of their identity and provide a common ground for their recollection.” See Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen. (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1992), p. 39.

## **COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONIES: WHAT THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY DO**

In order for the study of these monuments and their ceremonies to be effective, it is important to understand what commemorative ceremonies and rituals are, and why they are so meaningful for the transmission of historical narratives. First, a clarification of terms: I use the concept “commemorative ceremonies” here as an umbrella term. The commemorative ceremonies of the expellees need not (and often do not) occur at monuments. The festivities I discuss in this chapter, however, do and have indeed taken place at these sites. The ceremonies are regular (usually annual), highly organized and structured events that occur in public. My focus, therefore, is not on private, individual remembrance but rather on groups’ ritualized commemoration in the public sphere. I examine the both the concepts “commemorative ceremonies” and “rituals” here and use them interchangeably when appropriate. However, I do not consider them synonymous. For the purposes of this study, rituals are the constitutive parts of ceremonies. In other words, the former comprise the latter. Obviously, there are many types of both: secular/non-secular, public/private, political, commemorative, etc. In addition, although the commemorative ceremonies of the expellees often contain religious elements and include the participation of spiritual leaders, neither of these terms should be understood as denoting something religious. I do not distinguish between the two terms to imbue either with any sort of religious significance and thereby remove the other from the ecclesiastical realm. I understand the term “rite” as being synonymous with “ritual;” thus I employ the two interchangeably.

That clarified, the meaning of ritual as I define it is rather simple. In particular, my thinking has been shaped by the helpful explanations of the concept that Robert Bocock



and Paul Connerton have provided. Bocock states that “ritual is to be used here to mean bodily action in relation to symbols. The action is social, that is it involves groups of people who share some sets of expectations in common [...]” He elucidates his definition further with the assertion: “Ritual is the symbolic use of bodily movement and gesture in a social situation to express and articulate meaning.”<sup>9</sup> Connerton offers a similar explanation. His description starts with Lukes’ definition of ritual as the “rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance,” but goes on to say, “[Rites] are formalized acts, and tend to be stylized, stereotyped, and repetitive. [...] They are not performed under inner momentary compulsion but are deliberately observed to denote feelings.”<sup>10</sup> Rituals, in sum, are the highly structured, programmatic, and symbolic activities of groups which have meanings that transcend the actual activities themselves. Bocock labels what I call commemorative ceremonies “ritual occasions”: “These are social situations defined by the people themselves as separate, ‘special’ set-apart occasions, set apart from the world of work and from recreational activities.”<sup>11</sup> To reiterate, the commemorative ceremonies of the expellees are the various such occasions and are made up of rituals.

To begin my exploration of what commemorative ceremonies *do*, I start with concepts developed by Emile Durkheim. Focusing primarily on organized festivities of a religious nature, Durkheim saw the rites that make up ceremonies as the basis of society, and described the “change of consciousness” that is engendered by bringing together

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Bocock, Ritual in Industrial Society: A Sociological Analysis of Ritualism in Modern England. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1974), p. 36 & p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Connerton, How Societies Remember. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 44. The theories espoused in this important book will be discussed in greater detail below.

<sup>11</sup> Bocock, Ritual in Industrial Society, p. 39.

people for these purposes.<sup>12</sup> Groups coalesce around certain beliefs and gather to “revive the most essential elements of the collective consciousness” by “support[ing] the vitality of these beliefs” and “prevent[ing] them from fading from memory. In rituals, therefore, convictions already held are strengthened.”<sup>13</sup> The beliefs expressed in ritual form at ceremonies are integral for the internal cohesion and reaffirmation of social groups and communities. “No society can exist that does not feel the need at regular intervals to sustain and reaffirm the collective feelings and ideas that constitute its unity and personality.”<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the social element Durkheim observed is central and large numbers of scholars mention it, including the authors of virtually all of the literature I have cited in this chapter. Without a doubt, commemorative ceremonies are an important means of consolidating membership in a collective by transmitting shared convictions.<sup>15</sup>

While the formation of groups through rituals and ceremonies is crucial, at the center remain the beliefs around which the groups’ members coalesce. While Durkheim explored what the shared beliefs espoused during rituals mean for groups, I am more concerned with what groups mean for the beliefs. Commemorative ceremonies bring a group’s beliefs to life and are one means of putting them on display. These beliefs—referred to in other studies as “myths,”<sup>16</sup> “collective memories,”<sup>17</sup> or others terms—constitute the historical narratives that participants at the ceremonies enliven and

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<sup>12</sup> Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life. Tr. Carol Cosman. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 285 & p. 322.

<sup>15</sup> Those who do not share in the beliefs are unlikely to participate. As Connerton notes, “And conversely, people resist being forced to pay lip-service to an alien set of rites, incompatible with their own vision of the ‘truth,’ because to enact a rite is always, in some sense, to assent to its meaning” (Connerton, How Society Remembers, p. 44).

<sup>16</sup> For example, in Rüdiger Voigt, “Mythen, Rituale und Symbole in der Politik,” in Voigt (ed.) Symbole der Politik, Politik der Symbole. (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1989), pp. 9-37.

<sup>17</sup> For example, in Yael Zerubavel, Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

perform. In my opinion, this is the most important aspect of all; the staging of commemorative ceremonies at monuments gives even more credence to the beliefs articulated there, both by the monuments and by participants at the ceremonies—especially when the events are large, held in public, and are attended or officiated over by important leaders.

Commemorative ceremonies have a profound effect therefore on the authoritativeness of historical narratives. Writing about the meaning of rituals for political myths, Rüdiger Voigt, for example, has written that ceremonies “concretize” those beliefs. “Political festivals (*Feste*)—such as historical commemorations, national holidays, [...]—are where myths are newly attested and where acceptance of their political content is produced.”<sup>18</sup> Concerned primarily with how collectives perceive the past and how those perceptions are vocalized, Zerubavel states that commemorative ceremonies are one means through which such beliefs are authenticated and validated. “Collective memory is substantiated through multiple forms of commemoration: the celebration of a communal festival, the reading of a tale, the participation in a memorial service, or the observance of a holiday. Through these commemorative rituals, groups create, articulate, and negotiate their shared memories of particular events.”<sup>19</sup> The fact that beliefs—be they political myths or collectively produced memories of the past (both of which apply to the commemoration of the expulsion, of course)—are celebrated and commemorated at public ceremonies adds to their weight, thereby rendering them more

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<sup>18</sup> Voigt, “Mythen, Rituale und Symbole in der Politik,” p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, p. 5. Zerubavel makes an equally germane point about the historical selectivity of commemorative ceremonies. She declares, “Each act of commemoration reproduces a commemorative narrative, a story about a particular past that accounts for this ritualized remembrance and provides a moral message for the group members. In creating this narrative, collective memory clearly draws upon historical sources. Yet it does so selectively and creatively (p. 6).

credible. Commemorative ceremonies, therefore, reiterate and reinforce already held beliefs.

What is it about the performance of memories at commemorative ceremonies that makes them so fundamental for the consolidation and transmission of these beliefs? Jan Assmann, for example, notes that “all rituals have the double aspect of repetition (*Wiederholung*) and making present (*Vergegenwärtigung*).”<sup>20</sup> Paul Connerton also picks up on this point in his study How Societies Remember, an analysis of how memory is conveyed and sustained. He claims, “All rites are repetitive, and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>21</sup> Above all, Connerton sees “social memory” at work in commemorative ceremonies and other “bodily practices.” Two long passages sum up his views about the importance of commemorative ceremonies for conveying historical narratives. He writes:

This narrative was more than a story told – it was a *cult enacted*. It was a rite fixed and performed. [...] We would underestimate the commemorative hold of the rite, we would minimize its mnemonic power, if we were to say that it *reminded* the participants of mythic events; we should say rather that the sacred event [...] was *re-presented*; the participants in the rite gave it ceremonially embodied form. [...] Above all, it was through acts performed at a sacred site that the illusion of mundane time was suspended. [Emphasis in original]<sup>22</sup>

Connerton continues:

What, then, is being remembered in commemorative ceremonies? Part of the answer is that a community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative. [A ritual’s] master narrative is more than a story told and reflected on; it is a cult enacted. An image of the past, even in the form of a master narrative, is conveyed and sustained by ritual performances. And this means that what is remembered in commemorative ceremonies is something in addition to a collectively organized variant of personal and cognitive memory.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jan Assmann, Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, p. 17. As such, commemorative ceremonies and the rituals that make them up are a part of cultural memory, as opposed to communicative memory—a key distinction at the root of Assmann’s theory of cultural memory.

<sup>21</sup> Connerton, How Societies Remember, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

To be sure, as Connerton concedes, commemorative ceremonies are not the sole constituents of collective memory. He does state, however, that beliefs adhered to and conveyed at special ceremonies seep into everyday life as well: “But whatever is demonstrated in rites permeates also non-ritual behavior and mentality.”<sup>24</sup> According to Connerton, in order to preserve over time the beliefs its members hold most dear, a group will translate its memories into rites and perform them at commemorative ceremonies.<sup>25</sup>

Lastly, commemorative ceremonies—particularly at the local level—are one of the primary avenues for non-elites to gain access to the processes in which meaning is made of history. As Zerubavel points out, “While scholars and intellectuals engage in a formal historical discourse, for most members of society, knowledge of the past is first and foremost shaped by these multiple commemorations.”<sup>26</sup> This is an especially pertinent point when the historical interpretations at the grassroots are at odds with those held by elites. The commemorative ceremonies thus allow average people access to the past and permit them to interpret and frame it in ways government commissions and history books do not.

### **THE EXPELLEES’ DAYS OF COMMEMORATION: TAG DER HEIMAT & VOLKSTRAUERTAG**

In his analysis of ritual means of public mourning in Germany after 1945, Frank Maciejewski reaches the conclusion that when it came to commemorating their own victims of the war and its aftermath, Germans could only engage in mourning without rituals; when it came to commemorating others—including the victims of the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>26</sup> Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, p. 6.

Holocaust—the Germans were forced to conduct rituals without mourning.<sup>27</sup> Of course, this stance—more a statement about the commemoration of Germany’s victims than about German victims themselves—overlooks the numerous rituals of mourning and commemoration (and political demonstrations) the expellee organizations have conducted throughout (West) Germany since WWII. Starting in the late 1940s and continuing until today, the expellees have held regular, highly structured, well-publicized, and highly visible commemorative ceremonies at all levels: national, regional, and local. While participation levels have diminished since the early days, the ceremonies persist. The monuments the expellees have erected, however, have served as special loci of remembrance for these events. This is why my focus here remains on the ceremonies at these important commemorative sites, despite the fact that expellee gatherings take many forms and occur at many places.

Events at local expellee monuments have happened on a number of set days, including their days of dedication, traditional German days of mourning such as *Allerseelentag* (All Soul’s Day, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, i.e. the day after All Saints Day) in Catholic regions and *Totensonntag*<sup>28</sup> in predominantly Protestant areas, or on days of national and political celebration and reflection (for example, prior to reunification in 1990, on the Day of German Unity, i.e. June 17th). Nevertheless, the two main days of commemoration for the expellees have been Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag—both of

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<sup>27</sup> Franz Maciejewski, “Trauer ohne Riten – Riten ohne Trauer. Deutsche Volkstrauer nach 1945,” in Jan Assmann, Franz Maciejewski and Axel Michaels (eds.) *Der Abschied von den Toten: Trauerrituale im Kulturvergleich*. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), pp. 245-266. In this text—in essence, an examination of the shape of Holocaust mourning rituals (or the lack thereof) and how they came about in postwar Germany—Maciejewski argues that Germans commemorated their own dead and the dead of the Holocaust in the only means open to them. He writes, “The empirical results of ritual performances of Holocaust commemoration allows no doubt: a ritual of mourning in the emphatic sense does not take place on the German side; what one sees instead is the repeated staging of rituals of guilt” (p. 262).

<sup>28</sup> Totensonntag is also celebrated in November, on the last Sunday before the first Advent Sunday.

which have garnered scant scholarly attention, at least in this context.<sup>29</sup> These two dates—the very concepts of which parallel the historical narratives put forth by the monuments—also have in common the fact that they memorialize people and events intimately related to WWII. In what follows, I discuss the origins and evolution of these chief days of expellee commemoration, and describe the key elements of the ceremonies that occur on them. I then present a discussion of what these ceremonies mean for the historical narratives the monuments represent.

### **Tag der Heimat**

As Michael Schwartz has pointed out, public memorialization of the expulsion was hampered immediately after the war by the fact that there was no clear date—like June 17<sup>th</sup>, the Day of German Unity, for instance—on which to celebrate its yearly anniversary.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the pageantry for a new day of commemoration had to be “invented.”<sup>31</sup> The date selected was not May 8<sup>th</sup> or any other day associated with the end

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<sup>29</sup> As a result, the bulk of my material, particularly on Tag der Heimat, comes from the BdV’s own sources.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Vertriebene im doppelten Deutschland. Integrations- und Erinnerungspolitik in der DDR und in der Bundesrepublik,” *Vierteljahrsheft für Zeitgeschichte*, 1/2008, p. 141ff. Zerubavel has written that fixing specific dates as memorial days to guarantee the commemoration of key events is crucial for a collective’s cohesiveness. For this reason, the designation of certain days is crucial. See Zerubavel, *Recollected Roots*, p. 139f.

