

**Stories of Integration:
Ethnic German Refugees and Expellees in (West) Germany, 1945 - 2008**

by

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Introduction

As the Red Army advanced westward and the Allies shifted Europe's borders at the end of World War II, approximately 12-14 million ethnic Germans living throughout Central and Eastern Europe fled or were expelled from their homelands.¹ The vast majority of this population of refugees and expellees arrived in the occupied zones that make up modern-day Germany. Here they faced the challenge of rebuilding their lives in this war-torn society. This experience of losing their *Heimat*, or homeland,² and the subsequent effort to integrate pivotally impacted the lives of these millions of people. Furthermore, the influx of refugees influenced society's collective identity as it sought to recover during the initial postwar years. This group significantly contributed to the rapid rebuilding process that took place, thereby socioeconomically integrating into society. Six decades later, it makes sense that individuals view these experiences as important events in their life stories. Why, however, do the issues of flight, expulsion, and integration continue to be emotionally debated? Recent works of literature and efforts to publicly commemorate this past have played a significant role in this contemporary discussion. The resulting controversy centers around the question of how to portray both German suffering within the context of guilt as a result of World War II. Personal stories of flight and integration show how individuals experienced this past and how they understand it in the present. Looking at these various perspectives sheds light on how personal experiences and public views have

1 Various sources cite different statistics, see for example G.C. Paikert, *The German Exodus: A Selective Study on the Post-World War II Expulsion of German Populations and Its Effects*, (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1962), 1-3 and Gerhard Reichling, "Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Statistische Grundlagen und terminologische Probleme" in Schulze et al., *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, 46.

2 The term *Heimat* plays an important role in this discussion because it is continuously brought up in an emotional way, especially for refugees and expellees. Literally, *Heimat* means 'home' or 'homeland,' but it also evokes a nostalgic sense of a connection to a certain place. Having lost the *Heimat*, this concept holds personal significance for many refugees. The work of expellee organizations has also served to politicize this term in the language of their demands. Some continue to promote their "right to the *Heimat*," seeking a change to the postwar borders that caused their former homes to no longer be within Germany, but be parts of other countries.

influenced how flight, expulsion, and integration have been incorporated into individual and collective memory.

These refugees made up a significant part of the mass forced migration movements occurring both within Germany and across Europe as a result of World War II, its buildup, and its aftermath. It is estimated these events uprooted approximately 50 million people.³ These populations included those that fell victim to Nazi crimes or had to relocate as a result of shifting borders. Ethnic Germans spread across Central and Eastern Europe made up a significant percentage of the millions of refugees largely as a result of their association with or role in perpetrating Nazi crimes. Their former homelands included regions of various countries, primarily Poland and Czechoslovakia, where ethnic Germans had comprised a significant minority for centuries. The eastern areas of pre-war Germany were also significantly affected. The 1945 Allied agreements at Potsdam ceded these territories to Poland and Czechoslovakia, forcing the Germans who had lived there to relocate. Many of those who did not leave these territories for the West were deported to labor camps in the Soviet Union after the war. About two million people died as a result of this and along the trek westward.⁴ Two-thirds of the surviving refugees and expellees⁵ moved into the western zones in occupied Germany, while the rest resettled in the Soviet zone or found new homes abroad. In 1950 refugees made up 16 percent of the West German population, while they comprised a quarter of what became East Germany.⁶ Other groups, including

3 Franz Nuschele, "Das Jahrhundert der Fluechtlinge," in *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte: Bilanzierung der Forschung und Perspektiven für die künftige Forschungsarbeit*, ed. Rainer Schulze, Doris von der Brelie-Lewien, and Helga Grebing, (Hildesheim: August Lax, 1987), 11.

4 This is also a contested statistic and is cited as such in various places, including Wolfgang Benz, "Fremde in der Heimat: Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration," in Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland – Fremde in Deutschland: Migration in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Klaus Bade (München: Beck Verlag, 1992), 381 and Paikert, 3. See also Gerhard Reichling, *Die deutschen Vertriebenen in Zahlen, Teil I: Umsiedler, Verschleppte, Vertriebene, Aussiedler 1940-1985* (Bonn: Kulturstiftung der Deutschen Vertriebenen, 1986), 36 (he uses bracket dates 1945-1950 for his statistics on German deaths during expulsion and deportation).

5 Technically, the term "refugees" refers to those ethnic Germans who fled from the Red Army as the war ended, while "expellees" are those who were expelled from their homelands after the war ended. I use the terms interchangeably throughout this paper, except for when I refer to my interview subjects, who were refugees.

6 "Herkunft und Verbleib der Heimatvertriebenen," in *Bundesgesetze und Leistungen für die Geschädigten des Kreiges*

displaced persons, returning POWs, and bombed out city residents also added to the significant population movement occurring in occupied Germany during the postwar years. This crisis posed a great challenge for these decimated countries. Once the initial chaos of the postwar years passed, however, the refugee population played an important role in the recovery effort. In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), they contributed to and benefited from the “economic miracle” of the 1950s. Their overall increase in economic prosperity allowed them to integrate socially and politically to a great extent as well.

By the end of the 1950s and early '60s, the Federal Republic declared that it has successfully achieved the integration of refugees and expellees, causing this issue to fade into the background. The German Democratic Republic also made the effort to quickly integrate their population of “resettlers,” as refugees were called. Among the third postwar generation in contemporary reunified Germany, one by and large can no longer distinguish the former refugees and their children from those who represented the “native population” after the war. On the other hand, about every fifth or even every fourth person who lives in Germany comes from a family that originates from one of these eastern territories.⁷ For many people, the experiences of flight, expulsion, and integration remain potent for them in different ways. The fact that this group comprises up to 25 percent of the current population could be one reason why people continue to discuss these issues, wrestling with the past in new and different ways.

This issue has become especially relevant in recent years. Since the postwar period, family members have talked about their experiences with flight and expulsion in a private setting. Today,

und der Kriegsfolgen, Bonn 1957, 14f, cited in Wolfgang Benz, “Fremde in der Heimat: Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration,” in Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland – Fremde in Deutschland*, 382, Philipp Ther, “Expellee Policy in the Soviet-occupied Zone and the GDR,” translated by David Rock, in Rock and Wolff, *Coming Home to Germany?*, 56.

⁷ Albrecht Lehmann, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus: Flüchtlinge und Vertriebe in Westdeutschland; 1945 – 1990*. (München: Beck, 1991), 1. This statistic describes Germany in the early 1990s, but can still be seen as applying to contemporary Germany.

children and grandchildren of refugees play a significant role in bringing this topic into the public sphere. They thereby influence and reflect the broader public attention that the issues of flight, expulsion, and integration have received. An increased number of historians, sociologists, ethnographers, and psychologists analyze these events from their various perspectives. Eyewitness accounts have played an important role in this research. In this way, oral history has helped to increase the public significance of these personal and family memories. Authors have also written best-selling novels and memoirs describing these events and their aftermath. In the political arena, the issue of expulsion remains perhaps surprisingly salient to this day as expellee organizations, namely the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (League of Expellees, or BdV), continue to influence Germany's relations with Poland and the Czech Republic in terms of European Union expansion. In mainstream German society, including among many former expellees, the BdV often has a reputation for promoting revisionist goals such as their “right to the homeland.” Recently, however, members of the BdV have significantly helped to draw public attention to the effort to publicly commemorate flight and expulsion. The media closely follows these discussions, further promoting the prominence of this issue. These debates show not only that the appropriate way to remember and portray these experiences remains contested, but also that the effort to do so is a salient topic of discussion.

The forms that these discourses and representations take shed light on how the refugees' stories have been incorporated into the country's understanding of its past and present. My thesis explores why the issues of flight, expulsion, and integration continue to be emotionally discussed in contemporary society over six decades after these events took place. Karoline von Oppen and Stefan Wolff argue that it “has to do with the fact that this particular aspect of the Second World War and its consequences has never been properly dealt with by means of a broad and open public debate in Germany.”⁸ In

8 Karoline von Oppen and Stefan Wolff, “From the Margins to the Centre? The Discourse on Expellees and Victimhood

contemporary society, these issues have achieved an increased relevance, and it seems that this discussion is now belatedly taking place. Recent works of literature, museum exhibits, and plans for public memorials have all played a significant role in driving the public debate about how to represent this past. In turn, they and the reactions to them both influence and reflect how the discussion surrounding these events is changing.

Looking at these media and the debates surrounding them provides clues as to how these issues have been integrated into Germany's collective memory. Maurice Halbwachs defined this term in the 1920s as part of a broader discussion of how the past is socially constructed. He argues that a group's memory directly results from individuals' interactions with each other.⁹ In his work, Jan Assmann discusses Halbwachs' thesis. He states that “collective memory” is not a metaphorical concept, since it is present in each individual in a society. However, “even the most personal memories...only come about through communication and interaction within the bounds of the social group.” In other words, the memory that each person embodies, is a conception of the past that “depends on the 'frames' that organize his memory,” dictated by society.¹⁰

How do Germans individually and collectively remember the diverse set of experiences with flight, expulsion, and integration? In order to explore this question, it is important to look at the broader context of national collective memory of the Nazis, World War II, and the Holocaust. The frames that dictate the understanding of this past have determined the lenses through which individuals and society have understood refugees' and expellees' experiences from the postwar period to the present. In the 1950s, public focus on this population's traumatic experiences of loss helped the larger society in the Federal Republic to view itself as a nation of victims that had suffered just as much, if

in Germany” in *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*, ed. Bill Niven (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 208.

9 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, (Paris: 1925) cited in Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, (München: C.H. Beck, 1992), 35.

10 Assmann, 34-36.

not more than, the Jews. This perspective played a pivotal role in society's effort to reestablish itself domestically and internationally during these years.¹¹ Within this discussion, expellee organizations called for a “right to the homeland.” Politicians at least ostensibly recognized their demands to court this significant minority's vote.¹² In this way, these organizations found a legitimate, mainstream voice in politics during the initial postwar years. Their relevance reflects the collective memory's broader view of the past at the time.

This perspective helped to set the scene for the “victim/perpetrator” dichotomy that has dominated the public discussion of refugees' stories in the years after the initial postwar period. This view of victimization shifted to the other side of the spectrum in the 1960s and '70s. The expellee voice lost its influence as Willy Brandt practiced Ostpolitik, renouncing all claims to the eastern territories in the effort to reduce Cold War tensions.¹³ During these years, a “Holocaust-centered memory” served the opposite function of the “German-centered memory” that had previously dictated this discussion. This view made it taboo to consider stories of personal trauma that Germans had experienced. Historians and politicians promoted this perspective in the effort to reinforce Germany's perpetration in the Holocaust.¹⁴ Expellee organizations did not stop promoting their views, however, causing their position to become more associated with right-wing politics as they steadily lost legitimacy. This “victim/perpetrator” debate continued on the academic front, coming to a head with the 1986 *Historikerstreit* (Historians' Dispute). In this controversy, scholars representing the left side of the political spectrum promoted the focus on the Holocaust, while right-wing perspectives argued for the

11 Robert Moeller. *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 173.

12 Pertti Ahonen, “Taming the Expellee Threat in Post-1945 Europe: Lessons from the Two Germanies and Finland.” *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 1 (2005): 5.

13 Ruth Wittlinger, “Taboo or Tradition? The 'Germans as Victims' Theme in Federal Republic until the mid-1990s” in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 71.

14 Eric Langenbacher. “Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?” *German Politics and Society*, Issue 67 Vol. 21, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 53.

traditional view of German suffering prominent during the initial postwar years.¹⁵ The debate of how Germany's Nazi past should be historiographically represented did not explicitly involve “expellee” voices, but it did reflect the political polarization of this issue that had evolved during the postwar years. This perspective brought about a widespread understanding of stories of flight and expulsion as “inappropriate” examples of German suffering. Because they had no place in the view of German guilt, the discussion of these experiences was primarily associated with right-wing perspectives. This polarization effectively shut them out of mainstream discourse.

A look at the specific historiography on refugees and expellees reflects these political shifts. It also sheds light on refugees' presence in collective memory since the postwar period. In the 1950s, this research centered around the suffering of expellees. As a main example, Theodor Schieder's work, commissioned by the Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims, incorporated eyewitness accounts of flight and expulsion to do so.¹⁶ Scholars also focused on the integration process to some extent. In dealing with this issue, however, they largely discussed economic assimilation, not social and psychological issues.¹⁷ The attention then mostly shifted away from on the refugees' as a topic of research in the 1960s and '70s as the Federal Republic declared integration a success with the help of the “economic miracle.” During this academic lull, expellee authors and scholars continued to publish their own stories and conduct research on their homelands.¹⁸ Academic interest resurged in the 1980s, and scholars sought to portray how this topic remained economically, socially, and psychologically significant in the lives of refugees.¹⁹ Despite this increased interest, certain holes remained in the

15 Ibid., 56.

16 Alexander von Plato, “Bilanzierung der Fluechtlingsforschung vor und nach der Wende” in *Vertriebene in Deutschland: interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspektiven*, eds. Dierk Hoffmann, Marita Krauss, and Michael Schwartz (München: Oldenbourg, 2000), 88.

17 Doris von der Brèlie-Lewien, “Zur Rolle der Fluechtling und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte – Ein Forschungsbericht” in Schulze, *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, 30.

18 Moeller, 180-181.

19 Ibid., 35.

research. Little work was done on the experience of refugees living in East Germany and often historians failed to include the perspective of the native population in the integration process.²⁰ The end of the Cold War saw a shift in perspective as researchers currently try to fill these gaps.²¹ By looking at these different groups, their efforts seek to make the refugees' experience a part of the larger society's history. Alexander von Plato concludes his historiographical essay by stating that “some opposition to refugee research seems to maintain that even today, those who address the refugee topic divert from Nazi crimes in the effort to portray Germans as victims.”²² In this way, we see how this research attempts to create a more integrated historical narrative but is still often viewed within the context of the “German victims” debate.

The increased academic attention on the issues of flight, expulsion, and integration reflect and influence the recent resurgence in the public portrayal of German suffering in contemporary discourse. In their analysis of this phenomenon, some viewpoints perpetuate this “victim/perpetrator” dichotomy by viewing this discussion as a reflection of one side of the polarized debate on this topic. Bill Niven, for example, cites the various literature and films on refugees and expellees as having “thematized German victimhood during and after the war.”²³ Others, such as Aleida Assmann, see this shift as part of a disruption of this very political polarization. She focuses her analysis more specifically on the current place of refugees' stories in collective memory. Assmann notes how the “particularistic and politicized memory” of flight and expulsion has “moved out of its niche.” The contemporary widespread public interest in the family memory of these stories of suffering suggests that this point of view resonates with many Germans.²⁴ Given the extensive silence surrounding refugees' and expellees'

20 Plato, 93, 97.

21 Ibid., 99.

22 Ibid., 108.

23 Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 8.

24 Aleida Assmann, “On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory,” Translated by Linda

experiences throughout the previous decades, this current conversation has often been seen as breaking a significant taboo. This perspective seems to fuel the discussion in many cases. Bringing these stories to light is viewed as part of the process to make up for the years that society had repressed these stories, not only of flight and expulsion, but also of bombings and mass rape. Niven, for example, seems to recognize this effort to “break a taboo” as an excuse to return to this focus on German suffering outside of its historical context. Assmann recognizes this concern, emphasizing that “we should not underestimate the Germans’ readiness to use the role of victim in order to veil or dismiss their historical responsibility.” She continues, however, to say that “at the same time, it would be wrong to interpret any reference to suffering as a strategy to avoid, or even to deny, guilt.”²⁵ In this way, Assmann recognizes the political polarization that surrounds this issue and attempts to step beyond it. Her statement reflects the recent efforts to broaden the views of the experiences of flight, expulsion, and integration.

These various perspectives shed light on the frames that dictate German society's understanding of its past. In his analysis of these memory regimes, Eric Langenbacher argues that this polarized victim/perpetrator dichotomy has caused the controversy about the way in which Germans should remember World War II to remain anchored between two limited theoretical frameworks. These simplify any understanding of postwar German history to the issues of remembering vs. forgetting the Holocaust.²⁶ Aleida Assmann agrees with this statement in her discussion of contemporary memory:

“The norm of German national memory is the Holocaust...the recognition and working-through of German guilt, involving the assumption of historical responsibility for the atrocities of the Nazi-regime...(This) is the normative framework into which all the

Shortt, *German Life and Letters* 59, no. 2 (April 2006): 191.

²⁵ Ibid., 196.

²⁶ Langenbacher, 49.

other memories have to be integrated.”²⁷

It is of course important to understand that flight and expulsion was a direct consequence of Nazi crimes during World War II. In this way, German perpetration did serve as a catalyst for these events. Focusing solely on this point shuts out much of what German refugees and expellees actually experienced in terms of losing their *Heimat* and integrating into their new communities. It seems that these stories do not always neatly fit into a context of either remembering or forgetting the Holocaust. Reducing this traumatic situation and its effects to seeing it as the “payback” for Nazi crimes fails to include the stories of millions of individuals whose lives were indelibly impacted by this experience. On the other hand, viewing refugees exclusively as victims of the Red Army ignores their place in the historical context that recognizes that Hitler's regime directly led to flight and expulsion of people all over Europe. In these alternate ways, refugees have been specifically included and excluded at certain stages of “Germans as victims” debate for political purposes.

How a society portrays and remembers its history influences how individuals understand their own pasts. I argue that this “German victims” frame of reference has posed a challenge to refugees seeking to come to terms with their own experiences and to the larger society in integrating these stories. It has caused the discussion of their experiences to be centered around the events of flight and expulsion. Schieder's work and the efforts of expellee organizations to promote their stories and their memories of the *Heimat* serve as main examples of this. The integration process, on the other hand, has received much less attention. The process of creating a new sense of home while maintaining a connection to the *Heimat*, of simultaneously mourning and moving forward, has served as a difficult process for individuals and a society. It requires them to create a cohesive sense of self out of two environments, communities, or experiences that have been abruptly and painfully separated from one

²⁷ Ibid., 197-198.

another. Connecting these two pieces to one another is necessary for people to be able to link the past to the present in both individual and collective memory. The representation of these two types of memory discussed here show that acknowledging the integration process itself plays a significant role in facilitating this connection, both for individuals and the larger society. The fact that refugee issues continue to be salient suggests that as a whole, in many ways the society has not found a place for this experience in its collective memory. The recent contributions to this conversation are engaging in this effort to address this issue decades after it seemed to reach its conclusion.

The way that these contemporary efforts represent flight, expulsion, and integration plays a significant role in this effort to incorporate refugees' stories into Germany's collective memory. Günter Grass's 2002 novella *Im Krebsgang* (*Crabwalk*) serves as a central example. This book centers around the Soviet torpedoing of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a cruise ship that 7000 German refugees were on as they fled the eastern German territories in January 1945. It received extensive press and criticism, stirred largely by the media's initial surprise at Grass's choice in topic. As a Nobel Prize winner and prominent member of the broad left, the author had previously been outspoken in his opposition to the portrayal of German suffering. *Crabwalk*, as a result, may be seen to embody this broader shift in the public discussion about the past. Many critics located his work within the increased prevalence of stories of German victims. This view illuminates the frame that continues to dictate representations of flight and expulsion.

The media debate says more about how society perceives these stories than portraying Grass's viewpoint in that his intergenerational perspective defies a story of pure victimization. The author portrays the ways that his three main characters have dealt with their pasts in a negative light in order to make this point. Tulla, who survived the sinking of the *Gustloff*, still feels like a victim decades after her experience. In reaction to this nostalgic view, her son Paul has repressed this story while her grandson Konny, has turned it into a glorified view of the Nazi past. Grass uses these perspectives to

show how this story of flight continues to impact present. He then describes Paul's effort to present his own nuanced view of this story. Through this lens, Grass recognizes the personal trauma inherent in these experiences. He also conspicuously places this story of suffering within a discussion of the historical context of Nazi perpetration. By incorporating these different elements and views of the past, Grass promotes a conversation about these experiences. In this way, he “is not only referring to a social milieu that makes new communication of this memory possible, his novella is itself a contribution to promoting such a milieu.”²⁸ Grass's work promotes a discussion about flight in the effort to make a place for this story in collective memory. It conspicuously does not discuss the integration process, however. The lack of this element serves as a significant limit to this work, reflecting some of the broader past silence on this issue.

Influential memorial proposals and museum exhibits also present examples of recent public representations of these pasts. In my third chapter, I discuss the BdV's proposal for a “Center Against Expulsions” in Berlin and the “Forced Paths” exhibit, shown in Berlin in 2006, along with the House of History's “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit, which traveled between Bonn, Berlin, and Leipzig between 2005 and 2007. The BdV's association with the former two has largely influenced the extensive criticism that they have received. The House of History's effort, on the other hand, garnered wide public acclaim and has become moreover the museum's most popular exhibit. Like Grass's novella, all three incorporate individual experiences within a historical context, but their broader frames vary. The “Center Against Expulsions” proposal has been criticized from the beginning for focusing too extensively on German suffering by dedicating a large portion of their planned memorial to this story. The “Forced Paths” exhibit aimed to respond to this critique by placing the German expulsion within the context of other European forced migrations of the twentieth century. According

28 Ibid., 199.

to various critics, however, this effort also seemed to promote the view of German victimization. These reactions show that this frame is no longer acceptable in German society, supporting Assmann's view of German guilt as the norm for national memory.

“Flight, Expulsion, Integration” diverged most obviously from the BdV's efforts by focusing in large part on the integration process. At the same time, it also aimed to place the German experience within its European context. However, it expressed a much more explicit link between Nazi crimes and the expulsion. These elements of the exhibit emphasize the connection between the past and the present inherent in this story. The positive response to this exhibit suggests that this point of view resonated with many Germans. Furthermore, it also seems that the story of integration allows the exhibit to tell this story outside of the political debate that has surrounded the issues of flight and expulsion.

In my final chapter, I present the stories of two former refugees. Their experiences provide examples of the different forms that the integration process has taken and of the varying ways that it remains an issue in individual memory. My grandparents, Anneliese and Hans-Hermann Wiebe, fled West and East Prussia (modern-day Poland) at the ages of nine and twelve, respectively, in 1945. In a series of interviews, they told detailed accounts of their experiences of flight and postwar integration into West Germany, where they live today. Their experiences and present perspectives show the importance that building bridges between their two homes and, in turn, the past and the present, has had for creating an integrated sense of self and understanding of individual and collective pasts. Social networks have played a pivotal role in both Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's integration process and in their current conceptions of the past. As Jan Assmann argues, individual memories are formed through each person's participation in a communicative process.²⁹ Family, school, career, and religious

29 Jan Assmann, 36.

communities serve as a main example of this. For both Anneliese and Hans-Hermann, their families helped to preserve connections to their former homes, providing varying types and levels of support as they struggled to rebuild their lives. Their education and careers served an opposite but equally necessary function, allowing Anneliese and Hans-Hermann to form connections with the native population. These factors helped them to socioeconomically and politically integrate into their current homes.

Their stories differ to a great extent, however, in the extent to which they feel personally integrated. Inclusive and exclusive social networks played different roles in each of their lives, significantly impacting this process. After her experience in various refugee camps, Anneliese arrived in a supportive Mennonite community made up of both refugees and the native population. This network helped her to build a bridge between her two homes, allowing her to connect her childhood experiences to her life in her new community. Today, Anneliese's description of the term *Heimat* applies to multiple places, including her current home. She also explicitly describes her personal experiences with flight within the historical context of Germany's Nazi past. Just as she has been able to tie these two central places in her life together, she has also been able to appreciate the relationship between the past and present circumstances. These views suggest that the social network that allowed her to make these connections was vital to helping her integrate and create a cohesive sense of self.

Hans-Hermann, on the other hand, did not have this opportunity to build a bridge between his childhood and his new home. He had his family and later his career, but he lacked this third network that allowed Anneliese to connect to her new home without detaching from her old one. For Hans-Hermann, the native population served the opposite purpose, acting as an ostracizing influence for him and his family. Significantly, he still says that he feels like a refugee. Unlike his wife, Hans-Hermann clearly states that his current home is not his *Heimat* and does not make a similar explicit connection between his personal experiences and their historical context. While Anneliese describes a relatively

smooth integration process, it seems that for Hans-Hermann, this experience still recalls difficult, painful memories. His views suggest that he has not been able to come to terms with his experiences to the extent that Anneliese has. The fact that he lacked a network that could have helped him to build a bridge between his two homes differentiates Hans-Hermann's experience from his wife's. In turn, this difference could provide a clue for understanding their two current points of view. A recent trip to his former home and renewed contact with a childhood friend, however, serve as ways in which this past remains relevant in Hans-Hermann's life. His description of these current influence seems to reflect that they are helping him to more concretely conceive of a relationship between these two parts of his identity. This personal shift in perspective aligns with the current efforts present in German society today to come to terms with this experience. In this way, individual and collective memory overlap.

Because I conducted these interviews with my grandparents, “family memory,” like collective memory for any historian, serves as an influential lens through which I approach their stories and this topic. Harald Welzer discusses the similarities between these two types of memory. According to him, families, like every social group, also have a collective memory that sets the parameters for the communication between its members.³⁰ Torsten Koch and Sabine Moller explain this concept more specifically in terms of memory in families of refugees and expellees:

“These memories are passed on to younger generations through communicative “tradition-making” (*Tradierung*), and many of these stories find their way into the 'family memory.' This family memory is not only made up of the individual and collective stories that are told again and again. These memories also always integrate beliefs and judgments about the own family.”³¹

30 Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002), 23.

31 Koch and Moller, 217.

In the formal interview setting, my grandparents did not tell their stories in the more casual, spontaneous type of conversation that typically characterizes communication between family members. However, our preconceived notions of one another influence how my grandparents explained their life stories and the frame of reference that I had while talking with them and analyzing their points of view. This influences how I conceive of them through the lenses that influence me as a member of the same family.

My analysis focuses on how Anneliese and Hans-Hermann have dealt with their senses of loss and displacement by creating connections in their new communities and maintaining contact with their former homes. The effort to deal with these complex transcultural issues can probably be said to characterize my family's conception of itself. My grandparents were refugees, my mother is an immigrant, and I, as the daughter of a German mother and American father, have grown up between two cultures. The effort to strike a balance between two different places, communities, even lives, has impacted the members of each of these three generations differently. The fact that we have all dealt with these issues in some way, however, connects our life stories to one another. This acts as a significant element of our family memory and helps to explain why I focus on these issues in my work.

Stepping outside of the content of my grandparents' stories and my analysis of them, the fact that I chose to work on this personal project is also significant. My work can be seen as part of the larger trend of the third generation exploring personal and familial memory of Germany's Nazi past. Large numbers of children and grandchildren of refugees participate in the increasingly popular *Heimat* tourism, journeying to their families' former homes in Poland, for example.³² Membership of the third generation in expellee organizations has also risen. These grandchildren often promote positive relations with Poles in order to learn about “the culture and history of their families' *Heimat* in

32 Henning Suessner, “Still Yearning for the Lost *Heimat*? Ethnic German Expellees and the Politics of Belonging,” *German Politics and Society* Issue 71 Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 18.

search of a piece of their own identity.”³³ They seek connections to the people living in places where their families had made their homes for centuries but that they have no personal memory of. The prevalence of this past in family memory has clearly influenced them in this process.

These experiences connect to the private nature of this memory to the public sphere. In his analysis of how these topics of flight and integration continue to be discussed today in family memory, Albrecht Lehmann notes that as grandparents, many refugees “have won a new audience of attentive listeners from their grandchildren.”³⁴ Aleida Assmann describes how these younger perspectives have in turn sought to publicly represent these stories:

“Looking at recent publications, it is quite remarkable how many writers of the second and third generation are picking up this theme, researching it with great pains, investing it with their imagination and recovering in the process some of their own oral and written family memories.”³⁵

Just as I do here, these individuals with personal connections to this past have attempted to portray their own understandings of their family histories in the effort to better understand themselves and where they come from.

This experience is analogous in some ways to other cases in which a society has “rediscovered” a complicated, controversial, traumatic, repressed topic. A look at the resurgence of memories of World War I among the third generation in France around its 80th commemoration in 1998 sheds light on this phenomenon. Authors Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker explore the seeming contradiction present here as this generation seeks a connection to this past while continually becoming more removed from it. The combination of a “feeling of proximity” as a result of recent international

33 Wolfgang Stock, “Die Enkel suchen Verstaendigung,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 2, 1993.

34 Lehmann, 8.

35 Aleida Assmann, 192.

developments and a “feeling of estrangement” because of the length of time that has passed has resulted in a “strange paradox.”³⁶ Like their French counterparts, German grandchildren seek to understand seemingly remote experiences that at the same time have a considerable bearing on family memory. As they express their own voices in this process, they participate in the broader effort to incorporate these stories of flight, expulsion, and integration into a more cohesive personal, family, and collective memory of the past.

This story of integration looks at refugees' stories on two levels: how they have specifically integrated into their contemporary German homes and how their stories have and have not been incorporated into the country's contemporary conception of its past. Both my grandparents stories and the House of History exhibit show how important the story of the integration process is to understanding and being able to represent this history. These representations move beyond the initial experience of losing the *Heimat* in order to include this story that has previously not been extensively recognized. In doing so, they attempt to simultaneously honor the experiences of these refugees and expellees and to understand these stories in their political and historical context. The story of integration recognizes both old and new homes as two parts of a series of individual pasts. By building a bridge between these two places, this perspective also allows refugees and the larger society to connect the past to the present. This effect has specific significance for German society. As I have described, it has served as a particular challenge to integrate the various stories of German guilt and suffering as a result of the country's Nazi past into a cohesive collective memory. Understanding the refugees' experiences serves as one example of this since the causes and effects of flight and expulsion encompass both German guilt and suffering. Incorporating the experiences of integration in the collective view of flight and expulsion takes this discussion beyond the limiting framework of

36 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *14-18: Understanding the Great War*, translated by Catherine Temerson, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002) 10.

perpetration and victimization. It makes this story one of inclusion and exclusion as Germany rebuilt its identity during the postwar period. This effort to understand the complexity of refugees' experiences and memories in both the past and the present holds the promise of allowing individuals to deeper understand their experiences. Furthermore, it bodes well for a new, broader, and more empathetic incorporation of these stories into the country's collective memory.

Chapter 1

The Flight, Expulsion and Integration of Refugees and Expellees into the Federal Republic of Germany

Germany's turbulent history over the last century and a half have created a changing conception of "Germanness." The physical changes to the country's border have mirrored these developments. Since unification did not occur until 1871, Germans have lived in different areas across Europe since the Middle Ages. Hitler focused on this diaspora with his policies of expanding the German Reich so that it could encompass all Germans. With the Nazi defeat, the ethnic Germans living in these various regions feared the wrath of the Red Army and began fleeing west, to occupied Germany. The majority of those who stayed were then expelled from their homelands. Allied agreements at Postdam formalized the decision to clear these Central and Eastern European regions of their German minorities. Other peoples, mainly Poles, were then resettled into these areas. Just as the war changed nations' borders, these efforts also dramatically altered the landscape of the populations living in different European countries. The twentieth century has been referred to as "century of refugees,"³⁷ or "the century of expulsions,"³⁸ most significantly because of World War II and its aftermath.

Millions of refugees and expellees flooded into occupied Germany between 1944 and 1948. As a result, the Allies and then the young West and East German governments faced the challenge of socioeconomically and politically integrating these populations. In this chapter, I focus on the efforts made by the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in order to provide a background of the situation that my interview subjects faced when they settled in the western occupied zones after the war. The government of the FRG actively confronted this situation. The newly-established Ministry for

37 Nuschele, 11.

38 *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration: Begleitmaterial zur Ausstellung*. (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2006), 6.

Expellees, Refugees and the War Damaged, among other efforts, provided economic aid to expellees, involved them in the political process, and even commissioned the prominent historian Theodor Schieder to document the refugees' stories in the early 1950s.

Government efforts certainly aided these millions of refugees, who had to feed their families and find employment relying on minimal resources. In the cities, their poverty did not set them apart from the many members of the native population who had also lost almost everything. The integration process in urban areas often ran more smoothly than in rural towns, where many members of the native population were grudgingly forced to share their homes with refugees. As a result, their treatment from the local population bordered at times on social exclusion. Despite these challenges, the Federal Republic's rising prosperity in the '50s, which culminated in the "economic miracle," created a place for the refugees within the country's economy, allowing both groups to grow together. The integration had been "completed" by the early '60s and was heralded as the greatest accomplishment of the FRG.

At this point, the integration process for the most part ceased to be a central public issue. This popular view of a neat conclusion, however, did not mean that the social, cultural, and emotional problems that refugees faced had been solved.³⁹ These questions have been explored by many historians more recently, mainly through oral history work. Rainer Schulze, for example, found that while some former refugees have been able to reestablish a sense of *Heimat*, many others still refer to the place that they were born as their true homeland, expressing a complicated and even confusing conception of this term.⁴⁰ This discussion of the socioeconomic and political integration process, focusing mainly on influences of the government and the native population, illuminates the main lenses

39 Klaus Bade, "Sozialhistorische Migrationsforschung und 'Fluechtlingsintegration'" in Schulze, et. al., *Fluechtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, 137.

40 Rainer Schulze, "The Struggle of Past and Present in Individual Identities: The Case of German Refugees and Expellees from the East" in *Coming home to Germany? The integration of Ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe in the Federal Republic*, eds. David Rock and Stefan Wolff (New York : Berghahn Books, 2002), 47. His work specifically focuses on interviews done with former refugees in the northwestern German town of Celle and the region surrounding it.

through these issues have been publicly viewed. In turn, this perspective provides a backdrop for the contemporary discussion surrounding the issues of flight, expulsion, and integration.

