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CULTURAL MEMORY, IDENTITY
AND REPRESENTATIONS OF FLIGHT AND EXPULSION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Since the beginning of the 21st century, the topic of the expulsion of Germans after 1945 has received more attention in the wider public sphere, professional historical and in fictional writing than ever before. As a consequence, over the last years the field of German Studies has developed an enormous interest in this topic, which is part of the recent discourse of German victimhood during World War II. The issue of flight and expulsion is intimately related to the ongoing evolution and also construction of a German cultural identity through the creation of a ‘usable past.’

This dissertation examines the interdependence of aesthetic representations of flight and expulsion with the development, emergence and constitution of cultural memory as well as the effect of this experience on individual identity and that of German society. The textual analysis of four fictional works is located at the intersection of history, sociology and literary studies. The genre *Vertreibungsliteratur* seems perfectly suited to elucidate the difficulties that German society has in finding a

way to dissolve the rigid dichotomy of victim vs perpetrator without marginalizing or neglecting either side.

I address three main points in conjunction with the literary texts I discuss: first, the circumstances that led to the emergence of the—now widely rejected—notion of a ‘taboo’ surrounding the discourse on German victimhood. In the discussion of Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* (2002) it becomes evident that it is rather the problem of contextualization in a particular political climate that compelled Grass to nurture this popular view of a taboo that only he can break. Secondly, the analysis of Siegfried Lenz’s *Heimatmuseum* (1978) suggests that this text can be read as an allegory to the evolution and character of a normative and constructed German cultural memory. Thirdly, Arno Schmidt’s *Leviathan* (1949) and Reinhard Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten* (2003) reveal the advantage of modernist writing in terms of its potential to represent the devastating impact of trauma on identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years, the German experience of flight and expulsion at the end of WWII has evolved into one of the most important aspects concerning German cultural memory. It became part of a larger discourse about the right of Germans to emphasize their suffering in WWII, which had started in the late 1990s. While some German public figures still define Germans as a “Tätervolk,”¹ others have claimed repeatedly that “on their side of WWII, the Germans also suffered.”² It is particularly this ongoing insecurity, whether and to what extent Germans should be labeled perpetrators or also victims that triggers the emotional engagement of all groups involved in the debate on dealing with the issue of forced migration. This debate itself constitutes a substantial part of the continued German quest to define its cultural identity, a “project which requires the negotiation of national symbols, traditions and memories” (Eigler 392). A particular aspect of this identity search, the one concerning the fate of German refugees and expellees, has been incessantly fueled by provocative remarks and activities of the Bund der Vertriebenen, BdV,³ or groups close to this organization of expellees.

These expellees have various backgrounds: Germans had coexisted with other ethnic groups for, in some cases, hundreds of years in various countries in Eastern Europe—they were known as the ‘Volksdeutschen.’ Another segment of those millions of refugees originated from territories that had been part of the German Empire in the borders of 1937—these were the ‘Reichsdeutschen.’ The fictional texts I am analyzing here are centered on both ‘Volksdeutsche’ and ‘Reichsdeutsche’: Sudeten Germans,

West Prussian Germans, East Prussian Germans and refugees and expellees from Silesia. These were also the regions with the highest numbers of expellees.

In early March 2007 the German ARD television and French-German ARTE TV aired the two-part feature film *Die Flucht*, which re-enacted the ordeal of a part of those approximately 12 to 14 million Germans who had to leave their homes between 1944 and 1949. The makers of this feature film had called on both groups to share their remembrances and help director Kai Wessel create this fictional representation of the past. It is exactly this emblematic convergence of history, memory and fiction that is fascinating about the dynamics in literary representations of flight and expulsion. How this combination informs or at least mirrors the evolution of German cultural memory has been the main motivation for writing this dissertation. Interestingly, after this emotional television production aired in March 2007, there was no rekindling of the public debate, which had its culmination in 2003/2004. The reaction in March 2007 was restricted to a few comparably tranquil articles directly before and after the broadcast, *taz* and *WELT* equally approving of the depiction.⁴ Even though this was completely different from the forceful eruptions of *Feuilleton* articles accompanying every single publication of numerous books and opinions on the issue of “Flucht und Vertreibung” only a few years before, it is questionable whether this means that discussing this issue has become ‘normal’ already. It remains to be seen if ‘normalcy’ in terms of dealing with flight and expulsion is soon attainable in Germany—certainly not before the discussion on the planned location and form of a memorial for the expellees has ended.⁵

Bearing these factors in mind, I will look into several issues in this dissertation, which deals with a genre that Louis Ferdinand Helbig coined “Vertreibungsliteratur”.⁶

In 1996 Helbig compiled the most thorough survey on literature dealing with expulsions of Germans from regions of former German settlement. He defines “Vertriebenenliteratur” as autobiographical accounts by all sorts of expellees—thus eyewitnesses that are often amateur writers—whereas Vertreibungsliteratur includes all fictional texts about flight and expulsion, either by refugees, expellees or none of the above.⁷ All the texts I analyze here are from the latter group. I chose to adopt Helbig’s useful and appropriate terminology since his monograph has been so far the most extensive and thorough survey of fiction concerning flight and expulsion written prior to 1996. However, it proved more helpful to look mainly into secondary literature that is less descriptive and of a more analytical character, especially in the context of understanding cultural identity, which mirrors my own approach to this topic.

In Chapter 1 I will discuss the persistent notion of a “taboo that had to be broken” surrounding the question of German victimhood in the topos of flight and expulsion. Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* serves as the perfect focal point for my deliberations. In this work, and especially in interviews relating to his work, Grass and his narrator try to call for a more productive way of dealing with German suffering. Grass claims to have broken a taboo under which German suffering had no right of public attention. It becomes, however, obvious that it is not German victimhood that had been a taboo, but rather the comparison or contextualization of German guilt. Yet, doing this in an innovative way is exactly what Grass does not do in his book. Looking closely at *Im Krebsgang* as well as at Grass’s biography gives valuable insight into why he so adamantly co-created the myth of a taboo that only he can break.

In Chapter 2 I will argue that Siegfried Lenz's *Heimatmuseum* can be read as a means to understand the constructedness of cultural memory, which is the basis for cultural identity. The museum in his novel is under constant threat of misappropriation by either nationalists or a regional association of expellees; it is used to convey the dominant and normative way of how the past should be evaluated. It is the curator who decides—to a certain extent—what to display in the showroom, which serves as a metaphor for an officially condoned memory. The whole concept of an officially sanctioned memory is crucial in order to understand the implications of a normative cultural memory for the discourse on German victimhood.

In Chapter 3, I analyze how Arno Schmidt in *Leviathan* and Reinhard Jirgl in *Die Unvollendeten* employ linguistic representations of loss, suffering and trauma triggered by flight and expulsion from Silesia and East Prussia. I will argue that the modernist style of Schmidt and his successor Jirgl are much more suited to reflect the effect of trauma on identity. Especially in Jirgl's case, I look into the way the author develops the transgenerational repercussions of lingering trauma.

There was an enormous output in Vertreibungsliteratur between 1999 and 2005 that also involved a new generation affected by the post-war expulsions: the grandchildren and sometimes the children of those people who had to leave their homes. For them, the connection to the events is not possible through recollection but through an imaginative investment. Oftentimes these discoverers of a family past must resort to finding a connection to the past through photographs or other mnemonic devices—a process that Marianne Hirsch so suitably termed postmemory. I will leave it to the conclusion to explain this concept in more detail, since this is also the place where I

give a brief survey on the latest fictional literature on flight and expulsion, oftentimes written by children and grandchildren of refugees and expellees.

As it will become evident below, I read the texts in the following chapters within a theoretical framework that situates literary analysis at the intersection of contemporary history, sociology and cultural studies—the realm within German Studies that is most conducive to understanding this literature. Furthermore, I would encourage my readers to take the opportunity to look over the first eight figures—the maps and tables—in the appendix on p. 152 now. In numerous talks and presentations I gave over the last two years, all listeners were more than grateful for being introduced thoroughly to the background of this debate.

I

In order to recall why the remembrance of flight and expulsion had not been at the top of the agenda in the last decades, it is instructive to look at the way West German society and politics have dealt with the issue of flight and expulsion since 1945. Since the Second World War, in society and in oral family history, the feeling of loss and humiliation inflicted on Germans themselves has always been alive and discussed, where possible and emotionally bearable. As Robert Moeller shows, “rhetorics of victimization were vital parts of the civic culture of the Federal Republic” (Moeller 2005 159) from its inception. What would have been unthinkable in the GDR, where it was officially prohibited to speak of flight or expulsion instead of using the official term

“Umsiedlung,” or “resettlement,” happened in West Germany: the Federal Government commissioned a group of historians to compile the *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*. It was published by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in 1954 and re-published in 1984 and 2004.⁸ Two occurrences then curtailed a relatively open expression of loss and the open denial of the status quo with respect to the post-45 German borders, which evoked a new focus of attention on German cultural memory and an instable identity. First was the persistent questioning of the 68er student- and APO-movement triggered by the Auschwitz trials and by other socio-political events, most notably the war in Vietnam, seemingly paralyzing conservative structures at the universities. Furthermore Western support for the Shah of Persia and the rejection of the first SPD-CDU coalition, headed by Kurt Kiesinger, a former employee of Goebbels’ ministry of propaganda, contributed to the new focus. As a result, dealing with the past was transformed to predominantly dealing with German guilt, since protesters demanded an overdue break with former National Socialist continuities that seemed to be stalling the path to a remorseful and subsequently enlightened national identity. Secondly, Willy Brandt’s acknowledgement of the Oder-Neisse border as the final German border to the East in 1972 ended a continuing smoldering dispute. Before him, Konrad Adenauer had already opted to refrain from claiming former territory in exchange for a clear commitment to the Western bloc. Although the sentiment of returning to the homeland was still kept alive by random statements over the last decades by the numerous regional associations of expellees, these had no major public backing in society anymore; the majority of Germans supported Brandt’s policy. The expellee organizations enjoyed the occasional shoulder-

patting and Sunday speeches by mainly conservative politicians. Nonetheless, throughout the 70s, 80s and 90s, the associations of expellees acquired the status of folkloristic utopists, whose goals could be safely disregarded in German “Realpolitik.” What is more, during the 1950s and 1960s members and voters of the BHE, Block der Heimatlosen und Entrechteten,⁹ had already increasingly found their new home in the other ‘Volksparteien’ like CDU or SPD, which transformed the BHE from a powerful advocate for returning to the homeland to a rather marginal group.

Therefore, from the mid- to late 60s onwards the public discourse in Germany was more engrossed with a largely overdue comprehensive “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung” or “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” as it became known since the 1960s. In 1967, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich offered a Freudian explanation as to why this had been previously neglected. They argued that a wholesome mourning process was substituted by a state of melancholia right after the end of WWII, which led to a repression of the memory of the situation under Hitler, the Germans’ former messiah/father figure. It is true that a thorough way of dealing with Nazi crimes did not take place between the flawed allied denazification process and the 1960s. This was a period in which the indulgence in the capitalist reconstruction of West Germans seemed to compensate for many losses and deficiencies. A thorough dealing with the memories of the Third Reich—which would have enabled a healthy recall of potential complicity—was therefore stalled. Finally, when the then new, thorough and often painful occupation with the Nazi past began in the mid 1960s, it clearly focused on the crimes and the perpetrators of the Nazi regime. These perpetrators were still alive and not only among public figures in Germany, but also in

the ordinary family. This obviously created an atmosphere of insecurity among many family members, leaving them uncertain as to how and whether they should address their own suffering. Nonetheless, the need for keeping a low profile in society for many refugees and expellees from former Eastern territories had been prevalent since the end of the war, although certainly not in the form of a taboo. As Ruth Wittlinger points out, the “theme of German suffering has also been present beyond the 1950s in the popular press and on television, even if the official discourse dictated an acknowledgement of a different past” (73). Still, very often marginalized and discriminated against by their own fellow Germans—despite the official efforts to integrate them thoroughly—in a general atmosphere of the need to move on, these ‘other’ Germans tried to assimilate as smoothly as possible.¹⁰

In the public discussion and in fictional literature the issue of German guilt and complicity now dominated, while the aspect of German loss and suffering slipped into the background. Still, although it was a rather marginalized memory on the public level, the notion of a ‘Tabubruch’ when the question of German suffering resurfaced again in fictional literature and some theoretical, scholarly contributions is exaggerated as well.¹¹ There had been a continued output in fictional literature on flight and expulsion throughout the last three decades, e.g. the fictional and non-fictional texts of Walter Kempowski, Arno Surminski and certainly Siegfried Lenz. The events surrounding the expulsion of 12-14 million people were and are not only documented in non-fiction but also represented in many fictional texts and films immediately since WW II.¹²

Nevertheless, the observation is correct that the focus in the public and scholarly discourse shifted especially in the late 1960s. As it turns out now, this stance has been an essential and helpful means of coming to terms with the Nazi past. Yet, the extreme focus on this aspect created subsequent problems. When the concern with the issue of German suffering re-surfaced, many individuals and groups in society were overwhelmed with this and rejected this new addition outright as revisionist. Others welcomed it openly. In some cases it was misappropriated.¹³ This suggests that German cultural identity is far from being stable and clear sixty years after the end of National Socialism. What is more, it also shows to what extent the past is a constituting element for the present condition of a society.

II

The utilization of the past in its manifestations as history and memory are crucial and one of the essential and defining tools in the ongoing search of the German public for their cultural identity. Andreas Huyssen observes correctly that “the past has become part of the present in ways simply unimaginable in earlier centuries” (*Present Pasts* 1). He detects a hypertrophy of memory in cultural discourse, but for Germany, this is not completely new. Unquestionably, a national heritage has always been central in negotiating the existing condition of a nation in general. This is constantly being done by creating either a positive usable past or, in the German case, confronting a negative past that gains its usability for the present in the relentless effort of coming to

terms with it.¹⁴ In the German context, coming to terms with the past, or “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” as proposed by Theodor Heuss or “Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung” by Theodor W Adorno,¹⁵ has not meant a mere listing and evaluation of the Nazi-past in order to end it, at least not to all involved in that discourse. Working through the past was and is widely accepted as a means of creating a political-moral basis for the reordering of Germany without eliminating that past from cultural memory.¹⁶ As I pointed out, when mostly young Germans lamented an insufficient confrontation with the National Socialist legacy and its protagonists, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” received new momentum in the 1960s. Other forces in society have constantly called for an end to this struggle with the Nazi-past, a “Schlussstrich.” Given that cultural groups use the past in order to establish a meaning for the present, a “Schlussstrich” would be difficult to achieve in the highly normative cultural memory with which Germany lives, apart from the fact that it is undesirable. Media of all sorts, combined with Pierre Nora’s sheer endless list of “lieux de memoire” considerably blur the boundaries between then and now,¹⁷ and it is exactly these media(tors) that constitute the driving force in negotiating cultural memory, as Aleida Assmann describes it compellingly (cf. *Geschichtsvergessenheit* 49, and below).

Even though the fictional literature discussed in this dissertation is mainly a representation of rather than an agent in the discourse on how to deal with the German past—with the exception of Grass’s *Im Krebsgang*—these texts are indisputably included in Germany’s collective memory, contributing to the discourse on the expansion of cultural memory. I aim to examine the interdependence of aesthetic representations of expulsion and the development of individual and cultural identity

informed by memory. Hence, this dissertation is essentially an analysis of the nature and potential implications of Vertreibungsliteratur in these processes of identity formation when dealing with the past. At this point it is useful to describe the underlying assumptions and my approach to this issue.

III

The past is a concept that only exists through its shaping, representation and definitions that take place in the present. In the last decade, the discussion on the retrieval, depiction and recreation of previous times increasingly features the correlation of the two major modes of rendering the past, memory and history. Both have a similar impact on the formation of a cultural identity, even though they are far from being synonymous. They influence each other, which becomes evident particularly when one considers them narratives, as I do. Therefore, it is helpful to examine their interaction with each other and the aesthetic realm, which is strongly informed by memory and history. The nature of history, according to Pierre Nora, can be defined by its strong opposition to emotional and spontaneous memory: “History is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. [...] History, being an intellectual and non-religious activity, calls for analysis and critical discourse.” To Nora, history turns memory into prose, a “criticism destructive of spontaneous memory” (*Realms of Memory* 3). Thus he admits that history is also fueled by memory. Indeed, research norms claim to make history an almost objective analysis of past events

through its academic aura, created by ostensibly objective rational and scientific methodology. Nora does not mention here, however, that historiography—just as any fictional account of past events—is influenced by a particular outlook of the group or the individual that creates such a text, making it at best intersubjective but hardly objective.¹⁸ Jeffrey Olick expands on this idea: “History is written by people in the present for particular purposes, and the selection and interpretation of ‘sources’ are always arbitrary” (“Social Memory Studies” 110). However, the attempt is noticeable to leave out the emotional constituent of memory in order to create a basic and official sense of the past that is putatively less emotion-laden than memory. Still, we can perceive the limitations of narrative here as well.

It is instructive to observe which sources are admitted in historical accounts. Officially condoned history can appear constructed; still, it does not necessarily have to be constructed in a completely deliberate way. A certain current mainstream direction prevails, which is consented upon in historiography and communicated through various institutions and media, whose aim is to answer the questions of origin. This is one of the goals that can be achieved through the study of the development, transmission, and transformation of cultural practices and events. The discussion on the expulsion of Germans, placed in the century of forced migrations, has been kept highly rational and scientific. Yet, it is utopian to think that the superficially sober depiction of the German experience of forced migration in purely historical terms is sufficient to integrate it into the larger framework of dealing with the Nazi past. After numerous documentaries aired in the 80s and 90s, ARD’s *Die Flucht* added an emotional aspect to the discourse in the wider public, reaching more Germans than any fictional representation has ever

been able to. Apparently, empathy in the sense of Lessing's "Mitleid" is still considered a viable tool to create awareness, in addition to a desire to re-build memory. To a certain extent, the project of coming to terms with the past, which according to Adorno is also a project of educating the individual to self-reflection,¹⁹ has, nevertheless, not been finished. Both issues, Germans' complicity in the atrocities of the Third Reich as well as the resulting suffering of Germans are embedded and still dealt within the larger context of the ongoing and seemingly never-ending search for a German identity. Over the course of the last twenty years or so it became obvious that these two aspects are extremely difficult to reconcile.

One main indicator for this was the Historians' Controversy in 1986, sometimes also called the Historians' Debate, Dispute or Conflict. The "Historikerstreit" had proven at that time that the comparison or contextualization of Nazi crimes with any other genocidal phenomena "tended to relativize, normalize, or even 'air-brush' Auschwitz in order to make it fade into larger historical contexts and out of conscious focus" as Dominick La Capra summarizes (50). He echoes the reaction of other protagonists in the historians' controversy, such as Jürgen Habermas and Saul Friedländer, who responded to ideas of historicization with skepticism at the least; it was mostly outright rejection in those summer months of 1986. Many critics in the public sphere had considered especially Ernst Nolte's and Andreas Hillgruber's arguments and scholarly work inappropriate and apologetic. Nolte intended to compare Soviet expansionism and atrocities to Nazi expansionism and atrocities. In addition to this seemingly normal historical approach of comparison, as Charles Maier explains,²⁰ Nolte however neglected numerous other factors that lead to the development of

National Socialism and their ideology. Indeed, he disregarded the strong surge of anti-Semitism in Germany at the end of the 19th century, combined with the circumstances and repercussions of WWI as reasons for German anti-Semitism. What is more, instead of stressing the parallel development of this and Bolshevism, he asked rather questionably whether the “class murder” of the Bolsheviks was the “logische und faktische Prius des ‘Rassenmordes’ der Nationalsozialisten.”²¹ Andreas Hillgruber put the Holocaust and the events of flight and expulsion in the same context of fascist megalomania, driven by inhumane ideology. I will discuss the important implications of the debate surrounding Hillgruber’s publication *Zweierlei Untergang* only later on in the chapter on Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* and the question of an alleged taboo. Still it is important to note already now that Andreas Hillgruber’s predicament was to a large extent a result of the political atmosphere in the 1980s. At that time he attempted to “historicize” both events and was immediately considered revisionist as well.

Therefore, it is at first sight remarkable that it has become possible today for an historian like Ute Frevert to call for the exactly identical approach to the issue of German victimhood. In 2003, the year that brought a culmination of the public discussion on expulsion of Germans, she claims that “Historisierung tut auch der politischen Debatte gut und stattet sie mit selbstkritischen Obertönen aus. Indem sie auf Kontextualisierungen beharrt, könnte sie auch den aktuellen Streit um ein Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen in sachlichere und zukunftsfähigere Bahnen leiten” (13). Contextualization has indeed always been a viable option for historians to approach crimes of the past. However, her call against demonization, moralization and against maintaining the singularity of the Holocaust is astonishing, given the fiery discussion

seventeen years earlier. To Frevert, it has become more important now to ask bigger questions concerning the motivation for atrocities—and the same questions for all crimes. Only then can we find “das Monströse in Handlungsketten zerlegt” and it becomes “damit nachvollziehbar” (13). This method sounds straightforward, but she adds another important twist to the discourse: “Dazu gehört zum einen, Dynamik von Ursache und Wirkung, die Kausalität zu betonen und Täter- und Opfererinnerungen zu synchronisieren” (13). Interestingly, in 2003 no one objects to her rather carefree sounding proposal anymore, which was published in a widely read newspaper supplement. Perhaps her line of reasoning is compelling enough to her colleagues and the larger public: through historicization and contextualization, she wants to prevent German society but also European societies from exculpating the present by dwelling on the singular horrors of the Nazi genocide. This means that she demands responsibility and also comparison of current events to events in the past. Frevert’s approach also explicitly includes a new appreciation of the ordeal of the millions of German expellees.

When looking for reasons why this approach is now considered politically acceptable, one can find a list of small factors, which together form a compelling explanation. The distance in time is undoubtedly key to the fact that Frevert went unchallenged in 2003. As visible all over Europe, the experiential memory of the actual witnesses as a repository of first-hand accounts is vanishing, and the generation of grandchildren is increasingly interested in shedding light on the original events. The parents and grandparents seem to be willing to tell their story as well. Secondly, the formerly revolutionary 68er-generation is not influential anymore or even involved in redefining “Vergangenheitsbewältigung.” Furthermore, Germany has regained new

political self esteem. By means of German Unification in 1990, and by virtue of having been one of the main architects of the EU, but also by maintaining its status as economic leader and participant in military campaigns all over the world,²² Germany has developed a new self-consciousness. This became most noticeable in 1999, when Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer could persuade his formerly pacifist Green Party to join the war against Serbia, comparing the expulsion of Kosovar-Albanians with Auschwitz—interestingly not comparing them with the expulsion of Germans. However, it was an opportunity for expellee organizations to take advantage of the heightened interest in the fate of expellees (cf. von Oppen and Wolff 202). What is more, for many observers, the German-Czech-Declaration on Bilateral Relations in early 1997 marked a kind of closure, since here the questions of compensation were settled and a bilateral historians' commission was established. Similar measurements were taken with Poland, with the exception that their special position in Europe, and verbal and legal attacks by German expellees on the Polish government worsened the bilateral relationship between Germany and Poland until 2007. In addition, so-called "Wiedergutmachungszahlungen," or reparations,²³ to former slave laborers of German companies in 2000 were another aspect that apparently contributed to the general public perception that Germans have a right to turn to their own suffering on a larger scale.²⁴ Also, traveling to former German territories has become easier, so that many more Germans can now visit their parents' or grandparents' former home and re-activate family memory. Last but not least, the private mainstream media have discovered these issues as well, and again, the contribution of these commercial media in defining cultural memory should not be underestimated. All these circumstances were

completely different in 1986. It is that year when Hans Georg Betz made out Nolte's proximity, "consciously or inadvertently,"²⁵ to the National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD, and other German nationalist movements.

Therefore, Frevert's ostensibly innovative suggestions to historicize the Holocaust and recognize German victimhood are not as new and surprising as the lack of a reaction to her proposals is. Her ideas were even reiterated in May 2006, when *FAZ* journalist and writer of an Adorno biography Lorenz Jäger declared live on Deutschlandradio and on its website that the only question that he and historian Götz Aly consider worth asking is merely "wie viel Nolte wir ertragen und wie viel Nolte wir brauchen," referring to the idea of comparison of historical events. Indeed, it seems that comparison has regained its value. Aly maintains that Nolte has "sich auf eine eher stille Weise aber durchgesetzt,"²⁶ which is undoubtedly true in terms of methodology; however, he does obviously not refer to Nolte's additional highly flawed argument of a "kausaler Nexus", which suggests that Hitler-Germany's genocide was a result of the Soviet-Bolshevist threat and that German anti-Semitism only developed so forcefully due to that threat. In hindsight, it appears that the context of the historically revisionist Kohl era with his uniformist policies to declare every dead person between 1933 and 1945 a victim was more responsible for the strong rejection of Nolte and Hillgruber than their proposals for a new approach to the past per se (cf. also Chapter 3, Section II). Again, in March 2007, historians Jörg Baberowski und Anselm Doering-Manteuffel called for a comparison of National Socialism and Stalinism. Although they see that both systems obviously had different motivations for violence and terror—racist vs political—they point out that both had "ähnliche Gewaltmechanismen [...]. Das haben

wir bezeichnet mit dem Begriff des Strebens nach Ordnung, nach Eindeutigkeit. Beide Regimes haben ähnliche Techniken des Mordens eingesetzt, um die selbstgeschaffenen Probleme zu überwinden.”²⁷ And again, there are no negative responses to these new-old perspectives which, according to Frevert’s and Aly’s line of reasoning, will inevitably lead to the increased portrayal of Germans as victims and to including these experiences in cultural memory.

One such criticism did come from Germanist Ole Frahm. He categorically rejects the notion that Germans are capable of choosing the role as victim as more than an “alibi”, as Odile Jansen phrases it (443). Frahm is extremely skeptical about the new German sentiment of discussing one’s own suffering. He argues that Germans still lack the necessary ability to feel “Scham,” or shame, for their complicity in strengthening the National Socialist system (385). As long as this feeling of shame is not part of their way of dealing with the past they would always be inclined to simply equate victims of Germans with victims among Germans, which would not do justice to the suffering under Nazi rule. Other commentators agree that German experience of suffering should not be “zum ‘Opfer’ stilisiert werden,”²⁸ and that the tendency to portray suffering in an exculpatory manner undeniably exists. Critics like Frahm, however, do not attribute the sober ability of educating and negotiating a well-balanced historical discourse to historians. On the other hand, Frahm’s reservations are not completely paranoid. The ostensibly rational and analytical historical narrative using comparisons can undeniably become unbearable, as for example historian Jörg Friedrich’s use of language illustrates, when he compares the allied bombing squads with Nazi ‘Einsatzgruppen’ in his otherwise matter-of-fact and thorough analysis *Der Brand*.²⁹ Here again it becomes

apparent in what ways the convergence of fiction, memory and history—not only in the mass media—has made it increasingly difficult to determine what it is that constitutes a historical account. In the chapter on Siegfried Lenz's *Heimatmuseum* this question will be central.

Vertreibungsliteratur absorbs historical accounts as well, although its main repository from which it draws is memory. The relationship between these two with regards to their absorption in fictional literature will have to be discussed at greater length. Furthermore, it remains to be seen to what extent Vertreibungsliteratur can incorporate or even reconcile the historical accounts of the Holocaust and the suffering of other groups of victims of German crimes, an issue that becomes evident in the discussion of Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten*. Dominick LaCapra's warning that "historical comparisons are justifiable only if they serve the purpose of a proper 'working through' of trauma, rather than to 'act out our own desires for self-confirming or identity-forming meaning'" is certainly correct (qtd. in Littler 364). This applies to the individual as well as to a society as a whole, which can easily succumb to the temptation of the "perverse slippage from similarity to exoneration," as Paul Ricoeur calls it (331). What is universal, too, is that regardless of the motivation for these comparisons, if they are connected with working through trauma, they are a vital part in the process of forming identity.

IV

The other mode of rendering the past, memory, has been on the agenda of cultural analysts for decades now as Andreas Huyssen reminds us extensively in the introduction of *Present Pasts*, and the research on memory has produced an abundance of types and definitions. For cultural analysts it is highly instructive to look at memory and its uses, since memory is not only and not simply a reflection of the subjective mind but rather an indicator of how minds function together, in an intersubjective realm, and under what circumstances they reflect collectively held beliefs and influence the individual's form of reflection. Psychologists and sociologists have identified a large variety of forms of memory, and the interplay of those concepts on various levels is manifold. Throughout the following chapters, this will be illustrated in depth when discussing the workings of memory described in fictional representations. Therefore, a quick glance at these concepts will suffice here in order to illustrate its implications for cultural identity.

Since Maurice Halbwachs's *The Collective Memory* in 1925 it has become increasingly common to see memory as a collective effort. Even autobiographical memory is shaped by group membership and this leaves it difficult to determine what individual memory is. There is probably indeed something like a involuntary, genuinely personal memory in the Proustian sense, yet, even that can be overshadowed by a screen memory, as Freud calls it, which only serves to disguise a more disturbing memory. In some cases, individuals who "remember" have to use their imagination and their fantasy—they never experienced the event first-hand. Marianne Hirsch argues

compellingly that it still seems practicable to call this memory—or “postmemory.” Hirsch accurately emphasizes the powerful potential of this form of memory. The main reason for this potential is, that “its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation” (*Family Frames* 22). Another important issue for all books discussed here is the fact that individual memory is never completely uncontaminated since it is strongly affected by family memory or a communicated social memory. Harald Welzer adds that the narrative named memory is a mutual product of narrator and listener (*Das kommunikative Gedächtnis* 220), implying that all sorts of information and stories within the milieu of the individual will influence his or her recall. What is more, it is safe to say that memory is apparently even more than history a phenomenon of the present,³⁰ notably by its main difference to history: its emotional charge, or as Pierre Nora would put it, its “magic” (*Realms of Memory* 3), which historiography usually tries to suppress more or less successfully. In addition, memory on the individual and collective level is far more omnipresent in daily life through rituals and places than history. Memory on the individual level can easily be provoked by association and is obviously a constant conscious and involuntary phenomenon accompanying daily life.

The development of cultural memory is what interested me most when I set out to learn more about the interdependence of cultural identity and aesthetic representations of experiences of individuals in a cultural group. It is the definition for the term cultural memory by Aleida and Jan Assmann that serves as the basis for my deliberations. I also take into account what Anne Rigney described so compellingly: “cultural memory is a product of representations and not of direct experience” (Rigney

15). For every member of a society it is impossible to remember per se events in the past since they were not alive in the past; nonetheless, many societies call aspects of their cultural memory remembrance.³¹ The Assmanns developed their concept by building on ideas by Maurice Halbwachs. He was first to suggest that the aforementioned interferences of group memory with individual memory are powerful. Halbwachs builds his approach on the basic sociological question that tries to determine the interdependence of the individual and the social framework. Like Harald Welzer, Halbwachs's concept is therefore heavily influenced by Emile Durkheim's thesis, according to which ideas of individuals are accessible only through their social manifestations. Durkheim suggests that whatever existence ideas have in the individual consciousness, they can only be traced in the collective representations that characterize social life, which in turn influences them: "we are not fully free" (16). In his search for the enduring source of human social identity Durkheim had come to the conclusion that a pre-social being does not exist. Anything that goes beyond sensations and sensory needs—like conceptual thought or moral behavior—is socially constructed. Halbwachs does not outright deny that there are autonomous individual representations. Still, he also argues that most memory is generated within a socially generated linguistic framework: "The individual memory could not function without words and ideas, instruments the individual has not himself invented but appropriated from his milieu" (Halbwachs 51). It is not only through the linguistic level, but via the overall practices of a society that the individual is influenced. Halbwachs continues appropriately that within social dynamics, rival notions oftentimes allow one leading opinion, a phenomenon that already starts in the smallest nucleus of society, the family. His

definition of collective memory, therefore, does not necessarily entail that it is composed of individual memories, rather, it is a concept that is informed by an almost stereotypical dominant attitude toward past events, which rather resembles the putative veracity of (writing of) history. This concept is not easily digestible, since it neglects too much the constant input of dissenting memories that communicate with each other. Thus, sociologist Jeffrey Olick's definition of collective memory makes obvious what it is, namely simply "public discourses about the past as wholes or to narratives and images of the past that speak in the name of collectivities" ("Collective Memory" 345).