<sup>31</sup> I use the term “invented” here deliberately in obvious reference to Eric Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented tradition,” which he defines as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically, implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.” (p.1) The idealization of the prewar Heimat and the mourning of its loss (believed in the first few years after the war to be merely temporary, of course) as well the commemoration of the dead which have taken place on the expellees’ invented holiday, Tag der Heimat, seem to mirror the “process of formalization and ritualization” which Hobsbawm claims is the essence of inventing traditions. (p.4) He states “For all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion” (p. 12)—which certainly applies to the expellees, whose commemorative ceremonies helped make a motley crew of millions of Germans with different origins, dialects, religious convictions, etc., conscious of their fate as victims of WWII and the postwar settlement and amenable to the concrete and symbolic political and cultural objectives of the expellee organizations. See Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction,” in E. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.)

of the war. Instead, a date was chosen which connected the new day of commemoration with the signing of the Charter of the German Expellees on August 5, 1950, and its public proclamation in front of an estimated 150,000 demonstrators in Stuttgart the next day. As noted at various points in this dissertation, the date chosen for this act was not a coincidence. The Charter was signed and proclaimed on those respective days as a deliberate protest against the Potsdam Agreement, which five years before had formally sanctioned the postwar borders and set in motion the forced migration of the Germans.

The commemoration of the expulsion thus was not connected to the war but to this post-WWII event. The choice of this date shows that from the start, the expellee organizations had disconnected the causal link between the Nazi war of aggression and the forced migration of the Germans. “Instead of identifying themselves with the loss suffered by a ‘*Tätervolk*’ (perpetrators),” Schwartz writes, with the selection of this date “the expellee organizations portrayed themselves with the Charter as the conciliatory victims of a reprehensible postwar event.”<sup>32</sup> August 5, 1950 is considered the first Tag der Heimat, though expellees had held a similar day of commemoration and protest—Tag der Deutschen—at the same time the year before.<sup>33</sup> Initially, the national offices of the expellee organizations selected the first Sunday in August as the fixed date for the new “holiday.” After 1954, however, in an attempt to maximize the mobilization of their members and thus boost the media attention received by the ceremonies, the organizations moved the date to the second Sunday in September. With the selection of

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The Invention of Tradition. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14, as well as, in the same volume, Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” pp. 263-307.

<sup>32</sup> Schwartz, “Vertriebene im doppelten Deutschland,” pp. 143-144.

<sup>33</sup> The expellee organizations dedicated their monument in Kamen, referenced at the beginning of this chapter, on this precursor to the inaugural Tag der Heimat.



the new date, event organizers sought to avoid scheduling conflicts with the schools' summer break and increase participation.<sup>34</sup>

Credit for the conceptualization of Tag der Heimat is generally given to Paul Wagner, who, prior to the expulsion, served as the mayor of a small town in East Prussia.<sup>35</sup> In a memorandum proposing the introduction of the commemoration, Wagner outlined three principal objectives for the Tag der Heimat, all of which, when put into action, aimed at reaching the widest audience possible. First, Wagner wrote that “the expellees should gather annually to avow themselves in public to their currently lost Heimat. They should familiarize their children and all Germans with the Heimat, especially with the Right to Heimat, which is inalienable and indispensable.” Second, he stated that “the expellees should take pride in their Heimat and publicly display its cultural legacy and pass it on to their children.” Third, he encouraged his fellow expellees to make all Germans aware of the value of the Heimat and, at the same time, demand the Right to Heimat before the entire world. These efforts would result in “promoting the commonalities between local Germans and the expellees and end the divide between

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<sup>34</sup> Tag der Heimat on the national level occurs the first Sunday of September while local-level ceremonies take place on the second Sunday. The arrangement was made presumably to enable affiliates to send members to the national gathering and partake in their own local and regional celebrations as well. Gilad Margalit has another explanation for the date change. He claims the German government coerced the expellee organizations to push back the date to the second Sunday in September because Tag der Heimat in August fell during Konrad Adenauer's noted visit to Moscow in 1955. See Margalit, Guilt, Suffering, and Memory, p. 198.

<sup>35</sup> Wagner was born in Silesia in 1900 and later moved to East Prussia. He was a cofounder of the Landsmannschaft East Prussia and earned a *Bundesverdienstkreuz* for his efforts in initiating this holiday. I gleaned this and most of the following information about Wagner and his original concept of Tag der Heimat from a pamphlet published by the BdV and written by Gustl Huber. See Huber, Tag der Heimat – Tag der Deutschen. Kulturelle Arbeitshefte 17. 3rd Edition. (Bonn: Bund der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände, 1998). The text provides some historical background on the expellees, philosophical remarks on the meaning of Heimat, and the legal background information on the right to Heimat. This is followed by a description of the Tag der Heimat's origin, a discussion of the day's meaning, as well as guidelines for local branches of the BdV on organizing Tag der Heimat ceremonies.

them so that they might grow closer together.”<sup>36</sup> As Wagner conceived it, at the heart of Tag der Heimat was not a somber and mournful commemoration of expellee suffering and victimization but rather a celebration of the Heimat, which would serve to bridge the gap between the various expellee groups themselves as well as between the expellees and the Einheimischen and ensure that their cultural legacy would be passed on to their children, now spending their formative years on “foreign soil” in the West. The holiday’s goals were thus political, cultural, and intergenerational.

According to BdV documents from the late 1950s to the mid-1960s (cited in Huber’s pamphlet), organizers had strictly followed two main viewpoints concerning the subsequent development of this commemorative day: first, the Tag der Heimat was to have a decidedly political character. Organizers crafted events that “embod[ied] the entire culture of all Heimat regions.” Moreover, Tag der Heimat was to be a “day of admonition (*Mahnung*), a day of obligation, and a day of avowal to the Heimat snatched away from the expellees and to the difficult lot of the Germans suffering under the Communist yoke.” In addition to the already political content of the celebrations and commemoration, the events themselves were also highly politicized. The expellee organizations traditionally held Tag der Heimat’s opening ceremonies in Berlin to underscore its role as the capital of all Germans. According to Stickler, a number of notable public officials took part in the events in Berlin—including Willy Brandt (serving at the time as Berlin’s Lord Mayor), Herbert Wehner (the SPD’s deputy chairman) Kurt Georg Kiesinger (then Minister President of Baden-Württemberg). Interestingly, as Stickler points out, neither Konrad Adenauer, nor either of his two foreign ministers ever

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<sup>36</sup> Huber, Tag der Heimat – Tag der Deutschen, p. 8.

attended.<sup>37</sup> In fact, not until Gerhard Schröder participated in 2000 did a federal chancellor ever take part in the national Tag der Heimat ceremony.<sup>38</sup>

The second viewpoint demonstrates once again that Tag der Heimat organizers intended the day's content to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. The day was to be nonpartisan and interdenominational. As we have seen, all the major political parties embraced the expellees' cause at first, so the participation of leading figures from the SPD in the early and mid-1960s should come as no surprise. In light of the vociferous opposition voiced by the expellee organizations to the new Ostpolitik, it became inconceivable that Willy Brandt would have participated in any of the expellee organizations' functions in the late 1960s and early 1970s—just years after appearing at them in the early and mid-1960s. Nor would the expellee organizations have invited him. Therefore, the early pledge of nonpartisanship is particularly noteworthy. Concomitantly, the BdV's political objectives superseded any religious affiliations—hence, the great effort not to alienate expellees with either Catholic or Protestant backgrounds. This holiday was created to appeal to all Germans from the eastern territories, and, if possible, to local West Germans as well. Again, Huber cites the BdV's documentation: “all

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<sup>37</sup> The lack of participation of members of the CDU-led government is most likely attributed to the fact that, as we have already seen, the BdV's rigid political stance regarding the border issue was often at odds with the foreign policy objectives of the Adenauer government. The potential discord these disagreements would cause for West Germany's relations with its western partners proved to be too risky for the federal government. In addition, Edgar Wolfrum points out that there is evidence that the West German federal government did not want strong state involvement in any political commemorative ceremonies—in particular, in the remembrance events celebrating June 17, 1953—of the new republic because of the overwhelming role played by the Nazi state in such events during the Third Reich. For this reason, such events were organized in a decentralized fashion with little government direction. For more, see Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, p. 134. This is not to say, however, that state governments did not support Tag der Heimat festivities. For instance, Retterath describes the role played by the state government of Baden-Württemberg in aiding the coordination of events there. See Retterath, “Geschichtsbilderkampf...” p. 88.

<sup>38</sup> Stickler, “*Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch*,” p. 161.

Germans conscious of the homeland (*alle heimatbewußten Deutschen*) unite on [Tag der Heimat,] as an avowal of Heimat on this side and on the other side of the iron curtain.”<sup>39</sup>

As to the “decidedly political character” of Tag der Heimat—that is, to the actual content of the days’ festivities—the BdV’s directives, as Huber summarized, state clearly that the events associated with Tag der Heimat were “to remind the world public that the Potsdam Agreement was not the final settlement of the border issue.” Reflecting the concrete politics expressed by their monuments, the expellee organizations desired to make the point that the areas of German settlement to the east of the Oder/Neisse were still German territory. According to Huber, the BdV’s documents state that this fact [was] “to be acknowledged and the rights derived from this standpoint [were] to be represented.” The expellees sought to join all relevant non-expellee institutions in espousing “the right to homeland and its realization through peaceful transition and the dictates of the Basic Law regarding the unification of Germany. The ceremonies were also to vocalize the fact that “the expulsion of individuals or of entire groups is a violation of the most fundamental legal understandings of the international community.”<sup>40</sup> All of this had to do with concrete politics. No mention was made at this time of the suffering or victimization of the expellees unless it pertained to territorial reacquisition or tangible political rights. This, of course, would change in the years to come.

By the end of the 1950s, writes Stickler, Tag der Heimat had become a chief component of the expellee organizations’ public relations efforts. In addition to the festivities in Berlin, local branches of the expellee organizations celebrated their

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<sup>39</sup> Huber, *Tag der Heimat – Tag der Deutschen*, p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

ceremonies throughout West Germany in order to mobilize the expellees in all their home communities, often with the participation of prominent BdV functionaries. In addition, this “regionalization” of Tag der Heimat served to promote the involvement of local populations, in order to inform them of the BdV’s goals and garner their support.<sup>41</sup> All in all, Kossert contends, this mass mobilization of the expellees, not all of whom were politically active, served a two-pronged purpose. First, the events were to solidify the expellees’ identities as Germans from the East “to reinforce their inner cohesion as a group” and “to counteract the assimilation of ‘the community of fate’ (*Schicksalsgemeinschaft*) into West German society.” Second, the events were to be a show of strength vis-à-vis both the federal government and all political parties by demonstrating the grassroots support for the BdV’s concrete political aims.<sup>42</sup>

Over the decades, Tag der Heimat has become the principal day for commemorating the expulsion. Today, it is nothing new (though still controversial, particularly in Poland, because of the ongoing debate over the Center Against Expulsions) when the Federal Republic’s chancellor or its president speaks at the BdV’s national commemoration in Berlin. Though not all Tag der Heimat events happen at local monuments, the expellees’ commemorative ceremonies—including in the capital, where speeches are made and wreaths are laid at the monument on Theodor-Heuss-Platz—usually consist of events there. As we have seen, the expellee organizations have unveiled many other their monuments on Tag der Heimat. Nevertheless, the BdV’s ability to mobilize its members and sympathizers for local ceremonies at the monuments

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<sup>41</sup> Stickler, “*Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch*,” pp. 160-161.

<sup>42</sup> Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*, p. 146.

has definitely decreased.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the thousands who came out to protest in the 1950s and early 1960s, communal events today draw only hundreds, or occasionally even dozens. Yet the ceremonies persist and appeals have been made to the federal government to make it an official national holiday.

### **Volkstrauertag**

The history of Volkstrauertag—the “People’s Day of Mourning” (also translated as “Remembrance Day”)—extends back more than two decades before the end of WWII and the expulsion.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, its origins do not lie with the expellee organizations, and we should not view it exclusively as a day of remembrance and mourning for the expellees. In fact, the commemoration of the expulsion has comprised only a small part of the festivities. Nevertheless, like Tag der Heimat, the People’s Day of Mourning has become one of the central days of public commemoration of the expulsion in the Federal Republic, which regularly include ceremonies at local expellee monuments. While a full history of Volkstrauertag would exceed the scope of this chapter, a brief overview of the holiday’s genesis and its initial conceptualization are indispensable for understanding how the day has come to be used and understood after 1945, and how its appropriation by the expellees has become one more vehicle for the ritualized articulation of one-sided historical narratives.

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<sup>43</sup> Among other things, the reasons given for the decreasing rate of participation are usually the old age of the members of the expellee organizations and the *Erlebnisgeneration* (the “experience generation,” i.e. those who experienced the expulsion firsthand), the lack of interest of the second generation after its complete integration into society, and diminished financial support.

<sup>44</sup> Probably the most comprehensive investigation of Volkstrauertag’s origin and its evolution during the Weimar period and into the Nazi era (when it was known as Heldengedenktage) can be found in Fritz Schellack, Nationalfeiertage in Deutschland von 1871 bis 1945. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989).

As originally conceived, Volkstrauertag was set aside as a day for mourning the millions of fallen German soldiers of the First World War. After the National Assembly of the Weimar Republic was unable to pass the legislation necessary to institute a national day of mourning, a private organization founded in 1919 to oversee the care of German war graves, the *Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge* (VDK—People’s League for the Care of War Graves), proposed a secular day of mourning that would unite people of different political persuasions and religious faiths in common commemoration. Though the VDK made its proposal in consultation with the Christian churches, in the interest of neutrality, the date for the new day of mourning it selected was in no way associated with the Catholic (Allerseelentag) or Protestant (Totensonntag) days of mourning.<sup>45</sup> Instead, the VDK selected a day in the spring (both the 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday and 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Easter were used), which “symbolize[d] the resurrection of the German nation after its defeat by suggesting that the ‘heroes’ had sacrificed their lives for a better future.”<sup>46</sup> Though somber and mournful, Volkstrauertag was imbued from the start with a rousing national-political dimension. Though the parliament held an official, national-level ceremony in the Reichstag in 1922, it was not until 1925 that Germans celebrated Volkstrauertag throughout the country. The national-political dimension allowed its easy transition into and continuance during the Third Reich, where the Nazi leadership embraced the holiday, albeit after a law changed the name to *Heldengedenktage*

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<sup>45</sup> Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, e.V. (ed.) *40 Jahre Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge*, p. 26ff.