Flight and Expulsion from Central and Eastern Europe

The majority of the ethnic Germans who fled or were expelled from Eastern and Central Europe expellees lived in communities that had existed in territories in the eastern parts of Germany, such as East and West Prussia, East Pomerania, East Brandenburg, and Silesia, for centuries. Others comprised similarly long-established minority populations in various areas of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Russia, and the Baltic states. In 1939, these ethnic Germans totaled approximately 18 million.⁴¹ Part of Hitler's efforts to expand the Third Reich included consolidating this diasporic German population. The Nazi regime sought to create more *Lebensraum* (living space) for Germans. As Hitler annexed and occupied territories across Europe, he sought to bring the *Volksdeutsche* (ethnic Germans) living throughout Central and Eastern Europe "home to the Reich."⁴² Between 1939 and 1944, approximately one million Germans moved to these areas. These resettlements were accompanied by efforts to "purify" these regions of Jews, Poles and other populations targeted by the Nazis.⁴³

Nazi efforts to ethnically cleanse these regions of certain populations and repopulate them with Germans directly led to the flight and expulsion of Germans from these areas after the war. As the Red Army moved west, Germans living in East Prussia and the occupied territories of Poland began to flee their homes in fear and panic of Soviet revenge for Nazi crimes. Some had already experienced violence at the hands of Soviet troops, while others responded mainly to Nazi propaganda, which

41 Reichling, *Die deutschen Vertriebenen in Zahlen, Teil I*, 17

42 Ibid., 155.

43 Wolfgang Benz, "Fremde in der Heimat: Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration," in Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland – Fremde in Deutschland*, 376.

warned Germans of the approaching army's thirst for revenge.⁴⁴ They formed massive treks of refugees riding in or walking alongside covered wagons, laden with as many belongings as they could hope to salvage. Mainly women, the elderly, and children made up these groups of refugees, as most of the men were still at the front or in POW camps.⁴⁵ Many fled during the winter, traveling through snowstorms and sub-zero temperatures. In addition to these difficult conditions, the constant threat of being bombed along made the trek a life-threatening experience. Many refugees attempted to flee over the Baltic Sea once the land routes to the West were closed off in January 1945. Others traveled to port cities such as Danzig (Gdansk, where they boarded overcrowded ships under threat of attack. The sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* by a Soviet submarine on January 30, 1945, killing thousands of refugees, marked one a significant, concentrated tragedy of the flight.⁴⁶ For the most part, however, these ships safely reached their destinations in northern Germany or Denmark. Refugees were then herded into camps where some stayed for periods ranging from a few months to several before they could find a permanent home. Others continued on the trek until they reached one of the four occupied zones. Here they were also housed in refugee camps or were taken in by local families. This flight from the Soviet troops prior to the end of the war it formed the first wave of this exodus, lasting until the border was closed at the Oder-Neisse boundary in June of 1945.⁴⁷

The forced migrations continued throughout July as Poles and Czechs, mainly, forced Germans out of their countries. Known as the “wild expulsions,” this time period saw extensive violence and many deaths. Soviet influences often made the effort to put an end to this killing but consistently were

44 Deutsches Historisches Museum. *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration: Begleitmaterial zur Ausstellung* (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2006) 30.

45 Michael von Engelhardt. “Generation und historisch-biographische Erfahrung: Die Bewältigung von Flucht und Vertreibung im Generationenvergleich” in Hoffmann, *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, 339.

46 Deutsches Historisches Museum. *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration: Begleitmaterial zur Ausstellung*, page number

47 Johannes-Dieter Steinert, “Das Jahrhundert der Zwangswanderungen,” in *Zwischen Heimat und Zuhause: Vertriebene in (West-)Deutschland 1945 – 2000*, eds. Rainer Schulze, Reinhard Rohde, and Rainer Voss (Osnabrück: Secolo Verlag, 2001), 22.

unsuccessful. At the Potsdam Conference held late July – early August 1945, the Allies addressed the state of German minorities across Europe and the fate of the millions of refugees of other nationalities, specifically Poles. They focused their discussion on the western boundary of Poland. In the effort to promote peace, the Allies decided to evacuate the German minority and repopulate the area with four million Poles, many of whom had lost their homes with the simultaneous shift in Poland's eastern border. The Allies also oversaw the relocation of Germans living in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. An additional 3.5 million expellees had to leave the eastern territories that had formerly belonged to Germany.⁴⁸

The first phase of flight had occurred primarily as a result of Germans' fear of the revenge of the war's victors. With this second wave, the Allies attempted to stabilize the resulting postwar refugee crisis. They sought to protect the German minorities and ensure peace within the new postwar borders. Despite the efforts to ensure a humane transfer of these millions of people, the “wild expulsions” continued to some extent.⁴⁹ The intentions may have been different during these two phases, but for the most part, those who fled or were expelled from their homelands risked their lives to do so. Refugees and expellees faced violence, rape, and other dangers along the way, and many lost their lives as a result. The experiences of those who survived formed lasting, often traumatic, memories, which, in addition to the loss of the *Heimat*, impacted how they were then able to rebuild their lives and integrate into their new communities.⁵⁰

Refugee and Expellee Integration into the Federal Republic of Germany

Those who relocated to occupied Germany faced an integration process that from a cultural

48 Steinert, 24, 26.

49 Steinert, 26.

50 Michael von Engelhardt makes this overall point in his article “Generation und historisch-biographisch Erfahrung: Die Bewältigung von Flucht und Vertreibung im Generationenvergleich.” While noting that all refugees were affected by their experiences of flight and expulsion, he argues that the processes of coming to terms with this event and integrating into their new communities varied based on the age that refugees were at the time of flight (332).

perspective should not have been complicated. Von Engelhardt describes that in “dealing with the results of the war, the collapse of National Socialism, and the general state of emergency that a destroyed postwar Germany faced, refugees shared the same fate of all Germans,” to some extent.⁵¹ More significantly, perhaps, they were citizens of the country that they were relocating to. They had full rights and were familiar with German language and culture. Varying levels of regionalism play a significant role here, however. For this reason, among others, refugees’ integration process proved not to be seamless for most, at least initially. It presented a new range of issues that had to be overcome, including an unwelcoming reception, especially from much of the local population in the rural areas. Furthermore, these refugees generally lacked the most basic resources in a country that had been debilitated by war. With a ruined economy and unstable political situation, it took time before the government was able to provide refugees with substantial aid. These factors forced them, having lost practically everything, to face rebuilding their lives from scratch with limited support networks, especially during the initial postwar period.

Refugees and expellees made up a significant percentage of the postwar German population. The first postwar census, conducted on October 29, 1946, recorded 9.6 million expellees living in the 4 occupied zones, comprising 13.5% of the population.⁵² In addition to noting the general problems that all Germans faced following the war, as discussed above, von Engelhardt also describes the specific personal issues that many of these refugees faced upon arrival in occupied Germany. He lists the violent separation from their *Heimat*, their loss of their property, occupation, and social status, dealing with being seen as a foreigners in “their own country,” and having to rebuild their lives in a new environment, all on top of having experienced the actual trauma of flight and expulsion, as

51 von Engelhardt, 333.

52 “Herkunft und Verbleib der Heimatvertriebenen,” in *Bundesgesetze und Leistungen für die Geschädigten des Krieges und der Kriegsfolgen*, Bonn 1957, 14f, cited in Benz, “Fremde in der Heimat: Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration,” in *Bade, Deutsche im Ausland – Fremde in Deutschland*, 382.

characterizing their situation.⁵³

The influx of these millions of uprooted, homeless people served as a great challenge for the postwar Germanies. Refugees and expellees formed the majority of this group, but it also included millions of other displaced persons and local Germans who had been evacuated to the countryside and those who had lost their homes during bombings, along with returning soldiers and POWs.⁵⁴ In addition to integrating this population, the two states also had to rebuild their devastated infrastructure and economy and establish new governments. When the Allies discussed the expulsions of Germans at Potsdam, Churchill especially was concerned with not overburdening the defeated nation by sending more refugees there. He hoped to “maintain a calculable price of their victory over Germany.”⁵⁵ As part of this effort, the Allies also attempted to evenly distribute the refugees throughout the different zones. The Soviet zone did take in a disproportionately higher amount since it was the farthest east and therefore many of the refugees' first stop in occupied Germany.⁵⁶ According to G.C. Paikert, most of the refugees settled wherever they could find shelter as a result of the Allies' “inadequate directives” and the extenuating circumstances of the day. Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, and Bavaria were the easiest regions to reach in the western zones, therefore accepting the brunt of the stream of refugees.⁵⁷

The occupying zones approached this situation in different ways, but overall, the refugees received the same rights as the native population.⁵⁸ The majority of the expellees in the West settled in the British and American zones. In many cases, the authorities dealt with the housing crisis by forcing

53 von Engelhardt, 333.

54 Marita Krauss, “Das 'Wir' und das 'Ihr': Ausgrenzung, Abgrenzung, Identitätsstiftung bei Einheimischen und Flüchtlingen nach 1945,” in Hoffmann, *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, 26.

55 Steinert, 23.

56 Ibid., 25, 27.

57 Paikert, 22.

58 Rainer Schulze, “Zwischen Heimat und Zuhause?” in Schulze, *Zwischen Heimat und Zuhause*, 293.

members of the native population to take in refugees.⁵⁹ The British dealt with the refugees' needs through already existing government agencies. The Americans also created an agency targeted specifically to aid this population. Minimal numbers of refugees settled in the French zone right after the war since they did not recognize the expulsion agreements at Potsdam. Existing French agencies did aid those who were able to work, however, which promoted their integration.⁶⁰ Of the three western zones, Sylvia Schraut states that the occupying powers "significantly influenced the process and form of refugee integration" during the initial postwar period.⁶¹

The Soviets also actively responded to the influx of refugees. With refugees comprising one quarter of the population in 1948, Philipp Ther argues that the Soviet zone "was the state in Europe most affected by the flight of refugees and expellees."⁶² They were the first of the Allied powers to set up a government agency to deal with this challenge. Known as the Central Administration Authority for Resettlers, this agency's efforts centered around a targeted social policy, land reform, and a redistribution of housing. Its name also symbolizes how the German Democratic Republic (GDR) dealt with this group. While the Federal Republic officially used the terms "refugees and expellees," this group in the German Democratic Republic was referred to as "resettlers." The terminology shows how the government aimed to quickly integrate the 4.3 million refugees.⁶³ In terms of the discussion of whether or not flight, expulsion, and integration were "taboo" topics in the postwar German states, the intense focus on integration and the lack of reflection on the "resettlers" experiences suggests that this term may have had more bearing in the GDR.

With the end of the occupation in 1949, the young FRG took over the task of dealing with the

59 Sylvia Schraut, "Die Fluechtlingsfrage in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft: Konzeption einer Tagung und ihre Ergebnisse" in *Die Fluechtlingsfrage in der deutschen Nachkriegsgesellschaft*, eds. Sylvia Schraut and Thomas Grosser (Mannheim: Palatium, 1996) 10.

60 Ibid., 9-10.

61 Ibid., 10.

62 Ther, "Expellee Policy in the Soviet-occupied Zone and the GDR," in Rock and Wolff, *Coming Home to Germany?*, 56.

63 Ibid., 56, 60.

refugee population. Two million additional refugees (not including those who had fled from the Soviet zone) had relocated to West Germany. The first census on September 1, 1950 reported that this group made up 16.4% of the population.⁶⁴ Both the Allies and the FRG saw this significant minority as possibly susceptible to political extremism, especially because of the postwar agreements that caused many of their former homes to now be out of reach behind the Iron Curtain.⁶⁵ To combat this perceived threat, the new government established the Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees, and the War-Damaged in 1949 to promote refugees' economic, political, social, and cultural integration. These efforts specifically aided the expellees and at least from this perspective (as opposed to their interactions with many local Germans) allowed them to feel as though they were a part of the German nation.

To integrate refugees economically, two main initiatives supplied them with financial aid. The Immediate Aid Law, passed in August 1949, was the first major effort to financially assist refugees. It served as a precursor to the *Lastenausgleich* ('equalization of burdens'), which, by aiding refugees with the daily costs of living and rebuilding housing, sought to compensate them for what they had lost as a result of the war.⁶⁶ Passed in August 1952, this law was the "centerpiece of the Federal Republic's social integration program."⁶⁷ This aid helped many refugees to get back on their feet, enabling them to once again contribute to the economy. In this way, these laws promoted the recovery of the entire country.⁶⁸

As part of another effort to facilitate this process, the government also passed legislation to

64 "Herkunft und Verbleib der Heimatvertriebenen," in *Bundesgesetze und Leistungen für die Geschädigten des Krieges und der Kriegsfolgen*, Bonn 1957, 14f, cited in Benz, "Fremde in der Heimat: Flucht – Vertreibung – Integration," in Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland – Fremde in Deutschland*, 382.

65 Ahonen, 1.

66 Werner Abelshäuser, "Der Lastenausgleich und die Eingliederung der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge: Eine Skizze" in Schulze, *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, 230.

67 Ahonen, 3.

68 Abelshäuser, 232.

support the construction of public housing and sponsor the voluntary redistribution of refugees across the country. The (First New Housing Law, passed in 1950, was part of the former effort. It provided funds for the construction of new housing to directly benefit the large numbers of refugees in need of homes.⁶⁹ The relocation program sought to decrease the burden placed on the states that had taken in a larger number of refugees. Some expellees welcomed this move as it allowed them to reunite with family members scattered across the country. For others, having to uproot again added an additional challenge of integrating into a new community on top of their prior traumatic experiences. The government sought to alleviate added difficulties by compensating the refugees for the expenses of moving. However, the financial assistance provided to them only went so far in alleviating the personal and psychological problems that this population faced during these years.⁷⁰

In the political arena, the Federal Republic encouraged this group's participation in the young democracy. The Allies initially banned expellee organizations during the years of occupation, but these groups began to form anyway. They later became an influential voice in the West German government. Expellees established their own party, the *Gesamtdeutscher Bund*, later known as the *Bund der Heimatvertriebenen und Entrechteten* (BHE), which achieved brief success during the early 1950s. Although this party's influence then quickly declined, lobbying groups of expellees played an important role in politics throughout this period.⁷¹ On the one hand, *Landsmannschaften*, or Homeland Societies, united under the umbrella organization known originally as the *Vereinigte Ostdeutsche Landsmannschaften* (VOL) and then renamed the *Verband der Landsmannschaften* (VdL), brought together expellees based on their regions of origin. On the other, the *Zentralverband vertriebener*

69 [Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, Zeittafel der Vorgeschichte und des Ablaufs der Vertreibung, sowie der Unterbringung und Eingliederung der Vertriebenen und Bibliographie zum Vertriebenenproblem, Bonn: 1959-60, 79.](#)

70 Anita Eckstaedt, "Vertriebenenenschicksale – psychoanalytisch gesehen" in Hoffmann, *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, 362.

71 Ahonen, 3.

Deutschen (ZvD), which later changed its name to *the Bund der vertriebenen Deutschen* (BvD), tried to unite expellees based on their new communities in West Germany. These two competing groups joined in 1958 to form the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (BdV) or League of Expellees. This united group represented the “expellee vote” that politicians specifically courted.⁷² As refugees integrated, many of them found that other groups better represented their needs and interests. They joined other parties, causing the political character to shift in the Federal Republic as expellee organizations became more removed from the mainstream. Today, the BdV no longer has the influence that it had during these years, but this group continues to be active in politics.

These various expellee groups sought to concentrate the power that they had by being such a large minority. Their organizations boasted a membership of two million people. To keep their members involved, they issued publications, staged mass rallies and organized cultural events. The organizations used these efforts to promote their main causes, which Perri Ahonen notes as “twofold and somewhat contradictory.” He explains that the expellees lobbied for social and economic assistance to receive full compensation for what they had lost. They demanded this as part of a larger effort to regain their status as full citizens. Their desire seemed closely related to an effort to integrate into the Federal Republic and establish a new home in this country. The “Charter of Expellees,” signed in 1950, expressed these wishes. This document promised that expellees would not seek “revenge or retribution.” Simultaneously, they argued for their *Recht auf Heimat* (right to the homeland), which included a change of the postwar borders so that they could return to their former homes or at least have political power in these areas.⁷³

Refugees were able to express these perspectives at different levels of government as authorities actively recruited them, especially in the Federal Ministry for Expellees. Although members

⁷² Ibid., 4.

⁷³ Benz in Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland – Fremde in Deutschland*, 385.

of the native population still held the highest positions, many expellees achieved important positions. Their participation in politics certainly helped expellee issues to receive significant attention. Although the government ultimately did not come through on their demands to reclaim the *Heimat*, many political debates during the 1950s and '60s discussed the issue of redrawing the German-Polish border. Henning Suessner argues that this effort, alongside the expellees' campaign for the public not to forget cultures of the East, served to promote the “the false hope of a possible future return to their old homes.”⁷⁴ Politicians often payed lip service to the expellee organizations as a tactic to win this voting bloc's support.⁷⁵ The financial assistance provided through the “equalization of burdens” program achieved this goal more concretely, however. In evaluating the overall effect that expellee organizations had, Ahonen seems to disagree with Suessner. He states that these groups helped to facilitate integration by giving a “collective voice to a large mass of discontented people – an important social and psychological factor at a time of great turmoil.”⁷⁶ By encouraging the participation of these groups, the government of the Federal Republic played an important, and perhaps contradictory, role in this process of simultaneously recognizing expellee demands and promoting integration.

In addition to targeting economic and political issues, the Federal Republic also sought to encourage the refugees' social and cultural integration by honoring and preserving their stories. The Federal Expellee Act of 1953 promised that the federal and state governments would provide financial support for the promotion of expellee cultural heritage. This program funded museums and research institutes that focused on the history of Germans in Central and Eastern Europe. It also supported

74 Suessner, 5-6.

75 Ahonen, 5.

76 Ibid., 15.

cultural activities and *Heimattreffen*, meetings of groups of refugees from various regions.⁷⁷ These efforts presented a least a surface attempt to include this population into the new nation.

The Federal Ministry for Expellees also made a specific effort to record refugees' and expellees' experiences of flight and expulsion. The ministry's leaders commissioned Theodor Schieder, a prominent historian and professor at the University of Cologne, to chair a committee that collected hundreds of eyewitness accounts. Eight volumes were then published in 1953 under the title *Documents on the Expulsion of the Germans from Eastern-Central-Europe*. The editors provided a historical background of Germans in these regions and a description of the political situation that brought about flight and expulsion. Excerpts from refugees' and expellees' testimonies comprise the majority of these works, with many of them focusing extensively on the crimes committed by the Red Army. Abridged versions of these documents were also translated for an Anglo-American audience. In the foreword of the English version, the editors note their commitment to historical accuracy and their larger purpose of recognizing how Germans “have contributed to the fateful course of the last two decades...and to confirm the conviction, that events like those documented in the following pages must not be repeated.”⁷⁸ These works portray refugees and expellees as main examples of the ways in which the country was affected by the war. In this way, they present how West Germany viewed its role in contemporary global history during the 1950s.

Through these publications, we see the role that expellees played as the Federal Republic sought to form its identity and image in postwar Europe. Robert Moeller presents a detailed analysis of Schieder's volumes, discussing how these publications present the refugee population, along with POWs, as main examples of victims of the war. He also shows that various testimonies and

77 Rainer Schulze in Rock and Wolff, *Coming Home to Germany?*, 49.

78 Theodor Schieder, ed. *The expulsion of the German population from the territories east of the Oder-Neisse-line: a selection and translation from Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, Band I, 1 and I, 2, trans. Vivian Stranders (Bonn: Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims, 1956), vi-vii.

parliamentary debates equated the great hardship described continually in Schieder's works with the suffering of Holocaust victims.⁷⁹ In other words, Moeller argues that these publications gave validity to this type of discussion in the political arena. He uses these sources to contend that refugees and expellees had found their way into West German public consciousness and memory. Alon Confino presents a more complicated view. He explains that Nazi crimes were reduced to a view of them as having violated the “innocent *Heimat*,” with expellees as the main victims.⁸⁰ He also argues, however, that this sense of victimhood could be applied to all Germans since they were part of a nation that had lost part of its territories.⁸¹ Here it does seem as though these groups experienced a shared past. On the other hand, this same evidence can be used to say that grouping the refugee and native populations together in this way allowed the nation to overlook the individual experiences of these refugees themselves.

Competing perspectives present different viewpoints on the extent to which refugees were integrated into society's collective history. As shown above, Moeller argues that expellees' stories did receive significant attention during the early years of the Federal Republic. Ruth Wittlinger speaks more generally of the larger significance that refugees played during this time period. She says that expellees “provided living examples of German victimhood which...was an important factor in terms of creating a new identity for the West German state.”⁸² Looking at official sources such as the Schieder documents, this perspective seems to be valid. Analyses of oral histories by historians such as Rainer Schulze seem to present a different point of view, however. He expressly disagrees with Moeller's claim that “refugees and expellees became part of West Germany's public memory.”⁸³ Schulze does not mention the Schieder works, referring instead specifically to the “superficial” federal

79 Moeller, 79.

80 Confino, 85.

81 Ibid.

82 Wittlinger, 70.

83 Schulze in Rock and Wolff, *Coming Home to Germany?*, 53.

efforts to support refugee cultural heritage. He argues that

“the overall result was not the establishment of some form of shared past of native and refugee population (sic); instead, it meant that the experience and memory of the refugees and expellees could be shunted off into a special niche, separated from the generally accepting collective history of Western Germany which was basically that of the natives. At the same time it gave the native society the comforting feeling it was doing its bit to acknowledge the past of the refugees and expellees.”⁸⁴

Examined side by side, these perspectives clearly challenge one another. The sources that the authors rely on function as a main variable in this equation. They present the varying results of examining official documents as opposed to using oral history interviews. Looking at both types of sources, it seems that the expulsion may have become part of public memory but only insofar as it helped society to generally see itself as victims of the war. The Federal Republic may have specifically used refugees’ and expellees’ experiences as part of its effort to define this sense of victimhood, along with other foreign policy goals of possibly renegotiating the Oder-Neisse border. Having lost their *Heimat*, the often painful experience of integration seems to have been difficult to process for refugees and natives alike, partly because of the politicization of the “right to the *Heimat*” issue. The individual experiences of rebuilding a new life as unwelcome members of foreign communities⁸⁵ were not recorded in publications sponsored by the government (although they have been discussed in a variety of other works, with many using oral history). While “careful documentation would make the

84 Ibid., 50.

85 to paraphrase the title of Lehmann's book, *Im Fremden ungewollt zuhaus*, which roughly means “unwanted but at home in a foreign place”

expulsion part of the *Zeitgeschichte*, or contemporary history, of the Federal Republic,”⁸⁶ the government did not award the personal experiences of the integration process this importance or attention.

Some might even view this perspective of supporting a continued focus on integration as another example of Germans looking at their own suffering. This raises a larger question within the “Germans as victims” debate, namely how one can talk about German suffering in light of the Nazi atrocities committed during the war. Discussing the refugees' postwar experiences does not cancel out these horrible crimes, and of course it is especially important to frame this discussion within the broader historical context of the time period. While various authors explain how refugees and expellees have been a topic of much discussion and research, certain refugees themselves feel as though their stories have not been told. This sets up an interesting quandary in and of itself, which I explore in subsequent chapters.

This section looks at the outside factors that facilitated and hindered the refugee integration process, but an important question of this thesis is how individual refugees currently view their integration in society. The active government effort certainly played a role in influencing the expellees' economic, political, social and cultural integration. This external influence remained a remote one for most refugees and expellees in many ways, however. The native population that they encountered in their new villages, towns and cities, on the other hand, became a presence in their daily lives. The extent to which this second outside factor influenced the refugees' integration process varied in urban and rural environments. In both cases, however, the locals played a significant role in impacting the extent to which the refugees felt accepted in their new homes. For many refugees and natives alike, their memories of this time period remain pivotal in their understanding of their life stories. The native

86 Moeller, 56.

population often did not welcome these “foreigners” into their communities, especially in rural areas. As a result, they often impeded the smooth integration of many refugees, especially in the initial postwar period. This perspective presents at least a partial clue as to why this process served as a significant life experience for many refugees, one that often influences them to this day.

Postwar Germany faced a unique situation in 1945 as it attempted to deal with the influx of millions of people. Because the entire society was in a state of transition, Helga Grebing asks the question, “Into what were they being ‘integrated?’”⁸⁷ Marita Krauss elaborates on different uses of this term. She also asks whether the word “integration” even applies to the situation that refugees and the native population faced during these years. The American connotation of this term is often synonymous with “assimilation.” In German, however, the word “integration” can imply the change that impacts two relatively homogeneous cultures as a result of their contact with one another.⁸⁸ From this perspective, Krauss asks,

“Is ‘integration’ the appropriate term for the process that different parts and groups of society found themselves in in 1945? Does it describe the various processes and diverse dislocations? Was the contact with the refugees, expellees and evacuees not just a part of the overall societal transformation process?”⁸⁹

As shown above, her concern seems to apply more to the situation in the cities than in rural areas. She supports her statement by quoting Alexander von Plato. Krauss cites how he describes that in the industrial Ruhr region of northwestern Germany, refugees and expellees not only had to adjust to an unfamiliar place, but also had to integrate into a new era with social rules and political values

87 Helga Grebing, “Zum Begriff der Integration” in Schulze, *Flüchtlinge und Vertriebene in der westdeutschen Nachkriegsgeschichte*, 303.

88 Krauss, 27.

89 Ibid., 27.

alongside the native population.⁹⁰ In areas that had been more destroyed, the different groups seemed to have an easier time of adapting to one another. The process of rebuilding brought them together. The fact that the vast majority of Germans was in some way affected by the war meant that they all faced some type of adjustment period as the country recovered. In rural areas, however, the refugees encountered more rigid and closed communities. Less had changed there, so the process of growing together for both the native population and the refugees often took longer and was experienced more painfully on both sides.

Several examples of refugee integration in urban areas show that their experience with the native population was less tension-filled than in the rural regions. Based on his oral history work, von Plato, more specifically, found that the fact that most of the region had been bombed actually helped the refugees to integrate. This situation gave them a chance to rebuild the area alongside the native population. Many of them had also lost their homes, which had forced them to evacuate from the region. In 1945, refugees from Central and Eastern Europe were not the only group of people who were now streaming into this area seeking jobs in order to rebuild their lives. Their situation was not completely unique to them, and they shared similar life stories with the locals. Von Plato concludes:

“In the Ruhr region, refugees and expellees did have to integrate themselves into a new *place* (author's emphasis), but at the same time *everyone* – the long-established and the newcomers alike – had to integrate into a new *period* with new challenges and norms, with political reevaluations and with new social spaces. In this way, the integration of refugees and expellees is an extreme case of the general transformation.”⁹¹

90 Alexander von Plato, “Fremde im Revier” in *Kulturkonflikt: zur Erfahrung des Fremden*, 26. Deutscher Volkskindekongress in Frankfurt vom 28. September – 2. Oktober 1987, ed. Ina-Maria Greverus, 129-133. quoted in Krauss, 27.

91 Alexander von Plato, “Fremde Heimat: Zur Integration von Fluechtlingen und Einheimischen in die Neue Zeit,” in *Wir kriegen jetzt andere Zeiten: auf der Suche nach der Erfahrung des Volkes in nachfaschistischen Ländern*, ed. Lutz Niethammer and Alexander von Plato (Berlin: Dietz, 1985), 213.

Here von Plato does not aim to diminish the refugees' difficult experiences. Instead, he recognizes that the circumstances in the cities made their situation vary only to some extent from what everyone else faced.

Focusing on postwar Hamburg, Albrecht Lehmann found a similar case in his analysis of several refugees' experiences. He states that in the cities, the problems of integration could basically be reduced to issues of finding housing and employment.⁹² The influx of this new population was not a new phenomenon in these major urban areas, and the anonymity that the city provided them allowed them to make their own way relatively quickly. Lehmann also conducted interviews, and many of his informants expressed that after a short time of feeling like a foreigner to some extent, or at least experiencing hardships as a result of the postwar economic crisis, they were able to find a place for themselves in their new environment.⁹³ It did still take longer for refugees to achieve social parity with the native population in terms of their housing and jobs. The experience of flight and expulsion still plays an important role in their life stories. However, the integration process seems to have been far less traumatic than in rural areas. Lehmann found that many interviewees quite easily referred to their current homes as either their first or second *Heimat*.⁹⁴ A look at the refugees' experience in the cities shows that the refugees' environment played a significant role in influencing their integration process, both socioeconomically and personally.

Much of the work done on the native population's reaction to the refugees and expellees focuses on rural areas, since this proved to be mainly a social and cultural problem in this different environment.⁹⁵ Since rural regions avoided the destruction that faced many parts of Germany, many refugees were initially sent to these areas. Natives of these villages were forced to take in the

92 Lehmann, 45.

93 Ibid., 46.

94 Ibid., 47-48.

95 Ibid., 45.

newcomers, sharing their houses and food with them. On the surface, not living among ruins probably served as a positive aspect of this situation for the refugees. Many of these areas remained largely intact and in some ways unaffected by the war, making this population a conspicuous element in their new environment. In most small villages, locals had their own traditions and often spoke their own dialect. Many did not welcome having to share their space with these new neighbors and boarders. Furthermore, they often viewed the refugees as a burden or were jealous of the aid that they received. Even today, “despite modernizing developments...villages...remain closed “life-worlds” (*Lebenswelten*).”⁹⁶ This situation caused refugees to often be ostracized initially and to still stand out in some places decades later.

The refugees in rural areas were often labeled as “foreigners,” even though they shared the same nationality and a similar language and culture with the native population. From the locals' perspective, Marita Krauss sees an expression of xenophobia and prejudice that often accompanies contact between two cultures. She also notes aspects that seemed unique to the German situation given the country's recent history. She argues that many locals projected their self-criticisms, fears and disillusionment onto their new neighbors in the effort to divert attention away from their own feelings of guilt.⁹⁷ This process also helped them to differentiate themselves from the refugees, allowing the native population to define their own identity against that of this “other” group. Krauss views this process of drawing boundaries between the groups as an effort to compensate for the local Germans' loss of identity resulting from the Nazi defeat.⁹⁸

The main difference between the integration process in rural and urban environments seems to be the role that a physical rebuilding process played in facilitating the connection between the different

96 Ibid., 48.

97 Krauss, 34-35.

98 Ibid., 29.

groups. The fact that this tangible effort did not exist in villages left a bare social adjustment for the native population and the refugees that presented more challenges, in some ways. Just as various perspectives see the refugees as having achieved different levels of economic integration by the late 1950s, some scholars also present a positive view of a relatively quick assimilation process for these two groups. Social trends coinciding with the “economic miracle,” including postwar urbanization, the disintegration of rural classes, modernization, mechanization, and increased mobility, aided this development. These changes caused people to form identifications with different groups, such as youth groups and religious and political organizations. This process helping the “us vs. them' dichotomy” between refugees and the native population to dissolve rather quickly⁹⁹ as the “refugee” label steadily lost its significance. This trend, however, does not decrease the many difficulties that this group faced during the postwar years.

On the whole, the country's postwar economic growth significantly facilitated this integration process throughout most of the country within the several years after the war. Both refugees and the native population were generally able to come together to form a prosperous, consumer society. By the mid-1950s, homelessness, hunger, or unemployment no longer characterized the lives of millions of former refugees. They helped to create a flexible and plentiful workforce that propelled the country's economic recovery. In turn, these developments increased refugees' individual levels of prosperity.¹⁰⁰ This cyclical process significantly influenced the population's socioeconomic integration.

The government's active involvement also played an important role. Financial assistance provided many refugees with the means to take part in the “economic miracle.” Furthermore, the refugees' incorporation into the political system gave them a voice in the Federal Republic that helped to enable their feeling of acceptance into this “new” country. The government certainly took credit for

99 Krauss, 38.

100 Abelshauser, 235.

the “successful” integration of refugees and expellees, viewing this achievement as one the Federal Republic's most significant accomplishments. The dissolution of the Federal Ministry of Expellees in 1969 marked the perspective that the integration process had become a matter of domestic policy of decreased importance, having lost its pervasive foreign policy significance.¹⁰¹ Expellees’ influence in the political arena also decreased. This shift seemed to signify that they had achieved their demands and had assimilated, at least politically. From a socioeconomic and political point of view, at least, it seems as though the integration had come to a close.

Many refugees still had to face many more challenges than the native population into the 1950s and ‘60s. For example, young people did not have the same educational opportunities. Furthermore, when they found jobs, they were often not given the highest positions, which were mostly reserved for members of the native population. Refugees had to work their way up the ladder, starting at a lower point and facing more obstacles along the way than the native population. According to Helga Grebing, a little-discussed social stratification among the first generation still existed when she wrote her essay in 1986.¹⁰² Uta Gerhardt corroborates this finding in her historiographical essay. She cites two studies to support this point about the remaining issues of socioeconomic integration into the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁰³ According to Paul Luettinger, the first generation had not achieved a successful integration, remaining disadvantaged in terms of educational and employment opportunities.¹⁰⁴ Johann Handl's and Christa Herrmann's study, focusing on female refugees in Bavaria, found that about two decades passed before these women reached socioeconomic parity with the native population. They conclude, however, that assimilation of refugees into the Federal Republic’s social structure remained deficient

101 Wittlinger, 71.

102 Grebing, 303.

103 Uta Gerhardt, “Bilanz der soziologischen Literatur zur Integration der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge nach 1945” in Hoffmann, *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, 56-57.

