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GERMANS AS VICTIMS? THE DISCOURSE ON THE *VERTRIEBENE* DIASPORA, 1945-2005

by

KEVIN MARC LARSON

Under the Direction of Joe Perry

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines German memories of the *Vertriebene*, the twelve million Germans who fled their homeland in the face of Russian invasion in the closing days of World War II. I explore the acceptable limits of victim discourse and consider the validity of arguments about German victimization in light of the atrocities committed by Germans during the war. Three chapters discuss diaspora, discourse and commemoration. I relate diaspora historiography to the *Vertriebene* and then dissect the discourse of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* and its construction of a German "victim mythos" that undermined more acceptable claims for the recognition of Germans victimhood. I then analyze debates over the suitable commemoration of German victims in academic discourse, fiction, and efforts to build a memorial to the *Vertriebene*. I conclude that some Germans can be considered legitimate victims of the war, but only when one also remembers the victims of Germans.

INDEX WORDS: *Bund der Vertriebenen*, Commemoration, Diaspora, East Prussia, Expellees, Expulsion, Germany, Memorial, Memory, Migration, Pomerania, Refugees, *Vertriebene*, Victims, Victimhood, and World War II

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KEVIN MARC LARSON

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Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

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2006

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May 2006

For Oma and Opa

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BdV - *Bund der Vertriebenen*

CDU - *Christliche Demokratische Union Deutschlands*

DOD - *Deutscher Ostdienst*

FDP – Freie Demokratische Partei

KdF – Kraft durch Freude

SPD - *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*

ZDF - *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*

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Introduction: The Continuing Search for a Masterable Past

It was an idyllic childhood. Luzia Kalf remembered running through the fields and forests near Königsberg, East Prussia, playing with her siblings and friends, enjoying coffee breaks in the fields with the adults during harvest time, and being thankful for a pair of wool mittens given to her on Christmas Eve. The fond memories began to darken, though, when business owners who were Jewish began vanishing and, in the final days of World War II, the Russians began their advance westward. With the Russians pushing into German land and leaving a path of destruction and rape in their wake, Luzia and her family had no choice but to flee. Her memories are of dark, frigid nights spent crossing the *Frisches Haff* (Freshwater Bay) punctuated with strafing runs by Russian fighter planes and the fear of ice breaking open and swallowing refugee wagons whole. Arriving in Pomerania to find that the Russians—now tempered by officers who shot on sight any of their own soldiers who raped and pillaged—were already there, Luzia experienced life under occupation. Eventually, she and her husband pushed on to the Allied sectors of Germany, settling in a small farming village in North Rhein Westphalia, Germany. They started a family and began a new life. The memories of the past, though, never quite faded. The feeling of having lost their homeland and knowing they could never return, even if they wanted to, also never quite faded. They never felt sorry for themselves, but they did consider themselves victims, stripped of their homeland and pushed to live somewhere unfamiliar.[1] The question that begs to be answered, then, is whether or not this recognition of victimhood is valid or not.

Who are the victims of World War II? Historians have not answered the question as completely as possible, nor have they taken into account the full range of victims. One

[1] Luzia Kalf, interview by author, tape recording, Büren, Germany, November 25, 2003.

of the central issues that still must be resolved is the valid inclusion of Germans as victims of World War II, specifically the twelve million Germans who were expelled from German land east of the Oder-Neisse River, and the continued search in Germany for a masterable past. Interwoven within the valid inclusion of Germans as victims is the Holocaust and how it is remembered in postwar Germany.[2] A masterable past is attainable through the statement that "Germans are victims of the war, too," but care must be taken to ensure that this view is not myopic, especially where a "victim mythos" is concerned. A victim mythos is dangerous because it excludes other victim groups and celebrates the primacy of one group over another. The main objective is to explore the roots of German victimhood and its effects on recent history in determining the validity of German victimization vis-à-vis the *Vertriebene*. I look at how German refugees and expellees can be labeled a diaspora and how the discourse has shifted over the years from the end of the war until the present day in this thesis. I also explore how the acceptable limits of German victimhood have been expanded and are now encountering the outer limits of what is a reasonable victimhood claim. Even though some German victimhood advocates are pushing for recognition that borders on right wing, it is important not to lose sight of the need for Germans to be recognized as *valid* victims of the war in order to attain a masterable past.

True comparison between World War II victim groups is not possible despite the interwoven nature of the two questions at the core of German World War II memory and culpability. The extent to which one group of people suffered more than another is not up for debate. The horrors of the Holocaust are, without a doubt, among the most vile of

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[2] Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1, and Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: Memory, Holocaust, and German National Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 121.

human actions to take place within known history. For Germans to come to terms with their past, they must be confronted with the facts of the Holocaust and understand the culpability of the nation as a whole in perpetuating genocide. Germany must accept its guilt. But only accepting German guilt or merely accepting a one-sided German victimhood is shortsighted. The intent of this thesis is not to exclude or diminish any other victim group. It is important not to exchange one group of victims for another or to forget a group of victims. Only by understanding the historical dimensions of the discourse of victimhood can we understand its validity today.

Validating a German claim to legitimate victimhood—specifically for the *Vertriebene*—is the intent of this thesis. To accomplish this, I shall touch upon three key aspects. First, I will argue that the German *Vertriebene* are a diaspora. Second, I will explore the discourse of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (*BdV*) and determine whether or not the organization is successful in making inroads toward the recognition of Germans as victims. Finally, I will seek to explore how notions of German World War II victimhood have been understood and have changed over time. The assertion of this thesis is that German victimhood is valid, but that this claim should not diminish the victimhood of other groups.

Political realities, unfortunately, oftentimes stood in the way of valid victimhood. In several of his speeches, Konrad Adenauer—Germany's first post-war chancellor—said Nazism was never going to return to Germany. While that statement on its own is all well-and-good, the fact that Adenauer then focused his speeches on the plight of German prisoners of war and the *Vertriebene* while not saying anything about those who fought against and those who died because of Nazism was a disservice to the victims of the

Holocaust. Adenauer placed the plight of the *Vertriebene* over that of the Holocaust victims, creating a victim mythos. This is a position that is generally held to be misguided. His arguments denied the legitimate victimhood of the Holocaust victims, political realities of the new Cold War and West Germany's "anti-communist" sentiments aside. Such actions made it easier to deny the legitimacy of a German victimhood. While the two groups of victims are linked by the same event, true comparison, however, is not and should not be possible. Only by pursuing a course whereby both groups of victims are held to be legitimate and both groups are respected and treated with dignity can a masterable past be achieved. Recognition of the interwoven nature of the victim groups is also necessary, but sensitivity in recognizing that the groups cannot be compared is also necessary.

German victims were placed ahead of Holocaust victims, a dangerous proposition considering the events of the time. Politically, the statements by Adenauer may have prevented a "right-wing uprising that would (have) undermine(d) a still fragile democracy" and created that "fragile democracy" based on "justice delayed," but he did so at a cost.[3] Germany's character was questioned and the legitimacy of German victims was thrown not only into question, but practically dismissed. Atonement and balance were and are needed in attaining a masterable past. This thesis seeks to find that balance.

The first chapter considers German victimhood from the perspective of diaspora and thus argues for a valid inclusion of Germans as victims. Identifying the German *Vertriebene* as a diaspora is important because it allows German victims to be placed in a framework of peoples that had similar fates befall them. The chapter considers the theory and definition of diaspora by exploring classical and more recent diasporas. The goal is

[3] Ibid., 273, 7.

to define successfully the German *Vertriebene* as a diaspora, thus shattering the perception of a homogenous Third Reich and also allowing for a valid German victimhood claim.

The attempt to label the *Vertriebene* as a diaspora is radical when the classic definition of the term is considered. The original diaspora is the scattering of the Jewish tribes of Israel. Placing Germans in the same category as Jews is inherently risky, but the intent is not to dilute the experiences of any one group or to raise the plight of one group over the other. The comparison with other diaspora is useful in the academic sense because it allows for similarities between various displaced peoples to be identified. The diasporic discourse also offers a means to understand better the experiences of the *Vertriebene*. Reducing the legitimate claim to diaspora of any one group is not the intent; rather, the point is to broaden the diaspora definition by allowing more groups, specifically the *Vertriebene*, to lay claim to being a diaspora.

The second chapter of my thesis explores how the *Bund der Vertriebenen*, the German refugee and expellee organization, has created a German "victim mythos." The organization's discourse—garnered mainly from the pages of the *BdV*'s publication, the *Deutscher Ostdienst* (*DOD*)—is anchored in a review of the academic literature written in the same time frame as the *DOD* issues that I analyze. I chose to analyze issues over a fifty-year time frame, looking specifically at the issues that were published in the months that the *Tag der Heimat* occurred. This "day of homeland" was an annual gathering of *Vertriebene* where speeches, pageantry, and rallying would take place to remember the lost German homeland from which they had fled and been expelled. Doing this allows me to link notions of diaspora, homeland and the experience of expulsion. Anchoring

that analysis in the historical literature written at approximately the same time will assist in determining whether the discourse of the *BdV* influenced historians or if the historians influenced the *BdV*. If a link between the two can be discerned, then German historians consider the *BdV* a valid envoy of the German people and a facilitator in the creation of a valid victimhood claim. If no link exists between the discourses, than the *BdV* and German historians operate in separate spheres. If these separate spheres are present, the search for a masterable past is potentially in peril because it then does not consider the full spectrum of World War II victimhood. My research, however, concludes that the discourse of the *BdV* may have accomplished its goals but that its stagnant nature may have caused the *Vertriebene* to appear helpless. The present and ever-growing body of literature on the *Vertriebene* stems that trend and brings balance to the story of the twelve million Germans who lost their homeland by taking their victim status and putting it to work in arguing for valid victimhood recognition, specifically through commemoration.

The final chapter of this thesis considers the full spectrum of World War II victims and seeks to allow the *Vertriebene* to lay claim to valid victimhood. Only in recognizing that Germany's World War II legacy is one divided between perpetrator and victim can a masterable past be attained. Collectively, Germany is guilty of starting the war, conquering large parts of Europe, and perpetrating the Holocaust. Germans have laid claim to victim status in the late 1990s and early 2000s, specifically in the debate over suitable commemoration for the *Vertriebene* and what it means to be German sixty years after the end of World War II. The intent of the final chapter is to come full circle in the search for a masterable past and, unlike Adenauer, point to a valid German victimhood.

Again, it can not be stressed enough that the intent of this chapter is not to apologize for the actions that the Nazis committed; instead, it is my hope that this chapter and the thesis at-large is the first brick in a path that will lead historians toward creating a victimhood claim that embraces all without unduly belittling any one victim group and recognizing the varying degrees of human suffering that occurred in World War II.

An appendix that encompasses an interview with my grandmother, Luzia Kalf, is included in this thesis to provide a *Flüchtling*'s (a German who fled from East Prussia, Pomerania, or Silesia in the closing days of World War II) perspective on the closing days of World War II and the recent commemoration efforts for *Vertriebene* discussed in the third chapter.

Germany does have a masterable past. Denial, the short shrift of any victim group over another, and seeking to compare the incomparable are not the way to realize this. Instead, the answer lies in maintaining the legitimate claims to victimhood for all groups who suffered in World War II, not seeking to place one group over another. The answer lies in recognition of the Janus-like nature of Germany, a nation that was both a perpetrator and a victim. This thesis seeks to find that balance and suggest that a "masterable past" is possible.

Chapter One: German *Vertriebene* as a Diasporic Community: A Theoretical Model

> *"The Lord shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth."*[4]

A woman clutches her infant son to her chest and dashes from the burning rubble that was her home. In the distance, gun fire and the growl of tanks can be heard. Through the smoke, she sees the helmet-wearing and gun-carrying silhouettes of soldiers speaking in a language that is not her own. She begins to run, fleeing her town, fleeing her homeland, fleeing in search of peace and a life far removed from war…

A man stands at the railing on the deck of a large ship, his only possessions the clothes on his back and the satchel at his feet. He looks at the buildings surrounding the harbor the ship is steaming toward. Even though he has left his country to seek a better life, a wave of longing for "the old country" washes over him…

An ethnic community in a city gathers in a public square to celebrate its past, fondly looking to its homeland from where it came. Current life and political climate in the homeland are discussed. Money is collected to send "home" to help fellow "countrymen." Food, dance and music are shared with people who are not members of the community but are interested in learning more. Other people walk by and pay no attention to the celebration…

A man wakes up to find he is shackled and naked in a dark pit. His head throbbing, the last thing he remembers is getting struck in the head by a stranger's weapon. Looking around him, he finds that he is surrounded by others from his tribe, some in worse shape than he. Listening to the moans and cries that carry through the darkness, he hears the rush of water beyond the wood planks that make up the pit, a sound very much like that of a boat cutting through water…

The above vignettes capture the essence of diaspora. The stories are composites, drawn from the experiences of several different diasporic groups and thus not necessarily historical fact. But they nonetheless express the emotions that are felt by a disaporic person or community. They reveal the relationships between diaspora members and those who are not part of it. They underscore the scattering—whether it is by flight, journey, expulsion or capture—that is one of the keystones for identifying a diaspora. Forceful expulsion, as described in the passage above from Deuteronomy, is generally

[4] Deut. 28:25 KJV

viewed by historians as the foundation of a classical diaspora. But not all diasporas are created in the same way. Some are triggered by a search for new opportunity, some by enslavement, some by trade, and some by political circumstance. War and violence, however, are often the central causes of diaspora.

The goal of this chapter is to consider some of the theoretical aspects of diasporas, touch upon the classical diasporas and the more-recently defined diasporas, and then relate the theoretical findings and the diaspora historiography to the German *Vertriebene*. In the closing days of World War II, an estimated twelve million people, largely women and children, fled westward from East Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia in response to the Russian invasion of these eastern reaches of the Third Reich. The peace treaties drawn up at the conclusion of the war forcefully expelled more Germans from the traditionally German lands. Some settled in what would become East Germany. A larger contingent moved further west and settled in the states of Nordrhein Westfalen and Rhinelandpfalz in future West Germany. Within these states, the *Vertriebene* scattered themselves across villages, towns, cities and counties. It is because of this experience of removal and scattering that diaspora discourse can be applied to the *Vertriebene*. Defining the *Vertriebene* as a diasporic community broadens the traditional definition of diaspora and shatters the illusion of the German *Volk* and the believed homogeneity of the Third Reich. Oftentimes, upon their arrival in the west, the *Vertriebene* were seen as less-than German and even, in some cases, were called "Polish."[5] By calling Germans from the east Polish, the notion that the German *Volk* was one is toppled and allows for a viable

[5] Marita Krauss, "Das 'Wir' und das 'Ihr.' Ausgrenzung, Abgrenzung, Identitätsstiftung bei Einheimischen und Flüchtlingen nach 1945," in Dierk Hoffmann, Marita Krauss and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Vertriebene in Deutschland: Interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspektiven*, (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), 36.

claim to German victimhood. This claim to victimhood is grounded in memory and identity, topics that will be considered in this chapter but more fully dissected in subsequent chapters.

Diaspora is, at its root, a Greek word that means "to sow widely."[6] In its original context, there is no mention of violence, political ideology, or forced expulsion. Over time, however, diaspora became associated with the expulsion of people, usually by violent means, from their lands. While this link may not exist in every case of diaspora, it is the case for the *Vertriebene*. Thus, the diasporic nature of the *Vertriebene* makes a claim to victimhood more attainable; they lost their homeland due to violence. Traditionally, four groups of people have been defined as a diaspora within the context of a diaspora being a forced expulsion: the Jews, the Greeks, the Armenians and the Africans.[7] Historian Robin Cohen argued that diasporas share common elements. Every diaspora will not manifest every single element, but at least to qualify as a diaspora, some of the elements must be present. Cohen's definitions for identifying a diaspora are:

1. A dispersal from an original homeland to two or more foreign regions.
2. A collective memory of myth of an idealized homeland.
3. A commitment to the maintenance of the homeland, including a movement for return.
4. Strong, long-term, group consciousness and identity.
5. Shared fate.
6. Range of relations with host society.
7. Sense of empathy and solidarity with coethnics in other places of settlement.[8]

These definitions are quite broad and allow several groups of people to be defined as a diaspora.[9] Later in this chapter I will touch upon some of these elements in arguing that

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[6] Robin Cohen, "Diasporas and the nation-state: from victims to challengers," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 72, no. 3, Ethnicity and International Relations (July, 1996), 507.

[7] Ibid., 507.

[8] Ibid., 515.

the German *Vertriebene* can be considered a diaspora. I will also interject similarities between one diasporic group and the German *Vertriebene* throughout the chapter where applicable.

A trigger event like an expulsion is needed to begin a diaspora. More important, however, is the question of how the diaspora does or does not react, and how it shifts or assimilates rather than what caused the diaspora to occur. Exploring some of the other groups of people that have come to be labeled as a diaspora will allow me to build a foundation for the valid inclusion of the Germans as a diasporic community. The *Vertriebene*—although German in name—fled their lost homeland to a new country whose borders were redrawn because of its defeat. Furthermore, the *Vertriebene* were crossing over cultural and societal lines, as evidenced by being called "Polish" when they did arrive in the west. These cultural and social implications resonate throughout the experiences of more traditional diasporas.

My intent in comparing traditional diaspora to the German *Vertriebene* is not to lessen the significance of any one of the diaspora or to create an invalid and overbearing victim mythos for the German *Vertriebene*. Instead, while remaining sensitive to the historical realities and ramifications of history, the intent is to compare and contrast the diasporas for their own sake and not to dwell upon the causal factors. All diaspora are triggered, but not all diaspora flow along the same path. Only by fully exploring a diaspora in relation to other diasporas can a full appreciation of how they function be gained. This is my intent in dissecting the German *Vertriebene* via traditional diasporas.

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[9] Ibid.

Classic Models of Diaspora

As the above definition indicates, there is a classic definition for diaspora. In this section I explore some of the traditionally accepted, and thus "classic," diasporas. By looking at the creation of and the realities of the classic diasporas, I build a case for defining the German *Vertriebene* as a diaspora. Defining the *Vertriebene* as a diaspora is important because by applying the classic definitions to the flight and expulsion of the Germans from the lands east of the Oder-Neisse River, a valid claim to victimhood and recognition of suffering is possible. The realities of World War II are that Germans—specifically East Prussians, Pomeranians, and Silesians—did suffer, losing their homes and their homeland. While the realities of Germany's guilt cannot be ignored, the realities for all people that suffered because of the regime cannot be ignored either.

Suffering and loss of homeland are central tenants of diaspora. But some diaspora are able to return to the homeland, even creating a homeland where one did not exist previously. This is the case in the African diaspora. While the African diaspora and the German *Vertriebene* both have a homeland myth, the African diaspora took the concept further and created new homelands. Looking to Africa as the ideal homeland, blacks returned to and colonized Sierra Leone and established a nation in Liberia.[10] The movement to return to Africa became more pronounced after the Civil War in the United States. Africa was seen as the only hope for blacks, a true promised land.[11] Some would go, others would stay behind. Either way, wherever they went, blacks saw their destinies

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[10] Joyce Toney, "Similarities and Differences in the Response to Oppression among Blacks in the Diaspora," in Michael D'Innocenzo and Josef P. Sirefman, eds., *Immigration and Ethnicity: American Society—"Melting Pot" or "Salad Bowl"?*, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1992), 224

[11] Ibid., 225.

as "intrinsically entwined" and were interested in their scattered brethren.[12] The black diaspora shows classic features of a model diaspora: a sense of community and belonging is created via a network of global connections. These diasporic members who feel a connection to their old homeland, regardless of where they live, are drawn together by a shared fate. This shared fate can be so powerful that it allows for the creation of homelands where homelands did not exist before. Other diaspora, like the Kurds and the Sikhs, are not so fortunate.[13] Their notions of homeland are entirely imagined constructions because these groups never truly had a homeland to call their own or a homeland to look to and say, "this is where we are from, let us go back and settle it." The relationship to the experiences of the *Vertriebene* is that the group once had a homeland of its own but it vanished when the lands where ceded at the end of World War II. While the *Vertriebene* can point to the land that once was theirs and say "this is where we are from," the political reality is that the homeland no longer exists. Going home is not possible.