<sup>46</sup> Alexandra Kaiser, “Performing the New German Past: The People’s Day of Mourning and 27 January as Postunification Commemorations,” *German Politics and Society*. Issue 89, Vol. 26, No. 4 Winter 2008, p. 30. Kaiser’s essays on Volkstrauertag are important contributions to our understanding of this key holiday and are cited extensively throughout what follows.

(Commemoration of Heroes Day) in 1934 and made it a national holiday.<sup>47</sup> The name change gives an indication of the shift in memorialization that accompanied it; no longer was the public to “mourn” the fallen per se—instead, the public was to glorify the dead as the heroic sacrifices of those who paved the way for National Socialism.<sup>48</sup> The German public celebrated Heldengedenktage even after Germany began the Second World War: Hitler himself laid wreaths at the Neue Wache to honor both the dead of WWI and the more recently fallen soldiers of the Wehrmacht.

Germany’s unconditional surrender to end WWII, and the revelation of the countless atrocities committed in its name, made the postwar public commemoration of its dead—military and civilian—even more complicated than after its ignominious defeat in WWI. Nevertheless, under the auspices of its Weimar-era initiator, the VDK, the West German government officially celebrated Volkstrauertag at the newly established Bundestag in Bonn on the holiday’s traditional day in the first spring after the founding of the Federal Republic.<sup>49</sup> Two years later, a decree by the Federal Minister of the Interior moved the day to the second Sunday before the first Sunday of Advent in

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<sup>47</sup> See, for instance, Alexandra Kaiser, “‘Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen.’ Der Volkstrauertag und der Mythos vom Sinn des Sterbens im Krieg,” in Hein-Kircher and Hahn (eds.) *Politische Mythen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, p. 68.

<sup>48</sup> Also indicative of this shift was the directive of the Ministry of Propaganda, which oversaw Heldengedenktage, which required that flags no longer were flown at half-staff as had hitherto been the case.

<sup>49</sup> In spite of the changed historical context, the commemoration of the fallen remained essentially the same. Kaiser writes, “In articles and memoranda originating with the VDK, the sacrificial interpretation [of Volkstrauertag] clearly predominates: the Wehrmacht dead had done their ‘duty’ in ‘good faith’ to defend the beloved ‘Heimat’ (native land, and thus could be cast as heroes whose sacrifice should be revered.” See Kaiser, “Performing the New German Past,” p. 31. In her earlier text on this subject, she claims “The concept of “*Opfer*” [which in German means both “sacrifice” and “victim”] is the key concept that lies at the heart of the commemoration of Volkstrauertag from the Weimar Republic to today; its flexibility and adaptability enabled the reestablishment of Volkstrauertag after 1945.” See Kaiser, “‘Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,’” p. 70.



November, the date on which it has been held ever since.<sup>50</sup> The history of Volkstrauertag is a West (and reunited) German story. The SED did not establish an equivalent day of commemoration in the GDR.

While the commemorative focus remained on fallen soldiers, it was not long before Volkstrauertag organizers extended the focus to Germany's civilian dead, including those killed during the expulsion and aerial bombardment. Kaiser writes that in the VDK's opinion, Volkstrauertag was intended to memorialize only the German war dead. For the West German government, however, this became an untenable position due to growing knowledge of Nazi crimes, including those committed by the Wehrmacht. As a result, the Adenauer administration exerted pressure on the VDK to make Volkstrauertag more inclusive—an effort the VDK was able to withstand until the early 1960s, when organizers extended the holiday's commemorative umbrella to all “victims of war and violence”—i.e. German victims and Germany's victims.<sup>51</sup> The ceremonies' refrain became that all—civilians and soldiers, Germans and non-Germans—had suffered during the war and were thus all equally worthy of public remembrance.<sup>52</sup> This notwithstanding, Kaiser declares, “[T]he Volkstrauertag's position between the commemoration of the fallen and other German losses and commemoration of “all victims,” was always ambivalent.” She underscores this point by describing the

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<sup>50</sup> Lurz states that the date was changed because of regional elections scheduled on the Sunday Reminiscere in 1952. See Lurz, Kriegerdenkmäler in Deutschland. Vol. VI Bundesrepublik, p. 510. According to Thomas Peter Petersen, postwar Volkstrauertag organizers had sought a date that was neither politically nor religiously “bound” (*gebunden*). See Petersen, Volkstrauertag. Seine Geschichte und Entwicklung. Eine wissenschaftliche Betrachtung. (Bad Kleinen: Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 1998), p. 33. Henceforth, according to a bizarre formulation of the federal minister, Volkstrauertag was to be observed “in memory of all those who lost their life for the good of mankind” (*die Güter der Menschheit*).

<sup>51</sup> See Kaiser, ““Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,”” p. 31-32. On this point, she continues: “The rebranding of the Volkstrauertag can thus be regarded not only from a moral perspective, but first and foremost as a stratagem: only by eliding the difference between those who fought for the Third Reich and those who were persecuted by it was it possible to ‘honor’ the former group any longer in public” (p. 32).

<sup>52</sup> See for instance, Assmann and Frevert. Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit, pp. 209-210.

overwhelmingly military character of the national-level observances of Volkstrauertag, which after 1955 included the participation of representatives of the newly established Bundeswehr. The lack of explicit references, visual or verbal, to the victims of the Nazis, Kaiser notes, was even more telling.<sup>53</sup>

The new, sweeping conception of Volkstrauertag subsumed all war dead into one large category of victims. As we have seen, such commemorative efforts have had far-reaching implications for discussions of wartime guilt and responsibility. As Rosenfeld put it, “Commemorating not only the military dead of WWI but also those of WWII, along with the civilian victims of the aerial bombing and those of other nations, the Volkstrauertag effaced the distinction between victims and perpetrators into one generalized, suffering mass of humanity.”<sup>54</sup> This annulment of differences was achieved, “by concentrating on the individual suffering and death which was presented as ‘fate’ by way of the consistent disregard of the historical context.”<sup>55</sup> The interpretation of history that Volkstrauertag had come to represent thus served in many ways to relativize German war guilt (See also Chapter Nine). “The dogma ‘death eliminated all differences’ (*“Der Tod hat alle Unterschiede ausgelöscht”*) that was propagated constantly and believed by many,” according to Kaiser, “contains a potential for reductionism for individual and collective guilt that makes possible an historically haphazard and careless overcoming of the past.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, those who conceive of Volkstrauertag in this way deem all of the war dead, including German soldiers, innocent by virtue of their victimization. In other

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<sup>53</sup> See Kaiser, “‘Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,’” p. 33. In her analysis of Volkstrauertag, Ute Frevert is somewhat less critical than Kaiser, noting the “decidedly inclusive” nature of the official ceremonies. See Assmann and Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit*, p. 209.

<sup>54</sup> Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Munich and Memory*, p. 139.

<sup>55</sup> Kaiser, “‘Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,’” p. 71.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

words, those who commemorate all victims equally might be seeking to exonerate and absolve German perpetrators.

While the national ceremonies of Volkstrauertag have always received the most media (and indeed, scholarly) attention, and have always been broadcast live on the radio and television, the local events have enjoyed a wide resonance. In fact, annual commemorative ceremonies held in observance of Volkstrauertag occur in over 20,000 villages, towns, and cities in the Federal Republic.<sup>57</sup> As Ute Frevert and Alexandra Kaiser observe respectively, it is also at the local level, even more than in the official ceremonies held in Bonn—and after reunification, in Berlin—where the holiday’s true, one-sided character has been revealed. For example, Frevert remarks that “The farther away one distanced oneself from the center and its official diction, the more the commemoration was limited to fallen soldiers.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, local observances of this all-encompassing day of commemoration have been even more bereft of references to those persecuted by the Nazis. Echoing Frevert, Kaiser states, “In most communities, people gather at local war memorials or soldiers’ graves, places naturally devoid of reference to those killed by the Wehrmacht or the Nazis. The expanded conception of a ‘commemoration day for all victims of war and violence’ never filtered down to the local level, where families’ memories of their ‘own’ dead have always dominated and still do...”<sup>59</sup>

Of course, I am most interested in Volkstrauertag as it pertains to the commemoration of the dead of the expulsion, particularly when the ceremonies take place at local monuments. Kaiser’s main argument is that Volkstrauertag’s putative

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>58</sup> Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit*, p. 210.

<sup>59</sup> Kaiser, “Performing the New German Past,” p. 34.

inclusiveness “served to mask its purpose,” which was the commemoration of German losses, in particular, its fallen soldiers.<sup>60</sup> The only way to do so without upsetting the international (and in some circles, the domestic) community was by making token gestures of remembrance and reconciliation to those persecuted by the Nazis, all the time truly only wishing to honor “*unsere Toten*” (our dead).<sup>61</sup> This matches my argument about the subsumption of victims on many local expellee monuments, particularly those erected in the former GDR, most of which make vague nods to other war dead but only specify the victims of flight and expulsion (See Chapter Nine). By connecting all the victims of war (both Germany’s victims *and* German victims), both subsumptive monuments and commemorations of Volkstrauertag in this matter paint all who suffered with the same brush collective innocence. Not coincidentally, in my opinion, the dedications of many of these same monuments happened on Volkstrauertag.<sup>62</sup>

A number of expellee monuments throughout the entire Federal Republic play host to these annual ceremonies which, along with rituals held elsewhere in conjunction with Tag der Heimat, constitute the expellee organizations’ principal acts of public commemoration. These ceremonies have allowed the expellees to memorialize their losses alongside others, all while focusing exclusively on themselves. For the expellees, and for so many other Germans, Volkstrauertag—though conceived as an all-embracing

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 41. Serving as further evidence, she makes the very persuasive point that “The institution of a Remembrance Day for the Victims of National Socialism” (on January 27<sup>th</sup>) is a tacit admission that the VTT did not commemorate adequately victims of the Nazi regime, German or otherwise (p. 37). On this same point, see also Petersen, *Volkstrauertag*, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup> As such, in terms of remembrance of the war dead, Kaiser opines, WWII does not represent an ideological “rupture” (*Bruch*) as declared by others. As a proponent of this particular view, she cites Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, p. 5f.

<sup>62</sup> A short and incomplete list of local expellee monuments dedicated on Volkstrauertag must include the monuments in: Altenburg, Bleicherode, Rositz, Schmölln, Steinbach-Hallenberg, Unterweißbach (Thuringia); Brandenburg (Brandenburg); Schwerin (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern); Minden (North Rhine-Westphalia—discussed in Chapter Nine); Freital, Radeberg, Torgau (Saxony); Strassfurt (Saxony-Anhalt).

day of commemoration—remains an opportunity for German-centered commemoration. The following section, a more in-depth exploration of the ceremonies conducted on Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag, will explain how.

## COMMEMORATIVE CEREMONIES OF THE EXPELLEES

If the respective histories and conceptions of Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag by themselves were not persuasive enough to demonstrate the exculpatory German-centeredness of these chief days of expellee commemoration, close analysis of the main elements the ceremonies comprise certainly will be. Though the initiators of the respective days of remembrance had different objectives when the holidays were originally conceived (Tag der Heimat was a day of political protest and commemoration of civilian dead, whereas Volkstrauertag was a day for mourning fallen soldiers), their fundamental *raisons d'être* have come to converge, especially now after Ostpolitik and reunification ended the possibility of a border revision. Moreover, the ceremonies performed during the expellees' primary days of commemoration share some basic structural features and exhibit similar key elements. Above all, however, the commonalities are thematic: German wartime suffering—especially that experienced by the presumed collectively innocent expellees—is at the forefront during the ceremonies. Furthermore, while the festivities do not ignore the victimization of those persecuted by the Nazis, their emphasis on expellee experiences does overshadow it. Therefore, the ceremonies buttress and bring to life the one-sided historical narratives the expellee organizations advocate and the monuments put on display.

Like their monuments then, the expellees' commemorative ceremonies, while commemorative in tone, are actually political in intent. In the cases of both Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag, events have occurred for decades throughout (West) Germany on the national, regional, and local levels. Though some examples come from national events, the focus here remains on the festivities at the local level which happen at expellee monuments. In what follows, I provide a description of the most important and representative foundational features and traditional elements, particularly of those shared by both days of commemoration. In other cases, I stress outstanding features of either. Ultimately, the goal is to characterize the way the expellees' commemorative ceremonies have framed their historical understandings. For this reason, continuities or any changes over time in how this framing has been conducted are of great interest and will be given extra emphasis.