Here we see that a collective memory is still much freer and open as a pre-stage to the constructed and normative cultural memory. Collective memory is certainly intersubjectively informed, yet it does not prescribe a norm. Concerning exactly this form of memory, the Assmanns come in with a more democratic and collaborative, yet also somewhat idealistic approach: they offer an inclusive definition of cultural memory. The Assmanns acknowledge the interdependence between the personal, individual memory on the one hand and a memory condoned officially in society on the other hand. Still, they expand on this and define the term cultural memory as a collaborative and inclusive effort that does have the potential to incorporate competing ideas stemming from collective memory. According to them, on this level the need is greatest to create a social long-term memory that will help transport experiences and knowledge over several generations. It is increasingly dependent on the media, in addition to, as Pierre Nora would call, it '*lieux de memoire*': particular days, places, ways and habits of remembrance. Aleida Assmann attributes to this a more productive utilization, since—at least according to her ideas—it is capable of incorporating an

“irreduzible Vielstimmigkeit heterogener Perspektiven.” According to her definition, this pluralistic approach would allow texts of Primo Levi, Nelly Sachs and Ruth Klüger to stand next to works by Martin Walser or Heinrich Böll (*Geschichtsvergessenheit* 51). Assmann, therefore, rejects and dissolves the one-dimensional reality of Halbwachs’s collective memory, which leads to narrow social remembrances she calls “Siegergedächtnis,” “Verlierergedächtnis” or “Opfergedächtnis.” Collective memory is indeed a rather dissociated arrangement of public discourses and narratives and images of the past. In Assmann’s view, it is vital to a cultural memory that it entails a highly educated, largely emotion-free and analytical predisposition within society, which sounds contradictory, since memory itself is not like that, and societies are not either.

This is problematic. A free, democratically enlightened cultural memory like the one Assmann envisages is currently not feasible in German society—and presumably in hardly any society. Usually, contests regarding the incorporation of various perspectives still end up with a convention as to what and to what extent particular ‘remembrances’ can be incorporated in this cultural memory. Although these contests can be constructive and enlightening, they must at least temporarily succumb to a particular normative main perspective that emerges in society.³² In this respect Aleida Assmann is absolutely correct that cultural memory is, to a large extent, a construct. However, it cannot become more inclusive by simply calling for more academic competing views. Although it is not monolithic, only in the best case scenario does cultural memory allow for the inclusion of new thoughts and emotions. It would only then allow for the inclusion of new ways to remember. Only then could it transcend German injuries, German humiliations, and also German crimes and megalomania. Its

make-up serves perfectly as an indicator for the condition of cultural identity. The unease to more prominently include the collective memory of German victimhood in cultural memory is a central point in the discussion of the fictional representations of flight and expulsion of Germans. The collective memory of flight and expulsion can only be incorporated in the German cultural memory when accompanied by constant multi-perspectival discussion and contextualization. This highly problematic procedure is discussed in particular in the chapter on Siegfried Lenz's *Heimatmuseum*, where it becomes evident that cultural memory is highly volatile and prone to abuse and one-sided instrumentalization. It recurs in all chapters, however, that I look at the constitutive process, the elements and dynamics of cultural memory and how this is mirrored in Vertreibungsliteratur.

V

Fictional texts dealing with the issue of expulsion are expected to put together pieces of memory as a narrative. The reader witnesses how the protagonist goes through or at least relives events, which informs the individual or even a cultural identity. Storytelling in Vertreibungsliteratur emerges as a conglomerate of various aspects and perspectives, which process memory and history. Authors draw from their own experience and own memory, but more importantly also from that of others, and weave what they consider their own texture, sometimes unaware of the impact that experiences and social environment have on them. Their own narrative is certainly their own

creation and is subject to all kinds of alterations and additions of versions of the past. Without necessarily insisting that the authors are completely oblivious to their social framework, I will focus also on the author's limited authority of the text, which is an issue that goes beyond the way they shape their narrators and protagonists. It is interesting to see how the author creates the text, embedded in the framework of his or her beliefs or assumptions, which unconsciously govern the production of the texts I discuss here. As the reader and consequently also as a literary critic I will largely isolate the text from its author. What I mean here becomes especially clear when looking into Günter Grass's publicly stated motivation for writing *Im Krebsgang* and comparing it to the actual appearance of his text. Roland Barthes indicates that "the author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*: language knows a subject, not a person" (145), and becomes rather a 'scriptor', whose only origin is a—Halbwachsian—language, which was brought about through the society in which he or she lives. It is highly enlightening to read accounts of memory this way, also indirectly proposed by Foucault, which will in the following chapters be a means to comprehend the text creation by the authors. Barthes comments sarcastically about critics who would locate all central answers in the authorial persona: "When the Author has been found, the text is explained" (147). This erroneous view certainly does not hold in the case of Vertreibungsliteratur either. I found it instructive to look at the texts by deliberately questioning and thereby undermining the 'authority' of the author, and his or her ownership of the text. This reveals the situation and forces of society that shape the text more than the author is aware of. Here the view that "a text is made of multiple writings" (Barthes 148), mirrored also in the sociological

thought, on which I draw, materializes in literary theory. Harald Welzer reminds us of the author's only perceived authorship, which he develops through his research on memory.³³ The author's presumably own outlook or perspective is influenced by remembrances that are shared and dependent on previous definitions and jointly shared pasts. Reinhard Jirgl for instance creates involuntarily awkward comparisons to the Holocaust in *Die Unvollendeten*. Günter Grass wants to create a 'wholesome' approach to deal with a perceived taboo and still achieves quite the opposite in his text *Im Krebsgang*. Several chapters explain how the authors' own ideas of creating a contribution to a holistic cultural memory—and consequently cultural identity—interfere with unconscious automatisms acquired through their social framework.

One aspect should not be left unmentioned: the affective and aesthetic component makes the representation of the experience of flight and expulsion conducive to empathy. Especially this aspect permits the cultural analyst to use these texts to a certain extent as a diagnostic tool to investigate how Germans relate the past to the present. It is not the text itself that is necessarily a reflection of society. Yet, trying to understand how the author re-creates, re-lives and re-signifies the meaning of past events and thus influences the reader is highly instructive. Therefore, I will not only examine what influences an author during the creation of his piece of art. Looking at the impression on the reader is indispensable as well when finding out what the function of this fictional text is in the overall discourse on dealing with flight and expulsion. What is more, the traumatization of individuals, their effect on the development of their identity, and how they cope with this trauma is one element that draws the reader into

the pieces of fiction discussed here. My analysis of each work will encompass these important aspects.

VI

In the texts discussed in the next chapters it is exactly the traumatic experience of expulsion that alters identities.³⁴ The formation and preservation of identity is one of the important basic human needs, coming right after the need of physical health and security. As the set of behavioral or personal characteristics it makes a person recognizable and distinguishable to others, but also to themselves. Yet again, identity formation is not an isolated process. The oftentimes emotional self-realization of an individual or a social unit to which they belong in a particular cultural milieu is part of identity formation and maintenance, especially by defining oneself in view of the ‘other.’ As George Herbert Mead explains, the “self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience” (Mead 140). The experience of the self within this framework is a crucial aspect in the formation of its self-consciousness. Furthermore, the ability to reflect on past experiences is crucial for a stable self, and this can and must include negative and positive events. Equal to personal and individual identity formation, it is useful to apply this term to a cultural group as well. It is interesting, in this context, to note that Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer prefer the term “cultural memory” over “national character.” They argue compellingly that “compared to an essentialist understanding of fixed traits, this flexible

approach points to the constructed character, the contested nature, and the changing configurations of such a sense of self over time” (224).

Freedom to choose lifestyle and living space is vital to identity formation. The lack thereof will severely harm the individual, as becomes clear in Reinhard Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten*. Identity, as a persistent yet unstable entity, will be hindered from a sane and healthy formation by outside force or abuse. Events surrounding ethnic cleansing are a trauma that possesses this destructive quality, which has been thematized and researched.³⁵ To a certain extent, however, it can also have a powerful unifying effect for the expellees as a group, since it defines the group in opposition to a group regarded as the ‘other’ and defines it as being victimized. It thereby creates a group identity, which in turn informs the individual and vice versa. A society stabilizes itself through the development or creation of such a self-image. Yet, this rather productive process does not emerge immediately. First, accusations against the expelling forces—the Red Army, the Polish, the Czech population etc.—and the experience of loss and humiliation bring about grave irritations. The individual loss is manifold: family members, property and places of identification are irretrievably lost. Only after that, in the best case, identity formation starts anew. These are patterns described or implied in all of the fictional texts discussed here. The recurring problem pervasive throughout all plots is, however, that this renewed identity formation is defective. It becomes obvious that this is always due to two main reasons. For one, the individual is for personal reasons not capable of dealing with the trauma and not able to work through it in order to cope with these experiences. The second reason is that the individual feels restrained to deal with this trauma due to his or her environment that prohibits such coping strategies. It is

exactly at this last point where we encounter the fundamental problem that German victimhood has: unlike with most modern victims, the double identity as—or at least the nearness to—the perpetrator creates an enormous difficulty in incorporating the aspect of victimhood in German post-war identity. It is, therefore, exactly this preservation of a fixed dichotomy that lies behind the identity crisis of the individual characters in the works discussed in this dissertation. Potentially this might lead to a form of an additional subjectively perceived victimization: encountering reluctance to incorporate this experience into the narrative of cultural memory. The repercussions of this precarious and inadequate ‘either-or’ dichotomy is constantly thematized in the following chapters. The emerging German cultural memory has not yet facilitated a cultural identity that includes both roles in a productive way. The next chapters will mainly look into aspects of the challenges to the identity of protagonists, narrators, but also to the public persona of the author.

VII

In conclusion, this dissertation is a study of fictional representations at the crossroads of memory and history and of how these entities are used in order to give meaning to identity. I first read the text for representations of the impact that traumatic experiences have on the individual. Secondly, I place each text in the context of the discourse on German national identity through cultural memory. In the following chapters I examine the texts as well as the ways in which the authors try to convey the

experience of the repercussions of flight and expulsion. It will become evident that the texts some authors write are not necessarily the texts they may have wanted to write. This phenomenon again can be read in the context of the continuous search for an all encompassing and cultural identity through memory.

It should be made clear here that the premise of this dissertation is certainly unambiguous: the ordeal of expulsions of Germans took place as a result of the expulsions and other atrocities that Hitler and Germans inflicted on the ethnic and religious groups in the areas of their rule and occupation. The question of an equation of the Holocaust and expulsions of Germans or the need to create a ranking is clearly absurd and does not arise here. The texts I discuss and society as a whole, however, seem to follow Ute Frevert's line of reasoning that raises the question of comparability of suffering and victimhood in general. Thus, the question of why these expulsions took place is only a side note, albeit an important one, in this dissertation.

In terms of Vertreibungsliteratur it is striking that Louis Ferdinand Helbig's aforementioned monograph *Der ungeheure Verlust* on fictional literature on German expulsion is only one of three such documentations,³⁶ all three have not been translated into English. Helbig's book was written in German. Only in recent years, a small number of articles have been published in the United States on the literary representation of this particular topic in English.³⁷ Usually, however, those texts are predominantly written by authors from Great Britain. Bill Niven's collection *German as Victims*, for example is such a case. What makes Niven's collection so interesting is the fact that all contributors are unanimously of the opinion that a taboo to discuss

German victimhood has never existed. I therefore decided to dedicate my first chapter to an explanation of this nevertheless persistent notion of a nationwide taboo.

CHAPTER 1

Günter Grass Breaks the Taboo in *Im Krebsgang*—but What Taboo Exactly?

In recent scholarship,³⁸ it has become evident that there has never been a taboo to publicly thematize German victimhood. A strong indicator for this is clearly the quantity and quality of television documentaries and fictional literature produced over the last six decades. Nevertheless, during the recent debate on a more pronounced integration of German suffering into German cultural memory, the notion of a taboo kept emerging repeatedly from several sides. It is striking that especially among some intellectuals—and also progressive or left-leaning intellectuals—this view has been maintained adamantly.³⁹ This chapter critically examines this fascinating and seemingly paradoxical situation. I will look at the evolution of this notion of taboo, which has constantly been nurtured by oftentimes contradictory statements of the participants in the discourse on German victimhood. While I argue as well that the issue has indeed never been a taboo in German society, I will show that it is rather the difficulty of a comparison with similar atrocities—especially those committed by Germans—that has obviously created a sense among some intellectuals that German suffering has had an untouchable, reprobate character. I will offer an explanation as to why an author like Günter Grass has been eager to characterize the public stance towards German suffering in such a manner as well. By discussing his *Im Krebsgang* in light of his public remarks outside his fictional texts and of his biography I will point to possible reasons as to why

he considers German society under this limitation and himself predestined to change this perceived hindrance.

I

The sinking of three passenger ships in early 1945, each of them with thousands of refugees onboard, marked the gruesome climax of a chaotic flight of the inhabitants of Pomerania, East Prussia and West Prussia, and foreshadowed the expulsions from these German territories. The “Wilhelm Gustloff,” the “General Steuben” and the “Goya” were shot down within the first four months of 1945. Approximately 4500 died on the “Steuben,” up to 9000 on the “Wilhelm Gustloff” and the sinking of the “Goya” claimed about 6000 lives.⁴⁰ All three ships were sunk by Soviet submarines. One of the main problems addressed in all books discussed in this dissertation immediately becomes evident again in these occurrences: the difficulty in designating an entire group of people as mere victims. On each ship, many of the passengers were, from a military perspective, ‘legitimate’ military targets, namely fleeing soldiers and other military personnel. The other major group of passengers, however, consisted of civilians fleeing from the advancing Red Army. Still, complicating the issue further, even this group was not homogenous, either, in terms of the extent of their complicity with the Nazi regime. Especially on the Wilhelm Gustloff, some of the civilians were high-ranking NSDAP members and administrative officials. Thus this sunken ship with both perpetrators and victims alike onboard serves perfectly as a metaphor for the entire

Third Reich. What is more, the way Germans have dealt with the Third Reich experience is also comparable with the way Germans deal with the fate of this ship. This is one of the core dilemmas of the discourse on the expulsion of Germans from their former territories, as Tanja Dücker describes it in her book *Himmelskörper* in 2003: the protagonist of her book has to come to terms with the unanticipated exposure of her seemingly innocent grandparents as perpetrators during the Nazi period. In this story, too, the shipwrecked grandparents were obviously victims to an act of violence during the war. Yet, at the same time they belonged to the group of those who vehemently approved of the regime and its ideology, or of those who failed to stop Germany's expansionism or participated actively in implementing its plans for augmenting the "Lebensraum" for the master race. It is considered axiomatic that this made them complicit in all atrocities committed by Germans, which is a perspective reflected in most non-fictional representations of these issues. In some recent documentations this context is reduced to the mere mentioning of Nazi-Germany's attack to the East,⁴¹ but in general, German guilt has been mentioned frequently when depicting German suffering in widely watched documentaries like the award-winning 1981 documentary *Flucht und Vertreibung* or Guido Knopp's *Die große Flucht*, aired on ZDF in 2001. These TV productions are just additional instances showing that speaking or writing publicly about German victimhood has never been prohibited or implicitly taboo in West Germany. Nevertheless, 'taboo' remains a marketable label in Germany: as recently as March 2007 the German ARD announced the premiere of Kai Wessel's TV production *Die Flucht* with the headline: "Ein Fernsehfilm bricht ein Tabu."⁴²

I discussed the larger societal context of working through the past in the Introduction. In this chapter, I focus on the discourse in the academic world and intellectual circles that might provide an explanation for Günter Grass's contention that he is the one who is finally lifting the ban on the discussion of German victimhood. His *Im Krebsgang* was one of three high-profile texts that triggered debate about this particular aspect of the discourse on German flight and expulsion at the beginning of the new millennium. In intellectual circles, a major preoccupation and, which is important, even contextualization of German suffering gained new momentum after this had been stifled during the "Historikerstreit" in 1986—the implications of which I want to explore more thoroughly now. All three of these books are from different genres. One was literary scholar W.G. Sebald's socio-political commentary *Luftkrieg und Literatur* in 1999; the second one was historian Jörg Friedrich's historiographical narrative *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945*. Simultaneously, the third one, Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang*, published in February 5, 2002, generated the culmination of this debate in all societal circles, selling not only 250,000 copies in one week but also becoming the bestseller of that year.⁴³ *Im Krebsgang* will be at the center of this chapter, as I stated previously, since it was unique in its potential to reach the broader public and also influence the public scholarly debate on the issue of German victimhood and its alleged taboo—an achievement that had usually been restricted to television productions like the ones mentioned above.

Although the literary-aesthetic analysis of *Im Krebsgang* is not in the foreground in this chapter, it is still instructive to look closely at the plot, characters, and stylistic devices of this text. Doing so establishes why this book became the most relevant and

catalyst-like fictional literary work for the discussion on the diversification of German cultural memory. Furthermore, this will help to analyze why Grass chose to compose the (his)story around the “Wilhelm Gustloff” in the way he did and to try to identify his agenda behind it. It becomes obvious that it is not only about the sinking of one of many ships in early 1945, but rather about the way that Germans move through their own history, the way they have indeed used a kind of crabwalk towards and into a neglected memory. This will help answer the question why Grass and others have announced the urgency to incorporate this experience into cultural memory and German identity in a pronounced way.

II

The description of the constantly changing atmosphere and environment for public intellectuals within the last six decades will help us to understand how this notion of taboo has become so pervasive in the intellectual realm. It differs from the situation for wider society. Bernd Faulenbach and Robert Moeller give thorough surveys of the discourse over the last sixty years. Unlike many other historians, let alone other public figures, Faulenbach manages to describe this volatile discussion, which constantly changes in character, in a rather dispassionate manner. In contrast, speaking during a roundtable discussion with other historians in 2006, Norbert Frei for example, simply declares that “in the history of the Federal Republic these ‘German victims’ were present right from the start, both in private memory and in official commemoration”

(qtd. in Stargard 591). His characterization is certainly accurate for the time frame 1945 to the late 1960s. Yet, in a *taz*-debate with Helga Hirsch twelve months earlier, he had conceded that there had been “gesellschaftliche Stimmungslagen, in denen bestimmte Themen zurücktreten, andere an Gewicht gewinnen” (Frei qtd. in Feddersen 3), referring to the vast impact of the critical movement around and after 1968, but probably also to the “Historikerstreit” of 1986. It is true that it was often more on the family level that the experience surrounding the flight and the expulsion from the old East Germany was omnipresent throughout the years and subject-matter of countless conversations of many families. In addition, on the literary level there had been a steady output of fictional texts dealing with “Flucht und Vertreibung”: in these “spielen die nicht-deutschen Opfer eine wichtige, oft eine entscheidende Rolle” as well, as Louis Ferdinand Helbig argues (*Der ungeheure Verlust* 41)—a claim that might not be completely appropriate for all works analyzed in this dissertation, as I show in all three chapters.

In the historical and intellectual realm, the contextualization of German suffering with German guilt seemed less prevalent after 1968 and more so after the “Historikerstreit.” What is more, it became evident very early on how much more difficult the academic depiction of expulsions is. The 1954 *Dokumentation und Darstellung der Vertreibung aus den Ostgebieten* had described the plight of approximately 12-14 million expelled Germans. Contributors were historians like Hans Ulrich Wehler or Martin Broszat, among others. Very quickly they encountered the influence of societal pressures on their profession. Due to their strict adherence to historical academic rules, these historians were soon met with hostility from various

groups within society. The Bund der Vertriebenen, BdV, for example accused them that the documentation was in “wesentlichen Punkten nach dem Geschmack der Vertreiber ausgefallen.” Interestingly, already in the 50s, many historians put the issue of expulsion of Germans in the context of the expansionist National Socialist policy, since to them it was evident that “die NS-Politik plante ihrerseits gewaltige Umsiedlungsaktionen und führte sie mit brutalen Mitteln durch” (Faulenbach 49). In the wake of 1968, however, this dual approach fragmented. The discussion of the radical and inhuman imperialist policy fueled by ideology as well as questions of guilt and responsibility for the crimes became the main focus for historical discussion, whereas the debate of the injustice and cruelty towards German victims was increasingly and almost entirely taken over by the ‘Vertriebenenverbände’ and remained in the private realm. Historian Bernd Faulenbach identifies additional and convincing reasons for a decline in the academic and intellectual occupation with the issue of expulsion. He writes:

- Nationale Kategorien verblassten im westdeutschen historisch-politischen Bewusstsein.
- Es trat eine gewisse, westlich orientierte Territorialisierung des Geschichtsbewusstseins ein, dessen Raumbild den Osten nicht eigentlich mehr umfasste.
- Die Erkenntnis von der Einzigartigkeit des Holocaust und der anderen NS-Verbrechen ließ anderes Unrecht, andere Verbrechen verblassten.
- In Veröffentlichungen über die Vertreibung hatte eine gewisse Aufrechnungsmentalität eine Rolle gespielt, die zu Recht deutlich kritisiert wurde. Auf diese Weise galt das Thema generell als nationalistisch affiziert, was dazu beitrug, dass es von der jüngeren Generation der Historiker seit den sechziger Jahren kaum--allenfalls am Rande von Nationalismus-Forschungen--aufgegriffen wurde. (53)

In order to understand Grass's rationale how to justify the need to write about the "Wilhelm Gustloff" it is instrumental to look into the political culture and context in which Günter Grass participated during the 1960, 1970s and 1980 and what he witnessed. Grass cites his fear of the imminent threat of misappropriation of the "Wilhelm Gustloff" story by (Neo-) Nazis. Grass was not a student member of the 1968 movement.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, he was one of the protagonists and intellectual participants in the discourse of dealing with the Nazi past. Although he did not until 2006 publicly admit having been a member of the SS, he constantly accused other leading figures in politics of their complicity in the Third Reich system, writing private letters to Finance Minister Karl Schiller or open letters to Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger. In addition, Grass witnessed the "Historikerstreit" in 1986. This conflict made the debate of expulsion even more difficult and gave it an awkward and negative twist. When Andreas Hillgruber published his book *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums* in the same year, the context in which he located the issue of German victimhood was widely rejected. According to some commentators and participants in the "Historikerstreit" it was clear that Hillgruber wanted to equate the flight from the old East Germany with the Holocaust in an inappropriate way, thereby relativizing the Holocaust. Yet, to Hillgruber, both events were "nationale Katastrophen" that belong together (Hillgruber 9). It is until today often overlooked that he did not attempt to parallel "the 'catastrophe of the German East' with the Nazi Holocaust," as Helmut Schmitz insinuates (98).

It is fascinating to re-read the two essays in *Zweierlei Untergang* today. Obviously, Hillgruber's analysis came twenty years too early to be accepted and was

met, in some instances, with unfair critique. Apparently it was not sufficient that Hillgruber started both essays with an eloquent disclaimer, denouncing unambiguously the Nazi atrocities during the Holocaust and declaring unmistakably that the expulsions were a result of German atrocities, the “Rache der Roten Armee an der deutschen Bevölkerung für all das, was in den Jahren 1941 bis 1944 in den von deutschen Truppen besetzten Teilen der Sowjetunion – von welchen Dienststellen auch immer – an Verbrechen begangen worden war” (Hillgruber 21). For today’s observer the rules of engagement for debate in the ‘Historikerstreit’ were extremely tough and occasionally lack professionalism. Compared to 2003 and 2006, when Ute Frevert and Götz Aly and others (see Introduction) call openly for “historicization,” for more of Ernst Nolte’s approach—which is certainly questionable—and for a comparison of atrocities of the 20th century, 1986 was not the time to proclaim this. As Bernd Faulenbach points out with reference to Hillgruber’s theses:

Tatsächlich sind sie überaus anfechtbar und riskant, doch hat die sehr scharfe Kritik an Hillgruber wohl auch den Tatbestand zur Voraussetzung, dass der Holocaust seit den sechziger Jahren im deutschen Geschichtsbewusstsein zunehmend in den Mittelpunkt der Geschichte der NS-Zeit gerückt ist und als einzigartig und unvergleichlich qualifiziert wird, während die Vertreibung gleichzeitig immer mehr aus dem kollektiven Bewusstsein verdrängt und lediglich als Sache der Betroffenen angesehen worden war. (52)

The overreaction then of some critics of Hillgruber was bound to occur. Other than in the 1950s, the overall atmosphere after 1982 was a general uneasiness among progressive historians concerning German victimhood. It was an uneasiness that had understandably enough been triggered by Helmut Kohl’s new historical or rather historiographical visions, already apparent before his ‘Wende’ in 1982, that would

materialize as a “zentrale Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Neue Wache” in 1993. Sabine Moller, in 1998, appropriately called this “die Entkonkretisierung der NS-Herrschaft.” By that she meant that the Neue Wache—by means of the Kollwitz sculpture—institutionalizes a diffuse remembrance of “Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft,” or “war and tyranny,” by transcending a general mourning about a German century of catastrophes, in which all participants have turned into victims altogether.⁴⁵ Therefore, it is not surprising that some thinkers partaking in the ‘Historikerstreit’ were sensitized with regards to a perceived equalization of victim groups and appeared to be merciless in their criticism towards Hillgruber. Only one year before that Wolfgang Benz had published *Die Vertreibung der Deutschen aus dem Osten: Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen*,⁴⁶ so that it was clearly not a novelty to speak about the expulsion of Germans. Nonetheless, the combination of the Holocaust and expulsion of Germans published together was something new, something unheard of.

In order to support his criticism toward the seemingly revisionist historian Hillgruber, Jürgen Habermas quotes incomplete sentences of Hillgruber’s line of reasoning out of context. In his first essay for example, Hillgruber describes in a lengthy paragraph how many Nazi functionaries failed miserably to save their fellow Germans and describes that they stand for “Fanatismus, Brutalität und Feigheit” (37). Since Hillgruber also admits that there was the occasional Nazi who was not like that, Jürgen Habermas claims polemically that Hillgruber’s endeavour “is a question of portraying events from the point of view of the courageous soldier, of the desperate civilian population and also of the ‘tried and tested’ leading Nazi functionaries” (Habermas 30). Although Hillgruber maintains a sober and relatively balanced attitude

in his analysis, if this can be said of any historian, there is indeed a possibly superfluous commendation of German troops for their occasional assistance in the safety of the fleeing civilians – yet, obviously those operations did occur. Still, in the framework of the 1980s ‘Zeitgeist,’ Hillgruber’s thoughts turned out to be a fiasco for him, since this over-empathetic view, which sounded to some like a “tragic-heroic historical narrative” (Schmitz 99), emerged as his Achilles heel. Beyond that, reading both essays individually and subsequently has the reader detect an historical account and method that today would not stir up these emotions. When Hillgruber published his book, his view that both expulsion and Holocaust can equally be described as ‘national catastrophes’ that both originated from German radical racial doctrine and crimes provoked rejection. As Helmut Schmitz explains, public scholars like Dan Diner at that time detected—despite a lucid analysis in Hillgruber’s approach—a national historiography that removes the Holocaust from the center and thereby creates a double history, that “of the Germans and of the victims” (99). Apparently, the contemporary atmosphere at that time did not allow for concurrent “centers,” which would infer that empathy for German victimhood and empathy for victims of German guilt could coexist.

Hillgruber’s depiction is by far not as horrifying as, for instances, Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* or W.G. Sebald’s account of the occurrences in the air raid shelters in his *Luftkrieg und Literatur*. Sebald quotes Ernst Jünger-like accounts by witnesses of the bombing raids on the ground (see p. 62 of this chapter), which deliberately stir emotions that are not necessarily conducive to historical enlightenment. Historians and other scholars continue to quarrel about Hillgruber’s methodology and

insinuate reprehensible intentions while raising the question whether they really dealt with his work adequately, sometimes putting him on the same level as Nolte, as Andreas Huyssen does: “The revisionist history advanced by Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber clearly did not win the day. Its absurdities were too blatant, and they were effectively exposed in a wide-ranging public debate” (1995 83). Historian Michael Geyer in 2006 is still adamant in his criticism towards his late colleague: “The fatal flaw of his argument is his utter neglect of Germany’s victims, their suffering and murder” (interview with Stargard 606), which is also a surprisingly inadequate assessment given what Hillgruber’s actually wrote. Hillgruber appears to be well aware of those victims and describes this at length in several points in his two essays.⁴⁷ Consequently, Geyer’s colleague Karl Schlögel takes a different position in 2002. He re-read Hillgruber’s essays and comes to a different conclusion: to him Hillgruber did nothing other than mention the ordeal of the refugees. In view of Grass’s *Im Krebsgang*, Schlögel laments hyperbolically that apparently there was “keine Gerechtigkeit in dieser Welt” and continues:

Andreas Hillgruber, der Kölner Historiker, eine der internationalen Kapazitäten der Forschung zum Zweiten Weltkrieg, hatte 1986 in seinem Essay *Zweierlei Untergang* nichts anderes getan als was Günter Grass jetzt in seiner Novelle *Im Krebsgang* versucht hat: die Tragödie der deutschen Vertriebenen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges zur Sprache zu bringen. (Schlögel 2002)

To Schlögel, there was a taboo in effect that Hillgruber broke and for which he was, figuratively speaking, “fast gesteinigt” (Schlögel 2002). Certainly, Schlögel overlooks an important point: no one ever attacked Hillgruber for mentioning the victims of flight and expulsion—the outrage was provoked by the contextualization with the Holocaust,

ending Hillgruber's professional career and damaging his reputation until his early death three years later. It is here that the term taboo might have come to be applied to the topic. It is, therefore, more understandable now what Grass might have referred to when he spoke of a taboo. Being accustomed to a way of thinking that does not allow comparisons, since they are confused with equations, Grass must create a new line of reasoning that would justify his decision to write *Im Krebsgang*. Certainly, contextualizations and comparisons can be misunderstood or even abused as equations or relativizations of the atrocities of Germans during the Third Reich. On the other hand, only through contextualization can the danger of a revisionist historical view be avoided, since here larger connections can be addressed. Stefan Berger points out correctly: "The task for contemporary historians of Germany is to develop the ability to think German victimhood in the context of German crimes and German guilt" (222), thereby avoiding polarization. Contextualizations are not favored on all sides of the debate. Many members of the BdV are not ready for this more inclusive approach that was applied, for example, by former Federal Minister of the Interior Otto Schily in 2001. He started his key note speech at the Sudendentendeutsche Landsmanschaftstreffen with the sentence: "Millionen von Menschen haben in den Schrecken des von Deutschland angezettelten massenmörderischen Zweiten Weltkriegs....," but could not finish, since he was immediately booed mercilessly.⁴⁸

III

Günter Grass is not the first person to talk about the sinking of the “Wilhelm Gustloff” and his insistence that he is indeed the first, is worth examining. As Helbig illustrates, in fictional literature there has never been a taboo on writing about the forced emigration of Germans from their former territories either, and the production and its reception has been relatively steady, albeit on a low level. Walter Kempowski reminds the readers of *Stern* as well, and one senses his frustration in his comments, that there were certainly instances of literary representations of “Vertreibung” and in particular the flight of Germans from East Prussia: “Mein *Echolot* beschäftigt sich auf 3000 Seiten mit Flucht und Vertreibung. Allein der Abschnitt über die ‘Wilhelm Gustloff’ umfasst mehr als 100 Seiten. Dass sich Grass dennoch als kühner Tabubrecher feiern lässt, finde ich ungehörig” (Michaelson). Indeed, even long after the publication of *Im Krebsgang*, Grass continued to claim that “In West Germany, it was possible to speak of it and some documentary work was done, but not in a literary form” (Riding 2003), which is clearly inaccurate. The particular part concerning the flight on the “Wilhelm Gustloff” in *Echolot* was published in 1999. This was not the only example of the discussion of these repercussions of Germany’s war of aggression. Numerous films were made,⁴⁹ all of them in the genre of “Heimatfilm” depicting the experience of flight—including the “Wilhelm Gustloff” catastrophe—and expulsion, and also integration. This steady stream, however, ran dry in the late 1950s, possibly due to the improved integration of the expellees and refugees and the changed economic situation that did not require the typical sentimentalized approach of the theme, but rather nurtured a need to move on.

Oftentimes, reconciliation, coping with trauma and coming to terms with the past in a balanced way are not mutually exclusive in these works.⁵⁰ In addition to this *Vertreibungsliteratur*—explicitly fictional representations— there were many instances of *Vertriebenenliteratur*, autobiographical texts, namely accounts by e.g. Gräfin Maria Dönhoff, Christian Graf von Krockow or Alexander Fürst zu Donah-Schlobitten,⁵¹ widely read in Germany in the 60s, 70s, and 80s and not subject to public rejection or stigmatization. As I pointed out, the 1970s marked an increasing unwillingness not only among academics and intellectuals but on the part of society as a whole to incorporate the collective memory of flight and expulsion into cultural memory. The public approval of the associations of the expellees under their umbrella organization BdV dwindled significantly. They were now seen as some ‘Ewig-Gestrige’, or ‘holdovers’ who adamantly and stubbornly cling to the old times, or in the worst case as extremists. The public attitude towards them oscillated between rejection of their utopian and revanchist ideas—like ‘Schlesien bleibt unser’—and they were belittled them as folkloristic dancing groups sporting fancy outfits.

