

**Historical Memory and the expulsion  
of ethnic Germans in Europe, 1944-  
1947**

Thesis submitted by

**Robert Bard**

**to the University of Hertfordshire in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the  
degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**July 2009**

**Contents**

**Page no.**

**Abstract**-----4  
**Introduction** -----5  
**Chapter 1**  
Historical Background -----18  
**Chapter 2**  
Historic and Collective Memory: The Nature of German History -----38  
**Chapter 3**  
Historical memory of the expulsions in the 1950s and 1960s -----51  
**Chapter 4**  
1986: Hillgruber and de Zayas -----66  
**Chapter 5**  
Historical memory: from 1993 to the present day -----74  
**Chapter 6**  
Historical memory: Visual imagery and Guido Knopp -----85  
**Chapter 7**  
The Bund der Vertriebenen and the shaping of historical memory-----123  
**Chapter 8**  
The Reception of German historical memory of the expulsions by  
Polish historians and politicians -----144  
**Chapter 9**  
The Reception of German historical memory of the expulsions by  
Czech historians and politicians -----155  
**Conclusion** -----170

**Illustrations**

Figure 1. Map of 1930s Europe -----21  
Figure 2. Map showing the areas that comprised the new 1918  
Polish Republic -----29  
Figure 3. Death at Nemmersdorf -----33  
Figure 4. Red Army advance route, and *Gustloff* route ----- 34  
Figure 5. DVD cover illustration from 1981 documentary -----90  
Figure 6. DVD cover illustration from *Die grosse Flucht* -----94  
Figure 7. Two newsreel photographs of Nemmersdorf killings-----95  
Figure 8. Fleeing civilians from German newsreel-----96  
Figure 9. Newsreel photograph RAF fighter over Germany -----96  
Figure 10. Harvest autumn eastern Germany, contemporary illustration -----97  
Figure 11. Boarding the *Gustloff*, contemporary illustration. -----98  
Figure 12. Clip from 1959 German film, ‘Night over Gotenhafen’-----98  
Figure 13. Scene on board the *Gustloff* -----99

**Page no.**

Figure 14.	Series of stills from newsreel of ‘Fortress Breslau’.	-----99,100
Figure 15.	Stills of soldier who was at ‘Fortress Breslau’.	-----101
Figure 16.	Stills of German child soldiers.	-----102
Figure 17.	Polish newsreel of Germans being expelled	-----103
Figure 18.	German newsreel showing falling bombs.	-----104
Figure 19.	Newsreel footage of Edvard Beneš	-----105
Figure 20.	Book cover illustration <i>Die grosse Flucht</i>	-----107
Figure 21.	Refugees fleeing in winter from book, <i>Die grosse Flucht</i>	----- 111
Figure 22.	Fleeing refugees amid scenes of destruction	-----112
Figure 23.	Russian tanks roll into Mühlhausen, East Prussia	-----113
Figure 24.	Guido Knopp's <i>Die Grosse Flucht</i> cover from the DVD	-----116
Figure 25.	Knopp using the images of young children, and orphans	-----118
Figure 26.	<i>Gegen das Vergessen, Die grosse Flucht</i> , 2003 DVD cover	-----118
Figure 27.	Doku-staged picture of Hitler Youth being sworn in by the regime	----121
Figure 28.	The Breslau Death March from the <i>ZDF</i> website	----- -121
Figure 29.	Wprost depicting Erika Steinbach dressed as Nazi dominatrix	-----135
Figure 30.	Illustration, German Chancellor with a Hitler moustache.	-----153
Figure 31.	Reconciliation Cross in Teplice nad Metuji.	-----163

<b><u>Bibliography</u></b>	-----	.177
----------------------------	-------	------

**Appendices**

Appendix 1.	Television and radio in Germany	-----185
Appendix 2.	Beneš Decrees	-----186
Appendix 3.	Beneš Decrees Radio Prague article	-----188
Appendix 4.	German-Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their future development, 21 January 1997	-----191
Appendix 5.	Images of expulsion.	-----195

## Abstract

As the Second World War in Europe came to an end the Russians advanced from the east towards Berlin. German occupation of Poland and Czechoslovakia had been particularly brutal. Both of these countries, products of German defeat at the end of World War I contained millions of ethnic Germans, who had previously co-existed with their Slav neighbours, often for many centuries, but were now perceived by these neighbours as having encouraged and collaborated with Nazi Germany. Russians, Poles and Czechs now sought revenge triggering the largest forced expulsion in recorded history.

Somewhere between 8 and 16.5 million ethnic Germans fled to the west, and between 2 and 3 million perished during flight. Expellee property was subsequently seized by the Poles and Czechs. In broad terms, until the 1990s these events were seen within Germany as part of a submerged collective memory, suppressed in part by their having lost the war. In the last 20 years with an increasingly powerful expellee organisation (the Bund der Vertriebenen, Federation of Expellees) influencing mainstream German politics, academia, and the German media, an attempt has been made to change historical memory, or rewrite what has been referred to as an ‘unacceptable past.’ This, in recent years has led to claims by former expellees against the Czech Republic, and Poland for restitution. This in itself has led to bitter accusations by these countries that the expellees have rewritten German history portraying themselves as victims of the Second World War. This thesis explores the methods employed by the expellee groups and their supporters in the restructuring of their historical memory by examining literature dating from the 1950s until the present day from primarily German and American sources, as well as German television documentaries from 2000. These sources are considered in relation to how collective and historical memory have evolved into a position that has allowed the expellees to create an ‘acceptable past’.

## Introduction

In 1944 the Nazi hierarchy deliberately generated a fear in the hearts of the German population lying in the path of the advancing Russians. This fear, it hoped, would lead the population to resist the Russians, or in Hitler's terminology 'fight to the last man.'<sup>1</sup> In fact the fear generated from Berlin into the hearts of the population was well justified: the leaders, having initiated a campaign against the Slav *Untermensch* of the utmost brutality and cruelty, had no illusions as to what they could expect in return.<sup>2</sup> The hierarchy believed that the expectation of a merciless assault by the Russians on the German civilian population would lead both the German armed forces and civilians in the east to put up a desperate attempt to hold off the Red Army, and allow Germany time to regroup her forces. By January 1945 the Red Army had begun the 'Great Offensive', causing a wave of approximately 5 million Germans to flee westwards. The propaganda created by Goebbels in Berlin warning the Germans that the Russians were barbarians, created panic amongst the civilian populations that lay in the path of the Russian advance, which was characterised by ruthless pillaging, rape, and murder.<sup>3</sup> These waves of refugees were in a sense, unlike the later forced expulsions, voluntary. The aftermath of the war saw Poles and Czechs exacting revenge against their remaining ethnic German populations in the form of pogroms and seizure of property. Many ethnic Germans were seized by the Russians and sent as forced labourers to camps in Siberia.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Order given by Hitler to Helmuth Weidling, the Commander of the Berlin Defence area on 23rd April 1945. Weidling was ordered not to surrender and to fight to the last man. Wilhelm Willemar, 'The German Defence of Berlin', Department of the Navy -- Naval Historical Centre, p.8, < <http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/germandefberl.htm> > [accessed 14 July 2009]

<sup>2</sup> The Nazis had enslaved or murdered in the region of 10 million Russians, Poles, and Czechs. One in six of the Polish population had been exterminated, and in Czechoslovakia, of a 12 million population, 300,000 persons, mostly Jews, suffered the same fate. For a detailed analysis of figures and groups involved see R. C. Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust: the Poles under German occupation, 1939-1944*. New York, Hippocrene. (1997). Chapter 1, titled 'The German Occupation of Poland,' pp.1-39

<sup>3</sup> For details of the Russian advance, see A. Beevor, *The fall of Berlin, 1945*. New York, Viking. (2002),

<sup>4</sup> A. M. De Zayas, *A terrible revenge : the ethnic cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950*, New York, St. Martin's Press. (1994), pp.116-124

The forced expulsions of ethnic Germans from Poland began in June 1945 after the Yalta conference of 4 -11 February 1945 were approved at the Potsdam Conference which began on 17 July 1945 and concluded on 2 August. Essentially the large population transfers of ethnic Germans was discussed at Yalta, and given approval in Articles XII and XIII of the Potsdam Protocol.<sup>5</sup> The result of these conferences was that the Poles ‘were authorised to administer German territory as far as the Oder and the Western Neisse until the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany – a treaty never in fact concluded.’<sup>6</sup> Thus the expulsions from the east saw the beginning of what is still regarded as the largest forced ethnic migration in recorded history, involving figures variously quoted as being between 8 million and 16.5 million ethnic Germans.<sup>7</sup> It is estimated that well in excess of two million of these Germans perished at this time.<sup>8</sup> The expulsions reached their peak in 1946, declining rapidly by the end of 1947. Not only had they official allied sanction, but they were orchestrated by the allies. The key term at Potsdam, which was to affect the initial expellee political outlook and philosophy, was ‘final delimitation of the frontier at a future peace conference.’<sup>9</sup> Another key term was ‘orderly and humane’ in the transfer of the German populations. As Pertti Ahonen, in his extremely detailed and well-researched book on the expulsions, observes, ‘technically, the wording left open the possibility of subsequent boundary changes, as did other declarations in which the Western Allies expressly confirmed occupied Germany’s continued existence within its boundaries of 31

---

<sup>5</sup> The Berlin (Potsdam) Conference, July 17-August 2, 1945 (a) Protocol of the Proceedings, August 1, 1945 [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/decade17.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp) [Accessed 12 October 2008]

<sup>6</sup> A.J.P Taylor , *English History 1914-1945* , Oxford University Press, Oxford.1975, p.594

<sup>7</sup> Bert Franken, *Die grosse Flucht*, Hestia Verlag, Bayreuth, 1975 quotes ‘more than 14 million.’ Dust jacket. Guido Knopp, *Die Grosse Flucht*, Ullstein Verlag,Munich, 2003 quotes ‘over 12 million’ back cover, and Erich Kern, a former SS officer writing in 1964, *Verbrechen am Deutschen Volk*, quotes 8 million. The official website for the Union of the Expellees, (der Bund der Vertriebenen) quotes 12.5 million persons expelled: <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/>> [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>8</sup> > <http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/> [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>9</sup> Fourth meeting of the Council, of Foreign Ministers, Moscow, March 10 to April 24, 1947. Report by Secretary Marshall, April 28, 1947. <[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/decade23.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade23.asp)> [accessed 14 October 2008]

December 1937.’<sup>10</sup> Ironically, the Potsdam Agreement was to become a document offering hope to those expelled from Poland. There were approximately 4.5 million Germans in Poland prior to the war. By the end of 1945 550,000 had left of their own freewill, although pressure from the Polish government for them to leave was intense. De Zayas relates that their fate varied ‘from province to province...Those who were permitted to remain in their homes usually suffered the least, although many were subjected to abuses and in general lived close to the starvation level....’<sup>11</sup> It could be argued that technically, they were not expellees, because they were not forced to leave, but as de Zayas observes, ‘...the Germans who were promptly expelled were relatively fortunate, because their chances of survival were greater in the West – provided, of course they survived the transfer itself.’<sup>12</sup> February to December 1946, saw organised expulsions which, because of the Potsdam agreement, had the backing of the allies and the allied forces. Between December 1946 and November 1947 around 1.5 million ethnic Germans were moved from the Polish territory<sup>13</sup> to the British zone of occupied Germany, and 1.84 million to the Soviet. The expulsions continued until 1950, by which time the expellees from Poland and Czechoslovakia accounted for 16.5% of the total population of the Federal Republic.<sup>14</sup> In Czechoslovakia, the Sudeten Germans were targeted for expulsion from May 1945. President Beneš stated that he would ‘liquidate the German question in the Republic....’<sup>15</sup> 31 July 1945 saw a pogrom in Aussig, Czechoslovakia where 2,700 German women and children

---

<sup>10</sup> Pertti Aho, *After the Expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe, 1945-1990*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2003), pp.7-18

<sup>11</sup> A. M. De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam : the Anglo-Americans and the expulsion of the Germans : background, execution, consequences*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1977), p.124

<sup>12</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.124

<sup>13</sup> By the end of the War, Poland had played host to a total of around 9 million ethnic Germans made up of East Prussians (southern section): 1.3 million, Pomeranians: 1.8 million, East Brandenburg: 0.6 million, Lower Silesia: 3.0 million, Upper Silesia: 1.7 million, Free State of Danzig: 0.4 million.:

<[http://www.bpb.de/themen/0WTLNY,2,0,Die\\_Deutschen\\_in\\_Polen.html#art2](http://www.bpb.de/themen/0WTLNY,2,0,Die_Deutschen_in_Polen.html#art2) > [accessed 14 October 2008]

<sup>14</sup> All facts and figures in this first paragraph come from the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. ‘Deutsche Geschichte, Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte,’ (B 40-41/2003) available at <[http://www.bpb.de/suche/?allsearch\\_action=search&all\\_search\\_text=vertriebenen](http://www.bpb.de/suche/?allsearch_action=search&all_search_text=vertriebenen)> [accessed 13 October 2007]

<sup>15</sup> ‘Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Geschichte und Erinnerung,’ p.7, <[http://www.bpb.de/themen/NWE8GV.0.0.Links\\_zum\\_Thema\\_Geschichte\\_und\\_Erinnerung.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/NWE8GV.0.0.Links_zum_Thema_Geschichte_und_Erinnerung.html)> [accessed 2 October 2007]

were murdered, followed by other incidents which led to several thousand more deaths, either through mob attack, or suicide.<sup>16</sup> Of a previous pre-war population of over 3 million Germans in the Sudetenland it is believed that only approximately 200,000 now remain. Many of those Germans who were expelled from the east were killed or died as a result of the forced marches, cold, hunger, rape, suicide, military action, or revenge attacks. Around 37.2 % took up residence in the British Zone, 32.8% in the American, and 1.4% in the French. Just under 20% remained in the Russian zone, which was to become East Germany.<sup>17</sup>

### **Scope of thesis and outline of structure**

The term *expellee* or *Vertriebene* in the context of this thesis is used to refer to all of those Germans who during the latter stages of the Second World War were driven from the lands where they lived in the east, either by the westward advancing Red Army, by the terms of the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences, or by compulsion from the host countries: in the case of this thesis, Poland and Czechoslovakia, both of whom introduced laws with the aim of dispossessing their native ethnic Germans of their rights and possessions. In the Czech Republic these laws still remain in place. The events were recorded at the time by the Federal Government of Germany, and publications recording the events appeared from the beginning of the 1950s onwards.<sup>18</sup>

This thesis will explore the way in which the depiction of the expulsions has changed over time, from the 1940s to the present day; it will examine the ways in which German historical memory has been restructured, and at how this has impacted on two of Germany's neighbours, Poland and the Czech Republic. The thesis will consider the

---

<sup>16</sup> Helga Hirsch, 'Kollektive Erinnerung im Wandel,' *Deutsche Geschichte, Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B40-41/2003) pp.1-6 '  
<[http://www.bpb.de/themen/6QLFUQ,2,0,Kollektive\\_Erinnerung\\_im\\_Wandel.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/6QLFUQ,2,0,Kollektive_Erinnerung_im_Wandel.html) > [accessed 2 October 2007]

<sup>17</sup> Hirsch, 'Kollektive Erinnerung im Wandel,' pp.1-6

<sup>18</sup> T.Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern-Central-Europe*, Bonn., Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees and War Victims. (1950). This was the first of a government sponsored series published through the 1950s.



plight of the Sudeten Germans and the ethnic German population of Poland primarily because they represent the largest number of expelled persons in the closest proximity to what is now Germany.<sup>19</sup>

During the immediate post-war period Germany was a pariah nation occupied by the allies. This was not the time for newly arrived expellees to seek a sympathetic assessment of the events of the immediate past, particularly in the light of the revelations about the barbaric nature of the Nazi regime, the mass extermination of the Jews, and the damage inflicted by Germany on much of Europe and the United Kingdom. The events which afflicted so many Germans tended to remain internalised: a subject of family discussion. This situation remained broadly unchanged until the '68 generation, the generation who had been born after 1945, began to question their parents about the nature of their role in relation to the Nazi regime during the war.<sup>20</sup> With distance in time from the war, and the increasing passing away of the wartime generation, a different sense of social and historical perspective developed. By the 1990s with the increased sense of 'nation' created by German reunification and the rising conviction that one could not inherit war-guilt by birth, the subject of the expulsions and the treatment of German civilians by the Russians, Poles and Czechs in particular, during the latter stages of the war increasingly became the subject matter for German historians and politicians.<sup>21</sup> German historians were divided as to whether in the light of the atrocities against the Jewish civilian population of Europe the

---

<sup>19</sup> Of a pre-1938 population of 3.2 million, 3 million were expelled or took refuge in the west. As Theodor Schieder points out: 'The Sudeten Germans are the largest group of Germans, living outside the 1937 frontiers of the Reich, to be expelled from their homeland after 1945.' Theodor Schieder, *The Expulsion of the German Population from Czechoslovakia: A Selection and Translation from Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen Aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, Volume IV, 1 and IV, p.2 Bonn: Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees, (1960), p.3.

<sup>20</sup> The '68 generation are seen as a product of the hippy and anti-Vietnam movement who protested at what was seen as the follies of the previous generation. Norbert Frei says that in Germany the '68 generation looked to deal with the *unbewältigte Vergangenheit* or 'the past that had not been dealt with' which was the essential driving force of this movement. See Norbert Frei, *1968, Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest*, Munich, DTV Verlag, (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Some examples Ekkehard Kuhn, *Nicht Rache, Nicht Vergeltung, Die deutschen Vertriebenen*, Frankfurt, Verlag Ullstein, 1989, *Im Albrecht Lehmann, Fremden ungewollt zuhaus. Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in Westdeutschland 1945-1990* Munich, C.H. Beck Verlag (1991), Wolfgang R. Langenbucher und Fritz Hausjell, *Vertriebene Wahrheit : Journalismus aus dem Exil*. Wien, Ueberreuter Verlag, (1995).

subject of the expellees could legitimately be given a central role in Germany's post-war historical narrative. This thesis will show that much of the aim of the expellee organisation, the *Bund der Vertriebenen (BdV or Federation of Expellees)* is to employ lessons learned from the creation of the many Holocaust museums, exhibitions, and memorials which exist worldwide to educate and keep alive the events that took place in Germany between 1933 and 1945. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin has led to demands by the BdV for a Berlin-based memorial in central Berlin, to commemorate 'all expulsions.' The BdV have specifically, and carefully stated that their 'The Centre against Expulsions' would 'act as a memorial in the spirit of reconciliation with all neighbours, and will stand in solidarity with all victims of expulsion and genocide.'<sup>22</sup> Erika Steinbach, head of the BdV, emphasised that it would not be in direct sight of the Holocaust memorial.<sup>23</sup> In 2008, rather than leave 'history' in the hands of its old enemy Germany, and in retaliation to the proposed Centre against Expulsions, the Polish government has indicated its intention to build a 'World War II Museum' in Gdansk.<sup>24</sup>

This thesis will look at the significance of the increasing demand for memorials and museums by the BdV and its affiliated expellee organisations and the significance in memory evolution that these memorials seek to bring about in the expellee version of history: the primary aim being legitimacy on a par with the Holocaust. Much of the historical memory of the Second World War and the

---

<sup>22</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool/zentrumggvertreibung.php3>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>23</sup> 'Berlin Close to New "Center of Expulsion,"' Deutsche Welle online article, (01.08.2005), <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1664849,00.html>> [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>24</sup> In an interview with *Spiegel*, Janusz Reiter, a former Polish ambassador to Germany, stated that the reason for this Polish museum was that 'displacement and deportation should be viewed in the context of the crimes the Germans committed. Poland's fear has always been that future generations in Germany would not consider the displacements in the context of Germany's culpability for the war and would draw the wrong conclusions as a result. More than anything else, Tusk's proposal is a signal that we don't want to -- nor can we -- leave it entirely up to others to interpret the history of the 20th century.' *Spiegel* interview with former Polish Ambassador Janusz Reiter, 1 September 2008, found at <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,527580,00.html>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

events immediately afterwards derives its demands for both legitimacy and primacy on numbers. The Holocaust claimed 6 million Jewish lives, a fact which within Germany it is illegal to question.<sup>25</sup> Expellee history looks to its superior numbers for legitimacy, and venomously attacks historians who query the accounting methods used by the expellees.<sup>26</sup> Numbers equate to legitimacy.

It will be shown within the context of the expellees, that since the beginning of the 1990s historians and politicians have attempted to rewrite the history of Germany's role in the Second World War, by portraying the German nation and its people as the unwilling victims of the Hitler regime with particular emphasis on the period from 1944 onwards. This thesis will demonstrate that the language used to rewrite the history of the Germans' role in the Second World War operates at a number of levels. The language that has almost taken Germany from perpetrator to victim comes in a number of forms, both overt and subliminal. With a view to demonstrating this language this thesis will look at 'signposting' or the 'deification' of certain key expellee tragedies. The events of October 1944 in Nemmersdorf are a single example of an event which carried little significance in numerical terms in the overall context of the tragedy of the war in 1944, but is now firmly established in expellee history. Another example is the portrayal of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a refugee ship containing an estimated 9,000 German civilians which was destroyed off Gdansk on 30 January 1945 by a Russian submarine killing many thousands of refugees and in the process creating the world's largest marine disaster in terms of lives lost. Both of these events will be explored in more detail later in this thesis. This thesis will also look at this 'signposting' in the historiography of post-war expellee history and will show how it has led to a

---

<sup>25</sup> 'Germany's parliament passed legislation in 1985, making it a crime to deny the extermination of the Jews. In 1994, the law was tightened. Now, anyone who publicly endorses, denies or plays down the genocide against the Jews faces a maximum penalty of five years in jail and no less than the imposition of a fine.' <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1833619,00.html> > [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>26</sup> See an outspoken attack on the German historian, Ingo Haar on 17.11.2006 on the BdV's website by the President, Erika Steinbach for querying the numbers of expellee dead by 300,000 who the BdV list as murdered, but Haar points out that they were the victims of an eastward 'death march' and as such should not be counted. <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=496>> [accessed on 14 October 2008]

formulaic and structured history which appears in the visual and written media. This has the effect of creating a structured history of tragedy that is effectively a rival to the Holocaust in the way it seeks to solve the problems posed in German history by the Holocaust. These problems relate to a balance of suffering and the uniqueness of the Holocaust and will be dealt with later in this thesis.

The subject matter of this thesis has increasingly been the subject of investigation by academics within the United States, Britain, Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic during the last five years. Publications dealing with individual areas of expellee history such as guilt and suffering, ‘memory contests, victim status’, and ‘forgetfulness’ have increased dramatically in the last decade. Since 2003 there has been an increasing concentration by German language publications on German expellee organisations, in particular the BdV, and the *Preussische Treuhand*, or Prussian Trust, established to regain land and property from Poland and the Czech Republic on behalf of the expellees, by way of the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>27</sup> The combined efforts of these organisations and the effect their rewriting of German history has had on both Germany’s domestic politics and her increasingly acrimonious relations with Poland and the Czech Republic have come increasingly into the fore in Germany in recent years.

To date, 2009, whilst much has been written about the various aspects of German memory, the expellees, and the political role of the BdV, the author believes that there has not been a single work that analyses the nature of the development of German historical memory using German written and visual sources in relation to the formulaic

---

<sup>27</sup> See the *Preussische Treuhand* website for a clear outline of their aims. In July 2008 the website stated in the section headed ‘The Current Situation’: ‘The collapse of the totalitarian communist system of the Eastern Block countries in 1989/1990 has created a new situation for all displaced persons, their organizations, and all those involved in the matters of the expulsion territories. The main question of returning to one’s home, and especially the return of the property ownership to the rightful owners, has up to now been left unresolved by the German government. The current German administration even openly declines to represent the rights of the displaced persons to their property; while this right is actually being granted by public international law. In this situation, the German administration can, perhaps, be forced by legal and political means to represent rightful owner’s rights. Some organizations of displaced persons are currently pursuing just that. But this pursuit may have a long way to go; and, in the meantime claims may become infeasible, i.e., because deceased leave no heirs or the details have not been communicated sufficiently to the heirs. Claims may also become unmanageable in tangled communities of heirs.’ <<http://www.preussischetreuhand.de.vu/>> [accessed 29 July 2008]

elements of these media, and the impact that this development is having on the way that German history relates to the Third Reich.

This thesis also looks at the way that the events of 1944-1947, and the restructuring of German memory after German reunification, is leading to a renewal of old enmities between Germany and Poland and Germany and the Czech Republic. Recent books on the subject tend to look at the many individual themes of how Germans have come to see themselves as victims, but the structure of these works deals with the transition to victimhood using different elements. 2003 saw the publication by a leading U.S historian of German history, Robert Moeller, examining a number of segments of German post-war memory with particular reference to the expellees which he uses to show the origins of the journey from perpetrator to victim.<sup>28</sup>

In 2003 a definitive volume on the history of the controversial BdV by Pertti Aho was published. The book deals with the development of the expellee organisation from its splintered beginnings and looks at how, up to 1990, the BdV used its influence to direct Federal German government foreign policy.<sup>29</sup> In 2005 Dagmar Barnouw published a book which deals with the ‘intense public debate’ over the emergence of memories [in Germany] of wartime suffering in the context primarily of the German-Jewish relationship with Auschwitz as the primary reference.<sup>30</sup> Bill Niven’s 2006 publication, *Germans as Victims*<sup>31</sup>; is a collection of essays by experts in their own fields and deals with the history of the transition by looking at, amongst a number of areas, 1950s German Combat Movies, as Cinematic Representations of German Victimhood and a field that is receiving more prominence in the manner in which it is used to portray German victimhood, that of memory and the bombing of Dresden. Further sections deal with German commemorative politics, and how German wartime suffering has been portrayed

---

<sup>28</sup> R. G. Moeller, *War stories: the search for a usable past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, London, University of California Press. (2003). Elements looked at include the German post-war cinema.

<sup>29</sup> Aho, *After the expulsion*.

<sup>30</sup> D. Barnouw, *The war in the empty air : victims, perpetrators, and postwar Germans*, Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press ; [Chesham : Combined Academic, distributor], (2005).

<sup>31</sup> B. Niven, *Germans as Victims*, Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan, (2006).

in recent fiction within Germany.<sup>32</sup> Whilst many of the elements of the subject of this thesis have been dealt with as individual themes, with elements of cross reference, there is not a complete analysis at this stage, that takes the components used in this thesis and pieces them together to show the evolution of German historical memory and the formula of expellee history and its impact on current German relations with Poland and the Czech Republic.

This thesis will contribute to the growing literature on expellee history and will explore the restructuring of German history in the context of the expellees. It will investigate in particular the effects of formulaic writing and the attempted closing off of history to debate by the formulaic establishment of history as non-debateable fact. The term 'formulaic' as defined by the Concise Oxford English Dictionary is that of something 'constituting or containing a set form of words', and 'produced in accordance with a mechanically followed rule or style.' It will be shown that this is how through the use, in particular, of television documentaries and docudramas, expellee history is now disseminated. The Holocaust, legally within Germany, and amongst mainstream historians outside of Germany, falls squarely into the area of non-debateable history: this is the course that the BdV is looking to follow for expellee history.

The sources used to demonstrate the development of German historical memory will include primarily sources in German, including German expellee histories from the period 1950 to the present day. Books, journal articles and articles arising from conferences on expellee history will be used to assess the progress of the change of memory, and the level of debate. There will be reference to both German and English language academic journals which reflect aspects of academic debate on the nature of German historical memory. Works by an important German historian and television producer, Guido Knopp, will be

---

<sup>32</sup> Robert G. Moeller 'The Continually Suffering Nation? Cinematic Representations of German Victimhood' pp.43-61 and Paul Cooke, 'The GDR and Memory of the Bombing of Dresden,' pp.76-92, in Niven, *Germans as victims : remembering the past in contemporary Germany*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan.(2006).

used in conjunction with similar works to demonstrate the development of a formulaic, structured history of the expulsions, and will be used to demonstrate the change in boundaries of the ‘acceptable.’ By ‘acceptable’ is meant statements, and versions of history that would cause ‘offence’ in mainstream academia, leading to the marginalisation of the historian putting forward controversial views, no longer attracting attention or leading to the ostracising of the historian concerned.

In assessing the role of the media in the changing of historical memory, this thesis will concentrate in particular on the documentaries broadcast by *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*, (ZDF, the second largest German public television station) and Professor Dr. Guido Knopp, a controversial figure for the methods he uses to portray history, who has been in charge of the history production of ZDF since 1984.<sup>33</sup> (See Appendix 1 for ZDF viewing statistics). Such is the power of their ability to mould historical memory, that it is the opinion of many German academics and those involved in the portrayal of German history, that ZDF is rewriting history singlehandedly. Erik Franzen made the point in 2003 that ‘a *kollektiver Erinnerungsstau* (collective memory log-jam) has begun to be freed up with the interest of the mass media in the theme of *Flucht und Vertreibung*<sup>34</sup> (Flight and Expulsion) and its relationship to the Second World War.’<sup>35</sup>

This thesis will look at these methods with particular reference to Knopp’s documentary series of 2001 *Die grosse Flucht* (*The Great Flight*) and will analyse in depth a three-part 2001 documentary series *Die Vertriebenen, Hitlers letzte Opfer* (*The Expellees: Hitler’s last Victims*), and the book that accompanied the

---

<sup>33</sup> The ZDF website describes the station as follows: ‘Germany’s national public television broadcaster. It is an independent non-profit corporation under the authority of the Länder, the sixteen states making up the Federal Republic of Germany.’

<<http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/5/0,1872,2007525,00.html>> [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>34</sup> Note that the term *Vertreibung* or ‘expulsion’ was ‘introduced some years after the end of WWII as official victim term with the purpose of morally legitimising the claims of the expellee organisations.’ See the German statute at

<<http://bundesrecht.juris.de/bvfg/1.html>> [accessed 14 October 2008]

<sup>35</sup> K. Erik Franzen, *In der neuen Mitte der Erinnerung : Anmerkungen zur Funktion eines Opferdiskurses*, Berlin, Propylaen, (2003) p.49

series.<sup>36</sup> Knopp's documentary and written work is extremely popular both within and outside of Germany. He has stimulated comment from German historians who see it as worrying in the way that history relating to World War Two, and the expellees can be reconstructed to give German history a more acceptable face. This thesis will look to demonstrate through the close examination of these documentaries that their structure and their subliminal messages have contributed, and are contributing to the restructuring of German historical memory. This will be demonstrated by looking for the reinforcing of the formulaic method of depicting German expellee history, and the subliminal messages generated by the repeated uses of images normally associated with the Holocaust, such as cattle wagons, and helpless women and children clutching their belongings and attempting to flee persecution.

This thesis will begin by briefly examining in Chapter 1 the historical background to the expulsions to demonstrate the factual nature of the events surrounding and including the expulsions in order to establish a baseline of history from which the events as described by German historians, politicians, and the media can be measured to the present day. In Chapter 2, the thesis will look at German historical memory by examining literature which defines memory at a given period, and the literature that subsequently changed this historical memory. The following three chapters will explore, in chronological order, the depiction of the events of 1944-7 between 1950 and the 1990s including the impact of the German historian, Andreas Hillgruber's, 1986 publication *Zweierlei Untergang (Double Downfall)* and at the work of Alfred de Zayas, an American-born jurist and writer who produced early, important accounts of the fate of the expellees at around the same time as Hillgruber. Expellee historical memory in the 1990s will be explored, as will the work of Professor Guido Knopp, his television documentaries and the associated books. The imagery and methods used, and how they have changed the modern perception of expellee history will be examined.

---

<sup>36</sup> The documentary series, written by Christian Frey and produced by Martin Hübner, appeared on three German television channels, NDR, MDR, and ARD.



These will effectively deal with historical memory from the year 2000 to the present day. The thesis will then look at the politically powerful German expellee organisation, the BdV, which represents approximately 16 million persons, and how, within the context of its call for memorials and the way it portrays the history of the expellees, it has led to a change in expellee historical memory at the expense of Germany's relationship with Poland and the Czech Republic. Chapters 8 and 9 examine the effect of the restructuring of expellee historical memory from perpetrators to victims on Germany's neighbour Poland, and looks at the Sudeten expellee relations with the Czech Republic and the effect of the Beneš decrees on those relations. The conclusion will then summarise the extent historical memory in relation to the expelled ethnic Germans has changed, which has resulted in a reconstructed, incomplete history of the ethnic Germans, and so addresses the questions raised in this thesis.

# Chapter 1

## Historical Background

To understand the evolution of *Vertriebenen*<sup>37</sup> or ‘expellee’ studies requires some knowledge of pre-Treaty of Versailles German borders and ethnic German settlements. It requires an understanding of the real effects of the treaty on ordinary German civilians who woke up one morning, and found themselves a part of an either artificially constructed Poland or Czechoslovakia. The new borders were decided without consulting the defeated Germans, and were based on political, not ethnic considerations.<sup>38</sup> It also requires an understanding of the disputed role these ethnic or *Volksdeutsche* Germans played in their host countries after the rise of Hitler. In addition to approximately 10 million *Volksdeutsche* native to central and Eastern Europe prior to the Second World War, during the war more Germans, referred to as *Reichsdeutsche*, were offered incentives, including the ability to exploit the local Slav populations, to settle in the east, primarily in Poland, under Hitler’s policy of settling the east with ‘racially pure’ German settlers.<sup>39</sup> Broadly speaking during the first part of the 20th century Germans were distinguished between *Volksdeutsche* who were ethnic Germans living outside of Germany proper, and the *Reichsdeutsche*, Germans that lived within German borders. The expellees were for the most part *Volksdeutsche*.

---

<sup>37</sup> The German word *Vertriebene* literally means *displaced person* which equates to the English word *expelled*. The term used in this thesis is defined by German law as ‘a person who is a German citizen or an ethnic German whose home is one of the former German eastern territories that lies outside the borders of Germany after the ‘territory settlement’ (*Gebietsstande*) of 31 December 1937, and has as a consequence of the events of the Second World War, as a consequence of expulsion (*Vertreibung*), either through flight or banishment, lost everything.’ The definition comes from the German statute defining who can claim to be an expellee. See <<http://bundesrecht.juris.de/bvfg/1.html>> [accessed on 14 October 2008]

<sup>38</sup> For the full version of the treaty, and the clauses relating to Germany’s new borders see

<<http://history.sandiego.edu/gen/text/versaillestreaty/ver027.html>> [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>39</sup> Lukas, *The forgotten Holocaust*, pp. 24-27

This chapter will explore briefly the origins of the expellees who, with the fall of the Third Reich, either fled or were forced to leave their homes or *Heimat*<sup>40</sup> where in many cases their forbears had lived for centuries. It will then look at the existing prejudices between the Slavs and ethnic Germans that came to the surface during and after the war.<sup>41</sup> Finally this chapter will look at key events in expellee history from 1944. The following chapter will examine these events within the context of historical memory.

The ethnic Germans often claimed that the only culture in Eastern Europe came from their own Germanic culture. Indeed the majority of the aristocracy throughout the period from the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the First World War in these lands that were to become Poland and Czechoslovakia were Germanic, not Slav. The German minority tended to be insular, maintaining its own communities and encouraging its children to speak German as their primary language, and study at German-run schools. These schools educated exclusively German children, who then went on to form the intellectual elites and middle classes of their host countries.<sup>42</sup> There is evidence to show that the Polish and Czech native populations saw the ethnic Germans as interlopers. In general terms there is strong evidence that prior to the war, over a period of many centuries, the ethnic Germans had regarded their fellow Polish and Czech countrymen as ‘peasants’.

## **Germans in Czechoslovakia**

The creation of the Slavic state of Czechoslovakia came out of the 1918/1919 World War 1 settlement. The country comprised 3.5 million Germans, making up 28% of the

---

<sup>40</sup> In German the concept is that of ‘Heimat’ which on the surface means ‘home’ but has much deeper connotations relating to a physical and spiritual belonging to a place. The term itself is important in expellee history because it ties the individual to a particular region, even if others, such as Czechs and Poles, now live there.

<sup>41</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible revenge*. pp.13-31

<sup>42</sup> See Ákos Róna-Tas “Post-Communist Transition and the Absent Middle Class in East-Central Europe.” In Victoria Bonnell, *Identities in Transition: Russia and East Europe After Communism. International and Area Studies*: University of California, Berkeley, (1996), p.42

population. Czechs comprised 46% of the overall population.<sup>43</sup> Ethnic boundaries were disregarded by the victors as were the rights of the minorities, guaranteed under the Minority Rights Treaty of July 28, 1919.<sup>44</sup> The Czech government policies discriminated against the German minority in both the public and private arena, leading to high unemployment amongst the Sudeten Germans. It was this discrimination that was to allow joint exploitation of Sudeten discontent, and desire for autonomy by Henlein and Hitler.

Prior to the creation of Czechoslovakia, De Zayas describes the 700- year relationship between Germans and Slavs as a period ‘of close Slavic-German co-operation....[with] unhappier confrontations that flared up periodically...’<sup>45</sup> What is clear is that after the end of the First World War, both groups were looking for self-determination and ‘...the logical solution at the end of the First World War should have been to redraw frontiers along clearly definable ethnic lines...’<sup>46</sup> Some 3.5 million Sudeten Germans found themselves within a new state that promised equality to its minorities. In practice the Germans were discriminated against, and treated as second class citizens which in itself caused resentment.<sup>47</sup>

Glassheim observes that by 1918, the Germans and Czechs within Czechoslovakia lived within parallel and largely separate societies. Each group had its own fully developed social structure, economy, and national mythologies.<sup>48</sup> The poor state of relations between the two communities was illustrated when in late 1918 the Czech president Tomas Masaryk referred to the Bohemian Germans as ‘immigrants and colonists’, and it was around this time that the concept of expelling these Germans entered the Czech discourse.<sup>49</sup> Glassheim comments that the

---

<sup>43</sup> See De Zayas, *A Terrible revenge*, p.14

<sup>44</sup> De Zayas notes that ‘between 1919 and 1934 several thousand protests were lodged with the League of Nations by Germans in Poland and Czechoslovakia pointing to violations of the Minority Rights Treaty of July 28, 1919.’ De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.17

<sup>45</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.17

<sup>46</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.19

<sup>47</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible revenge*, pp.17-21

<sup>48</sup> Eagle Glassheim, ‘National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945’, *Central European History*, vol. 33, no. 4, (2000), pp. 463—486

<sup>49</sup> Glassheim, ‘National Mythologies’, p.467

‘Germans were sensitive to these Czech slights and complained bitterly of discrimination in the form of land reform, purges of the state bureaucracy, and school closings. Almost as soon as the ink was dry on Czechoslovakia's minority protection treaty in 1919, Germans began flooding the League of Nations with petitions.’<sup>50</sup>

As early as March 4 1919 ethnic Germans had taken to the streets demanding autonomy from the new Czech State. They were dispersed by Czech police using guns and bayonets. Nearly 60 unarmed ethnic Germans were killed.<sup>51</sup>

The Sudetenland is of significance because of its proximity to Germany, and the role it played in the politics of appeasement in 1938.



Figure 1 Source: American Hungarian Federation  
[http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/news\\_Benešdecrees.htm](http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/news_Benešdecrees.htm) consulted on 22 January 2007

It is clear that the pre-expulsion, pre-Second World War Germans had legitimate grievances concerning the way they were being treated by the Czech government. Arnold Toynbee, after returning from Czechoslovakia, wrote in 1937 ‘...in Czechoslovakia to-

<sup>50</sup> Glassheim, ‘National Mythologies’, p.470

<sup>51</sup> Timothy W. Ryback, ‘Dateline Sudetenland: Hostages to History’, *Foreign Policy*, No. 105 (Winter, 1996-1997), pp.162-178

day the methods by which the Czechs are keeping the upper hand over the Sudetendeutsch are not democratic....'<sup>52</sup> It has been argued that the discrimination against the Sudeten Germans by the Czech Government drove them into the hands of the National Socialists: '[the Czech government]...was seemingly determined to destroy the Sudeten German minority economically as well as politically. Therefore they became more and more receptive to Reich German propaganda, which increased concerning educational and cultural matters.'<sup>53</sup> An example quoted by de Zayas in *A Terrible revenge* which probably summarises the pre-war position of the Sudeten Germans, and the subsequently fatal mistake of embracing Nazi Germany is taken from a report by Walter Runciman who travelled to Prague and the Sudetenland in 1938. He reported to Chamberlain that

'Czech officials and Czech police, speaking little or no German, were appointed in large numbers to purely German districts; Czech agricultural colonists were encouraged to settle on land confiscated under Land Reform in the middle of the German populations; for the children of these Czech invaders Czech schools were built on a large scale; there is a very general belief that Czech firms were favoured as against German firms in the allocation of State contracts, and that the State provided work and relief for Czechs more readily than for Germans. I believe these complaints to be in the main justified. Even as late as the time of my mission, I could find no readiness on the part of the Czechoslovak Government to remedy them on anything like an adequate scale...For many reasons, therefore, including the above, the feeling among the Sudeten Germans until about three or four years ago was one of hopelessness. But the rise of Nazi Germany gave them new hope. I regard their turning for help to their kinsmen and their eventual desire to join the Reich as a natural development in the circumstances.'<sup>54</sup>

This dislike for its German minority led the Czechs to see these Germans as destructive, secretive forces. Both the Czech and Polish governments saw their German ethnic populations as possible or potential traitors within their midst. It was commonly believed that their true loyalty was to Germany. Valdis Lumans has convincingly argued that a large proportion of the *Volksdeutsche* of both Czechoslovakia and Poland actively supported Himmler in pursuit of his racial policies, and encouraged the invasions of the

---

<sup>52</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, quoting from an article in *The Economist*, p.27

<sup>53</sup> A.T.Komjathy and A. R. Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich : ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the wars*. New York; London, Holmes & Meier. (1980), p.17

<sup>54</sup> de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, pp. 18-19.

host countries by the forces of the Third Reich.<sup>55</sup> This is particularly so in the case of the Sudeten Germans and their political leader Konrad Henlein.<sup>56</sup> Writers sympathetic to the expellees see the discrimination as a satisfactory means of explaining active support for the National Socialists. De Zayas, for example, comments that 'If a Social Democratic Chancellor in Germany had offered to publicise the Sudeten case so as to bring international pressure on the Czechoslovak government, Henlein would have just as readily turned to him as he turned to a National Socialist – not out of political conviction, but simply out of practical necessity.'<sup>57</sup> The Henlein episode is a difficult one within expellee history; often Henlein is glanced over with barely a comment or completely omitted from the narrative, but Henlein, the leader of the ethnic Germans and who was a member of the Czech parliament, was acting as a traitor by indulging in secret negotiations with Hitler that would undermine the Czech state.<sup>58</sup> Much of expellee history and its call for justice and reparations is based on the inoffensiveness of the expellees when they were within their host countries.

Following German annexation of Czechoslovakia, German rule over the Czechs was ruthless from the beginning. In the autumn of 1939 Czech students who organised an anti-German demonstration in Prague were arrested and executed.<sup>59</sup> Probably the incident which most echoes through the decades was the destruction of the Czech village of Lidice in revenge for the June 1942 assassination of the SS Reich Protector of Bohemia, Reinhard Heydrich. All males aged between 16 and 60 were executed and the women sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp.<sup>60</sup> By the time German rule collapsed in May 1945 the Czech population, under encouragement from their President Beneš, were urged

---

<sup>55</sup> Lumans, *Himmler's Auxiliaries*, pp.9-16

<sup>56</sup> Henlein was a part ethnic German with a Czech mother, whose father was an ethnic German and follower of the nationalist Sudeten-German Party (SdP) under the slogan "Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer!" (One People, One Country, One leader). Henlein schemed to take the Sudetenland back into Germany by use of political means, agitation and civil unrest. The Czechs would not forget this in the aftermath of the war.

<sup>57</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.29

<sup>58</sup> Beppo Beyerl, *Die Beneš-Dekrete, Zwischen tschechischer Identität und deutscher Begehrlichkeit*, Promedia Verlag, Vienna, (2002), pp.26-30

<sup>59</sup> David Vaughan, 'The revolution begins', Radio Prague transcript, 16-July 2009, <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/118262>> [accessed 21 July 2009]

<sup>60</sup> Ryback, *Dateline Sudetenland*, p.169

to be ruthless in their revenge. Sudeten Germans were driven from their homes in what was to become known as “wild expulsions.” Many thousands of Sudeten Germans lost their lives.<sup>61</sup> Ryback sums up concisely the sequence of events which culminated in the final expulsions of 1947:

““It is surely not enough to say that the Germans brought these miseries upon themselves,” the *London Times* reported in the autumn of 1945, adding that “brutalities and cynicism against which [a war] was fought are still rife in Europe, and we are beginning to witness human suffering that almost equals anything inflicted by the Nazis.” Beneš told a group of factory workers in October 1945, “I declare categorically: we must get rid of our Germans, and they will go in any case.””<sup>62</sup>

On the run-up to the Czech Republic joining the EU in May 2004, the indignant Czech response to Germany’s call for the abolition of the Beneš Decrees, (which relegate ethnic Germans within the former Czechoslovakia to second class citizens) reveals that Hitler’s September 1938 annexation of the Sudetenland, with the apparent support of a large proportion of the Sudeten German population, is still very much part of the Czech psyche.<sup>63</sup>

The Beneš Decrees were promulgated between 1940 and 1946 by the Czechoslovakian President in exile, Edvard Beneš. Whilst in London during exile he stated ‘We must get rid of all those Germans who plunged a dagger in the back of the Czechoslovak State in 1938.’<sup>64</sup> During the summer of 1945 he announced firstly that any person of German or Magyar extraction, as determined by a census of 1929, would with immediate effect have their property confiscated. Secondly, all Germans and Magyars were subject to immediate expulsion. The allied powers approved these decrees.<sup>65</sup> More

---

<sup>61</sup> Ryback, *Dateline Sudetenland*, p.170

<sup>62</sup> Ryback, *Dateline Sudetenland*, pp.162-178

<sup>63</sup> See Pavla Horáková ‘The “Beneš decrees” - a historian's point of view’, Radio Prague interview transcript, (18-08-2003), <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/44227>> [accessed 18 July 2007]

<sup>64</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.33

<sup>65</sup> The stamp of approval was given in the Potsdam Communique but stated that those ethnic Germans who proved they had remained loyal to the Czech regime could be exempt. The major difficulty here would be the ability of finding proof, and what form the act of loyalty and proof required would take. Stephen Kertesz, ‘The Expulsion of the Germans from Hungary: A Study in Postwar Diplomacy’, *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Apr., 1953), pp. 179-208



than 3 million Sudeten Germans were expelled.<sup>66</sup> The expulsions of 1945-1946 were marked by sadism and violence. The Sudeten Germans were an easy target, having been forced to wear identifying white armbands. Prerau, between June 18 and 19, 1945 saw the killing by Czechoslovakian soldiers of the disputed figure of somewhere between 265 and 2700 Germans<sup>67</sup> and on 31 July 1945 a massacre of at least 1000 Germans took place in the Czech city of Aussig caused by rumours of sabotage.<sup>68</sup> Knopp estimates that the number of Sudeten Germans who lost their lives during the expulsions of 1945-46 was 19,452 but there would have been those that died later of hunger and exhaustion, a number which he estimates at a minimum of 100,000 persons.<sup>69</sup> Most expelled Sudeten Germans settled in Bavaria and became a powerful political force in search of justice. In 1994 'over three million out of Bavaria's population of twelve million claimed Sudeten German origin.'<sup>70</sup>

The Beneš decrees have acted as an anchor point in allowing the Sudeten Germans, the majority of whom supported Hitler's destruction of Czechoslovakia in 1938, to portray themselves as victims of injustice. De Zayas believes that the expulsions and transfers were unjust on the grounds that although the Nazis had committed appalling atrocities upon the Czechs, they

'were for the most part committed by members of the SS, the majority of whom were not Sudeten Germans. The simple German farmer living in the Sudetenland had little contact with the Czechs and could not have been held responsible for any abuses committed by the NSDAP in the Protectorate. Yet, he was left to pay the bill for the crimes of the Nazi regime.'<sup>71</sup>

As Nagengast points out, the decrees have been a bone of contention at governmental level between the two countries since the end of the war although there was an attempt by the then prime minister Vaclav Havel, in a speech of 15

---

<sup>66</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.33

<sup>67</sup> Source: 'The German Problem: The Eradication of Ethnic Germans', electronic article <<http://www.exulanten.com/brunn.html>> [accessed 1 August 2007]

<sup>68</sup> Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p.21

<sup>69</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.411

<sup>70</sup> 'Call for a Right to a Homeland.' *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, (9 June 1992), <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/>> [accessed 7 September 2006]

<sup>71</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam*, p.35

March 1990, at reconciliation with the Sudeten Germans when ‘he gave a personal apology for injustices committed after the war in Czechoslovakia’ against them,<sup>72</sup> but his conciliatory stand provoked antagonism within Czechoslovakia as did the Sudeten German demands for property restitution and the right to settle in the Sudetenland.