What becomes immediately apparent upon examination of the events on Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag are ceremonies' almost liturgical arrangements.<sup>63</sup> The events are highly organized and follow familiar patterns; in both cases, the national offices of the BdV and the VDK have issued guidelines (annually, in the case of the VDK, for Volkstrauertag) with advice for conducting local ceremonies. For example, those responsible for overseeing Volkstrauertag supply documents with "recommendations and thoughts" which have included suggestions for speeches, prayers, poems, and musical pieces, as well as other practical tips (e.g. on how best to publicize the event) in order to

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<sup>63</sup> Kaiser, "“Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,”" p. 79. For more on the infusion of civic and political rituals with religious elements, see Bocock, *Ritual in Industrial Society*, p. 69ff.

set the stage properly and maximize its societal resonance.<sup>64</sup> The BdV produced a revised, third edition of its recommendations for putting on Tag der Heimat celebrations in 1998.<sup>65</sup> Reading the instruction booklets, it is clear in both cases that the national overseers have wanted the yearly local events to be observed in a certain fashion and to strike with a particular tone. Writing about Volkstrauertag, Kaiser states that, “Tinkering with Volkstrauertag is work on the power of interpretation; the schematization, the transformation of commemoration into set ritual forms serves to control not only the formal aspects but also the content and safeguards the continuation of the ‘Volkstrauertag idea’ into the future.”<sup>66</sup> Her observation applies equally to the BdV’s oversight of Tag der Heimat, where some semblance of ceremonial conformity is also considered paramount. In addition to setting the tone, in both cases, the directives give the ceremonies a quasi-religious feel and contribute to the earnestness with which they are carried out.<sup>67</sup> Contributing to this solemn, sacral atmosphere, local religious leaders often also participate.

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<sup>64</sup> Kaiser notes this as well. See Kaiser, ““Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,”” p. 79. The instruction booklet for 2009 Volkstrauertag 2009 am 15. November. Anregungen und Gedanken zur Gestaltung von Gedenkstunden und Gottesdiensten is available on the Internet. <[http://www.volksbund.de/downloads/handreichung\\_volkstrauertag\\_2009.pdf](http://www.volksbund.de/downloads/handreichung_volkstrauertag_2009.pdf)> Accessed June 24, 2010.

<sup>65</sup> Huber, Tag der Heimat – Tag der Deutschen. One of the most interesting parts of this sixteen-page pamphlet is the instructions for organizing and conducting Tag der Heimat events. Topics in this section include costs, (ceremonies were/are to be financed locally), preparations for the media (including, for example, when to inform the press in order to spark the public’s interest), and preparing a worthy musical element to the program (Above all, works by composers from East, Sudeten, and Southeast European Germans were preferred, or at least works by one with a connection to the region). Huber, p. 11

<sup>66</sup> Kaiser, ““Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,”” p. 79.

<sup>67</sup> The BdV’s guidelines include a program example which structures the festivities like a religious service. The suggested program opens with a music piece (opening hymn), which is followed by: a formal greeting of dignitaries and participants (invocation), another music piece (hymn), a recitation of the Charter of the Expellees (creed), more music, a main address (sermon), concluding remarks (benediction) and a final music piece (closing hymn). According to Kaiser, the main address has formed the centerpiece of Volkstrauertag festivities since the Weimar period as well. See Kaiser, ““Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,”” pp. 75 & 79-80.

Ultimately, however, the ceremonies are about politics, though the emphasis—particularly during Tag der Heimat festivities—has shifted from a concrete politics of territorial revision to a broader symbolic politics of societal recognition as innocent victims. In this way, developments within the ceremonies themselves have pursued the same trajectory as identified among the different monuments’ physical designs. As we have seen, organizers have always intended commemorations on Tag der Heimat to be high-minded and uplifting. They crafted the ceremonies in such a way that the events are always as much about providing lessons for the future as commemorating of the past—hence the consistent stress on the universality of their ideals: human rights, self-determination, peace, etc. Giving further evidence of the national organizations’ efforts to shape the ceremonies and set the tone for the commemorations, starting in 1954, the BdV’s executive committee has given the annual celebrations official *Leitworte* (mottos), which have served as the thematic focal point around which events at all levels have revolved. According to the Tag der Heimat guidelines, each ceremony’s main speaker was to make the motto the centerpiece of his or her address.<sup>68</sup>

While the mottos were somewhat ambiguous and open to interpretation (I would argue that they were deliberately kept so to broaden their appeal and circumvent potential opposition), they have provided insight into both the self-perception of the BdV and its objectives throughout the postwar decades as well as its understandings of the expulsion in light of international political developments and shifting emphases in national historical narratives. Strikingly, the change over time in the tenor of the mottos of Tag der Heimat corresponds with the change in tone seen on the monuments. They, too, document this shift and enable us to trace it. For example, early mottos accentuated the

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<sup>68</sup> Huber, Tag der Heimat – Tag der Deutschen, p. 11.



expellee organizations' chief objective of territorial reacquisition and the procurement of more political rights: *In Ost und West – deutsche Heimat!* (In the East and West – German Homeland! 1954), *Recht und Treue siegen!* (Justice and Loyalty Triumph, 1957), *Heimat verpflichtet!* (Obligated to the Homeland! 1958) *Heimat in Freiheit!* (Heimat in Freedom! 1959), *Selbstbestimmung auch für Deutsche!* (Self-Determination for Germans Too! 1960). As the political tide turned against the interests of the expellee organizations, particularly on the question of West Germany's recognition of the Oder/Neisse, the emphases changed: *Verständigung und Frieden – kein neues Versailles!* (Understanding and Peace – No New Versailles! 1967), *Wer Gewalt anerkennt, verliert den Frieden!* (He Who Recognizes Violence Loses the Peace! 1970), *Gefahr für Deutschland – Gefahr für Europa!* (Danger for Germany – Danger for Europe! 1971), *Das Ziel bleibt: Die freie Heimat im freien Europa!* (The Goal Remains: Free Homeland in a Free Europe! 1973). As the slogans indicate, the thrust behind the Tag der Heimat commemorations in the quarter century after the holiday was established remained on concrete politics.

Much like the inscriptions on local expellee monuments, however, the BdV's executive committee moved away from vociferous political protest after Ostpolitik and the emergence of Holocaust-centered historical narratives to more somber and contemplative slogans. Instead of calling for a revision of the territorial status quo, the Tag der Heimat ceremonies have focused more on symbolic politics: on the broader societal recognition and explicit acknowledgement of expellee suffering, righting historical wrongs, historical truth, and justice. For instance, *Gegen die Mauer des Schweigens – Ganz Deutschland verpflichtet!* (Against the Wall of Silence – Obligated to All of Germany! 1979), *10 Jahre Ostverträge – die deutsche Frage bleibt offen!* (10

Years of the Eastern Treaties – The German Question Remains Open! 1982), *40 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Das ganze Deutschland ist unser Vaterland!* (40 Years of the Federal Republic of Germany – All of Germany is Our Fatherland! 1989), *Für Recht und geschichtliche Wahrheit!* (For Justice and Historical Truth! 1992), *50 Jahre Flucht, Deportation, Vertreibung – Unrecht bleibt Unrecht!* (50 Years Flight, Deportation, Expulsion – Injustice Remains Injustice! 1995), *Heimat ist Auftrag – Gerechtigkeit unser Ziel!* (Homeland is Our Mandate – Justice Our Goal! 1996) *Erinnern – Bewahren – Zukunft gewinnen* (Remembrance – Preservation – Winning the Future, 2002), *Erinnern und Verstehen* (Remember and Understand, 2008), *Wahrheit und Gerechtigkeit – Ein starkes Europa!* (Truth and Justice – A strong Europe! 2009) Once again, the effort to shape a more expulsion-centered historical narrative is reflected in this year’s slogan: *Durch Wahrheit zum Miteinander* (Through Truth to Togetherness, 2010).<sup>69</sup>

The attendance and participation of political figures at these ceremonies is clearly desirable. Though the events are officially organized by the VDK, the Federal Government has played an increasing role in carrying out Volkstrauertag ceremonies at the national level. Representatives of the government have long recited the official list of dead to be commemorated (*Totenehrung*—more about this illuminating facet of postwar commemoration below). Furthermore, since 1993 officials from the five branches of government have taken part in wreath-laying ceremonies at the Neue Wache in Berlin.<sup>70</sup> In the 2000s, the appearance alone of government officials at the national celebration of Tag der Heimat is no longer newsworthy—although their comments there often are. In both cases, events at the local level are more likely to feature representatives of city and

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<sup>69</sup> A complete list (1954-2010) of all Tag der Heimat mottos can be found on the Bavarian BdV’s website: <<http://www.bdv-bayern.de/72.html>> Accessed: April 12, 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Kaiser, “Performing the New German Past,” p. 32 & p. 34.

communal governments or national parliamentary backbenchers.<sup>71</sup> For the most part, gone are the days when the unveiling of a new monument prompts the participation of major national political figures as in the dedication ceremony at Schloss Burg (attended by Federal President Theodor Heuss) or Bad Harzburg (attended by Ernst Reuter and federal government cabinet members) in the 1950s. At any rate, the BdV's Tag der Heimat guidelines suggest contacting possible participants well in advance and urges local organizers to reach out to their state-level BdV office, should they need help finding a suitable speaker.<sup>72</sup> Obviously, the participation of government representatives adds to the "decidedly political character" but it also lends some official sanction to the event and, more importantly, to the ideas and beliefs espoused there.

A second central and illuminating component of these ceremonies is the aforementioned recitation of a "Totenehrung."<sup>73</sup> The fact alone that a list of those to be commemorated is presented during these ceremonies is in itself not interesting. What makes it noteworthy, however, is that the Totenehrung has become an indispensable component of both Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag events on all levels.<sup>74</sup> The ritual consists of the public reading of a list of people deemed worthy of recognition and remembrance. As we have seen, the official list of those commemorated on Volkstrauertag was expanded to include "all victims of war and violence" surprisingly

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<sup>71</sup> For example, during the over two decades between 1983-2006 the Tag der Heimat ceremonies in Hagen, North Rhine-Westphalia included the participation of a former parliamentary state secretary, members of the Bundestag, members of the Landtag, the chairman of the Silesian Landsmannschaft, the state chairman of the BdV, et. al.

<sup>72</sup> Huber, *Tag der Heimat – Tag der Deutschen*, p. 11.

<sup>73</sup> Kaiser translates this as "honoring of the dead." See Kaiser, "Performing the New German Past," p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> Citing a VDK source, Kaiser writes that the Totenehrung is among the three key elements of Volkstrauertag that, according to the Volksbund, must always be included. The others are a wreath-laying ceremony and the playing of the "Lied vom Guten Kameraden"—which is discussed in detail below. See Kaiser, "Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie 'Helden' nennen," p. 77. The importance of the recitation of the Totenehrung is indicated in the fact that virtually all VDK publications include a version of the list. A Totenehrung has also been an important feature of Tag der Heimat festivities at all levels in all decades.

early—the late 1950s and early 1960s. In particular, it was the mutability of the Totenehrung which allowed for this inclusion.<sup>75</sup> With the new list, it was easy to make the largely empty gesture Kaiser describes toward non-German victims, without abandoning the commemorative day's German-centered commemorative thrust. There can be little doubt that the augmentation of the Totenehrung at the national commemorations of Volkstrauertag can be seen as a bellwether for larger changes to come in (West) Germany's memory culture. Over the years, organizers have updated the text frequently to reflect the changing commemorative landscape and address contemporary remembrance needs. More recent modifications include the honoring of fallen Bundeswehr soldiers and victims of terrorism and xenophobia.<sup>76</sup> The official list clearly aims at comprehensiveness. Still, while references to non-German victims are rather vague, the references to German victims are more precise.

What this means in practice, of course, is that during the reading of the Totenehrung, the war dead of WWII and its aftermath—including victims of the Holocaust, fallen German soldiers, and the victims of flight and expulsion—are memorialized alongside those killed in more recent fighting and strife, both within Germany and abroad, as well as those who perished during the First World War. Thus,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>76</sup> The current text recommended by the VDK specifically mentions the victims of flight and expulsion and reads in full: "Today we think about the victims of violence and war, on the children, women and men of all peoples. We commemorate the soldiers who died in the world wars, the people who died due to the war or thereafter in prison or as expellees and refugees. We commemorate those who were persecuted or killed because they belonged to another Volk or were defined as belonging to another race or were declared unfit to live because of illness or handicap. We commemorate those who perished because they resisted against dictatorship and those who found their deaths because of their religious conviction or because they stood by their faith. We mourn the victims of war and civil war of our time, the victims of terrorism and political persecution, the soldiers of the *Bundeswehr* and other forces who have lost their lives in overseas engagements. We commemorate today those who have been victimized here because of hatred and violence against foreigners and the weak. We mourn with the mothers and all those who suffer because of the deaths. But our life stands in the hope of reconciliation amongst peoples and groups of people and our responsibility lies in peace amongst peoples at home and in the world." As cited in Volkstrauertag 2009 am 15. November, p. 5.

much like the expellee monuments dedicated “To the Dead of the War, the Expulsion, and Dictatorship,” the Totenehrung subsumes all who died into one undifferentiated category of victims. Indeed the current version might be the most flagrant instance of victim subsumption. But it does even more than just subsume. By linking the dead of the Second World War with the modern victims of terrorism and right-wing extremism, the distinction between the victims and perpetrators of WWII are more than simply blurred. They are dissolved all together. As discussed at length above (and in Chapter Nine), the implications for attributions of culpability and guilt are profound when all war dead are treated equally.

Tag der Heimat ceremonies also regularly incorporate a Totenehrung. To honor the dead, attendees are generally asked to rise for a moment of silence prior to the reading. Whereas the Volkstrauertag traditions of the Totenehrung have changed overtime, the recitations at these ceremonies have remained relatively constant: the ritual necrologies focus on the experience of Germans, namely those who fled and were expelled from the eastern provinces. The circle of those deserving commemoration has only grown minimally to include victims of the Nazis but has remained expansive and flexible enough to capture the various plights of Germans from the East as well as that of other expellees. A brief comparison of the Totenehrung recited at a local Tag der Heimat ceremony in Leverkusen in 1952 to the text presented by BdV Chairwoman Erika Steinbach at the national Tag der Heimat commemoration in 2006 will demonstrate this.