Some diasporas are successful in creating a homeland out of gossamer, however, or even existing as a diaspora without a physical homeland. For the *Vertriebene*, even though they had once had a physical homeland to call their own, the ceding of those lands to Russia and Poland at the end of the war in essence made the old homeland "vanish." Once the *Vertriebene* migrated, they were no longer tethered to their physical homeland and instead began to create an intangible and metaphysical homeland. This type of metaphysical creation of a homeland is similar to the diasporic process Hinduism has undergone in recent years. Hinduism, traditionally, has not been tethered to one specific

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[12] Ibid., 227.
[13] Cohen, "Diasporas and the nation-state," 516.

nation. Instead, it has migrated across India, parts of China, Indonesia and southwest Asia. Over time, Hindus have migrated globally. In *Diaspora of the Gods,* Joanne Punzo Waghorne explores the construction of modern Hindu temples in urban areas throughout the world and how these temples then affect Hinduism, specifically how an ancient religion intermingles with the modern world. Her thesis seeks to determine whether or not the process of globalizing the religion leaves room for local expression. She concludes that globalizing a religion does allow for localization, whereas universalization is detrimental to the creation of local expression in migratory religion.[14] The irony, however, is that Hinduism does not operate on centralized doctrine, with an authority structure, or with an institutional base.[15] Hinduism already allows for "localization" and assimilation in its dogma. As Hindus continue to disperse throughout the world and take their religion with them, the emigration is under the watchful eye of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), a militant Hindu nationalist organization that works toward the creation of a "shared ideological framework for Hindus abroad."[16] The VHP has moved into cyberspace in an effort to send its unifying message out to Hindu communities scattered around the world.[17] The use of cyberspace allows any diasporic group to "be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through a shared imagination."[18] In essence, an imagined community is created where thoughts and ideas are shared, but the intent is to create a unifying doctrine. As already discussed, Hinduism is a religion subject to the interpretation of each of its followers and allows for deviations.

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[14] Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Diaspora of the Gods: Modern Hindu Temples in an Urban Middle-Class World*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 178.
[15] Ibid., 175.
[16] Ibid., 175-6.
[17] Ibid., 176.
[18] Cohen, "Diasporas and the nation-state," 516.

Thus, the VHP, while seeking to create a unified diaspora, is standing in the way of the sowing of Hinduism's unique doctrine throughout the world.

But can the spreading of a religion really be considered a diaspora? While some of Waghorne's points are well taken, especially regarding the creation of community by means of cyberspace, it is a leap of faith to call the spread of Hinduism a diaspora. There is no myth of an idealized homeland, unless one considers breaking free of nirvana and karma and merging with the godhead upon death an idealized homeland. There is no forced flight. There is no move to return to the homeland. Finally, despite efforts by the VHP, the relationship between the various temples is limited. This is most likely because of the non-centralized inclination of Hinduism. Furthermore, the relationship of Hinduism with the communities it enters is different than that of a diasporic entity; there is no risk of assimilation. Rather, Hinduism travels to other nations with the intent of assumption. Hinduism seeks to bring in followers through its global travels. This makes the "diaspora" of the gods less of a diaspora and more of a recruitment effort.

One cannot be "recruited" into a culture. Thus, cultural ties are a strong precursor for creating a diasporic community. While allegiance to a nation can be strong, it is the cultural ties that bind people together and create society. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s provides an example of how "the ethnic question"—much like the case of the diasporic Germans who had formed a culture unto themselves—became confused and a matter of contention between people who are the same nationality. When the Soviet Union dissolved, its borders were discarded and new nations carved themselves out of the remains. These new nations "defined themselves as ethnic homelands even though their core nations stretched across newly established

boundaries."[19] In short, the Soviet government had shipped citizens from one end of its communist sphere of influence to the other end, seeking to diversify and most likely bring Slavic influence to its southern reaches that bordered on the Middle East and Asia. Poles had been moved to Kazakhstan. The Ukraine had its share of diverse populations living in its borders, as did Russia. Poland had several of its citizens flee to escape the Iron Curtain. The diasporas reveal the constructed nature of political entities. Political boundaries on a map are oftentimes labeled as societies, giving the mistaken impression that the people who live within those borders are the same. A political entity, in time, can fade or be drawn apart, whereas a culture has more permanence. People are more likely to feel a closer kinship with people who believe what they believe than with a person from a different part of the nation. These societal pulls can be so strong, that the nation must compensate for it and relate to each of its disparate members differently. This was and is the case for Russia, Kazakhstan and the Ukraine. This attitude was also prevalent in the German communities that had *Vertriebene* settle there; culturally, the *Vertriebene* were "foreign" and thus not "German."

One threat to a shared diasporic culture is cultural assimilation. This is the process of becoming "like" in language, behavior and values. The process of assimilation is structural because immigrants are "taken up and incorporated" and thus fully integrated into the society to which they have migrated.[20] For German *Vertriebene*, the process of becoming "like" the societies they lived in began even before arrival in western Germany. Polish shopkeepers demanded that Germans living in now-Polish

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[19] Charles King and Neil J. Melvin, "Diaspora Politics: Ethnic Linkages, Foreign Policy, and Security in Eurasia," *International Security* 24, no. 3 (Winter, 1999-2000), 109-110.

[20] Pedraza, "Immigration in America at the Turn of This Century," 377.

territory speak Polish to merit service.[21] The process is also evidenced by the Poles in Kazakhstan, were assimilation is a very real possibility for several reasons. The process of assimilation is one-way and the end result is predictable. Of the two broad definitions of assimilation, cultural and structural, the Poles in Kazakhstan were at risk of cultural but not necessarily of structural assimilation. The Poles in Kazakhstan are not exposed to Polish culture and have no access to Polish books or newspapers.[22] For Poles who have fled of their own volition to other countries, this is not the case. After World War II, Polish refugees in the United States and throughout the world maintained contact with one another, especially through the Polish-language press and books written by exiled authors. Personal contacts in the form of letter writing also played a role.[23] Furthermore, the relationship with the nation where the diaspora lives is crucial in determining whether assimilation will take place. Since Kazakhstan is calling for its own diaspora to come back to the "homeland," it seems highly unlikely that the Kazakh Poles will be taken in structurally by Kazakhstan.[24] Instead, the focus of Kazakhstan is to bring its own citizens home and reincorporate them into its society.

Sharing a myth of homeland and thus creating a strong imagined community is part of the diasporic model.[25] For the German *Vertriebene*, this imagined community was created in some cases by the *BdV* and in others simply through the act of memory. The strength of this imagined community serves to diminish the risk of assimilation. This act of remaining separate is evidenced by the Polish diaspora. Despite their lack of

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[21] Kalf, interview by author.

[22] Krystyna Iglicka, "Are They Fellow Countrymen or Not? The Migration of Ethnic Poles from Kazakhstan to Poland," *International Migration Review* 32, no. 4 (Winter, 1998),1004.

[23] Anna D. Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *The Exile Mission: The Polish Political Diaspora and Polish Americans, 1939-1956*, (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004), 230.

[24] King and Melvin, "Diaspora Politics," 130.

[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, (New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

exposure to traditionally Polish culture, Kazakhstan Poles look at Poland as a "lost paradise" or "a land of milk and honey."[26] For other diasporic Poles, the savagery of World War II and the coming of the Soviets sent them down the *polskie drogi* (Polish roads). These roads, an imagined construct, tie the diasporic Poles back to the homeland. The "Polish roads" gave refugees a sense of being Polish despite not being in Poland. In turn, that feeling allowed the diasporic Poles to build communities that kept Polish culture alive.[27] For Kazakh Poles, the culture is lost, but the feelings are the same. Many Poles long for their homeland, and their imaginations are the compasses that point the way home. For diasporic Poles, the return would be simpler; they have maintained their culturally identity and fought off assimilation. For Kazakhstan Poles, it would be more difficult; they do not speak Polish, they have no knowledge of life, be it political or cultural, in Poland, they are culturally different and this difference makes them appear distinctive.[28] Either way, be they Poles in Kazakhstan or Poles in the United States, they are a diaspora with a homeland myth.

In Russia, the hope is that any diaspora populations that remained in the nation would give up their homeland myths and be assimilated. The nation seeks to develop cultural and political ties with its diverse population and keep any diasporas where they are. The difficulty, however, is in determining who is a member of a diaspora or not.[29] Identification issues aside, Russia has come to the conclusion that wholesale assimilation of its population is the only way to deal with a diasporic populace.

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[26] Iglicka, "Are They Fellow Countrymen or Not?", 1008.
[27] Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann, *The Exile Mission*, 8.
[28] Iglicka, "Are They Fellow Countrymen or Not?", 1013.
[29] King and Melvin, "Diaspora Politics," 130, 132.

According to some scholars, however, assimilation is a process that does not rest upon cultural differences but upon ethnicity instead. Assimilation, according to Florence Ngọc Halloran, is only possible for small numbers of white immigrant groups. Citing ethnic enclaves in the United States as her evidence, Halloran argues that blacks, Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic groups tend to keep to themselves and do not seek to be taken in by the nation in which they live.[30] This is far too simple an explanation based on skin color. Why do people with the same color skin, like the Kazakhstan Poles and the German *Vertriebene* encounter prejudice and social stratification among their own, by definition, fellow citizens? Basing assimilation merely on the color of one's skin does a disservice to several other factors that must be considered when looking at assimilation. One must consider culture, language, religion, social circumstances, occupations, and other less visible traits before simply latching on to the color divide to explain why some cultures assimilate and others do not.

Some homelands fear that their diasporic populations have actually progressed so far down the road of assimilation that there is no hope of the diaspora's return. This is the case for the Filipino diaspora. Scholars in the Philippines believe that the Filipino diaspora has stretched the definition of what it means to be Filipino too far. With diasporic communities scattered across the world, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino psychology), must present any of its findings to a larger audience. Many in the Filipino academic community believe this is wrong and reintroduces elements of colonialism into Filipino history.[31] Filipino scholars are not investigating their own diaspora, despite the

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[30] Florence Ngọc Halloran, "Intergenerational Occupational Assimilation Among Refugees: The Case of the Vietnamese-Americans" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 1991), 32.

[31] S. Lily Mendoza, *Between the Homeland and the Diaspora: The Politics of Theorizing Filipino and Filipino American Identities*, (New York: Routledge, 2002), 63.

interest Filipino Americans have shown in reconnecting with their homeland. This is because Filipino scholars believe they have more important, domestic issues to consider.[32] Also, Filipinos that are not diasporic have the attitude that diasporic Filipinos have no reason to be wistful of the homeland because they have attained success outside of the borders of the Philippines. This creates tension between the diasporic Filipinos and homeland Filipinos, which in turn causes ripples in the syntax of the imagined community and nationalized homeland.[33] In response, several diasporic Filipinos have cast aside their identities and the links to the homeland and become *metisaje*, cutting off all ties to the homeland. This practice embraces the United States as the homeland and removes the Philippines from its position of dominance.[34] In casting aside their homeland, the diasporic Filipinos are no longer a diaspora. Instead, they become an independent community, one very much like a Hindu temple in a large city. The Filipinos are free to embrace whatever culture they feel most comfortable with or choose to be assimilated by the nation where they live. The irony, however, is that Mendoza—a scholar who studies intercultural communication, race, identity and politics—concludes that Filipinos who cast aside the Philippines as their homeland create a new homeland from the United States. The colonial history of the Philippines, for good or for ill, links it to the United States. Filipinos who have not left the Philippines know of the United States. Thus, diaspora Filipinos and homeland Filipinos are linked via a new "homeland."[35] For the *Vertriebene*, the idea of a new homeland was created through organizations like the *BdV*. Because political reality made it highly unlikely that the

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[32] Ibid., 93.
[33] Ibid., 189.
[34] Ibid., 191.
[35] Ibid., xxiii.

Vertriebene would return to their former homeland, the organization created a new "homeland" through homeland myths and shared experiences. The *BdV* is the lynchpin that links the old homeland with the new, giving the diasporic Germans a new homeland to call their own.

The Filipino situation reveals how a diaspora may no longer want to be considered part of its homeland and actively seek to sever all ties. But what the Filipino situation does not consider is the possibility for a diaspora to "participate fully in the social and political life of *both* countries, exerting quite an influence on the course of political life in the home country."[36] For the Filipino diaspora, stubbornness of the Filipino homeland scholars and the Filipino diasporic communities aside, this is a possibility. It is also possible for immigrants from countries like Cuba, Haiti, or the Dominican Republic. But it is not possible for some refugees and exiles.

The Israeli diaspora is a perplexing case where the diaspora discourse has been reapplied to a "classical" diaspora group. Truthfully, however, the Jewish diaspora is not just a topic shrouded in the foggy mists of past history. It continued well into recent times, lasting until the 1970s. Jews were attacked during the Crusades and expelled from England in 1290 and from France in 1394. They were deported from Spain in the late 1400s and terrorized by Pogroms in nineteenth and twentieth century Poland and Russia. In the 1930s and 1940s, the Nazis killed six million Jews. In the 1950s, Middle Eastern and North African Jews fled their homelands. Finally, in the late 1970s, Jews departed from the Soviet Union, Iran, and South Africa.[37] Only after the creation of Israel did the Jewish diaspora end. Or did it?

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[36] Pedraza, "Immigration in America at the Turn of This Century," 380.
[37] Steven J. Gold, *The Israeli Diaspora*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 1.

Tension between what it means to be a member of a nation and a member of a culture are a key element of creating a diasporic community within a nation seemingly united by culture. One example of this sort of tension is that between what it means to be Jewish and what it means to be Israeli within the Israeli diaspora. Even though they live in the Jewish homeland—the state created to end the Jewish diaspora and be a refugee for the Jews of the world—most Israelis identify themselves first as Israelis and then as Jewish. The core question is the debate between nationalism and religion. It is easier to label oneself as Israeli than Jewish because one lives in a nation-state. Israelis speak Hebrew and celebrate Jewish holidays, but this is seen as being Israeli rather than Jewish.[38] For the diaspora Jew living beyond the borders of Israel, religion is paramount. It is through religion that the diaspora Jew creates identity. For the Jew living in Israel, it is more important to be Israeli than Jewish. Identity is linked to the state. The state is not a receptacle for religion, nor is it a projector of Judaism to diaspora Jews. Israel may be the Jewish homeland, but it is a secular homeland nonetheless.

These classic examples of diaspora indicate that suitable evidence exists to label the German *Vertriebene* as a diaspora. While the causal factors at the roots of the diasporas may differ, the end results are the same; a group of people unified by a shared belief are expelled from a land they love. The following section takes the above gathered diasporic evidence and applies it to the German *Vertriebene*.

The Case of the German Diasporic Community

After having looked at the evidence for and examples of diaspora explored above, the intent is now to define the German *Vertriebene* as a diaspora. Applying the diasporic

[38] Ibid., 183.

model to the Germans is important because it builds a theoretical framework to craft a valid victimhood claim upon. Firmly rooting a German victimhood claim in the evidence and examples of diaspora successfully counters unfounded and nearly right wing claims to a victim mythos that has no grounding in academia. Building a model based on the experiences of other diasporic groups and relating that model to the German *Vertriebene* also allows for a more objective understanding of their experiences while fleeing and resettling. While the intent is neither to divorce the realities of World War II nor to hide the realities of Germany's dual roles as a nation of perpetrators and victims, the use of the diasporic model allows for a broadening of the German experience. The use of the diasporic model also gives a human face to what is oftentimes perceived as a faceless, totalitarian regime.

While it is not as pronounced as the Jewish diaspora, the German *Vertriebene* also exercised some elements of non-conformity upon arrival in western Germany. While they may have assimilated themselves structurally by taking part in the social and educational spheres of the villages, towns, cities and counties where they settled, they did not culturally assimilate. German *Vertriebene* maintained elements of their own culture, cooking the dishes that they cooked while living in Prussia and Pomerania and celebrating holidays like they did when they lived in the *Heimat*.

Many, if not most, of the Germans who fled from homes in Prussia and Pomerania call those lands their *Heimat*. *Heimat* is a German sense of homeland and belonging that strikes a deeper cord than the literal translation of the word as "home." In a speech given in 2002, the president of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* spoke of the pain of

leaving one's homeland and how this pain endures forever.[39] The group's purpose is to unite German *Vertriebene* across the nation. The pain that the German *Vertriebene* feel, even years later, is central to identifying them as a diaspora. Pedraza argues that the identities of immigrants are shaped by having grown up "in another land and place held dearly—a place called home—that one never fully leaves, as it remains in one's heart, wherever one may go."[40] I agree with Pedraza's argument because it reverberates throughout the memories and identities of German *Vertriebene*. *Heimat* is the place from which a person comes and therefore always has feelings for, memories of, and attachment to it.

The existence of the *Bund der Vertriebenen* points to another tendency of diasporic communities. Even though they are scattered across Germany, the *Vertriebene* maintain contact with one another via the network of the group. The group allows for the premigration culture and society to be preserved while at the same time forging new social ties.[41] This process creates an imagined homeland despite the absence of a physical one.

The belief that the lands in the East are the homeland of the *Vertriebene* makes the diaspora a continuous phenomenon with no discernable end point. This is because the German *Vertriebene* will never be able to go home. The homeland as they knew it no longer exists and returning to it is not possible due to political, ideological, and societal changes. The land is still there, but Prussia and Pomerania are gone, the two regions long

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[39] Erika Steinbach, "Erinnern – Bewahren – Zukunft gewinnen," speech given at Tag der Heimat, August 31, 2002; available from http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/presse/; Internet accessed 26 April 2005.

[40] Silvia Pedraza, "Immigration in America at the Turn of This Century: Assimilation or Diasporic Citizenship?", *Contemporary Sociology* 28, no. 4 (July, 1999), 380.

[41] John Lie, "From International Migration to Transnational Diaspora," *Contemporary Sociology* 24, no. 4 (July, 1995), 304.

since having been split between Russia and Poland. The likelihood that German *Vertriebene*—now scattered across Germany—participate in the political life of their old homelands is non-existent. But the existence of the notional homeland and of the myth of return allows German *Vertriebene* to come together as a group and maintain a bond despite being spread out across several German *Bundesländer* (federal states).[42] This scattering across Germany perpetuates the homeland myth, the myth of coming from a place that has been lost due to war, famine, or another traumatic event, and longing to one day return. This longing need not have any basis in reality or even be politically feasible so long as the desire is in the heart for the lost lands that have faded into the past.

By far the most perplexing issue in identifying the German *Vertriebene* as a diaspora is the premise that, in order to be a true diaspora, the German *Vertriebene* should have moved from one nation to several different nations. If one only looks upon the surface, it is easy to dismiss the German *Vertriebene* as not being a diaspora because of this. After all, the majority of eastern Germans merely fled from one region of Germany to another and thus did not engage in any sort of transnational flight. While it is true that most Prussians and Pomeranians migrated from one part of Germany to another part of Germany, it is still a diaspora. Some *Vertriebene* did flee to other nations, but those numbers are insignificant in relationship to my argument. The basis of this subtle argument lies in the roots of the German nation-state and the very nature of Germany itself.

The German nation is a conglomeration of several different peoples. While at their core one could describe them all as "German," they are nonetheless divided by

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[42] William Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1, no.1 (Spring, 1991), 91.

religion, culture and sometime even language. Birken captures the essence of what it means to be German best when he wrote, "like the Jews, the Germans were simultaneously a chosen and a cursed people, existing both everywhere and nowhere, living in many states but possessing no real nation-state."[43] Simply put, the Germans are a people but they have no true homeland to call their own. It is almost as though Birken is comparing the Germans to the Kurds and the Sikhs mentioned above. Germans do have land, however, which has, throughout history, been demarcated as their homeland. Thus, to dismiss the Germans as a people without a nation-state is too simplistic. It would allow the diaspora label to be more easily applied, but it would not be a correct assessment if one considers history.

So if Germans do have a homeland, then "all" Germans are a part of it. Germany is the cultural and societal conglomeration of all things German, the repository from which all Germans draw equally and all are painted with the same broad brush. Yet Germany is not nearly as homogeneous as the word "German" would imply.[44] Germany is, in truth, a construct composed of several different cultures that, while they all are considered "German," are different from one another. Otherwise, for the Prussians to leave their little part of Germany and move to another little part of Germany dismisses them as a diaspora. After all, Lie argues that "migration is *inter*-national across well-defined national territories and boundaries."[45] Cohen also is dismissive of the German *Vertriebene*, despite questioning whether or not they have a claim to the diaspora title. His argument is grounded in the lack of scattering. Furthermore, he would most likely

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[43] Lawrence Birken, "Volkish Nationalism in Perspective," *The History Teacher* 27, no. 2 (February, 1994), 140.

[44] See Celia Applegate's *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[45] Lie, "From International Migration to Transnational Diaspora," 303.

consider the *Vertriebene* a "stranded minority," a group which he does not consider a viable diaspora. The example he gives is that of Flemish-speaking Belgians living in ethnic enclaves inside a county.[46] Both Lie and Cohen would argue that to move from Prussia to Nordrheinwestfalen, even though Poland was crossed to get from one place to the other, is simply moving back into Germany. So how can the German *Vertriebene* than be a diaspora? The answer lies within Germany's formation.