The underlying distrust of the Czechs for their German neighbours was further highlighted in May 1996 at the annual Nuremberg Sudeten Rally. Theo Waigel, Germany’s finance minister, compared the expulsions with the atrocities in Bosnia. As Timothy Ryback summarises,

‘the German minister demanded that Prague condemn these actions [the expulsions] and distance itself not only from a series of decrees authorising the expulsions, but also from an amnesty law that sanctioned the murder and torture of tens of thousands of German civilians.’<sup>73</sup>

Waigel continued by stating, “We are awaiting a decisive word from the Czech side to the Beneš decrees and the so-called amnesty law of May 1946...”<sup>74</sup>

The response from Vaclav Klaus, the Czech prime minister, was blunt:

“I do not want anybody to instruct us what the rule of law or a legal state is...I am also very much surprised that anybody should wish us to speak about World War II with regret. I have the feeling it is the German side which should speak about the whole matter very quietly.”<sup>75</sup>

Much extant political conflict between the BdV and the Czech Republic can be traced directly back to the Beneš Decrees. An article in *The Economist* of August 15 2002 summarises the issues surrounding these decrees, succinctly highlighting the consequences of the laws: to rescind the decrees would open the floodgates to property claims, and besides, the Germans started the war and should have no grounds to ‘revise its effects.’<sup>76</sup> The decrees are still valid and despite

---

<sup>72</sup> Emil Nagengast, ‘The Beneš Decrees and EU enlargement’, *European Integration*, Vol. 25 (4), December 2003, pp.335-350

<sup>73</sup> Ryback, *Dateline Sudetenland*, p.162

<sup>74</sup> Ryback, *Dateline Sudetenland*, p.162

<sup>75</sup> Ryback, *Dateline Sudetenland*, p.163

<sup>76</sup> The Germans were stripped of ‘their citizenship and property, without compensation, and thrown out, unless they could prove that they had shown their loyalty to Czechoslovakia during the Nazi times.’ It goes on to point out that the Czechs have a major problem.

membership of the European Union, and strong political pressure from Germany, are likely to remain so. Appendices 2 and 3 contain a listing of the relevant decrees and their relevance to the expellees and modern German Czech relations.

Some historians believe the Sudeten German claims to be spurious, for as Ahonen says:

‘The Sudetenland had never belonged to Germany prior to 1938, and its annexation in that year had resulted entirely from the brutal power politics of the Nazi regime. Accordingly, and in striking contrast to the expellees from the 1937 territories, the only diplomatic document which the Sudeten Germans could cite in support of their cause was the notorious Munich Agreement, by which the European powers had imposed the Nazi fiat upon Prague in September 1938.’<sup>77</sup>

However, one of the main thrusts of expellee history, especially from the beginning of the 1950s and the creation of the state-sponsored *Dokumentation* which will be examined in detail in Chapter 3, was the presence of the ethnic Germans in Polish and Czech territories prior to the Second World War, which in the later history would be used to justify the slant of Germans as victims of war, as well as claims against Poland and Czechoslovakia for compensation.

## GERMANS IN POLAND

Prior to its creation in November 1918 Poland was a mixture of states which comprised both ethnic Germans and Slavs. There had been an at times uneasy co-existence between these two groups since the 13th century. The Germans tended to be middle class in profession, and many of the estates in these lands were peopled by a largely ethnic German aristocracy.<sup>78</sup> Post-Versailles many Germans left Poland for

---

Access to membership of the European Union could have depended on rescinding the decrees. *The Economist*, (August 15, 2002),

< [http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displayStory.cfm?story\\_id=1284252](http://www.economist.com/world/europe/displayStory.cfm?story_id=1284252) > [accessed 17 July 2008]

<sup>77</sup> The cause was re-union with Germany: Ahonen, *After the Expulsion*, p.34

<sup>78</sup> Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, p.67

Germany proper in the hope that the Treaty would at a future date be revised in their favour and they would be able to return. Many of those that remained in Poland

‘...felt insecure, and while some of them chose to accept the *fait accompli* or were willing to be *polonized*, others looked to the Reich for their liberation.’<sup>79</sup>

A census in 1931 based on linguistic criteria showed that only 68.9 per cent of the Polish population were Poles. The Germans accounted for 2.3 per cent, but their concentration in the western states meant that they were, in places, in the majority.<sup>80</sup> The areas where they were in the majority were West Prussia, Posen, Danzig, and Upper Silesia. In Danzig itself, Germans made up 96.5 per cent of the population.<sup>81</sup> They have been described as a ‘small but relatively wealthy bourgeoisie, [whose] separate aspirations were fundamentally incompatible with the aims of national unity as conceived by government Polish circles.’<sup>82</sup> Tension between Poles and their German minority increased during the latter part of the 1930s as Hitler’s acquisition of the Sudetenland, followed by the rest of Czechoslovakia, increased the length of the German borders with Poland, at a time when the Nazi propaganda machine was increasingly concentrating on the ‘Polish Corridor’ and Danzig as a handle on which to achieve with Poland the same results as Hitler had achieved at Munich in 1938 against Czechoslovakia.<sup>83</sup>

---

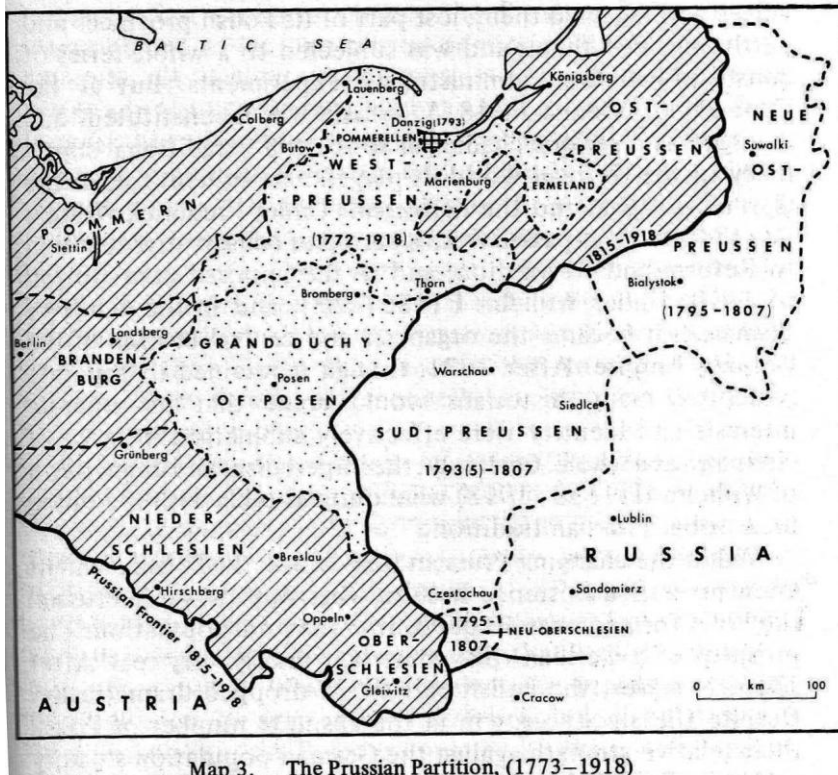
<sup>79</sup> Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, p.67

<sup>80</sup> The other ethnic groups were the Ukrainians with 13.9 per cent, Yiddish-speaking Jews 8.7 per cent, Byelo-Russians 3.1 per cent. The population of Poland in 1918 was 26.3 million, and increased to 34.8 million by 1939. Source N. Davies, *God's playground: a history of Poland*, Oxford, Clarendon (1981), pp.404-405.

<sup>81</sup> Komjathy and Stockwell. *German minorities and the Third Reich*, p.65

<sup>82</sup> Davies, *God's playground*, pp.404-405

<sup>83</sup> Davies, *God's playground*, pp.431-434



Map 3. The Prussian Partition, (1773–1918)

**Figure 2.** This map shows the territories which went to make up the new Polish Republic in 1918.

As in Czechoslovakia, external events in neighbouring Germany influenced the attitudes and behaviour of Poland’s ethnic German minority. A 1980 study of the role these Germans played, and the attitude towards their Polish host government suggests that it was Polish discrimination in education and language against this minority that led to a level of support for Hitler, but

‘...that the great majority of the *Volksdeutsche* were disinterested in the arguments of nationalists on both sides. Their only concern was survival under German or Polish rule, keeping their traditional customs, preserving their language and way of life, and securing the best possible economic conditions for themselves.’<sup>84</sup>

This may have been the case, but it was the perception of many native Poles that these Germans both prior to and in particular as the war came to a close, were traitors or potential traitors to Poland. This was further reflected in the perception by the Poles that the ethnic Germans had acted as a fifth column for the German Nazis, i.e., had actively paved the way for the Nazis. The reality is that probably only 4,000 ethnic Germans acted

<sup>84</sup> Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, p.159

directly on behalf of the Nazis at the beginning of the Second World War, and during the war, approximately 25,000.<sup>85</sup> It was this force that staged ‘border incidents’ on behalf of the Nazis prior to the beginning of the Second World War, and on Germany’s march into Poland ‘...performed sabotage actions, occupied strategically important points at the rear of the Polish army and held them until the arrival of the advancing regular [German] army units.’<sup>86</sup> 1 September 1939 saw Germany launching its attack on Poland.<sup>87</sup> The subsequent points are important in relation to the way German historical memory has come to view them at the present date. Hans Frank, the person placed in charge of the ‘General Government’<sup>88</sup> and given the role of Governor General for Poland, stated in an interview on 3 October 1939:

“Poland can only be administered by utilizing the country through means of ruthless exploitation, deportation of all supplies, raw materials, machines, factory installations, etc., which are important for the German war economy, availability of all workers for work within Germany, reduction of the entire Polish economy to absolute minimum necessary for bare existence of the population, closing of all educational institutions, especially technical schools and colleges in order to prevent the growth of the new Polish intelligentsia. 'Poland shall be treated as a colony; the Poles shall be the slaves of the Greater German World Empire.'”<sup>89</sup>

His ‘reign’ was brutal and destructive. Poland was split into two areas, the *Reich* and the General Government. The General Government was the part of Poland that was to be treated ‘as a gigantic labour camp,’ and the Reich was the area that would utilise this slave labour pool.<sup>90</sup>

One of the major problematic areas in expellee history, and the later claims for recognition and restitution, would lie in the unsavoury nature of German actions within

---

<sup>85</sup> Komjathy and Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich*, p.159

<sup>86</sup> All information about the ‘fifth column’ comes from Komjathy, and Stockwell *German minorities and the Third Reich*, p.159. The same paragraph acknowledges that German and Polish sources ‘naturally’ contradict each other on the numbers and role of these people, not made easier to determine as the German archives were destroyed at the end of the war.

<sup>87</sup> On 17 September the Russians attacked Poland from the east as agreed between Stalin and Hitler on August 23

1939. Source, Davies: *God’s playground*, p.439

<sup>88</sup> Hans Frank was executed in October 1946 for war crimes.

<sup>89</sup> S. D. Stein, ‘Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression’, Vol. II. *USGPO*, Washington, 1946, 624-653

<sup>90</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, pp.4-5

Poland which commenced with the war in 1939 and by 1945 had left much of Poland a wasteland. As Lukas observes,

‘As a result of almost six years of war, Poland lost 6,028,000 of its citizens, or 22 percent of its total population, the highest ratio of losses to population of any country in Europe. About 50 percent of these victims were Polish Christians and 50 percent were Polish Jews. Approximately 5,384,000, or 89.9 percent, of Polish war losses (Jews and Gentiles), were the victims of prisons, death camps, raids, executions, annihilation of ghettos, epidemics, starvation, excessive work, and ill treatment.’<sup>91</sup>

In the newly occupied Polish territories, the ethnic Germans or *Volksdeutsche* set up the *Volksdeutsche Selbstschutz* (ethnic German self-protection) organisation which was originally organised with the intention of protecting ethnic Germans against Poles but quickly transformed itself into a violent accessory to the SS, taking part in the execution of native Poles in revenge actions.<sup>92</sup> In 1940, Himmler, the head of the SS, followed a policy of ‘Germanisation’ in Poland: certain areas would be populated or colonised by Germans, and Poles moved out.

‘Approximately one million Poles were deported from the area [around Lublin]....The deportations, which reached a high point in 1940, were conducted under appalling conditions; people were forced into cattle cars and in the freezing weather of the winter of 1939-40 transferred to [other areas of] the General Government where they were unceremoniously dumped. Many died, especially children.’<sup>93</sup>

It is believed that approximately 750,000 German colonists moved into the area, many of whom ‘were recruited for administrative reasons or were businessmen and craftsmen; their primary interest seems to have been to make huge profits from the enterprises the Poles were forced to abandon.’<sup>94</sup> Villages and districts were cleared of Poles except for those capable of farming for the new German settlers. According to Lukas ‘the plunder of personal property, including food and clothes, was so rampant that the Reich Minister of Justice became concerned not because the actions were illegal and immoral but because of the Polish inhabitants who had been left practically without the means to subsist due to

---

<sup>91</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, pp.38-39

<sup>92</sup> K. E. Franzen, *Die Vertriebenen : Hitlers letzte Opfer*, Berlin, Propylaen, (2001), pp.64-66

<sup>93</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, p.18

<sup>94</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, p.19

German confiscations...’<sup>95</sup> By March 1944, however, German colonists were refusing to settle in Poland on account of possible Polish underground, and Russian military retribution.<sup>96</sup>

### **The Form of Expellee History**

The story of the expellees was that of flight before the oncoming Red Army, in the face of exhortations from the Berlin-based Nazis to stand firm. What happened next, murder at Nemmersdorf, sieges at Königsberg and Breslau, and the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, was the basis for much of the content of expellee history. The key formulaic themes that are now formalised in German literature on the subject of the expulsions can broadly be summarised in a chronological manner as *Nemmersdorf*, *Der grosse Treck*, (the Great March) *Der Untergang der Gustloff*, (the sinking of the Gustloff), *Die Festung Breslau*, (the Fortress Breslau), *Die Stunde der Frauen*, (The Hour of the Women), and *Die verlorenen Kinder* (The Lost Children), and we shall now look in detail at the factual events behind these themes. The reality of the situation that the expellees found themselves in begins with Nemmersdorf in October 1944 when the Russians first entered Germany proper. As previously mentioned, the tiny village of Nemmersdorf, with 650 inhabitants, is an important part of expellee history. It was, on 21 October 1944, the first piece of German soil to fall to the Russians. De Zayas regards the events of 21 October in Nemmersdorf as ‘one of the best-documented Russian atrocities of the Second World War.’<sup>97</sup> When the Russians entered the village they raped and murdered those inhabitants who had remained behind. A few days later German ‘units’ retook the village: ‘what greeted their gaze was a gruesome picture: everyone that had not already flown, was brutally murdered...the awful result of the first confrontation between a Russian band of fighters and German civilians left 26 dead, including women, children and the elderly.’<sup>98</sup> Terrible photos of dead German women and children from this massacre are common in expellee literature, as can be seen in fig.3. Goebbels immediately sent photographers to

---

<sup>95</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, p.19

<sup>96</sup> Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust*, p.19

<sup>97</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, pp.35-38

<sup>98</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.37



the scene in order to take dramatic photos of the dead for propaganda purposes and he vented total disbelief that such a massacre involving German citizens could take place on German soil, in an attempt to motivate German soldiers and civilians to stand firm against the advancing Russians. Nemmersdorf became and still is the first part of the legend of suffering inflicted on the German expellees.<sup>99</sup> The spreading knowledge of events at Nemmersdorf caused panic amongst ethnic Germans and contributed to the decision by many in East Prussia who, on 12 January 1945 began the ‘great march,’ fleeing the Russian tank advance.<sup>100</sup>

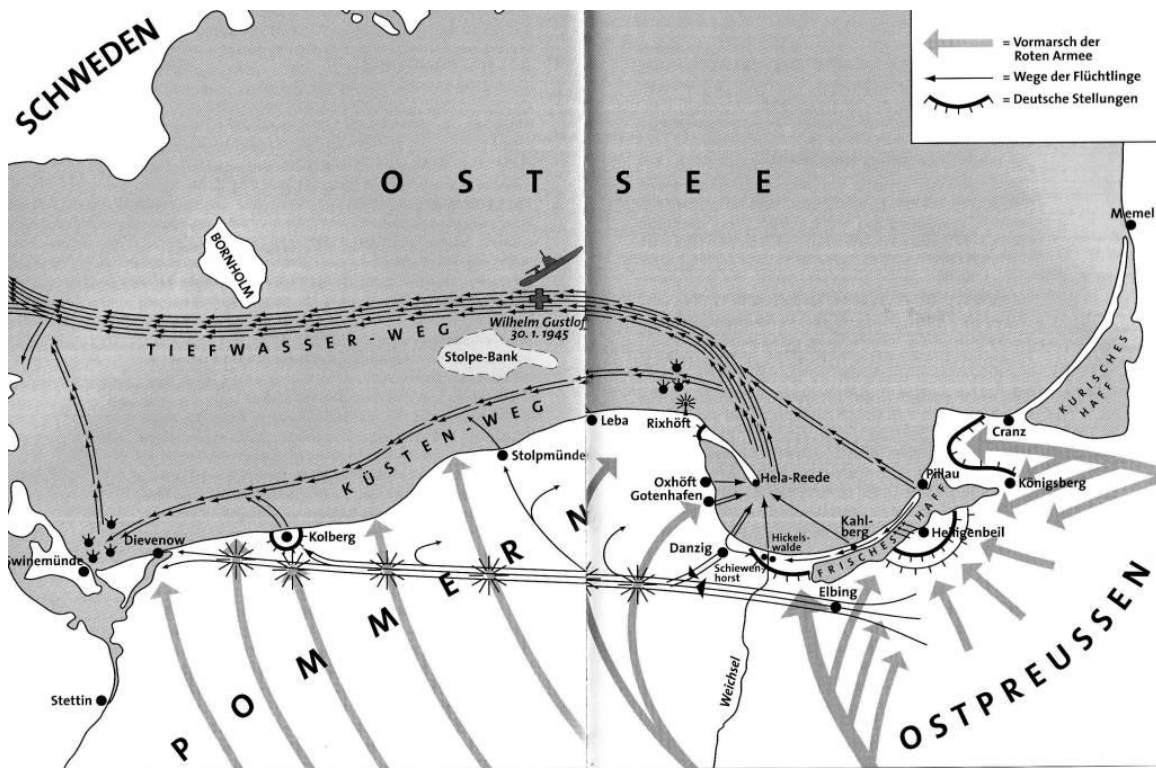


**Figure 3.** From Knopp’s ‘*Die grosse Flucht*’, pp.46-47. The caption with the picture reads: ‘Women and children brutally murdered. A German military commission examines the tragedy in Nemmersdorf.’ Source of photo given by Knopp as ‘Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin.’

<sup>99</sup> ‘Die Wahrheit über Nemmersdorf..... Russische Gräueltaten oder national sozialistische Propaganda?’ ZDF website (25.11.2001), <<http://history.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/23/0,1872,2004695,00.html?dr=1>> [accessed 28 October 2008]

<sup>100</sup> Knopp defines the *Grosse Treck* as the flight of more than two million east Prussians from a small strip of land ‘Die Frische Nehrung’ on the coast, southwest of Königsberg which was the only direction of flight available in the direction of the west after the Red Army had encircled the area in January 1945’. Source: television documentary *Die grosse Flucht* aired 7 March 2007. <<http://doku.cc/2007/03/07/guido-knopp-die-grosse-flucht--der-grose-dreck/>> [accessed 13 February 2008]

The refugees were heading for Danzig (see figure 4), in the hope of using sea travel to reach the western part of the German Reich. January 1945 was also the coldest winter in northern Europe for decades with temperatures as low as -20c.<sup>101</sup> Much of the trek crossed frozen water, and where the ice was too thin, refugees, their horses, carts and belongings disappeared beneath the ice and often drowned. The march is characterised by hunger, exhaustion, and frequent death from a combination of starvation, exhaustion and the cold, and attacks by the Russian airforce.<sup>102</sup>



**Figure 4.** Key: The grey arrows represent the advance of the Red Army. The smaller black arrows represent the sea escape routes used by the refugees, one being the Küstenweg, or coastal route, and the other, the Tiefwasser-weg or deep water route along which the Wilhelm Gustloff was sunk. Source: Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.110-111

On January 31 1945 9,000 German refugees, part of the ‘great march’ fleeing the Russians, crowded into the port of Danzig to escape by ship to Germany. They boarded the *Wilhelm Gustloff* at the port of Gdingen (Götenhafen) and a Russian

<sup>101</sup> See Knopp *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.17-85

<sup>102</sup> See Knopp *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.17-85

submarine torpedoed the ship which quickly sank. The waters were icy and few persons survived. This was, and still is the world's largest maritime disaster. The remains of the ship are now a war grave lying in shallow water approximately 60 miles northwest of the Polish city of Gdansk (formerly, Danzig).<sup>103</sup>

The next incident featured in expellee literature was the Russian capture of *Festung Königsberg* or the fortress of Königsberg (in a battered down sense), which has been described as one of the most terrible events of the war.<sup>104</sup> Königsberg was the capital of East Prussia which the Nazi Gauleiter Erich Koch told the East Prussians he, and they, would fight and hold to the last man.<sup>105</sup> The siege began in late January, 1945 and Königsberg finally fell on 9 April 1945.<sup>106</sup> Breslau was another German city which was to share the fate of Königsberg. The expellee literature makes the point that since the autumn of 1944 Breslau had been declared an 'open city.' i.e., a refugee reception area with no military purpose.<sup>107</sup> This did not save the 630,000 German inhabitants. After an 80 day siege Breslau fell on 6 May 1945, thus opening Silesia to the Red Army. The expellee literature depicts the siege as heroic, with the slaughter of the innocents by the Red Army.<sup>108</sup> As the towns of the east fell, the flood of refugees fleeing to the west increased dramatically. Between January and April 1945 figures of around 500,000 are quoted.<sup>109</sup>

After the surrender of the 'Hitler regime' in May 1945 the expellee story is now that of individual hardship, rape and murder at the hands of the Russians,

---

<sup>103</sup> The ship was named after a Nazi leader, Wilhelm Gustloff, a manufactured Nazi martyr after whom assorted factories, streets, and memorials were erected. The ship itself was personally launched by Hitler, and a suite on board was kept permanently available for *der Führer* who never used it. See <<http://www.greatoceanliners.net/wilhelmgustloff.html>> [accessed 15 October 2008]

<sup>104</sup> Beevor, *The fall of Berlin, 1945*, p.37

<sup>105</sup> Knopp, *Der Grosse Flucht*, pp.80-81

<sup>106</sup> Koch and his cohorts escaped by light aircraft from the city when the Russians started their bombardment, leaving the residents to fight to their own last men. With false papers the *Gauleiter* disappeared, exchanging military uniforms for civil clothes in order to avoid having to answer for his crimes. Source: Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.83.

<sup>107</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.151

<sup>108</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.190-191

<sup>109</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.63

culminating in ‘unjust’ expulsion by the fledgling Czech and Polish governments in 1945 and 1946. The atrocities committed by the Red Army are particularly well known and documented.<sup>110</sup> Natalya Gesse, a close friend of the scientist Andrei Sakharov, had observed the Red Army in action in 1945 as a Soviet war correspondent. “The Russian soldiers were raping every German female from eight to eighty,” she recounted later. “It was an army of rapists.”<sup>111</sup> The German population that stood in the way of the Russian advance could not, and did not, expect to be treated in any manner other than a mirror image of the German military in the early days of its eastward advance. The *Kommissarbefehl* of 6 June 1941<sup>112</sup> from the head of the *Wehrmacht* to his forces in Russia determined the future course of events. The order overturned the Geneva Convention and instructed the German forces to disregard all sense of humanity in its dealings with the ‘barbaric Asiatics.’ Antony Beevor describes the horror and vengeance inflicted by the advancing Russian soldiers egged on by the exhortations of Stalin’s propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg. The homes of Germans that lay in the way of the advancing Russians were plundered and often destroyed in the visceral wave of hatred that commenced in East Prussia. Beevor observes that

‘Although the Soviet authorities were well aware of the terrible retribution being exacted in East Prussia, they seemed angered, in fact almost offended, to find that German civilians were fleeing. Countryside and towns were virtually depopulated.’<sup>113</sup>

He quotes from a report by the Russian NKVD chief of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Belorussian Front to G.F.Aleksandrov, the chief ideologist on the central committee, that there were ‘very few Germans left...many settlements are completely abandoned.’<sup>114</sup>

Immediately after the war, with parts of Europe lying in ruins, there was little sympathy among the allies for these refugees. Both the eastern and western allies

---

<sup>110</sup> For a detailed description of Russian atrocities see A. Beevor, *The fall of Berlin, 1945*, pp.24-38

<sup>111</sup> Antony Beevor, ‘They raped every German female from eight to 80’, *The Guardian*, Wednesday May 1 2002, section G2, p.6.

<sup>112</sup> For an electronically reproduced copy of the original German language document see <<http://www.ns-archiv.de/krieg/1941/kommissarbefehl.php>> [accessed 18 October 2008]

<sup>113</sup> Beevor, *Berlin the Downfall*, p.36

<sup>114</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, has a chapter ‘Die verlorene Heimat’. pp.356-411

viewed the fate of the expellees as being a consequence of their having supported their criminal government, and lost. They would now pay the price.

The expellee historiography headlines the violent acts against the Sudeten and Polish ethnic Germans under the heading of *Die verlorene Heimat*, or ‘The Lost Homeland.’<sup>115</sup> From the point of view of the ethnic Germans who suffered at the hands of the Russians, their position was now ambiguous. They were on the losing side in the war. As 1945 progressed and the events concerning the extermination camps became known a history was being formed which the expellees, and the organisations that represented them from the end of the war, would have to reconstruct in order to gain legitimacy if they were to succeed in their claims for what they saw as their unjust expulsions from Czechoslovakia and Poland in the immediate aftermath of the war. It became apparent to expellee organisations, and some historians, that over the course of time, the way to solve this problematic history lay within the nature of memory, and its relationship to history. This reconstruction involved a specifically German expellee memory, that by the manipulation of historic and collective memory, would in due course become cleansed German mainstream history. It is to historic and collective memory that this thesis now turns.

---

<sup>115</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, has a chapter ‘Die verlorene Heimat’, pp.356-411

## Chapter 2

### Historic and Collective Memory

#### The Nature of German History

This chapter will be exploring concepts of memory, in particular historical memory and collective memory in order to see how these concepts have been applied by historians to expellee history and the results of the application of these concepts.

History in its purest form, it can be argued, is the simple factual recording of events that happened in a nation's past. Nations, however, are formed by their history, and their history shapes the nations which they wish to become. 'German History is unsavoury – above all when it concerns the National Socialist period,'<sup>116</sup> according to Ute Frevert. How one remembers and incorporates National Socialist history into national history is complicated. According to S. Conrad, 'Only those who had lived through the Third Reich and "themselves stood the test of the times" seemed eligible to interpret German history.'<sup>117</sup> Conrad cites the Institute for Contemporary History in Munich as being an establishment set up with the purpose of keeping 'interpretations of the recent past firmly in German hands....The director of the institute, Hermann Mau, proclaimed in 1950: 'Research into the history of National Socialism is a German task.'<sup>118</sup>

One of the major problems associated with the reconstruction of German history today is that the crimes committed by the German government from 1933 onwards were undertaken by a government in the name of its people. History after defeat was at first something to be looked at only in negative terms. It has been posited that German history

---

<sup>116</sup> Ute Frevert, 'Geschichtsvergessenheit und Geschichtsversessenheit revisited: Der jüngste Erinnerungsboom in der Kritik,' *German Life and Letters*, Volume 57, Issue 4, Published online. (30 Sep 2004), 354 – 356 <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0483.2004.00290.x>> [accessed 10 June 2008]

<sup>117</sup> Conrad Sebastian, 'Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945' *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 38, No. 1, (2003) pp.85-99

<sup>118</sup> Sebastian, 'Entangled Memories', p.91

since 1945 has passed through a number of phases.<sup>119</sup> The first, 1945-1960 saw the demonization of Hitler and his cohorts within Germany. Germany had been seduced, and Nazism was an accidental aberration in German history. Teaching of history in German schools finished with World War I.<sup>120</sup> The second phase ran from the 1960s-1970s when the younger, liberal left wanted to know what had occurred in German society that had allowed Germany to deviate from the accepted social norms associated with a civilized democracy. This was an era of accepting responsibility for Nazi crimes.

During the third phase, the 1980s, the Holocaust would become ‘comparable’ with the suffering inflicted on ethnic Germans by the Russians advancing westwards. *The Historikerstreit* was born in the late 1980s when the liberal trends of the previous decade were rejected:

‘Michael Stuermer (associated with the CDU): favoured a revival of national pride, a unified and positive national identity, and self-confidence; denounced the liberal-left’s obsession with guilt. He wrote: “In a land without history, the future is controlled by those who determine the content of memory, coin the concepts, and interpret the past.”<sup>121</sup>

On the two sides of the dispute were Jürgen Habermas, credited with triggering the *Historikerstreit*, who attacked what he perceived to be the relativisation views of Andreas Hillgruber and Ernst Nolte.<sup>122</sup> Hillgruber’s most controversial statement was that the Holocaust was not a uniquely evil event. He believed that Stalin’s crimes were equal to those of Hitler: thus although the Holocaust was an appalling tragedy, it was one of a number to occur in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>123</sup> Distinctions arose between victims, participants, collaborators, resisters, and diehard supporters of the ‘regime’. German society needed to

---

<sup>119</sup> R.Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany: Origins, Interpretations, Legacies*, Routledge, London, (1999), quoted from an online university summary titled ‘Writing the History of Nazi Germany: The Historikerstreit’, <[www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians\\_Controv.html](http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians_Controv.html)> [accessed 6 October 2008]

<sup>120</sup> Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany*. <[www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians\\_Controv.html](http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians_Controv.html)> [accessed 6 October 2008]

<sup>121</sup> Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany*. <[www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians\\_Controv.html](http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians_Controv.html)> [accessed 6 October 2008]

<sup>122</sup> Nolte published an article entitled ‘Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will’ (‘The Past That Will Not Go Away’) in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. (June 6, 1986). He advanced the view that the crimes of the Nazis were only a defensive reaction against the crimes of the Soviets.

<sup>123</sup> Stackelberg, *Hitler's Germany*. <[www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians\\_Controv.html](http://www.uncp.edu/home/rwb/Historians_Controv.html)> [accessed 6 October 2008]

deal with these issues because the nation had been participants either wittingly or unwittingly in genocide. The present time, or fourth phase, is a period in which expellee history is represented as an entity in many ways detached from the background events of the war. Context is often blurred. Demand for recognition of ‘victimhood’ and evolution of historical memory have arrived at a point where expellees have attempted to claim compensation for losses incurred as a result of World War Two.<sup>124</sup>

An important element of this thesis will be to show an evolution of thought within German political and historic memory away from ‘we Germans’ or Germans as an all-encompassing entity, which by implication indicated an overall ‘German’ responsibility for the war, to the ‘Nazi’ or ‘Hitler’ regime. This thesis will not deal with historical memory in the German Democratic Republic since reference and memory of these events were suppressed. Wulf Kansteiner in his work *In Pursuit of German Memory* repeats the observation that ‘in its demand for proof, history stands in sharp opposition to memory.’<sup>125</sup> Joanne Bourke comments that history and memory are

‘not detached narrative structures; at no time in the past was memory ‘spontaneous’ or ‘organic’; at no time has history been able to repudiate its debt to memory and its function in moulding that memory. This is not to argue that history and memory are identical: they work with different rules, as different genres. Indeed, the subjects of historical investigation are right to fear that history will transform their narratives into something unfamiliar, less heroic.....Memory always evokes anxiety in the historian. But this anxiety is to be embraced: it enables us to recapture a sense of awe about individuals in the past.’<sup>126</sup>

The introduction to an article published by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (Federal Centre for Political Education) in 2006 sums up the dilemma of memory in post-war Germany. Memory and its construction associated with the *Flucht und Vertreibung* springs from the same source as that relating to how the

---

<sup>124</sup> One recent example is that of the *Preussische Treuhand*, < <http://www.preussische-treuhand.org/en/index.html>> [accessed 14 July 2009]

<sup>125</sup> W. Kansteiner, and I. Ebrary. *In pursuit of German memory : history, television, and politics after Auschwitz*, Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press, (2006), p.15

<sup>126</sup> P. J. Bourke, ‘Remembering War.’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol 39, (4), (2004), p.485



victor nations believe that the Germans at the end of the war and the post-war generations should see their ‘war guilt.’ The article opens,

“Grandpa was not a Nazi – or was he? Is it permissible to discuss the bombing war (*Bombenkrieg*) or expulsion without falling foul of the correct conclusion? How convenient or comfortable are we with our memories of the German resistance? How should all of us remember these things? The conflict with the crimes of National Socialism colours the post-war German identity. They define our relationship with ourselves and our neighbours, they separate and unite the generations, east and west, and secure increasing television ratings.’<sup>127</sup>

Historical memory relates to identity, national myths, and the very legitimacy of states. Historical memory is by no means fixed or static; it varies by social group, participants, non-participants, and country. Historical memory relating to a particular expulsion or wartime event will not be the same for a Czech or Polish academic, participant, politician or historian as it is for a German. Hugo Frey, quoting Harold Bing, makes reference to a quote regarding a German university teacher, who in May 1945, three weeks after Germany capitulated to the allies, declared

‘There is no sense in teaching German history any more. There is no longer any German history anymore.’

The observation, made in 1951, continues,

‘Such a statement sounds strange indeed in English ears, for history has never been with us, at any rate consciously, an instrument of state policy or the handmaid of a particular *Weltanschauung* or political viewpoint.’<sup>128</sup>

It is likely that Bing was referring to the political nature of history. The events that had brought about the downfall of Germany were part of history and ‘historical memory’, but he was suggesting that from the German teacher’s point of view, there was a ‘zero hour’ where history and ‘historical memory’ did not belong. By definition, a new history would need to be constructed, out of a new form of memory. Frey’s article is a discussion of the relationship of German ‘historical memory’ and its relationship to Germany’s European

---

<sup>127</sup> Raul Hilberg’s introduction to a series of related themes on the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* web site: ‘Geschichte und Erinnerung’, < [http://www.bpb.de/themen/AZCRN2,,0,Geschichte\\_und\\_Erinnerung.html](http://www.bpb.de/themen/AZCRN2,,0,Geschichte_und_Erinnerung.html) > [accessed 20 Feb. 08]

<sup>128</sup> Frey, ‘The Study and Teaching of History in Post-War Germany,’ *History, The Journal of the Historical Association*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 126/127, (1999), 92-107. Frey identifies the source of the article as ‘published in an eminent journal of the day’ sometime in 1951.

integration. Effectively, the points he makes are valid with regard to the historical memory of the German expellees and the apparatus employed by their representatives to portray their past. Frey observes,

‘The terms ‘memory’ and ‘historical memory’ are used interchangeably to mean the manner in which the past is socially interpreted: that is to say how civic and political groups retrospectively select and view important events symbolically. Such ‘memories’ are communicated via all manner of cultural products, including programmatic political statements, popular journalism, film, literature, high art, as well as historiography itself....’

Frey goes further and comments that ‘Historical memory is a slippery subject. Attractive and fascinating, it is not easy to use to explain major political developments, although it seems to partially shape them.’<sup>129</sup> It will be shown that the expellee organisations and their supporters have been attempting to politically manipulate historical memory to allow an acceptable expellee past.

### **Collective memory**

The term ‘collective memory’ was first coined by the French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s. He believed that every community develops its own past, because it is necessary for its own identity. He believed that the past was a reservoir of symbols and ‘eternal truths’, and this is the point of reference for existing and future aims within a society. The Halbwachs model is simple to utilize as it emphasizes ‘the function of everyday communication for the development of collective memories’ and emphasizes ‘the imagery of social discourse ‘which resonates ‘very well with recent historiographical themes, especially regarding questions of historical representation.’<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> See Frey’s article internet article ‘Historical Memory and the Boundaries of European Integration’, published May 2000 found at <<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/LIS/MNP/may2000/Frey.html>> [accessed 12 September 2008]

<sup>130</sup> Kansteiner, *In pursuit of German memory*, p.12

Summing up Halbwachs, Ruth Wittlinger writes that ‘the past is socially constructed in the light of the present.’<sup>131</sup> She examines the nature of collective memory and its relationship to ‘history’:

‘Collective memory draws on current beliefs and meanings to make sense of the past. This means that it is not history as such that provides the ‘lessons’ but collective views of history which are constructed with present needs and purposes in mind. Whereas ‘history’ is about cognition and knowledge, collective memory is about experience and feeling, making history a matter of the past but collective memory ‘most definitely a phenomenon of the present’. Whereas ‘history’ insinuates that there is one story to tell, the term collective memory acknowledges that perceptions of the past can differ significantly and change over time.’<sup>132</sup>

Marie-Claire Lavabre says, ‘the concept of collective memory stresses less the institutional and political uses of the past...’ She continues by asking a question which is particularly relevant to the transformation of expellee collective memory: ‘how do we go from the multiplicity of experiences and recollections to the unity of a “collective” memory?’<sup>133</sup> Her answer is that ‘In order to work towards answering these questions, it is necessary to address the various realities that can be taken on by the word “memory,” such as commemoration, monument, political or even controversial or strategic use of the past, or remembrance of personal or handed-down experience.’<sup>134</sup> This thesis, using the Lavabre model, will look at how all of these elements have been adapted by the expellee organisations, elements of the German media, and some German politicians in the quest for a more savoury past.

Collective memory is part of the structure that needs examining in the context of historic memory. Kansteiner sounds a note of caution with regards the concept of ‘collective memory’ but believes that essentially, it has value for historians, if used correctly. Kansteiner says:

---

<sup>131</sup> Ruth Wittlinger ‘No Future for Germany’s Past? Collective Memory and German Foreign Policy,’ *German Politics*, Volume 16, Issue 4, December 2007, pp.481 - 495

<sup>132</sup> Wittlinger ‘No Future for Germany’s Past?’ p.482

<sup>133</sup> See Marie-Claire Lavabre’s internet article, ‘For a Sociology of Collective Memory’, <<http://www.cnrs.fr/cw/en/pres/compress/memoire/lavabre.htm>> [ consulted 31 October 2008]

<sup>134</sup> Lavabre, ‘For a Sociology of Collective Memory’.

‘Students of collective memory are, indeed, pursuing a slippery phenomenon. Collective memory is not history, though it is sometimes made from similar material. It is a collective phenomenon, but it only manifests itself in the actions and statements of individuals. It can take hold of historically and socially remote events but often privileges the interests of the contemporary....in essence, collective memory studies represent a new approach to “that most elusive of phenomenon, “popular consciousness.”’<sup>135</sup>

Kansteiner, however, points out the weaknesses of collective memory: ‘the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past; the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions; and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own interests.’<sup>136</sup> Kansteiner warns that collective memories may well originate through traumatic experiences, and be successful in their own right as collective memories. This indicates that the dramatic nature of the expellee memories may allow them to be successful as history in their own right, within Germany, as they do not require reference to a wider form of historical memory. However, as Kansteiner observes, particularly where one is looking at delayed collective memory, such as the Holocaust, or Vietnam, there is a danger that the debate that then takes place ‘has more to do with political interest and opportunities than the persistence of trauma....’<sup>137</sup> Marc Bloch observed that by using the metaphor of ‘memory’ in the context of commemorative sites or shared narratives, the actual cause of the key event itself was likely to be avoided, or left out.

Another definition of the term ‘collective memory’ is that it ‘is the lens through which the past is viewed,’ one purpose of which is to help ‘both masses and elites interpret the present and decide on policy’<sup>138</sup> but any analysis of German political behaviour needs to distinguish between *history* as a set of objectively definable events and *collective memory*, the subjective attribution of

---

<sup>135</sup> Kansteiner, *In pursuit of German memory*, p.12

<sup>136</sup> Kansteiner, *In pursuit of German memory*, p.12

<sup>137</sup> W. Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,’ *History and Theory*, 41 (May 2002), pp.187-8.

<sup>138</sup> Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe*, (Ithaca, NY, 1997), p.xiii.

meaning to those key events. Collective memory becomes the more formidable influence over time, due to “its multiplicity, its murkiness, its malleability.”<sup>139</sup>

The implication of this statement is that collective memory can be manipulated to say what is required of it by the parties concerned. An example of this is Bourke’s timeline of German wartime memory. Bourke comments:

‘...many Germans promoted an image of themselves as hapless victims. Instead of focusing on German crimes, emphasis was placed on the expulsion of 11,000,000 Germans from eastern and central Europe and the many thousands of German POWs who died in Soviet hands or who remained in captivity well into the 1950s.’<sup>140</sup>

Bourke continues:

‘Chillingly, in 1949, nearly 60 per cent of Germans subscribed to the view that National Socialism had been “a good idea badly carried out” while over 40 per cent still insisted that there was “more good than evil in Nazism”. It was to be some time before this national script was to change.’<sup>141</sup>

The passage of time is increasingly leaving us with fewer and fewer participants to the events which are the subject of this thesis, and at the same time, this in itself is allowing a more analytical, less emotional approach to the events surrounding the conclusion of the Second World War. This, though, is not to say that the subject matter does not cause emotional and heated reaction, it is just that with time, different forms of analyses become ‘allowable.’ The most obvious question in examining these changes in historical memory is whose memory is it that is being changed? Who is it that is doing the changing? The memory of an individual expellee, whose family lived in the Sudetenland since time immemorial, and who suffered violent expulsion may well see their own ‘collective’ or individual memory in a way that differs drastically from the more politically orientated historical memory.

## **Historical memory**

Within the context of historical memory, German history after the Second World War is problematic both within Germany and, not least, for the countries which were most

---

<sup>139</sup> Markovits and Reich, *The German Predicament*, p.xiii

<sup>140</sup> Bourke, ‘Remembering War’, p.475

<sup>141</sup> Bourke, ‘Remembering War’, p.475

affected by the events of the war. Semler in his 2005 summary of the state of German memory comments that Germans wish to normalise their past and ‘the formula that has gained acceptance in Germany over past decades goes something like this: the post -1945 generations are not guilty, but are, nevertheless, burdened with an historical responsibility.’<sup>142</sup> This could be seen as historical memory in that the ‘memory’ has not been re-structured by collective memory. Semler has no problem with the first part dealing with guilt, but in looking at the second element, the ‘burden of guilt’, Semler identifies a number of strands that have influenced the manner in which the BdV have tackled Germany’s historical memory:

‘How can collective responsibility be built into a society that, for decades, has gone through a powerful process of individuation, in which “responsibility” is confined purely to responsibility for one’s own deeds. Is there really such a thing as a “duty to remember”?’ The memory of Nazi crimes has recently been brought back into the collective consciousness by contemporary genocides and atrocities, and there are two sides to this coin also. On one hand, the memory of Nazism becomes part of a general memory of crimes against humanity in the twentieth century: it is universalised and loses its particular or specific quality. This goes along with committed support for policies with a strong human-rights element and support for international institutions, such as the UN and the International Criminal Court, that militate against the indiscriminate slaughter of peoples.<sup>143</sup>

Specifically in relation to the BdV Semler explains the manner in which a wider historic association with the atrocities of late 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe has utilized these later atrocities and expulsions to de-couple the expellee plight from the actions of the Nazis. Effectively the Holocaust becomes submerged within a sea of later atrocities, which detracts from the specific proximity of the fate of the ethnic Germans and the Holocaust. Semler comments that the BdV

‘...attempts to imprint a picture of Germans as victims into the cultural memory of the nation. While its ‘Centre Against Expulsions’ does not deny that Nazi aggression was the cause of the later expulsions, it seeks to avoid the criticism of being solely preoccupied with Germans as victims by tying their fate to the history of expulsion worldwide in the twentieth century. The association cannot be accused of trying to offset the suffering of the Nazis’ victims against the suffering of the

---

<sup>142</sup> Christian Semler, ‘Is the tide of German memory turning?’, *Die Tageszeitung* internet article, p.2

<<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2005-06-23-semler-en.html>> [accessed 8 October 2008]

<sup>143</sup> Semler, ‘Is the tide of German memory turning?’ p.2

expelled Germans but, despite attempts to internationalise, concentration on the fate of its own people leads to a “competition of victims”, the phrase coined by the Belgian historian Jean Michel Chaumont.<sup>144</sup>

Four phases of expellee collective memory process can be identified within expellee history and literature. These are not only general but ignore the differences between West Germany and the DDR. The first phase is survival. This period saw the foundation of collective memory involving what was regarded as the ‘unjust’ consequences of the war. Germany and Poland in particular were in ruins, the allies were in control and had been instructed not to fraternise with Germans. The expellees were forced to live in the rubble of the cities, begging for food, and surviving off the charity of the controlling armies. Many lived off the land, or worked for farmers in order to survive conditions of exceptional cold, and deprivation between 1944 and 1950; the allies and post-war German authorities saw the expellees as a possible source of political and social destabilisation.<sup>145</sup>

Rainer Schulze observes of this period that,

the life histories of the refugees and expellees were basically reduced to two aspects in postwar West German collective memory: victims of tragedy and crime in the course of German defeat, on the one hand, and resilient individuals who bounced back against all the odds with their successful integration into the postwar economy and society, on the other. All regional characteristics that were more than picturesque folklore, as well as their personal and group histories before their displacement, were widely disregarded. The overall result, therefore, was ultimately similar in both Western and Eastern Germany. The refugees and expellees had to integrate into the postwar polity, economy and society without their memories and experiences getting a proper place in a common narrative of the areas that received them.<sup>146</sup>

The second phase involved the move to the towns and commenced at the beginning of the 1950s. Survival was now assured, and the desire to take the initiative and improve living standards took over. Indeed, the expellees were credited with having driven Germany’s economic recovery.<sup>147</sup> Memory was now based on guilt: having started the war sympathy

---

<sup>144</sup> Semler, ‘Is the tide of German memory turning?’ p.3

<sup>145</sup> Philipp Ther, ‘The Integration of Expellees in Germany and Poland after World War II: A Historical Reassessment,’ *Slavic Review*, (1996), p.786

<sup>146</sup> Rainer Schulze, ‘The Politics of Memory: Flight and Expulsion of German Populations after the Second World’, *National Identities* Vol. 8, No. 4, (December 2006), pp.367 -382, p.371

<sup>147</sup> Philipp Ther, ‘The Integration of Expellees in Germany’, p.788

could not be expected. The expellee organisations were founded on the basis of looking after expellee needs. This second progressive phase between 1950 and 1989 sees the development of collective memory from that of guilt to that of joint victims of the Nazi regime. Within this period falls the generation known as the '68'ers, the generation of Germans born after the war who 'forced West German society to deal with its Nazi past...' <sup>148</sup> Schulze in his 'Politics of Memory' says of this period that 'the public discourse in Western Germany [moved] toward a more (self-)critical assessment of the Nazi period.' <sup>149</sup> Due to the new Chancellor, Willy Brandt's attempts to repair relations with Germany's eastern neighbours,

'the refugees and expellees were more and more regarded as a relic of the past, whose continued insistence that their loss and pain had to be acknowledged seemed to threaten the newly established dialogue with the eastern European countries. A further sign of how irrelevant a social group they appeared to be was the fact that the wave of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) which had arrived in the 1970s passed over and omitted their historical experience.....' <sup>150</sup>

Collective memory develops and takes on a more assertive, confident form by the beginning of the 1980s. Discussion starts as to the rights and wrongs of the expulsions. Schulze attributes this shift to Chancellor Kohl and the Christian Democrats returning to power in the early 1980s which meant that the refugees and expellees 'could become more connected again to the main political discourse.' <sup>151</sup> The refugee organisations hold substantial political influence, representing 15 million persons including actual expellees and their descendents, and after reunification they begin to demand what was previously impossible: compensation. Collective memory is solidifying in that the former homelands take on a real structure due to the ability now to revisit their old homelands. The reconnection with the past homelands is reflected between 1989 and 2002 in the increasing volume of literature relating to the expellee past. This is undoubtedly due to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in the autumn of 1989 which brought Poland and Czechoslovakia back within the realms of travel for former expellees. Many

---

<sup>148</sup> Ingo Cornils, 'Long Memories: The German Student Movement in Recent Fiction,' *German Life and Letters*, Volume 56, Issue 1, (January 2003), pp. 89-103

<sup>149</sup> Schulze, 'The Politics of Memory', p.372.

<sup>150</sup> Schulze, 'The Politics of Memory', p.372.