104 Paul Luettinger, *Mythos der schnellen Integration: Eine empirische Untersuchung zur Integration der Vertriebenen und Flüchtlinge in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis 1971*, in: *ZfS* 15 (1986), 35 quoted in Gerhardt, 56.

to some extent into the 1970s and '80s.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, other authors note that refugees have been socioeconomically integrated to the extent that they are no longer differentiated from the larger population.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, the definition of integration vary here, as do the experiences of different individuals. It seems as though certain social, economic, and cultural differences between these groups may perpetuate but that, for the most part, they do not stick out and may even only be noticeable to the people who actually experienced this situation, either from the refugee or native perspective. In this way, oral history has become an important part of understanding individuals' past experiences. They also shed light on how they continue to be impacted to this day. Interviews suggest that this issue plays a significant role both socially and personally for certain refugee families.¹⁰⁷ Oral history significantly contributes to a broader perspective on this past. At the same time, an understanding of the historical situation helps to contextualize and characterize these individual experiences.

This summary of the political, economic and social trends influencing postwar refugee integration illuminates that this was clearly an active process. Throughout the postwar years, however, the public focused mainly on the political and socioeconomic aspects of the experience, largely because these were the areas in which the Federal Republic achieved notable success. This perspective prevented the country from appreciating the various ways in which individuals came to terms with their traumatic experiences and the challenges they faced in doing so. Schieder's work shows that society did reflect on these issues, but primarily as part of an effort to use them for its own political purposes. As the economy continued to grow, the country focused its attention forward in many ways.

105 Johann Handl and Christa Herrmann, *Sozialstruktureller Wandel und Fluechtlingsintegration: Empirische Befunde zur beruflichen Integration der weiblichen Vertriebenen und Fluechtlingen des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Bayern* in *ZfS* 22 (1994), quoted in Gerhardt, 57-58.

106 Lehmann, 7.

107 Ibid., Torsten Koch and Sabine Moller, "Flucht und Vertreibung im Familiengedaechtnis" in Schulze, *Zwischen Heimat und Zuhause*, 217.

Refugees integrated into the economy, the political scene, and the larger society by staking a claim in this future. At the same time, different perspectives in society looked back, but the effort to deal with their Nazi past aroused various political controversies. Refugees' individual stories and memories were often not included in Germany's view of its past, which, as Rainer Schulze argues, remains a primarily a history of western Germany.¹⁰⁸ When they were discussed, it was often in a politicized manner that pitted the right-wing expellee organizations against the the widespread "Left" notion that this discussion of German victimhood inappropriately canceled out society's war guilt. Refugees' stories were embroiled in this polarized debate. This impeded the process of finding a place for them within the Federal Republic's collective memory. As a result, this issue remains a potent one six decades after flight and expulsion. The recent literary debate surrounding this issue shows the contemporary efforts to integrate this story into Germany's historical narrative and national identity.

108 Rainer Schulze, *Zwischen Heimat und Zuhause*, 293.

Chapter 2

Crabwalk: A Literary Perspective on the Story of Flight

In present-day German society, over sixty years after the end of World War II, the past's effect on the present continues to be a topic of discussion and debate. This issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, often expresses itself through cultural mediums, such as literature. Many influential contemporary authors take on this broader subject. Nobel Prize winner Günter Grass, for example, has repeatedly presented his perspectives on the historical events surrounding the Nazi regime in his various works. He also takes this subject further by delving into the ways that the memory of the past continues to be present in society today. His novella *Im Krebsgang* (*Crabwalk*), published in 2002, tells the story of the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* on January 30, 1945, resulting in the death of 5,000-9,000 refugees and soldiers.¹⁰⁹ This event is certainly a focal point of the narrative. However, Grass expands the story greatly beyond this historical situation. He includes details about the various circumstances leading to the sinking. Furthermore, by incorporating the viewpoints of Tulla Pokriefke, who survived this trauma, Paul, her son born on the day of the sinking and the narrator of this story, and Konny, her devoted grandson, Grass does not only write a novella about the past. He also seeks to portray how the different memories of this event continue to affect all three generations into the present.

The popular reception of this novella and the debate surrounding it shows that society continues to be interested in these issues. *Crabwalk* was a major success: within a few days after it had been released, the first 100,000 copies had been sold and the book reached number one on the German

109 Günter Grass. *Im Krebsgang*. (Goettingen: Steidel Verlag, 2002), 2.

Amazon's bestseller list. Within the first month, six printings had been issued.¹¹⁰ The liberal-conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported the surprise on the part of booksellers and Grass's publisher, Steidl, at the novella's success. They attributed the book's reception to its subject matter, especially.¹¹¹ The fact that Grass, an influential author and outspoken voice throughout the previous decades on the importance of remembering German guilt, took up this issue also surprised and interested many people. This popularity and attention shows that at the very least, this subject and the way it is being discussed here stirs people's curiosity. The emotional responses to this work also suggest that this topic strikes a chord with many. Through literary works such as these, society continues to talk about how the collective Nazi past plays a role in the present.

In turn, the lenses through which *Crabwalk* has been debated and criticized shed light on how individuals and society understand their country's collective Nazi and postwar history. This novella has received extensive media attention. Much of it has focused on how Grass's work fits into the “German victims” debate as it attempts to break the “taboo” on this subject. To some extent, Grass uses the vocabulary of this discourse as he portrays the perspective of Tulla, who views herself as a victim, and Konny, who, with his interest in right-wing, anti-Semitic activities, is clearly a “perpetrator.” Their stories are told through Paul's eyes, however. His narration struggles against his own previous repression of this past. He aims to balance different perspectives and place these memories of individual trauma within their collective historical context. In this way, Grass seeks to tell this story in a new way. He confronts the limiting dialectic of victim vs. perpetrator by aiming to expand the story of refugees and their descendants beyond this lens.

A look at the public discussions surrounding this work alongside the themes present in the

110 Martina Ölke. “Flucht und Vertreibung’ in Hans-Ulrich Treichels *Der Verlorene und Menschenflug* und in Günter Grass’ *Im Krebsgang*.” *Seminar – A Journal of Germanic Studies* 43:2 (May 2007), 116.

111 “Neues Grass-Buch mit einem ‘furiösen Start,’” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 8, 2002.

novella illuminates how contemporary public voices understand this story of flight and how these views compare and contrast with Grass's perspective on how German society should view this experience. I have already discussed how refugees were widely understood to be victims during the 1950s. As the dominant perspective shifted in the 1960s and '70s to focus on German perpetration, this group and their stories were in many ways shut out of collective memory. Refugees remained “victims,” but this focus on German suffering no longer found its voice in the politically correct discourse of these years. Looking at refugees and expellees in this way became relegated to the right. Many refugees did not want to be represented in this way,¹¹² and as my grandparents' stories will show, certain people had found alternate ways to understand their experiences. Groups such as the League of Expellees, however, were branded as revanchist and revisionist. In most cases, a discussion of refugees' stories became synonymous with a focus on suffering. As a result, in political, literary, and historical discussions, flight and expulsion became a “side issue” that “beyond reunification was dealt with only sporadically or with problematic ideological biases.”¹¹³

This limiting framework of the “German victim” debate created the taboo that certain contemporary authors refer to when discussing how the stories of these “victims” have or have not been told. W.G. Sebald, for example, gave several lectures on this topic in 1997. In these and in the essay that he later published, entitled *Luftkrieg und Literatur (Bombing Wars and Literature)*, he argues that post-war German literature has failed to represent the suffering and trauma of civilians during World War II.¹¹⁴ Some authors criticize his point of view, providing lists of several works on this topic and others that portray German victimhood, such as Schieder's, in order to refute Sebald's claim. Stefan Berger concludes that “there is very little evidence of trauma having produced silences

112 Langenbacher, 55.

113 Ölke, 119.

114 Sebald, W.G. *Luftkrieg und Literatur: mit einem Essay zu Alfred Andersch*. München: C. Hanser, 1999.

and resulting in the repression of memories of German suffering after 1945.”¹¹⁵ Other scholars, such as Wolfgang Emmerich, take a different approach. He does recognize that certain authors have discussed this widespread trauma, especially in the 1950s and '60s, but states that overall, the list remains relatively short. Emmerich therefore mainly agrees with Sebald. In any event, publications such as Sebald's certainly have fueled what Emmerich calls the “debate about the legitimacy of a public mourning for the German victims of war.”¹¹⁶

This discourse about Germans as victims of expulsion, bombing, and mass rape has become a more popular and acceptable topic of discussion in the years since reunification.¹¹⁷ Two scholarly debates of the 1980s precipitated this post-*Wende* shift by broadening the debate about the lenses through which Germany's controversial past should be represented. In the “Womens Historians' Dispute,” feminist historians argued about whether women can be seen solely as victims of the Nazi regime or if they also carry guilt for perpetrating its crimes.¹¹⁸ The broader “Historians' Dispute” served as another significant precursor to the historical change in focus in the 1990s. This controversy dealt with the “attempt to relativize the centrality of the Holocaust and to relegitimize a German perspective from the vantage point of empathy.”¹¹⁹ Both of these discussions openly pitted varying forms of memory against each other. The end of the Cold War came on the heels of this debate. Some scholars argue that this event made it easier and more common for Germans to question their role as a nation of perpetrators. Challenging the Allies for the bombings and expulsion of millions of Germans

115 Stefan Berger, “On Taboos, Traumas and Other Myths: Why the Debate about German Victims of the Second World War is not a Historians' Controversy” in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 212. See also Robert Moeller and Ruth Wittlinger.

116 Wolfgang Emmerich. “Das literarische Feld Deutschland – 15 Jahre nach der Wende.” *Revista de Filologia Alemana* 14 (2006): 123.

117 Ibid., 122, Langenbacher, 47.

118 Adelheid von Saldern, “Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the role of women in the Nazi state” in *Nazism and German Society, 1933-1945*, ed. David Crew, (London: Routledge, 1994), 159.

119 Helmut Schmitz. “The Birth of the Collective from the Spirit of Empathy: From the 'Historians' Dispute' to German Suffering” in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 96.

served as part of this process.¹²⁰ Berger focuses specifically on the years since the late 1990s when he states that the “perpetrator-centered approach” now became the justification for increasing the focus on German victimhood. He argues that this former perspective showed that society had dealt with its past crimes, thereby making this shift towards looking at examples of suffering more acceptable.

Various works have played an important role in signifying this shift. Jörg Friedrich's book *Der Brand (The Fire)*, which chronicles the Allied fire-bombing of German cities, serves as one example. His work received extensive press. These views mainly located it within this recent shift in discourse. In response to works such as these, critics continue to assert what Langenbacher calls “Holocaust-centered memory.”¹²¹ They raise their concerns that a renewed focus on German victimhood equates their suffering with that of the Jews. Helmut Schmitz criticizes Friedrich's work specifically for doing so by using images of mass graves and vocabulary such as “massacre” and “extermination” in his work.¹²² Here he echoes Moeller's analysis of the discourse about German victimhood prevalent in Schieder's work and others during the 1950s. Moeller himself describes a continuity in this “victim” perspective throughout the last several decades.¹²³ In this way, he and others express an overall concern that some Germans have not come to understand Nazi perpetration as part of their collective pasts.

Scholars generally agree that remembering the Holocaust is essential.¹²⁴ Different viewpoints come into play, however, in the discussion of the extent to which this memory negates a discussion of Germans' traumatic experiences. Emmerich, for example, argues that this latter topic is “allowed as

120 Karoline von Oppen and Stefan Wolff, “From the Margins to the Centre? The Discourse on Expellees and Victimhood in Germany” in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 196.

121 Langenbacher, 50.

122 Schmitz, 104.

123 Moeller, *War Stories*, 180-198.

124 See Berger, “On Taboos, Traumas and Other Myths: Why the Debate about German Victims of the Second World War is not a Historians' Controversy” in Niven, *Germans as Victims*.

long as the mass crime of the Holocaust is not relativized, not repressed, and not forgotten.”¹²⁵ In his essay, he disagrees with scholars who argue that many works that discuss topics of German suffering focus exclusively on this aspect of the story in the effort to obscure the Holocaust. Emmerich also supports the perspective that representations of German victimhood have, at least to some extent, been repressed. He counters scholars such as Berger, who denies this idea of a taboo, by saying that relatively few works have dealt with the long-term effects of expulsion, in particular.¹²⁶

One of the main reasons that *Crabwalk* has become such a significant piece of contemporary literature is precisely because different points of view, ranging from the media to literary criticism, have discussed it within this recent shift in addressing German victimhood. This novella has been grouped with other works that discuss examples of German suffering and “break the taboo” surrounding these issues. This reception shows that society continues to understand a story of flight as an effort to portray Germans as victims. As a result, they ask two main questions: Is it ethically acceptable to talk about German suffering? And, has this topic of talking about Germans as victims been made into a taboo? The various answers to these questions primarily comprise the media discussion surrounding *Crabwalk*.

For some newspapers and magazines, the answer to this first question about whether one can (and should) discuss German victimhood has been a definitive “yes.” *Der Spiegel*, for example, responded to Grass's newsworthy novella by publishing a four-week series entitled “The Germans as Victims.”¹²⁷ “The Flight” was their cover story on March 25, 2002, and the magazine printed several articles about the different stages of flight, expulsion, and integration. They forefront the “victim”

125 Emmerich, 123.

126 Ibid.

127 This magazine (The Mirror) is Europe's biggest and most influential weekly magazine, published in Hamburg, with a circulation of more than one million per week, having a readership of an estimated 6.5 million. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Spiegel, accessed February 4, 2008). The issues dealing with this series came out on March 25, March 30, April 8, and April 15, 2002.

perspective quite clearly. For example, the title of the third article in the series referred to German civilians deported to the Soviet Union after the war as “Hitler's Last Victims.” This article reports of eyewitness accounts of women who were deported to forced labor camps after the war. It discusses the traumatic experiences that these people endured, the loss of life, and the lack of an apology from nations such as Poland and the Czech Republic.¹²⁸ From this perspective, according to Stuart Taberner, the magazine erred on the side of focusing on German suffering without talking about German crimes.¹²⁹ This article reports about these experiences in a manner similar to Schieder's view of the early 1950s, thereby highlighting German victimhood. However, the fact that they awarded such considerable attention to this topic in 2002 suggests that *Der Spiegel's* editors felt that they were addressing it in a new and different, and thereby newsworthy, way.

The magazine explicitly did so as part of this effort to “break the taboo” surrounding these subjects. Journalist Hans-Joachim Noack sums up this perspective by stating, “There are no more traces of repression.”¹³⁰ In some ways, this effort probably helped to fuel the hype about Grass representing this topic of victimhood. It had now become acceptable, and even necessary, to teach a historically-interested third generation about its country's past. With these articles following on the heels of *Crabwalk*, they promote the idea that Grass had set the precedent for talking about flight and expulsion. The introduction to this series refers to young Germans: this group “does not want to 'process' this past or call the unchangeable into question. Instead, it wants to know what happened. *Der Spiegel* attempts to respond to this desire with the following four-part series.”¹³¹ By claiming to be able to tell people “what happened,” the magazine greatly simplifies this discussion about the past. Although Grass himself also referred to breaking a taboo and discussing a repressed topic, this

128 Klaus Wiegrefe, “Hitlers' letzte Opfer,” *Der Spiegel*, April 8, 2002.

129 Stuart Taberner, “'Normalization' and the New Consensus on the Nazi Past: Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* and the Problem of German Wartime Suffering,” *Oxford German Studies* 31, (2002): 164.

130 Hans-Joachim Noack, “Die Deutschen als Opfer,” *Der Spiegel*, March 25, 2002.

131 Ibid.

straightforward view taken by *Der Spiegel* about “finally” being able to talk about Germans as victims does not recognize the complex story that Grass tells in *Crabwalk*.

Other publications also responded to the success of Grass's novella by providing their readers with a similar type of history lesson. On the day it was published, the moderate liberal *Süddeutsche Zeitung* printed an article entitled “Current Lesson: Refugee Ship *Wilhelm Gustloff*” in its “Topic of the Day” section. It details the sinking of the ship, which it cites as the central focus of Grass's novella.¹³² *Die Stern*, a popular German weekly news magazine, followed suit by publishing a “Culture Special” on the *Wilhelm Gustloff* shortly after *Crabwalk* was released.¹³³ These articles suggest that Grass's novella made a certain type of history salient. They may not have been as specific about the use of the word “victim” as *Der Spiegel*. The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* article, however, avoids mentioning the historical context of the story of this ship, focusing mainly on its sinking. In this way, it highlights the story of German suffering. This focus differentiates these articles from Grass's novella, which weaves a broader, multi-layered narrative.

Others expressed the opposite perspective on this view of talking about Germans as victims, that is, they found it troubling and problematic. Ralph Giordano, for example, in his article printed in *Die Welt*, conveys his fear of this book bringing more focus to German suffering. As a Holocaust survivor, he reminds his readers that the causes of tragedies such as the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* can be directly traced back to Nazi crimes. Giordano expresses a concern with a blending of cause and effect, stating that there is a “significant danger that the before and after are separated...in the discussion about German victims.”¹³⁴ In her scalding review of *Crabwalk*, Irgmard Hunt also criticizes this novella for focusing on suffering. She asserts that “we should not, over the discussion surrounding

132 “Aktuelles Lexikon; Flüchtlingsschiff Wilhelm Gustloff,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 5, 2002.

133 Taberner, 162.

134 Ralph Giordano, “Der böse Geist der Charta; Ralph Giordano fürchtet, dass die Diskussion über die Grass-Novelle die Ursachen der Vertreibung vergessen macht,” *Die Welt*, February 9, 2002.

the book, forget the causes of the Vertreibung (expulsion) and who voted for the one who brought it all about.”¹³⁵ Both of these authors oppose this popularized discourse on German suffering, and they see Grass's novella as having helped to promote it. Their articles, however, do not recognize the nuanced nature of *Crabwalk* as Grass attempts to present a complex story that goes beyond a simple view of victimhood. Giordano and Hunt reflect one side of the polarized reactions to this novella that largely focus on one aspect of what Grass writes about and not on how he addresses broader issues.

In their reporting about this novella, other journalistic viewpoints took the angle of discussing more specifically the “nature of the taboo”¹³⁶ that they say that Grass broke. While *Der Spiegel*, for example, clearly sought to promote Grass's effort to break this “taboo,” other journalists made a point of contesting this idea that German suffering had been repressed. An article printed on February 13, 2002 in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* recognizes Walter Kempowski as an important figure who had recently discussed this topic.¹³⁷ It argues that Grass was not the first to bring up this issue, stating that Kempowski's work did not receive the same amount of attention as *Crabwalk*.¹³⁸ In *Die Welt*, Uwe Wittstock also discusses the various perspectives from which different authors have written about flight, expulsion, and integration. He echoes this point of view that Grass is by no means the first to write about this story, also noting that these previous works did not receive very much press.¹³⁹ In his article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Robert Moeller also chimes in on this subject. He cites various examples that have already dealt with flight and expulsion. These include “Nacht fiel ueber

135 Irmgard Hunt, “Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang*,” *World Literature Today* 77, no. 1 (April-June 2003): 128-129.

136 Elizabeth Dye, “Weil die Geschichte nicht aufhört’: Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang*,” *German Life and Letters* 57:4 (October 2004): 473.

137 Kempowski's work *Echolot: ein kollektives Tagebuch (Sonar: a Collective Diary)*, published first in 1993, comprises 10 volumes of letters, diary entries, autobiographical statements and other materials that deal with Germans' experiences during World War II, including flight and expulsion. See Emmerich, 121.

138 “Jedes Leid hat ein Recht auf Erlösung; ‘Warum schreibt Grass jetzt über die Gustloff?’: Flucht und Vertreibung gehören seit Jahren zum Werk von Walter Kempowski, aber gedankt hat es ihm niemand,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 13, 2002.

139 Uwe Wittstock, “Die weit offen stehende Tabu-Tür; Nachdenken über den Sensationserfolg der Novelle ‘Im Krebsgang’ von Günter Grass,” *Die Welt*, February 15, 2002.

Gotenhafen" ("Night Fell Over Gotenhafen"), a film about the sinking of the *Gustloff* and the *Heimat* films of the 1950s that portrayed expellees more generally. Moeller concludes by saying that "the topic of expulsion was not a taboo in the 1950s; reports about this were ubiquitous and served as an important medium for West Germans to portray themselves as a nation of victims."¹⁴⁰ In this way, he clearly argues against the view that Grass is bringing a repressed subject to light.

If various films, novels, and memoirs have dealt with stories of German suffering, then why is the attitude that these issues have been cloaked in taboo so widespread? It seems as though this idea has become a part of society's collective understanding of its postwar past. Grass's perspective in this debate seems to shed some light on this situation. In an interview published in *Die Stern*, he straightforwardly answers this question regarding this issue:

"It was (taboo) in East Germany. My books were banned there, and expellees and refugees were referred to as resettlers. In the West, it was not a taboo in terms of being forbidden. But (the topic) was not recognized."¹⁴¹

Grass expands upon this view in a speech given in Vilnius, Lithuania in October 2000:

"Notably and unsettlingly, it appears how late and still hesitantly the suffering that was inflicted upon Germans during the war is remembered...(It remains) a background topic. Even in post-war literature, the memory of the many who died during bombing nights and mass flight found little space. One injustice repressed the other."¹⁴²

Grass's own past sheds light not only on why he takes this perspective but also on the public's reactions to his apparent shift in focus here. During the 1960s and '70s, when the general view of

140 Robert G. Moeller, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 8, 2002.

141 "Eine Katastrophe, aber kein Verbrechen"; Günter Grass, der in seiner Novelle "Im Krebsgang" die Versenkung des Flüchtlingsschiffes "Wilhelm Gustloff" 1945 schildert, über Vertreibung, Verdrängung und Beifall von der falschen Seite," *Die Stern*, February 14, 2002.

142 Günter Grass, "Rede in Vilnius," Steidl Verlag, http://www.steidl.de/grass/a2_5_vilnius.html (accessed January 29, 2008).

Germany's past shifted to focusing on the Holocaust, Grass was an outspoken figure in support of this memory that focused on the Holocaust. He gained a high level of popularity and respect for his attitudes.¹⁴³ Grass is viewed as a leading figure in the broad left that promoted the taboo on the topic German victimhood. As a result, his “apparent conversion to the cause of German suffering (to be) immediately newsworthy.”¹⁴⁴ Grass's point of view throughout the previous decades had expressed that it had been “correct” to repress these stories. The surprise at Grass's apparent breaking of this “taboo” suggests that the majority of Germans had come to accept this perspective as well.

However, Grass has not completely switched to a discussion solely of victimhood, and his interviews hint at the search for understanding guilt alongside suffering that comes through in his novella. His work, of course, is not only about the sinking of the *Gustloff*. The way in which he constructs his narrative serves a specific purpose to combat the right-wing use of these stories in the present. In an interview on his publisher's website, Grass explains his perspective on the youthful fascination with Nazism. He states that because “flight and expulsion...were widely repressed...the Right took over this topic.” As a result of this taboo, Grass says, “very few people have ever heard anything about this ship or its catastrophe. Who Wilhelm Gustloff was, who shot him, for which reasons, it is as though this is gone, repressed. This is why I tell the history of this ship from its launch to its sinking, and also what led to its launch and its naming.”¹⁴⁵ With *Crabwalk*, he seeks to show the historical continuities of this story so that the link between cause and effect, or perpetration and victimhood, is not lost. Grass claims that in schools, especially, “the handling of the Nazi period is still too simple,” as many influences continue to label it simply as “bad.”¹⁴⁶ Grass does not seek to ignore

143 Nicole Thesz, “Against a New Era in Vergangenheitsbewältigung: Continuities from Grass's *Hundejahre* to *Im Krebsgang*.” *Colloquia Germanica*. 37, no. 3 (2004): 294.

144 Taberner, 161.

145 “Grass im Gespräch,” Steidl Verlag, <http://www.steidl.de/grass/index.html> (accessed January 29, 2008).

146 “Eine Katastrophe, aber kein Verbrechen”; Günter Grass, der in seiner Novelle “Im Krebsgang” die Versenkung des Flüchtlingschiffes “Wilhelm Gustloff” 1945 schildert, über Vertreibung, Verdrängung und Beifall von der falschen

this very obvious and significant part of Nazi history in *Crabwalk*. Instead, he attempts to broaden the story beyond the simple lens of looking at German guilt or suffering. He includes multiple perspectives in order to analyze the various layers and highlight the contradictions present in this history.

Looking at these various points of view on Grass's novella, it is clear that the words “suffering,” “victimhood,” “guilt,” “perpetration,” and of course, “taboo,” dominate these discussions. Although I argue that Grass attempts to expand the story beyond this narrow perspective, it is clear that the way he talks about his work lends itself to this media fixation on the “German victim” debate. This popular perspective shows that many Germans continue to view these issues of flight and expulsion through the lens of victimhood. Some are troubled by it, while others seem to embrace this viewpoint in the spirit of what Taberner calls a “particularly German propensity for melancholia and the glorification of self-sacrifice.”¹⁴⁷ Another viewpoint takes a middle road between these two perspectives. Many have commented on the “normalization” process that seems to have occurred since reunification in terms of how Germany views its past. Taberner discusses how various scholars argue that Germans simultaneously seem to be recognizing a past of perpetration alongside stories of suffering. This shift seems to evidence a healthy development in the process of coming to terms with the memory of the country's Nazi past.¹⁴⁸ Debating whether a taboo exists around these issues has been seen as part of this process. As discussed above, many examples show that the voice of German “victims” has not been repressed. On the other hand, it is clear that many Germans feel that it has. Elizabeth Dye addresses this seeming contradiction:

“...Even though (Grass's) work may not represent a significant step forward either in literature or in a wider social capacity, people want to perceive it thus; or, at the very

Seite,” *Die Stern*, February 14, 2002.

147 Taberner, 183.

148 Ibid., 165-166.

least, the work's reception could be said to have been subsumed in the contemporaneous heated debate on normalization in German society."¹⁴⁹

It is clear that there are no easy answers to these complex and contested questions about how to understand this process of coming to terms with the past. Looking at these debates serves a different purpose, however: it provides a clearer picture of the framework through which German society perceives various representations of its past. Grass's novella and the response to it show how Germans continue to use the dialectic of victims and perpetrators to discuss flight, expulsion, and their effects.

While Grass himself does, to some extent, talk about his novella from this perspective, a deeper look at *Crabwalk* shows how he delves into these issues in a more complicated way in the novella. Dye notes the shift in Grass's viewpoint, stating that he “has now come to realize that in order to achieve clarity, all aspects of the past must be examined, even if this strategy means disrupting the ‘Täter’/‘Opfer’ (victim/perpetrator) dialectic which had previously been viewed as a kind of safety mechanism for the German state.”¹⁵⁰ Grass seeks, through his multi-layered narrative, to extend the discussion of refugees and the story of flight beyond this limited framework. He weaves a story that presents the ways in which members of three generations deal with their individual and collective histories in different ways. He portrays Tulla, the member of the first generation who survived the sinking of the *Gustloff*, as a “victim” in the sense that she continues to focus on her own suffering decades after this traumatic experience. Paul, her son, has been indelibly marked by his mother's experience, especially because he was born on the day that the ship sank. He has reacted to this uncomfortable part of his past that he cannot remember by shutting it out. Grass suggests that these two influences, one focusing on victimhood and the other silent on the subject, have provided the third

149 Dye, 476.

150 Ibid., 477.

generation with only one main lens through which to comprehend these experiences. Influenced by his grandmother's nostalgic stories and his father's lack of a presence, Konny identifies with his own glorified version of the Nazi past. This view influences him to create a website that honors Wilhelm Gustloff, the Nazi party member for whom the ship was named, and then murder another teenager who poses as a Jew. Through these three perspectives, Grass narrates the ways in which the characters' alternate ways of coping with the past have negatively impacted them and their family members in the present.

Crabwalk then provides a fourth layer that addresses the complexities of this past in its attempt to narrate the history of Wilhelm Gustloff and the ship named after him. This account, interspersed throughout the entire narrative, presents a version of this story that includes both the historical context of Nazi crimes and the traumatic experiences that refugees faced as a result. In this way, Grass addresses the stories of Germans' individual and collective pasts. This tale is told from Paul's perspective as part of his effort to finally engage with this complex past, a task that he has long avoided. Grass juxtaposes this historical account with Tulla's sense of victimhood, Paul's effort at repression, and Konny's view of glorification. By working with Paul through the voice of “*der Alte*” (“the old man,” his publisher), Grass asserts that this version of the story is far more productive than the viewpoints of the three generations because it promotes an interaction between different perspectives.

Grass may use his influence here to “intervene directly in a very contemporary crisis in an immediate and perhaps somewhat didactic manner,” as Taberner argues.¹⁵¹ With the novel's complex structure and its open-ended conclusion, however, it is clear that the author does not aim to present a simple solution to this memory debate. Instead, Grass seeks to promote a conversation that addresses

151 Taberner, 184.

various points of view. His effort here is to broaden the discussion so that it makes room for Germans to hold within their understanding both their experiences of personal or familial trauma and the historical context of Nazi crimes that caused the larger phenomena of flight and expulsion.

Grass most clearly addresses this sense of victimization through his portrayal of Tulla. As a member of the first generation that experienced flight, she continues to focus on her own personal suffering in the present. We learn about various parts of her story as they are repeated several times throughout the novella. Pregnant, Tulla fled her homeland in East Prussia on the *Wilhelm Gustloff*. She survived the sinking, and her son was born shortly afterwards. This traumatic experience was followed by her arrival in the Soviet zone with her baby. There Tulla promptly found a job as a carpenter's apprentice, but she also faced many postwar hardships. The experience of the ship sinking clearly stands out in her memory as a pivotal moment in her life. Paul, who narrates this story, says that he has been familiar with it since he was a boy. Back then, the "eternal sinking was often Sunday's topic,"¹⁵² he says. Here he shows how this story has been told several times. Whenever Tulla talks about her past, as Paul observes, "nothing else counted."¹⁵³ Not only does she repeatedly bring up this experience, Tulla also shows how she continues to identify with her former home by holding on to the region's dialect. Paul refers to her way of talking when he says, "she continues to gripe in this way, as though a block of time had not passed since then."¹⁵⁴ Even linguistically, she has not integrated or moved on from her experience. Grass writes Tulla's dialogue in this dialect. In this way, he concretely portrays one way in which her past remains alive for her in the present.

The continual repetition of this story also shows how Tulla's view of her past has not changed in light of her subsequent life story. She does not historicize her experiences, that is, her views do not

152 Grass, *Im Krebsgang*, 33.

153 Ibid., 157.

154 Ibid., 11.

change to reflect knowledge of the historical context of Nazi perpetration that surrounds her personal trauma. As Nicole Thesz says, Tulla “turns this memory into an ideological tool to keep memories of the refugees' suffering alive, which also allows her to ignore German guilt.”¹⁵⁵ She is able to talk about the *Gustloff* in a context other than its sinking, but here she also only sees her family's experiences. As workers, Tulla's parents traveled on the *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF, or *Strength through Happiness*) ship before the war. The happy memories from their vacation that they shared with their daughter have stayed with her. “If only there were still pictures that had been taken on the *Gustloff*, I could have showed you all that they saw in just those few days...,” Tulla reminisces.¹⁵⁶ The tragedy that she later experienced on the same ship contrasts with this positive perspective. It is clear, however, that overall, these individual experiences dictate her view of the past.

The other survivors of the *Gustloff*, who the Pokriefke family meet at a service commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the ship's sinking, share views similar to Tulla's. As David Midgley notes, this event shows the “potential binding force of traumatic memory in the social world:...the other survivors...are presented as resentful of any attempt to understand the broader historical picture.”¹⁵⁷ They focus instead solely on their shared experience of loss that occurred on this date. Paul recognizes how they ignore the larger historical context of their experience:

“The coincidental fact that on this same date in 1933, Hitler came to power and that it also reminded of the birthday of a certain man (Wilhelm Gustloff) who was shot by David Frankfurter, out of whom a symbol of the Jewish people was made, was not publicly mentioned. In one or another of the group discussions during a coffee break or rest between presentations, it did, however, receive the mention of a weakly uttered

155 Thesz, 304.

156 Grass, 66.

157 David Midgley, “Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang*: Memory, Medium, and Message,” *seminar – A Journal of Germanic Studies* 41, no. 1 (February 2005): 57.

subordinate clause.”¹⁵⁸

These other historical stories, clearly important to Paul, do not get recognized by the survivors. The other events may not have impacted this group directly. However, they certainly play a significant role in Germany's Nazi history in bringing about the event of their trauma. In this way, these events clearly have bearing on the survivors' lives.

Grass criticizes their reminiscent focus on victimhood by presenting this limited view of the past. According to Midgley, “by making Tulla the bearer of traumatic memory in this text, then Grass has provided his readers with reminders of how easily the vividness of personal memory can shade over into nostalgia for a discredited regime and its values.”¹⁵⁹ Grass sees the first generation here as most susceptible to this one-sided perspective. He seeks to combat this point of view by presenting it in a negative way. Furthermore, Grass then layers it with other personal experiences and historical facts to build a more nuanced view. As a member of the first generation and a former refugee himself, the author shows that having personally experienced this past does not justify viewing oneself as a victim. In this way, Grass uses Tulla's sentimentalized memories to actually undermine the idea that German victimhood is the main focus of his novella.¹⁶⁰ This may be part of the story, but a fixation on this experience excludes other stories of German guilt necessary for a more nuanced individual and collective memory.