Before there was a place called Germany on the maps of Europe, there were several kingdoms, principalities and other noble-led entities that were home to the German people. These little states, while they did interact with each other, were independent. Loosely, all of the states were labeled Germany, but sixteenth century humanist and geographer Matthias Quad quipped of Germany that "there is no country in all of Christendom which embraces so many lands under one name."[47] Historian James Sheehan argued that "it may be time to give up the idea that all of those living in a nation possess only one past and to accept the fact that nations, like every other sort of complex group, contain different histories which often converge, overlap, or intersect, but which sometimes move in quite different directions."[48] After all, "*within* the German lands, there was a rich variety of dialects and cultural distinctions." Sheehan concluded that, "there was, in short, no terrain, no place, no region which we can call 'Germany.'"[49] Even after the *Reichsgründung* no true Germany existed. This was because Bismarck imposed his will on Germany, not that of the various German peoples. Through Bismarck's declaration that Germany was one nation, the various German peoples were

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[46] Cohen, "Diasporas and the nation-state," 513-4.

[47] Quoted in James J. Sheehan, "What is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography," *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 (March, 1981), 1.

[48] Ibid., 4.

[49] Ibid., 5. Emphasis in the original.

united in 1866-1871, but "were not in any useful sense of the word part of a self-conscious national community."[50] This lack of a self-conscious national community is just one factor that validates the *Vertriebene* as a diasporic community.

For the German *Vertriebene* to qualify as a diaspora, one has to understand the cultural differences between those Germans who fled and those Germans who remained. The East Prussians and Pomeranians that fled were generally farmers. The Germans in Nordrheinwestfalen were generally involved with industry. The East Prussians and Pomeranians were coming from a more heavily forested region of the world. Nordrheinwestfalen is more a gently rolling grassland with specks of forest here and there. Pomeranians were Lutheran, but significant portions of where they settled in western Germany were Catholic. These are but a few of the culture differences between the *Vertriebene* and western Germans. They are significant enough to make any *Vertriebene* feel as though he or she has stumbled into a new world. The nature of German towns to be somewhat clannish in their behavior toward newcomers is also a factor to consider. Very few people and families moved away from their hometowns, thus establishing deep histories. For a newcomer like a *Vertriebene* entering a town, overcoming these deep connections between established families in a town was difficult and daunting. These feelings of being alienated, even among supposed "countrymen," allows the German *Vertriebene* to be identified as a diaspora. In short, the German *Vertriebene* were treated like marginal people, a people caught between two separate cultures and not belonging to either.[51]

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[50] Ibid., 16.
[51] Pedraza, "Immigration in America at the Turn of This Century," 378.

The different effects that World War II had on the German people also allows for a sharp division to be drawn between the Prussians and Pomeranians and western Germans. The war was different for the different parts of Germany. War on the east front was savage and brutal. The Russians and Germans hated each other and fought against each other brutally. The war in the east was thus more personal and more directly intrusive in the lives of the people that fled. For western Germans, the war was more impersonal. Bombs would rain down from overhead and cause significant amounts of destruction, but the victims of these bombings did not have to look into the faces of their enemy until later in the war. When they did, the western Germans and the allied soldiers saw reflections of themselves, especially when one considers that many U.S. soldiers had German roots. Eastern Germans had to look into their enemies' faces, too, but it was different. Most likely what they saw there was hate. Whatever the case, the war was more tangible in some respects for the eastern Germans, even though western Germany was invaded, too. The allied forces that entered Germany from the west acted differently than Soviet troops, not raping and pillaging like the eastern allied forces. The sordid history that deeply divided Germanic from Slavic was not present in the western front, and thus did not lead to the same results where Germans who saw the enemy first-hand had to flee from him. For western Germans, the war was tangible in that they saw the results of the bombs. But seeing the results of the bombs allowed for positive action. Towns and cities that had been bombed would "immediately set about the task of clearance and reorganization."[52] And when occupation did arrive in the west, it arrived in a more reasonable fashion than it did in the east.

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[52] W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, (New York: Random House, 2003), 5.

Herein lies the core difference between the *Vertriebene* and the western Germans who were bombed; after a bomb falls and destroys a house, you can clear the rubble and rebuild the house. In essence, you can reclaim what was lost. For the German *Vertriebene*, this is not the case. Their homeland has forever been taken away from them and will not be reclaimed. This makes the *Vertriebene* a diaspora, because much like the Jewish diaspora before Israel, the desire to return home involved a "spiritual rather than a geographic journey."[53] There was always the promise of going "home," that the lands east of the Oder-Neisse River would be recovered. In 1990, following the unification of Germany, Helmut Kohl signed a treaty recognizing the post-war borders of Germany and thus dismissing that impossible promise. For the *Vertriebene*, there was nowhere to go home and a new home had to be created.

The shift in the borders of Germany also qualifies the *Vertriebene* as a diaspora. According to King and Melvin the shift in the boundaries of Germany and the loss of the homeland resulted in the *Vertriebene* being beyond the frontiers of their own "nation."[54] The question is what would happen to this diasporic population? The question is valid. Due to shifts in the political borders, the east German refugees were pushed from their homeland and found themselves in new states that were far from the former borders of Prussia and Pomerania. While it is true that the refugees were still in Germany and technically still in their "homeland," the feelings of the refugees and of the towns, cities, counties and states receiving the refugees would indicate otherwise. Not only did the *Vertriebene* cross geographic space, they crossed over historic borders, too. With the end of the war, the lands that they fled and were expelled from were taken away and

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[53] Gold, *The Israeli Diaspora*, 4.
[54] King and Melvin, "Diaspora Politics," 117.

essentially dissolved into history. The nations to which they were fleeing—East and West Germany—were also new constructs that had grown out of the results of the war and are thus "new" nations. In a sense, the *Vertriebene* suffered a double loss; they lost their own homeland and also lost the "greater German" homeland. This movement from the "old" country into a "new" country is a diaspora.

The German sense of victimization was exploited by Germany following World War II with Germans using the plight of the *Vertriebene* to save the German nation. Germany had been defeated and was charged with waging the most heinous and egregious crimes upon humanity. A silence descended over Germany. No admission of guilt was forthcoming from the German nation at-large. Something was needed to get over the silence, to make Germans feel good about themselves again. The German people needed something to rally behind and reunite as a people. The experience of the twelve million *Vertriebene* was usurped by Germany at-large and used to paint a picture that all Germans were victims.[55] Historian Robert Moeller, for example, argued that "individual memories shaped a public memory that permitted West Germans to acknowledge the war as part of their history and at the same time distance themselves from the National Socialist State—a state most Germans had supported and that bore complete responsibility for the war in Europe."[56]

The usurping of the *Vertriebene* experiences at the hands of the Russians allowed the Germans to find absolution and bolstered the self-identification of the *Vertriebene* as disaporic. Russians were painted with the broad brushstroke of being brutal and barbaric "Mongol" invaders despite the few "good Russians" within the horde. To the German

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[55] Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, first ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 3, 22.

[56] Ibid., 3.

mind, the vicious actions taken by the Russian invaders contrasted with the behaviors of the "good Russians" was a sort of vindication as well as an indulgence, revealing that "terror was the product of totalitarian regimes, not individuals." The existence of "good Russians" within the terror gave Germans a means of claiming individual innocence.[57] The use of the *Vertriebene* in this way is recognition of the concept that a "victim tradition" is integral to the definition of a diaspora, and, at the same time, it is a cold-hearted use of the memories in order to further "the domestic and diplomatic interests of the host country."[58] At some times, the *Vertriebene* are treated like they are foreigners and not truly German. At others, their memories and experiences are embraced and used for the good of all. Within this binary the only constant is that although both actions are widely different, they both point to the same result. The German *Vertriebene*, although they are German, are nonetheless a diaspora. Organizations like the *Bund der Vertriebenen* keep the diaspora alive in spirit, maintaining state clubs for German *Vertriebene* to join, coordinating meetings that recall the past and discuss the future of the *Vertriebene*, and arranging visits to the lands from whence the diaspora came. The organization uses the experiences of its people to call attention to present-day diasporas that are occurring, recognizing that diasporas are phenomena that know no boundaries, be they spatial or constructed.

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[57] Ibid., 82.

[58] Cohen, "Diasporas and the nation-state," 513-4, and Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies," 92

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Conclusion

When people leave their home to go to another place, it is not always a diaspora. Far more goes into defining the movement of a people as a diaspora than the simple act of moving. One has to consider whether or not the movement was forced or not, whether the people who fled maintain contact with their old homeland, and how the people cope with living in their new nation. Traditionally, the word diaspora was used in a very limited sense and only applied to four groups. Today, the definition of diaspora has been broadened sufficiently to allow other groups of people to be included. One such group is the German *Vertriebene*. Above, I touched upon some of the traditional diasporas and some of the more recent diasporas. Many, if not most, share several of the key elements that define a diaspora. The German *Vertriebene* share many, too.

Defining the *Vertriebene* as a diaspora by means of these key elements is important. Using the traditional diaspora constructs and applying them to the *Vertriebene* reveals the experiences that are common to diaspora. Recognizing these commonalities provides an academic basis for forging a path toward a valid claim to victimhood. Writing about the *Vertriebene* from the perspective of diaspora also allows for objective definitions to be applied to their experiences. By applying the definitions of diaspora, it becomes easier to explore, investigate, understand, and write about the *Vertriebene* experience.

The single sticking point within the argument of labeling these Germans as a diaspora lies in the geographic question of not having truly left Germany. I believe I have successful shown that geography truly is not an issue. To my mind, the most significant reasons for defining the *Vertriebene* lie in their fondness and memory of their

homeland that was taken from them, their victimization and then the subsequent usurping of this victimization by Germany. All of these events point to a shared destiny with all diasporas. Simply put, the German *Vertriebene* lost their homeland and were scattered across a Germany they were unfamiliar with and did not feel like home. In years to come, groups like the *Bund der Vertriebenen* would provide a community to nurture the homeland myth. It is too simple to say that a diaspora must come from one country and go to another; this does not allow any room for the significant differences in culture, religion, attitudes and society that exist within all nations. For me, to qualify as a diaspora, you must lose your homeland and relocate to a new place where you feel as though you do not belong. This, in essence, is the history of the *Vertriebene*.

Chapter Two: Diverging Discourse: The Language of the *Bund der Vertriebene* and Scholarly Accounts

When was the question of Germans as victims of World War II first raised? Was it in the closing days of the war? Right after the last bullet was fired and the treaties signed? Just before the Iron Curtain fell across Europe? During the Cold War? Right before reunification? Or sixty years after the end of the war? The question of German victimhood was raised almost as soon as World War II drew to a close. With twelve million Germans fleeing westward from the eastern reaches of the Third Reich, displaced by the encroaching Soviet military, the idea of Germans as victims of the war seemed obvious. But the difficulty of recognizing Germans as victims lies in the realities of World War II. Germany started the war and pushed it into Africa, southern Europe, and to the borders of the Soviet Union. Germany waged genocide upon millions. How is it possible to consider that Germans are victims of the war when they are the very people most responsible for beginning it and implementing inhumane and industrialized slaughter of millions of Jews as well as Slavs, Sinti, Roma, the mentally challenged, and homosexuals?

If the intent is to balance one-for-one or to raise the plight of Germans over that of those killed in the Holocaust, then Germans have no rightful claim to being victims of World War II. If, however, the intent is to understand the extent to which World War II affected the lives of all that were involved, to broaden the categories of victimhood, then a German victimhood claim is valid. But what Germans can be included in the victim category? Are all Germans who were alive during World War II eligible? Or are only those Germans that fled their homeland eligible? Herein lies the crux of the search for a

masterable past. How does one balance the realities of German nationalism and the Nazi regime with the flight of twelve million Germans and the subsequent loss of their homeland? This chapter will address the question of when Germans began to consider themselves victims and assert their claim. The diasporic model discussed in the first chapter is crucial to understanding German victimhood because it is the foundation for most if not all of Germany's victimhood claims. Reasons for Germans seeking a claim on victimhood vary; organizations like the *BdV* wanted recognition of the *Vertriebene*'s diasporic identity. The diaspora label is a valid claim, but the right-wing approach of the organization made the intent suspect. Politically, German victimhood was useful in unifying the country against the new threats of the Cold War and show solidarity with the West in the face of Communist aggression. On an individual level, Germans who had suffered during the war simply wanted recognition of their experiences. These are some of the "whys" behind claiming German victimhood.

To explore in detail the questions of when, why and how, I will analyze the *Deutscher Ostdienst* (*DOD*), the annual publication of the *Bund der Vertriebenen*, specifically looking at the years 1955, 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995. Within those years, I have chosen the edition that was published for the *Tag der Heimat*. This will allow me to concentrate specifically on the *BdV* discourse as it relates to notions of diaspora and homeland. In turn, I intend to anchor my analysis of the publications with a review and periodization of the literature written on the *Vertriebene* in the years of the publications. The intent and goal of this chapter is to explore the teleological question of how the *BdV* and historians first agree and then contradict one another in respect to German victimhood. In doing this, I will further knowledge and understanding of the German

diasporic community's use of victimhood. How scholarly prose was influenced by the discourse of the *BdV*, or vice versa, is one of the approaches I use in this chapter to determine how German victimhood evolved historically. The two discourses should be linked, but if no link can be determined, the historians searching for a masterable past and the *BdV* operate in separate spheres. But if the *BdV* is—as it claims—truly the "national champion of the entire German people," historians must consider the discourse of the *BdV* in their analyses.[59]

If one considers the search for a masterable past from the perspective of historians outside Germany, the topic has resurfaced with new force and clarity since reunification. In Germany, the topic gained momentum with the sixtieth anniversary of the war's end. But in fact the first works about the *Vertriebene* and the move toward victimhood came only a few years after the end of the war. The final chapter of this thesis will consider more closely the questions of recent historical efforts to find a masterable past. This chapter seeks to historicize the discourse of the *BdV* and excavate the different levels of this discourse, showing its evolution over the last fifty years.

1950s: The Victimhood Discourse Begins

In the 1950s, the first claims for German victimhood were voiced. The loudest claims were being made by organizations representing the *Vertriebene*. Initially, these calls for recognition were not in agreement with the political realities of West Germany. The clamoring for recognition came too soon after the end of the war. West Germany was in the process of aligning itself with the Western powers. The cries for victimhood

[59] Matthias Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch: Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972*, (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag GmbH, 2004), 429.

by the loose confederation of *Vertriebene* organizations did not balance with the political efforts West Germany was constructing at the time. This section explores this imbalance.

Before 1957, the *BdV* did not exist in its present form. Instead, the organization was composed of several independent state *Vertriebene* "teams" that worked with one another only loosely. On October 27, 1957, the state groups unified. A little over a year later, the *BdV* ratified its constitution and became the German-wide entity it is today.[60] In years previous, however, only a confederation of expellee organizations existed. All were working toward the same goal, but the lack of cohesion resulted in lost opportunities. In 1955, the Berlin state group for German *Vertriebene* called for a rally to take place that would invoke thoughts of German inclusiveness in terms of remembering the war. In the September 17, 1955 publication of the *Vertriebenen Korrespondenz*, the so-called "information service of the federation of expelled Germans," the execution of the event was unsuccessful despite "good" intentions because of a scheduling conflict. "All Germans" were invited to participate in the 10-year anniversary of the flight from eastern Germany and to uphold and recognize the virtues of "freedom, justice and peace" that had been nurtured in those ten years. Only 20,000 people came. According to the confederation's own analysis, the time chosen for the gathering collided with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's visit to Moscow. Despite realizing this, the date for the gathering was not changed, and the result was that the issue of German expellees and their rights was a muted event and not one that was put on "parade" for the world to see.[61]

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[60] *Struktur, aktuelle Aufgaben und Tätigkeiten des BdV*, available from http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/struktur-1.php3; Internet, accessed on 5 November 2005.

[61] *Vertriebenen Korrespondenz: Informationsdienst des Bundes der Vertriebenen Deutschen (BVD)*, 17 September, 1955, 1-2.

The tone of the writing in the articles by the *BdV* representatives is one almost of self-defeat and criticism; the date of the chancellery visit was known to occur on the same day as the planned gathering, but no effort was made to change it. After the gathering occurred and the turnout was sparse, the attitude was one of "see-I-told-you-so." The planning of the gathering and the retaliatory writing judging the effectiveness of the event indicates that the confederation of *Vertriebene* groups were at odds with one another, not so much over their messages and goals, but the effective execution of those goals.

The lack of interest in a "German" policy also went against the central tenant of the *BdV*'s interests in representing all Germans. Adenauer's visit to Moscow is interesting in that it seems to run counter to what the first post-war chancellor of West Germany had in mind for the nation. Adenauer was intent on building a West Germany that would be able to defend itself against the Communist threat from the east. He was not focused on pursuing any kind of "German" policy. Adenauer was firmly on the side of the West and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.[62] If the confederation's intent was to go head-to-head with Adenauer and the West German government in scheduling its event at the same time as the state visit, the *Vertriebene* groups did themselves a disservice. Even if there was no intent to pit the agenda of the government against that of the confederation, the groups' scheduling of the event during an international event that would garner more attention was a disservice to their goals. Over time, the government and the *BdV* would grow closer—that relationship will be touched upon to some extent in the next chapter—but the initial relationship was rocky.

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[62] Donald S. Detwiler, *Germany: A Short History*, (Carbondale & Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 216-7.

In the scholarly literature written during this time, the issue of expellees and refugees was treated more as a "Western" issue rather than a "German" issue. Refugees and expellees are considered an "international" problem caused by "excessive nationalism and materialism" according to sociologist Paul Frings.[63] Frings saw the Germans that fled from the east as a burden on the West German government, a group of people that created difficulties in juggling political and economic realities. The conditions in post-war West Germany, both economic and political, made it difficult to assimilate the twelve million refugees and expellees. West Germany was not economically able to handle the addition of twelve million additional people, especially since only four and a half million apartments were available for the *Vertriebene* to occupy. West Germany's lack of sovereignty politically also increased the difficulty in assimilating the refugees and expellees. Frings argued that a viable solution to the refugee and expellee problem could only be attained after West Germany established its own government and regained economic power.[64]

Instead of recognizing Germans from the east as fellow Germans and seeking German solutions—hampered by the division of Germany between the Allies—to the increase in population numbers that are putting stress on the fledgling economy, Frings pushed for an "international" (in truth, a "Western" solution—sending German refugees to Communist nations was not considered a viable option) solution where German *Vertriebene* "prepared for emigration." Only with the "solidarity" of foreign nations

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[63] Paul Frings, *Das Internationale Flüchtlingsproblem 1919-1950*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag der Frankfurter Hefte, 1951), 11.

[64] Ibid., 142.

allowing German immigrants to enter their borders could the stress of the eastern German diaspora have been eased.[65]

This sociological view was in lockstep with the political realities of West Germany during the 1950s. Adenauer was searching for a "western" solution to the difficulties facing the nation. One of those difficulties was the assimilation of millions of Germans from the east. Pushing these Germans out of the nation was, in effect, robbing them of their homeland again. The loose confederation of *Vertriebene* organizations would not be able to withstand these political realities with only further self-critical analysis. The time to federalize had come.

1960s: Calling with One Voice for Victimhood

In the 1960s, the various *Vertriebene* organizations recognized that they would be better served in calling for *Vertriebene* victim recognition if they gathered together under one banner. This is a transition from the disorganized yet vocal confederacy of the 1950s. The groups unified and became the *BdV*, the organization that spoke with one voice for *Vertriebene* victim recognition. The *BdV* found its niche in the 1960s, becoming the champion for all German people, pointing out the lessons learned from excessive nationalism and maintaining political neutrality so as to appear "above" German politics. The reoccurring theme in this section, just as in the one above, is the chasm between German politics and the *BdV's* discourse.

By 1965, the *BdV* had centralized its group structure, unifying state *Vertriebene* groups. The September10 edition of *Deutscher Ostdienst* trumpets in its masthead "unified state teams and state organizations." The tone of the publication is far more

[65] Ibid., 141, 145.

optimistic than that of the publication ten years earlier. The "day of homeland" (*Tag der Heimat*) in 1965 was not in conflict with any state visits, either, and the *BdV* proclaimed the timeliness of the event considering the political realities of the world at the time. Vietnam and Cambodia were experiencing a diaspora due to the escalating conflict in Southeast Asia. The *BdV* used this world reality to its advantage, calling for the world to recognize the plight of all expellees and refugees throughout the world, extolling that "an ever forgetful world public must always be reminded that the stolen homeland belongs spiritually and rightfully to its traditional population."[66] Nested within that message is the true principle of the *BdV*: informing the world about its German victim mythos and providing its version of a "masterable past." The *BdV*'s use of the Southeast Asian diasporic community could also be seen as an effort to aligning with the Western anti-communist stance.