Apparently it was, especially after 1968, less the issue per se, but rather the context in which flight and expulsion could not be discussed in Germany that lead some members of society to sense a particular privation in their lives. So it is not very surprising that contrary to Grass’s own claim to have written about the sinking of the “Wilhelm Gustloff” and “gleichzeitig über die Vorgeschichte, wie es dazu gekommen ist” (qtd. in Leitgeb and Löffler 25), Grass leaves this context out to a large extent in *Im Krebsgang*. The deliberate choice of the genre form of ‘novella’ allows Grass to omit this contextualization: since only the amazing “unerhörte Begebenheit” is described,

development or previous history can be shortened or even omitted. Therefore, the reader has to look further to find Grass's new way of depicting this issue. Thorough background information why the Germans were forced to flee with the "Wilhelm Gustloff" in the first place is almost exclusively mentioned by Grass in the numerous interviews that Grass gave after his literary success with the novella:

Zunächst sind nach dem Einmarsch in Polen 1939 die polnischen Bauern von ihren Höfen geschmissen und die Deutschen draufgesetzt worden. Das waren die ersten Vertreibungen, und dieses von uns ausgelöste Unrecht ist auf uns zurückgekommen. (Leitgeb and Löffler 22)

Grass has a reason to remind the public of cause and effect of these expulsions after his publisher Steidl launches the book: he is quickly applauded from commentators from camps he might not have envisaged and in a way that has not been imaginable before. Erika Steinbach, President of the BdV, is certain: "die Aufmerksamkeit für dieses Thema ist sicher hilfreich" (qtd. in Haß 31). Wolfgang Büscher of the *Welt* newspaper applauds Grass sarcastically by stating that "die Zampanos unserer Bewusstseinsindustrie alt werden, und auch ein Wüterich wie Grass irgendwann einmal milde wird und sentimental" (Büscher 3). It is striking that many commentators in conservative newspapers label *Im Krebsgang* "sein seit langem bestes Buch" (Schneider, R. 3) or thank him that Germany might be becoming "normal" (Büscher 3) now after *Im Krebsgang*. This is not necessarily the result of a splendid literary achievement, as many reviewers concede. His accomplishment is "an deutsches Leid zu erinnern" although one reviewer knows "es mangelt der Novelle an der artistischen und künstlerischen Gestaltung" (Spiegel, H. 56). Grass situates the story in the context of ongoing anti-Semitism in Germany, reducing the interest of the fate of the "Wilhelm

Gustloff” catastrophe to the curiosity of a young neo-Nazi, as a representative for an alleged enormous interest in right-wing circles. Yet, it is also Grass himself who by means of his alter ego in the book—“der Alte”—claims to be impelled to narrate the story of the sinking of the “Wilhelm Gustloff.” Günter Grass still had an impeccable standing as a quasi ‘moral compass’ for the nation in 2002—before and after the publication.

IV

The way that Grass creates the plot is in tune with his self-assessment as the one person who finally tackles this crucial topic. In many reviews, Grass’s text is indeed hailed as a liberating, long awaited politically correct way to address the suffering of millions of Germans after World War II. This is not only due to his decade-long active participation in society as a progressive thinker. Grass indeed contrives a plot and characters—or to a large extent rather types than characters—that are supposed to serve as a mirror to society and its mainstream. Thus, dangers stemming out of this allegedly undetected explosive situation, namely the neo-Nazi undercurrent, can be more easily exemplified. The realistically narrated story has several plotlines, which cover a time frame spanning one hundred years. All of these plotlines center on January 30 and are told simultaneously, to a large extent. Each plotline has different protagonists. The first one draws its material from historical facts and features Wilhelm Gustloff, a German Nazi from Schwerin, born on January 30, 1895. He helped establish a National Socialist

group in Switzerland. Also featured here is the story of David Frankfurter, a Jewish student who assassinates Gustloff in February 1936. Furthermore, the reader is guided through the life of the Ukrainian Alexander Marinesko, Soviet submarine commander who sinks the “Wilhelm Gustloff” on January 30, 1945, on the same day the fictional first person narrator Paul Pokriefke is born. This is the link to the second plotline—a completely fictional one, featuring the more or less successful life of the journalist Paul, including his professional and love life. His mother is Tulla Pokriefke—a character known from Grass’s works like *Katz und Maus* and *Hundejahre*—who continuously urges Paul to bear witness of the sinking of the ship. She gave birth to Paul in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe. As the third bigger plotline, Paul tells the story of his son Konrad or Konny, born 1980, and of Konrad’s love-hate cyberspace relationship to Wolfgang Stremplin, who poses as the Jew ‘David’ in an internet chatroom.⁵² Wolfgang is Konny’s age. They get to know each other by role-playing, each of them adopting with ideological conviction the position of Jew or Nazi respectively. All characters are rather one-dimensional types for a particular attitude in society: Konny embodies the alleged threat that results from neglecting German victimhood, Wolfgang stands for the overidentification with the Holocaust victims or philo-Semitism, Paul is the opportunistic soft and mediocre left-wing intellectual, whose lack of real convictions leads to the inability to serve as a role model, Konny’s mother the typical liberal but one-sided teacher, and Tulla is a simple-minded refugee. Konny turns out to be an extremist, and during an in-person meeting with ‘David’, or Wolfgang, he shoots him in cold-blooded “revenge,”⁵³ a culmination of his obsession with every detail surrounding the “Wilhelm Gustloff.” Grass has the relationship

between David and Paul's son Konny and their extreme interest with the ship develop under the helpless and to a large extent clueless watch of Paul, the narrator. All these strands are almost simultaneously narrated, converging in catastrophes: the sinking of the "Wilhelm Gustloff" and the shooting of Konny's cyberspace buddy-cum-enemy David, which was a logical consequence of the careless treatment by today's generation of the hardships the refugees went through—as the narrator and his alter ego, "der Alte", implies.

It is useful—especially in my attempt to answer the question of Grass's motivation in writing *Im Krebsgang*—to look into some of the narrative devices that Grass applies here, among them a fascinating, almost surrealistic conflation of fiction and reality. Jill E. Twark, in her excellent and detailed discussion of narrative techniques in *Im Krebsgang*, correctly discovers "characteristics common to postmodern narrative" in this extremely realistic piece of text (147), but stops short of interpreting fully the political implications of Grass's choice to employ them. One character and his appearance in the text is indeed surreal. Grass introduces a "Jemand," "der Alte," who enters the story by commissioning narrator Paul to write a report of the sinking of the "Wilhelm Gustloff" and the impact it had on his family history. This elderly gentleman is Tulla's age and used to teach at the TU Berlin. He used to be a writer himself, but now wants to use Paul as a "ghostwriter" (30) since he, as Paul suspects, "scheint sich leergeschrieben zu haben" (30) or at least "sich müdegeschrieben hat" (99). "Der Alte" complains in self-reproach and in detail that actually

wäre es Aufgabe seiner Generation gewesen, dem Elend der ostpreußischen Flüchtlinge Ausdruck zu geben: den winterlichen Trecks gen Westen, dem Tod in Schneewehen, dem Verrecken am Straßenrand und in Eislöchern, sobald das gefrorene Frische Haff unter der Last der Pferdewagen zu brechen begann. (99)

He continues that

niemals hätte man über so viel Leid, nur weil die eigene Schuld übermächtig und bekennde Reue in all den Jahren vordringlich gewesen sei, schweigen, das gemiedene Thema den Rechtsgestrickten überlassen dürfen. Dieses Versäumnis sei bodenlos. (99)

Grass has his narrator and “den Alten,” the old guy or perhaps the old-timer, declare several times that it is crucial to tell the story “as it was,” since otherwise right-wing extremists would take it and misappropriate it.

A very peculiar conflation of fiction and reality can be seen here with the author Grass. Grass himself repeats this notion of an urgency ‘to tell the story’ as well in several interviews outside the book, speaking of “irregeführte Menschen” (Leitgeb and Löffler 21), referring to a “kaum zu begreifenden Neonazismus an den Gymnasien, in den Oberschulen, der auf die Universitäten übergreift” (*Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* Feb. 12, 2002: 7) and promulgating his perception that “die Rechten haben sich der Tragödie bemächtigt” (Boedecker 29). It is doubtless that there is a latent threat of neo-Nazis infiltrating schools and misappropriating German victimhood in today’s Germany—not only with ‘Schulhof-CDs,’ the right-wing recruiting campaign in 2004.⁵⁴ Yet, Grass’s claim of an imminent danger that has grown into enormous dimensions remains unsupported. In a surprising and unorthodox move during the interview with Boedecker, Grass explains the necessity to become proactive against Nazis by using his own fictional characters as a proof: “Als Konny ein Referat über die positiven Aspekte der KdF-Organisation halten will, wird ihm das verboten. Das wird tabuisiert, weil die Lehrer davor Angst haben” (Boedecker 2002 29). Certainly Grass has been a serious

and important political commentator over the last fifty years for Germany. However, justifying his motivation to write this book with the invented character in his own ‘novella’ takes away from the perception that Grass is a serious analyst. Grass uses the fictional material again in another interview in order to justify the need for his work, since “die Lehrer sind dem nicht gewachsen, [...] deswegen ist der Stoff in der Schule dann tabuisiert” (Leitgeb and Löffler 25), which is incorrect, according to a study of Wolfgang Höpken, who describes a changing but continuous occupation with these issues in German history textbooks.⁵⁵ Here it becomes evident that Grass’s strategy of conflating real life and fiction gets out of hand. It is a strategy that does not stop for Grass after having published the book. Grass seems to forget that, unlike in fiction, statements in real life have to withstand scrutiny and cannot be supported with fictional characters from a novella.

It is highly bewildering behavior, and Grass’s puzzling line of reasoning immediately raises the question: does Grass potentially feel compelled to create a reason to write this book and is he frantically looking for a pretext for having done so? Or does Grass fear—not completely inappropriately so—that he might even be nurturing the spirits that he has inadvertently called forth now? Perhaps that might explain why he now starts this preemptive attack and develops this—certainly not unfounded but somewhat turgid—construction in his interviews. Indeed, it is notable that only after Sebald’s *Luftkrieg and Literatur*, Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* and Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* the Neo-Nazi party NPD in the Saxony parliament felt emboldened to coin the allied bombing in Dresden a “Bombenholocaust,”⁵⁶ thereby belittling the experience of approximately six million Jewish victims of German megalomania. The NPD incident

in Saxony was without precedent and exactly what Grass has spent his whole life trying to prevent. This could be seen as a justification for Grass's line of reasoning. Yet, *Im Krebsgang* does not offer any solution. Grass feels that the story has to be discussed more openly. Judging from his narrative technique, his own public comments and, last but not least, his biography, it is fascinating to see how Grass obviously is in an almost unbearable tension. He longs to tell the story but is still fearful to do it as Günter Grass, a.k.a. the country's 'moral compass.' Therefore, just like in *Im Krebsgang*, Grass's alter ego, "der Alte" and Grass are not discernible anymore—even outside the text. Grass gives implicit and explicit assistance and encouragement inside and outside the text to connect himself to "der Alte." He does not dispute the claim that he is the alter ego in the interview with Sven Boedeker, when Boedeker asks him why he describes himself as "müde geschrieben" (Boedeker 29). He simply replies that this particular trait is not true but does not correct Boedeker's premise that it is he, Grass, and more than a character in the book. This is exactly his blurring strategy in the text itself as well—Grass introduces this "Jemand" as his alter ego or a disguised Günter Grass, but certainly not explicitly as himself, the real Grass. The "Alte" regrets not having written the story himself, a story which has a lot to do with Danzig and thereby should have been "seine [the Alte's] Sache" (77). Grass, too, was born and raised in Danzig until he served with the Reichsarbeitsdienst and the SS. The "Alte" in *Im Krebsgang* even uses *Hundejahre* as a time reference: after the publication of *Hundejahre* "sei ihm diese Stoffmasse aufgetragen worden" (77). He admits that in the middle of the 1960s he was sick of the past, but he does not finish his thought about the present day inhibiting his abilities to recount the story: "die Gegenwart ihn gehindert habe, rechtzeitig auf etwa

200 Blatt Papier...” (77). Here, just like narrator Paul oftentimes, “der Alte” does not finish his sentence. If Grass is “der Alte,” and if common character traits of “der Alte” and Paul become apparent, the reader will perceive more Grass in the narration than Grass will admit.

The author Grass always gives the reader some ‘author Grass’ in order to then quickly obscure him again, quickly transforming this being into “den Alten” again before it can become too much Grass. In order to keep this balance, Grass employs another skilful narrative technique. It is exactly in the relationship between narrator Paul and “der Alte” that the reader learns more about the political tensions and inner conflicts of Grass. In addition, this relationship gives us, as I would argue, an interesting insight into the workings of the evolution of the dominant cultural memory. It also sheds light on the question of the transformation of German national identity and how some members of society deal with this normative cultural memory. During one of the “Arbeitstreffen,” or business meetings, of Paul and “der Alte,” it becomes truly surreal: the “Alte” claims that he did not actually invent the narrator but ‘found’ him on the name list of survivors (77-78). By stating that, he clearly says that he did not invent him but he easily could have done so. This is an almost surrealistic step, going far beyond a Brechtian alienation effect. He tells Paul—and the readers obviously know so as well—that Paul is just a figure that is actually only doing what he is doing since the meta-narrator and author is permitting him to act the way he does. It is an ingenious move: the author introduces himself through the narrator and at the same time strips the narrator of all powers and rights, making himself the omniscient, all-powerful institution. Günter Grass appears to need to be heard as Günter Grass. Yet again, and

this is at first sight confusing, Grass still wants to hide behind the “der Alte” and does not completely give up his possibility to retreat into fictionality. He renders himself as the mysterious ‘Auftraggeber’ in the plot, cladding himself as a semi-fictional character. Grass decides himself when it is necessary to step forward as the super-narrator, or meta-narrator, or simply the author and when it is more suitable to be a regular character again. In addition, he can always divulge more information outside his text in interviews. Stuart Taberner suggests that *Im Krebsgang* is indeed a “critical analysis of both Nazi and present-day efforts to focus on Soviet atrocities and to elide German crimes” (175), yet, I would argue that Grass’s remarks outside the text are detrimental to exactly this effort.

V

Why does Grass write the story this way? It would probably be too simplistic to explain this behavior only in the light of Grass’s own biography and his behavior over the last 60 years: Grass admitted in the summer of 2006 that he had—relatively incomprehensibly to many public observers⁵⁷—remained silent about his SS-past while at the same time he had continuously been forcing others to come out: “Ich hielte es für gut, wenn Sie sich offen zu Ihrem Irrtum [having been a member of the NSDAP] bekennen wollten. Es wäre für Sie eine Erleichterung und gleichfalls für die Öffentlichkeit so etwas wie die Wohltat eines reinigenden Gewitters,” he wrote to Minister of Economy Karl Schiller in July 1969 (c.f. Löer 2006). In the same letter he

utters the—then—enigmatic sentence “Mir ist diese Materie nicht unvertraut” (c.f. Löer 2006). It could be argued that Grass in *Im Krebsgang* lacks the courage to tackle the topic of German victims as the public figure ‘Günter Grass’, since he still feels, as he has constantly felt, the need to atone for remaining silent about his own past. This atonement has certainly never been performed, but to a certain extent was substituted credibly and thoroughly by fighting Nazism and Neo-Nazism, especially in the Kiesinger era. It is also obvious that Grass has perceived Germany as a country where you can only speak about certain issues but should remain silent about other ones: “So was kann man denken für sich, hast du gesagt,” Martin Walser reminds Grass in a joint interview in June 2007, “aber so was kann man nicht öffentlich sagen” (*DIE ZEIT* June 14, 2007). Walser reports here Grass’s reaction to Walser’s controversial speech on November 9 1998.

Nonetheless, without Grass, German society would have lacked an important moral leader indeed. Throughout all his books he featured flight and expulsion as a marginal aspect, other than in *Im Krebsgang* always in the appropriate context of Nazi crimes. He confesses late, only in 2001: “So ist mir die verlorene Heimat zum andauernden Anlass für zwanghaftes Erinnern, das heißt für das Schreiben aus Obsession geworden” (“Ich erinnere mich” 29). And oddly enough, in *Mein Jahrhundert* he gives the readership a first hint of his self-criticism for acting so inadequately and remaining helpless vis-à-vis the catastrophe of the “Wilhelm Gustloff.” But again, he only does so through a fictional character: “Ich sah mit Zivilisten, Verwundeten, Parteibonzen überladene Schiffe von Danzig-Neufahrwasser ablegen, sah die ‘Wilhelm Gustloff,’ drei Tage bevor sie sank. Ich schrieb kein Wort

darüber.”⁵⁸ This fictional character in *Mein Jahrhundert* (1999) is an explicitly mediocre journalist, like Paul Pokriefke in *Im Krebsgang*.

Apparently, in the last six years Grass has felt the need to tell the public more about his own biography and about how he feels about this trauma of being driven out of his homeland, culminating in his autobiography.⁵⁹ He articulates how much he wishes German victimhood would become a viable and self-sufficient part of German cultural memory. Before *Im Krebsgang* was published, Swenta Steinig already observes correctly, that “in den Geschichten von Grass ist die realpolitische Distanz immer da: seine Geschichten beanspruchen Relevanz für die Geschichte, z.B. im Sinne der Korrektur, der Erweiterung.” (Steinig 189). The only difference and a flabbergasting novelty is now that for *Im Krebsgang*, Grass considers the decade-long project of coming to terms with the past, or “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” as a major hindrance to what should have been discussed as well. He declares that there is the danger of right-wingers’ misappropriation of the story of the “Wilhelm Gustloff” since “die Linken sie fallen gelassen hatten” (Boedecker 29)—implying clearly that he, as a left-leaning intellectual is complicit in this negligence. Grass reiterates constantly the threat of misappropriation of neo-Nazis in order to finally permit what he has been longing to tell for many years. In the interview with *New York Times* journalist Alan Riding, Grass again uses a fictional character of *Im Krebsgang* or at least echoes his own alter-ego “der Alte”: “One of the many reasons I wrote this book was to take the subject away from the extreme right” (qtd. in Riding 2003). Yet, in the same interview Grass shies away from calling the event a war crime. Still, he implicitly sees German suffering on an equal footing with crimes committed by Germans themselves, leaving the reader

uncertain whether to understand this as a complaint or simple statement: “In general, it was the first responsibility of Germans to speak about German crimes. The question of German suffering was of secondary importance. No one really wanted to speak about it” (qtd. in Riding 2003). It appears that Grass considers this foremost a personal taboo he must break, a personal taboo he maneuvered himself into, that also Sebald perceived as the taboo of the nation-family: a “mit einer Art Tabu behaftetes Familiengeheimnis” (Sebald 18). Grass might have been deterred from speaking out earlier, witnessing Hillgruber’s experience. Although the latter showed even in a much more differentiated manner the clear genesis of flight and expulsion in German atrocities than Grass ever does in *Im Krebsgang*, he fell into disgrace. Grass might have been aware of the fact that he still had a discomfiting past, the public reaction to which he was not able to imagine. By bringing the issue of German victimhood to the fore but at the same time making himself be the one who fights the right-wing misappropriators, he takes a smart step to retain his authority as the old moralist Grass as which the nation knows him. With *Im Krebsgang* he can keep the balance of remaining the ‘moral compass’ and still tackle a topic so vital and dear to him.

Günter Grass was not the first left-wing progressive to take on this difficult balancing act of on the one hand describing an injustice close to his heart and biography, and on the other hand maintaining a reputation as politically correct. One important step was clearly to call it a ‘taboo’ that no one ever broke before. By this he could imply that only right wingers must have broken it, because he has not perceived any righteous person as having done so. Two years before the publication of *Im Krebsgang*, Grass already prepares the ground for this literary coup with a surprisingly uninformed

statement: “Selbst in der Nachkriegsliteratur fand die Erinnerung an die vielen Toten der Bombennächte und Massenflucht nur wenig Raum” (“Ich erinnere mich” 33). This pattern is visible with other participants in this discussion as well. The ageing ‘68er generation produced similar contributions and opinions, notably Alexander Kluge and W.G. Sebald. Some commentators therefore perceive Sebald’s argument of the repression of German war time suffering rather as “tabooed outside revisionist circles” (Fuchs, “From ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ to Generational Memory” 172). Anne Fuchs makes an interesting observation. In her view, Sebald compellingly applies the hypothesis of the Mitscherlichs’ psychoanalytic view to German victimhood:

from the German-as-perpetrators to the Germans-as-victims: while the Mitscherlichs had developed their argument with reference to the collective denial of responsibility for National Socialism, Sebald applies this very argument thirty years later to the repression of the emotional experience of the bombings of the German cities. (“From ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ to Generational Memory” 172-173)

Sebald indeed assumes a line of reasoning that could indeed have been written by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich or Sigmund Freud:

Das nahezu gänzliche Fehlen von tieferen Verstörungen im Seelenleben läßt darauf schließen, dass die neue bundesrepublikanische Gesellschaft die in der Zeit ihrer Vorgeschichte gemachten Erfahrungen einem perfekt funktionierenden Mechanismus der Verdrängung überantwortet hat, der es ihr erlaubt, ihre eigene Entstehung aus der absoluten Degradation zwar faktisch anzuerkennen, zugleich aber aus ihrem Gefühlshaushalt völlig auszuschalten. (Sebald 20)

He compares the Germans’ suffering and their silence in the aftermath of the allied bombings with the silence of the survivors of Hiroshima, about whom he knows that “viele von ihnen zwanzig Jahre nach der Explosion der Bombe nicht darüber reden konnten, was geschehen war” (Sebald 103). Sebald himself candidly admits that

throughout his adolescent life he sensed a lack of dealing with the destruction carried out by the allies. He remarks that this deficit in public interest and in literature was similar to his feeling of being deprived of something crucial,

dass ich aufgewachsen war mit dem Gefühl, es würde mir etwas vorenthalten, zu Hause, in der Schule und auch von den deutschen Schriftstellern, deren Bücher ich in der Hoffnung las, mehr über die Ungeheuerlichkeiten im Hintergrund meines eigenen Lebens erfahren zu können. (82)

For Sebald, Alexander Kluge's account in *Der Luftangriff auf Halberstadt am 8. April 1945* or Victor Klemperer's testimony of the bombing in Dresden "bleibt innerhalb der von der sprachlichen Konvention gezogenen Grenzen" (Sebald 34). Clearly, he misses an approach that he, in some kind of defiance, offers to himself and the readers now: he describes in graphic detail over several pages how exactly the fire burned people alive or cooked them to death. Furthermore, he tells the reader of survivors having gone insane, dragging their burned dead babies through the street, occasionally dropping these pieces of coal on platforms in train stations. Sebald grows very skeptical in his deliberations of the merits of the 1968 movement, which never produced writers who wanted to engage with a survivor literature like this. On the same note, Sebald implies that when one author deemed this impossible, others were supposed to see it the same way. He explains this with the fact, or rather his insinuation that it still is and has been difficult to criticize the wrong person, which has grave consequences in an overly political correct Germany: "...wer es wagt, am Bild eines akkreditierten Autors zu kratzen, der muss bis heute mit bösen Briefen rechnen" (104). Sebald speculates that authors in the "Gruppe 47" had to have a particular background. The "Gruppe 47" would not have allowed someone writing about German victims,

especially using sentences with “zerschlagenen Kiefern und Zähnen, zersprungenen Gehirnschalen, sickerndem Blut, zersplitterten Becken,” as Sebald deems it necessary (110). It is striking that both in Grass’s and in Sebald’s case the willingness to remember erupts in such a drastic fashion,⁶⁰ using images of unspeakable brutality, formerly only known in either Ernst Jünger’s *Stahlgewitter* or accounts of former concentration camp inmates like Primo Levi.

The general recurrently cited sentiment in the public discourse reverberates in Sebald’s complaint: allegedly no one was allowed to discuss the bombing or suffering in public, whereas, again, on the personal level, that of communicated family memory, it was a perpetually recounted narrative, as Sebald learns from numerous letters he receives after his *Züricher Vorlesungen*.⁶¹ In his lament, Sebald tries to find explanations as to why the horrors of the allied bombing campaign have not been mentioned more often. He, too, blames German atrocities which prompted the retaliation in the form of horrific bombing campaigns, a fact that did not allow Germans to grieve their victims. Now, however, he, too, paints the horror scenario of right-wingers trying to take over the issue if no one talks about it, but does not really find convincing examples for that: only “einige der Ansuchen [the letters to him] waren von dem Bedürfnis motiviert, die Deutschen endlich einmal als Opfer dargestellt zu sehen“ (Sebald 92). It is interesting that elderly authors like Grass or Sebald find it so important to constantly dissociate themselves from other advocates of German suffering. An almost schizophrenic attitude can be diagnosed: on the one hand they are relieved that finally the topic can be discussed that is so close to their own biography. On the other hand they still think in categories they perceive as prevalent, although they

are perhaps not as dominant and never have been as dominant as they perceived them to be. It was possible to discuss the bombing, it was also possible to write about flight and expulsion. And it is even more possible today. Society seems to help Grass and Sebald here; the third generation is obviously articulating new demands on identity. Assmann's analysis in regard to this third generation is plausible:

After the conflicts and breaks of the second generation with their parents, this third generation is now much more concerned with seeking its place in a continuous family history, however troubled and ruptured that continuum might be. The agenda of the third generation – in contrast to that of the '68 generation – is no longer to establish a new beginning. (“On the (In)Compatibility” 193)

Grass pretends in *Im Krebsgang* to be not fully certain why it is only now that he should write about it. He has the “Jemand,” or “der Alte,” ask his narrator a “why now?” The narrator stammers and stutters some broken-off sentences: “Weil Mutter mir immer wieder... Weil ich damals, als der Schrei überm Wasser lag schreien wollte, aber nicht konnte... weil die Wahrheit kaum mehr als drei Zeilen... Weil erst jetzt....” (7). Grass's hesitant and helpless narrator reflects Grass's own cautious approach to the question of how to deal with flight and bombing in a speech in 2002: “Merkwürdig und beunruhigend mutet dabei an, wie spät und immer noch zögerlich an die Leiden erinnert wird, die während des Krieges den Deutschen zugefügt wurden” (qtd. in Beyersdorf 568). Grass himself could have broken that silence and could have introduced a new “Nebeneinander von Opfergruppen,” as Aleida Assmann calls it. It cannot be Grass's task to show solutions for societal problems. What one misses in *Im Krebsgang*, however, is an attempt to show these ambiguities, which would help Germans acquire a new way to commemorate German victimhood, which would not be on the expense of

the remembrance of Nazi victims. Nurturing the notion of 'taboo' contributed to an additional polarization of the discussion.

CHAPTER 2

Using And Abusing The Museum: Institutionalized Cultural Memory in Siegfried Lenz's *Heimatmuseum*

As I argued in the Introduction, cultural memory is a construct that is subject to a particular normative understanding of the past within a society. In most societies, an evolving “Zeitgeist” determines which aspects of the ubiquitous collective memory are accepted or emphasized in cultural memory, which in turn produces the cultural identity of a particular society.⁶² In this chapter I will show how museums, especially history museums, are powerful tools that participate in forging cultural memory, and as Andreas Huyssen puts it, how they “inevitably construct the past in light of discourse of the present and in terms of present-day interest” (*Twilight Memories* 15). In this context I will discuss Siegfried Lenz’s novel *Heimatmuseum* as an indicator for the interference of this creation of cultural memory with the perception of past by individuals, which is equally constructed. Lenz’s text can be read as an account of the destructive potential of these interferences, here culminating in a futile attempt to evade the total misappropriation of the past by erasing mnemonic devices that could support various interpretations of the past.

Lenz published *Heimatmuseum* in 1978. It is a novel that connects—more or less chronologically—anecdotes that the first-person narrator Zygmunt Rogalla tells his daughter’s boyfriend from his hospital bed in Schleswig-Holstein. He ends up there after sustaining severe injuries when setting fire to his local heritage museum, which he had re-established after his flight from East Prussia. The anecdotes he recounts largely

took place between 1900 and the end of WWII in his native region of Masuria, East Prussia, German territory bordering with Polish regions. Although the museum is often the setting and abstract motivation for the actions of many of the protagonists in these stories, this book is also a kind of saga, depicting a family and its environment in Masuria as well as its daily life. This is probably one of the main reasons why this novel has mainly been interpreted for the *Heimat*-aspect in the title and not for the *museum*-component. Most contemporaries have mainly identified the affiliation with “Heimat” and how to deal with losing one’s homeland as the main topos of this book.⁶³ However, this 655-page novel offers much more than an explanation of why and how one can express one’s love to one’s “Heimat,” which Lenz undoubtedly does, and still be able to accept its loss after having been expelled. Lenz’s insistence on the gradual danger of instrumentalization of the museum in this novel ultimately suggests the metaphor of the museum as the institutionalized memory, thus offering fascinating insights into the workings of cultural memory. The traumatic experience of flight from Masuria and loss of former territory are the elements with which Lenz develops this allegory.

I

Physical locations are often used as a metaphor for memory. A variety of physically accessible places and spaces can be considered a form of embodied memory, and this does not only apply to memorials. In art and literature, archives have been

invoked as the most obvious of these types of spaces. Jorge Luis Borges for example employs a library in this context; however, he does so not only as another repository for memory. His gigantic library in the short story “Biblioteca de Babel” (1941) could also be seen as an important device to create and contain the *raison d’être* of a social and cultural group. Another obvious place that can also serve the purpose of myth creation or to create a usable past for a cultural group through remembrance is a hall of fame. The German Walhalla is a good example for invoking memory of past events and personalities connected with apparently defining moments of German culture.⁶⁴ The idea for this hall of fame was appropriately enough conceived in 1807, when the German states had been defeated by Napoleon. It was created in 1842 and is still being filled with busts and commemorative plaques of figures of alleged importance for the German cultural heritage. One of the last additions in the form of a bust was Konrad Adenauer, an indicator that the Federal Republic tries carefully to form a continuum from Hermann the Cherusker, or Arminius,⁶⁵ via Friedrich von Schiller and Sophie Scholl to the present. Aleida Assmann names the attic as a metaphor for memory, a more prosaic, but equally imaginative place (*Erinnerungsräume* 161). Here indeed a space is constantly filled with items currently not needed, kept locked up, accessible through its nearness to the regular living space, and entering that location one feels as if one were entering an unknown world—indeed a perfect metaphor for long-term memory.

However, the quintessential space of recollection is a museum. Public museums, especially history museums, are the physical concretization of the cultural memory of a society and an indicator of its identity, as I will illustrate in this chapter. In this context,

Alon Confino reminds us of Aby Warburg's argument that all human products, and "artistic work in particular, were expressions of human memory transmitted through symbols from ancient times" (Confino 173). It is exactly this fascination with any kind of trace to the past that these items created very early on for collectors. What once developed from a cabinet of private show-and-tell and of individuals' interests was increasingly shaped by "ever-widening social demands," as Jeffrey Abt emphasizes (132). These demands most visibly emerged in times of an evolving nationalism across the Western world. It was only in the 18th and 19th centuries that collections were opened up to the public. However, it was not only an insatiable interest in learning that was supposed to be fulfilled with the erection of publicly accessible spaces housing collections of art, technology or pillage from distant lands. Andreas Huyssen points out that "the construction of the cultural identity of modern Germany went hand in hand with the museal excavations that later formed the bedrock of German nationalism" (*Twilight Memories* 19). Indeed, there was another contemporary agenda behind collecting, as art historian Flora Kaplan explains: "In the 19th and 20th centuries the formation of museums and nation-states multiplied rapidly with the spread of industrial capitalism, the sciences, and the downward spread of knowledge in more open, changing and democratic societies" (165). Wider groups in society had gained access to education; the bourgeoisie intensified their aspirations for participation in society. It was exactly these groups that not only wanted to participate in the construction of a nation state in the—at that time—ubiquitous movement of nationalism, but also were rather the driving forces in its development. This had an impact on their participation in the evolution of the museum as well. The Germanische Nationalmuseum, for instance,

was founded by aristocrat Freiherr Hans von und zu Aufsess; nonetheless, it was mostly commoners who advanced its success in the next decades. It was the beginning of the systematic archiving of German artifacts and cultural achievements portraying 500 years of German culture. The new and increasing political cohesion after the Napoleonic shock and the challenges of the following restoration were some of the triggers for the urge to collect cultural trademarks of Germanhood. It was not the first one, but rather another vital attempt to identify elements for the cultural memory of a young Germany, and the erection of museums was not necessarily restricted geographically—other than the fact that they would have to be on German soil.