<sup>151</sup> Schulze, 'The Politics of Memory', p.372.



visited their former *Heimat* or homeland, and the subject of these former homelands came to the fore in German public consciousness. Schulze calls this period, 1989-1990 the 're-siting of memory', when the collapse of the wall brought together Germans from the east and west which focused public attention on the expulsions. This opened up 'a new cohesive and inclusive narrative.'<sup>152</sup>

The third phase began in 2002 when Günther Grass published *Im Krebsgang*. The book dealt with one of the key expellee tragedies, the sinking by a Russian submarine of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* on January 30, 1945. A review of the book at the time summarised its effect:

'The past and its influence on our present, our changing definitions of "martyr" and "hero," the nature of punishment and atonement, and the impermanence of monuments and memorials in a changing political climate, are all major themes here, related both to the sinking of the *Gustloff*.....'<sup>153</sup>

Schulze believes that *Im Krebsgang* moved beyond the selective remembrance of flight and expulsion and linked the events at the end of the Second World War with its origins in 1933 and earlier, on the one hand, and its legacy for the present time on the other.'

Schulze quotes from the 'old man' in the novel who says that his generation

'should have found words for the hardships endured by the Germans fleeing East Prussia. . . . Never . . . should his generation have kept silent about such misery, merely because its own sense of guilt was so overwhelming, merely because for years the need to accept responsibility and show remorse took precedence, with the result that they abandoned the topic to the right wing. This failure . . . was staggering.'<sup>154</sup>

Media interest led to a series of popular books, television documentaries, and the expellee organisations becoming more forceful in their demands. Schulze refers to a number of other novels which appeared after *Im Krebsgang*, in 2002 and 2003 which dealt with the theme of expulsion of the ethnic Germans from the east.<sup>155</sup> It is now nearly 60 years since

---

<sup>152</sup> Schulze, 'The Politics of Memory', p.376.

<sup>153</sup> *Crabwalk* reviewed in an internet article by Mary Whipple, 2003 on 'Mostly Fiction Book Reviews,'

<<http://www.mostlyfiction.com/history/grass.htm> > [accessed 2 October 2008]

<sup>154</sup> Schulze, 'The Politics of Memory' p.377, quoting from Grass, *Im Krebsgang*, Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, (2002), p.99

<sup>155</sup> Schulze refers to Jörg Bernig's *Niemandszeit* (2002) Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten* (2003), Tanja Dückers' *Himmelskörper* (2003), Olaf Müller's *Schlesisches Wetter* (2003) and Michael Zellner's *Die Reise nach Samosch* (2003). Schulze comments that 'in

the end of the war and a new generation free of war guilt is able to develop a new theory of the events of 1944, and the 'Hitler regime.' There is a reassessment in the German press and media of the sufferings undergone by the expellees. Those who took part in the war were carriers of Nazi contamination, but this generation was rapidly disappearing, and being replaced by another generation, those who had been members of the Hitler Youth, and whilst being part of the events of the time, could not be blamed for the Nazi atrocities. This generation is often referred to as the '48ers'.<sup>156</sup> Next were those born after the war whose parents and grandparents had participated in the war and who particularly during the 1960s and 70s (the 68ers) asked these earlier generations some awkward questions. The final (for the time being) phase are the generation who may increasingly be the children of parents and grandparents who were born after the war and thus are not tainted either by birth or immediate descent with any sense of responsibility for the atrocities of the war.<sup>157</sup>

With the movement of expellee collective memory which now seeks parity of victimhood with the Jewish Holocaust one needs to examine in detail the historical memory of the expulsions in the form of its development in order to measure the convergence of a favourable collective memory amongst the expellees and expellee groups with a modern favourable historical memory, that discards Germany's 'unsavoury history.' The 'historical' part of the expellee memory is that part which lies in the facts of the expulsions. The next chapter will explore expellee history and its relationship to historical memory.

---

all these novels, including the one by Grass, the main topic is one of never quite arriving and of a home that has never fully become a home. The novels are about the experience of loss and the consequences of this loss not only for the people who suffered it, but also for the second and third generation as well. They aim to overcome the silence about the pain their grandparents' generation suffered and the guilt some family members brought upon themselves during the Nazi period.' Schulze, 'The Politics of Memory', pp.377-378

<sup>156</sup> Christina von Hodenberg makes reference to the "mythic legacies" of victimization, resistance and ignorance among four generations ... called the "1933ers," "1948ers," "1968ers" and "1979ers." Christina von Hodenberg, 'Review of New Research and Writing in Modern German History', *H-German, H-Net Reviews*, (March, 2004), < <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?Path=653> > [accessed 18 May 2006]

<sup>157</sup> Joe Perry's summary in a review of Christina von Hodenberg, 'Konsens und Krise: Eine Geschichte der westdeutschen Medienöffentlichkeit 1945-1973'. *H-German, H-Net Reviews*. (September, 2007), < <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13623> > [accessed 14 October 2008]

## Chapter 3

### Historical memory of the expulsions in the 1950s and 1960s

Because of the enormous number of expellees, there is a surfeit of documentary evidence recording individual experiences, including oral testimonies, official volumes, and diaries which testify to the plight of the German expellees. The collapse of the eastern bloc and German reunification allowed access in the former DDR, Russia, Poland and Czechoslovakia to archives which in turn have provided, and are still providing new official documentary material relating to the expulsions. The overall nature of the events has never been disputed, but the reality, accuracy of memory, contextual portrayal, and often the justification of what took place has. The literature is almost by definition evolutionary. Particular pieces of literature have defined a key point in memory at the time of their publication. Three of the key texts in expellee literature which can be considered to mark different phases in the history of the expulsions are Theodor Schieder's volumes *Die Vertriebung der Deutschen Bevölkerung* ('The Expulsion of the German People'), published through the 1950s and early 1960s, the late Andreas Hillgruber's controversial work *Zweierlei Untergang*, ('Double Downfall'), published in 1986, and John Sack's *Eye for an Eye* published in 1993. A fourth phase in expellee literature can be said to date from 2000 and is marked by the work of Professor Guido Knopp and Günther Grass.<sup>158</sup>

This chapter will explore the key volumes relating to the first of the three phases which have contributed to the historical memory of the expulsions. The emergence of the theme of the expellees from the destruction and reconstruction of West Germany immediately after the end of the war was as much political as social. Out of nearly 15 million

---

<sup>158</sup> A.Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums*. Corso Bei Siedler, Berlin: (1986). T. Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern-Central-Europe*. Grass, *Im Krebsgang : eine Novelle*.

expellees nearly 11 million settled in West Germany and would therefore become increasingly important both politically and socially in the new German state.<sup>159</sup>

The primary text of the expulsions is the eight-volume work *Documentation of the Expelled* edited by Theodor Schieder, published between 1950 and 1961 by the West German Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims. They have the authority and respectability of being a product commissioned and endorsed by the then West German government. These volumes are all-embracing in that they deal with the German communities that were expelled from all regions of Eastern Europe, and beyond. The volumes of the *Documentation* which concern this thesis are Volume 1/1 *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse* (The Expulsion of the German People from the areas east of the Oder-Neisse) published in 1950, and Volume IV/1-2 *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei* (The Expulsion of the German People from Czechoslovakia) published in 1960. The eight-volume series was commissioned in 1950 by Theodor Oberländer, the head of the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims, in order to document the injustices inflicted on the expellees by, amongst others, the Russians, Poles, and Czechs.<sup>160</sup> These volumes are important as a foundation on which most expellee history is based because they offer three elements of authority: the endorsement by a government entity, the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims; the prolonged and exhaustive construction of these volumes by a number of apparently respectable German historians; and the reconstruction of the events corroborated by large numbers of eye-witness accounts.

The structure of the first German language volume dealing with the expulsions from Poland (Volume I) is broken down into a first section which deals with the events of 1943 and the increased allied bombing and the effect it had on the German people. It examines statistics and the high numbers of ethnic Germans in the key eastern towns in 1939, and the high number of those that remained at the end of 1944. This is to identify the

---

<sup>159</sup> Statistics from De Zayas 1994 work, *A terrible revenge*, p.152

<sup>160</sup> Theodor Schieder, *Documents on the Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern-Central-Europe*. Bonn: Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees and War Victims, 1950.

relatively low numbers that moved westwards under the influence of allied bombing, and those that were forced out later by other means.<sup>161</sup> The rest of the first section deals with the events of the Russian offensive of 22 June 1944 and the defence measures instituted by the Germans. The language is factual, but carefully distinguishes the NSDAP from ordinary German civilians. The implication is that there were two independent forces at work in saving Germany from the Russian advance: the Nazis, and the ‘Germans.’ The events of Nemmersdorf are subsumed within a greater story of Russian savagery during its advance and Königsberg is mentioned only in passing. The narrative in the second section deals with the Russian advance across Germany, with detailed reference to the rapes by Russians on the Germans. Nazi racial beliefs surface in this section when the author states that ‘...soviet soldiers of Asiatic origin...’ had the ‘..traits within the mentality of these people....’<sup>162</sup>

Many ethnic Germans were forced by the Poles and Czechs into concentration camps which were formerly used to house and exterminate Jews. It is observed that this should not have happened as most of those so dealt with were undoubtedly innocent:

‘The terrible mis-handling and destruction of so many Germans in camps and prisons under the pretext of atonement and punishment was a terrible injustice, especially as only some of those interned had been responsible for misdeeds against Poles or Jews. The majority of those interned were without doubt innocent....’<sup>163</sup>

Schieder then proceeds to compare the action of the Polish government and military with that of the Nazi rulers by commenting that a large part of the Polish government and military acted in the same, narrow-minded, chauvinistic manner as their Nazi forebears.<sup>164</sup> Schieder acknowledges that the events during the war which led to savage reprisals on the ethnic Germans at the end of the war were the consequences of the actions of the Nazi rulers.<sup>165</sup> ‘In hindsight, regarding the crimes carried out during the German occupation on both Poles and Jews, the behaviour of the Poles can be explained,

---

<sup>162</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the German*, p.112E

<sup>163</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the German*, p.112E

<sup>164</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans* p.112E

<sup>165</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans* p.112E

but not excused.<sup>166</sup> Schieder separates the actions of the NSDAP and the *Wehrmacht*. This separation is used to differentiate the criminal SS and the Nazi regime and ‘good honest’ German soldiers who were dragged into the conflict by the regime: the ultimate consequences being the suffering of innocent German civilians.<sup>167</sup> Schieder comments that ‘the relationship between the NSDAP, and the *Wehrmacht* became *even* (*my italics*) worse due to *Werwolf-Propoganda* and the activities of the National Socialist top officers....’<sup>168</sup> The implication is that the *Wehrmacht* was an honourable institution separate from the NSDAP. Schieder also observes, with a brief reference to its Nazi origins, that Germans within Polish territory were forced to wear white armbands bearing the image of the Swastika and that this led to discrimination. The third section then deals in detail with the expulsions as a consequence of the Potsdam Conference. The work then continues into the final and largest section<sup>169</sup> which reproduces original but edited eye-witness reports that confirm the events of the first section. Most of the 136 reports were written 5 to 7 years after the events described, being dated between 1950 and 1952. The reports selected by the committee on the basis of their being ‘representative’ relate some of the events that were later to become formulaic in expellee history: Nemmersdorf, Königsberg, and the marches over the ice to the ports in the German Baltic. The reports include some from those on board ships that sank whilst transporting refugees, including the *Karlsruhe* and the *Goya* which were torpedoed by the Russians on the night of 16/17 April 1945 near Stolpmünde (a port in Pomerania) with around 6-7000 soldiers and refugees on board, of whom only 165 survived. The eye-witness report for the *Goya*<sup>170</sup> predicts the future formulaic disaster of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. It had 5000 persons on

---

<sup>166</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans* p.125E

<sup>167</sup> The honourable *Wehrmacht* was a concept held until the Hamburg Institute for Social Research in 1995 put on an exhibition titled ‘War of Annihilation. Crimes of the *Wehrmacht*’. Photographs and documents were used to prove that the *Wehrmacht* was as guilty as the SS and *Waffen SS* in its planning of, and carrying out of murders on Jews and Poles. See Hamburg Institute for Social Research website, document headed ‘Crimes of the German Wehrmacht, Dimensions of a war of annihilation, 1941-1944’.  
<[http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/pdf/vdw\\_en.pdf](http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/pdf/vdw_en.pdf)> [accessed 19 December 2008]

<sup>168</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans*, p.285. This ‘difference’ between Nazi and *Wehrmacht* is further elaborated on in this section. ‘Werwolves’ were young bands of fanatic Nazis that on the collapse of the German armed forces, took to the forests vowing to carry out acts of sabotage against all enemies of the Reich. The reality was that they played a minimal role in this field.

<[http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/pdf/vdw\\_en.pdf](http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/pdf/vdw_en.pdf)> [accessed 19 December 2008]

<sup>169</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans*, the page numbering begins at 1 again and goes to 494

<sup>170</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans*, This Report number 84, ‘Erlebnisbericht von C.Adomeit aus Heilsberg’, Ostpr. Original, 21.Mai 1952 headed ‘Untergang der Goya in der Nacht vom 16.zum 17.April 1945’, pp.323-327

board. These numbers would change in favour of the *Gustloff* and the *Goya* would be relegated to second place as expellee mythology developed.

The eye-witness reports are numbered and given sub-headings. One dealing with Nemmersdorf is headed as follows:

‘Eye-witness report of Home Army member K.P. from Königsberg, East Prussia. Original, 14 January 1953, 7 sides. Partly reproduced.

Russian Atrocities in Nemmersdorf in October 1944’<sup>171</sup>

The significance of this reference to Nemmersdorf is its simple, undramatic heading, in comparison to the later references which would command either whole chapters of books or sections of documentaries. The writer of the report, a member of the *Volksturm*, states that they found naked women nailed to barn doors, and inside the various houses a total of 72 women and children, and a 74 year-old man, all murdered in a ‘bestial’ manner. Further graphic descriptions follow. As a matter of accuracy it is noted that the government reports gave the number of dead at 62.<sup>172</sup>

The depiction of the less savoury aspects of Germans in the territories that would become Poland and Czechoslovakia is careful not to include the barbaric nature of the German occupation:

‘Also during the time of the German occupation some hundreds of thousands of Germans had immigrated from the *Reich* into Poland. These were partly persons, who had been driven out of these territories by the systematic Polish boycott after 1919 and who returned after 1939. There were however also *Reich* Germans who came into the country in order to administer and carry on the economy of the Polish districts.’<sup>173</sup>

---

<sup>171</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans*, pp.7-9

<sup>172</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans*, p.8 The home army, (*Volksturm*) are a politically safer area for witness reports than the *Wehrmacht*. They tended to be older persons, unfit for the *Wehrmacht* and thus unlikely to have soiled the expellee case by having been involved in atrocities against the Poles and Jews.

<sup>173</sup> See the section on the *Selbstschutz* units of ethnic Germans within Poland who assisted the SS with the execution and rounding up of Poles.Ch.1. pp. 29-30

Many of these *Reich* Germans went into Poland presumably during the war to ‘administer and carry on the economy of the Polish districts’<sup>174</sup> under the dictates of Hitler’s regime. The implication, therefore, is that representatives of the German *Reich* were in Poland on legitimate administrative business, not in the role of a wartime occupier. It was however these *Reich* Germans who were assisted by the *Volksdeutsche* in the subjugation of the native Poles. Thus, the ethnic Germans are portrayed as a benign and benevolent influence in Poland, a legitimising factor in the demand for post-war recognition of the fate of the expellees. Schieder and the editorial committee thus laid the foundation for a new historical memory of how Poland was occupied, that the expellee organisations would continue to use into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The volumes which deal with the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans were released in 1960.<sup>175</sup> The format and structure is the same as earlier volumes. It was released in both German and English, with the English volume lacking the full number of witness reports ‘so as not to exceed the contents of a single manageable volume.’<sup>176</sup> Schieder, as editor, balances accusations that reports written by victims must by definition be subjective, with an opportunity to attack the Czech government for its subsequent anti-German laws. The volume begins with a detailed summary of the history of those Germans who were expelled, beginning with the history of the territory in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The sensitive period between 1938 is dealt with in a careful but detailed manner. Schieder acknowledges that in the Czech elections of 1935 two-thirds of the Sudeten Germans voted for Henlein’s Sudeten German Party but this was only because they had been ‘disappointed in their expectations of a solution to the German problem within the framework of the Czechoslovak Republic....’<sup>177</sup>

Thus Schieder establishes at an early point in expellee history that the Sudeten Germans were literally forced by circumstance into an unwilling alliance with domestic and foreign Nazi elements. In Schieder’s interpretation of the events of 1938 the

---

<sup>174</sup> Schieder, *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans*, pp.578-579

<sup>175</sup> T. Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia*. Bonn, Federal Ministry for Expellees. (1960).

<sup>176</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia* , p.v

<sup>177</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia* , p.v



implication is that the domestic politics of the Sudeten Germans were forcibly intercepted by Hitler to serve his own purposes, thus reducing Sudeten German culpability for the following dismantling of Czechoslovakia. Another area of sensitivity is carefully dealt with: that of the influx of *Reichsdeutsche* into the newly annexed Sudetenland who, due to the German fixing of the exchange rate of the Reichsmark against the Czech Crown at an artificial level, were able to purchase Czech businesses at artificially low prices. Schieder simply observes that because the Sudetenland lay in the heart of the *Reich*, and was highly industrialised ‘a great amount of manpower was thereby attracted from the *Altreich*.’<sup>178</sup>

The book sub-divides into headings which include the expulsions pre- and post Potsdam and ‘the Impact of the War on the German Element in Slovakia,’<sup>179</sup> which came into being as an independent state in March 1939 and was an ally of Germany. Schieder observes it was ‘almost considered to be a privilege to be conscripted into this area,’ and that the ethnic Germans in this former area of Czechoslovakia had been ‘blessed with favourable political conditions for the development of [their] ethnic group...’ These ‘favourable conditions’ i.e., alliance with and support for Nazi Germany ‘...were eventually to become fatal for the German element in Slovakia.’<sup>180</sup> In 1944 Slovakia signed an agreement with Germany allowing Germany to draw on Slovakia’s ethnic Germans as a source of recruits for the *Waffen-SS*. The recruitment to the *SS* of Slovakia’s ethnic Germans is explained in terms of finances. Rather than join the Slovakian armed forces which offered ‘scanty financial support’ many ethnic Germans volunteered for the *Waffen-SS* as both the *Waffen-SS* and German army ‘paid comparatively well.’ Of Slovakia’s ethnic German grouping of 150,000 in 1943 nearly 9,000 persons joined either the German army or the *Waffen-SS*.<sup>181</sup> Schieder observes that many of these persons who had joined for the good pay and food, deserted at the first opportunity, and that there was ‘a strong passive resistance’ to these organisations amongst the ethnic Germans. The reality is that by 1944 it was clear that Germany would

---

<sup>178</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia*, p.16

<sup>179</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia*, pp.147-170

<sup>180</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia*, p.147

<sup>181</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia*, p.148

lose the war, and that membership of organisations such as the SS would be likely to draw particular vengeance on individuals who had served in it. The middle section of Volume IV is headed ‘Annexes’ and contains 167 pages of decrees<sup>182</sup> and laws passed by the Czech Government between 1944 and 1950 which dealt with the expulsions, and (lack of) rights of ethnic Germans during this period. The final section contains a total of 136 reports written by ethnic German victims of the expulsions themselves. The majority of the reports were written between 1947 and 1957, in many cases 10 years after the events described.

Robert Moeller has looked closely at the nature of Schieder’s project, as well as his career, colleagues on the project, and the project itself.

‘At the heart of the project were over seven hundred personal testimonies and eyewitness accounts, some complete, some extensively excerpted. Together with brief editorial introductions and a range of official government documents, the volumes on individual regions totalled more than 4,300 densely printed pages. This staggering collection represented only a fraction of the eleven thousand “reports of experience” assembled by the federal government with the cooperation of expellee interest groups ...the sources included copies of letters to friends and relatives, diaries, testimonies dictated in response to questions from officials of regional expellee interest groups...and retrospective accounts written initially for the author’s family or as a personal diary.’<sup>183</sup>

The compilers realised that the validity of their project lay in its ability to use only valid sources, and at the same time sources which in their reported experiences were valid, i.e., not exaggerated. Moeller summarises

‘Schieder, who was directly involved in virtually all aspects of the project, from securing a typewriter to hiring secretarial help, also specified the criteria to be applied in determining the reliability of such (source) accounts. The work of sorting through and classifying individual reports was left to research staff, but Schieder detailed review procedures....it was critical to check documents against other documents, particularly official sources, and dismiss secondhand hearsay testimony...According to Schieder, if there was any question at all about the

---

<sup>182</sup> Schieder, *The expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia*, pp.173-340

<sup>183</sup> R. G. Moeller, *War stories: the search for a usable past in the Federal Republic of Germany*. London, University of California Press. (2003) pp.51-87

accuracy of an account, if in any particular it failed to pass the rigorous “testing procedures” of the editors, then it was excluded in its entirety.’<sup>184</sup>

It is clear that the authors were concerned that the historic validity of the volumes should be unassailable. The editors ‘certified that the documentation was just as valuable and reliable as the archival sources and official government documents....’ and ‘they (the editors) promised to transform subjective memory into unassailable fact.’<sup>185</sup> Moeller observes that

‘A characteristically enthusiastic West German assessment of the volume...[stated] ...the fact that an editorial board of “four university professors from Cologne, Hamburg, and Tübingen, together with a high-ranking archival expert [*Oberarchivrat*] from Koblenz, has examined this vast material with painstaking objectivity and the most exacting evaluative standards banishes from the start any doubt of the absolute historical accuracy of its work.’”<sup>186</sup>

Some German historians, have, however, questioned Schieder’s methodology. Claudia Kraft in a journal article published in 2003 wrote that Hans-Ulrich Wehler, a left-wing historian, made it clear that he believed that the purpose of the publication was to balance German crimes against German suffering.<sup>187</sup> Without actually questioning directly the validity of his results the nuance is that perhaps for such a seminal work, the methodology should be a matter of more research in itself.

Schieder’s problematic past certainly seems to have caused some discomfort, even amongst his colleagues. Kraft makes the observation with regards to Schieder’s outlook that,

‘For Schieder there is no connection between the National Socialist settlers [in the east] and ‘Annihilation’ politics. The Germans were indisputably jointly liable, and the fact of individual responsibility never came, to any extent, into his writings. The German people had a joint liability to bear: as well as Perpetrators (*Täter*) and later as Victims (*Opfer*), the Germans seem to retain a seemingly homogenous common destiny.’<sup>188</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, pp.60-61

<sup>185</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.61

<sup>186</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.61

<sup>187</sup> Kraft, ‘Was kann die zeithistorische Forschung’, p.43

<sup>188</sup> Kraft, ‘Was kann die zeithistorische Forschung’, p.45

A number of modern day German historians have expressed concern that the key historians involved in the construction of this seminal work were ardent supporters of Nazi racial policies. Schieder has been accused of supporting the *Entjudung* (removal of the Jews) from the east, without saying where they should go. The German historian, Michael Fahlbusch, notes that,

‘The NS careerist Theodor Schieder was the Head of Planning organisation in East Prussia where he showed himself to be anti-Semitic...[he knew of] the destruction of the eastern historic and cultural structures and oversaw their replacement with an unmistakably inhumane substitute.’<sup>189</sup>

Werner Conze, one of Schieder’s co-writers of the eight volumes, has been described as ‘a mastermind of the annihilation policies’ who played an active role ‘in the German plans for a new German order.’<sup>190</sup> There are two points which arise: firstly whether historians associated with Nazi resettlement and annihilation policies have dealt with a theme that interacted so closely with their own pasts that they could not be relied on to write objective history,<sup>191</sup> and secondly, whether historians working with the state on a project with political implications can write objectively. Ingo Haar believes that there was a tangible effect on what should have been independent historical research and its recording:

‘The expulsions were to be depicted as the singular event in European history. Because of this, through the means of an independent history committee he (Conze) withdrew from the proposed volume through his group of the *Dokumentation der Vertreibungs- und Vernichtungsgeschichte der Juden und Polen* (Documentation of the History of the Expulsions and Annihilation of the Poles and Jews). The reason for this was that the [sponsoring] ministry under Theodor Oberlaender wanted to portray the German cause as just in any ensuing peace talks. For this reason, the ministry obstructed the publication of any already prepared research dealing with the *Vernichtungspolitik* (politics of annihilation). This block applied to almost

---

<sup>189</sup> See M. Fahlbusch article: ‘Die Tragödie der Sozial- und Zeitgeschichte,’ (10 March 1999), <[www.hsozkult.geschichte.hu-belin.de/beitrag/essays/fami0499.htm](http://www.hsozkult.geschichte.hu-belin.de/beitrag/essays/fami0499.htm)> [accessed 7 July 2007]

<sup>190</sup> Götz Aly and Susanne Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung. Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung*, Frankfurt a.M. 1993, p.102f.

<sup>191</sup> Comment made on the German ‘Nachrichtendienst für Historiker’, website, see <[http://www.nfhdata.de/premium/newsboard2/dcboard.php?az=printer\\_friendly&forum=115&topic\\_id=44](http://www.nfhdata.de/premium/newsboard2/dcboard.php?az=printer_friendly&forum=115&topic_id=44)> [accessed 12 October 2008]

every commonly available work concerning the foreign policy of the Nazi state and its occupation of Poland.’<sup>192</sup>

But Haar also believes that the encouragement to ethnic cleansing put forward by some German historians, including Schieder, needs to be subject to professional and political examination in order to break a cartel of silence about the crimes committed in the east by German *Volksdeutsche* and their association with the Nazi apparatus that laid the foundations for the historical memory contortions that have allowed victim status in the modern portrayal of German history.<sup>193</sup> If the nature of the role played by some *Volksdeutsche* were clearly portrayed in German post-war history, the claim to victimhood would fall on sterile ground, Haar believes.

Both Oberländer and Schieder had been committed Nazis who were writing and collating on a theme that struck at the actions of the former Nazi enemies, the allies, and portrayed a tragedy larger in numerical terms than that of the Holocaust for which Germany as a nation had been regarded as morally responsible. Further, it is difficult to believe that an official document did not come under scrutiny from those that had commissioned it. Moeller claims an ulterior motive both for the publications themselves, and the fact that many were reproduced in English. He writes that ‘the decision to publish substantial excerpts from the volumes in English-language translation, a project supervised by Rothfels...was yet another indication that the project was aimed at readers beyond the Federal Republic’s borders, in those western countries held accountable for the Potsdam agreement and the abandonment of eastern Europe to the Soviets.’<sup>194</sup> English language editions also allowed understanding outside of Germany of the plight of the

---

<sup>192</sup> Ingo Haar, ‘Historiker im Nationalsozialismus,’ (27 Sept.2000 ) available <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de>> [accessed October 11 2008]

<sup>193</sup> Haar is a German historian who has written with Fahlbusch, on the influence of the Nazi historians, and their influence during and after World War II. Ingo Haar, ‘Historiker im Nationalsozialismus. Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der ‘Volkstumskampf’ im Osten’, 2001, deals with the role of German historians in Hitler’s Germany with regards the role the Third Reich played in the east- See also: Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch, eds. *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1920-1945*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005. A review of the books reads: ‘Although the editors do not explicitly advertise it as such, this is a collection of studies on the ethics of historiographic practice. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch have set themselves the task of demonstrating that historians and other scholars in the humanities stood “prominently in the foreground” (p. xix) when it came to drafting and implementing Nazi policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide.’ Review: Eric J. Engstrom, Institute for the History of Medicine, Humboldt University, Berlin. May 2006. <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=219201159896069>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>194</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.62

expellees. The Ministry of Expellees, according to Moeller, wanted to counter the belief that Germany had committed atrocities in the east.<sup>195</sup> Equally as important, as Moeller says,

‘The project was also framed explicitly as a refutation of the belief, ascribed to the western Allies, that what had happened to Germans in eastern Europe at the war’s end was no more than they had deserved. A detailed factual response would set the record straight, reminding foreign readers “that the forefathers of the expellees were already in possession of rights to a home in eastern and southeastern Europe at a time when America was not even discovered...’<sup>196</sup>

As Moeller correctly observes the testimonies used, whilst explicitly detailing the crimes of the Red Army and partisans, ‘did little to illuminate the crimes of Germans against eastern Europeans before the war’s end.’<sup>197</sup> The reality of Nazi occupation and the privileged status of the ethnic Germans and the role they would have played in the subjection of the Polish and Czech native populations is glossed over. As Moeller observes, the expellees were portrayed as victims twice over, prey first to scheming Nazis, then to marauding Communists.<sup>198</sup> As will be a common theme in the developing expellee history those that participated in Nazism were unwilling:

‘.....German men were unwilling and in some cases unsuspecting last-minute conscripts into the Waffen-SS....Doubtless Schieder included himself among the expellees whose National Socialist sympathies indicated neither a flawed character nor evil intentions.’<sup>199</sup>

Thus, the original ‘bible’ of the expellee organisations was the construct of former Nazis who believed in and promoted Nazi eastern racial policies. Moeller comments that ‘in their testimonies, some of the eye-witnesses in the Schieder collection acknowledged – directly or indirectly- the crimes committed by Nazis, yet they did so by describing their own collective suffering, not their collective accountability.’ He continues by quoting from a Schieder report which says that conditions confronting eastern European Germans

---

<sup>195</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.62

<sup>196</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, pp.62-63

<sup>197</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.72

<sup>198</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.73

<sup>199</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.73

“ could not have been worse [than] a concentration camp.”<sup>200</sup> These volumes also lay down the evidence for Germans as victims. As Moeller observes,

‘the testimonies presented in the documentation depicted Germans not as perpetrators but as victims of “a crime against humanity,” in scenes of families hastily rounded up and then torn apart by the same order heard at Auschwitz, sending “men to the left, women to the right,” as they awaited deportation to unspecified destinations in overcrowded cattle cars .....and in the makeshift mortuaries for those who did not survive Soviet labour camps, it was German, not Jewish, teeth that were searched for gold crowns before corpses, “stark naked,” were piled unceremoniously onto a wagon, arms and legs trailing from the sides, for transport to a mass grave.’<sup>201</sup>

These volumes still form the foundation stones of modern expellee literature and were the basis for, as late as 2003, a DVD commissioned by the Bavarian Ministry of Education for distribution in Bavarian schools.<sup>202</sup>

Another volume based on eye-witness reports was to come from Erich Kern (1906-1991) a lifelong and diehard Austrian Nazi, who believed that Schieder’s volumes were not outspoken enough. Kern had a career in publishing until the outbreak of war, including work as editor on a number of Austrian and German newspapers. He entered the SS division “Das Reich” in 1941 as an SS Sturmbannführer. His career as an author and supporter of the extreme right continued right through to the 1980s.<sup>203</sup> He believed that the allies had been just as guilty as the Germans of war crimes and that these crimes needed to be documented. Whilst Schieder was operating under political constraints, Kern was free to publish his findings. He relied on Schieder as a source, as well as a

---

<sup>200</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.78. The report he quotes from is identified as ‘Erlebnisbericht (Brief) des Kaufmanns und ehemaligan Stadtrats Hubert Schütz sen.aus Jägerndorf’, 4 Januar 1947,” *Tschechoslowakei*, 4/2:216

<sup>201</sup> Moeller, *War stories*, p.80

<sup>202</sup> This was announced by Erika Steinbach at a BdV conference held on 26 August 2003 at their Berlin Headquarters. The DVD-ROM was titled *Gegen das Vergessen-Die grosse Flucht* (Against Forgetting: The Great Flight). The press-release reads: ‘For the first time, the eight-volume scholarly work the *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa* which was created by the Ministry for Refugees and War victims, is now made available on DVD.’

<sup>203</sup> A German website which no longer exists briefly analysed his ‘career’and stated that Kern ‘attempted to whitewash the actions of the SS and the Wehrmacht, as well as portray the Germans as the victims of the events of WWII. The site, which appeared to contain well researched material, disappeared during the writing of this thesis.

number of works by David Irving.<sup>204</sup> Kern's 1964 volume, *Verbrechen am deutschen Volk, Dokumente alliierter Grausamkeiten 1939-1949*, (Crimes inflicted on the German People) is an extensive collection of eye-witness reports of the atrocities. However, in the foreword the author states,

‘For no other volume as this have I had so much difficulty in coming by the material I have needed. After the capitulation of 1945, the Allied Officers in charge of censorship carefully rummaged through the archives and libraries and seized everything that might be seen as evidence of war crimes. To this aim the Soviets and western allies were united. Thus, disappeared the five volume work of the foreign office which detailed the crimes committed by the Poles, French and British’.<sup>205</sup>

Kern observes that the attempt to find documents that might incriminate the allies is all but impossible, most of it having been taken away or destroyed. He then comments that even the *Dokumentation der Vertriebung der Deutschen aus OstMitteleuropa*, is difficult to come by, being either out of print, or carefully hidden away, and that his request to use some of this material for his book was turned down, the material being government property. After questions in the Bundestag prompted by his publishers, Kern claims that he was allowed to use material from these volumes, which the fortunate German public are now able to ‘benefit’ from in the form of this book.<sup>206</sup> Kern differs from Schieder in his outspoken enmity of the allies, and support for the German ‘victims’ of the allies. ‘Crimes against the German people’ is the central theme of the book, but the ‘expellees’ are not dealt with as a specific, separate entity. This book is significant as an early work which posited the view that a dramatic change was needed in the manner that German expellee history should be portrayed, i.e., from a more aggressive German-orientated stance.

The period of the 1950s, and early 1960s are important in that it was during this period, when memories of the destruction wrought by Germany on Europe were very

---

<sup>204</sup> The works by Irving are *Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht*, Schweizer Druck-und Verlagshaus, Zürich 1964, and *The Destruction of Dresden*, Kimber, London, 1963.

<sup>205</sup> E. Kern, *Verbrechen am deutschen Volk : eine Dokumentation alliierter Grausamkeiten*, Oldendorf, (1984), p.7

<sup>206</sup> Kern, *Verbrechen am deutschen Volk*, introduction. Kern states that he and his publishers underwent a number of difficulties in an attempt to gain access to documents, implying that the matter of ‘expulsions’ and ‘allied war crimes’ were not something that German politicians were ready to tackle at this time.



much alive both in Germany and amongst the Allies, that the German government sponsored a history of events that could be used to portray Germans as victims in a set of volumes which were designed, in fact, to justify a later re-adjustment of Poland's borders in Germany's favour, and demonstrate that Germans were victims of the Nazi regime.<sup>207</sup> It would not be until 1986 that the events of the expulsions at the end of World War II would be brought forcefully into the German academic spotlight, and it is to these that this thesis now turns.

---

<sup>207</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, p.62

## Chapter 4

### 1986: Hillgruber and de Zayas

It took a respected mainstream German historian, Andreas Hillgruber, to bring the debate relating to the expellees and their place in historical memory truly alive. Ironically one of the most important pieces of literature over the last 20 years dealing with the theme of expulsion, the product of two lectures, happens to be one of the shortest. The book consisted of two separate essays, one dealing with the Holocaust, and the other dealing with the expulsions.<sup>208</sup> The disaster that befell the German *Volksdeutsche* at the end of the war was juxtaposed directly with the Holocaust. Hillgruber's (1925-1989) background is relevant to the seminal work, published in 1986, titled *Zweierlei Untergang*, or crudely translated, *Double Downfall*. Andreas Hillgruber, the son of a secondary school teacher, was born on January 18, 1925, in a town that was then in East Prussia and is now in Poland. He earned a doctorate at the University of Göttingen in West Germany. His scholarly career included teaching at the universities of Marburg and Freiburg.<sup>209</sup> Hillgruber served in the German army between 1943 and 1945, becoming a prisoner of war in France. Whilst he acknowledged that he was indeed a conservative and nationalist, there is no evidence that Hillgruber was a Holocaust denier or a sympathiser of the extreme right. Robert Moeller sums up Hillgruber's work prior to *Zweierlei Untergang* as having done

‘much to illuminate the relationship between the *Wehrmacht*'s last-ditch attempt to hold back the Red Army in 1944 and 1945, on the one hand, and the aggressive pursuit of the “final solution,” on the other. In the early 1970s, he was among the first to challenge accepted claims that the *Wehrmacht*'s war in the east was in no way

---

<sup>208</sup> *Zweierlei Untergang*'s two sections have their own titles. The first part of the work, dealing with the German refugees from the east is titled ‘Der Zusammenbruch im Osten 1944/45 als Problem der deutschen Nationalgeschichte und der europäischen Geschichte,’ or ‘The Collapse of the East, 1944/45 as a problem of German and European national history.’ The second section which deals with the Holocaust, is titled ‘Der geschichtliche Ort der Judenvernichtung,’ or ‘The Historical Position of the Annihilation of the Jews.’ A. Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*.

<sup>209</sup> Source: Obituary, *New York Times*, May 25th 1989

linked to the brutal murder of many Soviets and the campaign to exterminate European Jews...'<sup>210</sup>

Moeller concludes that by the time that *Zweierlei Untergang* was published in 1986, Hillgruber was one of Germany's leading historians of Nazi war strategy and foreign policy.<sup>211</sup>

*Zweierlei Untergang* begins by stating:

'The Second World War encompassed two national catastrophes, whose after-effects are likely to involve not only several generations of those nations concerned, but all of Europe whether directly or indirectly will have to bear the burden: the murder of the Jews under national socialist Germany between 1941 and 1944, and then the immediate following on of the expulsion of the Germans from east-middle Europe, and the destruction of the Prussian-German Reich, 1944-1945.'<sup>212</sup>

Having linked the two events, Hillgruber tells us that the murder of the Jews was purely a consequence of Hitler's and the Nazi state's racial ideologies. At the same time the crimes of the national socialists were not in full measure known but nowhere does Hillgruber minimise or deny any of the national socialist crimes. He asserts that there was little doubt that the Russians would take extreme vengeance once they entered German territory because 'between 1941 and 1944 the Germans had undertaken extreme crimes and excesses on Russian soil.'<sup>213</sup> Hillgruber's empathy lay with the Germans in the east. He wrote that

'the historian considering the war's end and searching for a point of empathetic identification must identify himself with the concrete fate of the German population in the east and with the desperate and sacrificial exertions of the German army of the east and the German fleet in the Baltic, which sought to defend the population of the German east from the orgy of revenge of the Red Army, mass rapes, arbitrary killing, and compulsory deportations.'<sup>214</sup>

The result was an empathy that lay with the Germans, not the Jews. Charles Maier described Hillgruber's description of these experiences, Germans and Jews, as 'two sorts

---

<sup>210</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, pp.188-189

<sup>211</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, p.189

<sup>212</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, introduction, p.9

<sup>213</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, p.35

<sup>214</sup> Quoted from Robert Moeller's *War Stories*. The Hillgruber quote comes from Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, pp.24-25

of destruction, one is presented, so to speak, in Technicolour, the other in black, gray, and white.<sup>215</sup>

The implications of Hillgruber's assertions which appeared in 1986 were something that struck at the 'nature of historical understanding to the self-conception of the Federal Republic of Germany.'<sup>216</sup> Habermas saw any form of revisionism, or rewriting of Germany's historic past relating to the Second World War, as 'symptomatic of a neo-nationalist resurgence...that wanted to rewrite the Nazi past in order to reinstate historical continuity and to provide the firm basis for a "positive" or affirmative German identity in the present.'<sup>217</sup> The key question, and the area into which Hillgruber firmly placed his work, was whether the Nazi crimes were unique, or whether they were comparable to those of Stalin. In this he was not alone. Nolte, another leading historian asked the question in the key article that triggered the *Historikerstreit* debate "Was the Gulag Archipelago not more original than Auschwitz? Was the class murder of the Bolsheviks not the logical and factual precursor to the race murder of the National Socialists?"<sup>218</sup>

Hillgruber acknowledges the difficulty of telling the story of the German withdrawal from eastern Europe when he affirms that one thesis says that holding the eastern front would allow the unspeakable crimes of the national socialist regime to continue.<sup>219</sup> He then observes that this thesis is not valid. By 24 July 1944 the concentration camp at Majdanek in Lublin had already been occupied by the Red Army, and Himmler from the beginning of November 1944 had given orders to cease the murder of the European Jews.<sup>220</sup> Further still, Hillgruber argues that the events at Nemmersdorf had shown the Germans what to expect if they allowed the Russians to rampage unchecked through Germany. To not hold the Russians back would mean, as Hillgruber quotes a German General as saying, that it was the German people (*unser Volk*) who would have to 'pay

---

<sup>215</sup> C. Maier, *The unmasterable past: history, holocaust, and German national identity*, Cambridge, Mass. ; London, Harvard University Press (1988), p.23

<sup>216</sup> Arno J. Mayer, 'Why Did the Heavens Not Darken? The "Final Solution" in History,' *New German Critique*, No. 53. (Spring - Summer, 1991), 175-191.

<sup>217</sup> Mayer, 'Why did the Heavens not Darken?', p.176

<sup>218</sup> *Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper on 6 June 1986

<sup>219</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, p.19

<sup>220</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, p.18

the piper' for Hitler's crimes.<sup>221</sup> As Hillgruber bravely observes, to understand the events between June 1944 and May 1945 one must look at the situation from the German perspective.<sup>222</sup>

He who desires to understand what had happened in the Third Reich which brought central Europe to its knees needs to grasp these events from the distance of history. ....he must have an overall view of the events of war (*Kriegsgeschehen*) in the time span of June 1944 to May 1945 from the German perspective....

However, it was to be his juxtaposition of the expulsions and the Holocaust that was to prove most controversial. Even the title of the work challenged the concept of the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Whilst politically there was little difficulty with Hillgruber detailing the barbaric actions that the Red Army inflicted on the German civilian populations of the east, he was by implication portraying the German army as heroic in its vain attempts to hold off and protect German civilians from the Red Army. By inference, this could be seen as supporting 'heroic Nazis.'

In the space of a very short introduction, Hillgruber had transformed previously accepted orthodox German history. By linking the Jewish tragedy to the ethnic German tragedy, and blaming events on the crimes of the rulers of the Third Reich, Germans were now able to take their place amongst Europe's victims of Hitler. Hillgruber's writing is systematic and factual if controversial in places. He believes that to an extent, Hitler's plans for the east, except for the racial ideology element, were no more than an extension of Weimar German foreign policy.<sup>223</sup> Hillgruber was attacked and marginalised as a historian for a juxtaposition that has now become relatively common in the mainstream, that of the expulsions and the Holocaust as an comparison of victimhood. The importance of the debate was such that the West German President, Richard von Weizsäcker, declared in October 1988 before a congress of West German historians that "Auschwitz remains unique. It was perpetrated by Germans in the name of Germany. This truth is immutable and will not be forgotten."<sup>224</sup> Hillgruber's response was to say that he agreed

---

<sup>221</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, p.22

<sup>222</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, p.25

<sup>223</sup> Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang*, pp.46-47

<sup>224</sup> Eric Pace, 'Andreas Hillgruber, 64, Historian In West German Dispute, Is Dead', *New York Times*, May 25, 1989

and had 'never intended to "relativize" the past, but only to gain understanding of its times and conditions.'<sup>225</sup>

Even the title of his work, 'Two Kinds of Downfall' was controversial. Hillgruber, by choosing this title, had dared to challenge the 'uniqueness' of the Holocaust and make a direct comparison between Jewish and German suffering. The main area of attack which destroyed Hillgruber's career was that by sympathising with the German forces holding off the Soviet advance, he was allowing, by inference, the Holocaust to continue meaning that saving Germans was more important than saving Holocaust victims. Hillgruber had also largely ignored the main reason why Soviet troops were in Germany in the first place, the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941. By concentrating on the fate of the Germans, he was accused, again by implication, of having ignored the suffering of the other minorities, the Poles, Czechs, and Jews. Essentially in 1986, Hillgruber had highlighted and compared a series of events which led to him being compared with David Irving, and accused (falsely) of Holocaust denial. Years later Karl Schlögel was to ask 'why is it that Germans cannot talk about the expulsions and the Holocaust in the same breath? How is it that researchers looking at the 'Final Solution' cannot work with researchers dealing with the expulsions?'<sup>226</sup> Schlögel believes that the problem associated with the study of the expelled ethnic Germans is that the events lie within the shadow of other events, that is to say the crimes that led to the expulsions. 'The whole problem', Schlögel tells us, is that 'when one speaks of the post-war period, how does one speak in a measured manner of the 'double downfalls' which were so closely associated with each other?'<sup>227</sup> Schlögel then quotes from Andreas Hillgruber, 'The terrible events between the Autumn of 1944 and the Spring of 1945 required after the event, a treatment which world history sees in a singular manner....'<sup>228</sup> The 'singular

---

<sup>225</sup> Pace, 'Andreas Hillgruber, 64, Historian In West German Dispute, Is Dead'.

<sup>226</sup> Prof.Karl Schlögel 'Europa ist nicht nur ein Wort: Zur Debatte um ein Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen in Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive', Jürgen Danyel and Philipp Ther, Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive, (eds) 2003. p.7

<sup>227</sup> Schlögel 'Europa ist nicht nur ein Wort', p.7

<sup>228</sup> Schlögel 'Europa ist nicht nur ein Wort', p.10

manner' was a matter of empathy, or inability of the 'world' to see that there were victims that included Germans.

The real problem then as now was that the Holocaust marked the defining event against which expellee suffering and history would be measured. As Helmut Schmitz says '...the Holocaust attain[ed] the status of a foundational narrative for the present...Those Germans who lived through Nazism largely as bystanders are faced with the problem of how to address and represent their own suffering and losses during the war legitimately, while at the same time having to come to terms with the legacy of guilt and responsibility for Nazism and the Holocaust.'<sup>229</sup>

In summarising the role of Hillgruber in challenging and reassessing the role of the Nazis, it is clear that he had challenged the centrality of the Holocaust, and posited that there were other perpetrators equally as evil as the Nazis and that the victims of the war included Germans, for whom there should be empathy. His emphasis on German, not Jewish victims as well as his relativising of Nazi crimes with those of Stalin led to a heated academic dispute that would ultimately lead to the intervention of the president of the West German state (as noted above).

Another work that appeared in Germany in 1986 was the publication by Alfred-Maurice de Zayas of his volume *A Terrible Revenge, The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950*. Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, an American, had a distinguished law and diplomatic career with the United Nations.<sup>230</sup> Along with Hillgruber, de Zayas was one of the earliest 'respectable' academics to take up the cause of the expellees. His first work on the theme of the German expellees, 'Nemesis at

---

<sup>229</sup> De Zayas, *Nemesis at Potsdam: The Anglo-Americans and the Expulsion of the Germans: Backgrounds, execution, consequences*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1977

<sup>230</sup> De Zayas has been visiting Professor of International Law at the Universities of British Columbia (Vancouver), DePaul (Chicago), Trier (Germany), Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales (Geneva), Académie Internationale de droit constitutionnel (Tunis), and Universidad de Alcalá de Henares (Madrid). A retired senior lawyer with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, he currently teaches full time at the Geneva School of Diplomacy. For fifteen years he was President of the United Nations Society of Writers and today is President of PEN International, Centre Suisse romande. Source: Palgrave Macmillan

Potsdam' had been published in 1977. In the introduction to *A Terrible Revenge* he claims

'all victims of injustice deserve our respect. The crimes committed by the Nazis and Soviets against the Poles in the years 1939 to 1945 move us to existential identification with them. The merciless revenge that poured over the entire German civilian population of Eastern Europe, in particular in those sad years of the expulsions from 1945 to 1948 should also awaken compassion, for in either case the common people – farmers and industrial workers, the rich and the poor – all were the victims of politics and of politicians.'<sup>231</sup>

De Zayas does not mention the Holocaust, the Jews, or any other minority ethnic groups that suffered under the Nazis except in passing.<sup>232</sup>

His book *A Terrible Revenge* was, as he says, written 'to generate interest in this hitherto ignored tragedy [the German ethnic expulsions] and lead to a new respect for these forgotten victims and to more compassion and understanding for our neighbours.'<sup>233</sup> De Zayas in his introduction states that the book originated in a 1981 'prime-time television broadcast in Germany' which dealt with the expulsions, and in which he took part.<sup>234</sup> The book is based on the documentary script. The structure of the book is primarily that of eye-witness and participant reports of the expulsions much in the manner of Schieder's original *Dokumentation*. The book itself is a straightforward sequential history of the origins of Eastern Europe's ethnic Germans, the events leading up to their demise, and a number of personal interviews with the victims detailing the horror of the events. Not all of the interviewees are named, but the majority are. The comment on the back of the book cover indicates de Zayas' sympathies:

'...All over Eastern Europe, the inhabitants of communities that had been established for many centuries were either expelled or killed. Over two million Germans did not survive. Many of these people had supported Hitler, and for the Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians, and surviving Jews, their fate must have seemed just. However, the great majority – East Prussian farmers, Silesian industrial workers,

---

<sup>231</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.17

<sup>232</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.17

<sup>233</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.18

<sup>234</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, p.18



their wives and children – were guiltless. Their fate, sentenced purely by race, remains an appalling legacy of the period. ...<sup>235</sup>

The work is based mostly on personal memories by expellees, and the background research is detailed. De Zayas' senior position with the UN Human Rights Commission, his position as a United States citizen (not a German) and his indisputable humanitarian credentials meant that de Zayas' work was taken seriously in Germany and America: it opened a little known episode of post-war history to both the German, and English-speaking world, and unlike Hillgruber in 1986, his career remained unaffected. The book was greeted in Germany as dealing

‘...with a theme, that next to the Holocaust was at the very least central for the understanding and the political identity of the old Bundesrepublik...’<sup>236</sup>

It is likely that the reception of de Zayas' work was different to that of Hillgruber in that, like Schieder's *Dokumentation*, it dealt with a theme without linking the expulsions to the Holocaust, and de Zayas, unlike Hillgruber, was not a German who had participated in the war. The examination of Hillgruber's *Zweierlei Untergang* and de Zayas' *A Terrible Revenge* in this chapter has shown how two key academics looked at the expellee theme at the same period. Hillgruber, a German, was accused of relativising Jewish suffering, although the actual document is written in a reasonable and moderate tone. De Zayas, possibly because he was not German, and by profession was a lawyer, did not juxtapose the expulsions with the Holocaust, and escaped any professional consequences. The time was not yet ripe for a German to comment on German and Jewish suffering in comparative terms; even less so to suggest that Hitler had learned his craft from Stalin, thus comparing, and thereby relativising Nazi crimes. It was to be the work of another, the Jewish American journalist, John Sack, which would bring about major changes in the analysis of German expellee history, and its reception within Germany. It is to John Sack's work that this thesis now turns.