The *BdV* championed the importance of German participation in and contributions to the post-war politics of Europe. A "masterable past," according to the *BdV*, could only be attained by including Germans and not just policies implemented via Europe at-large. To exclude German contributions would risk "opening door and gate for radicalism from the left and right." Avoiding the influences of communism and fascism—the left and the right—was and is important to the *BdV* because the organization did not want to appear to be abetting the "enemy" nor to be seen as embracing the politics of Germany's past. Furthermore, the *BdV* goes so far as to question the nationalism of other countries, especially Poland. The Polish insistence that the French and Americans recognize the Oder-Neisse line as the border between "Germany" (East and West) and Poland served as a "catalyst" for intensive discussions at the Day of Homeland that year regarding "Polish

[66] *Deutscher Ostdienst: Informationen des Bundes der Vertriebenen*, 10 September, 1965, 1.

nationalism" and "chauvinism."[67] This was strong language from the *BdV*. On one hand, the organization was promoting a lessons-learned attitude. On the other hand, the organization was forgetting history and placing the root causes of why the expulsion and flight happened in the first place.

The lessons-learned stance allows the *BdV* to appear as somewhat of a noble patron, one recovering from the failures and transgressions of its own past and willing to share the hard lessons of nationalism gone awry. In the second scenario, the opposite is true; the past aggressions of the Nazis are forgotten and only those actions being taken against Germans are inexcusable. While the second scenario is frightening to consider in light of the realities of World War II, some elements are present in the *BdV*'s stance on homeland and its German victim mythos. The loss of German homelands that resulted in the diaspora of millions of eastern Germans *is* inexcusable. Not considering Germans as victims of World War II is shortsighted and unjust. But a delicate balance must be maintained. Considering the realities of the inhumane actions of the Nazi regime is necessary to avoid slipping into excessive victimization—a sufferer fetish—that glorifies German victims over all other victims of the war. I will investigate this slippery slope further in the next chapter.

World weariness where German victims were concerned was the central theme scholars discussed in the 1960s. The world was tired of hearing how Germans were victims of the war, they argued. Despite the strong prose used by the *BdV* in its publications, some scholars argued that the organization lost power and its public voice in the 1960s. According to Linus Kather, a German attorney and politician, the fate of the *Vertriebene* and their lost homeland was not discussed in public or in government

[67] Ibid., 5.

channels in either West Germany or the world.[68] Kather goes so far as to argue that the Western nations were not interested in hearing any more about German claims to the lands beyond the Oder-Neisse rivers and that any future reunification of Germany would never include East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia because the lands were "given away as a gift" to Poland, Russia and Czechoslovakia.[69]

Other scholars held the position that the *Vertriebene* and the search for a masterable past were pivotal points in creating political problems in Germany and only by disentangling the various issues surrounding the points could headway be made in addressing the problems. Furthermore, the *Vertriebene* provided Germany with a symbol that was useful in pursuing the German victimhood claim. Hiddo M. Jolles, a German sociologist, discussed how the German diasporic community brought into focus all of the important questions of the German public and lifestyle. For Jolles, the complexity of assimilating Germans from the east into West Germany was a microcosm of the social and political questions of Germany. Prior to reunification, the case of the German diasporic community was also useful in discussing the potential difficulties in merging West and East Germany into Germany.[70] These questions focused on German assimilation of Germans are insightful because they allow the *Vertriebene* easier claim to being a diaspora. It would appear that although by all appearances a homogeneous people, Germans have difficulties in taking in other Germans from different regions, especially if there are perceived social, economic, cultural, and political overtures. This

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[68] Linus Kather, *Die Entmachtung der Vertriebenen*, (München: Günter Olzog Verlag, 1965), 115.

[69] Ibid., 111.

[70] Hiddo M. Jolles, *Zur Soziologie der Heimatvertriebenen und Flüchtlinge*, (Köln: Kiepenheur & Witsch, 1965), 25, 23, 39, .

localized form of xenophobia may have its roots in how Germany was once a patchwork quilt of fiercely independent kingdoms, principalities, and other small states.

The discourse of the *BdV* and of the scholars writing about the *BdV* and the *Vertriebene* were at an impasse in the mid-1960s. The organization had just solidified its power structure and was making progress toward being the paramount advocate for the German victim mythos. Its strong stance against alleged Polish "nationalism" and its sharp discourse in its publications would indicate that the *BdV* was far from having its political clout stripped away. But rhetoric is only as powerful as the actions that result from it. If one uses the academic writings of the 1960s as a benchmark for the organization's impact on German policy and politics of that time, the *BdV* was not the powerful and far-reaching organization it believed itself to be. This imbalance between political reality and believed relevance is repeated throughout the *BdV*'s history, most recently with the debate in 2004 and 2005 over the location of a *Vertriebene* memorial, an issue that will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The political realities of West Germany did not coexist with the views of the *BdV*, either. In the1960s, a desire to confront the realities of Germany's past took root. Furthermore, in the last years of the decade, West German politics shifted in an effort to form better relationships with East Germany, Poland, and other Warsaw Pact nations. These changes took hold after West Germany's Social Democrat Party gained control of the government and put Willy Brandt in the chancellorship. Brandt ushered in an era of *Ostpolitik*, an era of reaching over the Iron Curtain and reconnecting to some extent the politically divided Germanys. By extension, better relationships with Poland and the Soviet Union were possible. This change in the West German political wind made the

rhetoric of the *BdV* with its cries of Polish "chauvinism" look outdated and ultraconservative. Some academia sought to counter balance this conservative stance by pointing out the resettlements the Third Reich conducted in Poland from 1933 to 1944, pushing Germans to live in traditionally Polish areas. This population resettlement forced on the Poles by the Germans was rarely mentioned by 1965 in most works about the *Vertriebene* and not at all by the *BdV*.[71]

1970s: The Search for Culpability

The 1970s were the decade where Germans began to question the nation's role in World War II. Academically, there was an odd silence on the topics of German victimhood and guilt. The *BdV* recognized German guilt for World War II in the 1970s, but the discourse still pushed for victimhood recognition. The decade seems to be laying the foundation for the 1980s, the decade where German guilt and victimhood discussion reached a head.

By 1975, the growing interest in West Germany to lay claim to a masterable past that took into account Germany's culpability for the war and the political realities of *Ostpolitik* caused a shift in the discourse of the *BdV*. The reaction to political efforts to nurture relationships with East Germany vis-à-vis *Ostpolitik*, however, was still less than celebratory. The feeling now was that not enough was being done to bring freedom to the people living behind the Iron Curtain, because, even after thirty years of peace, freedom and humanity had not progressed but gotten worse instead. Famine, flight and present-day expulsions were occurring throughout the world. The *BdV* wanted to call attention to the plight of humanity, declaring "Home, freedom, human rights!" its rallying

[71] Jolles, *Zur Soziologie der Heimatvertriebenen und Flüchtlinge*, 43.

call for 1975.[72] The organization had also made significant strides in staunching its more provocative rhetoric, or, at the very least, recognizing that Germany was the reason World War II happened in Europe.

The *BdV* began to revise its message and reason for being, establishing the message that it still uses today; "we do not deny the horrors the Germans began. But we also do not want the horrors toward Germans to be denied!"[73] The organization also firmly established itself as a diaspora in 1975, latching on to one of the key concepts from the first chapter, the psychological attachment to a "lost" homeland. The *BdV* recognized that the likelihood of Germany ever regaining lands east of the Oder-Neisse Line was far from possible. Nonetheless, a connection and love for the lost homeland was necessary, the *BdV* claimed, to the well-being of the *Vertriebene*. Furthermore, the organization was visionary in its claims that the division of Germany would not last forever and that only through reunification of East and West Germany would the German question be answered.[74] In truth, the reunification of Germany in 1990 brought forth more questions than answers; the next chapter will address some of those issues.

Scholars fell more or less silent on the topic of the *Vertriebene* in the 1970s. Very few books were published in the decade that discussed the German refugees or expellees. Much of the literature was autobiographical or narrowly focused on politics with no discussion of the German diasporic community. It almost seems like the decade was the so-called "calm before the storm" of the *Historikerstreit* that occurred in the 1980s. The *Streit* is discussed in the next section. Why were the 1970s a quiet period for German *Vertriebene* history and discussion? Perhaps the interest in pinpointing German

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[72] *Deutscher Ostdienst: Informationen des Bundes der Vertriebenen*, 4 September, 1975, 1.
[73] Ibid., 2.
[74] Ibid., 3.

culpability swept away any desire to label Germans as victims. It was too soon to reconcile the dual nature of Germany in the 1970s. The 1980s would be the decade where the difficult questions of German guilt and victimhood would be debated.

1980s: Recognizing Germany's Dual Nature

With the 1970s oddly quiet historically and the growing interest in determining Germany's World War II guilt, the 1980s was the decade when the questions of trying to balance what Germany did against what happened to Germans were first addressed. In the *BdV*, the reaction to the search for guilt was to swing back toward a conservative stance. In the academic community, the debates raged over how guilty were the German people and whether or not this guilt overruled any claims to victimhood.

The *BdV*'s reaction to the academic debate over German guilt was to follow the political climate of the nation. By 1985, the *BdV* had once again shifted its discourse slightly, leaning back toward a more "conservative" stance and reflecting the return of the *CDU* to power in West Germany. For example, in a speech at Gross-Gerau, Germany, *BdV* vice president Herbert Hupka made statements about Poland and Czechoslovakia that hinted at German nationalism but were cloaked in neighborly terms. Hupka called East Prussia and Silesia the "homeland of the Germans," not just of those Germans born there or expelled from there. The "inheritance of the past" is the reason the lost homeland belongs to Germany, Hupka said, even if those lands are forever Polish or Czech. If that were ever to change and the lands east of the Oder-Neisse were to once again fall within Germany's borders, it would not be due to any kind of hostile intent toward the Poles or the Czech. After all, the *BdV* was stressing its new "good neighbor"

stance.[75] The nationalist bent was further reflected in the 1985 issue of the *DOD*. "Faithfulness to Germany" was the call to action for the annual Day of Homeland. The issue also proclaimed that the *BdV* had never denied the deeds of Germans during World War II or attempted to balance the deeds of Germans against the victimhood of Germans.[76] While the comments by Hupka are useful in that they opened the possibility for all Germans, no matter where in Germany they were born or came from, to lay valid claim to victimhood, the comments were not particularly "neighborly." Hupka's comments seem to carry a veiled threat to Poland and the now-split Czechoslovakia that Germany would one day reclaim what is "rightfully" Germany's. Even the statement that any such move would not be hostile only causes more concern than it sought to ease; one only has to think back to *Anschluss* to remember the last pre-1990 reunification non-hostile joining of "German" lands to Germany.

Essentially, the *BdV* engaged in political double speak in the 1980s, stressing its hard line stance for laying claim to the lost German homeland and German victimhood while at the same time seeking not to alienate Germany's eastern neighbors. This doublespeak made the *BdV* look dangerously like a neo-Nazi organization. Considering the growing social problems in West Germany during the late 1980s, though, this kind of rhetoric by the *BdV* may have been influenced by those trends. Racial hostility was on the rise in West Germany, and right-wing parties were gaining in popularity with voters.[77] For the *BdV* to have possibly stooped to this level, though, is immoral, especially if the organization truly embraces its credo not to deny the victimization of any

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[75] *Deutscher Ostdienst: Informationen des Bundes der Vertriebenen*, No. 37, 1985, 5.
[76] Ibid., 1.
[77] Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 233.

other groups. To engage in political double speak and not maintain a clear message threatens the legitimacy of the organization and, by extension, endangers a compelling claim to German victimhood.

As for the scholarly literature, the plight of the *Vertriebene* had, at least in two instances, become the topic of mass-market paperbacks, spilling scholarly endeavors into the popular press. In 1985, *Spiegel Buch*, the book publishing operation of the same firm that prints *Der Spiegel*, went to press with *Die Vertriebenen*.[78] The book is seven chapters long, each chapter the personal experience of a *Flüchtling*. Organized chronologically, the chapters cover topics including the flight from the east and the creation of the *Vertriebene* organizations. One chapter covers the expulsion and resettlement of the Poles. The book offers the same perspective of the *BdV* but goes beyond the veiled nationalist fervor of the organization to recognize that the Poles suffered in the closing years of World War II as well. In the chapter on the creation of the *Vertriebene* organizations, reference is made to how the ceremonies that were held to rally the *Vertriebene* and garner support for politicians looked like "rendezvous of right-wing extremists" because of the impassioned calls to reunite the fatherland and former military bands playing marches and other martial music.[79] Simply put, the *BdV* has, at its roots, a propensity to appear right wing, as the *Spiegel* book suggests. This stance is somewhat frightening considering the realities of German history. Injecting a mass-market paperback into the public sphere appears to have been an effort to counter the

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[78] *Der Spiegel* is a weekly news magazine that claims to be Germany's "most significant" news magazine and one that does not align itself with any party or economic conglomeration. The topics the magazine covers range from politics, economics, science, medicine, technology, culture, society and sports. The magazine is sent to 172 countries and sells roughly one million copies every week. Source: http://www.spiegelgruppe.de, Internet, accessed on 12 November 2005.

[79] Joachim Reimann, "Wir missionieren bis an die Memel: Die Vertriebenenverbände," in *Die Vertriebenen*, Siegfried Kogelfranz, ed., (Hamburg: SPIEGEL-Verlag, 1985), 74.

nationalistic fervor of the *BdV* and also to call attention to the fact that the Poles were not winners at the end of World War II, either. While the *BdV* always claims to stand against expulsion and forced assimilation wherever it may occur in the world, the organization's discourse never once truly touched upon the plight of the Poles following World War II. The hope, however, was that the *BdV* politicians would recognize the dangers of reemerging German nationalism and counter it with "politics guided by reason."[80] The fear was that by pursing nationalistic agendas that Germany might alienate itself from the world and risk exiting the world economic system. Introducing concerns like these via mass-market paperback books is one way to inject a new line of debate into the overarching discourse of the *BdV*. Where the *BdV* remained silent, efforts were made by writers and publishers to inject alternate interpretations in continuing the search for a masterable past.

The scholarly literature of the 1980s called to attention another area where the *BdV* remains mysteriously silent: the failure of the Third Reich to respond quickly enough to the Russian invasion and evacuate more Germans. Ranking officials of the Nazi Party could have intervened in a more timely fashion and prevented having more Germans endure crimes against humanity. The Germans that were caught in the Russian advance included those who did not evacuate their homes quickly enough because the order too evacuate came to late if at all; people living in areas with limited transportation options; people who did not want to flee; and physically disabled and old people who feared the hardships of flight.[81] Could some of the inhumanities have been prevented had

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[80] Wolfgang Benz, ed., *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 262.

[81] Heinz Nawratil, *Die deutschen Nachkriegsverluste: unter Vertriebenen, Gefangenen und Verschleppten*, (München: Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), 32.

the government intervened more quickly and with greater resources? One only has to look to recent events in the United States and the response to Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast for an answer to that question. Most certainly, had the Third Reich sought to evacuate more refugees in a more timely fashion, some and perhaps many Germans could have avoided any inhumane treatment. Furthermore, it should have been obvious that the Russians would invade eastern Germany. The Russian counter offensive was predictable and the path was obvious. Oddly though, the discourse of the *BdV* was silent where this crucial bit of information is concerned, choosing instead to toe the party line and maintain the villainy of everyone but Germany in the expulsion of Germans from the east.

Other historical scholars questioned why Germany deserved to be treated with compassion where human rights were concerned. Even though twelve million Germans fled and twenty million Germans died, the question asked by German historian Adolf M. Birke was "how could the population of the country that had brought so much suffering into the world count on the compassion of the victors…?"[82] But Birke goes on to touch on the difficulties that Germany and the *Vertriebene* encountered in the post-World War II realities. The diasporic influx of refugees and expellees into West Germany further unbalanced an already precarious economy. Jobs were not readily available for the millions of Germans who were seeking employment. Land and areas to live were also being filled up quickly, ironically turning West Germany into the "nation without room" that Nazi propaganda had warned against in 1933.[83] The West German states also added to the already difficult situation by shifting diasporic populations back and forth between

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[82] Adolf M. Birke, *Nation ohne Haus: Deutschland 1945-1961*, (Berlin: Wolf Jobst Siedler Verlag GmbH, 1989), 24, 25.

[83] Ibid., 126, 127.

one another or refusing to take in refugees and expellees because of the economic hardships already present in their states. The allied powers, especially France, contributed to this struggle by not allowing the German diaspora to settle in the Saarland because the French government was hoping to take over the Saarland.[84]

The suffering of the diasporic German population, however, was not enough for some historians to allow for a legitimate German victimhood. German culpability had to be determined first. Essentially, the question that surfaced in the 1980s was whether or not all Germans were responsible for the crimes of World War II. If they were responsible, than they deserve no sympathy or rightful claim to victimhood despite the numbers of refugees and dead. The question of German culpability led to the academic debate known as the *Historikerstreit* in the 1980s. On one side were historians who argued Germany was essentially to blame for the entire war and guilty at-large for the Holocaust, while the other side favored guilt where guilt was due. The *Historikerstreit* will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter, but for now it suffices to write that the *BdV* never once posited to itself the question of whether or not Germans—or more specifically, East Prussians, Pomeranians and Silesians—are guilty of the war or not. Instead, the *BdV* only points to the numbers of German refugees and dead in its continued quest to demand recognition of inhumanity against Germans.

1990s: Reconciling the Past

The debates of the 1980s over Germany's guilt had repercussions in the 1990s. German public interest in the questions of German war guilt continued, but recognition of German victims increased. Interestingly, the discourse of the *BdV* became less

[84] Ibid., 161.

nationalistic. The 1990s were the decade of reconciliation, bringing together guilt and victimhood.

The nationalistic fervor that gripped the *BdV* was less apparent by 1995. At the forty-sixth Day of Homeland representatives from the embassies of Poland and the Czech Republic attended. The *BdV* was still advocating its claim to the homeland in the 1990s, but discussions centered more on developing the cultural property of the former homeland.[85] The organization even called on its members to work hand-in-hand with the "neighboring nations in the east" (Poland) in rebuilding the homeland.[86]

But the *BdV*, despite these efforts, still had problems in stanching its seemingly nationalistic bent. Before the 1995 Day of Homeland in Berlin, the *BdV* was harassed by a group that called itself the "Antifascists." The BdV did not report what the group wrote in its letters to the organization, only stating that the arguments of the group were against the values of the *BdV* and rife with disinformation.[87] Placing the blame on the *BdV* would be easy. After all, in the preceding years, the *BdV* did have an agenda that was to some extent nationalistic and thus could be interpreted as neo-fascist. As mentioned above, it was only ten years earlier that the *BdV* was calling for a "non-hostile" alteration of the status quo of what once was East Prussia and Silesia. The *BdV*'s engaging in such discourse is exactly what the organization stands for in its mission to serve as champion for the German people. This type of discourse, though, is more of a hindrance than a service to the German people and German victims because it calls into question the objectivity of a valid German victimhood claim. By seeking revenge-like reparations, the

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[85] *Deutscher Ostdienst: Informationen des Bundes der Vertriebenen*, 8 September 1995, 1.
[86] Ibid., 2.
[87] Ibid., 3.

BdV is giving more credence to Germany than it is truly due. The *BdV* is too far right-of-center to serve as the correct organization to argue for valid German victimhood.

An interesting aspect to consider in the turbulent relationship between Germany and Poland in reference to the *Vertriebene* is the issue of expellees who did not make it to either East or West Germany but remained in Poland. Poland denied that there were any Germans remaining within its borders, whereas the *BdV* believe one million Germans remained in Poland.[88] The efforts of Germany via the *BdV* and Poland to work hand-in-hand in coming to a resolution on the *Vertriebene* that all parties can agree upon, be it maintaining cultural property or discussing proper commemoration activities, is made that much more difficult if the two parties cannot agree on whether or not Germans remain in Poland.

The causal factor behind the German flight from the east is, according to the *BdV*, the Russians. This causal factor does not take into account the scholarly discourse on German settlement of the east. The tensions between Germanic and Slavic peoples are rooted in the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries, when the Germanic peoples moved into the areas that would eventually, by the mid 1930s, compose the eastern reaches of the Third Reich. In 1139, when the first Germans pushed eastward, they were not occupying empty land. The knights, merchants, farmers and priests that went east encountered people that were, by religious and royal decree declared subjects of the Germanic peoples and converted to Christianity.[89]

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[88] Bernhard Fisch, *"Wir Brauchen einen Langen Atem." Die deutsche Vertriebenen 1990-1999. Eine Innenansicht*, (Jena: Verlag Neue Literatur, 2001), 129.