The way a society, and even a so-called open society, creates its cultural memory is strikingly comparable to what curators do in the museum: they acquire or discard, put into order or classify by arranging a particular sequence of the artifacts; they prioritize, neglect or emphasize; they conserve, communicate and exhibit or leave in storage, retrieve from the archive and decide on the duration of its interest and exposure. In turn, the behavior of the visitor, the observer, in the museum could be considered a condensed version of how individuals in a society share remembrances within their cultural environment. Very often, however, what really takes place in a museum is rather a confrontation of the observers with the established and endorsed cultural memory of the society they are in. Museums in general have the ability to contribute to the particular significance of an aspect of the cultural identity of a nation or group by collecting and representing information.⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno quotes a bitter Paul Valéry who sneers: “Man wisse nicht, warum man gekommen sei: um sich Bildung zu holen, um sich Entzücken zu suchen oder um eine Pflicht zu erfüllen, einer

Konvention nachzukommen” (qtd. in Adorno 178). Adorno agrees to a certain extent: art becomes a matter of education and information, yet, it could also function as a “Naturalienkabinett des Geistes” (189), as Adorno somewhat reconciliatorily suggests. Moreover, as Mieke Bal points out in *Double Exposure*: “The discourse surrounding the exposition, or, more precisely, the discourse that *is* the exposition, is ‘constative’: informative and affirmative” (3).⁶⁷ It is true that the mere presence and selection, ordering and preservation of the object for the museum not only informs the viewer or reader of its significance but also affirms it to them. What is more, the institutionalized memory in the form of a museum can extend the artifacts’ significance by adding to the museum visitors’ own memory. Susan Crane asserts persuasively that “recollection is inspired by collections” (*Museums and Memory* 2), since the visitors will link their own knowledge about the significance of the object to the new museally created significance. The museum is subsequently not only the repository of memory or information; it is rather one element of the basis of cultural or national identity through the museum’s exhibition pieces’ reciprocity with memory—an idea that Proust already considered in *Recherche du temps perdu*. There he states that things—and therefore also artifacts—are “von Anbeginn neben ihrem spezifisch Ästhetischen, ein anderes, ein Stück des Lebens dessen, der sie betrachtet, ein Element seines eigenen Bewusstseins” (qtd. in Adorno 184).

The notion of a museum visit as a cultural experience as well as a high-impact personal experience becomes increasingly obvious when observing the design of the museum, the design of the exhibition and its environment. The political dimensions of the relatively new discipline of museum pedagogy are apparent, for example, in the

architecture and the interior design of the Jewish Museum Berlin. Its design appeals to all senses, sending the visitors through confusing corridors, having them experience claustrophobic moments, making them walk over irritating material or helping them to learn to write in Hebrew. A successful implementation of museum pedagogy was also apparent in the biggest nation-wide exhibition on German flight and expulsion ever, which opened in 2005. The initiators of the traveling exhibition “Flight, Expulsion and Integration,” or “Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration,” from the Haus der Geschichte in Bonn—the exhibition ended in Leipzig in 2007—decided to guide the visitor into the exhibition through a small room detailing German atrocities and German guilt of ethnic cleansing during the Third Reich. The curators deliberately used the museal space to create a chronological causality for the vengeance on Germans that resulted in their expulsion. Here again, making the experience of expulsion more accessible through the museal arrangement adds a new dimension to the remembrance of these events.⁶⁸

Unlike twenty years ago, when the atmosphere during the “Historikerstreit” clearly stifled an augmentation of official cultural memory, society now allows the refugees and expellees to incorporate their individual memories in cultural memory. Their experience has moved beyond the realm of the communicated collective memory of families and associations. It has been put into a larger cultural context by providing a particular official rendition and interpretation. This recent interpretation of the history of the expellees allows these events and their memory to receive a more pronounced legitimization as national trauma by being admitted entry to the Deutsches Historisches Museum and therefore becoming part of German cultural memory. Accompanying this transformation, the German media’s generally enthusiastic reception of this exhibition

signified that the issue of the expulsion of Germans had found its way into the officially condoned cultural memory of the Germans.

In order to explain the background of Siegfried Lenz's *Heimatmuseum* and the story about the 'exporting' of a museum, it is necessary to also look into the connection between museums and the issue of the expulsion of Germans. In contrast to memorials, which are typically located in surroundings interacting strongly with the meaning of a memorial, the location of the physical space of the museum is most of the time of lesser importance. This becomes obvious in the case of the German expellees and refugees and the commemoration of their experience in post-war Germany, and it is clearly a fundamental aspect in Lenz's novel. A museum possesses its expressiveness in itself through its self-contained compactness and is not necessarily in dialogue with its immediate location, as it becomes obvious once the museum is relocated to Schleswig-Holstein. In contrast, narrator Zygmunt Rogalla's hometown Lucknow erects a memorial for Hindenburg in order to show clearly Lucknow's sense of belonging to the German Empire.⁶⁹ Certainly, the location of the Holocaust Museum in the capital of the United States illustrates the significance of the Shoa for US-American cultural memory. However, it does not "transform its site" like a memorial does, as James Young argues (*The Texture of Memory* 7). Nürnberg, for instance, had some regional historic significance; yet, it was definitely not a hotbed of nationalism in the 19th century. Still, there is no need to relocate the Germanisches Nationalmuseum today, and it could as well be in Eisenhüttenstadt or Kiel. In contrast, a memorial like the Berlin Holocaust Memorial, for example, gains its significance through its nearness to the former headquarters of destruction.⁷⁰ It was Lüneburg, where in 1958 the Ostpreußisches

Jagdmuseum was opened, the predecessor of the Ostpreußisches Landesmuseum, which was inaugurated in 1987 in the same town.⁷¹ Although the initial focus appeared to be on hunting and the nature of East Prussia, the issue of the expulsion was naturally omnipresent. A few years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, in 1991, the Schlesische Landesmuseum opened its gates in Görlitz, as did the Pommersche Landesmuseum in Greifswald in 1996. These museums have received little to no attention at all among the wider public. None of these locations focus solely on the issue of expulsion, yet certainly this aspect in their history is featured in their permanent exhibitions. The depiction of culture and history of the people in the regions of former German residence in these institutions has certainly always featured the months and years of forced migration that these groups underwent. However, there has never been an extensive museal portrayal of these events in either West or East Germany apart from the aforementioned traveling exhibition “Flight, Expulsion and Integration,” when this issue became the central focus of this virtually unanimously acclaimed exhibition.

An additional exhibition tried to achieve this, the organizers emboldened by the success of “Flight, Expulsion and Integration”—and this exhibition has to be mentioned here, since it clearly intended to re-invent the circumstances of German flight and expulsion. It opened its gates in 2006, but did not receive widespread favorable attention. Quite the opposite was the case when the federal umbrella organization of all associations of expellees, the Bund der Vertriebenen, BdV, under their president and CDU MP Erika Steinbach, inaugurated the exhibition “Erzwungene Wege,” or forced paths, in August 2006 at the Kronprinzessinnenpalais in Berlin.⁷² It was considered the pilot project or at least the spearhead of the highly controversial “Zentrum gegen

Vertreibungen” by the BdV, which has tried, as a concept at least, since 2000 to fill this void of museal representation concerning the expulsion of Germans.⁷³

Not unexpectedly, therefore, it provoked considerable resentment and prompted Polish officials to denounce the exhibition as intrinsically revisionist and insulting. The main criticism of the Polish government—albeit fueled by some irrational domestic saber-rattling of president Lech Kaczynski and his twin brother prime minister Jaroslaw Kaczynski—was that this German organization tries more or less subtly to turn the German victims into innocent people, ignoring that among these German victims there were many perpetrators as well. When I visited the exhibition in August 2006, I was indeed struck by Erika Steinbach’s resolute insistence on the appropriateness and righteousness of the exhibition and rejection of any criticism. One of the problematic issues,⁷⁴ for example, was the fact that the displays had left out that the German civil population was very much involved in the process of marginalization and suppression of the Czechs after 1938 and before 1945—an issue that I also address in my chapter on Reinhard Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten*. Instead of seizing the chance to describe German victimhood by cautiously undermining the stereotypical dichotomy of victim vs. perpetrator by diligently contextualizing the events, the exhibit lost that opportunity. Carefully arranged artifacts like worn out shoes, a dysfunctional fiddle and toys added a tactile opportunity to emotionally identify with the plight of all those European people victimized by ethnic cleansing. What was different from the exhibition “Flucht, Vertreibung und Integration,” was the absence of any didactic means of introducing the audience to the topic’s wider context. The sole contextualization of the exhibition in the Kronprinzessinnenpalais was equating German suffering with all other Europeans groups

whose ethnic cleansing the curators described in equal terms. Instead of assigning various values to the different types of “ethnic cleansing,” the main aim was apparently to parallel German plight to the suffering of Armenians, Lithuanians, Italians, Jews and others, signified mainly by the equal size of the text boards.⁷⁵ Most importantly, what happened here was not the invention of facts but a more or less subtle change in the context in order to convey a particular view on history.

When visiting a typical German “Heimatismuseum,” or a local heritage museum, one is immediately struck by the overtly conscious effort to create a particular view as well: here it is mainly a strong sense of origin. The typical local history museum contains an overview of findings of pre-historic items; in addition one can find day-to-day items from the last 500 years and oftentimes the museum features some famous son or daughter of the town or region. Although some “Heimatismuseen” are now being renamed “Historisches Museum” to make them sound more contemporary, the idea is still the same. There is no significant difference in character between the Heimatismuseum Oberstdorf in Bavaria or the Historisches Museum Verden in Lower Saxony, which is a former Heimatismuseum as well. The artifacts of the latter span 120,000 years, exhibiting some of the oldest hunting weapons of the world, toys from several centuries, furniture, objects of daily life, craftsmanship and religious content and a temporary exhibition of Christian Modersohn, son of the painter Otto. Verden County prides itself on being the home to numerous artists in the famous artists’ colony of Fischerhude, although the main part of the colony was in the adjacent Worpsswede. A comparably eclectic variety of artifacts can be found in the Heimatismuseum Oberstdorf, where to all these local items they—not unexpectedly—added important collectibles

from the world of skiing. The curators of these two museums see their institution as an important element in the understanding of the here and now by using the past, thus considering themselves crucial players in the process of the development of cultural memory—and identity. On its website one Heimatmuseum prominently states its mission: “Heimatmuseum Oberstdorf — Nur wer die Vergangenheit kennt, kennt die Gegenwart.”⁷⁶ The present, however, often does not include all critical aspects of the past. For instance, in the heritage museum in Verden in Lower-Saxony one looks in vain for documentation of the Jews that fled or were deported from Verden, nor is there any piece of information about the large local satellite camp for slave laborers from Neuengamme.

II

In Siegfried Lenz’s 1978 novel *Heimatmuseum*, Adam Rogalla, the narrator’s uncle, does the exact same thing that we can see in the curating of many museums: collect items from the past to make sense of the present. Adam begins collecting after some amateur excavation work in the early 20th century in the fictitious Masurian town Lucknow. What his nephew Zygmunt—the first-person narrator in the novel—saves from destruction immediately before the Soviet invasion and subsequently brings to West Germany in 1945 resembles closely the material that one would find today in the typical local heritage museums I just portrayed. Adam had always been interested in prehistoric times: “er grub unsere Vorgeschichte aus, der fleißigste Maulwurf unserer

Vorgeschichte” (20). Adam adds to his discoveries other items of former and current daily life. For Lenz’s dramaturgy, the most significant and certainly crucial and constitutive difference to a regular heritage museum is the fact that the family in Lucknow lives and sleeps inside the museum:

[...] und während meine Mutter sich damit abfinden mußte, daß ihr Bett von Teufelsgeigen, Brummtöpfen und beflochtenen Reifen umstanden war, mußte ich mich vor allem mit der Nachbarschaft alter masurischer Brautgewänder abfinden, [...], und Sie [daughter’s boyfriend Martin –KD] müssen sich vorstellen, daß über meinem Bett ein Bord lief, an dem betagtes Küchengerät baumelte, Kohlstampfer, Gewürzstampfer, Kuchenmodeln aus Obstbaumholz, blütenförmig oder als Sechsstern [...]. (160)

Here Lenz creates a close relationship between the dimensions of time and space, between the reconstruction of the past and the current living space, which will, later in narrator Zygmunt’s life, end in devastating consequences. Lenz subsequently parodies the historical work of the local heritage museum, by pointing out that Adam Rogalla’s museum grows to serve one explicit purpose: constructing and re-inventing the history of Masuria. Winfried Freund, echoing the criticism of Zygmunt’s friend Conny in the novel, perceives in Uncle Adam’s local heritage museum “die unverrückbare ideologische Basis für die Praxis quasi feudaler Herrschaft, Brutstätte rechthaberischer Heimattümelei” (94). This observation is certainly correct; nonetheless it is interesting to look into how Lenz develops this transition from a seemingly innocuous project to brutal revisionism. Lenz demonstrates already here that constructing a repository of Masurian cultural memory will increasingly be exactly that—a construct.

The constructedness of this version of Masurian cultural memory becomes even more evident during the plebiscites following the Versailles treaty, when Uncle Adam feels ultimately compelled to exclusively utilize his collection for political purposes.

This is a change. At the beginning Uncle Adam's collection had included also artifacts of the pre-German era. Unlike his brother Alfons, Adam accepts—initially at least—the comprehensive and diverse Masurian heritage in his concept of 'Heimat' by also including Sudovian or Prussian objects from 1009 and accepts the creators of those pieces as his ancestors.⁷⁷ Thus, he even includes "Krummschwerter, mit denen meine Vorfahren den Missionar Bruno von Querfurt und seine siebzehn Begleiter getötet haben" (9),⁷⁸ as nephew Zygmunt indicates. Subsequently, however, the museum becomes a tool to promote a particular agenda, hence it becomes much more than simply an instrument to ensure transgenerational experience and knowledge to create an inclusive social long-term memory.

The first-person narrator, Zygmunt, experiences this ambiguous quality of the museum as both a means to conquer ephemerality as well as an instrument to push a particular agenda early in his life. A Russian officer has an argument with his Uncle Adam in his museum during the occupation of the region at the beginning of WWI and is quick to dismiss the mission of the heritage museum as the pure creation of a fiction of eternity, asking: "Warum? Jeder Tag zwingt uns zu der Erfahrung, daß alles auf Abschied hinausläuft: hier aber, in diesem Heimatmuseum, werde die Fiktion von Bleiben und Wiederkehr genährt" (165). In order to support his argument, the officer grabs an old paper document from the museum's collection in order to light his pipe with it. Zygmunt, who witnesses this destructive and foreshadowing encounter between fire and mnemonic device, will later recount this anecdote in almost reverential awe. What is especially interesting to Zygmunt is the fact that Uncle Adam is capable of producing almost the identical document again the moment the Russian leaves through

the door: Adam has preserved the originals in the cellar, exhibiting only the replicas. This ability to re-create memory through the re-creation of mnemonic devices is a first hint at the uselessness of trying to stop an artifact from serving as an arbitrary proof of origin.⁷⁹ This is a crucial message, the importance of which nephew Zygmunt, however, does not yet comprehend.

In the meantime, Zygmunt inherits his Uncle's obsession with collectibles. The difference is that he is opposed to dedicating his museum to the creation of fictions that serve as realities. Therefore, after Uncle Adam's death, Zygmunt reinstates his uncle's previously abandoned multi-ethnic approach to the region. For a while he continues the legacy in a different way, more on the informative level as he hopes, instead of serving chiefly as legitimization for the questionable German supremacy in this Masurian region and to justify the marginalization of the Polish population. Zygmunt's reasons for collecting are different, he argues merely for a fight against ephemerality to find meaning for the present:

[...] dieses vergangene Leben hat einen Anspruch darauf, vor restloser Vergessenheit bewahrt zu werden. Warum? Weil es unser Leben vorbereitet hatte. Weil wir ihm alle nötigen Erfahrungen verdanken, auch die betäubendste Erfahrung: Vergänglichkeit. Gegen den Schmerz um die verlorene Zeit gibt es nur das eine Mittel: ihr einen Sinn zuerkennen. (257)

Interestingly, just like his Uncle Adam he does not add any photographs to his collection, although their motivations differ. Zygmunt wants 'pure' and original items as artifacts that will help educate the visitor. Uncle Adam, however, was careful to not include any photograph in his collection since he is convinced: "Photographien – die haben rein nusch zu tun mit Zeijenschaft, mit jener Zeijenschaft, die für ihn ein Werkzeug besaß oder eine Waffe oder ein Spielzeug" (325). His opinion of the

usefulness of artifacts over photographs as revealing the past is disturbing, yet understandable from his point of view: although the character of a photograph certainly makes it vulnerable to misinterpretations as well, in comparison to a piece of amber the photograph cannot as easily be abused as evidence to serve the aggrandizement of a particular ethnic group. It might be a less corruptible witness of actual situations and unable to be integrated into Uncle Adam's testimonial, and therefore has only little 'Zeijenschaft'- value in the corrupted approach to testimony that Uncle Adam had taken. Zygmunt wants to turn the museum into a mainly educational and unbiased facility. Again and again groups of school children are brought into the museum to marvel at the armors of the knights of the Teutonic Order or the skeleton of a Masurian bear. It becomes obvious that it is rather wishful thinking to hope that the artifacts per se are not biased. On some occasions, Zygmunt and his wife provide visitors with some basic background information about the pieces on display.⁸⁰ This can be compared to a West German post-1968 approach to history teaching, which has focused on the source and the critical analysis.⁸¹ However, a German student learns quickly that this can be nevertheless equally problematic, since the choice of the sources continues to be a contentious issue. In Lenz's novel, it becomes increasingly clear that Zygmunt Rogalla's main intention to merely transport experience and knowledge through the generations is in constant danger of being abused as well, as I will show on the following pages.

Some scholars seem to overlook the nuanced progression from educating to misappropriating history in a society, as in the case of literary critic and social researcher Aleida Assmann. Her notion of cultural memory reveals a rather idealistic

idea of its chances. She argues that the evolution of cultural memory selects and uses “Artefakte wie Texte, Bilder, Skulpturen neben räumlichen Kompositionen wie Denkmäler Architektur und Landschaften sowie zeitliche Ordnungen wie Feste, Brauchtum und Rituale“ (*Geschichtsvergessenheit* 49). These are indeed the underlying structures that enable the mechanism of identity formation for a cultural group. Assmann emphasizes the wide spectrum of notions, views and perspectives that cultural memory might entail. It is surprising, however, that she, just as Zygmunt in Lenz’s novel, is overly optimistic in her assumption that its “Bestände lassen sich niemals rigoros vereinheitlichen und politisch instrumentalisieren, denn sie stehen grundsätzlich einer Vielzahl von Deutungen offen” (*Geschichtsvergessenheit* 50). It is exactly the fabricated nature of cultural memory that makes it so vulnerable. What is more, an all-inclusive cultural memory is not attainable. Not all individuals, members and bearers of cultural groups have an equal impact on the overall society, as Lenz demonstrates as well in the case of the Polish in Uncle Adam’s museum.⁸² The idea of “Heimat,” therefore, is not only a highly personal notion in which the individual indulges. It is also an uncompromising tool for the dominant group to exclude unpopular or inconvenient evidence about certain aspects of that society. What is important to note, however, is the fact that cultural memory is not completely rigid or monolithic, as we can see in the abovementioned examples that Lenz describes—some values and notions in a society are obviously unstable.

III

There are three main events in the novel that illustrate even more impressively the central theme of the instrumentalization of the museum and the resistance against that idea, and I will explore those in detail: first, the plebiscite after the Versailles Treaty, second the intended utilization of the museum by the Nazis and third the occurrences with narrator Zymunt's old childhood friend Conny. Conny, who initially rejects adamantly all attempts to Germanize Masuria, becomes after the flight to West Germany a fervent advocate of his revisionist association of the expellees, which appropriates the museum for its needs.

During the campaign for the vote that would determine Masuria's future nationality in 1920, Uncle Adam—Lenz surely implies some sort of personified claim to origin with this name—becomes ardent in his striving for the proof that Germans were the ethnic group that had settled in the region for a longer time. He has the testimony in his heritage museum that there had been other tribes before the Germans and that Masurians originate from tribes that later also contributed to the ethnic group of Latvians or Lithuanians. Still, this is not enough. Once the case has to be made against the Poles and their potential accession to power, he becomes a vociferous extremist. He now writes articles and produces ancient documents and old kitchen utensils from the 16th century that prove century-long Germanness in the region. The opposing Polish side does the same. They use events like the victorious battle of Tannenberg in the 15th century as the logical reason that Masuria has to be Polish again.⁸³ Even though Lenz might have his narrator exaggerate to some extent, the intentions become clear—both

sides employ the past in a distorting way in order to provide justification for the present and future. As a matter of fact, it does not really make a difference whether the origins can be traced back 400 or 500 years, since in the meantime, the power balances have changed several times in the region. Nevertheless, this is another example in which past events are used to prove a specific heritage, using scholarly and pseudo-scholarly findings to corroborate equally pseudo-historical arguments. Lenz shows the absurdity of these almost arbitrary proofs by giving German names to the Polish characters in his novel, whereas the Germans bear Polish names. Within this region and with all the changes in government, only language could have been the marker for these truly manufactured communities or ethnic groups. Yet, even that is not the biggest difference, since both ethnic groups speak the respective other language as well. The main explicit distinction between the two groups in Lenz' novel is the economic difference, with the Germans being the landowners and the Polish being laborers confined to Klein-Grajewo, a small village near Lucknow.

The second major event that illustrates the central theme of the instrumentalization of the museum takes place shortly after Uncle Adam dies—highly symbolically after he loses his memory. Not long before the Nazis take over in East Prussia and the rest of Germany, Zygmunt becomes the curator of the museum. He has gone through an extensive apprenticeship with Adam. He collects similar items and keeps adding new material. Now the National Socialists come to power, and very soon they are enchanted with the idea of taking advantage of the museum in order to use it for a justification of the supremacy of the German, Aryan, Nordic race in that region. Zygmunt soon provokes the now ruling Nazis' lamentation that his museum is not

“förderungswürdig in unserem Sinne” (368), since it does not stress solely the German origins of the region but the more inclusive multi-ethnic Masurian patchwork. Here the interplay of the concept of “Heimat” and past in the framework of power and instrumentalization is again apparent. The construction of a publicly acceptable and usable past through a manipulated memory is pursued mercilessly by the National Socialists who want to rename it “das große Grenzland-Museum” to bear witness to the “unbeugsamen Wehrwillen der Bevölkerung” (380). The Polish dimension, however, is left out to a large extent, and although Zygmunt is rather compassionate towards the Polish minority, he involuntarily becomes part of this scheme that he rejects increasingly. Zygmunt’s best friend Conny, still a notorious indomitable troublemaker at this point in the novel, which is last but not least also due to his Polish friendships, warns against letting the Nazis get hold of the museum:

Laß dich nicht darauf ein, Zygmunt, werde nicht ihr Lieferant. Es gibt Dinge, sagte er, denen wir keine Unschuld zugute halten können, und dazu gehört ein Heimatmuseum: ungewollt weckt es völkische Arroganz. Und erst ein Grenzland-Museum: das ist mehr als eine verklärende Narrheit, mehr als ein Dilemma, denn der Chauvinismus richtet es ein und möbliert es, und nationale Überheblichkeit schreibt die Kunde nach Bedarf um. (382)

Conny is convinced that the collected memory amassed in the museum could be used as a weapon one day. This would be especially true if Zygmunt were to do what the Nazis suggest: select only particular meaningful and undoubtedly non-Slavic pieces from the museum and send the others to storage. For the narrator it is obvious on the personal and cultural level that remembering is always connected with some political bias, as he tells his daughter’s boyfriend at one occasion: “Ja, du hast recht Martin, sobald wir uns erinnern, stellen wir die Zusammenhänge neu her. Es ist jedesmal eine Parteinahme. Eine Aneignung auf neue Art, ja” (451). Zygmunt knows that

Vergangenheit, sie gehört uns allen, man kann sie nicht aufteilen, zurechtschleifen; das verwächst doch miteinander, verschränkt sich, das bestätigt sich gegenseitig in Habgier, Macht und Niederlagen – manchmal aber selten in Vernunft; und wer versucht, die Dinge und Beweise zu trennen, die uns hinterlassen wurden, wer sich einen reinen Ursprung zulegen will, der weiß, daß er Gewalt braucht. (420)

Zygmunt's reaction to the Nazis' demands foreshadows the events in Schleswig Holstein, when he will destroy the rebuilt museum completely. For the time being his reaction is a little milder. The official tells him frankly: "das Urteil der Gemeinschaft setzt den Augenblick fest, zu dem eine Sache einen Wert gewinnt, der allen zugute kommen muss" (424). Zygmunt is devastated, since many artifacts are supposed to be removed, and he destroys some of them in a spontaneous rage. This is the beginning of what Louis Ferdinand Helbig calls "die letzte Freiheit des Zygmunt Rogalla," or "his Ausdruck höchster Freiheit" (*Der ungeheure Verlust* 129). At that time, when he tries to reclaim some sense of independence or even ownership of his memory and his collection by deciding to destroy it, he can be stopped by his wife. They decide that it would be better to evade the Nazis' intentions of abusing the museum by closing the whole place down completely.⁸⁴ However, he realizes that "der Wert aller Dinge bestand doch nur dann, wenn andere sie sahen, wenn andere bei ihrem Anblick etwas erfahren über sich selbst" (Lenz 428). It is a dilemma for Zygmunt, who on the one hand wants to give testimony about the past but on the other hand is not willing to take the risk of misappropriation. It is only later that Zygmunt, lying in the hospital bed telling his story, will realize that this boundary cannot be defined and maintained so clearly anyway.

The events leading to the complete demise of the newly restored local heritage museum in Egelund, Schleswig-Holstein, are of a similar nature. Conny, who had

always been wary of not only any kind of abuse of the museum but also of using it to construct a cultural memory, changes rapidly—and to Zygmunt, incomprehensibly. After a long absence, he visits Zygmunt in Schleswig-Holstein, the new location of the museum, in order to tell him jubilantly: “In unserem Museum fühlst du auf einmal, wie du Grund unter den Füßen bekommst; etwas trägt dich, richtet dich auf.“ (617). Zygmunt is stunned, but his bewilderment is increased when in horror he notices that Conny now has associated with the former Nazi Gauleiter Reschat of Lucknow, who had also fled successfully to West Germany and whom both friends despised in East Prussia during the Nazi era. When the Gauleiter comes to donate a large sum to the newly rebuilt “Heimatmuseum,” Zygmunt uses his old strategy and closes the museum quickly for the day. Conny however does not find Reschat’s presence in any way problematic: he even talks about giving him “eine zweite Chance” although he does not want to absolve him of his “Schuld und Verantwortung” (627). Conny has gone through a remarkable metamorphosis, something that Peter Wapnewski finds difficult to fathom in his review:

Wie erklärt es sich, dass Conny Karrasch, Zygmunts Jugendfreund und Über-Ich, tapferer, verschlagener und intelligenter Widerstandskämpfer gegen die Nazis, unversehens wiedererscheint als beflissenes Sprachrohr biedermännischbündisch auftrumpfender Vertriebenenmilitanz? (*Spiegel* 34, 1978 161)

Certainly, this is surprising, but an increasing need for a sense of belonging and home can lead to convictions that do not necessarily correspond with the sentiments one had in one’s homeland, as anecdotal experience of behavior and discussions of expatriates in their new homelands show, who tend to feel much closer to a homeland they do not live in anymore. When one is forced to leave the homeland, this metamorphosis can be even

more thorough. Conny writes for the exiled Lucknower newspaper now and works closely with the Lucknow “Heimatverein,” an organization of expatriates indulging in a nostalgic transfiguration of the past (cf. 604-605), the president of which former Gauleiter Reschat becomes. Conny’s desire to strip off his former self is evident. In Conny’s apartment, where Zygmunt visits him one day, nothing reminds Zygmunt of the old life Conny used to lead when living in Lucknow. Conny creates his own legend, he does not rediscover but re-invents his Masurian roots—a heritage and affiliation he used to reject so vehemently. The roles are increasingly reversed. Zygmunt seems to have come to terms with his past and accepts his new residence. He now lives in Schleswig-Holstein and is content to feel that Schleswig is the nearest town he ever needs to visit, and the museum can only have one humble purpose: “die Welt von Lucknow, so wie sie uns vertraut war, vor dem Vergessenwerden zu bewahren” (646), and with this “uns” he clearly refers only to himself and his immediate family, or at least to the family members and friends he was able to bring along from Lucknow. When a Polish film crew comes to Egelund to shoot a short documentary on his Heimatmuseum, Zygmunt realizes again that it is merely and simply a museum, “dessen Inventar lediglich den Beweis dafür liefern sollte, wie wir einst gelebt hatten” (630). He even decides that he wants to get in touch with the newly established local museum in Lucknow, which is now under Polish aegis. Conny, however, uses this visit to declare in front of the Polish camera that “er wollte die historischen, die gewachsenen Rechte anerkannt wissen” (640). The solemn reminder of the Polish cameraman for a necessary contextualization goes unheard: “Wer sie erduldet hat, die Geschichte, muss wohl oder übel an die Kausalität der Ereignisse erinnern” (643).

Conny becomes honorary citizen of Lucknow, a lost empire, an Atlantis of sorts, as Zymunt puts it ironically. Zymunt sees that things are slipping out of his hand; his museum is just a part of a scheme to recreate, or rather reinvent, a place that has never existed in that form before and in which all political differences are suddenly forgotten: “Lucknow, das ferne, das legendäre, ließ alle Unterschiede vergessen, wir waren ein Bund, ein Orden, eine Familie, ein Orden der Wehmut, ein Bund der Heimwehkranken” (652). All conflicts seem to be forgotten, and Zymunt remarks bitterly: “Ja, das ist wohl wahr: in unserem Gedächtnis führen die Dinge eine reinere Existenz, unbeschädigt, ungefährdet...” (628). This is exactly for what he blames Conny. He becomes the mouthpiece of an organization that indeed has highly problematic goals, rejecting ardently the approach of Willy Brandt’s “Neue Ostpolitik” that had been devised only nine years before Lenz published *Heimatismuseum*. While the official political position in Germany was a definite acceptance of the Oder and Neiße as the Eastern borders of Germany, the Bund der Vertriebenen, BdV, had different plans. At that time the BdV considered itself a “der Weidervereinigung Deutschlands als mitteleuropäische Hegemonialmacht mindestens in den Grenzen von 1937 verpflichtete nationale Avantgarde des deutschen Volkes” (Stickler 147). German society, however, especially the younger ones, became more and more detached from the needs of the expellees. Lenz refers to this as well. He sums this up in the description of the chaotic visit of the East Prussian writer Pillunat in the small high school in Egelund, Schleswig-Holstein. When Pillunat and Zymunt are supposed to give a presentation entitled “Vergessener Osten, eine Reise durch Masuren,” they are taunted and even heckled by the young audience and finally have to break off their lecture. Interestingly, even the

young descendants of the original Lucknower become increasingly indifferent towards their parents heritage. During one of the parties of the Lucknower Heimatverein the young kids dance to rock-and-roll in the showrooms of the museum and use some of the artifacts as ashtrays (606). Nonetheless, Conny remains stubborn in face of these antagonistic developments and the museum increasingly becomes an abundant source of items to justify the claim of the right to return—against Zygmunt’s will, who obviously feels that the museum is being hijacked. Especially Gauleiter Reschat remains a person of hatred to Zygmunt, since he was one of those who wanted to misuse his museum before and who blatantly abused his power during the chaotic flight from Masuria (cf. 578).

The Nazi background and the Nazi crimes per se do not seem to be the problem for Zygmunt—nor does author Lenz thematize the Nazi crimes extensively. This might be not atypical for many Germans’ attitude in the post-war era, who acknowledged the horrors inflicted on Jews and other minorities during the Nazi era, but nevertheless saw themselves as victims—and even as the first or prime—victims of Hitler’s Germany as well.⁸⁵ The Holocaust is only alluded to, and only mentioned once in the entire novel of over 655 pages when Zygmunt describes how his wife secretly sneaks to some train cars at the train station at night, giving sausages and other food to the people herded into these cars, in return receiving hectically scribbled notes with addresses in the Netherlands or France (cf. 508-509). Lenz, instead, focuses on the issue of individual suffering through an examination of uprootedness from the non-Jewish German point of view. Lenz creates a character in Zygmunt that still has nostalgic inclinations for his homeland but in contrast to other characters has accepted the new status quo of his

former homeland East Prussia being a part of Poland, i.e. Russia now—a position later on officially adopted by the BdV in the 1990s. Conny does not accept an irreversible fate, and he pushes an agenda that tries to abuse the only recently erected but already famous Heimatmuseum in Egelund. The frustration about this becomes unbearable, and Zygmunt wishes to bring the witnesses of the past, the artifacts, to a safe place, from where “die zwar nie wieder zum Vorschein kommen würden, wo sich aber auch niemand mehr ihrer bemächtigen würde” (655).