---

<sup>235</sup> De Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, back cover.

<sup>236</sup> Review of de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge*, by Rainer Ohliger: in H. Soz- u- Kult, an academic German language website for historians, 19 February 1997 found at <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=378>> [accessed July 2007]

## Chapter 5

### Historical memory: from 1993 to the present day

A key work which was to change the boundaries of what was acceptable within expellee literature appeared in the same year, 1993, as an English language reprint of de Zayas' *A Terrible Revenge*. This was a work by John Sack, a respected American Jewish journalist, called *An Eye for an Eye* which explored the work of the Office of State Security in Poland.<sup>237</sup> The style of this book borders on tabloid journalism, indicating that Sack had written it for the popular market. Sack's research is extensive and includes the use of many eye-witness accounts of events dealing with the handling of ordinary Germans in Poland after the arrival of the Russians. Sack was probably aware of the storm that his book would cause, and therefore had listed his extensive sources, which run to almost a quarter of the entire book. Primary sources used are extensive. They include official German government documents, and interviews with many of the persons concerned. Much of the material used comes from the *Bundesarchiv* in Koblenz, the same document source that was used by Schieder. Also, consulted is the Polish state archive in Katowice. The, mostly Jewish, individuals who are the perpetrators in his book and were interviewed by Sack, are listed by name and the role they played. Sack's book tells the story of the individuals involved in the torture and murder of ethnic Germans at the end of the war. He is alarmingly blunt in the portrayal of events. The Soviet area of occupied Poland contained approximately 10 million German civilians. The Soviets proceeded in 1945 to set up an Office of State Security staffed mainly by Holocaust survivors. These staff then proceeded to extract a gruelling revenge on the Germans, regardless of the role they may have played during the war. Prison camps were set up and deliberately organised and run on the lines of the former Nazi death camps. Sack states,

‘...the Office of State Security had 227 prisons for Germans, and each had its characteristic way of taking revenge for World War Two. The boys [Jewish

---

<sup>237</sup> J.Sack, *An eye for an eye: The Untold Story of Jewish Revenge Against Germans in 1945*, New York, NY, BasicBooks. (1993).

concentration camp survivors] used sticks in Breslau but splinters in Frankenstein, forcing them up the German's nails.'<sup>238</sup>

The best known, or most notorious, of these camps was Schwientochlowitz, about 30 miles from Kattowice run by a Jewish Holocaust survivor, Solomon Morel, who boasted that 'what the Germans couldn't do in five years at Auschwitz, I've done in five months at Schwientochlowitz.'<sup>239</sup> The Germans in fact far exceeded Morel's boast at Auschwitz, but the statement conveys the prevailing hatreds and animosities created by the Germans at that time. Morel, who died in February 2007, as an old man living in Israel, fought, ironically, an extradition request for crimes against humanity by the Polish authorities.<sup>240</sup> There are many appalling episodes depicted in Sack's book, but for the cool simple turning of the tables against the native German population of Poland:

'The roles were completely reversed now for Jews and Germans. Early on Friday, July 27, the Catholic and Jewish policemen swooped down on Bielitz, a village near Neisse, a couple of hundred homes surrounded by wheat, rye and barley fields peppered with red-petaled poppies. To the best of anyone's knowledge, none of the German farmers there were Nazis, but they were Germans and, at the H-hour, six in the morning, the cops started pounding on their doors, shouting, "*Wohnen hier Deutsche?* Do Germans live here?"

"Ja, ich bin Deutscher."

"Get out!"

The Germans got out.'<sup>241</sup>

Bernard Linek<sup>242</sup> confirmed the importance of this book when he wrote that '....the book by American journalist John Sack.....had far-reaching implications.'<sup>243</sup> These implications are the breaking of 'another taboo in the memory of the inhabitants [of Polish Upper Silesia].'<sup>244</sup> His main criticism of the work is that it relies on 'an over interpretation of individual accounts' and its 'fictionalized style of narration,' as well as

---

<sup>238</sup> Sack, *An Eye for an Eye*, p.87

<sup>239</sup> Sack, *An Eye for an Eye*, pp.106-107

<sup>240</sup> One needs to question whether politically the German government would have dared to do this.

<sup>241</sup> Sack, *An Eye for an Eye*, pp.128-129

<sup>242</sup> Dr.Bernard Linek is a historian specialising in Polish –German history, Schlesiisches Institut, Upper Silesia, Oppeln, Poland.

<sup>243</sup> Dr.Bernard Linek 'Recent Debates on the Fate of the German Population in Upper Silesia 1945-1950', *German History*, Vol.22 No.3, (2004), pp.372-405

<sup>244</sup> Linek 'Recent Debates', p.396

‘its heavy reliance on interviews with participants in these dramatic events.’<sup>245</sup> He concludes that it is this same heavy reliance on interviews that gives the work its strength, ‘since the several hundred accounts are made up not only of memoirs that fall within the framework of *Ostdokumentation*, but also of statements of Upper Silesians who remained in the region.’<sup>246</sup>

The book is important for expellee literature in that it has the endorsement of being written by a respected Jewish American journalist with impeccable research credentials. The initial attempt at publication in Germany failed: it was felt to be too radical and controversial, but its appearance in the English language still led to its recognition in Germany, a recognition that would lead to a German edition being published in 1993 shortly after the initial pulping of the Piper Verlag German edition. The publication of both language editions led to academic and media uproar with two extremes developing. Sack became an object of vilification amongst Jewish organisations.<sup>247</sup> On the one side, Jewish American organisations condemned the work as a total fabrication, and a number of proposed appearances by Sack on American television were cancelled.<sup>248</sup> On the other side were the conservative to extreme right who embraced the work as a vindication that if Sack, a Jew, could write such a work, it must have a real validity.<sup>249</sup>

One consequence of this book was that it brought the subject of the fate of the expellee Germans after the war into the German public arena. Sack had also introduced the theme

---

<sup>245</sup> Linek ‘Recent Debates’, p.396

<sup>246</sup> Linek ‘Recent Debates’, p.397

<sup>247</sup> ‘Not for sixty years has a book been so brutally suppressed as *An Eye for an Eye*. One major newspaper, one major magazine, and three major publishers paid \$40,000 for it, then were scared off. One printed 6,000 books, then pulped them. Two dozen publishers read it and praised it. "Shocking," "Startling," "Astonishing," "Mesmerizing," "Extraordinary," they wrote to Author John Sack. "I was riveted," "I was bowled over," "I love it," they wrote, but all two dozen rejected it. Then *An Eye for an Eye* was published by BasicBooks. It "sparked a furious controversy," said *Newsweek*—it was a best-seller in Europe but was so shunned in America that it became "The Book They Dare Not Review." <[http://www.johnsack.com/an\\_eye\\_for\\_an\\_eye\\_3.htm](http://www.johnsack.com/an_eye_for_an_eye_3.htm)> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>248</sup> See Daniel Goldhagen, ‘False Witness’, in *The New Republic magazine* Issue: December 27, 1993: available online at <<http://ftp.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/people/s/sack.john/press/goldhagen-on-sack.19931223>> [accessed 12 October 2008]

<sup>249</sup> See <<http://www.fpp.co.uk/online/04/04/wywf.html>> [accessed 27 February 2008]. The site is an American extreme right-wing website which gives full backing to Holocaust denial.

of Germans and as victims of Jews to the English-speaking world,<sup>250</sup> and added legitimacy to a theme that to the greater extent had remained within the borders which Hillgruber had attempted to change in 1986. De Zayas had done this earlier in *A Terrible Revenge*, but in a less dramatic, more academic, less personalised manner than Sack. Sack also concentrated on Jews as perpetrators, a subject not covered by de Zayas. The reaction indicates that although the expellee theme was becoming a subject thought worthy of discussion, works that too graphically portrayed the Germans as victims, and worse still, victims at the hands of Jews, were still unacceptable in some, mainly Jewish quarters in 1994. In Germany the book seems to have acted as a catalyst for the expellee organisation to encourage more research into the events of the war's end, though the major impact of Sack's book was that it allowed future mainstream publication of essentially controversial themes without causing any form of outcry. Sack had laid the groundwork, which a German journalist, Helga Hirsch would follow up and develop exploiting the theme of Morel and the torture of Germans by Jews, a theme now safely defused by Sack. Hirsch, by writing in German, risked little by way of external criticism.

Helga Hirsch, a German journalist and writer was born in 1948. She is a Warsaw-based Polish-speaking journalist for *Die Zeit*. Her father was one of the expellees, and he believed that the new generation of Germans should be told of the suffering that occurred at the end of the war. Hirsch says that it was the pulping of the entire German language version of Sack's book by PiperVerlag, that brought the subject matter to her attention. Her generation, she observed, 'had no understanding of the expelled, those who had been ousted, or for that matter, those Germans who had been bombed in Dresden, Hamburg and Cologne.'<sup>251</sup> Hirsch has written a series of books around the theme of the German expulsions. Her 1998 book, *Die Rache der Opfer (The Revenge of the Victims)* on Germans in Polish Camps 1944-1950, concentrates on the telling of the story with emphasis on the German survivors. Like Sack, she addresses Solomon Morel and the events within the camp he commanded at Schwientochlowitz in a chapter entitled 'Where is my father buried?' Hirsch devotes a large part of the latter section of her book to

---

<sup>250</sup> De Zayas had done this earlier in *A Terrible Revenge* but in a less dramatic, more academic less personalised manner than Sack. Sack also concentrated on Jews as perpetrators, a subject not covered by de Zayas.

<sup>251</sup> H. Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer : Deutsche in polnischen Lagern 1944- 1950*, Berlin, Rowohlt, (1998), pp.7-8

Morel's origins and career.<sup>252</sup> Bernard Linek observes that like Sack's book, Hirsch's has also inspired controversy but he fails to elaborate as to the nature of the controversy.<sup>253</sup> The work is essentially a German-language continuation of Sack's *Eye for an Eye* and it continued the historical memory and victim debate within Germany. Linek regards this book as 'traditional.' He writes,

'...her work presents a rather traditional grasp of the issue and is clearly based on the methodology of the *Dokumentation*, complemented with an emotional and evaluative narration privileging the accounts of witnesses....Hirsch's work contributes little that is new to our knowledge of the fate of post-war Germans in Upper Silesia'<sup>254</sup>

Linek comments that Hirsch's complaint that she had difficulties gaining access to archival sources '...raises considerable doubts.'<sup>255</sup>

Hirsch was and is a member and representative of the major expellee organisations and therefore could be safely categorised as being in that particular political camp. She is a popular figure in *Vertriebenen* circles, and her work has generally been well received by them. Furthermore, she is influential in the highest German political circles.<sup>256</sup> As a keen supporter of the BdV and the daughter of a soldier from Breslau, she has been vilified by Polish academics. Adam Krzeminski, a Pole,<sup>257</sup> says of Hirsch that she seems to be happy to 'darken the Polish side of her critical history....' and she is happy to

---

<sup>252</sup> Hirsch, *Die Rache der Opfer*, pp. 152-180

<sup>253</sup> Linek, 'Recent Debates', p.397

<sup>254</sup> Linek, 'Recent Debates', p.397

<sup>255</sup> Linek, 'Recent Debates', p.397

<sup>256</sup> Hirsch was mentioned in a speech given by the German President, Horst Köhler on the *Tag der Heimat des Bundes der Vertriebenen* (Day of Homeland of the Council of Expellees) on the 2nd September 2006 in Berlin: '...At the same time I find the question worthy of a second thought that Helga Hirsch, who is very well disposed to the expellees has made...that where possible when the correct position has not been observed, one needs to try to make peace with oneself and the past. And sometimes it is better to accept fate. So, I have read Helga Hirsch, and I believe it is a good notion.' <<http://www.bundespraesident.de/Reden-und-Interviews-,11057.632658/Rede-von-Bundespraesident-Hors.htm?global.printview=2>> [accessed 2 March 2008]

<sup>257</sup> Krzeminski, a journalist, is chairman of the German-Polish Association and is editor of the Polish weekly *Polityka*. He was guest editor on *Die Zeit* and specialises in German-Polish affairs. See *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. A. Krzeminski, 'Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheits politik,' *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung das Parlament*, 40-41/2003 (Sept.2003 Bonn), pp.3-5

emphasise Polish repression against German prisoners.<sup>258</sup> He clarifies the significance of Hirsch's book:

‘...it brought the reality concerning the presumed revision of German history into the realm of the Polish public. As long as the Poles saw and criticised the dark side of their own history ....then all was well. That a German should comment on Polish repression of German prisoners and pass judgement on the mass expulsions was almost a public scandal.’<sup>259</sup>

The Poles saw Hirsch as a traitor, but the message, according to Krzeminski, that Hirsch was putting over, and believed in, was that each nation should only be concerned about its own victims. His justification for this statement is that Hirsch is a major supporter of the Centre against Expulsions.<sup>260</sup>

The historiography of the 1990s was ‘developed’ initially by John Sack. He entered territory in an emotive personal style that allowed German writers to develop the theme of Germans as victims without being labelled in a negative sense as revisionists. Sack said things that a German would be unable to concerning the role of Jews in the post-war Polish prison camps. The proof that Sack's book triggered nervousness within Germany was the initial pulping of the entire German print run. When Hirsch published *Die Rache der Opfer* the major criticism came from Poland, not Germany. Hirsch, with her Polish connections, and membership of the BdV had moved the debate one step further. Sack was a Jewish American who attracted the wrath of the American Jewish official bodies. Although the victims he portrayed were Germans, he portrayed the aggressors as primarily Jews, thus there is little by way of criticism of the book from Poland, or Germany. When Hirsch published *Die Rache der Opfer* as a book directly inspired by Sack her target of attack broadened from just Solomon Morel to those she saw as Polish war criminals.<sup>261</sup> Moreover, Hirsch's fervent support for both the Centre against

---

<sup>258</sup> Krzeminski, ‘Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’, pp.3-5

<sup>259</sup> Krzeminski, ‘Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’, pp.3-5

<sup>260</sup> Krzeminski, ‘Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’, pp.3-5

<sup>261</sup> Justin Sparks, ‘Polish man accused of “war crimes” against the Germans’, electronic article in the *Daily Telegraph*, 12 March 2000.< <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2000/12/03/wwar03.xml> > [accessed 2 March 2008]. This is an elaboration of Hirsch's theme, and the Polish reluctance to pursue those that the expellees regard as war criminals.

Expulsions and the efforts of the *Preussische Treuhand* (see chapter 7 for assessment), a group of Germans seeking legal recompense from Poland for the property they lost in the expulsions, means that she has firmly set herself in the BdV camp.<sup>262</sup> Sack and Hirsch also moved forward from Schieder's condemnation of the Russians, and Hillgruber's comparison between the suffering of the Jews and the Germans with a Russian common enemy, to directly accusing Jews and Poles of being perpetrators against Germans. Neither Sack nor Hirsch directly progressed the formulaic expellee history, but they moved the boundaries of what was acceptable as mainstream German history working within Germany. It would take Prof.Dr.Guido Knopp, a German historian working with a major German television station, *ZDF*, to shape and establish the formulaic approach to expellee history, and Günther Grass, one of Germany's leading writers of literature, to bring the expulsions into the German public arena, and challenge historical memory in 2002/3. At the end of 2002, Günther Grass released a fictional work, based on the experiences of an expellee family and the tragedy that befell them. This work was seminal in becoming the catalyst for what has been described loosely as a 'release of memory' on the theme, and the raising of the subject into the mainstream of German historical memory.

It is probably unusual in a historiography of this nature to identify a work of fiction as seminal, but in 2002, a left-wing Nobel Prize-winning (1999) German author, Günther Grass, best known for his 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*, published a novel *Im Krebsgang*, (*Crabwalk*).<sup>263</sup> Grass was born in 1927 in Danzig and he has been called 'the most important German-language writer of the twentieth century.'<sup>264</sup> Grass had made a number of pronouncements that ensured that *Crabwalk* would not be seen as the work of a right-wing fanatic. In 1991 he stated that Auschwitz was an 'open wound' and a guilt that

---

<sup>262</sup> As of 2008 Hirsch holds no official position with the BdV, although she is on the board for the Centre against Expulsions, and often speaks in favour of the BdV's aims.

<sup>263</sup> Grass, *Im Krebsgang : eine Novelle*. Grass was born 1927 in Danzig. Grass had personal experience of much that he wrote about with regards World War II. He served in the *Waffen SS* and was wounded just before the end of the war. He then spent time in an American Prisoner of War camp.

<sup>264</sup> Patrick O'Neill, *Günther Grass Revisited*, New York: Twayne, 1999, p.13.



would remain with the Germans for all time.<sup>265</sup> His reputation came under review when in August 2006 he revealed he had once been a member of the *Waffen-SS*. This revelation, coming four years after the publication of *Crabwalk*, was too late to mitigate the effect it would have, as a work written by a man seen as the conscience of the German nation.<sup>266</sup> The fact that a noted left-wing author, and supporter of Germany's SPD, was now sympathetically dealing with a subject dear to the political right acted as a major introduction to, or reawakening, of the expellee subject within Germany.

The book deals with the expulsions from the east, with particular reference to the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. Grass's narrator is a passenger on the ship as a foetus whose mother Tulla Pokriefke survives the attack by the Soviet submarine. She '...relentlessly exhorts her son to tell the story of another, forgotten German past, one in which Germans were not perpetrators but victims. Visions of the *Gustloff's* sinking haunt her. "You have to write about it," she tells her son. "You owe us that because you were lucky enough to survive."<sup>267</sup> The book also looks at the effects of the disaster on three generations of Germans. It is similar to much of Grass's work in that it deals with a coming to terms with the past. The title itself, 'Crabwalk', could be regarded as the way in which Grass sees the progress of history and its relationship to the past. History, or historical memory does not move in a straight line – sometimes it moves sideways in the manner of the movement of a crab.<sup>268</sup> Ann Fuchs comments that the sinking of the *Gustloff* is a 'ploy' by Grass to 'explore the cross-generational communication patterns of the postwar period.'<sup>269</sup>

In the same way that a book such as *an Eye for an Eye*, had been controversial for having been written by a Jewish author, Grass's politics made the effect of *Crabwalk* all the more powerful. Moeller writing in 2003 comments:

---

<sup>265</sup> From R.Moeller, 'Sinking Ships, the Lost *Heimat* and Broken Taboos: Günter Grass and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany.' *Contemporary European History*, 12, (2003), pp. 147-148

<sup>266</sup> 'Nobel Laureate admits serving in elite Nazi unit', *International Herald Tribune*, August 14, 2006, p.1

<sup>267</sup> Moeller, 'Sinking Ships', p.150

<sup>268</sup> Grass observed that the title meant a 'scuttling backward to move forward.'

<sup>269</sup> Anne Fuchs, in 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' to Generational Memory Contests in Günther Grass,' *German Life and Letters* 59:2 April 2006, p.1

‘The publication of *Im Krebsgang* (*Crabwalk*) has prompted a national sigh of relief that has resounded in much of its reception by the popular media. The mass-circulation weekly *Der Spiegel* was not alone in endorsing the need to recall a history – long put off-limits, it claimed – which featured Germans as victims, not perpetrators. “Beyond political correctness” – that silenced any discussion of German suffering – it now seemed not only possible but legitimate and necessary to tell stories of “the air war and the mass flight more or less without inhibition.....The time had come to acknowledge “Germans as victims” announced the headline in *Der Spiegel*’<sup>270</sup>

A review in May 2003 in *The Guardian*, to mark the publication of the English language version, sums up the effect Grass’s book had in Germany.

‘History, Grass seems to be telling us, is a maculate and vexed affair, bursting with ironies – but we should at least talk about it. In this, he is chiming with a recent resurgence of interest in the war in Germany, after 50 years of glum or contrite silence. With Grass it is not, of course, as it sometimes has been in the past and on the part of right-wingers, a desire to present Germans as victims, nor even to acknowledge “faults on both sides”; but simply the conviction that the second world war is as much a part of our grey and scabby history as anything else. Grass is never an especially gainly writer, and *Crabwalk* is not his best book, but it is hard to argue with its thesis.’<sup>271</sup>

It has been suggested that Grass himself feared the effects that his book might have on the German public. Dagmar Barnouw asks whether Grass really believed that ‘Germans, waving [his] new book would now all be rushing to claim victim status?’<sup>272</sup> Undoubtedly Grass has contributed as much if not more than many of Germany’s popular historians to changing a nation’s perception of its history. An example is an advertisement taken from the cover of *Gegen das Vergessen*, the DVD, headed, ‘Appeal for a School Competition’ and signed by Monika Hohlmeier, the Bavarian Minister for Education and Culture which begins:

---

<sup>270</sup> Moeller, *War Stories*, p.151

<sup>271</sup> Michael Hofmann, ‘The wreck of the Gustloff, Michael Hofmann reads Günter Grass’s latest attempt to probe the fur ball of modern German history, *Crabwalk*.’ *The Guardian*, May 10, 2003  
<<http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,6121,951634,00.html>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>272</sup> D. Barnouw, *The war in the empty air: victims, perpetrators, and postwar Germans*. Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press [Chesham : Combined Academic, distributor], (2005), p.91

Liebe Schülerinnen, liebe Schüler!(Dear Schoolchildren!) Why now? This is a question asked by someone else, not me. “Because mother said to me again and again...because I want to scream whenever I’m in water, but cannot....Because the truth is scarcely more than three sentences....Because now.....’ So says the Nobel Prize winning author Günther Grass in his latest novella *Im Krebsgang (Crabwalk)*. His fictional narrator asks himself why now – 50 years after the expulsions of the Germans from the east – this dark chapter of German history should now be addressed. He was an eye-witness to the events of the past, and had much to tell.<sup>273</sup>

Thus Hohlmeier, outside of the real National Socialist context of the expulsions, invites schoolchildren to understand a horrific event that affected their grandparents’ generation on the basis of a character created by a famous German novelist’s exclamation ‘why now?’ She continues:

‘The School Competition “The Germans and their eastern neighbours” will take place in the school year 2003/4 with this theme [expulsion] and the background to the theme of flight and expulsion. It concerns 14 million persons who were expelled from the former eastern German territories, and the settlement areas in middle, eastern, and southern Europe and will shine a light on this subject matter – with the backing of the Museum of Bavarian History’s *Wanderausstellung* (migration exhibition)...the question will be pursued as to how approximately an eighth of the refugees came to Bavaria and were able to find a new homeland.<sup>274</sup>

Possibly in an attempt at some form of inclusiveness, devoid of any awkward questions presented by Germany’s role in World War II, she tells these students that,

‘...also some of your classmates may have fled from the civil war in Yugoslavia....Today, as in the past, in order to surmount the consequences of flight and expulsion in Europe one needs to understand both sides of the matter, German, and that of her eastern neighbours. This will be conducive to reconciliation (*Völkerversöhnung*) in the light of the impending *Ostweiterung* (expansion east) of the EU, and the formation of a new spirit of neighbourliness in Europe. The contribution that the expellees can achieve will be looked at in due course.’

*Crabwalk* was one of the reasons to which German historians Jürgen Danyel and Philipp Ther attribute an increasing interest in the expulsions. Another reason was the demand by

---

<sup>273</sup> *Gegen das Vergessen, Die grosse Flucht*. DVD, United Soft Media, Munich, 2003

<sup>274</sup> *Gegen das Vergessen*

the central expellee organisation, the BdV, for a Centre against Expulsions, to bear a similar form to the Holocaust centres in Berlin and America. Further, according to Danyel and Ther, the historiography of the expulsions had increased to such an extent that the *Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung* (Centre for Contemporary Historical Research) and the *Zentrum für vergleichende Geschichte Europas*, ('Centre for Comparative European History') in Berlin decided to hold a conference, inviting contributions from not only German, but also Polish and Czech historians.<sup>275</sup>

After 2003 German historical memory took on an increasingly victim- orientated perspective, manifesting itself in particular in the imagery used to portray the history which related to the expellees at the end of the war. (See Appendix 5) Historical memory was moving rapidly out of the hands of the historians, and finding new homes with German politicians, and powerful sections of the visual media. What was becoming clear was that historical memory was increasingly being shaped by television. Popular documentary television series dealing with episodes specific to the expellees, such as the *Gustloff*, on Germany's main television channels now had an increasingly significant impact on developing historical memory of the expulsions in Germany, and it is to the work of its key exponent Professor Guido Knopp, that this thesis now turns.

---

<sup>275</sup> Danyel und Ther, 'Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive'.

## Chapter 6

### Historical memory: Visual imagery and Guido Knopp

From 2001 expellee historiography was becoming more formulaic in its appearance, thanks primarily to the work of Professor Guido Knopp, a controversial German historian.<sup>276</sup> Knopp took the key events in expellee history and turned them into a canon of expellee history. This was achieved by means of creating history by formula. He has spent much of his working life writing popular history, mostly related to Germany's National Socialist past, and producing documentaries for a number of Europe's well-known documentary channels. The syndication of his documentaries to the History Channel allows the effect to reach outside German borders. Since 1984 he has been in charge of the contemporary history department at *ZDF*, Germany's second largest public television company. Within Germany a number of his works, both books and DVDs, linked with his television series which concentrate heavily on the Nazi era, have become bestsellers. Knopp has a very real ability through his position at the German television station *ZDF* to influence how the expulsions and the Second World War in Germany are portrayed. Such was the concern among academic history circles that history was being reconstructed by Knopp through the medium of television, that the 46<sup>th</sup> German History Day Conference was devoted to the power of television producers to portray history in a non-academic, populist manner to 'millions of people worldwide' and their ability to legitimize that which is not properly researched. The concern was and is that television documentaries have evolved since the 1960s from the relatively straightforward manner

---

<sup>276</sup> Frank van Bebber, 'Aversionen gegen Herrn K, Geschichtssendungen von Guido Knopp sind beliebt. Historiker kritisieren die Qualität der Berichte', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 29 September 2006. < <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissenschaften/archiv/25.09.2006/2798830.asp#>> [accessed 14 October 2008]. Electronic report from the 2006 historians' conference dealing with the way history was presented on television where the quality of Knopp's work, and the nature of 'history by picture images' was under discussion. Norbert Frei described Knopp's style as 'staccato TV' and described his work as 'terrible.' However, Frei also observed that 'Knopp is a central element of German Television history.'

in which events were portrayed.<sup>277</sup> Historians at the conference were concerned that ‘history’ was being reconstructed. It was inevitable then that one of the main themes of discussion was ‘Herrn K.’ (Knopp). Knopp’s audience is acknowledged as being vast: A newspaper report commented:

‘Professors, teachers, and students discussed the subject of history-related pictures and images in relation to historical events. It was a matter of how historical events could be interpreted by the image-dominated Media companies. The struggle between meaningful opinions and the effects required by the media are getting stronger. Documentaries and fiction are increasingly becoming intertwined. Peter Funke (Münster), chairman of the Historians Association, stated “ we must not pull back from the debate: one should not wallow in effect created “Histotainment”<sup>278</sup> .....

The concern was the disappearance of the borders between fact and fiction: the taking of history and turning it into a television product that may or may not be accurate.

Knopp’s domination of popular German history by virtue of his documentaries created much debate at the conference with observations that Knopp’s history did not come with the benefit of ‘footnotes’ and that it was in its construction nothing more than ‘visual history pornography.’<sup>279</sup> Another historian, Gerhard Paul, warned that Knopp’s style of history by pictures gave a false picture of history and that there was danger in the conveying of history by structured layout and cutting of pictures. Paul then commented that such was his concern for Knopp’s methods and style of history portrayal that he had pulled back from the ‘world of pictures’ and taken up reading again.<sup>280</sup> The serious side to the comments from the conference shows that German historians are aware that their history is being rewritten in a way that many see as dangerous. One of the conference papers makes the point that through the constant repetition of certain pictures and images

---

<sup>277</sup> A bi-annual 4 day event where themes in German history are debated. The 2006 event was held at the University of Konstanz in September 2006. 3000 ‘interested persons’ attended the 2006 Deutschen Historikertages, < <http://www.uni-konstanz.de/historikertag/>> [accessed 18 February 2007]

<sup>278</sup> Bebber, ‘Aversionen gegen Herrn K’.

<sup>279</sup> Bebber, ‘Aversionen gegen Herrn K’.

<sup>280</sup> Bebber, ‘Aversionen gegen Herrn K’.

these images enter the collective conscious, but they have very little to do with the reality of what happened.<sup>281</sup>

This chapter will look at a series of mainstream documentaries, culminating in the work, written and visual of Guido Knopp, including the first ever on the theme of expulsion, which dates from 1981, *Flucht und Vertreibung*,<sup>282</sup> by Eva Berthold and Jost von Morr, and a key documentary by Guido Knopp in 2001, already mentioned, *Die grosse Flucht* ('The Great Flight'), *Gegen das Vergessen - Die große Flucht 2003* ('Against Forgetting, the Great Flight'), and the 2004 documentary *Die Vertriebenen, Hitlers Letzte Opfer* ('The Expellees, Hitler's Last Victims'), to show that these documentaries are constructed to a formula which can only have the effect of redesigning perceived reality leading to a form of history which many Germans are comfortable with and which cannot be evaluated objectively.

Television in Germany is an extremely powerful and influential form of dissemination of images and propaganda. A survey by Exeter University on viewing habits suggests that 90.2% of Germans watch television several times a week. (See Appendix 1 for a brief explanation of the structure of German television and audience figures).

'The same study showed that RTL had leapfrogged Das Erste (ARD) in 2001 to become the most popular TV channel, with the families surveyed watching it for 28 minutes per day, closely followed by Das Erste (26 mins), ZDF and the regional "third programmes" (25 mins). They are followed by channels which are broadcast only on satellite and cable - Sat 1 (19 mins), ProSieben (15 mins) and Kabel 1 (10 mins).'<sup>283</sup>

Of most relevance to the power of expellee documentaries is the fact that all of these channels show documentaries with the exception of RTL.

---

<sup>281</sup> Frank van Bebber makes the point that this relates in particular to the iconography of the Third Reich: 'the style of Doku-drama employed by Knopp has led to a high level of acceptance, *Glaubwürdigkeit* (believability) and recognition...the content and complexity of content has been reduced which has had the consequence of popularizing the events of the Third Reich and reduced it to the position where Knopp's books head the list of bestsellers on the basis that "Hitler sells."': Bebber, 'Aversionen gegen Herrn K'.

<sup>282</sup> *Flucht und Vertreibung* produced by Eva Berthold and Jost von Morr in 1981 and now available in a repackaged DVD format, 2005.

<sup>283</sup> Paul Joyce, 'Television and radio in Germany', University of Portsmouth internet article. <<http://userweb.port.ac.uk/~joyce1/abinitio/chap10-21.html>> [accessed 10th October 2008]

Television, Wulf Kansteiner believes with particular reference to *ZDF* programmes (between 1963 and 1993), provided ‘a fascinating perspective on the development of the collective memory of the Nazi period in the Federal Republic of Germany.’<sup>284</sup> In relation to these programmes which were centred around the Holocaust and the Nazi period the results are

‘that television played a crucial role in the process of coming to terms with the Nazi past, because the medium relayed to a larger national audience the interpretations of Nazism that were originally developed by historians, writers and journalists in Germany and abroad. In this process, scriptwriters, directors and TV administrators served as conduits between the intellectual elite, to which they belong by training and social origin, and the mainstream national public which they serve.’<sup>285</sup>

Tobias Ebbrecht, in a 2004 article dealing with the distorting effect of film and television on expellee history, comments that

‘the filmed eye-witness accounts of contemporary witnesses tends to eliminate the differences between perpetrators and victims ... as does the production and editing technique. The result is a historical levelling, which, in the land of the perpetrator is a welcome exoneration, but elsewhere it is seen as a threatening matter.’<sup>286</sup>

He believes that a key example of the genre that distorts, or at least levels Germany’s historical past, is Guido Knopp’s *Die grosse Flucht* (‘The Great Flight’). Tobias Ebbrecht is of the opinion that Knopp’s portrayal of German refugee history is responsible for the situation whereby Germans are now portrayed as the victims of the war. He observes that Knopp has become the history teacher of the nation and that he has mastered Germany’s past. He believes that Knopp’s use of the word ‘Holocaust’ in conjunction with ‘all victims’ has allowed Knopp to not only politically cleanse Germany’s dubious past history, but also to aesthetically cleanse it. The linking of the words, ‘Holocaust’ and ‘all victims’ under the label of *Flucht und Vertreibung* allows the crimes within Germany’s

---

<sup>284</sup> Kansteiner researched 1200 programmes dealing with programmes on Nazism and the Holocaust on *ZDF* between 1963 and 1993. Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Nazis, Viewers and Statistics: Television History, Television Audience Research and Collective Memory in West Germany,’ *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2004 vol.39 (4), pp. 575-598

<sup>285</sup> Kansteiner, ‘Nazis, Viewers and Statistics’, p.2

<sup>286</sup> Tobias Ebbrecht, internet article, *Die grosse Zerstreuung: Heimat-TV im deutschen Geschichtsfernsehen*. December 2004, pp.3-31 available at <[http://www.rosalux.de/cms/fileadmin/rls\\_uploads/pdfs/050307\\_dtn\\_dossier\\_5\\_04.pdf](http://www.rosalux.de/cms/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/050307_dtn_dossier_5_04.pdf)> [accessed 3 November 2008]. Ebbrecht is an author on the subject of the development of television and film and lectures at the Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen in Potsdam, Berlin.



history to be buried, or turned aside.<sup>287</sup> Thus in a few words Knopp has transformed German guilt and crimes into German suffering, and with the words ‘victims of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’ the Germans have evolved from perpetrators to witnesses of a terrible history, in which they see themselves as the primary victims. Ebbrecht outlines the course of German expellee history as beginning with a genre known as the *Heimatfilm*. The word ‘Heimat’ has a deep emotional history. In essence it means home in relation to a homeland. The real meaning of the word is deeper: it evokes a sense of belonging in almost a *völkisch* racial manner. Most importantly from the viewpoint of expellee history, it knows no borders. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to look at the extensive German film genres, it is worth noting some of the observations made by Ebbrecht as to how in general terms films portrayed German history. He comments that the early films inspired a *Heimatgefühl* (feeling for the *Heimat* or homeland) and despite a similarity to the hills-and-mountain type portrayals of the National Socialist era, these films lacked any political content whatsoever. Conflict was portrayed metaphorically: ‘the crimes of the Germans and the war were an anathema in these films.’<sup>288</sup> Typically these films were devoid of the allied armies, and those of the Russians and Poles make no appearance. War and crimes are a reality for the expellees, but these early representations create a non-real history, or alternative history which gave comfort to the audience. They could identify with their own memories of the war, one in which they suffered. Thus Ebbrecht believes that the early representations of a blame-free cosy, alternative expellee history were the foundations for what was to follow. It was not until 1981 that a documentary was produced for television which introduced the Poles and Russians in the telling of the story.

This, the first of the *Vertriebene*-related documentaries, was a three-part documentary titled *Flucht und Vertreibung*<sup>289</sup> made within the time framework of the Cold War. The film was made by Chronos Films in conjunction with the German television station, Bavarian TV.<sup>290</sup> The documentary was the first German product that

---

<sup>287</sup> Ebbrecht, ‘Die grosse Zerstreung’, p.1

<sup>288</sup> Ebbrecht, ‘Die grosse Zerstreung’, p.2

<sup>289</sup> Ebbrecht, ‘Die grosse Zerstreung’, p.4 Eva Berthold and Jost von Morr, *Flucht und Vertreibung*, DVD, Polar Film and Medien, Gescher, 2005.

<sup>290</sup> Ebbrecht, ‘Die grosse Zerstreung’, pp.12-13

made use of eye-witnesses to the events of the expulsion from not only the victims but also the perpetrators.<sup>291</sup> Ebbrecht describes the documentary as focusing emotionally on the Germans who act as commentators to the on-screen pictures. More importantly from the point of historical memory,

‘The Soviet Union and the Red Army appear as faceless perpetrators. There is however some acknowledgement from German witnesses who acknowledge a general history of cruelty and occasionally refer to helpful Poles or Russians. The commentator emphasizes again and again the dichotomy of the situation relating to the victims of expulsion, and the Russian perpetrators. Against this, the role of the western allies plays only a small part. Because of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, the western allies are also portrayed as “victims” of the Soviet negotiation tactics.’<sup>292</sup>



Figure 5. Obverse and reverse of the 1981 documentary now re-released in 2005 DVD packaging portraying the standard expellee motifs of children, snowscapes, and trecks.

The documentary received historical recognition when the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* used it in Bavarian schools as a definitive historical account of the events at the

<sup>291</sup> Ebbrecht, 'Die grosse Zerstreuung', pp.12-13

<sup>292</sup> Ebbrecht, 'Die grosse Zerstreuung', p.4

end of the war. The accompanying explanation that goes with the *Bundeszentrale*<sup>293</sup> outline of the documentary structure is that it is a work that deals with the consequences and the fate of the refugees and expellees who were forced to leave their homes in the period 1939 to 1945. We are told that the first part deals with the forced resettlements that were a consequence of the Hitler-Stalin pact. The implication is that the resulting expulsions had little to do with the Germans as such: two powerful dictators came together, and the consequences were that innocent people suffered. A reference is made to the masses fleeing from a closely following Red Army, whilst the British launched air attacks on Dresden causing a large number of refugees to lose their lives. Ebbrecht comments of this three-part series of documentaries that there is little to inform the viewer of the context of the events surrounding the expulsions, i.e., nothing about the violent Nazi system of rule, or the National Socialists.

There is also nothing that explains the context of the Holocaust within the events described, and any references to unsavoury events are by insinuation only. Even these insinuations are minimal with a commentary that is careful to keep the focus of the film on the *Heimatvertriebenen*. The eye-witness commentaries are carefully controlled by the moderator in the nature of their recollections. The conclusion to the documentary states that in 1981 the fate of the expellees was ‘universalised’ to something that embraced the fate of humanity. (*Menschenheitsschicksal*).<sup>294</sup> Ebbrecht claims: ‘what the documentaries of the 1980s only hinted at was finally “unfurled” in 1995 by Guido Knopp’s historical documentaries.’ The documentaries that Ebbrecht refers to are *Hitler—Eine Bilanz* (1995).<sup>295</sup> Ebbrecht’s reference to ‘only hinted at’ is a reference to history portraying Germans as victims. These other documentaries that spanned the 1980s and 1990s will be looked at later in this chapter.

---

<sup>293</sup> A German government body run by the Ministry of the Interior with the aim of supporting democracy ie Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung Flucht und Vertreibung (Teil I - III) AV-Medienkatalog  
<[http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/FQ1BC1,0,0,Flucht\\_und\\_Vertreibung.html](http://www.bpb.de/publikationen/FQ1BC1,0,0,Flucht_und_Vertreibung.html)> [accessed 06 March 2008]

<sup>294</sup> <<http://www.mediacritique.org/vertreibung.htm> > [accessed 15 March 2006 ] (site no longer available October 2008)

<sup>295</sup> *Hitler – Eine Bilanz* was a 6-part German television documentary of 50 minutes per episode which was broadcast in November 1995. It was produced by ZDF.

The 1981 documentary itself is very much in the traditional mould in that there are three elements: the voice-over that guides the story line, the contemporary newsreel clippings, and the interviews, which presumably took place at the end of the 1970s with eye-witnesses. The documentary makes much use of the contemporary pictures of refugee trecks, and cameras from the aircraft of Russian fighter planes showing them attacking and strafing the fleeing refugee columns. We see numerous newsreel sections taken from contemporary Polish and Russian archives of Russian and Polish troops attacking the eastern German cities and the refugees fleeing amongst the smoking ruins of towns such as Breslau, Königsberg and Danzig. In the context of the evolution of historical memory the key expellee incidents are mentioned, but not to the depth or level of intensity which would be developed in later documentaries. Nemmersdorf is briefly mentioned, with contemporary newsreel footage, taken by the Goebbels propaganda machine, of dead women and children. Brief reference is made to the sinking of the *Gustloff* and the perils that faced the refugees whilst attempting to flee the port of Danzig by sea to the western section of Germany. Uniquely, as when compared to later documentaries, there is an extensive section on the bombing of Dresden by the allies in February 1945 which depicts allied bombers being shot from the skies by German anti-aircraft guns, and the bodies of burnt refugees lying stacked on the platform at Dresden railway station. There is an intense and emotional recounting of the events by a woman who was present at the time, who condemns the allies who 'should have known that Dresden was full of refugees.' The features that mark this documentary as the predecessor of a genre are firstly the unrelenting use of women, children, and old men featured fleeing, suffering, and dying in the early newsreels. Secondly, nearly all military scenes avoid reference to the *Wehrmacht*: where it is unavoidable, they tend to be shown in an almost benign defensive mode. The attackers, of which there are many clips, are the aggressive and destructive Russians. The British and Americans are rarely shown. Thirdly, eye-witnesses describe their personal experiences, but any references to Nazism or the role of Nazism in the events of 1944 onwards are notable by their absence. The eye-witness accounts place the expulsions purely within a historical vacuum devoid of contextual explanation. Finally, the documentary producers deal with the Hitler regime as

a partnership between Hitler and Stalin. Much is made of the Hitler-Stalin agreement of 1939<sup>296</sup> where the two parties agreed to ‘carve up’ Poland. The implication is that the Russians were twofold enemies, both in the context of being allies of the criminal Hitler regime, and secondly when they descended on the eastern German cities destroying as they went. Ehrenburg, the Russian propagandist, is portrayed in a newsreel clip and a copy of an article, in Russian, is shown goading the Russian troops to inflict a terrible vengeance on the Germans. By concentrating on the 1939 Hitler-Stalin agreement, the film detaches Russia from its post-1941 role as a partner of the western allies. Although it is the post-1941 role of the Russians that particularly concerns the expellees, it could be argued that because Russia had been an ally of Hitler, and in the barbarity of its actions no better than Hitler, Russia could be dealt with in political isolation.

Knopp’s work, *Die grosse Flucht* (The Great Flight) is the culmination of formulaic and restructured history which began with the 1981 *Flucht und Vertreibung* documentary. Knopp was to continue the role of the *Heimat* films in his documentaries. As head of the history department at ZDF he introduced many elements common to feature films: atmospheric music, quick aesthetic cuts, and an “embracing mixture of historical film material, fragmentary eye-witness interviews, and reconstructed scenes.”<sup>297</sup> Ebbrecht states,

‘these techniques lie at the root of Knopp’s series *Die grosse Flucht*.... It is a popular new form of *Heimat TV* that reaches into a layer of the people’s history (*Bevölkerungsgeschichten*)....it is a symbioses of the popular genre of *Heimat films* with a gesture towards the more scholarly documentaries of the 1980s....Knopp concentrates on the faces of the interviewees to show the immediacy of emotion....this film technique of treating the eye-witnesses in a “neutral manner has a levelling effect on the difference between “perpetrators” and “victims.”<sup>298</sup>

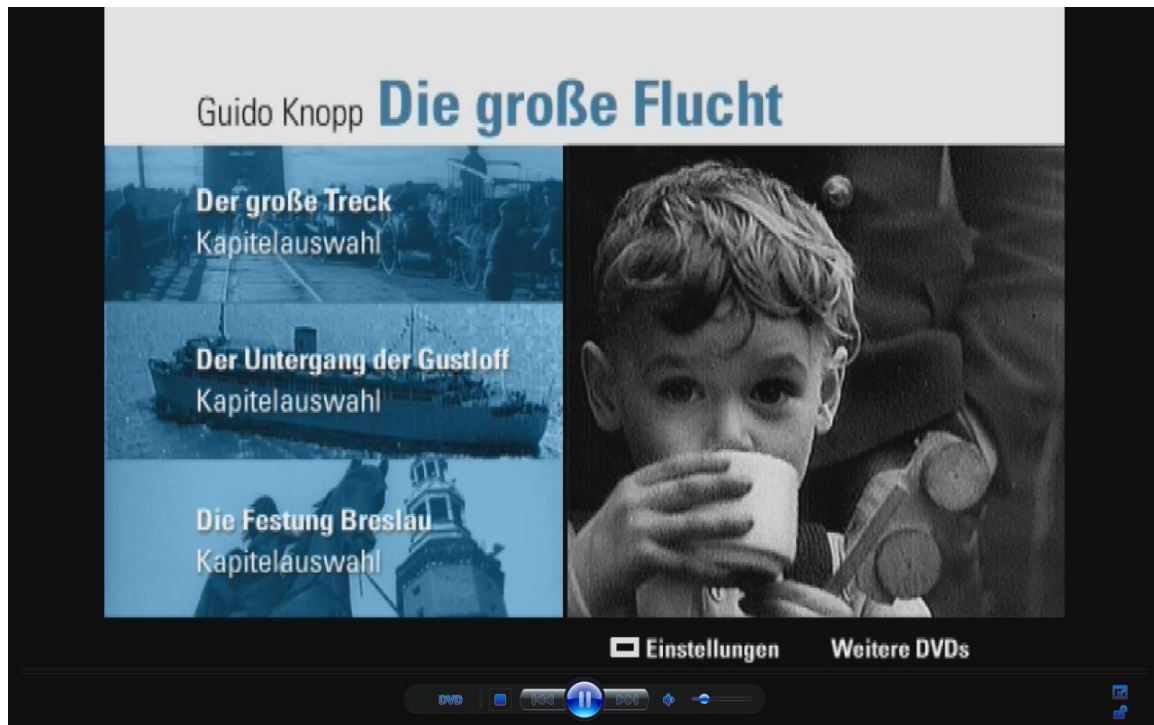
---

<sup>296</sup> The Ribbentrop Molotov Protocol of August 23 1939 which included the clause: ‘ In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish state the spheres of influence of Germany and the U.S.S.R. shall be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narew, Vistula, and San.’ See <<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/nazsov/addsepro.htm> > [accessed 27 February 2007]

<sup>297</sup> Ebbrecht, ‘Die grosse Zerstreung’, p.5

<sup>298</sup> Ebbrecht, ‘Die grosse Zerstreung’, p.5

The series had viewing figures of 5 million, or 16 percent of the available audience.<sup>299</sup> The work, a five-part series shown on *ZDF* at the end of 2001, and released on DVD in 2003, concentrates on the expulsions from the eastern territories which began in 1944. The book of the same name followed in 2002 and will be looked at later in this chapter.



**Figure 6.** The introduction to the first DVD highlighting the formula of expellee history. On the left from top to bottom the chapter introductions read, The Great March, The Sinking of the Gustloff, and Fortress Breslau. On the right, Knopp’s frequently used symbol of a history that should not be challenged, a child.

Knopp’s film differs from the three-part 1981 documentary in that it subdivides into five self-contained episodes and makes use of reconstruction where original footage is not available. The style is that of short, sharp eye-witness clips, interspersed with contemporary newsreel footage, or, where no footage is available, a modern reconstruction. The first chapter, *Der grosse Treck*, (The Great Trek) informs us that amongst the topics to be dealt with will be *Die Russen in Nemmersdorf* (The Russians in Nemmersdorf).

<sup>299</sup> Source Helmut Schmitz ‘The Birth of the Collective from the Spirit of Empathy: From the “Historians’ Dispute” to German Suffering, included in Niven, *Germans as victims*, pp.93-108.