[89] Marion Frantzioch, Odo Ratza and Günter Reichert, eds. *40 Jahre Arbeit für Deutschland – die Vertriebenen un Flüchtlinge*, (Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag Ullstein GmbH, 1989), 11-14.

This historic look back at when the lands in question became German is not discussed in the annals of the *BdV*. The twelfth-century expulsion of Slavic peoples from their lands to make room for Germans is not the beginning of the inhumanity. Instead, it is the beginning of seven hundred years of German "homeland." Only when the Slavs—the Russian army—returns to the land that could conceivably be called theirs does the "inhumanity" of expulsion and flight begin.

Some works in the 1990s backed the discourse of the *BdV* to some extent but went so far as to say that "Germans obviously find it difficult to reconcile the truth of not only being culprits but of being victims" but only because of a supposed "silence" in historical works addressing the expulsion.[90] Where historians and the *BdV* differ in opinion, though, are the casual factors of the expulsion. While the *BdV* holds that the invasion caused the expulsion, some historians maintain that the expulsion was a direct result of the Eastern European expansion policies of Hitler.[91]

Another area where the *BdV* was silent, even in the 1990s, was the economic impact the *Vertriebene* had in the areas were they settled. Some scholars raced to fill that gap, seeking to answer the question of how some of the *Vertriebene* sought to help themselves after losing everything. Economic historians began to ask the questions of what motivations a *Flüchtling* may have had to excel economically, what role government played in supporting the economic activity, and when were the companies that were founded by refugees able to go at it alone without further government support.[92] This help-yourself attitude displayed in the history of the *Vertriebene*, an effort to get

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[90] Robert Streibel, ed., *Flucht und Vertreibung*, (Wien: Picus Verlag, 1994), 9.
[91] Ibid., 10-11.
[92] Wolfgang Eckart, *Neuanfang in Hessen: die Gründung und Entwicklung von Flüchtlingsbetrieben im nordhessicschen Raum 1945-1965*, (Wiesbaden: Historische Komission für Nassau, 1993), 2.

one's own life on track via one's own gumption, is sorely lacking in the *BdV*'s discourse. It appears that the *BdV* was more interested in extolling the helplessness and the "woe-is-me-I-am-a-victim" attitude of the *Vertriebene* and beating the drum of nationalism rather than pointing out the areas where German refugees had excelled and made significant contributions to other local economies.

Some Germans feared that the *Vertriebene* from the east would economically handicap West Germany instead of helping to fuel the growing economy. Scholars addressed the fears that some local, native-born west Germans had about the east Germans and how they would be "asocial," basically helpless and seeking welfare.[93] But with a shortage in laborers in the work force, the *Vertriebene* became a welcome addition to the population and lifted a burden from the fledgling West Germany economy.[94] The *BdV* is all-to-often silent on how *Vertriebene* incorporated themselves into their new homes and provided necessary manpower to stoke the economic engine of West Germany following World War II.

Conclusion

After it united the separated state *Vertriebene* bands under one organization, the *BdV* has relentlessly pursued a German victim mythos in order to attain a "masterable past." Yet, according to Matthias Stickler, the notion of German victim has only recently come under the scrutiny of historians, with the majority of scholarly efforts concentrated

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[93] Uwe Kleinert, "Die Flüchtlinge als Arbeitskräfte – zur Eingliederung der Flüchtlinge in Nordrhein-Westfalen nach 1945," in Klaus J. Bade, ed., *Neue Heimat im Westen: Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge, Aussiedler*, (Münster: Westfälischer Heimatbund, 1990), 37.

[94] Ibid., 58.

in the last fourteen years.[95] Other scholars argue that the majority of works on the *Vertriebene* was already substantial by the 1960s, "virtually hard to overlook" but that most of it was tainted with politically ideology and of a "non-scientific" nature.[96]

Judging by the mountain of books that covered the floor of my computer room in my apartment and glancing at the dates of publication for most of the books, it seems that while there was a significant amount of literature covering the *Vertriebene* in the years following the war, the largest number of books was published in the 1980s and 1990s and were more academic in tone. Political, social, cultural and economic histories were developed in those years that explored the German *Vertriebene* to a greater depth than previous efforts. The historiographic efforts of scholars allows for the study of the *Vertriebene* to branch out and expand into areas that seek to get beyond a German victim mythos toward a legitimate victimhood. While it is important to establish the *Vertriebene* as victims of the war, it is equally important to move beyond that and recognize the contributions and impact that they had on West Germany and Germany at-large.

The *BdV* had difficulty recognizing the success the *Vertriebene* had in their "new" homeland. Instead of adjusting to the cultural and economic successes that the *Vertriebene* began to enjoy in West Germany, the *BdV* continued marching to the sound of only one drum beating out a cadence of "victim mythos." Over the course of sixty years, the message of the *BdV* has changed very little. While the political fervor of the organization waxes and wanes, and leaders call attention to refugee situations in various parts of the world, the message has always been and will continue to be that the German *Vertriebene* have lost their homeland and thus are victims of the war. Over time, this

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[95] Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch*, 13.
[96] Jolles, *Zur Soziologie der Heimatvertriebenen und Flüchtlinge*, 18, 11.

message will become less and less intense. The message will fade because of the ravages of age; the *Vertriebene*, much like the "Greatest Generation" in the United States that toppled the Nazi regime, are getting older and, sadly, dying. What purpose will the *BdV* have if the original *Vertriebene* are gone? For whose rights and recognition will they campaign?

Second, the changing attitudes surrounding the war are allowing the German *Vertriebene* to lay claim to valid and legitimate victimhood versus a *BdV* victim mythos. The *BdV* could be said to be a victim of its own success after having hammered away at the public with its consistent message for sixty years. There are battles that remain to be fought in commemorating German victims, but the time of blaming all Germans equally for the war has long since passed. Thus, the golden days of the *BdV* are passing as well. But one has to wonder if the *BdV* is truly the representative organization for *Vertriebene* that it claims to be. Some *Flüchtlinge* have opinioned that the *BdV* is an organization for the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, the Prussian Junkers of old. Membership numbers from 1955 are telling; of the more than seven million *Vertriebene* in West Germany at the time, only a little more than one million were members in a *Vertriebene* organization.[97] The *BdV* may very well have had nothing but the best intentions for German *Vertriebene*, but it seems an overwhelming number of German *Vertriebene* did not want anything to do with the organization. If this is due to the organization's tendency to lean far right of center or because of the perceived elitism of its membership and those it truly served remains open for debate and analysis.

What can be said with certainty, though, is that the *BdV*'s discourse may very well have achieved what it intended, but its stagnant nature may have caused the *Vertriebene*

[97] Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch*, 146.

to appear helpless and mere victims of war, especially when the economic and cultural success the refugees and expellees enjoyed in West Germany. The present and ever-growing body of literature on the *Vertriebene* seeks to stem this trend and bring balance to the story of the twelve million Germans who lost their homeland via diaspora, taking their victim status and putting it to work.

Chapter Three: Putting German Victimhood in Perspective

> "*Each age tries to form its own conception of the past. Each age writes the history of the past anew with reference to the conditions uppermost in its own time.*"[98]

Sixty years ago, the guns fell silent. Sixty years ago, the clatter of tank tracks stopped echoing through the cobblestone streets of pastoral villages. Sixty years ago, an exodus moved out of its homeland in the face of invasion. Sixty years ago, the drone of heavy bombers no longer filled the skies. Sixty years ago, buildings bombed into rubble were cleared, and the rebuilding began. Sixty years ago, one nation was split into two, with one half being "liberated" and the other half being "defeated." Sixty years ago, the Nazi horror that had darkened Europe for the past seven years was defeated by the Allied Powers. Sixty years ago, not only did the guns fall silent, the people did, too, refusing to acknowledge their specific role in the horrors of World War II, choosing instead to cover themselves with the blanket of collective guilt. World War II ended sixty years ago, but now the issues of guilt and innocence came to the front. Germany was now split in two, an East and a West on one hand; perpetrators and victims on the other.

With this chapter I investigate the acceptable and "outer limits" of the German victimhood discourse while at the same time navigating Germany's World War II legacy divided between perpetrator and victim. Much like the division between perpetrator and victim, German war memory is divided between the acceptable and unacceptable. Navigating this path successfully is difficult and fraught with the risks of stumbling too far off of the path into right-wing discourse. A stumble of this nature would breech the "outer limits" of acceptable Germany war memories. The limits of German public

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[98] Fredrick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1935).

memory address atonement for the Holocaust. This is as it should be. Germany must atone for its history. But the "outer limits" are where the *Vertriebene* and their memories and victimhood can be found. The "outer limits" is the area just beyond Holocaust atonement, the step just further up the path to including *Vertriebene* as victims of the war. But where do the "outer limits" of German memory and commemoration end, and is it possible to go too far beyond these limits? I hope to answer that question here.

The challenge in determining where the "outer limits" are is made more difficult by the history of Germany. Germany, in the collective sense, bears the entire guilt of starting a war that lasted from 1939 until 1945 that sought to conquer Europe and destroy innocent lives. Germany, in the collective sense, has also laid overt claim to victim status in the late 1990s and early 2000. History, literature and media articles centered on the creation of a memorial for *Vertriebene* in one way or another have begun discussing what it means to be German sixty years after the end of World War II. History books and articles approached the issue of guilt versus victimhood tentatively at first, seeking to not unduly give Germany too much leeway. Early historical efforts did not provide the *Vertriebene* a path to a viable victimhood claim and usually offered only recollections of the events that occurred. Historical studies in the 1980s began to debate the issue of whether or not Germany and its despicable actions were unique. Over time, the historiography altered course, seeking to answer the difficult question of German duality instead of merely debating it and labeling Germans as perpetrators.

The transitions in the historiography ushered in changes in other areas of discourse. The shifts in history caused ripples in the realm of literature. At first, in 1959, symbols were used to discuss the German dichotomy. Openly discussing the possibility

that Germans could be victims, even in the pages of literature, was far too right wing in the 1950s. Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* is the symbolic representation of Germany's World War II woes, the details of which will be addressed further in this chapter. With the reunification of Germany in 1990, however, open discourse that centered squarely on the issue of German war suffering became more mainstream thanks in large part to literature. The topic entered into the public discourse, specifically by means of *Crabwalk* which is Grass's open discourse on the German search for a viable victim status printed in 2002. Literature allowed the victim discourse to push even further into the public discourse. Following the introduction of the German victims into the public consciousness, news articles reporting on commemoration activities Germans were taking in recognition of this newfound status began to appear, specifically during the 2005 anniversary of the war's end.

The intent of this chapter is to explore as fully as possible how the discourse on German guilt and victimhood changed from the 1940s until the 2000s. History texts, works of literature, and news articles will be analyzed and placed into the perspective of the time frame they were published in in order to determine how Germany—divided geographically no longer—is coming to grips with its dual role of perpetrator and victim sixty years after the guns fell silent and the people did, too. The intent of this chapter is not to be apologetic for the actions that the Nazis committed; instead, it serves as a waypoint for responsible historians on the road toward creating a victimhood culture that embraces all without unduly belittling any one victim group and recognizing the varying degrees of human suffering that occurred.

Exploring the Acceptable Limits of the German *Vertriebene* Discourse

In this section, I intend to explore the acceptable limits that historiography established in the creation of a viable victimhood. The time frame under consideration is books published in the last ten years and tracks how the impetus of embracing a viable victimhood status for German *Vertriebene* grew from a mythos to one that is pushing the outer limits of acceptable victim discourse. Those outer limits will be discussed later in this chapter, focusing specifically on the commemoration activities that swept through Germany during the sixty-year anniversary in 2005. It is important to establish a basis for that discussion in the historical context, considering what previous historians argued on the viability of German victimhood. Some historians argue that Germans cannot be victims while others offer up a "victim mythos." A victim mythos does not take into account the full spectrum of victims and only seeks to place one group's experiences over another group. While the former is understandable, the latter is irresponsible. Dissecting these finer points within this section will allow me to point out what previous historians failed to consider where German victimhood is concerned. Through refining their arguments, I shall successfully argue that a viable German victimhood is possible, as is the attainment of a masterable past. It is my hope to attain a middle ground of sorts within this argument, stressing that Germany indeed waged the war, was responsible for the deaths of several millions of people (Jews, Russians, Sinti, Roma, and Poles), but that, as with any war, while some are victorious, nearly all are victims.

Among the first books to address the German *Vertriebene* was a three-volume collection of their memories, *Die Vertreibung der deutschen Bevölkerung aus den Gebieten östlich der Oder-Neisse*, first published in 1950. The books provide eyewitness

accounts from hundreds of Germans who fled from the east in the face of the Russian invasion. Collected through interviews, the volume provides no analysis and instead is quite sociological in nature. That stands to reason, considering the three books were originally published in the 1950s, some five or more years after the end of World War II. Germany was not prepared to consider the victim status of anyone, much less the German people, and instead slipped into the comforting silence of collective guilt and marveling at the economic juggernaut of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. Some historians, specifically Robert Moeller, however, argue that the Germans remembered "key parts of the first half of the 1940s with extraordinary passion and emotion" and also remembered the prisoners of war that never came home as a means to overcome the guilt of the war.[99] But such a selective recollection of the war is hardly complete and does dishonor to the six million Jews who were killed by the Nazi regime. Only recently, specifically in the late 1990s and early 2000, building to the sixtieth anniversary of the war in 2005, are Germans coming more and more to grips with their past. They are recognizing the complete victimology of World War II and are working toward break the silence on unspoken memories.

The work of historians, however, sought to penetrate that silence and seek answers to Germany's "unmasterable past" long before, especially in the 1980s, and explain how the horrors of World War II for which Germany was responsible were possible. Historians began to ask difficult questions: Are all Germans perpetrators or just some? Are all Germans victims or just some? These two questions are essentially finely focused issues that spring from the over-arching arguments at the center of the *Historikerstreit*. The two camps in this heated debate divide between whether Nazi

[99] Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*, 16.

crimes where unique and thus forever part of German history and a burden to be shouldered by Germany, or whether the Nazi atrocities were comparable to other nations' murderous regimes, especially that of Soviet Russia. Essentially, the argument between Germanists is best explained by Charles S. Maier in *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* as one of "horizontal" versus "vertical" comparison.[100] Horizontal comparison views the Holocaust as being similar to other genocides, whereas vertical comparison considers the flow of German history and thus its uniqueness. The *Historikerstreit* ties into German memory and victimization because of its polarity. If one considers the vertical model, then Germans have no right to view themselves as victims. After all, the war was started by the Germans and thus they deserved to be defeated in the manner they were (especially on the eastern front). However, if one embraces the horizontal model, then one can consider Germans were defending their homeland and staving off a vicious enemy intent on their liquidation. If this is the case, then German victimization is deserved.

Maier's stark look at the division between guilt versus innocence was published in 1988, a year before the events that led to the reunification of Germany. While this seems to imply that Maier's book is published in the "doldrums" of Germany history, the subtle influences of periodization are nonetheless discernable. Specifically, the pursuit of a German victim mythos is linked to politics. In the late 1980s, seeking to establish Germans as victims of World War II was a right-wing agenda, whereas in 2000 to 2005, the notion became more mainstream. In 1982, Helmut Kohl, a conservative and a member of the CDU (*Christliche Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, or Christian Democratic Union of Germany), was elected Chancellor with the help of a CDU-FDP

[100] Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 18.

coalition (*Freie Demokratische Partei*, or Free Democratic Party). The power change cost the SPD (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or Social Democrat Party of Germany) its control of the German parliament.[101] In 1987, East German leader Erich Honecker visited West Germany, stopping in Berlin and several other West German states. The visit was part of an effort to resolve questions of German nationality that had been strained by the 1967 East German law that stated East Germans were citizens of the German Democratic Republic only. This law ran counter to the 1949 affirmation by both "nations" that there was only one Germany—despite the Allied partition—and that citizens of the East were citizens of the West and vice versa. Furthermore, the 1967 law ran counter to West Germany's constitutional commitment to German unity.[102]

These transitions in German politics are the subtle influences behind Maier's arguments on the *Historikerstreit* and questions of German culpability. With the emergence of the CDU as the party in power and the ouster of the SPD, it is not surprising that historians began to express concerns regarding Germany's "unmasterable past." The CDU is a conservative party that touts itself to be the "most successful people's party in our history."[103] It seeks to increase Germany's military, broaden Germany's influence in global events, and it also supports the recognition of some Germans, specifically the *Vertriebene*, as victims of World War II. The last issue will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter. The insistence in 1987 by West Germany that all Germans regardless of living in the East or the West are citizens of a greater

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[101] Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 217.

[102] Donald S. Detwiler, *Germany: A Short History*, (Carbondale & Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999), 220.

[103] Party charter, available from http://www.cdu.de/politikaz/cdu.php/; Internet, accessed on 19 July 2005.

Germany also may have awakened concern in Maier that Germany was seeking to slip back to darker days, or, at the very least, that West Germany did not recognize the implications of the policy. With conservatives coming into power and West Germany holding on to a notion of a unified Germany despite the obvious division, it is no wonder that Maier wrote about Germany's "unmasterable past" and its seeming lack of culpability despite historic realities.

Beginning in 2000, historical and academic works that explored German victimhood in greater depth than those previously were published. These works were not the first to consider German victims. Instead, they were among the first historical efforts to address the topic in greater depth. The intent behind the historical efforts from 2000 and on was not to discredit any past historiographic efforts or to promote shamelessly Germans as victims, but to seek answers to the question of German victimhood and the possibilities of including it alongside other World War II victimhood claims. Several German historians began to contribute to this growing historiographic argument, notably Dierk Hoffman, Marita Krauss, Michael Schwartz, Jörg Friedrich, Matthias Stickler, Burkhard Asmuss, Kay Kufeke and Philipp Springer. Earlier efforts that addressed German World War II victims, specifically the *Vertriebene*, only did so from a recollection standpoint and not offering any analysis or were glaringly and painfully one-sided. Novelist Ursula Hegi's *Tearing the Silence: On Being German in America*, printed in 1997, and Alfred-Maurice de Zayas's *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950*, first published in 1986 and republished in 1994, are prime examples.

Of particular interest in respect to de Zayas's book is that it was originally published in German in 1986—two years before Maier's work detailing the *Historikerstreit* was published—under the title *Anmerkungen zur Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten*. Whereas Maier was reacting to the reemergence of a conservative Germany that was seeking to make less of the Holocaust while raising support for its own victims, de Zayas saw an opportunity to profit from the political situation and published a book with an agenda that closely matched the *CDU*'s agenda. While the book did address Germans as victims and was among the first to do so, it did not approach the topic from a constructive tangent. Rather, it sought to assign blame heavy-handedly toward the Russians and others who "persecuted" Germans during World War II. This argument's appearance in print suggests that a change in the political leadership of a nation can influence scholarly discourse. It is also interesting to note that the original German title translates to "Commentary about the Expulsion of Germans Out of the East." Over time, as the *Streit* over culpability for all versus innocence for some began to sway toward innocence, de Zayas capitalized on the shift in the historiography. He published the book in the United States in 1993 under the title *The German Expellees: Victims in War and Peace*. The 1994 paperback edition trumpets the title *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950*. Instances like these make it difficult for some Germans to lay legitimate claims to being victims. The words "ethnic cleansing" applied to the German *Vertriebene* ring hollow and lead to unfair and unsettling comparisons to the Holocaust. At no time does the fate of twelve million people who were forced to relocate equal the deaths of six million people at the hands of a ruthless government.

This kind of historic discourse draws readers to make comparisons between two linked events that should not be compared. Furthermore, in his discussion of Operation Barbarossa, De Zayas only briefly mentions that "special squads of German Security Service (SS) troops murdered hundreds of thousands of Soviet citizens, primarily Jews." When he addresses the Russian response to German atrocities, De Zayas writes of the "hate-mongering pamphlets and fliers" that were distributed to Russians, calling upon them to kill as many Germans as possible. De Zayas even quotes from one of the pamphlets, highlighting the Russian prose that calls upon Russians to create a "heap of German corpses."[104] This type of comparison that De Zayas uses is heavy-handed and unfair. What De Zayas is doing is vilifying the Soviets by quoting from one of their pamphlets, showing that they had documents that called for the deaths of Germans. It is as though De Zayas is desperately pointing to a well-organized effort to kill Germans and thus hoping to make German victimhood more attainable. De Zayas does a disservice to Germans and the legitimacy of German victimhood with his analysis. By not quoting from a German document that called for the deaths of the Russians—Operation Barbarossa was well organized and these documents do exist—De Zayas makes his bias painfully obvious. He tries too blatantly to pin atrocities on the Russians and hide the crimes of the Germans behind a single sentence. This is irresponsible use of source material and makes it more difficult for Germans who are victims to lay claim to that status. De Zayas analysis is one-sided and does not promote a victimhood claim that embraces all who were affected by the war. Instead, it creates controversy in a historiography that is already controversial enough.