IV

The final catastrophe, the destructive fire of alleged liberation, is another example for the highly symbolic nature of Lenz’s storytelling. Using the element of fire for this undertaking adds another important overtone, since fire is emblematic for the repercussions of the destruction triggered and brought about by 20th century Germany—the reason why Zygmunt is where he is now. Lenz plays with all side effects and repercussions a fire can have. Contrary to his previous actions when the Nazis attempted to limit his collection, this time Zygmunt’s actions are more drastic. He prepares carefully, carrying gasoline to strategically important locations within the museum and tries to ensure that the destruction will be as thorough as possible. He willfully accepts that his entire collection will become a victim to the flames, including artifacts of personal importance. The wedding rug he made when he got married to his first wife Edith—who perished when they fled from the approaching Soviets—as well

as ancient and newer kitchen utensils, jewelry or other important paper documents burn just as the entire building does, which was built according to original blueprints from the old “Heimat.” There is only one object that he wants to save: a manual meticulously describing how weavers should design and create one of these rugs for which his home region is famous. It was written by his late teacher Sonja Turk. Interestingly, this book had never been an artifact on display in the museum: thus it never therefore became part of a collective or even cultural memory, but was rather an item of his personal remembrance. Its value is not only determined by the fact that it contains those Masurian weaving rules.⁸⁶

Indeed it is the almost proverbial image of the magical and mystical weaving female that Lenz conjures here about this superstitious old woman, whose origin the reader and narrator never know—she might be a gypsy as Zygmunt learns (218)—and here as well she holds the secret to the ‘origins’ of tradition. Not only is this image of the woman as the bearer of culture a recurring theme in this novel. The whole metaphor of weaving and fabric is a crucial element in Lenz’s text. Terms like thread, fabric, pattern, structure and ultimately text(ile) can easily be applied to the recalling and retelling of a life story as well. Wolfgang Schneiß points to this crucial allegory by listing some of these terms:

Da werden Vorgeschichten “eingefädelt,” Bedingungen “geknüpft” (14) und “Muster unseres Lebens” ausgeschnitten (212). Weben ist ein “Durchkreuzen von Fäden” (247), auch ein Gedächtnis kann “Fäden aufnehmen” (538), zusammenknuten (649) oder in Erzählungen verknüpfen (507). (Schneiß 243)

Interestingly, even the formal level reflects the weaving theme—the narrator retells the whole story in a texture of anecdotes and short stories, which Lenz weaves together as a

whole product, the novel. Weaver master Sonja Turk's death during the flight from Masuria marks a crucial turning point in the chronological story, since with her death the book becomes the last bearer of the knowledge of the typical Masurian art of weaving, Zygmunt's knowledge as a weaver included. To Zygmunt this item has more value than the objects in the museum: it is a part of his identity, his personal and cultural past blend in it, since Sonja Turk is both a mother figure and a teacher to him. He is dependent on her book, in whose work "sich traditionelles Handwerk und archaisches Lebenswissen verbinden."⁸⁷ These two elements are vital elements for Zygmunt. He is heavily injured when trying unsuccessfully to save this book: he suffers from major burns, while this important aspect of his life vanishes. Nevertheless, he is slowly able to remember his past while recovering in the hospital.

The culmination of all symbolic events in Lenz's novel is clearly the conflagration, since burning down the museum entails another grave consequence and reveals the futility and even absurdity of the idea of trying to get rid of a misappropriated and misappropriatable past. When Zygmunt burns down the museum, the adjacent residential building goes up in flames as well because the wind suddenly changes direction. Although Zygmunt has fought off every attempt of his co-workers and family members to stop the fire in the museum, he now fights frantically alongside his family to stop the destruction of his private home, but this does not stop it from turning into a ruin. They manage to save some valuables, but ultimately both buildings are destroyed. Here Lenz does not want to leave any doubt that the ostensible, real or at least attempted extinction of memory will have a devastating impact on identity. Confused and disoriented, the self is gravely damaged when deprived of an immediate

home, deprived of a last protective cover, and this is more severe than the loss of the homeland itself could have been. Zygmunt will ultimately destroy his self when trying to get rid of other constitutive and essential elements of his self—his past.

Ironically, the extinction of the space and the damage to the body soon proves to be no match to the power of memory. Confused and disoriented in the hospital, Zygmunt is able to tell his story, his history, to his daughter's boyfriend. Here, in the hospital bed, new skin parts are already growing. His physical appearance might be in transformation, but his identity will remain. He realizes that he more or less deliberately severed a physical and mental part from himself in order to reach a new level of "Heimat"—but this proves to be an illusion, as Zygmunt realizes: "Schon aber regt sich das Gedächtnis, schon sucht und sammelt Erinnerung in der unsicheren Stille des Niemandslandes" (655). Attempting to destroy a repository of memory will not keep the memory from living on, even though the physical traces are erased. Despite the fact that Zygmunt's house had burned down, despite the fact that Sonja Turk had died and her collected wisdom was lost, Lenz shows us that the present will continue to use the past for its contemporary purposes, despite its salutary aspects.

It has become axiomatic that without memory there is no identity. This applies to the individual as well as society. Luis Buñuel once described the plight of his mother, suffering from amnesia, as follows: "[...] you have to begin to lose your memory, if only in bits and pieces, to realize that memory is what makes our lives. Life without memory is no life at all. [...] Our memory is our coherence, our feeling, even our action. Without it we are nothing" (quoted in Booth 31). At the individual level, nostalgia, or an idealized unrealistic longing for the past, and the sense of a tangible

continuation can support the evolution of a sense of a holistic essence. This applies to communities as well. Svetlana Boym apparently builds on this knowledge, but reminds us of the fact that “the stronger the rhetoric of continuity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is presented” (42). Whether this tradition is an invented tradition in which the individual indulges is unimportant for the members of a community.⁸⁸ For communities and individuals, the necessity to see how their lives are sedimented and how they inherit the present as a residuum of identity from the past is crucial. When religions—this oldest human way of coping with one’s environment—were created, they also catered to the very human need of explaining origin and having a sense of belonging, among other human needs, as Abraham Maslow suggested convincingly (cf. Maslow 277 ff.). They constitute, therefore, especially in German cultural identity the oldest and deepest-rooted traditional narrative that draws from the past and creates a tradition that gives meaning to the present. The Christian church, for example, has instrumentalized this need for the implementation of their teachings of origin. Two aspects in religious practice pertain to my discussion of the utilization of (institutionalized) memory. First, the Christian church utilizes acts of remembrance—the practice of reading the Scripture—as Christian pundit Allen Verhey’s candid admission reveals. His argument sounds similar to Zygmunt’s original reasons to maintain his uncle’s museum:

Without remembering, there is no identity. In amnesia, one loses oneself. In memory, one finds an identity. And without common remembering, there is no community. It is little wonder that the Church sustains this practice of reading Scripture and is itself sustained by it. The practice of reading Scripture is not only the way the Church has to remember, but Scripture is surely the critical document for the Church’s remembering. (Verhey 55)

This effect is seen by Boym as well, who also argues that utilizing this common practice, in this case reading the Scripture, has its individual and social benefits: “invented tradition does not mean a creation *ex nihilo* or a pure act of social constructivism; rather, it builds on the sense of loss of community and cohesion and offers a comforting collective script for individual longing” (42). This is a certain “social poetics” as Boym calls it (42), that provides support but also ‘glue’ in every day life. While Zygmunt engages in a more reflective and self-critical nostalgia—if any at all—Conny and others are well aware of their active reinvention of a past in their nostalgic longing, as a government official says during the inauguration of the new museum in Schleswig-Holstein: “Sehnen, sagte er leise, das heißt: Zeit aufheben und dem Ersehnten zu naher Gegenwart zu verhelfen” (599).

The second aspect of this utilization of memory becomes evident in Christian Verhey’s statement, which is crucial to the understanding of Lenz’s novel: the practice of memory also involves a particular item or object, around which it creates its rite of remembrance. Once these objects are destroyed, identity is at least altered.⁸⁹ Adolf Hitler’s legendary bunker in Berlin’s Wilhelmstraße was largely destroyed in the 1980s by the East German government; the ground above it is a parking lot today. These kinds of remnants were explicitly and deliberately deleted from German cultural memory (cf. Ladd 133-134). What is fascinating, however, is the fact that they continue to haunt the Germans, since every tourist who asks will easily find someone who will help him learn where the bunker was, and it is mentioned in numerous books on the architecture of Berlin. Lenz mirrors this effect in his books as well. The museum is gone, and still the remembrance starts again. Today the BdV members are bereft of their homelands, but

stage gigantic recreations of their traditional celebrations. Remembrance will continue to either help or haunt—depending on the vantage point—a society just as it does with an individual, as Lenz points out in the aforementioned quote, which is the very last sentence of his novel: “Schon aber regt sich das Gedächtnis, schon sucht und sammelt Erinnerung in der unsicheren Stille des Niemandslands” (655). Here, the connection to the lost homeland is evident again: memory also evolves in spaces and territories far from the original place. Memories will continue to return, it is useless to suppress them. It would be desirable to simply be able to deal with them thoroughly, to admit them, contextualize them and thereby prevent them from being abused and instrumentalized. In this respect, Aleida Assmann’s illusion that there exists something like an all-inclusive polyphonic cultural memory is understandable. Since the politics of memory is an integral constituent of the *raison d’être* of a cultural group, this should be attainable. Yet it presupposes an enlightened society that is open and, in addition, cautiously allows the unhindered dynamics of the political will that would encourage the creation of diverse cultural institutions of national memory. In the German case, it remains to be seen whether this high goal is possible.

V

The way that Lenz intertwines the challenge to personal identity and the utilization and deprivation of physical spaces is intriguing. There is an explicit comparability of the binary pair ‘recollection-forgetting’ of individuals on the one hand

and the conscious creation of a cultural memory and its use and abuse on the other. The research on *Heimatmuseum* since 1978 has focused on the issue of Heimat per se, as I pointed out earlier, just like Wolfgang Schnei does it for the most part in his discussion of this novel; or one reviewer approaches the text via the relationship between Zygmunt Rogalla and his daughter's boyfriend Martin Witt (cf. Fries). The reviews in numerous German newspapers right after the publication in 1978 focused on the multitude of anecdotes about life in Masuria, which Lenz's book undoubtedly is as well, albeit qualitatively far beyond Lenz's *So zrtlich war Suleyken*, his almost innocent and benign anecdotes of Masurian country life, written in 1955. No reviewer in the late 1970s reads the book as a reminder that Germans were also victims. These reviews reflect an extremely different outlook than the discourses that have arisen out of the books since the late 1990s that have depicted the flight and expulsion of Germans and published in the late 1990s and beyond. Again, societal developments or a particular "Zeitgeist" leads to a book being read differently.

The most fruitful observations so far have been made by Germanist Rachel Halverson. She discusses the issue of a personal "Vergangenheitsbewltigung," connected with the larger political theme of coming to terms with the past, triggered by the narrator's engagement with memory. Indeed, throughout the whole novel, Zygmunt Rogalla's account is put into context with political history. Halverson calls it an "amalgamation of 'Alltagsgeschichte' and political history" (61). Themes like the Russian occupation of Masuria alternate with the plebiscite after the Versailles Treaty or the rise of the Nazis and the subsequent approach of the Soviets that triggers the flight from Lucknow, forming the political historical framework for the novel. These

historical events create not only the frame for Zygmunt's anecdotes, but influence greatly the protagonist's own life. Zygmunt's admittedly only weakly contextualized account for his listener Martin Witt, therefore, according to Halverson, reveals his attitude towards historiography. Typical for the "Alltagsgeschichte" approach to historical research, we can indeed see here as well what kind of relationship the individual has to the surrounding structures. What is more, the chances but also the shortcomings of the narrator's approach in his selective way of remembering make this text a suitable example for personal historiography. As I pointed out in the Introduction, the similarities between historiography and memory are vast. I would, therefore, also speak of a 'directed use of memory,' rather than personal historiography, especially since the personal emotional aspect is undeniably in the foreground. When telling his life story to his daughter's boyfriend, Zygmunt chooses only particular events. This is certainly revealing and resembles a certain personal-politically motivated way of recreating the past, similar to the writing of history, or historiography. Yet again, the comparability with certain dynamics in the evolution of cultural memory is evident. In this way, given the highly synthetic character of cultural memory, Zygmunt's selective way of remembering and choosing to forget or at least to not remember underscores perfectly the highly symbolic nature of this novel.

Therefore, it is not only the metaphor of the heritage museum and the way its collection is under constant threat of misappropriation, but also the surrounding events on the human level that illustrate and can be translated into an understanding of the workings of the creation of a usable past. This is represented in the way that Zygmunt chooses to arrange his recollections according to his mood and the necessity to

underscore the motivation for his actions. Sometimes the reader is confronted with anecdotes that seem so taken from the realm of fairy tales that it becomes hard to believe the veracity of the other events. Especially in the Grimmelshausen-esque account of Zygmunt's trip through the snowy landscape, where for some wondrous reason he survives the barrage of partisans' bullets, the reader waits in vain for a disclosure of the secret of this miracle (cf. 475-476).

Through the character of Zygmunt, Lenz depicts a human being who seems to be in a—potentially final—transformation. His skin largely destroyed, he is in the hospital waiting for his transplanted skin to get used to their new location, and the skin is growing indeed (192). Another metaphor is used by Zygmunt: he calls the loss of the museum due to his own arson in Egelund an amputation, an extreme deed: “wenn ich heute daran denke, gebe ich zu, dass es vielleicht ein zu gewaltsames Aufräumen war, aber in dem Augenblick, als ich das Museum zerstörte, hatte ich keine Wahl” (339). He notices that he deliberately severed an integral part from himself—the residential building—in order to reach a new level of “Heimat,” making the whole survive through discarding one part. In this way he also subtly creates a monument for a vanished “Heimat.”

In a discussion of sculptor Jochen Gerz' oeuvre, James Young asks the macabre yet insightful rhetorical question “how better to remember forever a vanished people than by the perpetually unfinished, ever-vanishing monument?” (*At Memory's Edge* 131). Gerz indeed made a fascinating point about representing the Holocaust and fascism with “countermonuments” that disappeared at their “non-sites.”⁹⁰ Gerz's technique certainly reminds us of Zygmunt's actions. His motivations for making the

museum disappear might have been completely different, but involuntarily he created a monument for a lost homeland as well. This monument represents the loss even better, since it is a vanished monument for a vanished land. Still, similar to the processes in an individual, one cannot completely root out memory in a society. The collective memory will always inform or at least challenge the officially condoned cultural memory and demand negotiations—and as Lenz's text appears to suggest, it is impossible to weave only one singular narrative.

CHAPTER 3

Linguistic Representations of Flight and Expulsion in Arno Schmidt's *Leviathan* and Reinhard Jirgl's *Die Unvollendeten*

As pointed out in the Introduction, the issue of flight and expulsion added a new dimension to the ongoing discourse on a national identity in works from both East and West German authors in the late 1990s. Still, most of these texts employ a realist writing style, which almost gives the impression that it is only realism that, as a discursive practice, can convey and represent political and societal catastrophe. Authors like Arno Schmidt and Reinhard Jirgl, however, do not fit into this category. With both writers there is a distinct narrative ancestry visible and, what is more, their texts are the only ones in the genre of *Vertreibungsliteratur* that appear to constitute an extension of the axis of modernism. Indeed, their works can be distinguished from other works in *Vertreibungsliteratur* by its opposition to traditional forms and to the aesthetic perceptions associated with those forms. As I will show, Schmidt's and Jirgl's texts are to a high degree experimental—with highly self-conscious manipulations of form, which directly reflects traumatic experience. Flight and expulsion and its repercussions on the individual and society and the subsequent devastation of the self are a central point in Schmidt's and Jirgl's work. The way in which both authors implement this by abandoning linear narrative and epic patterns and apply innovative, i.e. modernist, strategies on storytelling is unique in literature on the trauma of flight and expulsion. Both Schmidt's and Jirgl's oeuvre has in general dealt with a highly skeptical stance towards their environment and German society; beyond the aesthetic representation of

individual experience the readers can detect a specific outlook on German society. In general, literature is indeed the “privileged sphere for reflection on German national identity,” as Stephen Brockmann points out (19). What I will also discuss—again—in this chapter is the necessity to try to reconcile the authors’ declared intentions and the impression the writing has on the reader.

Representations of trauma are omnipresent in post-WWII German literature. Rose Ausländer, Nelly Sachs, Paul Celan and Peter Weiss exemplify this in their portrayal of the persecution and genocide of European Jewry. The literature of most non-Jewish German authors, however, often deals with this “limit-experience,” or “Grenzerfahrung,” of individual, societal and moral downfall by leaving out the Holocaust, at least in the first decades after WWII.⁹¹ The lives of these authors within the Third Reich might not have been threatened or perhaps were threatened on a different level: nevertheless, their experience oftentimes had been mentally devastating. The pertinent terms “Kahlschlag,” “Stunde Null,” “Trümmerliteratur” and “tabula rasa” mirror an attitude defined by an utterly dispirited, disappointed and disoriented outlook combined with the desire to cast off their remembered experience of fascism. Expressing emotions was at that time considered only possible by decisively altering form and style.⁹² To many German-speaking authors who had remained in Germany these changes seemed inevitable and logical, after they had been exposed to years of oppression and cultural conformity and having learned more and more about the crimes of Germans, which many of these authors failed to oppose. Some of these supposedly new forms and stylistic elements were not new at all: some authors adapted the US-American prose form of the short story—in the case of Heinrich Böll and others—or

started to draw from expressionist narrative techniques (cf. Beutin 501). Especially Arno Schmidt succeeds in translating the destruction and fragility this generation had experienced in those years—his experiences constitute the linguistic forms he employs.

I compare Schmidt's writing with that of a post-“Wende” author, the East German Reinhard Jirgl, who was born in 1953, since Jirgl emulates Schmidt's style while at the same time developing it further. Therefore, it makes sense to also look into the way writers after the Fall of the Wall dealt with change and the (GDR-)past in their writing. Writers of fictional literature in East Germany after the 1990 unification did not feel compelled to do away with their familiar literary forms. Only occasionally did a new freedom of content translate into experimenting with new or at least modernist stylistic forms as we can see to some extent in works by Thomas Brussig, Gert Neumann and especially Reinhard Jirgl (cf. Beutin 668-672). Still, more often writers in the early 1990s rather engage in dealing with their imminent past and do so by employing decisively realist literary forms familiar to them in order to come to terms with their own lives marked by the GDR-regime, as we see for example in Klaus Pohl's *Karate-Billi kehrt zurück* (1991), Christa Wolf's *Was bleibt* (published 1991, allegedly written in 1979) or Monika Maron's *Stille Zeile Sechs* (1991). At the same time, the public critical discourse on the nature of a newly unified Germany emerges in both East and West literature. However, the continuing complications of the unification process preoccupy authors in the East more than those in the West, making the working-through of the trauma of deprivation of freedom and betrayed ideals a distinctively East German task. This is surprising since this issue has a crucial impact on the development on a new German identity. With exactly this aspect in mind, Stephen Brockmann provides

an excellent survey of post-unification literature. As examples of West Germans who tackle the issue of German-German sentiments after unification he can only mention two major works: Günter Grass's *Ein weites Feld* (1995), which engages in a discussion on German character, individually and nationally, and Martin Walser's *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* (1991). The latter indeed "struck a powerful chord with German readers" (Brockmann 139), since main character Dorn is both West and East German and experienced three German national configurations. Yet again, in terms of form, Walser and Grass employ a highly conventional style. Some East German authors, like Hans-Ulrich Treichel and Jirgl, clearly problematize in their work the emergence of national character as well. Treichel writes in a rather realist tradition, in a style that is adorned with hyperbolic, sarcastic and repetitive phrases—reminiscent of the Austrian Thomas Bernhard.

Hence, in virtually all literature describing the experience and repercussions of flight and expulsion from former Germany or regions of German settlement right after 1945 the phenomenon of new form—let alone modernist form—is only rarely visible. Of interest in this dissertation and especially in this chapter, however, is fictional literature that intends to aesthetically and linguistically reproduce direct experience, and how it aims to transport reactions and emotions—namely trauma—rather than to simply inform about events and describe reactions of individuals. Therefore, in this chapter I will look particularly at the intersection of the use of memory and the impact on identity by analyzing the translation of these aspects into form, style and other linguistic elements.

Louis Ferdinand Helbig's differentiation between *Vertreibungsliteratur* and *Vertriebenenliteratur* can illustrate my aim even further. In 1996 Helbig compiled the most thorough survey on literature dealing with expulsions of Germans from regions of former German settlement.⁹³ He defines *Vertriebenenliteratur* as accounts by all sorts of expellees—thus eyewitnesses that are often amateur writers—whereas *Vertreibungsliteratur* includes all fictional texts about flight and expulsion, either by refugees, expellees or none of the above (see Introduction).⁹⁴ Helbig juxtaposes hence a mere 'what happened' with a critical reflection of what happened, potentially using modern literary stylistic tools (cf. *Der ungeheure Verlust* 61). For the time being this indeed is a valid distinction. The translation of suffering and trauma into something approximating modernist style certainly is essentially non-existent in the accounts of expellees like Dohna-Schlobitten, Graf Krockow, Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, Horst Bienek and others. It would certainly be inappropriate and unfair to deny these writers the capability to come to terms with their oftentimes traumatic experience, simply because they are utilizing a realist writing style. Yet, the two instances of *Vertreibungsliteratur* discussed in this chapter have an additional potential to thematize "Vertreibung" by even going further than Helbig's reflection. True, *Vertreibungsliteratur* in general deliberately unfolds as a subjective perception of and subjective reaction to historical events, providing an aesthetic representation of trauma and challenges to the personality of a human being. Nonetheless, what takes specifically Arno Schmidt's and Reingard Jirgl's books beyond the level of Helbig's reflection is the fact that these texts feature an at first glance defective, disturbing kind or outright failure of reflection on the part of the narrators. This is rendered through distinct stylistic devices that serve as an

immediate representation of danger and the impact on identity of what to many resembled the apocalypse. It is especially non-realist writing and its linguistic alterations of Schmidt's and Jirgl's style that is highly conducive to a critical understanding of events. In his helpful comparison of realist and modernist writing, David James draws on ideas of Tyrus Miller for his central argument:

Miller has indeed claimed that a consistent trait of "late modernist" narration is the considered erasure of any stable or accountable provenance, thereby subverting in turn the "basis of the novel as an anthropomorphic genre." For "[o]utside the norms of realism, voices may come from no apparent body, a single body may be occupied by multiple voices, or one body may be given the voice of another." (James 128)

This is exactly what we find in Schmidt's and Jirgl's prose, which constantly challenges the reader, rendering the challenges to individual identity in trauma. This technique sets Schmidt and also Jirgl apart from authors like Günter Grass and Siegfried Lenz, in addition to other authors of *Vertreibungsliteratur*. Discussing Schmidt and Jirgl together, here in the context of flight and expulsion, shows not only their uniqueness in this literary genre, but also makes apparent the common origin of their language and the influence of Schmidt on the younger Jirgl.

I

Arno Schmidt, born in Hamburg in 1914, was different and especially after 1945 wanted to be different. It was not only his refusal to take part in the meetings of the "Gruppe 47" that made colleagues, critics and the public perceive him as someone distinctive from the others (cf. Schardt 47). His prose radically depicts the dissociating

effects of danger, destruction and frustration as the constituting factor for his form and style. As in Jirgl's case, Schmidt's own biography plays an important role in this. Deeply embittered in 1945—at the age of 31—by having been deprived of what he termed his “besten Jahre,” or best years, (cf. Schardt 38-39), one witnesses an evolution towards extremes in his style during the post-war years. By the end of the war, none of his literary attempts had been published. His texts until then were marked by a display of his vast knowledge of mythical and philosophical literature and his adoration of authors like Hermann Hesse, Adalbert Stifter, or James Fenimore Cooper. Perhaps the most representative piece of his art then was his *Dichtergespräche im Elysium* which were a gift for his wife whom he married in 1937 (Schardt 36). He also tried to write the libretto for an opera, an adaptation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Die Bergwerke zu Falun*. The score was supposed to be composed by his good friend and classmate Heinz Jerofsky who withdrew from the project. Schmidt had been writing poetry and prose, and more importantly, he was intrigued by the expressionists' style, much to the dismay of his German teachers at his Gymnasium in Silesia where he had moved to when he was fourteen. His mindset was obviously at odds with the general line of Nazi ideology and in 1934 he decided to start an apprenticeship as an accountant. The Nazis consolidated their power and Schmidt, distraught, withdrew into his private life. Undoubtedly, Schmidt's indulgence in a dreamlike fantasy world of glorifying certain writers during these years can be interpreted as a form of escapism. This attitude was reinforced by the death of his brother-in-law in 1944 who had been very close to him. In addition, his pride in education and knowledge is the omnipresent background in many of his works. He increasingly resembles Döblin, with echoes of naturalism, but

“for him the founding father of his art is not Zola but Lewis Carroll” (Bullivant 87). Yet, the intensive impact of the realities of the final years and months of WW II and the disillusionment associated with these experiences were crucial in order to develop the even more radical representations of his emerging worldview of cultural pessimism.

Schmidt published *Leviathan* in 1949 as a part of a trilogy written over the course of the previous ten years, in which topoi of the mythical ancient world merge with his experience of destruction. All of them have subtitles: *Leviathan oder die beste der Welten*; *Gadir oder Erkenne dich selbst*; *Enthymesis oder W.I.E.H.*, the latter title a clear allusion to Schmidt’s despair about his “wasted years,” since W.I.E.H. stands for “wie ich Euch hasse.” In recent years, *Leviathan* alone has been published together with *Schwarze Spiegel*, a chronological list of associative impressions after a fictitious nuclear Third World War. What connects these three short narrations is that they are told by intellectual narrators obsessed with coming to terms with their doomsday experiences through trying to find answers in the life sciences. Reviewers in 1949 were uncertain as to the genre to which his texts could be attributed. The *Welt am Sonntag* calls them novellas, the *Darmstädter Echo* is puzzled by the “Erzählungen, oder wie man das nennen soll” (Bock 9).

Indeed, *Leviathan*, in its stream-of-consciousness flow, is puzzling and receives its structure solely through marking it as diary-like entry dates. It is a diary of a presumably deceased person, as the fictional introduction states, the introduction in turn was written by a British soldier who claims to have found the diary. The writer of this booklet itself is an officer of the Wehrmacht fleeing in a freight train car from Silesia. Accompanying him on the flight from the advancing Red Army is a motley group of

brainwashed HJ-adolescents, a Protestant pastor and his family of seven, a prostitute, a mother and her daughter, and other soldiers. The form of the diary—a text in the text—gives the reader short impressions of scenes from an imaginary photo album that the narrator displays chronologically. These snapshot-like images alternate with reflections on what the first person narrator sees and does. Integrated in these images, the narrator engages in somewhat presumptuous deliberations on physics, namely in the realm of cosmology, many of his insights motivated by the theory of relativity. All this pertains to Schmidt's interpretation of a Leviathan; and its connotations are crucial in constituting the formal structure and use of language. This image goes far beyond Joseph Roth's still conventionally told allegory of *Leviathan* about the implacability of fate or the bleakness of a dying world. What the two works have in common, though, is the manifest allusion to the concept of Leviathan in Jewish and Christian narrative as a monster and demon threatening the established civilization. In addition, here the image of a Leviathan becomes apparent that resembles strongly Thomas Hobbes's concept of a strong government that can develop a destructive momentum of its own, even though it was once appointed to reign in accordance with the will of the subjects of a state.

Given the surreal occurrences, one is reminded in Schmidt's *Leviathan* of a retelling of a dream and its interpretation—or rather a mangled interpretation, rich in elements so typical of Expressionism, farfetched metaphors and similes: “Der Kopf pulst wie ein schwellendes Glockenmaul - oh -. Ich muss den Mund blähen und zerren. - Oh! –” (9). These observations and descriptions are connected to seemingly coherent accounts of what is going on; sometimes these are mere associations that are nevertheless rich in their disconnectedness, their incoherence:

Sie drehte mir auflachend, dann pfeifend den Rücken (“Fräulein, heut dürfen Sie nicht allein sein...”) hielt an, kam zurück, und erkundigte sich: “Passiert Ihnen das übrigens öfter: von mir zu träumen-?” Ich zögerte gar nicht, ich sagte verbindlich: “Ja.” Sie warf anerkennend den Kopf und meinte über die Schulter: “Etwas anders sind Sie doch geworden. Früher haben Sie bloß Augen wie Spiegeleier gemacht – na schön.” Sie bummelte wieder zu ihrer Mutter hinab. Das kranke Kind starb gerade; Och orro orro ollalu. (26)

Here, unlike in Schmidt’s later works, which are almost undecipherable at times, we still have a language that mostly employs words that one can still find in a dictionary and hardly any neologism. Inventing new words would become increasingly prevalent in his second work featuring the expellees and refugees and their difficulties in adapting to a new “Heimat:” *Die Umsiedler*, published in 1953.

Still, especially in this excerpt it becomes evident that the first-person-narrator suffers from a disturbing inability to perceive analytically and empathize appropriately—the first hint at a perception that can only react in this way to a world gone mad. In the narrator and protagonist’s view, the circumstances do not facilitate any sort of productive reflection, and he escapes into discussions of cosmology and the theory of relativity. In long gasping sentences, he expounds upon the physical structure of the world. Thereby he completely shuts out any social and emotional interaction, depicted by his inability to engage in a meaningful discussion about human sensitivities. They are mere monologues here, resembling the feverish ramblings of a sick person, affected by the experience of threat and danger. The associative keyword technique in other parts of the narration does not reflect a particularly advantageous mental state either. Associations constantly interrupt all rudimentary thoughts—paradoxically, since these associations appear to stream in an incessant flow. Unlike in his later works, there are only sporadic cases of changes in diction and punctuation, like an occasional

conglomerate of hyphens, commas and exclamation points or the replacement of the word 'is' by the equal sign—a phenomenon that Jirgl would expand upon forty years later. An important issue becomes evident here: Schmidt apparently wants to show the impossibility of retaining the old writing style considering the dissolution of values and destruction of all achievements of civilization. His creative changes as well as his neologisms are necessary in order to depict a decrepit culture: conventional narrative boundaries are no longer existent.⁹⁵

Schmidt's Weltanschauung and knowledge constitute a deeply formative aspect for his work. After *Leviathan's* publication, some reviewers criticize Arno Schmidt's blatant urge to show off his admittedly excellent education (Bock 17). Yet, particularly in this text it is an integral part of Schmidt's argument. Little insertions of names and summaries of findings in physics and philosophy, sometimes in mere headline style, describe to some extent a desperate search for a remedy for what seems inevitable given the self-destruction of humankind: the collapse of the civilized world. Still, in an interesting twist of reasoning, in the narrator's view, civilization and its achievements do not prevent civilization's downfall: to some extent this also rather promotes it, especially in connection with omnipresent Christianity: "blinde Gefolgschaft scheint immer schwarze Uniform zu tragen" (22), the narrator utters in disgust. The Protestant preacher who praises his Lord when his child dies particularly repulses the narrator. The narrator is certain that humankind follows the erratic leadership of their Lord, in the same way they adhere to the teachings of their Nazi leadership. In this radical view it becomes more comprehensible that Schmidt chooses to create types and not characters in order to convey his criticism. Yet, he risks that this method could reduce the potency

of his argument to a certain extent, since credibility grows with a multifaceted character. Still, the powerful image and scenery constitute an important backdrop, and his characters can remain one-dimensional: the adamant Hitler youth, proudly confabulating about the ‘Wunderwaffe’ are the analogy to the priest’s outlook. The narrator infers that “die erste abendländisch exakte Schilderung eines KZ verdanken wir der allerchristlich pervertierten Phantasie Dantes” (33), and continues to describe in an avalanche of terms from the torture chamber what kind of methods of torture he recognizes in Dante that are congruent with contemporary cruelty. Here, we see a feature of his work that is otherwise often absent in literature of WWII written by non-Jewish Germans. He describes the sight of a “Todesmarsch,” or death march, that he came across, describing it with expressionist imagery: “Judenfrauen und ihre Kinder, alle fürchterlich abgezehrt, mit unirdisch großen dunklen Augen, daneben fluchende rotbackige berittene SS-Henker, in schweren graugrünen Mänteln, wehe!” (35). Unlike Wolfgang Borchert in his *Draußen vor der Tür* for instance, Schmidt consciously adds this particular aspect of apocalypse to the dominant atmosphere of degeneration, originating from uncanny misappropriations of German culture throughout the previous twelve years. In addition to this, a gigantic plough, or “Schwellenreißer,” mounted at the end of train that destroys the track sills behind the train becomes the symbol of the Nazi policy of scorched earth. This makes the return to Silesia, occasionally uttered by the people on the train, as absurd as any hope for a continuation of life.