Paul's initial view of the past, presented in a way that is intermingled with his current attempt to change his perspective, represents an example of repression in response to his mother's focus on victimization. Although he was raised in the shadow of Tulla's story, Paul's education and career as a journalist has made him keenly aware of the Nazi crimes that brought on flight and expulsion. This

158 Grass, 92. Both of these events clearly structure the historical context surrounding the sinking of the *Gustloff*.
 159 Midgley, 56.
 160 Thesz, 295.

personal trauma and collective guilt became mutually exclusive in Paul's mind. They had canceled each other out because he could not hold both of these contradictory ideas in his view of his own identity. Recognizing the undoubtedly horrible nature of Nazi atrocities against the Jews, Paul found no way in which to conceptualize his mother's story. Elizabeth Dye explains this repression by saying that Paul felt uncomfortable with being a victim. She notes his "conflicting urges to bear witness and to be politically correct."¹⁶¹ Grass uses Paul's character to represent the larger trend toward these stories in West German society during the 1960s and '70s. Because his mother's story had influenced him, though, this view caused Paul to repress this part of his identity. He always wanted to avoid his birthday, for example, because it reminded him of his connection not only to the sinking, but also to the other events that occurred on this day.

“...This accursed thirtieth. How it hangs on me, labels me. It didn't change anything that I always, as a high schooler or college student, or as newspaper editor and husband, refused...to celebrate my birthday. I was always concerned that at such a celebration – maybe with a toast – the three-times-cursed significance of this date would be attached to me...”

His birthday highlighted a complex question: how can you celebrate a day on which various historical events occurred that directly or indirectly caused so many deaths? The fact that Hitler was born on this day causes a collective guilt to be woven in here. On the other hand, his mother's suffering shows how Germans also became victims in this historical narrative. Paul's struggle here can be seen as emblematic of that of the second generation, as they were born into this complex situation. Their identities became tied to what Paul called his “birth trauma”¹⁶² – this complicated history had marked these children and yet they held no personal memory of it. Here Grass uses Paul as a symbol for how

161 Dye, 483.

162 Grass, 151.

this group coped with this ambiguous past largely through repression. In this way, he speaks to the prevalent issue of a “taboo” within the novella.

Paul's tenuous relationship with his mother shows one way in which he attempts to separate himself from this personal and collective history. In his explanation of how he was born, he says he would have rather been an orphan. Paul imagines the life of this hypothetical child, taken in by adoptive parents¹⁶³ and allowed to develop an identity that was not so indelibly tied to this whole concept of Germans guilt and victimization. Because this was not his fate, however, Paul had to grow up in the shadow of his mother's story. Paul blames Tulla for infusing him with this identity, saying that “because you gave birth to me as the ship sank, I hate you.”¹⁶⁴ He expresses the disconnection between them: “...I never refer to her with the possessive “my,” instead just as “mother.”¹⁶⁵ It seems that Paul does not only resent his mother for connecting him to this tragedy that he cannot remember but must deal with. He also takes issue with her for promoting the view of victimization. Paul feels that he morally cannot take on this view, so he is left with no framework through which to understand this experience.

Through Paul, Grass shows how the conversation about these issues simply stopped as the view of victimization became unacceptable. Tulla continued to reminisce though, and she urged Paul to tell her story. This pressure pushed him further away, as he did not want to disseminate her sentimental and dramatic point of view. Of course, Paul could have struggled with these issues himself in order to create his own lens through which to understand them, instead of ignoring them. Both his mother and his ex-wife criticize him for being lazy and a failure,¹⁶⁶ and through this characterization, Grass seems to partially blame Paul for lacking his own story. At the same time, the author recognizes that his

163 Ibid., 143-144.

164 Ibid., 70.

165 Ibid.

166 Ibid., 92-93.

protagonist had no one to discuss this complex situation with. Paul explains that part of the reason that he did not want to tell his mother's story was because “no one wanted to hear about it, not here in the West and definitely not in the East. The *Gustloff* and her cursed history were taboo for decades.”¹⁶⁷ Attempting to find his own version of this story earlier might have enabled Paul to be more open with his son. The fact that Paul had repressed this memory for so long certainly led to his son's right-wing interests and resulting crime. In a way, Paul's historical narrative comes too late, because Konny's murder of Wolfgang is also part of the story (as I will describe in more detail below). Grass warns of the negative effects that the second generation's lack of a story has on the third generation. He uses Paul's perspective to argue against repression and show the necessity of individually and socially wrestling with these personal, familial, and collective memories.

Konny's point of view on his grandmother's and his country's history reflects Tulla's “victim” influence, unmediated by his father. According to Nicole Thesz, Konny's attitudes can be understood as stemming from exposure to both right and left-wing perspectives without the context that discussions with different family members could have provided.¹⁶⁸ Paul engages only in minimal contact with his son. Although Konny lives with his mother, he spends a lot of time with his grandmother, who “pumps him up with refugee stories, horror stories, rape stories that did not even happen to her.”¹⁶⁹ Konny takes these stories and weaves them into a glorified view of Germany's Nazi past. At the same time, he adopts his grandmother's identification with victimhood. He becomes fixated on the figure of Wilhelm Gustloff and on the ship named after him. Konny seeks to honor this Nazi party member, murdered by a Jew by the name of David Frankfurter and subsequently viewed as

167 Ibid., 31.

168 Thesz, 300.

169 Grass, 100-101.

a martyr for the regime.¹⁷⁰ He also attempts to commemorate the sinking of the ship, which he sees as a clear sign of German suffering resulting from World War II. This right-wing perspective portrays what Grass sees as a dangerous view as it leads Konny to commit a violent crime later in the novella.

He begins these efforts by searching for audiences to listen to his views on Nazi history. Konny clearly differs from his father, who attempts to be silent on the subject, by seeking to share Tulla's story (although interestingly, except for on one occasion, he does not cite his grandmother as a survivor of the ship's sinking). Konny attempts to celebrate Wilhelm Gustloff by giving a speech at a meeting of a group of neo-Nazis and holding a presentation at school. Both of these audiences do not pay attention to him. The skinheads are more interested in promoting the more topical hatred towards immigrants instead of listening to a history lesson. In school, Konny's teachers do not allow him to speak so favorably of the Nazis. Instead of deterring him, however, these efforts only cause Konny to seek other outlets through which to tell this story.

Konny finds an open space for this past on the internet, which gives him free reign for communication. He puts up a website that promotes his ideas, and he participates often in a forum discussion about Gustloff. Through his own search for information on this subject, Paul stumbles across this website. He follows the chatroom conversation and eventually figures out that his son is behind the right-wing voice of "Wilhelm." Paul sees how his son "plays the judge"¹⁷¹ in this arena by calling the Soviet submarine that torpedoed the *Gustloff* "the murder boat" and the entire fleet "women and children murderers."¹⁷² In this "global playroom,"¹⁷³ Konny can disseminate his ideas about glorified victimhood and engage in debates with those who may oppose him, but seem equally obsessed with this history. His activity in the chatroom leads him to talk extensively with "David."

170 The web address for Konny's site is "www.blutzeuge.de;" *Blutzeuge* translates to "martyr."

171 Grass, 134.

172 Ibid.

173 Ibid., 133.

This voice promotes the Jewish voice in opposition to Konny's support of the Nazis. Later on, these boys met up in Gustloff's hometown of Schwerin, where Konny shows David around the town. The novella then reaches a climax as Konny surprisingly murders this boy, shooting him four times as David Frankfurter did when he killed Gustloff. Konny also commits this crime in the spot where a monument honoring Gustloff had stood before the Soviets had destroyed it. His beliefs cause him to take drastic measures to avenge Frankfurter's act. By providing him with a means for communication, the internet helps to promote this extremism by allowing Konny to propagate his views without restraint.

Although this medium clearly serves Konny, however, it seems that it does not satisfy his desire for a human audience. Only this type of attention can actually bring the results that he seeks, that is, a public memorial for Wilhelm Gustloff. Konny's words spoken in court show how passionately he feels about this subject and how important it is for him to tell what has become “his” story.

B.D.: good & imp emphasis on the whole issue of being able to tell one's story, obviously above all for Tulla, and the repercussions that come when one cannot: again, beyond the literary achievements here, Grass is echoing (inter alia) an important historical emphasis of the last years, i.e., as I've mentioned before in the case of Becker/Audoin-Rouzeau's WWI book (and also work on “post-memory”).

In defense of his act, Konny gives a long speech “as though for a big audience.”¹⁷⁴ He tells his account, as Paul notes, beginning “with Adam and Eve, which means that he began with the birth of the later Nazi state group leader” (Gustloff).¹⁷⁵ Konny then talks about his murder, which he parallels with his own deed. He continues, describing the KdF ship as a “a living expression of national

174 Ibid., 191.

175 Ibid., 189.

Socialism.”¹⁷⁶ Then he discusses the torpedoing of the ship, signalling out his grandmother as a victim of this tragedy, which he had failed to do on other occasions when discussing this story. After moving on to an explanation of Alexander Marinesko's fate (the man who was responsible for the sinking of the *Gustloff*), Konny finally comes to his conclusion:

“I stand by my deed...Greater things were and are the subject here. The state capital Schwerin must finally honor its greatest son in name. I call for...a monument to be erected that will remind us and coming generations about this Wilhelm Gustloff, who was assassinated by the Jews.”

Konny's speech reminds the reader of his earlier attempts to share this history with his fellow classmates and right-wing extremists. These groups did not pay attention to him, but now, in the courtroom, he finally has a chance to tell his whole story from beginning to end. The comparison of the people at the trial to a public audience suggests that Konny's actions stem not only from his right-wing beliefs but also from a desire to find a group of captive listeners. It seems that the murder was necessary to achieve this goal. This process was clearly important for him, but it is also noteworthy that Konny describes his main goal as erecting this monument for Gustloff. Words only seem to take him so far, and he goes further by seeking this public commemoration of this past. Up to this point, Konny has shared this story with his grandmother and the other survivors. His campaign to promote the building of this monument seems to be part of an effort to spread this story beyond this limited group.

By describing Konny's view of the past and the drastic and tragic ways that he expresses it, Grass warns of how the lens of victimization in the first generation and the effort at repression in the second can lead to glorification of Nazism in the third. Konny only had the view of suffering through

176 Ibid., 190.

which to process his grandmother's past. Because Paul sought to ignore this story, and in effect ignored his son as well, Konny did not have a chance to communicate with people who might have helped him to understand this story in a more nuanced way. Kathrin Schoedel argues against the concept of normalization, stating that “on one level, Grass's *Im Krebsgang* is a representative story of a German youth of the third generation

B.D.: again: for you, too, from a historical perspective, worth emphasizing the role of these successive generations in this story-telling—even a bit more (and a bit more generally) than you do?]

who is unable to develop a normal individual identity because there is no normal national identity.”¹⁷⁷

Clearly Konny needs to develop his own sense of self, and building his personal view of this story is an important part of that process for him. As a result, he seeks his own means in order to talk about the past and to teach others about it. Grass portrays these three types of memory in a negative light. Through the narrative that Paul (and his editor) then construct, Grass attempts to present this story in a more constructive way. He inserts his voice through Paul's efforts to address the failure of the first and second generations to deal with this past in a way that does not lead to extremism in the third generation.

This fourth layer of *Crabwalk* essentially chronicles the same events that Konny talks about in his courtroom speech. In this way, Paul's narrative serves as a foil for his son's story of glorified victimization. Stuart Taberner describes the three strands of this account as the background for the report on the sinking, empathy with individual Germans in terms of the sinking of the ship at the moment of Paul's birth, and sympathy of individual suffering caused by the Red Army. “All three, taken together,” he says, “present Paul's belated account to compensate for his failure to defeat his own

177 Kathrin Schoedel, “Narrative Normalization' and Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang*,” in *German Culture, Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization*, ed. Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 200.

trauma and to offer his son a sustainable and more comprehensive picture of the past.”¹⁷⁸ The fact that Paul does not have his own story up to this point (unlike Tulla and Konny with their close-minded points of view) and his left-liberal political stance makes his perspective most conducive to forming a more complex viewpoint. Through Paul's story, Grass recognizes the challenges inherent in narrating this past while attempting to present an account that portrays both historical continuity and personal trauma.

Elements of historical continuity and context come through with the repetition of certain symbols, which in turn helps the reader to connect the pasts of German guilt and suffering. For example, Paul repeatedly discusses the various events that occurred on January 30. I discussed above how this date has personal significance for him and is part of the reason why he struggles so much with making sense of this larger story. The name Wilhelm Gustloff acts as a second symbol that takes on various meanings at different points in history and in Grass's novella. First, he is a Nazi party leader who was murdered by a Jewish man. This act causes him to be seen as a martyr, honored throughout Nazi Germany. Then a ship is named after him, which, by offering inexpensive vacations to workers, comes to represent a central example of Hitler's widespread support among this class. The *Gustloff* is used during the war as part of the navy. Finally, it achieves infamy when a Soviet torpedo hits this “troop transporter...(and) refugee and hospital ship.”¹⁷⁹ Several thousand refugees and soldiers die as the *Wilhelm Gustloff* sinks. Through this story, the name's significance evolves as it represents various combinations of German guilt and suffering throughout the years before, during, and at the end of World War II.

Paul's account also highlights elements of causation by repeatedly reminding the reader of Nazi perpetration while portraying these examples of victimhood. In this way, it contrasts with Tulla's and

178 Taberner, 177.

179 Grass, 111.

Konny's versions of this story. The perspectives of the first and third generations show how the connection between Gustloff's murder, the happy memories on the KdF ship, and then the tragic deaths of so many refugees could be construed as a story of pure victimhood. Paul, on the other hand, attempts to fill in the gaps that they overlook or misconstrue. For example, he calls into question this view of Gustloff as a martyr. He discusses how the Nazis promoted the idea that the "organized world Jewry"¹⁸⁰ stood behind David Frankfurter's act. Paul then shows that Frankfurter was a lonely man who committed this crime as an isolated act. He presents a view here that opposes Nazi ideology and that of his own son. At the same time, by telling a story of a Nazi victim and a Jewish perpetrator, Paul attempts to address some of the complexities present within this history. Other elements, such as the description of the positive aspects of the KdF ship, also serve this purpose. These details complicate this story by painting a portrait of the Nazis that is not exclusively negative. In this way, Grass combats the "simple" perception that he feels that society has promoted of Germany's Nazi past.¹⁸¹

As a third symbol, the town of Schwerin also reappears in different contexts throughout the novella. It is first Gustloff's birthplace, then later the place where the Nazis erected a memorial to honor him. In 1945, it was the town that Tulla and Paul arrived in when their flight ended in the Soviet zone. The monument to Gustloff was destroyed by the Soviets after the war in the effort to erase this past. This part of the story clearly attracts Konny. The town's significance for Gustloff probably influences his decision to move in with his grandmother, who still lives in Schwerin. In this place, personal, familial and collective histories overlap for Tulla, Paul, and Konny. It is the town where Wilhelm Gustloff was born and where these refugees ended their story of flight. In this way, it encapsulates how this one family is implicated in Nazi war guilt and also how they suffered as a result.

180 Ibid., 35.

181 "Eine Katastrophe, aber kein Verbrechen"; Günter Grass, der in seiner Novelle "Im Krebsgang" die Versenkung des Flüchtlingsschiffes "Wilhelm Gustloff" 1945 schildert, über Vertreibung, Verdrängung und Beifall von der falschen Seite," *Die Stern*, February 14, 2002.

Grass uses these various symbols to show how this story flows between different examples of perpetration and victimhood. Ultimately, it does not solely belong in either category. The fact that the narrative incorporates these various elements reinforces that having a single view of the situation, as Tulla, Paul, and Konny all do originally, obscures many other important aspects of the story.

Although Paul focuses more on these historical events in his narrative, he also recognizes that he must also finally acknowledge the individual trauma present in this experience. Stuart Taberner comments on this, saying that “this willingness to endorse, and give value to, the agony borne by individual Germans is unquestionably a new departure for Paul, for whom sympathy had always been politically suspect.”¹⁸² It is clear that his past inability to address these issues influenced his son's right-wing beliefs and crimes. With this new version of the story, Paul finally addresses what David Midgley calls his “special awareness of his personal association”¹⁸³ to the sinking of the *Gustloff*. He does not remember the traumatic experiences that Tulla does. As a result, “the type of memory that he exemplifies is...investigative...(It) is a predominantly conscious and intellectual activity, and it entails the conscious overcoming of emotional resistances to remembering.”¹⁸⁴ Paul does not necessarily want to deal with this difficult past, which is a part of himself that he cannot remember. On the other hand, he recognizes that he must present his own account of this story in order to challenge Tulla's and Konny's sentimental and glorified versions of this memory.

Recognizing the horror of the trauma itself serves as a central part of Paul's effort. Since he was not an eyewitness, he does not have the ability to report from memory what “really” happened. We have already seen, however, how Tulla feels that she has a certain power over this memory and how she uses this to hold on to her nostalgic views. Paul specifically avoids this type of perspective. Yet at

182 Taberner, 180.

183 Midgley, 60.

184 Ibid.

the same time, he does seek to incorporate an appreciation of these difficult experiences into his story. He expands the story beyond his mother, imagining how young soldiers, girls working on the ship, babies, children, teenagers, and elderly men and women experienced their flight, their time on the ship, or the sinking. Paul bases his descriptions of the young men and women on pictures of the *Gustloff's* passengers. In describing the children and elderly, he also seeks to recognize the experiences of those whose pictures did not survive and therefore might be more easily forgotten. By acknowledging these perspectives, Paul clearly shows that suffering is one important element of this story. This refers not only to these trauma events but also to fact that the stories of many of these victims have not been collectively remembered.

Even as Paul portrays this situation, however, he repeatedly concedes that he really has no idea about how to talk about what happened. He says regarding the experience of flight that “I cannot describe it. No one can describe it.”¹⁸⁵ When he comes to explain the ship's sinking, he reiterates this sentiment:

“I cannot capture with words what happened inside the ship. Mother's sentence, “I don't have any tones for that,” which she always uses to explain things that she cannot describe, says what I inarticulately mean. So I do not try to imagine the horrible things and to force the gruesome into a clearly filled-in image. My publisher tries to force me to rank individual fates, to (*den grossen Bogen schlagen* – translation?) with epic calmness and intense empathy, and so, with words of horror, to do justice to the scale of the catastrophe.”¹⁸⁶

With this statement, Paul does indeed recognize the magnitude of these events. Here, what he does not say (or cannot say) sheds light on how difficult the situation actually was. Paul makes a concerted

185 Grass, 102.

186 Ibid., 136.

effort to finally address these issues from his own perspective. He understands that even if these situations defy description, one can still recognize the gravity of the experience. His narrative, with its careful explanations and respective silences, aims to encapsulate the difficulty inherent in describing trauma. Tulla's and Konny's manipulation of these stories have shown the necessity of giving voice to them in a nuanced way. At the same time, however, we see that it is impossible to capture how things happened in the moment. Paul does not claim victim status by assuming that he knows what happened. Instead, he attempts to recognize these traumatic stories so that they can be placed within their historical context. In this way, as Nicole Thesz states, "Grass's novella suggests moving from sensationalized or one-sided attempts at commemoration to a dialogue that integrates the elements of suffering and guilt."¹⁸⁷

Throughout this process, Grass's writing style also continually reminds the reader of how difficult and complex this story is. The title of his novella, *Crabwalk*, centrally highlights these characteristics. Paul also further explains this concept. He addresses the title early on as he describes struggling with the form that this narrative should take:

"But I still do not know, if, as I have learned, that first one and then the other and then later this or that life story should be uncoiled or if I should approach time more diagonally, sort of like a crab, which seems to veer in a backwards walk but actually moves forward quite quickly."¹⁸⁸

Paul clearly chooses this second option in the novella. Its narrative form embodies this concept as it moves back and forth between different time periods and perspectives (although Paul is the only narrator, he alternately puts himself in Tulla's, Konny's, and historical figures' positions, including that of Wilhelm Gustloff and David Frankfurter). It avoids a more typical narrative style that tells a linear

187 Thesz, 298.

188 Grass, 8.

story by periodically reflecting on itself. In this way, the novella disrupts an easy reading process, thereby simulating the actual effort of communicating this story.

This narrative form serves various purposes. Its overlap of past and present “reenacts the process of remembering,”¹⁸⁹ according to Kristin Veel. After an event has occurred, the only thing left is the memory of it, experienced in the present. Grass addresses this as he deals with the complexity of remembering and with the various ways in which views of the past and the present influence each other. Paul repeats later in the novella that “once again, I have to crabwalk backwards in order to move forward.”¹⁹⁰ This is certainly an awkward and difficult process, and to the skeptical reader, it might seem as though Paul is again trying to avoid just telling the story. The novella is proof, however, that he is finally wrestling with this material. His story indicates that depicting past and present side by side more effectively captures the current relevance of this memory. The narrative specifically avoids a linear form. It thereby suggests that this perspective might actually undermine the elements of continuity between various historical events and symbols, such as the date January 30, Wilhelm Gustloff's name, and the town of Schwerin. This perspective supports David Midgley's view. He states that “it is the intricate structure of the narrative...that enables Grass to show us the organic connections between personal and historical memory, between historical experience and attitudes in the present.”¹⁹¹ To build this structure, Grass uses “subject” as opposed to “linear” continuity through his narrative style to specifically reinforce the historical context of this personal story.

The novella's self-reflective nature also reinforces how difficult this process actually is. In addition to addressing, his “crabwalk” writing style, Paul also engages in conversations with “Der Alte,” his publisher, who directs his efforts to write this story. As the narrator, Paul continually

189 Kristin Veel, “Virtual Memory in Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang*,” *German Life and Letters* 57, no. 2 (2004): 213.
190 Grass, 107.
191 Midgley, 62.

questions how to represent this past. Grass thereby portrays the writing of the book itself as a conscious process. By addressing this story of personal trauma within its historical context, the author may be attempting to present this story in what he deems to be a “proper”¹⁹² way. The fact that the narrative itself does not flow easily, that it stops, then moves backward, and then interrupts itself as Paul wonders how he should go on, conveys that while Grass's voice is present here, the author himself experiments throughout this process as well. The interaction between these two voices shows how communication between different perspectives serves as important part of the effort to tell this story. In different ways, both Paul, a member of the second generation, and Grass, a member of the first, take responsibility for writing this story. “Der Alte” says “it should have been the role of (my) generation to talk about the suffering of the East Prussian refugees.”¹⁹³ Paul also recognizes here that he has failed to talk about this past until now. This personal and historical memory has influenced both of them in different but integral ways. Now, the building of this story together allows them to reflect on and learn from how each has interpreted this past differently. It is only through this struggle between these voices that this story is able to incorporate various perspectives in the effort to become more whole. According to Midgley, “the dialogic relationship between author and narrator thus contributes directly to the resistances to straightforward acceptance of stories about the past that are built into the text. It reinforces the sense that the investigation of memory as it is conceived in this text is a social activity.”¹⁹⁴ It seems that with his novella, Grass tries to advocate a more positive way in which to talk about this past. From this perspective, he makes this point in order to promote a broader discussion of these issues between various perspectives and generations.

In the end, though, even with what seems to be Grass's effort to present this story in the

192 Veel, 214.

193 Grass, 99.

194 Midgley, 63.

“proper” way, he still does not pretend to have the answers to dealing with this memory. *Crabwalk* shows this by not coming to a neat conclusion. On the last page of the novella, Paul discovers that even though Konny, now in jail, seems to be moving on from this glorified version of the past, others have created a website for a group that honors his son. Grass then closes the novella with the words, “the story does not end.”¹⁹⁵ As Kathrin Schoedel comments, this perceived attempt at “narrative normalization does not to closure, to a new stable story of the German past that can be handed down from the father to his son.”¹⁹⁶ The story continues indefinitely, and it seems that the only hope in breaking this negative cycle is promoting communication between different perspectives. Grass promotes this dialogue in the effort to build nuanced viewpoints that do not lend themselves to extremism. The generations may not agree on the different ways in which to tell this story, just as Paul and his editor debate how he should construct his narrative. The interaction between these various points of view, however, allows the story to move forward in a more productive way. By promoting the necessity of communication, it seems that Grass finds that whatever results from a dialogue between different viewpoints is a “correct” way to tell this story, as long as it does not lead to a right-wing perspective of this past. Eric Langenbacher comments on how, as a member of the broad left, Grass's work represents memory in a way that “aim(s) to defang and contest the lessons that the right has tried to connect to these memories,” allowing this past to be used instead for “positive, prodemocratic, and pacifist ends.”¹⁹⁷ Grass uses the examples of Tulla and Konny to make it clear that there is a “wrong” way to represent these stories. Arguably, his novella does not necessarily promote the idea that there is only one “proper” way to talk about these memories, however. Grass instead advocates that it is necessary to find some way to tell this story that incorporates various perspectives.

195 Ibid.

196 Schoedel, 204.

197 Langenbacher, 63.

To encourage this process, he offers his readers guidelines for how to go about exploring these issues.

Crabwalk contrasts positive and negative ways in which to portray this story, juxtaposing the lenses of victimhood, repression and glorification with the more nuanced view that incorporates both individual trauma and collective guilt. David Midgley praises the way that this book treats these sensitive issues:

“With its juxtaposition of perspectives, with its contextualization of human actions, with its digressive way of connecting the various elements in the historical situation, and with its mediation of the inquiry through a narrator who is at once deeply implicated in and deeply troubled by the commemoration of events, this text acknowledges the force of traumatic memories and simultaneously provides built-in challenges to the monoperspectival interpretation of them.”¹⁹⁸

This complex view gives both refugees and the larger society a way in which to represent and understand this story of flight. The dialogue that Grass encourages here seeks to promote the sharing of various perspectives by different groups and generations. This broader understanding may, in turn, contribute to the views of Germany's Nazi and post-war history in the country's collective memory. The debates surrounding this work of literature show how society has perceived this story up to this point, as do the League of Expellees' proposed Center Against Expulsions and “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit at the House German of History, which I will discuss in the next chapter. The contemporary nature of these works poses a challenge in analyzing their significance for cultural history. In many cases, the larger significance that they have on Germans' views of this past remains to be seen. By attempting to expand the story of flight beyond the lens of victimhood, however, Grass's novella represents one example of a shift in discourse that seeks to integrate different elements into

198 Midgley, 66.

Germany's collective memory of the expulsion.

Chapter 4

The Contemporary Challenge to Commemorate this Past

The debates surrounding Günter Grass's *Crabwalk* show one way in which the historical issues of flight, expulsion, and integration have become salient in contemporary German public discourse. Since the end of the Cold War, previously closed archives have been opened, and Eastern neighbors are no longer Communist adversaries. These developments have made information about the post-war pasts on both sides of the Iron Curtain readily accessible. Media images of refugees from the former Yugoslavia during the 1990s also played a role in helping reunified Germany remember its own experiences with expulsion. This contemporary crisis also enabled Germans to view this event within a European context.¹⁹⁹ With this shift, a general consensus has emerged that the ways in which Germans suffered following World War II is a story that deserves public recognition. The variety of perspectives that voice their opinions on this issue shows that right-leaning revanchists and revisionists no longer claim sole ownership of this topic. These stories are anything but repressed in current discussions of the postwar past. In fact, the conception of a taboo surrounding these stories often fuels the dialogue about them. Different voices across political lines argue with a “better late than never” attitude that it is precisely now, as the first generation grows older and dies, that these stories must be told.²⁰⁰ According to Karoline von Oppen and Stefan Wolff, “from this present perspective it would seem as if the 1990s have finally enabled the expellees to become part of national collective memory.”²⁰¹

This widespread reexamination of flight and expulsion has not occurred without its controversy, however. Looking specifically at literature, Wolfgang Emmerich refers to a continued

199 Oppen and Wolff in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 199.

200 Karl Schloegel, “Europa ist nicht nur ein Wort: Zur Debatte um ein Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen,” in “Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive,” ed. Jürgen Danyel und Philipp Ther, special issue, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* Heft 1, (2003), 8.

201 Oppen and Wolff, 209.

“debate about the legitimacy of a public mourning of German war victims.” Specifically, various viewpoints continue to contest “if and to what extent (expellees) and their descendants have a right to lament their own victims and losses.”²⁰² The effort to publicly portray German suffering raises questions about how society can appropriately tell these stories while also recognizing its role in perpetrating Nazi crimes. In a departure from the treatment of this issue during past decades, influential figures now discuss not if they can publicly acknowledge this history but how they should take on this task. This change in perspective suggests that a shift has occurred in the extent to which this past has been integrated into Germany's historical narrative. Attempting to create a permanent “spatial representation of memory”²⁰³ serves as a further challenge, however. The expulsion encompasses the contradictory elements of German guilt and suffering, so publicly representing this story is not an easy task. The debate surrounding these issues shows that society has not come to a consensus about how to do this.

This issue has repeatedly surfaced in public discourse, especially within the last decade. In 1999, the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (League of Expellees, or BdV) announced its plan to build a “Center Against Expulsions.” I use this event as a starting point for exploring the main representations and responses to them that have suggested different ways to publicly portray these experiences of flight, expulsion, and integration. The BdV campaign has clearly had a significant impact. In 2002, the *Bundestag* agreed to fund a European Center Against Expulsions based loosely on their proposal. The BdV then unveiled a temporary exhibition in Berlin entitled “Forced Paths” in 2006 in an effort to provide a preview of the planned permanent exhibit. The German House of History exhibit “Flight, Expulsion, Integration,” showcased in Bonn, Berlin, and Leipzig between December 2005 and April 2007, also emerged as a public, historical response to this discussion. Centered largely around the

202 Emmerich, 123.

203 Veel, 209.

varying reactions to these three proposals and exhibits, the controversy about what form this memorial should take continues. Merkel has publicly announced her support for a Center Against Expulsions, stating that “memory of the expulsions serves as an important piece of German identity.”²⁰⁴ The Bundestag also reinforced its promise to support this effort in 2006 when it announced that it would fund a project that creates a “visible symbol”²⁰⁵ of flight and expulsion. An international group of scholars has also added a dissenting layer to this discussion, stating their complete opposition to such a project. As a result of these varying perspectives, the exact plans to build this center remain contested two years later.

The three examples that I discuss in this chapter have all played a significant role in shaping the discussion about how to portray these stories. These representations do not only tell the stories of refugees' and expellees' postwar experiences in specific ways. They and the reactions to them also shed light on how different groups in German society have come to understand the key themes of loss and integration in the present. Just as Günter Grass did not tell a simple story of German victimhood, these portrayals and the responses to them show that a general consensus exists that demands that these stories of suffering be placed within some sort of context. Usually this means representing Germans' postwar experience within a historical and/or European frame. Exactly how to go about this, however, provides the heat for the current debate. The Center Against Expulsions proposes to focus on the suffering of German refugees and expellees in one part of the exhibit and portray the other twentieth century European expulsions in the second section. Many critics find fault with this approach for portraying refugees and expellees as just another set of European victims. The BdV's “Forced Paths” exhibit attempted to respond to this criticism. Instead of primarily focusing on the German expulsion,

204 “Merkel will Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen,” *ARD Tagesschau*, September 18, 2006. <http://www.tagesschau.de/inland/meldung96654.html> (February 12, 2008).

205 Constanze von Bullion, “Geste des guten Willens; Mit einem neuen Ausstellungskonzept kommt der Bund der Vertriebenen seinen Kritikern entgegen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 1, 2006.

this version depicts it within a representation of nine different European forced migrations. Some responses supported this effort to highlight the historical context of the German expulsion. Other critics, however, found that this attempt simply achieved the same purpose of focusing on German suffering. They argued that this version used the other European examples in order to reinforce the concept of victimization in a broader sense, thereby inappropriately equating the German experience with that of other ethnic groups, namely the Jews. In addition to this discussion about how the BdV proposes to represent these stories, this organization's long history and revisionist reputation significantly impacts how others react to their proposals. Although the BdV has made an effort to contextualize these stories, many critics continue to blame them for forefronting the concept of victimization. This critical response suggests that German society has come to understand the expulsion as a multi-layered story: one that incorporates individual suffering within a larger European framework that also recognizes the country's role as perpetrator.

The "Flight, Expulsion, Integration" exhibit and the responses to it support this perspective. The House of German History's version of the story focuses on the refugees' and expellees' experiences with integration. Oral histories play a significant role in personalizing this past and connecting it to the present. Furthermore, it also addresses the important issue of context by explicitly linking the issues of German guilt in terms of the expulsion of the Jews, Poles, and other groups to that of German suffering following the war. The exhibit also concludes with a wider European perspective by representing the current views on the expulsion in Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic. This concluding perspective shows the extent to which this story has been integrated into the countries' national memories and allowed these different nations to move on from this difficult past. In contrast to the wide range of viewpoints that continue to fuel the debate around a Center Against Expulsions, this temporary, traveling exhibit has been widely praised by the press. In Bonn, 140,000 visitors made it

the House of History's most successful exhibit ever.²⁰⁶ Its acclaim and popularity suggest that this version of the past resonates with many Germans. The recognition of the integration process differentiates this exhibit from that of the BdV's efforts, which focus on the expulsion in order to highlight the experience of victimization. By acknowledging integration as a significant aspect of the experience, this exhibit presents a version of this past that makes sense to individuals and can be discussed by society because it does not end with a story of suffering but presents a more complex view of the past.

A closer look at the BdV's Center Against Expulsions sheds light on how this proposal portrays the themes of loss and integration in a way that forefronts the struggles of German refugees and expellees. At this point, the center exists as a plan laid out on the foundation's website. This source serves as my main reference for my analysis. Under the heading “The *Zentrum* (Center) in Berlin,” the foundation describes its plan for the permanent exhibit:

“We have set ourselves the objective of creating a place of documentation in Berlin which makes it possible to consider the fate of the German expellees and the changes in Germany as a result of their integration as well as the expulsion and genocide of other European peoples in the 20th century in an overview within a historical context.”²⁰⁷

The BdV outlines their proposal in a way that certainly addresses the public concerns relating to the representation of these stories. The way in which they go about portraying this past, however, leaves many questions unanswered about the extent to which they have adopted the more nuanced view that seems to resonate widely in contemporary society.