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[104] Alfred-Maurice de Zayas, *A Terrible Revenge: The Ethnic Cleansing of the East European Germans, 1944-1950*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 34.

Among the first works published in Germany that consider the *Vertriebene* from an intellectual and cultural history perspective is *Vertriebene in Deutschland: Interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspecktiven*. As the title suggests, the book is a collection of articles on the *Vertriebene* that offers research results and future possibilities from various disciplines. Published in 2000, the authors write in the introduction of the text that "the research into the results of flight and expulsion entered into a new phase in the course of the last decade." The reasons for the "new phase" are the reunification of Germany, an event that granted access to new primary sources and opened the field to new questions—is there a masterable past in German history? What are the limits for recognizing German victimhood?—and the perspectives of a "new research generation."[105] This new research generation did not experience the war first hand and so benefits from the "mercy of late birth" and is thus able to objectively question and research the results of World War II.[106] The new research generation is more likely to accept notions of German victimhood, understanding that even within culpability there is space in the historiography for other peoples affected by World War II.

A significant question raised by the recognition of the *Vertriebene* as victims is whether all Germans may lay claim to World War II victimization. While the question of German victimhood is not new, the shifts in the historiography are. The *Bund der Vertriebenen* (*BdV*) stance on that issue is yes. This stance of the conservative group

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[105] Dierk Hoffman, Marita Krauss, Michael Schwartz, eds., "Einleitung," in Dierk Hoffmann, Marita Krauss and Michael Schwartz, eds., *Vertriebene in Deutschland: Interdisziplinäre Ergebnisse und Forschungsperspektiven*, (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2000), 24

[106] During a state visit to Israel on January 24, 1984, then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl gave a speech that addressed the "*Gnade der späten Geburt*." The Israeli reaction to the idea that Germans born after the war should not bear some responsibility was less than stellar. The comment by Kohl brought about complications in Israeli-German relations.

which seeks to raise awareness on the *Vertriebene* is researched by Matthias Stickler in *Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch: Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972*. Published in 2004, the book takes an in-depth look at the policies and practices of the *BdV*. Most significant is the political stance of the *BdV* and its position on which Germans it represents. According to Stickler, the *BdV* does not see itself as a "representative of any particular interest, but as a national champion of the entire German people."[107] The *BdV*'s agenda has, since its inception, been the claiming of legitimate victim status for all Germans that suffered during World War II. Its agenda has only recently become a topic of valid historical study because of the changes in the perceptions on World War II and Germany. This shift in the historiography was most noticeable only within the last fourteen years, with more than half of the 264 titles that address the *Vertriebene* being published in that time frame.[108]

But the question of all Germans who suffered during the war having a legitimate claim to being victims is better addressed not by a history work on the *Vertriebene* but by a history book that navigates the World War II Allied bombing campaign of German cities. *Der Brand* by Jörg Friedrich considers the bombings of Germany from the perspective of the crews, their aircraft, and their weapons; from the strategic intent of the bombings; through a geographic breakdown of significant raids over Germany; from the musty, dingy depths of the bomb shelters; and finally through narrative in sections "Us" and "I." Throughout these sections, Friedrich describes the damage that the Allied

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[107] Matthias Stickler, *Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch: Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972*, (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag GmbH, 2004), 429.

[108] Ibid., 13.

bombing campaigns caused in Germany, writing about the suffering that the bombings caused the German civilians. Friedrich's intent with the book is to open up the historiography of World War II by writing critically and objectively about one of "the big tragedies of World War II" that is virtually missing from the field. Much has been written about the bombing campaigns themselves, but little about the results and the suffering that occurred after the bombs detonated.[109]

Friedrich's book has been the subject of debate and controversy among historians. The book strikes a tone of "lyrical nationalism" and showcases the horrors of the Allied bombings in detail. Not only does Friedrich use words to describe the bombings' effects, he has selected several photos that paint a grim picture of the bombings in black and white. The sole focus of *Der Brand* is the effect of the Allied bombings on Germany. Friedrich makes no excuses in his approach and is adamant in his pursuit of German victimhood. While the approach is heavy-handed, it does reveal just one of the "outer limits" that can possibly be pursued in labeling Germans as victims. Friedrich's book pushes beyond Holocaust atonement and considers the war's effects on Germans. This approach pushes beyond the normally accepted limits of World War II victim discourse and argues for recognition of German victimhood. The results of the bombings were tangible and the effects on the people involved were recorded. Thus, denying the impact of the Allied bombing campaigns on Germany is not possible. Although less tangible, the experiences of the *Vertriebene* are thus more easily validated thanks to the expansion of the victimhood limits by Friedrich's work.

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[109] Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945*, (München: Propyläen Verlag, 2002), 543.

Although only a museum catalog, the 2005-published *Der Krieg und Seine Folgen 1945: Kriegsende und Erinnerungspolitik in Deutschland* addresses the topic of German memory politics and, to some extent, victimhood. Published by the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin, the compilation hit bookshelves in time for the sixtieth anniversary of the war's end. The book is much more than a simple museum exhibit catalog; it is a collection of historical essays that explore the effects of World War II on German memory, politics and economy and it is also a catalog of the exhibits on display at the museum. Two of the essays in the text offer U.S. and Soviet World War II commemoration activities as a sort-of touchstone between the differences and similarities in the activities of victor versus vanquished.

The catalog is a straight forward journey through Germany's World War II history, taking a stark look at Germany's culpability and guilt in the horrors of the war, the effects the war had on the German people, the final days of the war and the silence, the reentry of West Germany into the western sphere, how East Germany slipped into its orbit around the Soviet Union, and what the past means for Germany's future. The book calls Germans to action, telling them that they only way to attain a masterable past is through a full understanding of what Germany was and what Germany did during and after World War II. It is powerful, giving all that are eligible a claim to victimhood and unashamedly levels the finger of guilt against those responsible for the war's horrors.

Each one of these books benefited from the events of 1990 and the publication of Günter Grass's novel *Crabwalk* (2002). If Germany had not been reunited, it is very possible that Germany may not have entered into a period of historical reflection. It can be said with certainty that whatever archival material and "new" primary sources that

were opened up for scholarly perusal by the unification would not have been available to scholars had the wall stayed in place. Grass's novel, most likely triggered by images of East Germans rushing through the Hungarian-West German frontier into West Germany, brought the plight of the *Vertriebene* out of scholarly circles somewhat removed from the general populace and into the light of public discourse. The historical significance and symbology of this landmark novel will be discussed later in this chapter. Another likely "trigger" for the increase in searching for a usable German victimhood claim is the sixtieth anniversary of the war's end that was marked in 2005. Although the stories of the *Vertriebene* may have been recorded in the 1950s, scholarly analysis of the stories did not occur until 30 years later. Even then, the debates on German guilt and victimhood were confined to the arguments of historians. Only in the closing years of the twentieth century did the question of German guilt versus victimhood enter public discourse. And with the end of the war sixty years in the past, some of the people who lived through those dark days who may have previously told their stories with traces of either collective guilt or negative knowledge are seeking recognition as victims in their own right.

The result is a plethora of primary sources that stand ready to be analyzed by the new generation of historians. The surge of research materials indicates to the public sphere that this topic is of significant interest to the research community, and its appetite for more is whetted. Media outlets pushed the discourse further, beyond the researchers and historians and to the masses, leading to story after story that discussed an issue once relegated only to history books. The timeliness and proximity of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II made that possible. How the media addressed the *Vertriebene*

discourse and commemoration will be discussed later. The effects literature can have on the historical discourse must first be addressed.

Günter Grass: The Public Conscience of the German People

If a single German could be said to represent the public conscience of the nation, many would most likely point to Günter Grass. Born in 1927 in Danzig-Langfuhr to Polish-German parents, the author studied art in Düsseldorf and Berlin after the war. By 1955, he was a member of *Gruppe 47*, a coalition of artists and writers critical of German society. In 1959, Grass became internationally renowned when *The Tin Drum* was published. Politically, Grass actively campaigned for the SPD in the 1960s.[110] A self-declared *Spätaufklärer*, "a belated apostle of enlightenment in an era that has grown tired of reason," Grass's first novel "comes to grips with the enormous task of reviewing contemporary history by recalling the disavowed and the forgotten: the victims, losers and lies that people wanted to forget because they had once believed in them."[111] Grass was recognized with the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1999 for his contributions to not only German literature, but also literature at-large. The awarding committee lauded Grass for his writings, especially *The Tin Drum*, because it "saved a vanished world from oblivion."[112] Grass portrays himself as the conscience of the German people and the emotions, realities and perceptions of the German people are apparent in his novels.

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[110] Günter Grass - Biography, *Nobelprize.org*, available from http://nobelprize.org/; Internet, accessed on 8 July 2005.

[111] Press release, Nobel Prize for Literature 1999, Günter Grass, "Whose frolicsome fables portray the forgotten face of history," *Nobelprize.org*, September 30, 1999, available from http://nobelprize.org/; Internet, accessed on 8 July 2005.

[112] Horace Engdahl, Presentation Speech, Nobel Prize in Literature 1999, Nobelprize.org, December 10, 1999, available from http://nobelprize.org/; Internet, accessed on 8 July 2005.

I will analyze *The Tin Drum* (*Die Blechtrommel*) and *Crabwalk* (*Im Krebsgang*) and will specifically address how the two novels are a dichotomy. The two books stand bookends apart from each other, not only because of publication dates, but also in the emotions each expresses about Germany and World War II. *The Tin Drum* is Grass's first novel and *Crabwalk* is his most recent endeavor. Each novel was written in a different Germany—specifically a post-war West Germany prospering during the 1950s *Wirtschaftswunder* and a post-unification Germany struggling after the 1990 reunification—and thus show the covert machinations of that time period upon their respective narratives and discourse.

First, I shall consider some of the symbolic and historical ramifications of *The Tin Drum* on German history, specifically addressing the *Vertriebene* discourse and Germany memory of World War II. *The Tin Drum*, first published in 1959, is replete with historical symbols that reflect Grass's views of post-World War II Germany, a nation in the midst of economic reform and revitalization. Grass's novel was published during the time when Germany was reemerging on the European and world stage due to the contributions by the Allied powers in the form of the Marshall Plan. West Germany was undergoing "rapid economic growth" although many West Germans considered the early 1950s to be "the worst years of their lives."[113] A new wave of refugees crossed into West Germany from East Germany in 1953, with more than four hundred thousand fleeing Walter Ulbricht's regime.[114] The 1950s also saw West Germany reestablish itself

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[113] Hanna Schissler, "Introduction: Writing About 1950s West Germany," in Hanna Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949-1968*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3.

[114] Detwiler, *Germany: A Short History*, 211.

militarily; in 1956, the nation passed constitutional amendments allowing an army and conscription.[115]

Within this maelstrom of political and economic advancement, West Germany was still coming to grips with its role in World War II. Generally, West Germany was silent in regards to its role in perpetuating the Holocaust and instead focused on its own "victims." One such group of victims, as chapter one discusses, is the German *Vertriebene*. While not directly discussed or overtly revealed in the novel, the *Vertriebene* as a symbol of victimization are nonetheless covertly present in *The Tin Drum*. Furthermore, Grass is able to capture the odd grieving behavior of Germany in the novel.

Specifically, the vignette in the novel that best addresses German victimization, silence, and feelings of guilt is Book Three's "In the Onion Cellar." In its description, the Onion Cellar tries to capture an element of a Germany that once was; Grass describes it as a *Gasthaus* upon which a sign with a "poignantly naïve likeness of an onion had been painted with deliberate awkwardness on an enamel sign which hung in the old German manner from elaborate wrought-iron gallows in front of the house."[116] The spirit of a Germany long forgotten is being recreated in making the Onion Cellar look like a traditional *Gasthaus*. It is a very German building, intended for people to gather and celebrate.

Oddly, however, the Onion Cellar is not a place of celebration. Nor is any food served. Instead, the Onion Cellar is a place where trendy Germans come to cry and grieve over what was lost. The only item on the menu is onions. The onions are not for

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[115] Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 213.
[116] Günter Grass, *The Tin Drum*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 520-1.

eating. Instead, the Germans use knives to cut the onions, releasing the stinging and searing juices from within and provoking a flood of tears in the Germans cutting the onions, allowing them to "cry properly, without restraint, to cry like mad. The tears flowed and washed everything away."[117] The onion is the only means through which the Germans can express their emotions, and yet it is a contrived scenario that indicates Germans are not truly sorry. It is a catalyst, a vehicle that makes it possible for Germans to cry about their defeat in World War II and to feel, possibly, some element of guilt.

The onion, thus, is a symbol of something in German history that allows Germany at least to try to overcome the silence that follows after the war and feel some emotion in respect to World War II. The onion also hides emotions as emotions are released. The act of cutting the onion is symbolic, too, because it shows the diasporic scattering of the *Vertriebene* across West Germany. The "onion" allows all Germans to lay claim to a sense of being victims of the war and share in the in the plight of the *Vertriebene*. After all, the *Vertriebene* fled their homeland in the face of a brutal invasion. The diaspora of the *Vertriebene* is the benchmark against which Germany can find some measure of humanity in the face of brutality. The plight of the *Vertriebene* allows Germany to point to itself and exclaim, "woe is me, I am also a victim of the inhumanity of World War II. I am thus allowed to mourn and grieve my losses, too."

Oskar Matzerath, the stunted dwarf who is the central character in *The Tin Drum*, is also a composite of *Vertriebene* and West Germany symbols. The stunted growth of Oskar is indicative of the stunted growth of the Third Reich. Seeking more and more *Lebensraum*, the Third Reich eventually went too far and was driven back into its pre-war borders. These lands were then divided between the victorious Allied powers; some

[117] Ibid., 525.

lands were stripped away from Germany in their entirety, specifically East and West Prussia, Pomerania and Silesia, the homelands of the *Vertriebene*. Oskar's mixed and confused parentage is also indicative of the German dichotomy and search for a masterable past, and is an autobiographical reflection of Grass's own parentage. Was Oskar the son of a Pole or the son of a German? Was he the son of Jan Bronski, "who lived by [Oskar's] mother's flesh, who, as to this day I believe and doubt, begot [Oskar] in Matzerath's name."[118] This kind of soul-searching question shows the confusing and violent relationship between Germany and Poland. The parentage of Oskar is similar to the capitulation of German land to Poland following in that it shows how something born of a German "mother"—the spirit of the German people—possibly created by a German "father"—a symbol of the Third Reich and the government—was truly Polish in the end.

This internal struggle within Oskar is also a clarion call for the current debates surrounding the creation of a memorial honoring and recognizing the *Vertriebene* as victims. The memorial, the farthest extent possible in recognizing the displaced Germans as victims, is best served being placed in what is today Poland, some supporters argue. While the land may be Polish, the spirit of Germany still resides in the lost homeland, and the souls of some *Vertriebene* are torn between being German or going home—physically, emotionally, spiritually—to what once was Germany and is now Poland. Oskar's red-and-white drum—red and white are the national colors of Poland—is also symbolic of the *Vertriebene* diaspora because it indicates the nation to which most of the German homelands were given.

West Germany's economic recovery, remilitarization, and assimilation of a flood of regime-fleeing East Germans in the 1950s makes it readily apparent why Grass's first

[118] Ibid., 132.

novel covertly focuses on aspects of the lost homeland and overtly details the lack of grief in relation to World War II that grips post-World War II Germany. In contrast to *The Tin Drum,* the historical influence of the *Vertriebene* is overtly addressed in Grass's *Crabwalk*. In this novel, the plight of the *Vertriebene*—specifically the fate of those aboard the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a *KdF* cruise ship turned refugee carrier, when it sank—has been raised from covert symbolism to a thematic device that drives the plot of the novel. Even the *Los Angeles Times* recognized that the *Vetriebene* diaspora is central to the novel, touting, "Grass…exposed a World War II tragedy buried for half a century."[119]

The title of the novel is indicative of the approach Grass takes in retelling the Pokriefke family's history. The Pokriefke's are the central characters in the novel. The grandmother was an Eastern German refugee who fled the Russian invasion on the *Gustloff*. Her grandson is enamored with the past, seeking to bring new life to his grandmother's memories. He is also a neo-Nazi. *Crabwalk* is thus an appropriate title; the present is linked to the history of the past, and moving forward is only possible by walking sideways into the past. The title, in a single word, captures the challenges and difficulties of German history. Is it possible to hold Germans up as victims of World War II? Are the *Vertriebene* the paramount German victims, or are those Germans who survived Allied bombings more entitled to victimization? Does stirring up the memories of the past and applying a victim discourse to them promote apologetic historical discourse, or, at the worst, neo-Nazism? These are just some of the historical questions that Grass's *Crabwalk* drums up.

Grass threads Germany history and historigraphic issues into the narrative of *Crabwalk*. The novel also addresses the reunification of Germany, an event that has

[119] Günter Grass, *Crabwalk*, (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2002), backcover.

significant effects on the mentality, society, and historiography of Germany. The reunification aspects are important in placing the novel in historical context, but do not lend themselves well to the issues I seek to address in this chapter. Instead, the memory dialog that Grass has created is more telling and central to my research. The first hints of German victimization memory appear on page fifty. The grandmother (the mother of Paul Pokriefke, the narrator of the novel) tells Paul that for "years and years 'you couldn't bring up the *Yustloff*. Over here in the East we sure as hell couldn't. And when you in the West talked about the past, it was always about other bad stuff, like Auschwitz and such.'"[120] *Yustloff* is the Russian name for the *KdF* ship. The conflict between being a good East German citizen versus being a German victim is obvious. Calling the ship by its Russian name allowed the grandmother to distance herself from the memory and also to assimilate with the Russian occupiers of East Germany. But her desire to be labeled a victim shines through nonetheless in her berating of the silence in the East and the focus of the West on the Jewish victims of the Third Reich. The grandmother feels that her plight and claim to victimhood is equally valid.

The grandmother's fondness for retelling the story of how she got her white hair also reveals the uneasy dichotomy between being a loyal East German citizen and still maintaining her diasporic identity. The white hair is a symbol of the hardships the grandmother suffered, a visible reminder of her being a victim of Russian aggression and being a member of the *Vertriebene* diaspora. Her hair turned white, the grandmother recalls, from seeing "all them little children, head down in the water…" after a Russian submarine torpedoed the *Gustloff*. People would ask the grandmother why her hair was so white at such a young age, bringing up "a subject that was not allowed in the Workers'

[120] Ibid., 50.

and Peasants' State." Grass also writes that the grandmother would call the Russian sailors heroes of the Soviet Union and allies and friends of the East Germans. The grandmother's lauding of the Russians was always in "stilted High German."[121] The grandmother's white hair calls attention to her experiences during World War II and lends an air of credibility toward her victim status. She uses her white hair like a rallying point and a means to send the subtle message that she is not comfortable under the Soviet yoke and not happy with the idea of having to lose her identity as a member of the *Vertriebene*. This is why she speaks of the Russians in High German; the language is formal and free of any regional pathos, stripped of any indicators that might reveal she once lived beyond the Oder-Neisse line. Speaking in High German allows the grandmother still to identify herself as "German" but not necessarily as a "*Vertriebene.*" She is thus able to fall in line with the prevailing attitudes of the Soviet and other Allied powers occupying then-divided Germany that she is not and never will be a victim of World War II.

Even though she seems slightly paradoxical in her vacillations between being a good East German citizen and a member of the *Vertriebene*, the grandmother does lean more fully toward identifying herself as part of the *Vertriebene*. This is especially true following the reunification of Germany and in retelling her stories to her grandson. The grandmother asserts her belonging to the *Vertriebene* diaspora by taking part in a "nostalgia tour." She, along with a group of fellow expellees, goes back to the homeland. The grandmother tells her son how "nice" it was there and how the "Polacks" had "rebuilt a whole lot."[122] But even going back to the homeland is not enough. The

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[121] Ibid., 149.
[122] Ibid., 221-2.

grandmother begins to recount memories of how it used to be and the adventures she had when she lived in the homeland. Two diasporic elements are presented here. The first is the desire to return to the homeland. By going on the nostalgia tour, the grandmother physically does return to the *land* of the homeland. The second diasporic element is the notion of the idealized homeland. This is the intangible homeland that exists in the memory of the grandmother. Even by going back to the lands where she once played as a child, the grandmother is not able to recapture the essence of having returned "home." The lands that were once German are now Polish, and the only homeland that exists for the grandmother and other *Vertriebene* is in the mind.