For the narrator, losing one’s homeland is just another aspect of the disintegration of the self, one that the young people in the freight train car do not realize yet, unlike the older ones. Consequently, the narrator proclaims that he would gladly

accept the destruction of mankind: “es begrüßen, wenn die Menschheit zu Ende käme; ich habe die begründete Hoffnung, dass sie sich in – na – in 500 bis 800 Jahren restlos vernichtet haben werden; und es wird gut sein“ (25). The juxtaposition of such remarks with typical phrases of courtship—the narrator makes this remark to the young girl on the train—creates an eerie sensation of an ambivalent “Endzeitstimmung.” This mood is also reflected and amplified by simultaneous occurrences in the train car: some of the soldiers are having sex with the prostitute while the child is dying, the pastor is praying loudly, the other children are crying, and all is interspersed with lectures in physics by the narrator himself that can hardly drown out the noise of the cannons of the advancing Soviet troops. This doomsday atmosphere builds up to an unbearable pressure, symbolized by even more dissociated and hectic descriptions of the events unfolding. Shortly before he finally describes his plans for the joint suicide with the girl, which reduces his previous flirting to absurdity, he again denounces the helplessness of civilized thought in face of destruction, symbolized by the image of the Leviathan:

Ich sprach rasch: ‘Buddha: Lehrt eine Methodik des Entkommens. Schopenhauer: Verneinung des Willens. Beide behaupten also die Möglichkeit, den Individualwillen gegen den ungeheuren Gesamtwillen des Leviathan zu setzen, was aber in Anbetracht der Größendifferenzen zur Zeit völlig unmöglich erscheint, zumindest auf der ‘Menschenstufe’ des geistigen Wesen. Vielleicht löst sich die Bestie aber in ‘Diadochem’ auf (christliche Andeutung in Luzifers Rebellion; umgekehrt will Jane Leade mit vielen Guten in einer magischen Kraft zusammen wirken und so die Natur paradiesisch erneuern – ist ein Ziel: Aufstand der Guten). (38-39)

The following picture in the narrator’s arrangement of snapshots is the announcement of his suicide, which is supposed to take place after throwing the diary out of the train. The at first glance paradoxical act of throwing away a mnemonic device signifies the ultimate frustration of hope for an afterworld. Yet, like a message in a bottle, author

Schmidt later has it found by an American soldier—at least one allusion that there exists a tiny chance of the emergence of future existence. The Western culture from which the narrator stems sees suicide as the biggest failure in life unless it is a heroic deed for a higher cause or in order to save someone else. The description of the events, however, details another huge failure: the inability to cope with an overwhelming situation, the failure to maintain a compassionate mankind. Suicide, therefore, is the inevitable result, not only the final futile protest in face of the apocalypse. Here, it rather appears to be the final opportunity to reclaim agency in a questionable attempt to deal victoriously with the traumatic experience of flight in these circumstances.

Schmidt's writing resembles various other forms of expressionist or even surrealist art that have been considered a viable means to come to terms with a traumatic experience. David Aberbach draws heavily from Freud's *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* when he explains that expressing grief in any kind of art "may also serve to confront and attempt to resolve emotional conflicts and heal wounds caused by the loss itself, or by unhappy elements in the relationship which the loss revives" (23).⁹⁶ This productive approach to trauma is not always foregrounded in theoretical deliberations on how to come to terms with trauma. Cathy Caruth reminds us that in modern trauma theory "there is an emphatic tendency to focus on the destructive repetition of the trauma that governs a person's life" (63). It is arguable whether this destructive repetition in form of flashbacks can be channeled into a means of working through the grief process that will help reorganize life and thereby stabilize the self. Still, there are indicators that this could be effective. Bessel A. van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart discuss a crucial and productive utilization of the difference between traumatic memory and narrative

memory, or, as I would argue, passivity vs creativity. Traumatic memory, they suggest, “has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity” (163). Oftentimes, flashbacks are triggered by situations that are reminiscent of the original traumatic events. Here the potential of the manner of recalling, narrative memory, becomes obvious: the conscious act of recalling does not necessarily repeat the affective and motoric elements of a devastating event and therefore can be more bearable. What is more, as van Kolk and van Hart suggest, by remembering consciously and by also slightly altering the scenarios that one went through, the victim regains the capacity to simply forget. Whether this is entirely possible, is questionable; yet the therapeutic character of this approach is convincing.

Schmidt’s writing mirrors these creative attempts to come to terms with a traumatic experience. Like other texts discussed in this dissertation, Schmidt’s narrator in *Leviathan* shows a clear inability to come to terms with the experience and tends to make it end in a destructive way, which, however, does not mean that the attempt to deal with this trauma is thwarted. What is at stake here is that the explicitly modernist style that Schmidt employs in his unique linguistic alterations conveys the creative and productive momentum of coming to terms with an experience that produces psychological injury or pain. I described a comparable phenomenon in the chapter on Siegfried Lenz’s *Heimatismuseum*, arguing that the extensive corpus of realist *Vertreibungsliteratur* has the capability to convey this as well. Yet, Schmidt’s style has more potential to convey the destructive force on the individual.

This phenomenon applies even to fictional works that are not written by survivors. Schmidt experienced events similar to those he describes in *Leviathan* when

he saw combat in 1944 and 1945 and organized his wife's flight from Silesia in February 1945 (cf. Schardt 39) and is the only well-known author—and the only author in my study—who witnessed the chaotic flight from Silesia. Yet, writers that did not experience these events first hand can provide an equally compelling representation of the mechanisms of suffering and coping with trauma. This is not only the case since autobiography per se is obviously not the epitome of veracity anyway, nor since writing can only to a certain extent mirror the turmoil a person has gone through. It is rather that in some cases, a relative of a survivor as author is able to develop protagonists through another unique perspective on those events described. Reinhard Jirgl is not a witness. In the following segment I will discuss how Reinhard Jirgl nonetheless creates his text with his alternating narrators in the context of a transgenerational first-hand knowledge of flight and expulsion. Convincingly, he portrays three generations of survivors and their descendants and their way to deal with traumatic memory. What is more, he also uses a modernist style that conveys these experiences in a much more forceful way.

II

Jirgl adds a new, more contemporary dimension to the adaptation of form to the experience of trauma and its effects on the self. Given the astounding similarities in their biographies, it is no surprise that Jirgl discovered Schmidt as a role model in his meticulous text design, in which he tries to reach his own level—admittedly influenced

by Arno Schmidt—of a representation of a damaged existence. Jirgl was born in 1953 in the GDR, and his writings were not published until the fall of the Wall.⁹⁷ Arne de Winde describes how Jirgl's first novel, *MutterVaterRoman* (1990), "hatte ihm das Etikett der 'nichtmarxistischen Geschichtsauffassung' eingetragen" (de Winde 153). Like Schmidt, he finally has the opportunity to show his immense aversion against the institution GDR immediately after 1990. Just like Wolfgang Hilbig—or Schmidt for that matter—who also withdrew into a regular job environment, Jirgl worked as a technician at the Volksbühne Berlin. He claims that theater was not of interest to him but he concedes that "es hat mir zumindest beim Schreiben den Rücken freigehalten, um nicht angreifbar zu sein." It saved him from being declared anti-social.⁹⁸ It was writing that allowed and allows him to be outside of where he did not want to be: however, this created a strangely dual lifestyle. He sought and still seeks "diese Heftigkeit, diese Bruchhaftigkeit, auch die Komplexität dieses alltäglichen Chaos im Text wiederkehren zu lassen" (Jung 58). As Erk Grimm points out, in his texts Jirgl deals with the question "was wurde aus dem Menschen an sich" (189), being exposed to a precarious world, and especially exposed to life in the powerful oppressive system of the GDR. In *Die Unvollendeten*, this becomes a crucial question as well, despite the main focus on the family's story of flight and expulsion from Silesia.⁹⁹ As in his previous works, it is Jirgl's original spelling—where he in parts emulated Schmidt—and his use of neologisms, a polyphonic narrator's voice, recurring changes in register and abrupt caesuras from scene to scene that accomplish the portrayal of a self that is threatened and deprived of an unhindered development that can be considered 'normal.' This self

is—as in Schmidt’s case—one that has been grievously harmed by the trauma of expulsion.

It is indeed appropriate to speak of scenes here, since—contrary but also similar to Schmidt with his photo album technique—Jirgl’s plot resembles that of a script of a feature film, often reminding the reader of Jean Luc Godard movies that appear badly edited but are not, since they always focus on the actions and verbal expressions of the characters. The film-like collage of scenes and flashbacks sometimes even violently interrupt each other mid-word. This is just one aspect of the need for the reader to try to reassemble this representation of a disturbed and fragmented self and its flawed development. These abrupt and arbitrary cuts indeed already hint at the meaning, since Jirgl’s writing style itself intends to embody the conflicts that he delves into. Jirgl admits: “Ich mache mir sehr viel Gedanken über Konstruktionsprinzipien von Texten” (Jung 67). This is visible, at times giving the whole undertaking an awkwardly forced feel. Indeed, it can seem paradoxical if the randomness of fate is represented in carefully arranged language. However, it is pursued methodically and proves highly effective in its intention to confuse the reader by nullifying conventions to which most readers are so much accustomed.

To a certain extent, reading becomes a veritable task in Jirgl’s text. It is, therefore, no surprise that Christine Cosentino, for instance, is skeptical of Jirgl’s attempts to estrange readers expectations: she argues that Jirgl’s usage of the number 1 for any variation of the article ‘ein’ or the number ‘1’ itself are “letztlich nichts anderes als ‘1 1zige’ Irritation, denn es ist äußerst fraglich, ob er seine Lesegewohnheiten ändert.” (“Ostdeutsche Autoren” 190). Changing reading habits, however, might not

even be Jirgl's goal. True, for traditional readers, Jirgl is at first confusing with his rather unconventional representation of the reality of chaos and its impact on the self. However, Jirgl clearly wants to provoke thinking. Cosentino's remark reminds us of a binary distinction of texts that Roland Barthes made: a "readerly" text caters more to conventional reading strategies, including closure, finality and clear plotlines, whereas in a "writerly" text meaning is open and erratic, identities unstable and closure is difficult to achieve.¹⁰⁰ What makes a "writerly" text—like *Die Unvollendeten*—so challenging and interesting in its obscurity, however, is the fact that the reader "becomes a producer" (Johnson 5), having to create meaning on her or his own. Although Barthes assumed that a writerly text could not be found in a bookstore, I would argue that Jirgl's text bears these "writerly" characteristics.

Furthermore, the way that Jirgl goes far beyond the limits of realist or naturalist prose is a form of "narrating the event" that Andrew Gibson describes as "representing," referring to Deleuze's threefold distinction "between representing, narrating and writing the event" (200). Gibson's elucidates in what ways Deleuze sees direct representations through imagery in, for example, the battle in Stephen Crane's *Red Badge of Courage* or through a multiplicity of character in Proust. Crane's descriptions and Proust's character/s mirror events and the situation, in which the protagonists are, in a mimetic fashion. As Gibson argues, however, Arno Schmidt—and I want to include Jirgl here as well—seem to generate sense as an effect in their narrative, simply by creating non-sense, which has to be deciphered. It is an effect that is mostly familiar to us in works like *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll. These elements are visible in Schmidt's and Jirgl's writing as well, only that both go even further. Just like with

Schmidt, Jirgl's method is an implementation of the narration of events through rendering the impact on the self and the identity of the characters without the mimetic realism we see in other authors thematizing expulsion and flight. Both marginalize plot for the sake of the representation of perception, which is displayed as bewilderment and inability to react in a situation of greatest stress and threat. So again, in *Die Unvollendeten*, the readers have to fill in the puzzling moments of these situations and emotions with their own explanations.

Jirgl seeks to apply this deliberately obscure element in his writing style on several levels and in numerous instances. *Die Unvollendeten* is divided into three parts, each of them featuring one important phase of the story of the family. It begins with the expulsion from Kommotau in the Sudetenland, then extends to life in the early GDR, where the family is already fragmented, and concludes with narrator Reiner's attempts of coping with his family's experience and life in East Germany, as well as within Germany after unification. The three parts are narrated mainly from Reiner's point of view, occasionally inserting stream-of-consciousness accounts of his mother Anna, but also throwing in remarks from other family members, presumably his grandmother and great-grandmother. Especially when describing Anna's sexual experiences, these accounts resemble the soliloquy of Joyce's character Molly Bloom in *Ulysses*. Readers can also at times assume that they deal with verbatim transcripts of recordings of her accounts, emphasizing Anna's dialect. In the second part, Jirgl divides the narration into events taking place at different places in the new homeland that would become the GDR as well as in the hometown of narrator Reiner. These events are distinguished from others by the titles given to them—they are various street names. Puzzling,

however, is the fact that after a few scenes, there is no real connection anymore between the street name headlines of the episodes and the location of the events taking place. They are simply arbitrarily allocated: sometimes they fit to the occurrences under that headline, and sometimes they have no connection whatsoever. It appears as if the narrator is engaging in some detached process of remembering his hometown while he throws events at the reader—events that took place before the narrator's birth, that he learned about through family memory. Sometimes these are abruptly stopped only to be continued after the next scene. Several layers of memory are thus represented within this instance of his unique text composition: the narrator, Reiner, apparently remembers old street names and, freely associating, retells this part of his family history, which in turn is separated into disjointed segments. In this manner Jirgl manages to incorporate “die Residuen von Träumen, von Überlegungen, von reflektorischen unbewusst, vorbewusst gemachten Beutezügen durch die Wirklichkeit [...], alles das, was sich ablagert in einer Person und bestimmt, ” as he points out in an interview (Jirgl qtd. in Jung 63). Indeed, the almost surreal, multilayered and constantly disrupted account here adds to the mood of a self that is bare of any stable core or reference point. This part and other similar parts of the novel are an impressive rendition of the sometimes erratic human way to remember, stressing the randomness of recall. Jirgl's effort to leave memory aside and dig deeper into “das Verdrängte, individuelles wie gesellschaftliches, das Entlarvende, die Irritation und die Subversivität des Traumes, jenes essentiellen Wissens” (Jirgl qtd. in Jung 65) is palpable. Still, Jirgl does not invoke this himself alone, he expects the reader to do the task as well.

In *die Unvollendeten*, Jirgl's carefully crafted text also enables the reader to fathom how the protagonists try to cope with several of crises of the self. What connects the various life stories of great-grandmother Johanna, grandmother Hanna and mother Anna in this book is that they originate from the same trauma of expulsion and the hardships they go through in adjusting to a Soviet Zone hostile towards these truly original East Germans.¹⁰¹ The continuous reduction in length of the names of these women clearly alludes to the increasing extent of the loss of their old identity by leaving their homeland in the Sudetenland, being treated like hostile intruders in the new East Germany and having to re-invent themselves. Even the narrator's—Anna's son Reiner Konda¹⁰²—severe problems have in part the same origin as that of these women who endure the difficult adjustment to their displacement and eventually find it impossible to adapt to the new life. He has been handed down moods, behavioral patterns and even emotions, as I will describe below (section III).

Certainly, something adds to his inherited problems, namely issues connected to Reiner's life in the GDR. With respect to Reiner, here Jirgl's own biography comes in. Reiner turns out to be his alter ego, not only in the similarity of the name but also by means of the identical birth date. This resemblance of characters and author has oftentimes been one of the main criticisms directed at Arno Schmidt, who indeed wrote mainly about himself, as the *Züricher Weltwoche* mockingly re-reviews his *Leviathan* fourteen years after publication (cf. Schardt 51). To Jirgl, this phenomenon appears to be normal, and he cannot be easily contradicted when he states adamantly that “alles, was man schreibt ist autobiografisch, ob man will oder nicht” (qtd. in Nord 13). It is indeed safe to assume that all creative writing involuntarily bears traces of personal

experience, consciously or subconsciously. Jirgl, however, does not go so far as to claim that his story is autobiographical and can be read as such, which would have to be encountered with caution.

Nonetheless, the intriguing conflation of Jirgl's own life and the life of narrator Reiner Konda continues in the third part. Both Jirgl—the theater technician—and Reiner—the dentist—were working in professions they considered safe and opportune vis-à-vis the dictatorial regime during the GDR. Reiner is someone “der diesen Beruf Zahnarzt hingeschmissen hatte und geworden war, was er von-jeher hatte sein wollen – Buchhändler” (166). This last part of *Die Unvollendeten* consists of Reiner's diary of events unfolding in a time span of five days while he is dying of cancer. Still, it hardly describes any present events, but is rather filled with memories that again conflate his own memories and those of his mother. These remembrances constantly refer back to the previous two parts. Short snippets in italics that had been interspersed throughout the book increase now. In the entire book, they symbolize recurring phrases the narrator recalls, or parts of conversations, so typical for a communicated family memory: “Monate-des-Trecks” (24), “jetzt schmeißen die mich ins ! Wasser...” (71) or “!Hüte dich vor den-Menschen, denn der Mensch ist schmutzig“ (155). Some of them are even printed in “Fraktur,” alluding to its old origin as conventions or portraying their background as “ideologische Floskeln” (Kammler 229),¹⁰³ but apparently making mainly a judgment about their obsolescence as well. And even if some of these memory items might be invented, here again Jirgl adds deliberately the raw material of his own family history, his “eigene Familiengeschichte” (Jirgl qtd. in Nord 13), leaving them as phrases in their original form.

Jirgl carefully constructs on the next linguistic level as well. Especially in descriptions of highest emotional despair his sentences seem endless, emphasizing injury but also the arbitrary character of recurring flashbacks, the typical results of traumatization. It becomes increasingly evident how the characters' experiences result in a defective identity, and Jirgl represents this here supremely as well. His punctuation is unique and in quantity goes far beyond that of Arno Schmidt who also attributed extreme semantic meaning to punctuation. His exclamation points and question marks are located in front of the words that he wants to highlight in an astonishingly effective attempt to visualize intonation. Here it becomes evident that to Jirgl, language is not merely a tool, but becomes material, a substance that down to its smallest meaningful units, down to its morphemes, is altered and manipulated. Jirgl excels in adding more meaning to a word by changing morphemes—even on this level creating new identities for linguistic units. Some of his spellings are a little weaker, rather platitudinous: ("Akademicker" 197). Still, some carry a multifaceted meaning. Spelling the word 'benutzt' as "benuttsten" (43), when he describes that Czech women use the town or calling the GDR an "Irr-Wahna" (198) is highly original and ingenious in his ability to add a very precise connotation to a particular term. By spelling out Germany as 'Doitschland' he incorporates one of the numerous Neonazi battle cries, the "oi,oi,oi." Here, he insinuates en passant that Germany's potentially newly awakened dream of being a world power again is already going awry; the concept of Germany is already being monopolized by radicals. This is also visible in his spelling of the word nation: "Nazion" (165). The reader can clearly detect a connection to the Jirgl of *MutterVaterRoman*, in which Jirgl describes the transition from Nazi-Germany to life in

the GDR. While that book does not deal with expulsions, it problematizes violence, problems with interpersonal relationships, and the impact of the political situation on the individual identity of the citizens who have hardly learned to grapple with the experience of war and destruction. A cultural pessimism similar to Arno Schmidt's is palpable in Jirgl's entire work. To Jirgl, it seems to be a natural development to write a novel about the fate of expellees ending up in East Germany, while at the same time emphasizing continuities of a disruption that continues to interfere with the development of German national identity. He traces the "emotionalen Kontenpunkte" (Nord 13) of his family, which have never been unraveled and left "unvollendet." The possibility to read this as an allegory of Germany as a whole is evident.

III

Nonetheless, despite this apparent sensitivity to a strengthened Neo-Nazi movement, some twists in the plot can lead the reader to conclusions that may even support a revisionist perspective. Certainly, with respect to the issue of the dualist perception of Germans as either perpetrators or victims he contends: "Es geht nicht mehr um 'schuldig' oder 'nicht schuldig', sondern darum, welcher Machteffekt welche Reaktion auslöst" (Nord 13). However, while Jirgl attempts to move away from dualistic perceptions of Germans as "either-or," his novel juxtaposes historical referents in a problematic manner that encourages a reinterpretation of perpetrators as victims. Two scenes from the book work in tandem to illustrate this: they span generations and,

therefore, intertwine the parts of his book. Early in the book the narrator recounts how the family along with other Germans are driven through a taunting and violent mob of Czechs when they are herded together to be transported out of the region. Anna, a child at that time, having been absent at the moment when the Germans were rounded up, comes back late. Yet, when she arrives in her street she becomes another onlooker among the raving Czech crowd, incapable of revealing her identity as a German for fear of being thrown into the stream of humiliated and beaten Germans. Years later in the late 1950s as a boy, Reiner witnesses from afar how farmers in his childhood East German village beat cattle onto a truck, one particularly brutal peasant severely injuring one ox, breaking its jaw. Reiner, infuriated by the scene, picks up a stone and throws it towards the raving peasant, causing the loss of one eye and subsequent death of the man. Both scenes are told in yet another breathless stream of sentences that almost appear as one, at times even omitting punctuation. Jirgl appears to construct Reiner's unconscious potential late rebellion against the continuous humiliations his family endured and that left an indelible mark on his family and on himself as a descendant. Grandmother Hanna and her sister Maria, living with Reiner at that time tacitly condone Reiner's assault that resulted in the peasant's death—Reiner is aware of the fact that they know about it but never take any action. Juxtaposing these two incidents is a fairly problematic if not dubious comparison: Reiner's family was never sent to the slaughterhouse, they were sent into a—at least initially—free country.

Paralleling these events in the way Jirgl does might invoke an inappropriate equation of expulsions with a third instance of herding people together: the Holocaust, which was the real journey to the slaughterhouse. Timm Menke sees the Holocaust

allusion—not necessarily in this scene but throughout the whole text—as well, yet he does so in a very positive light. Surprisingly, he argues that scenes like this criticize the genocide committed against European Jewry. Menke suggests that

Die wohl inhaltlich bedeutendste Leistung Jirgls bei der Darstellung von Vertreibungen aus der Heimat ist eben die literarische Sichtbarmachung eines unendlich monumentaleren Unrechts: der vom deutschen Nationalsozialismus verübte Genozid an den europäischen Juden. Überall im Text stoßen wir auf solche Entsprechungen. (Menke 4)

These “Entsprechungen,” or equivalents, can easily be misinterpreted or even misappropriated, since despite constant criticism of German megalomania Jirgl leaves out the Holocaust completely in *Die Unvollendeten*. Even though Jirgl claims that he is not discussing questions of guilt, and obviously not consciously apologetic, he still might appear as exactly that. It may seem legitimate to compare the Czech way of driving Germans through the street like cattle to the beginning stages of the Holocaust. Yet, it is helpful to be more cautious here; it is here where the limits of fictional writing or at least of Jirgl’s writing become apparent, when the individual experience is the focus and an author does not—understandably—want to patronize the reader with historical facts or constant reminders that his juxtapositions are not equations. Yet, in contrast to an historian like Andreas Hillgruber, who clearly described cause and effect for the expulsions, author Jirgl leaves out contexts. He falls short of illustrating the humiliating treatment that the Czech population endured during the Nazi occupation of the Sudetenland. There is not one sentence in which he mentions the reasons for the Czechs’ hatred of the Germans. Contrary to what Timm Menke suggests, one hardly visualizes the Holocaust or reinforces its horrors by leaving it out. Jirgl’s approach rather decontextualizes German suffering and does not compare but rather equates it in a

simplistic way with the ordeal of genuinely innocent victims, removing the occurrences in the Sudetenland from a crucial and more complex discourse by leaving out the background. As a result, the problematic implicit equation can stall a necessary and helpful comparison of ordeals and suffering that the discourse of German victimhood entails. Jirgl's faux pas here does not seem to be a singulary event or coincidence. In his novel *Abtriinnig* we find similar descriptions when Jirgl equates concentration camps during Hitler fascism to today's legions of unemployed.¹⁰⁴ As I pointed out in the Introduction: methodologically, comparisons are certainly a viable tool to understand any events in history or the present. In the German case, however, this cannot be done without proper contextualization, otherwise it will create false equations.

What this stone throwing scene definitely shows is that Reiner finally wants to react differently than these women in their "verfluchten Bescheidenheit" (227) and trained conformity—one of those constantly recurring memory flashes in italics—that, as Reiner cries out "ich von diesen Flüchtlingen geerbt habe wie einen seelischen Buckel" (227). The trauma once inflicted on grandmother and mother has been handed down to him, has forced him to come to terms with an experience he did not live through. To Reiner, however, it is the first and last rebellion against hardship for a long time, since after that he cannot lead a life according to his own will anymore. The GDR oppresses him, adding to his family repressions until the GDR dissolves. It is only then that he can finally be free and open a bookstore instead of working as a dentist. Still, even then, it becomes obvious that Reiner is still traumatized by tales of horror of eviction and hostility in the supposedly friendly Germany that his family endured—now combined with a lifelong frustration about his own life in the GDR.

Even Reiner's personal relationships are affected by this experience. He is not capable of having normal sex: memories he was told of his mother being raped clearly interfere with and direct his behavior during sexual intercourse (248). This marks the second pair of corresponding passages or rather scenes. It mirrors an instance of Anna's sexual activity. Anna, being uprooted from home, without role models or parents, stigmatized as the "Flüchtling," lives confined in her attic room, temporarily separated from her mother who goes about her job in another city. She has to work hard to get her Abitur, and make sure her landlord does not notice her occasional visitor. It is a boy from her hometown in the Sudetenland who engages now in illegal "De-Wiesnhandel" in Munich (141). He stands for the only contact she has to her youth, essentially consisting of occasional sexual encounters. It means more to both of them, but being pressed into two different lives they cannot continue their relationship. The narrator Reiner describes a sexual encounter Anna has with this boy named Erich, a scene that is characterized by desperation, mutual disrespect and lack of communication: "Seine Stöße wie Faustschläge in ihr Geschlecht, sie taten ihr weh, sie presste 1 Unterarm vor ihren Mund. Er fickte nicht wirklich sie. Er fickte auch nicht wirklich eine Frau" (137). There is an awkward resemblance of this story with an encounter Reiner has at the end of the book (248). Here as well the man's, Reiner's, action during the sexual encounter with his female partner is more of a violent impersonal abuse, and the only emotions involved are Reiner's constant thoughts of his mother and father—Erich. In another passage of the book the narrator admits that his grandmother Hanna's dictum "Die Frau muss Dem Mann !dienen" (168) is deeply engraved in his thinking, making sexual activity an obligation for the woman.

This scene points to a crucial aspect in Jirgl's novel: the inherited trauma, which is a phenomenon that is not unfamiliar in trauma research. In her discussion of the term postmemory—which I will discuss more in detail in the Conclusion—Marianne Hirsch reminds the reader of this potential effect as well, drawing from Cathy Caruth's research. Jirgl's narrator has to cope with second-hand traumatic experience, and Hirsch's summary of Caruth illustrates this effect: "Cathy Caruth suggests that trauma is an encounter with another, an act of telling and listening, a listening to another's wound, recognizable in its intersubjective relation." The experience of Jirgl's narrator mirrors Caruth's argument: "Trauma may also be a way of seeing through another's eyes, of remembering another's memories through the experience of their effects." Hirsch continues:

If indeed one of the signs of trauma is its delayed recognition, if trauma is recognizable only through its after-effects, then it is not surprising that it is transmitted across generations. Perhaps it is only in subsequent generations that trauma can be witnessed and worked through, by those who were not there to live it but who received its effects, belatedly, through the narratives, actions and symptoms of the previous generation. ("Holocaust Photographs" 13)

Jirgl's representation of Reiner Konda's dysfunctional behavior in many of his social interactions reflects this argument, since his problems stem to some extent from his family history. It is apparent, however, that Reiner cannot deal properly with his inherited traumatic experience in a constructive fashion, which would enable him to work through the trauma.

IV

In conclusion, Schmidt's and Jirgl's highly inventive prose forms, structures as well as neologisms and other linguistic alterations that even transport punctuation beyond mere denotation, contribute to an intriguingly intense rendition of the experience of traumatic expulsion. It is more than pure mimesis: here the text itself is subject to the effects that are described. Schmidt and Jirgl's criticism of society is scathing. Schmidt as well as his narrator detect the demise of his society—the allegedly civilized world—whereas Jirgl and his narrators experience the power struggle within society that also has a disastrous impact on the individual. This is a general theme of Jirgl's oeuvre, as Arne de Winde writes correctly: "Jirgl exploriert in seinen Romanen den 'Lebens=Krieg mit seinen verborgenen Alltagschlachten', die unendlich kleinen Machttechnologien, die von den globaleren Herrschaftsformen besetzt, kolonisiert und transformiert werden" (de Winde 157). As I pointed out in the Introduction, it is instructive to look into the author's specific framework, even if he might not be aware of it himself. It becomes evident that the suffering of the individual is rendered in an impressively convincing way. Writing can indeed serve as a compensatory "provision of meaning"—"Sinnstiftung"—that serves those who have been "uprooted by the process of modernization" as Jürgen Habermas points out in this context (Habermas 1988 46), in this case the modernization is a hostile and destructive challenge of the conventional lifestyle that Schmidt and Jirgl—not only their respective narrators—have experienced. What is more then, it becomes evident as well how much the text becomes an object of the reader who has to decode meaning due to Schmidt's and Jirgl's writing that makes

these texts so valuable. The reader is constantly confronted with enigmatic and erratic symbols, ideas and questions. In addition to filling the gaps by becoming the (co-) producer of the text as I explained above, this makes her or him also the analyst of the writer—or at least the narrator. Thus, contrary to realist writing, Schmidt and Jirgl make the reader also the “Other,” who will try to understand the narrator—or even the writer—in a much more analytical sense than in the case of realist prose.

CONCLUSION

Fictional literature on flight and expulsion has always been part of the collective memory in Germany. Nonetheless, until the beginning of the 21st century, literature dealing with German victimhood in relation to WWII in general has not been pronounced within the official cultural memory. It has only been in the past ten years or so that German suffering has become an issue that has defined German cultural identity more prominently. In addition to numerous non-fiction books and television documentaries, fiction in literature and recently also in film has become one central medium to represent the experience of forced migration. Fiction as a means to open up to non-rational, affective perspectives is extremely helpful in understanding processes of individual as well as societal identity formation. In this regard, Germanist Silke Arnold-de Simine raises an important point: “These narratives are not so much concerned with the truthful reconstruction of the past, but constitute a collective interpretation of past events according to the necessities of the community in regard to its present social and historical context” (10). In addition, in my analysis in the previous chapters it becomes obvious that what takes place in the texts I selected is—especially in the case of Grass’s *Im Krebsgang*—more than an interpretation of the past: to a certain extent they contribute to a discourse that shapes a community and modifies its master narrative, which now more readily incorporates flight and expulsion as a national trauma. Moreover, what connects these four works is the multifaceted and sometimes controversial way that these literary texts represent flight and expulsion and the

repercussions for individual and group identity—in the same insecure and indecisive way that cultural memory in Germany is adjusting to this issue.

I

The genre of *Vertreibungsliteratur*, especially in the case of the works analyzed in this dissertation, offers various perspectives: it describes and at the same time questions the experience of an alleged cultural and social cohesion before the war and exemplifies the dissolution of this cohesion during the impact of the war and during the flight. This literature also portrays the arrival in a new—oftentimes hostile—environment, and elucidates an experience that for many leads to a re-definition or re-creation of the past, for others even to a re-definition of their identity. What is more, this literature symbolizes the way German society in the 20th and incipient 21st century deals with the reconciliation of German guilt and German victimhood. Numerous discussions concerning the former membership in the NSDAP of illustrious Germans—among them Siegfried Lenz—in the summer of 2007 were yet another reminder that Germany is still learning to do away with the oversimplifying dichotomies of either perpetrator or victim, either guilty or innocent, either supporter or opponent.¹⁰⁵ I would argue that these texts dealing with flight and expulsion, which are typically highly political, reflect this pattern. It becomes obvious that the identity-defining cultural memory is not fully able to be encompassed in a dualistic perspective. For instance, at the opening of the exhibition “Erzwungene Wege” in the summer of 2006, I myself

heard how Joachim Gauck, the former executive official of the Office for Stasi files, stated in his welcome address that one may not neglect German victims simply because they were living side by side with German perpetrators. By so eloquently mischaracterizing the problem, his speech mirrored exactly the simplistic attitude towards German guilt and victimhood: the point is not that Germans have to accept the fact that many German victims were simply living next door to perpetrators and, therefore, are easily regarded as less important in their plight. The crucial point is that victims were often also at the same time perpetrators and vice versa. As Harald Welzer showed in his seminal study *Opa war kein Nazi* (2002), the blurring of the duality is hard to grasp for many Germans. The discussion about German suffering, however, can only be led by a constant remembering of these intertwined roles.

The difficulty in reconciling these two roles, especially in intellectual circles, has led to a notion of an alleged taboo surrounding German victimhood. Even though many historians and other scholars have compellingly shown over the last years that there has not been such a thing as a taboo, it was only in August 2007 that once again a German author, the ailing Walter Kempowski and renowned Swiss journalist Peer Teuwsen lamented in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* that German society is not allowed to commemorate their victims:

Teuwsen: Das Werk [Echolot-KD] bekam nie die Anerkennung, die es verdiente, weil darin eine Binsenwahrheit steht, die in Deutschland aber immer noch ein Tabu ist: Die Deutschen waren Täter und Opfer.