The 1952 version makes clear early on that even though the dead were to be honored, the territorial question would also be touched upon. It opens flatly: “We commemorate the dead. We commemorate the mothers and fathers, violently separated

from us, who rest in the earth of our Heimat. They wait for our return!” Clearly, the expectation was that the border situation was provisional and that it was only a matter of time before the former (German) inhabitants would be repatriated to their former homelands to tend to the graves of their ancestors and relatives. The text also mentioned the soldiers of the Wehrmacht. “We commemorate those who fell for us and our mutual Fatherland.” According to this telling, Hitler’s armies had been engaged in a defensive battle to protect civilians rather than a war of conquest and annihilation. The next section was also de-contextualized historically. As was typical at that time, it focused on the wartime (and postwar) suffering of the Germans from the East, including the various stages of evacuation, flight, the “wild expulsions,” the post-Potsdam Agreement forced resettlement, and even the difficult integration into West German society.

We German expellees commemorate all the brothers and sisters who fell victim to ethnic hatred and inhumanity. We commemorate those who we had to leave behind on the streets of flight and expulsion. We commemorate those deported and the tortured, those who froze to death and drowned, those who were innocently beaten to death and executed in violation of the law. We commemorate the 3.5 million people of our ethnic groups (*unserer Volksgruppen*) whose blood soaked the earth after the cessation of hostilities. We commemorate all those struck by fate who died in desperation and despair, here, far from home, in the years of hunger and misery.

What is missing, of course, is a reference to what precipitated all this suffering. The grounds for these calamities must have been understood by everyone in attendance because they were not at all mentioned. In fact, the text expressed no causality. The Totenehrung also makes apparent that the expellees at this time did not understand themselves to be “normal” casualties of war. Disconnecting their suffering further from the armed hostilities that Germany had unleashed, the text stressed the (by all accounts wildly exaggerated) numbers of dead killed *after the war ended*.

Interestingly, a vague nod to non-Germans victims followed. “We commemorate the people of all nations (*Völker*) who suffered and died in the inferno of inhumanity.” Who exactly these other people were is unclear. Again, no one in particular is made accountable for the “inferno of inhumanity” that brought about their demise. Apparently, it was fate akin to a natural disaster. The recitation concluded with an uplifting admonishment—what might be the most baffling passage of all. “They all [the dead] do not call us to revenge and retribution. And they certainly must not have suffered for nothing. Instead they want that those of us still living see a meaning and task (*Sinn und Auftrag*) in their deaths. Therefore do not commemorate them only as victims of the past, commemorate them as martyrs of what is to come!” The people commemorated in the 1952 text had not died in vain but were instead to be considered sacrificial victims who perished for an unspecified greater good.

Despite the passage of over fifty years, Erika Steinbach’s 2006 Totenehrung echoed the 1952 text in many ways.<sup>77</sup> Gone, however, was a reference to the Wehrmacht.<sup>78</sup> Though the possibility of a return to the former homeland was long gone, the theme of “Heimat” was the first one invoked. “We think of the Heimat, of the Heimat of our parents and grandparents. We will keep you in our hearts.” Then Steinbach began her enumeration of the dead to be memorialized: “We commemorate the grandparents and parents, the wives and fiancées, sisters, brothers and children who lost their lives because the streets were jammed and snowed over or because they were overrun by

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<sup>77</sup> The text was reprinted in an online document called “Dokumentation zum Tag der Heimat 2006. Menschenrecht achten – Vertreibungen ächten. Festakt des Bundes der Vertriebenen in Berlin, 2. September 2006.” <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/files/tdhdokumentation061.pdf>> Accessed August 12, 2010.

<sup>78</sup> The role of the Wehrmacht and its fallen soldiers in “defending” the expellees is still lauded at Tag der Heimat ceremonies and at less prominent gatherings of the expellee organizations on the local level, for example, at the *Kleines Ostpreussentreffen* at Schloss Burg an der Wupper, which I attended in July 2007.

tanks. We commemorate those for whom the ice over the lagoon (reference to the *Kurisches Haff* and *Frisches Haff*—two lagoons on the Baltic Sea) and rivers did not hold or was blown up. We commemorate those who were overcome by the waves and who sank in the icy flood as they tried to escape the death-bringing front on ships.” The desperate scenes she described were references to the perilous flight westward near the end of the war, as well as to the destruction of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* by a Soviet submarine. As has often been the case, the BdV presents some of the most harrowing expulsion experiences as archetypal or representative.

Steinbach continued with other familiar tropes. “We commemorate the women, men, and children who were deported for forced labor and have since disappeared. They remained lying on some country road and were shot to death. They disappeared on the side of railway streets in the far reaches of Siberia and were covered by snow.” What followed immediately thereafter was perhaps the most intriguing section of the official 2006 Totenehrung. It included what might be interpreted as a reference to victims of the Nazis. “We commemorate everyone who died in death camps (*in Todeslagern*) or were killed in massacres.”<sup>79</sup> Some ethnic Germans from the eastern provinces had indeed been held in camps at the end of the war, and thereafter, but they were hardly “death camps.” Of course, Steinbach might have been referencing Jews or other victims of the Nazi concentration camp system but because of the context this is difficult to imagine. The next statement, however, was definitely a reference to non-Germans: “We commemorate in gratefulness the men and women of other peoples who offered help despite the personal danger.” However, the reference applies as much to the travails of the expellees

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<sup>79</sup> For a scholarly article on the internment of Germans after the war and how it was commemorated, see Rex Rexhauser, “Das Bild des Nachkriegslagers in Lamsdorf im kollektiven Gedächtnis der Deutschen,” *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*.50 (2001), pp. 48-72.



(after all, they were the ones who needed the assistance) as it does to their helpful, non-German neighbors. At any rate, the text does not include another reference to victims of the Nazis.

Next, Steinbach honored two expellee dignitaries: first, the recently deceased Peter Glotz, SPD politician and co-chairman (with Steinbach) of the Center Against Expulsions Foundation, for his “efforts for a complete historical account” (*Geschichtsbild*), and second, the chairman of the Silesian Landsmannschaft, Herbert Hupka. Steinbach did not mention other non-Germans unless it served the needs of the expellee organizations. She followed the homage with a self-serving reference to victims of expulsion in other areas of the world. “We share (*nehmen Anteil*) in the fates of all peoples of other nations who have been and are being expelled. We feel for them.”<sup>80</sup> By expressing solidarity with other victims of ethnic cleansing and displacement, the BdV’s chairwoman decontextualized the German expulsion experience and linked it to that of other, more recent instances of forced migration, the images of which still flickered in the minds of many. The circumstances surrounding more recent events were unquestionably different. Clearly, not all expulsions are the same. She concluded the Totenehrung with a similarly uplifting admonition: “The dead have found their peace. They implore us by the thousands, yes, by the millions to work for peace and tolerance. That is our task. We will never forget the dead. They have a place in our hearts!”

The recitation of a Totenehrung has been a key component of Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag ceremonies on all levels. The versions of the Totenehrung cited here are

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<sup>80</sup> The victims of expulsion as a result of the Balkan Wars in the 1990s helped raise the profile of the expellee organizations. According to Gilad Margalit, images in the German media of downtrodden victims of ethnic cleansing and the displacement of various groups in Europe were a major catalyst in reopening the discussions about the German experience of expulsion during WWII and its aftermath. See Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*, p. 231.

typical. This abiding tradition has allowed for one-sided, exculpatory commemorations of the German dead of the Second World War. Another enduring—and similarly problematic—tradition that occurs during ceremonies on both key days of expellee commemoration is the ritual performance of the song “*Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden*” (“I Had a Comrade”),<sup>81</sup> labeled by one journalist Germany’s “secret national anthem.”<sup>82</sup> The playing of the song testifies to the centrality of the German experience at these gatherings and to the self-referential, self-pitying nature of the commemorative ceremonies that take place on Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag. Though brief rhetorical gestures are made toward the suffering of others there, German war losses remain paramount. The song is usually played at the conclusion of the Totenehrung. It is also often at this time that wreaths are laid at the feet of monuments.

The song has its origins in the wars of liberation during the Napoleonic occupation of German lands. Its text was written in 1809 by Ludwig Uhland and put to music in 1825 by Friedrich Silcher. In time, it came to be seen as the German equivalent of the

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<sup>81</sup> The song’s title is sometimes also given as “*Der Gute Kamerad*” (“The Good Comrade”) or the “*Lied vom guten Kameraden*” (“Song of the Good Comrade”). The lyrics are as follows:

<i>Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden,</i>	I had a comrade,
<i>Einen besseren findest du nit.</i>	A better one you’ll never find.
<i>Die Trommel schlug zum Streite,</i>	The drum banged to battle,
<i>Er ging an meiner Seite</i>	He walked by my side
<i>Im gleichen Schritt und Tritt.</i>	step for step.

<i>Eine Kugel kam geflogen</i>	A bullet came flying
<i>Gilt’s mir oder gilt es dir?</i>	Is it for me or for you?
<i>Ihn hat es weggerissen,</i>	It ripped him away,
<i>Er liegt mir vor den Füßen,</i>	he lied at my feet,
<i>Als wär’s ein Stück von mir.</i>	As if it was a piece of me.

<i>Will mir die Hand noch reichen,</i>	Wanted to reach me his hand
<i>Derweil ich eben lad:</i>	While I was reloading:
<i>“Kann dir die Hand nicht geben,</i>	“I can’t give you my hand,
<i>Bleib du im ewigen Leben,</i>	Remain for eternity,
<i>Mein guter Kamerad!”</i>	My good comrade!”

<sup>82</sup> Kurt Oesterle, “Die heimliche deutsche Nationalhymne,” *taz Magazin*, November 10, 2001.

American “Taps”—a funereal military song played at the burials of the fallen soldiers. Before long, its appeal broadened to the general public as well. Norbert Elias wrote that this song and others like it were part of the conditioning process which produced within the German people the compulsion “to follow leaders who proclaimed it to be the duty of Germans once more to take the field against the common foe.”<sup>83</sup> The song was intoned during the Weimar Republic to commemorate Germany’s two million fallen soldiers, remained a key element of commemorations of Heldengedenktage during the Third Reich,<sup>84</sup> and has continued to be heard despite its loaded militaristic legacy at the burials of Bundeswehr soldiers as well as at civilian commemorative ceremonies in (West) Germany throughout the post-WWII era, including, of course, those of the expellees.<sup>85</sup>

The performance of “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden” has become a fixture of postwar commemorative ceremonies of all kinds.<sup>86</sup> Tapping into this tradition has become a tradition itself. In the case of Volkstrauertag, Kaiser finds in the continued playing of this threnody—what she calls “the commemoration day’s most central symbol”—the most obvious instance of the holiday’s continuity over time despite the expanded circle of victims the day has come to embrace.<sup>87</sup> That is not to say, however, that the song’s usage has not been without its critics. Kurt Oesterle elucidated an official inquiry into the

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<sup>83</sup> Norbert Elias, The Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Tr. Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 332. In this same study and about this song, Elias contended that, “Few other peoples had in their national mystique, in their poetry, and in their songs so many allusions to death and self-sacrifice as did the Germans” (p. 331).

<sup>84</sup> According to Volker Ackermann, the playing of the song was not only the domain of common soldiers but was also played at funerals of fallen members of the SS as well. See Ackermann, Nationale Totenfeiern in Deutschland. Von Wilhelm I. bis Franz Josef Strauss. Eine Studie zur politischen Semiotik. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Kaiser, ““Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie ‘Helden’ nennen,”” pp. 76-77.

<sup>86</sup> A nine-part video of the Tag der Heimat ceremony in 2008 at the expellee monument in Leverkusen includes a one-sided Totenehrung as well as a performance of “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden.” The video is available on Youtube: Tag der Heimat in Leverkusen 2008 (Teil 4) <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCgHitjO\\_Qs&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCgHitjO_Qs&feature=related)> Accessed August 15, 2010.

<sup>87</sup> Kaiser, “Performing the New German Past,” p. 31.

song's origins and uses with the Folk Music Archive in Freiburg in the early 1990s. Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker's office wished to investigate the song's aptness for the memorial culture of the newly reunited Federal Republic.<sup>88</sup> On the local level as well, contends Oesterle, the song (especially the third stanza) is regularly criticized by peace activists who protest against the song's glorification of war and death in war. This is opposed, in turn, by veterans, who feel personally attacked when an alternative song is selected. Why? As to the former, as Kaiser put it, "The song embodies an uncritical glorification of soldierly comradeship, distorts death in war to a silent, valorous, heroic death (*Heldentod*) and gives it meaning without questioning the meaning of the war."<sup>89</sup> Kaiser believes the song "romanticiz[es] and glorif[ies] a soldier's death in war while emphasizing its arbitrariness."<sup>90</sup> Clearly, the song was tarnished by its usage during observances of Heldengedenktage during the National Socialist era as well as by its espousal of military virtue—an untenable position for some in light of the atrocities brought about by German soldiers in WWII.<sup>91</sup> Presumably for this reason, in most cases today the song is played instrumentally at commemorative ceremonies.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Oesterle cites the archivist's response which stated that "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden"—in addition to "Silent Night" and Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"—belong to the irreplaceable musical standard types in the everyday lives of average citizens. See Oesterle, "Die heimliche deutsche Nationalhymne."

<sup>89</sup> Kaiser, "Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie 'Helden' nennen," p. 77.

<sup>90</sup> Kaiser, "Performing the New German Past," p. 31.