The question then becomes how does this novel tie in at the time of publication with events in Germany. The most obvious link between events in the novel and reality is the 1990 unification of Germany. With reunification came several issues. The notion of what it meant to be German was being redefined. Political lines had to be shifted and public policy adjusted. Economic and ecological circumstances had to be scrutinized and reevaluated. Simply put, the reunification of Germany threw the nation into social and economic chaos and also reopened questions of Germany identity. The two Germanys had grown apart in their forty years of being two different countries. Neo-Nazism reared its shaved head in eastern Germany. Eastern Germans felt as though they were being assimilated against their will into West Germany.[123] The early 1990s were decidedly not happy days for the reunified Germany. The inspirations for Grass's *Crabwalk* are thus fairly obvious. The family in the novel is one split between east and west. Fears of assimilation present in the East German population are brought to the surface through the grandmother's memories and the manner she adopts when speaking of Russians. She

[123] Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany*, 247-8.

does not want to be Russian or even a good East German citizen, choosing instead to flaunt her white hair while at the same time speaking highly of the Russians in stilted High German. This introduces questions of identity; if one is not German, what then? The effect of the past on the present is also a theme that the novel borrows from the period in which it is published. By rejoining East and West Germany, specters from the past arose and questions for the nation's future loomed; these factors have yet to be fully worked through. Suffice it to say, however, that the reunification has caused a shift in Germany's perceptions of itself and role-played in World War II. While not all Germans are victims and no apologies can be made for the horrors of the Holocaust, the reunification did introduce the possibility that some Germans do have victim status. The reunification forced the nation to reexamine its past so that a clearer path to the future could be created; including some Germans as victims of World War II along with the other victims was the result.

Grass uses his literature to make himself the conscience of the German people. He reveals the struggles within the souls of Germans, the difficulty in trying to accept the guilt of the past, move on to a hopefully better future, and recognize within oneself a sense of victimhood. Grass is indeed a *Spätaufklärer* in that he moves from one side of the spectrum to the other in his literature. *The Tin Drum* and *Crabwalk* are polar opposites in terms of acknowledging victimhood and guilt. Guilt and subtle efforts to recognize Germans as victims permeates *The Tin Drum*. It shows the depths to which the German people have fallen psychologically because it takes an onion to make them cry about the war. The tears do not fall of their own will; instead, they must be forced. The guilt is there, but it is dark and hidden. In *Crabwalk*, German victimhood is at the core of

the novel. First fleeing the Russians and then living under their rule, *Crabwalk* reveals the extremes that Germans, specifically East Germans, experienced in the closing years of the war and throughout the Cold War. The victim mentality is portrayed best by the grandmother, who, even as she serves the Socialist government and, by extension, the Russians, looks back to the days with a twisted fondness when the Russians were the enemy, brandishing her experiences during the war and thus claiming her victimhood. Whatever the case may be, Grass's novel did bring the notion of Germans as victims into the public limelight. Several recent news articles from both English- and German-language media cite *Crabwalk* as the novel that brought German victimhood to the forefront of public discourse. Newspaper articles began to address topics that were once perceived as off limits. Specifically, media interest began to center on the creation of a memorial for German *Vertriebene*.

Public Discourse on German Guilt, Innocence, and the Creation of a National Memorial

With German victimhood gaining valid ground first in academia and then literature, the debate over German guilt and innocence moved from the theoretical into the public consciousness. From there, it was only a short jump to public discourse on the issue. It is interesting to note that most of the authors of the newspaper articles that bring German victimhood discourse into the public sphere, even the ones written for the U.S. media, have German surnames. Furthermore, no matter the tone or argument of the articles, whether they agree or disagree with the notion of recognizing Germans as victims, they all have the same effect on the public consciences; they continue to

introduce and reintroduce the German victim thesis into the public discourse. This section of the chapter will explore these outer limits that are possible in publicly recognizing German victims, specifically the *Vertriebene*, as discussed in the public media sphere. Public discourse that appeared in the media regarding the creation of a memorial—the farthest extent which can be attained in recognizing German victims—are indicators of how the discourse surrounding Germans as victims of World War II has changed over time and how the limits have been pushed. Moving beyond a memorial would be a step beyond the outer limits. A memorial does not transgress the limits of acceptable victimhood recognition because it does not seek to glorify the plight of one people over another. It would serve instead as a physical reminder of the experiences of the *Vertriebene*. Anything beyond a memorial—what that exactly would be I do not know—that would inflame feelings of superiority or cause derision would be unacceptable. Determining where that line is, though, is difficult. Guilt and innocence must be reconciled and the furthest extents realized without crossing the limits.

Allowing Germans to claim victim status leads to conflict between the long held view of Germans as perpetrators. Omar Bartov argues that writers Heinrich Böll, Günther Grass and Siegfried Lenz present Germans as victims in their writings at the expense of other victims, resulting in "an absence of representation."[124] German commemoration activities honoring Jewish victims are also being scrutinized as to whether they truly remember the victims or are instead focused on the actions of their "fathers and grandfathers." In an editorial, Nicola Frowein, a journalist for the German second television station *Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen* (*ZDF*), writes that "the Germans

[124] Omar Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 226.

remain the perpetrator people" and the importance in Germany of placing every word about the Holocaust "on the gold scale." This measuring of public discourse as it relates to the labeling of victims led to the realization that there were other victims of the Nazi regime that needed to be identified in order to fill "holes" in the memory discourse. Thus, Sinti, Roma, homosexuals, handicapped individuals, political prisoners, and other "victim groups" appeared in the public discourse. But in the 1990s, Germans grew tired of commemoration and instead began to look to themselves as victims, Frowein writes. Grass's *Crabwalk* opened the literal floodgates. Books about German soldiers' memories of the front began to appear next to books on the memories of Holocaust survivors. While Frowein writes it is legitimate and necessary to commemorate the victims of the Dresden bombings, the unfortunate trade-off is that these commemorative activities can lead to inappropriate comparisons to the Holocaust. Her call-to-action at the end of the editorial is summed up with a quote from Habermas: "We are trying to come to terms with ourselves with a monument for the murdered Jews."[125]

The evolution from a victim mythos to working toward a valid victimhood claim reveals a shift in emphasis in German society. The most likely trigger for the transformation was the reunification. Bringing East and West Germany back together reopened old questions of guilt long thought to have been suppressed. The suppression of guilt was marked by German silence following World War II. Political realities of occupation and the shame were the central culprits in creating the silence; Germans were not allowed to embrace the twelve million *Vertriebene* as war victims because this action would have been seen as balancing "numbers against numbers—thereby devaluing the

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[125] Nicola Frowein, "Wenig Platz für Trauer," *ZDFheute.de*, May 10, 2005, available from http://www.heute.de/ZDFheute/drucken/1,3733,2290343,00.html. Internet; accessed on 24 May 2005.

monstrous fact of the Holocaust."[126] The silence also stemmed from being defeated.[127] German pride did not allow room for the notion of defeat, thus most of the population did not talk about the war's end. Coming to terms with the realization that one's nation was also responsible for perpetrating heinous acts against humanity was also difficult for the German post-World War II psyche to handle. Nonetheless, every effort had to be made not to forget the victims of the Third Reich.

The result of this fear of devaluing the death of six million Jews is the German *Erinnerrungskultur*; this "culture of memory" places the Holocaust above all other losses. The result of this primacy has resulted in some Germans, particularly the *Nationaledemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, calling for a culture of memory that centers on German losses. The works discussed above by Grass and Friedrich were instrumental in introducing German victimhood into the public discourse. Baer writes that some Germans are running obituaries for "fathers and brothers" killed 60 years ago fighting in World War II.[128] Are soldiers, sailors and pilots who fought and died for the Third Reich victims? It would seem that the families placing the death announcements 60 years after the end of the war would say yes.

But was there truly a profound silence in Germany following the war? To some extent, yes, there was silence, but this silence masked itself as denial and transformation. For East Germany, the end of the war was a "liberation." In West Germany, the *Wirtschaftswunder* and efforts to bring West Germany into the western alliance being

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[126] Mackprang Baer, "Germans wrestle with culture of memory; Once silent about losses, Germans want to mourn their own war dead," *Toronto Star*, April 29, 2005, available from http://www.thestar.com. Internet; accessed on 24 May 2005.

[127] Hans-Martin Hinz, "Memories that can't be left to fade," *The Australian*, May 5, 2005, available from http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au. Internet; accessed on 24 May 2005.

[128] Baer, "Germans wrestle with culture of memory."

created to face Communism led to the creation of collective guilt.[129] This collective guilt allowed those Germans who truly were responsible for the Holocaust to hide within the population. Other Germans who were not responsible were given a cross to bear thanks to collective guilt and had to acknowledge their "silent" role in World War II. But this quiet acknowledgement was already showing signs of stress in the 1960s, when questions surrounding the roles of "fathers and brothers" who survived their duty in the Third Reich began to be asked. Radical students began to ask their parents about what they had known, seen or done during the Third Reich. They also asked the sharpest of questions; were you a perpetrator? And if not, why did you not resist?[130] Ironically, questions that sought to assign blame and track down the answers to the dichotomies of innocence versus guilt, knowledgeable versus not, began to crack the quiet resolve, the embracing of collective guilt by post-war Germany and the primacy of the Holocaust victims.

The primacy of any victim group should never be a topic of debate or a question in need of answering. A question that should be answered, however, is whether or not a memorial should be built in commemoration of the *Vertriebene*'s experiences; building a memorial would be a tangible statement of German victimhood. Building a memorial recognizing German victims would be the outer limits of the acceptable public victimhood discourse. To venture beyond this limit would be foolhardy and dangerously right wing. But the consideration of Germans as victims not only alters the victim discourse of World War II, it has ramifications on the perpetrator discourse as well. Some Poles fear that giving German *Vertriebene* victim status puts some Poles in the limelight as "perpetrators of German exile" and that allowing Germans to consider

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[129] Moeller, *War Stories*, 26-8.
[130] Hinz, "Memories that can't be left to fade."

themselves victims is historical revisionism.[131] Poland became uneasy when Germany proposed building a memorial in Berlin honoring the twelve million German *Vertriebene*. Wlodzimierz Suleja, director of the Wroclaw branch of the Polish Institute for National Memory and a modern Poland historian, argued that the creation of a memorial honoring German *Vertriebene* would create a symbol of German victimhood that is detached from the truth of the past. The statement is not attributed, but Richard Bernstein also writes in the article that the Germans who fled Wroclaw did so "of their own volition, fearing the Soviet Army."[132] Millions of the expellees were children, however, and thus, according to the *BdV*, could not be "held responsible for the Nazis."[133] If one flees voluntarily, one is then not a victim. That is the argument Bernstein is reporting in his article. But I would argue that if fear was the primary motivation for fleeing, then claims to being a victim are valid. Neither forced expulsion under the barrel of a bayonet-tipped rifle nor fleeing in anticipation of an army knocking on your door are any different in their causes or in the effects. Whether the soldier is present or not is irrelevant; if the very threat of a soldier telling you, "move on, this is not your home anymore" is enough to awaken fear, then that person who is afraid is a victim. The end result is the same, too. One flees and loses one's home.

The point, however, became moot when German and Polish leaders in September 2003 rejected the plan to build a memorial in Berlin that would have been in memory of the *Vertriebene*. German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder said the project was one-sided

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[131] Hinz, "Memories that can't be left to fade."

[132] Richard Bernstein, "Honor the Uprooted Germans? Poles Are Uneasy," *The New York Times,* October 15, 2003, available from http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/15/international/europe/15POLA.html. Internet; accessed on 15 October 2003.

[133] Tony Paterson, "Anger over tribute to Germany's 'war victims,'" *Telegraph*, August 31, 2003, available from https://www.telegraph.co.uk. Internet; accessed on 24 September, 2003.

and that if a center were to be built at all, it certainly would not be built in Berlin.[134] Schröder and Leszek Miller, Poland's prime minister, said they would rather work together toward creating a center to commemorate *European* exiles. Polish public opinion has no room for a monument that would solely recognize German *Vertriebene* because to most Poles, the expulsion of Germans from the east was justifiable in the view of the atrocities Poles faced at German hands.[135] Even Grass, whose novel *Crabwalk* brought the plight of the German *Vertriebene* into the public discourse, called for any memorial that would be built to recognize all European refugees and expellees because it is a "European, not just a German task" that should include Poles, Czechs, Greeks, Turks and Armenians.[136]

By including all of Europe's 20th century diasporas, a memorial can be created that does justice to all victims and sets aside any fears of a possible reemergence of nationalism in Germany that a German-centric memorial could create.[137] A joint European memorial would also lead to better relations between nations and create a "collective memory for the experiences of all victims of mass injustice and expulsion."[138] Some critics, however, write that a memorial for the *Vertriebene* is long overdue and that "Germany needs a place where German victims and their suffering are the focal point."

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[134] World Briefing: Europe, "Germany: Memorial Rejected," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2003, available from http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/23/international/europe/23BRIEF2.html. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[135] Kate Connolly, "Miller and Schröder seek to end 'exiles' rift," *Telegraph*, September 23, 2003, available from http://www.telegraph.co.uk. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[136] "Grass: Denkmal für Vertriebene nicht nach Berlin," *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 25, 2003, available from http://morgenpost.belin1.de/print.php/archiv2003/030825/feuilleton/story624947.html. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[137] "Expulsion Not Just a German Idea," *Deutsche Welle*, August 15, 2003, available from http://www.dw-world.de. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[138] "Sudetendeutscher Tag: Auch Vertriebene sind Kriegsopfer," *N24*, May 14, 2005, available from http://www.n24.de. Internet; accessed on 9 May, 2005.

To "package" the German diaspora with other European diasporas would make the memorial "pointless."[139]

The creation of a memorial specifically focused on the German *Vertriebene* makes Poland and other eastern European nations leery, however. German politicians have recognized this and efforts are underway to create a memorial that is "packaged" and thus inclusive. To that end and to avoid further any shadows of only honoring German victims, intellectuals and scholars have proposed building the expellee memorial outside of Germany, possibly in Poland or the Czech Republic. Doing so allows all of central Europe to recognize how deeply affected it was by World War II.[140] Putting the museum outside of Germany would create a museum that does not overemphasize either German suffering or Polish martyrdom.[141] Some politicians, especially Polish politicians, even favor moving the memorial to a country that has only recently been the victim of forced migrations. The prime location would be Sarajevo, Bosnia.[142] This would be beneficial because the diaspora memorial would not be limited to only one group, and it would cross over time periods in history as well.

Some have even suggested building the memorial in a "neutral" country like Sweden, a country that "isn't burdened by history."[143] The outer limits would be less strained by placing the memorial in a neutral country. Doing so, however, would take the

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[139] Sven Felix Kellerhoff, "Deutsche Opfer, deutsches Leid," *Berliner Morgenpost*, July 23, 2003, available from http://morgenpost.berlin1.de/print.php/archiv2003/030720/feuilleton/story617682.html. Internet; accessed on 24 September, 2003.

[140] "Expulsion Not Just a German Idea," *Deutsche Welle*.

[141] "Putting History in the Right Place," *Deutsche Welle*, May 17, 2002, available from http://www.dw-world.de. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[142] Philip Blenkinsop, "Germans war refugees' museum plan opens old wounds," *Reuters*, September 5, 2003, available from http://www.alertnet.org/printable.htm?URL=?thenews/newsdesk/L05261016.htm. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[143] "Germans and Czechs Turn a New Page on Troubled Past," *Deutsche Welle*, September 5, 2003, available from http://www.dw-world.de. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

memorial out of the area of Europe most affected by expellees and refugees and impose a kind of "memorial diaspora" on a memorial for diasporas; it would be forcing a diaspora memory itself to undergo a diaspora. It is as though the memories of the diasporic communities are not welcome in the lands where the communities settled. Instead of commemorating the diasporic community where it lives, the commemoration must emigrate. Placing a memorial in a nation that did not have a direct impact on the diasporas of Europe more or less tarnishes the significance on European history and gives short shrift to the expellees and refugees. It would displace the memory of diasporas and create an artificial memory site, a memory site where the events being commemorated never took place. In any case, some of the diaspora groups that the memorial would honor would have to travel to the nation where the memorial would be built. While the country chosen might not be the country from which they were expelled from or fled from, putting the memorial in a country that experienced a diaspora would allow all European diaspora members to feel some sense of connection and identify with the shared memories and experiences that are more or less communal between all diasporas.

A shared sense of community between diasporas would be attained by placing a memorial in a neutral county, but cooperation and compromise becomes the issue. The *BdV*'s fear is that this type of cooperation would lead to a diminished emphasis on German victims. Peter Glotz, vice president of the *BdV*, the German federation of expellees, said, however, that while the intent of the project was not to exclude Europe, the matter should not be elevated to the national and international level of cooperating with the Poles, Czechs and other governments. Furthermore, the focus of the center

should be on the twelve million Germans that were expelled from eastern Europe.[144] Seeking to cooperate with Poland and other nations, Glotz warned, would result in a "still-born child and would take the next thirty years" to complete.[145] The *BdV* also said it would proceed with the German-centric memorial, regardless of any political decisions, because it is an independent organization and it has already raised "significant funds" for building the memorial.[146] The intent of the *BdV* is to build the memorial next to Berlin's recently completed Holocaust memorial.[147] Some reporters have written that the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) stands beside the *BdV* in its efforts to build the memorial in Berlin.[148]

But is this view by the head of the German organization for expellees correct? In a word, no. While the public opinion in Poland seems overly harsh regarding the German *Vertriebene*, Glotz's statement may very well have inflamed the situation. Although his intentions to recognize Germans as victims are not misplaced, his skewed perception on the concerns of Germany's neighbors is grossly irresponsible. If German *Vertriebene* are to have any chance of being recognized as victims of World War II, it will take a concerted effort of all parties to accomplish this. Furthermore, to call particular attention to only the plight of the *Vertriebene* while ignoring other Europeans' legitimate claims to victimization is irresponsible and awakens specters of German "superiority." Any

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[144] "Leaders Quash Calls fro Berlin Expulsion Center," *Deutsche Welle*, September 23, 2003, available from http://www.dw-world.de. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[145] Daniel Brössler, "Ein 'nationales Projekt' verstört die Nachbarn," *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, July 15, 2003, available from http://www.sueddeutsche.de/deutschland/artikel/5521/14538/print.html. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[146] "Expulsion Not Just a German Idea," *Deutsche Welle*.

[147] Tony Paterson, "Memorial to displace Germans upsets EU members," *The Washington Times*, August 31, 2003, available from http://dynamic.washtimes.com. Internet; accessed on 24 September 2003.

[148] "Leaders Quash Calls for Berlin Expulsion Center," *Deutsche Welle*.

memorial for Germans would cast "the executioner in the role of a victim."[149] Efforts to place the memorial next to the Holocaust Memorial are also heinous and can be construed as seeking to make twelve million expellees equal to six million killed.

During a speech to the Bundestag on May 8, 2005, German president Horst Köhler said that "we Germans look back with fear and shame on the Second World War Germany unleashed and the German-initiated toppling of civilization that is the Holocaust." He also thanked the nations that freed Germany from National Socialism and said that Germany mourns all the victims because "we wish to be just to all people, not just our own."[150] This view recognizes that the German people at-large are perpetrators of one of the most heinous events in history, but it allows those Germans that did suffer during the war to make a legitimate claim of being a victim. At the same time, while Köhler's view embraces German victims, it does not seek to exclude any other group.

This seems to be the new approach politically in Germany; complete embracing of all who suffered during World War II. This viewpoint is satisfactory because it seeks to include all people that were affected by the war. The only critique of this view, however, is that it may inadvertently classify some groups of victims as more important than others, especially Germans. While the realities of the Holocaust are grim, an agenda that seeks to embrace all is noble, but placing any group of people ahead of the Jews is inexcusable and must be avoided. Miller maintains somewhat of a Polish-centric victim mentality, but even he made concessions to German victim status when he said, "when

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[149] The quote is by Marek Edelman, a Polish survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising against the Nazis and is reported in Tony Paterson's "Anger over tribute to Germany's 'war victims.'"

[150] Volker Dürr, "Das Unrecht der Verschleppung offen zur Sprache gebracht," *Siebenbürgishe Zeitung Online*, May 23, 2005, available from http://www.siebenbuerger.de. Internet; accessed on 24 May 2005.