Kempowski: Darf man immer noch nicht sagen. [...] Aber man wird es doch aussprechen dürfen, dass einen diese ewige Täterschaft quält. So wie es Walser getan und eins auf die Mütze bekommen hat. Das depressiviert mich sehr. (*Frankfurter Rundschau* August 4, 2007: 25)

Similarly to what I argued in the Chapter about this alleged taboo and Günter Grass, Kempowski's and Teuwsen's perspective that they are almost oppressed by this taboo instead stems from the limited ability of some public figures—themselves included—to thoroughly contextualize German victimhood and guilt.

One of the most controversial aspects in the books examined here is exactly this lack of appropriate contextualization. It alludes to a larger problem in society and Paul Ricoeur's warning of a "slippage from similarity to exoneration" (see Introduction) is not a far-fetched danger. On a textual level, the sort of text chosen might not have a great influence on this deficiency. Most of the works investigated here are novels, and a novel, at first sight, appears to be the text form that is, simply due to its length, theoretically more conducive to a more thorough and inclusive portrayal of historical events. However, it quickly turns out that it is not the length of a work that defines its potential of appropriate reflection on a particular issue. While in *Heimatismuseum* one is struck by the almost complete lack of reference to the Holocaust, in Jirgl's considerably shorter *Die Unvollendeten* one even detects a diligently developed but highly disturbing implicit equation of the Holocaust and German flight and expulsion. Grass's novella *Im Krebsgang* does not fulfill its stated purpose to offer a new and critical reading and handling of German victimhood, whereas the much shorter narration *Leviathan* by Arno Schmidt, in its grim juxtaposition of German suffering and its causal ideological insanity, does.

Contrary to Ferdinand Louis Helbig's claim, I would argue that non-German victims do not always play an important or even decisive role in Vertreibungsliteratur (cf. *Der ungeheure Verlust* 264). To a certain extent this would be understandable,

since the impression of violence does not necessarily lead to the ability of a sophisticated reflection on experience, especially if this impression has a traumatic character. Thus, it rather reflects German society's difficulties in finding a way to incorporate the "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" of National Socialism into the discourse of German victimhood, which are two concepts still seen as isolated from each other.

What we saw in some of the works I chose to present here, namely the lack of thorough contextualization, replicates the inability to integrate the experience of the Holocaust, which has so far dominated German cultural memory. This way of active forgetting in the Nietzschean sense through neglecting can ultimately lead to what Andreas Huyssen so aptly calls cultural amnesia, in this case a new cultural amnesia. Active forgetting is intrinsically connected with a suppression of what is remembered, and this would mean a significant step backwards: in the last forty years, Germany has certainly not suffered from cultural amnesia in terms of the way it has dealt with its guilt. If, however, turning to its own victimhood means a shift away from the attention to German guilt instead of reconciling it with German suffering, then historian Ute Frevert's vision of contextualization is not as functional yet as she describes it. It remains to be seen whether a temporary shift to the focus on German victimhood will in the long run add to a significant German achievement, namely this decade-long highly self-critical focus on guilt and responsibility.

Historians like Frevert are not the only ones who argue for a coexistence of victim and perpetrator narrative. I have shown in my previous chapters that this is indeed crucial and unavoidable for the emerging discourse. Many participants on all sides in this innocence vs. guilt discourse, however, lack the ability to carefully draw a

distinction between terms like comparison, equation and juxtaposition, oftentimes because some protagonists indeed are somewhat careless in their comparisons. While Andreas Hillgruber was accused of equating the Holocaust and the expulsions of Germans for his mere juxtaposition of these two occurrences, Reinhard Jirgl's comparison turned indeed into a largely unnoticed excruciating equation. Since Ernst Nolte uttered his historically flawed remarks of the Gulag as "viel ursprünglicher" than Auschwitz, many historians have no longer been willing anymore to consider comparison a viable historical method in this issue, contrary to what they usually do. Undoubtedly, in terms of this problem of useful contextualization, German society has arrived in recent years at a difficult phase, as numerous scholars ascertain: the need of inclusion and creation of a polyphonic historiography. As a remedy, Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove and Georg Grote suggest the use of "memory contests," that would put "emphasis on a pluralistic memory culture, which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past but embraces the idea that individuals and groups advance and edit competing stories about themselves that forge their changing sense of identity" (*German Memory Contests* vi). This sounds highly theoretical and perhaps—for the time being—even utopian. One of my central arguments is that cultural memory is always subject to competing notions in a society, with one normative perspective gaining opinion leadership. Hence, it requires a highly enlightened society to be able to critically reflect on their past without having such extreme notions like guilt and suffering take predominance or even smother each other. Fuchs's, Cosgrove's, Grote's, and also Aleida Assmann's highly theoretical views assume the existence of a high latitude and freedom in the emergence of cultural memory. However, as long as the

emotional involvement of all participants is still as strong as it is now, it will be very difficult to achieve this sober and rational approach to a polyphonic memory in society. What is more, Michael Rothberg argues compellingly that there is a danger in the ‘contest’ or ‘competition’ approach to memory. He rather suggests a different approach to a creation of cultural memory that he terms the “multidirectionality” of memory, which is determined by “the interference, overlap, and mutual constitution of seemingly distinct collective memories that define the post-war era and the workings of memory more generally” (162). His concept indeed is more promising than a ‘competition’ of memories at obviously predetermined fronts, since it “supposes that the overlap and interference of memories help constitute the public sphere as well as the various individual and collective subjects that articulate themselves in it” (162). Although his idea is slightly similar to the proposals of Fuchs, Cosgrove and Assmann, it opens the way for some leeway for the public sphere to develop its identity through various notions of the past that are assimilated and brought into a kind of larger narrative. Yet again, in order to reconcile various memories and different pasts in a still rather normative and homogeneous present, the passage of time seems to be an important remedy that will inevitably allow a more rational or sober discourse, that in addition might focus less on moralization than on contextualization.

II

The most recent books by grandchildren of expellees and refugees seem to support the assumption that the greater distance in time might also be conducive to a more critical and comprehensive approach to the past. Unlike older authors like Günter Grass or Siegfried Lenz and even Reinhard Jirgl, young authors more comprehensively and less reluctantly thematize and contextualize their grandparents' involvement or complicity with the Nazi system or even make this a central point in their plots that deal with flight and expulsion. These young authors have grown up in a society that has been involved in a constant critical discourse about German guilt, so their approach is different. Petra Reski's narrator in *Ein Land so weit* (2000) talks about her grandfather who did not change his Polish name although he was a Volksdeutscher in East Prussia. She concedes that her grandfather apparently did it "nicht aus Opposition gegen das Naziregime, sondern aus Trotz gegenüber seinen Brüdern" (81) who had become staunch Nazis. Olaf Müller's narrator in *Schlesisches Wetter* (2003) is doubtful about his grandparents' claims that they did not know about what was going on in the Groß-Rosen concentration camp: "Großmutter hatte es vom Zug aus gesehen und nicht gesehen. Weil es verboten war hinauszuschauen. Hinzusehen. Behauptete sie. Sie schien dankbar zu sein, dass ich nicht nachgefragt habe" (150). An important dimension becomes evident in this particular scene, yet it is visible in all these books: these young authors successfully assemble and place side by side anecdotes of everyday life and horror, and they are pointing out ruptures, contradictions and outright lies in their or their narrator's family history. In addition, Stefan Wackwitz's narrator in *Ein*

unsichtbares Land (2003) perceives similarities in the radical atmospheres of the 68-er movement and the Nazi era. Unlike the rhetoric of the right-wing press in the late 1960s who scornfully equated the APO radicals to the SA of the late 1920s and early 1930s, Wackwitz's juxtaposition rather points to a productively carefree and sober approach of younger authors to compare historical events without any revisionist intentions.

For all of these young authors of Vertreibungsliteratur who were born around or after 1960, this critical inquiry into their grandparents' past seems to be more than purely a matter of a bothersome duty, to which they had been conditioned in a Germany that has been trying to thoroughly deal with its past. It rather appears to be an unavoidable aspect of their manner of interacting with their family history. Stefan Wackwitz in *Ein unsichtbares Land* and another young author, Tanja Dückers (*Himmelskörper*, 2003), even make their narrators' struggle of reconciling their grandparents' guilt and their love of these family members the central theme of their books. Their narrators—also children of a thorough “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”—grew up with their grandparents' recurring casual racist and, in Dückers's case, anti-Semitic remarks and belittlement of Nazi crimes. When these adolescents realize that these remarks point to more than just some aggravating old-fashionedness, they have to grapple with the fact that these remarks actually accompany complicity with the Nazi regime—despite the decade-old family myth of having been victims to the injustice of being forced out of their homeland.

Another achievement of these young writers is their ability to incorporate the plot lines concerning the grandparents into very contemporary personal issues. Dückers, for instance, juxtaposes the shocking revelation of a beloved relative's guilt

with the discovery of the bi-sexual orientation of the female narrator's boyfriend. In both cases, an identity as 'either-or' is being exposed and challenged. This parallel, at first sight, appears to be problematic and schematic, but adds to the sense of conflation of personal and socio-political turmoil in which some Germans find themselves. Indeed, as Gerrit Bartels of the *taz* suggests, it is an "Identitätssuche tief in der Vergangenheit," in which the narrators notice that digging in their family past does not necessarily make life easier, but it explains certain aspects of their own identity. It is obviously not an identity as an expellee or refugee they re-discover, yet they discover their deep involvement in coping strategies of these older people—simply by being the descendants of these expellees and refugees.

III

Another fascinating aspect of dealing with memory and the past becomes, therefore, obvious in Dückers's novel, alluding to a phenomenon that Marianne Hirsch coined postmemory in her 1997 book *Family Frames* and numerous other articles. It is a term that has gained wider interest in the last decade due to its implications for second and third generations. Postmemory can have a healing or otherwise productive effect. In addition, what is instrumental in this concept is a focus on mnemonic devices in this form of 'remembering.' To a certain extent, this plays a role in the works discussed in this dissertation as well.

Postmemory is a concept of memory that is defined by its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory—it has a secondary memory quality, and its basis is defined by displacement and empathy. What makes it especially interesting is the fact that it is

distinguished from memory by generational distance from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation. (*Family Frames* 22)

In a later article Hirsch adds:

Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they “remember” only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right. (“Holocaust Photographs” 11)

Originally, for autobiographical reasons, Hirsch applies this term to the second-generational memory of Holocaust survivors—she is the daughter of Jewish-Romanians who via Vienna came to the United States when Marianne Hirsch was a child. To a certain extent, however, this concept is applicable to descendants of survivors of German refugees and expellees as well, regardless of the highly problematic background concerning their parents’ or grandparents’ potential double role as victims and perpetrators. Hirsch points out: “The children of victims, survivors, witnesses, or perpetrators have different experiences of postmemory, even though they share the familial ties that facilitate intergenerational identification” (“Holocaust Photographs” 12). The analogies between the impact on descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of refugees and expellees are indeed striking and are most pronounced in Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* and also represented in Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten*. Here the

familial ties are a crucial factor and in the latter the son suffers severely from the transgenerational trauma of mother and grandmother. What is more, as Hirsch suggests, for the second generation, the lost world of the parents will always be “the place of identity, however ambivalent” (“Past Lives” 662), an experience visible in *Im Krebsgang* and also in *Die Unvollendeten*.

The second important aspect of Hirsch’s concept is the reliance of commemoration on representations through artifacts, or mnemonic devices—or on devices that are declared as such. This plays an important role in society, but is clearly a factor in the construction of family history as well. A memory aid that has dominated in these constructions is the photograph, and Jo Spence and Patricia Holland have persuasively pointed to the tight connection between public and private memory here:

Family photography can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious. Our memory is never fully “ours,” nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past. Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a “real” one. (Spence and Holland 13)

In numerous works in German post-45 literature concerning the past of parents or grandparents, the photograph is a central element. As Friederike Eigler shows, Maron’s *Pawels Briefe* is a good example of this, since it “proposes a reversal of our conventional notion of remembrance, which holds that experience precedes remembrance” (395). Maron’s autobiographical narrator indeed knows her grandparents and their lives only from what she reconstructs from stories, photographs and other family documents. The same applies to characters Konrad and ‘Jew’ David in Grass’s *Im Krebsgang*, who claim to remember their own families’ and their idols’ family history, although this happens entirely through mnemonic devices like

photographs, films, subjective stories and all kinds of artifacts. The same is certainly the central theme in *Heimatismuseum* on a familial and ethnic level—and most of what Reiner Konda in *Die Unvollendeten* knows about his mothers, grandmother and great-grandmother is from stories and pictures. What differentiates the postmemory of these people from other kinds of family history, in Hirsch's line of reasoning, is again the extreme personal involvement through an imaginative investment by way of 'memory' aids that even has repercussions on the personal identity of the one remembering.

This phenomenon of self-recognition through a particular (family-) historical awareness is not only confined to one's very own family members, as Hirsch sees as well: "This form of remembrance need not be restricted to the family, or even to a group that shares an ethnic or national identity marking: through particular forms of identification, adoption, and projection, it can be more broadly available" ("Holocaust Photographs" 12). NPR's Michele Norris narrated a story about a daughter of a Holocaust survivor who had identified so strongly with the life story of an unknown woman about whose plight she learned at the USHMM, that she tattooed this woman's Auschwitz prisoner number into her own arm and later on met with the daughter of this Nazi victim, developing a very deep friendship.¹⁰⁶ This sort of personal involvement and emotionally highly charged forged family memory will certainly help to keep the memory, as numerous artistic recreations and representations do as well. However, Hirsch herself evaluates an effect like this—very appropriately—ambivalently, since the continuous repetition can be in some cases detrimental to any attempt to cope with a trauma that was handed down and will be experienced similar to own traumatic experiences. Yet, the positive effects, as I similarly suggested in Chapter 3 with respect

to writing as a means of coping with trauma, are worth exploring, as Hirsch argues as well:

Thus, I would suggest that while the reduction of the archive of images and their endless repetition might seem problematic in the abstract, the postmemorial generation—in displacing and recontextualizing these well-known images in their artistic work—has been able to make repetition not an instrument of fixity or paralysis or simple retraumatization (as it often is for survivors of trauma), but a mostly helpful vehicle of working through a traumatic past. (“Holocaust Photographs” 9)

Nevertheless, what adds a crucial complication to the question of postmemory within the issue of flight and expulsion is the fact that the important question of a thorough contextualization can perhaps better be achieved with a more sober discussion of this issue. A personal imaginative investment is certainly unavoidable in many cases. Therefore, I would argue that these kinds of emotional effects of postmemory, which until this day also take place among descendants of German expellees, will hinder a rational way to incorporate Germans’ guilt into the memory of German victimhood, which remains a desideratum.

IV

The applicability of Hirsch’s term postmemory alludes again to the aspect that I would call the phase of “re-”ization: in order to shape our present identity, we rediscover, reproduce and refabricate the past, recreate, reaffirm, resignify, redefine, re-attribute and recall in order to reinterpret—similar to storytelling. This leads to the important question whether our terminology for memory is adequate. The works I

chose in order to exemplify the mechanisms of Vertreibungsliteratur demonstrate in various ways the constructed character of cultural memory and identity through the utilization of collective memory—or what we call memory. “Reading” photographs, museal installations, oral history and literature equally as cultural texts underlines this crucial aspect of identity creation through embracing the past within a society.¹⁰⁷ Still, texts should be read in multiple, variable, plural ways and meanings, critically reflecting on their make up, their authors and their presumed intentions. All texts in this dissertation provide us with only one view of the events as they took place, and in all these texts the aspect of storytelling plays a crucial role: Arno Schmidt has his narrator tell his experience through a photo album-like diary, Siegfried Lenz’s narrator tells the story to his daughter’s boyfriend, Grass’s narrator and his son learn about the story surrounding the sinking of the “Wilhelm Gustloff” only from Tulla Pokriefke or one-sided history books, and the narrator in *Die Unvollendeten* can only represent his experiences and those of mother and grandmother in a massively disturbed fashion, expressing his own traumatization. Telling a story, handing down a story is exactly what we call memory and remembering, although strictly speaking, the term is to a certain extent inappropriate on a cultural scale. Given what Halbwachs and many others argued with respect to the constructedness of memory, we could reconsider the usefulness of this term. Even our individual memory, our collective memory and certainly the normative constructed cultural memory is rather this: an emotionally charged historiography and an acquired history—that often materializes as mnemonic practice.

Storytelling—in order to remain with this literary aspect—is nonetheless highly effective in a rather modernist form. As my discussion on Schmidt and Jirgl showed, their inventive prose forms contribute to an intriguingly intense rendition of the experience of traumatic expulsion. It is more than mimesis: here the text itself, down to its morphemes, is subject to the effects that are described. What I called the “distinct narrative ancestry” (p.101) make their texts unique in *Vertreibungsliteratur*, a genre that usually does not appear to constitute an extension of the axis of modernism. Jirgl’s and Schmidt’s distinct stylistic devices serve as immediate representations of danger, and the way their style designates repercussions on identity has a powerful impact. Non-realist writing promotes a critical understanding of events since it poses questions to a much greater extent, rather than openly trying to describe, explain and answer. The suffering of the individual in modernist writing is rendered in an impressively convincing way. This style of writing has the potential to serve as a compensatory “Sinnstiftung,” or “provision of meaning” to alleviate the experience of trauma. In addition, it has become evident that a text like this becomes to a large extent an object of the reader who has to decode meaning. The reader is constantly confronted with enigmatic and erratic symbols, ideas and questions. This makes the reader the analyst of the writer or at least of the narrator—contrary to his role as a reader of realist writing. However, even though I would argue that the ability to think critically is trained more thoroughly in these modernist renditions of traumatic experience, the realist writings of Grass or Lenz have an aesthetic component that conveys meaning and emotions similarly well.

V

Future research on this issue should look into the way the officially condoned GDR literature has dealt with the issue of flight and expulsion. My observations here have solely focused on West Germans or German literature after the Fall of the Wall. However, authors like Rolf Schneider (*Die Reise nach Jaroslaw*, 1974), Heiner Müller (*Die Umsiedler oder Das Leben auf dem Lande*, 1956-1976), Christa Wolf (*Kindheitsmuster*, 1976) and Werner Heiduczek (*Tod am Meer*, 1979) thematized the experience of “Umsiedlung,” or “re-settlement”—as it was called officially—in various ways already before 1990. It would be interesting to look into the fact that all these authors were born between 1926 and 1932, some of them—e.g. Christa Wolf—were expellees themselves. More importantly, questions like the role of the GDR regime in discussing Soviet atrocities in fiction have not been researched so far. The aforementioned works were only published—Heiner Müller’s *Die Umsiedler* was banned until the 1970s—when GDR literature in that decade made a decisive turn from Socialist Realism to a literature that concentrated “nun immer häufiger auf Lebensläufe von Individuen, denen durch Einzelne und Institutionen der Gesellschaft, durch ein autoritäres und zweckgerichtetes Regelwerk übel mitgespielt wurde” (Beutin 562). Indeed, most GDR authors then looked at the experience of flight and expulsion from a contemporary perspective and context as a GDR citizen without emphasizing any larger political and historical implications.

In addition, the constructedness and evolution of cultural memory should continue to be a central theme in German Studies. It would be a fascinating task for

German Studies to integrate empirical research that deals with the question which media—television, books, etc.—are more prone to influence public perception, which in turn will decide the allowed elements of cultural memory. This would not be a new approach to cultural studies concerning fiction. Susanne Brandt already consulted these forms of research in her discussion on the implications of the 1979 TV series *Holocaust* on Germans' perception:

Im Zusammenhang mit der Verjährungsdebatte äußerten nach der Ausstrahlung 39 Prozent der Befragten, dass die Kriegsverbrecher auch weiterhin verfolgt werden sollten. Vor der Ausstrahlung hatten nur 15 Prozent diese Meinung vertreten. Und während vorher 51 Prozent der Befragten erklärt hatten, die Verbrechen sollten nicht mehr verfolgt werden, ging ihre Zahl nach der Ausstrahlung auf 35% zurück. (263)

With regard to the issue of flight and expulsion it is questionable whether fictional literature could achieve what television does on a wider scale. It appears that only Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* created such an enormous interest, which was however spurred by TV documentaries on ARD and ZDF. Unfortunately, for the issue of flight and expulsion there are no before-after polls available, since the topic of the public opinion about the commemoration of expulsion has never been researched before the latest surge of interest starting in the late 1990s. Polls from 2004—at the culmination of the debate on flight and expulsion—show clearly that 70% of Germans believe that this topic should be featured more in schools and society.¹⁰⁸ Although there are no corresponding polls from an earlier decade, I assume that before the culmination of these issues in 2003, these polls would have been drastically different.¹⁰⁹

Last but not least, it would be interesting to follow, especially in literary criticism, the shift from national narratives on flight and expulsion to the transnational and European level. Authors like Anja Kruke and Stefan Berger have described this

shift already on the level of historical and cultural studies; these developments pertain especially to an Eastern European level in cultural and literary studies. Elke Mehnert and Uwe Hentschel have already begun with this in 2001.¹¹⁰ In their collection of essays one can discover new perspectives in literature on flight and expulsion from a Polish or Czech perspective. This is an effort worth exploring further.

APPENDIX: MAPS AND PICTURES



Figure 1: Germany in Europe in 2007



Figure 4: Masuria in the south of East Prussia on a map from 2005



Figure 5: Settlements of Germans by 1937



Figure 6: The Sudetenland, the region (north) from where the women in *Die Unvollendeten* were expelled. North-East of it is Silesia, where Arno Schmidt's *Leviathan* is set

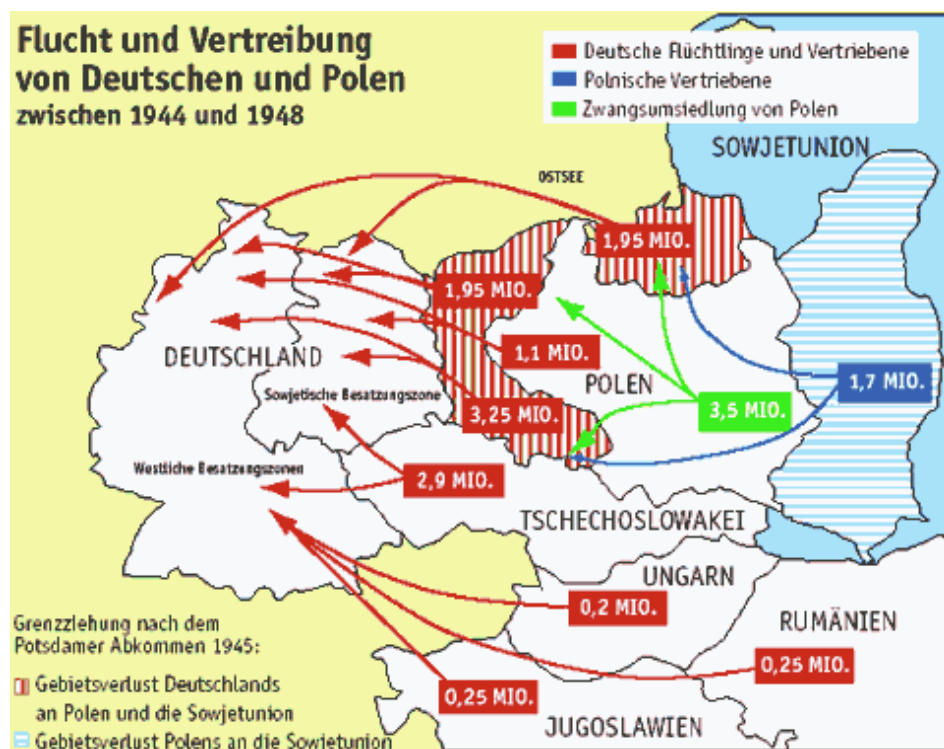


Figure 7: Origins of refugees and expellees who arrived between 1946-1948, in context with 5.2 Million Polish who were also expelled and resettled after the Potsdam Treaty

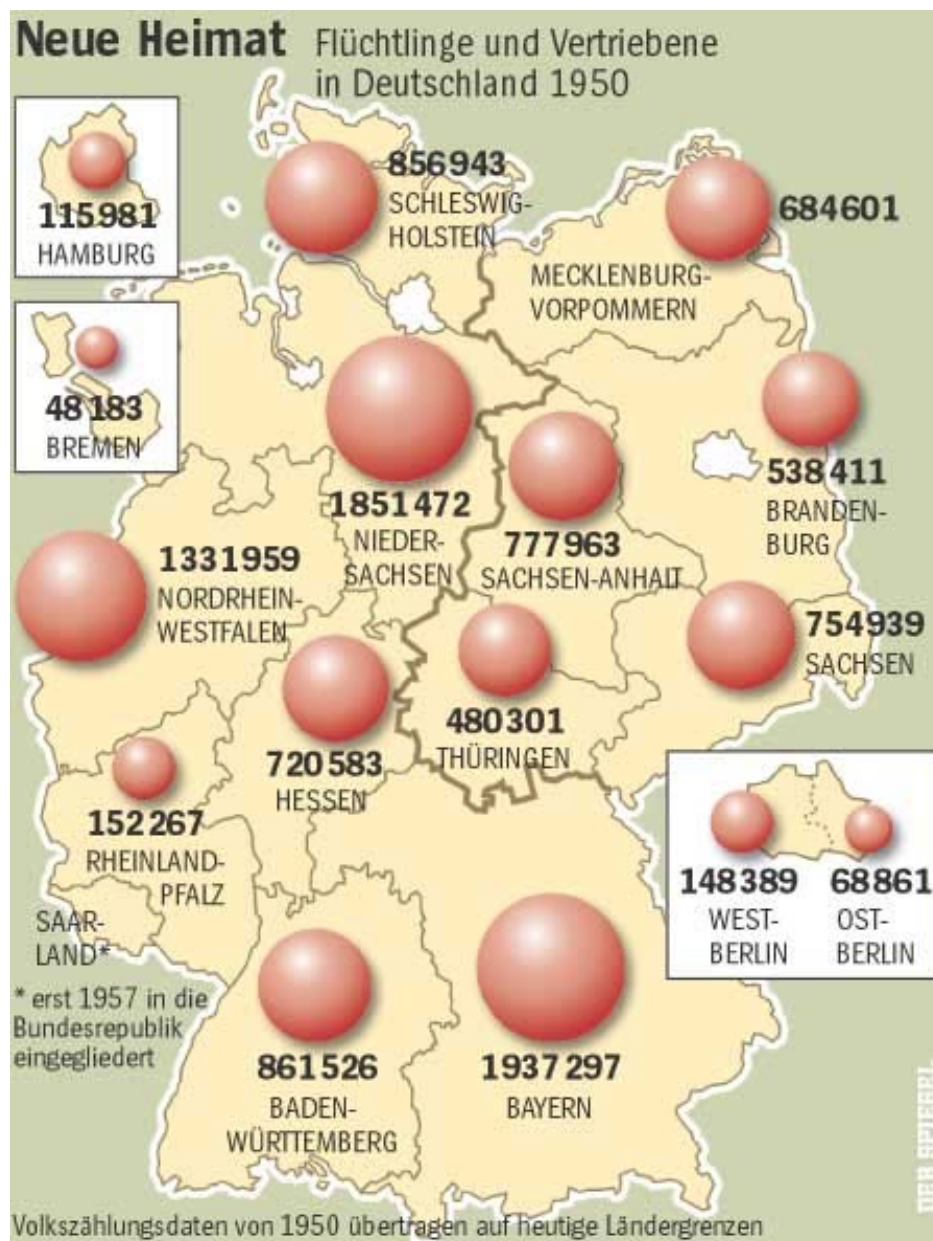


Figure 8: Numbers of refugees and expellees in 1950 in the borders of today's German States, total: 11.7 Million



Figure 9: One of the iconic pictures depicting the flight from East Prussia, Winter 1944/1945



Figure 10: Still from the TV drama *Die Flucht*, which premiered on ARTE and ARD in March 2007



Figure 11: Election Campaign Poster in 1949 for the Bund der Heimatlosen und Entrechteten, BHE (Party of the Homeless and Ostracized)

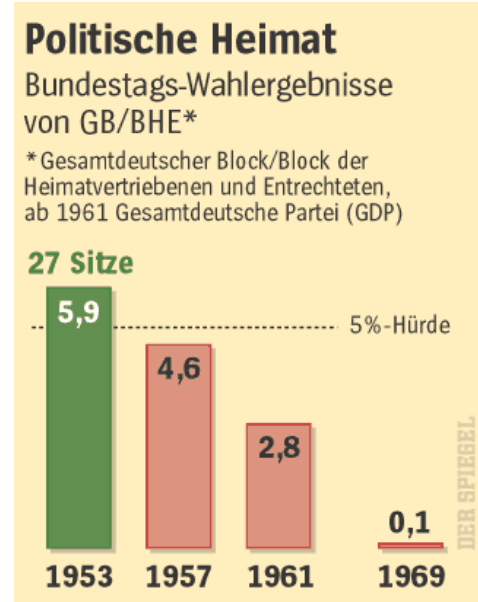


Figure 5: Development of Political Acceptance of the BHE in Germany from 1953-1969 with regards to its success during the Bundestags Elections



Figure 13: Poster for the Convention of the Silesian Association



Figure 14: Lovis Corinth (1858-1925), born in East Prussia. *Teutonic Knight*.



Figure 6: Artifacts in the Ostpreußische Landesmuseum, Lüneburg



Figure 7: Showroom in the Ostpreußische Landesmuseum, Lüneburg



Figure 8: East Prussian amber from the Ostpreußische Landesmuseum, Lüneburg



Figure 9: National Convention of Silesians in Nuremberg in 2001 (still from Bavarian Television)



Figure 10: President of the Association of the Expellees, BdV, Erika Steinbach portrayed as then Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's dominatrix who form together the "German Trojan Horse" on the cover of a Polish magazine in summer 2003, during the height of the discussion on flight and expulsion in Germany. The other words of the title page text read: "Germans owe the Polish one Trillion Dollars for WWII."



Figure 11: Demonstration in front of controversial exhibition “Erzwungene Wege,” organized by BdV in summer 2006

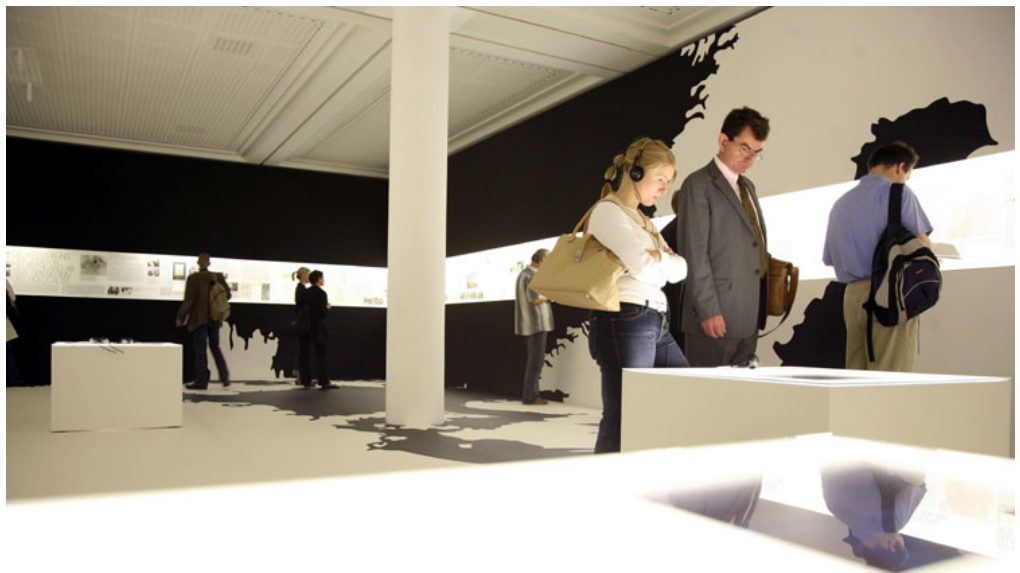


Figure 12: Showroom of controversial exhibition “Erzwungene Wege” in summer 2006



Figure 13: Table in controversial exhibition “Erzwungene Wege.”



Figure 14: Table in controversial exhibition “Erzwungene Wege.”



Figure 15: Original bell from the ship “Wilhelm Gustloff” at the controversial exhibition “Erzwungene Wege.” It had to be returned to the Polish museum after Polish politicians denounced the exhibition as revanchist and revisionist only a few days after its opening.



Figure 16: This photograph is one of the emblematic pictures for the portrayal of flight and expulsion. While *National Geographic* claimed in its article that it shows passengers boarding the “Steuben,” it is usually used in the context of the catastrophe of the “Wilhelm Gustloff.” It is also generally utilized in order to convey that mostly women and children perished during flight and expulsion, oftentimes in connection with the phrase “Die Stunde der Frauen”—a term coined after Christian Graf von Krockow’s autobiographical book *Die Stunde der Frauen*. München: dtv, 1988.