**Figure 7.** Knopp uses the NS propaganda footage of the time depicting German soldiers showing disbelief at the fate of the villagers at Nemmersdorf.

What will be noted from the individual episode chapters is the prevalent use of women, children, and snowscapes, the Russian military either strafing refugee columns or driving tanks through the smoking ruins of German towns of the east, whilst homeless, starving, innocent German civilians look on. This differs from the structure of the 1981 documentary in that each of the sections of Knopp's series are broken into the same formulaic chapters as the book of the same name. Probably due to the demands of TV programming, the 1981 documentary lacks much of Knopp's formula. Most of the incidents are referred to, but in overall geographical terms. The 1981 structure, adapted to modern DVD format, is more that of an encyclopaedia. The film clips are short, and one needs to search for information in the relevant sections. Knopp dispenses with the need to search: the entire story is laid out within each chapter.



**Figure 8.** As the Russians begin their advance across Poland, innocent Germans are forced to flee. Note again, the imagery concentrates on women and children. (contemporary newsreel).



**Figure 9.**Knopp's enemy are the Russian and allied air forces. The commentary showing a clip of RAF fighters is '...the hunt for refugees...'





**Figure 10.** The commentary talks of the cruelty of the Russians, and their desire for revenge before cutting to a clip of eastern Germany, in the Autumn of 1944 where all is peace and quiet.

The second programme in the series is headed *Der Untergang der Gustloff* (The Sinking of the *Gustloff*). Sub-headings here include *Die Russen kommen* (The Russians are coming) and *Die Erinnerung bleibt* (The memory remains).

The documentary voice-over in sequence with shots of dead and dying refugees lying in the frozen wastes observes that in what could only be seen as a humanitarian move, Admiral Kanaris had diverted many ships to the harbours of the Baltic to assist in moving 2.5 million refugees westwards. The pointed comment is made that on the *Gustloff* itself, there were 10,000 persons, who were women, children and wounded soldiers. An interview follows with a soldier (there are interviews with several former soldiers who had been on the ship during the course of this section) who had been on board, and a clip is shown of soldiers, certainly not wounded, boarding the *Gustloff*, holding children in their arms. There is extensive colour footage of 1930s German holiday-makers wining, dining, and enjoying the ship's facilities though the ship's Nazi and *KDF* (Strength through Joy) associations are glossed over. Workers using the onboard swimming pool, and singing with arms linked are shown enjoying themselves on the promenade deck. The German soldiers who had been on board when the ship left on its final journey are interviewed as benevolent old men, describing their pride and awe at having been on board such a magnificent ship.



**Figure 11.** The soldier carrying a young child boards, what we are led to presume, is the *Wilhelm Gustloff* in January 1945

To reinforce the civilian element of the *Gustloff*, footage obviously not available from the ship as it departed on its final voyage is borrowed from a film<sup>300</sup> made many years after the event to reinforce the point that the Russian sinking of the ship was a war crime.



**Figure 12.** Knopp uses a fictional film in his section on the sinking of the *Gustloff* to reinforce the civilian nature of the tragedy that befell those on board. The film used is 'Night over Gotenhafen' one of the first films about the sinking which was released in Germany in 1959.

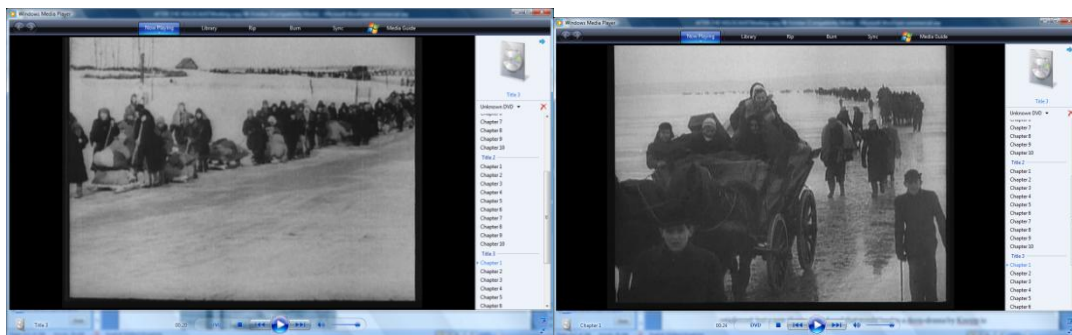
<sup>300</sup> *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen*, Director, Frank Wisbar, Deutsche Film Hansa GmbH & Co. 1959

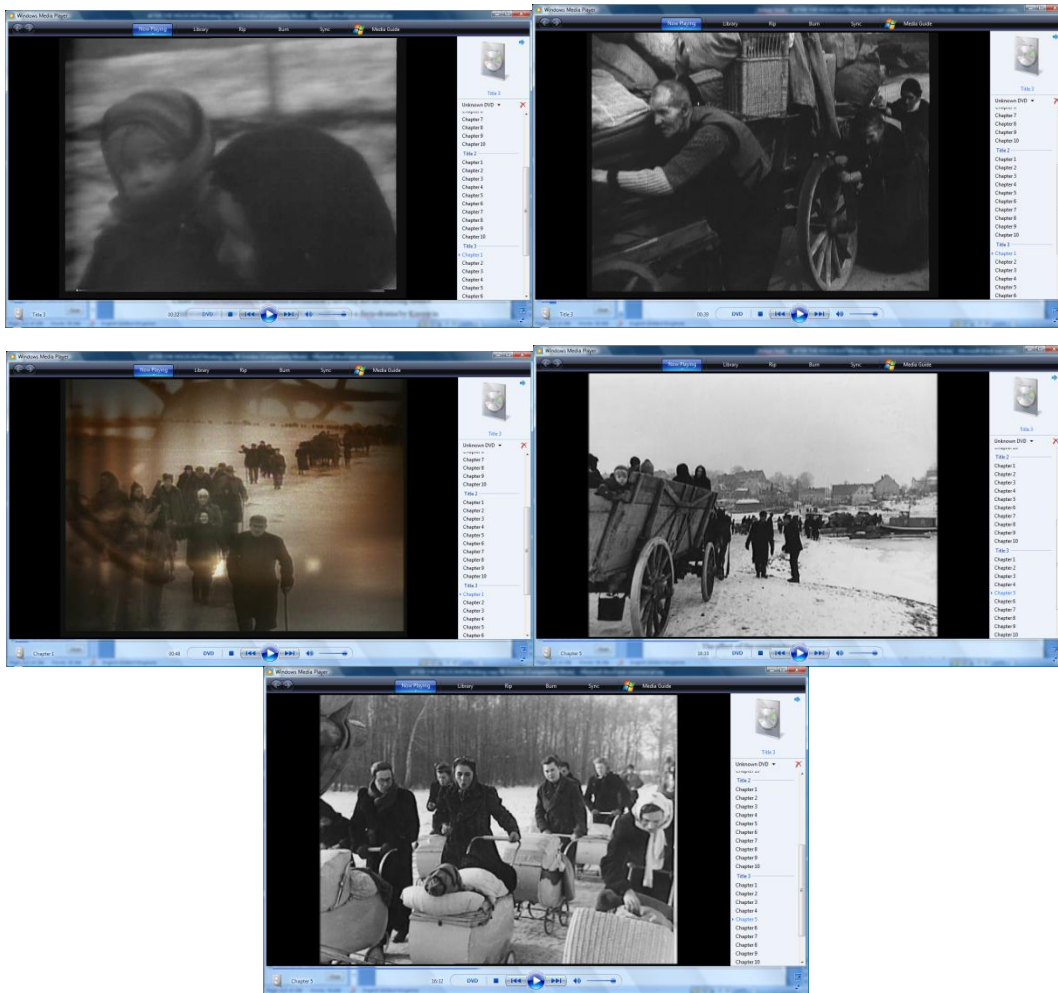


**Figure 13.** Knopp uses film from happier times on the *Gustloff* with no mention that the boat was for the exclusive use of those that were deemed ‘suitable’ by the National Socialists.

Knopp therefore uses fictional footage where original footage which could have reinforced a point is not available, and intersperses it with original newsreel footage. He then introduces modern footage of the area of the Baltic which witnessed the tragedy which is further designed to add a feeling of peace, serenity, and wrongdoing to the events of the sinking.

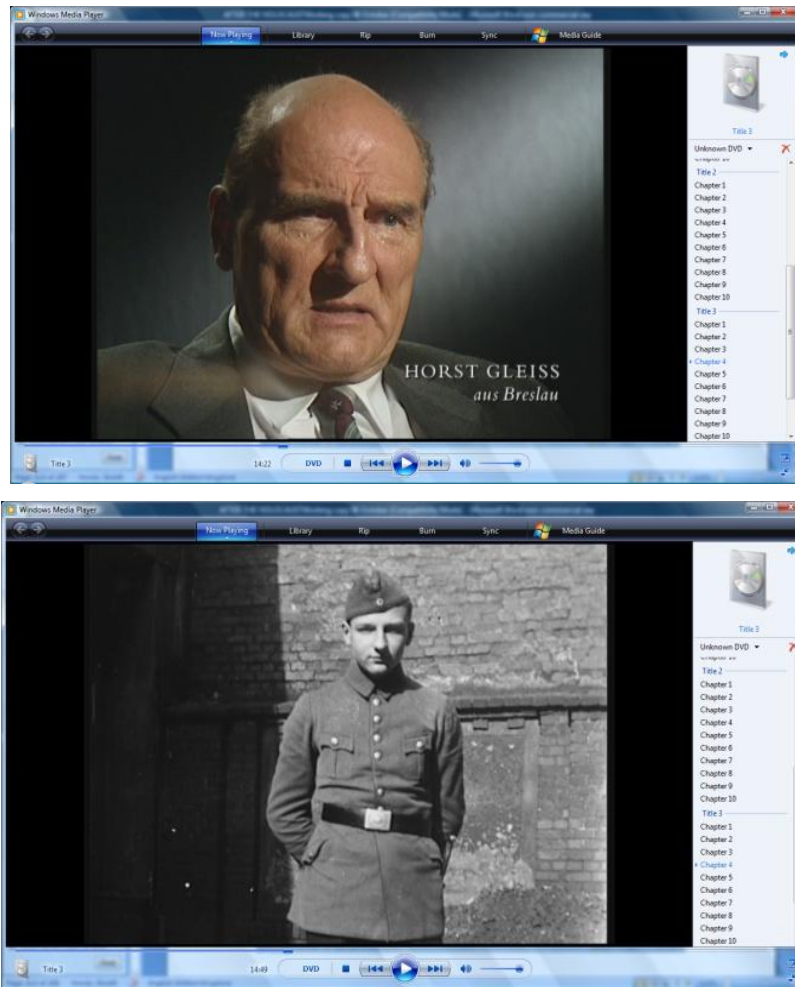
The third programme of the series deals with *Festung Breslau* or ‘Fortress Breslau’, a key part of the formula taken up and developed by Knopp. It follows a similar format to the previous sections of the series with opening sequences showing refugee trecks, advancing Russian tanks, and frozen refugee corpses spread over the ice. This forerunner sequence is to reinforce the human nature of the tragedy.





**Figure 14.** One of the opening scenes of the section dealing with *Festung Breslau* which reinforces the civilian nature of the events which were to follow. The key symbols of innocence are used: women, older men, and children in a state of despair.

The dialogue informs us that due to the advance of the Russians, the Silesian capital, Breslau, had become a safe, peaceful haven for around 200,000 refugees. Numerous contemporary newsreel shots of Breslau as a functioning city, and as a city being attacked by the Russians avoid all association with National Socialism. This was a city, an island that in Knopp's documentary has almost been untouched by National Socialism. An interview with a now ageing soldier and clips of the same soldier in uniform avoid any show of weapons or reference to Nazism.

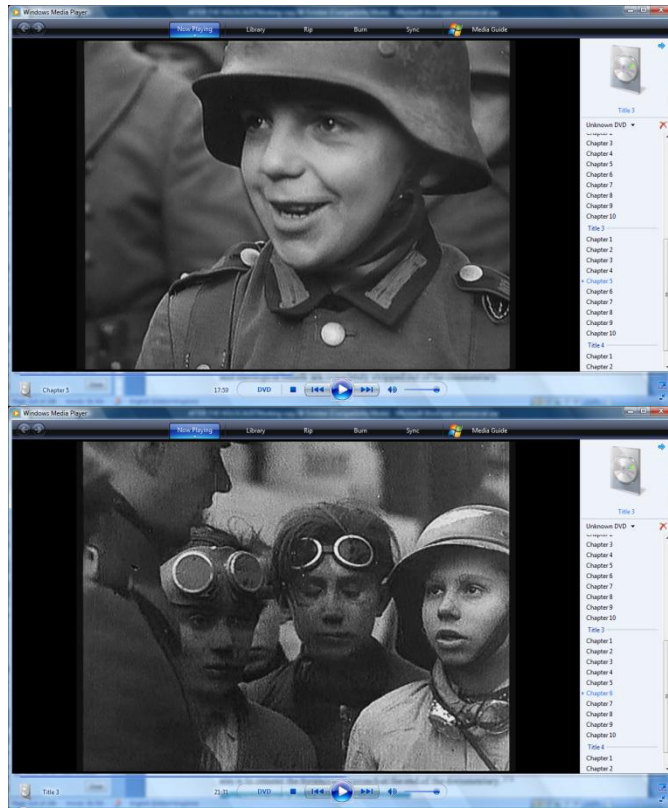


**Figure 15.** Horst Gleiss a ‘soldier’ at the siege of Breslau describes the horror of the events. Clips of Gleiss in his uniform of 1945 show no weapons or Nazi symbolism. The uniform could almost be seen as universal.

The commentary informs the viewer that Breslau was defended by a mix of *Wehrmacht*, Reserves, and *Volksturm*. The implication is that apart from the *Wehrmacht* who many Germans believed (incorrectly) to be innocent of atrocities in the east, this episode in expellee mythology, was being defended exclusively by the young and the old.<sup>301</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> Lukas, *The forgotten Holocaust*, p.5



**Figure 16.** Soldiers are shown as either very young or very old. In all depictions they are stripped of any sign of menace, both in demeanour and lack of weapon bearing.

The interviews with young soldiers of the time constantly refer to defending their *Heimat* or home. Political and ideological beliefs are completely stripped out of the commentary. Interviewees who were present express shock and indignation that the Russian soldiers occupied buildings in the town centre, and strafed the streets with machine gun fire. The misery and suffering associated with the intensity of the Russian attack are blamed squarely on the Nazi Gauleiter Hanck who used young boys, and girls to dig anti-Russian defences. The Gauleiter is accused of deserting the town by aircraft from a landing strip built by German civilians in the town centre, and leaving the innocent future expellees to face the consequences of the actions of the National Socialist regime alone. National Socialism is acknowledged, only to take the blame for the fate that befell the inhabitants of Breslau. In an interview, a former German soldier explains that when Breslau surrendered to the Russians two days before the end of the war was declared, he had ‘mixed feelings.’ Presumably he was happy that the war was over, but sad that Breslau had been taken by the Russians.

After the fall of Breslau, Knopp deals with the torture inflicted on German soldiers by the Russians. Amidst numerous sequences of women and children amidst handcarts, Knopp inserts a section from a summer, 1945 Polish newsreel which he claims is propaganda. The commentator explains that the expulsions were a *wilde Vertreibung* or uncontrolled in the manner in which they were carried. The Potsdam agreement declared that the population transfer should take the form of a humane *Umsiedlung* or movement of people, but, the commentator observes, the Polish newsreels showed no evidence of the violence and robbery that was common. An interviewee, an old woman, bitterly observes that ‘we were driven out, out of hate.’



**Figure 17.** Knopp uses a clip from a Polish newsreel that is meant to show happy ethnic Germans leaving in accord with the Potsdam agreement. The commentator accuses the Poles of lying as to the reality.

A sympathetic Polish woman observes that neither the Germans nor the Poles had deserved their respective expulsions.

The two remaining formulaic headings of episodes in the series are *Die Zeit der Frauen* (The Time of the Women), and *Die verlorene Heimat* (The Lost Homeland). The section, ‘The Time of the Women’ opens with columns of women and children heading eastwards through a frozen landscape. There is a short interview with Count von

Krakow, author of a book *The Hour of the Women* dealing with the flight of his family from the east.<sup>302</sup> The interview with the author of a book with a similar name, acts to reinforce the formulaic nature of this episode. The episode, in itself, is centred on the ordeals, trials and tribulations of the German refugees as they fled from the Russians. The reinforcement of this episode as a formula is significant in that by implication, and reasonable probability, the women were innocent of the crimes committed by the National Socialists, and other Germans, and were thus, in their very real suffering, victims of the Nazis. Knopp thus depicts the story without reference to earlier historical events, i.e., the brutality of the German occupation of these same territories. Using this same method, of extensive clips of contemporary refugee marches; Knopp transfers his attention from the Russian enemy, to the Americans. Without any mention of the military context of Swinemünde, i.e., the important German naval base, Knopp treats the attack by the American forces which took place on March 12 1945 as a direct and pointless attack on the fleeing German refugees. Many thousands were killed.



**Figure 18.** The new enemy. The American Airforce. An interview with an American pilot who claims that they were unaware that the towns were full of refugees. The logic therefore is that these towns were chosen as military targets.

---

<sup>302</sup> C. G. von Krockow and L. Fritz-Krockow, *Hour of the women :based on an oral narrative by Libussa Fritz-Krokow*, London, Faber, 1992.



Knopp claims that 25,000 ‘women, children and farmers’ were harmed in the air raids on Swinemünde. His interviewee, an old woman who was present as a child, calls the raid an attack on ‘the Dresden of the north...’ Whilst the bombing of Dresden has been a matter of controversy due to its possible lack of military relevance at a very late stage of the war, February 1945, Swinemünde with its naval base and railway marshalling yards was undoubtedly a genuine military target.

The next episode deals exclusively with the Sudeten Germans. The pitfalls here for expellee history are numerous. There was an overwhelming support for Henlein and the October 1938 German takeover of the Sudetenland where approximately three million ethnic Germans lived. The challenge for Knopp is how to relate the sequence of events so that they do not lead to a belief that the post-war expulsions of the ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia was in anyway justified.



**Figure 19.** This frame comes immediately after newsreel footage of Heydrich in Prague. It forms a direct juxtaposition with the expellee *bête noir*, Edvard Beneš, referred to as Heydrich’s *Gegenspieler*. The term means ‘opposite number.’

The manner in which this is achieved is to separate Henlein and the Nazis and treat them as separate entities. We are told that ‘the western powers allotted (*bewilligt*) the Sudetenland to the German Reich.’ We are shown newsreel footage of Hitler being greeted by cheering crowds in Prague, with a commentary stating that ‘Hitler saw himself as the liberator (*Befreier*) of Czechoslovakia.’ The effect is to distance Hitler’s wishes

from those of the ethnic Germans. We are told that the *Herrenrasse* (master-race) treated the Czechs badly and that 200,000 Czechs were forced to flee. Knopp tells us that ‘Hitler’s regime broke all promises and destroyed democracy within the former Czechoslovakia.’ Amid newsreel footage of the arrival of Reinhard Heydrich, probably one of Germany’s most notorious Nazis, Knopp cuts immediately to footage of Edvard Beneš, author of the Beneš Decrees, in exile in London. Beneš is still very much a symbol of evil and hatred in expellee historical memory. Knopp accompanies the commentary describing Beneš with Heydrich as Beneš’ *Gegenspieler*, or opposite number. The Knopp approach is to show Beneš in the same light as Heydrich. The effect would be to equalise the crimes committed by Heydrich on the Czechs, with the ‘crimes’ committed by Beneš on the Sudeten Germans.

In 2002 Knopp released the book of the documentary series.<sup>303</sup> The structure of the book is similar to that of the documentary with the exception that the book has a chapter titled *Die verlorenen Kinder* (The Lost Children) which is omitted from the documentary. The book, which comprises 416 pages, is not academic in style, lacking references, but offers a much more in-depth commentary on the events of the expulsions than the television series. The majority of the pages contain photographs of distressed expellees based on the images in the television documentary. Knopp uses a team of researchers, and claims to have interviewed over a thousand eye-witnesses and victims, including Russians, Poles, Czechs and Ukrainians. Knopp himself is not an entirely disinterested author, stating in his introduction that

‘my father’s family came from Upper Silesia. My grandparents, and both aunts at that time young women were forced to flee...my father was a prisoner, and the family found itself like many hundreds of thousands of families, taking a job in the first place where one became available.’<sup>304</sup>

The appearance and layout of the book is popular in style, with a cover portraying a pair of young female refugees, peering sadly, with a look of defiance towards the photographer, and clasping their belongings. (See fig.20). The book itself is important in

---

<sup>303</sup> G. Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht: Das Schicksal der Vertriebenen*, Munchen, Econ. 2001

<sup>304</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.6-15

analysing Knopp and the development of television and history based on image, in that approximately half the book is made up of images of expulsion, and that the author of the book, Guido Knopp, talks directly to the reader and puts forward his formulaic concept of expellee history.<sup>305</sup>



**Figure 20.** The cover of *Die grosse Flucht* published 2002, showing women with their belongings. It followed the TV series which came out in 2001.

The back cover is headed with the enigmatic statement that *Versöhnung braucht Offenheit* (conciliation needs openness), a theme echoed on the ZDF website, and then compresses the events of the expulsion where millions of Germans fled to the west in 1945:

‘They had to hold out until the last moment – a result of Hitler’s decision to hold firm. Then, in January 1945 as the Red Army set foot on German soil, hundreds and thousands of Germans were forced to take to flight. Through overpowering cold these refugees risked their lives powerless against the attacks delivered on them by the Soviets. Over 12 million Germans were driven or dragged away from the German territories of the east: more than 2 million failed to survive the Exodus.’<sup>306</sup>

Knopp, unlike in the television documentary, makes it clear in his introduction that this work deals with creating a more acceptable version of German historical memory for the German public.

---

<sup>305</sup> Sources for the images which are all contemporary to the events described are listed on the final page of the book. Nearly 50 sources are listed, the two key archives being the Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, and the Berlin Museum.

<sup>306</sup> Back cover of Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, 2002

‘When we think of victims at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then we should remember all victims of war and [the] Holocaust. We should also remember the victims of flight and expulsion and certainly not only the German victims. Expulsion was a 20<sup>th</sup> century crime that affected many: in Europe alone between 1939 and 1948 50 million people were forced to leave their homes. It is true that there were those who said we should not mourn our own victims because Hitler had started the war, and that Germans had been the perpetrators of the Holocaust. I regard this attitude as arrogant. It has nothing to do with relativisation or offsetting when we think of the dead: when we think of the dead who, in 1945, lay in the icy east Prussian streets: when we think of the dead who had perished in the Baltic, or went down with their ships, or those who were dragged off to Siberia, or died during the act of being expelled. The ability to mourn goes hand in hand with the courage for us to remember.’<sup>307</sup>

The message is that of inclusiveness. By remembering ALL victims of war, and inserting the word ‘Holocaust’ immediately afterwards, a duty to the 6 million Jews is acknowledged, but only as a part of greater human suffering. The sentiment that Knopp appeals to in humanitarian terms is reasonable, but one must ask whether this is history or emotion? The fact that the efficient, well-planned mass destruction of a large number of European Jews was carried out by Germans, many of whom lived and operated in the areas from which the subsequent expulsions took place, is passed over by Knopp. For Knopp causation is irrelevant, the dead are the dead and are deserving of equal reverence. This logic has the effect of smoothing the unacceptable face of German history. Knopp’s appeal for courage in remembering is similarly slanted:

‘It is a wonderful indication for new interchange within Europe that in the last 10 years, this courage [to remember] has now appeared, particularly in those lands in which the terrible events occurred. In Poland, the Kommandant of the Lamsdorf refugee camp has been brought to justice.’<sup>308</sup> In the Czech Republic the injustice of the expulsions is openly discussed....guilt should not be accumulated or stored up, but should be discussed. Conciliation needs, above all else openness.’<sup>309</sup>

---

<sup>307</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp 7-8.

<sup>308</sup> Lamsdorf was a prison camp used to hold German civilians at the end of the war. Conditions were appalling and many died. The Commandant, Geborski, was accused of war crimes against these ethnic Germans. The *ZDF* website for 1 December 2001 describes the court case against Czeslaw Geborski as the first time in Poland that crimes against Germans have been dealt with. Geborski, the website observes, pleaded not guilty but he had thrown prisoners into open fires. It is thought he was single-handed responsible for the deaths of 50 persons. < <http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/25/0,1872,2004473,00.html> > [accessed 20 February 2007]

<sup>309</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.8.

Knopp structures his sentences to allow a certain ambiguity. The ‘courage to remember’ within the context of factual history relating to the end of World War Two should be that of a defeated Germany, that had attempted to take over the lands to the east and subjugated the populations. In the process, Germany had acted with unspeakable savagery. The eastern ethnic Germans had mostly welcomed the arrival of Hitler, and stood to gain both economically and politically from the subjugation of what is now Poland and the Czech Republic. The remembering that he refers to is limited in how far it goes. Firstly, the fact that the Kommandant of the Lamsdorf refugee camp had been arrested by the Polish authorities was no more than a token gesture. By 2006, at the time of his death, he still had not been convicted despite charges having been brought in 2001.<sup>310</sup> The reasons for the trial lapsing were the ill-health of both the accused and the witnesses. Secondly, he fails to mention the overarching animosity towards the Germans for this period of the past that is still felt at all levels within Poland, and is coming increasingly to the fore. The evidence for this will be looked at in a later chapter. Finally he observes that in the Czech Republic the injustice of the expulsions is openly discussed. The expulsions are openly discussed, but as in Poland, the authorities believe that it is wrong that former Sudeten Germans dare to seek compensation from the Czech authorities for the disaster they underwent due to the defeat of Germany.<sup>311</sup> The separation of cause and effect can be seen further in the introduction:

‘[in 1941] Himmler’s minions left a trail of blood and million-fold murder from Finland to the Black Sea with the aim of making *Lebensraum* a reality. Now this was to rebound on the Silesian, Sudeten, east Prussian, and Pommeranian Germans. Himmler’s actions cost 13 million persons their *Heimat* and around two million, their lives.’<sup>312</sup>

The suggestion that Himmler’s action caused the expellees to suffer is a reinforcement of expellee history which blames the ‘National Socialists’ for the expulsions. Knopp completely disconnects up to 15 million expellee Germans who lived in the east under Nazi rule from the actions of the rulers. What Knopp ignores is the ethnic German

---

<sup>310</sup> Hans-Ulrich Stoldt, ‘Prozesse, Das Massaker von Lamsdorf,’ *Der Spiegel*, (02.06.2001), p.52

<sup>311</sup> Czech Radio transcript printed 26 March 2003. <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/39018>> [accessed 18 October 2008]

<sup>312</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.9

relationship to their National Socialist government which many supported. To interpret the paragraph in the way in which Knopp intends its meaning would be to believe that the ethnic Germans disassociated themselves entirely from the actions of the Third Reich, but were forced to undergo the consequences.

Looking briefly at the style of illustration and the way language is used throughout the book, although it was primarily women, the young and the old that suffered, there is an extensive use of these images that can be said to symbolise innocence, that perhaps suspends any critical questioning of why these events occurred in the first place. Knopp had taken the key elements of expellee history, as laid out in foundation form in the 1950s and early 1960s by Schieder. These were essentially of westward flight, suffering of the weak, and the merciless advance of the 'asiatic hordes.' These are reflected in *Die grosse Flucht* by numerous illustrations of women and children struggling stoically across ice lakes, and Russian tanks rolling over expellee convoys. Knopp emphasises the visual aspect of Schieder's collected reports. He then takes the point put forward by Hillgruber, that one needs empathy for those that suffer, and highlights almost exclusively the sufferings of the expellees, whilst almost completely ignoring those that suffered at the same time, in the same areas, namely the Czechs, Poles, and Jews, many of whom had also lost their homes, and were returning to countries ruined by the Germans during the course of the war. Effectively, Knopp took the most dramatic elements of these expellee histories from the television series, and then compartmentalised them into units that would allow both a book with defined chapters with beginnings and ends, a DVD of the series, and allow for catchy documentary titles. The viewer would be able to define episodes in expellee history and recognise these episodes as complete units of history within themselves. In both the documentary and the book Knopp has avoided the most controversial areas of expellee history, that of the camps in Poland where many thousands of Germans died, as told by Sack and Hirsch. With *ZDF* being a government-owned television station this would probably be regarded as too provocative: alternatively, the subject matter may simply lack available visual material, which is readily available for the mainstream expellee episodes. In 2002 Knopp was described by the BdV as,

‘a historian with the opinion that the crime of the expulsions (*das Verbrechen der Vertreibung*) should not be hidden, or silenced from the public view. One must encourage the viewing by people of “Die große Flucht” and encourage the discussion of his statement that ‘reconciliation needs openness.’ Expulsion is a historical burden and he who forces it into the shadows, will create even darker shadows....on this basis, his [Knopp’s] work is blessed strongly in this spirit.’<sup>313</sup>

A detailed examination of the book reveals that in his first chapter, titled, *Der grosse Treck*, Knopp sets the scene for the tragedy. Two thirds of a double-paged spread are covered with a contemporary photograph of a snow-scape in which three women ranging from young to very old, pull a sledge with a child seated upon a bundle of possessions, with anguished looks on their faces.

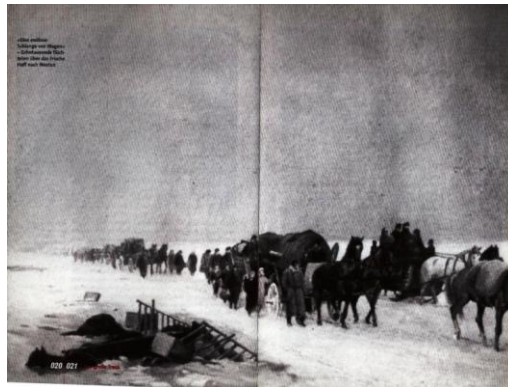


Figure 21. Illustration from the opening chapter of *die grosse Flucht*, entitled *Der grosse Treck*.

At the top of the page, (see illustration above) in a blood red type face is a summary of how Knopp defines *Der grosse Treck*. ‘East Prussia: January 1945. Russian tanks have in the last few days broken through on the eastern front. Hundreds of thousands of German

<sup>313</sup> electronic article available at <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=7>> [accessed 27 February 2007]

civilians flee head over heels from their homeland. They arrange themselves in ever growing ranks for the trek to the west. The caption for the picture reads ‘We tried to save our wretched lives.’ It continues: ‘Through ice and snow the refugees struggled on their journey westwards.’<sup>314</sup> The opening paragraph owes more to literature than descriptive history: ‘The landscape seemed endless: Sixty kilometres long and twenty kilometres wide the fresh ice glistened over the harbour. On the horizon, only dimly recognisable lay the tongue of land, the headland, which led to the open sea, which separated them from the Baltic.’<sup>315</sup> The enemy are the eastern allies, the Russians. On one page we are told ‘...it was a dangerous journey..the glistening white landscape offered absolutely no protection against Russian dive bomber attacks. Where high explosive bombs had torn into the ice despite temperatures of -20c, lay a treacherous layer of ice unable to bear any weight. Again and again were carts, people and animals plunged into the depths.’<sup>316</sup> On the opposite page is a contemporary photograph of a pair of Wehrmacht soldiers manning an eastward facing canon with a placard above the bunker-housing reading ‘We will protect Königsberg.’ The following page is a double-spread photograph of lines of helpless civilians crossing the frozen wastes with half-sunken wagons and horses alongside the columns.<sup>317</sup>



**Figure 22.** Knopp, in this double-page spread uses contemporary images that in their total appeal to human emotion and sympathy, lead to the suspension of analysis. In this contemporary photograph we have the standard images of suffering: snow, water, death, destruction, women, children, and the deadly results of Russian air attacks on the columns. Source. Landsmannschaft Ostpreussen.

<sup>314</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp. 16-17

<sup>315</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.17

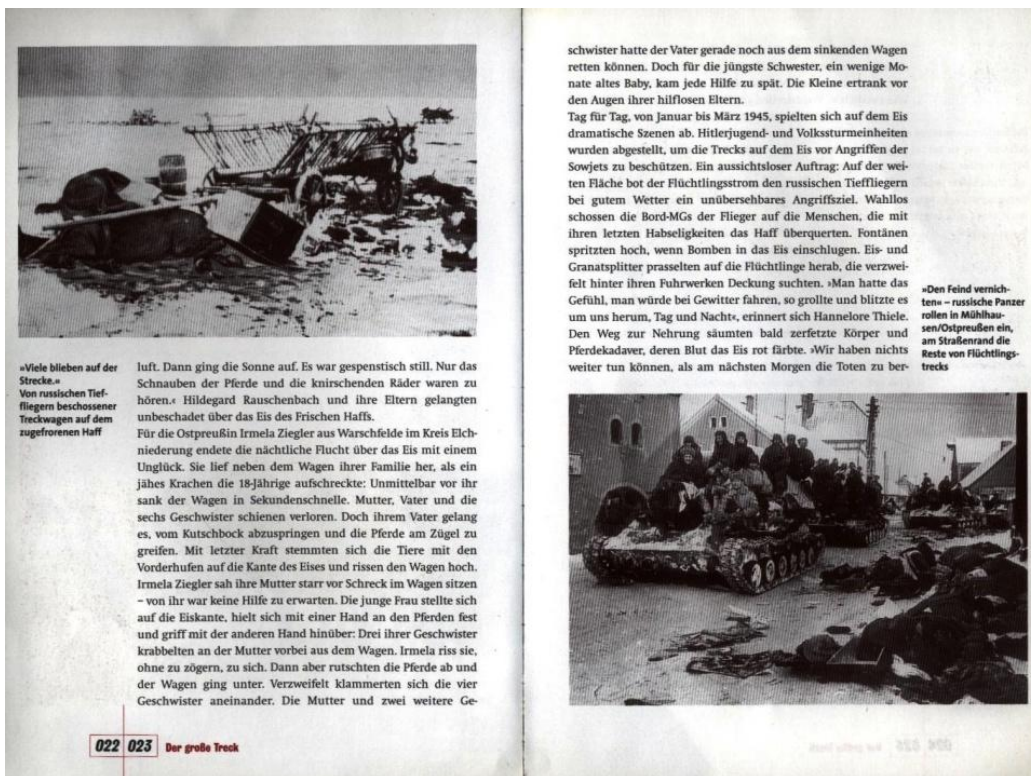
<sup>316</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.18

<sup>317</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.20-21



The following pages show contemporary photos of the results of the Russian dive-bombers on the civilians attempting to cross the ice. The insertion of personal tragic accounts of these events from those that were there create a distance between emotion and history. One such example is,

‘For the east Prussian, Irmela Ziegler...the nightly treck ended in misery. She walked next to the cart that belonged to her family when a sudden crack frightened the girl. The wagon sank right in front of her in a matter of seconds. Mother, father and six siblings seemed to be lost...but her father managed to climb onto the coach box and grab the horses’ reins. With a final effort he managed to pull horses and cart back onto the ice.’<sup>318</sup>



**Figure 23.** Knopp juxtaposes the images of death and destruction at the hands of the Red Army. The caption on page 23, (right) reads: ‘The enemy annihilates – Russian tanks roll into Mühlhausen, east Prussia: on the side of the street are the remains of the refugee columns. Source for photo page 22 is Landsmannschaft. Photo page 23 is Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin.

The opposite page shows a Russian tank with gleeful Soviet soldiers entering Mühlhausen in East Prussia, with the street lined with dead refugees, and the remains of

<sup>318</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.22

their belongings.<sup>319</sup> References as there are to the German armed forces take the following form: ‘Day after day, from January to March 1945, dramatic scenes were played out on the ice. Hitler youth and *Volkssturmeinheiten* were used to protect the columns crossing the ice from Soviet attack.’<sup>320</sup> The *Volkssturm* were the German equivalent of the territorial army created to defend the ‘Fatherland’ at the end of the war, comprising mostly the old and those that had not been fit enough to be drafted into the main forces. In effect, Knopp portrays the defence of the retreating German civilians as being in the hands of the young, who would have been innocent of the terror created earlier in the east, and the *Volkssturm*, a group of harmless men who again, were unlikely to have been involved in German atrocities in the east. This is safer than the use of *Waffen SS*, or *Wehrmacht* images. In another historical assertion Knopp tells us that the fall of East Prussia was the fault of Hitler and General Fieldmarshal Busch who had only allocated 500,000 men with which to protect a thousand kilometre long area in the east. Knopp tells us that ‘in a blind attack of bitterness this ‘army group’ (*Heeresgruppe*) became fixated on the idea every inch of German soil should be defended to the last man.....towns on the eastern front should be designated as fortresses, and defended to the last bullet.’<sup>321</sup> In dealing with the impending collapse of Königsberg, he acknowledges that the Russians had suffered for three years under German *Gewaltherrschaft* (violent rule).<sup>322</sup> The adversaries that Knopp then portrays are two opposing parties, Russian and Nazi, but both acting independently on a different plane to ordinary Germans, and to an extent ordinary Russian soldiers.

In the context of the latter days of the war, tragic as these events were, it is difficult in numerical terms to attribute any significance to these commonplace events. ‘Even today,’ Knopp tells us, ‘...many east Prussians still psychologically associate themselves

---

<sup>319</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp. 22-23

<sup>320</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.23

<sup>321</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.26

<sup>322</sup> Note that Ute Frevert in an article dealing with Germany’s *Geschichtsvergessenheit* says that in the Federal German Republic, the citizens became used to referring, or labelling the Third Reich as the *Gewaltherrschaft*, the reason for this being that it *entlastet* (unburdened) the people of the Republic. See Ute Frevert, ‘Der jüngste Erinnerungsboom in der Kritik’, in *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 40-41/2003, pp. 6-13

with this drama.... “one cannot even speak of Nemmersdorf” was one the reaction of many contemporaries.’<sup>323</sup> It could be argued that the terminology of something so awful, that it cannot be spoken about, is the terminology that one would associate with an event the size of the Holocaust, not the death of 62 persons in an East Prussian village within the context of mass murders and the thousands that died daily. The real anger and indignation for the killings is portrayed as follows at the point two days later when German soldiers re-entered the village:

‘The German soldiers reacted appalled at the display of brutality caused by the Red Army. Many swore revenge for the dead of Nemmersdorf and deplored the mindless murder of unarmed civilians.’<sup>324</sup>

Knopp virtually deals with the situation of the Germans in the former Czechoslovakia in a historic vacuum. The Sudetenland (Bohemia and Moravia) had been handed to Hitler by the allies in 1938. Hitler, in 1939, dismembered the remainder of the country incorporating some of it within a Greater Germany. Knopp observes that the ethnic Germans failed to fare any better in Czechoslovakia than they had in Poland:

‘.....in May 1945 the Czechs identified [amongst the Germans] those who had been in the military, officials and peaceful citizens....then the Germans were taken as forced labourers to work on the land or in Camps whilst the results of Czech investigations into who they were took place...the anger against the Germans expressed itself in targeted discrimination: a white or yellow armband with the letters ‘N’ for Němec or ‘German’ was compulsory.....the marginalisation of the Jews only a few years earlier now fell on the Germans themselves.’<sup>325</sup>

Again, there is a lack of depth to the reference to the past. For the Jews, the means of identification was merely an identification mode which would lead in most cases to death by shooting or extermination in a camp. The separation and identification of the Germans under the circumstances, at this stage was relatively benign. The book itself is a reflection both in its imagery used, and message of victimisation of Knopp’s television documentary of the same name.

---

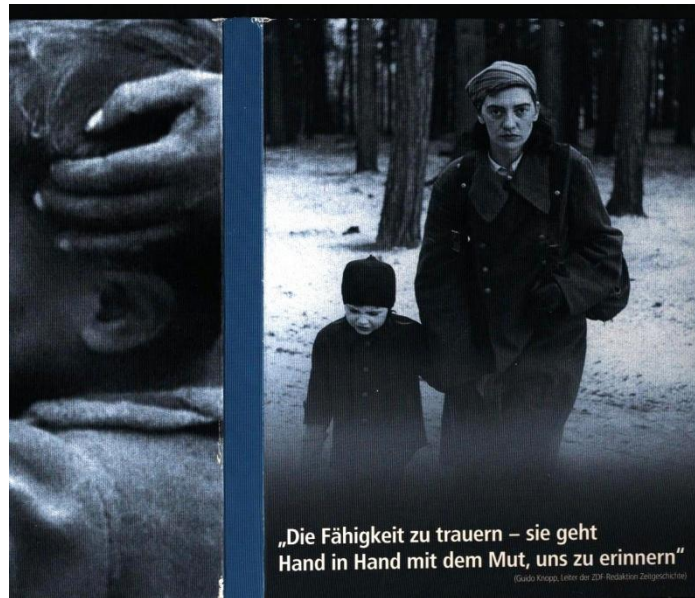
<sup>323</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp. 38-39

<sup>324</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.41

<sup>325</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, p.13

Another topic that has been explored in expellee history is that of the lost children. It is noteworthy, as mentioned earlier, that Knopp's book *Die grosse Flucht* contains a chapter not in the documentary series, entitled *Die verlorenen Kinder*.<sup>326</sup> In 2006, Knopp produced a documentary for ZDF which was shown on 5 December 2006 with the title *Wolfskinder: Deutsche Waisen 1945 in Ostpreussen* (Wolf children, German orphans in 1945 East Prussia). The introduction to the programme is emphatic in what it promotes. By the use of children, seen as symbols of innocence, any awkward questions can be avoided:

'They are known as "Wolf Children" – thousands of small boys and girls through flight and expulsion lost their parents. During the first years of Soviet occupation these children fled into the woods and struggled to survive. They were the last victims of the war that 'Hitler-Deutschland' unleashed...'<sup>327</sup>



**Figure 24.** The inner cover to Guido Knopp's *Die Grosse Flucht* cover from the DVD of the series portraying women and small children in a snowscape.

In moving on from pure documentaries to docu-dramas, in 2006 ZDF announced a 'trilogy which tells the history of a surviving German and Polish family at the end of the

<sup>326</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, chapter 5, pp. 216-287

<sup>327</sup> Quoted from the ZDF website, <<http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/8/0,1872,4081608,00.html>> [accessed 20th.February 2007]

Second World War, and in the chaos of the post-war years.’<sup>328</sup> The subject matter is fictional and revolves around two child victims of war that take to the forests in 1945, one German, one Polish. It is the story of how a

‘love between the German Elvira and the Pole, Fortek develops: a beautiful example of how it could be between Germans and Poles. ....The setting is that where the story originally took place, and use is made of original archive material and eye-witness accounts....’<sup>329</sup>

Knopp, having declared the docu-drama as ‘inclusive’, involving a Polish family, then reinforces in staccato form, in highly emotional language the suffering of the ethnic Germans at the hands of the Russians at the war’s end. He declares, and in doing so highlights one of his key themes, that ‘*Versöhnung braucht Erinnerung*’ or ‘reconciliation needs memory.’ After referring to his docu-drama *Die grosse Flucht*, as having laid the foundations for this reconciliation, and the courage required to embark on this journey he announces his new Polish-German collaboration. He says:

‘It is a good sign for new dialogue (*miteinander*) in Europe that despite everything, the courage has been shown, despite the current German Polish ‘discussions’ that are taking place in Poland, to create our trilogy *Die Kinder der Flucht* which is de facto a Polish-German production.’<sup>330</sup>

It could be seen as an indication of the aims that lie behind this documentary, and the obvious reluctance within Poland to embrace it, that in Knopp’s next paragraph he writes:

‘A Europe that is growing together cannot afford to leave unsettled matters in the junk room (*Rumpelkammer*) of history. Reconciliation, above everything requires openness, more so than just courage, we need to think about death: we need to allow the survivors the opportunity to remember.’

The credits for this three-part series suggest that this was an entirely German production. The production company was German, the actors, producers, advisors (which included Helga Hirsch) were all German. There are two Polish names listed, one under camera assistants and one under researchers.<sup>331</sup>

---

<sup>328</sup> ZDF, <<http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/8/0,1872,4081608,00.html>> [accessed 20th.February 2007]

<sup>329</sup> ZDF, <<http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/8/0,1872,4081608,00.html>> [accessed 20th.February 2007]

<sup>330</sup> ZDF, <<http://www.zdf.de/ZDFde/inhalt/8/0,1872,4081608,00.html>> [accessed October 2008]

<sup>331</sup> Produced and directed by Hans-Christop Blumenberg, *die Kinder der Flucht*, Three part series first shown on ZDF on 28 November 2006.

*Die Zeit*, in an article inspired by the *die Kinder der Flucht* production, was uncomfortable enough about the restructuring of expellee history to ask a series of questions: ‘where did the war come from? It is not recognisable here in this docudrama: the sad events occurred because a misfortune that came from a higher power.....’<sup>332</sup>



**Figure 25.** Knopp again uses the images of young children, orphans, and the snow to depoliticise the events of 1945



**Figure 26.** Ebbrecht refers to *Gegen das Vergessen, Die grosse Flucht*, 2003 as ‘history from the multi-media cutting room.’ On the cover, bottom right, it states: ‘Included are 4 hours of video cuts from the successful ZFD series *Die grosse Flucht*.’

In 2003 came a compilation DVD documentary titled *Gegen das Vergessen, Die grosse Flucht* (Against forgetting, the Great Trek). The work is an interactive encyclopedia of the expulsions using Theodor Schieder’s 1950s government-sponsored *Dokumentation* as a basis for providing the factual information, the rest is a synthesis of

<sup>332</sup> Evelyn Finger ‘Alle waren Opfer’, (everyone was a victim), *Flucht und Vertreibung II*: Hans-Christoph Blumenbergs manipulativer TV-Film, *Die Kinder der Flucht*, *die Zeit*, Nr. 48, (23.11.2006), pp.1-4

Knopp's *Die grosse Flucht*. The structure closes the circle that begins with Schieder and ends with Knopp's formulaic approach to expellee history. The DVD is supplied by the Bavarian Ministry of Culture completely free of charge to allow the teaching of schoolchildren. Containing four hours of Knopp's *Die grosse Flucht* footage there is an obvious connection with Knopp; however, the producers and compilers remain cloaked in anonymity. The imagery of the cover (see figure 26) is that of the Holocaust, women and children on a march peer out with haunted looks. The colouring of the cover even suggests the pyjama- style clothing so prevalent in the concentration camps.

Ebbrecht observes with some alarm that this DVD is 'history from the multi-media cutting room.' He wonders whether *Gegen das Vergessen* was an 'aesthetic folly designed to push the German suffering back into view.'<sup>333</sup> Ebbrecht believes that this documentary, *Gegen das Vergessen*, the 'construction kit' style employed by Knopp, and the fact that it is used to educate school-children is a cause for concern. He describes it as the re-ordering of picture materials, with a concentration on eye-witness interviews in which the differences between victims and perpetrators is made to disappear. Scenery, commentary and music are used to heighten the dramatic element. This is, Ebbrecht believes 'the writing of history on the *Baukastenprinzip* (construction kit) principle.'<sup>334</sup> Fragments are combined to create 'history' which Ebbrecht points out has very little to do with the truth. Another area relevant to the accuracy of the reconstruction of history is that *Gegen das Vergessen* has at its 'co-operation partner' the BdV.<sup>335</sup> The other partner is ZDF. In August 2003, the BdV held a press conference at which Erika Steinbach, the BdV president, and the publisher of the documentary, Michael Fleissner, were present. The purpose of the press conference was to give a presentation concerning this DVD, which the invitation observes is based on the eight-volume *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. The invitation to the presentation comments that the DVD is important as a teaching tool for the younger generation:

'This work is extremely important as it shows the younger generation this important part of German history. It is welcome as a valuable aid in portraying the

---

<sup>333</sup> Ebbrecht, *Die grosse Zerstreuung*, p.29

<sup>334</sup> Ebbrecht, *Die grosse Zerstreuung*, p.30

<sup>335</sup> Ebbrecht, *Die grosse Zerstreuung*, p.30

development of this history and the ability to understand the present discussions relating to the Centre for Expulsions.’<sup>336</sup>

The stamp of authority is then added by the Bavarian Culture Minister, Monika Hohlmeier, who, to introduce the DVD in a speech in Munich, described the subject matter as ‘one of the most sorrowful events in human history.’<sup>337</sup> The ‘blurb’ across the cover designed to sell the documentary proclaims: ‘Includes four hours of video out-takes from the successful ZDF series *Die grosse Flucht*.’ This, then, is a documentary created from visual sound-bites and clips from newsreels. The structure of the DVD itself is a cross between a documentary, based on Knopp’s *Die grosse Flucht* and an interactive online dictionary. The landmarks of expellee history are present and succinctly described.