The foundation's four tasks and objectives present a detailed description of the ways in which

206 Heinrich Wefing, “Ihr sollt Zeugnis ablegen; Synthese der Erinnerung: Kulturstaatsminister Neumann will die Ausstellung "Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration" dauerhaft in Berlin zeigen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 19, 2006.

207 “The Zentrum in Berlin,” Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, <http://www.z-g-v.de/english/aktuelles/?id=48> (accessed February 25, 2008).

they aim to achieve their overall goal of making the story German flight and expulsion a salient issue. First on the list is the plan to represent “the fate of more than 15 million German victims of deportation and expulsion.”²⁰⁸ BdV president Erika Steinbach has used this number freely in various situations, and it is stated not only as the first sentence of this explanation but also in various other places on the website. This is interesting in that the actual number of refugees and expellees has been greatly contested. The BdV has used a statistic higher than what is commonly cited in other sources, possibly in the effort to reinforce the significance of their project. In the process, however, their tendency towards exaggeration may actually undermine their effort.

The use of these statistics shows just one way in which the foundation seems to forefront the issue of German victimhood. The website explains that this is their purpose, at least in the section of the center, as it aims to provide a place for learning and for “sadness, sympathy and forgiveness.” It is unclear whether it is the Germans or the groups responsible for their expulsion who need to be forgiven. The sadness and sympathy, however, seem to be quite obviously directed towards expellees. The website declares that “people must not be left alone with this fate. It is a task for the whole of Germany.”²⁰⁹ This statement suggests that the BdV seems to be aware of its effort to use this center to influence national collective memory. On the one hand, their ability to make this issue a topic of discussion shows how German society has increasingly supported the effort to publicly represent this story in recent years. On the other, the BdV's concerted effort to influence how this story is remembered may make some people suspect of their political motives. Their insistence on their point of view of victimization could be one explanation for the widespread hesitance to adopt their plan.

As its second goal, the foundation seeks to depict the refugees' integration as a sort of glorified

208 “Our Foundation – Tasks and Objectives,” Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, <http://www.z-g-v.de/english/aktuelles/?id=35> (accessed February 25, 2008).

209 Ibid.

process. The description of this portion of the exhibit focuses on their contribution to German society in terms of practical skills. It also honors refugees for bringing with them the experience of living peacefully as ethnic minorities across Europe for centuries. The website states that in spite of these positive aspects of the situation, “this magnificent achievement has remained unprocessed and unknown to a great extent in this country.”²¹⁰ Again, their words suggest that they explicitly aim to frame flight, expulsion, and integration in a specific way to influence public memory of these experiences. This section shows that they focus not only on the suffering of expellees as they were forced to leave their *Heimat*, but also on how they became victims of the silence surrounding their experiences. In this way, they also frame the integration process as part of a story of victimization.

Third, the center aims to recognize victims of expulsion throughout Europe. This section shows the BdV's attempt to provide a context for the story of German refugees and expellees. Their effort to do so evidences the larger collective framework in place for talking about this story. The BdV has responded to the necessity for historical context by highlighting the other European expulsions of the twentieth century. The proposal for the center does so in a way that seems to reinforce that Germans were victims like millions of other people across the continent. The website does refer to Hitler's significant contribution to this larger story of the “century of refugees.” In this description, however, the experience of German expellees seems much more connected to that of various populations expelled by other dictators, such as Stalin, instead of being tied to a sense of collective German guilt for the suffering of these people. The website reinforces that “all the victims of genocide and displacement need a place in our hearts and in historical memory.”²¹¹ The BdV portrays the context of collective European suffering in its effort to influence the public's view of this story, but seems to gloss over the concurrent story of Nazi perpetration.

210 Ibid.

211 Ibid.

As its fourth task, the foundation presents the Franz-Werfel-Human Rights Award to a person or group who has promoted human rights by working against genocide and forced displacement of different groups. Franz Werfel, a Jewish German-Bohemian born in Prague, wrote *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, which brought international attention to the Armenian genocide. He also became a refugee when he fled Austria for France and then the United States after the Nazi takeover in 1938.²¹² His experiences seem to encompass both the German and Jewish side of the expulsions, in a sense equating them with one another. The award also glorifies the process of publicly portraying a repressed story of expulsion. This last goal seems to be part of the BdV's effort to promote the contemporary relevance of their effort to represent the past. Forced migration has been a widespread problem around the world throughout the twentieth century and continues today. If the BdV explicitly recognized the Nazis role in this phenomenon, they could have presented their Center Against Expulsions as part of an effort to take responsibility for Germany's Nazi crimes. Instead, they seem to use this contemporary frame in order to justify their portrayal of German victims. Their presentation of this influential cause through their specific lens explains to a great extent why this issue has incited so much controversy.

The plan for the permanent center in Berlin shows specifically how the foundation aims to achieve these objectives. The website presents its tasks as “equal-ranking,”²¹³ but the proposal for the center does not completely support this statement. A prologue and an epilogue connect the center's two main sections. The prologue sets up the “context” by providing a broad overview of the causes of expulsions. It also uses four maps to depict the various twentieth century European forced migrations. The website then outlines the first section, entitled “Fateful Progression of German Expellees.” This part is meant to be set up like a museum, with the first portion exploring the various aspects of *Heimat* for the expellees. This section looks at the meaning of this term, painting an “intense portrait of these

212 “Franz Werfel.” http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Franz_Werfel (accessed March 19, 2008).

213 Ibid.

lost worlds.”²¹⁴ It also honors the cultures of formerly German cities such as Breslau, Danzig, and Königsberg. Other *Heimats*, such as the Sudetenland and mixed national regions including the Baltic States, Poland, and Russia are also depicted here. As the discussion of my grandparents will show, the term *Heimat* has a lot of relevance for refugees and expellees. This loss has indelibly impacted their lives, so this experience serves as a significant part of the story. Talking extensively about this past, however, takes the focus away from the present reality of the situation. The BdV has received criticism for romanticizing the past with its extensive discussion of the territories and cultures that individual Germans and the country itself lost as a result of World War II. It seems that this view reflects in some ways how Grass depicts Tulla in *Crabwalk*. For her and for the BdV, this loss clearly occurred, but depicting it leaves little space for a discussion of how they have come to terms with this experience. The attempt to represent the former *Heimat* raises larger questions about the ways in which to balance honoring the losses of the past and recognizing the gains in the present.

The second part of this first section, under the heading “Outlawed and Deprived of Rights,” portrays the deportation, flight, expulsion, and experience in forced labor camps for the “more than 15 million Germans.”²¹⁵ (Here this statistic is used again). The plan for this portion includes a reconstruction of refugee treks, along with sections that present photographs, documents, and other objects that relate to the flight. This part of the effort to represent the refugees' experience seems as though it does not differ greatly from the House of History exhibit that I will describe later in the chapter. Trauma and loss clearly characterize this part of the experience, and the center aims to portray it vividly. It describes this part in a way that clearly reinforces the lens of victimization used throughout the exhibit's proposal to represent this story. The website states that “the arrangement of

214 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, “The Zentrum in Berlin - 1. Fateful progression of the German expellees.” <http://www.z-g-v.de/english/aktuelles/?id=51> (accessed February 25, 2008).

215 Ibid.

this part of the exhibition gives an idea of what it feels like to be uprooted and to lose one's human dignity.”²¹⁶ It also moves beyond the representation of the individual experience to talk about a collective process of “ethnic cleansing” promoted by the various groups that expelled Germans.²¹⁷ Furthermore, this section actually removes the German expulsion from its historical context as it only focuses on the various aspects of this phenomenon without examining the various expulsions that Germans executed. It represents the experience of Germans in forced labor and death camps, for example, without any mention of the Holocaust or the forced laborers who were deported to Germany during the war. In this way, this dramatic and limited description fails to connect the aspects of German guilt and suffering in this story.

The third and fourth sections of this first part of the exhibit propose to depict the conditions in refugee camps and the occupied zones following the war, respectively. The foundation aims to represent the ways that these Germans lived after they had fled or been expelled. It depicts the chaos and poverty in the camps and then the challenges that refugees faced as they began to rebuild their lives in various places abroad or in the two Germanies. This last part is meant to correspond to the portrayal of *Heimat* in the first portion of the exhibit. Juxtaposing the vibrant culture of a city or even the structured daily life of an ethnic German living in Poland before the war, for example, with the experience of living in a refugee camp or in war-torn occupied Germany, however, again reinforces the sense of loss to a great extent. Integration is also part of the story here, but it receives little attention compared to the space dedicated to the former *Heimat* and the experience of expulsion. A view of the restoration of an intact sense of *Heimat* or the new life that refugees built for themselves is only mentioned at the very end of this section. The focus on loss seems to overshadow these other aspects of the story, again contributing to the lens of victimhood that the BdV uses to represent this past.

216 Ibid.

217 Ibid.

With the second main section of the exhibit, entitled “Expulsion and Deportation of European Peoples and Ethnic Groups in the 20 Century,” (sic) the foundation makes its effort to place this story within its historical context. One might expect this part to provide descriptions analogous to the explanation of the German experience. Instead, it provides a table of various statistics concerning the different expulsions. This includes estimates of how many people were expelled and which groups caused and were victims of each example of forced migration. The page also provides a brief explanation and a list of its sources in order to cite these statistics.²¹⁸ According to the website, this part of the exhibit has not yet been completed. This clause shows that the German expulsion is clearly the priority for the center. In its present state, this list of numbers stands in stark contrast to the detailed description of the portrayal of the German expellees. The first part of the exhibit proposes to use various media in order help viewers identify with the stories of individuals and a collective group of German expellees. The compilation of statistics in the second section, on the other hand, does not use this personal, emotional perspective at all. It shows a long list of victims of European expulsions throughout the century, which Germans are of course a part of. In its list of objectives, the foundation claims not to be favoring one group over another. The very nature of portraying one population in the first section and using the second to talk about the rest of the groups, however, makes attaining this goal difficult. The juxtaposing methods of representation used in these two main sections of the exhibit allow the crimes that Germans perpetrated to appear greatly removed from the crimes that they fell victim to. It is this context that many seem to agree today is important to note when representing German flight and expulsion. The BdV's failure to explicitly represent this aspect of this story helps to explain the many negative responses to their Center Against Expulsions.

In the final part of the exhibit, the epilogue addresses the foundation's fourth task by reinforcing

218 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, “The Zentrum in Berlin - II. Expulsions of European peoples in the 20th century,” <http://www.z-g-v.de/english/aktuelles/?id=52> (accessed February 25, 2008).

the contemporary significance of this center. This conclusion serves as part of the BdV's effort to make their issue salient while also locating the center within the current debate around this issue of commemorating the expulsion. The website states that the project aims to draw attention to this story in the effort to prevent the use of expulsions as a political tool in the future. Along these lines, it promotes the “right to one’s homeland’...anchored by the UN.”²¹⁹ The continued assertion of this concept remains one of the main problems that many Germans and people in other countries have with the BdV. Their focus on this revisionist goal works against their broader efforts to “create understanding among nations, reconciliation and the peaceful neighborliness of peoples”²²⁰ with this center. However, they continue to reinforce what Germans lost six decades after World War II. This point of view makes these words seem empty. The contradiction here, in turn, sheds light on the hesitance and downright rejection that various perspectives express toward adopting the BdV's proposal.

The history of the BdV also helps to explain not only their approach but the way that many perspectives perceive their efforts to represent this past. The expellee lobby had played a significant role in FRG politics during the initial postwar years. Their influence then waned during the 1960s and '70s with Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the achievements in the refugees' socioeconomic integration. Expellee organizations did not disband as a result of this decrease in public visibility, however. Since German reunification, the growth in the public interest in the issue of flight and expulsion has coincided with a revival in the leadership of smaller homeland societies (*Landsmannschaften*) and umbrella group of the BdV. The expellee lobby has adapted “their rhetoric to the political language of the postmodern

219 “Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen - The Zentrum in Berlin – Epilogue.” <http://www.z-g-v.de/english/aktuelles/?id=53> (February 25, 2008).

220 “Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen – Our Foundation.” <http://www.z-g-v.de/english/aktuelles/?id=34> (February 25, 2008).

age”²²¹ through causes such as fighting ethnic cleansing in response to the refugee crisis in the Balkans. With this and their campaign to build the Center Against Expulsions, they have regained a certain level of relevance through which they continue to forefront the victimization of expellees.

Foreign policy issues concerning the expansion of the European Union have also provided the BdV with a current stage on which to express their concerns. Their demands reflect a “time-honored tradition” and include the right to return to their homelands, entitlement to compensation for their losses, and a restitution of their expropriated property.²²² The BdV's campaign on these fronts has significantly impacted relations with Poland and the Czech Republic, the two countries from which most Germans were expelled from, in the 1990s. For example, in 1991, 23 members of both expellee organizations and the CDU/CSU (Christian Democratic Union)/(Christian Social Union)-Bundestag faction did not support the treaty officially recognizing the Oder-Neisse border between Germany and Poland.²²³ Expellee groups, especially the Sudeten Germans, also expressed this type of diplomatic objection to a reconciliation treaty with the Czech Republic in the mid-1990s. Their demands and the argument over the 1945 Benes-Decree, which legitimized the German expulsion from Czechoslovakia, almost caused negotiations to collapse in early January 1996.²²⁴ It took two years of discussion for the neighboring countries to finally be able to come to an agreement.²²⁵ Expellee organizations' opposition to this treaty received extensive coverage in the media. Especially left-leaning newspapers often

221 Suessner, 18-19.

222 Oppen and Wolff in Niven, *Germans as Victims*, 199.

223 “Oder-Neisse-Grenze endgültig anerkannt; Bundestag ratifiziert mit grosser Mehrheit das deutsch-polnische Vertragswerk; In der CDU/CSU-Fraktion verweigern 23 Vertriebenenpolitiker die Zustimmung / Parlament erhofft Niederlassungsrecht für Deutsche in Polen / Appell an Firmen, sich an Entschädigung polnischer Zwangsarbeiter zu beteiligen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 18, 1991.

224 Hans Monath, “Die deutsch-tschechische Versöhnung nach Krieg und Vertreibung ist praktisch gescheitert: Die CSU verhindert im Auftrag der Vertriebenenverbände deutsche Aussenpolitik. In Tschechien nimmt das feindliche Klima gegenüber Deutschland zu,” *taz, die tageszeitung*, January 11, 1996.

225 “Deutschland und Tschechische Republik einigen sich auf Erklärung zur Aussöhnung Prag bedauert Vertreibung der Sudetendeutschen. Aus der Vergangenheit herrührende politische und rechtliche Fragen sollen die Beziehungen zwischen beiden Ländern nicht belasten / Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft lehnt den Text als geschichtlich einseitig ab,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 10, 1996.

portrayed expellees as right-leaning or backwards as they discussed their role in halting progress in the negotiation process. For example, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reported how then Bundestag vice president Antje Vollmer “urged the expellee organizations to 'take courageous steps forward' and to give up their domestic political blockade function for German politics.” The public recognition that expellee organizations received during this process has certainly helped to reinforce the perspective that they promote a view of victimization.

The issue of European Union expansion as run parallel to Germany's efforts to achieve reconciliation with Poland and the Czech Republic. This has also given the BdV a chance to remind the public of its demands. Just as expellee organizations attempted to block the reconciliation treaty with the Czech Republic, they have also expressed their opposition to their neighbor's entrance into the EU. The Benes-Decree remains a point of contention between the two perspectives. In 2001, for example, Steinbach demanded that the Czech Republic renounce it before they would be admitted.²²⁶ This perspective shows how the BdV continues to focus on the perpetration of other countries and bring up issues of the past that help them to portray themselves as victims. Their attitude helps to explain why many public figures are hesitant to build a Center Against Expulsions that allows the BdV to play a significant role in dictating how this past is portrayed.

This background serves as an important basis for understanding the various reactions to the Center Against Expulsions, both within Germany and internationally. On the one hand, the fact that this organization has been able to anchor their project in public thought indicates that the idea of creating a national commemoration of the German expulsion has resonated widely throughout society. Samuel Salzborn criticizes the media for influencing this perspective. He argues that the government

226 Ansgar Graw, “Stoiber streichelt die Seelen der Vertriebenen; Zum "Tag der Heimat" setzt sich der CSU-Chef für ein Zentrum gegen Vertreibung ein - Steinbach: Rücknahme der Benesch-Dekrete vor tschechischem EU-Beitritt,” *Die Welt*, September 3, 2001.

feels that it must go through with this project because of this high level of attention on the BdV's proposal. In other words, the concept of not building this memorial is no longer a viable option. He makes a valid point in that the German government has pledged its support for some type of public memorial. Salzborn goes on to state that the BdV has been awarded the "morally privileged victim status," allowing them to become the judge of this past.²²⁷ This argument only goes so far, however. In June 2002, when the Bundestag agreed to fund a Center Against Expulsions, they left where, when, and how it would be built open for debate.²²⁸ The fact that this debate continues almost a decade after the BdV first announced their plans to build this center shows that German society has widely agreed that their proposal cannot be accepted without modification.

Of the various issues that continually surface throughout this debate within the media and in politics, many of them address what type of context the expulsion should be placed in and criticize the lens through which the BdV portrays this past. One important topic in this discussion has been the issue of the proper location for this center. Steinbach has repeatedly asserted that the center belongs in Berlin because the expulsion concerns Germany's relations with various countries, not just Poland. She also wants to make sure that the "German expulsion does not get pushed into the background."²²⁹ In the Bundestag's announcement of support for the center, the CDU/CSU coalition endorsed Steinbach's position.²³⁰ The SPD (Social Democratic Party) and Green Party, on the other hand, have focused more on working with Germany's neighbors. They have argued that any sort of center memorializing expulsions must incorporate international input as well, stating that they would build a "documentation site of the 'twentieth century expulsions in Europe within their different causes, contexts, and

227 Samuel Salzborn, "Geschichtspolitik in den Medien: Die Kontroverse über ein 'Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen,'" *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, Heft 12, (2003): 1128.

228 Oliver Hinz, "Zentrum ohne Ort; Der Bundestag fordert ein Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, lässt aber offen, wann und wie es entstehen soll," *taz, die tageszeitung*, July 6, 2002.

229 "Steinbach beharrt auf Berlin," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 16, 2002.

230 "Zentrum ohne Ort," *taz, die tageszeitung*, July 6, 2002.

results.”²³¹ This wording makes clear that these politicians view the location of the center as a significant symbol for the frame in which this past is represented. Along these lines, SPD representative Markus Meckel announced in February 2002 that an expulsion center should be built in the Polish city of Wrocław (the formerly German city of Breslau).²³² Polish journalists Adam Krzeminski und Adam Michnik publicly stated their support for this proposal in May of the same year, arguing that this plan would allow for a depiction of the shared histories of Germans and Poles.²³³ Two months later, Günter Grass also endorsed this idea, reinforcing that it “had to be specifically historically conceived as a European task.”²³⁴ These various perspectives, notably left-wing or non-German, represent the view that Germans must consult with other nationalities in order to show that they are not trying to portray a story of pure victimhood.

The concept of depicting this past within a European context has evolved into various campaigns to build alternate centers dealing with expulsions in different ways. From December 5-7, 2002, an international group of scholars held a colloquium at the German Poland-Institute in Darmstadt entitled “A European Center Against Expulsions. Historical Experiences – Memory Politics – Future Concepts.” They discussed the historical aspects of European expulsions and the contemporary effort to publicly commemorate this past. Among the various perspectives voiced at this gathering on how to go about this, many agreed on the importance of promoting European discussions on the issue.²³⁵ In June 2003, the left-leaning *taz* (*tageszeitung*) reported that Meckel, in conjunction with a group of Central-Eastern European and German politicians and intellectuals, had proposed a “European Center

231 Ibid.

232 “Breslau statt Berlin?” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 23, 2002.

233 “Ein Museum für die gemeinsame Katastrophe der Deutschen und Polen,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 15, 2002.

234 “Grass für Wrocław; in kürze Vertriebenenzentrum,” *taz, die tageszeitung*, July 8, 2002.

235 Dieter Bingen, Włodzimierz Borodziej and Stefan Troebst, *Vertreibungen europäisch erinnern? Historical Experiences – Memory Politics – Future Concepts*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003, 9-10.

Against Expulsions, Forced Evacuations and Deportations.”²³⁶ The “European Network for Memory and Solidarity” serves as another example of a plan that has grown out of this debate. Founded in Warsaw in February 2005, this group confronts the issue of balancing research and representation by proposing to coordinate international projects, conferences, and exhibits. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reports, however, how the focus of this network has shifted away from expulsions to a great extent. The German government wanted this term to be part of the title of the organization, but “forced migration” only appears in the seventh paragraph of the group's declaration.²³⁷ This detail does not only indicate the breadth of the discussion on this issue. It also helps to explain why the BdV continues to assert its original plan as they argue that these alternatives move too far away from the German story. They see their Center Against Expulsions as an expression of their “self-evident right to permanently remember the fate of expelled Germans.”²³⁸ This focus, in turn, troubles the various groups who have attempted to establish alternatives. None of the efforts described here seem to have been able to gain the backing or the publicity that the BdV campaign has received, however. As the debate continues, it becomes even clearer how difficult it is to come to some type of national and international consensus on how to publicly deal with this complicated collective historical memory.

Some respond to this ongoing discussion by arguing that no center dealing with the German expulsion should be built. In August 2003, 116 intellectuals signed a petition declaring their opposition to this plan. The left-liberal *Frankfurter Rundschau* reported that this international group was composed mainly of Germans, Poles, and Czechs. These scholars feared that such a center would

236 Christian Semler, “Zerteiltes Vertreibungs-Gedenken; Soll im geplanten "Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen" vor allem der deutsche oder der europäische Blickwinkel gepflegt werden? Soll es Mahnmal oder Archiv sein? Berlin oder Wrocław/Breslau? Nötig oder nicht? Die Interessengruppen sind aufgestellt,” *taz, die tageszeitung*, July 17, 2003.

237 Konrad Schuller, “Dialogisch und gleichgewichtig; Die Gründung des 'Europäischen Netzwerks Erinnerung und Solidarität,’” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 3, 2005.

238 Christian Semler, “Zerteiltes Vertreibungs-Gedenken; Soll im geplanten "Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen" vor allem der deutsche oder der europäische Blickwinkel gepflegt werden? Soll es Mahnmal oder Archiv sein? Berlin oder Wrocław/Breslau? Nötig oder nicht? Die Interessengruppen sind aufgestellt,” *taz, die tageszeitung*, July 17, 2003.

hinder the process of European integration because of the negative responses of various countries to a view of German victimhood.²³⁹ Again, this issue of context comes up specifically in their argument:

“...in the historical dimension, there is the danger of de-contextualizing the past, thus breaking the causal relationship between the Nazi policies of radical nationalism and racial extermination on one hand and the flight and expulsion of ethnic Germans on the other hand.”²⁴⁰

This group fully opposes any plan to build a Center Against Expulsions because it seems to fear that such a project would not be able to appropriately represent the German expulsion without losing its connection to the story of Nazi perpetration. This opposition expresses a different element in the debate surrounding this issue. As Salzborn explains, however, this petition received minimal attention, especially in comparison to the BdV's visibility on this issue.²⁴¹ While most perspectives seem to share these concerns about contextualizing the story of the German expulsion, they seem more optimistic about the being able to find a way to represent this past so that it properly addresses this issue.

The BdV concretely contributed to this conversation with its “Forced Paths” exhibit, presented in Berlin at the Kronprinzenpalais from August to October 2006. With this exhibition, the organization attempted to respond to the criticism that it had not placed the German expulsion within its appropriate context. The BdV shifted its focus from the German expulsion, portraying this phenomenon as one of several forced migrations in twentieth century Europe in this exhibit. These include, among others, the Armenian genocide, the expulsion of the Jews, expulsions from Poland, the Ukraine, and the Baltic States, and the crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s. On its Center Against Expulsions website, the BdV specifically notes that “these events are each discussed within their historical

239 “Geschichtspolitik; Wissenschaftler gegen Vertreibungszentrum,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, September 4, 2003.

240 “Gegen ein Vertreibungszentrum!!!!” <http://vertreibungszentrum.de/> (accessed February 26, 2008).

241 Salzborn, 1128.

context.”²⁴² The following statement, however, alludes to the continued use of the frame of victimization, which is one of the main problems that critics have found with this exhibit as well:

“Alongside human tragedies, cultural losses are also represented. Eyewitness reports reflect individual European fates. Thematic topics are dedicated to comprehensive aspects, such as *Heimat*, flight paths, camps, legal situation, and dialog about these events, and report about the traumatic and existential experiences of those who have suffered.”²⁴³

Along these lines, the exhibit makes a clear point of highlighting the general humanity of forced migration. It broadens the scope of the “15 million German expellees” to include the “80-100 million...victims of flight and expulsion in twentieth century Europe.”²⁴⁴ This focus suggests that “Forced Paths” does not in fact stray far from the original plan for the Center Against Expulsions. The effort to contextualize the past seems more obvious here. However, the BdV still uses this context in order to reinforce the frame of victimhood instead of engaging with the complexities of this past in order to present a more nuanced view of these various stories of expulsion.

A closer look at the different parts of the exhibit illuminates how it places the German expulsion within a context of European suffering. The introduction, described on its website, more specifically describes the exhibit's effort to historicize the various expulsions that it portrays:

“The implementation of the idea of an ethnically homogeneous national state is one of the main causes for expulsions of ethnic groups and minorities in the twentieth century.

Aside from nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism were further driving forces for

242 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, “Das Zentrum in Berlin – Erzwungene Wege,” <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=502> (accessed February 27, 2008).

243 Ibid.

244 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen. “Erzwungene Wege – Einführung.” <http://erzwungenewege.z-g-v.de/einfuehrung.htm> (accessed February 27, 2008).

expulsion and annihilation.”²⁴⁵

In spite of this reference to racism and anti-Semitism, the text makes no clear link between one ethnic group's perpetration and their expulsion that occurred as a result, namely in the case of the Germans. This aspect of both this exhibit and the Center Against Expulsions serves as a significant point of concern for many critics, yet neither specifically addresses it. The BdV's current position on issues surrounding the German expulsion, discussed above, may stand in the way of this organization being able to comment neutrally on this subject. “Forced Paths” ostensibly aims to tell a different story, but in light of its form and its creators' positions on expellee issues, it in effect perpetuates the attitudes that this organization has promoted for decades.

The introduction highlights the aspect of victimhood directly following this explanation of the causes of expulsions. Just as statistics play an important role in the Center Against Expulsions' proposal, this exhibit also lists the high but inexact numbers of expellees in the twentieth century. The text then talks about how in many cases these statistics have not been officially recorded, describing this as part of an effort to “remove these victims from collective memory.”²⁴⁶ In this way, the exhibit also recalls the efforts of the Center Against Expulsions to bring this story to light. Instead of just focusing on Germans, it broadens the scope to frame all expellees as dual-victims, having lost both their homes and their place within national and international historical narratives. The BdV also defines its role in the effort to combat this latter injustice as it claims to “present historical events that are not well known in Germany or in the rest of Europe.”²⁴⁷ With this exhibit, the organization continues its conscious effort to influence contemporary collective memory with its story of victimization.

245 Ibid.

246 Ibid.

247 Ibid.

The different parts of the exhibit are constructed around this frame. The section entitled “Fates” elaborates on the various expulsions examined here with historical information and personal examples. With Germans on this list, the very nature of this format makes this group appear as another example of a collective of victims. The exhibit does not attempt to hide the role of the Nazis in bringing about the expulsion of the Jews and other populations. At the same time however, it does not draw the link between the perpetration of this act and the expulsion of Germans at the end of the war. It focuses instead on the plans that Germany's enemies had had since the beginning of the war to relocate this population in the event of a Nazi defeat. The text condemns the exiled governments of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Hungary for “collectively holding the Germans (living in these countries) responsible for Nazi crimes.”²⁴⁸ Renate Hennecke criticizes this lack of a clear connection between German perpetration and suffering. She states that the exhibit depicts the Holocaust as a “non-issue.” She finds that the exhibition sets it aside as an extraordinary historical phenomenon, and that this perspective thereby fails to illuminate the causal links between Nazi actions and the Germans expulsion. “The specific causes for the German resettlement fall under the table,” she says.²⁴⁹ With this exhibit, it seems that the context that the BdV has chosen only reaffirms the reservations that various perspectives have about allowing them to play a significant role in the public commemoration of this story.

The next section, “Thematic Topics,” goes into more depth about the individual and collective experiences of being a refugee. The first part, *Heimat*, explores various aspects of the term. I have described how the word *Heimat* has a specific relevance for the German experience with flight and expulsion. It seems that this part of the exhibit uses this conception as its basis for exploring the loss of

248 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, “Erzwungene Wege – Schicksale – Die Deutschen am Ende des 2. WK,” <http://erzwungenewege.z-g-v.de/Vertreibung/deutsche/deutsche.htm> (accessed February 27, 2008).

249 Renate Hennecke, “Erzwungene Wege: BdV-Ausstellung bestätigt Kritik an geplante Vertreibungszentrum.” <http://www.bohemistik.de/hennecke2.html> (accessed February 27, 2008).

the *Heimat* for various cultures. This exhibit looks at the issues that have confronted German refugees and expellees in the past and present and then explores the ways in which they can be applied to other groups. Over the last several decades, for example, groups of German expellees have made extensive efforts to preserve their traditions and cultures. *Heimatstuben*, or personal collections of items from the *Heimat*, are an example of this effort.²⁵⁰ Under the heading “memory culture,” the website displays a picture of a metal locker that a woman from a German-speaking Czech island brought with her in 1945. This is the type of item that could be found in such a collection.²⁵¹ A coffee set belonging to a Finnish refugee appears analogous to this image in the section “lost home.”²⁵² Publications and songs have also played an important role in helping German expellees to remember the *Heimat*.²⁵³ The section under the heading “*Heimat* songs” talks about this as a more general phenomenon for refugees of various cultures. In this way, this example supports this apparent effort to use the German experience to help explain that of other groups of refugees. Other topics, including the path of flight, the experience in refugee camps, the issue of rights, and the contemporary dialogue surrounding these historical events, also seem to stem from a basis of the German experience. It seems, in fact, that the “Forced Paths” exhibit uses the portrayal of the German experience in the proposal for the “Center Against Expulsions” as a sort of template to examine other European expulsions. In doing so, the exhibit seems to use the broader story of suffering to justify applying this view to the German experience.

One aspect that is noticeably absent here is the issue of integration. This element of the various stories could have differentiated them from one another and moved the accounts of forced migration

250 Albert A. Feiber, “Die archivalischen Bestände der deutschen Vertriebengruppen und anderer ‘nichtöffentlicher Institutionen’” in Hoffmann, *Vertriebene in Deutschland*, 432.

251 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, “Erzwungene Wege – Themenräume – Heimat – Erinnerungskultur I – III,” <http://erzwungenewege.z-g-v.de/themenraeume/heimat/erinnerungskultur.htm> (accessed February 27, 2008).

252 Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen, “Erzwungene Wege – Themenräume – Heimat – Verlorenes Haus,” <http://erzwungenewege.z-g-v.de/themenraeume/heimat/verloreneshaus.htm> (accessed February 27, 2008).

253 See Lehmann, 85-86, for example.

beyond a portrayal that focuses on loss. By not addressing this significant part of the story, the BdV stays focused on its issue of victimization of Germans and other European expellees. Talking about the integration would negate this view of collective victimhood in two ways. First, it would show how some Germans (refugees) were in fact “victims” of the negative treatment of others (the native population) during the postwar period. Second, this view of suffering clearly no longer applies today. While they may still have issues with their experiences, refugees and expellees have undeniably integrated into contemporary German society. The story of integration connects the past to the present in a way that brings the focus away from a story only of suffering. This element brings to light what these people have gained in order to move on from their losses. By excluding this important part of refugees' experiences, the BdV seems to specifically use the story of flight and expulsion to promote their view of victimization.

Different perspectives in the media continue to address this issue of context in terms of German guilt and suffering, but they perceive the BdV's efforts in various ways. In a February 2006 article for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* responding to the announcement of the exhibit, Constanze von Bullion recognized the “Forced Paths” exhibit as an attempt to address criticism in a “gesture of good will.”²⁵⁴ The article does view the “Forced Paths” exhibit and the Center Against Expulsions as having varying goals. It states that while the latter focuses on German suffering, the former shifts away from this issue. Bullion quotes Steinbach, who “aims to use this exhibit 'in dialogue with neighbors and to help to forge a path of freedom, in the spirit of reconciliation, between ethnic groups and a good relationship between people.’”²⁵⁵ The Center Against Expulsions foundation that financed the “Forced Paths” exhibit seems to be making an effort here to work with other European countries. However, Bullion

254 Constanze von Bullion, “Geste des guten Willens; Mit einem neuen Ausstellungskonzept kommt der Bund der Vertriebenen seinen Kritikern entgegen,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, February 1, 2006.

255 Ibid.

also reports on criticism towards this exhibit. Wolfgang Benz, a notable anti-Semitism researcher in Berlin, raises this issue of context as he finds fault with the exhibit's "unspecific boundary between the terms genocide and expulsion."²⁵⁶ This issue comes up in both the "Forced Paths" exhibition and the original proposal for the Center Against Expulsions. On the same day, the left-leaning *taz* also clearly notes the exhibit's European perspective, but in the same breath criticizes the way that it depicts, or does not depict, the Holocaust.²⁵⁷ These perspectives show that while the BdV's effort to reconstruct their story comes through in their more recent project, the issue of this view of victimization has clearly not been laid to rest.