REFERENCE NOTES

¹ The Chairman of the Jewish Community in Berlin, Gideon Joffe, made this remark at the first anniversary of the dedication of the Berlin Holocaust Memorial: "Es ist schlichtweg einmalig auf dieser Welt, dass ein Tätervolk einen Gedenkort für sein größtes Verbrechen im Herzen des Täterlandes platziert." May 2006 in *DIE ZEIT online*

<http://hermes.zeit.de/pdf/archiv/2006/19/holocaustmahnmal_bilanz.pdf>, last accessed March 9, 2007.

² Peter Schneider in the *New York Times* on January 18, 2003. This original headline has been changed to "The Germans Are Breaking An Old Taboo." <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/01/18/arts/18SCHN.html>>, last accessed May 9, 2007.

³ Only in June 2007 Erika Steinbach, the president of the BdV "hat nachdrücklich eine verbindliche Regelung noch offener Vermögensfragen gefordert. 'Das ist eine längst überfällige Aufgabe der Politik, auch der deutschen Politik,' sagte Vertriebenenpräsidentin Erika Steinbach. Sie sprach sich zugleich für einen nationalen Gedenktag für die Opfer von Vertreibung, Deportation und Zwangsarbeit aus. Eine 'längst überfällige Verpflichtung Deutschlands' nannte sie die Einrichtung einer Dokumentationsstätte über das Schicksal Vertriebener." (*Hamburger Abendblatt* 133, 2007:5).

⁴ In addition the *BILD Zeitung* started to collect the testimony of the last remaining eye witnesses of flight and expulsion right after the two part series was aired. They published it immediately after, giving it a title that is typical for any *BILD Zeitung* publication: Reuth, Ralf Georg, ed. *Deutsche auf der Flucht. Das große Schicksalsbuch der Deutschen*. Frankfurt a. M.: Weltbild Verlag, 2007.

⁵ Two major bitterly competing projects have emerged: The 'Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen', favored by the Bund der Vertriebenen, which urges the importance of having a permanent location in Berlin, whereas the government-supported 'Netzwerk über Vertreibung' proposed a location in Poland.

⁶ Hereafter without quotation marks.

⁷ Ruth Wittlinger describes that Germanist Bodo Heimann, in a 2003 conference she attended, divided authors of flight and expulsion in additional categories, which are useful and to a certain extent crucial for my discussion: group one include "authors who were already established writers before the war, whereas the second group experienced the war as young adults. Authors who experienced the expulsion as children or were not even born when it happened constituted the third group" (Wittlinger 72).

⁸ Both re-publications accompanied a shift in historical views: Helmut Kohl's skewed views on history, creating an indistinguishably homogenous group of victims to Nazi terror, became more obvious in 1984, and 2004 was the height of the new debate of flight and expulsion.

⁹ 'The Association of the Ostracized and Disenfranchised,' was a political party that was founded in 1950 and dissolved in 1961.

¹⁰ Interestingly, through these incidents of discrimination the arbitrariness and instability of Adolf Hitler's proclaimed national cohesion by 'blood' becomes evident. The moment these original East Germans come to the West, they are considered "Gesindel," or mob, or Polish, as Beer (115) describes.

¹¹ In addition to numerous public comments in German newspapers using exactly the term 'Tabubruch,' some literary scholars and authors have also considered this new discussion the break of a taboo (Hirsch, H. 23, Sebald 10).

¹² *Grün ist die Heide* by Hans Deppe in 1951; *Ännchen von Tharau* by Wolfgang Schleif in 1954; *Das Mädchen Marion* by Wolfgang Schleif in 1956; *Mamitschka* by Rolf Thiel in 1955; *Suchkind 312* by Gustav Machatý and *Nacht fiel über Gotenhafen* by Frank Wisbar in 1959: these films deal either with expulsion itself or with the problematic integration into West German society in the following years. It took twenty years until another filmmaker dealt with this topic in a feature film again, obviously in a completely different way: Alexander Kluge in *Die Patriotin* in 1979.

¹³ Saxony's NPD member Gansel called the Allied bombing of Dresden a 'Bombenholocaust' in January 2005.

¹⁴ The term 'usable past' has been used for more than a decade in scholarly discourse on the utilization of history. In 2001, Robert Moeller makes this part of his book title *War Stories. In Search for a Usable Past in The Federal Republic of Germany*.

¹⁵ Heuss himself does not explicitly use the term "Vergangenheitsbewältigung," but rather speaks of "nichtbewältigter Vergangenheit" or "unbewältigter Vergangenheit," mainly in his speech "Wert und Unwert einer Tradition" of June 25, 1959. In: *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung*, Nr. 118, July 4, 1959. Adorno usually spoke of a "Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," e.g. in his 1969 radio lectures for the Hessische Rundfunk.

¹⁶ See Benz, Wolfgang (ed). *Legenden. Lügen. Vorurteile*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1992. 197.

¹⁷ Nora suggests that "museums, archives, cemeteries, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions, monuments, sanctuaries and fraternal orders" can be of importance for remembrance by serving as "lieux de mémoire" (1989: 12), especially by investing them with a "symbolic aura" (1989: 19) for the social group.

¹⁸ Interestingly, in his preface to *Postwar*, historian Tony Judt declares frankly that his historical narrative is "opinionated": Judt, Tony. *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*. New York: Penguin Press, 2005.

¹⁹ Adorno, Theodor W. "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit." *Eingriffe*. Theodor W. Adorno. Frankfurt/Main, 1963. 144.

²⁰ "Suggesting the comparability of the Final Solution to other genocides opens the way to apologetics. It facilitates a literature of evasion. But in terms of historical method, some comparisons must be possible. Not only German nationalists but all social scientists must venture comparisons to understand even single events." Maier, Charles. *The Unmasterable Past*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988. 1.

²¹ "Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* June 6, 1986.

²² German armed forces and police are now currently in Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eritrea, Gabon, Georgia, Horn of Africa, Cambodia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kosovo, Kuwait, Liberia, Macedonia, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. According to nationmaster.com, Germany is the biggest exporter in the world: < http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco_exp-economy-exports >, last accessed May 10, 2007. Germany has also the third largest nominal GDP: < http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/eco_gdp-economy-gdp-nominal >, last accessed on May 10, 2007.

²³ Literally it means "to make good again."

²⁴ In addition to this particular fund named "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" of 2000, Germany presents on their official website numerous other payments ever made to alleviate their victims' suffering: < http://www.germany.info/relaunch/info/archives/background/ns_crimes.html >, last accessed on May 13, 2007.

²⁵ Betz, Hans-Georg. "Deutschlandpolitik on the Margins: On the Evolution of Contemporary New Right Nationalism in the Federal Republic." *New German Critique* 44 (Spring/Summer 1988): 127-157.

²⁶ Jäger, Lorenz. *Verändertes Geschichtsverständnis*. Deutschlandradio, May 22, 2006. < <http://www.dradio.de/dkulturr/sendungen/politischesfeuilleton/502670/> >, last accessed May 13, 2007

²⁷ Jäger, Lorenz and Jerismann, Michael. "Hitler und Stalin waren Paralleltäter. Ein Gespräch mit Jörg Baberowski und Anselm Doering-Manteuffel." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* March 16, 2007.

²⁸ Achatz von Müller in DIE ZEIT 44, 2003. Here the fascinating double meaning of 'Opfer' (victim and sacrifice) comes into play. Achatz von Müller alludes to the danger that German victimhood could be elated to a sacrifice to ultimately atone German guilt.

²⁹ Inappropriate in its use or rather abuse of terminology is also the slogan of the 'Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft' for their 2006 convention in Nuremberg: 'Vertreibung ist Völkermord – dem Recht auf die Heimat gehört die Zukunft.' Ethnic cleansing does not automatically equal genocide. Unlike the Holocaust, which meant the systematic annihilation of the European Jewish population, the expulsion of Germans from Czech territory aimed at sending the Germans to Germany mostly alive. What is more, the second part of the slogan will likely stir old anxieties among the Czech population.

³⁰ Regarding history as part of the present has become axiomatic in recent years among historians, e.g. Sabrow, Gassert, Conze and Baberowski. *Geschichte ist immer Gegenwart*. München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2001, who describe this phenomenon not only for the German context but for many Eastern European societies.

³¹ The license plate of Québec states “Je me souviens,” referring to unspecified individuals or to events that took place between 500 and 300 years ago. This sentence on the license plate describes obviously rather a received or acquired history or a mnemonic practice or a mere ritualized statement, which has nothing to do with the original meaning of remembering, especially since it is not even clear what it is that is supposed to be remembered. Remembering the Second World War is increasingly impossible for most inhabitants of Europe as well. However, speaking of ‘remembering’ is probably easier than saying ‘affirming the significance a past event has for the present condition.’

³² Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove and Georg Grote still call for ‘memory contests’ that would put “emphasis on a pluralistic memory culture, which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past but embraces the ideas that individuals and groups advance and edit competing stories about themselves that forge their chancing sense of identity” (vi).

³³ see above.

³⁴ It is especially helpful to look into the research of Cathy Caruth, whose research is highly instructive in the upcoming chapters.

³⁵ In a study with Bosnian refugees for example, the researchers describe the psychiatric assessments and trauma testimonies of twenty of those refugees who have recently resettled in the United States. They underwent systematic, trauma-focused, clinical interviews that included standardized assessment scales. The authors of the study concluded: “Ethnic cleansing has caused high rates of PTSD and depression, as well as other forms of psychological morbidity, in this group of resettled Bosnian refugees. The longitudinal sequelae of ethnic cleansing as a form of massive psychic trauma remain to be studied.” Described in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* 152 (1995):536-542.

³⁶ He published the first edition of his book in 1988. The second one has been published in Germany: Schneiss, Wolfgang. *Flucht und Vertreibung. Beispiele literarischer Bearbeitung*. Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1996. The third one is Feuchert, Sascha, ed. *Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschen Literatur: Beiträge*. Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 2001. However, he compiled all kinds of essays on the issue of flight and expulsion—anything from fairy tales, to Goethe and to expulsion of ‘Gypsies’ in Austria. Only in a few articles there is a discussion of instances of Vertreibungsliteratur.

³⁷ The first one was Cohen Pfister, Laurel. “The Suffering of the Perpetrator: Unleashing Collective Memory in German Literature of the Twenty-First Century.” *Forum of Modern Language Studies*. 41.2 (2005): 123-135.

³⁸ Especially among them are Niven, Berger and Wittlinger in “On Taboos, Traumas and Other Myths.” Ed. Niven, Bill. *Germans as Victims. Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

³⁹ In addition to numerous public comments in German newspapers using exactly the term ‘Tabubruch,’ some literary scholars and authors have also considered this new discussion the break of a taboo (Grass:31, Hirsch, H.: 23, Sebald:10). Historians seem to increasingly shy away from this characterization.

⁴⁰ These are figures according to a conservative estimate in a 2005 *National Geographic US Edition* article, interestingly written in a very sympathetic way by Marcin Jamkowski, the Deputy Chief Editor of the *National Geographic Polish Edition*.

⁴¹ In 2002, ARD television aired a documentary on flight and expulsion with the title “Hitler’s letzte Opfer.” Obviously this reflects a strong intentionalist approach, rejecting the functionalist explanation, which attributes a much higher involvement of the common population in Third Reich policies and activities.

⁴² <http://www.daserste.de/ttt/beitrag_dyn~uid,vqd1zek8ayrgn3vn~cm.asp> , last accessed May 5, 2007

⁴³ According to dpa news agency on February 14, 2002.

⁴⁴ Grass was, however, certainly politically engaged for the SPD and a political supporter of change, which even meant his rejection of the SPD-CDU coalition of Kiesinger. His support was clearly more focused on Willy Brandt.

⁴⁵ Moller, Sabine. *Die Entkonkretisierung der NS-Herrschaft in der Ära Kohl. Die Neue Wache – Das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas – Das Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Hannover: Offizin Verlag, 1998.

⁴⁶ Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag 1985.

⁴⁷ Hillgruber meticulously describes barbaric Euthanasia and the annihilation of European Jewry (cf. pp. 92-97).

⁴⁸ <http://www.wdr.de/tv/monitor/pdf/010726c_schlesier.pdf>, last accessed on May 10, 2007.

⁴⁹ *Kinder, Mütter und ein General*. Dir. Benedek, László. BRD 1955.

Nacht über Gotenhafen. Dir. Wisbar, Frank. BRD 1959.

Grün ist die Heide. Dir. Deppe, Hans. BRD 1951.

Ännchen von Tharau. Dir. Schleif, Wolfgang. BRD 1954.

Waldwinter. Dir. Liebeneiner, Wolfgang. BRD 1956.

⁵⁰ These are just a few German authors who wrote about flight and expulsion and only selected works: Arno Surminski (*Jokehnen*, 1974), Christine Brückner (*Jauche und Levkojen*, 1975), Horst Bienek (*Die erste Polka*, 1975), Uta Danella (*Der Maulbeerbaum*, 1964), Peter Härtling (*Janek Porträt einer Erinnerung*, 1973), Margarete Kubelka (*Absage an das Mondlicht*, 1972), Agnes Miegel (*Truso. Geschichten aus der alten Heimat*, 1958), Leonie Ossowski (*Weichselkirschen*, 1976), Heinz Piontek (*Zeit meines Lebens*, 1984). East Germans: Heiner Müller (*Die Umsiedlerin oder das Leben auf dem Lande*, 1975), Anna Seghers ("Die Umsiedlerin" in *Geschichten aus der DDR*, 1981), Werner Heiduzcek (*Tod am Meer*, 1979), Volker Braun ("Gdansk" in *In diesem Lande leben wir*, 1978) and Christa Wolf (*Kindheitsmuster*, 1977).

⁵¹ For a more detailed survey and for Helbig's very useful and convincing distinction between Vertreibungsliteratur and Vertriebenenliteratur refer to the Introduction and Helbig, Louis Ferdinand. *Der ungeheure Verlust. Flucht und Vertreibung in der deutschsprachigen Belletristik der Nachkriegszeit*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996: 61-62.

⁵² This is something that exists until this day. This recent disturbing conversation in a google discussion room features a "Sudentendeutsche" and an "anti-Neo-Nazi": <http://groups.google.com/group/de.soc.politik.misc/browse_thread/thread/55226036184c46f9/4881713e87b60dd8?lnk=raot>, last accessed June 18, 2007.

⁵³ "Er sagte: 'Nachdem meine Nachforschungen ergeben haben, dass Wilhelm Gustloff soziales Engagement mehr von Georg Strasser als vom Führer beeinflusst worden ist, habe ich nur in ihm mein Vorbild gesehen, was meiner Homepage wiederholt und deutlich zum Ausdruck gekommen ist. Dem Blutzeugen verdanke ich meine innere Haltung. Ihn zu rächen war mir heilige Pflicht!'" (Grass 195).

⁵⁴ The project "Schulhof-CDs" was an advertising campaign of German right-wing radicals, the "Freien Kameradschaften," in 2004. They tried to distribute free CDs near schools and youth clubs all over Germany in order to create an increased interest in the right-wing scene.

⁵⁵ Höpken, Wolfgang. "Das Thema der Vertreibung im deutschen Schulbuch." *Zwangsmigration und Vertreibung-Europa im 20. Jahrhundert*. Ed Anja Kruke. Bonn: Verlag Dietz, 2006. 107-115.

⁵⁶ NPD representative Gansel on January 21 2005, reported in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* December 24, 2005: 4.

⁵⁷ Perhaps not incomprehensibly to Grass himself as his answer to this important question seems to prove in an interview in 2007:

ZEIT: Die heftige Reaktion der Öffentlichkeit auf die Nachricht, dass Günter Grass in der Waffen-SS war, ist auch auf Enttäuschung zurückzuführen. Niemand kritisiert Sie dafür, dass Sie erst jetzt ein Buch darüber schreiben. Aber es gab auch immer den Bürger Grass, der in Reden und Essays Stellung bezogen hat – auch in Dingen, die die eigene Biografie betrafen. Warum ging das hier nicht?

[...]

Walser: Heilandsack, das ist doch seine Sache!

ZEIT: Aber noch mal: Warum konnte das nur literarisch mitgeteilt werden?

Grass: Weil ich Schriftsteller bin. Ich befinde mich nicht in der SED, wo ich öffentlich Schuldbekennnisse ablegen muss. Ich gehöre auch nicht zu einer christlichen Sekte, die sich aufgrund eines Pfingstwunders hinstellt und öffentlich bekennt. (*DIE ZEIT* June 14, 2007, No. 25).

⁵⁸ Grass, Günter. *Mein Jahrhundert*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999: 162.

⁵⁹ Grass, Günter. *Beim Häuten der Zwiebel*. München: Steidl Verlag, 2006.

⁶⁰ Grass's narrator recounts: "Mutter sagte mir, dass sich bei immer stärkerer Schlagseite eines der 3cm-Flakgeschütze vom Achterdeck aus den Halterungen gelöst habe, über Bord gestürzt sei und ein schon abgefiertes Rettungsboot, das voll besetzt war, zerschmettert habe" (138). „Schlimmer noch, sagte Mutter, sei es den Kindern ergangen: 'Die sind alle falsch runtergekommen, mittem Kopp zuerst. Und nu hingen se in die dicken Schwimmwülste mitte Beinchen nach oben raus....' " (140).

⁶¹ This is mentioned similarly by Uwe Timm in his novel *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*. Köln: Kiepenheuer&Witsch, 2003.

⁶² Martin Walser might not always exhibit the most perspicacious judgment in his analysis of society. Nevertheless, since he witnessed the last 60 years it might be of interest to read his view on the phenomenon 'Zeitgeist' in a *ZEIT* interview in summer 2007: "In jedem Jahrzehnt gibt es einen anderen zeitgeistempfohlenen, zeitgeistkonformen Umgang mit der deutschen Vergangenheit."

<<http://www.zeit.de/2007/25/L-Grass-Walser-Interview?page=all>>, last accessed on June 25, 2007.

⁶³ *Die Welt* writes: "Mit dem *Heimatismuseum* legt Siegfried Lenz seinen großen Roman über Masuren vor" (August 26, 1978). The *NZZ* also focuses on the "Heimat"-issue in its review (August 26, 1978). Horst Bienek who writes for *DIE ZEIT*, applauds Lenz's recreation of the "Heimat" Masuren (October 20, 1978). The *FAZ* focuses on how *Heimatismuseum* describes the danger of the abuse of terms like "Heimat" and "Vaterland" (November 11, 1978). *Die Weltwoche* is convinced that the fragile balance between "Heimattümelei" and "Heimatsbewusstsein" has been maintained (August 25, 1978). Only the *Spiegel* review notes that this story is also about the "Problem des Sinns der Geschichte, ihrer Aufbereitung und Verwendung, ihrer Nutzung im Guten und Bösen" (August 21, 1978). The *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*, however, sees rather "eine Stück Trauerarbeit" in this novel (September 2, 1978).

⁶⁴ The Walhalla is a hall of fame located on the Danube River, ten kilometers from Regensburg.

⁶⁵ Arminius successfully defeated a Roman army in the year 9 ACE, making sure that the Roman Empire would never be able to expand north of the Rhine.

⁶⁶ Peter McIsaac's forthcoming book *Museums of the Mind: German Modernity and the Dynamics of Collecting* (Penn State University Press, November 2007) plans to illuminate this as well, in the context of "how museums, literature, and digital media shape thought and behavior today," according to a blurb on the publisher's website

<cf. <http://www.psupress.psu.edu/books/titles/978-0-271-02991-7.html>>, last accessed on July 23, 2007.

⁶⁷ Bal is obviously referring to John Langshaw Austin whose central argument in the distinction of "performative" vs "constative" assertion is that the latter is a tool that is primarily interested in providing statements about the world.

⁶⁸ As I walked through the exhibition I discovered that Lenz's *Heimatismuseum* was one of the artifacts, which immediately gives this novel a particular significance that other novels thematizing expulsion of Germans do not have.

⁶⁹ The recently opened Creation Museum that re-creates the story of the Genesis in Kentucky, for example, could be anywhere else in the USA.

⁷⁰ Here I disagree with Jennifer Jordan who does not see a "direct, perceptible connection to the Nazi past" (Jordan 123). I would argue that despite the fact that the Reichskanzlei has vanished, the location is perfectly chosen, since its spatial location creates a chronological connection between the destroyed Wilhemstraße 77 and the new Berlin Republic with its re-adopted landmarks.

⁷¹ Their website is at <<http://www.luene-info.de/preussen/landesmuseum2.html?http://www.luene-info.de/preussen/start.html>>, last accessed on July 26, 2007.

⁷² The BdV was allowed to show their exhibition at a historically even more significant place in the summer of 2007, at the Frankfurt Paulskirche.

⁷³ Their website is at <<http://www.z-g-v.de>>.

⁷⁴ My criticism is reported by *El Mundo*'s Ursula Moreno: " 'En ningún sitio se destaca que los alemanes, a diferencia de los polacos o ucranianos, antes que víctimas fueron autores', explica Kai Diers frente a uno de los paneles casi enciclopédicos. Este germanista considera un error situar la exposición en Berlín. 'Si realmente quieren darle una dimensión europea, deberían haber elegido Varsovia o Breslau (Wrocław) y una lengua neutra como el inglés', añade."

<<http://www.elmundo.es/papel/2006/08/12/mundo/2011215.html>>, last accessed June 25, 2007.

⁷⁵ See images of the exhibition in the appendix.

⁷⁶ <<http://www.oberstdorf-heimatmuseum.de/informationen.htm>>, last accessed on June 13, 2007.

⁷⁷ Prussia was neither conquered yet by the Germans then, nor the Teutonic Knights.

⁷⁸ Bruno von Querfurt was a German cleric who became famous for his striving for Polish-German reconciliation. As Lenz depicts it correctly, he was killed on one of his numerous trips East by Sudovians or Prussians around 1010.

⁷⁹ The value of an artifact is determined by his “Zeijenschaft”-value, as Adam points out several times in his East-Prussian vernacular. Interestingly, this can be translated with either “Zeichenschaft” or “Zeugenschaft,” referring to the arbitrariness of both sign and testimony, which can be challenged through the ability to fake both. We see in Lenz’s character Adam how the signification of an artifact—its Zeichenschaft—collapses with its ability to lend testimony—its Zeugenschaft.

⁸⁰ This is even less than what the American Association of Museums states as their goal in the ‘Code of Ethics’: “Museums make their unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving, and interpreting the things of this world” <<http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm>> last accessed June 17, 2007. The Germanische Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg has an ostensibly more modest approach as well, simply speaking of collecting and preserving and leaving out the ‘interpreting’-aspect: “Als Nationalmuseum und Museum des gesamten deutschen Sprachraums sammeln und bewahren wir Zeugnisse der Kultur, Kunst und Geschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart.” <<http://www.gnm.de/museum.html>>, last accessed June 18, 2007.

⁸¹ A typical book is *Fragen an die Geschichte*, that has been used in German schools for thirty years now and which focuses almost entirely on sources. Publisher Cornelsen states: “Das Werk ist dem fragend-forschenden Lernen verpflichtet. Die selbstständige Erarbeitung der Geschichtsepochen durch Quellenmaterial steht im Vordergrund.”

<http://www.cornelsen.de/cgi/WebObjects/KatalogPlus.woa/wa/KPDirectAction/shop?shopName=Lehrer&pageName=Shop>, last accessed May 25, 2007. *Forum Geschichte*, which introduces to 5th-graders the interpretations of sources, has a similar approach. It is published by Cornelsen as well.

⁸² Another more contemporary example for these structures is that Islam is still not officially accepted as the third largest religious community, with the result that only Protestant and Catholic religious education is offered on a regular basis in German schools. It took the FRG fifty years to officially acknowledge the Muslim population in Germany at the first famous ‘Islamgipfel’ in 2006, where the possibility of a official acknowledgement of Islam as third main religion became finally palpable after 50 years of Muslim immigration. It took domestic but also international pressure to finally get together at the so-called round table talks. Furthermore, as another example, the inclusion of the remembrances of Primo Levi and Nelly Sachs as well as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass in the official cultural memory is consented to, Walter Kempowski and his *Echolot*, however, is not part of this canon. Here, the link to the issue of ‘Heimat’ becomes evident. Muslims in Germany—for various reasons that cannot be discussed here—have traditionally been a parallel society in Germany and have only slowly become part of the concept of ‘Heimat’ for Germans. The topos of German victimhood, which is the prominent feature in Kempowski’s *Echolot*, had been a rather neglected memory in the overall cultural memory until the late 1990s although it had affected 25% of the German population (including the newly arrived refugees) in occupied Germany in the immediate aftermath of WWII.

⁸³ This battle indeed took place in 1410. Masuria however was returned to the Deutschen Orden one year later, in 1411.

⁸⁴ Christian Rohrer details in a fascinating way the growing influence and omnipresence of the National Socialist movement from the late 1920s onwards in East Prussia in *Nationalsozialistische Macht in Ostpreußen*. München: Meidenbauer Verlag, 2006. When Lenz has Zygmunt describe receiving the orders from Königsberg to rearrange the museum, he might be alluding to the directives of the ‘Erich-Koch-Stiftung’, a pervasive institution named after the Gauleiter of East Prussia, also in charge of cultural affairs.

⁸⁵ Obviously “Hitlers erste Opfer” were Communists, Socialists, and Social Democrats as Connie Schneider maintains correctly (76), followed immediately by Jewish small businesses. However, with the term “erste Opfer” some Germans in the immediate post-war years tried to invoke the notion of seduction they had succumbed to, as Norbert Frei shows (cf. 2005: 97-99). In 2001, the German expellees were

also declared “Hitlers letzte Opfer,” according to Sebastian Dehnhard’s three-part television documentary aired by the ARD.

⁸⁶ This hand-written book by Sonja is strongly reminiscent of the gypsy mother’s “Exercise Book,” the central item in the 1950 Powell/Pressburger movie *Gone with the Wind*, alluding to the myth of the mystical woman as a bearer of wisdom.

⁸⁷ Dieter Bachmann observes this in his book review “Ein Museum aus Wörtern” in *Weltwoche* on August 23, 1978.

⁸⁸ Germans continue to experience this highly perplexing selective perception of past in the phenomenon of ‘Ostalgie,’ as Mark Landler of the *New York Times* describes it in an article on Trabant car aficionados in Zwickau: “East German flags fluttered proudly in the brisk wind. A cheerful young man showed off his black and red T-shirt, stamped with the name of the once feared spy agency, the Stasi. Lurking behind a souvenir table was a portrait of the Communist boss Erich Honecker.”

< <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/17/world/europe/17trabant.html?hp> >, last accessed on June 18, 2007.

⁸⁹ The Taliban tried this in Afghanistan in the late 1990s by demolishing the monumental Buddhas; Spanish Catholic ambitions were accompanied by the burning of texts written by ancient Maya and Aztec priests in Latin America.

⁹⁰ These monuments were erected—and vanished—in Kassel and Hamburg-Harburg. His proposal of a non-monument did, however, not find acceptance for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial as political scientist Noam Lupu explains (cf. 156).

⁹¹ The highly acclaimed seminal post-war work *Draußen vor der Tür* by pacifist Wolfgang Borchert, for example, does not mention once the genocide of the Jews.

⁹² It is highly instructive here to read Wolfgang Borchert’s text *Das ist unser Manifest* (1947), in which he calls for honest emotions and less focus on “grammar.” Heinrich Böll confessed that it is incredibly difficult to write half a page of prose after 1945 (cf. Beutin 502). In addition, Adorno’s dictum that writing poetry after Auschwitz can only be considered barbarian was not easily dismissable—Adorno had referred to poetry that would not try to process the experience and shock of National Socialist annihilation (cf. Beutin 594).

⁹³ Interestingly, this literature is mostly written by relatives or descendants of expellees or refugees.

⁹⁴ Authors for this particular genre of autobiographical texts of flight and expulsion are Silesian Horst Bienek, East Prussian Arno Surminski, East Brandenburg Christa Wolf and Leonie Ossowski who grew up as so called Volksdeutsche in Poland before the German occupation.

⁹⁵ This highly original method, however, might have contributed to the lack of Arno Schmidt-translations in non-German speaking countries. His English translator John E. Woods describes in lengthy terms what the problem were that he faces and admits that his translations are “considerably less compelling than the original” (Woods 21). Very often Schmidt changes the spelling of a word in order to create a new connotation or simply new meaning of the word, which basically defies translation. This is something that Jirgl has advanced to extremes and will be addressed later on.

⁹⁶ Freud ascribes a healing effect to creative child’s play, which enables them to reclaim agency after extreme situations: “Man sieht, dass die Kinder alles im Spiel wiederholen, was ihnen im Leben großen Eindruck gemacht hat, daß sie dabei die Stärke des Eindrucks abreagieren und sich sozusagen zu Herren der Situation machen” (Freud 13).

⁹⁷ Christoph Jürgensen—among others—describes that he “jahrelang ausschließlich für die Schublade geschrieben hatte” (Jürgensen 43).

⁹⁸ That is how he describes it in his interview with Werner Jung in the *ndf*: it saved him from “asozial erklärt zu werden” (Jung 57).

⁹⁹ Stuart Taberner’s summary of Jirgl’s *Die Unvollendeten* as “the chronicle of three women expellees” (Taberner 158) does not, therefore, by far justice to this complex text that develops its strength in the context of life in the GDR.

¹⁰⁰ Here even the title of the book *Die Unvollendeten* receives new overtones.

¹⁰¹ Indeed, Silesia was until the 1950s always considered part of Ostdeutschland, whereas today’s Ostdeutschland was considered Mitteldeutschland, still reflected in the name of the regional public radio and television station MDR (Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk).

¹⁰² Fascinating word play here again: although we only see the name written once, Anna's last name is Konda as well, which would make it sound like the aquatic boa. The connotations of the word snake in context with Anna's behavior might be worthwhile to explore in further research.

¹⁰³ Clemens Kammler created a table in which he painstakingly lists Jirgl's 'Zeichensystem', as he calls it. He adds his own interpretation what they mean, which sometimes seem reasonable, sometimes far-fetched.

¹⁰⁴ Gisela Funk describes perhaps well-meant analogy in her review of his book on Deutschlandfunk Radio on November 13, 2005. < <http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/buechermarkt/438021/> >, last accessed August 4, 2007.

¹⁰⁵ Within one month German media discovered previous NSDAP membership of Martin Walser, Erhard Eppler, Hermann Lübke, Dieter Hildebrandt, Horst Ehmke, Peter Boenisch and Siegfried Lenz.

¹⁰⁶ See <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6535380>>, last accessed July 10, 2007.

¹⁰⁷ In 2006, the MassMoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts opened its gates for the temporary exhibition *Ahistoric Occasion - Artists Making History* (See the exhibition's website at <http://www.massmoca.org/event_details.php?id=77>, last accessed on July 4, 2007). The museum assembled artists who, in their view, have "an eye-opening take on how the past produces the present," and at the same time asking "what are the stories from the past that make us who we are?" The idea of the re-creation of a historical event or period has obviously captured the art world's imagination in many ways. The artists in this exhibition, however, sought to deliberately subvert the notion of accurate representability of past events. Many artists deliberately created fake historical documents and artifacts, played with the imitation of those sources, which only after more careful observation would be revealed as falsifications. The culmination of this was a video installation by Nigeria-born artist Yinka Shonibare: *Un ballo in Maschera*. The entire video reflected his desire to show how origins are constructs, made up of mythologies and ideologies. Apart from a breeches part of one of the actresses, it was the clothing that puzzled the visitor at a second look. At first sight the viewer one was sure to witness an authentic dance in authentic dresses, but then it turned out that they were dancing to silent music, clad in gowns that looked authentic but made of textiles that bore the typical patterns of Indonesian batiks familiar in African clothing. For the inexperienced viewer even the dance was reminiscent of 17th century minuets, but when looking carefully, one noticed passages of modern dance. It seems to mock re-enactments in art, film, and even real museums, in which we are exposed to allegedly real representations of the past that are constantly filled with elements from other realms and the present, coalescing into what we call past. In connection with the other works in this exhibition one finds evidence that there are venues that do not only re-create past, but simply create it. The curators could have brought in an entire museum for their purpose: The culmination of what they mock appears to be the Creation Museum in Kentucky, which to some might be the phantasmagoria for bigots, whereas other visitors will be reaffirmed in their belief of the biblical genesis by the authority of a museum that states that Earth is 6000 years old and Dinosaurs were created on the 6th day. Apart from the aspect of recreation one other element is visible here: In the representation of the past within a society there is always a normative character, which rarely leaves open competing interpretations and views, a phenomenon that we encounter in the forging of cultural memory.

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.geo.de/_components/GEO/info/presse/files/geo_de_mahnmal_umfrage.rtf>, last accessed on July 17, 2007.

¹⁰⁹ It will be interesting to learn what authors like Stuart Taberner or Samuel Salzborn will be able to offer in two recent articles on the representations of German victimhood in the debate on flight and expulsion. They are part of collection of essays edited by Helmut Schmitz, published by Rodopi: *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* (2007), which was unfortunately not available yet when I finished this dissertation.

¹¹⁰ Mehnert, Elke, ed. *Landschaften der Erinnerung*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001.

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