The online dictionary section for Nemmersdorf makes reference to the Katyn massacre, which involved the cold blooded murder of approximately 15,000 Polish officers, almost certainly carried out on Stalin’s orders, but which bears no relationship to the nature or numbers to those at Nemmersdorf. In comparison Nemmersdorf was a trivial border incident in the context of the Russian fight-back. This is to reinforce the demonization of the Russians, and it could be seen as history out of context.

In the short period towards the end of 2006 which saw a flurry of *Vertriebenen* docu-dramas, ZDF released in December 2006 another Knopp docu-drama dealing with the events of *Festung Breslau*. In it German children, too young to be condemned as Nazis, are used by the stereotypical older Nazis as cannon fodder to be thrown at the other enemy, the advancing Red Army. There are two enemies in Knopp’s portrayal – the Nazis, and the Russians.

---

<sup>336</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=57&druck=1>> [accessed 27 March 2007]

<sup>337</sup> Speech made by Monika Hohlmeier in Munich on July 11 2003. Source Ebbrecht, *Die grosse Zerstreuung*, p.30





**Figure 27.** The Nazis, are treated as a separate entity in the defence of Breslau. Exploited children are used to highlight an innocence of the evil in which they, the children, are involved. The caption that accompanies this doku-staged picture states that ‘...in the rubble of the town, the Hitler Youth were sworn in by the regime.’

The abbreviated outline of the events at Breslau is interspersed with re-enacted scenes of suffering women and children.



**Figure 28.** The Breslau Death March from the *ZDF* website. An example of Knopp’s reconstructive methods – colour reconstructions have a greater immediacy and emotional impact than original black and white footage from another age.

Essentially Knopp has adapted cinematic technique and created a form of documentary (docu-drama) that is the culmination of a series of trends which relate directly to how the expellees have been portrayed on film over the course of the last 50 years. The imagery of these expellee docudramas, a relatively new phenomenon, is the same as that of the Knopp documentaries, except that where original newsreel footage was often used in the documentaries, the images of the docudramas is reconstructed. The images used, of women, children, snow, long marches, and the settings, such as *Festung Breslau* remain the same.

It could be argued that the work of Guido Knopp has severed links with the intellectual elite and created a version of history that serves a dual purpose, that of

cleansing and de-contaminating the expellee past, which tends to ignore historical reality, and provide history as entertainment. Knopp is not directly concentrating on collective memory, but historical memory: changing or ignoring the facts by way of manipulating words and images that will create a brand new acceptable past. By changing the way these 'facts' of history are portrayed, and reconstructed, this will eventually have an effect on collective memories as the new interpretations permeate the collective consciousness. The medium of television crosses borders, and the documentaries are sold to foreign networks which makes Knopp's portrayal of expellee history more pervasive than the written word alone. The end result of this form of imagery is that the expellee story, that of 15 million persons, has taken on the imagery of the Holocaust, and by implication adopts the same historical legitimacy as the Holocaust. The consequence is that Germans have become 'victims' of the Second World War, and a small clique, the National Socialists, and the Russians, and by implication the Poles and Czechs, have become the perpetrators. This move to show Germans as victims has led to increasing deterioration politically between Germany and her eastern neighbours. The key focus of Polish and Czech concern is the BdV who are seen as the key force in the rewriting of expellee historical memory. The origins and role of the BdV will be looked at in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7

### The Bund der Vertriebenen and the shaping of historical memory

The *Bund der Vertriebenen* is the main organisation which represents the expellees, and as such, is key to the manner in which the history of the expellees is shaped. This chapter will look at the BdV, and the controversies that surround it, because as a political force representing some 15 million Germans, it has the ability to influence thinking through its many publications: politics by way of its powerful political associations in Germany's coalition governments, and Germany's foreign policy, in that its lobbying power to gain reparations from the Czech Republic and Poland has led to increasingly acrimonious relations between Germany and these two neighbours over the course of the last decade. The structure, power, influence and origins of the BdV is a complex subject in its own right and beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is necessary to have a general understanding of the origins of the BdV and the nature of the power it wields in the sphere of expellee history. After looking briefly at the BdV's origins and history this chapter will concentrate on the role of the BdV after 2000. Probably the definitive work on the BdV and the nature of its influence on German politics is Pertti Ahonen's 'After the Expulsion, West Germany and Eastern Europe 1945-1990'.<sup>338</sup>

Ahonen believes that the expellee organizations, those that operate under the umbrella of the BdV and the BdV itself, are unrepentant, extreme, manipulative, and good at saying the right thing at the right time.<sup>339</sup> They have always swayed with the political wind. He regards the expellee organisations as self-serving, particularly discernable when every now and again, they allowed the mask of

---

<sup>338</sup> Ahonen, *After the expulsion*

<sup>339</sup> P. Ahonen, 'Taming the Expellee Threat in Post-1945 Europe: Lessons from the Two Germanies and Finland,' *Contemporary European History*, Volume 14, Issue 01, (Feb 2005), pp. 1-21

moderation to slip, and reverted to extreme right-wing type.<sup>340</sup> There are two areas in particular which Ahonen examines that are central to this chapter. He writes:

‘To be sure, the transgressions of the Third Reich were often present in the expellee lobby’s public discourse, but only peripherally. The usual rhetorical gamble was first to condemn any ‘violent acts’ committed by the Nazis, without going into details, and then to relativise that stance with two qualifiers...the organisations typically stressed that the expellees themselves had exerted ‘no influence’ on the small clique of fanatics who allegedly bore responsibility for the Third Reich’s wrongful deeds and that their condemnation extended not only to Nazi crimes but also to those of ‘all totalitarian regimes in the world,’ including of course, West Germany’s cold war nemesis, the Soviet Union.’<sup>341</sup>

Ahonen also observes:

‘In the diction of the *Vertriebenenverbaende*, [expellee organisations] the expulsions constituted not only a ‘crime against humanity and a violation of the basic ethical principles of our civilization.’ Because of their indiscriminate brutality and sweeping scope, they amounted to something much worse: ‘the greatest collective crime in history’ which endowed the expellees with a victim status comparable to that of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.’<sup>342</sup>

This then would place the history of the expellees alongside the history of Europe’s persecuted Jews. The war would thus have bred two sets of victims, both groups equally wronged against. This version of events has a number of implications: equivalisation of the fate of Germany’s Jewish victims; relegation of the Nazis to a clique, a cancer within German society ultimately responsible for the fate which befell millions of innocent Germans.

The origins of the BdV lie in the chaos that was post-war Western Germany. Poverty, hunger, and inadequate housing predominated, and as strangers from the eastern territories, there was initial hostility towards the expellees from the local Germans.<sup>343</sup> This, as well as idealised visions of the lost homeland, bound these

---

<sup>340</sup> Ahonen, *After the expulsion*, p.46

<sup>341</sup> Ahonen, *After the expulsion*, p.46

<sup>342</sup> Ahonen, *After the expulsion*, p.46

<sup>343</sup> Ahonen, *After the expulsion*, pp.1-21

people together. Small groups were formed, and one of the earliest was the ‘Emergency Association of the East Germans’ formed in June 1945. By 1946, as it grew, it expanded to include Germans expelled from all the countries to the east, and in 1946 renamed itself the ‘Association of German Refugees’.<sup>344</sup> Other local organisations were formed. In 1949 the *Zentralverband vertriebener Deutschen (ZvD)* was founded which saw its aim as the uniting of all expellees regardless of their origins.<sup>345</sup> It had a pyramid-like structure and a Federal Executive. It claimed to represent approximately 2 million members in the mid-to-late 1950s.<sup>346</sup> Throughout Germany were a number of ‘homeless societies’ or (*Landsmannschaften*)<sup>347</sup> of which by the early 1950s there were twenty. Many maintained lobbying groups in Bonn. The BdV was formed in November 1951 from the amalgamation of the various groups, and was now the primary organisation for representing the expellees.<sup>348</sup> It has been suggested in a well-argued article that the term *Vertreibung* (expulsion) in the title of the BdV is of major significance, and was carefully chosen by the organisation at that time because unlike terms in use at the end of World War II such as *Umsiedlung* (re-settlement) or *Ausweisung* (deportation) the term had a morally legitimising claim for the expellee organisations.<sup>349</sup>

The BdV is the umbrella group for a further 41 sub-organisations. It claims to be the sole representative of around 15 million Germans who have suffered, or are involved with the expulsion, persecution, or forced expulsion of Germans who were absorbed into

---

<sup>344</sup> Ahonen, *After the expulsion*, p.46

<sup>345</sup> See BdV website history section: <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/historie-1.php3>> [accessed 7 October 2005]

<sup>346</sup> See BdV website.p.4

<sup>347</sup> The term *Landsmann* translates as ‘countrymen’ or ‘compatriot.’

<sup>348</sup> See <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/historie-1.php3>> [accessed 7 October 2005]

<sup>349</sup> Dr.Samuel Salzborn ‘The German Myth of a Victim Nation,’ in H. Schmitz, *A nation of victims?: representations of German wartime suffering from 1945 to the present*, Amsterdam; Rodopi. (2007), pp. 87-104. Salzborn states that ‘As the representative 1959 work *Die Vertriebenen in Westdeutschland* explains, *Wort und Begriff des “Vertriebenen”* implicitly expresses the *Unrecht der Vertreibung*. (The injustice of expulsion). The term ‘expellee’ denotes *eine andere Würde als der Name Flüchtling*. In this sense one has to understand the *deutsche Rechtsterminus “Vertriebener”*, as *fortlaufender Protest gegen das Unrecht der Vertreibung*’. This is the reason why *Flüchtling* (refugee) or *Umsiedler* (re-settler) were rejected as collective terms:the re-settlement was supposed to be understood as passively endured injustice and everything that denoted responsibility or active participation was supposed to be removed from memory.’ Salzborn, ‘The German Myth of a Victim Nation’, pp.98-99

Germany.<sup>350</sup> The BdV has been led by Erika Steinbach since 1998. Steinbach's background and political associations are important in explaining the highly political nature of the BdV, and its influence on the restructuring of historical memory. Her father served as a non-commissioned officer in the *Luftwaffe* in Poland from 1941 and subsequently served on the eastern front and ended the war as a Russian prisoner of war. Steinbach and her mother fled westwards to Berlin.<sup>351</sup> She is a representative of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in Hesse, and has been since 1990 a member of the Bundestag for the party. She also sits on the board of *ZDF* and is chairperson of the 'Centre Against Expulsions', an organisation which wishes to build a permanent commemoration to the expellees, and which is meeting with strong political opposition from the Polish government.<sup>352</sup> What has recently increased suspicion from opponents of the BdV is the warm relationship between Steinbach and the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who is also the leader of the CDU.<sup>353</sup> What legitimises and makes the BdV such a formidable force within German politics is its position within German law. Under the *Bundesvertriebenengesetz* or Expellee Law of 1953 ethnic German expellees have certain rights which are enshrined in law: one of these rights is that of the 'inheritability' of refugee status. This law has had a major effect on the strength of the BdV ensuring that despite the amount of time that has passed since the events of the war, and the decreasing numbers of refugees, their recruitment is able to grow exponentially thus increasing their political strength and influence. If the BdV had not set itself up as a representative organisation for those Germans that had fled eastern Europe after the collapse of the Nazis, Salzborn believes that expellee history would have been confined to 'a few elderly people...telling stories about the former Eastern German territories, for example when they talked to their grandchildren about their own

---

<sup>350</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/historie-1.php3>> [accessed 6 October 2008]

<sup>351</sup> She and her family came indirectly to the west from Rahmel in West Prussia. See her brief biography on the Bundestag website: <<http://www.bundestag.de/mdb/bio/S/steiner0.html>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>352</sup> The Centre against Expulsions was an idea put forward by the BdV, of which Steinbach was the head, and the idea was supported by the CDU of whom Steinbach is a Bundestag member.

<sup>353</sup> Staff Reporter, 'Interview with the president of the federation of expellees: "Polish-German Relations can't get any Worse"' *Der Spiegel*, (11 April, 2005), electronic article <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,383325,00.html>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

childhood...’ Expellee history, Salzborn suggests, would be ‘...that of a closed chapter of German history.’<sup>354</sup>

This presentation of expellee history, as analysed by Ahonen, highlights the sufferings of the expellees in isolation to the surrounding history. Numbers play an important part in the BdV’s presentation of its history. The BdV puts the number of expellees at 16.5 million, with some 2 million dying as a result of the treck or of violence. When the German historian Ingo Haar (during a radio interview in 2006) challenged these figures, the BdV was quick to respond, as the need for accuracy strikes at the heart of its legitimacy. Haar felt that the BdV was relying on figures that were over fifty years old, and probably not reliable, and he referred to a 1974 study that estimated the number of deaths at between 500,000 and 600,000. Steinbach rebutted Haar’s claims, using the Federal Department of Statistics which gave the number in 1958 as 2,225,000 which according to her, still did not reflect the real, higher figures.<sup>355</sup>

There has been a determined effort by the BdV since 2000 to establish an exhibition and document centre dealing with the history of expulsion, called the Centre against Expulsions (Zentrum gegen Vertreibung) in Berlin, in the vicinity of the prominently placed Holocaust Memorial.<sup>356</sup> The centre was to be a building housing records of ethnic cleansing which allow the research of large-scale expulsions. The BdV looked to government funds for the memorial. ‘The original scheme was to have been a *Requiem-Rotunde* for the 16.5 million refugees and deportees from the previously German Eastern Provinces...’<sup>357</sup> The Centre’s proposed proximity to Berlin’s Holocaust Memorial immediately ignited controversy and opposition from Jewish groups within Germany and the United States. A number of prominent German historians warned that as ‘a mainly

---

<sup>354</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.87

<sup>355</sup> Steinbach further justifies the figures by quoting from the Federal Ministry of the Interior that stated in 1982 quite confidently that the numbers killed through *Flucht und Vertriebung* is between 2 and 2.5 million persons. In 1995 the *Kirchliche Suchdienst* (Church search service)...published a book which confirmed earlier statistics. See <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=496>> [accessed 28 February 2007]

<sup>356</sup> The memorial covers a large area in the immediate vicinity of the demolished Reich’s Chancellery and Hitler’s Bunker. It is a matter of 300 meters from the Brandenburg Gate, and visible from the slightly further distant Reichstag building.

<sup>357</sup> See Dagmar Barnow, *The War in the Empty Air*, Indiana University Press, 2005 p.143

national project [it] would provoke the suspicions of our Polish and Czech neighbours and cannot be in the common interest of our countries.’<sup>358</sup> This would in terms of historic memory set in stone the suffering of Germans and Jews: both would be commemorated in Germany’s capital as having been victims of the ‘Hitler regime.’ Redefining the perpetrator-victim relationship is

‘of extreme importance for their [BdV] image of history and the narratives of political history that are derived from it. The ultimate aim of a rewriting of the perpetrator-victim relationship is the moral and historical legitimization of their hegemonic interests, that is, the claim to financial compensation by the Polish or Czech state. Simultaneously, this allows them to play a passive or innocent role through the “construction of a victim community”, since the German responsibility for flight and expulsion is negated....The motivation of the expellee organisation is thus of a political nature rather than being concerned with a historically adequate interpretation of the past.’<sup>359</sup>

It is with this desire for an acceptable reconstruction that Salzborn believes the Centre plays such a key role in BdV aims. On the face of it, the Centre is ‘inclusive.’ As Salzborn observes, the use of the plural ‘expulsions’ ‘in the Centre’s title even seems to be a sign against inhumanity and crime, and thus seems abstract from the usual historical revisionism of the expellee.’<sup>360</sup> A comment made by Steinbach that she wanted the Centre to be placed in ‘historical and spatial proximity’ to the Berlin Holocaust memorial<sup>361</sup> is interpreted by Salzborn as taking the ‘flight and expulsion of the Germans out of its historical context,’ and that the location would ‘lend legitimacy to the claim that the Germans, too, had been victims, since they suffered under Hitler.’<sup>362</sup> The expellees, by proximity, thus attain the same victim status as those that died in the Holocaust. As Salzborn observes, the proximity of the Centre would turn ‘the expellee organisations

---

<sup>358</sup> . Dagmar Barnow, *The War*, pp.143-144. Those signing this statement included the Czech vice minister-president, two former Polish foreign ministers, the SPD president of the *Bundestag*, his CDU predecessor, and Günther Grass.

<sup>359</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.90

<sup>360</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.90

<sup>361</sup> Dieter Wonka, ‘Vertriebene für Gedenkstätte neben Holocaust-Mahnmal’, *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 29 May 2000, p.3

<sup>362</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.91



into representatives of a national tragedy.<sup>363</sup> He quotes from a comment made by Steinbach in May 2000 when she stated:

‘Essentially, the themes of Jews and expellees complement each other. The bestial racial ideology shall here, as there (at the Holocaust Memorial) be a theme of our Centre.’<sup>364</sup>

The implication is that the ethnic Germans were expelled for racial, not political reasons. Salzborn claims that

‘instead of putting the expulsions into a historical context, the Centre Against Expulsions would obscure the causal connections between Nazi *völkische* and genocidal politics in the East and flight and expulsion of the Germans from the eastern territories.’<sup>365</sup>

History in the manner that will be presented by the Centre, Salzborn believes, is removed from its complex historical reality and, by appealing to a de-politicised history, history is reduced to ‘to the criteria of “good” and “evil” without taking into account their contexts and political motivations.’<sup>366</sup> In other words, history is presented in an emotional manner in order to avoid moral or political judgement. Salzborn comments that the Centre, in removing any connection between the Nazi settlement of the east, its extermination policies, and the subsequent expulsions from collective memory, attempts to reconstruct the expulsions as a collective injustice. By doing so there would be ‘no individual responsibility or guilt on the German side.’<sup>367</sup> The purpose then of the proposed Centre against Expulsions, Salzborn believes, is to ‘situate the Germans’ own suffering in the centre of memory of the Nazi war.’ He continues:

‘What is new in this claim to victim status is the vehemence and aggression with which it is articulated, especially by the League of Expellees. New is also the

---

<sup>363</sup> Salzborn, *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.91

<sup>364</sup> Quoted by Salzborn, p.92 from Wonka, ‘Vertriebene für Gedenkstätte neben Holocaust-Mahnmal,’ *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, 29 May 2000, p.3. The original article reads: ‘Im Grunde genommen ergänzen sich die Themen Juden und Vertriebene miteinander. Dieser entmenschte Rassenwahn hier wie dort, der soll auch Thema in unserem Zentrum sein.’

<sup>365</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.93

<sup>366</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.95

<sup>367</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.93 In support of the concept of lack of individual responsibility Salzborn quotes the social philosopher Theodor W. Adorno who ‘noted in his *Minima Moralia* that the concept of universal wrong obscures any individual responsibility: *In der abstrakten Vorstellung des universalen Unrechts geht jede konkrete Verantwortung unter.*’

strategy of international focus, as the moral and political claims against Poland and the Czech Republic are validated under the guise of an allegedly global memory of a “Century of Expulsions”.<sup>368</sup>

The ‘strategy of international focus’ also has the effect of reducing the impact of the Holocaust as a moral counterbalance. By comparing German expellee suffering over the course of a century with non -World War II related expulsions, this creates generalisation, and dilutes the effect of the Holocaust as a competitive expulsion. This allows expellee history to neutralise the negative effects of the Holocaust on its own history.

The BdV has staged a number of exhibitions centred on expulsion. A highly controversial exhibition was opened on 11 August 2006 and was called *Erzwungene Wege - Flucht und Vertreibung im Europa des 20. Jahrhunderts* (‘Forced Paths - Flight and Expulsion in Europe during the 20th Century’).<sup>369</sup> The exhibition was seen by Steinbach as a stepping stone to the even more controversial aim of a permanent documentary centre in Berlin, or Centre against Expulsions. She said of the exhibition: “I believe that our exhibition will be an important step in the direction of opening a centre in Berlin documenting the expulsion.”<sup>370</sup> An article in *Der Spiegel* commented,

‘the exhibition seeks to portray Germans as victims of World War II and to rewrite history...An esoteric debate for historians? Hardly. It's an issue that has repeatedly strained Germany's relations with Eastern European countries and has particularly rankled next-door neighbour Poland. Indeed, soon after his election last fall, conservative Polish President Lech Kaczynski made it be known that the ongoing efforts of the German group Federation of Expellees - led by the vocal parliamentarian Erika Steinbach - to build a permanent center in Berlin devoted to post-war German expellees was unwelcome.’<sup>371</sup>

---

<sup>368</sup> Salzborn in *The German Myth of a Victim Nation*, p.97

<sup>369</sup> The exhibition ran from 10.08.2006 to 29.10.2006, at the Kronprinzenpalais, Unter den Linden 3, Berlin. Source: review giving political problems associated with Poland and the Czech Republic in relation to the exhibition. Matthias Stöckler, Institut für Geschichte, Universität Würzburg. <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/type=rezausstellungen&id=44>> [accessed 3 November 2008]

<sup>370</sup> Charles Hawley, ‘The Wounds of World War II, Remembering German Victims’, *Online Spiegel*, 10 August 2006, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,431115,00.html>> [accessed 8 October 2008]

<sup>371</sup> *online Spiegel* article dated August 10, 2006, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/0,1518,431115,00.html>> [accessed 25 February 2007]

Bill Niven believes that it was this temporary exhibition, that sought ‘to align the fate of the ethnic Germans more with that of the Armenians’ in order to ‘circumnavigate the Holocaust’ that highlighted the BdV’s true intentions with regards the permanent Centre against Expulsions.<sup>372</sup> Niven says that the exhibition, despite its apparently objective and critical stance, was even more destructive to German Czech and German Polish relations than the activities of the *Preussische Treuhand*.<sup>373</sup>

‘The exhibition avoided sentimentality and strong emotional appeals for the most part, an eschewal which lent it an air of objectivity and critical distance. But its manner was deceptive. For in essence, its presentation and interpretation of history were selective, tendentious and ideological. It came with a smooth urbane veneer, preaching the indivisibility of *humanitas*, pointing to the importance of conciliation, expressing concern at expulsions in the present – whilst actually pursuing a historiographical agenda more likely to cause rifts than stimulate consensus.’<sup>374</sup>

Niven identifies a number of areas where the exhibition deviated from a realistic portrayal of history. The events portrayed, he acknowledges, are true, it is the linking chains that deceive. He identifies some examples. The exhibition highlighted the fact that ‘Polish, Czech and Soviet national interests played an important part in the expulsion of ethnic Germans at the end of World War II and it made little reference to the issue of German culpability or the issue of revenge.’<sup>375</sup> The Czech section of the exhibition observed that ‘the Germans in the Sudetenland...were not *really* pro-Hitler; it was rather that Henlein’s Party had earned them a bad reputation.’<sup>376</sup> The Jewish expulsions from Germany are dealt with in a section called *Die Vertreibung der Juden aus Deutschland ab 1933* and avoids any discussion of the Holocaust with a statement that ‘the events of the murder of the European Jews is not a theme of this exhibition. This exhibition concentrates more on the step by step process of the expulsions leading to the

---

<sup>372</sup> See Niven’s article ‘Implicit Equations in Constructions of German Suffering,’ in Schmitz, *A nation of victims?* pp. 105-123

<sup>373</sup> A group of German expellees who are taking the Polish government to the European Court in order to claim restitution for damage caused when the Poles expelled Germans at the end of, and after World War II. The *Treuhand* is looked at in the chapter on Poland.

<sup>374</sup> Niven, ‘Implicit Equations...’ p.114

<sup>375</sup> Niven, ‘Implicit Equations...’ p.114

<sup>376</sup> Niven, ‘Implicit Equations...’ p.114

Holocaust.<sup>377</sup> Niven comments that ‘the very fact that such a statement was made smacks of bad conscience.’<sup>378</sup> He summarises the aim of the exhibition as being

‘...to allow the expulsion of the ethnic Germans to appear as one key scene in a history of repetition – a history in which surely innocent minorities, such as Greek Cypriots, Armenians and, it is implied, ethnic Germans – suffered at the hands of others. While the Jews were also included in this history, the exhibitors had to omit the Holocaust because a focus upon it would have made it clear that a *German* atrocity preceded the expulsion of ethnic Germans; that *German* perpetration in Poland and Czechoslovakia, generally, partly triggered the expulsions of ethnic Germans; and that the suffering and murder inflicted on Jews by *Germans* was of an infinitely more drastic order than that inflicted upon ethnic Germans by Soviets, Poles and Czechs. A focus on the Holocaust would have made it harder for the exhibition to sustain its tone of uncritical empathy for the ethnic Germans, and forced it to portray German perpetration much more comprehensively than it did.’<sup>379</sup>

The exhibition itself, like the proposed Centre against Expulsions, is regarded by the Poles as dangerous to the integrity of historical memory. They believe exhibitions and the proposed centre ‘could be misused by historical revisionists to marginalize or cast aside Nazi Germany’s responsibility for the colossal civilian suffering which occurred during the Second World War.’<sup>380</sup> A Polish MP was more forthright when he urged the Polish foreign ministry ‘to “react strongly to the exhibition”, saying its treatment of ethnic German expellees falsified history.’<sup>381</sup> Warsaw’s mayor, a former prime minister of Poland, cancelled a visit to Berlin.<sup>382</sup> The BdV and Steinbach’s background became a bone of contention for the chairman of the Polish Episcopal Conference, Archbishop Jozef Michalik, when he commented that ‘it must be kept in mind that German expellees’ leader Erika Steinbach herself was born in a town near Gdansk in Nazi-occupied Poland

---

<sup>377</sup> The original German statement reads: ‘die Darstellung der Ermordung der europäischen Juden ist nicht Thema dieser Ausstellung. Die Ausstellung zeigt vielmehr den schrittweisen Prozess der Vertreibung bis zum Holocaust.’ Niven, ‘Implicit Equations...’ p.117

<sup>378</sup> Niven, ‘Implicit Equations...’ p.117

<sup>379</sup> Niven, ‘Implicit Equations...’ p.118

<sup>380</sup> See online news site: Staff reporter, ‘Warsaw mayor cancels Berlin trip over refugee exhibition,’ *Expatica.com.*, 11 August 2006, <<http://www.expatica.com/de/articles/news/warsaw-mayor-cancels-berlin-trip-over-refugee-exhibition-32243.html>> [accessed 3 November 2008]

<sup>381</sup> Daniel Pawlowicz, is an MP for the nationalist League of Polish Families, part of Poland’s governing coalition. Source: *Expatica.com.*, <<http://www.expatica.com/de/articles/news/warsaw-mayor-cancels-berlin-trip-over-refugee-exhibition-32243.html>> [accessed 3 November 2008]

<sup>382</sup> Jan Puhl ‘Poles Apart’ *Spiegel Online*, October 26, 2006, <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,444037,00.html>> [accessed 3 October 2008]

as the daughter of a soldier who willingly served in Adolf Hitler's Nazi army.<sup>383</sup> He then commented that it was important to remember 'who was the perpetrator and who was the victim.'

Steinbach has also come under attack from the Polish President, Lech Kaczynski, who has let it be known that Steinbach and the BdV's efforts to build a centre in Berlin were unwelcome. The idea, in 2000, of creating a Centre against Expulsions, came about within the increasingly negative relations between the two countries. The situation then further deteriorated in June 2002 when Edmund Stoiber, a CDU member, and at that time Minister President of Bavaria, strongly suggested that there should be some form of *nationalen Erinnerungsstätte* (National Memorial) in Berlin. Within a matter of weeks the German parliament, (Bundestag) decided to create a Centre against Expulsion, but the location was not specified. The reception of this decision in Poland was initially mixed, on the basis that there was still some vagueness as to who would be commemorated, the expellees or all expellees of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Claudia Kraft comments that,

'... within Poland, during the summer of 2002, the voices against the Centre became increasingly prominent, no matter how the concept was explained. Critics of the Centre [within Poland] saw the attempt to create such a centre as an attempt to re-order not only the history of the Second World War, but the entire history of the conflict ridden German Polish relationship of the previous two hundred years. The purely national centred perspective of the Germans expellees as victims, with the Steinbach imprint so deeply ingrained, sent many Poles into "Alarm-Clock Shrieking" mode. They saw the whole concept as a general turning around of the Germans of themselves from being the perpetrators to the victims.'<sup>384</sup>

With regard to the hostility between Poles and Germans created by the BdV and its demand for a memorial, Krzeminski, a journalist specialising in German-Polish relations, observes:

'The debate over the 'Centre for Expellees' is not only a part of the German-Polish dispute, or the German – Czech dispute, or even an element of what the Germans

---

<sup>383</sup> Staff reporter, 'Warsaw mayor cancels Berlin trip over refugee exhibition,' *Expatica.com.*, 11 August 2006,

<<http://www.expatica.com/de/articles/news/warsaw-mayor-cancels-berlin-trip-over-refugee-exhibition-32243.html>> consulted 3 November 2008

<sup>384</sup> Claudia Kraft, 'Die aktuelle Diskussion über Flucht und Vertreibung in der polnischen Historiographie und Öffentlichkeit,' *Flucht und Vertreibung*, January 2004, pp.1-10

know about central European history, but above all is an aspect of the newly ignited *Erinnerungsboom* [memory boom]. . . . . The sufferings of the German civilians seem to qualify them to speak out. The taboo is broken. . . . one [the Germans] takes the victims of German aggression, with all their weaknesses, collaboration, and lust for revenge – strip them down – and then, at the same time, one glorifies one’s own victims and proclaims them in a memorial.<sup>385</sup>

On September 16 2003 Erika Steinbach visited Warsaw with a view to discussing with the Polish government the building in Berlin of a ‘Centre for the Expelled.’ It was not her intention, she said, to offend the Poles, but simply to ‘commemorate the suffering of all innocent victims.’<sup>386</sup> An article in the *Warsaw Voice* illustrates that all aspects of national memory and stereotypes are brought to play in an attempt by Steinbach to impose her demand on the Polish government for support in creating a memorial to the German expellees.<sup>387</sup> The key elements of this exchange are Steinbach’s offer to ‘forgive’ the Poles, and the Polish popular newspaper headline which read ‘Unheard-of tactlessness: Occupier’s daughter forgives us!’ It is clear from the article to everyone except Steinbach that for Poland, the horror of the German occupation was in memory terms, barely yesterday.

Following Steinbach’s visit a Polish news magazine, *WPROST*, on 21 September, 2003 showed Steinbach as a Nazi dominatrix riding on the shoulders of the German chancellor, Gerhard Schröder. Offence was taken at the highest level with the Polish Prime Minister, Leszek Miller, calling the picture tasteless and regretful. Schröder informed a German newspaper, the *Ruhr Nachrichten* that ‘I found the illustration was more offensive than the caption that went with the picture which was ‘The German

---

<sup>385</sup> Kraft, ‘Die aktuelle Diskussion ...’ p.5

<sup>386</sup> Staff reporter, ‘Arrogant Erika... Those expecting Erika Steinbach’s visit to Warsaw to be a breakthrough in the discussion concerning a center commemorating the suffering of the Germans in the wake of World War II were disappointed.’ *Warsaw Voice*, 25 September 2003, available at <<http://www.warsawvoice.pl/view/3558/>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>387</sup> Staff reporter, ‘Steinbach flew to Warsaw Sept. 16 at the invitation of *Rzeczpospolita*. In the daily’s headquarters, a debate was held with the participation of representatives of the Polish media, institutions dealing with international issues, and major political parties. The televised discussion, focusing on the idea-promoted by Steinbach for several months-of establishing a Center for the Expelled in Berlin, lasted over three hours. However, even in the opinion of the organizers, the meeting did not bring the expected results. Steinbach endeavoured to convince her opponents that the idea of establishing a German war-time martyrdom center was not directed against Poland; on the contrary, its intention was to commemorate the suffering of all innocent victims. She remained unconvincing, however, failing to respond to numerous counter-arguments given by the Poles.’ *Warsaw Voice*, 25 September 2003, available at <<http://www.warsawvoice.pl/view/3558/>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

Trojan Horse' which was a story about the planned Centre against Expulsion.'<sup>388</sup> (See figure 29). The WPROST response to Steinbach was undoubtedly a response to the meetings which Steinbach had held with leading Polish politicians in Warsaw. Steinbach had hoped at these meetings to soften the Polish attitude to the Centre, but the Poles found themselves even more united against a project which, they believed, changed the history of World War II by allowing Steinbach to split the blame for the events that took place on Polish soil.<sup>389</sup>



**Figure 29.** From the cover of the Polish Magazine Wprost. The photograph depicts the head of the BdV Erika Steinbach dressed in Nazi dominatrix regalia and straddling former Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. The implication is that Schröder takes his instructions from Steinbach, and the BdV. A wider interpretation is that the Poles view Steinbach as a Nazi.

<sup>388</sup> This portrayal was published in the Polish magazine WPROST. For an analysis see an article on the German language website *Netzeitung* of 20 September 2003 headed 'Vertriebenen-Präsidentin als Nazi-Domina.'

<<http://www.netzeitung.de/medien/255316.html>> [accessed 14 October 2008]

<sup>389</sup> *Warsaw Voice*, 'Arrogant Erika', 'At the beginning, Steinbach said that she had decided to come to Warsaw because she was "frightened by Polish responses... I would not like Poles to think that we want to change history. Quite the contrary, without Hitler there would have been no expelled," she said. During the discussion, however, it turned out that while the German representation were divided in their views, the Polish side presented a generally unanimous position against the center as proposed by the BdV. Prime Minister Leszek Miller voiced an opinion commonly shared by Polish political forces. Earlier, during a *Sejm* debate on the subject, Miller said that the government would not consent to the Germans falsifying history. "Poland will not agree to the idea of the center for the displaced being used to demonstrate the harm suffered by only one nation, all the more so since that nation caused the outbreak of the World War II," Miller said, adding that Warsaw supported the idea of the German authorities to establish a center for the displaced that would be of a pan-European character. Repeating the stance of his party chief, Oleksy reproached Steinbach. "Sharing responsibility for the war is out of the question, and please remember that at the Holocaust monument in Berlin the names of the perpetrators are not there, but such a list is to be present at the Center for the Expelled," he said.' Available at <<http://www.warsawvoice.pl/view/3558>> [accessed 30 December 2008]

Krzeminski has made a number of points concerning the BdV and what it is seen as the general move in Germany to rewrite history.<sup>390</sup> In an article, he highlights his belief that history and reality are rapidly parting company in the German quest for an acceptable past.<sup>391</sup> He believes that a memorial for the expellees would be no more than a ‘Valhalla’ which would give the expellees a moral ‘Ausgleich’ or equalisation. The question he then raises is ‘where would it stop if they got their memorial?’ Perhaps a monument for the victims of the allied ‘terror bombings.’ He commented that by the time that Germany commemorated the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war, in 2005, the Germans would be able to effectively prove that they were victims of the Hitler regime. Krzeminski reflects views which, although not directly related to the relationship between Poles and ethnic German expellees, reflect the belief amongst Poles that Germany is rewriting its history: he observes that Poland, as the ‘first victim of German aggression, is a particularly notable touchstone for 21st century German ‘memory politics.’<sup>392</sup> He believes that Poland plays only a peripheral part in German war-memory and that the fact that 800,000 Poles were ‘expelled’ from German occupied territory is all but ignored, whilst an increased interest by the Germans in their own past has led to a German history based on pity and victim cult. Furthermore he condemns the manner in which German-Polish history is portrayed: in a mediocre, marginal, oppressive, manner with ‘overpackaged’ German TV documentaries. The documentaries, says Krzeminski, tend to be one-sided, often tied in with ‘Polish Weeks’, and are often sponsored and tied in with

---

<sup>390</sup> This is not as far-fetched as this comment made in 2003. Recently, 2007, more and more attention has been paid to the fate of Germans, by Germans, including suggestions of memorials, who were annihilated in the flames caused by the allied bombing of Dresden on February 13 and 14, 1945. A recent book, Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand*, Ullstein Buchverlag, Berlin 2004 has become a best-seller in Germany and ignited much controversy as to the nature of the victimhood of the Germans in World War II. An English language version of the book was released in October 2006.

<sup>391</sup> Krzeminski ‘Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’, (The difficult German-Polish politics of the past) *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B 40-41/2003). Such is the animosity in German Polish relations that it has descended to alarmingly puerile levels. ‘Polish institutions that loaned artefacts to the [‘Forced Paths’] exhibit demand them back, under pressure from their government. The most prominent is a bell recovered from the wreck of the Wilhelm Gustloff, a German liner that sank in the Baltic Sea in January 1945 after being torpedoed by a Soviet submarine. A Warsaw museum asked for the return of a book taken from a Polish family by a German soldier and later returned to Poland, and an identification card issued to a child by the Polish authorities.’ From, Mark Landler, ‘Berlin Journal War Exhibit Further Strains German-Polish Relations’, Berlin Correspondent’, *The New York Times*, published August 31, 2006

<sup>392</sup> Krzeminski, ‘Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’.



books. Krzeminski gives an example of a documentary aired on 27 August 2003 by SWR, a German television company, about the financial benefits of EU borders.

‘The reporter filmed in Zamosc and casually reproached the Poles that they filled their churches instead of honouring the Polish-born Rosa Luxemburg: the reporter failed to mention that after the Nazi occupation the town was known as ‘Himmlerstadt’ and that thousands of Polish children were taken from there to Germany to be ‘aryanised’.<sup>393</sup>

Krzeminski then makes the point that the German media ‘obsessively’ repeats that young Germans are now ‘normal’ and as second and third post-war generations they have, he observes, the ‘right’ to mourn their own war victims, and not be expected to don sack cloth and ashes. The Czechs and Poles, the Germans believe, are only interested in perpetuating their victim status.<sup>394</sup> One of the results of this reconstruction of historical memory, is that the Polish and Czech victims are effectively diminished and those that committed the crimes, the Germans, are viewed not as evil, or devil-like, but as human beings, who were victims of a totalitarian ideology and fell victims to the victors, demanding revenge.

In July 2006 Kaczynski commented on Polish radio with regard to the ‘Forced Paths’ exhibition that, ‘The exhibition about expulsions which will open on (August 10) in a prestigious building in the Federal Republic of Germany is very definitely not in the interest of Poland. The relativization of the responsibility for World War II is not in Poland’s interest’. The *New York Times* attributes the Polish ‘posturing’ as being related to domestic politics: ‘The Kaczynski brothers, analysts say, are exploiting antipathy toward Germany to shore up their shaky government.’<sup>395</sup> In October 2006, Lech Kaczynski commented,

“And then there is the *Vertriebenen-Verbände* – a large organisation that are supported with tax-payers money and by the politicians. These people want to question the ownership structure of Poland – that concerns 34% of the surface of

---

<sup>393</sup> Krzeminski ‘Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’.

<sup>394</sup> Landler, ‘Exhibit Further Strains.....’, *The New York Times*, Lech Kaczynski, ‘Die Deutschen handeln leider nach der Devise: wer stärker ist, ist besser.’ *Tageszeitung Rzeczpospolita*, 14 October, 2006.

<sup>395</sup> Landler, ‘Exhibit Further Strains.....’, *The New York Times*,

Poland! And the Germans do nothing against it. It is high time that these goings on were put an end to.<sup>396</sup>

As late as February 2007, with no concrete memorial yet in existence, the antagonism between Poles and Germans continued to grow. The recognition of the damage comes from the German side as well as the Polish. Gesine Schwan, a German politician warned against the building of the centre:

‘It [the memorial] would place the German expellees in the role of the victims, which is not exactly the true course of their history.....In Poland there is a deep inbuilt ‘angst’ against her German neighbours, which, if the Centre is built will increase the level of distrust’<sup>397</sup>

The BdV finally succeeded with their attempts to build a Centre in 2008.<sup>398</sup> This followed Steinbach increasingly gaining support amongst the normally moderate SPD. In November 2006, 220 of the Social Democrats signed a document in support of Steinbach’s centre.

‘This is the first time that such a large number of the SPD members have openly supported the Centre.... “We Social Democrats want the Centre against Expulsions in Berlin. Join us and support us” reads an advert in the *Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung*’...<sup>399</sup>

For many years, the subject of a Centre against Expulsion, or the acceptance of anything to do with such a centre has been highly controversial. Support for the centre has traditionally come from the conservative parties such as the CDU. A political explanation for this change, which explains the close relationship between the political elite and the BdV, and the influence on the BdV outside its own natural conservative roots, is offered by Anna Reimann of *Der Spiegel*:

‘...one of the few “comrades” who was in favour of Steinbach’s concept was the former SPD coalition partner Peter Glotz, who died in the last year. He came from the Sudetenland, and had been the chairman of the foundation of the Centre against Expulsion. After the death of Glotz Franz Maget, the head of the SPD Bavarian coalition, in May, announced his support for the

---

<sup>396</sup> Landler, ‘Exhibit Further Strains...’, *The New York Times*

<sup>397</sup> Staff reporter, ‘Deutsch-Polnisches Verhältnis’, *Spiegel online* – 24 February 2007,

<<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,468455,00.html>> [accessed 3 November 2007]

<sup>398</sup> See <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/>>, p.4 [accessed 3 November 2008]

<sup>399</sup> Anna Reimann, ‘Genossen werben für Steinbach-Zentrum’, *Spiegel Online*, 29 November 2006.

<<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,451370,00.html>> consulted 3 November 2008

Centre. He wanted to build “the centre for information and documentation concerning flight and expulsion in the Europe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the spirit of Glotz.”<sup>400</sup>

The BdV is a major influence in German political life, both in domestic and in foreign policy terms. Just over sixty years and three generations after World War II the imagery projected by the BdV is important in the restructuring of historical memory. Probably the single most important event in the calendar of the BdV is its annual event, the *Tag der Heimat* (Day of the Homeland) which has taken place every September since 1950. This is an organised event at which Germany’s leading thinkers and politicians are invited to speak on themes involving expulsion and suffering. The BdV introduction to the *Tag der Heimat* 2006 at which the President of the Federal Republic of Germany was a guest begins with

‘the end of the European terror-rule of the National Socialists and the termination of the fighting in 1945, Middle and Eastern Europe became for many years a place without human rights....so in this year of 2006 we look back 60 years to the period of forced resettlement, inhumanity, and the cruel ‘wild’ expulsions of the Spring and Summer of 1945. Also, in 1946 many died whilst being transported and deported. They died in countless camps of hunger, exhaustion, epidemics, and multiple cases of murder and manslaughter....’<sup>401</sup>

In the same introduction to the *Tag der Heimat* 2006 Steinbach commented that it would only be ‘...a tiny step further before the introduction of a national *Gedenkttag* (Remembrance Day) for the expellees and asked the German President, for the introduction of a national Remembrance Day for expellees ‘...after all they have them in Italy for the Italian expellees.....the German expellees plead with you for the introduction of such a day. ....’<sup>402</sup> Erika Steinbach in the opening speech to the 2007 *Tag der Heimat* at which Angela Merkel and the German President of the European Parliament, Prof. Dr. Hans-Gert Pöttering

---

<sup>400</sup> Reimann, ‘Genossen’.

<sup>401</sup> *Tag der Heimat*, 2 September 2006 at the International Congress Centre Berlin, hosted by Erika Steinbach. From first page of the document *Tag der Heimat* 2006 published by the BdV on their website which states that the document is a recording of the actual speech given. <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=451>> [accessed 3 November 2008]

<sup>402</sup> BdV website <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=451>> p.2, [accessed 3 November 2008]

were present, repeated much of the 2006 speech and in a minute of reflection she reinforced the elements of imagery familiar from Knopp's documentaries :

'We remember the children, the women, and the men, who through flight, lost their lives, because the streets were blocked or frozen over ...and the tanks then rolled over them. We think of those that sank through the ice...those that were frozen crossing rivers and lakes...and those that were blown up by weapons....we think of those that died together on the waves, and the floods of icy waters sank, as their ships swept them away from the *todbringenen* (death bringing) battlefront. We remember the children, women and men, who were dragged away and are missing...those that were shot in their own streets or by the edge of the railway in distant Siberia, and left to lie under a blanket of snow...'

We think of those who were in the death camps (*Todeslagern*) and who paid with their lives, and those that were massacred, simply because they were Germans...we remember those that even after the end of the war were placed in cattle trucks or forced to endure death marches as they were forced out of their homeland.'<sup>403</sup>

The speech also contained a section titled 'Memory in a historical context', dealing with Hitler and the National Socialist government. Its purpose was to distance the expellees from the 'Hitler Regime' but it has the effect of placing expellee history outside of its real context.

'Our fate was terrible. Hitler had opened Pandora's Box, and we, the German *Vertriebenen* know more than any other, that we carry a terrible collective burden for this...but much too often is the National Socialist *Schrecken Herrschaft* (reign of terror) over Europe used as a justification for the mass expulsions.....'<sup>404</sup>

Steinbach goes on to point out that those Germans within Germany did not suffer expulsion just because they had voted for Hitler, or had been members of the SS or the SA.<sup>405</sup> The inference here is that it was the *Volksdeutsche* who paid for the political foolishness of the *Reichsdeutsche*, and though Steinbach pointed out that Stalin was the master of cruelty, she noted that the initiative to expel the ethnic Germans came from states themselves. She claims, in the same 2007 *Tag der Heimat* introductory speech, that Edvard Beneš, the Czech President, 'sold' Czechoslovakia to Stalin in return for his agreeing to the expulsion of the Sudeten

---

<sup>403</sup> < <http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool/tagderheimat.php3 p.3> > [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>404</sup> < <http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool/tagderheimat.php3 p.3> > [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>405</sup> < <http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool/tagderheimat.php3 p.3> > [accessed 11 October 2008]

Germans. She then observes that Hitler had inflicted similar destruction on Belgium, Denmark and France, and given these countries similar reason to inflict revenge on their Germans: but this had never happened.<sup>406</sup> This is to ignore certain facts of history. The German occupation of Denmark was relatively benign. Danes were seen as ‘Aryan’ kinsmen. Unlike the German occupation in the east, the inhabitants of these three countries were never destined for slavery and annihilation, and reason for revenge would never have been at the same levels as of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Steinbach’s introduction to the 2008 *Tag der Heimat* is the most strident and uncompromising setting out of her, and the BdV’s, view of expellee history to date. All context of the sufferings of the expellees is completely ignored. Some examples are:

‘The eastern, Sudeten, and south-eastern Germans underwent a collective arrest (*Kollektivhaftung*) for a regime and a war, although they were not in the slightest bit answerable for the war...’<sup>407</sup>

Speaking of the brutal treatment of ethnic Germans at the end of the war in the former Yugoslavia she excuses accusations of ethnic German support for the Nazis with the observation that

‘The able-bodied [ethnic German] men had no chance to avoid the indiscriminate call-up into either the *Wehrmacht* or the *Waffen-SS*. To say that they had any freedom of choice (*Freiwilligkeit*) is pure theory.’<sup>408</sup>

After attacking the post-war policies of Yugoslavia and Hungary in relation to their ethnic German populations, Steinbach, undoubtedly aware that there needed to be acknowledgment of context for the events at the end of the war, quotes from her former and late colleague Peter Glotz:

‘We have not forgotten who began the Second World War –Hitler, and, it must be said, many Germans. That does not mean that there should be perpetrators or victim peoples. Every people (*Volk*) is a *vertrackte* (dodgy) mixture of perpetrators, accomplices, followers and victims...’<sup>409</sup>

---

<sup>406</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/infopool/tagderheimat.php3> p.3> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>407</sup> The speech was given at the *Tag der Heimat* on 6 September 2008 at the International Congress Centre in Berlin, and is available on the home page of the BdV website. <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=769>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>408</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=769>> p.2 [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>409</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=769>> p.4 [accessed 11 October 2008]

Steinbach continues in her 2008 speech to welcome the fact that the Centre against Expulsions was now becoming a reality, and that it was

‘...a product of the BdV and a major achievement. We have through it, set off a lively debate. True, it is controversial, but it is necessary and fruitful. We want the fate of the German expellees to be visible in our capital city. We want in our own land, to display our own identity.....In the coming year we will put on an exhibition dealing with our culture and identity.’<sup>410</sup>

Steinbach also observed that the German political climate has changed enough in recent years to allow more ‘understanding’ of the fate of the expellees, much more than in earlier years. Significantly, she observed that ‘ there is a fellow-feeling, and there is, even in the younger generation, a curiosity and engagement with this unknown part of German history.’<sup>411</sup>

In summary, it is clear that the influence of the BdV continues to be felt within Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic. Its influence is mainly negative in Poland. Its influence through Steinbach, and her top-level connections within Germany’s political sphere, has allowed it to become an integral mainstream body of influence at the highest levels of Germany’s coalition governments. It could be argued that whilst paying lip-service to the concerns of Germany’s eastern neighbours, the BdV has its own agenda which involves the rewriting of the history of those that it represents. The ultimate conclusion of this rewriting, by way of memorials, memorial days, and the eradication of a negative past, is obtaining reparations from Poland and the Czech Republic, who it sees as the guilty, aggressor parties from 1944 onwards. The collapse of the Iron Curtain in 1991, and the entry of Poland and the Czech Republic into the European Union in May 2004, have intensified the arguments of the BdV because through the European institutions, an aspiration now has the capability of becoming a reality. The BdV’s links with the serious media, such as *ZDF*, and its prolific output of expellee-related literature, as well as its active pursuit of endorsements from

---

<sup>410</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=769>> p.6 [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>411</sup> <<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/index.php3?id=597&druck=1>> p.3 [accessed 11 October 2008]

leading world figures, has resulted in a historical memory that is disjointed, and unbalanced. The implications of this will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 8.