Articles published in August 2006, reporting on the opening of the exhibit, also make the effort to define the lens through which the BdV portrays this past, presenting levels of support and opposition. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* described "Forced Paths" in a positive light. Addressing the critics of the Center Against Expulsions, author Karl-Peter Schwarz sees "no sign of an interpretation of German past as a story of collective victimhood." He finds that this exhibit allows for a composed interpretation that in turn signals a step forward for the realization of the center.²⁵⁸ On a somewhat similar note, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* also finds that this exhibit makes clear that the topic of European expulsions has achieved a significant level of legitimacy. The article also recognizes the exhibit's specific perspective: "Especially noticeable here is the effort to allow the German chapter to appear in its European context." As its main critique, the article generally comments on the limits of museum exhibits as a medium for portraying the complex nature of the patterns of expulsions.²⁵⁹ It

256 Ibid.

257 Christian Semler, "Vertreibungen im Palais; Das "Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen" plant eine Ausstellung mit europäischer Perspektive im Kronprinzenpalais. Der Holocaust wird dabei aber ausgeklammert. Die Eröffnung ist im August," *taz, die tageszeitung*, February 1, 2006.

258 Karl-Peter Schwarz, "Anker der Erinnerung; Die Ausstellung "Erzwungene Wege" in Berlin zeigt die europäische Dimension der Vertreibung," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 10, 2006.

259 Harry Nutt, "Konsequent europäisch ; Erzwungene Wege: Die Ausstellung der Stiftung Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen im Berliner Kronprinzenpalais," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, August 11, 2006.

avoids specifically criticizing the content of the exhibit or its perspective, however, thereby adding to the legitimacy of this issue that the author has acknowledged here.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* review of the exhibit departs from the former two by criticizing the way in which the exhibit portrays its perspective. The author pinpoints the issue of context, stating that “the undoubtedly European approach just shows the Center's new, flexible strategy but no fundamental change in purpose.” The article goes on to recognize that while the exhibit clearly recognizes Nazi perpetration, it does not link this with the German expulsion. It criticizes this aspect: “Only rarely does the exhibit suggest that East Prussia did not lie on the moon, but, like the rest of Germany, carried its own guilt for Nazi crimes.”²⁶⁰ The author seems to state that without this clear connection, any effort to portray a European perspective of expulsions fails. These varying points of view show that some journalists recognized the BdV's goal of responding to its critics, while others were not convinced that their European context achieved the goal of placing the German expulsion within an appropriate framework. Varying views on the issue of victimhood come through here, but overall it seems that it is the lack of a consensus on this perspective that causes this debate to continue.

Across the street from the BdV's “Forced Paths,” the German Historical Museum showed the House of History's “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit for a brief overlap of a few weeks. Many of the articles that I have cited above referenced both exhibits, and it is interesting to note the comparisons between the two. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* contrasts the exhibits' topics in a neutral tone. It describes “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” as focusing on the German story, while “Forced Paths' presents expulsion as a political crime committed by many states at various times in Europe, bringing about the suffering of many peoples.”²⁶¹ The author seems to note an implicit theme

260 “Was bleibt, ist Heimweh; Die Ausstellung über "Flucht und Vertreibung" im Berliner Kronprinzenpalais,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 11, 2006.

261 Karl-Peter Schwarz, “Anker der Erinnerung; Die Ausstellung "Erzwungene Wege" in Berlin zeigt die europäische

of victimhood here, especially in comparison to the former exhibit. The article in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* more clearly cites these varying perspectives as a critique:

“In the German Historical Museum...the difficult but in the end successful integration serves as a constructive comment on the question of if and how foreigners fit themselves into a society. In contrast, at the Kronenprinzipalais, flight is presented as a singular traumatic moment.”

The author goes on to say that the exhibit does not mention the various reconciliation treaties that Germany and its neighbors have passed, concluding that this effort “is too recognizable as a political instrument.”²⁶² Basically, the article seems to criticize “Forced Paths” for failing to represent how Germany has moved on from this past of flight and expulsion. This mention of flight as a “traumatic moment” is reminiscent of how Grass describes Tulla's view of this past. Both this character and the BdV here have not included integration into their story of expulsion, and various voices censure them for holding on to their views of victimhood.

The story of refugee integration plays a central role in the House of History exhibit. It is this feature that differentiates it from the BdV's efforts. The Center Against Expulsions also addresses this issue, but flight and expulsion seem to receive more of the focus of this proposal. Based on the media responses, it seems that the public greets the story of grappling with the various aspects of integration with more approval. First, Germans probably agree more widely that the issue of refugee and expellee integration has been repressed. Just a look at Schieder's works shows that at least in the post-war years, flight and expulsion received considerable public attention. How refugees have coped with their experience of losing their *Heimat* as they have worked to build new lives, however, has not been the

Dimension der Vertreibung,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 10, 2006.

262 “Was bleibt, ist Heimweh; Die Ausstellung über "Flucht und Vertreibung" im Berliner Kronprinzenpalais,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, August 11, 2006.

subject of a government-funded oral history project until the German government allocated the funds for the House of History to compile this exhibit. Second, this story also needs to be placed within its appropriate context, but it is more removed from the potent issue of the Holocaust. As a result, it is not tied as directly to this seeming contradiction of viewing Germans as both victims and perpetrators. The story of integration deals with different issues. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, my grandparents' stories present two examples of refugees whose views look forward. They both accepted their pasts, having focused largely on rebuilding their lives and integrating into their communities since the initial postwar years. Their stories show how the process of integration has involved making connections to the *Heimat* and forming a new home in their current environments. In keeping with this perspective, my grandparents also do not seek any type of claim on their *Heimat*. While they do hold on to memories of their childhood homes, they do not dwell on their experiences of flight. Therefore their stories are not ones of victimhood, but of adjustment as they have attempted to build bridges between the past and the present. Perhaps it is these features of the broader story that the “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit tells that make it a more popular and acceptable representation of the past in the eyes of many Germans.

The introduction to the House of History's exhibit clearly states its focus on the German experience with flight and expulsion as framed by European expulsions of the twentieth century and on the integration of refugees and expellees. For this section, I base my analysis on the booklet of accompanying materials for the exhibit from the German Historical Museum, the book published by the House of History, and the description of the exhibit on their website. The booklet defines the exhibit's concept:

“During the first half of the twentieth century, between 60 and 80 million people had to leave their homes in Europe alone. Through World War II, unleashed by National Socialist Germany, flight and expulsion reached a new, shocking dimension. The

Germans were hit hardest with up to 14 million refugees and expellees. Their integration was a major challenge for post-war Germany; their fate is a topic that continues to influence the present.”²⁶³

This statement immediately contextualizes this exhibit. It defines expulsion as a twentieth century European phenomenon, providing the frame for this story. Both the guilt and suffering of the Germans then become apparent as the introduction zeroes in on the specific topic at hand. The text goes on to explain that the exhibit describes the experience of flight and expulsion and the various integration processes in East and West Germany. It also talks about the perception of these events in literature, film, and academia. In this way, the exhibit does not stop with a portrayal of pure victimhood, but moves on to represent the various themes that characterize the integration process.

Some overlap with the issues that the BdV raises does occur. For example, both “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” and “Forced Paths” portray their stories within the context of European expulsions. The House of History exhibit also “makes clear that the flight and expulsion of Germans at the end of World War II constituted the largest forced population shift of the 20th century.”²⁶⁴ As the introduction in the booklet suggests, however, “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” seeks to broaden its scope beyond the Center Against Expulsions proposal and “Forced Paths” exhibit by including the story of integration. Furthermore, the House of History's project explicitly confronts the issues of German victimhood and perpetration. The summary of the exhibit presented in the accompanying book states that “the Germans who had to flee their homes or who were expelled were victims.”²⁶⁵ It seems

263 Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration: Begleitmaterial zur Ausstellung*, (Berlin: Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2006), 4.

264 Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, “Flight, Expulsion, Integration,” [http://www.hdg.de/index.php?id=6425&no_cache=1&L=1&Fsize=2&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=171&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=116&cHash=b3f6a4e376](http://www.hdg.de/index.php?id=6425&no_cache=1&L=1&Fsize=2&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=171&tx_ttnews[backPid]=116&cHash=b3f6a4e376) (accessed February 28, 2008).

265 Herman Schäfer, “Zur Ausstellung Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration” in Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Deutsches Historisches Museum, Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration* (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2005), 8.

that this question always arises and that any discussion of this topic has to address it. Following this mention of German victims, author Herman Schäfer recognizes the other nationalities that also suffered. He then states that in modern-day Europe, it is clear that any discussion of these issues does not imply that different groups are attempting to focus solely on their losses. Schäfer then draws an explicit connection between Nazi crimes and German victimhood:

“Today it is obvious that the war that Adolf Hitler unleashed, after the success of the German army, backfired with brutal consequence on the Germans. Without the offensive that was advanced by the German side, mainly as a race and annihilation war in the East, it would never have come to the flight and expulsion that affected millions. The Second World War and National Socialist crimes were the direct cause of the expulsion of the Germans from the eastern territories.”

It seems that it is the lack of this type of clear connection that the various critics of the BdV find to be a cause for concern. Schäfer does not mention the Holocaust or the Jews, but seems to draw in all of the people who were victims of the Nazis. Portrayals such as the BdV's may imply this German guilt, but it seems that in contemporary German society, it is necessary to make this clear statement around any type of mention of German victimhood. By voicing this perspective, the “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit addresses the criticism directed towards the BdV's efforts and enters the conversation surrounding this issue from a more nuanced perspective.

Oral history served as a significant component of “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” in the effort to move beyond a view of victimization. It acted as a concrete way in which the exhibit attempts to portray a multi-layered story. Hundreds of responses to a survey that the House of History sent out, provided the information for the “life paths” that guided visitors throughout the exhibit. Upon entering, they received a chip card and at three different stations they could learn about the fate of one specific refugee. Professor Michael von Engelhardt at the University of Nürnberg-Erlangen also filmed several

extensive interviews with former refugees and expellees for the exhibit. Schäfer explains the purpose of forefronting the biographical aspect of this past as promoting communication between the eyewitness's perspectives and the visitors at the exhibit.²⁶⁶ This effort goes right to the heart of Grass's point in *Crabwalk*. It seeks to address the long period during which this issue was not discussed. Incorporating oral history helps to bring these stories to light in a way that both helps refugees and expellees and the larger society to acknowledge these past experiences in a nuanced way. Since the former refugees told their stories within the last few years, the interviews also help to bring the topic of flight, expulsion, and integration into the present. Refugees and expellees were asked, for example, how they view their past experiences, how they feel about the loss of the *Heimat* in the present, if they feel that their integration has been successful or not, and where they stand in the current debate surrounding these issues.²⁶⁷ Analogous to the results of my interviews with my grandparents, these refugees' responses show how they have dealt with their losses and integrated into contemporary German society. Portraying their stories publicly in the museum, in turn, makes this representation not only of past losses but also about present integration.

A closer look at different parts of the exhibit illuminates how the House of History exhibit does this in concrete ways. It is set up in seven chronologically-arranged sections. Under the heading “The Century of Expulsion,” the first part looks at European forced migrations prior to World War I, thereby contextualizing the German story within this historical frame. It first explains the political and ideological basis for expulsions. A picture of Armenians lined up to be killed, for example, portrays the experience of this group. The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, also presented here, connotes the expulsion of Greeks and Turks that followed this agreement. The exhibit then depicts the post-World War I conflicts between German minorities and majority groups Poles and Czechoslovaks. Resettlement of

266 Ibid., 7.

267 Ibid., 7-8.

Germans through the Nazi programs and deportation of Germans living in the Soviet Union after the Nazi invasion are also represented. This portion of the exhibit seems to overlap extensively with “Forced Paths” and the “Center Against Expulsions” proposal. All of them show historical continuity between the different expulsions, with Germans on the list of victimized groups.

Mirroring Schäfer's discussion of the link between German crimes and suffering, however, the exhibit differs from the BdV's efforts by physically representing “National Socialist conquest politics as the prelude to the uprooting of millions of Germans east of the Oder and Neisse.”²⁶⁸ The exhibit is set up so that after walking through this first section, the visitor sees pictures and documents that portray the Nazi “reign of terror” and “plans for resettlement.”²⁶⁹ These look similar to the images of other victims of expulsions. This could be interpreted as similar to the BdV's effort to equate German victimhood with that of other refugees. On the other hand, it could also make clear that Germans stood on both sides of these conflicts. The visitor then comes upon the representation of the German experience of flight and expulsion. The exhibit displays the historical elements of this event, explaining both the “wild” expulsions conducted by local Poles and Czechs and the Allies' “organized” following the Potsdam Conference. The website also describes that “selected objects such as a nautical clock, refugee children's toys, or signs carried in refugee treks offer individual biographical glimpses of the plight of masses.”²⁷⁰ By portraying these personal objects, the exhibit seems to overlap with the BdV's efforts here as well. It certainly does not aim to trivialize the refugees' experience of loss. The broader scope of the House of History exhibit, however, prevents a focus on these singular views.

In this section, the exhibit also recognizes both the historical and contemporary significance of flight and expulsion with its special section on the “myth of the *Gustloff*.” According to Schäfer,

268 Ibid., 10.

269 Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, “Flight, Expulsion, Integration,” [http://www.hdg.de/index.php?id=6425&no_cache=1&L=1&Fsize=2&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=171&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=116&cHash=b3f6a4e376](http://www.hdg.de/index.php?id=6425&no_cache=1&L=1&Fsize=2&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=171&tx_ttnews[backPid]=116&cHash=b3f6a4e376) (accessed February 28, 2008).

270 Ibid.

“Despite – or even because of – this horrible fate, this story of the “Wilhelm Gustloff” stands as an example of the reception of flight and expulsion in Germany's postwar history.” This example shows how the exhibit repeatedly moves back and forth between different time periods, just as Grass's *Crabwalk* does. The exact model of the ship portrayed here simultaneously evokes the traumatic experience of flight, the portrayal of refugees as victims in the postwar years, and the recent resurgence of this issue through the discussion surrounding Grass's novella. This complex story clearly has many layers that deal not only with historical events themselves but also the ways in which they have been understood at various points during the last six decades. Through its different sections, the exhibit attempts to bring these different perspectives into conversation with each other, just as Grass promotes this type of dialogue through his own work.

The third section of the exhibit portrays the hardships that refugees faced upon their arrival in the West.. A portion of the barracks that formerly stood in Furth im Wald, a Bavarian town near the Czech border, are set up here. This area shows blown up pictures of conditions in the camp behind a cot, a chest, and a few other items that refugees had.²⁷¹ A picture of a door to an apartment with various names on it portrays how many refugees had to share apartments with strangers, and an original search list compiled by the Red Cross represents refugees' efforts to find missing family members.²⁷² These scenes portray the extensive challenges that this population faced during the initial postwar years, again reflecting the losses that they experienced.

This section is followed by a depiction of the experience of integration into East and West German society. Here, like the Center Against Expulsions effort, the exhibit aims to “specifically point out the contribution of refugees and expellees.”²⁷³ The various examples that portray this past

271 Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration*, 18-19.

272 Ibid., 10-11.

273 Schäfer in Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Deutsches Historisches Museum,

complicate this story, however. A model farm shows the efforts to rebuild in the GDR and a political poster signifies the land reform that followed the war. Christa Wolf's novel "*Kindheitsmuster*" represents a literary portrayal of "resettlers," as refugees were referred to in the GDR.²⁷⁴ The fifth section, which looks at the "difficult and widely ramified process of integrating refugees and expellees in West Germany" serves as "a focal point of the exhibition."²⁷⁵ Four Mass goblets, which the Pope gave to the Archdiocese of Breslau for the religious care of Catholic expellees depict the role of the Church in dealing with the refugee crisis. The original Charter of German Expellees represents the expellee organizations' effort to integrate. A poster from the *Heimatfilm* "Green is the Heath" also symbolizes how this popular film genre idealistically represented the integration of refugees and expellees as a smooth process. The continued reference to personal stories reinforces here and throughout the exhibit that "the economic, social and political integration of the expellees varies in each individual case according to origin, age and educational background."²⁷⁶ The historical progression and the subjective elements depicted here represent flight and expulsion not just as a singular moment in time. Instead, this exhibit looks at the various aspects of the integration process to understand how this story and those involved in it have moved forward through their initial trauma and into their new environments to create some form of a new home for themselves in the present. While it does not ignore the challenges that refugees faced, the exhibit does not dwell on their experience of victimization. Some critics may criticize this primarily positive view of refugee integration. It serves a significant purpose, however, in that it shows that elements besides suffering play an important role in this story. This perspective, in turn, allows this story to move beyond the contested frame that has

Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration*, 11.

274 Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration*, 12-13.

275 Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, "Flight, Expulsion, Integration," [http://www.hdg.de/index.php?id=6425&no_cache=1&L=1&Fsize=2&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=171&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=116&cHash=b3f6a4e376](http://www.hdg.de/index.php?id=6425&no_cache=1&L=1&Fsize=2&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=171&tx_ttnews[backPid]=116&cHash=b3f6a4e376) (accessed February 28, 2008).

276 Ibid.

defined the story of flight and expulsion so that it can be represented in German society.

Following this portrayal of the integration processes, the sixth and seventh sections of the exhibit look at the various ways in which flight and expulsion have been commemorated and how this has influenced Germany's relations with its neighbors. This discussion leads up to the current debate surrounding these issues. The exhibit discusses Ostpolitik and the issue of late repatriates from the former Soviet Union moving to Germany, mainly since the end of the Cold War. It then moves on to portray the current discussion around the Center Against Expulsions. A 2003 Polish magazine cover of Erika Steinbach, dressed in a Nazi uniform and straddling Gerhard Schroeder as a "Trojan horse," represents the heated debate between Germany and Poland on this issue.²⁷⁷ Arguments about compensation are shown here as another source of conflict, while *Heimat* tourism is portrayed as an example of cooperation between different countries. The exhibit also presents the results of the Allensbach Opinion Poll, conducted in 2002, on the issue of flight and expulsion from current German, Polish, and Czech perspectives.²⁷⁸ By bringing this story up to the present in these various ways, the exhibit reflects and contributes to the relevance that this topic of flight, expulsion, and integration has for contemporary German society. This is a unique way of portraying history because it moves beyond dealing with past events to grapple with how these stories continue to be understood in the present. The exhibit does not only address those who experienced these events, it also challenges those who did not to take part in the discussion. It seems that bringing this conversation up-to-date acts as a significant way in which this exhibit is able to tell a story that moves beyond victimization. In turn, this aspect could help to explain why it has not been criticized nearly as much as the BdV's efforts to represent these issues.

The exhibit concludes with a film that shows wars and forced migration today. In this way, it

277 Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration*, 16-17.

278 Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration*, 24-25.

brings the visitors back to where they started, at least in terms of a wider context of international expulsions. This part also serves to remind the viewer of the current nature of refugee issues in various countries. As Michael Jeismann states in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, this final portion brings “the visitor back into the present of this topic.”²⁷⁹ This broader frame of expulsions may seem similar to the BdV's analogous effort to contextualize their story. All of the exhibits in some way talk about the experiences of German refugees and expellees with losing their homelands. What differs, however, is the extent to which their frames highlight victimization. “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” departs from the BdV's efforts in that it recognizes the issue of context by telling a uniquely German story that talks about both loss and integration, instead of focusing on suffering as a singular experience.

The reactions to this exhibit mainly present positive views. Jeismann generally refers to the exhibit as “very impressive,” and he notes the positive “echo in the media straight across the political spectrum.”²⁸⁰ In *Die Zeit*, Jörg Lau praises the exhibit for being moving but not overly emotional. He notes that the interviews add to this purpose by providing a sense of “the multitude and sometimes even contradictory nature of the expellee experience.” The exhibit places individual stories within the frame of political and historical events, thereby confronting people with various versions of the story and challenging them to form their own opinions about this past.²⁸¹ While Jan Feddersen in the *taz* finds that this exhibit is “all too politically correct” with its positive view of refugee integration, he also notes that this perspective helps to stimulate conversation. He talks about how many elderly people who had for a long time repressed this story because they had strongly supported reconciliation

279 Michael Jeismann, “Tränen sind nicht aus Blei,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 4, 2005 <http://www.faz.net/s/RubFC06D389EE76479E9E76425072B196C3/Doc~E8D0014F0B6554E7EB2B67B9A6AFA707A~ATpl~Ecommon~Spezial.html> (accessed February 14, 2008).

280 *Ibid.*

281 Jörg Lau, “Ein deutscher Abschied: Wie der Vertreibung aus dem Osten gedenken? Ohne Selbstmitleid. Eine Ausstellung im Bonner Haus der Geschichte,” *Die Zeit*, December 12, 2005, http://zeus.zeit.de/text/2005/50/Heimat_II (accessed February 13, 2008).

with Eastern Europe “can recognize themselves in the pictures of expulsion.”²⁸² This comment refers to this issue's shift away from the political polarization that had dominated during the Cold War years. These former refugees have now brought their children and grandchildren to the exhibit as “you hear everywhere that people are beginning to talk. About themselves, their feelings...without making them politically charged.”²⁸³ Feddersen refers to how this exhibit represents a shift in this discussion that allows people to talk about their pasts more openly. To comment on one critique on the exhibit, Martin Fochler criticizes the use of personal stories because they do exactly what other sources have criticized the BdV for attempting to do: equate the different expulsions of the twentieth century with one another.²⁸⁴ His article was published on the website connected with the petition opposed to a Center Against Expulsions, however, not in the mainstream media. For the more widely read sources discussed here, it seems that the context in which this exhibit has presented this story of flight, expulsion, and integration has joined and further promoted an open conversation about these issues. This response suggests that the view of individual experiences within a historical context spanning stories of loss and integration resonates with how many Germans feel that this story should be told.

Perhaps part of the reason that this exhibit has been viewed so positively is because it seems to differ significantly from the BdV's efforts, which have alienated many people both domestically and internationally. Many media responses mention the BdV and the Center Against Expulsions in their discussion of the “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit. They locate this most recent effort within the debate on how to follow through with the government's promise to publicly commemorate flight and expulsion. A report from WDR, a TV and radio station, questions whether the House of History's exhibit serves as an “alternative to the 'Center Against Expulsions.’” This source notes that some

282 Jan Feddersen, “Die kalte Heimat,” *taz, die tageszeitung*, December 10, 2005, <http://www.taz.de/index.php?id=archivseite&dig=2005/12/10/a0228> (accessed February 13, 2008).

283 Ibid.

284 Martin Fochler, “Verschobene Perspektiven,” <http://www.bohemistik.de/fochler.html> (accessed February 18, 2008).

political voices say that it could in fact replace the BdV's plan as its effort to create a "visible symbol" of the memory of flight and expulsion.²⁸⁵ In his review of "Flight, Expulsion, Integration," Jörg Lau also addresses this larger effort. He praises the House of History for creating an exhibit that seems "intellectually independent." In turn, this effort has helped to shed a "new, free view on the history of expulsion" amongst the "domestic and foreign political pressure" surrounding this issue. Lau also notes that Polish newspapers have praised the exhibit. He states that overall, its seemingly apolitical nature has allowed a shift in the discussion. In this light, it does not aid the exhibit, Lau says, to view it as a potential replacement for any type of political effort such as the BdV's plan and the SPD-Green opposing project, the European Network for Memory and Solidarity.²⁸⁶ These examples suggest that the mainstream media generally supports the way in which the exhibit stays removed from Germany's "history politics."²⁸⁷

This widespread support has caused the exhibit to officially become a part of the discussion about how to permanently commemorate flight and expulsion, providing further evidence for the argument that its view resonates widely among German society. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Minister of Culture Bernd Neumann (CDU) stated in May 2006 that this exhibit should serve as the "core of a future permanent exhibition."²⁸⁸ The debate about the concrete form that this should take has not come to a consensus, however, even with this popular exhibit. The effort

285 "Kommunikationskleid aus Mullbinden: Große Ausstellung zur Vertreibung von Deutschen" *WDR*, December 12, 2005,

http://www.wdr.de/themen/kultur/ausstellungen_2/haus_der_geschichte/index.jhtml?rubrikenstyle=kultur
(accessed February 13, 2008).

286 Jörg Lau, "Ein deutscher Abschied: Wie der Vertreibung aus dem Osten gedenken? Ohne Selbstmitleid. Eine Ausstellung im Bonner Haus der Geschichte," *Die Zeit*, December 12, 2005, http://zeus.zeit.de/text/2005/50/Heimat_II (accessed February 13, 2008).

287 *Ibid.*

288 Heinrich Wefing, "Ihr sollt Zeugnis ablegen; Synthese der Erinnerung: Kulturstaatsminister Neumann will die Ausstellung "Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration" dauerhaft in Berlin zeigen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, May 19, 2006.

to translate a temporary, traveling representation of flight, expulsion, and integration into a permanent exhibition continues to arouse strong emotions and opposing political perspectives. Michael Jeismann refers to the House of History's exhibit's impact on this debate:

“Finally...we think we can understand why, sixty years after the end of the war, memory and politics still have such problems with each other; more exactly: why with all the integration and so much good will on all sides, a disquieting feeling does not come to rest.”²⁸⁹

It seems that “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” may have served as a step towards a level of consensus. Perhaps Jeismann would not have expected the debate to still be going on over two years after he wrote this article. Using his view, as an example, it seems that many Germans support the multi-layered and contextualized view of history that the exhibit portrays. This still has not been easily translated into a permanent commemoration, however. As a result, the government and society continue to debate how they can appropriately institutionalize these controversial memories.

Recent developments in this discussion suggest that a representation of this painful past as connected to a more positive situation in the present may allow the various perspectives to come to some sort of consensus. After almost a decade of debate about how to create this memorial to flight and expulsion, it seems that the German government has recently come closer to a conclusion than ever before. On March 20, 2008, Christian Semler in the *taz* reported that the German government has agreed to set aside 29 million Euros to fund a “visible symbol” against expulsion. The “*Deutschlandhaus*” in Berlin has been chosen for the location of the exhibit, which will be modeled after the House of History's effort. Semler notes that the exact design of the exhibit remains to be

289 Michael Jeismann, “Tränen sind nicht aus Blei,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 4, 2005 <http://www.faz.net/s/RubFC06D389EE76479E9E76425072B196C3/Doc~E8D0014F0B6554E7EB2B67B9A6AFA707A~ATpl~Ecommon~Spezial.html> (accessed February 14, 2008).

determined. This fact shows that translating a traveling exhibit into a permanent memorial still serves as a significant challenge. With its focus on integration and its clear connection between the expulsion and Germany's Nazi crimes, however, it seems that this exhibit has played a significant role in allowing Germans to come closer to reaching a conclusion about how to publicly and permanently portray this story. The article specifically addresses these aspects of the exhibit:

“The federal government has repeatedly assured that the historical representation will allow no doubts to be raised about the relationship between the cause – the Nazi politics of conquest and extermination – and effect – flight and expulsion of the Germans...(The House of History) exhibit accentuated the integration of refugees and expellees in the societies of both the German states. It comes to a museum-political 'happy end.’”²⁹⁰

This quote sums up the issues that have been present throughout the debate begun with the BdV's proposal for a Center Against Expulsions. Their association with the “Germans as victims” debate, along with their presentations of the issues of flight and expulsion themselves, contributed extensively to the prominence of the heated controversy of the discussion. With these recent developments, the debate about how to publicly memorialize this past has made considerable progress. As Semler states, depicting the integration helps this past to come to a “happy end.” This perspective may have its own overly positive, celebratory overtones in its reference to the contemporary state of German society and government. The House of History exhibit shows, however, that this element of the story has enabled it to be publicly discussed with much more distance from the political polarization that had previously surrounding this issue. Furthermore, a look at the individual experiences of two former refugees in the next chapter sheds light on the personal significance of this

290 Chrisitan Semler, “Zeichen gegen Vertreibung in Sichtweite; Kabinett billigt Pläne von Kulturminister Neumann für "Sichtbares Zeichen" gegen Flucht und Vertreibung in Berlin. Für das Projekt werden 29 Millionen Euro plus Betriebskosten avisiert. Personelle Besetzung und inhaltliche Ausgestaltung noch unklar,” *taz, die tageszeitung*, March 20, 2008.

story of integration. The interviews, in conjunction with the “Flight, Expulsion, Integration” exhibit, suggest that acknowledging this experience helps individuals to understand their experiences and society to represent these stories. In this way, portraying the story of integration helps this past to find a place within collective memory, thereby representing a part of the integration process itself.

Chapter 4

Two Refugees' Stories of Integration

“I came into a ready-made nest, as one commonly says, so I didn't experience too much of it (the integration process).”

– Anneliese

“I still know today...that I am a refugee, but not that I would...I would never outwardly express that.”

– Hans-Hermann

My grandparents and interview subjects, Anneliese (*née* Wiehler), born in 1935 in Petershagen, and Hans-Hermann Wiebe, born in 1932 in Danzig-Langfuhr (both towns near Danzig - the current city of Gdansk, Poland), live today in Bingen, Germany, a small town on the Rhine near Mainz, in the state of Rheinland-Pfalz. During the winter of 1945 in fear of the approaching Red Army, they both fled their *Heimat* in West and East Prussia at the ages of nine and twelve, respectively. Having survived the trauma of flight, Anneliese and Hans-Hermann both faced various difficulties with integration upon arriving in western-occupied Germany. These traumatic situations as children have not prevented them from socioeconomically and politically integrating into German society, however. In their 70s, Anneliese and Hans-Hermann live today quite comfortably in retirement, having raised a family and completed successful careers. They express a significant level of contentment with their current lives. Anneliese's quote about her initial experience after arriving in her new home seems connected to this sense. But six decades later, why does Hans-Hermann inwardly still feel like a refugee? His statement sheds light on how memories of flight and integration continue to influence how these former refugees conceive of themselves and their environments today.

This chapter poses two main questions. First, how have Anneliese and Hans-Hermann integrated into their current homes? The loss of the *Heimat*, alongside the tragedy of each losing a parent,²⁹¹ clearly created a major disruption in each of their young lives. Both encountered unique circumstances in their new environments that influenced how they were each able to integrate into these communities. The role of different social networks significantly influenced both of their experiences. The process certainly was not seamless for either of them, but it took varying amounts of time for Anneliese and Hans-Hermann, largely as a result of the varying types and levels of support that each of them had in their new homes. Actively involved in the Mennonite community in Rheinland-Pfalz that her father married into after the war, Anneliese's religious connections played a significant role in her integration process. This network served both to help to her feel accepted in her new community and maintain contact with other refugees from her former home. Anneliese's education and career also connected her to West German society, while family played an important role in helping her to maintain her ties to her *Heimat*. By spanning these two groups, the Mennonite community helped Anneliese to build an integral bridge between her past and present homes.

Social networks also helped Hans-Hermann to both stay connected to the *Heimat* and assimilate into his new home. Family ties have helped both to maintain their link to their former homes, and they say together that family is the most important value in their lives. Furthermore, Anneliese and Hans-Hermann are actually distant cousins, so it is significant that they chose to marry each other, as two refugees from similar regions of Germany's former eastern territories. At the same time, Hans-Hermann states that as a police officer, his coworkers first made him feel fully integrated among the native population. His experience diverges from his wife's, however, in that he lacked a network that could integrate these two aspects of himself into a cohesive sense of self.

291 Anneliese lost her mother in an accident at a refugee camp in Demark in October 1945 and Hans-Hermann's father died on the Russian front in April 1943.

Second, in what ways have these past experiences influenced Anneliese and Hans-Hermann in their current conceptions of themselves and their pasts? Their points of view make clear that they do not sentimentally focus on their stories of suffering and have both made extensive efforts to integrate into their current environments. In *Crabwalk*, Grass portrays Tulla as having held on to this perspective of victimization into the present. Anneliese and Hans-Hermann, on the other hand, do not reflect this nostalgic attitude of the past. Their perspectives also counter the revanchist stereotype that characterizes many expellee groups. These points of view suggest that Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's personal experiences of suffering have not prevented them from understanding this trauma within the broader context of Germany's contentious past.

Their varying experiences with integration, however, do influence their current perspectives on *Heimat*, Germany's past, and their senses of self. Because Anneliese was able to connect her two separate homes and experiences to one another, she expresses a more flexible view of *Heimat* today that applies to where she currently lives. She has never lost touch with the importance that her former home still maintains for her. It seems that this recognition of her past, in turn, influenced how she reacted to seeing this place again. When Anneliese returned a few years ago, her emotions were less intense and her memories were less vivid than her husband's. The bridge between her two communities has allowed Anneliese to connect her past to her present. From this frame of reference, she also explicitly describes the link between Germany's Nazi past and her personal experience with flight. This broader conception of the historical situation shows how Anneliese has been able to move on from the personal pain of this experience to understand it within its historical context. Overall, Anneliese describes a smooth integration process and does not currently feel like a "refugee." It seems that having been able to build a bridge between her two homes has helped her to create a more integrated sense of self, in turn allowing her to more smoothly integrate into her new home.