<sup>91</sup> On the continued usage of the song after WWII, particularly during observances of Volkstrauertag, Kai Kruse and Wolfgang Kruse write, "[T]he attempt to transform the military cult on Volkstrauertag to a pacifist one without distancing it from the traditional rituals honoring soldiers was not convincing from the start, especially since the still-played song 'Ich hatt' einen Kameraden' must have seemed as a mockery to the victims of National Socialist dictatorship to whom commemoration of Volkstrauertag is actually also dedicated." See Kruse and Kruse, "Kriegerdenkmäler in Bielefeld. Ein lokalhistorischer Beitrag zur Entwicklungsanalyse des deutschen Gefallenenkultes im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in Reinhart Koselleck and M. Jeismann (eds.) *Der politische Totenkult. Kriegerdenkmäler in der Moderne*. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1994), p. 128.

<sup>92</sup> This compromise arrangement does not seem satisfactory to Kaiser, who writes that most participants at the ceremonies know the lyrics and that even the history of the song's use implicates it. See Kaiser, "Sie wollen gar nicht, dass wir mit lauten Worten sie 'Helden' nennen," p. 77. Indeed, the program for Tag der Heimat 1951 in Leverkusen includes the song's full text.

Throughout its existence, however, the song has been claimed and used by Germans of all social groups and political stripes. The explanation for the widespread usage of this song lies at the heart of my analysis. Oesterle attributes the lasting popularity to its capacity to be contemporized and adapted to new circumstances. Though the situation changes, the “ur-comrade” (*Urkamerad*) always remains recognizable. “Uhland’s song became, so to speak, a song to write over (*Überschreiblied*), a palimpsest hymn like the writing templates of the Middle Ages, which could be scratched off and written on again even though the old writing was still legible under the new.”<sup>93</sup> The still-visible traces of the past are of course why the song, despite its popularity in most circles, remains contentious in others. In her attempt to analyze the song’s prolonged pervasiveness, Eschebach opines that in contrast to the majority of other songs played at commemorative ceremonies, “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden” contains no “vision of community” (*Gemeinschaftsvorstellung*). Rather, she claims, at the core remains an “I” who speaks to the dying comrade as “he” then as “you.” She writes, “This presentation of war death as a personal experience is possibly the reason that this song has proven to be resistant to all the political ruptures of recent German history. The mourning is not directed toward an abstract collective of fallen soldiers but instead toward the individual whose death, in a late-Romantic gesture, is described as a harmonious farewell scene.”<sup>94</sup> The grief symbolized by the playing of this melancholy melody is thus singularly applied to individual soldiers.

Both of these explanations seem plausible but neither explains entirely why this song has been serially intoned at the commemorative ceremonies of the expellees. Indeed

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<sup>93</sup> Oesterle, “Die heimliche deutsche Nationalhymne.”

<sup>94</sup> Eschebach, *Öffentliches Gedenken*, p. 85.

it seems particularly strange, to say the least, that a song with a decidedly military theme would be performed in that setting. After all, though fallen soldiers are frequently mentioned, the primary focus of remembrance at expellee events is almost exclusively on civilians—on their deaths, and on their lost homelands. Building on both theories, my explanation would also tend to emphasize the personalized nature of the song, which in my opinion has enabled contemporary mourners to see themselves in either the fallen comrade or his surviving friend (or both). Reversing Eschebach's proposal, therefore, I would suggest that the mourning—as depicted in the lyrics of the song—emanates from an individual, a single soldier who bewails *his* loss. Directed toward individuals, the mourning is also conducted by individuals who lament *their* losses. In that regard also, it is personalized, one-sided. As such, "Ich hatt' einen Kameraden" is in keeping with the expellee organizations' historical interpretations and with those of all other Germans who wish to commemorate *their* losses. Thus the song's original mood and compositional motivation corresponds to the mood and motivation behind the commemorative ceremonies of the expellees—even though its explicit themes do not.

## CONCLUSION

It should be noted that while they display some striking continuities over time, the expellees' chief commemorative ceremonies and the days of commemoration on which they are held have proven to be very adaptable. The organizers of these events have been adept at responding to altered political circumstances, shifting social climates, and the emergence of new historical interpretations.<sup>95</sup> That said, when taken together, the rituals

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<sup>95</sup> It is certainly true that these commemorative ceremonies resonate differently than in the past. In general, they no longer draw tens of thousands or even thousand participants. Instead, numbers of attendees are

performed on all levels during the commemorative ceremonies of the expellees have framed historical understandings in a way that highlights German wartime suffering. The ceremonies that make up Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag—the most important days of commemoration for the expellee organizations—show in thought, word, and deed that even though the victims of the Nazis are usually mentioned in a rote and perfunctory way, the commemorative focus has remained primarily if not exclusively on the German experience of WWII and its aftermath. Analysis of the chief days of expellee commemoration and of some of the key elements of those ceremonies—their proscribed liturgical organization; the related, direction-giving slogans for Tag der Heimat; the practice of reciting a Totenehrung; and the performance of “Ich hatt’ einen Kameraden”—demonstrates this. Thus, like their local monuments, the expellee organizations’ commemorative ceremonies reflect and generate postwar narratives which decry the forfeiture of Germany’s eastern territories and accentuate the singularity of the suffering inflicted by the loss of Heimat, as well as which paint the expellees as collectively innocent victims. Seen in a different light, the ceremonies reinforce and echo the historical interpretations already articulated by the monuments.

More than just an exploration of the expellee organizations’ key days of commemoration and the rituals of which they are comprised, however, what I have

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more likely to be in the hundreds or even dozens. Winter and Sivan have written about the natural attrition of commemorative groups and the difficulty of sustaining such memory communities: “In this and other areas, agency is arduous. Its opportunity costs—time, money, effort—are substantial. And it rarely lasts. Other tasks take precedence; other issues crowd out the ones leading to public work. And ageing takes its toll: people fade away, either personally or physically. The collective remembrance of past warfare, old soldiers, and the victims of wars is, therefore, a quixotic act. It is both an effort to think publicly about painful issues in the past and one which is bound to decompose over time.” Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, “Setting the Framework” in Winter and Sivan (eds.) *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 10. Nevertheless, the expellee organizations continue to congregate for annual commemorative ceremonies and other activities. As we have seen, these events have been crucial for decades in solidifying expellee identity and for congealing historical narratives.

endeavored to accomplish here has been to demonstrate the important role played by monuments in vivifying these German-centered accounts of the past. To be sure, the monuments have a significance that goes beyond merely standing silent and overlooked in a cemetery or a municipal courtyard. Here, monuments help bring historical narratives to life. As Klaus Neumann writes, “[A] memorial’s visibility also depends on how and when people talk about it, or more generally, on how it is used.”<sup>96</sup> The best place to observe how monuments and other memorials are used, I would argue, is at the commemorative ceremonies which take place there. As we have seen, the ceremonies constitute the key moments when historical narratives are put into motion. Concomitantly, it is precisely during these ceremonies when monuments are most closely engaged with and (re)interpreted. Expellee monuments provide the physical space for this to occur. Thus, the ceremonies bring the monuments to life in ways otherwise impossible and add an additional dimension to their mnemonic capabilities.<sup>97</sup> As such, as the staging area for many of the observances of Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag, local expellee monuments are central loci of remembrance for the expellee organizations.

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<sup>96</sup> Klaus Neumann, Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 231.

<sup>97</sup> According to Jeismann and Westheider, commemorative ceremonies offer insight into how monuments are perceived in the years after newness wears off. They write, “Monuments are quickly forgotten. [...] Not until ritualized, extraordinary acts—forming a cultic-auratic ensemble—are conducted there, does commemoration of the dead become the cult of the dead (*Totengedenken zum Totenkult*). Individual mourning is not bound to a certain day or to public ritual even when these can serve as a cause for it. This is different from the collective, political cult of the dead, which first takes flight in the ritualized recurrence of commemoration. [...] The annual, ritual commemorations offered the opportunity to modify the political interpretation of the experiences of war and death and to adapt it to contemporary needs for justification.” See Michael Jeismann and Rolf Westheider, “Wofür stirbt der Bürger? Nationaler Totenkult und Staatsbürgertum in Deutschland und Frankreich seit der Französischen Revolution,” in Koselleck and Jeismann (eds.) Der politische Totenkult, p. 43f.



**CONCLUSION**  
**LOCAL EXPELLEE MONUMENTS:**  
**COMMEMORATIVE IN TONE, POLITICAL IN INTENT?**

This dissertation is an all-encompassing examination of local expellee monuments. In particular, I investigated the historical narratives that these monuments have made expressed. My study had three parts. In the Introduction, I presented my topic, enumerated the central arguments and formulated the study's key question, discussed the sources and methodology, and laid out my study's overall organization. This I followed with Part I in which I contextualized my work theoretically and historically. In Chapter One, I defined local expellee monuments and showed in general how monument initiators use them to construct historical counternarratives. Here, I also situated my work within larger debates on the mnemonic capabilities of monuments. The focus of Chapter Two was on an historical framework for my subsequent interpretations of expellee monuments. To this end, I periodized perceptions of the expellees and the expulsion in Germany in light of changing political and cultural contexts to explain why expellee monuments have taken the forms and employed the rhetoric they have. In the process, I directly addressed the first of my central arguments that German wartime suffering has never been taboo.

Part II constituted the empirical core of my analysis. Here, I presented evidence that substantiate my second and third central arguments: First, that local expellee monuments have been part of efforts to shape discussions of WWII victimhood; and

second, that the monuments facilitate and promote the construction of German-centered historical narratives. The two dominant subjects of the more than one thousand expellee monuments in reunited Germany correspond to the major themes of these narratives. For this reason, I categorized the monuments into two overarching thematic clusters: (A.) “Loss of Heimat and Territorial Claims,” and (B.) “Aesthetics of Innocence.” I then created categories of distinct monument groups within each cluster, which formed the basis for individual chapters.

Part III consisted of a single chapter in which I examined the expellees’ key rituals and remembrance practices involving local monuments, particularly those held on Tag der Heimat and Volkstrauertag. Here, I explored these chief days of expellee commemoration and discussed how the commemorative ceremonies performed on them bring the monuments’ historical narratives to life.

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In a provocative essay published in 2005, Michael Schwartz—a leading historian of the expulsion and its societal ramifications, and whose work I have cited repeatedly in this dissertation—takes to task a number of scholars who challenge the legitimacy of expellees’ assertions of victimization.<sup>1</sup> These writers, Schwartz claims, level unfair and insensitive criticism at the expellees’ desire for recognition of their suffering, particularly in the form of a national Center Against Expulsions. He contends that such authors rationalize and justify the expulsion as a warranted form of “collective punishment”

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Schwartz, “Dürfen Vertriebene Opfer sein? Zeitgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu einem Problem deutscher und europäischer Identität,” *Deutschland-Archiv* Vol. 38 Issue 3, 2005; pp. 494-505. Specifically, Schwartz criticizes Constantin Goshler, Philipp Ther, as well as Eva and Hans Henning Hahn.

meted out primarily against women, children, and old people.<sup>2</sup> Schwartz concedes that not all expellees were “innocent.” Nonetheless, as he states, “not every member of the Nazi party was automatically a Nazi perpetrator.”<sup>3</sup> Schwartz argues that today the most vocal advocates of the Zentrum and the acknowledgement it would bring are those who experienced flight and forced migration as adolescents. In other words, they are even less likely to have been tainted by a Nazi past. In addition, he points out that those same people and their descendants have experienced similar kinds of psychological issues as those of Holocaust victims and their offspring.<sup>4</sup> Schwartz calls attention, moreover, to the fact that the status as victim brought about no real advantages and was actually a sign of “weakness, abuse, and humiliation.”<sup>5</sup> He points out other neglected aspects in current debates over memory culture in modern Germany as well, such as the often antagonistic relationships between local Germans and the expellee newcomers, particularly in the first fifteen years after the end of the war.<sup>6</sup> Above all, expellees seek today the historical recognition of their suffering not only from their Polish, Czech, and other Eastern European neighbors but also from their own countrymen. This type of acknowledgement will in no way overshadow the victims of German atrocities during the Third Reich, Schwartz maintains. “At present, it is not about an alternative, but rather about a complementary consideration of memory (*eine ergänzende erinnerungspolitische*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 496 & 497.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 497.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 500. On this point, see also Kossert, *Kalte Heimat*. Schwartz states that envious local Germans countered expellees’ demands for material aid with the reproach that the expellees were themselves at fault for what had befallen them because of the Germans from the East were supposedly even more ardent followers of National Socialism.

*Berücksichtigung*) of German victims of war and its aftermath. This addition is overdue and ought to be seen less as a danger than as an opportunity.”<sup>7</sup>

Schwartz clearly has a problem with how certain historical facts are overlooked in contemporary debates and believes that all expellees are painted with a single brush. The essay’s title takes the form of a question: *Dürfen Vertriebene Opfer sein?* (May expellees be victims?), which he answers affirmatively. Despite all the criticism in this dissertation, my reply to the question is also a resounding “yes.” As I have stated throughout, I do not contend at all that German expellees did not suffer on their westward treks toward the end of the war, or during their forced transfer after the conclusion of WWII. Nor do I believe that they deserved to lose their homes, their possessions, or their lives. As I hope to have made clear, my arguments in no way aim to diminish the human suffering experienced by ethnic Germans from the eastern territories. It is easy to feel empathy for the suffering of the expellees when one encounters them on an interpersonal level. Indeed, it is undeniable and understandable that many of them still must endure trauma precipitated by great loss, including the deaths of family members and other loved ones.