## Chapter 8

### **The Reception of German historical memory of the expulsions by Polish historians and politicians**

The restructuring within Germany of German historical memory and the rewriting of Germany's past to incorporate history promoted by expellees and the wider public has caused increasing concern in neighbouring Poland and the Czech Republic which is now manifesting itself in open hostility at high political levels.<sup>412</sup> Both countries, on 1 May 2004, joined the European Union and became subject to its justice system. For Poland, historical memory relating to the war and its consequences leaves little room for the rewriting of history. Poland, of all Germany's victims, suffered the most heavily. The invasion and destruction wrought on the Poles by the Germans between 1939 and 1945 are for the Poles enshrined history. Krzeminski, writing in 2005, points out:

'...that a common European version of the Second World War is not exactly probable. Each nation has a different experience; each one has fostered and exposed its own war myths, as recorded in photographs, memoirs, novels or films, changing with the passage of time and often internally contradictory. First of all, the versions told by the two main victors dominated. It was they who imposed their view. The superpowers not only won the war and dictated the terms of the peace, they also had the mass media to disseminate their triumph.'<sup>413</sup>

Polish historians, the media and politicians have responded forcefully to what they see as an attempt by Germany to claim victim status – and even more alarmingly claim reparations for property lost as a result of the Second World War.

The increasingly opposing views of the Poles and Germans with regards their history has been the subject of attempts to reconcile diametrically opposed views. With this in mind, in 1972 *The Joint Polish –German Commission for the Revision of School Textbooks and Polish Views of German History* was established by a group of Polish and

---

<sup>412</sup> Although this recent example directly to the expellees, it illustrates how poor the relationship is between Germany and her eastern neighbours and was reported in *The Sunday Times* of February 4, 2007 with regards Angela Merkel's suggestions that she would re-open the question of the European Union constitution. *The Times* reported as follows: 'Britain's opposition is shared by Poland and the Czech Republic. The recent dismissal of the constitution by Mirek Topolaneck, the Czech prime minister, as a "pile of crap" does not bode well for negotiations.'

<sup>413</sup> Krzeminski 'As many wars as nations: The myths and truths of World War II'. *Signandsight.com* 06 April 2005, <<http://www.signandsight.com/features/96.html>> [accessed 5 November 2008]



German historians to find a common dialogue.<sup>414</sup> The aim of this commission was to bring West German and Polish historians together on a regular basis to review progress in the way each country researched the history of the other, and reflected it in school text books. Initial contact, mainly via University departments on both sides, was minimal due to the political barriers in place but the infra-structure for contact between German and Polish historians was put in place.<sup>415</sup>

Michael Müller, in a recent paper looking at the commission, believes that it is in the area of attempting to deal with the expulsions, a naturally sensitive area, that the commission has had one of its more interesting results:

‘...while the members of the Commission addressed the problem of the post-1944 expulsions of Germans from the now Polish western territories early on in their negotiations, and had to go through heated debates in order to find a consensual formula for the Commission’s ‘recommendations’, the overall interpretations of the Second World War as well as of its origins and inevitable consequences appeared largely convergent. Therefore the Commission had little reason to put the topic high on its conference agenda.’<sup>416</sup>

It would appear that the overall effect of the Commission, whilst undoubtedly increasing cooperation between German and Polish historians, may well in reality be pointless. As Müller observes ‘the majority of Polish specialists in German history have long since emancipated themselves from making use of a formalised dialogue as offered by the Commission. Nearly all can now make themselves both seen and heard by German scholars without the mediation of the Commission.’<sup>417</sup> Even with the Commission in place, Müller comments that the divergence in the way the two countries see their joint history is increasing; one key area is that involving the expellees:

‘...in 2002, in a special issue of the journal *Borussia*, both Polish and German historians expressed their scepticism over the future of the Polish-German political and historical dialogue. A conference on the *Landesgeschichte* of Poland’s West and Germany’s East organised in the same year by Hans-Jürgen Bömelburg...gave indications for a new parting of ways between Polish and German historiographies.

---

<sup>414</sup> Michael G. Müller, ‘The Joint Polish—German Commission for the Revision of School Textbooks and Polish Views of German History’, *German History* 22, (July 1, 2004), pp.433-447.

<sup>415</sup> Müller, ‘The Joint Polish—German Commission,’ pp.433-447

<sup>416</sup> Müller, ‘The Joint Polish—German Commission,’ p.441

<sup>417</sup> Müller, ‘The Joint Polish—German Commission,’ p.446

The recent Polish-German controversy over the project for a 'Centre Against Expulsions' to be created in Berlin marked, in the eyes of many Polish commentators, the end of an era in which both sides have committed themselves to the idea of 'negotiated' historical narratives.<sup>418</sup>

Despite the polarisation of official Polish and German views on their respective history, by the beginning of the 21st century a poll which Krzeminski describes as astounding showed

'an astonishing empathy for the German suffering. 57 percent of the participating Poles classified the German war victims in the same category as Poles, Jews, and Gypsies. At the same time only 36 percent of Germans expressed this opinion. At the same time 58 percent of Poles, and 38 percent of Germans were against a 'Centre for the Expellees' [memorial].....The poll outraged not a few commentators. One of the best known Polish journalists saw the evil in official attempts at reconciliation in that a young generation of Poles had completely lost any knowledge of the historical facts.'<sup>419</sup>

Claudia Kraft picks up on this increasing belief amongst young Poles that the Germans were also victims of World War Two, and the empathy of young Poles with the Germans. She believes that it was the concern within Poland at this 2003 survey result that led to an increasing hostility to the Centre against Expulsions which manifested itself from the summer of 2003 onwards.<sup>420</sup> Part of the reason for this she puts down to the difference in experience between the older generations and those who did not experience the war. As a German historian observing the Polish reception of Germany's attempt to restructure her history she believes that within Poland, if the present wave of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (overcoming her past) continues on its present path, the Poles fear that the Second World War will become associated with Germans and Jews as victims, and the Poles will be portrayed as the perpetrators.<sup>421</sup>

---

<sup>418</sup> Müller, 'The Joint Polish—German Commission', p.446

<sup>419</sup> Krzeminski, 'Die schwierige deutsch-polnische vergangenheitspolitik'.

<sup>420</sup> Kraft, 'Die aktuelle Diskussion über Flucht und Vertreibung in der polnischen Historiographie und Öffentlichkeit,' *Flucht und Vertreibung*, January 2004. < <http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de/md=Vertreibung-Kraft>> p.8 [accessed 28 March 2007].

<sup>421</sup> Kraft, 'Die aktuelle Diskussion über Flucht und Vertreibung..' .p.9

Zernack, writing in 2004, believes that in recent years there has been willingness on both sides to re-approach and study each other's history, but recent events relating in particular to the planned Centre against Expulsion, and German demands for reparations from Poland have seen a retrenching on both sides.<sup>422</sup> Claudia Kraft, also writing in 2004, believed that Polish-German 'history' relations between 1989 and 1998 were relatively cordial, with each side exploring within the context of the expellees the relationship of the new Polish settlers on eastern German land, and their relationship to that land. She believes the deterioration began during the German elections of 1998 and 2002. In 1998, Edmund Stoiber in his bid to become Chancellor demanded that Poland withdraw her post-war anti-German decrees or laws, known as the *Beirut Dekrete*.<sup>423</sup> These were the Polish equivalent of the Beneš decrees. Unlike the Czech Republic, the Polish laws had very little real effect, and Kraft puts the demand down to political posturing for electoral purposes.<sup>424</sup>

Polish-German relations took a turn for the worse when in 2000 the *Preussische Treuhand* (Prussian Trust) was founded as the representatives of a group of former expellees with the objective of making property claims against Poles who had appropriated former German property in the *Ostgebiete* 'eastern territories' which had been ceded to the Soviet Union and Poland after the end of the Second World War. The aim of the *Treuhand* is more than the work of a few individuals.

'The undertaking is connected with the east Prussian and Silesian sections of the *Bund der Vertriebenen*, but at the same time independent of these organisations. The chairman of the *Treuhand* is Rudi Pawelka, a former chief of police, who happens to be the chairman of the Silesian *Landsmannschaft*. The office address is that of the East Prussian *Landsmannschaft*.'<sup>425</sup>

The former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) on a visit to Poland in August 2004 stated that the demands for compensation from Poland were completely without

---

<sup>422</sup> Zernack is Professor Emeritus at the Freie Universität, Berlin. Zernack, 'Developments in Polish Scholarship on German History, 1945-2000,' *German History*, Vol.22, No.3, (2004). pp.309-322

<sup>423</sup> Kraft, 'Die aktuelle Diskussion über Flucht und Vertreibung' p.5

<sup>424</sup> Kraft, 'Die aktuelle Diskussion über Flucht und Vertreibung' p.8

<sup>425</sup> Kraft, 'Die aktuelle Diskussion über Flucht und Vertreibung' p.2

foundation.<sup>426</sup> Erika Steinbach, head of the BdV, and a CDU MP, and her coalition CSU colleague Jochen-Konrad Fromme even stated on December 12 2006 that,

‘We are against the activities of the *Preussischen Treuhand* because they damage and do mischief to the German-Polish relationship.’<sup>427</sup>

In 2007, the *Preussische Treuhand* took the matter of compensation for expelled Germans to the European Court, creating further tensions between Poland and Germany. A series of papers produced by the *Deutsches-Polen Institut* created to analyse the causes and possible effects of the *Preussische Treuhand* action on Polish-German relations comments that

‘The property claims of individual expellees, members of the *Preussische Treuhand*, arrived in front of the European Court of Human Rights in December 2006, and have badly damaged the German-Polish relationship. In addition, this action has led to the awakening of the old mistrust between the two countries.’<sup>428</sup>

The situation is politically and historically sensitive and there exists an interesting situation within Germany that leading political figures have had to disassociate themselves from this compensation claim, including Erika Steinbach. Politically, the BdV who have contributed most to this situation are standing back and watching, even showing disapproval of the aims of the *Treuhand*’s actions, despite the fact that the BdV has restructured accounts of the events at the end of the war with a view to compensation in mind.

Within Poland, the activities of the *Treuhand* are seen as the work of the BdV and the German government as a whole. It is also seen as the culmination, if not logical consequence, of Germany’s quest for victim status. The reaction from the highest level of

---

<sup>426</sup> Electronic article, ‘Wer steckt hinter der Preußischen Treuhand?’, <<http://dokmz.wordpress.com/2004/11/11/die-ruckgabe-ag-wer-steckt-hinter-der-preussischen-treuhand-teil-13-wdrde/>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>427</sup> ‘Vertriebene Polen und Deutsche kritisieren Preußische Treuhand’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Faz.net*, 16 December, 2006, <<http://www.faz.net/s/RubA24ECD630CAE40E483841DB7D16F4211/Doc~EEF1848F8D92A4138A0C38040FFE1CFEA~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html>> [accessed 8 November 2008]

<sup>428</sup> Stephan Raabe, ‘Die Klagen der Preußischen Treuhand. Zwischen politischer Hysterie und rechtlichen Fragen,’ *Politische und Rechtliche Fragen zu Restitutionsansprüchen aus Deutschland.*, (20 March 2007), pp.2-11, <<http://www.laender-analysen.de/polen/>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

government was swift. The Polish president, Lech Kaczyński, spoke of the dangers of the German proceedings by commenting that they, the Germans, had ‘set lose a very dangerous mechanism which is a threat to German-Polish relations.’<sup>429</sup> His twin brother, Poland’s prime minister at the time, commented that Germany now seemed to be gripped by a ‘new type of ideology.’ He, his brother, and the Archbishop of Warsaw commented in a Polish newspaper, FAKT, that Germany was attempting to portray itself as a victim of the Second World War.<sup>430</sup> Poland’s foreign minister suggested that the question was whether Germany felt any moral responsibility for her crimes committed in the Second World War. The result of the *Preussische Treuhand*’s legal actions has led to a historical, political, and legal replay of not only the expellee version of World War II but also to Poland’s predictable response which has been to set up the *Polnische Treuhand* (Polskie Powiernictwo) to fight its Prussian counterpart. An article by the German broadcaster *Deutsche Welle* dated September 2004 reads:

#### ‘Berlin Shocked By Polish Reparations Vote

The decision of the Polish parliament on Friday to demand reparations from Germany for World War II draws dismay from German lawmakers. Poland's ambassador to Germany, Andrzej Byrt, said the decision was "a reaction to the actions of the Prussian Claims Society." The expellees' lobby group, led by Rudi Pawelka, is currently planning a string of international lawsuits aimed at returning property and assets to ethnic Germans who were forced to flee Poland in the millions after World War II.<sup>431</sup>

The article then continues pointing out that the Polish parliament ‘rejected all claims for compensation or restoration of property from German expellees.’<sup>432</sup>

---

<sup>429</sup> Raabe, ‘Die Klagen der Preußischen Treuhand’, pp.2-3

<sup>430</sup> Raabe, ‘Die Klagen der Preußischen Treuhand’, pp.2-3

<sup>431</sup> ‘Berlin Shocked By Polish Reparations Vote’, *Deutsche Welle*, 12 September 2004, <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1325939,00.html>> [accessed 6 September 2007]

<sup>432</sup> The same *Deutsche Welle* article finishes with the observation that, ‘In recent weeks, lobby groups for the expellees, like the Prussian Claims Society, have issued demands that have sparked tremendous resentment in Poland. Many of the country’s citizens see the lawsuit threats as an effort to put German expellees on the same footing as the Polish victims of German war crimes..... The issue is emotionally charged in Poland, where old fears, painful historical experiences and the late consequences of propaganda program that stoked fear of Germans in the population for decades. It’s a bitter realization for anyone who has worked on behalf of the decades-long reconciliation process that has resulted recently in the closest cooperative relationship ever seen between Germany and Poland. And the consequences of any lawsuits could be enormous. In addition to the financial effects, Poles fear Germans would return to the

Bill Niven, despite the evidence to the contrary, writing in a book published in 2006 speaks of ‘a process of historical reconciliation between Germany, Poland and Czechoslovakia ...’<sup>433</sup> but again, an article by Elena Beier, a German journalist, dated October 2004, refers to tension simmering between Germany and Poland over expelled World War II compensation claims:

‘On Monday, senior lawmakers from Germany and Poland met in a bid to defuse tensions between the two countries over World War II compensation claims. ....The issue has created huge resentment in Poland, particularly since the country's entry to the European Union last May. Most Poles believe that the German losses pale into insignificance compared to the deaths of more than six million Poles after Adolf Hitler's army invaded the country in 1939.’<sup>434</sup>

A *Spiegel* article of January 2007 indicates a deepening entrenchment of views, encouraged in the battle for historical memory between Germany and Poland.<sup>435</sup> The article, headed *Kampagne der Lügen* (Campaign of Lies) deals with the ever-looming dangers associated with the *Preussische Treuhand*. The implications are economically, politically, and historically explosive should they succeed. The tone is set by the introduction to the article:

‘Alexander von Waldow, 83 lives in another world: a world where the German Reich occupies pre-1937 borders. These former German territories lie east of the Oder-Neisse rivers. The emeritus professor of Architecture from Eckenförde now wants, under EU law to “allow the expellees to return to their land and develop land now belonging to Poland. The Poles are not the only ones that can play that game.’<sup>436</sup>

Von Waldow, along with approximately 50 other persons, is taking Poland to the European Court of Human Rights to retrieve lost homes and property on behalf of the expellees. Kaczynski of Poland has stated that his government would take steps to ensure

---

eastern European countries they once occupied -- an uncomfortable notion for historically aware Poles, who have a clear idea of who was the culprit and who was the victim in World War II’, ‘Berlin Shocked By Polish Reparations Vote’, *Deutsche Welle*, 12.09.2004

<sup>433</sup> Niven, *Germans as victims* September 2006, p.19

<sup>434</sup> online article by Elena Beier 18 October 2004, <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1365292,00.html>> [accessed 6 September 2006]

<sup>435</sup> Jan Puhl und Andreas Wassermann, ‘Kampagne der Lügen’, *Der Spiegel*, 30 December 2006, p. 83

<sup>436</sup> ‘Kampagne der Lügen’, *Der Spiegel*, p.83

that ‘our assets are completely and fully protected.’<sup>437</sup> The *Spiegel* article goes on to point out that for Kaczynski, opposing any German attempts to take back land or property is strengthening his hand as a defender of Poland...’and for the brothers [Kaczynski and his brother] the organisation [*Treuhand*] is just the tip of the iceberg in a further movement in the Republic, the aim of which is to portray Germans no longer as perpetrators in the matter of the Second World War, but instead, as the victims.’<sup>438</sup>

Analyses of the history and memory surrounding the expulsions are important because this is not a subject that is likely to simply disappear. The evidence of the proliferation of interest over the last ten years indicates that the likelihood is that the subject of the expellees will eventually take a major role in the classrooms of modern Germany, and on the televisions in German sitting-rooms. Something interesting is undoubtedly taking place in this area of European history. At a time when the Poles are concerned that the Centre against Expulsion will distort historical facts, Marek Edelman, the last living leader of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, made an observation in a Polish weekly paper that the Germans were minimizing their past and slipping into the role of victims. He asks,

“...When during the Warsaw uprising they had murdered 20-30,000 underground soldiers and 200,000 civilians, against whom had the Germans been fighting? Before one erects a memorial for the expellees one should perhaps mourn for their victims.’<sup>439</sup>

Piotr Buras, a Krakow-based political scientist in Warsaw, writing in March 2007 effectively sums up the political effects of Germany’s new history within Poland:

‘Republic (Polish) and Germany: an anatomy of mistrust. The reality of the Polish-German political relationship is a result more of a changing Polish social and political landscape than a reflexive anti-German feeling. In fact, the [Polish] partnership with Germany after 1989 was a matter of priority with the Polish Government....There is a continuous lasting worry, [within Poland] concerning the change in Germany’s collective memory. Within Poland there is increasing discussion concerning the German victims of the Second World War, and a concern that there is within Germany a tendency to revise their historical outlook. Therein lies the heart of today’s German-Polish misunderstandings. During the course of

---

<sup>437</sup> ‘Kampagne der Lügen’, *Der Spiegel*, p.83

<sup>438</sup> Krzeminski, ‘Die schwierige deutsche-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’. Edelman was born 1922 and still living in 2008  
<[www1.yadvashem.org.il/odot\\_pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org.il/odot_pdf)> [accessed 6 October 2008]

<sup>439</sup> Krzeminski, ‘Die schwierige deutsche-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik’.

this revision of history one of the many contributions in this pluralistic, many-sided discourse, is the evaluation that in this overpowering flood, this revisionism has become established in [Germany's] "official thought."<sup>440</sup>

Piotr Buras thus summarises the belief within Poland, which is being reflected in the increasing political mistrust between the two countries, that the logical conclusion of a new, victim status for Germany in relation to the events resulting from the Second World War is that the claim by Germans against Poland, for compensation from Poland is for being defeated at the end of the war. The close political and historical interaction between the joint fates of Germany and Poland led the last Communist Prime Minister of Poland [Mieczyslaw Rakowski, 1973] to make the observation that '...nearly every Pole feels like an expert in German affairs,' an observation supported by the German historian Klaus Zernack.<sup>441</sup> Writing in 2004 he makes a number of salient points which are reflected in the growing antagonism that is developing between the two countries. History, especially relating to the expellees and demands for compensation, has now spilled over into politics. '...Polish interest in the history of Germany exceeds even that directed towards Russia...[everything] pales in comparison to the Polish preoccupation with German history.'<sup>442</sup>

As recently as August 2006 the 'International Herald Tribune' commented on the worsening German-Polish relations:

'To say there is baggage in the German-Polish relationship does not begin to account for the scars left by the war, bloodshed, persecution and humiliation of the last century ....so it is perhaps no surprise that a new exhibit here [Berlin], devoted to the suffering of more than 12 million Germans expelled from Poland and other countries at the end of World War II has touched a nerve with Poles – straining a relationship that has already fallen into disrepair. "Nothing good will come out of it for Poland, Germany or Europe," said the Polish prime minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who marked the exhibit's opening by visiting the site of a Nazi concentration camp in Poland.'<sup>443</sup>

---

<sup>440</sup> Piotr Buras, 'Republik und Deutschland: Eine Anatomie des Misstrauens'. Polen-Analysen. *Deutsches Polen Institut* Nr.3. (19.12.2006), pp.1-21

<sup>441</sup> Zernack, 'Developments in Polish Scholarship on German History', p.309

<sup>442</sup> Zernack, 'Developments in Polish Scholarship on German History', pp. 309-10

<sup>443</sup> 'The Unloved Neighbours, A History of Hostility between Poland and Germany,' *Spiegel Online*, 20 June 2007

<<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/0,1518,489510,00.html>> [accessed 7 November 2008]





Poland, not simply a band of maverick Nazis with a reluctant German people in tow. The BdV is seen as an organisation which in its attempt to change the facts, is seeking to benefit materially from the wartime losses of its members. By broadening German, and expellee historical memory to embrace 'all victims of expulsion,' the war and its unfortunate consequences becomes in itself all-embracing. Everyone suffered. The BdV's insistence on some form of memorial for 'all victims of expulsion' which will be, despite BdV denials, effectively a memorial for the German victims of the Czechs and the Poles has in itself led to tensions between these states and the German government. This will be looked at in the next chapter in relation to Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic.

## Chapter 9

### The Reception of German historical memory of the expulsions by Czech historians and politicians

The reception of Knopp, and the BdV's version of expellee history, in conjunction with the activities of the *Preussische Treuhand* has also led to a deteriorating relationship between Germany and the Czech Republic, which will be explored in this chapter. Relations between Germany and the Czech Republic have been every bit as strained as with Poland.<sup>445</sup> The fraught German-Czech relationship and the manner in which each side dealt with contentious issues relating to the other led in 1990 to the setting-up of a joint historical commission under the auspices of both the German and Czech foreign ministries.<sup>446</sup> Its remit was for the 'collective understanding of German-Czech history, with regards in particular to the present century.' It is described as 'meeting regularly and concerned with a variety of questions concerning the relationship of the joint pasts of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic.'<sup>447</sup> The existence of the commission to deal with German-Czech history, mirroring the German-Polish commission, is a pointer that all is not well politically between the two countries, and that the political differences find their base in recent expellee-based history. Lily Gardner Feldman, in a German foreign policy review, commented that

---

<sup>445</sup> Martin Brown and Dr Eva Hahn 'Sudeten Dialogues', *Central Europe Review*, (Vol 3, No 16), 7 May 2001 an electronic only journal which details the nature of the foreign policy problems between the two countries. <<http://www.pecina.cz/files/www.ce-review.org/01/16/odsun16.html>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>446</sup> The web site of the Deutsch-Tschechische und Deutsch-Slowakische 'Historikerkommission' (Historian Commission) explains its origins and functions. It states: 'The German-Czech and German Slovakian History Commission was founded in 1990 by the Foreign Ministries of Germany and the Czech and Slovakian Federal Republics. It was the initiative of Dietrich Genscher and Jiří Dienstbier.....The function of the Commission is to research the history of the peoples of the three lands within the wider historical context and from an interdisciplinary context. The 20th century and its themes of National Socialism, German occupation, World War, forced emigration, the Cold War, and the 'system conflicts' to the end of 1989, are especially within the remit of the Commission.....the results of this research will be made available to the public.....The members of the German section of the Commission are all on the recommendation of the Association of German Historians appointed by the Foreign Ministry. They all work on a voluntary, non-paying basis...' <<http://www.dt-ds-historikerkommission.de/>> [accessed 8 October 2008]

<sup>447</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic website: 'Gemischte Deutsch-Tschechische Historikerkommission', p.1. <<http://www.mzv.cz/www/MZV/default.asp?ido=14101&idj=2&amb=1&trid=1&prsl=&pocc1=5>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

‘The Czech perception of a need to cloak relations with Germany in history has been reinforced by a widespread German attitude that Czechs suffered less than Poles at German hands during the Third Reich. Connected to this perspective was the historical relegation of Czechs to the category of ethnic minority rather than nation...The sense of being second-class in German eyes was reconfirmed for Czechs when the Sudeten German Expellee Association (*Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft*) linked Czech EU membership to the resolution of outstanding claims....’<sup>448</sup>

Such was the burden of historical memory between Germany and Czechoslovakia that in an attempt to find a history acceptable to both sides the two countries signed a joint agreement in January 1997 after two years of negotiation. The German government apologised for the dismemberment and occupation of Czechoslovakia and the Czech government apologised for expelling the Sudeten Germans in 1945 and 1946. The agreement did not deal with the key issue of whether the Sudeten Germans could claim compensation from Czechoslovakia for property confiscated by the Czech government. To do so would have endangered the agreement. (See Appendix 4 for the agreement).

In 2002 the joint historical commission examined the most contentious issue in Czech-German historical memory, the Beneš Decrees. (See Appendix 3).The commission began by observing that at a meeting held in Berlin they had convened ‘to deal with the misuse (*Missbrauch*) of historical arguments which created problems within the contemporary political debate.’<sup>449</sup> It listed the ‘facts’ of the background to the decrees being instituted. The language used is conciliatory and non-contentious. The decrees were instituted as a response to ‘Nazi crimes.’ The crimes committed by the ‘Third Reich’ including the Munich Pact of 1938, and the destruction of Czechoslovakia in 1939, the violence of the occupation, as well as acquiescence from many Sudeten Germans, led to results, i.e., revenge and ‘resettlement’, that failed to reflect that there were Sudeten Germans who

---

<sup>448</sup> Lily Gardner Feldman, ‘The Principle and Practice of ‘Reconciliation’ in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic,’ *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Apr., 1999), pp.333-356, p.350.

<sup>449</sup> ‘Gemischte Deutsch-Tschechische Historikerkommission’,  
<<http://old.mzv.cz/www/mzv/default.asp?ido=14101&idj=2&amb=1&trid=1&prsl=&pocc1=5>> [accessed 11 October 2008] p.1

were loyal to Czechoslovakia. The Czech people were provoked by the events of Lidice, and in the months after the end of the war, encouraged by the Potsdam Conference, they drove German people out of Czechoslovakia.<sup>450</sup> The Commission comments that

‘Despite the events of the decade 1938 to 1948 it should not be forgotten that the German and Czech people in the Bohemian lands have lived in peace together, and that prior to 1935 most Germans were loyal to the state, voting for democratic parties.’<sup>451</sup>

The Commission then refers to an earlier meeting in 1996 which repudiated the concept of ‘collective guilt’ and that expulsion should never be a consequence of war. More directly, in an attempt to overcome the uncomfortable realities of fact and historical memory, the commission concludes that it,

‘has welcomed the view stated in the 1997 Czech-German Declaration that Czech-German relations should not be burdened by issues stemming from the past. This enables both communities to critically reflect on their own history. We urge that words should be weighed more carefully in political discussions on sensitive issues such as Czech-German relations. History is not a weapon.’<sup>452</sup>

The West German government had at various times during the Cold War period demanded the Beneš decrees be rescinded.<sup>453</sup> These demands were ignored. As with Poland’s entry into the EU in 2002, it took the proposed entry of the Czech Republic in December 2002 to bring the matter to a head again. Other key areas that have led to Czech distrust of the German portrayal of German-Czech history is the belief, as put forward by the Czech historian Miloš Havelka, that

‘There are in the Czech Republic many people who blame the Sudeten Germans, because their support allowed the National Socialists to destroy Czechoslovakian democracy, which then opened the door to communism in central Europe.’<sup>454</sup>

---

<sup>450</sup> ‘Gemischte Deutsch-Tschechische Historikerkommission’,

<<http://old.mzv.cz/www/mzv/default.asp?ido=14101&idj=2&amb=1&trid=1&prsl=&poccl=5>> [accessed 11 October 2008] p.1

<sup>451</sup> ‘Gemischte Deutsch-Tschechische Historikerkommission’,

<<http://old.mzv.cz/www/mzv/default.asp?ido=14101&idj=2&amb=1&trid=1&prsl=&poccl=5>> [accessed 11 October 2008] p.1

<sup>452</sup> ‘Gemischte Deutsch-Tschechische Historikerkommission’,

<<http://old.mzv.cz/www/mzv/default.asp?ido=14101&idj=2&amb=1&trid=1&prsl=&poccl=5>> [accessed 11 October 2008] p.1

<sup>453</sup> Nagengast, ‘The Beneš Decrees and EU enlargement’, *Journal of European Integration*, Volume 25, Number 4, (December 2003), pp. 335-350

<sup>454</sup> Miloš Havelka: ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte, Zusammenleben und Vertreibung,’ paper from Danyel und Ther, *Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive*, p.17

It was the impending elections of June 2002 that brought a stinging attack on Germany from the Czech Prime Minister, Milos Zeman, in an attempt to exploit inherent anti-German feeling among the Czechs. The hostile references to the German and Austrian demands that the Beneš Decrees be annulled simply brought the issue of the Sudeten Germans to the fore again in the Czech Republic.<sup>455</sup> Zeman had said that he believed the Sudeten Germans to be ‘traitors’ and a ‘fifth column,’ leading the German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, to cancel a visit to Prague in 2002.<sup>456</sup> A further rift was opened up when in the same year Bavarian Prime Minister, Edmund Stoiber, stated that by refusing to repeal the Beneš Decrees the Czechs were applying ‘collective guilt to the Sudeten Germans.’<sup>457</sup>

In his 2002 book *Beppo Beyerl*, an Austrian writer and journalist who specialises in Slavic studies, challenged much of what the expellee organizations have to say with regard to both the background to the expulsions, the expulsions themselves, and their hopes for the future. Whilst Beyerl is Austrian, not Czech, his area of research has allowed him to reflect the views and fears of Czech historians. Beyerl’s book is a direct challenge to the concept of the Germans as victims. He often questions the motives of the expellee organizations whom he regards as self-perpetuating and self-serving right-wing groups. Beyerl has taken issue with the expellees’ depictions of their historical memory. He claims there are two versions of history- real history, and expellee history, which leads to a game called ‘memory’ and ‘reality.’ Expellee history says that only a minority of Sudeten Germans were pro-Hitler, and they were the real victims of the war. Real history, says Beyerl, shows that the majority supported Henlein, and Hitler, a vicious regime, and they, the Sudeten Germans, ultimately paid the price for this support. Following the German occupation, the Sudeten Germans assisted in the killing and persecution of Czechs, and, Henlein, as a member of the Czech Parliament, was a traitor.

---

<sup>455</sup> Nagengast, ‘The Beneš Decrees and EU enlargement’, p.340

<sup>456</sup> Ian Willoughby, ‘Bavarian prime minister demands Zeman retract statements over Sudetens’, Radio Prague transcript, 25 January 2002. <<http://archiv.radio.cz/news/GB/2002/25.01.html>> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>457</sup> Mark Fernandez, ‘Restitution of nationalized properties raises eyebrows in Czech Republic’, *Diplomacy and Trade*, 2003, <[http://www.dteurope.com/julius/english/10\\_focus03.html](http://www.dteurope.com/julius/english/10_focus03.html)> [accessed 11 October 2008]

The Sudeten Germans, and newly arrived Germans from the Reich proper went on a business and property buying spree through an artificial exchange rate set to favour the German Reichsmark. Germany occupied parts of Czechoslovakia for 6 years and 6 days. The occupation was brutal and beneficial to the Sudeten Germans. Beyerl argues that the manner of leaving, far from being a wild expulsion, was in general controlled and humane, whilst conceding that there were, however, some revenge-induced killings.<sup>458</sup> These Germans, he argues, should not be entitled to any reparations as they pillaged and plundered Czech property when they left. Any arguments that the Czechs actually collaborated with the Germans during the six years are not valid, he believes, because all forms of social security were stopped to force the population to work for the occupiers in order to survive.<sup>459</sup>

Beyerl's analysis of the history of the Sudeten *Landmannschaft*, or organisation for the Sudeten expellees, is carefully argued. The expellee organizations, he observes, were founded and organised by former active Nazis, many of whom were involved in racial politics and who were offered respectability within these organizations that were funded by the German government, and structurally designed to self-perpetuate long after the last expellee died. Expellee history and expellee organizations are, he argues, based on the legitimacy of the Munich Pact, and looking to the enforcement of agreements made by Hitler. The implication of this is the acceptance by the expellees of the National Socialist government as a legitimate body, and by inference, the Munich Pact was valid in its dismantling of Czechoslovakia. The organizations are, he believes, a cloak for extreme right-wing politics. He links present leaders of the Sudeten *Landmannschaft* by name with leaders of the extreme right. Some of these associates are given as Jörg Haider, Gerhard Frey, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and Franz Schönhuber.<sup>460</sup> Beyerl observes that if the

---

<sup>458</sup> Beppo Beyerl, *Die Beneš-Dekrete : zwischen tschechischer Identität und deutscher Begehrlichkeit*, Wien, Promedia. (2002), pp.83-88

<sup>459</sup> Beyerl, *Die Beneš-Dekrete*, pp.83-88

<sup>460</sup> Haider, who died in 2008, was a popular Austrian far-right politician who led his Freedom Party to a surprise victory in the March 7, 2004 elections in the Austrian province of Carinthia. He was often accused of anti-Semitism and sympathy for the Nazi cause. Gerhard Frey is a German publisher, active on the extreme right-wing of German politics. Jean-Marie Le Pen is the extreme right-wing leader of the French National Front. Franz Schönhuber was an extreme right-wing politician. He died in 2005. See 'The German

ethnic Germans had not been expelled they would have been confined within a Communist state and therefore would have been unable to benefit from West German capitalism, and the associated standard of living that has made them such a prosperous group.<sup>461</sup> Beyerl's final trawl into the controversy of Holocaust and expellee politics states that:

'the fate of the Sudeten German expellees is readily compared with the murder of the Jews. These analogies are, by the nature of the choice of words, false. The expellee organisations use the following terms. Instead of 'holocaust' they use 'expellee holocaust' and the term *Völkermord* (murder of an ethnic group) is frequently used. Jörg Haider on 20 October 2000 in the Vienna Town Hall said, "we speak about restitution (*Wiedergutmachung*). That's something that is not only valid for New York and in the east, but above all for our Sudeten German friends. We must look after our own people.'<sup>462</sup>

Haider's statement was an equivalence of the Holocaust and the plight of the Sudeten Germans. The late Peter Glotz commented on Beyerl's book that:

'Unfortunately, the book is pitiless with regard the fate of the expellees. This is symptomatic of the tenor of the left, left-inclined liberals, and the left inclined Greens of the intelligentsia. Why is it that this political grouping seems to always view the fate of the expellees in this manner? They should show some empathy for the weak and mistreated...'<sup>463</sup>

The reviewer then continues to question some of Beyerl's interpretation of the events of 1938 and Beneš's responses to Hitler's demands. Glotz concludes that Beyerl's analysis is not balanced, as it ignores the injustices inflicted during the expulsions on the ethnic Germans at the end of World War II.

Just as in Poland, the Czechs have viewed the progress of the BdV in their aim to create a Centre against Expulsion with suspicion. The Centre is seen as a direct attempt at changing German historical memory of the events that led to the expulsion of the Sudeten

---

Right: Markets, Morality and Migration,' by Jan-Werner Mueller on the *American Foreign Service Association* website dated 2002. <<http://www.afsa.org/fsj/sept01/Muellersept01.cfm>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>461</sup> Beyerl, *Die Beneš-Dekrete*, p.108.

<sup>462</sup> Beyerl, *Die Beneš-Dekrete*, p.112

<sup>463</sup> A review by Peter Glotz, Beyerl, *Beneš-Dekrete. Zwischen tschechischer Identität und deutscher Begehrlichkeit*, Wien: Promedia Verlagsgesellschaft 2002, in *Sehepunkte* 3, Nr. 11, (2003), <<http://www.sehepunkte.historicum.net/2003/11/4134.html>> [accessed 13 October 2008]



Germans in 1946. In an interview in 2003 Jaroslava Moserova, a member of the Czech Senate, commented in the context of the Centre that what had happened to the Sudeten Germans was tragic, but ‘very much a tragedy of their own making.’

“I always say that we lost the Germans the moment they fell under the spell of Hitler and Henlein. It was a great shame, they were good people, but we lost them the moment they lost their minds. And I know that some had to leave the country, and some of them were innocent, and that always happens unfortunately, and it's certainly something we cannot be proud of. But I don't have a feeling of guilt.”<sup>464</sup>

The interviewer, Rob Cameron, then commented that Moserova's views were moderate and ‘quite typical of this country. Czechs are keen to rebuild the friendship with their German neighbours. But a Berlin-based "Centre Against Expulsion" will find little support here.’<sup>465</sup>

In a paper in 2004, Czech historian Miloš Havelka made the point that in the world of expellee history, the version of events portrayed, no matter how fair or unbiased, is German, and therefore cannot relate events as seen for example, by a Czech or a Polish national. Czechs and Poles see the same events completely differently to each other. Havelka observes that German-Czech relations are riddled with stereotypes, political doctrines, nationalism, and animosity.<sup>466</sup>

National groups remember their own history in the context of their own ethnic or national groupings – for example – the French remember historical events differently to those same events as remembered by Germans – Poles to Russians – Catholics to Protestants, and Czechs to Sudeten Germans or Slovaks. He acknowledges that the ethnic conflict between Czechs and Sudeten Germans is an emotionally charged subject. Its history seems to be motivated by the need for ‘self-determination’. He then looks at the consequences of the 1938 Munich Pact, the ensuing slaughter of Czechs, and the racial politics. Memory of the Nazi occupation is uppermost amongst Czechs. It is not easy for eye-witnesses to these events to be ‘objective’.<sup>467</sup> This is history at a micro level; ‘the individual lives in

---

<sup>464</sup> Rob Cameron ‘Insight Central Europe, Little support in Czech Republic for memorial to Sudeten German expellees.’, *Czech Radio* transcript, 22.August.2003, <<http://centraleurope.radio.cz/ice/article/44451>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>465</sup> Cameron, ‘Little support in Czech Republic’, <<http://centraleurope.radio.cz/ice/article/44451>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>466</sup> Havelka, ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte,’ pp. 13-14, Danyel und Ther, *Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive*.

<sup>467</sup> Havelka, ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte’, p.17

a shadow that allows much less of an overview – statistics are of no interest to the individual...’<sup>468</sup> The key element of Havelka’s paper reads as follows:

‘The Czechs do not remember the civil, productive, centuries long of living together with the German minority. Neither do they remember the richness of the land, or the cultural and spiritual development. No. They don’t even think of the terrible problems of the expulsion of the German minority after the end of the war...’<sup>469</sup>

Havelka makes clear that Czech history means that Czechs think of the Germans in terms of conflict.

‘...the Sudeten Germans do not remember their position as a nation-state before World War I – their unwillingness to live with the Czechs after 1918, their part in Hitler’s destruction of Czechoslovakia and their behaviour during the occupation. Lastly, it would seem, after the coming to office of President Havel at the beginning of the 1990s, when Havel offered his apology to the Germans for the expulsion, the Germans offered no return similar gesture, but demanded only that their property be returned.’<sup>470</sup>

He also makes the point that what we forget knows no bounds – it is possible to increase the amount we remember. Havelka calls this the *problem of forgetfulness*.<sup>471</sup> There is a belief that as we go through the first decade of the 21st century, there are signs that the evolution of German memory with respect to its wartime history and the expellees has now reached a stage where a state of forgiveness has been reached between Germans, Poles and Czechs. Indeed, Bill Niven in the introduction to a collection of papers dealing with elements of changes of German perception of history, comments that there is at least a degree of reconciliation and acknowledgement of injustices committed between Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.<sup>472</sup> The first example given is that of a memorial erected in 2002 in the Czech town of Teplice (formerly Wekelsdorf) in the former Sudetenland. (See Figure 31). This memorial, a ‘cross of reconciliation’

---

<sup>468</sup> Havelka, ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte’, p.17

<sup>469</sup> Havelka, ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte’, p.17

<sup>470</sup> Havelka, ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte’, p.18

<sup>471</sup> Havelka, ‘Gedächtnis und Geschichte’, p.19

<sup>472</sup> Niven, *Germans as Victims*, p.18

was dedicated 'to the memory of 22 Sudeten Germans and one Czech woman shot by Czechs on 30 June 1945.'<sup>473</sup>



**Figure 31.** Reconciliation Cross in Teplice nad Metuji. Source Radio Prague website, 16.09.2002, <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/32374>

Niven believes that this cross allows the Germans a degree of relative victimhood, presumably by the fact that the Czechs, in erecting such a memorial, have undergone a form of self-reproach for the violence committed on the Germans in 1945. A closer look at the Czech perspective, in this case a transcript of an article broadcast by Radio Prague, shows that the conflict is as deep as ever:

'Senior Czech politicians and representatives of Sudeten Germans attended the ceremony which wasn't without controversy.....Not everybody in the region seems to like the idea of a Czech-German reconciliation monument and the mayor of Teplice nad Metuji, Vera Vitova, says she faced threats over the sculpture. Opponents have argued the cross points only at the collective guilt on the part of the Czechs. A local military history club therefore revealed their own memorial close to the reconciliation cross, reading "To the memory of those forgotten in the reconciliation."<sup>474</sup>

Indeed, a recent BBC European affairs article dealing with the memorial makes the point that,

---

<sup>473</sup> Niven, *Germans as Victims*, p.18

<sup>474</sup> Pavla Horáková 'Cross of Czech-German Reconciliation revealed', *Radio Prague*, transcript, (16 September 2002), < <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/32374> > [accessed 15 September 2008]

‘The decision to commemorate the massacre had also led to a spat in the upper echelons of the Czech government with President Vaclav Klaus reprimanding Jiri Paroubek, the prime minister, for wanting to honour the victims of the massacre. Klaus was quoted as saying that Paroubek must be “out of his mind.”’<sup>475</sup>

The article then concludes that the failure of the Czech government to rescind the 1945 Beneš decrees is a ‘thorny issue’ which ‘still causes tension between the Czech Republic and Germany.’<sup>476</sup>

In 2004, *Der Spiegel* published an article condemning the Czech Parliament for honouring their former President, Edvard Beneš, who died in 1948, and who is regarded by the Germans as being directly responsible for the expulsion of approximately three million ethnic Germans at the end of the war, for his ‘service to the state’.<sup>477</sup> The fact that the Beneš decrees, which dispossessed the former German inhabitants of Czechoslovakia, still remain firmly in force, allows us an insight into the hatred and antagonism that still remains. The *Spiegel* article is also a reminder that Czech and German history, with regards to Beneš are diametrically opposed.

An article, this time from a German news source, dated May 2005, emphasises the depths of the distrust below the surface of neighbourly rhetoric:

‘At the weekend rally in Germany, Sudeten Germans and their patron, Bavarian Premier Edmund Stoiber, again called for the so-called Beneš decrees to be revoked and attacked the unveiling of a statue in Prague this week to former Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš who signed the expulsion order... The post-war transfer of the strong German minority from Czechoslovakia's border areas, the Sudeten territories, continues to stir up emotions in both the Czech Republic and Germany.....’<sup>478</sup>

---

<sup>475</sup> Staff reporter, ‘Czechs Honour Massacred Sudeten Germans’, *Deutsche Welle*, 01 August .2005, <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1664777,00.html>> [accessed 15 September 2008]

<sup>476</sup> Staff reporter, ‘Nazis Caused Fate of Sudeten,’ *Deutsche Welle*, 17.May.2005, < <http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,1586569,00.html>> [accessed September 15 2008]

<sup>477</sup> ‘Tschechien, Parlament zeichnet Beneš aus’, *Spiegel Online*, 25 February, 2004, <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,287958,00.html>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>478</sup> ‘Prague Apologises for WWII Expulsions’,

Right up until 1 June 2004 the Czech Republic remained under threat of veto in her accession to the EU. This threat came from the highest levels of the German government who were calling for the rescinding of the Beneš decrees. The Czechs remained defiant, made no concessions, and still entered the EU. The decrees are still in force. It is unlikely that they will be repealed, as to do so would undoubtedly lead to a rash of further claims from former expellees against the Czech State for compensation relating to seized property. Being the legal basis by which Czech law justifies the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans, the decrees are still historically and politically sensitive. The Czechs see them as not only a barrier to economic claims, but as a means of fending off Sudeten German attempts at equating German and Czech ‘wrongs’ during and at the end of the Second World War. Niven comments that restitution historically has a much deeper effect than simply that of money. He says that from revisionists in Germany,

‘...there is an attempted framing of post-war history as one in which the Germans appear morally superior to the Czechs and Poles because they paid compensation (of sorts), whereas the Czechs and Poles did not.’<sup>479</sup>

The implication here is that in the extremely unlikely event that the Czech government rescinded the decrees, and German claims were made, and then settled, there would be a moral equivalence in closing Czech-German history at the end of World War II. Both sides would have recognised that they were both aggressors and victims.

The situation in the manner Czech-German history is being re-written in Germany is summarised by Niven as equating German and Czech ‘crimes’ against each other as providing a middle-ground equivalent. Niven writes that within Germany, both the Czech Republic and Poland are seen as having not yet dealt sufficiently with their pasts (*Vergangensheibewältigung*): this lack of focusing on their own past ‘crimes’ has helped to reinforce within Germany

---

<sup>479</sup> Niven, *A nation of victims*, p.110

‘a widespread feeling that Germans have the *right* to focus public memory on their own victims, while the Czech Republic and Poland have the *duty* to acknowledge their history of perpetration....’<sup>480</sup>

Niven pointedly comments that even if the Czech Republic and Poland do have a past to face, it is not the past that has been ‘concocted by the BdV [and], not least by its indefatigable president Erika Steinbach’ who offers ‘a version in which ethnic Germans are absolute victims, Czechs and Poles are historical villains every bit as heinous as the Nazi perpetrators, and the Holocaust is seen as less relevant to an understanding of German history than it has been hitherto. All in all, a concoction that the Poles and Czechs, rightly, are reluctant to accept.’<sup>481</sup>

There is undoubtedly an economically based desire within the Czech political establishment for moderation in its attacks on its German neighbour. A 2005 ‘Radio Prague’ programme observed that

‘After a troubled common past, the Czech Republic and Germany are currently enjoying good neighbourly relations, with Germany being the Czech Republic’s biggest trading partner. The foundations of the modern-day Czech-German relations were laid in the Czech-German Declaration signed in 1997.’<sup>482</sup>

Other reasons put forward in the radio programme as to why relations have been said to have improved, are that Angela Merkel grew up in former communist East Germany, and thus understood the issues facing former communist countries, and that she had studied for some months in Prague when at University so ‘she knows the situation in this country very well...’<sup>483</sup> Despite ‘improvement’ at the political level, a 2005 survey by the Czech STEM institute found that 75 % of Czechs considered the post-war expulsions of Germans to be justified.<sup>484</sup>

---

<sup>480</sup> Niven, *A nation of victims*, p.110

<sup>481</sup> Niven, *A nation of victims*, p.110

<sup>482</sup> Pavla Horáková, ‘Czech-German relations expected to thrive after Merkel takes office’ *Radio Prague*, transcript, (24-November 2005), available <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/73028>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>483</sup> Pavla Horáková ‘Czech-German relations expected to thrive’. <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/73028>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

<sup>484</sup> Jan Richter, ‘Far-right group protests against Sudeten Germans in Prague,’ *Radio Prague*, transcript, (09 May 2007), <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/91139>> [accessed 13 October 2008]

More recently, the attempts by German expellees to regain property now within the Czech Republic have exacerbated poor relations between the two countries. As with the *Preussische Treuhand* claims against the Polish Government, the Czech Republic has been the subject of a number of German-based expellee claims. The first claim by the Sudeten Germans was filed with the UN in 1975.<sup>485</sup> More recently, in 2003, claims have been made by former expellees, including a claim for the restitution of a popular Czech tourist site, Cesky Krumlov Castle, estimated to be worth some EUR 1.2 billion. In May 2003 the Beneš decrees were cited by a Czech court as a reason not to return land or property because the claimant was an ethnic German.<sup>486</sup> In 2006 a high profile case involving a former Sudeten German aristocratic family, (Countess Colloredo-Mansfeld) also attempting to reclaim an ancestral castle, was defeated after a battle through the Czech courts. Having won an early court case and been given possession of the castle, Colloredo-Mansfeld had invested much money in the ancestral home. There was surprise, even amongst Czech observers, when the state decided to take the castle back into its own possession.<sup>487</sup> This verdict has now been overturned and the property returned to the Colloredo-Mansfeld family.