For Hans-Hermann, his views on *Heimat*, Germany's past, and his identity seem more

connected to his experience as a refugee. He clearly states that his current home is not his *Heimat*. Furthermore, Hans-Hermann's emotional experience when he returned to his childhood city shows that his memories of the past remain perhaps surprisingly present for him. He clearly states his opposition to expellee organizations' claim to the *Heimat*, expressing that he would never contest the current borders. At the same time, Hans-Hermann expresses a strong connection to his past experiences when he recalls his and his family members' view of the situation in 1945. He also noticeably does not make the explicit connection between Nazi crimes and his experience of flight that his wife does. Hans-Hermann's current sense of still feeling like a refugee seems connected to these points of view. The current presence of his past may stem from the fact that he made an effort to move beyond it in order to assimilate into the local population, which specifically excluded his family when they first arrived in their new homes. Hans-Hermann clearly lacked a supportive community that could have helped him to connect these two parts of his life to one another, like Anneliese experienced. Other factors, including his age, personality, and position as the oldest son in a fatherless family, also differentiate his experience from his wife's. I focus here on social networks, however, because of their importance for the formation of family and collective memory. In the larger integration process, it seems that this influence indelibly affected not only how these former refugees were able to integrate, but also how they conceive of their experiences in the present.

I recorded about nine hours of interviews with Anneliese and Hans-Hermann while were visiting the U.S. this past October. Talking with each separately, my grandparents first told me their life stories, both coincidentally concluding the initial portion of each of their accounts with their marriage. We then continued the interviews all together as Anneliese and Hans-Hermann told the rest of their life stories. After this first part, I conducted separate question and answer sessions with each of them. I found that each seemed to be more expressive and less impacted by the other's presence when we did the interviews one-on-one. From a list of questions that I had drawn up prior to these sessions, I

asked specifically about their experiences pertaining to their contact with the native population, their awareness of political influences, their feelings about *Heimat*, the ways in which they perceived their family members' experiences, and their attitudes about personal or collective feelings of war guilt. Their answers helped me to focus on key situations and highlight significant themes present in their present memories of their past experiences.

In light of the controversial public debate surrounding the representation of flight, expulsion, and integration, these interviews shed light on how collective memory affects how individuals understand their own experiences. Personal stories have been used to affect society's perception of a certain part of its past in various ways since the postwar period. Schieder's work, for example, serves as an example of how oral history was used to influence the public perception of refugees and expellees in the 1950s. These volumes show how this endeavor to reach a historical "truth" was manipulated by various political perspectives. The broader trend toward using oral history during the 1960s also served its political purpose as the German New Left sought to record the history of everyday life to draw more attention to "regular" people.²⁹² Oral history can be viewed as a way in which to report on the "true" stories of eyewitnesses. Their experiences cannot be taken at face value, however. The specific motivations and perspectives of both the interviewees and the interviewers influence how they tell and represent these stories. Peoples' testimonies of their experiences do not just recount what happened to them. They also illuminate how eyewitnesses remember what happened to them in the context of their present understanding of their life stories. With oral history, memory's alternating clarity and inadequacy significantly influences the way in which people recount their experiences. Oral historians' perspectives also impact how they represent these accounts. The present state of collective memory affects how both sides understand these stories at various times. In a

292 Confino, 64.

cyclical process, the representation of personal accounts on a broad scale also impacts how the larger society conceives of these individual pasts. It is therefore important to explore the frameworks, dictated by various social networks, through which individuals and society view their experiences.

A summary of Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's childhood experiences with flight provides background on the personal trauma that they had survived as they faced the challenge of integrating their new homes. Overall, Anneliese expresses a primarily positive view of her life, although she recognizes that she has had to deal with many challenges along the way. She briefly talked about her “very nice childhood” in West Prussia. Anneliese then began describing her experience of flight in 1945 at the age of nine. Her father was at war, so she fled with her mother, brother, grandmother, and great-aunt, while her aunt, uncle and cousin joined them later on the trek. Anneliese mentioned that “it was naturally very difficult for us to leave home. At that point we thought we would still be returning.” They packed a covered wagon, loaded with food, clothing, and bedding and then joined the procession of refugees fleeing westward. They came to a town on the Baltic Sea where Anneliese remembers the chaos as “so many people, horses, and wagons” crowded the port. In this madness, her immediate family was ripped away from her aunt, uncle, and cousin. They boarded the crowded ship, leaving behind most of their belongings. Anneliese recalls spending the entire journey in the ship's belly. It lasted two or three days, she couldn't remember exactly how long, but she did remember the ship being shot at by fighter planes along the way. She describes how “we just had to lie there and wait to find out what would happen to us.” Anneliese does not explicitly define the space that she was in here, and the ambiguity of her words seemed to express the utter lack of control that these refugees must have experienced. As a child, Anneliese could rely on her mother and grandmother to take care of her, but the emotional vividness of the traumatic experience has stayed with her.

The ship took these refugees to Denmark, where the family spent the next year and a half living

in three different camps. Anneliese recalls the lack of hygiene in these places, but also remarks that they tried to build some semblance of normalcy, attempting to “make the best out of what they had.” The camp provided some tutoring for the children, although she notes that she missed two years of proper schooling. This point seems to be an important one for Anneliese, and at different points throughout her story, she focuses on how she made a concerted effort to complete her education.

It was in the third camp that “the accident occurred, that my mother was shot,” in October 1945. Anneliese remembers the exact details of the event, explaining that a soldier had apparently been cleaning his gun when it went off, killing her mother and wounding her. Anneliese still has a bullet lodged in her thigh. She says, “I won't do anything to it. I don't have any problems, so why should I bother with it?” This statement shows how this experience is still with her. It has become a part of her that she has learned to live with, quite well in fact, so that she does not notice it is there. The way that Anneliese describes this tragedy seems almost symbolic of the significance that these traumatic experiences had and have for other refugees – clearly they were very painful at first, but they have become something that they have had to incorporate into their lives.

Anneliese explains that she was then taken to the hospital, where she was operated on immediately. She remarks that she received astonishingly good care from the Danish doctors, given that she was just a German refugee girl. Anneliese clearly remembers the white sheets and cozy bed that she slept on, along with the doll that she received. She notes that “I felt very comfortable there.” She seems to be thankful for the positive aspects of the situation, even though they clearly did not counter the loss of her mother. Anneliese's stay lasted three weeks, after which she had to return to the camp. There she was a refugee again, now confronted with the reality of facing life without her mother. Her close relationship with her grandmother helped to deal with this tragedy. Anneliese says quietly, however, that this was “not an easy time.”

Her story continues as she explains how her family was finally reunited several months later.

Her father had survived the war as a POW in Holland. After he was released, he lived on a farm in Schleswig-Holstein. Through the Red Cross, he found out what had happened to his family, including that his wife had died. Anneliese talks about how “amazing it was that so many people found each other again in the midst of all the chaos.” Again, she suggests the confusion of this time, with people separated from their family members, having survived tragedy, and still having no idea what would happen next or how or when their lives would return to normal. As Anneliese reflects on this period, she simultaneously describes how difficult it was and how they tried to maintain a positive attitude in order to deal with these traumatic events. “Even though things were *so* bad for us...at any rate, after the war we were all happy that we had survived,” Anneliese says. She repeats this postwar survival mentality often throughout her story. Of course she does not forget what happened to her mother, but she says of this tragedy that “it was just fate.” Her expression of her dual effort to mourn and move forward shows that Anneliese has clearly accepted what happened to her. At the same time, her words express how difficult it must have been and may still be to deal with these two aspects of recovering from loss.

Anneliese's situation began to improve once her father found a place for her to live in western occupied Germany. This was necessary for refugees before they could leave the camps. Anneliese remembers doing so on her eleventh birthday in November 1946. Her aunt and uncle, from whom she had been separated when she boarded the refugee ship, had also survived and were living in a small garden house on a farm in Kiel in northern Germany. They agreed to take her in, even though the house was already overflowing, with five people in it. Anneliese remembers looking out the window at the bombed out towns and cities on the train ride there. Recalling this destruction, she repeats that everyone was just happy to have survived. Anneliese began to attend school in Kiel. She reiterates her concern about missing out on her education, saying that “we didn't have school for so long, so I had to catch up on a lot.” Anneliese also describes the widespread struggle to find food. She says that they

“almost always had enough to eat,” remembering that once she had to go begging with her cousin. This was a difficult experience for her. Overall, however, Anneliese describes her situation in Kiel as having provided her with the necessities to get through this chaotic time period. Even after having lost her home, her mother, and having spent the majority of the past two years in a refugee camp, Anneliese sees herself as having been much luckier than many others because she and most of her family members had survived. This positive outlook certainly characterizes her perspective throughout her account.

Anneliese's “luck” continued when her father, Bruno, remarried to a fellow Mennonite, living in the small rural town of Kirchheimbolanden in the state of Rheinland-Pflaz. After a year and a half in Kiel, Anneliese joined her father and brother in their new home in central-southwestern Germany. Here she also met her new stepmother. From a financial perspective, this situation worked out favorably for the Wiehler's, since they were able to work on the family farm. Bruno was also a lay minister, and the welcome they received from the local Mennonite community, known as the Weierhof, provided an additional support network for this refugee family. This unique situation significantly influenced their subsequent integration process.

Hans-Hermann's experience of childhood and flight parallels Anneliese's in some ways and diverges from it in others. He was born near Danzig but spent most of his childhood years growing up in Sensburg, East Prussia (the current city of Mrągowo, Poland). Like his wife, he also recalls happy childhood memories. As the son of a policeman and then soldier, Hans-Hermann lived in the barracks. He happily remembers that “everyone loved us children and we could play wherever we wanted.” Hans-Hermann recalls excitedly joining the *Jungvolk* (a group of the Hitler Youth) at the age of 10 and wishing he were older so that he could also go to war. This sense of youthful freedom and enthusiasm seems to characterize how he remembers his childhood, probably because it stands in stark contrast to

his experiences of flight and integration.

Hans-Hermann then moves on with his story, noting the break caused by the end of the war:

“Die Kindheit nam praktisch ein jehes Ende als 1944 nach ende der Sommerferien unser Schule geschlossen wurde in Sensburg und die ersten Fluechtlinge von der deutsch-polnischen Grenze in Richtung Westen gezogen sind und bei uns in die Kaserne...Quatier bezogen haben.”

His father, Johannes, had died on the Russian front in 1943. By the fall of 1944, it became clear that the war was coming to an end. The family began to make preparations for a “move” to their relatives in Tiegenhof, West Prussia, allowed to them because Johannes had held a high-ranking position in the army. Hans-Hermann explains that he left first because his mother feared that as a member of the Hitler Youth, her son might betray the family by exposing that they were not planning on returning. This example shows how Hans-Hermann experienced the Nazi regime from a child's perspective. Today, he is candidly aware of how he was old enough to have been influenced by it.

In Tiegenhof, Hans-Hermann enjoyed a few more months of relative peace. He attended school there, in the class three grades ahead of his distant cousin and future wife, Anneliese (he remembers this clearly, while she has no recollection of him from her childhood). By January, however, the Red Army had advanced so that they were no longer safe in West Prussia. The family went to an uncle in the middle of the night, who agreed to build a trek with them. Hans-Hermann recalls vivid memories of how they left:

“Ja, wir hatten gar nicht viel Gepaeck dabei. Wir hatten ein Rodelschlitten mit zwei Koffern und einen kleinen Wagen...und in diesem Wagen sass dann meine zwei-jaehrige Schwester. Meiner acht-jaehrige Bruder und ich, wir zogen den Schlitten, und meine Mutter hatte ihre Mutter im Armen...und so zogen wir die Strasse entlang, auf der uns schon Fluechtlingswagen entgegen kamen.”

Hans-Hermann's memory portrays the immediacy of how these refugees actually fled their homes as they began the trek westward. He notes the conditions that they traveled through, remembering the snowstorms and temperatures reaching -20° Celsius. The two babies on the trek with them did not survive this brutal weather. Aside from noting these details, he does not extensively describe the actual experience along the flight, noting that this is difficult to portray. He summarizes the situation:

“Im inneren, wie es da aussah, das ist kaum zu schildern, denn auch der fest eingefleischte Glaube, wir kommen bald wieder zurueck, half nicht darueber hinweg, dass wir unsere Heimat verlassen mussten. Das bezog sich nicht nur auf die Eltern, das schlug sich auch auf die Kinder nieder, denn das traute Heim haben wir gewechselt mit unser Planwagen.”

These eloquent words evoke the fear and pain that these refugees must have felt as they left everything that they knew behind. They also, interestingly, echo Paul's and Tulla's difficulties with describing the actual experience of trauma. Paul “cannot capture with words what happened inside the ship” and Tulla always says that “I don't have any tones for that.”²⁹³ Hans-Hermann also hesitates to go into great detail to describe this devastating experience. The fact that he does not elaborate suggests that this trauma was beyond words. What does come through here, however, is the intense memory that Hans-Hermann has of his experience as a twelve-year-old. He recognizes his position as a child, but his memories show a mature awareness of the situation, perhaps because he felt a duty to care for his other family members as the “man of the family.”

Hans-Hermann traces the route west as he continues his story. Fighter planes constantly targeted them, and they often arrived in cities just as the air raid alarm was sounding or bombs were

293 Grass, 136.

falling. They managed to escape each time, but Hans-Hermann describes a few close calls. After two months along the trek, they reached their final destination of the Island of Fehmann in Schleswig-Holstein. The families were assigned to different farms, and the Schmidts living in Marienleuchte, a tiny town on this island, took in Hans-Hermann and his mother, grandmother, brother, and sister. He describes what he remembers of their arrival:

“Unser erste Eindruck, ich weiss das heute gar nicht mehr so genau, ich weiss nur eins, dass wir alle froh waren, diese schreckliche Flucht lebend und inzwischen wieder alle bei Gesundheit gut ueberstanden haben”²⁹⁴...all das hatten wir hinter uns, was sonst noch dazu gehoerte. Wir hatten es ueberstanden.”

Hans-Hermann's emphatic words reinforce the focus on survival that Anneliese also expressed. They had done everything they could to stay alive, and with the flight finally over, they were just thankful that they had achieved this, especially because they had little else. Unlike Anneliese's Mennonite community, however, the native population on this island greeted the Wiebe's coldly. Lack this initial support network, the family faced significant challenges as they struggled to rebuild their lives and integrate into their new community.

It is impossible to compare two experiences of trauma, but certain similarities do characterize Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's experiences up to this point. Both had lost their homelands and one of their parents by the time they arrived in their new communities. It is here that their experiences diverge in terms of the social networks available to them as they and their families rebuilt their lives. Anneliese notes that the integration really “began in Kirchheimbolanden as we gained a foothold there.” She describes this situation as supplying her with a “ready-made nest...so I didn't experience that much,” in

294 His brother had gotten very sick along the way but had recovered.

terms of major integration challenges. Anneliese's step-family, for the most part, significantly reduced the difficulties that most refugees, including the Wiebe's, faced when they arrived in their new communities. Because her father married a local Mennonite woman, Else, Anneliese became part of a well-established family that was able to provide her with many resources. She fondly remembers that her grandfather signed her up for piano lessons and her uncle, who was her math teacher, paid her tuition, allowing her to attend school right away, and tutored her. Anneliese still appreciates this support because many refugee families could not afford to educate their children during the initial postwar period. In this way, she was able to avoid many of the major obstacles that the millions of other refugees faced as they struggled to integrate across the country.

While her experience with the native population was primarily positive, Anneliese's relationship with her stepmother served as a significant example of a challenge that she, as a refugee, faced as a result of contact with the locals. She describes her stepmother's cold reception of her. "A child needs warmth," Anneliese says, implying that she did not receive this from Else. Having lost her mother, the task of replacing this important figure in her life went to her stepmother, who did not fulfill this role. Anneliese considers that perhaps their difficult relationship "was also related to integration, that she had problems and so did I." She reminds herself that Else had been a native of Rheinland-Pfalz and had never had her own children. This example shows how Anneliese's integration process was not seamless as adjusting to an unwelcoming stepmother posed a challenge as she acclimated to her new home.

Other family ties, however, played a central role in providing the support necessary for Anneliese to deal with the integrate process and simultaneously maintain her tie to her *Heimat*. Her relationship with Else seems to have made her especially appreciate these positive connections. When Anneliese says, "I always had my good father. He was always very kind to me." Her future mother-in-law, Charlotte, also played an important role in this capacity. After she moved to Kirchheimbolanden

from Schleswig-Holstein in 1950, Anneliese frequently visited Charlotte, a relative who was also part of the Mennonite community. She served in a sense as a surrogate mother for Anneliese after she had lost her own mother and now only saw her grandmother occasionally since she lived in a nursing home in another town. Furthermore, Else clearly left more to be desired in terms of supportive relationship. Anneliese contrasts her experiences with her stepmother and her future mother-in-law:

“Ich hab mich auch immer zu meiner Schwiegermutter...sehr hingezogen gefuehlt, weil ich zuhause nicht diese Nestwaerme hatte, weisst du? Du kommst gern nach Hause, du bist zuhause, nicht? Aber ich hab immer so ein bisschen bei meiner Schwiegermutter mehr zu Hause gefuehlt.”

Anneliese continues to talk about this sense of “home” as she continues to describe Charlotte as *“eine sehr herzliche Frau...Das war fuer mich ein bisschen Heimat.”* This connection clearly served as an important memory of her old home as Anneliese sought to build a new one in an environment not always friendly to her. Her relationships with Charlotte and her father seem to have played an influential role in mitigating the challenges that the integration process posed.

In this context, it seems quite significant that Anneliese married Hans-Hermann, another refugee, a fellow Mennonite, and a distant cousin from a region close to her original home, because this only deepened her already strong ties to the family and the *Heimat*. Their shared pasts with flight and integration probably influenced their sense of connection to one another. When I asked Anneliese to describe the specific integration challenges that she faced, she said that because Hans-Hermann *“auch aus unsere Gegend kommt, ne, und wir eine Beziehung zu einander hatten durch die Verwandtschaft,”* which of course included her close relationship to her mother-in-law, she felt that this process had not been as difficult for as it probably had been for others. Anneliese says this in present tense, showing the continued significance of this relationship to her husband and to the *Heimat*. They have formed a bond with each other that neither one of them could have with anyone else, and

together they embarked on building a new life of their own in West Germany. In this way, the very existence of their relationship nourished their connection to their homeland while providing both of them with the support necessary to continue the integration process into their new communities.

Anneliese's family clearly served as a significant influence, but other social networks also helped her to form connections with members of the native population. Her education and later her career provided opportunities to form relationships with her peers outside of her family and Mennonite community. Anneliese began attending school in Kirchheimbolanden right away, where she says she was "quickly integrated." Her family connections played an important role here since her uncle paid her tuition, thereby facilitating Anneliese's access to her education, which in turn helped her to integrate both socially and later economically in West German society. After finishing after tenth grade with the *Mittlere Reife*, which qualified her to attend a women's vocational school, she completed a degree in home economics. Anneliese later pursued a career, working at a hospital for 23 years training young women in this field. Her income helped the family to continue to climb the economic ladder at their and the country's prosperity increased during the postwar decades. In terms of social networks, these experiences have allowed her to Anneliese to form various friendships. She made a close group of friends at the women's vocational school, for example. After she got married, Anneliese recalls a happy memory of running into one of these women and finding out that she lived nearby. She also talks about how she is still in touch with these women today. In her life story, Anneliese makes clear that her relationship with her family is most important. Education- and career-related social ties, however, have helped her to identify with other groups in West German society. In various ways, Anneliese's family provided her with a strong base from which to seek these other points of contact.

A third significant integrating influence, the Mennonite community comprised both refugees and locals, thereby creating a place where Anneliese could identify with both of these groups. The church quickly integrated the Wiehler family, especially because her father began preaching there.

Anneliese recalls fondly that she was “right in the middle of things” with the youth group. When I asked her what her specific integration challenges were, she listed these reasons to explain why she did not experience very many problems, stating that “we felt very comfortable in Kirchheimbolanden.” It seems as though Anneliese's relationships with supportive members of the local population, alongside her contact with people who shared her experience of losing the *Heimat*, helped her to bridge the gap between her new and old homes.

Anneliese reinforces the significance that this integrating influence has had for her as she talks about how it was been important for her to maintain her connection to the Mennonite community after she moved away. It is still close to her heart, she says, because it provided her with a sense of belonging. Anneliese explains that this community is connected to important experiences and milestones, including her youth, her baptism, and her wedding. Living in Bingen, they are about an hour away. After they moved there, Anneliese insisted that they continue to worship in Kirchheimbolanden and raise their children as Mennonites. She explains that Hans-Hermann did not share this same strong connection. He suggested that they switch to the local Lutheran church so that they would not have to drive so far to bring their children to their baptism class. Anneliese says that she considered it, “*Aber ich konnte nicht. Ich fuehle mich zur Mennonitengemeinde hingezogen durch mein Vater schon und das ist in mir drin.*” Described her current efforts to remain involved, Anneliese shows how this significance continues to this day. It seems as though the Mennonite community carries such importance for Anneliese because it has allowed her to connect her two homes and experiences to one another.

In contrast to Anneliese's primarily positive, inclusive integration experience, the native population's exclusivity negatively impacted Hans-Hermann upon his arrival in Schleswig-Holstein. His discussion of his and his family's experiences suggest that these memories still evoke painful

emotions. While Anneliese arrived in a “ready-made nest” after her traumatic experience of flight, the Wiebe family's struggle to survive had not ended after they reached this new home. The Schmidt family, who was forced to take them in, had their own farm, inn, and plenty of food. Hans-Hermann notes almost accusingly that although this rural area had only been minimally affected by the war, *“freiwillig hat keiner was hergegeben.”* The government regulated the care of the refugees but the family still had to go to great lengths to feed itself, as Hans-Hermann describes:

“Was die Situation zur Nachteil der Fluechtlinge erlangte war, dass sie noch nicht einmal ueber das Lebensnotwendigste verfuegte und nun, Mitteln und Wege suchte, dass eine und das andere zu erlangen, was man unter heutigen...im Rechtsstandpunkt wohl schlicht und einfach als eine strafbare Handlung sehen wurde, denn, eh, wir haben gestohlen...nicht so deutlich...wir haben organisiert.”

As a former policeman, it seems to still bother Hans-Hermann that they were forced to break the law in order to survive. The fact that the native population had resources that they were unwilling to share with the refugees seems to reinforce the sense of pain and shame that Hans-Hermann experienced in his family's poverty.

In addition to this stinginess, Hans-Hermann also talks about how an attitude of jealousy compounded the native population's unwelcoming attitude. Refugees did obtain some assistance from the Allied governments, and Hans-Hermann also remembers receiving CARE packages from the United States. These provided them with many necessities that were difficult to come by during these years. This type of targeted aid sparked envy among the locals, who had no access to some of these goods. Hans-Hermann describes this response as *“neid, dass man Fluechtlingen Unterstuetzungen gewaehrte, die, nach ihre Einschaeztung, wohl nicht gerechtfertigt waeren.”* This comment seems to reflect a sense of bitterness that in turn suggests that these memories still conjure painful emotions for him. Hans-Hermann notes that as a child, he did not think about these issues and is doing so now from

an adult perspective. This qualification seems to further support the point of view that he has not fully come to terms with these very difficult experiences.

Hans-Hermann also describes the challenge that he faced as a refugee in their contact with the locals. He talks specifically about the Schmidts, saying that overall his family was *“hoeflich empfangen.”* Herr Schmidt, however, was not very friendly, und *“Wir gingen ihn lieber aus den Weg als in den Weg!”* Just as Anneliese places herself in her stepmother's shoes, Hans-Hermann also looks at the situation from the locals' perspective. He states that one has to consider that the locals had to share their homes with the refugees. Hans-Hermann remembers that at the time, they made their best efforts to be courteous to the native population. He talks again more broadly about the community:

“Die leuchte Familie, die waren nicht freundlich zu uns, und wir gingen ihn aus dem Wege, und wenn wir sie sahen haben wir freundlich gegruesst. Und darueber muessten sie wohl immer erstaunt gewesen sein.”

Here Hans-Hermann also seems to express some resentment in his recognition of his own attempts to adapt while noting the locals' hesitance to treat them kindly.

The sense of shame that Hans-Hermann felt as a result of his contact with this exclusive community comes through in various memories. He describes how he compared himself with the local population:

“Wir fuehlten uns zurueckgesetzt weil wir schlechter gekleidet waren, weil wir ein schlechteres Schulbrot mithatten, nicht, Bauernkinder hatten von Natur aus mehr Nahrung besessen als wir, und dann fuehlte man sich schon zurueckgesetzt.”

Having come from a place where Hans-Hermann does not recall this type of difference, it seems that the these basic necessities significantly reinforced for him how he was separated from the native community. It seems that with this statement, Hans-Hermann perhaps currently reacts more to the memory of this sense of difference rather than to the memory of the physical challenge that lacking

these resources posed. The fact that he was not dressed as well or could not bring a good sandwich to school allowed others to label him as a “refugee.” The pejorative use of this term on the part of the native population also reinforced this sense of exclusion. In school, he says, *“Es kam aber doch immer wieder zum Ausdruck, 'ach du Fluechtling, '...das hat dann schon mal weh getan.”* This derogatory reference clearly influenced him: with the currency reform of 1948, he says, *“da war diese Luecke auch wieder gestoppft. Und so verlor sich dieses Gefuehl, ich bin ein armer Fluechtling, mit mir kann man machen was man will, verloren es so mit der Zeit.”* Hans-Hermann's statement seems positive because he talks about how the situation improved, but in fact it captures the extent to which he internalized this perspective. The native population's unwelcoming attitude seems to have played an opposite role to Anneliese's Mennonite community. Instead of encouraging Hans-Hermann to form a bond between his two homes and experiences, this influence caused his past to be associated with a sense of ostracism from the local population. This situation did not only pose a greater challenge to integration. It also worked against the creation of framework through which Hans-Hermann could incorporate both his past and present homes and experiences into an integrated sense of self.

Lacking a supportive local community, Hans-Hermann's family, education, and career networks also influenced his integration process, but in different ways and at different times in comparison to his wife's experience. His family basically only had each other as they struggled to build a life for themselves during the postwar years. With her husband dead, the responsibility fell on Charlotte's shoulders to care for her three children and her elderly mother. Hans-Hermann made a specific point to honor her, among all other women during this time period, for providing for their survival:

“Meine groesste Hochachtung gilt den Frauen, die Kriegewitwen...die auf den Feldern gearbeitet haben bis zum umfallen bei der Ernte mit einem Ziel: die Kinder aufwachsen zu lassen. Die haben ihre Gesundheit aufgegeben um aus ihren Kinder anstaendige Menschen zu machen. Die haben das alles gemacht, so dass die Kinder als

Erwachsense nicht widerfaehren, was sie widerfaehrt haben.”

His perspective reflects that as the oldest child, at the time Hans-Hermann probably understood the challenge that his mother faced and the hard work that she engaged in to the greatest extent of the three siblings. He recognizes that her efforts were vital for their survival during this difficult time period. In this way, family served as a necessary element to ensure that they were able to rebuild their lives and socioeconomically integrate into their new homes.

The lengths Charlotte had to go to provide for her family's survival also impacted how she coped with this experience, in turn influencing how her son made sense of it. When Hans-Hermann and his siblings would complain, his mother would say, *“Kinder, klag nicht, wir haben den Krieg ueberstanden.”* He adds, *“Da war auch jeder still.”* The difficult circumstances of this time period made this perspective a common postwar mentality. Anneliese also reflects this perspective to some extent. In order to endure this struggle, they could not focus on their current problems. Hans-Hermann sums up how they approached these challenges: *“Alles andere muessen wir durchstehen. Irgendwann werden sich auch bessere Chancen ergeben. Und das hat sich auch nachher bewahrheitet. Wir haben alle das geschafft.”* In this statement, Hans-Hermann sums up the difficulties they encountered, how they had to work to change their situation, and the success that they achieved, leaving out the many difficult details that he and his family confronted along the way. This current perspective shows that Hans-Hermann still understands his past through this lens of positively focusing on the future without reflecting on past losses or present challenges. The senses of bitterness, resentment, and shame that come through when he describes his memories, however, show how he clearly experienced many difficulties during his integration process. In fact, that they still seem to be present for him suggests that his mother's point of view, along with the native population, failed to provide a supportive framework within which Hans-Hermann could understand and deal with the many challenges that he faced. It is interesting that for Anneliese, Charlotte served such a significant role in providing her with

a sense of warmth, support, and connection to her *Heimat*. Age and gender differences come into play here; Hans-Hermann's role as her oldest son made their relationship very different. Social contact dictates how individuals form memories, and family relationships pivotally impacted both Anneliese and Hans-Hermann during the postwar years. As a result, it makes sense that these varying influences would have both affected how they experienced their integration process and how they understand their pasts in the present.

Family continued to play a significant role in Hans-Hermann's life, but it in many ways played a different role than it did for Anneliese. His mother's attitude and his position as the oldest son influenced the level of support that he received from this network. Hans-Hermann felt that much of the responsibility for caring for his family lay on his shoulders. His decision to leave Schleswig-Holstein in 1952 to join his family reflects this sense of duty. They had moved two years earlier to join Anneliese's family among the other Mennonites in Kirchheimbolanden as part of the government-sponsored refugee resettlement program. Hans-Hermann explains his decision as stemming from “*das Gefuehl der eigenen Verpflichtung der Familie gegenueber, denn ich wollte den Wunsch meines Vaters getreuen, meine Mutter immer stets zur Seite zu stehen.*” He also cites his relationship with Anneliese as the other reason that he decided to move. As distant cousins, she was a part of his family even before their marriage, and this relationship signifies how connections to his *Heimat* remained important for Hans-Hermann as well. This decision to move was not easy for him because he had to leave his “*geliebtes Schleswig-Holstein,*” which had become his “*zweite Heimat.*” Despite the many challenges that Hans-Hermann had faced in this place, he had grown quite attached to it during the seven years that he lived there. The difficulty Hans-Hermann faced in leaving this region sheds light on the significance that family had for him, partly because of the support that they provided and perhaps even more in terms of the duty that he felt towards them.

Just as for Anneliese, Hans-Hermann's family support did create the foundation from which he

could pursue his education and career, which in turn also exposed him to social networks that helped him assimilate among the native population. Describing his classmates, he says “*Wir Kinder haben uns immer verstanden, in der Schule.*” At the same time, he still faced many challenges because he was a refugee. The differences between Hans-Hermann's integration process and his wife's come through here. While Anneliese's uncle paid her tuition, Hans-Hermann had to walk seven kilometers every day to go to school. Because of the hard work he had to do at home, he often fell asleep in class. He sarcastically describes what happened as a result: “*jeder hatte Verstaendnis dafuer, der hat mich dann geweckt – Boom – da flog da mal was gegen dem Tisch.*” As an afterthought, he adds, “*auch ein Teil der Integration.*” During these difficult years, the network that Hans-Hermann's school seemed to have offered at least the beginning of acceptance into the local community, but still reflected this population's sense of exclusivity. Perhaps the fact that his classmates provided a point of connection but simultaneously made him feel like an outsider further reinforced Hans-Hermann's painful feeling of not fitting in with his peers. This contrasts again with Anneliese's sense of being “right in the middle of things” with her youth group. Hans-Hermann's perspective shows that he certainly felt this separation from the native population very intensely. As a result, it seems that this sense of being different and longing to fit in has stayed with him.

After six years of struggling to rebuild his life and adapt to this unwelcoming new environment, the police academy finally provided the connection to the native population that Hans-Hermann had so acutely lacked during this difficult time. He did not begin this training until he was nineteen because he first left school at the age of fourteen to work as a farmer's apprentice. After four years, it became clear that because Hans-Hermann was a refugee and did not own his own land, it would be difficult for him to become a professional farmer. He decided to follow in his father's footsteps and pursue a career as a policeman. It was at the police academy, among students of all different backgrounds, that he says he first felt truly integrated:

“...egal wo wir herkamen, wir mussten uns untereinander verstehen. Und es dauerte nicht lange, dann haben wir uns verstanden, ganz schnell, schneller als jeder andere integriert werden konnte.”

It is interesting that Hans-Hermann portrays this point as an abrupt end to the integration process.

“Jetzt ist es klar zu sagen, dass mit dem Eintritt in der Polizei, einen Integrierungsfrage ueberhaupt nicht mehr aufgetaucht ist, weil wir alle gleich waren...Es war weg, gab's nicht mehr...man sprach nicht mehr davon, dass man Fluechtling war.”

Throughout his explanation of his life story, Hans-Hermann repeatedly mentioned the significance that this network had for him. It seems that his sharp sense of exclusion from the local community elevated the significance of the group that finally made him feel accepted. In response to my question as to whether he felt like a refugee at various points in his life, he says,

“bis zu dem Zeitpunkt, ja...Dieses Fluechtlingsgefuehl hab ich gehabt bis zu meinem neunzehnten Lebensjahr, aber ganz verloren hat das sich eigentlich nicht, aber es hatte keine Bedeutung, keine grosse Bedeutung mehr, weil man, wiegesagt, im Kollegenkreis voll als gleichberechtigt angesehen wurde.”

Hans-Hermann did not totally escape this feeling, but now he had a chance to move beyond it because at least his social network no longer labeled him as a “refugee.” His explicit contrast between his sense of self before and during his experience as a police trainee and officer shows how significant this network was for him to feel a sense of acceptance.