The problem with Schwartz’s stance, however, at least in the context of this study, is that the historical facts of flight and expulsion are not as important as the quality of their representation. In most cases, the monuments represent expulsion experiences as if the German people, in particular, the expellees, bore no responsibility for what happened. True, assigning collective guilt or pursuing collective punishment is wrong and morally unjustifiable. Suggesting the collective innocence of millions of Germans from the East, as so many local monuments do, however, is also a mischaracterization of the facts. Schwartz seems to make it impossible to criticize the expellees and their interpretations

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<sup>7</sup> Schwartz, “Dürfen Vertriebene Opfer sein?” p. 495.

of history, or their representations of the expulsion, without being what he labels an “apologist of the expulsion.”<sup>8</sup> I, on the other hand, see no problem with criticizing the way expellees—and, particularly, their political and cultural organizations—have dealt with their fate and how they have elected to portray and commemorate it in the hundreds of local monuments that dot the landscape not only of Germany, but also its neighboring countries, as well as farther flung locales such as Windhoek, Namibia or Olmsted Falls, Ohio.<sup>9</sup> In no way should a critical assessment of these local monuments be incompatible with recognizing and condemning the criminal excesses inflicted on Germans during or after WWII. Nor must it be construed as the expression of a lack of compassion for those who suffered.

Few would contest the expellees’ right to commemorate their dead. For me, however, it is a matter of how the expellees have conducted their mourning. Therefore, the guiding principles of this analysis have centered on the questions: How have the expellee organizations commemorated and represented the expulsion on their local monuments? Do the commemorations and representations treat the events as isolated occurrences unconnected to the Second World War? Do they suggest any causality? Do

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 502. Citing Adam Krzemiński, Schwartz writes that “generally, apologists of the expulsion who consider it a ‘peace solution’ should comprehend that their argument is cynical and the retaliatory thoughts behind it are inhumane vis-à-vis the expellees...”

<sup>9</sup> The front side of the monument standing in the memorial garden next to the Danube Swabian German-American Cultural Center in this suburb of Cleveland bears a large coat-of-arms along with the inscription DONAUSCHWABEN (Danube Swabians) with the text ZUM GEDENKEN UNSERER TOTEN IN DER ALTEN UND NEUEN HEIMAT (An English translation is also included: In memoriam. In remembrance of our loved ones here and abroad). The inscription on the back side is only in German: ZUM GEDENKEN DER OPFER DER KRIEGE UND DER UNSCHULDIGEN DIE IHR LEBEN LASSEN MUSSTEN NUR WEIL SIE DEUTSCHE WAREN, AUF DER FLUCHT, IN DEN LAGERN VALPOVO, MOLIDORF, GAKOWO, JAREK, MITROVITZA, KRNDIJA, RUDOLFSGNAD, KRUSCHIWL, U.A. SOWIE IN DER BARAGAN UND IN RUSSLAND. (In commemoration of the victims of the wars and the innocents who had to lose their lives only because they were Germans while fleeing and in the camps Valpovo, Molidorf, Gakowo, Jarek, Mitrovitza, Krndija, Rudolfsgnad, Kruschiwl, et al., as well as in the Baragan and in Russia). The monument was dedicated in 1990. Danube Swabians who left their homelands after WWII founded the “Society of the Danube Swabians” in Cleveland in 1958. A number of such organizations exist in the USA, primarily in the Great Lakes and Upper Midwest regions.

they imply German responsibility? Do they include other victim groups? To be sure, local expellee monuments are but one manifestation of a variety of such representations (other examples might include portrayals in literature or in television and film). Nevertheless, the results of how expellees have represented their experiences with local monuments are unmistakable.

In my effort to investigate and interpret the monuments, two distinct though related thematic patterns emerged, which I grouped into clusters. Cluster A (Chapters Three through Six) pertained to the large number of monuments which commemorate and represent the loss of Heimat. Because they lost their homelands, these monuments seem to say, the expellees suffered the worst of all German victims. Noticeably absent, of course, are direct references to other victim groups or to the war that precipitated the territorial loss. The expellee organizations erected these monuments in the pursuit of what one could call “concrete politics,” i.e. the desire for official political and cultural recognition, material compensation, and the reacquisition of lost territories. Above all, these monuments express the expellees’ desire to get their land back and bemoan the loss of German power over Eastern Europe. Inherent in the narratives conveyed by the monuments, therefore, is a territorial claim. Accordingly, the expellees erected the vast majority of cluster A’s monuments—with some noteworthy exceptions, e.g. those of the Southeast European Germans—during the first three decades after WWII. This was when the permanence of the Oder/Neisse border was at least somewhat in doubt.

The expellee organizations erected the monuments of cluster B to achieve other goals. After Ostpolitik ended hopes of border revisions, and after official historical narratives centering on the Holocaust became predominant, the monuments were

constructed in the pursuit of what one could call “symbolic politics,” i.e. societal acknowledgment of the collectively innocent suffering of the expellees. According to cluster B’s monuments, the expellees were brutalized for no other reason than their cultural background and ethnicity, not unlike the victims of the Nazis. Put another way, these monuments portray the expellees as the guiltless victims of events over which they had no control. What is more, because these monuments proclaim the collective innocence of the expellees—by employing religious symbolism, the female form, and subsumption—they are exculpatory. Indeed, these monuments have much to say in general about discourses of guilt and culpability in the Federal Republic since the 1970s and must be interpreted in light of the emergence of Holocaust-centered narratives. Once again, other victim groups are not usually mentioned by name on these monuments. Even when they are, however, the wartime and postwar experiences of the expellees are at the forefront.

In sum, the monuments articulate an ahistorical, German-centered narrative. With very few exceptions, the representations of flight and expulsion on local monuments commence *at the end of the war* as if nothing precipitated these events. It is as if everything started in 1945. In addition, the monuments do not treat the expulsion and the loss of the eastern territories as consequences of the Nazis’ genocidal war. These commemorative sites dissolve causal links between WWII (not to mention all kinds of Nazi atrocities, including the Holocaust) and the expulsion. Moreover, the self-pitying inscriptions are an indication of the unwillingness of a significant portion of the West German populace to recognize and accept German responsibility for the expulsion.

Furthermore, expellee monuments reflect an immediate and sustained effort to shape postwar debates over victimization and guilt. It seems that acknowledgement of German suffering in the form of local expellee monuments leads, at a minimum, to comparability, and in many cases suggests German suffering eclipses and effaces the suffering of other victims. Most of the time, the strategy of distancing and disconnecting glaringly omits all others who suffered during the Third Reich. Most monuments make it look as if the expellees were the only ones who suffered. Indeed, it appears that the initiators of the monuments have sought to go beyond simply commemorating their losses and instead have endeavored to contest any official postwar narratives which did not have German experiences, particularly those of the expellees, as their centerpiece. The point is not that expellees should not commemorate their dead, but rather that by not acknowledging other victim groups and not connecting the expulsion to Nazi Germany's actions, the historical accounts depicted on the monuments are distorted and de-contextualized, and give the impression that their initiators have sought to relativize—and even exculpate—what happened in Germany's name. Even monuments with conciliatory inscriptions, for example, those which quote the Charter of the German Expellees, remain self-centered. The lessons which the expellees claim to have learned are based on what was done to them, not what Germans did to others.

As such, the monuments offer compelling evidence that emphatically refutes the widely-held commonplace that commemoration of German wartime suffering was taboo in the sense that it was not allowed or somehow muted. Expellee monuments have been erected in every decade after the end of the war and stand in every Land of reunited Germany. They are located in bustling big cities and quiet small villages, in peaceful



cemeteries and churchyards, as well as well-visited town squares and city halls. Moreover, as public art, the monuments provide snapshots of how the recent past was perceived—particularly by expellee activists<sup>10</sup>—at the grassroots level at certain points in time, and illuminate the divergence between official historical narratives focusing on the Holocaust and local narratives focusing on German suffering.

It would be unfair and inaccurate, however, to suggest that the views and opinions of millions of expellees have ever been monolithic. Clearly, there is the potential for disparity between the attitudes of expellee organization members and those of other unaffiliated Germans from the East.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, memorialization of the expulsion has been and will remain controversial because of its politicization by the expellee organizations, chief among them the Bund der Vertriebenen. It seems that for the expellee organizations, political objectives—both concrete and symbolic—have in so many cases trumped commemorative goals. Quite clearly, with the monuments that form the empirical core of this dissertation, the expellee organizations have sought to ensure that their interpretations of WWII and its aftermath found—and continue to find—an enduring place in public memory. This pertained particularly on the local level. As my study shows, the expellee organizations often linked commemoration of the expulsion to political objectives. What was commemorative in tone was without question political in intent.

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<sup>10</sup> Claiming personal victimhood and projecting onto Hitler and his Nazi coterie all responsibility for National Socialist atrocities is not a prerogative only of the expellee organizations. Wide swaths of German society have done and continue to do the same.

<sup>11</sup> The number of BdV members has always paled in comparison to the actual number of expellees. Though this expellee umbrella organization claims to have approximately two million members today, most observers believe that number is inflated. They believe membership peaked at around that number in the late 1950s. See Stickler, *“Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch,”* pp. 136-148.

## APPENDIX

### MONUMENTS I HAVE VISITED

#### Baden-Württemberg:



Aalen (cemetery)

Main inscription: DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT  
Dedication: October 1950, expanded 1984



Asperg (cemetery)

Main inscription: DER ALTEN HEIMAT ZUM GEDENKEN  
– DEN TOTEN ZUR EHRE – DER NEUEN HEIMAT ZUM  
DANK – DEN LEBENDEN ZUR MAHNUNG 1945-1985  
Dedication: September 22, 1985



Backnang (schoolyard, formerly a refugee camp)

Main inscription: DER ALTEN HEIMAT ZUM  
GEDENKEN, DER NEUEN HEIMAT ZUM DANK  
Dedication: Tag der Heimat 1976



Blaubeuren (cemetery)

Main inscription: UNSEREN TOTEN  
Renovation: 1988





**Böblingen (street intersection)**  
**Main inscription: BÖHMEN. GEDENKT DER HEIMAT**  
**Dedication 1981**



**Erbach (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: UNSEREN TOTEN IN DER HEIMAT**  
**Dedication: 1956, expanded 2008**



**Essingen (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT**  
**Dedication: October 8, 1959, expanded 1980**



**Faurndau (hill overlooking town)**  
**Main inscription: UNSERE KIRCHENGEMEINDE ENTSTAND NACH DEM ZWEITEN WELTKRIEG DURCH DIE VERTREIBUNG UND ALL DIE HIER IHRE HEIMAT GEFUNDEN HABEN**  
**Dedication: 1988**





**Freiburg (street intersection)**  
**Main inscription: UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT**  
**Dedication: 1968/1969**



**Freiburg (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT**  
**Dedication: 1949**



**Geislingen (hill overlooking Geislingen)**  
**Main inscription: OSTLANDKREUZ & DEN TOTEN SÜDMÄHRENS**  
**Dedication: August 6, 1950, renovated 1992**





Göppingen (city park—Mörikeanlage)  
Main inscription: None  
Dedication: July 26, 1980



Göppingen (city park—Mörikeanlage)  
Main inscription: History of Banat Swabians which concludes with SIE WERDEN UNS UNVERGESSEN BLEIBEN. MÖGEN SIE RUHEN IN FRIEDEN.  
Dedication: Spring 1977



Göppingen (city park—Mörikeanlage)  
Main inscription: DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT. DEN OPFERN DER VERTREIBUNG  
Dedication: December 7, 1980





Heilbronn (cemetery)  
Main inscription: GEDENKSTÄTTE DER GEFALENNEN UND VERSTORBENEN LANDSLEUTE. LANDSMANNSCHAFT DER DOBRUDSCHA DEUTSCHEN  
Dedication: May 20, 1982



Heilbronn (cemetery)  
Main Inscription: DEN TOTEN UNSERER HEIMAT. 1945 – DIE HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN  
Dedication: unknown



Heilbronn (city square)  
SEE CHAPTER NINE



Herlikhofen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: WIR GEDENKEN JENER IN GLASERHAU SLOWAKEI AM 21.9.1944 VON PARTISANEN ERSCHOSSENEN MÄNNER  
Dedication: unknown





Heubach (along street)

**Main inscription:** SOLL ICH EUCH ERST DER DRANGSAL KUNDE SAGEN, DIE DEUTSCHES LAND SO OFT AUS OSTEN TRAF! MAHNUNG AN DIE HEIMAT VON 17 MILL. DEUTSCHEN.  
**ERRICHTET 1961**

**Dedication:** Tag der Heimat, 1961



Hüttlingen (cemetery)

**Main inscription:** ZUM GEDENKEN AN DIE TOTEN IN DER FRÜHEREN HEIMAT UND AN DEN TOTEN VON FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG NACH DEM 2. WELTKRIEG

**Dedication:** 2004



Karlsruhe (cemetery)

**Main inscription: DEN MILLIONEN DEUTSCHEN, DIE DURCH  
GEWALTSAME VERTREIBUNG, FLUCHT, INTERNIERUNG UND  
VERSCHLEPPUNG IHR LEBEN VERLOREN, ZUM EHRENDEN  
GEDENKEN**

**Dedication: November 19, 2000**



Karlsruhe (cemetery)

**SEE CHAPTER FIVE**



Kornwestheim (cemetery)

**Main inscription: DEN TOTEN UNSERER  
HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN**

**Dedication: unknown**



Laichingen (cemetery wall)

**Main inscription: VERLORENE HEIMAT-DICH  
SUCHET DIE SEELE-TOTE DER HEIMAT-EUCH  
BIRGT UNSER HERZ. DEN TOTEN DER  
HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN, DIE IM KRIEG UND AUF  
DER FLUCHT IHR LEBEN VERLOREN HABEN.**

**Dedication: unknown**





**Langenau (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: UNSEREN TOTEN GEWIDMET.**  
**DIE HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN**  
**Dedication: unknown**



**Malsch (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: DEN OPFERN DER VERTREIBUNG UND DER**  
**TOTEN DER HEIMAT & 1945**  
**Dedication: unknown**



**Marbach (cemetery)**  
**SEE CHAPTER SEVEN**



Murr (cemetery)

Main inscription: IM GEDENKEN AN DIE TOTEN IN DER BÖHMERWALDHEIMAT. VÖLKER HÖRET. DIE OPFER DER KRIEGE, VON FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG MAHNEN. LEBET IN FRIEDEN.