By 2007 relations between the two countries were still fraught, for the same reasons that had predominated through the previous decade. An article on the German news site *Deutsche Welle* referred to the Bavarian Prime Minister, Edmund Stoiber, speaking at a Sudeten German Association rally in Augsburg attacking the Beneš decrees, and then proceeded to defend the Sudeten German Association from an attack by the Czech President Vaclav Klaus, who had said that the ‘real goal of the organization was to wreck

---

<sup>485</sup> Andrea Gattini, ‘A Trojan Horse for Sudeten Claims? On Some Implications of the Prince of Liechtenstein v. Germany’, *European Journal of International Law*, Volume 13, Number 2, (2002), pp. 513-544

<sup>486</sup> Staff reporter, headed, ‘Czech court returns property to Colloredo-Mansfeld heir’, *Ceske noviny* article, (1 July 2009), [http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/tema/czech-court-rejects-claim-to-franz-ferdinand-d-este-heritage/380745&id\\_seznam=5854?id=370259&id\\_seznam=5854](http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/tema/czech-court-rejects-claim-to-franz-ferdinand-d-este-heritage/380745&id_seznam=5854?id=370259&id_seznam=5854) [accessed 1 July 2009]

<sup>487</sup> Jitka Mladkova, ‘Schloss Opocno wieder im Besitz des Staates’, *Radio Prague*, transcript, (11.April 2007), <<http://www.radio.cz/de/artikel/90245>> [accessed 18 August 2008]

Czech-German relations.’<sup>488</sup> Stoiber argued that the opposite was true and then spoke in favour of the Centre against Expulsions in Berlin. The Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolanek had refused an invitation to attend the two-day rally on the grounds that ‘his presence would not contribute to improving German-Czech relations.’<sup>489</sup> May 2007 saw a march across the Charles Bridge in Prague by the Czech right-wing National Party demonstrating against the Sudeten German Association: a National Party member stated why the march was taking place:

‘We are in this street because we would like to show that the German Association is against Czech interests, because they are trying to reconsider the results of the World War II and they are trying to change history. That is the main reason why we are here.’<sup>490</sup>

As has been seen there are a number of areas around which disagreements between Germans and their Czech eastern neighbours tend to arise. The first is the fact which the Czechs and Poles believe the Germans have forgotten: they were (between 1938 and 1945) victims of German invasion. Secondly, there is a belief within Poland and Czechoslovakia that the ethnic German populations supported Hitler’s invasion, and in many cases benefited substantially both socially and economically from the National Socialist period, and the annexation of Czechoslovakia, and invasion of Poland. However, the course of German 20<sup>th</sup> century history is not straightforward. There are legitimate claims on both sides. The post-World War I peace terms imposed by the allies on Germany made arbitrary divisions when it came to Germany’s eastern borders, many of which in the following two decades, the allies acknowledged had been ill-thought through. Out of the post-World War I settlement Czechoslovakia was created, and Poland reconstituted. Germany lost land and approximately 12% of her population to these new states. Many Germans who woke up in 1919 and found themselves citizens of Poland and

---

<sup>488</sup> ‘Stoiber Enters Sudeten German Row, Defends Expellees’, *Deutsche Welle*, (27 May 2007), <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2559416,00.html>> [accessed 18 August 2008]

<sup>489</sup> ‘Stoiber Enters Sudeten German Row’, *Deutsche Welle*, <<http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,2144,2559416,00.html>> [accessed 18 August 2008]

<sup>490</sup> Jan Richter, ‘Far-right group protests against Sudeten Germans in Prague’, *Radio Prague*, transcript, (09 May 2007), <<http://www.radio.cz/en/article/91139>> [accessed 6 January 2009]



Czechoslovakia may in many cases have lived in these ancestral lands for several hundred years. They were now minorities in foreign states often treated by the new states as second class citizens. Hitler's *Heim ins Reich* policy prior to the Second World War had a natural appeal to these disinherited Germans. Support for Hitler, and a desire for these lands to return to Germany proper, made these ethnic Germans traitors to their respective Polish and Czech governments and populations, on whom legitimate revenge for the crimes of the German wartime government could be justly taken at the war's end. It is this belief that underlines the hostile resistance that current demands for recognition and reparations from the BdV face.

## Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to examine how, over a period of time, both overt and subliminal forms of language and imagery have been used within Germany to transform its wartime history in the context of the German expellees, and create a history that allows the powerful expellee organisations to go forward with a historical memory that regards Germans, and the German expellees in particular, as victims of World War Two, and not as perpetrators. This thesis has shown the development of ‘signposting’ and the ‘deification’ of expellee tragedies that, it has been argued by opponents of the reconstructed history, now means that Germans, far from being the aggressors of the Second World War, are joint victims of the ‘National Socialist aggressors.’ The increasingly common expellee, and German version of World War II and its consequences is that a group of extreme aggressors, during the 1930s, hijacked the German nation and led its unwilling occupants into a war of aggression in which, at the end of this war, the ethnic German inhabitants of the eastern territories, the *Volksdeutsche*, suffered through no fault of their own. This same version of history now regards the Russians, Czechs and Poles as if not the guilty party of post-1944 events, then at least morally equivalent in any guilt as the Germans themselves. It has been shown that the collaboration between *Volksdeutsche* and Nazis is often ignored or glossed over by expellee history in the quest to maintain a moral high-ground and avoid the taint of having been a supportive element in the Nazi state. Similarly, the often zealous role of the ethnic Germans in supporting Hitler after the dismantling of Czechoslovakia and Poland is either glossed over or ignored: by ignoring this segment of history, expellee history has been shown to ignore historical fact that is inconvenient to their argument, and in doing so has now set down the path for compensation claims against Poland and the Czech Republic.<sup>491</sup>

---

<sup>491</sup> The *Preussische Treuhand* claim against Poland failed in October 2008. ‘*Preussische Treuhand* scheitert vor Europäischem Gerichtshof,’ *Spiegel Online*, 9 October 2008, <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,583252,00.html>> [accessed 6 January 2009]

Through a series of progressions beginning in the 1950s, but accelerating rapidly at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, expellee history has become formulaic, and has been deliberately developed in a manner and style which its proponents would wish to lead to an ultimate form, where it will be accepted fact, or canonical history. The single-minded determination of the BdV in its pursuit of the 'Centre against Expulsions' project, despite the consequences for Germany's relations with Poland and the Czech Republic, is evidence of a determination to force the issue of the German ethnic expulsions to a conclusion acceptable to the BdV. The ability to consolidate this formula and its style, it has been demonstrated, owes much to Guido Knopp, the growth of television as a means of disseminating history, and the manner in which television history is constructed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. One of the aims of this thesis has been to show that the boundaries of what has been acceptable in expellee history has changed dramatically in the last decade, with the formulaic approach and its associated paraphernalia culminating in the mainstream written and visual media of Guido Knopp.

Much reference has been made to the imagery of Holocaust history, in itself a major problem for any claim in German history to victimhood, which it has been shown the expellee groups have sought to minimise and relativise in order to allow ethnic German history to take its place as a history of victims, not perpetrators. To this aim, this thesis has shown that Knopp, the BdV and its regional affiliates have adopted much of the imagery of the Holocaust: that of civilian suffering, and cattle trucks being particularly notable in style as well as putting on exhibitions, and observing memorial days for the victims of the expulsions. The key, and most controversial area of the taking on of the Holocaust commemoration has been the proposed 'Centre against Expulsions,' a documentary centre in memorial form, which will lie close to Berlin's Jewish Holocaust memorial. In 2009, it is likely the Centre will be housed in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in the centre of Berlin.

The worsening political relations between Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany have been examined with the aim of showing that the quest for victim status is very real, and of showing the effects of the German quest for equal victim status, has had and is

having on Germany's relations with her eastern neighbours. The separated historical and collective memory of the events of 1944-1947 for Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany have been examined. These are at the present time still having major political consequences for the relationships between Germany and her neighbours.

Of importance in this thesis has been the strengthening of the formulaic outline of expellee history through 'humanisation' and how it has been achieved. Germany's expellee history was made more inclusive, a history that allowed everyone to participate, and unacceptable elements of Germany's expellee historical memory such as collaboration with the Nazis in Poland and Czechoslovakia, were simply airbrushed out of existence. As Knopp wrote, 'when we think of victims at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then we should remember all victims of war...'<sup>492</sup> Where Knopp differed from the German historians discussed in the earlier sections of this thesis, is that Knopp has the widely watched *ZDF* channel to disseminate history to a wider and probably less critical audience than the earlier historians who wrote for a much smaller, academic audience. This thesis has shown that the medium in which history is portrayed has an influence on the way historical memory is created. Television reaches a much broader audience than academic literature, and its ability to talk to its audience creates an air of unchallengeable authority. Knopp took up and cemented the expulsions into a shape which is formulaic, and once created, these episodes became part of the fabric of historical memory, very much in the way that the Holocaust is part of a structure of historical memory. It is in the direction of unquestionable historical memory that Knopp is taking expellee history. Television has the ability to distort through the use of production and editing techniques. As Tobias Ebbrecht observes, 'the filmed eye-witness accounts of contemporary witnesses tends to eliminate the difference between perpetrators and victims.'<sup>493</sup> Knopp's portrayal of German refugees depicts Germans as victims – but fails to answer the question, were it to be put – 'victims of what?' It has been posited by Ebbrecht that Knopp is Germany's history teacher who has 'managed' Germany's past.<sup>494</sup>

---

<sup>492</sup> Knopp, *Die grosse Flucht*, pp.7-8

<sup>493</sup> Ebbrecht, *Die grosse Zerstreung*, pp.3-31

<sup>494</sup> Ebbrecht, *Die grosse Zerstreung*, pp.3-31

History and literature came together to reinforce the new historical memory of the expellees. Günther Grass's novella *Crabwalk* allegedly released a flood of repressed German memory, supposedly stored pent-up within German society.<sup>495</sup> Literature and selective history led to much German public debate as to the suffering of the expellees and the 'reality' of post-war German history. This 'reality' has resulted in a new expellee historical memory. The turning points of the earlier years leading into the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were harnessed by the BdV who sought, and still seek to set the new historical memory, literally, into a concrete form, a 'Centre against Expulsion.' The disparate historical memories relating to the expellees and the increasing unease expressed by Polish and Czech historians led to a conference in 2003. It was hosted by German historians, who invited Polish and Czech historians to make contributions. The introduction to the conference acknowledged that the theme of expellee history was becoming a significant political factor in neighbouring countries, and that the increasing restructuring of expellee historical memory, with the 'Centre against Expulsion' particularly in mind, was causing a rapid deterioration in political relations between, in particular, Germany and Poland. New questions had arisen – as had the German nation's view of itself as *Opfer* (victims) in the matter.<sup>496</sup> Polish, Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian 'colleagues had examined the subject in a way which, not surprisingly did not always mirror the German perspective!'<sup>497</sup> The conference would have as its central theme 'memory' in a national context. It was felt that with the end of the Cold War it was possible to conduct a discussion concerning the expulsions which involved not only Germany but included Poland and the Czech Republic. Old animosities could be neutralised. The introduction to the conference made key points as to why the conference was so important.<sup>498</sup> Firstly, with the numerous publications of the previous few years the historiography of the expellees had posed new questions and problems as for some

---

<sup>495</sup> Alan Riding, 'Still Intrigued by History's Shadows; Günter Grass Worries About the Effects of War, Then and Now,' *The New York Times*, published April 8, 2003

<sup>496</sup> Danyel und Ther, 'Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive,' *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* (51.Jahrgang 2003), <[http://www.metropol-verlag.de/\\_ftp/zfg\\_01\\_2003.pdf](http://www.metropol-verlag.de/_ftp/zfg_01_2003.pdf)> [accessed 11 October 2008]

<sup>497</sup> Danyel und Ther, 'Flucht und Vertreibung,' introduction.

<sup>498</sup> The work that came out of the conference comprised 13 separate papers by leading Polish, Czech, Austrian and German historians, each specialising in an area of the theme of flight and expulsion in the context of the ethnic Germans expelled from the east at the end of World War II.

time each nation, including the Czechs, Poles, and the Germans, had attempted to come to terms with their own 'victim' status. The public debate in these countries, the authors felt, failed to recognise this. Thus it was felt that historians needed to come together from the nations concerned, and discuss the concept of memory within their national frameworks. The conference could be seen as symbolic of an evolving German expellee historical memory, which by 2003 was worrying historians in both Poland and the Czech Republic.

This thesis has demonstrated how the BdV has become increasingly successful in its rewriting and portrayal of expellee historical memory, and how it has actively fought for, at the least, equality with the Holocaust in terms of both numbers, suffering, and concrete memorials, and how it has created the expellee equivalent of Holocaust Memorial Day.<sup>499</sup> Despite the increasingly vocal opposition from its Polish and Czech neighbours as to how Germans are portrayed as victims, the BdV presses ahead with an agenda that is causing concern in moderate political and academic German circles.

The reception within Polish political and academic circles of Germany's quest for a new past has been commented on and it has been shown how the effect of rewriting expellee historical memory has gone beyond being a matter of argument for academics only. The Polish President in August 2006 condemned a BdV-sponsored exhibition 'Forced Paths', stating that the Germans were 'relativising' history and that the 'relativization of the responsibility for World War II [was] not in Poland's interest.'<sup>500</sup> Similarly, in dealing with German history and the Czech Republic, this thesis has shown the manner in which the less savoury aspects of the 1938 Munich Pact are either glossed over or ignored by expellee history, and how elements of modern expellee historical memory ignore the role of Konrad Henlein and how, with the support of the majority of ethnic Germans, Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland, followed by takeover of the rest

---

<sup>499</sup> *Tag der Heimat* or 'Day of the Homeland'. In 2006 the BdV also called for a national *Gedenktage* or 'remembrance day.'

<sup>500</sup> Severin Weiland, 'Auf schmalem Grat, Ausstellung "erzwungene wege"', *Spiegel Online*, 10 August 2006

of Czechoslovakia was enthusiastically welcomed. As has been shown, the very basis of the expellee organisations and their grievances against the Czech Republic are based on the legitimacy of the Munich Pact, which by inference, confirms the legitimacy of the National Socialist Government of the time. This is the same government that Knopp and the BdV depict as a lunatic fringe which hijacked the peace loving German people in 1933.

In reality, certain issues such as the 'Centre against Expulsions' and the *Preussische Treuhand's* claim against Poland are key steps towards the final purification of Germany's unpalatable World War II-related history. They are symbols of Germany's victim status. The journey from perpetrator in general terms began tentatively in the 1950s, and pushed forwards at the end of the 1980s. The debates and objections that greeted Hillgruber in 1986 no longer apply. Hillgruber's attempt at relativising the Holocaust and Stalin's crimes no longer raise an academic eyebrow. From the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to the present day, the highly influential combination of Erika Steinbach and Guido Knopp, has pushed the boundaries of Germany's historical memory into new territory. Within Germany, resistance to this history is dying as the participant generations pass on and the events the World War II and the crimes committed fade into a more distant historical past. Germany's former victims, keenly aware of the consequences of the depiction of Poles and Czechs as perpetrators of crimes against ethnic Germans in both financial and political terms, are increasingly protesting against Germany's new found victim status. The war of memory between Poland and Germany has been heated with Poland's politicians increasingly referring to the crimes that Germans committed during the Second World War. It could be argued that these constant references are an attempt to redress the balance of distorted historical memory. The Poles still see Germany as, potentially, their greatest enemy, despite common membership of the European Union. This thesis has looked at the diverse paths that have led, in 2009, to a new low point between Germany and her eastern neighbours, brought about by the expellee organisations, Guido Knopp, and their contribution to the re-structuring of history. Proof that the combined elements of restructuring expellee historical memory as demonstrated in this thesis have been successful are clear in statistics given by Salzborn

when he writes that ‘Opinion polls on behalf of the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (23 October 2003) and the Polish Newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* (21 October 2003) found that over 90% of Germans are of the opinion that the Germans are victims of the Second World War.’<sup>501</sup>

---

<sup>501</sup> Schmitz, *A Nation of Victims*, p.91



## **Bibliography**

### **Books**

Ahonen, P., *After the expulsion: West Germany and Eastern Europe, 1945-1990*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. (2003).

Bacque, J., *Other losses : an investigation into the mass deaths of German prisoners at the hands of the French and Americans after World War II*. London, Futura. (1989).

Barnouw, D., *The war in the empty air : victims, perpetrators, and postwar Germans*. Bloomington, Ind., Indiana University Press ; [Chesham : Combined Academic, distributor]. (2005).

Beevor, A., *The fall of Berlin, 1945*. New York, Viking. (2002).

Berthold, W., *Die grosse Flucht: das Kriegsende in Ostdeutschland*. Bayreuth, Hestia. (1975).

Beyerl, B., *Die Beneš-Dekrete: zwischen tschechischer Identität und deutscher Begehrlichkeit*. Wien, Promedia. (2002).

Cassidy Velma, H., *Germany 1947-1949. The story in documents*, Washington. (1950).

Davies, N., *God's playground : a history of Poland in two volumes*. Oxford, Clarendon. (1981).

De Zayas, A. M., *Nemesis at Potsdam: the Anglo-Americans and the expulsion of the Germans : background, execution, consequences*. London, Routledge and Kegan Paul. . (1979).

De Zayas, A. M., *The German expellees : victims in war and peace*. Basingstoke, Macmillan. (1993).

De Zayas, A. M., *A terrible revenge : the ethnic cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950*. New York, St. Martin's Press. (1994).

Eubank, K., Ed., *World War II, roots and causes. Problems in European civilization*. Lexington, Mass., D. C. Heath. (1975).

- Evans, R. J., *Proletarians and politics : socialism, protest, and the working class in Germany before the First World War*. New York, St. Martin's Press. (1990).
- Evans, R. J., *Rereading German history : from unification to reunification, 1800-1996*. London ; New York, Routledge. (1997).
- Franzen, K. E., *Die Vertriebenen : Hitlers letzte Opfer*. Berlin, Propylaen. (2001).
- Germany. Auswärtiges Amt., H. Schadewaldt, et al, *Polish acts of atrocity against the German minority in Poland*. Berlin, New York, (1940).
- Grass, G., *Crabwalk*. Orlando, Harcourt. (2002).
- Grass, G., *Im Krebsgang : eine Novelle*. Gottingen, Steidl. (2002).
- Great Britain. Foreign office. [from old catalog] *The British war blue book*. New York, Farrar & Rinehart. (1939).
- Haar, I. *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus: deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der "Volkstumskampf" im Osten*. Gottingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. (2000).
- Hillgruber, A., *Zweierlei Untergang : die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums*. Berlin, Corso bei Siedler. (1986).
- Hirsch, H. *Die Rache der Opfer : Deutsche in polnischen Lagern 1944-1950*. Berlin, Rowohlt. (1998).
- Hitler, A. *Mein Kampf*. [S.l.], Zentralverlag der NSDAP. (1927).
- Jong, L.D. *The German fifth column in the Second World War*. Chicago,, University of Chicago Press. (1956).
- Kansteiner, W. *In pursuit of German memory : history, television, and politics after Auschwitz*. Athens, Ohio, Ohio University Press. (2006).
- Kern, E. *Verbrechen am deutschen Volk. Eine Dokumentation alliierter Grausamkeiten*. (6. Auflage.), Preuss. Oldendorf: Verlag K. W. Schutz. (1964).
- Klessmann, J. D. *Unterwegs wie die Flüchtlinge und Vertriebenen  
Zur Debatte über ein europäisches Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen* (2003).
- Knopp, G. *Die grosse Flucht : Das Schicksal der Vertriebenen*. Munchen, Econ. (2001).
- Komjathy, A. T. and R. Stockwell, *German minorities and the Third Reich : ethnic Germans of East Central Europe between the wars*. New York ; London, Holmes & Meier. (1980).

Krockow, C. G. v. and L. Fritz-Krockow. *Hour of the women: based on an oral narrative by Libussa Fritz-Krockow*. London, Faber, (1992).

Luéza, R. *The transfer of the Sudeten Germans : a study of Czech-German relations, 1933-1962*. New York, New York University Press. (1964).

Lukas, R. C. *The forgotten Holocaust : the Poles under German occupation, 1939-1944*. Lexington, KY, University Press of Kentucky. (1986).

Lumans, V. O. *Himmler's auxiliaries: the Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle and the German national minorities of Europe, 1933-1945*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press. (1993).

Marwick, A. *The nature of history*. London, Macmillan Education. (1989).

Maier, C. *The unmasterable past : history, holocaust, and German national identity*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press (1988)

Mitscherlich, A. and M. Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens*. Leipzig, Reclam-Verlag. (1990).

Moeller, R. G., *War stories: the search for a usable past in the Federal Republic of Germany*. London, University of California Press. (2003).

Niven, B., *Germans as Victims*. Basingstoke, Palgrave MacMillan. (2006).

Richter, H., *No oppression of the Sudeten-Germans in Czechoslovakia? Czechoslovakians reply to the Czechoslovakian government*. Wien und Leipzig, W. Braumèuller. (1937).

Sack, J., *An eye for an eye*. New York, NY, BasicBooks. (1993).

Schieder, T., *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. Bonn, Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees and War Victims. (1949).

Schieder, T., *Documents on the expulsion of the Germans from Eastern-Central-Europe*. Bonn, Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees and War Victims. (1950).

Schieder, T., *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus der Tschechoslowakei*. BAND IV/2, Bonn, Federal Ministry for Expellees Refugees and War Victims. (1957).

Schieder, T., *The expulsion of the German Population from Czechoslovakia v.4.*, Bonn, Federal Ministry of Expellees, Refugees and War Victims. (1960).

Schmitz, H., *A nation of victims? : representations of German wartime suffering from 1945 to the present*, Amsterdam ; Rodopi. (2007).

Sorge, M. K., *The other price of Hitler's war : German military and civilian losses resulting from World War II*. New York, Greenwood Press. (1986).

Stackelberg, R., *Hitler's Germany: an interpretative history*. London, Routledge. (1999).

Szaz, Z. M. *Germany's eastern frontiers; the problem of the Oder-Neisse line*. Chicago,, Regnery., (1960).

Ther, P. and A. Siljak, *Redrawing nations : ethnic cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948*. Lanham, Md., Rowman & Littlefield. (2001).

Wetzel, D. and T. S. Hamerow, *International politics and German history: the past informs the present*. Westport, Conn., Praeger. (1997).

Wolff, S., *German minorities in Europe : ethnic identity and cultural belonging*. New York ; Oxford, Berghahn Books. (2000).

### **Journal Articles**

Ahonen, P. "Taming the Expellee Threat in Post-1945 Europe: Lessons from the Two Germanies and Finland," *Contemporary European History*, Volume 14, Issue 01, (Feb 2005).

Bourke, J. "Remembering' War." *Journal of Contemporary History* 39(4): 473-485. (2004).

Cornils, Ingo, "Long Memories: The German Student Movement in Recent Fiction," *German Life & Letters* 56 (1), 89-101. Volume 56 Issue 1, (January 2003).

Feldman, Lily Gardner, "The Principle and Practice of 'Reconciliation' in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic", *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Apr., 1999).

Frahm, O. "Ein Deutsches Trauma?' Zur Schamlosigkeit Deutscher Opferidentifikation." *German Life and Letters* 57(4): 372-390. (2004).

Fuchs, Anne in "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" to Generational Memory Contests in Günther Grass,' *German Life & Letters* 59:2 (April 2006).

Glassheim, Eagle, "National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945", *Central European History*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2000, 463-486.

Kraft, C., "Was kann die zeithistorische Forschung zum oeffentlichen Erinnerungsdiskurs über Flucht und Vertreibung beitragen?" *Zeitschrift fuer Geschichtswissenschaft*, 51. Heft 1. (Jahrgang 2003).

Hahn, H.J. "Leerstellen in Der Deutschen Gedenkkultur: Die Streitschriften Von W.G. Sebald und Klaus Briegleb." *German Life & Letters*, 57(4): 357-371. (2004).

Haughton, T. "Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-Central Europe, 1944-1948." *Nations Nationalism* 10(3): 392-393. (2004).

Hauner, M. L. "Edvard Beneš' Undoing of Munich: A Message to a Czechoslovak Politician in Prague." *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (4): 563-577. (2003).

Jackman, G. "Introduction." *German Life & Letters*, 57 (4): 343-353. (2004).

Jansen, O. "Doppelte Erinnerung: Täter- und Opferidentitäten in Christa Wolfs Rekonstruktion Des Traumas Der Flucht." *German Life & Letters*, 57(4): 440-455. (2004).

Kansteiner, W. "Nazis, Viewers and Statistics: Television History, Television Audience Research and Collective Memory in West Germany." *Journal of Contemporary History* 39 (4): 575-598. (2004).

Krzeminski, A. "Die schwierige deutsch-polnische Vergangenheitspolitik," *Politik und Zeitgeschichte* (B 40-41/2003).

Komska, Y. "Border Looking: The Cold War Visuality of the Sudeten German Expellees and its Afterlife." *German Life & Letters*, 57 (4): 401-426. (2004).

Linek, Bernard "Recent Debates on the Fate of the German Population in Upper Silesia 1945-1950," *German History*, Vol.22 No.3. (2004)

Menke, T. "Fluchtlings- und Vertriebenenenschicksale im Werk Arno Schmidts." *German Life & Letters*, 57(4): 427-439. (2004).

Moeller, R., "Sinking Ships, the Lost *Heimat* and Broken Taboos: Günter Grass and the Politics of Memory in Contemporary Germany." *Contemporary European History*, 12, (2003).

Nagengast, E., "The Beneš Decrees and EU enlargement," *Journal of European Integration*, Volume 25, Number 4, (December 2003).

Preusser, H.P. "Erinnerung, Fiktion und Geschichte. Die Transformation Des Erlebten Ins Kulturelle Gedachtnis: Walser - Wilkomirski - Grass." *German Life & Letters*, 57(4): 488-503. (2004).

Ryback Timothy W., "Dateline Sudetenland: Hostages to History", *Foreign Policy*, No. 105 (Winter, 1996-1997).

Schulze, Rainer "The Politics of Memory: Flight and Expulsion of German Populations after the Second World War and German Collective Memory", *National Identities*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 367-382. (December 2006).

Thaler,P. "Fluid Identities in Central European Borderlands." *European History Quarterly* 31(4): 519-548. (2001).

Ther, Philipp, "The Integration of Expellees in Germany and Poland after World War II: A Historical Reassessment," *Slavic Review*, (1996).

Veel, K. "Virtual Memory in Gunter Grass's Im Krebsgang." *German Life & Letters* 57(2): 206-218. (2004).

Vogel, J, "The Search for the Nation." *Journal of Contemporary History* 35(3): 501-511. (2000).

von Borries, B. "The Third Reich in German History Textbooks since 1945." *Journal of Contemporary History* 38(1): 45-62. (2003).

Wingfield, N. M. "Book Review: The Problem with 'Backwardness': Ivan T. Berend's Central and Eastern Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *European History Quarterly* 34(4): 535-551. (2004).

Zernack, K., "Developments in Polish Scholarship on German History, 1945-2000." *German History* Vol.22 No.3 (2004).

### **Websites**

[http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/decade17.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/decade17.asp)

<http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org>

<http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/>

<http://www.bundespraesident.de/>

<http://www.bpb.de>

<http://www.dw-world.de>

<http://www.dteurope.com>

<http://www.expatica.com/>

<http://www.exulanten.com/brunn.html>  
<http://www.economist.com>  
<http://www.eurozine.com/>  
<http://www.euractiv.com>  
<http://www.fpp.co.uk>  
<http://www.globalpolitician.com>  
<http://books.guardian.co.uk>  
<http://www.h-net.msu.edu>  
<http://www.hsozkult.geschichte.hu-belin.de>  
<http://www.iht.com>  
<http://www.h-net.org>  
<http://www.johnsack.com>  
<http://www.literaturfestival.com>  
<http://www.mediacritique.org/vertreibung.htm>  
<http://www.mzv.cz>  
<http://ftp.nizkor.org/>  
<http://www.netzeitung.de>  
<http://www.ns-archiv.de> [www.uncp.edu](http://www.uncp.edu)  
<http://query.nytimes.com>  
<http://www.nfhdata.de>  
<http://www.polen-analysen.de>  
<http://www.radio.cz>  
<http://www.rosalux.de>  
<http://rektorenportraits.uni-koeln.de>  
<http://www.surrey.ac.uk>  
<http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe>  
<http://www.sehepunkte.historicum.net>  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>  
<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/>  
<http://www.uncp.edu>  
<http://www.uni-konstanz.de>

<http://www.warsawvoice.pl>

<http://www.wdr.de>

<http://www.yale.edu>

<http://www.zeitgeschichte-online.de>

<http://www.zdf.de>

<http://nurtext.zeit.de>



## Appendix 1

### Television and radio in Germany

#### **Public Broadcasters:**

Germany has two public broadcasting corporations. The first of these, ARD, was founded in 1954 and comprises eleven regional public television and radio stations. Each of these regional stations contributes programmes to ARD's national television channel "Das Erste" (= "*the first*"), and also broadcasts its own regional channel known as "das dritte Programm" (= "*the third programme*"), which concentrates on the culture and politics of their area.

As its name suggests, ZDF (= "*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*") is the second national TV channel. It was launched in 1961, and, unlike ARD, it is structured as a single national corporation.

The Austrian public broadcaster ORF offers two TV channels: ORF 1 and ORF 2. The Swiss national broadcasting company DRS also offers two German-speaking channels - SF1 and SF2 - alongside their French and Italian output.

#### **Viewing habits in Germany**

According to a survey of viewing habits carried out on behalf of ARD, 90.2% of Germans watch television several times a week. Only 83.6% of Germans said that they read a newspaper or listened to the radio regularly each week. The viewing figures are slightly higher for women (91.3%) than they are for men (89.1%), and in terms of age groups, the over 60's watch the most television (95.5%), whereas the 20-39 year olds watch the least (85.4%).

In 2001, German households spent an average of 333 minutes per week [watching television] compared with 275 minutes in 1992. There was a pronounced regional difference: families in the former GDR spend an average of 375 minutes per week watching the box, whereas "West" Germans spent only 323 minutes doing so.

The same study showed that RTL had leapfrogged Das Erste (ARD) in 2001 to become the most popular TV channel, with the families surveyed watching it for 28 minutes per day, closely followed by Das Erste (26 mins), ZDF and the regional "third programmes" (25 mins). They are followed by channels which are broadcast only on satellite and cable - Sat 1 (19 mins), ProSieben (15 mins) and Kabel 1 (10 mins). A regional difference is again apparent, with citizens of the former GDR spending much more time - 33 minutes per day - watching both RTL and the regional third programmes.

Source: Exeter University, <<http://userweb.port.ac.uk/~joyce1/abinitio/chap10-21.html>>

## Appendix 2

### Beneš decrees

Decree of the President of the Republic from May 19, 1945 concerning the invalidity of some transactions involving property rights from the time of lack of freedom and concerning the National Administration of property assets of Germans, Magyars, traitors and collaborators and of certain organizations and associations.

12/1945 Sb. Decree of the President of the Republic on June 21, 1945 concerning the confiscation and early allotment of agricultural property of Germans, Magyars, as well as traitors and enemies of the Czech and Slovak nation)16/1945 Sb. - Decree of the President of the Republic on June 16, 1945 concerning the punishment of Nazi criminals and their accomplices and concerning extraordinary people's court)27/1945 Sb. - Decree of the President of the Republic on June 27, 1945 concerning unified management of domestic settlement)28/1945 Sb. Decree of the President of the Republic on May 20, 1945 concerning concerning the settlement of Czech, Slovak or other Slavic farmers on the agricultural land of Germans, Hungarians and other enemies of the state .33/1945 Sb. -Constitutional decree of the President of the Republic on August 2, 1945 concerning modification of Czechoslovak citizenship of persons of German and Hungarian nationality) .(Decree of the President of the Republic on October 25, 1945 concerning confiscation of enemy property and concerning Funds of national recovery).

### Post-war settlement in Europe and the Beneš decrees

The Beneš decrees are most often associated with transfer (expulsion or resettlement) in 1945-47 of about three million former Czechoslovak citizens of German ethnicity in Czechoslovakia to Germany and Austria. However, they do not directly refer to the transfer or expulsion. It was the Potsdam conference in 1945 in which the Allied powers agreed to the expulsion of some 11 million ethnic Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The Czechoslovak government expelled Czechoslovakia's German population into the "occupation zones" which were set up in post-war Germany. Some of the decrees concerned the expropriation of wartime traitors and collaborators accused of treason but also all Germans and Hungarians regardless of their degree of guilt. They also ordered the removal of citizenship for people of German and Hungarian ethnic origin who were treated collectively as collaborators. This was then used to confiscate their property and expel around 90% of the ethnic German population of Czechoslovakia. These people were collectively accused of supporting the Nazis (through the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP) led by Konrad Henlein) and his affiliation to the Third Reich in 1938. The SdP received around 65% of the [ethnic] German vote at the 1935 elections. Almost every decree explicitly stated that the sanctions did not apply to anti-fascists although the term anti-fascist was not explicitly defined. Some 250,000 Germans, some anti-fascists, but also people required for the post-war reconstruction of the country remained in Czechoslovakia.

Impact on today's political relations: Up to some point the decrees affect the political relations between the Czech Republic and its neighbours, Austria and Germany (and on

even smaller scale between Czech Republic and Slovakia and Hungary). The expellees organised within the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft (part of the Federation of Expellees) and associated political groups call for the abolition of the Beneš decrees. They consider the decrees to be based on the principle of collective guilt. So far European and international courts have refused to rule on cases concerning the decrees as most international treaties on human rights took effect after 1945/46. The Czech political scene and most of the public refuse any reconsideration of the decrees, suspecting it would be followed with financial demands to the Czech Republic. See Beppo Beyerl *Die Beneš-Dekrete* pp. 120-126

### Appendix 3

[18.08.2003] - **Talking Point** - Pavla Horáková, an interview on Radio Prague

The "Beneš decrees" - a historian's point of view

During the past few years, the two words "Beneš decrees" have been ubiquitous in the Czech media. Most recently the term has been used in connection with the case of Franz Ulrich Kinsky, a member of an aristocratic family with long roots in Bohemia, who has filed a total of 157 lawsuits asking the Czech courts to confirm that he is the rightful owner of large amounts of property which were confiscated from him as a child after the war. The so-called "Beneš decrees" that politicians, journalists, lawyers and property claimants frequently refer to, are in simple terms usually described as "post-war legislation that sanctioned the expulsion of ethnic Germans and Hungarians from Czechoslovakia and the confiscation of their property". But of course, matters are much more complex. Historian Jan Kuklik, who is assistant professor at the law faculty in Prague, specialises in the history of law. I spoke to him about the origins of the so-called "Beneš decrees".

"The so-called "Beneš decrees" are in fact laws which were issued during the Second World War and immediately after the war by at first by our exile government in London and then by the first post-war government in Czechoslovakia. So these acts were issued during the period of the Second World War when there was no Czechoslovak Parliament, when the country was occupied by Nazi Germany, when it was divided into the so-called "Protectorate" occupied by Germany and the independent puppet Slovak State. The Czechoslovak exile government represented the continuity of the Czechoslovak state during the war. It was almost the same government as other states established in wartime London, like the Polish exile government, Yugoslav or Belgian government. Also the so-called "Beneš decrees" were in fact similar acts that were produced by these exile representations and also by first post-war governments all over Europe. So in my view, the so-called "Beneš decrees" were in fact emergency legislation for the duration of the war and the period immediately after the end of the war."

**The official title of the legislation is the Decrees of the President of the Republic. The popular term "Beneš decrees" seems to suggest that Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš was the only person responsible for the acts, but as Dr Jan Kuklik says, this is not the case.**

"Of course, President Beneš was the head of the first exile government and then of the whole representation of the Czechoslovak Republic in exile, that's why these acts are named after this president. But of course, the preparation of the legislation was in the hands of the government. And also the ministers were responsible for the legislation so I think it is not correct to use the name "Beneš decrees". But they were called "Beneš decrees" by the opponents of President Beneš and that's why I think it is now very common to use this name "Beneš decrees" especially in Czech-German relations."

**In recent years, the validity of the presidential decrees has often been questioned, particularly by the Czech Republic's neighbours. So what is the status of the decrees within Czech law, are they still part of it?**

"A part of this legislation is still valid because these acts were never approved after the war by the first Czechoslovak parliament in 1946 and then became just constitutional and ordinary laws of Czechoslovakia. Of course, there are some decrees, now laws, still valid but, I think that the problem of the validity of the so-called "Beneš decrees" is in fact connected with the Czechoslovak restitutional laws after 1989 which opened some questions of our history. The people who were deprived of property not only according

to the "Beneš decrees" but also during the communist time, then claimed their property back. And of course, they used the legislation which was valid during the time they lost their property. So for me this problem is really the connection between these so-called restitutional laws and post-war legislation. There is a second problem to it and it is that the so-called "Beneš decrees" are a kind of symbol or the wartime and post-war development in the Czechoslovak-German relations. Because especially for the Germans who were expelled from Czechoslovakia, these so-called "Beneš decrees" are symbols of the expulsion and then transfer from Czechoslovakia. But in fact, it is a combination of international decisions and our post-war legislation, so again, it is not very accurate to say that it is only a case of the so-called "Beneš decrees".

**Some groups in neighbouring Austria and Germany wanted to see the decrees abolished as a precondition for the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union. Last November, the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament approved a resolution, stating that the so-called "Beneš decrees" did not present an obstacle to the Czech Republic's accession to the EU. The verdict was based on the outcome of a legal expertise commissioned by the European Parliament which concluded that the decrees are not in violation of EU law. So how does international law in general look on the decrees? Historian Jan Kuklik.**

"According to international law, the "Beneš decrees" are, of course, a part of Czech, or Czechoslovak legislation, because in 1991, a special constitutional bill was adopted which said that also those parts of the "Beneš decrees" are not in force that are in contrary to human rights principles. So I think that this so-called "problem of the Beneš decrees" according to international law is solved because there is really no contradiction between Czech legislation and international law, especially from the point of view of human rights in the Czech Republic. And I think the process of accession of the Czech Republic to the EU proved that our position towards this problem is right and that of course, from our point of view the "Beneš decrees" are not an obstacle for the Czech Republic to become a part of the EU."

**The economic and human rights situation of the deported and their families in Austria and Germany was very likely incomparable to the life they would have led had they stayed in communist Czechoslovakia. Still, for the survivors and their descendants, the post-war transfer apparently remains a very emotional issue.**

"I think I can understand the feelings of the people who after hundreds of years of their settlement in the Czech Lands were expelled or transferred to Germany or Austria after the end of the war. Personally, I can really understand their feelings. From the point of view of individuals it was very difficult to accommodate with this new situation but, of course, it was a situation which was not created by Czechoslovakia itself. It was really a situation which was an outcome of the Munich decision, the Protectorate, six years of German occupation and the Second World War and the situation after the end of the Second World War. And I think it is really necessary to understand it also from this Czech point of view. That it was a kind of very tragic end of the coexistence of the two nations in the Czech Lands. But of course, it is a problem which, in my view, is very difficult to solve now, after fifty years or so."

**The European Parliament has stated the "Beneš decrees" are not in breach of EU law, but does Jan Kuklik think the debate will continue even after the Czech Republic joins the European Union in May next year?**

"Well, I think that of course, there will still be discussions among historians, politicians and also among the public. I think there will also be some legal disputes. But I think that the importance of these discussions and claims will decrease - and I hope it will decrease in the future. But I think it remains to be seen."

---

**Source: Czech Radio 7, Radio Prague**

URL: <http://www.radio.cz/en/article/44227>

© Copyright 1996, 2008 Radio Prague

## Appendix 4

### **German-Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development of 21 January 1997**

The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic,

Recalling the Treaty of 27 February 1992 on Good-neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic with which Germany and Czechs reached out to each other, Mindful of the long history of fruitful and peaceful, good-neighbourly relations between Germans and Czechs during which a rich and continuing cultural heritage was created, Convinced that injustice inflicted in the past cannot be undone but at best alleviated, and that in doing so no new injustice must arise, Aware that the Federal Republic of Germany strongly supports the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance because it is convinced that this is in their common interest, Affirming that trust and openness in their mutual relations is the prerequisite for lasting and future-oriented reconciliation, jointly declare the following:

#### I

Both sides are aware of their obligation and responsibility to further develop German-Czech relations in a spirit of good-neighbourliness and partnership, thus helping to shape the integrating Europe.

The Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech Republic today share common democratic values, respect human rights, fundamental freedoms and the norms of international law, and are committed to the principles of the rule of law and to a policy of peace. On this basis they are determined to cooperate closely and in a spirit of friendship in all fields of importance for their mutual relations.

At the same time both sides are aware that their common path to the future requires a clear statement regarding their past which must not fail to recognize cause and effect in the sequence of events.

#### II

The German side acknowledges Germany's responsibility for its role in a historical development which led to the 1938 Munich Agreement, the flight and forcible expulsion of people from the Czech border area and the forcible breakup and occupation of the Czechoslovak Republic.

It regrets the suffering and injustice inflicted upon the Czech people through National Socialist crimes committed by Germans. The German side pays tribute to the victims of National Socialist tyranny and to those who resisted it.

The German side is also conscious of the fact that the National Socialist policy of violence towards the Czech people helped to prepare the ground for post-war flight, forcible expulsion and forced resettlement.

### III

The Czech side regrets that, by the forcible expulsion and forced resettlement of Sudeten Germans from the former Czechoslovakia after the war as well as by the expropriation and deprivation of citizenship, much suffering and injustice was inflicted upon innocent people, also in view of the fact that guilt was attributed collectively. It particularly regrets the excesses which were contrary to elementary humanitarian principles as well as legal norms existing at that time, and it furthermore regrets that Law No. 115 of 8 May 1946 made it possible to regard these excesses as not being illegal and that in consequence these acts were not punished.

### IV

Both sides agree that injustice inflicted in the past belongs in the past, and will therefore orient their relations towards the future. Precisely because they remain conscious of the tragic chapters of their history, they are determined to continue to give priority to understanding and mutual agreement in the development of their relations, while each side remains committed to its legal system and respects the fact that the other side has a different legal position. Both sides therefore declare that they will not burden their relations with political and legal issues which stem from the past.

### V

Both sides reaffirm their obligations arising from Articles 20 and 21 of the Treaty of 27 February 1992 on Good-neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation, in which the rights of the members of the German minority in the Czech Republic and of persons of Czech descent in the Federal Republic of Germany are set out in detail.

Both sides are aware that this minority and these persons play an important role in mutual relations and state that their promotion continues to be in their common interest.

### VI

Both sides are convinced that the Czech Republic's accession to the European Union and freedom of movement in this area will further facilitate the good-neighbourly relations of Germans and Czechs.



In this connection they express their satisfaction that, due to the Europe Agreement on Association between the Czech Republic and the European Communities and their Member States, substantial progress has been achieved in the field of economic cooperation, including the possibilities of self-employment and business undertakings in accordance with Article 45 of that Agreement.

Both sides are prepared, within the scope of their applicable laws and regulations, to pay special consideration to humanitarian and other concerns, especially family relationships and ties as well as other bonds, in examining applications for residence and access to the labour market.

## VII

Both sides will set up a German-Czech Future Fund. The German side declares its willingness to make available the sum of DM 140 million for this Fund. The Czech side, for its part, declares its willingness to make available the sum of Kc 440 million for this Fund. Both sides will conclude a separate arrangement on the joint administration of this Fund.

This Joint Fund will be used to finance projects of mutual interest (such as youth encounter, care for the elderly, the building and operation of sanatoria, the preservation and restoration of monuments and cemeteries, the promotion of minorities, partnership projects, German-Czech discussion fora, joint scientific and environmental projects, language teaching, cross-border cooperation).

The German side acknowledges its obligation and responsibility towards all those who fell victim to National Socialist violence. Therefore the projects in question are to especially benefit victims of National Socialist violence.

## VIII

Both sides agree that the historical development of relations between Germans and Czechs, particularly during the first half of the 20th century, requires joint research, and therefore endorse the continuation of the successful work of the German-Czech Commission of Historians.

At the same time both sides consider the preservation and fostering of the cultural heritage linking Germans and Czechs to be an important step towards building a bridge to the future.

Both sides agree to set up a German-Czech Discussion Forum, which is to be promoted in particular from the German-Czech Future Fund, and in which, under the auspices of both Governments and with the participation of all those interested in close and cordial German-Czech partnership, German-Czech dialogue is to be fostered.

Prague, 21 January 1997

For the Government of the  
Federal Republic of Germany  
Dr Helmut Kohl  
Dr Klaus Kinkel

For the Government of the  
Czech Republic  
Prof. Václav Klaus  
Josef Zieleniec

Source: EuroDocs, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah,  
USA. <[http://eudocs.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Czech-German\\_Declaration](http://eudocs.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Czech-German_Declaration)>

## Appendix 5

### Images of expulsion



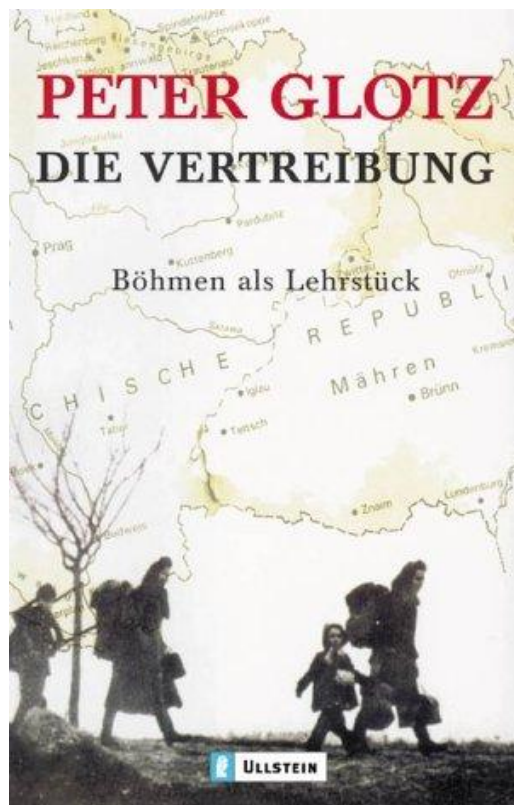
'Sacrifice: the expulsions of the Germans and Poles in the 20th century.' The Cover shows elderly men and women, all civilians, fleeing the advancing allies.



Flight (or escape), the expulsion of the Germans from the East. Refugees fleeing from the Russians with their worldly goods through the snow.



A title from 2005 that retains the woman and child imagery, but shows a trend towards a standardised title



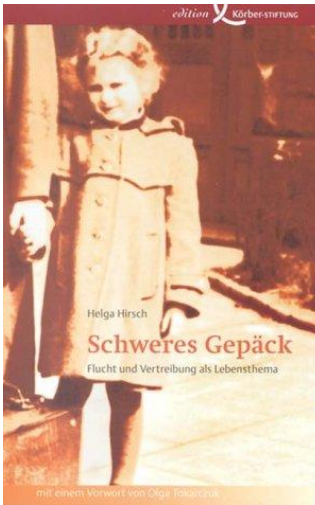
'The Expulsion.' Women, with children carrying worldly goods in a bleak landscape being 'escorted' by what would appear to be a Russian soldier. Glotz was an SPD politician and joint chairman with Erika Steinbach of the BdV of the Centre Against Expulsion foundation.



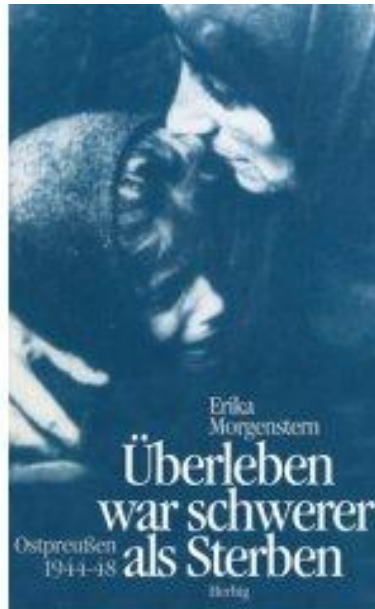
The title of the work above right is ‘The German expellees, No perpetrators, only victims’.



The above three covers are the original covers from the first real documentary of the genre which appeared in 1981



The five covers above make use of children to increase the emotional impact. The centre cover is titled 'We could not expect pity'. This is unusual for the genre, but the mother and child image it could be argued, are designed to gain sympathy.



Erika Morgenstern. Überleben war schwerer als Sterben: Ostpreußen 1944-1948 Februar 2004



Patricia Clough: In langer Reihe über das Haff. Die Flucht der Trakehner aus Ostpreußen. Verlag: Dtv (Oktober 2006)



Katharina Elliger: Und tief in der Seele das Ferne. Die Geschichte einer Vertreibung aus Schlesien (März 2006)



Marie Frisé: Eine schlesische Kindheit März 2006