Adolf Hitler attacked Poland, he didn't only condemn the Poles and other peoples to death and suffering but also many Germans."[151] The suffering that was rampant during World War II is not so small that anyone group can claim it all. There is enough room in the chronicles of human suffering to include all victims, although care must be taken in ensuring that nothing is taken away from any particular group of victims.

Conclusion

German victimhood has become a less taboo topic of discussion in German society. The fear, however, is that World War II is still too close in the past for Germany to consider its own losses and not topple the Holocaust from its deserved primacy. Is this fear valid? Is there not enough room in the culture of memory to embrace all victims of World War II? The Holocaust was the most gruesome and diabolic event of World War II. The ruthless, factory-like inhumanity that killed six million Jews cannot be denied. Hitler and his Third Reich were intent on annihilating as many Jews as possible throughout Europe. But while Hitler was pushing his foul agenda, the Germany people suffered, too. Nonetheless, the most important number and the most concrete number following the war is six million, the number of people "systematically destroyed by Germans." Furthermore, even though almost every nation in the world, including Germany, was affected by World War II, it is important to remember in Germany's case that "before German suffering comes German aggression."[152] While one cannot be justified in postulating a mathematical formula that twelve million German *Vertriebene* is equal to six million murdered Jews, the fact remains that human suffering knows no

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[151] "Leaders Quash Calls for Berlin Expulsion Center," *Deutsche Welle*.

[152] Burkhard Fraune, "Der verheerendste Krieg der Geschichte," *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, May 7, 2005, available from http://www.rhein-main. Internet; accessed on 24 May 2005

ethnic, racial, political or national boundaries. World War II was a profound event in the annals of human history, one whose dark days of suffering touched every life involved.

German victimhood and public discussion of it were initially taboo in the years following World War II. Debate on German culpability was discussed in academic circles, most heatedly in the *Historikerstreit*, the debate among historians over what ordinary Germans knew during World War II. In the 1960s, Germany's youth began to question the roles of their parents, thus encroaching on the silence within the private sphere of family. Reunification opened up an avenue toward asking more questions about Germany's World War II past, and landmark works by Grass and Friedrich in early 2000 brought the idea of German victims out of the private sphere into the public sphere. Since then, the idea of German victims has been addressed more openly in academic works, especially in Germany. Commemoration activities for the sixtieth anniversary of World War II's end further pushed the academic question of victim versus perpetrator into the public sphere. The media, with its various articles discussing German memory, commemoration, Polish reaction, and the search for a usable past in Germany, have allowed the debate to be carried to the public. It almost seems as though the question, "can Germans consider themselves victims of the war?" will be answered in the public sphere and subsequently debated in the academic literature for years to come.

Sixty years ago, a ruthless and inhumane government hell-bent on world domination and human extermination was purged from the face of the earth. Today, sadly, ghastly shadows of those evils still haunt Europe. But that does not change the grim truth of World War II; while some were victorious, nearly all were victims. Some Germans are or were guilty of heinous crimes against humanity. Not all of them were

caught or brought to justice following the end of the war. But the greater number of Germans, especially those living in the industrial cities and those who lived in the eastern frontiers of Germany, are victims of war. The historiographic debates over whether or not the common German knew what was going on or not or whether Germans are inherently evil will continue to rage, as will the debate over the question of German dichotomy. The issue of German victimization is important because it allows historians and the public to recognize that the citizens of a government that instigates a war and initiates inhumane acts can also suffer. The pendulum swing between guilt versus innocence is important for contemporary reasons, too. Consider the United States; the government passed the PATRIOT Act in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, and some U.S. citizens and U.S. aliens had their civil rights violated. When historians look back on these events, will they equally condemn both the government and its citizens for violating these rights? Or will they recognize that the citizens are essentially "victims" of the government?

Recognizing the difference between the acts of a government and the effects on its citizens is essential. That is why addressing the issue of German guilt versus victimhood in regards to World War II is important. The topic was addressed at first only in passing, then discussed by historians, was brought to the public by an author, and finally debated in the public sphere. The limits will continually be pushed by the public debate and the validity of a German masterable past that includes Germans as victims is ongoing. The diasporic model presented in the first chapter is important because it gives credibility to the validity of German victims. Recognizing the commonality between traditional diasporas and German *Vertriebene* allows for a reconciliation to take place

between the dual nature of World War II Germany, balancing guilt and victimhood. This reconciliation between guilt and victimhood is possible, and this chapter has considered that question from the perspectives of history, literature and the public discourse that surrounds the creation of a *Vertriebene* memorial. While not everyone will feel comfortable with the idea of German victims, the reality is that some Germans were victims of the war, too. With the question openly raised in public discourse, Germans are now able to consider both sides of their dichotomous history and proclaim that the war ended sixty years ago, that their silence has been overcome, and that a masterable past is within their grasp.

Conclusion: German Victims and a Masterable Past

The German search for a "masterable past" can end once Germany's dual World War II roles of perpetrator and victim find balance. Key to attaining a master past is the valid recognition of German victims, specifically the *Vertriebene*. By examining the diasporic model and its application to Germans, the *BdV*'s victim mythos, and the changing trends of German victimhood in recent history, we can see that valid German victimhood for the *Vertriebene* is possible. The argument is that many Germans are valid victims of the war but that this validity can only exist by taking into account the victims of the Third Reich. The main thrust of this thesis is to define the notion of German victimhood more successfully than it has been before. The evidence indicates that German *Vertriebene* have always considered themselves victims, that the diasporic model allows for a valid claim, and that the outer limits of what is acceptable victimhood recognition are recognized in the creation of a memorial for the *Vertriebene*.

Giving Germans a valid claim to victimhood should not diminish the status of other World War II victims. The effects of the Holocaust are more clearly visible and the suffering and death brought upon Jewish victims in Nazi Germany was abominable. There should be no question as to whether or not Germany was culpable for these crimes against humanity. Shortsighted political machinations like Konrad Adenauer's silence toward Holocaust victims damaged German objectivity in successfully accepting culpability. Without acceptance of German guilt, there can be no German victimhood; not accepting German culpability denies Holocaust victims their agency. If Holocaust victims are denied their agency, than it is an easy matter to deny German victims theirs.

Thus, this thesis is not an apologetic venture in establishing Germans as victims of World War II. Instead, it seeks to uphold the legitimate victimhood of the German *Vertriebene* while at the same time denying no other victim group. It underscores the possibility of shaping a masterable past by arguing that Germany is a binary nation. Maintaining the balance between perpetrator and victim is one way of attaining a "masterable past." Acceptance of one without the other is objectionable because this paints an incomplete picture of what Germany and the German people were during World War II.

Only by understanding the diasporic nature of the *Vertriebene*, the discourse of the *BdV*, and the commemoration and reemergence of victim discourse into the public sphere is it possible to offer a balanced view of German victimhood. Anchoring the *Vertriebene* as a diaspora is important because it provides a historical foundation to point to and show how previous diasporas share similarities with the *Vertriebene*, Exploring the discourse of the *BdV* is important, too, because it shows how some *Vertriebene* see themselves and what steps they are taking in order to increase awareness of their situation. Unfortunately, though, the discourse of the *BdV* is tinged by right-wing language and therefore casts a somewhat negative light on German victimhood. Much of what the *BdV* writes and says does not focus on German *Vertriebene* specifically—instead, the *BdV* focuses on the expulsion of other refugees from their homeland, seeking to show similarities between German *Vertriebene* and other refugees and thus validating German victimhood—but what they do not do is consider the Holocaust victims. In doing so, the *BdV* is perpetuating the same philosophy that Adenauer did in the 1950s.

This denial of a group's victimhood is, as I have discussed, unacceptable and does not provide a valid masterable past.

As I have shown, the search for a masterable German past in the last ten years centers on the emergence of the victim discourse in the public sphere via literature and commemoration activities. My conclusions show that the German people understand that, in order to come to grips with their past, they must not only seek to recognize Holocaust victims, but their own victimhood as well. The idea that Germans can be victims has now crept into the public sphere, moving beyond the political and academic spheres the claim once occupied. While some of the commemoration efforts, especially those the *BdV* supports, are responsible for instances of bad feeling between different victim groups, the most important aspect is that the victim groups are communicating amongst themselves and transmitting these messages to the public. This open dialogue between victim groups inclusive of the public is necessary in successfully finding the balance and attaining a masterable past. Expanding the World War II victimhood discourse to include the *Vertriebene* should also be welcomed because it opens German history and provides a means to study innocent Germans. Also, the German peoples are a heterogeneous group, one with different histories; this work pushes German historiography in new directions and provides new avenues for approaching ordinary and peculiar Germans.

Diaspora, discourse, memory and commemoration. These are the central themes of this thesis and the themes that lend to establishing the German *Vertriebene* toward having a legitimate claim to victimhood. The answers to German victimhood lie within these themes, and hopefully this thesis has successfully allowed for a viable claim to

German victimhood or, at the very least, provided a waypoint in the continued search for Germany's "masterable past."

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APPENDIX

Interview with Luzia Kalf, recorded November 25, 2003 in her Büren, Germany, apartment.

Kevin Larson: When and where were you born?

Luzia Kalf: The town or the county?

Kevin: Town…county…both.

Luzia: Arnsdorf in Heilsberg county on 28 October 1933.

Kevin: And that's in East Prussia, right? Near Königsberg?

Luzia: Yes, that's near Königsberg.

Kevin: Tell me about your childhood. What was your favorite time of year? What did you do for fun? Do you have any memories of your childhood that you'd like to share with me?

Luzia: Yes, I grew up in a large family with…how many siblings were we…after me there were two more siblings…I was the tenth child. And…what was the question?

Kevin: Favorite time of year.

Luzia: Favorite time of year…yes…my favorite time of the year was in the summer.

Kevin: Why?

Luzia: We could be outside a lot, we always went running through the fields, and when it was harvest time, we had coffee at midday…a bread break…then, we played together, siblings and friends. How many were we? We were a big group. We worked for the largest farm in the town. We didn't have our own house, but we lived in a leased house. We got flour from the farmer, we had a cow, we fed pigs, and that was all loaned to us because Papa didn't have money. Papa went with to work in the fields. Christmas was a nice time. What more should I say?

Kevin: What happened at Christmas?

Luzia: Excuse me?

Kevin: What happened at Christmas?

Luzia: For Christmas? Mother had knitted socks, from sheep's wool. A pair of gloves. There wasn't much. There weren't many toys. I had a doll as a child. We were a big family. We played outside a lot, but later, geese and ducks were slaughtered.

Kevin: Did you work on the farm?

Luzia: As a child? No. When I turned 11, though, we had to cream milk, make feed, sort potatoes. We never got to go into the city. Until we went to school, we didn't go anywhere. We just stayed in the village on the estate.

Kevin: What did you feel when the war began?

Luzia: When the war began, we already had a radio…we got that as a gift when I was born. Hitler is my godfather because I was the tenth child. As the tenth child, you got something. You got a radio or a sewing machine. That was the time; you couldn't do anything about it. Papa was drafted…he had to leave. And there were always more men getting drafted. We didn't know anything about what they were all doing to the people. There were always fewer and fewer, but as a child you didn't worry about that and no one told you anything anyway. I don't even know if my parents knew anything about the Jews. There were businesses in town that went away and when they went away than the people were gone, too. Where they went, I don't know. Awful feelings. Fear, fear, always fear.

Kevin: What did you think about the Third Reich? What did you hear about it?

Luzia: In school we had to greet the teacher with a "Heil Hitler." Rich farmers' children brought the teacher sausage, but we were poor children. I only went to school for three years and then we fled from East Prussia.

Kevin: When was that?

Luzia: It was in the winter. If the harbor wouldn't have been frozen over then we wouldn't have been able to escape. We would have had to stay. Two days and three nights we drove over the harbor with our horse-drawn wagon. The harbor was full of people. The ice was brittle, it would crack, and people would fall in the water. Our horse, too. There was a moment where someone yelled, "Everyone get off of the wagon!" and we did. And Papa was in the war, so we'd left without Papa and we were three days from home before he found us. We had fled for three days, and he came home because he'd deserted and he went home. There was a little girl sitting on the stairs outside of the house, Papa said he called out, thinking it was me, and she didn't react. Papa went into the house and there was an old *opa* (grandfather) lying in my brother's bed and the place was full of dirt in the apartment and he thought, "they're already gone and now I'll never find them." He searched and how it happened, I don't know how, but three days in a church Papa found us again. He was wearing clothes he'd dug up from graves because he'd been wearing his uniform. We had taken things with for him on the

horse wagon. My sister was driving the wagon. We lay in our bed blankets in the wagon so we wouldn't freeze.

Kevin: What did you take with?

Luzia: We had enough. We took our jarred preserves, meat, but we didn't get anything else to eat. We took a few clothes with. When we left we let our pigs out of the stalls and we let our cow run free so that they wouldn't starve in the stables. We couldn't take anything else. The joy was large, though, when father found us. We made water from ice, and we took a pot and we made a soup with some of the preserves. Then we ate. Above us, the pilots always shot at us. We had to hide under the wagons.

We all had diarrhea. After the harbor, we crossed into Pomerania. It was night and it was very cold. We had a large ladder wagon with a plank roof, we turned it into a house of sorts. Sometimes we rode with the roof off, and sometimes we couldn't ride further because the horse's hooves had no shoes, they were broken, and they kept slipping. My father went to get some milk from another farmer nearby, and he came back and said, "I believe the Russians have us. We're under the Russians." They rode up, they stole my sister's gloves, the women had to hide, but I was only 11. We came into a village and we had to work for the Russians. I had to work as a nanny for a Russian family. I had to cook and wash clothes, everything a wife had to do, because the wife went to work herself.

Kevin: So in Pomerania, when you got there, the Russians were already there.

Luzia: The Russians caught us in Pomerania, yes. The situation became a little more stable when the Russians forbid the raping and abduction of women. If they caught someone doing that, they were shot dead.

Kevin: But before the rules were put down, did that happen?

Luzia: Yes, the Russians did all of that. But when an officer saw things happening, the soldiers would be punished if they did that kind of stuff, if it came out. But at first, no. First we worked under the Russians, then they gave it all to the Poles, and then we had to work under the Poles.

Kevin: Did you fear for life at any time?

Luzia: Yes, even as a child. We often hid. When men or soldiers came, then we were scared.

Kevin: German or Russian?

Luzia: Russian, Polish.

Kevin: Were there German soldiers?

Luzia: I didn't see any German soldiers. They were all pretty much taken prisoner. There were no German soldiers. There were Russian prisoners in East Prussia. There was a guard, who watched over the Russian work crews. My father felt so sorry for them that every Sunday my mother would bake a cake and we would take it to them because they were hungry, too. The German guard hit my sister with a spade. My sister Maria still has a broken bone from that today. We ran away. She had an operation just recently for it. But as we ran away, her shoes were full of blood. We experienced a lot as children back then, really gruesome times.

Kevin: How did the Russians behave in Pomerania?

Luzia: Like wild men, all of them. They behaved badly at first. Who didn't work, didn't eat. Even children had to work, otherwise you didn't get anything. I had it well, when I worked for the Russian family. When the wife got something new, when she got a new dress, I got a new dress. They treated us well later. We got bread to take home. Things were going well for us. But later, with the Poles, things were worse again. Everyone had to work on the field, on the large estate, my grandfather, too, and my relatives.

Kevin: That was still in Pomerania?

Luzia: 1957 we left Pomerania. We married over there, I was pregnant with your mom when we came over here.

Kevin: How did the change from the Russians to the Poles happen?

Luzia: The Russians had to leave. One part was Russian and one part was Polish. It's still like that today. In East Prussia, it's Russian and where we lived that was a zone that went to the Poles and the Russians had to leave. That's how that happened.

Kevin: Were the Poles there or did they come?

Luzia: No, they came.

Kevin: So they were resettled?

Luzia: Yes, they were resettled. The Germans had to leave their farms, and the Poles took over.

Kevin: What did you think about that? What did you feel?

Luzia: First things went well, but then things got worse and won't things change. Relatives that were already in the west were searching for us with the Red Cross, too. We could write each other then, we wrote letters. At first, we weren't allowed to leave, but then eventually they had to allow us to flee to the west. But people had to pay for that.

Kevin: Why did you want to flee Pomerania?

L: For a better life in the west. Most of our relatives were already gone and there were only Poles there. That's why we wanted to flee, too.

Kevin: What did you eat when you worked for the Poles? Was the food good or bad?

Luzia: The first days were bad. We had to steal from the field. Potatoes were taken from the fields. After awhile though, we were allowed to keep a pig for ourselves, and thing were going better for us. We were allowed to go shopping, we got Polish money. So things weren't too bad and were good. Everybody had to work. When there wasn't any work on the estate in the winter, we had to plant trees in the forest. We planted small trees. We had to work all the time, summer or winter. To eat, at first we had nothing, but then later it was good. We weren't eating like we were here. When we got here, we thought we were in heaven. In Friedland, the area where all the refugees passed through to the west, we were classified as Refugee A. That meant we had rights to move to the west. We each got money handed to us. I went shopping for 20 marks and I had a whole sack full. I had a couple of bottles of beer for Opa. We thought we were in heaven. We had it well. We had jobs right away in Eichhoff. We both worked.

Kevin: And physically?

Luzia: Physically we were fit from all the work we'd done.

Kevin: How did the Poles treat you?

Luzia: When my mother went shopping in a Polish shop, she was told, "you have to speak Polish, otherwise you get nothing today." But we went dancing with the Poles, and the Polish soldiers came and helped with the harvest and there was dancing in the evenings.

Kevin: Did they ever accuse you of anything relating to the Third Reich?

Luzia: No, they just told us, "You are German people."

Kevin: You came to Eichhoff and Nordrhein Westfalen because family was already here?

Luzia: Yes, in Dortmund. My sister, my father's two sister, Opa's family came here, too. That's why we got a document that allowed us to travel.

Kevin: And how were you received by other Germans that were born here?

Luzia: The reception was good. The farmers in Eichhoff took us in well, here in the West. We had to work, though, too. We didn't get any refugee money, though, because

we got married to late over there and because we lived with our parents too long. My mother got that money, but we newlyweds, we didn't get the money because we lived too long with our parents in Poland, we weren't on our own. But our work we were able to pay a little bit of money to get furniture and a few pairs of clothes.

Kevin: When you think back…

Luzia: When I see things about the war on TV, it all comes back. That's why one is so tired as a person today. One can't look at pictures like that from the war, I have to cry. It's sad. That's terrible. It's in my memory. Everything comes back to the surface.

Kevin: Did you ever dream about those days?

Luzia: Yes, today still.

Kevin: Nightmares?

Luzia: Yes. That was a terrible time back then. But despite that, even today, I want to go back and travel there. I want to, and so do Gisella and Sabina, your mom I don't know, but Gisella and Sabina want to go and look where we grew up in East Prussia and Pomerania. Today, the possibility is there. Even with that, though, I don't want to live there anymore. My children have built a life here, you can't leave that and go back. Many say that they want to go back to their "homeland" but it's not even German anymore. East Prussia was a rich land. The fields, it was a good life there. In Pomerania, too. It was a nice life.

Kevin: It was German.

Luzia: Yeah. It wasn't like here, where everything was done with machines. It was done by hand. On the field, everything.

Kevin: There was a plan, about a year ago or so, to build a memorial in Berlin for the refugees—

Luzia: I heard about that on the television—

Kevin: Schröder changed the plan.

Luzia: I don't think the memorial belongs in Berlin. I think the memorial belongs there where all the things happened.

Kevin: So there should be a memorial?

Luzia: There should be a memorial but in Pomerania. That's where everything happened. But not in Berlin, for the refugees. They don't want that in Poland or

anywhere else. I think it should be there, though, even if they don't want it. I would say yes to that. Is that bad?

Kevin: That's your opinion.

Luzia: Yes, that's my opinion.

Kevin: But the Polish say that the Germans aren't—

Luzia: Right, right, the Poles had it bad, right, right, that the Germans were bad. That's probably true, but not in Pomerania. The Poles had to leave their homes, too, and were sent to Pomerania and they treated the Germans badly, but I don't know all of that. But Berlin, it doesn't belong in Berlin.

Kevin: I've heard that it's not going to be built.

Luzia: Right. But that would be bad. We lost our homeland (*Heimat*), and there should at least be a memorial for all refugees, East Prussia, Pomerania, Silesia. Right? That's what I think, even today.

Kevin: Do you have anything else? Anything that comes to mind?

Luzia: My sister knows more. She was already in school. Josef was already gone, he was a soldier and he was a prisoner of war in Yugoslavia.

Interview ends