Dedication: 1981



Murrhardt (city park)

Main inscription: DIE HEIMAT BLEIBT UNVERGESSEN

Dedication: Tag der Heimat, 1991



Pforzheim (Haus der Landsmannschaften)

SEE CHAPTER EIGHT





Plüderhausen (next to church)  
SEE CHAPTER THREE



Oberdischingen (private property)  
Main inscription: DEM  
GEDÄCHTNIS DER DEUTSCHEN  
HEIMAT IM OSTEN UND UNSEREN  
DORT RUHENDEN TOTEN  
Dedication: 1984



Rechberg (on hill overlooking town)

Main inscription: NEUEIGEN GROSS DITTERSDORF 1946 – 1988.  
DIESER GEDENKSTEIN HIER AM RECHBERG—IM JAHRE 1988  
ERSTELLT—SOLL STETS AN UNSERE „UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT“  
ERINNERN, DIE GANZ NAHE AN DER ODERQUELLE IM  
EHEMALIGEN LANDKREIS BÄRN IM SUDETENLAND LIEGT UND  
DIE WIR IM JAHRE 1946 VERLASSEN MUSSTEN.  
Dedication: 1988



Reutlingen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: UNSEREN TOTEN ZUM GEDENKEN.  
DIE GEMEINDE TSCHEB a.d. DONAU  
Dedication: unknown



Reutlingen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: SACKELHAUSEN BANAT. UNSEREN  
GEFALLENEN, VERMIßTEN, VERSTORBENEN ZUM  
GEDENKEN  
Dedication: 1980



Reutlingen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: NEU-PASUA. 1790-1945.  
VERGESSET UNSER NICHT.  
Dedication: 1976.



Reutlingen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: FRANZFELD IM BANAT. 1792.  
DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT UND ÜBERALL  
IN DER WELT  
Dedication: 1973





Reutlingen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: UNVERGESSENE HEIMAT  
Dedication: April 15, 1984, moved November 24, 2001



Schelklingen (along bike path)  
SEE CHAPTER THREE



Schwäbisch Gmünd (cemetery)  
Main inscription: HEIMAT DER DEUTSCHEN AUS DEM OSTEN  
Dedication: October 14, 1989



Schwäbisch Gmünd (cemetery)  
Main inscription: DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT  
Dedication: November 1, 1955





Sindelfingen (cemetery)

Main inscription: DER UNVERGESSENEN HEIMAT UND IHREN TOTEN. BUND DER VERTRIEBENEN

Dedication: 1982



Sindelfingen (on hill near school)

Main inscription: GEDENKT DER BRÜDER UND SCHWESTERN, DIE OPFERND FÜR UNS IHR LEBEN GELASSEN, DIE SCHULDLOS GEMORDET, IM ELEND VERSTORBEN, DIE FORTAN NOCH WEILEN IN HERBEM VERMIßTSEIN, DIE FERNE AUCH RUHEN IN VERLORENER HEIMAT.

Dedication: chapel 1949; cross, 1953



Stuttgart (in front of inner courtyard of the Neues Schloss)

**Main inscription: VERSTÄNDIGUNG STATT VERTREIBUNG. VERSÖHNUNG STATT VERGELTUNG. IM ANGESICHT DER VERHEERUNGEN VON KRIEG, FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG WURDE VON DEN DEUTSCHEN HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN UND FLÜCHTLINGEN AM 06. AUGUST 1950 VOR DEN RUINEN DES NEUEN SCHLOSSES DIE CHARTA DER DEUTSCHEN HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN ÖFFENTLICH VERKÜNDET. AUS IHRER LEIDVOLLEN ERFAHRUNG SOLL KÜFTIGEN GENERATIONEN EIN GEEINTES EUROPA, WELTWEITE VERSTÄNDIGUNG UND EIN INTERNATIONAL ANERKANNTES MENSCHEN- UND HEIMATRECHT ERWACHSEN.**

**Dedication: August 21, 2002**



Stuttgart (park)

**SEE CHAPTER EIGHT**



Stuttgart (cemetery)

**Main inscription: DEN TOTEN IN DER ALTEN HEIMAT UND IN ALLER WELT. IM 13. JH. AUS DEM DEUTSCHEN SÜDWESTEN AUSGEWANDERT. AB 1825 DIE DEUTSCHE GEMEINDE GEGRÜNDET, 1944/1945 VERTRIEBEN. IN DEUTSCHLAND, ÖSTERREICH, UND IN ALLER WELT NEU BEGONNEN. DIE ÜBERLEBENDEN, DIE NACHKOMMEN UND DIE PATENSTADT STUTTGART**

**Dedication: 1984**





Stuttgart (cemetery)  
Main inscription: EIN EHRENDES GEDENKEN.  
Dedication: 1987



Ulm (Donauschwabenufer)  
SEE CHAPTER FIVE



Ulm (Donauschwabenufer)  
SEE CHAPTER FIVE





Vaihingen (cemetery)

Main inscription: VON WILLKÜR VERBANNT, AUS UNSERER VÄTER LAND. NUR LIEBE DIE DEN HASS VERPÖNT, ZEIGT AUF DEN WEG, DER DANN VERSÖHNT.

Dedication: 1995



Winnenden (cemetery)

Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN AN UNSERE HEIMAT UND UNSERE TOTEN. GEMEINDE SCHOWE 1736-1944

Dedication: unknown



Winnenden (on hill at street intersection)

Main inscription: BRÜCKE ZUR HEIMAT

Dedication: September 15, 1965

## Bavaria



Bischofswiesen (church wall)

Main inscription: 1945. DEN TOTEN DER HEIMAT. SUDETENDEUTSCHE LANDESMANNSCHAFT

Dedication: September 25, 1949

## Berlin



Berlin (Theodor-Heuss-Platz)

Main inscription: FREIHEIT RECHT FRIEDE. DIESE FLAMME MAHNT: NIE WIEDER VERTREIBUNG!

Dedication: September 10, 1955



## North Rhine-Westphalia



Ahlen (parking lot)  
SEE CHAPTER EIGHT



Bad Oeynhausen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: FERN DOCH TREU  
Rededication: July 16, 1995



Bielefeld (cemetery)  
Main inscription: DEN TOTEN UNSERER OSTDEUTSCHEN HEIMAT  
Dedication: May 8, 1955, expanded 1999



**Bielefeld (entrance of civic administrative building)**  
**Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN AN DIE VERTREIBUNG DER DEUTSCHEN AUS IHRER HEIMATSTADT WANSEN IN SCHLESISIEN AM 7. AUGUST 1946**  
**Dedication: September 14, 1996**



**Bielefeld (end of street)**  
**SEE CHAPTER EIGHT**



**Bielefeld (city park)**  
**Main inscription: DER ELCH ALS SINNBILD OSTPREUSSENS WURDE FÜR DIE PATENSTADT GUMBINNEN DURCH DIE STADT BIELEFELD GESTIFTET. BILDHAUER HANS RUWOLDT 1961**  
**Dedication: 1961**





**Bonn (near the Beethovenhalle)**

**Main inscription: DIESE PATENSCHAFTSBÄUME STEHEN HIER ZUR ERINNERUNG AN DIE LÄNDER UND STÄDTE...**

**Dedication: October 1972**



**Dortmund (park)**

**Main inscription: WIR ERINNERN AN DAS SCHICKSAL DER ÜBER 15 MILLIONEN FLÜCHTLINGE, VERTRIEBENEN UND DEPORTIERTEN AUS SCHLESSEN, OSTBRANDENBURG, POMMERN, DANZIG, WEST- UND OSTPREUSSEN, DEM SUDETENLAND, UND DEN SIEDLUNGSGEBIETEN VON DEUTSCHEN IN OST-, MITTEL- UND SÜDOSTEUROPA, DIE 1945 HIERHER KAMEN. MEHR ALS 3 MILLIONEN VERLOREN DABEI IHR LEBEN – DIE HEIMATVERTRIEBENENVERBÄNDE-**

**Dedication: 2004**



**Düsseldorf (side of street)**

**Inscription: DANZIG DANZIG DANZIG**

**Dedication: 1964**



Düsseldorf (park)  
SEE CHAPTER ONE



Düsseldorf (Gerhart-Hauptmann-Haus)  
Main inscription: DER ALTEN HEIMAT ZUM GEDENKEN.  
DER NEUEN HEIMAT ZUM DANK  
Dedication: 1981



Euskirchen (entrance of old city hall)  
Main inscription: HEIMAT UNVERGESSEN  
1302-1945-2002  
Dedication: September 14, 2002



Euskirchen (cemetery)  
Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN DEN OPFERN DER FLUCHT  
VERTREIBUNG UND VERSCHLEPPUNG  
Dedication: 1976





Euskirchen (outside county administration building)  
Main inscription: NAMSLAU SCHLESSEN UNVERGESSEN  
Dedication: June 15, 1958



Hagen (park)  
SEE CHAPTER THREE



Hemer (park)  
Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN  
DER OPFER DURCH FLUCHT UND  
VERTREIBUNG



**Herne (cemetery)**

**Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN DER VIELEN OPFER DIE DURCH FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG IHR LEBEN VERLOREN 1945-1948**  
**Dedication: September 18, 2004**



**Herne (music school)**

**Main inscription: GEGEN KRIEG UND VERTREIBUNG. ALTE HEIMAT IN OSTPREUSSEN UND SCHLESSEN. NEUE HEIMAT-PATENSTADT HERNE**  
**Dedication: 2004**



**Hille (entrance of city hall)**

**Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN AN FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG. BUND DER VERTRIEBENEN**  
**Dedication: July 16, 1995**





**Iserlohn (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: UNSEREN TOTEN IN DER OSTDEUTSCHEN HEIMAT**  
**Dedication: 1958**



**Krefeld (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: DEN OPFERN VON GEWALT UND VERTREIBUNG**  
**Dedication: 1985**



**Leverkusen (cemetery)**  
**Main inscription: DEN TOTEN DER OSTDEUTSCHEN HEIMAT. 8.X.1950**  
**Dedication: October 8, 1950, expanded 1995**



Lippstadt (cemetery)  
SEE A. LOSS OF HEIMAT AND TERRITORIAL CLAIMS



Menden (war memorial)  
Main inscription: 82 ANGEHÖRIGE DER HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN LIESSEN IM WELTKRIEG 1939-1945 UND IN FOLGE DER VERTREIBUNG IHR LEBEN  
Dedication: unknown



Menden (cemetery)  
Main inscription: IN CHRISTUS IST HEIMAT  
Dedication: 1954



Minden (entrance of city hall)  
Main inscription: ZUM GEDENKEN AN DIE 2 MILLIONEN OPFER DURCH FLUCHT UND VERTREIBUNG 1944-1948. GESTIFTET VON DEN LANDSMANNSCHAFTEN UND DEM BdV 1998  
Dedication: November 15, 1998





Minden-Todtenhausen (cemetery)  
SEE CHAPTER NINE



Minden (park)  
Main inscription: WEST- u. OSTPREUSSEN. POMMERN-  
OSTBRANDENBURG. SCHLESIEN-SUDETENLAND  
Dedication: August 8, 1985



Münster (city square)  
Main inscription: DEN DEUTSCHEN FLÜCHTLINGEN UND  
HEIMATVERTRIEBENEN IN MÜNSTER SEIT 1945  
Dedication: April 5, 2003



Neuss (city square)  
SEE CHAPTER THREE



**Oberhausen (Schloss Oberhausen)**  
**SEE CHAPTER NINE**



**Porta Westfalica (side of street)**  
**SEE CHAPTER FOUR**



**Schloß Burg (Gedenkstätte des deutschen Ostens)**  
**Main inscription: DEN VERTRIEBENEN IN**  
**EUROPA ZUM GEDENKEN**  
**Dedication: October 21, 1951, expanded June 2, 1962**



**Soest (BdV meeting rooms in former NATO barracks)**  
**Main inscription: VERGESST DIE HEIMAT NICHT. DIE OPFER**  
**DER FLUCHT VERTREIBUNG UND VERSCHLEPPUNG 1945**  
**Dedication: unknown**



Soest (BdV meeting rooms in former NATO barracks)  
Main inscription: **DIE HISTORISCHEN DEUTSCHEN OSTPROVINZEN. HEIMAT VIELER SOESTER BÜRGER**  
Dedication: unknown



Soest (exterior wall of city hall)  
Main inscription: **VERGESST DIE HEIMAT NICHT. DIE OPFER DER FLUCHT VERSCHLEPPUNG UND VERTREIBUNG INFOLGE DES KRIEGES 1939-1945**  
Dedication: 1989



Soest (exterior wall of city hall)  
Main inscription: **ZUR ERINNERUNG AN GROSS-STREHLITZ OBERSCHLESISIEN. DIE PATENSTADT SOEST**  
Dedication: unknown

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