This attitude among the police network served as a significant element of the broader sense of assimilation that Hans-Hermann felt among the native population during these years. He describes how after their initial years of struggle, his family's economic situation steadily began to improve. With this shift, the locals began to be more accepting of them: *“Auch die Familie Schmidt wurde nach und nach zugaenglicher...Im Laufe der Zeit wurde das immer besser, denn meine Mutter arbeitete auf dem Hof*

mit.” Hans-Hermann notes that their hard work was necessary for this to occur, recalling the challenges that his mother had faced in order to feed her family. He also describes the various external factors, namely the currency reform, the equalization of burdens, and the refugee resettlement program, that provided more job opportunities, thereby aiding the refugees in achieving more wealth. Hans-Hermann describes how this change decreased his sense of being a “refugee:”

“...mit dem Wohlstand verlor sich das auch. Wir waren genau so gekleidet wie die anderen auch, und wir hatten genuegend zu Essen inzwischen, und die Kriegerwitwen kamen zu ihrer Pensionen aus dem Recht ihrer Maenner, die im Krieg gefallen sind und so fand doch eine regelrechter Vermischung zwischen Einheimische und Fluechtlinge.”

His lack of basic resources had clearly set him and his family apart from the native population, which explains why it was so important for Hans-Hermann to work hard to reduce the socioeconomic gap between them and the locals. He has achieved this parity today, but the way that he describes his experiences makes it seem as though these emotions are still with him. The fact that Hans-Hermann had felt this sharp sense of separation at one time, for example, makes it seem as though it has been more important for him to make sure that he remained part of this network throughout his life. As Anneliese's story shows, her relationships with her family members and the Mennonite community have been central in her life. She fondly talks about her school friends and colleagues, and clearly these also have significance for her, but Anneliese mainly focuses on these other ties. While family also has a central significance for Hans-Hermann, his repeated reference to his police network shows that for him, it might have been more important to for him to promote a strong connection to a community disconnected to his *Heimat*. The native population's influence seems to have caused Hans-Hermann to make more of an effort to separate himself from his former life in the effort to be included. In this way, his “integration” process seems to have been characterized more as an experience of assimilation, of adopting the characteristics of the local community in order to fit in, as opposed to incorporating both

his new and old homes and experiences into a cohesive sense of self. Juxtaposing Hans-Hermann's and Anneliese's experiences, it seems that the native population and Mennonite community respectively played opposite roles not only in their direct experience of integration, but also in how they have come to incorporate these experiences into their overall views of themselves.

Hans-Hermann's relationship with the Mennonite community serves as an example of how the exclusive nature of the native population and Hans-Hermann's resulting effort to fit in part influenced him to specifically reject the type of connection to the *Heimat* that Anneliese felt. At the same time, the community's reaction to him seems to also have echoed that of the local population when he first arrived in Schleswig-Holstein, although clearly to a lesser degree. After moving to Rheinland-Pfalz, he describes that he did not experience the welcome from this community that his wife did. Hans-Hermann explains this “*aus dem Grund meines Berufs her.*” He does not talk more about this, evidencing his lack of connection to this group. Anneliese elaborates by stating that as pacifists, the Mennonites did not like that he always wore his police uniform. She also notes that he had a “*andere Mentalitaet...er konnte sich nicht so schnell integrieren wie ich das konnte.*” For Anneliese, “*es war fuer mich immer ein bisschen schade, weil (Hans-Hermann) keine Beziehung zu der Kirche hatte.*” Their sense of connection to this network clearly differentiates their experiences. For Hans-Hermann, the two aspects of his life remained isolated from one another: his ties to his *Heimat* through his family was completely separate from his contacts to the local community through his career. His lack of identification with the Mennonite community prevented this group from serving the purpose that it did for Anneliese once he joined her in Rheinland-Pfalz.

Hans-Hermann's view on expellee organizations reflects how he may have rejected this type of connection and also echoes his mother's postwar survival mentality. In response to my question about these types of groups, he says:

“*Ja, das gab's wohl, aber ich hab den keine grosse Bedeutung beigemessen.*”

“Warum?” I asked.

“Ach, warum? Es wurde zu viel ueber die Heimat beklagt. Sentimentale Lieder gesungen, das hat mich nicht so gelegen. Man hat ein Verlust, den hat man zu verkraften, den Krieg war verloren und wir mussten neu aufbauen...Kurzfristige Versuche daran Teil zu nehmen, die hab ich wieder genau so schnell abgebrochen.”

Both mourning and moving forward play important roles in coming to terms with loss and integrating into a new environment. Here, Hans-Hermann talks about how he moved forward, but does not refer to how he dealt with his past losses. In this way, his view reflects the larger societal perspective of repression of many of these issues after the initial postwar period. Anneliese, on the other hand, views expellee organization groups in a different light, which in turn supports the perspective that social groups influence how individuals form memories. She describes these groups' purpose, at least initially, as *“die Verbundenheit,”* as opposed to their more current promotion of revisionist viewpoints. In this way, Anneliese recognizes that they served a similar function as the Mennonite community by bringing groups of people together with a shared experience. The fact that both the Mennonites and expellee organization were disconnected from the native community seems to have influenced Hans-Hermann's lack of interest in them. As a result, however, he lacked the support that this type of organization could have provided him as he struggled to integrate into his new community. This situation provides a clue as to why his past remains so present for him decades later.

How have these past experiences and social networks influenced Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's current perspectives on these issues? The fact that Anneliese had a supportive social network that helped her to foster her connection to both her old and new homes seems to be related to the fact that today, she flexibly applies the term *Heimat* to various places. She still uses this word to characterize her former home in modern-day Poland. When I asked her to define this term, however,

Anneliese presented a more open point of view:

“Was ist Heimat? Es ist da wo du dich wohl fuehlst, wo deine Familie ist, das ist Heimat, nicht? Deine Umgebung, die Leute die du kennst, wo du dich wohl fuehlst...Heimat fuer mich ist da wo ich zuhause bin, wo meine Familie ist, wo ich Arbeit habe, wo ich die Umgebung kenne, wo alles ist, was ich brauche.”

Based on this definition, she spoke specifically about how this word relates to her former home:

“Die Zeit ist anders geworden, sind nicht mehr die Menschen da, die du frueher gekannt hast, und von daher...kann man nicht mehr von Heimat reden, in dem Sinne.”

It seems that for Anneliese, the word *Heimat* applies to her childhood home in name only and that it can also refer to wherever she has her most important relationships. This sense of connection has allowed her to explore other social networks and feel comfortable in her environment. Anneliese's definition implies that her sense of *Heimat* is more connected to people than to a specific place. Looking at her past, it seems that her relationships with her family and Mennonite community have significantly influenced her sense of belonging in her current home.

Anneliese's recent trips to her former *Heimat* sheds more light on her sense of this term and her connection to her past. She and Hans-Hermann took their first trip together as part of an organized group of Mennonites in 2003. The bus tour took them to the areas in present-day Poland where each of them had lived. Anneliese then returned to the former West Prussia with a group of about 50 other family members, including her two daughters, in 2005. She explains that *“ich wollte das schon immer wieder mal sehen.”* This perspective evidences the sense of connection to her *Heimat* and past that Anneliese maintained in her new home. Returning to her former home was certainly a powerful and important experience for her:

“Das war schon ein Erlebnis, kann man gar nicht beschreiben, was das fuer ein Gefuehl ist, nach so vielen Jahren, du warst damals Kind und jetzt bist du so alt

und...du siehst dann deine Heimat wieder, alles ist ganz anders geworden, es ist nicht mehr so schoen wie es war...(Hans-Hermann) konnte sich an noch mehr erinnern als ich, an die Schule...Das weiss ich jetzt nicht mehr. Ich weiss nur noch, dass ich auf der Wiese Gaensebluemchen fuer meine Lehrerin gepflueckt hab...Ja, das war schoen, die Reise war wunderbar.”

The fact that Anneliese was only nine years old when she left her homeland influences the types of romanticized memories that she had when she returned. She maintained her connection to the *Heimat* through relationships, but without visits to the actual place that would have updated her mental image of her former home, it makes sense that she would still have these girlhood memories.

On the other hand, this connection has helped Anneliese to comfortably recognize her former home as a part of a past that she has no wishes to reclaim:

“Nach so lange Zeit haette ich jetzt nicht sagen koennen, ich will jetzt wieder da leben, da ist alles anders. Die Polen haben sich da eine Heimat aufgebaut, eine Existenz, wir haben uns hier eine Existenz aufgebaut. Wir haben ja mehr Wohlstand als da in Polen, und wer will das dann aufgeben, nicht? Das sind also ganz wenige die noch so Ideale haben...Wir koennten uns vorstellen da Urlaub zu machen, das waer bestimmt schoen da am See...Wir fahren zwar gerne hin und gucken uns das mal an, wie das aussieht, aber will keiner mehr zurueck.”

Anneliese clearly has no illusions about returning to live in this place. Furthermore, she seems to be at peace with this part of her past, expressing attitudes of contentment and even thankfulness in terms of her current home. Anneliese's interest in and reaction to seeing her former home shows that her *Heimat* is still an important part of her. This speaks to the deep significance of the loss that forced migration causes. The fact that the trip was not overwhelmingly emotional, however, seems to reflect the fact that Anneliese's continued connection to her *Heimat* has helped her to make sense of this experience. Her

memories of the past do not cross over into the present, suggesting that she has been able to integrate her two senses of *Heimat* into a cohesive sense of self.

Anneliese's understanding of her personal experiences within the broader framework of Germany's Nazi past seems to stem from this sense of connection between her two homes and, in turn, her own past and present. When I asked Anneliese how she sees flight and expulsion in relation to the political results of the war, she explains an explicit link between these events and Nazi crimes:

“Also ich sag mir, was waere passiert wenn Hitler den Krieg gewonnen haette? Das waer ja schlimm gewesen...Jetzt sind wir ja frei, wir waren dann keine freie Menschen...Ich meine, ich waere gerne in meiner Heimat geliebt aber nicht unter diese Voraussetzungen. In eine Diktatur zu leben, das waer doch schlimm...Von daher sage ich mir, was die Deutschen angerichtet haben...und wir mussten von Zuhause weg...das ist die logische Folgerung von dem was die Deutschen gemacht haben...Man sieht da was in Russland passiert ist...kein Wunder ist, dass wir auch alles verloren haben, nicht?...Ich kann jetzt nicht sagen, dass das uns recht geschehen ist, so will ich das nicht ausdruecken, aber das ist die Folge von dem. Und es ist nicht so, dass ich jetzt sagen kann, was sind fuer schlimme Menschen und was haben die alles mit uns gemacht, ja sicher, die ist ein Krieg, da passiert immer schlimmes, und das die Grausamkeiten...die Russen und die Deutschen...und das war die logische Folgerung von dem was Hitler angezettelt hat.”

As Anneliese thinks about what it would have been like if Hitler had won the war, she recognizes that although the expulsion was a tragic effect, this other result would have had even worse consequences. Anneliese looks at the horror of war, refraining from taking sides between the Germans and the Russians. She recognizes herself as having been a part of it, but this view causes Anneliese to neither promote a sense of victimization nor repress this difficult experience because of its connection

to Nazi crimes. Instead, she expresses a nuanced view of the situation that includes both guilt and suffering as part of the German experience. Anneliese's statement is significant in that it strikes at the heart of the long-winded and controversial debate about how to publicly represent the stories of flight and expulsion. She clearly expresses a view that differs from that of expellee organizations as they promote their own sense of victimization. Anneliese's perspective also differs from *Crabwalk's* portrayal of Tulla as an overly nostalgic representative of the first generation. Her attitude seems to align more with the view that Grass attempts to promote with Paul's current representation of this past. It also reflects the perspective put forth in the House of History exhibit. I argue that the fact that Anneliese has been able to integrate into German society and incorporate both her past and present homes into a cohesive sense of self has allowed her to view her individual experiences within this important historical context. Because this view of flight and expulsion presents an integrated perspective of guilt and suffering, it seems more conducive to personally understanding and publicly representing this difficult past.

Hans-Hermann's views on *Heimat*, Germany's past, and his own sense of self reflect his more challenging experience with integration. His sense of *Heimat* clearly differs from that of his wife's in that it has not evolved to apply to his current home. In response to my question, he explains his definition of this term:

“Das ist ja eine schlimme Frage. Wie definiere ich Heimat? Es gehoert eine sehr intensive Beziehung zu dem Gebiet in dem ich wohne, in dem ich hineingeboren bin, oder in dem ich eine tiefe innerliche Beziehung entwickeln konnte, denn ich bin zwar in Danzig geboren, hab in der danzige Gegend die ganze Familienverwandschaft gehabt, ich habe das nie so als Heimat empfunden wie die Stadt Sensburg, die ich auch heute noch als meine tiefe oder als meine Heimat bezeichne, weil ich da vom Kleinkind an

aufgewachsen bin und eine ganz feste Beziehung zu dieser Stadt habe. Das hat sich auch gezeigt, als wir in die Stadt Sensburg einfuhren mit unserem Bus da ich auf einmal eine ganz anderen Verhalten zum Ausdruck brachte, als ich es mir vorgenommen hatte...Und die laengste Zeit meines Lebens wohne ich in Bingen, aber meine echte heimatliche Beziehung habe ich...weder zu dem Land Rheinland-Pfalz noch zu dem Standort Worms in dem wir geheiratet haben und wo unseren zwei aeltesten geboren worden, noch in der Stadt Bingen in dem wir jetzt wiegesagt die laengste Zeit unseres Lebens sind eine solche heimatliche Beziehung entwickeln koennen. Ich lebe dort, es gefaellt mir dort, aber mehr ist es nicht.”

“Warum?”

“Das kann ich nicht erklaren. Das ist kein Vergleich mit Sensburg, und heimatliche Beziehungen haben sich in Schleswig-Holstein entwickelt. Diese Menschenart...dieses landschaftliche Umfeld, die Leute in ihrer Art, das hat sich in den...sieben Jahre Lebenszeit die ich da verbracht habe, haben mich so gepraeagt, das ich das als meine zweite Heimat angesehen hab. Eine dritte gibt's nicht, obwohl wir schon so lange dort wohnen. Von '52 bis jetzt sind wir in Rheinland-Pfalz. Das ist erstaunlich, nicht?...Es ist Gefuehlsache...die sitzt in mir. Mit keinem telefoniere ich so lange als mit meinem Freund Klaus.”²⁹⁵

Unlike Anneliese, who refers to relationships in her definition of *Heimat*, Hans-Hermann focuses on his connection to a place. He clearly feels this for his childhood city and he refers to Schleswig-Holstein as his “second *Heimat*,” but makes a clear point that he cannot apply this term to his current home. This is not to say that Hans-Hermann is not content with his present situation. However, his

²⁹⁵ Hans-Hermann reconnected with his childhood friend Klaus, who currently lives in the former East Germany, about ten years ago. He notes that he even changed his phone plan in order to get a better rate to talk to Klaus.

sense of *Heimat* remains tied to a memory of past loss. Hans-Hermann has learned to comfortably live with this feeling in the present, but it still evokes strong emotions when he talks about it. The fact he explicitly says that Bingen is not his *Heimat* suggests that Hans-Hermann has not been able to build a bridge between his past and present homes to the extent that his wife has.

His interest in returning to his former home evidences this sense of disconnection. Hans-Hermann explains why they only recently returned to the *Heimat*. “*Ich hab das immer abgelehnt,*” he says. “*Ich wollte Sensburg so in Erinnerung behalten, wie ich das verlassen habe.*” His varying social influences seem to have made it difficult for Hans-Hermann to be able to both focus on the future and maintain his sense of connection to the *Heimat*. His relationship with Anneliese has fostered this bond to some extent, but by and large, Hans-Hermann seems to have repressed his painful experience of losing the *Heimat* and being a refugee.

His visit to his childhood home in 2003 shows the relevance that his past still has, probably because of the way that he has dealt with it since the initial postwar period. Hans-Hermann describes that despite his initial reluctance to make the trip, his actual feelings upon seeing his *Heimat* again reflected that he still had vivid memories of and a strong connection to the place: “*Ich muss feststellen, dass ich da auch recht begeistert gewesen bin, meine alte Stadt Sensburg wieder zu sehen, und dass ich...dort gemeint haette, ich waere gestern erst ausgegangen.*” It is significant here that he feels like no time has elapsed since he left. Hans-Hermann's lack of interest in visiting seems to reflect his effort to deny this part of him, but his experience when he saw his *Heimat* again shows how alive these connections still are six decades after he left.

Hans-Hermann continues to describe this experience, which he alluded to in his explanation of his definition of *Heimat*, further evidencing how connected he still feels to this place. A smile comes over his face as he recounts this recent memory:

“*Ich hatte vor gehabt, kuehl zu bleiben...Das ist mir absolut nicht gelungen, und so hab*

ich vom Bahnhof bis zum Hotel, allen mitgeteilt, wo was ist. Das war die Kaserne in dem ich aufgewachsen bin, das war das Gymnasium, in dem ich nicht hinein gekommen bin, dann kam meine Schule, die ich in den vier Grundschuljahren und in der Hauptschule besucht hab, dann kam der Marktplatz, Schwannteich, und schliesslich das Amtsgericht gegenueber das Landratsamt, und dann waren wir den Schossee entlang schon fast im Hotel, und dann war ich ruhig. Der Fahrer der uns gefuehrt hat meinte, 'Hier scheint jemand gewohnt zu haben.'"

It seems that for him and Anneliese, their memories of their *Heimat* were frozen in time over the many years that they did not return. Both seem to remember their homes as they had left them. Hans-Hermann, however, describes much more vivid memories and intense emotions when he saw his childhood home again. He remembers specific landmarks, and this experience made him very happy. Hans-Hermann evokes a strong element of surprise as he describes his reaction to driving into Sensburg. He says that when they entered the city, "I expressed a very different attitude than I had expected." Hans-Hermann had planned to "stay cool," but this clearly did not work for him. In many ways, Hans-Hermann acted like an excited child returning home after a long absence, even though he was now in his 70s. This seems to stem from the fact that he made such a concerted effort to separate himself from this past. His reactions show present his past still is for him, especially in comparison with his wife. While Anneliese has adopted a more flexible sense of *Heimat* and integrated her experience with flight and integration into her sense of self, it seems that Hans-Hermann's rigid view of this term relates to his effort to disconnect his past and present lives. His trip to Sensburg reflects, however, that this bond still exists.

Alongside the immediacy of these memories, Hans-Hermann maintains his sober view of the past and focus on the present and future, which prevents him from adopting nostalgic attitudes. Like Anneliese, he has no hopes of returning to his *Heimat* for more than a visit. The effort to disconnect

from his former home comes through again when Hans-Hermann talks about this:

“Obwohl das hier jetzt Europa ist...aber was soll ich in Polen, da wird Polnisch gesprochen und ausserdem, wir haben unser Leben in Westdeutschland aufgebaut und haben das Berufsleben durchgefuehrt und sind jetzt im Ruhestand und werden auch in Westdeutschland bleiben. Da gibt es nur ein klares 'Nein.'”

With this statement, Hans-Hermann echoes his wife's point of view in their recognition and acceptance of the present borders between Germany and Poland. He says that they have worked too hard and for too long to give up their current lives to return to a place that is now foreign to them. Hans-Hermann's definitive attitude here, reminiscent of his declaration of the “end” of the integration process once he entered the police academy, seems to shut out any sense of loss that might accompany this reality. Anneliese, on the other hand, clearly evokes this sadness when she looks back on the relationships that she had in her former home. Hans-Hermann accepts the present reality of the situation, but without the supportive social networks that helped his wife to view her past in this way, it has been much more difficult for Hans-Hermann to balance his two homes and experiences.

His view of Germany's Nazi history, especially as compared to Anneliese's, seems to reflect some of the continued presence that his past experiences have for him. In response to my question as to when it became clear to them that they would not be able to return to their homelands, Hans-Hermann answered by saying, *“1945 wurde es klar, dass der Russe das nicht wieder her gibt.”* It is interesting that he uses this language to recall this particularly painful memory. “The Russian” would have been a derogatory, general reference to the “enemy” during the war. Hans-Hermann then qualifies this statement by saying, *“Aber da gib ich die Meinung die aeltere Generation...Wenn ich das sage, 1945 – da war ich dann 13, also so ne eigene Meinung hatte ich damals gar nicht.”* It is interesting how Hans-Hermann not only expresses the adults' resentment but uses their words as well. His past feelings, influences, and current perspective all blend together here as he recalls these memories.

Hans-Hermann's past experiences have influenced how he has come to understand his personal role in the broader historical context. His status as a refugee has neither caused him to view himself as a victim nor fail to understand Nazi perpetration in World War II. At the same time, he does not make the clear link between the expulsion and Hitler's crimes that Anneliese does. Hans-Hermann instead expresses a more conflicted effort to come to terms with his country's Nazi past. During the postwar years, "*die Wisshheit, dass Deutschland diesen Krieg ohne Grund insziniert hat, blieb mir mehr und mehr unverstaendlich.*" Hans-Hermann was quite involved in the regime through the Hitler Youth, given that he was twelve years old when the war ended. This experience seems to have posed a challenge to incorporating the various and at times contradictory elements of Hans-Hermann's past into a cohesive sense of self. Along with the influence of various social networks in his life, he has faced more challenges in coming to terms with his past, compared to his wife. This situation sheds light on why Hans-Hermann's view of his personal experiences within their historical context is more contested.

These various influences have played a significant role in influencing Hans-Hermann's current sense of identity. His past experiences maintain a current relevance for him. As he explained the meaning that the word "refugee" has had for him, I asked him about the extent to which he continued to identify with this feeling. Hans-Hermann replied, "I still know today that I am a refugee." This statement encapsulates how his experiences of loss and integration continue to impact his sense of self. He would "never outwardly express that," suggesting that this feeling lies below a surface of being integrated. Hans-Hermann conveys this sense with his positive view of how he has "been successful...(in) making up for my education lost during the war and thereby ensuring my professional development." In their retirement, one would have to search to find the differentiation between the Wiebe's and the current "native population" (this term no longer really applies because of how society has grown together). Anneliese's attitude toward *Heimat* and her sense of identity reflect this far more

than Hans-Hermann's, however. The role that various social networks played in their lives seems to have significantly influenced their currently somewhat conflicting attitudes towards their experiences of integration.

In many ways, Hans-Hermann's effort to separate himself from his past sense of loss has characterized his integration process. Recently, however, his rediscovery of his friend Klaus has helped him to reconnect with his *Heimat*. At various points throughout Hans-Hermann's story, he refers to Klaus's past and current significance in his life, such as when he talked about leaving Sensburg in 1944:

“Mit meinem Freund Klaus haben wir uns herzlich verabschiedet. Und wir haben uns wieder gefunden, jetzt, vor etwa fünf Jahren, anfang 2000...und die Freundschaft ist heute wie eh und jeh und so was findet man selten.”

With this statement, Hans-Hermann connects the difficulty of leaving his *Heimat* to his present rediscovery of this relationship. His words capture how his friendship with Klaus has recently served this important function. It seems that Hans-Hermann has recovered a part of his seemingly lost sense of connection to his *Heimat*. In fact, it was shortly after their renewed contact that Hans-Hermann finally agreed to return to East and West Prussia with Anneliese. Throughout the past six decades, the Mennonite community has helped Anneliese to maintain this connection to her former home through important relationships. Hans-Hermann did not experience this same level of support. Klaus therefore seems to have special significance for him at this point in his life. Their friendship has allowed Hans-Hermann to explore this bond to his *Heimat* without separating him from his current home and social network. In turn, it promises to help him to connect his two homes to one another and to better understand the ties between his past and his present.

It is probably not a coincidence that Hans-Hermann's interest in his own past has grown as this issue has resurged publicly in German society. This recent shift suggests that both are still in the

process of coming to terms with these past experiences. Furthermore, it shows a clear overlap between individual and collective memory. Flight, expulsion, and integration have clearly not lost their relevance in private and public discourse over six decades after the end of World War II. Individuals and society currently explore this memory in a new way through different types of personal stories and public representations. By linking the past to the present and viewing individual trauma within its historical context, they engage in the effort to integrate this story into a more cohesive sense of personal and collective memory and identity.

Conclusion

Günter Grass's novella, the House of History exhibit, and Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's accounts show how individuals and society currently understand and represent this complex story of flight and expulsion. The experience of forced migration, coinciding with the end of World War II, created an abrupt break in people's lives, and, as a result, in personal and collective memory. After an initial period of remembering and still experiencing suffering, the "economic miracle" caused most members of society, at least in the Federal Republic, to look toward the future instead of back on the past. For many refugees, this past was connected to a painful sense of loss of the *Heimat*. Focusing on this difficult experience seemed to impede the process of acclimating to their new lives. For the larger society, reflecting on its past brought back its perpetration of Nazi crimes. Public representations initially presented Germans as victims in the effort to cancel out the atrocities that Nazis had incurred. After the early postwar years, however, it became more and more important to talk about German guilt in order to negate this dominant view. Stories of suffering or integration found no place within this Holocaust-centered narrative. Accounts of victimization were relegated to the right-wing expellee perspective. The Federal Republic also precipitously declared refugee integration a "success" by the late 1950s and early '60s as part of this effort to move beyond their story of suffering. Both of these elements served as part of the country's effort to rebuild a new sense of identity that had broken by its Nazi past. In the process, however, they largely shut out the refugees' experiences with loss and integration that so pivotally impacted their lives.

The public politicization and denial of these issues, along with the individual difficulties that characterize these experiences, promoted the disjunction between the different places and time periods that played a role in refugees' and the larger society's pasts. This type of memory created a significant obstacle for individuals and society in understanding a continuous narrative of the past that connected

these varying elements of guilt and suffering, along with refugees' old and new homes, to one another. This sense of the past seems to characterize Hans-Hermann's story. As Anneliese's account shows, however, some individuals were able to create a cohesive sense of identity out of their disjointed pasts. The central role that her social networks played in this process shows how collective influences affect individuals' conception of themselves and their pasts. For Anneliese, as her community helped her to integrate into her new home, it also enabled her to incorporate the seemingly contradictory parts of her past into a connected sense of self.

Anneliese's perspective sheds light on the personal and collective importance of these two levels of integration. In comparison with her husband, she seems more content with her current situation. Anneliese's flexible sense of *Heimat* shows how her past losses seem far less present for her. Her views stand in stark contrast to groups such as the League of Expellees. With their continued demands for their "right to the homeland," these advocates take the opposite viewpoint to another level. Their efforts evidence the political ramifications of the failure to integrate especially in terms of Germany's relations with its neighbors, namely Poland and the Czech Republic.

Anneliese's recognition of her personal experiences within the framework of Germany's Nazi past also shows a related example of the importance of these two levels of integration. Largely because of the ways in which expellee organizations have represented this past, a main challenge to telling this story of flight and expulsion has been its connection to a story of suffering. The debate surrounding the BdV's Center Against Expulsions shows that it is unacceptable for Germans to publicly portray themselves solely as victims of World War II. Anneliese's story of refugee integration suggests, however, that her cohesive sense of self is connected to her clear understanding of the historical context that surrounds her personal experiences. It is interesting to note the overlap between Anneliese's point of view and the perspective represented in the House of History's exhibit. For both, the story of integration applies not only to personal and collective postwar experiences but also to the

incorporation of the seemingly contradictory elements of German guilt and suffering into a continuous narrative of the past. For groups like the BdV and characters such as Günter Grass's Tulla, this perspective does not fit into their view of themselves as victims of the Nazis. It is clear, however, that their narrow lens excludes the significant historical complexity of the story. Unlike Anneliese, they have not been able to integrate to the extent that they can understand these various aspects of the past. Expellee organizations continue to mourn their losses in the effort to promote their political goals. In the process, they prevent both themselves and the larger society from being able to move beyond these past experiences and reconcile with their Polish and Czech neighbors.

As Hans-Hermann's story shows, experiencing a lack of social support in the integration process has not prevent him from being able to understand the historical context surrounding his personal experiences. His views on this issue suggest, however, that he still seems to be in the process of coming to terms with his individual and collective past. In a way, Hans-Hermann's point of view evokes similarities to Paul's character, who also attempted to separate himself from this difficult memory for a long time in reaction to certain social influences. They are also similar in that Hans-Hermann by no means supports a view of victimization. His story suggests, however, that lacking the personally integrating influences available to his wife has made it more difficult for him acquire a cohesive sense of self that fits into a more continuous understanding of a collective past.

The contemporary conversation about the issues of flight, expulsion, and integration in public debate seems to be promoting an incorporation of these stories into collective memory. Individual accounts have played an important role in broadening this discussion. The various stories challenge society to engage with a more complex view of this past, instead of supporting a single perspective that promotes a political agenda. In this way, oral history serves a purpose different from Schieder's efforts in the 1950s to use eyewitnesses' historical "truth" to promote the perspective that Germans were victims of the war. Anneliese's and Hans-Hermann's personal stories reflect some of the diversity

inherent in personal accounts. One might have assumed from the outset that because they are married, their accounts would not differ greatly from one another. Clearly, however, they experienced very different situations upon arriving in the West, which in turn impact their varying views of the past today. Their two stories help to counter the negative reputation that the “expellee voice” has as a result of groups like the BdV. Furthermore, Anneliese's and Hans-Herman's perspectives present the challenges and promises that this integration process holds for individuals. They show how personal and collective memory currently overlap with one another in the effort to create a more complex and integrated view of the past.

There is no doubt that over six decades after the end of World War II, refugees and expellees have socioeconomically integrated into German society. From this perspective, the Federal Republic, achieved a significant success in uniting the various populations that flooded into war-torn Germany after the war. Hans-Hermann reflects this perspective:

“Es ist nicht zu verneigen, dass Flucht und Vertreibung eine kolossale Umwälzung in der deutschen Bevoelkerung gegeben hat, das rechtlichen Massnahmen notwendig waren, ein Ausgleich zu schaffen. Ein Ausgleich, dass...ohne Beispiel in unserem Land ueberhaupt gewesen ist, eine Leistung die seitens der Regierung mit enorme Kraft Anstrengung durchgefuehrt und gelungen ist, so dass wir heute in Westdeutschland, verbunden wieder mit Ostdeutschland, ein deutsches Volk sind.”

Germany society has clearly grown together, and it is significant that Hans-Hermann, as a former refugee himself, recognizes. In addition to the government's achievement, his and Anneliese's stories show how refugees' personal efforts also played a significant role in this process. They have faced considerable challenges as they sought to complete their education, pursue careers, and raise a family, given that they started much lower on the economic ladder than their local counterparts. The Wiebe's see their hard work as having paid off, pointing to having financed their three children's education and

living comfortably in retirement today in their apartment in Bingen. As they concluded telling their life stories, Hans-Hermann looked at his wife and said, “*Wir haben's gepackt.*” Anneliese echoes this positive view, showing that they are both satisfied with their integration achievements.

This is an important ending note, but looking at their individual accounts shows that it does not encompass the whole story. As the public resurgence of these issues reflects, the significance of refugees' stories has not ended with their socioeconomic integration. The current conversation about this memory evidences the contemporary effort to achieve refugees' integration into a more cohesive sense of personal and collective identity. Various generations take part in this discussion as they attempt to locate themselves within this past and shed light on these stories from different perspectives. It is interesting how these self-reflective views of personal, family, and collective memory are being used to engage in this effort to create a place for refugees' and expellees' stories. Aleida Assmann comments on the larger significance of the way that these stories are being told:

“This form of literature in which memory is a source, a theme and a mode of representation is today enjoying an amazing popularity. More and more writers are engaged in inscribing themselves into a long-term family memory and placing their own biography within the continuum that spans three or four generations. In this genre, we observe new ways of accessing large-scale history as it crosses and intersects with individual lives and family memory.”²⁹⁶

My family perspective of looking at grandparents' individual memory within the framework and collective memory clearly fits into this broader effort. As the third generation takes part in this conversation, they play a significant role in helping to present a more integrated view of this story that connects the past to the present. They locate their own place in this story of integration, thereby

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showing how this past not only continues to have relevance for refugees themselves, but also for subsequent generations. Some views may criticize the “happy end” that the story of the integration process seems to promote for being an overly positive perspective. Based on the examples that I have discussed, it seems that this element allows this story to be told in a way that incorporates the contentious events related to Germany's Nazi past. The views of guilt and suffering have canceled each other out, standing in the way of allowing society to publicly represent an “appropriate” view of its past. Looking at the experience of integration, however, recognizes the aspects of mourning and moving forward that are inherent in the refugees' coming to terms with their pasts. Because the third generation did not directly experience flight and expulsion, they help to distance this story from the emotional and politicized nature that has stood in the way of this past being privately understood and publicly represented.

At the same time, the third generation experiences a significant proximity to these events as they engage with them through their own family memory. This process itself seems to be a part of refugees' current efforts to understand their pasts in that it allows them to tell their stories. My grandparents' reaction to our interviews reflects this. My grandfather said that he had never talked so much about his life before, and it seems as though this is one of the first times that he has presented his life story to someone else as a detailed and cohesive narrative. Perhaps this experience will help Hans-Hermann to more clearly recognize some of the continuities between the different elements of his past. Overall, my grandparents told me that it meant a lot to them that I showed interest in their stories. My connection to them has also caused me to be personally invested in this project. Working with their accounts, I have become more aware of how my own cross-cultural story is related to my grandparents' and my mother's respective experiences with being refugees and an immigrant. I have not personally experienced (forced) migration, but growing up between two cultures has also challenged me to build bridges between two ostensibly separated homes and sets of experiences. Perhaps it was my effort to

understand my own story that drew me to my grandparents'. While I can only speak to the personal significance that these experiences have, it is interesting that my effort here is only one small part of a larger trend among the third generation to explore these personal and family pasts. It seems that their concurrent separation from and connection to the experiences of flight, expulsion, and integration puts this group in a unique position to represent this past. As Audoin-Rouzeau's and Becker's discussion of the memory of World War I in France suggests, this contemporary effort does not only characterize the German experience with coming to terms with its contentious and painful past. The third generation's role in helping to integrate this story sheds light on how individuals in society can help to broaden the personal perspectives present within the framework of collective memory.

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